



Aboriginal Next Steps II

McCreary Centre Society

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©The McCreary Centre Society, 2010
3552 East Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V5K 2A7
Tel: 604-291-1996
Fax: 604-291-7308
Email: mccreary@mcs.bc.ca
www.mcs.bc.ca
978-1-895438-08-6

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and community-based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to identify and address the health needs of young people in the province.

Project Team

Annie Smith
Executive Director

Sherry Simon
Provincial Coordinator

Duncan Stewart
Research Associate

Carly Hoogeveen
Research Assistant

Additional assistance for the project was provided by Stephanie Martin and Alison Murray.

Evaluation for the project was provided by Dr. Maya Peled.

Community Organizers

Bella Bella
Cindy Neilson, Jacqueline George
& Cherish Mason

Courtenay
Ann Marie Kraft, Alanna Mitchell
& Tabatha Webber

Cranbrook
Debbie McPhee & Bonnie Scott

Hazelton
Andy de Boer, Thomas Smith
& Joeseeph Bowden

Lytton
Noni McCann, Gabrielle Kingston
& Forrest Sampson

Nisga'a
Amber McKay

Prince George
Candice Monai, Billy Rowin,
Pierre John & Theresa (Indya) Sam

Prince Rupert
Debbie Leighton-Stephens, Carla Rourke
Sandra Carlick, Miguel Borges,
Anne Smythe & Tiana Albert

Skeetchestn

Candice Simon, Amber McDougall,
Eden Billy, & Jalyssa Phair

Westbank

Trent Pontalti, Emily James
& Zane Knaflich

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Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Introduction | v |
| Vision of Youth Engagement | vi |
| ANSII Introduction | vii |
| ANSII Overview | viii |
| Bella Bella | 1 |
| Courtenay | 3 |
| Cranbrook | 5 |
| Hazelton | 7 |
| Lytton | 9 |
| Nisga'a | 11 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Prince George | 13 |
| Prince Rupert | 15 |
| Skeetchestn | 17 |
| Westbank | 19 |
| Nexus Youth Leadership | 21 |
| Lessons Learned | 22 |
| Youth Response to ANSII | 23 |
| ANSII Evaluation | 24 |
| Acknowledgements | 26 |
| Additional McCreary Resources | 27 |

A Personal Vision of *Youth Engagement*

Since 1994 I have been dedicated to working with urban and rural Aboriginal communities, including within my own Secwepemc Nation. I have learned that co-creating sustainable models for community development does not only take an understanding of the systemic barriers and personal challenges facing Aboriginal youth - it requires creative strategies that are flexible enough to grow with their particular needs over time. All ten communities involved with Aboriginal Next Steps II (ANSII) successfully completed their youth-led programs with amazing results and McCreary Centre Society (MCS) was subsequently awarded the Solicitor General Award (2009) in recognition of its outstanding contribution to community safety. It is an accomplishment that would not have been possible without the steadfast commitment of MCS' Executive Director, Annie Smith. She was a tireless advocate and ally who translated ongoing growth to our funders and board during (what I can only describe as) the *evolving metamorphosis* of a project that ended up reaching the lives of over 500 Aboriginal youth across BC. I often remark to youth that alliance with others who will respectfully share power, is a key to making the big changes they want to see. I am grateful for my allies; therefore, I aspire to always be an adult ally that young people will choose to work with.

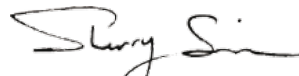
At the heart of this ANSII model is a vision of youth engagement. MCS and other research indicate that successful youth engagement often involves: meaningful participation for youth, opportunities for youth to take responsibility and leadership, and as noted, partnership with supportive adult allies.

With this in mind, I purposefully designed ANSII to be as youth-led as possible. Youth participants had the opportunity to be key decision makers, organizers, researchers and co-writers of a grant that secured \$5000 for their projects. They were asked to identify their 'adult allies' and a 'supporting organization' (i.e.: school or band office) that would hold their grant, but the youth were fully responsible for deciding where every penny was spent. Therefore, ANSII was uniquely different in each community. From the evaluations, we learned that the young people who participated fully were impacted the most. Many of these youth did not self identify as 'leaders,' but when provided the opportunity they stepped courageously into the role with notable integrity and wisdom. Some also joined the ANSII provincial Youth Council, so they could take on an advisory, decision-making role and connect with other like-minded youth across the province.

Whenever possible, I combined experiential learning, expressive arts-based facilitation and cooperative learning in programming to strengthen the youth's leadership capacity and tools for community action. I was continually gifted with the passion and energy of young people, whether so-called 'at-risk youth' or 'A students', who had the desire to speak out on issues that really mattered to them.

Kukstec-kuc (thank you) to all the incredible youth and supportive adults who made this a success. I am inspired by your wholehearted dedication to the future health of our communities and your willingness to work together for positive change.

All My Relations



Sherry Simon
Provincial Coordinator

ANSII *Introduction*

Since 1992 Aboriginal youth have participated in the Adolescent Health Survey (AHS). Following the release of the second AHS (1998) which included 1,710 Aboriginal youth, McCreary Centre Society (MCS) worked with Aboriginal community partners to create the report entitled *Raven's Children*, which looked at the health of Aboriginal youth in grades 7-12. In 2003, AHS III included 2,478 Aboriginal youth and again MCS collaborated with Aboriginal communities to release *Raven's Children II*. The Aboriginal Next Step (ANS) workshop series (2001) was first developed to give Aboriginal youth an opportunity to respond to the *Raven's Children II* report by developing recommendations for improving the health of young people in their community.

Aboriginal Next Steps II

Building on the success of the ANS workshop series (2001), ANSII was designed to cultivate a positive and sustainable approach by nurturing the creative potential and innovation of Aboriginal youth. Through the project, young people (aged 13 to 18) in ten communities across the province participated in workshops to discuss the current status of youth health, identify priority issues associated with substance use and other youth health issues, and creatively share their ideas about improving youth health with their school and community. Inspired

to transform their ideas into action, youth and local adult allies were supported by MCS in developing and delivering youth-led community projects.

ANSII community project's highlights include: international award winning claymation films; creating a youth council to work with the local school board to reduce the percentage of youth dropping out of school; developing a multi-school photojournalism and traditional language project; and designing conferences and camps to 'build bridges' between youth and local Elders.



Protective Factors

McCreary's research indicates that protective factors promote healthy youth development. Young people need positive relationships and caring social environments to grow and thrive. For example, research has shown that youth who feel connected and safe at home, at school and in their community have better health, take fewer risks and have higher educational aspirations, even in the presence of risk factors such as substance use or depression. Other protective factors include: creating opportunities for mastering creative skills, artistic expression, teamwork, health-enhancing social activities and for making a difference in their community through volunteer work. ANSII aimed to foster these protective factors among Aboriginal youth.

