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# NANAIMO YOUTH RESILIENCE STRATEGY

Building Safer Communities

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## DISCLAIMER

The *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy* was prepared by the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (CMNCP) for the City of Nanaimo. While care has been taken in the preparation of this document to ensure its contents are accurate, complete, and up to date, there are certain limitations with the data. The information presented in this report is based on a review of existing data and documents as well as consultations with various community members and groups. One challenge with qualitative data (focus groups, interviews, etc.) is the subjectivity of responses. Participants share their perspectives and opinions based on their own experiences and knowledge. As a result, the statements made by an individual may not reflect the perspectives of others. It is therefore important to recognize that the findings from this research must be considered in their own context. However, the findings do offer valuable insight for future planning as a thematic analysis.

Please note that this is a living document. New information, actions, and recommendations related to youth resilience as well as gun and gang violence prevention emerge regularly. This report reflects the data collected at the time of the strategy development.

**Trigger Warning:** This document includes discussion about sensitive topics related to violence, safety, and gang activity that could be triggering to some people. If you have any questions about the *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy*, please contact [communityplanning@nanaimo.ca](mailto:communityplanning@nanaimo.ca).



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that the City of Nanaimo boundary lies within the Traditional Territory of Snuneymuxw First Nation who have many significant ancestral village sites throughout the city including Stlilnup (Departure Bay) and Sxwuyum (Millstone River). We recognize the Snuneymuxw Treaty of 1854, a trade and commerce treaty that forever and always preserves and protects Snuneymuxw villages, waters, enclosed fields, harvesting and gathering sites, and the right to hunt and fish as formerly.

Why is this here? A land acknowledgment statement represents an act of reconciliation, honouring the land and Indigenous heritage and history that dates back thousands of years. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory we reside on, and a way of honouring the Indigenous people who have cared for this land for thousands of years. It is important that we understand our history that has brought us to reside on the land, and to seek to understand our place within history.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Developing the *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy* was a collective and collaborative effort. Thank you to Public Safety Canada for allocating funds to develop a strategy to improve youth resilience in Nanaimo. Furthermore, sincere gratitude is offered to the community members who attended the consultations and completed the survey questionnaire. Your participation will help ensure gun and gang violence prevention efforts are rooted in the experiences and context of Nanaimo residents. This Strategy is stronger because of your voices.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to the project team and steering committee who acted in advisory capacities from the following organizations:

- BGC Central Vancouver Island
- Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society
- City of Nanaimo
- Connective Support Society
- Island Health
- Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services
- Liaison Strategic Solutions
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Nanaimo RCMP
- Nanaimo Family Life Association
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- School District #68
- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- WorkBC

We would like to thank local partners, stakeholders, organizations, practitioners, and service providers in Nanaimo for supporting and participating in consultation sessions. This includes:

- BGC Central Vancouver Island
- Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society
- CFSEU (Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit) / Nanaimo RCMP Street Crime/Intel
- Community Health Network
- Connective Support Society
- Island Health
- Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services
- Liaison Strategic Solutions
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Nanaimo City Council
- Nanaimo Family Life Association
- Nanaimo RCMP
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- Public Disorder and Homelessness Working Group
- Risebridge Project
- School District #68
- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- United Way
- Volunteer Nanaimo
- WorkBC
- Youth 20/20 Can Project
- Youth Advocacy Network

Lastly, thank you to Dr. Irvin Waller for providing expert feedback to strengthen this strategy.





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*“I wanted to be the real leader that my grandma and elders would be proud of.”*

*– Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy Participant*





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*"Nanaimo's downtown is my favourite area to visit at night. The orange glow of the street lights and the bright, colourful neon signs make me feel like I'm walking through a movie scene. A crime drama, maybe. Because it's also unfortunately where I feel most unsafe. Every visit downtown after the sun sets is one my head moves on a swivel as I walk past alleys and street corners. It does add to the air of mystery and intrigue, but I would love to enjoy the scenery without fearing for my safety"*

*- Nanaimo Photovoice Participant*





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Public Safety Canada selected Nanaimo as one of 22 municipalities in British Columbia to develop and implement a gun and gang violence prevention strategy. The City of Nanaimo was charged with developing an approach to accomplish this task over the next three years. Through a fast-paced, but comprehensive consultation process with key community stakeholders and a review of existing data, factors were identified that put children and youth at risk for gang involvement.

A multi-disciplinary steering committee worked alongside City staff, Snuneymuxw First Nation, and consultants to design actions to address the identified risk factors and enhance protective factors. In total, this led to the establishment of six focus areas for funding. The proposed focus areas establish new and augment existing efforts in the community to meaningfully connect with and support youth, especially youth at risk. Finally, they speak to the need to address broader systemic issues and the importance of positive messages about the potential of prevention.

The recommended focus areas are supported by a series of additional recommendations, found in the Strategy Implementation Guide for the *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy*, that

will support the implementation of the strategy. These span from the importance of community engagement, transparent communication, appropriate governance, to evaluation and monitoring and finally, the necessity of sustainability planning. Together, these elements support the *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy* and should be regarded as a road map towards a safer and more equitable community.

