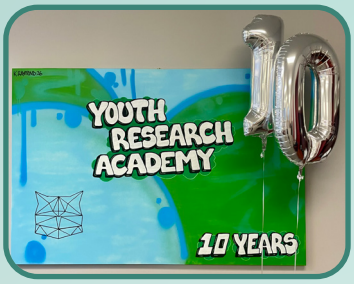
2025–2026 Annual report











YOUTH HEALTH • YOUTH RESEARCH • YOUTH ENGAGEMENT









McCreary
Centre Society

We gratefully acknowledge that the McCreary Centre Society is located on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xwməθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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McCreary's mission statement:

To foster all aspects of youth health and positive development based on the strengths of our research, evaluation, and engagement with youth and communities.



Suzanne Vardy

Chair's report

2026 has been a busy year for the McCreary Centre Society's Board of Directors. Following the successful updates to our Strategic Plan in 2025, the Board turned its focus this year to a comprehensive review and modernization of our Policy and Procedure Manual. The work was focused in three areas:

- **Strategic Alignment:** We ensured that the updated polices support and reflect the 2025 Strategic Plan.
- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:** We intentionally embedded EDI practices and inclusive language throughout the document to ensure it reflects our core values.
- **Best Practices:** We examined polices to make sure that McCreary aligns with and surpasses current sector standards.

The updated manual provides a strong and clear foundation for McCreary Centre Society moving forward.

Next year the Board will turn its focus to celebrating 50 years of McCreary Centre Society! It is an incredible milestone, and we are looking forward to commemorating it and the history of the Society.

The Board would like to extend our deepest thanks and gratitude to all the youth who are part of the Youth Advisory and Action Council (YAC), the Youth Indigenous Research Team (YIRT), the Minister of Health's Youth Advisory Council on Health and Wellness (BC YAC), Youth Health Ambassadors (YHA), and the Youth Research Academy (YRA). Your voices, your commitment, and your energy are the heart and soul of McCreary Centre Society.

Thank you also, to the amazing staff at McCreary who hold space for the youth to share their stories, support them in the telling of their stories, and amplify their words.

I would like to sincerely thank Malak Albadry who has been our YAC representative this past year. Malak, we are grateful for you representing the YAC so well and for all your passion and dedication that you've shared with McCreary.

I am grateful to work alongside a board that has such integrity, commitment, and deep community values.

Thank You!

YAC

Young Indigenous Research Team

bc yac

YOUTH HEALTH AMBASSADORS



Dr. Annie Smith

Executive Director's report

This year has felt like one continuous Wednesday. The 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) feels as far away as Wednesday does from the previous weekend, and it also seems like there is a lot of the work-week left before we get to the excitement of the 2028 survey.

The year has also been a hump day in many other ways with the usual highs and lows combined with some unexpected bumps. Many non-profits struggle to retain staff in the current financial climate and this has been a particularly challenging year for McCreary with a couple of long-term staff moving on to pastures new, as well as much more turnover in other positions than anyone would wish for. Hopefully, we now have a settled team that can grow and learn together. I am grateful to be on this journey with Elizabeth, Colleen, Maya, Evelyn, Jim, Erin, Danielle, Sara, Warren, and Emal, and am so appreciative of all that they bring to the organization.

The issue of staff turnover is not unique to McCreary, and in fact is one of the factors behind the recent decision for TRRUST Collective Impact to cease operating in its current form. Staffing, funding, and capacity challenges along with mandate changes have meant key partners who are vital to the systems change needed to improve outcomes for youth aging out of care have been increasingly unable to participate. A decision was therefore made to move away from a collective impact model. Much of the work of the collective will continue but in a format that is more manageable and sustainable to the partner agencies and young people involved.

TRRUST has achieved a lot for youth aging out of care in Vancouver and there is much to celebrate for everyone who has worked together over the years. I am excited to see how things evolve and what new and innovative ways we will find to continue to work together. I am also excited that for the first time since we moved to our current office location, we have a new tenant downstairs. We were sad to see ***Options for Sexual Health*** close their clinic and move out as a cost saving measure. However, we are delighted to now be sharing space with ***Paws for Hope***, and their furry office residents.

As well as the achievements of TRRUST and Paws for Hope, there have been a lot of other initiatives to celebrate at McCreary this year. These have included the launch of our first ever data dashboard, a new website, and our first BC AHS report focused on First Nations youth health created by our YIRT, among my personal favourites. This year also marked the tenth anniversary of the YRA which felt like a monumental achievement, especially when members of almost every cohort gathered to celebrate and reflect on their time together.

Next year will be another reason to celebrate as McCreary turns 50, so this year might feel like Wednesday but we are already looking forward to what is coming up in a few more sleeps.



Annie presenting Dr. Emily Jenkins with the 2025 Youth Health Award.



Staff & YRA alumni at the 10-year celebration.

"Nothing about us without us":

Our long tradition of youth perspectives guiding and explaining our research continues.



Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc



McCreary Centre Society policy guideline

Access to racial and ethnic data

Rationale

McCreary Centre Society supports the use of its data to understand the needs, strengths, and challenges of youth from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The Society acknowledges that comparisons between racial groups and between ethnic groups can highlight inequities. However, such comparisons can also reinforce harmful stereotypes, ignore protective factors and diversity within groups, and distract from the systemic issues that cause disparities. As a result, the Society has criteria in place for any study which intends to consider race and ethnicity using McCreary data, and applies a decision tree (*see page 2*) to ensure the study meets McCreary's minimum standards.

McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation, and community-based projects.

Founded in 1972, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

Background

The BC government's guide to working with data about racial and ethnic groups cautions that misinterpretation of findings comparing racial and ethnic groups often contributes to 'deficit thinking' about groups who are portrayed as needing additional supports (BC Data Service Division, 2023). A number of studies have found that emphasizing racial or ethnic differences can reinforce stereotypes, encourage 'victim blaming,' exacerbate stigma, distort risk perceptions, ignore protective factors, and reduce support for important policies in groups who are not considered at risk (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2019; Coleley & Awad, 2013; Harell & Lieberman, 2021; Holder & Xiong, 2022; Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2022; Stephens-Dougan, 2022; Charity-Parker et al., 2023; as cited in BC Data Service Division, 2023).

Such perceptions can affect policy and program planning, as well as how racial and ethnic groups are perceived more broadly (BC Data Service Division, 2023). The BC government guide also notes that there is evidence that studies that emphasize differences among groups tend to increase the risk of stereotyping and incorrect attribution of responsibility, while those that illustrate variability within groups tend to decrease these risks (e.g., Harell & Lieberman, 2021; Holder & Xiong, 2022; Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2022; Stephens-Dougan, 2022; as cited in BC Data Service Division, 2023).

