

# Mission Outcomes Report

A report from Valley Youth Partnership for Engagement and Respect (VYPER):  
August 2015



“We have a lot of knowledge. I think that most youth want to share that too; we want share our opinions if someone is willing to listen to us and actually appreciate what we have to say. If we have the opportunity to bring our knowledge and skills and adults bring their experience, we’ll definitely see change happen.”

- Mission Youth

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## Valley Youth Partnership for Engagement and Respect (VYPER)

In February 2014, Health Canada’s Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund (DSCIF) funded a 2.5 year project based in the Fraser Health Authority region of British Columbia, called Valley Youth Partnership for Engagement and Respect (VYPER).

## A commitment, a belief, and a hope

Very briefly, the project can be described as emerging from the following commitment, belief and hope:

- **Commitment:** To a capabilities approach, which asks, "What are young people capable of doing or being in this environment?"
- **Belief:** That young people will be the most effective proponents and stewards of an evidence-informed approach to youth-related health promotion and prevention in their communities.
- **Hope:** That communities, with intentional supports from VYPER (staff and funding), will bring forward opportunities for young people to discover, explore and demonstrate their capabilities in ways that compellingly embolden and sustain community commitment to the capabilities approach to youth engagement and prevention.

## Objectives

VYPER's objectives are to support the implementation of evidence-informed prevention and health promotion practices through facilitation of linkages and exchanges among regional services and supports with the goal of:

1. Strengthening and expanding health-promoting and preventative social connectedness to offset or replace detrimental influences
2. Building skills, capacity and supportive environments that encourage adjustment of self-concepts that may be causing youth to identify with these detrimental agents or deficits – moving from socially-assigned identities (based on disadvantages) to self-assigned preferred identities (based on personal strengths and capabilities)
3. Providing a range of mechanisms, roles and responsibilities (especially the opportunity and responsibility to diffuse leadership throughout the cohort of VYPER participants – adults and youth alike) that support the development of a sense of self-efficacy (gaining more control over the decisions that affect their lives) and reduce fatalism (creating opportunities to discover a more positive outlook for the future)

## Theory of change

"By supporting community entities to more consistently and intentionally collaborate with each other and with rural youth and youth who are disadvantaged by their living conditions on the initiation, development, delivery and evaluation of programs that affect and aim to engage youth, programs will be more effective, and youth will be more resilient, develop more strength-based identities, have increased self-efficacy and reduced fatalism, which will consequently prevent, delay and/or reduce youth substance use and abuse."

This theory is supported by evidence compiled by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse in "Stronger Together: Canadian Standards for Community-based Youth Substance Abuse Prevention" (2010).

The standards state: "The potential rewards of community-based prevention activity are enormous, but preventing youth substance abuse isn't easy. Research shows community-based initiatives can work but in real-world situations often don't work. The reasons why this is so are not completely clear, but research and practice suggest two possibilities:"

1. "Mounting a community-based prevention initiative is not a trivial undertaking." On this point CCSA identifies that, "Only by monitoring efforts to keep the initiative on track and evaluating activities to see if they work will a team know for sure whether its efforts are worthwhile. Standards can guide a team's process, increase the likelihood that it reaches its destination and help the team demonstrate success." (p. 12)

2. “Community-based teams often do not use all of the tools at their disposal.” On this point CCSA identifies that, “Too often, community-based teams or coalitions overlook the most powerful tool at their disposal—young people themselves. Initiatives that ‘target’ youth or are ‘directed to’ youth, rather than ‘partnering with’ youth will likely have a muted effect. Committing to partner with youth is not necessarily the easiest route for a team to take, but it’s undoubtedly more likely to be a dynamic and effective initiative. It is this point that adult team members must come to fully appreciate—encouraging participation, leadership and decision-making among youth partners isn’t just good for the youth themselves (although it certainly is), it’s vitally important for the outcome of the initiative.” (p. 13).

VYPER aims to address these two CCSA-identified possible impediments to successful community-based prevention activity by providing:

1. A multi-modal systems-based change management and monitoring framework (Outcome Mapping), designed and tested for addressing socially embedded issues such as problematic substance use. CCSA identifies the use of alcohol and other drugs among youth as, “complex [and] influenced by legislation, policy, media, corporate interests, societal structures and community values” (p. 12).
2. A focus on supporting youth-adult-partnership activities and behaviours. This strategy is aimed, not just at change in the present, but at creating a legacy of capability and competence at a community level.

## Youth-Adult Partnership Coordinator

The Youth-Adult-Partnership Coordinator (YAP Coordinator) develops, maintains and builds upon relationships with and between the various project partners in the designated area. The YAP coordinator facilitates and co-facilitates regular meetings of a Mission Youth Committee. The YAP coordinator collects opportunities for youth-adult-partnerships from local organizations and committees and presents them to the MYC, then helps the MYC to determine if and how it would like to engage with these opportunities. The YAP Coordinator assists the MYC to move forward on those projects it takes on, engaging other supports from partner organizations as needed.

## Plan H Funding

The PlanH program provides funding (the HCCB funding) to local governments to support learning about the community context for health and well-being, partnership development between sectors, collaborative priority setting for health and well-being in local planning and policy, and innovative action to influence local health outcomes.

