



# Final Report

## VYES Youth Pathways Project



VICTORIA YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SOCIETY

Prepared for The Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee by Julie-Ann Hunter,  
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## Who We Are

For more than 30 years, The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (VYES) has served youth ages 12–24 across three sites in Greater Victoria through a coordinated pathway of prevention, early intervention, and crisis care. Supporting over 1,000 youth and families annually, VYES provides welcoming, non-judgmental spaces of safety and belonging beyond home and school.

Youth accessing VYES often navigate complex, intersecting challenges including housing instability, family conflict, mental health and substance use concerns, school disengagement, and food insecurity. Through accessible, youth-centred programs, VYES fosters resilience, dignity, accountability, and long-term stability.

## What We Do

The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (VYES) delivers a wide range of programs and services designed to support youth and their families through critical transitions, reduce barriers, and promote long-term well-being. Our work spans basic needs support, crisis intervention, life-skills development, emotional wellness, and housing stability, providing youth with the tools and connections they need to build safety, resilience, and independence.

Service Scope Includes:

- **Drop-in supports:** Safe space, meals, basic needs, and connection to services
- **Emergency shelter:** Short-term housing and crisis support for youth in unsafe situations
- **Detox and recovery supports:** Non-medical youth detox, counselling, and wellness groups
- **Youth outreach:** Mobile, community-based support, advocacy, and systems navigation
- **Youth & family services:** Counselling and family-focused supports to strengthen relationships
- **Supported independent living:** One-to-one help with housing, life skills, and transitioning to adulthood
- **Housing Support Fund:** Flexible financial assistance to help youth secure or maintain safe housing
- **Youth justice program:** Case management and advocacy for youth involved in the justice system
- **Life skills and groups:** Programs that build coping skills, healthy relationships, and resilience
- **Seasonal programming:** Summer opportunities, activities, and connections to supports
- **Food and basic needs support:** Pantry access and essential items to reduce barriers

# **Executive Summary Youth Pathways Project**

The Youth Pathways Project was developed as a six-month pilot project to provide short-term, flexible intervention and system-navigation supports to youth ages 12–19 who were waiting for long-term services through the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (VYES). VYES had noted that due to increased wait times for long term services, many youth were waiting to access support during a crucial period where often short term support can be used to create solutions. The project focused on early engagement, prevention, and stabilization during periods of heightened vulnerability. Youth were assessed quickly, connected to appropriate community and VYES programs, and supported to develop coping strategies and safety plans while waiting for ongoing services.

All anticipated outcomes were achieved, with 71 youth being offered targeted interventions. Youth demonstrated increased awareness of supports, earlier risk identification, and smoother transitions into long-term programs. The success of this project has directly informed organizational development at VYES, and we are moving forward with the creation of an Intake Coordinator position to ensure sustained access to timely early intervention for youth. The project has meaningfully contributed to prevention services by reducing risk, and strengthening protective supports for vulnerable youth.

## **Program Description**

The Youth Pathways Project provided short-term, flexible interventions, advocacy, and system-navigation services to youth (ages 12–19) waiting for long-term support at VYES.

The project prioritized:

- Immediate assessment and prioritization of support needs.
- Addressing short-term support needs prior to escalation.
- Continuity of care during wait periods.
- Decreasing stress experienced by youth awaiting service delivery.

Referrals were received directly from youth and families, as well as through schools, probation, community service providers, and partner agencies. This cross-system collaboration strengthened diversion efforts and ensured youth were not left unsupported during critical transition periods.

## **Program Objectives**

The objectives of the Youth Pathways Project were to:

- Act as an access point for youth requiring support related to family conflict, homelessness, unemployment, mental health, and substance use.
- Serve as a bridge for youth on waitlists, ensuring stability during transition.
- Increase awareness of community supports and system navigation resources.
- Provide education related to risk factors, coping skills, and emotional regulation.
- Improve outcomes for marginalized youth and reduce risk of justice system involvement.

# **Outcomes of Youth Pathways Project**

**Over six months, the following outcomes were achieved:**

Number of youth offered targeted interventions: **71**

Number of youth connected to external community services: **38**

Number of youth transitioned to long-term services with VYES: **41**

Number of youth reporting improved emotional regulation: **28**

## **Interpretation of Outcomes**

71 youth accessed short-term stabilization during a high-risk period. 38 youth strengthened their support network through successful service connections. 41 youth transitioned into long-term services with improved readiness and stability. 28 youth reported improved emotional regulation, a key protective factor associated with reduced justice involvement. Together, these outcomes reflect strong engagement, early risk reduction, and effective bridging between immediate intervention and longer-term supports.

## **Justice-Related Outcomes**

The Youth Pathways Project directly supports the mandate of the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee by prioritizing prevention, diversion, and early engagement.

Rapid response allowed workers to identify risk related to justice involvement, including:

- family conflict
- school disengagement
- substance use
- unsafe peer involvement
- housing instability and homelessness

Through early identification and immediate intervention, youth were supported before situations escalated to police contact, court involvement, or deeper justice system engagement. This preventative model contributes directly to diversion efforts, promotes accountability and stability, and enhances community safety. By stabilizing youth sooner and strengthening protective factors, the project improves developmental outcomes for young people.

## **Prevention and Early Intervention Impact**

The Youth Pathways Project strengthened prevention capacity within VYES. By engaging youth immediately at referral, rather than waiting for long-term case assignment, workers were able to identify risk factors earlier and implement timely support strategies.

This proactive approach:

- stabilized youth before escalation to crisis.
- strengthened protective factors, including school engagement, family stability, prosocial peer relationships, and positive coping skills, all recognized as protective factors against justice system involvement.
- resolved many presenting concerns within short-term intervention.

Early intervention reduced the likelihood of youth progressing into deeper system involvement and reinforced a strengths-based, community-focused model of care.

## **Organizational Development Resulting from the Project**

Due to the demonstrated effectiveness of providing access to a youth worker at the point of referral, VYES is implementing an Intake Coordinator position.

This role will:

- provide short-term intervention at the initial point of contact
- offer consistent connection during wait periods
- reduce service gaps between programs
- strengthen coordination across youth justice and community systems

This structural enhancement ensures the sustainability of the prevention model piloted through the Youth Pathways Project.

## **Conclusion**

The Youth Pathways Project successfully met all objectives and demonstrated that early, short-term, flexible intervention significantly improves outcomes for youth awaiting services.

By bridging wait periods, reducing risk factors, and strengthening protective supports, the project contributed to measurable improvements in youth stability and reduced risk of escalation into court involvement or deeper justice system engagement.

With the implementation of a permanent Intake Coordinator position, VYES will continue advancing early intervention, diversion, and community-based prevention efforts in alignment with the priorities of the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee.

## **Acknowledgement**

We sincerely thank the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee for their generous support, which made this six-month pilot possible. Your investment has strengthened prevention capacity in our community and positively impacted the lives of vulnerable youth.

### Contact Information

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