In Canada, Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) is viewed as a key component in the development of effective policies, programs, and legislation. It recognizes that everyone has multiple intersecting identity factors that shape their experiences (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age). Applying a GBA Plus lens ensures we move beyond a focus on a single one of these to avoid making incorrect assumptions which can lead to unintended and unequal impacts on particular groups of people (Government of Canada, 2025).

Attributing health and well-being outcomes to race has been used to promote the incorrect assumption that these disparities are due to biological differences, and to ignore the reality that these differences are caused

1

Research Director's report

The commitment to youth engagement and youth perspectives in research and recommendations from the findings isn't new at the McCreary Centre Society; it has been a key principle in our youth health research for more than 40 years. It has shown up over the years in our commitment to engaging research team members from among those with lived and living experience, as youth and across a diversity of identities and experiences. This longstanding principle has helped ensure that the research we do is research that matters to the young people who are participating in the work, and can have an impact in policy, programming, and in inspiring other researchers to see the benefit of this ethical approach to research.

This commitment has shown up in our longstanding YAC, the Next Steps Toolkits to help identify key findings and develop recommended actions for communities, and the funding for Youth Action Grants, all ways our research can be guided by youth perspectives and youth voices. While this has been the way we work for decades, it has increasingly become an expectation in other youth health research, and with policymakers, and McCreary can take some credit for that uptake. For example, in the last few years, the WHO-sponsored Health Behaviour of School Age Children Survey's Canadian team have established a YAC for guiding research projects and engaging communities, among others. We have also focused on ensuring that the research questions, the work done, and how we interpret the results involves those from the specific communities that are the focus.

Increasingly, students completing dissertation and thesis work with McCreary research data, as well as academics who conduct analyses, are also engaging youth and community advisory councils as part of their work, and finding unexpected insights that strengthen their analysis and publications. I have even seen journal reviewers commenting on the benefit of the advisory feedback on the results as a strength of the research!

For our Society, a key research action worth noting this past year was the creation of a public-facing policy document to explain our longstanding practice and internal policy of **"Nothing about us without us,"** specifically as it pertains to research with racial and ethnicity data. This guidance for academics and students who also access our data helps ensure our commitment to youth perspectives and community engagement in research that matters to the community extends not just to our work, but to the work of others who wish to access our data, to ensure those analyses are conducted and reported guided by ethical principles of inclusion.



Dr. Maya Peled

Director of Evaluation's report

This year's AGM theme, **"voices behind the data,"** got me thinking about what that means in the context of our evaluations. Whether we collect qualitative information from focus groups/interviews, quantitative survey data, or/and use another methodology, our goal is to amplify participants' voices. The young people who participate in the evaluations share invaluable feedback about their experiences in the programs we are evaluating. However, we sometimes grapple with how to represent their voices when the number of participants is relatively low, compared to the tens of thousands of students whose voices are represented in each wave of the BC AHS, for example. Challenges in these situations include finding ways to share youth's experiences and feedback while maintaining their anonymity. We also need to recognize that voices may be missing of program participants who choose to not take part in the evaluation. We continue to find ways to address the challenges that sometimes come with carrying out community-based evaluations, and for young people's voices to be heard and acted upon.

In addition to our external evaluations, we carried out an internal evaluation of the 2026 youth research slam. A research slam is a brief, fast-paced research project on a specific topic that each cohort of the YRA hosts as part of their time at McCreary. For this year's research slam, the YRA were joined by the BC YAC. Given the rise of AI use among youth, both the YRA and members of the BC YAC were interested in researching how youth are using AI, and looking at its associations with youth mental health and substance use. Members of the YRA and BC YAC helped to develop a short survey that was shared with youth across the province, and a total of 158 youth completed the survey.

> ***"I learned how to analyze data ... I learned that everybody has a voice and that you can share it by gaining confidence and experience."***
>
> —BC YAC research slam participant

Twelve members of the BC YAC then came together from across BC to learn how to analyze the data. They were supported by three YRA members who guided them in statistical analysis and in creating slides to share the voices behind the data. Through discussions, they also had an opportunity to voice their own reflections and interpretations of the survey results. Evaluation findings showed that all BC YAC members who took part in the research slam reported they had gained skills and knowledge; felt safe and heard; felt the project was engaging; and they had fun taking part. In response to an open-ended survey question about what they had gained through their involvement, they identified gaining skills in data analysis and a greater understanding of the research process, as well as a better understanding of how young people can use their voice to create change. Suggestions from the BC YAC included having more opportunities to discuss the survey findings and to share the results with peers across BC.

Community-based evaluation may come with challenges, but the process and findings can help us to learn how youth's voices may be amplified and acted upon in the programs and activities in which they are involved. We look forward to continuing this learning alongside our community partners in the coming year.

For information about our evaluation services, please contact ***evaluations@mcs.bc.ca***.

Dr. Roger Tonkin Youth Health Award

In 2003, Kathy Powelson joined McCreary founder Dr. Roger Tonkin as the Community Development Coordinator for the McCreary Youth Foundation. When the Foundation folded into the Society, Kathy moved across to work with the Society as well, until moving on to new opportunities after almost six years.

It is therefore fitting that Kathy is the first recipient of McCreary's renamed Dr. Roger Tonkin Youth Health Award. The award aims to honour someone whose values and belief align with the Society and who has made a positive impact on youth health. Kathy was the unanimous choice of the McCreary Board to be this year's winner.



Photo of Kathy at Paws for Hope's new Community Hub



Photo of the 2026 Dr. Roger Tonkin Youth Health Award.

Kathy founded ***Paws for Hope Animal Foundation*** in 2011 after realizing that BC's animal welfare system was only set up to respond to the immediate and urgent needs of animals in crisis. At that time, upstream supports were non-existent and there was little in place that could support the often vulnerable people behind those pets who were being surrendered or apprehended into shelters. Kathy established Paws for Hope with a vision to support existing animal welfare and rescue organizations and to provide non-judgemental, low barrier, accessible programs and services to help fill the gaps for people and their pets.

During her time at McCreary, Kathy often dreamed of founding an animal welfare charity and of locating it underneath the office at McCreary. That dream became a reality when Options for Sexual Health moved out of that space this spring, and Paws for Hope moved in. The organization has already supported many of the low-income young people we work with through their free pet-food pantry, free vet care clinics, and foster program.

The space has been transformed since Paws for Hope moved in and is allowing the organization to accomplish Kathy's vision of providing wraparound service for pet families. This support helps to ensure that low-income pet owners do not have to surrender their pet over vet bills, or because they need to access treatment for themselves or find stable housing.

