VERNON GUN & GANG VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

Building Safer Communities Fund

March 2023

DISCLAIMER

This Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy was prepared by the [Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention](#) (CMNCP) for the City of Vernon. While care has been taken in the preparation of this document to ensure its contents are accurate, complete, and up to date, CMNCP recognizes certain limitations with the data. The information presented in this report is based on a review of existing data and documents, as well as consultations with various community members and groups conducted by Urban Matters. One challenge with qualitative data (focus groups, interviews, etc.) is the subjectivity of responses. Participants share their perspectives and opinions based on their own experiences and knowledge. As a result, the statements made by an individual may not reflect the perspectives of others or the reality of the situation. It is therefore important to recognize that the findings from this research must be considered in their own context and not deemed as unequivocally representing the reality of gun and gang violence challenges in Vernon. At the same time, they offer valuable insight into community and service provider experiences which is important when developing plans to address local issues.

Please note, this is a living document that reflects the data collected and information available at the time the Strategy was developed. New information, actions, and recommendations related to gun and gang violence prevention emerge regularly. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the project team, the steering committee, the City of Vernon employees, or the larger community of Vernon.

Trigger Warning: This document includes discussion about sensitive topics related to violence, safety, and gang activity that could be triggering to some people.

If you have any questions about the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy, please contact 250-545-1361.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Developing the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy was a collaborative effort. We extend heartfelt appreciation to the members of the community who participated in the consultations and/or completed the confirmation survey, sharing their perspectives, experiences, and concerns. Your involvement was essential in identifying the challenges faced locally and ensuring that the efforts towards preventing gun and gang violence are grounded in the experiences and context of Vernon. The strength of this Strategy owes much to your valuable contributions.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to the project team and steering committee who acted in advisory capacities from the following organizations:

- Amelia Sirianni   Vernon and District Immigrant Services Society
- Annette Sharkey   Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan
- Brandy Mellows   Turning Points Collaborative
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- Rachael Zubick   City of Vernon, Community Safety Coordinator
- Shawna Baher   RCMP

We would also like to thank local stakeholders, organizations, practitioners, service providers, and youth in Vernon for supporting and participating in the consultation sessions. This includes the following organizations from the social service, education, health, municipal, and justice sectors:

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- City of Vernon
- Community Futures Youth Employment Program
- Family Resource Centre
- FASD Okanagan Valley Assessment and Support Society
- Interior Health
- North Okanagan Friendship Centre Society
- North Okanagan Neurological Association for child development (NONA)
- North Okanagan Youth and Family Services (NOYFS)

- Okanagan Indian Band
- RCMP
- Restorative Justice
- School District #22
- Turning Points Collaborative
- Vernon and District Immigration and Community Services Society
- Vernon Native Housing Society

We would also like to thank Public Safety Canada for the opportunity and their support during the development of this Strategy and the submissions.

Finally, thank you to Urban Matters who, within a short time frame, reached a solid cross section of the Vernon community for consultations and who provided a report about their funding on which much of this Strategy is based.

A full copy of the report can be found in Appendix 7.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Building Safer Communities Fund, administered by Public Safety Canada (PSC), has provided funding to twenty-two communities in British Columbia with the goal of addressing the root causes of gun and gang violence in municipalities and Indigenous communities. The City of Vernon plans to submit a funding application to Public Safety Canada to access up to $950,000 in federal funding and this document outlines the strategic plan designed to reduce risk and increase protective factors through evidence-based prevention strategies.

Despite the community's substantial level of engagement and collaboration, data suggest that post-Covid challenges have exacerbated existing social issues, particularly for populations already facing multiple risk factors. This is particularly concerning given the decline in service capacity, as evidenced by long waitlists for assessments and supports.

PROCESS

As the recipient and administrator of funds, the City of Vernon engaged in a consultation process with local stakeholders and youth to identify the most prevalent risk factors for young people in the community. This process was supplemented by a review of quantitative data from Statistics Canada and other public sources measuring community safety in municipalities across the country. Local service providers in Vernon also contributed local reports to inform the process.

A steering committee comprised of local stakeholders and staff from the City of Vernon was formed to oversee the development and implementation of the Strategy. Upon review of the data from the consultations, the steering committee created a list of potential projects to address the identified and agreed-upon risk factors. These actions were subsequently grouped into scope 1, (projects that will be directly covered by the funding and form the main part of the Strategy) and scope 2 (additional actions that might be taken on over time as resources and capacity become available). Projects were further rated for their capacity to create impact. And only those deemed likely to see a medium to high impact were selected for scope 1. As well, only those which met the eligibility criteria provided by Public Safety Canada (see Appendix 1) were considered.

RECOMMENDED PROJECTS

CMNCP recommends three distinct, but interrelated project activities, which are to:
1. Develop outreach and navigator support for at-risk youth during the hours the Vernon Youth Safe House is closed.
2. Develop an Indigenous, peer-based, youth mentorship program to reduce discrimination and promote cultural awareness among young people, with a specific focus on fostering a greater sense of belonging for Indigenous youth.

3. Develop a waitlist management program to prevent children and youth from experiencing additional negative outcomes due to delays in receiving necessary services. The project aims to provide support for children, youth, and their families who are currently unable to access services and for whom prolonged waiting periods may lead to long-term negative impacts and increased risk factors.

Combined, all three projects have the potential to significantly enhance the prevention and early intervention capacity of the community. As a result, there is a strong likelihood of reducing the number of youths who may engage in gang and gun violence over the medium and long term.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, this Strategy recommends several additional measures to increase the likelihood of success and ensure that the work continues even after the funding period. These recommendations encompass various aspects such as ongoing community engagement, communication, governance guidelines, the stewardship team (e.g., Partners in Action) role, as well as project evaluation and monitoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

Although the recommendations were based on data and sound evidence, including input from community consultations and deliberations by the steering committee, time constraints required CMNCP to make some decisions about what to include in the Strategy. Ideally, all decisions would have been made collaboratively with the steering committee, but deadlines did not permit this process. Therefore, it is crucial to view the recommendations as a roadmap and part of an evolving document. Nevertheless, CMNCP is confident that the recommendations meet the criteria of promising practices, based on research and other strategies of this kind, both past and present.

PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations form the main part of the Strategy and speak to **WHAT** projects will be put into action.

CMNCP recommends:
1. Developing outreach and navigator support for at-risk youth during the hours the Vernon Youth Safe House is closed.
2. Developing an Indigenous, peer-based, youth mentorship program.
3. Developing a waitlist management program to prevent children and youth from experiencing additional negative outcomes due to delays in receiving necessary services.

CMNCP also suggests that actions falling under scope 2 (as detailed starting on page 34) be subject to further discussion and examination as the project progresses, and as additional capacities are identified.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of any strategy largely hinges on the processes utilized for its implementation, or **HOW** the community, city, key stakeholders, and ultimately youth unite to foster prevention opportunities and collaborate towards realizing the objectives. In this context, CMNCP examined seven factors that require attention. These recommendations draw on experiences from safety collaborations within Canada and beyond, which have been adapted to reflect CMNCP's comprehension of the local context.

Specifically, CMNCP recommends actions in the following areas:

GOVERNANCE
1. That a stewardship team (e.g., Partners in Action or current steering committee) be put in charge to function as the body responsible for the Strategy implementation, be a hybrid between a backbone committee for collective impact and for the constellations governance

as described starting on page 43 and that the current terms of reference be adjusted to reflect this governance approach and all recommendations related to governance.

2. That some of the funds available through Public Safety Canada be dedicated to hire a staff (part-time) or consultant that can support the stewardship team in fulfilling its function.

FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENTS

3. That the stewardship team share with the community and its stakeholders the foundational commitments as outlined starting on page 42 and regularly monitor adherence to them.

EVALUATION & MONITORING

4. That the City of Vernon engage an outside evaluator to assess the process and impact of the Strategy; and that this evaluator be charged with developing a theory of change for the overall Strategy in collaboration with the stewardship team.

5. That all funded activities follow a logic model created by a working group and the project leads.

6. That the evaluation monitors changes in risk factors over time, including through existing data, as outlined in the list of indicators provided starting on page 52.

7. That the evaluator, in collaboration with School District 22, implement the Communities that Care survey for grades 8-12 in November 2023 and repeat the survey in January 2026 to assess changes over time.

SUSTAINABLITY PLANNIG

8. That the stewardship team, on an ongoing basis, reviews and discusses project-related actions and the factors that impact sustainability as outlined starting on page 60.

9. That the City of Vernon implements the sustainability survey developed by CMNCP starting in the fourth quarter of year one and that the survey be repeated annually as outlined in the table starting on page 64.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

10. That the stewardship team, in collaboration with the City of Vernon, review its engagement efforts on an ongoing basis with an eye to best practices in engaging the community generally and marginalized populations more specifically.

11. That all project leaders regularly engage with youth to ensure actions taken are meaningful and relevant to them and are seen as adding value.

COMMUNICATION

12. That the stewardship team be charged with forming a working group to develop both internal and external communication guidelines as outlined starting on page 70.

13. That the communications working group develops messages and delivery mechanisms that support a root causes analysis of gang and gun violence, aids public understanding of risk and protective factors, and well as counters youth phobia.

PROJECT SUCCESS

14. That the City of Vernon, in collaboration with the stewardship team and project leads, follows the guidelines for project success in community safety, as developed by the UN and others, and as outlined starting on page 73.

BACKGROUND

VERNON, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Vernon is a city in the Okanagan Region of the Southern Interior of British Columbia and has a population of 44,519 (2021). With this population, Vernon is the largest city in the North Okanagan Regional District. Vernon is located 440 km northeast of Vancouver. It Is known for its lakes and beaches in the summer, and skiing and hockey in the winter making it a year-round tourist destination.

Vernon's population has been consistently growing in recent years. According to the 2020 Community Profile, Vernon has seen steady growth over the past 20 years with its total population now 21.6% larger than it was 25 years ago. Looking ahead, "the city expects steady growth, with the region anticipated to add another 18%, or more than 15,000 new residents over the next twenty-five years".[i]

In 2021, Vernon had a similar average family size (2.6) to British Columbia (2.8) and Canada (2.9), but an older population than the rest of the province. 7.3% of residents of the city of Vernon identified as Indigenous, compared to 5.9% across the province and 5% nation wide. Visible minorities represent 8.0% of Vernon's total population, which is lower than the provincial and national rate.

LOCAL CONTEXT

It is crucial to position the Strategy for preventing youth gang violence within the wider context of community safety and well-being challenges in Vernon, as these issues are interrelated. These challenges, in turn, should be viewed through enforcement data as well as information that speaks to the social, economic, and community climate. This entails considering existing initiatives and programs that can inform or be utilized as part of the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy, as well as local strengths and assets related to crime, violence, and safety.

The community of Vernon possesses numerous strengths. Steering committee members have emphasized the community's collaborative spirit, which has remained intact even during difficult times. They have expressed that the community has accomplished tasks even without external support. This can-do attitude has served the community well over the years. Furthermore, Vernon has already initiated efforts to increase youth engagement and services, as demonstrated by the Youth Integrated Services Hub (YISH) development.

However, like many other municipalities, Vernon is grappling with the aftermath of COVID-19, which disproportionately affects marginalized populations. This is compounded by several years of austerity resulting in significant gaps in services, including assessment services. Waitlists for numerous interventions are long, and it can take up to two years to receive services. During this period, some youth disengage from services, further exposing them to adverse outcomes. These challenges collectively increase risk factors for youth to engage in gun and gang violence.

VERNON'S GUN AND GANG VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

The Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) was announced by Public Safety Canada in March 2022, with the aim of addressing the root causes of gun and gang violence in municipalities and Indigenous communities. As part of this initiative, the City of Vernon plans to submit a funding application to Public Safety Canada to access up to $950,000 in federal funding for projects. To achieve this, the City of Vernon partnered with the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (CMNCP) and Urban Matters to develop a comprehensive Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy from January 2023 to March 2023. The Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy's objectives include: (1) bringing together system leaders, organizations, and community members to collaborate on developing a vision and a practical plan for (2) enhancing youth resilience and safety in the community.

While the Strategy is ambitious and challenges conventional thinking, if not practices in various systems, it also aims to be realistic and acknowledge real-world constraints such as organizational structures and budgets, as well as the complexities of bringing multiple organizations and communities together to co-create and implement a strategy.

The primary focus of the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy is reducing risk, vulnerability, and harm. Accordingly, it prioritizes a process that involves identifying key risk factors and collaborating to implement prevention and early intervention measures. To visualize this, the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General's Prevention Framework[ii] highlights the different levels of prevention and intervention critical for community safety.

Prevention Framework
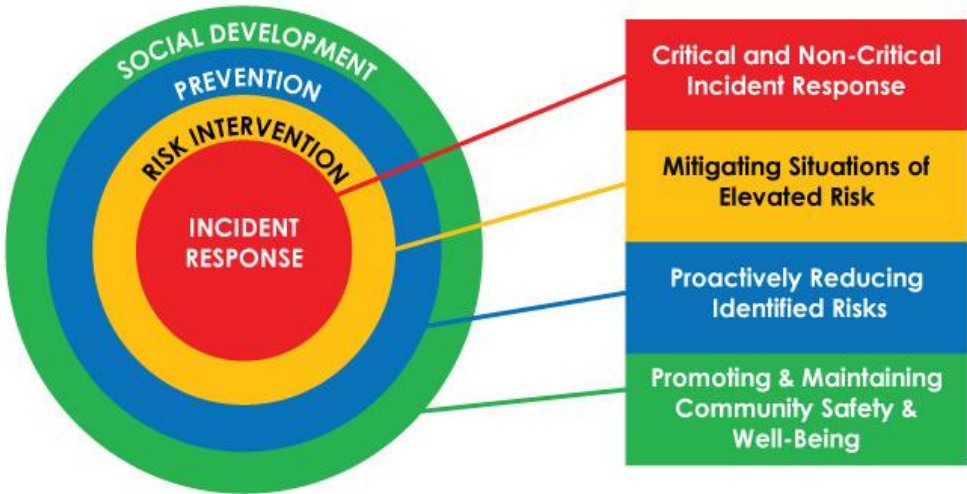
Level	Description	Scope for Project
Social Development	Intervening to reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors in the general population.	Limited scope
Prevention	Identifying at-risk individuals or communities and intervening to reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors.	In scope
Risk Intervention	Responding to acutely elevated risk situations to mitigate harm and decrease the likelihood of (re)victimization.	In scope
Emergency Response	Immediate response to urgent incidents to stop harms, minimize victimization and hold individuals responsible.	Not in scope

The Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy has a strong focus on delivering concrete outcomes and achieving measurable impact through localized action. Specifically, it prioritizes prevention and risk intervention to decrease the demand for incident response. This entails identifying key risk factors and situations with elevated risks and working to prevent risk factors, enhance protective factors, mitigate harm, and reduce the likelihood of gang involvement.

The Strategy is built on the understanding that social, economic, familial, and individual conditions and experiences, including trauma, have a significant impact on whether a young person comes in conflict with the law or becomes a victim. Thus, it aims to engage local leaders and the wider community in generating a shared vision and committing to actions that address the local conditions, improving youth resilience and community safety. To be effective, this Strategy should inspire and enable a shift in how organizations work. Rather than engaging in isolated interventions, it requires a systems approach where a broad cross-section of organizations and people collaborate and elevate their partnerships to achieve collective impact.

Importantly, this Strategy is consistent with the social determinants of health through a focus on decreasing risk factors and strengthening protective factors – the "root causes" known to impact a young person's pathway. Risk and protective factors are varied. Some require broad-based, long-term, sustained investment and commitment (social development), typically led by federal and provincial governments, to improve social inequities such as racism, poverty, and unemployment. Others are more readily achievable through localized consensus, leadership, and commitment to action.

YOUTH GANG INVOLVEMENT: ROOT CAUSES, RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

KEY DEFINITIONS

One of the key challenges related to preventing or intervening in gang violence is the absence of a universal definition of "gangs". There are multiple terms and definitions which vary according to the needs of the sectors/organizations that propose them (e.g., academia, criminal justice, community-based organizations). Furthermore, unique definitions often emerge through observations made in specific geographic, political, and cultural contexts. Despite the various potential definitions, there tends to be several key criteria or descriptors used to define gangs, including the number and age of individuals involved, duration, types of activities conducted, level of organization, use of certain symbols or brands, etc.

Gangs

For the purpose if this document, the following gang definition will be used: A gang is a group of three or more individuals that has existed for at least one month and engages in criminal activity on a regular basis. Gang-related crime can be conducted within the group context or by individual gang members in isolation – as long as such criminal activity, directly or indirectly, benefits the gang.[iii]

This definition, which is consistent with the Canadian *Criminal Code* definition of a criminal organization (section 467.1), allows one to distinguish between gang definers (three or more members, in existence for at least one month, involvement in criminal activity) and gang descriptors (personal characteristics of gang members, gang size, level of organization, type of criminal involvement, etc.). Such a definition would also allow the identification of different types of gangs, including adult vs. youth gangs, transient vs. permanent gangs, and specialized vs. opportunistic gangs. This definition further allows the classification of gangs according to the number of members, their level of organization (i.e., whether they have leaders and followers), their level of involvement in violence, and other gang characteristics (i.e., ethnic composition, gender composition, names and symbols, gang slang, informal and formal rules, etc.).

Youth Gangs

The Vernon Gang and Gun Violence Prevention Strategy has a focus on young people at risk. It is important to define and understand the nature and scope of youth gangs.

According to Public Safety Canada, "youth gangs consist of young people who self-identify as a group (e.g., have a group name), are generally perceived by others as a distinct group, and are involved in a significant number of incidents that lead to negative responses from the community and/or law enforcement agencies."[iv]

Youth gangs are active across the country in both urban and rural communities. Youth may become involved with gangs for different reasons, including a desire for excitement, prestige, a sense of belonging, protection, or money. It is also important to recognize that loose associations between one or more youth may not meet the criteria and definition of an organized gang, but they may be precursors for potential gang involvement, thus they should be included in the scope of preventative measures.

Gang Violence

Gang violence means "criminal and non-political acts of violence committed by a group of people who regularly engage in criminal activity, often for financial benefits." The term may also refer to physical, hostile interactions between two or more gangs.[v]

Some communities across Canada have recently observed an increase in gun and gang violence, with devastating impacts. In 2021, Canada saw the highest rate of gang-related homicides in 16 years. Gang-related homicides continue to account for nearly one-quarter (23%) of all homicides. Furthermore, of the 297 gun homicides in 2021, police believe 46% were gang related.[vi] The trauma of such violence not only affects victims but extends to their families and the communities in which they live.

In Canada, gang violence is generally not focused on the public. In most cases, violence is the result of attempts to settle scores between rival gangs.[vii] However, gang violence in a community severely impacts resident sense of safety and well-being.

ROOT CAUSES

To prevent crime and violence – including gang violence – it is important to understand their causes. Crime is primarily the outcome of multiple adverse economic, social, and family conditions. While individuals have an obligation to act responsibly and with respect for their fellow citizens, communities have a responsibility to address these conditions which hinder healthy development and can lead to delinquent behaviour.

The root causes approach is a way of thinking systemically and holistically about the complex, multiple, and interconnected roots of social problems such as gang violence. It calls for collaborative, comprehensive, and sustained efforts to transform these underlying conditions rather than focus solely on the symptoms. The goal is to prevent crime and victimization from occurring in the first place by building a society that supports the well-being of everyone.

The root causes of crime and violence are well documented and researched. Gang violence prevention efforts should ideally focus on improvements in all three of these areas:

Economic Factors: includes lack of financial resources, lack of educational opportunities, lack of meaningful employment options, poor housing, lack of hope, and prejudice against persons living in poverty.

Social Environment: includes inequality, lack of support to families and neighbourhoods, real or perceived inaccessibility to services, lack of leadership in communities, low value placed on children, and individual well-being.

Family Structures: includes family conditions such as parental conflict, parental criminality, lack of communication, lack of respect and responsibility, abuse and neglect of children, and family violence.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS[viii]

Much of what we know about why crime and victimization occur comes from a growing body of knowledge about risks and protective factors. This research provides an important understanding of what increases or decreases the likelihood of negative outcomes, such as gang violence.

Factors that lead to crime most often go beyond the individual, their family, and peers, to the heart of the community. Risk and protective factors combine to make the probability of crime, victimization, and fear of crime more or less likely. No one variable should be considered in isolation. Instead, crime and victimization are the outcomes of interactions between risk and protective factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. This is commonly referred to as the ecological framework.

Ecological Framework
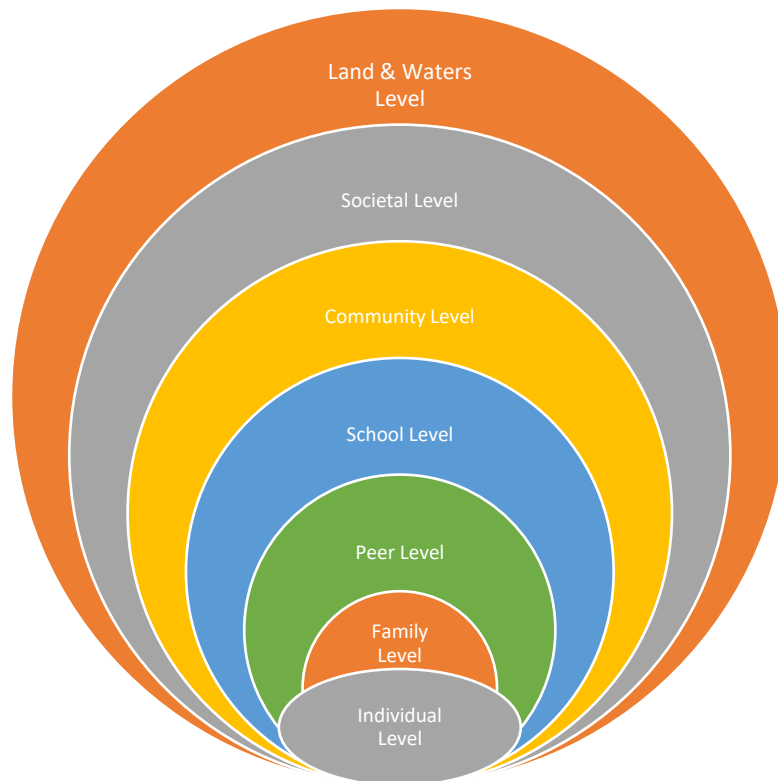
- **Land & waters level** efforts focus on Indigenous teachings related to the importance of access to and availably of healthy lands and waters, including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines.
- **Societal level** efforts focus on what increases the likelihood for positive outcomes for all, including value structures, services, and systems that advance equity and decrease "isms".
- **Community level** efforts focus on building capacity within the community at large and its neighborhoods to contribute to positive outcomes for children and youth and their families.
- **School level** efforts focus on what the school can provide to increase the chances of healthy attachment to education and social endeavors. Schools are, for many children, the first place they receive guidance outside of the home and socialization beyond the family.
- **Peer level** efforts seek to increase positive peer involvement and minimize exposure to negative peer environments. Healthy peer-to-peer connections have long been identified as significantly contributing to prevention of longer-term ill outcomes including coming in conflict with the law.
- **Family level** efforts focus on the whole family as the main source of daily interaction for children and youth. Strengthening the family inevitably has positive outcomes for children. However, it is important to be cautious not to move from blaming the individual to blaming the family. The family, too, must be seen within the larger context in which it exists.
- **Individual level** efforts most closely resemble traditional service approaches. A focus on prevention, however, means that the risk and protective factors go beyond any individual to the family, the community, and finally the whole society. Thus, noticing risk factors in the life of a child inevitably ought to raise questions about the larger context rather than limiting the focus to addressing these factors in isolation.

