

Moving Upstream

Aboriginal Marginalized and
Street-Involved Youth in BC



Moving Upstream:
Aboriginal Marginalized and Street-Involved
Youth in B.C.



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This report is available as a free downloadable pdf file from the website.

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An artist and designer from the Secwepemc (Shuswap)
Nation in the Interior of B.C., Tania Willard wrote this about
the cover art she created:

The illustration for this report was inspired by the salmon run. The salmon has been an important part of many B.C. Aboriginal people's diet and cosmology. The journey of the salmon is meant to represent the journey we go through in life: the struggles and challenges, swimming upstream to get to home. This innate sense of home is a symbol of our feelings about home and identity as Aboriginal people, especially as young people whose journey often includes self-discovery, cultural revitalization and the search for our roots. In this illustration the salmon swim through an urban centre. Salmon-bearing streams criss-crossed the province, but have since been filled in or polluted and no longer are salmon-bearing. But the path is there; it may be hidden under concrete, but our journey home is still there for us to find. No matter what the circumstance, no matter how lost we feel, if we look for it we can find our way home.

Photos: Youth from Abbotsford, Kamloops, Kelowna, and
Prince George who were involved in the research project also
contributed photos for the report.

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Introduction from BC's Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond



To understand a person you must take a look at the world, as best as you can, through their experience. In First Nations parlance, we say “walk a mile in my moccasins.” The message is clear: Learn before you form an opinion—be open to another person’s experience. For youth, keep the focus on them and ensure the system responds to them appropriately and respectfully given their unique rights. But also, listen to what they say. Their voices will tell us what they need.

Hunger, homelessness, homophobia, physical and sexual violence and racism. These are not our wishes for the lives of Aboriginal children and youth in British Columbia. A walk in their moccasins with the McCreary Centre Society, through a closer look at marginalized and street-involved Aboriginal youth, tells a grim tale of our service delivery system failing to reach Aboriginal youth and the cracks in our civil society which challenge the most vulnerable.

Moving Upstream should be read by everyone in the social serving system in British Columbia - health care providers, First Nations leaders, educators and education administrators, justice workers including police, and child welfare and youth support service workers. The survey speaks loudly of the need to improve the system of support for Aboriginal youth across British Columbia. They have experienced far too much suffering and difficulty, often at the hands of adults in their lives, and because of the absence of systems of support. Their resilience depends on our willingness to hear their voices, listen to them and meet them where they are, with assistance in a committed and respectful manner.

A strong civil society will present every opportunity for the most vulnerable to be safe and healthy. A civil society nurtures the learning spirit. It norms excellence for young people and makes it possible through support. Each of us needs to work to build that system and the bedrock will be what the McCreary Centre Society has done here – listening to youth, engaging, respecting their voice.

As B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth, I thank the youth for participating. They require a strong social support system to overcome the barriers they and many of their families face. The McCreary Centre Society has provided a valuable opportunity to hear the voices of Aboriginal youth. Let’s make sure the next walk in their moccasins is on a better path, with improvements and greater opportunities to fulfill their hopes and potential.



At a Glance

In 2000 the McCreary Centre Society conducted a health survey of marginalized and street-involved youth in six communities across British Columbia. The study was repeated in nine communities in 2006 and was completed by 762 youth, 410 of whom identified as Aboriginal (54%). In the communities that participated in both surveys there was a rise in the numbers of Aboriginal youth from 36% to 57%.

This report takes a closer look at the experiences of those Aboriginal youth who completed the survey and also discusses the response to these findings of community stakeholders in the nine communities that participated. Unless otherwise noted, the information in this report includes only those 410 youth who identified as Aboriginal.

Although the survey was not created with a cultural lens, the community discussions that took place to guide this report clearly emphasized the importance of including such a lens when considering the research findings, including the legacy of colonization, cultural disconnection, the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, and the importance of culturally-relevant interventions.

Key Findings

- More than half of the youth involved in the original survey were Aboriginal, which suggests prevention, intervention and other supportive programming for street-involved youth must include approaches specifically for Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal youth.
- A large number of the youth reported leaving home before entering their teen years. 40% of males and 47% of females had first run away at age 12 or younger, and one in three had been kicked out by age 12. This underscores the importance of early interventions with families.
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth (LGB) were highly over-represented, especially among female participants. Only 44% of females identified as 100% heterosexual, compared with 77% of males.
- 42% of those who participated in the survey had been in foster care.
- 47% had gone hungry because they or their parents didn't have money for food.
- Violence was a significant issue for most of the youth. 63% reported having witnessed family violence, and almost 60% having been physically abused.

- Aboriginal youth in the survey reported being discriminated against for a number of reasons, with 1 in 4 reporting racial discrimination in the past year. Females were more likely to face discrimination than males, with 51% of females reporting discrimination in the past year compared to 39% of males. It is important to keep in mind that street-involved and marginalized Aboriginal youth may be discriminated against because of a number of intersecting factors at any given time.
- 30% of males and 23% of females had been sexually exploited. Youth who reported physical or sexual abuse were twice as likely to be sexually exploited as those who were not abused.
- 1 in 3 youth had been pregnant or had caused a pregnancy.
- Substance use was a significant issue for the majority of teens surveyed, and important in community discussions. Youth were likely to report a family history of substance use, as well as to use drugs or alcohol themselves. Among those youth who felt they had a problem, nearly half (47%) wanted detox services, outpatient or residential treatment; however, 9% of youth said these services were not available in their community. These numbers were consistent with findings for street-involved youth in general.
- 26% of males and 36% of females seriously considered suicide in the past year. 30% of females and 18% of males had actually attempted suicide at least once during the past year.
- Youth in the most precarious living situations were less likely to be in school, but surprisingly, 41% of youth who lived in squats, abandoned buildings, tents, on the street, hotels, and in shelters reported attending school.
- Despite the challenges they face, most participants were hopeful about their future. When asked to envision their life five years from now, 50% expected to have a job, 33% would have their own home, 25% expected to have a family and 19% thought they would be in school. Some participants had high educational aspirations: 26% planned to graduate from a post-secondary institution.
- The community discussions highlighted the importance of connecting street-involved youth with cultural and traditional teachings in order to strengthen their relationships to their home communities.
- Young people in all the communities said their communities needed more services; the most common services needed were for safe housing (61% indicated one of the housing responses), job training (49%), work experience (38%), as well as school programs (33%), life skills programs (29%) and youth clinics (29%).

To read more about the recommendations from youth and from community discussions, see the Final Word section of the report, on page 57.



About this Report

In the fall and winter of 2006, McCreary Centre Society collaborated with a number of community organizations and youth to conduct a survey of marginalized and street-involved youth in nine communities across the province. We wanted to hear from youth about their lives and their needs, in order to help communities improve programs and services. One of the unexpected findings of the research was that 54% of the youth surveyed across B.C. identified as Aboriginal, which is much higher than the percent of Aboriginal youth in school (9.8%; Ministry of Education, 2007).

Our community partners and co-researchers felt it was important to create an additional report to focus on the lives of the Aboriginal youth in the survey, and we agreed. This report is the result of additional discussions with stakeholders in the nine participating communities, as well as the work of a team of Aboriginal researchers and project advisors.

About the Survey

The McCreary Centre Society's 2006 survey was administered to young people involved in a street lifestyle, including those who were homeless, panhandling, involved in the sex trade, selling or using drugs, engaging in criminal activities, or who had recently left these situations. The survey was a pencil and paper questionnaire based on previous McCreary youth health surveys, with additional input from an advisory committee of representatives from youth-serving organizations (including several Aboriginal organizations) from nine communities across B.C.

In these communities, *community researcher* teams of youth with experience in street involvement and staff from local agencies surveyed 762 marginalized and street-involved youth between the ages of 12 and 18.

The original survey was not designed to speak to the specific needs of Aboriginal youth and communities, but was designed to learn from all groups of street-involved youth about their experiences. We acknowledge that this has resulted in a lack of culturally-specific research data, but we aim here to contextualize the findings within a more culturally-relevant framework.

More information about the survey and the methods are reported in *Against the Odds: A Profile of Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in British Columbia* (2007).

Communities in the 2006 survey

Abbotsford/Mission
Kamloops
Kelowna
Nanaimo
Prince George
Prince Rupert
Surrey
Vancouver
Victoria

Formation of an Aboriginal Research Team

Historically, most research about Aboriginal people has been done by non-Aboriginal “experts,” without the involvement of Aboriginal people and communities in designing and carrying out the research itself. As a non-Aboriginal organization, the McCreary Centre Society has aimed to provide space for Aboriginal people to guide the creation of this report. McCreary, like other research organizations and many academic institutions, is committed to developing collaborative approaches to research with an Aboriginal focus.

Aboriginal people have supported the project throughout, from the original design and delivery of the survey, to the creation of this report. Our research team was made up of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, including those who conducted the community discussion forums, analyzed the research data, and wrote this report. Additionally, Aboriginal people with an expertise in youth issues were invited to review this document, providing feedback on an initial draft.

Community Dialogue

Community discussion forums were held in each of the nine communities that participated in the 2006 survey. The research team organized two- to four-hour

discussions that included community service agencies, community members, youth, and Elders. While the emphasis was on having representation from Aboriginal organizations and individuals at the forums, non-Aboriginal front-line workers contributed as well. The aim of these discussions was to present the preliminary findings and receive suggestions to guide the final report, especially to place the results into the community context. Discussions focused on possible explanations for the findings, key health issues for Aboriginal marginalized and street-involved youth in the local area, community strengths and challenges, services and resources, and ways to structure and format this report.

Several Aboriginal service providers, leaders, and community members who could not attend the discussion forums provided feedback through telephone and face-to-face meetings, email exchanges, and/or providing comments on the draft report. Most people participating in the discussions or providing review and feedback in other ways agreed to be acknowledged, and are listed at the back of this report; however, some people who provided important perspectives did not want to be identified or listed by name (for example, some of the youth who had been or still were street-involved). We thank them for sharing their opinions and advice, and respect their wish not to be listed.

Contents of this Report

This report is comprised of findings from the 2006 Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth Survey, as well as dialogue from the community discussion forums and individual interviews. **Unless otherwise noted, the information in this report includes only those 410 youth who identified as Aboriginal.** Guided by feedback from the community discussions, we also included some results that compare Aboriginal youth to non-Aboriginal youth. While most of the findings did not show significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, we have included some areas where significant differences were found.

Limitations

The survey which forms the basis for this report was not designed specifically for Aboriginal youth, and therefore lacked culturally specific questions. For example, there were no questions about relationships with extended family, *Two Spirit* was not included as a sexual orientation option, and no specific questions about traditional knowledge or cultural practices were included. The survey did not measure cultural connectedness, and this report can therefore not offer insight into the importance of culture in the lives of Aboriginal street-involved youth.

Although participation in the survey was considered representative across most of the communities, the number of youth who participated on Vancouver Island was lower than anticipated due to a number of factors, including adverse weather conditions and an influenza outbreak at the time of data collection.

Finally, it is acknowledged that while the intention was to ensure Aboriginal community agencies and key community personnel were fully represented at the community discussions, this did not always occur. The report cannot and does not claim to be representative of the views of all Aboriginal people in the nine participating communities.



A Note About Terms

In this report, a term first written in *italics* indicates that we have defined the term here.

Aboriginal

In this report, we use the term Aboriginal to include those youth who self identified as First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, including individuals with Indian status, without status, on-reserve, off-reserve and those who do not have a specific band membership but who have Aboriginal ancestry.

Community researchers

In the original study on which this report is based, both young people who were currently or had been street-involved, as well as staff from agencies who work with street-involved youth, were hired in each community. They helped finalize the questions, gather the data, guide some of the analyses and draft the report, *Against the Odds: A Profile of Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in BC*. These team members, some of whom continue to be involved in this project are considered community researchers.

Cultural Connectedness

This idea refers to the ways people feel a part of their cultural traditions, identify with their heritage and have access to traditional knowledge and practices.

Marginalized and street-involved youth

The survey was aimed at “young people who are involved in a street lifestyle,” and included those who were homeless, panhandling,

involved in the sex trade, selling or using drugs, or engaging in criminal activities. Youth who had recently moved away from a street involved lifestyle or who were living in temporary or unstable housing were also included. During the survey, the community researchers noted that some youth did not consider themselves street-involved, yet they experienced many of the same challenges as homeless youth, or those involved in a street lifestyle. The community researchers decided to use the term “marginalized” in addition to “street-involved”, in order to better represent those youth.

Participants

The term *participants* refers to Aboriginal youth who participated in the original 2006 survey, unless stated otherwise.

Two-Spirit

This is a term adopted by First Nations and American Indian gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups in the 1990’s. For some First Nations people, the Two-Spirit identity is one that is given by an Elder, and has spiritual connotations and specific community roles; for others, it is a term a person chooses to indicate they have an identity similar to gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people in other cultures. Two-spirit people have a range of sexual and gender identities, as well as cultural or indigenous affiliations. Some two-spirit people use the term to talk about their gender identity, which often does not fit in to normative categories of “man” or “woman”, while others use the term to refer to their sexual orientation.


