



VITAL CAFÉ OCTOBER 28TH, 2020

Youth: Good Health and Wellbeing in Whistler: Why Does It Matter? – Summary

This summary's goal is to provide a snapshot of the event's breakout room conversations. We looked at a broad meaning of youth; from high school student to those resident and seasonal people in the 18 – 35 age group. Our panel members represented these demographics.

Thank you to our Sponsors: Whistler Public Library and Leith Wheeler Investment Counsel

Please visit our website for more information about [Whistler Community Foundation](#) and other Vital Signs initiatives such as our most recent report 'A Vital Exploration'.

Panel Members

Stephen Greig

Stephen has lived in Whistler for 17 years and has been coming to Whistler on vacation since 1996. He works with Whistler Blackcomb as a Snow School Manager. Stephen is the founder of Whistler Blackcomb's LGBTQ2's+ group supporting WB staff and community members. He has a passion for mountain living but understands that it can have challenges. He works a lot on health and wellness with Snow School staff, making sure employees know what is available for support and how to access it. Stephen truly loves the community he lives in and will continue to provide support where he can.

Kayla Benbow

Kayla's family moved to Whistler when she was 8 years old. She graduated from Whistler Secondary in 2002, was an active ski racer throughout her high school years and then joined the BC ski team. Kayla completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria and held many jobs in the Whistler community including coaching alpine ski racing, running the Big Brothers Big Sisters programming, and being a youth worker at the Youth Centre. More recently she attained her master's in counselling psychology and is now in private practice in Function where she works with children, youth, adults, families and couples.

Beverly Baker

Constable Bev Baker has been a police officer with the RCMP for 16 years. She is originally from Nova Scotia and moved to Whistler as her first posting in 2004. She has worked in all of the Sea to Sky communities and moved to the Okanagan in 2010 where she worked with the Major Crime unit across the Southeast of BC. She returned to Whistler in 2015, where she worked in the General Investigation Section (plain clothes unit) and is currently in the role of Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault investigator for the Whistler detachment.

Dakota Williams

Dakota was born and raised in East Vancouver. He is First Nations from Ontario's Garden River Reserve, coming from Ojibway, Cree and Mohawk descent. In grade 9 he joined the Adventure Sessions with Zero Ceiling fell in love with snowboarding. After saving for used gear, he honed his skills on the North Shore mountains. In 2017 Dakota moved to Whistler to participate in Zero Ceiling's Work 2 Live program and now thrives in the mountains. He's volunteered for Zero Ceiling's Ride Days and Adventure Sessions as a Bike

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Instructor. Dakota sat on the Board of Directors in his second year of living in Whistler and is now a Peer Support Worker for Zero Ceiling.

Kathleen Collins

Kathleen moved to Whistler in 1991 with the intention of spending the summer. Her passion for the community kept her here, working with the Blackcomb Ski Patrol from 1992-1999. Currently, she is grateful to be able to help serve children, youth and families in her role as the Team Leader of Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMH), with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Kathleen has worked with Communities That Care (CTC) Whistler since 2004 and is excited to be part of such a committed and dynamic group.

Question 1: What is youth health and wellness what do you know about the health of young people in our community?

Snapshot

Mental health was the overarching topic for discussion when asked ‘what we know’. With a large population of 18 to 35-years-olds (35% of population Stats Can), most without family support in the community, was top of mind when thinking about the health and well-being of youth. The cost of living, lack of services including the number of physicians and the waitlist for mental health support was seen as a detriment.

Summary of Answers

A Balance:

When looking at youth health and wellness in Whistler, there was the agreed observation that this includes a youth’s social, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. To satisfy this need; connection and a sense of belonging is paramount. The more connected youth are to their peers (and adults that are mentors), and stronger these connections are, the better they do. We have a lack of ‘wrap around’ family support, multigenerational involvement with raising/nurturing/supporting youth in Whistler.

Perception:

There is a perception that we are physical and healthy community but due to substance use, socio-economic disadvantages, and lack of activities for non-sports people, there are gaps in this reality.

There is a disconnect between what read in report (Vital Signs) and perception. Under 20% of youth (school-age) were not meeting regular physical activity each day of one-hour per day. In the pandemic, many kids were not getting enough exercise; sports teams and indoor activities cancelled. Those who don’t bike or ski, are at a disadvantage. Expensive sports are hard to attain for some youth and parents of younger youth. It was agreed that there needs to be a balance, where all needs, social, physical, emotional, spiritual health, are met.

Realities:

For youth aged 18-35, our largest demographic (35 % Stats Can), their health and wellness are greatly impacted by economic and social conditions. One big factor affecting health and wellness outcomes are: low wages and high rent, leading to crowded living conditions where attaining a

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balance of social, physical, emotional, and spiritual health, can be difficult. During the pandemic, there was a comment that for Indigenous youth there was inconsistency in provision services.

