

YOUTH VITAL SIGNS

METRO VANCOUVER IS ME

REPORT CARD
2013



CHECK THE PULSE OF METRO VANCOUVER >

MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH VITAL SIGNS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

HELLO,

We're the Youth Vital Signs Leadership Council, a diverse group of young people from across metro Vancouver who are passionate about improving our communities. We've been working together for months to compile this report, and it's our pleasure to present to you the second edition of Youth Vital Signs — a report card on youth life in metro Vancouver.

This report is the result of more than 3,500 young people sharing their opinions and making suggestions for positive change. We are proud that Youth Vital Signs creates a space for youth to make their voices heard, and we invite adults and decision-makers to share in this ongoing dialogue.

Providing suggestions and direction, we collaborated with Vancouver Foundation staff and community stakeholders to create this public opinion project. We learned that, though we come from different backgrounds, we can share a common purpose and make meaningful change in our communities.

We hope this report helps you to understand the young people around you a little better and, more importantly, that it contributes to an ongoing discussion about how youth can participate in decisions that affect our lives.

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the Youth Philanthropy Council; the City of Vancouver; McCreary Centre Society; the Vancouver Public Library; and Mountain Equipment Co-op. We also thank the 3,500 youth who shared their voices and opinions to make this report possible.

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ABOUT YOUTH VITAL SIGNS

Youth Vital Signs 2013 is a youth-driven research and public opinion initiative — a report card — that gives voice to young people aged 15 to 24 in metro Vancouver. Building on the success of the first Youth Vital Signs in 2009, this year we expanded our reach, connecting with 3,500 youth living throughout metro Vancouver. The result? A larger, more diverse snapshot of youth experiences across the entire region.

First started in 2009 by members of Vancouver Foundation's Youth Philanthropy Council, the project is modeled after a similar report that surveys adults in the region. Youth Vital Signs was created under the direction of a Youth Leadership Council — a group of 14 young people from all walks of life. They collaborated with mentors, community stakeholders, and alumni from the first Youth Leadership Council to make this project happen. From survey design to data analysis, they oversaw the project every step of the way.

In this survey, youth graded and identified opportunities for positive change in 13 subject areas, including: sustainability, homelessness, employment, and education, among other social issues. The report includes profiles on innovative youth organizations and programs, and a review of secondary research to help create a well-rounded perspective of youth life in metro Vancouver.

Youth Vital Signs 2013 offers a way for youth to share their perceptions and experiences of metro Vancouver. The goal is to inform and influence decision-makers, policy-makers, funders, and organizations on issues affecting young people. The 3,500 responses from youth provide an exciting opportunity to begin a dialogue and make positive change.

SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH IN METRO VANCOUVER

- According to the 2011 Census, there are:
 - About 145,200 youth aged 15 to 19 living in metro Vancouver.
 - About 159,000 youth aged 20 to 24 living in metro Vancouver.
- These two groups together make up 13% of metro Vancouver's total population.
- Compared to other age groups, the youth population in metro Vancouver is continuing to shrink. This has been a consistent trend since the 1991 Census.
- Young people are flocking to areas where housing is more affordable, such as Maple Ridge, Surrey, and parts of the Langley Township. Here, population growth of youth and young families is outpacing other metro Vancouver regions.
- Aboriginal youth continue to be the fastest growing segment of the youth population in British Columbia.
- Youth in school in metro Vancouver are remarkably diverse.
 - 60% speak a language other than English at home.
 - Among youth aged 15 to 24 in metro Vancouver, the most common reported ethnic origins were European, Asian, and East and Southeast Asian.
 - From 2003 to 2012, the number of international students coming to British Columbia increased by 51%.

RESEARCH METHODS

We used three primary research methods to capture the perceptions and experiences of youth in metro Vancouver: a survey; analysis of secondary research; and a gathering of youth stories. Together, this quantitative and qualitative approach provided a rich understanding of youth life in metro Vancouver.

THE SURVEY

The Youth Vital Signs survey invited youth aged 15 to 24 who live, work, or play in metro Vancouver to grade 13 key areas of life. They were also asked to identify opportunities for positive change and rank priorities for community investment. This was done through 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 three youth focus groups. Identical online and hard-copy versions of the survey were distributed between May 7 and June 30, 2013.

More than 3,550 completed surveys were received — 2,004 online and 1,555 on paper. Youth Leadership Council members, trained and supervised by the McCreary Centre Society, facilitated and collected the surveys at 27 community and school workshops to ensure that hard-to-reach youth voices were included in the report.

SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH

The McCreary Centre Society also produced a demographic profile of youth in metro Vancouver using data gathered from a range of primary and secondary sources, including the 2011 Census.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

With support from McCreary Centre Society, the Youth Leadership Council collected and reviewed a vast amount of secondary sources related to the subject areas, and chose to highlight two or three statistics or related research in each area.

For a detailed list of references, visit the website at youthvitalsigns.ca.

THE TOP FOUR

For each subject area, youth identified their top priorities for the next year. We highlight the top four only, giving occasional mention to other priorities throughout the report.

YOUTH IN ACTION

Youth are doing amazing things to make metro Vancouver a better place, and there are some equally amazing organizations dedicated to improving life here for young people. The Youth Leadership Council gathered their stories, some of which are presented in this report and include profiles on youth-led projects and organizations.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

- We expanded the survey to youth across metro Vancouver for the first time. We successfully connected with youth in most municipalities; however, the results are not a geographically representative sample.
- We did not have a 100% survey completion rate as youth were able to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering.
- The use of the term “metro Vancouver” instead of Lower Mainland may have caused confusion for some respondents.
- We only offered the survey in English. Although we attempted to connect with newcomer youth and English language learners in community and school settings, this may have been a barrier for some young people.

THIS IS HOW WE GRADED METRO VANCOUVER

HIGHLIGHTS

Youth Vital Signs is organized around 13 subject areas. The following four areas were identified by young people as requiring immediate attention:

1. POVERTY

"I fear that I will always be living paycheque to paycheque. Because of the [high] cost of everything, I don't have any extra money to put into savings each month."

2. EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

"It doesn't matter how much experience you have or the degree you have, it's nearly impossible [to find a job]. More and more people are growing up, getting older and would like to move out, but cannot..."

3. EDUCATION AND LEARNING

"High tuition combined with the high cost of living is financially crippling for a person trying to independently support themselves through university."