ANSII *Overview*

Whether it was a collaboration between key community partners, an adult advocate for the youth, school space, a community hall, or a multitude of other forms of support, community commitment was essential for this project to be successful. A strong component of ANSII was the idea of partnership, stemming from our belief that sustainable community development depends on growth from within.

An adult Aboriginal advisory committee was formed to select the communities and assisted in guiding the project. Two Aboriginal youth in each community were also invited to take on an advisory, decision-making role by joining the project's provincial Youth Advisory Council (YAC).

Aboriginal Next Steps II

ANSII was a two year project that was accomplished in phases. The aim in phase I was to increase Aboriginal youth's understanding of health risk behaviors (e.g.: substance use), to develop trust, to team build, and to connect with key stakeholders. During phase II participants were able to transform research and ideas into community action.

Phase I: Workshops 1 & 2

In the beginning, youth participated in workshops pertaining to substance use and other Aboriginal health issues. Participants were able to discuss the current status of youth health; dispel negative stereotypes; identify priority issues associated with substance use; and to explore innovative ideas for improving the health of young people in their

communities. Participants created action plans to address issues related to substance use and youth health that they cared about.

During workshop 2 the goal was to integrate their new knowledge, while gaining skills through creative tools, in this case, film making. Reel Youth, a not-for-profit media empowerment program (www.reelyouth.ca) partnered with us on this part of the project and assisted youth to make short claymation films about the Adolescent Health Survey results that they felt were most important in their community. The youth then presented their films and action plans to their school and/or community at a community dialogue event and film premiere.

Phase II: Workshops 3 & 4

In the second phase of the project, YAC members and participating youth developed and delivered a sustainable youth-led community project. In workshop 3 participants designed their community-based, youth-led project by developing a project idea, preparing a budget and evaluation plan, and completing a draft of a grant application. MCS provided grants up to \$5000 to fund the youth's sustainable project ideas which had been identified in Phase I and developed and formalised through workshop 3. MCS offered support to local youth while they delivered their community-based project.

In the final workshop of the series (workshop 4) youth evaluated the success of their community projects and created a sustainability plan to ensure their projects continued after funding and MCS support had ended.

Bella Bella

Bella Bella is located halfway up the coast of BC on Campbell Island, nestled in the “Great Bear Rainforest.” It is home to the Heiltsuk Native Band, which is the largest community on the Central Coast. The Bella Bella Community School takes great pride in their heritage and they strive to teach students through both modern and traditional ways, including Heiltsuk cultural activities such as singing and dancing into their school program.

Since March 2008 the youth who participated in ANSII were dedicated to doing a youth-led initiative that integrated these values. They called their project ‘Building Bridges’ because they wanted to strengthen the connection between youth, adults, and elders in the school and the community.

Peer Educators

From the beginning, the youth were adamant about using existing spaces to create a safe environment for young people to engage in a multitude of creative activities. They also identified the need for youth to educate each other and the community about youth health issues, especially those related to substance use.

During the first workshop, they organized into three planning groups to address the youth health issues of their community. The first group’s film “Big Wall” highlighted the importance of youth who feel alone reaching out to each other and breaking down the walls that keep them apart. Through the film “A Job WELL Done,” the second group shared a posi-

tive message with the community; that statistically Aboriginal youth are making healthier decisions and overall substance use has decreased. Group three created “No Glove, No Love,” a film that encouraged Aboriginal youth to continue making healthy decisions. This film was shown at both the Vancouver Film Festival and the Bangkok Harm Reduction Film Festival.

Building Bridges

By the time the youth met again for the project planning workshop, the original planning group had doubled in size. They organized a conference to not only strengthen the relationship between the adults and youth, but to inspire youth in Bella Bella to begin doing things for themselves.

Their goals included:

- ◆ Help youth explore creative ways to intertwine urban and traditional cultures;
- ◆ Bring adults, youth, and elders together to bridge the generation gap;
- ◆ Reduce drug and alcohol abuse by showing that you can have fun while learning healthy alternatives.

In May 2009 they hosted their conference and invited all the senior youth. They had workshops from both local service providers and guest facilitators. Topics included harm reduction, photojournalism, true colors personality types, theatre, turntablism,

Heiltsuk traditional cultural values and cultural awareness mixed in with poetry/spoken word. They successfully created a safe place for the youth to engage in creative expression, developed critical skills and reinforced positive values. Participants learned how to express modern youth culture and *'still be involved in traditional culture too'*. During the last night they invited the community to the school for an open mic and shared their art, poetry, performances, and a youth-made Zine that was a mixture of youth culture and traditional Heiltsuk words, images and values.

At the end of June, the youth had a follow up photojournalism project and created an additional Zine called *Vision. Transformation. Inspiration. in Bella Bella* that focused on the positive things youth could do as alternatives to drinking and doing drugs. They are planning to continue to create their own media.

"It was back in October when I first met Sherry and she came to us with a proposal. There was many amongst us in the room and it took time for the youth within the room to open up. You have to respect children and youth just as you respect Elders. Why? Because they are just as important, their voice is just as strong, and their feelings matter. Like everybody else in this world of ours, you have to gain trust and respect.

Working alongside Jackie and communicating with Sherry almost daily is why our youth conference was a success. That is where our commitment came in; it was not just one person who did it all, we all contributed along the way with the support of many others. It was hard work, but me and Jackie were determined to bring greatness into the community for our youth. Anything is possible, you just have to believe and actually want it."

Cherish Mason, Bella Bella Youth



"Well I guess that I was with Sherry from the start. It all began when she came to Bella Bella. We started by making short videos. My group's film made it into the film festival down in Vancouver, which I think was pretty excellent. I was happy to have gotten the chance to be able to make a difference in my community. We are putting a conference on for the youth in our community which I am happy to say will have a great impact.

My group and Sherry have kept in contact with one another for the whole process of applying for a grant and whatnot. It has been very exhilarating. So far I'm learning how to apply for money, plan out a conference, what it takes to do something as grand as this, and well I'm learning time management.

All these things I can apply to my life, so I guess that these are life skills that Sherry has shown my group. Instead of just standing around and waiting for something to happen, my group is getting up and doing things for themselves. I'm glad to be working with her on this project."

**Jacqueline George
Bella Bella Youth**



Courtenay

Courtenay is on the east coast of Vancouver Island and located within the traditional lands of the K'ómoks First Nation. In April 2008, youth from the Nala'atsi Alternate school program that was housed in the Wachaiy Friendship Centre Society completed the first two workshops of the ANSII project. Perhaps due to direct experience and a sense of belonging within the Friendship Centre, the youth were most interested in the information about inclusive community and education. For their community project they decided to focus on fostering community in Courtenay.

Fostering Community

The youth organized into three working groups to create their films. One group created a film to draw awareness to the struggles of youth homelessness. The second focused on the possible consequence of the choices of the decisions we make around sexual relationships. The final group's film "The Centre" focused on how connecting Aboriginal youth to community services such as a Friendship Centre can make a positive difference.

