

A Seat at the Table

A Review of Youth Engagement in Vancouver



McCreary Centre Society

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The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and community-based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to identify and address the health needs of young people in the province.

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Executive Summary

Adolescence is a time when young people develop an increased ability to engage in abstract thinking, complex problem-solving and rational decision-making, yet they are still often excluded from decision-making processes that impact them and their communities.

When young people have the opportunity to engage in the decision-making processes that affect their lives they are more likely to report better health, higher self-esteem and greater educational aspirations, and are less likely to report extreme levels of stress or despair, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and substance use. They also experience empowering relationships with adults and peers in their community, and are motivated to become further engaged in their community.

With the changing demographics of Vancouver it is more important than ever to ensure young people are meaningfully engaged in the decision-making processes in the city. Youth engagement in formal decision making can be defined as: *The meaningful participation and sustainable involvement of young people in shared decisions in matters which affect their lives and those of their community, including planning, decision making and program delivery.*

A review of practices across the city revealed that youth engagement in Vancouver is creating empowered, educated and skilled youth. However there are also many places where improvements can be made to ensure youths' voices are heard within the decision-making process.

There are a number of successful strategies that can be used to ensure young people are meaningfully engaged in decision making. These include:

- Establishing clear expectations and tangible goals for youth involved in decision-making processes.
- Supporting and training staff in youth engagement practices.
- Offering adult support and mentorship to assist youth to be successfully engaged.
- Fostering a collaborative relationship between youth and adults based on mutual respect.
- Providing learning opportunities and skill building.
- Recognizing that the personal impact and pride resulting from a youth-led initiative can promote ongoing youth participation.
- Engaging in regular program evaluation, involving both youth and adults, to assess the effectiveness of the program's strategies and to make changes as necessary.
- Documenting successful strategies and processes of youth engagement on an on-going basis to facilitate best practice.

Youth who participated in this project reported that meaningful youth initiated projects and/or shared decision-making with adults kept them engaged in their agency and gave them a sense of ownership and inclusion which made them feel respected and heard. We have a responsibility to ensure that more youth get these opportunities.

Introduction

The Vancouver Foundation and the Vancouver Youth Funders Committee commissioned the McCreary Centre Society to review youth engagement in decision making in Vancouver and to make recommendations based on this review for how local service providers and youth funders can better engage youth in their work.

This report focuses on youth engagement in civic and community decision making. It includes a literature review and offers different examples of involving young people in decision-making processes in the Vancouver area from the perspectives of youth, service providers and funders.

The report aims to offer a better understanding of the continuum of youth engagement that exists and to show the different ways that youth can be involved

in decisions that affect their lives. Based on the evidence presented, the report concludes with some suggestions and check lists for successfully engaging young people.

As part of the project, the Vancouver Foundation also contracted the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and the Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory (RVu) to create a demographic profile of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years in Vancouver. The profile involves an integration of data from a range of primary sources, including the 2006 Census, to create a snapshot of Vancouver youth. This has been reproduced in Appendix 4. The profile includes demographic factors which have implications for youth engagement, such as accessibility and marketing.



About the Review

A series of interviews and focus groups were conducted to gather information about youth involvement in decision making within agencies across Vancouver. Additionally one neighboring youth group, the Surrey Leadership Youth Council (SLYC), were included as they provide an effective example of youth engagement within municipal decision making.

Twelve municipal, federal and not-for-profit organizations that work directly with youth and ten youth service funding agencies participated in this project (see Appendix 1 for list of participants). Information was gathered through ten youth focus groups, three service-provider staff focus groups, and 12 individual in-person or telephone interviews with service providers and funders. Additionally, six staff completed questionnaires about youth engagement within their organizations.

Approximately 25 service-provider staff, ten funder agency staff and 80 youth aged between 13 and 25 participated in this project. The focus groups and questionnaires were completed between November 2008 and May 2009.

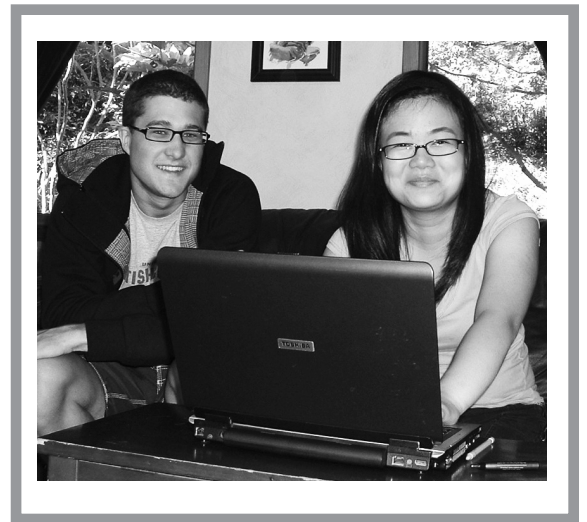
The focus groups, interviews and questionnaires were semi-structured and focused on youth engagement practices and specifically youth engagement in decision making (See Appendix 2 for sample questions).

A number of other Vancouver based youth-serving agencies and funders were approached to participate in this project but declined because they did not formally engage youth in decision making.

Quotes from youth and adults who were interviewed for this project appear throughout the report in italics.

Limitations

Information that individuals provided may not have been representative of the entire organization. Additionally, the definition and conceptualization of youth engagement differs between individuals. Therefore what may be considered youth engagement to one individual may not necessarily be so for another.



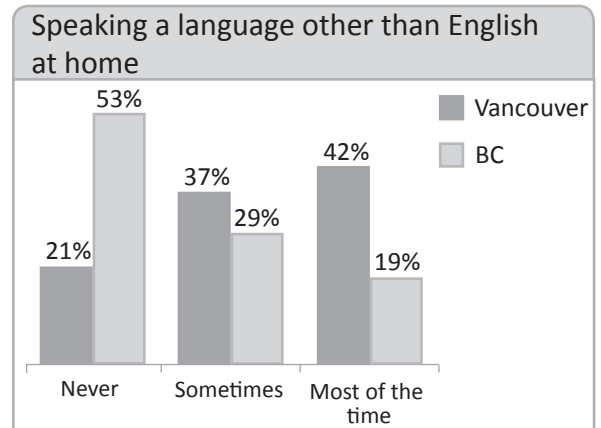
Youth in Vancouver

Overall, the population in Vancouver is aging. According to the 2006 Census, youth make up only 13% of Vancouver’s total population (see Appendix 4 for further details). As this percentage is expected to continue to decline, today’s youth will become the working adults who carry the fiscal and social responsibility of a growing elderly population. It is therefore vital that they are prepared and skilled.

According to the results of the 2008 Adolescent Health Survey (*A Picture of Health*, 2009, available at www.mcs.bc.ca), the majority of youth in BC aged 12-19 identify as being of European heritage (54%). However, Vancouver youth come from a more diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds with the majority being of East Asian descent (55%).

The survey also found that 34% of Vancouver students were born outside of Canada (higher than the provincial rate of 18%), and 17% had lived in Canada for less than 5 years. Additionally, 79% of students in Vancouver spoke a language other than English at home (compared to 47% provincially). This means that many Vancouver youth may not have traditional family and cultural ties to the area and to local institutions and processes.

In addition to its ethnic and cultural diversity, Vancouver is home to youth who identify as disabled, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, who bring their own unique perspectives and contributions. It is therefore important to recognize the demographic makeup of the city’s youth and recognize where they may need additional support to engage in their community.



Given Vancouver’s aging population, this generation of young people will need to be equipped to deal with a host of economic and social decisions and be prepared to get involved more than ever before. The good news for Vancouver is that many youth seem to already be volunteering in their communities, and in fact Vancouver youth are more likely to volunteer than youth in the province as a whole (67% vs. 62%).

Ethnic or cultural background (among Vancouver youth aged 12-19)

East Asian	55%
European	20%
Southeast Asian	16%
South Asian	8%
Aboriginal/First Nations	3%
Latin/South/Central American	3%
African	2%
West Asian	2%
Australian/Pacific Islander	1%
Other (excluding Canadian)	1%
Don’t know	1%

Note: Youth could choose more than one option

Definition of Youth Engagement

Many organizations and individuals interpret youth engagement in different ways. By accepting the definition below, we can move from viewing youth simply as service recipients toward a place where they have meaningful and shared involvement in the systems and processes that affect them, and where they can learn from experienced and supportive adults.

Youth engagement:

The meaningful participation and sustainable involvement of young people in shared decisions in matters which affect their lives and those of their community, including planning, decision making and program delivery.



Literature Review

The focus of this literature review is on youth engagement in formal decision making. It considers theories as well as examples of international and national policies, research and practices.

Positive Youth Development and Engagement

A positive youth development approach is essential to engaging young people in decision making. This approach moves away from focusing on problems and risky behaviors that are traditionally associated with adolescence, and emphasizes building strengths and positive attributes in youth. Young people are regarded as valuable resources with the capacity to make healthy choices (Fisher, 2003). Positive youth development models are effective in producing more positive outcomes for young people than the previously practiced harm reduction, problem-focused approaches (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001).

The concept of engaging youth in decision making is central to promoting positive youth development. Youth engagement fosters civic competence, a sense of identity, interpersonal skills, and social responsibility among young people. Engagement also serves a socialization function and provides youth with structured and challenging experiences that involve planning and taking action on behalf of others (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin & MacNeil, 2006).

Engaging youth in decision-making processes in their community can help them to become part of the solution to youth issues rather than being perceived as the problem (McCreary, 2002). Policies and programs that promote active youth involvement are likely to be effective not only in serving adolescents' needs but also in fostering healthy development and lifestyles and in contributing to positive changes in the community. It is therefore vital for adults to provide an environment where youth can engage and exert their influence (Evans, 2007).

Youth Engagement in Decision Making

Cognitive development during adolescence includes an increased ability to engage in abstract thinking, complex problem-solving and rational decision-making (e.g., Moretti & Peled, 2004). However, youth are still often excluded from decision-making processes that impact them and their communities (Amsden & VanWynsberghe, 2005).

Meaningful youth engagement in decision-making is accomplished through a partnership between youth and adults (Wheeler, 2007) where each learn from one another. In addition to receiving mentorship from adults to guide them in the learning process, youth also need to be respected and trusted so they can engage in independent planning and decision

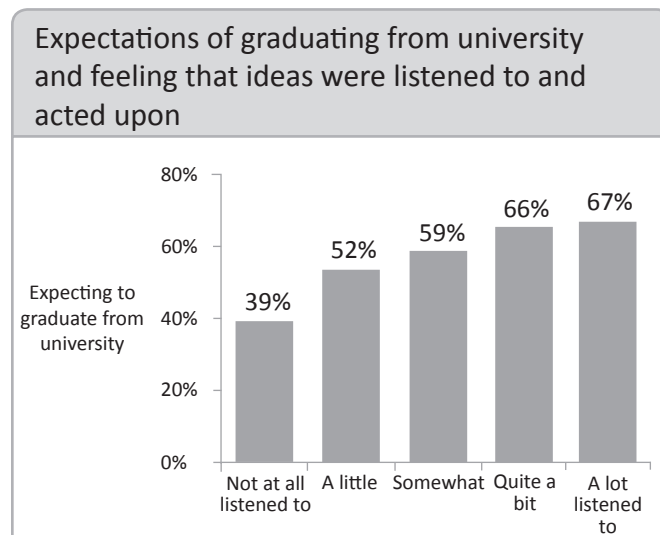
making. By treating youth as equal partners in the process, young people enhance their sense of voice and influence (Zeldin & MacNeil, 2006). When this happens, youth experience empowering relationships with adults and peers in their community. The development of mutual support and contribution to the community creates a positive cycle for further effective youth engagement (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Benefits of Youth Engagement

Engagement in the community can be pivotal in a young person's life. The community influences the development of young people, and in turn the actions of young people have an impact on their community (Developmental Systems Theory; Lerner, Alberts, Jelicic, & Smith, 2006). Research has found that youths' involvement in organized community activities is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, including enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction

(Gilman, 2001) as well as reduced rates of delinquent behaviour, criminal arrests, substance use, and mental health problems (e.g., Mahoney, 2000; Palen & Coatsworth, 2007).

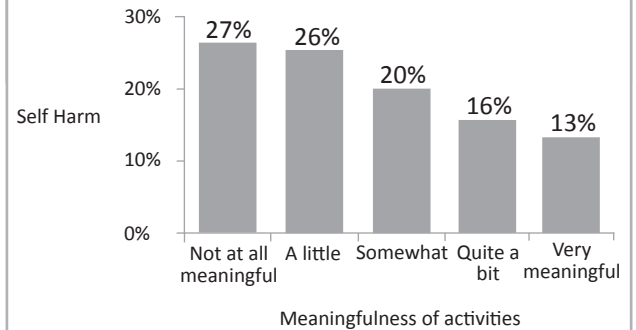
In British Columbia, high school students who reported higher levels of youth engagement—including feeling that the activities they were involved in were meaningful or that their ideas were often listened to or acted upon in the activities they took part in—were more likely to report better health, higher self-esteem and greater educational aspirations, and were less likely to report extreme levels of stress or despair, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and substance use (McCreary Centre Society, 2009).



