



NORTH COWICHAN YOUTH SERVICES REVIEW

10/11/2024



PREPARED FOR:

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We respectfully acknowledge that the Municipality of North Cowichan sits on the traditional territories of the Snuneymuxw First Nation, and the Quw'utsun First Nation. The Quw'utsun First Nation includes the Cowichan Tribes, the Halalt First Nation, the Lyackson First Nation, the Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

This report provides a strategic overview of youth services in North Cowichan and provides a rudimentary understanding of the existing youth services and youth services needs*. Its purpose is to:

1. Identify and Analyze Youth Service Needs
2. Provide Evidence-Based Recommendations
3. Support Strategic Decision-Making

This research seeks to equip the Municipality of North Cowichan with key insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing youth services. It combines findings from a desk study on youth demographics and socioeconomic factors with engagement input from youth, service providers, and community groups. The result is a set of recommendations aimed at improving the local youth services.

** For the purposes of this report and unless otherwise specified, references to youth are inclusive of older children ages 12-18 years old.*

COMMUNITY AND YOUTH PROFILE

Key Findings

1. Geographic Distribution of Youth Services

- Chemainus and Duncan host the bulk of the youth services, likely due to their status as the largest communities in the area.
- Duncan and Crofton exhibit a higher demand for these services, given their larger population of families and youth.
- South End and Maple Bay, being near Duncan, are better situated to access and benefit from services available in Duncan.

2. Demographic and Socioeconomic Considerations

- Chemainus has an older population, and a proportionally lower youth demographic compared to Crofton, South End, and Maple Bay.
- Crofton is characterized by lower incomes and a higher proportion of one-parent families and may benefit from low-barrier youth services or improved transportation options.

3. Indigenous Youth Needs

- A large share of residents in North Cowichan are Indigenous, and Indigenous students often face challenges related to health, wellbeing, and participation in extracurricular or out-of-school activities.
- Alarming, 54% of Indigenous students and 49% of non-Indigenous students in SD 79 report poor mental health.

4. Participation in Extracurricular Activities

- A substantial proportion of students in SD 79 rarely or never participate in activities outside of school hours. Specifically, 43% of students in grades 10-12 and 31% of grade 7 students exhibit low participation in extracurricular or out-of-school activities.

5. Early Development Indicators and Future Youth Needs

- Approximately 45% of North Cowichan's young children living in Crofton and Chemainus (~ 5/6 years old) in 2018/2019 were shown to have multiple early development indicator (EDI) vulnerabilities, much more than is average for BC. These children are now around 10 years old and will be youth soon (12-19).

6. Service Availability and Gaps

- Chemainus offers a diverse range of services, including substance use support, youth counselling, community centers, libraries, and health-related programs, indicating a relatively well-supported area for youth services.
- Crofton shows a more limited range of services, primarily focused on mental health, seasonal recreational programs, food banks, and community centers. There seems to be a gap in terms of the variety and extent of available services compared to other areas.
- Duncan provides a mix of mental health services, counselling, community outreach, and recreational opportunities, but may not consider North Cowichan's population needs when reviewing and assessing their community's youth service needs.



Integrated Findings

These integrated findings summarize a combination of background research with engagement input, offering insights into youth challenges and opportunities in North Cowichan.

- **Validation of Existing Gaps:** Engagement confirms gaps in youth services, especially in underserved areas like Crofton.
- **Limited Services in Crofton:** Crofton lacks services tailored to its lower-income, one-parent family demographics, despite a high proportion of youth.
- **Need for Indigenous-Focused Programs:** Indigenous youth are underserved, particularly in culturally relevant mental health and skill development programs.
- **Scarcity of Mental Health Supports:** Mental health services for youth are insufficient, with long wait times and a focus on intervention rather than prevention.
- **Geographic Disparities in Service Access:** Youth services are unevenly distributed, with transportation barriers limiting access, particularly in remote areas.
- **Lack of Extracurricular Engagement:** Older youth have limited opportunities for skill-building and extracurricular activities, highlighting a need for diverse programming.
- **New Insights and Emerging Gaps:** The loss of key service providers and programs exacerbates existing gaps, and there is a need for a youth centre to address multiple service gaps.
- **Technology Access and Economic Barriers:** Youth face barriers to accessing technology and affording program participation, hindering opportunities for education and employment.
- **Desire for a Youth Centre:** Both youth and service providers express strong interest in a youth centre to serve as a hub for services, activities, and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to address these gaps and improve service delivery for youth in North Cowichan, carefully considering all integrated findings from the desk study and engagement process.

Recommendation #1: Conduct a Feasibility Study for a Youth Centre Model

Explore potential youth centre models, including:

- **Full-Scale Permanent Youth Centre:** A centralized facility in a key area like Chemainus.
- **Flexible Mobile Youth Centre:** Mobile units delivering services to underserved areas like Crofton.
- **Integrated Youth Hub Network:** Smaller hubs located in community spaces, leveraging local resources.

Recommendation #2: Enhance Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Programming

Collaborate with Indigenous communities to develop programs that support mental health, cultural identity, and skill development for Indigenous youth. These programs can be integrated into youth hubs or mobile units.

Recommendation #3: Improve Transportation Options for Youth

Implement transportation solutions to enhance youth mobility, such as subsidized public transit, dedicated shuttles, or rideshare programs. Additional engagement with youth on transportation needs could further inform these strategies.

These recommendations, expanded upon and supported by smart and promising examples in the report, provide a targeted approach to addressing the diverse needs of youth in North Cowichan.

INTRODUCTION



1. INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

Adolescents require youth-friendly programs and services that are accessible, relevant, and trustworthy to address their unique developmental needs and create a supportive environment for early intervention and the nurturing of their interests and abilities. Without these supports, youth are at greater risk of facing intersecting vulnerabilities that can continue into adulthood. In North Cowichan, the dispersed nature of rural communities like Crofton, Chemainus, and Maple Bay presents challenges for youth to access services concentrated in the urban center of Duncan. Recognizing this, the Municipality of North Cowichan's Parks and Recreation department has actively supported youth through targeted outreach in Crofton and school-based initiatives at Chemainus Secondary School. However, these efforts have revealed potential gaps in broader community services, leading to further investigation.

In 2023, North Cowichan engaged Urban Matters to conduct a Youth Services Review aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the wants, needs, opportunities, and barriers faced by youth aged 12-18 in accessing appropriate services. The project seeks to provide a broad perspective on the youth service ecosystem in North Cowichan, combining data with insights from youth and service providers to identify gaps and opportunities for new or enhanced services.

To guide future decisions on youth services, the project involved engaging directly with youth, service providers, and community groups closely involved in youth service delivery. This approach ensures that the Municipality's strategies align with the real needs and aspirations of North Cowichan's youth, helping to create a future where services are not only comprehensive and equitable but also resonate deeply with those they intend to support.

The Municipality of North Cowichan (North Cowichan) was home to approximately 31,990 residents in 2021, and includes the communities of Crofton, Chemainus, Maple Bay, and the South End.¹ North Cowichan is located within the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) in British Columbia (BC). Appendix A – Municipality of North Cowichan Geographic Boundary shows the boundaries of the Municipality and some of the larger communities within. The Municipality is situated within the traditional territories of the Quw'utsun First Nation (Cowichan Tribes), Halalt First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, Stz'uminus First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, and Snuneymuxw First Nation.

North Cowichan is accessible via the Trans-Canada Highway (Highway 1), which connects North Cowichan communities to other parts of Vancouver Island and BC. The Municipality is also near BC Ferries terminals, providing access to the nearby Gulf Islands and the BC mainland. BC Transit operates public bus services within North Cowichan, facilitating transportation for residents and connecting them to neighbouring communities.

Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) serves North Cowichan's health needs, specifically through the Central Vancouver Island branch. The Municipality falls under School District 79 – Cowichan Valley (SD 79),

¹ Statistics Canada, 2023

which includes 17 elementary schools and 5 secondary schools.² This includes 9 elementary schools and 3 secondary schools that fall within North Cowichan.

Acknowledging the relationship between North Cowichan and Duncan is integral to this Report. While Duncan does not fall within the Municipality of North Cowichan, Duncan serves as a crucial urban hub that, perhaps inadvertently, services the needs of North Cowichan's communities. As a result of this relationship, data and information pertinent to Duncan are also included within this Report to develop a more fulsome picture of the broader youth service ecosystem.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report can be summarized as follows:

1. Identify and Analyze Youth Service Needs

To assess and understand the current needs, interests, and challenges faced by youth aged 12-18 years in North Cowichan, including a survey of existing services and potential gaps in the service landscape.

2. Provide Evidence-Based Recommendations

To offer actionable recommendations for enhancing youth services in North Cowichan, drawing on both local data and best practices from other regions, ensuring these recommendations are informed by the perspectives of youth and service providers.

3. Support Strategic Decision-Making

To equip the Municipality of North Cowichan with a broad understanding of the youth service ecosystem, enabling informed decisions on future service improvements and potential new initiatives that can effectively meet the needs of youth of live or spend time in North Cowichan.

METHODOLOGY

This Youth Services Review was developed by synthesizing data collected during a desk study of existing data and through active engagement with youth and youth service providers. The desk study included the following components:

- Community & Youth profile analysis
- Survey of local youth services and service providers
- Gaps analysis
- Review of smart and promising practices
- Recommendations

² Cowichan Valley School District, 2024

Desk Study

The Community & Youth profile analysis was a fundamental component of this study, providing insights into the composition and trends that shape the youth landscape in North Cowichan. This analysis laid the groundwork for understanding the evolving needs and challenges faced by youth in the area. Additionally, a youth services inventory was created to offer a preliminary overview of available resources and services (see Appendix C). While this inventory captures a point-in-time snapshot and is subject to change, it serves as a useful tool in identifying existing services and potential gaps.

To complement this analysis, the report also reviewed smart and promising practices from other comparable contexts, focusing on those with the potential to address identified gaps in North Cowichan's youth services landscape. These practices were selected for their creative adaptability to the unique needs of the local community.

- The desk study's Community & Youth profile drew on various data sources, including:
- Statistics Canada, 2021 Census Profiles for BC, North Cowichan, Chemainus, Crofton, Maple Bay, South End, and Duncan
- BC Ministry of Education, Student Learning Survey Results (2022/23)
- Provincial Health Services Authority, BC Community Health Profile for North Cowichan (2021)
- McCreary Centre Society, Adolescent Health Survey (2018)

Engagement

The engagement process was designed to ensure that the findings and recommendations of the Youth Services Review were evidence-based and reflective of current youth needs and perspectives. The engagement objectives were threefold:

1. Engage Directly with Youth

Involving youth who live or spend time in North Cowichan was essential to validating the desk study findings and uncovering new insights. This approach adhered to the principle of "nothing about us without us," ensuring that youth voices were central to the development of relevant and effective services.

2. Engage with Youth Service Providers and Community Groups

Engaging with representatives from youth-serving organizations was crucial for validating the desk study findings and gaining insights from those with direct experience in youth services. This collaborative approach helped identify gaps and opportunities from multiple perspectives.

3. Understand Youth Service Needs

The engagement aimed to determine youth interests, perceptions of current services, barriers to access, and needs and opportunities for future services, including the potential establishment of a youth centre.

Engagement involved over 100 youth aged 12-18 years and representatives from 11 youth service provider organizations. Various methods, including surveys, open houses, focus groups, and interviews, were used to gather input from participants

This combination of desk research and stakeholder engagement provided a robust foundation for understanding the current landscape of youth services in North Cowichan and laid the groundwork for developing the informed and evidence-based recommendations included in this report.

Considerations

While desk study data sources provide valuable insights, a few considerations related to data availability and pandemic influences are worth noting.

Although the data applied in this study offers important perspectives, accessing granular, neighborhood-specific information was unavailable, which impacted the depth of certain analyses. Additionally, the lack of available data from indices like the Middle Years Development Index (MDI) and Youth Development Index (YDI) for SD 79 limited the scope of the analysis. Additionally, a more detailed geographic analysis linking service distribution with population density across various communities could provide additional insights, however, the scope of this report was aligned with available data and the project's objectives.

The data spans from 2018 to 2023, providing valuable historical context while also recognizing that youth experiences may have shifted over time. Given the period data was collected from, it is important to acknowledge the potential impacts the Covid-19 pandemic may have had on youth and family experiences, particularly when it comes to data collected from the 2021 Census and the 2021 BC Community Health Profile. These findings should be viewed with an understanding of the unique circumstances during the pandemic.

The engagement process yielded valuable and diverse insights, with a few considerations to keep in mind. The process successfully involved 11 of the 45 individuals and 8 of the 39 organizations contacted, which is typical for such initiatives. Perspectives were gathered from a range of youth service providers, including representation from Indigenous youth service providers, though direct engagement with First Nation communities did not occur.

Most youth participants were aged 12-16, offering strong insights from this age group, though the perspectives of older youth were less prominent. To enhance the authenticity of responses, both public and private engagement options were provided, along with digital and paper formats, minimizing potential response bias. While multiple avenues for participation were available, some youth without reliable digital access may have been underrepresented.

Overall, these considerations highlight areas for potential future focus but do not detract from the value and relevance of the findings gathered through this inclusive and thorough engagement process.

COMMUNITY AND YOUTH PROFILE





2.COMMUNITY AND YOUTH PROFILE

This section includes information on families, the overall population, and other relevant demographic details revealed in the desk study. While not exclusive to youth, this section compiles data that is invaluable for better understanding of the needs and challenges faced by youth in North Cowichan. These data elements serve as a foundational basis for a more nuanced analysis and the formulation of informed recommendations to enhance youth services within North Cowichan.

The results presented in this section are intended to highlight demographic and socioeconomic conditions for the Municipality of North Cowichan, and where possible compares communities within North Cowichan, including Chemainus, Crofton, South End, and Maple Bay. Data for BC as a whole is included to evaluate local trends in relation to the provincial average.

COMMUNITY

Population

Historical Population

North Cowichan experienced notable population growth between 2016 and 2021, with its population reaching 31,990 residents in 2021, a 7.7% increase over five years (See Figure 1). This growth was particularly pronounced in the communities of Chemainus and Maple Bay, which saw increases of 11.7% and 9.7%, respectively. Maple Bay, with 7,457 residents, emerged as the largest of the smaller communities within the Municipality.

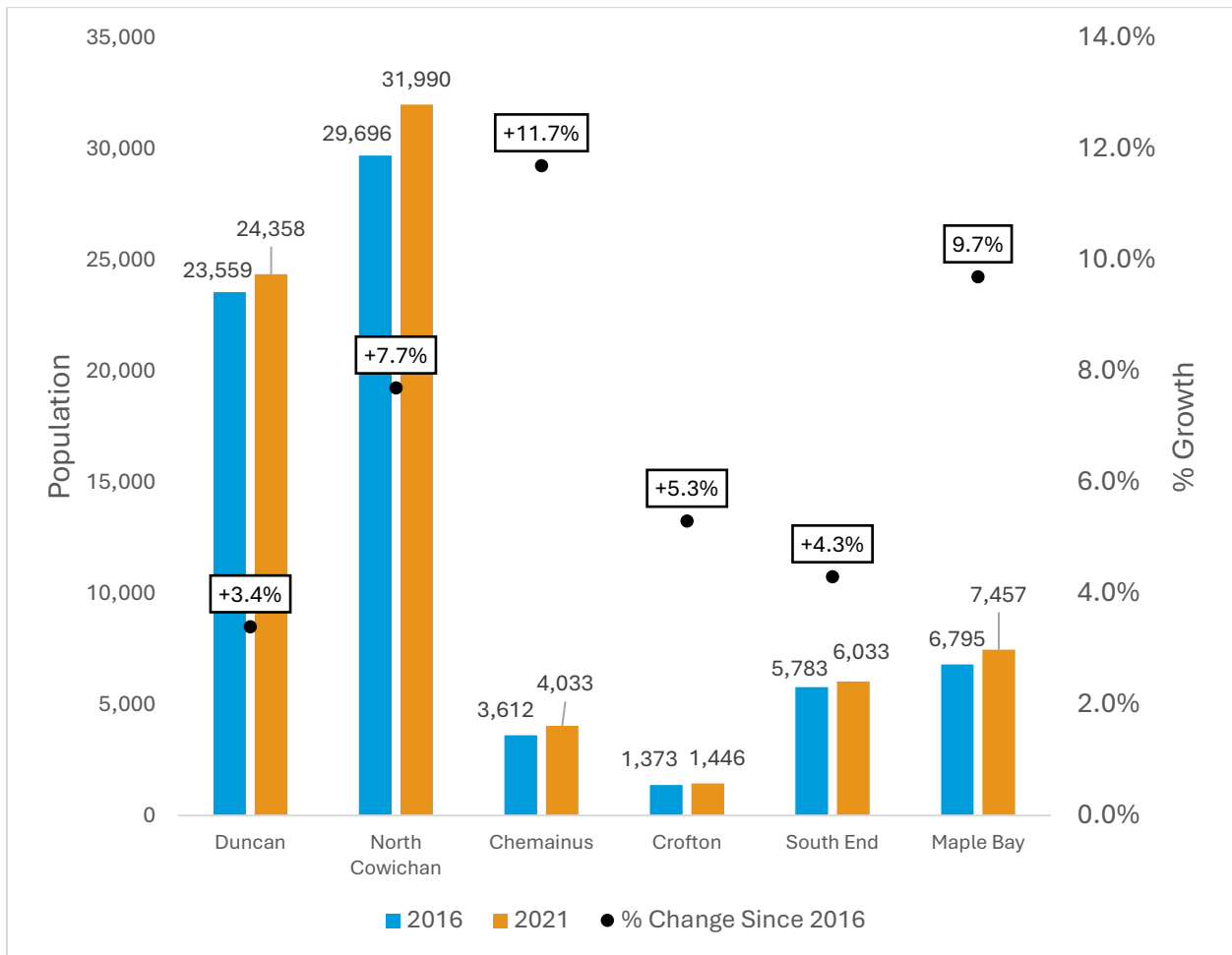


Figure 1: Population and Population Growth, Duncan, North Cowichan, and North Cowichan Communities, 2016-2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles 2016, 2021.

Demographic Composition

Figure 2 shows that in 2021, North Cowichan was home to 5,995 children between the ages of 0 and 19 years, with a significant share (2,660 or 44%) residing in areas other than Crofton, South End, Maple Bay, and Chemainus. Maple Bay held the second largest share of children (1,470 or 25% of the population) while Crofton, despite having the most children per capita, had the smallest overall number of children, accounting for just 4% of the Municipality's child population.

Within Crofton, children under 19 years old represent 22% of the community's total population (See Figure 3). This is the highest proportion of children within any of North Cowichan's communities, highlighting Crofton as a particularly youthful area compared to others.

