

MAKING THE GRADE:

A REVIEW of ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS in BC



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EDUCATION PROGRAMS in BC

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“Even if the students give up on themselves the teachers will never give up on them...” PRINCIPAL

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Abbotsford (SD 34)
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Kamloops-Thompson (SD 73)
Nanaimo-Ladysmith (SD 68)
Prince George (SD 53)
Prince Rupert (SD 52)
Surrey (SD 36)
Vancouver (SD 39)

PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS

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for their support in disseminating
information about this project and
consenting to the participation of staff
and/or students in their program:

ABBOTSFORD

Abbotsford Continuing
Education School
Abbotsford Police Department
Ministry of Children and
Family Development
Abbotsford Community Services

KAMLOOPS

Twin Rivers Education Centre
Boys and Girls Club of Kamloops

NANAIMO

Northfield Learning
Alternatives Program
Five Acres Junior
Learning Alternatives
VAST Centre Senior
Learning Alternatives
MCFD
Living in Families with Teens (LIFT),
Nanaimo and Area
Resources for Families

PRINCE GEORGE

Alternative School Program
Concept Ed, Native Friendship Centre
Continuing Education (ACE Program)
Go Anywhere Program (GAP)
Storefront Alternative
Teen Mothers' Alternative Program
Transition Alternative Program:
Secondary Future Cents

PRINCE RUPERT

Charles Hays Secondary School
Kaien Island Alternative
School Friendship House

SURREY

OPTIONS: Services to Communities
Society (Lee School)
OPTIONS: Services to Communities
Society, T.R.E.K. (Trust,
Respect, Empathy, Knowledge)
Pacific Community Resource Services
Knowledge and Education
for Youth (KEYS)
Teen Recreation and Educational
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Gateway Alternative Program (GAP)
Pacific Community Resource
Society: Eagle High
The South Vancouver Youth
Quest Day Program
Downtown East Education Centre
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

VICTORIA

S.J. Willis Alternative School
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"Everyone has a fundamental right to education no matter who they are." SOCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the official policy of the Province of British Columbia

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COVER ART

Justin Shymkowich's painting was completed during a workshop at McCreary's Building Bridges, Breaking Barriers (B4) conference in October 2007. The conference brought together youth from Alternative Education programs, youth from mainstream schools and youth who were street involved.

Justin's 'River of Life' picture reflects his at times difficult journey across BC and the many twists and turns of his adolescence, which brought him to Vancouver, where he is now hoping to spend the rest of his life and watch the sun set.

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INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned by the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth. It aims to provide a better understanding of the experiences of at-risk and high-risk youth attending alternative education programs in BC communities where there is a high prevalence of youth street involvement and sexual exploitation.

It is widely accepted that, along with employment and shelter, education is a primary factor that enables people to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. For youth, education also plays an important role in healthy development (*Building Resilience in Vulnerable Youth*; McCreary, 2006), as it gives them the tools and skills to become meaningful contributors to their society.

McCreary's *BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS*; McCreary, 2003) shows that when even the most vulnerable youth feel connected to school they are more likely to report better health, above average marks and engaging in fewer risky activities than youth who are less connected (McCreary, 2006). However, not all youth thrive in a mainstream school setting. As a result, school districts in BC offer a range of alternative education programs aimed at serving both the academic and non-academic needs of these students.

School can play a pivotal role in assisting youth to overcome many of the challenges in their lives. For example, McCreary's recent study of marginalized and street-involved youth (*Against the Odds: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC*, 2007) found that a connection to school was important to even the most vulnerable youth in the province with 28% attending mainstream school and 34% attending alternative programs. Around one in four (26%) marginalized and street-involved youth planned to continue their education and graduate from a post-secondary institution.

Access to supportive educational programs and having a connection to school are therefore vital protective factors in the lives of youth, particularly for those who are disengaged from home and community. Many educators and social service professionals view school as the last point of connection to community for youth who do not necessarily have those connections in their day-to-day lives. For some young people, school is the only place that is safe and stable, where there might be a trusting and supportive adult, and where they can get connected to other social supports. Therefore, education programs that address the complex social and educational needs of at-risk and high-risk students are necessary to ensure they have the appropriate tools and social supports to navigate a smooth transition into adulthood.

“When I think about a child at-risk . . . [It’s] the kind of kid, of course, whose living conditions may be such that they aren’t able to really connect with the school.” SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

“[High-risk youth are] beyond at-risk, [they] are usually street-involved youth, they are very vulnerable to get involved in the sex trade or the drug trade.” TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

Alternative education programs were first introduced in British Columbia in the 1960’s to assist youth who were struggling in the mainstream school setting. Although the programs have evolved and changed, the overarching philosophy has remained: to assist youth to successfully attain an education in a supportive, nurturing and non-judgmental environment. Despite being around for 40 years, there has been little research published about the effectiveness of these programs in meeting the needs of the youth they serve in British Columbia.

This study considers the challenges faced by at-risk and high-risk youth and explores how these are addressed by alternative education programs in communities with a high prevalence of youth street involvement and sexual exploitation.

AT-RISK AND HIGH-RISK YOUTH

In the context of this report, “at risk” youth are those youth who are marginalized, for example as a result of abuse, sexual exploitation, substance use, bullying, discrimination, mental health problems or street involvement. “High risk” youth are the “at risk” youth who have disconnected from school, family and community, compounding the risks and challenges in their lives.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education defines alternative education programs as “programs that meet the special requirements of students who may be unable to adjust to the requirements of regular schools (for example timetables, schedules, or traditional classroom environment).”

*"I'm on the streets. I live in a room-and-board situation.
I also am doing very well in school"* 17 YEAR OLD MALE,
IN THE MARGINALIZED AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SURVEY

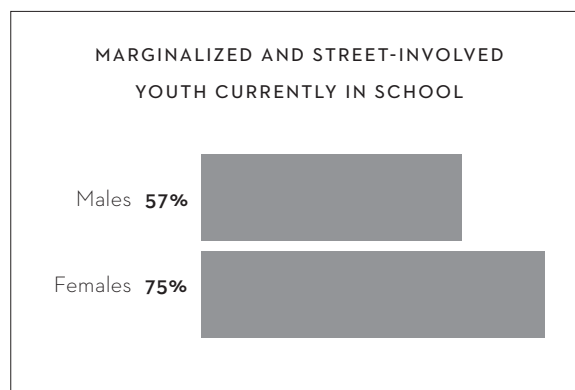
"I like school but I hated going cause I was made fun of."
18-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, MARGINALIZED AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SURVEY

MARGINALIZED AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH STUDY

The results of McCreary's marginalized and street-involved youth study (2007), which was conducted in the Autumn and Winter of 2006, has already revealed much about the educational experience of at-risk and high-risk youth. For example, the study found that:

- Youth who had dropped out of school most commonly reported doing so during or after Grade 8.
- Youth who reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment within the past 12 months (e.g., based on sexual orientation, disability, race, skin colour) were significantly less likely to be attending school than those who did not report such experiences (62% vs. 70%).
- Youth who had witnessed someone in their family being abused or mistreated were significantly less likely to be attending school compared to youth who had not witnessed such abuse or mistreatment (62% vs. 74%).
- Youth who had cognitive difficulties or mental health problems were significantly less likely to be attending school than those without such issues. For example, youth who had never been told by a health professional that they had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or depression were approximately 1.5 times more likely to be attending school than youth who had been told they had such problems.

- Youth were less likely to be in school as the number of barriers they faced increased (e.g., pregnancy, abuse, unstable housing, mental health problems, criminal involvement).
- Many marginalized and street-involved youth showed great determination to continue their education despite experiencing multiple barriers, with those attending alternative programs reporting more barriers than those in regular school settings.
- Even though youth in more unstable housing were less likely to attend school, one in three youth who were living in the most precarious housing (e.g. abandoned building, tent, car) were still attending school.



This alternative education study aims to further explore the experience of those youth who do continue to attend school despite seemingly overwhelming odds, and the challenges that they face.

KEY FINDINGS

- There is a diverse range of alternative education programs and administrative structures operating across the province that are meeting the needs of the vast majority of at-risk and high-risk youth who attend them, in a variety of innovative and responsive ways.
- At-risk and high-risk youth attending alternative education programs reported high levels of school connectedness, had positive relationships with teachers and support staff, liked school considerably more, and skipped school considerably less, compared to their previous education experience.
- The more connected youth felt to their school, the more likely they were to report post-secondary educational aspirations, good health, and positive feelings about their life.
- Peers play a pivotal role in keeping youth engaged in their education. Thirty nine percent of youth were attending their current alternative education program because their friends were.
- Many youth faced multiple challenges to their education including hunger, unstable living conditions, and abuse.
- Aboriginal youth and youth who had been in government care were disproportionately represented among youth in the alternative education survey.
- Alternative education programs offer specialist programs, community connections, and additional supports beyond academics to a variety of at-risk and high-risk youth. These resources are particularly important given that many youth face challenges such as sexual abuse and exploitation, problem substance use, and debilitating health conditions or disabilities.
- In addition to housing and special education programs, youth identified more job training as the most needed service in their community.
- The opportunities and experiences available to youth in alternative education programs differed across settings. For example, youth in alternative programs attached to mainstream schools were exposed to more organized sporting opportunities than those in other locations, whereas youth attending programs located in community centres had easier access to specialist support services.

ABOUT THE STUDY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This mixed-methods study used quantitative and qualitative data gathered from three different sources: A survey administered to youth attending alternative education programs; interviews with key adult community stakeholders; and further analyses of existing data from the McCreary Centre Society's survey of marginalized and street-involved youth (2007) to capture the experiences of youth who are disengaged from education.

The study explored the experiences of youth attending alternative education programs, living in communities where a high prevalence of youth street-involvement and sexual exploitation were identified. Nine school districts located within communities that had participated in McCreary's marginalized and street-involved youth study were invited to participate in this study. Of those, seven participated in both the youth survey and the adult community stakeholder interviews (Abbotsford, Kamloops, Nanaimo-Ladysmith, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Surrey and Vancouver), one participated only in the adult community stakeholders interview component (Greater Victoria), and one declined to participate.

The community stakeholder interviews occurred between December 2006 and June 2007, and the survey was administered to students between April 2007 and June 2007.

YOUTH SURVEY

The youth survey was a pencil-and-paper questionnaire based on two previous McCreary youth health surveys, the *BC Adolescent Health Survey* (2003) and the marginalized and street-involved youth survey (2007). Information about both of these surveys is available on the McCreary Centre Society website at www.mcs.bc.ca.

Additional questions specific to alternative education were incorporated into the survey following consultation with school districts, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), and with youth who have experience in alternative education programs. A McCreary researcher administered the survey at the participating alternative education programs.

One in ten of the students surveyed in the alternative programs had also participated in the marginalized and street-involved youth study.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with key adult community stakeholders, such as alternative education program staff, social workers and probation officers with clients in alternative education programs, and parents of youth attending alternative education programs. The interviews were used to identify major themes and common experiences across the province. In total, 62 community stakeholders were interviewed (40 school district staff and 22 other stakeholders).

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

This study does not represent the experiences of all youth in alternative education programs, and considers only the self-reported experiences, perceptions, and opinions of those who participated. Participation may have been impacted because written parental consent was required for youth aged 18 years and younger to take part. Further, other perspectives may have been lost among youth with insufficient literacy and comprehension skills to complete the questionnaire, even though it was read aloud to increase comprehension.

Although the views expressed by participants cannot be considered representative of the experiences of all youth in alternative education programs, the study does provide useful insight into the experiences of at-risk and high-risk youth, and the alternative education programs that strive to meet their needs, in communities where issues of sexual exploitation and street-involvement are prevalent.

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

All comparisons and associations reported in this study have been tested and are statistically significant.

All statistics presented were derived from youths' responses on the alternative education questionnaire, unless otherwise stated.

PROFILE OF THE YOUTH

In total, 339 youth (49% female, 51% male) from 34 alternative education programs completed the student survey. They ranged in age from 13 to 19 years with an average age of 16 years. The majority (57%) identified as having European ancestry, and 36% identified as Aboriginal.

ANCESTRY OF YOUTH FROM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS BACKGROUND

European (e.g., English, French, Scottish)	57%
Aboriginal/First Nations	36%
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)	4%
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)	4%
African	4%
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Filipino, Vietnamese)	3%
Latin American	3%
West Asian (e.g., Afghani, Iranian, Arab)	1%
Other	12%

NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Among the youth in alternative education programs, over half (58%) reported attending an alternative education program run by the school district outside of a regular school; one quarter (25%) were attending a program located at 'a youth centre, a drop-in

centre, a community centre, etc.'; 13% were attending a program located within a regular school; and 5% did not know what type of alternative program they were currently attending.

A total of 42% of the youth participants had started their alternative education program in September 2006; 31% had been in the program for more than one academic year; 12% reported that they had started the program within the past 30 days; 2% had started within the past week; and 13% did not know how long they had been involved in their current program.

