Youth mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic:
Conversations with young people

Prepared for Vancouver Coastal Health

November 2022

Youth mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic:

Conversations with young people

Prepared for Vancouver Coastal Health

November, 2022

Acknowledgements

Table of contents

Executive summary

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) commissioned McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) to gather youth perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on their mental health and well-being, as well as their suggestions for how young people's well-being could be better supported.

McCreary hired, trained and supported a team of 37 Youth Health Ambassadors who facilitated 26 conversations with 147 of their peers. An additional 10 conversations were facilitated by McCreary staff, engaging an additional 108 youth.

Young people shared the challenges they had experienced during the pandemic, including feeling isolated and disconnected from their friends, school and community as a result of the closure of schools and community resources. They also experienced a sense of loss at missing milestones and events such as graduation and other school, family and community events. Many youth also spoke of developing or exacerbating mental health conditions such as Depression and Anxiety, as well as of more generalized mental health challenges such as feeling lonely, stressed, and fearful. However, there were also some youth who appreciated the time the pandemic gave them to focus on self-care, learn new hobbies, and spend time outdoors.

The opportunity to spend time outdoors and explore the nature in their neighbourhood during the pandemic gave many young people an appreciation for the positive impacts that it can have on mental health. They also gained a desire to learn more about local nature, and spend time in green spaces. However, they also realized the need for more and better lit sidewalks, as well as more bike paths, parks and trails, and other measures which could make nature more accessible.

In addition to their ideas to improve young people's ability to explore and enjoy the natural environment, youth had a range of suggestions about how young people's mental wellness could be fostered across the region. These ranged from the need for increased access to mental health services to support those who are struggling, to more upstream suggestions which focused on ensuring young people had access to safe community spaces and events where they could connect with friends and meet new people.

Some specific suggestions included ideas about how to create youth-friendly spaces within existing indoor and outdoor community resources, as well as for community programs which would foster connectedness, relationship building, and skill development. Programs could include addressing basic needs in a non-stigmatizing way, such as through community meals and access to personal hygiene products at community resources. Programs could also offer youth opportunities to connect and build skills (e.g., through opportunities to engage in civic decision making and community events, as well as to learn employment skills).

Youth also noted the need for multi-generational events, for pets to be welcomed in community spaces, and for all community spaces to be inclusive, diverse, and equitable. For example, the collections available at libraries could reflect the diversity of the community, and changes could be made to architecture that young people view as exclusionary.

Introduction

McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) were commissioned by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health and well-being, and to gather young people's suggestions to improve youth well-being in the region. The initial plan was to host exclusively youth-led (peer to peer) conversations to gather young people's input. However at VCH's request, additional conversations were facilitated by McCreary staff.

Between May and October 2022, 255 youth aged 13–19 participated in one of 36 conversations, including 147 who participated in one of 26 youth-led conversations. Conversations took place in Richmond, Vancouver, West Vancouver, North Vancouver, Sunshine Coast, and Whistler. This report details the results of those conversations, and includes quotes from youth participants throughout.

Youth Health Ambassadors

In April 2022, McCreary trained a diverse group of 37 youth aged 13 to 19 as Youth Health Ambassadors. The Youth Health Ambassadors were supported to facilitate or co-facilitate conversations with their peers about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to gather their suggestions for ways young people's mental health and well-being could be better supported within their communities and across the VCH region.

Youth Health Ambassadors shared the results of the conversations they hosted with McCreary staff, as well as any written materials that were generated. From April to October, the Youth Health Ambassadors also met online at least monthly to connect, share challenges and successes, and to discuss the themes that were emerging in their conversations.

The Youth Health Ambassadors included 46% who identified as a visible minority, 43% who identified as LGBTQ2S+, 8% who were Indigenous, and 8% who identified as having a disability. The majority lived in Vancouver, while others lived in Richmond, the Sunshine Coast, and the Sea to Sky region.

Format of the conversations

The conversations were designed to last around one hour and included three interactive activities. The first activity was a general discussion about the impact of the pandemic on youth health and well-being. The second activity saw youth work alone or in groups to design a community that promoted the health and well-being of its youth, which they shared and discussed with their peers. The final activity supported participants to identify and prioritize actionable ideas to support youth health and wellness.

Limitations

Despite efforts to ensure that Youth Health Ambassadors and conversation participants represented the diversity of the region, information included in this report is not necessarily representative of the experience of all youth across VCH. For example, more females participated in the conversations than male or non-binary youth; and there was no representation from some of the more remote parts of VCH, such as Bella Bella. Also, conversations had to be adapted to best meet the needs of each group, which may have impacted responses to the different activities. For example, some were held online and some were held over two sessions.

66

This report details the results of those conversations, and includes quotes from youth participants throughout.
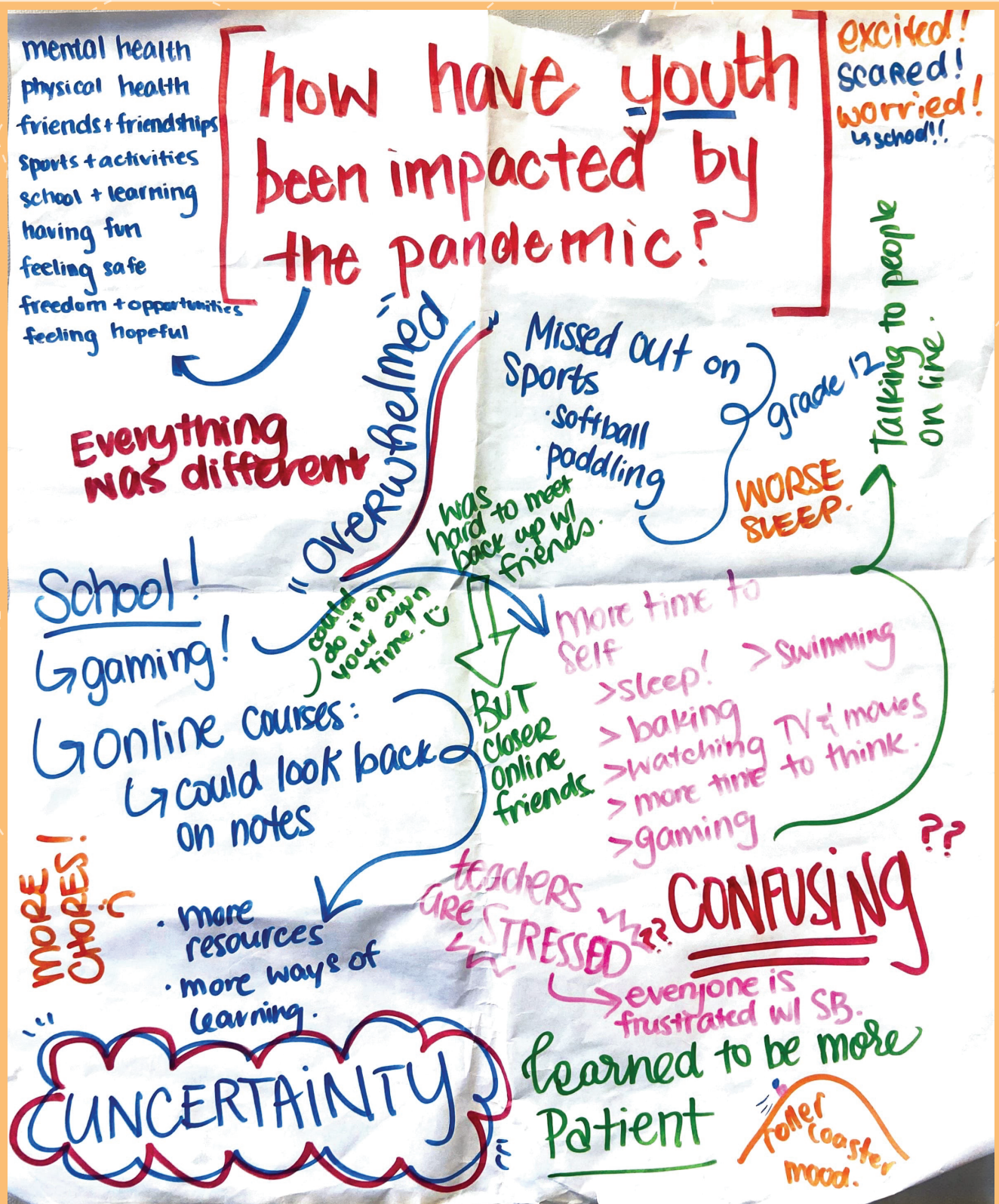
What youth shared about the impacts of the pandemic during a conversation in Vancouver.

