



Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies  
serving infants, children and young parents - together

L'Association Ontarienne des Agences pour Jeunes Parents  
servir nourrissons, enfants et jeunes parents - ensemble



**Building strong foundations:  
Recommendations based on the  
current state of live-in/intensive day  
programs for pregnant and parenting  
youth, their infants and children in  
Ontario**

**POLICY BRIEF**

November 2024



# Building Strong Foundations: Recommendations from Wilfrid Laurier University Policy Brief

April 3<sup>rd</sup> , 2025, 12:00 – 1:30pm

# Land Acknowledgement

OAYPA acknowledges that its work, and the work of its community partners, take place on traditional Indigenous territories across the province. We acknowledge that there are 46 treaties and other agreements that cover the territory now called Ontario. We are thankful to live, learn and benefit within the boundaries of these territories. We are thankful to the First Nations, Metis and Inuit people who have cared for these territories since time immemorial and who continue to contribute to the strength of Ontario and to all communities across the province. We recognize that in this territory, Indigenous rights holders have endured historical oppression and continue to endure inequalities that have largely resulted from the widespread failure of non-Indigenous treaty people to hold up their responsibilities within the Dish With One Spoon Covenant.

We also acknowledge all Treaty peoples – including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past – and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.



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# Webinar Objectives

- 1. Present Key Research Findings** – Share insights from the policy brief, highlighting the challenges faced by young families in Ontario.
- 2. Review & Discuss Recommendations** – Examine the proposed policy recommendations, their potential impact, and how they address existing gaps in support.
- 3. Engage Experts** – Facilitate a panel discussion with researchers, young parents, sector leaders, service providers and to explore solutions.
- 4. Encourage Participation** – Provide a platform for attendees to ask questions, share experiences, and contribute to the policy conversation.

# Agenda

- Welcome, OAYPA Overview and Context for Policy Brief
- Policy Brief Introduction, Methodology, Recommendations
- Panel
- Q & A

# Presenters

- **Ekua Asabea Blair**, President, OAYPA; President/CEO, Abiona Centre For Infant & Early Mental Health
- **Alexandra Burman**, MSc Candidate, Health Sciences, Wilfrid Laurier University
- **Hannah Denberg**, MSc Candidate, Health Sciences, Wilfrid Laurier University
- **Dr. Melody Morton Ninomiya**, Associate Professor, Health Sciences, Wilfrid Laurier University

# ABOUT OAYPA

The Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies (OAYPA) represents 20 Young Parent and Infant Agencies (YPIAs). Our members offer evidence-based programs and services that are reflective and responsive to the voice, wishes and needs of pregnant/parenting youth.



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# Mission

Ensure young parents and their infants/children have equitable access to the right services, at the right time, to reach their full potential.

# Vision

Optimal mental health and wellbeing for young parents and their infants/children.



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# OAYPA Members



Maison Columbus House



# OAYPA Members

- Offer **evidence-based/-informed programming and interventions**
- Provide early identification, targeted intervention, treatment and referrals to:
  - Promote positive infant and maternal mental health
  - Promote optimal growth and development
  - Reduce involvement with child welfare
- Use a client-centered, strengths-based, **parent-child dyad** approach
- **Work collaboratively** with other health and social service agencies (e.g., child welfare, children's rehab, community centres, cultural organizations) to optimize outcomes for young families



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# Provincial Context



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- MCCSS Policy shop
- Young Parent and Infant Sector Modernization – MCCSS Transfer Payment Recipients
- 50% of members MCCSS funded
- Alignment with provincial priorities and initiatives
  - Supporting children with complex special needs
  - SmartStart Hubs
  - Child Welfare Reform

# Policy Brief

## Goal:

Work with a research team to develop a policy brief to develop system-level recommendations to support advocacy efforts for OAYPA.

- Partnership with Wilfred Laurier University
- Mitacs matching funding
- 100%-member response rate (provider & young parent)