## A Brief History

In the spring of 2014, the Mission Youth Homelessness Committee (MYHC) had been meeting for about year as a collaborative youth resource centre project began to take shape. This committee included representatives from the District of Mission, Youth Unlimited, Mission Community Services, and Fraser House Society. The Mission Child and Youth Committee was preparing for their annual Pulling Together conference at this time as well. Brian Gross, co-chair of the Abbotsford Youth Health Centre, executive director of Impact Youth Substance Use Services (Abbotsford and Mission), manager of Youth Engaged for Sustainable Healthcare (YESH), and Project Director of VYPER, sat on both committees and introduced the idea of collaborating with youth on these projects using youth-adult partnership behaviours. This required creating and funding a youth-adult partnership coordinator position. The Health Community Capacity Building Funds (HCCB Funds) aligned well with what this community was trying to do, so a decision was made to apply for this funding.

## Connection to VYPER

Brian Gross, the Project Director for VYPER, brought Hayfa Abichahine, the Project Manager for VYPER into the MYHC meetings to facilitate the process of creating the YAP Coordinator position based on the mission and

vision of VYPER. Because VYPER focuses on creating sustainable partnerships and collaborations that will affect the well-being of the community, the YAP coordinator position fit the requirements of the Plan H funding.

The application was reviewed and approved.

### Hiring Process

The hiring process was unique in that it was youth-guided. A few key adults met with a group of youth to ask them what qualities they believed to be necessary in a YAP Coordinator. Eventually a job posting was created. The qualifications and experiences the youth were looking for included:

- In-depth understanding of the socio-economic conditions, trends in health challenges and opportunities experienced by youth in Mission.
- Experience with collaborative youth-adult projects and a commitment to youth engagement.
- Undergraduate degree, diploma or certificate in public health, social work, child and youth care, sociology, or allied field (or equivalent work experience in the field).
- Extensive experience with group facilitation, and some experience with supporting facilitative capacity-building in others.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, and ability to respond in a positive way to demanding issues and project a welcoming, friendly personality.

The deliverables for this position were:

1. Developing local, confidential youth-friendly primary care health services in the form of a weekly youth health center in Mission.
2. Improving available services and supports for youth who are experiencing housing insecurity.
3. Helping the Mission Child and Youth Committee to move further toward having more and more involvement of youth in decision-making when it comes to programs that affect youth.

Included in the third deliverable was the annual Pulling Together conference on October 24<sup>th</sup>. This event provided a timeline for the job which would be from July through October 2014, with a possibility of extension. Youth, with members of the MYHC and CYC, reviewed resumes indicating a yes, maybe, or no. After going through all of the resumes, youth narrowed it down to a 6 ideal candidates that all members of the group indicated with at least a "maybe". Youth, alongside Brian Gross and Phil Degagne, a counsellor at Fraser House Society, held interviews with the selected candidates. They alternated asking questions, and youth asked further questions when they felt it was necessary. A decision was made to hire Aimee Beauchamp on August 6<sup>th</sup>.

Following the success of the conference, a qualitative evaluation held by the youth and facilitated by Phil Degagne was used to determine whether the YAP Coordinator would continue in her position. The decision was to keep her as the YAP coordinator as long as funding was available.

### Mission Youth Committee

After hiring the Youth-Adult Partnership Coordinator, the youth felt that the next steps would be to come up with a name, develop community agreements, and create a mission and vision. This came about after discussing the purpose of youth-adult partnership behaviours. There was a particular focus on VYPER's mission of moving from isolation to a sense of belonging. The youth saw creating a name and developing agreements as a way of

helping youth feel that they belonged to a community. The group made suggestions and ultimately agreed upon the name Mission Youth Committee, or MYC.

The vision and mission were created entirely by the youth during a conversation facilitated by the YAP Coordinator. The group was asked what they hoped would come from having a group focus on encouraging youth-adult partnership behaviours. The youth's discussion resulted in these statements:

- The vision - *to create a podium for youth all over to speak and be heard on issues regarding youth. We wish for youth involvement in projects related to youth in Mission.*
- The mission - *to bring youth involvement to Mission through working with our partners to engage youth in community projects.*

The Mission Youth Committee already had two proposed projects when the coordinator was hired, so much of the discussion during the weekly meetings revolved around these. The first was Mission's Child and Youth Committee's annual Pulling Together conference for service providers, and the second was the development of a youth resource centre.

Initially, 3-4 youth were regularly involved with the meetings. The youth gave the coordinator the task of locating other youth orientated groups and developing partnerships with them so as to encourage those youth to unite their voice with the MYC in whatever capacity they felt most comfortable with. After building connections with the Fraser Valley Youth Society (FVYS), Mission's Leisure Centre Youth Lounge, Girls Empowerment Motivation Supports (GEMS) group, and other local groups, the MYC developed a presentation to take to the youth in these groups. This process, alongside referrals from service providers became the main way of increasing youth participation. Youth participation ranged from attending every meeting to contributing via email/text during environmental scans.

Between August 2014 and August 2015, there have been:

- Meetings: 45
- Number of individual youth and young adults involved: 15
- Average number of youth per meeting: 6
- Age range: 12 to 22 years old
- Average age: 18 years old
- Number of youth from rural areas surrounding Mission: 8
- Number of youth from the main District of Mission: 4
- Number of youth from outside Mission: 3

Many of the youth coming from the GEMS group and the Youth Lounge were generally 12-14 years old, whereas those coming from service provider referrals and the FVYS were usually 18-22 years old. This created an interesting dynamic within the group. Initially there was a struggle to create cohesion between the older and younger youth. The older youth voiced their feelings around the "lack of focus and productive contributions" from the younger youth, but the younger youth were feeling intimidated by the conversations of the older youth. One girl, 12 years old at the time, stated that she felt "like nothing [she] had to say was as good or as smart as what the older youth said." Staying true to the vision of having youth speak on youth issues, this conflict was resolved collaboratively by the group. There was an open discussion about the gap between "tweens" and young adults even within the community. The decision was to rework the community agreements to reflect the thoughts and opinions of all members of the group. This was done through a silent activity

facilitated by a youth. The final result was somewhat of a mentoring dynamic between the older youth and the younger youth.

