

The Youth Engagement Project

A Youth Perspective on Developing a Youth-Friendly Sooke

Part One: Where Are We Now Compared to the Ideal Community Described by Our Youth?



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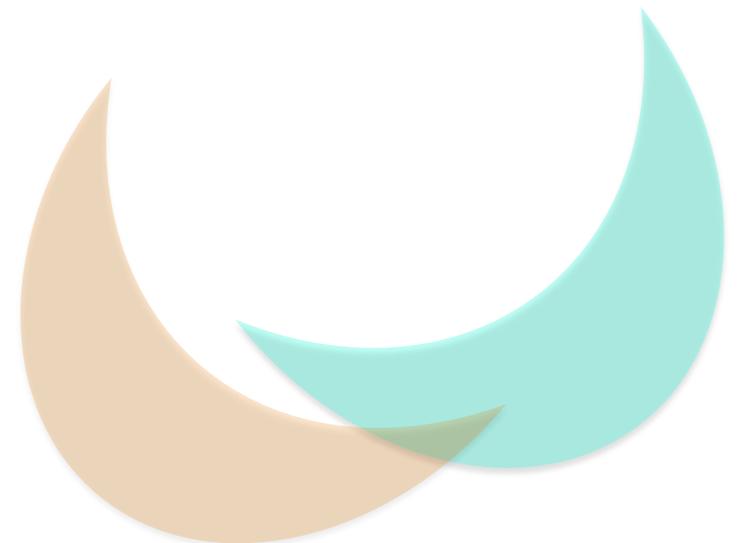
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Introduction.

This report is a result of the first phase of research of The Youth Engagement Project conducted by the Edward Milne Community School Society. The intent is to perform assessments of the current needs of Sooke's youth to determine gaps in these protective factors: Health, Support, Sense of Community, Engagement, and Safety. By determining these needs, community organizations and individuals who advocate for youth will have a greater understanding of where to focus their resources for the greatest impact.

As a local organization with our finger on the pulse, we have discovered that after graduating high school and completing post-secondary, traveling, working, etc, almost all of our youth want to return to Sooke. In addition, many of the determined needs are echoed throughout the community by groups and individuals who are not necessarily connected to youth issues. Through this, we are beginning to understand how "Youth Issues" are in fact "Community Needs". This report outlines reasons why Sooke youth want to return, and the future Sooke they are hoping to return to as engaged adult citizens.

The next phase of the project began in May 2013 as part of the Guerilla Blackboard Project. This Leadership Victoria initiative asks, "What matters to you in your community?" and gives youth the opportunity to share their thoughts without censorship. Keep an eye out for the Guerilla Blackboard in your community through 2013-2014!

This report is designed as a general guide for local individuals and organizations to have a sense of youth needs in the community as represented by a group of approximately 50 youth in the Sooke Region. The sample population was comprised of Leadership Class students and although it gives great insight into the thoughts of those particular youth, the information may not represent the voice of the entire youth population of the Sooke Region.

Please feel free to contact Heather Walsh, Community School Coordinator, at hwalsh@sd62.bc.ca if you would like to collaborate on future phases or to learn more about replicating this study in your region.

Methodology.

From January to March 2013, approximately 50 youth from Edward Milne Community School participated in interactive and solo brainstorming activities to help determine which protective factors are important for youth in Sooke. The youth sample was comprised of students in the Edward Milne Community School Leadership class; it is not representative of all of Sooke's youth, but does include a mix of youth in grades 10 to 12 who are locals, visiting on international exchange, of differing genders, introverts and extroverts, and both leaders as well as those learning how to be involved in their community.

To be inclusive of as many students as possible, we were mindful to incorporate a variety of activities in which each youth could participate to their fullest capacity. First, we asked the students to define "Community" individually, compiling the answers to create one joint definition. With that definition in mind, we asked them to create an "Ideal Youth-Friendly Community" by writing and drawing in small groups. We then asked them to individually brainstorm what Sooke should "Stop-Start-Continue" in comparison to the ideal communities they created. After assessing those results, we played a game of "Dotmocracy" to determine which of the issues unveiled in Stop-Start-Continue were the most important. Finally, the students formed a World Café to map out physical locations from Port Renfrew to Victoria where they could find resources, felt connected to the environment, and felt safe or unsafe.

