

Kids Up Front Evaluation Project

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Top 3 Impacts

Kids Up Front's most significant impact is **stronger relationships** for program participants that result from the positive social opportunities it provides. Across different schools, agencies and services survey respondents stated that they relied on Kids Up Front tickets to strengthen connections within families, build ties between organization staff and clients, and create connections between vulnerable individuals and community supports. Based on the evidence provided in focus groups and surveys, it is reasonable to conclude that Kids Up Front opportunities contributed to the catalyzing and fostering of critical social connections for individuals across different demographic groups. This in turn can lead to improved support networks and increased social capital.

Another important outcome area was **expanded knowledge, interests and skills** in participants, resulting from participants being able to access a diverse array of barrier-free community events. Based on the observations of Kids Up Front partner organizations, there was a strong relationship between exposure to different aspects of community and culture, and a resulting increase in knowledge of community, and new interests in program participants. Experiencing various cultural, recreational and educational events resulted in immediate shifts in perspective, the pursuit of new skills, and contributed to expanded worldviews amongst participants.

Improved well-being was also amongst the top 3 impacts attributed to Kids Up Front services, with participants found to respond positively to distance from stressors during Kids Up Front events. Survey and focus group respondents made the connection between positive experiences and improvements in general well-being and mental health. Short term improvements included reduced stress, improved mood, and increased happiness demonstrated even after an event had concluded. Well-being also improved in response to an increased sense of being valued by others, heightened self-esteem and greater confidence.

Expected Outcomes

The following results show Kids Up Front contribution to improvements in expected outcome areas.

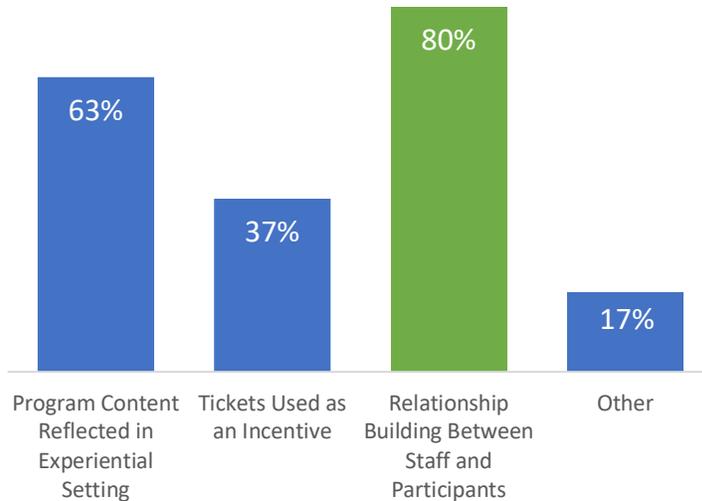
- **91%** of survey respondents that indicated that **social isolation** was an issue with their clients also confirmed that Kids Up Front contributed to its reduction.
- **91%** of survey respondents that indicated that their clients experienced **low family cohesion** also confirmed that Kids Up Front contributed to its reduction.
- **77%** of survey respondents that indicated that their clients had a need for **recreational and mental wellness opportunities** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.
- **74%** of survey respondents that indicated that their clients lacked **educational and cultural opportunities** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.
- **67%** of survey respondents that indicated that their clients needed **safe and appropriate spaces, facilities and events** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.
- **64%** of survey respondents that indicated that their clients **needed respite opportunities** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.

Community Partner Impact

Kids Up Front Partner organizations found the top impacts on their programs and organizations to be:

1. Improved **relationships** between staff and clients
2. Strengthening of **program content**
3. Improved ability to provide **recognition and incentives**

Program and Agency Impacts



According to respondents, successful relationships lead to successful interventions. This impact was not limited to simply providing incentives to improve program retention rates, or recruit volunteers and mentors, it went further. When strong positive relationships between staff and participants were critical to program functioning, Kids Up Front opportunities were being used to improve the efficacy of the programming itself.

How Kids Up Front Contributed

- By providing positive **social experiences** to those who needed them
- By providing opportunities for **group experiences**
- By supporting **shared experiences** as drivers of stronger relationships
- By providing **barrier-free access to diverse events**
- By allowing families the **ability to test** appropriate events
- By **closing the experience gap** between average families and those that face additional barriers to participation
- By **distancing** families and children from their **stressors**
- By giving children and families opportunities to **feel valued**
- By providing young people with **avenues for exploring their social identity and independence**

Introduction

This project was commissioned by Kids Up Front Calgary in anticipation of the organization's 20th anniversary in the year 2020. As part of its strategic plan, the organization set out to conduct the very first formal evaluation of its work, with a focus on identifying and communicating the outcomes of its services. Kids Up Front occupies a unique space in Calgary's non-profit sector – it is a smaller, grassroots organization with the following mission:

“Kids Up Front distributes tickets to arts, culture and sporting events to deserving kids and their families.”

Although it provides a service that directly impacts children, youth and the supportive adults in their lives, the bulk of its offerings are delivered through a wide network of partnerships with social service agencies, government services, schools and hospitals. These community partners provide access to free tickets, events and experiences to individuals that participate in their programs as clients, students, volunteers and staff. As a result, Kids Up Front as an organization has little to no contact with the program participants that actually receive event tickets through their services and have virtually no avenues for the direct measurement of their impact.

Given this context, the purpose of this project was to comprehensively explore the impact of Kids Up Front services: by identifying beneficiary¹ characteristics and needs, describing the changes that occurred as a result of Kids Up Front interventions, and understanding the basic mechanisms through which changes were occurring.

The following questions defined the boundaries of the project:

1. What are the key characteristics of Kids Up Front beneficiaries? What are their needs?
2. What kinds of impact on individual beneficiaries and partner organizations can be observed as a result of Kids Up Front services?
3. How does impact occur?

¹ A Note on Terminology: The children, youth and supportive adults that actually receive tickets and directly benefit from them are referred to as 'beneficiaries' or 'program participants'. 'Community partners' and 'partner organizations' refer to the organizations that partner with Kids Up Front to distribute tickets through their programs or school. All references to 'Respondents' refer to staff from community partner organizations who participated in the surveys and focus groups for this project.

With the focus of the evaluation being to describe outcomes, learn about beneficiaries and improve the program, a mixed method approach that combined qualitative and quantitative data was devised. Data was collected through online surveys, focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews, resulting in responses from 164 partner organizations, with additional input from Kids Up Front staff and board members. Program documents such as annual reports, program statistics and previously administered surveys were also reviewed. Whereas multiple sources were consulted over the course of this project, the bulk of the findings were informed by the online survey results and 5 focus groups conducted with community partner representatives. While a comprehensive literature review was not within the scope of this project, a scan of publicly available academic resources and studies was conducted to supplement the findings of the project. Most of the studies included were reviews and were used to provide a breadth of external evidence that could help frame the results of the report.

The findings of this report are laid out in 4 sections:

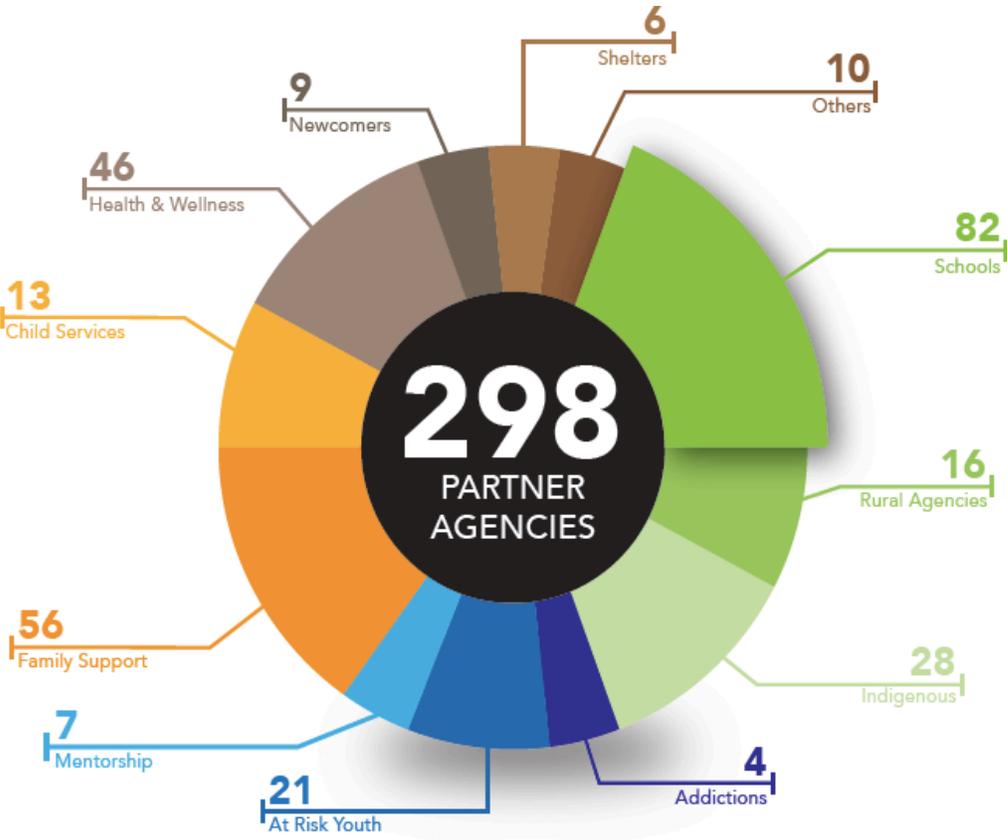
1. The first section describes the partnerships and processes that support Kids Up Front in achieving its mission.
2. The second section presents the key characteristics and needs of Kids Up Front beneficiaries.
3. Section 3 is focused on Kids Up Front's impact: it lays out the results of survey questions that tested whether expected outcomes were occurring, describes the most significant impact of Kids Up Front's work as highlighted by partner organizations, and lays out the mechanisms through which Kids Up Front services contributed to the changes observed. The impact section is subdivided to clearly lay out the top 3 impacts on beneficiaries, and those experienced by partner organizations.
4. The fourth and final section is focused on learning and improvement. It documents challenges and success factors, and lists recommendations for service improvement as suggested by respondents.