There were also dozens of one-to-one interactions with youth. Youth who may feel uncomfortable sharing in front of the group tend to take opportunities to share information they feel is important to the conversation with the Youth-Adult Partnership Coordinator during breaks in the meetings or while being driven to or from meetings. The security of the one-to-one discussions gives youth the opportunity to share more personal stories that add to the data being collected, without having to 'out' themselves.

Youth have the opportunity to meet the YAP Coordinator before attending any of the meetings. They are always given the option to meet one-on-one with the coordinator, with the adult/youth who referred them, or the coordinator can also bring along 1 or 2 youth from MYC to better explain the group. This provides youth the opportunity to build a connection and trust and to hear about the projects without any commitment to join, or to continue participation once attending the meeting.

### Specific meeting activities

Many of the youth-adult-partnership meetings that are run in association with VYPER, instead of following a linear agenda, collaboratively develop an "agenda map" at the start of each meeting – where anyone can throw up a potential topic for discussion (and additional topics can be added throughout the meeting). Like with a map, not every point needs to be visited during every trip/meeting, but instead the group can travel from place to place on the map by consensus and then fold up the map at the end of the meeting to follow up on unvisited points, revisit points that are appropriate, and subtract and add to the map at future meetings. As mentioned, the main activities were the development of the youth resource centre and the Pulling Together conference, but activities also included: an environmental scan, grant application development, newsletter submissions, workshop development, and the MY VYPER project.

### Environmental scan (August 2014 to August 2015 and ongoing)

A common technology that VYPER utilizes is an environmental scan of youth-related programs and resources available in a community (conducted with adults and youth separately). Typically the scan identifies disconnects between what youth and adults identify as resources available in the community. Unfailingly, scans have identified resources that adults are aware of, but youth are not. However, with free flow of conversation, many other details emerge, particularly from youth – about why youth may or may not feel comfortable accessing those resources of which they are aware. Critically, simply having these conversations with adults and youth begins a process of inquiry for all, which always eventually leads from discussion about resources for youth, to discussion between resources and youth.

Initial discussions with youth revealed that youth who had accessed services already were much more aware of resources within the community, but that they only became aware of these resources one at a time through a slow process of recommendation. Youth who had no accessed services had limited knowledge of community resources outside of their school counsellors and Fraser House Society. The youth identified a lack of resources in the areas of mental health, basic necessities, employment, and substance use. More than this, the youth found the few resources available to them to often be unapproachable for various reasons (typically negative personal experiences).

The MYC found that accessibility posed an issue for many youth when it came to using services and resources. The 3 issues discussed at length and deemed to be the main problems were:

1. **Hours of services** – service organizations are typically open 9-5 while youth are in school, which only leaves approximately a 2 hour window for youth to access the services (a particular challenge for those having to take the bus or whose school is in a rural area).

2. **Transportation** – If resources are not along a main bus route or near their school they become very challenging to access. Many youth have parents who work late and are unable to drive them, or they are not at a place where they feel comfortable sharing with their parents that they want to use a community resource.
3. **Waitlists** – The youth found that being put on a waitlists that ranged from 2-6 months for serious issues such as suicidal thoughts and major anxiety made the resources seem useless and not worth reaching out to.

Some other issues included going to the wrong resource and not being connected to the correct resource and stigma around accessing a particular resource. Through MYC's partnerships with different community service providers, a few organizations have addressed some of these issues and seen some increase in youth accessing their services. Mental health services in Mission adjusted their hours to be more school-friendly, as well as included the option of drop-ins where they could immediately speak with a psychiatrist without an appointment. Other services offer bus passes or are taking their services to more accessible locations on certain days of the week. Despite the progress being made, stigma and past negative experiences still pose a challenge when it comes to making resources and services more approachable.

#### VYPER mini-grant application (November 2014)

VYPER's mini-grants are designed to support the process of bringing together adults and youth/young-adults to develop the Youth-Adult-Partnership Grant applications, including such activities as:

- Participating youth and adults getting to know each other better and building trust
- Developing community agreements about how youth and adults will work together
- Developing and clarifying your project's vision, mission, possible activities and outcome markers (VYPER staff are available for free application development workshops that touch on these areas.)
- Producing and submitting your Youth-Adult-Partnership Grant application

Mini-grants will be for a maximum of \$500, generally to cover honoraria for youth participation, food, and transportation costs.

In November 2014, the Mission Youth Committee submitted a mini-grant application with the following general description:

The Mission Youth Committee is planning and developing a project aimed at implementing a series of workshops to educate businesses and organizations on respecting child and youth rights and making sure the youth they are involved with are aware of their rights. It is based around the UNCRC (<http://www.uncrcletsgetitright.co.uk/>). The goal is to eventually have a group of youth and adults create these workshops and use them to train different organizations which would lead to their "accreditation" as a Child and Youth Rights Approved Business/Organization.