Impact of the pandemic on youth health and well-being

Conversation participants were asked to share their perspectives of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and well-being. They spoke of the wide-ranging effects the pandemic had on young people's mental health and physical health, as well as on their relationships and experiences within their family, school and community.

MENTAL HEALTH

Across the region, most conversation participants felt that the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health. Examples included developing or exacerbating a mental health condition, as well as a general deterioration in mental health due to social isolation, loss of activities and opportunities, and the fear of getting sick.

❝

Overall, I think there's been overwhelming evidence of the negative impact on youth's mental health. I can say that I experienced a drastic increase in anxiety during the pandemic and some depression. The social isolation was also rough. It was also way harder to get help in regard to school work and mental health.

❝

I am a social person so it was hard to be alone for most days.

Feelings of depression and anxiety

Across the region, most conversation participants felt that the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health. Examples included developing or exacerbating a mental health condition, as well as a general deterioration in mental health due to social isolation, loss of activities and opportunities, and the fear of getting sick.

❝

I think it made people more depressed and anxious and also made them more isolated.

Became more lazy and had a lack of motivation.

Burnt out of things that used to be enjoyable.

Generalized anxiety symptoms were also reported, such as feeling anxious in social settings, around strangers and in large groups. This was partially due to youth worrying they no longer had the social skills to interact with peers or new people, and partially due to fear of getting sick or getting someone they loved sick.

❝

I've become more germophobic and stressed about getting covid/getting sick.

Feel anxious being around people again.

Public health guidelines were also a common cause of anxiety for youth. For example, some felt anxious when they wore a mask (e.g., they worried they would not be able to breathe) whereas others felt anxious when their family or peers did not comply with public health guidelines. Some youth also expressed discomfort when restrictions were easing, resulting in increased fear or anxiety about getting sick or getting someone else sick.

> *Anxiety with wearing masks if no one else is.*
>
> *I felt trapped in my mask.*
>
> *I liked when we all had to wear a mask. I get anxiety with wearing a mask when no one else is.*

Youth also noted feeling anxious about their future. For some youth, it was because they had missed out on pre-requisite courses and other specific opportunities such as scholarships which would support them moving into post-secondary education. For others, their anxiety was more global and included anxiety about climate change, racial injustice, future employment and housing opportunities, and potential future pandemics.

> *I feel more anxious about the future.*
>
> *I couldn't play softball and now I won't get to play at university. Think my career is over.*
>
> *How am I supposed to care about homework when I feel hopeless for the future?*

Sense of isolation and loneliness

Feelings of isolation and loneliness were common, in part because youth were unable to connect with their friends and peers in person, and also because they felt disconnected from the institutions and community spaces they had accessed prior to the pandemic. For example, they could no longer participate in structured and unstructured activities within their neighbourhood or community.

> *Isolation affects mental health - not being able to talk to anyone in person; being alone most of the time.*
>
> *Disconnection and loneliness.*

Youth also noted feeling anxious about their future. For some youth, it was because they had missed out on pre-requisite courses and other specific opportunities such as scholarships which would support them moving into post-secondary education. For others, their anxiety was more global and included anxiety about climate change, racial injustice, future employment and housing opportunities, and potential future pandemics.

Reduced sense of autonomy

Youth talked of feeling they had lost some of their independence and felt 'trapped' or 'stuck' at home with their family. They were saddened to miss out on activities that brought them pleasure, such as independent travel and having sleepovers with peers.

> *I feel like I missed out on a lot of my youth staying at home. I've felt very lonely for the last 2 years.*
>
> *Hard to have alone time when no one could leave the house.*

Grief and loss

Young people spoke about the grief they had experienced when a loved one (such as a grandparent) became sick or died during the pandemic, as well as of not being able to visit with relatives who were in residential care or were vulnerable to infection.

They also described feeling a sense of grief and loss at missing out on experiences and developmental milestones, such as annual family vacations, school trips, their prom, and work and volunteer opportunities. Some also felt sad that their younger siblings were missing out on experiences they had enjoyed during childhood or early adolescence. A few articulated that they felt they had missed out on a 'normal' adolescence, where they could stress about typical 'age and stage' experiences, such as school grades, dating relationships, and getting their first job.

> "
>
> *Feeling robbed of the usual 'cool' high school experiences but I'm about to graduate.*
>
> *We are having behavioural issues...these issues are a trauma response & misplaced grief & we wish that adults understood that and brought in a grief counsellor.*
>
> *Not getting a proper grade 7 graduation, missing a major milestone.*

> "
>
> *Never able to stop thinking about what we lost and what we won't have.*

What youth shared about the impacts of the pandemic during a conversation in Vancouver.

Challenges accessing mental health services

Youth who had needed to access mental health services had experienced challenges such as long waitlists which they felt had exacerbated or prolonged their mental health challenges. Additionally, those who had accessed services online that had previously been in-person had not found these as helpful as in-person services.

> **Therapy felt less personal since it was online for a while.**
>
> **Couldn't get mental health support that I needed.**
>
> **It was very hard to get help when it was needed (therapy).**

Those who were unfamiliar with mental health services prior to the pandemic spoke of not being able to find information about which services they could access or how to access them.
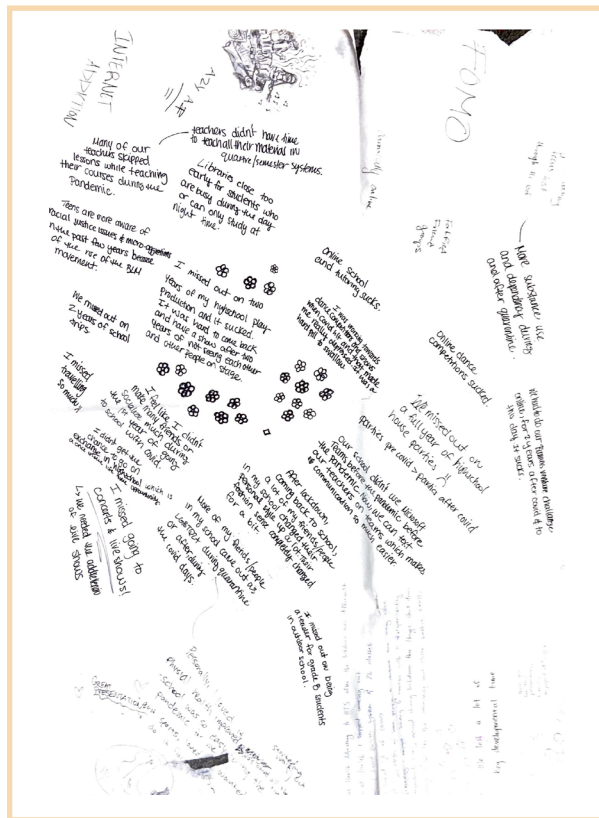
Poster on the impacts of the pandemic on youth, from a conversation in North Vancouver.