The responses from describing an Ideal YF Community and from Stop-Start-Continue were then collected and grouped into each of the protective factors and ranked in order of responses yielding the most results per factor.

As you read over the responses, we encourage you to ask questions that may further develop the ideas presented by the youth in this study. If you would like more detailed information our research, or would like to collaborate on a project concerning a section of this report, please feel free to contact us with your ideas.

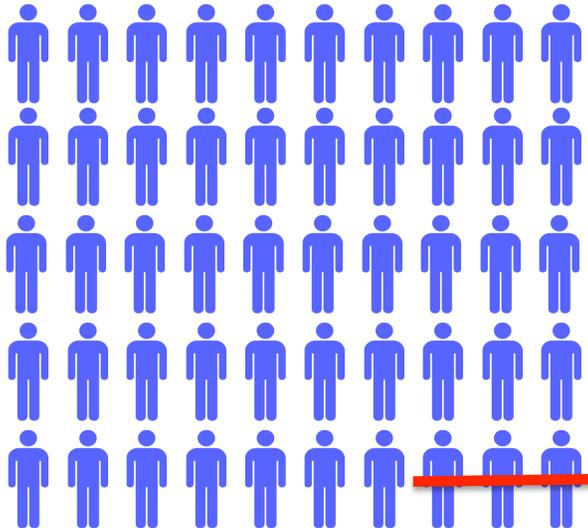
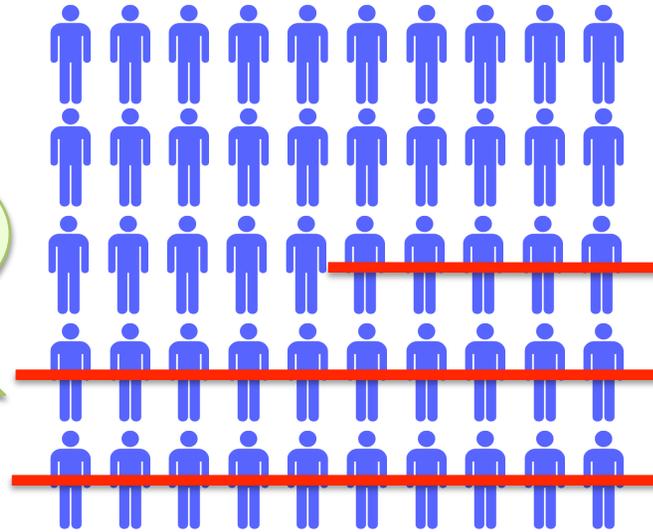
"A 'Community' is a group of people, living around each other, who work together."

~ "Community" as collectively described by our youth ~

Key Finding.

Q: How many of you want to stay in Sooke after Graduation?

A: About ½



Q: How many of you want to return to Sooke at some point after post-secondary, work, travel, etc?

A: Almost ALL!

Wow! This is exciting news. After graduating high school and finishing post-secondary, traveling, or whatever else they have planned, the students in the survey want to return to Sooke as engaged adult citizens. Keep this in mind as you review this report... today's "Youth Issues" are tomorrow's "Community Needs"!

An Ideal YF Community.

One of our first activities was to determine what a Youth-Friendly Community looks like to our youth. Our hope was to identify the characteristics of their ideal community and compare the ideal to the youth's definition of "Community" and to how they currently feel as youth members of Sooke. Below are the top 3 categories we determined after grouping their responses. Each category has examples of the responses provided by the students, in no particular order. A star (*) represents responses that were repeated several times by different students.

INFRASTRUCTURE: LEISURE/RECREATION/GENERAL (26 responses)

i.e.: Turf/Sports Field*, Sports/Fitness Centre*, More Parks, Movie Theatre*, Bowling Alley, Shopping, Community Centre, Places to Go/Be*, Housing for Homeless, Free Wi-fi.

