

Welco**ME** Youth Action Team

Review of community
spaces on the North Shore



Prepared by BUNYAAD Public Affairs and McCreary Centre Society for the Youth-Friendly North Shore initiative.

The initiative's work is led by the District of North Vancouver in collaboration with the City of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, Squamish Nation, and Tsleil-Waututh Nation.

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Public Safety
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Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh
Úxwumixw
Squamish Nation



Tsleil-Waututh Nation
PEOPLE OF THE INLET



We respectfully acknowledge the original Peoples of the lands and waters that situate and surround us wherever we work. We honour the səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and x̱m̱əθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), on whose territories we work, play and live. We extend our gratitude and raise up their ongoing relationship with land they have stewarded since time immemorial. As well, we recognize Métis Nation BC, Inuit and urban Indigenous Peoples who have deeply rooted relationships with the land we all call home.

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Photographs and comments taken by members of the YAT are included throughout this report.

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	7
YOUTH REVIEWS	11
Getting to and from	13
Transit and bus stops	13
Parking	14
Active transportation	15
Streets and crosswalks	16
Outdoor Physical Space	17
Facilities and amenities	17
Space and equipment for activities	18
Safety	19
Plants and nature	20
Wayfinding	20
Accessibility	22
Indoor Physical Space	23
Architectural and interior design	23
Facilities and amenities	25
Youth-only spaces	28
Wayfinding and signage	29
Programs and Activities	30
General programs and activities	30
Youth-specific programs and activities	31
Information and awareness	32
Sense of Belonging	34
Youth-only spaces and programs	34
Peers and peer connections	35
Diversity and inclusion	36
Supportive adults	37
Digital Spaces	39
Style and design	39
Navigation	40
Finding information and resources	41
YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS	43
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	47
REFERENCES	48
APPENDIX A - COMMUNITY REVIEW REFLECTION QUESTIONS	49
APPENDIX B - COMMUNITY REVIEW WORKSHEETS	52

March 2024

Executive Summary

Youth-Friendly North Shore (YFNS) is a three-year initiative to help build healthy communities where youth thrive. Building on the existing strengths in the community, YFNS focuses on (1) creating youth-friendly spaces by engaging youth and (2) improving the system of care for youth across the North Shore.

WelcoME Youth Action Team (YAT) is a recurring effort supported by McCreary Centre Society to engage youth across the North Shore to discuss their experiences accessing various physical and digital spaces. From November 2023 to March 2024, McCreary facilitated the Youth Action Team (YAT). This group of 12–18 year old youth from the North Shore reviewed local spaces, programs, and websites to identify what made them feel youth-friendly, and to suggest areas where they could improve.

The YAT visited and reviewed 11 community spaces across five domains: **Getting to and from; Outdoor Physical Spaces; Indoor Physical Spaces; Programs and Activities; and Sense of Belonging.** They also reviewed three digital spaces. Following their reviews, the YAT identified common factors which contributed to youth feeling safe and welcome, including specific considerations for diverse populations, such as newcomer youth, racialized youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth. They developed a list of key recommendations for community spaces across the North Shore, which included:

- developing dedicated youth spaces, which are designed with youth to meet their needs and interests;
- enhancing youth-specific programs, ensuring they are accessible, varied, and include introductory programs;
- fostering community connections through art, events, and intergenerational programming;
- prioritizing inclusion and accessibility across all spaces and programs to support participation from those with diverse needs;
- creating safer physical spaces through improved lighting, and supporting safety for those using public transit or active forms of transportation;
- incorporating clear wayfinding features to help youth easily navigate spaces;
- ensuring proper care and maintenance of spaces;
- providing training for staff on best practices for supporting and engaging diverse youth;
- improving the advertising of youth spaces and programs, including using school outreach, community events, and youth-friendly digital spaces to increase awareness;
- designing digital spaces which reflect how youth seek out and process information; and

- engaging youth in ongoing decision-making and feedback processes, to ensure spaces and programs continue to meet evolving needs.

The YAT's findings highlight the importance of centering youth voices in the creation of inclusive and engaging community spaces, as this can not only support their unique and diverse needs but can also benefit the wider community.

Introduction

Youth-Friendly North Shore

Youth-Friendly North Shore (YFNS) is a three-year initiative to help build healthy communities where youth thrive, reducing the risk of involvement in gang or organized criminal activities. Through targeted prevention and intervention activities, YFNS aims to reduce risk factors, such as negative influences, limited positive role models, and a lack of community attachment, while enhancing protective factors, such as social belonging, recognition, and access to social, recreational and cultural services.

Building on the existing strengths in the community, YFNS focuses on (1) creating youth-friendly spaces by engaging youth and (2) improving the system of care for youth across the North Shore. To learn more about the initiative, visit the YFNS webpage [here](#).

WelcoME Youth Action Team

In a time when the needs and interests of young people on the North Shore are rapidly changing, it is more important than ever that there are community spaces where youth feel safe, connected, and welcome. To address this need, the WelcoME Youth Action Team (YAT) is a recurring effort supported by McCreary Centre Society to engage youth across the North Shore to discuss their experiences accessing various physical and digital spaces.

Members of the YAT are diverse youth from the North Shore who are interested in contributing to making community spaces more welcoming and friendly for youth. Youth between the ages of 12–18 years who reside on the North Shore are recruited through a multi-agency effort each fall. Each of the three cohorts of the YAT will review the youth friendliness of community spaces across the North Shore.



WelcoME team visits Bunyaad offices for their final session in April 2024.



Project Team

YFNS is being implemented by BUNYAAD Public Affairs in partnership with McCreary Centre Society. As leaders in youth engagement and participatory research, the McCreary staff, listed below, provided support to the WelcoME YAT in all aspects of the described work.

- Dr. Annie Smith, Executive Director
- Evelyn McGowan, Director of Community Engagement
- Katie Horton, Director of Youth Engagement
- Karen Forsyth, BC Adolescent Health Survey Coordinator and Research Projects Manager
- Lucie Anderson, Research Assistant

What the YAT Did

Getting Started

The first cohort of the YAT consisted of 21 youth aged 12 to 18, including newcomer youth, racialized youth, neurodivergent youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Between November 2023 and March 2024, the YAT identified characteristics of safe and welcoming spaces, and developed a framework for reviewing the youth-friendliness of various North Shore community spaces. To create the framework, the YAT adapted the evidence-based Our Place Standard Tool (Scottish Government, 2023), and consolidated the original 14 domains from that tool into five key areas of focus:

- **Getting to and from:** public transit, active transportation, streets, sidewalks, and parking.
- **Outdoor Physical Spaces:** the physical features of parks, natural spaces, and other community gathering spaces.
- **Indoor Physical Spaces:** the physical features of community centres, libraries, and other community indoor spaces.
- **Programs and Activities:** the programs and activities offered at these spaces.
- **Sense of Belonging:** feelings of safety, inclusion, and belonging when in these spaces.

The YAT developed a series of questions to help them reflect on the “youth-friendliness” of a space in the context of each of these five domains (See Appendix A). Using this adapted tool, YAT members visited 11 community spaces around the North Shore and an additional three virtual spaces.



The Youth Action Team imagines what a Youth-Friendly North Shore could look like in 2029 if their recommendations are implemented by community partners.

During each visit, they identified ways that these spaces supported a sense of belonging for youth, and areas where they could enhance or improve. They recorded their observations on the community review worksheets designed for this purpose (Appendix B).

Visiting Sites

With the support of McCreary staff, youth visited the following community spaces:

- Civic Plaza
- Delbrook Community Recreation Centre
- Delbrook Park
- Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre
- John Braithwaite Community Centre
- Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre
- Lynn Valley Branch of the North Vancouver District Public Library (Lynn Valley Library)
- North Vancouver City Library
- West Vancouver Memorial Library
- William Griffin Park
- Youth Hub at Park Royal

YAT members visited the websites for each of the physical sites they visited, as well as the following websites:

- Foundry North Shore (foundrybc.ca/northshore)
- North Shore Restorative Justice Society (nsrj.ca)
- North Shore Youth Services Directory (nsyouth.ca)

Developing Recommendations

Together, the YAT shared their respective findings, identified commonalities and differences, and discussed the factors that may have affected their experiences. They collaborated to ensure their reviews were inclusive of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of young people in the group and in the broader community. Together, they identified key recommendations across all domains, that they felt were most important for community spaces and the YFNS initiative to address, and that could ensure spaces are welcoming, engaging and inclusive for all youth.

Limitations

The YAT's experiences of community spaces recorded in this report may not be representative of the experiences of all youth or across all community spaces on the North Shore. For example, the first cohort of the YAT did not include any youth who identified as Indigenous and did not include youth living outside of North Vancouver. Focused efforts will be made in future cohorts to recruit Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh youth and youth from West Vancouver.

