

# Town of Stony Plain Engaging Youth Strategy

2025-2027



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## **Executive Summary**

Youth are the cornerstone of a thriving community, representing the possibilities of tomorrow. As emerging leaders, their perspectives, ideas, and engagement are critical for addressing social challenges, fostering innovation, and ensuring the sustainability of community development. When youth are valued, supported, and provided with opportunities to grow, they develop the skills and confidence needed to lead, contribute, and thrive.

Investing in young people through programs that nurture their strengths, address vulnerabilities, and create spaces for connection and belonging, not only enhances their individual development but also strengthens the entire community. Stony Plain has seen that engaged youth are more likely to participate in civic activities, champion inclusivity, and promote positive change, ensuring a ripple effect that benefits all generations. Recognizing their potential and empowering them as active contributors fosters resilience, equity, and collaboration, building a foundation for a future driven by their innovation and leadership.

By prioritizing youth engagement, Stony Plain affirms youth's role as integral members of society and ensures they have the tools and support needed to shape a world that reflects their values, hopes, and aspirations. Their success is our success, making youth empowerment not just an investment in the future, but a critical strategy for thriving communities today.

Belonging is a fundamental developmental need for youth, essential for their ability to thrive and reach their full potential. It plays a critical role in positive brain development, fostering emotional regulation, resilience, and social connections. Creating an environment where youth feel a genuine sense of belonging requires empowering their voices, granting them agency, and involving them in meaningful decision-making processes. When young people are active participants in shaping their surroundings, they are more likely to feel valued and respected, reinforcing their sense of community and purpose. This holistic approach to belonging not only supports healthy development but also equips youth with the confidence and skills they need to navigate and contribute positively to the world.

The development of this strategic plan will build on over two decades of progress, with a focus on leveraging data-driven insights and continuous engagement to create meaningful opportunities for youth. By combining developmental asset principles with innovative programming, Stony Plain is fostering a supportive, inclusive environment where young people are empowered to lead, grow, and contribute to the well-being of their community. This comprehensive approach reflects a commitment to nurturing the potential of every young person while strengthening the social fabric of Stony Plain.

## Background

#### Youth Services in Stony Plain

Since the early 1990s, the municipality of Stony Plain has had a focus on supporting youth and helping them to be active, engaged community members. Activities took place to engage youth in conversation and encourage them to step into leadership roles related to planning community events, supporting each other in peer support models, and giving back to the community. Youth participated in the Teens in Action summer volunteer program to support work experience skills development. Stony Plain youth have participated in workshops and programs delivered in community spaces and educational settings with a goal to enhance self-esteem and empowerment, improve communication skills, and develop resiliency towards bullying. Over the years, those programs have included Chillaxing for Anger Management, Rock Solid for anti-bullying, and Heroes for resiliency. The Stony Plain Youth Team, which still functions today, began in 2003 as a way to provide youth with formal mechanisms to design the services and supports which mattered to them.

The Stony Plain Youth Centre, established as a physical location in 2004 in response to a youth-identified need, has been a hub for young people aged 11-17 for the past two decades. It is a space designed by youth to ensure it reflects their unique needs, interests, and aspirations. As a youth-focused space, it prioritizes creating an environment where young people feel welcomed, valued, and seen as a vital part of the community. It provides a space for youth to engage, participate, and lead activities, events, and initiatives that matter to them.

While the physical space of the Youth Centre serves as a home base for planning and coordinating activities, many activities take place out in community. These activities have included hosting inclusive events, intergenerational celebrations, and summer trips (providing opportunity to participate in activities that may otherwise be less accessible). Regular engagement continues to reveal a strong desire among youth to contribute to creating inclusive communities by fostering connections, advocating for others, ensuring safe spaces, and reducing risks for individuals. This intentional focus on youth empowerment and connection helps youth to thrive.

