

**Youth Community Asset Mapping Initiative Report**  
***Environmental Youth Alliance***

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## ■ Introduction

Through community consultation and years of experience as programmers, we see a shift from relying on external leaders of communities to the increasing need to engage communities and individuals to meaningfully contribute to all Determinants of Health. Communities have come to embrace the asset-based and capacity-focused approach as opposed to needs-based and barrier-focused approaches. The more effective approach to community development is to “locate all of the available local assets, to begin connecting them with one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes.”<sup>1</sup> We recognize the potential of mapping as an effective tool to conduct asset-based research, engage community, catalyze social change, and produce positive outcomes in population health promotion.

### **What is Community Asset Mapping?**

Community Asset Mapping (CAM) is a creative and participatory tool used to build capacity and engage youth with their communities. It begins with acknowledging existing community resources—instead of deficits. CAM involves a variety of popular education techniques to youth to identify their strengths,, give them a space to articulate their voices, and empower them to create change.

CAM is also about community building. By engaging youth in dialogue about issues affecting the places they live or groups they belong to, youth begin developing relationships with the people and organizations within their communities. CAM enables youth to identify local community resources (green spaces, programs, safe places) and solutions to community needs. Youth not only gain a better understanding of themselves, but also their neighbourhoods. It is this collaborative process that makes mapping as much about the process as it is about the produce. .

The community maps that are created are just as exciting and valuable as how they are made. This very visual, colorful, and comprehensive medium for presenting information has made community mapping a great tool for doing evaluations, research, policy work, community organizational development, and community art projects.

### **What is the Community Asset Mapping Initiative?**

The Youth Community Asset Mapping initiative (formerly known as “Rediscovering Vancouver, Rediscovering Ourselves”) arose following consultations with youth through the Vancouver Windows of Opportunity (1998 – 2001), a community consultation with inputs from youth, parents, and service providers, and through a United Way funded youth community consultation in 2000. These processes indicated that a new outreach mechanism was needed to engage a broad range of youth and that youth desperately wanted more involvement opportunities available to them in their communities.

To address this need, the Self Help Resource Association and the Environmental Youth Alliance worked in partnership to organize the Youth Community Asset Mapping Initiative (YCAM). After receiving core funding from Centre of Excellence for Youth

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<sup>1</sup> Mcknight, John L. and Kretzmann, John P. “Building Communities From the Inside Out: a path toward finding and mobilizing a community’s assets” Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993. P.5-P.6

Engagement, Vancouver Foundation, and United Way of Lower Mainland, and guided by a Steering Committee and supervisors from both organizations, YCAM began to use the tool of community mapping to increase the capacity of the youth community and began, following their mandate to catalyze the involvement of youth in meaningful social change activities and to connect youth to existing supports and services in their communities.

In this report, we will highlight 5 of the 8 projects that we have been supporting for the past year, discuss the health outcomes of the projects, and also explore possible directions and potentials for Community Asset Mapping as a Population Health Promotion tool.

## ■ Participatory Action Research and Knowledge

Community asset mapping is a participatory action research and knowledge tool for community development. With funding support from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, we are in the process of developing a manual that outlines models for community capacity building that have emerged from our projects, with the goal of sharing this knowledge with a broader audience. The following is some of the information and guidance that will appear in this manual.

In 2001, the Advisory Committee of YCAM established guiding principles that have evolved into values and characteristics that are embodied in each of the projects that we support truly believe in.

### ***Guiding Principles***

#### **1. Youth Driven**

empowerment, equal/equitable, honouring ability voice

#### **2. Diversity**

honouring diversity in communities, multiple learning styles, popular education, multi-barriered, culturally etc, retaining identity, integration verses separation, respect encouragement of community

#### **3. Striving for Positive Social Change**

advocacy, community awareness, nurturing, healthy community

#### **4. Sustainable**

support, skill development, inspiration, mutual support, transferable, sustainable, adaptability of tool

#### **5. Local and/or Community Driven**

localization, expand needs of community

#### **6. Identifying and Generating Relationships**

Provide resources, linkages, bringing in 'outside community, uncovers relationships, supports projects, outreach

#### **7. Multi-spective**

flexibility, creative, openness, perspective, creating, non-positivistic, not-linear,

### ***Mapping as Research***

Community asset mapping allows participants to have control over the values, knowledge and experiences represented in each of the outputs created. The rich qualitative research that is created enables opportunities for the identification of problems, analysis and solutions. It also provides opportunities to identify asset-based data such as community resources or best practices.

