

Going Green

Safety

Arts Scene

Health

Rich and Poor

Youth Housing

Employment

i am VANCOUVER

Youth Voice

Youth Spaces

Homelessness

Education

Belonging

Transportation

i am VANCOUVER

Culture

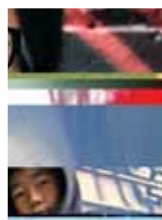
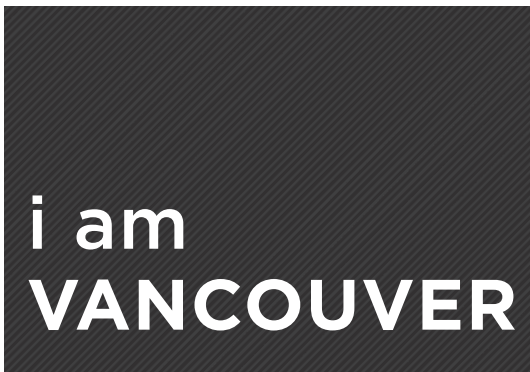
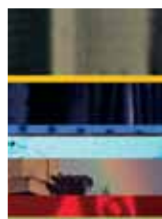
Training

Poverty

Identity

Learning

Well-Being



2	Message from the <i>Youth Vital Signs</i> Leadership Council
3	Highlights
4	Snapshot of Youth in Vancouver
5	Methods
6	Transportation
8	Going Green
10	Safety
12	Arts Scene
14	Youth Spaces
16	Youth Voice
18	Youth Housing and Homelessness
20	Poverty: The Gap Between Rich and Poor
22	Employment and Training
24	Education and Learning
26	Health and Well-Being
28	Culture, Identity and Belonging
30	Mobile Text Survey
31	Grader Profile
32	Differences Among Us
34	Acknowledgements
35	What Next?

message from the *youth vital signs* leadership council

We're pleased to present the first-ever *Youth Vital Signs* report card. It's the product of a year-long, youth-driven research and public opinion project that gives a new voice to Vancouver youth age 15 to 24.

Our report aims to increase the influence of youth in public policy and community investment decisions that affect their lives by encouraging dialogue, debate and action.

We've learned that youth have strong opinions, good ideas and a concern for the future of their community. We've also learned there are many decision-makers who want to know how youth experience the world, and are willing to provide support and resources to make sure youth are heard.

The project was directed by the *Youth Vital Signs* Leadership Council. We are a diverse group of Vancouverites age 15 to 24 who worked together, with mentors and community stakeholders, to make this report happen.

We would like to thank our generous supporters: the 1,700 youth that contributed to this report, Vancouver Foundation and its Youth Philanthropy Council, Telus, the City of Vancouver, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Vancouver School Board, CBC On The Coast, Vancouver Sun and airG.

In these pages, you'll find a big picture snapshot of youth experiences and perspectives on life in this city. We invite you to join us in shaping a positive future for younger generations who will call Vancouver home.

“I love Vancouver. But I think we owe it to our city and ourselves to look at the good things AND the things that need to change.” – YOUTH VITAL SIGNS SURVEY RESPONDENT

highlights

Synthesizing thousands of youth voices, research and stories in a short report is a challenge. This report's findings on perceptions and experiences of youth are organized around 12 subject areas. Four of these subject areas were identified by youth as most urgent.

Poverty: the Gap Between Rich and Poor

Safety

Youth Housing and Homelessness

Going Green

Across these subject areas, three major themes emerged.

High Cost

“Most young people can't afford to live a safe and healthy lifestyle in Vancouver...”

– YOUTH VITAL SIGNS RESPONDENT

Vancouver is an expensive city to live in. Some of these high costs, such as housing, are more obvious than others, while the cost of transportation affects where we choose to live, work or spend our free time. When the cost of basic needs is so high, there is little room (and dollars) for us to pay for post-secondary education, cultural or recreational activities.

Accessibility and Awareness

“Vancouver is a great place for youth to be able to speak out, but sometimes we don't know how to get started.” – YOUTH VITAL SIGNS RESPONDENT

The results show we are aware of social and environmental challenges. We would like to make a difference. But sometimes, we don't know how or where to begin. And other times, those systems and processes lack space or room for our voices.

Our Unique Needs

“You're either a kid and you can't do anything or an adult and you have to do everything... what do you do when you're 18?”

– YOUTH VITAL SIGNS RESPONDENT

We need policies and services that reflect the transition between childhood and adulthood. We are not asking for every program or amenity to be “youth only”, but we would like some services to meet our specific needs. For example, we need more youth clinics that are open late, and more skills and employment readiness programs targeted specifically towards youth.

Overall, we are optimistic about life in Vancouver. And when we felt disappointed in a subject area, we took time to make thoughtful recommendations to improve things. If there's one thing to take away from *Youth Vital Signs*, it is that that we want to be involved in decision-making processes that affect our lives and our city.

snapshot of youth in vancouver

Who are we? How many of us live here? Where do we come from?