The existence of gun and gang violence is a serious concern for any community experiencing it. Nanaimo is not alone in this regard and the Strategy must be seen as part of a larger attempt to prevent violence and crime before it happens. As a result, the Strategy is not only based on local knowledge but is also evidence-informed and draws on promising practices in the prevention of crime, victimization, and fear of crime.

A focus on children and youth, especially those that are at risk, inevitably calls for a commitment to a more distant future while taking action in the here and now. The *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy* relies heavily on the capacity to engage community and its key stakeholders and finally, children, youth, and their families. In that sense, the community has the opportunity to become the extended family of all children and youth living in Nanaimo.



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## FOCUS AREAS

The Strategy includes six focus areas to prevent youth from engaging in gun and gang violence and to address the significant youth related risk factors for Nanaimo. The focus areas are connected to evidence based outcomes and meet the required criteria under the Building Safer Communities (BSC) funding program. These focus areas provide a road map on how to reduce risk factors for youth, improve youth resiliency and will provide guidance on how funds should be prioritized and distributed between 2023 and 2026. The focus areas identified may interconnect and, more than one focus area may be addressed through implementing one or more program(s) or initiative(s). The six focus areas are:

### SAFE YOUTH GATHERING SPACES

To establish safe, free, youth gathering spaces, within existing facilities.

### YOUTH OUTREACH

To expand street outreach and related programs including service hours and locations to build relationships with youth at risk and to meet a wide range of their needs such as food, harm reduction, engagement in recreation, access to counseling, etc.

### CONNECTING YOUTH TO LAND AND WATER THROUGH SNAWAYLTH (TEACHINGS)

Enhance existing and/or create new opportunities to connect youth to the land and water through Snawaylth to strengthen their mental, emotional, spiritual and cultural resilience.

### YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM

To connect youth, especially youth at risk, with diverse role models and significant/caring adults (e.g. tutors, trades or vocational role models, mentors, teachers, coaches, etc.).

### ENHANCING EXISTING PROGRAMS

To improve existing programs for youth by adding new components that fill gaps and build protective factors for children and youth-at-risk (e.g. sports, culture, education, health and wellness, life skills, socio-emotional learning, volunteering etc.).

### MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

To build relationships with media and develop key positive messaging to highlight successful youth programs and initiatives that counter repeated negative media attention that perpetuate discrimination and stigmatization against youth.

In addition to the above actions, some recommendations were out of scope for the Strategy. These recommendations fall under Scope Two (to be discussed further as additional capacities become available) or Scope Three (to be referred to appropriate community partners or sectors). Scope Two and Three recommendations are reflected in Appendix 4.





## FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENTS

It is recommended that the Steering Committee share with the community and its stakeholders the foundational commitments below and regularly monitor adherence to them.

**Accessibility:** Ensuring all children and youth have fair, equitable, and low-barrier access to services, spaces, and supports in Nanaimo.

**Accountability:** Directing resources toward increasing access and equity.

**Anti-Oppression:** Recognizing multiple forms of oppression (e.g. systems of supremacy, differential treatment due to discrimination, ideological domination, and institutional control) and seeking to mitigate their effects.

**Knowledge and Evidence Informed:** Ensuring that efforts are guided by evidence and community wisdom.

**Capacity Building:** Implementing approaches that build capacity within individuals and organizations.

**Collaboration:** Sharing responsibility, taking collective action, and avoiding siloed approaches.

**Communication with the Public:** Communicating with the public ongoingly for transparency and buy-in.

**Cultural Awareness:** Being sensitive to and respectful of differences and similarities between cultures.

**Diversity:** Acknowledging that differences between people (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, religion, geography, physical or cognitive abilities, etc.) are valued assets and striving for diverse representation.

**Equity:** Committing to the pursuit of fairness and justice and recognizing diverse needs and histories.

**Focus on Future Generations:** Committing to an upstream approach to prevention.

**Intersectionality:** Accepting that multiple dynamics of privilege and oppression operate simultaneously in complex and compounding ways.

**Neighbourhood Focus:** Understanding and addressing local needs and challenges through a neighbourhood lens.

**Reciprocity:** Understanding that individuals using services have agency and the right to meaningfully contribute.

**Reconciliation:** Committing to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Actions with a focus on those related to children and youth (#1 to #66).

**Trauma Awareness:** Integrating how trauma can affect people in all aspects of the work.



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## BACKGROUND

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In March 2022, Public Safety Canada announced new federal funding to address community safety through the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF). The objective of this fund is to help municipalities and Indigenous communities prevent gun and gang violence by addressing their root causes. Gang violence has become a growing concern in Nanaimo, after a shooting in January 2020 and a stabbing in February 2020, both believed to be connected to drug trafficking and local gang activity. Similarly, there was an increase in gun violence in Nanaimo in 2022, leading to multiple injuries. Since the beginning of 2023, there has been at least one stabbing and one shooting in Nanaimo, which have significantly impacted the community's sense of safety.

