

DATE OF MEETING JUNE 16, 2025

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SUBJECT BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES FUND UPDATE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

To provide Council with an update on the implementation of the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy.

BACKGROUND

The City of Nanaimo was allocated \$1.8 million from Public Safety Canada (PSC) through the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) to develop and implement a gun and gang violence prevention strategy between 2022-OCT-24 and 2026-MAR-31.

At the 2023-MAY-01 Regular Council meeting, Council endorsed the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy (Attachment A). The Strategy outlines the following six focus areas to prevent youth from engaging in gun and gang violence:

- *Safe Youth Gathering Spaces* – safe, free youth gathering spaces within existing facilities.
- *Youth Outreach* – to expand existing youth outreach to provide basic needs.
- *Connecting Youth to Land and Water through Snawylth (Teachings)* – connections to land and water to strengthen mental, emotional, spiritual, and cultural resilience.
- *Youth Mentoring* – to connect at risk youth with diverse role models and significant, caring adults.
- *Enhancing Existing Programs* – improve existing programs by adding new components that fill gaps and build protective factors.
- *Media & Communications* – develop key messaging to highlight successful youth programs and to address discrimination and stigma against youth.

These focus areas are connected to evidence-based outcomes and meet the required criteria for PSC under the BSCF program.

In July 2023, the City launched the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Grant application process to identify community partners to coordinate programs and activities in connection to the six focus areas in the strategy. At the 2023-SEP-25 Regular Council meeting, Council approved a total of \$1,611,149 of BSCF to be allocated between 2023-OCT-01 and 2026-MAR-31 as follows:

- **Big Brother Big Sisters (BBBS) - Mindful Mentoring: Nurturing Resilience in Youth**
 - *A multifaceted program integrating yoga, mindfulness meditation, and cognitive therapeutic techniques - \$80,000*

- **BGC Central Vancouver Island (BGC CVI) – Nanaimo South Youth Hub**
 - Drop-in youth spaces at Fifth Street and Nanaimo Aquatic Centre providing registration-based options, navigation services, case management, and activities for the most vulnerable youth - \$177,386
- **Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS) – Connections**
 - Interactive workshops empowering youth to build a sense of belonging and create positive networks and coping strategies - \$177,386
- **City of Nanaimo – Parks, Recreation & Culture (PRC) Youth Initiatives**
 - A drop-in space with enhanced opportunities for recreational programs targeted to youth at risk - \$201,425
- **Nanaimo Foodshare – Food for Youth**
 - Providing food security, cooking, and growing educational opportunities in safe youth gathering spaces - \$84,952
- **Nanaimo Hornets Rugby Club – RugbyWorks**
 - Incorporating mentorship and positive socialization activities by providing a visible presence in neighbourhoods, leveraging social media, and volunteerism - \$90,000
- **School District 68 (SD68) – Uy’ Sqwalawun (Good Heart & Mind)**
 - Drop-in youth spaces at Woodlands Secondary, Pleasant Valley Elementary, and Georgia Avenue Community School with opportunities to connect with local Indigenous teachings, art, recreation, music, and caring adult mentors - \$500,000
- **Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN) – Youth Resiliency & Snawaylth**
 - Drop-in space at Snuneymuxw Gym with socio-emotional learning opportunities, life skills, and traditional teachings - \$300,000

With one year of grant funding remaining, the purpose of this report is to provide an update of the progress made to date and the activities that are ongoing for the duration of the funding.

DISCUSSION

Safe Youth Gathering Spaces

There are six Safe Youth Gathering Spaces that have been established or enhanced with BSCF funds:

