

# Witnessing Through Story

Youth Justice Circle  
Work Summary

Indigenous Youth Voices on Justice, Safety & Wellbeing

2025



BC FIRST NATIONS  
JUSTICE COUNCIL

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## Opening Prayer

Chichelh siyám, Ts'itholetstel ey te Yoyes -Creator, I thank you for the good work in this document that shines a light on our Youth especially those most in need of your blessing and guidance. Creator I thank you for blessing those who work with our Youth and continue to guide them as they work to keep our Youth safe and healthy.

***Submitted by: Shoyshqwelwhet - Dr Gwendolyn Point***



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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the Indigenous Youth who courageously shared their voices, stories, and hopes for the future with us, as well as to those unable to share due to ongoing system involvement and harm.

Above all, this work aims to honour the Indigenous Youth who have journeyed to the Spirit Realm while waiting for the systems that impact them most to change – some of whom now have their voices reflected in these pages. May their stories and experiences guide this work forward and be the catalyst for long-overdue transformation.



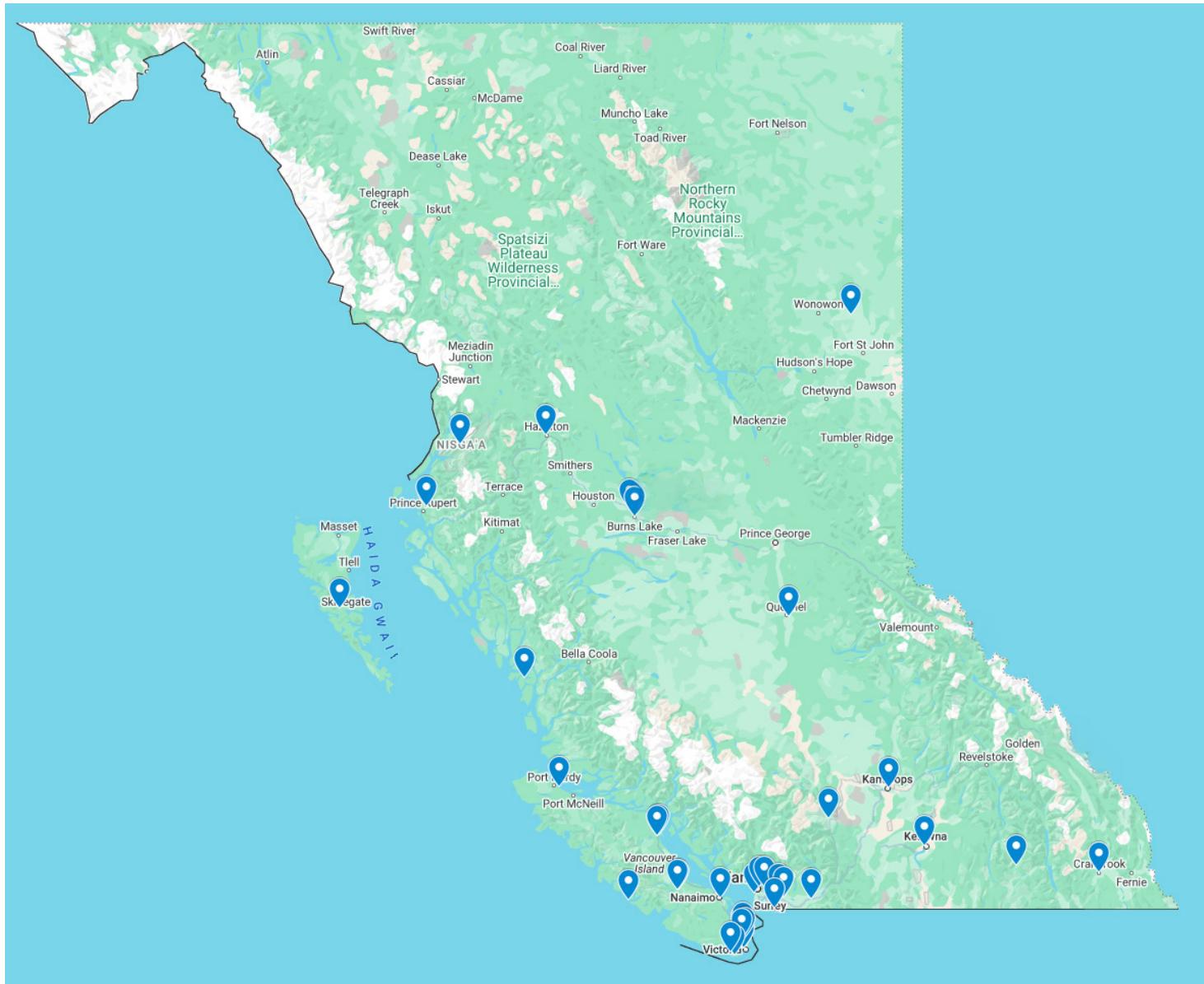
## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and honour the Indigenous Youth who came forward to share their voices, speaking truth to systemic harms, racism, and inequity. We also recognize the Elders, grandparents, Aunties, uncles, community members, service providers, and community leadership, who stood beside them, offering support and strength reaffirming the true meaning of community for Indigenous Peoples.

We acknowledge the many First Nations communities who welcomed us into their unceded homelands as guests to work towards the creation of these opportunities; the Gitxsan, Nisga'a, Haida, Heiltsuk, Tsimshian, Wet'suwet'en, Ts'il Kaz Koh, Treaty 8 (Doig River, Fort Nelson, Blueberry River First Nations), Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc, Ktunaxa, xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm/Musqueam, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh/Squamish, səlilwətaɬ/Tsleil-Waututh, Stó:lō Coast Salish, Nlaka'pamux, Syilx, Esquimalt Songhees, Pauquachin, Tseycum, Tsawout, Tsartlip, Scia'new, T'Souke, Snuneymuxw, Hupacasath, Tseshah, Kwakiutl, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, Kwiakah, Sinixt, Lhtako Dene, Katzie, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tla-o-qui-aht peoples.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) provided funding to the BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) to support the Indigenous youth engagement process and development of a "What We Heard Report" to inform MCFD's Youth Justice Services Framework (YJSF). The following report includes contents that fall outside the scope of the agreed upon engagement, but are included as a reflection of what we heard from the youth. The opportunities cited herein will inform BCFNJC's Youth Prevention Plan (Strategy 10) when we are able to advance this important work.

We have witnessed the resilience, determination, and humour of Youth as they shared their challenges, frustrations, successes and priorities for future change. Their strength and knowledge inspire and humble us as they remain undeterred by rigid colonial barriers and political inaction.



**Full Map Can Be Found Here: <https://bit.ly/bcfnjc-youth-engagement-map>**

## Defined Terms

**First Nations:** in BC are the proper Title and Rights Holders, who hold inherent, constitutional, and human rights, and inherent laws, legal systems, systems of governance, and jurisdictions, which First Nations have derived from the land and exercised throughout the entirety of our territories and homelands prior to contact, and which continue to exist and be applied and exercised throughout the entirety of our territories today.

**Indigenous:** is the collective term for First Nations (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit. Indigenous is used either collectively, or separately, and is the term used in international contexts, e.g., the 'United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' (UNDRIP).

**2SLGBTQIA+:** recognizes Two-Spirit peoples as the first 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, acknowledging their deep-rooted presence in our cultures and societies since time immemorial. We honour the realities of Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual Indigenous Youth. With open hearts and minds, we embrace those in our communities who are decolonizing, affirming, and sharing their identities. The "+" reflects inclusivity for all who identify within sexual and gender-diverse communities and use additional terminologies. While the 2SLGBTQIA+ term is utilized within the body of this work, we recognize the right of First Nations and Indigenous Youth to define themselves as they see fit.

**Wholistic:** In this report we utilize 'wholistic,' instead of 'holistic', in respect of Seven Generation teachings, and to emphasize the concept of 'whole' – the interconnectedness of all aspects of life: mental, emotional, physical and spiritual, as well as the land, ancestors, community and future generations. Seven Generation teaching promotes a way of being that encompasses wholistic decision-making, for now, as well as for those who will inherit those decisions in the future.

**Circle Work:** Circle Work, a longstanding practice among many First Nations, creates an inclusive space where all voices are valued equally and fosters dialogue rooted in respect, reciprocity, and collective decision-making.

## Youth Defined Terms

Through community engagements, participants shared their perspectives on the meanings of Family, Justice and Safety, and Youth. Their voices have shaped our understanding, and we have reflected their definitions and insights within these pages. Restoring Indigenous meanings revitalizes Indigenous languages and

strengthens cultural identity. Reclaiming and applying Indigenous self-determined definitions is crucial for the cultural and social well-being of Indigenous Youth.

**Chosen Family:** is the broader definition of family that exists within Indigenous communities, encompassing Aunties, uncles, grandparents, Elders, cuzzins, Knowledge Keepers, and other chosen individuals with familial or community ties.

**Justice:** is Indigenous Youth equity within all systems and the recognition of their voices. Indigenous Youth see the justice system as a system designed to promote the presumption of guilt over the presumption of innocence to reform the Indian in the Youth. Indigenous Youth see the colonial justice system as biased, developed without them in mind and skewed toward those with the most access to resources. True justice means no Indigenous Youth in care or custody. It means sovereign and autonomous Nations are at decision-making tables, Youth voices are heard and acted upon, and a shift from punishment toward wholistic remedy and healing that ensures mistakes become opportunities for growth and a fair path forward.

Circle Work revealed that First Nations Youth, particularly those in rural, remote, and Northern communities, face challenges that far exceed those faced by the majority of their peers. Youth today have expressed that what they need is already known, and that Youth should not have to constantly relay these needs to decision makers. Youth expressed a need for action. Noting the myriad needs due to systemic challenges and crises, including disparity of Youth loss due to the opioid and mental health crises, the urgency for action feeds into a Youth meaning of Justice and a desire to engage with an Indigenous justice system.

Indigenous Youth understand justice as a Wholistic concept rooted in balance, accountability, and collective well-being, a definition extending far beyond the formal justice system. For Youth, as justice is inseparable from the current social, economic, cultural, and environmental disparity that shape their lives, the need for action across multiple systems is emphasized, including across the education, health, child welfare, and community development systems.

From this perspective, preventing interactions with the justice system requires addressing systemic inequities, strengthening cultural identity, and ensuring access to opportunities that uphold dignity and self-determination. For Youth, justice is not merely about responding to disparity and current challenges but about creating equitable conditions for Indigenous Youth to thrive and be supported, empowered, and free from the structural and racial barriers that contribute to their vulnerability and criminalization.

This understanding of justice is a critical lens through which this report must be read. It informs the broader approach taken, one that emphasizes that justice for Indigenous Youth is not confined to the legal system alone but is fundamentally tied to their Land-born belonging, improved well-being of their communities, and long-

awaited equitable improvements across all the systems that shape their current lived experience.

**Youth:** refers to individuals within the age range of 12-29+. Existing legal Youth definitions do not reflect Indigenous ways of being or account for the intergenerational impacts of historical harms and trauma, which shape Youth self-determination and development. First Nations, in what is called British Columbia, are working to reclaim their own inherent expectations, responsibilities, and roles for community members while strengthening cultural identity. To honour First Nations autonomy to determine meaning and definitions through their own legal traditions, and to respect Indigenous Youth autonomy as individual rights holders, this report broadly defines 'Youth' as ages 12-29+ without imposing strict parameters. Youth feel that an expansion of the legal age definition of Youth respects First Nation autonomy and traditions and would also enable equitable support to increase education system, child welfare system, and justice system transition success.

Throughout this document, we have made the intentional decision to capitalize 'Youth' and 'Children' when referring to them in the same way we capitalize 'Elders.' This choice is rooted in our commitment to recognizing and respecting the inherent dignity, knowledge, and agency of young people within Indigenous communities. By capitalizing these terms, we honor their cultural significance and affirm their vital role in shaping the future of their communities.

*"Rather than being tied to a rigid age category, 'Youth' can be better defined as a life stage characterized by learning, playing, and experiencing joy – just being a kid."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

**Safety:** starts with gaining and then moving beyond basic human rights. Safety is a response to emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, and financial need that can be met through a reduction in stressors. Safety is access to supportive spaces, and the ability to use one's voice, express one's needs, and have the wholistic experience that shapes their behaviour acknowledged in remedy absent unwarranted, or excessive punishment. Safety is family, community, culture, language, traditional foods, homelands, land-based activities, and equitable education. Safety is mutual respect and trust. Safety is an environment that allows an Indigenous child to thrive and self-actualize.

*"Safety is within families, within culture, having the ability to do more cultural activities, mutual trust, being able to trust yourself, being able/willing to listen to*

*your children and trust your children to tell you stuff, talking to kids and grandkids about drugs and stuff, being rich in culture, rich in family, preserving culture and language, growing that traditional life, lack of fear, support, attention, friends, an ability to speak up and set boundaries, being loved and nurtured – security, being worriless, secure in where you live, secure in yourself and your money, a lack of danger, having somewhere to be, somewhere to go, community trust.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“I feel safe in places that I feel respected and that my voice will be heard appreciated and taken into consideration.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Safety means drumming and smudging and a positive view on culture.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“The basics - basic human rights.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

The term ‘safety’ is utilized throughout this report, but safety means different things in different contexts, in different spaces, and to different people. There are nuances to the way this word is used that go beyond the conventional definition of safety as a condition of being protected from something that is a danger or risk for injury.

