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*Welcome to our spring newsletter. We hope you are starting to enjoy the longer days and warmer weather. This time of year always brings a sense of freshness, as we close out one fiscal year and enter a new one. There is renewed excitement for the projects which are scheduled for the year ahead, and a sense of accomplishment at having survived the long winter nights and tight deadlines of the previous fiscal year.*

*In this newsletter we will be sharing updates on what we have been working on, as well as updates from the Youth Research Academy (YRA), Young Indigenous Research Team (YIRT), Youth Advisory and Action Council (YAC), BC Health and Wellness Council, and Youth Health Ambassadors.*

*The seventh cohort of the YRA graduated at the end of March. As the first in-person cohort since the pandemic, they have made the office a more fun and enjoyable place to be. They have also made an enormous contribution to McCreary through their research projects to support youth in and from care. They all deserve a huge congratulations for what they have achieved, and we look forward to continuing to work together and connect in the years ahead.*

## 2023 BC AHS in the field

Data collection for the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) is in full swing across the province. This year marks the 30-year anniversary of the BC AHS, and 59 of the 60 school districts are participating. Once data collection is complete, we will begin cleaning and analyzing the data and hope to have the results available in early 2024.



We are indebted to the 700 Public Health Nurses, Public Health Resources Nurses, nursing students, and other allied health professionals who are administering the survey to students, and answering questions the students may have about the survey, their health, and about services in their community.

While this year's survey maintains many of the same items from the previous six waves of the survey, several new topics have been included, such as experiences of discrimination, food security, the impacts of Covid-19, sex education, and sources of reliable information about mental and sexual health.

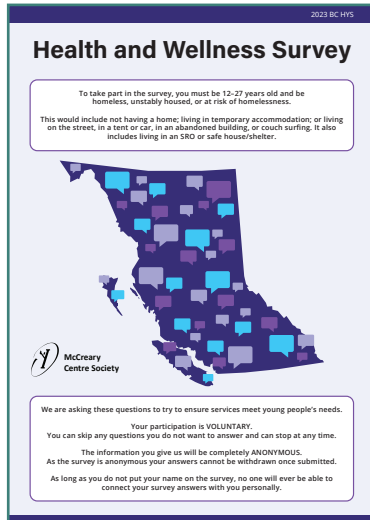
Information booklets and additional resources about the survey have also been created for principals, teachers, students, and parents/guardians. These are available for download at: [mcs.bc.ca/about\\_bcchs](https://mcs.bc.ca/about_bcchs). McCreary's Youth Health Ambassadors also created a video to help their peers make an informed choice about participating in the survey. You can read more about the video in their update on [page 7](#).

We know there are other surveys being administered in schools this year and have been overwhelmed by the positive response to the BC AHS from students, teachers, principals, and parents. We are excited to share the results as soon as we have them, and to hopefully begin to pay back all the youth and adults who have made the data collection possible.





## Homeless Youth Health and Wellness Survey



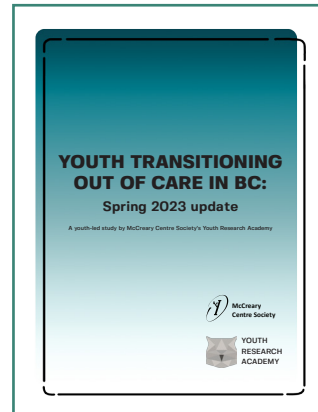
The Homeless Youth Health and Wellness Survey is currently being rolled out across the province in partnership with community agencies and local youth researchers. Supported by funding from SPARC and the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, the survey aims to capture the health picture of young people aged 12–27

who are experiencing homelessness and unstable housing in diverse communities across the province. The survey shares many of the same questions as the BC AHS, as well as additional questions which reflect the unique experiences of homeless youth, including their pathways to homelessness, and barriers to exiting homelessness.

The survey was first administered in the early 1990's in seven communities across the province but there has been growing recognition that youth homelessness cannot be seen exclusively as a big city issue. Data collection is currently underway in 28 BC communities including communities as diverse as Hope, Trail, Penticton, Salt Spring Island, and Port Alberni. We have been humbled by the enthusiasm of community agencies and youth researchers to partner with us and ensure youth in their community are represented in the survey. Data collection will continue through May. Once analyses are completed, the community agencies and youth involved in the data collection will come together to review the data and select key messages for the final report which is anticipated to be released in the Fall.

If you know youth who are homeless or unstably housed (or recently had this experience) who might be interested in completing a survey or if you would like to host a data collection session at your agency, please email [katie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:katie@mcs.bc.ca).