Youth Vital Signs:

50% of youth surveyed said reducing the voting age to 16 for all elections should be a priority for Vancouver.

Self harm and meaningfulness of activities



Youth Engagement Legislation and Policies

International

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was accepted by Canada in 1991 and protects the basic rights of young people under the age of 18 years around the world. The Convention recognizes children and youth as entitled to the same respect as adults, and capable of participating in decisions that affect their lives. It extends beyond the rights of protection, to include their rights and responsibilities of engagement and decision-making.

National

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the foundation of Canadian law. The Charter states that all Canadian citizens have a “right of equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination” which includes discrimination based on age.

Example in Action:

Although Canadian law excludes minors from participating in the traditional voting system, there are alternatives which offer young people the opportunity to voice their opinions and make changes in their communities. For example, the British Columbia Youth Parliament organizes an annual session at the Provincial Legislature in Victoria where representatives of youth organizations from across BC learn about and experience the parliamentary process. Proposed activities are presented in the form of government bills which once passed become translated into action in the community.

Local

While many not-for-profit organizations in the city had already established a role for youth in their decision-making processes, Vancouver adopted the Civic Youth Strategy (CYS) in 1995. This strategy highlights that youth should have a place in the community, a strong voice in decision-making, and a strong support base (Cook & Blanchet-Cohen, 2006). This policy has established an increased awareness of the value and importance of involving young people in the civic process. The policy has also helped to embed youth engagement into the daily practices of city workers through the creation of a Youth Outreach Team that works to connect youth in the community with civic staff and community resources.

Engagement Along a Continuum

Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992) offers a useful way of thinking about youth engagement along a continuum. The rungs of the ladder describe different levels of youth engagement. The lower rungs reflect lower levels while the higher rungs reflect higher levels of engagement. *Manipulation* is the lowest rung of the ladder and refers to adults using youth to support their own causes and pretending that the causes are inspired by youth. In actual fact, the youth have no understanding of the issues. A higher level of engagement, and one of the middle rungs, is *Consulted and Informed*, which refers to youth giving advice on

projects that adults design and run. The youth are informed about the outcomes that stem from adults' decisions. The highest rung— *Youth-initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults*—is when projects are initiated by youth, and decision-making is shared among adults and youth. These projects empower youth and at the same time enable them to learn from the life experience of adults. For more details and examples, see Hart (1992) and McCreary's *BC Youth Health Handbook* (Tonkin et al, 1996).

Concern has emerged about some young people being over-engaged or over-scheduled in activities or projects, which may increase their stress levels and have a negative impact on overall well-being (e.g., Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000). Others argue that over-engagement is healthier than no engagement at all (Mahoney et al., 2006). However, over-engagement of some young people, and the over-reliance on them to represent 'youth,' may take engagement opportunities away from other youth (TakingITGlobal, 2006).

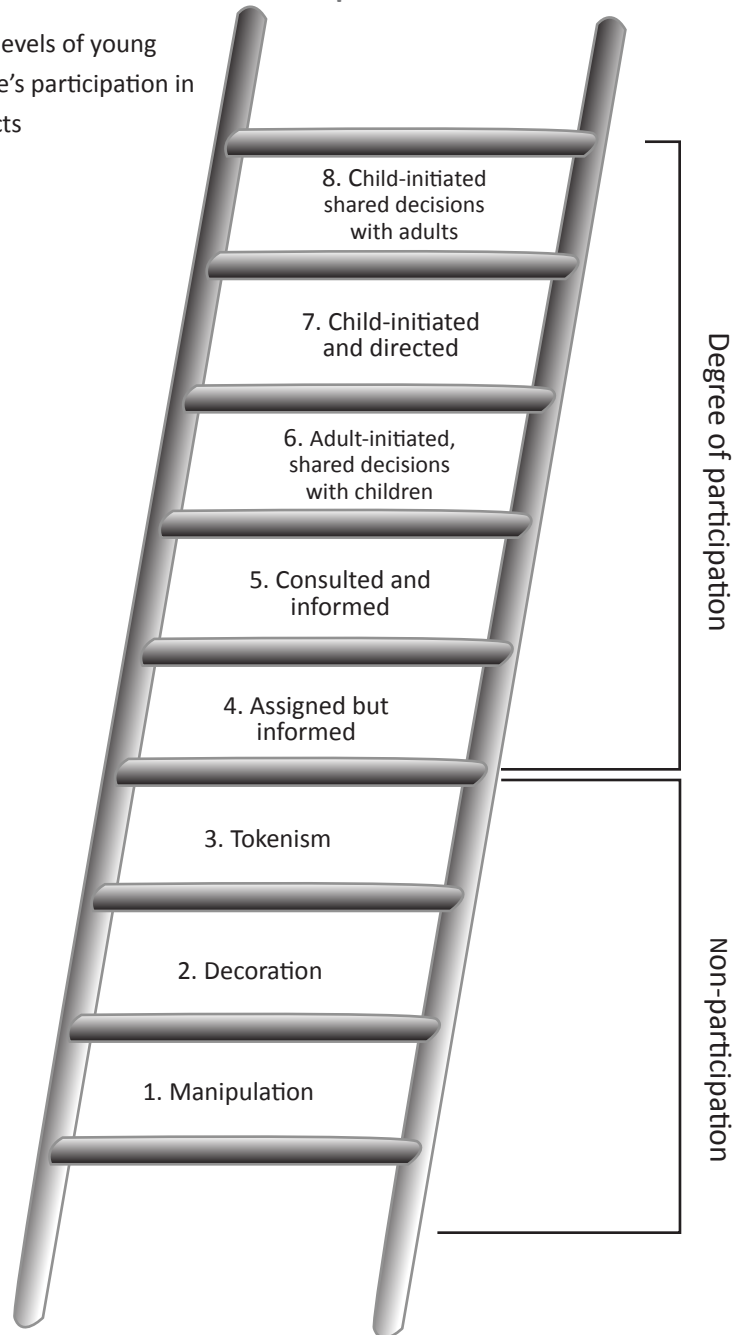
Successful Examples of Youth Engagement from Around the World

Youth engagement in civic policy

The Hampton Coalition for Youth in Hampton, Virginia, is comprised of a youth commission made up of 24 young people who are also employed in city departments and serve on almost all city boards and committees. Youth have input at every level, and are viewed as providing expertise to policy making (Zeldin, Camino & Calvert, 2007). There is equal partnership, voice and representation from both youth and adults, and youth are given a significant amount of responsibility.

The Ladder of Participation

Eight levels of young people's participation in projects



Source: Hart, R.A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*.

Engagement through granting organizations

The Ford Foundation is a major international granting organization that has adopted a positive youth development perspective and effectively incorporated youth engagement into its work (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001). Having seen the success of engaging young people in decision making, the Foundation funded community youth engagement projects and projects that developed youth leadership skills in several countries.

Youth engagement in Canada

The Toronto-based national Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE) brings together youth, service providers, academic researchers and policy makers to identify, build and implement models of meaningful youth engagement and to document the results. The CEYE acknowledges the value of engaging young people in meaningful ways to improve health outcomes for youth.

Youth Vital Signs:

14% of youth surveyed said creating programs for youth to learn about politics/government should be a priority for Vancouver.

Youth engagement in British Columbia

In 2007, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) created a Youth Advisory Council, aimed at bringing together young people from across the province to share their knowledge, skills and experiences with the Ministry. The goal is to include youth in the decision-making process and seek their recommendations in policy and program areas. More recently, MCFD took further steps to ensure youth had a voice in the development of services with the appointment of five regional Youth Engagement Coordinators.

Youth engagement in Vancouver

The development of the Youth Outreach Team has been one of the most successful outcomes from Vancouver's Civic Youth Strategy. It was established in 2002 and operates under the City of Vancouver's Social Policy Department (formerly known as Social Planning). Main priorities include supporting city staff in providing youth engagement opportunities and working with youth directly to connect them with resources offered by the city (Cook & Blanchet-Cohen, 2006).

Another example of positive youth engagement in Vancouver has been carried out by the Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS) project. The project aimed to have youth evaluate the level of youth friendliness in health services across Vancouver. Adults' involvement was limited to preliminary planning, and youth

Example in Action:

The local grassroots project Check Your Head was developed in 1998 by a group of 10 youth to create awareness on issues regarding globalization, media, sweatshops and genetically modified food. The group provides workshops, conferences, interactive theatre and activist camps and has gone from touring high schools in BC to creating live, interactive theatrical performances which were broadcast on the internet for youth throughout the world. This youth-initiated group has been successful in partnering with the BC Teachers Federation, and hold workshops to discuss topics such as how to make improvements in education (Goldberg, 2002).

Youth Vital Signs:

17% of youth indicated that improving marketing about opportunities to get involved should be a priority for Vancouver.

participants then determined the direction of the project (Amsden & VanWynsberghe, 2005). Youth were involved in all aspects of the research project, including developing youth friendly surveys, collecting and analyzing data with support from adult staff, and presenting findings at a child and youth health conference. Through this experience, youth were given the opportunity to have a voice and make decisions as partners, as well as develop a range of important and transferable skills.

Less Successful Examples of Youth Engagement

Throughout this report there are many positive instances of active and meaningful youth engagement but lessons can also be learned from less effective examples. Barriers to successfully engaging youth include adults not listening to or respecting youths' opinions; power imbalances between adults and young people; youth feeling used by adults; and attempts to engage youth in activities they do not find personally meaningful. Negative experiences of youth engagement that mislead youth about their level of potential involvement and influence or that are not personally meaningful can be detrimental and lead to disengagement in the future.

Top-down approaches

Adult-initiated projects and strategies can be considered 'top-down' (Gerodimos, 2008). These strategies are not initiated by youth and fall at the low end of the continuum of youth engagement. For example, in response to increasing concern about a decline in youth voter turnout, adults in one country set up internet Web pages with youth as the target audience to promote involvement in voting, relay news and information, and encourage involvement in other political affairs (Gerodimos, 2008). However, because these activities were not youth-driven, young people did not necessarily find them engaging or meaningful.

Lack of equal inclusion

Another barrier to youth engagement is lack of equal inclusion. In one example, high school students could be members of Boards of Education and could comment on proposed regulations, but were not allowed to vote on the Boards (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Another example is an adult committee that initially agreed to accept youth input but then scheduled meetings at times and locations that were inconvenient for the youth, thereby creating obstacles for attendance and engagement. Youth felt manipulated and disempowered, and felt that adult organizers expected them to "fit into bureaucratic timetables and venues" (National Crime Prevention Strategy, 1995, as cited in Hoogeveen, 2006).

Youth Vital Signs:

19% of youth surveyed said integrating youth into decision-making processes (i.e., in City Hall) should be a priority for Vancouver.

Benefits of Youth Engagement

Youth engagement benefits young people, adults, organizations and the community.

Youth

- Learn they can play an effective and important role in community and organizational development
- Gain skills and confidence
- Are encouraged to engage and participate in other areas

Organizations and adults

- Gain new perspectives on youth
- Have access to new and creative perspectives
- Develop improved youth services initiatives
- Build credibility with youth

Communities

- Benefit from more effective community development strategies when youth and adults work together
- Benefit from youth growing up to become adults engaged in their community

Youth Engagement in Action

The Continuum of Youth Engagement in Vancouver

The types of youth engagement in decision making varied across agencies and ranged from adhoc situations where youth were involved sporadically or informally, to organized youth committees and coalitions that were either completely youth led or had a designated decision making role (for example, with youth representation on the organization's Board).

Most organizations did not have a unified structure for youth to contribute to decision making but had various mechanisms within different projects that they ran. Youth described being engaged in decision making in three different ways. The first was as a participant in a program or project, the second as a mentor to youth who were new to their organization and the third was by having influence over how an organization is run. The 'decision maker' role varied from providing feedback and suggestions to being a member of a committee or board, creating policy and best practice.

Youth from every agency reported that what was important to them and what kept them involved with the organization was having a sense of ownership, feeling respected, having their voice heard and feeling that they were treated as equals by their 'adult allies.'

Key themes emerged from the discussions with youth and agency representatives. They included the practicalities of participating in decision-making processes

and highlighted some of the successes, challenges and limitations in youth engagement practices.

Example in Action:

The 2009 Youth Vital Signs report card is one project which aimed to increase the engagement of young people in the city and to influence public and community decisions. The youth-driven public opinion project represents the views of 1,700 Vancouver youth ages 15 to 24. The report card asked youth to grade the city in 12 key areas. Youth identified four areas as needing the most urgent attention: the gap between rich and poor, youth homelessness and housing, safety, and the environment. In each of these areas, youth highlighted the need to make improvements. Youth also reported that they were denied access or were unsure about how to gain access to influence policy decisions, they did not have the necessary income to fully engage in their community, and they felt that the impact of policy decisions on youth were often not considered.

