

Report of V.O.Y.S.S. YOUTH FORUM

Voices Of Youth on the South Shore

October 23rd and 24th, 2014
at the Mahone Bay Centre



How do I navigate through all THIS?

Join us at

VOYSS

Voices Of Youth on the South Shore

Getting Real about What Matters

A gathering of young people and adult supporters with real conversations, games, workshops, activities.



VOYSS Youth Forum
October 23 & 24, 9am-5pm each day
Mahone Bay Centre @ 45 School Street

It's **FREE!** Food provided.
Youth in grades 8-12 from across Queens & Lunenburg Counties are welcome!

For more info & to apply:
southshoryouthforum.ca
Space is limited so apply soon. Deadline: Oct 14th

Hosted by:

Be the Peace, Second Story Women's Centre

HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development/Leaders of Today



Supported by:

- ✚ South Shore Child and Youth Network
- ✚ South Shore Regional School Board
- ✚ N.S. Advisory Council on the Status of Women
- ✚ N.S. Sexual Assault Strategy
- ✚ BMO Nesbitt Burns, Bridgewater
- ✚ Leanne Children's Foundation
- ✚ Lion's Club, Bridgewater

VOYSS Youth Forum Executive Summary

Background

Be the Peace is a project of Second Story Women's Centre, funded by Status of Women Canada, 2012-2015, to coordinate a community response to violence against women and girls in Lunenburg County and surrounds. With the support of schools and South Shore Regional School Board, Be the Peace has engaged youth in focused activities on how to foster healthy relationships in the midst of youth and popular culture infused with highly sexualized and often violent material. While these activities were engaging for young people in a school setting, there was a deeper level of conversation and subject matter about the roots of healthy/unhealthy relationships we wanted to broach. At the same time, we aimed to provide a breadth of experience and information for young people to draw on in order to make healthy decisions for themselves and in their community of peers. The provincial LOT (Leaders of Today) Summits offered annually for youth, were a great model to replicate locally, in partnership with their facilitators, the HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development, allowing the youth to engage in collective follow-up action if they were inspired to do so.

VOYSS Youth Forum

In late October 2014, 45 young people from Lunenburg/Queens Counties gathered in Mahone Bay with adult supporters to attend the 2-day regional Youth Forum, VOYSS. The purpose of VOYSS (Voices of Youth on the South Shore) was to offer an opportunity for local youth to critically reflect on the influences that shape their self-perceptions and their decisions about relationships. The Forum was hosted by Be the Peace, HeartWood and a planning/hosting team of youth and community partners, with a variety of generous in-kind and financial support.

The goals of the Forum were to:

- Create a safe and welcoming space for everyone
- Engage in honest and real conversations, informed by credible information about the issues that matter to youth
- Explore and think critically about the influences on youth self-perceptions, the quality of their relationships, and decisions they make
- Build more trusting relationships of support among youth and adults
- Build skills and become more aware of resources to support decision-making
- Develop an increased capacity to have loving relationships free from trauma
- Leave inspired to take action – and have a plan

These goals were accomplished to varying degrees.

Day 1 consisted of welcoming and team-building activities, the development of Community Standards and an introduction to the concept of power as it plays out in both relationships and also at a systemic level. Youth then chose two workshops in which to participate. Nine choices were offered, each facilitated by a community organization and chosen carefully to initiate critical thinking about an issue of importance (e.g. gender, sexuality, cyberbullying, mental health). The workshops were

followed by a World Café in which youth shared their reflections on the workshop discussions and began to formulate questions for further exploration on Day 2.

Day 2 consisted almost entirely of youth-driven conversations in Open Space format. Topics were identified by individual youth who then led that particular conversation. Two rounds of Open Space were followed by an action-planning session in which groups of youth along with their adult supporters generated ideas for collaborative action in their school or community.

Themes

Throughout the two days, several themes emerged as the youth grew more confident and felt safer to engage in deeper conversations:

- The fun was really important to them
- Youth stated they do not usually have the opportunity to share what is really important to them at a deep level with others (including their friends)
- They were pleasantly surprised at the atmosphere of acceptance, positivity and non-judgment and the experience of being listened to
- They constantly feel the pressure of being judged by others, and so do not feel free to speak or truly be themselves in their usual environments
- They delighted in being able to meet and have a way to engage with new people
- They feel pressure from peers and others (including media) to engage in behaviours that they may otherwise not choose
- They are acutely aware of the prevalence of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation among their peers
- They don't seem to have the tools to connect and respond in supportive ways to people having difficulties

Feedback

The feedback received from participants about the event was overwhelmingly positive, with strong indications of the need for further and more in-depth discussions of specific issues, and the desire to transfer their experience of safety and acceptance into their usual realms of home, school and community. The Evaluation Summary will be available for viewing at www.bethepeace.ca shortly.