The application was reviewed and approved by the VYPER Regional Youth Committee.

#### Community capacity building tool (February 2015 and August 2015)

In early February 2015, youth and adults in Mission were engaged separately in responding to the questions in a validated tool, the Community Capacity Building Tool (CCBT). For the purposes of the tool, respondents were asked to provide retrospective (from before MYC started in Mission in August 2014) responses, viewing their "project" as "youth-adult-partnership behaviours". The tool covers 9 domains and asks 35 specific questions answered with a 4 point scale (1- just started, 2 - on the road, 3 - nearly there, 4 - we're there).



The CCBT was conducted a second time with service providers in August 2015 to assess the progress made in the last year of incorporating youth-adult partnership behaviours via the Mission Youth Committee, as was agreed upon in the Plan H Funding Application. The plan is to do the same with the youth before the end of the year.

### *Youth Responses*

Largely because the tool was not designed for youth, they found they simply had no access to the information that would allow them to answer the questions. There was a blend of being unable to answer the question because they did not know and indicating the domains with a score of 1: “Just Started.”

#### *Some key comments:*

- Sometimes adults think they know what we want so they make assumptions, but they don’t really ask us.
- We understand that the adults trying to help youth usually have a lot of training and experience. They go to school for counselling and other stuff for a reason, but if you haven’t gone through [the trauma/health issue] then it’s really hard for you to understand everything that a youth is going through, especially today. Things are different than they were 10 years ago, even 5 years ago.
- I’ve never been invited to take a leadership role like this. Sometimes we are asked to lead other youth, like in leadership class or student council, but we don’t get asked to teach adults ever. I think we have some good insight that would help service providers.
- Adults don’t listen to us or ask our opinion so after awhile we just don’t want to talk to them anymore or listen to them. It’s not that we have nothing to say, we just feel like no one cares about what we have to say.
- We feel like adults lump us all together, like they think we’ll all respond the same to their one way of helping. There’s no one program or event that every youth is going to like. A lot of times they think that because they have this one really fun or really helpful program that that’s good enough, but if we have a bad experience with that one program then we’re kind of screwed and have no other options.
- If I feel like I’m being respected and that adults value what I’m saying then I’m going to do the same for them.

### *Adult responses – first round*

In February, adults responded specifically to each question, and responded with an average score (between the 9 domains) of 1.455: between “Just Started” and “On the Road.”

#### *Some key comments:*

- It’s a challenge getting youth involved instead of just being interested in the project.
- We’d like to see the shift towards youth led explorations about root causes of issues. However, we have not yet engaged youth in these conversations.
- I believe the return of the student council would be a positive youth-adult partnership.
- Our external supporters’ policies do not encourage community action on issues related to projects that involve youth-adult partnership behaviors.
- There is no place within the community to have these types of conversations with youth about the root cause of youth-related issue.
- The community has not provided adequate learning opportunities for youth and the community members to learn how to better work together.

### *Adult responses – second round*

In August, adults were again asked questions relating to youth-adult partnership behaviours, but this time they were asked more specifically about the Mission Youth Committee. The questions were developed by the MYC, keeping in mind that ultimately the answers would need to fulfill the 9 domains of the CCBT. This time there was an average score (between the 9 domains) of 2.714: between “On the Road” and “Nearly There.”

*Some key comments:*

- There are concrete plans in motion to create a newsletter that communicates project information to everyone. We are preparing to meet with the Mission Youth Committee to work on this and we feel it will increase awareness around the project.
- We see the youth are taking leadership roles when it comes to creating more socially aware service providers. We feel particularly more knowledgeable around areas of mental health and LGBTQ+ issues due to the training provided by the youth.
- We were invited by the youth to mentor them in different areas that would help benefit the initiatives they were working on, which led to some great collaborations.
- The Mission Youth House is such a collaborative project and it relies almost entirely on the resources the adults bring and the knowledge and experience the youth bring to create guidelines and policies.
- We have seen some external supports identify a need for policy change in regards to youth-adults partnership behaviours. However, we have yet to see them make those changes.

### *The 9 domains*

**Participation:** Participation is the active involvement of people in improving their own and their community's health and well-being. Participating in a project means the target population, community members, and other stakeholders are involved in project activities, such as making decisions and evaluation

**Leadership:** Leadership includes developing and nurturing both formal and informal local leaders during a project. Effective leaders support, direct, deal with conflict, acknowledge and encourage community members' voices, share leadership, and facilitate networks to build on community resources. Leaders bring people with diverse skill sets together and may have both interpersonal and technical skills. Finally, an effective leader has a strategic vision for the future.

**Community Structures:** Community structures refers to smaller or less formal groups and committees that foster belonging and give the community a chance to express views and exchange information. Examples of community structures include church groups, youth groups, and self-help groups.

**External Supports:** External supports (funding bodies) such as government departments, foundations, and regional health authorities can link communities and external resources. At the beginning of a project, early external support may nurture community momentum.

**Asking Why:** Asking why refers to a community process that uncovers the root causes of community health issues and promotes solutions. The community comes together to critically assess the social, political and economic influences that result in differing health standards and conditions. Explorations through "asking why" helps refine a project to reflect the community needs.

**Obtaining Resources:** Obtaining resources includes finding time, money (other than from funding bodies), leadership, volunteers, information and facilities both from inside and outside the community.

**Skills, Knowledge and Learning:** Skills, Knowledge, and Learning are qualities in the project team, the target population, and the community that the project team uses and develops.

