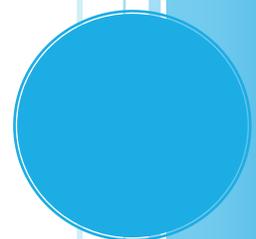


YOUTH ADULT
PARTNERSHIP
FACILITATOR AND VOICE
OF YOUTH FOR
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

A report on the six month pilot project in Chilliwack

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November 2015



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THE BEGINNING

The hiring of the Youth-Adult Partnership Facilitator was undertaken by VYPER and supported by MCFD. Stacy Wood, the VYPER Area Facilitator for Chilliwack, and three youth developed the hiring process, including posting the position, reviewing resumes, and conducting interviews.

MCFD and the youth hired Sophie Smit to take on this role on April 15th. For the first few weeks in the position, Sophie spent time orienting herself to Chilliwack and meeting the numerous service providers who work with youth. This included developing an understanding of the level of youth engagement within the community as well as meeting youth who might be interested in participating in a group focused on advocating for youth voice in the community. A \$500 VYPER Mini Grant that had already been obtained by MCFD was used to support youth participation in the first meetings and projects VOYCE took on.

Transition from VYPER to VOYCE

The transition from VYPER to VOYCE went smoothly for those who had the chance to be a part of both groups. While VOYCE has been more project-based and therefore it may have felt at times that VOYCE was more focused than VYPER, the youth who were a part of VYPER had the chance to be involved in the beginnings of conversations about important topics that impact youth. Being in VYPER prepared us to be in a more action-focused group like VOYCE, as VYPER introduced us to the experience of being able to share our opinions and be heard. It empowered us to take action to create change in our community, which is what we are now doing in VOYCE.

ESTABLISHING VOICE OF YOUTH FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Once the Youth-Adult Partnership Facilitator was hired, the first task was to find youth who wanted to be involved in the meetings. Youth came from many areas in Chilliwack and many were already connected to other youth groups, including VYPER, Youth as Gatekeepers, INVERT, Be the Change Committees at the high schools, the Child and Youth Committee, Chilliwack Society for Community Living, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Some youth were in university, others had recently graduated high school, and most were currently attending Sardis Secondary, Chilliwack Secondary, or GW Graham.

The first task was to develop a community agreement with the youth who were involved. This was entirely decided by the youth and it outlined what the youth expected from themselves and the group. This document grew and changed as the group expanded.

The next task was to apply for a Youth-Adult Partnership Grant from VYPER. In developing the grant the group defined who they were, their mission, and vision. Later they also developed a purpose.

- **Vision:** *To create a society where youth and young adults are given opportunities to reach their full potential and be valued as meaningful contributors.*
- **Mission:** *To create a dialogue in the community of Chilliwack around youth strengths, abilities, needs, and wants, in hopes to guide adults and society toward enlightenment about youth situations and the equalization of youth voice.*
- **Purpose:** *To advocate for youth who do not have a voice, to help adults understand youth better, and to get work done on the projects brought to us.*

The youth wanted to develop their identity as a group and as separate from VYPER. In the discussions about what the group was about, the youth came up with the name VOYCE, or Voice of Youth for Community Engagement. They thought this name concisely described their purpose, their connections to the community, and the unique nature of the group being both an advocacy and action oriented group.

From the first meeting on May 16th to the last meeting on October 28th, VOYCE successfully applied for a grant, hired a Youth Coordinator, organized and led the well-attended Youth Speak Up: Breaking Down Barriers Conference, completed numerous side projects to engage with the community, and presented at City Council in hopes to obtain funding to support the YAP Facilitator position and VOYCE.

Meeting Details and General Outline

Meetings generally started with going over the community agreement as well as a check in. The YAP would develop the agenda and always check in with the youth to see if they wanted to make any changes. The YAP would facilitate the meetings and guide discussion on whatever projects were being worked on at the time. This could include large group discussions or break out groups. There is always food and drinks for the youth as well. At the end of the meeting there is a check out to see how everyone is feeling about the work. Typically meetings are two hours long with youth taking breaks when they need to. Youth are also given an honorarium for attending meetings to acknowledge the work that they are doing.