“No mystery to youth engagement, you ask them and you do something about it”

Reasons Youth get Involved

Youth reported getting involved in decision making within their organization to have their voice heard and to make changes in their environment.

“Lots of youth come with the mentality of being hopeless, powerless... but you can give your opinion here. It matters.”

Many rallied around a united cause or issue that was affecting them and their peers directly, such as poverty or homelessness. They also wanted to be positive role models for others, including younger siblings or peers.

“This is our home. We care what goes on here.”

Youth were often initially encouraged to join a committee or council primarily because they heard success stories from other youth who were already engaged in the decision-making processes. Some youth also became involved in a group because they saw it as a place where they could ‘escape’ problems and issues they may be facing on a daily basis.

“[The council I am involved with] affects how I act and I use volunteering as a prize. Like I can make it through the day and go to volunteering at the end.”

Age Range

Most organizations defined youth as between 12 and 24 years of age, although some agencies included youth up to the age of 29, and others did not have a clearly defined age range.

Youth Vital Signs:

45% of youth surveyed said reducing the cost of rental housing should be a priority for Vancouver.

For some youth, transitioning away from their group as they reached the maximum age limit felt like a natural process similar to graduating high school. However, others reported that through participation in their agencies’ youth engagement structures they felt a sense of connection, pride and ownership that they did not want to give up when they reached a certain age.

“I won’t leave until I’m too busy, too old or move away for school.”

Five agencies operated an alumnus for youth who reached the maximum age for involvement on their Youth Advisory Committees and who wished to remain involved with the organization. This allowed older youth the opportunity to share their experience, mentor younger youth and provide continuity for the agency.

“Once a SLYC member, always a SLYC member.”

Recruitment

Although some organizations reported turning youth away because they had limited spaces available or

required youth with specific skills, many others reported that they had trouble recruiting and retaining youth volunteers due to a lack of resources and because many youth are in need of paid employment.

“We constantly hear, ‘yeah we would love to be involved but I just don’t have the time.’ They are overburdened with things to do.”

Recruitment practices varied between agencies but most youth appeared to have gotten involved by hearing about the opportunity through word of mouth, although many agencies reported using additional tools such as posters and newsletter articles.

Once interested in being involved in decision-making processes, some youth were interviewed by agency staff whereas others were interviewed by youth members and the decision as to whether they could join an existing youth committee or group rested with existing youth members.

“People that were interested in being involved in the project had to email the staff and let her know the reasons why they wanted to be involved. The staff was the person who organized recruiting committee members.”

Guidelines, Contracts and Agreements

Youth reported finding it beneficial to have an agreement in place that laid out the expectations of their involvement and that stated any consequences of not adhering to the agreement.

In the majority of agencies, the agreements or contracts were discussed and finalized by the youth with advice and support from adults. Youth also appreciated adult support when members broke the agreement and consequences were necessary.

“Youth benefited from an increased awareness for the need for boundaries.” (Youth Worker)

Almost all the groups had a “No ‘isms” rule (e.g., no sexism, no racism) strongly enforced in their agreement. Other rules outlined in the contracts were specific to the organization, such as youth needing to be sober to attend a meeting.

Several youth did report that although their organization had agreements set up at the start of their groups, these were not regularly revisited and newer members were not aware of their existence.

“We don’t follow anything really, not that I know of anyway.”

Four agencies documented the goals of the individual youth when he or she signed up to volunteer. The staff and youth then discussed what the young person wanted to achieve or contribute to the organization. This process allowed the agency to cater any training or support needs specifically to the youth involved.

Not all agencies operated a contract or agreement, or required a specific commitment from youth. This approach was popular with youth who did not want to

make a specific commitment and preferred to be flexible in their involvement.

“We don’t need a contract, we are on our best behaviour when we are here.”

Induction and Training

Four agencies provided youth with formal training prior to their involvement in any youth engagement activities.

All the other programs had training dispersed across the time the youth spent on the council or committee. These were mainly in the form of internal workshops or workshops facilitated by outside agencies with expertise on a specific topic which built skills or addressed the specific interests or needs of the group.

“At every session you learn something new.”

Recognizing Youth Contributions

Many of the agencies had incentives to encourage youth to remain engaged and to recognize their contributions to the organization. Youth in every organization reported that they received food and drink, any

Example in Action:

The RCMP offered youth a two day consultation-training day where young people formed connections with their peers and mentors, as well as learned leadership and public speaking skills and received training on how to successfully run a community event.

Example in Action:

Youth at Directions reported that through their training they were “better equipped to handle stress” and learned skills such as public speaking, teamwork and problem-solving.

The Vancouver Foundation’s Youth Philanthropy Council identify learning opportunities and hold training sessions on the identified issues. These have included anti-oppression, decision making, group and peer facilitation, and public speaking.

The McCreary Youth Advisory Council hold an annual ‘by youth for youth’ leadership conference (Breaking Barriers Building Bridges; B4). The conference is a peer education opportunity, and organizing the conference also builds a range of skills because youth are responsible for the logistics and content of the conference, including budgeting, fundraising, promotion and workshop facilitation.

necessary childcare, and public transport subsidies to assist them to participate in meetings and events. Additional incentives such as t-shirts, hoodies, drink mugs and pens were also available.

“I’m a big fan of certificates.”

Some youth were able to receive high school credits for the voluntary work hours they completed within the organization. Youth also reported that building their resume and getting a reference letter were

strong motivators and positive outcomes for their involvement in a volunteering role.

“Volunteering looks great on your resume, plus, to be honest, the girls are impressed when you say you volunteer!”

The majority of groups provided some form of honorarium including money and gift cards. Some youth felt that receiving a financial reward for their participation had a negative effect:

“If they’re here for the money you won’t get as much out of it. You should do it for the community. It’s not about the money.”

Only one youth reported that he was motivated to attend meetings by receiving an honorarium. Although many youth reported that the honorarium had provided an initial incentive to get involved, they also agreed that money had not been a factor in their continued participation.

“A friend said to come and I would get ten bucks.”

One organization did not offer any form of honorarium, and did not feel it was necessary as they had no problems retaining volunteers.

Example in Action:

SLYC replaced their \$15 honorarium with a yearlong Recreation pass which many of the youth preferred to the ‘instant money.’

Example in Action:

The YWCA youth facilitators are recognized for their contribution at an annual Volunteer Appreciation event in addition to a Volunteer Dinner and Debrief held at the end of their initial seven week session.

Group Meetings

Youth and adult supports all felt that their meetings were held at convenient locations and aimed to be flexible around youths’ other commitments. Accessibility of public transport was also an important consideration to ensure youth could attend meetings and events.

Having a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment with familiar faces created a space where youth felt comfortable sharing their opinions and where they felt valued.

“I go to school then come here. It’s a good place to come home to.”

The majority of the groups met once or twice a month unless there was a pressing issue or a lead-up to an event. Youth reported that this was ideal as they usually had too many other commitments to offer any more time to the organization. If meetings were fewer than once a month they lost their sense of cohesiveness as a group and felt less committed.

Adult allies reported that if youth were only involved once a month, it was important that the adult sup-

port ensured the youth received up-to-date information on relevant developments in the past month. Most staff members, who were supporting youth committees and groups, were accessible in person and by phone or email to ensure youth could access them in between meetings as needed.

Many groups had a formal or written set of meeting rules and practices. These included ensuring everyone got the chance to speak and that all comments were respectful and constructive.

“We try to never make it personal in here.”

Youth appreciated the freedom they were given to make their own decisions, and to try out new ideas within a supported environment.

“Our adult support sometimes holds back in meetings so it stays youth driven.”

Involvement in Organizational Decision Making

“Ultimately, we get to make the decisions although sometimes there’s no explanation for decisions made by the adults.”

Youth experienced a variety of different decision making opportunities. These opportunities included involvement in hiring staff, sitting on the organization’s Board of Directors, applying for funding, and making decisions for their project.

In some organizations, the adult support was responsible for taking youths’ ideas forward to others within the agency, whereas in other organizations

Example in Action:

The Vancouver Youth Visions Coalition have a group agreement in place to ensure that everyone has a turn to speak at meetings.

SLYC have one member run an energizer at the beginning of each meeting.

youth got to represent themselves such as by having a representative on the Board.

Adults recognized still falling short of their ideal in engaging youth in decision making, for example if their organization’s constitution or insurance did not allow youth under 19 to be voting members of a Board.

“The staff has final say [here], probably 25% youth vote, 75% adult vote.”

Keeping Youth Engaged

“When you see change happen it inspires you to do more.”

Youth reported that what kept them engaged was experiencing a fun environment where their opinions were respected, as well as learning new skills and feeling empowered to create change.

“I feel like I’m totally making a difference.”

“I don’t feel useless anymore.”

No matter what level of involvement youth had in the agency, they reported gaining skills and having oppor-

tunities for new experiences. They also reported that pride and ownership of their projects and a sense of being part of a team motivated them to stay involved, and to want to continue to make a difference in their community.

“I’m here because I wanna give others a chance to express their opinions.”

“It’s great. How many teens can say they made an impact in their own city?”

Another motivation for young people to stay engaged was the opportunity to build on the skills they were gaining, such as through involvement in new projects, new skills training or paid employment.

“I was volunteering and then got hired. How good is that!”

“Personally I was heading down the wrong track. (LOVE) changed me internally, and I’m different... Now I’m making a difference helping people.”

Extracurricular occasions (social and/or team building activities) were appreciated by the youth and provided incentives to stay involved as they offered

Example in Action:

Check Your Head have policies which ensure there is at least one youth on their Board of Directors. The youth has equal say in any decisions made.

Example in Action:

LOVE have a scholarship for post secondary education which is offered for the duration of a degree or certificate program (usually four years). This is a highly coveted scholarship and provides an incentive to keep youth engaged and motivated toward a long term goal.

opportunities to bond with peers and adults. Examples of activities included camping trips and a breakfast club as well as youth forums and Open Mic Nights.

“Of all volunteering this is the most fun. It’s laid back, you learn a lot and you’re part of something big.”

Having tangible goals and clearly defined roles and projects also motivated youth to stay engaged. They felt they knew what was required of them and they could articulate what they were doing to benefit local youth and their community.

Challenges of Keeping Youth Engaged

There are a number of challenges to keeping youth engaged. Many youth reported that due to school and other commitments they could not always give as much time as they would like to the projects they were involved in, which could mean that meetings and groups became disjointed as youth missed meetings.

Example in Action:

Vancouver Youth Visions Coalition used their personal experiences to create a play about youth homelessness in their community. They were aiming to use the play to inform the community and policy makers and to engage them in a possible solution.

“They’ve included us in a lot of this project but having an inconsistent group of council members attending meetings means that the council’s input process is not as good as it could be.”

Time and resources for adult support was also identified as a challenge, with many youth engagement initiatives relying on adult volunteers or staff to take on the role in addition to many other duties:

“Because we’re all adults, we have other priorities and can’t always take on more initiatives.”

A number of youth interviewed for the project were engaged in numerous other organizations. Adults reported concern about “over-worked, over-burdened youth” and were concerned that other, often more marginalized or disadvantaged youth were not getting the opportunities to get involved and build skills.

“I see myself as a productive member of society not someone who is growing up to be productive. I am productive now. I hold views. I have lots to contribute now.”

Role of Adult Mentors

It is important that youth feel connected to the adult allies who are guiding and mentoring them. Youth reported that they really benefit when adults create a nurturing environment where the youth feel comfortable making mistakes and learning from them.

“Through my relationship with my mentor I gained a better understanding of who I am.”

“It may be a steep learning curve at first but the majority of time they will rise to the challenge and sometimes exceed your expectations. You need the time and patience and allow them to make mistakes and learn from them.”

The level of involvement of adult support varies across Vancouver. For example, the youth-run Vancouver Youth Visions Coalition only access their staff support if an irresolvable disagreement occurs.

“Staff are there to help if you want it, but they’ll leave you alone if you ask them to.”

Many adults gave their time voluntarily to support youth engagement because they saw it as important and also because providing this support allowed them to build personal relationships of mutual trust and respect with the youth. Adults saw their role as empowering and guiding youth, and providing logistical support to the youth and their projects.

“There is a tough balance to strike between being flexible so youth feel comfortable to speak, but also ensuring they understand that certain things need to be done and time needs to be set aside for.”

“Make sure you have time to give, be open and flexible, have fun and don’t get stressed.”

“[Our role as adult allies is] working to empower youth, taking more time to listen to youth and provide adult support and guidance to youth who did not have adult support at home. Building better relationships with youth as well as being concerned about issues that affect youth.”

Youth appreciated adult allies who were honest and treated them as equals and only used their authority when needed, such as for safety reasons.

“They are like friends but in a leadership role.”

