

Summary of Parent Key Findings

- Parents indicated they would initially seek help from a classroom teacher if their child is bullied or bullies others in school. If the issue was not resolved they moved up the hierarchy to Vice Principal and Principal, Superintendent and Trustee. When parents discussed bullying as an infringement on their child's Human Rights, it was promptly addressed. When parents identified that teachers displayed bullying behaviours towards their children, they received minimal support from administrators. Other notable individuals parents sought assistance from included: the Special Education Resource Teacher, Child and Youth Counsellor, Social worker, English as a Second Language Teacher and Police. Outside the school, parents sought support from Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK), the Family Doctor, Children's Aid Society, Halton Support Services and family and friends.
- Parents indicated they would seek help from similar supports if the bullying occurred outside the school. Other outside agencies that parents accessed for support included: ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, Churches, and mental health outpatient services. Parents also felt more empowered to be part of the solution if the bullying incident occurred in the community.
- Parents identified three primary areas of support needed to help them with bullying: Education, Communication and Resources.

1. Education:

- Parents highlighted the need for education related to the definition of bullying and the long terms effects and consequences of being bullied and bullying others.
- Parents wanted more education on cyber bullying and internet safety, ways to advocate for their child and how Accepting Schools Act Bill 13 supports students.
- Parents also felt a strong need to teach their children pro-social skills early in life including how to get along with others, treating others with respect, regulating emotions, conflict resolution, and assertiveness, empowerment, and resiliency skills.
- There also needs to be more education for children on how to intervene when bullying is witnessed.

2. Communication:

- Parents identified learning needs in relation to strategies for talking with their children about bullying, encouraging them to open up when something is wrong and what to do if their child discloses they are being bullied.
- Tips on how to communicate with teachers and school administration in a diplomatic, non-aggressive way would be beneficial.
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3. Resources:
- Parents identified the need for increasing awareness about available supports in their school such as the Social Worker, Child and Youth Worker and Police Liaison Officer.
 - Information on what to do if their child engages in bullying behaviour is also needed.
 - Highlighting resources in the school newsletter or on the website would be helpful.
 - Newcomer parents expressed having resources available in different languages along with information on support services such as Youth Settlement workers would be valuable.
 - Having age and developmental appropriate books for children with special needs was also pointed out.
- Parents felt promotion of professional supports available to parents in Halton Region is needed. An interactive online help line where you can privately type in your question or speak to someone live on the phone would be beneficial.
 - Many parents expressed bullying needs to be addressed at different levels including parents, schools, school boards, government and with policy.
 - Parents like to receive information about bullying from a variety of sources including websites, books, newsletters, emails, parent lending library, and videos. Providing a link on line to an expert speaker that has been pre-recorded would be helpful.

Summary of Youth Key Findings

- Youth define bullying as a repeated and unwanted act or behaviour that occurs between people in various relationship contexts with intention to harm. Participants feel it occurs in many forms and includes but is not limited to cyber or online bullying, emotional or physical abuse, violence, harassment, gossiping, rumours, talking behind someone's back, threats, aggressive behaviour, name calling, stalking, discrimination, oppression, and blackmail.
- Youth vocalized that they seek help from individuals who are caring, honest, supportive, open-minded, non-judgemental, trustworthy, good listeners and have a genuine interest in helping. Confidentiality and trusting relationships are crucial.
- Youth seek guidance and help from a variety of sources including schools, places of worship, at home and in the community.
- Youth identified four groups of people that could help effectively address bullying including school communities, the general community, peers and family members.

1. School community:

- Youth believe that school administrators, champions and educators serve a crucial role in influencing school climate and how bullying is addressed. Specifically, youth feel schools need to:
 - establish more “safe” environments and spaces for students, improve staff-student relationships,
 - develop harsher consequences or punishments, increase supervision during lunch and recess,
 - improve strategies to address the bully and the person being bullied
 - provide support and guidance.
- Increasing school awareness through provocative guest speakers, bullying awareness events or creative activities was also highlighted.
- A greater school response in acknowledging and addressing behaviours and use of a mediator or a neutral party to respond to bullying incidents was identified as being helpful.

2. General Community:

- Youth expressed the need for a more supportive, aware, and action oriented community.
- Youth also expressed that having a designated positive role-model or mentor, support groups, and organizations that are meaningfully involved are beneficial in supporting bullying prevention.
- Youth identified a need to encourage greater awareness and knowledge about diversity within the local community.
- Utilizing law enforcement such as police to address bullying was identified as being valuable.

