

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

*A Report on Project Activities for the
Connecting Community to Surrey
Youth Aging Out of Care Project*



We acknowledge that this work takes place on the unceded, ancestral and traditional territories of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Kwantlen, Qayqayt and Tsawwassen First Nations. We recognize the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples, which is evident in the disproportionate number of Indigenous children and youth in the care system. We commit to approaching this work in the spirit of reconciliation; aiming to decolonize our practice and amplify the voices of Indigenous youth whenever possible.

AN INITIATIVE OF



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Surrey Youth
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth in and from care matter. And they deserve to be heard.

Of the approximately 700 youth in BC who leave government care on their 19th birthday each year, anywhere from 50 to 70 youth “aging out” every year call Surrey their home. In 2016, the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition identified youth who had “aged out” of the government care system as a key demographic to support, noting the increased risk of poverty for these young people. They set out on a mission to “wrap the community around youth”, and radically rethink the ways youth are supported by the broader community as they transition from the care of MCFD into independence when they turn 19.

Over three years, we focused our work in three areas: research, building community, and youth leadership development. In our final year of the project we launched two prototype projects that brought together findings and work from those three areas.

The focus on youth leadership development was two-fold: we wanted to amplify the voices of youth in and from care by ensuring the project activities were designed, implemented and evaluated with direct input from youth with care experience. We also wanted to support the leadership development of youth, and provide them with opportunities to access skill development opportunities, new experiences, and to build connections with the community-at-large.

This report highlights the work we did on youth leadership development, and includes highlights on the distinct activities related to this area of focus:

- The development of a Youth Advisory Committee
- Supporting a range of advocacy opportunities for youth
- Hosting 3 Youth Retreats

Paramount to the project’s success was the creation of the Youth Advisory Committee; a group made up of diverse Surrey youth with care experience, with a mandate to advise on all activities related to the Connecting Community to Surrey Youth Aging Out of Care project. This group of outspoken young people provided crucial direction and expertise on the process, the actions, and the intended outcomes of the project-at-large. Project activities were further supported by the collaboration of diverse community members and key stakeholders through an overall Project Planning Committee and a number of distinct Working Groups

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THE CONTEXT

Approximately 700 youth in BC leave government care every year on their 19th birthday, and around 5,000 young BC adults (aged 19-24) have previously been in government care. While increasing numbers of young people in BC are living with their parents until well into their twenties, young people coming out of the care system are forced into independence at 19; cut off from familiar services and supports before they may be ready.

Surrey has the largest youth population in BC; in 2016, roughly a quarter of the City's population was under 19 years old. But prior to 2016, there wasn't a lot of information specifically about youth with care experience in Surrey. Looking to take action on this issue, the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition commissioned a report by the McCreary Centre Society in 2016 entitled "Surrey Youth Aging Out of Care" to paint a clear local picture of this issue. Their research showcased some important facts: including that amongst Surrey's young people, anywhere from 50 to 70 turn 19 and 'age out' of government care every single year.

The research showed us that most British Columbian parents expect to support their children up to age 28, and most of them do. While just about all of their peers receive some financial or other assistance from their families between the ages of 19 to 28, only a tiny fraction of former youth in care in Greater Vancouver had received any housing or financial support from their family since turning 19. Unfortunately, the pattern across BC is true for Surrey youth with care experience - the research done by the McCreary Centre Society found that local youth who age out of care are more likely than their peers to become homeless, have poor educational, employment and health outcomes, and claim income assistance benefits.

Additionally, the research showed that the majority of BC adults believe that 19 year-olds do not have the necessary skills and resources to live independently, and need the support of their families through their twenties. A 2013 Vancouver Foundation poll showed that only a quarter of BC adults were aware that government support ends when young people in care reach their 19th birthday. Initiatives like Fostering Change, and the work of the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks and First Call have extremely successful at raising public awareness of this important issue, and so the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition set out to see how to bring individuals, organizations, and local government together to more effectively support young people transitioning out of care in Surrey.

 This report focuses on the project activities related to youth leadership development, and our efforts to increase the skills of youth from care, and empower them to be changemakers in the community.

