

The 2025 Victoria Youth Empowerment Society Annual Report



VICTORIA YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SOCIETY



YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT
SOCIETY



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Board of Directors 2024-2025

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Taryn Castles
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Sara Daniels
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Vision

Our vision is to provide a continuum of care that empowers positive choices in the lives of multiple-barrier youth by providing accessible, innovative and proactive programs.

Mission

First, to assist youth to remove themselves from the high-risk environment of the street and make the transition to healthier and more constructive life situations.

Second, to help youth make positive choices, which will prevent involvement in at-risk behavior or connection with the street scene.



Message from the Board President

We have had some exciting changes at VYES this year, and even in an uncertain economic climate, we are experiencing growth across our program offerings and behind the scenes.

One of our biggest new offerings has transformed the space at our main building, as we have started utilizing an empty floor for the Youth Food Pantry. With the growing food insecurity faced by youth and their families, we are pleased to be able to provide not just groceries, but also toiletries, pet supplies, clothing, bedding, and school supplies to youth across our region.

This year has also seen the return of our Youth Janitor Program, offering youth an opportunity to gain some employment skills, and the addition of recovery groups to our programming to help youth in their substance use recovery journeys. With the continued economic uncertainties all Canadians are facing, setting up youth for future success as much as we can through programming like this is, in my view, one of the most important contributions we can make right now. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank our staff and volunteers for all they do to support this work every day.

Behind the curtain, we have been able to make some necessary improvements to our facilities, in particular our main building where we have updated our security systems, lighting, and windows. We have also continued to improve our financial practices with the able assistance of our bookkeeper, Sandy Firth, and our Executive Director Julie-Ann Hunter and Operations Director Kisae Petersen keep making strides to allow the organization to run as smoothly as possible.



Message from the Board President

Our strategic planning for the future carries on as we keep our eye on funding sources, and I am proud to say that our future remains bright. In addition to our main Souper Bowls of Hope fundraiser later this month, we expanded our reach this year to Pender Island, where we held the first ever Remote Bowls of Hope event and connected with more youth and families in the region. Strengthening our relationships with donors through new fundraising efforts will continue to be a priority for VYES over the next year, as we keep strengthening our relationships with youth and their families who need our support.

Respectfully submitted,
Merissa Raymond, Board President



Message from the Executive Director



I want to begin this message by acknowledging that the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society's work takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking peoples, including the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples. As we continue our work with youth and community, we do so with gratitude and respect, recognizing that reconciliation requires ongoing action, listening, and learning.

As we gather to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year, I am filled with deep gratitude for the dedication, compassion, and collaboration that continue to define this organization. Each year, I am reminded that our work is only possible because of the unwavering commitment of our Board, staff, volunteers, community partners, funders, and supporters, and the remarkable strength and resilience of the youth and families we serve.

I am incredibly proud of the ways our team continues to show up for young people across Greater Victoria. Because of the solid foundation built over the past 30 years, YES has been able to grow and evolve to meet the changing needs of youth. This year, we introduced new initiatives such as the Youth Food Pantry and Youth Recovery Groups; programs that meet youth where they are and provide the individualized support they so richly deserve.



Message from the Executive Director



This work would not be possible without the significant and ongoing support of our community. In 2024–2025, alongside our core contracts with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Island Health, we received vital support from the Victoria Foundation, the United Way, the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee, the Rogers Youth Grant, and the Sovereign Order of St. John Victoria Commandery. We are also deeply grateful for the generosity of the Quail Rock Foundation, Sotheby's Real Estate, Etrash to Cash, the Felicia Oliver Fund, Provincial Employees Services, the Royal Canadian Legion, and the Kiwanis Club of Victoria — as well as the many individuals and foundations who donated through CanadaHelps and other platforms. Each contribution, large or small, helps youth and families gain access to the supports they need to thrive.

I also want to extend heartfelt appreciation to our Board of Directors. Their commitment to evolving and improving our services, and their belief in the potential of the youth we serve, have been truly inspiring. A special thank you to President Merissa Raymond for her thoughtful guidance and partnership this past year, and to Sara Daniels for her years of dedicated service, you will both be greatly missed.