History and Context: Aboriginal Perspectives

B.C. is home to a large number of First Nations, with a diversity of cultural traditions, languages and histories. In addition to these original inhabitants, the province is now home to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who have moved here from other areas across Canada. Aboriginal youth in B.C. come from both on-and off-reserve communities, as well as urban, rural, and isolated areas. Many are of mixed heritage, or have grown up away from their Aboriginal family members. This diversity challenges many stereotypes and assumptions that people make about who Aboriginal youth are, what they look like, and how connected they are to their culture or community.

All community discussions emphasized the importance of culture in understanding the experience of marginalized and street-involved Aboriginal youth. Given the legacy of colonization and resulting cultural disconnection, they saw solutions in community-level healing, as well as re-connecting youth to Aboriginal cultural traditions and worldviews. Participants also talked about the importance of building strength and unity in Aboriginal communities. Youth represent a fast-growing part of Aboriginal communities: according to Statistics Canada, the number of Aboriginal youth age 15-19 in B.C. increased by 22% between 2001 and 2006, and community members were anxious to ensure current and future generations of young people are supported to follow a good path.

The Indian Act has determined who has Indian status, as well as the creation of the band system, reserve system, and education systems for First Nations people, including the residential school systems, where Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from families and forbidden their language and culture. For many years, the Indian Act criminalized cultural and spiritual ceremonies of First Nations people, including

the potlatch or feast system in B.C. Métis people had no Aboriginal status under the Indian Act, and were not recognized as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples until the 1982 constitution. The last federally-run residential school closed in 1988, less than 30 years ago, with further privately-run schools closing as late as 1994.



Community members also discussed recent changes in provincial government and policies that had a strong influence on Aboriginal families and youth. These included new treaties, such as the Tsawwassen Accord; the Ministry of Children & Family Development delegating authority for child welfare to Aboriginal organizations; and increasing Aboriginal control over many aspects of community life, including education, land use and community supports. The change in the B.C. provincial government in 2001, from the NDP to the Liberal party, was mentioned frequently. This change brought about alterations in social welfare policies, access to services, policies for youth in care and youth in custody, and in some communities, an increase in Aboriginal-specific services. Despite optimism about some new services, overall, community members named lack of services as a crucial issue. They also talked about problems resulting from discontinuity in services when youth turn 19. While this survey only included youth aged 12-18, many marginalized and street-involved youth are over 19, and some may become street-involved when they “age-out” of services.

Within each of the nine participating communities, pressing local issues were also discussed in the forums. Some communities have experienced economic booms related to new logging, mining, or industry in their area. Others have a struggling economy with growing unemployment and poverty. Throughout the report, where a specific issue is noted for a community, it arose out of the community forums or feedback from individuals.

The issues that Aboriginal youth in B.C. face are complex, and result from historical and present day discrimination. Here, we hope to provide a better understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal marginalized and street-involved youth in B.C., in order to better address their needs. We call for their voices and experiences to be at the centre of any decisions that will impact change in their lives.



Aboriginal Youth Profile

Ethnicity and Place of Origin

More than half of the 762 youth who participated in the Marginalized and Street Involved Youth Survey indicated Aboriginal identity (54%). In contrast, only 9.8% of youth in BC schools are Aboriginal (Ministry of Education, 2007).

This was a significant increase in the percentage of Aboriginal youth compared to the same survey in 2000, for the five communities that participated in both years. Overall, the percentage of youth reporting some Aboriginal heritage increased from 36% to 57% (from 34% to 58% for males, from 38% to 56% for females).

McCreary's 2006 Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth Survey & 2000 Street Youth Survey.

There are several possibilities why there might be more Aboriginal street-involved and marginalized youth than in 2000. Suggestions emerging from the community discussions included:

- Increasing numbers of Aboriginal youth are connecting to Aboriginal-specific services, and therefore they were more easily reached by the survey.
- More youth are proud of their heritage and willing to identify as Aboriginal, whereas in the past they have been

Aboriginal youth surveyed in each community

Community:	# of youth surveyed in 2006	% Aboriginal in the 2006 survey	% Aboriginal in the 2000 survey
<i>Abbotsford/ Mission</i>	55	36%	23%
<i>Kamloops</i>	75	37%	
<i>Kelowna</i>	75	34%	
<i>Nanaimo</i>	33	53%	
<i>Prince George</i>	75	79%	
<i>Prince Rupert</i>	73	89%	82%
<i>Surrey</i>	80	38%	23%
<i>Vancouver</i>	212	66%	41%
<i>Victoria</i>	83	39%	19%

McCreary's 2006 Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth Survey and 2000 Street Youth Survey

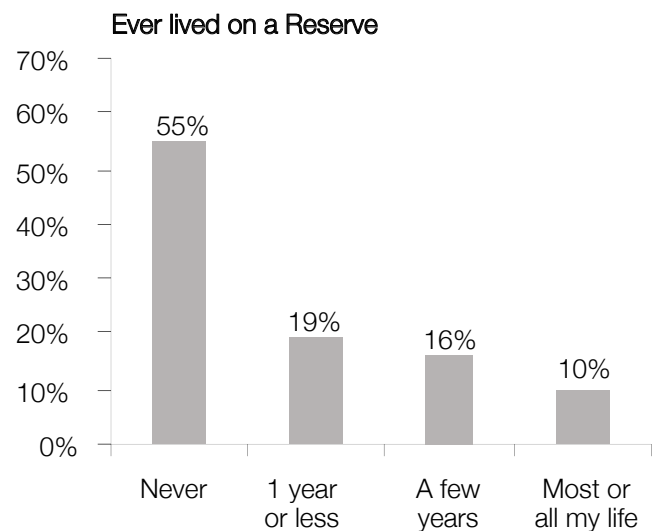
reluctant to identify as Aboriginal for fear of racism, or because of shame arising from cultural dislocation.

- More Aboriginal youth are becoming street-involved due to the lack of affordable housing and inadequacy of wages and social assistance. Aboriginal youth may be more affected by cuts to housing and social programs.
- There is an increase in the Aboriginal youth population, which is reflected in the increasing numbers of youth who become street-involved.

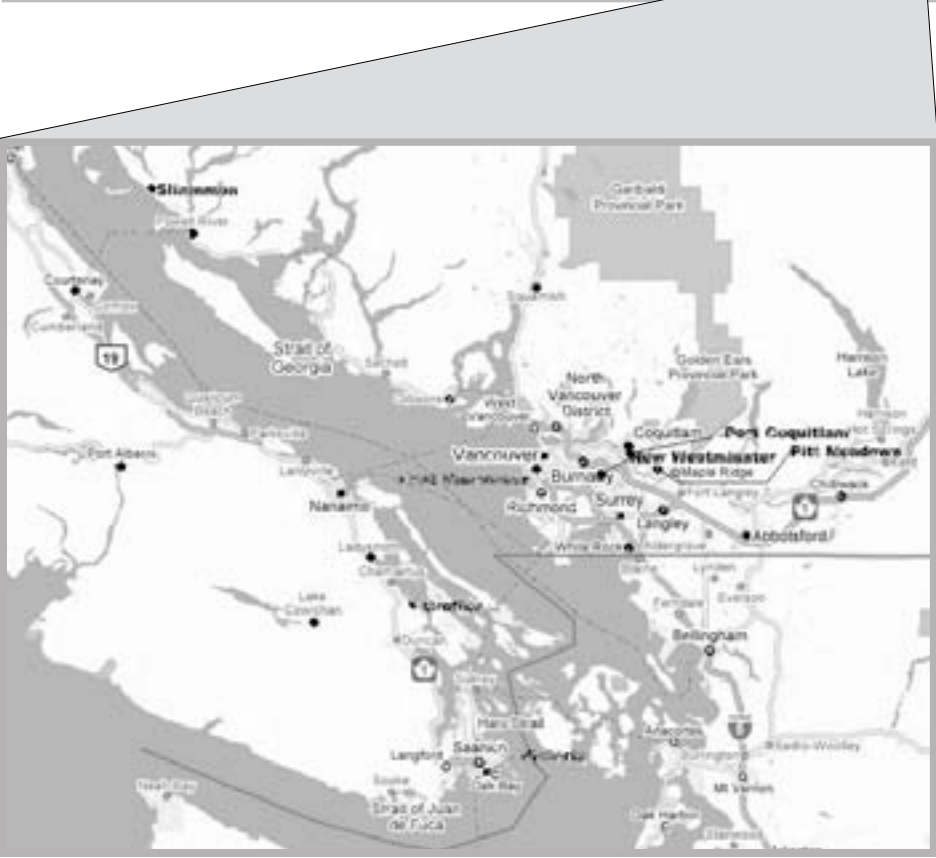
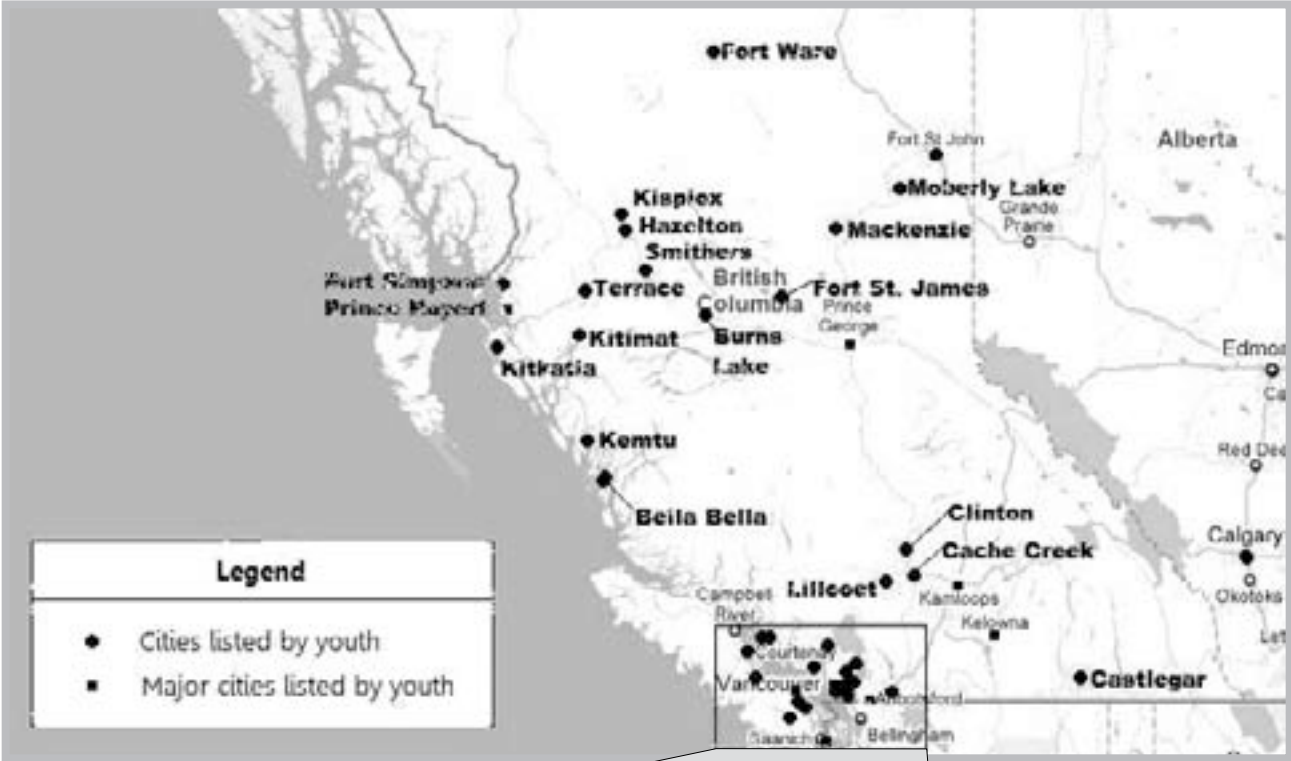
Among the 410 Aboriginal youth in the survey the majority reported First Nations status (59%), while another 1 in 4 said they were Aboriginal without status (26%), 11% were Métis, and 1% were Inuit. The rest either indicated indigenous ancestry from outside of Canada, such as Mayan, or did not provide specific information about their Aboriginal ancestry.

Among participants, 75% said they were exclusively Aboriginal, while 25% reported two or more ethnic backgrounds (participants could choose all that applied). The majority of those who chose more than one background indicated only two, and of these, the overwhelming majority of them chose Aboriginal and European heritage (91%).

Participants in the community discussions reported that growing up on a reserve or in an Aboriginal community may increase cultural connectedness. Approximately one in ten youth said they had lived on a reserve most or all of their life, while more than half had never lived on a reserve (55%). The survey did not specifically ask whether or not the youth had lived in rural or isolated parts of the province (which may be off-reserve but have a high concentration of Aboriginal people).