The youth had come to their current programs through the involvement of a number of different individuals, including referrals by school counselors (23%), teachers (20%), family (18%), social workers (10%), youth and family support workers (8%), and probation officers (5%). Twenty five percent reported that they had referred themselves to the program and approximately 8% were unable to say who referred them.

Prior to attending their alternative education program, the youth had experienced a variety of different learning environments including regular school (89%), correspondence courses (19%), Internet based (8%), home schooling (17%) and classes in a custody centre (3%).

“First Nations materials and First Nations content allows the students to tap into the material a little bit better than they would with the traditional curriculum or curricular materials that are used in the other schools.” VICE-PRINCIPAL

ABORIGINAL YOUTH

Among youth who identified as Aboriginal, 30% indicated having lived on a reserve at some point in their lives – 16% for one year or less, 10% for a few years, and 4% for most of their lives.

Much has been reported about mainstream schools’ ability to adapt to the culturally specific needs of Aboriginal youth. Therefore, it is not surprising that these youth are over represented in the alternative education programs. (36% of youth in the alternative education survey indicated Aboriginal heritage compared to 7% in the *BC Adolescent Health Survey*, 2003.)

Stakeholders spoke of the additional barriers to education for Aboriginal youth associated with the legacy of residential schooling and colonization. Despite these barriers, those who identified as Aboriginal in the marginalized and street-involved youth survey were just as likely to be currently attending school as those who did not identify as Aboriginal (67% vs. 64%).

Aboriginal youth who completed the alternative education survey reported experiencing a greater number of risk factors for disengaging from school compared to non-Aboriginal youth, such as precarious housing, physical and sexual abuse, being kicked out of home, and working 20 or more hours per week. These findings indicate that Aboriginal youth are overcoming the obstacles they face to remain engaged in their education.

Most of the communities that participated in the survey have programs specifically designed for Aboriginal youth. These programs deliver academic and pre-employment options, alongside a culturally appropriate curriculum and supports.

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION “ARE YOU ABORIGINAL,” AMONG YOUTH WHO IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL	
Yes, I have First Nations status	56%
Yes, I am Aboriginal but don’t have First Nations Status	25%
Yes, I am Métis	13%
Yes, I am Inuit	1%
Don’t know/Other	5%

“We have a lot of really skilled Aboriginal staff connecting [with youth] because I’m seeing a lot of youth that don’t know their cultural identity.” SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- Four Directions in Kamloops Thompson School District offers First Nations youth individualized instruction in core academics coupled with courses on First Nations Design and the Shuswap language and a variety of field trips and out of school activities. The program aims to build self-esteem and cultural identity/awareness in a safe and supportive environment.
- The Kaien Island Alternative School Friendship House program in Prince Rupert offers First Nation youth the opportunity to engage in their own culture through education in North Coast First Nations history, First Nations language courses and a First Nations art course. "...Every year [the program] takes on a major project. This year they worked on a war canoe and took part in painting it and they christened it at the National

Aboriginal Day [celebrations] ... and the students can take part in a lot of events such as feasts and elders gatherings and the All Native Tournament [annual basketball tournament] and they volunteer a lot and learn a lot through that process too on what some of the etiquette is..." Social Services Manager

- Britannia Outreach Secondary School in Vancouver is an alternative education program for First Nations youth, ages 14 to 19. Youth work on a self-paced basis with opportunities to work in a small, structured group setting and to participate in community activities. In addition to the core academic courses, Outreach also has an outdoor and fitness education program, life-skills training and a rich First Nations cultural component. Youth also have access to individual counseling and employment opportunities.

CHALLENGES

HOUSING

Findings from the *BC Adolescent Health Survey* (McCreary, 2003) have shown that youth who live in unstable or challenging home environments often experience interruptions to their education which can lead them to fall behind academically and subsequently become disengaged from school.

Among the youth in alternative education programs who participated in the survey, 42% reported living at their current address for one year or less, while 26% reported living at their current address for six months or less. Approximately one in three (29%) had experienced living in precarious housing at some point (staying in an abandoned building, squat, tent, car or on the street). Half of the youth (51%) reported that they had run away from home at least once and 37% reported that they had been kicked out.

A disproportionate number of youth reported living in government care. Approximately 10% reported that they were currently living in care, and 14% were in government care in the past year. In comparison, only 2% of youth who participated in the 2003 BC Adolescent Health Survey had been in government care in the past year.

Youth were also asked about the people they lived with during the past 30 days. Although more than three out of four had lived with their parents at least part of the time, youth had also lived with a variety of other people including friends (5%), romantic partners (9%) and their own children (2%), and 2% reported living alone.

CURRENT LIVING SITUATION (FOR YOUTH WHO COMPLETED THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY)

Parent's home	65%
Other relative's home	10%
Foster home	6%
Group home	3%
Own place	8%
Transition house	2%
Safe house/shelter	1%
Nowhere/all over (couch surfing)	2%
Abandoned building, squat, tent, car	2%
Street	2%

NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

PEOPLE THE YOUTH HAD BEEN LIVING WITH DURING THE PAST MONTH

Parent(s)	78%
Other adult relative(s)	8%
Friend and their family	6%
Friend(s)	5%
Romantic partner	9%
Own child/children	2%
Alone	2%

NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

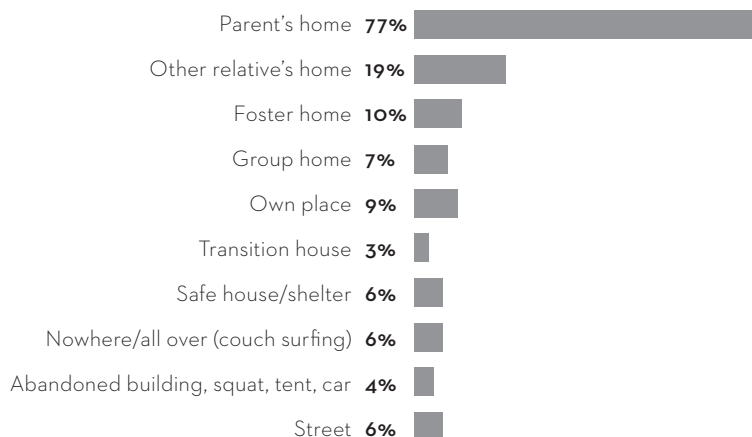
"These kids have had so many disruptions in their lives... so by the time they get here their education is pretty disjointed." SCHOOL COUNSELOR

"How are they supposed to prepare for exams, how are they supposed to finish courses when they don't know where they're going to sleep?" TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sixty seven percent of the youth had experience hanging out on the streets. Among those youth, their reasons included doing so due to their friends hanging out on the streets (57%), not getting along with their parents (28%), having an alcohol or drug addiction (27%), running away from home (23%), feeling accepted on the streets (22%), being kicked out of their home (19%), and the presence of violence or abuse at home (16%).

According to community stakeholders, youth who live independently from their parents or guardians, for example because they have their own children or have left to avoid violence and abuse, experience additional challenges, such as needing to secure a place to stay and having enough income to set up and maintain their households.

YOUTHS' LIVING ACCOMMODATIONS IN PAST YEAR



EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Gateway Alternative Program in Vancouver serves street-involved youth, ages 16 to 18 (although youth as young as 13 may be admitted). The program provides youth with recreational activities, core academic courses and job readiness skills, with a focus on basic literacy and life skills.

CHALLENGING FAMILY SITUATIONS

Youth within alternative programs reported a number of challenging family situations. For example, 33% reported that a family member had tried to kill themselves, and this event had happened within the last 12 months for a third of these youth.

Aboriginal youth were around 1.8 times more likely to have had someone in their family attempt or commit suicide compared to non-Aboriginal youth.

Fifty-four percent of youth had witnessed someone in their family being abused or mistreated (61% of Aboriginal youth and 50% of non-Aboriginal youth).

Stakeholders concurred that many youth in alternative education programs live in unstable home environments, with parents or guardians who may be experiencing challenges such as addictions, illness or domestic violence which can impact youths' ability to succeed.

As described by stakeholders, some parents may also have had their own negative experiences with the education system, making them reluctant to facilitate attendance, engage with or even visit their children's school. Alternative education programs recognize that connecting with a youth's family can be instrumental in assisting a youth to remain connected to their education.

Despite their sometimes challenging family situations, youth in the survey reported relatively high levels of family connectedness, and more than three quarters reported that they had turned to parents (79%) and other family members (76%) for support in the past year. Among youth who turned to family for support, the majority reported finding the support helpful (83%).

"It's kind of hard for kids to concentrate on academics when there is family violence going on at home or they're dealing with substance abuse issues."

SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

"Some [parents] get inspired and maybe they join the adult grad program . . . we've had an actual mother and her son, with the son attending the alternative school while she's attending the adult grad program and they're going to school together and hanging out together." SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

"[For] parents who have had challenges with the education system there is often a trust issue and you can see that in the kids." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- The Kaien Island Alternative School Friendship House program in Prince Rupert offers youth's families the opportunity to participate in family nights at which a meal is prepared by the youth: *"There's a feast every month for them and their families...and they're learning how to cook meals on a limited budget and every week they'll learn a cultural dish like how to cook herring eggs and how to jar salmon."* Social Services Manager
- The KEY program in Surrey has a family support component built into it. Youth learn to cook, can socialize together and connect with their families, while parents either socialize or have small workshops on identified topics of interest: *"We've actually provided family support in very creative ways... sometimes it's about parent/teen mediation... helping single moms who are financially struggling finding safer, more affordable*

places to live so that they're not financially strapped all the time ...There are family support workers who've even gone as far as sitting down with single moms and doing resumes and helping them find work so they can get more income to make things more comfortable." Social Services Manager

- The youth and family counselor in Greater Victoria works with social workers, probation officers, students and their families to assist the youth to attend school. Youth have access to their counselor as needed, and the counselor follows up via phone calls or home visits with those who need extra support to attend school.

PREGNANCY AND PARENTING

Nine percent of youth in the alternative education survey reported that they had originally disengaged from school because they had become a parent.

Aboriginal youth were 1.9 times more likely to have been pregnant or caused a pregnancy compared to non-Aboriginal youth, and were more likely to report having children compared to non-Aboriginal youth (13% vs. 3%).

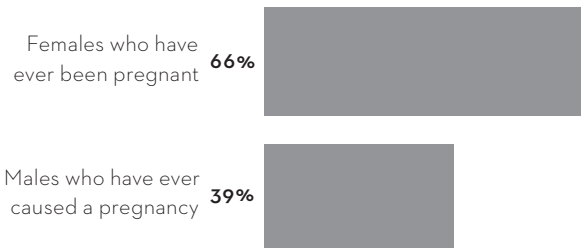
Among the 7% of all youth who reported having children, there were no differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in terms of whom their children live with. The majority of youth (74%) reported that their children live with them.

Among youth in the marginalized and street-involved survey, females who had experienced a pregnancy were less likely to be in school than females who had never been pregnant (66% vs. 80%). Similarly, males who had caused a pregnancy were less likely to be in school than males who had not (39% vs. 63%). However, among females who had been pregnant, the majority were currently in school (66%), whereas among males who had caused a pregnancy, the majority were currently out of school (62%).

Stakeholders spoke of how becoming a parent can be especially challenging for youth who are disconnected from their family, and discussed how young mothers wanting to continue their education are often forced to stay home because many day-care centres do not accept infants, or the youth cannot afford the fees.

"Day care? There is none for infants, there is none . . . so then they're held to being at home with their child." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

PERCENTAGES CURRENTLY IN SCHOOL AMONG
FEMALES WHO HAVE BEEN PREGNANT
AND MALES WHO HAVE CAUSED A PREGNANCY



(FROM THE 2006 MARGINALIZED AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SURVEY)

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- Teen Mothers' Alternative Program (TMAP) in Prince George is designed to provide academic, life and career skills for pregnant and parenting female youth. In addition to the educational program, youth also have access to Elizabeth Fry Outreach Services in the same facility. The course components cover academic, cultural, life and career skills, and instruction occurs on an individual or group basis.
- GAP/Options in Greater Victoria is specifically designed for young women up to the age of 18 who are pregnant or parenting, with on-site daycare provided.

POVERTY

The impact of poverty can be significant in the lives of at-risk and high-risk youth, and many who completed the survey were reliant on money they received from outside their family. Within the past month, 32% had worked at a legal job, although only 27% reported getting paid and 20% had received money from illegal or street level activities. Nineteen percent reported receiving no income at all during this time period.

Stakeholders reported that some youths' families are unemployed or in low income or seasonal employment, and they struggle to provide their children with enough food and appropriate clothing for school, such as a warm winter jacket and footwear for Physical Education classes. The shame and humiliation experienced as a result can lead youth to disengage from school.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

The Youth Around Prince Resource Centre in Prince George has showers and laundry facilities, a food program and employment programs. By housing the alternative education program in the centre, many of the barriers to accessing these services have been removed.

"They don't want to go to school because they're embarrassed because they have dirty clothes. . . [They're] not wanting to be around kids at school who don't have the problem."

SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

"Kids are having too much on their plate. . . Is my mom going to find a job? Is my dad going to provide support? . . . Most of [the students] have issues outside of school that make learning pretty difficult."

