

YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT

For the Period of April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007

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PROJECT FUNDED BY:

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Youth and Ecological Restoration Project (YER) was designed to provide vulnerable youth with ecological restoration work experience and training opportunities, while improving their sense of belonging within our community. Located in the Comox Valley, YER has been funded by Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children, and British Columbia, Ministry of Children and Family Development. This report evaluates YER progress from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

YER engages youth with community members to restore the environmental health of local watersheds. Program completion requires each youth to speak to a community group about their experience. On finishing the speech their YER accomplishments are honoured with a certificate, crest, letter of reference, and a fifty dollar payment or fulfillment of community service hours. Achievements also include school work experience credits, employment experience, personal confidence, communication and life skills, and learning about local watersheds and ecosystems.

Since its inception in July 2004, seventy-two youth have been involved with YER, and sixty-eight finished. From April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007 twenty-eight youth have completed the program. Community partnerships are instrumental to YER success, and between youth referral agencies, environmental organizations and community presentations fifty-nine Comox Valley groups have participated in the program. Over the past year, YER promotion was achieved by developing a brochure, being interviewed on CBC radio and publishing articles in newspapers and magazines.

YER formed part of the research for a University of Victoria student's, Master's thesis in Dispute Resolution, "Supporting the Transformation of Vulnerable Youth". The thesis noted that YER's unique process is an excellent example for supporting youth to make positive changes in their lives. Developing a subsequent program to facilitate maintenance of those changes for youth was a thesis recommendation. To mark the end of another successful year a YER celebration was held to honour its graduates, which was attended by parents, youth workers, environmental organizations and other supporters.

2. INTRODUCTION

In July 2004, Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children, Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC) approved one time only funding to the Youth and Ecological Restoration Project (YER). This funding was made available through the Vancouver Island Strategic Investment Initiatives Fund and was granted to selected programs for the delivery of innovative approaches to address prevention and early intervention for youth at risk.

YER emphasizes one-on-one work experience, training and support for youth under nineteen who are experiencing challenges connecting to school, community and employment. Established in the Comox Valley, the twenty-hour program provides youth at risk with opportunities to broaden their understanding of the social and ecological aspects of their community. For both youth and community members, YER assists with expanding their circle of community to include people they don't normally associate with.

As a result of its success in the initial year of operation, CWAC subsequently granted YER with funding to continue through to March 31, 2006. Ministry of Children and Family Development

(MCFD) then provided the program with financial support from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007. MCFD has approved funding for YER to operate until March 31, 2008. This report documents the first year of MCFD funding for YER.

3. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

YER has a vested interest in maintaining healthy relationships with both the youth and the community. By developing strong community partnerships at the beginning, YER continues to learn and grow from the established communication links. These partnerships are a foundation for YER and its ability to provide a valuable community service.

From July 2004 to July 2005, five youth and four environmental organizations partnered with the program. From April 2006 to March 2007, two youth organizations referred youth to YER, and youth participants worked with ten environmental organizations and completed speeches for nineteen community groups. Since YER began, youth participants have worked with twenty-one environmental groups and made speeches to thirty-three community groups.

Youth Organization Partnerships

From April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007, YER had twenty-eight youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen; eight were girls and twenty were boys. The youth were referred from the following youth organizations (Table 1):

- Ministry of Children and Family Development
Parent Teen Mediation; Probation Officers; Mental Health
- School District #71 Alternate Programs:
Sandwick Alternate School; Independent Learning Program;
Nala'atsi Program; Contract Tutoring Program

Ten youth were referred by MCFD over the past year (Table 1). These youth came from the following: five from Youth Services, Probation Officers were court ordered to do community service hours; four were from the Parent Teen Mediation Program; and one from a Mental Health Therapist with the Mental Health Team.

Eighteen out of the twenty-eight youth were referred from the Comox Valley SD #71, Alternate School Programs (Table 1). Within the Alternate School Program the youth were referred from these specific programs: eight from Sandwick Alternate School; five from Nala'atsi Program; four from Independent Learning Program; and one from the Contract Tutoring Program.

Prior to the past year, there were three other youth organizations that referred youth. Comox Valley Youth Resource Society is no longer operating; Comox Valley Community Justice Centre has had some policy changes that restrict referrals; and John Howard Society is not currently involved with community service hour referrals, these youth now come directly through MCFD.

Each of the youth participant's connections with other youth services in the Comox Valley was explored to determine their involvement with other organizations. The twenty-eight youth had connections with the following youth services: nineteen had prior and/or current connections with MCFD; six had involvement with John Howard Society; five with Comox Valley Boys and Girls Club; two with Comox Valley Community Justice Centre; and eight with Comox Valley Youth Resource Society (Table 1).

