

Hosting Fresh Voices and Fostering Change has been an expression of Vancouver Foundation’s commitment to engaging youth who face barriers to success.

In spring 2018, both initiatives moved to other community organizations. During this transition, youth, staff, board and community partners reflected on what has been learned: from both the challenges and successes of youth engagement.



Fostering Change is an initiative to improve policy, practice and community connections for young people in B.C. transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Fostering Change is guided by the Youth Advisory Circle, young people age 19-24 with lived experience of foster care.



Key achievements 2012-2017

- \$5 million in grants to community organizations improved the lives of former foster care youth
- Groundbreaking public opinion surveys and economic research showed a clear rationale for increasing supports for youth aging out of care
- Over 17,000 petition signatures and 147 Candidates Pledges demonstrated public and political will across BC
- In 2018, BC government made significant policy improvements to eligibility, amount and length of time former youth in care can access financial support, investing \$30 million over next three years

FRESH VOICES

Fresh Voices is a group of refugee and immigrant youth, age 14 to 24, working to make B.C. a better place for young newcomers, through public engagement, advocacy, research and partnerships.



Key achievements 2011-2017

- Over 1,000 immigrant and refugee youth brought together to discuss public policies that affect their lives
- Successfully renaming English as a Second Language to English Language Learning
- LostVotesYVR, a public education and engagement campaign to extend municipal voting rights to permanent residents

Youth Engagement Practices

- Sharing power**
 - Create shared goals and Terms of Reference and engage youth in problem solving throughout the initiative
 - Be transparent about extent of youth decision-making power in different situations
 - Use foundation credibility and networks to open doors to decision-makers
- Youth capacity building**
 - Provide opportunities for formal and informal learning
 - Engage adult allies in the youth council
 - Assist youth to prepare fully before meeting with decision-makers, media
- Foundation capacity building**
 - Invest adequate time and funds for deep engagement
 - Acknowledge and reduce organizational barriers
 - Ensure board and staff understand link between youth program and Foundation goals



Read the full report:
vancouverfoundation.ca

Vancouver Foundation’s Youth Engagement Report

Learning from Fostering Change and Fresh Voices
April 2018

Lessons on ...

Youth engagement

- 1 **Involve youth early in the process**, and keep them in the centre throughout.
- 2 **Sharing power means** sharing information and responsibility.
- 3 **Hiring staff with lived experience** is effective for engaging youth that face marginalization.
- 4 **Youth engagement staff need to be well supported** in order to support everyone else.
- 5 **Respect the knowledge youth bring with them** while supporting them to build new capacity they need to lead.

Change within the Foundation

- 6 **Just as youth are building leadership capacity**, so the organization needs to increase its capacity for inclusion.
- 7 **Be innovative to balance the Foundation's risk management** with the conditions for successful youth engagement.

“In youth engagement there are no mistakes just learning opportunities.” - Youth advisor

Community collaboration

- 8 **A youth advisory council can become a resource** for the community: a stream of young leaders skilled in engagement.
- 9 **The Foundation's emphasis on youth engagement encourages community organizations** to improve their practice.

Building public and political will

- 10 **There are not many venues** where youth and decision-makers can discuss public policy, but we can create them.
- 11 **Youth with lived experience can engage in all phases of advocacy** - and campaigns will be stronger as a result.
- 12 **Combining the Foundation's credibility with young people's voices** makes for powerful public and political outreach.