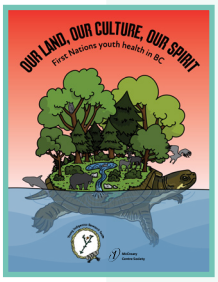
Kathy has also been an active participant in TRRUST's pets passion project. She is currently working to bring youth-serving agencies and human health services into the Paws for Hope space during wellness clinics, so that pet owners can get access to flu vaccines and other supports and services at the same time as their companion animal is seeing the vet.



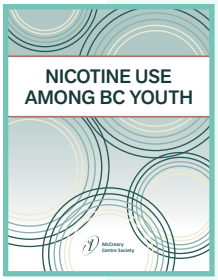
Paws for Hope's new Community Hub.

BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS)

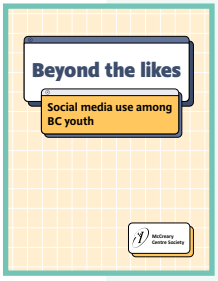
The past year has been focused on creating user-friendly, useable resources from the 2023 BC AHS. We have also spent time engaging young people in projects which address some of the "why" questions that the data provokes, and which seek to support and improve youth health. Below are a few examples of resources created for a community audience over the past year. Find these and more on our website: ***mcs.bc.ca***.



Our land, our culture, our spirit: First Nations youth health in BC was created by McCreary's YIRT and is discussed in more detail on ***page 14***.



Nicotine use among BC youth offers an in-depth look at nicotine use among BC adolescents, with a focus on smoking and vaping. The findings highlight the important role of positive family, peer, and school experiences in reducing the likelihood of youth vaping and smoking. The report was accompanied by five regional infographic posters, and a by-youth-for-youth poster created by members of McCreary's YAC to summarize the key findings from a youth perspective.



Beyond the likes: Social media use among BC youth analyzed the role of social media in the lives of BC youth. Reflections from 570 youth who reviewed the findings were also included. Problematic social media use and the link between social media and lower body satisfaction, poorer sleep, eating disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and reduced life satisfaction were examined. The YAC also created ***a poster*** summarizing findings from the report.



BC AHS fact sheets provide a brief but detailed analysis of a specific topic included on the survey. Over the past year, we have released fact sheets on topics as varied as youth's experiences of ***safety on transit***, the association between ***concussions and mental health challenges***, and youth's experiences of ***self-harm***, ***eating disorders***, ***food insecurity***, and ***sleep***. Fact sheets about several different subpopulations of youth have also been released, including ***international students***, ***youth with caregiving responsibilities***, and ***youth with FASD***.

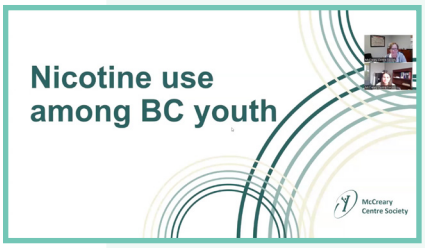


Peer reviewed publications:

BC AHS findings about youth with FASD were published in a peer-reviewed article in *Children and Youth Services Review*. The article focused on understanding challenges and identifying supports to foster healthy development for youth with FASD (***https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108736***).

A group of research partners at UBC published two articles based on their work which used BC AHS data to study school absences (***https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735261455382***) and substance use (***https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2025.2600964***) among youth with disabilities and health conditions.

Our longstanding research partners at UBC's ***Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC)*** published an article about trends and disparities in mental health and suicidality by sexual orientation among East Asian adolescents which appeared in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* (***https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2026.01.004***).



Presentations:

As in previous years, we travelled the province as well as carried out online presentations to share BC AHS report findings. Highlights included presentations to the BC School Centred Mental Health Coalition; Tobacco and Vaping Task Force; First Peoples Education Council; and with youth, school staff, and District Parent Advisory Councils in various school districts.



Data source for non-McCreary publications:

BC AHS data was used by a diverse range of government and community partners to inform and evaluate their work. This included *Taanishi aen tamaashchihooyayhk: Métis Population Health Program—Interim Update, 2026* report released by Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (OPHO); Island Health's Youth Mental Health and Resilience Framework and Status Report; the Provincial Nicotine Reduction Strategy; the Ministry of Health's Strengthening Public Health Initiative (SPHI) Priority Indicators dashboard; and a joint project of the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, Child Health BC, and BCCDC on child and youth health indicators.

Preparations for 2028

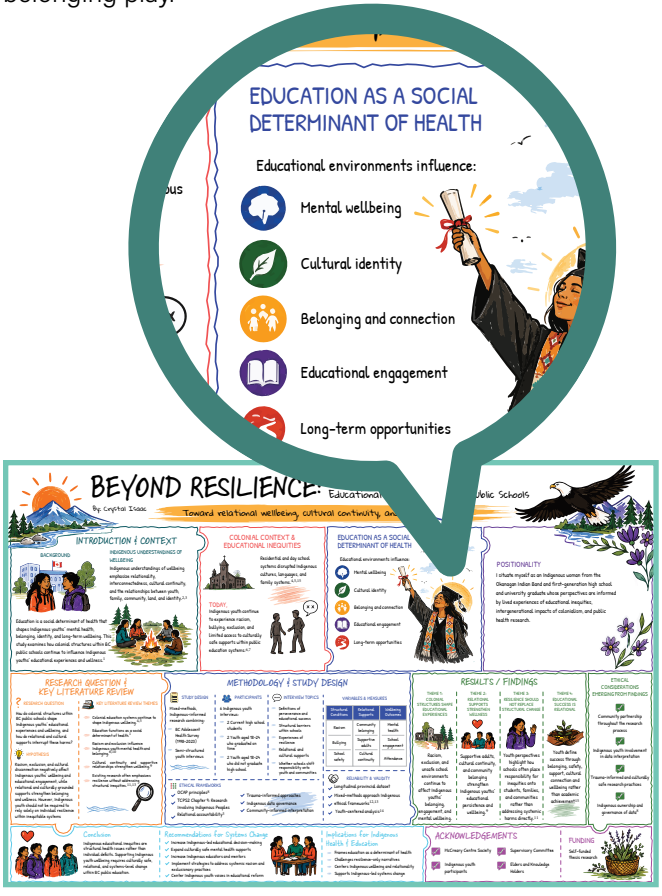
In addition to the work with the 2023 data, we have also started planning for the 2028 survey in earnest. Since early fall, we have been collecting suggestions for items that can be removed from the BC AHS for 2028, as well as new items that should be considered for inclusion. In addition to meeting with subject matter experts, youth, and other stakeholders, we have been collecting question and topic suggestions through an ***online suggestion form***. The suggestions we have received to date have been very much appreciated, and it is great to see so many people interested in youth health and well-being, and wanting to ensure we capture what is important in young people's lives.