THE PROJECT



RESEARCH

- Surrey Youth Aging Out of Care Report
- Youth in Care Fact Sheet
- Housing Resource Sheet
- Youth Mentorship Program Models
- Youth Housing Models
- Youth Housing Survey



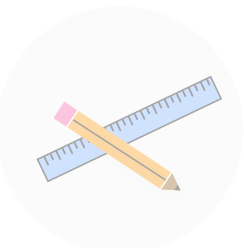
BUILDING COMMUNITY

- Stakeholder Workshops
- Holiday Dinners
- BC Children & Youth in Care Week Awards and Community BBQ
- 19th Birthday Installation and Event
- Youth Story Harvest



YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Youth Advisory Committee
- Advocacy
- Youth Retreats



PROTOTYPE PROJECTS

- Compass Connections
- Plenty of Threads

Given what the statistics say about the increased risk of poverty for young people with care experience, it was a natural fit for the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition (SPRC) to lead a project focused on supporting youth aging out of the care system. The intent of this work was to “wrap the community around youth”, and radically rethink the ways youth are supported by the broader community as they transition from the care of MCFD into independence. And so, in 2016, with the support of funding from the Vancouver Foundation, “Connecting Community to Surrey Youth Aging Out of Care” launched into its first phase. With continued support from the Vancouver Foundation in 2017, and additional funding from Coast Capital Savings, Envision Financial, the Ocean Park Foundation, the Youth Employment and Education Fund (now the Surrey Youth Assistance Fund) and others, we hit the ground running with an ambitious vision to change outcomes for youth in and from care.

We brought together stakeholders, decision-makers, adults and youth with lived experience, and community members to hear from youth and what they need to feel connected to the community as they make the leap into independent living. Our vision was that:

- Surrey youth in and from care will be better supported in their transition into adulthood.
- Youth participants will develop and refine their leadership skills, with the tools and knowledge to more effectively advocate for policy and systems change.
- Individuals and organizations not currently engaged with young people will be actively engaged in providing support to Surrey youth with care experience through financial contributions, in-kind support, or volunteer roles.

Our vision was supported by an approach rooted in shared core values amongst those involved:

- Centre the Youth Voice
- Know the Facts
- Raise the Profile
- Change the System

Over three years, we focused our work in three areas: research, building community, and youth leadership development. At the end of the project we launched two prototype projects that brought together findings and work from those three areas. Project activities were supported by the collaboration of diverse community members and key stakeholders through an overall Project Planning Committee, a number of distinct Working Groups, and the Youth Advisory Committee.

THE WORK

Our commitment to supporting youth throughout the project was two-fold: we wanted to amplify the voices of youth in and from care by ensuring the project activities were designed, implemented and evaluated with direct input from youth with care experience, to ensure that there was “nothing about them, without them”. We also wanted to support the leadership development of youth, and provide them with opportunities to access skill development opportunities, new experiences, and to build connections with the community-at-large.

The authentic inclusion of youth voices was a vital part of the overall project. Through the creation of a Youth Advisory Committee, supporting youth to engage in advocacy opportunities at the local and regional level, and hosting multiple youth retreats, we were able to actively work towards our overall project goal that:

- Youth participants will develop and refine their leadership skills, with the tools and knowledge to more effectively advocate for policy and systems change.

Engaging with young people across the City, we remained responsive and reactive in our project implementation; shifting our own actions to better support youth, and seeking out opportunities to improve our focus on the issues that mattered most to young people.

To evaluate the impact and success of each project activity, we engaged in a wide variety of evaluation activities. Using valuable feedback from event participants, the Youth Advisory Committee, the Planning Committee, and relevant stakeholders, we were able to draw out key reflections and recommendations for related project activities. These findings and suggestions are summarized and highlighted in each of the following sections.

YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) was both part of the organizational and decision-making structure of this project, and an important case study in itself as the first Youth Advisory Committee in Surrey focused on the needs of youth in government care.

Youth with care experience aged 15-24 were invited to meet regularly with a focus on providing insight and expertise to the Planning Committee and working groups on all project activities, developing leadership skills, creating connections with their peers, and advocating on important issues affecting young people with care experience. YAC Members were actively involved in planning and facilitating the youth retreats, holiday dinners, and engaging in advocacy in the region. The success of our YAC inspired the creation of several additional YACs throughout Surrey during the course of this project. While it is awesome that other YACs provided opportunities for youth outside of the care system to engage in the issues and services that impact them, most, if not all, of them remain 'advisory'. What made our YAC unique were the opportunities for members to roll up their sleeves and do the work. Advising, yes. But also planning, implementing, and facilitating project activities and events that changed the experience for youth transitioning out of care.

The YAC chose to name themselves VIBE, which stands for: raising our Voices, Improving services, Be noticed, and Evolve.