TRANSPORTATION (16 responses)

i.e.: Potholes Bus, Better Transit*, Subsidized Trolley by Business District, Proper/Safe Roads, Sunday/Late Night Bus, Another Highway Out, Another Bridge, Sidewalks*.

YOUTH SUPPORT (13 responses)

i.e.: LGBTQ Support Groups, Easy Access to Discreet Mental Health Services, Youth Support Groups* for Mental & Physical Illness, Reliable Services (Worklink, Doctors, Counselors, Resources*), Funding, Problem Solving.

Other categories, in order from most to least responses, included: Youth-Specific Programming (10), Happiness (8), Entertainment (8), Engagement (7), Acceptance (7), Youth Employment (6), Food & Beverage Infrastructure (5), Beautification (4), Volunteer Opportunities (4), Respect (3), Life Motto (3), School Scheduling (3).

Overall, an ideal Youth-Friendly Community would provide youth with:

1. A Sense of Community (11 points)
2. Engagement & Safety (Tied: 10 points each)
3. Support (9 points)
4. Health (5 points)

Stop. Start. Continue.

This activity was led by our passionate and energetic Canada World Youth volunteers. Their idea was to determine, “In Sooke, what should stop? Start? Continue?”, to compare the responses to the youth’s description of the ideal Youth-Friendly Community, and to assess how the responses affect the protective factors.

Each youth was given three sticky notes - one for each of the Stop-Start-Continue boards - to write down their ideas and place them on the appropriate board. This activity was done individually, so that students could express freedom and uniqueness in brainstorming their responses.

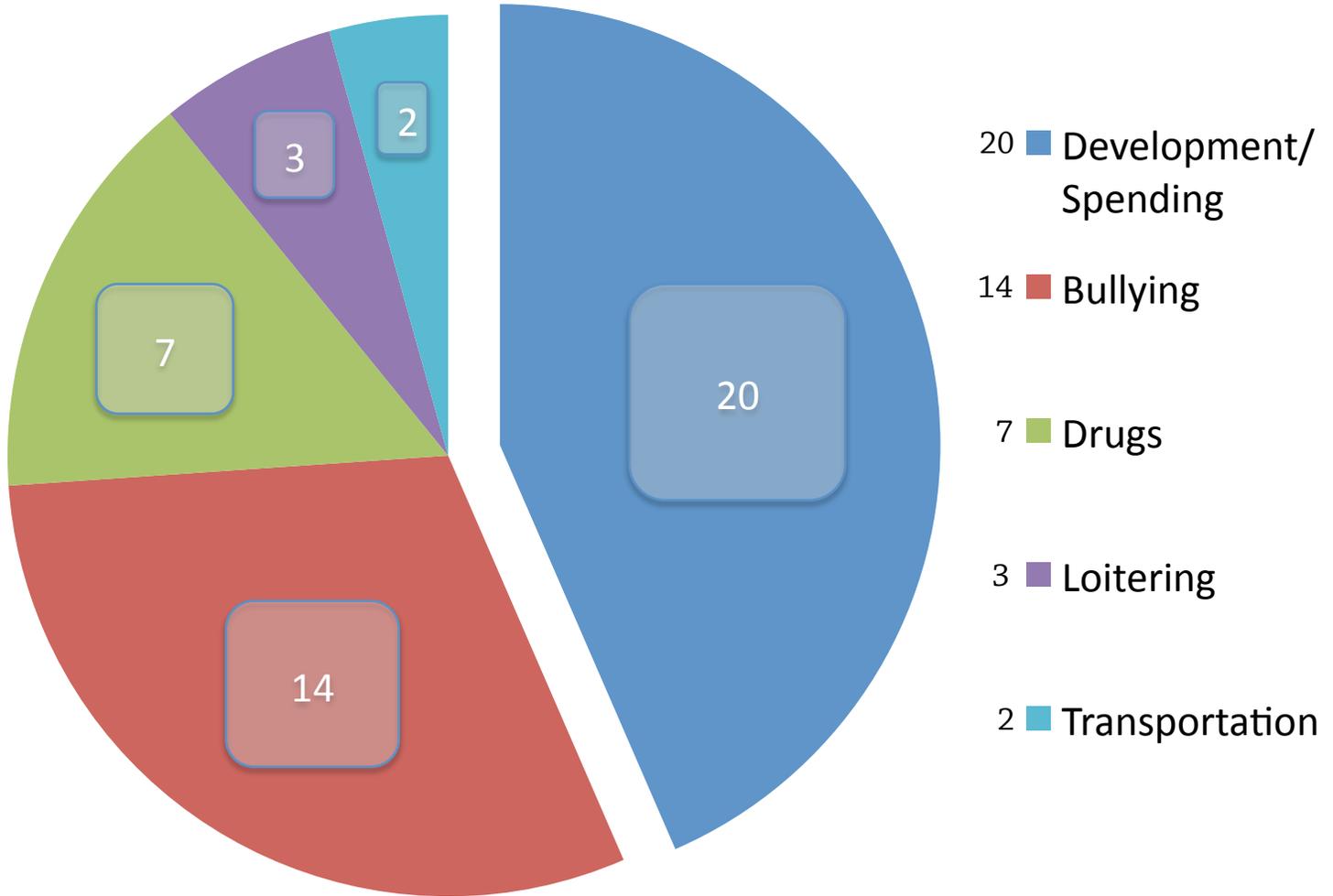
The results of this exercise were grouped into categories reflecting this order of importance for the factors:

