

# YOUTH JUSTICE LAB

## PROGRAM REPORT



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# ABOUT NSRJ

The North Shore Restorative Justice Society (NSRJ) is a non-profit and charitable organization established in 1997. For over 20 years, NSRJ has served the North Shore community through the Restorative Response Program (RRP), whereby local police forces can divert criminal files towards community-based resolution. In a restorative process, we help victims move forward and heal while also helping harm-doers learn from their actions and not commit the same mistake again. Since 2013, through our Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) Initiative, we have worked with hundreds of children and youth to develop emotional awareness, communication, and conflict resolution skills. In our Circles in Schools program, we focus on the relationships between peers as well as with school staff, thereby strengthening our community fabric. In the summer of 2020, we launched our Youth Justice Lab program centering high school age students who might have been feeling aimless or isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Building off of the success of the first Youth Justice Lab cohort we held our second annual Youth Justice Lab in the summer of 2021, focused on building community and developing awareness of the root causes of the issues we see present today.



# ABOUT THE YOUTH JUSTICE LAB

In partnership with the SFU Centre for Restorative Justice, NSRJ launched the second annual Youth Justice Lab (YJL) in the summer of 2021, inviting 10 youth from the North Shore to participate. Staff and guest speakers held weekly sessions with the youth, exploring topics such as restorative and transformative justice, decolonization, anti-racism, accessibility, power dynamics and more. In small groups, participants developed project plans to tackle justice issues with the guidance of local mentors. At the program graduation, groups presented their ideas to the community. Projects included a mentorship program for youth exploring the intersections of mental health and racism, an art event centering the voices and experiences of Black, Indigenous and youth of colour, and finding ways to collectively decolonize our perspectives on homelessness. Through this 7-week virtual lab, youth deepened connections between themselves and with community leaders by exploring questions such as:

- How can we use restorative justice principles to meaningfully engage in decolonization, truth, and reconciliation?
- What does youth justice look like in our community?
- What is peer mediation and how can we use it in everyday life?



Our aim was to foster strong and lasting ties between participants and provide a mechanism through which they can connect meaningfully with role-models, community members, and NSRJ. In this report, you will find our program introduction, content, and schedule, as well as the profiles and feedback from participants and mentors, our lessons learned, and plans for the future.

# PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Collaboration and opportunities for youth to take charge of their learning are great determinants of youth engagement. With that in mind, we drafted a flexible program schedule to fit our participants' unique curiosities and needs. Incorporating the youth's input and suggestions, the line-up and content of the program took shape as follows:

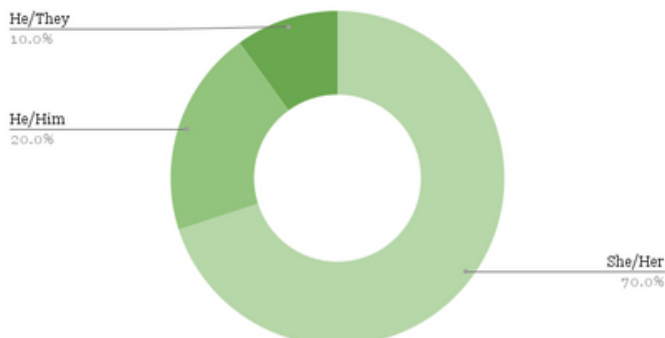
Youth Justice Lab Schedule	Guest Speaker(s)	NSRJ Content
<b>Week 1:</b> Introduction to Restorative Justice	<b>Brenda Morrison,</b> Director of the Centre for Restorative Justice & <b>Zofia Switkowski,</b> Restorative Justice Practitioner and Advocate	Community Building & Program Overview
<b>Week 2:</b> Understanding Bias	<b>Marie Haddad,</b> SFSS Vice President of Equity & Sustainability	Program Session Review & Ideation
<b>Week 3:</b> Decolonization & Indigenous Roots of RJ	<b>Warren Hooley,</b> Community Facilitator & Indigenous Leader	Indigenous Roots of Restorative Justice
<b>Week 4:</b> Accessibility & Public Space	<b>Kat &amp; Rabbit,</b> LOVE BC	Anti-Oppression Overview
<b>Week 5:</b> Anti-Racism & Inclusivity	<b>Charles Lartey,</b> HOPE U Canada	Giving & Receiving Feedback
<b>Week 6:</b> Reconciliation & Healing Justice	<b>Jessica Bolduc,</b> 4R's Youth Movement	End of program reflection and action ideation
<b>Week 7:</b> Graduation & Celebration!	<b>Community guests, NSRJ board members &amp; staff</b>	Group project presentations and closing circle celebrations