Acknowledgements

With sincere thanks to the organizations and people who made VOYSS possible:

- ✚ LOT/HeartWood Centre for Community Youth development via N.S. Child and Youth Strategy
- ✚ South Shore Child and Youth Network
- ✚ South Shore Regional School Board
- ✚ N.S. Advisory Council on the Status of Women
- ✚ N.S. Sexual Assault Strategy
- ✚ BMO Nesbitt Burns, Bridgewater
- ✚ Leanne Children's Foundation
- ✚ Lion's Club, Bridgewater

And to all the Adult Supporters who devoted their time and energy to encouraging the voices of youth.

Report of VOYSS Youth Forum

I am accepted.

I am needed.

I am supported.

My voice counts.

Learning is fun.

~ HeartWood model for community
youth development

Introduction

This 2-day forum with 45 Lunenburg/Queens County youth in Grades 8-12, was hosted by Be the Peace (www.bethepeace.ca), a project of Second Story Women's Centre, (www.secstory.com) in partnership with HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development/LOT (www.heartwood.ns.ca).

It was made possible with the support of the South Shore Regional School Board, and generous sponsorship from:

- South Shore Child and Youth Network
- N.S. Advisory Council on the Status of Women
- N.S. Sexual Assault Strategy
- BMO Nesbitt Burns, Bridgewater
- Leanne Children's Foundation
- Bridgewater Lion's Club
- Be the Peace, a project of Second Story Women's Centre
- LOT/HeartWood via provincial Child and Youth Strategy

Purpose

The purpose of VOYSS Youth Forum was to create a safe and welcoming space for youth, primarily, but also their adult supporters, to engage in honest and real conversations about the issues that matter to youth. The opportunity for youth to explore and think critically about the influences on their perception of self, the quality of their relationships, and decisions they make, was one of the primary goals. Other aims were for youth to build skills and strategies based on credible information, foster more trusting relationships with adults, and generate inspiration and support for youth to take action in their own spheres.

The Participants

45 youth came from various schools and community groups with 12 Adult Supporters who were teachers, teacher's assistants, community and youth group leaders. The age range of youth was 13-21 years old in the following age and gender configuration:

Age Distribution

Grades 8- 9	13 year olds	12	
	14 year olds	12	24
Grades 10-12 or beyond	15 year olds	4	
	16 year olds	9	
	17 year olds	5	
	18 year old	1	
	21 year olds	2	21

Gender

	Female	Male
Hosting Team	10	2
Adult Supporters	10	2
Youth	35	10

DAY 1- October 23rd

Community Standards: These were developed collectively at the beginning of the event to promote a safe space for people to be and bring all of themselves. The standards include:

What do you need?

- **Acceptance**
- Trust
- Positivity
- Honesty
- Equality
- Attention
- Friendship
- Kindness
- Humour
- Sincerity
- Relaxed
- Empathy
- Confidential
- Comfy space
- Not be cut off
- Less sexist jokes
- Mutual power
- Encouragement
- Value my opinion
- People feel like they can approach me- I'm an introvert
- Able to voice my opinion freely **without being judged**
- Open mindedness
- **To not be judged**
- Knowing more people
- Made to feel welcome
- **Respect for everyone!**
- Someone else to start
- Support, eye contact
- Please do not "Shhh" me
- To know my surroundings
- Recognizing people's strengths
- Respectful, inclusive conversation
- Knowing it is anyone's time to speak
- That more room be made for introverts
- People to listen and not pick one leader
- To feel like my thoughts are taken seriously
- To have the choice about whether to speak or not.

What will you offer?

- Insightfulness
- Good advice
- Community
- Spirit
- Honesty
- Consideration
- Creativity
- Understanding
- Inclusiveness
- Comfort
- Friendship
- Empathy
- Trustworthy
- Sense of humour
- Will not judge people
- Do my best to help
- Time and patience
- Kindness and support
- Compassionate listening
- Respect other's opinions
- Positive energy and smiles
- Creativity and open-mindedness
- Help make others feel comfortable
- Try to be present in the moment
- Willing to be a voice for the silent or fearful
- Being honest and keeping the conversation going
- Be a positive role model and encourage quiet voices
- Alternative perspectives, thoughtfully
- Multiple alternative

Potential Workshop Topics: On registration, youth were asked what topics most concerned them or that they would like more information on. The results are here:

TOPIC	# OF YOUTH VOTES
Gender Identity	12
Sexual Orientation	13
Sexuality and Sexual Health	17
Risk-Taking and Self-Care	23
Violence in Relationships	26
Mass Media Influences (Gender, Culture and Violence)	26
Gender Stereotypes	27
Social Action	27
Resolving Conflicts	28
Social Media and Cyber-bullying	29
Peer Pressure	32
Mental Health (including anxiety and depression)	34

Workshops Offered:

The first workshop for all participants was “**Let’s Talk About Power,**” exploring different kinds of power; who is powerful, who is not; what powerful/powerless looks like and feels like; distinctions between power ‘over,’ power ‘to,’ power ‘with.’ Notes from this session are captured in **Appendix 1.**

The following nine, 45-minute workshops were offered in 2 rounds of concurrent sessions with the purpose of informing, opening conversations on these issues, and a component of skill-building/strategies youth can use:

- **Mental health and Self Care**- 10 participants (Aaron Goodwin & team from Laing House)
- **Gender Stereotypes**- 12 participants (Derek and Connor- Pathways)
- **Risk Taking**- 10-15 participants (Derek and Connor- Pathways)
- **Cyber-bullying and Cyber-safety**- 9 participants (Ron McLeod from High-Tech Crime Investigation Association)
- **Safer Sex and Consent**- 5+8 participants in 2 sessions..... (Kaleigh and Amanda from Venus Envy)
- **Social Activism**- 11 participants (Jean Ketterling)
- **Marketing to Youth**- 5 participants(Sadie Watson, South Shore Health)
- **Relationship and Family Violence**- 10-12 participants (Kaleigh Heide and Mermaid Youth Theatre)
- **Being an Adult Supporter** - 10-15 adult participants(Rena and Lou, HeartWood, adults only)

Also planned but cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances:

- **Sexualized Violence** (Avalon Sexual Assault Centre)
- **Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation** (The Youth Project)

Notes captured from workshops on Gender Stereotypes and Social Activism can be found in APPENDIX 1.

World Café Conversation Harvest - Day 1 (after the workshops)

Question #1: “What stands out for you from today (workshops, conversations) and why does it matter to you? To the world?”

- Gender stereotypes
- The workshops!
- Sharing feelings and opinions
- Change the things you care about
- Pronouns are important
- Peer pressure conversation
- Fun, food, snacks
- Love the vibe!
- Our diversity
- Connections

- Don't give up
- Lack of sex education
- Focusing on + balance
- # of male participants
- Expanding of knowledge, broader perspective
- Eye-opening experiences
- Everyone's opinion matters
- The world needs more positivity
- Cause we'll be in charge someday
- Real people helping real people
- Remember others are experiencing similar things
- How youth are as important as adults
- Mental health services in Bridgewater- we NEED it
- A lot of people with mental health issues aren't being heard
- "If they want us to be safe, they need to tell us how"
- "You have the power to change the world with your voice."
- Need someone to lean on; new people can help us in different ways
- People were a lot nicer and approachable than I thought they would be
- Meeting new people; making new friends; making meaningful conversation
- Social action; stand up for what you believe in; impact on your community
- Youth respecting each other; helping each other versus saying "just ignore it"
- Equity, friendliness, respect- came for the same reasons; everyone accepting
- Peer support is so important; hard to feel like professionals understand us.
- Get to know people more- who i am and what I like to do; more ways to know each other
- Family violence interactive; relationships and violence; what is an unhealthy relationship?
- Interacting and use of drama for education and expressions with difficult topics
- Sharing ideas and feelings- what I want to put into the world
- Power session; power and privilege of heterosexism; we take privilege for granted
- I like how you weren't judged no matter who you were and I learned you can identify yourself as more than just a girl or a boy.
- We should decide things for ourselves. But what would happen if youth were the only ones who made the rules?
- Want to be a peer support person
- A lot of information in a short period of time
- Helps practice acceptance of what's different
- What we all bring to these conversations
- Shared experiences, relevant, positive
- So we can all grow; so we can affect change
- Matters b/c help meet people in the region

Question #2: "What are you already doing about these issues and what more do you need?"

Note: (#) indicates how many people cited it.

- **SHOUT** (Stop Hurting Others Underway Today)
- **It doesn't have to be boring**
- **Arts-based care**
- **Communication and language**
 - Stop and say, "That's not cool/nice"
 - Gives advice whether it's useful or not (tries best to give helpful advice)
- **Share your experience/storytelling**
 - Hands on- don't educate, tell stories

- People need to tell the stories of the “survivors” of bullies and homophobia to show the repercussions
- Be yourself- support others to do the same
- **Connect across difference**
 - We need more things to bring the community together
 - Active kids who care-- doing their thing in isolation
 - Forming relations with diverse groups
 - We are coming to things like this—need more of this- to talk about these issues more- encourage and share (4)
 - Reminding ourselves that other people may desire different things- you need to respect that
 - There are men’s, women’s and public washrooms- more signs, designations
- **Support systems (6)**
 - Support others
 - More knowledge
 - I’m here!
 - Talking to people who can help us achieve our goals
- **Encourage healthy lifestyles and volunteering**
- **Less sexist jokes**
- **Pronoun buttons would make a huge difference to some people**
- **Spread awareness**
 - More people bringing more awareness of issues and less buy-in to technology and social media
 - I’m on a school board and use my time to discuss issues outside the classroom
- **Social action**
 - Encourage our friends/peers to participate to make change
 - We talked about social action and gender stereotypes- how did we already help? How can we help now?
 - I started the revive kindness act with friends
 - Keep finding ways to brighten society
- **Education**
 - Educate myself on the issues (2)
 - Informing curious people
 - Learn and listen to people
 - Attend more meetings like this (3) and educate others with what you’ve learned
 - Educating others on violence and abuse
 - Group gathering- educate myself –share experiences and ideas, standing and speaking up
 - Destroying barriers of ignorance

DAY 2- October 24th

Opening Mingle:

Pairs and trios with person(s) you don't know or haven't spoken to yet:

- Share something about a topic you care about- (eg., from your photo profile), 2 rounds
- In trios: think about a really great conversation you've had with someone—what made it great or meaningful to you? Sharing was the segue into “Open Space” conversations.