1. Sense of Community & Engagement (Tied: 27 points each)
2. Safety (23 points)
3. Support (21 points)
4. Health (10 points)

Although we’ve determined that this group of youth values the factors in this order, we also acknowledge that with each response, we find ourselves asking “Why?” as there was little space on the sticky note for students to fully explain themselves. This leaves room for further exploration of the issues as we continue the Youth Engagement Project.

STOP

What Needs to Stop?



RESPONSES

DEVELOPMENT AND SPENDING (20 responses)

- Projects (Prestige)
- Mass developing
- Making the community grow business-wise
- Building houses
- Deforestation
- Building pointless things
- Building housing complex (we need more businesses)
- The waste of projects
- Bringing in big companies
- Opening fast food restaurants. Except Subway. I like Subway.
- Focus less on tourists and more on community growth
- Having crappy mayors and council
- Spending our money on things the community doesn't need
- Spending money on useless community ventures

BULLYING (14 responses)

- Negativity
- Swear words
- Judging each other
- Being prejudiced

LOITERING (3 responses)

- Hanging out at the bus stop ALL DAY

DRUGS (7 responses)

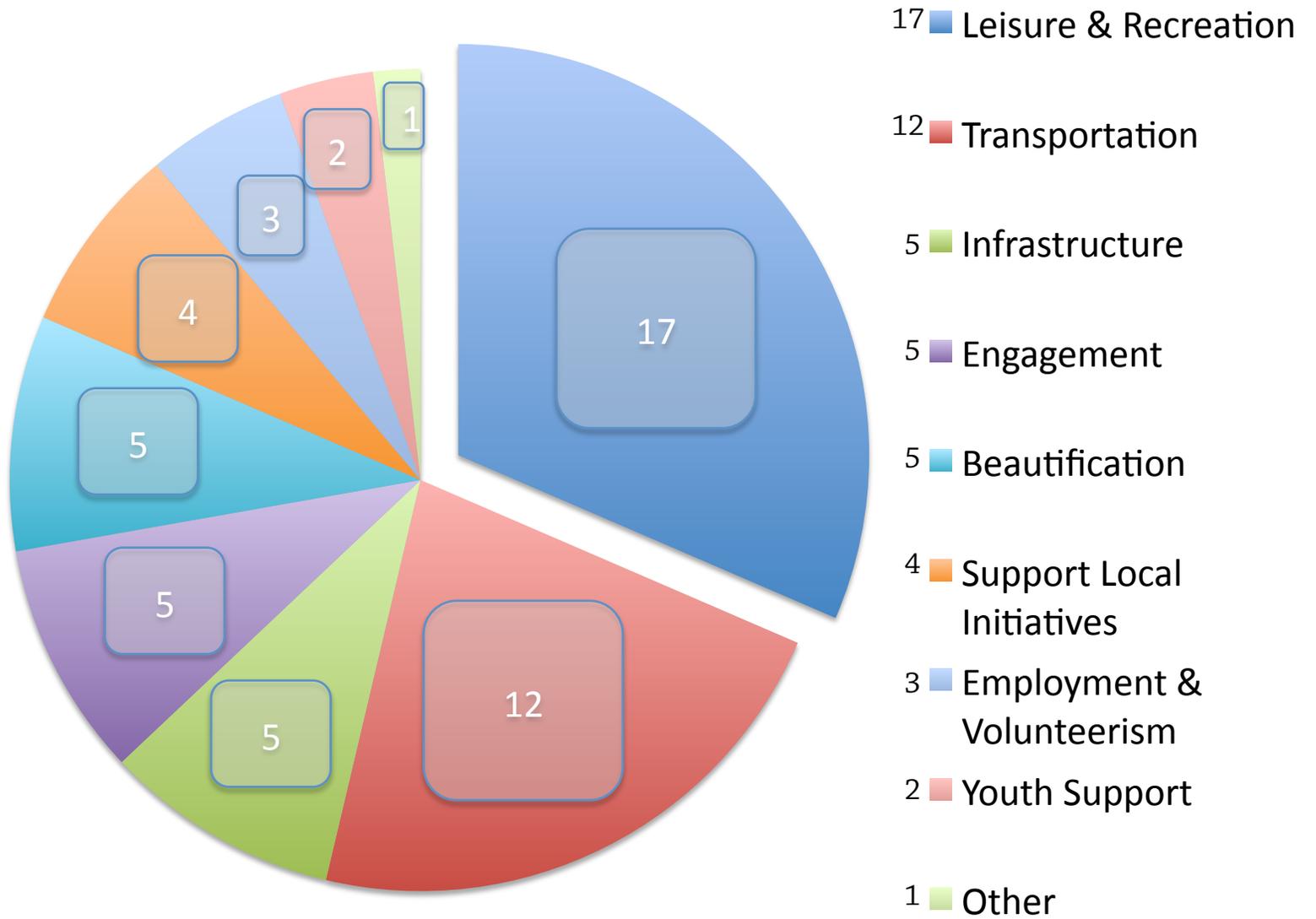
- Drug use
- Drinking
- Drug use among youth
