

YOUTH JUSTICE



PROGRAM REPORT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

About NSRJ

About the Youth Justice Lab

Our Participants

Group Projects

Our Mentors

Mentors' Feedback & Reflections

Into the Future

Thank You's



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 after a crime while also helping offenders 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 school Circles, we focus on the relationships between peers as well as with school staff, therefore strengthening our community fabric. In the summer of 2020, we launched our first-ever cohort program centering high school age students who might have been feeling aimless or isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



ABOUT THE YOUTH JUSTICE LAB

In partnership with the SFU Centre for Restorative Justice, NSRJ piloted the first Youth Justice Lab (YJL) in the summer of 2020, inviting 15 youth from the North Shore to our first-ever cohort program. We held weekly sessions with staff and guest speakers exploring topics such as restorative and transformative justice, decolonization, racial struggles, intergenerational activism, and more. In groups, participants developed projects to tackle justice issues with the guidance of local mentors. At the program graduation, groups presented their ideas to the community. Project topics included poverty and income inequality, curriculum changes to decolonize BC public education, and peer mental health support networks. Through this 6-week virtual lab, youth deepened connections between themselves and with community leaders by exploring questions such as:

- What are the applications of restorative justice during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How can we use restorative justice to meaningfully engage in decolonization efforts?
- What can youth justice mean in our community?



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 indicators of youth engagement. With that in mind, we drafted a flexible program schedule to fit our participants' unique curiosities and needs. By the time they applied, only our two first sessions were planned. Over the course of the cohort, given the youth's input and suggestions, the line-up and content of the program took shape as follows:

- Week 1: Welcome and Introduction. Guest Speakers: Dr. Brenda Morrison and Zofia Switkowski on Restorative Justice
- Week 2: Indigenous Roots of Restorative Justice. Guest speaker: Warren Hooley on Decolonizing Practices.
- Week 3: Peer Mediation 101 and Restorative Communication. Guest speaker: Morgan Switzer-Rodney on Intergenerational Organizing
- Week 4: Part 2 Peer Mediation 2.0 and Restorative Communication. Guest Speaker: Anastasia Gaisenok on Activism and Organizing
- Week 5: Group Project Preparation. Guest Speaker: Kai Cheng Thom on Transformative Justice
- Week 6: Group Project Preparation. Guest Speaker: Winnie Tam on Art & Change

Youth Justice Lab Schedule	NSRJ Content 30 - 40 min	Guest Speaker 40 min - 1 h	Readings/ Materials
Week 1: Jul 23 Restorative Justice	Elder Welcome Intro to RJ	Zofia Switkowski	Welcome Package <i>Making it Right</i> by Marielle Peters, Ch. 1
Week 2: Jul 30 Decolonization & Reconciliation	Indigenous Roots of Restorative Justice	Warren Hooley	Peters, Ch. 4
Week 3: Aug 6 Racial Justice & Intergenerational work	Peer Mediation 101	Morgan Switzer-Rodney	Peters, Ch. 3
Week 4: Aug 13 Youth Issue #1 : Life of an Activist	Peer Mediation 2.0	Anastasia Gaisenok	Readings may include: - Climate change & sustainability - Youth racial and gender equity - Youth homelessness and food security - Youth mental health
Week 5: Aug 20 Youth Issue #2 Transformative Justice	Group project round table	Kai Cheng Thom	
Week 6: Aug 27 Youth Issue #3 Art & Change	Grad prep	Winnie Tam	
Week 7 Location / format TBD	Dinner and graduation Team project presentations. Friends, mentors & NSRJ Board invited. Circle reflections on the Youth Justice Lab		*Event will be held in person if COVID-19 guidelines allow*

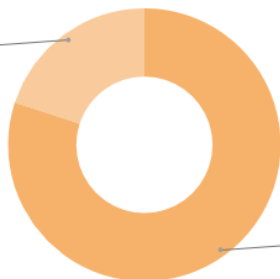
OUR PARTICIPANTS



From over 20 applicants, we selected 15 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. Just from reading their responses, we learned this was a group of curious and critical thinkers. Some were also artists and chose to share their creative writing and visual art with us. If this program was grounded on equity, it was important to value multiple forms of expression from the very starting point. Every week, youth called in from their homes in North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Squamish, and even Bowen Island. 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 pronouns distribution.

