A YOUTH SAFETY LENS FOR THE COWICHAN REGION

Developed by:
Safe Youth Cowichan
and
Duncan Junior Youth Council

In partnership with the
Cowichan Valley Regional District Community Safety Advisory Commission,
Safer Futures (CWAV Society), and Community Options Society

Fact:

According to Statistics Canada 2011 Community Profile there are 18,595 young people between the ages of 10 to 25 in the Cowichan Region.

This number represents approximately 23% of the population of the region.

Safe Youth Cowichan—Who are we?

Youth in the Cowichan Region are diverse with diverse needs.

We are blessed with communities that have youth from a variety of cultural backgrounds, belief systems, incomes and orientations.

Safe Youth Cowichan is a group of young people made up of a diverse range of youth.

We are concerned about our communities.

We strive to create communities that are safe and accessible for all.

This includes youth of different ages, genders, races, religions and incomes.

Safe Youth Cowichan 2013 facilitators from left to right clockwise: Selena, Patrick, Brittney, Emma, Chelsea, Christy, Leif, Ashley, and Jenni

What's this all about?

WHAT is a 'youth lens'?
A youth lens is a way of looking at the world that encompasses the interest, beliefs and needs of youth.

WHY do we need this?:
Youth voices often go unheard in local government decision making and this checklist is a way to ensure that young people's interests are considered when decisions are made that affect them.

We need to champion the interests of youth!

WHO can use this tool?
Elected official, planners and developers.

WHEN should this tool be used?:
To assess policies, procedures and proposed developments such as the use of land, design of buildings and the provision of physical as well as social infrastructures.

This tool should be used to expand the planning process by considering a youth perspective.

WHERE can this tool be used?
This tool can be implemented in the Cowichan Valley and could be used in other jurisdictions as well.

HOW can decision makers use this tool?
Firstly, elected officials, planners and developers need to determine whether the issue they are addressing is a 'Social Issue' or a decision regarding 'Physical Infrastructure'. From there they can proceed to ask themselves a series of questions contained in the checklist on page 13.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is a signatory, states that every child has:

◊ *the right to survival*
◊ *the right to develop to the fullest*
◊ *the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and*
◊ *the right to participate fully in family cultural and social life.*

Article 12 of the Convention further enshrines the right to be heard.

(Perry Kendall OBC, MBBS, MSc, FRCPC, Provincial Health Officer)

COWICHAN REGION YOUTH SAFETY LENS

Where did this come from?

"Our young people are such important assets and they have a lot to offer. We need to involve them in planning our communities! This Lens will tell us why and how."

(Lori Iannidinardo, Chair, Community Safety Advisory Commission)

Background and Purpose

In response to dialogues conducted with youth in the Cowichan Region during 2012, the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) Community Safety Advisory Commission (CSAC) recommended the development of a Youth Lens that would provide:

1) A statement of community values and positive assumptions for and about youth
2) Indicators of a youth safe community (social, environmental, institutional) that take into account specific age/gender/geographical needs and needs of vulnerable youth at home, school and in the broader community
3) Advice and best practices on how to create youth friendly places and programs that are accessible to all youth
4) Advice on how to engage and include youth voices.

The purpose of the Cowichan Region Youth Safety Lens is to provide decision makers with a tool to assess safety factors for youth when they are considering questions about community planning and development. It has been developed by Safe Youth Cowichan and is based on dialogues involving over 500 young people around the region.

This Lens is intended to complement the Cowichan Region Youth Safety Dialogues Report. It will offer a series of steps and questions to provide considerations for enhancing safety and social well-being of young people.

It will also include direction for youth engagement to ensure that young people are included in decisions that affect their well-being.

Why Safety?

Introduction

Safety is a basic quality of life issue. Personal and public safety is an essential part of community living. A safe community is a place where all citizens can live, work and play safely <u>and</u> without fear of harm.

Community safety is different for different people. There are significant differences depending on age, gender, abilities, race/ethnicity, income and/or sexual orientation. Safety is dependent upon a combination of factorsincluding:

- Well designed, accessible physical environments
- Adequate physical infrastructure (e.g., housing, transportation, parks and open space)
- Social infrastructure (e.g., neighbourhood networks, recreation, adequate and accessible community support systems such as childcare, family programs, counselling, etc.)