Social workers use ‘child safety’ as a marker in their decisions on whether to remove children and Youth from their homes, families, and communities. For Indigenous Youth, intergenerational familial loss, trauma, poverty, and racism are all inequities that are deeply seeded, and their reality of safety is far more complex. Many Indigenous Youth live in a constant state of survival – where immediate needs dominate and meeting basic human needs for survival and growth through familial and cultural guidance takes priority – impacting how justice and safety are perceived. Indigenous Youth definitions of Justice and Safety are grounded in current lived experience, and the lived experience of their ancestors, rather than abstract policy.

Through the lens of Indigenous Youth, safety is not something that Indigenous Youth are gaining and experiencing across colonial systems, whether it be in schools, interacting with the myriad justice system personnel, like the police member at first contact, in a courtroom, interacting with social workers, or when

confined within a foster home, in custody, or in a correctional facility. Throughout Circle sharing, Youth indicated that they do not feel safe from an early age, carrying with them the burden of racism or the weight of preconceived stigma or labelling, and a myriad racial assumptions, combined with lived disparity due to the impact of colonialism. Assumption and disparity are alive in the education system, in the child welfare system, in the legal system, on the streets, and in greater society. Youth do not feel safe from emotional, financial or physical stressors that are tied to being an Indigenous Youth, whether living urban, rural, remote, or living in poverty. Indigenous Youth want to be safe. Indigenous Youth want to live.

To Youth, safety is rooted in connection – to family, Elders, peers, community culture, language, traditional foods, and homelands. It is nurtured through land-based practices, ceremony, stories, and teachings that affirm identity and belonging. Removing Indigenous children and Youth from these deep roots accomplishes the exact opposite of what is needed to keep them safe. When asked which question was more important to them in their day to day, “What does justice mean to you?” or “What does safety mean to you?”. Youth indicated that “What is safety to you?” is a more important question.

Safety means being seen as sacred, valued and powerful. Safety is also the right to education that also reflects lived realities and ancestral knowledge, the ability to speak one’s truth, and the freedom to imagine and shape the future. It is mutual respect, trust, and intergenerational healing. Safety exists where Indigenous Youth are supported to thrive, lead, and fully become who they are meant to be – in mind, body, heart and spirit. Until the Child Welfare and Justice systems provide sufficient supports that align with Youth lived experience and perception of safety, Youth will not feel safe within the systems and will not feel justice within or between the systems.

## Preface

Imagine a young Indigenous girl taken from her home before she could even understand why. The child welfare system, built on policies that have historically torn Indigenous families apart, placed her in foster care—far from her community, her language, and her culture. She grew up navigating the need for true safety in homes that were never hers, experiencing instability, disconnection, and a growing sense of not belonging. Without family, without the teachings of her people or the land that should have raised her, she searched for belonging in a world that did not hold her. The system marked her as ‘at risk’, punished her for the wounds of displacement, and called it care. It watched, it judged, but it never saw her as what she was: a child of dislocation, searching for a sense of belonging and safety, grieving what she did not even know she had lost.

By the time she reached adolescence, the system that claimed to protect her had already set her on a path toward another colonial institution: the youth justice system. Without access to cultural support or community-based alternatives, her interactions with police and social workers became inevitable. In foster care, typical teenage defiance—sneaking out, skipping school, arguing with caregivers—was criminalized in a way it never would have been for a child growing up in their own home. Reports were filed, charges laid, and suddenly, she found herself not in a house but a cell. The statistics tell us this is not a rare story but a common one. The child welfare system monitors and punishes Indigenous Youth long before they reach adulthood. By the time they turn eighteen, many are already burdened with criminal records, limited educational opportunities, and a justice system that never saw them as worth rehabilitating.

If we only look at this young girl’s experience through a single system—whether child welfare or youth justice—we miss the complete picture of how colonial structures intersect to shape her life. The reality is that these systems are not separate; they are layers of the same oppressive force, reinforcing one another at every stage. A wholistic review of Youth opportunities is not just a policy exercise; it is an urgent necessity to stop the cycle of harm that begins long before a child ever sets foot in a courtroom. Indigenous Youth have been calling for solutions that address the root causes of their overrepresentation, solutions that do not simply tweak an already broken system but fundamentally change its approach. They ask for supports that strengthen families so fewer children are taken into care, for justice interventions that do not criminalize their existence, and for culturally grounded alternatives that help them heal rather than punish them for their pain.

Without change, we are not preventing harm, we are paying for its survival. The voices of Indigenous Youth must guide this reckoning, and their solutions must

reshape every system built to erase them. This is not about bending colonial frameworks but breaking them: confronting what these systems have stolen and daring to build what comes after. A future where Indigenous children and Youth are not targets of the state, but sovereign, rooted, alive and living fully as their ancestors imagined, as The People that their homeland calls for them to be.

Implementing policy change to youth justice for Indigenous Youth is not the responsibility of one single ministry: governments cannot sever the social determinants of justice (poverty, education, child welfare involvement, mental health and addictions, housing instability, gender and sexual identity, etc.), from the responsibilities of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Attorney General, Education and Child Care, Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Housing, and Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Thus, while we acknowledge that some of our opportunities fall outside the scope of the delineated statutory powers of the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD), MCFD holds the responsibility to work across government and with all orders of government to advance transformative change as envisioned by the BC First Nations Justice Strategy.

## Introduction

The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) was created in 2015 by the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, who together form the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC). BCFNJC has a mandate from the 204 First Nations within the colonial borders of what has been more recently known as British Columbia to bring about transformative change in the justice system and achieve better justice outcomes for Indigenous people.

In 2020, BCFNJC released the BC First Nations Justice Strategy ('the Strategy'), which advances 25 individual strategies and 43 actions across two tracks to address the ongoing negative justice outcomes for BC First Nations. Developed in collaboration with BC First Nations, BCFNJC, and the Province of British Columbia, the Strategy was formally endorsed by the BC Government and the FNLC. Since the Strategy was ratified, BCFNJC has made considerable progress and reached many milestones in implementing the Strategy. As part of its commitments under the Strategy, BCFNJC established a network of 16 Indigenous Justice Centers across the province that provides free, culturally appropriate legal services, Gladue services, and outreach to support all Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia.

It is understood that a strong connection exists between the child welfare and youth justice systems, with many First Nations Youth entering the justice system after involvement with child welfare. MCFD has signaled the intention of a critical shift from a protection-based model under the Child Family and Community Services Act toward a prevention-focused framework that legally upholds children's rights, including their rights to kinship, culture, and Indigenous legal traditions, within communities working towards jurisdiction. This redirection aligns with BCFNJC's efforts to address the systemic pipeline between child welfare and youth justice, recognizing that meaningful prevention in the justice system must include targeted actions within child welfare. By working collaboratively with MCFD, BCFNJC seeks to advance policies and programs that support the shift from a protection and apprehension model for Indigenous children, Youth, and families, to a model of prevention reinforcing a shared commitment to respect First Nations Youth rights and keep Youth out of the justice system by ensuring their wholistic safety and well-being.

The purpose of the *Witnessing Through Story: Indigenous Youth Voices on Justice, Safety & Wellbeing* report is to reflect the voices of Youth and community members who participated in Circle Work aimed at addressing the overrepresentation of First Nations Youth in the criminal justice system. These discussions were guided by **BCFNJC's Strategy 10: Prevention and Youth**, which highlights the need for proactive, coordinated approaches to prevention. In the creation of the Justice

Strategy, a key priority identified by participants was the development of preventative programs and supports that keep First Nations Youth out of the justice system. In response, this report aims to provide key learnings and opportunities that inform the creation of the **Strategy 10 Youth Prevention Plan**, to be developed by BCFNJC and the Province of BC.

## Circle Work Overview

This report is grounded in Indigenous methodologies, specifically Circle Work and the practice of Witnessing, which are foundational to ethical engagement and relational accountability within Indigenous communities. Circle Work, a longstanding practice among many Indigenous Nations, creates an inclusive space where all voices are valued equally, fostering a dialogue rooted in respect, reciprocity, and collective decision-making. Witnessing respects oral history telling ways and further reinforces Circle Work principles by ensuring that knowledge shared is heard, acknowledged, carried forward, and honoured in future actions. Witnesses are entrusted with holding and safeguarding the truths shared, reinforcing community accountability beyond the immediate discussion. These methodologies are not simply tools for consultation but are integral to ensuring that Indigenous knowledge is engaged on its terms rather than through colonial frameworks of extraction and validation. Embedding these practices within this Report, upholds a commitment to meaningful, culturally grounded Circle Work while recognizing that Indigenous policy and program development must be informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and relating.



## Preparing to Be in Circle

As the team prepared for engagement, they completed an environmental scan of existing research, reports, articles, and bodies of work relevant to Indigenous Youth Justice and Wellbeing in British Columbia and abroad, as well as relevant legislative frameworks, statistics, programs, and services. It is important to note that sparse research has been completed regarding Indigenous Youth specifically in the justice and child welfare systems in British Columbia. Much of the existing material is on Youth in general, is Canada-wide, is not BC-specific, is not Indigenous-specific, or stems from other countries. Insights gathered from the scan formed the basis for guiding questions and discussion topics around Youth Justice, while the lack of disaggregated data for impacted Youth living in what is called British Columbia, determined a need to engage current Youth.

In the summer of 2023, significant groundwork was laid to ensure a strong foundation for Youth-centered engagement. Team members completed training in *Cultivating Safe Spaces and Trauma-Informed Practice for Facilitations* and engaged in meaningful discussions on wellness and cultural safety with BCFNJC

Elders. An engagement strategy was developed to center the theme of 'Your Voice Matters'. The team refined engagement approaches to ensure trauma-informed consent-based practices and the principles of First Nations data collection (OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) were honoured. Protocols for informed consent related to data collection, photos, and storytelling were established.

During pre-engagement planning, Nation-specific preferences for Elders, venues, catering, and cultural protocols were identified by working directly with First Nations community members. The team worked to create flexible engagement formats to put forward, including in-person and virtual sessions, creative expression opportunities, and surveys to respect the diverse communication needs of Youth, and identified Youth-focused participant gifts. BCFNJC used social media platforms, Indigenous Justice Centers ('IJC's'), and community connections to raise awareness about in-person and virtual community engagement opportunities for Indigenous Youth to share their lived experiences.

Prior to engagement, a letter was sent to all 204 First Nations in BC notifying them of upcoming opportunities. Host Nations were notified in advance of upcoming visits to their homelands, with a request to identify Youth leaders. The Team developed a series of Youth-friendly engagement materials including: a visual infographic and summary of the project; a *Call for Stories* campaign with posters, safety guidelines, and storytelling template; posters and templates for both in-person and virtual engagement sessions to be sent to IJCs, partner organizations, and posted on social media; and a resource list that included Youth and Child help lines.

The Youth Team conducted preliminary outreach through phone calls and emails to surrounding First Nations, Indigenous Youth Councils and Leadership Groups, Friendship Centers, Urban Indigenous Organizations, Restorative Justice Programs, Indigenous Justice Programs, Indigenous Court Workers and Counsellors, First Nation Community Schools, Public Schools with Indigenous Student Programs and Support Workers, Post-Secondary Institutions and Indigenous Student Centers, and other Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Youth Service Providers.

In addition, the Youth Team prioritized creating a safe and inclusive space for our 2SLGBTQIA+ Kin, recognizing the importance of culturally grounded, trauma-informed, and identity-affirming practices. This included ensuring facilitators and BCFNJC were aligned in an approach meant to foster inclusivity, using language that honored diverse identities, and fostering an environment where all participants felt seen, heard, and respected. By centering the voices and experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth, we aimed to uphold our commitment to making the Circle a space of belonging, respect, safety, and trust for all.

## Being in Circle

In the Fall of 2023, the Team implemented the first of two community engagement phases with the intent of ensuring Indigenous Youth in BC were provided meaningful opportunities to share discussion around ongoing or emerging issues and gaps and challenges affecting them, their loved ones, and friends with regards to Youth Justice and Wellbeing in B.C.

The Team planned, scheduled, facilitated and took notes at in-person engagements hosted in the homelands of the: Ts'msyen Nation (Prince Rupert); Tsimshian Nation (Terrace); Gitxsan Nation (Hazelton); Ts'il Kaz Koh and Lake Babine Nation (Burns Lake); Treaty 8 First Nations (Fort St. John); Fort Nelson First Nation (Fort Nelson); Secwepemc Nation (Kamloops); Ktunaxa Nation (Cranbrook); Wei Wai Kum First Nation (Campbell River); Hupačasath Nation (Port Alberni); Snuneymuxw Nation (Nanaimo); Songhees and Esquimalt Nations (Victoria); Nlaka'pamux Nation (Merritt); Stó:lō Nation (Chilliwack); Musqueam Nation (Vancouver); Kwakiutl Nation (Port Hardy); syilx Nation (Kelowna). Elders provided cultural support and ensured a safe space was provided for Youth and community members. In addition to in-person opportunities, The *Call for Stories* and the *Caregiver & Service Provider Survey* went 'live' for submissions for three months from September to December. The 2023 engagement totals stemmed from seventeen in-person engagements, two virtual engagements, and ten *Call for Stories* submissions, for a total of fifty-one pages of data from one hundred and twenty-three participants over almost forty-two hours of discussion. The outcome of the first round of Youth Circle Work was the development of 58 Youth Opportunities, grouped under 13 main themes.