Environmental Organization Partnerships

Originally four environmental organizations partnered with YER, and this number has increased to twenty-one. From April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007, the youth worked with ten environmental organizations (Table 1). These environmental organizations are:

April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007 – 10 Environmental Organizations

- Oyster River Enhancement Society
- Tsolum River Restoration Society
- Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards
- Morrison Creek Streamkeepers
- Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society
- Fanny Bay Enhancement Society
- Comox Valley Land Trust
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans
- Comox Valley Project Watershed Society
- Georgia Strait Alliance

The twenty-eight youth participants each worked with an average of four environmental organizations and forty-seven community members (Table 1). A majority of the youth worked with the following three organizations: twenty-five with Oyster River Enhancement Society, twenty-four with Tsolum River Restoration Society, and twenty-one with Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards (Table 1). Fourteen youth participants worked with both Morrison Creek Streamkeepers and Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society (Table 1). Sixteen youth also worked with the remaining five organizations (Table 1).

Community Presentations

As part of the program, the youth participants give speeches on what they have learned through their involvement with YER. They tell their audiences about local watersheds and ecosystems, about some of the people that they met, about how the environment is impacted by humans, and about some of the ways we can take better care of the Earth. The youth usually begin their presentations by being very nervous, and end feeling extremely proud of themselves and their accomplishments.

Since July 2004 youth participants have given speeches in a total of thirty-three different locations, and nineteen were in the past year (Table 1). The broad diversity of community groups that youth made presentations to include: senior citizens; pre-schools; kindergarten, elementary, and middle schools; alternate schools; environmental organizations; first nations groups; and youth service groups and agencies. The nineteen groups from the past year are listed below:

April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007 – 19 Community Presentation Locations

- Sandwick Alternate School
- Glacier View Lodge Society
- Independent Learning Program
- Wachiay Friendship Centre, Raven Back Youth Group
- Youth and Ecological Restoration Celebration
- Ministry of Children and Family Development, Mental Health Team
- Ministry of Children and Family Development, Over Twelve Team
- John Howard Society, Staff Meeting
- Oyster River Enhancement Society, Monthly Meeting

- Tsolum River Restoration Society, Directors Meeting
- Courtenay and District Fish and Game Protective Association, Monthly Meeting
- Courtenay Middle School, Grade 8
- Lake Trail Middle School, Grade 9
- Arden Elementary School, Grade 4
- Puntledge Park Elementary School, Grade 4
- Contract Tutoring Program
- Nala'atsi Program
- Comox Valley Boys and Girls Club, Voices Choices Group
- Comox Valley Aboriginal Head Start Program

Twenty-eight youth gave presentations at nineteen locations, and the average audience number per youth was fifteen (Table 1). Five of the youth gave their presentations at Sandwick Alternate School; three at Glacier View Lodge Society; and two each at the Independent Learning Program, Raven Back Youth Centre, and the YER Celebration. The youth presentation at Courtenay and District Fish and Game Protective Association was attended by seventy-three people, and two youth each presented to an audience of sixty at the YER Celebration.

4. PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

When the original YER proposal was being developed, individuals and groups in the Comox Valley community were consulted to obtain advice on what would work best for youth at risk. Many of these people and organizations are still involved, and communications remain open so that the program can adapt and make any changes required to provide the best service possible. In order to provide documentation of YER effectiveness, youth are interviewed to provide an account of their experience in the program.

Feedback received from youth participants, youth workers, environmental organizations and community members is crucial for YER success. After three years of operation and seventy-two youth participants, YER has evolved from being a short-term project to a permanent fixture in the community. It is now regarded as a valuable program, a proven commodity that obtains positive results and maintains a high level of completion by the youth participants. In December 2006 and January 2007, twenty-one letters of support were received from members of the Comox Valley community that testified to the success and value of YER.

Work Experience and Training Activities

Ecological Restoration is a recognized professional field, internationally as Society for Ecological Restoration (www.ser.org), which has a British Columbia Chapter, and University of Victoria has a Restoration of Natural Systems Program (<http://www.uvcs.ca/restore/>). In the Comox Valley, many environmental organizations are involved with conducting ecological restoration activities in our watersheds and ecosystems. YER enables youth to be involved in practical work that is being done by members of those organizations. Over the past year, youth working with ten local environmental organizations have done the following:

- Monitor downstream juvenile salmon migration.
- Clear upsteam migration access for adult salmon and count spawning salmon.
- Involvement in capturing adult salmon for taking eggs and maintaining hatchery operations.
- Conduct aquatic insect and juvenile salmonid population estimates.

