

SHAKING THE MOVERS

2026

British Columbia

**Exploring Freedom of
Expression and Identity
Through the Lens of
Children's Rights**



ACCESS TO JUSTICE BC



THE CENTRE FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AT SFU

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This workshop took place on the unceded and stolen territories of the **xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam)**, **Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish)**, and **səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)** Nations. To gather in the spirit of children's rights education is to also reckon with the fact that Indigenous children from these territories and beyond have been among the most impacted victims of human rights violations in the world.

When thinking of human rights education and advocacy, it is imperative to acknowledge that the rights of children cannot be separated from the rights of their communities, their cultures, and their land. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are not separate documents with separate concerns, they are interconnected calls to action. As advocates and educators, we must do more than teach rights in the abstract. We must continue to name what has happened, to stand with those still fighting for justice, and to ensure that every child is seen, heard, and protected.

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OVERVIEW

British Columbia's 2026 Shaking The Movers workshop took place at Mountainside Secondary School in North Vancouver. The session was facilitated by four amazing youth facilitators, and brought together 14 high school youth between the ages of 15 and 18 with diverse gender identities. Most participants had previously attended North Shore Restorative Justice's weekly Circles at the school.

The youth who attended expressed wanting a space to talk about things that matter. The group was comprised of a mix of junior and senior cohort students, which provided an opportunity for positive cross-group connection.

The RJ Aspect

Unique to B.C.'s workshop is the use of Restorative Justice (RJ) practices and principles. By starting our session with an opening check-in round, and following up with a group discussion on values and how we want to show up in community with one another, we set an intentional tone of collaboration, sharing, and being present during our time together. A talking piece was introduced by one of the facilitators to ground the group and ensure there would only be one voice at a time.

The use of Circle was continued throughout the day, providing a space to debrief activities as well as close our workshop at the end of the session.

ARTICLES OF THE UNCRC REFLECTED IN DISCUSSIONS

- **Article 2 — Freedom from Discrimination**
 - Every child has the right to be protected from all forms of discrimination. Many of the youth agreed this is extremely unlikely to be upheld by adults and the law in their experience.
- **Article 3 — Best Interests of the Child**
 - The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions affecting children. The group expressed feeling this is frequently not the case, especially in healthcare and education systems.
- **Article 7 — Right to Equality Before the Law**
 - Youth noted that this right is often "shadowed by bias"
 - "They look at the person and judge them before they get their story."
- **Article 12 — Respect for Children's Views**
 - Children have the right to give opinions that are taken seriously. The group shared consistent experiences of being dismissed or not meaningfully heard by adults.
- **Article 13 — Freedom of Expression**
 - Participants shared experiences of feeling restricted in expressing their identities across many public spaces, schools, and institutions.
- **Article 24 — Right to Health**
 - Access to mental health support, specialized care (autism, gender-affirming care), and crisis intervention were identified as critically undermet needs.
- **Article 31 — Right to Rest, Leisure, and Play**
 - Youth highlighted a lack of free or accessible spaces to simply rest and be with friends, noting that loitering laws and cost barriers restrict access to leisure.

