

**SCHOOL DISTRICT #71
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
MENTAL HEALTH REPORT**



**Glacier View Secondary School student, Alex Main, conducting a chum salmon egg take
with Oyster River Enhancement Society.**

**For the Period of September 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023
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By

YOUTH AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

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COVER PAGE – Glacier View Secondary School student, Alex Main, conducting a chum salmon egg take with Oyster River Enhancement Society 1

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INTRODUCTION

Youth and Ecological Restoration (YER) (www.youthecology.ca) has been mainly funded by Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). There were four hundred and forty-eight youth participants from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2023, with most referrals coming through School District #71 (SD #71). For the 2022/2023 school year, SD #71 granted YER \$10,000.00. This is the second year that Ministry of Education, Mental Health funded the program.

These funds were designated to increase mental health support, community interaction and outdoor education. The YER five main goals are: Building Healthy Community Relationships; Gaining Valued Work Experience; Improving Ecological Knowledge; Increasing Personal and Social Skills; Enhancing Communication Skills. The goals are achieved through revealing youth to the natural world through scientific methods, place-based education, ecotherapy practises and one-on-one mentoring support. Completion of the twenty-hour program requires youth to give a public speech for a community group, transforming the students into educators.

During the 2022/2023 school year, twenty-nine SD #71 students participated in YER. All of the youth attended Comox Valley schools and were referred from six different locations; one referral was from Comox Valley Transition Society. The report summarizes their experiences, focussing on students from Glacier View Secondary School and Nala’atsi Alternate School. Both of these secondary schools assign grades for YER youth participants. The program provides nature based experiential learning for youth who retain knowledge better outside of the classroom setting.

RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Comox Valley primary and secondary school students, aged twelve to eighteen, are referred to YER due to experiencing anxiety, isolation, bullying, violence, device addiction, substance abuse, depression or other mental health related concerns. As this report is based on SD #71 funding for the 2022/2023 school year, reporting on all of the YER participants is beyond its scope. For more details see YER, Annual Reports at: <https://youthecology.ca/annual-reports/>.

YER Interviews and Goals

Youth are interviewed prior to starting ecological work, at the end of each work day, and after their work placement and presentation. These interviews utilize qualitative research methods for data collection to understand their experiences, reality, attitudes, behaviours and how these may have been altered through YER. Questions are designed to draw out information on the YER five main goals and sub goals that are listed below:

1. **BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS** - Cooperation, Support and Compassion; Positive Role Models and Mentoring; Increased Community Capacity and Caring
2. **GAINING VALUED WORK EXPERIENCE** - Data Collection Methods; Working with Tools; Worksite Safety; Teamwork; Good Work Ethics
3. **IMPROVING ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE** - Ecosystem Cycles and Interconnections; Identification Techniques for Plants, Animals and Fish; Understanding Environmental Impacts
4. **INCREASING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS** - Meaningful Participation and Empowerment; Commitment, Respect and Responsibility; Patience and Endurance; Accomplishment, Self-confidence and Success
5. **ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS** - Public Speaking and Leadership; Active Listening and Engagement; Interpersonal Relationships

School Referrals

Twenty-nine YER youth participants attended Cumberland Community School, Glacier View Secondary School, Highland Secondary School, Lake Trail Community School, Miracle Beach Elementary School and Nala'atsi Alternate School. These were YER youth #420 to #448. Four youth participated in YER, Phase II (YER II); one each from Glacier View and Nala'atsi, and two from Lake Trail. The following is a list of the number of students from each school:

1. Glacier View Secondary School (GV) – eleven participants
2. Lake Trail Community School (LT) – nine participants
(one Lake Trail student was referred from Comox Valley Transition Society)
3. Highland Secondary School (H) – five participants
4. Nala'atsi Alternate School (NA) – two participants
5. Cumberland Community School (CC) – one participant
6. Miracle Beach Elementary School (MB) – one participant

Beneficial partnerships have formed with all of these schools and others over the YER nineteen-year history. YER contacts school principals, counsellors, youth and family support workers and other staff to recommend youth for the program. Once a positive connection is established with a school staff member, referral numbers with that school tend to increase. Most of the youth also have connections with MCFD and other Comox Valley youth services.

Youth Quotes and Academic Credits

YER benefits for eleven GV and two NA students are expressed using their voices as evidence of their personal experiences. These interviews acquire information from the youth through social science research interviewing techniques. YER participant numbers, academic grades achieved for program participation and quotes are listed in the following section.