Open Space Conversations- Two rounds of 45-minute conversations on topics chosen by the youth in the moment, and youth-led, (in some cases declining adult participation), in response to the question:

“What conversation is important to you to have today?”

The following are the topics chosen by the youth, plus the tweet they were asked to share to summarize the conversation:

- 1) **Technology**
.... It's a tool like no other. It's our responsibility to use it for good.
- 2) **Self-Harm**
.... # Too many suicides.
- 3) **Self Esteem and Self Confidence**
.... Do they like you? A better question → do you like you?
- 4) **Society's influence on Self-Image**
.... # Hit like a girl, because I am a girl!
- 5) **Music**
.... music is the connection between all, it draws us together. # How it gets you through.
- 6) **Mental Health and Depression**
.... No shame. # Against stigma. # Embrace your problems.
- 7) **Drugs**
.... Need education and conversation not war.
- 8) **Power/Empowerment**
.... How are you using yours? # Responsibility.
- 9) **Trust and Support**
.... Where can we go for information? # Who to trust.
- 10) **Bullying**
....The best way to stop bullying is to never start. # Hurt people hurt people.
- 11) **Equality**
.... # No judgement.
- 12) **Freedom**
.... What is it for you? Freedom of speech is a right until you invalidate it and lose it.
Freedom of choice.
- 13) (When friends make) **Bad Decisions**
.... We are here when you are ready. # Heart to heart. # Support systems.

For detailed notes from the Open Space Conversations, please see **APPENDIX 2**

Day 2 Afternoon

Open Mic: An opportunity to showcase youth talents:

- + Katherine H.
- + Forest Heights Community School
- + Bluenose Academy Crew
- + Jessica V.
- + Ashleigh
- + Jillian

Resource Wall: Participants were invited to share worthwhile resources they knew of, and a handout of community resources was provided.

- HeartWood-- youth leadership development programs www.heartwood.ns.ca
- YMCA www.ymcalunenburgcounty.org
- Second Story Women's Centre www.secstory.com
- Hopes River Community Outreach, Laura and Clyde Uhlman 521-1032
- LOVE- Leave Out Violence www.leaveoutviolence.org
- Scarleteen- sex ed by/for youth www.scarleteen.com/
- The Media Coop- news by & for the people www.mediacoop.ca
- www.Beinggirl.com
- The Door That's Not Locked- cybersafety www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca/app/en/

Taking Action:

Youth assembled with their Adult Supporters by school or group of origin to reflect on whether action was emerging for them in their schools/ communities. Possibilities and ideas were shared. These notes were not captured.

Reentry:

Conversations focused on re-entering one's usual spheres and environments, where others who have not been part of this experience, may have difficulty understanding what it was like. Participants practiced what they would share with others in their lives, and wrote a "Letter to Myself" reminding them of how they felt about the experience and the value it had for them. They self-addressed the letters to themselves and we will mail the letters to them in January 2015.

The Closing Circle: Sharing – 27 youth and their Adult Supporters remained, each given an opportunity to speak, (a number of people had to leave early).

What is one thing I learned while here?

What is one thing I appreciate about what happened here?

- So many amazing people
- Not all people suck. That's really important for society and the world
- I forgot everyone is really equal- are goodness and people who really care
- Someone's always going through the same stuff you are
- Learned creative ways to deliver messages, facilitate conversations
- How to truly be myself again- and a way to connect with people
- There are LOTS of young people who care about how the world unfolds
- I am stronger at leading than I thought I was and more confident speaking in groups
- If work hard, think hard, will be able to
- Role models come in all shapes and sizes
- Are reliable adults who are trusting
- It's not our job to understand what somebody's going through, it's our job to understand we are not entitled to judge it
- I've never talked so much
- That I can say whatever I want to say
- I saw a completely different side of my friend- a better feeling for him
- So surprised to see all the motivation
- Need to give people more chances to make mistakes
- Everyone has own responses and reactions
- Can be yourself and people won't judge you
- It's okay to occasionally share stuff about self and people don't judge you.
- Everyone listened and tried to make connections
- Learned more here than in school, and that's not necessarily a good thing
- The amount of diversity- and could do whatever you wanted on the breaks
- The amount of courage it took
- How much energy- it's energizing- so much resourcefulness and creativity and strength
- The wisdom you have at this stage of life
- The general vibe here
- Really respectful in what I have to say
- Really fun and educational
- There is magic here and possibility
- I can stay quiet for 2 days and listen!
- How nice to listen to others and be listened to
- Amount of time, effort, resources and planning put into it; to creating this atmosphere
- Seeing my students blossom in these 2 days

Evaluation/Feedback

All participants were asked to provide feedback about the Youth Forum at the end of Day 2, by answering the following questions:

1. The 2 things I will be telling my family and friends about this experience are....
2. What situations do you feel more capable of handling as a result of this forum?
3. What situations do you still need more support or learning to deal with?
4. For me, the highlight of the forum was...
5. At this forum I was surprised by...
6. I also want to say....