# OUR PARTICIPANTS

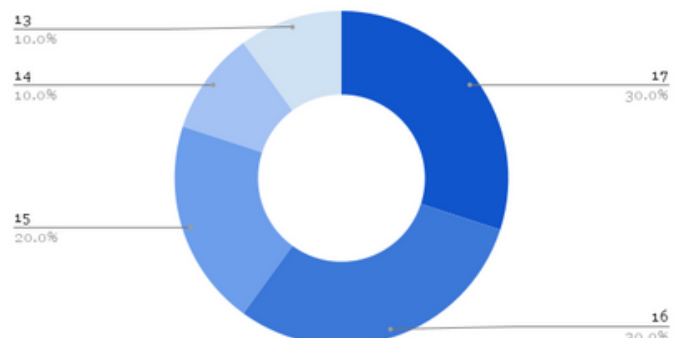


We selected 10 youth to join us in the Youth Justice Lab. In the application form, we asked about their stories, their relationships to the place where they live, what justice means to them, and if they could fix one injustice in their community, what would it be and how would they do it. From their responses we learned this was a group of dynamic and passionate youth. Every week, youth called in from their homes and connected with youth from all over the North Shore. Although we did not ask them to self-identify along the lines of race or ethnicity, over the course of the program many participants shared about their families and background, highlighting challenges related to racism, xenophobia, and colonization. Similarly, we did not collect data on class or sexuality, but the youth were keen to both learn and share their experiences with these topics as well. In the pie charts below, you can find the participants' age and pronoun distribution. We were also intentional with age-ranges, noting that learning can and should happen among a variety of ages, and we were excited to have a large range of youth from 13 - 17.

## Participant's Pronouns



## Participants Age



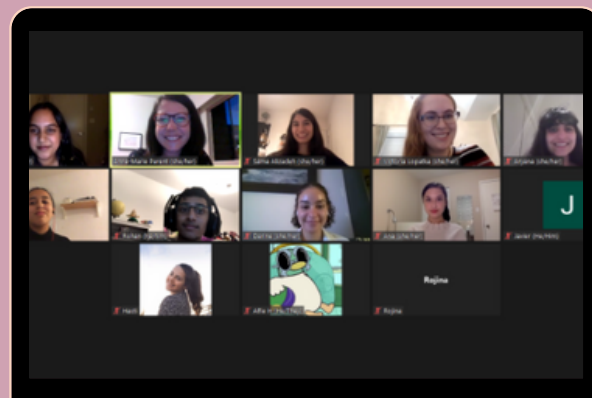
# YOUTH FEEDBACK & REFLECTIONS

At the end of the cohort, participants answered open-ended questions designed to elicit more detailed feedback on the impact of the program. Below we have selected some of their reflections, organized into recurring themes.

## PERSONAL GROWTH

"Through this program, I developed stronger personal growth. I find myself thinking openly and taking others into consideration more than before the program."

"I can easily say that the area of myself developed the most during this program was personal growth in the form of a heightened sense of awareness regarding various world issues. I also improved my ability to critically think about issues, the effects of them and the root causes behind them. Being in a collaborative environment I was able to experience other peoples perspectives and opinions and this broadened my range of thinking and made me more understanding of others."



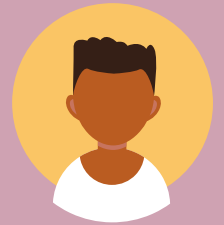
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"I feel like I was very lucky to get the chance to be able to make relationships with everyone in the Youth Justice Lab, and that I learned more about how I can take care of myself and others in a normal day! I also learned how to deliver support to people and heal them, and strengthened my project planning and leading abilities!"

