

# Welco**ME** Youth Action Team

Summary of year 3  
Youth Engagements



Prepared by BUNYAAD Public Affairs and McCreary Centre Society for the Youth-Friendly North Shore initiative.

The initiative's work is led by the District of North Vancouver in collaboration with the City of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, Squamish Nation, and Tsleil-Waututh Nation.

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Public Safety  
Canada

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Skwxwú7mesh  
Úxwumixw  
Squamish Nation



Tsleil-Waututh Nation  
PEOPLE OF THE INLET



We thank all the youth who shared their perspectives in this year's Welco**ME** activities, and for their interest in helping to shape a more youth-friendly North Shore.

We are also grateful to the North Vancouver School District and West Vancouver School District for supporting student engagement in Welco**ME**.

We respectfully acknowledge the original Peoples of the lands and waters that situate and surround us wherever we work. We honour the səliilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), on whose territories we work, play and live. We extend our gratitude and raise up their ongoing relationship with land they have stewarded since time immemorial. As well, we recognize Métis Nation BC, Inuit and urban Indigenous Peoples who have deeply rooted relationships with the land we all call home.

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# Executive Summary

WelcoME is the youth engagement program within the Youth-Friendly North Shore (YFNS) initiative, a three-year strategy to foster safe, connected, and inclusive communities for youth on the North Shore. Led by BUNYAAD Public Affairs, WelcoME is delivered in partnership with McCreary Centre Society (McCreary).

In this third year of engagement, McCreary facilitated focus groups with 32 diverse youth from across the North Shore. This approach built on the work of the previous two years and aimed to engage youth who may face multiple, complex barriers to participating in longer-term youth engagement opportunities, to ensure their voices are included in shaping current and future community priorities.

Across these sessions, youth shared their experiences of living on the North Shore and identified what felt welcoming and youth-friendly, as well as areas where their community could improve. Findings were organized across five domains: Getting to and from, Outdoor spaces, Indoor spaces, Programs and activities, and Sense of belonging.

Youth identified a number of factors that contributed to their sense of safety and welcome on the North Shore, including access to nature, the presence of supportive adults in youth-specific spaces, and community centres and programs designed with and for youth. They also identified significant barriers and concerns, including experiences of discrimination, safety and access challenges on public transit, a lack of free or low-cost spaces and activities, and a broader feeling of not being treated as valued members of their community.

### Key recommendations and reflections from youth included:

- Improving transit safety and affordability, including free or discounted transit for youth.
- Adding seating, shelter, and garbage bins in outdoor spaces, like parks and bus stops.
- Expanding access to youth-specific indoor spaces, especially low-barrier, one-stop-shop services like Foundry North Shore.
- Increasing awareness of existing youth programs and services.
- Providing more employment training and entry-level employment opportunities.
- Addressing stigma, stereotypes, and discrimination in public spaces, businesses, and on transit.
- Ensuring youth are treated with the same respect as adults, and that their voices meaningfully contribute to decisions about their community.

Youth who participated in these focus groups greatly appreciated the opportunity to share their perspectives, and hoped their insights could contribute to tangible change in their communities for themselves, their peers, and future youth on the North Shore.

# Introduction

Youth-Friendly North Shore (YFNS) was a three-year initiative which aimed to foster healthy communities where youth can thrive and reduce the risk of their involvement in gangs or organized criminal activity. From 2023–2026, YFNS aimed to reduce risk factors through targeted prevention and intervention activities. Funded by Public Safety Canada, the initiative was led by the District of North Vancouver and pursues its goals through two interconnected streams of work: creating youth-friendly spaces through active youth engagement, and improving the system of care for youth on the North Shore.

McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) was contracted to lead WelcoME, the YFNS initiative’s youth engagement activities. WelcoME aimed to better understand the experiences of youth ages 12–18 living on the North Shore, and to gather their perspectives on what makes spaces, programs, and services feel welcoming and youth-friendly. What youth shared has shaped other YFNS strategies and activities.

The first round of WelcoME engaged 21 diverse North Shore youth ages 12–18 in the Youth Action Team (YAT). The second round engaged 49 youth in multiple YAT groups over a shorter period (full-day or three weekly sessions). In this third and final round, WelcoME engaged youth who faced multiple, complex barriers to joining community-based programs and services for youth.

