Stakeholder Engagement Report

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WE BELIEVE PEOPLE MATTER

Working to build healthier, more inclusive communities

Youth-Friendly North Shore (YFNS) is
a three-year initiative that is funded by
Public Safety Canada through the Building
Safer Communities Fund, led by the District
of North Vancouver and supported by the
North Vancouver RCMP.

DISTRICT OF
NORTH
VANCOUVER

Public Safety   Sécurité publique
Canada   Canada

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Introduction

Project Background

Public Safety Canada's Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) offers four years of funding to support municipalities and Indigenous communities to develop and deliver community-based prevention and intervention initiatives that address risk and increase protective factors associated with youth gun and gang violence.

The BSCF aims to increase the recipient's knowledge of the nature, scope and challenges associated with gun and gang activities, as well as support recipients to develop a plan to sustain successful prevention and intervention activities upon completion of the four-year program.

Building Safer Communities is funded by Public Safety Canada, led by the District of North Vancouver and supported by the North Vancouver RCMP. The intention is to develop a three-year plan for the North Shore, in collaboration with the District of West Vancouver, City of North Vancouver, Squamish Nation and Tsleil-Waututh Nation.

Engagement Objectives

The overarching goal of this stakeholder engagement is to gather local insights to inform the development of a three-year public safety and youth crime prevention plan. In particular, the stakeholder engagement helped us to:

- understand the local context of youth behaviour and risks for criminal activity;
- engage and incorporate the voices of community partners in building prevention and intervention initiatives;
- identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing community initiatives, including youth services that increase protective factors and mitigate the impact of risk factors for youth;
- identify emerging threats to public safety both internal and external to the North Shore;
- identify opportunities to enhance building resilience among youth and their communities to deter engagement in criminal activity and support justice-involved youth to mitigate future criminal activity and contact with the criminal justice system; and
- identify the target youth population that would benefit from future prevention and/or intervention initiatives on the North Shore.

What We Did

Approach

This engagement was designed to draw local insight and knowledge about crime prevention and effective interventions for North Shore youth. The focus was on youth between the ages of 10 and 19 who are at risk or are engaged in organized crime as well as youth affected by organized crime.

Our engagement design followed the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of engagement and was grounded in the principles below that were approved by the North Vancouver BSCF Joint Management Team (JMT).

Strengths-based

Support protective factors, foster youth resilience and build on past successes to address gaps that are identified by the community

Youth-Focused

Focused on the needs and perspectives of local youth as they have expressed to the adults that surround them

Youth Resilience

Strengthen youth's ability to manage life challenges and make decisions that reflect their life goals

Community Resilience

Nurture a broad network of caring, respect and empathy that fosters meaningful dialogue

Sustainable

Use reasonable and accessible resources that can be continued and replicated in other settings

Equity Lens

Recognize that we do not all start from the same place. Address the imbalances so that fairness and justice apply to all

Culturally Appropriate

Be alert and responsive to others' values, customs, beliefs without judgement or prejudice to create a respectful and safe space for all participants

Engagements and Analysis

We used two different methods to engage stakeholders; (1) Stakeholders at the *Collaborate and Involve* level were invited to participate in 1-on-1 interviews, and (2) stakeholders at the *Consult* level were invited to participate in a group discussion. Some exceptions were made to connect with interested *Consult* level stakeholders in a 1-on-1 interview to accommodate stakeholder schedules in the limited engagement window. All engagements were conducted between April 6 and 19, either in person at an accessible venue, online via Zoom or over the phone.

A wide variety of stakeholders from K-12 education, sports and recreation, health and crisis support, police and justice, and youth service agencies were invited to participate in the engagement. The proposed list of stakeholders was reviewed and approved by JMT. We note that there are no youth justice organizations on the North Shore, that youth were not directly engaged and that most stakeholders do not actively provide programming for youth involved in gang activities or gang prevention. Therefore, most participants talked about youth in general or what they define as 'at risk' rather than being a stakeholder actually supporting youth in gangs. The detailed list of stakeholders engaged is presented in Appendix A and the General Question Guide is in Appendix B.

Notes were taken in each session but sessions were not videotaped or audio recorded. Any attributable information was removed from transcribed notes. After each engagement activity, the facilitators and notetakers debriefed to capture ideas and themes from the views and experiences shared by participants. These preliminary themes from their observations and reflections were captured in a short, structured form.

Key themes and emerging trends from the data are reported below. Specific recommendations related to programs and services emerging from the stakeholder engagement will be included for the JMT's consideration in the development of the three-year plan.

Intergovernmental Engagement

Efforts to engage the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, as well as the City of North Vancouver, were initiated during the week of April 3, 2023. All governments responded to the initial invitation and the engagements were completed by the week of May 15, 2023.

What We Heard

The Organized Crime Agency of BC defines a gang as a "group of three or more persons that plan or carry out crime for profit".

Risk factors are influences that may increase the chance that a person engages in crime or becomes a victim of crime.

Protective factors are influences that may decrease the odds that a person engages in crime or becomes a victim of crime.