Some of the youth used the film "The Centre" as part of their presentation to the school board to advocate for the students who did not want the Nala'atsi program to be moved from the Friendship Centre. The school board eventually did move the program, but to a larger building only a block away.

With increased confidence in their ability to organize, the youth decided to maintain their partnership

with ANSII while creating their own group: Future Leaders of the World (FLOW). FLOW decided to host their own leadership retreat at the end of summer. They intended to use the event to recruit more youth, create a springboard for discussion and find solutions for addressing community issues.

During the months leading up to the retreat, the youth presented at community meetings, local high schools and gatherings to recruit new members and gain support for their project.

F.L.O.W

Two super youth, Alanna and Tabatha, became key organizers and the grant. FLOW increased and gained a significant community support. They held ally-rich, outdoor retreat

Tabatha, co-writers of membership amount of community support that summer.





One of FLOW's priorities was to invite elders to the retreat to bridge the generation gap, as they felt they were the two groups that could learn the most from each other and help both *"belong more to this community and the people in it."*

The elders were invited to tell their stories, share knowledge, sacred objects, histories and *'good laughs'* with the participants. They created skits together, discussed issues, explored traditional knowledge and practises, played games and had fun.

Some of the workshops offered were:

- ◆ Drum making and how to build a sweat lodge
- ◆ Beatboxing and poetry for non-poets
- ◆ Dream interpretation and meditation
- ◆ Learning about the land and medicinal teas
- ◆ Journaling, writing and collage art

FLOW received positive feedback via participant evaluation forms and several phone calls in the weeks following the event. All the participants said they benefited from being a part of the event.

For many it inspired them to become more involved in their community, allowed them to meet new people, learn new skills, and gain useful knowledge.

They were also very thankful to experience having fun in both structured and unstructured ways, without drugs or alcohol.

In the months that followed FLOW held a well attended, follow-up event at the friendship centre.

"At the beginning of our planning sessions we didn't have a clear goal. After looking more closely at the underlying problem, we realized that there just wasn't enough youth leaders in the community to accomplish everything we felt needed to be changed – and our purpose became obvious.

Our community needs strong, young leaders to power the change we feel is necessary – why limit ourselves to addressing one problem, when we could teach a relatively large group of youth how to address any problem they ever come in contact with, and persevere through it with pride and honor.

Each person's personal empowerment is the sustainable change we want to see. Using art, dance, music, culture and traditional ecological knowledge we intend to teach the youth of today how to live positively in the worlds of tomorrow."

Tabatha Webber, Comox Valley Youth



Cranbrook

Cranbrook is nestled in the heart of the Kootenays, located in the Columbia Valley. It is the largest city of the Rocky Mountain region and has more sunshine than any other city in BC. Due to many of the youth travelling long distances into Cranbrook from neighbouring areas for school, the ANSII project was set up at the centrally located Mount Baker Secondary School (MBSS).

Safety & Acceptance

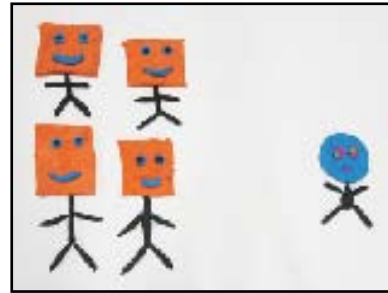
In the first workshop, the group discussed numerous ideas for programming and events to help youth feel like they belong, including a central and accessible youth centre where youth *‘feel safe and accepted and to help them make ideally right decisions.’* This centre would also have workshops to build self-confidence and personal growth creating more awareness about healthy alternatives.

Once the participants had learned about the health of Aboriginal youth through discussions of the Adolescent Health Survey (AHS) data, they split into groups to explore the health issues that they identified as most important.

One group felt moved by the AHS results that proved Aboriginal youth are making “good decisions” (the title they chose for their film) and they so focused on substance use and abuse. For example, fewer Aboriginal youth are drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs. They created their film working off of this question: can dreams impact youth’s deci-

sions? This film was screened as part of the Bangkok Harm Reduction Film Festival.

The youth who were surprised by the higher rates of drug and alcohol use seen among marginalized and street-involved youth formed the second group. The AHS fact that amazed this group the most was learning that the number one reason marginalized youth reported hanging out on the streets was because their friends were there. This group’s film highlights how feeling a sense of connection and belonging in a community can influence youth to make healthy decisions.



A third group considered that although rates of suicide have remained stable over the past decade, protective factors (such as connection with friends and family) can drastically reduce the risk of attempted suicide. Their film showed the importance of having support, especially from friends with positive social values, and how to ensure that *‘no one is an outsider.’*

Following the completion of the film-making workshop, a film premiere and community dialogue night was hosted by the St. Mary Indian Band. The youth were fantastic presenters, expertly fielding questions about the research information related to their films.

“Good collaboration between organizations. Everyone was involved (hands on) in some way. The kids getting a unique experience of making a film to get a message across. The chance to showcase some of their talents especially in being leaders when getting a task done.”

Adult Ally, Cranbrook

Storytellers

In the second year some youth moved or graduated, so the remaining group reconnected after summer and recruited new members. They concluded that the best way to help youth feel like they belong in the community was to first learn more about their culture and then become peer educators.

Finally, they decided to become storytellers in direct response to learning that MBSS’ First Nations Support Workers were consistently getting requests to present stories and information to younger students

in the district.

To jumpstart their project they organized and hosted a storytelling training day at their school.

Two professional storytellers from the Ktunaxa Nation facilitated the training: Joe Pierre and Herman Alpine, MBSS Elder Advisor in Residence. Mr. Alpine shared with the youth the importance and place of stories in Ktunaxa culture. Mr. Pierre facilitated the training on the art of storytelling. By the end of the day, each participant chose a story, practiced it and shared it with the large group.

The youth have ensured the sustainability of their project through goals that include:

- ◆ Ordering legend books so the youth can record them and make podcasts.
- ◆ The storytellers will listen to the podcasts on their mp3 players and practice with the educators and storytellers.

Once they are ready, these young storytellers will visit local schools to tell legends in Ktunaxa (and English).

“I learned about making good decisions.”

Cranbrook Youth



Hazelton

The Hazeltons (Hazelton, New Hazelton and South Hazelton) have been home to the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people for centuries. Named after the hazel bushes that adorn the river-carved terraces, the Hazeltons are situated in a majestic setting dominated by the rugged Roche de Boule Range. Hazelton Secondary School has a student population of approximately 75% First Nations. A geographically dispersed community (including Hagwilget, Gitanmaax, Kispiox, Gitwangak, Gitanyow, Gitsegukla, New Hazelton, South Hazelton and Kispiox Valley) many of the students travel at least one hour on the bus every morning to attend school. The ANSII project began in May 2008 when we met at the centrally located Hazelton Secondary School.