During Phase 2, the Team organized five in-person regional community engagements, hosted in the homelands of the Secwepemc & syilx Nations (Revelstoke); Dakelh & Tsilhqot'in Nations (Quesnel); Hul'q'umi'num Nation [Southern] (Surrey); Nuu-chah-nulth Nation (Tofino); and Haida Nation – Xaad Kil/Xaaydaa Kil (Haida Gwaii). In addition to in-person engagements, Youth were provided opportunities to meet in a one-on-one virtual session with a Youth Team member, and an opportunity was created for them to provide their reflections of the developed Youth Opportunities, referred to as the *Guiding Draft*, through written or artistic expressions. Letters were again sent to all 204 First Nations notifying them of engagements, host Nations were notified of upcoming visits to their homelands, and a request was made for assistance identifying Nation-identified Youth leaders. Outreach was again completed through emails and phone calls to communities, councils, organizations, schools, and service providers. Posters were displayed on BCFNJC social media, in-person at IJCs, and sent out through email to communities and service providers.

The 2024 engagement totals stemmed from five in-person regional engagements, nine one-on-one virtual engagements, and fifteen Guiding Draft survey submissions, for a total of eighty-two pages of data from seventy-four participants over twenty-eight hours of discussion. Though the 2024 engagements had 60% fewer participants than the 2023 engagements, the intimate nature of the one-on-one sessions resulted in 38% more data for analysis than in 2023. The team also attended three community events (Okanagan Indigenous Youth-Centered Justice Project, First Annual 2S+ Powwow, What Happens Upstream Youth conference) to create further awareness of the work and undertake micro-conversations with Youth on whether the Opportunities reflected their priorities.

In 2025, the Team offered additional engagement opportunities via invitations to ten previous participants to participate in a Youth Panel to review existing opportunities and provide additional feedback. In addition, the team attended a Provincial Youth Gathering conference to facilitate two sessions with Youth participants.

The Team utilized a rights-based approach to guide 220 participants through 38 engagement opportunities in three separate phases, with multiple opportunities for review by the BCFNJC Policy Team, the BCFNJC Steering Committee, and the Indigenous Justice Secretariat, as well as by community members interwoven into the process.

<b>PHASE 1:</b>	<b>2023 (Fall)</b>	<b>21 engagement opportunities:</b>	17 in-community facilitated
			2 virtual facilitated
			2 tailored online
		Collation, Analysis:	58 Opportunities ( <i>Guiding Draft</i> )
<b>PHASE 2:</b>	<b>2024 (Summer)</b>	<b>15 engagement opportunities:</b>	5 in-community facilitated
			9 1:1 sessions
			1 tailored online
		Collation, Analysis:	80 Opportunities
<b>PHASE 3:</b>	<b>2025 (Winter)</b>	Policy & Steering Committee Review	Community Review
		Revisions:	80 Opportunities
		Youth Panel Review	Community Review
		Revisions:	80 Opportunities
		Council Review	Community Review
		<b>2 engagement opportunities:</b>	<b>Provincial Youth Gathering (2025)</b>
			2 facilitated sessions
		80 Opportunities ( <i>Witnessing Report</i> )	Community Review

## Challenges & Complexities of Being in Circle

While this report reflects the voices and priorities of many Indigenous Youth and community members, several barriers impacted the depth and breadth of engagement.

Meaningful engagement with Indigenous Youth and communities requires time, trust, and reciprocal relationships. Too often, Youth and community members are invited to participate in one-time speaking opportunities, where their stories and perspectives are extracted for a report—without any follow-up, accountability, or tangible action. Over time, this extractive and transactional approach has contributed to a longstanding lack of trust, particularly when past consultations have not led to meaningful change.

From an Indigenous methodological perspective, building trust means returning to the community multiple times, allowing familiarity and connection to grow organically. Recognizing that Youth are Rights Holders, Circle Work should not be confined to formal sessions with people unfamiliar with their community, but should occur in diverse, culturally grounded settings—such as supporting ceremonies, offering a spring break camp, or hosting a youth drop-in night. These approaches honour Indigenous ways of being, voice and agency, where relationships are prioritized over outcomes and communities are engaged as full partners, not just participants.

Circle Work can be constrained by tight timelines and funding structures that do not account for the time and care required to build authentic relationships and spaces where trust lives. Emotional and systemic barriers—such as historical distrust, consultation fatigue, the impact of colonial systems, and recent losses within communities—also shaped the level of participation.

Additionally, participation was influenced by structural, economic, and environmental factors including geographic location, availability and cost of transportation, timing of sessions, Youth need for support and safe chaperones, and a lack of widespread awareness of engagement opportunity. Differences in Indigenous Youth definitions of justice and safety created additional intricacies to discussions which then needed additional explanation in non-Youth spaces.

Lastly, while online submissions including surveys were offered to reduce barriers to participation, the provision of honorarium for online submissions introduced challenges in data collection and analysis, including the need to utilize time and resources to analyze submissions for fraudulent responses.

These challenges illustrate the complexities of holding respectful and safe Circles with Indigenous Youth and community members.

## **What We Witnessed**

Through community engagements, Indigenous Youth and community members shared their firsthand experiences and perspectives, helping us gain a deeper understanding of the various barriers they face and the priorities they envision for transforming the Youth justice system in BC. These conversations highlighted how the systems that impact Youth most significantly can be reshaped to align with Indigenous Youth and community needs, as well as the essential services required to support a meaningful shift toward diversion.

Knowledge gathered from community engagements highlighted key themes and concerns that will inform future Youth Justice developments and initiatives. The themes collected have been sorted into three overarching tracks:

- **Reforming the Existing Justice System**
- **Preventing Youth Justice System Interactions**
- **Restoring First Nations Justice Systems**

To provide clarity on priorities identified in community engagements, the story gathered has been further organized into fourteen key themes presented within the three overarching tracks.

## **Reforming the Existing Justice System**

We heard that there is an urgent need for actions that ensure greater accountability across the systems that impact Indigenous Youth justice interactions, including additional efforts to ensure the well-being and safety of 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth.

Participants emphasized the need for reforms within the existing justice system, including corrections, courts and First Nations Courts, Gladue, and policing, to better reflect the needs and rights of Indigenous Youth. Youth noted that Youth justice legal orders should move beyond punitive approaches to recognize relational familial, and community accountability, ensuring that Indigenous legal traditions guide decision-making, and precontact ways of remedy.

### **Accountability**

- In 55% of facilitated discussions, participants expressed a strong desire to have their voices heard in a meaningful way, particularly on the issues that impact them most.
- Across various sessions and submissions, there was a call for measures that would ensure greater accountability to Indigenous Youth, particularly in sectors like education, child welfare, and justice.
- It was agreed that this accountability stems from Indigenous Children and Youth being informed, empowered, and given a stronger voice in oversight, decision-making, and in shaping the services that directly affect them.

*“There’s such a stigma to children in a way, and to younger people that we don’t understand, and I see that a lot, even in my work now, that Youth are undervalued, and aren’t part of decision making. Their voices are not valued in those spaces.”*

- Crystal-Starr Lewis

*“There is no accountability for Social Workers or justice staff when egregious harms occur under their care.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“We need collaborative supports with Youth involvement.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“We need stronger processes in place for communicating with Youth.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Funding consistency is accountability. We have completed four years of justice work but have no justice funds to move the work forward now. I am scared that we will lose everything that we have built towards so far.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

### **Corrections**

- We heard that there is a need for cultural safety training for justice professionals working in corrections to ensure services are delivered in a way that respects the experiences of Indigenous people.
- We heard the call to expand the availability of programming, services, and transition supports within Provincial corrections to better support the successful reintegration and healing of Indigenous Youth and people within BC's corrections.

*“Support for successful reintegration is super important.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

### **Courts & First Nations Courts**

- We heard that there is a need to expand access to First Nations Courts and integrate cultural practices within all courts to ensure equal access to restorative justice, culturally appropriate support and traditional ways of making amends, and healing from wrongdoing.
- We also heard that there is a need to address barriers that make it difficult for Indigenous Youth to access the essential services provided in First Nation Courts.

*“The court system did nothing for me. I didn’t get pointed to the right places. A good, supportive lawyer was the only good thing from my situation. It’s their word against yours and I had to pay a lot of money just to get someone who would listen.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“I loved the distinction between offering alternative measures to court for folks who aren’t pleading guilty. This is currently a huge downfall existing right now within our Indigenous courts. There still needs to be an accountability piece, but accountability does not necessarily mean being guilty.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“I have seen what difference it makes to have an Elder in that space and for many Youth that come through our court it’s their first offence so having an Elder there brings a calming energy. But even on the opposite side of the scale there’s people who have interacted many times and having the Elder there still brings a lot of calmness. The title, position, and role are so well respected across Indigenous communities and having them in the regular court space is a step in decolonizing that space.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

### ***Gladue***

- Through community engagements, we heard that Youth and community members had limited awareness of Gladue.
- Participants with justice-related work experience expressed a strong desire to expand access to Gladue services and increase knowledge through training initiatives, helping to build a stronger understanding of Gladue across various levels of justice professionals.
- We heard participants call for more access to Youth-friendly plain-language education on their rights.

*“On Gladue factors in the custody setting, as officers in the prison we did not have access to information regarding the people who were there. We could infer certain things or ask but knowing important information about their trauma for example, whether they were in foster care or had family members with links to residential school, could guide officers working in those settings to be more trauma informed.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“It would be important to be making sure that either at intake or when someone is being admitted into custody that there is some sort of Indigenous liaison or Indigenous officer who goes and does an intake to address those Gladue factors.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“When it comes to pre-sentence and Gladue reports for people going to court, there’s no training or education for Corrections officers on those things at all. No education on why that might be important, if someone puts in a request. We need to provide Gladue training to Corrections workers, Bylaw officers, Navigators, Admissions and Discharge officers.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **Policing**

- Participants who shared their experiences with police frequently emphasized that there is a need for meaningful actions that address systemic mistrust, targeting, labeling, assumptions, unconscious bias, and discrimination of Indigenous Youth and community members.
- We also heard that there is a need for cultural safety training for all professionals working in law enforcement as well as a need to strengthen relationships and collaboration between police and the communities they work in.
- Lastly, there was a call for an increase in Indigenous representation in policing including through Indigenous-led policing initiatives, liaison roles, and recruitment efforts.

*“Police need to acknowledge the different customs and protocols. We are only thirty minutes away from another community, and there are big differences in our customs, language and protocols.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Police Officers are a gang and look at you as a threat unless you are privileged.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“I am labelled as ‘rebellious’ if I ask questions or push back on things I think are wrong. We hate that word.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Why do they always approach with their hand on their gun, like we are threatening?”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“The police...often think or assume that I am ‘under the influence’. I get heat-related dizziness and fainting spells, and their assumption is always that I am on something.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Safety is the biggest worry because the police use violence when we haven’t done anything wrong.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **2SLGBTQIA+**

- Youth who identified as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community spoke about the realities of being “a minority within a minority” and emphasized the urgent need for dedicated funding to recognize and address the specific challenges and heightened vulnerability they face within the justice system, including experiences of being targeted by law enforcement and receiving unfair treatment due to their gender and sexual identities.

*“We need funding that is specific to us.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“My gender identity had me put in solitary confinement when I was detained, which had a detrimental effect on my mental health as I didn’t feel my crime deserved such treatment.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **Preventing Justice System Interactions**

Throughout engagement sessions, Indigenous Youth, community members, and service providers consistently emphasized the importance of early intervention and the use and abuse of discretion by justice system actors—particularly police officers—at the first point of contact. Youth repeatedly highlighted that these initial interactions can shape their entire relationship with the justice system, and, far too often, these experiences are marked by criminalization, fear, violence, and distrust.

As one Youth participant shared, *“Biggest worry is police treating us unfair.”* Another echoed, *“Safety is the biggest worry because police use violence when they [Indigenous Youth] have done nothing wrong.”* These fears are not hypothetical—

these experiences reflect actual harm caused by systems that are meant to provide safety and support but instead have further alienated Indigenous Youth.

Participants strongly called for justice system professionals to receive comprehensive, culturally grounded training focused on discretion and relationship-building. The Youth asked for justice actors to *“take time to humanize Native kids instead of dehumanize us.”* This means understanding the root causes of behaviour, such as trauma, racism, poverty, and displacement—not simply responding with force, charges, or detention.

Training alone, however, is not sufficient. Youth and communities stressed the importance of genuine relationship-building over time. Discretion is not just about policy but about presence, care, and connection. It is about knowing the community, understanding local supports, and assessing when a situation calls for diversion rather than criminalization. This requires justice actors—particularly police—to engage outside of crisis moments, to build familiarity and trust with Youth and their communities through consistent, culturally safe interactions.