Not surprisingly, the answers to these questions are complex and always changing. Here's a quick snapshot of youth in Vancouver. It's a small part of the picture of who we are.

According to the 2006 Census, there are 81,261 youth age 15 to 24 living in Vancouver.

Most of this group are age 20 to 24 (66%), and their numbers are growing, as Vancouver continues to attract university and foreign language students, and new workers.

The number of high-school-age youth is slowly declining, relative to Vancouver's overall population growth rate.

The relative size of the youth population is shrinking compared to other age groups. Youth represent only 13% of Vancouver's total population. This trend is expected to continue. By 2036, it's projected that youth will make up only 11% of the total population.

Young people live in every Vancouver neighbourhood, but tend to be concentrated in certain areas. For example, approximately 57% of youth age 20 to 24 live west of Granville Street, including UBC (but excluding downtown). The largest proportion of youth age 15 to 19 live in South Vancouver.

Vancouver youth are incredibly diverse. More than 60% belong to groups that were traditionally considered "visible minorities."

One third of youth (24,530) are immigrants. More than 80% hail from Asia and the Middle East and 55% come specifically from China and Hong Kong.

The first language for more than a third of Vancouver youth isn't English or French. In 2006, Chinese was the mother tongue for 17% of youth.

research methods

Four primary research methods were used to capture the perceptions and experiences of youth in Vancouver: a survey; an analysis of census data; a gathering of youth stories; and an independent mobile text survey. Together, with a review of secondary research, this provided a rich understanding of youth in Vancouver.

The Survey

The *Youth Vital Signs* survey invited youth age 15 to 24 who live, work and/or play in Vancouver to grade 12 key areas of city life, identify issues for action, and rank priorities for community investment by answering a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey also collected demographic information.

The McCreary Centre Society provided mentoring and support to the Youth Leadership Council on survey design and delivery, and field-tested it with six youth focus groups. Identical online and hard-copy versions of the survey were distributed between October 23 and November 15, 2008.

More than 1,700 completed surveys were received from youth: 1,192 online and 556 on paper. A team of nine youth, trained and supervised by the McCreary Centre Society, collected the surveys at 30 community and school workshops.

The Stats

The Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. (SPARC BC) was contracted to produce *A Demographic Profile of Youth in Vancouver*. The *Profile* gathered data from a range of primary sources, including the 2006 Census, to create a snapshot of Vancouver youth.

The Fast Facts

The Youth Leadership Council collected and reviewed a vast amount of secondary research related to the subject areas, and chose three “fast facts” to highlight in each area.

Youth in Action

Youth are doing amazing things to make Vancouver a better place. The Youth Leadership Council gathered many of their stories throughout the project, a selection of which are presented in this report.

transportation

Getting around is important. We like to drive, but fewer of us do compared to other age groups. We would like to say it's because we care about the planet, but it's also because cars are costly and licensing rules curb driving until we're almost 19. We rely on buses, SkyTrain and cycling to get around more than any other age group.

More investment in transit will help our economy and environment. Hopefully, it will also help us love transit enough to keep us from buying our own cars.

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

32%

Increase availability, frequency and service of buses and SkyTrain

31%

Reduce transit costs for youth and create a universal U-Pass

23%

Support alternative modes of transit i.e., increase bike paths

14%

Improve safety and cleanliness of public transportation

We are the Riders

We use public transit more than any other age group. About 28% of the transit users in our region are youth age 16 to 24, when youth only make up 14% of our region's population. Generally, we feel safer using TransLink services than other age groups do.

SOURCE: Third-quarter Customer Service Survey, TransLink, 2008

Pedal Power

Public support for making cycling a viable mode of transportation is very high, particularly among youth age 16 to 24. Almost 60,000 bike trips are made every day in our city. The City has expanded bike lanes from 116 kilometres in 1994 to almost 400 kilometres as of 2008.

SOURCE: City of Vancouver Fact Sheet, June 2008

U-Pass

The U-Pass, a discounted transit pass for post-secondary students, led to a surge in riders after it launched at UBC in 2003. Now, it's the preferred way to get to UBC and makes up 42% of all trips. The monthly cost of a three-zone U-Pass is \$23.75. Those of us who aren't students pay big bucks: \$136 for a three-zone pass.

SOURCE: www.upass.ubc.ca



Youth in Action

EARN-A-BIKE

If you build it, you can keep it. Earn-a-Bike teaches youth age 12 to 18 how to build a bike. At the end of the program, they've developed bike maintenance skills, and get to ride off on their own two wheels. It's all part of a grand scheme – Pedal Energy Development Alternatives (PEDAL) aims to promote cycling as the way to get around. www.pedalpower.org/youth_earn_a_bike



going green

Youth Grade

B

We tend to brag about the natural beauty of our city – the climate, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

But climate change threatens everything. Society's behaviour is creating more greenhouse gas emissions. What people drive, eat, heat, cool, move, make, and throw out is hurting the environment. In B.C., most of our residents' personal carbon footprint comes from cars and trucks.