To our incredible staff team, thank you. I am continually in awe of your passion, professionalism, and creativity. This year, I've been especially moved by the ways you've expanded programming and created new opportunities for youth. Whether full-time, part-time, or relief, your collective commitment across all our programs is the heartbeat of YES.

Message from the Executive Director



We are equally grateful for our volunteers, who give their time, energy, and creativity to support our fundraising efforts and help provide nutritious meals to youth. Your generosity enriches every corner of our organization. In particular I want to give thanks to the ARKA Brotherhood for all the amazing volunteer hours they have given to our organization this past year.

This past year has been one of meaningful progress for the agency, and one of growing needs for youth and families. Together, we supported over 1,000 individual youth and families across our programs. The Alliance Club saw 4,054 visits by 550 youth, the Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter supported 153 youth in crisis, and the Supported Independent Living Program helped 63 youth move toward independence. The Life Skills Program supported 88 youth in developing essential tools for adulthood, and 62 youth accessed our Specialized Youth Detox. The Summer Opportunities Program engaged 95 youth, while the Youth Wellness Program supported 101 youth in prioritizing their mental health. Additionally, 205 youth and parents were served through Youth and Family Support Services, and 362 youth accessed resources through our Youth Outreach Program. And our newest programs, including the Youth Food Pantry, Recovery Groups, Volunteer Group and Youth Janitor Group have supported an additional 150 youth over the past year.

Behind every number is a story, a young person finding stability, a parent finding support, or a youth taking their first brave step toward change. These are not just program outcomes; they are the seeds of a stronger, healthier community.

Message from the Executive Director



Our programs also reflect broader trends in the realities youth face today. Families continue to struggle with rising costs for food and housing. Youth with complex needs, intersecting mental health, substance use, and neurodiversity, are increasingly seeking our support. We've seen a growing need for safe, affirming spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, a rise in younger youth (ages 12–15) facing early vulnerabilities, and an increase in families requiring basic need supports. Barriers to mental health care and housing remain urgent and ongoing challenges.

As we look ahead, YES remains steadfast in its commitment to deepening our impact and responding to these evolving needs. We will continue to listen to youth and families, invest in programs that meet immediate needs, and amplify youth voices in shaping the services that support them.

When we invest in youth, we are investing in the future, in stronger, healthier, and more compassionate communities. Every hour volunteered, every dollar donated, and every moment spent supporting a young person ripples outward, creating lasting change that strengthens the fabric of our society.

To everyone who has supported our mission, thank you. Your belief in the potential of youth transforms lives every day. Together, we are building a community where every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

Finally, to the youth and families we serve, thank you for trusting us. It is an honour to walk alongside you. You challenge us to grow, inspire us to innovate, and remind us every day why this work matters. The world is a better place with youth in it, and we will continue striving to ensure that every young person feels seen, supported, and empowered.

-Julie-Ann Hunter,
Executive Director

Community Impact Highlights 2024-2025

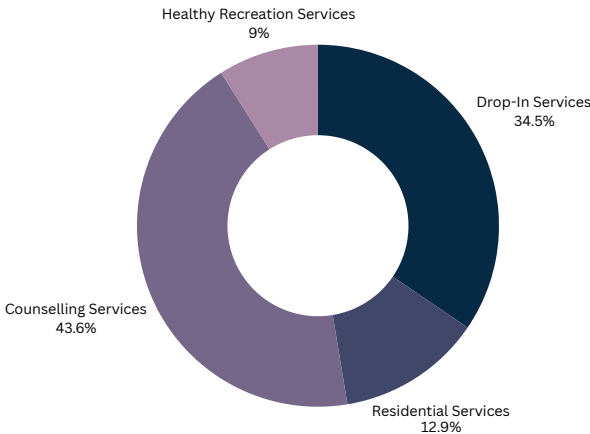
576 Youth got their essential needs met in 2024-2025 through our Alliance Club Drop-in (Helen's Place)

728 Youth and Families received Support Services in 2024-2025

6,250+ Meals and snacks were served to youth in 2024-2025

153 Youth Accessed a Safe Bed At our Emergency Shelter in 2024-2025

1,000+ Individual youth and families across the Greater Victoria region received services through YES this year.