INDIVIDUAL

RELATIONSHIP

COMMUNITY

SOCIETAL
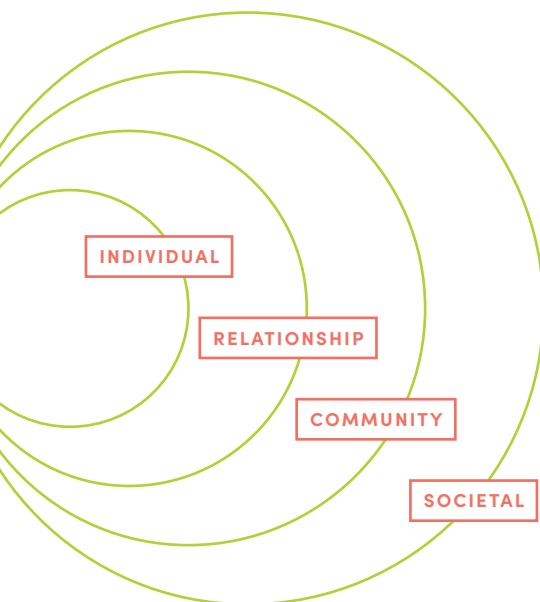
Overview

We heard from representatives of stakeholder organizations that serve youth. Participant perception of youth crime on the North Shore varied greatly, but most observed that gang-related crime was not a major issue. Most participants stated that they do not interact with or see youth who are involved in gangs or organized crime. However, some participants who support justice-involved youth were aware of more youth involved in gangs.

Participants from seven engagements expressed the view that there was no significant gang activity happening on the North Shore. In some cases, paradoxically, they went on to describe activities such as dealing drugs which is a gang-related activity. Participants noted that there are "packs of youth" that hang out together and may engage in mischief or petty crimes.

Participants shared that it is more common to see youth involved in low- to mid-level crime such as shoplifting, vandalism (including graffiti), and use of substances in public spaces. Some participants shared that youth may be involved in gang-related crimes, including drug trafficking, 'dial-a-dope' operations, and sexual exploitation. A couple of participants shared that on rare occasions they were aware of youth carrying weapons - knives or pepper spray - and admitted that this behaviour may be a result of a desire to protect oneself.

Participants identified many different risk and protective factors that influence the behaviors of youth on the North Shore. In many cases participants identified that a factor that offers protective benefits for some youth can increase risk for other youth. For instance, geographic proximity to outdoor sports on the mountains was seen as a protective factor for many youth but was also recognized as a risk for lowering sense of belonging for youth from low income families who may not be able to afford equipment or for youth from newcomer families for whom such outdoor activity is unfamiliar.

The main themes that emerged are categorized by each tier of the socio-ecological model, which considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. This allows us to understand what puts youth at risk or protects them and reminds us to act across multiple levels at the same time. This approach is more likely to sustain prevention efforts over time and achieve population-level impact.[1]

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/social-ecologicalmodel.html

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"Every young person has different needs"

We identified several common themes in participant responses that relate to the individual-level factors impacting youth engagement or risk of engagement in criminal activity in the North Shore. Participants noted risk and protective factors related to class and socioeconomic status, family system, increasing mental health concerns among youth, substance use, and identity and emotion dysregulation, and experiences of victimization. Significantly, participants also reported a lack of a sense of community belonging among youth.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Almost all participants attributed (risk of) engagement in crime, particularly low level drug dealing, to economic need or socioeconomic status (SES). This is discussed in two contrasting ways:

On one hand, participants noted that youth experience high financial need due to their low socioeconomic status. Youth and their families experience poverty, housing insecurity and financial distress due to the higher cost of living on the North Shore. For these youth, engaging in criminal activity such as drug dealing provided access to money quickly.

On the other hand, participants also noted that affluent youth engage in criminal activity. For instance, one participant shared that affluent youth are able to use their parents' cars to engage in 'dial-a-dope' activities. For some affluent youth, gang involvement may provide opportunities to show power and exert control amongst their peers. Ultimately, those who are cognizant of gang activity on the North Shore associated economic need with motivation for joining gangs. As discussed below, economic position was also a barrier to participation, where youth in economic need were unable to afford some services/supports (e.g., sports, leisure), yet affluent youth were not those engaged in programs.

Finally, economic position was also seen to influence how youth spend their "idle time." Some participants identified employment as a protective factor, and felt that there are fewer employment opportunities for young adolescents. This was seen to contribute to risk factors such as boredom and intergenerational poverty. Other participants noted that a lack of financial literacy or support with financial planning during adolescence can increase the vulnerability of youth as they transition into young adulthood.

> ## "Mental health challenges among youth causes criminal offences or engaging in risky behaviour"
> **PARTICIPANT**

Participants noted that some youth experience lack of parental supervision, dysfunction at home, separation and divorce, witness violence at home, intergenerational violence, and that some youth who are engaged in or at risk of engagement in criminal activity are living in single-parent homes. In some cases, youth are living with parents or caregivers who are struggling with their own substance use. Not only do these familial dynamics produce risk for youth, but also may lead to their further access to other youth involved in criminal activities. For instance, one participant shared that divorced parents living in different parts of the North Shore or Lower Mainland connect youth to other regions. Thus, we heard from participants that the family dynamic can present a risk for some young people living in the North Shore.

> ## "post-COVID kids have terrible sleep cycles, gaming all night, sleep all day. [They] connect online. Lost social connection in person. Massive anxiety. Sleep health is shot…"
> **PARTICIPANT**

> ## "A lot of it has to do with the environment they grew up in"
> **PARTICIPANT**

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

In conjunction with the above, participants repeatedly suggested that youth have complex mental health needs that remain unmet. Almost all participants make comments on youth substance use and mental health concerns on the North Shore. Increasingly, youth may be carrying and using substances, such as cannabis, alcohol, and other illicit drugs. One participant commented on the perceived escalation of use from legally available substances to illicit substances such as cocaine. They also suggested that some youth are misusing prescription medication. In some circumstances, youth are engaged in criminal activity to cover the cost of their substance use.