### ***Mapping as Knowledge***

The different kinds of mapping tools allow various knowledge to be discovered. The relationships between individuals, community groups, associations, local institutions, governments and the environment, is discovered through the mapping process.

### ***Mapping as Action***

Mapping results in research leading to change while allowing youth to express what the future could look like and find ways to make that happen. Through the knowledge and research of mapping, youth are given a powerful communication tool that represents their collective understandings and has the potential to result in the implementation of future change.

## ■ Projects

### ***Youth Friendly Health Services (Youth Engine Project)***



In 1998, Windows of Opportunity, a coalition of community members, service providers and local government conducted a series of youth consultations throughout Vancouver. One of their findings from this process was the conclusion that young people rarely access the formal health services in their communities. What this consultation process did not address was why not - a question with potentially huge policy relevance that could only be answered by youth themselves.

Through partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, Environmental Youth Alliance at the same time was looking at the potential of participatory action research as a means to encourage youth to recognize the value of their knowledge and experiences, and empower youth to take action and make social change. Initiated in May 2002, the EYA,

Self-Help Resource Association, YouthNet Vancouver, and Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement joined forces to create the Youth-Friendly Health Services project. The central question that this research project asked was “what makes a youth-friendly health service?”

In order to keep the project, its benefit and results within the control of the youth community, the project was structured according to a participatory model. A group of youth facilitators were trained in conducting research workshops and the process of data coding. We piloted our research workshop<sup>2</sup> with 5 community youth groups (Gab Youth Services for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning youth, Little Mountain Neighbourhood House, Killarney Neighbourhood House, Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS, and Leave Out Violence). In each workshop, youth were given markers and flipchart papers to write down and/or draw about their thoughts on “what does a healthy youth look like?” “What are the barriers to becoming a healthy youth?” “What are the resources to support a healthy youth?” Finally, they also were given the opportunity to map out their experiences and their thoughts on what a “youth-friendly” health service is. Subsequently, the youth were invited back to a coding session where the youth collated and coded the data, and from this the data was further formatted into a survey of Youth Friendliness Indicators that have provided the basis for our next step – the action phase of the project.



<sup>2</sup> see attached workshop outline (Appendix B).

In November 2002, this project received funding from United Way of Lower Mainland, the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, and Human Resource Department of Canada that allows it to take the next step: Evaluating Health Services and Engaging in Health Services Policy Development, and this phase of the project will present its final product at the end of May 2003. We have engaged youth who have participated in the last project to visit 4 health clinics and conduct anonymous evaluations based on the indicators developed in the first phase, and document their experiences through creative tools such as creative writing, video making, or photography. The results of the evaluation will facilitate a dialogue between youth and the decision makers on making changes at each specific clinic.



The opportunity for youth to engage in policy development is a key step in affecting change, and we are creating the model of engagement as we conduct our project. Currently, We are in the process of establishing relationships and partnerships with specific clinics, because we believe that to effectively affect change, decision makers and policy makers must be integral project partners of the project even before evaluations begin. We would like to establish this partnership by facilitating discussions between the decision makers and youth in developing the protocols and methodology for evaluations. In creating this partnership, we have to at the same time recognize the responsibilities the decision makers have to other bodies, and understand that the decision making process within the health authorities. This will help us to create an effective model to engage in health policy development.

An example of how this process will affect larger policy processes is through CAM's relationship with the City of Vancouver. In a recent meeting, the director of Social Planning for the City of Vancouver requested that we present the health services mapping information to a multi-stakeholder body of different levels of government, who are in the process of redesigning the provincial health care delivery system. One of the models they are looking at is a "one-stop" health clinics. The work done by the youth and the YCAM team on health services will provide invaluable information on how these clinics might be structured. This process will be ongoing for the next year or more, but the information generated from this research will be extremely important in assisting policy makers and front line workers in the transition to this new model.

YCAM has a dream and this is a pilot project to help us reach that dream. We want to establish the model for youth engagement in health policy development through this pilot project, and conduct a comprehensive look at the youth friendliness of health services in Vancouver. This comprehensive project will include strengthening the relationships between service providers to better provide services for youth, and closing the gap of perceptions between the service providers and the youth communities.