Indigenous Youth and community members pointed to several models that incorporate diversion principles. The **RCMP Youth Intervention and Diversion Program** offers tailored, non-judicial responses to prevent re-offending and reconnect Youth to the community. The **Vancouver Police Department** operates several youth outreach programs framed as preventative, though participants emphasized that stronger Indigenous-led partnerships and cultural components are needed. The **Tsawwassen First Nation’s criminal justice plan** demonstrates a more transformative model, where community-led, culturally grounded justice pathways offer meaningful alternatives to the mainstream system.

We heard that programs like these must be resourced, scaled, and adapted to local Indigenous contexts. More importantly, the intention behind these approaches must shift from managing risk to nurturing relationships, from authority to accountability, and from punishment to collaborative remedy that respects their way of being.

Indigenous Youth do not want to be treated as problems to be solved—they want to be seen as sacred, powerful, and deserving of care. Discretion and diversion are not just justice strategies—they are acts of reconciling the intended systemic harms and critical steps toward restoring trust and creating safety for Indigenous Youth.

## **Child Wellbeing**

- In 56% of sessions and submissions, we heard that systemic failures in the child welfare system are a major factor contributing to increased vulnerability of Indigenous Youth and Youth justice system interactions.
- Participants highlighted issues relating to a lack of appropriate and effective support for Indigenous Youth in the child welfare system. Issues included disconnection from family, culture and community, insufficient mental health and disabilities supports and diagnosis, and a lack of guidance and support for transitioning into adulthood and out of care.
- Participants spoke strongly about having a lack of power to be meaningfully heard when it came to the decisions being made about their lives and futures.
- Participants also highlighted inadequate assistance for grandparents and extended family members acting as caregivers, and concerns about safety while in government care.
- Participants spoke to a shift from a protection and apprehension-based model of care to a prevention-based model that legally recognizes Children and Youth rights, including rights to kinship, culture, and Indigenous legal traditions.

*"Sometimes what communities know is right for their children is different than what the government sees as being right. Those who do not fall in line with government policies are labelled as "difficult" and "uncooperative" even when doing what they know is best for their kids."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"They spend money for fosters, pay someone thousands of dollars to keep them, and take them away from family."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Why do I not have a voice in what just happened? Why are they not listening to my side of the story at all? This has stayed with me through my whole adolescent life through to when I was adopted. No sustainability, no voice, so why try to do anything about it?"*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"My cousin is in the foster system, and she doesn't talk about it much, because she is embarrassed, but she is more likely to get stopped by the cops, to spend time in the drunk tank, get arrested, spend time in a holding cell, get bothered. They assume she is trouble because she is in the system."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"I was passed from house to house and labelled as rebellious. I was not rebellious. No one talked to me. When you ask questions, they use that word. We should not be placed in so many houses."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"We need to hold MCFD legally liable for abuse while being a Youth in Care. A law should be put in place that holds them accountable. Compensation should be given."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

### **Crisis Response**

- Youth see collective crises in mental health, drug and alcohol addictions, MMIWG2S+, poverty, and lack of sustainable housing options. They also see an emerging crisis of toxic social media exposure, and its effects on emotional wellbeing, combined with problematic data safety that affects mental health and suicide rates.
- Across our engagements, we heard that crisis response plays a critical role in shaping Indigenous Youth interactions with the justice system. In 44% of sessions and submissions, participants emphasized the urgent need for culturally safe, trauma-informed crisis response services that prioritize Youth well-being, rights and reconciliation, over punitive approaches. Youth and community members shared that current crisis response systems are either lacking and/or often escalate situations rather than de-escalate them.
- Calls for change included the need to expand Indigenous-led crisis response teams, enhance mental health supports, and ensure first responders and caregivers receive the necessary training and resources to respond effectively and compassionately to Youth in crisis, including those who are missing.
- Additional expressed needs included increasing support for housing, substance use treatment, and addressing the impacts of parental incarceration, as well as taking action to prevent the rising number of missing, murdered, and deceased Youth entangled in the child welfare and youth justice systems.

*"When it comes to foster parents and Children and Youth in-care, the policies seem to encourage interactions between MCFD, the justice system and the health care system. When a foster parent or group home can't handle the behaviour of a Youth, the process is to call mental health services or police services. We would have the police called on us for doing things like breaking the lock on the pantry or fridge to*

*get food because we were hungry and didn't make it home in time for our foster parents' strict mealtimes. Children and Youth in care aren't treated like every other young person who is likely to make mistakes and have big emotions about situations that are very challenging."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Focusing on mental health and wellness is crucial for improving things for young people and the community. Providing accessible mental health services, creating safe spaces for open discussions, and promoting overall well-being can address many underlying issues that lead to trouble. When youth feel supported and understood, they're more likely to make positive choices and contribute positively to their community."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"I see it coming through the courts with the Youth. The opioid epidemic is huge, kids getting recruited into gangs and human trafficking is getting really scary especially for the Youth. Indigenous-led Crisis Response is needed now and will be needed even more in years coming. Having it be Indigenous-led and peer-led is important."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Police need to take sexual violence way more seriously (longer sentences and they need to take action)."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Suicide is the biggest concern. We have lost 17 from suicide of the approximate 250 people in our community."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Our community has 36 people on our wait list, and we only build 6 houses per year, so there are people on the list with a six year wait. That's not acceptable".*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Addictions and mental health - it comes in waves. Sometimes it's bad, then it gets better for a bit, then it gets bad."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **Data Safety & Data Sovereignty**

- We heard that the lack of consistently available and disaggregated data separating First Nations, Inuit, and Métis statistics makes it difficult to plan programs and services that accurately reflect the unique experiences of each group, and hinders accountability, reliable policy creation, budgetary provision, and equitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.

*“There’s a tendency to categorize Indigenous people, to “put us all in one box,” even though there are so many unique Indigenous identities and cultures. It’s unfair and frustrating to be expected to fit into a broad, generalized idea of ‘Indigeneity’. Pan-Indigeneity is a significant issue, and we need to step away from the pan-Indigenous view in a lot of different areas for true reconciliation to happen.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“So many things are viewed as ‘Indigenizing’ but are missing the plot because they aren’t approaching things from a community-led wholistic perspective, so they end up being colonial anyway.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“The child welfare and corrections systems need to be more transparent with their data.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **Education, Training & Mentorship**

- In 67% of sessions and submissions, participants emphasized the need for changes in education, career training, and mentorship opportunities as key preventative measures.
- Due to intergenerational loss of the transfer of culture, much Circle Work linked increasing access to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, distinction based Indigenous education support workers, and Indigenous mentors who could provide guidance, mentorship, culturally grounded learning opportunities, and positive views of culture.
- Participants highlighted the need for stronger educational supports, including career-focused training, internships, and mentorship networks that foster long-term growth. They also called for post-secondary initiatives that ensure a future increase of meaningful Indigenous representation in education, justice, and social work sectors, as well as life skills education.

- Addressing racism, stigma, bullying, and the lack of support, and timely diagnosis for students with disabilities or special learning needs in schools was a key concern raised.
- Lastly, participants stressed the importance of embedding and normalizing traditional knowledge, teachings including ceremony, land-based education, Title and Rights, and traditional Indigenous justice into all spaces where education takes place. Expanding Indigenous language revitalization programs to strengthen identity, knowledge of traditional law embedded within language, community connections, and cultural teachings on parenting, and raising children.

*"We need more emphasis on having culture integrated earlier."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Having more access to land-based programming in schools for all kids is important. Some kids, for different reasons won't have access to this in their families, so having it in the school would be a good way to have people involved in that."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Having resources or funding secured for teachers who want to learn how to infuse Indigenous culture and tradition into the classrooms would be helpful."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"It's extremely important for Youth to have someone to go to who isn't their parent."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Education needs more real-life stuff. Everything is well and good until you graduate then supports cut off."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"There are not enough Indigenous support workers in schools and there is not enough funding to adequately support those who are there."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"There are not enough accommodations being made for Youth with different learning needs."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“They won’t let our Elders teach us because they don’t have diplomas...they are here, they are smart, they know the language, they know the culture, they know us, but they don’t have diplomas, so they are left out.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **Legislation**

- Youth and community members consistently expressed a strong desire to redefine and expand the definition of Youth to better reflect factors such as brain development, readiness, and life experience. These were recognized as key factors contributing to the lack of support for successfully transitioning out of the Child Welfare and Justice systems.
- There was also a strong desire to embrace a broader understanding of family, one that reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and relationships. This includes recognizing extended family, Elders, and other trusted adults who play significant roles in the lives of Indigenous Youth, ensuring they are meaningfully involved and supported.
- There was a clear need for legislative changes to better protect vulnerable Youth and ensure they receive right based community supports and services **through legislative changes that enable community notification when a Youth finds themselves within the justice, education and health systems.** Notification enables community contact and involvement in decision making, while honouring the communities right to speak to what is in their Youths best interest when planning forward.

*“The YCJA requires broader language in multiple areas that empowers extended family who are the chosen support system for the Youth.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Without a clear definition for ‘confidentiality,’ there becomes issues in how confidentiality is applied, and it becomes difficult to challenge it as well in circumstances where it is being applied too tightly and doing a disservice to the child or Youth or community it concerns.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Many ‘adults’ could benefit from the same programs and services offered to Youth depending on their life experiences and life course development.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Youth is anyone from ages 12 to 30. We have to extend the age for Indigenous people because we’re constantly having our youth years stripped from us in a colonial world. My Grandma went to Residential School where she was abused throughout her Youth. Today, people like me are put in the child welfare system with no compassion or empathy from Social Workers. I was never given space to just be a youth because the topic about my future was always brought up by Social Workers and it led me to focus on my future, and not fully getting to enjoy the experience of being a Youth.”*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

### ***Prevention***

- We heard that strengthening cultural and community connections and identity and prioritizing basic human needs, addictions, mental health and healthy relationships are key to preventing Youth justice interactions.
- We heard that preventative measures are strengthened by effective information sharing and notification, ensuring Youth, communities, designated community members, caregivers and service providers are aware of the issues Youth are facing and the programs and services available to support them.
- Participants also emphasized the need for dedicated and consistent funding for First Nations and Indigenous-led organizations, programs, and services to promote healing.
- We heard that program and service providers need to work closely together to provide a continuum of wholistic supports and must have more accountability to ensure the funds they receive are truly benefitting Youth.
- Lastly, we heard that strengthening supports requires recruiting and retaining skilled staff in programs and services and expanding funding for and access to accessible ‘safe space’ infrastructure, such as cultural and recreational centers where Youth feel supported and empowered outside of home and school settings.

*“I think the most important thing to focus on for improving things for young people and the community is to provide accessible support systems that address root*

*causes of challenges, including mental health resources, education, safe spaces, and addressing systemic issues like poverty and inequality."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Mental health services need reframing as preventative rather than as reactive once someone is already in a bad place."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"People need to know their roots and where they come from."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

### ***Programs & Services***

- Across sessions and submissions, participants consistently emphasized the need for improved access to programs and services that help prevent involvement with the justice and child welfare systems.
- There was a strong call for greater access to culturally specific programs, with addictions, mental health, safe housing, parenting support and the removal of barriers to these services identified as top priorities. Many also highlighted the need for programs that support a safe and sustainable transition.
- Other recurring themes included concerns about underfunding, a lack of awareness of available resources, stigma, transportation challenges, and barriers to services for off-reserve and away-from-home Youth.
- Youth ask for more Indigenous lawyers, teachers, support workers, service providers, and Youth workers with lived experience, as well as dedicated funding for these professionals to take the training that they need to provide services in a non-biased but knowledgeable culturally responsive, safe, and trauma-informed way.

*"Having more land-based healing and programming is vital for many folks including myself. Nature has such a healing effect and can be a great entry point into re-connecting with culture for those who have been disconnected. Some people have so much anxiety or have imposter syndrome. They feel unworthy because they don't have those ties anymore and may even be living somewhere they are not originally from so tying it to the land is such a neutral way to reconnect with culture."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Youth having the ability to do "more" of their cultural activities and practices promotes safety."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"We need services where we live not now, too, not just where we are from."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

## **Restoring First Nations Justice Systems**

We heard that there is a strong desire to enact First Nations' self-determination and jurisdiction over their inherent justice systems by revitalizing traditional legal and family structures and restoring traditional ways of healing and making amends through 'Track Two' work of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy.

### **Track Two**

- Track Two work of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy is about restoring First Nations justice systems, institutions, and legal traditions. Participants highlighted the importance of this – of replacing colonial systems that were never designed for them with wholistic ones that are rooted in ceremony and traditional ways of making amends and healing.
- To support the restoration of First Nations justice systems, communities need the knowledge and tools to walk with and support their Youth. We heard there is a great need to start interim work to advance community jurisdiction and increase community capacity and Youth community connection, by creating legal notification pathways. This will increase community knowledge of where their Youth are within systems and allow for communities to be included in planning for the best interests of their own Youth.