Provincial and municipal governments are taking steps to create a more sustainable path. We also want to be involved, as we have the creativity and vested interest to build a sustainable world.

BEE GREEN

Students from two Vancouver high schools have been busy, building bee “condos” in woodworking class and caring for them in our parks. The program is called Park Pollinators’ Paradise, and it’s a brainchild of the Environmental Youth Alliance that aims to raise awareness about the vital role pollinators play in the ecosystem, and in the food we eat.

www.eya.ca or www.masonbeevancouver.com

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

46%

Increase awareness and resources to help engage youth

28%

Invest in transportation infrastructure for transit, biking, skateboarding

14%

Create more green spaces such as parks

12%

Individual or group action-based programs i.e., recycling, composting

Carbon Footprints

Individuals are directly responsible for about 30% of B.C.’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, mainly through vehicles. That’s about five tonnes per person, per year. GHGs are produced when fossil fuels are burned, releasing the carbon dioxide and methane in the air that leads to climate change.

SOURCE: www.livesmartbc.ca

GHGs per B.C. Household

PERSONAL VEHICLES	40%
HOUSEHOLD WASTE	19%
AIR TRAVEL	19%
SPACE HEATING AND COOLING	12%
WATER HEATING	7%
BUS AND RAIL	2%
APPLIANCES AND LIGHTING	1%

SOURCE: www.livesmartbc.ca

Bees and Food

Bees are important to our biodiversity. Last winter, B.C. lost 23% of its honeybee population. Their loss threatens Canada’s \$5 billion fruit and crop industry. About 30% of the food supply depends on pollinators like bees.

SOURCE: Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturalists

safety

C

We all want to feel safe. For us, safety is not just about crime, but issues like bullying or being prepared for natural disasters. What makes some of us feel at ease, makes others feel threatened. We want to feel safe on public transit: some of us think more transit police will help; others want better lighting at SkyTrain stations.

Our relationship with the police is varied and volatile. Police can be our allies, but some of us feel mistrust and fear when we see the badge. We would like to see this relationship improve. This will take time and attention.

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

33%

Improve relationship between police and youth

25%

Improve transit safety i.e., more light at SkyTrain stations

17%

Harsher punishment for crime

14%

More prevention programs for sexual exploitation and bullying

Safety at School

Only 41% of B.C. students in grades 7 to 12 said that they always feel safe at school. About 9% of students reported that they were attacked physically or assaulted while at school or on the way to school in the last year.

SOURCE: *Highlights from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey*, McCreary Centre Society

Cyber-Bullies

One in four young people in B.C. say they were victims of cyber-bullying, and almost one in five say they have bullied others online. Why? According to nearly 80% of Canadians age 9 to 17, it's easier to bully online than in person, and 67% who bully think they'll never get caught.

SOURCE: *Microsoft Canada and Youthography Internet Safety Survey*, 2009

Youth and Crime

Despite the media spotlight on youth crime, B.C. has the second lowest youth crime rate in Canada. The success of our diversion and prevention services debunks the myth that punishment is the answer. Especially when we consider that in B.C., annual community supervision costs \$20,000 per year, and each youth in custody costs \$215,000.

SOURCE: *Kids, Crime and Care*, B.C. Government, February 2009



Youth in Action

LOVE

LOVE can stop the cycle of violence. Leave Out Violence (LOVE) is a grassroots program that helps youth age 13 to 19 whose lives have been touched by violence turn it into something positive. They encourage youth to use culture and media to spread messages of anti-violence, and hopefully stop the cycle of violence in their own lives.

www.leaveoutviolence.com



Youth Grade

B

arts scene

Vancouver has a vibrant cultural scene, but the youth arts scene often runs below the radar. And the ticket prices for mainstream events are sometimes too much for us.

According to the Canada Council for the Arts: "Participation in the arts helps young people develop self-confidence and achieve higher academic performance," and is particularly important for at-risk youth.

Encouraging youth in the arts is good for business. Increasing evidence highlights the link between a vibrant local arts scene and a city's social and economic health.

ART AT THE PURPLE THISTLE

In 2001, eight kids got together and created the Purple Thistle, an arts and activism centre in East Vancouver. Run by a youth collective, the Thistle is a place where we can hang out, participate in paid training programs about publishing or community engagement, and dabble in creative experimentation at drop-in programs such as darkroom photography, silk-screening, animation or painting.

www.purplethistle.ca

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

45%

More events that are relevant to youth and their interests

27%

Reduce admission costs for events and galleries

21%

Promotion that targets youth to raise awareness of cultural events

7%

Opportunities to create and showcase youth arts

The Starving Artist

The average paycheque for artists in Canada is low, and getting lower, despite their high levels of education. Young, emerging artists do even worse. Artists age 15 to 24 earn an average of \$8,300 per year in Canada, 27% less than the average income of their peers in other fields.