Percentage of Youth Served by Program Group

Life Skills Program



The Life Skills Program provides services for multi-barrier, at-risk youth between the ages of 12 to 19. This may include youth who are not attending school, having difficulty finding or maintaining employment, are experiencing family difficulties, have some mental health issues that are impacting their ability to maintain in the school/home, and/or are unable to sustain a stable housing situation. Youth may also be dealing with multiple issues such as poverty, poor physical health, homelessness, and substance use.

Snapshot 2024-2025

88 youth accessed the Life Skills Program.

Life Skills received **48** referrals this past year.

The average age of youth accessing was **16**.

56% of youth referred identified as female, **31%** identified as male and **12%** identified as trans/non-binary.

Additional Programming offered by Life Skills: Volunteer Group and Life Skills Support Group

The volunteer group addresses a critical need, as many youth lack resume experience, making it hard to secure employment. Participants gain essential skills through workshops led by Life Skills Support Workers. The program also provides a supportive space for socially anxious youth to connect with peers. Unlike other programs requiring referrals or regular attendance, this drop-in format is unique in Victoria and offers familiarity, as participants work with known staff, easing social discomfort.

This support program was created and designed to meet the needs of youth ages 12-19 in various areas where we are seeing critical need, meaning these groups vary on what support is being offered based on demand. In March 2025 the Life Skills Program ran its first Life Skills Support Group which was a Food Safe Certification Course. External resources, Alert First Aid, were brought in to run the course and provide valid certification. Is support workers were also present during the group if any youth needed extra support from staff.

Alliance Club (Helen's Place)



The Alliance Club (The Club) is an evening drop-in center for youth aged 13 to 19. The Club provides a safe, healthy alternative for youth who may be hanging out in the downtown core, as well as a connection point for vulnerable youth who may wish to explore a more positive lifestyle. The Club addresses the short-term, immediate needs of youth and makes referrals to facilitate community connections. The staff and volunteers build rapport with youth to develop trusting relationships, increase awareness of avenues to reduce risk, offer support in implementing positive change, and provide basic life skills to enhance successful long-range goals.

Snapshot 2024-2025

550 youth got their needs met through the Alliance Club drop-in.

4054 visits were made to the Alliance Club Drop-in, with an average of **17** a day.

4526 meals and snacks were served to youth.

440 clothing and hygiene products were given to youth.

Donations and Volunteers

The Club welcomed 30 volunteers during this fiscal year. The Club received several donations throughout the year.

Alliance also received significant donations from Soap for Hope and Gibson's Barber Shop & School, who provided a number of hygiene products. Finally, local businesses occasionally reached out to provide donations such as coats and other clothing items. Many items were donated over the Christmas period, including gift cards and various items from the following businesses: Flavour, Vintage After Death, Baggins, and Shine Café.

Additional Programming offered by Alliance Club: **Youth Janitor Group**

Youth Janitor Program: A hands-on mentorship initiative that provides youth with real-world work experience in a safe, supportive environment. Participants gain valuable job skills, build confidence, and develop references they can use in future employment. This program helps youth strengthen their resumes and take meaningful steps toward long-term employment success.

The Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter (KEYS)



Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter (KEYS) is a 10-bed facility that provides services for youth between the ages of 13-18 who are in crisis and have no safe housing alternatives. The program offers assistance 24 hours a day 7 days a week. KEYS provides a safe and supportive environment and responds to a wide range of crises.

Snapshot 2024-2025

153 youth accessed the shelter this past year.

49% of youth who accessed identified being unhoused.

57% of youth who accessed identified substance use, with cannabis, alcohol and meth being the top three substance used.

57% of youth who accessed identified a mental health challenge with anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation being the most concerns identified.

38% of you accessed identified as female, **49%** identified as male and **13%** identified as trans/non-binary.

The average age of a youth accessing was **16** years old.