Positive impacts

Despite the identified negative impacts of the pandemic, some young people reported improvements in their mental health as a result of many extracurricular activities being cancelled or postponed. They felt they had more time to relax, practice self-care, and explore their identity, interests, and relationships. Some also appreciated the switch to online learning, and the increased flexibility offered by teachers who prioritized student well-being over deadlines.

> **I feel like in general I was able to increase self care over quarantine. I was also more conscious of how I was using my time and became a lot more productive, for some reason.**
>
> **More time for self care. I didn't have to go to soccer or volunteering or anything so I had all this time to focus on eating healthy, exercising, and started meditating.**

Several also commented on taking time to explore their identity and learn new things about themselves. For some, this included using the time they were not spending with peers to explore their gender and sexuality.

> **Being isolated from peers gave me a lot of time to think about my priorities and figure out what I truly like without being judged.**
>
> **Questioning gender and sexuality.**
>
> **GROWTH! Maturity and character development. I finally had a chance to look inward and figure out exactly who I am and how I want to live.**

PHYSICAL HEALTH

As with mental health, most conversation participants felt that the pandemic had impacted their physical health negatively. For example, around half reported a decline in their and their peers' fitness levels and participation in exercise. A few directly attributed this to a lack of available programming, as gyms, pools, and other recreational spaces were closed. Others stated that their worsening mental health had decreased their motivation to exercise.

Physical health got worse, didn't go outside or exercise.

For physical health, I started working out less than I used to because gyms were closed, swimming pools are closed and there were not much volleyball clinics available either.

In addition to a lack of exercise, youth reported challenges with their eating behaviours and sleep hygiene which they attributed to the pandemic. For example, some reported eating more than they felt was healthy because they were at home, bored, and had consistent access to food. Others reported eating less due to a lack of structure in their day, attending fewer social activities where food was provided, being less hungry because they were not active, and because increased stress or anxiety affected their appetite. Similarly, some reported sleeping later because they felt bored, lacked structure and felt they had no reason to get up. Others slept in later because they tried to combat loneliness by staying up late talking with friends online.

Eating habits weren't good since bored a lot.

Sleep schedule was messed up. It became less fixed (sometimes got more sleep, sometimes got less).

When we were under lockdown, I think my physical health got worse because I didn't go out and do exercise and I was constantly at home in proximity to all of our food (since it was so easy to access, I probably ate more compared to pre-lockdown).

Youth who experienced problems with their physical health during the pandemic reported that it had been challenging to access health care when they needed it. This included not being able to have in-person appointments with general healthcare providers such as family doctors and dentists, as well as with specialist health-care providers and allied health professionals such as physiotherapists.

There were less opportunities to go to the doctor and dentist/orthodontist.

It has been harder to access help around the community.

Positive impact

A minority of youth commented they had become more active during the pandemic. These youth had taken up new activities to stay healthy, such as working out at home, running, and biking. A few youth shared that they had exercised and had been active because it helped their mental and physical health, provided a chance to get outdoors, and gave them time to themselves.

Everyone's physical health has decreased a little bit being trapped inside all day but at the same time it has given us more time to cook and try new recipes as well as use online workout videos.

I started running every other day in the pandemic to feel better, which helped me meet more people.

SCHOOL

This project intended to focus on the impact of the pandemic on youth's life outside of school. However, young people felt that the impact they experienced on their schooling due to the pandemic also impacted other areas of their life, such as their general mental health and sense of connection to others.

Some youth enjoyed the switch to online learning early in the pandemic. However, most found the changes they experienced to their schooling to be challenging. These challenges included:

▶ Finding online learning difficult to engage with (particularly as the pandemic wore on).

▶ Experiencing challenges with the online platforms used.

▶ Reduced teacher support to complete the curriculum and navigate transitions.

▶ Reduced interactions between students.

▶ Catching up if they had missed schooling (e.g., due to illness).

▶ Maintaining motivation to complete coursework and homework.

▶ Time management.

▶ Losing connections with friends, peers, and teachers.

▶ Missing out on events and milestones such as prom, graduating, and school trips.

> 66
>
> *I feel like since everything was on Zoom or Teams, and you didn't always have to have your camera and mic on, I started to pay less attention, and was less motivated to learn.*
>
> *Fail to have a connection at school - awkward making friends; uncomfortable/forced to talk.*

Whether or not they had enjoyed online schooling, the transition back to in-person school was a difficult and stressful adjustment for most youth, particularly as a number of public health restrictions remained in place. Many noted struggling to adjust from being able to stay muted online with their camera off to being expected to participate in class. Some also felt that their friends and peers had changed during lockdown so it was difficult to re-establish connections.

> 66
>
> *School was less stressful in the beginning [when it was online], but going back was really hard.*
>
> *Homeschool was really easy for me so going back really affected my ADHD.*
>
> *The school spirit is not the same as it used to be because there are so many restrictions on what we can do.*

> 66
>
> *When school first went online, it felt relieving to no longer need to go in person. However, the feeling wore off after about a month and the isolation became harder to cope with.*

COMMUNITY

Participants felt they had become less connected to their community during the pandemic. Their reasons for feeling disconnected included being less likely to spend time in their community due to fear of catching COVID-19, as well as no longer being familiar with local places, people, and resources due to service closures or reduced accessibility.

❝

Difficulty engaging with friends and community.

Outside became scary because I didn't want to get covid and it gave me anxiety to go outside.

Reduced access to community resources

Reductions and restrictions to transit systems, as well as the closure or reduced operating hours of indoor and outdoor community facilities impacted youth's access to resources such as Wi-Fi and exercise equipment. These restrictions meant that some young people could no longer meet up with friends and family, which increased their social isolation and disconnection. For example, the closing of the mountain resort in Whistler meant youth in that community lost a focal point where they exercised and met their friends to socialize.

❝

Can't go to public spaces and use the public service I don't have at home (printers, gym, and stable Internet).

Since we weren't able to travel anymore, a lot of people weren't able to meet some close family and friends. I think this was a major cause of mental health issues for youth.
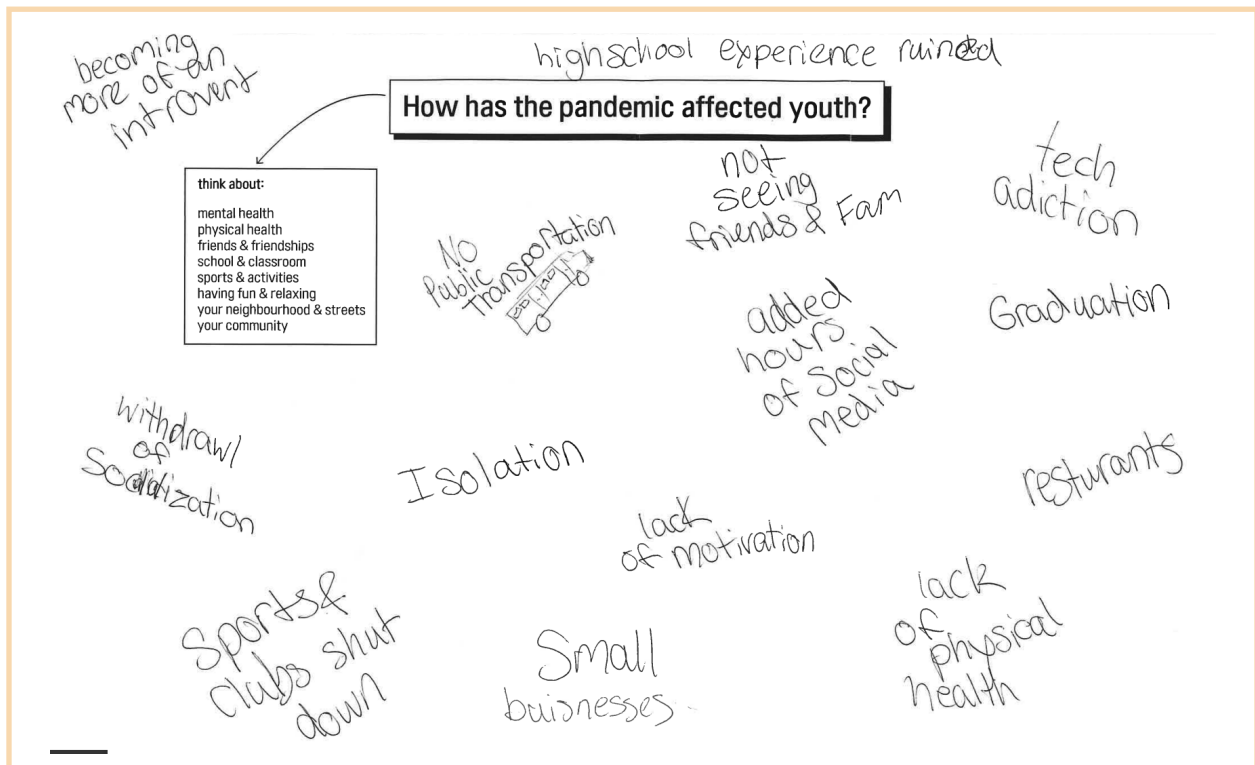
Worksheet on the impacts of the pandemic on youth, from a conversation in Vancouver.

