



**Digital Creator North  
3 Years, 6 Communities,  
7000 Visits**

**Final Evaluation Report**



## Acknowledgements

The following individuals contributed to the implementation and/or the evaluation of the Digital Creator North Pilot Project:

**Brittany Sheridan**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Elliot Lake  
**Shane Miljevic**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Elliot Lake  
**Nathaniel Marchand**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Kenora  
**Will Holligshead**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Sault Ste. Marie  
**Katie Huckson**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Sault Ste. Marie  
**Laine Helbling**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Sioux Lookout  
**Sarah Fraser**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Sioux Lookout  
**Steven Kozinski**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Temiskaming Shores, Technical Coordinator  
**Dominic Lafontaine**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Temiskaming Shores  
**Victoria Vezina**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Timmins  
**Tyler Levesque**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Timmins  
**Heidi Vandenbroeke**, Digital Creator Program Lead, Timmins

**Kirsten Kosloski**, Digital Creator North Program Coordinator  
**Alexander Rondeau**, Digital Creator North Program Coordinator  
**Dale Carrigan**, Technical Coordinator

**Carol-Ann Churcher**, Chief Executive Officer, Timmins Public Library  
**Helena Huopalainen**, Manager of Community Engagement, Sault Ste. Marie Public Library  
**Rebecca Hunt**, Library CEO/Head Librarian, City of Temiskaming Shores Public Library  
**Karen Bachmann**, Director/Curator, Timmins Museum  
**Crystal Alcock**, CEO/Head Librarian, Kenora Public Library  
**Erin Auger**, Supervisor, Timmins Public Library  
**Kate Matuszewski**, Coordinator of Arts & Culture, City of Elliot Lake  
**Mike Laverty**, CEO Sioux Lookout Public Library  
**Ada Wassink**, Assistant Librarian Sioux Lookout Public Library

**Julie Koslowsky, Robin Willard, Eric Reyes and Jeff Hodges** of YouMedia Chicago

**Holly Cunningham**, Executive Director Near North Mobile Media Lab  
**Morningstar Derosier**, Communications Officer, Near North Mobile Media Lab  
**Jameson Toye**, Social Media Intern, Near North Mobile Media Lab

**Report Written by Amanda Mongeon**, independent program evaluator, for Near North Mobile Media Lab.

Recommended Citation: Near North Mobile Media Lab, 2019. *Digital Creator North: 3 Years, 6 Communities, 7000 Visits: Final evaluation report.*

*Cover page photo credit:* Nathaniel Marchand

## Supporters



Canada Council  
for the Arts  
Conseil des arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



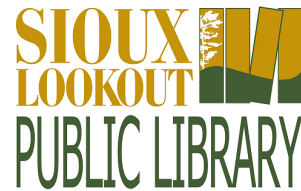
Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario  
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



CHICAGO  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY  
YOU MEDIA

## Partners



## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Contents.....	4
Highlights .....	5
Reflections from the Executive Director.....	7
About Digital Creator North.....	8
About this Evaluation.....	11
How was Each Digital Creator Space Used? .....	13
What has Changed for Youth? .....	21
What did we learn along the way? .....	25
Conclusions .....	35



## Highlights

- Digital Creator North is a pilot project in Northern Ontario modelled after the successful [YouMedia](#) program in urban Chicago.
- Both YouMedia and Digital Creator North are based on the HOMAGO concept by researcher Mimi Ito that found young people participate in digital media by “hanging out”, “messaging around” and “geeking out”.
- Digital Creator North spaces encourage youth and emerging artists to explore digital technologies at six partnering locations with a focus on creating positive change through technology and creativity. These spaces are designed to be located in easy to access public spaces: libraries, galleries and museums and staffed by full-time Program Leads.
- The project involves six sites: Kenora, Sioux Lookout, Elliot Lake, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and Temiskaming Shores.
- During the pilot, there were a total of 7154 visits to Digital Creator North sites by almost 3000 youth.
- Although initial uptake was highest among those in the preteen demographic, a shift in programming limited to those aged 14-19 has led to increased uptake within this age group.
- Participation in Digital Creator North is giving Northern Ontario youth new skills related to digital media and some are interested in and some have pursued related fields after high school.
- Program Leads benefit from ongoing support that recognizes the variety of skills needed for their roles (creative, administrative, leadership).
- Clear and consistent support from both host partners and the Near North Media Lab helps each site stay true to its mandate and effectively reach youth.
- Ongoing local promotion, collaboration with other organizations and outreach all help bring new teens to Digital Creator spaces.
- There is agreement that the model has been a success.



## Summary in Numbers

Total Digital Creator North communities: 6

Total visits: 7154

Visits among youth aged 14-19: 4713

Unique visitors aged 14-19: 1154

Total number of Program Leads over the course of the Pilot: 12

Total number of Program Coordinators over the course of the pilot: 2

Budget for equipment: \$150,000



## Reflections from the Executive Director



Holly Cunningham is Executive Director of the Near North Mobile Media Lab in North Bay, Ontario.

Undertaking a three-year pilot project across a region the size of a small European country is no easy task. From planning to implementation, it takes considerable resources and expertise from many people. It is hard to reflect on what exactly are the most crucial learnings from a project so multifaceted, but some key lessons come to mind.

Firstly, the people behind the project have been fundamentally vital to the output. Folks from all over Northern Ontario have brought forward their own valuable contributions to help make Digital Creator what it is today. Collaboration with so many organizations and personalities is a lesson in patience. Years before putting pen to paper, time was taken

well in advance to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with communities (not all of which survived to the implementation stage). This paid off tenfold in the long run, ensuring all of our collaborative partners were on the same page, allowing the project to move forward in a thoughtful way. This is an ongoing process that asks of us a commitment to listening, honesty and ongoing communication. We also learned that young people don't get around very easily, and location was very important. Many relied on deficient bus systems and often their own two feet in a region with the harshest winters in the province. How easily spaces can be accessed contributed to both the success of some, and as a barrier to others.

Arguably the most important outcome, which is still very much an evolving process, was creating a welcoming space for participants that allowed them to feel safe to be themselves. This is not as easy to pull from a study or consult an expert about. We understood early on that this part of Digital Creator would need to include some room for self-determination from the participants themselves. Feedback from similar projects helped us set the stage, but ultimately the participants would create their own scene—we are simply passive catalysts and curious observers. This also meant each space would be different, that there would be no one-size-fits-all programming. Each space is its own ever evolving ecosystem. Each new Program Lead would come with their own unique contributions and personality and as some participants move on others moved in. It has been an exercise in flexibility, and allowing for the unexpected. Sometimes this can feel uncomfortable from a project management perspective. We want to control outcomes and measure expected results. Yet, if there is one thing we have learned from three years of Digital Creator, it's that teenagers won't be put into a box, and any successful project must respect that.

## About Digital Creator North

Digital Creator North is a project of the Near North Mobile Media Lab (N2M2L). N2M2L is a not-for-profit organization in North Bay, Ontario that actively promotes media arts access for all artists, regardless of age, class, gender, sexual orientation, race or ability. N2M2L provides the tools that artists, students, and audiences in Northern Ontario need to produce, present and enjoy all forms of contemporary media art.

Digital Creator North spaces encourage youth and emerging artists to explore digital technologies at six partnering locations with a focus on creating positive change through technology and creativity. These spaces are designed to be located in easy to access public spaces — libraries, galleries and museums.

The Digital Creator Program operates as drop-in, out-of-school learning environments for youth to develop skills in digital media using a participatory culture model and is staffed by full time Program Leads. This project aims to have a positive cultural impact on Northern Ontario by increasing participation in the media arts sector in six small to mid-sized communities. The Digital Creator sites are located in the following partnering communities — New Liskeard, Timmins, Elliot Lake, Sault Ste. Marie, Kenora and Sioux Lookout.

The Digital Creator North project began as a series of consultations in 2013-2014 with an aim to increase participation in media arts disciplines in northern Ontario. In 2015, N2M2L travelled to the Digital Media and Learning conference in Los Angeles and connected with YouMedia, a Chicago-based initiative providing inner-city youth with access to digital media using the library system. Through a knowledge exchange, N2M2L developed Digital Creator North using YouMedia’s research as a blueprint. In spring 2016, N2M2L received an Ontario Trillium Fund Grow Grant to develop Digital Creator North as a three-year pilot project. The first Digital Creator Spaces in six communities across the north opened in early March 2017.