The majority of youth trusted the adults who supported their projects, and reported that the adults

respected and cared about them. Youth saw their adult allies as interested in their wellbeing and in helping them achieve their potential through youth engagement projects.

“We can go to him for anything.”

“We got a lot of support. We could turn to anybody for help.”



Youth Vital Signs:

33% of youth surveyed said improving the relationship between youth and the police should be a priority for Vancouver.

“It is important that they have lots of opportunities to have their voice heard, adequate support and see what they really want to happen happen.”

Example in Action:

The Transit Police operate a youth engagement program called “On-Side” which aims to break down the barriers that exist between police and youth. The officers receive training around youth engagement and developing supportive adult-youth relationships. The program is also designed to be respectful of youths’ apprehension about engaging with police.



Funders' Perspectives

Youth as Decision Makers within Vancouver Funding Agencies

Two funding agencies (The Vancouver School Board and the Vancouver Foundation) engaged youth in decision making roles within their organization. Youth responsibilities varied but both agencies offered youth the opportunity to sit on independent committees and to work alongside adult allies.

One example of how the Vancouver School Board (VSB) engaged youth was through the district student council. Student representatives (aged 16-18) represent their individual school student councils. The district council's responsibilities include governance, budgets, collecting student feedback and philanthropy. Each district student council member is also appointed to a standing committee. This ensures that there is a student voice on decisions that are made at the School Board level, although final decisions regarding budgets and school operations remain within the responsibilities of School Board administrators.

One way that the Vancouver Foundation engages youth in its decision making is through the Youth Philanthropy Council. Members of the council (aged 15-22) are responsible for administering funds for youth led projects in Vancouver. Youth on the council are selected primarily based on their involvement in the community and their personal experience. The council's responsibilities include using their knowledge of youth needs to identify priority funding areas, set funding guidelines, and develop the applications and monitoring systems.

Example in Action:

Students from one school wanted to have a district-wide student forum on sustainability to discuss how VSB could be more eco-friendly. The district student council proposed the Forum idea to the School Board, and it was accepted and successfully instigated.

The council has full independence of their granting program within the Terms of Reference or community agreements that they have established. There is a Board member that attends the council to act as a liaison, and representatives from the council attend Board meetings.

Training, commitment and recognition

Youth involved in both projects receive an orientation and on-going training. Members of the youth philanthropy council sign a Terms of Reference and a Conflict of Interest declaration.

For both VSB and Youth Philanthropy Council, the commitment required is about 10 hours per month for at least a year. Members of the district council also have to attend meetings within their school.

In both organizations, youth are provided with food at meetings, and receive acknowledgement and staff support but do not receive financial compensation for their involvement. Youth also gain valuable public speaking and interpersonal skills as a result of their participation in the councils.

Limitations to engagement

Youth are sometimes frustrated when they want to get involved in decision making that goes beyond their designated responsibilities. For example, VSB students cannot run as trustees, and youth involved in decision making within the Vancouver Foundation would not be consulted in investment policy decisions. Although young people may feel that this limits the full extent of their engagement or participation it can be used as an opportunity for continued dialogue and learning for both youth and adults:

“There’s plenty of room for a cultural shift, either within our organization or others, that recognizes the opportunity to include young people in other kinds of decision making roles.”

As was the case with many youth-service providing agencies, youth involved in the funders’ decision making processes tend to be youth that take on leadership roles in a variety of capacities, and who are engaged in many other community activities. This means that marginalized students are often underrepresented, despite efforts to target their inclusion.

Contributions to the agency

Funders identified many advantages to engaging youth in their decision-making processes. The VSB noted that having student input into developing best practices in teaching was one of the most valued outcomes for them. Other contributions noted by the funders included youths’ energy, intelligence,

knowledge and experience which helped to engage other young people.

Funding Organizations without Youth as Decision Makers

The other funders did not currently involve youth directly in their funding decision-making processes. The most common way that these agencies engaged with young people to inform their practice was through regular or one-off focus groups with youth who received services or funding.

Unlike many other municipalities, the City of Vancouver does not operate a youth council because it is not felt to be the best way to represent and engage young people in the city. It is also felt that it might be tokenistic to ask youth for input into decisions which they could not influence.

“Is it representative to have twelve people representing 80 thousand?”

“[We’re] not asking them to be token, not asking for input on meaningless decisions because it is a City Council decision.”

City staff engage young people in other ways, such as hiring youth through the Youth Outreach Team. In turn, the Youth Outreach Team’s role is to engage young people in their community, including connecting youth to community resources, engaging them in decision-making processes in the City and the community, assisting City departments to be more inclusive of youth and gathering information about the needs of youth to inform best practices on proposed program and policy changes:

“This way...we can also get people [involved] who wouldn’t normally get involved and sit on a committee or council. [We] get diverse participation and build capacity as we do it and the youth can shape the policy before it even makes it to Council.”

Future Plans for Youth Engagement

Several of the funding agencies had plans to increase their youth engagement practices, especially as youth engagement becomes more prominent within the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Funders listed a variety of areas in which they believe engagement of young people could be improved within their agency. These included increased dialogue with young people receiving services and with youth who are most marginalized, involving young people in granting decisions, having mentorship programs, and creating a youth consulting committee within their agency.

Example in Action:

There was extensive youth consultation by the drug policy unit within the City in the development of the Four Pillar drug policy recommendation. Approximately 20 young people were trained as facilitators and held community focus groups to get other young peoples’ input into the drug strategy proposal before it went to Council for approval.

Example in Action:

The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General is creating a ‘youth development strategy’ to guide internal practices as well as to create a guide for funding applicants.

Barriers to Youth Engagement

For many funding agencies, youth engagement is not required in their mandate. The necessary financial and staffing resources are therefore not available that would be required to undertake activities such as creating youth committees, organizing focus groups, or supporting ongoing projects.

Formal policies and practices in place within the funding process often inherently exclude young people. For example, if the federal and provincial government create the criteria for funding projects and programs, the regional level agencies administering these grants can only give youth limited input into the already established process.

Other barriers that were identified included having to adhere to strict timelines which restricted the time for youth consultation, and risk of breaching the confidentiality of youth who received funded services or who were involved in any potential decisions regarding funding.

Youth Engagement when Funding Youth-Serving Organizations

Age range / Definition of youth

Funding agencies had differing age ranges for the youth programs they would fund. The minimum ages ranged from 12 to 15 and the maximum from 18 to 30. One funder had no specific age range and used the criteria of the agency applying for funding.

Development of application criteria

Two agencies had youth input into the development of their grant application criteria. The Vancouver Foundation's Youth Philanthropy Council also acts as an advisory committee within the Foundation and as one of many "peer review" committees providing input into funding priorities and criteria.

Youth engagement in granting decisions

The majority of funders did not assess youth engagement in the projects they fund. One funder is currently developing a set of guiding principles for grantees about youth engagement. The City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Foundation are two funders that do consider the level of youth engagement in grant applications or services that they fund.

The City of Vancouver takes into consideration whether young people were involved in the program development as well as in the grant application. They also consider whether the applicant has included a program evaluation which involves young people.

Example in Action:

The City of Vancouver piloted (but did not continue) a program in which youth were directly involved in granting decisions. This "Get Out" program involved a 'youth friendly' application process for young people to apply for grants. A youth committee reviewed the applications and made recommendations to the City Council who then made the final decision.

The Vancouver Foundation expects to see youth engagement in funding applications where appropriate, most notably in applications to the Youth Philanthropy Council. This includes having young people involved in developing the project as well as in the application process. Members of the Council will interview youth who are involved with a project to identify the level of youth engagement.

"Young people are invited, encouraged to participate in decision-making processes that have an implication for their lives."

Like the service providers, funding agencies wanted to see diversity among youth who are engaged in civic decision-making processes, and spoke of the need for themselves and the agencies they fund to find creative ways to engage marginalized youth.

"[Youth engagement] must be culturally relevant, sensitive, and understand needs to different groups and address barriers to participate that may exist."

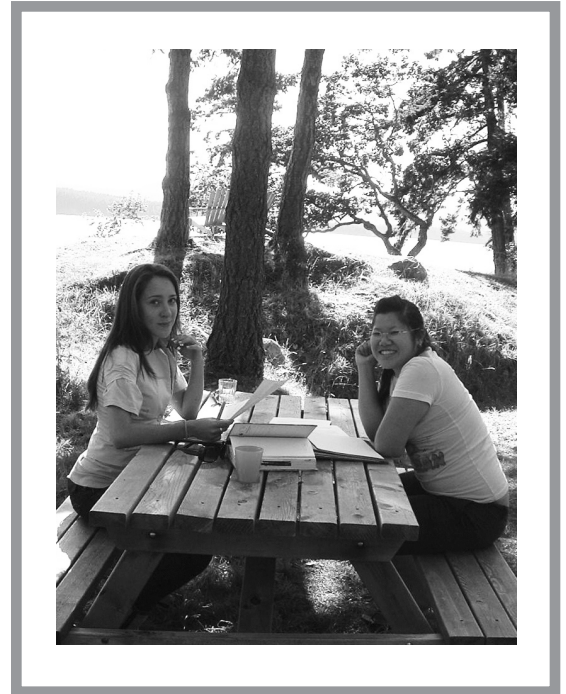
Example in Action:

Although Ministry of Safety and Solicitor General grant applicants are not currently required to demonstrate youth engagement, positive youth development is considered a priority. In a recent review of grant applications, approximately 40% of the applications were focused on positive youth development.

With the exception of the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Foundation, funders reported limited follow up with agencies to see if they were engaging youth once the agencies were funded. One funder reported that although they do not hold agencies to their commitment to engage youth, agencies that demonstrate best practices will be the ones that continue to receive funding.

Youth engagement is of increasing interest to youth-serving funding agencies and is seen as a vital component to youth service providers. There is great enthusiasm within these agencies to further engage young people in the decision-making process as well as develop better tools and opportunities to engage young people in the development and sustainability of services.

Despite this enthusiasm, legislative policy and practice still often restricts the engagement of youth in decisions that affect their lives, most notably in regard to the distribution of resources to and within youth-serving agencies.



Strategies for Successful Youth Engagement

Youths' engagement in decision-making processes is vital to fostering their development and to becoming productive members in the community. There is a need for more opportunities for youth engagement and it is important to ensure that young people are taking part in meaningful activities that are directly linked to decision making. Evaluation of local programs is essential to promote formal youth decision-making and can identify effective strategies that will benefit future youth-engagement initiatives.

These strategies include:

- Establishing clear expectations and tangible goals for youth involved in decision-making processes.
- Recognizing that involvement in a successful youth-led initiative can promote ongoing youth participation.
- Providing learning and skill building opportunities.
- Providing encouragement and motivation to foster positive relationships and increased confidence.
- Creating a safe, non-threatening environment.
- Being flexible around youths' needs, for example with meeting locations that are accessible on public transit and meeting times that are out of school hours.
- Creating opportunities for team building and social activities which can assist with retention.
- Acknowledging that the level of youth responsibility may vary depending on the youth's age and their previous experience.
- Understanding the importance of time spent on preparation, relationship building with other members, and mentorship to youths' likelihood of experiencing success.
- Supporting and training staff in youth engagement practices.
- Offering adult support and mentorship to assist youth to be successfully engaged.
- Ensuring there are strong adult allies within the organization to assist youth work within traditional management structures and overcome organizational barriers.
- Fostering a collaborative relationship between youth and adults based on mutual respect.
- Holding training for staff, management and board to ensure they can put aside prejudicial attitudes about youth and are prepared to share some of the privileges of adult power.
- Reviewing the organizations' policies and practices to ensure inclusive decision making.
- Engaging in regular program evaluation, involving both youth and adults, to assess the effectiveness of the program's strategies and make changes as necessary.
- Documenting strategies and processes of youth engagement on an on-going basis. Successful strategies can then be used with other similar programs to facilitate best practice.
- Creating alumni involvement for youth who 'age out' to continue engaging them in the decision-making process and for other youth and adults to learn from their expertise.