The majority of the original YAC members remained regularly engaged over the course of three years, which is exceptional in terms of youth engagement. One member who relocated to Prince George continued to attend meetings remotely, via online platforms. YAC members have credited the success of the YAC to the authentic approach to engagement, where the youth felt empowered to steer the project through their decisions about the project priorities and activities.

“

The YAC saw me for the individual I am, and saw me for who I was.

- YAC Member

”

#YOUTHSPOTLIGHT

EDWARD

Edward joined the YAC with a prompt from his youth worker. Edward is a self-described youth advocate, and the YAC was the perfect place for him to find and use his voice. He is proud of the impact project activities like the Youth Retreats had on Surrey youth. Edward is currently attending post-secondary education to become a Lawyer, and works with the SOS Children's Village.

STACEY

After experiencing the government care system, Stacey is determined to ensure no one else has the same experience she did. She joined YAC to deepen her understanding of how the system works and has been a continuous force, advocating for change in Surrey. Stacey is currently working towards a Degree in Child and Youth Care, to fulfill her dream of being a Youth Worker.

JOZAE

Jozae initially joined the YAC for the financial incentive. But she stayed because, in her words, it was badass work. Zae has been an important addition to the YAC since its inception, and she has grown into a leader on issues related to youth in care. Zae has a dream to be a famous painter and share her art with the world and to pursue a career in youth work. Or, she might find a way to do both and hopes to run an arts program at a local youth centre. The sky is the limit for Zae, and we all know she will fly.

ALEX

Alex is artistic, creative, and makes a statement with his performance art. They joined the YAC to gain leadership skills and to make a difference in the community. Acting as a Cabin Leader at the Youth Retreat was a personal accomplishment for Alex; and their hilarious performance as the talent show emcee will not be forgotten! Alex never stops advocating for youth in care, the LGBTQQI2S community, and Indigenous people.

“

I LEARNED HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR MYSELF. I TAUGHT OTHERS HOW TO ALWAYS SPEAK YOUR TRUTH AND ALWAYS KNOW YOUR WORTH. THESE ARE LESSONS THAT WILL STICK WITH ME FOREVER. LEARNING ABOUT BOUNDARIES. I LOVE THAT I DIDN'T EVER THINK I COULD CARE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE. I FELT THAT I COULD BE MYSELF AROUND ALL THE PEOPLE HERE. THIS IS A LIFESTYLE I NEVER THOUGHT I'D LIVE. LIKE I COULD DO ANYTHING I PUT MY HEART TO. THIS GROUP COULD SEE ME ON A REAL LEVEL. RELATIONSHIPS ARE REALLY HARD FOR US, AND THIS WAS THE FIRST GROUP I MET (YOUTH FROM CARE) WHERE I FELT LIKE I BELONGED. I SEE THIS AS A FAMILY. MY FAMILY. THIS WAS A VERY DIFFERENT LIFESTYLE THAN WHAT I HAD AND BEING A PART OF YAC TAUGHT ME HOW VALUABLE MY LIFE IS, HOW I WANT TO TREAT MYSELF, AND HOW I WANT TO TREAT OTHERS. AFTER THE FIRST COUPLE MONTHS OF THE PROJECT I STOPPED THE ILLEGAL STUFF I WAS DOING, AND I NEVER LOOKED BACK.

”

- Jozae, *YAC Member*

ADVOCACY

An important part of the project was a commitment to amplifying the voices of youth in and from care. Through participation on the YAC, youth gained valuable leadership skills around advocacy and public speaking.

The YAC participated in a number of events where they were able to speak out about policies that directly impact them. Members of the YAC were able to speak about the challenges and needs of youth transitioning out of care in many diverse ways. For example:

- Participating in all-candidate meetings during elections;
- Attending policy meetings with regional groups like Fostering Change;
- Attending provincial conferences to speak directly to decision-makers;
- Acting as guest speakers on a podcast about youth in care;
- Presenting to various City Committees, and the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition;
- Providing feedback to organizations and groups asking for input or advice; and
- Advocating for themselves in their personal and professional lives.

“

If you give us the chance to speak, and sit there and listen, then you will get to know what we need. This YAC gave me the strength to advocate for myself, tell me what's right or wrong. And speak up in the system.

- Alex, YAC Member

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All of these experiences helped the YAC gain the confidence and skills needed to affect change in the community.