- Remove non-native plant species and plant native plants.
- Take water quality measurements to monitor potential source pollutants.
- Assist with identification, analysis and care of sick and injured birds.
- Participate in fundraising, education and information activities.
- Contribute to environmental awareness and education in our community.
- Clean up local beaches, streams and forests.

YER Data Collection and Goals

The information for monitoring YER progress and outcomes is obtained by interviewing the youth participants. All of the youth and their parents or guardians are required to sign informed consent forms so the interview material can be used in publications and presentations. Individual files are created and maintained, and each youth is given a number to protect their anonymity. The data from the files is compiled, analyzed and summarized to develop tables and lists for report writing and presenting YER details to youth service and community groups.

YER is designed so that youth succeed, and the program helps them to make a positive contribution to and experience a sense of belonging in our community. To assist them in making a commitment to complete the twenty hour program, they are required to sign a work agreement on their first day. Return transportation from their homes to the job site and lunch are provided, further facilitating the youth to meet their obligation to do the environmental work.

Through the work experience and training activities, the youth participants learn much more than the actual task at hand. The learning goes beyond the practical work and is best summarized by the YER five main goals (Table 2). They are: building healthy community relationships, gaining valuable work experience, improving ecological knowledge, increasing personal and social skills, and enhancing communication skills. The five goals are divided into three more categories and in the following sections youth quotes are given to demonstrate and clarify each of their meanings.

GOAL # 1: BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Cooperation, Support and Compassion – 100% of Youth Participants

- “I learned that there is no age limit. I learned when we all work together we get things done faster, even if we don’t know who the other person is. It was great because most people didn’t even know me and they were so nice and they helped me get things done even if they don’t know who I am.” (Participant # 67)
- “You have to stick together because if one person falls in the other person can help. You have to work together, it is really important. I went to go and play and if you fell in, I would have been gone. Be careful, we got to work together, it makes things go faster.” (Participant # 68)

Positive Role Models and Mentoring – 100% of Youth Participants

- “They are doing volunteer work because they like fish. It’s kind of cool how they all get together in groups and talk at the same time as they work. They work good together, they get it all done and they do it proper.” (Participant # 53)
- “It was interesting to see people that dedicated. I don’t see it very often. I don’t see people that are that selfless. It is good to see people who are satisfied by their work.” (Participant # 70)

Increased Community Capacity and Caring – 100% of Youth Participants

- “Everything is connected, everything I’ve learned in this program has taught me that we are

all connected and every choice we make impacts everyone and everything around us.”
(Participant # 46)

- “Both organizations I worked with showed interest in trying to make me feel comfortable and welcome, which turned me to the realization that these organizations are more a group of friends with a common interest, who are trying to make a positive difference not just a group of people picking garbage like I originally thought.” (Participant # 56)

GOAL # 2: GAINING VALUED WORK EXPERIENCE

Data Collection Methods – 93% of Youth Participants

- “After we caught the fish we measured them by length and weight. Also to identify the species we caught cutthroat, coho salmon, sculpin, stickleback. We measured lengths and the widths and the depths, why we do that is to see how much water we have in the creek. It’s not just in the creek; it’s also outside the creek. We used a current meter to measure the water.” (Participant # 63)
- “The water sample was to see if the dump water was going into Morrison creek. If the dump water was the fish could die from pollution.” (Participant # 66)

Working With Tools – 100% of Youth Participants

- “We helped the Comox Valley Land Trust with invasive plant species, taking out broom which is a shrub with yellow flowers. We used a tool just for pulling broom that was invented in Duncan.” (Participant # 47)
- “I learned how to drive a bobcat, which is amazing because I didn’t think they would trust me to drive it but they did, and I spent six hours moving a monstrous pile of gravel into the stream.” (Participant # 57)

Job Variety – 89% of Youth Participants

- “I got to work in a variety of different areas with different organizations. It was a lot better than just picking one to do.” (Participant # 55)
- “The variety of jobs were pretty good, they helped me learn separate things instead of just sticking to one thing.” (Participant # 60)

GOAL # 3: IMPROVING ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Ecosystem Cycles and Interconnections – 96% of Youth Participants

- “Trees depend on the fish and the fish depend on the trees. It’s all a circle, an ecosystem. Fish help the trees with nutrients, the trees grow big and it helps the fish because they give them shade and it keeps the water from heating up.” (Participant # 59)
- “It was the first time I ever heard that things are like a circle. About how everything is connected and it makes a huge gigantic circle and how if one part is taken out it wouldn’t be a circle anymore.” (Participant # 61)

Identification Techniques for Plants, Animals and Fish – 96% of Youth Participants

