



## NEXT STEPS WORKSHOPS with MARGINALIZED and STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH in BC



# IMPROVING THE ODDS

## NEXT STEPS WORKSHOPS with MARGINALIZED and STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH in BC

### **The McCreary Centre Society, 2008**

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**THE MCCREARY CENTRE SOCIETY** is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and youth leadership projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

#### **Areas of interest include:**

- Health behaviours
- Health promotion
- Youth participation and leadership skills development

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necessarily represent the official policy  
of the Province of British Columbia.

## *Special thanks:*

*To all the participants who volunteered their  
time, shared their experiences and ideas and  
provided a voice for marginalized and street-  
involved youth across BC.*

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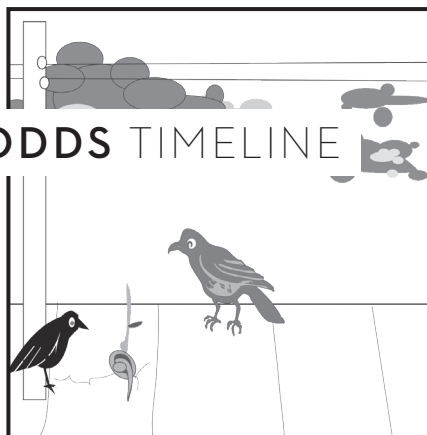


## AGAINST THE ODDS TIMELINE

### JUNE 2006

McCreary funded to conduct a survey of street involved youth in BC.

Advisory committee formed for the project which included representatives from MCFD and agencies working with marginalized and street involved youth in nine communities with a prevalence of sexual exploitation.

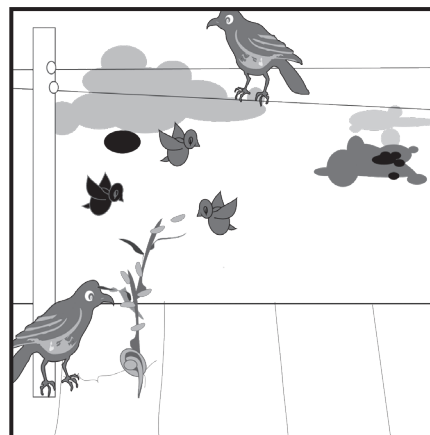


### JUNE-AUGUST 2006

Survey developed, piloted and finalised with input from service providers, current and former street involved youth.

### SEPTEMBER 2006

Two representatives from each of the nine communities were hired as Research Assistants. One was a community worker and the other was a youth with experience of street involvement. The representatives came together with representatives from the other communities and were trained in their roles as Research Assistants on the project.

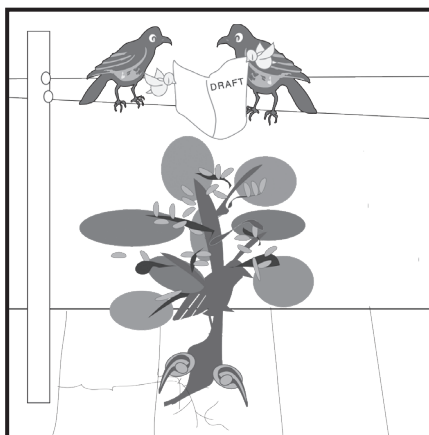


### OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2006

Data collection took place in the communities.

### JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2007

Data analysis and report preparation.



### FEBRUARY-MARCH 2007

Community Research Assistants and Advisory Committee members came together, reviewed and edited the draft report, discussed their experiences and contributed to the preparation of the final report.

### APRIL-MAY 2007

Conference presentations of the report and its findings by MCS staff and youth research assistants.

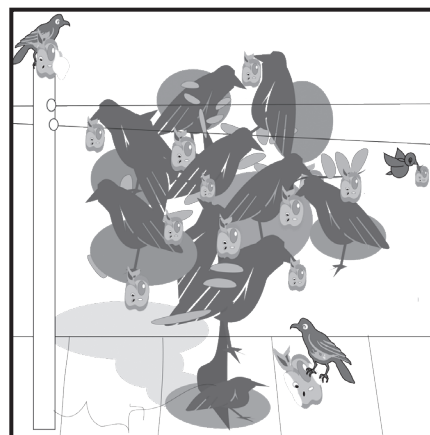


### JUNE 2007

Research Assistants gathered in Vancouver to develop Next Steps workshop curriculum, and a series of fact sheets from the report to take the survey results back to marginalized and street involved youth in their communities.

### SEPTEMBER 07-JANUARY 2008

Next Steps workshops took place in communities across the province. Fact sheets and copies of the research report distributed.



### JANUARY 2008

Community representatives and youth who participated in the Next steps workshops gathered in Vancouver to discuss the findings of the workshops, provide input into the Next steps final report and create three Claymation videos.

# INTRODUCTION

## NEXT STEPS

workshop curriculum  
and reports are  
available at  
[www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)

## AGAINST THE ODDS

*Against the Odds: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC* (McCreary Centre Society, 2007) reported the findings of a survey completed by 762 marginalized and street-involved youth in 9 communities across BC. To gather information, youth researchers with knowledge of street-involvement along with staff and volunteers from local agencies administered a pencil and paper survey. The survey, which was a repeat of a 2000 McCreary study (No place to Call Home) asked questions about health status, health-promoting practices, and health risk behaviours.

## THE NEXT STEPS

The Next Steps is a workshop series that was designed to provide youth with an opportunity to discuss the results of McCreary Centre Society youth health research, to make recommendations for change, and to plan projects for improving the health of youth in communities across BC.

To date, Next Steps workshops have been conducted in response to surveys in schools, custody centres and with specific youth populations such as Aboriginal youth and lesbian, gay and bisexual youth.

Following the release of the *Against the Odds* report, a Next Steps workshop curriculum was developed to share the research findings with marginalized and street-involved youth in communities that participated in the survey. The aim of the workshop was to offer youth the opportunity to discuss the *Against the Odds* results, and to make recommendations based on the findings and their own experiences, which could improve the health of marginalized and street-involved youth in their community and across the province.