SOURCE: *2008 Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada* (based on 2006 Census Data), Hill Strategies

The Art of Money

For every dollar invested in the arts, arts organizations earn or raise an additional \$12.75, according to an estimate from the City of Vancouver. Of all the provinces, B.C. has the largest percentage of its labour force in arts occupations – 1.08%.

SOURCES: *Alliance for Arts and Culture*, and *2008 Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada* (based on 2006 Census Data), Hill Strategies

The Funding Bucks

Most performing arts are subsidized, either by grants or booze. For teen audiences and artists, this is a double-whammy. There is limited grant support for many of the arts that suit our tastes (such as hip hop, slam poetry and indie music), and few financial incentives for private venues to host all-ages gigs.



Youth Grade

youth
spaces

B

A NEW DIRECTION

The door is always open at Directions Youth Services Centre – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Centre serves as a safe urban youth space away from the streets where homeless and at-risk youth can take part in educational, artistic and recreational programs. They also help youth search for housing and employment, and provide hot meals and showers.

www.fsgv.ca

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

40%

Increase youth safety in public spaces (parks, SkyTrain stations)

34%

Create all-ages venues and late night spaces for youth

18%

Better promotion to make youth aware of these spaces

8%

More funding and investment in youth-only spaces

Youth Spaces

Traditional youth spaces have been created by government, organizations, and adults to give us a place to hang out and participate in recreational, educational and cultural activities.

In Vancouver, there are:

- 23 Parks Board community centres
- 18 Public high schools
- 10 Neighbourhood houses
- 4 Youth hubs

Future Shop

We don't always hang out where one might expect. Coffee shops are good for no-hassle hanging out. And for Kitsilano youth, the Future Shop on West Broadway is a popular choice because they can meet up with friends, check out cool stuff and stay dry on rainy days.

SOURCE: 2007 *Kitsilano Neighbourhood House Westside Youth Mapping Project*

Our Virtual Spaces

We consider the Internet and social media networks as our places. On MySpace, Facebook and other sites, we can "hang out" uninterrupted without adult supervision, create our own pages, and define ourselves. As of March 2009, approximately 207,000 metro Vancouver youth age 15 to 24 had a Facebook page.

SOURCE: Facebook

Hanging out is an important way of forming friendships, and helps us stay connected and learn what's going on in our community. The youth and community centres in Vancouver are great, but they aren't always open late or on weekends, when we are able to go. With so much of life structured and controlled, we want places we consider our own, where we can just be. Some of our favourite youth spaces are coffee shops, parks, the corner store, and virtual space too: Internet and social networking sites that allow us to be in sync with friends, and connect with our peers.

Youth Grade

C

youth voice

Youth voice is about the power that comes from being heard and included in decisions that affect our lives, and our communities. Many of us have felt injustice firsthand, and want to make a difference.

Youth who are involved contribute to the well-being of their communities. They develop a stake in the future. As youth in Vancouver, we recognize there is a lot of good work being done and we're part of it. We volunteer in community programs, serve on non-profit boards, organize events and mobilize our peers. But there's always more we can do to make sure that we have a voice, and that our voice is heard.

Youth in Action

REEL YOUTH

The Reel Youth Film Festival encourages youth age 19 and under to shine the spotlight on the changes they want to see in our world. From films about growing up in foster care to how First Nations youth are affected by the history of residential schools, the Festival gives our peers the chance to have their work juried by youth and shown across Canada.

www.reelyouth.ca

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

50%

Reduce the voting age to 16 for all elections

19%

Integrate youth into decision-making processes i.e., City Hall

17%

Improve marketing about opportunities for youth to be involved

14%

Create programs for youth to learn about politics/government

Low Voter Turnout

Voter turnout among Canadians is at an unprecedented low, but it is young people who are least likely to cast a ballot. Here's some perspective: in the 2006 federal election, only 44% of people age 18 to 30 voted, when adult turnout was 78%.

SOURCE: *Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group at the 39th Federal General Election*, Elections Canada, 2006

We Volunteer

In B.C., some 50% of 15- to 24-year olds reported volunteering in 2004, with a median of 60 hours time contributed. Nationally, 55% of young Canadians reported volunteering but they gave less time: a median of 50 hours.

SOURCE: *Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: highlights from the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, Statistics Canada, 2006

Youth Activism

While statistics show a low number of Canadian youth voting in elections, over 65% of Canadians age 15 to 34 have forwarded an email or letter about a cause or signed an online petition. Youth voice also comes in the form of public demonstrations and writing letters to the media or their political leaders.

SOURCE: *Youth Voter DNA Report*, 2006

youth housing

and homelessness

D

Access to housing can help us make the jump to independence. Unfortunately, in Vancouver affordable housing is in extremely short supply.

Our earnings make renting out of reach for many of us. Half of us age 20 to 24 still live at home. On any given night, up to 900 of us are homeless. And it is scary to complain to our landlords when we have few other options.