Between May 15th 2015 and October 28th 2015, there have been 33 VOYCE meetings. The group has been able to reach 22 different youth, and around 8 youth consistently attend meetings. The youth who attend the group range from age 15 to 23, with an average age of 18. Indirectly, VOYCE has reached many more youth through word of mouth and spreading knowledge of resources through their members.

PROJECTS

Applying for the Youth-Adult Partnership Grant

The main project intended for the group to carry out was an East Fraser Regional Youth Led Conference. However, prior to beginning the planning for the conference, and with the use of a VYPER mini grant that had already been obtained, VOYCE developed an application for VYPER's Youth-Adult Partnership Grant to support the planning of the conference.

In working on the application, VOYCE members collaborated on the vision and mission (noted above). They discussed who they were as a group, who their partners in the community are, and who they aimed to influence with their project. They outlined how their intended projects would support the stated mission and vision and the expectations they had for the work they were going to undertake. They also broke down the budget, planning for the hiring of a Youth Coordinator, youth participants, transportation, food, and other expenses. This process took three meetings to complete.

The youth submitted their application to VYPER. The initial submission was not accepted and revisions were requested. VOYCE took one extra meeting in order to revise the grant and resubmit. They were then successful in obtaining the grant for \$5344.30.

Hiring of the Youth Coordinator

VOYCE discussed hiring a Youth Coordinator to support the planning of the conference. The youth developed the job description and it was posted on the VOYCE Facebook page. The youth decided that they would open up the application to VOYCE members to start, and if a suitable candidate was not found they would open it up to the general public. Six youth were a part of the hiring committee.

The hiring committee also developed the application requirements and the interview questions. They reviewed the resumes and cover letters and invited the applicants to an interview. The hiring committee interviewed the applicants and discussed the qualifications of each. The group then came to a consensus and hired Briann Gillies.

After being hired, the Youth Coordinator began doing tasks that were outlined in the job description. These included typing and posting the meeting minutes, coordinating youth for the weekly meetings, reporting any conference work that had been done, and meeting with the YAP. The Youth Coordinator also completed tasks set out by the YAP, which included organizing the conference and project binders, connecting with certain community members, transporting youth, picking up food for the meetings, and obtaining information for the conference, among many other conference specific tasks. Although initially hired to support the planning of the conference, the Youth Coordinator contributed heavily to the organization and facilitation of meetings, other projects VOYCE took on, and report writing.

Youth Speak Up: Breaking Down Barriers Conference

The planning of the conference was primarily done by VOYCE youth with the support of youth across the East Fraser Region. As noted above, prior to beginning the bulk of the work for the conference, VOYCE hired Briann Gillies as the Youth Coordinator to support the work that needed to be done.

Youth Involvement

There were three meetings with youth across the East Fraser Region. At these meetings, youth decided what topics they wanted the conference to focus on, the layout of the day, who should be invited, who to approach to speak, what should be included in the introduction, and they agreed upon the conference name that was proposed by VOYCE youth. Youth from each area also prepared information from the McCreary Adolescent Health Survey to share in the introduction.

VOYCE youth determined the remaining details of the conference as follows:

- 1. Advertising**
 - a. Youth created the poster for the event
 - b. Youth invited service providers and other adults who work with youth
- 2. Registration**
 - a. They determined what was needed at the tables
 - b. They decided to have packages and was needed in them
 - c. They set up and ran the registration tables the day of
- 3. Food for the day**
 - a. Youth decided on the menu for the day
 - b. Youth put out a request letter for food donations and related items
 - c. Youth helped to pick up the food and prepare the food
 - d. Youth participated in the set up and cleanup of the food on the day of
- 4. Youth Showcase**
 - a. Youth created a poster advertisement
 - b. Youth advertised in their schools by having staff announce the Showcase to the school
 - c. Youth collected and contributed all of the artwork and stories included in the showcase
 - d. They set up the Showcase the day of
- 5. Introduction**
 - a. Youth organized everything that was needed for the introduction
 - b. They prepared the ice breakers (telephone and McCreary Quiz)
 - c. Youth from across the East Fraser Region presented McCreary facts they found relevant to their areas
 - d. Youth MCs prepared for and presented the introduction
- 6. Breakout Sessions**
 - a. Youth decided on who they wanted to present the day of and guided the development of all of the presentations
 - b. VOYCE youth created their own Mental Health Presentation
 - c. VOYCE youth collaborated with Mark Littlefield to present on Youth Rights
 - d. VOYCE youth collaborated with Brian Gross to present on Trauma Informed Practice
 - e. Mission Youth Committee facilitated their LGBTQ+ workshop
 - f. Fraser South Youth facilitated their Youth Engagement workshop
 - g. YouthCo presented on Sexual Health and Healthy Relationships
- 7. Youth Panel**
 - a. Youth screened the questions submitted prior to the event
 - b. Youth spent time preparing answers for the questions
 - c. Eight youth participated in the youth panel