*"Colonial justice is designed to tear apart our people. Youth are being affected. You see it all throughout colonial systems."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"In the current justice system, if you don't have the resources to win, your truth doesn't exist."*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

*"Making amends with a person (is important) but make amends with yourself first. Traditions and ceremonies are our resources. Making amends is very important in our lives. I like to make amends with everybody. If you're not at peace with yourself, how can you spread peace or positivity?"*

- Youth Circle Work Participant

**BC FIRST NATIONS JUSTICE COUNCIL**

**YOUR VOICE MATTERS!**

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH JUSTICE**  
Community Engagement Session

**CALLING ALL INDIGENOUS YOUTH!**  
(Ages 12-29+)

Please join our Indigenous Youth Justice Team this fall during one of our **Community Engagement Sessions**. Be part of designing a Justice Plan for Indigenous Youth by Indigenous Youth. **Engagement Sessions include:**

- Dinner
- A sharing circle to share your experiences
- Collaboration to create plans for the future

To RSVP or to learn more about these sessions and other BCFNJC **community engagements**, visit our **Community Engagement Calendar** on our website [bcfnjc.com/engagement-calendar](http://bcfnjc.com/engagement-calendar) or scan the QR Code or email: [youth@bcfnjc.com](mailto:youth@bcfnjc.com)

**BC FIRST NATIONS JUSTICE COUNCIL**

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN**  
Community Engagement Session

**Tuesday October 24**

**CALLING ALL INDIGENOUS YOUTH!**  
(Ages 12-29+)

Please join our Indigenous Youth Justice Team this fall during one of our **Community Engagement Sessions**. Be part of designing a Justice Plan for Indigenous Youth by Indigenous Youth.

**BC FIRST NATIONS JUSTICE COUNCIL**

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN**  
Community Engagement Session

**Monday August 26 - Tofino**

**CALLING ALL INDIGENOUS YOUTH!**  
(Ages 12-29+)

Guide the creation of a Justice Plan for Indigenous Youth by Indigenous Youth!

Please join our Indigenous Youth Justice Team at one of our summer Community Engagement Sessions.

**Engagement Sessions include:**

- Dinner
- A sharing circle to share your experiences
- Collaboration to create plans for the future

We are grateful to gather on the unceded traditional territory of the Tle-o-gul-aht First Nation of the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples.

**CONTACT**  
[youth@bcfnjc.com](mailto:youth@bcfnjc.com)

**DATE & TIME**  
Monday August 26th, 2024  
5pm - 8:00pm

**LOCATION**  
WICKANINISH CONFERENCE HALL  
1119 Pacific Rim Hwy  
Tofino BC

**RSVP & SURVEY**

**SCAN TO SHARE YOUR STORY**

**BC FIRST NATIONS JUSTICE COUNCIL**

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH JUSTICE**  
CALL FOR STORIES OPEN: SEPT 10 - DEC 15, 2023

**WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICE!**

Share your story and receive a \$50 virtual giftcard!

Calling on Indigenous youth (ages 12-29+) who have been impacted by, or have lived experience with, the criminal justice system. By sharing your experience and wisdom (with primary caregiver permission), your stories can be a powerful tool to help develop the new Indigenous Youth Justice Plan, and help your friends, cousins, and family interact with a safer and more respectful justice system.

To share your story, scan our **Call for Stories submissions QR Code** or visit the link: [bcfnjc.com/YourStory](http://bcfnjc.com/YourStory)

**RSVP & SURVEY**

**SCAN TO SHARE YOUR STORY**

Throughout the province, a series of Youth Engagement Posters played a crucial role in fostering in-person interaction. These visually compelling materials, designed to resonate with youth audiences, were strategically deployed across various platforms, including online channels and physical spaces in communities and schools, thereby maximizing their reach and facilitating direct, meaningful engagement.

## **What We Accomplished Together**

Review of 2023 Circle Work story led to the initial development of 13 priority themes and 58 draft opportunities, compiled into a Guiding Draft incorporating Youth quotes, statistics, and insights on systemic harms. Final Circle Work additions resulted in 80 Youth opportunities reflecting the priorities shared by Indigenous Youth and community members. Guided by their voices and experiences, these discussions identified key priorities and opportunities for change.

In Spring 2024, Youth, community members, and leaders reviewed and refined these opportunities, ensuring they accurately reflected lived experiences. Additional engagement in 2024 validated, expanded, and introduced new priorities, using an analytical framework to track emerging themes and regional feedback. This process led to the addition of one new theme and 22 further opportunities.

To uphold Indigenous research methodologies and center Youth voices, a final round of review took place in Winter 2025. The opportunities were presented to a dedicated Youth Panel, where an Elder provided guidance and cultural support, and Youth received honorariums for their time and contributions. Additionally, Youth had the opportunity to join the Youth Team at a Provincial Youth Gathering, where the team facilitated two sessions to ensure the opportunities accurately reflected lived experiences.

This work aligns with research emphasizing the importance of addressing poverty, trauma, racism, and colonialism through early intervention, postvention, follow-up, and diversion supports. It also reflects emerging research on brain development, which supports the expansion of the 'Youth' age range to ensure policies and interventions are developmentally appropriate and responsive to the evolving needs of young people. Altogether, these opportunities are the fibers that weave the basket to 'catch Youth in culture' and significantly reduce the number of Youth who become involved in the criminal justice system.

## **Youth Opportunities Overview**

Indigenous Youth, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, service providers, and community members have called for a fundamental transformation of British Columbia's youth

justice system. They have asked for more than reform— they have demanded a justice system that doesn't just 'include' Indigenous laws, but surrenders its monopoly on power, one that answers to our lands, our ancestors, and the unbroken jurisdiction our Nations have always held.

Throughout all phases of engagement, Youth expressed that safety, dignity, belonging, and self-determination must be central to how systems engage with them. The current system, born from colonial foundations, continues to enact harm through surveillance, punishment, and disconnection. Youth shared that justice cannot be achieved through isolated policy shifts but through wholistic, relationship-based, and community-led change.

This work is vital as MCFD transitions from a protection-based model toward a prevention-focused framework. Indigenous Youth and Nations have been clear: real prevention means resourcing our solutions unconditionally. It means fighting poverty, displacement, and racism at their roots. It means building spaces where every door is the right door, not just 'culturally safe' zones, but sovereign ground where Youth are safe to be brave, where land, language, and kinship are the foundation, not an add-on.

The opportunities in this report offer a path forward rooted in accountability, cultural strength, and Indigenous Youth's inherent rights.

## **Summary of Youth Opportunities**

### **1. Indigenous Governance and Oversight**

- Establish a Provincial Indigenous Youth Justice & Child Well-being Council with direct Youth representation.
- Create Indigenous-led oversight bodies for child well-being, policing, and youth justice.
- Return jurisdiction to First Nations through customizable justice and child welfare agreements.

### **2. Prevention Over Punishment**

- Create culturally grounded diversion pathways at first contact with police, courts, or child welfare.
- Invest in land-based, language, and cultural programs as prevention tools.
- Provide safe, youth-specific third spaces (spaces other than home or school) and healing lodges rooted in Indigenous governance and law.

### **3. Strengthen Community-Based Services**

- Fund community-led crisis response and mental health supports.
- Support transitions for Youth leaving care or custody through culturally relevant housing, mentoring, and advocacy.
- Increase access to Roots Workers, Cuzzins, Elders, and other Indigenous support roles in all systems.

#### **4. Justice System Redesign**

- Expand and enhance First Nation Court models for Youth, including those who don't plead guilty or face serious charges.
- Fund Youth-focused Native Courtworkers, cultural navigators, and mediation supports.
- Integrate Gladue reporting at every decision-making point, ensuring community involvement in healing plans.
- Continue to advance, and create awareness, in collaboration with justice and government partners, Strategy 6 of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy which includes the implementation of a Gladue Strategy to advance the application of Gladue Principles, the timely delivery of Gladue Reports, and Gladue awareness and education programs.

#### **5. Education, Employment & Mentorship**

- Create a robust, paid mentorship network to connect Youth with Indigenous leaders in justice, policy, and governance.
- Ensure cultural competency training across education systems, co-developed with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
- Provide credit for cultural learning and integrate life skills, rights education, and Indigenous law into K-12 curricula.

#### **6. Accountability in Corrections and Policing**

- Conduct audits of correctional facilities for cultural safety and trauma-informed practice.
- Amend use-of-force and complaints processes to be transparent, youth-friendly, and community-informed.
- Ensure Indigenous Youth representation on all relevant policing and justice advisory committees.

#### **7. Data Sovereignty & Legal Reform**

- Strengthen Indigenous Data Sovereignty by creating Youth-specific data governance standards.
- Reform legislation to reflect brain science, trauma-informed care, and inclusive language aligned with UNDRIP.
- Protect Youth by limiting access to non-serious Youth records and mandating confidentiality of Gladue reports.

These opportunities aim to amplify their voices and translate their input into actionable steps for meaningful change. A full list of Youth opportunities can be found in **Appendix A**, along with a full list of existing legal frameworks, treaties, and policies that uphold the rights of Indigenous Youth and children in **Appendix B: Rights**.

## What We Witnessed & MCFD's Youth Justice Mandate

As cited earlier in this report, transforming outcomes for Indigenous Youth who become entangled in the Youth criminal justice and child welfare systems must take a whole of government approach. This intention, indeed, is reflected throughout the BC First Nations Justice Strategy. While the 80 opportunities seek to promote this truth, the following section outlines how the proposed 80 Youth Opportunities interface directly with the mandate of MCFD as it relates to Indigenous Youth Justice. We have examined the MCFD Minister's Mandate Letter, the 2024/25-2026/27 Budget Service Plan, and information drawn from the MCFD website to clarify the Ministry's mandate and cited the specific opportunities that align with the MCFD mandate. In terms of prioritization, for the purpose of this report, all cited opportunities that fall within the scope of MCFD's mandate are considered urgent priorities.

### 2025 MCFD Mandate Letter

The 2025 Mandate Letter from Premier David Eby directs the MCFD to prioritize Indigenous jurisdiction over children and families and address the overrepresentation of Indigenous Youth in Care.

To reduce overrepresentation of Youth in care and protect child well-being, the Youth opportunities that link to MCFD's mandate are as follows:

- 2.3 Review MCFD's standards for service qualifications;
- 2.4 Increase culturally responsive transition program funding;
- 2.11 Implement "Host Nation" agreements for youth to access services from Nations while they are away from their own communities;
- 2.15 Develop jurisdiction templates that are tailored to the specific needs of individual children, Nations, and communities that are involved; and
- 2.16 Create a provincial and federal agreement registry for Nations to access best Practices.

### MCFD 2024/25-2026/27 Service Plan

The MCFD 2024/25-2026/27 Service Plan's (Service Plan) operations include a focus on Indigenous reconciliation with a cross-jurisdictional approach. Objective 1.1 of the Service Plan is to continue collaboration by developing a distinctions-based funding model to support First Nations as they enter into Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) agreements through appropriate consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and partners, as required by the Declaration Act Action Plan (Action 4.16).

To advance jurisdiction over children and families and protect child well-being, the Youth opportunities that link to MCFD's mandate are as follows:

- 1.1 Establish a provincial Youth Justice and Child Well-being Council to inform agreement processes and outcomes.
- 2.15 Develop jurisdiction templates that are tailored to the specific needs of individual children, Nations, and communities that are involved; and
- 2.16 Create a provincial and federal agreement registry for Nations to access best practices.

Objective 1.2 of the Service Plan focuses on implementing restorative polices and commits to eliminating racism and discrimination by refining culturally safe resources with Indigenous peoples, service providers, partners, and youth. Together, with like-minded organizations, MCFD commits to design a trauma-informed and culturally responsive justice system that addressed the gaps contributing to overrepresentation of Indigenous Youth in the justice system. This objective is to be actioned through developing alternatives to custody, enhanced cultural connections, and safe and supportive transitions of jurisdiction.

- 2.7 Develop a youth friendly complaints mechanism to address misconduct and discrimination;
- 3.1 Support successful, culturally responsive, and needs based reintegration for Indigenous youth who are transitioning out of correctional facilities;
- 3.2 Fund cultural healing spaces throughout Correctional Centres that promote healing, family reconnection, and successful reintegration;
- 3.3 Conduct an independent audit to evaluate Correctional Centres adherence to Provincial guidelines to include trauma informed practice and culturally appropriate programming for Youth in custody.
- 4.1 Establish sustainable funding for First Nations to develop independent court alternatives;
- 4.2 Fund the creation of Youth-specific Native Court Workers, Counsellors, Mediators and Regional Indigenous Youth Justice Workers;
- 4.4 Sustain and honour distinct First Nations cultures in courts;
- 4.5 Expand First Nations Court models to include Youth serious offences and Youth who do not plead guilty;

- 4. 6 Conduct a comparative review of cases involving Indigenous peoples versus non-Indigenous peoples to identify disparities and systemic biases;
- 5. 2 Develop streamlined funding for First Nations and partners to proactively address crisis through early interventions, detox, treatment, culture, ceremony, and second stage housing for Indigenous Youth;
- 6. 2 Conduct an analysis of policing body data management systems and protocols related to Youth information;
- 6.3 Amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to improve Indigenous data sovereignty;
- 8. 1 Focus on identifying opportunities for diversion;
- 8.3 Amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act to make the use of Gladue reports mandatory for Indigenous Youth;
- 9. 1 Revise the legislation and policy governing Youth Justice in BC to provide ongoing access to on-on-one mental health supports;
- 9. 3 Fund a review of the Canadian Criminal Code to address the distinct needs and experiences of Indigenous Youth;
- 9. 4 Reform parole and probation practices;
- 9.5 Amend legislation governing Youth justice to align with UNDRIP;
- 10.4 Conduct a review of the British Columbia Police Act and the federal Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and amend to ensure that resolving complaints against law enforcement officers are accessible for youth;
- 11. 2 Establish a mechanism for comprehensive support for every Child and Youth to meaningfully connect to their family, culture, Nations, and community;
- 11. 9 Host a forum to determine service-based issues, related to notification barriers, throughout Justice, Child Well-Being, Corrections, Education, and Health institutions;
- 13. 1 Develop reliable healing lodges to provide diversion and prevention-based programs and services; and
- 13. 2 Amend and develop legislation that will enable First Nations to resume jurisdiction over their own inherent justice systems.