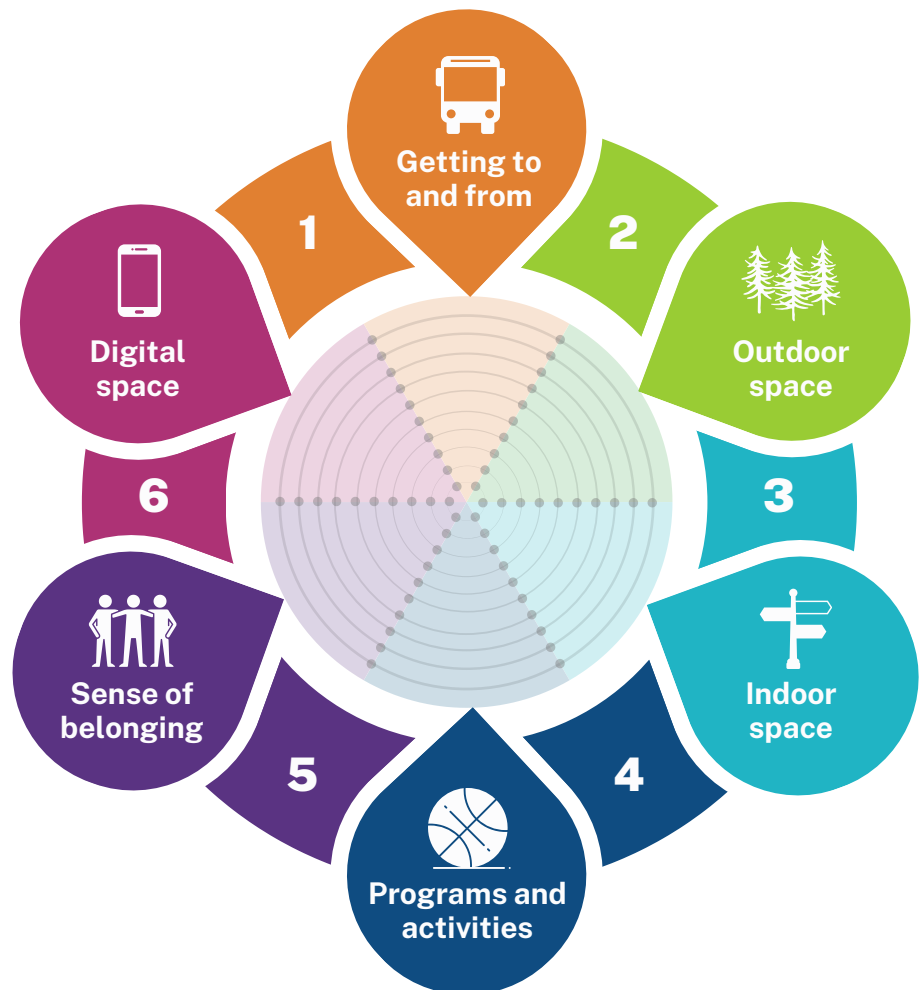
The YAT shared recommendations based on a single time-limited visit to each community site, and therefore, may not have considered factors that may have affected the operations of a space on the day of their visit (e.g., staff shortages). Additionally, the YAT did not visit any programs that required intake or registration.

Youth Reviews

What the YAT Found

The YAT conducted community reviews and gathered feedback shared in this section. This includes broad feedback about feeling welcome in a space, as well as specific feedback for each of the five domains: **Getting to and from**, **Outdoor Physical Space**, **Indoor Physical Spaces**, **Programs and Activities**, and **Sense of Belonging**.

Despite the diverse backgrounds within the group, most youth shared similar feedback about what made a space feel welcoming and friendly. Specific feedback from diverse populations is highlighted, including from newcomer youth, racialized youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth.



WelcoME Youth Action Team's adaption of the Scottish Our Place Tool for their community review of spaces on the North Shore

When reviewing community spaces, youth were encouraged to reflect on the purpose of the space, as well as the needs of other age groups and populations who may use them. The YAT considered how their recommendations may impact other age groups, and strived to ensure their suggestions for creating a more youth-friendly community would not unintentionally negatively impact others.

Getting to and from

When reviewing community spaces, the YAT considered the method of transport they used most frequently, as well as other ways youth may travel. For each review, the group traveled by public transit, as this was the most common method of transport used by the majority of the group.

The experience of getting to and from a location was identified as having one of the greatest impacts on whether or not youth will visit a location. Key factors included bus frequency, location of bus stops, and feeling of safety at bus stops and on buses; as well as how well streets and crosswalk were maintained and lit; whether a location could be easily and safely accessed on foot or by bike; and the location and amount of parking (for those who had access to a car or had an adult to drive them). Refer to Appendix A for the full list of prompt questions.

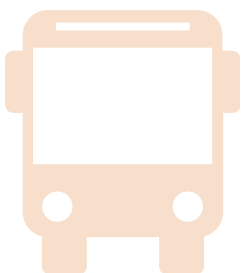
TRANSIT AND BUS STOPS

What felt youth-friendly

The YAT noted that the distance between a bus stop and a site could influence whether a young person decides to visit that place. For all sites visited, they felt that bus stops were convenient and accessible. Most bus stops were located directly outside the entrance to the site, or within a two-minute walk (about 100 to 200 metres), which youth felt served as an incentive to visit those spaces. Most youth felt that bus stops located under a five-minute walk from the destination could be considered youth-friendly. Youth particularly appreciated the close proximity of bus stops at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, the Youth Hub at Park Royal, and the Lynn Valley Library. Youth also noted that almost all bus stops were located at or close to traffic lights, which helped to ensure safe crossing when getting to and from the bus.

Many of the bus stops had shelter and seating, which youth appreciated. They preferred shelter over seating, but recognized the importance of both, since seating can help seniors or those with mobility challenges. The bus stops near Delbrook Community Recreation Centre and the Youth Hub at Park Royal were particularly favoured by youth.

Youth appreciated bus stops that featured signs displaying real-time bus arrival times, as this feature increased their sense of safety while waiting for the bus. They also found the bus to be a relatively affordable and accessible method of transportation, especially considering youth aged 18 and under are able to purchase discounted tickets and passes. A few youth also felt that North Shore bus drivers were friendly and approachable, and appreciated



that drivers were willing to answer questions and offer assistance for those who needed help.

What felt less youth-friendly

Across all community outings, youth felt less positively about bus scheduling, bus routes, and the frequency of buses. They found it challenging to coordinate routes for the community outings, often requiring transfers between two to three buses to access programs and spaces across the North Shore. Their departure time could also significantly affect the trip. For example, the travel time between two sites varied between 27 minutes and 58 minutes. During the community outings, youth commonly noted that they often had to wait 30 minutes between buses.

Youth observed that many bus stops lacked adequate lighting, making these areas feel less safe for those waiting, especially after dark. They also noted that most bus stops do not have posted schedules or real-time bus arrival times. Given that not all youth have access to a phone or reliable data to check bus schedules or arrival times, not having this information could be inconvenient and make them feel unsafe.

PARKING

What felt youth-friendly

Most youth in the YAT did not drive. However, for those who did, the availability of free or low-cost parking was important. This parking could be located onsite, such as the parking lot at Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, or on adjacent streets.

Youth did not have a preference for underground or outdoor parking, as long as there was sufficient parking available. For example, one youth who drove noted that they were always able to find parking at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, even during peak times (e.g., weekday evenings).

What felt less youth-friendly

Youth reported difficulty finding some underground parking lots, due to insufficient signage outside and inside the building. They also felt that most sites lacked safe, convenient pick-up or drop-off areas. Many sites were

located near busy streets, with only a single lane to enter or exit. This could make stopping a vehicle to pick up or drop off a youth not only disruptive to traffic, but also potentially unsafe for both the youth and other drivers.

Youth felt less comfortable in parking lots with narrow lanes and small parking stalls. They expressed that many youth are new drivers, so may feel more anxious and less confident navigating narrow parking areas.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

What felt youth-friendly

Youth felt positively about spaces which were located along bike routes, especially off-street and protected bike lanes. They felt more inclined to use active transportation methods, like biking when they perceive these routes as safe, enjoyable, and convenient. For example, they noted that the Mosquito Creek Trail was an accessible and convenient trail that led directly to Delbrook Community Recreation Centre.

Youth appreciated having access to safe and secure bike storage. Many noted their preference for the bike lockers available at Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, which offered secure, covered bike stalls. These lockers were perceived as more secure than traditional bike racks, and youth liked that they kept bikes covered and out of view. Similar bike storage was found at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre and Civic Plaza.

A private company provides electric bikes and scooters for rent across the North Shore. While it could be expensive and inaccessible for some, youth appreciated the availability and convenience of e-bikes and e-scooters, particularly for those who did not own a bike or scooter.

What felt less youth-friendly

Some areas had very few bike racks, or bike racks that were located far from the entrance to the space. This not only felt inconvenient, but also raised concerns about the security of bikes parked out of sight of the facility.



Bike racks and covered bike storage at Civic Plaza.

STREETS AND CROSSWALKS

What felt youth-friendly

Youth valued sites that were located near crosswalks equipped with traffic lights. This helped them feel safer than at pedestrian crossings without lights, or where there were no crosswalks within three blocks of a site's entrance, and they may be more likely to jaywalk.

While youth recognized the value of having a community space located on a busy street, they preferred when sites were located on quiet or traffic-calmed streets, like the John Braithwaite Community Centre, or near pedestrian-only areas, such as the North Vancouver City Library. These areas offered a greater sense of safety and calm.