**Linking with Others:** Linking with others refers to linking your project with individuals and organizations. These project links help the community deal with its issues. Examples include creating partnerships or linking with networks and coalitions.

**Sense of Community:** Sense of community, within the context of a project, is fostered through building trust with others. Community projects can strengthen a sense of community when people come together to work on shared community problems. Collaborations give community members confidence to act and courage to feel hopeful about change.

#### VYPER Youth-Adult-Partnership grant application development (March 2015)

In March 2015, the MYC submitted a VYPER Youth-Adult-Partnership grant application, which they described as being developed in the following way:

We held 3 youth-adult partnership meetings. Because the Mission Youth Committee has so many projects and initiatives we're working on, we spent the first meeting discussing exactly where the youth coordinator hired from the grant funding would be most effective. We decided that the Mission Youth Committee itself is a project meant to explore youth-adult partnership behaviours and adding a second coordinator to this general project would help us to continue that work, as well as support us in our smaller projects. During the next two meetings, the youth took on various roles including leading the meeting, taking notes, typing up the application, actively participating in the brainstorming process and doing final edits. This process differed from previous/other organizational funding application development as in past applications, an adult has filled out the form without youth contribution. This application was filled out by a group of youth with input from two adults.




The application identified the project partners as:

- Mission's youth
- Mission Community Services
- Fraser House Society
- The District of Mission
- Mission Child and Youth Committee
- University of the Fraser Valley

The application identified possible activities arising from the grant as:

- Have youth involved in "Mission Youth House" which is a resource centre to provide necessities to homeless and at risk youth who wouldn't otherwise be getting them.
- Have youth design workshops to raise awareness about the (U.N.) Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Improve sexual education to be more inclusive about gender, sex, and sexuality and ultimately be more educational.

The application identified the following outcome markers:

<p><b>Expect to See:</b> You're pretty sure at least some of these things will happen when you carry out your activities.</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> <i>We expect that organizations will have worked with youth in ways that they haven't before on the development of funding applications and related programs.</i></p>	<p><b>Like to See:</b> If these things happened when you carry out your activities, it would be pretty great!</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> <i>We'd like to see organizations formally evaluating their partnerships with youth in new ways, and making changes to the way they work in an attempt to improve these partnerships.</i></p>	<p><b>Love to See:</b> You would be over the moon if these things happened when you carry out your activities!</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> <i>We'd love to see youth-adult-partnership more explicitly incorporated into organizational visions and missions, and/or reflected in plans that organizations set for the future.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Youth consultancy in all decisions regarding youth within our community.</li> <li>-The mission school district books a workshop for staff on inclusive sexual education.</li> <li>-The principles of the convention on the rights of the child practiced through all our partnerships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Youth consultancy in all decisions regarding youth on all fronts.</li> <li>-shift towards more comprehensive and inclusive sexual education</li> <li>-more community support towards youth and other youth related programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Prioritization of youth made decisions about youth related topics</li> <li>-Adoption of a comprehensive and inclusive sexual education program addressing gender identity and healthy relationships.</li> <li>-Having Mission Youth house open 24/7</li> </ul>

The application was reviewed and approved by the VYPER Regional Youth Committee.

The grant was then used to hire a second YAP Coordinator as the initial coordinator transitioned out of the role. The same youth-led hiring process was used to hire Samantha Johnson in July 2015.

### Newsletter Submissions

In late August, the Mission Youth Committee was asked to regularly contribute to VYPER's quarterly newsletter. A member of the MYC volunteers to take on the task of writing an area update. During meetings, that member will typically facilitate a discussion around what is important to mention in the newsletter; then they will take that information and write up their submission. They have contributed to 3 newsletters so far and plan to continue this partnership. In addition, they have connected with a community member to begin providing area updates to the What's On! Mission Magazine.

### MyVYPER

The MyVYPER project is a youth informed poster series consisting of interviews with VYPER participants and service providers within the Fraser Health Region. MyVYPER is a collaborative effort between participants within the VYPER project to create a distributable poster series that will assist in putting a face to VYPER.

Both youth and service providers from Mission have participated in the MyVYPER project as it helps to explain, in a more tangible way, the mission and visions of VYPER and the MYC regarding youth-adult partnership behaviours.

See page 22 for examples from Mission.

### City Council Presentation

The MYC has been concerned for some time that the District of Mission is not necessarily complying with the UNCRC, which states that all children and youth have the right to leisure. However, the MYC has noted that there is a lack of free, accessible leisure for older children and youth. They are in the process of developing a presentation to take to the city council regarding this issue. Their hope is that the council will partner with in creating accessible leisure activities in the community.

### Major topics of discussion

#### Reaching out to services (or not)

- Many discussions focused on youth not feeling comfortable with an adult, or even walking into more 'adult spaces'. They are often waiting for adults to tell them what to do or when to speak.
- Youth have mentioned that the meetings feel more like a professional job rather than school or the part-time jobs usually offered to youth. They were given more responsibility and autonomy, which they said made them respect the role more and actually want to participate.
- They have talked at length about wishing that adults would give them more chances to have responsibilities like they have in the MYC. Their experience has been that adults usually give them small tasks to do and that it makes them feel like the adults don't think they can be more responsible. They noted that when they are trusted in more significant roles, they always surprise the adults with how well they do. They often mentioned that if more adults trusted their capabilities then maybe there wouldn't be such a strain between youth and adults.
- They stressed that if they had someone who they or other youth identify as a safe ally to support the process of initial meetings with service providers, they think this would be helpful. They mentioned that having a trusted adult ally in the beginning steps felt like "back up," like they were supported, and therefore felt more comfortable speaking up. They understood that some service providers are still changing their mindset towards youth and that having another adult there to facilitate the conversation made them feel safe and respected.
- If not given in introduction to an adult by someone they already trust prior to an appointment, youth are less likely to go to the appointment and to share information openly.