### **MCFD Youth Justice**

MCFD's Youth Justice services administers community supervision and custody programs for youth aged 12-17, providing mental health services, and facilitating programs aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration.

To protect child well-being and develop rehabilitation and reintegration processes that are centered in First Nations inherent laws, legal systems, systems of governance, and jurisdictions, the Youth opportunities that link to MCFD's mandate are as follows:

- 3.1 Support successful, culturally responsive, and needs based reintegration for Indigenous youth who are transitioning out of correctional facilities;
- 3.2 Fund cultural healing spaces throughout Correctional Centres that promote healing, family reconnection, and successful reintegration;
- 5.4 Direct the Provincial Indigenous Youth Justice & Child Well-being Council to promote culturally grounded, Wholistic approaches to addressing healing and well-being; and
- 12.3 Increase the number of regional transition and resource homes for Indigenous Youth transitioning out of care or the justice system.
- 12.4 Provide funding to First Nations to establish and develop the Community Justice Band Designate role and essential programming. The Community Justice Band Designate will serve as the first point of contact when First Nation Youth become involved with the justice system.

## **Breaking the Cycle: “We Need Action Now Not in Another 20 Years”**

If the voices of Indigenous Youth on justice reform continue to be ignored, Indigenous Youth face a heightened risk of entering the adult criminal justice system. Currently, Indigenous Youth make up 41% of those in BC’s youth justice services which is five times their representation in the general population. This overrepresentation becomes even more pronounced at deeper levels of the youth justice system, with Indigenous Youth accounting for 51% of those in sentenced custody and 56% of those in remand. The percentage of Indigenous Youth in care in youth custody, excluding Family Service Agreements and Youth Agreements, is 24.77% in Continuing Care, 8.53% in Voluntary Care, and 8.25% in Temporary Care. The percentage of Indigenous Youth in care on community youth justice caseloads, excluding Family Service Agreements and Youth Agreements, is 5.62% Voluntary Care, 15% in Continuing Care, 5.95% in Temporary Care.

Without urgent action to address systemic inequities, these Youth are likely to transition into the adult correctional system, where Indigenous adults represent 36% of those in custody and 28% of those under community supervision, but only make up 6% of BC’s population. The disparity is even greater for Indigenous women, who made up 49% of the female provincial custody population in BC as of 2023 but represented only 4% of all women in Canada.

The long-standing calls for justice reform, including those from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, highlight the strong need for Indigenous led culturally relevant solutions, from early intervention to prevention to reintegration and

aftercare services. However, despite Canada's ongoing outward commitments to justice reform and reconciliation, Indigenous people continue to be disproportionately impacted by systemic failures as highlighted above. High rates of incarceration, violence, and police-related harms persist and underscore a lack of meaningful action to address the root causes of these issues.

Addressing this crisis requires an urgent and meaningful commitment to listening to Youth, understanding their priorities and implementing their opportunities, and ensuring that justice reforms go beyond empty promises and posturing to deliver real wholistic change that will end the overrepresented of Indigenous Youth in both youth and adult correctional systems.



## Conclusion

Throughout community engagements, Indigenous Youth and community members voiced a strong and urgent need for change. Regardless of whether they lived in urban centers, remote, rural or Northern communities, or away from their homelands, participants have experienced harm across multiple systems – including education, healthcare, child welfare, and justice. It was made clear that these systems do not operate in isolation, and their combined impact has created deep and lasting challenges for Indigenous Youth.

A recurring theme in what we heard was the absence of Youth voice in decisions that directly affect their lives, alongside a lack of physical and emotional safety in many spaces. These factors contribute to a chronic sense of injustice and systemic failure. Barriers to preventative programs and services, such as a lack of cultural reconnection, mental health, addictions, and disability supports, continue to limit opportunities for Indigenous Youth to heal and thrive. The lack of transitional supports for those aging out of child welfare or exiting the justice system compound these issues leading to cycles of disconnection, reintegration failure, and recidivism.

The message is clear: Youth call for meaningful collaboration in creating solutions to long-standing systemic issues and the way forward must be shaped by them, with solutions that honour their lived experiences, cultural identities, and right to self-determination.

## Next Steps

BCFNJC's expectation is that, through continued consultation and cooperation with MCFD we can further work in a collaborative, coordinated way to advance the implementation and prioritization of this work. While the engagements conducted thus far have provided ample insight into the needs and requirements for Youth justice, there is still more work to be done to address various gaps. Moving forward, we will continue using a cross ministerial approach and work towards a co-developed implementation strategy with Youth, Matriarchs, Elders, Two-Spirit-peoples, and Knowledge Keepers from the 204 First Nations of this region, all Indigenous Peoples in BC, subject matter experts, academics, and other likeminded organizations.

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs, BC Assembly of First Nations, and the First Nations Summit, working together as the First Nations Leadership Council will be updated on the progress of BCFNJC's Strategy 10 update and have the opportunity to provide feedback and further endorse the implementation of the opportunities. Together, we will advance the *Witnessing Through Story: Indigenous Youth Voices on Justice, Safety & Wellbeing* report to uplift the youth and amplify their voices.

## Closing the Circle: Our Responsibility Is Ongoing



In Indigenous ways of knowing, a circle is never just a shape—it is a teaching, a reflection of relationships, and a promise. To “close the circle” is not to end a process but to return to it with care, intention, and respect. The work shared on these pages begins and continues in ceremony. The prayers are still open. The circle is not closed, and neither is our responsibility.

This journey has been guided by Indigenous methodologies and led by a team of Indigenous women. That alone made this work powerful. Across every phase of this engagement, Youth saw themselves reflected in those holding the circle—women who carry knowledge, women who serve the community, and women who lead. They were not asked to justify or defend their experiences. They were received with understanding. They were honoured as sacred.

Over the course of this journey, the team met with 220 participants from across the province who experienced the Child Welfare or Youth Justice systems. These participants brought their full selves into the circle, sharing hard truths about violence, displacement, racism, shame, and fear. But they also brought vision, clarity,

humour, leadership, and love. They spoke not just for themselves but for their younger siblings, their cousins, and their future children.

*“We do not want to fear RCMP—for example, [the loss of] Chantel Moore and Julian Jones. RCMP should get extra training to work with Indigenous people.”* — Youth Circle Work Participant

*“Restore First Nations’ Justice Systems and Structures.”* — Provincial Youth Conference Circle Work Participant

*“Justice is complicated as we are often excluded from the tables where our rights are discussed.”* — Youth Circle Work Participant

*“There is an identity crisis in Youth—being ashamed of family, and being ashamed of being, looking, or acting Indigenous. This needs to be addressed in preventative ways. Bring pride back into their lives.”* — Youth Circle Work Participant

**These voices are more than quotes in a report. They are teachings, truth-telling, and calls to action.** Indigenous Youth are not just asking for change—they are leading it. And they are watching to see whether the systems around them will rise to meet the vision they have offered.

This work is not just about youth justice. It is about justice for Youth. And that means honouring their inherent rights, creating spaces where they feel safe and seen, and supporting them to thrive—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Research in this context was not extractive. It was relational. It was ceremony. It was a sacred act of listening, returning, and committing. It comes with responsibility—ensuring the stories, solutions, and dreams shared by youths do not sit dormant in a document but move into policy, practice, and transformation.

**This is not the end. It is a beginning. The circle is still open. The work continues. And so does our responsibility.**

## Appreciation

We want to express our deepest and most heartfelt appreciation to the Indigenous Youth, First Nations, community members, service providers, and organizations who have walked alongside us to support this work from the very beginning.

Listening to and learning from Indigenous Youth across this province has been a profound privilege. Their brilliance, strength, and vision have shaped every part of this work. Throughout this journey, we have witnessed the depth of their intelligence not only in how they navigate the world today but in the wisdom they carry from generations past and the insight they hold for future generations. Many Youths shared experiences that have emerged from pain, trauma, and systemic harm, yet spoke with incredible clarity, courage, and care about their hopes for a better future.

We were especially moved by the way the Youth spoke not only for themselves but also for their siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews, and future kin. Their stories reflected a powerful sense of responsibility and love—one rooted in community, identity, and the desire to create lasting change for the next generations.

Thank you for your honesty, leadership, and unwavering commitment to justice, healing, and transformation. Your voices have not only shaped this report but also set a vision for what is possible when Indigenous Youth are heard, honoured, and empowered.

## Principles that Guided the Work



## About the Authors

The women acknowledged here want to share that they are not the authors of this work, but the weavers through which it was carried forward. These pages are woven with voices, visions and truths of Indigenous Youth across these lands – their stories are embers, to add to the flame. It has been our sacred honour to walk beside them, to witness their brilliance and to bring their words to this report with the care they deserve.

**Lisa Hotte (Senior Researcher)** is a registered member of Blueberry River First Nation. Her family names are Apsassin on her grandfather's side, and Napoleon on her grandmother's side. Her Dad is a Settler from Amsterdam. Lisa contributed to the BCFNJC Youth Team through a rights-based lens, the traditional teachings from her mother, and through intergenerational experiences as an Indigenous female. Lisa lifts her hands up to the Ancestors who guide the way, and the participants who shared in hopes of change.

**Shannon Cameron (Researcher)** is Dakelh, a member of Ts'il Kaz Koh on her maternal side, and Irish Scottish on her paternal side. The lived experiences of her grandmother (Nancy Charlie) & mother (Cecelia Sam) helped shape Shannon's work with Indigenous communities on repatriation and protection of cultural heritage resources, specific claims research, community safety and justice. Shannon is grateful for the trust she was given to do this work alongside Indigenous Youth.

**Skyla Singleton (Researcher)** is Métis with Red River ancestry through her mother, and of English and Irish descent through her father. She has taken a special focus in working with Youth, people with disabilities, and Indigenous people. Skyla feels grateful to have worked alongside Indigenous Youth on a cause that has touched her & her loved ones personally. Skyla is thankful to have been part of a Team that was passionate about creating a better future for Youth and our communities.

**Alicia Carlow (Director of Work for Women, 2S+, Youth and Education)** is a dual-heritage woman of Coast Salish (Snuneymuxw First Nation) and settler ancestry. With deep gratitude, she honours the opportunity to help guide this work and witness the power of these stories as they ripple outward, planting seeds of truth, healing and change.

**Katisha Paul (Policy Analyst)**, also known as Kwikws *lv̄sáos* (Little Angel), is a *xwíl̄n̄xw sténi?* (woman of this land: She/her pronouns) from the *W̄JOŁEŁP* and *Lil'wat* Nations. She is the elected Union of BC Indian Chiefs Youth Representative and a fierce advocate the young leaders of today. Katisha works diligently to ensure youth voices are protected, respected, and amplified through cultures, laws protocols, languages, and governing systems.

## Appendix A: Youth Opportunities

The following opportunities reflect the insights and priorities shared by Indigenous Youth and community members during engagement sessions and highlight the changes they believe are necessary to improve justice outcomes for Indigenous Youth.

### 1. ACCOUNTABILITY:

- 1.1. **Provincial Indigenous Youth Justice & Child Well-being Council:** Establish a Provincial Indigenous Youth Justice and Child Well-being Council ('Council') to ensure Youth have a platform to inform solutions on Justice, Child Well-being, and Housing issues. The Council will establish an Indigenous led regional and municipal "situation table" network hosted by BCFNJC;
- 1.2. **Indigenous Youth Specific Well-being Oversight:** Establish an independent Indigenous Youth Oversight Monitoring body that includes Youth representatives. Legislative amendments will support this position to ensure that opportunities are implemented, and progress is made. The Indigenous Youth Oversight Monitoring body will have authority to consult and collaborate with other oversight bodies;
- 1.3. **Indigenous Youth Specific Police Oversight:** Establish an independent Indigenous Youth Police Oversight body that includes Youth representatives. The Youth Specific Police Oversight body will have authority to consult and collaborate with other Police Oversight Bodies;

### 2. CHILD WELLBEING:

- 2.1. **Expand Support for Caregivers Under the Extended Family Program:** Increase the Extended Family Program to include supports and services, that address the unique realities of each Youth, for caregivers providing care to all Indigenous Children and Youth (up to 29+) in their homes and communities. Ensure funding is provided for unresolved trauma, grief, and loss and provide equitable services that acknowledge the unique needs of mixed-heritage families caring for Indigenous Youth.
- 2.2. **Increase Support for the Needs of Youth:** Expand the eligibility criteria to receive support services and funding for all Indigenous Children and Youth (up to 29+) to ensure supports are in alignment with their unique needs and circumstances and ensure caregivers have improved access to essential resources and support measures.