“

THE WHOLE TIME I FELT LIKE EVERYONE WHO WAS THERE HAD MY BACK. EVEN THOUGH THEY DIDN'T NECESSARILY KNOW WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY, OR HOW LONG IT WOULD GO, OR HOW INTENSE IT WAS GOING TO BE... THAT WAS THE TIME FOR ME THAT FELT LIKE.. I CAN JUST KEEP GOING AND THEY WILL SUPPORT ME NO MATTER WHAT. MY WHOLE LIFE I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT I TALK A LOT, AND PEOPLE LOOK AT ME WEIRD SO I STOP TALKING. IT'S HARD WHEN YOU HEAR YOUR WHOLE LIFE TO STOP TALKING, BECAUSE THAT'S WHO I AM. I'M OFTEN SILENT [NOW]. THE EDWARD I VISUALIZE MYSELF AS, LIKE THE IDEAL EDWARD, THE EDWARD I WOULD BE IF I HADN'T GONE THROUGH THOSE EXPERIENCES WHERE I FELT LIKE I HAD TO ADHERE TO OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS AND VIEWS ABOUT ME - I WAS ABLE TO CHANNEL THAT INTO [THE TIME] I SPOKE TO THE [COMMUNITY GROUP] AND I WASN'T GOING TO STOP UNTIL I FELT LIKE THEY ACTUALLY UNDERSTOOD, AND I WASN'T GOING TO STOP UNTIL I SAID EVERYTHING I WANTED TO SAY, AND THAT I WAS ABLE TO ADDRESS WHAT NEEDED TO BE ADDRESSED. AND I FELT LIKE I WAS ABLE TO BE DONE AND SAY EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED TO SAY. IT WAS GREAT.

”

- Edward, *YAC Member*

YOUTH RETREATS

The YAC planned and facilitated three youth retreats; two that were open to any youth in or from care, and one for the YAC members. In preparation for the retreat, the YAC learned facilitation skills, event planning skills, and worked with project staff to plan the logistical details.

The name of the first retreat in 2017 was “Changing Our Story, Changing Our Future”, and 17 youth attended. At that initial retreat, we gained valuable insight from the youth around the challenges young people face as they transition out of the care system, with a specific

focus on Surrey. These youth were integral in identifying the top priorities that became the foundations for the working groups and all project activities.

The second retreat, “VIBES reYACt 2k19”, had 18 participants, with a focus on reporting back on the work the YAC had done throughout the project, and to provide a true camp experience for youth. Most of the participants had never camped before, and had high barriers to participation. The itinerary included youth-led activities and workshops, and time for nature walks, archery, ropes courses, and games. The retreats also provided a unique opportunity for youth to connect with their peers outside of their regular routines, creating positive memories and lasting connections.

Our final retreat, held in 2020, was an opportunity for the YAC members to reflect on their experience as part of the YAC, and to celebrate the incredible work they have accomplished.



TRISTAN MILLER 2020

“

Retreats are valuable because they bond youth in care together in a safe space. We got to be out in nature without our labels

- Retreat Participant

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THE LESSONS

We had a lot of hits, and like any project, a few misses, along the way - always reflecting and learning how to do this work more effectively and equitably. We learned a lot about youth engagement, inclusion, and empowerment through the implementation of our project activities; highlighted through these reflections on key takeaways.

1. YOUTH KNOW WHAT THEY NEED.

Like all people, youth from care are experts in their own lives. And they should be acknowledged as such. Youth from the care system have important ideas on how to address the system and community gaps in support that impact them most. When we asked youth at the retreat, on the Youth Advisory Committee, and through our other activities what the priorities are for their community, they answered! It didn't take long for dozens of youth to come to a shared vision of what needs to change. What made our project successful was that we believed and valued what youth had to say, and we used their insight to shape all of our project activities. We found that youth almost always have the words, but they sometimes need a little nudge, or the space, to use their voice.

2. YOUTH NEED SUPPORT TO SHOW UP.

Whether it's to regular YAC meetings, to an event, or to a retreat, many youth require a lot of emotional and logistical support to participate. In the initial stages of this project, the Planning Committee under-estimated the amount of staff support it would require to ensure broad youth participation. Following feedback from the youth and staff, we committed to having a dedicated staff person available to support youth at each YAC meeting, and to ensure the retreats and events were adequately supported. We also made sure that there were staff with lived experience deeply involved at the staff-level, present at youth events, and that any additional staff approached the work through a trauma-informed lens. Youth need support to show up, and what that support looks like matters just as much.