Participants' pronouns

He/Him
20.0%

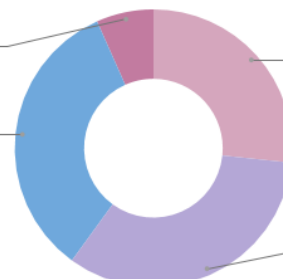


She/Her
80.0%

Participants' age

19
6.7%

17
33.3%



15
26.7%

16
33.3%

YOUTH FEEDBACK & REFLECTIONS

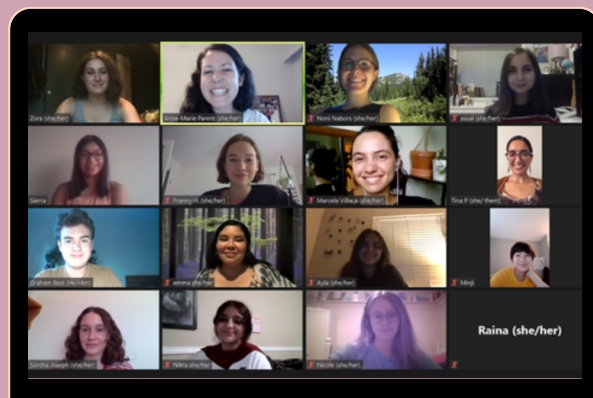
At the end of the cohort, participants answered open-ended questions designed to solicit more detailed feedback on the impact of the program. Here we have selected some of their reflections, organized into reoccurring themes.

CONNECTION TO OTHER YOUTH

"I did not expect the sessions to be so engaging and in depth, and I learned so much more than I could hope for from each one. I also did not expect to feel so connected to the group in such a short period of time, but the relationship-building was one of the best parts of this program and I am so glad that I had the opportunity to form meaningful connections with other youth."

"The most important thing that I achieved was feeling valued amongst other people my age when having dialogue."

"I loved just everything about this little community that we created. We were all so comfortable with each other and the trust between us was so much that many of us even shared our deepest thoughts and experience with each other."



"The Lab has also given me the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for planning and implementing a project through working on my project with my mentor and project group. The program has also given me the means to make an impact in my community by giving my project group and I the necessary support and platform to actualize our project idea."

NEW SKILLS

"Through my participation in this program, I learned so much about group work and how to initiate and follow through with project ideas.

Especially, I learned more about how to communicate with teammates and mentors to be engaged in the given work and deal with unexpected problems."

"There was so much but one thing that really stood out was learning about how to structure a project; not something we learn in school."



CONFIDENCE BUILDING

"I feel that I have become much more confident in my ability to participate and voice my opinion in a group setting, which has been one of my personal goals for a long time."

"I learned to share my opinions and suggestions and that it might inspire one person."

"I learned how to be comfortable and form relationships with people outside of my own age group and gender."

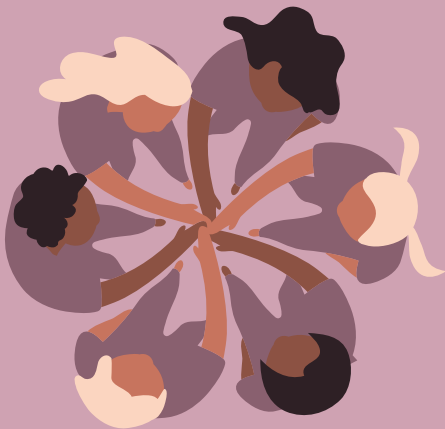


GROUP PROJECTS

Another important component of the Youth Justice Lab were the group projects. In our first week together, participants self-selected into groups of three based on issues of interest. Each group was then paired up with two program mentors, who they met with regularly 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 project titles were:

- Real Talks: Peer Mental Health Support Program
- Poverty and Income Inequality in Canada: A Video Presentation
- Decolonizing Education
- Reducing Stigma in Schools: Race, Gender and Sexuality
- Equitable Access to Education During COVID-19

The group projects were a great success, and we were happy to learn that some have decided to follow up on and implement their ideas beyond the Lab.



"My favorite part of the program was working on my project with my project group and mentor. I loved getting to know the other youth in my group and I really enjoyed having the opportunity to work with others with similar interests and goals. I learned so much and developed/improved on so many skills during the project process (interview skills, how to develop a project proposal, teamwork skills, presentation skills, etc.), and I feel that it was the part of the program that I benefited the most from."