- 2.3. **Review MCFD Standards & Policies:** Work to conduct a thorough review of MCFD's standards and policies that determine how Youth qualify for various agreements, funding, programs, and services provided by the ministry.
- 2.4. **Transition Supports for Youth in Care:** Increase access and adequacy of fully funded transition programs & services for Indigenous Youth leaving the Child Welfare system and enhance access to tailored transition supports that are culturally appropriate and relevant to the self-identified and unique needs of Indigenous Youth.
- 2.5. **Enhance Social Work Delegation Training:** Conduct a formal review of social work delegation training including comparing and aligning educational and other materials between relevant government ministries, Indigenous child well-being initiatives, and organizations specializing in training community members and professionals working with Indigenous communities to provide culturally appropriate care.
- 2.6. **Delegated Social Worker Registration:** Establish a robust social worker registration and oversight framework that mandates cultural safety, trauma-informed care, and continuous professional development while implementing independent accountability mechanisms.
- 2.7. **Develop a Youth-friendly Complaints System:** Address misconduct. Launch accessible reporting and advocacy pathways for families and Youth to enhance safety, trust and transparency in service delivery.
- 2.8. **Ensure First Nations Community Involvement in all Significant Measures and Create opt-in communication for Prevention Services:** Ensure timely reporting of significant measures impacting Indigenous Youth, dedicate resources to maintain accurate and current contact information for Nations, and transition to modern, culturally appropriate communication beyond a fax-based process to strengthen accountability and responsiveness in respect of Indigenous data sovereignty:
- 2.9. **Review the Ministry of Child and Family Development Aboriginal Operational & Practice Standards:** Conduct a formal independent review of the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators framework to align with current rights-based legislation.
- 2.10. **Increase Access to and Awareness of Land-Based & Cultural Programming:** Establish core reliable, sustainable funding for distinctions based on-the-land and/or cultural programs and services that connect

Children and Youth receiving services to their community, culture, languages, laws and identity. Ensure ease of access, for equal distribution, through communication of the programming to Youth led coalitions, councils, and other Bodies or organizations providing services to Indigenous Youth.

- 2.11. **“Host-Nation” Agreements:** Develop a “Host Nation” Agreement template for community access. The template would enable the delivery of programs and services to away from home or disconnected Indigenous Children and Youth receiving services including Youth whose home communities exist outside of BC.
- 2.12. **Randomized Visits to Foster Homes:** Social workers should report quarterly to the Child or Youth’s community and annually to a designated First Nations leadership body on home and care monitoring outcomes for all Children and Youth in care. The reporting mechanism will ensure that the care provided aligns with Child and Youth safety, health, and development standards set by Indigenous, provincial, federal and international law.
- 2.13. **Conduct Meetings in Neutral Environments:** Create changes in practice to Case Management Meetings, Family, or Supervised Visits to ensure these take place in a safe neutral environment, ensuring visits can be supervised by community grandmothers and/or community appointed or approved family or community members:
- 2.14. **Parental Removal to Protect Children:** Take all measures necessary to establish a funded pilot project that works to shift protection practice by removing the parent rather than the Child or Youth to protect their best interest and reduce their vulnerability.
- 2.15. **Child & Family Services Jurisdiction Templates:** Develop customizable Child, Youth, and Family jurisdiction pathways, service delivery, and service agreement sharing templates to assist First Nations in regaining jurisdiction over Child and Family services:
- 2.16. **Enhance Transparency Within Provincial and Federal Child Well-being Agreements:** Create a provincial and federal Child, Family and Community Agreement registry open to all Indigenous communities.

### **3. CORRECTIONS:**

- 3.1. **Support Successful Reintegration:** Fund consistent, equitable, substantive, culturally relevant distinction and needs based accessible supports for all Indigenous Youth transitioning out of correctional facilities, regardless of location.
- 3.2. **Culturally Based Healing for Incarcerated Indigenous Youth:** Support incarcerated Indigenous Youth by funding culturally rooted responsive spaces and programs that promote healing, family reconnection, and successful reintegration:
- 3.3. **Ensure Unit Officer Accountability:** Conduct an independent audit to evaluate whether individuals employed in Correctional Centres are adhering to Provincial guidelines, particularly regarding trauma-informed practices and culturally appropriate programming, for both Adult and Youth Custody.

### **4. COURTS & FIRST NATION COURTS:**

- 4.1. **Culturally Grounded Alternatives to Court:** Establish reliable and sustainable funding to enable First Nations to design and implement independent, culturally grounded alternatives to the court system that utilize traditional methods of conflict resolution and accountability. Amend policies to prioritize the use of these alternatives as the primary community response, ensuring they are integrated into the justice process.
- 4.2. **Support for Youth Navigating the Courts:** Provide funding for the creation of Youth-specific Native Court Workers, Counsellors, Mediators and Regional Indigenous Youth Justice Worker positions. Ensure timely and fair, Youth focused, widespread knowledge and communication of rights to access existing First Nation Courts and justice services developed by Nations:
- 4.3. **Establish a Court Elder Program:** To increase community justice accountability, sufficiently fund a Court Elder Program initiative to ensure Elders, as well as Knowledge Keepers or Cultural Mentors, are available to be present in the court and court interview rooms of each Indigenous Youth going through any court process:
- 4.4. **Sustain Local First Nation Culture in Court:** All Provincial Court spaces to sustain the cultural practices of local First Nation(s).
- 4.5. **Expand First Nation Court Models:** Increase Youth access to culturally relevant, restorative justice approaches. Enhance the scope of First Nation Court Models to include Youth serious offences, and Youth who do not plead guilty.

- 4.6. **Identify Disparities & Biases in the Courts:** Conduct a comprehensive review, including targeted case studies, to compare similar cases or trials involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals across both family court and criminal court matters. This review should analyze tangible differences in outcomes for identical case scenarios, identifying disparities and systemic biases to be addressed.
- 4.7. **Increase Knowledge of Distinctions Based Services:** Mandate a collaborative court environment and create required standardized orientation materials for Crown Counsel that include comprehensive distinctions base services that includes available Indigenous-led justice programs and services.

## 5. CRISIS RESPONSE:

- 5.1. **Indigenous-led Crisis Response Teams:** Set up dedicated funding for First Nations, Friendship Centres, and Grassroots Organizations to develop and operate Indigenous-led Crisis Response teams, addressing incidents involving trafficked; or missing, murdered, or victimized Youth, including cases of sexualized violence, race-based violence, and gang violence, both on and off reserve. Funding will assist victims and their families in navigating grief, trauma, addictions, and healing.
- 5.2. **Resources to Address Emerging Youth Crises:** Develop sustainable funding pathways to enable First Nations, Friendship Centres, and Grassroots Organizations to implement proactive measures aimed at addressing and preventing emerging Youth crises, including suicide, mental health challenges, lack of safe housing options, toxic drugs and addictions. Funding will be used to address the need for safe spaces and safe housing and establish an integrated and culturally safe continuum of care that includes, early interventions, detox, treatment, culture, ceremony and second stage housing for indigenous Youth impacted by intergenerational trauma from residential schools, the child welfare system, or the justice system.
- 5.3. **Addictions & Toxic Drugs:** Establish sustainably funded, regional Youth specific treatment centers, after-care and second-stage housing that provides holistic care inclusive of family systems, addressing addictions and reducing the devastating impact of toxic drug-related deaths among Indigenous Youth through culturally grounded, intergenerational strengths and trauma-informed approaches that support long-term healing, and recovery.

5.4. **Indigenous Youth-Specific Response to the opioid and mental health Crises:** Co-develop a distinct Indigenous Youth platform within the Provincial Indigenous Youth Justice & Child Well-being Council to address systemic factors contributing to substance use and promote culturally grounded, holistic approaches to addressing crisis, healing and well-being.

## **6. DATA SAFETY & DATA SOVEREIGNTY:**

6.1. **Develop a Best Practices Youth Data Guide:** Strengthen Indigenous Data Sovereignty, develop a best practice guide and accessible repository for distinctions-based Youth data collection, storage, access, use, and analysis, cross jurisdictions:

6.2. **Protect Youth Data:** Conduct a comprehensive analysis of all policing bodies data management systems and security protocols related to Youth information:

6.3. **Clearly Define Confidentiality:** Co-develop a clear definition of “confidentiality” as it relates to Indigenous Children and Youth within the British Columbia Child, Family and Community Service Act, the Health Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and the RCMP Operational Manual. Amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to improve Indigenous data collection and community jurisdictional care efforts.

## **7. EDUCATION, TRAINING, & MENTORSHIP:**

7.1. **Enhance Local Education Agreements:** School districts to set aside funds to equitably engage First Nations Education representatives to co-develop Local Education Agreements.

7.2. **Cultural Competency in the Education Sector:** Collaborate with Elders and key organizations guiding First Nations education in BC to design a mandatory distinction-based, cultural competency professional development program for persons working within the education system. The bi-annual training will incorporate Indigenous perspectives on the best interest of the Child, traditional justice practices, diversion and making amends, and include key elements such as trauma-informed approaches, mental health and substance use awareness, and understanding neurodivergence and how lived experience can impact learning needs. Training to include an acknowledgement of intergenerational trauma and loss.

- 7.3. **Indigenous-led Paid Mentorship Body:** Create a robust, accessible, and funded mentorship network of Indigenous role models, empowering Youth to explore and pursue community leadership, justice, law, policy, information technology, and Child Well-being careers, while celebrating and drawing upon traditional knowledge, lived experiences, and diverse forms of intelligence.
- 7.4. **Access to Indigenous Support Workers:** Ensure the number of Indigenous Support Workers in schools can effectively and fully support the Indigenous student body.
- 7.5. **Standards for “Indigenous” & “Cultural” Roles:** Develop or amend policies and best practice standards to guide organizations in creating roles like "First Nation Liaison," "First Nation Advisor," and "Cultural Advisor" that require these positions to be held exclusively by First Nation people born within the area called British Columbia or who have strong ties to the area, combining traditional knowledge with lived experience and a commitment to ensuring the work is done in alignment with the needs and values of Indigenous communities.
- 7.6. **Language Programming:** Create additional pathways for First Nations language programming at the greater community and community level, supporting Elders, adults, Youth, Children, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ incorporating innovative approaches with the provision of reliable targeted funding.
- 7.7. **Indigenous Educators:** When possible, Indigenous Education courses should be designed and taught primarily by Indigenous educators, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers who bring lived experiences, cultural understanding, protocol awareness, and traditional teachings.
- 7.8. **Increase Education and Career Representation for First Nations Youth:** Establish a comprehensive initiative that enhances educational and career opportunities for First Nations Youth by giving credit for cultural activities, integrating tuition waivers, expanded admissions criteria, and community-focused career development programs across Information Technology, Social Work, Governance and justice-related fields.
- 7.9. **Independent Indigenous Student Feedback:** Create independent mechanisms for Indigenous students to provide feedback on their experiences at educational institutions and include accountability measures to ensure their feedback is acted upon in a meaningful way. As best practice, communities should be engaged to co-develop and create these

accountability measures.

- 7.10. **Integrating Indigenous Justice, Rights, and Life Skills in Education:** Update Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum to include learning opportunities focused on Indigenous Title and Rights and strengthen practical education on financial literacy and essential life skills
- 7.11. **First Nation Junior & Senior High Education Models:** Expand First Nation Education funding to develop distinction based First Nation junior and secondary education models. Include costs for infrastructure, resources, staffing and operational costs.

## **8. GLADUE:**

- 8.1 **Increase Documentation of Gladue Factors:** Establish reliable pathways requiring justice and correction personnel to document Youth Gladue factors, focusing on identifying opportunities for diversion.
- 8.2 **Best Practices for Sharing Gladue Reports:** Co-develop legislation governing Gladue that includes a best practice process for sharing Gladue reports. This legislation should ensure that information from a Youth's Gladue report remains confidential and cannot be made public through any medium, such as media, court records, or information requests, except as part of the Youth's healing plan. As part of this plan, the Gladue report shall be shared with the Youth's community justice department and Elders upon their release, ensuring that tailored healing plans are developed collaboratively and respectfully. Additionally, provide funding for First Nations to establish community justice programs and ensure Elders are fully compensated for their work with Youth on healing plans.
- 8.3 **Mandatory Gladue Reports:** Amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act to make the use of Gladue reports mandatory for Indigenous Youth in both sentencing and when considering detention or release.

## **9. LEGISLATION:**

- 9.1. **End Harmful Isolation Practices:** Revise the legislation and policy governing Youth Justice in BC to provide ongoing access to one-on-one mental health supports and prohibit the use of isolation as a disciplinary measure, except in cases where medically necessary separation is required and unrelated to a mental health crisis.
- 9.2. **Acknowledge the Role of Trauma and Other Influences on Brain Development:** Amend the YCJA to incorporate the current evidence-based

understanding of brain development in Youth. While recognizing that trauma disproportionately affects Indigenous Youth and plays a significant role in shaping brain development, it is also important to consider other contributing factors, such as environmental, social, and health-related influences. This understanding should inform approaches to culpability, trial and sentencing procedures, and the design of correctional programming that is effective, equitable, and tailored to the unique needs of Youth and their developing minds.

