

What We Heard: Reframing Support For Youth Affected By Parental Substance Use through the Voices of Natural Supports

Starlings Natural Support Project

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Agnes Chen, Starlings Community

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@starlingscommunity

@starlings_community





Meet your presenters

Bridging empirical evidence on trauma and recovery with lived wisdom and expressions of resilience to advance holistic, person-centered approaches to healing.



Tacia Tsimaras

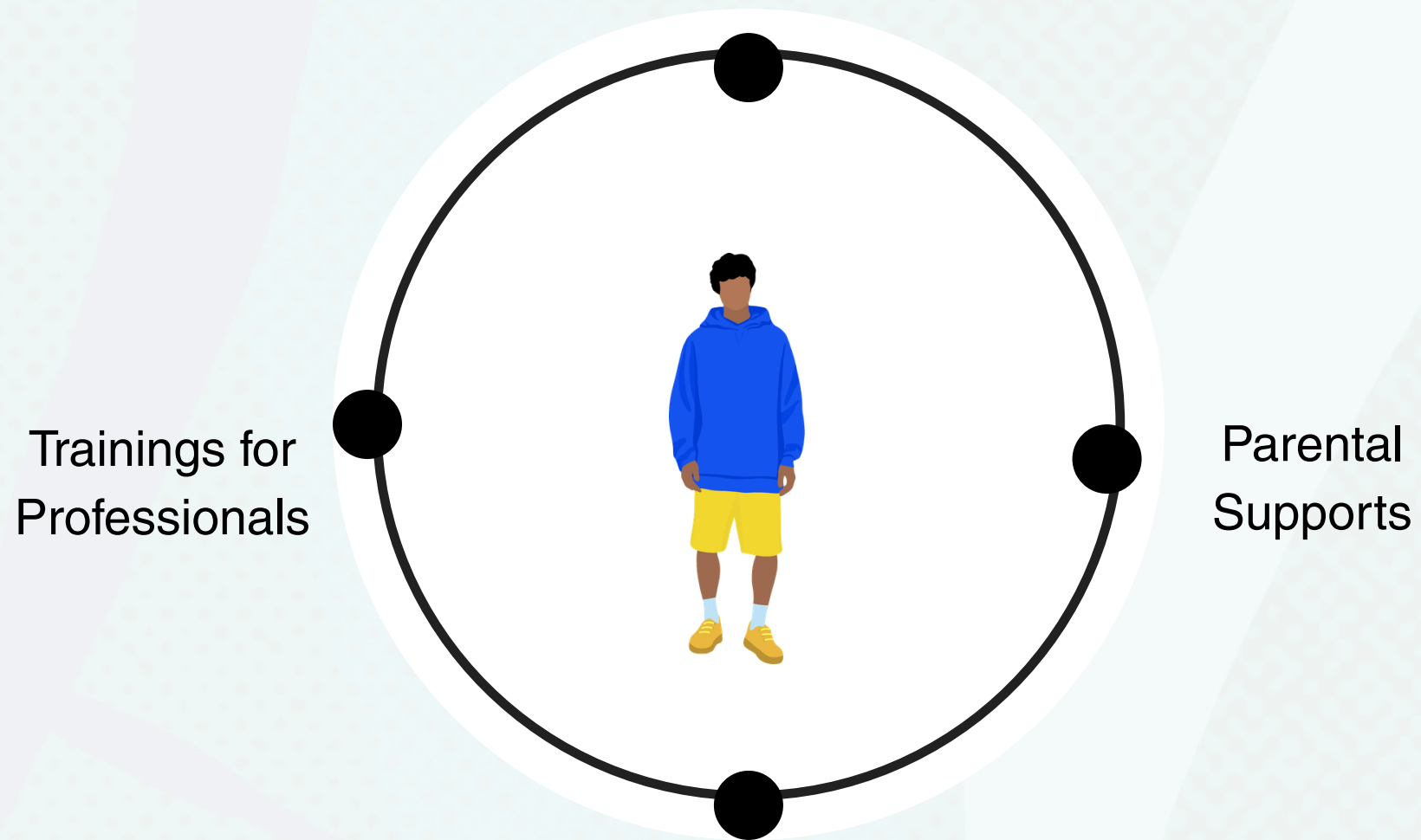
Community Education Lead; Registered
Provisional Psychologist, Subject Matter
Expert at Starlings



Agnes Chen

Founder and Executive Director at Starlings
Community; Registered Nurse; Subject
Matter Expert at Starlings

Youth /Peers Leadership & Mentorship
1:1, Group, Storytelling Focused



Capacity Building Caregivers/Natural Supports

Mission: Strengthening the community of support around young people growing up with parental substance use challenges

We aim to not only support individuals, but to ***strengthen and transform the conditions, relationships, environments, and responses that influence safety, belonging, help seeking, and healing*** within communities and systems.