SCHOOL COUNSELOR

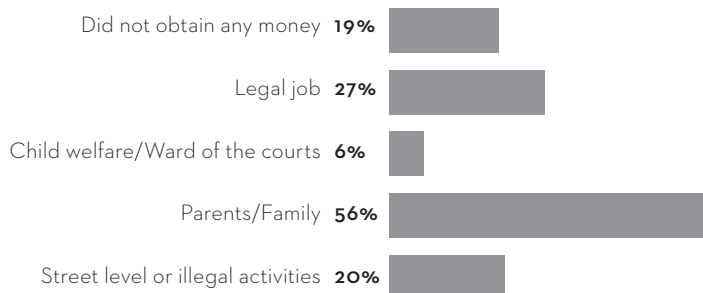
Community stakeholders recognize that many families are unable to contribute toward the expenses of their children's school activities which, combined with budgetary constraints, can make it challenging for programs to deliver services and offer additional supports they feel would be beneficial to youth. This financial constraint can be particularly difficult for programs not attached to a mainstream school because they lack some of the infrastructure and resources available to youth who attend programs attached to mainstream schools. As a result, some programs have developed innovative fundraising initiatives that are either organized within the program or in conjunction with the community:

"If we're hosting some sort of an event here, some kind of meeting, we'll get [the Kaien Island Alternative School Friendship House program students] to make lunch and we'll pay them for it and then they make enough [food] to feed the program too." PRINCE RUPERT FRIENDSHIP HOUSE STAFF

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- S.J. Willis Alternative School in Victoria offers a course called 'Get Growing.' Youth make garden and household decorations, grow vegetables and then invite the community in for a sale: "Students enjoy it and they're really proud and they love it when the community comes." Teacher, alternative education program
- The Take-A-Hike program in the Vancouver School District set up a Foundation that provides financial support to the program.

WAYS YOUTH OBTAINED MONEY IN THE PAST MONTH



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

HUNGER

In addition to the social impact of poverty, symptoms of poverty such as hunger have been shown to negatively affect learning and concentration. More than one in five youth (22%) reported going hungry because they or their parents did not have enough money to buy food, with 11% of youth reporting that this happened at least once a week. Among those who reported going hungry, almost half (48%) went hungry once a week or more.

Given the high levels of poverty experienced by youth in alternative education programs, sharing a meal was identified by classroom staff as one of the most rewarding and important aspects of their program. It not only addresses youths' basic needs, but provides an opportunity for staff and youth to connect over an activity unrelated to their academic work.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Twin Rivers Education Centre in Kamloops offers students a free breakfast every morning and a free or subsidized lunch**
- **The Take-A-Hike program in the Vancouver School District provides a hot breakfast to students.**

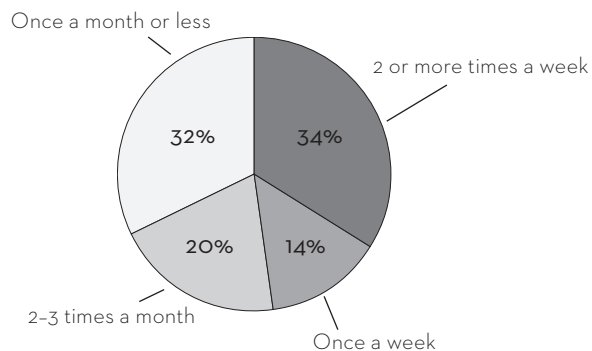
"[What keeps me coming to this program is] food is supplied" 18 YEAR OLD MALE,

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

"It's always nice to be able to break bread with kids and it seems to help develop relationships with staff."

SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

HOW OFTEN YOUTH EXPERIENCE HUNGER,
AMONG THOSE WHO GO HUNGRY



“Students coming to school without lunch, without having had breakfast . . . that’s an impediment on their ability to learn.” TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

“[We start off the day] with a warm meal with them . . . We try to focus in on what the kids like so they’ll eat those meals . . . Consistency is really important for the kids so we may have the same meal on a Tuesday, so ‘Taco Tuesday’ for example and they look forward to that . . . We look to give the kids some consistency and reliability with an adult relationship which is something I think they have definitely lacked.” TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

TRANSPORTATION

Youth who completed the survey were not specifically asked about transportation, however it was a common theme among stakeholders. Accessible and affordable transportation to and from school was identified as a barrier for youth living in poverty, particularly those in rural areas, and a number of programs assist youth with transportation costs and rides to and from the program.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

The Lee School in Surrey offers transportation support to assist students to get to and from school.

“Some best practices have been supporting the kids outside of the classroom so if Johnny doesn’t show up for school, taking the time to go to their house, talk to the parent, coax Johnny into coming to school . . . going to pick them up and dropping them off.”

SOCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

EMPLOYMENT

Almost a third of youth surveyed in the alternative education programs (32%) were working in a legal job and the majority of these youth (60%) were working 20 hours or more a week.

Anxiety about finding employment after leaving school was a genuine concern for youth. Forty nine percent of youth who completed the alternative education survey, and 47% of those in the marginalized and street involved survey, reported that more job training was needed in their community.

Among marginalized and street-involved youth, the more hours they worked, the less likely it was that they would be attending school. Additionally, the more different sources of income they relied upon (such as panhandling, busking, “squeegeeing”) the less likely they were to report attending school.

Community stakeholders reported that the option to secure employment and earn an income can be attractive to youth who are struggling at school and looking for an alternative. It can also be a necessity for those who need to support themselves or their families. This was identified as a particular problem for youth living in poverty, especially in areas where opportunities to work in the construction and resource industry were readily available.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- The KEY program in Surrey work with students to prepare them for employment: “... we’ve also experienced some success around the delivery of employability skills within the program...”
Social Services Manager
- Go Anywhere Program (GAP) in Prince George is a ten-month program designed for students aged 17 to 24 years who are preparing to transition to employment. GAP offers components in employability skills, academic upgrading and career and personal development.

“Some of them really need to leave [school] and find work.”

SCHOOL COUNSELOR, ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAM

“As the job opportunities increase, our enrollment decreases.”

PRINCIPAL,
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

"[What makes me happy] is playing sports and getting an education." 15 YEAR OLD FEMALE IN THE MARGINALIZED AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SURVEY

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND FITNESS

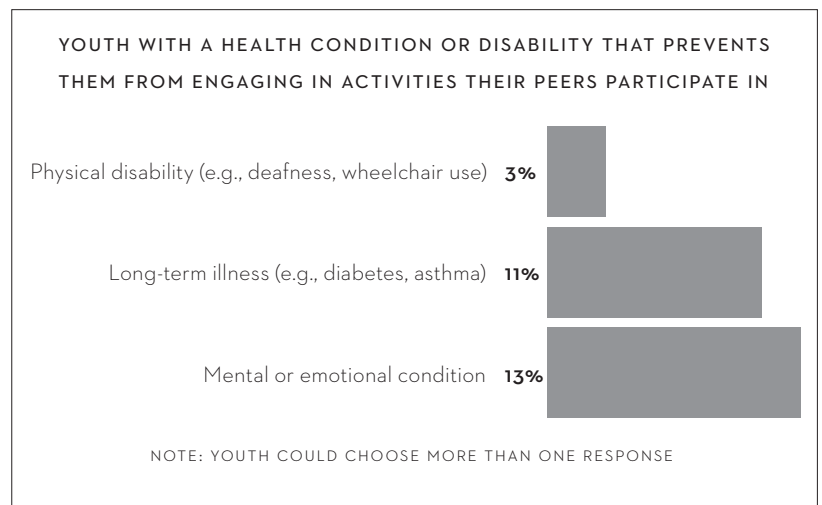
Two thirds of youth (67%) reported that their health was good or excellent, and 56% reported that their level of physical fitness was good or excellent. Approximately one in four reported that they had a health condition or disability that prevented them from engaging in activities that other youth their age engage in; 13% reported having a mental or emotional condition (depression, eating disorder, etc.), 11% indicated having a long-term illness (diabetes, asthma, etc.), and 3% reported a physical disability (deafness, using a wheelchair, etc.).

When alternative education programs are located within mainstream school settings, youth are able to maintain connections to school clubs, sports teams, and other extra-curricular activities, and to access support from the school administration in general.

Youth currently attending alternative education programs located inside a mainstream school were twice as likely to have played sports with a coach or instructor in the past month, compared to youth attending education programs outside a mainstream school. Rates of playing sports with a coach or

instructor were no different among the two groups prior to starting their current alternative education programs. Among youth who attend alternative education programs outside a mainstream school, 25% indicated that they would join a sport team or club if they had the opportunity to do so.

Interestingly, youth who attempted suicide in the past 12 months were almost twice as likely to report not engaging in any sporting or recreational activities compared to youth who did not attempt suicide in the past 12 months.



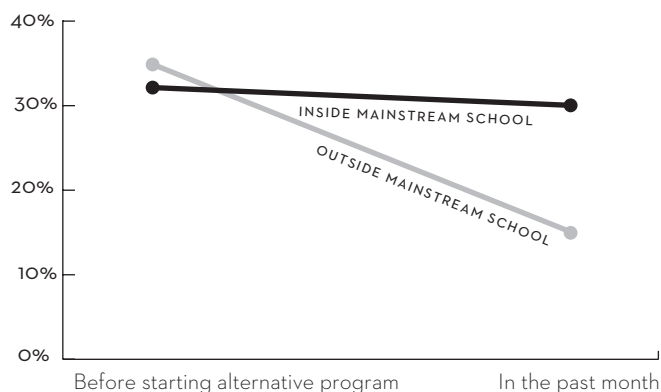
"[What makes me happy] is playing sports and getting an education. I am not a nerd but it is better than being on the streets." 15 YEAR OLD FEMALE, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

Whether located within a mainstream school or out in the community, programs strive to provide outings and health promoting activities. These outings and activities give youth a break from their course work, expose them to a range of new experiences, and ensure they do not miss out on the types of activities available to youth in other school settings. Those programs that lack recreational and sport facilities have developed a range of alternative activities for youth, such as overnight camping trips.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

The Tupper Alternative Program in Vancouver is located in a secondary school setting where students have access to the regular school club, extra-curricular activities, sports teams, and have support from the school administration.

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED SPORTS BEFORE AND AFTER ENTERING THE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM, BY LOCATION OF THE PROGRAM (INSIDE VS. OUTSIDE A MAINSTREAM SCHOOL)



"Our trips are really important. Just having that time where we're with them for 48 hours or more and eating together and playing together and driving together, it just gives you a chance to be real with them and develop some relationships so they can trust you a bit because I think it's hard for some of our students to trust with some of the things they're going through."

TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

"Having a component of your program that is away from academics, out of the school, that's another way to learn, another way for kids to achieve some confidence and success and sense of self."

TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

According to the youth, the most common problems that health professionals told them they had were difficulties with anger (22%), depression (21%), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD; 18%), a learning disability (14%) and addictions (13%).

Emotional health concerns were a reality for a large number of youth in the alternative education survey. For example, 22% seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months, 14% had made a suicide attempt, and 9% had made multiple attempts including 3% who had made six or more attempts. Of those who attempted suicide in the past 12 months, 37% reported that their attempt was serious enough to require treatment by a doctor or nurse.

Female youth had greater odds than male youth of seriously considering suicide in the past year (28% vs. 16%) and of attempting suicide in the past year (19% vs. 10%). However, male youth generally have higher rates of successful suicides compared to female youth.

Community stakeholders reported that mental and emotional health can affect a youth's success in the school system. For example, youth living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or an anxiety disorder may find it too difficult to even walk into the school building and attend class.

In addition to those with diagnosed mental and emotional health problems, some youth have difficulties that go undiagnosed, making it harder for the youth and the school to understand and address their behaviours.

"[A student who] has significant depression and anxiety tends to have high absenteeism . . . Sometimes they just can't bring themselves to come." YOUTH SUPPORT WORKER

"Most of the kids I see have learning disabilities that are completely obvious to me that were undiagnosed."

YOUTH PROBATION OFFICER

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- Abbotsford Continuing Education has an educational psychologist who sees youth at intake to assess diagnosed and undiagnosed learning difficulties. This ensures the necessary supports are put in place at the program, and also ensures the youth can be connected to other services that may be required.
- The Success District Resource Room in Kamloops is an intensive behaviour intervention program that addresses learning and behavioural issues. The program combines academic exercises with social outings in order to build social and academic skills.
- Twin Rivers Education Centre in Kamloops offers self paced humanities and science courses for youth whose mental health makes the classroom environment challenging.
- The Take-A-Hike program in the Vancouver School District has a full time clinical therapist who offers intensive therapeutic support to youth.
- SJ Willis in Greater Victoria focuses on behavioural issues and awareness of mental health issues affecting youth.
- The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Program in Prince George is a resource program for teachers and youth to address the needs of youth diagnosed with FASD.
- The Intersect program in Prince George serves youth who have severe mental health issues, which interfere with their ability to attend other educational programs. Educational instruction is provided on an individual or group basis, depending on the youths' needs.
- The Lee School in Surrey provides educational, social and emotional support for at-risk and emotionally fragile youth. The course components include adapted academic programs to meet individual needs. The focus is on moral and multiple intelligence, which helps youth develop tools to deal with intense emotions and to focus on identifying their strengths.