- 9.3. **Strengthen Protections for Vulnerable Youth:** Provide full funding for a comprehensive review of the Canadian Criminal Code to better address the needs and experiences of Indigenous Youth, particularly those who have neurodiverse conditions and broader vulnerabilities linked to social determinants of health. Expand the legal definition of “vulnerability” beyond medically diagnosed conditions to explicitly include those affected by environmental and systemic factors. Implement strict penalties for those who exploit or harm these Youth, recognizing the layered risks they face.
- 9.4. **Reforming Parole and Probation Practices for Youth:** Conduct a comprehensive review of parole and probation practices and guidelines, including Youth probation, the roles of the crown, BC Prosecution Services, and the Parole Board.
- 9.5. **Update Legislation for Inclusivity:** Make amendments to the legislation governing Youth Justice to ensure language is inclusive of distinct Indigenous world views, laws, customs, and various gender identities. Make amendments to legislation and policy governing Youth Justice and align legislation with UNDRIP.
- 9.6. **Limit Access to Youth Records:** Reduce long-term barriers in education, employment, housing, and reintegration for justice involved Youth by limiting access to non serious Youth records and revising Youth data handling protocols.

## **10. POLICING:**

- 10.1. **First Nation-Led Accountability:** Ensure First Nations have the resources needed to establish their own “Due Diligence Committees” to guarantee First Nation voices are embedded in the selection and evaluation processes of police positions that will be working with Youth.
- 10.2. **Transparency in Officer Complaints:** Implement a mandatory notification process requiring First Nations to be directly informed if an officer with a

complaint regarding an interaction with an Indigenous person is assigned to work within their community or the broader region encompassing their homelands.

- 10.3. **Redirecting Resources to First Nation-Led Solutions:** Reallocate funding currently directed toward criminal law enforcement responses to lower and mid-level police calls within First Nations communities, such as mental health crises, loitering, minor disputes, and noise complaints to support the development of Indigenous-led community justice services. Provide culturally responsive training for First Nation first responders.
- 10.4. **Review of Complaints Process:** Conduct a comprehensive review of the legislation governing the handling of police complaints, including the British Columbia Police Act and the federal Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act, and make amendments to ensure that procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints against law enforcement officers are accessible, Youth-friendly, and transparent.
- 10.5. **Indigenous Youth Representation in Policing Advisory Committees and Units:** Include additional positions on relevant provincial policing advisory committees and oversight units for First Nation Youth representatives, with lived experience, who will provide input and perspective on gendered and 2SLGBTQQIA+ issues as an accountability measure.
- 10.6. **Use of Force:** Amend the Use of Force reporting requirements to include external, publicly accessible tracking of incidents involving the use of force with Youth and ensure the development of mechanisms to protect Youth privacy.
- 10.7. **Strengthen Self-Administered Agreements:** In the interest of needed police reform, incorporate mechanisms to strengthen and expand Public Safety Canada support of the First Nations Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP) to bolster Self-Administered agreements with First Nations. Include provisions that promote meaningful mentorship and internship opportunities for Nations and Indigenous Youth.
- 10.8. **Proactive Relationality:** All police officers should actively engage with First Nations in their detachment area by attending cultural events, community events, and spaces where they are welcomed to build genuine relationships with Nation members, particularly Children and Youth. Emphasis should be placed on fostering proactive connections, and enabling trust, empathy and understanding between policing members and Children and Youth, rather

than on reactive and punitive responses.

## 11. PREVENTION:

- 11.1. **Youth Justice Analyst:** Establish a fully funded First Nations 'Youth Justice Analyst' position to provide essential information that can be easily shared among First Nations, Friendship Centres, and Grassroots Organizations available through a virtual 'Youth Hub'.
- 11.2. **Increase Access to Roots Workers:** Require the placement of external Roots Workers in Education, Child Welfare and Justice systems to establish a pattern of comprehensive support for every Child and Youth to reconnect in meaningful ways with their family, culture, land and community.
- 11.3. **Cuzzin Position:** Extend the Aunties Pilot Program, to include an Indigenous Youth Justice "Cuzzin" position. The "Cuzzin" will support Youth to navigate needed resources. Cuzzins will help Youth access and connect to needed existing programs and services including Native Courtworkers, Counsellors, and Elders and will act as a Peer Mentor and guide.
- 11.4. **Equitable Access to Social Workers & Justice Staff:** Ensure that communities have an equitable number of both early in their career and experienced culturally aware social workers and justice staff, preferably with lived Indigenous experience, with a particular emphasis on ensuring Indigenous representation and improving staff retention in rural, remote, and northern on-reserve communities.
- 11.5. **Virtual Youth Hub:** Develop a virtual 'Youth Hub' to provide a centralized resource base where Youth, community members, service providers, and organizations can easily find information and public education regarding Indigenous Child & Youth safety, wellbeing, Title and Rights. Funding will be allocated specifically to the Virtual Youth Hub to promote awareness and enhance public literacy on Indigenous Rights, Indigenous Youth justice and Indigenous Child Wellbeing as curated by the Youth Justice Analyst.
- 11.6. **Technology for Youth Safety:** Sufficiently fund the implementation of new and existing security and safety devices and a check-in app, for Indigenous Youth.
- 11.7. **Enhance Youth & Community Safety:** Enhance Youth and family safety by providing core sustainable funding for Indigenous led initiatives that address distinction-based risk and vulnerability factors.

- 11.8. **Access to Third Spaces:** Communities to provide greater consideration to investment into culturally responsive Youth-driven and Youth-specific “third space” infrastructure as a preventative measure.
- 11.9. **Forum on Systemic Issues Across Institutions:** Host a forum to determine issues related to contact throughout Justice, Child Well-being, Corrections, Education, and Health institutions.

## **12. PROGRAMS & SERVICES:**

- 12.1. **Legal Services to Support Children & Youth:** Provide legal services to support Indigenous Children and Youth who have experienced harm in government institutions and ensure accountability when established complaint systems fail.
- 12.2. **Grant Writing Support:** Establish a Grant Support Worker position to support First Nations to write their own grant proposals related to Child, Family and Justice well-being.
- 12.3. **Accessible Transition and Resource Homes:** Increase the number of regional transition and resource homes for Indigenous Youth transitioning out of care or the justice system, ensure homes are designed, constructed or renovated in compliance with current accessibility standards to ensure the safety and inclusion of Youth with disabilities.
- 12.4. **Community Justice Band Designate and Programming:** Provide funding to First Nations to establish and develop the Community Justice Band Designate role and essential programming. The Community Justice Band Designate will serve as the first point of contact when First Nation Youth become involved with the justice system.

## **13. TRACK TWO:**

- 13.1. **Youth Healing Lodges:** Establish reliable and sustainable funding for the development, and expansion of safe regional Healing Lodges. Healing Lodges to provide two streams of programming, including diversion and prevention-based programs and services. Provide funding for Youth to attend existing cultural ceremonies and events.
  - o Lodges will integrate traditional governance and Indigenous laws to provide a restorative approach.

- Admission will be open to Youth who have encountered the legal system, those who would otherwise face conventional corrections, and those experiencing on-going trauma stemming from ancestral connections to Indian Residential Schools.
- Referrals may be court-imposed or provided by a Youth's family, community or Nation.

13.2. **First Nation-Driven Justice Systems:** Amend existing legislation or create new legislation where necessary to ensure that First Nations are empowered to resume jurisdiction over their own inherent justice systems. Ensure that relevant policies and funding pathways are also responsive to evolving and specific needs of their communities.

**14. 2SLGBTQIA+:**

14.1 **Develop a Youth 2SLGBTQIA+ Justice Strategy:** Development of an Indigenous Youth 2SLGBTQIA+ Justice Plan grounded on a distinctions-based approach, considering safety challenges for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and groups, including Youth, through a 2SLGBTQIA+ led team.

## Appendix B: Rights

The below list includes key legal frameworks, policies, principles and treaties that uphold the rights, protections, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples, Children, Youth, and marginalized communities both in Canada and internationally.

### Canadian Legal Frameworks

- **United Nations Declaration Act:** [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)
- **Accessible Canada:** [Accessible Canada Act](#)
- **Canadian Constitution:** [Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982](#)
- **Canadian Charter:** [Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms](#)
- **C-92:** [An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Children, Youth and Families](#)
- **NHSA:** [National Housing Strategy Act](#)
- **YCJA:** [Youth Criminal Justice Act](#)

### International Frameworks

- **UNDRIP:** [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- **UNCRC:** [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- **UNCRPD:** [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

### Legal & Policy Principles

- [Best Interest of the Child](#)
- [Cultural Continuity](#)
- [Jordan's Principle](#)
- **Gladue:** [Gladue Principles](#)
- [Substantive Equality](#)
- **Yogyakarta:** [Yogyakarta Principles](#)

### Provincial Frameworks

- **YJA:** [Youth Justice Act \(BC\)](#)
- **CFCSA:** [Child, Family and Community Service Act](#)
- **DRIPA:** [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)
- **RCY Act:** [Representative for Children and Youth Act](#)

### Reports

- **TRC:** [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#)
- [MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice](#)
- [RCAP \(1996\)](#)

## Treaties

- **Modern Treaties:** [Modern Treaties | BC Treaty Commission](#)
- **Treaty 8:** [Treaty Texts: Treaty No. 8](#)

**Table 1. Rights Upheld by the Youth Opportunities**

Theme	Rights, Principles and Calls to Action/Justice embedded in:
2SLGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP, UNCRPD, Yogyakarta Principles</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice</li> </ul>
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, C-92,</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Best Interests of the Child, Cultural Continuity, Jordan's Principle, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> CFCSA, DRIPA, RCY Act</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #1, 38, 55, and 66</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
ChildWell-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP, UNCRPD</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Best Interests of the Child, Cultural Continuity, Jordan's Principle, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> CFCSA, DRIPA, RCY Act,</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
Corrections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, YCJA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Jordan's Principle, Substantive Equality</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA, YJA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #1, 21, 22, 30, 31, 35, 36, and 38</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Courts &amp; First Nations Courts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, YCJA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Best Interests of the Child, Cultural Continuity, Gladue</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA, YJA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #27, 30, 31, 38</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Crisis Response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, NHSA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Jordan's Principle, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #18, 21, 22, 30, 40</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Data Safety &amp; Data Sovereignty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Best Interests of the Child, Cultural Continuity, Jordan's Principle, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> TRC Call to Action #55</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Education, Training &amp; Mentorship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNCRPD, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Best Interests of the Child, Cultural Continuity, Jordan's Principle, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> TRC Calls to Action #7, 10, 13, 30, 57, 62, 63</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Gladue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, YCJA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Gladue, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA, YJA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> TRC Calls to Action #27, 28, 30, 38 and 42</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Legislation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNCRPD, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, YCJA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA, YJA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #33, 34, 38, 42, 50, and 57</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Policing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, YCJA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> CFCSA, DRIPA, YJA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #36, 38, 39, and 42</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNCRPD, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, C-92</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> CFCSA, DRIPA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #1, 3, 7, 12, 30, 38, and 66</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Programs &amp; Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNCRPD, UNDRIP</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> Accessible Canada Act, Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, C-92, NHSA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> Accessible BC, DRIPA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action #18, 30, and 50</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>
<b>Track Two</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Frameworks:</b> UNCRC, UNDRIP</li> <li>• <b>Canadian Legal Frameworks:</b> UNDA, Canadian Charter, Canadian Constitution, YCJA</li> <li>• <b>Principles:</b> Cultural Continuity, Substantive Equality</li> <li>• <b>Provincial Frameworks:</b> DRIPA, YJA</li> <li>• <b>Reports:</b> MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ Calls for Justice and TRC Calls to Action 30, 40, 38, 42, and 50</li> <li>• <b>Treaties:</b> Treaty 8 and Modern Treaties</li> </ul>



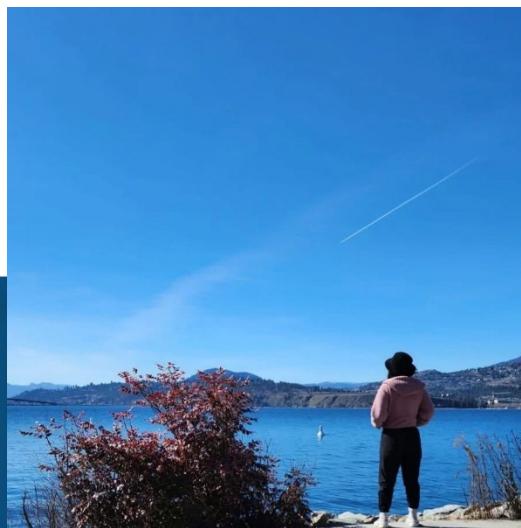
## Closing Prayer

The Land is Law.  
The Ocean rushes through our veins.  
All Four Directions feel our waves.  
The Earth rests below our skin.  
We will grow strong from our roots within.  
The Wind travels through our lungs.  
Tall mountains will carry our songs.  
The Stars live within our eyes.  
Many aspirations fill our skies.

We are the Land.

Love is our birth right.  
Creator, protect us as our families reunite.  
While we are kind to everybody,  
Creator, give us the dignity to respect our body.  
As all walks of life remain aligned,  
Creator, humble our minds so we can be kind.  
Our backbones hold power with pride,  
Creator, provide spaces for our voices to be amplified.

**Kwikws Ivsáos: Little Angel Katisha Paul  
from the W̱JOŁEŁP and Lil'wat Nations**



# YOUTH VOICES MATTER



@bcfnjc