These spaces inspire creative experimentation, peer networking/collaboration, civic engagement, and hands-on learning using various media arts disciplines. Participants can practice video production, audio recording, graphic design, and coding/programming among other periphery disciplines. These teen to young adult learning spaces provide a variety of programming and content to engage program-led projects, after-school drop-ins, peer-to-peer learning and encourage participants to become active producers of digital culture. These hang-out spaces are for collaboration with friends, exploring technology, sharing ideas and finding one-on-one mentorship. Digital Creator North not only connects young people to technology, media, creative arts, mentors and institutions, but encourages civic engagement through the digital arts.

Accountability for the project has been held by the N2M2L Board of Directors and Executive Director. A Program Coordinator was hired in the first year, followed by the hiring of one Program Lead for each of the six Digital Creator Spaces. The N2M2L Executive Director, Program Coordinator and six Program Leads act as the Program Team. Program Leads develop programming that is creative and responsive to each of their community spaces and share feedback and ideas with one another. The Program Coordinator facilitates monthly check-ins with the whole team, regular one-on-one check-ins with each Program Lead, occasional communication with community partners and group coordination related to purchasing, evaluation and other logistics. The team has communicated remotely through the use of 'Basecamp' a cloud-based project management software, along with Skype for most communications.

About each of the six Digital Creator North spaces:

### **Timmins**

- Host organization: Timmins Museum
- Programming locations: Timmins: Timmins Museum and National Exhibition Centre, and the Timmins Public Library, and various pop-up spaces around Timmins, C.M. Shields Public Library South Porcupine

### **Temiskaming Shores**

- Host organization. New Liskeard Public Library
- Programming: New Liskeard Public Library, Art in the Park summer evening events.



### Kenora

- Host organization: Kenora Public Library
- Programming Location: Keewatin Branch

### Sault Ste. Marie

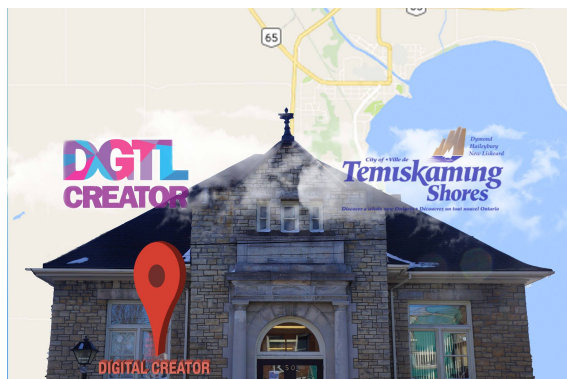
- Host organization: Sault Ste. Marie Public Library
- Programming Location: James L McIntyre Centennial Library and Korah Branch

### Elliot Lake

- Host organization: City of Elliot Lake
- Programming Location: Lester B. Pearson Civic Centre and more recently at Scotiabank Plaza

### Sioux Lookout

- Host organization: Sioux Lookout Public Library
- Programming Location: Sioux Lookout Public Library, some remote programming to Sandy Lake First Nation and Bearskin Lake First Nation



FREE Media arts workshops & studio space for youth and young adults.

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>11:30-3PM</b> Homeschool / Alt-School Drop-In *Ages 11-18 <b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>5-7PM</b> <b>Vlog / Podcast Workshop</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>3-5PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>1-4PM</b> <b>Spotlight: Stop Motion Drop-In</b> *Ages 11-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio
<b>5-7PM</b> <b>Video Editing Workshop</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Public Library Computer Lab	<b>11:30-3PM</b> Homeschool / Alt-School Drop-In *Ages 11-18 <b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>4:30-8PM</b> *Ages 11-19 <b>CREATIVE 2 YRS</b> Two Year Anniversary Pizza Party! @ Timmins Museum: Studio	<b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>1-4PM</b> <b>Spotlight: Stop Motion Drop-In</b> *Ages 11-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio
<b>5-7PM</b> <b>Digital Sketch Workshop</b> *Ages 11-19 @ Timmins Public Library Computer Lab	<b>11:30-3PM</b> Homeschool / Alt-School Drop-In *Ages 11-18 <b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>5-7PM</b> <b>Abstract Photography Workshop</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Public Library TEMBEC	<b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>1-4PM</b> <b>Spotlight: Stop Motion Drop-In</b> *Ages 11-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio
<b>5-7PM</b> <b>Portrait Photography Workshop</b> *Ages 13-19 @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>11:30-3PM</b> Homeschool / Alt-School Drop-In *Ages 11-18 <b>3-7PM</b> <b>Open Studio Drop-In</b> @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	<b>5-7PM</b> <b>Character Animation Workshop</b> *Ages 11-19 @ Timmins Public Library TEMBEC	<b>4-8PM</b> <b>Games Night</b> Teen & Adult Drop-In *Ages 13 and up! Board Games, Video Games, Air Hockey @ Timmins Museum: NEC Studio	

www.digitalcreator.ca

timmins@digitalcreator.ca

@dgtltimmins

#dgtltimmins

Send us a message or email to sign up for workshops.

## About this Evaluation

This report captures data from the three-year Digital Creator North pilot project. It summarizes the project’s uptake, successes and challenges, and documents learnings to help others who may be interested in establishing a similar program in other communities.

This report follows a mid-project report written to describe usage of the Digital Creator Spaces and to support the ongoing development of the program including any lessons learned that might affect the continuation of spaces beyond the current granting period.


Project staff kept journals to reflect significant happenings, things they would like to discuss with their peers such as successes, challenges and other lessons learned. These journals became a prompt for regular check-ins to help support ongoing project improvements and also a record of lessons learned.

Even though the data collection strategies were adapted from the YouMedia model, Program Leads found that regular data about project participants was difficult to collect. It was felt that asking too much from youth might deter them from participating or visiting Digital Creator Spaces. When spaces were just starting up and trying to attract youth, this presented an ongoing challenge. As a result, sign-in sheets were used in some cases and their data are summarized below. The sign-in sheets’ primary use was to track the number of youth in their spaces as well as age ranges.

Participant surveys were administered every six months, again mimicking YouMedia’s process. Digital Creator North administered the survey four times in the three years of implementation. The intent was to learn about and measure participant experiences over time.

One-one-one interviews were carried out with four of the six host sites and with the Program Coordinator.

Data collection methods are summarized in the table below.



## How are we doing?

Thank you for taking the time to answer a few questions about the Digital Creator Space! Your feedback will help us to improve the space for you and others who use it.

The survey is private and anonymous. We will use an ID to help us link your responses over time but will never know your name.

1. What are the first 3 letters of your first name? \_ \_ \_
2. In which month were you born? \_ \_ \_
3. Since coming to the Digital Creator Space, have you learned something new?  
 Yes  No  
 If yes, please name one thing you have learned in the past 6 months: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please describe the most significant change for you since joining the Digital Creator Space: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Imagine it's five years from now. What would you like to be doing in life? \_\_\_\_\_

### Digital Creator Space: Registration

A bit of info to help us understand who’s participating, and reach you if we need to:

<b>Name</b> _____	<b>Postal Code</b> _____
<b>Phone/Text</b> _____	<b>School</b> _____
<b>Grade</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 8 or less <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 11 <input type="checkbox"/> 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<b>Age</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 13 or younger <input type="checkbox"/> 14 <input type="checkbox"/> 15	<input type="checkbox"/> 16 <input type="checkbox"/> 17 <input type="checkbox"/> 18 or older
<b>Gender</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<b>Reason for joining the Digital Creator Space?</b> _____	
<b>How did you hear of the Digital Creator Space?</b> _____	
<b>What kind of internet access do you have at home?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> WiFi <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Cable Internet <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have internet at home <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe): _____	
<b>For your own exclusive use, do you have a: (check all that apply)</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Smartphone (with apps) <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile device (no calling but can text, surf, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Other cell phone (no apps) <input type="checkbox"/> Nope!	

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Summary of Evaluation Methods

Type of Data	Evaluation Questions	Frequency	People responsible	Summary
<b>Usage data</b>	How is each media hub being used? By whom? How can the project be improved on an ongoing basis?	Collected Daily, entered monthly, analyzed annually	Participants (sign in), Leads (data entry)	Registrations from 152 youth, sign-in information from 6 sites, sign-in records from 993 visits
<b>Journal entries</b>	How can the project be improved on an ongoing basis?	Ongoing	Coordinator, Leads	Received 384 journal entries from Program Team Members
<b>Monthly check-in</b>	How can the project be improved on an ongoing basis? What lessons can we share with others doing similar work?	Monthly	Leads, Coordinator	Held monthly
<b>Participant survey</b>	What has changed for those involved in the program?	Every 6 months	Leads	Administered four times, 157 responses from 117 youth
<b>Librarian interview</b>	What has changed for those involved in the program? How can the project be improved on an ongoing basis?	At project conclusion	Program Evaluator	Carried out 6 telephone interviews and one via email with hosts from all 6 sites.