In 2018, a partnership was established with WestView Primary Care Network which has included supported referrals to the Youth Mental Health Clinic and related programming. A Community Connector works directly with youth within the Youth Centre and continues to be active in engaging with youth-led activities in coordination with Stony Plain team members.

Building on this rich history of youth engagement and support, the Town of Stony Plain continues to prioritize programs and partnerships that respond to the evolving needs of its young residents. The collaborative efforts initiated in the 1990s and early 2000s have grown into a comprehensive approach to youth development, focusing on creating meaningful opportunities for empowerment, skill-building, and connection. By blending traditional programming with innovative initiatives, the Town has reinforced its commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where youth can thrive.

Today, the integration of evidence-based practices, such as the Developmental Asset Framework, ensures that programs are intentional and aligned with the strengths and needs of youth. This ongoing

dedication to empowering young people reflects Stony Plain's belief in the value of youth as leaders and contributors, creating a legacy of engagement and growth that continues to inspire future generations.

As Stony Plain grows towards a population of 30,000 residents, understanding the needs of youth will continue to be important. Within the municipality, the Community and Social Development department will continue to review, implement, and evaluate actions related to the youth services with the intent of formalizing a comprehensive Youth Strategy.

# **Building a Youth Strategy**

It is important to involve youth in opportunities for programs and services as part of the Town of Stony Plain commitment to fostering a sense of community belonging and inclusion. As seen in the Town's Strategic Plan *Youth will feel a greater sense of belonging in Stony Plain and will be recognized as valued members of the community.* Regular and ongoing youth engagement will ensure the Town's Youth Strategy is relevant, effective and meaningful and that young people will be able to see their voices and contributions included in the development of a youth strategy.

Fostering youth engagement requires creating meaningful experiences that resonate with their life stage, interests, passions, and lived experiences. When young people see their values and priorities reflected in the opportunities offered, they are more likely to invest their energy and creativity. This approach not only builds their confidence and competencies but also empowers them to take on leadership roles in ways that feel authentic and relevant, laying a foundation for lifelong engagement and contribution.

Structured program scaling is important for providing developmentally appropriate leadership opportunities, capacity building, and skill development for youth. By tailoring opportunities to align with different stages of growth and readiness, these services can ensure that every young person is supported in developing their unique potential. Programs and services that prioritize development, skill building, and capacity enhancement play a vital role in empowering youth and promoting equitable opportunities. By focusing on reducing barriers—whether social, economic, or structural—these initiatives create pathways for all young people to succeed.

Conversations take place through the planning cycle to understand what youth need. Youth discussions during programs, workshops, and community events, provide perspective into the range of options that youth would like to explore. During 2023 engagement sessions, youth shared that their sense of belonging is strongest in moments when they feel accepted and understood, such as being around people with shared experiences, not being judged for being themselves, seeing minority groups included, and celebrating culture and diversity. These insights underscore the importance of nurturing belonging and inclusion among young people.

## Mentorship and Support

Effective service for youth relies heavily on components of mentorship and relationship building. Creating relationships with youth is an essential part of showing them they are valued and worthy of a time commitment. Adults in the community play a crucial role in fostering this sense of belonging by

building strong, trusting relationships with the youth. Acting as mentors, role models, and reliable resources, they provide guidance and support during pivotal moments in young people's lives. Adult role models include volunteers who attend programs to teach skills or share their hobbies, staff, and community partners. With Stony Plain's proximity to the City of Edmonton and several post-secondary institutions which offer programs related to youth, children, and social services, Stony Plain youth have benefited from practicum students and interns who have led creative activities to engage youth.

The Stony Plain Kinsmen provide funding towards programs and support youth projects to increase intergenerational connections. Individual Rotarians have provided funding towards projects and the Rotary Club of Stony Plain is contributing funding for the Community Helpers Program for 2024 and 2025. Within the municipality, programs such as the Shikaoi Exchange offer opportunities for global travel and cultural exchange, while local sports associations and recreational organizations promote physical activity, teamwork, and personal growth. Together, these efforts create a rich network of support that nurtures life skills, broadens horizons, and strengthens the social fabric for youth in Stony Plain.