Where Youth Said They Lived Before Hanging out on the Street



The majority of Aboriginal participants reported they were from the same place where they completed the survey (52%), while 36% were from elsewhere in BC, 11% from elsewhere in Canada, and 1% from outside of Canada. However, the survey did not capture the experience of participants who travel between larger city centres and small outlying communities for their entire lives, considering the two to be part of the “same place.” These youth may therefore be from a smaller community, but be street-involved in the neighboring city centre, and consider the whole area to be their “home.” The map on the next page shows all of the places youth said they had come from before they became street-involved.

Age

Survey participants ranged in age from 12 to 18 years. The average age was 16.2 years old; females were slightly younger than males (average age for males: 16.3 years, for females: 16.0 years) 31% of the youth were 18 years old. There were small differences by region, with the average age of youth in Vancouver the oldest (16.7 years) and those in the Interior and the North the youngest (15.9 years).

Gender

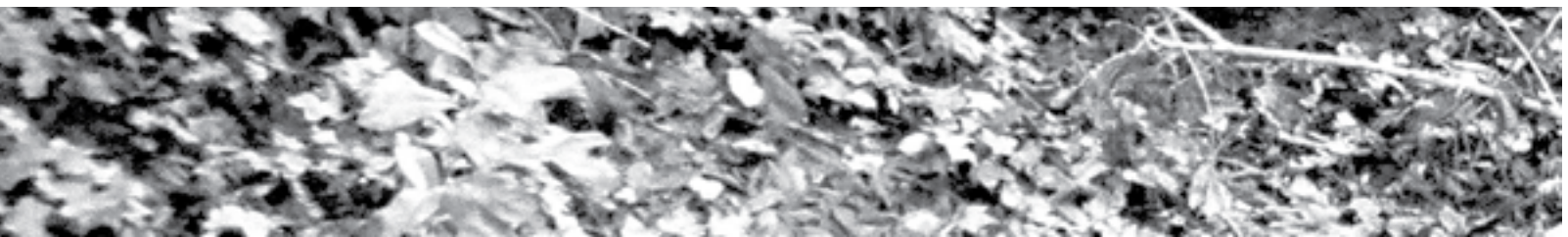
Of the survey participants, 48% were male, 51% were female, and 1% were transgender or did not provide this information. There were no significant differences in gender by region. This result is surprising, as previous surveys of street-involved youth across Canada report higher numbers of males than females. However, most previous studies include youth above the age of 18. Some of the results we report will be for males and females separately. Because so few transgender youth participated, they will be included in the overall numbers, but cannot be reported separately.

It is worth noting that the survey did not offer *Two-Spirit* as either a gender or sexual orientation category, nor did it provide a space for youth to self-define their gender. This may have resulted in some youth skipping these questions or picking a category that does not represent them as well. Transgender and Two-Spirit youth face enormous stigma based on their gender and/or sexual orientation.

What do you like best about your life?

“Friends, family, school, ocean, mountains....”

Transgender youth

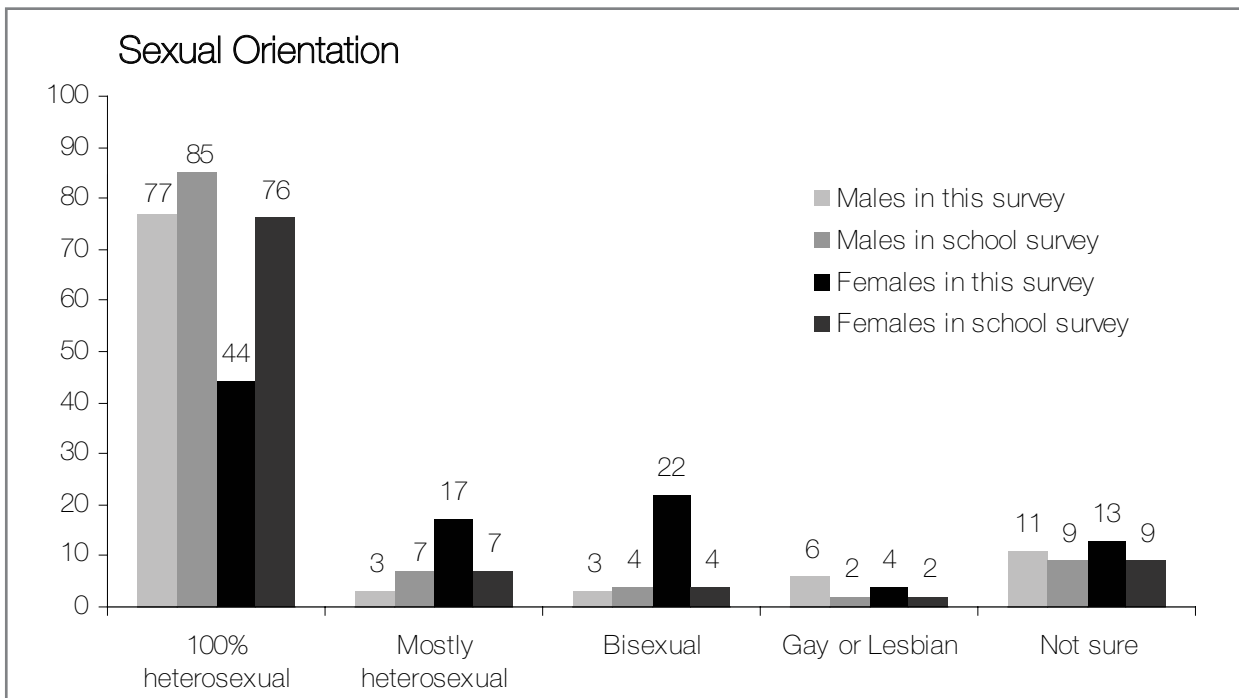




Sexual Orientation

Far more Aboriginal youth in this survey identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) than did Aboriginal youth in B.C. high schools who completed a similar survey in 2003 (*Raven's Children II*, 2005). Participants were less likely to identify as 100% heterosexual than youth in school of their same gender, and females were less likely to identify as 100% heterosexual than males.

Of the survey participants, 77% of males identified as exclusively heterosexual compared to only 44% of females. Only 6% of males said they were gay or bisexual, but 26% of females identified as lesbian or bisexual, and another 17% identified as mostly heterosexual. These gender differences are important, as the overrepresentation of lesbian, bisexual and questioning females on the street calls for programs which specifically address the needs of these youth.



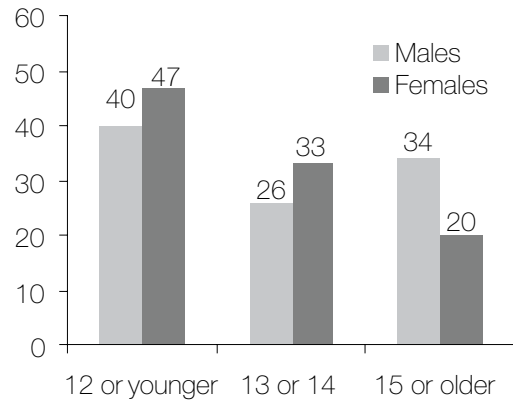
("school survey" refers to the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey, reported in *Raven's Children II*, 2005)

Shelter and Street Involvement

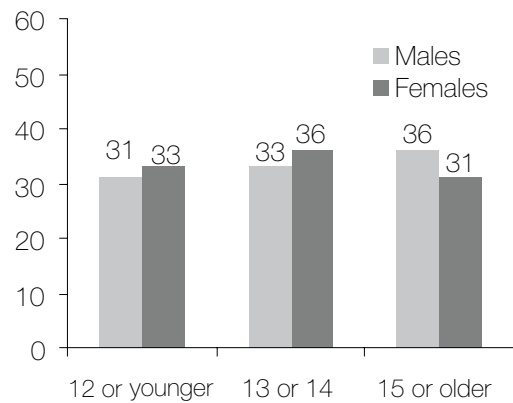
Leaving Home

Most of the youth surveyed had run away from home, had been kicked out, or both. Nearly two-thirds of males (65%) and three in four females (73%) had run away from home at least once, and just over half had ever been kicked out (51% males, 52% females). Among these, the majority of youth had both run away and had been kicked out (60%), but one in three had only run away, and a much smaller number had only been kicked out of their home. When youth had both run away and been kicked out, they were most likely to have run away first or to have done both within the same time frame.

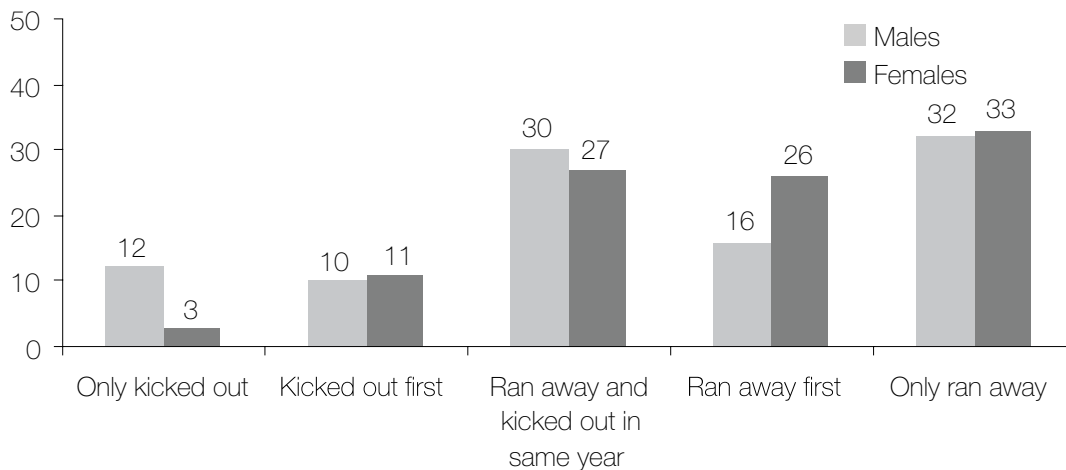
Age First Ran Away



Age First Kicked Out



Running Away and Being Kicked Out



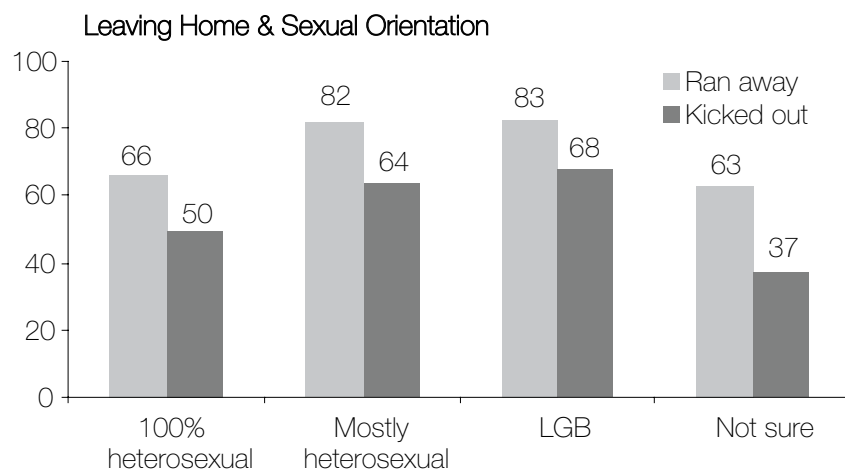


Survey participants reported leaving home very young: Of those who had left home, two-thirds of males and 80% of females had first run away by age 14, and two thirds had been kicked out by this age. Indeed, 40% of males and 47% of females had first run away at age 12 or younger, and one in three had been kicked out by age 12. When questioned about whether youth felt they had a choice the first time they ran away or left home, 66% felt they had a choice and 34% felt they had no choice.

Aboriginal youth who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or mostly heterosexual were far more likely to have left home compared to their peers who were exclusively

heterosexual or those who were not sure of their orientation. More than 80% of LGB and mostly heterosexual teens had run away, compared to 66% of exclusively heterosexual youth and a similar number of unsure youth (63%). Similarly, more than two-thirds of LGB and mostly heterosexual participants had been kicked out, while just over half of heterosexual and not sure youth had been kicked out.

Among participants, 33% had lived at home in the past year, 21% had never returned home since they left (ran away), 15% had run away between two and four times in the past year and 15% had run away once in the past year.



What do you like best about your life?

“Being with the ones I love and the ones that love me.”

Male youth, Interior Region

First Street Involvement

Survey participants also reported becoming street-involved at a young age, with 45% reporting involvement by age 12, another 34% between ages 13 and 14, and the remaining 21% at age 15 or older.

Reasons for being on the street

My friends hang out on the streets	45%
I don't get along with my parents	28%
I feel accepted there	26%
I ran away from home	23%
I am addicted to alcohol or drugs	20%
I was kicked out of home	18%
Violence or abuse at home	16%
I can't find a job	10%
I didn't like my foster/group home	8%
I can't find affordable housing	6%
I am traveling	6%
I am avoiding criminal charges	5%
Conflict at home because of my sexual orientation (among LGB youth only)	15%

Reasons for Hanging Out on the Street

Youth had many reasons for why they were on the street, but the most common were because their friends were there, they felt accepted, they didn't get along with parents, they ran away or were kicked out, or there was violence or abuse at home. Around one in five also said they were on the street because they were addicted to alcohol or drugs.