4. YOUTH HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

"I love [metro] Vancouver but fear that because of these housing prices, my peers and I will not be able to afford to stay here."

These four subject areas are closely interconnected — the rising costs of education, increasing competition for entry-level jobs, and limited affordable housing options all delay our transition to adulthood and hinder our ability to achieve independence. They can also contribute to an ongoing cycle of poverty, especially for those of us coming from low-income families.

There are also some interesting differences in top priorities that reflect our diverse life experiences and backgrounds:

- Approximately 2% of youth who participated in the survey identified as transgender. Youth Voice and Poverty were listed as first and second priority for this group of youth, with Safety, Mental Health, and Transportation tied for third.
- After Poverty, Housing, and Employment, Aboriginal youth listed Safety fourth and Mental Health fifth among their top subject areas.
- Youth living with a disability included Mental Health within their top issues of concern, tied with Education.

Three key themes emerged across the 13 subject areas:

HIGH COSTS

Beyond housing and education, the cost of public transportation also affects us, given that so many of us have no other means of getting around. Arts, culture, and recreational activities are also out of reach for many youth. Due to the high cost of living and a shortage of available jobs, many of us are choosing to leave metro Vancouver to live in other regions of BC or other provinces.

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

We are interested in learning more about environmental and social justice issues, especially at school where many of us spend a lot of our time. Incorporating these issues into our curriculum, starting at the elementary level, would help us value the importance of social justice and environmental sustainability at a younger age. For many of us, there are barriers to receiving this information at home. Therefore, schools are key to developing critical thinking skills, and helping us become active and engaged citizens.

ACCESSIBILITY AND AWARENESS

We are a savvy generation and can easily navigate the virtual world. But unless we go looking for information about youth-specific services, resources and opportunities, it is not easy to find. And while information does exist online, we would appreciate more meaningful opportunities to receive support and services in person. We need more accessible mental health services and information, better access to and awareness of youth spaces and clinics, and more information about our rights as employees.

TOP COMMUNITY INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

We also asked young people to rank 18 services and programs in which they would like to see more public financial investment. These are the five community investment areas that are considered essential to the well-being of young people living in metro Vancouver:

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1 | EDUCATION | 4 | MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES |
| 2 | AFFORDABLE HOUSING | 5 | EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS |
| 3 | PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION | | |

B YOUTH SPACES

A PLACE TO CALL OUR OWN.

Metro Vancouver has many amazing public spaces and lots of great programs for youth. However, not all of our communities have youth-friendly spaces, and the few that do exist suffer from a lack of funding. This makes it difficult to meet up with our friends in a safe and accessible place — especially in the evenings.

Accessibility is even more important for those of us who are from diverse ethnic backgrounds or who are transgender. We would like more affordable youth spaces, all-ages venues, and more inclusive community hang-outs. Contrary to what some people think, we'd love to hang out in spaces other than the mall.

We gave Youth Spaces a B.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

- 1 Create and promote more youth-only spaces (like all-ages venues)
- 2 More affordable spaces (e.g. youth discounts at community centres)
- 3 Invest in better quality spaces
- 4 More accessible spaces (e.g. longer hours, transit-friendly routes)

FAST FACTS

- In 2013, “all-ages” shows were banned at bars and cabarets. Previously, these facilities had the option to suspend their liquor licenses for “all-ages” events. This policy decreases the number of venues available for “all-ages” performances and concerts. 2013
- When establishing youth spaces, it’s important to recognize young people’s differing needs. Young people need spaces for services, programs and learning; safe spaces to relax and hang out; and spaces to nurture youth-led projects. 2011
- Community centres currently offer youth a space to gather. These centres offer different activities such as air hockey, ping pong, movies, pool and sports events.



“Not all youth spaces are queer- or trans-friendly. To be accessible to me and my friends, there needs to be bathrooms we can access and we need to feel safe and accepted in that space.”

“There needs to be more community spaces where youth can hang out without spending money or being forced into buying coffee or paying some sort of fee.”

C THE ARTS

WHEN ART THRIVES, SO DO WE.

We believe the arts should be given more support and recognition in our schools and communities. We would appreciate more opportunities to participate in programs that are affordable, to explore our creativity and to express ourselves through various artistic mediums. Metro Vancouver has a huge variety of festivals, but not many all-ages venues and few opportunities for youth to showcase their art. Increased funding would help more people experience the beauty and meaning that arts and culture can bring to our lives.

We gave the Arts a C.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

Reduce costs and increase funding

2

Promote youth art and events

3

More support for arts and culture

4

More arts education

FAST FACTS

- There is a strong connection between participation in the arts and overall satisfaction with life, including increased physical and mental health. 2012
- 70% of arts and culture organizations in Canada indicate that obtaining funding from government, foundations or corporations is a challenge. 2012
- In British Columbia, the federal and provincial governments spend the least on culture per capita than any other province — about \$53 per person. 2012

“There are many wonderful art shows and concerts that are available to the public. Unfortunately, many are not [accessible to youth] because of the lack of available all-ages spaces, especially for night-time shows.”

“[Metro] Vancouver is shutting down far too many cultural and art spaces. Live venues, galleries and theatres are extremely scarce...”

C YOUTH VOICE

IF IT AFFECTS US, WE SHOULD BE INVOLVED.

As young people, we are the experts of our own life experiences. Youth voices should be included in decision-making processes that affect our cities, schools, and communities. While voter turnout among our demographic has traditionally been low, many of us volunteer on boards and committees that serve our neighbourhoods, and inform regional and province-wide issues. We welcome the opportunity to learn more about policy-making and governance, and hope to be meaningfully engaged on equal and not just token terms.

We gave Youth Voice a C.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

- 1 More meaningful decision-making opportunities (e.g. at City Hall and in school)
- 2 Support, engage and motivate youth
- 3 Promote importance of youth voice
- 4 Re-evaluate current electoral process (e.g. lower voting age)

FAST FACTS

- Authentic youth engagement happens when organizations take risks by letting young people make decisions and recommendations that may not always be consistent with the organization's priorities. The risk is shared when youth take risks in sharing their personal stories publicly. 2013
- In BC's 2009 provincial election, only 27% of eligible voters aged 18-24 cast a ballot. The most important barrier for young people was a lack of knowledge about the electoral process. Other barriers included getting a voter identification card and the inability to get to a polling station. 2009; 2011

“[It would be great if] adults could listen to what we have to say because we have great ideas for our future... If they are able to work with us, and vice versa, then I think we are capable of accomplishing many great things.”

