

Hearing From Our Youth

What young people in Nanaimo told us about the programs that matter to them

26

youth
participated

3

organizations
represented

4

focus group
sessions

"I became a way better person after coming here."

— Focus group participant

Qualitative data was collected in February and March of 2026 by VIU Student Researchers, through four on-site focus groups in collaboration with:

- Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society: Library Club
- City of Nanaimo & Boys and Girls Club: Youth Lounge
- With special support from Nanaimo Foodshare

WHAT YOUTH TOLD US

A place to belong

Youth described these programs as safe, welcoming, non-judgmental, and consistent - somewhere to go after school instead of just going home.

Adults who truly care

Leaders checked in on feelings, waited with youth for rides home, modeled effective communication and conflict resolution, and showed kindness to every youth, every day.

Friends and community

Many youth made their closest friends here. Group activities helped break down barriers and build real bonds.

Skills for life

Youth reported learning patience, communication, how to include others, and money skills they carried into school and work.

Basic needs met

Food, bus passes, clothing, and groceries made a real difference. For some, this was the only reliable meal after school.

Better mental health

Youth shared that these programs reduced anxiety and depression, and helped them build confidence to be themselves.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I was terrified to tell people about my passions, but the people were so accepting of me that it made me feel safe enough to share."

— Focus group participant

"Coming to the program has made me less depressed. It is a calm space which decreases my anxiety."

— Focus group participant

"I learned I'm not as shy as I thought I was, which led me to making friends."

— Focus group participant

"Leaders are considerate — they really do care about your feelings and your opinions."

— Focus group participant

WHAT YOUTH ASKED FOR MORE OF

Activities they want

- More sports, instruments, and baking
- Anime nights, Nerf Wars, and tech activities
- More snacks — food makes the space feel safe
- Extended hours including school breaks

Access they need

- Raise the max age to 19 so older youth stay
- More funding — youth worry programs may disappear
- Consistent leaders throughout the full day
- Safe pickup and drop-off support

"It is hard to meet people. They need to make more places like this, because this is where I met my people."

— Focus group participant