- “About the trees you can tell them by their bark or leaves. Some of them have scaly, rough or stripped bark. And their leaves are different; some are pointed, prickly and flat.” (Participant # 51)
- “To identify birds you got to double check by looking it up in a book because there are different ways of identifying different species, some birds have longer legs than others, different colours, feathers look different, and eyes have different colours.” (Participant # 54)

Understanding Environmental Impacts – 96% of Youth Participants

- “Sustainability – to keep something the same without being harmful. Like say I had a plant, you would have to sustain it as in keep it healthy and make sure it grows and make sure no one harms it.” (Participant # 45)
- “The dump can be bad for the environment because it has different chemicals that can be dangerous for the environment and it can affect us because some small town’s water supply comes right from the creek!” (Participant # 62)

GOAL # 4: INCREASING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Meaningful Participation and Empowerment – 100% of Youth Participants

- “I liked the best the shoreline cleanup because we were walking and talking and it was just us four girls, which was a blast. We cleaned up the shoreline for tourists, for ourselves, for the environment and for the animals. It is for making the world a better place, I like making the world a better place.” (Participant # 58)
- “It was a totally different experience from anything I have ever done before. The feeling was glorious and triumphant. Every time I caught a fish I had to bring it over to an experienced person who would call the name of it to the person taking a record of the fish. There were people everywhere, carrying buckets with fish in them, and there were people holding the nets. It was very busy. There were about 30 people in total.” (Participant # 64)

Commitment, Respect and Responsibility – 100% of Youth Participants

- “Skills and experience I gained that I can add to my job resume are: teamwork, communication skills, being able to show up to work even if I am in a bad condition, knowing that I will do the best I can no matter how hard it is going to be and not giving up.” (Participant # 48)
- “That you shouldn’t just quit and keep on trying and then it will always work out for you if you keep your head up. I thought you were going to get mad at me when you came. You just looked out for me and knew I could do it and I did.” (Participant # 72)

Accomplishment, Self-esteem and Success – 100% of Youth Participants

- “It felt pretty good to be congratulated, like more confidence. It also helped me to think I might go back there again in the future. It seemed like I could help out some, like for finding a job.” (Participant # 60)
- “Later on that day we went to Millard Park to plant the rest of the trees that were left from day one. It was pretty fulfilling when people passing on the trail would tell us how great it is to see some one taking care of the earth and trying to make this place look a little better.” (Participant # 71)

GOAL # 5: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Public Speaking and Education – 100% of Youth Participants

- “It felt good telling the younger kids about some of the things we did and some of the things we did for the environment.” (Participant # 62)
- “It was pretty interesting. It took a lot of courage to get up there and talk in front of everyone. I felt different, like I was being looked up to and everyone was looking at me.” (Participant # 65)

Active Listening and Engagement – 100% of Youth Participants

- “During this examination I learned how to handle an injured bird without the bird being injured further. With the red tailed hawk it was important not to move too quickly around him. They told me not to look into his eyes because the bird takes it as challenge and not to do it just out of respect for the bird.” (Participant # 50)
- “Everything has a purpose in life. I was just thinking when I was sitting down when we were talking about choices and stuff I thought that everything has a purpose.” (Participant # 51)

Interpersonal Relationships – 100% of Youth Participants

- “It’s kind of interesting how people can have different points of view, but they are both technically right.” (Participant # 49)
- “Socially, just getting to know people. I think it can be awkward, usually you can find a common ground to talk about something. It was a good feeling because it relaxes you and you are like, oh yeah!” (Participant # 56)

Additional Youth Quotes

Through the interview process, youth participants expressed significant learning from and appreciation for the YER program. The following quotes further demonstrate the value of YER to provide potentially life changing experiences for youth who choose to be involved and open to embracing new knowledge and life lessons.

- “Not only was the program an excellent learning experience it was also therapeutic, and provided me with a means for social interaction and exploration with other people. I currently attend school at the North Island College pursuing a degree in the sciences. While I might have learned many things and seen wondrous forces at work, I will never forget Wendy and the gift she has given me. The chance to see into a world, albeit invisible to many, a glimpse into a world that has altered my point of view and given me the chance to pursue a vision. I have set myself some goals for the distant future, something I believed to be impossible for me not long ago. And now that I have been given the chance, I will try my hardest to make a difference in our world.” (Participant # 46)
- “All in all I have spent my time doing worthwhile jobs and they were for sure a good and new experience. I was not expecting to learn this information about the ecosystem. It was a real movement in my life to learn how different it was from my perspective and from how it really was. All I thought was that fish swim and trees grow and I would probably thought that for another 20 years and now I know how important the forest is to the river and how important the river is to the forest. All the jobs we did were connected one way or another and it’s not like one random job and then another. Everything we did was for a special purpose.” (Participant # 64)
- “I thought it was pretty interesting because I never get much time walking a creek like that. You hear nature sounds like the trees going with the wind and the water moving at its own pace. From my experience of doing that, I felt relaxed, walking in nature for a decent time hearing all the various nature sounds can release depression, anger or frustration, and makes you relaxed.” (Participant # 65)
- “I thought this job was going to be boring and very uneventful, but I sure was wrong. I am so glad that I had the opportunity to do it. One day I called Wendy up and told her I didn’t feel like going to work but she didn’t give up on me. She came to my house and got me anyway. I am so happy that she ended up coming. Wendy is a really great individual and a great person to work with because she listens and understands all the youth she works with and has a special connection with each and every one of them. Even though it sucks that I don’t get