- Drug use at school

TRANSPORTATION (2 responses)

- Bad roads
- Expensive busses

START

What Needs to Start?



RESPONSES

LEISURE & RECREATION (17 responses)

- Youth activities (dances, concerts, movies, festivals)
- Adventure club
- More activities
- Community Talent Show (Sooke's Got Talent)
- More events
- More activities involving everyone
- Community nights, movies, etc.
- Writing groups
- More sport leagues for different sports
- Open gym drop-in
- Supporting youth sports (financially)
- Putting money towards better fields
- Building community sports complex

TRANSPORTATION (12 responses)

- Sidewalks
- Building another highway out of the community
- Safer roads
- Frequent bus schedule
- Putting money towards better transportation

INFRASTRUCTURE (5 responses)

- Making more centres for people to meet
- More covered (roof) bus stops
- Tim Horton's
- Place for homeless people

RESPONSES

ENGAGEMENT (5 responses)

- More involvement of youth in the community
- Expanding youth sector (more opportunities)

BEAUTIFICATION (5 responses)

- Doing pick-up litter activities
- Putting garbage in the garbage can
- More recycling encouraged

SUPPORT LOCAL INITIATIVES (4 responses)

- Selling/buying local food
- Local food farms
- Listen to the OCP

EMPLOYMENT & VOLUNTEERISM (3 responses)