No Rewind Button

Even though some of the youth were not acquainted, an inspiring level of commitment to each other and their goals was notable from the first workshop. They were all dedicated to their project and remained in their working groups whether eating lunch together or working out creative differences.

Ideas for their community project included an ambitious list of fun and educational activities including: educational workshops, theatre, games nights, suicide awareness/support, and youth camps.

During the film-making workshop, the first group focused on physical and emotional health. Their film encouraged us to reach out to our loved ones, be-

cause in life there is no 'rewind button.' The second group showed us that sexual health is another important area where Aboriginal youth can continue to make healthy choices. The final group focused on substance use and abuse and promoted their vision of an inclusive 'Cool Bean Camp - where every bean is welcome.'

The film premiere and community dialogue was integrated into Hazelton Secondary's well attended community showcase. The students proudly displayed and discussed their work and highlighted their ideas for their community project.



Healthy Alternatives

The planning group was determined to create opportunities for youth to learn new skills and alternatives to 'getting bored and doing drugs.' They were very clear that they wanted to do 'something other

than sports' but did not know anyone in the area that taught art or did other creative programming. They definitely wanted to keep the project within the school, so it could include as many youth as possible and strengthen a positive association with school. Thomas and Joseph, the youth advisors and co-writers of the grant, kept the planning at the forefront as school began to wind down for the summer.

When the project started again at the beginning of the school year, they decided to provide an opportunity for students to reconnect while learning different ways of expressing themselves.



"For our first event, we are going to invite Reel Youth back because the feedback was so positive from the first workshop they did here. The youth commented that they now talked to other youth in that workshop in the hallway because they had gotten to know each other more. We want to start the school year with building more on those relationships."

Hazelton Youth

International Programs

For their first workshop they invited Reel Youth, developed new films and learned more about using electronic equipment for creating their own media.

After strengthening relationships between the students, they designed the second event to continue

media training and connect the youth to an international program. For this event they partnered with the organization L.O.V.E (Leave Out Violence) and learned how to become photojournalists. During the training they explored how to express and document their thoughts and feelings about what violence and/or substance abuse meant to them and how it negatively affects their lives. They also connected with an art councilor who did workshops within the Hazelton area.

Opening Doors

Both workshops were held in the school's art room, a room in the basement that most of the students did not know existed. This room had been unused for the past few years because the school did not have an art teacher on staff.

After the workshops, the students purchased new equipment and requested that the art classroom be reopened so they could continue doing their photojournalism and film projects. The youth are continuing to collaborate with the L.O.V.E project.



Lytton

Built on the site of a First Nations village known as *Camchin*, also spelled Kumsheen (where rivers cross) Lytton is at the convergence of the mighty Fraser River and its largest tributary, the Thompson River. Lytton First Nation is located on 14,161 acres of land divided into 56 reserves. ANSII began in Lytton in April 2008 when I was invited by a group of young community leaders who were part of the Ambassador Program.



The Ambassador Program

For the duration of the 10 month Ambassador Program the youth strived to develop interpersonal, leadership and life skills. They worked with cultural practitioners, such as elders and community leaders, and made a commitment to stay drug and alcohol free. This was also part of their personal objectives:

to foster pride, self-esteem, and goal-setting for the betterment of themselves and their community.

During the first workshop, we had time to discuss and explore the impact of colonization in Aboriginal communities. They decided to focus their film-making on 1) creating a comedy encouraging youth to say “no” to drugs; 2) encouraging youth to think about the consequences of their sexual choices and the importance of being informed; and 3) creating a message about the complex issue of perpetuating violence.

The Ambassadors shared their films and action plans (that address youth health issues) at a large youth conference in the Kumsheen Secondary School. They skilfully presented to a gymnasium full of youth and adults from four neighbouring communities. Over the year, some members of the original Ambassador’s group graduated or moved before the ANSII was completed but new youth



joined the remaining organizers as they relocated to the Kumsheen Secondary School.

"I believe that this could have a huge positive influence on the youth in this community. Thanks for the opportunity."
Lytton Youth

Hip Hop, Poetry, & Photography

When I met with the group to support their planning and grant writing, they wanted to ensure a *'new positive influence'* for the youth because they did not like the alcohol and drug abuse that they were witnessing among the young people in their community. It came to their attention that there was an unused studio available where youth were welcome to record songs, take music lessons and essentially do whatever creative projects that they wanted.



The first step, they concluded, was to inspire youth to get involved, including utilizing the studio. They also wanted to strengthen a positive relationship between the youth, the school and the rest of the community.

To reach these goals, they partnered with local health services and organized workshops on hip hop, poetry and photography. They co-organized and offered their workshops at a large youth conference hosted at their school. Over 200 youth attended this event and both of the youth's workshops

were well attended. Social services later reported that their workshops were among the most popular in the evaluation forms.

Newly inspired youth who attended the workshops were encouraged to use the studio time that the youth organizers had purchased for the year. Many students also connected with teachers to share ideas on how to use the studio time. By the end of the week the teachers already had students planning future studio projects.

Installation at the Hall

Within a few months, the youth also completed a poetry and photography project. They decided to install their art and writing at the local hall, a central location that hosted many community activities such as the annual school parent and teacher night.

"By having our art/community showcase... we are showing the adults in the community some of the cool, positive things that youth are doing. We would like this to be an ongoing addition to their meetings, as it will build the youth's confidence as they continue to find creative ways to express themselves and create community awareness."

Lytton Youth



Nisga'a

The Nisga'a live in the Nass River valley of north-western BC. Their name comes from a combination of two Nisga'a words: Nisk'- "top lip" and Tl'ak'- "bottom lip". This term was used because K'ali-aksim Lisims (Nass River Valley) is so bountiful that many living creatures come to it to feed. The Nisga'a saw that every living creature used its Nisk' and Tl'ak' to eat, therefore... Nisga'a!



The Nisga'a Nation is represented by four Villages: Gitlakdamix (New Aiyansh), Gitwinksihlkw (Canyon City), Laxgalts'ap (Greenville), and Gingoix (Kincolith). Students from the four communities attend Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School (NESS), which is located in the Village of New Aiyansh. In September 2008 they came together for creative community action.

During the first workshop, after the group explored the facts about Aboriginal youth health, they split into four action planning groups. After developing their four action plans, they organized themselves

into three groups to create films. One of the films was about sexual health and was accepted into the Bangkok International Film Festival. Even though they were a large group, and from different communities, the youth were excellent at listening to each other's ideas and including everyone in the process. A common theme was how important community wellness was to them. The youth were committed to providing more options for youth through job training, affordable housing, travel and education.

The film premiere was hosted in the same auditorium in New Aiyansh. A special thank you to Paul Mercer and the Nisga'a Lisims Government for providing the meal and to all the adults who shared their words of encouragement and support to the young people.