In order to attract (and keep) young people, our region needs greater public policy action and investment in affordable housing for youth. Because a couch is not a home.



Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

45%

Reduce cost of rental housing

20%

More options such as co-ops, rentals, shelters, and supported living

17%

More mental health and addictions programs to prevent homelessness

13%

Foster safe living conditions and address issues of slumlords

No Vacancies

Generally, Vancouver youth have few options. In 2008, the city's apartment vacancy rate hit a low of 0.3%, after two years of stable but low vacancies. Of 54,442 total rental units in our city, only 160 were available as of October 2008. Only 96 of 36,840 one-bedroom apartments were vacant.

SOURCE: *Rental Market Report*, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2008.

The High Cost of Rent

From 2006 to 2008, the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Vancouver surged 11% to \$936 a month. Living in a one-bedroom apartment would cost the average youth more than 80% of their income.

SOURCE: *Rental Market Report*, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2008; and the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C.

Young and Homeless

The 2008 Homelessness Count found 270 homeless youth under age 25, and 59 under age 19. Estimates of the actual youth homeless population in our region range as high as 900. On count night, only 89 youth stayed in a shelter – twice as many slept outside or couch surfed.

SOURCE: 2008 Metro Vancouver Homelessness Count

Youth in Action

OPENING DOORS

The Broadway Youth Resource Centre's supported-housing program rents apartments and sublets them to at-risk youth, to support their transition towards independent living. Their staff liaise with landlords and do everything they can to help youth make the most of this opportunity by providing one-to-one support, life skills and employment training.

www.pcrs.ca



Youth Grade

poverty

the gap between
rich and poor

D

STEP UP

Step Up is a program that offers social nights for youth, with a purpose. Youth gather at Check Your Head's Vancouver office to hash through systemic issues that create inequality and poverty in our lives, and come up with solutions. They've developed a workshop on the roots of poverty to empower low-income youth and share the message through hip-hop, movies, theatre and more.

www.checkyourhead.org

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

38%

Raise minimum wage

31%

More availability of affordable housing

15%

Accessible youth mental health services

13%

Create employment and training opportunities for the poor

High Poverty Rate

In 2006, 23% of children and youth age 18 and under in Vancouver lived in households with incomes below the poverty line, while the national rate was 16%. For youth age 15 to 24 living on their own, the poverty rate was 70%.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

Low Wages

More than 60% of workers in Canada who earn minimum wage or less are under 25. B.C. has not raised its minimum wage of \$8 an hour since 2001, and has an even lower "training" wage of \$6.50 an hour for inexperienced, young workers.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

The Growing Gap

The gap between rich and poor in metro Vancouver grew by nearly 9% between 2001 and 2005. In 2005, the average income for the richest 10% of residents was \$145,800, while the average income for the poorest 10% was \$14,100. This means the richest 10% averaged more than 10 times the income of the poorest 10% of our residents.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada Tax Data

The gap between rich and poor in our city and our province is growing wider. Youth in low-income families have fewer opportunities to play, learn and earn than their peers from wealthier families, creating intergenerational cycles of poverty. After high school, those of us from low-income families face pressure to start earning and are more likely to take on high debt to continue our education.

Society needs to recognize the barriers faced by youth who live in poverty, and find ways to empower them by helping them earn livable wages, find affordable housing, and feel connected to and valued by their communities.



Youth Grade

employment and training

B

Young people are busy juggling school, friends, volunteering and work. We aren't working just to buy things: we're saving for education, striving for independence, and sometimes supporting parents and children.

Much of the work we get is entry-level service jobs, typically for low pay. We are learning – sometimes the hard way – that all workers have a right to be safe, to know their rights and ask questions.

Developing skills for the future is our major concern – through on-the-job training, education and apprenticeships. Ultimately, we want to feel valued and earn appropriate pay for the work we do, regardless of our age.

Youth in Action

YOUTH SPOT

Finding work can be a hurdle for young people. Youth Spot has been helping youth find sustainable employment since 2001. Operating on a drop-in basis, Youth Spot provides one-to-one employment assistance, everything from access to their fax machine to help writing cover letters and preparing for job interviews. Youth Spot is operated by the Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House.

www.youthspot.ca

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

42%

Eliminate the training wage

29%

Create more job readiness and training programs for youth

15%

Increase awareness about workplace rights for youth

10%

Create meaningful employment for youth

More Youth at Work

In 2006, about 57% of youth age 15 to 24 were participating in Vancouver's labour force, up nine percentage points from 2001. More than half of us worked in sales and services occupations, and many of us work and go to school at the same time.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

Male versus Female

The average annual income for youth in Vancouver age 15 to 24 was \$11,936 in 2005. Male youth earned an average of nearly \$1,300 more a year than females – \$12,594 compared to \$11,298 for female youth.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

How Young is too Young?

In B.C., we can start working between age 12 and 14, if our parents give their permission. A permit is required from the Director of Employment Standards for children under 12 years.