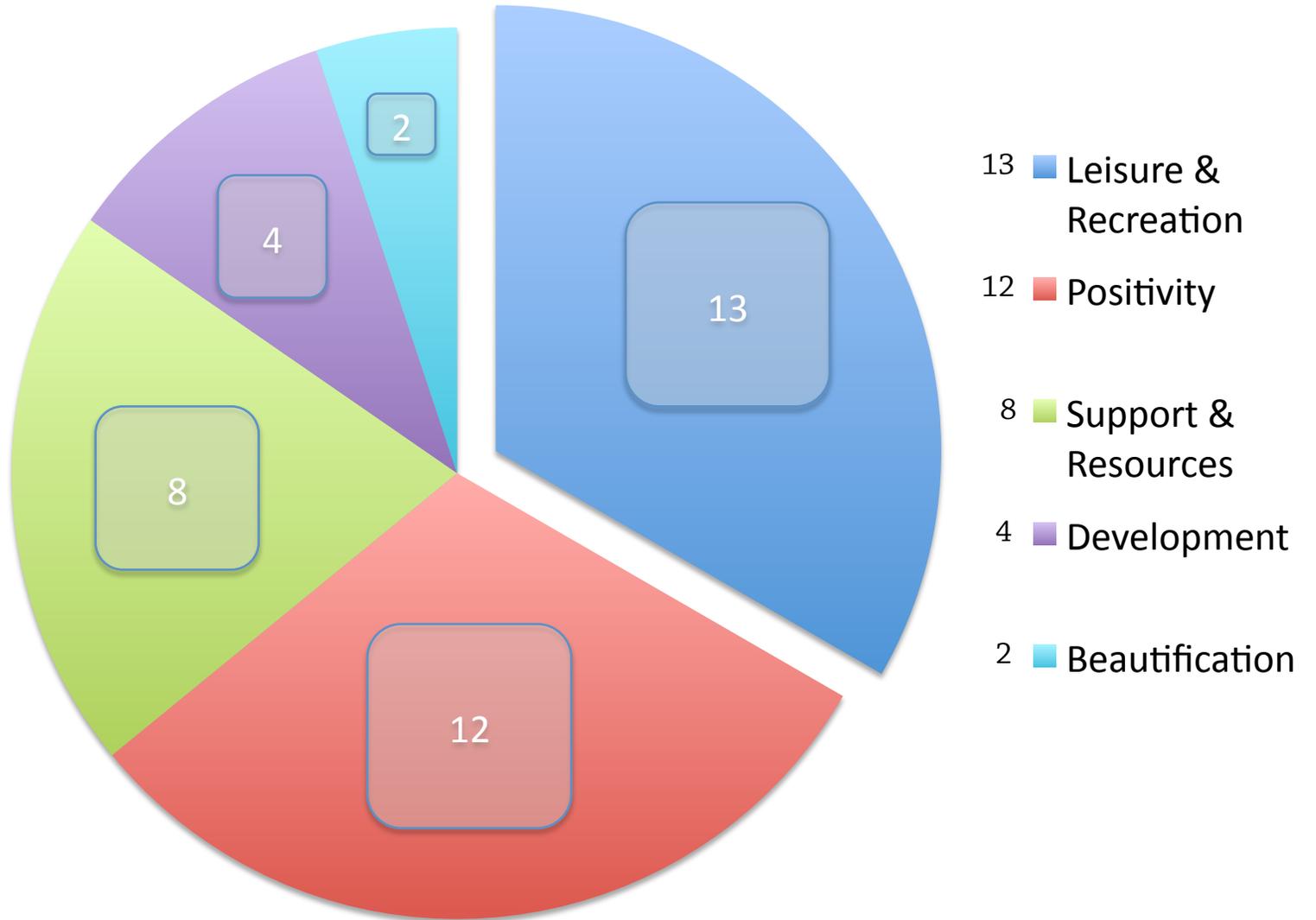
- New jobs
- More volunteer opportunities
- Paying disabled people their rightful income

YOUTH SUPPORT (2 responses)

- Support groups (mental health/diabetes)
- Youth & Adult togetherness

CONTINUE

What Needs to Continue?



