



Project Crossroads Participants Surveys October 2020

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Abstract:

After COVID-19 hit, studies from around the world showed that effects of isolation, quarantining, and economic impacts had begun to negatively impact mental health; especially for youth and essential workers.

How did being outdoors in nature, and spending time with community, help with this? This was the topic that we wanted to explore to add to the worldwide reflection about the healing and peace that being outside in times of difficulty can bring.

After ACER's COVID-19 protocol took shape and plantings were scheduled in the diverse communities for Project Crossroads, the ACER team – including myself, other team members and the board of directors - developed a survey that looked at both people's personal states of mental health and experiences in nature during COVID-19; importantly, we also asked questions about how people felt, if their moods had changed, before and after planting with ACER. Surveys were undertaken in person on site during planting days.

Report and Lessons Learned:

Developing and undertaking the survey was a very interesting and eye-opening experience for me. Collaboration with ACER Board and others with relevant backgrounds was extremely helpful, giving further insight into how the survey could be improved. After edits from the board, the survey was changed after the Folkstone planting to give people more space to tell ACER what they felt was important in a post-pandemic recovery. Given the dynamism of the Project Crossroads base, the survey was able to reach many people with diverse backgrounds on planting days. Participants ranged from youth to the elderly and included staff members of the conservation authority, schoolteachers, and families. Because of the variety of those surveyed, we also have a variety of experiences represented.

The majority of survey respondents described the COVID-19 pandemic as creating more stress in multiple aspects of their lives and more online time. Almost all respondents reported getting outside into nature and plant trees helped relieve their COVID-19 worries, and allowed for a happy distraction away from the realities, restrictions, and isolations that a global pandemic present. The Project Crossroads tree plantings, in areas of low tree canopy and high social needs, acted as a safe community gathering space in times of need with all COVID-19 protocols in place.

Everyone who came to the plantings, left with positive, joyful experiences and a greater sense of connection and community, and would highly recommend it to their family and friends.

People felt supported, valued, and that they were able to give back to their communities. Particularly during the social isolation compounded by COVID-19, people greatly appreciated the opportunity to get out into the community, work, learn, and grow together.

Most event attendees recognized the connection between planting trees and the positive impact it can have on climate change and the environment, as well how important being outside and moving our bodies can have on our own physical and emotional health.

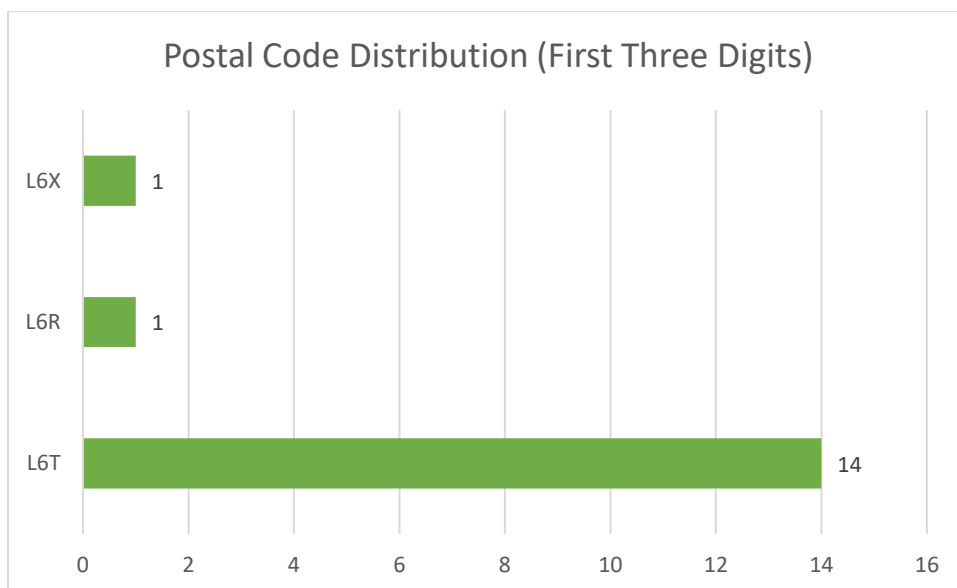
The survey also identified good youth jobs and emergency preparedness planning as priority for a strong recovery, based on what people surveyed had to say. As next steps, many participants identified attending either a virtual book club or nature walks to help stay safe and warm during the second wave of COVID-19 in Ontario and during the colder winter temperatures.

In conclusion, the Project Crossroads community plantings were a great success, capturing the response to this experience; not only in terms of connecting people from diverse backgrounds – newcomers, racialized youth - with their communities, but also for working together to put the trees in the ground to improve their neighbourhood!