These data were used to inform the content below. Where useful in adding context or increasing understanding of the data, number of respondents have been specified. Qualitative data such as those from interviews and journal entries have been analyzed for themes and reported accordingly.



## How was Each Digital Creator Space Used?

Digital Creator North spaces saw staggered starts in spring/summer 2017 as staff were hired, spaces set up and community partnerships solidified. Digital Creator Leads used a number of strategies to raise awareness about their spaces among local youth. Each community has a different story and corresponding set of challenges. Leads and the Program Coordinator continue to work to identify access barriers and ways to encourage use of the space.

### Programming

Each space offers different programming according to the knowledge of the Leads. In addition to frequent drop-in times, Program Leads offered workshops such as:

creating memes • musical mixing and experimentation • digital drawing • learning to code • graphic arts • photography club • video gaming club • zine making • collaborative artmaking • special effects workshops • outdoor photography • 3D design and 3D printing • stop motion animation • light painting • black and white photography • photoshop • animation • urban typography • video projection mapping • rotoscoping • digital mandalas • radio shorts • double exposure • green screen and more.

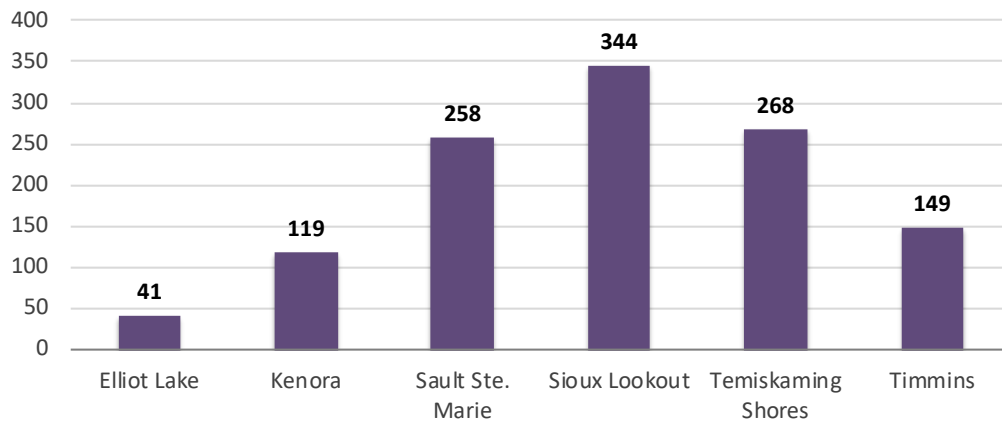
A new calendar was developed monthly at each of the sites and promoted within their host site communications, online and in the Digital Creator Spaces.

Although feedback from youth was almost entirely positive, it was often challenging to meet the needs of all youth, and to have them successfully engage in the programming.

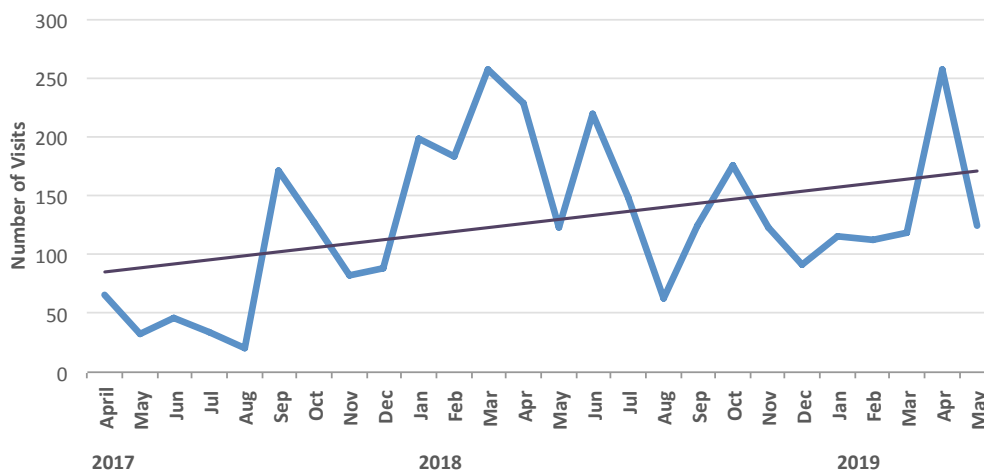
## Participants

Participation in Digital Creator North increased over the course of the project, with a total of 7154 visits between April 2017 and May 2019, by 2954 unique visitors. Total visits by youth aged 14-19 was 4713, by approximately 1154 youth. The data below present number of youth and number of visits per month, by youth aged 14-19, between Digital Creator North’s launch in April 2017 and the end of the pilot phase, May 2019.

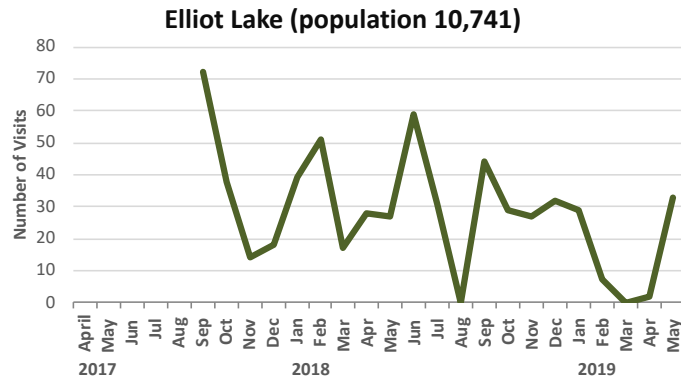
**Each site had a different total number of teens aged 14-19.**



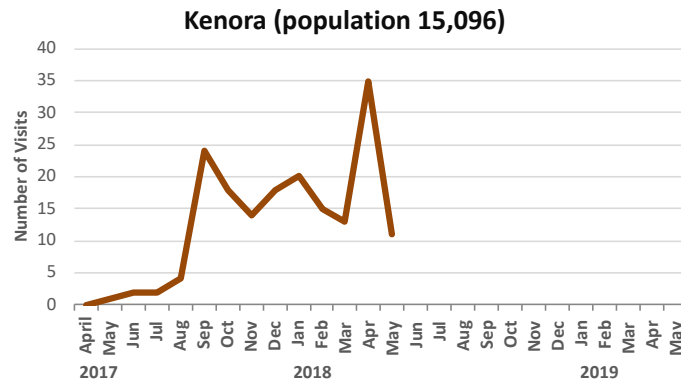
**Visits by youth aged 14-19 have increased overall.**



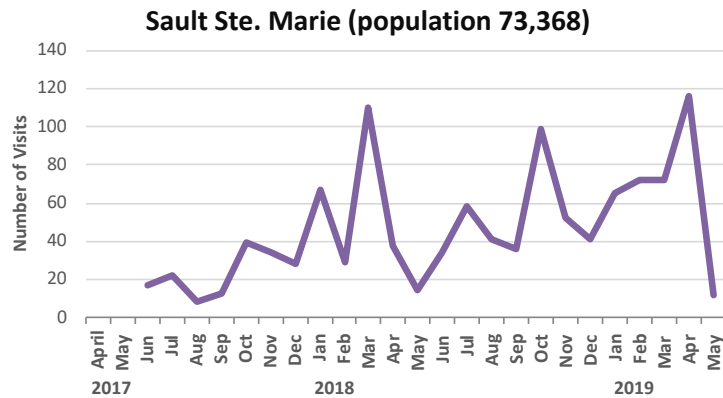
Elliot Lake opened in fall 2017. The building in which Digital Creator was located experienced a traumatic roof collapse in February 2018, leading to a closure of the space for two months.



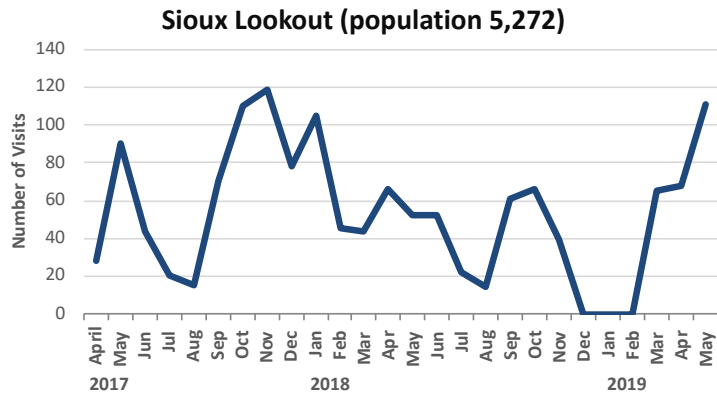
Kenora got started early, but due to funding issues was left without a Program Lead until May 2019.