ABUSE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Half of the youth in the alternative education survey (51%) reported having been physically abused or mistreated (61% of females and 40% of males), and 28% reported having been sexually abused (44% of females and 10% of males). Aboriginal youth were more likely to report having been physically abused (60% vs. 46%) and sexually abused (35% vs. 23%) compared to non-Aboriginal youth. Additionally, 35% of all females and 11% of all males reported that they had been forced to have sex when they did not want to.

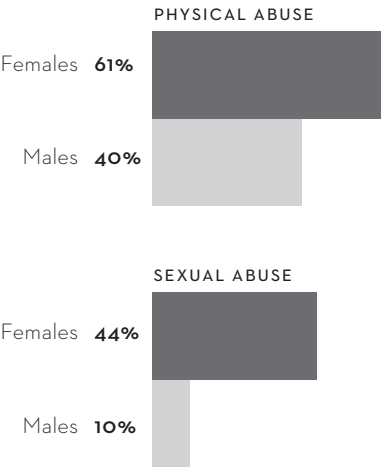
Another form of abuse is sexual exploitation, and 6% of youth reported having engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money or goods. Unlike other types of abuse, however, male youth were equally likely to report sexual exploitation as female youth. The most common reasons for doing so were for money (82%), drugs and alcohol (53%), shelter (24%) and food (12%).

Evidence from the marginalized and street-involved youth survey indicated that sexual exploitation is a barrier to education. Among these youth, those who reported having been sexually exploited were slightly less likely to be attending school than those who had not (61% vs. 69%).

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

SJ Willis in Greater Victoria has a girls' group, which explores sexual health, positive relationships and other related topics, assisting female youth to recognize when they are being sexually exploited.

YOUTH IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION STUDY WHO HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY OR SEXUALLY ABUSED



SUBSTANCE USE

Youth who participated in the alternative education survey reported high rates of substance use, and many started using at a young age. A total of 78% of youth had their first drink of alcohol by the time they were 14 years old. Three quarters (75%) had tried marijuana by the time they were 14 years old, with 46% having tried it by age 12. Approximately 69% of youth (73% of males and 65% of females) reported using marijuana in the past month, and 51% of youth (57% of males and 44% of females) reported using marijuana yesterday.

Binge drinking is defined as having five or more alcoholic drinks within a couple of hours. Around 67% of males and 70% of females who had tried alcohol engaged in binge drinking in the past month. Approximately 46% of males and 49% of females who had tried alcohol engaged in binge drinking on three or more days in the past month.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth reported comparable use of drugs overall, with the exception that Aboriginal youth were more likely to have ever used amphetamines other than crystal meth, compared to non-Aboriginal youth (40% vs. 25%).

For youth in the alternative education survey, school connectedness was related to drug use. Youth who reported using marijuana and other drugs within the past month (e.g., mushrooms, hallucinogens, crystal meth) were less connected to school compared to youth who did not use these drugs.

Among youth in the marginalized and street-involved survey, those who indicated addiction problems or recent substance use were less likely to be attending school than those who did not. For example, youth who used no substances yesterday or in the past month were approximately 1.5 times more likely to be in school than those who had used.

Stakeholders confirmed that substance use was a barrier to school attendance for many youth:

“Drug culture, it’s a huge issue, it takes youth away from schooling and a large number of students come from homes where parents are using.”

VICE-PRINCIPAL

“When drinking and drugging is more frequent than eating... (the youth is) not going to be very successful in school.”

YOUTH PROBATION OFFICER

**SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUTH IN
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY**

DRUG	USED IN PAST MONTH	EVER USED
Alcohol	70%	82%
Marijuana	69%	85%
Ecstasy	21%	60%
Cocaine	15%	46%
Mushrooms	14%	57%
Prescription pills without doctor's consent	9%	27%
Hallucinogens	8%	35%
Crystal meth	6%	29%
Other amphetamines	6%	30%
Ketamine	5%	21%
GHB	5%	14%
Inhalants	3%	20%
Heroin	3%	13%
Steroids without doctor's prescription	3%	7%
Injected illegal drug	1%	6%

NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- PLEA's 'Daughters and Sisters' and 'Waypoint' in Surrey are day treatment programs for female and male youth with addictions issues. An individual treatment program is developed for each youth, with the goals of reducing high-risk behaviours and increasing self-esteem. Youth have access to parent-teen mediation, individual and group counseling, academic courses and recreational activities. The teachers work with the youths' previous teachers and the youth themselves to develop an academic plan to meet their needs.
- The Connections Program in Surrey is for youth with challenges such as involvement with drugs and alcohol, involvement with the legal system, poor attendance and difficulty interacting with peers and/or adults. The teacher and Youth Care Worker provide educational support in core academics but also teach students coping skills and behavioural strategies.

CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT

In addition to the 20% of youth who reported engaging in illegal or street level activities (such as busking and “squeegeeing”) in the past month, 35% of youth indicated ever having been charged with or convicted of a crime. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth were equally likely to have been charged with or convicted of a crime, although Aboriginal youth were 1.5 times more likely than non-Aboriginal youth to have been held in a custody centre as a result of a charge or conviction.

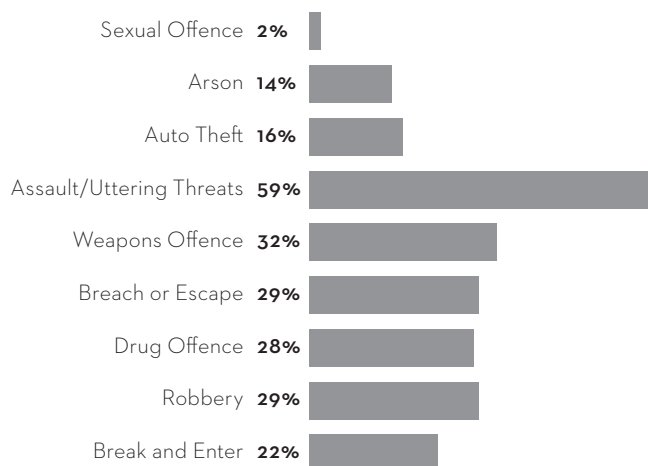
Criminal involvement was identified as a barrier to education among community stakeholders, but findings from the marginalized and street-involved youth survey did not indicate that being charged with or convicted of a crime was a major barrier to

education, as 77% of those who had been convicted of a crime were attending school. Having spent time in a custody centre, however, did lower the odds of school attendance. Youth who had been in a custody centre were less likely to be currently attending school compared to youth who had never been in a custody centre (57% vs. 72%).

Programs located within community centres can be particularly helpful for youth who have exhausted their educational options in school district alternative programs (for example, as a result of legal issues or criminal activity).

“It’s the chaos of going through the court system and the length of time it takes to get anything settled. . . They don’t want to take kids into programs or school programs when they’re not sure they’re going to be around.” YOUTH PROBATION OFFICER

**TYPES OF OFFENCES AMONG YOUTH WHO HAVE
BEEN CHARGED WITH OR CONVICTED OF A CRIME**



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- The Pacific Community Resources Society offers an alternative education program specifically for youth on probation.
- The Youth Resource Centre (program of Abbotsford Community Services) is piloting an Education Support Program for youth on probation, staffed by Education Support Workers. Youth receive support with academics and personal and family issues as they transition back into the school system.
- The Adapted General Education program in Surrey serves high-risk youth who are under the supervision of a probation officer. The program provides rapid placement and short-term assessment, with the end goal of placing students into an appropriate long-term alternative education program.

EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the information youth provided about the complexity of their lives and the impact that this can have on their ability to remain engaged with education, they also provided valuable information about their earlier disengagement from school, their reasons for returning to education and their experiences of reengagement through the alternative programs.

DISENGAGEMENT

Disruptions in youths' early education experiences can affect their ability to form connections to school, community and peers, and can make the process of disengaging more likely (McCreary, 2006). Forty eight percent of youth in the survey had attended three or more elementary schools, and one quarter (25%) of youth had attended three or more high schools. A total of 34% reported having been held back a grade. For the majority of youth who were held back (72%), this occurred in high school.

A minority of youth reported that they had never previously left school (33%). Among those who had experienced a break from education, a variety of reasons were given.

Seventeen percent of youth reported having left school because they did not feel they fit in. This finding was consistent with stakeholders who spoke of some youth being unable to understand the social skills of mainstream school.

"Many of our kids have been in 11 different schools by the time they get here." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

"Many of our kids will tell stories about being misunderstood in the larger school... [the teacher] is not used to the world that that kid comes from." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

"I think we have too many students who could possibly succeed [in mainstream school] if they could come for part of the day, if they could build a relationship with someone who has a bit more time." VICE-PRINCIPAL, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Two thirds of youth reported leaving school because they had disengaged on a cognitive or emotional level (including because they felt it was boring, they did not care about school and/or felt it was irrelevant to their lives).

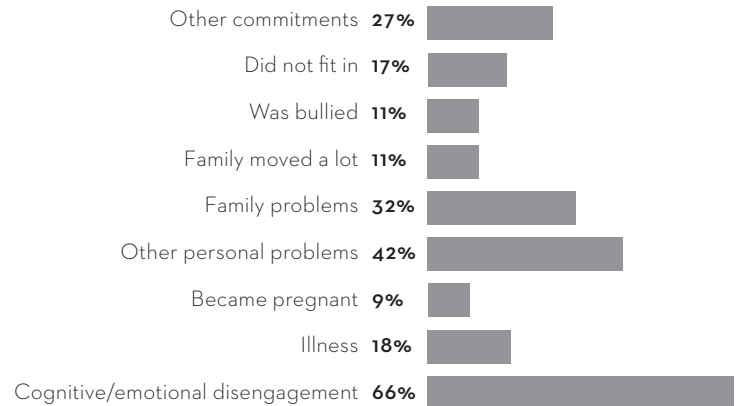
More than one in four (27%) left because of competing responsibilities, including family care-giving responsibilities, needing to work in their family's business, or to make money.

A third of youth (32%) left school because of family problems. Aboriginal youth were more likely to have left school in the past due to family problems compared to non-Aboriginal youth (41% vs. 25%).

Stakeholders confirmed that family problems and other external factors often affected youths' ability to fulfill the requirements of a mainstream school timetable, which can lead to them dropping out or being asked to leave.

According to community stakeholders, and consistent with findings from the marginalized and street-involved youth survey, youth disengage from the education system and become at-risk or high-risk between Grades 8 and 10 (13 to 16 years of age). This period in a young person's life represents a time of social and developmental transition that may exacerbate existing hardships and lead to an increase in risky behaviours.

YOUTHS' REASONS FOR HAVING LEFT SCHOOL IN THE PAST (AMONG THOSE WHO LEFT)



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

"Challenges really start when they go from elementary school to high school because they lose that connectedness with the school and with teachers and they're in a new environment... So Grade 8 is a very difficult time and a lot of them start dropping off between Grade 8 and Grade 10." SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

"[I came back to school] because I need to be my own person and I can't do that unless I graduate." 16 YEAR OLD FEMALE, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

RE-ENGAGEMENT

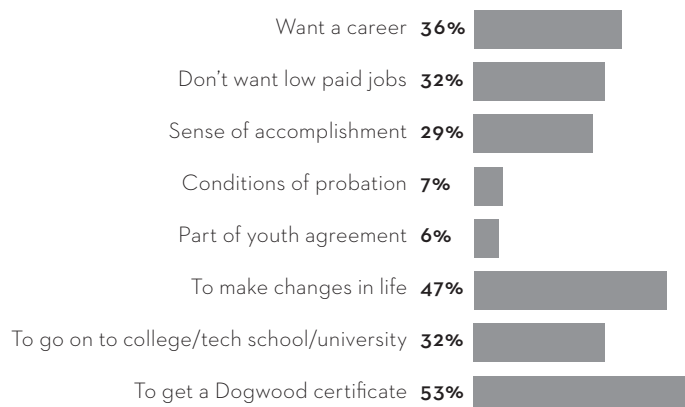
Youth who returned to an alternative program after having left school provided a number of reasons for coming back, including wanting to get a Dogwood certificate, wishing to make changes in their lives, and wanting a career. Relatively few youth indicated that their return was mandatory, such as a requirement of their Youth Agreement or probation.

Of those youth who had disengaged from school and then decided to return, 28% reported that it took about a month to get back into a program, and 32% reported that it took one week or less. A smaller amount of youth indicated that it took a whole school year (4%) or longer (6%) to get back into a program.

A range of services have been established to assist youth through the potentially difficult process of transitioning into alternative education or out of an alternative program and back into a mainstream school. Although some alternative education programs have designated intake sessions throughout the year, most have a continuous intake process, allowing youth to reconnect with their education when they are ready to do so. This process not only allows for a timely response to youth but also often ensures that individual support and assistance can be put in place during the transition.