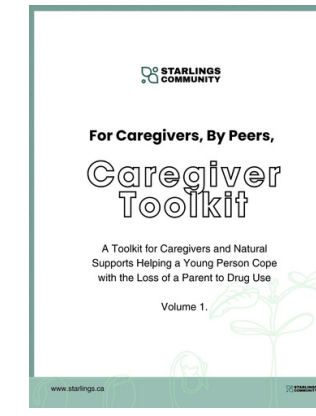
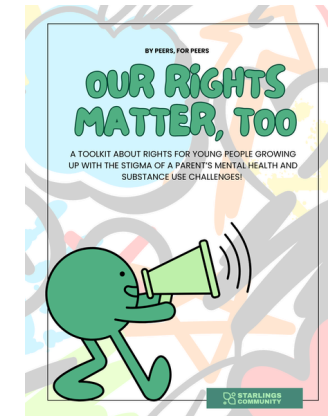
learn more and inquire about programs and trainings



Project Background: Why Engage Natural Supports in this Context?



Youth Don't
Grow Up
Alone



Natural Supports
Asked for Help

Early
Engagement
Confirmed the
Need

We Launched a
Dedicated
Inquiry: Natural
Support Project

These Insights
Shape Our
Future



Project Background: Why Engage Natural Supports in this Context?