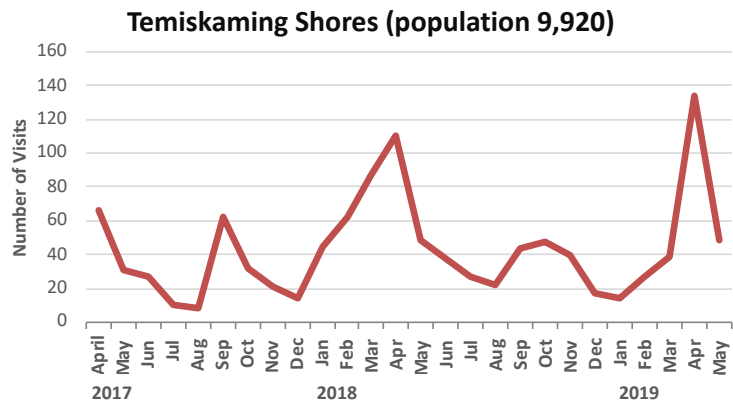
Sault Ste. Marie has had steady participation since it opened in late spring 2017.



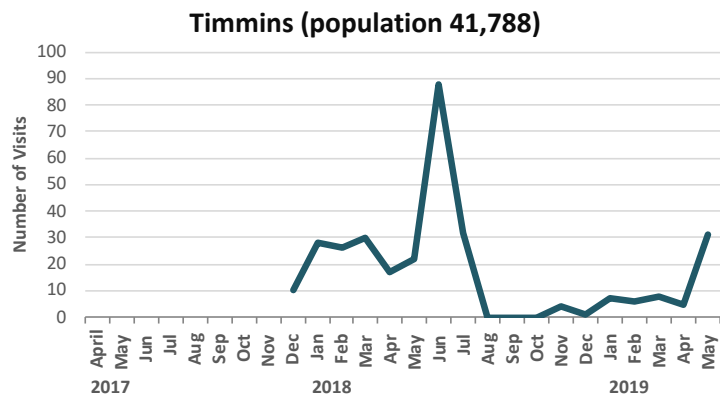
Sioux Lookout was one of the first Digital Creator North spaces to open. One 2-month closure due to staff turnover happened in early 2019.



Also one of the first to open, Temiskaming Shores did have one change in Program Leads, but was able to avoid any time with the Space closed.



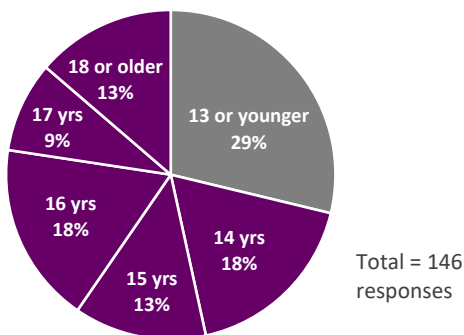
Although Timmins began operating in the summer of 2017, data was not collected until December. After steady growth, a Program Lead had to vacate the position and the current Lead has seen gradual yet steady growth since November 2018.



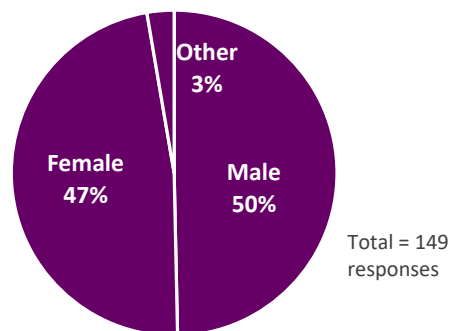


As a pilot project, Digital Creator North tested whether youth engagement would operate as expected in new and different environments based on prior research. An important lesson learned was in relation to age and access - early in the project, Digital Creator North attracted children and pre-teens as young as 9 years old. This was understandable, as children are often more willing to learn new things at this age and are often encouraged by their parents to participate in programming. Often parents would accompany younger children into the spaces, which in turn may have discouraged teens from using spaces with heavy adult presence. Mid-way through the first year, spaces began applying an 80-20 rule, with the majority of programming being offered to those within the target age range and the remainder of programming being offered to preteens aged 11-13. It was felt that youth under the age of 11 were too far removed from the original target demographic. When specific programming wasn't being offered, spaces were protected for hang-out time for teens, and in some cases opened to preteens on Saturday mornings. There is agreement among Digital Creator staff that reserving space for age-specific groups encourages more responsive engagement. Among the registrations, a diversity of ages from preteen to young adult are represented.

**A variety of ages participate in Digital Creator.**

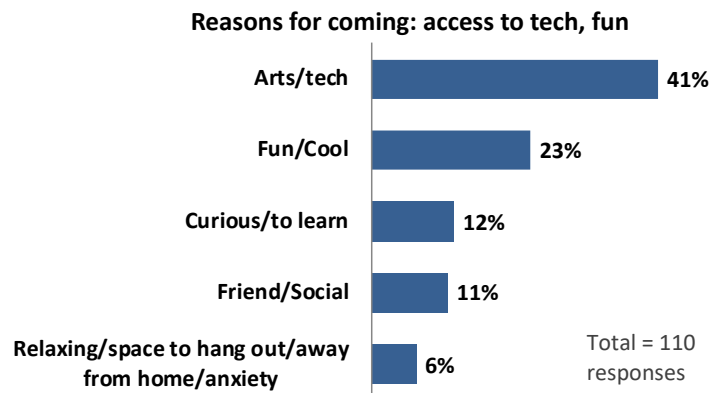


**Equal numbers of male and female youth.**



While 80% of programming has been reserved for those aged 14-19, closer to 70% of the overall participation is from this age group. Where representation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) topics have historically been dominated by males, participation in Digital Creator North has effectively attracted male and female participants in equal proportion. The spaces also documented participation from non-binary, trans, and 2 spirit youth at a rate of 3%.

Participants reported coming to Digital Creator for a variety of reasons. The top reason related to the content of Digital Creator such as technology or specific workshops. Others cited coming purely for fun, because it's 'cool', because they were generally curious, because their friends were there or to connect with others. A few specifically mentioned it being a place away from home where they could relax, and still a few others specifically mentioned it being a respite for anxiety.



“I feel like I have a second home! The space makes me feel like I can get away from some hardships in my life and actually have a good time!” –15 yr old participant

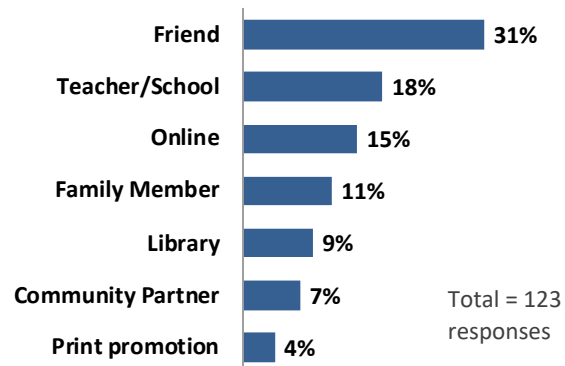
“I like to try new things and I love to create” – 14 yr old participant

“I want to learn animation, learn how to make videos, become better with tech” – 19 yr old participant

“A space away from home where I can feel comfortable and use equipment I don’t have access to otherwise” – 19 yr old participant

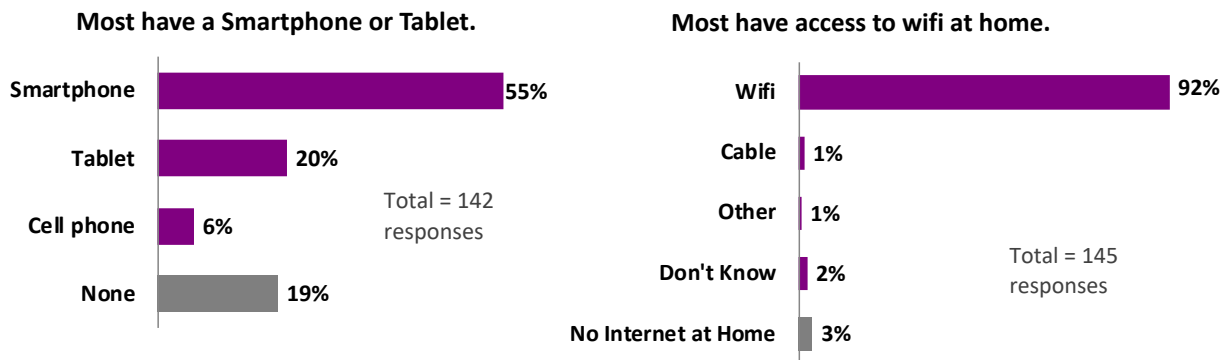
When asked, teens reported hearing about Digital Creator in a variety of ways; the most popular is from a friend, then from their teacher or at school, Facebook or Instagram, a parent/ grandparent/ sibling, and at the library itself. A small number reported having heard from a community organization, or from a poster, pamphlet or newspaper.

