

YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM – PHASE TWO

FINAL REPORT

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**VANCOUVER FOUNDATION
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CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Youth and Ecological Restoration Program (YER) works with Comox Valley youth from the ages of 12 to 18 who are having challenges by offering them guidance and support. They gain employment experience, build personal confidence, and improve communication and life skills through working with community members to restore the environmental health of local watersheds.

YER was initially funded by Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children, Child Welfare Advisory Committee from July 2004 to March 2007, then directly through Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) YER from April 2007 through to March 2010. The first phase of the program (YERI) has had one hundred and thirty youth participants, many who requested continuing with the program to build on their initial learning experiences. In March 2007, a funding proposal for the second phase (YERII) was sent through the Natural Journeys Society (NJ) to the Vancouver Foundation (VF), Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee. The YERII work commenced in August 2007 and concluded in April 2009.

2. RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

YERII is a specific program and not a non-profit organization, so the original proposal to VF was sent under the auspices of the Natural Journeys Society (NJ). The program meshes well with NJ goals of reconnecting people with nature through experiential learning and mentoring for personal development and environmental education. This section of the report is divided into sections on: YERII participants; YERI interviewees; community partnerships; and program promotion.

YERII Participants

The ten youth who participated in YERII were all graduates from the first phase of the program; three agencies originally referred them to YERI (Table 1a). They were all given numbers to protect their anonymity; the numbers are arranged with YERII first, then YERI in brackets. The YERII participants had been in the first phase of the program from four years to a few weeks before entering the second phase. YERI and YERII dates are included with the youth quotes below.

A YERII contract, questionnaire and consent form were created for YERII participants to sign a work agreement, be interviewed for program feedback, and obtain consent to use the interview content in reports. As YERII progressed the questions were revised for clarity, which improved the ease and ability for youth to respond. Version three of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A. The questions were designed to follow the five main program goals: building healthy community relationships; gaining valued work experience; improving ecological knowledge; increasing personal and social skills; and enhancing communication skills (Table 2).

YERII objectives were for youth to build on the skills and experience they learned in YERI, utilizing the program goals as a guideline. The youth were involved with specific projects to focus on and increase their ecological knowledge about one local watershed and environmental organization. For each project, two youth participants worked with two adult mentors for promotion of teamwork and cooperation values. Three of the adult mentors were paid through YERII and the other two were professionals paid through the five different YERII projects (Table 1b).

Four YERII projects engaged two youth participants and two adult mentors, and Comox Valley Project Watershed Society had one youth in 2007 and another in 2008 (Table 1b). YERII completion required youth to lead a public guided tour of the project site; and tour information is given in Table 1b. Once the tour concluded the youth were awarded with a honourarium, a YERII certificate made from a photo of them as they were involved with their project, a letter of reference, and a hoodie with the YER logo.

The questionnaire (Appendix A) provided feedback from youth about their experiences, which was analyzed to evaluate their learning and presented in Table 2. While statistical information is a standard and useful method of presenting information, it is enhanced by providing examples of the youth's words and listening to their voices. A quote from each of the ten YERII participants is given below:

YERII Participant # 1 (79) (*YERI May 2007; YERII September 2007*)

- “I learned how to meet new people this time and not judge them and how they look. I usually don't like older people, I was kind of forced to be with them, so I kind of got used to them. I just started growing on them and being their friend. I guess I trusted them, not in the beginning, it just happened.”

YERII Participant # 2 (9) (*YERI October 2004; YERII September 2007*)

- “I learned what Garry oak is first of all and Douglas fir trees make shade over them that makes them die because they need lots of light. I learned how to see how old a tree is without cutting it down, check for soil compaction, measure how round a tree is, what herb Robert is. The land used to be called a prairie and all the underbrush was burned to collect acorns easier and maintain the Garry oak.”

YERII Participant # 3 (16) (*YERI March 2005; YERII September 2007*)

- “Translating the information from technical to normal language so people would understand it. Don helped me, he taught me a lot. The knowledge and experience has been useful in my life with more social skills, with leadership experience.”