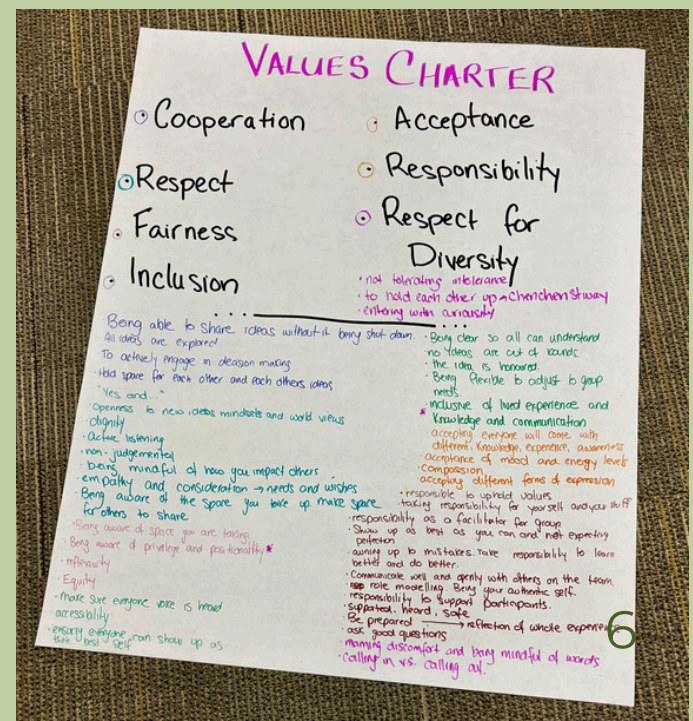


FACILITATOR TRAINING & PLANNING

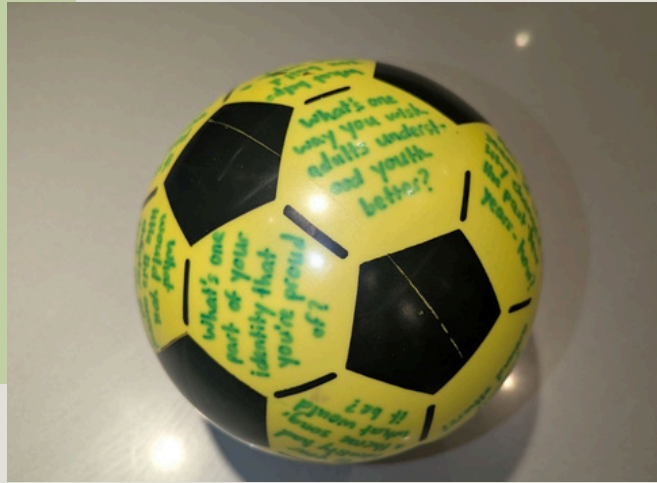
Prior to the workshop, a one day training was held for the youth facilitators. The day was spent running through the activities they would lead on the day, and deciding on facilitation pairings for each activity. We also spent time sitting in Circle and exploring the intersection of restorative justice and human rights.

As B.C.'s first Shaking The Mover's Workshop in recent years, the organizer's decided to ease back in; we did this by taking on a smaller group of participants, shortening the duration of the workshop, and having one organizer create the agenda rather than creating it collaboratively as a team.

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OPENING CIRCLE



Light & Lively

To have students begin thinking about the day's topic, the group tossed around a soccer ball covered in hand-written questions focused on self expression and Identity. Below is a summary of what was shared:

- What's something you wish adults understood about youth?
 - Let youth create their own boundaries, rather than setting boundaries for them
 - Compromising, communicating more around making choices with them rather than for them
 - Struggled with depression in high school, culturally my parents saw me as lazy/unproductive, but really just needed a hug/support
- Something you're still figuring out about yourself:
 - What's important to them
 - Hobbies
 - What they like to do
- What stereotypes frustrate you:
 - That youth are rude
 - Older generations automatically receiving respect, when youth don't do this they're seen as rude/defiant
- What makes it hard to be yourself around others:
 - Being queer
- How do you like to express yourself:
 - "I like to share random things about myself"
- Values that are important to you right now:
 - Trust
 - Authenticity

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Community Values

Using the seven core values of human rights, the participants discussed how uplifting each other might look in the space.

"We're really just here for you" - facilitators let the group know the space was one centred on youth voice and experience.

Community Values

Cooperation

- hearing other people's ideas
- teamwork, sharing work load
- discussion, hearing/adding on
- sharing burden & benefits

Respect for Diversity

- everyone shows up differently - shaped by their background, culture, race etc.
↳ even if it doesn't align with your opinion
- spread awareness instead of talking over others with lived experience

Respect

- understanding boundaries
- accountability
- listening
- not interrupting / finishing thoughts

Responsibility

- show accountability with your actions & show up how the other people prefer/request
- everyone in the room, including facilitators uphold agreements