20%

OF YOUTH

Stress and stigma of a parents
substance use

2-3X

RISK FOR

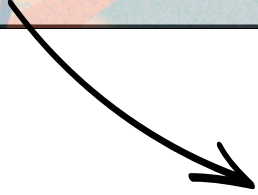
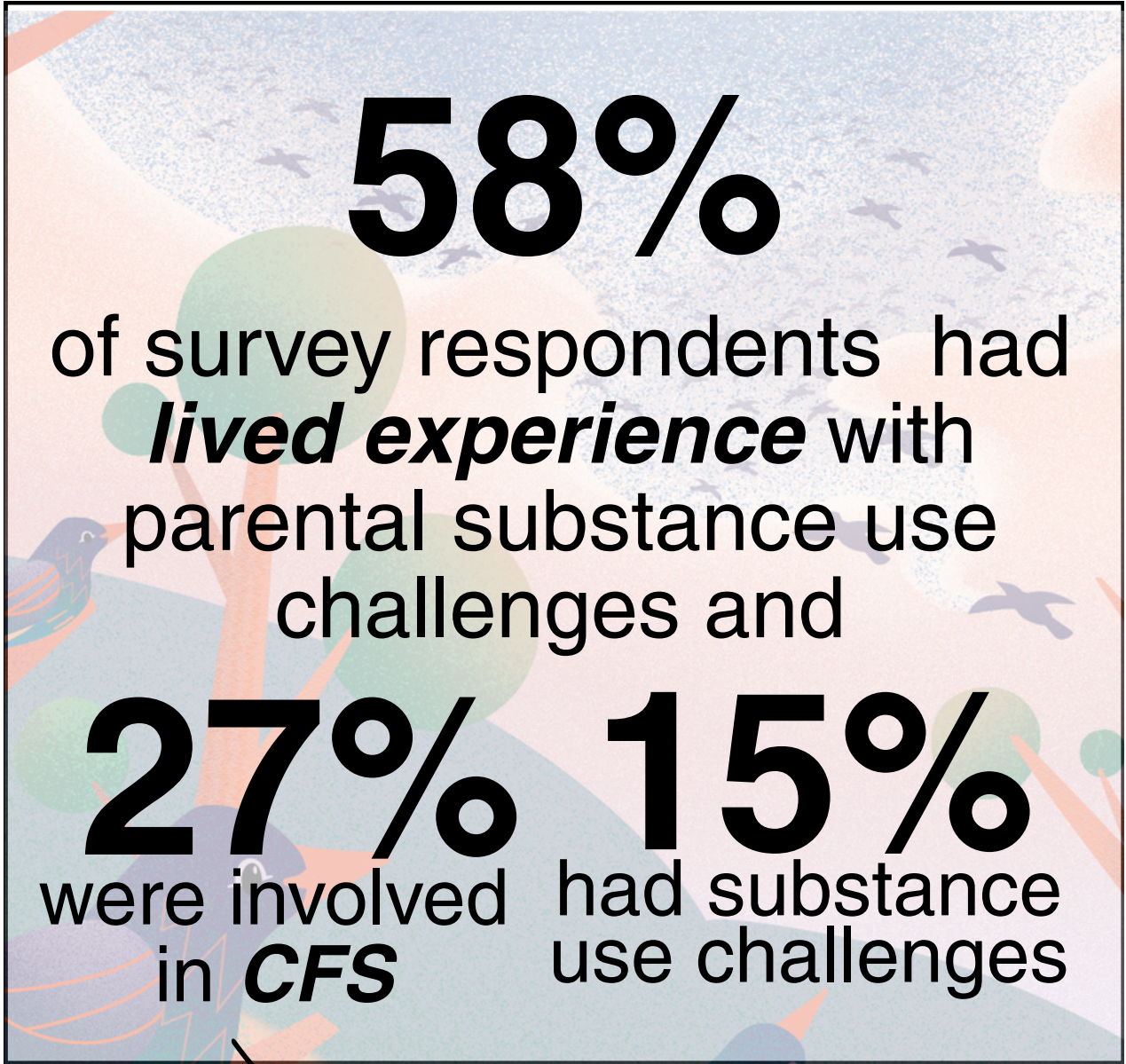
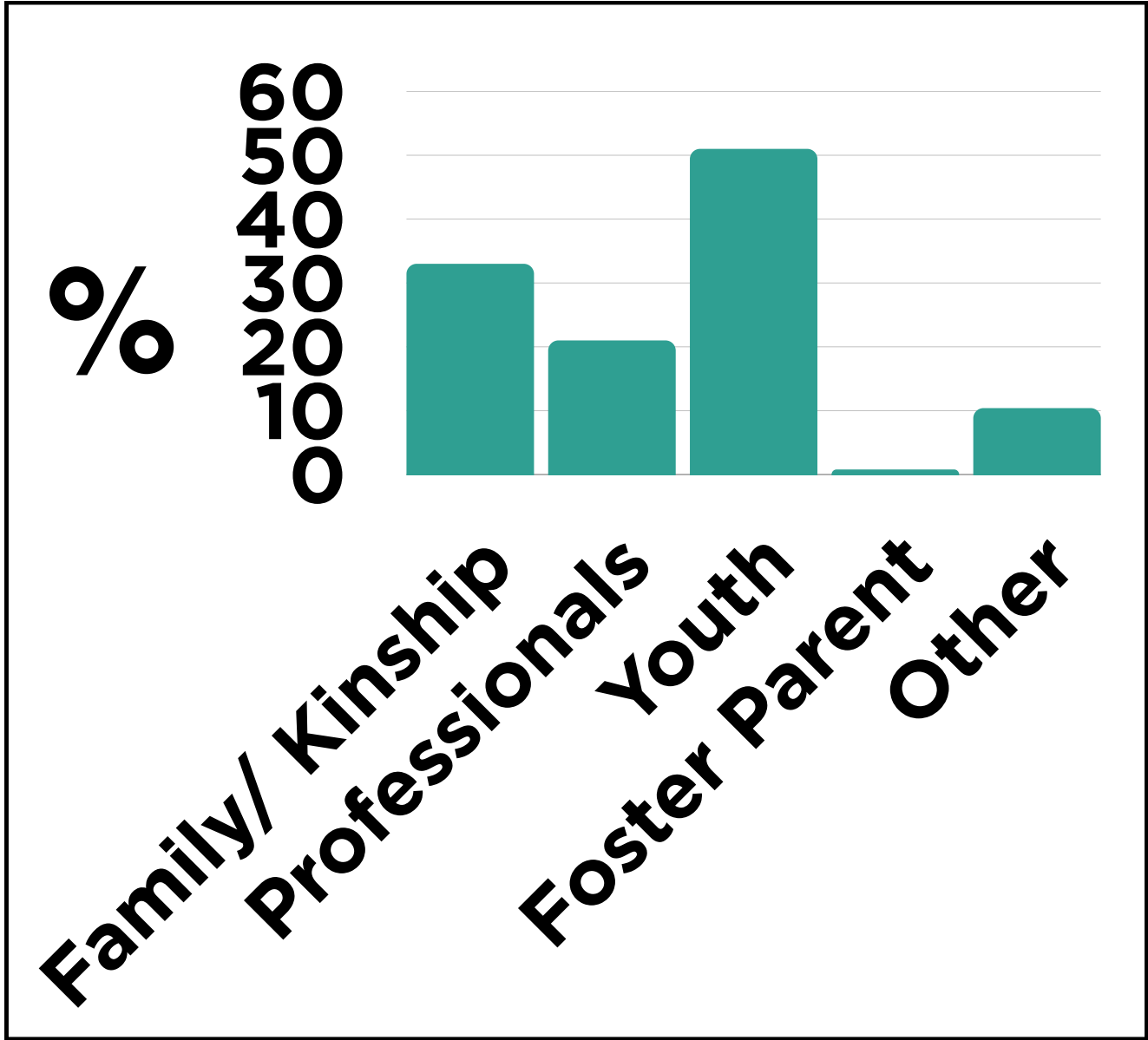
Poor mental health, substance
use challenges, and suicide