Many youth liked rainbow crosswalks, especially when these were easily visible from a community space, such as the one located directly in front of the Lynn Valley Library. A few youth, including those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, stated that this contributed to a sense of feeling welcome before even entering the library, and could help to increase youth's feelings of inclusion, safety, and belonging.

What felt less youth-friendly

Youth observed that some sidewalks were narrow and required maintenance, raising concerns about safety and accessibility. They noted that some sidewalks were only wide enough for pedestrians to walk in a single line, with a shallow curb on one side and hedges or trees on the other. Additionally, some curbs and sidewalks were deteriorating, impacting their accessibility and safety.

Outdoor Physical Space

The YAT emphasized the importance of youth having access to safe outdoor spaces for their health and well-being. They visited several outdoor spaces, including parks, playgrounds and community gathering areas (e.g., plazas). Refer to Appendix A for the full list of prompt questions.

FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

What felt youth-friendly

Youth consistently liked when parks and similar outdoor spaces offered a range of amenities, including accessible, single-stalled public wash-rooms (refer to page 14 for further discussion). They also appreciated the bike pump station near the Lynn Valley Library. Other amenities they felt contributed positively to a space included garbage bins, water fountains, covered areas (e.g., gazebos), and bike racks.

Youth appreciated having ample seating and seating that encouraged social gathering, such as the park benches at Delbrook Park. They also liked seating integrated into the natural or manufactured landscape, such as the seating built into the water feature at the Civic Plaza, or the rows of boulders at Mahon Park.

What felt less youth-friendly

Many youth commented on the amount of litter in parks and outdoor spaces (e.g., cigarette butts and food packages near park benches). They felt that this showed a disregard and neglect of the space, and could be harmful to people, animals, and the environment. They were concerned about finding discarded containers from medication and cannabis products, fearing that a child or pet might accidentally consume these substances.

Youth observed a lack of garbage bins, particularly in areas where people tend to gather and garbage may accumulate, like near park benches. They were concerned that many outdoor spaces lacked water fountains or had fountains that were hard to locate, as these are spaces are intended for play and physical activity.

Youth felt that parks and outdoor spaces lacked the means to share community events, updates, and opportunities. Given that parks and other outdoor areas are easily accessible and often visited by youth, they felt these places “could benefit from an opportunity/community board” to share information for young people.



Garbage bin at William Griffin Park.



SPACE AND EQUIPMENT FOR ACTIVITIES

What felt youth-friendly

Youth valued outdoor spaces which provided room for structured and unstructured play, commonly known as “sports and recreation.” This included open areas, such as grassy fields, and areas designated for specific activities, such as tennis courts, basketball courts, or skate parks.

One youth appreciated anything in an outdoor space that “[offered] space to play,” like at Delbrook Park.

Some parks included outdoor exercise equipment, like the self-propelled treadmill at Delbrook Park. Youth liked these features because they encouraged physical activity in a fun and playful way. While this equipment seemed moderately dangerous for younger youth, they felt it introduced an appropriate level of risk for older youth.

Youth also appreciated when play areas used sand or rubber surfaces instead of wood chips. They preferred rubber surfacing, like the play area at Delbrook Park, as it was clean, safe (e.g., no risk of splinters or hidden hazardous items), and sturdy enough to absorb impact.

What felt less youth-friendly

In several outdoor spaces, the YAT observed that playgrounds were designated for children. While youth acknowledged the need for such dedicated spaces, they desired more play/playground areas designed for adolescents, such as outdoor fitness equipment. Many youth in the group enjoyed climbing, swinging, and playing on the playground equipment, but even when it was not specifically prohibited, they felt judged or that it was “socially frowned upon” to use the playground equipment.

Youth also felt that some equipment, such as the fitness equipment, lacked clear signage or instructions for proper and safe use. Not only could a lack of instructions pose a risk to users, but it may also be a barrier for youth unfamiliar with using such equipment.

Several youth also noted that some outdoor activity spaces required maintenance or faced ongoing infrastructure issues. For example, some basketball courts had poorly maintained surfaces or nets, which were unsafe for play and contributed to a sense of neglect. It was also noted that some soccer

pitches frequently flood due to rainfall, rendering the space unusable in poor weather.

SAFETY

What felt youth-friendly

The YAT noted that their feeling of safety heavily influenced their overall rating of a space. They felt safer when spaces were well-lit and there were lots of other people around. This was particularly true for racialized youth and for youth who identified as a gender or sexual minority.

While youth felt safest with overhead lighting, such as pathway or street lights, they also liked when lighting was incorporated into the existing infrastructure or landscaping, like the lights in the stair railings at Delbrook Park. However, this lighting was often not bright enough to illuminate an entire space, so it was preferred when outdoor spaces had both overhead and structural or landscape lighting.

Youth also frequently noted that signs and guidelines prohibiting smoking or vaping helped them to feel safer. They felt that smoke- and vape-free areas helped to protect the health and well-being of themselves and others, and reduced waste, such as discarded cigarette butts.

What felt less youth-friendly

Youth expressed concern over community sites located along busy roads, particularly parks and play spaces (e.g. playgrounds), where there was a risk for those who may be playing, such as if their ball rolled into traffic. They also noted that some parks had safety features in need of repair, including broken or deteriorated fences designed to prevent accidents. They felt these posed a particular safety hazard for children, especially when near running water such as creeks.

They also observed that many outdoor spaces were poorly lit, including pathways that are frequently used for daily commutes. This was of particular concern during the winter when youth felt unsafe travelling to and from school or extracurricular activities in the dark.

PLANTS AND NATURE

What felt youth-friendly

Youth frequently mentioned that trees, plants, and other greenery made outdoor spaces feel inviting and contributed to a sense of calm. For example, one youth stated that the trees and plants at William Griffin Park gave them “a calm feeling.”

Some youth preferred parks that featured natural landscaping over carefully designed gardens. They also appreciated efforts to enhance a park’s biodiversity and to restore plants that are native to the area, such as the Habitat Enhancement Upgrades happening at William Griffin Park. They also liked when parks included signs with information and descriptions about the local plants and their properties. One youth noted that this education could help youth “feel more connection with local nature.”

What felt less youth-friendly

While acknowledging this may have been due to the time of year, youth found that the plants and foliage in many parks and outdoor spaces felt dull or sparse. Many trees were deciduous or lacked leaves, and plants had not yet bloomed. Many youth also observed dead trees or plants that obstructed walking paths, which could pose a risk to visitors.

WAYFINDING

What felt youth-friendly

Some parks included maps of the space and its trails and amenities, which youth appreciated. Maps and other clear signage helped them feel comfortable and confident navigating a space, especially when it was their first time visiting. They particularly appreciated the modern, bright, and easily visible signs on the new washrooms at Delbrook Park.

What felt less youth-friendly

Conversely, when parks and similar outdoor spaces did not have clear signage, this contributed to a feeling of inaccessibility and uncertainty. In some parks, a lack of information about washrooms, or how long the trails were or where they led, prevented some youth from exploring those spaces.

COMMUNITY ART AND EVENTS

What felt youth-friendly



Public art piece "Eventually #1" by Adam Kuby in William Griffin Park.

Youth appreciated outdoor spaces that incorporated art and colour, which could include formal art, like murals and sculptures, as well as colourful and inoffensive graffiti. They felt that art improved the look and feel of a space, and could help foster a sense of community. They particularly liked when there was a sign or placard sharing about the artist and the meaning of the art. For example, they liked the carved glass art and engraved literary quotes in Civic Plaza, "Eventually #1" in William Griffin Park, and the sculptures around Delbrook Community Recreation Centre. They also felt that the graffiti in the skate park at William Griffin Park "added a nice pop of colour to the park."

Youth liked outdoor spaces that encouraged community events and gatherings. They felt that events aimed at the entire community offered opportunities for youth to have fun and to feel part of their community. For example, the YAT visited Civic Plaza for a community event, and one youth noted how easily the open space could be transformed to meet different community event needs. Other youth shared similar sentiments about local parks, Lonsdale Quay, and the Shipyards.



Small, turf area with chairs in front of the North Vancouver City Library.

The YAT also appreciated when smaller spaces were designed to encourage gathering, such as the small turf area in front of the North Vancouver City Library. At the time of their visit, a small group was having a picnic in this area.

What felt less youth-friendly

Youth felt that spaces mostly made of concrete and lacking colour or art were not inviting or friendly, and did not foster a sense of community.

ACCESSIBILITY

What felt youth-friendly

Youth considered having public washrooms available an important feature of any outdoor community space.

Particularly, 2SLGBTQ+ youth preferred when washrooms were single stalls, gender neutral, and physically accessible.

This entailed washrooms being big enough to accommodate mobility aids and having buttons to automatically open and close doors. They liked the washrooms at Delbrook Park for these reasons.

What felt less youth-friendly

While washrooms were physically accessible, navigating to the washrooms and other areas in some parks was not easy for those with mobility challenges or mobility aids. Some parks had hills, stairs, uneven ground, or curbs along the path to the washroom, making it challenging for those with accessibility needs to reach them without difficulty.