#### Mental health and substance use

- What is available needs to be more accessible and better-publicized. Hours should be more youth-friendly and regular, so youth know that on these days at these times, help is available. Having hours that only run until 4 or 5 means they have very limited time to access services.
- Most services youth have only learned about since and because they have been involved with VYPER – which doesn't mean that just because they have learned about them, that they won't now forget. Youth have to have ongoing opportunities to be aware of services.
- There's a lot of stigma around getting help for mental health issues or substance use issues. Youth wished that there was better education around mental health in particular so that it was destigmatized. This way other youth would feel more comfortable using the services available to them.
- Being told to see someone makes youth feel singled out, tells youth that they have a problem or issue that needs to be fixed. Whereas if the youth are informed through respectful education and discussion about these issues, it is their own choice to get help that they do want and need, even though they may be scared.
- They stressed that service providers should have a form of sensitivity training or trauma-informed training that helps them to be mindful of the words they choose to use or their body language and tone of voice. All of these affect the experience a youth has of seeking help.

- In school we get basic information about dangers related to sexual health, mental health and substance use, but we aren't really told how to be safe. We may be told about options, but not about how to use them. Instead youth are learning about these other options through the internet or through friends.
- Youth have commented that they do not feel supported bringing an issue up to an adult, and that they do not have enough information to be able to support their friends who may be struggling with mental health issues (depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation).
- Youth discussed their many negative experiences of seeking help where the service providers were dismissive of their feelings. They were made to feel like they didn't know themselves or know what would be good for them. They even felt like they were being treated like young children who knew nothing.
- Youth have mentioned that when they are being helped, they don't want to be rushed into anything. They don't want to be forced to be sober right away, or at all. They don't want to be forced into taking medications for mental health issues. They want options and compromises; they want to work with the service provider on developing a plan that works for them.

### LGBTQ+ issues

- Youth discussed that often adults, particularly teachers and service providers, use terms that are exclude those who identify as LGBTQ+
- They found that there was a lot of ignorance around appropriate LGBTQ+ terminology. They found there was a particular lack of knowledge regarding the difference between gender and sexuality. Youth did not believe most service providers and teachers were malicious in their discrimination, but that it simply came from a lack of education.
- They felt that training around LGBTQ+ awareness should be mandatory for adults that work with youth. They even found that in the Mission School District policy manual, there is mandatory training. However, they haven't seen the school district follow through with this. This has made many youth who identify as LGBTQ+ feel like they are not valued.
- They noted the lack of publicized safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth. Some businesses placed small stickers that were symbolic of a "safe space," but many youth had experienced that this sometimes meant they were allowed to go there, but not necessarily advertise their sexual orientation. And their comfort always came secondary to other customers/staff.
- They also felt that there weren't enough groups for LGBTQ+ youth to join. There is really only the Fraser Valley Youth Society, but if someone didn't get along with someone else in that group then they had nowhere else to go.

### Sexual Health Education and Healthy relationships

- This has been a big topics for youth – the conversation has been around wanting to have information and discussions both individual and as a group regarding healthy relationships with partners, parents, friends, and other individuals.
- They discussed the limited education they receive in school that usually only includes STIs, condoms, and anatomy.
- Although sexual health was identified by many youth as something that is lacking, the youth felt that focusing on healthy relationships would include topics such as safety, consent and sexual health, but also talk about communication, interpersonal communication skills, healthy lifestyle choices, and ultimately cover any topics that they have questions about.
- Heteronormativity was also found to be a major issue with sexual health education. The way youth are taught about sex and relationships is based almost completely on cisgender, heterosexual couples. This left many LGBTQ+ youth without education.

- They stressed the importance of creating a dialogue with youth about healthy relationship behaviours vs. unhealthy relationship behaviours. They noted how helpful it would be to know what “red-flags” to look for in relationships and how to handle them.

## Pulling Together Conference: You Asked For It (October 2014)

The Mission CYC holds an annual conference for service providers called Pulling Together. It has a different theme each year, and 2014 was to be focused on youth. Specifically, members of the CYC wanted to know how to improve their interactions with youth. The idea was brought up during a CYC meeting to partner with youth in the development of the conference. This was met with a mix of enthusiasm and uncertainty. A group of youth, who would later be a part of the Mission Youth Committee, were invited to be involved in the planning and organization of the conference. They were told they could be as involved as they wanted. The youth decided to take on the entire planning process with the help of the YAP coordinator and members of the CYC. They chose to include a Youth Panel where service providers would submit questions before the conference which would be answered by an onstage panel.