Section 1: Partnerships and Processes

This study found that there was no defined programmatic structure for Kids Up Front services, and no preferred or prescribed way to distribute Kids Up Front offerings. Community partners had adapted Kids Up Front services to their own organizational and program context, using the opportunities flexibly to match their time and resource constraints as well as to meet changes in demand. Even within the same program, Kids Up Front offerings would fluctuate over time depending on staff changes, how busy a program was, and whether or not a program’s priority needs were being met.

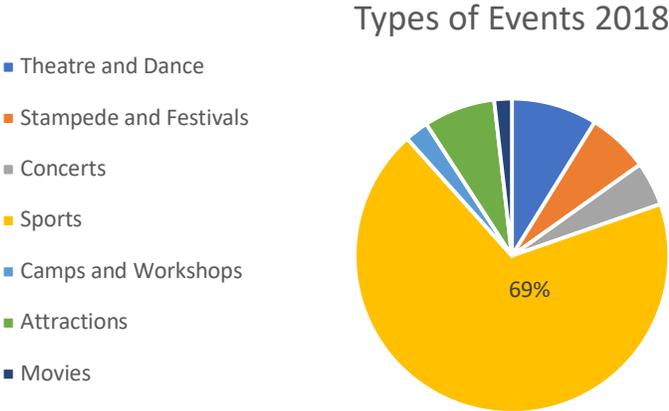
Partnership Snapshot

Based on Kids Up Front’s 2018 Annual Report, the organization was in partnership with 298 organizations serving different populations across Calgary. This network included partnerships with social service agencies, government services, schools and hospitals. Amongst the different organization types, **schools and agencies supporting families** were the most prominently represented.



In 2018, Kids Up Front distributed over 31,000 tickets through its 3 main programs:

1. **Can't Use Your Ticket** – Kids Up Front's largest program distributes tickets through formal partnerships with agencies
2. **Kids Count** – Special event experiences that can include behind the scene tours, food and beverages and meeting celebrities or athletes
3. **Getzlaf's Gamers** – Provides access to a VIP suite at Hitmen games, and can include food, drinks and merchandise



With more than 20,000 of the tickets distributed being for hockey, football and other sports, **sporting events comprised 69%** of all events made available through Kids Up Front in 2018.

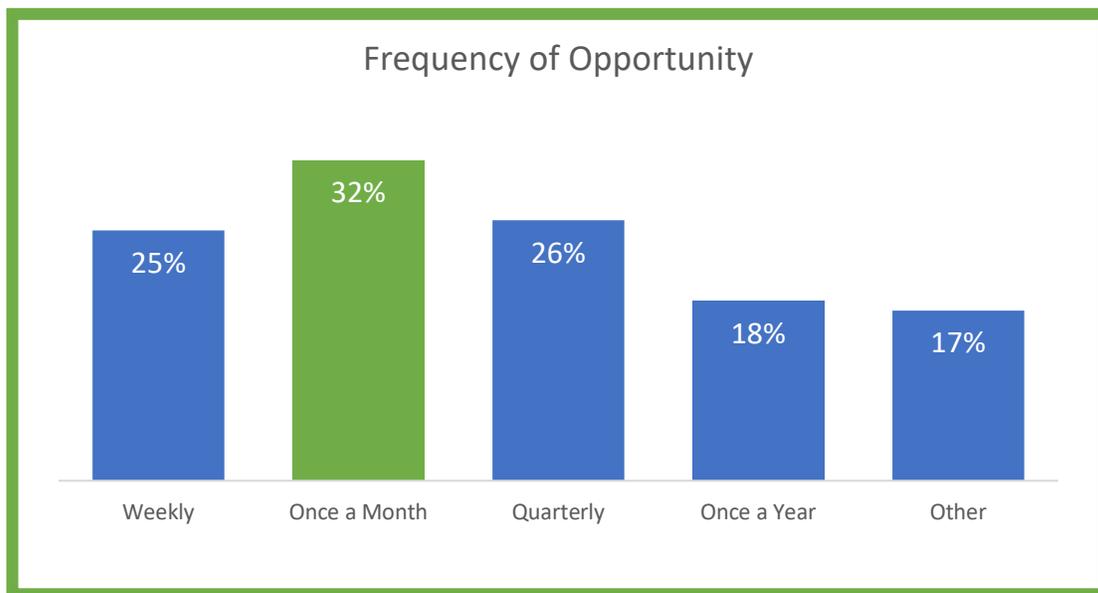
Distribution Processes

Focus group respondents were asked about the processes they used to distribute tickets amongst their program participants, and to explain how they made decisions about who would receive opportunities to attend events. A notable factor that influenced distribution processes and consistency within an organization was whether or not the work was part of a staff person's official responsibilities.

- **Draw or Lottery** – Draw amongst the general population or specifically interested program participants
- **Staff Discretion** – Decisions were made by staff who relied on their knowledge of client needs, situation and interests to award tickets

- **Wishlist** – Staff and/or program participants were consulted to develop a Wishlist of events that was then submitted to Kids Up Front
- **Multiple Contacts** – Different program staff within an organization maintained independent partnerships with Kids Up Front representing their own specific program needs
- **Central Coordinator for Programs** – One staff person coordinated with several/all organizational program leads to communicate opportunities to program participants and confirm interest with Kids Up Front
- **Central Coordinator for Beneficiaries** – Responsible for sending information about opportunities directly to program participants and communicate requests back to Kids Up Front
- **Ticket Committee** – Organization assigned two or more staff to coordinate ticket requests and distribution for all programs
- **Online Request Forms** – these were completed directly by program participants to develop a Wishlist

How Often Would Program Participants Go to a Kids Up Front Event?

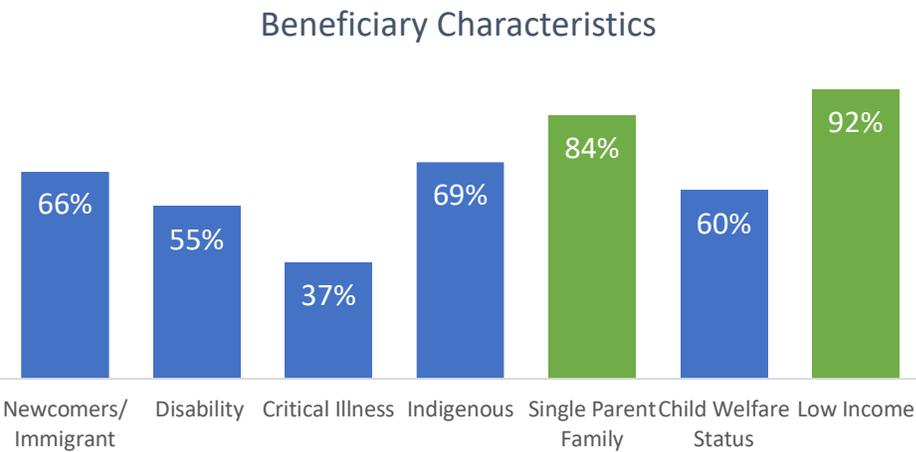


Survey responses showed that different programs offered tickets to their participants at varying intervals and frequencies. While 'Once a Month' was the most common survey response, focus group respondents revealed that in most cases **there was no meaningful average** for the uptake of Kids Up Front tickets. Event attendance varied greatly between participants within same program, with some choosing to go far more frequently and others choosing never to participate at all.

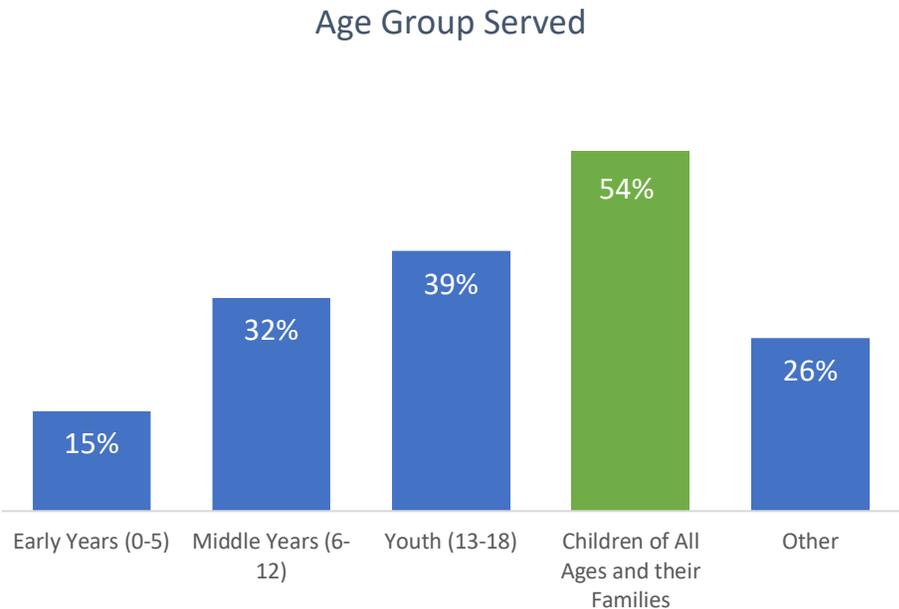
Section 2: Who Does Kids Up Front Serve?

Beneficiary Needs and Characteristics

Based on input from 164 respondents it was found that Kids Up Front services benefited children and their families belonging to some of the **most vulnerable groups in Calgary**. In addition to serving low-income and single parent families, a majority of programs also served indigenous children, newcomers, individuals or families with a disability, and individuals with child welfare status.



92% of Kids Up Front partner programs and organizations served participants in **low income situations**, with **84%** also serving **single-parent families**

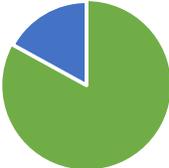


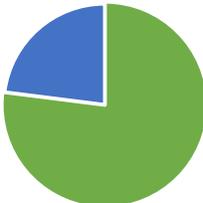
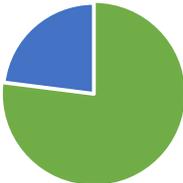
A majority of Kids Up Front partners worked with **children of all ages and their families**

Understanding Beneficiary Needs

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the prevalence of expected needs amongst their program participants. These expected needs had been identified in prior consultations with Kids Up Front staff. The online survey allowed respondents to indicate whether or not any of the listed needs were relevant to their program participants. Respondents were also able to provide further details about the factors that contributed to program participant’s needs. In the results below, these contributing factors were ranked in order of how frequently they were mentioned by survey respondents.