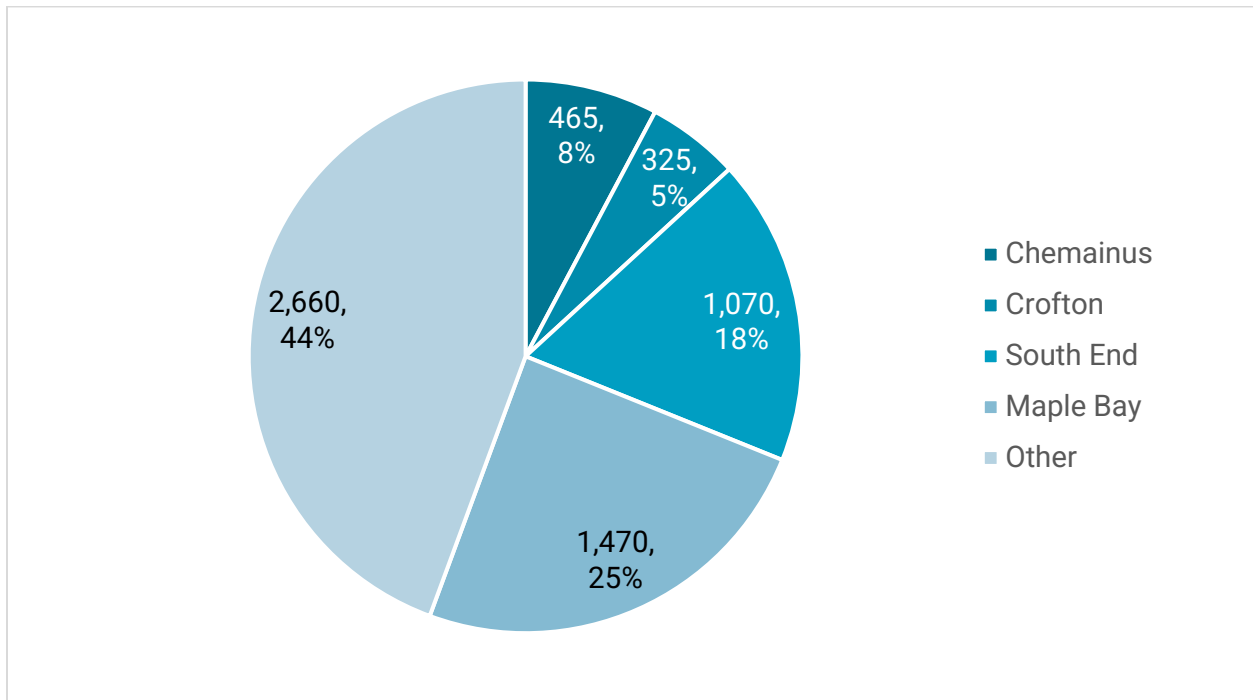


Figure 2: Number and Proportion of Children Ages 0-19 years, North Cowichan, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles 2016, 2021.

North Cowichan's age distribution reflects an older population compared to the provincial average, with a median age of 51.2 years (see Figure 3). Chemainus, in particular, has a significantly older population with a median age of 62.4 years, while Crofton, with a median age of 44.8 years, not only has the youngest median age but also the greatest proportion of children under 19 years (22%) and fewer older adults.

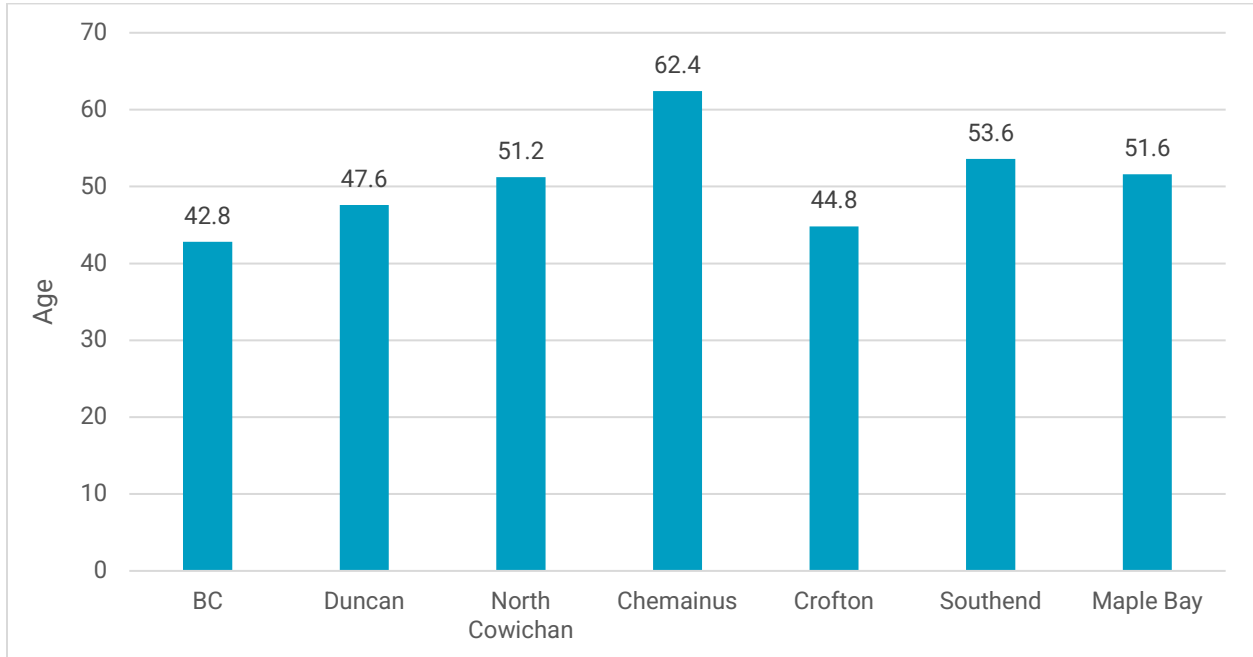


Figure 3: Median Age, BC, Duncan, North Cowichan and North Cowichan Communities, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles 2016, 2021.

Figure 4 shows that the proportion of children under 19 years in North Cowichan is equal to that of the province at 19%, however, North Cowichan has less adults in working age years, between 20 and 64 years. 53% of North Cowichan's population is made up of adults between 20 and 64 years, compared to 60% for BC. On the other hand, North Cowichan has a greater share of older adults who are over 65 years (29%) compared to the province whose share makes up only 20% of the population.

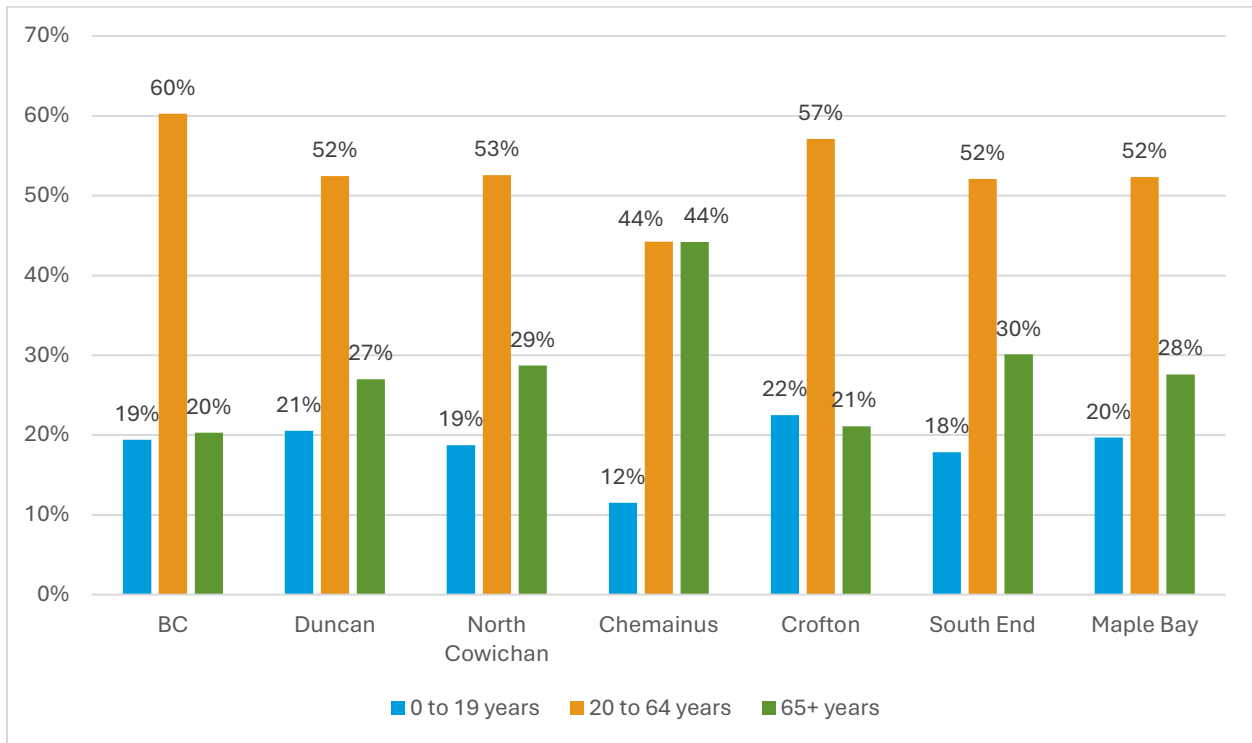


Figure 4: Age Distribution of Children and Youth, BC, Duncan, North Cowichan and North Cowichan Communities, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles, 2021.

Anticipated Population

Looking ahead, BC Stats projections indicate that North Cowichan's population will continue to grow albeit slowly compared to provincial growth rates. Figure 5 shows the year over year growth between years. The population is expected to increase from 33,078 in 2021 to 40,162 by 2044, representing a 21% growth over this period. This growth rate is significantly lower than the projected provincial growth rate of 49% during the same timeframe.

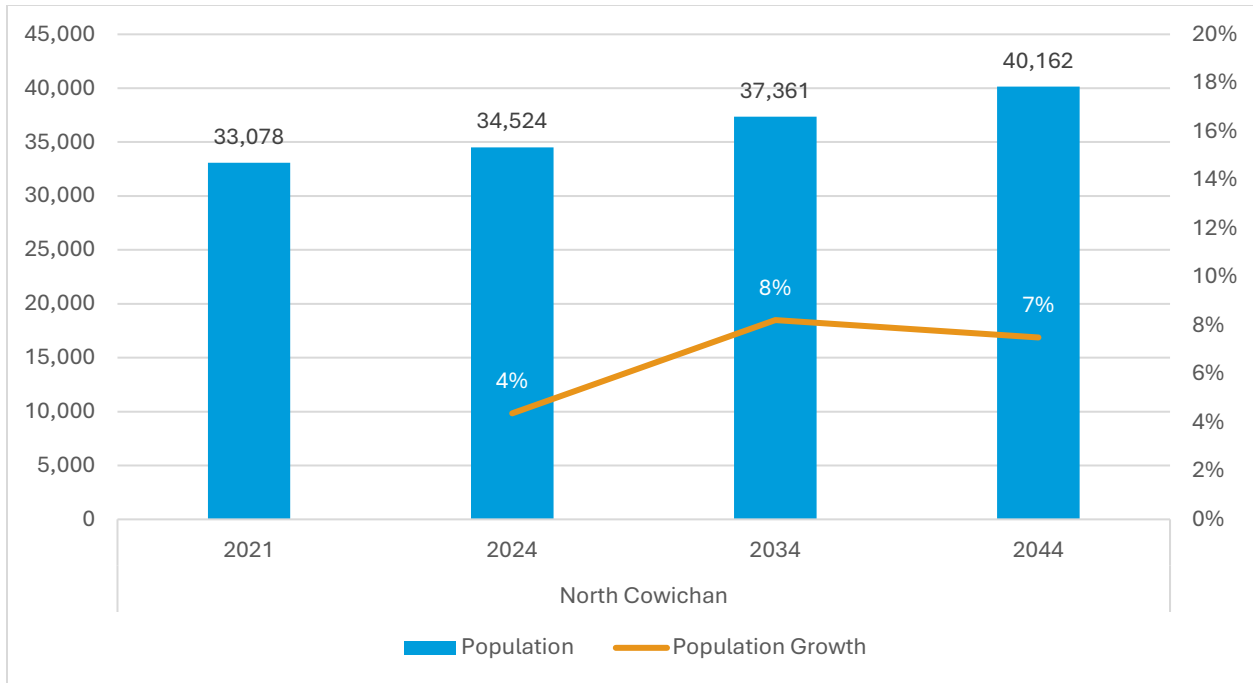


Figure 5: Projected Population and Population Growth (2021-2044), North Cowichan

Source: BC Stats, Population Estimates & Projections for British Columbia.

Note: BC Stats estimates of 2021 populations differ slightly from Statistics Canada Census data, as they are periodically revised to reflect methodological improvements. Census data are never revised unless an error is discovered.

Age Distribution & Youth Population Trends

While the overall population is expected to grow, the proportion of youth within North Cowichan's population is projected to decline. As indicated in Figure 4 above, youth aged 10-19 years made up 10% of the population in 2021. However, BC Stats projections for the 12-18 age group indicate a decline from 7.8% in 2024 to 6.3% in 2034, and further down to 5.7% by 2044.³ This trend suggests a gradual aging of the population, with fewer young people proportionally, even as the total number of residents increases.

Implications of Population Dynamics

These population dynamics present both challenges and opportunities for North Cowichan. The growth in overall population, coupled with the declining share of youth, highlights the need for adaptable and sustainable youth services. While the number of young people may decrease as a proportion of the population, the total number of youths could remain stable or slightly increase, particularly in light of the overall population growth. This underscores the importance of ensuring that youth services are flexible, scalable, and geographically distributed to meet the needs of a potentially smaller but still significant youth population.

³ Province of British Columbia, 2023a

Moreover, the absence of specific data on Crofton's population growth trajectory emphasizes the need for localized data collection and planning to ensure that the unique needs of communities like Crofton are adequately addressed as part of the Municipality's broader strategic planning.

Indigenous Identity

Figure 6 indicates that 9% of the population in North Cowichan identified as Indigenous in 2021, a proportion notably higher than the province's 6% share. This suggests that North Cowichan has a relatively significant Indigenous population compared to the rest of British Columbia. Moreover, in the neighboring community of Duncan, the proportion of the population identifying as Indigenous was even higher, with 16% of residents reporting Indigenous identity in 2021. This indicates that the broader region, including North Cowichan and Duncan, is home to a substantial Indigenous population.

Further emphasizing this point, data from the 2022/2023 BC Student Learning Survey reveals that 19% of the 1,199 students who participated in the survey within School District 79 (which includes North Cowichan) identified as Indigenous.⁴ This higher proportion among the student population reflects the strong presence of Indigenous youth in the community, highlighting the importance of culturally relevant programs and supports for this demographic.

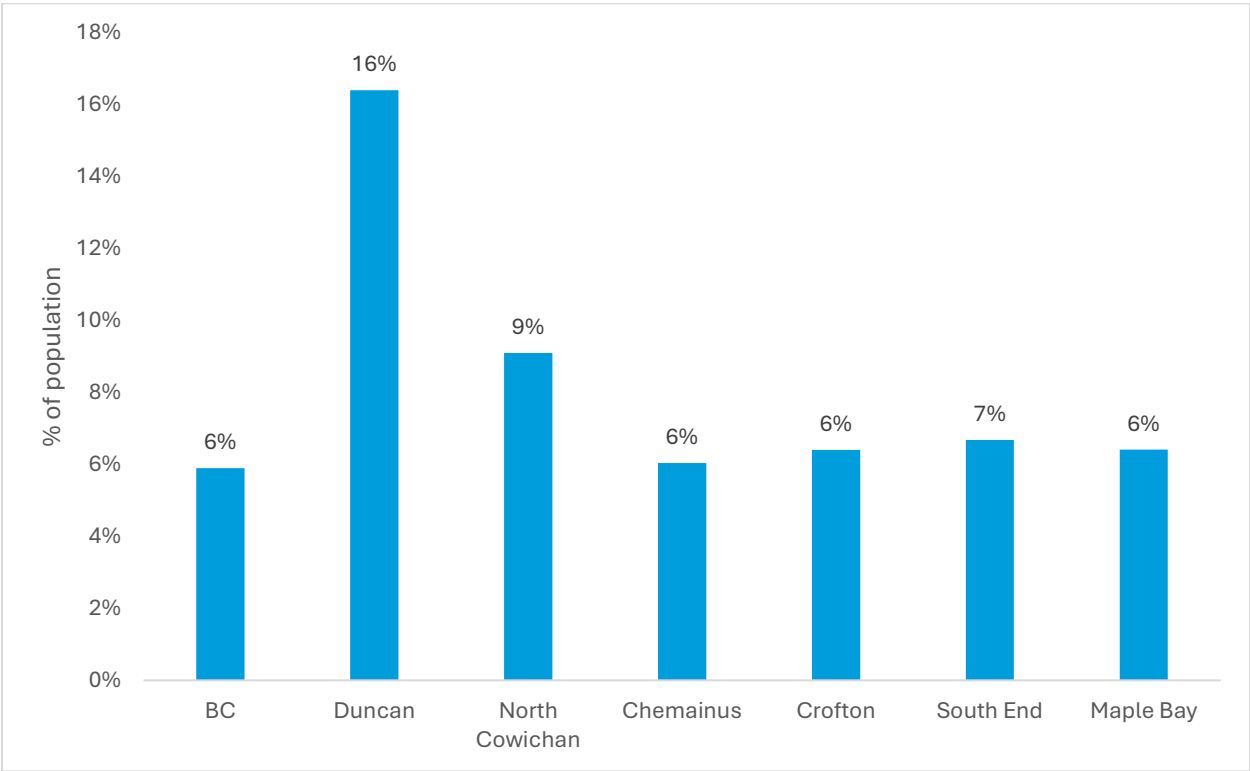


Figure 6: Share of the population identifying as Indigenous in BC, Duncan, North Cowichan, and North Cowichan Communities, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles, 2021

⁴ Province of British Columbia, 2022

Households

Household Composition

In North Cowichan, 19% of households are couples with children and 8% are one-parent families (see Figure 7). Within North Cowichan, Crofton has the greatest share of one-parent households (7%). Considering that one-parent households typically earn significantly less income and often rely on income supports. This financial disparity underscores the importance of giving special attention to youth services that cater to low-income, one-parent households, particularly in communities like Crofton, where these households are more prevalent.

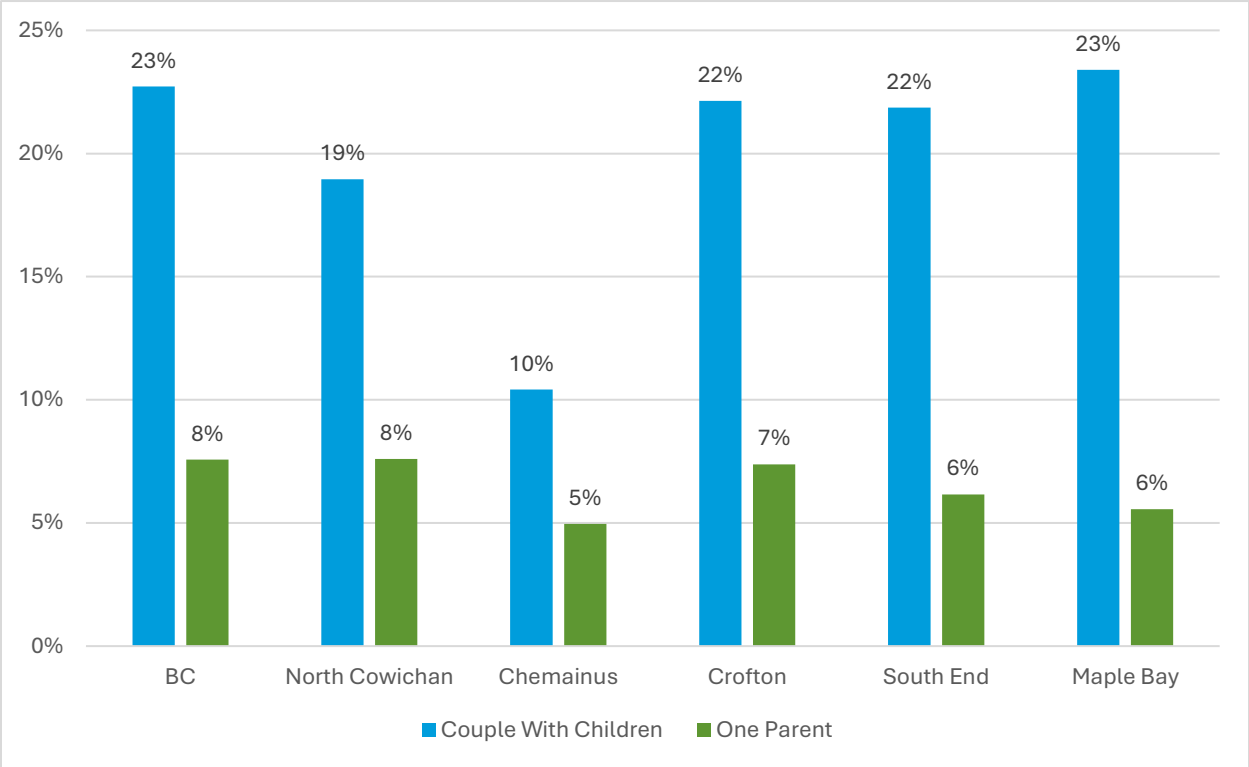


Figure 7: Share of Households by Household Type with Children, BC, North Cowichan and North Cowichan Communities, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles, 2021.