“Rather than just giving youth a voice, allow for direct youth participation in decision-making around the region.”

B SUSTAINABILITY

CARING ABOUT TOMORROW, TODAY.

We are fortunate to live in one of the greenest places in the world.

We also know that the threat of climate change is real and urgent. We need to take action now to secure a sustainable future for ourselves and our children. Emphasizing environmental awareness early in school can help us make smarter and more eco-friendly choices. We know we can do a better job of protecting our forests, fresh water, and habitats through innovation and improved environmental policies. Whether we are policy-makers or individuals, we all have the responsibility to make small-scale actions that contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of our region, our province, our country, and our world.

We gave Sustainability a B.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

More action-based programs (e.g. recycling, composting, reducing carbon footprint)

2

Access to resources and education on sustainability issues

3

Invest in alternative modes of transportation and infrastructure (e.g. transit and biking)

4

More green and clean neighbourhood spaces

FAST FACTS

- Metro Vancouver will ban organic materials (including food scraps) from its waste-management facilities by 2015. About 40% of all food waste comes from businesses and institutions, amounting to more than 100,000 tonnes every year. 2013
- The City of Surrey's PARKit program transforms parking lots and under-utilized areas into temporary pop-up parks, creating vibrant urban green spaces. 2013
- In 2014, the City of Vancouver will launch a network of shared bicycles available for short-term use for a fee. Located in secure docking stations, the public bike share system will add a convenient and affordable way to cycle in Vancouver. 2013

Youth in Surrey gave Sustainability a C while youth in the rest of metro Vancouver gave it a B.

"It's really exciting that so many young people are taking an interest in the environment. I feel like a lot of individuals in [metro Vancouver] are making healthy choices and decisions."

B TRANSPORTATION

PUBLIC TRANSIT SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST.

Overall, public transportation is good and our region is well serviced. However, in suburban areas, bus service can be inconsistent and, at times, non-existent. We would like better integrated services between municipalities, additional bus routes to Sky Train stations and universities, and more affordable transit passes for youth, especially for those of us without a U-Pass. We'd also like to improve the transit experience. Young people constitute the majority of transit users, yet many of us continually have negative experiences with transit police and staff.

We gave Transportation a B.

"Having just graduated from university, it is very shocking to go from paying \$30/month for a three-zone pass to \$91 for a one-zone pass. Monthly passes are really expensive."

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

- 1 Improve public transit system (e.g. increase frequency, services and safety)
- 2 Reduce cost of public transit
- 3 Reduce price of gas
- 4 More alternative transportation (e.g. bike lanes and co-op cars)

FAST FACTS

- 42% of 18-24-year-olds in metro Vancouver use public transit as their main mode of transportation. This is 30% higher than any other age group. 2011
- Since 1999, there has been a noticeable drop in the proportion of young adults with driver's licenses. This may be due to the graduated licensing program, the successful U-Pass program, and shifts in values and attitudes. 2011
- Transit fares have increased by 25% since 2009, rising from \$73 to \$91 for a one-zone monthly pass. 2010; 2013

"[Transit is] good in the city of Vancouver. But in the suburbs, such as Langley, service is very limited and not always an option for young people."

C

SAFETY

CRIME STATISTICS ARE DOWN. WHY ARE WE STILL WORRIED?

We all want to feel safe, whether in our neighbourhoods, classrooms, personal relationships, or at home with our families. While many of us feel metro Vancouver is relatively safe, the realities of sexual exploitation and bullying, particularly cyberbullying, are very real and close to home. We feel we need more support from police and RCMP. This relationship is complex, and we will continue to work on it to build mutual trust and respect.

We gave Safety a C.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

Improve public safety and reduce violence (e.g. more security and better transit safety)

2

More education about bullying, drugs, gangs and sexual exploitation

3

Improve relationship between police and youth

4

Improve justice system effectiveness

FAST FACTS

- In 2011, the total incidents of crime in metro Vancouver was down by 7%. However, across Canada, incidents of luring a minor via the Internet increased by more than 10%. 2011; 2012
- In 2012, the BC government announced that up to \$1 million would be available for projects that help build safe communities. Bullying Awareness Day (aka Pink Shirt Day) was also announced by offering grants to school-led anti-bullying efforts. 2013

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"Sexual assault and abusive relationships are common in high schools and post-secondary schools. We need to be talking to youth about why this is happening and [encouraging] them to check up on each other, to care about each other, and to call friends and strangers out on abusive behaviour."

"I feel like some youth are afraid to go to the police to ask for help, so there should be a better connection between youth and the police."

C

POVERTY

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN POVERTY TO FEEL ITS EFFECTS.

We love our region. We'd love it more if we could afford to live here. Some of us are experiencing poverty first-hand, as members of working-poor families and as young adults. We see the stigma and unfair treatment of those living in poverty, and we'd like to change this. We want to bring government, businesses, and local communities together to start a solution-based dialogue on raising the minimum wage and social assistance rates, to help cope with the high cost of living in metro Vancouver. This would help ensure that metro Vancouver becomes a more affordable and vibrant place for everyone.

We gave Poverty a C.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

More support for people living in poverty

2

Reduce the cost of living and raise minimum wage

3

More affordable housing

4

Improve economic policies (e.g. tax structures to reduce poverty gap)

FAST FACTS

- BC's current minimum wage of \$10.25 an hour would leave a full-time worker, living on their own, about \$3,000 below the poverty line. 2012
- According to a recent study on BC child labour laws, 16% of youth participants reported dropping out of school due to their work schedule and/or financial need. 2013
- In 2011, 11% of BC children and youth aged 18 and under were living below the poverty line. 2013



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"The housing market is out of control, leading myself, and many others I speak to, making plans to move east to other cities or provinces...in order to afford the basics."

"[We need to] provide lower-income individuals with the necessary resources, programs and opportunities to progress and further their abilities."

C

YOUTH HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

MORE HOUSING OPTIONS, FEWER RESTRICTIONS.

Metro Vancouver is our home. But rental costs in the region continue to outstrip our average weekly earnings. Safe, clean, affordable housing options for young people are limited. We need more options like co-ops, rental subsidies, and family housing for young parents. We also need integrated services and supportive policies that recognize the transition to independent living varies by individual, and doesn't always coincide with our 19th birthday.

