

2021

PROGRAM REPORT

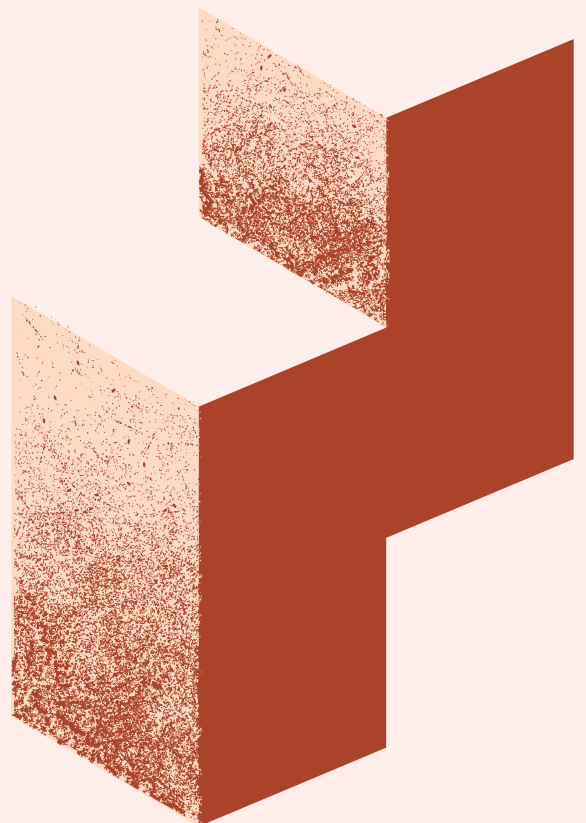


SCHOOL  
JUSTICE  
LAB

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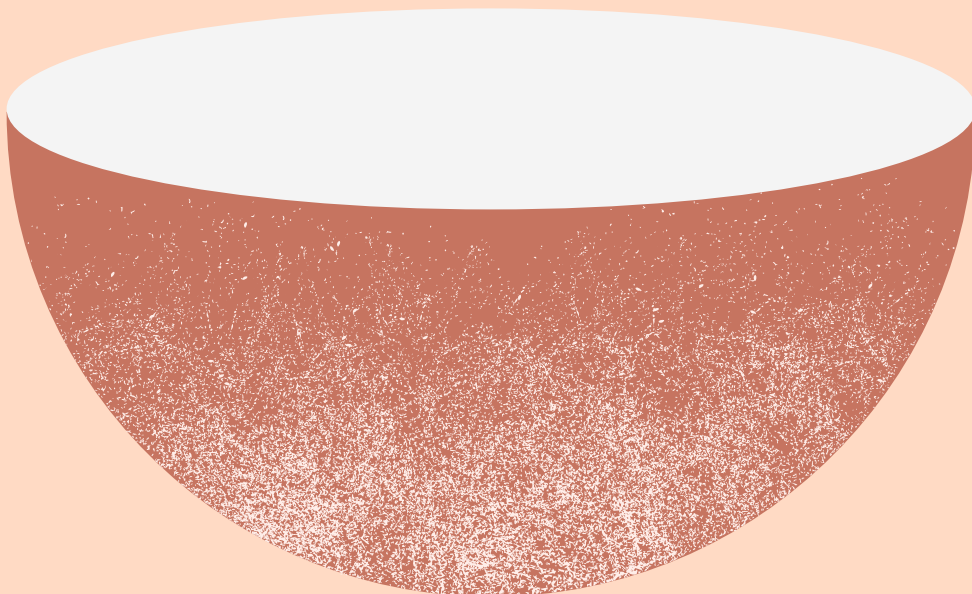
**SCHOOL  
JUSTICE  
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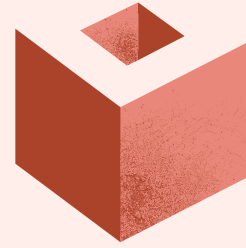
# Background & Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the inaugural Youth Justice Lab was born in response to the many unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcomed fifteen youth, six guest speakers, and nine mentors to a transformative six weeks together. Over that period, we dove deep into issues of social and Restorative Justice (RJ), including the Indigenous Roots of RJ, decolonization, racial struggles, multi-generational activism, art as a vehicle for change, and a lot more. The success of this pilot program inspired us to reconnect with youth to talk about justice, but this time, in school.

In February of 2021, we launched the pilot School Justice Lab! We dove into this ten-week in-class program with three partners: Queensbury Elementary, Sutherland Secondary, and Mountainside Secondary. In total, we reached 67 students and 5 staff through our weekly workshops. NSRJ staff and guest speakers collaborated to explore themes such as Restorative Justice; Colonial & Decolonial values; Lessons Learned Inside; Colonialism, Migration, & Global injustices; Displacement and Disability; and Blackness in Canada. We connected with teachers to co-create a program that was relevant to each class and their unique needs. In this report, you will find a brief overview of what we learned in this process, feedback from our partners and students, and our vision for the future of the Lab.