This series of Next Steps workshops was facilitated or co-facilitated by McCreary's Youth Participation Coordinator in conjunction with local youth workers and/or youth with experience of street-involvement. The workshops were held in a variety of locations, including youth drop-in centres, Aboriginal friendship centres, youth resource centres, youth shelters and affordable housing units. In total, approximately 95 youth and 20 adults participated in 10 workshops across BC. Youth ranged in age from 14 to 22 with slightly more females than males in attendance.

## NEXT STEPS WORKSHOPS

TOOK PLACE IN: **THE NEXT STEPS WORKSHOP** CONSISTED OF TWO MAJOR COMPONENTS:

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Vancouver<br>(3 locations) | 1. Discussion of the research findings among youth who may have participated in the survey or who were currently marginalized and street-involved. |
| Nanaimo                    |  |
| Victoria                   | 2. Creation of meaningful suggestions and ideas for action.  |
| Prince George              |  |
| Surrey                     |  |

**DISCUSSING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**  
The workshop began with a trivia game based on the research results published in *Against the Odds*. Youth were shown questions highlighting statistics from the survey and asked to guess what answer they thought youth across BC gave. After each question, youth chose an answer and had a chance to explain why they chose it. Participants then discussed how the results compared to what they saw in their own communities and to their own and their friend's experiences. This section of the workshop also gave youth an opportunity to discuss what programs and services were available and helpful to them in their community.

## SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

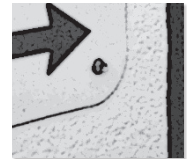
After the research was presented, youth worked together to decide on priority issues for their community and to make suggestions to tackle health challenges and to promote healthy development among marginalized and street-involved youth. For example, youth in Surrey felt that the priority needs in their community were a 24-hour youth centre and a program for youth aging out of government care. They then spent some time discussing what they felt these services should look like.

Youth in every community offered their own unique perspectives, experiences and ideas, yet many themes emerged which were common across communities.

The following is a summary of what youth said about the priority health issues identified through the *Against the Odds* Next Steps workshop discussions, and their ideas for action to address these.



## YOUTHS' PERSPECTIVE & IDEAS FOR ACTION



# HOME & FAMILY . . .

## HOUSING

The single most important topic for youth in every workshop was the need for accessible housing in their community. This included a need for emergency shelters, transitional housing and safe and affordable housing.

While many of the participants received government support for housing, most reported experiencing difficulty finding a place that was clean, safe and affordable. Youth described waiting for months to find housing and resorting to living in dilapidated accommodations in neighborhoods in which they felt unsafe.

### *Youth Said*

- Affordable housing is almost impossible to find.
- Landlords don't want to rent to young people, even if youth have money to pay rent.
- It is difficult to find housing that is clean, and safe.
- Finding affordable housing is not just a Vancouver problem.
- Waitlists for youth shelters are too long.
- Age 19 is too young to have to leave youth shelters and it leaves older youth with nowhere safe to go.
- Young mothers and youth without children have different housing needs; mothers get complaints about being up at night with their babies.
- Youth in Nanaimo praised the youth housing unit. They reported that they enjoyed living in the unit because they had their own space. They felt that this was really important but not available in many other places.

*"It's hard to find a place; it took me a year and a half to find a nice place".*

*"You can't wait a few months for low income housing".*

### ➤ ACTION

#### **Provide more safe, clean and affordable housing**

- Open more youth shelters and emergency accommodation.
- Provide more transitional housing.
- Provide more places to rent.
- Offer support to youth so they can keep housing when they do get it.
- Create more low-income housing for youth under 16 and over 19.
- Help youth transition into adulthood by opening a youth shelter for young people over 19.
- Encourage landlords to rent to youth. They could be educated and offered incentives to provide accommodation to young people.
- Create a low-income housing unit specifically for young mothers and pregnant youth. In the marginalized and street-involved youth survey, youth on Vancouver Island reported the highest rates of pregnancy or causing a pregnancy (36%). It was therefore not surprising that youth in the workshops in Victoria and Nanaimo emphasized the needs for services for young mothers.

## LEAVING HOME

In each community, participants almost unanimously chose 13–14 as the age that they themselves had left home and that they thought most youth in the survey had said they were first kicked out or ran away from home.

Youth had a number of suggestions to support 13–14 year olds who have run away or been kicked out of home, and to help them before things got so bad that they ended up on the streets.

**Q** What was the average age youth in the survey said they were first kicked out or ran away from home?

**A** 10–11   **B** 13–14   **C** 16–17

Correct Answer: **B** 13–14

Majority of youth chose: **B** 13–14

*"This applies to me"*

## Youth Said

- 13–14 was the age that they and many of their peers had left home.
- At this age, youth are rebelling and testing boundaries.
- Puberty hits and youth experience new emotions and begin to explore new identities.
- At this age, youth start to make new friends who might be a bad influence.
- Youth don't get along with their parents so they either leave or get kicked out.
- There are too many rules at home.
- There may be violence in the home so the street is a better place.
- Youth are not ready to fend for themselves at this age and need a lot of help.
- There are not enough services or supports available for 13–14 year olds.

*Youth kicked out at 13 or 14  
"are still really young, really  
vulnerable, and really  
impressionable"*

*"A home should be a place  
where you can go and be  
loved, not neglected"*

## ACTION

### Provide support to younger youth

- Focus outreach efforts on youth who are 12, 13 and 14 to work through problems before they become too big to handle.
- "Work with the whole family" to help youth work through their problems, both before they leave and after they have left home.
- Start a mentorship program where pre-teens are linked with role-models so they have "someone they can talk to they can trust."
- Provide additional practical and emotional supports to 13–14 year olds when they leave home.
- Provide housing for younger youth who do not fit into the age category defined by most shelters.
- Create transitional housing units to provide for the needs of younger youth.



## GOVERNMENT CARE

Youth were not surprised by the high number of marginalized and street-involved young people who were, or had been, in government care. Most workshop participants reported that they had experience living in care themselves.

Q

What percent of youth in the survey had spent time either living with foster parents or in a group home (government care)?

A 5% B 20% C 40%

Correct Answer: C 40%

Majority of youth chose: C 40%

*"I think 40% because all my friends are in foster care"*

## Youth Said

### ACTION

- Foster care is tough because it requires moving from home to home.
- Youth in government care often do not know what their rights are and what they are entitled to.
- When youth in care have been told their rights they report a more positive experience of government care.