Scaled Questions: Participants were asked to place sticky dots along a continuum:

- If this happened next year, how likely are you to attend and tell your friends they should come?
- How safe did you feel speaking honestly and being yourself at this forum?
- How important do you think it is to have these conversations?
- I now know where I can get information and support that I need to make important decisions or face challenges in my life...

For detail of participant responses, see *APPENDIX 3*

APPENDIX 1: [Workshop Notes](#)

[Workshop Notes: “Let’s Talk About Power”](#)

Social Power

- Financial system— history
- Power in numbers
- Age
- History of ‘winning’
- Heterosexism
- Gender male > female
- Education
- race
- Patriarchy
- Religion
- Family
- Language
- Media
- Financial state
- Family history
- Height
- Attractiveness
- Right handedness
- Ableism/accessibility
- Sense of humour
- Quick to classify
- Social groups

Powerful

- With friends
- Doing something you’re good at
- Doing well on a test
- Helping others
- Financial power- wealth
- High standing job
- Bullying someone
- Being alone
- Someone comes to you for advice
- When you’re the right in an argument
- Physically stronger than someone else
- Anonymity (eg., on-line)
- In charge, having people look up to you, listen to you

When feel powerful...

- May support, give advice
- Act arrogant
- Confident- walk with a straight back, use big words
- Abuse- put their needs above others
- Ability/comfort in being honest
- Can be violent
- Put their needs last
- Belittle others
- Talk a lot in a group
- Talk about yourself
- Controlling, micromanaging
- Exclusive

Powerless

- With elders
- In a new/unknown space
- School- alone in a crowd
- Doing something that’s not one of your strengths
- When your feelings are discounted
- When you have knowledge/experience but aren’t being listened to
- No opportunity to share what you know
- Anxiety/depression
- If someone is hurting and you don’t feel like you can help them
- New social group

Workshop Notes: “Gender Stereotypes”

- Hard to carry around all the pressures
- More in the girl backpack?
- Why stereotypes exist (and persist)
 - History
 - Tradition
 - Toys (Barbie, Ken)
 - Princesses, princes
- Can harm mental health—trying to live up to all the stereotypes
 - bullied, harassed
- When you don’t fit in, it hurts
- Takes courage to NOT try to live up to the stereotype
- Some are good to live up to
- Find your own friends

Strategies:

- Do well in school
- Be yourself
- Don’t be vain
- Commit to something
- Do what you choose to do
- Felt better with no peer pressure
- Decide what goes in your backpack
- Take a step back—is it healthy/best for me?
- Why am I doing it?
- Examine your thoughts/behaviours

Workshop Notes: “Social Activism”

What is an activist?

- Share beliefs and opinions
- Taking action
- Community
- Social paradigms
- Movement
- Change for the better
- Promotion and informing
- “Troublemakers” challenges
- “You don’t know enough”
- “Not enough life experience”
- “Not taking you seriously”
- Opposition or push-back
- Lack of resources

What do activists do?

- Public speaking
- Persuasion
- Share their ideas with small/big groups
- Support causes
 - Share info-raise awareness
- Recruitment
- Trying to prevent things—rally, protests
- Social media
- Fundraisings
- Petitions

- Letters—newspapers, open letters

Issues in our community

- Not enough for youth to do
- Social class divide- wealth gap
- Schools closing, not many businesses, so not many youth projects
- Homophobia
- Mental health issues
- Binge drinking
- Stereotypes
- Drug use
- People leaving

APPENDIX 2: Detail of OPEN SPACE conversations

- 1) **Technology**
- 2) **Self-Harm**
- 3) **Self Esteem and Self Confidence**
- 4) **Society's influence on Self-Image**
- 5) **Music**
- 6) **Mental Health and Depression**
- 7) **Drugs**
- 8) **Power/Empowerment**
- 9) **Trust and Support**
- 10) **Bullying**
- 11) **Equality**
- 12) **Freedom**
- 13) (When friends make) **Bad Decisions**

1) Technology

- **Good**
 - Finding people/connecting
 - Entertainment
 - Homework
 - Research
 - Learning
 - Mingling
 - Organization
 - Knowledge
 - Escape
 - Egyptian Revolution
 - Monitoring
- **Bad**
 - Distracted
 - Virality/wrong news
 - Monitoring
 - Hate- anonymity supports hate
 - Deteriorating communication skills
 - Develops at an absurd rate, making education impossible
- **Ugly**
 - Cyberbullying
 - Addiction
 - Gore
 - Desensitization
 - Illegal stuff
 - Radical cases (Ottawa, Boston)

QUESTIONS?

- How will the government react to the event in Ottawa (relating to technology)
- How can youth be educated about technology?
- Where will it go next?