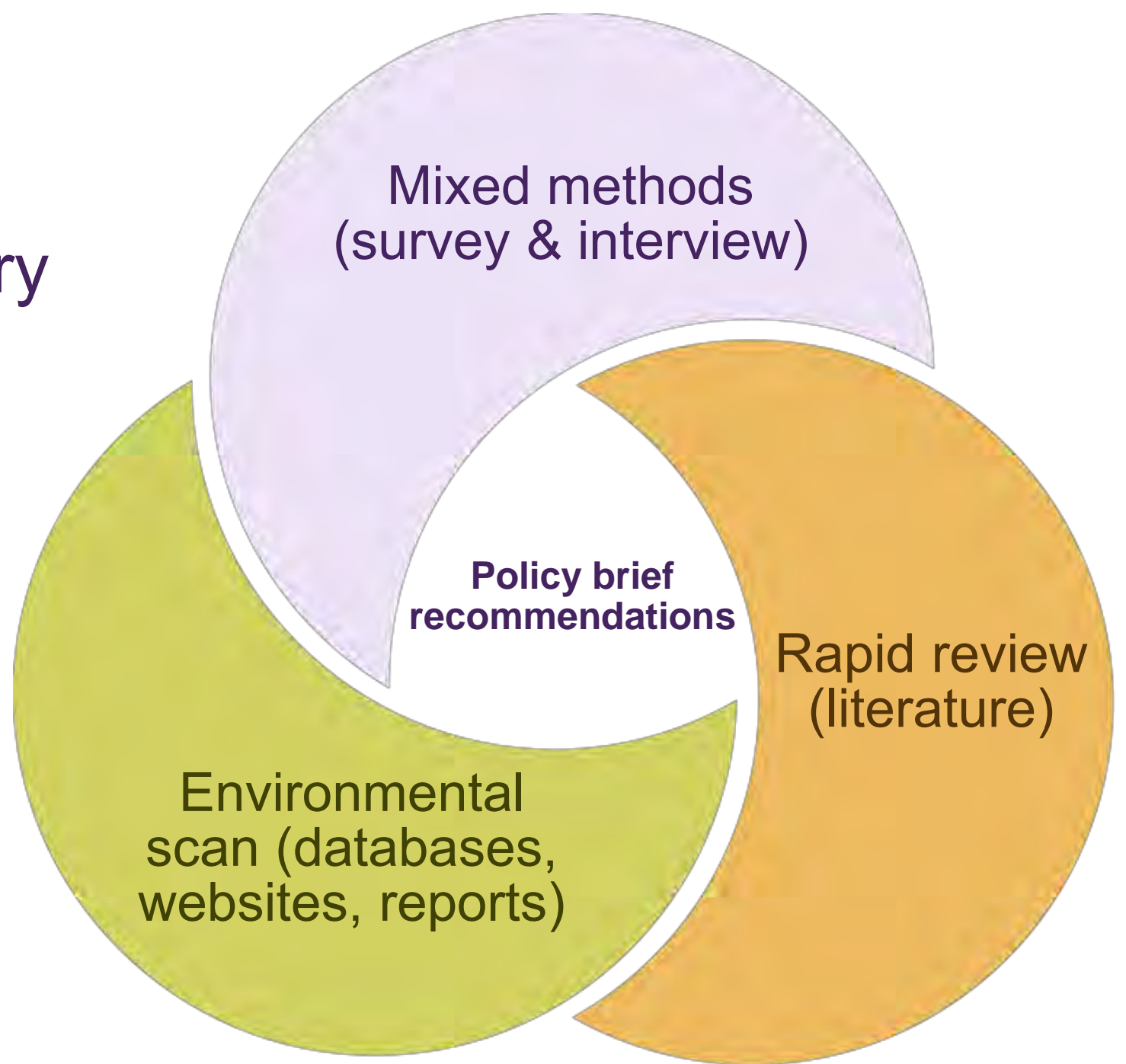


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# 3

## Complementary Studies



# Environmental Scan - Trends Using ON Data



## Public Databases

Looking for trends about pregnant & parenting youth in Ontario.

**Ex. 221 Ontario, Public Health Ontario,  
Statistics Canada**



## Young Parent & Infant Agencies (ON only)

Gathering brief descriptions across all agencies.

**Ex. types of programs, funding from MCCSS,  
supports for young parents & children**

# Mixed Methods (Survey & Interviews) - New Data



**Online surveys**  
(5-10 min)



Invited diverse **survey**  
**respondents**



**Online interviews** with  
youth & staff (separately)

# Rapid Review - Existing Evidence



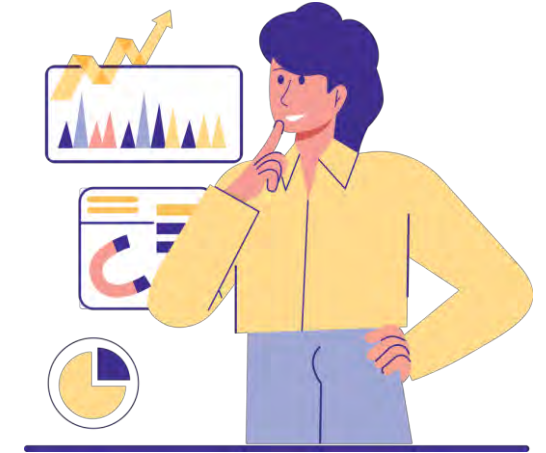
## Search & gather data

Pregnant & parenting youth programs, services, & interventions published 2014-2024



## Sorting

Describes programs, services, & interventions reported outcomes



## Analyzing relevant data

Extract information & analyze data

# Policy Brief Recommendations

## Recommendation 1:

Improve equitable access to Young Parent and Infant Agencies & services (Immediate/Urgent)

- Need **equitable access**
- **Increase \$ from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)** - only 11 of 20 have MCCSS \$
- \$ needed for cost-of-living adjustments, and **collaboration with key partners to ensure a cohesive, province-wide support system** for young families

## Recommendation 2:

Enhance mental health services within Young Parent and Infant Agencies for the parent, child & dyad (Short-term)

- Mental health is exacerbated by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma, systemic discrimination, etc.
- Need **specialized mental health professionals**
- Professionals offer **trauma-informed mental health supports** for youth, parent-child dyads, and infants and young children

# Policy Brief Recommendations

## Recommendation 3:

Revise policies, funding, and eligibility to reflect changing demographics (Short-term)

- Need for **long-term, intensive mental health and wraparound services**, especially people with cognitive and/or developmental disabilities
- Live-in treatment care policies, funding, and **eligibility requirements need to align with changing demographics** (account for infants; raise age limit)

## Recommendation 4:

Establish partnerships to develop and implement housing strategy (Long-term)

- **Safe & stable housing** is key to healing, child development, and ending cycles of poverty
- Housing near essential services is important
- **MCCSS partner with OAYPA and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH)** to create and implement a housing strategy