#### Youth Engagement

Youth engagement centers on creating meaningful opportunities for young people to share their voices, develop skills, and strengthen their connection to the community. Regular and ongoing engagement, coupled with formalized opportunities for involvement, plays a crucial role in fostering youth development and ensuring sustained participation in community initiatives. By providing consistent avenues for young people to connect with their peers, mentors, and community leaders, these opportunities help to deepen their sense of belonging and investment in their communities.

Informal engagement, such as ongoing conversations and regular check-ins, is essential for ensuring that youth perspectives remain central in shaping future programs and opportunities. By maintaining open lines of communication with young people, communities can stay attuned to their evolving needs, interests, and concerns. Informal engagement allows for flexible, real-time feedback that can be quickly integrated into program design and decision-making processes. These interactions, whether through casual discussions, peer groups, or one-on-one check-ins, create a space where youth feel comfortable sharing their ideas and experiences in a less structured, more approachable setting. This continuous dialogue helps to ensure that programs are relevant, responsive, and reflective of the youth's voices, fostering a sense of ownership and participation. It also strengthens the relationship between youth and adult leaders, reinforcing trust and collaboration. Ultimately, informal engagement is a powerful tool for sustaining meaningful youth involvement, ensuring that their perspectives guide the development of programs that truly meet their needs and aspirations.

Formalized opportunities, such as structured youth councils, advisory boards, and volunteer programs, offer a clear framework through which youth can actively contribute and develop leadership skills. These settings not only facilitate meaningful engagement but also provide youth with a platform to influence decisions that impact their lives, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment. When engagement is ongoing, it allows youth to build long-term relationships and refine their skills in a supportive environment. Regular participation also reinforces the importance of commitment and accountability, helping youth to develop resilience and adaptability.

Together, regular informal engagement and formalized opportunities create a foundation for youth to become active, confident, and responsible members of their communities, prepared to take on leadership roles and contribute to collective well-being.

### Developmental Asset Framework

Leveraging knowledge of developmental assets is key to creating environments where youth strengths are recognized, celebrated, and consistently supported, while vulnerabilities are identified and addressed with care. Acknowledging the profound relational tie between a sense of belonging and the presence of developmental assets highlights the importance of fostering both (Scales & Leffert, 2004). When these elements are lacking, the community feels the ripple effects through disengagement, missed opportunities, and diminished outcomes for youth. By working collectively to bolster assets, strengthen relationships, and create inclusive spaces where every young person feels valued, communities can cultivate resilience, enhance well-being, and improve outcomes (Benson et al., 2011). This shared commitment not only enriches the lives of youth but also creates a stronger, more vibrant society for all.

In January 2025, a Developmental Asset Profile was conducted for Stony Plain to establish a baseline of data on youth development. This snapshot in time helped identify areas of strength and potential vulnerabilities within the community. The Developmental Asset Framework, created by the Search Institute, is a globally recognized model for positive youth development, grounded in extensive research on resilience and prevention (Search Institute, 2005). This framework identifies 40 critical supports and strengths young people need to thrive. Half of these assets are external, focusing on relationships and opportunities provided by families, schools, and communities, while the other half are internal, emphasizing social-emotional strengths, values, and personal commitments. Research shows that the presence of more developmental assets correlates with increased likelihood of resilience and thriving and reduced engagement in high-risk behaviors (Scales et al., 2000).

By understanding the developmental assets in Stony Plain, the community can create targeted strategies to strengthen supports and foster positive youth outcomes. Leveraging these insights allows programs to focus on building external assets, such as nurturing relationships and creating safe, engaging environments, while also enhancing internal assets, like fostering empathy, resilience, and purpose. When programs align with these strengths and needs, they not only support community engagement and civic mindedness but also empower youth to take an active role in shaping their lives and surroundings. This holistic approach ensures that youth are equipped with the tools and opportunities to thrive, creating a ripple effect that benefits the entire community.