On the Street, Different Cities

Many of the Aboriginal youth in the survey said they had hung out on the streets in more than one community (60%). About 38% of youth had only hung out on the streets in the community where they were surveyed, 27% had hung out at one other place, 12% hung out in two additional places, and 14% had been on the streets in three or more other places.

Recent Housing

Housing was an important issue in the community discussions. Many of the communities had very low vacancies for housing, and high costs for rent or mortgages. First Nations reserves also faced housing crises, with residents facing substandard living conditions and overcrowding in family homes. Community members also talked about discrimination from landlords on the basis of age and ethnicity as barriers to youth finding rental housing. Youth in the survey were asked a series of questions about their current living situation, and the types of places they had lived in the past. Nearly one in three (32%) had lived in one or more of the most precarious types of housing in the past year, (such as in squats, abandoned buildings, cars, or tents) and more than one in ten (12%) were currently living in these circumstances. Among the youth who had lived in precarious housing in the past year, more than half of them had lived in two or more different types of such housing.

About half of the youth reported living with a parent at some point in the past year. Less than one in three had lived in the same place for the entire year (30%), and while most of these youth had lived with their parents, 20% of those who lived in the same place the entire year had lived in foster care or group homes, and another 17% were on the street or in shelters, in squats, or in cars. More than two-thirds had lived in more than one place during the past year, often with their parents plus somewhere on the street. One in five (20%) of the youth had lived in five or more different types of housing in the past year.

If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“To help more teenagers off the street, more safe places to go.”

Female youth, Northern Region

Family Relationships

What makes you happy?

“My son, my girlfriend, my family.”

Male youth, Island Region

Participants in the community discussions spoke a lot about family, and the importance of extended family in Aboriginal cultures. The survey included several questions about the quality of relationships with parents and family. Together these questions create a measure of family connectedness. Among Aboriginal youth in school, family connectedness was linked to lower emotional distress and suicide attempts, better school performance, and lower odds of smoking and binge drinking, marijuana use, or risky sexual behavior (*Ravens Children II*, 2005).

As one might expect, Aboriginal youth in this survey were not as connected to their families as Aboriginal youth in school, but the majority were generally satisfied with their family relationships. Only 20% did not feel close at all to their mother, and 37% were not close at all to their father. Nearly half of youth (46%) reported they felt very close to their mother, and 33% report they were very close to their father. The majority reported they felt their mother cared a lot about them (70%), and more than half felt their father cared a lot about them (53%).

More than one in five participants felt the people in their family understood them a lot (22%), while 57% reported their family understood them some, and 20% felt their family did not understand them at all. However, given the importance of

extended family in Aboriginal cultures and communities, this survey may not have adequately captured the role of the extended family in the lives of marginalized and street-involved Aboriginal youth.

Youth as Parents

16% of participants reported they had children. Among those who were parents, 36% said their children lived with them, 34% said their children lived with relatives, 20% said their children lived in foster care, and 5% said their children were adopted. (Youth could indicate more than one response; for example, both the youth and his or her child could live in foster care or with relatives).

Pets

Half of the youth reported that they had at least one pet: 23% had a dog, 31% had a cat, and 8% had another kind of pet. Youth who were currently living in the most precarious types of housing were just as likely to have a pet as those who lived in more stable settings. Interestingly, youth who had a pet were significantly more likely to be attending school than those without a pet (76% of youth with a pet were attending school, compared to 51% of those without a pet).



Family Challenges

People who participated in the community discussions stressed the legacy of colonization in Canada has created challenges for many Aboriginal families. Residential schools have had a devastating impact on the relationships between children, their parents and Elders, because generations of children grew up away from their families. Traditionally, many First Nations raised children in community settings, with Elders playing a large role in passing down knowledge to the younger generations. Communities are currently coping with trying to rebuild these traditions, and are grappling with how to heal this painful history and bring back the strength of Indigenous family ways.

Youth were asked about a number of different circumstances that can create stress for family members. Many youth reported family members had problems with alcohol or drugs,

involvement with the law, and/or a history of mental illness. Youth had also lost family members due to accidents (30%), suicide (26%), overdose (24%) and violence (20%). When families are struggling with the trauma resulting from such challenges, it becomes even more difficult to support and nurture young family members.

More than one in three youth indicated a parent or family member had an alcohol problem (youth could choose more than one family member). Similarly, a third of participants indicated at least one family member had a drug problem. Nearly one in four youth reported family involvement with the law, and a similar number reported one or more family members have experienced a mental illness.

Youth who reported problems experienced by family members			
	Mother had this problem	Father had this problem	Other family member(s) had this problem
Problems with alcohol	30%	24%	36%
Problems with drug use	19%	20%	34%
Criminal record	17%	28%	39%
Experienced a mental illness	11%	6%	24%

(Youth could choose more than one option)

School and Work

Attending School

Education was an important issue in most of the community discussions, and most groups identified it as one of the top priorities for influencing Aboriginal youth health. They were surprised and pleased at the high numbers of marginalized and street-involved Aboriginal youth who were attending school. At the same time, most groups talked about the challenges that Aboriginal youth in general may face in attending school, and the high drop-out rates. The mainstream education system often does not accurately reflect Aboriginal people in school curriculum, and can set expectations of behavior that are not culturally consistent for many Aboriginal students. The history of residential schools has also created a negative view of the school system in some First Nations communities, making school achievement less of a priority. Community stakeholders also described the positive impact of Aboriginal schools and alternative education programs in some communities that incorporated Aboriginal culture and ways of learning in the teaching styles (see also *Making the Grade: A Review of Alternative Education Programs in B.C.*, 2008).

Nearly two out of three survey participants reported currently attending school, with 55% of these attending mainstream schools (and 45% attending alternative education programs). Young people in the most precarious living situations were less likely to

What makes you happy?

“Playing sports, school and jobs.”

Male youth, Fraser region

be in school, but even so, 41% of youth who lived in squats, abandoned buildings, tents, on the street, hotels, and in shelters reported attending school.

The majority of youth who were attending school reported liking school (80%). About 19% said they like school very much, 61% said they like school some, and 20% said they don't like school. Most students in school felt their teachers cared about them. Aboriginal youth who were not attending school were more likely to say they did not like school (34%).

A number of questions were asked about connectedness to school, including whether young people felt like a part of their school, felt teachers were fair, and felt safe at school. The majority of students who attended school felt connected to their school.



Educational Aspirations

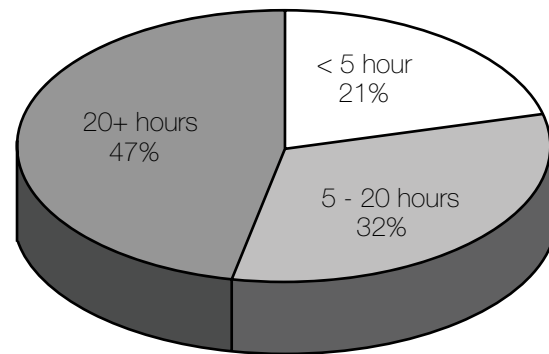
Even among youth who were currently not attending school, some still had educational aspirations beyond completing high school. Although one in four of the youth in the survey reported planning to end their education after graduation from high school, another one in four (26%) plan to graduate from a post secondary institution (14% from a community college or technical institute, and 12% from university).

Sources of Income

Youth reported a variety of sources of income to support themselves. Although many survey participants were not living at home, nearly half of all participants still relied on their parents for money in the past month (45%). One in four 25% of the survey participants worked at a legal job. Of those who worked, 47% worked 20 or more hours per week, 32% worked 5 to 19 hours, and 21% worked less than 5 hours per week.

Other sources of income included drug dealing or drug running, child welfare or social welfare payments, panhandling, theft, and busking (performing on the street), squeegee work, and by exchanging sex for money, which is considered a form of sexual exploitation or abuse for youth under age 19. Nearly one in five, however, did not obtain any money at all in the past month (19%).

Hours worked per week (among those who worked)



Sources of income in past 30 days

Parents	45%
Legal job	25%
Drugs	20%
Theft	13%
Panhandling	12%
Welfare	12%
Child welfare	9%
Sex trade	4%
Other illegal means	5%
Squeegee	2%
Busking	2%
Phone sex	<1%
Internet sex	<1%
Did not obtain money	19%

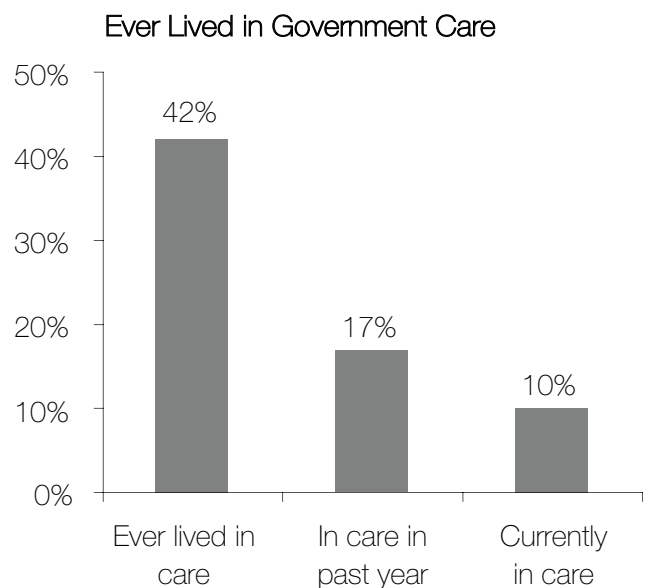
(Youth could choose more than one option)

Government Care

Several studies have noted the link between being in the care of the government and subsequent homelessness or street involvement. Youth who have been in government care, whether in the foster care system or the juvenile justice system, are more likely to become homeless or street-involved during their teen years. A much higher percentage of Aboriginal children and youth are placed in government care than non-Aboriginal youth. According to the B.C. government, 52% of the youth in foster care and 49% of the youth in custody centres are Aboriginal, even though they make up only 9.8% of the population. Community participants emphasized that this is related to a long history of government policies, such as attendance in residential schools, which have disrupted Aboriginal communities and prevented them from passing on traditional parenting roles and cultural teachings. People in several of the community discussions also mentioned there are not enough Aboriginal foster parents, for teens who are unable to live with parents or other family.

Similar to the government statistics about the numbers of Aboriginal children and youth in care, 42% of the youth in this survey said they had lived in foster care or a group home at some point. A smaller number of youth were

currently in care (10%) and 17% had lived in foster care or a group home in the past year. There were no gender differences between the number of males and females in care. The rates of youth living in care among the five communities that participated in both 2000 and 2006 were unchanged: in both years, about the same percentage of Aboriginal youth reported living in care now, in the past year, or ever.



Health

Physical Health

Youth who spend a lot of time on the street can experience a range of health problems for example as a result of exposure to bad weather, violence, and stress; limited access to food, bathing, and safe sleeping spaces; and risky behaviours such as drug and alcohol use. The overwhelming majority of Aboriginal youth in the survey reported one or more health problems in the past month (84%), with the most common being headaches, and coughs, colds, or the flu.

Common health problems in the past month

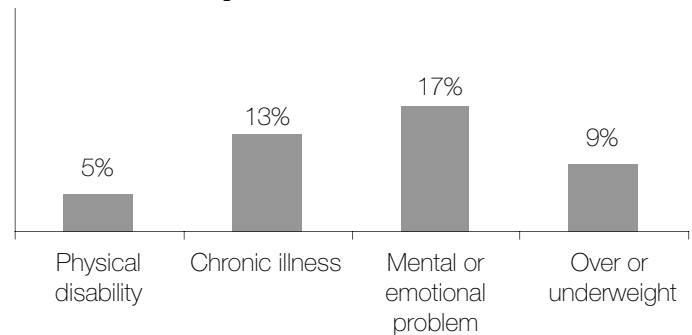
Headache	60%
Cough, cold or flu	44%
Backache	43%
Stomachache	42%
Sleep difficulties	41%
Dizziness	28%
Skin problems	12%
Frostbite	10%
Scabies, fleas, lice	5%

(Youth could choose more than one option)

Youth were also asked if they had a health condition or disability which keeps them from doing things other youth their age can do. Nearly one in three reported some form of disability (31%). This is almost twice as high as among Aboriginal youth in school (16%,

Ravens Children II). Among participants in this survey, 17% said they had an emotional or mental health problem, 13% reported a long-term illness, 9% were limited by being overweight or underweight, and 5% said they have a physical disability.

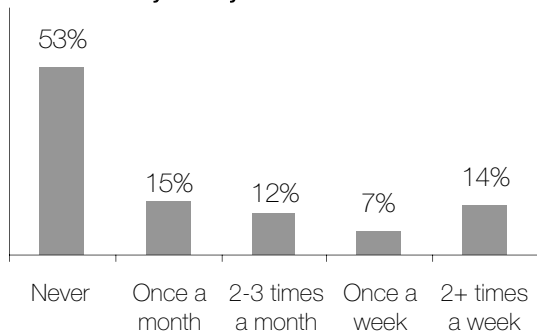
Youth with a limiting health condition



Nearly half of the youth in the survey reported going hungry because they or their parents had no money to buy food: 15% reported going hungry once a month or less, 12% indicated two to three times a month, 7% once a week, and 14% reported going hungry two or more times a week. Many community discussions mentioned hunger and adequate nutrition as key health issues for marginalized and street-involved Aboriginal youth. This is also reflected in the fact that food banks were the most-used resource reported by youth and soup kitchens also rated high on the list.