YERII Participant # 4 (76) (*YERI April 2007; YERII March 2008*)

- “I learned how to communicate more verbally with the public. I learned more about birds and you shouldn't keep them if they are wild. It builds up my confidence to speak up more. Communicating more with the public is building up my confidence to speak with crowds.”

YERII Participant # 5 (65) (*YERI October 2006; YERII March 2008*)

- “Knowing the birds interest, like a foster kid gets put in a foster home temporary care and the social worker needs to know the kids interest and the person who is caring for the bird needs to know what its best interested in.”

YERII Participant # 6-(103) (*YERI April 2008; YERII August 2008*)

- “Working with different people and learning different things about collecting data and different fish and being a leader instead of a follower. Pretty cool having lots of people listen to you and blow them out of the water. Some of those big words I said on the tour, like impressing people and helping people, it helps them learn about the environment. I guess I impressed myself by how I remember all the stuff now; normally it goes in one ear and out the other.”

YERII Participant # 7-(109) (*YERI May 2008; YERII August 2008*)

- “The more that I know, the more knowledgeable I will be when I tell other people. I can tell them more stuff the more I know and learn about. If I tell people who don’t know about things, if I tell a person and they know about it they can tell another person, then more people can know about it in our community, sort of like passing it on.”

YERII Participant # 8 (99) (*YERI February 2008; YERII September 2008*)

- “It helps youth get out in the environment, it helps getting them working with people who are skilled in the environment, it teaches communication, working with different people. It allows you to carry on a discussion with people who work in the environment. It was good for public speaking, good experience all around, getting out there and learning instead of from a textbook.”

YERII Participant # 9 (113) (*YERI September 2008; YERII October 2008*)

- “With Frank and Josh and you we always joked around. We always clowned around, it meant fun. We got along together. Like socializing and a learning way, it helped me to feel better about myself.”

YERII Participant # 10 (114) (*YERI September 2007; YERII October 2008*)

- “Working in YERII basically showed me about the commitment and the concentration in listening that is required for a job. I won’t be not knowing what to do and following orders. It is a step by step process on getting the job done and the key is to stay focused.”

YERI Interviewees

Twelve youth were interviewed for longer-term evaluation of the benefits of YER on their lives. There was one and a half years to four years time difference between their participation in YERI and being interviewed. YERI and interview dates are given with the youth quotes below. The interviews took one to two hours and all of the youth except the first one were paid twenty dollars for their time and the knowledge that they shared. Most of the tours started with a walk in a local nature park with the youth prior to their interview. They gave invaluable feedback for the program and it was essential to have a sense of continuity for the mentoring relationship established in YERI.

The YERI interviewees were originally referred from five different agencies (Table 1a). Their interviews reflected that most of the learning occurred for the program goals of community relationships, ecological knowledge, personal, social and communication skills; and the least learning occurred in gaining valued work experience (Table 2). The youth clearly said that life skills mattered to them more than work experience. In the interests of honouring each of their voices, quotes are given below:

YERI Interviewee # A (46) (*YERI April 2006; Interview July 2008*)

- “It’s taught me to become more independent, to make my own goals and sort of reach out and do things for myself. I’ve gained initiative from the program. I’ve got a job, I’m working with a group of people and sort of using those skills of teamwork and community thinking that have helped me push my comfort zone.”

YERI Interviewee # B (54) (*YERI May 2006; Interview February 2009*)

- “I think its good that people help out for no reason, like doing it on their own free will. I guess it is just something they love to do. We feel better about ourselves. It feels better for me that everyone is doing that for the community. I basically liked helping out the animals. I felt good that I was helping out.”

YERI Interviewee # C (32) (*YERI September 2005; Interview February 2009*)

- “I think it was a really positive experience and we are really fortunate to have it. We’re fortunate to have the knowledge that you provide and the hands on experience and helping the environment and repopulating the streams and stuff.”

YERI Interviewee # D (87) (*YERI October 2007; Interview February 2009*)

- “Before I didn’t care about the environment and I didn’t care about myself and it kind of wakes you up when you see that. Because some people don’t even get to see that. Now I think about it in a good way, all the nature and people getting together and trying to make a difference, people getting together are making a difference.”