Conducting the Developmental Asset Profile provided a baseline understanding of youth strengths and vulnerabilities, informing targeted programming to enhance areas of vulnerability and promote areas of strength. Volunteerism and civic engagement initiatives promote empowerment by helping youth feel valued and develop a sense of purpose, while workshops and public recognition foster positive values such as caring and responsibility. Youth development initiatives equip youth with entrepreneurial skills, addressing social competencies, like planning and decision-making and promoting positive values, like integrity and equality. Leadership programs support positive identity and amplify youth voices through platforms like advisory boards and youth-led initiatives. Social skill programs enhance interpersonal competence and conflict resolution, helping youth form meaningful connections

and navigate challenges. This comprehensive approach ensures youth are empowered, resilient, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

## Focus Areas for the Youth Strategy

Together, these focus areas reflect a comprehensive and intentional approach to youth development, ensuring young people are supported in building meaningful connections, fostering self-esteem, and gaining the skills and confidence needed to succeed. By aligning with the strengths and aspirations of youth, the strategy creates a foundation for long-term positive outcomes for individuals and the broader community. Each of these areas aim to build upon existing strengths and talents, recognizing the unique abilities each young person brings to their community. By fostering these strengths, the strategy enhances individual capacity, equipping youth with the skills and confidence needed to pursue meaningful opportunities and navigate challenges effectively. Through intentional programming, the strategy promotes a strong sense of belonging, ensuring that all youth feel valued, supported, and connected to their communities

#### Belonging

Ensure that young people feel connected, supported, and valued.

The focus areas for youth strategy development prioritize fostering a sense of belonging, building resilience, and empowering young people to thrive as active contributors within the community. Key activities include conducting a baseline assessment to identify strengths and vulnerabilities, facilitating volunteerism and civic engagement to develop skills and confidence, and supporting social enterprise initiatives to promote entrepreneurial and problem-solving capabilities. Leadership opportunities and youth-led initiatives amplify youth voices and enhance their self-esteem and decision-making abilities. Additionally, social and skill development programs aim to strengthen emotional regulation, communication, and relationship-building. Through these priority activities, youth are supported in developing critical internal and external assets, meaningful connections, and long-term positive outcomes for both individuals and the broader community. These activities provide meaningful opportunities for young people to connect with their communities, build relationships, and contribute to causes that matter to them. Together, these experiences promote a sense of belonging by affirming their value and impact, helping them feel integrated into a larger community, and equipping them with the confidence and skills to thrive.

## **Empowerment**

Empowering youth through participation and service to others.

Youth empowerment is essential for equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and opportunities to lead meaningful change and share their voices, perspectives, and ideas. Leadership programs that emphasize self-advocacy, critical thinking, decision-making, and public speaking provide a foundation for youth to navigate challenges and take initiative. Establishing platforms such as advisory boards and consultations ensures youth have opportunities to contribute their opinions in ways that are developmentally appropriate and aligned with their interests. Supporting youth-led initiatives enhances

empowerment by providing resources for projects that reflect their passions and priorities, fostering agency and ownership. By fostering leadership and agency, youth not only develop critical life skills but also become active participants in shaping their communities and future.

These programs focus on building critical skills such as decision-making, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, equipping youth with the tools needed to navigate complex situations with confidence. By providing structured opportunities to lead projects, participate in advisory boards, or mentor peers, leadership programs not only enhance engagement but also instill a sense of agency and responsibility. Leadership development is not just about individual growth; it is a pathway to creating a generation of informed, confident, and socially responsible leaders.