Glacier View Secondary Centre Students

#421 – Leadership 11: 2 credits at 94%

It's helped me figure out my future a bit more because I know I want to be a doctor and medical professional. One of my options was veterinary practises and now I do think I want to do that.

#428 – Leadership 11: 2 credits at 91%

Seeing all those people volunteer their time to helping our ecosystem was incredible, they were all so helpful and kind, it was unlike anything I've ever been a part of before. This program gave me a new perspective on how important knowing about our community and local ecosystem is. These are just a few reasons why I'm grateful that I signed up.

#429 – Leadership 10: 2 credits at 88%

How much everything relies on each other, like how the salmon rely on the trees for protection and shade and then how the life cycle works, like how salmon are also eaten by bears and other animals and the predators, once they have eaten the salmon the carcass goes to feeding the trees and it goes on and on.

#430 – Leadership 10: 89%

It gave me experience that I wouldn't have got if I didn't go. It opened my eyes to other types of work because when I think of work, I think about customer service and construction and now I know more about more nature based and local work that's out there.

#432 – Citizenship 9: 90%

It was good, they were all very friendly and very good teachers. It was good learning from them. It was a lot more interactive than school. I learned to go in with an open mind and to let the people that have been doing it for a long time teach you.

#437 – Leadership 10: 2 credits:72%

Good, because it gives me a sense of accomplishment because I made fifty bucks.

#438 – Leadership 12: 2 credits 80%

It helped me by putting me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to experience new things and get out instead of just sitting around and doing boring stuff. It has got me out experiencing nature. I should continue to put effort into learning new things because it gives me a sense of achievement, as well as broadening my knowledge of nature.

#439 – Leadership 10 2 credits; 90%

I think the biggest part that comes to my mind is I wouldn't have learned any of this because they don't do it in school. It's cool to have a knowledgeable, almost teacher like figure, that actually listens and asks for feedback and opinions and it's more mutual.

#442 – Citizenship 9: 86%

This program has helped me find out what I want to do in my life. It has taught me about nature and what humans have done. If I had friends I would suggest this program, it teaches a lot and introduces youth to the community in a fun and helpful way.

#446 – Citizenship 9: 2 credits 87%

It was a big step for me because I have really high social anxiety when it comes to working with new people but it has been getting better. At first it was very nerve racking and I was very stressed, but then after a while it got easier and easier to work with people I didn't know.

#447 – Citizenship 9: 82%

I learned that I am rather willing and open to doing things when it's not my mother because you know how kids don't want to do what they tell them to do, like I didn't want to do this program but she made me and I'm glad she did.

Nala'atsi Alternate School Students

#420 – Science 10: ecology 70%

Working as a team for one, be respectful for another and don't complain and just do the work and make the best of it. I also get work experience at the end of this and so I have a higher chance, now that I have the work experience, to find a job.

#426 – Science 10: ecology 78%

My favorite part was getting to hold a Canadian goose and as I got to hold the goose, I could feel its heart beat go from fast to calm. It was my favorite part because I never got to hold a goose before nor have, I ever been close to one before.

Youth Quotes and Academic Credit Summary

The youth interviews document their experiences and provide evidence of how YER alleviates mental health issues. For youth struggling to relate with family, school and community, the program is an alternative connection. It takes them to places they don't normally go and links them with people they would never meet in their daily lives. Youth talk about career planning, community relationships, ecological interconnections, role models and teamwork. They also acknowledge that it gets them outside of their comfort zone and for some just finishing twenty hours is an accomplishment. Their voices give an articulate account of their YER experience.

Academic credits assigned to each student is another recognition of the value of YER for SD #71. Seven GV students were categorized as Leadership for Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12; four GV students received marks for Grade 9, Citizenship. The two NA student credits are classified as Grade 10, Science. It is an achievement for students and YER to receive these academic credits.

CONCLUSION

This is the second year that School District #71 has provided Youth and Ecological Restoration with funding to address student mental health issues. The five goals of the program identify a spectrum of areas that influence personal growth, work ethics, life skills, ecological awareness, interpersonal relationships, communication and empowerment. YER promotes alternate learning through forming trust within a one-on-one mentoring relationship while introducing youth to the natural world and community members. Documenting its effectiveness is dependant on youth interviews, which is the source of information used to describe their observations, insights, and feedback. Youth received academic acknowledgement for Citizenship, Leadership and Science. YER has a successful nineteen-year history of bringing exceptional youth into nature to alleviate mental health issues, obtain work experience, interact with volunteers, receive school credits and understand local ecology. The program bridges ecological and societal worlds.