Household Income

The economic landscape in North Cowichan is marked by median after-tax household incomes that are generally lower than the provincial average. In 2020, the median after-tax household income in North Cowichan was \$86,000, which is \$9,000 less than the median income for British Columbia as a whole (\$95,000).

Median household income varies significantly between different household types. Couples with and without children earn the highest incomes and one-parent households typically earn the least. North Cowichan has

a lower-than-average median income. In 2020, the median after-tax income in North Cowichan for couples with children was \$114,000, \$77,000 for couple only households, and \$60,800 for one-parent households (see Figure 8).

Median after-tax incomes throughout North Cowichan also vary by community. In Crofton, the median income was \$99,000 for couples with children, the lowest median income for this household type across North Cowichan; 21.2% less than the BC median income of \$120,000 for couples with children. For one-parent families earning a median income of \$57,600 in Crofton, they are earning 25.9% lower than the BC median income for this family type.

On the other hand, communities like South End and Maple Bay have higher median incomes. South End's median income for couples with children is 4.2% higher than the BC median, and Maple Bay's median is 2.5% higher, reflecting better economic conditions in these areas.

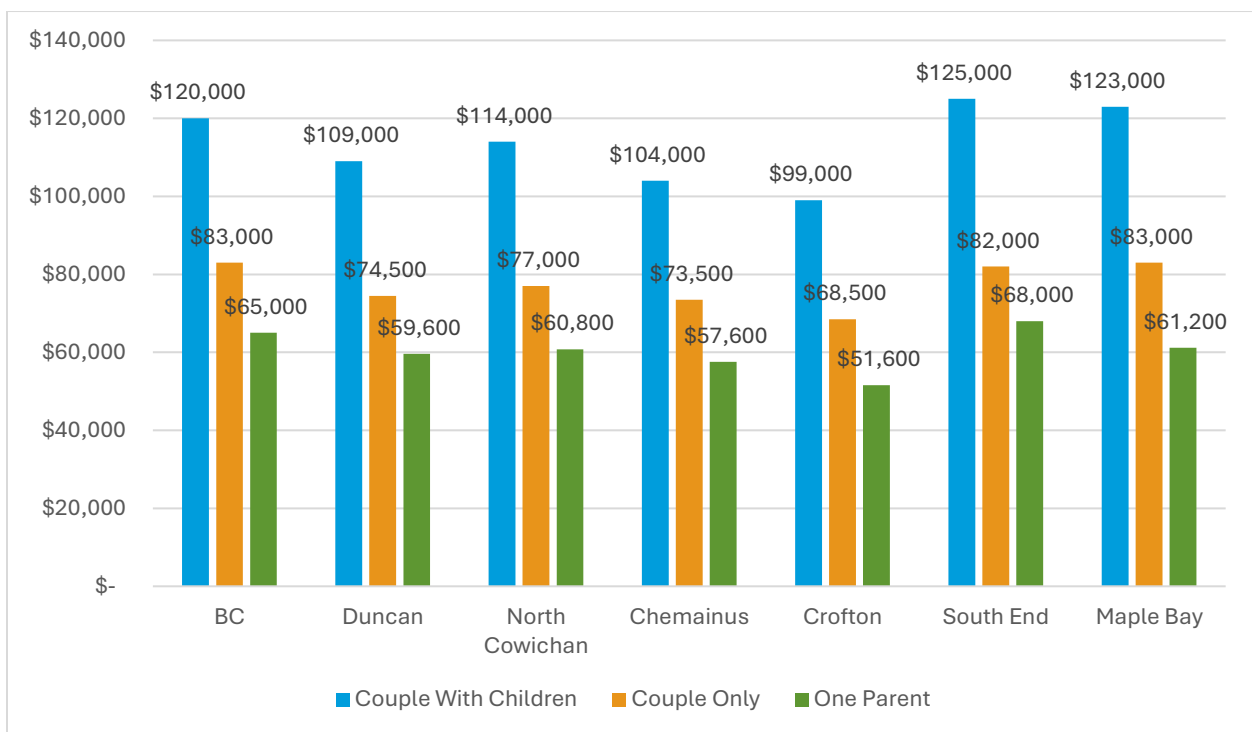


Figure 8: Median household income (after tax) in BC, North Cowichan, Chemainus, Crofton, South End, and Maple Bay, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles, 2021

Labour Force Status

Participation rate indicates the proportion of the working-age population that is either employed or actively seeking employment. A higher participation rate suggests greater economic engagement within the community. Conversely, unemployment rates show the percentage of the labour force that is actively seeking work but unable to find employment. A lower unemployment rate typically reflects a healthier job market.

Relative to BC, North Cowichan has lower labour participation rates and lower unemployment rates, likely a result of having a greater share of residents in or close to retirement age compared to BC, meaning that many residents are likely not seeking employment (see Figure 9).

Within North Cowichan participation and unemployment rates vary. Chemainus has the lowest labour force participation rate (41%) and the highest unemployment rate (11.3%). This combination indicates some economic challenges exist within the working-age population. Given that Chemainus has a high median age (62.4) and a large retiree population, many residents are likely not in the workforce, which contributes to the low participation rate. However, those who are in the workforce appear to be struggling to find employment, which is reflected in the high unemployment rate.

Crofton, with a participation rate of 61.5%, has the highest workforce engagement across North Cowichan. This is likely due to its younger population (median age of 44.8), which is more actively involved in the labour market.

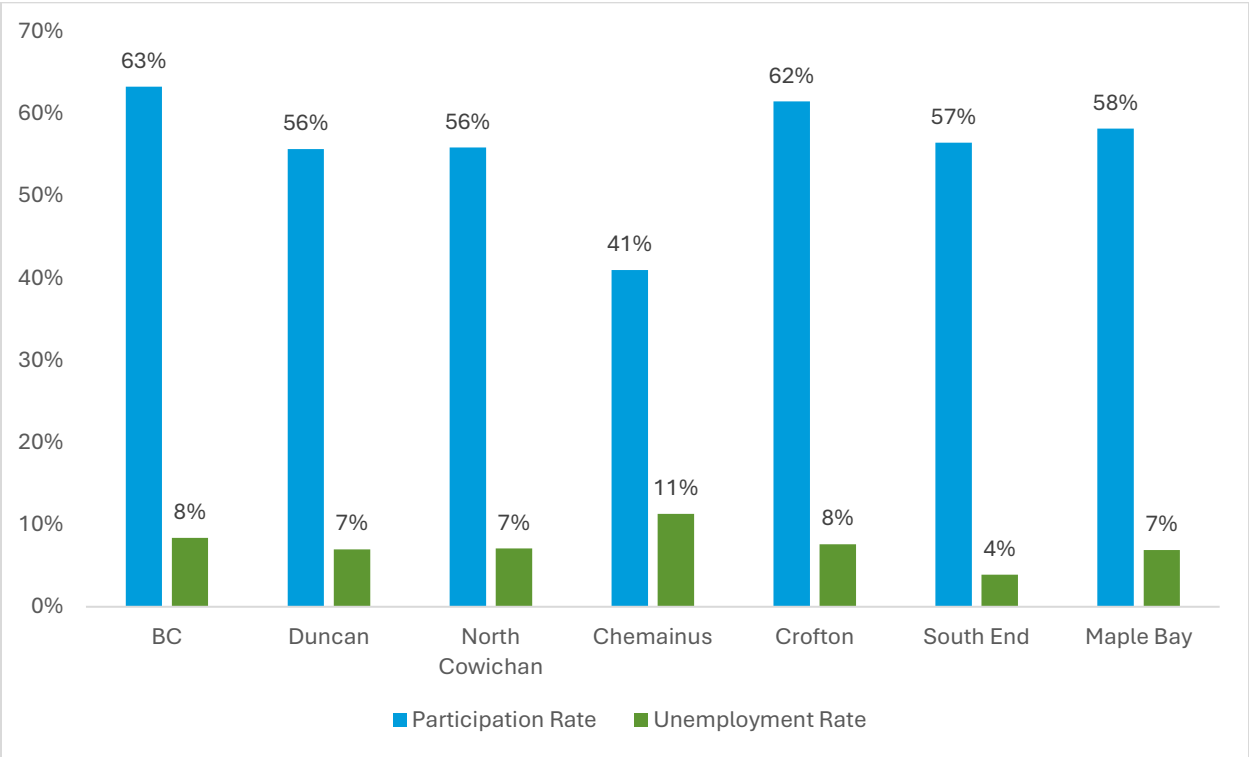


Figure 9: Labour Force Participation and Unemployment Rates in BC, North Cowichan, and North Cowichan Communities, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada Census Program, Census Profiles, 2021

YOUTH EXPERIENCES

Early Childhood Experiences

Youth have specific needs that are influenced by their development stage, and these needs can be shaped by their early childhood experiences. Early child development is a social determinant of health, conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that influence their overall health and well-being.⁵ These factors include socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood, and access to health care. The Early Development Indicator (EDI) is a standardized tool used to assess the developmental readiness of young children, typically around the age of five. It measures vulnerabilities related to:

- Physical health and wellbeing,
- Social competence,
- Emotional maturity,
- Language and cognitive development, and
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

The EDI may provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers to support early childhood development. Vulnerability scores may provide insight into the kinds of needs and services children with higher vulnerability may need as they become youth.

Outcomes of the EDI for SD 79 from 2018/2019 showed that:

- 34% of all assessed children were vulnerable on one or more of the five scales listed above, and
- In North Cowichan, 30 out of 67 (45%) children were vulnerable on multiple scales.

These children, whose average age was five and a half years old in 2018/2019, will be considered youth in a few years. If these vulnerable children didn't receive appropriate interventions in the years following 2018/2019, they may require additional supports and services.

Notably, North Cowichan boundaries used within the SD 79 EDI study do not align with the municipal boundaries and exclude the communities of Southend and Maple Bay, both of which communities show lower vulnerability scores (see Figure 10). Despite imperfect alignment of boundaries between SD 79 and the Municipality of North Cowichan, this EDI study still highlights that early childhood vulnerabilities are particularly pronounced in Chemainus and Crofton.

⁵ Human Early Learning Partnership, 2019

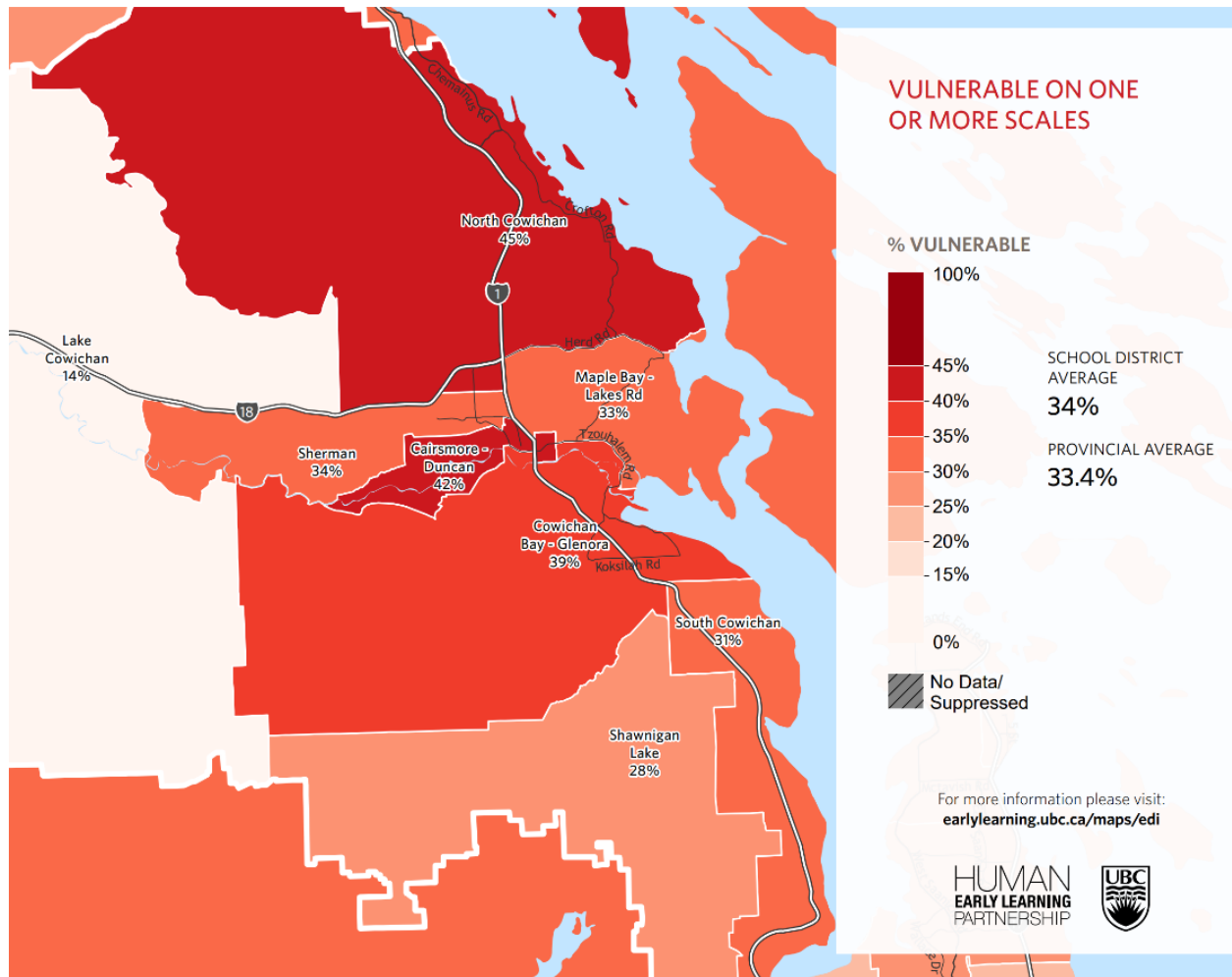


Figure 10: Cowichan Valley School District (79) Early Development Instrument Vulnerability Scores, 2018/2019

Source: University of British Columbia, Human Early Learning Partnership, 2023

BC Student Learning Survey

The BC Student Learning Survey provides insight into student experiences in SD 79 for grades 7, 10, and 12 and provide insights into various aspects of students' lives, covering physical and mental health, community involvement, extracurricular activities, and well-being.⁶ This survey allows for a comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student experience. Analyzing the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student responses in the BC Student Learning Survey is crucial for advancing reconciliation efforts in education by addressing disparities, promoting equity. The data provided by the Student Learning Survey is inclusive of all students who filled out the survey in SD 79 in the 2020/21 and 2022/23 school years. More detailed, granular data for North Cowichan is unavailable from the Student Learning Survey.

⁶ Province of British Columbia, 2023b

Nevertheless, the provided responses offer valuable insights to inform any recommendations related to youth services and support for the Municipality, focusing on identified areas of need.

Findings from the Student Learning Survey for SD 79 indicate highlight the following trends related to youth health and wellbeing:

Physical Health

68% of students reported their physical health as excellent, very good, or good. However, 10% fewer Indigenous students (66%) reported this level of health compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

Mental Health

Approximately 51% of students rated their mental health as excellent, very good, or good, with a notable disparity between Indigenous (46%) and non-Indigenous (60%) students.

Self-Perception

Only about 51% of students reported feeling good about themselves all or most of the time.

Alcohol and Tobacco/Nicotine Use

The survey revealed that 6% of students in grades 7, 10, and 12 drink alcohol every day or often, and 9% use tobacco or nicotine daily. These findings underscore the importance of substance use prevention and intervention programs tailored to the needs of youth in the community.

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Participation Rates

Participation in extracurricular activities is notably low among SD 79 students. 43% of grades 10 and 12 students rarely or never participate in school activities outside of class, while 31% of grade 7 students reported minimal engagement in clubs, sports, or music classes. Additionally, Indigenous students reported lower levels of participation and learning opportunities outside of school compared to their non-Indigenous peers, with only 34% participating regularly in extracurricular activities.

According to a 2018 study conducted by the McReary Centre Society on the health and wellbeing of youth in Central Vancouver Island, there was a startling increase in anxiety disorder, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder between 2016 and 2018, differences of nine to fourteen percentage points. 10% of males and 26% of females inflicted self-harm and 19% had considered suicide. What's more, 21% of youth on Central Vancouver Island reported not receiving the mental health services they needed.

GAPS

In summary, five key gaps have been identified during the process of analyzing the youth services landscape of North Cowichan through a desk study:

- Crofton, characterized by lower incomes and one-parent families, has a youth population not adequately served by current services, indicating a need for more tailored programs.
- There's a notable lack of culturally relevant programs for Indigenous youth in North Cowichan, particularly in mental health and cultural identity development.
- Existing mental health programs may be insufficient for the needs of North Cowichan's youth, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.
- Youth services are unevenly distributed across North Cowichan, with Crofton facing limited service variety and challenges in accessing services in Chemainus and Duncan.
- There is a significant gap in extracurricular activities for older students, indicating a need for more diverse and accessible programs, especially outside Duncan.

CURRENT YOUTH SERVICES

The Municipality of North Cowichan is already providing a range of youth services to seek to address these gaps and enhance youth access to recreation across several targeted programs and partnerships in the region.

This service model includes but is not limited to:

Youth Outreach Program

The Youth Outreach Program has a dedicated full-time staff member who organizes opportunities for youth aged 12-18 to participate in learning, leadership, and group activities through a drop-in space at the Community Youth Room at Chemainus Secondary School. The Community Youth Room is open for drop-in mornings before class and during the lunch hour to provide healthy snacks and a hang out space. This partnership with School District 79 started in 2010 and has been successful in creating opportunities for enhancing social inclusion, skill-building, and food security for students of Chemainus Secondary during the school year.

Recreation Programming

North Cowichan offers several recreation opportunities for youth at both Cowichan Aquatic Centre and Fuller Lake Arena, many of which are low-cost. These include gym access, teen skate times, teen swim lessons, and public swim.

Skill-Building

Youth in North Cowichan can currently access several types of skill-building workshops year-round at the Fuller Lake Arena or Crofton Community Centre. These include Babysitter Training, First Aid, FoodSafe, Barista Training, and Cashier Training. Grants often allow for low-cost registration of \$10-\$20.

Group Drop-In

Beyond the Community Youth Room at Chemainus Secondary, youth in North Cowichan have access to Teen Pizza, Movie, and Skate Nights at Fuller Lake Arena a few times a year. There is also a dedicated drop-in space at Crofton Community Centre during the summer while the Community Youth Room at Chemainus Secondary School is closed for the break. This drop-in offers similar services of light snacks, organized activities, and a hang out space.

Overall, North Cowichan is undertaking significant strides to provide varied and accessible youth programming for recreation, skill-building, and social inclusion. Summer drop-in programming has seen particular success during the 2023 and 2024 seasons, indicating the need for more permanent services of this type in the community.

ENGAGEMENT



3. ENGAGEMENT

The findings summarized in this section are a synthesis of input provided by participants from all engagement activities. To maintain anonymity of engagement participants, not all open-ended responses are included in this report. However, open-ended responses have been carefully reviewed and their insights have been incorporated into the overall analysis and conclusions.

During engagement with youth, youth service providers, and community groups, several key findings emerged. The following key findings are a snapshot of the most significant input received from both youth and youth service providers.

Engagement findings revealed insights related to youth interest in certain services; their perceptions of current services; barriers, needs, and opportunities associated with youth services; and to youth interest in the development of a youth centre. For a full summary of engagement findings, view **Appendix C**.

Youth Interest in Services, Programs, or Activities

- There was a strong interest in increased sports programming, with specific mentions of basketball, hockey, volleyball, and general sports activities.
- Youth expressed a desire for more arts opportunities, particularly drama, visual arts, and arts and crafts.
- Many youths highlighted a desire for dedicated hang-out spaces with extended hours for socializing.
- Access to food, including more food stores and cooking opportunities, was an important need identified by the youth.