Service providers and front-line professionals have highlighted similar concerns, and school professionals have reported an increasing gang presence in elementary and high schools. In recent years, there has been an alarming trend of mainland gang members recruiting young people from Nanaimo, often through social media, resulting in increasing levels of youth involvement in gang-related activities, including drug trafficking and violent crime.

The City of Nanaimo received \$1.8 million from Public Safety Canada to develop and implement

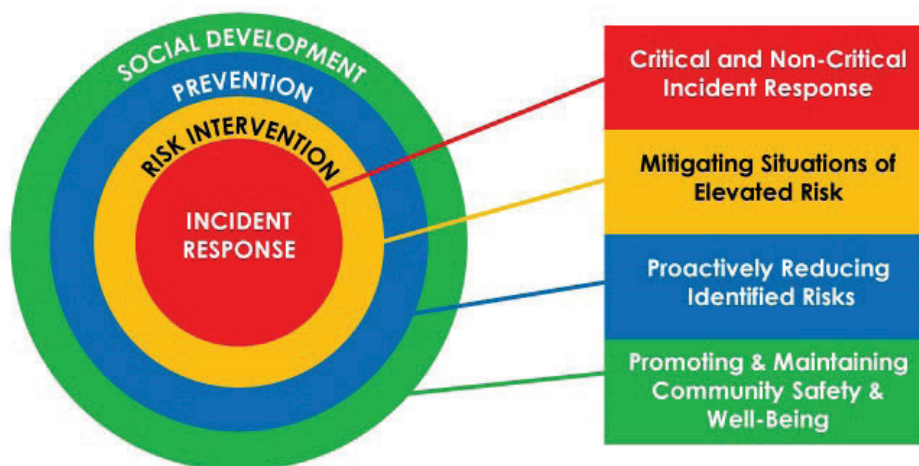
a strategic plan to address gun and gang violence through building youth resilience. Among other objectives, the *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy* brought together system leaders, organizations, and community members to co-create a vision and an actionable plan to increase youth resilience and safety in the community. It focuses on reducing risk, vulnerability, and harm by prioritizing a process to identify key risk factors as well as prevention and intervention measures to address them collaboratively.

The development of the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy involved a rapid risk assessment using diverse quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and subsequent analyses. Gathering different data sources helped to build a comprehensive data set and provided the steering committee members and consultants with an understanding of risk and protective factors for youth in the local context. For more information on the assessment process, refer to Appendix 5.

The Strategy findings and focus areas are specific to the geographical boundaries of the City of Nanaimo and reserve lands governed by Snuneymuxw First Nation. The Strategy however recognizes that the impact and prevention of gun and gang violence does not happen in a vacuum and notes that the implementation of the Strategy may see programs and initiatives delivered in the general region of Nanaimo.



The Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General's Prevention Framework<sup>i</sup> highlights the different levels of prevention/intervention.



Level	Description	Scope of Work
Social Development	Intervening to reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors in the general population.	Limited scope
Prevention	Identifying at-risk individuals or communities and intervening to reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors.	In scope
Risk Intervention	Responding to acutely elevated risk situations to mitigate harm and decrease the likelihood of (re) victimization.	In scope
Emergency Response	Immediate response to urgent incidents to stop harms, minimize victimization and hold individuals responsible.	Not in scope

The *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy* focuses specifically on prevention and risk intervention to reduce the demand for incident response. The Strategy is grounded in the knowledge that social, economic, familial, and individual conditions and experiences (i.e. trauma) influence whether a young person turns to crime and/or is more likely to be victimized. Accordingly, it seeks to engage local leaders and the broader community to generate a shared vision and commit to actions that address local conditions to improve youth resilience and community safety. To be successful, the Strategy must inspire and enable an approach where a broad cross-section of organizations and people work collaboratively toward collective impact.

Importantly, this strategy is consistent with the social determinants of health<sup>1</sup> through a focus on decreasing risk factors and strengthening protective factors known to impact a young person's pathway. Risk<sup>2</sup> and protective factors<sup>3</sup> are varied. Some require broad-based, long-term, sustained investment and commitment (social development), typically led by federal and provincial governments, to improve social inequities such as racism, poverty, and unemployment. Others are more readily achievable through localized consensus, leadership, and commitment to action.<sup>4</sup>

1. *Social Determinants of Health* refer to a specific group of social and economic factors within the broader determinants of health. These relate to an individual's place in society, such as income, education, or employment. Experiences of discrimination, racism and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain groups such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ and Black Canadians.

2. *Risk Factors* are negative influences in the lives of individuals or communities which may increase the presence of harm, victimization, or crime. They can occur at the individual, family/peer, community/school/organization, and/or societal levels.

3. *Protective Factors* are positive influences that can improve the lives of individuals or the safety of a community. They may decrease criminalization and victimization and can be found at the individual, family/peer, community/school/organization, and societal level.

4. Please refer to Appendix 11 for a list of guidelines for effective prevention approaches.

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## KEY FINDINGS

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### QUANTITATIVE DATA

The following section offers a high-level summary of local demographics and trends based on a review of research and available data/statistics. The full review of local data/statistics can be found in Appendix 2.