We gave Youth Housing and Homelessness a C.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

More affordable housing

- From 2007 to 2012, the average cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment in metro Vancouver increased by 16% to \$982 a month. 2013

2

More long-term sustainable housing options (e.g. rentals and co-ops)

- The 2011 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count found 397 homeless youth under the age of 25. 2012
- Of the 397 homeless youth, 79 reported they had been affected by the withdrawal of youth services. The majority were 18 or 19 years-old when the withdrawal occurred. This is the age at which young people "age out" of the child welfare system. 2012

3

Invest in homelessness prevention and intervention

4

Lower the cost of living

FAST FACTS



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"There were many occasions when I have been nearly homeless... forced to sleep on people's floor and couches because I was unable to find housing that was affordable while working full-time and going to school full-time, fully supporting myself."

"[We need to] address the issues that cause youth to be homeless, rather than moving [young people] from foster home to foster home."

B

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN WAISTLINES.

Some of us spend a lot of time at school, so it's important that schools promote a healthy lifestyle. For example: make athletics affordable; maintain a physical education curriculum; and promote a healthy body image. We believe this will help increase awareness and understanding that "being healthy" encompasses more than perceptions of diet and exercise. Unfortunately, youth clinics are not always accessible, especially in suburban areas. We'd love to have better access to these clinics, and also to more youth-friendly recreational activities.

We gave Health and Well-Being a B.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

More youth-oriented recreation options

2

More education and awareness about healthy lifestyles

3

Reduce cost of fitness and community centres

4

Better access to and awareness of youth clinics (e.g. reduce wait times and costs)

FAST FACTS

- Only one youth clinic in Vancouver is open Monday to Friday until 8:00 pm, although two are now open on Saturdays. On the North Shore and in Richmond, most clinics close between 4:00 and 5:30 pm, making them difficult to reach if youth are in school. 2013
- Only 68% of 12-19-year-olds in Canada reported excellent or very good health in 2009. This is down from 81% in 1998. 2010

“Physical Education for students up to Grade 10 is minimal and often ineffective to ensure life-long physical activity and well-being. We need programs that can entice youth and teens, not just children, to stay active.”

“Health doesn't [just] mean what you eat, if you smoke or not, or exercise a certain amount of time per day. Health goes much deeper, down to who your friends are, how you feel about yourself, and the conditions in which you are living.”

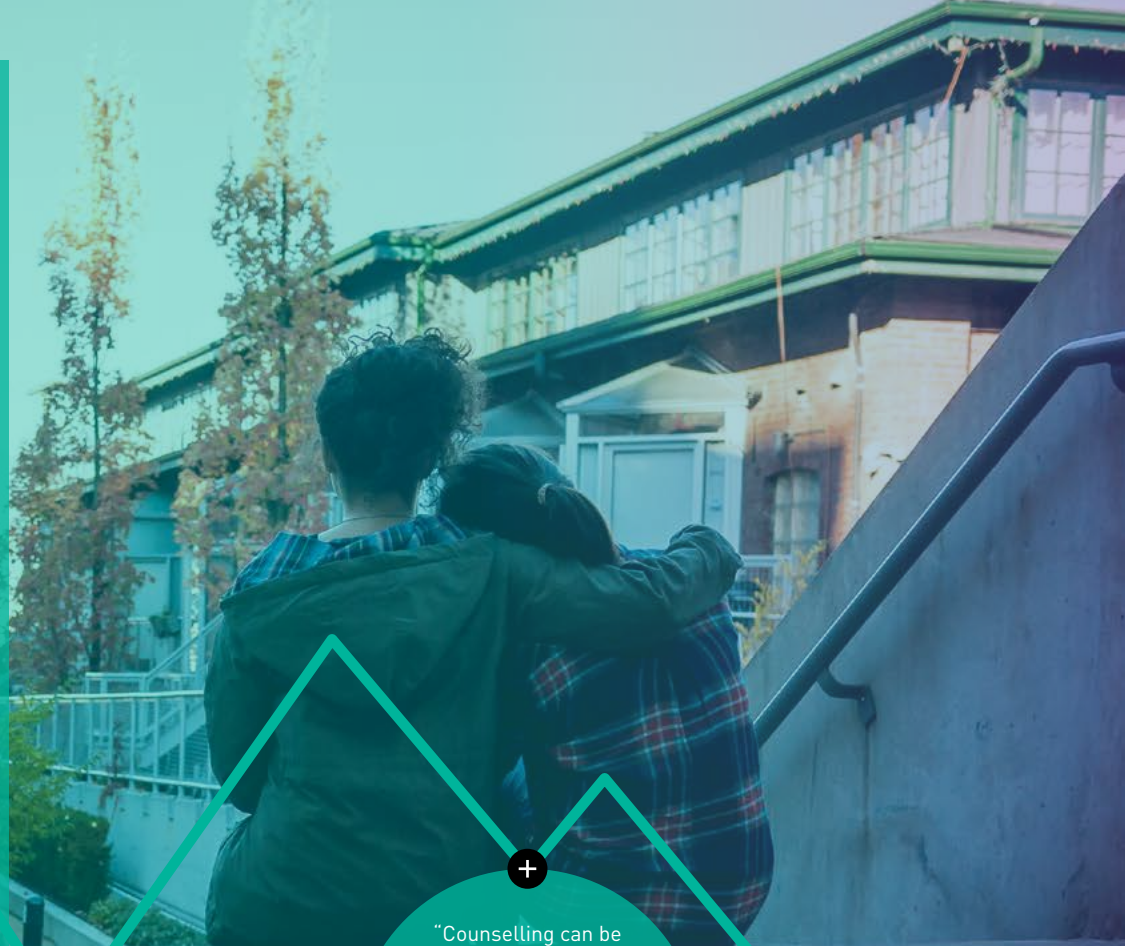
C

MENTAL HEALTH

AWARENESS IS ONE THING, UNDERSTANDING IS ANOTHER.

We don't often talk about mental health because of the stigma surrounding it. Sometimes, we aren't even aware that our friends may be struggling with depression or anxiety. We want to improve awareness and understanding of mental health to help us better navigate support services and address issues quickly, before they get worse. We need mental health services that are youth-specific, accessible, comprehensive, and offered in schools and health clinics. These should include prevention, proper diagnosis, and harm reduction.