YERI Interviewee # E (14) (*YERI November 2004; Interview February 2009*)

- “I think it is an amazing program. It’s great for all the kids. Everyone who I went to school with, we were all talking about it and what we learned and we got out of the classroom and didn’t have to deal with all the stuck-up teachers. You are not a stuck-up teacher, so it was good. You taught by showing and explained while you were doing it. Going out and seeing all the different stuff and learning. Not enough hands on stuff in school. Kids they mind, they do what they see.”

YERI Interviewee # F (63) (*YERI October 2006; Interview February 2009*)

- “It’s changed me in a good way to understand why people like the forest more. A whole lot of stuff, like I met a lot of nice people through it. Kind natured people, like nice as a person, like hello, how are you, more like polite. It was just nice to have more politeness, someone being really nice to me.”

YERI Interviewee # G (22) (*YERI April 2005; Interview February 2009*)

- “It was a really good experience because you’re helping salmon and helping the nature. It’s empowering because you are helping something. Its not like work, you are doing something good. I think it brought the inner me out, the good side of me out when I was doing that stuff.”

YERI Interviewee # H (37) (*YERI October 2005; Interview February 2009*)

- “I felt very proud of myself because I actually accomplished something and I never gave up on myself and you motivated me a lot. You kept saying you can do it, you can do it. There was never a time when you said I couldn’t do it, you lifted my spirits up and you told me that I could do it. If I put my mind to anything I learned that I could do it and that I was capable of it.”

YERI Interviewee # I (20) (*YERI April 2005; Interview February 2009*)

- “It gave me a lot more respect for what’s around me and a lot more knowledge about the wilderness. It has changed my life because before I used to be reckless

and didn't care about my surroundings. Back when I had no respect for anything I didn't care, but now I have respect for things, I have more respect for myself and other people in my life and that's how it's changed me."

YERI Interviewee # J (78) (*YERI May 2007; Interview February 2009*)

- "I think I'm more knowledgeable about what I'm passionate about and it's given me more to bring to the table in lots of aspects, like in job hunting and just conversations with people. With job hunting I'm looking for an outside job and when people understand I know nature, it's something bigger to bring to the table, it's bigger, I understand ecosystems."

YERI Interviewee # K (64) (*YERI October 2006; Interview February 2009*)

- "It was a fun learning experience; it definitely helped me turn around. It gives you something meaningful, it makes you feel good about doing something for your community. I think that if I hadn't completed your program I would be still out there today not caring."

YERI Interviewee # L (40) (*YERI November 2005; Interview March 2009*)

- "You get a lot more recognition in this program. You actually accomplish something. It is good for self confidence. You get there, you meet new people, and people say you are a good kid for doing this."

Community Partnerships

YER has now connected with eighty-one groups in the Comox Valley. The partnerships developed through YER building bridges and working with different community groups. Youth have been referred by six groups, conducted ecological restoration with twenty-eight groups; and given oral presentations about their experience to forty-seven groups. The diversity of groups and individuals facilitates healthy relationships, for both youth and community members. They learned to regard each other from a positive perspective, not separated by age or class, but people working together for a common cause.

Program Promotion

YER has press releases in Comox Valley newspapers several times a year to keep the program in the public eye, as well as to announce tours and the annual YER celebration that honours the youth participants. VF funds were used to update the YER brochure and support the development of the YER website which was released on March 1, 2009 at: www.youthecology.ca

Further promotion of YER occurred through a "Youth and Community Relationships" conference paper which was offered as a power point presentation at the Community-University Partnerships: Connecting for Change conference held at University of Victoria from May 4-7, 2008. The conference was the largest Canadian gathering of community-based researchers to create collaborative partnerships between academics and community members. Conference goals include mobilizing people fully and equally, and combining knowledge with action to meet community needs and create positive social change. The YER paper is published in the conference proceedings on the internet through the following link: www.cuexpo08.ca/program/abstracts/youthcommunityrelationships.pdf

3. OBSERVATIONS, LEARNING AND INSIGHTS

The original timeline for YERII was for one year, which was extended for an additional eight months. The most significant observation was the growth of the youth's personal, life, social and communication skills as they took risks and realized more confidence in themselves as young people in our community. This is true for both YERII participants and for YERI interviewees. Equally important for the youth was the mentoring.