*"There should be advocacy for younger children [in care]"*

### Ensure all youth in government care know their rights

- When young people enter government care they should have their rights explained to them and they should be told what resources are out there for them (i.e. how much money is supposed to go to them, when they can see their families, their right to privacy).
- Youth in government care should be paired with a mentor and/or advocate who would be independent and support them as they navigated their way through the system. Ideally, this mentor or advocate might be an older youth who had been through the care system.





# SCHOOL . . .

Youth found it very surprising that young people who completed the survey were more likely to attend school if they had a pet. They felt that if youth had a pet to look after they would be less likely to go to school.

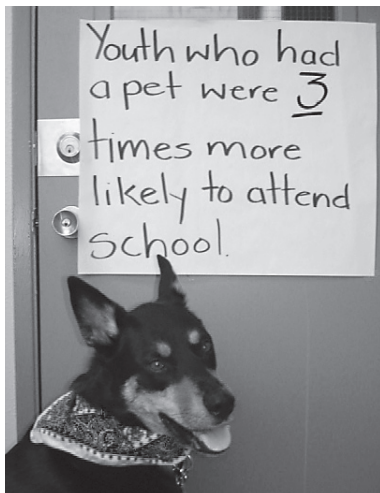
## Youth Said

- Youth want more encouragement and fewer barriers to go to school.
- Pets give you unconditional companionship.
- Services that allow pets are a good thing.
- It's good to see that a number of shelters and day programs have begun making accommodations for pets.

## ACTION

### Make more services for youth pet-friendly

- Allow pets at youth services and hang-outs.
- Allow pets to stay in shelters.
- Open a kennel at alternative schools so that youth with pets can go to class.



Are youth more or less likely to attend school if they have a pet?

A More

B Less

Correct Answer: A More

Majority of youth chose: B Less

*"I went to school and no one is there with a pet"*

END NOTE: When youth from across the province who had participated in the Next Steps workshop series came together at the end of the project to share their experiences, youth from Kelowna and Victoria were able to report positive changes to the way pets are being treated in local services. For example, one local Kelowna drop in centre has purchased pet carriers to house pets in, while youth attend the centre.

Youth participants spoke of strong connections to school and the positive supportive role that it plays in their lives. They also acknowledged the difficulty of staying connected to school when they are marginalized and/or street-involved.

**Q** How many youth in the survey who lived in abandoned buildings, tents, cars, squats, or on the street attended school?

**A** 1 in 3   **B** 1 in 25   **C** 1 in 50

Correct Answer: **A** 1 in 3  
Majority of youth chose: **A** 1 in 3 and **B** 1 in 25

## Youth Said

- Youth go to school because it's warm, social, and prevents them from getting bored.
- School is somewhere to go, when there is nowhere else to go.
- Many workshop participants reported liking alternative education programs because they offer them more one-on-one support than mainstream school.
- Attendance requirements at alternative education programs are more flexible than in mainstream school, and this helps them to stay connected and attend even when they are not in stable housing.
- A number of participants asked how anyone is supposed to go to school if they are not properly cared for.
- It's hard to go to school when they are hung over or on drugs.
- It's hard to go to school when they don't feel safe or accepted.
- Youth often miss school because they are dealing with personal problems, and with issues from their past.

## ➤ ACTION

### Support youth to stay connected to school

- Provide counseling and one-on-one support to youth.
- Hire more classroom support so teachers can have more one-on-one time with students. Youth felt that by strengthening relationships between youth and teachers there is increased accountability to attend school and it also helps youth work through difficult times with someone who cares about them.
- Get youth in surrounding communities together to support each other and help each other to stay connected to school.
- Create a system where points are awarded for attendance and completing assignments and can be used to take part in recreational activities to make school fun and give youth an incentive to attend.

# HEALTH . . .

The majority of youth in the workshop reported that they could get the prescription medications that they needed, but felt that this was not the case for many other youth.

**Q** How many youth reported that they could not get prescription medication when they needed it?

**A** 1 in 2   **B** 1 in 6   **C** 1 in 16

Correct Answer: **B** 1 in 6

Majority of youth chose: **A** 1 in 2

## Youth Said

- Youth clinics give out medication to youth who need it, but they are always booked up.
- Sometimes clinics will give youth free samples of the medication they need so they do not have to get a prescription.
- Some youth cannot afford medication even if they have a prescription.
- Prescription medications are sometimes given when it would be better to provide counseling or other forms of help.

*"I wouldn't mind seeing a counselor, but it's expensive"*

## ACTION

### Improve access to health care for youth

- Have doctors visit youth drop-in centres and shelters to make sure youth can see them when they need to.
- Have longer opening hours for youth health clinics so that doctors can see more youth.
- Provide alternatives to medication such as physiotherapy and counseling, to keep youth from taking medication. Ensure that these services are free to youth in government care.



**END NOTE:** When youth from Kelowna and Victoria joined others at the Next Steps wrap up event they reported that they now have a doctor who visits the youth clinic and this is a well-accessed and appreciated service.

# SPORT & RECREATION . . .

Throughout the workshops, sports and recreation came up as a way to increase protective factors in youths' lives. The positive value of sports involvement was recognized by youth, yet they were also very aware of the often prohibitive costs and challenges of participating.

**Q** Did youth become more or less involved in sports after they became street-involved?

**A More      B Less**

Correct Answer: **A and B**—while sports with a coach decreased from 42% to 14%, sports without a coach increased from 41% to 64%

Majority of youth chose: **B Less**

**END NOTE:** Since the workshop series was completed a youth gym has opened at a drop-in centre in Kelowna.

## Youth Said

- Many participants reported skateboarding and playing hacky sack and many guessed correctly that these activities increased after youth became street-involved.
- Sports and other fun activities give youth a release from their problems, and also keep them busy and away from drugs and alcohol.
- Youth would like to be able to play on sports teams including softball, hockey and soccer.
- Participants in Victoria reported that youth can get recreation passes at youth drop-in and detox centres, but this is not well advertised and not many youth know about these passes.