Specialized Youth Detox (SYD)



Specialized Youth Detox (SYD) is a 5-bed non-medical withdrawal management facility serving the youth of Vancouver Island. SYD is a voluntary program for youth 13 to 18 years of age that require acute physical detoxification. Youth are required to have a medical screen completed prior to entering the SYD program to ensure 24 hour supervised medical care is not required.

Snapshot 2024-2025

62 youth accessed the youth detox this past year.

44% of youth who accessed came from outside the Victoria region.

Average age of youth accessing Detox was **16** years old.

45% of youth accessed identified as female, **47%** identified as male and **8%** identified as trans/non-binary.

The three most commonly identified substances used by youth include alcohol, fentanyl and meth.

79% of youth who accessed Detox had a formal mental health diagnosis.

Additional Programming offered by SYD: Recovery Groups

Our Youth Recovery Groups offer a safe, supportive space for youth to explore and build their recovery journey. Led by experienced youth workers, these groups use the evidence-based SMART Recovery model to help participants develop practical tools to support their recovery. YES is currently offering two different groups, one for youth who are interested in recovery and one for those who would like to maintain their recovery.

Supported Independent Living (SIL)



The Supported Independent Living (SIL) program supports youth 16-19 years old who have Youth Agreements (YAG), Independent Living Agreements (IL), or are otherwise transitioning out of MCFD services to independence. The SIL program also supports young people 19-24 years old who are aging out of Victoria MCFD services and are pursuing or have secured Agreements with Young Adults (AYA). SIL support workers work one-on-one with these young people in order to assist each of them in addressing the independence goals detailed in their personal intake assessment and work to ensure that the needs of the youth are met in a developmentally and culturally appropriate manner. SIL provides flexible support in order to accommodate youth who are employed, attending school, or are parenting, or meeting other family obligations.

Snapshot 2024-2025

63 youth accessed the Supported Independent Living Program this past year.

SIL received **49** referrals this past year.

The average age of youth accessing was **19** years old.

63% of youth referred identified as female, **27%** identified as male and **8%** identified as trans/non-binary.

“I feel cared for and I appreciate the flexibility and meeting me with where I’m at in life”

-Youth, 18

Summer Opportunities Program (SOP)



The Summer Opportunities Program (SOP) is a voluntary, drop-in, day program designed to provide at-risk, vulnerable, and street-involved youth (aged 13-19) with a safe and healthy environment, fun activities, basic needs and emotional support during July and August each year.

Snapshot 2024-2025

101 youth accessed SOP over the summer.

SOP provided over **20** unique experiences and activities over **6** weeks.

On average SOP served **38** meals a week.

Activities included art, going to local Victoria establishments like Crystal Pool and Miniature world, and fun treats like milkshakes.



Club and SOP staff
Summer 2024



Youth and Family Support Services (YFSS)

The Youth and Family Support Services (YFSS) program provides interventions and support to youth (12-19 years of age) and their families in resolving conflict and/or crisis. This program consists of the YFSS Counsellor (job-shared by two counsellors) and the YFSS Outreach worker. The program facilitates the reunification and/or reintegration of youth with their families and/or communities. When appropriate, the staff strive to safely maintain youth within their current family system while helping to increase the family's capacity to deal with the concerns that led to the breakdown.

Snapshot 2024 - 2025

205 youth and families accessed the Youth and Family Support Services this past year.

YFSS received **75** referrals this past year.

The average age of youth referred was **15** years old.

67% of youth referred identified as female, **25%** identified as male and **7%** identified as trans/non-binary.

“I am very grateful for the commitment you made to us, and to the trust you were able to build with [youth]. It is a huge comfort to know that people are willing to take on the difficult work that you do. Thank you so very much.”

-YFSS family

Youth Services Outreach Team (YSOT)

The Youth Services Outreach Team (YSOT) connects with youth (13-19 years) and their families/caregivers to reduce risk, to resolve current and emerging issues and offers: prevention, diversion, and crisis intervention services. YSOT is a direct access point for youth, families, social workers, probation officers, community service agencies, teachers, and police to connect with youth support workers.