3. Peers:

- Youth articulated there is a strong need to develop youth bystander intervention skills and help youth recognize their role in reducing/preventing bullying.
- Youth also verbalized there is a need for greater empowerment and encouragement amongst youth to intervene when bullying is witnessed as well as peer-led support groups.

4. Family:

- Youth generally felt that parents are a good support for them and are more beneficial if they listen to them instead of attempting to “fix” the bullying issue. Enhanced parental/caregiver involvement and consistent, open communication is key.
- The need for parents to acknowledge and address bullying behaviour in children is crucial.
- Youth identified that parents should be monitoring their children’s social media and internet usage and instilling more positive attitudes and values.



Bullying Prevention Task Force Parent Voice

Summary and Recommendations

**February 2016
Prepared on behalf of The Bullying Prevention Task Force
Our Kids Network School Years Committee**

1.0 INTRODUCTION and OBJECTIVE

Community stakeholders across Halton Region have a strong shared interest in addressing bullying for children and youth. Our shared interest in working together to address bullying resulted in the creation of the Bullying Prevention Task Force, a working group of the Our Kids Network School Years Committee. This task force is committed to facilitating a co-ordinated community approach in addressing bullying issues for children and youth across the region.

School aged bullying has significant impacts not only on the youth directly involved in the incident, but those who also support them, including parents and caregivers. A key focus for the Task Force is the inclusion of parent voice to guide our community work.

Bullying impacts the health and well-being of every child and youth. Some children and youth are at greater risk of being bullied or bullying others including those who identify as LGBT, belong to an ethnic minority group, have a disability and/or experience mental health issues (PREVNet, 2015).

Based on this knowledge and with the key objective of parent voice in mind, the task force wanted to hear from parents of this higher risk group as often their voice is not heard in a larger general survey like the Halton Parent Survey.

Therefore, the objective of these parent voice focus groups is to identify how parents of children and youth in these higher risk groups can be supported when dealing with bullying issues.

2.0 METHOD

2.1 Process used for selecting and recruiting parents

Many community agencies that serve children and families in this higher risk group are partners of the Bullying Prevention Task Force. Some include Nelson Youth Centre, Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK), ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, Halton Multicultural Council, and Positive Space Network. These agencies have existing parent groups established that allowed for easy access to participants. Parents within these groups were invited to participate in a single focus group session. It should be noted that the focus group consisted of a small number of parents and does not represent all Halton parents in general.

Youth from these groups were also asked for their input and their responses can be found in the OKN Youth Voice report.

The parenting group from Positive Space Network were unable to accommodate a focus group but were still interested in providing feedback. Therefore a written questionnaire was created using the focus group questions.

2.2 Participants

Parents who participated in the focus groups varied in age, gender and ethnicity, and had children who attended either Halton Catholic or Halton District School Board schools. The majority of parents were born in Canada, others immigrated in recent years. Such groups included parents from ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, Nelson Youth Centre, Halton Multicultural Council and Families for Families (Reach Out Centre for Kids).

Their children's ages ranged from four to twenty-five and parents identified having a son/daughter or both. The majority of the participants indicated that their child was either bullied or bullied others either at school or in the community. Thirty-five parents provided feedback, and lived in Burlington, Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills.

2.3 Format of Focus Group Sessions

The focus groups were facilitated and notes were scribed by two members of the Bullying Prevention Task Force and varied from thirty minutes to two hours in length. Participants were initially asked what the term bullying meant to them. This allowed for a discussion regarding the Ministry of Education definition of bullying which is as follows: *Bullying is typically a form of repeated and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.*

2.4 Focus Group Questions

The remaining time with parents focused on discussing the following questions:

- If your child was to experience bullying or to bully others in a school setting where would you go for help?
- If your child was to experience bullying or to bully others outside the school where would you go for help?
- What information/resources do you think parents in Halton need to help them deal with bullying?
- What other support do you think would help parents deal with bullying?
- How do you like to receive information about bullying?

The notes from the focus groups were analysed by three individuals and broad themes were identified.

3.0 RESULTS

This section describes the primary themes drawn from the discussions with parents across the different focus groups.