to work with her anymore I am glad that she taught me what she did. I just want to say thank-you to Wendy Kotilla for helping me through all of this.” (Participant # 72)

YER Promotion

One of the objectives for the past year was to further promote YER, which was accomplished in a variety of ways. They are: a magazine article, a radio interview, a YER brochure, and newspaper articles. Opportunities to advertise and promote YER through the different available mediums benefit the program in becoming more widely known on a local, provincial and national scale.

The Watershed Sentinel magazine published an article about YER in the May/June 2006 issue (<http://www.watershedsentinel.ca/library.htm>) called “Youth Restoring Relationships”, written by Wendy Kotilla (YER Coordinator). CBC Radio British Columbia, All Points West host, Scott Walker, interviewed the YER Coordinator, which was broadcast on June 2, 2006.

The development of a YER brochure has been in the plans for the past year, and in January 2007 the idea became a reality. The brochure describes the twenty-hour program, giving details about what the youth have done, what the youth say, what supporters say about YER and includes ten pictures of youth working with community members. Five hundred copies of the brochure were printed and most of those have been distributed throughout the Comox Valley and beyond.

Three Comox Valley newspapers had articles about YER in February and March 2007. The Comox Valley Echo had a full page article with pictures written by a staff reporter. The Comox Valley Record and Comox Valley Echo both published an article that invited people to attend the February 28th YER Celebration. The Comox Valley Echo and Comox Valley Record printed a follow-up article and photo about the YER Celebration, and the Island Word printed the photo.

YER Celebration

The Youth and Ecological Restoration Program (YER) held a celebration on February 28th, 2007 at the Courtenay, Florence Filberg Centre, Evergreen Seniors Lounge. Since YER began in July 2004, this is the third community celebration, and the most well attended. The first celebration in September 2004 had about twelve people; at the second one in July 2005 the turnout was about thirty people, and at the most recent YER celebration sixty people were present.

The evening started with everyone sitting in a circle and sharing their favourite place in nature. The full range of natural spaces was shared – from peoples’ own back yards, to Seal Bay Park, to Paradise Meadows. Two youth gave presentations about what they learned through YER, and both were awarded with a YER certificate and crest, a letter of reference, and fifty dollars. The other twelve program graduates in attendance also shared some memorable YER experiences.

Several representatives from local environmental organizations and youth referral agencies in attendance were asked to comment on YER, and all gave supportive feedback. The celebration also had community support through the following contributions: Thrifty Foods gave \$100.00 for snacks; Wachiay Friendship Centre, Raven Back Youth Centre donated Panago Pizza coupons; and Shea Kotilla made the celebration cake. The celebration wrapped up with a song, and then everyone had pizza and cake, and spent time socializing.

About two weeks after the YER celebration the following anonymous letter appeared in the Comox Valley Echo, Beefs and Bouquets section:

“CLEAN RIVERS AND STREAMS to Wendy Kotilla and her Ecological restoration Project. Wendy is a wonderful lady who not only helps the environment, but she does it with so many youth of our community. She gives the youth hope and a sense of self-worth while teaching them about the environment and themselves. Recently she held a get-together at the Florence Filberg Centre for the graduates of her project and as a mother of one of Wendy’s graduates I wanted to say thanks for the circle, the song, and the muchly anticipated pizza. Thank you for taking the time to help our kids, who sometimes get off track, thank you for giving them a chance to experience something that they would not normally get to experience and thank you for showing the kids that there are people out there who do care and who do want them to succeed. May your project get all the funding it needs and may everything you do be as warm as you are. Thank you Wendy for everything.” (Author Unknown)

5. UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

YER was chosen as one of two projects that formed the basis for a Master’s thesis in Dispute Resolution by Carol Sparks at University of Victoria (UVic), which was called “Supporting the Transformation of Vulnerable Youth”. This involvement benefited YER by providing a closer evaluation of the program. The following section was written by Carol Sparks from UVic, who can be contacted at sparksc@uvic.ca or 250 686 5547 for further information on this research.