Social Isolation was ranked as the most prevalent need, with 83% of respondents indicating that it was an issue that affected their program participants. 82% of respondents also confirmed that a lack of recreational and wellness opportunities impacted their participants. Overall, community partners provided strong confirmation that the expected needs were being experienced by their program participants. Each expected need option was selected by a majority of respondents (50% and over), indicating that Kids Up Front services were being directed to populations that were most likely to benefit from them.

<p style="text-align: center;">Social Isolation</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">83% of Kids Up Front partners said their participants were socially isolated</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Contributing Factors</p> <p>Respondents identified low income as an important factor in the social isolation of their program participants.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low Income 2. High social anxiety, poor social and communication skills, experiences of social rejection and bullying 3. Disability 4. Newcomers 5. Transience 6. Domestic Violence
<p style="text-align: center;">Lack of Mental Wellness or Recreation Opportunities</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">82% of Kids Up Front partners said their participants lacked mental wellness or recreation opportunities</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Contributing Factors</p> <p>Respondents identified low income as an important factor that contributed to the lack of wellness and recreational opportunities for their program participants.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low Income 2. Other – lack of knowledge, infrastructure, variety of opportunities 3. Disability 4. Mental health issues

<p>Lack of Educational or Cultural Opportunities</p>  <p>79% of Kids Up partners said their participants lacked educational or cultural opportunities</p>	<p>Contributing Factors</p> <p>Respondents identified low income as an important factor that contributed to the lack of educational and cultural opportunities for their program participants.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low income 2. Newcomers 3. Lack of natural supports or role models 4. Barriers due to disability 5. Transience, severe disruptions to home or family life
<p>Low Family Cohesion or Family Disconnect</p>  <p>77% of Kids Up Front partners said their participants experienced low family cohesion or family disconnect</p>	<p>Contributing Factors</p> <p>Respondents explained that in many cases where there was low family cohesion and disconnect, unstable homes and family breakdown were a factor.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complex, broken families, unstable homes, low parenting capacity and independent living (almost complete disconnect of child from family) 2. Low income 3. Domestic violence 4. Government involvement, separation, foster care, group home 5. Disability 6. Single parent 7. Severe issues: mental health, addiction, abuse, trauma and racism 8. Transition and disconnect from extended family
<p>Lack of Safe and Appropriate Facilities</p>  <p>68% of Kids Up Front partners said their participants lacked safe and appropriate facilities</p>	<p>Contributing Factors</p> <p>For many respondents that stated their participants lacked safe and appropriate facilities, disability played a key role in their accessibility challenges.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disability 2. Safety (from domestic violence, racism, homophobia and transphobia) 3. Behavioural issues or lacking knowledge of appropriate public behaviour/social skills 4. Severe disruptions to home or family life

Need for Respite	Contributing Factors
 <p data-bbox="228 558 756 667">63% of Kids Up Front partners said their participants needed opportunities for respite</p>	<p data-bbox="805 281 1349 407">Survey responses indicating a need for respite opportunities often mentioned that their program participants were parents – in many cases single parents.</p> <ol data-bbox="854 443 1373 638" style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parenting/single parents 2. Need for qualified supports like community aides, support workers and personal care attendants 3. Disability 4. Lack of natural supports

Cross-cutting Characteristics

Despite having different backgrounds and circumstances, many Kids Up Front beneficiaries were found to share certain needs. During focus groups, participants representing non-profit agencies, government services and schools were asked to describe the situations of the children, youth and families they served – the 3 key themes described in this section emerged across a diverse set of sub-populations.

Limited Social Experiences

According to focus group respondents, many if not most of the beneficiaries of Kid Up Front interventions were confined to a limited range of experiences. This looked different from sub-group to sub-group, with respondents describing a spectrum of situations that children, youth and families faced. Some faced additional barriers in their day to day lives that kept them bound - this would have been due to living with a disability, financial constraints, or language barriers. For others, respondents described more extreme experiences of marginalization and social disconnect, often in conjunction with family dysfunction, poverty or homelessness. In those cases, addiction and mental health issues were frequently cited as contributing factors. Respondents described individuals as ‘being on the outside and looking in’ with few opportunities to experience activities that would be considered ‘normal’ for others. At times this meant that young people found it difficult to understand what was expected of them in different social and community contexts - this was compounded by having few opportunities to observe and then practice expected behaviours.

In general, experiences of community were confined, either socially or geographically, oftentimes both. Social limitations were experienced in the form of exposure to only one set of cultural norms or little experience with the wider community. Geographic limitations meant that individuals had never left their neighbourhoods and were completely unfamiliar with areas outside of the community they resided in. This resulted in program participants knowing little about their city, cultural norms and lacking a sense of belonging. Having a limited set of

experiences also meant that children and young people were struggling to imagine themselves doing anything new or different. As one respondent described: 'they can't really picture themselves doing something different because they've never seen it.' At times this would result in an actual aversion to trying new activities, with beneficiaries being described as 'anxious' or even 'terrified' about entering unfamiliar situations.

Poverty and financial constraints were often mentioned as barriers to participation, with the cost of transportation, parking and the events themselves being prohibitive for many program participants. In the case of certain children, unfamiliar social situations needed a more careful, and slower paced introduction, especially with children who were prone to overstimulation, and were sensitive to noise or crowds, or those with physical, medical or behavioural issues. Different groups also shared the common characteristic of being unable to prioritize recreational and wellness opportunities due to other concerns taking precedence. Newcomers were focused on settling into their new circumstances, low income families prioritized their basic needs, families that included an individual with a chronic illness found that medical care and physical health came first.

Need for Bonding and Relationship Opportunities

Across various sub-groups Kids Up Front beneficiaries tended to be described as needing more opportunities for bonding, connection and relationship-building in their lives. One or more of the following areas were often lacking in the lives of program participants: strong interpersonal and social skills, healthy family bonds, opportunities to interact outside of limited social circles, and strong connections to community.

For many children and their families, it was common to lack typical community connections, resulting in fewer opportunities for developing friendships and relationships. Newcomers and those with a disability or medical condition were often limited in their ability to participate in social activities, due to language barriers, resource and time constraints, or physical barriers. These restrictions would ultimately impact their social capital and support networks.

Large families, or children that required additional supports/ aides to participate in activities often lacked opportunities to bond given the challenges of organizing larger numbers of people or finding appropriate facilities and events. For families with a child who had a disability, the importance of building strong sibling relationships was highlighted as critical, and perhaps a more pressing need than in the average family, as typical siblings would often take on caregiver roles in their future. Other situations that impacted relationships within families included children that had experienced separation from caregivers, complex family structures, and government intervention. In cases where family cohesion was particularly low due to multiple factors (including addiction and mental health issues) children lacked the developmental relationships that characterize stable family dynamics. Gathering from respondent descriptions of situations like these, severe complications in the primary social unit - the family - tended to negatively influence how individual children grew up to construct their wider network of social interactions and relationships.

Need for Respite

Organizations in partnership with Kids Up Front highlighted that in many cases, their program participants had a higher than average need for a break from their day to day experiences. According to focus group respondents, the children and families they worked with often faced greater stress than average and enjoyed fewer opportunities for self-care or improving their well-being.

Families of individuals with a disability, chronic illness or other medical challenges not only spent more time as caregivers, they also had additional responsibilities in managing hospital visits, medical care and additional supports. More than once, focus group respondents talked about how families with one special needs child often needed opportunities for 'sibling respite' – situations where typical siblings were able to enjoy recreational experiences, build stronger family relationships and receive some additional attention from their parents.

Focus group respondents also talked about children's need for relief from day to day stressors. While this may be the case for most children at some point in life, respondents described their program participants as facing persistent stressors to the point of facing adversity. These children often found themselves facing responsibilities or challenges that were usually associated with adults.

This was frequently the case when children were from refugee families, when a family member or parent had addiction or mental health issues, or when a youth had an insecure living situation or was homeless. According to respondents, children that had entered into the foster care system, or had experienced severe disruptions to a stable family life carried past or current experiences of trauma. In many cases, focus group respondents described children being in situations where they needed an escape from this trauma, with the level of stress they were facing having the potential to seriously impact their well-being.

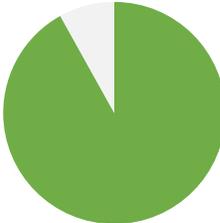
Section 3: Impact

Impact 1: Strengthening Relationships

From amongst the top 3 impacts described, survey and focus group respondents identified that the strengthening of relationships and social connections was the most important change to which Kids Up Front’s work contributed. Across different agencies, services and schools, respondents stated that they relied on Kids Up Front tickets to strengthen connections within families, build ties between organization staff and clients, and create connections between vulnerable individuals and natural supports in community.



91% of survey respondents that indicated that **social isolation** was an issue with their clients also confirmed that Kids Up Front contributed to its reduction.



91% of survey respondents that indicated that their clients experienced **low family cohesion** also confirmed that Kids Up Front contributed to its reduction.

What Changes Did Community Partners Observe?

Strengthening Family Ties and Connections to Natural Supports

“These events allow for families who have lived a legacy of trauma the opportunity to experience an event in a healthy way and make new memories together. We often hear from the families about the event even months after they attended.”

When community partners described Kids Up Front services it was clear that they viewed them primarily as opportunities for relationship building. They identified a number of important outcomes for beneficiaries as a result of attending events:

Increased socialization with family (and other natural supports), increased family bonding and improved attitudes towards family members were seen as some of the more immediate effects for children and their families. Initial bonds would strengthen over time due to improved socialization between individual family members, more open communication, and the connections that were created after having positive social experiences together. Ultimately, respondents reported seeing families build more trusting and positive relationships with each other, resulting in increased family cohesion and healthier family functioning on the whole.

Given that Kids Up Front beneficiaries tended to belong to at-risk groups many of the positive impacts had occurred in complex situations and with individuals facing higher than average levels of social disconnect. Respondents reported that Kids Up Front tickets contributed to the nurturing of bonds between foster parents and children, reconnecting families that had experienced trauma and separation and the strengthening of relationships between typical siblings and siblings living with a disability.

Strengthening Ties to Community

While most respondents emphasized the importance of Kids Up Front events to strengthening family bonds, many identified that stronger connections were also being built outside of the family unit. The strengthening of ties to community and consequently the building of social capital were key outcomes that Kids Up Front was contributing to.