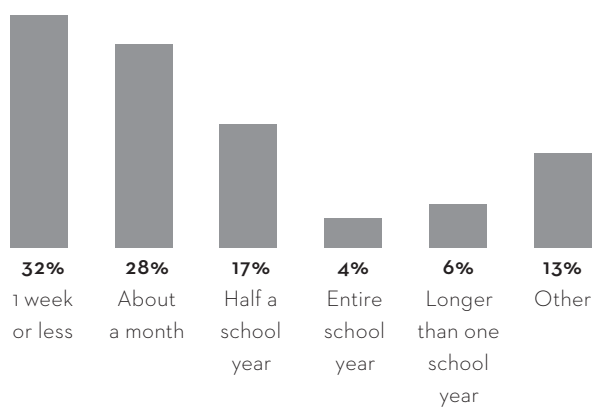
A *Dogwood Certificate* is awarded to students who graduate from a Grade 12 graduation program or an adult graduation program.

REASONS FOR RETURNING TO SCHOOL



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

REPORTED TIME IT TOOK YOUTH TO RETURN TO SCHOOL (ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM)



EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District has a transition counselor who provides personal counseling and advocacy for those transitioning into a mainstream school or an alternative program. The counselor also liaises with families, and other agencies such as child and youth mental health.
- Prince George has a Community Alternative Programs Support Team, which consists of one counselor, two Aboriginal education workers, and one youth care worker. The team assists youth to transition into alternative programs and from alternative programs into mainstream schools, provides individual and group counseling, and facilitates cultural awareness for Aboriginal youth.

“A lot of times they’ve been kicked out of the regular school system because they weren’t attending enough so what’s the logic in an alternative program kicking them out for not attending... [You] have to have more flexible expectations.” SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

STAYING ENGAGED

Alternative education programs in the province are designed to assist youth to reconnect and remain engaged with their education, despite other challenges they may be facing in their lives. Low teacher-to-student ratios and the additional supports of teaching assistants and youth care workers allow alternative education programs’ staff to gain an in-depth knowledge of youth, assess their educational, emotional and practical needs, build positive relationships, identify their optimum learning style, and offer additional supports as required. It also ensures programs can offer flexibility in their delivery methods, with both teacher-directed learning and self-paced courses. Finally, the diverse range of alternative education programs ensures that youth are offered a supportive atmosphere and the chance to meet other young people with similar experiences. Examples include programs for pregnant and parenting youth, programs for Aboriginal youth, intensive behaviour intervention programs, and programs for youth on probation.

As many courses are self-paced, attendance requirements can be flexible and can be worked around youths’ other needs or commitments. Knowing they have this flexibility can be vital for those experiencing chaotic home lives, mental health or addiction issues, or returning to education after a lengthy absence. This flexibility can serve to keep youth connected, as 30% reported that the flexibility was a factor that kept them attending their program.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Twin Rivers Education Centre in Kamloops offers supported self-paced courses to students who come to the program mid-semester.

“[The program has] students this year whose reading levels go anywhere from Grade 2.3, 2.7 right up past high school... so that presents some difficulties in terms of programming and planning and trying to develop materials that are appropriate for that particular age group.” VICE-PRINCIPAL, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Community stakeholders reported that at-risk and high-risk youth often struggle in a mainstream school setting when their academic achievements fall below that of others their age. For example, some youth may be in Grade 10 but have a much lower reading level, which can be frustrating for the youth and challenging for the teacher. These youth can be more readily accommodated in an alternative education setting.

Findings from this survey indicate that many youth in alternative education programs have survived traumatic and damaging experiences. Stakeholders indicated that these youth require significant levels of therapeutic support in addition to the academic and practical supports built into the programs they attend. In a number of programs, youth are assessed and treated by specialist professional staff, such as an educational psychologist. Even in programs that do not have access to clinicians, teachers and staff find creative ways to offer youth emotional support.

"If you can just get them to attend regularly then that's a good measure of success." SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

The T.R.E.K. program in Surrey provides opportunities for staff and youth to share their thoughts about their day over a meal together. The program also offers activities which aim to improve youths' memories: *"[Students have had] so many traumatic experiences that their memories don't seem to function properly... so what we do is take all these photographs of them doing things throughout the year... that is an opportunity for them to start to reconnect, not just with academic memory but actual memory of what my life is about, who am I, where am I going and where have I come from and we find that to be really beneficial for the kids."* Teacher, alternative education program

Individualized Education Plans (IEP)

All youth in alternative education programs are entitled to have an IEP. An IEP is a written plan, developed for a youth, which describes the services, program modifications and/or adaptations that are to be provided. It serves as a tool for collaborative planning among the school, the parents, the youth, and others. Even when youth are not able to communicate their ideas and wishes, their participation at their IEP planning meeting is encouraged. However, only 36% of youth reported that they had an IEP, 26% reported that they did not have one, and 39% did not know.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District has a transition counselor who assists youth to meet IEP goals and identify personal goals.

“An individualized approach to each kid is very important . . . you don’t want to be dealing with them in the same way.” SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

“When kids can look back and they’ve had that moment in school of going ‘that was so amazing, I did that, I accomplished that.’ They can have that experience of actually succeeding in some way—then they can recreate it themselves.” TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Learning Support

Forty three percent of youth reported that they have continued attending their alternative education program because they liked the teaching style. Alternative education programs are able to accommodate a range of different learning styles. A large percentage of youth indicated that a combination of self-paced, hands-on, teacher assisted, and one-on-one learning styles work best for them. A minority reported that lecture style and accelerated learning were approaches that work best for them.

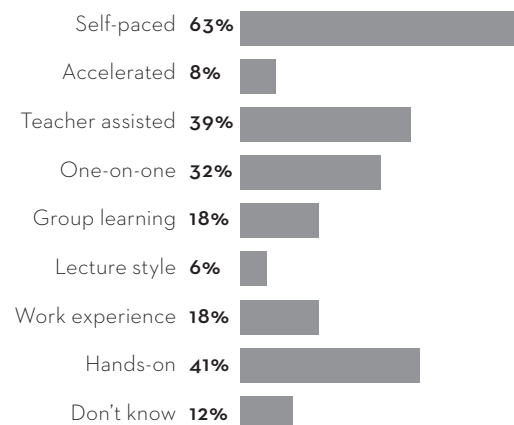
Community stakeholders reported that the individualized education provided in alternative programs offers opportunities to build success, and subsequently self-esteem, in youth who have not previously had this positive experience in their education, and who are often reluctant to try new opportunities or develop new skills for fear of failure.

“The higher my expectations, the better they perform . . . they resent it, they kick and they struggle . . . but usually, the vast majority of time they rise to the occasion, and then when they do, and when they accomplish these things, they feel like a million bucks, and you can just see it in them. They look like new people.” TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

8J/9J in the Vancouver School District works with youth who have strong academic and artistic skills but have struggled in the traditional school setting putting them “at-risk” of disconnecting from the education system. The program focuses on fine arts, and fosters a sense of accomplishment to improve self-esteem, with the aim of successfully returning the youth to mainstream education or finding senior alternatives.

WAYS OF LEARNING THAT YOUTH IDENTIFIED AS BEST FOR THEM



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

"A good peer group [is important]. We see kids help one another to get better rather than dragging each other down." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

"[What keep me coming is that it] has a great environment to be in" 17 YEAR OLD MALE, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

EFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS

Peers

Previous McCreary research (AHS, 2003) has shown that peer relationships are an important part of healthy youth development and can be affected when youth leave home, change schools, or move to another community. Recognizing the importance of these relationships is an essential feature of the alternative education programs. Thirty nine percent of youth reported that they attend their current program because their friends do. Youth were most likely to turn to friends than anyone else when they needed help. Over 90% reported that their friends had been supportive when they had asked them for help.

Adults

In addition to peer relationships, stakeholders across the province repeatedly asserted the importance of assisting youth to develop healthy relationships with important adults in their lives.

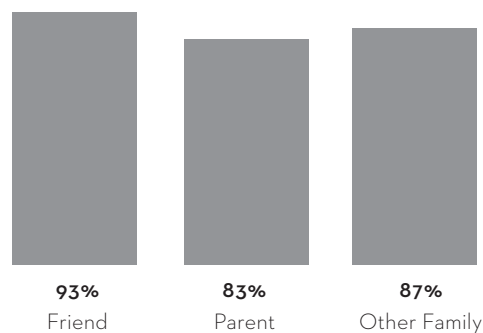
Stakeholders working in alternative education programs spoke of their responsibility to be positive adult role models to their students, particularly to youth without other such figures in their lives. Teaching methods aim to incorporate a youth's individual strengths, learning style, and life experiences. There is strong emphasis on community building and the development of positive, supportive and healthy relationships.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Take-A-Hike in Vancouver addresses students' academic, social and behavioural needs through adventure-based learning (backpacking, orienteering, canoeing, snow-shoeing, etc.) where students learn to build trust, develop team work skills, develop positive relationships with peers and adults, develop positive behaviours, and learn new coping skills.

"We really try to be empathetic rather than judgmental." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

PERCENT OF YOUTH WHO FOUND OTHERS' ASSISTANCE TO BE HELPFUL*



*OF THOSE WHO SOUGHT HELP WITHIN THE PAST YEAR

"[What keep me coming is that] I feel safe and comfortable" 14 YEAR OLD FEMALE, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

"[What makes me happy] is being at school with my friends" 14 YEAR OLD MALE IN THE MARGINALIZED AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SURVEY

School Connectedness

Results from the *Adolescent Health Survey* (2003) show that school connectedness is essential to keeping youth engaged in their education. School connectedness includes elements such as relationships with teachers, feelings of safety, and sense of belonging at school. Creating this sense of connectedness can be particularly challenging for alternative education programs offering part-time, flexible or self-directed schedules. Overall, programs appear to be overcoming these challenges as the majority of youth reported feeling that they were a part of their school (69%), were happy at school (72%), and felt safe at school (78%). More than 8 out of 10 (81%) reported liking their current program, whereas only 4 out of 10 (41%) had liked their previous school.

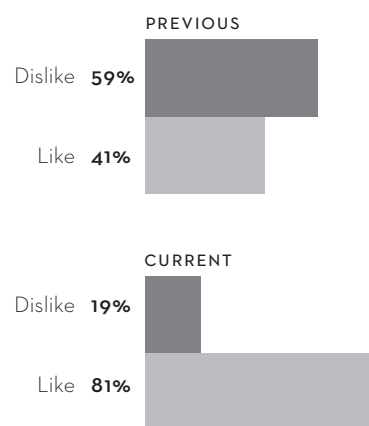
When asked about cutting classes, 45% reported that they do not skip classes in their current program; almost half (47%) reported that they skip classes less than they used to now that they are in an alternative program; and only 5% indicated that they currently skip classes more than they used to.

Youth who reported greater levels of school connectedness also reported better health than those reporting lower levels of connectedness.

"I attend every day!"

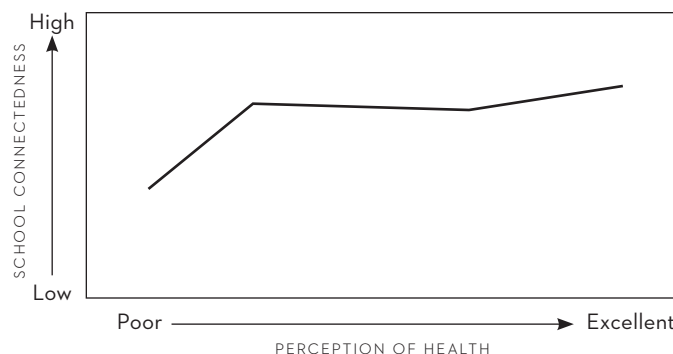
16 YEAR OLD FEMALE, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

YOUTHS' RATINGS (LIKE/DISLIKE) OF PREVIOUS PROGRAM AND CURRENT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM



(PERCENTAGES EXCEED 100% DUE TO ROUNDING)

PERCEPTIONS OF HEALTH IN RELATION TO SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS



“Historically, [schools] primarily saw that kids should be focusing on their academics. The reality though is that a majority of them won’t graduate from an alternative school. . . so developing independence skills is very important.” SOCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

“The teachers are cool”

16 YEAR OLD MALE, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

Youth most commonly reported that what kept them coming to the program they were in was wanting to finish/graduate; liking the teaching style; feeling that the teachers and staff respect their abilities; teachers and staff showing respect to all students; teachers and staff understanding students’ situations; and their friends being at the program.

Access to non-academic qualifications (e.g., Food Safe, First Aid, Super Host) alongside work experience, volunteer opportunities, life-skills, and outdoor recreation programs enable students who may not excel academically the opportunity to experience other learning opportunities. These opportunities can increase youths’ confidence, competence, and likelihood of gaining employment. Access to these opportunities was clearly important to youth, as one in five (21%) reported that opportunities to learn new skills was what kept them engaged in their alternative program.

“If they have questions . . . [I encourage them] to ask all the other [students] and they’ll exchange the [information]. . . and the kids are doing better than they expected . . . and they learn social skills.”

TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

WHAT KEEPS YOUTH COMING TO THEIR CURRENT PROGRAMS

Want to finish/graduate	67%
Teaching style	43%
Teachers and staff respect my abilities	43%
Teachers and staff respect all students	41%
Friends are here	39%
Teachers and staff understand my situation	39%
Flexible program	30%
Learn new skills	21%
Interesting programs	16%
Friends are not here (no distractions)	9%
Part of my youth agreement	6%
Must attend for probation	6%

NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

In addition to academics, the ACE intermediate program in Abbotsford offers opportunities for students to gain qualifications and develop skills in other areas including certificate training such as Food Safe and First Aid, a work experience program, a volunteer program, and a cooking program.

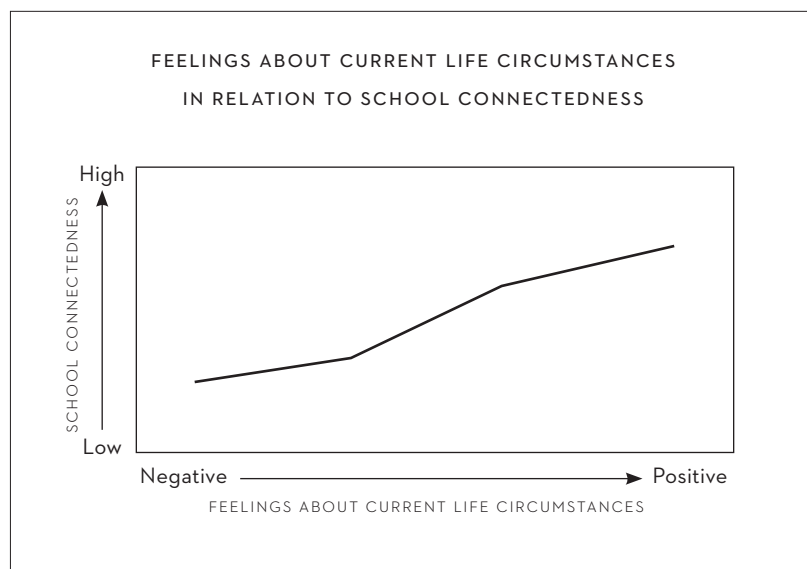
Stakeholders echoed the views of youth, reporting that the range of academic and non-academic support not readily available to students in the mainstream school system was what made the alternative education programs so successful in serving the most vulnerable youth.

Among youth in the alternative education survey, females were significantly more connected to school than males, and connection to school for both males and females increased with age.

Youth in the alternative education survey who reported having been sexually exploited, forced to have sex, or having attempted suicide in the past year were less connected to school than youth who had not had these experiences. Additionally, an increase in the number of different drugs consumed was associated with a decrease in school connectedness.

Youth who felt better about their current life circumstances were more connected to school than youth who felt worse about their current life circumstances.

The survey results also showed that levels of school connectedness were not affected by whether youths' programs were located inside or outside a mainstream school.



Community Connections

School district partnerships with community agencies and government departments provide unique opportunities to support at-risk and high-risk youth. Where such partnerships exist, a wider range of services and opportunities can be offered to youth.

Building community connections is particularly important for youth who may not have other supports in their lives. Therefore, offering youth opportunities to engage in a range of community activities, including volunteer and work experience is an essential component of a number of alternative education programs.

A number of the alternative education programs are offered through community centres. These are particularly effective for youth in need of additional

supports such as addictions counseling and pre-employment training, since these can be readily accessed in an already familiar environment. These programs are also able to offer an educational option to youth who are unable to attend school district alternative programs (for example, as a result of criminal activity or behavioural issues) and to youth who would otherwise be put off from entering an educational setting.

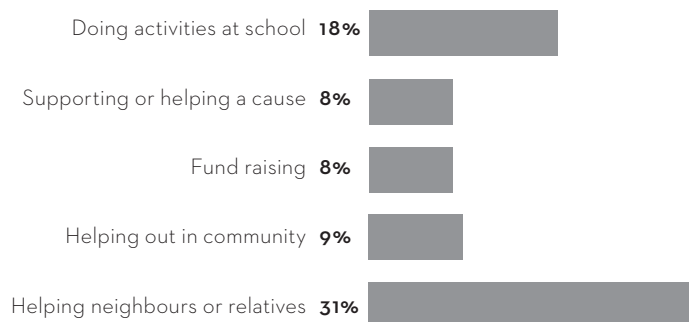
Among youth who attend a program outside a mainstream school, over half (53%) indicated that they would not like to attend a program located in a mainstream school, 29% were unsure and 18% reported that they would like to go to a program that is located in a mainstream school.

"It's that collaborative approach . . . it's like this kid is the centre of a wheel and all these agencies are spokes feeding into the centre of that wheel and the more spokes the more likely that wheel is going to turn." POLICE LIAISON OFFICER

"The program provides opportunities to be more part of the community . . . [The students] can help within the cafeteria [which also gives them] work experience." PARENT

"If it looks like school and smells like school they won't come." TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

HELPING OTHERS WITHOUT PAY IN THE PAST YEAR



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- The Lee School in Surrey is delivered in partnership between School District 36 and Options: Services to Communities Society, and the Gateway Program in Vancouver is delivered in partnership between School District 39 and Family Services of Greater Vancouver.
- Most of the programs in Prince George are located in a community centre: the Alternative School Program is located in the Youth Around Prince Resource Centre (YAP), the Storefront Program is located in the Family Resource Centre, the Teen Mothers Alternative Program is located in the Elizabeth Fry Society Building, and the Concept Education Program and Connections Program are both located at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- The Kaien Island Alternative School Friendship House Program (Prince Rupert) has a unique process in place that involves influential community members in addressing student disciplinary issues, based on principles of progressive discipline, restorative justice and community engagement. Any youth experiencing disciplinary problems initially meets with their teacher and discusses guidelines for appropriate behaviour. If the problem continues, a behavioural contract is drawn up. If this does not succeed, the youth is asked to attend a meeting with senior program staff. Finally, when all internal options have been exhausted local community elders

meet with the youth: “We give them a lot of chances and then the next step is to meet with the elders and they tell the elders what’s going on and the elders give them advice and that’s usually the step where a lot of them straighten out.” *Teacher, alternative education program*

- Total Education in Vancouver places strong emphasis on community building and the development of positive, supportive relationships.

"I like school for support reasons." 18-YEAR-OLD FEMALE

*"The teachers at [the program] care, which is the ultimate difference...
[The students] are really encouraged."* PARENT

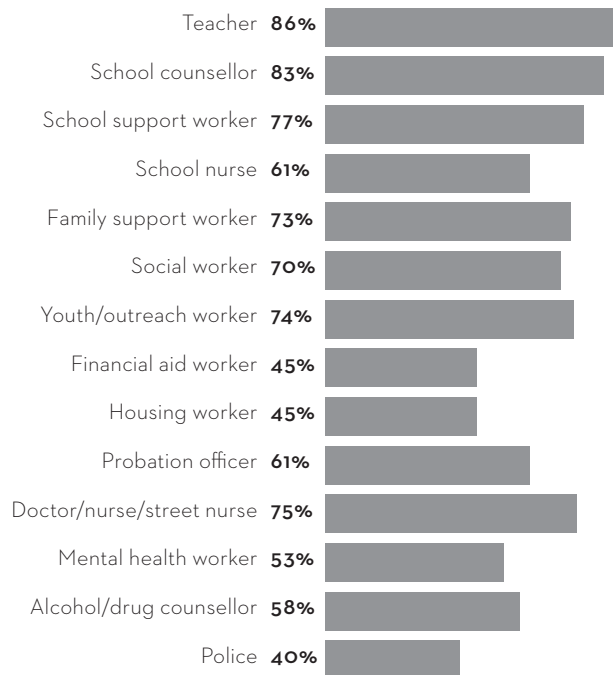
Professional Supports

Findings from the *Adolescent Health Survey* (2003) indicate that supportive relationships with caring adults are key to healthy youth development. Youth who completed the alternative education survey reported seeking support from a range of adults in their lives, including teachers (70%), school counsellors (61%), school support workers (52%), social workers (51%), youth outreach workers (51%), and doctors/nurses/street nurses (50%). Youth who accessed professional supports reported finding them helpful.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

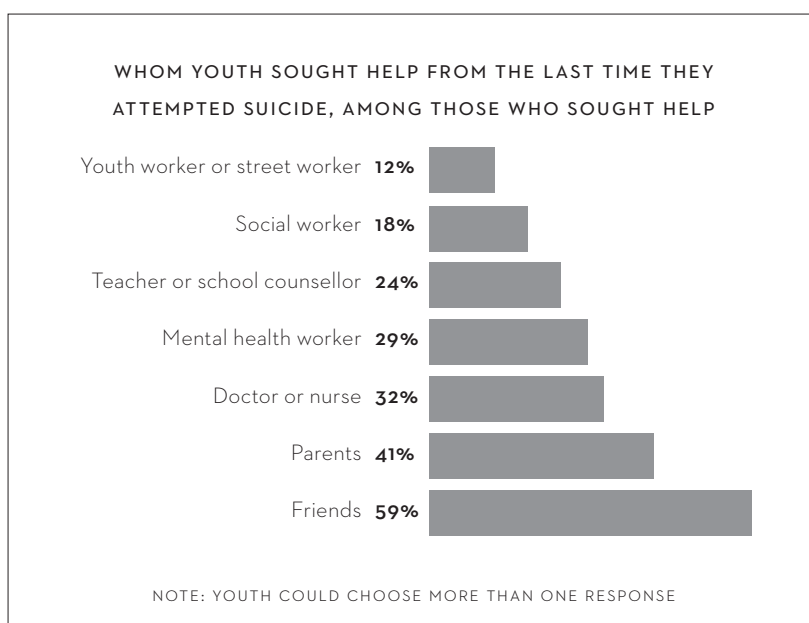
The ACE Intermediate Program in Abbotsford features self-paced and individualized learning options for youth. The teacher to student ratio is 1:10 and the classroom includes the support of teaching assistants and youth care workers allowing youth to have as much one-on-one time as they need.

PERCENT OF YOUTH WHO FOUND PROFESSIONALS' ASSISTANCE TO BE HELPFUL*



*OF THOSE WHO SOUGHT HELP WITHIN THE PAST YEAR

Teachers can be a source of emotional as well as educational support. A total of 30% of youth in alternative schools sought help the last time they attempted suicide. Although friends (59%) and parents (41%) were the most accessed source of support, almost one in four youth (24%) asked their teacher for help.



Youth attending alternative schools were asked to identify needed services and programs in their community. The services most identified were those relating to employment, education and housing, supporting the findings of the marginalized and street-involved youth study.

SERVICES OR PROGRAMS THAT YOUTH IDENTIFIED AS NEEDED IN THEIR COMMUNITY	
Job training	49%
Safe and affordable housing	42%
Work experience	41%
Safe house	31%
School program for street youth	28%
Youth clinic	26%
Affordable child care/babysitting	26%
Shelter	26%
Alcohol/drug counseling	25%
Life skills training program	24%
Street nurses	19%
Youth treatment and youth detox	18%
Safe injection site	17%
Mental health services	16%
Needle exchange	16%
Dental services	16%
Services to obtain ID	15%
Transitional housing	11%
NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE	

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS

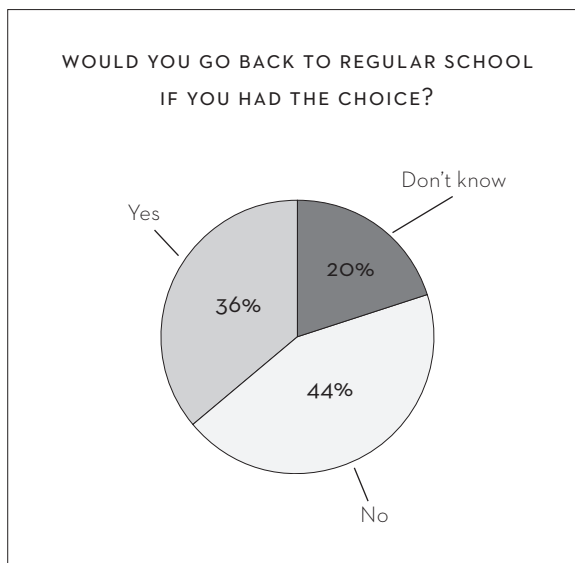
Innovative practice in administrative structures can support staff and youth in alternative programs.

- In the Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District all alternative education programs come under the umbrella of Learning Alternatives. The structure ensures all programs are familiar with what each other provides, and staff across the district get the opportunity to meet regularly to discuss a variety of issues, including student success and challenges.
- The administration of Community Alternative Programs in Prince George operates from a central location, where a number of the alternative education programs are also located. A central database of youth is maintained which tracks all youth transitioning in and out of programs. Additionally, a centralized community team operates out of the local youth centre, and other strong community links have been forged by housing a number of programs in community centres such as the Teen Mother’s program at the Elizabeth Fry Society.