# Mixed Methods (survey & interviews)

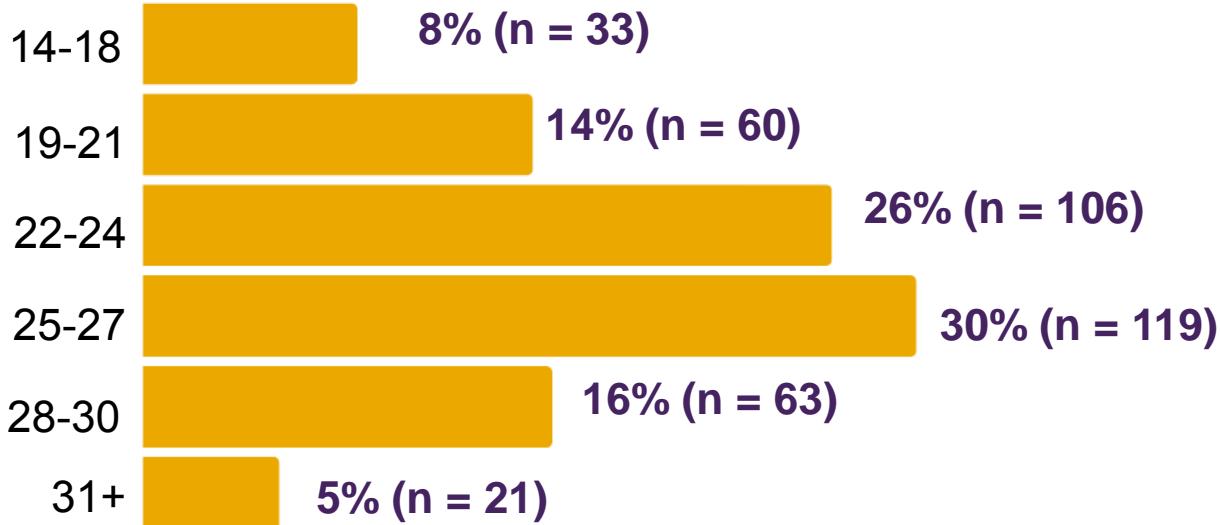
## Key Findings



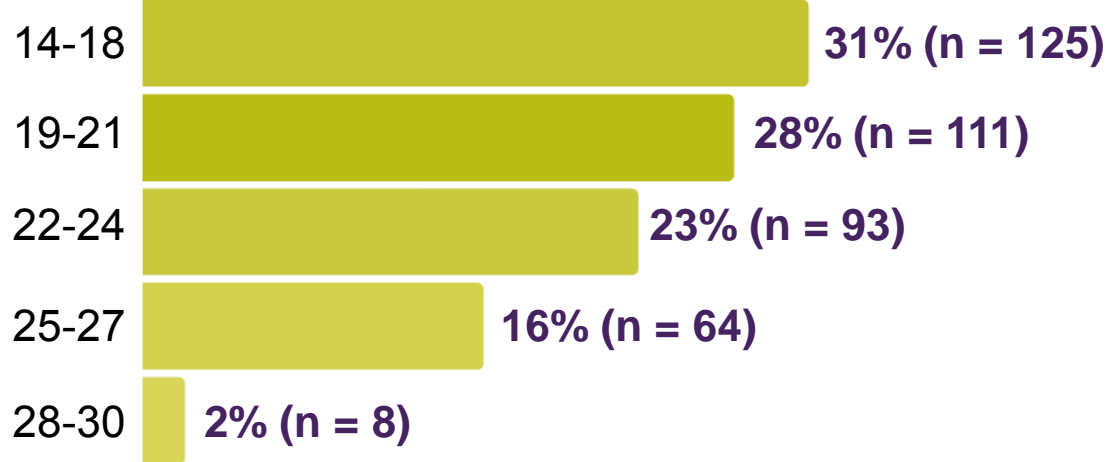
# Demographics: PPY

Survey Participants: n = 411  
Interview Participants: n = 5

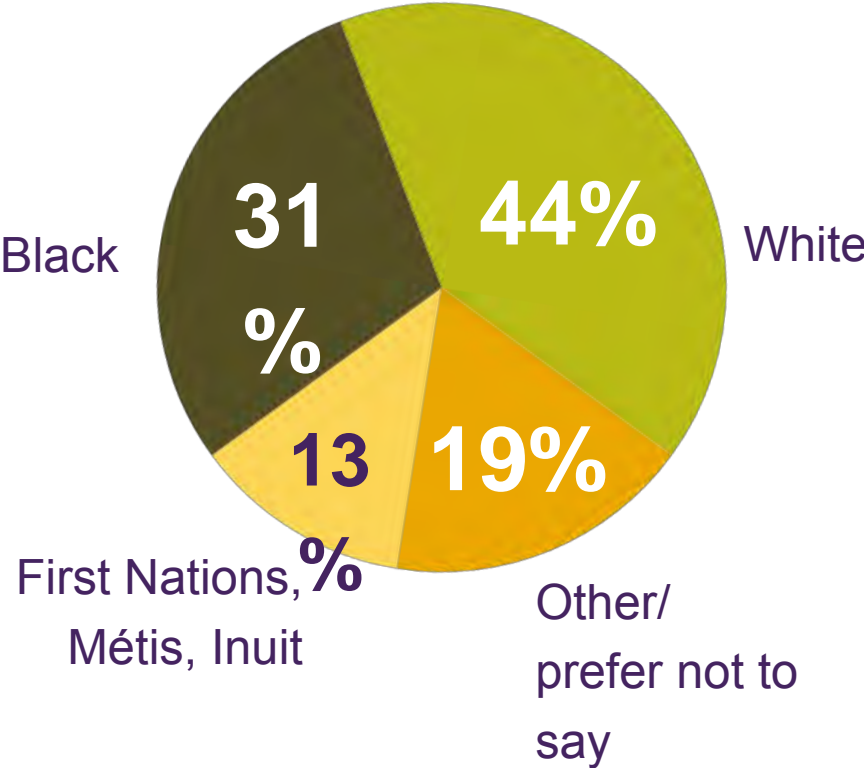
## Current Age



## Age when first became a parent



## Race/Ethnicity



# Demographics: Staff

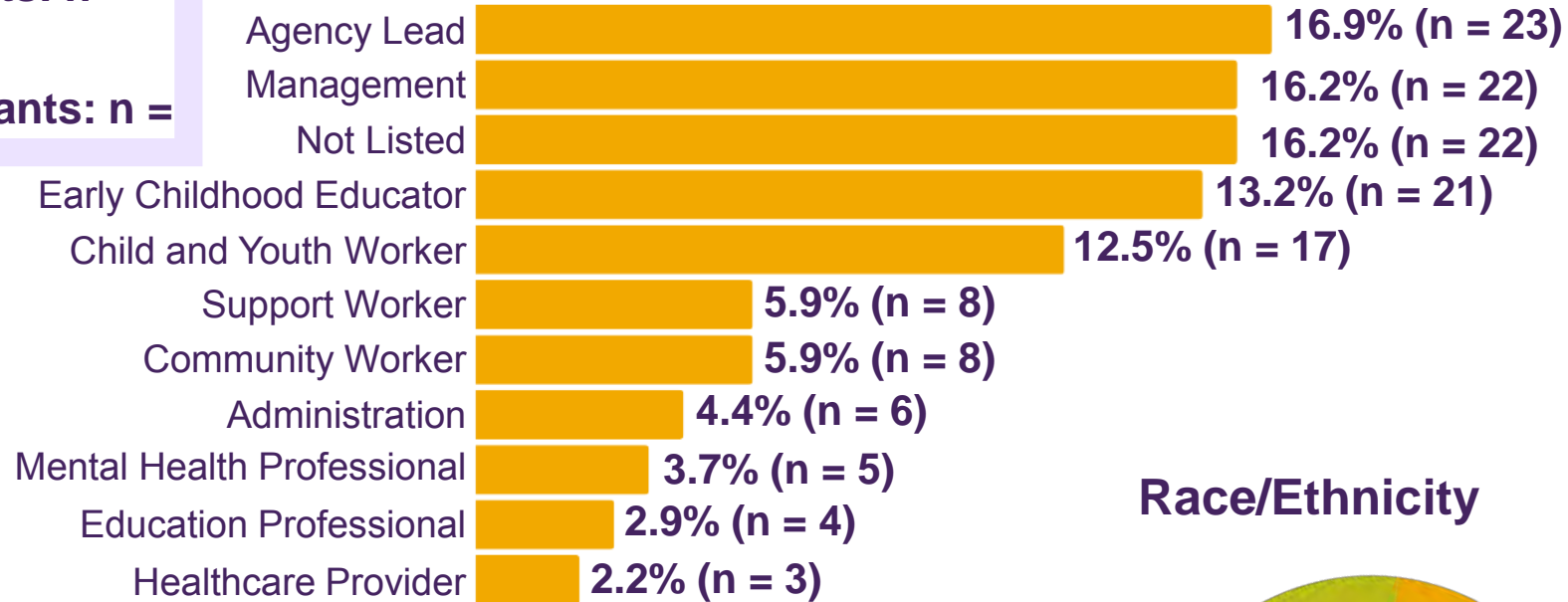
Survey Participants: n =

153

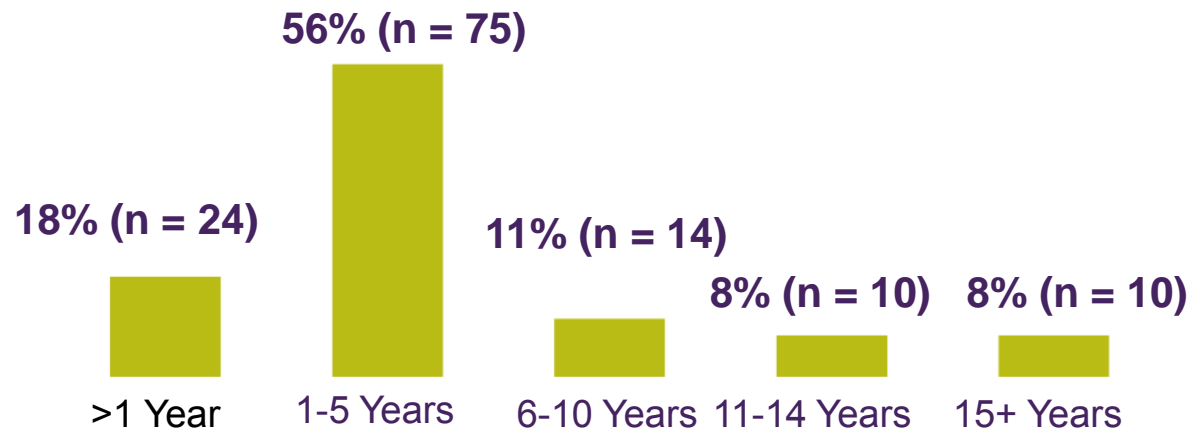
Interview Participants: n =

3

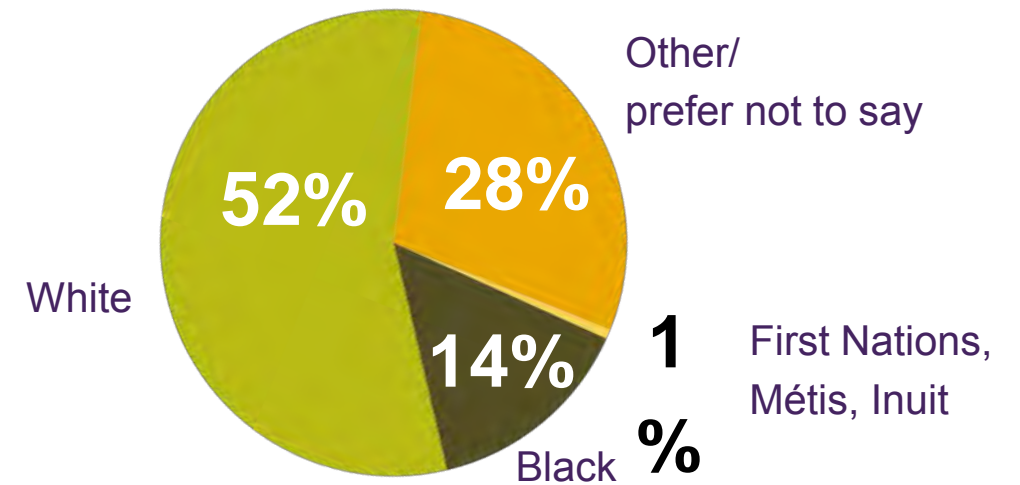
## Position at Agency



## Years of Experience



## Race/Ethnicity



# Supports Accessed

## Most Helpful Supports (for PPY)

1. Housing
2. Mental Health and Counselling
3. Safe and Healthy Relationship Skills