Kids Up Front interventions were seen as directly influencing the attitudes of children, youth and their families regarding the role of community in their lives. Beneficiaries built their understanding of what community was, had improved knowledge of social norms in different contexts, and understood how to be more involved in community. For newcomer families especially, who faced language and cultural barriers, respondents reported increased connection and cultural understanding with individuals outside of their cultural community. Interestingly, improvements in knowledge of social norms and behaviours were not restricted to newcomers and immigrants to Canada. For some born and raised Canadians, their situation of marginalization due to chronic poverty, racism or isolation meant that they too experienced significant learning when exposed to novel community settings.

Events were not only sites for social learning, they were widely experienced as opportunities to initiate new connections, and to strengthen ties outside of the immediate family unit. Youth were able to build one-on-one friendships with their peers, or connect in a more positive ways with teachers, mentors and other supportive adults. Families with a child with a medical illness or disability found that Kids Up Front opportunities were a forum for initiating and strengthening connections with families facing similar circumstances and challenges. According to respondents, these ties contributed to an improved network of support, and a longer-term sense of belonging in community. Service providers also linked short-term benefits such as new connections and improved cultural understanding to the longer-term process of healthy integration into Canadian society for newcomers and immigrants.

How Did Kids Up Front Contribute to These Changes?

Positive Social Experiences

Respondents talked about the importance of having suitable opportunities to socialize and bond. Survey and focus group respondents stated the fact that if the Kids Up Front opportunity had not existed, many beneficiaries simply would not have attended an event of that nature. Having accessible and suitable events and family centred opportunities meant that individuals could interact in a safe, positive and meaningful way. Events were often an opportunity to observe and practice social and communication skills and to demonstrate publicly acceptable behaviours. At times, being in a different setting allowed young people to break out of negative social responses; and with frustrating or limiting environments out of the way, they were able to demonstrate much more positive interactions with their peers and other adults.

Opportunities for Group Experiences

Respondents highlighted that a critical factor for the relationship-building they observed was the provision of group opportunities to beneficiaries. Having the option to go in groups meant that these events were social experiences, and a unique opportunity for everyone to enjoy something together. This meant that larger families were able to go to events that they would otherwise not have been able to attend. Respondents described how a Kids Up Front opportunity was in many cases the first time an entire family was attending an event together. Kids Up Front gave community and social services the ability to provide opportunities for members of foster families and biological families to bond, for step siblings to attend events together, and for cohorts of youth sharing residence in a group home to form stronger relationships. When larger groups went together, multiple families found opportunities to connect with their peer group and build a sense of community – this was especially important to families that faced similar circumstances, whether it was the common experiences of being foster parents, having a child with a disability, or being a newcomer to Calgary.

Shared Experiences as Drivers of Stronger Relationships

Respondents reported that beneficiaries left with shared positive memories as a family (or group) - these memories were believed to influence relationships in the longer term, with impact lasting far beyond the event itself. Respondents described events as 'opening up conversations amongst families' - with families discussing their experiences and having something to talk about for a long time after the event was over.

Shared experiences also acted as a catalyst for community belonging with beneficiaries feeling included and part of experiences that were typical for the average Calgarian. They had more in common with other people in society, which strengthened their ability to connect with people outside of their immediate social circles. Respondents described that when a young person or child felt marginalized, having a common experience like attending a hockey game gave them

social experiences to talk about with others, something to share that was relatable, and made them feel included in their peer group. They also had a better understanding of other's norms which aided them in bridging connections outside of their limited social circles.

What Did the Research Say?

There is overwhelming evidence to support the theory that bonding, with families and parents in particular, is key to the overall health and well-being of children and youth. Researchers have highlighted that children develop in the context of relationships with family, and the science of early childhood development has identified that responsive relationships in early life build the very foundation of children's brains (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016). Similarly, healthy bonding is critical to the overall well-being of adolescents, with a large-scale study finding that a positive family and home life play an important role in protecting children from harm. In a large-scale study of US teens, adolescent's feelings of connection to family and parents was found to be the most consistent protective factor across 90,000 teenagers (Lee & Lok, 2012).

Central to the theory that Kids Up Front opportunities contributed to building stronger relationships for children and youth is the premise that these events were not just recreational - they were critical sites for social interaction. Many community partners stated that they intentionally used events to build bonds within families, with natural supports and to encourage friendship and peer bonding. Research confirms the idea that events are opportunities for social interaction, with multiple studies suggesting that socialization is a key motivator that drives people to attend events (Hixson, 2012). Mirroring what was stated by respondents in this study, research suggests that 'events create a public space in which people can interact and become more familiar with each other' (Hixson, 2012). Bonding and understanding pro-social norms are critical to the healthy development of young people, and safe community environments are considered appropriate for encouraging both of these developments (Lee & Lok, 2012).

Increased social connectedness and a sense of belonging are both outcomes associated with experiencing performances, affirming the idea that cultural and recreational events have a role in improving connection to the community (Carnwath & Brown, 2014). Residents have been observed to develop place identity through community events, with shared experiences and collective images of a place being key to this process (Hixson, 2014). This can go a step further when observing the impact of engagement in sports on newcomers and immigrants to Canada. A study of 4,000 new citizens in Canada found that 'sports have the ability to generate national pride and a more intense connection to Canada and being Canadian'. This study describes mechanisms for integration that are similar to those described by respondents in this project; explaining that in the experience of new citizens, even knowledge of a popular sport (and not actually playing it) was enough to establish connections, begin conversations and develop a greater sense of belonging in Canada (Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014).

Section 3: Impact

Impact 2: Expanded Knowledge, Interests and Skills



74% of survey respondents that indicated that their clients lacked **educational and cultural opportunities** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.



67% of survey respondents that indicated that their clients needed **safe and appropriate spaces, facilities and events** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.

What Changes Did Community Partners Observe?

“Helps expand students' worlds by breaking them out of their isolated shells and giving them experiences that they couldn't otherwise access.”

The role that Kids Up Front opportunities played in exposing children and their families to new social and cultural experiences was highlighted by respondents as being one of the top 3 impacts of Kids Up Front’s services. According to focus groups, there was inherent value in experiencing something for the first time. They highlighted the contribution of these experiences to outcomes like having an expanded perspective, having a new understanding of culture and society, and a clearer understanding of how the world works. The short term impacts that were more immediately attributable to Kids Up Front included the following: exposure outside of one’s home neighbourhood (for those individuals that tended to be geographically confined), exposure to Canadian culture, greater knowledge of community resources and an increased knowledge of a variety of sports and recreation events. This increased exposure was linked to a shift in attitudes towards previously unfamiliar or intimidating social and recreational activities. Respondents observed the development of new

interests, ideas and passions in young people. Children saw an expansion in their overall opportunities, had new ideas and inspiration, and were more excited about sports, physical and cultural activities.

The positive impact of exposure was not simply limited to new recreational interests. Respondents saw Kids Up Front events give some young people opportunities to improve their social skills and practice appropriate behaviours in social settings. Respondents talked about encouraging the children they worked with to attend an event where they could try out newly learned social skills that they had learnt in treatment or programming settings. Many children served by Kids Up Front particularly benefited from opportunities for social skill building, either due to growing up in isolated settings, having limited experiences with mainstream society due to sickness or disability, or generally requiring additional support to build confidence and understand common social settings.

It was also observed that children and their families tended to participate in a wider array of events after attending a Kids Up Front opportunity. They were seen experiencing the kind of personal growth that comes with undertaking positive challenges and entering new situations. Respondents suggested that this kind of exposure, when implemented in a safe manner, built confidence and willingness in children, young people and their families to try new things. For example, parents showed greater willingness to take a special needs child to an event after a good experience with a Kids Up Front event - they would build the confidence to venture out further and more often. In the long term this could result in decreased social isolation due to increased participation in social activities.

How did Kids Up Front Contribute to These Changes?

“If they can see it, they can be it”

Barrier-free Access to Diverse Events

Respondents highlighted the fact that without Kids Up Front services, most of the opportunities experienced by children and their families would have been unknown, unaffordable or inaccessible to them. Without the tickets many of the families and children simply would not have been able to go due to lack of knowledge about community events and facilities, and financial barriers. Kids Up Front offered a wide range of opportunities that matched the different interests of beneficiaries and met their specific needs. Flexible seating options such as suites and boxes, accessible seats, and tickets to accommodate multiple families at the same time were also highlighted as a critical factor in realizing positive outcomes for these target populations. Families that needed aides or additional support for their disabled child could attend an event, newcomer families could enjoy an opportunity with the guidance of a volunteer or mentor’s family, children that had experienced domestic violence could access a safe and enjoyable social experience that would have otherwise been unaffordable.

Ability to Test

The removal of the cost of the ticket also contributed to a stress-free experience for many families. Many respondents elaborated on the need for families to ‘test’ an event; with many children having sensory or behavioural issues, it was important to have the flexibility to leave if the child was overwhelmed or having a poor reaction to the environment. With Kids Up Front opportunities families were able to attend part of an event and leave when necessary, experience events from a more suitable setting such as a suite, and build up their child’s tolerance for new environments, all without incurring large financial costs.

Closing the Experience Gap

A frequent probing question posed to focus groups focused on how exactly novelty, or having exposure to new experiences resulted in positive outcomes for children and young people. One explanation that was posited by focus groups was that respondents were working with children who had a deficit in experiences and their lives often lacked variety. Kids Up Front experiences helped them close this gap and have a range of experiences that was closer to the average person in Calgary. With new experiences came personal growth. One respondent described how going to new events meant that children were broadening their horizons and gaining a new perspective of the world. They understood that new possibilities existed, adopted new roles models, and were inspired to have new dreams. Other respondents affirmed that this process occurred in their program participants, suggesting that when children could see a bigger picture, they came away with more hope, more aspirations for their own future, and more positive feelings in general.

Growing Skills and Interests

Respondents highlighted that an important change arising from increased exposure to a variety of cultural, educational and recreational events was the growth of new skills and interests in children. This was a topic many respondents expanded on, explaining that **young people were more likely to develop an appreciation of sports, arts and theatre after attending an event.** Respondents stated that watching professionals perform often inspired children to pursue their own interests. This could go well beyond the desire to simply watch - children’s ambitions to participate and perform themselves were often catalyzed after exposure to an event. Agency and school staff also saw children diversify their interests due to the accessibility of different kinds of experiences. They described how some children were exposed to a wider variety of sports, while others were able to shift their interests beyond just sporting activities to other forms of recreation like arts, music and theatre. In many cases it meant that young people gained new interests, pursued new skills and for some, re-imagined their careers and life trajectories.