"I think I definitely built new skills, such as leadership, project planning, organization, and overall communication skills too. I think I can now talk to new people with more ease, and I also feel more confident in some of my leadership skills. I also became a lot more knowledgeable in certain areas where I was not before, which to me is just as important as developing new skills."

"After participating in this program I feel way more comfortable speaking up, and after Warren's talk I feel better about balancing my life. I also feel better working in teams and presenting."

## NEW SKILLS



## COMMUNITY BUILDING

"I found amazing people in my community and learned lots of different concepts from the book [Making it Right]"

"I was able to create a project with other people in my group that can potentially help a lot of people in my community. I was able to participate in conversation and learn about so many important topics."

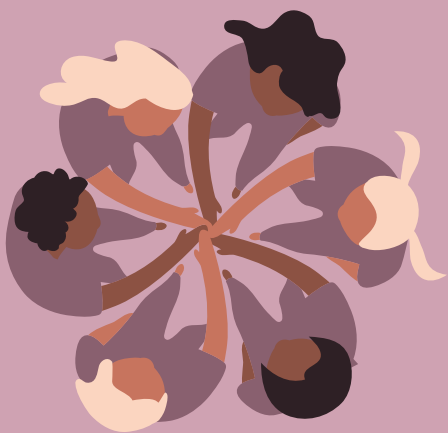
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# GROUP PROJECTS

Another important component of the Youth Justice Lab were the group projects. In our first week together, participants were put into three groups based on issues of interest. Each group was then paired up with two program mentors, who they met with weekly throughout the Lab. Project guidelines were intentionally loose, as we expected (and hoped for!) a wide variety of outcomes. Rather than complete or realize these projects, given our short timeline, we asked them to create a 'project plan': a road map to what these projects could become. At our graduation event, groups took turns presenting their projects and ideas to an astonished audience of NSRJ staff, youth families, YJL mentors, and community partners. Their projects were:

- A mental-health mentorship program for elementary and high school students navigating the impacts of racism on mental health
- An art event highlighting BIPOC artists and raising funds for local artists and anti-racism organizations
- A project focused on decolonizing our thoughts and stigma around homelessness



"It was really great to be able to work with my mentors because they really guided us through the project and really helped us know what parts we could improve on and make better! They helped us figure out the problem that we want to solve and slowly helped us to move up step by step towards completing our project! I loved how it was a safe space and how everyone's opinions were appreciated, and the fact that we got together and talked about the things that we cared about!"

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# OUR MENTORS



From left to right, our Lab mentors:  
Sierra Lee, Emma Mendez, Graham Best, Sorcha Joseph, Mackenzie Dickson, Ravi Patel

Lab mentors connected with youth in independent sessions to offer support and guidance throughout the program. We invited mentors from a wide-range of backgrounds, with a variety of professional and lived experiences as well as former youth participants from the 2020 Youth Justice Lab. Our hope was to create an opportunity for them to connect and learn from one another, and that after the lab, youth would have found new friends and role models. Based on their mutual feedback, it seems like this too, was a great success. It was also a great opportunity for former participants to showcase their knowledge and experiences with a greater understanding of how the current youth participants would be feeling.

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"The mentor/mentee experience was extremely helpful for me, I found it to be a great source of information and they were quite easy to talk to. I appreciate how they pushed us a little to get on the right track but gave us total freedom of the entire project so that it really felt that it was our own creation as a team."

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# MENTORS' FEEDBACK & REFLECTIONS

"I enjoyed how the mentor role allowed me to challenge myself, and I definitely feel that it was also an amazing learning opportunity - I was able to learn a lot about myself and my facilitation/leadership style. I also always felt so supported as a mentor. The role really allowed me to build my confidence week after week, as it was originally something I considered to be outside of my comfort zone at the beginning of the program. I was also able to learn a lot from my co-mentor and I valued that partnership!"

## CONNECTIONS & MUTUAL GROWTH

"My time as a mentor for the Youth Justice Lab 2021 was such a profound learning experience. Not only as a mentor and my first experience stepping into that role, but also as a human being. It was such a transformational experience to explore community, leadership, and what social justice means to each person."