Volunteerism plays a vital role in supporting the development of both external and internal assets in youth, fostering personal growth and a deeper connection to their communities. Developmental asset research supports the numerous positive outcomes of volunteerism, particularly within the external asset category of empowerment. Providing meaningful roles for young people builds confidence, leadership, and an understanding of their ability to effect change. Research indicates that regular service activities enhance social-emotional skills such as empathy and responsibility, while strengthening ties to their communities (Scales et al., 2000). Supporting youth to identify causes they are passionate about further empowers them to engage with purpose, enhancing their capacity to make a positive impact. Studies show that empowering youth through these assets reduces risky behaviors, improves emotional well-being, and equips them with skills for lifelong civic engagement, benefiting both individuals and the wider community (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Collaborating with Volunteer Alberta to develop and structure a youth-focused volunteer program offers a powerful opportunity to expand engagement and broaden young people's capacity to contribute to their communities. Structured volunteer programs enable youth to build confidence, develop valuable skills, and form meaningful connections, which are key components of positive youth development. The program will increase access to diverse volunteer opportunities and provide training to help youth build the skills and confidence needed for meaningful participation. A critical element involves equipping adults with tools and strategies to integrate youth as equitable members of boards, roundtables, and service groups. This approach fosters inclusion, strengthens organizational memberships, and cultivates the next generation of committed volunteers. By empowering youth to take active roles in decision-making and community service, the program enhances leadership skills and provides organizations with fresh perspectives, ensuring long-term sustainability and mutual growth.

Recognizing and celebrating youth volunteers through awards, public acknowledgments, and community celebrations reinforces their efforts and fosters a sense of accomplishment and belonging. Youth who perceive their contributions as valued by the community develop a stronger sense of belonging and purpose (Benson, 2006). Together, these efforts create pathways for youth to thrive while nurturing a lifelong commitment to civic engagement and community stewardship.

### Leadership

Strengthen emotional regulation, communication, and social skills to support leadership development. Foster entrepreneurial skills amongst youth while addressing social challenges that prioritize social impact and sustainability.

Leadership initiatives can play a vital role in fostering the positive development of both internal and external assets for youth, combining skill-building with a commitment to addressing social challenges. Social and skill development offer a powerful platform for connecting youth to key developmental assets in the areas of positive values, positive identity, and social competencies, fostering holistic growth and resilience. Participating in development initiatives will enable young people to cultivate positive values such as caring, equality, and social justice by addressing community challenges like poverty and inequality. They will also develop integrity, honesty, and responsibility by acting on their convictions, staying accountable, and making ethical decisions. Additionally, youth strengthen social competencies by developing skills in planning and decision-making, interpersonal and cultural competence, and conflict resolution. These initiatives foster critical life skills, empathy, collaboration, and leadership, empowering youth to drive sustainable social change and contribute positively to their communities.

Social and skill development is essential for promoting overall mental wellness, as it helps youth build the emotional and interpersonal skills necessary to navigate life's challenges. Workshops, events, and programming focused on healthy relationships provide safe and supportive spaces where youth can learn to understand their emotions, practice empathy, and resolve conflicts constructively. These experiences not only enhance their ability to form positive relationships but also contribute to a stronger sense of self-worth and belonging. By fostering these skills, social development programming supports resilience, reduces feelings of isolation, and promotes emotional well-being, ensuring that youth are equipped to thrive both personally and within their communities (Elias et al., 1997).

Engaging in leadership opportunities like social enterprise projects help youth develop critical internal assets such as planning and decision-making, a sense of purpose, and resilience (Scales & Leffert, 2004). Simultaneously, it strengthens external assets like empowerment and meaningful community engagement by providing opportunities for youth to contribute to solving real-world issues. Training programs focusing on business planning, funding strategies, and impact measurement equip youth with practical tools to launch and sustain initiatives, while equitable access ensures opportunities for all participants. Structured program scaling allows youth to progressively build their skills over time, fostering confidence and long-term success. Mentorship networks further enrich the experience by connecting youth with experienced individuals, businesses, and organizations that provide guidance, real-world insights, and opportunities for growth. Through initiatives like social enterprise, youth gain tools to create sustainable solutions, amplify social impact, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. The experiential nature of social enterprise projects reinforces positive identity, providing youth with a sense of personal power, self-esteem, and purpose as they witness the tangible impact of their efforts and gain optimism about shaping a better future (Scales et al., 2000).