Youth that are here on their own without family support are greatly impacted. When injured, these youth do not have family or a connected belonging to community to have support. With our transient community and short-term relationships, there is sense of loss after investing time/effort in a relationship. A fear of loss, of fear of getting involved.

Pressure to perform. Pressure from peers but so much from parents. The pressure weighing on the kids as they get older. Ski School staff are very aware of this as the caregiver of the child for the day. Staff needs to be aware that the child comes with lots of pressure and expectations from parents.

Smaller communities in BC have more problems, Whistler is one of these. Youth athletes have a social identity as and athletic, but if injured are unable to compete, then suffer a complete loss of self. Older youth experience the same but are isolated without family and suffer loss of income.

Challenges:

There was a perception that some parents of teens were not admitting to problems and these parents may be struggling themselves. More families are reaching out for support, especially in the COVID-19 crisis, where parents have lost their jobs and others struggle with working at home. The lack of programs in Squamish, Whistler & Pemberton is also a challenge; special needs residential program, referral program, support for families/youth with special needs and 1:1 support.

To have youth health and wellbeing it means they need to have experiences, to have the opportunities to growth, wide exposure to differing opinions, people and involvements. This is how youth form opinion. Teen social identity is closely tied to their mental health; it is the most important thing for youth. Can be negative or positive.

Resources:

This event was an eye-opener in view of what is available. There was information shared by service providers in the group, so the participants learned from this. There is an acknowledgment that information for resource support is not commonly known and possibly not easy to find, to access and afford. People being injured without family or social support, crowded living conditions all negatively impact the person as we tie it all together.

Surveys and Data:

There are several recent surveys that look at youth health and wellness.

- Whistler Blackcomb Foundation Survey on Mental Health:
<https://whistlerblackcombfoundation.com/pages/mental-health-survey>
- Communities That Care survey: <https://ctcwhistler.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CTC-2017-PreventionNeedsAssessment.pdf>
- McCreary Report:
https://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/balance_and_connection_northshorecoastgaribaldi.pdf

Question 2: What are you/we currently doing in Whistler to talk / act, in regard to youth health?

Snapshot:

It was agreed that there are some youth activities that provide free/inexpensive, alcohol-free activities, though some of these are limited due to the pandemic. Access to services was seen as a barrier, whether due to stigma, expense, lack of providers, lack of knowledge or long waitlist. The pandemic has made it necessary for business and service agencies to work closer together. There is a need to greater and continuing community partnerships. The RMOW's COVID-19 support committee is specifically looking at the social aspect of recovery. The frontline workers in the audience felt that the pandemic has adversely affected the mental health of youth and will take years to overcome. There is a need to market service agencies health and wellness services on social media.

Summary of Answers

Current Programs:

LUNA, Whistler Public Library, the Youth Centre and Zero Ceiling provides access to activities that are dry and free or low cost. It was acknowledged that the Library and the Youth Centre had been closed for events since mid-March, with some offerings online. Zero Ceiling has taken their programming outdoors with hiking and biking to create an ability for youth to connect. Zero Ceiling has been in contact with the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre to reach out to local indigenous youth, to connect with traditional teaching and aspects of health.

Whistler Community Services provides free outreach to youth 16+ (and older adults), and they have seen a rise in need. This is particularly apparent with the loss of work and number of youth and families requiring food bank assistance. Large business, such as Whistler Blackcomb have recognized the need for belonging and have put in place more and more inclusive support over the past few years. Whistler Blackcomb took a step back from the party attitude several years ago as they saw the toll on staff. At this time, they began fostering outside fun for their staff gatherings and began the Epic Promise program.

In Squamish, the new Foundry program will be providing health and wellness resources, services, support online and through integrated service centres space and programming to support youth, ages 12 to 24. Programs and support are currently available online. There are currently 19 Foundry programs in BC and there is hope that there will be one in Whistler. The RCMP Liaison Officer speak in the schools as does Whistler Community Services, addressing aspects of youth health and wellness. There is a Healthy Lifestyle Program for Grade 9.

Options for Sexual Health (was called the Safe Clinic), offers essential sexual and reproductive health care. They have seen drop in STIs during the pandemic. The access to the outdoors; skate park, valley trail, bike trails lakes, parks and others, was seen a tremendous asset.

Stigma and Barriers:

There was recognition that there is a slight reduction in stigma around mental health, but there is a long way to go. A staff member calling in sick whether due to an injury, a cold or mental health,

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should be treated the same, and without barriers. There is a perception and stigma that a free service is not as valuable to one that charges a fee. Barriers to outdoor activities include, the cost of mountain and cross-country sports, both ticket and equipment. Also, the pressure to have the latest equipment for biking and mountain sports.