## Most Helpful Supports (for Children)

1. Childcare
2. Parenting Support
3. Healthy Eating and Nutrition

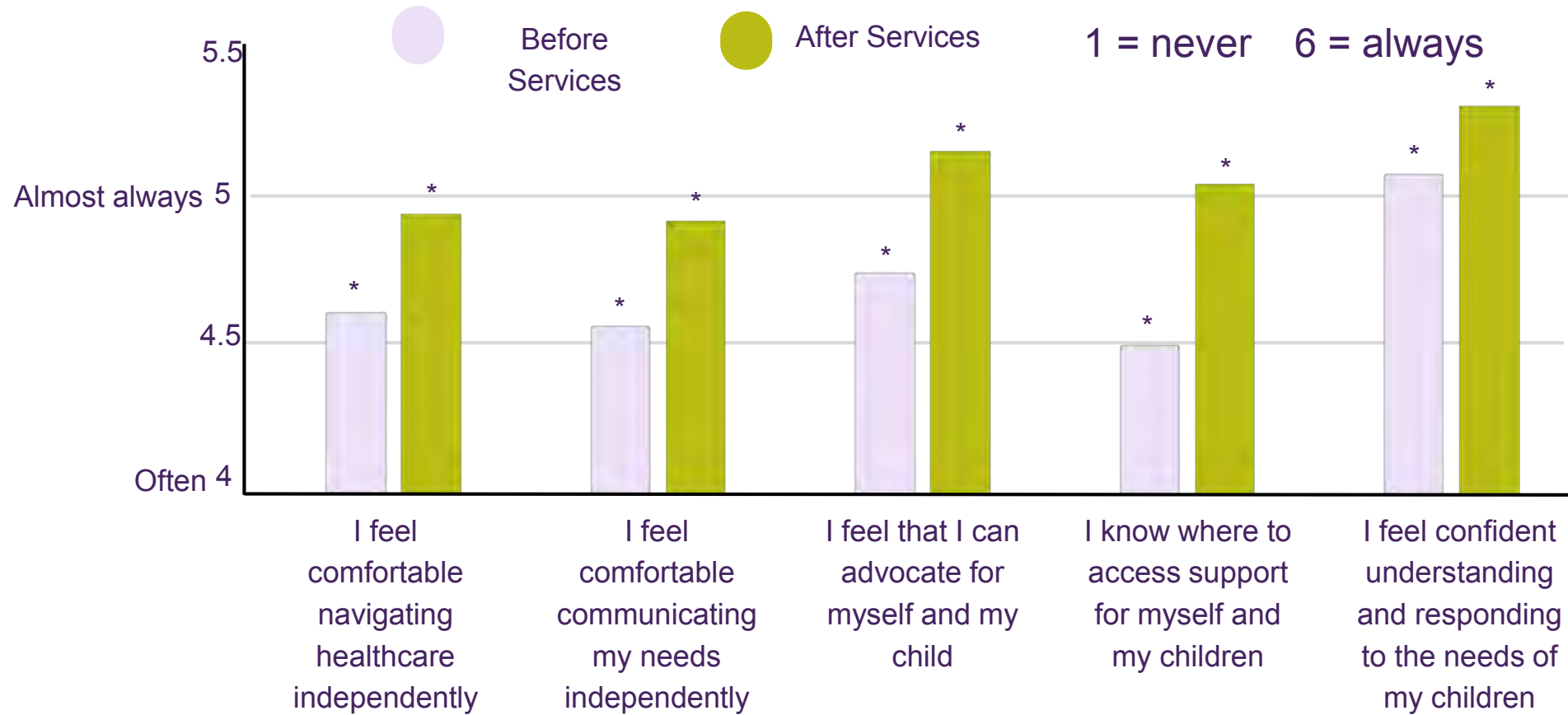
*I've learned a lot through [agency] such as **different coping mechanisms**. **How to handle a stressful situation** and knowing that it's okay to not be okay. And I've only been at [agency] for a very short period of time, so, I've only had three visits with the psychotherapist. I've talked to her about some stuff that was hard as well as we went through the intake. So that was hard, but she helped me with some grounding techniques. [...] **I'm learning about boundaries**, how to keep those boundaries because I know about boundaries, but how to keep those in place, and **what a healthy relationship is..***