Students at McCreary

In addition to the resources that McCreary produces, our partnerships with post-secondary institutions across the province and beyond allow students and other researchers to access the BC AHS and make valuable contributions to our collective knowledge base about youth health and well-being.

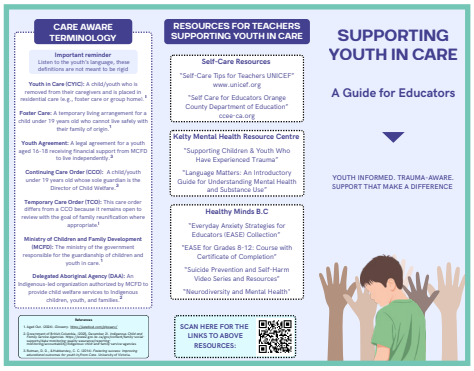
Several masters and doctoral students have been using the 2023 BC AHS data for their thesis and dissertation work. An SFU Psychology Department student is exploring the relationship between self-harm and discrimination among sexual minority youth. Another student from the Psychology Department at UBC Okanagan is looking at how rurality is associated with youth mental health and access to services. As well, a student from the UBC School of Nursing is looking at digital use and mental health among West Asian and North African youth.

A University of Victoria Masters of Public Health student completed their practicum focused on Indigenous youth and the educational barriers they face. They are now working on their thesis which takes a mixed-methods approach to examining Indigenous youth's educational experiences and the role that culture, community, and belonging play.



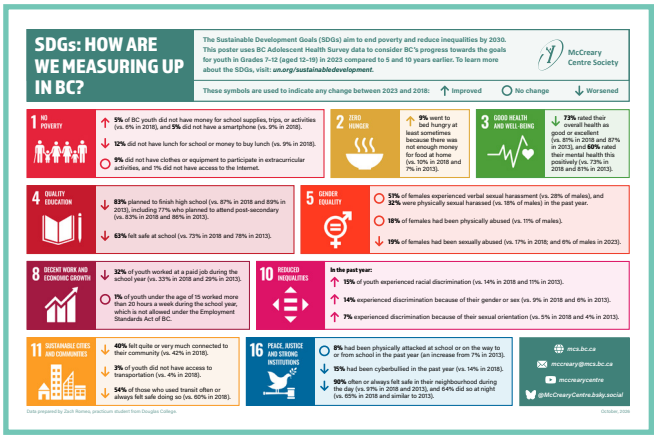
Poster created by a University of Victoria practicum student.

In addition to work with the BC AHS data, McCreary hosted several practicum students to work on other projects this year, including three from Douglas College. A Youth Justice Diploma student supported the YRA in their activities and developed a ***youth-informed resource for high school educators*** which outlined key barriers and supports impacting educational success for youth with care experience. In addition, two students from the Child and Youth Care program explored the topics of self-harm, and nicotine use and mental health, respectively. A University of Victoria student from the Child and Youth Care Program completed their practicum this spring and looked at school connectedness among youth with government care experience.



Youth-informed resource for high school educators on youth with care experience.

Since September we have been working with graduate students from the University of Manitoba, UBC Okanagan, and University of the Fraser Valley through the University of Manitoba's CARe-RTP program. We are excited to work with them over the next two years on a qualitative project which builds on the results of the Youth Transitioning Out of Care Study.



Recently released poster using BC AHS data prepared by a Douglas College practicum student.

Youth workshops

In recent months we have begun offering two free workshops in schools and to community groups which focus on topics identified through the 2023 BC AHS.

From loot boxes to lottery tickets



Behind every statistic in McCreary's ***From loot boxes to lottery tickets*** report is a young person with a different set of experiences and perspectives on gaming and gambling. Now, we're bringing those findings back to youth through an interactive workshop which aims to build and strengthen core competencies, such as critical thinking and decision making.

Over the past year, McCreary has worked alongside diverse youth from across BC to develop a workshop curriculum that uses data from the 2023 BC AHS as a starting point for discussion about gaming and gambling. This workshop looks at where gambling might show up in youth's lives, from video game loot boxes to sports betting; explores youth's beliefs about gaming and gambling; and talks about ways to keep gaming and gambling in a healthy place.



McCreary staff in Prince Rupert for a workshop.

We will be facilitating workshop sessions with youth aged 12–19 throughout the current school year. For more information and to bring this workshop to your group, please visit ***mcs.bc.ca/gaming_gambling_workshop*** or email ***youth@mcs.bc.ca***.

Taking Pride

When we have facilitated conversations with BC youth about what matters most to them, we have often heard how important it is to learn healthy relationship skills as part of sexual health education. However, these conversations haven't always been developed with 2SLGBTQ+ youth in mind. That we also see higher rates of dating violence among sexual minority youth (compared to their straight peers) shows how important it is that education about healthy relationships reflects the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

This year saw the return of the Taking Pride program, but with some key changes to reflect the changing needs of youth in BC. First developed in 2019 in partnership with SARAVYC, Taking Pride is a workshop to help 2SLGBTQ+ youth build healthy relationship skills, including communication, healthy boundaries, conflict resolution, and recognizing the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. The workshop has been co-developed with 2SLGBTQ+ youth in BC and piloted with students in different grades to make sure it reflects the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ young people today.

The Taking Pride curriculum has also been adapted for early stage post-secondary students. This follows requests from young adults who noted they had not received any training in healthy relationships, and felt they would benefit from the opportunity to participate in an age and stage appropriate version of the workshop. The young adult version of Taking Pride can be facilitated either online or in person depending on the needs and preferences of the participants.

For the 2026–2027 school year, we are bringing the Taking Pride workshop to school and community groups across BC. We are looking to facilitate this workshop with any 2SLGBTQ+ youth aged 12–19, either virtually or in person. Training for school staff or other adult supports (e.g., youth workers, nurses) to lead the workshop is also available. For more information, please visit ***mcs.bc.ca/taking_pride*** or email ***youth@mcs.bc.ca***.

2026 VFAC Summerfast 10K

Summerfast is an annual 10km race hosted by the Vancouver Falcons Athletic Club (VFAC). McCreary was named the charitable recipient for the race again this year. McCreary's team of runners included YRA members for the first time, and we are excited to see more young people getting involved!

We are grateful to VFAC for our continued partnership.



McCreary staff at our Summerfast booth.

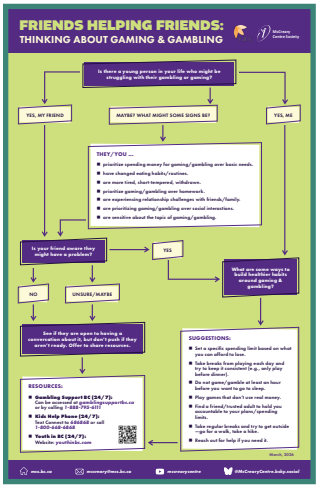
Photo credit: Jonathan Behnke.