Service Provider	Service Hours	# of Youth Served	Services Provided
Youth Lounge – PRC & BGC CVI	Weekly – Thursdays, 3 pm to 7 pm Fridays, 2 pm to 9 pm	75 youth weekly (*15 youth waitlisted)	Space for youth ages 11 to 18 to access a variety of recreational programs and activities including swimming, skating and physical fitness in the weight room.
South Side Teen Centre – BGC CVI	Weekly – Wednesdays & Thursdays, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm	Over 418 unique youth connected to programming thus far	Drop-in space for youth ages 12 to 18 to access health & wellness workshops, art, social and other

			creative activities along with school and hygiene supplies, and nonperishable food.
Youth Lounge – Woodlands (SD 68)	Weekly – Fridays, 2:30 pm to 4 pm	15 youth weekly	Drop-in space for youth grades 8 to 12 with access to food and connecting with others through fun games.
Youth Lounge – Georgia Avenue (SD 68)	Weekly – Mondays, 12 pm to 2:30 pm	15 youth weekly	Drop-in space for Georgia Avenue students grades 5 to 7 to gain educational and social-emotional support from youth care workers through cooking and music.
Youth Lounge – Pleasant Valley (SD 68)	Weekly – Tuesdays, 2:30 pm to 4 pm	15 youth weekly	Drop-in space for Pleasant Valley students grades 5 to 7 to gain social-emotional support from youth care workers through cooking and music.
Recreation and Wellness Centre – Snuneymuxw First Nation	Weekly – Monday to Friday, 4 pm to 9 pm	25 to 30 youth daily, Monday to Friday	Drop-in space for youth ages 12 to 18 to access various sports, fitness, recreation, arts, crafts and cultural activities.

Youth Outreach

Youth Outreach has been integrated into all partner activities to build stronger connections with youth and meet basic needs such as healthy snacks, transportation, support in accessing services, and reducing financial barriers. Some partners have used grant funds to create roles like a Youth Navigator at BGC CVI to help vulnerable youth access long-term social supports, Youth Care Workers with SD 68 to provide support, advice and connection to services, and a Youth Lounge Outreach Worker with PRC to engage youth gathering outside the Nanaimo Ice Centre, the Nanaimo Aquatic Centre or around the Stadium district to build relationships and connect them to other programming. These positions have been key in engaging youth, fostering trust, and supporting conversations around substance use, emotions, and behavior, while offering flexible, ongoing support and mentorship, and connection to other social supports.

Youth Mentorship

All community partners receiving BSCF funding incorporate youth mentorship. The programs work to connect youth, especially youth at risk, with diverse role models and caring adults. This includes peers, vocational role models, cultural leaders and coaches. The following provides a summary of the types of mentorships offered to youth accessing BSCF programming:

- *Nanaimo Hornets Rugby Club* - offers Junior, Mini, and After School Rugby programs throughout the school year, engaging over 335 students, many trying rugby for the first time. Thirteen youth have earned their Level 1 Coaching Certificate, and 40 participated in a coaching workshop. Many new coaches are former Mini or Junior players who now mentor younger teams, acting as role models and assistant coaches. The program emphasizes community involvement, with 25 youth also volunteering locally.
- *Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)* – runs a peer mentoring program that trains youth to support young newcomers in Nanaimo. With CVIMS staff, mentors lead weekly programs like a youth library club, art therapy groups, and an English club, averaging 20 participants. In 2025, CVIMS partnered with the Vancouver Island Regional Library and Volunteer Nanaimo to host a youth art exhibit, providing leadership opportunities for peer mentors. Mentors also organize holiday events, pizza nights, movie nights, and outings to Nanaimo Clippers games.
- *Snuneymuxw First Nation* – delivers culturally holistic mentorship, addressing mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Youth connect with peers, staff, leaders, and Elders through gym programs, fitness/weight rooms, and indoor/outdoor basketball courts. Field trips and events with the RCMP Indigenous and Youth Units provide opportunities to discuss issues like substance use, bullying, sextortion, and online safety. Daily drop-in mentoring reaches 25–30 youth, and an Education Navigator supports youth with personalized plans for education, employment, and life skills.
- *BGC Central Vancouver Island (BGC CVI)*– alongside its Youth Lounge and South Side Teen Centre, BGC CVI offers mentorship programs like Generation Q for LGBTQ2SIA+ youth and Purple Girlzillas for female-identifying youth, focused on self-esteem and peer connection. These programs engage up to 80 unique youth per session.
- *Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS)* - delivers 8-week Mindful Mentoring sessions to high school and elementary students, combining mindfulness, yoga, and cognitive therapy to support mental well-being.
- *City of Nanaimo, Parks, Recreation & Culture (PRC)* – Recreation Prescription, funded through BSCF, is a partnership with Vancouver Island University and SD 68. VIU students act as health advocates to promote physical activity and social well-being among Grade 5 and 6 students. The program has reached 150 students at Randerson Ridge, Fairview, and syuwénct Elementary Schools. Participants receive a free Active Pass for City recreational facilities.
- *School District 68 (SD 68)* - at Woodlands, a music mentorship program pairs high-profile SD 68 graduates with students twice weekly to create and produce music. Additional mentorship projects include a welcome pole, graffiti art, ceremonial necklaces