- Current Client

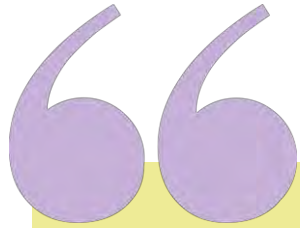
# Impact of Programming from Client Perspective

Clients are seeing **significant positive changes** in their parenting skills after accessing services

## Means Before and After



## Impact of Programming and Effective Strategies from Staff Perspective



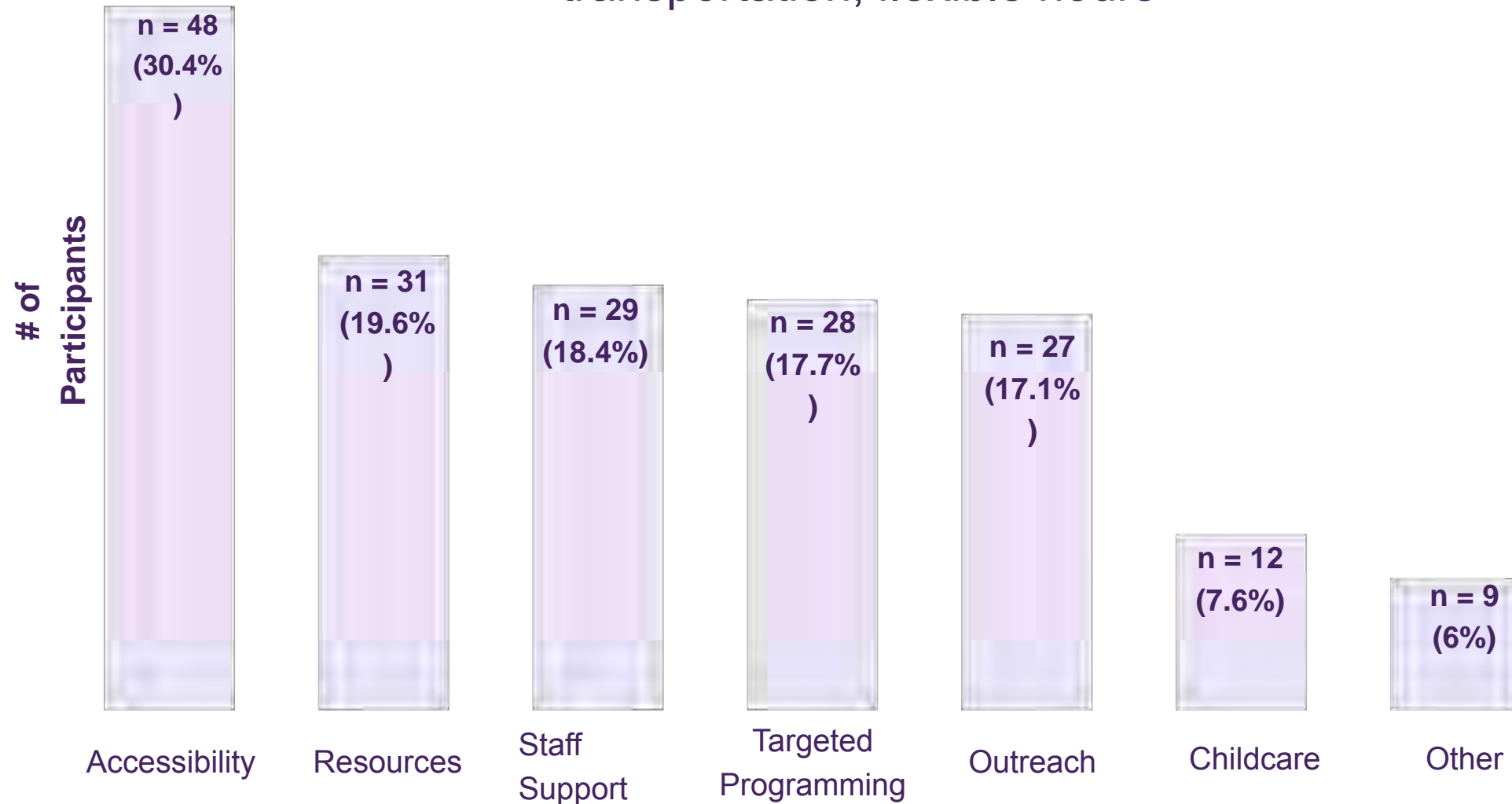
*We have worked and worked and worked with this team to understand that **building the relationship is the work**. That is the work. **Safety, collaboration, trust, that is your work**. And we are seeing changes in our youth, because **they feel safe, they feel trust, they feel accepted and appreciated**, they get someone working alongside them to teach them things, instead of 'I told you to clean this up, and if you don't do it, we're going to have to call [child welfare agency], so I'll come check again tomorrow'. Instead, 'Hey, can I come in and can we figure this out together, how to keep your little ones safe?'*