Job opportunities

In a few conversations, youth talked about losing their job during the pandemic and having difficulty finding alternative work. This situation left some worried about their ability to gain valuable work experience and to have an income of their own to spend or save for the future.

"

Job search is harder.

Lost my part-time job due to covid shut-down.

:Padlet

😫 How has COVID affected youth?

MASKS ♡2	anxiety with wearing masks if no one else is ♡1	its easy to talk to people from time to time ♡1
i am more focased in my acedemics rather then sozializing ♡2	it is both hell and heaven ♡4	being able to spend more time with my family ♡2
we had band class and classes like food studies online, which frankly did not work at all. ♡2	I've been biking alot more! ♡2	I look for more genuine connections now, instead of spending time with people who don't align with me ♡2
Burnt out of things that used to be enjoyable ♡2	rise in social distress ♡2	Disconnected from your community and school ♡2
	loss of community within school ♡2	less exercise ♡2
The place we could hang out with friends has reduced ♡4	online learning gave me more freedom with my schedule ♡1	APs were online, which was both good and bad ♡2
less adventurous to go out in the world ♡2	family time has became less valued ♡1	no family visits ♡2
I hate social distance ♡2	harder to connect with people that you do not already know ♡2	disconnection and loneliness ♡1
Masks make skin worse and cause acne ♡4	My sports team feels more disconnected ♡2	I miss going to school without anxiety ♡1
Asian youth and their families targeted in public locations, at school, on the streets ♡3	i cant really talk too people its a little scary ♡1	Cancelled events and activities ♡2
i have more time to explore my interests at home ♡1	Cancelled extracurriculars ♡3	no more musical theatre ♡1

Youth's reflections on how the pandemic has impacted young people, from a conversation in Vancouver.

Extracurricular activities

The sense of grief and loss described earlier was also felt by youth who were no longer able to participate in community sports teams, groups, and clubs as a result of the pandemic. This included feeling saddened that they had lost contact with their teammates and peers, or no longer having things in common with those people.

"

Many activities that were considered fun are more stressful or not allowed because we have to consider things such as masks or social distancing.

I couldn't hang out with my teammates and I think we have more social anxiety. Still feels awkward.

In addition to the impact on their mental health of losing access to extracurriculars, some youth felt they lost skills (such as sports, dance and music skills) without the opportunity to practice. In particular, those competing at an elite level felt that their forced absence from their activity at a critical point in their development may have cost them the opportunity to pursue their craft at the highest level.

"

I used to figure skate like 5-6 times a week but due to covid, that wasn't possible for a few months and so I became less active and less motivated to exercise. Even when I returned to skating, we got less ice time, and due to taking a long break, I was more out of shape so exercising felt more challenging.

"

Sports has been canceled which affect my mental and physical well being.

Intolerance and lack of inclusion

Several youth felt their community had become more divided during the pandemic. They witnessed tensions between people and felt people had become less tolerant and more judgemental of each other, particularly around mask wearing and vaccination status. Youth in most communities also felt that racism had increased, and particularly racism toward Asian communities.

"

People have become more judgemental.

Asian youth and their families targeted in public locations, at school, on the streets.

Participants spoke about witnessing increased mistreatment of vulnerable populations, such as homeless people. They also raised concerns about the inequities they saw in their neighbourhoods, including the increased risk of getting COVID-19 that essential workers experienced, such as low paid grocery store workers.

"

I feel like homeless people are very endangered.

People in poverty → losing jobs → loss of income → lower income neighbourhoods are higher density → more chance of getting covid.

Positive impacts

Some young people shared that, because they were unable to travel or participate in their typical activities during lockdown, they had more opportunities to explore their neighbourhood and wider community. Examples included exploring new streets, parks, and neighbourhoods; visiting local tourist attractions; and spending time in nature.

"

Explored my city more.

I would say that it has brought communities closer together because everyone was going on walks just to get out of the house.

Many youth also spoke about replacing structured activities with more unstructured hobbies and pastimes that they could do on their own, such as art, music, cooking, reading, and gaming. Through these activities, some youth developed social connections, such as online friends made through video games, or found a sense of purpose through new interests and learning new skills.

"

Isolation let me find new passions.

Helped me connect and find more friends through games whom are now a big part of my life.

What some youth shared about the impacts of the pandemic, from a conversation in Vancouver.

Impacts

changes in schooling (combination of virtual and in person)	Less human contact	events and celebrations cancelled (ex. grad)	Harder to communicate with people	Created greater devises in communitys	Needing to adapt to technologie	loss of routine
Events moved online (grad, or different organisations events)	Travel restrictions	Can't get together with family	Loss of motivation	Participation in different activities is/was much lower	More people in the food bank	extracurriculars cancelled
Easier to lose social skills	Back steps in socially anxiety that had been previously made	losing contact with friends	Needing to be able to adapt quickly with all the changes	reduced capacity in buildings	zoom fatigue	

LIFE AT HOME AND ONLINE

Time with family

> **"**
>
> *I think that the pandemic helped me get closer to my family—and more specifically, my parents. They would come home from work, tired, and we wouldn't get much chance to interact, but now that they work from home, we see each other much more often.*

Most youth reported they had spent significantly more time at home and with their immediate family as a result of the pandemic. For some, the additional time with family led to a lack of personal space, tension, and sometimes fighting, whereas for others it was a positive experience.

> **"**
>
> *Staying at home all the time grew annoying on family members.*
>
> *I could not go to places that I like but I enjoyed spending time with family and coming up with new activities.*

Technology use

The increased screen time that youth experienced during the pandemic had offered some a welcomed opportunity to form new relationships online, particularly those who previously had few in person friends. However, most expressed concern that they had become more dependent on technology, screens, social media, and games. They commonly noted experiencing 'Zoom fatigue' and some worried their eyesight was degrading because of their increased screen time.

> **"**
>
> *Most things moved online long term, so I now spend all of my time on screens.*
>
> *I'm addicted to gaming on Roblox and Minecraft educational mode edition because I can't do as much stuff outside.*
>
> *I made quite a lot of IRL [in real life] friends through the Internet.*

Some youth felt that spending more time on social media during lockdown had contributed to lower self-esteem and challenges with their body image. They had then struggled to adapt to in-person interactions when lockdown was lifted because they could not control how they looked and what they shared in the same way they had been able to do online. For some youth, this had contributed to social anxiety and disordered eating.