RISK FACTORS

Though the terms 'risk factors' and 'root causes' are sometimes used interchangeably, there are important distinctions between them. While root causes focus on affecting large systems, changing cultural norms, and influencing policy change, risk factors are negative influences in the lives of individuals or a community that may increase the presence of crime, victimization, or fear of crime. For example, not completing high school is a 'risk factor' that strongly predicts delinquency. The more risk factors a youth experiences, the more likely they are to join a gang. The table below presents an overview known risk factors that influence youth gang involvement, young people who join gangs tend face specific risk factors and therefore, to effectively prevent youth gang violence and build the resiliency of young people, it is essential to understand these risk factors and build prevention and intervention measures that address them.

Level	Risk Factors
Land and Waters	- Limited/lack of access/availability to healthy lands and waters, including Indigenous foods and medicines.
Societal	- Large number of people living in poverty - High level of inequity - Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism

	• Lack of affordable, appropriate, and safe housing • Lack of adequate services (social, physical health, mental health, addictions, etc.) • High unemployment
Community	• Presence of organized crime (and human trafficking) • Repeated negative media attention • Availability of street level drugs • Availability of street level weapons (including firearms) • Fear of social disorder (e.g., homelessness, public drug use) • High transience in neighborhoods • Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational) • Large number of residents reporting feeling unsafe in their neighborhood • Neighbourhoods that show neglect and lack of sense of ownership and pride by residents
School	School Environment • Lack of dedicated educational supports to students with special needs • Too few teacher role models • Lack of attention to bullying (including cyber bullying) • High number of suspensions and expulsions • Negative labelling by teachers • Undiagnosed learning disabilities • Access to street level drugs within the school • Classmates that are gang involved Relationship to School • Low attachment to school • Low educational aspirations • Consistent underperformance
Peer Group	• Friends who are part of a gang • Friends with problematic substance use issues • Interactions with peers who are in conflict with the law • Lack of meaningful peer connections • Tolerance of violence in peer group • Discrimination of peers due to their race, sexual orientation, gender, faith, country of origin • Pre-teen exposure to high stress
Family	• Intimate partner and family violence • Erratic or overly laisse-faire or punitive parenting • Tolerance of problematic substance use • Abuse and neglect of children • Violence between siblings • Criminalized or incarcerated parents • Lone parent household with limited economic means • Family members (including in the extended family) that are gang involved
Individual	• Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) • Prior delinquency and criminalization • Illegal gun ownership • Involvement in trafficking drugs • High desire for status, recognition, and protection • Low sense of belonging • Problematic alcohol and drug use • Lack of attention to trauma • Frequent displays of aggression and violence (including verbal violence) • Early sexualization • Isolation, boredom • Low sense of self

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are positive influences that can improve the lives of individuals or the safety of a community by decreasing the likelihood that people engage in crime or become victims. Building on protective factors makes individuals and communities stronger and better able to counteract risk factors. Drawing on research regarding gang prevention and youth resilience, the table below provides a list of protective factors.

Level	Protective Factors
Land and Waters	• Access/availability of healthy lands & waters including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines
Societal	• Social and economic policies and actions that encourage positive youth engagement. • Access to resources to meet basic needs for all. • Strong social safety net • High level of equity in all regards • Adherence to human rights • Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation • Visibly valuing children and having a commitment to the future
Community	• High level of community engagement • High level of volunteerism • Access to and participation in traditional healing and cultural activities • Availability of barrier free recreation • Strong neighborhoods • Strong leadership (both elected officials and "natural" leaders) • Investment in community safety through social development
School	• Effective connections between school and home environment • Clear behavioral expectations and follow-through on infractions • Attention to context in which the school exists. • School-neighborhood collaborations • Knowledge and utilization of asset-based teaching. • Availability of diverse extracurricular activities • High number of students that graduate
Peer Group	• Positive and sustained peer relations • Connections to peers who are actively engaged in the community in positive ways. • High level of intolerance towards violence and problematic substance use • Involvement in after school activities • Peers that are engaged in recreational activities.
Family	• Parents that are present and consistent • Availability to family dialogues on challenging topics • Shared activities between members of the family • Parents modeling involvement in recreation • Parents whose needs are met and who feel supported in the larger community. • Multiple and healthy connections to the wider community • Sense of agency
Individual	• Positive self-regard • Strong sense of belonging • Regular positive acknowledgement from peers and family • Conflict resolution skills • Intolerance towards violence and coming in conflict with the law. • Success in one or more significant areas of life (school, recreation, social connections) • Access to one significant other outside of the family

ASSESSMENT OF RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The development of the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy involved a rapid assessment using diverse quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and subsequent analyses. Gathering different data sets helped with triangulation and provided the steering committee members and consultants with an understanding of risk and protective factors for youth in the local context.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

The City of Vernon hired Urban Matters to assist in the development of their Prevention and Intervention Strategy by gathering community feedback and supporting the identification of priorities for prevention and intervention programs. Specifically, Urban Matters was responsible for conducting community engagements to inform the selection of risk and protective factors for the Strategy to focus on. Below is a summary of the process and findings.

The engagement process took place February 6 through March 8, 2023, and involved gathering input from the following:

- Steering Committee Meeting #1 (virtual) – Introduction to the project and review of community engagement strategy (12 participants)
- Four in-person key stakeholder focus group sessions (22 participants total)
- Five interviews with key stakeholders
- Engagement materials and host for in-person youth engagement at Teen Junction and CMHA youth peer support group (10 youth participants)
- An online youth survey with 15 responses (including Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA representation)
- Presentation of project information to the North Okanagan Child and Youth Mental Health Local Action Team

The tight schedule created constraints on the engagement process, such as the limited participation of certain stakeholders who lacked the resources to contribute. Additionally, the timeframe restricted the capacity to involve groups that require the establishment of trust and rapport prior to engagement activities, such as Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, or immigrant youth groups. Although the youth survey and engagement managed to reach out to some Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

Summary of Consultation Themes

Vernon's youth face many challenges and social service providers have noticed several trends that are increasing the number and severity of risk factors young people experience. While many of these trends have existed for some time, they have been exacerbated by social isolation, and

other social and economic strains the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on families already struggling.

Key themes that emerged during the consultations included:
- Mental Health and Substance Use Challenges
- High Cost of Living and Housing
- Access Barriers to Assessment for Disabilities and Mental Health Challenges
- Lack of Engagement in School and Key Services
- Lack of Transportation
- Lack of a Healthy Identity
- Intergenerational, Family, and Community Trauma
- Stigma (age, race, sexual orientation, etc.)
- Service Gaps and Challenges including lack of Sustainable and Flexible Funding
- Long Waitlists
- Lack of Adequate Staffing and Volunteers
- Outreach and Communication Challenges
- General Distrust of the Social, Health and Justice Systems
- Lack of After School Activities
- Lack of Mental Health and Harm Reduction Supports
- Lack of Safe Spaces for Youth
- Lack of Engagement of Youth at School

For more information on the process, findings, opportunities, limitations etc., please see Appendix 7.

CONFIRMATION SURVEY

Following the consultations, Urban Matters identified **key risk and protective factors** that were presented to several key stakeholders in the form of a confirmation survey hosted by CMNCP. The survey was shared with over 20 recipients who are members of the steering committee, participated in the engagement sessions, and/or stakeholders unable to attend a consultation session. A total of 12 people completed the confirmation survey.

Summary of Risk Factors
The survey results led to the creation of a list of key risk factors in order of importance:
1. Lack of adequate and appropriate services
2. Inattention to systemic trauma in community
3. Low sense of belonging
4. Discrimination, stigmatization, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, mental health challenges, youth phobia, and racism
5. Problematic substance use (early onset)

6. Low school attachment
7. Lack of educational supports
8. Lack of integration of and settlement support for newcomers, especially newcomer youth with special needs
9. Abuse, neglect, and lack of supervision of children in the home
10. Lack of affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing
11. Low sense of self and healthy identity

The lists of both risk and protective factors, when combined, resulted in a detailed overview of risk factors identified by local stakeholders. While community experiences are an important source of information in building any prevention strategy, it is also critical to review official data from a variety of sources. The existing data discussed below helped clarify what was heard from local service providers.

EXISTING QUANTITATIVE DATA

The following section offers a high-level summary of local demographics and trends based on a review of research and available data/statistics (more information can be found in Appendix 2).

Local Demographics

According to the 2020 Community Profile, Vernon has seen steady growth in population over the past 20 years with total population now 21.6% larger than it was 25 years ago. The population of Vernon was 44,519 in 2021. Vernon expects a steady growth anticipating the addition of another 18% or more than 15,000 new residents over the next twenty-five years in the region.[ix] In 2021 there was a lower percentage of immigrants in Vernon (12.4%) compared to British Columbia (29%) and Canada (23%). Furthermore, 7.3% of Vernon's residents identified as Indigenous, compared to 5.9% across the province and 5% nation wide. Visible minorities represent 8.0% of Vernon's total population, which is lower than the provincial and national rate. The average family size in Vernon is similar to that in other locations in the province. Approximately 17% are one-parent families, with most lone parents being women. In Vernon, the average age of the population is slightly higher than that of the province, with youth (15 to 29 years old) representing almost 15% of the population.

Trends

Vernon Protective Services publishes a yearly report with information on bylaw compliance investigations and calls for service. This data highlights the most common public calls for service which reflect the issues most concerning for Vernon residents. In 2022, the number of files investigated increased by 7%, mostly due to increases in Parks and Public Places files as well as files related to "street entrenched populations". Over half of bylaw compliance complaints in 2022 were public calls for service. The key areas of concern were traffic as well as parks and public places, including temporary shelters, substance use in public places, and prohibited use of public spaces. These statistics are consistent with the concerns identified by the Activate Safety

Taskforce which aimed to address issues related to the impacts of homelessness, poverty, addictions, and criminal behaviour in Vernon.

In addition to bylaw complaints, calls for services to the police can also provide information on the community's attention to crime. Often, calls for service to police are a better indicator of crime and victimization given that not all reports lead to charges, so they are not always represented in police-reported crime statistics. It is also important to remember that by far not all crimes and experiences of victimization are reported to police. In 2022, the most common calls for service were related to traffic and theft. With regards to criminal charges, there was an 8.1% decrease in overall charges registered by the Vernon RCMP between 2019 and 2022. The rate of youth (12 to 17 years old) charged for violent Criminal Code offences decreased by 50% over the past five years but saw a slight increase between 2020 and 2021. Quarterly statistics provided by the Vernon RCMP show that they responded to 165 cases of domestic violence in 2022, compared to 104 the previous year. Similar increases have also been noted in other communities during and after lock-downs due to COVID-19.

One key risk factor related to gun and gang violence is early childhood development, particularly adverse childhood experiences. In this regard, the Early Development Instrument (EDI) data provides insight into the healthy development of children by highlighting inequities and vulnerabilities. Based on the EDI, vulnerable children are those who, without additional support and care, are more likely to experience future challenges in their school years and beyond. In the Vernon School District, 32% of children are vulnerable on at least one area of development measured by the EDI between 2016 and 2019. The highest level of vulnerability was related to emotional maturity (18%) and social competence (17%). Vernon-West and the incorporated community Lumby/Cherryville have the highest rate of EDI vulnerability among children (52% and 31%, respectively).

With regards to health and mental health, a 2016 report published by the Centre for Addictions Research[1] of BC provides information on the consumption of alcoholic drinks per capita. These statistics show that the rate of people reporting heavy drinking is higher in Vernon (average of 1.8 alcoholic drinks per day) compared to the province (1.5). With regards to drug use, the rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in Vernon more than doubled between 2019 and 2022.

In 2021, Vernon conducted a Homelessness Point-in-Time Count to help provide an overall snapshot of homelessness in the community. In total, 224 people were identified as experiencing homelessness, compared to 151 in 2019. Of those 224, 63% had been homeless for 1 year or more, while 25% had been homeless for under six months. With regards to demographic information, 64% of individuals experiencing homelessness were men, 81% were adults between the age of 25 and 54, and 40% identified as Indigenous. Furthermore, approximately 85% of respondents reported struggling with addictions and 63% had mental health challenges. Over 70% of the overall homeless population reported two or more health concerns. People experiencing

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[1] Now called the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR)

homelessness in Vernon indicated that the services they access the most are food services, emergency room services, and the health clinic.

Likely not unrelated, over 41% of tenants in Vernon spend 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, which is higher than the rest of the province (37%) and higher than the UN guidelines. Furthermore, over 4,875 individuals in private households in Vernon have a low-income status after tax and the rate of persons aged 65 years and older with low-income status is higher when compared to rest of the province.

KEY RISK FACTORS

Based on the data sets mentioned earlier, the steering committee has identified several significant risk factors that need to be addressed. As the funding is limited and Public Safety Canada has specific requirements, the steering committee is responsible for developing projects that can reasonably handle these risk factors through this Strategy.

SOCIETAL LEVEL
Discrimination, stigmatization, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, mental health challenges, youth phobia, and racism
Lack of adequate services (social, physical health, mental health, addictions, etc.).

COMMUNITY LEVEL
Lack of adequate services (cultural, recreational).

SCHOOL LEVEL
Lack of dedicated educational supports to students with special needs.
Low attachment to school.

FAMILY LEVEL
Abuse, neglect, and lack of supervision of children in the home and family violence.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
Inattention to trauma.

Low sense of belonging.
Problematic substance use (early onset).
Low sense of self.

FULL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

PROCESS

During a second (in person) meeting with the steering committee, members participated in a sorting process to develop recommendations to prevent and address the identified risk factors. This is detailed in more detail in the section on Key Findings and Recommendations. In an ideal world, CMNCP would have spent more time with members of the steering committee to confirm risk and protective factors and take more time to specify projects opportunities, however, due to time constraints, the following approach was adopted instead.

SCOPING STRUCTURE

After identifying the risk factors through consultations, the confirmation survey, and reviewing existing data, steering committee members categorized them by assessing whether there was adequate capacity to address them through a project of this nature. To sort the risk factors, the committee utilized a set of questions outlined in Appendix 3, and grouped them into the following areas:

Scope 1	Risk factors that can be addressed through the Strategy.
Scope 2	Risk factors that are primarily the responsibility of existing organizations in the community and can be taken on by project stakeholders (potentially with some additional resource supports).
Scope 3	Risk factors that are out of scope for the Strategy (e.g., poverty, housing).

While risk factors in scopes 2 and 3 may not feature in the Strategy, CMNCP recommends they be reflected as part of the Strategy to ensure that a more holistic view is maintained and to make certain that participants from the consultations can see their voices reflected in the report.

IDENTIFICATION OF ACTION AREAS

Based on the above key findings and agreement on risk factors to receive attention in Vernon, the steering committee, at its meeting, utilized a matrix (see Appendix 3) to develop actions that can address the selected risk factors in three inter-related areas:

Changes in policies and practices

This area was designed to include actions that can lead to changes in existing approaches which can reasonably be expected to support prevention and early interventions (e.g., changes to policies that exclude youth from programs to manage challenging behavior). The expectation is that the Gang and Gun Violence Prevention Strategy can be a catalyst for different ways of

thinking about longer standing issues, and that this thinking, in turn, can lead to tangible changes in the service landscape and the community.

Enhancement of existing programs and services

This area includes actions that can augment existing efforts by extending hours, opening services to a population currently not served, and so on. This piece recognizes that the community already has ongoing programs and services for at-risk children and youth that can be part of the solution to gang and gun violence.

Identification, adaptation, and implementation of promising practices

Actions in this area speak to the design and implementation of projects that, in research and community practice, have been identified as having evidence or promise when it comes to the prevention of gang and gun violence. It is important to note that this area is not meant to simply copy existing programs but take their successful elements and adapt them to the local situation. Such programs may have been tested in other communities or may be part of the Vernon experience with applicability for this Strategy.

RATING OF EFFORT & IMPACTS

Through the next process, the members of the steering committee identified 11 actions falling into the action areas noted above. During this process, members of the steering committee reviewed these actions while considering capacity and potential outcomes, and subsequently rated each action for effort and impact. The rating options for both effort and impact ranged from low to high.

PROCESS OUTCOMES

These ratings, alongside the risk factors the actions were designed to address, are listed in the tables below for each of the three areas.

The final list of risk factors the steering committee designed actions for were:
- Lack of and waitlist for services (including recreational services) and assessments
- Inattention to trauma in the community
- Low sense of belonging
- Discrimination, stigmatization, and racism
- Lack of meaningful peer connections
- Problematic substance use (especially early onset)
- Low school attachment
- Lack of educational supports
- Low sense of self

AREA 1: CHANGES IN PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Below is a list of all proposed actions by members of the steering committee. For more detail on the proposed actions including their rationale, risk factors, and effort-impact rating, please see Appendix 4.

1. To provide home support for at-risk families with young children to decrease the pipeline to service waiting lists.
2. To help to ensure equitable access to recreation subsidies and free transportation.
3. To partner with the Local Immigration Partnership Council (LIPC) for the integration of awareness-raising efforts in their existing programs focused on newcomer youth at risk.

AREA 2: ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Below is a list of all proposed enhancements by members of the steering committee. For more detail on the proposed actions including their rationale, risk factors, and effort-impact rating, please see Appendix 4.

1. To develop and implement a community education and awareness curriculum on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and protective factors to decrease the by-stander effect in the community.
2. To develop a grant program for organizations to implement service enhancements that meet the following criteria:
   - Serving youth at risk
   - Decreasing risk factors
   - Advancing equity
   - Decreasing discrimination and stigmatization
   - Increasing access to recreation including the arts.
3. To establish harm reduction and mental health navigation support for children and youth waiting for assessments due to suspected FASD, ASD, and/or learning differences.

AREA 3: IDENTIFICATION, ADAPTATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROMISING PRACTICES

Below is a list of all proposed adaptation of promising/evidence-based programs by members of the steering committee. For more detail on the proposed actions, including their rationale, risk factors, and effort-impact rating, please see Appendix 4.

1. To establish the Youth Integrated Services Hub (YISH) space with a focus on youth at risk.
2. To create a safe space for peer-to-peer interactions to decrease discrimination, including discrimination of the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC community.
3. To host a youth conference, with a focus on youth at risk, that is co-designed with youth and includes youth achievement awards.

4. To develop outreach and navigator support for at-risk youth during the hours when the safe house is not open.
5. To develop an Indigenous, peer based, cultural awareness program to support Indigenous youth.

CMNCP CONSIDERATIONS

Ideally, a strategy of this nature spans all three areas of intervention and includes multiple actions at different levels. Additionally, care should be taken to ensure there is a balance between actions that take a high effort and those that are less labour and resource intensive.

Currently, the Gang and Gun Violence Prevention Strategy has limited dedicated resources and thus, funding the implementation of **all the actions** identified by the steering committee would be very challenging, result in too much dispersal of resources, and as a result, likely decrease the impact of these efforts.

CMNCP placed the actions into either scope 1 or 2. Actions in **scope 1** will feature in the core strategy and will be funded through the grant from Public Safety Canada. Actions in scope 2 can either be taken on by a key stakeholder in the community OR may be pulled into scope 1 later as additional resources may become available through sustainability planning efforts. This helps ensure that if an action does not feature in scope 1 it is not lost to the prevention of gang and gun violence in the community altogether. The Strategy should be seen as a roadmap and a catalyst for creating momentum in the early intervention/prevention efforts in Vernon. As the actions in scope 1 are implemented, and potential additional resources are secured, actions that have been moved to scope 2 could receive more attention and become part of the ongoing work.

Scope 1

Actions in this area were identified by the steering committee as having a high impact. They also meet the criteria of serving youth at highest risk in conjunction with youth at lesser risk but on the trajectory of becoming high risk. They are also likely to yield the highest return on investment for the resources available and meet the criteria for funding from Public Safety Canada (see Appendix 1).

During the consultation and steering committee meeting lack of services was repeatedly identified as a significant challenge in the community. This is likely the outcome of many years of austerity measures coupled with post-COVID consequences leading to staff burnout, challenges in recruitment, and a lack of resources to bring youth in when needed. As a result, waitlists for many services, including assessments for FASD, ADS, and other risks, are high. Additionally, children and youth (and their families) waiting sometimes two years or more, often become disengaged altogether, further increasing their risks for adverse outcomes. Meanwhile, children and youth facing risk factors, but not at a level significant enough for access to already limited services, can increasingly become higher risk, adding more individuals to the waitlist, and continuing the cycle.

CMNCP therefore recommends a strategy that includes interventions for youth at highest risk for gang involvement, as well as actions to prevent youth at medium risk from becoming high risk. Many of the latter are likely on waitlists or soon to be on waitlists. CMNCP further recommends that these actions be grounded in cultural awareness of the circumstances that put Indigenous youth at a greater disadvantage and higher risk compared to their non-Indigenous peers. This approach supports a focus on reducing risks and enhancing protective factors on a continuum from earlier intervention/prevention to selected interventions.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITY PROJECTS (SCOPE 1)

More specifically CMNCP recommends the following actions be the focus of SCOPE 1:

1. TO DEVELOP OUTREACH AND NAVIGATOR SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK YOUTH DURING THE HOURS THE VERNON YOUTH SAFE HOUSE IS CLOSED

The Vernon Youth Safe house is an Indigenous-run not-for-profit program that operates through the Friendship centre and provides temporary housing and life skills support to youth (13-18) experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or living in unsafe situations. While this is an important feature of the Vernon support network, the current absence of services during certain hours of the day puts youth and the community at risk. When the place that is essentially their home is unavailable for multiple hours each day due to resource challenges, young people are at an increasing risk of self harm and coming in conflict with the law, including through entering gangs and accessing guns.

Risk Factors & Evidence

Research demonstrates that generally a very small number of young people are responsible for most social disorder and criminal activity, including gang activities[xxi]. Providing supports to youth most at risk not only reduces harm and suffering, but it also increases the chances they will be able to contribute to their community in a meaningful way, rather than lose their sense of hope and belonging and consequently become so disengaged they become involved in crime.

The risk factors[2] this project seeks to address are:

Societal Level
- Lack of services

Peer Group Level
- Lack of meaningful peer connections
- Friends who are part of a gang
- Friends with problematic substance use issues.

Individual Level
- Problematic alcohol and drug use
- Low sense of self
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

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[2] The **bolded** risk factors were those identified in the consultations as most significant for youth in Vernon.