IDEAS

- Allows people to connect like never before
- Allows entertainment escape
- Allows people to learn
- Helps people make change
- Distracts people
- Hurts communication
- Isolates people from parents

- Helps people generate hate
- Gore/porn (for kids)
- Illegal activities
- Cyberbullying
- Desensitization

2) Self Harm

- No relief from emotional trauma, but you can experience relief from physical trauma. It becomes a positive reinforcement.
- We spend so much time in our own heads that we might forget about our body. Self harm could be a way of feeling more embodied
- The ultimate self harm is ignorance
- It's not a friend's job to understand, it's a friend's job to know that they have no use for judgement.
- People can find foundation in self harm and "become stuck"
- A friend's simple presence helps. "It's the best medicine you can provide"
- Attempts of suicide happen more than we realize
- Are self harm and suicides opposites? Feeling something vs. feeling nothing
- Suicide as revenge
- If someone is that determined to kill themselves, they are going to do it.

QUESTIONS?

- How can someone come forward when they know their parents will be contacted?
- What if it comes from issues in the family?
- Are we really in touch with our bodies?

IDEAS

- Does self harm mean "danger"?
- Can there be wiggle room with disclosure laws?
- Be there to support- personally or through resources
- Day of recognition for self harm and suicide.

3) Self Esteem and Self Confidence

- What affects your own self esteem
 - Representation and media (good and bad)
- How your self esteem affects other people
- Positive and negative mind sets
- When giving compliments, don't focus on looks
- Peer comments can bring you down
- What brings your self esteem and self confidence up?

Solutions

- Have a laugh
- Talk about it
- Don't be too serious
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Do things you like and are good at

- Compliment yourself and others
- Take the negative stuff and make it positive

QUESTIONS?

- How can self esteem affect you? Bad or good self esteem?
- How can you help someone boost their self esteem?

IDEAS

- Impossible expectations and standards set by media
- Low self confidence can come from not just expectations of beauty, but from standards of athleticism and bruises
- We were all made purposefully to be different
- Kindness- acts of kindness help boost self confidence
- Music, do something you enjoy, help other people feel better, compliment yourself

4) Society's Influence on Self-Image

- Media can be positive and negative
- Society's standards are too high
- A lot of pressure
- The sizes have gone down
- "Hit like a girl" always!

QUESTIONS?

- What is beauty?

5) Music

- Different types of music (genres)
- How music helps us through tough times
 - Dances, songs you like
 - When people are annoying in class
- Telling people to listen to songs that may help them in situations
- Different lyrics mean different things to different people
- Sparking emotions
- Music is life

QUESTIONS?

- Positive or negative impacts?

IDEAS

- Lyrics are relatable
- Music touches people
- Contradictory music
 - Sad lyrics, upbeat music etc
- Listening to songs people say they like can help you understand them and their feelings

6) Mental Health and depression- how to cope, how not to cope

- Coping – use a number line to measure situations (1-10, eg)
 - 1- not a big deal/dropping your food
 - 4-5- try mindfulness and breathing courses (on your own)
 - 10- end of life situation/someone passes away
- How NOT to cope:
 - Hiding away
 - Not telling
 - Violence
 - Self hurt
 - lying

QUESTIONS?

- Are schools not covering enough mental health?
- Is there a difference between being depressed or just being sad or upset?
- How do you feel when you are extremely upset (imagine that, every day, all the time)
- Is it wrong to take breaks from work when you are depressed (would it make it better or worse?)
- What are some signs of depression?
- If a friend is depressed you should always tell someone (what it means losing their friendship?)

IDEAS

- Don't run from your problems- embrace them
- Disinterested (not engaged)
- Over a long period of time (2-3 weeks, then diagnosed)
- Sleep less/more, eat less/more
- Isolate themselves
- Not your "normal self"
- Change in habits doing or not
- Feeling guilty, or like everything is your fault
- Kids should take a break from school if they need it (some, it may help to go to school- get away from home)
- Everyone has bad days
- Schools do not cover enough mental health. We should have speakers come in with personal experiences (offer it at high school at least)
- Even if telling someone means losing a friendship, you can save a life by getting help
- Covering up, lying, is not good.

7) Drugs

- Responsible use education
- Self-medication
- Higher potency
- Looking for extreme effects; bingeing
- Escapism
- Not doing it for fun
- Steroid use

QUESTIONS?

- Why are youth seeking such “extreme” experiences- such as binge drinking, getting really out of it?

IDEAS

- Mental health link?
Is there a link between overdoing drugs/alcohol and self harm?
- Body image?
- Revolution #9
- Please don't stop your quest for joy!
- Past the point of being “natural” A YEAR AGO????

8) Power/Empowerment

- Power:
 - When someone comes to you personally for advice or a question
 - Being employed somewhere, the customers go to you
 - Beating a sports team constantly
 - Making people happy
 - Success
 - Positive attitude
- Powerless
 - Parents telling us what to do or not, constantly
 - Making mistakes
 - When you're in the minority
 - First time, somewhere new, trying to follow the “norm”
 - Negative attitude
 - Being excluded

QUESTIONS?