## Longitudinal study of youth transitioning out of care



Since 2019, the Youth Research Academy (YRA) have been surveying youth in care who are approaching their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and every six months after that until their 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. (You can read more about the YRA in their update on [page 4](#)).

The YRA recently launched *Youth Transitioning out of Care in BC: Spring 2023 Update*. This is the third annual report to be published from the study, and it builds on findings from the 2021 and 2022 reports. The 2023 report reflects analyses from a total of 423 surveys.

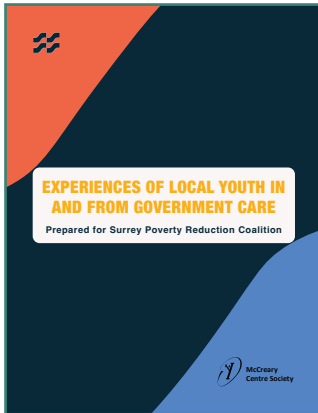
The survey was modified in 2022 following a meeting with the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the 2023 report is the first to reflect the changing government policies to support youth transitioning out of care. For example, questions about youth's experiences with transition workers were added to the survey to reflect the introduction of these new positions.

The YRA is continuing to recruit youth aged 18–24, in or from care, who might be interested in participating in the study. Youth who might be interested in participating can contact [yicstudy@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:yicstudy@mcs.bc.ca) for the survey link.

If you have any questions about the study, or wish to request paper copies of the survey, please contact the email above.

For more information about the study, please visit: [mcs.bc.ca/youth\\_transitioning\\_out\\_of\\_care\\_study](https://mcs.bc.ca/youth_transitioning_out_of_care_study).

## The health and well-being of youth with government care experience in Surrey



The Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition commissioned McCreary to analyze data from the BC AHS focusing on youth in Surrey with government care experience, and to examine local data from the YRA's Youth Transitioning out of Care study. To view the report, visit [mcs.bc.ca/pdf/sprc\\_yic\\_2023\\_report.pdf](https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/sprc_yic_2023_report.pdf).

With permission of the Surrey School District, the report included analyses of local data from three waves of the BC AHS (2008, 2013, and 2018), as well as 2019–2022 data from the longitudinal survey of youth transitioning out of care. Results highlighted the challenges experienced by youth in care, as well as the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the care system. Youth in care in Surrey were six times more likely than their peers never in care to identify as Indigenous (18% vs. 3%). Gender diverse and sexual minority youth were also overrepresented among those with care experience.

BC AHS results did show a number of improving trends in some areas of housing stability, access to health care, connection to culture, and school connectedness. Additionally, although youth with care experience remained less likely than their peers to plan to continue their education after high school, they were more likely to plan to attend post-secondary compared to a decade earlier (78% vs. 50%).

Results from the longitudinal study of youth transitioning out of care highlighted the difficulties young people experience when they leave care. For example, 86% had trouble finding housing, and around half (54%) had couch surfed. However, the survey findings also highlighted young people's resilience, and youth shared their suggestions for how they could be better supported.

Members of the YRA created a presentation of the results, and included their reflections on the findings. The project concluded with YRA members sharing their presentation with members of the coalition.

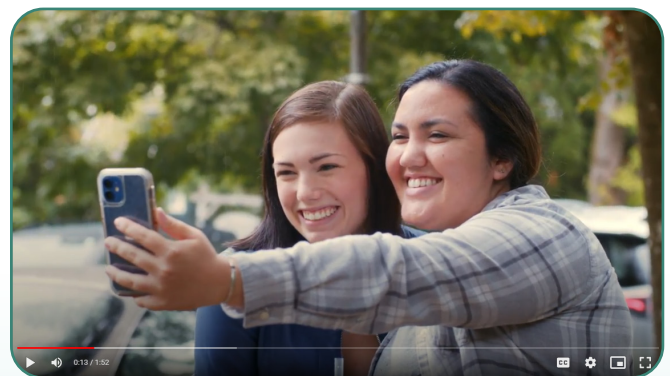
## Taking Pride

Working in partnership with UBC's Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC), Taking Pride is a healthy relationships workshop series for LGBTQ2S+ youth in BC that aims to reduce dating violence and help youth build skills to foster healthy relationships.

Over the past few months, we have continued to connect with school and community groups that support LGBTQ2S+ youth, and are interested in delivering the Taking Pride healthy relationships workshops with their groups, such as with Pride Clubs or Gender and Sexuality Alliances.

We have also continued supporting high school groups currently facilitating the workshops, including multiple schools in Victoria and North Vancouver. Among those groups, youth facilitators have shared that their groups have appreciated being able to have open conversations about relationships. Youth have also shared that what they have learned has positively impacted not only their dating relationships but their friendships and other kinds of relationships, as well.