In addition, participants reported that mental health challenges remain an issue among youth. Participants shared concerns that poor mental health is linked, at times, to a young person's involvement in criminal activities. They noted that mental health concerns may manifest through obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, fetal alcohol syndrome disorders, among others.

> ## "…when [racial slur graffiti appears] in more affluent areas, people are taken aback because they're like 'oh, racism exists in this community?'. Parents view it as 'youth didn't mean it that way' or feel that there are no connections between the slur and history of the comment. This really impacts community violence and safety."
> **PARTICIPANT**

About half of the participants noted that these challenges are exacerbated by the continued effects of COVID-19. For instance, they note that youth experience a loss of social connections, developmental delays, gaps in education and disengagement in school, or anxiety about in-person social connections due to the lasting impact of COVID-19. These changes in socialization patterns may impact youth mental health. Many participants reported that youth have much higher daily online activity with increased online gaming as well as increased use of social media and messaging

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platforms. These interrelated changes in social patterns, daily routines and worsening mental health are thought to be linked to risk of or engagement in criminal activities among youth on the North Shore.

Adults who work with youth recognize that adolescence is a time when youth can be relatively more impulsive, take risks and experience emotional turmoil. However, participants reported that youth are showing more anger, aggression, and difficulty managing their emotions compared to pre-pandemic levels. They speculated that poor sleep and social isolation may be contributors. This dysregulation is connected to increased victimization, possible violence, threats on social media, harassment and bullying, risk-taking behaviour, and sensation seeking. One participant said that youth engage in criminal behaviour for "the thrill" and others note that youth engage in crime to "get a rise out of adults". The implications of these findings and responses to risks are described further below.

Additionally, some participants observed that youth at risk or engaged in criminal activity are more likely to belong to under-represented groups, such as racialized, immigrant, refugee, and newcomers. While many participants tended to group black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) youth into one category, some participants clearly articulated the specific risks for these youth populations. For newcomers, the social and economic challenges of settling in a new place may result in youth who are trying to form friendships and connections in a new community while their primary caregiver(s) are busy with employment. Youth from a refugee family may be navigating recent personal and/ or vicarious trauma that has not yet been addressed by the appropriate supports.

This idea was further discussed by participants through the prevalence of racism and hate-motivated issues across the North Shore. Importantly, a few participants noted a lack of awareness among youth and some parents about the connection between racial slurs expressed in vandalism and the legacies of oppression. One participant shared that parents are dismissive of the negative motivations their child may have had towards another racial group.

Thus, some participants were cognizant of the ongoing impact of race and racism. Others noted that crime is a systemic issue, and thus needs to be addressed through culturally-informed ways (see theme below).

SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

An overwhelming concern among participants was the lack of community belonging among some youth on the North Shore. Participants expressed that community belonging and social connectedness is an important protective factor, but remains a limited experience for certain youth. Because of this unfulfilled need, participants suggested that youth may seek belonging through crime. Some participants noted that there is a particular lack of belonging felt among immigrant, refugee, racialized, youth from low socioeconomic families, and other groups of equity deserving youth.

The fundamental need for connection and belonging may lead certain youth to develop peer relationships that are of a criminal nature. One participant noted that gang-related activities were motivated by a cultural component, whereby youth from immigrant, racialized, and refugee families are seeking a sense of belonging. For instance, some participants shared that youth may not always view gang affiliation in a negative light, as being part of such a group may offer a sense of belonging and protection. Participants felt that this dynamic was gendered and shared that young men may be particularly vulnerable to this mindset if they see themselves as "vigilantes," or as protectors of the community. Participants shared that fear of police interactions may result in calls that might otherwise go to the police being "deferred out" to groups of young men acting in this community protector role.

The current lack of connectedness and sense of belonging to the community among youth was reflected in participants' perception of the need for a relational focus in working with youth at risk or engaged in criminal activities.

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"It Takes a Village"

A predominant focus of discussion among participants was the need for a relational-focus in any work with young people at risk or engaged in criminal behaviour. Many of the participants indicate that the community should be focused on building a sense of social connectedness among youth. One participant shared, "...the benefit of accessing programs, being able to go somewhere safe and connect with others. It's a chance for social interactions with peers". This involves meeting youth where they are. Building this sense of trust is articulated as a process. For example, one participant noted that it, "may take years of building trust on their [the youth's] terms". Additionally, an important aspect of a relational focus and building a strong sense of belonging was linked to developing strong relationships and rapport with youth.

Further, participants address the need to build connections with youth (i.e., youth-adult connections). They noted that these relationships and connections are important among stakeholders and youth, as well as parents, caregivers, or other significant adults.

However, participants suggested that caring adults need more training on how to support and connect with youth. Moreover, they suggested that it has been difficult to maintain connections among agencies due to staff turnover and COVID-19. As a result, they noted that there is a need for inter-agency collaboration and wraparound approaches to support youth at risk or engaged in criminal activities.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENT AND CAREGIVERS

A common thread among participants is that family members need to be involved in support and programs aimed at youth to foster relationships and connections among youth and their family. Participants from K-12 education and youth services felt that parents or caregivers must be more involved: "...youth need the caregivers involved. You need a full care team. It takes a village".

Currently, however, some participants expressed a lack of involvement or concern among parents, caregivers, and other significant adults and community members. They believe that parents and the community should be held responsible for supporting youth and to create a sense of belonging within the community where youth feel safe. There is a sense of the need for families and communities to be engaged in services with youth. Some participants pointed to youth peer mentorship programs as a potential

"need to focus on the adults in the room, as this is where the problem lies"

GROUP PARTICIPANT

"Relationships with trusted adults are key. Having intergenerational connections is vital. Youth need to feel a sense of belonging to the community.