Available Services:

When someone is in crisis, they need to assess very quickly and a triage protocol to prioritize youth would be a huge asset. Difficult to put assistance in place with limited resources. A lot of services are already full and the services that are free are already waitlisted. Also, service providers find it hard to afford to live here, and expensive to sustain a lifestyle, and subsequently we lose trained people with good intrinsic knowledge.

Cost:

It was recognized that Whistler is an expensive place to live with much pressure but on youth. The expectations are not affordable. That coupled with expensive housing can be a deterrent to youth health and wellness. It was recognized that the Official Community Plan (OCP) wishes that 75% of workers are housed in the valley. This cuts down on the expense of travel, gives more time for family and friends and fosters a sense of belonging and personal investment in the community. To that end the Whistler Housing Authority has worked to provide housing in the valley. As have many employers. Whether there will be a housing shortage in view of the pandemic is yet to be seen. The need for more buses at very low cost, regional transit and parking costs were also cited as barriers.

Question 3: What can we do as a community/individual to improve the current of youth health in Whistler?

Snapshot:

There is a need to engage youth (both resident and seasonal folk) at the decision-making level, to share their lived experience and hear their needs. The cost of living is key to health and wellness, as is connection and a sense of belonging in our community. We need to continue to support and advocate for services, programming and activities for youth.

Summary of Answers

Broad View

If the determinants of youth (18-35) health and wellness, involve the effects of low wages and the cost of housing and groceries, it is a priority to address these factors. Broader solutions would involve seeking out provincial initiatives in order to be creative with our limited land for housing, to provide solutions. There is a need to put something in place now, and so we need to be flexible, it does not have to be perfect. We need to continue to support and advocate for services, programming and activities for youth.

Engage the Right People working towards solutions

Are we engaging the right people? Could we capture the skills our seasonal youth to share what they know? Share knowledge, experiences and skills from home, to build a community of like-minded people here and to influence others. Encourage more businesses, organizations and community

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groups to foster and provide activities that don't include alcohol. Engage retirees who have skills, time and wish to connect, with young people. Encourage a peer-support program. Young people are inspired, we need to recognize this and create a space for them to excel. We need to lift them up, give them an outlet, let their inspiration drive their peers. Find out how 'we' can help them and foster this process.

Marketing

It was suggested that all services agencies market their health and wellness services where the youth are: Instagram, Snap Chat, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. They cannot know about services if they don't see it.

Celebrate Successes

We are doing well in many respects and there was a suggestion to celebrate the success; tell people they are doing well, make connections. Support the programs that aren't expensive and reach out to youth.

Get the McCreary report staff to present their finding and engage the youth on solution-making. Encourage them to work together on a group activity to craft ideas.

Youth Leaders

Youth can lead by positive example. We need to improve seasonal youth and local family support and not look at youth health and wellness in isolation. This means removing/reducing the 'fear of shame' for both individuals and the family's experience, when they admit there is an issue. Such a huge step; it needs to be as easy as possible. We need to provide more funding for service workers to provide resources, however the challenge is finding staff due to cost of living in Whistler

Open Up the Dialogue

- Young people new to the community, having just left the family home need support to 'find out who they are' – gain a sense of belonging.
- Open talk about 'partying' and the emotions that youth are feeling
- Peer counselling - first-hand knowledge is key
- Use youth as role models and or champions in the community

Continue to Support What We Have

- Whistler Community Services
- Zero Ceiling
- Whistler Community Foundation
- Whistler Blackcomb Foundation
- The Youth Centre
- Luna
- Alphabet Soup and the LGBTQ2 individuals in the community

Question 4: In 2030, if Whistler has been successful in attaining all the United Nations Sustainability Goals, what would our community look like when we think about youth health?

Snapshot

In 2030:

- youth will be bigger influencers in the world and in Whistler we will have raised/nurtured community leaders
- life for people, animals and plants in Whistler will be healthy and sustainable
- elders will continue to nurture positivity and be respected
- daily life will be less frenetic and more balanced, leading to a healthy population.
- youth health and wellness will be a model for other communities
- Whistler will offer a diverse experience for all peoples, those who live here for a season or for life
- people will be treated equally
- youth will be able to afford a safe and healthy lifestyle
- youth will be engaged in work that meets their personal goals.

Summary of Answers

SDG #1 No Poverty

- workers are paid a 'living wage' that enables them to work one job if they wish, with a balance of free time.
- housing is healthy and affordable, where local residents and seasonal workers can live here if they wish
- more food is sourced locally and grown sustainably
- food co-op established, where families and individuals share expenses on bulk buying*.

SDG #2 No Hunger

- there is no need for a food bank. See above*.