SOURCE: B.C. Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services

education and learning

B

For most of us, school and learning are a major part of our daily life. The quality of our education plays a key role in defining our career aspirations and earning potential. Relevant curriculum, class size, school safety, and teaching all impact the value of our educational experience.

And there are other barriers. For some of us, it is the cost of post-secondary tuition or a lack of assistance with learning disabilities. For many of us, it is learning English. Of Vancouver's 58,000 elementary and secondary students, 61% speak a language other than English at home.

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

41%

Curriculum not relevant and does not prepare students for post-secondary studies

37%

Cost of post-secondary education is too high

15%

Reduce class sizes and address overcrowding

7%

Improve teaching to support learning disabilities and cultural sensitivity

Big Debt

Tuition fees for B.C. undergrads averaged \$5,040 per year in 2008-09, up 6.4% since 2004-05. B.C. was the province with the second highest percentage of borrowers from Canada Student Loans – 17.7% – in 2004-05. The average B.C. full-time student loan was \$5,261.

SOURCE: *The Daily: University Tuition Fees, Statistics Canada, 2008, and Canada Student Loans Program Annual Report 2004-05*, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Curriculum Conundrum

Vancouver has one of the highest rates of high school graduation in the province. But we're not that pleased with the quality of our education. Only 39% of us report being satisfied with what we're learning, less than the provincial satisfaction rate of 48%.

SOURCE: B.C. Ministry of Education Student Statistics

Big Classes

Class size is one of our major concerns. In 2008, the average number of students in a Vancouver high school classroom was 25.6 students. The provincial average is slightly less, at 24.4 students in a high school class.

SOURCE: B.C. Ministry of Education, January 2008



Youth in Action

TAKE A HIKE

Getting out in nature can be a life-changing experience. Take a Hike is an alternative education program for at-risk youth age 15 to 19 that mixes academics with outdoor adventure, counselling with community involvement. A partnership between Vancouver School Board and Take a Hike Foundation, this program offers a breath of fresh air for youth who have struggled with the system. www.takeahikefoundation.org



health and well-being

Youth Grade

B

Health is a far-reaching topic that ranges from health promotion and prevention, to specialized services and treatment. Recreational activities are vital to overall health, but their cost is sometimes beyond our means.

We generally feel pretty good about the quality of health care services. However, it's important to meet the unique needs of different groups, such as making health information accessible to new immigrant youth who lack English skills. Other examples include ensuring youth clinics are open during hours when we can go, that mental health services are available when we need them and helping transgendered youth who are leery of mainstream care.

Youth in Action

HUSTLE: MEN ON THE MOVE

There's help for male youth hustling on the streets of Vancouver who want to leave the sex trade. HUSTLE: Men on the Move provides one-to-one peer and crisis support for these youth. Created by Prostitutes Empowerment, Education and Resource Society, the project aims to increase the overall health and safety of the young men, while preventing sexual exploitation.

www.bccec.wordpress.com or www.peersvancouver.org

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

31%

More youth clinics and longer, more convenient hours

29%

Mental health and substance-use support services for youth

23%

Have education/school programs about nutrition and healthy living

12%

Reduce the cost of fitness centres for youth

Youth-friendly Clinics

Vancouver has 10 youth clinics at community health centres that offer free services on a drop-in basis with no ID required. But the majority are only open from 2 to 5 p.m., which is usually when we have to go to school. Only two clinics stay open until 8 p.m., and then, only once a week.

SOURCE: Vancouver Coastal Health

Sports and Money

Sports can be out of reach for some of us. In 2005, youth from Canadian families that earned \$80,000 and over were twice as likely to participate in sports as those with household incomes of less than \$30,000.

SOURCE: *Sports Participation in Canada 2008*, Statistics Canada

Help with Mental Health

Youth are often unable to connect with mental health services due to stigma, lack of awareness and limited professional resources. Approximately 140,000 B.C. children and youth experience mental disorders each year that create significant stress and barriers for them at school, with their family and the community.

SOURCE: *A Review of Child and Youth Mental Health Services in B.C.*, 2008

culture, identity and belonging

B

We are trying to strike a balance between our need to belong – and the diversity of our experiences. Youth are a mix of intersecting identities – gender, sexual, ethnic, socio-economic status – that form who we are. It's easy to try and neatly group us with terms like at-risk youth, immigrant and refugee youth, disabled youth, gay and bisexual youth, but within these groups life experiences vary broadly. Sometimes we are only trying to find out who we are. Our identity is fluid, changing as we discover the world around us, and ourselves. Ultimately, inclusion leads to belonging, and we all want a place to belong.

Priorities

TOP FOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT YEAR

54%

Increase awareness of immigrant and Aboriginal youth issues

25%

Education and awareness about homophobia and transphobia

15%

Create shared public spaces to hold educational and cultural activities

6%

More youth-led education programs about diversity

Sense of Belonging

A sense of connection and belonging is critical to the healthy development of children and youth. More than 14,000 children and youth who live outside their parents' homes or in government care in B.C. may experience a disruption in their ability to forge a sense of belonging.