### ***Collingwood Renfrew Youth Mapping Educators***

When the YCAM team rolled out the plan to support local organizations and groups to conduct mappings around youth issues, a group of youth from the neighbourhood houses of the two areas lead by the youth workers, Bill Hamilton and Mike Mclenaghan, came onboard. At the same time, the City of Vancouver Planning Department started



their community consultation process on regional planning (Community Visions) in the areas of Collingwood and Renfrew, and they were looking for an effective tool to engage youth in the consultation process. The collaboration with the Planning Department was then established through the facilitation of the Civic Youth Strategy of the Social Planning Department.

Building relationships with all of the players and establishing a common vision of the project had taken place over a period of 6 months before we began engaging youth in planning the specific steps of the project. Once a group of youth was involved, YCAM devoted a lot of time and energy into building the group process and capacity, and the most rewarding feedback was the excitement among the youth wanting to use mapping. They expressed their wishes to first explore and evaluate their neighbourhoods, and then presenting the results of their work to be inputted to the process of affecting policy development.

In June 2003, a core group of 13 youth and 11 youth workers and community developers narrowed down the first domain to start their mapping project – parks, and planned their next steps. A mapping workshop was specifically designed for mapping domains of the physical environment, and the core group of youth was subsequently trained. This core group of youth through training was able to facilitate 6 workshops with other youth in the community, and the results of the workshops were then compiled into 6 maps for 5 park maps and 1 ideal park map.



With support from the United Way of Lower Mainland, this group of youth is presenting the results of their park mapping to the Parks Board of Vancouver and engaging in discussions with the community on how to improve the park spaces for children and youth of the community. For CRYME, parks map is the first step, and the next domains will be recreations, transportations, schools...etc. The broad vision of that they would like to achieve is to create a Child and Youth Friendly Neighbourhood in the Collingwood and Renfrew areas.



### **UNEP Children's Conference**

During the 2002 International Children's Conference on the Environment hosted by United Nations Environment Program in Victoria, BC, 491 children, aged 10-12 years, from 91 countries addressed major environmental questions through mapping.

YCAM staff designed a series of mapping activities and workshops that span 5 days with an elected junior board to assist in finishing the final products. The maps they created, which focused on water, climate change, healthy communities, healthy children, and resource conservation, were then coded and analyzed by the children. The results of this process were a list of environmental and social challenges of which two of the children presented to leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Their efforts resulted in direct global policy change, as evident in a commitment made by the world leaders in the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, to "assume a collective responsibility to advance...sustainable development."<sup>3</sup>



EYA and the Institute for Children Rights and Development at the University of Victoria to examine how children view environmental change, and furthermore look at how international children see ecological and social responsibility. The results of this research will both advance the field of research with children and also have practical relevance for environmental programs.

The maps created by the children are also being used as a rich source of data by researchers at



### **Teen Pregnancy Issues in the Community Health Area 2**

The Community Health Area 2 (CHA 2) in the Vancouver Regional Health Board has statistically very high rates of teen pregnancy compared to the rest of British Columbia.<sup>4</sup> Service providers are very concerned about the available support, education and prevention resources in this area. Diane McLeod, a CHA youth nurse, came to us and expressed interest to use mapping to engage the youth and the service providers to look at this particular issue.

<sup>3</sup> Point 4 and 5 of Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development from the World Summit Sustainable Development.

<sup>4</sup> P.7 Vancouver/Richmond Health Board (2001). *Health & Service Plan Appendices*.  
[http://www.vcn.bc.ca/download/VRHB\\_Health\\_Plans/Health&ServicePlan/HSP2001-02~2003-04-Appendices.pdf](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/download/VRHB_Health_Plans/Health&ServicePlan/HSP2001-02~2003-04-Appendices.pdf)

Although Diane's community development background has been limited, her passion has given her the drive to put together an amazing project. A survey of the youth community in CHA 2 was conducted as a preliminary step in determining whether or not the youth in CHA 2 saw the high teen pregnancy rates as problematic and what services the youth could identify in relation to teen pregnancy. 238 responses were received. In partnership with the YCAM team, Diane and 2 of her student nurses developed a framework where we would engage both the service providers and the youth in this issue. More than 40 service providers came out to the first workshop hosted by the YCAM team, where the sense of partnership and collaboration was developed. In the workshop, they specifically mapped out the services that each agency provides and they talked about how they can work together better. Subsequently, Diane brought together a team of both sexually active and pregnant teens in CHA 2, and used mapping to talk about various issues. The youth-driven workshop was structured with flexibility where youth were given the opportunity to guide the discussions. They first map out the services available for pregnant teens in Vancouver, but then it became a deeper discussion on what services were needed to provide support for teen mothers. Furthermore, they also identify the importance of a one-stop health center, and they mapped out a Youth Health House, where youth are able to receive care without running around to appointments. This information will be invaluable to the City and other levels of government in their planning for the upcoming new health service delivery models.

