

June 21, 2023

The Honourable Michael Parsa  
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 438 University Ave, Toronto, ON, M5G 2K8

Via email: [ministermccss@ontario.ca](mailto:ministermccss@ontario.ca)



Dear Minister Parsa,

Northern Lights Collaborative (NLC) works with youth and organizations across Northern Ontario to centre youth leadership, storytelling, decrease youth isolation, and increase organizational accountability to youth voices.

Since 2019 the NLC has been part of Laidlaw's Youth CI program working towards the Implementation Phase, which we anticipated would be launched in April 2023. We recently received news that Laidlaw Foundation's Youth CI (Collective Impact) funding stream will not be renewed. We understand this is a decision of the Ministry of Children and Community Services. Closing the Youth Collective Impact funding stream carries far-reaching consequences for our collaborative, for other grantees, and most importantly, for the youth that this program was meant to support and uplift.

It is deeply disappointing that after 15 years of successful implementation, this fund has been abruptly closed. It is especially devastating for Collective Impact initiatives such as ours, who were readily preparing to receive 18 months (\$225,000) of implementation funding. Organizational resources including funding and staff were already allocated to the implementation phase and we were under the impression that there was full intention of being awarded the final implementation phase funding.

The Ministry's decision carries many ramifications, including there now being even less support for youth in the underserved, already under-resourced northern region where we work. Here in Northern Ontario, youth programs are severely lacking; we know this based on research and data harvested through our previous Social Mapping Project. The loss of our implementation funding has dampened the momentum we had built up over 3.5 years of work and has particularly impacted our organization's young staff, who have dedicated themselves to the Collaborative's work over many years and are now facing employment transitions. Through our Implementation Phase, we would have collectively implemented our Theory of Change and shared Evaluation Platform, which would have assisted Collaborative partners, youth-serving communities, and organizations to better understand and advocate for change in the North.

### ***WHO WE ARE***

Northern Lights Collaborative is supported by our lead organization, CatalystsX in Ottawa, and serves the wide geographic area from Baawaating / Sault Ste Marie and the Algoma District (Northeastern Ontario) to Animikii Wiikwidoong / Thunder Bay and the region of Northwestern Ontario. The Collaborative consists of Thinking Rock Community Arts, NORDIK Institute, Mindful

Makers Collective, and recently we began onboarding Thunder Bay Entrepreneur Centre, The KLUB 2SLGBTQ+ Community Centre, Youth Odena and Roots Community Food Centre.

### **OUR SHARED WORK**

Through programming, events, and advocacy, the NLC empowers youth facing barriers to lead, advocate, and contribute their voices to their communities. We work with youth and organizations across Northern Ontario to centre youth leadership and storytelling, decrease youth isolation, and increase organizational accountability to youth voices.

We have been grateful, successful applicants to the Youth CI program for the past 3.5 years, funding which has made our work possible and impactful. We could not have foreseen the changes that we would experience in a global pandemic. Although we were accustomed to working remotely across the province, we were not aware of how relevant our collaborative's goals of reducing social isolation in the North would become with the mental health crisis the pandemic has brought with it, propelling our work into the future.

### **ACTIONS: A WAY FORWARD**

Our Federal and Provincial Governments have a *social responsibility* to commit *legally and financially to social infrastructure development*. We are calling upon allies working within, around and through the systems to lend a hand in supporting the sustainability of Collective Impact work in our future. Together, we can do this by sharing our experience with regional MP's and Ministry representatives who are in a position to bring our shared concerns forward, and to hold our government accountable.

The organizations below have signed onto this open letter to respectfully ask you, the reader, to take urgent action to support Youth Collective Impact work. Collectively, we are calling on the Ministry of Children and Community Services to:

- Recommit to supporting Collective Impact Work through Laidlaw Foundation's Youth CI program;
- Engage in sound, sustainable financial planning to further develop and support youth engagement with community building in Northern Ontario;
- Reverse funding cuts to Youth Collective Impact work;
- Develop actionable mechanisms to better sustain, uphold and support Collective Impact work:
  - This includes the Ministry developing *policies and practices* that ensure measures of *accountability and transparency* are put in place when allocating funds to support important sector, community development and collective impact work.
  - Key to this is having the Ministry and the foundations administering funds on their behalf, *signing Memorandum of Understanding or contracts*. This would ensure that the foundation is in a clear, transparent position to support organizations and their work, and are not left in a lurch; where they have over-promised or under-delivered on large, multi-year projects.
  - This would ensure longer notification timelines and funds to support transitioning to other revenue sources.
  - Succession planning is then possible for foundations and their beneficiaries, like the NLC, to avoid catastrophic gaps left in the arms of grassroots organizations to fill. These policies and practices would ensure ample time is provided for

strategizing when/if any changes to the funds allocated may be on the horizon.

Northern Lights Collaborative respectfully requests that the termination of the CI program be reconsidered, thereby supporting northern youth entrepreneurs to lead collaborative systems innovation work in a region that is contextually different and largely underserved in comparison to southern areas. We look forward to your positive response, and to renewed opportunities to continue our important, impactful work.

Sincerely,

 mindful  
makers  
collective



Caroline Kajorinne Krievin  
Founding Creative Director,  
mindful makers collective



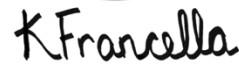
Miranda Bouchard  
Artistic Director, Thinking Rock Community Arts



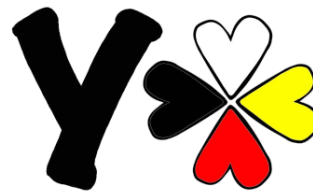
Justin Ford  
CEO, CatalystsX Network Community Inc.



Tamanna Rimi, Ph.D.  
Director of Research, NORDIK Institute



Katrina Francella, (they/them)  
Founder/Director  
The KLUB 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Centre



**Youth Odena**



Caceila Trahan  
Co Founder / Manager