- Prior delinquency and criminalization
- High desire for status, recognition, and protection
- Low sense of belonging
- Lack of attention to trauma (intergenerational and residential school)
- Frequent displays of aggression and violence (including verbal violence)
- Early sexualization
- Isolation, boredom

Funding to augment existing positions or to hire additional staff for the safe house would allow (1) the safe house to stay open 24/7 and (2) provide youth with supports to navigate services and systems such that they:
- can succeed in finding more permanent living arrangements;
- become engaged with their community;
- make meaningful and positive peer connections,
- engage in positive recreational pursuits;
- connect with a significant adult for mentorship and ongoing support;
- receive therapeutic and community-based support to deal with the factors that put them at risk in the first place.

Implementation Considerations

It will be important to implement these activities in a way that does not stigmatize youth, but rather amplifies their strengths and enhances their protective factors. Stigmatization and marginalization increase risks even further. Messaging this intervention to the youth, community stakeholders, and the public in a way that avoids this will be crucial for the success of the program.

2. TO DEVELOP AN INDIGENOUS, PEER-BASED, YOUTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Indigenous youth that are disconnected from their communities and culture are at risk of coming in conflict with the law, including entering gangs. While all youth facing the risk factors cited below are in danger of entering gangs, for Indigenous youth, these risk factors are intensified by intergenerational trauma, including trauma from residential schools.

Risk Factors

The risk factors[3] an Indigenous Youth Mentorship program would seek to address are:

Peer Group Level
- Lack of meaningful peer connections
- Friends who are part of a gang

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[3] The **bolded** risk factors were those identified in the consultations as most significant for youth in Vernon.

- Friends with problematic substance use issues.
- Interactions with peers in conflict with the law.
- Tolerance of violence in peer group
- Discrimination of peers due to race, sexual orientation, gender, etc.

Individual Level
- Low sense of belonging
- Lack of attention to trauma (intergenerational and residential school)
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- Prior delinquency and criminalization
- Involvement in trafficking drugs
- High desire for status, recognition, and protection
- Problematic alcohol and drug use
- Frequent displays of aggression and violence (including verbal violence)
- Early sexualization
- Isolation, boredom
- Low sense of self

Protective factors that can help decrease these risks include having meaningful peer-to-peer connections and having a trusting relationship with a significant adult (other than a family member) that youth can turn to for support, advice, and mentorship. The peer-based mentorship program would help develop opportunities for youth to make these connections in a way that is culturally appropriate and grounded in Indigenous teachings.

Implementation Considerations

Overall, a peer-based Indigenous mentorship program can provide Indigenous youth with a safe space to learn and connect with their culture. General considerations when creating the Indigenous peer-based youth mentorship program could include:

1. Key approach: this project should be developed, lead, and implemented by an Indigenous community organization.
2. Inclusion of Indigenous leaders and elders to ensure the program is culturally appropriate and respectful. Elders and Indigenous leaders can provide valuable insights into the needs of the youth and suggest ways to engage them.
3. Recruit Indigenous youth that are knowledgeable and passionate about their culture to act as peer mentors in the program. These mentors should have a solid understanding of their cultural heritage and be able to communicate it effectively to others.
4. Develop a curriculum that includes a mix of traditional and modern teaching methods. It could cover topics such as Indigenous history, traditions, language, and spirituality. The curriculum could also incorporate hands-on activities and experiential learning opportunities.
5. Create a safe and inclusive space for youth to learn and grow. Ensure the program is open to all Indigenous youth, regardless of their background or level of knowledge.

6. If possible, involve the local community and non-Indigenous youth in the program by invitation from the Indigenous youth to foster a sense of collaboration. This could include inviting elders to speak alongside Indigenous youth in the community or hosting Indigenous community events.

7. Continuously monitor whether the program is meeting the needs of the youth and achieving its goals. Use feedback from the youth and their community to make necessary adjustments and improvements.

While this program should be Indigenous-focused, ideally some aspects of it would be open to include other youth, specifically youth at risk, in Vernon to foster healthy peer-to-peer interactions and to advance greater cultural awareness of Indigeneity with the next generation through direct experiences with Indigenous peers and Indigenous teachings.

This program would be greatly aided by increasing the awareness of the impact of trauma in the wider community. Non-Indigenous peers and the community at large often lack the cultural awareness of how Indigenous youth experience the community and its institution. This can lead to peer-to-peer conflict and further alienate Indigenous youth. While most services in Vernon are trauma informed, this is not necessarily true of the wider community. Specifically, trauma as it is experienced by Indigenous youth. Community awareness of trauma including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and protective factors (such as youth mentorship) promotes greater empathy towards youth at risk generally and Indigenous youth specifically. While awareness-raising efforts within the community at large do not meet the funding criteria and therefore should be seen as a scope 2 activity, designing, and implementing activities that advance awareness of Indigenous culture could be an action that Indigenous youth engage in with their mentors and peers.

The youth mentorship project for Indigenous youth could therefore further lead to a community education and cultural awareness program as an outcome from the mentorship connections. This could significantly increase positive sense of self and sense of belonging among Indigenous youth. The development of cultural awareness activities could be an excellent way to support Indigenous youth in hands-on learning about and celebration of their cultural heritage.

3. TO DEVELOP A WAITLIST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TO PREVENT CHILDREN AND YOUTH ON THE WAITLIST FROM EXPERIENCING FURTHER ADVERSE OUTCOMES FROM NOT RECEIVING THE SERVICES THEY NEED IN AS TIMELY A MANNER AS WOULD BE IDEAL.

By implementing this project, mental health organizations can provide support and resources to individuals waiting for services, improving their well-being, and increasing their chances of successfully accessing necessary services when they become available.

Risk Factors & Evidence

Creating a culture of early, less intensive interventions for children and youth not yet "at risk", but showing signs of struggle, could augment the waitlist interventions by reducing the number of individuals on the waitlist. Sometimes minimal and timely engagement with peers (through recreation) or a significant adult can go a long way towards preventing the need for more formal and resource-intensive services. For example, the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program has shown positive results by using school properties in struggling neighbourhoods to bring parents together. While their children engage in recreational pursuits, the parents cook together, learn about managing expenses on a limited budget, learn about nutrition, and engage in facilitated self-help supports. Research has shown that low school attachment is often inter-generational. Bringing parents and children into schools for positive engagements decreases the sense of school being a threatening environment. It simultaneously helps address food insecurity and parenting problems while providing children with a safe peer-to-peer environment.

There are many steps that can be taken to decrease the impact of being waitlisted on children, youth, and their families, as well as to reduce the needs for services through early intervention.

Implementation Considerations

There are several evidence-based options that could be implemented in Vernon to support individuals on waitlists until they receive more comprehensive care, including:
1. Behavioral Activation: an evidence-based practice that helps individuals engage in activities to improve their mood and reduce stress. This practice can be used during wait times to help individuals engage in self-care activities and build resilience.
2. Brief Intervention: a time-limited intervention that can help individuals manage their substance use or mental health concerns while waiting for services. This can include counselling, education, or referral to other resources.
3. Peer Support: an evidence-based practice that involves connecting individuals with peers who have similar experiences. Peer support can help individuals feel less alone, provide emotional support, and offer practical advice and guidance.
4. Motivational Interviewing: an evidence-based practice that can be used to help individuals increase their motivation to change their behavior. This practice can be used during wait times to help individuals prepare for treatment and engage in self-care.
5. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): an evidence-based practice that can help individuals manage their mental health concerns by changing negative thought patterns and behaviors. CBT can be delivered in a self-directed format or through teletherapy services.
6. Mindfulness-based interventions: mindfulness meditation or yoga have been found to be effective in reducing stress and improving mental health outcomes. These interventions can be used during wait times to help individuals manage their symptoms and improve their overall well-being.

By using evidence-based practices during wait times, mental health and addiction treatment providers can help individuals manage their symptoms, build resilience, and prepare for treatment, improving their chances of successful outcomes when they do receive services.

Mental health organizations can provide mental health support to individuals waiting for services by implementing the following strategies:

1. Regular communication: Organizations can establish a regular communication schedule with individuals on the waitlist, such as sending regular updates on wait times, available resources, and other information to keep them informed and engaged.
2. Support groups: Organizations can offer support groups or peer-led groups for individuals on waitlist to provide emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation.
3. Psychoeducation: Organizations can provide psychoeducation on mental health conditions, coping strategies, and other relevant topics to help individuals manage their mental health concerns while waiting for services.
4. Teletherapy: Organizations can offer mental health teletherapy supports to those waiting for in-person services.
5. Crisis support: Organizations can offer crisis support services such as hotlines, online chat services, or emergency intervention to provide immediate support to individuals experiencing mental health crises while on a waitlist.
6. Referrals to alternative services: Organizations can refer individuals on the waitlist to alternative services, such as community mental health clinics, support groups, or teletherapy services, to ensure they receive the support they need while waiting for services.
7. Self-care resources: Organizations can provide self-care resources such as exercise classes, meditation or mindfulness resources, or other tools to help individuals manage their mental health concerns while waiting for services. These can be in-person or referrals to interactive websites.

SCOPE 2

As mentioned above, the limited resources for this project resulted in a prioritization of actions in scope 1 based on return on investment within the limited timeframe of the project. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the other recommendations identified by the steering committee – those listed in scope 2 – and include them in this plan as there is potential that they can be taken on later in the implementation process or when more resources become available (in-kind or additional funding). It should also be noted that the actions proposed by the steering committee are not mutually exclusive – that is, some actions may result in impacts that align with others – for example, efforts to manage service waitlists could include steps that make recreation and transportation more accessible over time. Similarly, the action focused on creating a trauma-informed community has in part been rolled into the creation of the Indigenous Youth Mentorship Program.

Given these considerations, CMNCP recommends the following actions be moved to scope 2.

Actions that fall under awareness raising/education

- To partner with the Local Immigration Partnership Council (LIPC) for the integration of awareness-raising efforts in their existing programs focused on newcomer youth at risk.
- To host a youth conference with a focus on youth at risk that is co-designed with youth and includes youth achievement awards.

While activities in this area are important, they don't meet the criteria for direct interventions with youth at risk. However, designing programs **with and for youth** has great potential for going beyond awareness raising to create connections to mentors, learn new skills, and gain a sense of agency and positive identity, all of which are protective factors. The activities in this area should receive further attention as the project is being implemented, and successes in scope 1 can be demonstrated.

Actions that fall under animating the community
- To help to ensure equitable access to recreation subsidies and free transportation.
- To develop a grant program for organizations to implement service enhancement that meets the following criteria:
  - Serving youth at risk
  - Decreasing risk factors
  - Advancing equity
  - Decreasing discrimination and stigmatization
  - Increasing access to recreation, including the arts

Without a doubt, these actions can greatly contribute to the reduction in risk factors. The first could become a matter of partnering with or advocating to the City of Vernon and the Vernon Transit Commission for greater access to barrier-free recreation and transportation. The grant program could be something that the stewardship team designs over time and seeks to secure additional resources for. Both actions can be logical outcomes from having created community momentum and understanding of the issues outlined through the strategies in scope 1.

Actions that fall under advancing existing efforts
- To establish the Youth Integrated Services Hub (YISH) space with a focus on youth at risk
- To create a safe space for peer-to-peer interactions to decrease discrimination including discrimination of the 2SLGBTQ+ and BIPOC community.

There is also potential to merge these two actions. A space that is safe for all youth inevitably needs to be designed with attention to discrimination and other experiences that put youth at risk. It was also the understanding of CMNCP that efforts for the YISH are already underway, and thus, are less likely to meet the criteria from Public Safety Canada for new interventions.

Actions that fall under prevention efforts with a longer timeframe
- To provide home support for at-risk families with young children to decrease the pipeline to service waiting lists.

Prevention research, such as the data from the Perry HighScope Project, shows that the earlier we invest in the well-being of children, the higher the savings both in human suffering and financial terms ([Perry Preschool Project - HighScope](#)). However, given the short time frame available for the current funding, it would be very difficult to demonstrate the impact on reductions in risks for gang engagement through a focus on very young children. CMNCP hopes that the stewardship team, specifically, and the community and its institutions, more generally, use this moment in the history of Vernon to advance further dialogue about prevention and a focus on future generations.

RECOMMENDED FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENTS

To enable the stewardship team to effectively carry out its duties, it is essential to establish a list of foundational commitments to guide actions and reinforce the stewardship team's mission, objectives, and expectations. These **foundational commitments** will help ensure the endeavors focused on preventing gun and gang violence in Vernon consider the viewpoints and suggestions of, and implications for, all community members, especially those who are marginalized and most vulnerable.

FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENTS

The steering committee was presented with a list of potential foundational commitments based on CMNCP's previous work on similar projects with other communities (see Appendix 5 for the full list). After discussion, the steering committee selected the following to inform Vernon's Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Plan:

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring all children and youth have fair, equitable, and low-barrier access to services, spaces, and supports in Vernon.
- **Knowledge and Evidence-Informed:** Ensuring youth resilience efforts are guided by evidence and the wisdom of the community to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Collaboration:** Sharing responsibility, acknowledging the need for collective actions and integration, and avoiding siloed approaches.
- **Equity:** Committing to the pursuit of fairness and justice through recognizing the different challenges, needs, and histories of diverse groups.
- **Focus on Children, Youth, and Future Generations:** Identifying the importance of promoting resilience in children and youth as part of an upstream approach to prevention.
- **Reconciliation:** Committing to the actions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.

RECOMMENDED GOVERNANCE

BACKGROUND

The Vernon gang and gun violence prevention strategic plan is grounded in data and the engagement of key stakeholders including youth. Plans of this nature have the potential to galvanize the community and can lead to significant momentum for change from the grass roots to the highest level of decision making. They also raise expectations across the community that the goals will be achieved and that there will be beneficial outcomes for youth, specifically youth at risk and their families, and that overall community safety will be positively impacted. Therefore, it is critically important that a solid and effective governance approach be developed to provide oversight and guidance and ensure monitoring as the Strategy is being put into action.

Some municipalities across the country have Centres of Responsibility (CORs) charged with developing community safety plans. CORs support community-based partnerships for prevention, often hosted rather than led by their local governments. These collaborative bodies develop and coordinate the implementation of strategies to reduce the risk factors and root conditions that lead to public insecurity. In the absence of a COR collaborative that could guide the implementation of the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy, Partners in Action or a steering committee can take on role of a stewardship team.

The Terms of Reference for the current steering committee were developed by Urban Matters and approved by the respective committee and are included in Appendix 7. The steering committee was built for the purpose of the development of this Strategy and is a multi-disciplinary body tasked with creating a common understanding of the need for the Strategy and its activities along with providing oversight during the implementation process. A stewardship team is proposed as a unique partnership between service providers, community groups, local government, and community members, with up to 15 members from the following sectors/organizations/areas:

- Child Welfare
- City of Vernon
- Community Policing
- Education
- Enforcement
- General Health Care
- Indigenous Community
- Indigenous Welfare
- Indigenous Youth Services
- Justice
- People with Living/Lived Experience
- Substance Use/Addiction
- Youth Employment

- Youth Mental Health
- Youth Services
- Youth Shelter Services

This approach fits well within the parameters of a collective impact design.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The literature on [collective impact](#) speaks of **enabling activities toward the realization of a collectively agreed-upon agenda**. This is accomplished through facilitation, coordination, managing strategy related activities, communicating on behalf of the collective, stimulating ongoing engagement of key players, keeping the community and its organizations informed of emerging trends, and staying abreast of research. For a collaborative approach to be regarded as a collective impact it needs to meet five key criteria:

- The development of a common agenda which, in the case of Vernon, is the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy. While the Strategy is a road map and a living plan, it clearly defines the purpose as: decreasing the factors that put children and youth at risk of engaging in or becoming victims of gun and gang violence and increasing the protective factors that can prevent this.
- Using shared measurement to understand progress as identified in a strategy evaluation framework. An evaluation framework is included in the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy.
- Supporting mutually reinforcing activities. This is included in activities that fall under the areas of **enhancement to existing services and programs** most of which leverage programs already in existence and build on knowledge gained from the consultations to close important gaps.
- Engaging in continuous communications. This is accommodated by the meeting schedule and City staff supporting the stewardship team as well as the community engagement and communication sections in the Strategy.
- Providing a backbone to move the work forward. This is the role of the stewardship team. The stewardship team makes collaborative decisions geared towards supporting the community, and more specifically the children and youth in Vernon that are at risk. The stewardship team, in turn, is supported by City.

The success of collaborative work is directly related to having adequate resources for coordination of collaborative efforts. This is a complex and concentrated task that should not be underestimated. Effective implementation, while hopefully inspired by a passion for the work, also needs a knowledge base and skill set that comes with training and experience not only in prevention but also in community development.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION

Research from public health and other bodies with long-standing investments in prevention, including the World Health Organization, shows that for prevention work to be effective it needs to adhere to the following:

- Efforts need to be intensive, not ad hoc. Prevention is not accomplished through multiple unrelated projects, but instead through integration of approaches towards a common goal. The stewardship team will need to monitor how far actions remain connected and integrated.
- Programs are ideally located in natural settings such as neighbourhoods or existing community organizations rather than establishing new ones. This is recognized in the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy.
- While interventions that start as early as possible and enhance protective factors are ideally suited for successful prevention work, the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy is more selective by focusing on children and youth at risk. This is mostly due to funding criteria limiting certain actions and the timeframe for which funding is available. Nonetheless, we know that when children grow up in caring families, safe and healthy communities, and equitable and inclusive societies, their chance of living fulfilled, and peaceful lives is exceedingly better than when these conditions are not met. The stewardship team in this regard has a role in helping to generate knowledge about how involvement in gangs might have been prevented in the first place. This knowledge can lead to changes in existing practises and policies such that the community over time goes further upstream in its prevention efforts.
- Leaders in prevention inevitably place a high value on the well-being of future generations and the community of Vernon, by investing in the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy, is clearly doing just that.

It will be at the stewardship team where horizontal knowledge (data emerging about youth from the interventions) can be integrated with vertical level efforts (changes to the community and its institutions). Through this integration, prevention becomes more possible. **Violence prevention is a complex task and no one system has all the solutions. For that reason, the establishment of an ongoing, well-resourced round table of key partners with a clear roadmap (the Strategy) and the willingness and capacity to contribute is vital for the successful implementation of the strategy**. In addition to their responsibilities for oversight, the stewardship team members will have opportunities to align efforts around key risk and protective factors, thereby slowly beginning to change the social conditions that lead to youth being at risk in the first place. In successful collaborations for violence prevention, the risk and protective factor framework becomes a kaleidoscope through which different interconnected patterns come into view.

CMNCP recommends that to maximize the capacity of stewardship team members they are encouraged to view their role as representing a sector rather than their home organizations. Sector leaders have expertise, connections, and credibility within an area of intervention. Sector

leaders focus on the well-being of the whole rather than simply representing their place of connection or employment.

While collective impact is a framework for collaboration, the constellation governance model is an approach that maximizes limited resources and provides the greatest flexibility in collaborative ventures.

THE CONSTELLATION GOVERNANCE MODEL

The constellation governance model was created by the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) in Toronto around 2005 (Constellation Model of Governance - Centre for Social Innovation). The model has been adapted many times since then to meet diverse conditions that call for collective, rather than single organization answers. In a paper documenting early experiences, Sonya Turman from CSI in 2006 described the model as a way of bringing together multiple groups or sectors to work toward a joint outcome. It is a governance model ideally suited for partnerships, coalitions, networks, and even movements. As an approach for bringing together diverse service and community voices towards a common goal it has great potential for animating the community while staying grounded in strategic agreements. The essential elements of a constellation governance model include:
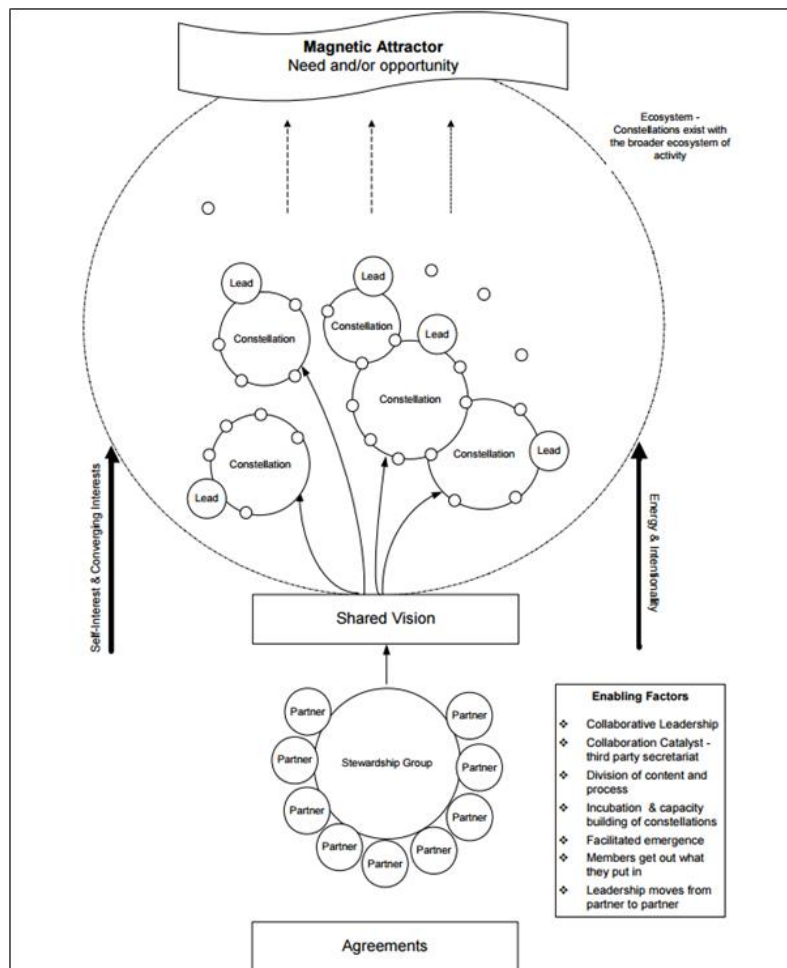
STEWARDSHIP TEAM

Partners in Action or a steering committee for the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy is the stewardship team. Ideally members of the stewardship team that participated in the development of the Strategy will remain involved for the duration of the implementation to ensure consistency and avoid the loss of historic knowledge. This stewardship team should meet regularly (often enough to maintain momentum but not too often to avoid burn-out) and always keep an open seat at the table for additional engagement from an organization or individual not yet included.

Ideally members of the stewardship team will remain consistent, and if change is necessary, an orientation hand-over is part of the responsibility of the departing stewardship team member. The key responsibilities of a stewardship team match the terms of reference of the steering committee for the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy.

