

The Community Healing Project:

Year 1 in review

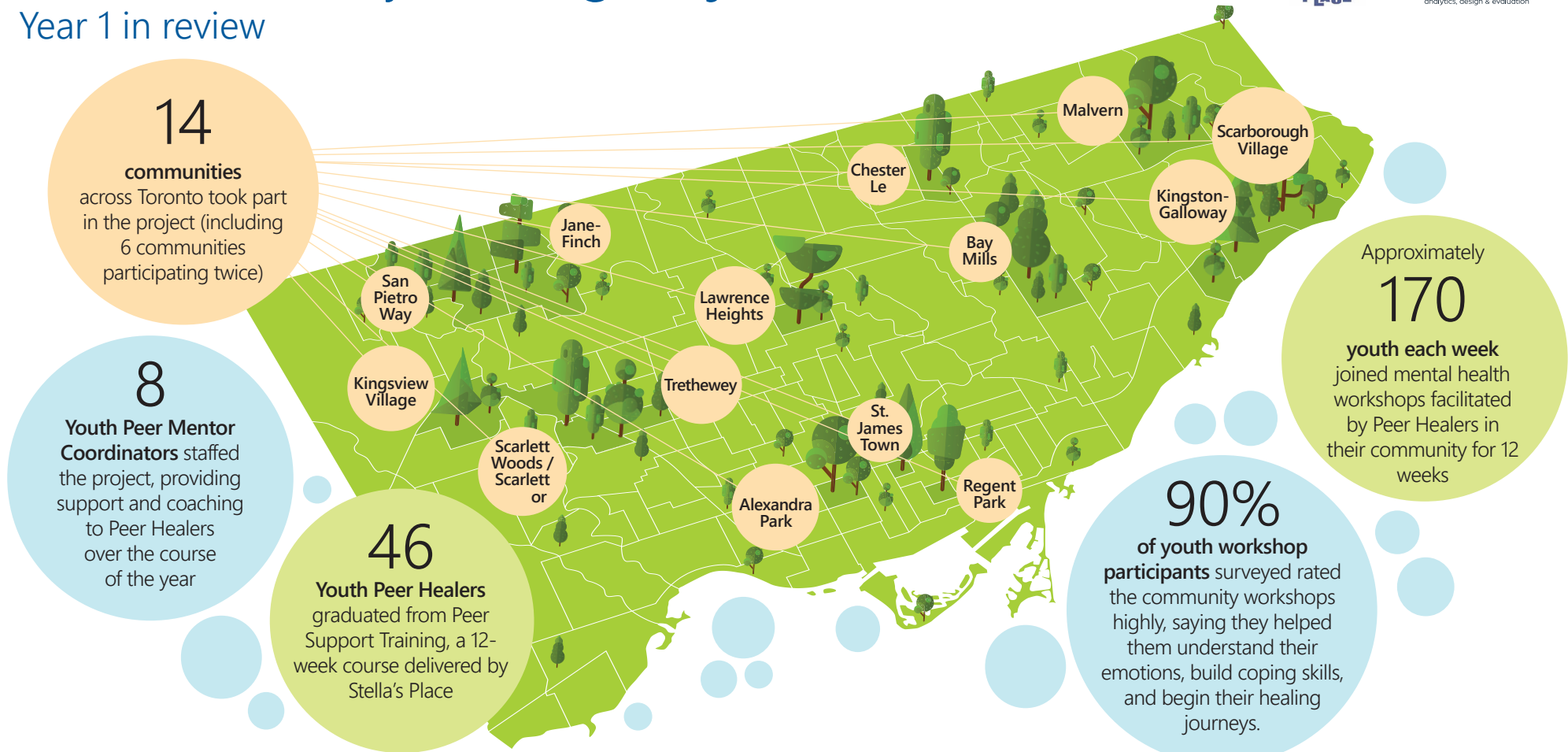
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The Community Healing Project (CHP) is a peer-based approach to addressing the impact of exposure to violence on youth and their communities.

It brings together the City of Toronto, Stella's Place, CHP alumni (who act as Youth Peer Mentor Coordinators, or YPMCs), and partners from across the city – Agincourt Community Services Association, Jane and Finch Family Centre, St. Stephen's Community House at The Neighbourhood Group, and Yorktown Family Services – to train and empower Peer Healers to

deliver workshops to youth, many of them from communities who have experienced direct or indirect exposure to community violence.

CHP is grounded in the belief that peers – individuals with lived experience – can connect with youth in ways that community organizations and clinicians cannot, and that effective healing must

be community-based and community-driven. It is collaborative, responsive to the needs of communities and youth, and prioritizes the well-being of participants and partners. CHP also encourages Peer Healers to consider their lived experience and the skills they learn in the program as part of an employment path, and to build on these skills in relevant work opportunities after the program.