Indoor Physical Space

YAT members felt that indoor community spaces (including youth centres, libraries, and community centres) could offer young people the opportunity to connect with others in the community and participate in programs and activities outside of school. Refer to Appendix A for the full list of prompt questions.

ARCHITECTURAL AND INTERIOR DESIGN

What felt youth-friendly

Youth enjoyed when community spaces featured lots of windows and bright, natural light, such as at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre. If a community space relied on artificial light, youth preferred soft and warm lights instead of harsh fluorescent lighting. For example, they found the soft, indirect lighting at John Braithwaite Community Centre created a calming feel.

Most youth preferred modern, open architecture, like the design of Delbrook Community Recreation Centre. They felt the spacious hallways and open areas allowed easy and comfortable movement through the space for those with mobility devices. Some youth who identified as 2SLGBTQ+ expressed feeling safer in larger spaces as opposed to those with narrow and dimly lit hallways, which offered less natural surveillance. However, a few YAT members felt that smaller space like the West Vancouver Memorial Library or Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre, felt “cozy” and “comfortable.”

A few youth liked spaces that incorporated wood and other natural materials into the architecture or design. They felt such materials helped to balance out the sleek, modern architecture to create a warmer environment. They liked such features in the North Vancouver City Library and the West Vancouver Memorial Library.

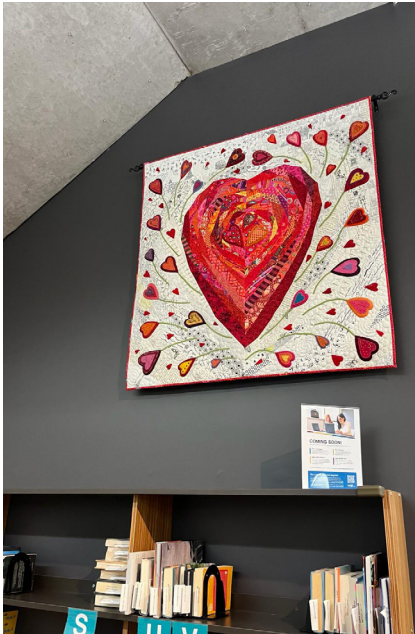
Some spaces featured interactive elements in the architecture, which received positive ratings from many youth. For example, the stairs at the North Vancouver City Library are numbered, allowing visitors to count the steps they have taken. One youth stated that this gave them “a sense of accomplishment when you climb up them all!”

Youth preferred spaces that incorporated colour into walls and furniture. Spaces that incorporated warm, inviting colours created an environment where youth felt more comfortable to relax and spend time, such as to



Lynn Valley LOVE community art display at the Lynn Valley Library.





Art display at Lynn Valley Library.

socialize or study. The specific colours youth preferred depended on the purpose of the space. For example, they liked the muted, warm colours of the North Vancouver City Library, which is a community space meant for quiet work. They also liked the bright colours of the Youth Hub at Park Royal, which is a space dedicated for young people to relax, socialize, and play.

Similar to outdoor spaces, youth enjoyed indoor spaces with art and other visual displays that helped the space appear more interesting and welcoming. For example, youth liked the glass art at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, the wall of literary names at the North Vancouver City Library, and the art at the Youth Hub at Park Royal. One youth noted that when a space displayed community art, it helped foster a “sense of community” such as through the art and messaging of the Lynn Valley LOVE display at the Lynn Valley Library and the wall of heart messages at Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre.

Youth appreciated spaces with enough seating and a variety of seating options to meet different needs. For example, Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre featured benches, café-style tables and chairs, and covered outdoor seating. They also appreciated different seating arrangements for different size groups. For example, at all three libraries they visited, they noted that there were seating options for those sitting alone or with another person, and for small or large groups. There was also general seating where strangers could share a table. Youth valued having choice and variety in where and with whom they could sit. They also appreciated when seating could be moved, for example, so they could move a chair to sit on their own.

What felt less youth-friendly

While most youth liked the contemporary look of some spaces, a few found this style “cold” and “empty looking.” They found such spaces felt less inviting due to their minimalist design and the use of concrete, metal, and “dull” or “bland” colours (e.g., white, beige, grey). Dark colours on walls and doors were particularly disliked as they made the space feel darker and less welcoming, with one youth noting they made the space appear “closed in.”

Many youth expressed their discomfort with large windows that provided direct views into areas such as the fitness centre, pool, or youth lounge. Exterior windows were especially concerning as youth felt they allowed people to easily look in.

Several youth observed that many doors were locked, including certain washrooms, which they perceived as restrictive and made them feel less comfortable and welcome to explore the space. They noted that this restriction was not specifically directed at youth but had a negative impact on their experience.

A minority of youth believed that libraries should prioritize carpeted floors and stairs to minimize ambient noise, especially in high-traffic areas.

FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

What felt youth friendly

The YAT identified facilities available at a space, such as a community centre, as impacting their decision to visit that space. They believed that a site's facilities and amenities contributed to the overall feeling of being welcome and comfortable in that space.

Youth appreciated that most community spaces included automatic entrance doors and elevators. They considered these important accessibility features for those with mobility challenges, but also convenient for others, including youth.

Youth preferred community spaces with areas designed for different activities and purposes, as these could meet the varied needs of community members and serve as a safe and reliable hub. For community centres, this included facilities for various sports and activities (e.g., basketball courts, pools, fitness rooms), as well as multipurpose rooms for a range of programming.

One youth positively remarked that Delbrook Community Recreation Centre was a “big space with lots of different rooms.”

For libraries, this included quiet spaces, areas for group discussions, meeting rooms, and public computers areas. For instance, one youth liked that West Vancouver Memorial Library had “sooo many study spaces!” Another appreciated having “lots of different spaces – loud, quiet, computer, study” at the North Vancouver City Library. A third youth noted that the Lynn Valley Library had a “great layout on the 2nd floor, [with] a good mix of work spaces.”

Youth valued specialized areas that included equipment or materials that are safe and appropriate for young people. For example, at Delbrook

Community Recreation Centre, the fitness area featured lighter and lower boxing bags suitable for shorter individuals or those requiring less resistance.

Youth also favoured the unique facilities across the North Shore, considered “destination” sites that youth would travel outside of their neighbourhood to access. Examples included the wave pool at Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre, the pottery studio at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, and the recording studios at the North Vancouver City Library.

Youth appreciated the option to purchase food or drinks at a community centre or library, as they could spend multiple hours in these places. Vending machines and cafés were frequently noted as liked features, especially when prices were reasonable. Many preferred spaces with cafés, where they could purchase food and drinks but could also comfortably study or socialize with peers, such as those at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, the North Vancouver City Library, and the West Vancouver Memorial Library. Youth also valued the low-cost concession at the Youth Hub at Park Royal, finding the price and variety appropriate.

While purchasing food was a nice addition to spaces, having access to water fountains and water bottle fill stations was considered a necessity. All indoor community spaces featured these amenities.

Youth appreciated community spaces with plenty of power outlets located in areas where they would be needed most, including in seating areas, study spaces, and meeting rooms, such as those at North Vancouver City Library. For community centres, youth liked the abundance of outlets in the wash-rooms and change rooms, as observed at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre.

All community spaces youth visited offered free, high-speed Wi-Fi, which youth deemed was a crucial and necessary feature. Access to the Internet ensures youth can communicate with family and friends, as well as study or do homework.

Youth emphasized the importance of community spaces, especially community centres, having safe and secure spaces for youth to store their belongings. These were available in all community centres that youth visited, and they particularly appreciated the free wallet lockers at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre and Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre.



Outlets located in the floor near comfortable seating.



Clearly labeled waste management system at the Lynn Valley Library.

Washrooms were considered youth-friendly when conveniently located. For example, one youth liked that washrooms were available on every floor of the West Vancouver Memorial Library. As with washrooms in outdoor spaces, it was particularly important for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to have access to single-stall, gender-neutral washrooms located in accessible areas of indoor spaces. Most community centres had easily identifiable universal washrooms, with 2SLGBTQ+ youth expressing particular satisfaction with the universal washrooms and change rooms at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre.

The presence of clearly labeled bins for garbage, recycling, and food waste was viewed as a positive feature of a community space. The labels alleviated youth's concerns about properly disposing of waste, and the separated bins followed environmentally-friendly practices, which some youth felt should be prioritized. A few youth noticed less litter when waste bins were located frequently throughout the space. They appreciated the signage and frequency of waste bins at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre and Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre. One youth also noted the following as a youth-friendly aspect of the Lynn Valley Library: "garbage and multiple different waste disposal bins!!! Very detailed!!!"

What felt less youth-friendly

In the gendered, multi-stall washrooms, youth noted the large gaps in the doors. They also disapproved of the change room doors with frosted glass, fearing others might be able to see through them.

A few youth felt that the activity spaces were not designed for or adaptable to the needs of young people. For example, basketball nets could not be lowered for younger youth.

Youth observed that some facilities showed signs of wear and age, such as minor leaks or peeling paint. A few believed these issues contributed to a feeling of neglect, which could negatively impact the sense of comfort and community in these spaces.

Youth felt that the name of the Wi-Fi connections in some community spaces are not labeled in a way that makes it easy to identify. One youth felt that the name of the Wi-Fi connection in one centre felt like it was "a scam" or an unsafe connection.