> **"**
>
> *The denormalization of social media, especially 'image-focused' social media, would improve youth mental health.*

Peer relationships

Most youth reported feeling less connected and less close to their friends, as they experienced fewer opportunities to spend time together and fewer spaces to hang out in. Younger youth in particular also noted that they did not have any way to connect with their friends online, so had lost contact altogether during the pandemic. For many, this contributed to their feelings of isolation and loss, although a few noted that the pandemic allowed them to identify which friendships were strongest, and they were now focused on those relationships.

> *It showed who cares about me and who didn't; who were my friends.*

> *Since I couldn't see my friends constantly, over time we drifted: at first we used to communicate regularly online but eventually that became less and less and since some of my friends still kept in contact with each other more, I felt more isolated from my friend group.*

Nearly all youth felt that being disconnected from their peers had heightened their social anxiety. They felt pressure to rekindle old friendships and develop new ones but felt they had lost some of their social skills and subsequently struggled to make small talk and have conversations.

> *I feel like the pandemic separated everyone from each other for a little while so everyone was kind of awkward and we couldn't remember how to make friends for a little while.*

> *Not being able to interact with people in person damaged relationships.*

Poster on the impacts of the pandemic on youth, from a conversation in North Vancouver.

🥰 What do youth need to support mental wellness?

Just in general more queer support
♡ 2

Having question boxes for student who are afraid to ask questions
♡ 4

Education on consent and SA
♡ 3

Yess!! I completely agree with the life skills comment.
♡ 2

Better support for minority groups in school
♡ 3

home ec / life skills should be mandatory
♡ 2

better support for kids who are leaving highschool and graduating into the "real world'
♡ 4

Training for specific subjects that aren't covered in school.
♡ 3

Less heavy books (my back hurts)
♡ 5

Education for teachers on how to support queer students
♡ 2

making mental health a less taboo subject
♡ 3

plant rooms
♡ 6

Employment opportunities
♡ 3

Free trauma support (hypno therapy, etc)
♡ 3

Youth have more say about what happens in the community.
♡ 3

more anonymous ways to get help
♡ 3

Clubs all the time for everything
♡ 2

having different forms of therapy other than just talking about feelings. like art therapy, music therapy, online therapy etc
♡ 3

More education in schools about different communities (queer, indigenous, etc)
♡ 4

Cat cafe at school!
♡ 2

More support for sa survivors
♡ 4

Comfy test environment (sofa, blankets, soft classical music)
♡ 5

Teachers being taught about mental health
♡ 3

Providing trauma support
♡ 1

minority councillor/therapist
♡ 4

Other methods of dealing with extreme emotions
♡ 2

4 day school weeks and or shorter school days
♡ 2

Snacks provided at school throughout the day
♡ 2

Free school lunches and comfier eating space/lounges at school
♡ 4

instead of telling kids there is a councillor at school, getting the councillor to personally introduce themselves to the students so they feel more welcomed to come talk

Educating kids and teens about systemic oppression
♡ 1

more accessible counselling

Queer councilors or therapists
♡ 3

educating youth about mental health/illness at a

Suggestions from youth for how communities can support mental well-being from a conversation with youth from across the Vancouver Coastal Health region.

Suggestions to improve young people's health and well-being

Having shared the challenges they experienced as a result of the pandemic, youth went on to provide their suggestions for how young people could be better supported moving forward. Many youth saw the pandemic as an opportunity to 'build back better' to support young people's mental well-being. They felt that efforts should be made to create equitable, inclusive communities free from violence and discrimination which incorporated youth-friendly, welcoming, and safe spaces. Some saw the pandemic as an opportunity to make widespread changes to services and supports for young people, whereas others focused on smaller more easily implementable ideas.

> *My ideal community is inclusive and has no discrimination. We need to eliminate racism, homophobia, sexism, etc.*

> *Equality for all, affordable life style, free post secondary.*

ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

A few youth noted that the pandemic had highlighted disparities within their communities, especially for youth and families unable to meet their basic needs, such as having access to food, healthcare, healthcare products, and the Internet. They felt that these disparities needed to be addressed within their community for young people to be able to thrive and feel like they belonged.

Food security

Many youth wanted to see an increase in the meals and snacks available to young people through their school and through community programs. They emphasized that these food programs should be free or low cost, provide healthy options, and be available to all students. Offering universal access to these food programs would not only reduce the stigma young people experienced when they accessed the program but would also bring people together to share a meal and create a sense of community.

> *Free healthy breakfast & lunch for kids (nutritious).*

> *Without food we can't learn or do sports.*

Some youth wanted to expand the role of farmers markets within communities to provide nutritious food for vulnerable populations and those without transportation. They felt that small pop-up farmers markets throughout the community would increase the physical accessibility of locally grown and produced food. Farmers markets could also provide a low barrier opportunity for youth to sell products they grow or make. They felt that youth programs could be developed which taught them how to produce goods for these markets, and supported them to obtain any needed permit or certification.

Poster from a conversation in Vancouver, where participants designed communities that support mental health and well-being for young people.

Access to hygiene and healthcare products

A few youth participants noted that access to hygiene products, particularly menstrual products, had been challenging during the pandemic. Many of the spaces where they usually accessed hygiene products, such as some community centres, had been closed or these services were unavailable. Youth recommended ensuring menstrual products were free and accessible in school and community washrooms (including libraries and community centres) for anyone who needed them.

> *Pads and tampons are a public health issue. They should be free everywhere.*

> *Menstrual products in all bathrooms regardless of gender.*

Access to the Internet

For many youth, the pandemic highlighted the digital divide present in their schools and communities. They felt that access to the Internet and Wi-Fi should be available to all young people across the region. They saw Internet access as vital to supporting young people's health and well-being, especially for those needing to access health care and counselling online. Youth who did not have data on their phones noted they needed access to community Wi-Fi to develop and maintain social connections, find information, and increase their personal safety.

> *Widespread Internet access.*

Access to needed mental health supports

Across all groups, youth noted needing improved access to appropriate mental health support when, where, and how they need it. Most discussed the need to take an upstream approach, as well as to provide supports to those who struggle. Their specific suggestions included:

▶ Provide young people with opportunities to have conversations about mental health within their home, school and community, as this will help to reduce the stigma around mental health challenges and to normalize the topic.

▶ Ensure boys are part of any mental health conversations. This includes ensuring conversations are developmentally and socially appropriate for male youth, and are facilitated by someone they can relate to.

▶ Educate young people about the signs and symptoms of mental illness.

▶ Ensure youth have access to support when they experience mental health challenges or have questions about their own or others' mental health.

▶ Offer grief counseling to support youth experiencing grief and loss as a result of the pandemic.

▶ Offer 'mental health days' so that youth can take time off from school or work when they needed to care for their mental well-being, as they would if they were physically sick.

> *Continue w/ campaigns of destigmatizing & educating [people] re mental health.*

> *Normalizing talking about mental health and emotions without it being weird and awkward.*

For youth who need access to mental health services, these services should be free and easily accessible. This would include ensuring services are available in smaller communities, do not require parental consent to access, and are available to youth at the time they need help (rather than youth having to go on a waitlist).

> *More mental health resources (during the pandemic, I wanted to get counselling and was put on a really long wait list).*

> *Accessible counselling for youth, no waitlist or socio-economic barriers, no parent consent needed to receive treatment/therapy.*

Youth wanted more mental health education in the school curriculum. They suggested community organizations could go into schools to share their expertise and talk about how to access their services. The presence of community organizations within their school would also help young people feel more comfortable approaching these agencies outside of school when they needed help.