#### Local Demographics

Nanaimo's population has consistently grown in the past 5 years, reaching 99,863 in 2021.<sup>ii</sup> Based on future projections, strong population growth is expected to continue in the Nanaimo area. According to the 2021 Community Profile report, Nanaimo's population growth has resulted from migration. People move to new areas for a variety of reasons including employment opportunities and quality of life factors. There are three types of migrants: intra-provincial (within BC), inter-provincial (other provinces) and international immigrants (outside of Canada). Between 2015 and 2020, on average, over 3,000 net new migrants relocated to the Nanaimo region.<sup>iii</sup>

The average family size in Nanaimo is similar to other locations in the province. Approximately 18% are one-parent families, with most lone parents being women. In Nanaimo, the average age of the population is slightly higher than that of the provincial average, with youth (15 to 29 years old) representing almost 17% of the population.<sup>iv</sup>

#### Trends

One key risk factor related to preventing gun and gang violence is early childhood development, particularly adverse childhood experiences. In this regard, the Early Development Instrument (EDI) data provides insight into the healthy development of children by highlighting inequities and vulnerabilities. Based on the EDI instrument, vulnerable children are those who, without additional support and care, are more likely to experience future challenges in their school years and beyond. In Nanaimo, 37% of kindergarten children are vulnerable on at least one area of development measured by the EDI between 2016 and 2019. The highest level of vulnerability was related to emotional maturity (20%) as well as physical health and well-being (20%). Cedar-Wellington-Gabriola, South Nanaimo, and Townsite-Nanaimo Downtown have the highest rate of EDI vulnerability among children.<sup>v</sup>

Police-reported crime statistics can provide insight into the most prevalent offences in Nanaimo. However, it is important to remember that not all crimes and experiences of victimization are reported to police. With regards to criminal charges, the overall rate of police-reported crime statistics in Nanaimo decreased slightly between 2019 and 2020 but increased between 2020 and 2021. The rate of youth aged 12 to 17 years charged (all violations combined) has increased since 2019, going from 1,117 to 1,518. With regards to violent crime, the rate per 100,000 population has increased consistently over the past five years, reaching 2,542 in 2021, which represents a 70% increase since 2017. The rate of youth (12 to 17 years) charged for violent Criminal Code violations was lower in 2019 and 2020 compared to 2018, but increased again in 2021, reaching 983.<sup>vi</sup>

In 2020, the Homeless Hub published a Community Profile for Nanaimo which highlights statistics related to homelessness.<sup>vii</sup> In total, 433 were identified as experiencing homelessness, of which almost 60% were experiencing chronic homelessness. Furthermore, 253 individuals were experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Among the people experiencing homelessness in Nanaimo in 2020, 23% identified as youth (age 18-24), 33% identified as Indigenous, 26% identified as 2SLGBTQ+, and 68% identified as male.

Over 40% of tenants in Nanaimo spend 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, which is higher than the rest of the province (37%). Furthermore, over 10,000 individuals in private households in Nanaimo have a low-income status after tax and the rate of persons aged 65 years and older with low-income status (27.4%) is higher when compared to the province (19.6%).<sup>viii</sup>

With regards to health and mental health, data collected by Island Health shows that the Greater Nanaimo region has a higher rate of youth in care than the rest of the province but has seen improvements in recent years. With regards to drug use, the rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in Nanaimo almost tripled between 2019 and 2022.<sup>ix</sup>





## QUALITATIVE DATA

The following section offers a high-level summary of the themes identified during the community consultation process, including focus groups and questionnaires with community members and service providers, as well as a youth photography project. The consultation themes are organized into two categories: 1) strengths/resiliencies in Nanaimo and 2) challenges/concerns in Nanaimo.

### Strengths and Resiliencies in Nanaimo

Positive Areas/Locations that Youth and Families Enjoy:

- Cinemas
- Library
- Faith organizations (churches, mosques)
- Gyms
- Restaurants, coffee shops
- At home (theirs or friend's)
- Beach, waterfront
- Hiking trails (e.g. Mount Benson)
- School (for many Indigenous youth, this is the only place they go)
- Parks:
  - » Neck Point Park
  - » Oliver Woods Park
  - » Maffeo Sutton Park
  - » Piper's Lagoon Park
  - » Bowen Park
  - » Diver Lake Park

What Makes Youth and Families Feel Safe and Happy:

- The youth-serving organizations, services, and service providers in the community.
- Spending time/doing activities with friends, family, loved ones.
- Spending time outside, in nature (e.g. parks, playgrounds, trails, oceanfront).
- Doing personal care activities (e.g. baths, journaling, reading, working out, music).
- Doing cultural activities (e.g. art, museums, libraries).
- Doing sport activities (e.g. basketball, volleyball, etc.).
- Taking safety precautions:
  - » Carrying pepper spray.
  - » Traveling in groups, having a buddy system
  - » Not walking alone downtown or after dark.