To do so, McCreary facilitated two 1.5- to 2-hour focus groups with 32 13- to 18-year-olds accessing low-barrier, supported education programs in North and West Vancouver. Participants represented diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences, and included Indigenous and racialized youth, newcomer youth, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and youth who identified as neurodivergent.

During focus groups, youth were asked to share the places and programs where they felt welcome on the North Shore, and what contributed to that sense of inclusion and belonging. Participants also discussed where they felt less so, and shared recommendations for how the North Shore could be safer and more welcoming for youth.

This report summarizes findings from two focus group sessions organized across the five domains identified by the first YAT as features of any youth-friendly community:

- **Getting to and from:** public and active transportation, and safety on the way to and from places.
- **Outdoor spaces:** parks, natural areas, and other outdoor public gathering spaces.

- **Indoor spaces:** community and youth centres, libraries, and other indoor community spaces.
- **Programs and activities:** availability of meaningful, youth-centred opportunities.
- **Sense of belonging:** feelings of safety, inclusion, and belonging in the community.

### Limitations

The findings in this report reflect the experiences of the youth who participated in these focus group sessions, and may not be representative of all youth on the North Shore.

# What youth shared

“Everything is near each other, parks near beaches near malls, etc.”

The following section shares feedback gathered from the focus group sessions. This includes participant’s broad insights into the youth-friendliness of the North Shore, as well as specific, tangible feedback across all five domains.

Across engagement sessions, youth largely shared similar perspectives on what made a space or experience feel welcoming and youth-friendly. This also largely aligns with what youth have shared in previous WelcoME activities, with a few exceptions. For example, in this year’s engagements, participants discussed barriers to employment and interactions with local police in more depth than youth in previous years.

## Getting to and from

The experience of getting to and from places was identified in both sessions as having a major impact on whether youth felt able and willing to access spaces and programs in their community. Youth in both groups discussed public transit as a primary mode of transportation on the North Shore and shared a range of experiences related to it.

### What felt youth-friendly

Some participants appreciated the availability of transit as a way to get around independently. They noted that having transit close to key destinations, such as community centres and Park Royal Mall, made those places more accessible and appealing to visit.

Uber and other ride-sharing services provided an additional way to get around. These were more expensive than public transit but were considered a valuable service for youth, particularly for late-night travel when public transit was less frequent or unavailable.

### What felt less youth-friendly

Public transit was also one of the most consistently discussed sources of frustration across both sessions.

Youth in both groups described experiencing bus drivers who were rude or dismissive toward youth. They noted that drivers would sometimes drive away even when youth were visible at the stop, and felt bus drivers were unsympathetic or rude when youth did not have the correct bus fare or took too long to retrieve it. This was especially true for youth living in West Vancouver, who felt that many assumed they were affluent and that they were choosing not to pay for transit out of a sense of entitlement, rather

“Bus drivers are rude to teens and will drive away even when you are at the bus stop.”

“There have been times I haven’t had the bus fare, and I’ll ask to be let on, and the driver just says no. It’s like they assume because we’re in West Van we have money to take the bus.”

“I remember one time I didn’t have my bus card, and the driver let me on, but then my friend, who is Black, got on behind me, and the bus driver came down harder on them.”

“There have been old men recording girls on the bus.”

“A lot of West Van bus stops don’t have seats.”

than a lack of funds. The cost of transit was identified as a major barrier for youth wishing to get around the North Shore. They also noted that this is not only an access issue, but also a safety one, if youth are not permitted to ride transit without sufficient fare.

It was also noted that youth were not all treated equally, depending on their identity or how they presented or expressed themselves. Some shared accounts of bus drivers being less lenient about not paying bus fare with youth who were racialized or were perceived as less affluent.

Safety on transit, particularly at night, was a major concern for youth in both sessions. They described some buses, like the N24 night bus, as feeling largely unsafe due to passengers using substances or behaving erratically on board. While youth felt compassion towards these community members, their behaviour also made youth feel less safe. Several participants, predominantly female-identifying youth, also described experiencing verbal, physical, or sexual harassment while using transit, mostly perpetrated by adults. A few even claimed to have been recorded.

