WHAT WE ARE HEARING

YOUTH RESILIENCY STRATEGY

MAY 2024

New Westminster is a community that is "growing up" in many ways – quite obviously as a growing population center – however it is far more than that. New Westminster is taking a leadership role in building a community with high levels of well-being embodied within its inclusive values.

As such, the City of New Westminster is working towards a *Youth Resiliency Strategy* to support youth growing up in New Westminster so they feel safe, have valuable ways to contribute, and thrive.

Resiliency is the ability and capacity of an individual to cope with and adapt to challenges, as well as their ability to bounce back from difficult experiences. Resiliency for youth is highly influenced by factors such as the sense of belonging, social connection, emotional health, a sense of meaning, positive identity, goals and aspirations, individual culture, and the presence of positive opportunities.

Crucial to all these elements is a sense of safety; if youth feel safe in their community, their opportunities to maximize these factors increase, which builds the conditions where youth thrive.



Components of resiliency



Understanding resiliency

Resiliency is the capacity to cope with and adapt to challenges, as well as the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences.
(Crooks et al., 2020)

Building on strengths

New West youth have a wide range of community assets that currently support their well-being and development. During a community asset mapping workshop in April 2024, over 80 existing community support assets were identified that support youth resiliency through:

- connecting youth to their community and local environment,
- supporting individual youth,
- bringing friends and families together, and
- supporting youth through expressing culture and identity.

These four components of youth resiliency are vitally important in building the community conditions where youth can thrive. Youth shared their appreciation for the support they receive across these domains and recognized the hard work and mentorship that is provided to them by caring adults in the community.



While there are a significant number of community assets for youth, youth and community members also shared there are challenges facing youth that are emerging in the community in several ways. It is important to note that these two things can be true simultaneously – there is amazing support for youth and youth are experiencing challenges causing turbulence in their lives; these are the growing pains of resiliency and well-being.

Emerging Themes

Just as the Fraser River's turbulent waters have shaped the land on which New Westminster exists – there appear to be some turbulent elements of life in the city that are occurring 'below the surface' for youth in New Westminster.

These elements seem to be heavily shaping the lived experiences of youth. The emerging themes represent an early understanding of elements that will shape this project going forward. Some are visible while others are less so, occurring below the surface, and deserving of deeper exploration.



People and place-based safety

Youth shared concerns about particular locations throughout the City where they felt less safe. These concerns were sometimes related to the presence of other people, the behaviour of others, or the physical location itself. It will be important to continue to learn about certain areas that feel less safe for youth and to understand what contributes to feelings of security.

Additionally, young women and gender diverse youth expressed concern about their interactions with other community members, and the notable gendered difference in harassment for example, and how that impacted their perception of safety. Both youth and service providers shared concerns about the perception of youth violence amongst the wider community, due to a range of factors including social media.

Still some questions remaining...

Youth are reporting feeling unsafe in some areas and are having challenging interactions with some community members potentially causing a reduction of emotional health and sense of connection within their communities. To know more, we intend to inquire about these interactions and the impact they are having to identify common themes or experiences.

We also intend to explore the reported worsening of youth violence within New Westminster as youth crime statistics tend to report that youth violence or crime is trending downwards year over year, indicating a discrepancy that is important to understand.

Safe spaces for youth

Youth and community had a shared call for increasing the availability of safe spaces for youth both during school and after school hours. Youth shared a strong desire for the increase of violence and crime prevention programming in schools and during after school hours to help increase a sense of safety from violence and "grooming" type activities by other youth involved in high-risk activities.

Youth and community members shared that capacity challenges at the high school have led to a decrease in quiet and calming spaces for youth, resulting in challenges of personal anxiety and fear. Additionally, the lack of space has reduced the opportunities for positive youth programming in the school provided by youth workers and other community partners.

The increase of community recreation space provided by the new təməsewtxʷ Aquatic and Community Centre are welcomed additions for the City's youth. Youth and community members provided feedback around the need for more accessible recreation space for youth including gymnasiums for basketball and other court sports, as well as lower-cost and accessible options for weight training and regular physical fitness.

Questions for deeper exploration...

Youth report feeling "tight" or withdrawn with the density and fullness of their lives and we want to understand this more deeply to see how density is affecting the elements of resiliency and the experience of growing up in New West.

We are interested to know if this is a common experience across cultural groups and how it might be showing up differently for various cohorts.

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Creating waves
A deep desire for feeling safe

In New Westminster, some youth shared that they feel compelled to carry self-defense items they perceive will increase their safety. This can become a rapidly growing whirlpool; the more youth that carry these items, the more likely other youth will follow suit out of a perceived (and/or real) necessity; the more youth protecting themselves in these ways, the more likely a negative result could occur.

Some youth appear to be acting out of a personal need for safety – not a desire to cause harm. This is vitally important as it informs the next stages of the project – bridging vulnerability into protective factors.

What does this mean moving forward?

We heard that youth are taking action by creating their own sense of safety by carrying self-defense items. We want to explore the extent to which this phenomenon affects youth, including understanding the vulnerability factors that increase their likelihood of resorting to self-protection **and** the protective factors that increase their feelings of safety to reduce the need for self-protection.



The New Westminster Youth Resiliency Strategy is at a critical junction that needs community voice. On June 3rd and 4th a series of community design labs will be held across the community to bring a wide range of voices and experiences together to plan the way forward – and we hope you will be involved.



What's next?

Bridging vulnerability into protective factors

When there is turbulence below, waves emerge at the surface of the river. The same can be said for a youth growing up. The more turbulence, the more likely waves and whirlpools emerge in their lives.

While there are numerous assets in the community offering protective factors to keep youth safe, the number of risk factors that threaten to erode youth safety will continue to rise as the community grows.

Youth in New Westminster, and the community, have a shared desire to move from fear and apprehension into safety and engagement. The way forward is through community led planning and action to develop a Youth Resiliency Strategy. This strategy will focus on resiliency factors designed to help increase the sense of belonging, social connection, emotional health, sense of meaning, positive identity, goals and aspirations, individual culture, and the presence of positive opportunities for all youth in New West.



NEW WESTMINSTER

YOUTH RESILIENCY STRATEGY

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or visit:

https://www.newwestcity.ca/building-safer-communities-fund-program