3. LIVED EXPERIENCE DESERVES REMUNERATION.

Through the YAC, we asked youth to actively participate in planning and evaluating project activities. Their lived experience is indeed a credential, and should be remunerated as such. With limited funding, we sought specific grants to ensure that we could offer our YAC members an honorarium for each meeting. They also received an honorarium for their participation on working groups, in the Planning Committee, as participants in the prototype projects, and for their facilitation of events and retreats. Youth deserve fair compensation for their contribution and work to support project development and implementation. The YAC should not be expected to provide free labour, in any form. Period.

4. YOUTH NEED A SOFT LANDING.

Youth may know what they need, but they don't always have the skills to advocate for themselves or for systems-change. They may not even recognize what those skills are, until they jump in. Most young people haven't had the chance to present in front of decision-makers, or advocate for policy change to large groups. From the beginning, we built in workshops and training sessions to our YAC meetings, so that they were empowered to lead the way. We worked on facilitation, event planning, public speaking, and other key skills and supported them to be front and centre in the community. There were a lot of nerves, some missteps, but mostly incredible learning and growth. To be empowered along their own journey in advocacy and activism, youth need strong support to stand up, speak out, and fall right back down if they need to. Rinse and repeat.

5. RADICAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT MEANS GETTING FLEXIBLE.

It isn't enough to invite youth into adult spaces. If we are authentic in our desire to radically change the way we support youth, it means shaking off our preconceptions of youth engagement and being willing to do things differently. The timing of meetings and events, the location, and the meeting structure all likely need to shift to ensure that youth are able to attend and be actively involved. We were able to support these principles in our YAC meetings, meeting more frequently based on feedback, and at times and places that worked for youth. We struggled more to accommodate youth into our working groups, where the service provider/stakeholder availability didn't always align with youth availability. While we never got it perfectly right, we found other concrete ways to honour youth engagement; for example, bringing every decision back to the YAC, and adapting the project structure and timeline as youth identified new needs and ideas. What radical youth engagement looks like is ultimately up to youth to decide; but usually always demonstrated by a commitment to putting the needs of youth ahead of our own.

6. CONSISTENT STAFFING MATTERS.

The majority of our YAC members had a consistent presence on the committee over three years. In technical terms for youth engagement: that's pretty much bananas. Throughout our debrief activities, many of the YAC members honed in on the consistent staff support and what that consistency meant to them. Often, they described their experience in the care system as one marked with a high turnover of supportive adults; either in paid or unpaid roles. The project's consistent staffing meant that youth could develop deeper relationships with project staff and allies, without fear that they would eventually move on. As it turns out, when the revolving door stops turning, youth don't feel the need to leave.

“

When it comes to YAC, we didn't have specific instructions, there was no manual on how to do our work, it was just pretty much [project consultants] coming in and saying "I'm here to bring the food and you guys decide whatever you want to do." The freedom. That was given to us.

- Jozae. YAC Member

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THE HORIZON

Any future work will reflect the same commitment to authentic and radical youth engagement, and centering the voices of those with lived experience. We don't know exactly what our next steps will be, but these key recommendations will help shape our actions moving forward.

1. ELIMINATE THE HOOPS, WHILE RAISING THE BAR.

We need to minimize the barriers for youth to participate as much as we can. We need to address their specific needs to ensure they have adequate supports in place to be a part of all project activities, including the YAC. At the same time, we need to continue raising the bar for their involvement; they are creative, bright, and capable young people and should be expected to maintain professionalism and be accountable to fulfill their chosen duties. We brought youth struggling with mental health and addictions to the retreat, invited youth in crisis to the YAC meetings, and recognized some of the most high-needs youth at our awards ceremony. We also expected them to be on time, to be professional, and to be accountable for whatever they took on. Let's continue to eliminate any hoops youth have to jump through, while simultaneously demonstrating our respect for their abilities by maintaining high standards for involvement. We have seen that when you raise the bar for what you expect from young people, they can - and will - meet it every.single.time.

2. LET YOUTH TAKE THE WHEEL.

All of the project activities need to be youth-driven and youth-led. When they are, they tend to strike the right balance between "fun" and "work". And who says the two can't overlap, anyways? One of the most common reflections we received from youth engaged in our project activities was that they were appreciative there was always ample space to build personal connections; whether it was time to share personal updates, cook together and share a meal, or have planned downtime during a retreat. Reflecting on that feedback, we can see that the project activities are about much more than checking off a to-do list. They are also about inviting youth to show up as their authentic selves and building meaningful connections between peers, staff, and the broader community. Letting youth guide our processes will ensure that our meetings and our activities are safe and inviting places for all youth.