As mentioned in the impact section, respondents stated that families were more likely to continue to participate in community and social events once they had been introduced through Kids Up Front. A contributing factor in this was that once they had experienced an event (with a lower financial risk) they better understood what it would take to go out together as a family, the capacity they had, and the possibilities that were open to them. For some, this was as simple as familiarizing themselves with another part of the city that they had never visited before, for others, it was knowing that a venue had accessible seating, washrooms in close proximity and realizing exactly how their child reacted to certain noise levels.

What Does the Research Say?

Studies on the impact of culture and sport on young people suggest that the positive outcomes of participation are not limited to the immediate benefits derived from a social or leisure activity. Attendance of museums, galleries and heritage sites have been found to positively impact young people's learning. Participation in structured arts activities, and organized sports have been associated with improvements in numeracy skills and overall academic achievement for students (CASE, 2010).

While not all Kids Up Front opportunities provided a structured format (although some do), respondents stressed the importance of exposure as a first step in young people familiarizing themselves with and testing a new area of interest. There is evidence to support this thinking - a statistical analysis to understand drivers of engagement found that childhood experiences of cultural and sport-related activities were positively associated with continued engagement as an adult. Results showed that this pattern of continued engagement was consistent across different types of cultural and sporting activities (CASE, 2010).

Similarly, a review of multiple studies uncovering the impact of cultural experiences found that creative activation was a well-documented short-term outcome of attending a performance, while in the longer-term individuals experienced increased cultural capacity and an expanded worldview (Carnwath & Brown, 2014). These changes mirror the kinds of increases in learning, understanding and pursuit of interests observed by the respondents in this study.

Section 3: Impact

Impact 3: Improved Well-Being



77% of survey respondents that indicated that their clients had a need for **recreational and mental wellness opportunities** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.



64% of survey respondents that indicated that their clients **needed respite opportunities** also confirmed that Kids Up Front helped address this need.

What Changes Did Community Partners Observe?

“They (parents) feel good seeing their children smiling and enjoying something after often experiencing trauma and turmoil. The moms and the children are building positive memories.”

A final theme that emerged in the top 3 impacts of Kids Up Front services was improvement in the well-being and emotional health of beneficiaries. Immediate impacts that can be directly attributed to attendance of an event included increased joy and happiness, lower stress and improved mood, as well as distance from negative thoughts and mental burdens. Respondents also suggested that for parents it was important that the event gave them a much-needed break, as well as relief from monotony for the whole family. Community partners described clients as smiling, laughing and enjoying themselves and being in a better mental space. For children it was ‘a chance to just be a kid for a night’ and ‘an opportunity not to focus on problems.’

Respondents also described further effects such as decrease in stress for parents, increased happiness for individuals and families even after an event, and improvements in overall family wellness. Longer-term impacts included boosts in the self-esteem and identity of children and young people. Respondents reported seeing improved self-confidence, increased sense of independence and improved self-efficacy in children and youth. After receiving event tickets children were more likely to view themselves as being valued by others and as having something to contribute to those around them.

How Did Kids Up Front Contribute to These Changes?

“Students have had a positive experience in their lives to offset negatives”

Removal from Stressors

Respondents listed the following critical factors that contributed to improvements in well-being: being removed from day-to-day stressors and being in an enjoyable environment. For both children and adults, respondents described how it was important to be able to put their negative experiences away and do something positive and fun. Focus group respondents described laughter, enjoyment and freedom from worries as healing processes for many of their clients. Children who were often exposed to adult realities and problems were able to act their age during events and experience some recreation and play in their lives.

As described previously, for some clients the distance from typical environments meant that they were removed from the frustrating circumstances, triggers and negative associations that impacted their behaviour towards others. In allowing the space for improved relationships, Kids Up Front interventions catalyzed changes that would strengthen support networks around children and further contributed their overall well-being.

Feeling Valued

Children and their families felt valued when tickets were offered to them, they often saw it as a sign of being respected or recognized by the service provider or school. Improvements in self-esteem were also linked to a change in perspective where children saw themselves, sometimes for the first time in their lives, as contributors – individuals who brought something of value to others. For a young person, being the reason why their family or friends were able to attend an exciting event meant that they were able to counter negative perceptions and build their standing with others. This effect was seen in young people across different target populations, ranging from children with limited independence (due to illness or disability) to young people with behavioral issues.

Building Inclusion and Perceptions of Normalcy

“Clients report that receiving the tickets help them feel “normal” again. It helps them remember the great things that are out there and the importance of engaging as a family.”

Respondents often framed Kids Up Front services as a ‘social equalizer’- a set of opportunities that diversified access to community resources and social assets. In many cases the extent to which some groups faced barriers accessing an opportunity meant that they were virtually excluded from the realms of spectator sport, the performing arts and other community recreation events. These barriers could be in the form of unsuitable or inaccessible facilities/events, or they could take the form of financial, geographic and cultural unfamiliarity. By providing a financially risk-free starting point for participation, Kids Up Front played a role in making community events more accessible and contributed to the diversity of the audience and participants enjoying these events.

Given the context of marginalization for many of these children, an important result of Kids Up Front services was the improvement in perceptions of sense of belonging in society. More than one respondent talked about the children and families they worked with feeling ‘normal’ due to attending events that the average Calgarian would have experienced. Children felt fewer negative emotions and experienced less sense of being left out and isolated. One respondent described the children they worked with as ‘being on the outside, and looking in’, and explained how something as simple as attending Stampede for the first time helped them feel more like a part of the society they lived in.

Venue for Exploring Social Identity and Independence

Events often allowed children and youth a new level of independence and allowed them to develop a better sense of their own role in society. Respondents described how going to an event with their peers gave youth a first step into society as their own person. It allowed them to practice how to function in public and discover how they relate to society as individuals. From a respondent perspective, Kids Up Front events presented a ‘safe challenge’, an experience that was inviting enough for a young person to willingly undertake in the company of peers that was also an opportunity to navigate a new situation successfully and practice independence.

As has been previously described, focus group respondents observed that there was a power in being in a new setting where expectations were not set. Children who had a negative image amongst their family, peers or teachers were often able to behave differently when removed from their typical environment and construct a better public image. This mechanism for change has already been discussed in association with stronger relationships and improved knowledge and skills; respondents additionally linked the same process to enhanced well-being in program participants. In response to improvements in relationships, social skills, and pursuit of new

interests, children and youth saw a ripple effect that positively impacted their confidence, self-esteem and sense of efficacy.

What Does the Research Say?

The positive relationship between well-being and participation in arts, cultural and recreational activities is found in many studies. A number of different types of events, performances and activities are documented to have enhanced general well-being in individuals; including concerts, arts events, sporting activities, theatre attendance and attendance of museums and heritage sites (Wheatley and Bickerton, 2017) (Hill, 2013). Canadians who had attended a theatre performance were found to be more likely to report strong satisfaction with life than non-attendees and were more likely to report that they were in good mental health (Hill, 2013). A literature review aimed at discovering the various impacts of cultural experiences found that attending a performance had both immediate and longer-term impacts on individuals. People attending an event were likely to experience spiritual uplift and feelings of social connectedness in the short term, while extended impacts included a longer-term sense of social belonging, positive memories of the event and health benefits (Carnwath and Brown, 2014). It is important to note that positive well-being effects were not limited to cultural and community activities that would normally be considered intellectually stimulating. While positive outcomes were observed as a result of art gallery attendance, classical music concerts, and museum attendance, they were also associated with pop music concerts, sporting events and festivals (Wheatley and Bickerton, 2017) (Hill, 2013). According to one study, some of the well-being benefits of such events are derived from the generation of ‘positive leisure experiences’ (Wheatley and Bickerton, 2017), and would presumably not be limited to educational or ‘high-brow’ activities.

Research also confirms that adolescents require exposure to cultural belief systems, values, and norms for healthy identity development as well as needing opportunities for meaningful social inclusion (Lee and Lok, 2012). According to a study on the impact of young people’s participation in events: “Leisure activities can enhance quality of life because young people are able to express themselves through their interests and can be themselves. At this young age, adolescents are most likely trying to find themselves and their place in society. As adolescents who are still in the transitional process of establishing their sense of identity, exploration of how events contribute to their identity can shed more light on their process of self-development” (Hixson, 2014). Similar to how respondents described young people using events to develop and configure their social identity, the same study found that it was important for young people to ‘try on’ different aspects of their personality through social interactions (Hixson, 2014). Finally, there is also evidence to suggest that giving young people opportunities to undertake meaningful challenges that focus on allowing space for improvement and granting responsibility supports them in building their self-efficacy (Lee & Lok, 2012); just as described by respondents in this study.

Section 3: Impact

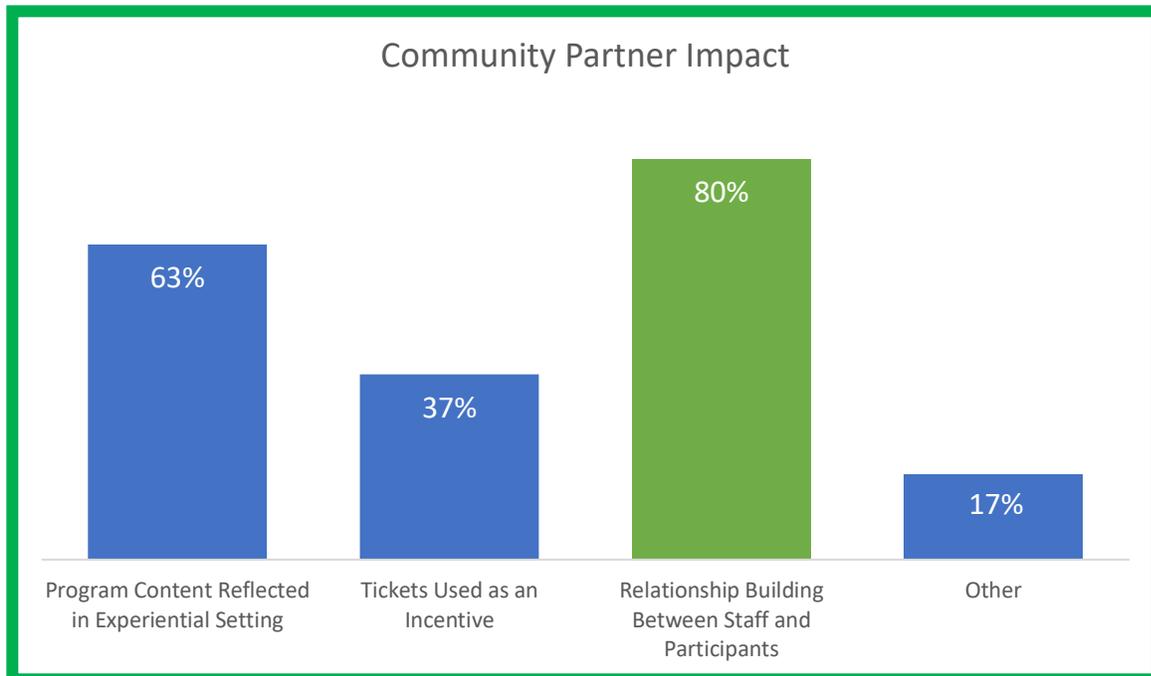
Impact on Community Partners and Programs

Improved Relationships between Staff and Clients

Similar to the results discussed in the top 3 impacts, the most significant direct impact on community partners was an improvement in the relationship between their staff and clients (or students). This was seen across different kinds of organizations and entities: government services, schools and a variety of non-profit service providers.