## ACTION

### Increase opportunities for involvement in sports and recreation activities

- Have more free healthy activities, evening dances and sports equipment available to street involved youth through youth drop-ins and shelters.
- Provide government subsidies to allow youth in care to participate in organized sports activities instead of deducting fees from their monthly cheques.
- Have cultural nights with art, songs and smudges.
- Have more activities that are specifically for Aboriginal youth.
- Provide free childcare at drop-in centres and rec centres to help out young parents.
- Create a night at drop-in centres just for older youth so they can interact and do recreational activities with youth similar in age.
- Youth in the North felt strongly that there was a need for more cultural events in their communities. They talked of the need for more community-wide events which involve all young people but also events specifically for street involved youth such as art, music, and dancing.

# SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR...

Youth were concerned that older youth were less likely to use a condom, especially because workshop participants in every community felt that youth knew how and where to get free condoms. The overwhelming majority of participants felt that nothing could be done to get more youth to use condoms.

Q

Who reported the lowest rate of condom use?

A 14 year olds   B 18 year olds

Correct Answer: **B** 18 year olds  
(50% of 18 year olds reported using condoms at last sexual intercourse compared to 66% of 14 year olds)  
Majority of youth chose: **A** 14 year olds

## Youth Said

- Condoms are easy to find; there are many different locations where youth can get them for free.
- Younger youth might be using condoms more because there is more education on condom use now than in the past.
- Youth get less worried about pregnancy and STI's over time, so after a while they stop using condoms.
- Youth who are in a relationship often won't use a condom with their partner. One participant cited difficulty getting her partners to use a condom, saying "most guys have said to me 'I'm not going to use a condom'".
- Youth get their information about safe sex from peers.
- It seems like unplanned pregnancies are becoming more frequent.
- Many of the participants reported being parents themselves.

*"14 year olds don't get pregnant often, so it seems like they are remembering to use [condoms]"*

*"I know a lot of 15, 16 year olds who are knocked up"*

*"People just don't care about safe sex"*

## ACTION

### Increase youths' awareness and assertiveness around the need to wear a condom

- Educate youth about sex and health at drop-in centres to encourage youth to use condoms.
- Providing youth with pamphlets on the topic of sexual health and resources where youth can get help such as on bulletin boards at youth drop-ins.
- Teach youth the skills to be assertive about their partner wearing a condom.

# SUBSTANCE USE . . .

Substance use was a topic of much discussion in the workshops. Participants identified drug and alcohol use as an important issue among their peers and often as a barrier to attaining healthy outcomes in their lives.

Participants were surprised that the use of most drugs had not increased. There was a great deal of discussion in each community about the prevalence of crack cocaine use.

**Q** In Vancouver and Victoria, which of the following drugs did more youth report using in 2006 than in 2000?

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>A</b> Hallucinogens                   | <b>F</b> Amphetamines |
| <b>B</b> Cocaine                         | <b>G</b> Heroin       |
| <b>C</b> Mushrooms                       | <b>H</b> All of them  |
| <b>D</b> Prescription meds without an Rx | <b>I</b> None of them |
| <b>E</b> Inhalants and crystal meth      |                       |

Correct Answer VANCOUVER:  
**I** None (But the method has changed—injecting drugs has increased)

Correct Answer VICTORIA: **E** Inhalants

Majority of youth chose: **F** Crystal Meth, Cocaine, Heroin

## Youth Said

### ACTION

- The way youth use drugs is more important than what drugs they are using. Participants were concerned about the rise in injecting as a method of drug use. One youth explained this statistic by stating, “You start injecting when you can’t get high.”
- Some participants reported not using drugs or alcohol at all.
- Drugs and alcohol often get blamed for youth becoming street-involved but in BC you can stay away from drugs and still not have a job or a place to sleep.
- It is important for youth to have supportive adults in their lives. Youth workers, alternative education program teachers and parole officers were among the adults identified by participants as the most helpful when dealing with drug and alcohol use.
- There are often no working payphones in communities because they are broken or have been removed to stop people using them for drug deals.
- Participants in Victoria were surprised about the increase in inhalant use as they did not use them or know of friends who used them.

**Provide affordable prevention and treatment options for youth who are using, or at risk of using drugs and alcohol**

- Police should crack down on drug dealers, not youth who are using drugs.
- Install serviced payphones in downtown areas that can be used to report discarded needles.
- Hire more drug and alcohol counselors and more outreach workers to deal specifically with drug and alcohol use.
- To prevent youth relying on drugs and alcohol to cope with their problems, allow government funding for counseling. One youth stated, “All my friends and a lot of youth I know, we’ve got lots of issues, issues we can’t deal with by ourselves but we can’t afford the help to deal with them”.

*“It is so easy to get crack, crystal; you get offered them all the time”*

During the workshops youth shared many personal stories about what had helped them deal with their drug and alcohol use and what interfered with their recovery. Many youth from outside Vancouver spoke of not accessing drug and alcohol services because they were located in Vancouver and the youth either could not afford to travel there, were scared to make the journey, or did not want to leave the support and familiarity of their family, friends and community.

**Q** How many youth in the survey said that they had received drug or alcohol treatment?

**A** 1 in 2   **B** 1 in 4   **C** 1 in 10

Correct Answer: **B** 1 in 4  
Majority of youth chose: **B** 1 in 4

## Youth Said

- Treatment is difficult to access because of long waiting-lists.
- Some workshop participants had waited up to a year to get into treatment.
- Going to treatment is scary for youth, and this is especially so if they have to leave their home community.
- Treatment centres are often a long way from a youth's home and this puts some youth off going or they do not stay once they get there, because they feel isolated and are separated from their support networks.
- Some youth felt that drug and alcohol counseling was only effective if youth decide to quit themselves, while others found that court ordered treatment was also helpful.
- Two participants reported that their probation officers were helpful when going through court-ordered treatment.

*"Not all [street-involved youth] use drugs"*

*"Too many youth are addicted"*

*"A lot more people end up in jail than in treatment"*

## ACTION

### Improve the services offered to youth who need treatment for drugs and alcohol

- Open more treatment centres to reduce the long waiting lists.
- Open treatment centres in more communities so youth don't have to travel as far.
- Assist families who do not have transportation to be able to visit the treatment centres.
- Open sweat lodges at all treatment centres to encourage healing.
- Offer more support groups for youth who are not in treatment and for those who have finished treatment.



# FEELING SAFE . . .

Based on their own experiences, youth expected that a large number of young people who had participated in the survey had indicated not feeling safe where they slept.