How often hungry because no money to buy food?



Injuries are another common health factor for marginalized and street-involved youth. In the past year, nearly half were injured seriously enough to require medical attention (45%). Of those who had been seriously injured, 49% had been injured once, 20% had been injured twice, and 31% had been injured 3 or more times in the past year.

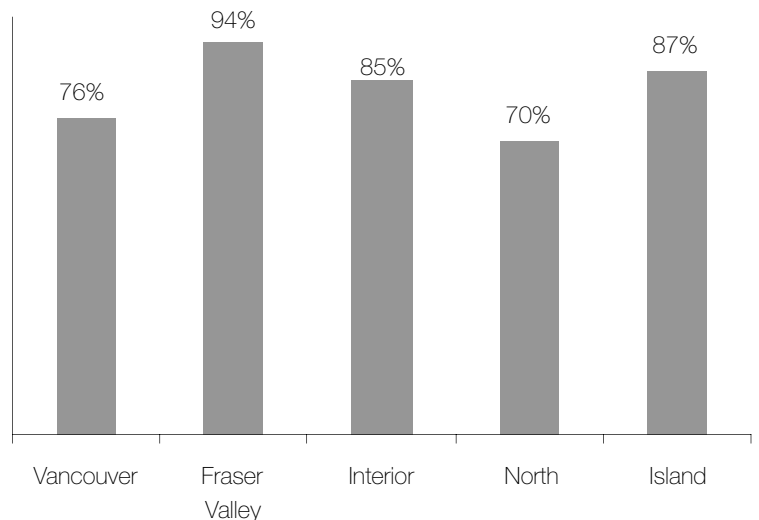
Youth who share needles for injecting drugs, piercings, or tattooing, or who share drug equipment such as crack pipes, are at heightened risk for illnesses such as HIV or Hepatitis C. More than one in five participants reported some level of heightened risk: 20% said they had shared needles or other gear for drugs, while 5% were not sure if they had. Similarly, 14% had shared tattoo, body piercing, or shaving equipment, and 7% were not sure if they had done so.

Despite the high rate of health problems and injuries, most youth reported their health was excellent or good (65%), More than half of youth in this survey rated their level of physical fitness as excellent or good (58%).

Sexual Health

The majority of survey participants were sexually experienced: 69% reported they have had oral sex, and 79% reported they have had sexual intercourse. Most, but not all, of the community conversations raised issues around sexual health. There was some variation in sexual behaviours by region: the Fraser Valley area had the highest percent of youth who reported ever having sex (94%), while youth in the North had the lowest prevalence of sexual experience (70%). However, these differences may be because the average age of participants in each region was also different, and as youth get older, they are more likely to be sexually experienced.

Percent who have ever had sex by region



Early or unwanted first sex, and using drugs and alcohol during sex can also affect the sexual health of youth. Among those who have had sex, more than one in three participants reported first having sex by age 13, and 40% reported using alcohol or drugs the last time they had sex. Even so, nearly three out of four males (74%) and more than half of females (55%) reported using condoms the last time they had sex, and overall, 73% reported using an effective method of birth control the last time they had sex.

Female participants were twice as likely to report they had used no method of birth control than males (24% vs.12%).

Nearly one in three sexually active youth in the survey reported they had been pregnant, or had caused a pregnancy (32%), with 19% involved in pregnancy once, and 13% reporting two or more pregnancies. Females were more likely to have said they had ever been pregnant (40%) than males said they had ever caused a pregnancy (22%). Teen pregnancies were an area of concern in some community discussions, and again, pregnancy varied somewhat by region: Vancouver Island had the highest percent of teens involved in pregnancy (51%), the Fraser Valley was next highest (32%), while Vancouver (30%), the Interior (28%), and the North (29%) were similar in their rates.

Methods used to prevent pregnancy at last sexual intercourse

	Females	Males
Same-sex partner	11%	11%
Birth control pills	17%	14%
Condoms	41%	56%
Depo Provera	8%	4%
Patch	4%	<1%
Ring	2%	<1%
*Withdrawal	10%	5%
*Not sure	6%	9%
*No method	24%	12%

*(Among sexually active youth only—youth could choose more than one answer)
 =not a method of effective birth control

Mental and Emotional Health

Youth were asked if a doctor or nurse had ever told them they had certain mental health problems that research has found are more common among street-involved or homeless youth. These included such diagnoses as a learning disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), depression, addiction problems, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), epilepsy, schizophrenia, or anger problems. We cannot tell if the youth were actually assessed and diagnosed and some youth may have one of these conditions

but not been diagnosed, so these results should be considered with caution. The number of participants who reported one or more of these conditions was high: nearly two out of three girls and half of boys said they had one or more conditions. Just over one in five youth said they had a learning disability (22%), while 20% said they had ADHD and/or anger problems, and 11% had been told they had Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

Health conditions identified by a health care provider	
A learning disability	22%
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	20%
Depression	20%
Problems with anger	20%
Addiction Problems	16%
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS/FAE)	11%
Chronic Anxiety Disorder or Panic Attacks	9%
Bipolar Disorder	5%
Schizophrenia	4%
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	4%
Epilepsy/Seizures	2%
None of the above	39%

(Youth could choose more than one option)

Females were much more likely to report mental and emotional problems than males; for example, 24% of females compared to 17% of males had been told they had problems with anger. Only 8% of males reported they had depression, while 31% of females reported this. Similarly, 10% of males and 22% of females said they had addiction problems.

Youth were also asked a series of questions about stress and their moods in the past 30 days, which can provide some sense of their level of emotional distress. More than one in three reported feeling under a lot of strain, pressure, or stress (39%), and 28% felt so sad, discouraged, or hopeless, or had so many problems that they wondered if anything was worthwhile. Nearly one in four reported being bothered quite a bit by nerves or nervousness (23%), and 18% were bothered by illness, physical problems, pains, or fears about their health.

Suicide

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among all adolescents in Canada, and both street-involved youth and Aboriginal youth in general are at higher risk for suicidal thinking and attempts. There are many complex factors which contribute to these heightened rates of suicidality, including historical trauma, stress and exposure to violence. Concerns about suicide among Aboriginal youth were voiced by many participants in the community discussions, including the high number of suicide attempts in many Aboriginal communities in recent years.

Having a close family member attempt or actually complete a suicide is a strong risk factor for suicide attempts among youth. Among survey participants, a high percentage reported a family member had attempted suicide: 29% had done so more than a year ago, 15% had a family member attempt suicide in the past year, and 24% did not know if a family member had done so.

The survey results showed that Aboriginal females were more likely to consider and attempt suicide than males (however males generally have higher rates of suicide completion than females). One in four (26%) Aboriginal males and one in three females (36%) in this survey had seriously considered suicide. In the past year, 18% of males and 30% of females had actually attempted suicide once or more. Of youth who had attempted suicide, the majority of both males and females (76%) reported that their attempt resulted in injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be medically treated.

Reasons for Last Suicide Attempt*

Feeling stressed	22%
Feeling lonely & depressed	20%
Feeling angry	18%
Problems with family	17%
Living situation	15%
Feeling rejected	13%
Death of a family member/friend	11%

**Among those who attempted suicide; youth could choose more than one*

Seeking Support After a Suicide Attempt

Of youth who had attempted suicide, just over half of females and a third of males sought help (53% of females, 39% of males). Among those who sought help, the majority went to a friend for help after their last attempt (55%), and a third went to a parent (33%). Another one in four sought help from a doctor or nurse (24%), while about one in five went to a mental health worker (22%), a youth worker or street worker (22%), or a social worker (18%), and another one in ten sought help from a teacher or a school counselor (12%).

Self-injury

Young people who are seriously distressed or having difficulty coping may engage in self-injury without intending to actually commit suicide. Participants in the community discussions expressed concern about self-harming behaviors, such as cutting, burning or other forms of harming one's own body, which are thought to be more prevalent among youth with historical and ongoing trauma. Nearly half of survey participants had deliberately cut or injured themselves (44%). Females were far more likely to report self-injury than males (55% vs. 32%). The most common reasons for self-injury among female participants were: feeling lonely and depressed (63%), feeling angry (53%), feeling stressed (53%), and feeling rejected (38%). The most common reasons male participants gave for self-injury were: feeling angry (36%), feeling stressed (28%), feeling lonely and depressed (28%), and drugs and alcohol (23%).



Substance Use

Substance use was identified as a key health issue in many community discussions. Alcohol and other drugs are commonly used among marginalized and street-involved youth, sometimes as a way to cope with the stress and trauma in their lives, sometimes to help manage mental health symptoms like depression or anxiety, and sometimes to help with numbing feelings of hunger, cold, or pain. Some youth may come from families or communities with intergenerational drug or alcohol use that has become normalized. The majority of youth in this survey had tried alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, and a significant percent had tried other illegal drugs. We asked participants about substance use over their lifetime, recent use (in the past month) and current use (used yesterday). Substance use remained mostly unchanged among Aboriginal youth between 2000 and 2006 in the five cities that participated in the survey in both years. Fifteen percent of Aboriginal youth reported that they did not use any alcohol or drugs at all in the past month.

Significantly, Aboriginal youth were less likely to report recent substance use than non-Aboriginal youth for most substances, including mushrooms, inhalants, ecstasy, hallucinogens, crystal meth, heroin, and cocaine.

Drugs Used in the Past Month: Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal

%	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Ecstasy	22	28
Cocaine	18	31
Mushrooms	17	25
Crystal meth	12	18
Hallucinogens	11	21
Other amphetamines	8	14
Ketamine	6	13
Heroin	6	10
Inhalants	3	7

Note: All significantly lower for Aboriginal youth; other drugs no difference in use

Exposure to alcohol and other drugs at a young age increases the risk that youth will develop substance abuse or dependence, and the young people in this survey reported very early ages of first use. Among Aboriginal youth who had ever used alcohol or marijuana (pot), over half reported they had tried alcohol at age 12 or younger, and a similar number had tried marijuana by that same age. Recent or current marijuana use was more common than alcohol use.



The survey also asked about all the different drugs used yesterday. More than one in three youth had not used any alcohol or other drugs at all yesterday (35%), another 41% used only one substance, most often marijuana, and another 17% used only two substances, usually marijuana and alcohol. Just over 7% of youth reported using three or more substances yesterday, with only 11 youth reporting they used five or more drugs.

Youth reported experiencing a variety of negative consequences as a result of their alcohol and drug use, including passing out (48%), arguments with family members (30%), physical fighting (29%) and getting into trouble with the police (29%).

Recent Alcohol and Drug Use		
	% Used in past month	% Used yesterday
Marijuana	82	58
Alcohol	74	31
Ecstasy	22	2
Cocaine	18	6
Mushrooms	17	3
Crystal meth	12	6
Hallucinogens	11	2
Prescription drugs	11	4
Other amphetamines	8	3
Ketamine	6	1
Heroin	6	2
Injection drugs	6	3
GHB	5	2
Inhalants	3	2
Steroids	3	2



Drug and Alcohol Treatment

Discussion forums in many of the communities considered substance abuse an important issue in the lives of Aboriginal youth. In nearly every community both youth and adults who work with youth talked about the need for more accessible detox services. Currently, detox and treatment services are located regionally and have long wait lists, often preventing youth from receiving services, especially when they live in more remote areas.

Among youth who had used alcohol or other drugs, 14% reported they had used detox services, 13% had used other outpatient treatment, 9% had gone to a treatment centre and 4% had gone to a recovery home. However, 9% of participants said these services were not available in their communities.

Among those youth who felt they had a problem with alcohol or drugs, 16% were interested in receiving detox services, 16% were interested in receiving outpatient treatment, 11% were interested in accessing a treatment center and 4% were interested in a recovery home. The low rates of interest in services may reflect a lack of relevant education about the benefits of these services as well as the location of services. Many community members talked about the importance of accessible, culturally-relevant addiction treatment services, and the lack of such services in many areas of the province.

If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“Get kids into detox and treatment faster. No waiting list. Larger shelter to fit more youth and more health coverage.”

Female youth, Interior region

Juvenile Justice

“I changed my life around because of treatment, not jail. Youth need help, not a jail, or institution.”