Both parents and their children were reported to have improved perceptions of schools where Kids Up Front opportunities were a regularly offered component of programming. Families saw teachers as going 'above and beyond' for their children and perceived them to be genuinely concerned about students' well-being. Teachers reported that providing opportunities for their students allowed them to build a better reputation for their school, and create the sense that school was a welcoming space for all students. Showing that they actively supported the needs of children, including family wellness, gave schools the ability to build a positive perception of providing holistic supports. School staff also reported using Kids Up Front tickets to make initial connections with parents and then engage them into the broader school community.

Non-profits and public service representatives saw similar changes, with improved relationships with clients and improved reputation being frequently cited outcomes of their partnership with Kids Up Front. Staff described tickets being used to keep waitlisted individuals feeling connected to the organization, bringing parents back to certain programs, and opening the door to positive relationships with new clients. Agencies had a means of showing support during challenging times, as well as a way to build one-on-one relationships with clients by attending events with them. Program staff observed stronger communication after events, and an ability to open up conversations with clients they were struggling to connect with. Counsellors found that the experiences were a convenient conversation starter during sessions, and home visitors found they were no longer perceived as strangers entering a home. Staff reported that the opportunity to distribute tickets also contributed to their own well-being, as they felt they were able to do something positive for the families they worked with. Respondents also observed that in most cases, successful outcomes for children and their families were significantly tied to the quality of relationships they had, meaning that a wide array of programs would see stronger outcomes when client relationships improved.



Strengthening Program Content

Respondents from across the service sector and school system talked about using Kids Up Front opportunities to enhance their programs and complement their curriculums. Some of the advantages that were listed included: being able to stretch program budgets since relevant opportunities were being provided for free, offering diverse experiences as part of their program, and allowing staff to explore a more comprehensive range of interests for each young person. Services that would otherwise have been focused strictly on basic needs were able to diversify their offering to clients. Respondents stated that they were able to provide opportunities that allowed children to fully explore their strengths and build on assets as they worked through the program. Many mentioned that they were often able to tailor experiences to the needs, interests and passions of their clients. Events also provided an experiential element to regular programming, with concepts and skills being brought to life in performances, sporting events and educational experiences. For agencies that worked with families living with a critical illness, Kids Up Front events also formed the basis for wish programs and life enrichment programs within agencies.

Providing Recognition and Incentives

Many agencies and schools were using Kids Up Front tickets to motivate and appreciate their clients and students. Events were frequently offered as incentives to improve the participation and retention of clients in services. Similarly, teachers awarded tickets to students for improved attendance. Respondents reported seeing increased motivation in their clients and students due to being recognized, and found that they had avenues for celebrating children's achievements in a way that their regular program budget would not allow.

Supporting Volunteer Programs

Throughout Calgary, volunteer programs that benefit children and their families were being supported by the event tickets provided by Kids Up Front. Agencies consistently used tickets to support volunteer recruitment, strengthen mentor and mentee relationships, as well as provide them with appropriate activities to attend together. Respondents stated that tickets were an incentive for volunteers, they alleviated the cost and effort of finding social activities, and they allowed agencies to recognize their volunteers in a meaningful way.

Section 4: Learning and Improvement

Kids Up Front Success Factors

This section of the report is focused on describing success factors that applied across a spectrum of contexts and contributed to the achievement of different outcome areas.

Flexibility and Lack of Paperwork

Numerous focus group respondents agreed that Kids Up Front's flexible model and lack of red tape were critical to the success of the overall service. These factors allowed agencies to maintain a partnership with minimum time spent on completing paperwork and reporting, and to adapt the service offering to match their specific program needs. They were able to scale back ticket distribution during times of crisis or put in additional requests to match increased interest shown by clients. The lack of paperwork was also highlighted as an important factor in increasing the popularity and uptake of tickets amongst program participants. Many focus group respondents agreed with the idea that if program participants were required to fill out forms to access the service the additional step would act as a significant barrier for many individuals. The ability to simply confirm interest in an event and then receive a ticket was cited as a key factor in the success of the intervention, particularly given the characteristics of the beneficiary population.

Group Settings

As discussed in previous sections of the report, a notable driver of positive outcomes for Kids Up Front was providing groups of people with access to events. While building one-on-one relationships were thought of as important, focus group and survey respondents tended to emphasize that the impact of group opportunities was particularly significant. Providing a larger number of tickets meant that potential outcomes could be scaled – beneficiaries were not only bonding within their family units, they could bridge out and form new relationships, and events became opportunities to build a sense of community.

CRA Administrative Work

Community partners at one of the focus group sessions agreed that Kids Up Front performed an important function in supporting the administrative work required by the Canada Revenue Agency which was necessary for organizations to accept tickets as donations. It was suggested that without Kids Up Front shouldering this work, individual agencies would likely have to limit the amount of donations accepted as the administrative resources required would be too high. This in turn would impact the scale, quality and diversity of the opportunities offered by programs to their participants.

Suggested Improvements

The following items represent the top suggestions for improvements to Kids Up Front services made by survey and focus group respondents.

Increased Notice: This was the most frequently highlighted improvement suggested to Kids Up Front. Respondents suggested that it would be beneficial to know about available opportunities earlier, stating that any notice or information in advance would be helpful to them. Last minute opportunities made it harder for families to plan and made many opportunities an unrealistic option for individuals who would have otherwise greatly benefited from them.

Ticket Pickup: Staff noted that they often spent an excessive amount of time picking up tickets and then distributing them to clients. While suggestions for an alternative system were not offered, there was a clear preference for more e-tickets to be made available as well as more will call options.

Equitable Distribution System: Some respondents called for a ticket distribution system that gave more equitable results across organizations. The current system was seen by some as a 'first-come-first-serve' system that was favouring organizations that had desk-based contact people. For individuals who worked in the community or kept limited office hours, securing event tickets was reported to be more challenging. Respondents suggested guaranteeing or assigning some tickets for organizations so that there was less uncertainty about their availability.

Conclusion

This project was an initial step for Kids Up Front to demonstrate its impact on its beneficiaries, partners and the wider social service sector in Calgary. If future opportunities for evaluation were to present themselves, Kids Up Front would be well served by two further areas of exploration. With a number of key outcomes now described, efforts that are focused on measuring change in expected outcomes would strengthen Kids Up Front's evidence base. A second area of focus could be an in-depth exploration of causal mechanisms, which would help shed light on how exactly different factors and contexts interact and lead to a variety of outcomes.

Based on the findings of this project, it is reasonable to conclude that a diverse spectrum of groups benefited from Kids Up Front events, which acted as catalysts and builders of critical social connections. Despite groups facing different kinds of barriers, ranging from lack of inclusion all the way through to strong experiences of marginalization, observations indicate that stronger relationships are a typical result of experiencing Kids Up Front opportunities. The evidence suggests that with these short-term outcomes Kids Up Front contributes (in conjunction with other factors) to overall increased social capital and improved support networks for vulnerable children, youth and families.

This study uncovered that successful relationships mean successful programs and interventions. Agencies, social service providers and schools used Kids Up Front events to support mentoring programs, ensure that transitions to foster homes or back to biological families were more successful, and change the reputations of their organizations. This impact was not limited to simply providing incentives to improve program retention rates, or recruit volunteers and mentors, it went further for programs where relationships were a core program component. When strong positive relationships between staff and participants were critical to program functioning, Kids Up Front opportunities were being used to improve the effectiveness of the programming itself.

Appendix A: Method and Limitations

Method

After discussions with Kids Up Front staff about the purpose of this evaluation project, it was agreed that the project would undertake a learning-focused approach that was focused on exploring what changes were occurring and why. A contribution framing for this exploration was found to be most relevant, as the emphasis was not on attributing causation, but to describe outcomes and understand the mechanisms through which changes were occurring.

A mixed method approach using an online survey and focus groups was adopted that combined qualitative and quantitative data. This method allowed prominent themes to emerge through the online survey that could then be further expanded in a focus group setting. Two online survey instruments and two focus group questionnaires were developed.

Data collection was heavily focused on gathering information from Kids Up Front's community partners. This meant that no direct beneficiaries or program participants were intentionally included in the sample. This decision was made based on two factors. Community partner representatives were best placed to observe both changes at the individual level and the bigger picture of change within organizations. Secondly, had measurement of expected outcomes been a priority objective of this study, it would have been considered suitable to select indicators to be measured directly through program participants. However, with no such focus it was considered appropriate to limit data collection to community partner staff.

The first phase of data collection was a focus group with Kids Up Front staff. This yielded an initial understanding of expected needs and outcomes that were then further tested and refined in the following data collection phases.

The second phase was an online survey hosted on Survey Monkey. The survey was sent to all active Kids Up Front partners (298) through an email link. 111 responses were collected for the 10-question survey. The average time spent completing the survey was 23 minutes. A follow up survey consisting of 2 questions was completed by 164 respondents to provide supplemental information about program participant characteristics. A separate online survey was also sent to Kids Up Front board members and was completed by 11 respondents.

The final data collection phase was conducted through 5 focus group sessions that included 17 respondents. Focus group sessions lasted two hours. A purposive sampling strategy was used to determine appropriate focus group attendees. This strategy ensured that perspectives from a comprehensive cross-section of organizations were represented using a classification system based on the type of service, population of focus and type of organization (school, community agency, government service etc). An important decision made by Kids Up Front was that focus group attendees belonged to organizations that constituted the top-ticket takers, thus representing the strongest partnerships throughout the network.