We need to educate community members to treat youth with patience and kindness... take efforts to keep the kids engaged"

PARTICIPANT

"..[we] might not have this behaviour from these kids, if there was more involvement among parents"

GROUP PARTICIPANT

way to engage community members in services. However, these participants noted that there were barriers to implementing such programs. Even in cases where participants felt they could identify potential positive role models within the community, they noted challenges, such as staff capacity, to coordinate a formal mentorship program.

Further, some participants noted that a lack of safety at home may cause youth to disassociate from their home life and seek safety in other settings, such as at school. However, they noted that youth do not always feel safe in public schools. These participants stressed the need for more culturally-relevant alternative programs, and for schools to take a trauma-informed approach to education.

By using this approach, participants emphasized the need for safe community spaces, where youth feel a sense of belonging. They shared that the attitudes of adults towards youth in any space of service will determine which youth feel welcomed and comfortable in that space. While all participants said they work on creating a welcoming space for all youth, many recognized that they may not be reaching specific groups of youth in their drop-in spaces or services. This sentiment reflects the need to build relationships, connections, and safety for youth to foster belonging in services and spaces.

Additionally, rather than focusing on punitive responses to crime, the majority of participants held the belief that organizational responses to youth crime must be grounded in relational approaches that build trust with youth and invest in improving youth-adult relationships.

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Community Themes

In addition to the above individual and relational themes, participants identified factors that are specific to the North Shore community that contributed to risk and protective factors relating to youth engagement in criminal activity. These themes fall into three broad categories: (1) geographic factors, such as the natural landscape and topography of the North Shore; (2) community planning, meaning how well-organized and connected communities on the North Shore are to one another; and (3) how programs and services are delivered to youth.

"ACCESS TO TRAILS, WATER AND BEACHES"

Access to nature was generally seen as a protective factor that is unique to the North Shore among almost all participants. They noted that the abundance of parks, forested areas, and hiking trails on the North Shore provide opportunities for youth to engage in healthy activities and support mental health. However, some noted that barriers to accessing nature persist for some sub-populations on the North Shore. These barriers include infrequent or inadequate public transport, lack of funds to engage in organized sports/outdoor activities, or limited hours of access or limited availability for public funded recreational services. One participant mentioned the need for financial support for youth from lower income households but also recognized that families may not be aware of these or may feel ashamed to ask for this assistance in a relatively affluent community.

The close proximity to nature was also seen as a risk factor. In particular, the streets get quite dark quickly and the presence of nocturnal animals reduces the sense of safety particularly in the long winter evenings. Participants shared that limited street lighting and darkness in green spaces makes the city difficult to navigate at night and can contribute to youth feeling isolated in their own neighbourhood. Some participants shared examples that illustrated that dark public spaces may also present opportunities for mischief or for bullying or harassing behaviours to go unnoticed, and this may also lower youth's sense of safety in their community.

"no matter where you live, you can work, walk and play all within your school catchments"

PARTICIPANT

"A strength of the North Shore is in its community relationships, and in the variety of activities that promote social connectedness and purpose for youth. These activities are also an opportunity to connect to adult supports that can become, over time, a person to go to for help and guidance."

PARTICIPANT

"It gets quite dark. There are lots of places to hide, to get up to trouble at night in the parks."

GROUP PARTICIPANT

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"LIKE AN ISLAND"

Participants repeatedly noted that the geography of the North Shore contributes to feelings of both isolation and self-containment among residents. Participants expressed that the geographic conditions (having to cross a body of water) make it feel like the North Shore is significantly disconnected from the City of Vancouver despite proximity. In some cases, this was seen as a protective factor which kept youth connected to the North Shore and "away from the city" for longer. In other cases, this was seen to cut off access to other resources.

The insular, island-like nature of the North Shore is perceived as a barrier for youth who are seeking or accessing specialized services. For instance, one participant noted that they frequently refer urban Indigenous youth that are not from Tsleil Waututh or Squamish Nations to the Friendship Centre in Vancouver. Another example cited was referrals for youth to specific LGBTQ2+ services in Vancouver since there is a limited offering of such services on the North Shore.

Additionally, the "village-based" orientation of North Shore neighbourhoods was seen in both a positive and negative light in one group session. While some participants noted that living in smaller communities can foster a sense of belonging, others noted that for individuals and newcomers who do not feel a sense of identity in the community, this could lead to feelings of increased social isolation. Participants also expressed that smaller communities may contribute to a lack of anonymity for youth, which may prevent them from accessing services or asking for help. One participant shared a specific example of LGBTQ2S+ youth accessing their service from an adjacent neighbourhood so that adults in their own neighbourhood would not know that they were gay.

This perception of geographic isolation also contributes to the perception that organized crime is not occurring on the North Shore. Participants from seven engagements expressed the view that criminal activity and organized crime occurs elsewhere in the lower mainland, but is not a pervasive issue on the North Shore.

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SPACES WHERE "YOUTH CAN BE YOUTH"

Participants repeatedly suggested that having youth friendly hang out spaces in every neighbourhood is an important priority. Different participants had different ideas about how youth spaces should operate; some felt that youth spaces should be "unregulated" or "youth-led", while others emphasized the role of supportive adults in "semi-structured environments". Others stressed the importance of empowerment and leadership opportunities for youth through community engagement programs. Regardless of the specific approach, participants agreed that more youth-dedicated spaces need to be embedded in communities across the North Shore.