The Basics

Youth Friendly Practices

An organization that is committed to youth engagement will have practices that ensure:

- Youth are given the opportunity to speak
- Youth are given the information they need to develop informed opinions on issues beyond their current experience
- There are opportunities for informal networking between youth
- A support system is in place to facilitate the development of successful adult-youth partnerships
- An orientation system is in place for new youth participants
- Youth voice is considered equally as important as adults in decision making
- The organization seeks feedback from youth on how it could better serve their needs
- Youth are given the opportunity and support to develop employability and other skills and experience
- Adults are trained in positive youth development approaches

Youth Friendly Meetings

Important things to remember when holding youth friendly meetings:

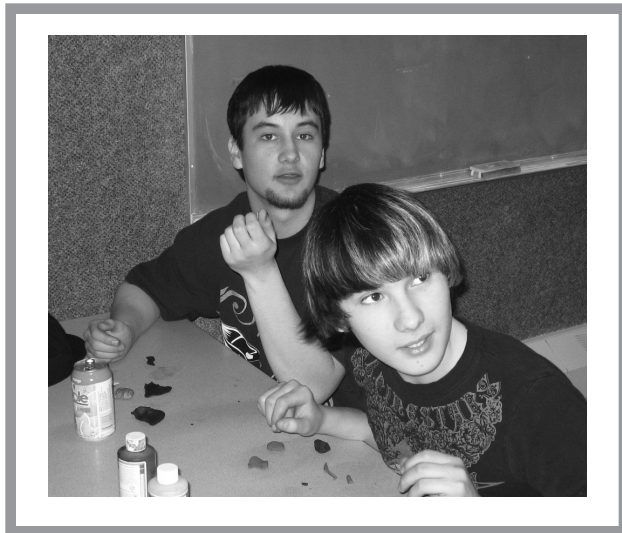
- Be flexible about setting meeting times (most youth are at school during the day)
- Provide orientation materials about the organization, project, meeting procedures and time lines
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms
- Provide short breaks during longer meetings
- Create a supportive environment and always invite more than one youth
- Don't be too formal
- Consider providing food and transportation support (e.g., bus tickets)
- Include youth in the decision-making process
- Provide opportunities for relationship development

Youth Friendly Documents

Key points to producing youth friendly documents:

- Consult with youth for their input in the development of the document
- Keep the writing accessible, dynamic and straightforward
- Use examples and stories to help illustrate the important points
- Use tables and graphs to summarize main points
- Highlight major points and interesting quotes and consider pulling these points out of the document.
- Use clear and descriptive titles and headings to help focus the document
- Provide details of where to get further information
- Make the documents available on-line

Adapted from *Youth Engagement in Decision Making: The Basics*, produced by the Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat



Messages for Funders

Vancouver has traditionally experienced a high ratio of the working-age population in relation to the elderly. However, this situation is changing with the elderly population increasing and the working-age population decreasing. Over time this will result in significant increases in spending on health care and social security and decreases in working-age tax payers. To cope with the fiscal demands of an aging population there will need to be full economic, social and political participation of the city's youth.

Although youth participation in decision-making is beneficial now and vital for the future of Vancouver, it is not always effectively practiced. Effective strategies for youth participation require appropriate funding and include as many young people as possible in core aspects of social structures, institutions and processes. By engaging youth in civic and community decision making, young people are offered important forums for developing the skills they will need in the future, and the community is provided with opportunities to benefit from youths' current contributions.

Based on the findings of this report, it is suggested that funders:

- Identify effective strategies and opportunities for engaging youth within their organizations' decision-making practices. Examples include:
 - Youth Advisory Council/committees to provide input on issues affecting youth and the organization they are advising.
 - Youth Governance Board which has the authority to make decisions and review grants, not just provide input into decisions.
 - One time or annual youth summit where the organization brings together many youth to have broad-reaching and in-depth discussions together.
- Ensure that policies and practices facilitate youth inclusion. For example:
 - Hold meetings at times convenient for youth.
 - Ensure that youth have access to transport to attend meetings and activities, and are provided with transit fare if needed.
 - Ensure recruitment reflects Vancouver's diverse youth population.
 - Have materials available in different languages and in youth-friendly formats.
 - Ensure meetings are at a wheelchair accessible location.
 - Be sensitive to diversity. For example, do not schedule meetings on cultural or religious holidays.
- Ensure adults at all levels within the organization are trained and committed toward youth engagement in their practices.
- Create mechanisms for open and safe communication between youth and adults.
- Make sure that sufficient funding and resources exist to effectively engage youth in decision-making processes. For example, provide a budget for transportation, refreshments, honoraria, training, and staff support hours.
- Provide funding for organizations to strengthen the role of youth in their decision-making processes. For example, fund paid youth staff positions.
- Evaluate the role of young people in local programs applying for funding. For example, were youth involved in planning the proposed project? Were they involved in delivering the project? Are they involved in the evaluation of the project?

Appendix 1: Participating Youth Groups, Service Providers and Funding Agencies

Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC) is an integrated centre for at-risk youth aged 12-24 years. They offer services for housing and employment, as well as counseling, aboriginal youth services, drug and alcohol counseling, mental health counseling and a health clinic. The *Youth Advisory Group* is available to all youth who are involved in the BYRC. It is a volunteer based program with monthly meetings held at the centre. They give the youth opportunities to share their ideas, concerns and visions for the future.

Check Your Head is a youth driven organization located in Vancouver. They educate young people on global issues by looking at the connection between global events and issues and local realities. *Check Your Head* provide education, resources, training and support for youth, who then facilitate workshops, organize events and coordinate projects promoting education and action around issues of globalization and social justice.

City of Vancouver (COV) has a *Youth Outreach Team* whose mission is to provide support, resources and a voice to youth in Vancouver. The youth are involved in various projects such as the COV Youth Award, Youth Politick and the Four Pillars Drug Strategy.

Directions Youth Services Centre provides programs for at-risk and homeless youth. Young people gain access to tools, support and guidance so they can make the next steps to a positive and healthy life an easier transition. The urban youth centre provides training, artistic and recreational programs, as well as hot meals, storage and laundry facilities available to those who need them.

Leave Out ViolencE (LOVE) runs out of the BYRC and is a leading youth-led organization focusing on preventing violence among youth. This youth driven organization gives young adults the tools and skills to empower themselves and other youth to stop violence in their community.

The McCreary Centre Society is a not-for-profit committed to improving the health of youth in BC through research, education and youth engagement projects. The Society has operated a *Youth Advisory Council* since 1995. The Council's role is to educate youth on current health issues, organize and run the Breaking Barriers Building Bridges (B4) Conference as well as facilitate workshops in the community.

Reel Youth is a non-profit media empowered organization that aims to support youth to create and distribute films about their visions, ideas and concerns regarding the world around them. They have a *Youth Advisory Board* who are part of the Advisory Board.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) ran a *Youth Advisory Group Pilot Project* as a part of the 'E' Division Community Policing Services. It was a year-long province-wide mentoring program with clear goals and outcomes.

Surrey Leadership Youth Council (SLYC) is a group of Whalley youth who describe themselves as "youth helping youth speak up and have their voices heard." SLYC is part of a project to engage youth in social and community planning. They have organized two Youth Speak Up! Forums, open-mic nights and many outreach activities for the City. The City of Surrey's

Youth Engagement Coordinator acts as a guide and mentor to the youth.

Transit Police maintain safety and security on public transportation. They work alongside the RCMP and municipal police agencies. They run a program, *On Side Initiative*, for at-risk youth. The purpose is to connect, educate, and break down barriers and perceptions that youth have when they see police in uniform out in the community.

The Vancouver Visions Youth Coalition run out of Ray Cam Community Centre was established in 2004 to ensure the non closure of the *Underage Safe House Project*. The youth continue to fight for other youth and their needs and to campaign for change in their community and city. They provide support and guidance, community awareness and education, facilitate workshops and build bridges with service providers. Their mission is to listen, to speak and to act.

The Vancouver Foundation has been around since 1943 and is one of the largest community organizations in Canada. They help people give back to their community. The *Vital Signs* project was started by members of the *Youth Philanthropy Council* as they realized youth needed more of a say in how their community is run and should have somewhere they can voice their opinions. The *Vital Signs* project was youth led with guidance available from adult mentors. The *Youth Leadership Council*, a diverse group of 18 youth aged between 15-24 years, were in charge of the entire project from conception to final product.

YWCA are a progressive, non-profit organization for women and their families. They strive to build better lives for all through equality, economic independence and educational services. They have two programs, *Welcome to My Life* and *Boys 4 Real*, located in elementary schools where youth facilitators run a seven week program for grade seven students transitioning into high school. They discuss current issues and focus on a community service learning project.

YouthCo AIDS Society is Canada's first youth driven organization focusing on HIV and HepC through peer education, support and youth leadership. The youth volunteers hold a monthly *Speakers Bureau* where they discuss current issues in the media and have an opportunity to chat with other youth in the organization.

Funding Agencies

BC Housing
Child and Youth Mental Health – Vancouver Coastal Health
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
City of Vancouver
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Multiculturalism and Settlement of BC
Residential and Contract Services – RKA Vancouver Coastal Region
Vancouver Foundation
Vancouver School Board

Appendix 2: Sample Questions Asked to Youth, Service Providers and Funders

For Youth:

- What is the process for youth to get involved in the program?
 - a. Are youth provided with training? If so, what kind?
 - b. Is there contract/agreement/rules? If so, what are they and how are they introduced/enforced?
 - c. How many hours per week/month do you commit to? Is this flexible?
 - d. How long do youth stay involved? Is there a set end point? Is there opportunity for youth to stay involved after they leave the program?
- What types of independence do youth have in the program? What does this look like?
 - e. How are adults involved in youth decision-making?
 - f. Who has the final say in decisions made?
- Do youth receive guidance and mentorship from adults when needed? What support is provided?
- When do you meet? Does this work well for you? Why or why not? Is the location of meetings convenient? Why or why not?

For Providers:

- What is the role or responsibility of staff in the program? In decision making?
- Who has the final say in decisions made?
- Are there limitations to youths' involvement? If so, what are they?

For Funding Agencies:

- Please tell us a bit about the funding program you administer. What, if anything, are youth responsible for?
- Are youth involved in the decision-making process?
- What types of independence do youth have in making granting decisions? What does this look like?

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Appendix 4: A Demographic Profile of Youth Ages 15 to 24 Years in Vancouver

Prepared by SPARC BC



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Introduction & Methods

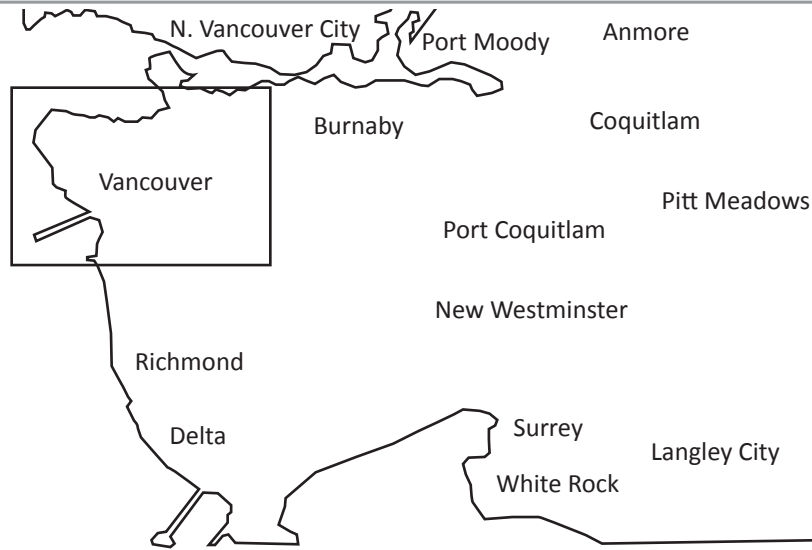
As part of their Youth Engagement Options Study, Vancouver Foundation and the Vancouver Youth Funders Committee are interested in providing options and rationale for service providers and youth funders to engage youth in their work. In order to develop a set of options to help service providers and funders adapt their systems to engage youth in planning and decision-making processes, Vancouver Foundation wanted to have a better understanding of the youth they are trying to engage. As such, they engaged the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and the Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory (RVu) to create a demographic profile of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the City of Vancouver.

This demographic profile provides context around the number of youth in the City, how those numbers are projected to change, sub-populations of the youth population, as well as education, employment, income, housing, health, and transportation factors specific to youth in the City of Vancouver. The report provides the current state and trends, as well as comparisons to other age groups. The report concludes with some key findings of the demographic profile that should be factored in when considering options for youth engagement, as well as some specific implications for youth engagement around accessibility, marketing, and activities.

This demographic profile was developed through consulting secondary data sets produced by organizations such as Statistics Canada, BC Stats, schools boards, the City of Vancouver, and other government sources. The research team sought out the most recent information available about youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the City of Vancouver. Some additional data was collected through the same secondary sources to allow for comparisons over time and to other age groups within the City of Vancouver's population. Maps were obtained through the Canada Social Data Strategy regional atlases.