We have also been working with our Youth Advisory and Action Council (YAC) and YRA to adapt the secondary school curriculum for first- and second-year post-secondary students. We have begun piloting the updated workshops with university groups, and are anticipating launching the post-secondary workshops across the country in September. To learn more about the workshops and to discuss bringing Taking Pride to your group, please contact Katie at [katie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:katie@mcs.bc.ca).



A still from one of the video vignettes used as part of the Taking Pride curriculum with post-secondary students.





## Youth Research Academy



The YRA is a group of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 with experience in the government care system. Members of the YRA are trained to conduct research projects of interest to youth in and from government care and the agencies that serve them.

The seventh cohort of the YRA just wrapped up, and we have accomplished a lot in the past few months. This was our first year since the start of the pandemic that we were able to attend the Galiano Island working weekend with members of McCreary's YAC. We were also able to have our YRA holiday party in person again, where we enjoyed watching a movie, playing games, and eating lots of food.

The 2023 BC AHS and the Homeless Youth Health and Wellness Survey are currently being administered. Before the surveys were finalized, we looked over them and gave our input, so that the surveys are easy to understand and are asking the right questions.

Over our time with the YRA, we also worked on the Youth Transitioning Out of Care Study (See [page 2](#) for more about the study). We did a lot of work on recruiting for the study, including brainstorming ideas for recruitment and finding contacts to reach out to across BC. To get ready for the 2023 report, we created Instagram posts to highlight key findings from the March 2022 report. We also worked on creating a PowerPoint presentation and presented a preview of the findings from this year's report to a team from MCFD. We also have some upcoming presentations planned, including at the TRRUST Collective Gathering and the Child and Youth Care Association of BC Conference.

Other projects we worked on recently include the report for the Surrey Poverty Reduction Coalition (See [page 3](#)). We also each worked on individual research projects, which we presented on the last day of our YRA cohort. Our projects analyzed 2023 BC AHS pilot data and looked at topics like: body image, self harm, eating disorders, employment, and alcohol consumption. We also developed a brochure for youth in care sharing research findings about youth with pets, as well as discussing the cost of pets, and things to consider before getting a pet. And finally, we finished our second claymation video to share what we've learned in our time with the YRA. This year, the cohort had a fun experience overall and learned many new skills that we will take with us wherever we go next!



Members of the YRA's 7<sup>th</sup> cohort after their final presentations.

Recruitment for the eighth cohort of the YRA, which will run from June 2023 to March 2024, is now underway. Youth aged 16-24 with care experience who are interested can complete the brief application form available at [mcs.bc.ca/youth\\_research\\_academy](https://mcs.bc.ca/youth_research_academy). Please email Katie at [katie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:katie@mcs.bc.ca) if you have any questions or would like to learn more about the YRA.

## Youth participation and governance of care conference

Two members of the YRA joined Annie Smith at the inaugural *Youth participation and governance of care conference* in Australia (via Zoom). The youth presented on their experiences with the YRA and reflected on how youth-engaged research can impact policy-making processes.



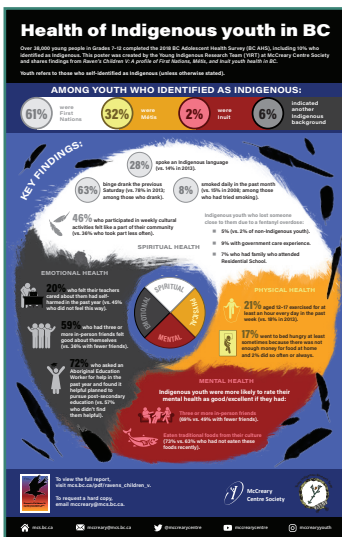
Real-time Rights-based  
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## Young Indigenous Research Team



The Young Indigenous Research Team (YIRT) is a group of Indigenous youth researchers, who are all graduates of the YRA. The YIRT work on projects to support the health and well-being of Indigenous youth in BC.

Since the release of our first **fact sheet** on building school connectedness among urban Indigenous youth, the YIRT has continued to meet monthly, and has been busy working on many new projects. As a relatively new group, YIRT members have been working together to identify and articulate shared goals for the group, and agree how we would like to work together.



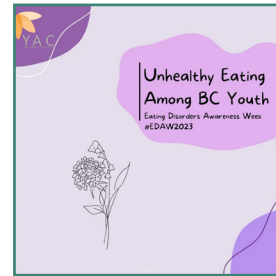
Last month, the YIRT met with MCFD to share their insight on naming the new youth transitions program. The group spoke about the importance of names, and that the program name should feel hopeful, accessible, and representative of the youth that will access it.