SOURCE: *Champions for Children and Youth: Report on the 2008 B.C. Summit*

Young Refugees

Vancouver is one of the most popular landing places for refugees in B.C. In 2008, over 800 government-assisted refugees from 24 different countries arrived in our city – 327 of these refugees were under 18. Refugee youth have extraordinary needs: learning English, dealing with trauma, and learning a new way of life.

SOURCE: *GAR Bulletins*, Immigrant Services Society of B.C.

Aboriginal Youth

Aboriginal youth age 15 to 19 are the fastest growing segment of the youth population in B.C. Their numbers rose 22% from 2001 to 2006. This change raises the profile of issues affecting Aboriginal youth, especially those in urban areas.

SOURCE: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

MY CIRCLE

The Immigrant Services Society of B.C. created the Multicultural Youth Circle (MY Circle) to train leaders to run peer-support workshops for fellow immigrants and refugee youth. Over 300 youth have done the training, and many formed Action Teams to work on projects like the video *UFO: Unidentified Foreign Object*, about hardships newcomers face in Vancouver.

www.issbc.org

mobile text survey

Texting – Using Technology to Sample Youth Attitudes

Originally, the Youth Leadership Council wanted to complement this report with a public opinion poll about attitudes of youth toward elections and civic participation.

However, due to cost and other factors, it couldn't be done. Most polling companies have a hard time reaching youth. Typically, they don't include people under 18 in polls. And even if they did, many young people use cell phones rather than landlines. This means youth are not usually included in the traditional public opinion research that is used to shape policy and investment decisions.

The Council contacted Vancouver-based airG (www.airg.com) – a global leader in powering mobile communities and wireless social networking – to see if they could help. They agreed to donate some time and resources.

AirG issued a five-question poll by text to its 15- to 24-year-old clients in the 604 and 778 area codes. The results were dramatic – more than 3,000 replies were received in a single day.

Overall, youth shared a positive outlook on the importance of voting, and their ability to make a difference.

Limitations

The results of the airG poll are not considered scientific, as airG users are not a random sample of the general youth population. It was unable to capture additional demographic information on respondents. The text survey also only included the opinions of airG users who cared enough to text a vote.

What We Really Learned

The poll received responses from a lot of young people. Fast. Two things that most researchers didn't know how to do.

Youth can be reached, and are willing to share their opinions. It just helps to use their preferred communication tools. Mobile phone technology offers untapped potential as a public opinion research tool.

Results

The airG poll asked youth to consider the following five statements on political and civic participation. **Percentage represents youth who agreed or strongly agreed.**

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Voting in elections is important | 66% |
| 2. Youth have the power to make a positive difference in their community | 70% |
| 3. It's important to volunteer in political or social causes | 69% |
| 4. Youth issues are a priority for political leaders | 72% |
| 5. Youth and young adults have less power than adults in decisions that impact their lives | 60% |

grader profile

Here is a breakdown of demographic information on the 1,748 youth who made the *Youth Vital Signs* survey possible. Please note there are discrepancies in totals because some youth chose to skip certain demographic questions and also due to rounding.

Age

15-18 years old	65%
19-24 years old	18%
Under 15	12%
Over 24	5%

Gender

Female	54%
Male	41%
Transgendered	1.5%

Sexual Identity/Orientation

Straight	84%
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirited	15%

Country of Birth

Born in Canada	69%
Born outside Canada	30%

Ethnic Identity

Identify themselves as Canadian (the majority of youth)	42%
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The survey asked youth to check all ethnic identities that applied to them:

East Asian	38%
European	23%
Caucasian/White	17%
Southeast Asian	13%
First Nations and Aboriginal	9%
Latin/South American	7%
South Asian	6%
Black	3%
Middle Eastern	3%
African	2%
Australian/Pacific Islander	1%
Caribbean	1%
Don't know	2%

Youth graders who are...

In care	10%
People with disabilities	8%
Working	49%
Working and going to school	70%
Volunteering	58%
Who feel somewhat connected to their community	53%

Time Living in the Vancouver Region

Entire life	57%
5-15 years	22%
2-5 years	14%
Less than 1 year	7%

Number of Times Youth Moved in the Last Year

None	56%
Once	22%
Twice	11%
Three or more times	11%

Neighbourhoods

East Vancouver	53%
South Vancouver, Downtown West End and the West Side	34%
Suburbs outside of Vancouver	10%

Living Situation

Youth who live at home with their parents **over 80%**
(The next most common domestic situation was living with siblings, followed by living with other relatives.)

Language Spoken

Most common language	English
Number of youth who speak a second language	55%

Online or paper

Youth who took the survey online	1,192
Youth who filled out a hard-copy survey in community-based settings	556

differences among us

One of the coolest things about Vancouver is its diversity, particularly among youth. In large part, the youth who participated in the *Youth Vital Signs* survey reflected this diversity. It's interesting that, regardless of our background, many of us share similar views about the major issues.