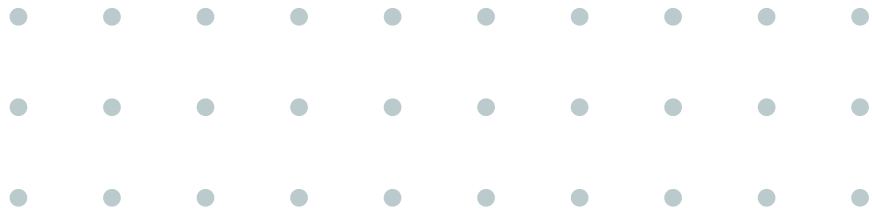
child welfare
involvement

Justice
involvement

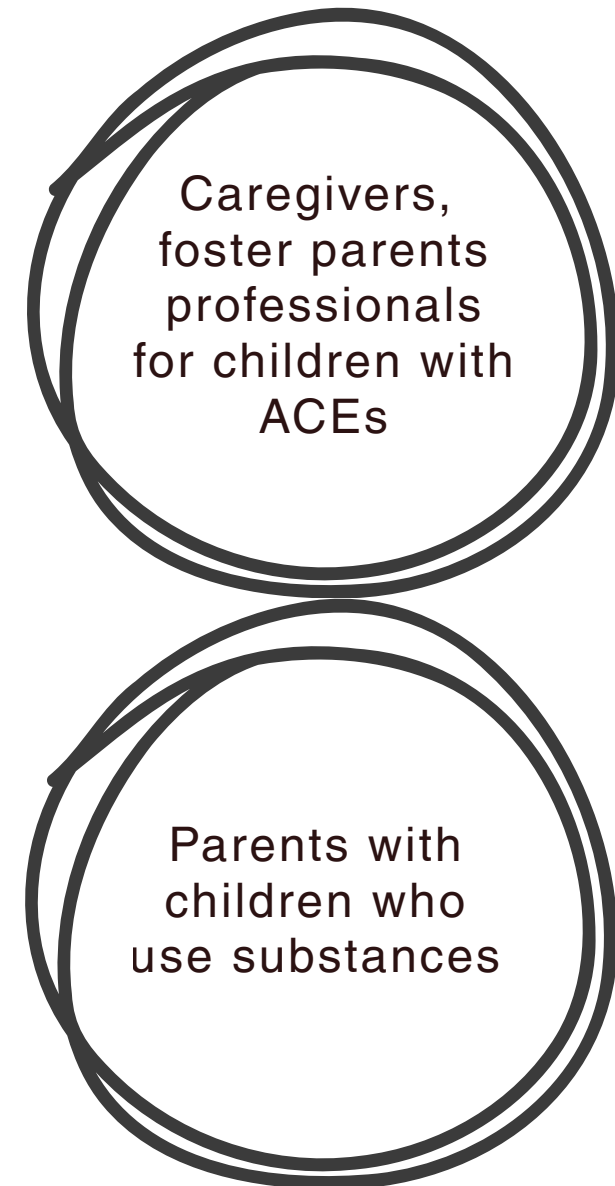
Engagement Overview: *Who We Heard From*



52% had someone close to them involved with child and family services



What we learned: *the Literature: There is a gap in understanding the needs of natural supports helping youth in PSU context*



CHALLENGES

- Mismatch between needs & system capacity
- Discrimination & structural inequities
- Caregiver burnout & emotional strain
- Undervalued & unsupported kinship caregivers
- Stigma & trust barriers
- Fragmented & inaccessible services

SUPPORTS

- Financial aids & public benefits
- Trauma-informed tools, handbooks, parenting guides
- Peer mentorship programs
- Family resource centers & general community-based supports
- Some culturally-relevant services (Indigenous)

GAPS

- Reducing stigma through language & communication
- Tools to contextualize PSU
- Kinship system navigation checklist
- Self check-in tools
- Inclusion of Elders & cultural models in healing strategies