Participants noted that public transit access between community hubs is limited and youth who may be at risk may not have access to an adult with a vehicle to drive them around. They shared that the geography of the North Shore presents challenges to accessing services. In particular, participants noted that the frequency of buses impact how youth are able to get around the North Shore, and that asking youth to leave their neighbourhood to access a program or service presents a substantial barrier to engaging in programs or services.

Participants shared that acquiring space to host programs and services for youth in their communities is a challenge.This was seen as a barrier to developing age-specific and age-appropriate programming, as small, shared facilities impede the ability of service providers to provide dedicated spaces geared to specific age groups or interests. Additionally, participants consistently noted that the hours of operation for existing services often do not align with the needs of youth. Participants emphasized that services need to be open later in the evenings and on weekends, as well as offer a greater diversity of programs to reach more young people.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORTS

As noted above, many participants felt that youth mental health has worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic but expressed that additional support to address this increased need has not materialized. Several noted that existing mental health support is not accessible: free or subsidized mental health services have long waitlists, while paid services present financial barriers to many youth and families.

Participants also perceived that youth may not be accessing the existing services and supports available to them. Some attributed this to an increase in peer orientation as a result of social media. Participants shared that youth may turn to their peers for support in moments of crisis and that this may in turn place a lot of pressure on youth to take care of each other.

In regards to solutions, participants identified the need for respite services for parents and families who are supporting young people. Participants shared that existing mental health services are not available during the hours that youth need them, and that services that operate after hours, or 24-hours per day are needed to fill this gap. Additionally, they noted that emergency respite services are needed for youth who are kicked out of their homes by their parents for substance use or poor behaviour; participants were quick to note that this would be beneficial for youth from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants shared that substance use is increasing among youth in their programs and services. Participants predominantly viewed substance use as a coping mechanism to navigate mental health challenges, or as a way for youth to fit in. They noted that there are limited harm-reduction or low barrier services available for youth who use substances on the North Shore, and that existing abstinence or zero-tolerance policies may contribute to youth disengagement from programs and services.

> "Core issues that young people face are mental health challenges, and criminal justice issues/ involvement regarding substance use"
>
> PARTICIPANT

> "youth are not reaching out, not going to counsellors, not reaching out to services that are advertised"
>
> PARTICIPANT

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SERVICE ORGANIZATIONAL LANDSCAPE

The high number of services available on the North Shore is generally noted as a strength among participants. However, almost all participants expressed significant challenges and limitations in the service organizational landscape. These concerns fell into three sub-themes:

- Struggle to engage youth that are most at risk of involvement in crime
- Absence of leadership and overall strategy to provide a robust, coordinated care continuum
- Lack of consistent training across agencies and
- Staff turnover (high burnout)

It is important to note that only the District of West Vancouver offers direct, government run youth outreach, drop-in and support services as part of its municipal functions while the District and City of North Vancouver provide funding to a number of different organizations to deliver a range of youth services. While the above sub-themes still apply in West Vancouver, we noted that DWV has less staff turnover and more autonomy to provide a continuum of care for youth at risk.

Service agencies struggle to engage youth that are most at risk

Participants shared that they felt current services are not reaching everyone, particularly the youth who are most at risk of involvement in crime. They noted that existing services may not feel welcoming for many youth, and cited the need for more harm reduction and low-barrier support and services. In particular, multiple participants expressed concern that youth may be asked to leave or be banned from services for drinking, vaping, or substance use. Other participants remarked that requiring youth to pay a fee to access recreation programs or equipment presents a barrier to participation and can contribute to youth feeling like they are not welcome. While participants shared a desire to reach more youth, many expressed concern that providing dedicated services for "at-risk" youth may amplify existing stigma and prevent youth and their families from accessing these programs.

Additionally, many participants lamented the lack of age-specific programming for older adolescents, as they felt this was a difficult demographic to reach. Participants shared that youth from this age category are

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not motivated or interested in attending programs if the space is shared with younger adolescents or children.

Finally, many participants noted a deficit of culturally appropriate support for newcomers and Indigenous youth. Some participants that respond to crisis or emergency situations stated that BIPOC youth were the primary audience that they get called to support. However many participants who worked to enhance protective factors seemed unaware of the different vulnerabilities and stressors for newcomer youth from a different culture and for Indigenous youth. One participant who works closely with justice-involved youth stated that in addition to linguistically diverse resources, having community members from within a particular cultural or racial community talk to newcomer families in their own language and cultural context would be invaluable. Providing culturally relevant support was seen as important to increasing "buy-in" among Indigenous and racialized youth.

No robust, coordinated overall strategy or care continuum for youth

A pervasive theme from our interviews is the perception that community services operate in silos on the North Shore. Some participants attributed this to the North Shore being separated into three different municipalities, while others identified precarious or competitive funding as barriers to collaboration.

Participants noted the importance of individualized case management and flexible service delivery, particularly customizing services to each youth's unique needs. In this regard, operating "in silos" may allow services to be tailored to specific community or individual needs. However, when supporting youth to move between services and organizations, many participants noted that referrals to other community agencies might not be successful due to a lack of alignment between mandates or approaches. For instance, some participants shared that there is a lack of dedicated harm reduction services available for youth and that some service agencies take abstinence-only approaches. This feature of services limits the ability of agencies to connect with and refer youth who are using substances to other important community services. Others shared that limited flexibility in the delivery of services (e.g. limited timing, scheduled appointments only, etc.) can present barriers to the most at-risk youth.

Overall, the absence of a coordinated care continuum is seen to leave youth vulnerable as they move between programs, services, and institutions on the North Shore.