Youth Advisory & Action Council (YAC)

McCreary's YAC is a group of Lower Mainland young people aged 15–24 who work on projects to improve youth health, and facilitate the Youth Action Grants (YAGs) program.

It has been a good year for the YAC! We have completed a few by-youth-for-youth resources. We also did some strategic planning in August 2026 and have continued to track progress towards our goals.

We created the latest edition of our 'Friends Helping Friends' poster series titled 'Thinking about Gaming & Gambling.' We extracted points from McCreary's gaming and gambling report (***From loot boxes to lottery tickets***) that we thought were most important to highlight for youth.



We used these points to create an interactive, youth-friendly poster by simplifying the information. We designed this poster as a 'yes' or 'no' flowchart, reading much like a "choose your own adventure" activity. The questions guide youth through different paths, depending on their answers, until they reach a personalized recommendation. We intend for this resource to be set up in schools or community centres for youth and educators to engage with and learn from. We hope that this resource prompts youth to reach out and connect with community resources and partners if they need it. This poster is available in ***English*** and ***French***.

We also created posters summarizing findings from the report on gaming and gambling in ***English*** and ***French***, as well as from reports on ***social media*** and ***nicotine use***.

> ***"To me, the YAC allows youth to have a voice and platform to make positive change for themselves and others."***
>
> —YAC member

We have also been working on a new financial literacy resource for youth. We each focused on a financial literacy topic to research and write a summary on: credit cards, scholarships/student loans, and insurance. Our intention is to turn these sections into a mini-series of youth-friendly posters and guides to financial literacy. Our target audience for this resource is high school youth who we hope it will help prepare for graduation and as they plan their next steps.

Last year, we set the goal to meet in person more often. We restructured our meeting schedules to include one online meeting (every second Wednesday, through Zoom) and one in-person meeting (every last Saturday) per month, amounting to two meetings a month. We have maintained this structure throughout the year, and it has been wonderful working more closely and collaboratively with each other.

It is important to connect regularly as we have also had a lot of turnover this summer in the YAC. We want to thank our departing and graduating YAC members for their years of effort and dedication to the YAC and we wish them the best of luck in their next endeavours! We have also been busy recruiting new youth and we cannot wait to bring them into our YAC family and use their skills to help us reach our goals!

Any youth aged 15–24 who are interested in joining the YAC can email ***youth@mcs.bc.ca***.

Youth Action Grants (YAGs)

The YAGs are facilitated by the YAC and offer up to $750 for youth-led projects that address key findings from the 2023 BC AHS and support youth health and well-being.

The importance of belonging and connectedness was evident in the 2023 survey results and this year the YAC funded several projects which focused on building connections to school, community, and the land. For example, students from Kamloops organized a trip to Ainsworth Hot Springs where youth challenged themselves to not look at their phones during the trip, to socialize with others that they did not know, and increase their sense of connectedness to the land and Indigenous culture.

A group of students in Victoria used their YAG funds to restore their school's community garden. They tidied the area, replanted the garden, and created a cared-for space where students could feel safe, as well as have a space to sit in and de-stress to improve mental health. Another group from the same school created a quiet indoor seating area complete with bean bag chairs, fidget toys, and a small table where youth can go to unwind in a low-stimulation environment.

Fostering mental and physical well-being were also a feature of other YAG funded projects on Vancouver Island. One group created affirmation posters in English and French that they put around their school to promote positive mental wellness. Another group promoted healthy eating and nutrition by providing a large variety of fruit at their school; while others used the funds to install new equipment in their school gym to encourage young people to increase their level of physical activity. On the mainland, students in North Vancouver aimed to improve their health and meet new friends by organizing a drop-in volleyball session during their lunch hour.

Students in Powell River hosted a Wellness Conference for Grade 7 students in their school district. The event focused on mental and physical wellness, healthy relationships, information about substance use, transitioning to high school, and where to access community resources.

A few projects extended beyond school. For example, youth in Richmond organized a free community event during BC Youth Week which included field games, crafts, and a barbecue to encourage youth to try new activities and connect with others. Finally, one YAG-funded project saw youth create a collaborative art project for the Port Moody Youth Pride Festival as a way to create a safer environment for queer youth and their allies. The event was a huge success and the final art project was presented to Port Moody's mayor and council.

It is inspiring to see the creativity and effort that youth across BC put into these projects to help address findings from the BC AHS and improve their communities.



Ainsworth Hot Springs



Community Garden

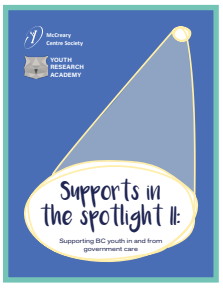


Chill and Grill Event in Richmond

To learn more about the YAGs or to apply, visit ***mcs.bc.ca/youth_action_grants*** or email ***yag@mcs.bc.ca***.

Youth Research Academy (YRA)

McCreary welcomed its tenth YRA cohort at the beginning of September 2025, and this cohort was the first to have a September to May schedule. The tenth cohort took part in so many things in the short time we were with McCreary. We were trained to analyze data using SPSS, put together graphs and charts, and learned about how to summarize findings. This prepared us to complete analysis for a Youth Transitioning Out of Care (YTOC) Study report, as well as to work with BC AHS data to create the ***Supports in the spotlight II*** report.



During our nine months together we also did recruitment for the YTOC study, as well as presentations of the results, attended TRRUST Collective Impact gatherings, had a booth at Connect2Thrive, created infographics, helped rework the Taking Pride curriculum, did a consultation with BC Liquor and Cannabis Regulation Branch, planned and supported a research slam on AI, hosted the YRA's 10-year celebration, facilitated and participated in focus groups, and learned about money and taxes.

One of the first projects the YRA did was for each of us to create a presentation about government care in a different country. This wasn't a public presentation, it was more so to give us experience of gathering information from somewhere we were unfamiliar with, putting a PowerPoint together, and presenting our research. We got to choose any country we wanted and learned how the group home and/or foster care system is different, and that some countries have more advanced systems than others (including ours!). Some of the countries had little to no information available while others had countless articles and reports. This project was a good way to learn about different systems, and spark talks about why they are different, what they do that we don't, how this impacts our view of the Canadian system, and many more questions like that.

The cohort also learned to create a résumé and cover letter, and practice interview skills. We learned how to transfer the skills gained from the YRA on to a résumé. We had to write a cover letter to fit the job requirements of a mock job posting while using the skills learned from McCreary. We then did a mock interview with two McCreary staff to help us prepare and feel better about future job interviews, as well as get feedback on how we could improve.