One on one interviews were offered to all focus group invitees that were unable to make it to any of the five scheduled focus group sessions. A total of two one-on-one interviews were conducted, lasting about an hour each.

Qualitative responses underwent a thematic analysis, with data being sorted and then initial codes being defined based on recurring concepts. Themes were identified as patterns emerged, and a second layer of analysis was conducted to frame cross-cutting themes. Quotes were selected from survey responses, and focus group notes to summarize and illustrate findings, and to provide a sense of respondent voice.

Limitations

This study was built around an intervention that had a flexible implementation design and few parameters around target population and dosage. The study approach was to describe outcomes and understand the intervention's contribution towards them. This report describes a range of immediate to long-term outcomes that Kids Up Front has contributed to at varying levels. For immediate and short-term outcomes, it is likely that the intervention would be considered sufficient to be the direct cause. For some of the longer-term outcomes, the intervention was described as having played a catalytic role, in that it was necessary for the change to have occurred (but other factors would also have played a role in causation). It is important then to remember that the results cannot be interpreted as the average effect of the intervention.

The sampling strategy for focus group respondents is biased towards reflecting outcomes emerging from Kids Up Front's more successful partnerships. While this does not diminish the credibility of described results, it does once again limit the ability to claim that the outcomes described are the average result of the intervention, particularly in situations where community partners are not very engaged in the partnership.

Appendix B: Data Collection Tools

KIDS UP FRONT EVALUATION PROJECT

Kids Up Front Staff Interview Guide

Introduction

1. Tell me about your role at KUF and how long you've been here.
2. How have things changed since you've been a part of the organisation?

Target Population and Need

3. Thinking of the different kinds of agencies you partner with, what is the need that they are trying to address through your services?
4. What do the different agencies that you work with have in common? What about the agencies that receive the most tickets/vs least tickets? What do they have in common?"

Process and Integration

5. Can you describe the process through which tickets are requested, received and distributed to families? How are decisions made about who gets what?
6. How are your services integrated into programs/organisations?
7. KUF wants to be known as 'More than a ticket.' What does this mean to you?

Impact

8. What are the short and long term impacts of KUF services on:
 - A) Agencies - Why are these impacts occurring – how does it work?
 - B) Individual participants and their families - Why are these impacts occurring – how does it work?
9. Are there differences in the outcomes experienced by different groups/target populations?
10. What role do you see KUF playing as part of Calgary's social sector? What is the role of the organisation in the wider system?

Learning and Improvement

11. What do you think is working well?
12. What do you think is not working?
13. How can KUF package experiences so that they have a greater impact?
14. What would it take for this kind of a service to be seen as an essential part of program activities (to the degree where it is an official partnership for example)?

KIDS UP FRONT EVALUATION PROJECT

Agency Focus Group Guide

Introduction

Partnership Overview and Need

1. How long has your agency had a partnership with KUF? How did the partnership with KUF come about? Can you give me a sense of the number of people or families receiving a ticket every year?
2. What is the (broader) need in your program/organisation that this partnership addresses?
3. Can you tell me about which specific program(s) receive tickets? What is the target population for the program? Why?

Partnership Processes

4. Can you describe the process through which tickets are requested, received and distributed to families **within** your program/organisation?
5. Is the service integrated into your program? How? How are decisions made about who goes?
6. On average, how often would an individual in your program experience a KUF opportunity? What is the thinking behind this?

Impact

7. What is the most significant change to your agency, program or participants as a result of KUF services? Why do you think this change is happening?
8. Other than what you've already mentioned, are there any short or long-term impacts on children/families as a result of engaging in these positive experiences? How do they happen?
9. Other than what you've already mentioned, are there any short or long-term impacts on your agency or program as a result of KUF services? How do they happen?

Program Learning and Improvement

10. How can KUF package these experiences so that they have a greater impact?
11. Do you consider this service to be essential to your program (your program outcomes would be negatively impacted if you did not provide it). Why/Why not? If not, what would it take for this kind of a service to be seen as an essential part of your program activities?

KIDS UP FRONT EVALUATION PROJECT

All Agency Survey

Introduction

Overview

1. Please provide an overview of your organization's partnership with Kids Up Front, including the information prompted below:
 - A) Organization Name
 - B) How long has your agency had a partnership with KUF?
 - C) How many tickets are provided to your agency per year?
 - D) How many people/families receive a ticket each year?

Need and Target Population

2. Please list the program(s) in your agency that receive tickets and provide a short description of what its purpose is.
3. Do you serve a particular age group with the programs listed above?
 - Early Years (0 – 5)
 - Middle Years (6 – 12)
 - Youth (13 – 18)
 - Children and their families
4. Follow Up Survey - In order to understand its impact, Kids Up Front is interested in knowing who amongst your participants is receiving tickets. Do your program participants belong to any of the at-risk groups listed below? (Please remember that your answer should relate to only the programs receiving Kids Up Front tickets, not all your current programs).
 - Newcomers/immigrant
 - Individuals/ Families living with a disability
 - Individuals/Families living with a critical illness
 - Indigenous
 - Single parent family
 - Child welfare status
 - Low income
5. Do your participants experience any of the following needs? If so please provide some further details on what those needs look like:
 - Lack of Educational or Cultural Opportunities
 - Lack of Recreational or Mental Wellness Opportunities
 - Low Family Cohesion/Family Disconnect
 - Need for Respite
 - Need for Safe and Appropriate Facilities, Spaces or Events
 - Social Isolation

Impact

6. If you answered yes to any of the needs above, have you observed that Kids Up Front opportunities have had any impact on those needs? Please explain your answer.
7. Do Kids Up Front opportunities have any impact on your program/organization? Please also explain your answer in the space provided below.
 - Complementary Activities (Program content reflected in experiential setting)
 - Incentives (Tickets used as an incentive)
 - Relationship Building (Tickets help staff build relationships with participants)
 - Other
8. Kids Up Front is interested in learning more about how the frequency of opportunities influences the benefits experienced by participants. On average, how often would an individual in your program experience a KUF opportunity?
 - Once a year
 - Quarterly
 - Once a month
 - Weekly
 - Other
9. What are the top 3 changes to your program, agency or participants that have occurred as a result of KUF services? Please also talk about why you think the change occurred.

Learning and Improvement

10. Kids Up Front is interested in learning more about how its services can be better integrated into programming. What would it take for KUF services to be a core part of your program activities?

KIDS UP FRONT EVALUATION PROJECT

Kids Up front BOARD SURVEY

Introduction

15. Tell me about your role at KUF and how long you've been here.
16. How have things changed since you've been a part of the organisation?

Target Population and Need

17. Thinking of the different kinds of agencies you partner with, what is the need that they are trying to address through your services?
18. What do the agencies served by KUF have in common?