8. Wrap Up

- a. Youth created donation request letter to gather door prizes
- b. Youth distributed them to businesses in the community and collected donations
- c. Youth MCs prepared for and presented the wrap up
- d. Youth collected feedback forms that they had created

9. Other details

- a. Youth wanted lanyards for easy identification on the day of
- b. Buttons with Youth Speak Up on them were created by youth for attendees
- c. Youth handmade the center pieces
- d. Youth printed and put together the McCreary Adolescent Health Survey
- e. Youth created the conference pamphlet
- f. Youth created the logo for the conference
- g. Youth created the posters for the day
- h. Youth created the Door Prize and Youth Panel Question boxes

Schedule of the day

- 8:30-9:00 – Registration
- 9:00-10:00 – Introduction
- 10:10-10:50 – Breakouts
 - LGBTQ+ - Mission Youth
 - Trauma – Brian Gross
- 11:00-11:40 – Breakouts
 - Youth Rights – Mark Littlefield
 - Sexual Health and Healthy Relationships – YouthCo
- 11:40-12:30 – Lunch
- 12:40-1:20 – Breakouts
 - Youth Engagement – Fraser South Youth
 - Mental Health – Chilliwack VOYCE
- 1:30-2:30 – Youth Panel
- 2:30-3:00 – Wrap up

Mental Health Presentation

The Youth Coordinator and four other VOYCE members developed the mental health presentation. They came up with questions to ask youth in the community about their opinion of the mental health system, distributed the questions, and compiled their responses. Using that information and the *Mental Health Strategy for Canada: Youth Perspective* document they created a PowerPoint for the presentation. They also developed a quiz of McCreary Mental Health facts and skits on the dos and don'ts for mental health practitioners that work with youth.

YAP Facilitator Involvement

The YAP supported the youth in planning the conference. She facilitated the planning meetings and worked to ensure that youth from across the East Fraser region were also included in the planning of the conference. This involved collaborating with VYPER Area Facilitators and the Mission YAP. The YAP also gathered all of the necessary supplies the youth requested, this included items for registration, presentations, the center pieces, posters, the youth showcase, and the food. Advertising the conference and the youth showcase was another primary task for the YAP. Throughout the planning of the conference,

the YAP connected with agencies in the community to take advantage of available resources, including food and space donations. In addition, the YAP supported the Youth Coordinator in her role by assisting with donation request letters, following up on donations, and other tasks.

Youth Coordinator Involvement

From July to October, the Youth Coordinator did several things to help the YAP and the youth bring the conference together. This included writing the food donation and door prize request letters, distributing a large portion of those letters, following up on donation requests, and picking up donations. The Youth Coordinator also did the research for the mental health presentation, compiled the information, and created and edited the power point. In addition, the Youth Coordinator also put together the McCreary mental health facts quiz, retrieving the information and compiling it in quiz form on Kahoot at the youth's request, and ensured that all youth were happy with the presentation, making any requested changes when necessary. Lastly, the Youth Coordinator was present to help with any details of the conference or other projects that needed to be worked out, such as the centerpieces, posters, advertisement, and food shopping, to name a few.