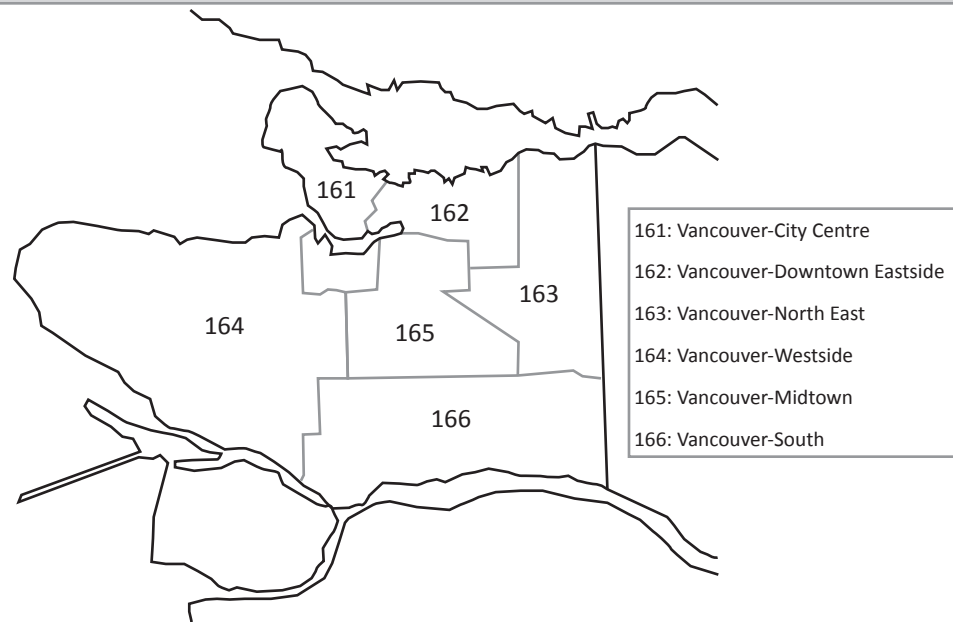
Data collected through different sources can often be collected with varying geographic boundaries. This report relies primarily on the census sub-division boundaries established by Statistics Canada, which corresponds with the City of Vancouver. In some instances, data is collected through the Local Health Area (LHA) boundaries. There are five LHAs within the City of Vancouver's boundaries. Data collected for the LHAs can be aggregated to correspond with the City of Vancouver's boundaries. The following maps show the census sub-division and LHAs for the City of Vancouver.

Census Sub-Division Boundaries for the city of Vancouver



Source: BC Stats, 2009

Local Health Area Boundaries for the City of Vancouver



Source: BC Stats, 2009

Overall Youth Population

While the overall population in the City of Vancouver is aging, it is important to track trends related to changes in the youth population specifically. For example, changes in the numbers, proportion, and movement of youth around the City can inform decision-makers as they plan the education system and where to locate youth related programs and services.

Current State:

In 2007, there were 81,261 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years living in the Vancouver Local Health Area (LHA). This age group represented 13% of the total population, which is similar to the proportion of youth at the provincial level (14%). The youth population in the City of Vancouver was fairly evenly split between males and females. Almost two thirds of the youth population in the City was between the ages of 20 and 24 years. ⁱ

Over half of those between the ages of 20 and 24 years in the Vancouver LHA lived in the West Side LHA (57%). The largest proportion of youth between the ages of 15 and 19 years lived in the South Vancouver LHA (28%). The Downtown Eastside LHA was home to the smallest proportion of Vancouver's youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years, with only 7% of youth living in that LHA. ⁱⁱ

A third of youth living in the City of Vancouver (15 to 24 years of age) were not born in Canada. As of 2006, 27% of these youth had been in the City for less than five years and another third (31%) arrived between 1996 and 2000.

Of the 24,530 immigrant youth in the City, over 80% were from Asia and the Middle East, with 55% coming from China and Hong Kong, 17% coming from the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, 9% coming from Europe and 5% coming from India and South Asia. ⁱⁱⁱ

Youth Population (15-19 and 20-24 years) for Vancouver Aggregate and Vancouver Local Health Areas, 2007

LHA	15-19 Years	20-24 Years
Vancouver Aggregate	30,011	20,250
City Centre	2,297	10,176
Downtown Eastside	1,924	3,629
North East	5,745	8,292
West Side	7,942	11,460
South Vancouver	8,481	10,840

Source: BC Stats Population Projections for Local Health Areas, 2008

With such a large proportion of the population coming from elsewhere around the world, those people that traditionally would have been considered “visible minorities” in Canada, now represent more than half (61%) of the youth population in the City of Vancouver.

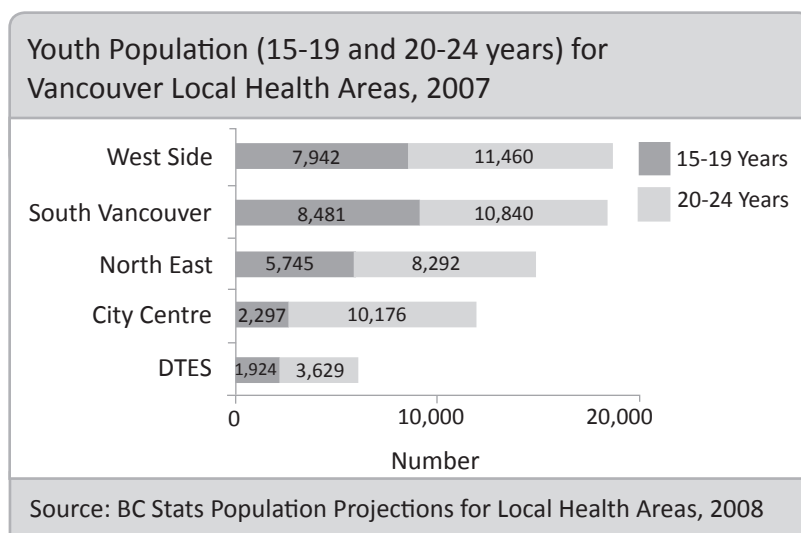
87% of Vancouver youth (15 to 24 yrs) speak only English and 12% are bilingual with knowledge in both English and French. However, for more than a third of youth in the City of Vancouver (38%), neither English nor French are their mother-tongue. 2% of this population see themselves as having two mother tongues: one English, and one other language. Chinese (either Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, etc.) was the mother tongue language for 17% of the City of Vancouver’s youth in 2006. 5% of youth identified Punjabi as their mother tongue.^{iv}

Comparisons to Other Age Groups:

The youth population in the Vancouver LHA made up a relatively small proportion of the total population in 2007. The bulk of the population was between the ages of 25 and 44 years (representing 37% of the City’s population). Children (14 years and younger) represented 12% of the Vancouver LHA’s population, while seniors (65 years and over) represented 9% of the population.^v

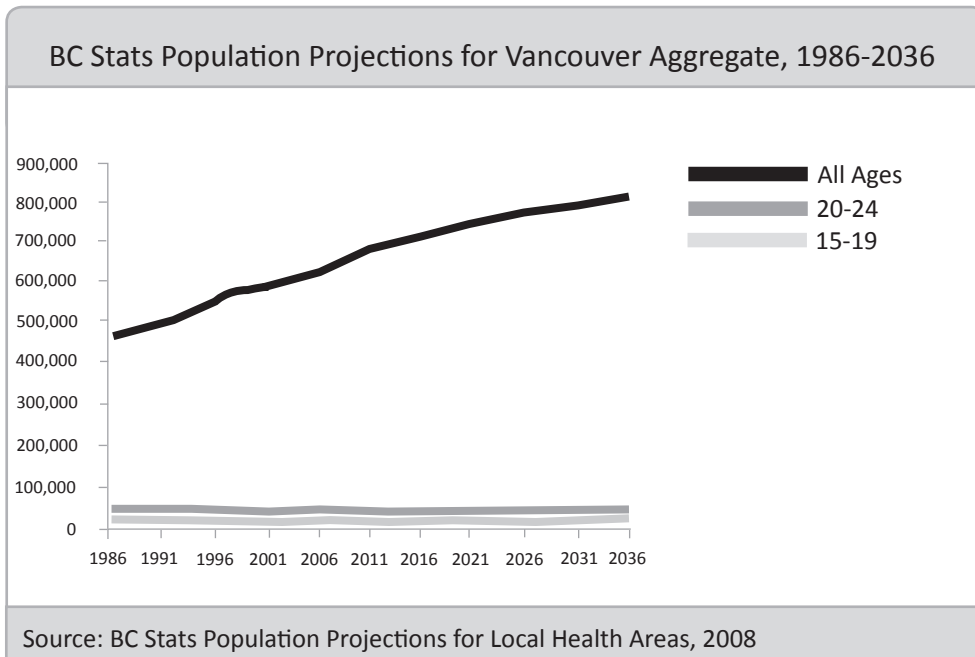
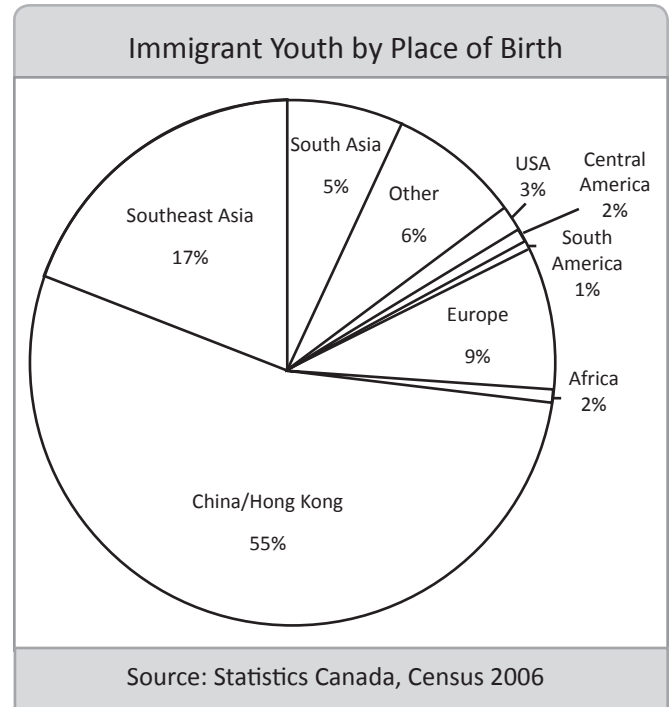
Trends Over Time:

In 1987, there were 71,197 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 in the Vancouver LHA. At that time, youth represented 15% of the total population in the area, which means the proportion of youth in the area has declined in the past 20 years. This decline is on par with the provincial trend. Although the number of



youth has increased by 14% since 1987, this growth rate was much lower than the total population's growth rate, which was 35%.

BC Stats estimates that the youth population will grow to 85,325 by 2036. This means that the trend of youth representing a smaller proportion of the total population in the LHA would continue, as population projections show that in 2036, people between the ages of 15 and 24 years would only represent 11% of the total population in the Vancouver LHA. The growth rate for the total population is projected to be much sharper than for the youth population, as the following graph illustrates.^{vi}



Education

School plays a significant role in the lives of most youth. In the younger ages, youth spend the majority of their days in high schools, with friends from school, and in school-related activities. After high school, different types of training, apprenticeships, college and university help to shape future career paths and employment options. Having access to a variety of good and affordable education options that reflect what youth want to learn is important to youth's quality of life, both today and into the future.

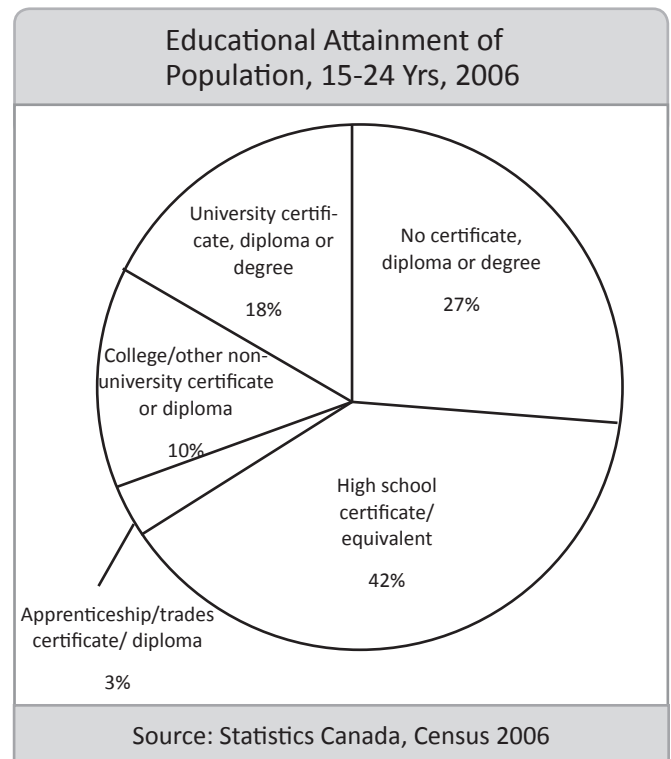
Current State:

As of 2006, 73% of 15 to 24 year olds in the City of Vancouver had some form of educational certificate, degree or diploma. 41% had their high school certificate and 18% had a university certificate, degree or diploma and 13% had a certification from a college or apprenticeship.^{vii}

Between 2005 and 2007, 96% of 18 year olds in Vancouver graduated from high school, as compared to only 77% in the province overall^{viii}. Completion rates of Grade 12 provincial exams were also higher in the City of Vancouver than in BC generally. For example, while 69% of Grade 12s in the City completed their English 12 Provincial exam, the BC average completion rate for the English exam was 62%.^{ix}