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*“I found basketball and learned how to be part of a team.”*

*– Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy Participant*



## Challenges and Concerns in Nanaimo

- Organized crime (such as Hells Angels) recruits young people to sell drugs, etc.
- Peer pressure (e.g. wanting high end or designer clothes), wanting to fit in.
- Lack of parental supervision and accountability, bad adult influences.
- Lack of focus on arts and sports to divert children from bad activities.
- Lack of available low-barrier activities (peer-led).
- Poverty, living in families who struggle to make ends meet.
- Mental health, disability (e.g. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) and substance use.
- Lack of connection to something meaningful (connection to community, family, peers).
- Indigenous youth sometimes feel like they are not welcome anywhere.
- Lack of significant adults/role models in young people's lives other than parents (e.g. coach).
- Racism and discrimination with systems and agencies.
- Need more opportunities for hope, no matter the background or economic situation.
- Lack of resources to address barriers in children's lives.
- TV, media portraying gangs.
- Lack of education for youth.
- Isolation, boredom, loneliness – this was exacerbated by COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Exposure to violence in the home (important to break the cycle).
- Adverse childhood experiences.
- Lack of meaningful opportunities for pro-social engagements and accessible supports.
- Parents not working and not being actively involved in their child's life.
- Social determinants of health: income, housing, prenatal and early years, and food security
- Trauma (including inter-generational trauma).
- Having friends who are involved with gangs or criminal activity.
- Desire for power, fun, excitement, street cred, peer recognition.
- Lack of services for substance use and mental health among youth.
- School challenges: poor performance, bullying, drop-out.
- Experiencing insecure housing.
- Lack of trust within services, agencies, organizations.
- Lack of self-esteem, sense of belonging, sense of identity.

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*"The sad truth about happiness. Fences are an integral part of Nanaimo's downtown landscape. Knowing that these fences are there to prevent people experiencing homelessness from gathering and camping is the sad truth in attempting to make the City a happier and safer place."*

*- Nanaimo Photovoice Participant*





## Who Participated?



229 Total participants



28% were 24 years of age or younger



11 stakeholder interviews



4 focus groups



34% identified as First Nations



74 service provider respondents



## RISK FACTORS IN NANAIMO

Based on the analysis of data sets mentioned above, the steering committee identified several risk factors as significant for Nanaimo. These are presented below. Public Safety Canada has criteria for funding and the steering committee is responsible for developing and recommending focus areas that can reasonably reduce the identified risk factors and increase the corresponding protective factors within the time frame and within the resources and capacities available.

### LAND & WATERS LEVEL

- » Limited or lack of access/availability to healthy lands & waters, including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines

### SOCIETAL LEVEL

- » Large number of people living in poverty
- » Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression, such as racism
- » Lack of affordable, appropriate, and safe housing
- » Lack of adequate services (social, physical health, mental health, addictions, etc.)
- » High unemployment

### COMMUNITY LEVEL

- » Presence of organized crime & human trafficking
- » Repeated negative media attention
- » Availability of street level weapons, including firearms
- » Fear of social disorder (e.g. homelessness, public drug use)
- » Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational)
- » Large number of residents reporting feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood
- » Neighbourhoods that show neglect and lack of sense of ownership and pride by residents

### SCHOOL LEVEL

- » Too few teacher role models
- » Lack of attention to bullying (including cyberbullying)
- » Negative labelling by teachers
- » Access to street level drugs within the school
- » Low educational aspirations

### PEER LEVEL

- » Friends who are part of a gang
- » Friends with problematic substance use challenges
- » Interaction with peers in conflict with the law
- » Lack of meaningful peer connections

### FAMILY LEVEL

- » Intimate partner and family violence
- » Abuse and neglect of children
- » Criminalized or incarcerated parents
- » Lone parent household with limited economic means



## ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

In addition to the risk factors listed above, community members and local stakeholders identified several challenges related to the service system (not included above) that are also important to consider as part of the efforts to increase youth resilience and prevent gun and gang violence. They include:

- Struggles with rigid policies within programs and services.
- Lack of accountability for how resources are used within organizations and services (e.g. not providing equitable access to services).
- Organizations/sectors working in silos creating difficulties for youth in navigating services and systems.
- Lack of collaboration between services.
- Organizations lacking resources, staff, and funding.
  - » Several programs rely on one or two staff that champion programs, which is not sustainable.
- Lack of low-barrier, free services, and programs.
- Gaps in programming in certain geographic areas of Nanaimo (particularly Central and North Nanaimo).