However, the differences in opinion are also interesting. Some of these differences are described below.

Age

While we generally agreed on the top four subject areas that need immediate attention, the majority of youth age 15 to 18 identified Education as their fifth issue of importance, while 19- to 24-year olds chose Transportation.

Gender

There were no significant differences between female and male grading of key subject areas or selection of the top four areas in need of more attention.

About 1.5% of youth who participated in this survey said they were transgendered. Culture, Identity and Belonging, as well as Health and Well-being were among the top subject areas for this group, which varied significantly from non-transgendered youth.

Diverse Life Experiences

Overall, the youth surveyed see Vancouver as a welcoming and inclusive place to explore identity and culture. But our perceptions vary on the area of Culture, Identity and Belonging, depending on our circumstances.

Fifty-six per cent of youth who have lived in Vancouver their entire lives graded this issue with an A. However, only 8% of youth who have lived here less than one year perceived this area to be excellent.

Youth who said they were European, East Asian, White and Canadian graded Culture, Identity and Belonging with a B – on average one letter grade higher than their peers who identified as First Nations, Aboriginal, Black, African, South and Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin and/or South American. The latter generally gave this area a C grade.

First Nations and Aboriginal Youth

In addition to Housing, Poverty and Safety identified by all youth as the most urgent of the subject areas, First Nations and Aboriginal youth listed Education fourth and Health fifth among their top subject areas.

Immigrant and Refugee Youth

Immigrant and refugee youth's top subject areas of concern, in addition to Housing and Poverty, were Education (third), Employment (fourth) and Transportation (fifth).

Youth with Disabilities and Youth in Care

Youth with a disability and youth who identified as being in care at some point in their lives were the only two groups that listed Youth Voice among their top issues of concern.

Current Living Situation

The majority of us agree that Youth Housing and Homelessness is in dire need of immediate attention. Those of us who live on our own, who are young parents with children, who have moved multiple times or not experienced stable housing, or who have been a youth in care, perceived Vancouver's youth housing scene to be failing (more than 50% gave it an F). This is in stark contrast to youth who live with their parents – only 17% of these gave this area an F, and 3% gave Housing and Homelessness an A.

Community Connectedness

Those of us who do volunteer activities feel a stronger sense of connection to our community. We typically volunteer in our neighbourhoods – places like our community centre or neighbourhood house. We also serve on youth advisory committees, do fundraising, and volunteer to keep our parks clean.

Online versus Print

As mentioned earlier, the *Youth Vital Signs* survey was conducted in two ways: online using the website, and in community-based settings using printed copies. While there were no differences in top priorities and issue areas of concern between the two sets of respondents, youth who participated using the printed surveys

scored eight of the 12 subject areas one letter grade lower than youth who did the survey online.

On both versions, Youth Housing and Homelessness and Poverty consistently received a D and Safety and Youth Voice, a C. The youth completing the print surveys gave the remaining subject areas a C, one letter grade lower than the B grades from the online survey and the overall combined average.

Conclusion

Youth in Vancouver are concerned about housing and homelessness, poverty, education, accessible health services, and public transportation.

These concerns cut across all divisions of age, gender, and ethnicity.

The *Youth Vital Signs* survey has shown that – whether we are part of an ethnic minority; gay or straight; a new immigrant or someone who has lived here our entire life; whether we live with our parents or in foster care – we all want a roof over our head, safety on the streets, equal opportunities for education, a green and livable city, and a voice on the future of our community.

acknowledgements

Together we are the team behind *Youth Vital Signs*.

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Support and Funders

vancouver
foundation



On The Coast



HANGAR 18 CREATIVE GROUP INC.

Community Partners

Britannia Community Centre
Broadway Youth Resource Centre
Check Your Head
Covenant House
Directions Youth Services Centre
GAB Youth Services
Go Girls/SFU FREDA
Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association
La Boussole Francophone Centre
Leave Out Violence
McCreary Centre Society
MOSAIC
Reel Youth
Regional Vancouver Urban Observatory
Sunset Community Centre
Social Planning and Research Council of B.C.
Urban Native Youth Association

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what next?

Vancouver is a great place to be. As youth, we are generally optimistic and positive about our city and region.

However, youth also recognize that everyone, including ourselves and the public, governments and the private sector, community organizations and funders, has work to do. The youth who participated in *Youth Vital Signs* identified the most urgent priorities for action and increased public investment as:

affordable housing
education
public transportation
environmental action

Youth also recognized the importance and need for increased community investment in drug and alcohol treatment options, language and culture awareness programs, family support services, and parks and recreation.

Now it's up to you. You've read the report. You've got the grades. Do they reflect your perceptions and experience in Vancouver? What can you do about them?

Share your thoughts

visit: www.youthvitalsigns.ca
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I am Vancouver, and I want to...

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