RESPONSES

LEISURE & RECREATION (13 responses)

- The existence of Seaparc
- Community activities via Schools/Seaparc
- Enhancing youth (program) opportunities
- Having community events/volunteer opportunities
- Movie nights
- Fishing
- Canada Day Fair
- Community sports for all ages
- Sports

POSITIVITY (12 responses)

- Improving
- Fun
- Being awesome
- Smiling
- Being honest with others around you
- Being a safe community
- Working hard
- Caring
- Loving where we live

SUPPORT & RESOURCES (8 responses)

- Teen clinic
- Support groups
- Helping teens
- Transition House
- Sooke Youth Council
- Youth expansion (more say)
- Youth work

DEVELOPMENT (4 responses)

- Preserving wildlife
- Being small and natural
- Building our community
- Expanding our community

BEAUTIFICATION (2 responses)

- Recycle

Ranking the Top 5 Issues.

After determining what needs to Stop-Start-Continue, we wanted to know which issues mattered most. We calculated the top 5 issues from S-S-C and posted them on boards around the room. Each student was given 3 stickers and asked to place them on the top 3 issues they cared about.

Students were given a few options in the Dotmocracy. First, they could place none of their stickers on the boards if they did not feel passion for the top issues. Second, could also place one sticker on each of their top 3 choices. Finally, they could place 2 to 3 stickers on their top issue(s) to demonstrate passion for their chosen topic(s).

Leisure & Recreation: 44 dots

Transportation: 32 dots

Development & Budget: 30 dots

Youth Support: 20 dots

Bullying: 13 dots

Quotes From Classroom Discussions.

“Langford is only a 20 minute drive away.
Why bring everything that’s there here?”

“I don’t understand why there are subdivisions that take out all the trees and take out the space people come to Sooke for.”

“We only have one road and one bus. There is no small bus to take people around Sooke to visit friends.”

“We have a lot of houses that people aren’t buying. [Developers should] come here and do better things for this area.”

“All of the developments take down all of the trees”

“[Local developer] keeps developing... what are we getting out of it?”

“Most of the retail and customer service jobs are done by youth for \$20,000 a year... how can we afford ‘affordable housing’ *and* cars?”

“Transportation doesn’t match the current housing situation. If you don’t have a vehicle, you can’t get around.”

YOUTH-FRIENDLY ADULTS
MUSIC
KITCHEN OR RESTAURANT
DANCES
YOUTH WORKING THERE
GOOD COFFEE AFTER WORK
ROCK CLIMBING WALL
WORKOUT GYM
ROAD LIGHTS
SAFE TRANSPORTATION
FREE

Elements of a YF Space

COMMUNITY KITCHEN

NIGHT TO WATCH HOCKEY OR FOOTBALL

OLD SCHOOL ARCADE

TV

OPEN LATE

HANGOUT LOUNGE

SPORTS GYM

FREE WI-FI

PING PONG

SIDEWALKS

Quotes on Youth-Friendly Spaces...

NO ADULTS

- “It has to be run by students”
- “Affordability is important. If there’s a gym, it’s a draw to be free”
- “If it’s open all week, have one day that’s cheaper and I’ll know my friends will be there”
- “Youth that are scared to go home need a place to be all week”

POOL TABLE

GOOD PARKING

Notes From Mayor's Advisory Panel.

On Transportation

- Bus fare just went up and there is no longer a student fare. More people are driving illegally (more than 1 passenger with an 'N' license).
- A summer shuttle bus to/from the Poltholes would help prevent drinking and driving. It's hard for youth to get transportation home since there is no cell reception in the park.
- Biking around town isn't a better option due to scary and dangerous roads.
- Youth living in East Sooke and Kemp Lake are isolated (physically and socially) due to poor transportation.
- The Trolley in Langford runs off donations. It's great for tourism and gets you to all the tourism attractions! We need one in Sooke to take tourists and youth around the downtown area.
- The city bus gets you to school 1 minute before the bell rings; after school, you have 1 minute to get to the bus or you'll be waiting for the 4:30 bus.
- The bus after school isn't a double-decker! Sometimes youth get turned away.