MOVING ON

RETURNING TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOL SETTINGS

The survey results suggest that although the ultimate goal of many alternative education programs is for youth to return to the mainstream school system, this is not appropriate for all youth. In response to the question “If you had a choice, would you go back to regular school?” 44% reported that they would not go back, 36% reported that they would, and 20% reported that they did not know if they would go back.



Stakeholders were able to identify a number of negative stereotypes about alternative education programs and the youth who attend them, in both the education and wider community, which made it more difficult for youth to transition back into a mainstream classroom after they had experienced an alternative program.

"In some cases [it's] a real struggle to get the kids that are placed in those programs into regular classrooms . . . in most cases it's because of a fear, [the teachers] are afraid they're not going to know how to deal with this kid in the classroom." SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Youth who are 19 years old and who are not planning on attending a regular high school to graduate sometimes have the option to graduate from an Adult Continuing Education program. In many school districts the Adult Continuing Education programs are located in the same building as the alternative education programs. This offers youth the advantage of being able to continue their education in an already familiar location.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

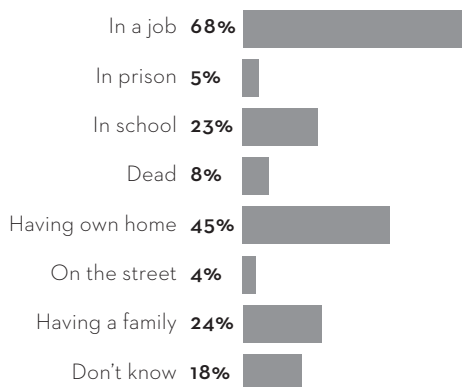
The KEY Program in Surrey was developed for youth in Grade 11 who were not ready to return to a regular classroom setting after Grade 10. The program provides academic content and transition planning including job training, for those unlikely to complete their academic courses: *"The intent has always been in Surrey for kids to attend an alternative school program up until Grade 10... A lot of them, they really weren't prepared to make that jump back into the regular school system and so we've added a classroom that provides that added support."* Social Service Manager

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Results from the *Adolescent Health Survey* (2003) show that school connectedness is a key factor in youths' desire to continue on to further education.

Around 40% of youth in the alternative education survey felt they were gaining the skills and knowledge to go on to college, university or a technical institute, and these youth reported greater school connectedness than youth who felt they were not getting these skills and knowledge. A total of 32% reported returning to education through their alternative education program because they wanted to continue on to college, technical school or university.

WHERE YOUTH SEE THEMSELVES IN 5 YEARS



NOTE: YOUTH COULD CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE

When asked about when they expect to finish their education, only 6% of youth indicated that they would complete their education before graduating from high school; 28% upon graduating from high school; 17% after graduating from a community college or technical institute; and 19% upon graduating from university. One in four (26%) were unsure about when they would complete their education.

FEELINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Findings from the *Adolescent Health Survey* (2003) indicated that optimism about the future is linked to healthy youth development. Community stakeholders in the alternative education study identified that at-risk and high-risk youth often develop low self-confidence and experience hopelessness about their future as a result of their perceived poor school performance. The responses of some youth who completed the alternative education survey seem to reflect this sentiment. A few youth answered the question, "What do you like best about your life?" with responses such as "Nothing really..." (16-year-old male), and "Not much good going on here yet" (19-year-old female).

However, only a small number of youth reported that in five years they anticipate being dead (8%), in prison (5%), or on the street (4%). Most youth (85%) felt their current life circumstances were good or fair, and 82% indicated having a positive outlook for the future.

SUMMARY

- At-risk and high-risk youth experience multiple barriers to their education. Many youth are disadvantaged by the effects of poverty, such as hunger, unstable housing and the need to secure income, yet many are determined to maintain their connection to education and to build a positive future.
- At-risk and high-risk youth attending alternative education programs reported high levels of school connectedness, had positive relationships with teachers and support staff, and liked school considerably more and skipped school considerably less when compared to their previous education experience.
- Previous research has shown that when youth are engaged and connected to school and community, they have better health outcomes (*McCreary Centre Society studies, 1998 to 2007*). School connectedness was also linked to better health for students in this study. These results highlight the value of alternative education programs in supporting and engaging students who have struggled in traditional school settings.
- The value of peer relationships to youth cannot be underestimated. Fifty seven percent of youth in the alternative school survey had spent time on the streets because their friends were doing the same, and 39% were attending their current alternative education program because their friends were there. Training youth to be peer mentors and incorporating peer support models has been successful in assisting youth to build healthy, supportive relationships and to remain engaged with their program.
- With three out of four youth in alternative education programs having tried alcohol and marijuana by the age of 14, and many youth living in challenging home situations and/or dropping out of school during or after Grade 8, alternative education programs recognize the need to provide additional supports to families as well as youth.
- Aboriginal youth are disproportionately represented among students in alternative education programs, and programs specifically designed for them allow these youth to develop a positive connection to education.

- Nearly half of youth in the alternative education survey (49%) and 47% in the street involved and marginalized youth survey reported that more job training was needed in their community. Many alternative programs have work readiness components built in, particularly for youth who are unlikely to succeed academically.
- Services that target special populations of at-risk and high-risk youth are necessary. Programs such as those for pregnant and parenting female youth are particularly successful because supports can be tailored to the specific needs of each youth, including the chance to receive peer support from others with similar experiences. The success of these programs is supported by evidence from youth in the marginalized and street-involved youth survey, as females who had been pregnant were more likely to be engaged in school than males who had become fathers, for whom there are no similar services.
- When integration and collaboration occur among school districts, programs and community agencies, additional supports are available to youth which can ensure that their complex needs are adequately addressed.
- When alternative education programs are located within mainstream schools youth have more opportunities to engage in organized sports. Many community programs work to overcome this imbalance by accessing community facilities and alternative recreation opportunities. These programs have been successful given that their location did not impact school connectedness among the students surveyed.

"I'd like to see more pre-employment programs and trades programs for kids and more applicable support and funding for girls wanting to get into a trade . . . more programs that girls would be interested in." YOUTH PROBATION OFFICER

"There's no service for the dads and more and more of the dads are more involved."
TEACHER, ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM

"What we need is some sort of directory and that's what I find a problem with alternative programs is that you just don't know [all the programs]"
SOCIAL SERVICE MANAGER

CONCLUSION

Alternative education programs serve the most marginalized and disenfranchised youth in the province. They operate with the intention of assisting youth who experience multiple challenges to achieve successful outcomes academically, socially, and vocationally. This review shows that the programs are predominantly succeeding, by using teaching methods which incorporate a youth's individual strengths, learning style and life experiences, and by placing a strong emphasis on building community connections and developing positive, supportive and healthy relationships.

Programs are not only providing an arena where youth who would otherwise be out of school can pursue educational outcomes, they are also providing an environment in which youth feel valued, supported and engaged. However, a number of the most vulnerable youth in the province are still not connecting with any of the mainstream or alternative education programs available to them. If communities can build on their successes and best practices they could reach out to even more of the youth at highest risk in British Columbia.

APPENDIX A

Profile of Alternative Education Programs in BC

Although all alternative education programs in the province aim to address the challenges that students experience in their lives, programs are delivered in a variety of ways. Examples of the diversity of programs delivered include: the TAPS program in Prince George which provides high school completion combined with employment training and support, and 8J9J in Vancouver that offers an alternative setting for students with strong academic skill who simply cannot fit within the mainstream school system.

Alternative education programs are administered and structured differently in each school district. (See Appendix B) They may be delivered from one central location, or from a range of locations. They may have strict or flexible attendance requirements, and they may offer teacher led classes, self paced on-line learning or a combination of the two (See Appendix C for examples). Despite these differences, there are also similarities in the types of programs offered:

- **Day Programs/Day Treatment Programs** provide intensive supervision to students with mental health, behavioural, addiction or legal issues. These programs are located in hospitals, treatment centres, community centres or in the community and are generally well connected to a variety of social services.
- **Adult Graduation Programs** offer courses for older youth and adult students to complete their Dogwood or Adult Dogwood certificate.
- **Provincial Resource Programs** provide services for youth from all over BC. They are usually operated in partnership with different governmental agencies. Education programs in youth custody centres are considered Provincial Resource Programs.
- **Community Alternative Education Programs** are generally funded and delivered in a partnership between a community agency and a school district. Examples include The Lee School in Surrey, a partnership between School District 36 and Options: Services to Communities Society and the Gateway Program, a partnership between Family Services of Greater Vancouver and School District 39.
- **Resource Rooms/Student Learning Centres** are located in mainstream schools and provide students with access to a resource/special needs/ learning assistance teacher, and additional classroom supports such as youth care workers. In some school districts, these are designated as District Resource Programs, meaning that students from all over the district are able to access the program (e.g. Connections in Surrey and RETRAC in Prince George).
- **Storefront Programs** are commonly housed in a community agency, often in collaboration with other community services, and offer electronic or paper-based, self-paced courses with a focus on academic, social and life skills and can be with or without teacher-led instruction. Examples include Four Directions in the Kamloops-Thompson School District and the VAST Centre in the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district.

APPENDIX B

Participating School Districts' Alternative Education Program Structures

Participating school districts operate a variety of different structures aimed at meeting the needs of youth in alternative education programs in their community:

- **Abbotsford School District (SD 34)** has resource rooms at some secondary schools and one main centralized alternative education program which also houses the adult continuing education program. Alternative programs for Aboriginal students are also provided.
- **Greater Victoria School District (SD 61)** has responded to requests from schools in the district by developing a central office to coordinate critical issues and cases in the district. There are two Student Support Principals, one for elementary students and one for secondary students. Both principals work closely with the district counselor and their support staff to identify and assist the students who require special support. SD 61 currently offers three community-based alternative education options for at-risk and high-risk youth, in addition to the resource rooms at the high schools, and the education program at the youth correctional facility.
- **Kamloops-Thompson School District (SD 73)** administers the main alternative education program out of one location and has three smaller, off-site programs delivered in partnership with local community agencies. Most of the high schools in the district have their own resource room, learning assistance room, or alternative program.
- **Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District (SD 68)** has reorganized its alternative education programs over the past two years and has developed a collaborative approach to service delivery with community social service agencies. All alternative programs are administered by Learning Alternatives, which is responsible for eight small school programs and the education program at the correctional centre. The District has two main off-site alternative programs in Nanaimo, namely Five Acres for intermediate students (Grades 8 to 10) and the VAST Centre for senior students (Grades 11 and 12). There is also the Outreach Program for students who are transitioning back into school after a lengthy absence.

- **Prince George School District (SD 57)** provides community based alternative education programs and a Provincial Resource Programs run out of the Prince George Youth Custody Centre, which are organized under the centralized administrative umbrella of the Centre for Learning Alternatives. There are also District Alternative Programs, (RETRAC I and II), which are administered through the hosting secondary schools. The school district is unique in that it has an established multi-disciplinary team focused on alternative education students. The team works from a community based central location and has access to a centralized data base of youth, which can be used for planning and transition monitoring.
- **Prince Rupert School District (SD 52)** has learning assistance/resource rooms in both the secondary schools and one off-site alternative education program located at the Friendship House Association of Prince Rupert.
- **Surrey School District (SD 36)** administers alternative education programs under the organizational umbrella of the School District Student Support Services, and also delivers programs in partnership with community agencies such as the Pacific Community Resources Society and OPTIONS: Services to Community Society.
- **Vancouver School District (SD 39)** offers 28 Alternative Resource Programs and runs six Adult Education Centres. There are nine intermediate alternative programs, three senior alternative programs and two Aboriginal Education programs. The School District also offers eight Adolescent Day Treatment programs in partnership with community social service agencies.

APPENDIX C

Selection of Alternative Education Programs in BC

The selection below is a small sample of the various alternative education programs available to meet the needs of at-risk and high-risk youth in the province. Differences in factors such as population size, and ethnic background mean that each school district has developed programs to meet the unique needs of youth in their community. The programs in the section were chosen as examples to illustrate the diversity of alternative education programs that can be delivered and represents only a subsection of those available:

SCHOOL DISTRICT 34: ABBOTSFORD

- The ACE Intermediate Program is aimed at Grade 8 to 10 students and features self-paced and individualized learning options. The teacher-to-student ratio is 1:10 and the classroom includes the support of teaching assistants and youth care workers. Students are able to upgrade their academic skills to return to mainstream school or to move on to the Adult Continuing Education program. Students also have access to certificate training such as Food Safe and First Aid, and to work experience, a volunteer program, cooking program, art program, a First Nations program, a recreation program that includes camping and hiking trips, and a lunch program. The program also provides academic screening by an Educational Psychologist to identify possible learning disadvantages. ACE has a continuous intake process throughout the year and students can self refer or be referred by their current school.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 61:

GREATER VICTORIA (GVSD)

- S.J. Willis is the largest, centralized alternative education program in the district. Students work on Grades 9 and 10. Students are encouraged to return to mainstream school or to move into adult education once they complete their Grade 10 course requirements, although some students do work on Grade 11 courses while at the program. The program operates a regular timetable, with two class blocks in the morning and two class blocks in the afternoon. The courses are self-paced, with the exception of Physical Education, Art, Bike Maintenance, Project Math and the 'Get Growing' gardening program which follow a more traditional class structure. The program also has a girls' group, which explores sexual health, positive relationships and other related topics, and a First Nations group where students learn about the local First Nations culture through field trips and guest speakers. Attendance is flexible although students are encouraged to attend more than once a week.