These key responsibilities are:

- Partnering with the City of Vernon in providing oversight to strategy implementation.
- Championing the Strategy.
- Ensuring that the community is informed and engaged.
- Helping to ensure the foundational commitments are adhered to.
- Reviewing the evaluation and monitoring results as they emerge to advise on changes to the Strategy as needed.
- Taking leadership in the implementation of the sustainability plan.
- Engaging new stakeholders as the needs arise.
- Being ambassadors for the strategic vision.
- Communicating plan priorities within their own spheres of influence.
- Seeking out novel or aligning existing resources in new ways to support the strategic plan implementation and thereby advancing sustainability.
- Facilitating connections to existing efforts that align with the strategic priorities.
- Being a support and sounding board and providing oversight to the action teams.
- Staying informed of and sharing knowledge regarding developments relevant to the Strategy with Vernon and beyond.
- Developing policies to support the strategic objectives.
- Chairing action teams, as applicable.
- Providing guidance to the staff coordinating the collaborative implementation of the overall Strategy (no to be confused with staff responsible for specific actions).

ACTION TEAMS

Not all actions can be accomplished through the mechanism of the stewardship team. Occasionally, action teams will need to be formed that are responsible for attending to specific priorities. Action team tables broaden the partnership beyond the stewardship team to other organizations and even individuals from the community. This increases resources but also ensures that diverse subject matter expertise is available. Action team tables tend to be smaller and meet more frequently than the stewardship team, whose responsibility it is to ensure that action teams

stay focus on their priority areas, that they align with the Strategy objectives, and that duplication is avoided. Action teams, unlike the stewardship team, have a limited mandate and as objectives are accomplished, actions teams may sunset and other action teams may be developed. Not all action teams start at the same time, and it is the responsibility of the stewardship team to select which priorities receive attention, and when.

GOVERNMENT-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Municipalities are the places where the prevention of crime and the advancement of community safety occur because they are the order of government closest to the community and hence ideally suited to support partnerships for prevention. The relationship between the City of Vernon and the stewardship team needs to be clearly defined and ideally should follow the principle of "who leads what and when" to establish a shared leadership approach right from the start. While the City of Vernon holds the funds for the Strategy, without ongoing community buy-in and leadership, it cannot succeed. As stipulated in the sustainability plan, the future of the Strategy beyond the initial funding window is highly dependent on the capacity to mobilize existing community efforts.

There are five prototypes for government-community collaboration for crime prevention:

Grassroots Committees

While these committee are powerful mechanisms for mobilizing the community, they tend to be limited in their capacity to make change because of resource limitations.

Police-Driven Community Committees

In the context of violence prevention, these committee tend to struggle with distinguishing between prevention from attention to root causes and enforcement efforts.

These first two options are likely insufficient and inappropriate for steering the implementation of the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy.

Government Departmental Committees

City of Vernon staff play a vital role in the implementation of the Strategy. However, departmental committees that have community representation are too restrictive when it comes to sustainably mobilizing the community.

Stand-Alone Organizations to Host the Strategy

Outside government organizations tend to have the greatest level of autonomy. As such, they are more easily embraced by community. However, they can find themselves in competition with other services and organizations over resources, which makes partnership building challenging. Additionally, creating an organization is resource-intensive and would absorb too much of the funding available from Public Safety Canada. This is also unlikely to meet the funding criteria which demand that resources are concentrated on interventions serving children and youth at risk rather than infrastructure development.

Government-Community Partnership

This approach brings both government and community together with equal input and decision-making power. These tables tend to include heads of departments (or their delegates) and key decisionmakers from within the community. Members of this type of round table are selected for their relevance to the Strategy and their capacity to influence change. These round tables must take care to ensure equity, which includes engaging with and amplifying the voices of disadvantaged groups. This should further include the teachings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.

PROPOSED GOVERNANCE FOR THE VERNON GUN AND GANG VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

In contemplating the most appropriate governance model for the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy, the following considerations were of most importance:

1. The timeframe of the Strategy necessitates an "all hands-on deck" approach and leaning on established opportunities.
2. The Strategy development was in part guided by a steering committee whose members acknowledge that the membership of the stewardship team may need to increase or change to accommodate the selected actions.
3. The City of Vernon has made significant in-kind staff supports available to the stewardship team in the development of the Strategy.
4. The community has provided significant energy in the development of the Strategy.
5. Life in communities does not stand still while plans are being made or put into action, and any governance structure necessarily needs to be able to adapt frequently and with ease if the Strategy is to stay relevant to the community.

Given the above considerations, CMNCP recommends a constellation governance approach that incorporates collective impact principles as best suited for the successful implementation of the Strategy.

CMNCP further recommends that the collaborative efforts for the Strategy implementation be supported on an ongoing basis through a dedicated staff position to maintain the momentum, support sustainability, and prevent coordination challenges and confusion.

Broader Context

The implementation of the Vernon Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy does not function in a vacuum. As the Strategy becomes better known in the community and beyond other persons engaged in related efforts will see their alignment with the strategic objectives. This is an ideal, but often not anticipated, consequence from prevention strategies and it is to be encouraged by the stewardship team members. Prevention strategies, if communicated well to the public and championed by persons with credibility (Mayors, Elders, etc.), have the capacity to significantly animate the community beyond the time frame of the initial funding. This is where governance, sustainability planning, communication, and engagement efforts align. It is at the place of the stewardship team that these connections are attended to. If this is part of the regular agenda of

the stewardship team, the Strategy can become the catalyst for policy and programmatic changes even beyond the community.

The collective impact framework provides the focus for the Strategy. The constellation governance provides room for organic developments and flexibility. The more flexible and yet focused the governance approach can be the more likely that the Strategy will live on beyond the funding window and change the service landscape of the community of Vernon for years to come thereby realizing a common vision for future generations. The combination of collective impact framing and a constellation governance makes relationship building central to the collaboration.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Evaluation and monitoring are vital processes for assessing the performance, effectiveness, and impact of Vernon's Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy. A monitoring and evaluation plan is a combination of data collection and analysis (monitoring) to assess the extent to which a strategic plan has, or has not, met its objectives (evaluation).

Evaluation and monitoring try to answer two questions:
(1) Did the project do what it set out to do?
(2) How effective were these actions in achieving the desired and agreed-upon outcomes.

Generally, key functions of evaluation and monitoring include:
- **Providing feedback** on the progress of a project to support learning and inform adjustments and improvements during the project to ensure its objectives can be achieved.
- **Assessing outcomes** to determine if the project has achieved its intended goals.
- **Identifying strengths and weaknesses** of the project to address any issues that may be hindering its success and to advance those that promote it.
- **Ensuring accountability** so the project is implemented in a way that is accountable to its stakeholders, including efficient use of resources and delivering on agreed-upon outcomes.
- **Supporting decision-making** by ensuring those responsible for project implementation have the necessary information to make informed decisions (i.e., which activities to continue, expand, sustain, or terminate and how they connect to the anticipated outcomes).

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

There are several conceptual challenges associated with evaluating gun and gang violence prevention programs:
- **Complexity:** Gun and gang violence is a complex and multifaceted issue that cannot easily be addressed by project-based interventions. Many of the risk and protective factors go beyond the scope of any project. Evaluating the impact of a prevention program in this context tends to be very challenging. While activities may **contribute** to positive outcomes it is rarely possible to **attribute** positive outcomes to any one activity.
- **Lack of Standardized Metrics:** There is no standardized set of metrics for evaluating gun and gang violence prevention programs, thus requiring the creation of new measures, including proxy measures. A proxy is an **indirect measure of the desired outcome** which is strongly connected to that outcome. It is commonly used when direct measures of an outcome cannot be observed or are unavailable. For example, it may not be possible to get a

measure of how many children live in homes with food insecurity, but it is possible to measure increases in uptake of breakfast programs at schools.

- **Difficulty Measuring Outcomes:** While it may be possible to measure reductions in some risk factors, other desired outcomes will not be realised within the project time frame.
- **Difficulty Establishing Causation/Correlation:** It is very challenging to establish causation or even correlation between a prevention project and a reduction in gun or gang-related crimes. No single factor will lead to gang and gun violence. Many factors go beyond the project and are connected to wider changes in the political, social, economic, and community environment. As a result, it is unlikely that a change can be attributed directly to any single action.
- **Resource Constraints:** Conducting a rigorous evaluation of a prevention program is resource intensive. Communities and organizations commonly lack the capacity to conduct an evaluation effectively for that reason.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Evaluating gun and gang violence prevention programs raises many ethical considerations, such as the need to ensure the safety and confidentiality of program participants, the importance of obtaining informed consent, the potential of stigmatizing certain populations, unintended negative consequences of program participation, etc. An evaluation and monitoring strategy must adhere to best practices in research ethics to ensure no one is harmed in the process. Additionally, it is good research practice to have a control group (a group of individuals that do not receive services) against whom the youth that receive supports can be measured. However, denying access to programs to any child or youth at risk is unethical. Finding comparable groups outside of the community by which it can be demonstrated that an intervention in Vernon has been effective is very challenging. One potential way to address this is to take a baseline measure with the youth entering the program and compare those data when the youth leave the program. While this is not the same as a control group approach it does provide a comparison over time.

To effectively assess the success of a program, it is essential to establish dependable and transparent methods for monitoring processes and outcomes, despite any challenges that may arise. This will enable identification of areas where additional efforts may be necessary, as well as provide insight into whether the program is achieving desired results. The strategic plan should serve as the foundation for the overall evaluation approach, with logic models used to measure specific activities.

Incorporating a variety of measures is crucial for comprehensive evaluation and monitoring, including both quantitative data (e.g., crime statistics and surveys), as well as qualitative data (e.g., interviews and focus groups). By using multiple measures, a more thorough understanding of the impact of the project can be gained. This monitoring and evaluation framework includes the following aspects:

- A theory of change.
- Logic models for specific actions.
- General indicators for the project.

- Specific indicators related to risk and protective factors that are being addressed through specific activities.

THEORY OF CHANGE

To describe how the gun and gang violence prevention project is affecting change in the short, medium, and long term, and the extent to which it is achieving its intended impacts, it is necessary to develop a theory of change. A theory of change is a **model that shows how a plan/project/strategy/intervention contributes to achieve the intended result** through a chain of interconnected short-term, mid-term and long-term outcomes.

A theory of change is a blueprint for evaluation and in a gun and gang violence prevention strategy it needs to include the following:

1. Ongoing Indicators
   a. Increases or decreases in risk and protective factors.
   b. Gun and gang violence and related activities in the community.
   c. Perceptions of gun and gang violence.
2. Stewardship Team Support
   a. Level of collaboration.
   b. System-level changes in polices and practices.
   c. Interplay between project activities (horizontal) and system responsiveness (vertical).
   d. Sense of shared responsibility.
3. Knowledge Exchange
   a. Changes in community and system-level knowledge.
   b. Understanding of root causes and risk factors of gun and gang violence with key stakeholders and in the wider community.
   c. Extent of use of evidence-based and promising approaches.
4. Community Engagement
   a. Increases to existing resources and assets in the community for prevention.
   b. Level of inclusion of persons with lived and living experience in decision making.
   c. Community-based activities that include children, youth, and families at risk.

LOGIC MODELS

To determine the impact of the gun and gang violence prevention project, it is essential to create logic models for each project component. This approach will allow project staff and evaluators to comprehend the expected outcomes in the short, medium, and long term, and how they relate to the overall project activities. Ideally, a logic model should be constructed for each significant project area, which will encompass:

- **Inputs:** The resources, such as funding, staff, and materials, needed to implement the project.
- **Activities:** The specific actions or interventions the project will undertake to achieve its objectives.

- **Outputs:** The immediate results of project activities, such as the number of people served, or the number of training sessions conducted.
- **Outcomes:** The intended changes in behavior or social conditions expected to result from the project. Outcomes may be short-term, intermediate, or long-term.
- **Impact:** The goal or broader social change the project is intended to achieve.

INDICATORS

An indicator is an observable, measurable piece of information about an outcome. Indicators are generally used to measure project outputs as well as the impact of these outputs to determine whether the activities achieved the desired changes. They can be quantitative (e.g., numbers and statistics) such as the percentage of the population that are un- or underemployed, or they can be qualitative (e.g., judgments and perceptions) such as how local populations perceive the level of gun and gang violence and related activity in their community. Definitions of indicators should clearly state which level of analysis they are attached to:

- Ecological level (land and waters)
- Societal level
- Community level
- School level
- Peer group level
- Family level
- Individual level

POTENTIAL COMMUNITY-WIDE MONITORING / EVALUATION INDICATORS

Below is a list of available and potential indicators that relate to youth resilience and violence prevention at different levels that can be used monitor and measure the progress and impacts of this Strategy.

Overall Indicators

In this context, it is crucial to differentiate between attribution and contribution. While certain actions may contribute to a change in outcome, it is seldom feasible in community interventions involving humans to attribute these changes exclusively to a single activity – even a broad strategy such as this one. Furthermore, it is essential to measure the impact of such a strategy by assessing indicators that cannot plausibly be altered through any one intervention, such as crime rates.

This is not an exhaustive list and additional indicators may be required. The list is intended to support future evaluators to make informed decisions.

Level	Indicators	Frequency	Data Source
Ecological / Land and Waters	N/A		
Societal	• % of households that are moderately or severely food insecure	Annually (if applicable)	Household Food Security Survey
Community	• Police-reported crime statistics (inc. hate crimes) • Crime Severity Index • # of calls for service to police • % of students who feel safe at school • Average monthly frequency of participation in physical activity • # of free recreation and leisure opportunities for youth	Annually Annually Quarterly 2023 and 2026 Annually Annually	Police-reported data (Statistics Canada) Crime Severity Index RCMP CTC[4] Recreation Centres Recreation Centres
School	• Ratio of students to educators in public schools • # of after-school activities available in community • % of youth completing high school • Suspension and expulsion rates • % of students in alternative learning programs • % of students with identified learning challenges, including FASD	Annually Annually Annually Annually Annually Annually	School board records Community org. School board School board School board School board
Peer Group	• Average daily amount of time spent with friends (minutes per day) • Self reported sense of inclusion and belonging.	Annual Annual	CTC CTC
Family	• % of households who spend >30% of income on shelter costs • % of lone-parent households • % of families with children experiencing violence in homes • % of children experiencing abuse/neglect • % of children of criminalized or incarcerated parents • % of children and youth reporting problematic substance use in the home	Start & end of project Annually Annually Annually Annually Annually	Census data Census data RCMP MCFD TBD Interior Health
Individual	• Rate of emergency department visits for mental health conditions • % of children and youth identifying low sense of self • % of children and youth identifying problematic alcohol and drug use • ACEs scores • # of children who are vulnerability in one or more areas of their development measured by the EDI scale	Twice per year Annually Annually Annually Every 4 years	Interior Health and hospital data CTC Interior Health/CTC MCFD, EDI, CTC EDI

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[4] For information on CTC, see next page.

Specific Indicators

In addition to the general indicators above, the table below includes a list of potential specific indicators that can be used to monitor the recommend projects and measure outcomes.

Recommended Projects	Demographic Data	Monitoring Indicators	Outcome Indicators
1. To develop outreach and navigator support for at-risk youth during the hours the Vernon youth safe house is closed.	• Age • Gender identity • Sexual orientation • Race and cultural identity • Faith associations • Disabilities (physical, learning, etc.) • Home by area code • Family data (composition of family, economic situation, time lived in Vernon, etc.) • Referral source	• # of youth served • Opening hours • # of spaces • Age groups served • Retention rate	• Satisfaction • Self-reported changes in attitudes and behaviours • # of youth in school • # of youth connected to a mentor • # of youth re-connected to family/community • # of youth connected to services outside of the safe house (counselling, addiction, employment) • # of youth in recreation programs • Post-program (6-months and 2-year follow-up)
2. To develop an indigenous, peer-based, youth mentorship program		• # of mentees • # and type of adult significant/caring adults (mentors, coaches, vocational role models) • # of mentors / significant adults available for project (volunteers) • Types of activities engaged in with youth • # Retention rate	• Level of satisfaction • Self-reported skill & knowledge development • Self-reported changes in attitudes and behaviours • Self-reported changes to respect for self and others • Self-reported sense of connection to elders • Self-reported sense of connection to land • Self reported sense of belonging • Self-reported sense of connection to youth • # of youth reporting strong connection to family and community

			• Post-program follow-up (6-months and 2-years)
3. To develop a waitlist management program to prevent children and youth on the waitlist from experiencing further adverse outcomes from not receiving the services they need in as timely a manner as would be ideal.		• # of children youth on wait lists for services (mental health, addiction, dual diagnosis, counselling, educational support, recreation, etc.) • # of children youth on wait lists for assessments (learning disabilities, ADS, FASD, etc.) • # and type of supports and services received through other services • # of children and youth leaving wait list overall and reasons for wait • # of children and youth attending wait list management programs	• Level of satisfaction • Self-reported skill & knowledge development • Self-reported changes in attitudes and behaviours • Reduction in no-shows for services following wait times • Post-program follow-up (6-months and 2-years) •

In order to be able to collect this data, the community will need to establish a Memorandum of Understanding with services that maintain waitlists, allowing their data to be included in monitoring. Services should communicate transparently with children, youth, and their families about the actions on data collection being taken. It would be beneficial if some children and youth could participate in an evaluation to assess their experiences in the community, as well as while being on a waitlist and using waitlist programs.

The evaluators responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Strategy can assess the changes that have occurred over time for each activity by examining each outcome, the associated indicators, and the collected data. This enables a comprehensive evaluation of the Strategy, while also allowing for adjustments to be made during the process as new data become available.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

CMNCP recommends the following for monitoring and evaluation:

Create an Overall Theory of Change

Creating a theory of change will help provide a broad and comprehensive framework for understanding how an initiative is expected to create change, and it focuses on the underlying assumptions, activities, and pathways through which change is expected to occur. Based in evidence, the theory of change should describe the ultimate goals or impacts of the initiative and the specific outcomes that will lead to achieving those goals.

Create Logic Models for the Key Funded Activities

To determine the impact of the components of each key activity, logic models should be created to illustrate how each program is expected to work and to communicate its design and goals to stakeholders.

Monitoring of Risk Factors and Gun and Gang Activity Through Existing Data Sets

Annually review the existing, available data sets on risk factors as identified above.

Purposeful Monitoring through Additional Tools

The existing statistics and data sets are not sufficient to adequately monitor progress and impacts with regards to youth risk and protective factors. To improve monitoring and comparison of overall risk and protective factors, we propose the use of the Communities That Care (CTC) tool. CTC is a community-based school assessment system designed to assess and promote positive youth development, prevent problem behaviors, and improve the overall health and well-being of young people. CTC is an evidence-based model grounded in social-ecological theory, which recognizes that individual behavior is influenced by factors at multiple levels, including individual, family, peer, school, community, and societal.

The CTC tool should be implemented with all grades 8-12 students in Vernon in November 2023 to create a baseline and again in late January 2026 to assess changes through comparison and help with planning prevention and implementation approaches to continue reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors.

Hiring an External Consultant

CMNCP recommends hiring an external evaluation consultant/group. As opposed to having an internal evaluation team, outsourcing this process offers several benefits:

- **Expertise**: An external consultant will bring specialized knowledge and expertise in program evaluation to the project, including knowledge of the latest evaluation methods, tools, and best practices. Ideally, the evaluator will have knowledge/expertise in gun and gang violence prevention.
- **Credibility**: An external consultant can provide an independent, third-party validation of the program's effectiveness, which can enhance the program's credibility with funders, stakeholders, and the community.

- **Cost-effectiveness**: Hiring an external consultant can be more cost-effective than building and maintaining an internal evaluation team, especially if program evaluations are not a core competency of the organization.
- **Efficiency**: An external consultant can often complete the evaluation more efficiently than an internal team, freeing up organizational resources to focus on program implementation and other mission-critical activities.
- **Objectivity**: An external consultant can provide an objective assessment of the program's effectiveness, free from any biases or conflicts of interest that may exist within the organization.

SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

Funding for community projects is usually short-lived, rarely exceeds four years, and mainly focuses on piloting services. Within this timeframe, communities usually build trust among project participants, service providers, stakeholders, and residents. Successful projects often raise expectations for continued growth and, more importantly, sustaining positive outcomes. Unfortunately, even successful evidence-based projects are often discontinued, leaving participants, service providers, and the community wondering why evidence-informed approaches are not funded on an ongoing basis. When funding ends, a potentially long and uncertain transition tends to disrupt project activities due to impacts such as loss of client and community trust, shifting stakeholder priorities, and reduced organizational capacity. This may result in the loss of positive project outcomes altogether. Thus, taking steps to mitigate these challenges is crucial to support the long-term success of the work and maintain commitment to a project's goals.

Project leaders, partners, and communities should prepare for the cessation of funding with sustainability planning. Ideally, this process should be integrated into the project's design and implementation from the start to increase its resilience to change. By identifying key successes and considerations for sustainability on an ongoing basis, project leaders and partners have a greater chance of maintaining and protecting the project's success in the long run.

Project sustainability typically refers to the ability of a project to continue beyond its initial funding period, with newly secured resources. While securing funding is a critical aspect of sustainability, it is just one part of a successful plan. Focusing solely on acquiring more funding can mean overlooking other opportunities that could increase a project's potential for long-term viability and success. Instead, sustainability should be viewed as a process of designing project activities for lasting impacts and enabling communities to benefit from the project for years to come. Achieving project sustainability requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses development, implementation, identification of community needs and expectations, and evaluation outcomes.

Rather than exclusively focusing on funding, the goal should be to maintain the project's positive outcomes over time, not only for individuals and groups served but also with a view to changes in service approaches that may reduce the need for interventions. To achieve this, decision-makers must consider new partnerships and system changes necessary to sustain the project's success, in addition to new financial resources. This requires a focus on capacity building, stakeholder engagement, effective communication, and ongoing evaluation throughout the project's duration.

Community Development in Project Sustainability

In simple terms, community development involves fostering trust among community members and stakeholders, leading to greater investment in project objectives. When community members and partners understand the positive impacts of the project, their enthusiasm to participate in the initiative will likely increase. Ensuring long-term growth, success, and sustainability for

community-led initiatives requires careful planning, prioritizing relationship-building in communities, leveraging insights from evaluations, and viewing the project as a catalyst for change.

Organizational and System Capacity Project Sustainability

Sustainability refers to an organization's capacity to achieve its mission by leveraging community engagement and utilizing essential resources (including human, financial, technological, and organizational) to collectively tackle complex social problems. This necessitates acknowledging that current systems fall short in addressing these issues. Additionally, it brings to light the need for equitable solutions that address systemic gaps. In the case of gang prevention initiatives, sustainability planning could involve reorienting existing staff positions to provide more direct support to at-risk children and youth.

Research and Reflection in Sustainability

To achieve long-lasting impact, it is essential that the design and implementation of a project allows for research and reflection on the underlying causes of the issue it aims to address, and what changes are needed over time to prevent its recurrence. This requires acknowledging that communities and their existing services may not have all the solutions, otherwise, the project would not be necessary.

FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS OF PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

Based on a review of pertinent tools and literature, the accompanying image highlights various elements of project and program sustainability.