How many youth said they didn't always feel safe where they slept at night?

A 1 in 2 B 1 in 4 C 1 in 10

Correct Answer: B 1 in 4  
Majority of youth chose: A 1 in 2

*"I don't feel safe  
anywhere I sleep"*

## Youth Said

- To stay safe, many youth sleep in groups or with dogs.
- Participants and their friends often did not feel safe where they slept.
- Participants reported feeling unsafe sleeping both outside and in shelters.
- Many participants felt they could not trust anyone, with one youth saying, "Friends on drugs will always disappoint you."
- Participants reported sleeping on the streets because there were too many barriers to accessing shelters.

*"I've heard a lot of stories of not being able to sleep at night 'cause of not feeling safe, especially youth".*

## ACTION

### Provide more shelters where youth can feel safe

- There is a need to build more youth shelters across the province.
- Open more shelters for youth under 16.
- Open shelters for youth aged 19 and over as they are not ready for adult shelters and do not feel safe there.
- Open 24 hour youth shelters that offer a place to stay, a phone to contact parents and life skill programs.





# SEXUAL EXPLOITATION . . .

In the survey only 1 in 20 youth reported income in the last 30 days from the sex trade, yet more than 1 in 3 reported they had ever traded sex for money or goods such as drugs, alcohol or a place to stay.

**Q** Has the rate of sexual exploitation (the exchange of sex for money, clothes, food, drugs or a place to stay) increased or decreased?

**A** Increased

**B** Decreased

Correct Answer: **A** Increased  
Majority of youth said: **A** Increased

## Youth Said

- Awareness of the issue of sexual exploitation is increasing.
- Sexual exploitation is increasing. “There are young girls working on every corner.”
- Youth often work to pay for drugs.
- Sexual exploitation may have decreased because more people are aware of it.
- Many youth trade sex for money, clothes, food, drugs or a place to stay but do not consider this sexual exploitation.
- Youth don’t always trade sex on the street.
- Some youth face sexual exploitation in the home.
- One youth was in a program that focuses on women at risk who wish to exit the sex trade and felt it was a positive experience.

## ACTION

**Develop programs that increase awareness of sexual exploitation and provide resources to youth who are being sexually exploited**

- Offer programs about sexual exploitation at drop-in centres because raising awareness can help to decrease it.
- Make resources for sexually exploited youth more visible by posting them on bulletin boards at youth drop-ins.
- Offer support to youth who may be actively involved in the sex trade and want to get out.

# TRANSITIONS TO ADULthood ...

Many of the youth in the workshops were either starting to think about, or had already begun to deal with, the issue of turning 19 and “aging out” of youth services. Many felt uncomfortable or unprepared to access adult services and particularly to stay in a shelter with adults. A number of participants reported that at 19 they still identified as a youth and not as an adult.

When asked what they would like to see in a program for youth over 19, participants suggested:

- Specific services for young adults ages 19–29
- One-on-one outreach workers
- Social workers and transition workers
- Healthcare services
- Childcare support
- Free education to finish grade 12
- Shelter and Safe house
- Life skills training
- Help finding a place to rent
- Detox specifically for young adults
- Job-skills training
- Counseling
- Income assistance
- Education and awareness raising on sexual exploitation

## Youth Said

- When youth ‘age out’ of government care they have nowhere to go because a lot of youth services stop when young people turn 19.

*“Keep people off the street, out of the cold and able to keep jobs”*

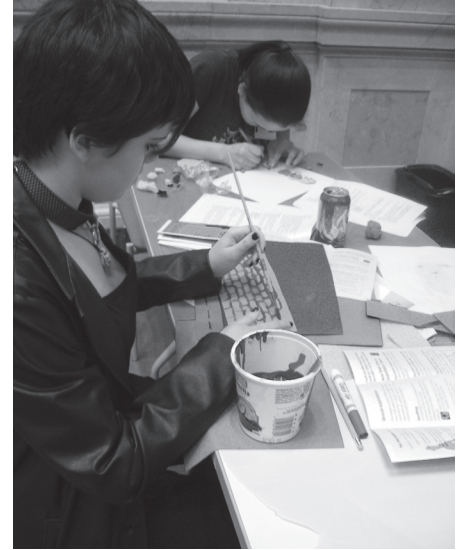
## ACTION

### Provide more programs for youth turning 19

- Create programs to help youth transition to adulthood.



END NOTE: A roundtable discussion about transitioning to adulthood was included in the wrap up event at the end of the project. Youth who had participated in the Next Steps workshops discussed the issue with their peers from other communities. Common themes which were identified mirrored those of the individual community discussions and included the need to improve supports, services and access to services for young people aged 19 and over. Most participants expressed the importance of support from friends, family, and youth workers during this time.



As with the workshop participants in the different communities, a major concern was the lack of support available for young people as they age out of government care. Many participants who had experience of the care system emphasized that they lacked the knowledge and support to live independently, yet they had no choice but to do so. Youth aged under-19 reported that they felt that existing youth services were helpful but feared losing these when they turned 19 or as a result of funding cuts. Youth who were both younger and older than 19 reported not feeling comfortable accessing adult support services, or in many cases, did not know of their existence.

Youth felt that the transition to adulthood would be much easier if specific services were available to youth aged between 18 and 25 that explained their rights to them, taught them budgeting and other money management skills and provided free day care and other services for young parents. *The Useful Tips for Youth Leaving Care* booklet and the Office of the Representative for Child and Youth were highlighted as good sources of support for youth turning 19 in government care.

# SOCIAL & COMMUNITY SUPPORTS . . .

The positive effect that youth services have on the lives of marginalized and street-involved youth was evident at every workshop. From drop-in centres that provide youth with a safe space and opportunities to build life skills, to shelters that provide a place to sleep and shower, to the youth workers who act as a constant support in youth's often chaotic lives, youth services were consistently praised for their positive and meaningful impact.

Youths' suggestions for change most often came down to building on services that already exist. For example, they expressed a need for more outreach workers, shelters that could accommodate more youth, longer hours for drop-ins, more opportunities for job training and more drug and alcohol counselors.