3.1 Who parents seek help from when their child is bullied or bullies others in School

Parent responses were similar related to who they accessed for support regardless of if their child was bullied or bullied others. The individual they sought support from varied based on the context of the bullying incident.

Most parents indicated that the individual who bullied their child was frequently another student within the school. Most often parents would seek out assistance from the classroom teacher and if the issue was not resolved they moved up the hierarchy within the school to the Vice Principal and Principal. If their concerns were not addressed at this level they would seek assistance from the School Board including the Superintendent and Trustee. Several parents identified that when they discussed the bullying as an infringement on their child's Human Rights, it was promptly addressed at the school board level. Other notable individuals within the school that parents sought assistance from included: the Special Education Resource Teacher, Child and Youth Counsellor, Social Worker, English as a Second Language Teacher and Police.

Outside the school, parents often mentioned connecting with Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK) for counselling support and treatment for their child. Other services accessed included the Family Doctor, Children's Aid Society, Halton Support Services and informal supports such as family and friends with lived experience of bullying, and neighbours.

In other instances, some parents identified that teachers had displayed bullying behaviours toward their children. When these situations occurred, parents felt that they received minimal support from the principal or school board. Parents felt that administrators had the teacher's interest in mind and did not support the family.

3.2 Who parents seek help from when their child is bullied or bullies others outside of school

The responses that parents provided for supports they access if bullying occurred outside of school were very similar to parent responses about supports accessed if bullying took place inside the school. However, parents focused more on community supports like agencies and informal supports (i.e. parents, family). Parents would involve the school administration if the children/youth involved in the bullying incident were from the same school. The expectation was not that the school would intervene but to raise awareness of the relationship problem. If the bullying included cyber or electronic use then parents would involve the school as well as police.

Parents felt more empowered to be a part of the solution if the bullying incident occurred in the community. Many parents indicated that they would address it directly with the parents of the child who was involved or the adult (i.e. coach) if they were the instigator. Some reported that they felt that bullying did not occur in their community as often as within the school as it was dealt with more directly, meaning they could take action themselves vs. leaving it with school administration.

The outside agencies that parents accessed for support included: ROCK, ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, churches, mental health outpatient services. The family doctor or the pediatrician was also accessed for support and they would provide referrals to agencies such as ROCK.

3.3 Information and resources parents need to support them with bullying

Parents identified three primary areas of support: Education (which included topics related to the effects of bullying, rights of the family/advocacy, cyber bullying and legal consequences, and skills to teach children), Communication, and Resources.

1. Education

Definition and Effects of bullying

Parents felt there still remains the myth that bullying is a rite of passage and something that many children experience. Parents highlighted the need for education related to the definition of bullying and the long term effects and consequences of being bullied and bullying others.

A point of interest from parents who were new to Canada revolved around providing information about what bullying is in Canada. Some parents reflected that behaviour which is 'typical' in their birth place is not accepted or tolerated here.

Rights of child and parent / Advocacy

Parents were both unaware that the Accepting Schools Act Bill 13 existed and did not know where it could be accessed at school. They felt strongly that they needed to know how this Act supported students and parents and felt more communication needs to occur to increase parental awareness about the Accepting Schools Act. Another significant theme was in relation to the parent's role as an advocate. These parents want more education on how parents can advocate for their child, and the other roles they can take on to help resolve bullying incidents.

Cyber bullying and legal consequences

Cyber bullying and internet safety for children and youth were other areas of interest for parents. Many felt unsure of what their children are involved with online or how to help them if a problem arose. They identified that social media is changing all the time and it is hard to keep up with what youth are doing. Parents were very interested to

know what the legal consequences were to cyber bullying and when you should involve the police.

Skills to teach children

Parents felt very strongly that they need to take a lead early in life to teach their children pro-social skills inclusive of getting along well with others, treating people with respect, and how to regulate emotions. They also discussed the over use of the word 'bullying'. Parents need to teach their child the difference between teasing, bullying and normal conflict. Some skills that parents need to teach their children include how to be assertive, empowerment skills and how to resolve conflict. It was also highlighted they need to teach children how to be resilient so they can let some relationship issues not affect them. There also needs more education to children related to the power the bystander and how quick bullying can stop when peers intervene. Parents need to take responsibility and reflect on their own interactions and relationships with friends, family members and significant others as at times they can engage in bullying behaviour themselves. Parents recognized that they are the key role model for their children.