Fairness

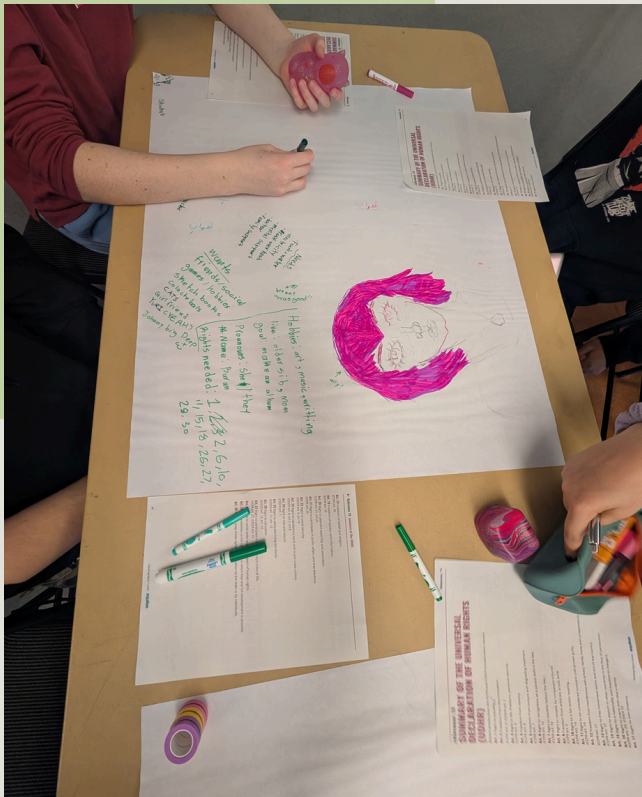
- trying to see big picture
- getting what we need to succeed (can be different)
- no judgement even if you disagree
- everyone right to participate
- everyone's opinion as equal

Acceptance

- accepting you cannot control others' thoughts or actions, only ourselves
- do what you can to make the space as safe as possible
- accepting agree to disagree

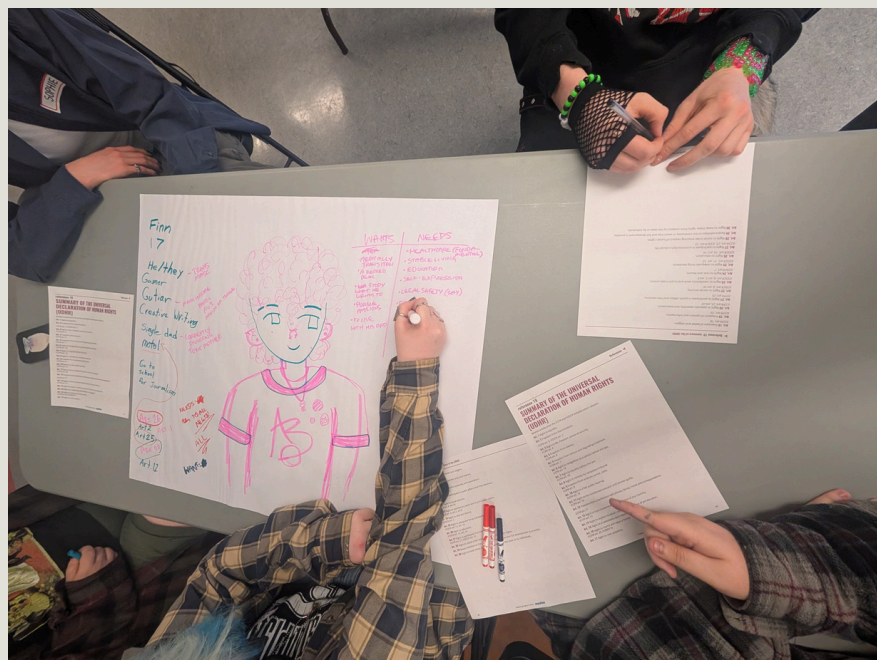
Inclusion

- we listen but we don't judge (especially the cover)
- accessibility → thoughts, how we show up



ACTIVITY 1: WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?

In the first activity, participants were divided into groups and asked to create realistic youth characters. Each group developed a character's identity, background, hobbies, needs, and rights. They then presented their characters to the larger group in Circle, and discussed which rights they felt were most important and why.



Baran - she/they, 16

Background:

Immigrated from Iran. Previously lived under restricted expression; now able to express identity more freely in Canada. Identifies as lesbian and navigates cultural and family expectations.

Needs identified:

Food, water, shelter, mental health support, healthcare, family support, social connection, art supplies, community belonging.

Is their identity respected?