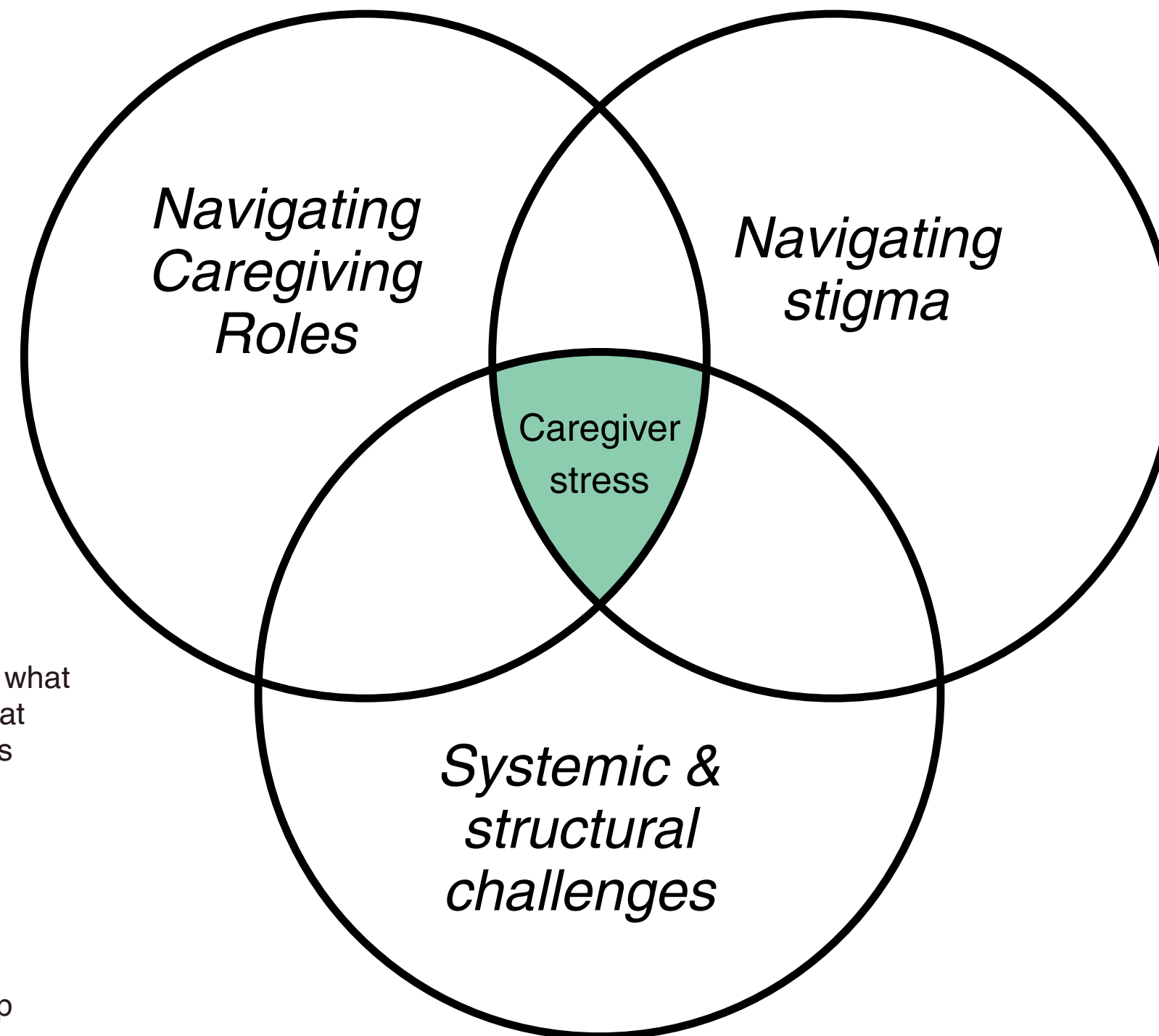
What we learned: The *Challenges*

- 60% of survey participants felt overwhelmed or burnt out,
- 50% felt unsupported by the system.
- 77% of survey participants experienced challenges navigating relationships with the child's parent or family.
- 27% worried about saying the wrong thing when talking about substance use

Mismatch between what youth need and what the system provides

Inconsistent and unreliable support

Lack of training or guidance for kinship caregivers



- 40% encountered stigma through judgments, unfair assumptions or blame.
- 40% faced money or legal problems connected to their caregiving role.