Youth Perceptions of Current Services, Programs, or Activities Offered

- Youth generally had positive perceptions of current services, with many describing them as "good," "fun," "welcoming," and "happy."
- 58% of youth rated current services as 'Good' or 'Very Good,' indicating overall satisfaction, while 31% rated them as 'OK' suggesting room for improvement.

Barriers in Youth Access to Current Services, Programs, or Activities

- The most frequently cited barrier was transportation, including limited public transit and lack of access to rides.
- Geographic distance and financial constraints were also notable barriers to accessing services.
- Social challenges, such as bullying and lack of peer inclusion, were also frequently noted.
- Limited mental health services and long wait times for available services were significant challenges mentioned by almost all service providers.
- Limited access to technology, including cell phones, printers, and computers, was a significant barrier for youth, mentioned both by youth and service providers, impacting youths' ability to complete schoolwork and seek job opportunities.

- Restricted operating hours of facilities was also frequently commented on as a challenge for youth participation.
- Service providers highlighted challenges in delivering youth services related to staffing challenges, funding, and communication among service providers, as well as difficulty engaging youth to participate.

Needs and Opportunities Related to Youth Services, Programs, or Activities

- Enhancing transportation options, such as public transit subsidies and dedicated buses for youth, was a key need expressed by both youth and service providers.
- Service providers noted a significant need for mentorship programs to support youth through trusted adult relationships.
- Maintaining and expanding food access programs were noted by youth and service providers as crucial for supporting youth needs.
- Opportunities for improvement include enhanced transportation options, mobile services, mentorship programs, and peer-led programming.

Interest in the Establishment of, and Vision for, a Youth Centre

- Most youth (60%) indicated they would likely use a youth centre.
- All service providers expressed a youth centre would be beneficial, and many suggested it should be mobile or prioritize multiple locations utilizing existing community spaces and integrating with broader community initiatives.
- Youth expressed that the most desired features for a youth centre would include TV and video games, workout areas, lounge spaces, food access, and an outdoor activity area.
- Service providers emphasized the importance of health and safety services, consistent operating hours, diverse programming, accessible and inclusive environments, and technology access (such as computers and Wi-Fi) as important elements to include within a youth centre

INTEGRATED FINDINGS



4. INTEGRATED FINDINGS

The integration of the desk study and engagement findings provides a rounded view of the challenges and opportunities facing youth in North Cowichan. The desk study provided a foundational understanding of demographic trends, geographic disparities, and service availability, while the engagement findings brought forward the lived experiences and perceptions of youth, service providers, and community members. Together, these insights validate existing gaps and introduce new areas of concern that require attention.

VALIDATION OF EXISTING GAPS

The engagement findings largely validate the gaps identified in the Community & Youth Profile, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions or continuation of well-attended programming in several key areas:

Limited Services Tailored to Crofton's Demographics

The Community & Youth Profile revealed that Crofton, compared to other North Cowichan communities is a community characterized by lower incomes, a higher prevalence of one-parent families, and in proportion to the size of the community, and compared to neighbouring communities, a large share of children between the ages of 12 and 18 years. Although Crofton has a small population compared to other North Cowichan communities, and although the proportion of youth ages 12 to 18 years is projected to decline in North Cowichan over the next 10 and 20 years, the youth services in this community may not reflect the current needs and may not be prepared to meet the needs of additional youth, either migrating to Crofton, or aging from children (under 12) to youth.

When viewing the Youth Services Inventory (Appendix C) for Crofton, there is a noticeable shortage of youth services locally. Despite being an area with lower incomes and a higher proportion of one-parent families, there appears to be a lack of specialized or tailored services addressing the specific needs of youth in Crofton. Non-remote services focusing on mental health, skill-building, and career development may be inadequate or absent. Lower incomes and one-parent families highlight the need for low-barrier services or improved transportation options between Crofton, Chemainus, and Duncan.

The Early Childhood Experiences study conducted in 2018/2019 found that 45% of children around the age of 5 in North Cowichan were considered vulnerable on multiple scales. This high percentage suggests ongoing needs as these children transition into adolescence, highlighting the importance of sustained support. Although specific data for Crofton is unavailable, the socioeconomic profile of the community—characterized by lower incomes, a higher prevalence of one-parent families, and a higher proportion of children—indicates that many of these vulnerable children, now around the age of 11 and entering youth, are likely to reside in Crofton.

Need for More Indigenous-Focused Youth Programs for Youth

The Community & Youth Profile highlighted that across the CVRD, including North Cowichan, Indigenous youth are disproportionately impacted by poor mental health and are shown to have lower participation rates when it comes to after school activities and extracurricular programs. While some initiatives exist for Indigenous youth in North Cowichan, there seems to be a gap in the availability of culturally relevant

programs specifically designed for Indigenous youth. Programs that cater to their mental health, cultural identity, and skill development within this age group are notably limited.

The engagement findings strongly validated this gap, with numerous stakeholders emphasizing the lack of culturally relevant programs specifically designed for Indigenous youth. Notably, 18% of the youth engagement participants identified as Indigenous, which is significantly higher than the 9% of the total North Cowichan population who identified as Indigenous in the 2021 Census. This disparity underscores the importance of addressing the unique needs of Indigenous youth in the community.

Service providers echoed the necessity of expanding culturally relevant programs, stressing the importance of integrating mental health support, cultural identity, and skill development into these initiatives. Additionally, service providers expressed a desire for enhanced training in areas such as trauma-informed care, Indigenous cultural safety, and de-escalation techniques to better address the needs of Indigenous youth.

Mentorship also emerged as a critical component in supporting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Several service providers acknowledged the importance of trusted adults who can help build supportive relationships with youth, fostering participation and social inclusion, especially in drop-in spaces and schools. Service providers noted that for Indigenous youth, mentorship roles—such as youth coordinators, non-clinical mental health supports, and school staff—are essential. These mentors can provide pathways to connect with Elders, facilitate language learning, and offer other cultural supports that are vital for Indigenous youth.

Scarcity of Mental Health Supports for Youth

The Community & Youth Profile showed that the prevalence of poor mental health among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in North Cowichan raises concern about existing mental health programs tailored for this demographic. Although counselling services are accessible virtually in Crofton and virtually and in-person for Chemainus, the persistently high rates of poor mental health in youth signal the necessity for more proactive and targeted interventions. Current service offerings appear to primarily focus on intervention rather than prevention, lacking in upstream strategies crucial for promoting mental wellness among youth in the area.

The engagement findings further underscore the severity of this gap. Service providers and youth alike frequently noted social challenges such as bullying and a lack of peer inclusion, which exacerbate mental health issues. Additionally, there was a widespread acknowledgment of the limited availability of mental health services and the long wait times for accessing these services. Youth participants specifically pointed out a shortage of mental health support services, highlighting the urgent need for more accessible and timely care.

Service providers also emphasized the insufficiency of free counselling services for youth, with many reporting long delays in receiving care, particularly from Island Health. This lack of timely access has led some youth to resort to self-medication as a coping mechanism. Moreover, school counsellors, who are often the first point of contact for mental health concerns, are typically limited to addressing school-related issues, leaving broader mental health needs unmet. The engagement findings revealed high levels of anxiety among youth, particularly in the post-pandemic context, and pointed to a pressing need for more immediate support, including grief counseling and trauma support.

These insights highlight the necessity for a more comprehensive and preventative approach to mental health services in North Cowichan. The focus should shift toward upstream strategies that not only address existing mental health issues but also work to prevent the onset of these challenges by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for all youth.

Geographic Disparities Impacting Service Access

The Community & Youth Profile highlight that youth services across North Cowichan are unevenly distributed, resulting in varying levels of accessibility for different communities. Chemainus and Duncan serve as primary hubs for youth services due to their larger populations and offer a diverse range of programs, including substance use support, youth counseling, faith-based programs, Indigenous-focused services, youth outreach, and health-related programs. In contrast, Crofton has a more limited range of services, primarily focused on recreational activities, which does not fully address the needs of its youth population.

Duncan, as the primary urban area within the CVRD, offers a comprehensive range of youth services, including mental health support, skill-building, pro-social activities, Indigenous-focused services, counseling, community outreach, and recreational opportunities. However, as a distinct municipality, Duncan may not fully consider the needs of bordering North Cowichan communities like Maple Bay or South End when assessing service provision. Consequently, these North Cowichan communities face challenges in accessing tailored services that cater specifically to their needs, leading to disparities in service access.

Engagement findings strongly highlighted transportation as the most frequently cited barrier to accessing youth services across North Cowichan. Approximately 36% of youth participants mentioned transportation as a significant barrier, with limited public transit options and a lack of access to rides being the most notable issues. The limitations of public transportation, such as infrequent bus schedules and long wait times between buses—often up to two hours in Crofton and Chemainus—exacerbate these challenges. Evening and weekend service is also highly limited, further restricting access to essential services and opportunities for youth.

Geographic distance and financial constraints were also significant barriers, cited by 12% of youth participants. These factors compound the difficulties faced by youth in remote areas like Crofton and Maple Bay. For instance, although the distance between Crofton and Chemainus is relatively short (~11 kilometers), irregular bus timings make it difficult for youth to access services in Chemainus. Similarly, the proximity of Maple Bay to Duncan (~9.5 kilometers) does not translate into convenient service access due to transportation constraints; while a car ride takes around 15 minutes, a bus journey can take up to 55 minutes.

The engagement findings also revealed that both youth and service providers expressed a strong need for improved transportation options. Suggestions included public transit subsidies, dedicated buses for youth, and the development of mobile services to bring programs directly to remote communities. Enhanced transportation options are seen as crucial for overcoming the geographic disparities in service access and ensuring that all youth in North Cowichan have equitable access to the services they need.

By addressing these transportation barriers, the Municipality of North Cowichan can significantly improve service accessibility for youth in underserved areas, particularly in communities like Crofton and Maple Bay, where transportation challenges are most pronounced.

Lack of Extracurricular Engagement Opportunities

In North Cowichan, there's a noticeable need for extracurricular engagement opportunities for older students (grades 10-12), reflected by low their participation rates according to the Student Learning Survey. This scarcity hints at a potential lack of diverse programs that cater to their interests and may suggest limited access to activities beyond Duncan, or limited transportation options for students living in Crofton and attending high school in Chemainus. The inadequate provision of skill-building, social activities, and community involvement programs for this age group underscores a necessity for more tailored and accessible services. There's a clear need for the development of targeted initiatives focusing on mental health, cultural support, skill-building, and diverse extracurricular activities unique to youth needs and interests.

Feedback from youth during engagement indicates strong interest in expanded sports programming (including basketball, hockey, volleyball, and general sports), as well as increased opportunities in the arts, particularly drama, visual arts, and crafts. Many youths also expressed a desire for dedicated hang-out spaces with extended hours for socializing, and extracurricular opportunities with food.

Despite generally positive perceptions of current services—with 58% of youth rating them as 'Good' or 'Very Good'—there remains significant room for improvement, particularly in catering to older students. The desire for a youth centre, expressed by 60% of respondents, reflects the need for a centralized space offering diverse programming, such as TV and video games, workout areas, lounge spaces, and outdoor activities. Additionally, service providers emphasized the importance of integrating health and safety services, consistent operating hours, and technology access, all within accessible and inclusive environments.

The limited provision of skill-building, social activities, and community involvement programs for this age group underscores the necessity for more tailored and accessible services. Developing targeted initiatives that focus on mental health, cultural support, skill-building, and diverse extracurricular activities aligned with youth needs and interests is essential for fostering greater engagement and supporting the holistic development of young people in the region.

NEW INSIGHTS AND EMERGING GAPS

The engagement process revealed some new insights that were not fully captured in the background review. These include:

Loss of Youth Service Providers and Programs

During the development of this report in 2024, North Cowichan and the CVRD experienced a devastating loss of two service providers and one critical youth program. This includes the closure of Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Cowichan Valley and Cowichan Family Life Association, both of which provided key mentorship and counselling supports. During the same year, the Cowichan Valley Youth Services were forced to end their Youth Employment Mentorship Program. All these key youth services ended due to a loss or lack of funding. The loss of these key youth services and providers in North Cowichan and the CVRD has created significant gaps in support, particularly in mentorship, mental health, and employment services for vulnerable youth. This could lead to increased strain on remaining services, higher risks for youth disengagement, and broader social challenges within the community. Strategic reinvestment and community collaboration are essential for addressing these emerging needs and preventing long-term negative impacts.

Technology Access and Economic Barriers

The engagement findings highlight a gap in access to technology, such as cell phones and computers, which impacts youths' ability to complete schoolwork and seek job opportunities. Economic barriers, including the cost of participation in programs and transportation, were frequently cited during engagement as obstacles for youth. Addressing these barriers will require targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.

A Desire for a Youth Centre

During the engagement process, the concept of a youth centre emerged as a significant point of interest among both youth and service providers. This interest was reflected in the responses to questions about the potential usage and desired features of a youth centre in North Cowichan. Many participants expressed enthusiasm for a dedicated space that could serve as a hub for various services, social activities, and support systems for youth. This centre could address many of the identified gaps, including the need for safe spaces, mental health support, and diverse programming. The development of a youth centre should be a key focus moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The integrated findings provide a comprehensive roadmap for improving and/or continuing important youth services in North Cowichan. By addressing both the validated gaps and the newly identified challenges, the Municipality can develop a more responsive and inclusive youth service landscape that meets the needs of all its young residents, building on the existing service model centered around drop-in spaces and affordable recreation. The following section presents a set of recommendations based on these findings. Each recommendation addresses a key gap identified in the youth services landscape in North Cowichan, supported by smart and promising practices.

Recommendation #1: Conduct a Feasibility Study for a Youth Centre Model

During the engagement process, the concept of a youth centre emerged as a significant point of interest among both youth and service providers. This interest was reflected in the responses to questions about the potential usage and desired features of a youth centre in North Cowichan. Many participants expressed enthusiasm for a dedicated space that could serve as a hub for various services, social activities, and support systems for youth. This centre could address many of the identified gaps, including the need for safe spaces, mental health support, and diverse programming. The development of a youth centre should be a key focus moving forward.

- **Full Scale Permanent Youth Centre:** A full-scale, permanent youth centre would be a centralized facility located in a key area like Chemainus. This model would provide a stable, long-term space where youth can access a wide range of services and activities under one roof. The centre could include mental health support, educational programs, skill-building workshops, recreational spaces, arts and crafts areas, and culturally relevant programming for Indigenous youth. It could also feature social spaces like a lounge and a café, with consistent operating hours to ensure accessibility. To address transportation needs, the centre could integrate solutions such as public transit subsidies, dedicated community shuttles, or partnerships with local transportation services to ensure that youth from areas outside Chemainus can easily reach the facility. This model fosters a strong sense of community and offers comprehensive support but requires significant investment in infrastructure and ongoing operational costs.
- **Flexible Mobile Youth Centre:** The mobile youth centre model involves deploying one or more mobile units that travel to different communities within North Cowichan, particularly underserved areas like Crofton. Mobile units can function as "hubs on wheels," bringing essential services directly to youth who might otherwise face barriers to access. The services provided could include mental health counseling, cultural programming, recreational activities, and educational support. This model is highly flexible, cost-effective, and can be tailored to the specific needs of each community. However, it may lack the stability and sense of permanence that a fixed location provides.
- **Integrated Youth Hub Network:** The integrated youth hub model involves creating a network of smaller hubs located in existing community spaces or partnering with local organizations. Each hub would offer a range of services, such as mental health support, skill-building programs, and recreational activities, with an emphasis on collaboration with local service providers. This model leverages existing resources, ensuring that services are well-integrated

into the community. Hubs would be strategically located to maximize accessibility, and transportation support would be key to enabling youth from rural areas to reach these hubs. This approach combines elements of both permanence and flexibility, offering a scalable solution that can adapt to changing community needs. A feasibility study for a youth centre model in North Cowichan should emphasize the need to align the selected model with community needs and address upstream challenges. The study should evaluate cost and sustainability to ensure a financially feasible solution, integrate transportation to make services accessible for all youth, and leverage partnerships to enhance service delivery. Additionally, it should consider scalability to adapt to future demands. This comprehensive approach will guide the Municipality in choosing a model that effectively addresses root causes and supports long-term youth well-being.

SMART AND PROMISING PRACTICE

Access Youth Outreach Bus

Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody, BC

This initiative offers a mobile support system for youth, providing essentials such as food, clothing, and hygiene supplies. It also extends vital services including counselling, education on sexual health and substance use, and referrals. Key successes include offering a safe space, essential supplies, and access to health education and counselling services. Through this program, Access has made 30,000 connections with at-risk youth through mentorship and engagement. The program's inclusive and harm reduction approach has been particularly effective in reaching a diverse range of youth, making it a vital community resource.

The Access Youth Outreach Bus program demonstrates how a mobile support system can effectively reach at-risk youth by providing essential supplies and services like counseling, health education, and referrals. The bus could be a mobile one-stop-shop for youth in need of accessing food, clothing, winter gear, blankets, sexual health supplies, harm reduction supplies including Naloxone, personal hygiene supplies, and more. There may also be opportunity to provide, not only mobile intervention supports and resources, but also operate as a mobile youth centre and offer recreational activities and opportunities for pro-social activities. This model could be particularly useful for reaching youth in rural areas. Implementing a similar mobile approach could help address gaps in service accessibility, offer safe spaces, and foster meaningful connections with vulnerable youth in the community.

SMART AND PROMISING PRACTICE

City Centre Youth Hub

Location: Surrey, BC

The City of Surrey, British Columbia, has established the CCYH, a permanent and central space dedicated to youth services. This hub serves as a multi-service center that offers a wide range of support, including mental health care, educational programs, career counselling, and recreational activities. Designed in collaboration with young people, it provides a safe and welcoming environment where youth can access services tailored to their needs.

The centralized approach to providing youth services in Surrey has resulted in improved service accessibility, greater youth involvement in community activities, and enhanced support networks. Implementing a similar permanent youth hub in North Cowichan could offer a centralized solution to various service gaps, including limited services, a need for more Indigenous-focused youth programs, better access to mental health supports and services, ensuring sustained and comprehensive support for youth in North Cowichan.

Foundry Kelowna Wellness on Wheels

Kelowna, BC

The Foundry Kelowna's Wellness on Wheels initiative offers mental health outreach by employing a mobile unit to deliver services to rural areas. This program provides vital mental health and wellness support directly to underserved communities, ensuring accessibility for those in rural or distant regions. The mobile clinic model caters to the needs of diverse populations, addressing geographic barriers and bringing essential mental health services closer to youth in remote or underserved areas.

Implementing a similar program in North Cowichan's rural communities, such as Crofton, could effectively bridge gaps in mental health access, aligning with the specific geographic challenges observed in the region.

Recommendation #2: Enhance Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Programming

Develop programs that are culturally grounded and inclusive, particularly for Indigenous youth, to support mental health, cultural identity, and skill development. Culturally relevant programming is essential for supporting Indigenous youth in North Cowichan who face unique challenges related to mental health and cultural identity. Expanding these programs involves close collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations to ensure they are culturally relevant and supportive. These programs can be integrated into youth hubs or delivered via mobile units to ensure broad access.

Collaborating to develop culturally grounded and inclusive programs for Indigenous youth can support enhancing mental health, cultural identity, and skill development in North Cowichan. By collaborating closely with Indigenous communities and organizations, these programs can be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous youth. Integrating such programs into youth hubs or delivering them via mobile units ensures broad accessibility, fostering a supportive environment that empowers Indigenous youth and strengthens their connection to their cultural heritage, promoting long-term community well-being and resilience.

SMART AND PROMISING PRACTICE

Sḵw̓xwú7mesh and Lílwat7úl Cultural Centre

Whistler, BC

The Resort Municipality of Whistler, British Columbia has worked closely with the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations to create the Sḵw̓xwú7mesh and Lílwat7úl Cultural Centre. This Centre represents a unique model for supporting Indigenous-focused programs. Established through a partnership between the Squamish Nation and Lil'wat Nation, it serves as a hub for sharing and sustaining Indigenous cultures. The Centre's success in integrating cultural knowledge and experiences into its offerings makes it an exemplary model for similar initiatives.