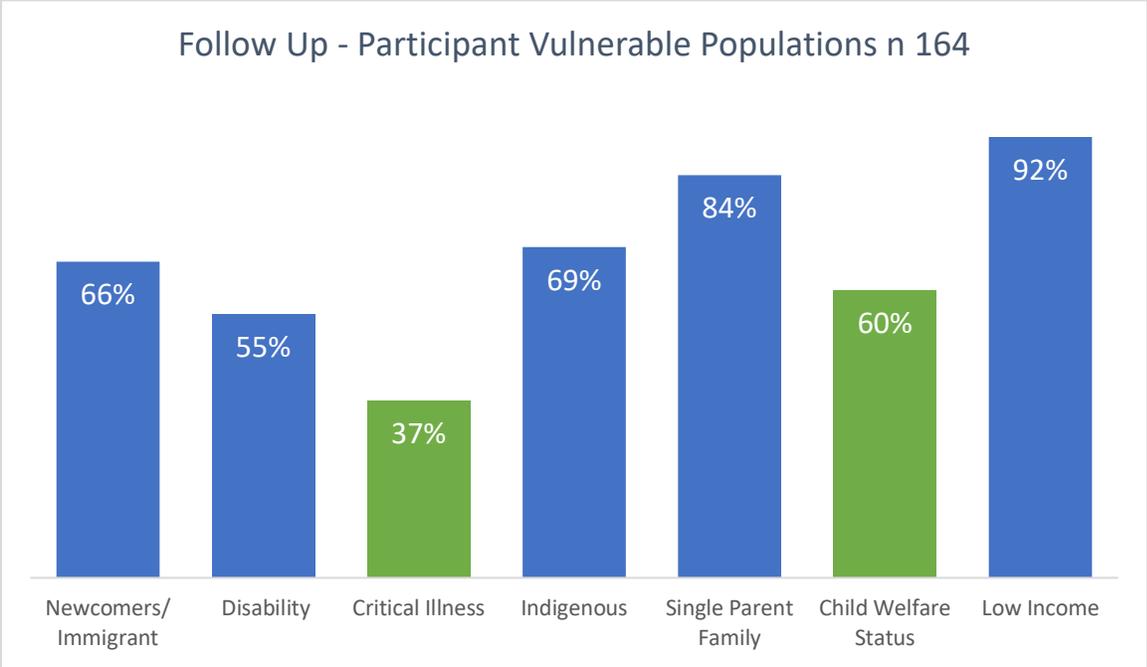
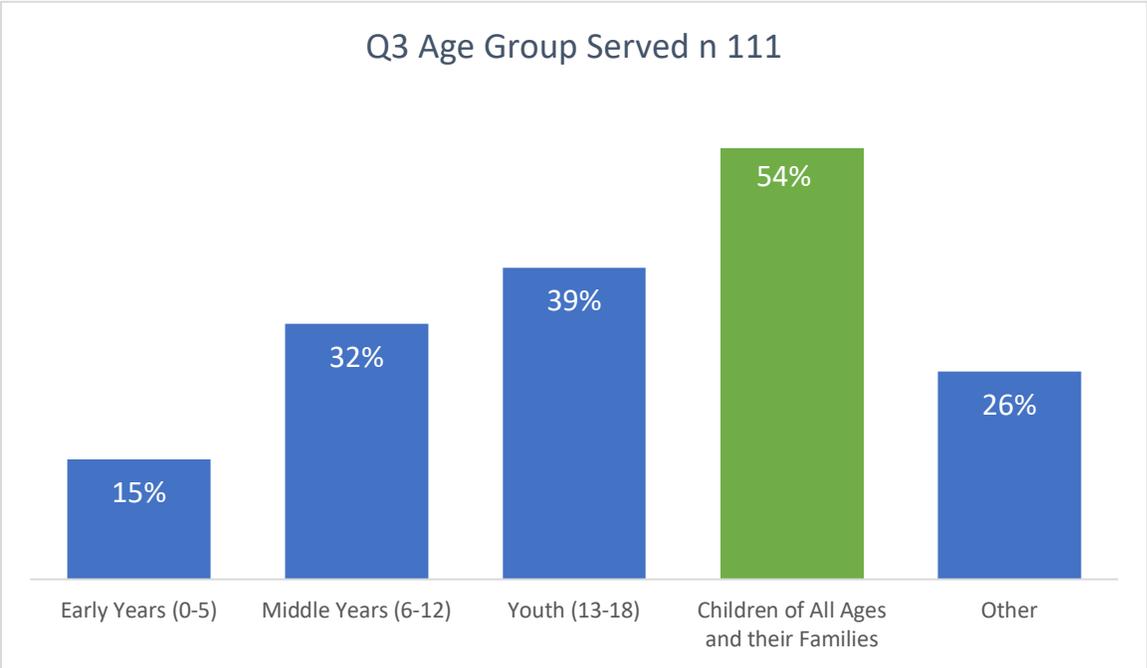
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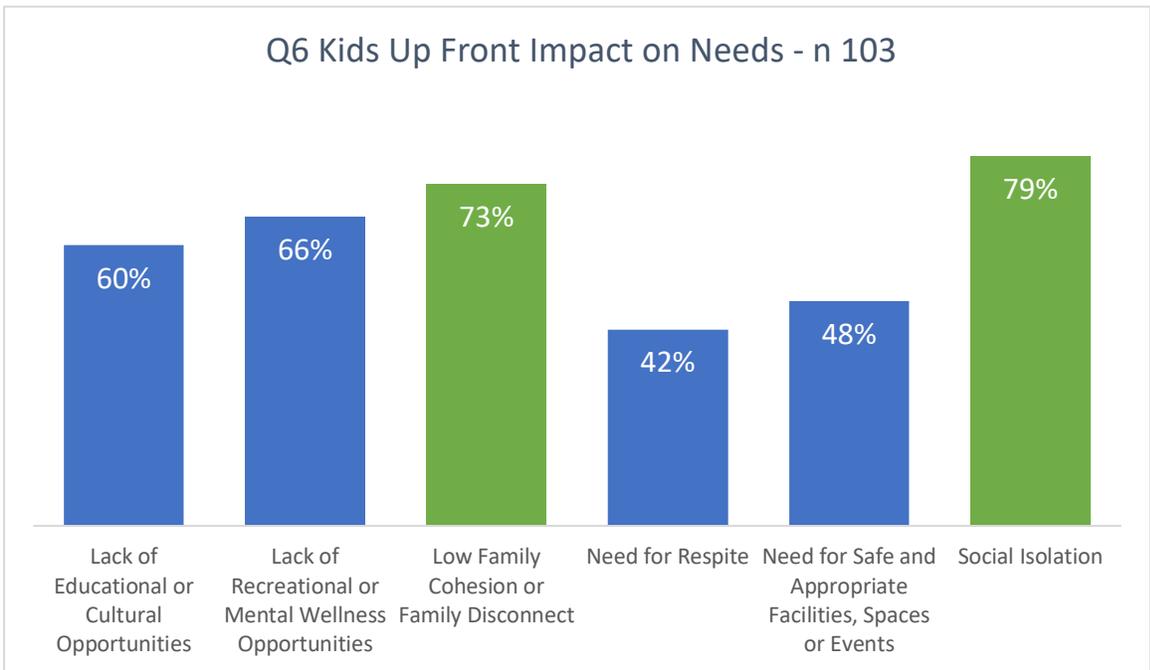
19. What are the short and long term impacts of KUF services on:
 - C) Agencies (Please explain how you think this might be happening)
 - D) Individual participants and their families (Please explain how you think this might be happening)
20. Are there differences in the outcomes experienced by different groups/target populations? Why?
21. What role do you see KUF playing as part of Calgary's social sector? What is the role of the organisation in the wider system?

Learning and Improvement

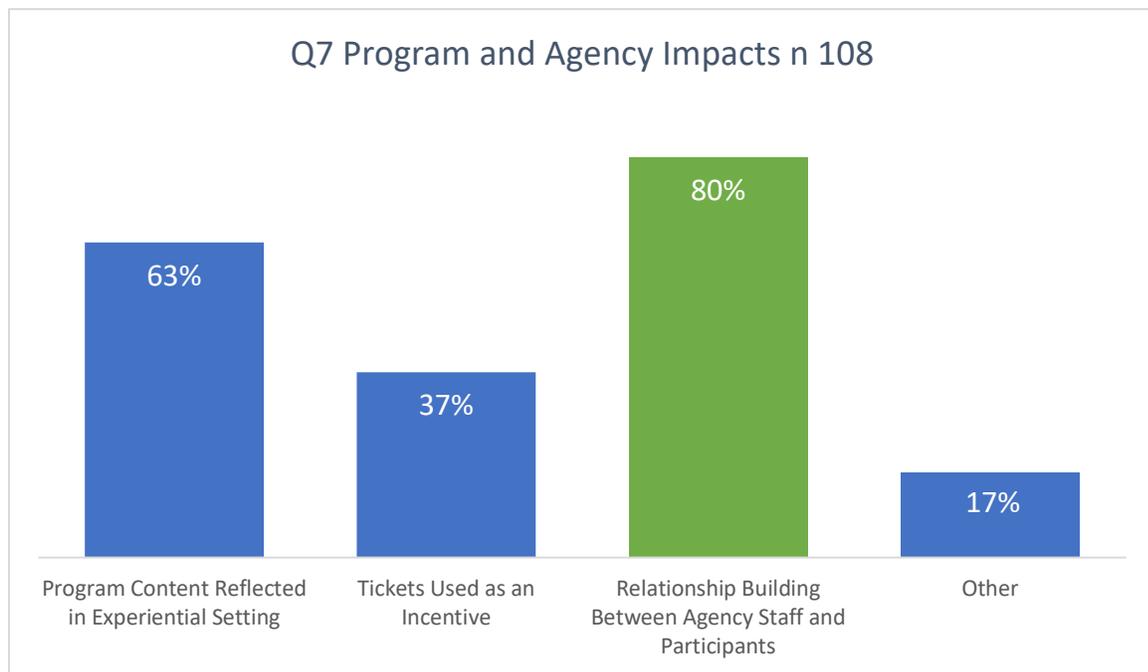
22. What do you think is working well?
23. What do you think is not working?
24. How can KUF package experiences so that they have a greater impact?
25. KUF wants to be known as 'More than a ticket.' What does this mean to you?
26. What do you think it would take for KUF services to be considered an essential part of other agencies core programs?

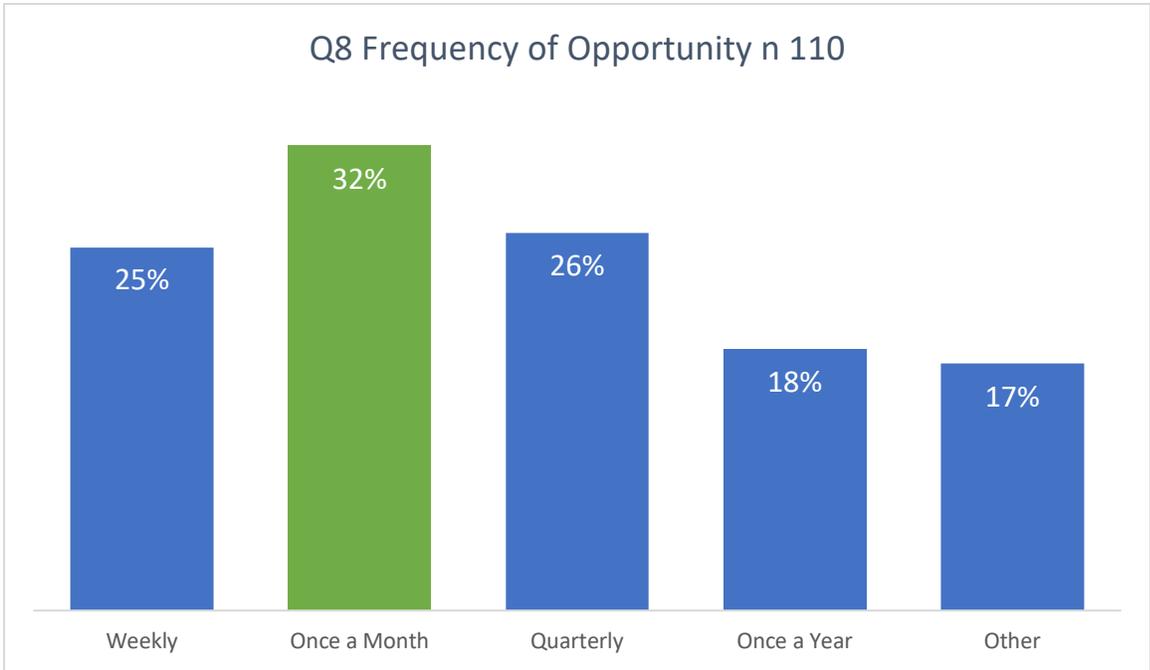
Appendix C: All Charts





KUF Contribution to Expected Needs Calculation			
Item	Q5 Needs Prevalence (n)	Q6 KUF Impact (n)	Result (%)
Lack of Educational or Cultural Opportunities	84	62	74
Lack of Recreational or Mental Wellness Opportunities	88	68	77
Family Cohesion/Family Disconnect	82	75	91
Need for Respite	67	43	64
Need for Safe and Appropriate Facilities Spaces or Events	73	49	67
Social Isolation	89	81	91





Appendix D: Additional Suggestions

While the following suggestions were not included in the body of the report due to not being one of the top 3 suggestions each was mentioned by more than one respondent:

- Increased communication – a number of respondents mentioned that it would be beneficial for their organizations to be able to hear more about Kids Up Front, including information about the organization in general, how to request tickets and how to put in requests via a Wishlist
- Support for the cost of transportation, parking and food as these can be quite prohibitive for some families
- Expansion of the beneficiary population to above 18 – respondents stated that they worked with families and individuals who would greatly benefit from Kids Up Front opportunities but were not eligible to receive tickets

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