

# The Healthy Living Youth Council: Youth Engagement in Action

*Student-led discussions lead to a student-developed mission and vision for BC's first province-wide Healthy Living Youth Council*

Last month, DASH proudly introduced British Columbia's first Healthy Living Youth Council (HLYC). The HLYC offers high school students from all over the province an opportunity for meaningful youth engagement in the context of healthy living and healthy school initiatives. After a successful kick-off event in November, teachers, students, and parents from across BC are eager to learn more about the council, and discover how a "for youth, by youth" mode of student engagement can contribute to developing healthier schools and communities of learners.

This month, we will introduce the concept of youth engagement and present the mission and vision of this year's HLYC which were generated by council members and serve as an exciting example of youth engagement in action.

## **What is youth engagement?**

The evolving definition of youth engagement reaches past basic participation and delves into the facilitation of programming designed, implemented, and evaluated by youth, for youth. The reasoning behind this extension is simple. Individuals commit to activities more heartily when the topic or program has meaning to them and was their idea, especially when it comes to youth. Youth are the experts on their experiences, needs, and interactions with their local environments.

## **What does youth engagement look like?**

Youth engagement can take many forms; Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) and youth-initiated and led programs are two prime examples. Nonprofit organizations, such as the McCreary Centre Society, and branches of government, such as the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, have led the way with successful YACs. YouthCo, a Vancouver-based nonprofit organization working to reduce the impact of HIV and Hep C on the youth of BC, are another excellent example of youth engagement in action. Their staff and board of directors are made up of youth working for youth, and they work to achieve their mission through peer support, education, and meaningful community engagement.

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Youth engagement empowers youth and builds their capacity by encouraging them to initiate and lead activities of all varieties. During the HLYC Kick-Off Event in November, facilitators committed to youth engagement successfully supported the council members in developing their own mission and vision statements through student-led discussions and brainstorming sessions. Over the course of the event, the HLYC worked together and created a preliminary mission and vision statement for the council:

*The HLYC is a dedicated group of BC's students wanting a community that is fully educated about their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. They will bring their vision into reality by empowering youth through support systems and providing resources for all the youth of BC!*