The planning process took place from July to October through weekly 2-hour meetings. Youth started by brainstorming issues that they felt were important to youth in that community. Eventually topics were created from that brainstorm that would become workshops/presentations at the conference. The topics were:

- Comprehensive and Inclusive Sexual Health Education
- LGBTQ+ Awareness
- Child and Youth Rights
- Learning Styles

The Mission Youth Committee laid out the day as follows:

8:30 – 9:00 Registration

9:00 – 9:30 Welcome

9:30 – 10:30 Workshop

10:30 – 11:30 Workshop

11:30 – 12:30 Panel 1

12:30 – 1:30 LUNCH

1:30 – 2:30 Panel 2

2:30 – 3:30 Workshop

3:30 – 4:30 Workshop/Close

The conference took place on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014. There were approximately 80 people in attendance, and 15 youth were involved in the planning process. Youth were involved in tasks such as brainstorming, note taking, emailing service providers, making posters, doing registration, ushering, setting up and taking down, and presenting.

## Workshops

There were 4 workshops based on the topics the MYC felt were important. Two workshops were designed and presented by youth, and the other two were presented by adults who worked with the youth to design a workshop that fit their criteria. The workshops were as follows:

1. **Complete Sex Education** – Often youth feel that the Sex Education they are receiving, if any, is incomplete and solely focused on anatomy and STI's. This workshop is meant to help explain what it is youth are looking for from Educators and Health Professionals in regards to sex/sexuality/gender. This will touch on relationships, emotions, consent, and sexuality/gender inclusivity.
2. **Rights Pertaining to Youth** – As adults and professionals, it is our duty to provide youth with information regarding to their rights in our specific fields. This workshop will explore the benefit of making youth aware of their rights, as well as providing tools to help us fulfill our responsibility as bearers of knowledge regarding youth rights.
3. **VARK Learning Styles** – This workshop is meant to explain the idea behind different learning styles and the challenges of having professionals present information to them through only one mode.\*
4. **Respectful Discussion around LGBTQ+** - One of the major issues facing youth today is a lack of understanding surrounding those who identify as LGBTQ+. The goal of this workshop is to help breakdown some of the preconceived ideas and misinformation regarding this group of youth. It will touch on understanding the language and terms, challenging heteronormativity, and creating safe spaces for youth.\*

\*Developed and presented by youth

Following the conference, the MYC's workshop on LGBTQ+ has been requested multiple times throughout Mission, Abbotsford, and Chilliwack to help train staff who work with youth. The Adolescent Day Treatment Program in Abbotsford invited the MYC to present the workshop to the health care workers, as well as to their clients. The MYC has also developed a handout to coincide with the workshop. The MYC is also pushing for this workshop to be used as the mandatory training for teachers in the Mission School District. In their own research they found that Policy 26 states:

1. The District will require school counselors to have training so they are informed and familiar with expectations pertaining to human rights, anti-homophobia, anti-transgender phobia, discrimination, cultural diversity, and harassment, and to be sensitive to sexual minority students and those with sexual minorities in their families.
2. The District will provide required training for all staff, elected trustees, and Parent Advisory Councils to develop their knowledge, skills, awareness, and behaviours to identify and eliminate sexual minority and gender identity discrimination and to foster dialogues of understanding and respect.

The MYC workshop on LGBTQ+ would meet the requirements of the training required in the policy. The MYC has approached the school board and has attempted to contact the superintendent. However, they have yet to hear back. They are still hopeful their concerns will be heard come the next school year.

The Rights Pertaining to Youth workshop was presented by an instructor at the University of the Fraser Valley. This collaboration developed into a partnership that is currently working on a project to make youth aware of their rights, as well as to train staff in being responsible bearers of knowledge.



## Youth Panel

The MYC requested that service providers send in questions they wanted youth to answer. As questions came in, MYC youth, as well as youth from other groups, answered the questions individually. At the conference, 5 youth sat on a panel onstage to share their answers. Each youth had a chance to share their own answer; in addition, youth who were not comfortable speaking onstage could have their answers read aloud by someone else. Examples of questions and responses are:

- ❖ In looking back at difficult times for you what was the most significant helpful thing that someone did for you or said to you?
  - A: "It's not your fault"
  - A: Just being there and willing to listen to what I had to say
- ❖ How can we adults and youth work together to ensure every kid has positive adult role models in their lives?
  - A: Not every youth wants a role model. I don't mind having people help me, but I don't necessarily want to model myself after anybody else.
  - A: Giving youth options. We're not all going to connect to the same person.
- ❖ What resources do you know of in Mission to get help for substance use issues?
  - A: Honestly, nothing really.
  - A: Fraser House. Or else there are places in Abbotsford.

It is important to mention that two of the youth onstage have struggled with anxiety when it comes to public speaking. Both youth spoke eloquently and enjoyed their experience.

## Feedback

There were feedback forms, created by the MYC, for attendees to fill out during closing and were collected on the way out. The questions on the form were as follows:

1. Did you have a clear idea prior to the conference of what it was about it?  
  
YES      NO
2. Was the conference what you expected?  
  
YES      NO  
  
If no, how so?
3. What was your favourite part of the conference?
4. What aspect could use improvement and in what way? (ie. Food, registration, location etc.)

The forms indicated that the overall experience was extremely positive. People were especially pleased with the Youth Panel. They indicated that the information they received at the conference would help them improve their practice.

The MYC received personal feedback from service providers who attended the workshop expressing gratitude for organizing the conference and for speaking candidly.

The MYC had a follow-up meeting to go over their experience with the conference. The feedback included feeling valued, feeling appreciated, improved confidence, pride in oneself, and hopeful for more projects with youth-adult partnership behaviours.