- How to feel more confident and powerful in certain situations
- Is empowerment psychological or physical and how you were brought up and your environment?
- People thrive around tradition, how does this affect power?
- How do people act when they are empowered, not empowered? Their attitude.
- What's the difference between positive empowerment and negative empowerment (abusing power)
- In school, do kids feel empowered? (teachers tell us what to do... almost too many leaders (one age range of leaders) in one environment)

IDEAS

- If you go into a situation feeling confident and powerful, you will get a better outcome (open minded)
- Social class or status, sometimes unearned because of a group or financial state
- Attitude: some people who are empowered are cocky/positive/controlling/happy
- Using power to help others or make others feel empowered by including them (positive)
- Unearned power: Given by society because of history... how to share this power, or acknowledge this power

- Using power just to stay “on top” is negative (our society makes the rich more rich and the poor stay poor) or else there wouldn’t be a higher class
- Making a personal difference and personal view can make you feel empowered

9) Trust and Support

- Who do you trust?
 - Friends, siblings, cousins, parents
- Who don’t you trust?
 - Guidance counselors
 - Teachers, principal
 - Peers
 - “Trusted adults”- parents!!
- How can you get someone you trust?
 - Talk to someone in a similar situation

QUESTIONS?

- How to address when someone is not being trustworthy
- What defines a mental illness?
- Who do you go to to ask about possibly having a mental illness?
- Will they tell your parents?

IDEAS

- Write a letter
- Tell another adult
- Get a boy and girl counselor
- Teachers should be more sensitive, confidential and respectful

10) Bullying

- Verbal, physical harassment, cyberbullying
 - Hard to create punishment
 - Easier to do, no emotions
- Don’t pick out people’s flaws
- Consciously make the decision to be positive
- See the bully’s side
- Solutions:
 - S.H.O.U.T (Stop hurting others, underway today)
 - Helping people be aware and knowing what to do
 - Finding an alternative, doing something to release
 - Being aware of our friends’ situations and others

QUESTIONS?

- What do we do?
- How can we help lessen it?

IDEAS

- Not just in schools

- Stand up for people
- Telling someone can make you feel better
- Find something to release emotions
- Try to avoid being a bully yourself
- Raise awareness

11) Equality

- Popular people
- Real world
- TV/Stereotypes
- No other friends
- Adults/change
- Picking/likes you
- Gender doesn't matter
- Disney
- Fairy tales
- Judgemental
- Pretty does not equal mean
- Mindsets
- Be better/ ??
- Popular in their own way
- Own cliques
- Feel need to be welcomed
- Age range
- 3 years- lots happens between 13-16
- Young kids accept
- Mean popular girls
- Following examples
- Acceptance
- "That's so gay"
- Adults fear homosexuals more
- They're people too
- High school change
- Join groups with common interest

QUESTIONS?

- How do we change it? (the discrimination)

IDEAS

- Explain more to kids
- Teach the next generation
- Ask!
- Accept them
- Ask both girl/boyfriend for both genders
- Try not to pigeonhole!
- Speak out
- Ask about pronouns
- Try not to assume
- Give them the power

12) Freedom: What is it to you?

- Freedom of speech
- Can be abused
- Equality
- Being free
- Making your own decisions
- You have freedom until you invalidate your rights
- Doing what you want
- Freedom of choice
- Dictionary definition: The power to write, speak, or think as one wants

QUESTIONS?

- Why don't we have freedom?
- How do we gain freedom?

IDEAS

- To make more freedom when we grow up
- Earn your freedom by being responsible

13) When friends make bad decisions...

- How do I help my friends when they: Do drugs? Skip class? Hurt themselves?
 - Without being a: buzz-kill, party-pooper, goody-goody
- You can only help people who want to be helped
- Have a heart to heart, change their way of thinking
- Keep it general, ask an adult what to do

QUESTIONS?

- What if you do the wrong thing, like make it worse?
- What if you don't do anything? And it gets bad.

IDEAS

- Talk to them
- Warn them
- Offer support
- Giving them an alternative, a positive one
- Show her real happiness
- Change their thinking
- Let them know when they're reading, I'm here to talk

APPENDIX 3: Feedback Data

From approximately 37 respondents.

(#) is the number of people who mentioned the same thing.

Participants were asked to reflect on and then write comments on flip charts in response to these 6 questions:

1) **The 2 things I will be telling my family and friends about this experience:** (19 separate responses)

- Lots of learning and fun
- It was a lot of fun and really inspiring
- That it was awesome and I would come here again
- That it was a very influential, touching & meaningful experience. Also it was super fun!
- Everyone at this forum was so understanding and accepting
- This particular opportunity, for me, wasn't what I was expecting, and was refreshing
- The topics talked about here are really important and should be talked about more!
- How accepting everyone was and how informed it was
- Really respectful. Understanding people
- Nothing. They missed out!!
- That this was an awesome experience for youth and how supportive everyone was
- Fun. Friendly. The experience. How much I learned. You missed out!
- Apparently I am not done growing (6'6" here I come!)
- How much fun this was. That you can change some things
- The convos (?) and the energy of the people
- They should come to things like this if they can!
- A reminder that everyone is equal
- That I love and support them
- How nice people can be and how this can change your way of thinking.