Although the feedback on services available to youth was overwhelmingly positive, youth from outside Vancouver were keen to emphasize that many services do not exist in their community. They strongly believed that this was because of the myth that homelessness is a "big city" problem, and as a result, Vancouver received funding for services and resources whereas their smaller communities did not. Additionally, youth in Kelowna spoke of the challenge of accessing programs and shelters because of inadequate transportation services in the area.

## Youth Said

- Youth turn to friends because they are good listeners.
- Programs like Reconnect (a provincial program to help street-involved youth leave the street and to prevent other youth from becoming street-involved) are very helpful.
- Social workers help youth without looking down on them.
- Social workers help youth find a home and get them into detox.
- All youth want someone in their life that they can turn to when they need someone to talk to, and to "just call someone and they'll be there".
- In every workshop in every community, participants discussed the positive impact that youth workers had made on their lives.

## ACTION

### Provide more outreach and other trained workers to assist youth

- Hire more outreach workers, including specialist outreach workers for drug and alcohol users.
- Offer more sensitivity and diversity training for police officers (focusing on youth, women and Aboriginal communities). This training would lessen negative interactions between youth and police, and increase the likelihood that youth would turn to them for help.



Who are the top three people youth are most likely to turn to when they have a problem?

- |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| A Youth workers | D Police          |
| B Social Worker | E Doctor or Nurse |
| C Family        | F Friends         |

Correct Answer: **A** Youth workers, **C** Family, **F** Friends  
Majority of youth: Guessed correctly

Youth in every region chose either shelter, safe and affordable housing or both as their answer to the question, “What are the top two services or programs needed in your community?” It was also the answer they thought most youth in the survey would have chosen.

## Youth Said

- Each community needs all of these services.
- Youth need more options for education and work experience.
- There should be job training for well paid jobs, rather than for jobs that pay minimum wage.

*“There were a lot of things my social worker did that I hated [at the time], but I saw later that it was in my best interest”*

## ACTION

### Provide more services and programs in every community

- Open job skill training for youth at drop-in centres.
- Offer more job-training and certification programs so youth can build their resumes and become more employable.
- Hire youth as staff at drop-ins and shelters to help them get involved, earn money and gain experience.

Q What were the top two services or programs youth felt were in greatest need in their community?

**CORRECT ANSWERS**  
ACROSS ALL COMMUNITIES  
Housing services and job training

Youth chose: Housing services





#### YOUTH HELPING YOUTH

Young people across the province were keen to get involved in helping other youth in their community. There were many suggestions such as organizing sporting events, fundraising, mentoring younger youth and other more community specific ideas.

Youth in Nanaimo were concerned about the number of street-involved youth who were pregnant and/or parents and wanted to do something to help them. While they praised the services of the Nanaimo Mother & Baby Society, which offers a variety of programs including classes on childbirth, parenting, infant stimulation, pre and post-natal yoga and play groups, they also wanted to see more services for young mothers.

The youth suggested working with the community to start a 'baby-drive.' The baby-drive would be youth run and would operate like a food or bottle drive, collecting diapers, formula (including soy based formula for lactose-intolerant babies), baby food and clothing for babies and toddlers.

#### ACTION

##### Provide 24-Hour Youth Centres

Many participants complained that youth centre opening hours were not long enough and spoke of the need for a 24-hour youth centre in their community. When asked what they would like to see provided at such a centre, participants gave the following suggestions:

- Outreach workers
- Drug and Alcohol counseling
- A weekly food bank
- Phone and Internet access
- Showers and personal hygiene products
- A washer and dryer
- A resource wall with information on safe houses, detox options, suicide prevention, sexual exploitation and sexual health
- A kennel or other safe place for pets
- A childcare centre
- An art room
- Computers
- A smoking room
- Comfortable couches



# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE . . .

Although youth in the workshops reported that transitioning to adulthood can be a daunting prospect for those who lack the supports available to their peers, many continue to show resilience and an optimistic view of the future.

Like youth who completed the survey, youth who participated in the workshops had many different opinions about what the future held for them.

Q

Where do most youth see themselves in 5 years?

- A Still on the street (1/25)
- B With a job (1/2)
- C With a home of own (1/3)
- D Dead (1/10)

Correct Answer: **B** With a job

Youth chose: **A** Still on the street, **C** Home of own

## Youth Said

- Many participants reported that they are not thinking about the future, with one youth saying, “what I think about is how am I going to live the next day.”
- One participant reported he thought he would not live past 20 because of the violence youth face on the street and at home.
- One participant noted that it is hard to survive if you are not good at budgeting.

*“Life can look so sad and not worth it, but it is amazing to be alive”*

## Youth Also Said

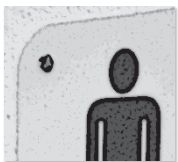
*“In the future I see myself . . .”*

- Graduating from high school
- Going to college
- Having my own place to call home
- Becoming a pediatrician
- Getting off drugs and alcohol
- Becoming a martial artist/  
Being an amateur wrestler
- Cleaning up my behaviour
- Being a father/Starting a family
- Becoming a Chef
- Being a role model
- Continuing to work with the elderly
- Starting a dance group for youth
- Helping out my peers when they need it





# WRAPPING UP



# YOUTHS' FEEDBACK

## ON THE NEXT STEPS WORKSHOPS

As the workshop series was in the planning stage, several people in communities that participated in the survey were skeptical about the idea of conducting a series of Next Steps workshops about the findings of the Against the Odds report stating that marginalized and street-involved youth would not be interested, would not be able to concentrate and remain engaged for a 2 to 3 hour workshop, and would not attend unless they were paid to do so. All of these notions proved unfounded, with youth in many communities staying behind after the workshop was scheduled to end, to continue discussing the research results and their relevance to their own lives and those of their friends. They had a wealth of ideas and suggestions to improve the lot of youth in their community and showed genuine compassion and a desire to make changes so that other youth would not go through what they had been through.

Youth were also prepared to ‘walk the talk’ and were looking for opportunities to get involved with local services or to find a way to remain involved with McCreary and the Against the Odds project.