> "[I] try to be a bridge to clinical supports or youth centres, but often the kids I am working with are not leaving the house, or aren't able to get to weekly appointments"
>
> PARTICIPANT

> "having members of that community to talk to these families in culture [and] in language is hugely missing"
>
> PARTICIPANT

> "Referrals can be challenging, community partners are not always able to support, or present barriers to engagement"
>
> PARTICIPANT

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Lack of consistent training and staff turnover (high burnout)

Participants noted that there is a lack of standardized training for service providers across the North Shore. Many participants said that they do not provide specific training to staff members to deal with crime or gang-related violence. They consistently spoke to a lack of staff capacity to manage increasing caseloads, both in terms of the number of youth requesting services, and in the complexity of cases. Participants shared that this burden is a post-pandemic impact, as described in the above section in relation to mental health and substance use. Higher acuity and complexity of cases is overwhelmingly cited by participants as a major contributor to staff burnout. The high cost of living on the North Shore is also seen to contribute to challenges in staff recruitment and retention.

Some perceived increased staff turnover as a barrier to collaboration among organizations. They noted that consistent staffing promotes community stability, and is a requirement for continuity of care. Participants also noted that messaging between service providers was not always consistent. Participants identified that there was no opportunity for them to network with others working on the North Shore with a specific focus on either youth crime prevention or promoting youth wellbeing broadly.

Need for case management support, admin support among youth service agencies

" [it's] been challenging to rebuild relationships, largely due to staff turnover [since COVID]"

PARTICIPANT

"Collaboration [between organizations] is required for prevention"

PARTICIPANT

Most participants noted that they have positive relationships with other community partners on the North Shore, but expressed a desire for increased coordination and collaboration between agencies. They expressed concern that the many existing services are not well-known to the community, as well as a fear that services are being duplicated. Participants felt that increased collaboration between agencies might support youth who are currently falling through the cracks. Participants proposed several solutions, including coordinated intensive case management teams, a situation table, establishing a "youth-worker coalition across social service agencies," or expanding the capacity of the North Van CAT with a focus on crime prevention. Currently, staff capacity is seen as the primary barrier to facilitating this level of coordination across services. Participants agreed that solutions that seek to increase community collaboration should not present bureaucratic barriers or increase administrative burden for service organizations.

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"Systemic Contexts in Which Youth are Raised"

Participants spoke to two key societal factors that impact youth on the North Shore and contribute to risk of engagement in criminal activity. Specifically, they spoke about the impact that social media has on young people, and how this can contribute to other identified issues such as poor mental health, social isolation, and young peoples' inability and/or unwillingness to engage in services. Participants also identified racism both as a factor that increases the risk of youth involvement in criminal activity, and as a challenge that participants are grappling with within the landscape of youth service provision more broadly.

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

Almost all participants felt social media has an overwhelmingly negative impact on youth. While some participants acknowledged that social media allows young people to connect based on their interests and can build a sense of community, most felt that online interactions have completely replaced in-person interactions. Some participants expressed mixed feelings about this.

Participants viewed social media as contributing to poor mental health, including increased social isolation and anxiety. Others noted that bullying or harassment is common via social media. The ubiquitous use of social media is also seen to increase peer orientation among youth. As one participant shared, "peer relationships are important, but they are [only] online". Participants perceived that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this dynamic due to the increasing reliance on technology during this period. Overall, most participants agreed that youth experience tremendous pressures to maintain an online presence. This can further feelings of "othering" or exclusion for youth who may not have the means to participate in online spaces.

Participants also expressed concern over generational gaps in knowledge, and the "changing goalposts" of technology for parents. Some participants who identified themselves as parents expressed that some parents feel they have limited oversight as to what their children are accessing online and expressed concerns about negative online influences. Conversely, social media and technology are seen as positive tools that service providers can harness to get the word out about their services and better engage with young people.

"[We're seeing a] little more of all of the problematic things we saw before. Everyone has difficulty engaging appropriately in a community setting. The last years of isolating has worsened our ability to socialize appropriately – we are relearning"

PARTICIPANT

"it depends on what they [youth] are primarily attached to. If it's parents and adults, then ok, but if their primary connection is online then it can lead to challenges"

PARTICIPANT

"so much criminal activity is done on phones"

PARTICIPANT

> "All the photos online [of the service provider's website] are of White people. They [BIPOC youth think] 'Oh, I shouldn't be going there, that's not somewhere I would feel safe to go'."
>
> — PARTICIPANT

In reference to being groomed as a victim of crime or being recruited into crime, participants shared that much of it happens over social media and other online activity on a mobile device. Young girls are seen as particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation through social media (Snapchat and OnlyFans), while other participants noted that recruitment into criminal activity or gangs occurs rapidly in online spaces. What may start as a relatively benign activity has the potential to build up to more complex involvement in crime.

RACISM/OTHERING

Several participants identified racism as "a ubiquitous part of the community" which impacts youth on the North Shore. Racism includes exclusionary policies, attitudes, or beliefs as well as pervasive cultures of Whiteness in institutions, services and society more broadly.[2] Racism and Whiteness are social determinants of health that increase the risk of racialized youth becoming involved in or affected by crime. They can also present barriers to participation in prevention and intervention services which seek to deter youth involvement in crime.

Some participants noted that identifying and speaking about racism seemed to be challenging for parents and other important supportive adults in youth people's lives. One participant commented on the White fragility and White parents not wanting their children to feel uncomfortable about their identity. Another shared how Black and biracial families have expressed concerns that conversations about racism are not occurring in important spaces for youth learning, such as schools.

