

VULNERABLE YOUTH STRATEGY THEORY OF CHANGE

RATIONALE

Research indicates that positive social supports are essential in creating a sense of inclusion and resiliency as well as in maintaining both the mental and physical well-being of all individuals. For vulnerable youth, the presence of non-professional and natural supports has been identified as vital for successful transitions to adulthood. These supports are central to ensuring that individual gains made through programmatic interventions can be sustained beyond the duration of the program, given that they are based on 'real world' relationships that often outlast professional relationships.

While the importance of non-professional and natural supports is now almost universally recognized among professionals working with vulnerable youth, evidence suggests that few organizations are successfully implementing strategies to strengthen these types of supports and that professionalized systems of care may even get in the way of connection to these supports. Community feedback to United Way of Calgary and Area supports this research. Youth-serving professionals recognize that vulnerable youth require a range of non-professional supports, however many acknowledge that current programs are not designed to foster and strengthen these relationships, and in practice may even work to undermine them.

TARGET GROUPS

- Youth serving sector in Calgary (agents of change).
- Vulnerable youth 15-24 years of age in Calgary (targets of change).

OUTCOMES

In Phase Two of the Vulnerable Youth Investment Strategy, United Way and Burns Memorial Fund will support partner organizations to continue and expand upon the work that began in 2012. Phase Two is designed to achieve two main outcomes:

- Strengthen the capacity of the youth serving sector to enhance vulnerable youth connection to natural supports.
- Increase the number of youth who are able to create and maintain natural supports.

IMPACT

The outcomes contribute to the longer term impact:

- Vulnerable youth successfully transition to adulthood.



**Burns
Memorial Fund**

A legacy for Calgary's children



**United Way
Calgary and Area**

Building a great city for all.

STRATEGIES

The outcomes will be achieved through the implementation of five interconnected strategies:

1. **Investing in application of learning** which will focus on applying the approach across programs and integrating it into organizational procedures, policies, and culture to impact more vulnerable youth and their natural supports.
2. **Convening of a Change Collective** which will consist of 14 organizations from across human services to focus on building and strengthening natural supports for vulnerable youth.
3. **Mobilizing knowledge** from the learning phase to the application phase where it will be embedded into the practice of the entire youth serving sector.
4. **Informing funding practices** in terms of continuing to fund innovative approaches and building natural supports for vulnerable youth.
5. **Advocating for sustainability** of this principles-based approach with the goal of ensuring that the involvement of natural supports in youth and family work is a priority within funding, policy and system institutions.

WORKING THEORY OF CHANGE

By creating a supportive learning environment where frontline staff and managers can examine existing practice and perspectives, and develop new ways of working with youth and their natural supports, the individual and organizational capacity of participants will be strengthened. These new ways of working will be shared with others in the youth-serving sector, strengthening sector capacity to support vulnerable youth to create and maintain a network of natural supports. These supports will in turn enable more successful transitions to adulthood for these youth.