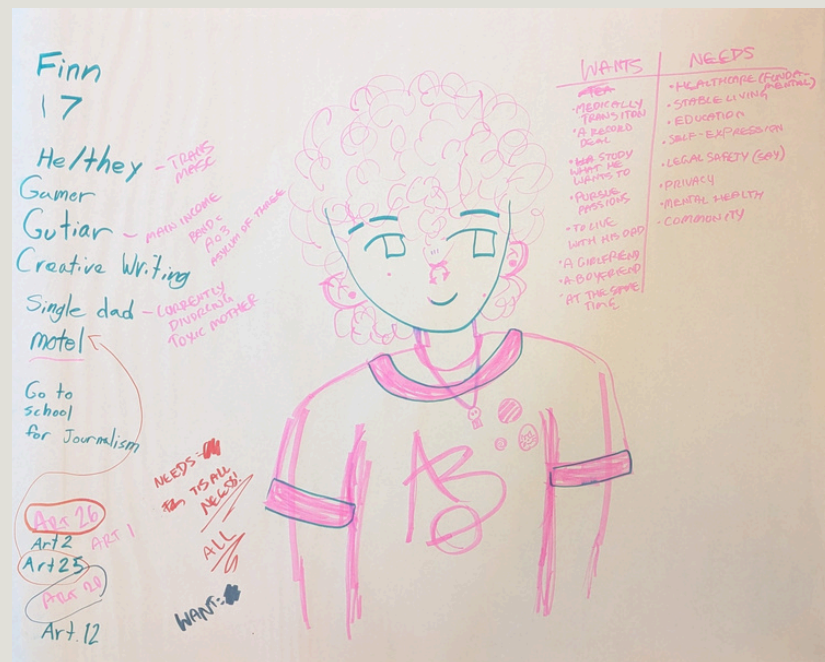
Partially. Cultural and family pressures require some concealment of identity.

Can they freely express themselves?

Partially; they are actively working toward more open expression, particularly within their family.



"Being an immigrant is hard, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't listen to their story. [Baran] wants to not hide themselves and be loud and proud."



Finn — he/they, 17

Background:

Creative; has his own band, writes, and games. Identity is respected by his father but not his mother. Needs financial independence and a safe living situation.

Needs identified:

Adult acceptance of his identity, financial support for independent living, emotional safety at home.

Is their identity respected?

By his dad yes, by his mom no.

Can they freely express themselves?

Most of the time, but still working toward it.

WANTS	NEEDS
- MEDICALLY TRANSITION - A RECORD DEAL - STUDY WHAT HE WANTS TO - PURSUE PASSIONS - TO LIVE WITH HIS DAD - A GIRLFRIEND - A BOYFRIEND - AT THE SAME TIME	- HEALTHCARE (PHYSICAL/MENTAL) - STABLE LIVING - EDUCATION - SELF-EXPRESSION - LEGAL SAFETY (SAY) - PRIVACY - MENTAL HEALTH - COMMUNITY

Kai — he/him

Background:

Struggles with substance use, impulsivity, and shoplifting. Feels the world has treated him unfairly. Has a best friend named Cat Kai.

Needs Identified:

Rehabilitation, mental health support, legal aid, community, access to food and activities without cost.

Is their identity respected?

No.

Can they freely express themselves?

Yes.

"We should focus on how this young person has made some mistakes, and they want them to have support on how to grow from those experiences and get into a safer place in their life."

KEY DISCUSSION THEMES

What Rights are Most Important

- Many of the youth agreed that Article 2 (Freedom from Discrimination) is extremely unlikely to be respected by adults and the law.
- Article 7 (Right to Equality Before the Law) is often "shadowed by bias" some shared.
- The group expressed frustration that all rights feel essential, so It's hard to say which are "most important"

"Everyone needs all these rights; it's hard to choose because they deserve them all."

"You can't wait till the breaking point when the need is not met; you have to notice and tell when someone is going through something. Seek out confirmation that the need is met before it gets too late."