Finally, we have started adapting the Taking Pride healthy relationships workshops for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous youth. These adaptations will support 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous youth to learn healthy relationship skills in a culturally appropriate way, and will honor the long history of Two-Spirit individuals in Indigenous history.

If you would like to learn more about the YIRT, please email [mccreary@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:mccreary@mcs.bc.ca).

## Youth Action and Advisory Council

The YAC has been as busy ever these past few months. To celebrate all we accomplished in 2022, we had an in-person rockstar-themed holiday party. We joined with youth from the YRA for a fun evening of snacks, games, and building gingerbread houses.



In February, we participated in Disordered Eating Awareness Week, which is a topic the YAC felt to be very important, as many youth experience disordered eating or know of a friend who does. We created a poster to share some of the possible signs of disordered eating, how youth

can support a friend who may experience disordered eating, and resources for where to get help. We also shared a series of posts on Instagram, highlighting stats from the 2018 BC AHS about disordered eating and sharing about body positivity.

We were also active on Instagram during Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week, sharing a series of posts about findings on sexual health from the 2018 BC AHS, as well as a youth-friendly post on options for birth control.

We are currently creating a new series of social media posts that highlight McCreary findings about the rights of BC youth with physical or sensory conditions, including right to education, autonomy, equal access to health, and the right to freedom from violence and abuse.

The YAC is very excited that the 2023 BC AHS is currently in schools across BC! For the first time, students can complete the BC AHS online, and we participated in a pilot of the online survey and provided feedback on the format. We also provided input on what information was important to include in the promotional video for youth, which is shared with schools participating in the survey. The video can be viewed at [youtube.com/@McCrearyCentre](https://youtube.com/@McCrearyCentre). We are currently brainstorming ways we would like to share information from the 2023 BC AHS back with the youth taking the survey, including through a new board game!

The YAC is always looking for new members, so if you or any youth you know is between 14 and 24 years old and has a passion for youth health, please email [katie@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:katie@mcs.bc.ca).



## BC Health and Wellness YAC



The BC Health and Wellness Youth Advisory Council (BC YAC) is a group of diverse youth from across the province in grades 8–12 who provide insight on current health issues. The group is a partnership between McCreary

and the BC Ministries of Health and Education, and currently meets virtually once a month. Our primary focus as a group has been exploring the issue of vaping and e-cigarette use among teens.

This year we started a new project called *"let's clear the air"*. The purpose of this project was to take a peer-to-peer approach to starting conversations about vaping. One of the members of our group created this really cool picture of a pair of lungs with flowers growing out of them, which we made into stickers and pins. We've been giving these stickers and pins out to our friends as a way to spark non-judgmental conversations about vaping. So far, we've been able to have interesting conversations with our peers and we will continue with this until the end of this school year.



Pin and stickers from the BC YAC's *"let's clear the air"* project.

Through this last winter and into the spring we've also had the opportunity to meet with the creative agency that was hired by the BC Ministry of Health to give input into the design of the Ministry's new media campaign about vaping. We were able to say which designs we liked best, and then give feedback into initial scripts for the videos. It was great to be able to see the process of developing ads for social media, and it felt like our voices and perspectives were taken into account.



A still from one of the videos from the BC Ministry of Health's media campaign about vaping.

This year a few of us also had the opportunity to participate as youth judges for Interior Health's poster contest about vaping. We were given the opportunity to have input into the judging forms that Interior Health created, and then used them to review the poster submissions. The winning poster was then chosen based on our feedback. It was cool to be involved in that way, and we even got a mention in an online article! [castanet.net/news/BC/414801/Young-artists-share-views-on-tobacco-and-vaping-for-Interior-Health](https://castanet.net/news/BC/414801/Young-artists-share-views-on-tobacco-and-vaping-for-Interior-Health).

As a group we continue to be passionate about having youth views included in provincial decisions, and want to have a positive impact in our own communities. Our mission is to ensure that youth are properly represented and supported on decisions relating to youth health. We are also extremely excited about getting the chance to meet in-person later this year, after a couple years of getting to know each other virtually!



## Youth Health Ambassadors

McCreary's Youth Health Ambassadors (YHA) are youth from across the province that are trained to facilitate conversations with their peers on projects that support youth health and well-being. Over the past year, YHA from across the Vancouver Coastal region have hosted conversations with their peers to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth, and to gather suggestions for how communities can support youth well-being, safety, and belonging.