CHP is funded by the Government of Canada as part of the National Crime Prevention Strategy.

CHP Year 1 Evaluation

The City of Toronto partnered with Blueprint to evaluate the five-year Community Healing Project. In the first year of the evaluation, Blueprint spoke with five YPMCs, five Peer Healers, and staff from all partner agencies to understand their experiences with CHP and how they think it can be improved in Year 2. The evaluation team also collected written feedback from 71 youth who joined workshops in their communities. Blueprint is grateful to everyone who generously shared their time and insights and who made the evaluation possible.

What we found

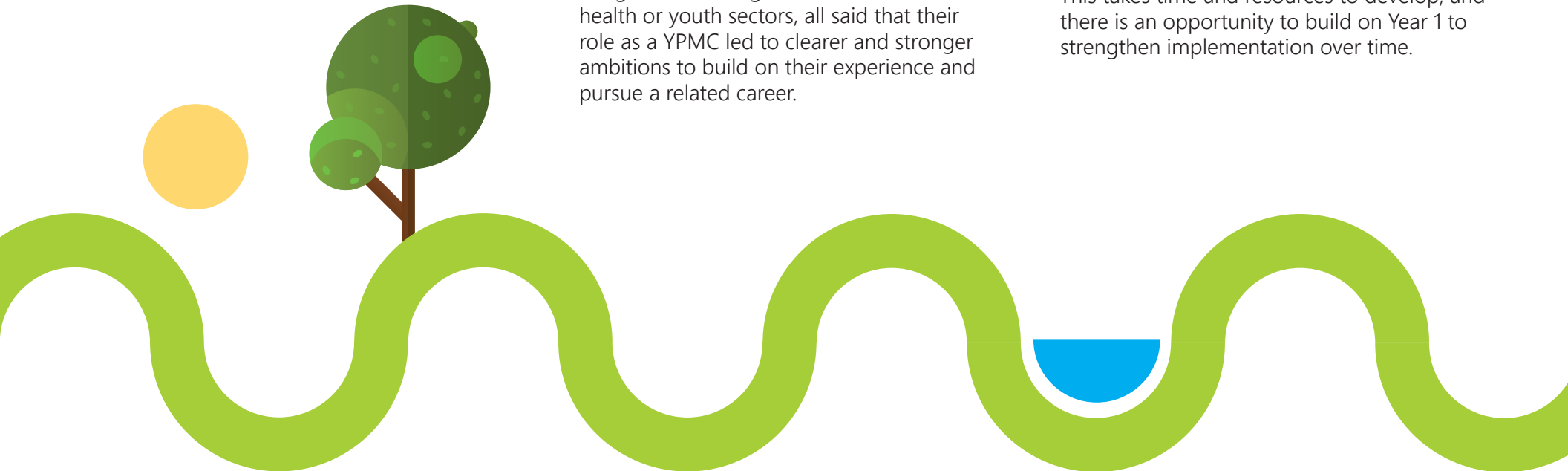
Participants see CHP as a rare and transformative opportunity in their lives.

- Peer Healers gained unique skills, experience, and insights, and were able to reach and connect with youth in ways that community organizations and non-peer staff cannot.
- Many of the Peer Healers that we spoke with shared that their time in CHP helped them see the value and relevance of their lived experience in building a career that they're passionate about. They described how CHP helped spark career ambitions in the youth work or social services sectors, and helped them build work-related skills.
- While few of the YPMCs came into CHP with the goal of building a career in the mental health or youth sectors, all said that their role as a YPMC led to clearer and stronger ambitions to build on their experience and pursue a related career.

- Several Peer Healers and YPMCs have continued to stay involved with the City, Stella's Place, and Quadrant Lead organizations, including some who have found full-time work with these organizations.

As an ambitious, complex program, CHP requires a high level of coordination and relationship-building, which take time.

- To meaningfully engage youth across Toronto, support learning, healing, and professional development, and work with community partners to ensure local relevance and application, CHP relies on strong and active collaboration across a broad range of partners and participants.
- This takes time and resources to develop, and there is an opportunity to build on Year 1 to strengthen implementation over time.