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## FOCUS AREAS

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SAFE YOUTH GATHERING SPACES

YOUTH OUTREACH

CONNECTING YOUTH TO LAND AND WATER THROUGH SNAWAYLTH

YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAMS

ENHANCING EXISTING YOUTH PROGRAMS

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

“

*"The Vault Café is my favourite place downtown. I love coming here for a drink, meeting friends and listening to local artists. It is a place that makes me feel at home."*

*– Nanaimo Photovoice Participant*



## SAFE YOUTH GATHERING SPACES

Establish safe, free youth gathering spaces, within existing facilities, with the following elements:

- A flexible budget that includes transportation and access
- Community-level champions that are grassroots informed
- Hybrid approaches where some resource linkages are offered during the daytime (1 – 4 PM) and other youth programs carry into the evening (6 PM – 12 AM)
- Socio-emotional learning opportunities
- Partnerships between agencies and schools for wrap-around approaches
- The ability to meet youth where they are at (no agenda)
- Attractors such as sports, arts, culture, food, and leisure available on a drop-in basis
- Connection to local Indigenous culture
- Flexible age funding (11-25 years)
- Clearly identified recruitment and referral approaches with simple intake processes
- Other elements identified during implementation (ideally in collaboration with youth)

### Evidence & Risk Factors

At-risk youth tend to have difficulty accessing health and social services, mostly due to barriers like age-related restrictions, abstinence requirements, limited-service hours, etc. To overcome this, studies suggest removing "blanket age restrictions", "establishing youth-centric social housing, and supporting peer-driven, low-threshold services". Consultation participants also identified the need for a safe, free, accessible, low barrier youth space that fills gaps in services.

The risk factors this focus area seeks to address are:

- Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism
- Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational)
- Lack of meaningful peer connections and high level of interaction with negative peer groups (e.g. gang involved, problematic

- substance use, criminality)
- Intimate partner and family violence
- Erratic, overly lenient, or punitive parenting
- Abuse and neglect of children
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and lack of attention to trauma
- Low sense of belonging and self-esteem
- Problematic alcohol and drug use
- Isolation, boredom

### Implementation Considerations

Creating accessible spaces for youth also requires considerations such as physical accessibility (including those with disabilities), inclusivity (the space is welcoming for all youth regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.), and safety (clear guidelines and policies to address safety concerns or incidents).





## YOUTH OUTREACH

Expand street outreach and related programs, along with service hours and locations, to build relationships with youth at risk and to meet a wide range of their needs such as food, harm reduction, engagement in recreation, access to counselling, etc.

### Evidence & Risk Factors

Outreach programs that aim to offer supports and services (e.g. mentorship, skill-building, homework help, harm reduction, recreational activities, etc.) to at-risk youth have been proven to effectively prevent crime and increase youth resilience. For example, the United Kingdom's Youth Inclusion Program (YIP), provided outreach services to at-risk youth aged 13 to 16 years in several neighbourhoods and aimed to make them feel liked, valuable, and included within their community. Program evaluations found a 65% reduction in youth arrests, 27% reduction in youth removed from schools, and a 15% reduction in overall crime in the selected neighbourhoods.<sup>xi</sup>

The risk factors this focus area seeks to address are:

- Fear of social disorder (e.g. homelessness, public drug use)
- High desire for status, recognition, and protection
- Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational)
- Lack of meaningful peer connections and high level of interaction with negative peer groups (e.g. gang involved, problematic substance use, criminality)
- Low sense of belonging and self-esteem
- Problematic alcohol and drug use

### Implementation Considerations

Data from the assessment process suggests certain locations/neighbourhoods in Nanaimo may be "priority areas" or "high risk areas" and therefore should be the focus of youth outreach programs. While this approach can help direct the Strategy's limited resources to areas facing the most challenges, targeted neighbourhood social policies/approaches have some limitations that should be considered.<sup>xii</sup>

Specifically, neighbourhood-based programs may have limited reach since they only serve residents in a specific area. There is also a risk of stigmatizing certain neighbourhoods and their residents or implementing programs that do not meet the needs and realities of certain neighbourhoods. Some community members may resist the implementation of neighbourhood-based initiatives, particularly if they feel their needs or interests are not being adequately met or if they fear the program will negatively impact their safety.

If a neighbourhood-based framework is adopted for the implementation of youth outreach initiatives in Nanaimo, it is important to engage community members and stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation process. It is also important to be transparent about the goals and objectives of the program, and actively involve residents in decision-making and program evaluation.





## CONNECTING YOUTH TO LAND AND WATER THROUGH SNAWAYLTH

Enhance existing and/or create new opportunities to connect youth to the land and water through Snawaylth (teachings) to strengthen their mental, emotional, spiritual and cultural resilience.

### Evidence & Risk Factors

During community engagement, many Snuneymuxw and other youth identified being on the land or water as important to their happiness and wellness. Youth and those working with them also identified the importance of cultural belonging, connections with trusted adults in guiding / mentoring roles and having opportunities to give back.

Providing youth opportunities to reconnect to land, language and cultural practices by following a Snuneymuxw way of being through Snawaylth (teachings) and the Longhouse Learning and Healing Framework will help build strong positive cultural identity, connection, belonging and a sense of responsibility. These factors are essential for youth to be resilient and resist the challenges and stresses that draw them into gang involvement, substance use, crime, and violence.

Our Snawaylth are our Teachings – they govern and guide all aspects of our lives. Snawaylth are our laws, values, beliefs, spiritual guidance, and principles for action. They are comprehensive in that no aspect of our lives, and the actions and choices we make, can be understood apart from our Snawaylth.