Conference Attendees

Organizations that had individuals register for the conference:

- Chilliwack Child and Youth Committee
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Fraser Valley Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society
- UFV
- MCFD
- Pacific Community Resource Society
- Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health
- Child and Youth Mental Health
- Ann Davis Transition Society
- Chilliwack Community Services
- Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association
- VYPER
- Chilliwack Division of Family Practice
- Chilliwack School District #33
- Cyrus Centre
- Chilliwack Society for Community Living
- VOYCE
- District of Mission
- Mission Association for Community Living
- The Home Society
- Tedx Chilliwack
- Vitality Switch
- Mission Community Services Society
- Fraser Valley Regional Library
- Chilliwack Youth Health Centre
- Clearview Horticultural Products

- Hope and Area Transition Society
- Restorative Justice
- Fraser Valley Youth Society
- Agassiz Harrison Community Services
- SOURCES Community Resource Centre
- BC Responsible and Problem Gambling
- FORCE Society
- Fraser Cascades School District #78
- Abbotsford Addictions
- Abbotsford School District #34
- Youth Resource Centre
- Fraser Health
- Young Artist Warriors
- Sts'ailes
- Youth as Gatekeepers
- City Life Centre
- Healing Grounds
- IMPACT: Youth and Family Substance Use Services
- Child Development Centre
- Legal Grounds Coffee House
- Hope Medical Clinic
- Mission School District #75
- Mission Youth Committee

Represented areas at the conference:

- Chilliwack
- New West
- Langley
- Abbotsford
- Mission
- Hope
- Boston Bar
- Agassiz
- Harrison
- Port Coquitlam
- Surrey
- Delta
- Aldergrove
- Deroche

Number of attendees:

- 133 individuals
- 22 youth

Number of attendees that went to each workshop:

- **LGBTQ+ Presentation**
 - 10 Youth

- 51 Adults
- **Trauma Informed Practice Workshop**
 - 6 youth
 - 48 Adults
- **Sexual Health and Healthy Relationships Presentation**
 - 5 youth
 - 55 Adults
- **Youth Rights Presentation**
 - 10 youth
 - 24 adults
- **Youth Engagement Presentation**
 - 5 youth
 - 27 adults
- **Mental Health Presentation**
 - 10 youth
 - 52 adults

Conference Feedback

1. **What community do you work in?**
 - Chilliwack – 41
 - Agassiz/Harrison – 3
 - Abbotsford – 9
 - Mission – 5
 - Hope/Boston Bar – 3
 - Aldergrove – 1
 - Langley – 1
 - Delta – 1
 - Fraser North – 1
 - Surrey – 3
2. **Was the conference well organized, on topic, worth your time?**
 - Yes – 68
 - No – 0
3. **Did you learn something new?**
 - Yes – 68
 - No – 0
4. **If you were to do this again, what would you add or remove to improve the conference?**
 - Feedback on what could be different the next time a conference such as this one is planned was largely around having more time in the breakouts, more time in the youth panel, more time for questions, and more time for networking. Attendees also would have liked to be able to attend all of the workshops, with one individual even suggesting a two day conference. Having more counselors and teachers that work in schools, as well as other service providers who work with youth, attend the conference was also emphasized.
 - All youth led workshops (2)
 - Longer breakouts(question time) (8)
 - Attend all breakouts (8)

- Keynote speaker (1)
- Counselors/teachers from schools and more service providers attending (2)
- Longer youth panel (6)
- More promotion regionally (1)
- Over two days (1)
- Email information from presentations after (1)
- More networking time (3)
- Table discussions between youth and adults (1)

5. What did you think about having youth involved?

- Everyone who provided feedback on this question emphasized the importance of youth being involved.
 - Pivotal, important, vital, necessary, essential, imperative, valuable
 - Awesome, impressive, wonderful, incredible, so impactful, love!
 - Hearing youth voice was the best part
 - Very empowering
 - Made information meaningful and honest
 - Important for connections to be made between youth, adults, and services
 - Youth were intelligent and informative
 - Needed to clearly represent youth
 - Fantastic, should happen more often
 - Wouldn't have been the same without it
 - Loved hearing the youth perspective
 - Important to have youth voice involved on the topic of talking about youth
 - Great to have youth perspective
 - Makes a difference, they know what's going on in their life
 - Learned a lot about what they need and want
 - So great to hear voices and opinions of youth
 - Awesome idea, youth perspective is so valuable and needed to improve service delivery

6. Did the conference name seem relevant?

- Yes – 68
- No – 0
- “Frequently there are barriers adults put in place and not know it, we also need to be reminded to ask and thus youth can speak up”