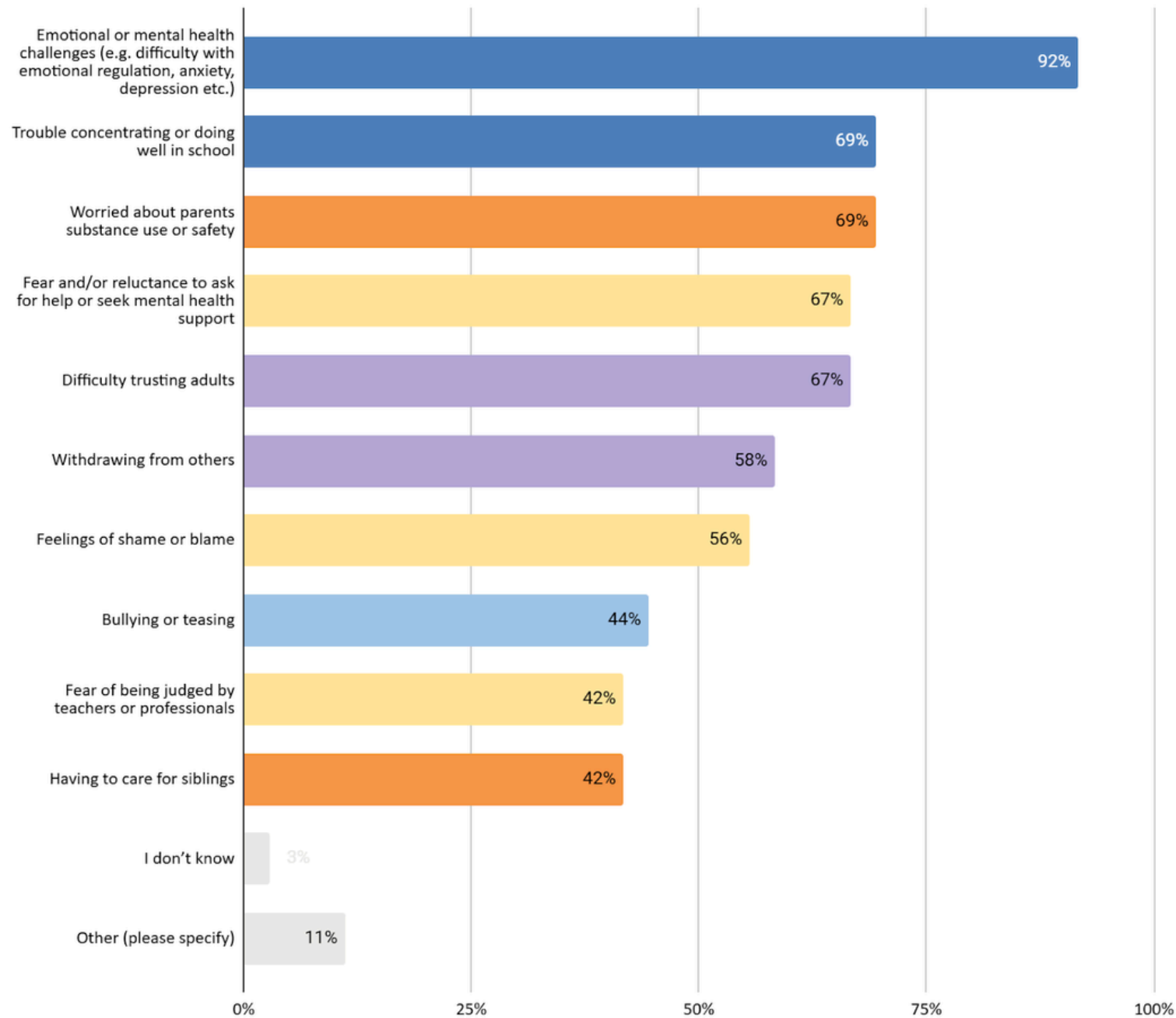
I dont know how to talk about parental substance use