> *Instead of telling kids there is a [counsellor], getting the [counsellor] to personally introduce themselves to the students so they feel more welcome to come talk.*

Regular check-ins with adult supports such as youth workers should be available to youth in community spaces, such as youth centres and libraries. These check-ins could provide an opportunity for youth to build stronger relationships with safe adults, discuss mental health in a way that does not require youth to make a formal appointment, and reduce stigma and barriers to talking about mental health. Participants recognized that adult supports may not currently have the expertise, comfort level, or time to take on this role, so may need additional training and support to build this type of support into programming.

> *Anonymous mental health check-ins maybe monthly or biannually? Something like that to help people get things off their chest.*
>
> *In schools, mandate a weekly check-in to talk. You can talk about school but also to talk about what's stressing you out and will make it easier to ask for help. Maybe also in libraries and others places teens are.*

Youth also wanted to have access to mental health supports that were individualized and tailored to their specific needs and background. For example, some youth mentioned wanting services outside of talk-based therapy, such as art or music therapy. Others commented that they were looking for diverse therapists from different backgrounds, such as People of Colour, Elders, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals.

> *Diverse therapist → e.g., POC [People of Colour], elders.*
>
> *Queer counsellors or therapists.*
>
> *Having different forms of therapy other than just talking about feelings. Like art therapy, music therapy, online therapy, etc.*

To address concerns about safety, anonymity and confidentiality in accessing mental health support, youth suggested they could have access to websites and apps where they could anonymously learn more about mental health and mental illness. These sites could also provide resources for self-management, as well as details of how to access support. They also suggested offering an anonymous online forum, text service, or chatline moderated by mental health professionals where youth could ask anonymous questions that would be answered by the moderator. The question and answer could then be posted publicly, and be available to other youth.

> *Anonymous online forums for mental health – moderated, answered by healthcare professionals.*
>
> *Anonymous chat with a mental health professional.*

Community design worksheet from a conversation in Vancouver.

YOUTH-FRIENDLY INDOOR COMMUNITY SPACES

Young people felt that the pandemic had highlighted the essential role that community spaces play in supporting youth health and well-being, and particularly the role that community centres and libraries can and do play. They had a number of suggestions to make these spaces more youth-friendly, safe, and accessible. These included providing a designated area within indoor community spaces—such as neighbourhood houses, friendship centres and libraries—where youth could safely go to relax, hang out with friends and meet new people. These spaces should be free to access, and would ideally offer free snacks, as well as allow youth to bring in food from outside.

> ❝
>
> *Youth centre - free - quiet library, gym, fun, good food, counselling, art/pottery, gives necessities (rape whistle, bear spray, etc.).*
>
> *Creative spaces with free supplies.*
>
> *A place where you can listen to music and do art or do what each person wants to do.*
>
> *More places for youth to study, eat lunch, hang out.*

Exercise areas

Young people also wanted more spaces where they could exercise, including gyms, climbing walls, and indoor swimming pools. Providing youth with access to yoga and other meditative practices within community spaces was also noted as being important for physical and mental health.

> ❝
>
> *Skate Park + indoor dirt jumps.*
>
> *More swimming pools.*
>
> *Physical health centre containing gym, yoga, breathwork.*

Inclusive and accessible

Youth felt that community spaces and activities should be welcoming to diverse groups of youth by ensuring spaces reflect varied and marginalized populations in their physical design, staffing and programming. This includes ensuring spaces are welcoming to LGBTQ2S+ youth, neurodivergent youth, and Indigenous and other racialized youth, and providing resources relevant to and reflective of each specific group. For example, libraries should ensure their collections represent different identities and experiences of young people in a community, and all community spaces should have accessible and gender-neutral washrooms available. Also, increasing accessibility features, such as ramps, could help reduce barriers to accessing community spaces for young people with disabilities or who are caring for babies and young children.

Some youth suggested providing community spaces that could accommodate animals, including where animal therapy could be offered. They also wanted to be able to take their pets into indoor community spaces, such as libraries, so that they did not have to leave their pet outside or not access the space if they could not leave their pet alone.

In addition, a few youth noted the need for community centres to offer extracurricular activities at different times and days, to make them more accessible to a greater number of youth. Also, they felt it was important that programs ran during school breaks as this would allow youth to participate who might not be able to attend while school was in session.

> ❝
>
> *Inclusive architecture (ramps, elevators, etc.).*
>
> *Gender neutral bathrooms.*
>
> *Pet-friendly spaces.*
>
> *Diverse libraries!*
>
> *Queer-centred community youth spaces.*
>
> *Trans friendly sports teams.*

A variety of free classes, programs, and activities

Having missed out on opportunities to connect with others in their community during the pandemic, youth wanted access to a greater range of groups and events where young people could meet and make friends, including with people from different generations. A few youth specifically mentioned wanting 'human library' type events, where individuals can 'check' a person out to listen to them share more about their lives.

> *Being able to hear other people's stories as a means of feeling less alone.*
>
> *Community centre activities with youth to be able to meet more people in your community.*
>
> *Something I think would make my community better is more programs for youth to interact with either the elderly or with young children—it helps to give people perspective and actually connect with those of different ages and experiences.*

Specific suggestions for clubs or groups youth would like to see in their community included pottery clubs, book clubs, mental health clubs (which could include self-care and identity discovery), and climate change clubs, where youth with shared interests could connect and expand their skills.

> *Community clubs like book clubs, climate change etc.*
>
> *Community based clubs/groups geared towards supporting youth mental health and encouraging creative outlets.*

In nearly all conversations, youth wanted community spaces to offer free classes where they could explore different interests and activities, including art programs such as music, theatre, and visual arts classes; physical activity classes such as yoga, aerobics and sports taster classes; and life skills programs, such as cooking, baking and financial literacy. One youth suggested an 'adopt-a-plant' program at a library or community space where youth could learn the skills of plant care and either care for a plant in the community space or take a plant home to care for it.

> *Classes for free (art, crafts, martial arts, workout, yoga, music, acting/drama).*
>
> *Knitting, crocheting, group baking classes.*
>
> *Free sports/activities in community centres to encourage youths to explore their interests.*

Youth-specific events

Youth participants also suggested offering youth-specific nights at community centres, and other community resources such as pools and libraries. They also wanted events that gave youth opportunities to come together with other young people to create, play, listen to and record music, and try new musical instruments. These events would provide a structured but relaxed environment where young people could meet new people and have fun together.

> *Youth-only nights at the pool, gym, or library.*
>
> *Youth movie nights with popcorn and comfortable chairs.*

Youth-friendly physical space

When asked about how an indoor space could be designed for the specific needs of young people, most participants shared similar ideas about light, colour, and design. Most youth preferred large, open spaces with lots of natural light and windows, and suggested light, soft, or neutral colours to foster a calm environment. Many youth noted the importance of having lots of plants and greenery in a space, to both connect youth with nature and to promote calm and relaxation.

> *Lots of greenery!!*
>
> *LOTS OF windows and natural light.*
>
> *Brighter colours in rooms without windows to make the room feel lighter.*

Youth suggested that an ideal youth-friendly space might include individual and group seating so that youth could spend time relaxing and reading alone or sitting with peers. Youth largely preferred soft comfortable chairs and couches with pillows and blankets but also suggested more unique seating options like hammocks and bench seating with built-in planters. One youth recommended a 'bonding bench' or 'buddy bench' to encourage social connections between strangers, possibly around a shared interest. Another suggested bleacher seating with power outlets on every row.

> *Bonding bench where people with the same interests would come and strike a conversation.*

Youth also suggested the need for community study spaces where they could go to study and work on group projects. These spaces could offer soundproofed individual and group study pods with ergonomic upright seating and access to large or individual tables where they could speak online, make phone calls, or practice a presentation.