OUR MENTORS



From left to right,
our Lab mentors:
Isa Nafissi, Zofia
Switkowski, Jay
Castro, Anastasia
Gaisenok, Nic
Campos, Rekha
Pavanantharajah,
Ravi Patel, Dustin
Horvat, and
Morgan Wheeler.

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. 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.

"I am so glad I got to work with my mentor and her guidance and advice was very valuable. I really appreciated how my mentor encouraged my group and I to pursue our original ideas, and she gave us feedback that we used to improve our project without changing our core ideas. I loved that groups had the opportunity to work with and learn from mentors."

MENTORS' FEEDBACK & REFLECTIONS

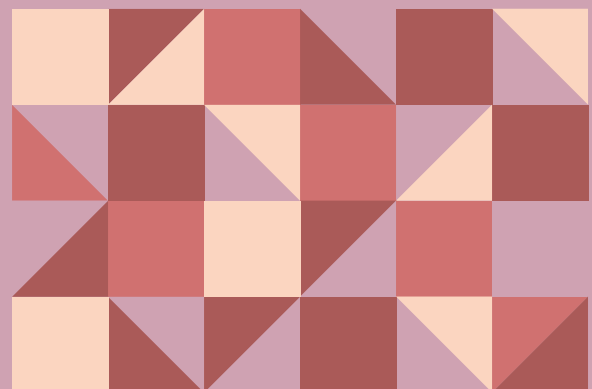
"This really humbled me. My knowledge and experience may be advantageous with age, but the youth were a lot closer than I was expecting, and in some cases, ahead of me."

"This experience was extremely valuable for me professionally because it opened my eyes to the level of passion that the youth in my community have about such incredibly important issues."

"I think I really was able to realize the value that my experiences hold and how that can really be used to positively impact the youth in my community. I also learned how much I love working with youth."

"I've seen them become more outspoken from week to week in our small groups, and witnessed how they've solidified their commitment to their values and viewpoints with the support and validation of their peers and us as mentors. Each week, we went a little deeper and were able to hear more about their personal lived experiences. They were also incredibly supportive of each other, and accommodating of each other's needs throughout the process."

CONNECTIONS & MUTUAL GROWTH



INTO THE FUTURE

With the great momentum generated by the 2020 cohort of the Youth Justice Lab, we found ourselves dreaming even further, and are now channeling this energy into new ventures. Here are some of our next steps:

- **Creation of a Youth Advisory Council:** In 2021, we plan to establish a Youth Advisory Council, with members selected from the first Youth Justice Lab 2020 cohort, who will guide and support the following iterations of the Lab and other youth-focused initiatives at NSRJ. Having youth at the decision-making table ensures that their voices are centered at every step along the way, from design to evaluation phase. We believe that it is a critical step in making our youth programs truly equitable.
- **Scaling Out the YJL Model:** For 2021, we want to scale out the Lab model and pilot it in at least one elementary school on the North Shore.
- **Peer Mediation, Youth as Actors of Change:** Next, we want to co-develop a peer mediation program, based on Restorative Justice practices, to address school-based conflict.



THANK YOU'S!

As we celebrate the successes and lessons learned at our first 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: Stewart Gonzales Sempulyan, Dr. Brenda Morrison, Zofia Switkowski, Warren Hooley, Morgan Switzer-Rodney, Anastasia Gaisenok, Kai Cheng Thom, Winnie Tam, and Senaqwila Wiss. To our mentors, Rekha, Ravi, Jay, Dustin, Nic, Zofia, Isa, Anastasia, and Morgan, 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 a very short timeline. They were supported by Dr. Brenda Morrison, a long-term NSRJ Board member, from the earliest stages of this project. We thank them for their ambition and their deep commitment, and dedication to the Lab. A special thank you to Andrea Froidefond Laberge from Leadership au Pluriel who provided advice at the early beginnings of the program on different aspects of the cohort 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. 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, Assal, Alex, Graham, Nicole, Zora, Ayla, Emma, Jace, Camila, Nikta, Sierra, Minji, Sorchia, Franny, and Raina for their curiosity, determination, and willingness to embark on this learning journey. They demonstrated incredible compassion, fire, and courage, both individually and collectively. We are lucky to have crossed paths with each one of you!

YOUTH JUSTICE LAB

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