## Speakers & Discussion Circles



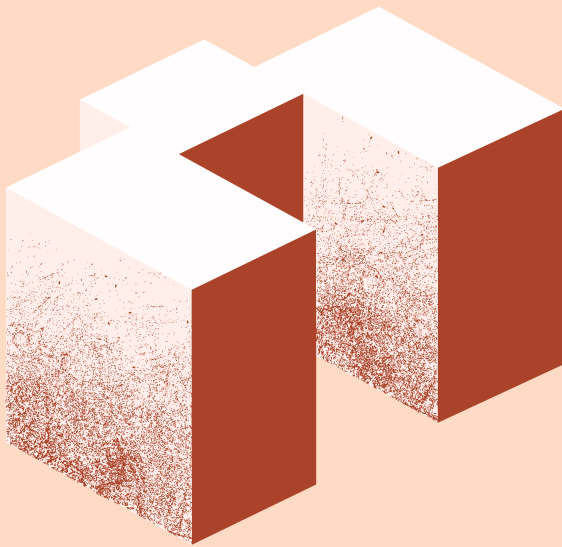
We owe a huge thanks to Zofia Switkowski, Warren Hooley, Heather McCain, Earl Waskewitch, Nada al Masry, Mohammed Zaqout, Nungo Magdalene, Nic Wayara, and Orene Askew who shared their wisdom with our students. Once a week, we sat in a circle in class and turned our attention to a guest speaker over Zoom. While virtual facilitation has its many challenges, these folks charmed our students and pushed them out of their comfort zones speaking about life experiences that are seldom discussed in school.

“My favorite part was definitely (hearing from) speakers. I knew it was hard during covid-19, virtual setups make a big difference but I really enjoyed meeting and listening to new people share their experiences. It helped me see and understand other perspectives.”

After hearing from the speakers, NSRJ facilitators led follow-up discussions where students and teachers got to share reflections and connect what we learned to their own lives. These were rich conversations, where we dove into themes like youth mental health, accessibility in schools, and the particular challenges faced by newcomer families and students. Indeed, these talks ended up informing many of the Group Projects students took on.

“The best part was debriefing after an activity or guest speaker! I love hearing from my classmates and they always have a lot to say. The project was also very meaningful, as I enjoyed creating an initiative for an issue I care about.”





## Group Projects

Throughout the Lab, students were working on independent group projects. They had complete autonomy over what issue they would like to work on and how to go about it. The criteria was broad, which was new for many who are used to clear instructions in school and yet, they delivered. In our final week together, we watched, in awe, as each group presented their work to the class. Topics ranged from LGBTQ+ Awareness and Inclusivity in Schools, Food Insecurity, ADHD Myths & Awareness, tackling Youth Mental Health through a podcast, Anti-Racism workshops, Teaching & Learning ASL, a letter-exchange program for Newcomer Youth, Online Tutoring help during online school, and many more. We were inspired by what the groups created and excited to see them creating new connections to community members and school staff to get those projects off the ground.

“At first, I wanted to work on a project alone but working with others refreshed my idea and improved the project. It was interesting to see many different presentations of other groups.”

“ I like getting contact with members of my community.”

“I LOVED the group project. I loved how much freedom there was to choose our topic and decide what we wanted to do.”

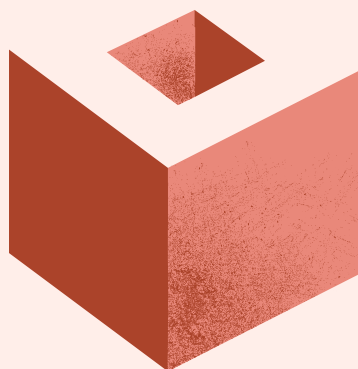
## Classroom Trust

We also owe a huge thank you to Cassandra Brien, Carly Roy, Jeffrey Aw-Yong, and Claudia Panton for trusting us with their students and welcoming the School Justice Lab pilot into their classrooms. The Circle format was new to some, but over ten weeks, we developed a safe environment to share deeply and witness each other's growth. In their feedback, students expressed appreciation for that opportunity, as well as for the new skills they gained.

"My favorite thing was how we got to dive into topics. I usually would never have conversations about that at school."