> *Soundproof room where I can be on the phone.*
>
> *Indoor study spaces.*

Most youth wanted power outlets incorporated into tables, seating, and walls in youth-specific spaces. However, a few also recommended a designated 'electronic-device free space,' to allow youth to work or study without distraction.

Multi-purpose

Youth wanted community spaces to be multi-purpose and adaptable to accommodate different programs and events, such as seating that could be rearranged to look more like a cinema for movie nights. Participants also wanted access to a community kitchen for cooking programs or to host community dinners; a science lab or lab equipment for youth to engage in science programming; game rooms for different activities including pool, karaoke, video games, and board games; and art spaces for creative programs like ceramics and painting. Each of these spaces should include the equipment, materials, and supplies that would be needed for youth to fully participate in each of these activities.

> *A supervised science lab for teens to do research or just to have fun learning science.*

Environmentally friendly

Many youth felt that youth-friendly community spaces should prioritize sustainable and environmentally-friendly practices and designs, including water bottle filling stations and minimizing or eliminating waste. These spaces could feature youth-created art, including murals painted by local youth or blank walls for youth to draw or paint on.

> 66
>
> *Communal doodle wall.*
>
> *Mural painted by youth.*

PARKS & OUTDOOR SPACES

What is important to include in a park or outdoor community space?

- tennis courts/ basketball courts
- Permanent equipment that can be adjusted based on its need. For example, ping pong tables at concord pacific park
- gender-neutral washrooms that also provide things like pads/tampons :)
- benches, picnic tables
- different spaces such as open grass, forest with trails and some art and family gathering zones
- Safety (safe equipment, widely available first aid)
- reading zone
- family gathering space (picnic tables, BBQ areas)
- dog friendly or dog friendly section
- <-- adding onto this point: dog friendly spaces that arent just fenced off areas on gravel
- Clear paths and strong lighting and night
- Greenery thats inclusive and welcoming: too often parks are made up of strict flower beds that isnt very interactive for kids (no go zone)
- some type of water. either a water fountain, river or something soothing/calming
- Space can be used all year round --> what are ways we can work to make these spaces accessible throughout the year?
- heritage sites to explore more about the park/city's history
- educational programs for students
- small pavilions or gardens for people to meditate
- diverse flora and fauna
- Natural landscape
- Emergency stations (like the ones on university campuses)
- accessibility for everyone (e.g., wheelchair friendly trails)
- clean environment (no garbage, wastes)
- sustainable (no harm to surrounding ecosystem and not disrupting animals' lifestyles)
- encouraging connections to animals and nature (e.g., geese, squirrels)
- outdoor workout equipment

- positive messages or quotes purposefully displayed throughout the area
- (A trampoline that looks like a toadstool mushroom)
- outdoor gym
- outdoor lighting
- "friend" bench – where people can find someone to talk to
- (But with fast food!)

Youth suggestions for how outdoor community spaces could be designed to support youth well-being, from a conversation with youth from Richmond, Vancouver, and Whistler.

YOUTH-FRIENDLY OUTDOOR SPACES AND ACTIVITIES

Access to green spaces, walking outdoors, and spending time in nature took on greater significance for young people during the pandemic. As a result, they wanted to have access to more green spaces, including parks, dog parks, and community gardens throughout the year. This could include providing weather shelters and coverings to encourage gathering even during wet and cold weather—with picnic tables, barbecues, gazebos, and benches, and where pets are welcome. Some youth also articulated wanting parks and community spaces to have a range of diverse Indigenous plants.

Infrastructure improvements could include widening sidewalks to increase accessibility for those using mobility aids, and prioritizing pedestrians over car traffic.

We need parks everywhere. More community gardens.

Personally, I love the outdoors and I like to spend time in parks. More trees, parks, and less tall skyscrapers that don't care for the environment.

Dog friendly spaces that aren't just fenced off areas on gravel.

Different spaces such as open grass, forest with trails, and some art and family gathering zones.

Encouraging connections to animals and nature (e.g., geese, squirrels).

Diverse flora and fauna.

Lots of trees and plants in the city, because looking at wildlife just makes people (or at least me) happy.

Greenery that's inclusive and welcoming: too often parks are made up of strict flower beds that isn't very interactive for kids (no go zone).

Space can be used all year round. What are ways we can work to make these spaces accessible throughout the year?

Youth liked that the pandemic had led to an increase in outdoor seating and dining options. They felt that this should be maintained and expanded with the addition of more awnings and designated outdoor seating. This could include outdoor study spaces with comfortable chairs, tables, and umbrellas to allow youth to study or work outside. In addition, surrounding buildings could be colourful and incorporate sustainable architecture principals.

More colourful buildings/streets.

Green architecture (studio Ghibli vibe town!).

fav park in vancouver: Terranova Park(richmond), Cloverdale Athletic Park, Hastings Park

four square + community bin of sports balls and equipment

scavenger hunt

painted by LOCAL ARTISTS and a description of the artist

benches that don't have a divider in the middle to stop homeless people from sleeping comfortably

interactive nature house to show the diverse ecosystems of the park

Youth suggestions for how outdoor community spaces could be designed to support youth well-being, from a conversation with youth from Richmond, Vancouver, and Whistler.

Access to nature

Youth wanted to be able to experience nature within their own neighbourhoods and communities. They felt that parks and community spaces in the region need more walking, hiking and biking paths, and nature trails need to be accessible to give those with mobility aids the option to use them.

❝

Accessible for everyone (e.g., wheelchair-friendly trails).

Youth suggested having clear signage for trails to assist with navigation and which could provide information about local nature and history. These signs could offer motivational messages and also provide activities such as a scavenger hunt with clues and lessons about local history and the surrounding nature.

❝

Positive messages or quotes purposefully displayed throughout the area.

Some youth wanted parks to offer more educational programming and resources so they could learn about the land, animals and nature in their community. These resources could also use trees, rocks, stumps and other natural elements to create spaces where younger children could safely play and explore nature. One youth suggested that more parks and playgrounds should be designed similar to Terra Nova Adventure Playground in Richmond, BC.

❝

Educational programs for students.

Interactive nature house to show the diverse ecosystems of the park.

Heritage sites to explore more about the park/city's history.

Environmentally-friendly spaces

As with indoor community spaces, youth emphasized the need for more compost and recycling programs available in public spaces (including campsites, and parks), and more efficient litter disposal programs.

❝

Composts/good garbage system so no littering → cleaner places.

More recycling programs/emphasis on recycling rather than throwing things out.

Accessible and active transportation

For safety and accessibility, youth in different VCH communities wanted public transportation to be frequent, low cost and available into the evening. Several also suggested that having measures to reduce traffic would encourage more young people to use active means of transport and could help to create a sense of community among residents. Youth in urban and rural areas also wanted to have more sidewalks, bike lanes and paths that led directly to community amenities.

❝

Walkable, easy to make connections & get around - social, cat café, easy to chat with neighbours, sense of community, not individual.

More public transit → buses run more often and later.

Bike-accessible, convenient, safe.

Safety

Recommendations for how community spaces could be designed to increase feelings of safety, especially for young people who may be travelling alone or after dark, included more street lighting and better lighting around bike paths, walking paths, and parks. A few youth also recommended the installation of emergency phone stations, similar to those available at some post-secondary institution.

Well lit streets with emergency phones for those who feel unsafe.

Youth suggested that the removal of some colonial features in their community would help to increase the sense of safety and connection for Indigenous youth. Others suggested removing architecture or community features that were designed to discourage loitering or sleeping in public, and replacing these with features that celebrated diversity and inclusion.

Non-hostile architecture.