with a local Snuneymuxw carver, and regular youth activities such as boxing, dance, basketball, and DJ sessions.

- *Nanaimo Foodshare* - provides food equity focused opportunities for youth in BSCF programs, including cooking classes, FoodSafe certification, meal planning, and access to nutritious food. Mentorship takes place in familiar, supportive environments such as their Pine Street kitchen and farm site.

Connecting Youth to Land and Water through Snawaylth

During the community engagement phase of the development of the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy, many Snuneymuxw and other youth identified being on the land or water as important to their happiness and wellness. Snuneymuxw First Nation and the SD 68 have provided youth opportunities to reconnect to land, language and cultural practices. The following summarizes the opportunities youth have had to connect via cultural teachings to the land and water with the BSCF:

- *Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN)* – offers youth the ability to reconnect through traditional and survival camping, canoeing and hiking field trips. These field trips incorporate storytelling with Elders highlighting the importance of caring for the land and water and how it connects to Snuneymuxw culture. The youth also engage in cedar weaving, drumming, traditional workshops and healing circles, food harvesting, Tribal Journeys and traditional Coast Salish games with a focus on intergenerational connection.
- *School District 68 (SD 68)* – Woodlands offers the ability for students to connect with an Elder in residence for cultural connections weekly. Activities offered by the Elder in residence includes drumming sessions, singing and cultural storytelling, art activities such as carving and painting murals, and Hul'qumi'num' language and land lessons. Students learn cultural protocols with cedar brushing and take trips to the beach for cold plunges to reduce stress, elevate their mood and demonstrate resilience.

Enhancing Existing Programs

Existing programs have been enhanced with components that build protective factors and meet youth needs. Youth can engage in new activities in existing programs offered by community partners with the support of the BSCF funds. For example, all youth participants in BSCF programming have access to healthy food through Nanaimo Foodshare meal provision and have been able to access FoodSafe and cooking classes. Other activities that have been used to enhance existing programs includes boxing, rock climbing, gardening, arts, and a variety of sports. BSCF has also allowed for the inclusion of family members of youth to participate in programs through community events or benefit from food provisions shared with youth. Finally, life skills and socio-emotional learning components have been added to programming to take advantage of learning opportunities through activities and programs.

Media and Communications

To address negative media attention, discrimination and stigma among youth, community partners have been working to develop key messaging to highlight achievements among youth and share information about successful programming.

The City and partnering organizations promote BC Youth Week, May 1 to May 7, annually, through social media, the City website and in the Parks, Recreation and Culture Spring Activity Guide. Partners are also featured on a dedicated page on the Get Involved Nanaimo website under the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy project. A Youth Engagement page on the City of Nanaimo website also provides a calendar of events for youth and their families to access upcoming activities and initiatives.

The Nanaimo Hornets Rugby Club collaborated with VIU Recreation and Tourism to conduct two focus groups with parents and coaches. Feedback was used to produce a promotional video for their After School Program. CVIMS uses its website and social media to share a promotional video featuring testimonials from its Youth Connection – Peer Mentor Certification Program, along with posts and event pages for other youth-focused activities.

Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy - Steering Committee

The Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy Steering Committee was formed to support the development and implementation of the Strategy. The committee includes multi-sector representatives who meet monthly. The role of the committee includes:

- Partnering with the City to provide leadership and oversight for Strategy implementation
- Informing the community on the status of priority projects recommended in the Strategy
- Helping ensure the foundational commitments are adhered to
- Reviewing the evaluation and monitoring results as they emerge to provide advice on changes to the Strategy as needed
- Taking leadership in the implementation of the sustainability plan
- Engaging additional stakeholders as new needs arise
- Communicating the plan priorities within their own spheres of influence
- Seeking out new or existing resources to support Strategy implementation and thereby advancing sustainability
- Facilitating connections to existing efforts that align with Strategy priorities
- Providing supports and oversight to any action teams
- Staying informed and sharing knowledge regarding developments to the Strategy within Nanaimo and beyond, and
- Guiding the distribution of the BSCF by developing grant criteria and making recommendations to the City for fund disbursement.