In addition to their experiences on the bus, youth identified several other infrastructure gaps that contributed to negative transit experiences. Many bus stops lacked lighting, shelter, or seating, making waiting unsafe or uncomfortable in poor weather. Youth noted that stops on less-frequent routes were often the least likely to have shelters or seating, meaning passengers may be standing unsheltered for long periods. Additionally, youth felt these stops were more likely to be located in neighbourhoods where older adults with mobility challenges may be using them, recognizing that infrastructure aimed at improving the youth-friendliness of a community could benefit that community more widely.

“It’s usually the less popular bus routes with buses that come less often that don’t have shelters, which makes no sense because people are often waiting for longer at those stops so are more likely to get wet in the rain.”

Youth also recalled that most stops lacked real-time bus arrival information, and phone apps or other digital tools were not often accurate when tracking bus arrival times. This contributed to uncertainty and difficulty in getting youth to where they needed to go on time, and was a concern for those waiting alone after dark.

“I like all the options for food, wildlife, beaches, sunsets, festivals and concerts.”

“I like Lynn Canyon. I like the trails and that it’s a pretty calm hike. Also the 30-foot pool.”

“There should be more dry spots – coverings to shelter from rain and sun.”

“More covered spaces, more benches.”

“Everyone complains about litter, but there are no garbage cans anywhere. We need more garbage cans!”

“More garbage cans, and recycling and compost. And ashtrays!”

## Outdoor spaces

The North Shore’s parks, trails, beaches, and green spaces were among the spaces most valued by youth. At the same time, youth identified infrastructure gaps that limited how welcoming and comfortable some outdoor spaces felt.

### What felt youth-friendly

Across both groups, youth spoke positively about the region’s natural spaces. Ambleside Park, Lynn Canyon, Lighthouse Park, Deep Cove, and the Cleveland Dam area were frequently mentioned as youth’s favourite places on the North Shore. Many appreciated the variety and accessibility of outdoor spaces, including how easily they could get to them (e.g., by public transit) and that they were free to access. These were also places where they could “hang out” with groups of friends without being bothered, and sometimes offered other amenities (e.g., nearby food) and community events. Above all, youth were drawn to these spaces for their connection to nature.

“The Cleveland Dam area is one of my favourite places on the North Shore. It’s in nature, it’s beautiful, it’s great for hanging out.”

Others described how their local skate parks were outdoor spaces that encouraged community building, connecting with peers, and being physically active.

### What felt less youth-friendly

Youth in both sessions highlighted several ways that outdoor spaces did not consistently feel welcoming and comfortable. One concern was the lack of seating at basketball and tennis courts, requiring youth and other community members to sit on the ground while spectating or waiting for court time. Youth also expressed a lack of covered spaces and shelter from both rain and sun in outdoor areas, especially at parks and skate parks.

Youth noted there was a lack of garbage bins and ashtrays in many public areas, especially along streets, in parks, and at bus stops. This led to a large amount of litter, which youth felt made their neighbourhoods and communities feel less cared for and less welcoming.

“Chief Joe [Mathias] Centre [is my favourite place], it’s welcoming, community oriented, helps with food, helps with anything you need.”

“The Lonsdale Quay McDonald’s [does not feel youth-friendly]. It’s dirty and smells bad.”

## Indoor spaces

When discussing indoor spaces, participants in both sessions were most appreciative of places that felt designed specifically for youth . However, much of their input focused on the programs and activities provided in these spaces, as well as the overall sense of belonging of a space, rather than strictly about its physical features.

### What felt youth-friendly

Overall, youth felt welcome in indoor spaces that were accessible by transit, and where they were able to be comfortable (e.g., comfortable seating). This included spaces that provided couches, comfortable chairs, carpet, and other features that encouraged them to relax and spread out.

The Chief Joe Mathias Centre, run by the Squamish Nation, was highlighted by multiple participants as a welcoming and youth-friendly space. Youth like that it provides food, is open to all youth, and is staffed by people who are genuinely caring and treat youth with respect. The centre also features both an indoor and outdoor basketball court, allowing youth to play basketball at any time.