For the past two years, Carol Sparks from UVic has used the YER project as a topic of research for her Master’s thesis. The research examined how community action projects support youth to make and maintain positive changes in their lives. Several interviews were conducted with adults participating in the YER project. From these interviews it became apparent that adults involved in the YER project have an implicit but previously undocumented process that supports youth.

An extensive literature review was conducted that examined the various approaches and theoretical perspective on how to create positive change in youth. The information gathered was compared with the process described by adults involved in the interviews. The YER project emerged as an excellent example of what should be done to support youth. The personality of the project coordinator, the presence of caring community people and organizations, and the provision of a flexible environment were highlighted as factors that contribute to adults successfully supporting youth. The process described by adults involved in the YER project could provide valuable knowledge and direction to other community action projects attempting to support youth to make positive changes in their lives.

It is important to note that the unique process used by YER to support youth has the potential to assist and motivate youth to make positive changes in their lives. Participating in the project provides youth with the knowledge, skills and support to overcome challenges in their environment. Supporting youth to maintain the positive changes, however, is dependent on finding ways to continue to assist youth once their participation in the project is complete. Possible solutions include: developing subsequent projects that build on the positive changes that have resulted from a young person’s participation in the YER project or, providing ongoing support to people and organizations in the community to ensure the continued presence of caring adults in their lives.

6. KEY LESSONS AND LEARNING

YER continues to be successful for building relationships between youth and the community, and the proposal developed three years ago is the model that continues to be effective. That model is based on respect for everyone involved which includes: the youth, the community members, the youth referral agencies and the environmental organizations. However, there are always issues that come up that need to be dealt with, and sometimes the same ones come up again and again. My passion and commitment to YER and the youth at risk in our community remains strong, and the community collaboration and support helps me through the difficult times.

Modifying and adapting the program to work for each of the youth is ongoing. It takes careful observations and watching for subtle clues from the individuals to learn how to best provide a positive learning experience. After working with seventy-two youth at risk, I continue to be both teacher and student. Being open to change is fundamental for the program success, as is spending time and building trust with the youth. Usually it takes about ten out of the twenty hours before a trusting personal relationship with them begins to be evident.

Requiring the youth to sign the work agreement helps them to realize that making a mutual commitment is needed for employment situations. The consent form signed by the youth and their parents or guardians gives permission for YER information to be used for presentations and publications. Some of the youth interview content and pictures were used to develop the YER brochure, and to prepare the press releases for the YER celebration. The celebration was an excellent way for completing the first year of MCFD funding, and the large turnout at this event attested to the significant value of and appreciation for YER in the Comox Valley community.

Encouraging youth to participate, taking them out of their familiar surroundings and stretching them beyond their comfort zone helps to create willingness for them to change. To support youth making positive changes in their lives, they need to know that caring adults are available to assist them with that transformation. To continue to support youth to maintain positive changes will require ensuring that the human relationships continue beyond the initial program. Developing a subsequent program would facilitate the maintenance of these changes, and many YER graduates have requested such a program. Through a YER Phase II, the youth could build on the skills, knowledge and experience gained in the original program.

7. BUDGET UPDATE

The final budget for YER from April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007 was \$30,892.38 (Table 3). Funding was provided by MCFD in the amount of \$30,000.00. This amount was presented to YER in August 2006, and \$833.83 in interest was gained from investing the principal in a term deposit. The amount of \$66.10 was donated at the YER Celebration. The principal, interest and donation were all deposited into the YER bank account. The total amount was \$30,899.93, and \$7.55 remains in the account.

Listed below are the expense items:

- **Professional fees** included fees, administration costs and program evaluation.
- **Honouraria** for youth participants was calculated at \$50 for 23 youth participants.
- **Equipment** purchased for YER operation included tools for planting, etc.

- **Transportation** costs were calculated at \$.45/km for 712 km.
- **Supplies** included office, lunch costs and general materials required for YER work.
- **Other** expenses included: insurance; bank charges; YER crests; YER brochure; and food items and room rental for the YER celebration.

In kind contributions came to a total of \$5000 (Table 3). Additional time was required for the YER report writing, which was considered an in kind contribution. Training time and work tools were contributed by the environmental organizations (Table 1; Table 3). Department of Fisheries and Oceans provided photocopier use (Table 3). YER celebration contributions came from the following: Thrifty Foods, Wachiay Friendship Centre, Panago Pizza, and time required for a professional cook to bake the celebratory cake (Table 3).