Community Partnerships

The success of ANSII in Nisga'a was largely due to the enthusiastic dedication of local 12th grader Amber McKay. When I met Amber she had already trained as a peer educator because she was determined to increase awareness among the youth. She immediately saw ANSII as another opportunity to address youth health issues in all four of the communities. Amber decided to job shadow me at two youth conferences to gain experience in different models of youth engagement. At school she held meetings and surveyed the youth for additional ideas. Consistently, the young people wanted to increase youth awareness and skills. To complete the

project, we formed a partnership with the Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School (NESS), Nisga'a Valley Health Authority (NVHA), and Nisga'a Lisims Government to realize the youth empowerment/ leadership conference called *The Spirit of Hope*.

With a strong community collaboration and Amber voicing the suggestions of previous youth's planning sessions, as well as providing her own input, the conference was an incredible success and attended by 100+ youth!



"We will encourage youth during our event to take the skills they learn and continue them in the school including using the new radio station the school will have for this year. Also to encourage the youth to join the Youth Advisory Councils and help plan with NVHA for next year. We want to inspire them.

The youth will be able to hang out with each other in a safe environment, try new things, stretch their comfort levels, practice leadership skills and socialize. For them to get along and have fun without drugs and alcohol is important. Also to practice using their voice. It's important for the youth to talk with each other and the adults of our community."

Amber McKay, Nisga'a Youth



The Spirit of Hope

The conference combined the strengths of local service providers with guest facilitators to offer a unique mix of workshops in photojournalism, media, theatre, personal development, substance use awareness, writing, and traditional culture. On the second day they invited all community members to their energetic and fun open mic. Finally, the third day was dedicated to cultural activities and provided an opportunity for youth to reconnect with elders.

In feedback forms and talking circles the youth expressed overwhelming gratitude for such a positive experience.

"[This project can help address substance use by] giving young people something else to do other than alcohol or drugs."

Nisga'a Youth



Prince George

Prince George is situated where the Nechako River joins the Fraser River near the center of BC. The Prince George Native Friendship Centre (PGNFC) was established in 1969 by a group of young Native activists who held the vision of providing a community resource base for the Aboriginal population in Prince George and the surrounding area.

The Friendship Centre has since grown; in addition to The Gathering Place on third avenue, PGNFC maintains several safe house locations for youth at high risk. Their goal is to provide a safe, stable, supportive environment for youth undergoing positive life-style changes. It was at this central hub that I met with a group of young people in October 2008.

Dreamcatchers Youth Committee

When the youth first got involved in ANSII, they formed an organizing committee to develop their sustainable community project and called themselves the *'Dream Catchers Youth Committee'* or DCYC.



"We are a group of Aboriginal Youth ranging in age from 13 to 19 years of age. We all currently live in the city of Prince George, but many of us are from the surrounding reserves. Our common bonds with each other includes we are all First Nations Youth, have been in care of the government at one point in our lives, we are survivors and we are looking forward to the future. We all participated in the Claymation workshop hosted by The McCreary Centre Society.

The group felt that many aboriginal youth living in Prince George have not had opportunities to learn and practice their culture. The group decided the project would be to creating a cultural learning opportunity that would give youth a starting point to begin or continue learning and practicing aboriginal culture."

DCYC Prince George

Camping with Culture

DCYC hosted a three day cultural camp called *'Camping with Culture'* at Camp Friendship. The traditional practices were mentored and supported by attending community elders, who also provided cultural teachings and guidance at camp. Traditional practices included: smudging, circle talks, making drum bags and storytelling.

The camp also included workshops that focused on Aboriginal identity and provided an opportunity for the youth to learn new tools for self expression such as writing, drawing, improvisation and performing arts.

Part of the youth's sustainability plan included strengthening DCYC so they felt confident in organizing ongoing events at the Friendship Centre and Camp Friendship throughout the year. The committee concluded that once the core group was strengthened it would become self-sufficient and successful in creating future youth events.



They also planned to maintain a relationship with the elders so that future events would continue to be supported and attended by them. They aimed to build on the communication developed during this groundbreaking event.

Their goals included giving the youth the opportunity to:

- ◆ Be free from drugs and alcohol while promoting and creating positive change within themselves and amongst their peers.
- ◆ Develop the skills to make healthier choices in their everyday routines.
- ◆ Build meaningful relationships with local community elders and learning about their traditions, culture and healing.
- ◆ Strengthen their confidence as individuals and as a group to organize future programming.

Positive Self Identity

This event was indeed a platform for growth, positive self identity, self-awareness and healing. With guidance and support, DCYC has continued to help nurture and strengthen young people in the community by providing input into youth events, organizing youth activities themselves and by actively preserving their culture.



"I like that we are all given the opportunity to raise consciousness within the group + eventually on a community + perhaps provincial + a nationwide scale. I am thankful for your activism on a topic of such great importance."

Prince George Youth



Prince Rupert

Prince Rupert is situated on Kaien Island, just north of the mouth of Skeena River, and is located in the traditional territory of the Tsimshian Nation. They have one of the best collections of standing Tsimshian and Haida totem poles in the north. The ANSII project began in Prince Rupert in April 2008.

Even though some of these youth did not know each other, they were notably respectful as they worked together during the first workshops and as they completed their films. Teamwork and consideration was reflected in their city wide action plans. The youth's goal was to reach out to the Prince Rupert community, inspire everyone to get involved in creating safe spaces, and provide extra support and activities for youth and their families.



Community Partners

Even though the first few workshops were well attended and the planning workshop made significant progress, the project could not maintain its core group once they separated. The organizers suspected this division was related to larger community issues that took priority.

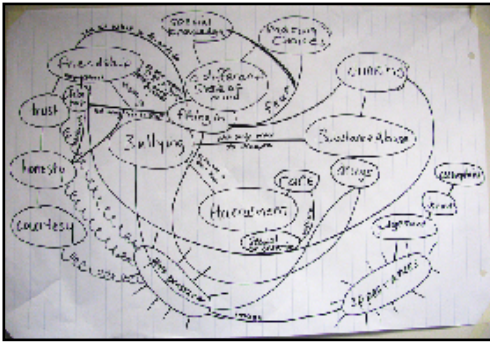
Thankfully, as the year progressed, Debbie Leighton-Stephens (District Principal of Aboriginal Education) guided the project back to solid footing again by initiating a creative community partnership.

Hoy sis ts'al {Putting on a Face}

Youth and supportive adults from Charles Hays Secondary School, Pacific Coast School and Aboriginal Education Council of SD 52 collaborated to keep the ANSII project in Prince Rupert. In the initial planning workshop, the youth shared thoughts about young peoples' relationships and the challenges often associated with growing up. In this workshop, the youth identified three central themes: harassment, bullying, and substance abuse.