2. Communication

The theme of communication skills was cited often by parents. Parents identified learning needs in relation to strategies for talking with their children, and encouraging them to open up if they suspect something is wrong. The importance of listening carefully came up as well as children may give little information over a period of time and parent needs to piece things together. Parents also indicated that they were unsure of what to do or say if their child comes forward and discloses to them that they are being bullied. Some parents felt it would be helpful to learn how to communicate in a diplomatic, non-aggressive way when interacting with teachers and school administration. Several indicated that they worried about the ramifications for their child if they are very active or vocal in following up on bullying incidents at school.

3. Resources

Parents identified that they were not aware of where to go for help in their school or of available school supports such as the Social Worker, Child and Youth Worker and Police liaison officers. Some suggestions for increasing awareness about these supports included highlighting these resources in the school newsletter or on the website. Parents also reflected that there was very little information about what to do when your child engages in bullying behaviour. Families of these children have often been referred to community agencies like ROCK or Nelson Youth Centre.

Newcomer parents expressed strongly the need to have resources available in their primary language. By fully understanding the information, this would allow the family to become actively involved in the school and increase the parent's confidence in knowing how to be a part of the solution. They also highlighted the importance of

Halton Multicultural Council, especially the Youth Settlement Worker as a valuable resource and support. The importance of having age and developmentally appropriate books for children with special needs, also was pointed out. Such as stories could include children with special needs being bullied and how they coped.

3.4 Other Supports that would help parents

As a whole, parents felt that many supports are available to parents in Halton Region but promotion of these supports is needed. Although a formal parenting support group was not identified, parents did feel that an online help line would be beneficial. They suggested one that is interactive and where you can privately type in your question or concern but also have the option of speaking to someone live on a phone. Parents expressed that they like to receive support from friends and family but appreciate speaking to professionals in agencies that their children are linked to (ROCK, Nelson Youth Centre, ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, etc.).

Many parents expressed that bullying cannot be addressed just by the schools but that everyone needs to be involved and address the issue together. Parents also felt that bullying needs to be addressed at different levels: with parents, schools, school boards, government, and with policy.

3.5 How to receive information about bullying

Parents reflected that not a 'one size fits all' when it comes to receiving bullying information. Parents like to receive information on websites, books, newsletters, emails, parent lending library, and videos. They enjoy hearing an expert speaker but reflected it would be best to record the speaker and provide link on line as often busy parents cannot make it out in the evening.

4.0 CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Themes identified from the information collected at the parent voice focus groups can help to inform the collective work of the Bullying Prevention Task Force. Considerations for future practice of community service providers in bullying prevention and intervention work include the following:

1. Develop key educational strategies or activities for parents related to understanding bullying and intervention

Education needed related to:

- What is bullying?
- Accepting Schools Act: parts of the Act that are particularly relevant for parents – may be necessary to articulate the role that both the school and parents play within this Act

- Roles for parents in intervening (e.g. advocacy)
- Cyberbullying and internet safety
- Consideration of cultural context and inclusiveness in the development and implementation of educational strategies
- Consider parent engagement strategies and alternate ways to reach parents (website, speaker, webinar, booklets, etc.)
- Help parents understand the positive impact of Developmental Assets® and positive role modelling and communication with youth
- Strategies to help parents support their children with assertiveness, problem solving, conflict management skills, resilience
- Response to children during disclosure of bullying

2. Increase parental awareness about internal and external community supports related to bullying prevention and intervention

- Improve communication between schools and families in relation to bullying prevention plans/strategies (e.g. internal committees such as Safe School Action Team)
- Be explicit in how to navigate channels/processes to address bullying incidents both within schools and in the community (e.g. police)
- Educate parents on internal school supports (e.g. Child and Youth Counsellor, Social Worker, Special Education Resource Teacher, police liaison officer) and how/when to contact them

3. Explore the use of varied communication channels (e.g. online support groups) to provide support to parents

- Online support that reinforces anonymity
- Increase awareness of existing supports (Halton Parents, Kids Help Phone)

5.0 CONCLUSION

This report includes thoughts, feelings and considerations from a small number of Halton parents who have children within this higher risk group. While moving forward it would be important to consider the above considerations for future practice of community service providers in bullying prevention and intervention work in Halton as well as to inform the next steps for the work of the Bullying Prevention Task Force.