Foundational Aspects of Project Sustainability

Coherent Vision/Theory of Change	Without a coherent vision for project outcomes and a theory of change for how to achieve that vision, projects tend to lose momentum and sustainability is less likely.
Community Support	The level to which a project is accepted by the community, champions,[5] and leaders[6] impacts its success and how much it can be sustained over time.
Stakeholder Engagement	The ability to mobilize stakeholders for specific aspects of the project impacts the capacity to sustain the momentum of a project.
Leadership Approach	Project leadership and governance are critical for successful implementation, but also the ability to carry on aspects of the project beyond the initial funding window.
Organizational Resilience	The ability of the lead organization(s) (beyond their financial capacity) to overcome challenges and continue to thrive greatly impacts the project's success and longevity.
Monitoring and Evaluation	A monitoring and developmental evaluation framework ongoingly supports the successful implementation of the project and tends to sustain motivation to continue the positive aspects of the work.
Adaptability of Approach	Projects that are implemented in a flexible and nimble way, rather than adhering to early, rigid concepts, tend to have a better chance of maintaining momentum and buy-in.
Technological Infrastructure	The integration of applicable technology greatly supports project vitality.
Staff Capacity	When project staff are well prepared, equipped, and readily engaged in the work, projects are more successful and therefore more likely to be maintained over time.
Operating Environment	The political and economic context at the federal, provincial/territorial, and regional level in which a project is implemented impacts its potential to be sustained over time.
Political Investment	How much the project is accepted in the current local political climate and seen as advancing political goals makes a difference for its overall acceptance within the community.
Financial Resources	Project viability is directly related to the ability to secure diverse funding sources.

The Value of Regular Sustainability Reviews and Planning

Given the complexity of sustainability, routine sustainability assessments along with the development of actions to increase the likelihood of sustainability will be key to the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy in Vernon.

Sustainability Discussions by Stewardship Team

To increase sustainability, it is recommended that stewardship team members review and discuss project-related actions at least once a year. These discussions should focus on the sustainability

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[5] Individuals or organizations that act as advocates, leaders, and role models with a deep understanding of the needs, challenges, and aspirations of the community create positive change, and improve the quality of life for community members they serve.

[6] E.g., heads of organizations, faith leaders, neighbourhood leaders, Elders.

survey results, identifying areas with low scores, and how to improve them. For a list of potential actions to address sustainability challenges, see Appendix 6.

Sustainability Survey

CMNCP designed a survey, including all fundamental aspects of sustainability, to assess a project's ongoing sustainability. To maintain momentum towards greater sustainability, the City of Vernon should conduct the survey annually and present the findings to the stewardship team for deliberation and decision-making (see above). Stewardship team members have a chance to set an example by sharing how their respective sectors are adapting to address the risks facing children and youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

We recommend that Vernon continues to assess and discuss sustainability as follows:

Project Stage	Type	Who	Expected Outcome
Year 1			
Year 1 – Q4	Implement sustainability survey	City of Vernon	Quantitative baseline
Year 2			
Year 2 – Q1	Discuss survey results Engage in sustainability planning	Stewardship Team	Action items for years 2-3
Year 2 – Q4	Implement sustainability survey	City of Vernon	Year 2 quantitative baseline
Year 3			
Year 2 – Q1	Discuss survey results Engage in sustainability planning	Stewardship Team	Action items for year 3
Year 3 – Q3	Sustainability Survey	City of Vernon	Year 3 quantitative baseline
Year 3 – Q4	Discuss survey results Engage in sustainability planning	Stewardship Team	Review of actions items from year 3 and adjustment of action items to ensure ongoing sustainability.

Since the City of Vernon will not complete the sustainability survey until the fourth quarter of year one, CMNCP recommends the following actions in the first half of year one:

- Communicate the project's purpose to key stakeholders and the community.
- Articulate a vision and make it explicit for all stakeholders and the community.
- Develop a theory of change (overview/logic model) that connects desired outcomes with actions and provides a rational for those connection as identified in the evaluation and monitoring section.

Having an agreement on the preferred future (vision) and a clear sense of purpose is critical for community buy-in and sustaining momentum.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ONGOING ENGAGMENTS

Ongoing discussions, consultations, and engagement with key stakeholders are essential for the success of a project. These stakeholders include youth at risk, individuals with lived experience, families and caregivers, Indigenous communities, and local organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, program staff and funders can gain a comprehensive understanding of their realities and experiences related to the project, including local strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. This community input can supplement quantitative data from surveys or local data and may reveal new information not previously captured in other sources. Successful engagements are a continuous and collaborative process that require consistent effort and communication.

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENTS

There are several types of engagements with varying purposes.

Type	Purpose
Informational	To educate and inform participants so they can make informed decisions and provide feedback.
Consultative	To gather community perspectives, experiences, and ideas to inform decision-making.
Collaborative	To network and build partnerships with community members, organizations, and stakeholders.
Empowerment	To foster the leadership skills and capacities of community members to affect change.
Co-Creation	To work alongside the community in the development of programs and processes and to share decision making.
Advocacy	To build momentum to promote policy and system changes to create lasting impact.

BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENTS

Meaningful engagement has many benefits, including:
- Building trust.
- Receiving information that may otherwise not readily be available.
- Ensuring stakeholders are informed about progress and challenges.
- Creating buy-in and soliciting support from local organizations and community members.
- Fostering and strengthening relationships with and among stakeholders.
- Strengthening communication about the Strategy.
- **Enhancing sustainability** (see sustainability plan).
- Providing information for the **evaluation** of the project (see evaluation plan).

DIFFERENT FORMS OF ENGAGEMENTS

There are many different approaches to engagement such as town hall events, focus groups, individual interviews (qualitative engagement), and surveys (quantitative engagements) to name a few. All these formats have value as well as advantages and challenges.

Qualitative Engagements

When conducting qualitative engagements, it is important to consider the unique needs of different populations. Some engagement methods may inadvertently privilege certain voices within a community, particularly those who hold more power or influence. Therefore, townhall meetings should be used sparingly, as they may not be the most effective way to engage with marginalized groups. Instead, engagement processes should be tailored to the population of focus to ensure that all voices are heard and that planning and implementation are grounded in lived experiences. Engagements that amplify the voices of marginalized groups help ensure their concerns and experiences are understood and that planning and implementation can be grounded in their lived and living experiences. This increases the likelihood that subsequent efforts will improve their lives, which is a key prevention aspect of any community safety strategy.

Quantitative Engagements

Aside from reviewing existing data, such as police-reported crime rates and Statistics Canada demographic information, many municipalities also gather information on victimization, perceptions of safety, and attitudes towards social development efforts through annual or bi-annual surveys. To prevent survey fatigue, these questions should be distributed in conjunction with other surveys. National survey approaches are often used to ensure questions are tested and produce valuable information, and to enable municipalities to compare their results with similar urban centres. Conducting annual/bi-annual surveys on experiences, perceptions, and attitudes related to community safety annually allows trends and changes to be monitored over time. The gathering of quantitative data should adhere to best practice guidelines for surveying populations and be carried out by individuals with expertise in survey methods and analysis.

Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods must adhere to the research ethics guidelines outlined in the considerations below.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENTS

The following are important considerations for engagements:
- Adhering to the principle of "Do No Harm", including:
  - Respect for Persons: the decision to participate should always be fully informed and voluntary.
  - Concern For Welfare: organizers should take every step to protect participants and prevent them from being exposed to unnecessary risks.

- Justice: all people must be treated equitably, with equal respect and concern for their well-being.
- Ensuring there are measures in place to address trauma that might be triggered through the engagement and keeping the space safe for all participants (i.e., counselling services on-site, pamphlets for resources, trauma informed facilitators, etc.).
- Having skilled and experienced facilitators run the session to ensure no one dominates the conversation and everyone has an opportunity to meaningfully participate.
- Ensuring participants are fully aware of who will be present at the session.
- Providing an opportunity for participants to share additional feedback following the session.
- Providing contact information for those who can respond to questions or concerns from attendees.
- Taking steps to increase accessibility to and during the session (e.g., childcare options, bus tickets, food, honoraria, considering the time and location, etc.).

WHO TO ENGAGE

While ultimately, the decision of who to engage will depend on the community and its composition, CMCNP proposes three general groups to consider when planning community engagements (in no particular order):
- local stakeholders, practitioners, and service providers;
- equity-deserving groups and people with lived/living experience; and
- other focused populations within the community with a connection to the issue or who are disproportionally affected by the issue.

In the context of gang and gun violence prevention, CMNCP recommends consultations and engagements with at least the following five groups:
- Youth experiencing increased risks.
- People with lived/living experiences.
- Families and caregivers.
- Indigenous communities.
- Local stakeholders, practitioners, and service providers (e.g., youth services, school board, etc.).

Youth Experiencing Increased Risks

Involving youth in creative activities to express their perspectives can be more effective than traditional engagement methods, such as focus groups. The photovoice approach is a tool commonly used with young people and it is best led by local youth-serving organizations that have established credibility with the local youth population. In a photovoice project focused on community safety, youth are asked to take photos of spaces they feel safe and comfortable, as well as areas that make them feel uneasy or unsafe. For each photo, they describe why they chose that location. The photos can then be compiled and shared through various channels, such as a website, art exhibits, newsletters, and other media.

Families & Caregivers

Family members and caregivers tend to have a greater understanding of children and youth than any professional. As a result, it is crucial to engage them throughout the prevention and early intervention strategy to ensure their input is included. At the same time, it is important that these conversations involve discussions around root causes, risk factors, and how to improve the lives of young people without making participants feel judged or stigmatized. Additionally, prior to any engagement, full transparency around the legal requirement to report any mention of abuse or neglect of a child to the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) is vital.

People with Lived/Living Experience

Engaging individuals with lived and living experiences requires the involvement of a local organization that works closely with the target population, such as current and former gang-involved youth. If the engagement involves a mixed group of attendees, all participants should be made aware of who is in attendance (e.g., police) to create a safe environment. Additionally, honouraria are strongly recommended to compensate individuals with lived and living experience for their time and contribution to the project. Whenever possible, facilitators from organizations that have established trust with participants should lead or at least be present during the engagement. Facilitators in all engagement efforts, but especially those involving individuals with lived and living experience, should be trauma informed.

Indigenous Communities

Centering the voices of Indigenous peoples is crucial for obtaining buy-in among the surrounding Indigenous communities. To ensure cultural appropriateness and proper local protocols are followed (i.e., holding ceremony, smudging, and offering tobacco), engagement with Indigenous peoples should ideally be co-developed and facilitated by a local Indigenous community or organization. Recognizing the time and knowledge of participants not attending as part of a professional role can be done through honorariums. Before initiating any engagement with Indigenous groups, it is crucial to have training related to and awareness of the harm experienced by Indigenous populations due to colonial history, including residential schools.

Local Stakeholders, Practitioners, and Service Providers

Local stakeholders and individuals working in direct services possess crucial knowledge about the needs of the community and the populations they serve. They can offer valuable insight into strengths, challenges, and opportunities, as well as gaps in systems and services and how to address them. Therefore, it is important to engage them in consultations and engagement processes that are co-developed and facilitated by both the City of Vernon and the implementing organizations.

THE VALUE OF REGULAR ENGAGEMENTS

Consistent engagement is crucial to enhance the community's comprehension of the Gun and Gang Violence Prevention Strategy and promote continuous support. It can also result in quality

enhancements, promote long-term sustainability, and advance knowledge. Stewardship team members should frequently review and discuss the results of engagement efforts. Engagement activities should not be limited to the development of the Strategy but should continue throughout its implementation. Doing so will not only improve sustainability but also facilitate communication and evaluation efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CMNCP recommends that:

- The stewardship team, in collaboration with the City of Vernon, review its engagement process on an ongoing basis with an eye to best practices in engaging the community generally and marginalized populations more specifically.
- That all project leaders regularly engage with youth to ensure that actions are meaningful and relevant to them and are seen as value added.

COMMUNICATION

Community projects focusing on complex social challenges (such as the prevention of gun and gang violence) inevitably lead to changes in local awareness. This focus can generate both risks and opportunities.

RISKS

Funding for gun and gang violence increases the risk of public insecurity in various ways, such as:

- Exaggerating the prevalence of gun and gang violence beyond actual reality.
- Generating a feeling of hopelessness.
- Blaming youth, their families, and caregivers, especially those who face multiple risk factors like limited education and marginalization.
- Amplifying the notion that implementing social programs to prevent gun and gang violence is a lenient approach and ineffective in combating crime.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Strategy provides opportunities to share knowledge with community members and key stakeholders about risk and protective factors related to the prevention of gang and gun violence. This moment in the history of Vernon provides a chance to demonstrate that prevention can be both effective and cost efficient. It also is an opportunity to:

- Involve the community in prevention efforts.
- Strengthen prevention initiatives within current institutions.
- Instill hope and empower the community and its institutions to take charge of their safety.
- Collaborate with media to reduce unwarranted public fears.
- Promote positive images of children and young people.
- Strike a balance between enforcement and preventative measures.
- Increase community awareness of intergenerational trauma and its impact on Indigenous youth.

KEY AUDIENCES AND TOOLS

Communication messages should be designed based on the characteristics and communication preferences of different audiences.[7] Key audiences for this project likely include:

- Community Members

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[7] We use the terms "audiences", "community", and "stakeholders" instead of the more commonly used term "target groups". Target groups can have negative connotations for several reasons including: it may imply a one-way communication approach in which the sender of the message is actively trying to reach and influence a passive recipient. This approach can reinforce power dynamics and may be seen as paternalistic, especially if the targeted group is historically marginalized or disadvantaged. It can also be associated with tactics that aim to manipulate or exploit people's needs and desires, rather than genuinely engaging with them in a respectful and ethical manner.

- Elected Officials and Community Leaders
- Service Providers
- School Professionals
- Parents/Caregivers
- Youth

KEY MESSAGES

For communication to be impactful, all parties involved must reach a consensus on the essential messages to be conveyed regarding the Strategy. This reduces the risk of conflicting information that could lead to confusion. Consistent messaging also demonstrates to the public that partners are working together and are deliberate in their approach.

Potential Key Statements

The community of Vernon and its organizations can leverage multiple opportunities to avert young people from engaging in criminal activities, including gang and gun violence. They can also play a significant role in preventing victimization, as well as promoting prevention efforts and their importance.

Key Frames

How an issue and its solutions are framed significantly impacts how it is communicated, understood, and supported by the wider community. Positive framing tends to be more mobilizing than frames which focus only on the problem. This should not be confused with "spinning the truth" or making light of negative experiences. Rather, a combination of frames that include a clear problem definition, while also offering solutions, tend to be most effective in advancing appreciation of prevention projects.

Framing of key messages should include the following:
- Problem Frame (highlights the existence of a problem or issue)
- Conflict Frame (speaks to the existence of opposing views or interests)
- Human Interest Frame (focuses on personal stories and experiences)
- Responsibility Frame (assigns responsibility to those most able to achieve a positive impact)
- Solution Frame (emphasizes potential solutions to a problem including interventions, promising practices in prevention, evidence-informed approaches, and cost-effectiveness)

ROLE OF PARTNERS IN COMMUNICATION

The City of Vernon, as the funds holder, is ideally positioned to develop and execute a comprehensive communication strategy in partnership with the stewardship team. The primary objective of this strategy should be to mitigate potential risks and capitalize on opportunities

associated with this funding. To demonstrate that the well-being of young people in Vernon is a collective responsibility, it is crucial to disseminate messages not only through city communication channels, but also through mechanisms available to key stakeholders.

Ideally, the stewardship team, in partnership with the City of Vernon, will oversee all communication related to the strategy, including decisions on the overall project spokesperson, as well as who should be consulted or speak to specific aspects of the strategy. The stewardship team should also be responsible for filtering media inquiries and deciding who should speak with the media about which topic. Ideally, the stewardship team will engage local media proactively, rather than waiting until there is a need to react to an issue. Media can be powerful allies in advancing messages of prevention.

Collaboration among community organizations that receive funding is essential for effective dissemination of information about the project, including how their activities contribute to achieving project objectives. This can be accomplished through various means, such as word-of-mouth, social media, posters, newsletters, and more. While partners may contribute their individual expertise and experiences to specific project activities, it is crucial for all partners to **speak with one voice** when it comes to the strategy overall. Creating a unique identity or brand for the project and thereby setting it apart from any one organization (including the City of Vernon) goes a long way towards creating shared ownership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CMNCP recommends the stewardship team, together with the City of Vernon, develop a clear communication policy that outlines:

- Guidelines and procedures for how to communicate about the project.
- How to manage communication in a crisis.
- When and how to use social media.
- Internal (among project partners) and external (with the public) communication approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT SUCCESS

The International Center for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) and UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme, among other organizations, have consistently identified the critical factors required for successful strategic planning and implementation. Based on their insights and experiences from both Canadian and international contexts, the essential components for successful projects are outlined below.

BACKBONE POSITION

Coordinating efforts across multiple stakeholders is a time-consuming process that cannot be achieved through ad hoc additions to existing roles. As a result, establishing or assigning a position to lead the work is a crucial element for success. The primary responsibility of that person is to facilitate the mobilization of systems and community interactions and serve as a catalyst for change.

EVIDENCE AND GOOD INFORMATION

A multi-disciplinary body of knowledge on gun and gang violence, its multiple causes, along with promising and proven prevention approaches is growing. While implementation inevitably must be grounded in community context and wisdom, there are many well-established data sources that can guide implementation activities (e.g., CrimeSolutions.Gov, Public Safety's Canada Crime Prevention Inventory). The more local communities can ground their decisions in existing data the more likely they are to generate solutions that work.

CHAMPIONSHIP

Championing is a critical component in driving a tipping point toward positive change. The advocacy of local leaders, including mayors, city councillors, Elders, ministers, and others, for prevention approaches and community projects can generate significant support.

MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Gun and gang violence prevention, as well as youth resilience, are complex areas and no single system has all the solutions. Establishing an ongoing structure of key partners with capacity to contribute to the reduction of conditions that lead to gang involvement and violence will be vital for the successful implementation of a strategy. This role should be played by the project stewardship team to ensure effective collaboration approaches that maximize local resources and capitalize on local strengths.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CMNCP recommends that the City of Vernon, in collaboration with the stewardship team and project leads, follows the guidelines for project success in community safety, as developed by the UN and others.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES FOR FUNDING FROM PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA

Eligible activities must support the achievement of BSCF objectives and must be domestic in scope. This includes:

- Development of a strategy on gun and gang violence
- Development and delivery of prevention intervention initiatives addressing risk factors associated with gun and gang violence, including but not limited to mentoring, counselling, skills development and recreational opportunities;
- Development or enhancement of data systems to support data gathering/reporting on gun and gang crime or on results achieved;
- Development of knowledge to fill gaps at the community/recipient level, including research, and sharing of information and/or best practices related to gun and gang violence;
- Outreach and recruitment of preventative initiatives or intervention participants;
- Public awareness and education;
- Collaboration and integration of horizontal initiatives related to gun and gang violence;
- Development of a plan to sustain successful preventative initiatives or intervention activities beyond the end of the contribution agreement;
- Any other prevention and intervention initiatives as developed in consultation with the program authority.

APPENDIX 2: DATA REVIEW

Bylaw Compliance

For more information on Bylaw, consult Vernon's Official City Plan at https://www.vernon.ca/homes-building/neighbourhood-planning/official-community-plan.

Vernon's Official Community Plan (OCP) defines the vision of the community–how the community sees itself growing and developing in the future and ultimately what kind of place Vernon will be. This community driven vision is balanced with Vernon's expected population growth, opportunities for development and the availability of resources for infrastructure projects.

Calls for Service and File Types

The Vernon Protective Services 2022 Year End Report shows that Bylaw Compliance Investigations and Calls for Service for the year 2022 increased by 7% in the total number of files investigated over the previous year (5354 to 5727). The primary contributing factors affecting the increase included a 21% increase (2055 to 2491) in Parks and Public Places files and a 32% increase (1481 to 1960) in files related to the Street Entrenched Population Target Analysis (SEPTA).

Year	File Count	Change over Previous Year
2018	6102	29.2%
2019	6774	11.0%
2020	6148	-9.2%
2021	5354	-12.9%
2022	5727	7.0%

The table below provides an overview of the Bylaw Compliance Complaints by file type in 2022. The most common file types were Parks and Public Places (2491) as well as Traffic (1580). Over half (52%) of all complaints were public calls for service.

	Business License	Traffic	Refuse Collect	False Alarms	Noise	Pan Handle	Prop. Maint.	Zoning	Parks & Public Places	Fire Service	Misc.	Total
Bylaw Generated Complaints	11	68	12	0	6	60	5	6	1805	11	52	2036 35.5%
COV Staff Generated Complaints	6	93	5	0	1	0	10	5	165	9	53	347
Public Calls for Service	27	1402	58	0	133	46	302	212	497	47	288	3012 52.6%

RCMP Transfer or Assist	0	17	0	269	3	2	0	1	24	0	16	332 5.8%
Total	44	1580	75	269	143	108	317	224	2491	67	409	5727

Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) Related Files

The Protective Services 2022 Year End Report provides an overview of Downtown BIA related files. The table below shows there was a 55.8% increase in Bylaw generated calls and a 7.5% decrease in public calls for service. In total, there was a 14.8% increase (634 to 728) in BIA files. The most common file types in 2022 were related to traffic (149), prohibited use of City facilities and parks (120), and substance use (111).

Call Origin	2021	2022	Percent Change
Bylaw Generated	197	307	55.8%
COV Staff Generated	39	49	25.6%
Public Calls for Service	388	359	-7.5%
RCMP Transferred	10	13	30%

Parks and Public Places Files

In 2022, Parks and Public Places Bylaw related files increased by 21.2% over 2021 (2055 to 2491). The most common file types were temporary shelters (1171), followed by substance use (464) and miscellaneous such as found property/prohibited use (352).

File Type	Number
Fight / Confrontation	9
Fires in a Public Place	68
Mental Health	68
Miscellaneous (Found property/Prohibited use)	352
Referred to Public Works or Contractor	108
Rubbish Clean Up	143
Safety/Security (Warrants/RCMP Assist)	88
Substance Related (Drugs, Alcohol, Sharps)	464
Temporary Shelters	1171
Urinate/Defecate in Public	8
Vandalism	43
TOTAL	2491

Bylaw Compliance Street Entrenched Person Target Analysis (SEPTA) Files

According to the Protective Services 2022 Year End Report, Bylaw Compliance utilizes the RCMP's definition of Street Entrenched in order to "standardize reporting to aid in interagency

communications and file follow-up. All Bylaw Compliance files relating to the street entrenched population are referenced as Street Entrenched Population Target Analysis (SEPTA)".

SEPTA files include all calls for service where concerns relate to drugs, alcohol, sharps, paraphernalia, temporary overnight shelters, encampments, panhandling, personal security related complaints, mental health, urinating/defecating in public or damage and vandalism to public facilities is reported or witnessed. The table below shows the SEPTA file count.