We gave Mental Health a C.



TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

Better understanding of related issues to reduce stigma

2

Improve service accessibility and awareness

3

More services and resources (e.g. offer counselling at school)

4

Invest in substance-use prevention and harm reduction

FAST FACTS

- The effect that stigma has on people living with mental health problems can be as great as the mental health issue itself. Stigma can have a negative impact on relationships with friends, family, educators, employers and the health care system. 2009
- A review of BC's youth mental health services found that wait lists are a major barrier to accessing support. Some youth were on wait lists for more than a year to see a mental health professional or receive treatment. 2013

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"Counselling can be instrumental in the beginning of mental health challenges, yet it is extremely hard to come by, and the more easily accessible services are [only] available to people in crisis..."

"Efforts are being made, but I believe youth need to be more involved in the planning of these resources, because only youth understand the issues youth face."

B EDUCATION AND LEARNING

QUALITY EDUCATION + CRITICAL THINKING = VALUABLE LEARNING.

We value learning and the education system. Whether it's the high school curriculum, a trades program or a university degree, we recognize that education plays a pivotal role in our lives as emerging young leaders and entrepreneurs. We also value our public school teachers and believe they should be supported. Access to bursaries and scholarships, more alternative education programs, and recognition of the language skills of newcomer students all contribute to an environment where learning is valued.

We gave Education and Learning a B.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

- 1 Better curriculum and grading system (to prepare us for post-secondary)
- 2 Reduce cost of education and increase school funding
- 3 More alternative education programs and awareness
- 4 Reduce class sizes

FAST FACTS

- Interest rates on student loans in Canada are approximately three times higher than the rates in other countries, such as the United States, Sweden and Australia. 2008
- Average cost of post-secondary tuition in BC is projected to rise from \$5,719 in 2013/14 to \$6,129 in 2016/17. However, BC still has the fourth least expensive fees in the country. 2013
- In BC, there was a 15% increase in the number of elementary and high school classrooms with educational assistants between the 2008/09 and 2012/13 school years. 2008; 2012

"We need more teachers, smaller classes, and more support staff, especially for students with special needs."

"[Schools should] apply more critical thinking activities and focus more on expanding ideas and thinking at a critical level, rather than straight memorization of information from textbooks..."

C

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

**WITHOUT WORK, WE CAN'T GET EXPERIENCE.
WITHOUT EXPERIENCE, WE CAN'T GET WORK.**

The unemployment rate for youth under 24 is 7% higher than the general population. The effects of the economic downturn and inadequate job training are a few of the hurdles we face in our job search. Some of us accept unpaid internships or unsafe working conditions that do not acknowledge our workplace rights. This makes it hard to support ourselves and save what we've earned, especially when minimum wage barely covers basic living expenses. Effective co-op programs provide valuable experience and offer fair compensation. Despite these continued challenges, we are eager to enter the workforce to gain experience and learn applicable skills to ensure success and independence.

We gave Employment and Training a C.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

Create jobs and work experience opportunities

2

More job training and readiness programs

3

Better awareness of workplace rights (e.g. address unpaid internships)

4

Increase minimum wage

FAST FACTS

- Unpaid training is common among young workers. Many youth do not know they can file a complaint with the Employment Standards Branch about unpaid training wages. 2013
- According to WorkSafeBC, 30 young people are injured on the job every day. The greatest risks are from lifting objects, working at elevated heights, and working with knives. 2013
- Although the overall number of injury claims for young workers aged 15-24 has declined in the past few years, the severity of accidents has increased. 2013

"We need more summer student positions. Not just jobs, but real career-building positions between school semesters."

"There aren't many entry level jobs for young people. Most positions require 3-5+ years of experience. Often, the only way to get a foot in the door is to take unpaid, full-time internships."

B

CULTURE, IDENTITY AND BELONGING

OUR STRENGTH LIES IN OUR DIFFERENCES.

We are a generation that believes, now more than ever, that it is critical to connect across boundaries and celebrate the diversity of our cultures, beliefs and sexual identities. We need to create thoughtful and engaging events to learn from our differing experiences of class, race, and gender. We're striving for unity, but it can be difficult in the absence of education and awareness of our family histories and the history of Canada's First Nations people. We're trying to unlearn systemic discrimination in order to create a more inclusive metro Vancouver.

We gave Culture, Identity and Belonging a B.

TOP 4 PRIORITIES

1

Cultural awareness through events and festivals

2

More education for youth about power, diversity and inclusion

3

Better awareness by general public of discrimination and racism (e.g. Aboriginal and LGBTQ2S issues)

4

Address systemic and covert discrimination

FAST FACTS

- The most commonly cited reason for discrimination among BC youth is physical appearance (18%), followed by race/skin colour (12%), and sexual orientation (4-5%). 2008
- Throughout a series of dialogues with newcomer youth, participants expressed the need for safe spaces where people of different cultural backgrounds can meet and learn about each others' histories. 2013
- Many newcomers want to learn more about Canada's Aboriginal peoples. But the information available is often not from Aboriginal people's perspective and ignores the complexities of Aboriginal history. 2011

"We need to unlearn so much - racism, ageism, heterosexism, ableism, classism - and the list goes on."

"Sweeping BC and Canadian history under the rug is not the answer. Being able to learn from our past mistakes (e.g. residential schools, Japanese internment during WWII) is the first step towards changing [our] culture for the better."

GRADER PROFILE

Here's a breakdown of demographic information on the 3,559 youth who made the 2013 Youth Vital Signs survey possible. Please note there are discrepancies in totals because some youth chose to skip certain demographic questions, and some questions asked youth to select all that apply.

AGE

- 64%** 15–18 years old
- 21%** 19–24 years old
- 13%** Under 15
- 2%** Over 24

GENDER

- 56%** Female
- 42%** Male
- 2%** Transgender

SEXUAL IDENTITY/ORIENTATION

- 89%** Straight
- 12%** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, two-spirited

COUNTRY OF BIRTH

- 70%** Born in Canada
- 30%** Born outside of Canada

ETHNIC IDENTITY

(The Survey asked youth to check all ethnic identities that applied to them):

- 55%** Canadian
- 37%** East Asian
- 23%** European
- 12%** South Asian
- 11%** Southeast Asian
- 8%** Aboriginal (First Nations/Inuit/Métis)
- 5%** Middle Eastern
- 5%** Latin/South/Central American
- 4%** African
- 3%** Australian/Pacific Islander
- 3%** Caribbean
- 3%** Don't Know

LANGUAGE SPOKEN

ENGLISH Most common language

- 17%** Youth who speak more than one language at home
- 11%** Youth who speak more than one language with friends

YOUTH GRADERS WHO ARE...