**Teens heard about Digital Creator in many ways.**

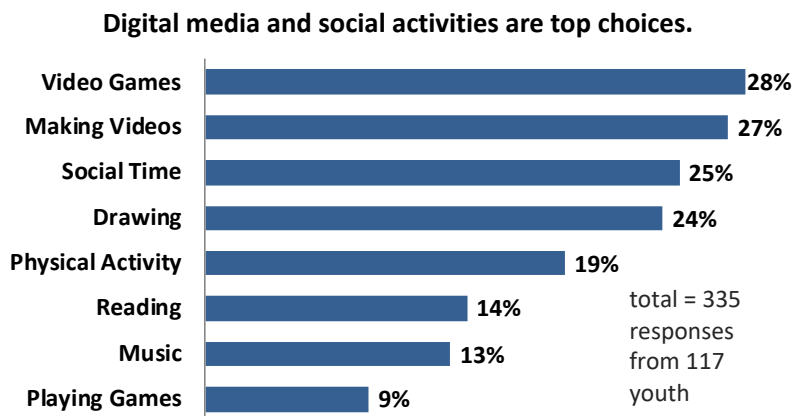


To understand current personal access to technology at home, they were asked about internet access at home and their mobile device use.

Most youth have either a Smartphone or tablet, although 1 in 5 do not have access to any mobile device. Most all have access to wireless internet at home, but a small percentage do not have any internet access at all. Programs such as Digital Creator are poised to build on tools that youth already use, but perhaps more importantly can provide opportunities to develop digital competency for youth who may not otherwise have any opportunity at all.



When asked to list the “top 3 things you enjoy doing,” teens reported enjoying a diversity of activities, many of which relate to digital media.

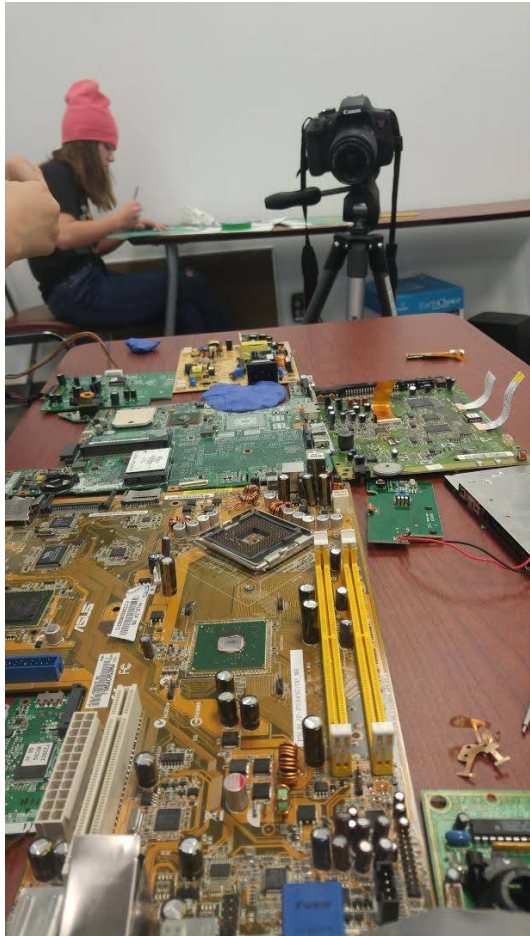
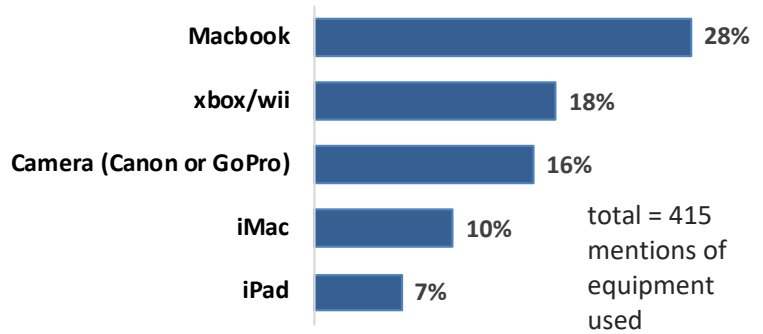


Of the visits for which teens signed in, the median number of visits per teen was 2. The maximum number of visits by a single person was 40, and the lowest was 1.

415 visits included the type of equipment being used at that visit. Of these, Macbook was the most cited, with gaming equipment (xbox, wii, etc) as the second most cited.

Of the 993 sign-ins to Digital Creator spaces, 383 documented visits listed the activities that took place. Most cited among these were video games, followed by workshops, photography, and other activities.

**Macbook is the most used equipment**

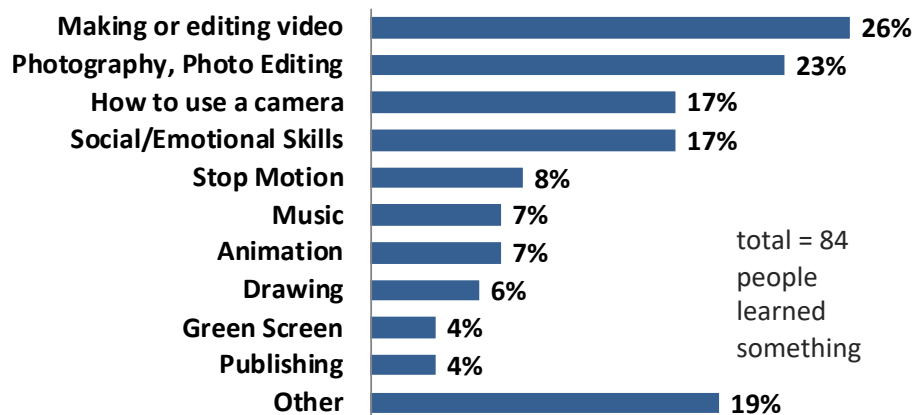




## What has Changed for Youth?

Of the youth who responded to the surveys, **71% reported having learned something new** since joining Digital Creator. Most mentioned related specifically to making and editing video, with other related skills also mentioned frequently (e.g. camera use, animation, stop motion, green screen). A large number listed social and emotional learnings. Other learnings include 3D printing, code, gaming, and lighting.

### Teens learned a variety of digital media skills.



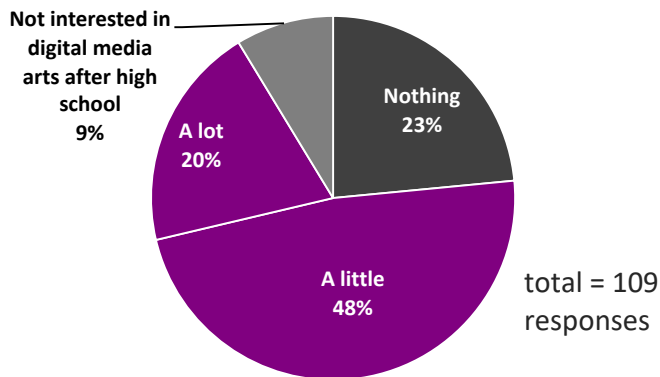
It has provided a space where teens can “just exist, hang out.” Youth being able to see Program Leads work as artistic leaders in the community further supports their role as mentors and the goal of providing young people with an increased sense of digital media as options beyond high school.

**44% of youth** who responded to the survey reported **wanting to do something related to Digital Creator** in the future.

**In 5 years I see myself...**

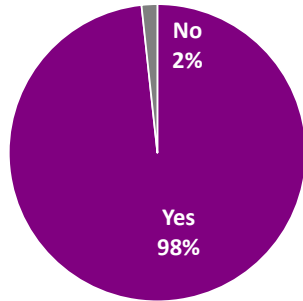
- “...getting a high school diploma, continuing computer work and photography, and maybe having a YouTube channel on video gaming.”
- “...making a profit off of my works.”
- “...I'll be the soon-to-be lead person for Digital Creator!”
- “...Playing videos games and Drawing”
- “...Making games”
- “...art for a living”
- “...digital art, web or graphic design”
- “...making animations”
- “...learning how to programe”
- “...in a Toronto film school”
- “...I'm not sure, but I do know I always want to be creating, innovating, and exploring.”
- “...Computer Programmer (math) or Engineering in University studying. Poetry or Digital media arts have also been considered.”