Bullying Prevention Task Force Youth Voice

Summary and Recommendations

**February 2016
Prepared on behalf of The Bullying Prevention Task Force
Our Kids Network School Years Committee**

1.0 INTRODUCTION and OBJECTIVE

Community stakeholders across Halton Region have a strong shared interest in addressing bullying for children and youth. Our shared interest in working together to address bullying resulted in the creation of the Bullying Prevention Task Force, a working group of the Our Kids Network School Years Committee. This task force is committed to facilitating a co-ordinated community approach in addressing bullying issues for children and youth across the region.

A key focus for the Task Force is the inclusion of youth voice to guide our community work.

Bullying impacts the health and well-being of every child and youth. Some children and youth are at greater risk of being bullied or bullying others including those who identify as LGBT, belong to an ethnic minority group, have a disability and/or experience mental health issues (PREVNet, 2015).

Based on this knowledge and with the key objective of youth voice in mind, the task force wanted to hear from youth of this higher risk group as often their voice is not heard in a larger general survey like the Halton Youth Survey.

The objective of the youth voice focus groups was to identify how youth in these higher risk groups can be supported when dealing with bullying issues. The Task Force intentionally sought youth voice from this higher risk group; however, it is important to note that the focus groups consisted of a small number of youth and does not represent all Halton youth in general.

2.0 METHOD

2.1 Process of selecting and recruiting participants

Many community agencies that serve children and families in this higher risk group are partners of the Bullying Prevention Task Force. Some include Peer Outreach Support Services & Education (POSSE); Nelson Youth Centre, ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, and Positive Space Network. These agencies have existing youth groups established that allowed for easy access to participants. Youth within these groups were invited to participate in a single focus group session.

Parents from these groups were also asked for their input and their responses can be found in the Parent Voice report.

2.2 Participants

Youth who participated in the focus groups varied in age, gender, and ethnicity and attended either Halton Catholic or Halton District School Board schools. Youth were a part of existing groups from ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, Nelson Youth Centre, Peer Outreach Support Services & Education (POSSE) and Positive Space Network.

The youth ages ranged from eight to twenty-five and identified themselves as male or female. The majority of the participants indicated that they have either been bullied or bullied others either at school or in the community. Seventy-five youth provided feedback, and lived in Burlington, Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills.

2.3 Format of focus group sessions

The majority of the focus groups were facilitated by two youth from POSSE who also recorded notes. One group was facilitated by an adult member of the Bullying Prevention Task Force and another by a nursing student and a Halton Region youth facilitator. Groups varied from thirty minutes to two hours in length.

2.4 Focus group questions

Following youth engagement principles, youth from POSSE were involved from the beginning of the planning and helped to develop the focus group questions related to bullying supports for youth.

The discussion revolved around the following questions:

- Define bullying: What do you think it is? What do you consider bullying?
- Do you have someone to talk to if you were bullied? Who would it be? Why that person? What characteristics do they have that make you trust them?
- What can others do to help with bullying (in school, community, teachers, parents, and youth)?
- What needs to change?

The notes from the focus groups were analysed by three individuals and broad themes were identified.

3.0 RESULTS

This section describes the primary themes drawn from the responses of participants from the youth voice focus groups.

3.1 What Bullying Means to Youth

The youth felt that bullying is a repeated and unwanted act or behavior that occurs between people in various relationship contexts with intention to harm. The varied contexts are inclusive of friendships, romantic, work or familial relationships among others. The idea of power imbalances was another concept often used to describe bullying.

In terms of what youth considered bullying to be, there was universal consensus that it can appear in many forms. This includes but is not limited to, cyber or online bullying, emotional or physical abuse, violence, harassment, gossiping, rumors, talking behind someone's back, threats, aggressive behavior, name calling, stalking, discrimination, oppression, and blackmail.

Facilitators were able to share the Ministry of Education definition of bullying which is as follows: *Bullying is typically a form of repeated and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.*

3.2 Who Youth Seek Help From When Bullied

It was apparent through these discussions that youth seek guidance and help from a variety of sources when bullied. Common places to seek assistance included schools, places of worship, at home, and in the community. Within these places, youth found comfort in some instances talking to parents, family members, teachers, bus drivers, crossing guards, therapists, youth workers, and religious personnel. Other unique figures mentioned that youth sought help or guidance from included police officers, pets, social workers, significant others, neighbours, counselors, and professional staff at ROCK, Positive Space Network, POSSE, and ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development. Another unique theme that emerged from some of the youth discussions was the idea of utilizing self-reflection to be a support and advocate for oneself.