Notes From Mayor's Advisory Panel.

On Health & Engagement

- Take money spent on vending machines and put it towards EMCS cafeteria program for healthier food options.
- Youth want to be active, but it's too expensive.
- There's a "nothing else to do" mentality to overcome when it comes to substance abuse.
- Programming shouldn't be organized. No one will attend if they know the primary focus is education; however, youth are interested in learning. Incorporate learning without making it a primary focus.
- Programs should incorporate hands-on learning, exploration, and then applying what was learned to real situations.
- Youth want more sports teams and transportation for teams and spectators. This will help us be competitive and build team spirit in Sooke.

Notes From Mayor's Advisory Panel.

On Building a Sense of Community

- We want to move away, but we want to come back to raise our families.
- Bartering would be cool! It could create volunteer opportunities for youth who need hours for graduation.
- Add a volunteer auction (like United Way's Volunteering With Benefits event) to the Rotary Fair for those who aren't able to donate money.
- "Volunteer bucks" can be raised to trade local volunteer hours for local services.
- Include a youth section in the Sooke News Mirror, advertising upcoming sports games in and out of school. Youth might read the paper more if they know their friends will be in it.
- Have a bulletin board for youth downtown, like a youth corner. A place to be. Connect it with the Leadership classes.
- We need to get the word out on the good things youth do. The bad youth don't represent all youth.
- Have a youth night in Sooke (collaborate!) where items at restaurants and recreation services are discounted and a flat rate.
- Youth programs should run later than 7pm. Most youth are at home eating and doing homework until then.
- "It's a big deal to us and they don't get that yet" Re: New businesses with no roots in the community.

Recommendations.

- 1. Involve youth in local issues.** There seems to be a miscommunication between Mayor and Council & Sooke's youth population. While youth are asking for a START to infrastructure, they are also asking for a STOP to development. It should be noted that the youth are aware that housing development is required for our local economy; therefore, we recommend communication between these groups to further determine what the youth are looking for in the local housing developments. Some questions to consider: Why are they opposed to current housing developments? What does the future Sooke look like to our future adult citizens?
- 2. Involve youth in your planning process** for products, services, and developments – especially where it involves issues in Start-Stop-Continue. Our youth are interested in helping, but we are not connecting with them. If youth are not actively sharing their voice, it is not because they don't want to, it is because we are not giving them the proper opportunities to feel comfortable in doing so. The Sooke Youth Council may be able to help build a more inclusive environment for youth to learn and share. Working together, we may be able to act as a consulting voice to answer specific questions the community may have for our youth.

Recommendations.

- 3. Show them the power of community and empower youth** by taking on the responsibilities of the projects they are interested in. Our youth have the capacity for great change, but they are unsure of their abilities as individuals. They are not always as connected with the community outside of their school, family, and friends, so they need assistance building their capacity through community connections. By creating an inventory of skills and abilities in our community, we can develop a network of individuals who are able to transfer their knowledge and share their skills to help accomplish goals. Young people can take on major projects, but need to know they have guidance and support through friends, family, and the greater community.
- 4. Support youth sports by attending important local games.** This report demonstrates the importance of sports in the lives of our youth. The Sooke Youth Council is working on booking a bus to shuttle players and spectators to and from games in Greater Victoria. We hope this will increase the support for youth sports. If you have any ideas on how to support youth sports, please feel free to share!

Conclusion.

Our youth care about this community. Their input and ideas are thoughtful and meaningful; they want to raise their families in a community they can be proud of, that offers future generations more than they were offered. This is what we all hope for with for our children – youth issues are community needs.

Whenever we go through the results of this research, we are inspired by the brilliance and energy of the youth who participated. There are so many questions and so many possibilities. As an advocate for youth in Sooke, we encourage you to dig deeper into the issues you connect with in this study. Work with us to determine root causes and to implement sustainable change so that our future citizens will have the inclusive community they dreamed of in their youth.