YOUTH-ONLY SPACES

What felt youth-friendly

In many sites the youth visited, there were spaces designated for young people, which they appreciated. This included separate rooms or centres designed for youth, like the youth centres at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, and John Braithwaite Community Centre. Some sites had general spaces that were reserved for youth during certain times, like the youth space at the Lynn Valley Library and the Teen Room at the North Vancouver City Library. Youth felt more comfortable to “just hang out” in designated youth spaces compared to other spaces in the community. Describing the Lynn Valley Library teen space, one youth stated, “I love this space instantly and can imagine myself coming here after school or on weekends.”

The YAT appreciated that youth-only spaces were designed to meet the specific needs of young people, which may differ from those of other age groups. This includes the type of art, furniture, and other amenities in a space. In most youth spaces, YAT members described such features as things that contributed to that space feeling welcoming and inclusive. These included comfortable seating like beanbag chairs and soft couches, youth-created art or pictures on the walls, and youth-focused posters and resources. Of the teen space at the West Vancouver Memorial Library, one youth shared:

“Beanbags, many outlets, the youth space is designed specifically for teens. I love it.”

Similarly, youth perceived the Youth Hub at Park Royal as a space designed by and for young people, contributing to its welcoming feel. The comfortable seating, bright colours, artwork, and facilities like the concession stand all met the specific needs of youth because it was designed by youth. When asked what felt less youth-friendly about the Youth Hub, one youth wrote, “nothing!”

What felt less youth-friendly

Youth had very little feedback on what made youth-specific spaces feel less friendly. Any feedback they did share related to the lighting and colour of the space (see page 18), the lack of awareness and information about the space (see page 28), and the absence of signage to help youth find the space (see pages 23-24).

WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

What felt youth-friendly

Youth valued being able to navigate a space easily, particularly during their initial visit. Clear and prominent signage, maps, and marked pathways aided in this endeavour. For instance, youth appreciated the large overhead signage at Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, which facilitated the easy location of various rooms and facilities. Similarly, at the North Vancouver City Library, youth found the “directory showing what’s on every floor” to be helpful.

Youth considered it crucial for spaces to have signs indicating the location of washrooms, stairs or elevators, parking, and where to seek assistance if needed. Several youth pointed out that Delbrook Community Recreation Centre had clearly labeled safety features, such as emergency exits and an “easy to find First Aid Room by the pool.” Additionally, youth found it easy to locate staff or an information desk if they required assistance at all three libraries.

Youth appreciated signage featuring icons and clear, youth-friendly language to convey information such as codes of conduct, rules or guidelines, or instructions for using a space or its equipment properly. Some youth found the signage at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre helpful and effective, noting the presence of “lots of guides/reminders to help you.” Furthermore, youth valued signs were accessible to all, including those with large, clear font like at Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, and those incorporating Braille, like at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre.

What felt less youth-friendly

Conversely, youth perceived a space as less friendly when it lacked easy-to-read maps and signs. In such instances, they encountered difficulty in locating specific rooms, washrooms, or elevators, which made it challenging to orient themselves if they got lost. Additionally, signage that was hard to read, such as signs using thin or light-coloured font, compounded the issue.

Some spaces also lacked sufficient outdoor signage, posing a significant barrier to youth’s overall awareness of those spaces. This was especially problematic for sites situated off main streets and for youth centres that were part of a larger space but had a separate entrance.



Clear signage at Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, which helps youth to navigate the space.

Programs and Activities

YAT members observed that engaging in meaningful programs and activities can assist youth in developing positive peer and community connections, acquiring new skills, and enhancing their confidence. This section presents their feedback on the programs and activities available at each of the sites they visited, including those tailored specifically for youth. Refer to Appendix A for the full list of prompt questions.

GENERAL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

What felt youth-friendly

Across all sites, youth appreciated the diverse array of programs and activities offered, finding that they catered to the varied needs and interests of the community. In community centres, this included a range of sports like basketball, soccer, ping-pong, swimming, and skating, as well as arts programs like pottery and dance, and meeting spaces for programs like the YAT. In libraries, youth valued the assortment of book clubs, homework programs, and skill-building programs available. They liked the convenience of accessing multiple programs in one space and favoured places offering drop-in programs due to their busy schedules, which often precluded them from committing to a long-term or registration-only program.

In smaller spaces like youth lounges, youth appreciated the presence of “various zones” catering to different activities. This typically included areas for watching TV or playing video games, studying or doing homework, and engaging in group activities separately.

Most community centres and libraries offered programs tailored to beginners, which youth found particularly welcoming. They valued the opportunity to explore new activities in a structured and supportive environment.

Additionally, youth enjoyed passive programming such as colouring sheets at Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre and puzzles at the West Vancouver Memorial Library. They appreciated the low barrier to engagement, with all materials readily available for quick and easy participation. For instance, at the West Vancouver Memorial Library, puzzles were set up on tables with pieces already disassembled, inviting youth to sit down and work on them.



What felt less youth-friendly

Some drop-in programs were not scheduled at convenient times for youth, such as public swim times. Youth noted that these programs often took place during school hours, or late into the evening, for instance, after 7:00pm. After-school hours were typically allocated to children or structured programs like swim clubs.

Some youth expressed concerns about the cost of programs, particularly the fees associated with community centre courses. They viewed this as a significant barrier for youth from low-income families or those responsible for paying for their own extracurriculars. Youth were unsure about the availability of bursaries or discounts and struggled to find such information online or on information boards.

Furthermore, youth felt that many structured activities, such as swimming lessons or art classes, were geared towards children, seniors, or patrons of all ages. They observed a limited number of programs specifically tailored for youth, especially introductory or beginner programs. Even if such programs existed, youth found it challenging to access this information easily. They felt that most youth would not feel comfortable participating in programs alongside adults, as would be the case with all-ages programs.

YOUTH-SPECIFIC PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

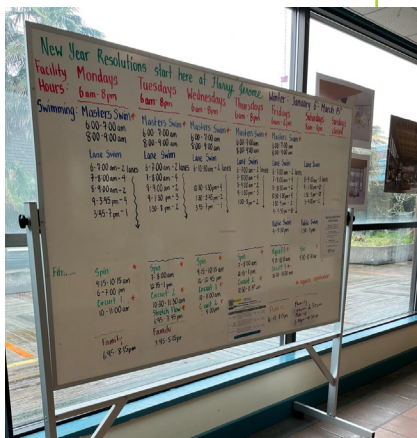
What felt youth-friendly

Reflecting their appreciation of youth-specific physical spaces, the YAT also strongly preferred youth-specific programs and activities, as these were most effective at addressing youth's specific needs and interests, and fostered a welcoming environment where young people felt encouraged to participate. These programs were also facilitated by staff skilled at supporting young people. The YAT provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about all youth-specific programs at sites they visited, particularly those offered at the Youth Hub at Park Royal.

Youth appreciated the variety of activities that were available across the North Shore, including sites that offered passive and facilitated programs. For instance, the Youth Hub at Park Royal has separate spaces for watching TV, playing video games, doing homework, or engaging in activities like ping-pong. They also offer a full schedule of drop-in activities. One youth enthusiastically shared about the Youth Hub:



Community information board at Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre.



Program schedule located at entrance of Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre.

“Soooo much you could do!! Watch tv, play games, video games, piano, guitar, foosball, study space if you need it. 10/10.” Another added, “it’s so much fun here!! Ping-pong, too.”

Youth found that the three libraries provided limited but diverse youth-specific programming. They felt this programming contributed to a sense of inclusion for young people, whether they participated in it or not. As one youth wrote, “It’s good to have stuff just for us.” Across all libraries, youth appreciated the teen book collections as well as the youth-specific spaces discussed previously.

Each library offered specific programs that youth enjoyed, such as the writing workshop and book clubs, especially the Queerly Quilled book club for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, at the Lynn Valley Library. At the North Vancouver City Library, they liked the teen open gaming time, and workshops on beginner bike mechanics and stop-motion animation. At the West Vancouver Memorial Library, they liked the recording studio workshop for youth. These library programs provide opportunities for youth with diverse interests, needs, and identities to connect with community, participate in meaningful activities, and learn important skills.

What felt less youth-friendly

The YAT identified a need to increase awareness and availability of youth-specific programs, especially as they observed that some spaces were not being well-utilized during their visits.

INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

What felt youth-friendly

Many community spaces displayed program schedules near the entrance, such as on a bulletin board or whiteboard, as seen on the community board at the Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre, which youth found useful. These boards often included information about other community events as well, and some had separate boards specifically for youth programming. Additionally, the Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre also provided brochures with program information for youth to take. Since youth often had difficulty finding up-to-date information about programs online (see page 36), they found these physical displays very helpful,

especially when they were youth-specific and they could take information away to read later.

What felt less youth-friendly

Overwhelmingly, youth were unaware of the variety of programs and activities available to them in the community. They observed that some community boards did not share information about youth-specific programs, or this information was hard to find on a bulletin board that contained a lot of information that may not be relevant to youth.

Sense of Belonging

The YAT stated that low barrier community spaces with a range of programs and resources on offer can play an important role in creating supportive and welcoming environments for youth. However, when youth do not feel like they belong in a space or program, this is enough to discourage them from participating, and can negatively impact their self-confidence and feeling of connection with their community.