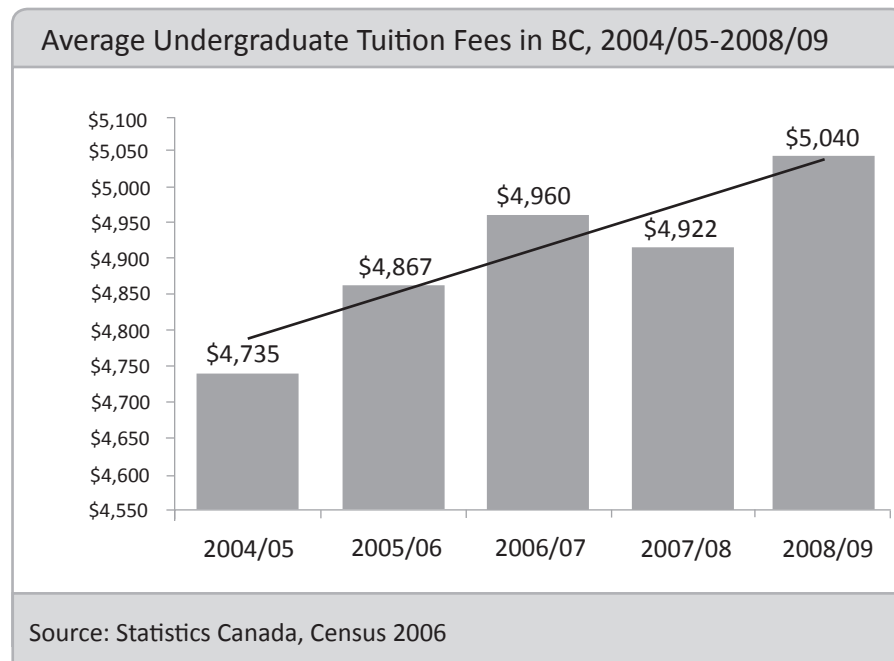
Despite these high graduation rates in the City of Vancouver, student-reported satisfaction with school was alarmingly low.

Asked the question, "**Are you satisfied with what you are learning at school?**", only 39% of respondents in Grade 12 indicated that they were satisfied either "all of the time" or "many times." This represents a marginal improvement over previous years but is well below the provincial average of 48%.^x



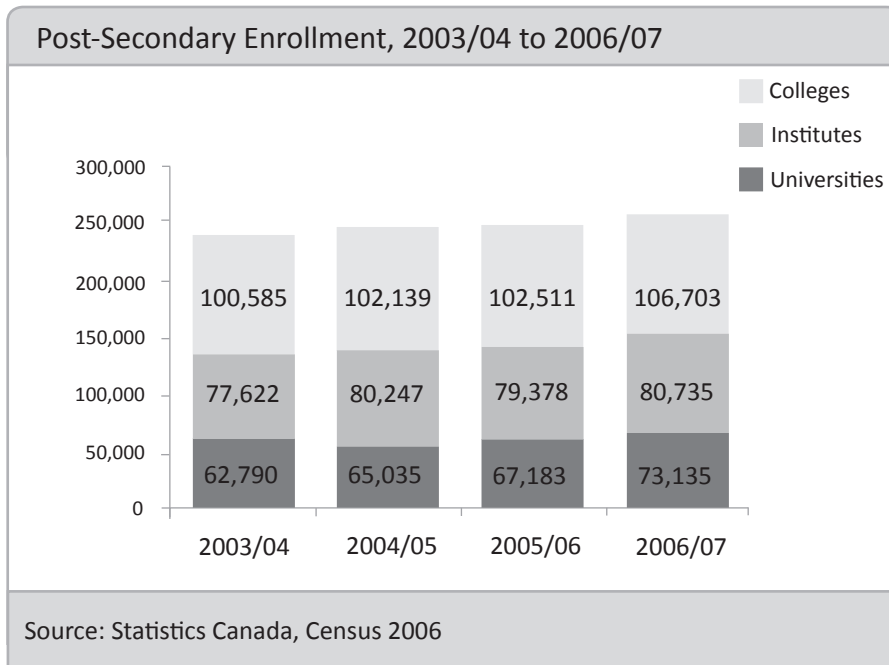
The average undergraduate student in British Columbia is paying \$5,040 in 2008/09. This represents a 6.4% increase since 2004/05 and is 7% higher than the Canadian average of \$4,724.^{xi}

Average compulsory fees for recreation and athletics, student health services, student associations and other services have also risen. As of 2006/07, compulsory fees added an average of \$442 to the costs of attending university in BC. Compulsory fees had increased by 28.2% since 2001/02, however, as of 2006/07 they were well below the national average of \$619 and among the lowest in Canada.^{xii}



Notwithstanding the costs of post-secondary education, enrolments in universities and colleges in Vancouver continue to see steady increases. Between 2003/04 and 2006/07, post secondary enrolments rose by 8%.

As of 2006/07, there were 260,573 students enrolled in universities, colleges and institutes in Vancouver.^{xiii}



Employment

Part-time jobs can allow youth to gain work experience and pay for post-secondary education. Understanding employment trends for youth can help ensure that adequate supports are in place to support youth as they transition into the labour force and allow us to understand how youth spend their time and earn their incomes.

Current State:

In 2006, 57% of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years were participating in the labour market in the City of Vancouver. While the employment rate was 50% for youth, the unemployment rate was 12%. The participation rate was slightly higher for female youth in the City of Vancouver, with 58% participating in the labour force, compared to 55% of male youth. The employment rate for female youth was also slightly higher at 52% compared to 48% for male youth in the City. In 2005, 46% of youth in the labour force in the City of Vancouver reported working mostly full-time. The average worker between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the City of Vancouver worked 32.1 hours in 2005.^{xiv}

Youth in the labour force in the City of Vancouver worked in a variety of occupations in 2006. Approximately half worked in sales and services occupations. Over half of those youth employed in sales and services occupations were female (57%). Almost one in five youth worked in business, finance, and administrative occupations. Only 4% of youth were employed in management occupations.^{xv}

Comparison to Other Age Groups:

Within Metro Vancouver, workers in the 15 to 24 age range in 2008 (December) represented 17% of the total labour force 15 years and older.^{xvi} At the same time, the participation and employment rates for youth in the City of Vancouver was lower than all people in the City over the age of 15 years. This was not surprising given that many youth are still in school, rather than in the labour market. The participation rate for all people over the age of 15 years in the City of Vancouver was 66% in 2006, compared to 57% for youth. The employment rate for all people over the age of 15 years was 62% compared to 50% for youth. The unemployment rate for all people over

Participation, Employment and Unemployment Rate for All Ages and Ages 15-24 Years in the City of Vancouver, 2006

	Participation Rate (%)	Employment Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)
Total (all ages)	66.4	62.4	6.0
Total (15-24 years)	56.9	50.0	12.1
Males (15-24 years)	55.4	48.0	13.2
Females (15-24 years)	58.4	52.0	11.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006

the age of 15 years was half that of the youth population, which indicates that youth participating in the labour force were having a harder time finding employment than the City's total labour force. The average number of weeks worked in 2005 for the total labour force was 42.7 weeks.^{xvii}

While over half of youth in the City of Vancouver's labour force were employed in sales and services occupations, only a quarter of the total labour force in the City was employed in such occupations in 2006. Meanwhile, a larger proportion of the total workforce (11%) was employed in management occupations compared to youth in the labour force.^{xviii}

Trends Over Time:

The employment rate for youth has increased slightly since 2001, when the employment rate for youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the City of Vancouver was 48%. Correspondingly, the unemployment rate also dropped between 2001 and 2006 for youth, coming down from 14%. Back in 1996, the unemployment rate for youth in the City of Vancouver was 16%.^{xix}

Occupations for Youth Aged 15-24 Years in the City of Vancouver, 2006

Occupations	# of Youth in Occupation
Management	1,425
Business, finance, and admin	6,145
Natural and applied science and related occupations	2,285
Health	955
Social science, education, government, and religion	2,255
Arts, culture, recreation, and sport	1,995
Sales and services	17,570
Trades, transportation, and equipment operators and related occupations	3,005
Primary industry	500
Processing, manufacturing and utilities	755
Total (Ages 15-24 years)	36,890

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006

Income

Youth income and poverty rates tell us about the quality of jobs available to youth and the effectiveness of government services and programs in terms of supporting youth as they transition into more independent lifestyles.

Current State:

Over three quarters of youth in the region reported having some income in 2005 (78%). The average income for youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the City of Vancouver in 2005 was \$11,936. The average income for male youth was \$12,594, which was higher than the average of \$11,298 earned by female youth. The average income for youth living independently of their families in the City of Vancouver was slightly higher than for all youth at \$13,568 in 2005.^{xx}

Within Metro Vancouver, average hourly earnings for youth 15 to 24 years was \$13.62 at the end of 2008, up 6% from the same time one year earlier.^{xxi}

Over two thirds of youth in the City of Vancouver earned their income through employment in 2005. The average employment income for youth was \$11,959. For those youth that worked full-time full-year, the average income was much higher at \$25,538. The average income for male youth was almost 20% higher than for female youth.^{xxii}

Some youth in the City of Vancouver have to rely on government benefits as the primary source of income. In September 2007, 2.1% of youth between the ages of 19 and 24 years were receiving income assistance. Approximately half of those youth had been receiving income assistance for over one year. The majority of youth receiving income assistance were not classified as employable – only 0.7% of youth between the ages of 19 and 24 years were receiving income assistance through the “expected to work” category. Another 0.8% of those between the ages of 19 and 24 years received employment insurance in September 2007. In fact, youth represented 7.1% of all people receiving employment insurance benefits.^{xxiii}

With low average income, a large proportion of youth in the City of Vancouver had household incomes that fell below the poverty line. One third of youth between the ages of 18 and 24 years lived in households where the average incomes fell below the after-tax poverty line in 2005. The after-tax poverty rate was higher for female youth at 35%, compared to 33% for male youth. The poverty rate was particularly high for youth between the ages of 15 and 24 living on their own. In 2005, 70% of youth living on their own in the City of Vancouver had incomes below the after-tax poverty line. The prevalence of low income was slightly lower for children under the age of 18

years living in the City of Vancouver in 2005, with 23% living in households where the after-tax household income fell below the poverty line.^{xxiv}

Comparisons to Other Age Groups:

Average income for youth fell far short of the average incomes for the total population. The average income for people of all ages in the City of Vancouver was \$36,605 in 2005. The average income for people of all ages from employment was \$38,303 and it was \$54,316 for those working full-time full-year.^{xxv}

As for government transfers, the proportion of the total population in the City of Vancouver claiming employment insurance benefits was much lower at 0.2% than for the youth population in September 2007. This is likely because the unemployment rate for youth is twice that of the total population in the City of Vancouver. There was a smaller proportion of youth receiving income assistance, however, with 4.5% of those under the age of 65 claiming welfare benefits in September 2007.^{xxvi}

Given that a larger proportion of the total population in the City of Vancouver reported income for 2005 (95%) than of the youth population, it is not surprising that the poverty rate was much lower for the total population. In 2005, the poverty rate for all age groups was 21.4%.^{xxvii}

Trends Over Time:

In 2008, average hourly earnings for youth in Metro Vancouver were 39% less than the average earned by those in the overall labour force. In addition, while hourly wages overall saw an increase of 7% in the region between 2007 and 2008, for youth this increase was 6%.^{xxviii}

The average income for youth increased by 10% between 2000 and 2005 in the City of Vancouver. However, the average income for all people over the age of 15 years increased at a much greater rate of 18%. The average employment income for youth also increased at a slower rate than the average employment rate for all people over the age of 15 years. The average employment income for youth increased by 6% between 2000 and 2005, while the average employment income for the total working population increased by 13%.^{xxix}

Housing

The housing market in BC has become out of reach for many. It is important to track changes in the housing market to ensure that young people have access to safe and affordable housing options, as they transition into living arrangements which are independent of their families.