stigma: fear of disclosure, unsure how to talk about parental substance use

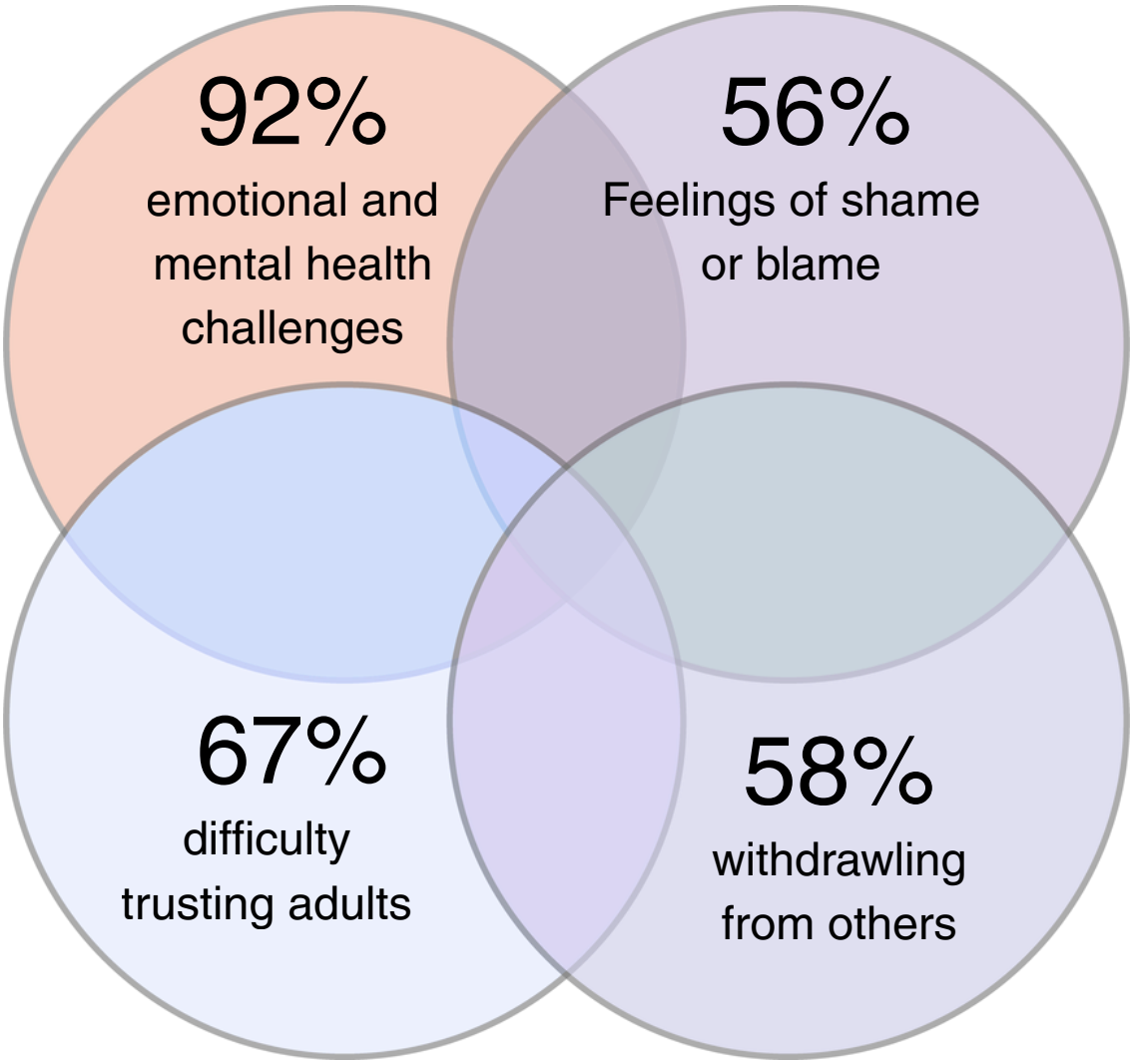
Mistrust within and across systems

What we heard: Caregiver Perspectives *on Young people navigating PSU*

Figure 1: Challenges faced by youth related to stress and stigma, through the lens of caregivers and natural supports (n=36)



Challenges faced by youth related to the stress and stigma, through the lens of natural supports



What We Heard: *From Youth Peers*

Questions

Who can help me? questions about safety, trauma, and healing how do I cope?
desire to understand addiction & generational trauma what resources are available to me?

Challenges

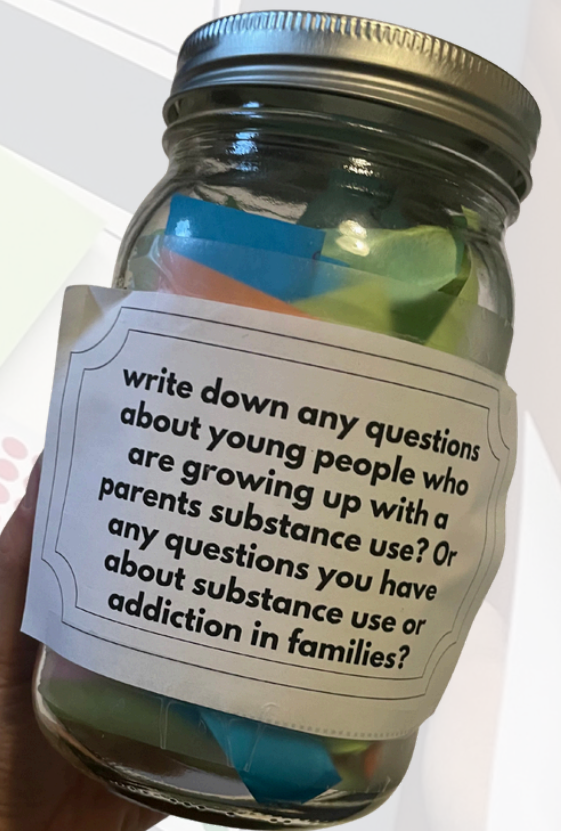
Knowing the right things to say to friends own lived experience misunderstanding, judgment & stigma
Taking care of myself while caring for others system barriers