Year	Bylaw Department Yearly File Count	SEPTA Files to Year End	Percentage of Total Files
2021	5354	1481	27.7%
2022	5727	1960	34.2%

Childhood Development (EDI)

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a tool that collects data providing insights into the healthy development of children.[xii] The EDI questionnaire was developed by Dr. Dan Offord and Dr. Magdalena Janus at the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, but is used across jurisdictions, including in British Columbia. EDI data show that avoidable and persistent inequalities in children's developmental health and well-being exist in BC and have been sustained over time. Inequalities in children's well-being arise because of social inequity in the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.

The section below outlines the data from EDI collected between 2016 and 2019 in the Vernon School District (SD22) and at the provincial level. The full report is available here.

Demographics

	School District 22	British Columbia
Total EDI	543	43,377
Student Mean Age	5.63	5.64
# Males	305	22,260
# Females	238	21,117
# English Language Learners	16	8,356
# Special Needs	24	1,680

EDI Vulnerability Scale

Based on the EDI instrument, vulnerable children are those who, without additional support and care, are more likely to experience future challenges in their school years and beyond. Vulnerability is determined using a cut-off for each EDI scale. At the provincial level, the current vulnerability rate for children Vulnerable on One or More Scales of the EDI is 33.4%. This means that 14,468 Kindergarten students in the province start school with vulnerability in one or more areas of their development. These vulnerabilities may have an influence on their future success and well-being. In Vernon, 32% of children are vulnerable on at least one area of development as measured by the EDI between 2016 and 2019. The table shows vulnerability rates and the corresponding number of children vulnerable across each of the five EDI scales.

Category	% Vulnerable	# of Children
Physical Health and Well-being Children's gross and fine motor skills, physical independence, and readiness for the school day such as motor control, energy level, daily preparedness for school and washroom independence.	16%	89
Social Competence Children's overall social competencies, capacity for respect and responsibility, approaches to learning, and readiness to explore new things.	17%	91
Emotional Maturity Children's prosocial and helping behaviours, as well as hyperactivity and inattention, and aggressive, anxious, and fearful behaviour.	18%	97
Language & Cognitive Development Children's basic and advanced literacy skills, numeracy skills, interest in math and reading, and memory.	12%	67
Communication Skills & General Knowledge Children's English language skills and general knowledge, e.g., ability to clearly communicate their needs, participate in story-telling, and general interest in the world.	14%	78

The table below demonstrates a breakdown per neighbourhood of the percentage of children who are vulnerable on one or more scales of the EDI in School District 22. Vernon – West and Lumby – Cherryville have the highest rate of EDI vulnerability among children.

Neighbourhood	# of Children	Vulnerable on One or more Scales of the EDI	
		% Vulnerable	# of Children Vulnerable
Coldstream	95	22%	21
Lumby – Cherryville	88	31%	27
Vernon – East	103	27%	28
Vernon – Okanagan Lake	73	29%	21
Vernon – Southeast	64	27%	17
Vernon – West	120	52%	62
TOTAL (Vernon)	543	32%	176

Crime and Victimization

Police Calls for Service

Between January 1st to December 31st, 2019, the Vernon North Okanagan RCMP received 30,713 calls for service. Between January and December 2022, they received 31,172 calls for service, representing a 1.49% increase from 2019. The graphs below show the 2022 top 20 calls for service for the Vernon/Coldstream Detachment and the North Rural Detachment.

Vernon/Coldstream Detachment

Category	Value
TRAFF	1735
THEFT	1579
UNWANT	1529
ASSOA	1470
CHECK	1418
ALARMS	1329
DISTB	986
PROP	974
SUSPC	906
MVI	794
SUSPP	764
ASSGP	652
AB911	651
MISCH	619
OCC	521
DOMRPT	452
MISSING	434
THREAT	426
FRAUD	408
HAZARD	407

North Rural Detachment

Category	Value
TRAFF	1363
ASSOA	903
MVI	446
ALARMS	413
CHECK	407
PROP	357
ASSGP	322
SUSPC	314
THEFT	292
DISTB	286
AB911	231
ASLT	203
MISCH	197

Between January 1st and December 31st, 2022, the Vernon RCMP registered 2,322 criminal charges compared to 2,527 in 2019. This represents an 8.1% decrease. There was also a 23.9% decrease of prisoners held in 2022 (1,376) compared to 2019 (1,809).

	2019	2022
Criminal Charges	2,527	2,322
Prisoners Held	1,809	1,376

The most recent data for 2022 was provided by the RCMP in the 4th Quarter Report (October to December 2022).[xiii] The table below highlights the total number of calls for service with Criminal Code offences and property crime extracted for the 4th quarter as well as the cumulative number for year to date.

Category	Vernon		Coldstream		Vernon Rural	
	Q4	YTD	Q4	YTD	Q4	YTD
Calls for Service	4,594	19,590	321	1,414	413	1,731
% change	-14.1%	-6.5%	-15.7%	-15.3%	-13.7%	-7.5%
Criminal Code	1,314	5,854	50	314	54	248
% change	-16.7%	-0.03%	-30.5%	-8.7%	-30.7%	-22.9%
Property Offences	698	3,398	28	188	27	157
% change	-25.5%	-4.2%	-46.1%	-5.5%	-49.1%	-16.9%

The table below indicates total charges forwarded to the Vernon Crown Counsel, total prisoners held in the Vernon cell block, and total interventions by Vernon North Okanagan Police Dog Service. Vernon North Okanagan Detachment continues to track files associated to the street entrenched populations (SEPTA files).

	Vernon/Coldstream		North Okanagan	
Category	Q4	YTD	Q4	YTD
Charges Forwarded	495	2,050	71	272
Prisoners	269	1,220	38	156
FDS Interventions	14	48	6	18
SEPTA Files	40	758	N/A	N/a

Police-Reported Crime Statistics[xiv]

The table below shows police-reported crime statistics in Vernon for all Criminal Code violations between 2017 and 2021. The overall rate of police-reported crime statistics in Vernon decreased slightly between 2019 and 2021. The rate of youth charged (all violations combined) decreased significantly over the past five years, going from 2,387 in 2017 to 855.03 in 2021.

Total, All Violations, 2017 – 2021					
Violations	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Actual incidents	5,081	5,620	7,503	6,709	6,508
Rate per 100,000 population	12,032.02	13,141.28	17,303.97	15.175.99	14,489.27
Percentage change in rate	-8.22%	9.22%	31.68%	-12.30%	-4.53%
Percent unfounded	8.05%	8.36%	7.61%	7.88%	5.24%
Total, adult charged	890	911	1,036	940	789
Rate, adult charged per 100,000 population aged 18 years and over	2,534.17	2,559.56	2,867.11	2,550.12	2,107.99
Total, youth charged	58	27	34	27	22
Rate, youth charged per 100,000	2,387.81	1,105.65	1,386.62	1,073.99	855.03

population aged 12 to 17 years					

With regards to violent crime, the rate per 100,000 population has increased consistently over the past five years, reaching 2,273.13 in 2021. The highest rate was recorded in 2019 (2,661.44), which represented a 47% increase from the previous year. The rate of youth (12 to 17 years) charged decreased by 50% over the past five years but increased slightly between 2020 and 2021.

Total Violent Criminal Code Violations, 2017 – 2021					
Violations	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Actual incidents	648	777	1,154	1,041	1,021
Rate per 100,000 population	1,534.49	1,816.86	2,661.44	2,354.78	2,273.13
Percentage change in rate	-13.0%	18.40%	46.49%	-11.52%	-3.47%
Percent unfounded	13.37%	16.99%	15.52%	13.68%	8.84%
Total, adult charged	214	232	272	275	275
Rate, adult charged per 100,000 population aged 18 years and over	609.34	651.83	752.75	746.05	734.72
Total, youth charged	26	8	17	10	13
Rate, youth charged per 100,000 population aged 12 to 17 years	1,070.40	327.60	693.31	397.77	505.25

There were very few incidents related to firearms in Vernon between 2017 and 2021. The lowest rate was recorded in 2018 (4.68), while 2019 and 2021 recorded the highest rates (13.84 and 13.36 respectively). No youth were charged for firearm-related offences in the past five years.

Total firearms, use of, discharge, pointing, 2017 – 2021					
Violations	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Actual incidents	5	2	6	4	6
Rate per 100,000 population	11.84	4.68	13.84	9.05	13.36
Percentage change in rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Percent unfounded	0.00%	33.33%	14.29%	0.00%	0.00%
Total, adult charged	0	1	4	4	3
Rate, adult charged per 100,000 population aged 18 years and over	0.00	2.81	11.07	10.85	8.02
Total, youth charged	0	0	0	0	0
Rate, youth charged per 100,000 population aged 12 to 17 years	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Crime Severity Index[xv]

The Crime Severity Index in Vernon has decreased since 2019 for all types of crime (general, violent crime, and non-violent crime). The general Crime Severity Index in Vernon reached 140.32 in 202, compared to 151.37 in 2020.

Crime Severity Index, 2017 – 2021					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Crime Severity Index	127.72	137.82	169.51	151.37	140.32
Percent Change in	-15.33%	7.91%	22.99%	-10.70%	-7.30%

Crime Severity Index					
Violent Crime Severity Index	115.00	117.94	137.50	135.38	112.35
Percent Change in Violent Crime Severity Index	5.27%	2.56%	16.58%	-1.54%	-17.01%
Non-Violent Crime Severity Index	131.99	144.64	180.63	156.77	150.05
Percent Change in Non-Violent Crime Severity Index	-20.22%	9.58%	24.88%	-13.21%	-4.29%

Demographics

Population Size and Growth

While both the provincial population and the population of Vernon increased slightly between 2016 and 2021, the increase was higher in Vernon (11.0) compared to British Columbia (7.6). According to the 2020 Community Profile, Vernon has seen steady growth over the past 20 years with total population now 21.6% larger than it was 25 years ago. Looking ahead, "the city expects steady growth, with the region anticipated to add another 18% or more than 15,000 new residents over the next twenty-five years".[xvi]

	Vernon	British Columbia
Population, 2021	44,519	5,000,879
Population, 2016	40,116	4,648,055
Population percentage change, 2016 to 2021	11.0	7.6

Family Characteristics

In 2021, Vernon had a similar average family size (2.6) than British Columbia (2.8) and Canada (2.9). Furthermore, the number of lone parent families are similar between Vernon (17%), British Columbia (15%), and Canada (16%). In all three locations, more than 75% of lone parents are women.

	Vernon	British Columbia	Canada
Total number of families	12,485	1,399,405	10,262,925
Average size of families	2.6	2.8	2.9
Total couple families	10,330 (83%)	1,190,405 (85%)	8,576,585 (84%)
Total one-parent families	2,155 (17%)	208,475 (15%)	1,686,340 (16%)
Woman	1,690 (78%)	161,820 (78%)	1,302,670 (77%)
Man	465 (22%)	46,655 (22%)	383,670 (23%)

Age Characteristics

In 2021, Vernon had an older population than the province of British Columbia and the country. The average age was 47.2 in Vernon, compared to 43.1 in British Columbia and 41.9 across Canada. The median age in Vernon was 49.2, compared to 42.8 in British Columbia and 41.6 in Canada.

	Vernon	British Columbia	Canada
Age (average)	47.2 years	43.1 years	41.9 years
Age (median)	49.2 years	42.8 years	41.6 years
0 to 14 years	6,030 (13.5%)	716,900 (14.3%)	6,012,795 (16.3%)
15 to 29 years	6,390 (14.3%)	885,430 (17.7%)	6,636,740 (17.9%)
30 to 44 years	7,775 (17.4%)	1,031,675 (20.6%)	7,429,585 (20%)
45 to 59 years	8,225 (18.4%)	995,385 (19.9%)	7,319,850 (19.8%)
60 to 74 years	10,015 (22.5%)	946,900 (18.9%)	6,630,135 (17.9%)
75+ years	6,080 (13.6%)	424,595 (8.5%)	2,962,870 (8%)

Diversity and Immigration Status

In 2021 there was a lower percentage of immigrants in Vernon (12.4%) compared to British Columbia (29%) and Canada (23%). Furthermore, 7.3% of Vernon's residents identified as Indigenous, compared to 5.9% across the province and 5% country wide. Visible minorities represent 8.0% of Vernon's total population, lower than the provincial and national rate.

	Vernon	British Columbia	Canada
Non-immigrant	37,300 (86.5%)	3,319,230 (67.5%)	27,042,120 (74.4%)
Immigrant	5,345 (12.4%)	1,425,710 (29%)	8,361,505 (23%)
Non-permanent resident	470 (1.1%)	171,000 (3.5%)	924,850 (2.5%)
Non-Indigenous	60.440 (%)	4,625,735 (94%)	34,521,230 (95%)
Indigenous	3,150 (7.3%)	290,210 (5.9%)	1,807,250 (5%)
Visible minority	3,465 (8.0%)	1,689,490 (34.4%)	9,639,205 (26.5%)

Education

School District 22 Enrolment

Vernon's public schools are administered by School District 22, which serves the communities of Vernon, Coldstream, Lavington, Lumby, and Cherryville. SD22 currently includes 17 elementary schools, 5 secondary schools, an alternate school, and an online learning school.[xvii] The enrolment rate in 2020/21 was 8,174. The enrolment projection indicates an increase in enrolment from 8,400 in 2021 to 8,705 by 2031, a decrease of 214 at the elementary level and an increase of 524 at the secondary level.[xviii]

The table below shows the enrolment projection of elementary and secondary schools for SD22 from 2021 to 2031.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Elementary (K to 7)	5020	4955	4986	4997	4990	4940	4921	4897	4866	4863	4861
Secondary (8 to 12)	3378	3509	3590	3673	3717	3754	3775	3817	3861	3858	3844
Total (K to 12)	8398	8464	8576	8670	8707	8694	8696	8713	8727	8721	8705

Education Level

With regards to education levels, in 2021, over 80% of Vernon residents had attained at least a high school diploma. 52.8% of Vernon residents had a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree compared with 57% at the provincial level.

	Vernon	British Columbia
No certificate, diploma, or degree	5,790 (15.6%)	565,665 (13.5%)
Secondary/High school diploma/Equivalency	11,655 (31.4%)	1,238,000 (29.5%)
Apprenticeship or trade certificate or diploma	3,805 (10.2%)	323,635 (7.7%)
College, CEGEP, or other non-university diploma	8,140 (21.9%)	711,810 (16.9%)
University certificate or diploma or degree below bachelor level	1,230 (3.3%)	161,600 (3.8%)
Bachelor's degree level or above	6,465 (17.4%)	1,199,710 (28.6%)

Education Workshops for Youth

CMHA Vernon provides youth workshops on various topics to students in SD22. The table below provides a breakdown of some of the workshops offered between October 2021 and January 2023.

Date	Duration	# Participants	Topic of Workshop
29-Oct-21	2 Hours	9 Participants	Anxiety and Mindfulness
7-Nov-21	1.25	7	Anxiety and Mindfulness
22-Jan-11	1.5	7	Stigma
22-Jan-25	1	5	Anger Management
22-Jan-28	2	9	Stigma
Feb.12.22	1	9	Mental Health Resources
Feb.15.22	1	12	Self-esteem
feb.22.22	1	12	Substance Use
Feb.23.22	1	30	Anger Management
1-Mar-22	1.5	28	Anxiety and Mindfulness
3-Mar-22	1.5	24	Substance Use
10-Mar-22	1.5	18	Anxiety
14-Mar-22	1.5	18	Anxiety and Mindfulness

Date	Hours	Number	Topic
17-Mar-22	1.5	6	Zoom
24-Mar-22	1.5	7	Zoom
31-Mar-22	1.5	4	Zoom
4-Apr-22	1.5	23	Stigma
5-Apr-22	1.5	24	Anxiety and Mindfulness
5-Apr-22	1.5	20	Anxiety and Mindfulness
11-Apr-22	1.5	23	Anger Management
19-Apr-22	2	9	Mental Health and Exercise Workshop
21-Apr-22	1.5	21	Self-worth
21-Apr-22	1.5	22	Self-worth
25-Apr-22	1.5	21	Self-worth
29-Apr-22	3	4	Laser tag
30-Apr-22	2.5	2	Swimming
30-Apr-22	2.5	2	Bowling
3-May-22	1.5	23	Substance Use
10-May-22	1.5	6	Intro to Anxiety
17-May-22	1.5	24	Community Resources for Youth
20-May-22	1.5	36	Stigma x2
24-May-22	1.5	10	Mindfulness Introduction
27-May-22	3	5	Movies
28-May-22	3	1	Painting in Park
28-May-22	3	4	Movies
30-May-22	1.5	22	Anger Management
30-May-22	1.5	15	Anger Management
1-Jun-22	2	21	Grade 10 career class- Anxiety
3-Jun-22	1.5	21	Stigma
3-Jun-22	1.5	17	Stigma
15-Jun-22	2	5	LGBTQS2+ Mental health resources/support
2-Aug-22	1.5	7	Anxiety and Mindfulness
18-Aug-22	2	2	Anxiety and Mindfulness
3-Oct-22	1.5	54	Anxiety and Mindfulness Workshop
3-Oct-22	1.5	82	Anxiety and Mindfulness Workshop
6-Oct-22	1.5	20	Living Life To The Full Session 5
7-Oct-22	1	9	Integrated Service Hub-Youth input.
11-Oct-22	1	21	Anxiety and Mindfulness
13-Oct-22	1.5	20	Living Life to The Full Session 6
17-Oct-22	1.5	16	Anxiety and Mindfulness
18-Oct-22	1.5	19	Self Worth
20-Oct-22	1.5	20	Living Life to The Full Session 7

21-Oct-22	2	3	Boarding House Café
24-Oct-22	1.5	19	Stigma
27-Oct-22	1.5	18	Living Life To The Full Session 8
8-Nov-22	1	15	Anger Management
9-Nov-22	1.5	22	Anxiety and Mindfulness
22-Nov-22	1	17	Stigma
23-Nov-22	1.5	15	Anxiety and Mindfulness
25-Nov-22	2	2	Bowling/Social Responsibility
13-Dec-22	1	12	Substance Use
14-Dec-22	1.5	23	Anger Management
17-Dec-22	2	2	Ratio Coffee Shop
21-Dec-22	2	15	Anxiety and Mindfulness
21-Dec-22	1.5	4	Team Building
11-01-2023	1.5	24	Stigma
12-01-2023	1.5	24	Substance Use and Harm Reduction

Health

The Interior Health region is divided into local health areas (LHAs) – geographic areas defined by the Ministry of Health. Each year, Interior Health publishes LHA profile reports which provide information about the area's population, health status, and how often health services are used. The section below outlines some relevant health-related data for the Vernon LHA in 2021.
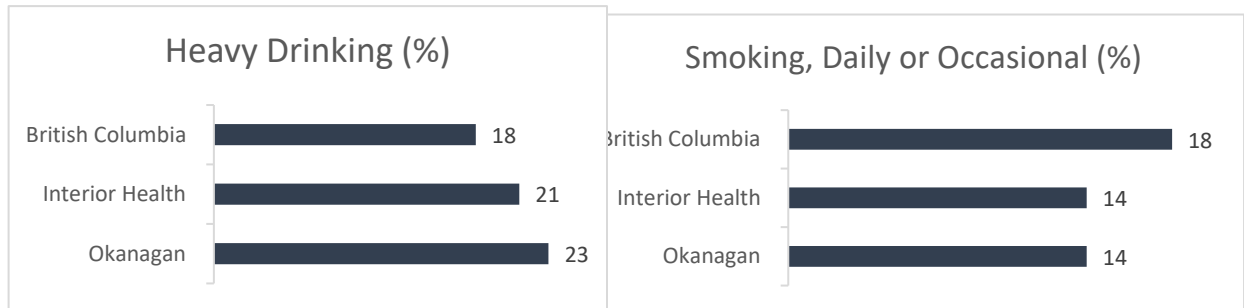
Health Service Indicators

Vernon residents have access to a variety of healthcare services, with Vernon Jubilee Hospital offering acute and emergency care, ambulatory care, medicine, and surgery, psychiatry, maternity, and pediatrics. The table below shows that three public and community health centres located in the Vernon LHA. These centres provide mental health and addictions services, public health nursing, aboriginal health, home, and community care programs, residential and assisted living facilities, as well as laboratory and diagnostic services. A variety of other health-related services, practitioners and clinics are also available in Vernon.[xix]

Description	Vernon LHA	Central Okanagan LHA
Local Health Area – 2019 Population	69,716	201,532
Number of Hospitals	1	1
Number of Teaching Hospitals	0	1
Number of Hospital Beds	186	400
Community Health Centres	1	1
Public Health Centres	2	3
Physicians per Capita	136	110
Specialists per Capita	106	99
Supplementary Practitioners per Capita	201	145

Drinking and Smoking Habits

The graphs below provide data on self-reported drinking and smoking habits for individuals aged 12+. A higher rate of individuals reported drinking heavily in the Interior Health region (21%) compared to the province (18%), but a lower rate of individuals reported smoking in the Interior Health region (14%) compared to British Columbia (18%).[xx] In 2016, the Centre for Addictions Research of BC released a report on the consumption of alcoholic drinks per capita. In the Vernon LHA, residents reported drinking an average of 1.8 alcoholic drinks per day, compared to 1.5 in BC.[xxi]

Heavy Drinking (%)		Smoking, Daily or Occasional (%)	
British Columbia	18	British Columbia	18
Interior Health	21	Interior Health	14
Okanagan	23	Okanagan	14

Maternal and Infant Health

According to the Vernon Community Health Profile (2021), pregnancy and childbirth have a significant impact on the physical, mental, emotional, and socioeconomic health of women and their families. Pregnancy-related health outcomes are influenced by a woman's health and other factors such as income, age, race, and ethnicity.[xxii]

Between 2011 and 2015, the infant mortality rate (< 1 year old) in the Vernon LHA was the same as the British Columbia average rate (4 per 1,000 live births). The rate of low-birth-weight babies was slightly lower in Vernon (54 per 1,000 live births) than the BC average (58 per 1,000 live births).

Birth	Vernon LHA	BC
Infant Mortality (< 1 year old)	4	4
Low Birth Weight	54	58

Mental Health

Self-Reported Mental Health Statistics

In 2015-2016, 68.4% of Okanagan HSDA population (aged 12 and up) reported very good or excellent mental health. In 2015, 874 people in Vernon LHA were newly diagnosed with depression or anxiety. Because these figures are based on diagnosis, they do not capture individuals who have not sought medial help or support.[xxiii]

MHSU Beds Availability and Clients

Interior Health offers an array of community, acute, and tertiary Mental Health and Substance Use (MHSU) services to people with mild, moderate, or severe mental illnesses. The table below shows the number of mental health and substance use beds available in the Vernon Local Health Area (this number excludes room count, supported independent living beds, and BC Housing Unit and Provincial Health beds).[xxiv] In 2021, there was a total of 28 active MHSU clients per 1,000 population.