The cohort ended in May but some of the YRA worked over the summer with one cataloging and organizing McCreary's library and others continuing to work on the YTOC study. They also helped to redesign the McCreary website, created a presentation for the launch of the First Nations report, and contributed to other projects as needed.

10 YEARS
Est. 2016

The tenth YRA cohort marks the ten-year anniversary of McCreary having the YRA program, and this big milestone was something that couldn't go uncelebrated. McCreary invited everyone from each cohort to come and celebrate. The celebration consisted of food, snacks, games, and reminiscing about the ten cohorts and all of their accomplishments. Before the celebration, the McCreary staff and summer students put together a big poster timeline from the first report the YRA did to the most recent report as well as other reports and infographics the YRA has done throughout the years. The celebration was a beautiful event full of nostalgia—it was so nice to see how far the YRA have come.



Artwork created by youth artist from Frog Hollow Neighborhood House and YRA alumni to commemorate 10 years of the YRA.

Learn more about the YRA at ***mcs.bc.ca/youth_research_academy***.

Youth transitioning out of care study (YTOC)

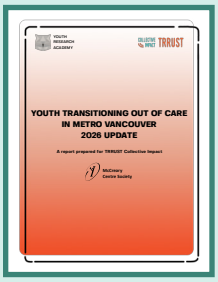
Since 2019, the YRA have been conducting a longitudinal study of BC youth transitioning out of government care and alternatives to care (e.g., on a Youth Agreement), including youth transitioning out of the services of Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies. The goal of the study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of BC youth as they go through the process of transitioning out of care.

This information is used to improve services and supports for youth through their transition. This study is an example of youth-led participatory action research (YPAR), as the YRA are involved in all aspects of the study. They reflect on the findings as well as their own lived experience to propose recommendations for youth transitioning out of care.

The survey asks about youth's background, health, experiences in care, living situations, education, employment, finances, goals, access to services and supports, and strengths and needs. Youth involved in the study have opportunities to provide their unique perspectives on how young people can be better supported during their transition, and share their goals, passions, and the supports they currently need.

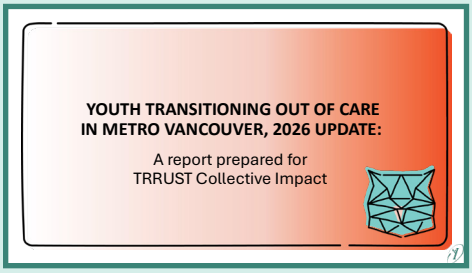
"Don't just cut us off at 19. The support needs to fade out, not fall off a cliff. More help with actual housing, not just a list of websites. Real, practical life-skills stuff before we age out."

"More support with transition workers, help finding jobs, etc. Wrap-around supports for youth aging out such as substance use workers, counsellors, housing workers, employment, etc. (full wrap-around supports depending on the youth and their needs)."



We have recently released the third report on the experiences of youth transitioning out of care in Metro Vancouver, which includes data from 310 youth. This report was prepared by two YIRT members for TRRUST Collective Impact. Findings in the report suggest there has been significant progress in some of the areas that TRRUST has focused on such as education and employment. For example, over the course of the study there has been a decrease in youth leaving high school before graduating and an increase in those attending post-secondary and in receiving a tuition waiver. However, there has also been an increase in youth leaving school during post-secondary, which suggests that more supports are needed during this stage in their educational journey.

The impact of having useful services and helpful adults while still in care on outcomes for youth once they had transitioned out of care was also evident in the data. This finding has been emphasized in presentations the YRA have completed with service providers, and has led to some good discussions about how youth approaching their transition out of care can be better supported, as well as those who have transitioned.





With the school year underway, we have been reaching out to schools and community organizations across BC to invite youth who are nearing their transition out of care to join the study.

Youth interested in participating can contact ***yicstudy@mcs.bc.ca***. For questions about the study, to request copies of any reports, or to schedule a presentation of the recent findings, please email Erin at ***erin@mcs.bc.ca***. For more information about the study, visit ***mcs.bc.ca/youth_transitioning_out_of_care_study***.

Young Indigenous Research Team (YIRT)

The YIRT are Indigenous graduates of the Youth Research Academy who work on projects focused on Indigenous young people's well-being.

Over the past year, the YIRT has continued to grow, collaborate, and contribute to projects that highlight the experiences, perspectives, and well-being of First Nations, Métis, and other Indigenous young people across British Columbia.

One exciting development this year has been welcoming three new graduates from the YRA to the YIRT. Their involvement has brought new perspectives, ideas, and opportunities for collaboration, helping strengthen youth participation in research and community-focused initiatives.

Throughout the year, the team has contributed to several important projects, including working together to produce McCreary's first ever BC AHS report focused on the health of First Nations youth, as well as the development of several mini reports in response to specific requests from school districts. We have appreciated these opportunities to not only work with the BC AHS data but also contribute our perspectives to research and support the sharing of information relevant to First Nations communities.

For the last couple of months, the YIRT have been working on a social media project, capturing the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous youth across the province. The project has given us opportunities to find new ways to share information, connect with young people, and make research more accessible and engaging.

As we look ahead, the YIRT hopes to continue building meaningful opportunities for youth involvement, strengthening collaboration, and ensuring that young people's voices remain an important part of the work being done at McCreary.

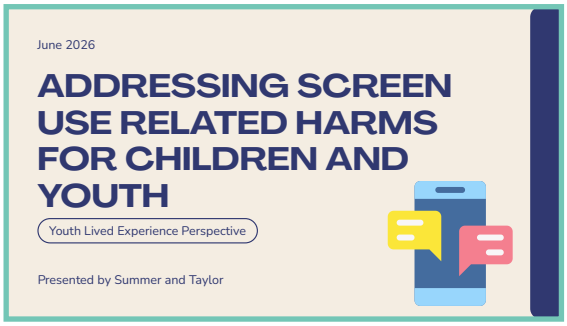


Our land, our culture, our spirit: First Nations youth health in BC
Prepared by the YIRT, this report looks at the health and well-being of First Nations youth in BC, using data from the BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). Results from the 2023 BC AHS show that First Nations youth aged 12–19 continue to face systemic challenges as a result of colonialism. However, results also show they are resilient and with support and connections, particularly to culture, community, and language, can experience more positive health and well-being.

Minister of Health's Youth Advisory Council on Health & Wellness (BC YAC)

When we were thinking about the theme of this year's annual report, **'voices behind the data'**, it wasn't hard to think about what that meant for the BC YAC. Like all of McCreary's youth groups, the purpose of the BC YAC is to make sure youth voices are included in the research and decisions which affect them. Members of the BC YAC provide youth perspectives on topics like vaping, nicotine use, and other important health issues to inform BC Government decisions. Over the past year, the BC YAC had lots of opportunities to lead our own research and projects, and to share our voices on things the data can't always show.