Finally, a key element for community safety is having meaningful opportunities to participate in all environments, including decision-making processes.

Youth Dialogues

During 2012 - 2013, the Cowichan Valley Youth Safety Dialogues looked at a range of indicators that tell us about risk and protective factors for youth in the Cowichan Valley and involved approximately 500 youth in discussions about what safety means to them, why and where they are concerned about their safety, what they do to stay safe and what would help them to feel safer in their communities.

The results indicate that many youth in the Cowichan Region are participating and involved in employment, recreation, arts and volunteerism. Yet there are still too many who are not, and there are indicators of risks and stressors that make it difficult for youth to flourish, and to be safe.

"...protective factors promote healthy youth development and reduce the risk of harmful behaviours. For example, research has shown that youth who feel connected and safe at home with their family, at school, and in the community have better health, take fewer risks, and have higher educational aspirations."

(McCreary Centre Society, 2010)

COWICHAN REGION YOUTH SAFETY LENS

What do we know so far?

What does safety mean to youth?

Safety is a multidimensional concept and has different meanings for different people, from an absence of violence and crime, to feeling out of danger, to having basic needs met.

Dialogues with youth have told us that safety is related to positive relationships with others, to acceptance, to connections with culture, family, friends and community networks.

Youth also stressed that it is important for them to be who they are, and to able to use and be part of their community freely, and without worry.

Youth emphasized inclusion, connection, culture, respect and dignity, warm and accessible environments, and communities that promote safety through devoting resources to prevention and intervention.

Youth Safety Concerns

Youth expressed concerns about a wide range of actual or potential safety issues including harassment, racism, sexism, discrimination, homophobia, aggression, violence, intimidation and bullying.

These concerns were related to strangers, but also to people (including other youth) known to them and to particular places in the community.

Youth expressed concerns about places that are isolated, dark, where people hang out, where there is substance use. Youth also stressed that they are often pedestrians and need to walk to where they need to go.

They stressed the importance of accessibility along highways and streets, including lighting and signage. They are also transit users and need to be considered in transportation planning.

What would help to make communities safer for youth?

Young people had much to say about what would help them to be and feel safer in their communities. The following themes highlight needs identified by youth in the Cowichan Region.

☐ Youth friendly, safe places.

☐ Youth friendly activities and programs that are affordable and serve *all* youth.

☐ Having a presence of authority, enforcement of rules and having safety strategies.

☐ Youth friendly physical environments (adequate lighting, crossing areas; having natural areas and people around, vibrant communities, adequate and safe transportation/transit).

☐ Social strategies such as creating sense of community, prevention of violence and substance abuse programs, and jobs for youth.

☐ Finally, youth stressed that their involvement and participation in decisions that affect them is key.

What would a youth friendly community look like to you? *

Everyone is treated equally; no singling out anyone; no judging
Friendly youth
Everyone helping out
Where everybody looks at things from your point of view
Kind, considerate, understanding of differences
Our kind
Support, love, caring, trustworthy, courage
Support, loveable, caring
Youth drop-ins
It looks like a fine place to socialize
More free sports
Everyone accepting you as you are
Supportive people
Safe place to go hangout (late nights)

What would help youth to be and feels safer?

What helps youth to be able to use and be part of their community?

How can we include the voices of young people in decisions about our communities?

Principles for Youth Safety

"Acceptance by those around me makes me feel welcome and loved."

(Youth Participant)

From the dialogues, the CVRD CSAC developed six principles for youth safety.

Youth safety is rooted in respectful and nurturing connections with family, friends, school, neighbourhood and community.

Youth safety means being able to be in and participate in the community - to be included - and able to engage in activities and enjoy nature without having to experience or worry about crime, violence, drug use, bullying, harassment, prejudice, sexism, homophobia and racism.

A community that is safe for youth promotes and encourages diversity, acceptance, opportunities for youth to participate in various aspects, and has an abundance of places where all youth feel welcomed and valued. It also provides services and outlets for youth who experience or fear violence and discrimination.

A community that is safe for youth strives to build community environments with youth in mind.

A community that is safe for youth has a focus on positive youth development (resiliency and protective factors) and a commitment to investing in assets that promote youth safety and well being.

Youth engagement and voice - particularly the voice of vulnerable youth - in community decisions that affect them is key.