This example demonstrates how local governments can collaborate with Indigenous communities to create spaces that celebrate and educate about Indigenous culture and history, thereby fostering mutual respect and understanding. Cultural inclusion programs like those offered at the Sḵw̓xwú7mesh and Lílwat7úl Cultural Centre can support youth specifically by offering educational programs and experiences that connect them with their cultural heritage. Such initiatives help foster a deeper connection to their Indigenous cultures, promoting cultural continuity, identity formation and healthier Indigenous youth.

SMART AND PROMISING PRACTICE

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre

Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre's Youth Development program is a leading example of an Indigenous-focused youth program. It's dedicated to empowering Indigenous youth, offering culturally relevant services encompassing mental health support, traditional teachings, skill development, and leadership opportunities. With a holistic approach rooted in Indigenous culture and values, the center provides mentorship, healing circles, and initiatives tailored to Indigenous youth. Its success lies in creating a safe space that respects cultural identity while addressing the unique needs of Indigenous youth in Winnipeg and fostering community connections.

The Municipality of North Cowichan can support Indigenous-focused youth initiatives like the one delivered by the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre by collaborating with local Indigenous communities to integrate their cultural values into youth programs, allocating budget for development and operation, providing resources and spaces for cultural activities, and ensuring community involvement in program planning. Additionally, regular monitoring and assessment of these programs will be crucial to ensure they effectively meet the needs of Indigenous youth

Recommendation #3: Improve Transportation Options for Youth

To address geographic disparities in service access, North Cowichan can implement transportation solutions that ensure youth can easily travel between communities. The Municipality could establish a subsidized public transit program specifically for youth, providing discounted or free transit passes to increase affordability. Additionally, the local government could introduce a dedicated shuttle service that operates during peak hours, evenings, and weekends, connecting key locations like schools, youth hubs, and community centers. Partnering with local organizations to coordinate rideshare programs could further enhance mobility for youth in more remote areas.

This recommendation may require collaboration with regional transportation authorities, community organizations, and local government to secure funding and support for transportation improvements. A thorough assessment of transportation needs and preferences among youth should inform the planning and implementation of these strategies. Additionally, promoting awareness and utilization of these services will be crucial to their success.

It may be beneficial to better understand what the specific transportation needs of youth are and if transportation advocacy or engagement is required. In 2021, Modus, on behalf of the Municipality of North

Cowichan, conducted engagement with 498 North Cowichan residents to inform the Master Transportation Plan, currently underway. According to the Draft Engagement Summary, only 0.9% of respondents were youth.⁷ Given the lack of youth participation in this engagement, additional engagement targeted to youth around transportation may be beneficial. Additionally, a supplemental report or addendum to the final Transportation Master Plan may be proposed, if engagement findings prove applicable. This supplemental report can highlight the insights gained from the ongoing study and offer additional recommendations based on the study's outcomes.

SMART AND PROMISING PRACTICE

Community Bus Initiative – GERTIE

Gabriola Island, BC

GERTIE is a community bus initiative on Gabriola Island, BC. It exemplifies a promising model for rural public transportation, driven by community needs and involvement. GERTIE operates with a focus on environmental sustainability and serves as an efficient transport solution for areas with limited public transit. Its community-based management and operation demonstrate a practical approach for similar rural or small communities, offering insights into organizing, funding, and maintaining local transit services.

Adopting a model like GERTIE for North Cowichan may benefit local youth, and could provide reliable, community-focused transportation, especially important for areas lacking frequent public transit services. This may support improvement of access to educational, recreational, and employment opportunities for young people, fostering greater independence and community engagement.

⁷ Modus, 2021

CONCLUSION

This Youth Services Review has conducted primary and secondary research through a desk study and community engagement with youth and youth-serving organizations to gain a nuanced, timely snapshot of youth service needs in the Municipality of North Cowichan. While some key gaps were surfaced, it also became clear during engagement that youth in North Cowichan have a strong sense of their needs and several dominant themes emerged. Integrated findings indicate an opportunity for targeted supports such as Indigenous-focused programming, increased sports and arts activities, hang-out spaces, and improved food access, among other diverse interest areas expressed by youth. These findings highlight that the continuation of existing successful services provided by North Cowichan, particularly the drop-in spaces at Chemainus Secondary School and Crofton Community Centre, is critical. Exploring the feasibility of a youth centre that integrates programming and social spaces is also crucial, along with improving transportation options to reduce geographic barriers and ensure youth can access these services.

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APPENDICES



7.APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – MUNICIPALITY OF NORTH COWICHAN GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARY



Source: Municipality of North Cowichan's Interactive Web Map.

APPENDIX B – YOUTH SERVICES INVENTORY

Geography	Service Category	Organization/ Service Provider	Details
Chemainus	Mental & Physical Health	Island Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides Discovery Youth and Family Substance Use Services Public Health Nurse is available at Chemainus Secondary School, offering confidential discussions and referrals
		Huli'tun Health Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental and physical health care for Halalt and Lyackson Nations
	Social & Recreational Services	Chemainus Harvest House Food Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides food to those in need
		Municipality of North Cowichan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seasonal drop-in and programmed activities and sports and seasonal and rotating youth focused courses (e.g., Babysitters course, Barista Training) Youth outreach programs involving games, activities, and tournaments at the Chemainus Secondary School
		Chemainus Secondary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides before school and during lunch drop in space for youth with games, snacks, socializing and monthly organized activities
		Calvary Baptist Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith-based youth programs
		Chemainus Pentecostal Tabernacle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith-based youth programs
Crofton	Mental & Physical Health	Island Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides Child and Youth TeleMental Health Service
	Social & Recreational	Harvest House Foodbank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides food to those in need
		Municipality of North Cowichan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth outreach programs involving games, activities, and tournaments at the Crofton Youth Room in the Crofton Community Centre

Duncan	Mental & Physical Health		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor pool and seasonal swimming lessons and drop-in swimming
		Crofton Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds an Open Gym seasonally for sports and games
		Camp Qwanoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith-based summer camp
		Warmland Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsors Crofton youth to attend camp
		Island Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discovery Youth & Family Substance Use Services Youth clinic at Cowichan Secondary School and Margaret Moss Health Unit Child and Youth Mental Health BC (CYMH) Youth Eating Disorder Services
		Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Cowichan Valley Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Centre Anti-poverty initiative for youth which provides a safe communicative space for socio-economically disadvantaged youth and those with lived and living experience(s) of poverty, addiction, or homelessness Activities, computers, and refreshments
		Cowichan Valley Youth Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counselling for youth and parents of youth Parent workshops Youth Employment Mentorship Program* <p><i>*Program no longer available as of 2024.</i></p>
Cowichan Tribes - Kwun'atsustul Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trauma informed counselling and treatment programs Suicide prevention and intervention services 		
Cowichan Women Against Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth counselling 		
Cowichan Family Life Association**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable family and youth counselling services 		

		<i>**Service no longer operational as of 2024</i>
		Clements Centre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After school groups for youth with developmental disabilities
		Big Brothers and Sisters*** <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth mentoring programs for boys and girls <i>***Service no longer operational as of 2024</i>
		Cowichan Tribes – Youth Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship, peer support, and group activities • Cultural education services for youth • After school programming • Groups for boys, youth, Elders and youth, girls, fishing, cooking • Gym night and youth drop in when no programs are available at the Youth Centre
	Social & Recreational	Cowichan Women Against Violence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based violence prevention program • Raven’s Nest Child and Youth Advocacy
		Cowichan Valley Intercultural and Immigrant Aid Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement Workers in Schools program for youth who are newcomers
		Cowichan Valley Arts Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art programming for youth
		Cowichan Valley Youth Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth outreach and support services • Art Group promoting pro-social activities
		Cowichan Valley Salvation Army <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides food hampers, clothing, and other necessities
		Cowichan Green Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosts KinPark Youth Urban Farm which provides youth with opportunity to learn about sustainable agriculture and creates youth led opportunities to serve the community

		Hiiye'yu Lelum Society House of Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Pillars program supports Indigenous youth with intergenerational connections, cultural programming and recreational activities • Crime prevention programming (pro-social activities) for youth
		Cowichan Basket Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food bank
		Nourish Cowichan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides meals and snacks to all students who want it at Chemainus Secondary.
		Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) – Cowichan Community Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal sport and recreational programming for youth • Drop-in games and sports
		Duncan Pentecostal Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth group program
		Duncan United Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth group program
		St. Edwards Parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth group program
		Volunteer Cowichan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth 2020 Can connects youth volunteers with local community projects, events, and activities
Remote Services		Kids Help Phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-hour mental health support for youth and children
		Ministry of Child and Family Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-hour support line
		Island Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and Youth Tele Mental Health Service • Beyond the Talk youth sexual health line

APPENDIX C – WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

The background features a vibrant, abstract design with overlapping circles and patterns in shades of blue, purple, yellow, and green. A prominent feature is a vertical sequence of numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) arranged in a zig-zag pattern, with some numbers in red and others in white boxes. There are also scattered colorful dots and geometric shapes.

WHAT WE HEARD SUMMARY

August 7, 2024

Youth Services Review
Municipality of North Cowichan

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1.0 BACKGROUND

It is well understood that adolescents need youth-friendly programs and services to ensure accessibility, relevance, and trust, addressing their unique developmental needs and fostering a supportive environment for early intervention and empowerment in their interests and abilities. Without these supports, children and youth are more susceptible to intersecting vulnerabilities that can persist as problems into adulthood. In North Cowichan, the wide geographic spread of rural communities including Crofton, Chemainus, Maple Bay, and others means that youth programs and services concentrated in the urban hub of Duncan may be hard to access for youth in the wider area. The Municipality of North Cowichan's Parks and Recreation department has been proactive in supporting youth needs through targeted outreach programs in Crofton and school-based morning and lunch-hour initiatives at Chemainus Secondary School. Through this initiative, some potential gaps in youth services were noted by Municipality staff, prompting further exploration.

In 2023, North Cowichan retained Urban Matters to conduct a Youth Services Review to gain a greater understanding of wants, needs, opportunities, and barriers for youth aged 12-18 to access age-appropriate services in the area. The project's goal is to obtain a macroscopic perspective of the youth service ecosystem in North Cowichan, integrating data with youth and service provider input to develop nuanced insights and identify service gaps and potential opportunities for new or enhanced services.

To best inform future decisions about youth services, the engagement with young individuals and youth service providers and community groups closely involved in youth service delivery was facilitated. This approach is meant to ensure that the Municipality's strategies are attuned to the genuine needs and aspirations of North Cowichan's youth, paving the way for a future where youth services are not only comprehensive and equitable, but also deeply resonant with those they aim to serve.

2.0 APPROACH

This section describes the engagement methodology for the North Cowichan Youth Services Review, including the objectives for engaging, who the participants were, and the activities and events used to engage.

2.1 ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE #1 – ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH YOUTH

Engage with youth who live or spend time in North Cowichan to validate the background review findings and provide a forum for uncovering new insights, ensuring that the findings and recommendations developed for the Youth Services Review are both evidence-based and reflective of the current youth needs and perspectives. It is crucial to include those with lived and living experience in this engagement process, adhering to the principle of "nothing about us without us". This approach ensures that the voices of the youth themselves are central to the development of services that affect them, leading to more effective and relevant outcomes.

OBJECTIVE #2 – ENGAGE WITH YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Engage with interested parties from youth-serving organizations and groups to validate the background review findings and provide a forum for uncovering new insights, ensuring that the findings and recommendations developed for the Youth Services Review is both evidence-based and reflective of current youth needs and perspectives. Hearing from those on the front lines of youth services is intended to ensure that any future recommendations are informed by those with direct experience in serving youth. This collaborative approach helps in identifying gaps and opportunities from multiple perspectives, leading to comprehensive and well-rounded recommendations.

OBJECTIVE #3 – GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUTH SERVICE NEEDS IN NORTH COWICHAN

Through engagement with youth and youth service providers, the Municipality of North Cowichan seeks to validate the youth services background review findings and to provide opportunity for uncovering new insights, ensuring that any future findings and recommendations developed for the *North Cowichan Youth Services Review* are both evidence-based and reflective of the current youth needs and perspectives. At a high level, the objective of this engagement is to determine:

- Youth interest in services, programs, or activities
- Youth perceptions of current services, programs, or activities offered
- Barriers to or challenges in accessing current services, programs, or activities
- Needs and opportunities related to youth services, programs, or activities
- Interest in the establishment of and vision for a youth centre

2.2 WHO WE HEARD FROM

- 100+ youth aged 12- to 18- years who live or spend time in North Cowichan

- Eleven (11) representatives from the following eight (8) youth service provider organizations and community groups that serve North Cowichan (i.e., both those within North Cowichan, and those within the broader region):
 - Municipality of North Cowichan
 - Cowichan Valley Arts Council
 - Cowichan Valley District Parent Advisory Committee (DPAC)
 - Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) – Cowichan Branch
 - Cowichan Valley Youth Services Society
 - Hiiye’yu Lelum House of Friendship
 - Cowichan Neighbourhood House
 - Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Cowichan Valley

2.3 HOW WE ENGAGED

The table below describes the event or activity used for engagement, timeline for the event or activity, participants included, and the approach for the event or activity.

Timeline	Activity/ Method	Participants	Approach
May 22 – June 18, 2024	Youth Survey	Sixty-seven (67) youth aged 12-18 years who live or spend time in North Cowichan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted on North Cowichan social media accounts. • Included as a virtual engagement component at the Open Houses.
May 27, 2024	Youth Open House (x2) – Chemainus Secondary School & Cowichan Aquatic Centre	<p>Chemainus Secondary School: ~ Eighty-five (85) youth aged 12-18 who live or spend time in North Cowichan and attend Chemainus Secondary School.</p> <p>Cowichan Aquatic Centre: ~ Twenty-one (21) youth aged 12-18 who live or spend time in North Cowichan.</p> <p><i>These participant counts are conservative, based on those who visited the food station. Since not all participants visited this station or received food, actual numbers may be higher.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted on social media, through schools, and with print posters at Open House locations. • A mix of tactile and digital engagement tools created an interactive flow for participants to walk through and share their thoughts. • Tools included a Mentimeter game (an interactive digital engagement tool that allows users to create engaging, real-time polls, quizzes, and Q&A options), a Dotmocracy board, and sticky note brainstorms about wants, needs, barriers, and challenges. • Food, drinks, and prizes included.
June 5 - 26, 2024	Service Provider Focus Groups (x2) and One (1) Interview	Ten (10) representatives from seven (7) local youth-serving organizations including:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives were invited via email. • Focus groups took a discussion format to explore what’s working

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cowichan Valley District Parent Advisory Committee • Cowichan Valley Arts Council • Municipality of North Cowichan staff delivering youth services • Cowichan Valley Youth Services • Hiiye'yu Lelum - House of Friendship • Canadian Mental Health Association • Vancouver Island Regional Library 	<p>and where there are barriers to youth participation and programming in general.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A service provider who was unable to attend the focus group participated in a one-on-one interview.
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2.4 LIMITATIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

As with all engagement processes, there are certain limitations and considerations worth noting related to both the engagement findings and the engagement approach. In the spirit of transparency, it is important to acknowledge these considerations, though they should not be seen as invalidating the valuable insights gathered.

- We received meaningful input from a diverse range of youth service provider organizations and groups. We successfully engaged with eleven (11) of the forty-five (45) individuals and eight (8) of the thirty-nine (39) organizations we reached out to. Although these numbers are low, this level of participation is not atypical in such engagement processes. It is important to note, however, that some groups were not represented. Specifically, we did not receive perspectives from faith-based organizations, and although we received input from Indigenous youth service providers, we did not hear directly from First Nation communities.
- Few youths in the 17-to-18-year range participated in engagement activities. 49.6% of participants were 12- to 13- years, 44.1% were 14 to 16 years, and only 6.3% were in the 17-to-18-year range. This means that the findings related to what we heard from youth primarily represent 12- to- 16-year-old youth who live or spend time in North Cowichan.
- There is a possibility of response bias where participants might have provided socially desirable answers or been influenced by their peers, particularly in public or group settings. This can affect the authenticity of the responses and the overall findings. To mitigate the impacts of peer influence, in-person engagement sessions provided opportunities for youth to engage both digitally and on paper, and both publicly (in front of peers) as well as privately. More personal lines of questioning were reserved for digital and private formats.

- Limitations related to access to technology might have affected the ability of some youth to participate in digital engagement activities. This could result in an underrepresentation of the perspectives of those without reliable access to digital tools and the internet. While both paper and digital opportunities were provided, some youth without digital tools (e.g., a smart phone) may have been less inclined to participate.
- Facilitating an Open House at the Cowichan Aquatic Centre resulted in a potential overrepresentation of the desire for a 50-metre pool due to high participation from youth who are on the swim team. Additionally, potential confirmation bias may have occurred, as many participants could see the pool within view while they were interacting with the engagement materials.

3.0 WHAT WE HEARD

The findings summarized in this section are a synthesis of input provided by participants from all engagement activities. To maintain anonymity of engagement participants, not all open-ended responses are included in this report. However, open-ended responses have been carefully reviewed and their insights have been incorporated into the overall analysis and conclusions.

3.1 KEY FINDINGS

During engagement with youth, youth service providers, and community groups, several key findings emerged. The following key findings are a snapshot of the most significant input received from both youth and youth service providers.

Youth Interest in Services, Programs, or Activities:

- There was a strong interest in increased sports programming, with specific mentions of basketball, hockey, volleyball, and general sports activities.
- Youth expressed a desire for more arts opportunities, particularly drama, visual arts, and arts and crafts.
- Many youths highlighted a desire for dedicated hang-out spaces with extended hours for socializing.
- Access to food, including more food stores and cooking opportunities, was an important need identified by the youth.

Youth Perceptions of Current Services, Programs, or Activities Offered:

- Youth generally had positive perceptions of current services, with many describing them as "good," "fun," "welcoming," and "happy."
- 58% of youth rated current services as 'Good' or 'Very Good,' indicating overall satisfaction, while 31% rated them as 'OK' suggesting room for improvement.

Barriers in Youth Access to Current Services, Programs, or Activities:

- The most frequently cited barrier was transportation, including limited public transit and lack of access to rides.
- Geographic distance and financial constraints were also notable barriers to accessing services.
- Social challenges, such as bullying and lack of peer inclusion, were also frequently noted.
- Limited mental health services and long wait times for available services were significant challenges mentioned by almost all service providers.
- Limited access to technology, including cell phones, printers, and computers, was a significant barrier for youth, mentioned both by youth and service providers, impacting youths' ability to complete schoolwork and seek job opportunities.
- Restricted operating hours of facilities was also frequently commented on as a challenge for youth participation.

- Service providers highlighted challenges in delivering youth services related to staffing challenges, funding, and communication among service providers, as well as difficulty engaging youth to participate.

Needs and Opportunities Related to Youth Services, Programs, or Activities:

- Enhancing transportation options, such as public transit subsidies and dedicated buses for youth, was a key need expressed by both youth and service providers.
- Service providers noted a significant need for mentorship programs to support youth through trusted adult relationships.
- Maintaining and expanding food access programs were noted by youth and service providers as crucial to support youth needs.
- Opportunities for improvement include enhanced transportation options, mobile services, mentorship programs, and peer-led programming.