This spring, two BC YAC members presented at the Public Health Association of BC's Best Brains Exchange, to talk about how screen use is impacting youth mental health. In addition to youth, there were multiple different people who shared their perspectives on the topic, including parents and other adults that work with youth. We shared our perspectives on how youth use screens, as well as how youth see other people in their lives use screens. It was a really rewarding experience, and it was interesting to hear so many different voices on the same topic!



Slide from the BC's Best Brains Exchange presentation.

The highlight of every year is our annual Working Weekend, where we all gather at SFU to work together on a project that we're interested in. This year, we were interested in learning more about the impact of AI on youth wellness, including mental health and substance use, so we worked with the YRA to create a survey for youth across BC. We analyzed the findings at our Working Weekend and are now working on resources to share our findings. It was fun to learn different aspects of the research process, like making a survey, making sure it's not repetitive or boring, and analyzing the data we found. After meeting online the rest of the year, one of the best parts of the weekend is finally being able to actually get to hang out and work together in the same room!

The year also brought other opportunities, from presenting the results of last year's BC YAC study on vaping to school district staff, to creating resources to help youth support themselves and others who struggle with vaping. We also had the chance to meet with the Honourable Josie Osborne, BC's Minister of Health, to discuss the impact of being involved in the BC YAC and having our voices heard in government decisions.

Part of being the **'voices behind the data'** is also about making space for new voices to be heard. In August, we celebrated as almost half of the group graduated from high school and from the BC YAC. We're so sad to see them go, but appreciate everything they've brought to the group and wish them luck in their next chapters! This also means we're looking for new members to join the BC YAC! We're inviting any Grade 8 to 12 students in BC with experience of vaping, smoking, or using other substances to join! Being part of the BC YAC means you are part of a team where your voice is heard and used to make positive change.

If you want to learn more or join the BC YAC, please email ***youth@mcs.bc.ca***.

"Sharing and talking and having a space where when I say lots of things, they're actually heard and used to make change ... that's why I'm on the BC YAC."

—BC YAC member





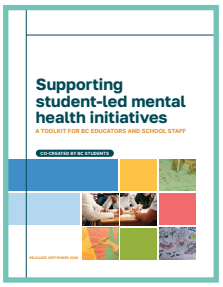
Photos from the BC YAC's Working Weekend.

Youth Health Ambassadors (YHA)

The YHA started five years ago to empower young people across the province to take an active role in gathering youth perspectives on important health topics. As YHA members, we are trained and supported to host conversations with our peers to help inform different youth health programs or policies.

Every year, we work on a different project, but the purpose is always the same: to give youth a chance to share their voice. This year, the Ministry of Education and Child Care asked us to create a toolkit for BC school staff to help students lead mental health-related projects in schools. The point of the toolkit was not about mental health education or support, but about giving students the chance to lead positive change in their schools. For this toolkit, we talked to our peers about what kind of mental health-related projects they would want to lead in their schools, and what kind of help they might need from school staff to make it happen. At the same time, McCreary staff were having similar conversations with BC educators. We talked to 82 Grade 7–12 students, and McCreary staff talked to 18 education partners, from all across the province.

We then worked together with McCreary staff to create the toolkit based on what we'd heard in our conversations. We discussed what content should be in the toolkit, what it should look like, and even researched other toolkits and student engagement activities.

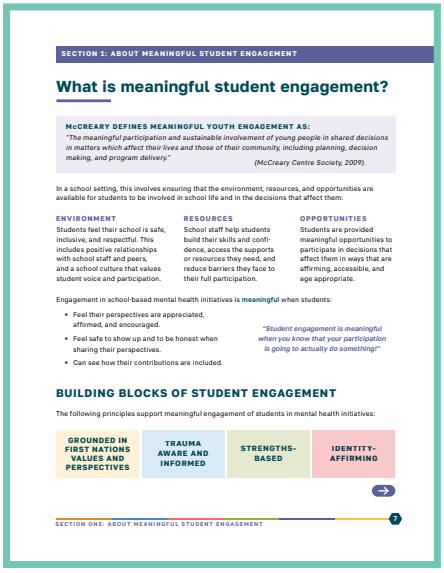


In September, and after months of hard work creating, reviewing, and editing the toolkit, the Ministry of Education and Child Care launched the toolkit on the **erase (expect respect & a safe education)** website! The toolkit is ***now available*** for anyone who wants to support youth to get involved in leading projects in their school or community.

We're so proud of this toolkit and are grateful for being part of a project that can have a lasting impact on students and schools in BC. Our work and this toolkit remind us that it is important to go beyond sharing numbers and data, and find opportunities for the youth reflected in that data to be supported to take action.

In 2021, McCreary started the YHA program to hear from youth about the health issues most important to them to help inform the 2023 BC AHS. This school year, we're returning to our first project, and the YHA team will host conversations to inform the 2028 survey.

Want to get involved in making sure youth have a voice in the 2028 BC AHS?
Email ***youth@mcs.bc.ca*** fto learn more about becoming a Youth Health Ambassador.


SECTION 1: ABOUT MEANINGFUL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

What is meaningful student engagement?

McCREARY DEFINES MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT 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."
(McCreary Centre Society, 2009).

In a school setting, this involves ensuring that the environment, resources, and opportunities are available for students to be involved in school life and in the decisions that affect them:

ENVIRONMENT
Students feel their school is safe, inclusive, and respectful. This includes positive relationships with school staff and peers, and a school culture that values student voice and participation.

RESOURCES
School staff help students build their skills and confidence, access the supports or resources they need, and reduce barriers they face to their full participation.

OPPORTUNITIES
Students are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them in ways that are affirming, accessible, and age appropriate.

Engagement in school-based mental health initiatives is **meaningful** when students:

- Feel their perspectives are appreciated, affirmed, and encouraged.
- Feel safe to show up and to be honest when sharing their perspectives.
- Can see how their contributions are included.

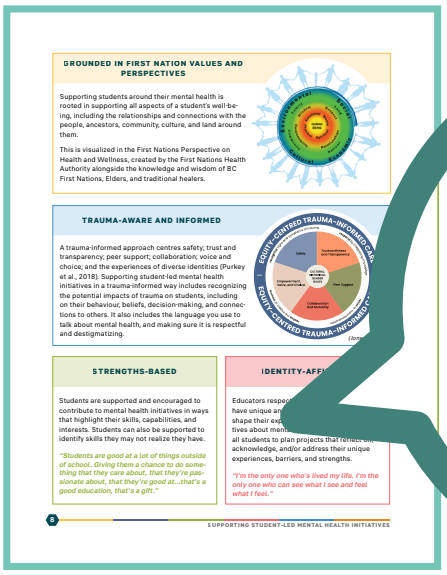
"Student engagement is meaningful when you know that your participation is going to actually do something!"