The youth centre at the John Braithwaite Community Centre was also mentioned, with one participant sharing that it has “a place to hang out and chat, and the manager is so sweet.” Youth enjoyed the facilities at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, especially the pool and sauna, and the skating rink at the West Vancouver Recreation Centre. A few youth liked the Park Royal Youth Hub for being youth-centred, located in an area accessible by transit, and for being a space with comfortable furniture.

Foundry North Shore was highlighted in both sessions as a youth-friendly space. Participants appreciated that the building and facilities were specifically designed for them, and was easy to get to and accessible to navigate inside the building.

### What felt less youth-friendly

Most often, youth felt that a lack of cleanliness (e.g., litter) or proper facility maintenance made indoor spaces feel less welcoming. When a space felt dirty or not cared for, youth generally wanted to spend less time there, and viewed these places less positively.

## Programs and activities

Youth in both sessions noted and appreciated the wide range of program options offered across the North Shore, but also identified barriers related to cost, awareness, and relevance.

### What felt youth-friendly

Overall, most youth felt the North Shore provided access to a variety of activities to suit different needs and interests. Most youth felt they had access to a program or activity that was meaningful to them, and especially outdoor and sports activities. Youth mentioned rugby clubs, skating, skate parks, snowboarding, and other activities connected to North Shore's natural environment. The Studio in the City program (a summer arts apprenticeship program for youth ages 15 to 18) was mentioned as a valuable opportunity for youth interested in creative expression to explore their interests. Youth also appreciated the variety of programs available at local community centres, including Delbrook Community Centre, the Park Royal Youth Hub, and the Chief Joe Mathias Centre.

Most felt the programs they participated in were available at times that were accessible and convenient for them, and did not feel they were without needed programming during certain times of the day or week. For example, youth who attended the weekly youth basketball drop-in program at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre felt it was offered at times that worked well for youth (Mondays, 6:30–8:00pm), but also appreciated being able to access the outdoor basketball courts outside of those hours.

Programs that provided free food and snacks for participants were greatly appreciated, and increased youths' positive experience of the program. This included lunches and dinners provided at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre, and snacks at the Park Royal Youth Hub.

Youth also valued having a choice in what programs they participated in. Rather than being required to participate in specific activities, they appreciated the drop-in programs provided by Foundry North Shore and the youth centres, where they could choose from a range of activities and engage on their own terms.

“[To have fun, teens need] spaces for them to do activities for FREE.”

“The North Shore is really expensive.”

“There should be more harm reduction supplies that are readily available.”

“[My school is youth-friendly because] the staff treat us like people. There is respect, boundaries. We hold value.”

### What felt less youth-friendly

Affordability was raised as a significant barrier in both sessions. Youth described the North Shore as expensive, with high costs limiting access to recreation and activities, including at community centres. Youth called for more free or low-cost activities, and for discounted access to things like ski passes and recreational programs.

Youth also raised concerns about awareness of existing programs and services. Many felt that existing programs were poorly advertised and hard to find, particularly on municipal- or district-run websites. They described a lack of a centralized and accessible database of opportunities, programs, and activities available to youth on the North Shore.

Youth also felt there were too few programs to support youth experiencing mental health and substance use challenges, especially for youth living in West Vancouver or Bowen Island. Foundry North Shore provides some of these services, including harm reduction supplies, but is too far for many youth to access regularly.

### Sense of belonging

In previous years of WelcoME, discussing belonging often proved more challenging for youth than other domains, as belonging can be nuanced, abstract, and not always connected to something concrete or tangible. In this year’s engagement sessions, however, participants spoke at length about the features of the North Shore that did, and did not, contribute to their overall sense of belonging and connectedness.

### What felt youth-friendly

For many youth, belonging was closely tied to the people and places where they felt safe, accepted, and valued. This often included the supportive adults in their communities who showed genuine curiosity about youths’ interests, treated youth with the same respect and dignity as adults, and empowered youth to feel they were valuable members of the community. Participants commonly mentioned the Chief Joe Mathias Centre, Foundry North Shore, and their respective school programs as places where they felt welcomed and supported by the adults who staffed them.

Youth on the North Shore often felt the strongest sense of belonging in places where they could spend time with their friends and move about independently without feeling surveilled, like malls, parks, and other natural

“My room [is my favourite place] because I can do what I want.”