From adult supporters: (4)

- There is MUCH hope for our future with these leaders in our midst. We must try to embrace optimism- it feels better than the alternative!!
- All youth should experience a forum where their voices are heard
- My faith in the future has been renewed
- All youth should have this opportunity, even those who are not leaders or desire to be leaders, and maybe they will discover some skill they did not think they had

2) **What situations do you feel more capable of handling as a result of this forum?**

- Talking about gender/gender stereotypes (4)
- Risk-taking
- When people don't just go by 'he' or 'she', I can now respect and understand that better 😊
- Every situation I can think of (2)
- All, I feel like I could take on the world!
- LIFE
- Everyone 😊
- Mental health/depression/people with mental illnesses (3)

- Bullying
- Judgmental people (2)
- Knowing who to trust
- Accepting... opening up to others in a safe environment
- Dealing with my own problems I have
- Dealing with ignorance
- Relationships

Adults Supporters

- Listening more
- I am able to WAIT in order to let the Youth VOICE be heard
- Facilitating a decision-making forum using some of the strategies here

3) What situations do you still need more support or learning to deal with?

- Trusting people/others, peers, family... (4)
- Believing in myself
- I feel I still have issues in certain, more common social situations, in day-to-day life
- None
- Things that I can't do by myself
- How to be less judgmental
- Being hurt by people you love most...
- Helping other people with their problems/situations in life (3)
- Gender stereotypes... cuz I missed the discussion on that
- Times when people are in the middle of self-harm or drugs
- The hard times
- More support in meeting new people and talking in public on the spot
- Talking to others I don't know and being comfortable with it. Accepting that H8rs gonna H8.
- The days when everything seems wrong

Adult Supporters:

- My own fears
- I must work harder to avoid pessimism!!
- Only one boy/man for this program with 8 girls/women → where are the boys?
- Supporting youth at risk

4) For me, the highlight of the forum was...

- Relationship and family violence workshop
- Risk-taking workshop
- One of the workshop guys said "Adults are no smarter than you, they're better liars"
- Two things stood out for me- the workshops and the small group discussions. All very eye-opening
- Meeting new friends and bonding/meeting with old friends again (2)
- Meeting a lot of people who have that YOLOSWAG (?) attitude (3)
- The great conversations
- Learning lots of new things- thanks (2)
- Awesome people and conversations
- The open-space conversations

- All the conversations I had
- Discussing SOOOO many topics of importance
- Meeting new people! (9) with common interests; that don't judge you on what you say; connecting with people
- Feeling comfortable and being able to act like myself with everyone at this forum
- Getting my ideas out; getting to have my say (2)
- Coming with my friends! 😊
- The workshops and the time spent with the people I didn't come with
- Letting me, be me 😊 thanks
- Trusting group
- Getting to know one of our school teachers better

Adult Supporters

- Watching my student participants blossom in this non-judgmental environment
- A youth named (withheld to protect privacy)
- Meeting awesome people
- Open mic- the presentations Day 1- the conversations created by the youth- the food
- To know and see that there are youth that care about change and are willing to take on challenges

5) At this forum I was surprised by...

- The fact that so many people cared about so many different things (2). Plus this program wasn't laid out the way I expected.
- How nice everyone is/was! (2)
- How much we all have in common
- How people didn't judge me for what I had to say
- The welcoming and accepting community (2); how my ideas flowed because of the atmosphere of others; how kind everyone here was!
- The friendliness
- How positive and non-judgmental everyone was
- How many different types of people were here (3) ; and people didn't judge them
- So many people of different age-groups, styles and backgrounds
- How accepting everyone was (5); right from the get-go; about each other; accepted me for who I am
- Number of people who attended (2)
- How many good ideas and thoughts were shared
- How much I loved it
- People being so opened
- How open-minded and eager to be educated everyone was
- When they said it was non-judgment and no one judged

Adult Supporters:

- The opening (?) of the youth to direction and sharing

6) I also want to say....

- Thank you
 - For everything!
 - For letting me come and share my ideas!
 - For giving me hope!

- This was a great/amazing/awesome experience (4)
- I'd love to do this again!
- This was a great opportunity!
- ... so much for letting me experience this. Changed my way of thinking!
- I rate 8/8
- Open it up to young adults
- Well done
- This was the **BEST!!!**
- This whole experience was cleansing and refreshing. I have a new sense for what matters concern teens most 😊
- It was a great experience
- This experience was one I'll never forget!
- I had the time of my life
- Really inspiring and lots of fun
- Mad respect for y'all
- Oh my gosh, I had an epic time
- Have more...
- Hope to see you next year 😊

Adults:

- Merci (2) bien
- This has been a truly uplifting experience
- Well-organized, great flow, great variety of opportunities, some youth are still missing
- Great job, obvious planning and prep

Scaled Questions: Participants were asked to place sticky dots along continuums:

If this happened next year, how likely are you to attend and tell your friends they should come?											
Not likely	←									→	Very likely
									1		36

How safe did you feel speaking honestly and being yourself at this forum?											
Not safe	←									→	Very safe
					1	1	3	6	8	18	

How important do you think it is to have these conversations?											
Not important	←									→	Very important
									1	9	28

I now know where I can get information and support that I need to make important decisions or face challenges in my life.											
No	←									→	Yes
					1	6	7	4	5	13	