



# Children and Youth Planning Table Meeting Minutes for April 8, 2021

**Theme: Belonging in Action: Attachment & Relationships | #WhatReallyMatters**

2:30pm to 5:30pm

To view the PowerPoint presentation slides for this meeting, please click [here](#).

To view the Zoom recording for this meeting, please click [here](#).

## Welcome

Barb Cardow and Goranka Vukelich, Co-Chairs of the Children and Youth Planning Table (CYPT), welcomed everyone and provided a Territorial Acknowledgement (the acknowledgement was created by the Wellbeing Waterloo Region [WWR] First Nations, Métis, Inuit Advisory and Advocacy Circle).

As a standard practice, all those that took the CYPT virtual "stage" situated their identity by sharing a few details about their identity (e.g., preferred pronouns, racial identity, gender identity, Indigenous or settler identity, etc.). This is practiced so that:

- The audience has a better appreciation for the lens in which content is being delivered through.
- The stakeholders can be reflective on which voices are on the CYPT stage (or not).

## Smart Waterloo Region Relaunch

### With Grayson Bass

Enclosed in the PowerPoint presentation linked above, you'll find slides that summarize and outline Grayson Bass' presentation, detailing the projected plan of Smart Waterloo Region going forward. Grayson encouraged all to contact him at [gbass@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:gbass@regionofwaterloo.ca) with any questions they may have about the work.

## Guest: Gerard Sagassige, Indigenous Knowledge

### Keeper and Elder

Elder Gerard asked us to consider how the education system creates expectations on young people on how they should behave and what they should achieve. He speaks from personal experience of how he felt barred from the formal education institutions. Parts of his life experience—or his perceived milestones—specifically



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occurred because he did not engage with these formal structures. An important part of this story for Elder Gerard is survival by telling truth and persevering through self-expression at a young age.

Gerard highlighted that when we consider celebrating learning, we need to consider it in various forms – like art or traditional practices (i.e. indigenous dance, song, folklore, etc.). In similar ways to diversifying our ideas of learning, young people have launched many great bottom-up and grassroots initiatives outside of the formal education system. They are tackling issues of climate change and social change. Young people are listening and asking questions. They are our tutors—we aren't necessarily their tutors.

COVID-19 has challenged us but in some ways brought us together – it has been a complicated process. We need to consider asking what is connectedness? What do young people think is connectedness? We often want to connect with external things rather than spiritual internal-ness. Considering internal/personal connections with ourselves can help us open our vision to see the need beyond external resources (books, screens, etc.). Likewise, we can consider how do we communicate physically and how do we visit one another? Waking up, we can think to ourselves: what is our purpose today?

Gerard left us thinking about how the relationship with ourselves subsequently impacts our relationships with others: “You cannot heal if you haven't soothed.” See recording of meeting to experience his talk.

## The Importance of Connectedness and Relationships

The panelists discussed how the pandemic has affected their relationships over the last year and a half. Maddie described her experience of losing access to connections she had previously valued in school. Valuing the importance of supporting other young people, she helped launch a podcast that seeks to build virtual relationships. Asher, likewise, mentioned how it was more challenging now to connect with his community beyond the classroom – something he has always enjoyed. However, he is proud to have persevered through this experience, and more specifically, he is grateful that he has participated in a variety of community-wide initiatives.

Adan emphasized that belonging – or a person's sense of belonging – is especially important to consider during this time. Not having a sense of belonging makes participation – online or not – difficult for young people. This is something we have to continuously keep in mind. Jim agreed with the panelists, and noted that we need social connections to be able to successfully do things in our day-to-day lives. Kathilee furthered this point by noting how physical contact and care have a significant impact on an individual's development. Similarly, Gerard noted how the spirit of communication between individuals was compromised during this time but that individuals remained resourceful and adaptive.



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The panelists prompted our thinking about connections and opportunities made possible over the last year and a half. Jim spoke about the importance of taking time to slow down and appreciate the opportunities we are given to learn new things. Over the last year, Jim learned about cryptocurrency and joined online crypto-communities.

Asher pointed out how through digital platforms, like Zoom, we have been able to connect with more people than ever before – succeeding physical restrictions such as attendee limits. He has also been able to continue his out of school learnings on topics that have always been of interest to him. Maddie agreed to this sentiment, and expressed how she has been able to connect with family members and others across the world. She has also been able to incorporate new skills in her projects, such as video editing.

Gerard agreed with these points – and emphasized how the pandemic is one of many turbulent events in history. We have been able to mitigate some of the challenges of this event through the use of digital channels of communication.

Kathilee expressed how she has begun noticing the level of compassion across her neighbourhood and community. She noted that people are friendlier and more supporting of local initiatives than ever before. She especially appreciated having her dog during this time – which allowed her to participate in community walks. For her, the opportunity to also connect and learn from people all around the world through online webinars has been positive. Adan reflected on this point and mentioned how important small gestures – a smile, saying hi or waving – can have on people. By doing these small things, we can impact a person's sense of belonging. She also mentioned how she has become closer to her family through this process.

## #WhatReallyMatters Small and Large Group

### Discussions

In both small and large groups, attendees discussed the below questions. The answers included are paraphrased and do not reflect the full scope of the discussion.

#### **What personally keeps you going through this time?**

- Increased quality time with family, including the chance to eat meals together
- Hobbies and activities like music, reading, gardening, arts and crafts, jigsaw puzzles, walks, etc.
- Greater connection to our environment and spending time outdoors
- Inner reflection – focus on spirituality and meditation
- Cultivating new skills
- Daily gratitudes
- Pets



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**With concerns about well-being and impacts of the pandemic, what do children, youth, families most need to hear and see right now?**

- More resources to incorporate non-digital, physical, and natural aspects to create a healthy balance
- Having a safe space and being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel
- Understanding that however they're feeling right now is okay and what they're doing now is enough
- Name good things that are happening and celebrate the little things
- Mental health resources – where they can be found and making it accessible
- Message of belonging as we start to re-socialize and in response to other social issues occurring in the community

Following this meeting, the following [letter to young people, parents and those parenting](#) was created, translated into 6 languages and distributed to the community to coincide with the end of the school year. Members are encouraged to share as they see fit.

## Closing and Updates

Barb and Goranka provided the final number of respondents for the Youth Impact Survey: 1021. They also noted that we have over 380 young people who are interested in continuing to stay connected to our system-level child and youth wellbeing work. Barb and Goranka thanked everyone for their work in promoting this collaborative effort.

In closing, Barb and Goranka thanked presenters, and all participants for their commitment to ensuring all children and youth in the Region are happy and healthy. They noted that our next steps include seeking the opportunity and power of shared, meaningful messaging that we can rally around together over the summer.

An update from the respective Chairs of our 7 various committees and group can be viewed [here](#).