Social Return On Investment (SROI) Case Study: Safe Communities Innovation Fund Learning Through the Arts’ Youth Empowerment Program

“LTTA is the best way to study because you experience it. There’s a 99.9% chance that you’ll love it. There are so many different ways of learning, and LTTA is the best way to learn.”

-Grade 7 LTTA Student, FMCSD

Program Background:
The Royal Conservatory of Music’s Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) initiative is focused on improving student learning engagement, academic achievement, and pro-social skills development.
The LTTA Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) for the Wood Buffalo region was customized to regional needs through a lengthy consultations process involving local youth and other community members, and which was specifically designed to fit Alberta’s Crime Prevention Framework.
The result was a program of highly engaging, pro-social, arts-based activities delivered in school and community settings that were targeted to the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) youth in grades 6-10 who were identified as already at risk, or being at risk, of social detachment, dropping out of school, and anti-social behavior, leading to gang involvement, substance abuse, or other criminal activities.

Theory of Change
If First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) youth, who are in danger of dropping out of schools and becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, become actively engaged in arts-based learning using culturally based and contemporary art forms, then they are much more likely to stay in school, develop stronger vocational skills, have greater self esteem and sense of identity, and become positive role models to other FNMI youth, serving as more productive contributors to their communities.

Program Goals
LTTA’s YEP program aimed to empower youth, particularly those ages 12 to 16, to be successful in school and society by doing the following:
- Fostering enhanced school attachment, attendance, and academic achievement through arts-based, in-school programming;
- Cultivating self-esteem, creativity, resilience and positive self-identity;
- Encouraging positive pro-social interactions to reduce the number of polarized cultural groups; and
- Creating safe spaces for program activities.

While YEP put particular focus on activities that promoted the academic and social success of FNMI youth, the program was offered to youth from across all social segments. Community consultations with FNMI youth and community leaders emphasized inclusive practices to support a goal of social cohesion.

Social Value Created
An academic research team worked in collaboration with staff, key stakeholders, and community partners to document evidence of program impact using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Positive outcomes achieved over the course of YEP’s three years were wide-ranging and community-inclusive:
- Improved attendance, learning engagement, and enjoyment by youth of school subjects taught using YEP.
- Significantly improved academic achievement in Social Students, Science and Mathematics where YEP was applied.
- Greater ability for teachers to provide individualized student instruction and to make learning come alive though arts-based methods
- Expanded artist professional training, networks, and employment
- Improved inter-cultural understanding and acceptance within communities

Funding Year | SROI Ratio
--- | ---
Year 1 | 2.16 : 1
Year 2 | 7.44 : 1
Year 3 | 4.91 : 1

Contact Details:
Jason van Eyk, Learning Through the Arts
jason.vaneyk@rcmusic.ca

Fast Facts
- 5,891 students, 255 teachers, and 64 artists participated in YEP across 182 classrooms, 50 afterschool programs, and 25 camps over three years.
- 86% of students felt a sense of belonging in their class.
- 93% of teachers witnessed improvement in student learning engagement.
- 85% of teachers observed increases in students’ inter-cultural understanding.
- Fort McMurray FNMI students significantly outperformed their all-province cohort on the 2013 PATs, especially in the subjects of Math and Science.
Social Return On Investment (SROI) Case Study: Safe Communities Innovation Fund

Participant Outcomes
The long-term impacts of the LTTA’s YEP program are:
- Increased school attachment and community participation by youth
- Improved school attendance and academic achievement
- Reduction in instances of criminal activity
- Reduction in cases of substance abuse
- Greater sense of pride in cultural identity and traditional values leading to greater self-esteem
- Improvement in student employment skills

Without the LTTA’s YEP program, FNMI youth are at a higher risk of becoming involved in the following:
- Criminal and gang activities
- Substance abuse
- Unemployment
- Poor mental and physical health
- Family and/or community violence

*There is not a shadow of a doubt, according to the evidence in this study, that arts-based instruction is beneficial to a majority of at-risk students—the focus on FNMI youth bears this out*

Dr. Lee Willingham, Wilfrid Laurier University

Valuing Change—Social Return on Investment
The goal of YEP is to positively engage FNMI youth in learning and social success in order to reduce or eliminate their involvement (or potential involvement) in gang activities or criminal behaviour. This goal has the capacity to help avoid, save, or reallocate current and future costs to society, as well as to increase future income values, which are monetized based on the specific changes noted in chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational assistant wages</th>
<th>Cost of dropping out of high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs of child and youth case worker</td>
<td>Cost of addictions / substance abuse treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of community support worker</td>
<td>Cost of police time / call out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Part-time income</td>
<td>Youth court process costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Value of Annual Investment
The total present value of investing in YEP was calculated to be $9,940,239 with a total investment in the program of $2,025,659.00. This indicates that for every dollar invested there is a total average return of $4.91 in social value created by the program over the three years.

The ratios presented in the chart represent a minimum value, as the social return on investment (SROI) ratio demonstrates that a real value is created for stakeholders, it remains exclusive of the emotional and social success experienced by the participants. This type of success is difficult to quantify in financial terms. Therefore, the real value created by the program cannot be fully estimated, but should be considered to be of an even higher value that the financial calculations can express.

Looking Forward
YEP will continue to run in the Wood Buffalo region at least until 2016 under a blended support model leveraging local and private funding. We have learned a good deal from the experience and intend to take some next steps, including:
- Sharing our learning, knowledge, and promising practices with our community partners and stakeholders to ensure these are embedded throughout LTTA and its networks at regional, provincial, and national levels;
- Sustaining a regionally responsive, collaborative and FNMI focused program built on principles of innovation and community-wide participation; and
- Building upon the success of our local program innovations, including in how we develop and deliver Artist-Educator training, teacher professional development, and ongoing mentorship, to ensure regionally responsive promising practices are applied in support of a high quality, sustainable program.