Female youth, Lower Mainland

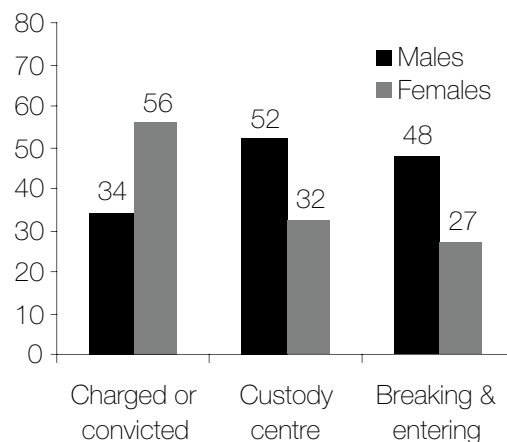
Although the B.C. government reports that Aboriginal youth in general are more likely to be charged with a crime or placed in a custody centre, this was not the case for youth in this survey. About the same percent of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in this survey reported they were charged with or convicted of a crime (46% Aboriginal youth vs. 47% non-Aboriginal youth). There was no significant difference between the percent of Aboriginal youth (42%) and non-Aboriginal youth (39%) who reported having ever been in a custody centre.

There were generally no differences in the kinds of crime youth reported, regardless of their ethnicity. Among those Aboriginal youth who had been charged with a crime, the most common offences were breaking and entering (39%), assaults or threats (37%), breach or escape (37%), and drug offences including possession or dealing (28%).

Among Aboriginal youth, females were more likely to be charged with a crime than males (56% vs. 34%) but they were less likely to have been placed in a custody centre (32% females vs. 52% males). Similar percentages of girls reported each type of crime as did boys, with the exception of breaking and entering, which boys were almost twice as likely to report (48% males, 27% females).

Just under half of Aboriginal youth (42%) carried a weapon such as a gun, knife or club in the past month. Most of these (21%) carried a weapon on six or more days, while 12% carried a weapon on two to five days, and 9% of youth carried a weapon once in the past month. Among those who carried a weapon in the past month 31% carried a knife or razor most often, 10% carried a club, stick, bat or pipe, 8% carried a chain, 6% carried a handgun, 2% carried other guns, such as a hunting rifle or shotgun and 8% carried some other weapon, such as mace or pepper spray.

Gender differences in juvenile justice issues



Discrimination and Violence

Discrimination

Marginalized and street-involved youth often face discrimination based on their ethnicity, street lifestyle, sexual orientation, or a combination of factors. Community members talked about the discrimination they saw youth experiencing, for example by landlords, employers, police, and service providers. Community discussions also highlighted the fact that it may be difficult for youth to tell why they are being discriminated against at any given time, as factors such as racism, classism, and sexism are interrelated on both systemic and interpersonal levels. Nearly one in four participants reported being discriminated against because of their race or skin color (23%), 22% because of their street lifestyle or reputation, 16% because of physical appearance, 8% due to their sexual orientation, 6% from having been in care and 4% because of disability. Experiences of discrimination were somewhat different for females and males.

Forms of discrimination in the past year

	Females	Males
Race or skin colour	25%	20%
Street lifestyle	24%	22%
Sexual orientation*	26%	18%
Physical appearance	22%	9%
Having been in care	7%	4%
Disability	5%	3%
No discrimination	49%	61%

Youth could choose more than one response

**Among lesbian, gay, bisexual teens only*

If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“That all people of color, [and] size would be able to get a job somewhere.”

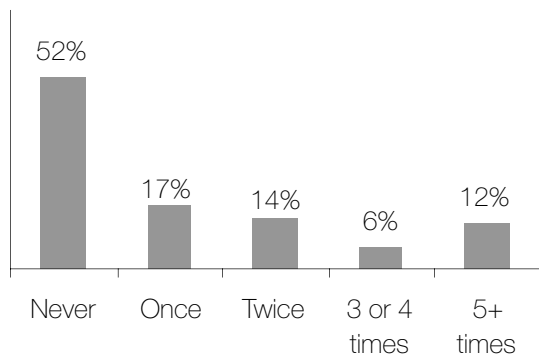
Female youth, Northern region

Violence

Although some Aboriginal youth may originally leave home in an attempt to escape violence or abuse, the situation on the street is also usually unsafe. Many marginalized youth fear for their personal safety on the street, and are at risk of being exploited or victimized. While the majority of Aboriginal youth reported they always felt safe when sleeping at night (58%), 15% often felt safe, 12% sometimes felt safe, 5% rarely felt safe and 10% never felt safe.

Nearly half of youth reported being threatened by someone in the past year (48%), often more than once. More than one in three youth (37%) had been physically attacked or assaulted in the past year, with 16% having been attacked once, 8% attacked twice, and 14% reported being attacked three or more times in the past year. Nearly two thirds of the youth reported having been in a physical fight in the past year (64%).

How often threatened in past year



If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“I would make sure there was more housing and safe places for the youth.”

Female youth, Fraser Region

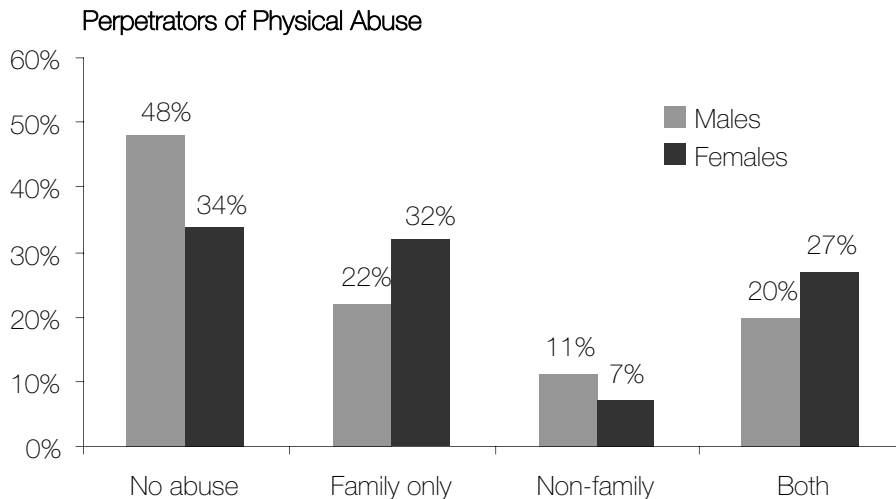
Physical Abuse

Experiences of physical abuse were commonly reported by Aboriginal youth. Nearly two in three had witnessed family violence (63%) and 59% had been physically abused.

Among those who reported physical abuse, almost one in four (24%) were abused by one person, 11% were abused by two people, 6% were abused by three people and 6% were abused by four or more people. More than one in four (27%) were abused by family only, 9% were abused by people outside their family only, and 24% were abused both by family members and non-family.

Percent youth reporting physical abuse by specific perpetrators

Father	21%
Mother	20%
Step parent	13%
Other relative	22%
Friend	17%
Stranger	17%
Romantic partner	14%
Police	13%
Foster parent	5%



Sexual Abuse

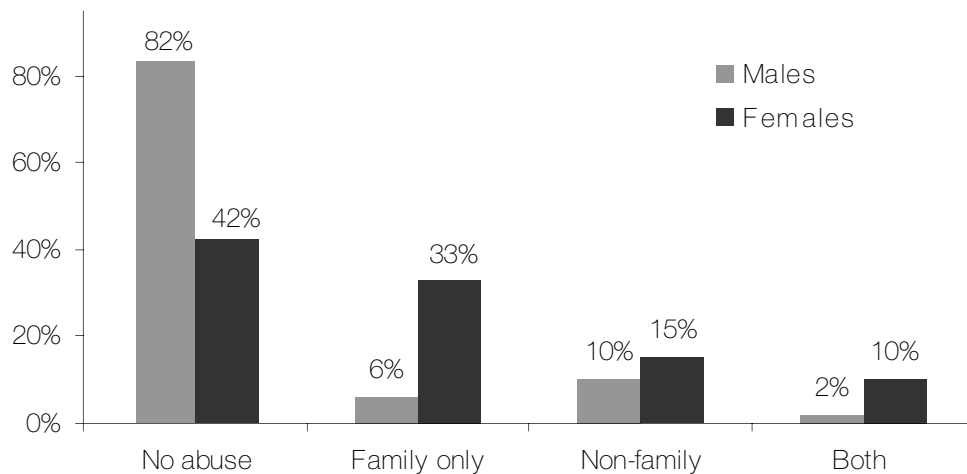
More than one in three participants reported they had been sexually abused (39%). Females were more likely to be abused than males (58% of females, 18% of males). Generally, 5% or fewer males reported sexual abuse by any one person, with family other than parent (5%), strangers (4%), and friends (4%) being most the common perpetrators. Females were also most likely to be abused by non-parent relatives, friends, and strangers, but nearly one in ten were also sexually abused by stepparents, fathers, or romantic partners.

Although many youth had experienced abuse at some point in their past, the majority (87%) reported they had not been abused in the past month. However, 11% were physically abused in the past month, and 2% were sexually abused in the past month, with less than 1% of these experiencing both physical and sexual abuse in the past month.

Percent youth reporting sexual abuse by specific perpetrators

	Females	Males
Other relative	28%	5%
Friend	15%	4%
Stranger	12%	4%
Step parent	10%	2%
Father	9%	1%
Romantic partner	8%	<1%
Police	4%	0%
Foster parent	3%	2%
Trick or Date	4%	1%
Pimp	2%	1%
Mother	1%	<1%

Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse





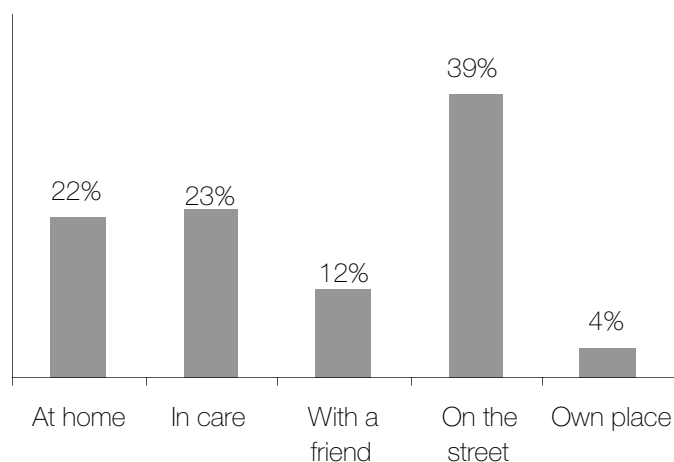
Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation, defined as exchanging sexual acts for money, drugs or resources such as transportation, clothing, shelter or food, is a form of sexual abuse. Perpetrators who sexually exploit youth under age 18 are breaking Canadian law. Just under one in three survey participants reported sexual exploitation: 30% of males and 23% of females.

Rates were unchanged in the communities that participated in both 2000 and 2006; however, the average age of first exchanging sex was slightly older in 2006 than in 2000 (up from 13.8 years to 14.3 years). While more than one in three participants (34%) reported first trading sex before age 14, another 23% first traded sex at age 17 or 18. Community members suggested this might be because some services have age limits that exclude older youth, or younger teens are given priority for the limited foster care placements. In other communities, discussion participants felt the structures around income supports or youth agreements that require teens to live alone might not be culturally appropriate, and might isolate older teens, making them more vulnerable to being exploited as a means of survival.

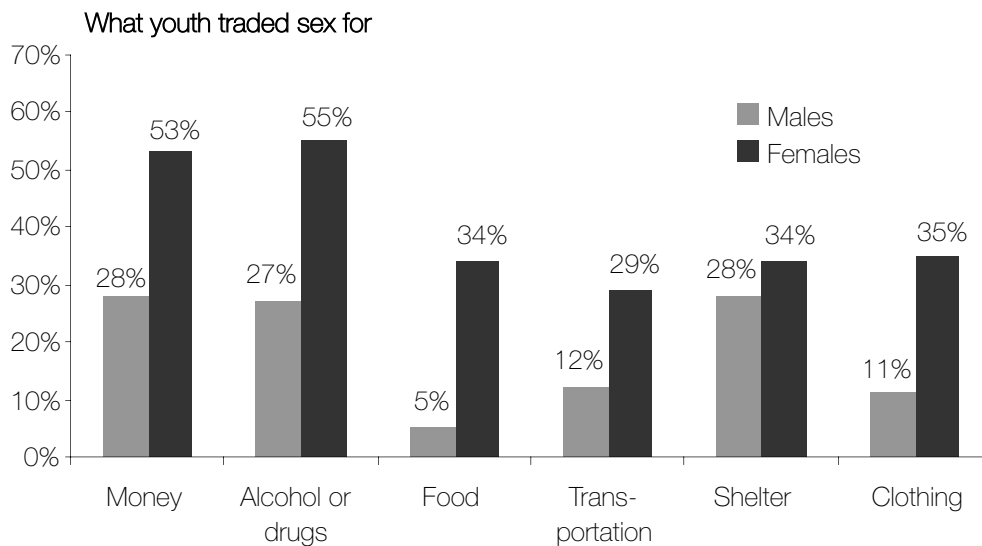
In general, sexually exploited Aboriginal young people reported becoming street-involved (77%), running away (73%) or being kicked out of home (71%) before the first time they exchanged sex. Similarly, about 90% of sexually exploited youth reported first using alcohol or marijuana at a younger age than first being exploited.