With teachers, guest facilitators and elders on board, the youth explored how to document their thoughts and feelings about harassment, relationships and how substance use affect their lives. They organized media, art and writing workshops designed to increase their skills and provide support as they constructively and creatively voiced their views.

Through multiple mediums they were encouraged to report on youth culture from their own unique perspective. They also aimed to incorporate their traditional language and eventually invited an elder to assist in the project.



After the first workshop, the youth explored many techniques to create material for their project including writing, photography, audio recordings, graphic design, and drawing. During the second workshop they worked together to combine the raw materials.

In the end, they produced a multi-media art installation called “Hoy sis ts’al” (Putting on a Face). It included some of the *‘superficial qualities’* of society and friendship, such as *‘people pretending to be something that they are not’* and *‘the lack of honesty we sometimes seem to be faced with.’*

“[I liked] planning out workshops we’re going to be doing and choosing the topics that were interesting to us.”

Prince Rupert Youth



Sustainability in Action

The group intends to sustain the project by getting the participants to train and work with next year’s participants. To support those future endeavours, they purchased additional supplies and digital equipment.



There will likely be no shortage of interest in future programming, as was evident from the number of youth who felt they had *‘missed out.’* During the workshops and especially the construction of the art installation, students who missed the initial call-out for participants lingered around the school asking to be involved. This was something the school Principal commented he had *‘never seen before.’*

The youth’s multi-media project has been displayed at three locations in Prince Rupert and has received further requests for showings.

“[I liked] planning everything that we were going to do to reach out to the youth... all the things we could do instead of substance use.”

Prince Rupert Youth

Skeetchestn

The Skeetchestn First Nation is a member of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation, located in the central interior region of BC. As part of their initiative toward future self-reliance, the Quiq'wi'elst (Blackstone) School officially opened in 1996. One of its goals is to integrate a quality education program with Secwepemc language instruction and First Nations awareness.

Skeetchestn's youth joined the ANSII project in September 2008. After developing their community action plans, they organized themselves into two groups to create films. Their films reflected their interest in the impact of substance use and physical and emotional health.

When the youth came back together, a common theme emerged in their planning - they wanted to learn new ways to create safe, drug and alcohol free events where youth are engaged and feel inspired. They wanted the participants of their future events to experience feeling supported in making healthier choices.

Once the films were complete and youth were set on their community project idea, the film premiere and community dialogue



night was hosted in the centre of the Skeetchestn community. The presenters did an amazing job of explaining their films and talking about their plans to increase youth awareness.

"With the project we have chosen we will be able to be more healthy and be able to understand what it means to be healthy."

Skeetchestn Youth



Youth Leadership Training

In this community, the young people were geographically spread out and had diverse interests, so one of the main goals was to bring them together and strengthen their identity as a group. Similar to other communities, the best central meeting place was the school. They decided to host a youth leadership retreat at the end of summer, to reconnect the youth before school started and to build skills for the students to be part of the youth council.

Unfortunately due to circumstances beyond their control, the youth retreat had to be rescheduled for October. However, it gave the youth time to connect with the school's new staff and identify adult allies for the project.

Destined to Make Change

In the middle of their two year project, the main adult ally for the youth was elected to band Councillor. Thankfully she kept this project a priority as the community was not able to re-hire a youth worker and there was a significant turnover of staff at the school.

"We talked at the end of the training about how to strengthen the youth voice in the school through the Youth Advisory Council but also in our community. The youth training was an amazing three days where they learned so many creative and healthy outlets. It gave them the opportunity to express themselves. They created a Zine called "Destined to Make Change or DMC" that was printed to share with the community. This project brought together several youth and gave them a safe, healthy, encouraging and drug and alcohol free environment. This alone could impact these individuals beyond what I hope for them."

Candice Simon, Band Councillor



Youth Advisory Council

After meeting with the school staff and the youth, it was clear that the best strategy to move forward was to support the school not only with youth leadership training but through supplies and resources, so they could build on the momentum of the project for the rest of the year. Currently, the teachers, principal and the youth are working together to continue arts-based programming in the school.



Westbank

Located in south central BC, the Okanagan Valley is home to the Westbank First Nation (WFN), one of seven Aboriginal communities that belong to the Okanagan Nation. WFN is comprised of five reserves, a few that are in close proximity to the City of Kelowna. In April 2008 WFN youth joined the ANSII project and we did our first workshop in their beautiful Wellness Centre.

The youth first learned about Aboriginal youth health from Raven's Children II and then they decided to focus on the physical and emotional health, substance abuse, and street-involved/ marginalized youth information for their films. They were a contemplative group, thoughtfully presenting their films at the premiere and community dialogue night. Not only were they very supportive of each other, they took turns sharing amazing insights with the large audience. The event and community dinner was hosted by the Westbank First Nation.

Due to staff change over, the second phase of the project was in partnership with the Mount Boucherie Secondary School and organized by an enthusiastic group called the Adventure Committee.

Adventure Committee

With MCS' research on protective factors in mind, members of the Adventure Committee decided kayaking was the perfect activity to strengthen a relationship between students, the school and the community. The youth organizers also learned from an adult ally that Aboriginal youth who drop out



of school, tend to do so within the first year as they transition from middle school to secondary. In response, the Adventure Committee decided to add a 'buddy system' where grade 9 participants were partnered with older high school students so that "when the grade 9's come to high school they will have a buddy to help them and give them support through everything." Emily and Zane, ANSII Youth Advisory Council members, successfully incorporated the group's ideas as they co-wrote the grant and secured the funds for the project.

Camp Discovery

In June and Septembers five discovery day camps were organized to connect students from Constable Neil Bruce Middle School and Mount Boucherie Secondary School. Their goals included: learning about Aboriginal culture, building relationships, and developing skills and knowledge to work together and support one another. The day camps were held at three locations on Okanagan Lake, all within a 20 minute drive from the school.

"This project would be beneficial because it allows the opportunity to talk about the problems that youth face."

Westbank Youth

Learning About The Land

The youth also wanted the participants to learn more about their heritage and about the history of the land. To assist, they contracted cultural facilitator Lenord Raphael to guide the youth who were not in kayaks on nature walks.

They learned about different methods of harvesting and medicinal uses of local plants. At the end of the workshop they made each other tea.



"I learned about the traditional uses of many native plants and I am looking forward to making different types of tea! (yarrow, etc.)"

Westbank Youth



"We know that our project will be success if the youth become inspired to do other positive activities or hobbies, continue supporting their buddies in school, if the younger youth become peer mentors, if all the youth feel like they learned a new skill."

Westbank Adventure Committee



Nexus Youth Leadership

As the funding for the ANSII project came to a close in December 2009, youth travelled from across the province to attend McCreary's ANSII *Nexus Youth Leadership Retreat*. It was created specifically for youth from the 10 communities to connect, share their experience as young leaders and build a network of support for their future endeavours. The training combined experiential learning and expressive arts-based facilitation; it focused on working together to strengthen their leadership capacity; and was designed to increase self awareness, motivation, social and emotional literacy and self-efficacy.