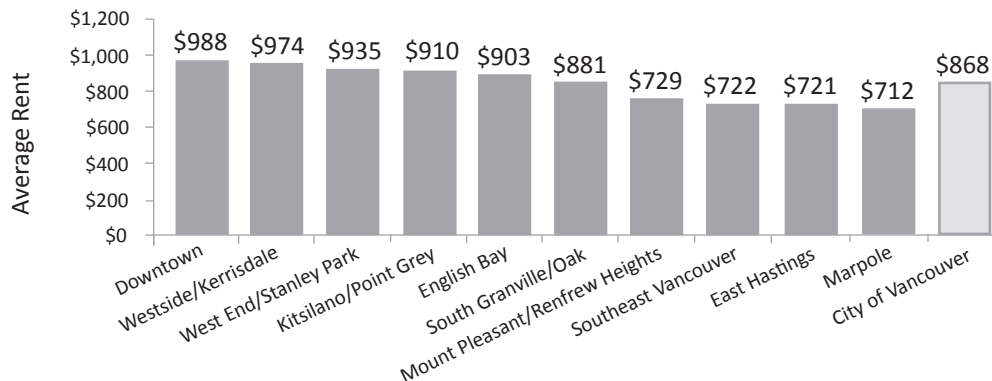
Current State:

In 2006, 87% of people under the age of 25 years who were the primary maintainer of their homes rented their accommodations in the City of Vancouver. The median rent in the City of Vancouver was \$825 a month in 2006 (for all rental types). By comparison, the average monthly rent in BC was \$752. Although there is no data available for the City of Vancouver, two thirds of household maintainers under the age of 25 years in Metro Vancouver were paying more than 30% of their gross income for rent. The average rent

in the City of Vancouver represented 83% of the average income for youth in the City in 2006. After paying for shelter, the average income for youth would leave very little left over for food, tuition, transportation and other expenses. Purchasing a house is even more unattainable for youth in the City. Only 13% of the primary maintainers under the age of 25 years owned their homes in 2006. This is likely because the average cost of an owned dwelling in the City was \$628,682 at that time, a third higher than the provincial average. ^{xxx}

Youth represented a relatively small proportion of those living in the City's Downtown Eastside single room occupancies (SRO) and social housing units. The City of Vancouver reported that 3.5% of those living in the SROs were under the age of 25 years and 2.6% of those in social housing units were under the age of 25 years. ^{xxxi}

Average Rent for a One Bedroom Apartment by Area in the City of Vancouver, October 2006



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report Vancouver and Abbotsford CMAs, 2007

With the high cost of housing and low average income, not all youth in the City of Vancouver can access safe and affordable shelter. In fact, 154 youth under the age of 25 years were identified as homeless in the City of Vancouver during the 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count. Homeless youth represented 12% of the homeless population in the City of Vancouver in 2008. ^{xxxii}

In 2006, there were 48,795 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years living at home with their parents in the City of Vancouver. Youth represented one third of all children living at home with their parents. Almost half (46%) of youth living at home with their parents were between the ages of 20 and 24 years. Those youth between the ages of 20 and 24 living at home with their parents represented 50% of all 20 to

24 year olds in the City of Vancouver in 2006. The fact that half of youth are living at home could suggest that average incomes for youth are not adequate to allow them to begin living independently, especially given the high cost of rent and of owning a home in the City of Vancouver. There were, however, 18,125 youth living on their own in the City of Vancouver in 2006, which represented over one third of the City's youth population. The vast majority of those living on their own were between the ages of 20 and 24 years, although 12% of youth living on their own were between the ages of 15 and 19 years. Less than 10% of youth in the region lived with their spouses or partners or their own children as a lone parent. ^{xxxiii}

Census Family Status by Age Group for the City of Vancouver, 2006

	Total-Census family status	Spouses	Common-law partners	Lone parents	Children in census families	Persons not in census families
Total - Age groups	569,135	202,650	41,340	23,610	148,545	152,985
Under 15 years	73,725	–	–	–	73,025	700
15 to 19 years	29,385	185	270	70	26,600	2,250
20 to 24 years	44,290	1,815	4,050	350	22,195	15,875
25 to 45 years	203,940	80,575	26,265	7,765	22,775	66,540
46 to 49 years	45,030	24,590	3,670	3,565	1,825	11,380
50 to 54 years	40,900	23,120	2,830	3,320	990	10,635
55 to 59 years	36,560	21,195	2,095	2,495	635	10,140
60 to 64 years	24,260	14,315	1,060	1,060	305	7,520
65 years and over	71,045	36,855	1,090	4,975	185	27,945

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006.

Comparisons to Other Age Groups:

Almost half of all primary household maintainers in the City of Vancouver owned their homes in 2006. For those who rent in Metro Vancouver, a smaller proportion of all primary household maintainers were spending more than 30% of their income on rent at 44%, compared to two thirds of those under the age of 25 years.^{xxxiv}

Trends Over Time:

The cost of shelter has increased since 2001, particularly for owned dwellings. In 2001, the average rent in the City of Vancouver was \$796 and the average value of an owned dwelling was \$358,374. The average income for youth in the City of Vancouver increased by 10%, which exceeded the growth rate of the average rent between 2001 and 2006, which was 4%. However, the cost of an owned dwelling increased by 75%.^{xxxv}

Health

Health and wellness are central to people of all ages; however, the issues and concerns that youth face in regards to both their physical health and mental well being are different than those of adults, children and seniors. Different components determine wellbeing for youth. In many cases, youth also face barriers to health services.

Current State:

As of 2005, less than half (46%) of youth aged 12 to 19 rated their own health as being either “very good” or “excellent,” as compared to 57% in the total population (18 years and over). Just two years earlier, 64% of youth rated their health as either “very good” or “excellent.” In both years, self ratings of health were considerably lower among female youth than males. However, self ratings of mental health were more positive. As of 2005, 73% of youth rated their mental health as either “very good” or “excellent,” as compared to only 66% in the broader population. In the case of mental health, female self ratings were higher than those of males. 66% of youth in this age group also indicated that they felt either a somewhat or very strong sense of belonging to their community.^{xxxvi}

Whereas the leading causes of death in the general population relate to diseases such as cancer and heart disease, among youth, 15 to 24 years of age, unintentional injuries were the most common cause of death, responsible for 40% of all deaths in this age group in 2006 in BC. The second most common cause of death

in this age group was suicide, responsible for 15% of all deaths.^{xxxvii}

While rates of death from HIV/AIDS are diminishing, 7% of deaths from HIV in BC were among those under 30 years of age. Only 2% of alcohol-related deaths in the province were among those between the ages of 15 and 24. 6% of deaths considered to be drug induced were among the 14 to 24 population.^{1 xxxviii}

Looking at aspects of a healthy lifestyle, over 70% of youth 12 to 19 years reported to be physically active during their leisure time, as compared to 55% of the general population (2005). However, 18% of youth 18 to 34 years of age in the Vancouver region were overweight in 2005 and less than half (41%) were eating the suggested quantity of fruits and vegetables five or more times per day.^{xxxix}

Results of the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey indicate that 29% of high school students in Greater Vancouver had tried smoking or marijuana; 39% of survey participants had tried binge drinking in the past month. Rates of both marijuana use and binge drinking had increased over time, rising 12 percentage points since 1992 in the case of marijuana and by 10 percentage points in the case of binge drinking.^{xl}

1 *Alcohol and drug-related deaths include deaths where alcohol/drugs were a contributing factor (indirectly related) as well as those directly due to alcohol/drugs.*

This survey probed on risk-taking and found that multiple risk takers, defined as those having tried illegal drugs, skipping school in the past month, having been in a physical fight in the past year, and having seriously considered suicide. Results found that 9% of youth in Greater Vancouver fell into this category of multiple risk takers in 2003. Rates were slightly higher among females than males and considerably higher among older teens (over 17).^{xii}

With respect to accessing health services, the large majority of youth in Vancouver aged 12 to 19 (84%) had a regular medical doctor in 2007 and 77% had seen their doctor in the last year.^{xiii}

Transportation

Youth rely on transportation to get to school, part-time jobs, extra-curricular activities, and to socialize. While some might have access to their own car or to their family car, many rely on the public transportation system to get around.

Current State:

Almost half of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years in the City of Vancouver primarily used public transit to get to school or work in 2006. Over one third used a private automobile as their primary source of transportation, but about one fifth of those using private automobiles carpooled. There was virtually no difference in the proportion of youth using public transportation, depending on whether they had employment income or not.^{xliii}

Comparisons to Other Age Groups:

While many youth relied on public transit, only 29% of the total population in the City of Vancouver used public transit to get to school or work in 2006. Half of the total population was a driver of their own private vehicles and an additional 6% were typically passengers in a car.^{xliiv}

Mode of Transportation for Youth in the City of Vancouver, 2006

	Total Youth	Youth w/o Employment Income	Youth w/ Employment Income
All Modes	36,560	2,820	33,745
Car, truck, van, as driver	10,845	670	10,170
Car, truck, van, as passenger	3,115	390	2,725
Public transit	16,270	1,230	15,040
Walked	5,050	440	4,615
Bicycle	955	80	875
Motorcycle	45	–	45
Taxicab	95	–	95
Other method	185	10	170

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006.

Key Findings/Conclusions

- The youth population is expected to grow at a much slower rate than the total population.
- Youth in the City of Vancouver have relatively high graduation rates and participation in post-secondary education; however, youth in high school are expressing low levels of satisfaction with school, which could have impacts in terms of decisions about continuing on to post-secondary education. It is possible that post-secondary enrolment may decrease if satisfaction with school does not increase. On the other hand, high unemployment rates for youth may force youth to continue on with post-secondary education.
- Tuition fees have risen significantly during the first part of this decade, as have fees for recreational activities. Although post-secondary enrolment continues to increase despite the increases to fees and other associated costs, down the road this could be another potential cause for decreasing enrolment, especially as the cost of living increases in the City.
- Female youth still seem to be experiencing the same disparities in terms of average incomes as older generations, which shows that this is still an issue that needs to be addressed in the community.
- There are very few youth in the City of Vancouver who own their own homes. Many are still living at home with their parents. This suggests that youth appear to be having difficulties transitioning into the housing market because of the high cost of housing. This transition is made even more difficult because the average incomes for youth do not appear to be keeping pace with the increasing cost of housing in the City. Given the high cost of living in the City of Vancouver, youth may choose to leave the city to find more affordable communities.
- Labour force participation is high among youth – 15 to 24 year olds represent 17% of the total labour force. However, youth unemployment rates also remain high. This means that youth may be experiencing barriers as they enter the labour force or in maintaining jobs.
- The average income for youth is quite low, with hourly earnings just 64% of the average earned by those in the overall labour force. This may be because many youth work only part-time while they are pursuing their studies. However, the average income for youth working full-time full-year is still well below the average income for full-time full-year workers of all ages. Part of the low average income for youth can be explained by the fact that youth are typically just starting out in their careers, and therefore will likely be at the lower end of the pay scale. However, the cost of living in the City is very high, especially for shelter costs, which means that youth will have a difficult time making ends meet, which helps to explain the high poverty rates for youth, especially for those living independently of their parents.
- Almost half of youth rely on public transit as their primary mode of transportation to work and school. Just under one third of youth have their own private vehicle to get to school and work.

Accessibility of Youth Engagement Activities:

Youth engagement strategies will have to take into consideration that many youth have very low incomes. On top of low incomes, fees for tuition and recreational activities have increased dramatically, creating additional financial burdens for youth in the City of Vancouver. Youth engagement strategies should take into consideration the fact that youth have limited incomes and high costs. Cost could be a barrier to participation in activities, especially if they are living independently of their parents.

Almost half of youth depend on public transportation as their primary mode of transportation. A youth engagement strategy should ensure that activities are accessible by public transit. Not only should activities be located near public transportation hubs, but the timing of activities should be consistent with public transit schedules.

Transit costs might also have to be figured into the accessibility of youth engagement activities. While many youth have access to bus passes they pay for themselves or the U-pass, some may not and will have to purchase one-time fares or tickets to attend activities. As well, the almost one third of youth with their own private cars will have to incur expenses for gas and parking to attend activities.

Reaching Youth – Marketing Strategies:

There are high concentrations of youth living on the West side of the City of Vancouver. Many of these youth are likely students at UBC. Engaging these youth can be done relatively easily because they will tend to congregate where student congregate, such as at UBC, local colleges or in local coffee shops to study.

Although there are high concentrations of youth on the West side, there are more youth on the East side, likely because the East side has relatively lower shelter costs, which is important for youth, given the low average income for youth, even for those working full-time full-year. With the high cost of purchasing a home, the East side is more affordable for youth trying to transition into the housing market. These youth may be more difficult to engage, as they are more likely spending their time in different ways. They may be traveling long distances to UBC, SFU or some of the local colleges, or they might be already working. In terms of marketing youth engagement opportunities, many youth without employment income rely on public transportation, so advertising and marketing could be done through TransLink. While many youth with employment do still rely on public transportation, a large proportion use cars to get to work, so perhaps marketing via radio would be more effective.

Content:

Given that youth unemployment rates are high, youth might be interested in youth engagement activities that create networking opportunities, which could help youth find the contacts they need to transition into the workforce. They may also be interested in youth engagement activities that would help them build their resume to make them appealing to potential employers, such as including volunteer or skills building activities as part of youth engagement strategies.

A diminishing proportion is self-reporting to be in good health. As well, many youth seem to be engaging in 'risky' behaviours and the leading cause of death among youth is accidental injuries. Perhaps youth engagement strategies could include some health promotion activities to help improve health outcomes for youth. The vast majority of youth claim to be active during their leisure time, so youth engagement strategies could incorporate active programming, which would also serve to improve health outcomes for youth, while allowing for educational opportunities to prevent risky behaviours.

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