Where youth were living when first exploited



Among those who said where they had been living when they were first exploited, just over one in five (22%) youth reported they had been living at home, another 23% had been living in foster care or a group home, 12% were living with a friend, 4% in their own place, and the rest (39%) were living on the street, in a shelter, a hotel, or couch-surfing.

Youth were exploited in exchange for a variety of goods or services in the past year. The two most common resources were for money or for alcohol and drugs, with just under half of youth reporting exchanging sex for these (42%). However, at least one in three youth also exchanged sex for shelter, and one in five for transportation, for food, and for clothing (participants could choose more than one answer).



Some members in the community discussions wanted to know if there was a way to tell which Aboriginal youth are at higher risk of being sexually exploited, to help prevent exploitation. Sexually exploited youth were more likely than their peers to have been kicked out (64% vs. 48%), but were no more likely than their peers to have run away, to have been kicked out at a younger age, to have been exposed to alcohol or drugs at an early age, to live in precarious housing, to have been charged with or convicted of a crime, or to have ever been in foster care.

However, there were some areas of difference: Aboriginal sexually exploited females in the survey were more likely to be non-status compared to those who had not been exploited (50% vs. 22% of non-exploited females), which

suggests that youth who are more connected to Aboriginal communities may be less vulnerable to exploitation. Another difference is sexual orientation: lesbian, gay, and bisexual Aboriginal youth were significantly more likely to report sexual exploitation than heterosexual youth.

One of the key differences between exploited and non-exploited participants was experience of abuse. Youth who reported physical or sexual abuse, especially those who reported abuse both from family members and from people outside their families, were twice as likely to report sexual exploitation as those who were not abused.

Social and Community Supports

What do you like best about life?

“Livin everyday to my fullest, looking forward to seeing the people I luv and luv me in return, meeting new people, exploring my opportunities.”

Male youth, Fraser Region

The experiences of street-involved Aboriginal youth described in this report call for increased resources targeted at prevention, intervention and exiting support. As one male youth who attended a community discussion stated: “kids can’t do it all by themselves.” Effective services are part of the solution, according to youth and community members. However, many community members stressed that these services can be only part of a larger strategy for strengthening Aboriginal families and communities, and creating systemic change for Aboriginal people in Canada and around the world.

In the survey, youth were asked a series of questions about who they turn to for help, the types of services they accessed, whether or not these services were helpful, and what services they thought were available and needed in their communities. The community discussions and interviews also included questions relating to services for youth.

Many community members talked about the great work being done by services providers and organizations in their communities. Friendship Centres and other Aboriginal organizations were highlighted as providing positive support for youth. Many non-Aboriginal organizations were also acknowledged for their work with Aboriginal youth. Despite these positive stories, in every community people also talked about a lack of some services. They also discussed barriers to existing services, including a lack of culturally relevant programming, as well as racism and other discrimination from service providers. Lack of services was a particular concern in smaller communities, but even in more service-rich areas such as Vancouver, people talked about gaps in accessible services.

The transfer of authority for Aboriginal child and family services was discussed in many communities. In 2002, the government of British Columbia and Aboriginal leaders

signed the Tsawwassen Accord, beginning a process of transferring child and family services back into the hands of Aboriginal communities. Community members largely talked about this process as a positive development and felt hopeful for the future. However, some participants also spoke about the challenging process of negotiation and capacity building, and the need for community-level healing as a foundation for this work.

Help-seeking

Youth were asked who they turned to for help over the past 12 months, and whether or not they found these people helpful. Participants identified friends, youth/outreach workers, family, and doctors/nurses/street nurses as the most helpful (over three quarters of youth who asked for help reported these people were helpful).

Aboriginal youth were more likely than non-Aboriginal youth to report having asked for help from family (69% vs. 58%) and friends (73% vs. 64%). Community participants commented on the fact that friends were the primary support for most participants, highlighting the importance of peer support and education, especially for Aboriginal youth



who may be seeking a sense of belonging and identity in the context of cultural dislocation and widespread community distress. Discussion participants also talked about the importance of extended family in Aboriginal cultures. Youth's responses to the question "What makes you happy?" also reflected friends and family are among those most asked for help and are considered most helpful: most youth named friends and family in answering that question.

Youth workers and outreach workers were also named by community members as important resources for youth. Engaging with youth through outreach services was seen as particularly important by many community members. While current outreach programs were seen as effective, participants felt there were not enough resources in this area. They talked about how outreach services were often the most vulnerable to funding cuts, but are essential to effective service delivery to Aboriginal marginalized and street-involved youth.

Aboriginal youth were more likely than non-Aboriginal youth to ask for help from social workers (59% vs. 46%), and family support workers (33% vs. 21%). These differences may reflect the high rates of involvement of Aboriginal youth with the child welfare system. Although Aboriginal youth were not more likely than non-Aboriginal youth in this survey to report having been in care, their families may have had more non-custodial contact, such as family services files or ministry-mandated family support workers. The involvement and impact of government child welfare systems was a theme running through most community discussions.

Youth also identified other professional helpers, including medical care providers, teachers and school counsellors, financial aid workers, and police, as people they asked for help and found helpful to varying degrees. Given that the survey was not designed with Aboriginal youth in mind, it did not include Elders, Aboriginal workers, or other Aboriginal community members as listed options, but these people were named in many community discussions as important resources who were doing good work with street-involved youth.

Who youth went to for help with a problem

If you have asked the following people for help in the past 12 months, how helpful were they?	% Asked for help	% Didn't ask for help	% Helpful
Friends	73	27	87
Family	69	31	79
Social worker	59	41	60
Youth/Outreach worker	58	42	82
Doctor/nurse/street nurse	48	52	77
School counselor/teacher	47	53	69
Financial Aid worker	34	66	44
Police	43	57	38
Alcohol and drug counselor	36	64	58
Probation officer	37	63	64
Family support worker	33	67	54
Mental health worker	31	69	45
Housing worker	30	70	59
Other	29	71	34

Accessing Community Services

Youth were also asked what services they accessed in their community, and whether they found them helpful. Services related to basic human needs such as food, shelter, health care, and employment, were most often used by youth in the survey and were also highlighted in the community discussions. Food banks were identified as the mostly commonly used service, followed by safe houses, dental services, job training, work

experience, and soup kitchens. Similarly, the most helpful services were food banks, work experience and job training, with more than three quarters of all youth who used them reporting that they were helpful. Again, culturally-specific services such as Friendship Centres, were not included among the listed options, so were not identified by youth, but were talked about as key services in many communities.





Accessing Services

If these services are available in your community, did you access them and how helpful were they?	% Asked for Help	% Didn't ask for help	% Said service not available	% Helpful*
Food bank	40	52	8	78
Safe house	37	50	13	68
Dental services	36	54	10	70
Job training	35	55	10	76
Work experience	34	56	10	77
Soup kitchen	34	57	9	69
Youth clinic	32	54	14	74
Life skills training program	31	58	11	73
Youth agreement	30	58	12	66
Alcohol and drug treatment/ counseling	30	59	11	66
Services to obtain identification (ID)	29	58	13	59
School program for street youth	28	60	12	69
Shelter	27	52	11	73
Safe and affordable housing	26	60	14	55
Street nurses	26	60	14	59
Youth detox	24	64	12	49
Transitional Housing	22	67	11	50
Parent/teen mediation	24	63	13	56
Needle exchange	22	66	12	55
Affordable childcare/ babysitting	21	65	14	53
Safe injection site	18	67	15	42

*Among those who asked for help.

Sport and Recreation

What makes you happy?

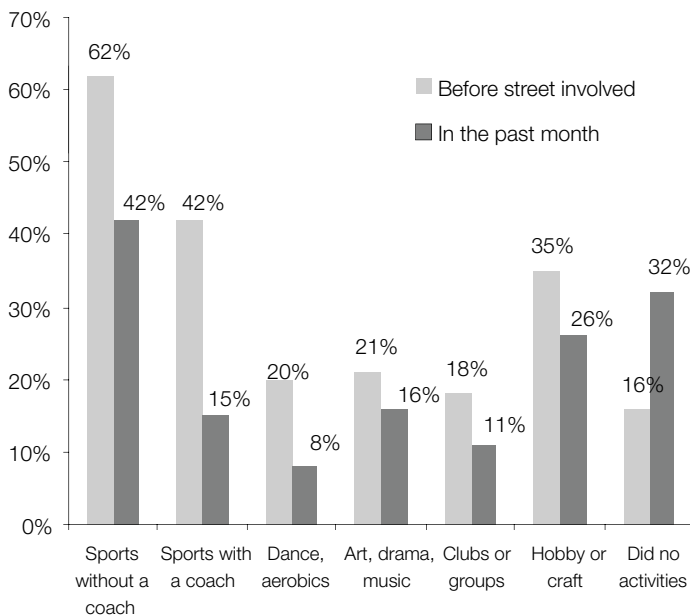
“Snowboarding, biking, eating.”

Male youth, Interior Region

Many community members spoke about the importance of sports and recreation activities for youth, as part of a holistic vision of health and wellness. Youth also talked about sports and recreation in answer to the question “if you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?” Youth need opportunities to engage in physical exercise and enjoy positive social activities with others in order to remain healthy and to grow and develop. Youth were asked what sports and recreational activities

they were involved in before they became street-involved, as well as what they were doing at the time of the survey. Many survey participants were still involved with sports and other recreational activities, although they said their levels of activity were much lower than before they became street-involved. This was especially prevalent in sports that required a coach or teacher. For many youth, losing contact with sports and recreation activities also involved losing touch with someone who may have been an important mentor or support person.

Involvement in sports/recreation before & since becoming street-involved



Filling the Gaps

Identified Need for Community Services

Which of these services or programs do you need more of in your community?	%
Job training	49
Shelter	41
Work experience	39
Safe house	38
Safe and affordable housing	34
School program for street youth	33
Life skills training program	29
Youth clinic	29
Alcohol and drug counseling	27
Youth treatment and youth detox	27
Street nurses	26
Affordable child care/babysitting	26
Dental services	24
Transitional housing	20
Mental health services	20
Safe injection site	19
Needle exchange	19
Services to obtain identification (ID)	19
Other	14

Youth could choose more than one option.

If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“More youth outreach centres. More/better youth advocates/outreach workers, safe houses & shelters (men & women). Detox for parents. More things to keep youth occupied. Support.”

Female youth, Northern region

Youth were asked to indicate which services they thought were needed in their communities. The services that were in the highest demand were job training (49%), shelter (41%), work experience (39%), safe house (38%), safe and affordable housing (34%) and school programs (33%). Among youth who responded to the questions about services, 61% chose at least one of the four housing options as needed services. Housing was a key issue in most community discussions, and many participants talked about discrimination from landlords, as well as the extremely low vacancy rates in their communities. This lack of housing was related to the rising housing prices in many parts of B.C., including both rural and urban areas, and the lack of housing in many First Nations communities and on reserves.



Community members also talked about several types of services that were not included among the options listed in the youth survey, such as youth centres, social recreation programs, outreach workers, after-hours programs, services for youth transitioning into adulthood, and services for specific groups of marginalized youth such as Two-Spirited youth, or sexually-exploited youth. Community members stressed the need for activities for all ages of youth, and talked about many existing programs successfully being run by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations. They discussed the importance of programs that are youth-driven and provide opportunities for developing youth leadership. Participants also talked about the need to remove barriers to services, the lack of consistency of workers (given funding instabilities and high turnover of staff), discrimination and racism from service providers and agencies, and lack of Aboriginal people in service provider roles. Community members also talked about the importance of collaboration among services, both as a strength in some communities and a challenge in others, including the challenges in developing the capacity of Aboriginal agencies that are taking over services from the Ministry for Children and Family Development. Despite these challenges, people in several communities used the word “unity” to describe strength in their community, referring to the many people and organizations working together to make a difference.

A common theme in community discussions and interviews was the need for culturally-based services. Research suggests that cultural and community connectedness is protective for Aboriginal youth. Thus it is important to provide youth with opportunities to connect with their Aboriginal cultures, such as by learning about their own traditional practices and histories, and by being exposed to Aboriginal stories and traditions. Given the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and the fact that many marginalized and street-involved youth are not living in the community they or their family are from, youth may not have easy access to their own traditions. However, many people in the community discussions talked about the power of learning Aboriginal stories and traditions, even if they are from a different Indigenous culture. They talked about the importance of involving Aboriginal Elders in youth programming, and some made suggestions such as local bands “adopting” Aboriginal youth in to their community. Participants also talked about placing Aboriginal concepts such as holistic health or the medicine wheel at the centre of service delivery in youth-serving agencies. They also stressed the importance of community-level healing, including healing from residential school experiences and intergenerational abuse, as crucial to creating healthy environments for Aboriginal youth.