No anti-loitering (let people exist in public!).

The design of new buildings and community spaces should also recognize the potential for future pandemics, such as by being able to accommodate physical distancing and other safety measures if needed.

Outdoor exercise opportunities

Youth wanted more opportunities to exercise outdoors through increased provision of outdoor gyms and exercise equipment. They also wanted access to more sports fields and green spaces where they could play casual sports and activities (without having to be part of a structured class or team), as well as more skate parks, tennis and basketball courts, and outdoor swimming pools.

Parks - playground, turf, track, walking paths, lots of trees, plants, garden, baseball/softball field.

Versatile outdoor gyms → parks with calisthenic equipment.

Tennis courts/basketball courts.

Community events

Youth wanted communities to offer opportunities for people to come together more regularly through events such as block parties, fairs, public performances, festivals, pride parades, movie nights, and concerts. Participants also suggested cross-generational activities such as gardening sessions, community hikes and picnics, and events for families (e.g., swimming lessons, games nights, costume contests). The event youth most commonly wanted to see was free, outdoor movie nights.

Give students the chance to hold events like bake sales, yard sales and talent shows in the neighbourhood.

Maybe more outside group activities for youths to support them in going out with friends more instead of spending more time on social media.

Opportunities to interact with nature.

Accessible and cheaper outdoor programs.

EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Youth spoke of wanting more employment opportunities so they could earn money and build their résumé. They also wanted more low-cost or free training opportunities to develop employment and life skills (including first aid training).

> *Career opportunities for young adults to make money to support themselves.*
>
> *More opportunity for youth to build start-ups and small business in the community.*
>
> *More resources to teach youth how to get a job, write a résumé, apply for positions, university.*

Youth explained that volunteer hours are a requirement for graduation but have been hard to access during the pandemic. For this reason, and because many wished to contribute to their community, they wanted greater access to volunteer opportunities. They most commonly wanted to be able to volunteer in environmental programs, or with younger children or older adults. Some also wanted opportunities to participate in community advocacy on issues they care about (such as climate change or mental health), and to see youth in leadership roles within their community.

> *I also wish there were more volunteering opportunities for youth, which will happen if there were more community center services and school activities.*
>
> *Opportunities for activism/advocacy (youth council, strikes/marches etc.).*
>
> *More opportunities for youth to be involved in city council decisions and community projects.*

Suggestions for how communities can support well-being from a conversation with youth from across Vancouver Coastal Health region.
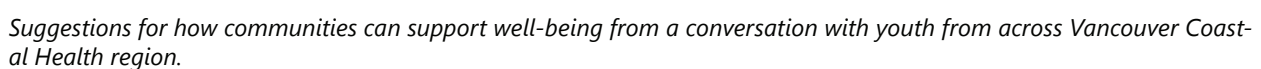
CONCLUSION

Youth across the VCH region shared the challenges they had experienced to their health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the areas where the pandemic had positive impacts. They demonstrated their resilience as they spoke of how they had adapted to changing public health guidelines, and to the impact of the pandemic on their relationships, their schooling and their engagement in community life. Many missed out on celebrating key milestones (such as the transition from elementary to high school), and felt a sense of grief and loss at the activities and opportunities they missed out on as a result of the pandemic.

Youth participants also identified what could help them to thrive moving forward, including access to mental health supports, and youth-friendly community spaces, programs and activities. They wanted more opportunities to connect with their peers, supportive adults, and their communities, and shared their suggestions for how this could be achieved.

Young people also showed their commitment to sustainability and to equity, diversity and inclusion. They wanted to ensure that the needs and wants of all groups in their community were included in any planning decisions, and that no decisions were made which would be detrimental to any population.

The majority of the conversations conducted for this project were carried out by young people with their peers, and showed the benefits of meaningful youth engagement. Many of the Youth Health Ambassadors who facilitated these conversations are committed to continuing to work with VCH to provide their perspectives on any changes that result from this project and to share their work with others interested in supporting young people's well-being.

What solutions can we be a part of?

- having more youth specific areas in the community (could also prevent loitering)
- access to clinics and health support (walk in or online)
- LOW COST/no cost ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH!!!
- helping people find affordable housing/getting people off the street
- youth need a space to nonjudgementally ask questions about "shameful" or difficult topics

Community

- Personally, spending time at my closest community centre made me feel more connected and positive throughout the pandemic and my high school career
- I feel like an organized community group can give someone social events to attend, projects/volunteer opportunities to join, and a sense of purpose
- walk in discussion groups, online and in-person
- a force that only deals wit...
- have better ways/more options to report oppressive/discrimina tory behavior
- no judgement workout/exercise groups ?
- art activities: guiding youth to learn different ways to address issues

Organizational

- no body image centered fitness, teach about health and nutrition from a positive perspective, not for weight loss/appearance
- volunteering, social, street
- offering a lot of opportunities for youth to gain experience

- I wish that schools would make it a requirement that every student join at least one school club, and commit to it for a year.
- I feel like school clubs help students to connect, meet students outside of their circle and in different grades, and do something meaningful and fun outside of academics
- could even be like term by term
- spending more time outside of the home, and in the community with friends or family
- giving more free time specifically to relax or do activities, having a designated time each day that's for youth to actually take a minute for them (during the day at school maybe)?
- teach youth about sex and consent and all the sexual health things in a session or forum regularly!!!

Individual

- if your friends don't reach out, make an effort to be the one to reach out ;)
- get to know your community centre's Youth staff, they are very friendly and open to chat usually
- volunteering for events (engaging with the community, gaining connections, gaining experience

Strategies for how individuals, organizations, and communities can support the well-being of young people from a conversation in Richmond.

My ideal community

- environmentally friendly
- everybody is able to express their authentic selves
- sense of belonging
- Playful
- flexibility
- mental-emotional support
- GREEN
- consistency, commitment, sustainability
- Architecture of buildings supports all abilities
- Community built on empathy & understanding
- Variety of styles of architecture
- Clubs & programs, art, sports, etc.
- Easy ways for people to connect with others but also access to alone time & privacy
- Everyone can pursue the career path they want to and are supported, no pressure about money or status
- Good access to learning
- Library — Books! & Resources
- Wifi & internet access
- Health resources easy to access
- Free healthcare & mental health — People's physical & mental health needs met
- Safe cool places to hang out
- Fun games (Escape rooms, video game hang out, Dungeons & Dragons)
- Free things → I know the logistics don't really work but who cares this is an ideal community
- Everyone's needs are met
- No one in poverty
- No abuse
- No war
- MUSIC
- Pasta! & sushi
- Yummy, available food — Free — Variety
- Beauty, Lots of nature, Eco friendly
- Art more prevalent & encouraged all kinds!
- Theatre!
- Cats! Animals
- Animals treated well
- Bed for napping
- School that is actually good
- More time with friends — Exploration of topics
- Less assessment & stressful things — Variety of subjects
- Cool clubs — Support the people — Sports
- Nature

My ideal community

- Campsite — free — nice bathrooms
- Free Hospital & physio therapy
- Skate park
- Skating
- Pump track
- Art center
- Trails that are hangout friendly
- Park — lake — Dock — Sand — Grass
- Playground
- Safety tool center
- free YOUTH center — Gym — Yoga — Snacks — free counselling — Homework area — Library
- School — free night classes
- Climbing indoor free
- Indoor & outdoor swimming & hot tubs
- Village Shops!
- Grocery Store — free hygiene products
- rexal
- Clothing Shops re-use it
- Clothes & toys
- Store — Grocers
- Drive in Theater!
- Free for hostels & people & families in need

Community design worksheets from Vancouver (top) and Whistler (bottom), where participants shared ideas for how communities could be designed to support health and well-being for young people.

McCreary
Centre Society