- 14%** People with disabilities
- 90%** Going to school
- 40%** Working
- 59%** Volunteering

YOUTH GRADERS WHO FEEL...

- 72%** At least somewhat connected to their community
- 28%** Hardly or not at all connected to their community

YOUTH GRADERS WHO...

- 11%** Ever experienced homelessness
- 9%** Ever experienced government care

TIME LIVING IN THE METRO VANCOUVER REGION...

- 51%** Entire life
- 29%** 5–10+ years
- 12%** 2–5 years
- 9%** Less than two years

WHERE YOUTH GRADERS LIVE

- 39%** Vancouver
- 6%** North Shore
- 4%** Tri-cities
- 6%** Central – Burnaby/New Westminister
- 10%** Richmond, Delta, Tsawwassen
- 35%** South of Fraser – Surrey/White Rock/Langley/Aldergrove

LIVING SITUATION

- 86%** Youth who live at home with their parents
- The next most common domestic situation was living with siblings, followed by living with other relatives

NUMBER OF TIMES YOUTH MOVED IN THE LAST YEAR

- 55%** None
- 23%** Once
- 11%** Twice
- 11%** Three or more times

DIFFERENCES AMONG US

Everyone has a story. Our barriers or privileges shape our stories and impact how we experience life in the metro Vancouver region. This report offers a small window into the many voices, perceptions, and experiences of our peers through “hot spots” along the pulse line in each subject area. Sometimes we are in full agreement with one another about what needs to change. Other times, our opinions diverge. This section will dig a little deeper into our differences and reveal the dynamics of our diversity.

AGE

Youth between 19 and 24 were more likely to indicate that more long-term, sustainable housing is a priority, compared to youth 15 to 19 (27% vs. 15%). Many of us work and go to school at the same time — 68% of us work and attend post-secondary studies, and 32% of us work while attending high school or alternative programs. With the exception of Sustainability, older youth also gave every subject area a lower grade.

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

The survey results revealed that when we volunteer, we're more likely to feel strongly connected to our community. Interestingly, young people born outside of Canada also reported a strong sense of community connectedness. However, “community” was not defined in the survey, so we cannot assume that it holds the same meaning for everyone. It can refer to a city, a school, or a faith-based or ethnic community.

PLACE OF BIRTH

Thirty per cent of survey respondents were born outside of Canada. Youth respondents born outside of Canada were more likely to suggest that increasing employment and job training opportunities for youth is a priority. We cannot assume that youth respondents born outside of Canada are new immigrants or refugees. They may also be international students, or those who migrated to Canada at a very young age. With the percentage of international students coming to British Columbia almost doubling in the last 20 years, we have to remember that every journey to Canada is unique.

DIVERSE LIFE EXPERIENCES

Overall, the average grades indicate a positive experience of life in metro Vancouver, but many of us are not “average.” Within the Mental Health subject area, youth who experienced homelessness were more likely to prioritize the need for substance misuse support services and harm reduction. LGBTQ2S youth were more likely to suggest improved service accessibility and mental health services. Youth with disabilities graded Mental Health lower than their peers without disabilities. They were also more likely to indicate that it's not easy to access general youth-specific supports and information within their communities. These youth groups also generally gave every subject a lower grade.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Youth in Vancouver frequently stated that reducing the cost of post-secondary studies is a priority. Youth living outside of Vancouver wanted smaller class sizes. Growth in the student population in municipalities such as Surrey is out-pacing the availability of classroom space. Vancouver remains one of the most expensive cities in the world to live, which makes it difficult to balance the costs of post-secondary tuition and keep a roof over our heads.

CURRENT LIVING SITUATION

Young people who had to move more than three times in the past year were almost twice as likely to suggest more stable housing options than peers who didn't have to move as frequently. For youth who had ever been in government care, 46% had experienced homelessness. For youth who had no experience with the foster care system, only 8% had experienced homelessness.

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

Through the process of designing and administering this survey, we've learned a lot. As much as we tried to deliver an inclusive and youth-friendly survey, we received some feedback that will enrich the next edition of this survey, and add to our own valuable learning:

• PANSEXUALITY

Some youth respondents shared their disappointment in not having an option to choose pansexuality as a sexual orientation. We contacted community partners and organizations and learned that pansexuality includes attraction to people of all sexual orientations as well as gender identities. Bisexuality can be confused with pansexuality, but the main difference is that people who identify as bisexual are attracted to either male or female, but they may not be open to developing relationships with transgender people.

• TRANSGENDER YOUTH

We learned that there isn't a consensus among young people who identify as transgender. Some understand this as a gender identity while others see this as a sexual orientation.

• IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

We didn't ask youth to self-identify as new immigrants or refugees in this survey, so we haven't been able to capture the demographic information and perceptions of newcomer youth's experience in metro Vancouver. Although we did ask youth to share how long they have lived in Canada or if they were born outside of Canada, we can't determine the experiences of newcomer youth based on those questions alone.

YOUTH IN ACTION

Youth are doing amazing things to make metro Vancouver a better place. Here are a few examples.

YOUTH VOICE

Organization: Vancouver Foundation

Project: Youth Philanthropy Council (YPC)

Location: Metro Vancouver

www.vfypc.ca

Vancouver Foundation's Youth Philanthropy Council (YPC) is a group of volunteer youth who research and assess community concerns, work with local non-profit organizations, and make grant money available for other youth-led groups who want to create positive change in their community. The YPC supports programs that promote youth voice and encourage inclusiveness and equality.

Organization: Coast Capital Savings

Project: Youth Leaders Community Council

Location: Metro Vancouver

www.coastcapitalsavings.com

The Young Leaders Community Council is responsible for reviewing grant applications to Coast Capital Savings and making recommendations for the allocation of community investment funds. This "for youth, by youth" initiative helps Coast Capital Savings build a brighter future for young people across metro Vancouver.