Snapshot 2024 - 2025

362 youth were supported through the Youth Outreach Team this past year.

YSOT received **85** referrals this past year.

The average age of youth referred was **16** years old.

59% of youth referred identified as female, **40%** identified as male and **1%** identified as trans/non-binary.

Additional Outreach Services: Youth Justice Program

The Youth Justice Program is for female young person(s) who are bound by a Probation Order, Bail Conditions, or Extra Judicial Sanctions Agreement (EJS) and are engaged in high-risk activities and/or have precarious or unsafe living arrangements. The program includes services that locate the young person(s), engage them in services, link them to family and/or community support services, transportation to appointments and monitor their safety. Over the course of 2024-2025, this part-time program support 10 youth that were referred by Probation.



Youth Food Pantry

The Youth Food Pantry is the newest program at YES!

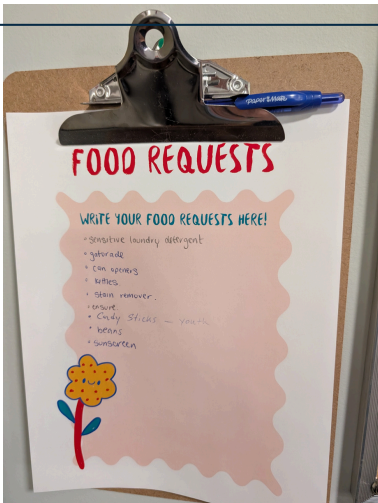
The YES Youth Food Pantry provides youth aged 13-19 access to healthy, culturally relevant food options, household items, hygiene products, and clothing. The Food Pantry also offers skill building workshops around food, cooking, and budgeting for grocery trips. The Food Pantry is a welcoming, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed space that is youth friendly. All of the food, supplies and workshops are free of charge. The Youth Food Pantry launched in November of 2024.

90 individual youth have accessed the pantry.

The Pantry received **205** visits.

5 cooking workshops were held to support youth.

18 businesses participated in food drives.





Youth Wellness Program

The Youth Wellness Program supports youth who are experiencing a wide range of vulnerabilities. Group activities and individualized supports are offered to help youth develop social, life, and coping skills; stress management strategies; community connections; and confidence in their abilities.

Snapshot 2024 -2025

95 youth and families accessed the Youth Wellness Program.

15 volunteers offered unique workshops and experiences.

15 unique workshops over four months

Activities included Zine making, bike repairs, visits to the Bug Zoo, and bleach dying

Additional Programming offered by Wellness: Queer Connections Group

The volunteer group addresses a critical need, as many youth lack resume experience, making it hard to secure employment. Participants gain essential skills through workshops led by Life Skills Support Workers. The program also provides a supportive space for socially anxious youth to connect with peers. Unlike other programs requiring referrals or regular attendance, this drop-in format is unique in Victoria and offers familiarity, as participants work with known staff, easing social discomfort.



Griffin Housing Support Fund

The Housing Support Fund was started in 2022 as a way to support youth to maintain their housing. Since then, the fund has helped over 60 youth to ensure that they remain housed.

The Housing Support Fund was renamed in 2024 to honor Pat Griffin's legacy of support for vulnerable youth.



“We salute the youth and families that we serve, your resolve and courage to improve your life situations through challenging situations motivate our daily efforts.” -Pat Griffin

Remote Bowls of Hope 2025

For the first time ever, Souper Bowls of Hope hosted a second event! Remote Bowls of Hope took place on Pender Island and supported YES to provide services to youth who come from the Gulf Islands.

This event featured soups prepared by local chefs, music by local Pender Island Youth and provided the opportunity for YES to ensure youth on the Gulf Islands knew about services



Thank you to Sherry Moir and her wonderful committee for putting on this event! A heartfelt thank you to the sponsors: the Pender Island Legion, Poet's Cove, Truss Farms, Southeridge Farms, and Barry's Bees, for contributing to tonight's incredible meal. Thank you to the many others who contributed to making Remote Bowls of Hope a success, your hard work does not go unnoticed.



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