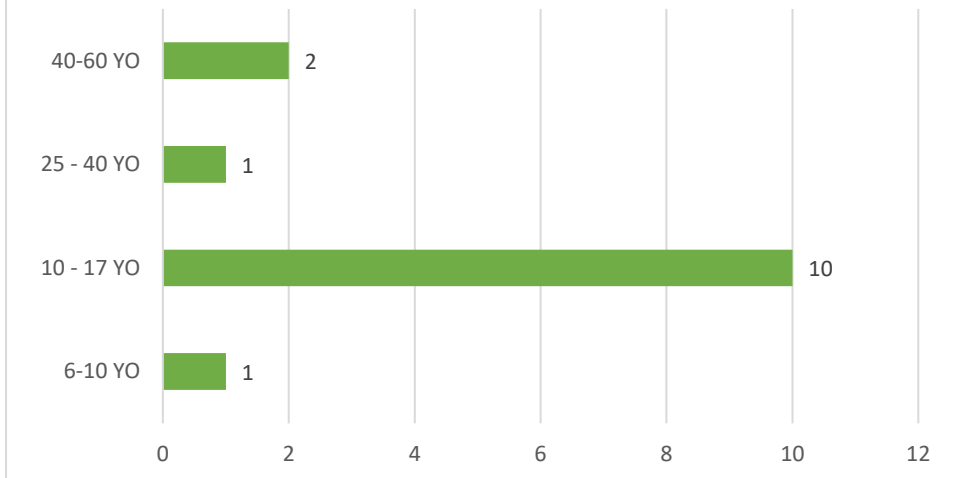
Attached:

Copy of Survey administered both before and after parts (both Folkstone and Knightsbridge attached)

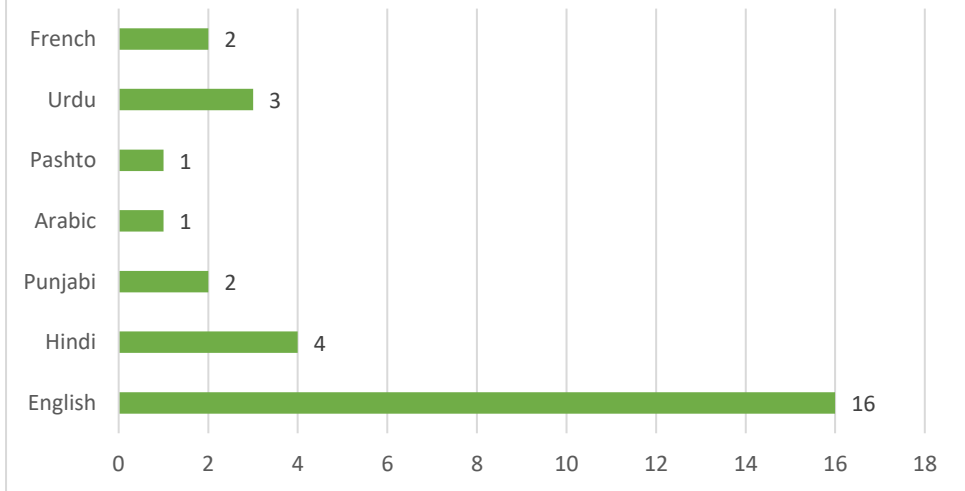
Summary of Raw data



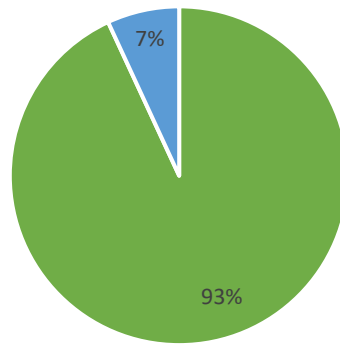
Age Ranges of Respondents



Languages Spoken

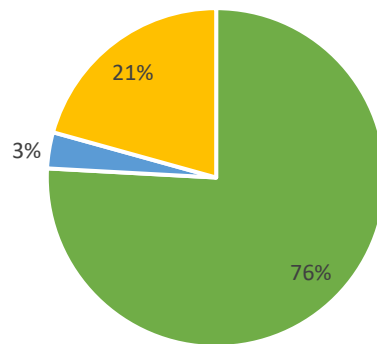


Screen Time During the Pandemic



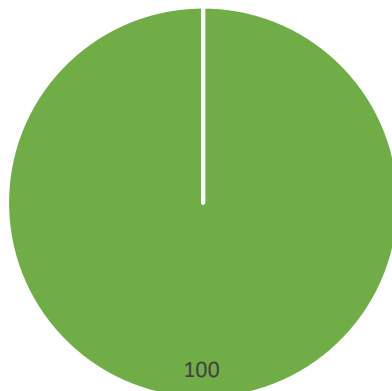
■ More Screen Time ■ Less Screen Time

Stress Levels During the Pandemic

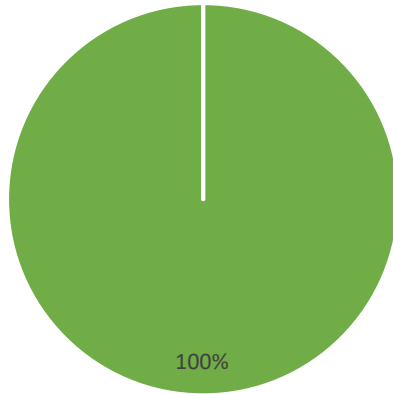


■ More Stress ■ Less Stress ■ Same

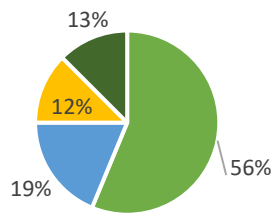
Mood Improved After Planting



Recommend Event to Others



Reported Impacts on Health after spending time in nature, including ACER Planting



- Reduced Stress
- Provided Happy Distraction From Covid-19 worries
- Time to focus on family/friends
- Enhance my own well-being