Interest in the Establishment of, and Vision for, a Youth Centre:

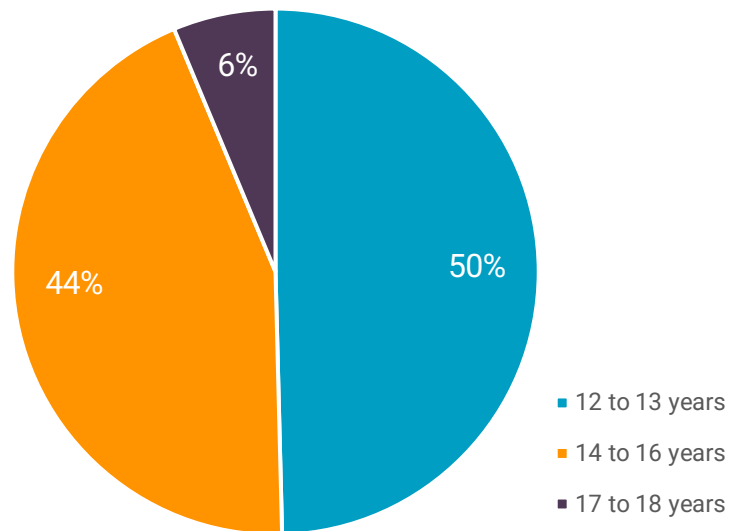
- Most youth (60%) indicated they would likely use a youth centre.
- All service providers expressed a youth centre would be beneficial, and many suggested it should be mobile or prioritize multiple locations utilizing existing community spaces and integrating with broader community initiatives.
- Youth expressed that the most desired features for a youth centre would include TV and video games, workout areas, lounge spaces, food access, and an outdoor activity area.
- Service providers emphasized the importance of health and safety services, consistent operating hours, diverse programming, accessible and inclusive environments, and technology access (such as computers and Wi-Fi) as important elements to include within a youth centre.

ABOUT THE YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Through the Youth Survey and Mentimeter game, participants in the youth engagement were asked to provide demographic information, including age, gender identity, and neighbourhood. This information provided the project team with a better understanding of who responded to the online survey and attended the youth Open Houses. Where questions were the same or similar in both the Mentimeter and the survey, an average has been taken to prevent duplication of results. Since some participants attended open houses but did not fill out a survey or participate in the Mentimeter game, not all data on participants has been captured. For a more detailed engagement results, refer to Appendix A, B, C, and D.

Age: As shown in **Figure 1**, the largest (average) share of participants were 12- to- 13- years, representing 50% of all participants. 14- to- 16-year-olds made up 44% of respondents, and older youth (ages 17- to- 18- years) had the lowest participation, at only 6%.

Figure 1. Age breakdown of youth participants

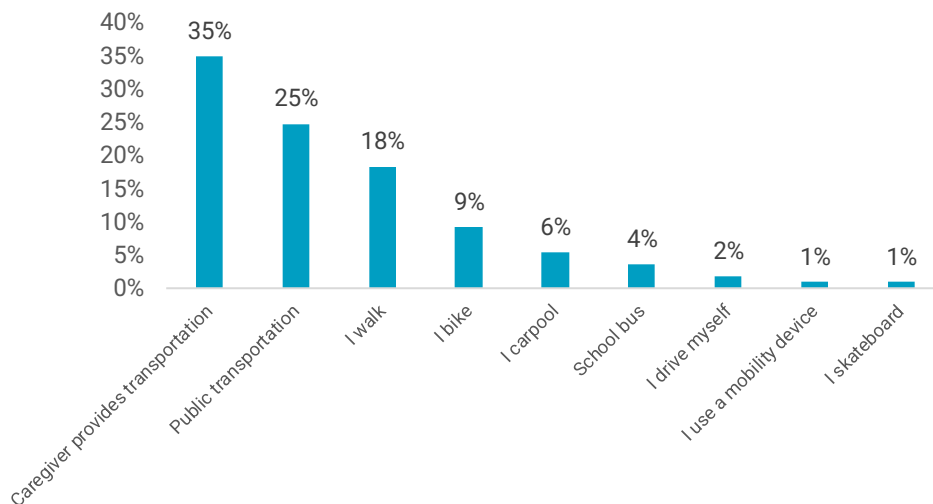


Gender Identity: Participation was balanced between male and female identifying youth participants at 50% and 45% (on average) respectively. There was also gender diversity expressed among survey participants, with 3% expressing either non-binary or transgender identity.

First Nations, Inuit, or Métis Identity: 18% of the youth identified as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or holding multiple Indigenous identities.

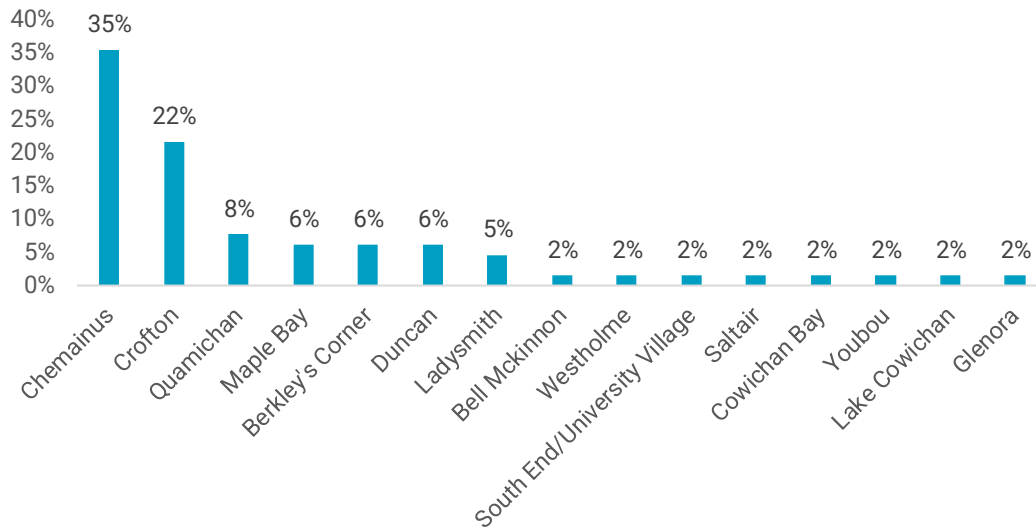
Mode of Transportation: Figure 2 shows that most youth participants rely on caregivers for rides (35%), public transportation (25%) and walking (18%) as modes of transportation. Most youth who use public transportation reside in either Crofton (44%) or Chemainus (44%). Only 2% of youth participants drive themselves, and 6% carpool. Since most participants were not old enough to drive alone (17+), the share of those driving themselves is likely underrepresented due to the lack of engagement with older youths.

Figure 2. Share of youth by mode of transportation used



Neighbourhood: Youth from all over North Cowichan and even outside North Cowichan were represented in the survey, however most participants (on average) reside in Chemainus (35%) and Crofton (22%) (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Neighbourhoods where youth participants reside



3.2 ENGAGEMENT THEMES – YOUTH

Within the following sub-sections engagement responses from the survey and Open House activities were coded into key insights to gain a high-level snapshot of youth sentiments towards programs, services, and supports in North Cowichan. It is important to note that these were open-ended questions with no predetermined answers provided, resulting in a wide range of answers.

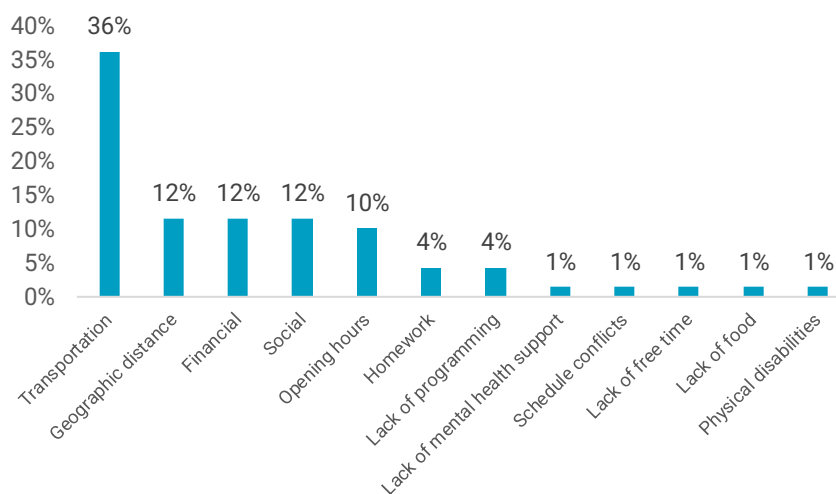
BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

Youth were asked what they see as the greatest barriers and challenges to accessing youth services, programs, and supports locally. Out of 69 responses from both the youth survey and Open House display board activity, several key themes surfaced and are identified below and in **Figure 4**.

- **Transportation:** 25 out of 69 (36%) responses noted transportation as a barrier. Transportation emerged as the most significant barrier and was mentioned three times more frequently than other barriers, such as geographic distance, financial constraints, and social obstacles, which were all equally cited. The most notable issue related to transportation was the lack of access to 'rides'. Additionally, the limitations of public transportation were frequently highlighted, underscoring the critical role transportation plays in accessing essential services and opportunities for youth.
- **Geographic Distance:** 8 out of 69 (12%) responses identified 'geographic distance' as a barrier. Also related to transportation, 'geographic distance' was cited as a barrier in relation to factors like long driving times, friends living too far away, and being located in Crofton. When combined with transportation, 48% (33 out of 69) of youth mentioned distance and/or transportation as a barrier.

- **Financial:** 8 out of 69 (12%) responses identified financial circumstance as a barrier. ‘Money’ in general was mentioned often, and there were also 2 mentions of the cost of gym access being a barrier. These answers were unspecific as to whether the financial barrier was for the family or youth themselves, and if the cost barrier was for supplies, registration for programming, transportation, or a combination of factors.
- **Social:** 8 out of 69 (12%) responses indicated social reasons were a barrier to accessing services. Notably, participants shared a need for safe spaces, and expressed that barriers to participation in youth services were related to not being included by peers, bullying, or lacking friends to go with. All participants who expressed this barrier were students of Chemainus Secondary School.
- **Service Operating Hours:** 7 out of 69 (10%) of responses shared that limited open hours presented as a barrier to participating in youth services. Limited operating hours of local businesses and organizations with youth offerings were mentioned repeatedly, specifically at the Cowichan Aquatic Centre Open House. This may indicate that youth do have a desire to be in shared or public spaces.
- **Other:** Other lesser mentioned responses from participants were related to not being able to participate due to homework responsibilities, a lack of free time, or other schedule conflicts. Participants also expressed that there was a lack of programming available to them or suited to their interests, a shortage of mental health support services, a lack of food provided, or that a disability limits or prevents participation.

Figure 4. Barriers youth face in accessing youth services



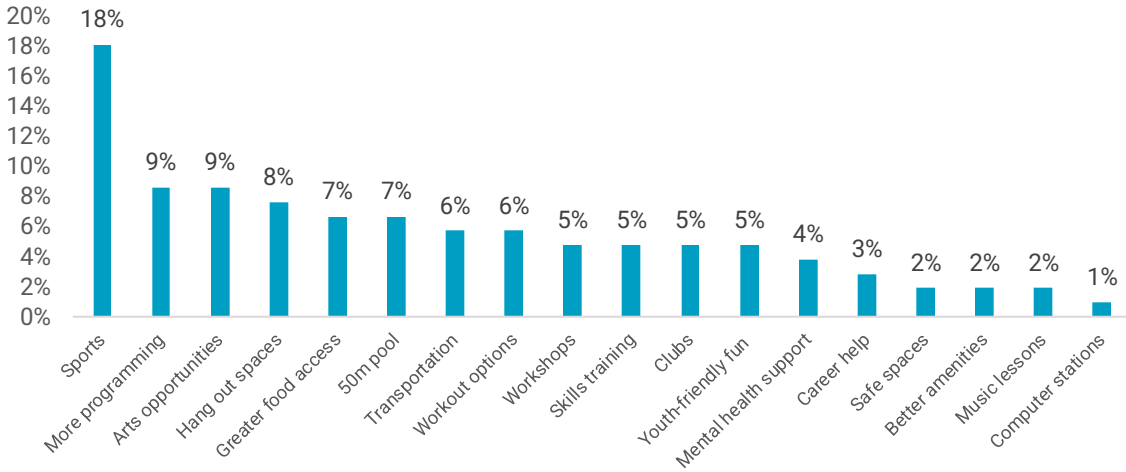
WANTS & NEEDS

Youth were asked what programs, services or supports they want or need in North Cowichan. Youth survey and Open House participants expressed 107 instances of wants and needs. Several key themes surfaced and are identified below and in **Figure 5**. While these themes represent the most mentioned want and needs, the distribution of wants and needs is fairly balanced across categories representing a diversity of interests and desires for services and programming.

- **Sports:** Most responses (19 out of 105 or 18%) favour sports, indicating a desire for increased sports programming. Sports-related mentions include basketball, hockey, volleyball, rock climbing, cheerleading, and several requests for more sports in general.

- More Programming:** 9 out of 105 responses (9%) identified a desire for more programming in general, which was most often written as ‘activities’ or ‘more activities.’ Taken in consideration with feedback around opening hours, sports, and the desire for hang-out spaces, there appears to be a willingness in youth to participate if the right supports and connections are in place to ease anxiety and other barriers.
- Arts Opportunities:** 9 out of 105 responses (9%) identified a desire for more arts opportunities. The desire for more arts opportunities was most significant for students from Chemainus Secondary School; 67% of these students would like to see more arts opportunities. Desired arts opportunities include drama, art media, visual art workshops, arts and crafts, and more art classes.
- Hang-out Spaces:** 8 out of 105 responses (8%) identified a desire for spaces to hang out in. Many expressed value in the hang out space currently available to them at Chemainus Secondary School Youth Room. Specific comments related to hang-out spaces included offering youth hang out opportunities that are open later in the evening, lounge areas, games, and places to spend free time.
- Greater Food Access:** 7 out of 105 responses (7%) indicated a desire for greater food access. Comments related to greater food access included mentions of more food stores, food and cooking opportunities, more snacks, and food in general. These responses reiterated the importance of maintaining school food programs already present in North Cowichan schools and considerations for summer food accessibility when school is out.
- Other:** Other lesser mentioned but still notable wants and needs include the desire for a 50-metre pool at the Cowichan Aquatic Centre, affordable work out opportunities, and workshops and skills training. They also expressed a desire for club activities, youth friendly fun, enhanced and timelier mental health support, career help, safe spaces, improved amenities in general, opportunities for music lessons, and places to access a computer. While transportation was the most cited barrier, and most often related to rides, it was also mentioned several times as a want or need, particularly regarding public transportation. Youth mentioned needing faster buses, more buses, and better bus options to Crofton. This may indicate that many youth see greater access to public transportation as a solution to their limited access to rides from caregivers.

Figure 5. Services, programs, or activities wanted or needed by youth



Wants and needs were also explored in a ranking question with eight options in the Mentimeter digital engagement tool, which asked youth to rank their interest in participating in various youth supports and

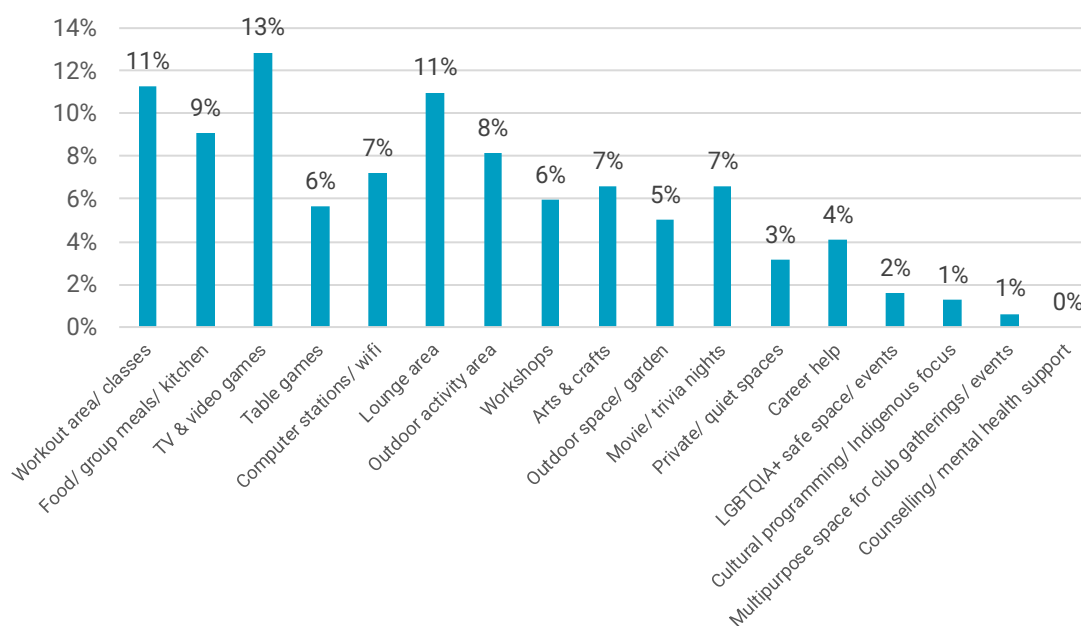
services; where 1 represents the service most interested in and 8 represents the service least interested in. The full Mentimeter results can be found in Appendix 2 and were consistent with the results above, in that sports and recreation, drop-in spaces, and arts-based programming were top priorities. It also revealed a clear interest in 'outdoors/environmental learning' and 'clubs/advocacy groups,' which came 4th and 5th out of 8, respectively.

Although not ranked within the top 1 to 5, it should be noted that 35% of Mentimeter participants identified 'Health and social supports' as within their top 4 choices, and 20% identified 'Substance use support' as within their top 4 choices. This indicates that although most youth expressed a strong demand for more recreation and fun-based activities, there was a notable percentage of youth participants who identified direct supports as a personal priority.

INSIGHTS ON A YOUTH CENTRE

Anticipating that hang out spaces would be highly reported as a priority for youth in North Cowichan, the Open House engagement included a dotmocracy board which allowed participants to vote with stickers on what they would like to see most if a youth centre were to be created. There were 17 options to vote on and an option to add additional categories. With 319 votes between both Open Houses, **Figure 6** highlights that, if a youth centre was to be established, youth respondents were most interested in tv and video games (41 votes; 13%), a workout area or workout classes (36 votes; 11%), a lounge area (35 votes; 11%), access to food, group meals, or kitchen (29 votes; 9%), and an outdoor activity area (26 votes; 8%). Youth participants expressed the least interest in counselling or mental health supports being included as a component of a youth centre. However, this activity was highly public, and responses may reflect some peer influence.

Figure 6. Youth preferences for an ideal youth centre



The dotmocracy findings are consistent with the findings related to wants and needs and reveal a strong interest in workout opportunities beyond organized sports. Computer stations and Wi-Fi, arts and crafts, movie or trivia nights, and an outdoor activity area were also popular options.

PARTICIPATION & CURRENT SENTIMENTS

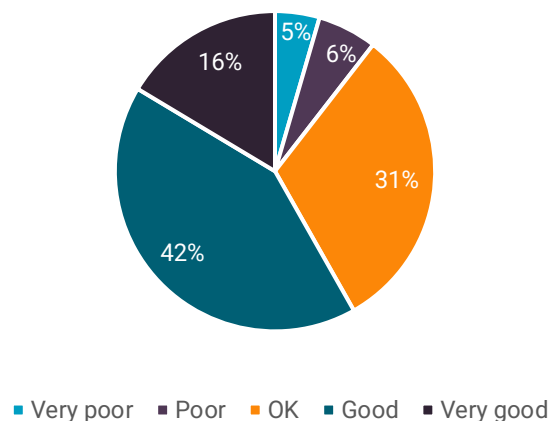
We asked two questions to assess how youth feel about the youth programs, services, and supports currently available to them in North Cowichan. One was a word cloud question within the Mentimeter game that asked: “What’s one word or feeling you associate with the current youth programs and services in your community?” This received 80 responses revealing mixed sentiments, with many positive attributions standing out, including ‘good’, ‘fun’, ‘nice’, ‘welcoming’, and ‘happy’ (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7. One-word descriptor of North Cowichan’s youth services as provided by youth participants



The second question was asked with the Youth Survey: “How would you score youth services, activities, and programs where you live?”. Responses to the question, as show in **Figure 8** are mostly positive with 58% finding services either ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’, 31% expressing ‘OK’ services, and 10% percent selecting either ‘Poor’ or ‘Very poor’.

Figure 8. Youth rated sentiments about services, activities, and programs locally



Additionally, the Youth Survey revealed that if there was a place in North Cowichan for youth to hang out and participate in programming, 60% would be either ‘Likely’ or ‘Very likely’ to hang out there, with only 12% selecting ‘Unlikely’ or ‘Very unlikely’ and the remaining 28% choosing ‘Neither likely or unlikely’.