**-Program Director**



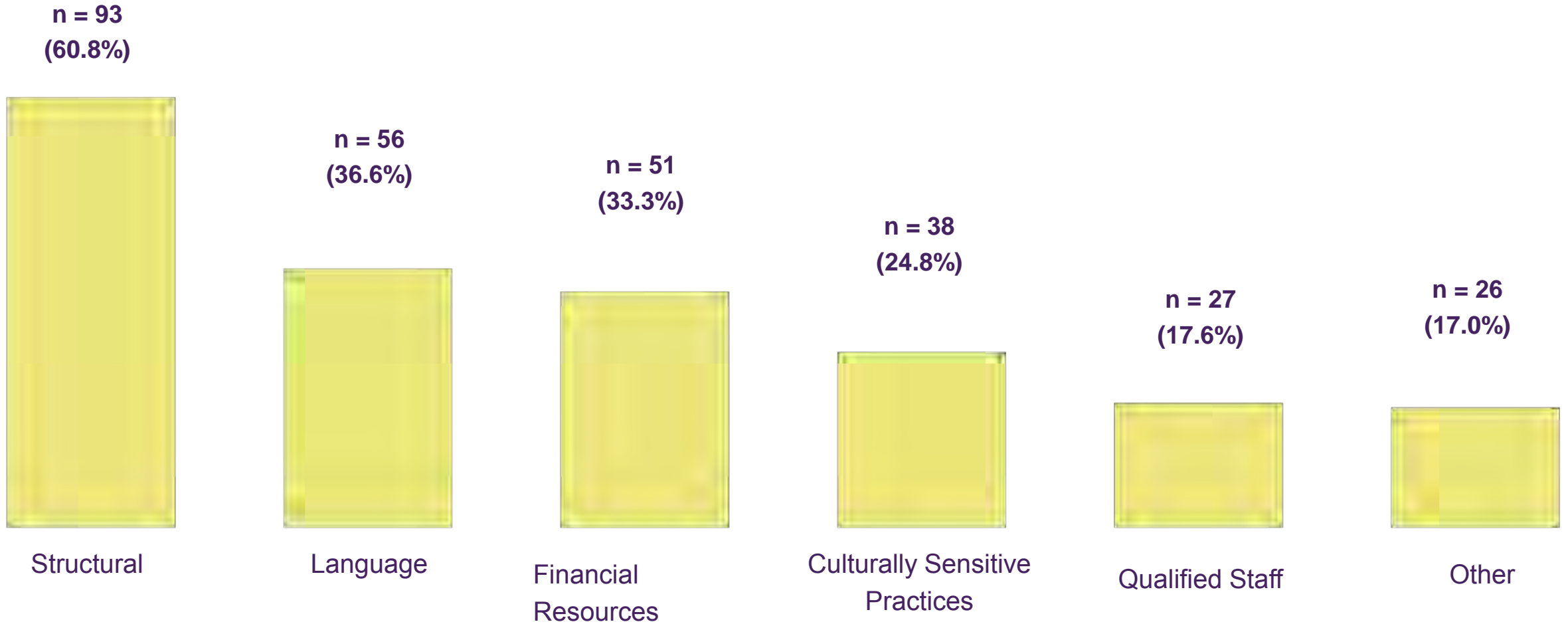
# Recommendations from PPY Perspectives

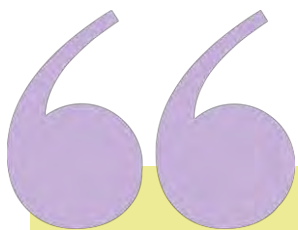
Biggest barrier to obtaining services from YPIAs is **accessibility**: eligibility criteria, transportation, flexible hours



# Recommendations from Staff Perspectives

**Biggest barrier** to providing services at YPIAs are **structural**:  
limited space, staff and resources





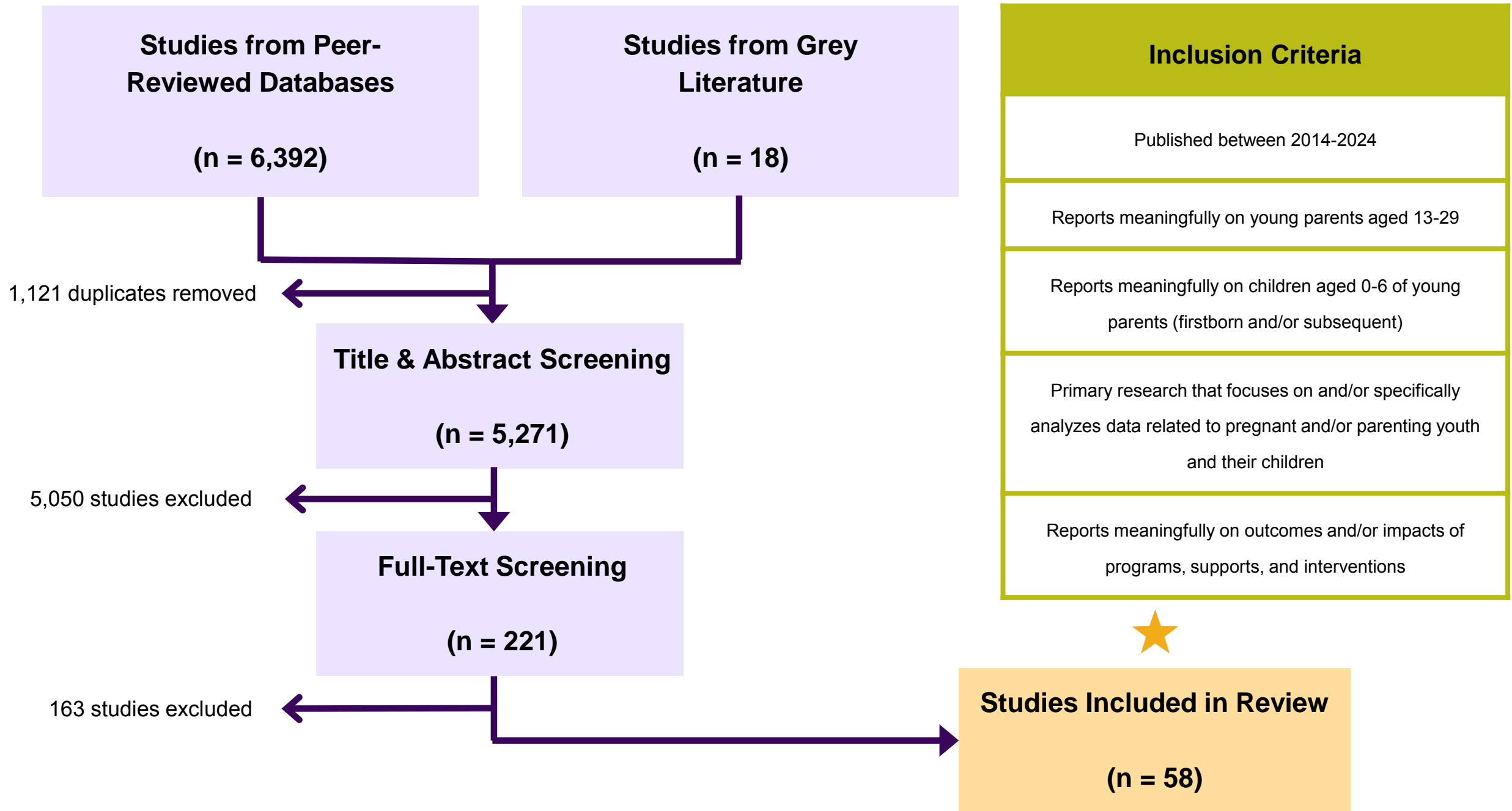
*And when you asked about was there a time that I found it hard to respond to their needs, that year [of **staffing shortage**] was **horrible**, because what [the clients] told me is, '**there's nobody here when I need them**, I never know who's going to be working'. There's only one person on at a time, and there's so many people with so many needs. 'There's nobody when I need help. My mental health is not good. I need someone to play games with me. I need someone to talk to me. I need someone to listen to me'. And hearing that was horrible, **because you're failing them**. And they were letting me know very clearly.*