The YAT shared that it was often hard to identify what made them feel like they belonged, and was often intangible. As one youth shared, “it’s just a feeling you get” when you walk into a space or program. They also expressed that what creates a sense of belonging may be different for different youth based on their identity, needs, and past experiences. However, the YAT felt that, overall, youth feel like they belong when they feel safe, supported, and represented in the program and by others in the space. Refer to Appendix A for the full list of prompt questions.

YOUTH-ONLY SPACES AND PROGRAMS

What felt youth-friendly

The value of youth-only spaces and programs has been discussed previously, and was raised again as examples of places on the North Shore where youth can feel like they belong, and where they can feel a sense of importance and self-worth. As one youth wrote about the Youth Hub at Park Royal, “this whole thing is just for youth!!” About the North Vancouver City Library teen space, another youth wrote:

“Adults get the rest of the library, they make it clear [the teen space] is just for YOUTH. It’s our space!!”

Youth appreciated spaces where they had opportunities to share their feedback and meaningfully contribute. Examples included the West Vancouver Memorial Library Room 14 Graphics program, where youth design content and slides for the display in the youth-only space, and Own the Shelves, where youth create book displays and booklists for the library. Both North Vancouver City Library and the Lynn Valley Library support Teen Advisory Groups to have a say in the programming and spaces at the library.



What felt less youth-friendly

Youth felt that some adult community members judged them for “taking up ‘their’ space.” The YAT did not note any specific comments made to them, but one youth noted, “adults look at you weird.”

PEERS AND PEER CONNECTIONS

What felt youth-friendly

Across all programs and spaces, youth felt that the presence of other young people created an initial feeling of belonging, as their presence helped to convey a sense that the space was a welcoming, safe, and age-appropriate environment for youth. In their community visits, the YAT noted the presence of many of their peers in the fitness centre and playing basketball at Delbrook Community Recreation Centre. At the North Vancouver City Library, they noticed youth studying and accessing the books and computers, as well as youth hosting a youth-led event in the teen space.

Seeing their peers meaningfully engage in a space or program, such as actively participating or leading, helped to address any initial anxiety or concern a youth may have when visiting for the first time or while they built connections with peers and adult supports.

One member of the YAT wrote that a sense of belonging can be fostered through any “programs for youth to engage with one another in, such as teen swim or skate, library programs, etc.”

What felt less youth-friendly

When youth did not see their peers in a space, even if that space was intended for youth, they were more hesitant and less comfortable accessing that space. They felt that a lack of youth conveyed that this was not a space where youth wanted to be, or where they felt safe and comfortable. For example, when sharing what felt less youth-friendly about a space, one youth wrote, “didn’t see many people my age.” Regarding a different space, another youth wrote, “not many youth in general area.”

The YAT shared that even the concern that there may not be any other youth in a space could be a significant enough barrier to prevent a young person from engaging with that space.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

What felt youth-friendly

While the general presence of peers was important for a youth's initial sense of belonging, youth with diverse needs and identities, including newcomer youth, racialized youth, youth with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, had additional considerations.

When diverse youth saw their identities, experiences, or cultures represented in youth, adults supports and community members around them, this helped signal a sense of safety and acceptance in a space.

It enabled youth to know that, “If someone else here is like me, I can be here, too.”

Youth also valued when spaces incorporated icons, imagery, or displays to indicate diverse youth and individuals were accepted and celebrated. For example, 2SLGBTQ+ youth noticed many Pride flags and stickers displayed across all sites, as well as signs that read “everyone is welcome” and staff wearing pronoun pins. Youth also valued programs for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, such as the designated 2SLGBTQ+ youth swim time at Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre.

Each library also offered diverse reading materials and programs, such as the Queerly Quilled Book Club at the Lynn Valley Library. At the North Vancouver City Library, one youth noted: “LOTS of books written from all perspectives including queer & POC [People of Colour]. These books are actually on display which is really good.”

A few youth noticed Nowruz displays at sites like Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre and Delbrook Community Recreation Centre, and appreciated this cultural representation and the opportunity for others to learn about this important Persian holiday. Other youth noted that sites included resources and materials, like books, posters, and programs, in a variety of languages. A few youth were newcomers to Canada, and appreciated when materials were provided in their first language. One shared that this helped them feel more connected to the space because materials “[spoke] to me in my language.” It also helped this youth to receive accurate information while their English was improving.

Youth noticed efforts to ensure programs and spaces were accessible, such as for physical disabilities, sensory and other learning needs, and for neurodivergent youth. For example, they appreciated when spaces included



Poster for 2SLGBTQ+ youth swim program at Karen Magnussen Community Recreation Centre.

different kinds of activities (such as group and individual activities), and offered different ways to engage with those activities (such as through written participation, art, or discussion). This variety allowed for a strengths-based approach to meaningful participation for neurodiverse youth, youth with different learning needs or styles, and youth who may struggle with mental health (e.g., social anxiety). In particular, the YAT felt the Youth Hub at Park Royal offered a range of activities which would support youth with diverse needs to participate.

What felt less youth-friendly

Youth who identified as 2SLGBTQ+ experienced less welcoming environments in spaces lacking inclusive facilities like universal washrooms, inclusive imagery such as Pride flags or pronoun pins, or events tailored for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. These features and programming contribute to youth feeling physically safer in a space and more supported and accepted by staff. In the notes about their sense of belonging in a space, one youth wrote, “needs more queer flags and staff and stuff like that.” Similarly, when information or materials were not provided in multiple languages, a few newcomer youth felt this negatively impacted their feeling of connection.

SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

What felt youth-friendly

In many of their community reviews, youth emphasized the impact of adults, including program and administrative staff, on a youth’s sense of belonging. When youth perceive adults as friendly (e.g., smiling when youth approach), respectful (e.g., communicate in a kind and compassionate way), and willing to help (e.g., answer questions which may seem basic or obvious), youth felt more comfortable and welcome in that space. Youth noted that staff working in youth-specific programs and spaces all exhibited such welcoming and respectful behaviour.

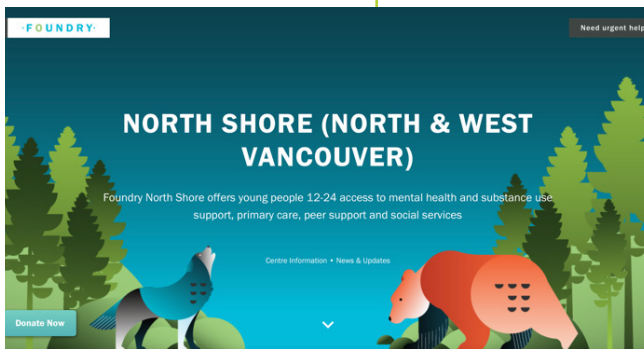
Youth also appreciated when staff understood and advocated for things youth deemed important, such as ensuring a safe and well-maintained youth space. An example of this occurred during one of the community visits when a YAT member noticed an adult sitting in the space reserved for youth. Without being asked, a staff member approached the adult to explain that the space was intended for youth and asked them to move elsewhere. The YAT member felt encouraged and supported by the staff member’s commitment to maintaining the space for youth.

What felt less youth-friendly

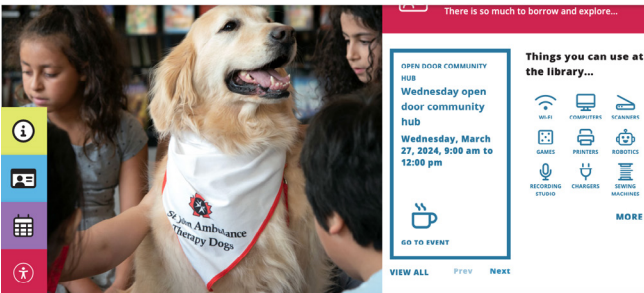
Most youth had very positive interactions with the staff across all sites. However, in a very small number of instances, youth felt less supported when they couldn't find staff to help or perceived that staff were too busy to help. A small minority also felt that some staff expressed frustration with their questions, perceiving the interactions as rude or dismissive.

Digital Spaces

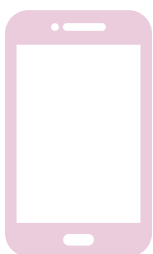
The YAT felt that many youth seek information about programs online, making a community space's digital presence an important platform for sharing accessible and relevant information. For some youth, the appearance of a community site's digital space influenced their decision to visit the physical location. Refer to Appendix A for the list of reflection questions that guided their review.



Bright but calming colours of the Foundry North Shore website.



Icons and bright colours of the North Vancouver City Library website.



STYLE AND DESIGN

What felt youth-friendly

Youth preferred websites that incorporated colourful designs, especially bright and inviting colours. They also appreciated intentional use of colours, such as to colour-coding different parts of the website. For example, they felt the website for Foundry North Shore inviting because the colours were bright yet calming, and were used consistently throughout the site. One youth wrote: "It does look welcoming to youth. I think that this is because of the wide variety of colours that they used. It is also very visually appealing as the colours used fits their logo design."