COWICHAN REGION YOUTH SAFETY LENS

Indicators for Youth Safety

How can we look at our communities with youth well-being in mind?

We can begin by looking at indicators of youth resilience, well-being and risk factors that may be present for youth in their communities. The following
indicators where chosen by the CSAC to represent key aspects of resilience, protective and risk factors. There are many more indicators that can be
examined but these were considered to be basic statistical indicators that should be a part of looking at youth safety and well-being.

Cowichan Region Youth Safety Indicators

Youth involved in sports, recreational and special interest activities
Rationale: Involvement in sports and hobbies is a resiliency factor for youth.

Youth volunteerism
Rationale: Volunteering can aid integration and social cohesion and reduce isolation.

High school completion rates
Rationale: High school graduation is an indicator of literacy and employability, both of which are associated with the ability to increase standard of living and decrease safety risk.

Income levels
Rationale: Youth living in poverty have more extreme stress in their lives and experience challenges to accessing opportunities. They are more likely to live in housing that is unsafe and have more health problems.

Teen pregnancy rates
Rationale: Teen parents are less likely to have social and economic resources and are therefore more likely to live in poverty, and to be vulnerable to violence and crime.

Youth in foster care
Rationale: Youth in care are more likely to have experienced violence and neglect. They are less likely to graduate from high school.

Youth who are victims of crime
Rationale: Children and youth under 18 years of age are more at risk of physical and sexual assault than adults.

"Vulnerable youth are at greater risk for not finishing school, experiencing homelessness, problem substance use, and other health-compromising behaviours. Their difficult life situations and disconnection from meaningful relationships can leave some vulnerable youth at risk for emotional distress and some even attempt suicide."

*McCreary Centre Society;
Our Vulnerable Youth. (Vancouver: Author; 2010).*

Understanding Differences:
Gender, Diversity and Safety

The 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey found that 44% of youth experienced verbal sexual harassment and 27% were physically sexually harassed. Of those youth, females were more likely than males to be verbally sexually harassed (55% vs. 38%) and physically harassed in the past year (37% vs. 17%).

McCreary Centre Society; Our Vulnerable Youth. (Vancouver: Author; 2010).

It is important to look beyond broad indicators to consider differences in age, gender, culture, race, sexual orientation and geographical characteristics, as well as the needs of vulnerable youth at home, school and in the broader community.

For example, using a gender-based analysis can help us to look at how policies, programs or initiatives affect diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys, taking into account gender and other identify factors.

This helps recognize and respond to the different situations and needs in the community.

Gender-based Analysis begins with but goes far beyond gender, and includes the examination of a range of other intersecting identity factors (such as age, education, language, geography, culture and income).

The following questions will help you to consider gender and other differences.

1) Does this issue affect women and men, girls and boys in different ways?

2) How will this issue be different for different people depending on age, culture, race, sexual orientation, ability, and the income of the population in the area?

3) Which specific concerns are related to this issue (e.g., safety, accessibility, affordability, cultural specificity, family responsibilities, access to decision making, racial profiling)?

4) What are the needs of (different population groups of) women and men, girls and boys?

5) Have you considered socio-economic status, geographical location, age, sexual orientation, racial/ethnic roots, ability, etc.)?

6) How have you consulted with all of the groups involved? For example, holding focus groups, consultations, interviews, seek feedback, by using interviewers from the same population; providing childcare, transportation, safety, language, accessible location, time, multiple formats, avoiding religious and cultural holidays, using culturally appropriate methods, ensuring confidentiality, sensitivity to some issues.

The 2004 General Social Survey identified that being young, being single, going to school, being unemployed, earning a low income, living in an urban area and engaging in 30 or more evening activities a month tended to contribute to a person's increased risk of being the target of a violent crime.

General Social Survey; Violent Victimization in Canada. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada; 2008).

Involving Youth

We can begin to consider youth safety and well-being by gathering specific information and indicators that are available. However, youth have stressed that one of the most the most important aspects in their safety is having their voices included in decisions that affect them.

Safe Youth Cowichan youth have looked at the question of how best to involve youth.
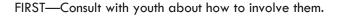
What are some things about youth that they want the rest of the community to know about them?