The first YERII project in August 2007 (Table 1) was in the experimental stage, so the interview questions were not well established and the ecological information did not go past the data collection stage. These early lessons led to revision of the questionnaire and interview methodology, and assurance that the environmental work would be useful.

YERII tours brought out the youth's ability to communicate the knowledge they learned. They excelled when they realized they were educating people who were eager and appreciative to be learning from them. Some tours that were co-facilitated with adults from the environmental organizations did not work as well. With future YERII projects more effort needs to be taken for youth to lead the tours to their best potential.

As YERI interviewees reflected on what they learned from the program, they revealed that mentoring was the prominent value that helped them gain self confidence and worth. That was coupled with the work of being out in the healing powers of nature and helping to restore the natural world. Being of service to nature, guided by community members helped them to feel better about themselves.

4. BUDGET

VF granted \$20,000.00 to develop the YERII pilot project as an extension of learning opportunities for YERI youth graduates. Ten youth completed YERII, and an additional twelve youth were interviewed to assess the longer-term affects of YER on their lives. YER information was distributed through a conference presentation and creation of a website. The budget items, description, cost and in kind contributions are presented in Table 3, and are consistent with the grant application submitted to and accepted by VF.

5. FUTURE OPTIONS

YERII is the second phase of the original program and according to the ten youth that completed YERI and YERII it has proven to be an excellent addition. Funds for YERI have been secured from MCFD for April 2009 to March 2010, but no funds are currently in place for YERII. There will always be youth who, after completing YERI, aspire to continue with the learning that the program provides and annual funding needs to be available to provide this opportunity for them. MCFD has expressed some interest in supporting YERII.

Some YERII graduates are requesting a third phase of the program, which would have them learning to mentor youth participants involved in the first phase. Initial funding will be sought to pursue YERII as a pilot project sometime in the next couple of years.

YER has proven to be a viable and cost effective program that delivers consistent and dependable results. Over its five year history, YER has advanced with slow, deliberate and confidence steps. Options for YER future development include the following:

- Continue concurrent operation of YER Phase I and II.
- Develop a YER Phase III for graduates to help mentor youth entering the program.
- Compile a YER display for promotion at conferences and community events.
- Promote YER in other parts of BC through presentations at conferences and forums.
- Make a DVD of participants conducting YER work for program promotion.
- Replicate the YER program in other communities.

6. SUMMARY

YERII accomplishments through VF funds include: ten youth completed YERII; twelve youth interviewed for longer-term evaluation of YER on their lives; presentation of a YER paper at the Community-University Partnerships conference; and creation of the YER website. YERII youth participants advanced their communication, cooperation and personal confidence skills, even surprising themselves sometimes as they strived to reach the goals before them. YERI interviewees stated that involvement in the program helped them to feel better about themselves and the life skills they gained trumped the actual work experience. Dissemination of YER information was achieved through presentation and publication of the “Youth and Community Relationships” paper at the community-based research conference, and especially by the launch of the website.

YERII has been beneficial for the youth as a follow up to the mentoring and caring that they experienced in YERI. This is true for both the YERII participants and the YERI interviewees. Longitudinal monitoring of social programs is rarely done, but the outcome of this evaluation is critical for understanding changes that occur and how effective our efforts are for the youth that we serve. Continuance of YERII is uncertain at this time, but MCFD has expressed interest in funding a limited number of youth through YERII. Future ideas for expansion include creating a third phase of the YER program for YERII graduates to assist mentoring youth entering the program for the first time. VF funds that provided an opportunity to create YERII are gratefully appreciated, and as a pilot project it has clearly demonstrated its significance for the vulnerable youth in our community.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

YER has been an amazing journey of discovery and learning. All of the youth that have been in the program are special gifts, and I am grateful for the knowledge and wisdom that they have shared. Wes Gietz, president of Natural Journeys Society, offered support and helpful comments for this report.