At the heart of our Snawaylth is a worldview that sees the interconnected relationship between all living things in creation. Seeing this interconnectedness teaches us that all things must be honoured and respected, for they all have a spirit and purpose. This guides us in our daily lives, and in the decisions we make as a community. For example, from our worldview to speak of the “impact” of a decision, means to view the impacts holistically through a lens that recognizes the living spirit within all things, and how everything is connected and relates to one another.

The risk factors this focus area seeks to address are:

- Limited or lack of access/availability to healthy lands & waters, including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and lack of attention to trauma
- Isolation, boredom
- Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational)
- Low sense of belonging and self-esteem
- Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism
- Too few teacher role models

### Implementation Considerations

It is important that projects that connect youth to land/water, and teachings be developed, led, and implemented by Snuneymuxw First Nation (and as appropriate, partner organizations may also be involved). This allows the prioritization of cultural safety and respect for a Snuneymuxw way of being, including learning and practicing cultural protocols, language, and respectful ways of being on land and water.

Snuneymuxw Knowledge Keepers can provide valuable insights into the needs of youth and suggest ways to engage them in ways that support healing, build trust, and positive youth development.

It is recognized that potential projects under this focus area may interconnect and include several other focus areas such as youth mentoring, outreach, and safe gathering spaces. Regular evaluation and monitoring of projects chosen in this focus area are critical to ensure outcomes for youth are positive, culturally responsive and succeed in building youth resilience and resistance to involvement in gangs, violence and other related harmful behaviours. Connecting youth to land, and water through Snawaylth can effectively promote intergenerational healing, cultural revitalization, and positive youth development.





## YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAMS

Connect youth, especially youth at risk, with diverse role models and significant/caring adults (e.g. tutors, trades or vocational role models, mentors, teachers, coaches, etc.).

### Evidence & Risk Factors

Evidence shows that youth mentoring programs (i.e. programs that connect them to significant/caring adults) can divert them from crime. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters pairs children/youth, aged 6 to 18 years and living with a single parent, with an adult mentor and has resulted in a “statistically significant reduction in initiating drug and alcohol use and antisocial behaviour among mentored youth”.<sup>xiii</sup> Participants have also experienced improved relationships with parents and better school performance. One study found that for every dollar spent on mentoring programs, communities could expect more than four dollars in net benefits.<sup>xiv</sup>

During the consultations in Nanaimo, most service providers mentioned the need for programs that connect youth to role models (including those working in the trades), coaches, teachers, Elders, and other caring adults. This is consistent with research around promising practices to build youth resilience and prevent gang involvement.

The risk factors this focus area seeks to address are:

- Abuse and neglect of children
- Erratic, overly lenient, or punitive parenting
- High desire for status, recognition, and protection
- Low educational aspirations
- Low sense of belonging and self-esteem
- Too few teacher role models

### Implementation Considerations

Mentoring programs that connect youth with significant/caring adults should be implemented in Nanaimo by adapting existing, evidence-based programs to the local context. This allows the community to implement effective elements in a way that best suits its needs and aligns with the Strategy's budget.<sup>xv</sup> Modifications should remain true to the evidence to ensure effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

When developing youth mentorship programs, it is important to define the program's goals, objectives, and the expected outcomes for mentors and mentees. To ensure mentors have the skills, knowledge, and experience to effectively support youth, various factors (e.g. age, gender, and cultural background) should be considered. A matching process that considers factors like shared interests, personality, and compatibility is key to the success of these programs. As well, providing comprehensive training (e.g. communication, youth development, cultural competence) to help mentors develop the skills and knowledge to effectively support youth is essential. Ongoing support and guidance for mentors helps ensure they feel equipped to effectively support their mentees. Regular program monitoring and evaluation is also necessary to ensure it is meeting its goals and objectives, and adjustments can be made as needed.



5. To learn more about local adaptations of crime prevention programs, refer to the following toolkit: <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2017-s019/index-en.aspx>.



## ENHANCING EXISTING YOUTH PROGRAMS

Improve existing programs by adding new components that fill gaps and build protective factors for children and youth at-risk, including:

- Sports and recreation programs that build team identity.
- Opportunities to connect youth to the land.
- Educational, health, and wellness programming.
- Youth mentorship.
- Life skills and socio-emotional learning (e.g. conflict resolution, family violence prevention, prevention of early onset alcohol and drug use).
- Inclusion of family members of youth in provision of food, and other social services.
- Food security measures, including gardening, to connect with the land and Indigenous culture.
- Opportunities for youth engagement to foster a sense of belonging, value, and connectedness within the community (e.g. volunteering, mentoring, connecting peers to services).