Youth vocalized that they seek help from people within these settings because they possess characteristics such as being caring, honest, supportive, open-minded, non-judgemental, trustworthy, good listeners and have a genuine interest in helping. They also indicated that confidentiality and building a trusting relationship or rapport with these individuals was crucial in order for them to feel safe in confiding personal information regarding bullying.

3.3 What Others Can Do To Help Address Bullying

In attempting to identify what others in the broader population can do to help address bullying, the youth identified four groups of people that could help effectively address this issue. The four groups of people included school communities, the general community, peers and family members.

School Community

Within the school community, it was recognized by youth that school administrators, champions and educators serve a crucial role in influencing school climate and how bullying is handled or addressed. Youth identified that school communities could use varied strategies to positively enhance school climate.

Firstly, it was discussed that schools need to establish more safe environments and spaces where students feel protected and comfortable (guidance office, library, chapel). Staff-student relationships was another area the youth felt needed improvement as youth viewed staff to sometimes be intimidating, inaccessible, and lacking visibility. Youth suggested that this can be improved on by increasing supervision or an increased presence by school staff, especially in vulnerable locations or times such as recess. Positive intentional staff-student interactions are welcomed and encouraged by youth.

It was also noted that staff need more education and support regarding handling bullying as well as thoughtful strategies to address both the bully and the person being bullied, so students can be better helped. The youth also described that harsher consequences or punishments need to be in place for students who bully, and a “zero-tolerance policy” needs to be enforced. However, youth also felt that students engaged in bullying behaviours require support and guidance from school staff in order to improve self-awareness about their behaviours and how to access help to address them. It was also noted that positive behavior from any student needs to be acknowledged and rewarded as well.

Youth in elementary schools also acknowledged the use of school assemblies, provocative guest speakers or creative activities to increase awareness about bullying prevention in a fun and engaging way. The need for a delegated champion to handle bullying incidents within schools was also highlighted as a role students thought they needed a staff person(s) to take on.

General Community

As a whole, the youth expressed a need for a more supportive, aware and action oriented community that could be meaningfully involved in bullying prevention. Some youth also thought that youth having a designated positive role-model or mentor within the community could serve as another effective bullying prevention strategy. The youth also found that having support groups and organizations such as POSSE and ErinOakKids Centre for Treatment and Development were also beneficial in supporting bullying

prevention. It was thought by some that there is a great need for more of these organizations and programs as they may not be accessible to all who may be interested.

Peers

Youth also verbalized a need for greater empowerment and encouragement in order to intervene when bullying is witnessed. There was a strong need articulated by youth about increasing knowledge related to practical bystander interventions (i.e. tools or strategies). Peer support groups were also mentioned as a way to help share and increase knowledge about bystander interventions.

Family

With regard to the role of parents/caregivers, youth generally felt that parents were a good support for them. They acknowledged that sometimes they do not confide in them as they are fearful they will over react, or will cause them to worry. At times some youth identified that they only need to have their parents listen to them instead of attempting to take an active role in trying to “fix” the bullying issue. A small amount of youth stated that their parent(s) also exhibited bullying behaviours towards them.

In relation to addressing bullying incidents youth felt that this required honest and straight-forward dialogue between parents and children. It was also thought that school staff and parents/caregivers require more consistent and open communication when dealing with bullying incidents.

3.4 What Needs To Change

Youth were also asked what needs to change within the context of school, family, peers, and the community in order to improve or prevent bullying from occurring.

School Community

Youth suggested numerous strategies which they felt had the potential to reduce or eliminate bullying, as well as to assist with coping. Younger youth thought that more bullying awareness events within the school community would benefit students and staff to increase knowledge about the issue. They identified that the use of mediators or a neutral party in responding to bullying incidents would be a helpful strategy. The youth were also in support of establishing “safe” environments or rooms within the school such as guidance office, library, or chapel. The youth also felt that more visible and active supervision is needed during activities or times such as lunch or recess, when the opportunity for bullying is increased. Greater school response in acknowledging and addressing behaviors of bullies was also something that youth identified as needing improvement. Lastly, the youth thought that having more helpful, realistic and reasonable strategies to help cope with being bullied needs to be made available for all ages of students and their families.