TABLE 1:**YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM, PHASE TWO (YERII)
YOUTH PARTICIPANT SUMMARY TABLE FOR AUGUST 1, 2007 TO MARCH 31, 2009.**

YERII is a work experience and training program for vulnerable youth in the Comox Valley funded by the Vancouver Foundation (VF). All youth participants were graduates of the first phase of the program (YERI). Ten youth completed YERII; twelve youth were interviewed for long-term evaluation of YERI effectiveness. YERII youth numbers are listed first with their original YERI numbers second; the interviewees were issued letters, followed by their original YERI number.

a. YOUTH REFERRAL AGENCIES Youth were originally referred by five agencies in the Comox Valley.	YOUTH TOTALS
Ministry of Children and Family Development: YERII Participants: # 1 (79), 6 (103), 7 (109) YERI Interviewees: # A (46), G (22), K (64)	3 3
Comox Valley Alternate Schools: YERII Participants: # 2 (9), 4 (76), 5 (65), 8 (99), 9 (113), 10 (114) YERI Interviewees: # B (54), C (32), E (14), F (63), H (37), I (20)	6 6
Comox Valley Community Justice Centre: YERII Participants: # 3 (16) YERI Interviewees: # D (87)	1 1
Comox Valley Youth Resource Society: YERI Interviewees: # L (40)	1
George P Vanier Secondary School: YERI Interviewees: # J (78)	1
TOTAL YOUTH REFERRALS	22

b. ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION WORK (YERII Participants only) Two youth worked together on each YERII project with two exceptions.	YOUTH TOTALS
August 2007: Tsolum River Restoration Society: YERII Participants # 1 (79), 2 (9) September 30th Tour for BC Rivers Day; attended by 15 people	2
September 2007: Comox Valley Project Watershed Society: YERII Participant # 3 (16) September 30th Tour for BC Rivers Day; attended by 6 people	1
April 2008: Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society: YERII Participants # 4 (76), 5 (65) April 13th National Wildlife Week Open House; attended by 250 people	2
August 2008: Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards: YERII Participants # 6 (103), 7 (109) September 7th Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards Tour; attended by 16 people	2
September 2008: Comox Valley Project Watershed Society: YERII Participant # 8 (99) September 19th Tour for BC Rivers Day; attended by 19 people	1
November 2008: Oyster River Enhancement Society: YERII Participants # 9 (113), 10 (114) November 17th Tour for Sandwich Alternate School; attended by 5 people	2
TOTAL 5 ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS	10

TABLE 2:**YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM, PHASE TWO (YERII)
PROGRAM GOAL SUMMARY TABLE FOR YERII FROM AUGUST 2007 TO MARCH 2009.**

Funded by the Vancouver Foundation, ten vulnerable youth from the Comox Valley participated in YERII, after graduating from the first phase of the program (YERI). Twelve additional YERI graduates were interviewed to determine long-term benefits of YERI on their lives. All participants were given a number to protect their anonymity. YERII participant numbers are first YERII, and second their YERI number; YERI interviewee numbers are first a capitalized letter, then their original YERI number.

GOAL #1: BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Cooperation, Support and Compassion; Positive Role Models and Mentoring; Increased Community Capacity and Caring.	
YERII Participants: # 1 (79), 2 (9), 3 (16), 4 (76), 5 (65), 6 (103), 7 (109), 8 (99), 9 (113), 10 (114)	10
YERI Interviewees: # A (46), B (54), C (32), D (87), E (14), F (63), G (22), H (37), I (20), J (78), K (64), L (40)	12

GOAL #2: GAINING VALUED WORK EXPERIENCE

Data Collection Methods; Working with Tools; and Teamwork.	
YERII Participants: # 1 (79), 2 (9), 3 (16), 4 (76), 5 (65), 6 (103), 7 (109), 8 (99), 9 (113), 10 (114)	10
YERI Interviewees: # A (46), D (87), E (14), G (22), J (78), K (64)	6