7. What was your favourite thing about the conference?

- Overwhelmingly, attendees noted that the youth involvement, whether it was the speakers, the panel, the inclusion of their perspective or their leadership, was the best part of the conference.
 - Youth involvement/speakers (25)
 - Youth panel (18)
 - MCs (1)
 - Youth perspective (4)
 - Knowing youth were being listened to (2)
 - Networking - with service providers and youth (4)
 - LGBTQ+ Presentation (2)
 - Inclusion of McCreary Adolescent Survey (2)
 - Door prizes (2)

- Venue (1)
 - Free food (1)
- 8. How do you feel about the fact that this conference was organized by youth?**
- Again, feedback was entirely positive regarding the conference being organized by youth.
 - Great! Did amazing
 - Fantastic
 - Very proud
 - Planning was wonderful
 - Empowering
 - Inspiring
 - Love it
 - Powerful
 - Meaningful
 - Was why so many people showed up
 - Glad they had the opportunity
 - Great to see them using their voices!
 - Should have been done a long time ago, it is such a huge step in our community and I cannot wait to see how it impacts the Fraser Valley
 - Impressed
 - Awesome learning experience
 - Youth are the experts of their own lives, and we should be listening to them
 - The best
 - Grateful
 - Hope this involvement continues!
 - Wonderful on so many levels
- 9. Would you like to see more youth led events in your community?**
- Yes – 68
 - No – 0
- 10. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not good at all and 10 being amazing, what are your overall feelings about the conference?**
- 4 - 1
 - 6 - 1
 - 7- 5
 - 7.5 - 2
 - 8 – 7
 - 8.5 - 3
 - 9 - 20
 - 10- 25
 - Average: 8.9

SIDE PROJECTS

International Youth Day

August 12th was International Youth Day, a UNESCO designated day to celebrate the potential of youth as partners in society and to raise awareness on the importance of youth involvement in communities. VOYCE decided that they wanted to promote this day and raise awareness about the value of youth engagement. The youth planned a hot dog fundraiser at a local Save-On-Foods for August 12th. Youth created the poster advertisement, set up the area, cooked the hot dogs, and engaged with all who came by. VOYCE also submitted a write up on the group and the day to Chilliwack Healthier Community who included it in their July 30th press release. The group raised over \$200 which was later used to support the purchase of items for the Youth Speak Up Conference.

Chilliwack Society for Community Living

CSCL approached VOYCE for feedback on how to engage with all youth in their programming. CSCL program has typically been geared towards youth with special needs, and includes programs such as cooking class, dance program, drama program, recreation programs, first aid classes, etc. They were interested in opening up the programs to all youth to foster a sense of inclusion and to decrease stigma around youth with special needs. VOYCE youth provided feedback on the types of programs, the day and time the programs take place, as well as advertising the program to youth.

City Life Centre

City Life Centre approached VOYCE for feedback on their Unstoppable program. This program was made for youth who had parents that were going through divorce. VOYCE was given a copy of the program and interested youth took the time to read through the program and provide input. This input included comments on the approach, the content, the pictures used, the formatting, the organization and how to facilitate the program in a way that would keep youth engaged.

Youth Health Centre

VOYCE was asked to provide input on the re-branding on the Youth Health Centre in Chilliwack. The youth provided feedback on the name and proposed name changes, the environment, the logo and the pamphlet.

Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative: Local Action Team

VOYCE was invited to a Local Action Team meeting to help guide the development of their goals for the upcoming year. VOYCE was able to provide some input at the meeting, including emphasizing the importance of the youth health centre and ensuring that teachers are educated and equipped to work with youth with mental health concerns.

The youth spent the following VOYCE meeting debriefing the experience. They felt the environment at the meeting was not youth friendly as it was a large group with little opportunity for youth to speak, no breaks, and much of the conversation was around information that had not been explained to the youth. As a result, VOYCE provided feedback

to the LAT on how they could make their meetings more receptive to youth and their input. This included having specific questions for youth, incorporating breaks, breaking into smaller groups so it's easier for youth to speak up, and ensuring the youth are caught up and know what is being discussed.

The youth were also invited to present the Youth Perspective on the Mental Health System Presentation they created for the Youth Speak Up: Breaking Down Barriers Conference at a Local Action Team Meeting. The presentation was very well received. The youth were then invited to present at CHANCE Alternate School and are currently developing a document based on their presentation to provide to service providers to disseminate this important information.