Participants noted the well-established Persian-Canadian community on the North Shore, and many participants feel that their services are adaptable to the needs of these communities by having staff who speak Farsi available to offer support and/or translation services. However, participants also expressed concern that other newcomer or immigrant individuals and families may face more challenges integrating into the North Shore if there is less of a well-established community from their country of origin.

[2] *Examples of Whiteness in service provision include privileging Eurocentric knowledge or approaches, and "exclude[ing] the perspectives and leadership of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) even when equity is a stated priority." National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. (2020). Let's Talk: Whiteness and Health Equity. Antigonish, NS: NCCDH, St. Francis Xavier University. https://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/comments/ Lets-talk-whiteness-and-health-equity_2020_EN.pdf*

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Many participants shared that the "face of the North Shore is changing," and note an increase in immigrant and refugee families accessing community services. In particular, some participants feel that Filipino, Ukrainian, and Russian newcomer families may experience isolation due to a lack of existing community as well as immigrant or culturally-based services. Similarly, participants expressed concern that the high cost of living and of housing in particular on the North Shore can push these families out.

As previously noted, Indigenous and racialized immigrant youth are regularly identified as being the most at-risk for involvement in criminalized activity. Despite this, non-Indigenous participants noted a lack of culturally appropriate and relevant support for these youth. Indigenous participants noted that the Indigenous youth they support overwhelmingly do not access services offered by the municipalities or other non-Indigenous community agencies. This was attributed to youth feeling like they do not belong, and to experiences of racism and discrimination in these settings. One organization offering mental health support noted that over 80% of the youth they served were White; this was in spite of the ubiquitous sentiment about poor youth mental health and in spite of other participants stating that the majority of calls they respond to involve BIPOC youth involvement in crime.

If racialized youth do not see themselves or their histories represented in programs and services, they are likely to internalize the idea that these programs and services are not "for them." This contributes to "othering" which may result in youth who need the most support self-selecting out of spaces designed to support them (e.g. libraries, youth centres, schools, etc.). Othering can also lower youths' sense of belonging and place limits on or where, when, and how youth seek help.

SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT analysis was compiled from SWOT analyses completed by participants during group engagements and drawn from interview responses. In some cases, the SWOT analysis was completed in addition to guiding interview questions, and thus may include different perspectives and/or similar ideas captured in the thematic analysis above.

STRENGTHS

What factors prevent North Shore youth from engaging in crime?

- Connections among adults and youth
- Strong community partnerships and relationships in some areas
- Plethora of services/programs – in quantity and variety – to support youth and their families in different capacities from upstream prevention to crisis support
- Wraparound services through community relationships
- Many planned and naturally occurring opportunities for youth recreation, sports and activities
- Recognition and support for youth mental health needs by many
- Youth-centred approach in services and focus on involving youth in service planning
- Community belonging and connectedness (due to the small community nature of the NS, sense of safety and belonging for some)
- Some service providers offer programs and support that attempt to meet the diverse needs of youth.
- Observed active involvement of many parents
- Programs that connect Indigenous youth to culture and language

WEAKNESSES

Why may some youth on the North Shore engage in criminal activity?

- Absence of sense of belonging and community connection among some youth sub-populations (e.g. IBPOC youth)
- Feelings of isolation / boredom among youth
- Limited low barrier, accessible youth spaces, particularly within their own neighbourhoods (e.g., geographical challenges in accessing spaces)
- Travel across North Shore poses barrier to access services (limited public transit between community hubs)
- Limited, competitive funding for youth services poses challenges for staffing, collaborative wraparound service delivery across organizations, and a consistent standard in the continuum of care
- Limited resources to customize services resulting in service gaps for youth sub-populations (e.g. with complex needs, from different cultural or racial backgrounds, newcomers, experiencing trauma or intergenerational trauma)
- Limited access to youth mental health and substance use services for youth (high demand, long waitlists, limited timing, and transportation barriers to access)
- Perception of lack of anonymity due to the small, connected nature of the community which can increase (perceived) stigma when seeking help. Perceived fear and shame among family.
- Perceived lack of youth involvement in gang-related activity. There is a belief that there is no active youth crime prevention or intervention work underway
- Relative affluence creates conditions for access to legal and illegal drugs
- Limited relationships/connections between schools, parents and community organizations working together
- Retaliation for race- and hate-based issues
- Lack of support and accountability among adults in supporting youth
- Bullying and harassment between youth
- Lack of knowledge among stakeholders around invisible disabilities
- Lack of programming for younger kids (early intervention/prevention)
- Economic pressures on immigrant youth and families
- Lack of employment opportunities and job readiness training for youth, support with financial planning as older adolescents transition into young adulthood
- Lack of consistency and stability may lead to disconnection from support
- Limited to access counselling or therapy services

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OPPORTUNITIES

What opportunities are available today to further reduce the likelihood of North Shore youth to engage in criminal activity?