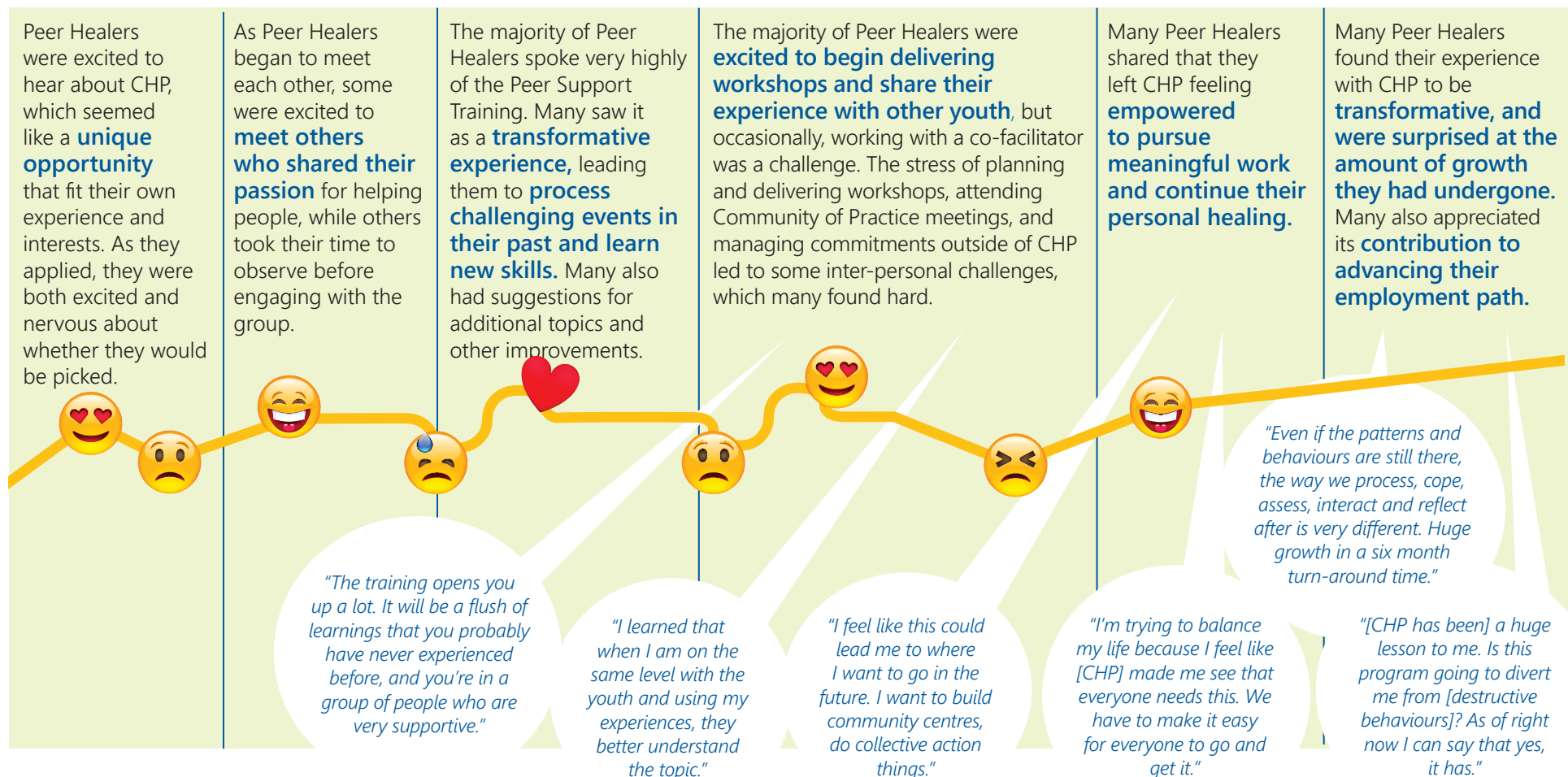
Understanding the experiences of Peer Healers

As part of the evaluation, Blueprint worked individually with five Peer Healers to map out their journeys in the program – from when they first heard about it to their graduation. Peer Healers chose emojis to represent how they were feeling at different stages of the experience, and the most common ones are included below. Here's what we heard.