Top 5 Most Recommended Services in Each Community

Abbotsford / Mission

Safehouse - 64%
Job Training - 57%
Shelter - 50%
Safe & Affordable Housing - 43%
Work experience - 43%

Prince Rupert

Job Training - 52%
Safehouse - 46%
School Program for Youth - 42%
Shelter - 35%
Street Nurses - 35%

Kamloops

Safehouse - 50%
Shelter - 41%
Job Training - 41%
Alcohol & Drug Counselling - 27%
Work Experience - 27%

Surrey

Job Training - 62%
Work Experience - 36%
Shelter - 35%
Safehouse - 29%
Safe & Affordable Housing - 35%
Alcohol & Drug Counselling - 35%

Kelowna

Shelter - 55%
Safehouse - 35%
Safe & Affordable Housing - 30%
Job Training - 30%
Work Experience - 30%
Youth Clinic - 30%

Vancouver

Job Training - 48%
Work Experience - 40%
Shelter - 38%
Safe & Affordable Housing - 36%
Safehouse - 35%

Nanaimo

Job Training - 64%
Work Experience - 50%
School Program for Youth - 50%
Safe & Affordable Housing - 50%
Life Skills Training Program - 43%

Victoria

Shelter - 46%
Job Training - 38%
Affordable Childcare - 33%
Youth Treatment and Detox - 33%
Work Experience - 33%

Prince George

Job Training - 54%
Work Experience - 50%
Shelter - 46%
Safehouse - 42%
Life Skills Training Program - 40%

Looking to the Future



What makes you happy?

“Personal achievements.
Close relationships. Being
healthy.”

Female youth, Northern region

Aboriginal youth were generally optimistic about life. Youth in the survey were asked how they feel about their current life circumstances: 43% felt life was good, 41% felt it was fair, 10% felt their life circumstances were poor, and 6% felt life was awful. Girls were just as likely as boys to rate their life circumstances as good.

The youth participants were asked to predict what they would be doing five years from now. Most of the youth had positive expectations for their future. Half of participants reported they expect to have a job (50%), 33% would have a home of their own, one in four said they expect to have a family (25%), and one in five anticipated they will be in school (19%).

Fifteen percent said they did not know what they would be doing in five years, and a smaller number of youth had more negative assessments of their futures. Eight 8% thought they would be dead, 7% saw themselves in prison, and 3% thought they would still be on the street.

Final Word

Aboriginal marginalized and street-involved youth in British Columbia face a number of challenges in their lives, and changing conditions in their communities. These challenges are related to the ongoing legacy of colonization and cultural disconnection and create serious difficulties for young people's health and well-being. At the same time, the youth who participated in this study also identified a number of strengths and skills that they possessed, and reflected hope for their future. Most of them reported strong connections to their family. Many participants were working hard to create a better life, despite the difficulties they faced every day around meeting their basic needs. They also had ideas about what was needed to improve their own lives, and what was needed in their communities to help other youth, ideas which were also raised in the community discussions.

A number of recommendations came from youth through the survey and from youth and adults in the community discussions, to increase community supports for young people.

Street-involved youth lack housing options, but the issue extends far beyond this group of youth to their families and wider Aboriginal communities. Lack of available housing was

If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“The kids who feel like no one cares about them, let them know that we do care, we have unconditional love for all human beings.”

Male youth, Vancouver

seen as a result of violence and other risk factors, as well as contributing to a sense of desperation for many Aboriginal youth and their families. Additional housing resources may not only contribute to a decrease in the number of Aboriginal youth on the street, but may also improve the quality of life of those who are street-involved and marginalized, adding an important layer of stability where one currently does not exist.

Early prevention and intervention programs are key to creating healthy Aboriginal families and communities. Prevention programs are needed to provide support for at-risk families. Holistic programming for families should include resources to support healthy development from pregnancy through to early childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, and beyond. Additionally, early intervention is necessary for Aboriginal youth who are becoming street-involved, not just at the ages

If you could change anything in your community to help street youth, what would it be?

“...loyalty and trust based on more teaching and learning about the laws and our rights and each others personal development...”

Female youth, Vancouver

of 12 or 13 but as early as age 10, as identified in some community discussions. In particular, children and youth who are disconnected from school or family at an early age should be the focus for intervention, and provided with wrap-around supports to ensure the development of healthy long-term community connections.

Resources for Aboriginal youth should include culturally-specific programming. This should include programs for particular First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, offering traditional teachings, stories and connections to Elders from their own background. Additionally, urban and displaced Aboriginal youth should have access to programming which provides a level of general cultural knowledge and a connection to Indigenous teachings.

Given the huge overrepresentation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning (unsure) youth in this survey, resources should be created to address the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two-Spirit, queer or questioning youth, both prior to and during street involvement. In particular, programs must take in to account the needs of females. Additionally, research should be done to specifically identify the needs of LGBTQ and Two-Spirit Aboriginal youth, to understand their high levels of street involvement, and to make recommendations for relevant support for these youth.

Youth who are in the care of the provincial government should be better supported, with increased resources and programming which speak specifically to the needs of Aboriginal children and youth. Although the transfer of care to Aboriginal delegated agencies is one important step, there are many other changes which could be made, to improve the support currently offered to youth in care. Because these youth are particularly at risk of street involvement, additional measures must be put in place to support them.

Relationships formed in school settings can provide a central support for many youth. Resources should be put in place to foster a greater sense of connectedness to the school system, as well as with individual teachers, Aboriginal counselors and other school staff.

Opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills and to take ownership over their lives should be prioritized in youth programming. Youth and community members talked about the freedom that many marginalized individuals find through street involvement. Resources should be provided to develop healthier, safer venues for youth to develop this sense of freedom and to have some control over their own lives.

Issues of discrimination should be addressed more thoroughly in all community contexts, with an understanding of how racism, sexism,



classism and other forms of discrimination affect Aboriginal people and communities. These forms of discrimination operate at both systems and interpersonal levels, and further work is needed to address the impact of multi-layered discrimination on the lives of Aboriginal youth. Anti-discrimination training should be a priority for youth-serving agencies, to ensure staff are able to address their own biases and can offer fair and equal treatment to all clients.

Further research is needed to measure cultural connectedness for Aboriginal youth and communities, and to address the impact this may have on street-involvement and health issues of street-involved youth. Although this issue came up repeatedly in community discussions, little research has been done to measure cultural connectedness in the lives of Aboriginal youth, and to make recommendations for increasing the levels of connection in communities.

Recommendations from Youth and Community

- Safe, affordable housing.
- Early prevention and intervention programs to promote healthy families.
- Intervention to foster greater connections to school.
- Culturally-specific programming for street-involved youth, and training in cultural safety for youth workers people who work with youth.
- Services to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, Two-Spirit, queer and questioning street-involved youth.
- Additional support for Aboriginal youth in care.
- Opportunities for youth to develop skills to take ownership over their lives.
- Anti-discrimination training and other strategies to reduce stigma and discrimination towards Aboriginal street-involved youth.
- More research on the influence of cultural connectedness for Aboriginal youth and communities.

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Surrey

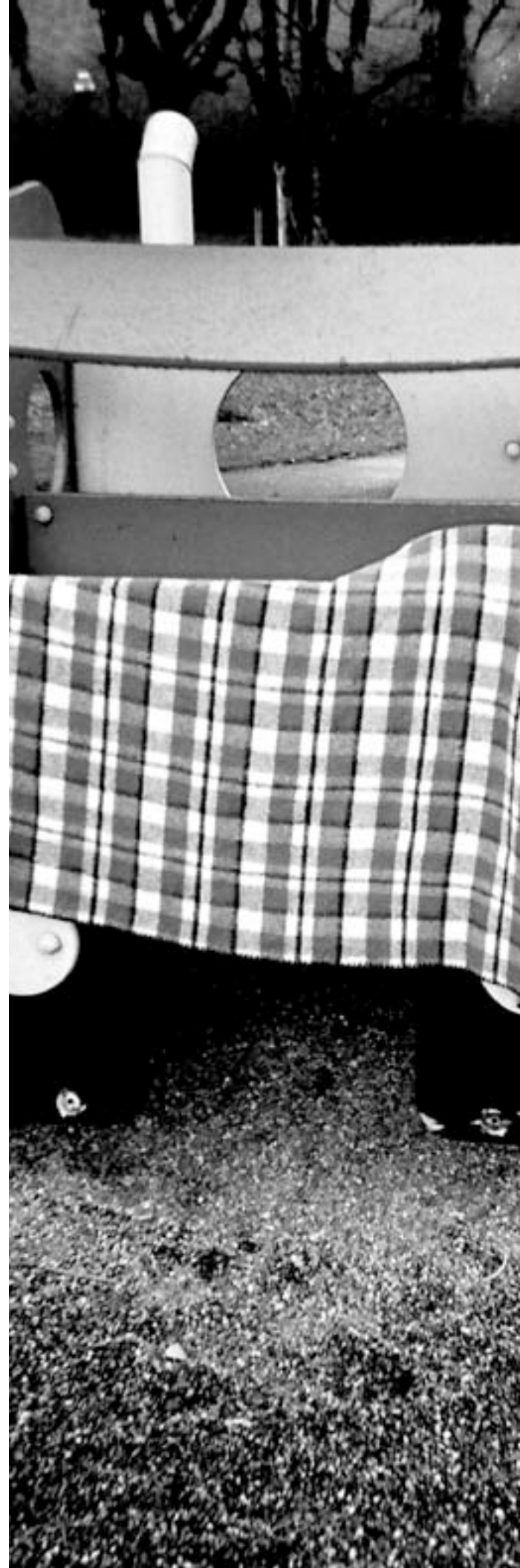
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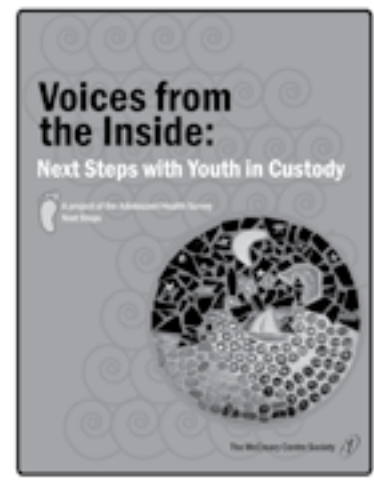
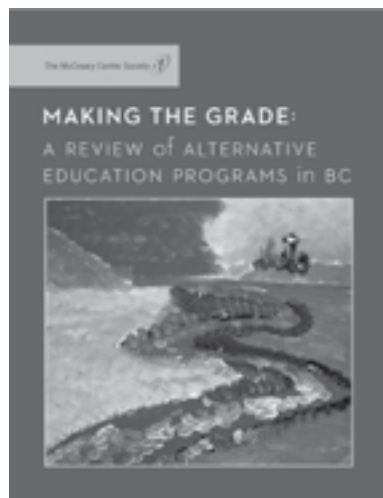
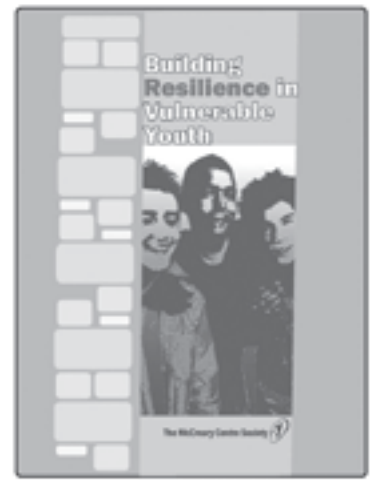
- Tyler Cuddahy, youth
- Steve Dancey, Urban Native Youth Association
- Alison Emond, Broadway Youth Resource Centre
- Ginger Gosnell, Urban Native Youth Association
- Angie Gray, Broadway Youth Resource Centre
- Linda Gray, Urban Native Youth Association
- Hilda Green, IRSSS
- Mark Gueffroy, Youth advocate
- Jamie Lee Hamilton, A-Step
- Jennifer Hanrahan, Directions Youth Services Centre
- Lucinda Johnston, Vancouver Native Health Society, West Coast Alternate High School
- Shahana Khanmohamed, Urban Native Youth Association
- Bernard Manuel, Vancouver Coastal Aboriginal Planning Committee
- Katherine Morgan, Family Services Youth Detox
- Tyrone Paul, Vancouver Coastal Aboriginal Planning Committee
- Cole Rheaume, Mikmwegiu Management
- Cass Thompson, Broadway Youth Resource Centre
- Jerilynn Webster, Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association
- Henry Wesley, Pacific Hotel
- Renee Wishart, Directions Youth Services Centre
- Kim van der Woerd, Reciprocal Consulting

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- Tom Bradfield, Vancouver Island Health Authority Aboriginal Health
- Malcolm Crockett, MCFD
- Jennifer Donison, Aboriginal Regional Support Services Team, MCFD
- Maureen French, Victoria Services MCFD
- Kim Graybowski, Caring for First Nations Children Society
- Max Henry Jr., Ponquachin First Nation
- Nicole Jackson, Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- Leon Johnny, Tse'wulhtun Health, Cowichan Tribes
- Doug McGhee, Victoria Youth Clinic
- Ellen Newman, Aboriginal Child & Youth Mental Health
- Sonya Pighin, Aboriginal Child & Youth Mental Health
- Don Tom, MCFD VI Region
- Annie Thuveson, Youth Probation, MCFD
- Toni Williams, Chemainus First Nation



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