- Rebuild community partnerships that were lost after COVID-19
  - Increased continuity of care and throughcare between agencies and services
  - Continue or build relationship with schools
- More ages and stages-based programs through different partnerships
- Increased training to identify risk and mitigate criminal involvement among youth
- Use of risk-needs-assessment (RNA) in programming with youth
- Diversity in hiring and on-going training among service providers
- More youth-friendly safe spaces/facilities in community centres where they are lacking – potential to use school spaces after hours
- Engage youth in conversations about their needs
- More culturally-informed support for families and youth. In addition, there should be some staff who are part of the community being supported (e.g., who may speak the language, understand social location).
- Greater access to low barrier programs to improve accessibility for youth (e.g., hours of service extended, closer/more accessible via transportation, accessible to youth with different developmental capacities etc.)
- With recognition of parental capacity, increase accessible programs and support that include the whole family in service. This should aim to support parents/guardians in understanding and meeting the needs of their children. This could be extended to support or training for any caring adult in the youth's life. In doing so, relationships between adults and youth can be repaired or built (where necessary). Some accountability should be taken for significant adults (where able) to support youth.
- Active willingness by some stakeholders to support youth with diverse, intersectional identities
- Including Restorative Justice-focus in programming and services
- Raising awareness among community members and parents to prevent youth involved in crime
- Gaining a stronger understanding of which youth are not being serviced and supported
- Build more affordable housing
- Individualized case management
- Early prevention and intervention services and programs to support youth at younger ages. Caregivers should be involved in these services.
- Digital education (e.g., using webinars for trainings to extend access)
- Using motivational Interviewing, promoting prosocial behaviours, goal setting in programs and services
- Building self-esteem and coping among youth through programs and services
- Better pathways between service providers and gang/organized crime intervention services
- Positive role-modelling through peer mentorship programs

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THREATS

What might increase the likelihood of North Shore youth to engage in criminal activity?

- Carceral and punitive orientation of responses to youth criminal activity or deviancy
- Lack of accountability and responsibility among institutions serving youth
- Change in substance use and drug policy landscape
- Social media influences and advances in digital technology
- Rise in populism, racism and othering
- Colonialism and the legacy of residential schools
- Intergenerational trauma and family disconnection
- Lack of trauma-informed approach in school settings
- Evolving local and global economic situation
- Gaps in the healthcare system (e.g., lack of continuity of care).

Appendix A | Stakeholders Engaged

List of stakeholders invited to BSCF engagements between March and May 2023. Organizations in bold, pink text participated in an engagement session either in person, virtually on Zoom or over the phone.

K-12 EDUCATION

SD 44

SD 45

SD 93 *(école André-Piolat)*

Independent High Schools

(Brockton, Bodwell, St Thomas Aquinas*, St. Alcuin College for the Liberal Arts, Vancouver Waldorf School, Collingwood,* Mulgrave*)*

POLICE AND JUSTICE

North Vancouver RCMP

West Vancouver Police

North Shore Restorative Justice Society

PLEA BC

GOVERNMENTS

District of North Vancouver

City of North Vancouver

District of West Vancouver

Squamish Nation

(ESLHA7AN Youth Program at Mountainside Secondary)

Tsleil-Waututh FN

North Shore Youth

GENERAL YOUTH SERVICES

(provide extracurricular activities, life skill development, employment services, shelter, food, disability or other social supports)

Lynn Valley Services Society

Norvan Boys and Girls Club

Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland

North Shore Community Services

North Shore Women's Centre

North Shore Disability Resource Centre

North Shore ConneXions

Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society

YWCA (North Van)

Impact North Shore

Harvest Project

Lookout Housing and Health Society

Capilano University

Girl Guides of Canada

Jack.org

Pathways Serious Mental Illness Society

GENERAL YOUTH SERVICES – CORE FUNDED BY DNV

North Shore Neighbourhood House

Capilano Community Services

Parkgate Community Services

Hollyburn Family Services

Family Services of the North Shore

SPORTS AND RECREATION ASSOCIATIONS

North Vancouver Football Club

North Shore Girls Soccer Club

North Vancouver Minor Hockey Association

North Shore Basketball Academy

SPORTS AND RECREATION – MUNICIPAL

North Vancouver Recreation and Culture

West Vancouver Recreation

North Vancouver District Public Library

North Vancouver City Library

West Vancouver Memorial Library

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Appendix B | General Question Guide

1. **Tell me about how you interact or work with youth in your role (or how your organization works with youth).**

2. **In the programs and services that you offer for youth, have you encountered youth involved in general and/or organized criminal activity? If so, please describe.**

   PROBES:
   - This may include mischief, petty crimes, gang activity as well as trafficking
   - How do you know? What are early indicators that raise concern?
   - What are the organization's protocols/processes for:
     - To support youth engaged in criminal activity?
     - To identify suspected activity?
     - To maintain safety for other youth?
   - Who does the process serve? (Youth who are engaged in criminal activity or keeping them away from youth who are not engaged in criminal activity, do they bring in at-risk youth or shove them out…)

3. **Can you describe how you are resourced to deal with youth who may be involved in criminal activity?**

   PROBES:
   - This may include mischief, petty crimes, gang activity as well as trafficking
   - Resources could be training, time, process or other material supports
   - Do they feel the resources they have are adequate? If not, what would they like to see?
   - Do the staff/ volunteers receive training? If so, what?
   - Do the staff/volunteers have professional/legal/ regulatory obligations?

4. **What actions do you or your organization undertake when you encounter youth involved in general and/or organized criminal activity?**

   PROBES:
   - Is there a formal process?
   - What actions have been helpful (for youth?)
   - What actions have not been effective in supporting youth?

5. **In the programs and services that you offer for youth, have you encountered youth affected by general and/or organized criminal activity? If so, please describe.**

   PROBES:

6. **What actions do you or your organization undertake when you encounter youth affected by general and/or organized criminal activity?**

   PROBES:
   - What actions have been helpful (for youth?)
   - What actions have not been effective in supporting youth?

7. **Are the youth that your organization serves representative of the overall population of the North Shore?**

   PROBES:
   - Think about race, culture, religion, gender diversity, income, disabilities etc.
   - If not, why do you think that is? and what are you doing to reach a more diverse community?
   - If yes, what is your organization doing to create the conditions for this to happen? What insight would you like to share with other agencies?
   - Does your organization track demographic information about the youth you serve?

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