**Most teens know about options for digital media arts after high school.**



“To Whom it May Concern, I am writing this letter with regards to the Digital Creators Program in Timmins to say how thankful I am for it’s assistance. Last year, while preparing my film school application portfolio my laptop suddenly crashed leaving me unable to finish it. Then I discovered the program, the easily accessible assistance and professional technology/editing software. With the help of Tyler and Digital Creator I was able to not only complete my portfolio assignment but also improve upon it which help me get into film school; and for that I am incredibly grateful. This is a great program which I hope will continue to help others in the future.” -Program Participant.

**Most would recommend Digital Creator to a friend.**

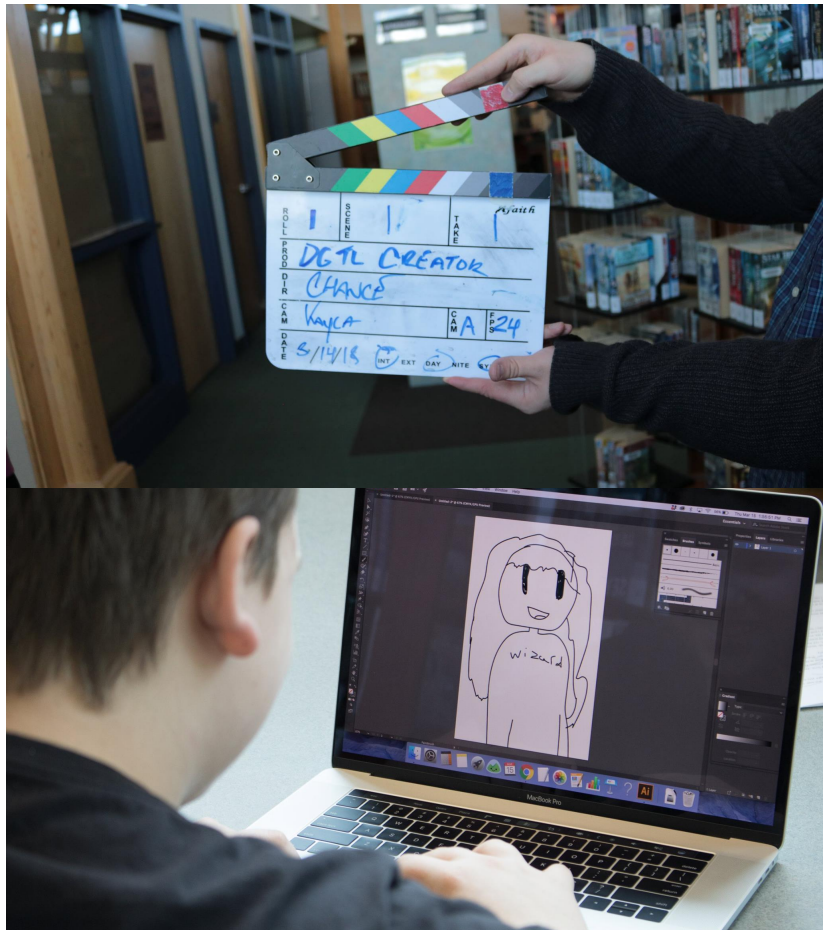


total = 117 responses

“I stopped being mopey and had something to look forward to.” – 16 yr old participant

“...one teen, but he has come every day for the past few days that I’ve been open. He said that he likes having somewhere to go after school that’s laid back.” – Program Team Member

“Jeremy came in this morning. We started a stop motion that turned into a PSA for responsible water consumption. I think he was pretty proud of it. We shot it with the iPad Pro and did some additional editing/sound in Imovie on the MacBook Pro. He was messing around in Photoshop afterwards. At one point he said to me ‘Command, D gets ride of the marching ants right?’ ... as in the shortcut command to deselect. I said YES!!! I was so proud. My most dedicated creator is picking up Adobe Photoshop shortcuts!” - Program Team Member



Digital Creators in Timmins



Youth taking part in Hike Photography session with Digital Creator Temiskaming Shores

“Teens LOVE being the Creator, they just need that little encouragement of someone telling them ‘you can!’ – Program Team Member

“And the library asked if I had any creative teens who would help make a coloring book to raise money for library at blueberry festival...so I asked around and got some artists & photographers who will take shots of beloved landmarks around Town & then trace them digitally into coloring pages!” –Program Team Member

“The movie we filmed last weekend is going over really well. A few shares online. Lots of views. The kids are getting a kick out of the fact that we’ve had 300+ views on it. They want to make more now. I think it’s a testament to the power of sharing work has on inspiring future projects. They like getting feedback from the public and knowing their work is being seen.” – Program Team Member



Behind the scenes at Digital Creator North Timmins





## What did we learn along the way?

The following are learnings have been organized into themes that emerged from the large amount of data from journal entries and interviews with project team members. A number of the reflections presented here are consistent with lessons passed on by YouMedia in Chicago, while others were more unique to this project being implemented across the vast and less-populated geography of northern Ontario.

**Connection across the region.** Program Leads and Coordinators emphasize the importance of connecting regularly across the distance, and in particular face to face. Each of the six Program Leads connects through the project management software 'Basecamp' which became a community where they frequently posted questions and ideas for one another about workshop ideas, tips and lessons learned. They were also able to meet in person twice over the course of the project: once in 2017 for a group trip to Chicago's YouMedia, and a second time as co-presenters at the Sparc Community Symposium in Cobalt, Ontario in 2018.

"I love having regular opportunities to talk things out with the other leads – we often reflect each others concerns and I always get awesome ideas." – Program Team Member

"We had our team meeting today. I look forward to those because it's nice to hear what is going on in the other spaces and to share advice or concerns." – Program Team Member

"They are constantly communicating with each other on Basecamp (Campfire), Facebook group chats, phone calls/texts, quick Skypes etc. All this helped to build a relationship, so that when we do meet face-to-face or on Skype together, there is a relaxed nature to our meetings." –Program Team member

**Diversity of Programming.** Program Leads attest to the value of providing unstructured time for youth to follow their own interests. This is balanced with more structured programming like workshops to draw in new youth and help focus their attention. As teens became more accustomed to the space, their leadership and initiative grew prompting them to start clubs or initiate their own programming.

Program Leads also emphasize the value of balancing drop-in times for youth to follow their own interests and workshops to draw in new youth and help focus their attention helps meet youth needs and interests. As teens became more accustomed to the space, their leadership and initiative grew. Not all programming is successful or has much uptake.

“Some of the other daily visitors have been playing too much video games for my liking, but I feel that I can encourage them to pursue their own interests and projects in the long run as they are open to creativity and do participate in workshops.” – Program Team Member

“Local teens seem used to receiving specific examples of activities that they can participate in as opposed to coming up with their own ideas for what to do in the space.” – Program Team member

“I’ve been thinking how difficult it can be to have someone to tell you to be creative. It can be so overwhelming to deal with the ambiguity. Where do you start when someone tells you to create something? And do you want people, especially kids to think there is a time to be creative and a time not to be? Or that some people possess creativity like some kind of gift from God and some people just don’t.” –Program Team Member

**Collaborating with the community.** Effective outreach to community partners can help create opportunities to diversify programming and reach more youth. Groups with whom Digital Creator North collaborated included indigenous groups and organizations, local museums, art galleries, schools and school boards, culture days, YMCA, media, high schools and colleges, and local sports teams.

In some communities, Digital Creator North is the only access to media arts equipment and expertise available, yet in other communities, there may be school maker spaces, or other youth resources. By knowing what else is available in the community and how it’s used, Digital Creator Leads were able to better able to offer relevant and useful complementary programming.

“It was also good to learn a little bit more about the teens in this community. Many of the ones who are active in extra-curricular activities are overloaded with them. Other students just want to spend time at home or with their friends.” –Program Team Member

“I’ve also increased my search for collaborative partner organizations that already deal with kids. If they won’t come to me, I’ll go to them.” – Program Team Member

“We know each other—we celebrate the successes and help each other with problems. The bonds are strong and they regularly help one another—finding new software, coming up with programming ideas, help give advice or a pep talk.” –Program Team member

**Ongoing promotion.** All six spaces promote their programming in multiple ways including monthly schedules, posters, social media, and classroom visits. Many spaces took advantage of their host organization’s communication channels to advertise and also did their own independent promotion, largely in the form of flyers and social media. Some expressed a desire for additional funds to market the Digital Creator North spaces. Program Leads also reflected that outreach to youth helps promote the space and works better when it is active (speaking to and engaging with youth directly). They found that even as the project unfolded into years, there were always teens who had yet to learn about Digital Creator North.