What Helps Youth Thrive (What They Already Have)

- Accessible, alternative education (places like Mountainside Secondary School)
- At least one trusted adult they genuinely feel safe with
- Access to mental health services
- Creative outlets (music, art, writing)
- Stability and housing consistency
- Experiencing a greater freedom of expression since immigrating to Canada

What Youth Still Need

- Supports tailored to specific identity intersections (queer, immigrant, neurodivergent youth)
- Adults who are queer/neurodivergent/cultural elders in roles that are community facing (representation)
- More language and immigration support; English as a second language is a real barrier.
- Financial support to live independently when home environments are unsafe.

"Kids are humans too! They deserve the rights because they will be adults one day. We learn and our experiences as a kid will transfer to adulthood."

"Just because their outside appearance might look different to you, as long as it's not hurting others, it's fine."

What Adults Need to Know

- Cultural safety is essential, especially for immigrant and racialized youth.
- Youth need a legal voice in matters that affect them (such as family situations, healthcare decisions).
- Adults must create spaces where diverse identities (queer, immigrant, neurodivergent) are represented and supported.

ACTIVITY 2: WHERE I LIVE — COMMUNITY MAPPING

In our second activity, participants mapped their current neighbourhoods, identifying places connected to their rights, wellbeing, and places they feel they can express themselves openly. The groups then redesigned their maps toward an "ideal" community; discussion revealed that *access to*, not just the *existence of*, services is the defining barrier youth face.

KEY DISCUSSION THEMES

- ## What Makes Their Neighbourhood or Community Special

- "It's where everyone I love lives."***



- # Shaking The Movers

Places Where Youth Can Express Themselves Freely

- Mountainside Secondary School: accessible/free food, flexible curriculum, teachers who listen and incorporate lived experience into learning.
 - Getting a place at Mountainside is difficult; this makes it especially valued.
- Girl Guides troupe: queer-affirming leaders, autonomy over activities, genuine sense of safety.

“...we've all been through something [at Mountainside]; there's always a sense of community.”

Places Where Youth Cannot Express Themselves Freely

- Other high schools: described as cliquy and exclusionary, particularly without financial resources or social capital.
- Transit (especially at night).
- Public gyms: body dysmorphia, gym anxiety, fear of being seen by peers from other schools.
- Youth centres: stigma from peers who know participants' backgrounds.
- Large classes without queer or diverse representation among peers or staff.
- After-school programs: youth described needing to "scope out" who is present before feeling safe enough to join.

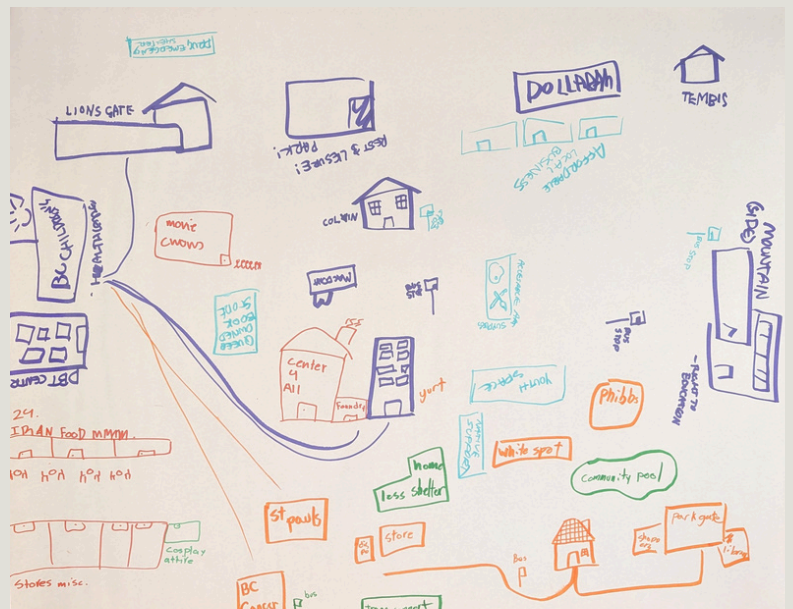
Redesigning an Ideal Community

Youth were asked to shift their maps toward their ideal community. Their responses were centered on access and proximity; not just the existence of services, but the ability to reach and use them.