**-Program Director**

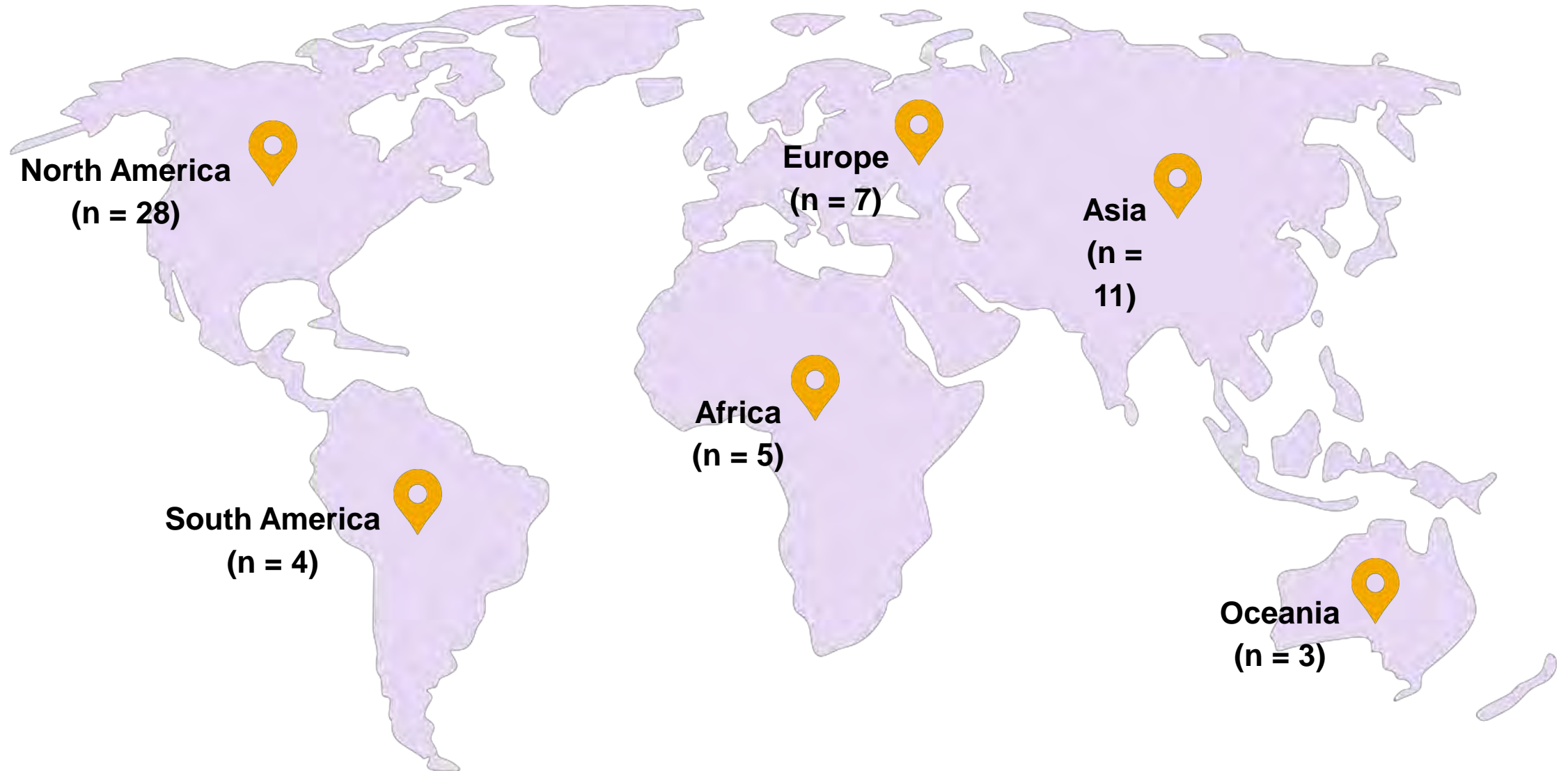


# Rapid Review: Key Findings





**Included studies encompassed 17 countries from 6 different continents.**





**Studies utilized a wide range of *primary* research methodologies.**

Randomized Controlled Trials (**n = 29**)\*

Quasi Experimental Studies (**n = 10**)

Mixed-Methods Studies (**n = 8**)

Non-Randomized Experimental Studies (**n = 8**)

Qualitative Studies (**n = 2**)

Other (**n = 2**)

**The settings of the interventions/programs were diverse and adaptable, emphasizing flexibility and accessibility in service delivery.**

Community-Based (n = 19)\*

Combination of Service Delivery Methods (n = 13)

Home-Based (n = 10)