3.3 ENGAGEMENT THEMES – YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH

- **Transportation:** Service providers acknowledged the challenges youth face in accessing transportation due to limited public bus services, the geographic spread of communities and social services, and the cost limitation of public transit or personal vehicles. Participants noted that transportation impacts several areas of life for youth in North Cowichan, including difficulty accessing education and employment opportunities due to transportation challenges. It was also flagged that since the school bus is many youths' only way to get home, transportation can present challenges for youth trying to get to and from youth programming in the evening. Participants suggested that dedicated buses for these services or subsidies for youth to take public transit would help.
- **Mental Health:** It was mentioned multiple times that there is an insufficient supply of free counselling services for youth and long wait times for available services. One person noted that there are delays in receiving care from Island Health. Service providers also see youth resorting to self-medication due to lack of access to health care. Participants shared that school counsellors are limited to school-related topics and that high levels of anxiety have been observed post-pandemic. Several participants shared the need for more immediate support including grief counselling and support with trauma.
- **Participation:** Several service providers reflected on how youth participation has changed following the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that youth who were between 10 and 12 years old during the height of the pandemic are more socially isolated and less likely to commit to organized programming. Since the older youth during the pandemic have now aged out of youth programming, they note that there is a gap in participation for those who are now in the 13 to 14 year and older age range. Participants shared that financial barriers also hinder participation for low-income youth.
- **Awareness:** Connected to participation, some service providers find that it can be hard to engage youth to participate in services, programs, or activities, and as a result many youth are perceived to be unaware of many available resources, programming, and supports.
- **Economic Barriers:** Relating to several other barriers, service providers shared that cost is a common barrier to youth when it comes to transportation, technology, and participation in organized programming and extra-curriculars.
- **Technology Access:** Participants suggested that many youths face financial barriers which prevent access to having a cell phone, printer, and other technology which helps them perform tasks like looking for a job or conducting research for school. It was noted that there are no public telephones, putting pressure on service providers to lend their phones to youth to enable them to seek resources or support.
- **Housing:** While only mentioned by one service provider, some serious concerns were raised around youth who are aging out of care and do not have the life skills or resources to secure stable housing for themselves. In extreme cases this provider has witnessed youth sleeping in adult shelters, sleeping rough, or taking a bus to Victoria to access the youth shelter at Cool Aid Society.

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

- **Limitations in service offerings:** Some service providers report performing support far beyond their area of service to try and fill the gaps in existing resources for youth in the area, and taking on something more like a social worker role despite being under-resourced and untrained to do so.
- **Staffing:** Most service providers indicated that either staffing or finding volunteers was a challenge to providing sustainable programming with continued support for youth, including in the summer when school is out. The biggest barrier to this was funding for staff, and finding able-bodied, youth-oriented volunteers for volunteer programs.
- **Funding:** Service providers are seeing long-standing organizations and programs in the region shut down due to financial sustainability issues and are understandably concerned. Some noted that more funding is needed to provide essential services to youth in North Cowichan, as many programs are propped up by private funding which is not reliable year to year. Participants also noted that funding should be applicable to operational costs, staff wages, and training, not just projects or programs.
- **Communication:** Service providers find there is a lack of centralized information and that although there is a newsletter distributed among organizations, it is not specific to youth services. Some see opportunity to enhance collaboration and coordination among service providers. One participant suggested connecting with a school receptionist can be an effective pathway to share information about resources and programs to youth and their families. One participant noted that increased communication and collaboration between the municipality and service providers would also be appreciated.
- **Training:** Service providers expressed a desire for enhanced training to address youth needs in areas such as trauma-informed care, Indigenous cultural safety, and de-escalation techniques.

LEVERAGE POINTS & OPPORTUNITIES

- **Transportation options:** Service providers noted that some youth programming is under-attended due to lack of transportation. Public transit subsidies or dedicated buses were suggested to mitigate this.
- **Mentors:** Several service providers acknowledged the importance of trusted adults to help build supportive relationships with youth and encourage participation and social inclusion, including in drop-in spaces and schools. With Big Brothers Big Sisters closing their mentorship program due to lack of volunteers, youth are limited in mentors available to them. Some types of mentors mentioned include youth coordinators, non-clinical mental health supports, and school staff. These roles were noted as essential to help create safe spaces for youth to seek resources and get involved in their community. Additionally, for Indigenous youth, mentorship creates meaningful pathways to connect with Elders, language learning, and other cultural supports.
- **Mobile services:** Given the unique geographic spread of North Cowichan, many service providers suggested mobile services to meet youth where they are at, reducing barriers such as cost and transportation and increasing comfort levels by meeting youth in a familiar place.
- **Peer-led programming:** It was suggested to create a youth round table to support peer-led learning and facilitation.

- **Food security:** Food security for youth is strong in North Cowichan thanks to a large range of food access through in-school programs, Nourish Cowichan, Cowichan Green, and service providers who provide food for youth including the House of Friendship and others.
- **Childhood intervention:** Service providers with connections to the education system suggested intervention and relationship building when youth are still children, to create strong connections before they age into youth and begin facing cited barriers.

SERVICE PROVIDER INSIGHTS ON A YOUTH CENTRE

Service providers shared valuable insights on factors they thought would be essential to creating a youth centre that addresses youth needs in North Cowichan, focusing on a range of social and health supports that would be responsive to youth transportation and participation barriers.

- **Health and Safety:**
 - Provide health services, including a street nurse and sexual health resources.
 - Offer food, referral resources, and safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth.
 - Ensure safe transportation for youth to get home after evening programs.
- **Operating Hours:**
 - Ensure consistent and extended hours, including evenings and weekends.
- **Programming:**
 - Facilitate youth-led and peer-led programming.
 - Support arts-based, literacy, job training, and media literacy programs.
 - Provide mental health support, social activities, and safe spaces for youth to interact.
 - Develop programs to address various needs including art, literacy, job training, and social skills.
 - Offer unstructured and structured opportunities, including mental health support and recreational activities.
 - Provide computers and phone access for youth seeking jobs or resources.
- **Accessibility:**
 - Ensure accessibility through transportation solutions and free or low-cost activities.
 - Create a sense of belonging and connection for all youth, including those from Indigenous backgrounds and single-parent households.
- **Locations:**
 - Establish smaller, regional centers instead of one large center to reduce transportation barriers.
 - Utilize existing community spaces like schools and gyms.
- **Community Integration:**
 - Connect youth services with broader community initiatives to address interconnected issues.
- **Innovative Ideas:**
 - Limit Wi-Fi to encourage in-person interactions.
 - Provide mobile units offering flexible, on-the-go services.

- **Youth Engagement:**

- Create roles for youth ambassadors to facilitate connections and engagement.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

Findings from engagement activities will build upon the Youth Profile and Best Practices included within the North Cowichan Youth Services Review. Bringing these three components together will support an informed and evidence-based approach for developing a set of recommendations to include within the Final Review.

4.1 IMPLICATIONS OF ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

The engagement findings presented in this summary provide a broad understanding of youth needs and barriers in North Cowichan. Going forward, these findings present several opportunities:

- **Utilization of Findings:** The survey and engagement findings can serve as a valuable tool for future initiatives. The Municipality of North Cowichan can use this data to identify specific programming needs and geographic suitability for services, ensuring that efforts are tailored to community needs.
- **Program Development:** There is an opportunity to develop targeted programs that address the specific needs identified, such as increased sports and arts programming, hang-out spaces, and improved access to food. These programs can be designed to be both comprehensive and adaptable to the diverse interests of youth in North Cowichan.
- **Youth Centre Consideration:** Exploring the feasibility of a youth centre that integrates both programming and social spaces can be a key focus. Such a facility would aim to meet the varied needs expressed by the youth, providing a central hub for services and activities, either mobile, in various locations, or in one designated location with transportation supports.
- **Transportation Solutions:** Improving transportation options to reduce the geographic barriers identified is a significant opportunity. Enhancing public transportation routes, schedules, and affordability will ensure that youth can access the services and programs they need.

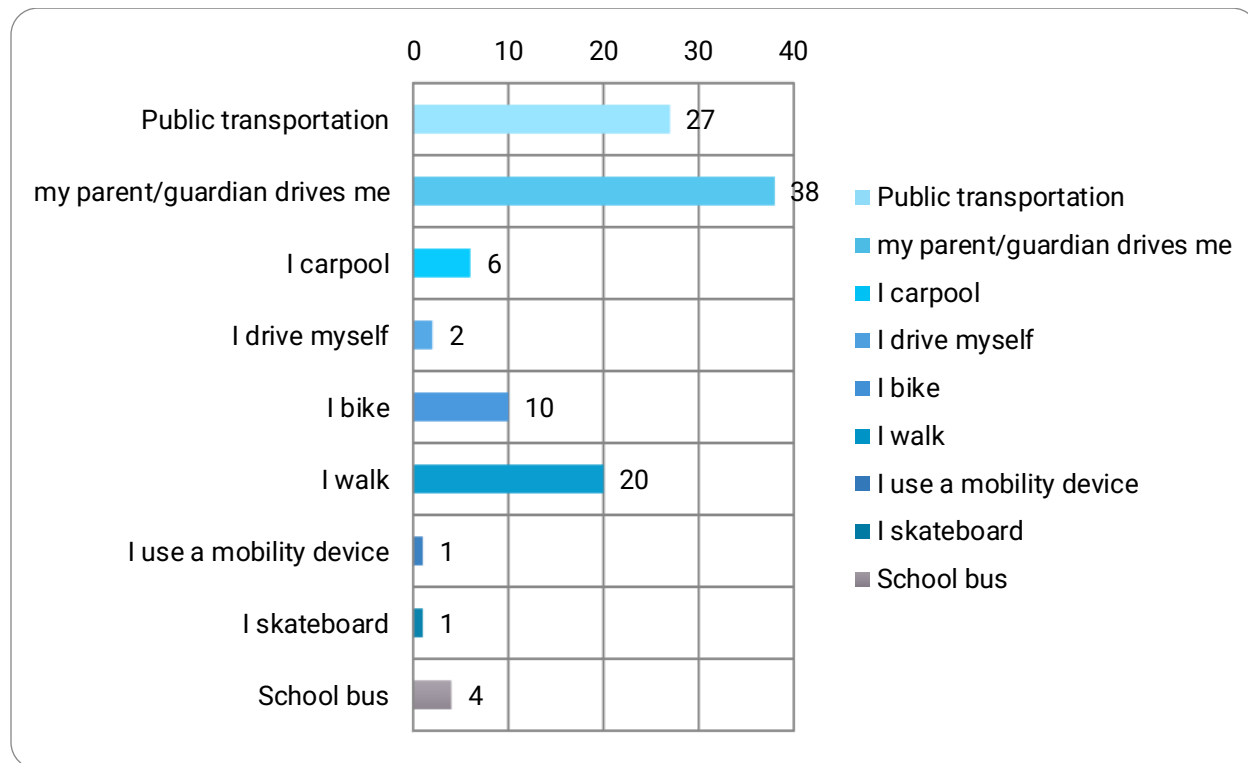
These opportunities will help ensure that future initiatives are well-informed, actionable, and aligned with the needs and aspirations of North Cowichan's youth.

Appendices

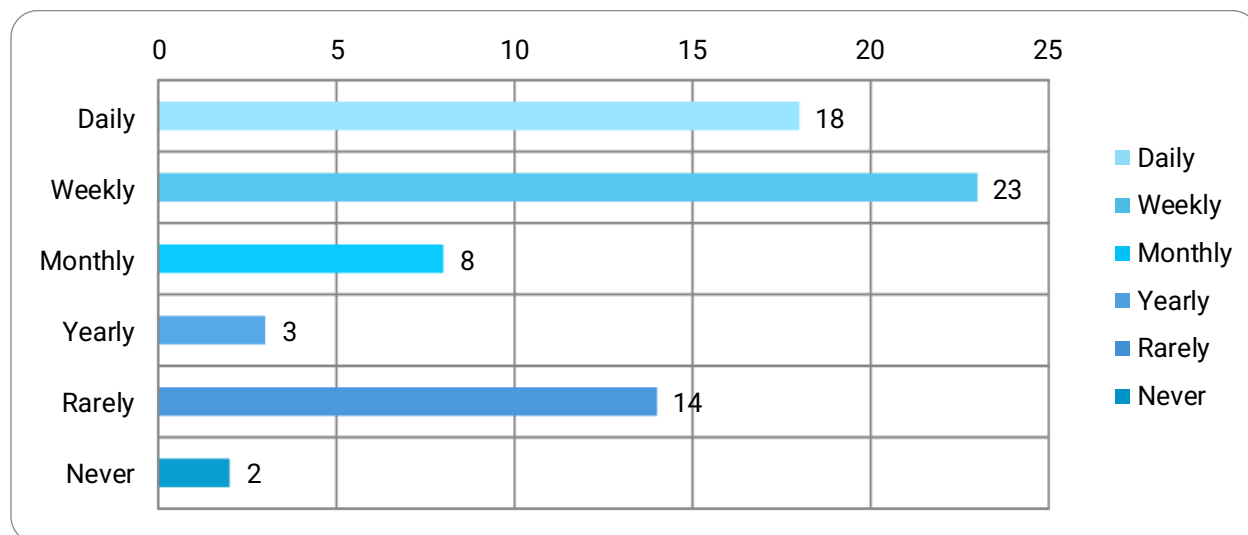
Appendix A – Youth Survey Results

(67 respondents)

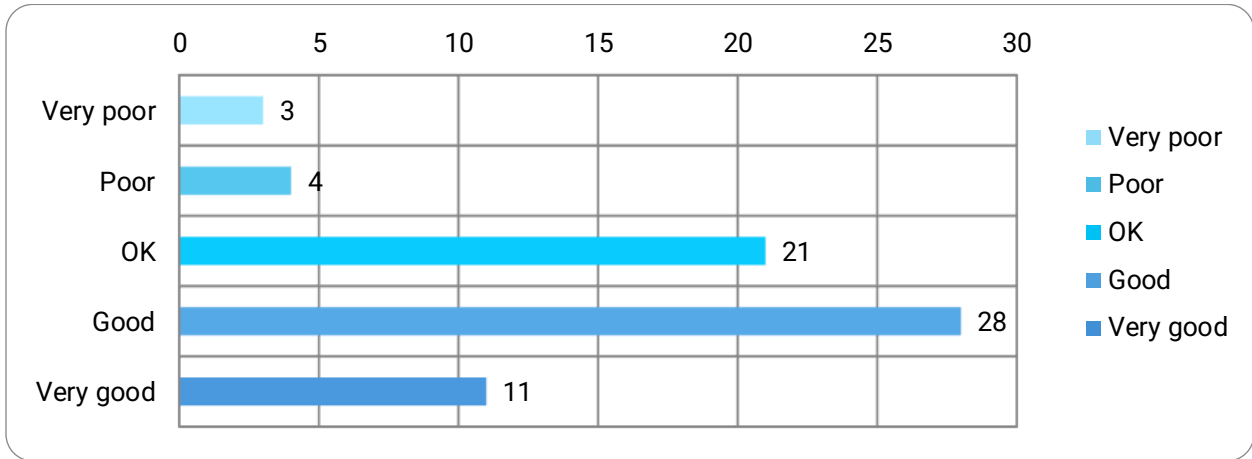
1. How do you get around (to school or elsewhere)? Choose all that apply.



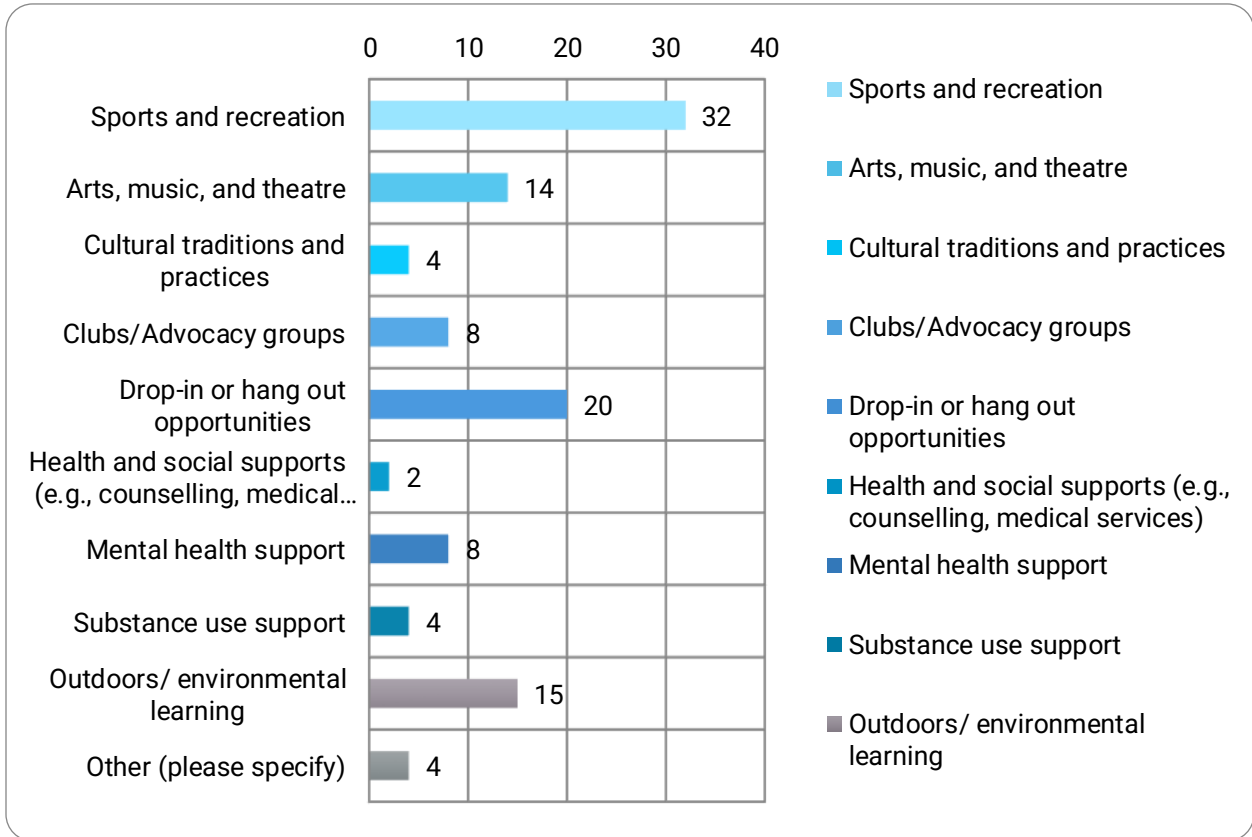
2. How often do you participate in out-of-school programmed activities (this means activities that are not linked to your school or any other school)?



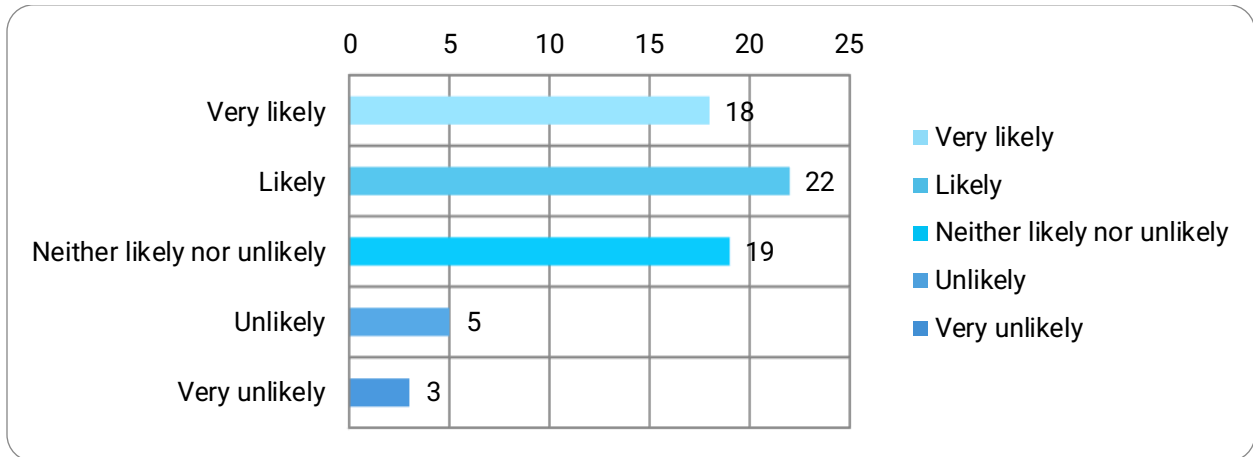
3. How would you score youth services, activities, and programs where you live?