SDG #3 Good health and wellbeing

- everyone (including seasonal folk) has access to a family physician
- mental health access will be low barrier, where people are triaged, urgent cases are given immediate priority. There is enough service staff, to provide easy access and very reasonable wait time
- access to outdoors is accessible to all members of community (eliminating barriers e.g. gear, pass, etc.
- we would have integrated indigenous perspectives on health into wider community and have learned from that.
- we have learned from elders towards building community through social, emotional and spiritual health
- there would be an intertwining of western, traditional and holistic health care

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- wrap-around support for workers when they are injured
- there would be a hospice and community support for chronically sick kids and youth.

SDG #4 Quality Education

- education looks at the whole person, where education and service providers are available to parents and students
- a percentage of the learning is done outdoors
- alternate education by pairing retirees with young people. Retirees have time and experience, possibly wisdom and no pressure and expectation
- rise youth up to be role models to a little buddy, someone they can mentor
- mentorship programs bring like-minded people together as well as those wanting to try new skills, sport or other. Skills would be shared in natural teaching flow by working together.

SDG #5 Gender Equality

- people of all genders are treated with respect and equality.
- no stigma or wage discrimination to any one gender.
- youth will find their community and support.
- no need to think about inclusivity as would happening in all elements (work, community, etc.)

SDG #6 Clean water and sanitation

- we have a high quality of water and sanitation.

SDG #7 Affordable and clean energy

- individual houses, businesses, strata and hotels will have access to charge electric vehicles.
- all business and housing are using clean energy, and this is the only option for purchase.

SDG #8 Decent work and economic growth

- people who wish to work, are able to earn a 'living wage' and are meeting/working towards their career goals.

SDG #9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure

- Whistler is a leader in eco design, industry and innovation in regard to utilizing existing bricks and mortar.
- to be a leader in the resort industry for this goal.

SDG #10 Reduced Inequality

- connection between permanent and seasonal community.
- differences will be celebrated.
- no need to think about inclusivity as would happening in all elements (work, community, etc.). youth will be bigger influencers in the world.

SDG #11 Sustainable cities and communities

- affordable and safe housing is in place.
- heritage from our indigenous community is known and respected.
- transit is readily available and runs on clean energy.

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- the need for a personal vehicle is less.
- lit pathways making for safer walking.
- we would celebrate the diversity within the community.

SDG #12 Responsible consumption and production

- practising a goal of zero waste and low consumption, with products sourced from local manufacturers and producers.
- using sustainable, compostable and recyclable products.

SDG# 13 Climate action

- single vehicle use would be lower, and the vast majority of personal vehicles would be electric.
- electric/propane buses for local and regional transport.
- energy-efficient upgrades in homes and businesses are supported by grants and subsidies.

SDG #14 Life below water

- no pollutants are entering our rivers and lake systems; no invasive species are introduced to lakes and rivers.
- we have a healthy stock of aquatic life.

SDG#15 Life on land

- invasive species of plants are a thing of the past.
- all life is respected and sustainable.

SDG #16 Peace and justice strong institutions

- that after the global effect of the pandemic, Whistler has recovered and rebuilt with human rights as the centre of this recovery.
- that the justice system treats no one; an individual, race or gender as unequal.

SDG #17 Partnerships to achieve the goals

- we have collaborated with the communities in the Sea to Sky Corridor on all the goals and paved the way to share resources to attain all 16 goals.

Local Resources for Information and Opportunities to Get Involved

Alphabet Soup: LGBTQ+ individuals, their friends and family

<https://www.whistlerlibrary.ca/events/alphabet-soup-0>

Communities that Care: www.ctcwhistler.ca 2017 report: <https://ctcwhistler.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CTC-2017-PreventionNeedsAssessment.pdf>

Feminists Deliver: Is a grassroots collaboration of BC-based Two-Spirit people, non-binary folks, Indigiqueer, trans women, lesbian women, and cis women and girls, and the organizations that support them <https://feministsdeliver.com/>

Foundry Squamish centre: A hub for youth throughout the entire Sea to Sky Corridor to gather, access mental health support, primary care, peer support, social services and more <http://www.sscs.ca/foundry-squamish>. Online help now available <https://foundrybc.ca/>

Howe Sound Women's Centre Society: <http://hswc.ca/our-purpose/>

McCreary Centre Society: <https://www.mcs.bc.ca/>

Mental Health and Substance Use Support Services in Whistler: http://www.vch.ca/locations-services/result?res_id=849

Options for Sexual Health, Whistler: Sexual and reproductive health services for all ages, all genders, and all orientations. <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/clinic/whistler-opt-clinic/>

Vancouver Coastal Health, Whistler: http://www.vch.ca/Locations-Services/result?res_id=1352

Vital Signs: An Initiative of the Whistler Community Foundation, <https://whistlerfoundation.com/work/vital-signs/>

Whistler Community Services Society: <https://mywcss.org/programs/reduce-reuse-recycle/>

Whistler Blackcomb Foundation: Mental Health Survey report <https://whistlerblackcombfoundation.com/pages/mental-health-survey>

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