Needs

stability and people who listen validation & compassion clear pathways of support
systems that support not stigmatize adults who get it practical, actionable resources

Dreams

end the stigma hope, understanding & healing system changes
"you matter...we matter" autonomy living in dignity



What We Heard: *Summary*

Disconnected
Systems

Stigma

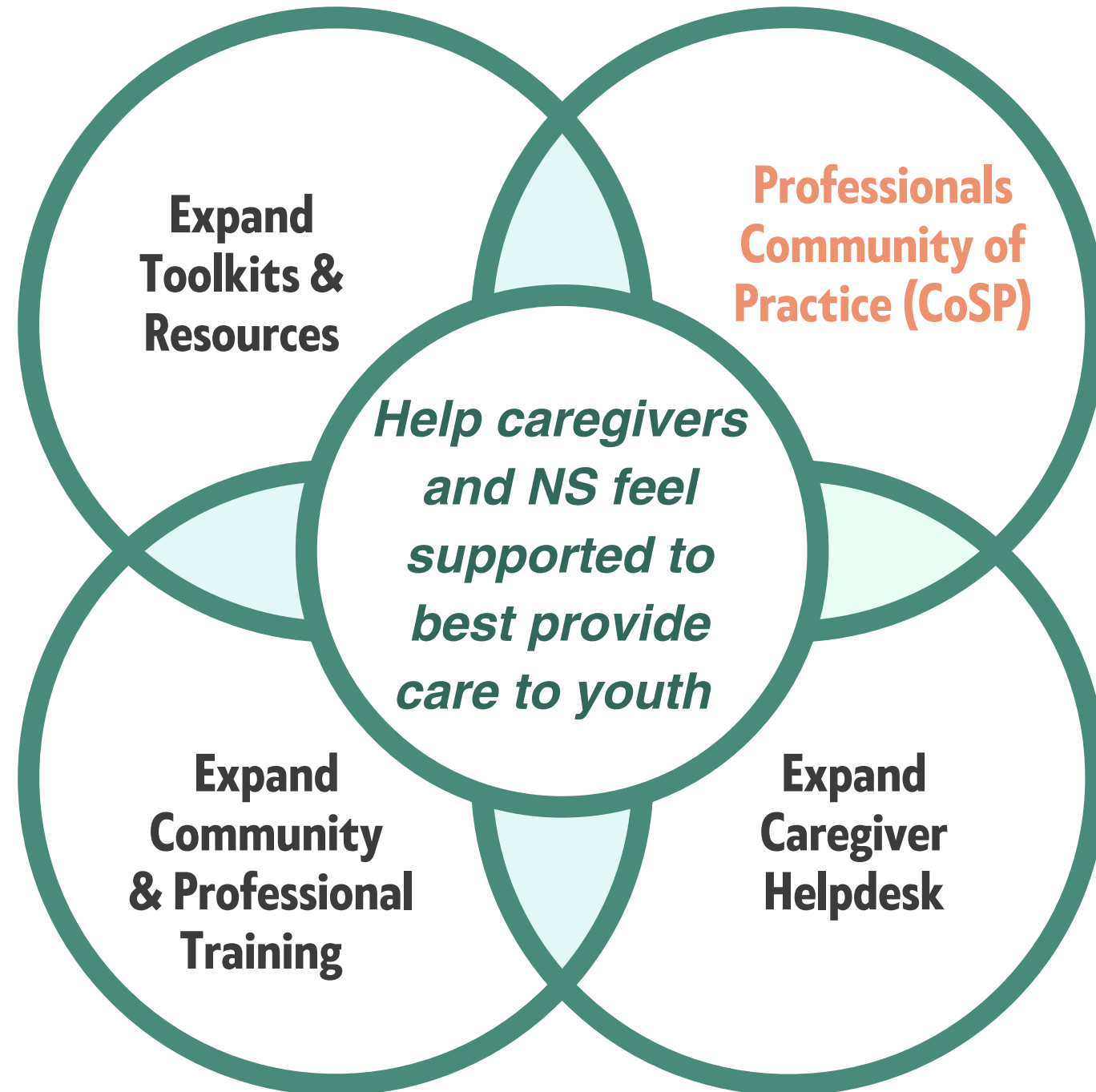
Need for more
resources, skill
building, &
understanding

Burnout

Unclear
Supports



Ongoing Priority Areas



Questions?



QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK

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Community Of Practice

Family Caregivers at Starlings