Youth also appreciated the use of images, icons, and other visual elements (e.g., pop-up buttons, doodles). They liked the North Vancouver City Library for its use of colour and imagery, which they felt made the page fun and exciting to navigate, and reduced the amount of text needed. One youth found the website's digital mural engaging, which they thought was a great way to explore library and community resources, and another

stated: "It's sooo nice! It feels like a game. You click on the icons and it takes you where you need to go." Youth also liked the images of the book covers on the West Vancouver Memorial Library website and felt they contributed to a more welcoming look.

Overall, youth preferred websites with simple and modern designs, such as Foundry North Shore, North Shore Youth Services Directory, and the North Vancouver City Library sites. While some of these sites included a lot of information, youth felt the layout was "modern."

What felt less youth-friendly

When websites used little to no colour, or used dull or muted colours, youth perceived them as less appealing and “made for adults.” The same sentiment applied to websites that lacked images, icons, or other visual elements, or featured images that were not relatable, such as images of children or adults.

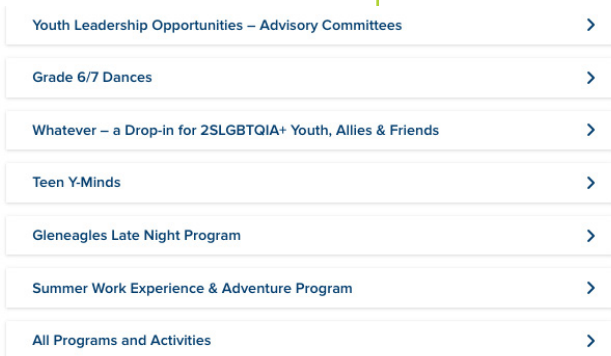
NAVIGATION

What felt youth-friendly

Youth appreciated the quick and easy access to information about youth programs upon visiting a website. They preferred websites that directly linked to the youth page from the landing page, as seen on the North Vancouver District Public Library and West Vancouver Memorial Library websites.

Youth found it helpful when information was presented in drop-down lists, making it easier to find the necessary information without extensive scrolling or scanning through paragraphs of text. In particular, they appreciated the use of drop-down lists on the Foundry North Shore, North Shore Youth Services Directory, and West Vancouver Youth Services websites.

Similarly, websites that utilized bubbles, icons, or other design elements to aid navigation felt more engaging and accessible for youth. For example, the North Shore Youth Services Directory website employs bubbles on its landing page and colourful bubbles for its directory filters. Youth found enjoyment in navigating through these stylized elements.



Drop-down lists on West Vancouver Youth Services Website.

What felt less youth-friendly

When youth had to click through four to five links on a website in order to find the youth-specific information, they quickly lost interest. While reviewing websites, the YAT shared that they would have disengaged if they had been seeking this information on their own. Additionally, some found drop-down menus to be overwhelming, especially when there were more than about eight drop-down boxes.

Youth encountered difficulties when website information was not mobile-friendly. For example, some had difficulty accessing drop-down menus on their phones as parts of the drop-down lists would not display on their screen or would open automatically while browsing.

FINDING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Youth Drop-In (Grades 8 – 12)	Hours of Operation
<i>No drop-in on statutory holidays.</i>	
Thursday	3:30–6 p.m.
Thursday (2SLGBTQIA+ and allies)	7–9 p.m.
Friday & Saturday	3:30–10 p.m.

Amenities

- Wi-fi
- TV/streaming services
- PlayStation 5
- Nintendo Switch
- stereo
- board games
- pool table
- ping pong table

Bullet point list of amenities at Youth Hub at Park Royal on the West Vancouver Youth Services website.

Welcome to Foundry North Shore!



Video about Foundry North Shore shared on their website.

What felt youth-friendly

Youth strongly preferred having information about youth-specific programs available in one central location, rather than being directed to multiple different sites. For example, the West Vancouver Youth Services website consolidates information for all youth spaces and programs across the community, including those at community centres, youth centres, and libraries.

When navigating a website, youth valued the ability to quickly access and digest information. If they couldn't find what they needed within a few minutes, they indicated they would likely give up. They appreciated when the most important information was prominently displayed near the top of the page, such as the "Need urgent help?" button on the Foundry North Shore website.

Websites received more positive rating from youth when they utilized concise text, such as bullet point lists or single sentences. Examples of this approach can be seen on the Foundry North Shore, North Shore Youth Services Directory, and West Vancouver Youth Services websites.

Similarly, youth appreciated when websites included only essential information. They felt the West Vancouver Youth Services website effectively communicated pertinent details without unnecessary clutter. The website provided information about locations, program schedules, brief program descriptions, and a concise bullet point list of amenities.

Youth found sites more accessible when information was presented using different formats, such as through

images, videos, or interactive elements. For example, the Foundry North Shore website features a video showcasing Foundry North Shore, its programs and services, and provides a virtual tour of the space. One youth wrote:

“I like the way that [the Foundry North Shore website] is presented. One of the main things that I like is how they shared their story in the format of a video. I feel like a lot of organizations don’t do this and instead they type massive paragraphs that youth don’t want to read.”

What felt less youth-friendly

Some youth struggled to locate information about local youth programs online. Others found websites that listed community programs but offered minimal details, lacking links for further information like locations or schedules. Additionally, youth noted that some websites featured outdated information about programs and services.

The YAT emphasized that when information was absent or outdated, they were unlikely to persist in their search. For example, if they could not find program details online, they wouldn’t result to calling or emailing for more information.

Youth had difficulty engaging with websites that used inaccessible or complex language, or “too many fancy words.” Such language made it challenging for youth to identify what information, if any, was directed at them. They also noted large blocks of text caused disengagement.

Youth Recommendations

The YAT developed a list of their key suggestions for how North Shore community spaces could continue to build and support spaces where young people feel welcome:

Provide dedicated youth spaces

Youth should have access to dedicated spaces tailored to their needs. These spaces should be designed with input from diverse young people in the community, incorporating bright or calming colours depending on the purpose of the space, and prioritizing soft lighting where possible. The space could showcase art and displays crafted by youth, such as murals, graffiti, curated book collections, or other resource displays.

Comfortable seating areas conducive to socializing and participation are vital for creating a welcoming environment. Additionally, they should also include quiet zones for homework and studying, especially for those lacking such spaces at home.

Youth-only spaces could also prioritize environmentally-friendly practices, such as providing clearly labeled garbage, recycling, and food waste bins to guide proper waste sorting.

This space should include free, high-speed Wi-Fi, along with ample outlets and charging stations.

A youth-only space could feature a variety of other amenities, including video or board games, art materials, age-appropriate books, and table games like foosball. It's preferable to a mix of passive and facilitated activities that cater to diverse interests.

Offer dedicated youth programs

Similar to youth-only space, dedicated youth programs should be informed and guided by the specific needs and interests of the young people in the community. These programs should be available after school and on weekends, with earlier weekend times provided, such as the afternoon and early evening, as transit can be challenging and feel unsafe later at night.

Offering a variety of programs across different community spaces ensures that youth with diverse interests can find meaningful and appropriate

programming. This includes introductory (“how-to”) programs where youth can explore new hobbies or interests in a supported and low-pressure setting. Ensuring these programs are provided for free or at a low cost, with bursaries available where needed, can reduce financial barriers to participation.

Promote community connections

Art in public spaces, such as murals, sculptures, graffiti, and community art projects, not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of a space but also promotes feelings of connection to that space. Involving youth in such initiatives could foster a sense of ownership and pride, contributing to youth feeling more integrated into their community.

Youth recommended hosting more community events and gatherings for all ages, which they felt could contribute to a greater sense of belonging and connection for all community members. They also recommended offering more intergenerational programming to encourage learning, respect, and connections between youth and seniors in the community.

Ensure inclusion and accessibility

All young people should feel welcome and included in community spaces on the North Shore. Whenever possible, spaces and programs should prioritize designing or adapting to meet diverse needs, including youth with physical and sensory disabilities, culturally diverse youth, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and youth with diverse learning and participation needs.

To ensure diverse youth see themselves represented in the people and environment around them, community spaces could prioritize on diversifying materials. This includes providing books, movies, and information in different languages and from different cultures, establishing partnerships to provide diverse programming, and building a staff team that represents the diversity of the community.

Create a safer physical space

Youth cannot meaningfully engage in programs or feel connected to their community if they do not feel safe. Indoor and outdoor spaces should prioritize adequate lighting, especially near entrances, play spaces, bus stops, sidewalks, and popular pathways.

Community spaces should promote safe active transportation, such as providing secure bike racks or covered bike storage units in well-lit areas. They should also facilitate safe public transportation, such as displaying bus schedules or real-time bus ETA signs inside the community space.

Ensure clear navigation and wayfinding

Being able to easily navigate community spaces helps youth feel comfortable and confident in those spaces. Outdoor spaces like parks should have maps detailing walking distances and signage explaining local nature and history.

Indoor spaces should incorporate clear and easy-to-understand maps, signs, and other wayfinding features both inside and outside the centre to help youth easily find their way around.

Maintain community spaces

Maintaining well-kept and clean environments, both indoors and outdoors, along with implementing effective waste management systems, are crucial for creating spaces where youth feel safe and valued.