### What youth liked best about the workshop...

- “Brainstorming about health, sex, house, work, substance use”
- “Being involved”
- “Everything, it was amazing”
- “Talking about experiences that have happened to us”
- “Being heard and not blocked off”
- “Hear everyone’s views and experiences”

### What youth would like to see come out of the workshop...

- “More housing for young moms”
- “More support for youth”
- “To see our ideas go to work”

### Other thoughts about the workshop:

- “This workshop is sweet and helped me and others to speak out”
- “It’s a start to change in the community”
- “A lot of people participated and I learned a lot”
- “We might actually do something active and helpful”
- “The numbers are in and are pretty accurate”
- “I have learned people are there for youth”
- “I think getting more people/youth involved with these issues will strengthen our community”

### EVALUATION

Among youth who provided written feedback about the workshops, the majority of participants felt that the workshops were “very worthwhile” (65%) and they had a chance to express their ideas and opinions “a lot” (67%).

# IMPROVING THE ODDS—

## NEXT STEPS WRAP UP EVENT

### SHAPING THIS REPORT

At the conclusion of the workshop series, youth who had participated were invited to Vancouver for a wrap-up event. Despite terrible weather conditions, including unexpected snow storms, youth from Prince George, Kelowna, Kamloops, Vancouver, Surrey, Victoria and Nanaimo joined McCreary staff to discuss the findings from the workshops, agree on the key points and messages, decide how these should be presented, and talk about what had happened in their community since the workshops had taken place.

Youth agreed that while the messages provided by youth across the province were largely the same, each region had its own unique lens. Having reviewed the key findings from the Against the Odds report (on which the Next Steps workshops were based), considered the feedback from young people in each of the different communities, and worked on a draft of this report, the youth worked together to pick out three key points from the workshops that they all agreed were important to emphasize.

- Age 19 is too young to lose youth services. There is a need for better services to help youth transition to adulthood.
- Outreach workers are very important to youth.
- There needs to be programs that continue to raise awareness of sexual exploitation.

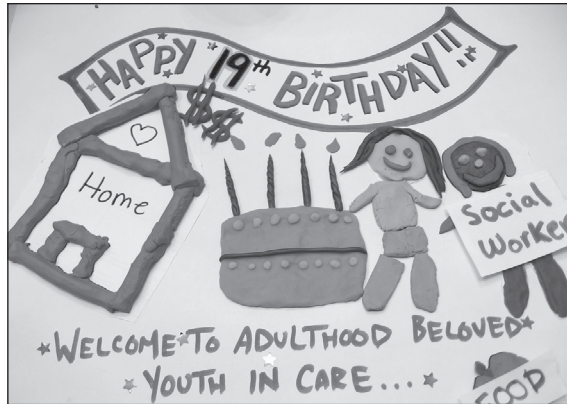
### CLAYMATION

The youth then worked in three small groups to produce claymation videos which highlighted these 3 key points.

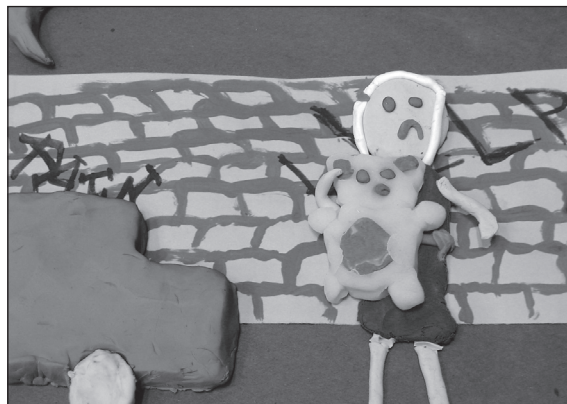
The making of the three films was facilitated by McCreary in conjunction with Reel Youth and can be viewed at [reelyouth.ca](http://reelyouth.ca), as well as at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca). The films have been entered into the Vancouver International Film Festival.



*Stills from the claymation workshop*



**Happy Birthday** is the story of a youth turning 19 in government care and highlights the need to continue to offer services for youth beyond their 19th birthday.



**Hidden Prison** shows a young girls' first exposure to sexual exploitation and the need for programs and services to support youth who are sexually exploited.



**Homelessness** emphasizes the vital role played by outreach workers in the lives of marginalized and street-involved youth.

# SUMMARY

Youths' key points for action to assist marginalized and street-involved youth were consistent across the workshops in every community:

- Provide more safe, clean and affordable housing.
- As most youth leave home at 13-14 there is a need to target support for younger youth.
- Ensure all youth in government care know their rights.
- Make more services for youth pet-friendly.
- Support youth to stay connected to school.
- Improve access to health care.
- Increase opportunities for involvement in sports and recreation activities to youth before and after they become street involved.
- Increase youths' awareness and assertiveness around the need to wear a condom when engaging in sexual intercourse.
- Provide affordable prevention and treatment options for youth who are using, or at risk of using drugs and alcohol.
- Improve the services offered to youth who need treatment for drugs and alcohol.
- Develop more programs that raise awareness about sexual exploitation and provide services to youth who are being sexually exploited.
- Provide more outreach and other trained workers to assist youth.
- Provide more services and programs for youth in every community.
- Provide 24-hour youth centres.
- Provide more programs for youth turning 19.
- Provide more shelters where youth can feel safe.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

The Next Steps workshop series was designed to take the results of McCreary's Against the Odds report back to marginalized and street-involved youth in the communities where the study took place, and give them an opportunity to make suggestions for change in their community. It did much more than that.

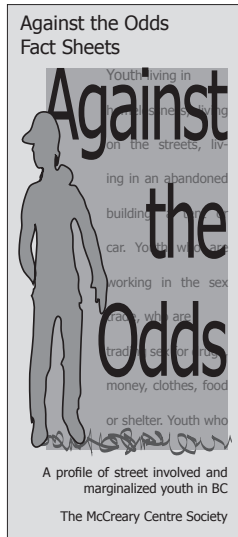
It showed that even when youth are marginalized and disenfranchised they take an interest in their lives and the lives of their peers. They have the knowledge and willingness to contribute to the changes they want to see in their communities.

The workshop series also provided an opportunity for youth to add their own stories to the numbers in the report, to feel that they were not alone and to feel that they had made a start to improve the odds for marginalized and street-involved youth in their community and across the province.