* We are all different.
* We can make a change.
* We want to have a voice. We do have a voice if you give us the chance.
* We can be outgoing, we can have a crazy/silly side but we are all caring about everyone.
* Not all youth are hooligans. Not all youth steel or are 'bad'. Some youth want to help whenever possible.
* We are kind, have worth and are our future.
* There are a lot of people who think they are alone but aren't.
* We respect elders and our community.

"Positive youth development views youth not as problems to be solved, but rather as assets to be developed."

(City of Surrey, Child and Youth Friendly City Strategy, 2010)

How to Engage Us: What Youth Say

FIRST—Consult with youth about how to involve them.

Always remember to involve the diversity of youth and look at differences.

> Age
> Gender
> Sexual orientation
> Culture
> Race
> Income
> Geography

1. Visit classrooms or groups
2. Put information in school newsletters or on school notice boards.
3. Partner with a youth serving organization to help gather youth.
4. Hold an event. Make sure it's scheduled it at a time when youth can attend.
5. Make it fun, creative and welcoming and use simple language.
6. Consider the event location – ensure it's comfortable and welcoming for youth—a park for example.
7. Provide transportation.
8. Provide food or snacks!
9. When advertising, make posters simple and fun and use pictures.

COWICHAN REGION YOUTH SAFETY LENS

Questions to Ask

Begin by asking:

⇒ **Have youth been consulted directly on this issue? (if not please refer to 'Youth Engagement')**

⇒ **Are youth able to understand the language used in this policy, by-law or report?**

Then, if this is a social issue/question:

⇒ How could this decision affect the rights of youth?

⇒ Can all youth benefit from this initiative? How?

⇒ Does this initiative consider differences for genders, ages, sexual orientation, culture, etc.?

If this is about physical infrastructure or design:

⇒ Would this proposed land use effect or disrupt an existing youth environment or youth culture?

⇒ Does this structure or land use hinder or help youth safety? Is this a structure and/or resource that youth can use?

⇒ Can youth easily access this resource by foot, bike or bus?

Applying the Youth Lens

Social Issue – Street Harassment

Have youth been consulted directly on this issue? (if not please refer to 'Youth Engagement')

> Yes. Dialogues held during 2012 – 2014 identified street harassment as an issue affecting safety of girls, boys, First Nations youth and LGBTQ youth.

Are youth able to understand the language used in this policy, by-law or report?

> As the Duncan Junior Youth Council initiated the issue as part of their agenda, the report was written from their perspective.

Can youth benefit from this initiative? How?

> Yes. The initiative was designed by and for youth.

How could this decision or initiative affect the rights of youth?

> This initiative could enhance the rights of youth and improve their ability to move around their community.

Does this initiative consider differences for genders, ages, sexual orientation, culture, etc.?

> Yes, the initiative is being designed with differences highlighted.

Applying the Youth Lens

Physical Infrastructure – Youth Transportation along the TCH Corridor

Have youth been consulted directly on this issue? (if not please refer to 'Youth Engagement')

> Yes. Youth were consulted through invitations to planning events, through visits to high schools, and through safety assessments conducted by youth themselves. The consultations and assessments involved the diversity of youth in the community. As a result of this consultation, recommendations for enhancing youth access along the TCH Corridor were included in the draft plan.

Are youth able to understand the language used in this policy, by-law or report?

> Youth were provided with copies of reports and draft by-laws and were provided with interpretation.

Will the proposed land use effect or disrupt an existing youth environment or youth culture?

> If recommendations are implemented, the intent is to enhance youth environment.

Does this structure or land use hinder or help youth safety?

> Currently, the TCH hinders youth safety but the recommended improvements are intended to address youth needs.

Is this a structure and/or resource that youth can use?

> Yes.

Can youth easily access this resource by foot, bike or bus?

> Currently, the TCH hinders youth access but the recommended improvements are intended to address youth needs.

Developed by:
Safe Youth Cowichan
and
Duncan Junior Youth Council

In partnership with the
Cowichan Valley Regional District Community Safety Advisory Commission,
Safer Futures (CWAV Society), and Community Options Society

We wish to thank all of the youth involved in this project, and acknowledge the
contributions of the BC Ministry of Justice to our Youth Dialogues and Status of Women Canada to our Neighbourhood Action Projects that informed this lens.