“A 18 year old student came and it was the first time I’ve had an older high school student at a workshop. He was very interested in learning more about the software since it is available to him at school, but he said that they didn’t have the time/opportunity in his classes to learn how to use it.”... “I’m surprised how many teachers and school officials have never heard of us in the 2 years that we’ve been operating here.”  
– Program Team Member

“New students were in today, and said ‘this place is nice, I’m going to come here every day,’ which feels great but also makes me wonder how we can communicate the program better so that it doesn’t take so long for teens to know about us.” – Program Team Member, 2 years after Digital Creator North launched.

“There’s getting to be more and more teens in the space. Word of mouth from their peers goes way farther than any social media or online advertising! My main challenge now is encouraging them to move beyond gaming into creating something or just trying something new.” – Program Team Member

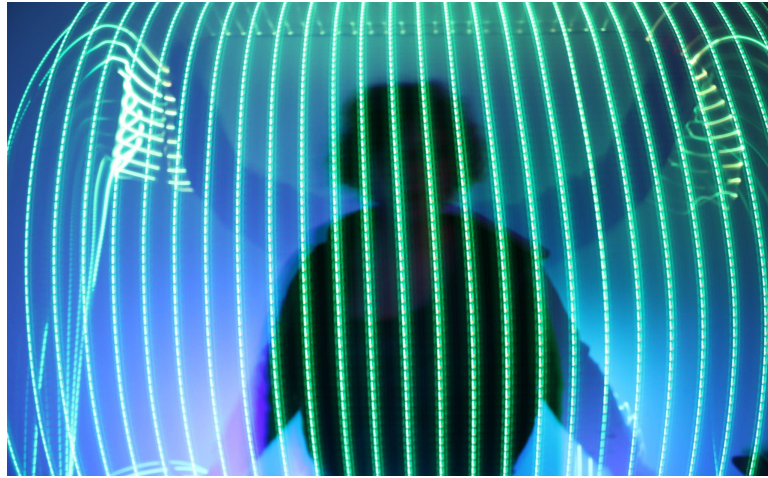
**Unique northern challenges.** In northern Ontario, programming numbers were impacted by snow days and travel patterns common for the region. In addition to the general tendency to stay inside during winter months and for youth-accessible transportation (e.g. bicycles, walking) to be less accessible and keep teens from attending Digital Creator spaces, frequent “snow days” that lead to school bus cancellation tended to keep youth at home, which also affected any planned after-school programming in Digital Creator spaces.

In some northern communities, there is a relatively large contingent of youth from remote Indigenous communities who spend the school year billeted with local families and then return home during school breaks such as Christmas and March Break. And, many families who have the means to travel often do so during these same breaks. Where in some communities, these school breaks might be an optimal time to offer programming, whereas in others many youth are not available.

“I had a drop-in scheduled for today but the school buses were cancelled due to snow. No students came. I used the drop-in time to run updates on the computers and to create some posts on social media.” – Program Team Member

“I had a decent amount of march break programming planned. Much slower attendance than when school is in. I think it speaks to the value of after school programming. Families go on trips on march break, students from the north go home. After school, if there aren’t extra curriculums, kids are looking for a place to go and something to do.” – Program Team Member

**Clear reporting structures help.** At the core of the Digital Creator North model is a collection of Program Leads who are each accountable to the Program Coordinator (which could include staff, board, and/or youth advisory committee.) Reporting relationships varied with sources of funding and with organizational norms of the host site and for the most part became easier to navigate over time, but did present some complexity to Program Leads.



Photography Club at Digital Creator North Sioux Lookout

**Letting teens take the lead.** Although the Program Team created workshops and proposed programming, there was a lot of care given to fostering youth leadership: letting youth determine direction, work with less structure. Being teen-led can also mean being sensitive to the diverse realities of teens' lives outside of Digital Creator, and having enough flexibility to keep these from interfering with their participation.

“Friday afternoon a group of older teens came in for a few hours. They were interested in starting up a Dungeons & Dragons group here. We talked about it a bit and it sounds like a good idea to do once a month. There are lots of teens here who play, and they are also interested in character development, sketching, and animation (all of which could be extrapolated from the game into a learning opportunity/workshop opportunity).” – Program Team Member

“My homeschooled group is getting really comfortable in the space. I find that as they get more comfortable, they need less and less encouragement to start projects. They come in now with ideas of their own.”  
–Program Team Member

“Getting forms signed by a parent is kind of a silly thing to ask of a kid who has bigger concerns in their lives. It’s something I face in this space...too. Give kids forms and you have a hard time getting them back. I had a conversation with a high school teacher once about ‘pushing’ students. He said he’s not too hard on them when they come to class late, or miss deadlines. He said if you’re too hard on them, they might not ever come back to the class. So, what do I do? Just keep providing a service and safe space for them. Forms feel like homework...” –Program Team member

**A need for ongoing training.** Program leads benefit from and need ongoing learning related to various forms of digital media; enhancing what Digital Creator North can offer with skilled guests can broaden the menu of media mentoring available in the spaces. This can include learning from one another, online, from youth or from specific off-site training. Whichever format it takes place, time and, often additional funds, are required.

Work as a Digital Creator Lead requires a very diverse skillset including proficiency in digital arts as well as project management and leadership. Depending on a particular individual's mix of experience and knowledge in these areas, some training in areas such as time management, administrative work, work-life balance would be helpful. Program Leads would also benefit from learning/training related to working with youth, and knowing when, where and how to seek support. Examples include autism spectrum, developmental disabilities, youth behaviour, youth in poverty, violence in the workplace, and mental health first aid.

"...how do you manage keeping one person comfortable vs. keeping others comfortable?" – Program Team Member

"...there were two brothers who had been planning to come for a while who also started coming this week. Both of them are on the autism spectrum and are in the foster care system." – Program Team member



Portrait Workshop with Digital Creator Kenora

"You can't help but think you're spinning your tires with kids, trying to get them interested in digital media when there are so many other things going on in their life." – Program Team Member

**Staff retention.** The Program Lead position has been set up as an ideal first step for a new graduate, both in terms of pay schedule, level of support and demands of the position. Generally speaking, Program Leads who were not originally from the community in which they were working had a harder time networking and collaborating within their new communities both professionally and personally. Recruiting qualified Program Leads for these northern communities was challenging, both during the initial project start-up and as vacancies occurred.

All six sites experienced some Program Lead turnover within the pilot period and was challenging for youth who lost continuity. To mitigate these challenges, host sites and N2M2L tried to hire quickly after the departure of a staff member, have outgoing Program Leads build succession plans and if possible support overlap between the outcoming and incoming Program Leads. Unfortunately in most cases a Program Lead's departure led to a gap in program delivery with a result of spaces being closed for months.

**Different age groups have different programming needs and hang-out styles and may not always be compatible.** Managing different age groups within a single space can be challenging. Adapting the spaces to different age interests can be achieved with blocked off dedicated hours for age demographics. For example, spaces can reserve programming and drop in for ages 11-13 on Saturday mornings, while keeping it dedicated to 14-19 year olds during after school hours and Saturday afternoons etc. There are mixed perspectives about the benefits and risks of opening up Digital Creator North spaces to a broader range of age groups. In communities where teen demographics are responding well and programming is at capacity, this may not be appropriate.

“I did have two younger students come in for 12 and under drop-in day. They made three short stop motion videos and put a YouTube channel together to post their vids. I think this program would serve that age group so well. It would be nice if there was time and space for that programming because I now there would be no problem getting participation. I regularly run into their parents around town. Even the parents ask me when I’ll be able to open up more time for younger groups. It would be pretty cool to have a Digital Creator Junior. It could be a good job for a high school kid or a part-timer.” – Program Team member

“One of my teens (who has been actively involved since the very start of the project) expressed a lot of concern over our switching to an all-ages programming schedule. They mentioned that they won’t really have a place to go anymore and that it is scary, and will probably make teens who come here nervous/anxious....they also mentioned that we’d likely need another staff member to be able to keep up with this new influx of people and to juggle programming for all ages.” –Program Team member

“Since I haven’t had any teens sign up for workshops I’m sort of unofficially operating on the basis that anyone 10-11 and older is allowed in the space. I had three boys come with their mom today (the oldest was around 13). Their parent drove them into the city from ~two hours away. I tried to do my planned workshops but their interest was all over the place. They would ask about something like music editing and as soon as I sat down to explain something they would be off doing something else. I don’t intend to have such young kids in my programs all of the time but there were no teens here today. In the end we made a short stop-motion video and started to add sound effects. It went

“...although I understand the need for increased programming, I find this new direction strays a lot from our original model which was based on YouMedia in Chicago, and was always teen-only. I feel that, particularly in sites....where the programming has been consistently steady and has increased teen presence in the library, we have been saying, ‘hey teens, we see you and want you to feel you have space and attention and autonomy here’ and now we are sort of going against that, which to me is a little disappointing. I will say though that there has always been interest from other age groups, just I think we are doing a bit of a disservice to the teens and hope we still hold space for them in an accountable, sincere way.” –Program Team member

**The Program Coordinator role changed over time.** The Program Coordinator’s role shifted considerably as the project unfolded. At the start of the project, the focus was on the groundwork of setting up the six project sites. This included travel across the region to meet community hosts and visit future Digital Creator North spaces, high schools, and other community stakeholders. This time also included posting and hiring positions for Program Leads, and then purchasing and coordinating delivery of all of the equipment and furniture for each of the six spaces.