Type of Beds	Description	Number
Community	Delivered in private homes, retirement communities, residential or long-term care homes, and community clinics.	115
Acute	Delivers necessary treatment for disease or severe episode of illness for a short period of time.	17
Tertiary	Delivers highly specialized services designed for individuals with severe illness that have not responded to treatment.	12

The table below shows the number of MHSU Community Active Clients by Core Service between 2018 and 2021. Active clients in MHSU community data are clients who had at least one service day in the fiscal year reported. There was a decrease in active clients in all core services between 2018 and 2021. The most used services are crisis response.[xxv]

Core Service	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Access	809	693	564
Counselling & Treatment Services	369	419	335
Intensive Care Management	61	68	52
MHSU Crisis Response	642	609	638
Seniors MHSU Services	234	205	196
Substance Use Counselling & Treatment Services	374	379	275
Treatment, Support, & Recovery	359	362	345

Substance Use

In June 2019, Vernon launched its [Harm Reduction and Opioid Overdose Response Strategy](#) which includes an overview of key challenges in the community and recommendations. The development of the Strategy was based on community engagements, including consultations with 15 Indigenous peers with lived experience of opioid misuse, 12 family members with loved ones active in their substance misuse, 21 peers active in their substance misuse, 5 peers in recovery from opioid misuse, 25 partner organizations, and a survey (57 responses).[xxvi] The findings and recommendations are outlined below.

Top Issues Identified
• Stigma and shame associated with substance misuse
• Lack of cultural supports and inclusion across all programs and services
• Lack of treatment and recovery options
• Transitions between programs/supports
• Lack of access to harm reduction supplies

Flowing from the engagement gathering processes, several recommendations emerged including ones specific to Indigenous culture. The recommendations were prioritized and themed based on the type of action required –education, training, resources, and services. The recommendations have all been linked back to the harm reduction focus areas to support a collaborative and cross-sectoral approach to addressing the opioid crisis in Vernon.

EDUCATION	
Peer Recommendation	Focus Area
Effective opportunities for engagement, education and training for peers requires face to face invitations from service providers in order to establish rapport and relationships. This may require repeated action from service providers.	Treatment/Referral Intervention Social Stabilization
Develop anti-stigma campaigns for the public to breakdown the shame and stigma experienced among peers, employers, family, and community	Intervention Social Stabilization
Provide increased education in the school system to support students with emotional competency and resilient mental health	Prevention Intervention
Develop employer campaigns (in particular, high-risk occupations) that are peer-developed to provide compassion and understanding in the workplace	Social Stabilization

TRAINING	
Peer Recommendation	Focus Area
Provide cultural safety training to all service providers who are working in treatment, harm reduction or recovery programs and services	Intervention

Develop employee training and employment programs that support peers in returning to the workplace (e.g., graduated return to work program)	Social Stabilization
Continue compassion training for first responders including Fire, RCMP, Bylaw and Emergency Health Services	Social Stabilization
Provide ongoing access to Naloxone training	Treatment/Referral Intervention

SERVICES	
Peer Recommendation	**Focus Area**
Provide a balance in diversity for all cultures and representations of Indigenous people to reduce the feeling of being isolated and stigmatized	Treatment/Referral Intervention Social Stabilization
Increase the number and range of service providers and organizations who are familiar with treatment, harm reduction and recovery options in the community to ensure there is no wrong door to navigating supports	Treatment/Referral Intervention
Ensure there are a range of balanced supports for Indigenous men and women and introduce services that are directed to men such as the Moosehide Campaign, Dudes Club or Gathering Our Strength Program through the BCCDC	Intervention Social Stabilization
Create safe, clean public washrooms and storage facility to minimize the stress of loss of belongings and harm reduction supplies	Intervention Social Stabilization
Increase availability of withdrawal management supports including programs such as heroin maintenance and Overdose Agonist Therapy	Treatment/Referral Intervention Social Stabilization
Create more widely available and accessible programs for family members to support their healing and connection to others with shared experience (in particular for men)	Prevention Treatment/Referral Intervention Social Stabilization
Implement harm reduction supports and training for Vernon Jubilee Hospital employees through a peer support program built by peers to support them during times of crisis to reduce the stigma associated with opioid substance misuse (e.g., Victim Services or Hospital Volunteer based program)	Prevention Social Stabilization
Support peers in developing a peer employment program to support clean-up efforts and improve business relationships	Social Stabilization
Support peers to design and implement a Peer-to-Peer support program for wellness	Treatment/Referral Social Stabilization

RESOURCES	
Peer Recommendation	**Focus Area**
Include cultural representations in harm reduction supplies such as personal affirmations, pictures of sacred items, photocopy of daily	Intervention

elders' meditations, colouring pages of Indigenous culture, cards with spiritual/religious/cultural quotes, Prayer Rocks, small dream catchers, medicine bags, or tobacco ties	
Host a session with Elders, Indigenous leaders, traditional medicine people and service providers to develop a framework with best practices of what and how ceremonies, cultural practices, traditional medicine are best to be provided to people who are under the influence of mind-altering substances	Intervention
Support and train Elders to do outreach and be available at service provider locations for Indigenous people to connect with for guidance, teachings, and ceremony	Prevention Intervention Social Stabilization
Ensure service providers have a broad range of knowledge of Indigenous cultural programs and support services for Indigenous clients to facilitate referral and navigation of services; balance this by assuring Indigenous clients that they are also welcome at services for the general population and that they have choices in accessing services.	Prevention Intervention Social Stabilization
Develop early intervention criteria for children and youth regarding mental illness with wrap-around supports for families	Intervention
Review process map for accessing services to identify transition points and minimize/manage the transitions for people in recovery	Treatment/Referral Intervention Social Stabilization
Ensure local resource information is easy to access and available at every entry point (e.g., pharmacies, hospitals, doctor's offices, etc.)	Prevention
Increase connections with family physicians and service providers regarding community supports and services available to support people seeking recovery and who are active in recovery	Prevention Intervention Treatment/Referral Social Stabilization

RCMP Opioid Agonist Treatment Project

The Vernon RCMP has an Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) Project which includes referrals, education, and material distribution to support OAT. The table below shows results from the OAT project in 2022 reported by RCMP, based on a 2023 presentation to stakeholders in Vernon.

	Card Given	Referral Made	Video Shown	Kit Given
TOTAL (Jan - Dec 2022)	482	89	13	679

Drug Toxicity Deaths

The rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in Vernon has more than doubled between 2019 and 2022, as shown in the table below. With regards to harm reduction, Interior Health distributed 2,012 naloxone kits between January and September of 2019, and 554 people reported having used naloxone kits during that same period.

Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths (per 100,000), Vernon[xxvii]			
2019	2020	2021	2022
14	28	42	40

Homelessness

Point-in-Time Count

Each year, several communities across the country conduct a Point-in-Time homeless count. A Point-in-Time Count is a one-day snapshot of homelessness in communities that contributes to a national picture and advance the knowledge on homelessness. It provides a community-wide measure of homelessness, identifying service needs and informing plans to prevent and reduce homelessness. When completed over subsequent years, it can also be used to track changes in the homeless population over time and measure progress in reducing it.[xxviii]

The 2021 Point-in-Time Count occurred in Vernon on the evening of May 6th and the day of May 7th to help provide an overall snapshot of homelessness in the community. In total, 224 people were identified as experiencing homelessness, compared to 151 in 2019. Of those 224, 63% had been homeless for 1 year or more, while 25% had been homeless for under 6 months. Furthermore, 84% of respondents had been in the community for at least 1 year.[xxix]

Access to Shelter

Of the 224 people experiencing homelessness, 76% were sheltered the night of the count, while 24% were unsheltered. The table below shows where the unsheltered individuals stayed the night of the count.

Location	Percentage of Respondents
Outside	67%
Makeshift shelter/tent	13%
Vehicle	11%

Demographic Information

With regards to demographic information, 64% of respondents were men, 81% were adults between the age of 25 and 54, and 40% identified as Indigenous (compared to 7% of the general population). Among the respondents, 11% identified as 2SLGBTQ+ and 3% identified as having trans experience. Furthermore, 43% had experienced homelessness for the time as a youth, and 30% had been in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth agreement.
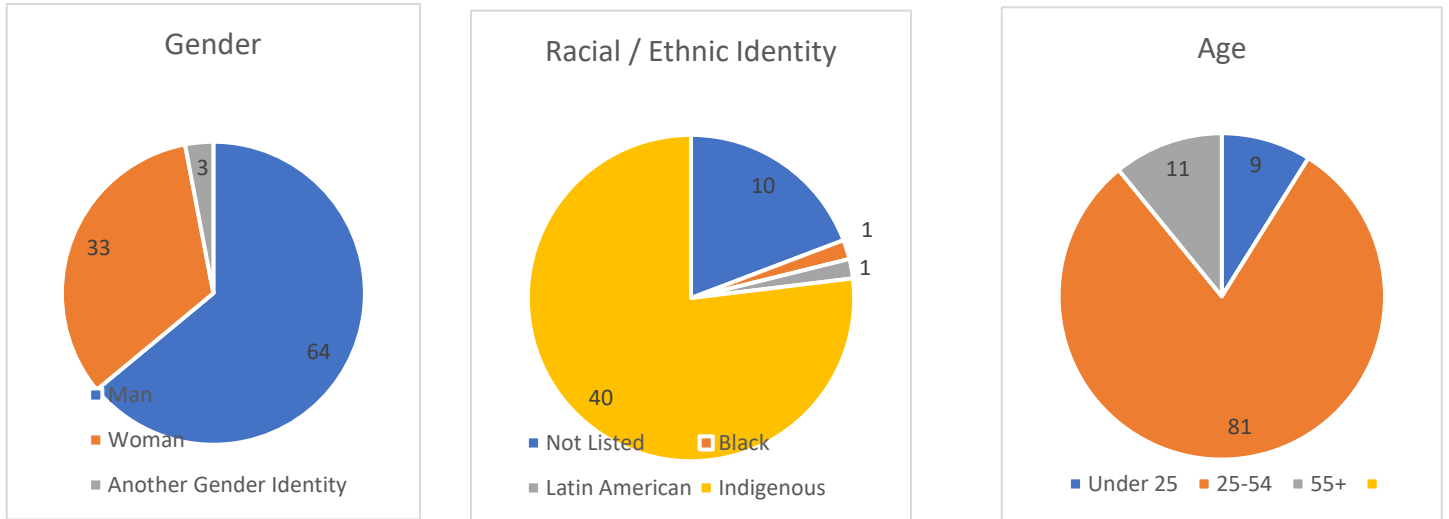

Reasons for Housing Loss

When asked about reasons for housing loss, the top answers were not enough income (39%), substance use issues (26%), and conflict with partner (23%). In total, 96% of respondents indicated having one or more sources of income, including:

- Income assistance: 62%
- Disability benefit: 34%
- Bottle collection: 21%

Services Accessed

The table below demonstrates the main services accessed by people experiencing homelessness in Vernon. The top 3 most popular services were food services (70%), followed by emergency room services (56%) and health clinic (55%).
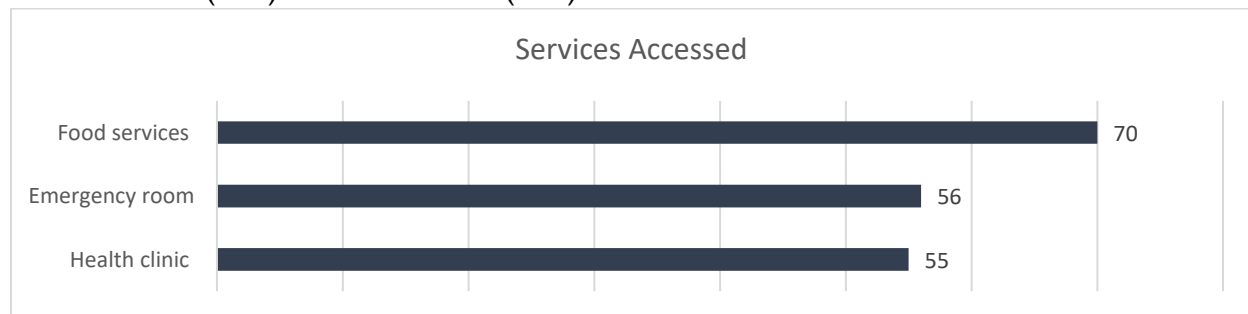
Respondents were also questioned about health concerns. Approximately 85% of respondents reported struggling with addiction and 63% had mental health challenges. Over 70% of respondents reported two or more health concerns.

Health Concerns
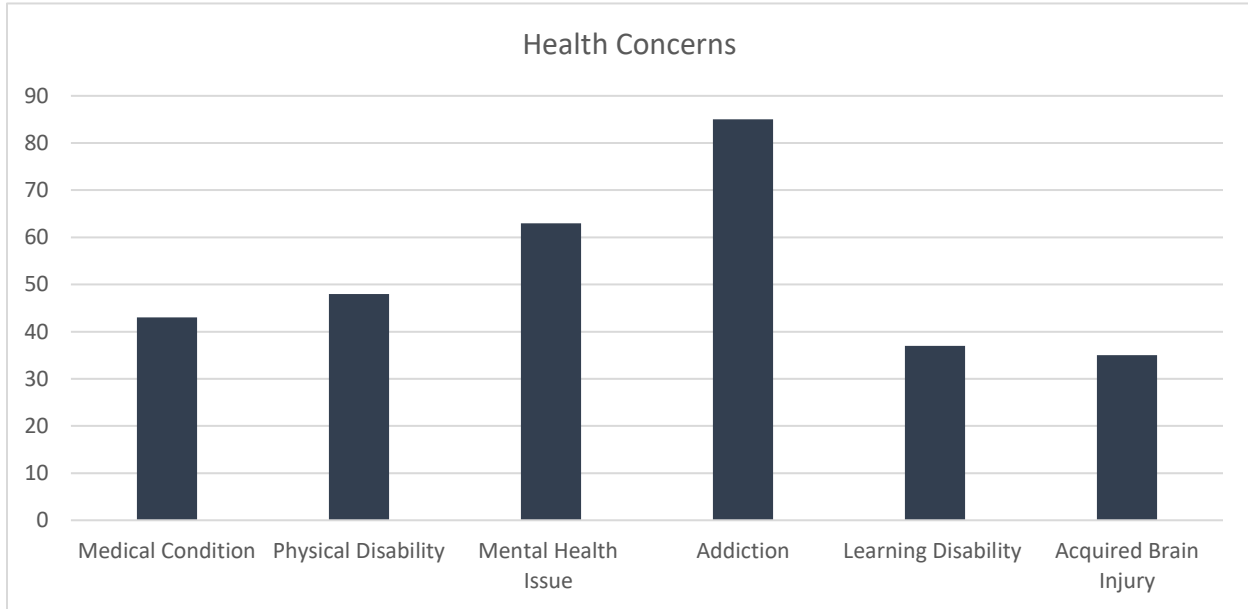
Housing

British Columbia is facing a housing crisis and severe housing affordability challenges. Data gathered from the 2021 census show that British Columbia rates as the most unaffordable province for housing in Canada. To learn more about Vernon's approach to strengthening responses to housing and homelessness, consult Moving Forward: Building Homes, Strengthening Community, which are Vernon's Housing and Homelessness Strategies.

Cost of Shelter

In Vernon, the average monthly cost of shelter is slightly lower than the provincial average. The most common rule of thumb to determine how much individuals can afford to spend on housing is that it should be no more than 30% of their gross monthly income. In 2021 approximately 15.3% of owner households and 42% of tenant households spent 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, compared to 19.3% and 37.8% in the rest of the province.[xxx]

Average Cost of Shelter (Monthly)		
	Vernon	British Columbia
Owner	$1,302	$1,668
Renter	$1,298	$1,494

The number of people who own their dwelling was the same in Vernon (66%) and in the province (66.8%) in 2021. There was a slightly lower percentage of individuals who lived in government or band housing within Vernon (0%) compared to the province of British Columbia (0.5%).[xxxi]

	Vernon	British Columbia
Owner	13,065 (66%)	1,363,190 (66.8%)
Renter	6,725 (34%)	669,450 (32.8%)
Government or Band Housing	0 (0%)	9,190 (0.5%)

Housing Stock

Single-detached homes make up most of the housing, representing 48% of all built housing in Vernon. As the city grows the mix of housing has been changing, with apartments and low/high rise buildings making up 33% of all housing and other dwelling types making up less than 1%.[xxxii]

Housing Stock, 2020	
Type of Dwelling	Number of Dwellings in Vernon
Houses	12,980
Apt. Building Low/High Rise	6,650
Other Dwelling Type	150
Total Dwellings	19,780

Income

In 2020, over 66% of households in Vernon earned a total income of less than $100,000. In 2020, the average household income in the City of Vernon was $97,100 an increase of almost 23% in the past five years. In Vernon, personal income is primarily derived from employment sources; however, like much of the Okanagan Valley, pension and investment income is also an important source given the prominence of retired residents who are drawn by the lifestyle amenities.[xxxiii]

	Vernon	British Columbia
Total number of private households	19,775	2,041,835
Under $5,000	150 (0.7%)	30,080 (1.5%)
$5,000 to $9,999	90 (0.5%)	13,160 (0.6%)
$10,000 to $14,999	160 (0.8%)	19,290 (0.9%)
$15,000 to $19,999	535 (2.7%)	41,735 (2%)
$20,000 to $24,999	1,100 (5.6%)	82,340 (4%)
$25,000 to $29,999	795 (4.0%)	63,830 (3.1%)
$30,000 to $34,999	785 (3.9%)	64,895 (3.2%)
$35,000 to $39,999	985 (4.9%)	75,105 (3.7%)
$40,000 to $44,999	890 (4.5%)	73,975 (3.6%)
$45,000 to $49,999	880 (4.4%)	73,180 (3.6%)
$50,000 to $59,999	1,530 (7.7%)	144,895 (7.1%)
$60,000 to $69,999	1,530 (7.7%)	139,140 (6.8%)
$70,000 to $79,999	1,340 (6.8%)	131,840 (6.5%)
$80,000 to $89,999	1,280 (6.4%)	122,530 (6%)
$90,000 to $99,999	1,170 (5.9%)	112,775 (5.5%)
$100,000 and over	6,565 (33.1%)	853,065 (41.8%)

The table below shows that in 2020, a total of 4,875 individuals in private households had low-income status after tax in Vernon. Among those individuals, 35.5% of residents were over 65 years of age, which is higher than the provincial rate (24.9%).

	Vernon	British Columbia
Total number LIM low-income status – households, after tax	4,875	528,870
0 to 17 years	830 (17%)	98,830 (18.6%)
18 to 64 years	2,310 (47.3%)	297,960 (56.3%)
65 years and over	1,735 (35.5%)	132,075 (24.9%)

Labour Force

The labour force is composed of those 15 years of age and older who are either employed or actively seeking work. Changes in the labour force are the result of changes in population and economic opportunities. A growing economy attracts workers from other areas and induces people to enter the labour force. When the economy slows, people leave in search of opportunities elsewhere or withdraw from the labour force.[xxxiv]

Employment Rates

Vernon is home to a labour force consisting of approximately 56% of the population. As illustrated in the table below, this is lower than the provincial value of 63.3%. The unemployment rate in Vernon (8.2%) is similar as the rate of province (8.4%).

	Vernon	British Columbia
In the labour force	20,930 (56.4%)	2,657,275 (63.3%)
Employed	19,210 (91.8%)	2,433,600 (91.5%)
Unemployed	1,715 (8.2%)	223,675 (8.4%)
Not in the labour force	16,155 (43.6%)	1,543,145 (36.7%)
Unemployment Rate	8.2	8.4

Labour Force by Occupation

The table below provides a breakdown of Vernon's labour force (56%) by occupation. Vernon's largest segment of the labour force is employed in sales and service (31%). Relatively, British Columbia's largest segment of the labour force (25.1%) is employed in a sales and service occupation. Vernon has a greater proportion of its labour force in health occupations (9.4%) than the province (7.5%), as well as a greater proportion in trades, transport, equipment operations, and related occupations (18.7%) than the province (17.7%). According to the 2020 Community Profile, some of the larger employers in the region include Interior Health, School District 22, Tolko Industries, Kal Tire, Sparkling Hill Resort, and SilverStar Mountain Resort.

	Vernon	British Columbia
Management	185 (0.8%)	32,255 (1.2%)

Business, Finance, Administration	2,805 (13.4%)	446,160 (16.8%)
Natural, Applied Sciences, and Related	1,155 (5.5%)	209,185 (7.9%)
Health	1,965 (9.4%)	199,185 (7.5%)
Education, Law, and Social, Community, and Government Services	2,065 (9.8%)	309,360 (11.6%)
Art, Culture, Recreation, Sport	555 (2.6%)	110,585 (4.2%)
Sales and Service	6,505 (31%)	666,705 (25.1%)
Trades, Transport, Equipment Operators, and Related	3,925 (18.7%)	469,450 (17.7%)
Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Related	555 (2.7%)	72,075 (2.7%)
Manufacturing and Utilities	825 (3.9%)	88,155 (3.3%)

Quality of Life

Places of Worship

Vernon serves as a cultural centre for many of the surrounding communities in the area. Vernon is also home to numerous religious faiths and places of worship.

Denomination	Number
Anglican	3
Baptist	5
Catholic	10
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	1
Jehovah's Witnesses	3
Lutheran	5
Muslim	1
Presbyterian	3
Seventh Day Adventist	2
Sikh	1
United	5
Other Christian	36

Recreation

Vernon offers a wide range of recreational opportunities, including outdoor/nature activities and indoor amenities. Vernon has many parks, lakes, beaches, ski resorts, and golf courses.

Description	Activities
Ellison Provincial Park	Camping, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, cycling
Hillview Golf Course	Golf
Kalamalka Beach	Swimming, tennis, volleyball
Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park	Boating, beach
Kal Tire Place	Primary Ice Area
Kin Beach Park	Swimming, boating, picnicking
Mabel Lake Provincial Park	Camping, boating, swimming

Mara Lake Provincial Park	Boating, swimming, camping, fishing
Marshall Fields	Soccer, baseball
Paddlewheel Park	Swimming, boating, sailing, picnicking
Polson Park	General recreation, garden, tennis, picnicking
Predator Ridge	Golf
Silver Star Ski Resort	Downhill skiing, Nordic skiing, mountain biking, hiking
Sovereign Lake	Cross country skiing, snowshoeing
Spallumcheen Golf Course	Golf
Swan Lake	Boating
The Rise	Golf
Vernon Aquatic Centre	Swimming
Vernon Golf and Country Club	Golf

Restorative Justice

The table below shows referrals of youth to restorative justice programs between 2018 and 2022.