The first day of the retreat focused specifically on strengthening team-building and communication skills. Our guest speaker was Andrew Robinson, the Associate Deputy Representative from the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

The second day highlighted the potential of fusing imagination and leadership. Youth learned about interpersonal relationships and understanding group dynamics through a series of exercises. They also developed various tools of expression including: writing, drawing, spoken word, singing and physical movement (e.g.: theatre, improv, etc).

On the final day the youth participated in visioning exercises and explored how to utilize their skills in their community. They had the opportunity to share their experiences of being part of this project and support each other's future plans through goal setting, problem solving and brainstorming concrete actions for each other in small groups. At the end

of the retreat they shared their incredible work and performances in a showcase.

Incredibly, the youth spontaneously took over the retreat after the final break. They separated the adult staff into another room and in 20 minutes created detailed scenarios about their experiences over the weekend including idiosyncrasies and signature work of each of the facilitators. It was the most amazing recapitulation and utilization of the work we (the staff) had ever witnessed and it spoke volumes to the participants' abilities and confidence that had been expanding since the first day.

Overall, the retreat exceeded our expectations. Not only had the youth shared their experiences, strengthened their creative leadership skills and built a network of support but we have since learned that many are using the tools to enhance programming and are working with adult allies on future projects in their communities.

Keep up the good work!



Lessons Learned

As with all large scale projects this one faced many challenges and there were many lessons learned during the course of the two years. Some challenges were expected such as unpredictable weather, accessing remote geographic locations and the knowledge that two years is a long time to keep young people focused on a goal. Some challenges were unexpected, such as the sudden and unexpected death of a youth in one community and the loss of a key community adult ally in another, but through support and perseverance all 10 communities experienced success. In every community there were many youth, adults and organizations that were dedicated to doing something positive. What was surprising was that they were not always aware of each other or the possibility of working together.

Building Trust

MCS research indicates that young people need positive relationships and social environments to grow and thrive. Caring relationships with safe adults that had positive expectations for the participants' growth was an essential component of this project. From feedback and evaluations we learned that young people who engaged fully from the beginning of the project benefited the most but all youth seemed to get something out of being involved, even if their involvement was only for a short while.

In some areas, staff turnover was high; therefore it was essential to have multiple community partners

so that whenever possible the youth were not left without local adult support. It was also important to find adult allies who were able to balance guidance with allowing space for the youth to work through things on their own. Often at the beginning the youth were suspicious of the project and the adults within it, expecting that the adults would not take them seriously or do the things they promised. Some adults reported that initially they did not know how to bridge the communication gap and get the youth's input on their activities or events, but a lasting legacy of this project will be that many now report that gap has been bridged.

A key component of the success of the project was that it was always as youth-led as possible, which included the youth identifying their own adult allies. We also learned that when working on a multi-year project it was necessary to find successors for older youth who graduated and that momentum could be lost over holiday time so it was important to regroup quickly after a break. We were also mindful that some youth had multiple commitments so it was occasionally hard for them to complete their tasks. Therefore it became important to be proactive by staying in touch with participants consistently, providing skill-building opportunities and maintaining group motivation.

Overall, we are grateful to the adults and youth who honoured the commitments they made to each other, who strived to build trust through open and honest dialogue and were open to new ways of working together including collaboration as equals.

Youth's Response to ANSII

A formal independent evaluation of ANSII was carried out to see if the project met its goal of reducing substance use and improving community connections for Aboriginal youth (see pg 24 for more details). As part of the evaluation, youth were asked for their feedback about their experiences within the project and the effect that it had on their lives.

Aboriginal Next Steps II

What affect will your experience with ANS II have at home, community, or school?

"It will give me more opportunities, goals and it gave me confidence that I can be a leader!"

"I think it's going to change how I feel about my community."

"In the end, the presentation helped me truly evolve and come out of my shell and my shyness."

"Taught me to be confident in myself, not to be afraid to show my sensitive side, anything's possible."

"This was over all just a great experience and would love to do it again."

"I had so much fun and will participate in any upcoming event and help plan them and a great big thanks to the staff and everyone else that helped and participated."

"I had so much fun. I really want to do this again it

helps you find your inner self and your personality. Did a lot of activities that were mind setting."

"My next step would be to encourage the city to make more opportunities for youth, such as cheaper activities."

"I feel that I now know what I want to achieve and how to do it. I have hope."

Nexus Leadership Retreat

Nexus participants were also asked to complete evaluation forms about their experiences.

"They showed me how to lead kindly."

"[I will] share the knowledge I gained today with my friends and family."

"Step out and invite and encourage people to join me in stepping out of my shell."

"How to build other's self confidence."

"I would say I can go home and be a true leader."

"I loved doing the last skit with no planning at first, for the facilitators, best part of this weekend."

"I now know how to choose allies."

"I now know how to build a very strong group."

"Thank you for this incredible experience. I loved everybody. The improv and spoken word were amazing."

ANSII *Evaluation*

The ultimate goal of this project was to reduce criminal and health risk behaviours, including substance use, among the Aboriginal youth who participated. The expectation was that community involvement and participation in meaningful youth-led projects would reduce Aboriginal youths' risk factors for engaging in criminal and high-risk behaviours and would bolster protective factors associated with healthy development. Evaluation of this project was conducted by Dr. Maya Peled.

Evaluation Design Overview

Quantitative data from youth self-report questionnaires and from youth and adult feedback forms were used. In addition, qualitative information was collected through open-ended questions on the feedback forms and from interviews with caregivers and feedback from adult mentors.

To measure short-term outcomes, feedback forms and a brief quiz at the end of Phase I workshops assessed the degree to which the workshops increase Aboriginal youths' awareness and understanding of substance use and associated health risk and criminal issues.

In addition, youth self-report surveys were administered at the start and end of the project to assess if positive short-term and long-term outcomes (e.g., reduced substance use and criminal activity, and increased connectedness and hopefulness) occurred as a result of participating in the project.

Outcomes Evaluation Findings

- ◆ Participants' feedback and quiz performance in Phase I indicated increased awareness and understanding of youth substance use and related health risk and criminal issues.
- ◆ Most youth participants who had engaged in risky behaviors indicated that participation in the project helped to reduce their substance use (92% of youth), criminal behaviour (92%), thoughts about suicide (100%), and self-harmful behaviour (100%).
- ◆ The majority of youth participants reported that their involvement helped to increase their community connectedness (69% of youth), peer relationships (87%), and school connectedness (63%). Most (60%) also reported that their involvement helped to enhance their family relationships.
- ◆ Youth also reported improvements in their self-esteem (81%), sense of meaning in the activities they engage in (81%), and hope for their future (94%).
- ◆ Feedback from youth and adults indicated that youth participants felt empowered and satisfied as a result of planning the sustainable youth-led events. They also gained skills that will help them now and in the future. Further, some reported that this experience was a life-changing one for them.