Each student is assigned a teacher advisor and a youth and family counselor who work as a team to support students and address their educational and personal needs. The youth and family counselor also works with students' families and offers telephone and home support to assist students attend school. Youth and family counselors also work with non-school support services such as probation officers and social workers.

Students either self-refer to the program or are referred by their school, probation officer or social worker. Prior to admission students are required to take an academic assessment test.

- ACCESS is a partnership between the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (VYES) and the GVSD. ACCESS operates on a storefront model and offers a part-time schedule. Students have access to a teacher, an education assistance worker and a youth and family counselor. Students also have access to other support services provided by the VYES such as the youth drop-in and youth clinic.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 73:

KAMLOOPS-THOMPSON

- Twin Rivers Education Centre (TREC) is the district's alternative secondary school, for students ages 14 to 16. Students generally start with one course and add more classes as they succeed, with the expectation that they finish at least two courses per semester. Students have access to core self paced academic courses and traditional teacher directed classes for sciences and humanities. Students are strongly encouraged to attend the teacher led classes and elective classes are also offered. Those aged 15 and older also have access to the Work Experience Program. TREC operates a flexible schedule, and provides a free breakfast every morning, and a subsidized or free lunch. Students have access to a full time counselor and support worker as well as additional support from

drug and alcohol counselors, mental health workers, and probation officers.

Students who are new to the district or who have been out of school in excess of three months can self refer or be referred by probation officers and social workers. Students who are already enrolled at another school in the district must be referred by that school principal. An intake interview is scheduled prior to admission to the program.

- The Success District Resource Room Program is an intensive behaviour intervention program for students in Grades 7 and 8 that addresses learning and behavioural issues. The program combines academic exercises with social outings in order to build social and academic skills. Students are referred by their current school or social service professional.
- Four Directions Storefront School is for First Nations students ages 15 and older. The program offers individualized instruction in core academics including Math, English and First Nations Studies for Grades 10, 11 and 12 and courses on personal planning and life skills. The strong cultural component aims to build self-esteem and cultural identity/awareness in a safe and supportive environment. The schedule is flexible and students are able to upgrade their skills, work on pre-requisite courses for post-secondary education or employment requirements, graduate, or transition into a mainstream school setting.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 68:

NANAIMO-LADYSMITH

- Five Acres is an off-site alternative education program for students in Grade 8 to 10. Students concentrate on academics in the mornings and life-skills and recreational activities in the afternoon. Students are required to attend at least 4 days a week. Students can self-refer or be referred by their current school, probation officer, social worker or the transition counselor. An intake meeting is held with program administrators, staff and youth and family workers to evaluate the application. Junior students are given a 'sponsor' to act as an adult support if assignments are missing, attendance issues arise, etc.
- The VAST Centre operates on a traditional storefront model, where students work on self-paced academic courses. Students have the option of working at the Centre or from home. The program is for students 16 years or older and also offers an adult continuing education program. The referral process is the same as for Five Acres.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 57: PRINCE GEORGE

- Alternative Community Education (ACE) is for students aged 17 to 18 who do not need intensive social, behavioural or emotional support and are working towards their Dogwood Certificate or their Adult Graduation Diploma. The program requires that the student commits to 10 hours of instructional hours per week and meets with a teacher mentor once a week. Students can self-refer, or be referred

through the Community Team or other community agencies. A student's length of stay in the program is based on individual need. The program accepts referrals throughout the year.

- Alternative School Program is located in the Youth Around Prince (YAP) Centre (a multi-service centre for youth at-risk in Prince George) and is aimed at students who have not yet completed Grade 10. The focus of the program is on life skills, social skills and academic upgrading. Each student receives either individual or group instruction. The program has the capacity for up to 30 students on a part-time basis. Priority is given to students already involved with other agencies such as MCFD or Probation. Students can either self-refer or be referred through the Community Team or other community agencies. Intake occurs monthly and once admitted students are assessed for appropriate placement at other programs.
- Concept Ed is run out of the Prince George Native Friendship Centre. This program is specifically designed for high-risk students aged 13 to 18. Concept Ed offers academics, life skills, physical education, cultural awareness and social skills components. The number of hours a student is required to attend the program is assessed on an individual basis. The program has the capacity for 38 students. Intake and screening occur monthly. Students can either self-refer, or be referred through the Community Team or other community agencies.

- Connections is also located at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre and is specifically for students aged 12 to 13. The structure and focus of this program is similar to Concept Ed but only has a capacity for 8 students. The students have one teacher and one youth care worker. Students are referred through the area support team school psychologists, the Community Team or through other community agencies.
- Go Anywhere Program (GAP) is a ten-month program designed for students aged 17 to 24 years who are preparing to transition to employment. GAP offers components in employability skills, academic upgrading and career and personal development. Students can attend the program on a full-time or part-time basis. The program has capacity for 24 students (12 full-time and 12 part-time). Students can self-refer or be referred through the Community Team or other community agencies. Intake is on a continuous basis throughout the school year.
- Intersect Program is an alternative education program for youth who have severe mental health issues. Educational instruction is provided for up to one year on an individual or group basis, depending on the needs of the student. Up to 30 students are accommodated and the program has a continuous intake process throughout the year. Students are referred through Intersect therapists.
- Teen Mothers' Alternative Program (TMAP) is designed to provide academic, life and career skills for pregnant and parenting adolescent mothers. Students also have access to Elizabeth Fry Outreach Services in the same facility. Students can stay in the program up to two years. The program has the capacity for 35 to 40 part-time students. Students can self-refer or be referred by the Community Team, other community agencies or high school counselors. Intake occurs on a monthly basis.
- Transitional Alternatives Program (TAPS): The TAPS program is for students ages 17 to 19 who have the necessary skills to achieve their Dogwood or Adult Dogwood Certificates. This program assists students to successfully transition into employment, other educational programs and/or independent living. Students are required to attend 80 minute sessions daily. Course components for the program include academics, physical education, life skills, social skills and work study or work experience. The program has the capacity for 110 students. Students can self-refer or be referred by the Community Team or other community agencies. Intake happens on a continuous basis.

In 2001, the First Nations Education Council, comprised of representatives from First Nations communities and agencies and School District 52, signed a partnership agreement to “improve academic success of First Nations students in SD 52.” The Council oversees the services provided to First Nations students in the school district.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 52: PRINCE RUPERT

- Charles Hays Secondary School (CHSS) has a dedicated alternative education room, which has one learning assistance teacher and one youth care worker. This program is open to students in Grades 8 through 12. Students can attend between one and five classes depending on their preference and the level of support they need. Students are referred by their teacher or school counselor.
- The Futures Program at Kaien Island Alternative School Friendship House is aimed at First Nations students ages 15 to 18 and is a one year program for students to finish their Grade 10 and upgrade their academic skills, although students can stay up to 3 years. The goal of the program is to integrate students back into the mainstream school setting to complete Grades 11 and 12 or to assist them into the adult continuing education program when they turn 19. The Futures Program works closely with the Friendship House to access services such as alcohol and drug counseling and opportunities to participate in volunteer activities, work experience, fundraising and cultural programming. The program provides three teachers and two First Nations Support Workers to its 28 students. Students are referred by parents/guardians, social workers, counselors or schools. The intake process involves an academic assessment and an interview with the student. Students are required to sign a contract which outlines expectations for behaviour, attendance etc.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 36: SURREY

- New School is a two-year educational program for at-risk youth ages 15 to 16 with significant literacy and other challenges. The program focuses on literacy development, academic skills, art and technology and aims to facilitate the student’s successful transition into a traditional classroom setting. Applications to the program are accepted from Student Support Services.
- Adapted General Education (AGE) is a partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) for high-risk youth who are under the supervision of a probation officer. AGE is a half-day program for 14 students ages 13 to 16. The program provides short-term assessment, intervention and remediation in order to place students to an appropriate long-term alternative education program. Students are referred by a probation officer. A district resource counselor is assigned to the student to act as a liaison with the AGE program and an application review is conducted prior to acceptance into the program.
- Knowledge and Education for Youth (KEY) is jointly funded by MCFD and the Ministry of Education and operates in partnership with the Pacific Community Resources Society. This program is for at-risk students ages 16 to 18 who have involvement with MCFD, Youth Probation or mental health services and have been unsuccessful in the traditional classroom environment. KEY offers academic and recreational components in addition to supports such as individual and group counseling. Referrals are submitted by a student’s social worker. A review

committee comprised of representatives from MCFD, Student Support Services and KEY determines the appropriateness of a student's placement in the program.

- Lee School is funded through MCFD, OPTIONS: Services to Communities Society and SD 36. The program is for students ages 13 to 16 and provides educational, social and emotional support for at-risk and emotionally fragile students. In addition to academic support, students have access to a youth care worker and the Wheels Program. The Wheels program provides transportation for students to attend the Lee School. The course components include adapted academic programs and programs that help students develop tools to deal with intense emotions and identify their strengths. Sessions run in half-day blocks with time set aside for recreational activities. Students must be diagnosed by a mental health clinician and be referred by a district resource counselor.
- PLEA's 'Daughters and Sisters' and 'Waypoint' are day treatment programs for youth aged 12 to 18 with addictions issues. An individual treatment program is developed for each youth with the goal of reducing high-risk behaviours and increasing self-esteem. Students have access to parent-teen mediation, individual and group counseling, academic courses and recreational activities. They are required to complete one Physical Education credit and at least one academic course credit. Both programs have the capacity for 10 youth. The programs are Provincial Resource Programs and accept referrals from probation officers and from

drug and addictions counselors. A review committee reviews each application to determine placement eligibility.

- The T.R.E.K program is a partnership between OPTIONS: Services to Communities Society and SD 36 aimed at high risk students 13 to 16 who are disengaged from the education system. The main focus is on building positive relationships between the staff and students. The program has two sessions, morning and afternoon, and each session begins and ends with a check-in where students and staff share how they felt when they started the day and how they felt when they ended the day. Students and staff also share a meal together as a way to aid positive relationship building. The program offers individualized academic components alongside group and individual counseling, life skills training, parent/teen mediation, job readiness and social and recreational activities. Intake for the program occurs twice a year in September and February. Referrals are accepted from students, families or professionals.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 39: VANCOUVER

- 8J/9J is a three year program for students in Grades 8, 9 and 10 with an academic and fine arts focus. Students have strong academic and artistic skills, but have struggled in the traditional school setting. The program focuses on fine arts works to foster a sense of accomplishment and raise self-esteem. When students have completed Grade 10 they are expected to return to the mainstream school setting or move on to a senior alternative program to

graduate. The program can accommodate 22 students and is staffed by a teacher, a youth and family worker and an alternative program worker. 8J/9J is located on a mainstream school property. Intake occurs in September and January. Students are required to complete an application and undergo an interview. Students are also required to take the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT) and achieve a score equivalent to a Grade 5 level.

- Tupper Alternative Program (TAP) is located in a secondary school setting where students can access school clubs and extra curricular activities, sports teams and support from the school administration. The program is designed for students, ages 13 to 16. Students are integrated into the larger school for various elective courses with the intention of eventual full integration into the mainstream classroom setting. TAP has the capacity for 44 students, is staffed by two teachers, a youth and family worker and an alternative program worker. The program has a continuous intake process.
- Take-A-Hike is a unique program for high-risk students ages 16 to 19, which incorporates experiential learning techniques through an outdoor adventure-based curriculum, with self-paced academic course for Grades 8 to 12. The program provides hands-on experience and a balance between academics and personal growth activities. Generally, students have been out of the education system for over 18 months and the program is specifically designed to address their academic, social and behavioural needs. Through the adventure-based component (backpacking, orienteering, canoeing, snow-shoeing and other similar activities), students build trust, develop positive behaviours, and learn new coping skills. Students have access to individual and group counseling. The program has capacity for 40 students and has two teachers, two youth and family workers and a clinical therapist. Students are referred by counselors, a youth and family worker or an administrator.
- Cedar Walk is a day treatment program specifically for First Nations youth, ages 13 to 18. Students are able to work at their own pace on Grade 8 to 10 academic course work and electives that include: life skills, cultural enrichment, a video project, CAPP, physical education, Arts/Crafts, educational outings and cooking. Students also receive employment preparation support with resume writing, job search and job placement. The program has the capacity for 20 students, has one teacher, two youth counselors/recreation workers, one project manager and a part-time cook. Students are referred through a joint MCFD and VSB screening committee.
- Gateway Alternative Program (GAP) is for street-involved youth, ages 16 to 18 (although youth as young as 13 may be admitted). The program provides students with recreational activities, academic upgrading in core academic courses and job readiness skills, with a focus on basic literacy and life skills. The program has the capacity for 20 students and has one counselor/group facilitator and one teacher. Referrals are made through a joint MCFD and VSB screening committee.