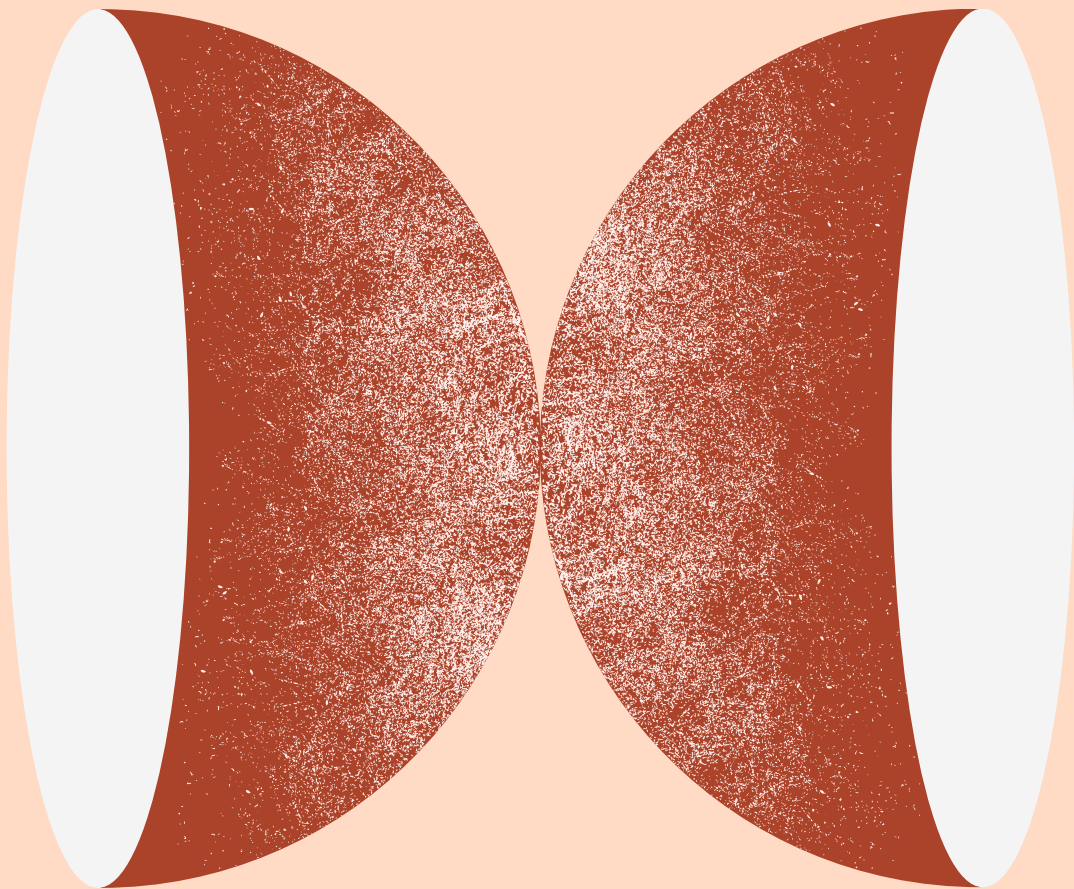
"I like when we played games about our differences and opinions because it helped me understand how diverse our class is."

"The sense of community and safe space created a great learning environment for me."



## Introduction to Peer Mediation

The last three weeks of our program were dedicated to an Introduction to Peer Mediation. In partnership with Zofia Switkowski, our first guest speaker who is also a Restorative Justice practitioner with Community Justice Initiatives (CJI), we worked through the Conversation Peace booklet, learning skills and discussing topics relevant to peer conflict. Modules included: Restorative Values vs. White Supremacy Values, Conflict Styles, Working with Anger, Empathetic Listening, Open-Ended Questions, and Peer Mediation Role-Play. It was a short introduction to a rich field of Restorative Justice, and we were happy to learn that many of our students are interested in pursuing further training to become Peer Mediators in their school.



## Into the Future

**Peer Mediation, Youth as Actors of Change:** Many of the youth who took part in the School Justice Lab participated in an Advanced Peer Mediation Training with Zofia Switkowski from Community Justice Initiatives (CJI), which provided further skills to be able to mediate student-to-student conflict. Our vision in the next few years would be to co-develop a peer mediation program, based on Restorative Justice practices, to address school-based conflict. We imagine this to be part of an integrated and restorative approach to harm and conflict in schools.

**Alignment with Social Justice Curriculum:** We note great alignment between the School Justice Lab and the BC Social Justice curriculum, which could further support social justice teachers.

**Group Projects:** One of the crucial components of the School Justice Lab is having youth voices as a key part of conversations around systems change. We continue to be astonished at the potential youth have to act as change agents if given the platform and opportunity. Our intention is to continue to hold intentional spaces that balance autonomy and support.

**Offering the Program to Other Schools:** We seek to envision ways to promote and bring the program to other schools in the future, which will need further sustainable sources.

# Thank you's

As we celebrate the successes and lessons learned from these three pilots, we want to acknowledge the advice, time, and support of many inspiring members of our community.

We are deeply grateful to all of guest speakers who spoke brilliantly about their work and shared their teachings with full energy and expertise to this program, and with the students.

We also acknowledge the important work of NSRJ staff, Marcela Villaça, Elysia Dalgarno, and Anne-Marie Parent, and their dedication to adapt the Lab to educational settings in a creative way.

A big thank you to our students participants at Queensbury Elementary, Mountainside Secondary, and Sutherland Secondary. Thank you for curiosity, determination, and willingness to embark on this learning and leadership journey! We were inspired by each and every one of you!

Finally, to our sponsor, United Way and our partners at North Vancouver School District, we are grateful for your trust in our vision. Your support was instrumental in bringing this program to reality and in creating a lasting impact on the next generation of young student leaders on the North Shore.