EDUCATION

Organization: Vancouver Foundation

Project: Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team (YAT)

Location: Metro Vancouver

www.make-it-count.ca

Metro Vancouver's immigrant and refugee youth and youth workers are a rich source of insight. Fresh Voices engages youth to influence policies and practices that impact their belonging and inclusion. In 2011, the BC Ministry of Education adopted one of the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team's key policy recommendations: to rename English as a Second Language (ESL) as English Language Learning (ELL) to acknowledge newcomers' additional language skills as strengths.

YOUTH HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Organization: Vancouver Foundation

Project: Youth Homelessness Initiative Youth Advisory Circle (YAC)

Location: Metro Vancouver

www.vancouverfoundation.ca/grants/youth-homelessness

For most people, homelessness is only a vague notion. But for some youth, it's an everyday struggle. The Youth Advisory Circle (YAC) is a small but diverse group of young people aged 17 to 24 who have lived in government care or have been homeless. Through sharing experiences, developing a deeper understanding of the policies, and conducting research for youth homelessness prevention, they develop innovative new ways to raise awareness.

POVERTY

Organization: Family Services of Greater Vancouver

Project: Financial Literacy for Youth (FLY)

Location: Metro Vancouver

www.fsgv.ca

Financial literacy is an important skill to have, especially if you're just starting to work and earn money. The FLY program supports youth who are transitioning to independence or are facing unstable housing situations and other barriers. Through this program, young people can learn skills like budgeting, managing credit, and planning for the future.

HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Organization: Red Fox Healthy Living Society

Project: Red Fox Medicine Wheel

Location: Vancouver

www.redfoxsociety.org

Offering a holistic perspective on health, Red Fox serves Aboriginal and inner-city children and youth, youth with disabilities, and families. They provide a range of programs that foster healthy living. One of their many projects is the Red Fox Medicine Wheel, a youth-led project in which young people can explore geo-caching and outdoor recreation at regional parks.

SUSTAINABILITY

Youth Group: Kids for Climate Action

Location: Vancouver

www.kidsforclimateaction.ca

Kids for Climate Action is a youth group that advocates for stronger government action on climate change. They want to encourage parents and elected officials to work on the issue of climate change — not just pass it on to future generations. Through rallies, education, and campaigns, they hope to raise awareness about climate change at community and government levels.

SAFETY

Organization: ACCESS Youth Outreach Services (formally PoCoMo Youth Services)

Project: Project Reach Out

Location: Tri-Cities

www.accessyouth.org

ACCESS Youth Outreach Services' philosophy is "No youth is left behind." Their main program, Project Reach Out, is an innovative mobile drop-in centre and outreach program. A converted bus travels through communities to offer safe and supportive programming on Friday and Saturday evenings. On average, they reach 40 young people per night.

CULTURE, IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Organization: Peace it Together

Location: Vancouver

www.peaceittogether.com

Peace it Together brings together Palestinian, Israeli, and Canadian youth with the potential to become peace-builders and change-makers. These young people co-create films that explore key issues and reflect their unique view of the conflict. Through the power of film, Peace it Together fosters dialogue about cultural conflict and global peace-building throughout Israel-Palestine, Canada, and the world.

TRANSPORTATION

Organization: Shift

Location: Vancouver

www.shift.coop

Thousands of small deliveries, from coffee to office supplies, are made in Vancouver's downtown core every day, often using cars and vans. Noting this as an opportunity, five students created the Shift Delivery Co-op, which offers a green alternative to car couriers. Using trikes outfitted with cargo bins to deliver packages around downtown, Shift is decreasing carbon emissions and pollution while shifting perceptions about sustainable transportation.

MENTAL HEALTH

Organization: Family Services of the North Shore

Project: Youth Leadership Advisory Board (Youth LAB)

Location: North Vancouver

www.familyservices.bc.ca/youth/contact.php

The Youth Leadership Advisory Board (Youth LAB) consists of 8–10 youth who are engaged in creating outreach strategies for the North Shore. Youth LAB addresses issues such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. They reach out to communities and raise awareness through presentations on mental health to local organizations, politicians and schools.

YOUTH SPACES

Organization: Surrey Youth Resource Centres

Location: Surrey

www.pcrs.ca/surrey_youth_resource_centres

With two drop-in centres for youth in Surrey, the resource centres provide a youth-friendly environment that offers a wide array of services. These include employment counselling, life skills and housing supports, and alternative education programs. Young people can also develop leadership skills through youth-led initiatives and take advantage of the Resource Room — all free of charge.

EMPLOYMENT

Organization: Langley Association for Community Living

Project: Youth Works

Location: Langley

www.langleyacl.com

The Langley Association for Community Living promotes the full inclusion of people with disabilities in their communities through the discovery of each individual's talents, and works to ensure those gifts are recognized. The Youth Works initiative supports youth with developmental disabilities in Grades 10–12 to discover their work and career aspirations, and helps them secure and maintain summer and afterschool employment.

Organization: Coast Capital Savings

Project: Coast Community Youth Team

Location: Metro Vancouver

www.coastcapitalsavings.com

The Coast Community Youth Team consists of Grade 11 and 12 students who gain on-the-job experience by spending a year working as a Service Pro (also known as a bank "teller") in a Coast Capital branch. The team members also represent Coast Capital Savings at community events and initiate community volunteer projects, all while earning money and gaining valuable skills.

THE ARTS

Organization: The Cultch

Project: The IGNITE! Youth Festival and Youth Panel

Location: Vancouver

www.thecultch.com

The IGNITE! Youth Panel consists of 20 young people aged 14–24 who create and organize Vancouver's largest youth-driven arts festival — IGNITE! The one-week festival showcases the work of over 250 young artists from across metro Vancouver, creating a community of young artists who can further expand their talent and inspire generations of young people to come.

WHO WE ARE

YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



Afeef Ahamed Hifzur Rahuman, Surrey

Afeef, 19, moved to Canada from Sri Lanka when he was 14 years-old, in search of a better education. Afeef loves to travel with his family, play cricket and read non-fiction books. He recently graduated from high school and is looking forward to studying Child and Youth Care at Douglas College.



Andy Lin, Burnaby

Andy, 16, is a Grade 11 student at Burnaby South Secondary. Andy is excited about Youth Vital Signs because he enjoys working with the other Leadership Council members and contributing to such an awesome report.