3. BRING THE YAC TO THE COMMUNITY, AND THE COMMUNITY TO THE YAC.

Some of our most inspiring and exciting moments were when the YAC was invited to advise community groups on the work they were doing. We also took the YAC on the road to speak to City Advisory Committees, elected officials, and at conferences with key decision-makers. We are hungry for more! Part of changing the way we do youth engagement with young people from care is providing an open invitation for community organizations and people to access the YAC and solicit feedback on their program or service, and how they might better serve youth in and from care. We can invite others in, but we must also continue to be proactive in finding ways for the YAC to be involved in raising awareness of this issue in the community-at-large. Watch out Surrey: the YAC is coming.

4. CONNECT THE DOTS.

There is power in numbers. There are already some amazing groups and initiatives like Fostering Change, AgedOut.com, and the Federation of BC Youth in Care focused on improving the outcomes for youth in care locally, regionally, and nationally, in addition to a number of other YACs across Surrey. This time around, we didn't have the resources necessary to expand our reach. One of our priorities moving forward will be to more actively tap into this wisdom and momentum and connect the Surrey YAC to the broader youth movement to create an even stronger unified voice amongst young people. We also want to ensure our YAC members have a range of opportunities to sharpen their skills and exercise their right to speak out on behalf of youth from care. Plus, Surrey youth are rock stars and we want to show them off. Obviously.

5. DECOLONIZE.

We know that in Surrey, and throughout BC, Indigenous youth are vastly overrepresented in the care system. While some of our YAC members identify as Indigenous, our work thus far in moving the dial toward decolonization has been minimal. Moving forward we want to build stronger connections to the urban Indigenous community in Surrey to ensure that we are doing this work in a way that reflects our desire to decolonize the process and practices of youth engagement, inclusion, and advocacy; while also ensuring we are effectively addressing the specific challenges for Indigenous youth exiting the care system.

6. FOCUS ON SYSTEMS CHANGE.

When it comes to youth development, it can be challenging to tease out what defines immediate impact, and what is systems-change. While we know that any immediate impact like the development of the YAC will inevitably change the way young people and the broader community interact with each other, a key focus needs to be on empowering youth to see themselves as important changemakers in the community. As the supportive adults in this work, we can identify and engage the champions in every sector and create the opportunities for youth engagement. Let's ensure that we arm youth with the tools they need in their toolbelt to understand how to access decision-makers, and where the levers are at every level of decision-making to impact change and improve outcomes for young people leaving care.

7. PLAN, DO, REVIEW.

We had some great debrief sessions with the YAC following our retreats, our presentations, and each event. But things were moving and shaking and we didn't always stop to catch our breath and really capture the impact of our youth leadership development activities. The YAC offered an opportunity for youth to hone their leadership skills, but it also shifted the system by engaging youth at every level of the development and implementation of the project. A more thorough and nuanced evaluation strategy will help us capture all the amazing ways the YAC brought about change, both individually and throughout the community.

THE WRAP

We accomplished a lot over three years together. Our successes span from immediate impact on the ground, to important work behind the scenes, bringing new people in, building partnerships, and gaining a better understanding of the challenges and barriers Surrey youth experience as they transition out of care.

The consistency and commitment of the youth and adults involved over three years is a testament to both the need, the sense of urgency, and the desire to make lasting change for youth. Our work has built on the efforts of others, and will be an important foundation for work in Surrey to come.

Youth leadership development can take many forms and we have only scratched the surface for what is possible in Surrey. We have learned a lot of valuable lessons throughout our three years working directly with hundreds of young people, and know that whatever this work looks like in the future, it must continue to be youth-driven, youth-led, and be open to radically changing the way we imagine youth engagement.

Youth who have experience in the care system have been through enough. Let's continue to work together to ensure their next chapter into adulthood is one that includes healthy relationships, a strong sense of community, self-empowerment, access to resources and opportunities, and endless hope for a bright future ahead.

“

Everyone keeps saying “oh the YAC is coming to an end.” I don't think of it that way. I think there's a lot more work to be done, and there's no doubt in my mind that we will find something, because this is just... it can't end now. I feel like we are picking up, we are on a roll, and there's no way you can just stop something in its prime.

- Edward, YAC Member

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