The maps and the qualitative outcomes on services available and services needed will be brought back to the team of service providers and distributed to the communities and service providers. The report will also be forwarded to key policy makers in the city and other levels of government. This will definitely catalyze an on-going discussion between the service providers, youth and policy makers on the needs and the quality of care in that area for pregnant teens.

### ***Mapping Peer Support Model***

The Kinex youth initiative of the Self Help Resource Association has always been a key partner in the YCAM initiative. Kinex's mandate is to focus on promoting youth mental health and well-being across Vancouver. They are committed to developing new models of peer support with community partners and creating worthwhile opportunities for youth engagement within their communities.

As part of education awareness and research tool, Kinex proposed a project to map out the different forms of peer support that youth subscribe to in the community. Through a series of activities in a workshop, youth are provided with the opportunity to give input on "who they turn to for support and help," and learn about the formal peer support services available in Vancouver.

Currently 4 workshops have been given and the feedback has been tremendously positive. We recognize that doctors or counselors aren't always accessed for physical and emotional help, and it is important to legitimize the other forces out there helping youth (such as families, friends, sports teams, and other role models...etc.).

## ■ Outcomes

When the YCAM initiative began, the goal was to provide a new approach to connect youth to services and offer them meaningful opportunities for involvement in their communities. However, community asset mapping provides much more.. The community asset mapping process builds relationships that catalyse community actions. All stakeholders are able to come together and coordinate their efforts towards a common goal. Youth populations, service providers, and policy makers can collaborate to improve their communities.

The community asset mapping model that we have developed, has become a true asset-based community development tool. It allows the communities that have been labeled by outside researchers as 'barriered populations' to identify their assets, resources and allies, and further act upon building the communities from within.

The potential of mapping as a tool for population health promotions model is infinite. It provides a comfortable fit with the *2000 Ottawa Charter for Action to Achieve Health*, and the project outcomes that have already been demonstrated directly fall within the categories addressing Determinants of Health.

The **Youth Friendly Health Services project** looks at specifically health services with a goal to improve the accessibility of health services for youth. It is about engaging youth in discovering their own needs for being healthy and taking actions to share those needs with front-line health workers, health services management, and health policy makers. This project provides youth the opportunity to explore their communities and create awareness in the youth community. The engagement of youth also allows youth to take ownerships of the health services and their communities.

The **Collingwood Renfrew Youth Mapping Educators (CRYME)** project specifically looks at the relationship between environment and youth health. The community has a long history of youth involvement, and youth are interested in ensuring that the environments they live in (houses, parks, schools, and transportation) meet their needs adequately. This project became a dynamic policy engagement piece when all the key players and youth worked together to design a healthier youth community.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, there has been increased awareness of youth's neighbourhoods, and a greater sense of ownership of the physical environment.

Although we have not yet seen the policy engagement pieces come to a final stage, the **UNEP Children's Conference** provided evidence that youth engagement and policy development can in fact work hand in hand at a global level. The fact that children's voices were included in the WSSD Declaration provides an indication of the impact that children can have on the world.

The goal of the **Community Health Area 2 (CHA 2) teen pregnancy project** was to address personal health issues holistically and as a community. The project focused on the positive assets of the community. Not only have the youth had the opportunity to learn about issues affecting their lives, but they have also begun to recognize what they can do as a community to address particular health issues.

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<sup>5</sup> We have based much of our research on UNESCO's Growing Up in the Cities Research project.

**kinex** found that peer support is still quite a foreign concept for a lot of youth, and the different forms of peer support are yet to be legitimized to have health impact on the youth. So far, the youth who are involved in this project have given amazing feedbacks on what they have learned about building different forms of support network. This form of knowledge engagement (both learning and contributing) will likely build towards their health resiliency.

All of the projects follow the guiding principles of empowering diverse groups of youth in working with other key players to develop sustainable actions for positive social change. Our projects focus primarily in the areas of low to middle income communities to provide more opportunities for community driven actions for those that need it the most. We also believe that through the process of engagement, mutual learning can occur between all parts of the community.

## ■ Other projects and activities

In addition to supporting different projects in the community, we have also been involved in different policy development work, engaging in conversations with different service providers, and community advisory work.