Recognizing the importance of creating fun and positive opportunities to practice these skills in safe and supportive environments ensures youth feel encouraged and engaged. These experiences not only expand their social and emotional abilities but also result in more empowered and capable individuals who are prepared to thrive in their communities and personal lives.

# **Next Steps**

The activities outlined in this strategy are designed to remain ongoing, with regular review and analysis to ensure they stay current and relevant to the needs of youth. The information collected through the Developmental Asset Profile and engagement activities will support annual work plans and guide programs and initiatives. By capturing youth perspectives on belonging, resilience, and their developmental needs, this will provide a clear picture of strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth within the community. It will serve as a critical resource to inform future programming, policies, and initiatives, ensuring they are grounded in the lived experiences and aspirations of local youth. This report will also act as a tool for accountability, showcasing how youth voices directly shape decisions and actions that support their development and well-being.

By regularly reviewing the data and insights gathered from the Developmental Asset Profile and engagement activities, the key themes, priorities, and areas of focus identified by young people will remain at the forefront of work planning. The strategy will outline actionable steps to address identified needs, enhance developmental assets, and create equitable opportunities for youth to thrive. By embedding youth voices at its core, the Youth Strategy will serve as a roadmap for fostering belonging, empowerment, and positive development, reinforcing the community's commitment to supporting and investing in its young people.

## Key Activities for 2025-2027

This plan applies the Developmental Asset Framework to guide programs and initiatives that strengthen both internal and external assets, supporting positive youth development in Stony Plain.

#### 1. Developmental Asset Profile

- Conduct a comprehensive Developmental Asset Profile (DAP) to establish a baseline of youth strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Analyze the results to identify key areas of focus, including developmental strengths, gaps in support, and opportunities for growth.
- Share findings with youth, stakeholders, and community to build awareness and inform action.

#### 2. Engagement Activities

- Host a Youth Engagement Summit to gather diverse youth perspectives on belonging, leadership and community engagement.
  - (2025) Keynote by Tyler Smith, survivor of the Humboldt Bronco bus crash and founder of Not Alone Co., sharing his story of resilience and community impact.
  - Interactive sessions to explore youth experiences and foster meaningful dialogue.

• Facilitate focus groups, surveys, and one-on-one conversations to ensure diverse youth voices are represented.

#### 3. Youth Strategy

- Compile and analyze data and feedback from the Developmental Asset Profile and engagement activities. Produce a comprehensive report, summarizing key findings, youth-identified priorities, and opportunities for improvement.
- Outline clear objectives and action steps to strengthen developmental assets and address priority areas, such as:
  - Belonging: Enhancing inclusive spaces and opportunities for connection.
  - **Leadership**: Expanding youth-led initiatives and skill development.
  - **Empowerment**: Increasing volunteerism and community involvement.
- Expand avenues for youth participation and deepen engagement across community initiatives.

These actions ensure a data-driven, youth-centered approach to supporting positive development, empowering young people to lead and thrive while fostering a stronger, more inclusive community. Fostering youth development through intentional programming, volunteerism, community engagement, and skill-building initiatives is essential for building both internal and external developmental assets. These initiatives strengthen skills, confidence, and a sense of belonging while empowering young people to lead meaningful change in their communities.

By leveraging the Developmental Asset Framework, we can identify strengths and address vulnerabilities, creating targeted opportunities that enhance social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Providing platforms for leadership, social skill development, and youth-led initiatives ensures that young people are not only equipped to navigate challenges but also actively contribute to creating a more equitable and resilient society. Recognizing and celebrating their efforts reinforces their value, amplifies their voices, and inspires them to build a brighter future for themselves and their communities. Through these collective efforts, youth are empowered to thrive as engaged, capable, and impactful members of society.

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