An additional table was developed to demonstrate the 2006/2007 monthly expenditures (Table 4). YER work experience and training for youth at risk is normally seasonal type work, and most of the program costs occur during the spring and fall.

8. CONCLUSION

YER is based on connecting youth with the natural world and the human community. It is about developing relationships with the land and her people, and knowing both by working with them. We develop a sense of place and belonging by making an investment and spending time getting to know what makes where we live unique and special. YER introduces youth to the watersheds and ecosystems that make the Comox Valley the place where we live. Youth participants gain practical and environmental knowledge and experience through sharing time with caring adults. Healthy social and ecological relationships are essential elements of healthy communities.

Through the interviews we have an opportunity to hear the youth's voices and to learn how YER benefits and supports them. The one hundred per cent completion rate over the past two years is a testament to the success and accomplishment of each of the youth participants. By involving them with meaningful work, they feel empowered and valued as part of the community. They learn that hope and self-esteem come from setting goals and not giving up. From spending time in nature working with positive community members, the youth are given insights into how they can make a difference in the world. The YER celebration was a ceremony held in the spirit of acknowledging the achievements of each of the youth participants and how their presence in our community makes it a better place.

TABLE 1: YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT (YER)	
YOUTH PARTICIPANT SUMMARY TABLE FOR THE PERIOD APR. 1, 2006 TO MAR. 31, 2007.	
YER is a 20-hour work experience/training program for Comox Valley youth-at-risk funded by BC, Ministry	
of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The youth were given a number to protect their anonymity.	
From Apr/06 to Mar/07 there were 28 youth participants; 8 girls and 20 boys; ages 13 to 18.	
YER COMPLETION	
YER completion required finishing 20 hours and giving a community presentation.	YOUTH PARTICIPANTS
Total Complete: Participant # 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72.	28
TOTAL 560 WORK EXPERIENCE HOURS	28
YOUTH ORGANIZATION REFERRALS	
School District # 71, Alternate Programs:	
Participant # 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71 (Sandwich Alternate 8; Nala'atsi Program 5; Independent Learning 4; Contract Tutoring 1)	18
Ministry of Children and Family Development:	
Participant # 45, 46, 47, 53, 55, 56, 57, 64, 70, 72 (Probation 5; Parent Teen Mediation 4; Mental Health 1)	10
TOTAL 2 YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	28

YOUTH ORGANIZATION CONNECTIONS	
MCFD: Participant # 45, 46, 47, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63, 64, 65, 67, 70, 71, 72	19
John Howard Society: Participant # 50, 51, 58, 61, 63, 64	6
Comox Valley Boys and Girls Club: Participant # 50, 54, 58, 63, 65	5
Comox Valley Community Justice Centre: Participant # 57, 67	2
Comox Valley Youth Resource Society: Participant # 45, 46, 54, 58, 61, 63, 65, 67	8
TOTAL 5 YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	40
ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION WORK	
YER work events were attended by about 1331 community members with average interactions of 47 community members per youth. Each youth worked with about 4 environmental organizations.	
Oyster River Enhancement Society: Participant # 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	2 5
Tsolum River Restoration Society: Participant # 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70	2 4
Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards: Participant # 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 56, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72	2 1
Morrison Creek Streamkeepers: Participant # 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 60, 62, 65, 66, 67, 68	1 4
Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society: Participant # 49, 50, 52, 54, 55, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 68, 70, 72	1 4
Fanny Bay Enhancement Society: Participant # 61, 62, 65, 69, 70, 71	6
Comox Valley Land Trust: Participant # 45, 47, 50, 51, 54	5
Department of Fisheries and Oceans: Participant # 58, 59, 64	3
Comox Valley Project Watershed Society: Participant # 57	1
Georgia Strait Alliance: Participant # 58	1
	1
	1
TOTAL 10 ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS	4
TABLE 1 (Continued): YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT (YER)	
YOUTH PARTICIPANT SUMMARY TABLE FOR THE PERIOD APR. 1, 2006 TO MAR. 31, 2007.	
YER is a 20-hour work experience/training program for Comox Valley youth-at-risk funded by BC, Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). All of the youth were given a number to protect their anonymity.	
From Apr/06 to Mar/07 there were 28 youth participants; 8 girls and 20 boys; ages 13 to 18.	

COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS		
YER presentations were attended by about 577 community members, and each	Y	
youth interacted with an average of 20 community members.	O	
Sandwich Alternate School: Participant # 47, 49, 51, 59, 66	U	
Glacier View Lodge: Participant # 53, 56, 69	T	
Independent Learning: Participant # 48, 67	H	
Wachiay Friendship Centre, Raven Back Youth Centre: Participant # 60, 63	P	
Youth and Ecological Restoration Celebration: Participant # 71, 72	A	
MCFD, Mental Health Team: Participant # 46	R	
MCFD, Over Twelve Team: Participant # 55	T	
John Howard Society, Staff Meeting: Participant # 61	I	
Oyster River Enhancement Society: Participant # 45	C	
Tsolum River Restoration Society, Board of Directors: Participant # 57	I	
Courtenay and District Fish and Game Protective Association: Participant # 64	P	
Courtenay Middle School, Grade 8: Participant # 70	A	
Lake Trail Middle School, Grade 9: Participant # 65	R	
Arden Elementary School, Grade 4: Participant # 54	T	
Puntledge Park Elementary School, Grade 4: Participant # 50	I	
Contract Tutoring: Participant # 68	P	
Nala'atsi Program: Participant # 52	A	
Comox Valley Boys and Girls Club, Voices Choices Group: Participant # 58	R	
Comox Valley Aboriginal Head Start Program, Pre-school Group: Participant # 62	T	
TOTAL 19 COMMUNITY PRESENTATION LOCATIONS	S	
	5	
	3	
	2	
	2	
	2	
	1	
	2	
	8	

TABLE 2: YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT (YER)	
GOAL SUMMARY TABLE FOR THE PERIOD OF APR. 1, 2006 TO MAR. 31, 2007.	
Funded by the BC, Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), 28 Comox Valley youth at risk	
were involved with YER from Apr. 1, 2006 to Mar. 31, 2007. All participants were given a number to protect	
their anonymity and interviewed to document what they had learned. Interview analysis was conducted to	
verify each participant's learning accomplishments.	
BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS	TOTALS
Cooperation, Support and Compassion: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Positive Role Models and Mentoring: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Increasing Community Capacity and Caring: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
GAINING VALUED WORK EXPERIENCE	
Data Collection Methods: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72	26
Working With Tools: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Job Variety: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	25
IMPROVING ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE	
Ecosystem Cycles and Interconnections: 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	27
Identification Techniques for Plants, Animals and Fish: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	27
Understanding Environmental Impacts: 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	27
INCREASING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS	
Meaningful Participation and Empowerment: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Commitment, Respect and Responsibility: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Accomplishment, Self-esteem and Success: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57,	28

58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	
ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS	
Public Speaking and Education: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Active Listening and Engagement: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28
Interpersonal Relationships: 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72	28

**TABLE 3: YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT (YER)
BUDGET TABLE FOR THE PERIOD OF APRIL 1, 2006 TO MAR 31, 2007.**

Expenses, income and in kind contributions required for YER to conduct the work experience and training program for youth at risk in the Comox Valley. YER was funded in 2006/2007 by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

Expense Item	Expenses	Income	In Kind Contributions
Professional fees	\$16,250.00	MCFD \$30,000.00	Training \$2,850.00
Administration	\$4,500.00	Interest \$833.83	YER Report \$1,500.00
Evaluation	\$3,000.00		
Honouraria	\$1,150.00		
Equipment	\$214.28		
Mileage	\$3204.00		
Supplies	\$956.90		Work Tools \$300.00 Photocopying \$100.00
Other	\$1,617.20	Donations \$66.10	Celebration \$250.00
TOTALS	\$30,892.38	\$30,899.93	\$5,000.00

**TABLE 4: YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROJECT (YER)
MONTHLY EXPENDITURES FOR APRIL 1, 2006 TO MAR 31, 2007.**

Month	Total	Fees	Honour	Mileage	Equip.	Supplies	Other
Apr/06	3,094.71	2,400.00	50.00	331.65		139.86	173.20
May/06	5,539.47	3,800.00	300.00	522.45	214.28	180.14	522.60
June/06	1,954.01	1,500.00	150.00	213.30		71.71	19.00
July/06	784.98	700.00		74.25		4.13	6.60
Aug/06	873.70	750.00		117.90			5.80
Sept/06	2,115.74	1,800.00		257.85		51.29	6.60

Oct/06	4,864.74	3,900.00		578.70		227.84	8.20
Nov/06	3,532.94	2,800.00	150.00	353.70		124.74	4.50
Dec/06	1,616.17	1,300.00	250.00	180.45		24.33	11.39
Jan/07	2,694.31	1,800.00	100.00	193.95		14.81	685.55
Feb/07	2,915.11	2,200.00		379.80		118.05	67.26
Mar/07	906.50	800.00	150.00				106.50
TOTAL	30,892.38	23,750.00	1,150.00	3,204.00	214.28	956.90	1,617.20