- ◆ The attrition rate for YAC members was very low although it was a challenge to establish continuity in participation among other Aboriginal youth across the two-year project. The two-year duration of the overall project highlighted the challenge of keeping youth engaged for this length of time.
- ◆ Feedback from adult supports (i.e., community supports/mentors) and youth participants highlighted the importance of having clear commitments from a sufficient number of local adult staff at the start of the project. This commitment (and low staff turnover rates) greatly contributes to the smooth-running of the project and to helping youth participants stay engaged.
- ◆ Caregivers pointed out that there should be collaboration with school administration to ensure that students' attendance records are not affected by participation in project-related events or meetings that take place during school time.
- ◆ This project resulted in an increased capacity for not only planning but also sustaining youth-led community initiatives, including crime-reduction projects. Many of the youth participants have specific ideas for future workshops and events they are interested in organizing. In some communities, youth are continuing with their projects in a similar format as was adopted during the ANSII. In others, youth are seeking new funding to expand and develop their projects.

Summary

Youth participants reported that their overall involvement in Aboriginal Next Steps II enhanced their leadership skills, sense of connectedness to their community and school, their peer and family relationships, self-esteem, and sense of hope.

They also reported reduced substance use, criminal activity, suicidal ideation, and self-harmful behaviour. Additionally, youth participants reported feeling inspired to organize similar projects in the future and felt capable of doing so given what they had learned from this experience.

Youth reported feeling proud of their accomplishments and were grateful for the opportunity to have a voice in their community.

An adult mentor in one community wrote, "For the Aboriginal community it has started a ripple, which will only grow with time and with more similar projects." Another youth stated, "Most amazing experience of my life. Something I'll never forget."

For more information or to learn more about McCreary Centre Society's program evaluation services, please visit our website www.mcs.bc.ca or contact MCS at (604) 291-1996.

Acknowledgements

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Healing Our Spirit - Special thanks to Anna Soole and Bambi Tait from our partnering organization Healing Our Spirit for joining us and providing youth with additional information such as illustrating the connection between substance use/abuse and HIV/HCV. www.healingourspirit.org

YouthCO Aids Society - Thank you for your support, guidance, and amazing youth friendly resources! www.youthco.org



Thank you Mark Vonesch & Erica Kohn. RY is a not-for-profit, media empowerment program supporting young people to create and distribute films about their visions for a more just and sustainable world. www.reelyouth.ca

Andrew D. Robinson, the Associate Deputy Representative Advocacy, Community and Aboriginal Relations from BC Representative for Children and Youth. Thank you for your support & stories.

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Cranbrook: Mt. Baker Senior Secondary School

Hazelton: Barb Janze; The kitchen crew @ H.S.S.; Hazelton Secondary School.

Lytton: Kumsheen Secondary School; Lytton First Nation.

Nisga'a: Nisga'a Lisims Government; Rychard Paszkowski; Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School; Nisga'a Valley Health Authority; Cherie Mercer, Sammy Azak; Janice Stephens.

Prince George: Prince George Native Friendship Centre; Reconnect Youth Services.

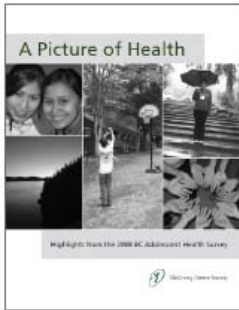
Prince Rupert: Treena Decker; Northwest Community College; Tom Rooney Playhouse; The Prince Rupert Daily News; Restorative Justice Society.

Skeetchestn: Skeetchestn First Nation; Skeetchestn Community School; Chrystal Simon.

Westbank: Westbank First Nation; Mount Bouche-rie Secondary School; Karen Chase.

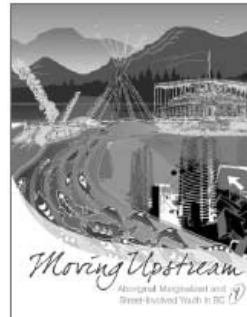
Additional McCreary Resources

For any of these, or other materials by the McCreary Centre Society, visit our website www.mcs.bc.ca



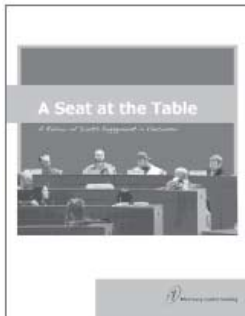
A Picture of Health: Highlights from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (2009)

The Adolescent Health Survey has been conducted in schools every 5 years since 1992. The 2008 survey asks questions about physical and emotional health, and about factors that can influence health during adolescence or in later life. This report highlights trends in the health status and risk behaviours of BC youth.



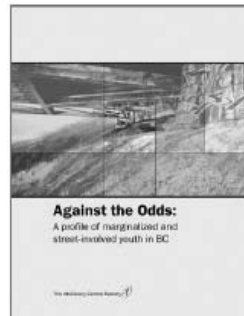
Moving Upstream: Aboriginal marginalized and street-involved youth in BC (2008)

This report analyzes the experiences in nine BC communities of homeless, inadequately housed, street-involved and marginalized Aboriginal youth. The report is a further analysis of McCreary's Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth Survey.



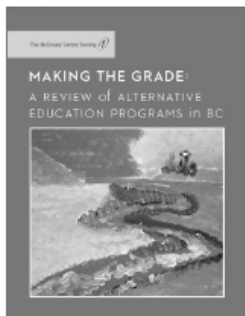
A Seat at the Table: A review of youth engagement in Vancouver (2009)

This report focuses on youth engagement in civic and community decision-making. The report aims to offer a better understanding of the continuum of youth engagement and to show the different ways that youth can be involved in decisions that affect their lives.



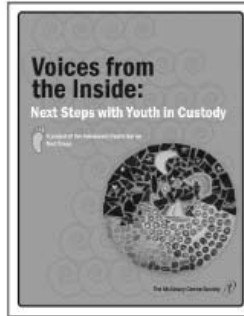
Against the Odds: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC (2007)

The lives of marginalized and street-involved youth are complex and filled with challenges, dangers and opportunities. This report summarizes the results of surveys with marginalized youth in the North, Interior, Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island and Vancouver.



Making the Grade: A review of alternative education programs in BC (2008)

A review of alternative education programs in BC, involving youth attending alternative education programs for "at-risk" and "high risk" youth across the province, and adult stakeholders. The review documents the positive impact of these programs for youth.



Voices from the Inside: Next Steps with youth in custody (2007)

The Next Steps is an interactive workshop series that gives youth the opportunity to respond to the results of McCreary's youth health research. It was adapted to give youth in custody the opportunity to respond to the results of McCreary's 2004 survey of BC youth in custody.