City Council Presentation

VOYCE members, the YAP, Stacy Wood from VYPER, and Karen Steegstra from the CYC presented at a Chilliwack City Council Meeting to share their accomplishments and submit a proposal to keep the YAP Facilitator position funded so the work of VOYCE may continue in Chilliwack. The youth took the lead by sharing their experiences with the YAP and VOYCE, as well as the importance of the work being done.

The presentation was well received and supported by numerous community members that attended the meeting. The VYPER *Making Resilience Happen* document, a Chilliwack specific document, and letters of support from community agencies and individuals were provided to city council as well.

IMPACT OF THE YAP FACILITATOR AND VOYCE INVOLVEMENT

Impact on Youth

The YAP Facilitator and the approach influenced by VYPER has benefitted youth in numerous ways so far, with more work still to be done. VOYCE provides a space where youth are able to be themselves, share their ideas, and engage in meaningful work. The youth that have been involved in VOYCE so far have been able to take on projects and tasks they otherwise would not have been able to. Putting the information and tasks in their hands so they can guide the projects that will impact service providers and community organizations is a powerful tool for fostering self-esteem and a sense of belonging. In this way the YAP Facilitator and VOYCE as a group is able to foster resilience for the youth involved.

Personal growth is something that has developed for every individual that has attended VOYCE meetings. Whether it's sharing an honest thought, speaking up in front of a group of people, or monitoring oneself so as to respect other people's opinions, every single VOYCE youth has challenged themselves to engage in positive ways. Many have gone outside of their comfort zone to put together presentations, provide feedback, and speak in front of large groups. Youth have gone the extra mile in creating documents and brainstorming ideas on their own time as they recognize the importance of the work that they are doing. Youth who may not have engaged previously with a youth group want to continue the work that is being done so they may contribute to their community in positive ways.

From the Youth:

- “YAP’s have helped me gain valuable experience in the human services field, they have connected me with important members of the community and have facilitated the feeling of having my voice as a youth heard; it is empowering and has built my self-confidence”
- “I feel more comfortable talking to older people, especially about my feelings and for help, and talking in general.”
- “We are more knowledgeable about youth services”
- “I have become way more outgoing and confident, I would have never been able to MC or stand in front of a big audience before I became a part of this group.”
- “I was able to gain confidence speaking amongst people, I learned how to make decisions and take leadership in a group, and I was able to feel like someone with something to contribute. “
- “VOYCE has made a huge impact in my life. I have been more exposed to youth who come from different walks of life that have been able to share their stories and who I have gotten know personally that I wouldn't have met otherwise.”
- “VOYCE has broadened my perspective on issues that youth struggle with and how to help combat these issues.”
- “VYPER/VOYCE reminded me of what it is to dream big dreams and plan for all the possibilities. I want to do more, and I believe I can now!”

Youth Voice

Youth are able to speak up not only in the VOYCE meetings, but are also speaking up in the community. VOYCE has given youth a very real and tangible outlet for having their thoughts and opinions heard. Youth who may have felt isolated from the community have been empowered to reconnect by sharing their voice in a place where they know it will be valued. This positive connection with the community and self-advocacy work is incredibly beneficial for the healthy development of youth. The YAP Facilitator is able to facilitate that connection between adults and youth by sitting on the Child and Youth Committee, the Youth Matters Subcommittee and maintaining relationships with service providers.

From the Youth:

- “VOYCE empowers youth to advocate for themselves. When youth can advocate for themselves they have higher self-esteem and are more likely to avoid situations where they may be harmed.”
- “VOYCE means I can share my thoughts to the broader world without feeling judged or intimidated.”
- “Youth have a lot of important things to say and ultimately they know best what they need from our community. Being listened to will empower youth, boost their confidence, help them implement things they need and help them grow into stronger adults”
- “Youth voice needs to be heard so adults can understand what teens are actually going through and how they could help better”
- “VOYCE empowers youth of our community. It gives youth a say in their lives and drives them to self-advocacy.”
- “Adults gain a youth’s perspective and learn about their take on situations instead of just assuming how they feel, what they want, and the reasons for their actions.”
- “VOYCE is an amazing place where youth can be heard and can speak their mind about things that are concerning them. It also promotes the idea of youth speaking up for one another which is so important for society.”
- “My opinions are listened to and talked about. I feel like I’m contributing to the group.”