We were invited to speak to the medical and dental students of the University of British Columbia around the issues of youth mental health and access to health from a youth perspective. This opportunity allows us to make an impact on the future service providers. We have also contributed in a national consultation called Voluntary Organizations Involved in Collaborative Engagement in health policy round table. This consultation enabled us to learn about the work that the other organizations in the community are working on in advocating for community participation in policy development.

### ***Encouraging Youth Emotions Support Project (EYES)***

One of the research projects that we have proposed is the EYES project. Over the years, the kinex youth team has worked with thousands of youth from many different backgrounds. Through our work with youth groups and organizations across the city, it became apparent to us and our community partners that youths in different communities approached peer support very differently, and that it is important to look at specific models for specific populations to improve service delivery in those communities.

EYES was initiated to meet the needs identified by our community partners around developing specific models of delivering peer support for youths accessing their services. Through EYES, kinex brought together a broad range of organizations who function as highly specialized support centers for youth from different organizations. The partners are:

1. Save the Children: Youth who have experienced sexual exploitation
2. Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks: Youth in and/or from care
3. BC Association for Community Living: Youth with developmental disabilities
4. SUCCESS: Newcomer Chinese youth from Mainland China and Canadian born Chinese
5. Gab Youth Services: Young women identifying as bisexual, lesbian, or questioning
6. Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS: Young Asian men identify as queer, gay, bisexual, or questioning.

This is an amazing model of research identifying best practices from an asset-based approach. Pilot programs were developed based on Kinex's health promotion framework includes: skills building, peer support, and youth engagement (meaningful community involvement and community connectedness) by each project partner.

The project has been successful in enabling organizations to research and develop population specific youth peer support models. In doing so, it has had a profound impact on the youth participations by improving self-esteem, creating a sense of belonging, developing important social skills and strengthening their connections with their community. These outcomes also corresponded to the research done in the community: "This increased their capacity to make healthy decisions about their lives and strengthens their sense of identity and belonging. These factors, in turn, make them less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours that can cause harm to themselves or others."

(McCreay, 1996) As well, it was a unique opportunity for organizations to network, share resources and experiences with each other. Finally the EYES project model itself has proven to be a very successful structure in which many different facets of one issue can be explored collaboratively by organizations with expertise in specific populations.

## ■ Recommendations and Future Directions

With YCAM's success in supporting other organizations in Vancouver doing asset based community development, we want to further legitimize youth voices in the mapping projects by conducting participatory action research using mapping as a tool. The work that we have done so far should be followed up with longitudinal studies examining the behaviour changes resulting from this grass-root participatory initiative on a larger scale in Vancouver. We passionately believe that mapping is a tool that can effectively engage youth and mobilize the community to strive towards positive social change, and we want to prove it. This tool can help youth explore different issues that they are passionate about and lead into positive actions such as creating awareness, building community connections, and influencing personal and community behavioural changes.

*Youth Friendly Health Services* was an exciting pilot project, and we want to expand this project to include all key players in examining the health services in the community. With the use innovative, youth-led, adult-supported, community based programming, we can engage youth to gather data and enact service delivery improvements that contributes to policy changes. The goal is to improve the overall accessibility and quality of youth health services in Vancouver. The broader objectives of this more comprehensive project includes:

- (1) Improve the awareness, amongst youth and youth service providers, of the availability of current youth services and supports
- (2) Improve the youth friendliness of existing youth health services
- (3) Work in partnership with youth and youth service providers to identify gaps in services and work towards filling those gaps
- (4) Improve the collaborations and partnerships between service providers
- (5) Support the ongoing engagement of youth in improving health services in Vancouver through local, neighbourhood based community programming

Additionally, the diversity of the community should be reflected in this project where different populations of youth (cultural backgrounds, economic status, and sexual orientation) will also develop their own indicators of youth friendliness and engage in discussions on improving the quality of care for their communities. Service providers and front line workers who work in specific issues will have the opportunity map out their collaboration and partnership strategies together. We are currently working with YouthNet Ottawa to implement this exciting model in Ontario.

Youth engagement is a very grass-roots concept, and often the outcomes are not always measurable. It is often difficult for us to evaluate the outcomes of short-term projects, because they include qualitative opinions, personal behavioural changes, social/community behavioural changes, that often times require long term evaluation. However, we know that we are making an impact because we see the attitudes of the youth transform within the short time frame of the project. We want to continue support different organizations to engage the youth communities in exploring and mapping out different issues that youth are passionate about. In time, youth will have the opportunity to build skills to be meaningfully involved in the communities, increase resiliency, and increase their capacity in making healthy and informed choices.

# APPENDICES