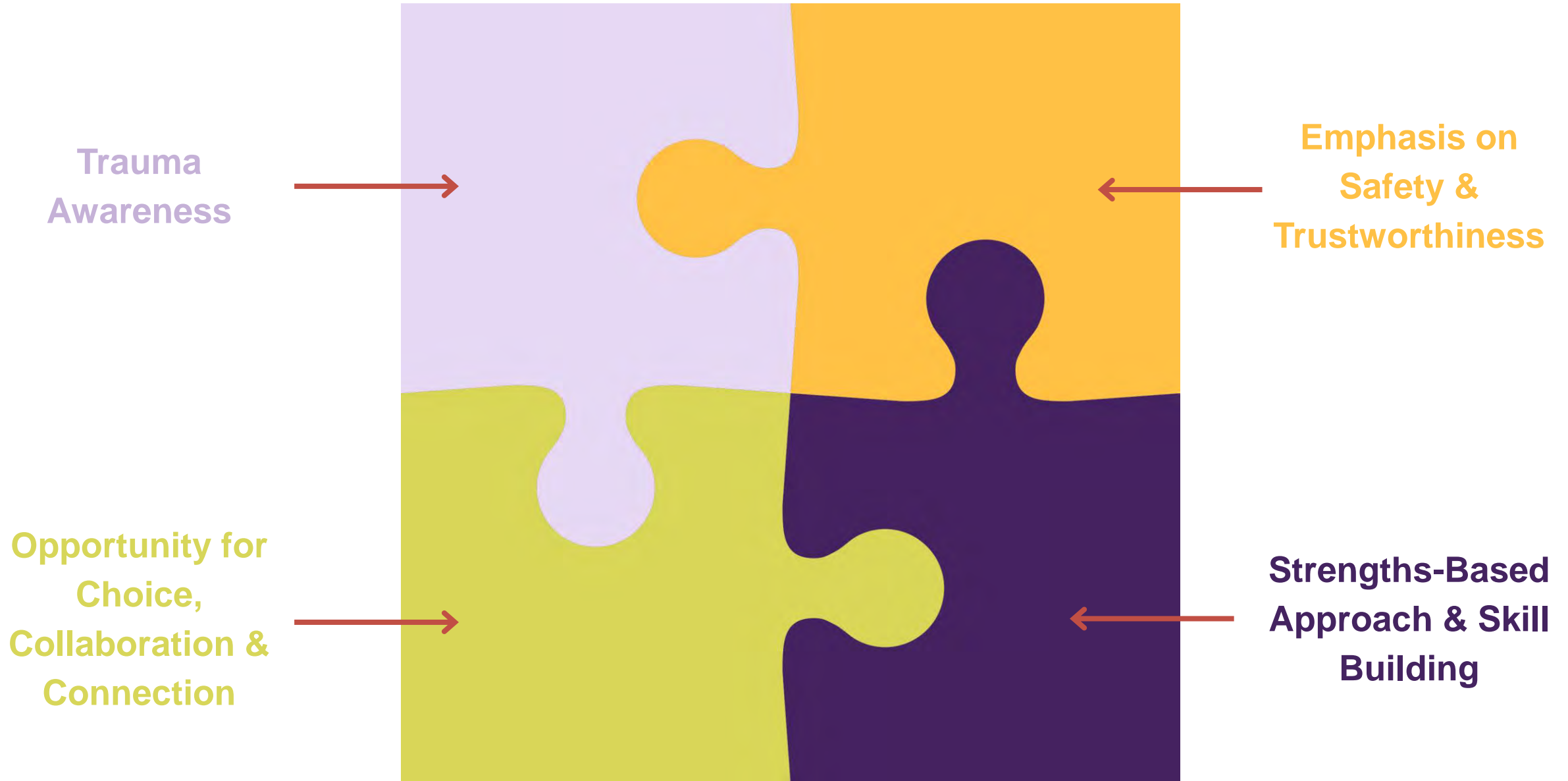
Virtual/Web-Based (n = 8)

Intensive Day Programs (n = 7)

Live-In Programs (n = 1)



# Thematic Organization of Studies: Trauma-Informed Principles



Principle	Definition	Lessons Learned
<p><b>Trauma Awareness (n = 15)</b></p>	<p>Recognizes the <b>prevalence of trauma</b> among young parents, <b>their responses</b>, and its <b>impact on services</b>.</p>	<p>Trauma-aware practices <b>integrated therapeutic approaches</b> (e.g., counselling) and <b>practical support</b> (e.g., food aid).</p>
<p><b>Emphasis on Safety &amp; Trustworthiness (n = 33)</b></p>	<p>Involves creating secure spaces, tailored support, and cultural respect to ensure <b>physical, emotional, and psychological safety</b>.</p>	<p><b>Group programs and peer support</b> foster safe, trusting spaces, enhancing engagement and outcomes.</p>
<p><b>Opportunity for Choice, Collaboration &amp; Connection (n = 30)</b></p>	<p>Engaging PPY in shaping support by <b>offering choices and addressing their needs</b>, ensuring responsive and collaborative services.</p>	<p>Including PPY in <b>program design and flexible learning boosts</b> engagement and support effectiveness.</p>
	<p>Emphasizing PPY's <b>resilience and skills</b>, fostering</p>	<p>Shifting from a deficit-based approach to <b>leveraging</b></p>

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# Panel Discussion

- **NK**, Young Parent
- **Jane Kenny**, Vice President, OAYPA; Executive Director, Rosalie Hall
- **Gillian Thompson**, Nurse Practitioner, Young Families Program, SickKids
- **Promise U Now**, Young Parent and Researcher



**Recommendation 1:** Improve equitable access to Young Parent and Infant Agencies & services (Immediate/Urgent)

---

**Recommendation 2:** Enhance mental health services within Young Parent and Infant Agencies for the parent, child & dyad (Short-term)

---

**Recommendation 3:** Revise policies, funding, and eligibility to reflect changing demographics (Short-term)

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**Recommendation 4:** Establish partnerships to develop and implement housing strategy (Long-term)

How do the **recommendations align with the challenges you see in your role** – as a provider, young parent, sector leader, researcher? Are there any that stand out for you as particularly **urgent**?

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What role can **young parents** play in advocating for these changes? How can organizations and policymakers better **include** the **voices** of young parents in **decision making**?

**Recommendation 1:** Improve equitable access to Young Parent and Infant Agencies & services (Immediate/Urgent)

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**Recommendation 4:** Establish partnerships to develop and implement housing strategy (Long-term)

How can **service providers and advocates contribute to implementing** the recommendations in a way that meaningfully supports young families?

# THANK YOU!

For more information:

[www.oaypa.ca](http://www.oaypa.ca)

[oaypa@abionacentre.ca](mailto:oaypa@abionacentre.ca)



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