Youth Engagement

VOYCE has provided youth with something positive, productive and meaningful to engage in. VOYCE has grown in numbers and often has meetings with 8-10 youth, most of which continue to come back. The continued engagement of these youth can be attributed to the action-oriented nature of the group, the safe space that is created, as well as the transportation, food, and honorarium.

From the Youth:

- “There are always food and drinks for people and we talk and laugh together. This makes it less scary and more welcoming. It gives people a happy feeling instead a feeling of that they are pressured to do something.”
- “VOYCE helps us feel safe and heard”
- “Have more opportunities to be a part of the community, it gives me a place to go do meaningful things”

- “The best part about VOYCE is how comfortable I am being myself”
- “This group has made an impact in my life, as has the YAP and the best part about working with her specifically was how open minded and for us she is. She made sure that we were all good to go and that we felt comfortable with everything that VOYCE was doing.”
- “The best part about VOYCE is that it is a safe environment in which the youth of Chilliwack can feel as though they are making a difference in the community; our YAP has been the one to create the safe environment and she has worked to connect us with program and does whatever it takes to have our voices heard”

Impact on the Community

Service providers, adults, and the community as a whole have benefited from VOYCE. Members of the CYC are constantly reminded by the presence of the YAP Facilitator that youth voice and opinion is an essential part of the equation when considering services that impact youth. Numerous agencies have connected with VOYCE for feedback on their services. In particular, agencies attended the Youth Speak Up: Breaking Down Barriers Conference organized by VOYCE and youth across the East Fraser region. They were able to learn what topics are important to youth and how to better engage with youth in their work. The community also benefits from having a strong group of youth who are engaged and want to make positive change in the community. VOYCE youth come from many backgrounds, and every single one of them has become a strong leader that will continue to impact the communities they live in positively.

From the Youth:

- “The community of Chilliwack has benefitted from VOYCE and having youth voices speaking to programs and issues within the community as it both educates service providers and empowers youth to do more.”
- “Our conference helped adults and service providers better understand us, they have new knowledge and better ways to help and approach us”
- “Adults are better educated on matters that deal with youth or affect youth in some way and how to improve services for youth”
- “As we do more in the community we are bettering life for all youth”
- “At the conference, service providers learned how to help and communicate with struggling teens better, to actually listen”
- “I think that we showed service providers that youth can do an awful lot when they put their minds together and put the effort in. If that means that youth will not be tokenized as much, and that people believe we can help ourselves...that may just change how service providers reach out to and treat young people.”
- “Youth can know a lot of things that adults does not know. So I think is important for everyone to work together and learn together. The benefits that can come from Youth being heard by adults are that both the Youth and the adults will learn a lot from it, Youth will feel more accepted and welcoming, and there will be a better understanding between adults and youth which will lead to less and less misunderstandings.”

- “So many service providers have come to me and told me how amazing the conference was and how awesome all the presenters were and that was all possible because of the YAP position and VOYCE”

Additional Feedback from the Youth

- “VOYCE has helped make life better for the youth in our community because our YAP has facilitated the spreading of the youth’s opinions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas on important issues that pertain to youth. Youth have also been able to affect how services are run and the perspectives of service providers in positive ways”
- “Many youth can miss out on great experiences to get out in the community, the YAP plays an important role in effectively organizing these experiences”
- “The YAP has made a huge impact in all our lives by keeping us positive and helping us to make the conference what it was.”
- “The best part about VOYCE for me is getting to be so involved in the community and getting to know that youth and service providers who have helped us along the way.”
- “VOYCE made it so that youth across town were able to work together and meet with others to make something great happen with the conference. “
- “To me, being part of the VOYCE group, meaning to have a big family. A lot of times, I feel lonely and I miss my family back home. When I spend time at VOYCE, I always feel so happy and warm. Members of the VOYCE Group are also my friends. I love to spend time at VOYCE and with everyone there. In addition, VOYCE is a place where I can speak without negative feedbacks. People at VOYCE are very kind, funny and patient.”
- “Being part of the VOYCE Group meant that I can speak freely, meeting new friends, having someone to listen to me when I feel upset, and most important of all, I enjoy my time at VOYCE and I love VOYCE and everyone there.”
- “It is important because youth are members of the community as well and it takes everyone to better our area. I feel that we as youth are underestimated in our abilities and what VOYCE has done is helped to break down that barrier so we can show our true skills and help our community.”