GOAL # 3: IMPROVING ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Ecosystem Cycles and Interconnections; Identification Techniques for Plants, Animals and Fish; Understanding Environmental Impacts.	
YERII Participants: # 1 (79), 2 (9), 3 (16), 4 (76), 5 (65), 6 (103), 7 (109), 8 (99), 9 (113), 10 (114)	10
YERI Interviewees: # A (46), B (54), C (32), D (87), E (14), F (63), G (22), H (37), I (20), J (78), K (64), L (40)	12

GOAL #4: INCREASING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Commitment, Respect and Responsibility; Patience, Endurance and Confidence; Accomplishment, Success and Empowerment.	
YERII Participants: # 1 (79), 2 (9), 3 (16), 4 (76), 5 (65), 6 (103), 7 (109), 8 (99), 9 (113), 10 (114)	10
YERI Interviewees: # A (46), B (54), C (32), D (87), E (14), G (22), H (37), I (20), J (78), K (64), L (40)	11

GOAL #5: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Public Speaking and Education; Active Listening and Engagement; Interpersonal Relationships.	
YERII Participants: # 1 (79), 2 (9), 3 (16), 4 (76), 5 (65), 6 (103), 7 (109), 8 (99), 9 (113), 10 (114)	10
YERI Interviewees: # A (46), B (54), D (87), E (14), F (63), G (22), H (37), I (20), J (78), K (64), L (40)	11

TABLE 3: YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM, PHASE TWO (YERII), BUDGET TABLE FOR AUGUST 2007 TO APRIL 2009.

Expenses and in kind contributions required to conduct YERII work experience and training program for Comox Valley vulnerable youth. YERII 2007/2009 funding was provided by Vancouver Foundation, Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee.

Items	Description	Cost	In Kind Contributions
Professional Fees	YERII Coordination	\$11,200.00	Training \$2,000.00
Subcontractors	YERII Assistance	\$1,500.00	
Honourarium	Youth Honourariums	\$870.00	
Equipment/Supplies/Office	Tools/Equipment/Office	\$676.39	
Travel/Mileage	Work Site Transportation, Conference Travel	\$1,180.53	
Publicity/Promotion	YER Crests, Brochures, Hoodies, Community Celebration Room Rental	\$725.91	
Evaluation	Maintain YER Youth Files	\$2,000.00	
Dissemination	Website Creation, YER Presentation at Conference	\$625.04	
Other (specify)	Report Writing	\$222.13	\$827.87
Administration	Natural Journeys Society Administration	\$1,000.00	
TOTALS		\$20,000.00	\$2,827.87

**APPENDIX A: YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM
PHASE II – YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE # 3 – OCTOBER 14, 2007**

YER PHASE I FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are your memories of participating in YER?
- 2) What was the most important thing you learned?
- 3) Has involvement in YER changed how you view our community? Socially? (Goal 1) Ecologically? (Goal 3)
- 4) Did you find the skills and experiences have been useful in your life? In what way? (Goal 2)
- 5) Has this changed how you think about yourself? How? (Goal 4)
- 6) Have you been able to use the communication skills? How? (Goal 5)
- 7) Would you be interested in participating in YER Phase II?
- 8) Do you have any other comments about your YERI experiences?

YER PHASE II PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did you want to participate in YER Phase II?
- 2) What do you hope to learn?
- 3) The purpose of YER Phase II is to build on the ecological information, research techniques and communication skills learned in Phase I. How do you think that purpose will benefit you?
- 4) Do you have any ideas about how your participation will benefit our community?
- 5) What connections do you have with Comox Valley community organizations? (environmental or social)? Any of the following: The Linc; Boys and Girls Club; Ministry of Children and Family Development; John Howard Society; Community Justice Centre?

PHASE II POST-WORK QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was most important thing you learned?
- 2) Are there specific personal or social skills that you learned? (Goal 4) Communication? (Goal 5)
- 3) Were there ways that your participation helped our community? Did community members help you? (Goal 1)
- 4) Will the YERII experience help you with employment opportunities? How? (Goal 2)
- 5) Did you learn more ecological information about the Comox Valley? What? (Goal 3)
- 6) How might you use the YERII experience in your life?
- 7) Do you have any further comments about your involvement with YERII?