"I loved my time as a mentor for the Youth Justice Lab. Having previously joined the Lab as a youth participant, I felt that the mentorship role was the perfect opportunity for me to utilize the skills and knowledge I had gained to support other youth. Taking on this position also allowed me to challenge myself. Witnessing the growth of my mentees over the course of the program, and seeing them eventually arrive at a complete and fully realized project plan that tackled a justice issue they were passionate about, was the most fulfilling part of the role for me personally. I also had an amazing experience working with my co-mentor. I highly recommend this program to all youth who are passionate about social and restorative justice, and those who are interested in personal growth, collaborating with other youth, and learning how to develop a project plan."

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# INTO THE FUTURE

Following the success and momentum from the 2020 Youth Justice Lab, three goals were set to continue to bring the spirit and energy of this program to life in 2021. These goals were: to create a Youth Action Council with members from the first Youth Justice Lab; to scale out the Youth Justice Lab program into a school setting; and finally to develop a peer mediation program to address school based conflict. We can happily report all three goals have been achieved and/or are in the process of being completed!

- The Youth Action Council is comprised of four members who meet regularly and plan community events and actions focused on justice and equity. Most recently they held an event series titled "Discussions on Decolonization" for youth by youth throughout the North Shore with support and facilitation by a former Youth Justice Lab speaker, Warren Hooley. The event series was a great success and will continue to be held in the coming year.
  - The School Justice Lab was piloted and held at three schools, one elementary and two high schools, bringing in guest speakers focused on topics like peer mediation, restorative justice skill building, anti-racism and decolonization. A report with more in-depth information and insight into the program can be found [here](#).
  - A peer mediation program focused on school-based conflict is currently being developed and hoping to be piloted come the new year in 2022.
  - Finally, with the success of two iterations of the Youth Justice Lab we hope to continue to offer this program and continue to learn how it can be improved. The intention for the coming year is to offer this program in-person, allowing for more extensive community building, place-based learning and support for all participants.
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# THANK YOU'S!

As we celebrate the successes and lessons learned at our second annual Youth Justice Lab, we want to acknowledge the advice, time, and support of many inspiring members of our community.

We are deeply grateful to all of the Elders and guest speakers who spoke brilliantly about their work and shared their teachings with full energy and expertise to this program: Brenda Morrison, Zofia Switkowski, Marie Haddad, Warren Hooley, Kate Rabbit, Charles Lartey, and Jessica Bolduc. To our mentors, Emma, Graham, Sierra, Mackenzie, Sorchia and Ravi we are so thankful for the time, guidance, and expertise you shared with our participants. Mentorship plays a vital role in building young people's skills, relationships, and confidence, and you did way more than this. We thank you for your gentle guidance, energy, presence, and support in making this program a success.

We also extend our thanks to our generous NSRJ community including staff, Board members, and volunteers who showed up to our graduation with open hearts and minds to listen, learn, and contribute meaningfully by providing feedback to the youth on their group projects. We also acknowledge the important work of NSRJ staff, Marcela Villaça, Noni Nabors, Tina Parbhakar, and Anne-Marie Parent, who allowed themselves to dream big and boldly and created this inaugural program in 2021. Their success and efforts allowed current staff members Anne-Marie Parent, Rowena Sahota, Victoria Lopatka and Kelly Chessman to build off of their success and bring new ideas and inspiration to the program.

To our sponsors, Simon Fraser University Community Engagement Initiative, the West Vancouver Foundation, the Government of Canada Emergency Fund, and Canada Summer Jobs, we are grateful for your trust in our vision. We are also grateful for Taking IT Global for your support during our graduation ceremony and efforts in bringing youth projects to life in a sustainable and engaged way. All of your support was instrumental in bringing this program to reality and in creating a lasting impact on the next generation of young leaders on the North Shore.

Finally, a big thank you to our dear youth participants, Alfie, Ana, Aryana, Darine, Eva, Hasti, Javier, Rohan, Rojina and Sama for their curiosity, passion, and willingness to learn. They demonstrated incredible compassion, fire, and courage, both individually and collectively. We are lucky to have crossed paths with each one of you!

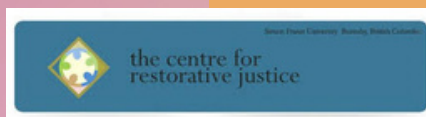
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