Ashley Astronaut, Vancouver

Ashley, 19, is a creative leader, artist, activist, Leave Out Violence (LOVE) alumni, and a member of Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative Youth Advisory Circle. She loves to make others, and herself, laugh and smile. Ashley is also a bacon and Arizona Iced Tea enthusiast. #YOLO



Diego Cardona, Vancouver

Diego, 17, arrived in Canada from Colombia in 2005 with his mom and sister. Diego is a graduate of the Multicultural Youth Circle Program, a current member of the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team, and part of the Youth Philanthropy Council of Vancouver Foundation. He currently spends a lot of his time doing work around issues such as youth engagement, immigrant and refugee youth inclusion and social inequality.



Elaine Andy, Vancouver

Elaine, 21, is a member of the Nuxalk Nation and studying to be a Health Care Assistant at the Native Education College. Originally from Tsawwassen/Ladner, she is involved in the Rights of Passage Program at Covenant House Vancouver. Elaine cares deeply about her community, and especially about the importance of ensuring young people have access to quality education and supportive mentors.



Fatima Zaidi, Delta

Fatima, 21, is a Criminology student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and sits on the Kwantlen Student Association and Kwantlen Arts Faculty Council. Fatima is passionate about empowering young people to make their voices heard in decision-making processes. Active in her community, Fatima is involved in many organizations including the Boys and Girls Clubs, Immigrant Services Society and The United Way.



June Liu, Surrey

When June, 18, is not pretending to be a mature young adult with her life figured out, she spends time either online or accidentally producing cakes. Sometimes she gets tired of cakes so she volunteers with the City of Surrey, and works there too. She's really hardcore about promoting social justice and equality.



Michelle Su, Vancouver

Michelle, 17, is part of the Richmond Youth Service Agency, runs the Amnesty International Club at her school, and loves studying the multi-dimensional complexities of history. Michelle is excited about being a youth in metro Vancouver because of all the amazing opportunities she has to make positive changes in her community.



Rahul Walia, Vancouver

Rahul, 20, is thrilled to be working on the Youth Vital Signs project. He is a third-year student attending the University of British Columbia, where he studies Life Sciences. In his spare time, Rahul can be found volunteering at the local food bank, complaining about the weather, or biking around the Vancouver seawall.



Renee Sun, North Vancouver

Renee, 18, is a first year Criminology student at SFU. She is actively involved in her North Shore community, as a member of several youth leadership programs with the North Shore Multicultural Society and the Family Services of the North Shore. Renee is passionate about photography, and likes to walk around the city with her camera in hand to experience the world through its lens.



Savneet Sandhu, Vancouver

Savneet, 18, likes to bake, make bracelets and do yoga. Savneet loves being a young person in metro Vancouver and is excited about Youth Vital Signs because of its potential to showcase youth opinions and create positive change. If Savneet had a superpower, it would be the ability to fly because there would be no boundaries.



Syahidah Ismail, Vancouver

Syahidah, 24, has been breathing the fresh mountain air of unceded Coast Salish territories (Vancouver, Canada) since 2007. She moonlights as a writer and considers herself a closet musician. An aspiring media critic, she also enjoys watching television, films and keeping up with pop culture in general.



Victor Ngo, Vancouver

Victor, 23, is a graduate student studying urban planning at the University of British Columbia. Committed to social and environmental justice, he is passionate about cities, community development, and urban sustainability. Born and raised in Vancouver, Victor enjoys photography and cycling in his spare time.



Victor Wakarchuk, Vancouver

Victor, 18, is in his second year of studies at UBC and hopes to graduate with his Bachelors of Social Work. In his spare time, he facilitates workshops on HIV and sexual health from a sex-positive and anti-oppressive perspective with YouthCO HIV and Hep C Society, and works as an on-call youth worker at Richmond Youth Service Agency.

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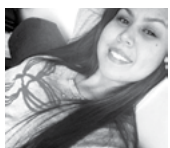
Bacilia 'Cia' Ramirez, Vancouver

Cia is a member of the Cowessess Nation in Saskatchewan and proud mother to nine-year-old Tikiya. Cia feels a deep personal responsibility to increase the voice of Aboriginal youth, and helped produce a film called **Residential Truth – Unified Future**, a documentary on the impact of residential schools. Cia is currently studying Family and Community Counselling at the Native Education College.



Hawa Mire, Toronto/Vancouver

Hawa is a Somali storyteller and youth advocate who writes and rants about Blackness, diaspora and (dis)connection. Hawa has worked locally, nationally and internationally with youth and service providers around the broad topic of youth engagement using an anti-oppressive analysis. Her work focuses primarily on supporting, mentoring and sparking youth-run, youth-oriented leadership.



Kim Webber, Vancouver

Kim is from the Nuxalk Nation and first became involved with Youth Vital Signs in 2009 through her work with Reel Youth. Kim is a member of Vancouver Foundation's Youth Philanthropy Council, and currently resides in East Vancouver with her 10-year-old son Lucius.



Ricky Tu, Vancouver

Ricky is a youth worker with Britannia Community Services Centre. Having participated in the first Youth Vital Signs initiative, this time he's back to support the group in a mentorship role. Ricky is passionate about creating spaces for youth to say what matters to them and make their voices heard.

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WHAT'S NEXT

This survey takes the pulse and checks the vital signs of metro Vancouver from a youth perspective. These pages provide a glimpse into the lives, opinions and experiences of young people from across the region.

Overall, we are positive and hopeful about the future of metro Vancouver. Where we see the need for improvements, we've made recommendations for positive change. We hope this report initiates an ongoing discussion between youth, local governments, community organizations and the general public about how youth contribute to the health and well-being of our communities, and how we can be meaningfully engaged in decisions that directly affect our lives.

Though this is the end of our report, it's really just the beginning. The start of a bigger process of acting on what we found. We want to connect with you and hear your ideas. We look forward to bringing youth and decision-makers together at community conversations across the region, to consider the grades and recommendations of this report. We look forward to developing ideas for action and change.


But we need your help. Help us keep metro Vancouver the vibrant place it is:

- Participate in a community conversation. Sign up for our mailing list so you can stay informed of events and updates.
- Give your own grade. Visit our website at www.youthvitalsigns.ca and grade each of the subject areas. We invite you to share your grades and opinions through Twitter and Facebook to spark a discussion among your peers. **#yvs2013**
- Do you have an idea for positive change in your community? We want to hear from you! Share your thoughts and ideas:

Visit: www.youthvitalsigns.ca

Email: ypc@vancouverfoundation.ca

THIS IS THE PULSE OF METRO VANCOUVER FROM A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE



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