### Evidence & Risk Factors

The Building Safer Communities Fund does not permit the provision of resources to existing programs, but it does allow the enhancement of those that can decrease local risk factors identified as needing attention. As such, the steering committee suggested several changes to existing programs. Further, programs that build life skills, socio-emotional learning, healthy conflict resolution, and connections with mentors are deemed effective prevention approaches.<sup>xvi</sup>

The risk factors this focus area seeks to address are:

- Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism
- Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational)
- Too few teacher role models
- Low educational aspirations
- Lack of meaningful peer connections and high level of interaction with negative peer groups (e.g. gang involved, problematic substance use, criminality)
- Intimate partner and family violence
- Erratic, overly lenient, or punitive parenting
- Abuse and neglect of children

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and lack of attention to trauma
- Low sense of belonging and self-esteem
- Problematic alcohol and drug use
- Isolation, boredom

### Implementation Considerations

It is important to ensure the allocation of (limited) funding is guided by evidence (e.g. previous evaluations) and community feedback. When enhancing existing programs/services, peer-led approaches that offer employment opportunities (rather than volunteer or honoraria-based) should be prioritized. When working with Indigenous organizations, desired outcomes and criteria should be clearly communicated without dictating how to achieve them. Lastly, Nanaimo could consider implementing a system to monitor the impact of new program components.





## MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

Build relationships with media and develop key, positive messaging to highlight successful programs and initiatives that counter repeated negative media attention that perpetuates discrimination and stigmatization. Existing communication and marketing resources can be leveraged within the community and its organizations to share these key messages.

### Evidence & Risk Factors

The media (newspapers, radio, social media, Internet, television, etc.) is a key source of information on crime and safety for a significant portion of the population. While no causal link has been demonstrated between media reporting and public perception of community safety, some studies have found that media on crime and social disorder can generate fear of crime generally and of and within certain populations (e.g. youth, newcomers) specifically.<sup>xvii</sup>

When a community receives repeated negative media attention highlighting instances of crime, violence, and social challenges, public perceptions of safety and well-being are negatively impacted. This perception can result in people avoiding certain areas, making them vulnerable to neglect. During the consultation process in Nanaimo, several residents (including youth) indicated that despite having never experienced harm themselves, they feel unsafe in certain locations often mentioned in the news. The field study mentioned in Scope Two provides further important data in this regard and is also available as a standalone document.

While repeated negative media attention can lead to fear of social disorder, impact residents' sense of safety, and increase fear of certain locations/areas in the community, research suggests that media have the potential to also contribute to prevention and community safety by sharing positive messages and highlighting successful initiatives in the community.<sup>xviii</sup> These messages can also be picked up by social media and repeated in more informal publications like community and organizational newsletters.

The risk factors this focus area seeks to address are:

- Fear of social disorder (e.g. homelessness, public drug use)
- Large number of residents reporting feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood
- Neighbourhoods that show neglect and lack of sense of ownership and pride by residents
- Repeated negative media attention
- Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism

### Implementation Considerations

It will be important to implement these activities in a way that stays true to the local context and challenges (i.e. not discounting concerns highlighted by residents), while also including positive stories and successes in communication materials. Furthermore, it is important that positive messaging does not set unrealistic expectations and is part of a broader communication strategy to avoid having only limited impact.

Showcasing community-driven programs and events that work to address discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression can be used as a communication tool to educate the general community. An inventory and assessment of community events can be collected and any gaps identified can be included in communication planning.

Finally, changes in attitude towards a place or population are not accomplished quickly and there are setbacks in rolling out a communication campaign. The more the Youth Resilience Strategy can become seen as a distinct effort with a name (brand), look, and associated activities, the more likely that it will over time become embraced by Partners, key stakeholders and the community.

## STEERING COMMITTEE

The Strategy relies heavily on the capacity to engage overall community and its key partners to commit to addressing risk factors for youth upstream while taking action here and now. A steering committee was formed to support the development and implementation of the Strategy. The steering committee has met monthly since January 2023 and will continue to meet regularly over the next three years. The steering committee fulfills the following roles:



The steering committee is a multi-disciplinary body comprised of representatives from the following sectors:

- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- City of Nanaimo
- Urban Indigenous Community
- Policing
- Indigenous Welfare
- Child Welfare
- General Health Care
- Justice
- Community Policing
- Business
- Youth
- Youth Services
- Youth Advocates
- Youth Shelter Services
- Youth Substance Use / Addiction
- Youth Employment
- Education
- People with Living / Lived experience



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## NEXT STEPS

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### STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR THE NANAIMO YOUTH RESILIENCE STRATEGY

The Strategy Implementation Guide provides a step-by-step guide on how the steering committee, along with support from City staff, can best implement the Strategy. The guide also provides evaluation and sustainability frameworks on how to evaluate and monitor the impact of the Strategy, and how to maintain the momentum of the Strategy after the funding from Public Safety Canada has ended.

City staff are working with the steering committee to identify projects that address the focus areas identified in the Strategy. Funding received from the BSCF will provide financial support to these projects for the next 3 years. Development and implementation of projects is targeted to begin in the Summer of 2023.

While funding from Public Safety Canada is a crucial first step in these developments, the Strategy speaks more broadly to the opportunities to address root conditions and risk factors and enhance protective factors for all children and youth in Nanaimo.