General Community

At the community level, youth identified a need to encourage greater awareness/knowledge about the racial, ethnic, gender and cultural diversity within the local community and to support more acceptance of this diversity. Finally, the youth thought that utilizing law enforcement such as police officers more often to address bullying would be beneficial.

Peers

Youth acknowledged the importance in helping all youth recognize and internalize their role in reducing or preventing bullying as crucial to improving this social issue. Developing youth bystander intervention skills and technique was thought to be an important strategy to address bullying in addition to the creation of peer-led or support groups to assist with coping in the aftermath of bullying incidents, or to support bullying prevention interventions (e.g. peer mediation).

Family

At home and within families, youth recommended enhanced parental or caregiver involvement in schools and communities when bullying issues arise. Youth were firm in vocalizing that parents/caregivers need to acknowledge the bullying behaviors of their children and be prepared to address them. Another important message youth conveyed is that parents or caregivers can monitor social media and internet usage of their children to become aware of any potential cyber bullying cases. Lastly, youth thought that parents or caregivers, who are leaders at home and within communities, need to instill more positive attitudes and values into their children.

4.0 CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Themes identified from the information collected at the youth voice focus groups can help to inform the collective work of the Bullying Prevention Task Force. Considerations for future practice of community service providers in bullying prevention and intervention work include the following:

1. Continue a collaborative community approach to bullying prevention

- Continue to strengthen collective efforts to ensure that common language and the same foundational philosophies of bullying prevention underlie a consistent approach used.
- Provide consistent and clear communication between caregivers at home and school personnel in addressing issues of bullying.

2. Focus on capacity building and competence development of community members.

There were numerous themes identified that suggest a need for increasing awareness, knowledge of and competence in implementing bullying prevention and intervention strategies for school staff, caregivers/parents, peers, and the broader community.

School staff

- Improve staff-student relationships as a strategy for bullying prevention and support, which can contribute to a positive school climate where youth view staff as trusting, approachable and an important resource to seek out if bullying issues do arise.
- Continue integrating the Developmental Assets® framework in schools to promote school climate. It would also be important to explore how to sustain the uptake of asset building not just by teachers, but by all school staff (e.g., janitors, crossing guards) and administrators.
- Help school staff understand the importance of positive relationships and ways they can continue to develop their capacity as asset builders.
- Increase staff knowledge and skill in responding quickly and in a supportive manner when bullying incidents occur.

Parents/Caregivers

- Target education and skill building activities to parents related to internet safety and monitoring of youth internet use.
- Support parents/caregivers in developing positive characteristics of the children and youth they interact with often.
- Help parents in supporting the social-emotional development of their children.
- Increase knowledge development related to recognition of bullying behaviours of their children and where to access support to address them.

Greater community

- Develop more formal mentoring programs as vehicles to connect youth with positive role models
- Need for greater acceptance and acknowledgment of diversity (racial, ethnic, gender and cultural) in the local community.
- Identify existing structures or organizations across Halton that are currently addressing inclusion and demographic diversity and explore opportunities for the integration of youth voice if not already present.

Youth

- Increase youth knowledge about the significant impact that bystander or peer intervention has on curbing bullying in addition to developing strong peer intervention skills.

- Need educational and skill development activities that promote self-reflection and resilience to foster positive coping mechanisms in times of conflict.

3. Provide infrastructure to support implementation of consistent bullying intervention and response processes in schools

- Encourage school staff to be more visible and accessible at certain times of the day (e.g., recess) and locations (e.g., entrances and hallways) when increased bullying could take place.
- Use school designates to champion bullying prevention efforts to help keep this issue at the forefront.
- Explore how school communities, inclusive of parents and students, can continue to develop, implement and sustain consistent processes for responding to and addressing bullying issues.
- Consider how the school effectively and regularly communicates these policies or updates to parents/caregivers.
- Provide internal and external support services to families that assist with coping, behavioural support for both students and their families engaged in the bullying incident.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This report includes thoughts, feelings and considerations from a small number of Halton youth within this higher risk group. While moving forward it would be important to consider the above considerations for future practice of community service providers in bullying prevention and intervention work in Halton as well as to inform the next steps for the work of the Bullying Prevention Task Force.