“Services like Foundry are very accommodating to youth.”

“Locals are unfriendly and suspicious of youth.”

“If you look like a teen, they always assume you are up to something nefarious.”

“It’s like [adults] assume any non-compliance from teenagers is because they are purposely being disrespectful. Like, no, believe me, I just forgot my bus card!”

areas. These places allowed them to explore their autonomy and be free to come and go as they pleased. For some, this was why their favourite place was their home, because they had the freedom to do what they wanted, when they wanted.

Participants also appreciated places and programs that supported their unique needs without judgement. This could include providing a range of mental health services for different challenges and experiences, such as at Foundry North Shore; accommodating diverse learning needs in alternative education programs; or offering programs with a variety of activities to meet different interests and comfort levels, such as the Park Royal Youth Hub.

### What felt less youth-friendly

Youth in both sessions described regularly feeling they were treated with suspicion and judgement by others for what they perceived as being because they were teenagers. This included experiences in stores, on transit (as previously mentioned), and in public spaces like parks, where they may be gathering with groups of peers. Youth reported being followed by store staff, being accused of shoplifting, and feeling they were held to different standards than adults. One participant described noticing that store staff treated them differently depending on whether they appeared younger or older.

“I’ve noticed that if I have my facial hair grown out, the staff don’t even notice me because they think I’m an adult. But if I’m clean-shaven and look younger, they’re more suspicious of me.”

They felt that whenever youth broke rules or social norms, adults interpreted it as deliberate disobedience. In reality, youth may not have realized they were doing something wrong, or their choices may have been shaped by their circumstances rather than intent (e.g., not paying bus fare). Participants also described how this, and other negative perceptions they faced, contributed to feelings of worthlessness.

“Society treats kids as less than human. Like we don’t matter and just do what you’re supposed to.”

Youth felt confused by inconsistent expectations and concerns of adults, which they believed set them up for failure. For example, youth described how adults often pushed them to get out of the house more, but then punished them for going out too much or for how they chose to spend their time outside the house.

“Adults are like ‘youth don’t go out enough!’, and then we go out and they’re like ‘youth go out too much.’ It’s like, pick one!”

“I think some businesses see a teenager and think they’re not going to work hard.”

“It’s so hard. You need work experience to get a job, but how do we get work experience if we have never had a job?”

“Community can look down A LOT at people who are outside of the norm.”

“[On the North Shore, there should be] less prejudice for teens with dyed hair/piercings.”

Participants also felt the beliefs and judgements about youth also affected the opportunities they were afforded. For example, many felt they were unable to get entry-level jobs because adults hiring for them assumed that teens are unreliable, lazy, and incompetent.

“I’ve applied to [name of fast food chain 1] like 6 times, [name of fast food chain 2] 4 times, [name of fast food chain 1] 2 times. They say I’m not the right fit for the job.”

Youth who expressed themselves in unique ways (e.g., dyed hair, piercings, heavy makeup) felt particularly judged by adults in the community. They perceived the North Shore as a place where everyone looked the same or had similar interests, and anyone who looked different was treated as an outsider. These youth described being made to feel unwelcome in both subtle and overt ways, like sneers, being followed in stores, or receiving negative or hurtful comments from community members. Youth who identified as 2SLGBTQ+ agreed and shared similar experiences.

“[One thing I don’t like about the North Shore is] the discrimination. Especially against queer youth/those who wear styles and clothes that are generally associated with the LGBTQ+ community.”

Racialized and Indigenous youth shared about their experiences of racial discrimination. One participant recalled multiple instances in which their friend, who they described as having more visibly Indigenous features, had been accused of shoplifting and had to accompany staff back into the store to prove the item had not been taken. This youth did not have the same experiences when shopping without this friend.

“I have a friend who looks more Native than me, and we’ve had trouble in stores with being followed by staff. Like in [name of grocery store] once, they accused my friend of stealing, and we had to walk back inside with them and show them the item was still on the shelf.”

“In the daytime,  
there’s always a  
cop car there...  
they’re never there  
at night when  
there’s sketchy  
people and sketchy  
stuff going on.”

“Let teens have  
their fun, stop  
calling the cops for  
stupid reasons.”

“Local police are  
very biased  
based on looks.  
[They] go much  
easier on ‘rich,  
basic-looking’ kids.”

