



Meeting Summary CASA Youth Council May 19th, 2016

The inaugural meeting of the CASA Youth Council focused on identifying some of the major issues facing youth impacted by mental health struggles. The issues discussed by the CASA Youth Council have been summarized below.

Gaps in the education system. Members of the CASA Youth Council shared that schools seem to offer very little information about mental health concerns, how to get help, or stigma reduction. Some schools offer mental health days or a week, but this seems either inadequate or even a counterproductive in making any difference. Teachers have a lack of understanding or ability to support students facing mental health challenges. School support is not immediately available if needed.

Parent information. Parents and caregivers may not have the information they need to understand what is happening with their youth or how to properly support them.

Parent and caregiver support. Parents and caregivers need their own support to help them support their youth. They may need support groups, counselling, or other types of services. These are not readily available.

Lack of peer understanding. Many youth do not understand their peers' mental health concerns. They may be afraid of it, dismissive, or may bully youth who talk about their mental health. Young people need information about mental health concerns and how to support someone who is working to overcome their challenges.

Issues in the mental health services system. Youth have experienced stigma related to their conditions from care professionals. Health systems and professionals sometimes treat youth as though they are lying or manipulative, may ignore their self-knowledge or stated concerns, may refuse to acknowledge symptoms and experiences that do not fit with their educational understanding of mental health conditions. Negative experiences with the system that was meant to provide support can make it extremely difficult to talk about mental health challenges or seek further supports.

What can we do to start tackling some of these issues?

Communicate our concerns to the school boards. CYC members discussed the possibility of writing letters to several Alberta school boards asking for greater inclusion of mental health topics and anti-stigma actions in schools.

Deliver advocacy and awareness presentations at schools. CYC members explored the idea of sharing their experiences through presentations to students. Some council members and a CYC facilitator already have experience in this area, and could help in actioning this project.