## Mission Youth House (M.Y. House)

The Mission Youth Homelessness Committee began meeting in the spring of 2013 to collaborate on a local solution for youth homelessness. They found that many youth were going to other communities to find resources that were unavailable in Mission. As a first step, the committee decided to open a resource facility to provide showers, laundry, meals, resources, and connections. Down the line, the committee wants to offer extreme weather emergency shelter spaces, a short-term shelter and youth housing options. Members of the committee felt that the best way to make a successful youth resource centre was to partner with youth on the project.

The Mission Youth Committee was approached and was thrilled at the idea, as a few of them had accessed or attempted to access resources in other communities during times they didn't have a safe environment to call home.

Local youth settled on the name Mission Youth House or M.Y. House because it allowed youth to maintain privacy about their situation by simply stating that they were going to "M.Y. House" to clean up. They also felt that it created a sense of ownership, like those who were considered "homeless" now had a home to call theirs.

### Logo Design

The MYC was asked to come up with a logo that would be youth-friendly and inviting. The group felt that the best way to achieve this was to have youth design the logo. They chose to hold a contest for all local youth to design a logo.

The winner of the contest was a local 13-year old girl, and this was the result:



The MYC then worked with a graphic designer to help with branding. He facilitated a conversation around the importance of colour in a logo and that it should convey a message because those colours will be strongly associated with your organization. They chose these colours to represent happiness, health, and fun. Youth felt that many shelters and resource centres focus on the hopelessness they may feel on the street, but they didn't want to associate with that; they wanted to think positive thoughts and be reminded of their youthfulness.

The tagline – “Making youth feel at home” – was also created by a youth. The MYC was focused on making sure this facility did not feel like an office, or a centre, but rather that it could feel like a home for those who don't have a house or don't feel at home in their house.

### Task Force

Due to all the community collaboration on this project, there were many groups meeting to discuss M.Y. House and how it was to be built and how it would run. Unfortunately, this meant a lot of confusion as to what was going on and this really slowed down the progress. The Executive Director of Mission Community Services suggested that a task force be created where all the information could funnel through. He invited a representative from Youth Unlimited to be a part of this task force, as well as the Mission Youth Committee.

The task force met on a regular basis to discuss the next steps to take. This included advertising, website design, event booths, policy making, staff training, finding resources, and building more community connections – all of which the MYC contributed to. The website, [missionyouthhouse.ca](http://missionyouthhouse.ca), is designed and operated by a local youth from the MYC. They were also invited to meet with the M.Y. House Manager to develop guidelines and policies regarding how the staff and clients will interact within M.Y. House. The manager stated that much of the work the MYC has done with training service providers about Healthy Relationships and LGBTQ+ issues has helped to prepare him to be in the his role at M.Y. House.

### Effects of Youth-Adult Partnership Behaviours (August 2015)

After a year of the MYC engaging with the community, interviews were done with individual youth and individual service providers to assess the effects of incorporating youth-adult partnership behaviours into youth-adult collaborative projects. Overwhelmingly the experience was positive and all individuals deemed the Mission Youth Committee a crucial part of the community in Mission.

### Service Providers

These are statements taken directly from the interviews with service providers:

- “Organizations have seen how important it is to support a youth voice and let them take the lead.”
- “The partnerships with the Mission Youth Committee have created a greater consciousness of the power of youth.”
- “They've addressed the communication gap between adults and youth in a positive way. It's been effective, unlike some other attempts that have been made. This is working.”
- “The Mission Youth Committee has made an in-road for local leadership. It has created the beginning for the possibility of youth leadership on health.”
- “The youth involved in the MYC have taken positive risks. They've begun to understand their own gifts and abilities.”

- “This makes a difference for the youth and starts to change the mindset of the community towards youth. The potential here is unlimited.”
- “The Mission Youth Committee has given hope to many of us fighting for this kind of interaction with youth”
- “The effect of the MYC can be weighed by the fact that two new youth workers were hired to interact with the community in this manner.”
- “The Mission Youth Committee has challenged the way organizations look at working with youth. How can we respect them more?”
- “The Mission Youth Committee has contributed to building local leadership directly by preparing young leaders, and indirectly by affecting how we view leadership. It really encourages critical thinking amongst [service providers].”
- “This has given youth someone to believe in them, they have adults who support them.”
- “The youth are so consistent, very business-like, and they show up on time. I think this is different from other ‘youth groups’.”
- “Service providers have all been affected by their workshops. They gave us training we don’t normally get, like LGBTQ+ issues. We really learned a lot from them.”

## Youth

These are statements taken directly from the interviews with youth:

- “I feel like people are listening to me, like what I’m saying matters and they know it.”
- “We’re providing an avenue that youth can access and adults can understand. We haven’t had that.”
- “I think adults notice us more, they know we’re not dormant.”
- “I’ve felt that service providers are listening to us more. They’re just more open to youth’s needs rather than just saying ‘go away’ or making us feel like we’re a bother.”
- “I’ve seen my peers in the group change for the better. Some had an attitude before and that’s toned down. Some have stepped out of their comfort zone and taken healthy risks. We all have more confidence. This encourages youth.”
- “The Mission Youth Committee gave me a sense of belonging, like I’m doing something important. It’s not just something to do, it’s something we’re being, like an effect. I’m more comfortable with myself and it’s opened doors for me.”
- “This has given us avenues to take leadership. If we had an idea, we went for it. It provided a platform for us to showcase the skills we already had.”

- “It’s given me a way to manifest my knowledge and passion as well as use it to create change in the community.”