## Safety and policing

Safety and security were initially discussed as part of the Sense of belonging domain, as youth noted they do not feel they belong if they do not feel safe. However, participants also wanted to discuss their specific experiences of policing on the North Shore.

Some youth felt that the police presence in certain areas and at certain times, such as Lonsdale Quay at night, was insufficient and did not help them feel safer in their communities. Multiple youth reported seeing police cars parked at Lonsdale Quay during the day, but could not see any enforcement activities and felt the Quay posed greater danger at night when police were not present. This was particularly true for female-identifying participants, but was also experienced by male-identifying youth.

Others, however, described feeling uncomfortable or unsafe around police, citing prior negative experiences. For these youth, seeing a police car at Lonsdale Quay led to an immediate sense of insecurity and fear. A few described having the police called on them when gathered with peers in a public place, which they felt was both discriminatory and a waste of resources. Others described similar patterns of discriminatory treatment by police elsewhere on the North Shore, like on the bus.

There was not consensus among the youth about the level of police presence needed to ensure a youth-friendly North Shore. For some, a greater and more visible police presence would help them feel more secure, while for others, it could have the opposite effect. However, there was consensus that youth want to be treated fairly and not judged based on pre-conceived assumptions about teenagers’ behaviour.

# Youth recommendations

Youth in both sessions offered a range of recommendations for how the North Shore could become more welcoming, accessible, and youth-friendly.

## Getting to and from

- Provide free transit for youth, with student identification accepted as proof of eligibility.
- Install bus shelters and seating at all bus stops, with priority on routes with long wait times.
- Add real-time bus arrival information at bus stops across the North Shore.
- Improve safety and cleanliness on public transit and at bus stops.
- Provide training for bus drivers on respectful, non-discriminatory engagement with youth passengers, as well as non-violent crisis intervention.

## Outdoor spaces

- Add seating at outdoor recreational facilities, such as basketball and tennis courts.
- Install more garbage bins across the North Shore, particularly in areas frequented by youth.
- Create more covered outdoor spaces and sheltered areas so youth can gather in all weather.
- Improve safety and cleanliness at Lonsdale Quay.

## Indoor spaces

- Expand access to youth-centred, low-barrier spaces, especially for youth in West Vancouver, Bowen Island, and other communities further from North Vancouver.

### Programs and activities

- Provide free or discounted pricing for youth for recreational activities, including mountain passes and community recreation programs.
- Ensure information about youth programs is easy to find, accessible, and available on youth-friendly digital platforms.
- Increase outreach and advertising for programs that already exist, including through schools and community centres.
- Increase accessible, visible, and youth-specific mental health and substance use supports across the North Shore, especially for youth in West Vancouver, Bowen Island, and other communities further from North Vancouver.
- Provide more employment training and entry-level employment opportunities for youth without prior work experience.

# Final messages from youth

“Teens need just as much respect as adults.”

“Every single person has inherent value.”

“Equal treatment for youth, not assuming they are up to no good just because of their age.”

“Not assuming things because they’re teens, such as being followed by security or not giving them job opportunities because they don’t think they can do it.”

In addition to sharing tangible recommendations, participants were given an opportunity to reflect on the broader shifts needed to make the North Shore a more youth-friendly place. Participants shared the following overarching messages:

**Treat youth as valued and valuable members of the community.** Youth asked to be treated with the same respect as adults, and to have their presence in public spaces considered a normal and welcome part of community life. They reflected on how the strength of any community depends on all its members caring for and respecting each other, and the recognition that each person brings value to that community.

“[To feel safe youth need] adults to actually stand up for them and acknowledge when teens need help in public.”

**Actively address biases and discrimination, and promote inclusion.** Through language and actions, youth wished for community members to reflect on and address their own biases about youth, and work towards building a community that celebrates diversity.

“Being supportive through language. Being inclusive to people who are culturally different.”

**Meaningfully involve youth in the decisions that affect them.** Youth were grateful for the chance to share their perspectives in this limited-time engagement and were eager for additional opportunities to help shape the activities, decisions, and priorities of their communities.

“Take youth seriously. Even though we’re young, our ideas and opinions matter just as much as yours.”



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