Peer Healers' pathway



What we heard



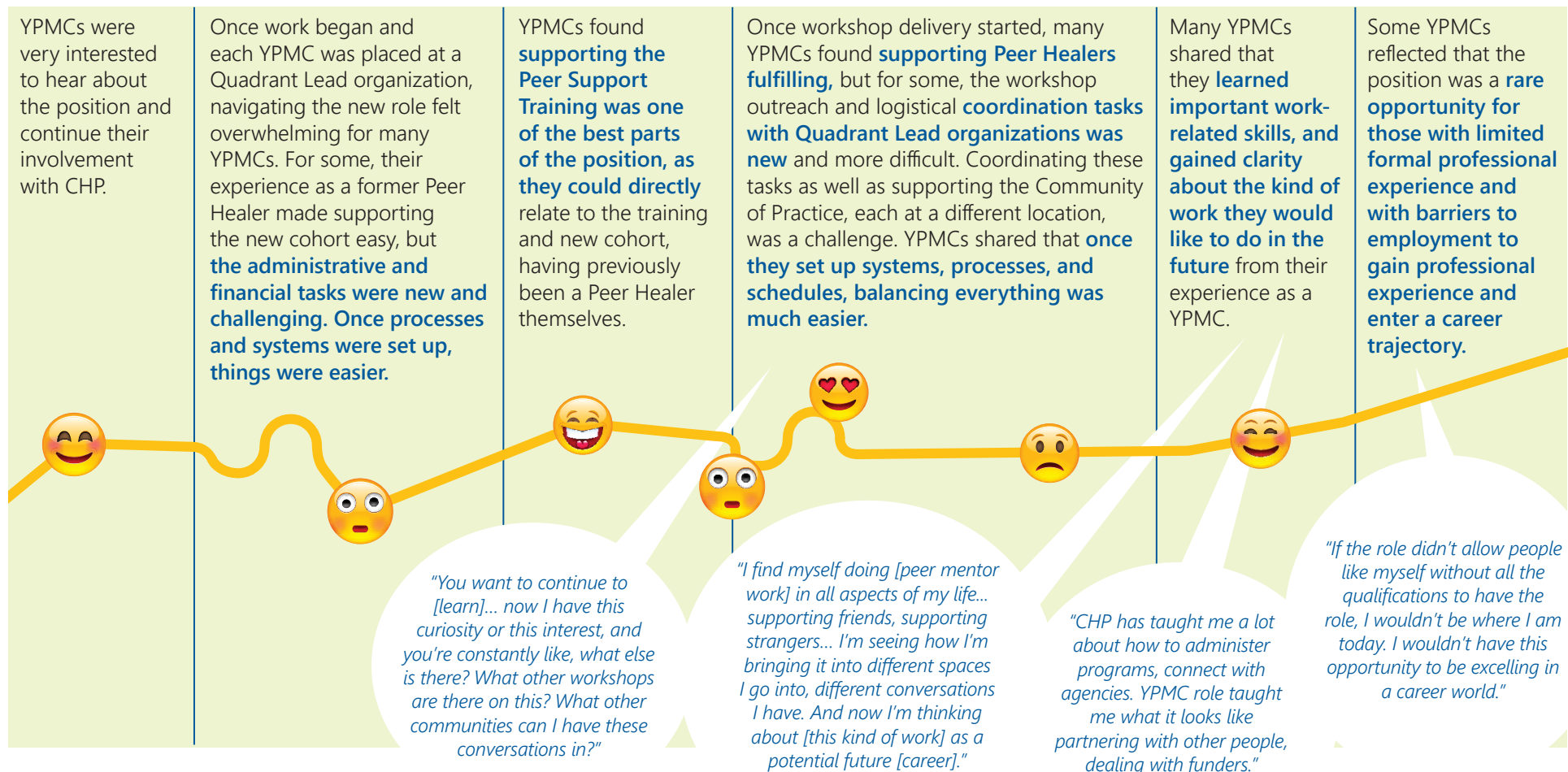
Understanding the experiences of Youth Peer Mentor Coordinators (YPMCs)

As part of the evaluation, Blueprint worked individually with five Youth Peer Mentor Coordinators (YPMCs), all of whom were former Peer Healers, to map out their journey in the role, from when they first heard about the opportunity to its end a year later. YPMCs chose emojis to represent how they were feeling at different stages of the experience, and the most common ones are included below. Here's what we heard.

YPMCs' pathway



What we heard



CHP Year 2: Looking Forward

The City of Toronto, Stella's Place, and partner agencies have already started to incorporate feedback from participants and partners into the second year of the project.

- The **Peer Support Training Program has been extended** to 14 sessions, and includes an additional conflict resolution module, an extended module on diversity and identity, and greater emphasis on communication
- There is a **new application process** for Peer Healers who wish to deliver community workshops, with additional training
- A **Case Manager** has been hired to support Peer Healers
- **Four new counsellors** are now available to provide up to five counselling sessions - at no

cost and with no waitlist - to Peer Healers and workshop participants on a referred or self-referred basis

- The **YPMC position has been split into two roles:** Youth Coordinators working closely with each of the four partner agencies and Youth Mentors who will continue to coach and support Peer Healers

The City of Toronto and Stella's Place also recognize that the need for the Community Healing Project is greater than ever with the COVID-19 pandemic. They are actively working with Peer Healers, Youth Mentors, and Youth Coordinators to respond to the needs of Toronto youth, deliver online workshops, and bring together communities virtually.

We want to hear from you!

To learn more about the evaluation and share your feedback, contact:

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