BUILDING BLOCKS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The following principles support meaningful engagement of students in mental health initiatives:

GROUNDED IN FIRST NATIONS VALUES AND PERSPECTIVES | TRAUMA AWARE AND INFORMED | STRENGTHS-BASED | IDENTITY-AFFIRMING

SECTION ONE: ABOUT MEANINGFUL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT 7


GROUNDED IN FIRST NATION VALUES AND PERSPECTIVES

Supporting students around their mental health is rooted in supporting all aspects of a student's well-being, including the relationships and connections with the people, ancestors, community, culture, and land around them.

This is visualized in the First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness, created by the First Nations Health Authority alongside the knowledge and wisdom of BC First Nations, Elders, and traditional healers.

TRAUMA-AWARE AND INFORMED

A trauma-informed approach centres safety; trust and transparency; peer support; collaboration; voice and choice; and the experiences of diverse identities (Purkey et al., 2018). Supporting student-led mental health initiatives in a trauma-informed way includes recognizing the potential impacts of trauma on students, including on their behaviour, beliefs, decision-making, and connections to others. It also includes the language you use to talk about mental health, and making sure it is respectful and destigmatizing.

STRENGTHS-BASED

Students are supported and encouraged to contribute to mental health initiatives in ways that highlight their skills, capabilities, and interests. Students can also be supported to identify skills they may not realize they have.

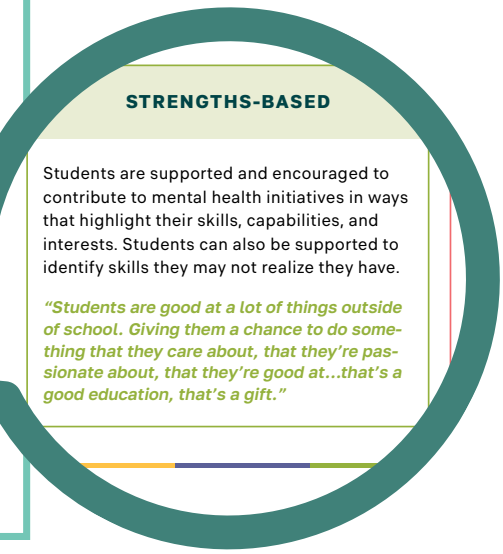
"Students are good at a lot of things outside of school. Giving them a chance to do something that they care about, that they're passionate about, that they're good at…that's a good education, that's a gift."

IDENTITY-AFF

Educators respec… have unique ar… shape their exp… tives about men… al students to plan projects that reflect … acknowledge, and/or address their unique experiences, barriers, and strengths.

"I'm the only one who's lived my life. I'm the only one who can see what I see and feel what I feel."

8 SUPPORTING STUDENT-LED MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES



Examples of pages from the toolkit co-created by the YHA.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT TRRUST



Stills from TRRUST's Pets Passion Project video.



Filming the Pets Passion Project video.

TRRUST Collective Impact

TRRUST has been one of the longest running collective impact initiatives in Canada. However, despite a number of successes which were achieved by working together collaboratively across sectors, it has become increasingly difficult for key stakeholders to play an active role in the collective. This has meant that McCreary, as the backbone agency for TRRUST, has been required to shoulder a greater burden of responsibility.

Extensive consultations have established that many statutory and non-statutory agencies no longer have the capacity to commit to regular meetings or to working together within a collective impact framework. Others have shifted their focus either out of TRRUST's geographical area or are no longer serving youth with care experience in the same way as they previously did.

The collective adjusted to a focus on time-limited achievable projects tackling a single issue. One of these was the pets passion project which brought together animal welfare agencies, youth service providers, and post-secondary partners to develop curriculum for post-secondary students in professions such as nursing, child and youth care, recreation, and youth justice. This year we had two cohorts of nursing students from Vancouver Community College (VCC) complete practicum placements developing and piloting the curriculum. The curriculum was then expanded to include ***videos*** which share the realities of the lived experience of youth aging out of care with pets, alongside academic content.

As this successful project draws to a close, it has been decided that the collective impact model is not sustainable in the current climate, and McCreary can no longer fulfill the increasing demands of being the backbone organization. The work to improve outcomes for youth aging out of care is not complete but will evolve to look different moving forward. For now, the partners are pausing to celebrate the gains of the past 12 years, and to acknowledge all the positive changes that have occurred.

For more information or resources created by TRRUST, please visit ***mcs.bc.ca/trust***.

Treasurer's Report

Anik Muhuri

We know that we are in challenging financial times and that we need to be ever mindful to ensure we continue to diversify our funding sources, and exercise restraint with our expenditure. It is therefore pleasing to be able to report that we closed out the 2026 fiscal year with a modest surplus of $4,624.

Reversing the pattern of recent years, we saw a decrease in income from $1,292,818 to $1,169,383. However, we also saw a corresponding decrease in expenditure from $1,285,943 to $1,164,758.

Revenue came from a variety of sources including government and non-government contracts (which accounted for 85% of the year's income), as well as from rental income and interest. The contracted projects included funding for evaluations, research reports, and youth engagement activities.

Despite a decrease in expenditure on personnel (due to turnover and vacancies), wages and benefits remained our biggest expense, accounting for almost three-quarters (73%) of all expenditure. Compared to the previous fiscal year, we saw an almost 40% increase in spending on repairs and building maintenance, and as the building ages is an area we anticipate some additional large bills in the future.

Once again, MNP who prepared our Financial Statements commented on the quality of our financial record keeping, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank our bookkeeper, Jim Li, for his continued high standards and diligence.

Thank you to our funders, including:

British Columbia
Supported by the Province of British Columbia

UBC

Vancouver CoastalHealth

Income	
Data Access	3,450
Donations	3,496
Interest	53,635
Other Income	23,211
Rental Income	82,200
Report Sales	25
Utility Reimbursed	13,200
Government Contract Revenue	585,839
Other Contract Revenue	404,327
Total Revenue	**1,169,383**

Expenditure	
Accounting	11,839
Amortization	8,186
Bank charges	1,189
Consultants	9,284
Equipment maintenance	55,823
Insurance	24,219
Office and miscellaneous	11,051
Postage and courier	2,040
Printing	6,257
Property taxes	24,950
Salaries and benefits	850,548
Supplies and materials	10,590
Telephone	4,282
Travel	26,230
Utilities	18,164
Website	7,695
Workshop and events	14,825
Youth activities	4,945
Youth Action Grants	52,124
Youth participant expenses	20,517
Total Expenses	**1,164,758**
Excess of Revenue over Expenses	**4,624**



McCreary
Centre Society

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