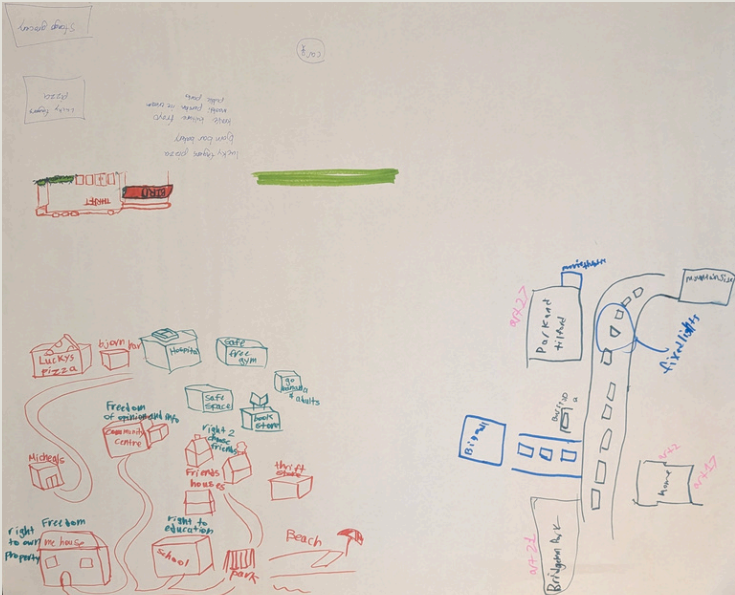
- Fixed street lights and safe, walkable streets
- Reduced transit wait times
- More youth shelters located near community centres
- Locally owned stores rather than large commercial chains
- Physically and emotionally accessible spaces: gyms, pools, and community centres where youth feel genuinely welcome
- Curated libraries, art supplies and studios
- Free or affordable drop-in spaces requiring no registration/minimal barriers

"Resources are out of the way and some people may not even be able to afford transit."

"[Services] exist, but we can't get to any."



**Highlighted:
Mental Health &
Specialized Supports**



- Strong call for early intervention and prevention; not waiting for crisis.
- Youth want to be fully informed about their own treatment plans at every stage
- Undiagnosed conditions need to be identified and addressed, not left for years.
- Need for accessible, specialized therapy beyond generalized support:
 - 1-on-1 care for autism, transgender youth, and other specific needs.
- Ability to browse and choose therapists, see who they are before committing.
- Frustration with 6-month wait times and single appointments with no continuity.

"There's a lack of follow-through and understanding your journey rather than just a one-time meeting."

FACILITATOR DEBRIEF & HIGHLIGHTS

The strong pre-existing sense of community among participants was a significant asset to the session, facilitating depth and openness that might not have been possible with a new group. Very vulnerable things were shared throughout the day, made possible by the rapport already built through NSRJ weekly circles. Bringing junior and senior students together worked well, with positive cross-group collaboration observed. Youth were generous with their time, some of the group staying an extra hour to finish their discussion.

Youth were notably more engaged with the “What Are My Rights?” activity, as the arts-based character creation supported introspection and exploration of identity themes. “Community Mapping” required more prompting, as reflecting on identity in the broader community was a newer and more abstract concept for many participants. Throughout both activities, youth primarily reflected on school and home, with less connection drawn to the wider city around them.



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Butterfly Moments (Highlights)

During the “What Are My Rights?” activity, some participants initially approached playfully; when they realized their work would be shared with those in positions of power (local, provincial, federal governments etc.) they paused and collectively decided to take it seriously - a powerful and unscripted moment of civic ownership.

Facilitators also described the joy of watching a teacher and counsellor see their students fully engaged and thriving in the space.

Youth sharing their vulnerabilities was a consistent highlight: participants felt genuinely safe and were visibly excited to be heard.

Connections formed organically in Circle: head nods, shared experiences, and youth building thoughtfully on each other's words. Phrases like "to echo" and "to reiterate" emerged naturally, with youth taking time to thank one another for being vulnerable.

A strong thread of identity ran through the entire session. Queer identities, neurodivergence, and the intersection of different cultures were woven throughout the day's conversations.

“Seeing the hope and wishes youth hold for building the communities they want to live in was amazing.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Location

Mountainside Secondary School, North Vancouver, B.C.

Community Partners

Landon Pearson Centre for the Study of Childhood and
Children's Rights

North Shore Restorative Justice Society

Equitas

SFU: Centre for Restorative Justice

Access to Justice BC

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