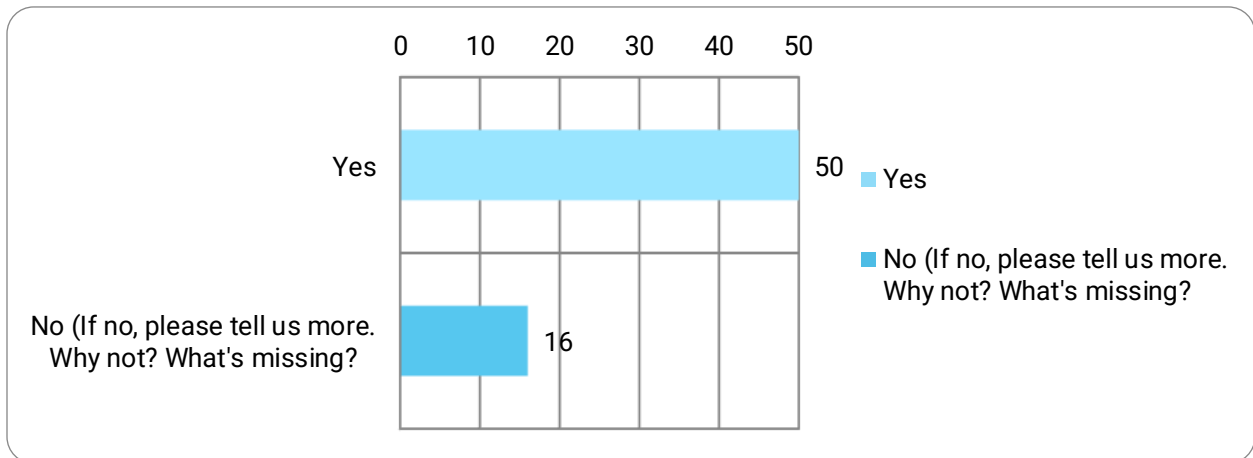
4. What type of youth services or programs are you interested in participating in but are currently missing in your community? Choose all that apply.



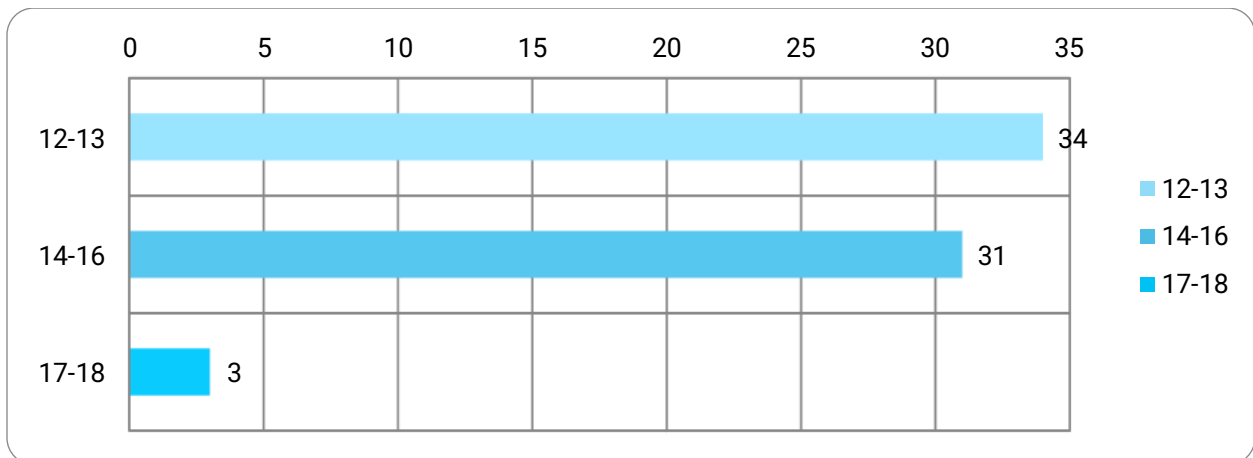
5. If there was a place in North Cowichan that provided a nice space to hang out and offered youth services and programs, how likely would you be to hang out there?



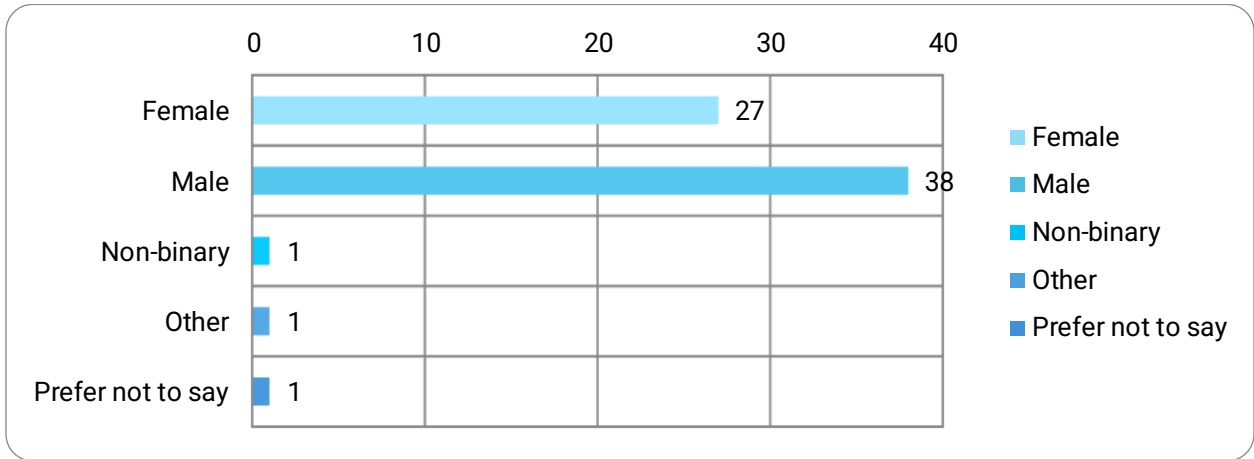
6. Do you feel you have opportunities to engage in activities related to your cultural traditions?



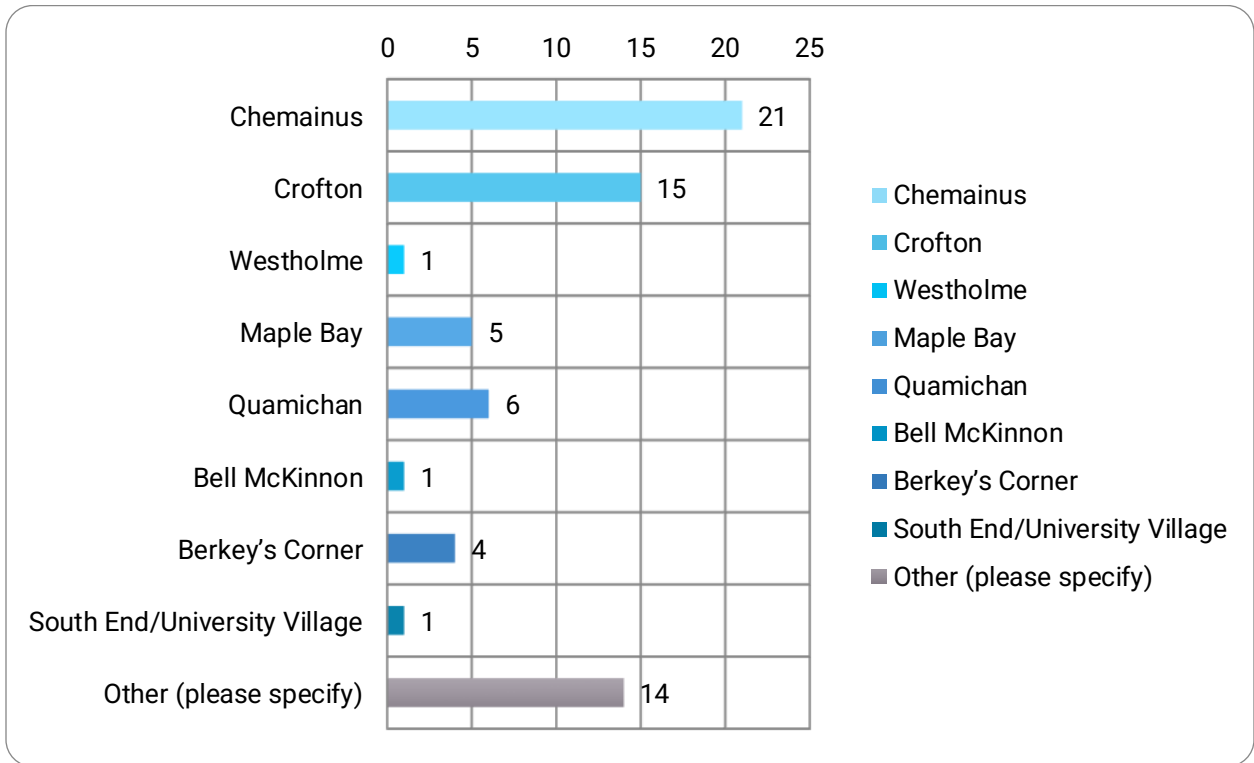
7. How old are you?



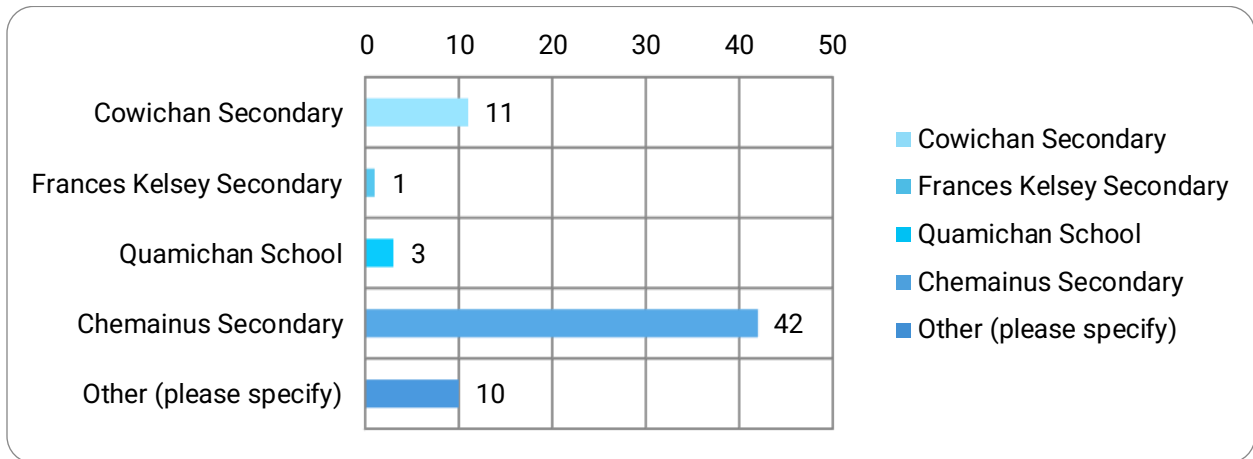
8. What is your gender identity?



9. Which town or neighborhood do you live in?



10. Which school do you attend?

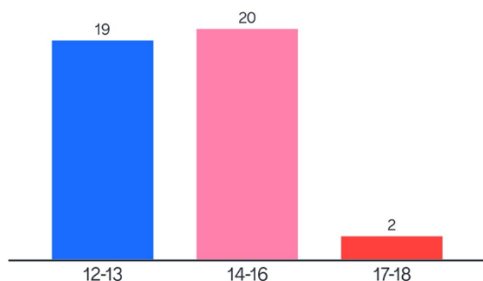


Appendix B – Mentimeter Results

(59 respondents)

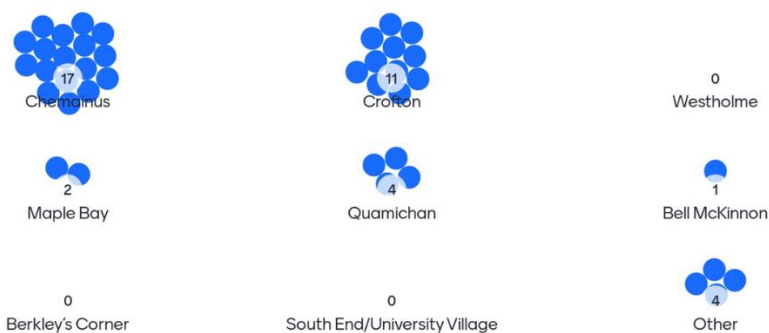
How old are you?

- **12-13** - 29 responses
- **14-16** – 25 responses
- **17-18** – 5 responses



What community do you live in?

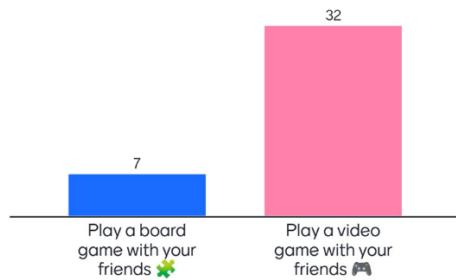
- **Bell Mckinnon** –1 response
- **Chemainus** – 25 responses
- **Crofton** – 13 responses
- **Maple Bay** – 3 responses
- **Other** – 9 responses
- **Quamichan** – 4 responses
- **Westholme** – 1 responses



Do you identify as Indigenous?

- **Yes** – 10 responses
- **No** – 45 responses

What is your gender identity?

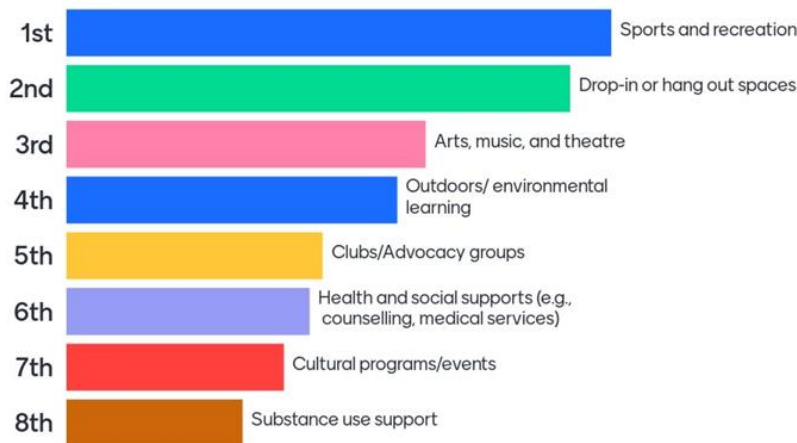


Rank your interest in participating in the following programs or services (1 being most interested, 8 being least interested):

Note: 35 completed the ranking in full, and 19 more partially completed it (ranked some but not all)

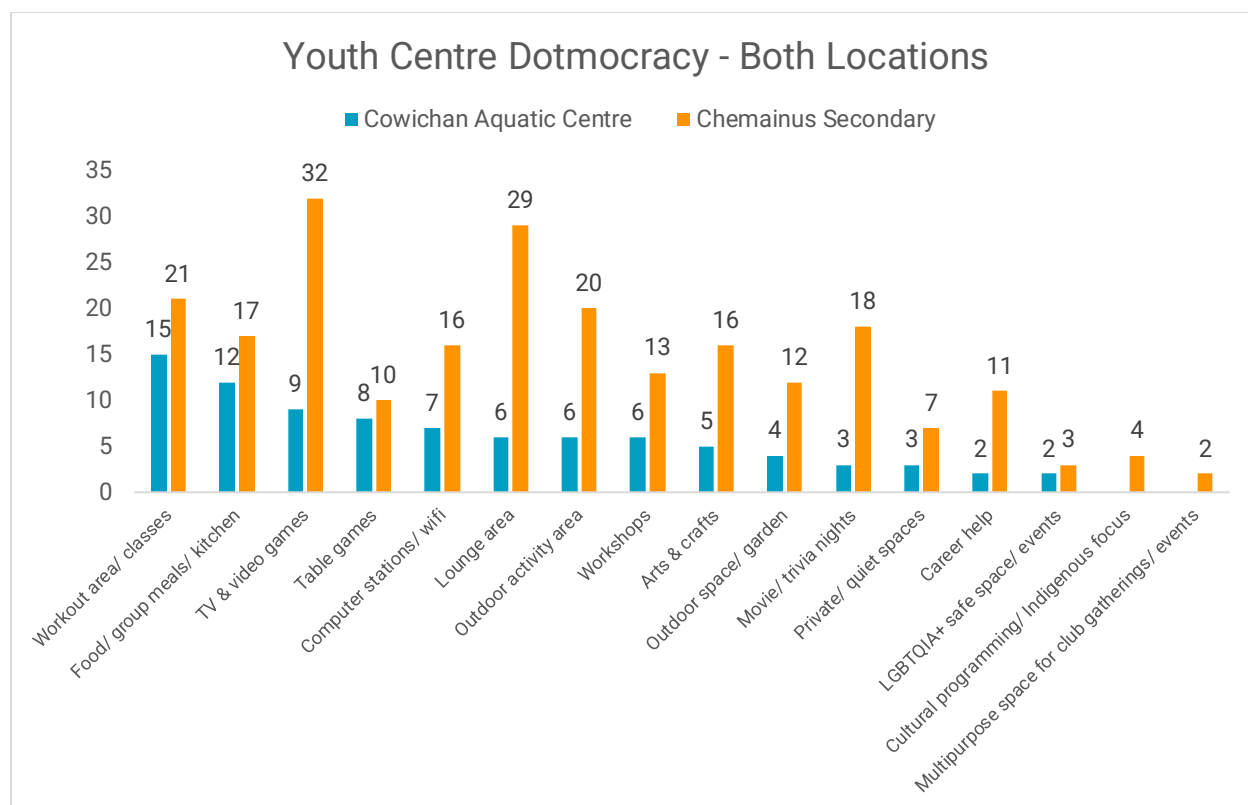
Ranking results:

1. **Sports and recreation** – average ranking 2.8
2. **Drop-in or hang out spaces** – average ranking 3.3
3. **Outdoors/ environmental learning** – average ranking 4.1
4. **Arts, music, and theatre** – average ranking 4.0
5. **Clubs/Advocacy groups** – average ranking 4.7
6. **Health and social supports** (e.g., counselling, medical services) – average ranking 4.7
7. **Cultural programs/events** – average ranking 5.2
8. **Substance use support** – average ranking 5.8



Appendix C – Dotmocracy Results

CATEGORIES:	Cowichan Aquatic Cen	Chemainus Secondary	Combined
TV AND VIDEO GAMES	9	32	41
WORKOUT AREA/CLASSES	15	21	36
LOUNGE AREA	6	29	35
FOOD/GROUP MEALS/KITCHEN	12	17	29
OUTDOOR ACTIVITY AREA	6	20	26
COMPUTER STATIONS/WIFI	7	16	23
ARTS & CRAFTS	5	16	21
MOVIE/TRIVIA NIGHTS	3	18	21
WORKSHOPS	6	13	19
TABLE GAMES (PING PONG, POOL, BOARD)	8	10	18
OUTDOOR SPACE/GARDEN	4	12	16
RESUME OR CAREER HELP	2	11	13
PRIVATE/QUIET SPACES	3	7	10
LGBTQIA+ SAFE SPACE/EVENTS	2	3	5
CULTURAL PROGRAMMING/INDIGENOUS FOCUS	0	4	4
MULTIPURPOSE SPACE FOR CLUB GATHERINGS AND/OR EVENTS	0	2	2
COUNSELLING/MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT	0	0	0
		Total number of votes:	319



Appendix D – Display Board Results

Board #2: Envisioning a Youth Centre, Together