The Program Team set up a 3-month work-plan to help launch the spaces and established a regular schedule of team teleconferences as well as one-on-one check-ins with each Program Lead. Other tasks included supporting Leads in navigating each of the diverse site structures (sites differed in funding, type of host location and internal reporting structures and preferences) and diversity of other unique issues. Another important role of the Program Coordinator become liaising with the Program Leads and working with the Executive Director to develop Human resources supports were developed as needs emerged. The Program Coordinator is also responsible for continuing to maintain ongoing data tracking and ensuring that related administrative tasks are completed and in a timely fashion.

With the program now well established, the Program Coordinator’s work has since concentrated on program maintenance and sustainability with a focus on maintaining contact with each site through biweekly email contacts, monthly group teleconferences, phone calls and, most valued, one-on-one skype meetings.

“These two years have helped me grow as an artist, administrator, educator, and arts community member.”  
–Program Team Member

**Seeking funding takes time.** In several cases, Program Leads have taken time to seek additional funds for their spaces, for equipment or programming. The Program Coordinator role also evolved to include significant grant-writing time. It was challenging to carry on with regular important tasks while also looking for funds to enhance or continue Digital Creator North.



Photography Club with Digital Creator North Sioux Lookout

**Supporting artists.** Early on, the decision to hire artists as mentors rather than educators was a deliberate one in an attempt to give the teens a sense they were collaborating with a fellow creator rather than being monitored or talked over. Efforts were made to support not only teens, but also Program Leads and Coordinators with their own artistic practice. Depending on the phase of the program and workload, not all were successful in feeling that they could adequately feed their individual projects. Others made use of “Creative Leave,” an HR program where N2M2L would match an amount from each paycheck to accumulate time off for employees to pursue creative endeavours. Everyone on the Program Team used and built on one another’s networks to support each other’s practice: the Program Coordinator and the Executive Director’s networks supported both Program Leads and youth, Program Leads supported youth, and increasingly, youth have begun to mentor and support one another.

**Digital Creator Spaces need... space.** With a diversity of communities came a diversity of architectural configurations. Some Digital Creator spaces were set up in a distinct room with a door, while others are part of the main library that would be cordoned off during programming times. Some locations also make use of a pre-arranged scheduled with drop-ins at a different location in a ‘mobile’ fashion. This diversity shaped when and where programming would be made available. In spaces that are open and shared concerns such as noise, other patrons and uncontrolled lighting were cited as variables needing to be navigated. Where a space became entirely dedicated to Digital Creator, there may have been some sense of loss to patrons who were accustomed to using the space for other purposes. Still, host sites felt that having Digital Creator was a net gain.

Another variable was the availability of storage space for equipment. One host site with a separate room for Digital Creator North was able to purchase a lockable storage cabinet and place it within the space. In another location, an existing storage space was used, but this was located away from where programming took place and may have negatively affected frequency of use of equipment.





**Host sites did more than provide space.** In addition to hosting the program within their physical space, host organizations provided on site supervision of Program Leads, enhanced community connections, assisted with marketing through existing tools, provided pizza at Digital Creator events and provided support in co-solving tensions that arose with participants or library visitors.

In some cases, host sites anticipated many benefits from Digital Creator North but did not foresee challenges that arose such as having to support a broader diversity of demographics and behaviours. In response, they worked with the Program Team to establish rules of conduct that struck a balance between teen safety, openness, and broader public space etiquette. Some Digital Creator spaces and their Leads benefited from the policies already in place for their host sites in this regard.

“Initially, I think patience has got to be your biggest asset...I know that feeling all too well, where you put your heart and soul into something and literally no one shows up, and you think, ‘why the hell did I do this? I’m wasting my time.’ It’s hard not to take it personally, you start to doubt yourself. You’ve just got to keep doing it, keep doing it, eventually it will... it’s like starting a fire, right? It’s going to grow, and once it starts it’s really going to take off.” –Digital Creator Community Host

**Host sites benefitted from Digital Creator North.** All those who participated in interviews were glad to have been part of this program. Digital Creator North allowed host sites to reach a whole new demographic; it was seen as a symbiotic working relationship. Program Leads often helped the host site by providing digital media support such as documenting events and, where possible, Digital Creator programming was able to merged with other host site programming.

The presence of each Digital Creator space was reported to have not affected workload for staff within host sites, although depending on how hands-on or supervisory the host site’s main contact was, there was some impact on time spent. Program Leads were considered an extension of the organization hosting the program and welcomed as staff. One site worked to coordinate its schedule with Digital Creator to provided extra support to the program.

“(Digital Creator) raised the profile of the library in the community.” –Digital Creator Community Host



Digital Creator North Sault Ste. Marie

**Host communities benefitted as well.**

In addition to affecting the participants of the program, for host sites and other community collaborators the program has led to some unexpected outcomes. Program Leads themselves contributed to the wellbeing of their communities, outside of their work with Digital Creator North. In one community the Program Lead has begun teaching at the local university. Another has initiated new recreation programming where it wasn't otherwise available.

**Overall, the model was effective.**

As described above, having centralized support and cross-regional communication allowed individual sites to develop and grow as part of a broader community. Ongoing support for Program Leads, access to a support network for teens, an organizational infrastructure strong enough to exist alongside the host sites without draining their capacity, and savings on bulk purchases of equipment. Overall, the hub-and-spoke model led to additional support for libraries, museums and community spaces seeking to incorporate Digital Media programming into their communities.

“The perfect model.” –Digital Creator  
Community Host



Workshop with Digital Creator Temiskaming Shores



## Conclusions

This evaluation's goals were to determine whether the 3-year pilot of Digital Creator North was successful and to document lessons learned that could be shared with other communities that may be considering development of similar projects. Simply put, the project has been a solid success. Implementing a project of this scale across the vast geography of northern Ontario is no small feat, and all of the supporters, partners and staff were together able to make it happen. The steady increase in numbers, strong and consistent positive feedback from teens, partners and staff, and desire to keep all six project sites beyond the project's pilot phase all indicate this success. Digital Creator North has tested and is ready to share a model that will allow these communities and others like them to continue, grow, and create their own Digital Creator spaces.

The Near North Mobile Media Lab in North Bay has been successful in securing a grant from Canada Council for the Arts to continue and expand Digital Creator North. While continuing in all six of the initial communities, the program will also begin to run in North Bay and nearby Dokis First Nation.

While keeping teens a program priority and attempting to protect the teen-focused hang-out spaces, programming will be offered more openly across all ages. There is also interest in expanding outreach more broadly to other library branches, schools, recreation facilities. Also, there appears to be interest in encouraging the Digital Creator spaces to support creative creation overall (i.e. beyond digital media).

Six communities in Northeastern Ontario have digital media equipment inventories, programming foundations, established partnerships and a desire to continue. Now, they can build on this to determine target ages and future direction.

“(one youth) ended the evening by saying ‘well, this was really fun!’ – I seriously LOVE when they say stuff like that. It’s good to hear you are doing your job well, but it means SO MUCH MORE coming from the teens themselves.” –Program Team Member

“...I think it’s important for me to impress upon the participants that creativity doesn’t just happen within the confines of these walls. They need to take it with them everywhere.” –Program Team Member

“This was fun. We have a lectern in the space that the library uses for speaking events. I’ve just been putting the sign-in and registration sheets on it. A group of students came in, turned it on and set up a karaoke party with it. They used the lectern’s microphone/speaker and put karaoke videos on YouTube on one of the pcs. There were about 8 of them all singing in a group or two at a time taking turns. It was a fund night. We had the door shut to the media room, but you could still hear the singing through the library. It was awesome. I checked with the librarian, she didn’t care about the noise, she thought it was great. I think it’s interesting that they can take something they walk by almost daily and turn into something super fun. Resourcefulness and creativity go hand in hand. In the scope of this project, it tells me that flashy tech is great, but a space that students feel comfortable in is so important.” –Program Lead