The YHA team hosted 26 conversations with 147 of their peers in communities across the VCH region, and shared many great insights on how young people can be better supported in their neighbourhoods and communities. These findings have been shared in a report that can be found at [mcs.bc.ca/pdf/vch\\_youth\\_mental\\_health\\_covid.pdf](https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/vch_youth_mental_health_covid.pdf).

In March, three representatives of the YHA team presented their findings to the VCH Healthy Public Policy team. They highlighted what youth shared about how streets and neighbourhoods, indoor and outdoor community spaces, and youth programs could be designed to promote social connection, belonging, and opportunities for meaningful activities. The youth also shared about their experience as part of the YHA team, and about the positive impact of having young people lead and participate in these conversations.



In preparation for the launch of the 2023 BC AHS, YHA from across the province also contributed to a promotional video, which helps to explain more about the survey to youth

who have been invited to participate. The video is available at [youtube.com/@McCrearyCentre](https://youtube.com/@McCrearyCentre). YHA members also participated in a youth consultation to inform a 'Best Brains Exchange' on how public health can support youth mental well-being, and one of our amazing YHA members helped to open the event.

## Evaluation update

These past few months have involved wrapping up a mixed-method harm-reduction evaluation and an evaluation for a pilot program to assess if a mental wellness initiative that has demonstrated success in BC could also be successful in other Canadian provinces and territories. Based on the success of this pilot program, we began evaluating the scaled-up national version of the initiative, while continuing to evaluate the BC-based initiative.

We have also been evaluating a mental wellness pilot program for newcomer youth, a province-wide anti-racism program, a human trafficking initiative, and a housing subsidy program. Our internal evaluations of the Youth Research Academy (YRA) and other youth-engagement initiatives are also ongoing, as is our evaluation of TRRUST Collective Impact.

Findings from our YRA evaluation continue to show that youth are gaining research and transferable skills through their involvement, and feel their time in the YRA is meaningful and worthwhile to them because of their work on projects that impact youth in and from care.

We are looking forward to the various upcoming evaluation focus groups, interviews, and survey development sessions, as well as to supporting a new cohort of YRA members to gain skills in community-based evaluation and research.

## Developing an index of adolescent deprivation for use in British Columbia

McCreary has published an article in the *Child Indicators Research Journal* on developing a measure that captures the experiences of deprivation among youth in BC. Inspired by a model successfully used in the UK to measure material deprivation, the BC Youth Deprivation Index was developed ahead of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey and collected results from over 38,000 BC youth. To access the article, visit: [mcs.bc.ca/deprivation\\_article](https://mcs.bc.ca/deprivation_article).



## Students at McCreary

With the lead-up to the 2023 BC AHS administration, we continued our partnerships with nursing schools across the province. Over 200 nursing students, including those from UNBC, UBCO, UFV, and BCIT, have been trained to support their local public health nurses to support the survey administration in schools.

Nursing students from Langara and Vancouver Community College have also been on practicum at McCreary helping to support the roll out of the survey 'behind the scenes' and learning about community-based research more broadly. Each set of students also worked on a research project based on the 2023 BC AHS pilot data, with Langara students focussing on sexual health education in school and the VCC students focussing on the relationship between substance use and violence exposure.

### So what is Comprehensive Sexual Health Education?

A slide from the Langara students' final presentation.

Two students from Douglas College have also been on practicum, and supported data collection for the Homeless Youth Health and Wellness Survey. Additionally, they completed their own research projects using the 2023 BC AHS pilot data, with one focusing on the relationship between community connectedness and mental health and the other looking at the health of youth with physical disabilities.

Other students continue to work with McCreary data. For example, a UBC clinical fellow used the 2018 BC AHS data to study health care access among youth with government care experience, and is currently preparing a manuscript submission.

## Sharing McCreary's work



McCreary's Executive Director, Annie Smith (left) and Dr. Petra Göbbels-Koch (University of Dortmund, Germany) are pictured sharing information from their collaborative project about meaningfully engaging care experienced youth in research at the *Compassions and care conference* in Manchester, England. The project is also a collaboration with Dr. J.P. Horn (California State University) and Dr. Róisín Farragher (University of Galloway).

## TRRUST Collective Impact

McCreary continues to be the backbone organization for TRRUST which is a collective impact initiative aiming to improve outcomes for youth transitioning out of government care in Vancouver.

To join the collective, subscribe to the free weekly news blast, or learn more, contact Erica at [erica\\_trrust@outlook.com](mailto:erica_trrust@outlook.com).

Founded in 1977, McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation, and community engagement projects.

CONNECT



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