EXTENSION OF THE PROJECT

After the three initial months of the project, MCFD extended the YAP Facilitator's contract for another three months to support the completion of projects and applying for additional funding to support the position and VOYCE. A proposal has been sent to the Vancouver Foundation and Chilliwack City Council. The Vancouver Foundation proposal was unsuccessful, and we do not know the response from City Council as of the writing of this report. Therefore, the future of the YAP Facilitator position and VOYCE is currently in limbo.

THE FUTURE

VOYCE has many opportunities to continue the important advocacy and project based work they are doing. There are more youth to engage with, more services to reach out to, and VOYCE specific projects to begin. Not only does VOYCE want to take on projects brought to them by members of the community, they want to start up their own projects that they feel the community and youth services will benefit from. Through this work the youth will continue to experience personal growth, develop a sense of responsibility, become more resilient individuals, share their knowledge with peers and adults, and develop a sense of belonging to their community.

Potential Future Projects

- Continued work with the Local Action Team surrounding the Youth Health Centre
- Working with Restorative Justice on a Youth Speak Out Series
- Environmental Scan with UFV for the development of a youth hub in Chilliwack
- Providing feedback to Youth Matters, a subcommittee of the Child and Youth Committee
- A survey of service providers in Chilliwack to establish the current level of youth engagement and inclusion of youth voice in organizations
- More youth panel events
- Continued collaboration with other service agencies
- Continued advocacy for the incorporation of youth voice in services that impact them
- Following up with agencies that VOYCE has previously worked with

From the youth:

- “If this group goes away, the things that we do in the community would be lost and a lot of our voices would no longer be heard. While some of us youth may continue with other projects regardless there would be a huge gap between us and the community that would be hard to fill.”
- “We made a lot of progress, and I don't want to see that progress lost. There are many youth right now who want to continue forward with VOYCE, and I am one of them. There is still more we could do here in our community, and I would love to do it all with the other lovely people I have met in VOYCE. The YAP position was what tied all the work we did together. It was with her help that we could band together as a group of youth with a powerful voice. It takes someone who can dedicate their time to the cause fully--I can't always make it, but with a YAP the group has

someone they can rely on. I believe that for VOYCE to continue, the YAP position needs to as well.”

- “A lot of things would be missing from the community as well as my life personally and the youth the YAP worked with as well. Firstly I would not have anything to do on Wednesdays, secondly the things that we do in the community would be lost and a lot of our voices would no longer be heard.”
- “This group has changed my life so much and I want it to keep going so I can help to change others’ lives as well.”

Future Deliverables for the Youth-Adult Partnership Facilitator

1. Collaborating with youth to support a youth-developed Mission and Vision regarding how youth in the community can inform and guide local youth-focused services and initiatives.
2. Facilitating youth-led weekly meetings where youth explore and/or develop opportunities for youth-adult partnerships in Chilliwack.
3. Supporting youth in the development and design of youth-adult partnership community collaboration proposals and supporting youth in bringing forward proposals to service providers in the community.
4. Attending service provider youth-specific meetings/collaboratives/committees (ie. Child & Youth Committee). Networking with service providers to help connect youth with new and/or emerging opportunities to collaborate with service providers.
5. Serving as an advocate for a capabilities approach when adults collaborate with youth.
6. Facilitating the process whereby organizations explore ethical practices when collaborating with youth, including the creation of youth-friendly meetings and spaces.
7. Collaborating with youth and service providers to explore external funding opportunities and apply where appropriate, to secure funds for continued support of youth-adult partnership opportunities in Chilliwack.
8. Traveling throughout area to meet with service providers and interested youth.
9. Upholding youth-developed community agreements for creation of safer spaces for youth.
10. Making referrals for youth to service providers where appropriate and when youth needs exceed the scope of the project.