*"I hope things will change just a bit"*



# RESOURCES



A series of fact sheets based on the *Against the Odds* report are available online at [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)

## Sexual Health

## Sexual Exploitation

## Substance Use

## Moving on: School,

## work, housing

## Mental and

## Physical Health

### USEFUL NUMBERS

#### Kids Help phone

[www.kidshelphone.ca](http://www.kidshelphone.ca),

Call: 1-800-668-6868

#### MCFD Children's Help Line

Call: 310 1234 (no area code)

Deaf and hard of hearing: 1-866-0505

#### BC Representative for Children and Youth.

[www.talktotherep.ca](http://www.talktotherep.ca)

1877.476.3933

#### Youth In BC

[www.youthinbc.ca](http://www.youthinbc.ca)

24 hour Hotline: 1.866.611.3311

For help coping with stress, bullying and violence, mental health issues, suicidal feelings and your sexuality

#### Mind Your Mind

[www.mindyourmind.ca](http://www.mindyourmind.ca)

Information on youth and mental health

#### Facts of Life Line:

1-800-SEX SENSE

To talk about your concerns around sex toll free at 1-800-SEX-SENSE

#### OPT: Options for Sexual Health

[optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://optionsforsexualhealth.org)

Information on STIs, birth control, sex, pregnancy and where to find a clinic near you.

#### Sexual Assault and Family Crisis Line:

Victim information line 1-800-563-0808

**NOW Canada:** (New Opportunities for Women) programs, ongoing support to female youth who have been victims of sexual exploitation. [www.nowcanada.ca](http://www.nowcanada.ca)

#### Onyx

[www.plea.bc.ca](http://www.plea.bc.ca) 604-708-2647

Services for sexually exploited youth in Richmond, Vancouver, North Shore, Sea to Sky, Sunshine Coast, Powell River, Bella Coola, and Bella Bella

#### PFLAG Canada

[www.pflagcanada.ca](http://www.pflagcanada.ca)

Information for gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning teens, their friends and family

#### Alcohol and Drug Information

**Referral Service:** 1-800-663-1441

Deaf and hard of hearing callers: 604 875 0885 (collect calls accepted) or text 604 875 6381

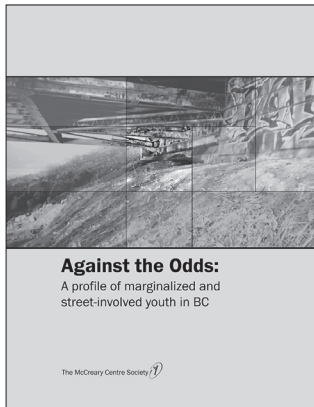
#### Booklet: Useful Tips for Youth

**Leaving Care.** [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child\\_protection/pdf/useful\\_tips.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/pdf/useful_tips.pdf)



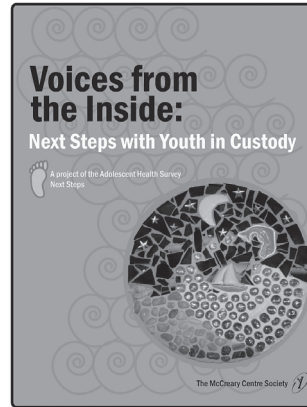
# ADDITIONAL MCCREARY RESOURCES

For any of these, or other materials by the McCreary Centre Society, visit our website [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)



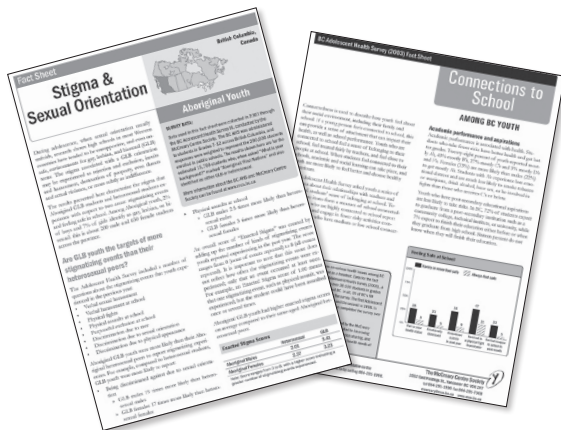
## AGAINST THE ODDS: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC (2007)

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



## VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: Next Steps with youth in custody (2007)

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

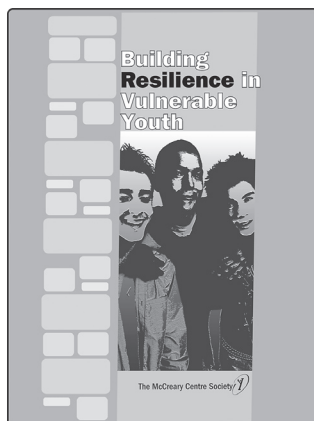
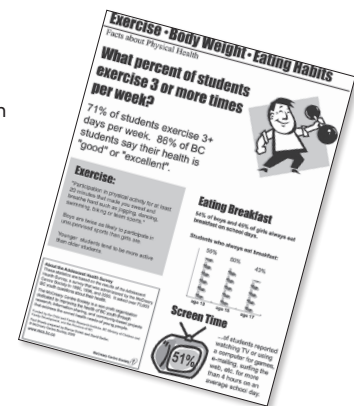


## FACT SHEETS

Fact Sheets offer research results on a variety of topics using the most recent Adolescent Health Survey data.

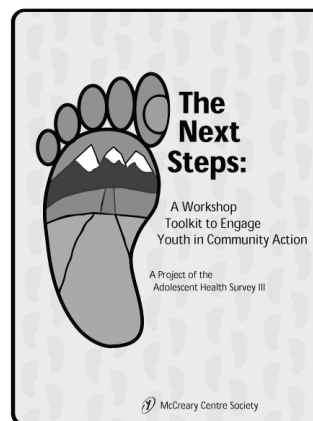
For example, McCreary has published fact sheets on:

- Sexual behaviour & sexuality
- Connections to school
- Safety and violence
- Harassment & discrimination
- Emotional health
- Injuries



## BUILDING RESILIENCE IN VULNERABLE YOUTH (2006)

This report explores the experiences, risks and health challenges facing vulnerable youth in BC, and describes protective factors that offer hope for helping them build resilience, connections and a positive future.



## NEXT STEPS TOOLKIT

The Next Steps is a workshop series that provides youth, along with supportive adults, an opportunity to: discuss the results of the Adolescent Health Survey; identify priority issues; and plan projects for improving the health of youth in their communities. The Next Steps: A Workshop Toolkit to Engage Youth in Community Action