Have youth-friendly and welcoming adults

Youth's sense of belonging is influenced by the staff and other adult supports they encounter. The YAT recommended training reception and program staff in adolescent development and equipping them with the skills to interact with and support diverse young people effectively.

Advertise youth programs and spaces

Effectively disseminating information about youth programs is vital for increasing awareness and participation.

While youth appreciated the presense of information boards in many indoor community spaces, they felt these were only beneficial for those who had already visited those spaces. They recommended that community programs could organize presentations in schools and host open houses and drop-in "get to know you" events to attract youth to visit the space.

They also proposed that outdoor community spaces could benefit from information boards to promote opportunities, resources, and programs in the community, especially for youth.

Additionally, they recommended that programs and spaces should ensure all necessary information youth is easily accessible and understandable, and shared on a centralized and accessible platform (e.g., social media platform, website). Such information could include details about the space or program schedule, available activities, answers to common questions or concerns that youth may have about joining, as well as images of both the exterior and interior to familiarize youth with the space.

Design youth-friendly digital spaces

Digital spaces should cater to how youth access and process information online. This includes incorporating inviting colours, bright images and icons, using small amounts of text in an easy-to-read font, providing only essential information, and ensuring its ease of navigation for quick access to the information youth needed.

Encourage youth voice

The YAT suggested that community spaces continuously seek ongoing input and feedback from youth to ensure that programs remain relevant and responsive to their evolving needs.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The YAT's review highlighted many youth-friendly spaces across the North Shore. Community sites in North and West Vancouver are already fostering respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environments for young people. Each of the spaces visited by the YAT exhibited many positive features, and the youth discovered several new programs and spaces which they felt were already integrating best practices in meaningful youth engagement.

The YAT's reviews also illuminated areas for expansion or improvement to further meet the needs and interests of youth on the North Shore. While some of the youth's feedback may exceed scope of this project, the YAT aimed to provide a comprehensive list of priority short- and long-term recommendations applicable across various community spaces. These recommendations will also be incorporated into other activities within the broader YFNS initiative.

The place-based assessment tool adapted by the YAT for this project provided an effective framework to consider the youth-friendliness of community spaces on the North Shore. Utilizing this tool enabled the youth to evaluate the physical and social components of these spaces in a coordinated and structured manner.

The YAT carefully developed and considered all five domains of the tool (Getting to and from, Outdoor Physical Spaces, Indoor Physical Spaces, Programs and Activities, Sense of Belonging), and approached the responsibility of reviewing community spaces with curiosity and competence. Their recommendations offer a blueprint for the North Shore to continue building spaces where youth feel valued, supported, and empowered.

Community sites visited by the YAT will have the option to receive a brief report outlining the youth's site-specific feedback and recommendations. These sites will also have the opportunity to respond and share information which may clarify questions or feedback from the youth's review.

The second cohort of the YAT will run from November 2024 through March 2025, and will build on the work accomplished by the first cohort. Recruitment for the second cohort of the YAT will begin in Fall 2024.

To receive a report specifically about your site, support recruitment for the next WelcoME YAT cohort or to learn more about how these recommendations will inform other activities within the broader YFNS initiative, please contact yfns@bunyaad.ca.



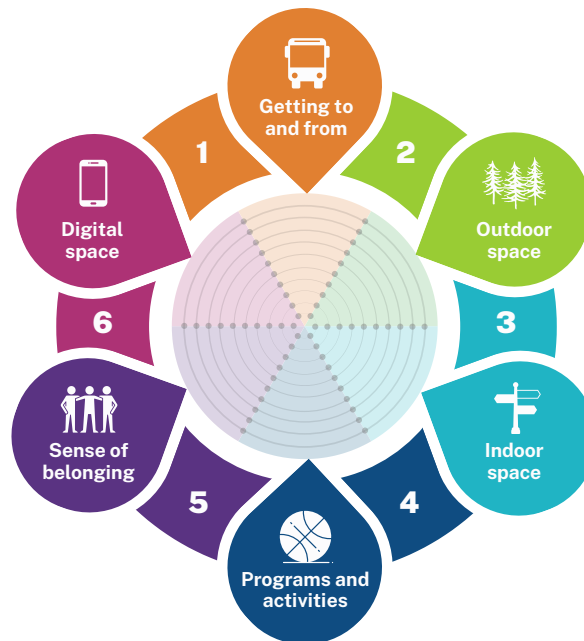
Youth-Friendly North Shore project stickers that promote inclusion and can be placed on objects, doors or windows to signal that welcoming spaces for youth from diverse backgrounds.

References

Scottish Government. (2023). *Place Standard Tool: How Good is Our Place?*
<https://www.ourplace.scot/sites/default/files/2023-11/Place%20Standard%20Tool%20%28How%20Good%20is%20Our%20Place%29.pdf>

Appendix A - Community Review Reflection Questions

Youth compiled the following list of prompt questions to reflect on during their review of physical and digital spaces.



Getting to and from

1. Does the public transit schedule meet your needs? Do buses come frequently enough?
2. Are there real-time bus updates?
3. Is there somewhere to keep dry while you wait?
4. Is the bus stop accessible?
5. Are the bus routes easy to understand? Did you have to change buses?
6. Do you feel safe on transit?
7. Do you feel comfortable on transit? Consider things such as the temperature (too hot or cold), and space (places to sit, places to stand).
8. Do bus stops and buses feel clean and well-maintained?
9. Is there enough parking, and is it close enough to the entrance of the location?
10. Do you feel safe in the parking lot (e.g., is it well-lit)?
11. Are there pick-up/drop-off zones?
12. Is getting to and from affordable? Consider the cost of parking, the price of a bus ticket, etc.

Outdoor Physical Spaces

1. Is there parking and transit nearby?
2. Are there plants, trees, or other nature?
3. Is the space clean and well maintained? Is there a place to put garbage and other waste (including recycling and food waste)?
4. Are there necessary amenities or facilities, and are they well maintained (e.g., water fountains, washrooms)?
5. Are there (enough) places to sit, and are they located in appropriate and desirable areas? Are there covered areas to shelter from the rain or sun?
6. Does the space encourage participation in activities? What kinds of activities?
7. Do you feel safe in this space?
8. Is the space well lit? Are there certain areas that are more lit than others?
9. Does the space feel welcoming for individuals and/or for groups of people?
10. Is the space accessible and inclusive for different needs?

Indoor Physical Spaces

1. How do you feel about the look of the space (e.g., wall colour, décor)?
2. Is there enough space to feel comfortable and move around easily? Does it feel too crowded or too empty?
3. Is the space easy to navigate and easy to get around?
4. Are there sufficient facilities and amenities (e.g., washrooms, water fountains, waste bins, outlets, Wi-Fi, etc.)? Are they located in convenient and appropriate places?
5. Are there enough places to sit, and are they comfortable?
6. How is the lighting in the space?
7. Depending on the purpose of the space, are there spaces available for different kinds of programs or activities?
8. Depending on the purpose of the space, are there comfortable spaces for different size groups?
9. If it is appropriate, is there a space designated for youth?
10. Does the space feel well-maintained and cared for?

Programs and Activities

1. Are there a variety of programs available?
2. Are there any programs specifically for youth?
3. Are programs or activities scheduled at times that are convenient for youth?
4. Are the programs well-advertised? Had you heard of them before?
5. Are you able to find all the information you need (e.g., program times, cost)?
6. Are programs or activities affordable? Is there a youth discount?
7. Are resources or equipment provided to help youth participate?
8. Are the programs and activities inclusive and accessible to all youth? Think about: skill level and diverse needs, backgrounds, and identities.
9. Are there other youth participating in the programs?
10. If appropriate, are there water fountains or snacks provided?

Sense of Belonging

1. Do you feel welcome in the space?
2. Are there other youth in the space?
3. Do you see yourself (e.g., your needs, identity, background, culture) represented in the space, the staff, or the other youth?
4. Consider the diverse needs of your peers. Does it feel welcoming to all youth?
5. Is the space accessible?
6. Does the space feel safe?
7. Are there opportunities to make friends in the space?
8. Does it feel like a supportive environment?
9. Are there resources available to get help if you need it?
10. Are there events or programs specifically for youth?

Digital Spaces

1. Was the website easy to find?
2. Is the website easy to navigate?
3. Is the information shared in a way that is easy to understand and follow?
4. Is the information provided helpful and updated?
5. Does the look and design appeal to youth?

Appendix B -

Community review worksheets



WELCOME

COMMUNITY REVIEW

Reviewer name:

Date & time:

Location:

Brief description of location:

Notes & comments:

Have you ever heard of this space?

Have you ever been to this space?

GETTING TO AND FROM

What feels youth-friendly?

What feels less youth-friendly?

Notes & comments

Rating:



PHYSICAL SPACE

OUTDOOR

What feels youth-friendly?

What feels less youth-friendly?

Notes & comments

Rating:



PHYSICAL SPACE

INDOOR

What feels youth-friendly?

What feels less youth-friendly?

Notes & comments

Rating:



PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

What feels youth-friendly?

What feels less youth-friendly?

Notes & comments

Rating:



SENSE OF BELONGING

What feels youth-friendly?

What feels less youth-friendly?

Notes & comments

Rating:





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