The steering committee is a multi-disciplinary body comprised of representatives from the following sectors:

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| • Business | • Policing |
| • Child Welfare | • Snuneymuxw First Nation |
| • City of Nanaimo | • Urban Indigenous Community |
| • Community Policing | • Youth |
| • Education | • Youth Advocates |
| • General Health Care | • Youth Employment |
| • Indigenous Welfare | • Youth Services |
| • Justice | • Youth Shelter Services |
| • People with Living / Lived Experience | • Youth Substance Use/Addiction |

Between 2024-NOV-15 and 2025-JAN-10, City Staff worked with the Steering Committee to evaluate the committee's roles, project goals and progress under the Strategy. The purpose was to review the current efforts and identify areas for improvement. Key feedback included the need to improve communications about the project and promotion of activities with youth, their families and the community at large, and to share stories from the youth and families impacted by the outcomes of the grant.

Successes

Approximately 2,010 unique youth in Nanaimo have participated in one or more programs, events or activities supported through BSCF grant funding. As part of this support, Nanaimo Foodshare has provided a minimum of 3,787 meals to youth and their families.

Many BSCF funded agencies report an increase in protective factors among youth served through the provision of safe places, meaningful connections and a sense of belonging. Strong connections with caring adults and positive peer role models help youth build emotional resilience, confidence, and a strong sense of identity. These trusted relationships offer consistent support and guidance, contributing to improved life, social, and emotional outcomes. For instance, the SD68 reports a reduction in RCMP calls to the school among youth engaged in BSCF programming. These same youth are acknowledging personal growth, improved feelings of social connection, reduced screen time, and are gaining more skills to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Another key success of this project has been the collaboration among community partners and the cross-sector integration of programming and services now accessed by youth. Through the efforts of grant partners, the Steering Committee, and other community networks, several examples of successful collaboration have emerged. For instance, Nanaimo Foodshare has provided cooking classes and meals for youth groups through BGC Central Vancouver Island, CVIMS, Snuneymuxw First Nation, School District 68, and others. Additionally, SD68 schools have benefited from integrated programming delivered by the Nanaimo Hornets Rugby Club, City of Nanaimo Parks, Recreation and Culture, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. These partnerships have expanded access to services and supports that may not have otherwise been available to youth in our community.

CONCLUSION

Many of the partnerships within the Steering Committee and BSCF funded programs continue to grow and strengthen. Although BSCF funding is scheduled to end on 2026-MAR-31, community partners are actively exploring sustainable ways to continue programming. This includes redirecting internal funding to support BSCF based programs for youth and families. Other agencies are pursuing additional grant opportunities. These efforts will be more effective as BSCF partners commit to ongoing collaboration and resource sharing to support youth in the community.

The Steering Committee and BSCF partners also supported a recent Youth Foundry application led by Snuneymuxw First Nation and Kw'umut Lelum. The shared vision between the Snuneymuxw Foundry and the Strategy and Steering Committee helps ensure that many goals and focus areas for at risk youth will continue through the Foundry's work. The Foundry is expected to open in late spring 2026.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The City of Nanaimo was allocated \$1.8 million from Public Safety Canada (PSC) through the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) to develop and implement a gun and gang violence prevention strategy between October 2022 and March 31, 2026.
- Since October 2023, eight organizations have been delivering programs that address the six focus areas of the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy to support at risk youth.
- The Youth Resilience Strategy Steering Committee will continue to support and monitor project progress until the grant funding concludes in March 2026, with a focus on improving communication and collaborating to secure sustainable funding or permanently integrating activities into existing programming.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: Link to Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy

ATTACHMENT B: PowerPoint Presentation: Building Safer Communities Fund Update |

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