REFERRALS				12 – 17 YEARS				18 – 29 YEARS	
Year	Total	Youth	Number & Types of Incidents/Situations	Male	Female	Gender Diverse	Not Specified	Male	Female
2022	14	12	1-Assault 4-Mischief Under 2-Theft Under 5-Other	15-PW 4-PA	10-PW 1-PA	2-PA			
2021	16	9	4-Mischief Under 5-Other	1-PW	10-PW		1-PW		
2020	21	10	2-Assault 1-Mischief Under 5-Theft Under 2-Other	5-PW	3-PW			3-PW	
2019	27	15	3-Mischief Under 10-Theft Under 2-Other	8-PW 1-PA	3-PW 1-PA			4-PW	
2018	33	12	8-Theft Under 4-Other	10-PW	4PW	N/A		1-PW	N/A

Legend:
- PW = Person Who Caused Harm (Incidences with a criminal charge)
- PA = Person Affected (Community Concern Situations with no criminal charge)

Social Challenges and Sense of Safety

In 2018, the City of Vernon created the Activate Safety Taskforce to address issues related to the impacts of homelessness, poverty, addictions, and criminal behaviour on the local business community. To this end, the Task Force engaged the business community through direct discussions and a Town Hall consultation held on April 5th, 2018. This led to the identification of several challenges in Vernon related to social challenges and sense of safety.

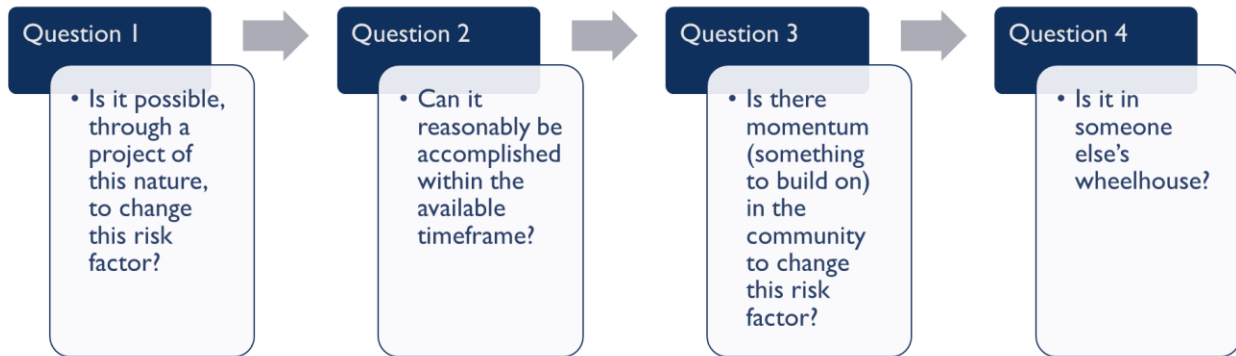| Issue	Description
Enforcement	There is a public perception that the RCMP and bylaw enforcement are allowing open drug use and street level drug dealing and turning a blind eye to prostitution.
Drug Use and Prevention	• There are numerous accounts of open (hard) drug use, as suggested by the fact that 42% of complainants at the Town Hall mentioned it. These accounts can also be found in general social discourse, including social media.
Improperly Discarded Needles	• Needles found in numerous locations, and particular concern over needles in and around playgrounds.
Litter and Urban Decay	• Garbage, litter, dumpster diving, burnt out streetlights, used condoms, etc. Several subcategories have been lumped into this category since all of them have to do with litter of general degradation in some form. Businesses report that garbage is frequently thrown around back alleys, secondary streets, and around dumpsters.
Defecation in Public Areas	• Numerous businesses report having to deal with public defecation, resulting smell, cleanup costs, and a general degradation in the public spaces.
Shopping Carts	• Shopping carts are being abandoned at Bottle Depots, at camp sites, in parking lots, and various other locations. In addition, full carts congregate in parks (most notably Linear Park) and along streets, where they obstruct pedestrians, obstruct public use of benches, and add to a sense of urban decay.
Graffiti	• Graffiti adds to the sense of urban decay, in particular when it is left in place.
Relationship Between Social Service Providers and Neighbourhood Businesses	• Relationships between service providers and surrounding businesses and homes are strained, as identified at the Town Hall as well as in subsequent correspondence and interviews with stakeholders.

Youth Services

BGC Okanagan provides systemic opportunity to all children and youth. They offer a wide array of programs for children, youth, and families. In Vernon, Teen Junction provides positive adult mentors guided by the Club's core values to build self-esteem and encourage healthy relationships while instilling the importance of mutual respect, teamwork, and being socially responsible. They also provide a safe and supportive place to hang out in addition ot recreational opportunities, games, creative arts, and special events. The programs are accessible, affordable, and address community needs.[xxxv]

The table below shows statistics on youth accessing the Teen Junction services and programs in Vernon between 2018 and 2022.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022

Youth Accessing	192	253	118	98	58
Youth Events	3903	4142	2500	1290	788
Meals	263	4401	2406	2081	2827
Snacks	414	4516	2932	3499	3652

APPENDIX 3: SCOPING TOOLS

Question 1
- Is it possible, through a project of this nature, to change this risk factor?

Question 2
- Can it reasonably be accomplished within the available timeframe?

Question 3
- Is there momentum (something to build on) in the community to change this risk factor?

Question 4
- Is it in someone else's wheelhouse?

Risk Factor: **Goal:**			
Focus Area	What actions should the community take?	Who should lead? Who is also responsible?	How will the actions be measured?
Changes in policies and practices			
Enhancement of existing services and programs			
Identification and adaptation of promising practices			

APPENDIX 4: SCOPING RESULTS

AREA 1: CHANGES IN PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Proposed Actions	Rationale	Risk Factors	Effort-Impact Ratings
To provide home support for families at risk with young children to decrease the pipeline to service waiting lists. Who: Local health providers and MCFD	With waiting lists being high in Vernon, little attention is given to what puts children at risk in the first place to prevent them needing support for complex and intense needs. It has been shown that providing support to families that struggle in the first few years of a child's life saves significant resources and human harm later in their lives.	Lack of services (and long waiting lists)	High-High
To help to ensure equitable access to recreation subsidies and free transportation. Who: Stewardship team in collaboration with the City of Vernon and Vernon Transit commission	Many youths and children, especially those from families and neighbourhoods that are economically struggling, could benefit from free recreation and free transportation to access recreation programs. Currently transit is free for children up to the age of 12 and this should be extended to the age of 18.	Lack of recreational services and access issues due to transportation challenges	Low-Medium Medium-High
To partner with the Local Immigration Partnership Council (LIPC) for the integration of awareness raising efforts in their existing programs focused on newcomer youth at risk. Who: Stewardship team and LIPC	Newcomer youth that experience discrimination and lack a sense of belonging are at a higher risk of entering gangs. Local immigration organizations have opportunities to raise awareness about this challenge.	Low sense of belonging Experiences of discrimination among newcomer youth	Low-Low

AREA 2: ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Proposed Actions	Rationale	Risk Factors	Effort-Impact Ratings
To develop and implement a community education and awareness curriculum on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and protective factors to decrease the by-stander effect in the community.	While many services work in a trauma-informed manner, children and youth with ACEs could greatly benefit from a community that is aware of the impact of trauma (including intergenerational trauma) and how to support children and youth in accessing help.	Inattention to trauma in the community	Medium-High

Proposed Actions	Rationale	Risk Factors	Effort-Impact Ratings
Who: The Oak Centre, the Family Resource Centre, the Youth Advisory Committee			
To develop a grant program for organizations to implement service enhancements that meet the following criteria: • Serving youth at risk • Decreasing risk factors • Advancing equity • Decreasing discrimination and stigmatization • Increasing access to recreation including the arts. Who: The development of the grant program and the selection of recipients could be led by the City of Vernon and the stewardship team leaning on established grant programs incorporating the above criteria.	Many programs in Vernon could contribute to the gun and gang prevention agenda by focusing on youth at risk and enhancing their services such that they can contribute to reductions in risk factors and promotion of protective factors. Providing grants based on agreed-upon criteria could greatly contribute to the prevention strategy and provide opportunities for children and youth on waitlists.	Lack of services including recreation for youth at risk (and long waiting lists) Discrimination and stigmatization	Low-Medium Medium-High
To establish harm reduction and mental health navigation support for children and youth waiting for assessments due to suspected FASD, ASD, learning differences. Who: School board • Health and counselling services	It is challenging to gain access to assessments for FASD, ASD and learning differences. This can leave children and youth in schools without the supports they need. Proving supports to those waiting for assessments could greatly decrease mental health and substance use challenges down the road.	Lack of access to assessments Lack of resources for educational supports	Medium-High

AREA 3: IDENTIFICATION, ADAPTATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROMISING PRACTICES

Proposed Actions	Rationale	Risk Factors	Effort-Impact Ratings
To establish the Youth Integrated Services Hub (YISH) space with a focus on youth at risk. Who: Ongoing effort	Youth at risk often have a low sense of belonging and lack connections to peers that have a positive and hopeful attitude towards life. Providing a hub that can connect youth to youth as well as youth to role models and significant adults outside of the family decreases the chances that their lack of belonging will lead them to enter a gang.	Low sense of belonging Lack of meaningful peer connections	Medium High

| To create a safe space for peer-to-peer interactions to decrease discrimination including discrimination of the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC community. | While stigmatization of youth (youth phobia) is something that negatively impacts all youth, youth from the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities experience discrimination at a much more intense level than their peers. Consequently, the community and its institutions can feel unsafe and unwelcoming to them. Establishing physical, but also emotional, spaces where ALL youth can be and feel safe prevents them from becoming marginalized and potentially seeking affiliations with criminalized peers and gangs. | Lack of meaningful peer connections

Discrimination of the 2SLGBTQ+ youth | High-High |
|---|---|---|---|
| To host a youth conference with a focus on youth at risk that is co-designed with youth and includes youth achievement awards. | A youth conference can be a catalyst for youth engagement if it is designed **with** youth, especially youth at risk. It also provides the opportunity to highlight the positive contributions that youth make to their community. | Low sense of self

Lack of meaningful peer connections | High/Medium-High |
| To develop outreach and navigator support for at risk youth during the hours when the safe house is not open | The safe house closes for several hours during the day leaving youth at a loss for where to be and what to do. Providing a reliable adult to support them during that time and to assist them in navigating the system and services could greatly decrease the chances of them being recruited into drug trafficking and other criminal activities. | Lack of services

Problematic substance use

Lack of meaningful peer connections

Low sense of self | High-High |
| To develop an Indigenous, peer-based cultural awareness program to support Indigenous youth.

Who: OKIB, NOYFSS and the Friendship Center | Indigenous youth experience multiple risk factors such as lack of sense of belonging and poor sense of self as well as inter-generational trauma. These conditions become exacerbated by a community and peers that lack cultural awareness of the impact of colonialism and residential schools. Enhancing awareness about this situation could greatly enhance equity and belonging for Indigenous youth and in turn reduce decrease if not prevent engagement with gangs. | Low sense of self

Low sense of belonging | Medium/Medium-High |

APPENDIX 5: POTENTIAL FOUNDATIONAL COMMITTMENTS

List of potential additional foundational commitments provided by CMNCP:

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring all children and youth have fair, equitable, and low-barrier access to services, spaces, and supports in Vernon.
- **Accountability:** Holding organizations and systems accountable for directing their resources toward increasing access and equity.
- **Anti-Oppression:** Recognizing the multiple forms of oppression that exist (such as systems of supremacy, differential treatment due to discrimination, ideological domination, and institutional control) and seeking to mitigate their effects.
- **Knowledge and Evidence Informed:** Ensuring that youth resilience efforts are guided by evidence and the wisdom of the community to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Capacity Building:** Implementing approaches in such a way that they build capacity with individuals and in organizations for sustainability and lasting impact.
- **Collaboration:** Sharing responsibility, acknowledging the need for collective actions and integration, and avoiding siloed approaches.
- **Communication with the Public:** Recognizing the importance of engaging and communicating with the public for transparency and to obtain ongoing buy-in.
- **Diversity:** Acknowledging that differences between people (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, country of origin, education, religion, geography, physical or cognitive abilities) are valued assets and striving for diverse representation.
- **Equity:** Committing to the pursuit of fairness and justice through recognizing the different challenges, needs, and histories of diverse groups.
- **Focus on Children, Youth, and Future Generations:** Identifying the importance of promoting resilience in children and youth as part of an upstream approach to prevention.
- **Focus on Determinants of Well-Being:** Affirming the importance of the social determinants of community safety and well-being.
- **Intersectionality:** Accepting that multiple dynamics of privilege and oppression (i.e., race, gender, class, sexuality, age, ability, religion, citizenship/immigration status) operate simultaneously in complex and compounding ways.
- **Neighbourhood Focus:** Adopting a localized lens to understanding and addressing the specific needs and challenges of various geographies within the community.
- **Reciprocity:** Understanding that individuals that are using services have agency and the right to meaningfully contribute to change.
- **Reconciliation:** Committing to the actions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.

APPENDIX 6: SUSTAINABILITY TOOLS

Sustainability Survey Tool

The following survey tool was developed by CMNCP based on a review of project/program sustainability research and tools.

Scale:

Agree (4), Somewhat Agree (3), Somewhat Disagree (2), Disagree (1), Not Sure, Not Yet Applicable

Questions:
1. The project has a coherent vision/theory of change.
2. Clear links are made between the project's desired outcomes and activities.
3. The project has strong community champions.
4. The project has effectively been communicated with community leaders.
5. The project has effectively been communicated with the public.
6. The project helps increase community awareness of the issues it seeks to address.
7. BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, and other equity deserving groups are meaningfully engaged throughout the project.
8. Key community organizations are invested in the success of the project.
9. The project activities are well integrated into the operations of the key organizations rather than seen as an add-on.
10. Stakeholders are engaged in the development of project goals.
11. Community leaders contribute meaningfully to the project.
12. The project goals are understood by all stakeholders.
13. Project roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined for all stakeholders.
14. The project leaders advocate strongly in support of the project.
15. The project leaders effectively articulate the vision of the project to external partners.
16. Future resource needs are considered within the project.
17. The project has a long-term financial plan.
18. The project monitoring process includes regular reporting on short-term and intermediate outcomes.
19. Evaluation results inform project planning and implementation.
20. The value and successes of the project are actively demonstrated to the public.
21. The project adapts to emerging knowledge.
22. The project proactively adapts to changes in the social, economic, and community environment.
23. Evidence and evaluation are used to make project programming decisions.
24. The project includes applicable technologies.
25. The project staff have sufficient resources to complete project-related tasks.
26. The federal political and economic climate are favourable to the project.
27. The provincial political and economic climate are favourable to the project.

28. The local political and economic climate are favourable to the project.
29. Local elected officials have a good awareness and understanding of the project.
30. Local elected officials attend project related events.
31. Local elected officials advocate for the project.
32. The project is funded through a variety of sources.

Sustainability Tool to Mitigate Sustainability Challenges

The following tool was created to assist the steering committee members in prioritizing and addressing the various elements of sustainability, as well as identifying and mitigating any areas that scored low on the sustainability assessment.

COHERENT VISION/THEORY OF CHANGE			
Without a coherent vision for project outcomes and a theory of change for how to achieve that vision, projects tend to lose momentum and sustainability is less likely.			
Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Actions	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project has a coherent vision/theory of change.		Clearly communicate the project's purpose.	Is the vision clearly understood by stakeholders and the wider community?
Clear links are made between the project's desired outcomes and activities.		Articulate a vision and make it explicit for all stakeholders and the community.	Was the vision co-designed or in the very least grounded in community consultations?
		Develop a theory of change overview/logic model that connects desired outcomes with actions and provides a rational for that connection.	

COMMUNITY SUPPORT			
The level to which a project is accepted by the community impacts its success and how much it can be sustained over time.			
Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project has strong community champions.		Use stewardship team to identify potential community champions. Ensure that local champions are invited to if not featured in project events.	Do community members see the value added through the project or is it seen as lacking relevance and if so, how can relevance be demonstrated?
The project has effectively been communicated with community leaders.			
The project has effectively been communicated with the public.		Frame project goals and activities such that they increase relevance and are explicit about value added for the community.	
The project helps increase community awareness of the issues it seeks to address.		*See communication plan*: use social media platforms to reach a wide audience.	Are there specific groups in the community that likely do not see the project as something that has relevance to them when it should and how can these be engaged?
BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, and other equity deserving groups are meaningfully engaged throughout the project.			

| | | Celebrate significant milestones[8] related to the project with the community (the concept of "small wins" is frequently applied to work settings but also applies to community settings and is further described in the article cited below).

Ensure that presentations about the project are offered as widely as reasonable.
Offer workshops that can assist the community to better understand the issues at hand.
Keep an open chair or two at all tables.

Stay open to and actively solicit feedback. | |

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The ability to mobilize stakeholders for specific aspects of the project impacts the capacity to sustain the momentum of a project.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
Key community organizations are invested in the success of the project.		Make relationship building central to the project. Provide regular opportunities for key stakeholders to participate in project development and implementation. Regularly assess the collaborative process (i.e., governance approaches, teamwork, cross-sectoral trust, etc.) Annually review the memberships of committees to ensure that stakeholders that should be present are in fact engaged. Provide training in how to effectively collaborate. And make shared decisions.	Are key stakeholders involved, engaged, and display a sense of ownership over the project? Are stakeholders regularly consulted during the implementation phase of the project? Are the stakeholders making adjustments to their own services to better support the prevention of risks?
The project activities are well integrated into the operations of the key organizations rather than seen as an add-on.			
Stakeholders are engaged in the development of project goals.			
Community leaders contribute meaningfully to the project.			
The project goals are understood by all stakeholders.			
Project roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined for all stakeholders.			

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[8] Amabile, Teresa M., and Steven J. Kramer. 2016. "The Power of Small Wins." Harvard Business Review. June 8, 2016. https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-power-of-small-wins.

| | | Offer incentives (such as public recognition) for stakeholders to get and stay involved. | |
| | | Ensure that the concerns and needs of stakeholders are clarified and attended to (don't rely on altruism). | |

LEADERSHIP APPROACH

The project leadership and governance are critical for successful implementation, but also the ability to carry on aspects of the project beyond the initial funding window.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project leaders advocate strongly in support of the project.		Follow/implement a democratic leadership process.	Who are the project leaders and are they sanctioned to be in that role?
The project leaders effectively articulate the vision of the project to external partners.		Devote time and resources to developing governance policies that are understood and sanctioned by all involved, as well as monitored for compliance. Build (or partake in) a network of professionals as part of leadership development. Make succession planning part of sustainability planning. Model the way when it comes to the values underpinning the project and collaboration.	Are there easy-to-understand terms of reference and policies which govern the project development and implementation? Is project leadership transparent and inclusive?

ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

The capacity of the lead organization(s) (beyond their financial capacity) to overcome challenges and continue to thrive greatly impacts the project's success and longevity.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
Future resource needs are considered within the project.		Foster an organizational culture that acknowledges the presence and inevitability of change, in addition to its ability to present new opportunities.	Is the organization nimble enough to adapt to unanticipated changes?
The project has a long-term financial plan.		Regularly ask questions about the project being implemented and your role within it (e.g., encourage the asking of questions in meetings and/or more formal organizational assessments. Introduce the conceptual framework which identifies problems as either simple, complicated, or complex.	Does the organization aspire to ongoing learning and transformation (beyond pre-determined transactions)? When complex problems are oversimplified, communities run the risk of

| | | Develop a post project budget which would support the organization in sustaining the essential aspects of the project. | being ineffective in the implementation process.[*]

Does the problem definition acknowledge the complexity of the issues?

Do working groups too readily defer to perceived experts rather than support group deliberations? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A monitoring and developmental evaluation framework ongoingly supports the successful implementation of the project and tends to sustain motivation to continue the positive aspects of the work.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project monitoring process includes regular reporting on short-term and intermediate outcomes.		Throughout the project, pause to reflect on available data and (if necessary) change direction to achieve project outcomes.[10]	Is the project accomplishing its goals, and how is that determined?
Evaluation results inform project planning and implementation.			
The value and successes of the project are actively demonstrated to the public.		Share project data at intervals throughout the project with the community.

Attract students to provide research on aspects of the project that are not included in the evaluation framework to assist continuous learning. | Does the stewardship team maximize the developmental evaluation to make project adjustments as needed? |

ADAPTABILITY OF APPROACH

Projects that are implemented in a flexible and nimble way rather than adhering to early, rigid concepts tend to have a better chance of maintaining momentum and buy-in.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project adapts to emerging knowledge.		Build in time for reflections on process and outcomes in the project meetings.	Is the initially developed approach in achieving the project goals still the best way of approaching the project, and if not, what needs to change?
The project proactively adapts to changes in the social, economic, and community environment.			
Evidence and evaluation are used to make project programming decisions.		Ensure time is reserved to do environmental scans and discuss changing industry trends.	

TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The integration of applicable technology greatly supports project vitality.

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[9] "Conversation Agent - Valeria Maltoni - Simple, Complicated, and Complex Problems." www.conversationagent.com. Accessed February 2, 2023. https://www.conversationagent.com/2015/11/simple-complicated-and-complex-problems.html.

[10] This is further elaborated on in the evaluation framework.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project includes applicable technologies.		Regularly ask project staff/stakeholders whether the technologies applied are values-added or too time-consuming? Involve individuals with knowledge of technological advances that can support project management (beware that the "tail doesn't wag the dog).	Are the project management tools in use effective? Is the project management availing itself to technologies that are capable of simplifying processes (e.g., electronic document sharing, communication systems, and providing opportunities for virtual participation)?

STAFF CAPACITY

When project staff are well prepared, equipped, and readily engaged in the work, projects are more successful and therefore more likely to be maintained over time.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project staff have sufficient resources to complete project-related tasks.		Provide opportunities for staff to stay abreast of most recent developments and engage in ongoing skill training.	Are staff equipped to achieve the project outcomes? How to best support staff: Project staff have sufficient tools to contribute to the success of the project. Project staff have sufficient knowledge and skills to contribute to the success of the project.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The political and economic context at the federal, provincial/territorial, and regional level in which a project is implemented impacts its potential to be sustained over time.

Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The **federal** political and economic climate are favourable to the project.		Host public awareness sessions preferably with people who have high credibility in the community. Create and distribute a document on risks and protective factors for public consumption (i.e., easy to understand).	Is the current social climate in which the project is being implemented one that shares the essential underpinnings of the project or is it one that is more hostile towards such approaches (e.g., is the concept of root causes understood and embraced or is it seen as an excuse for individual wrongdoing)?
The **provincial** political and economic climate are favourable to the project.			
The **local** political and economic climate are favourable to the project.			

POLITICAL INVESTMENT

How much the project is accepted in the current local political climate and seen as advancing political goals makes a difference for its overall acceptance within the community.			
Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
Local elected officials have a good awareness and understanding of the project.		Invite elected officials to participate in committees and working groups related to the project to increase their sense of ownership. Provide regular updates to all local-elected officials.	Are there elected officials that are prepared to champion the project or in the very least ensure that it is not met with public opposition?
Local elected officials attend project related events.			
Local elected officials advocate for the project.			

FINANCIAL RESOURCES Project viability is directly related to the ability to secure diverse funding sources.			
Questions	Score	Potential Mitigating Factors	Potential Stewardship team Considerations
The project is funded through a variety of sources.		Host meetings with funders to establish a relationship at various stages of the project. Invite funders to community events related to the project. Harness resources in-kind to augment financial contributions. Consider all along who potential future funders should be Track resources in kind such that they can be shared with funders as a sign of greater community buy in.	How many current/future funding opportunities exist to support the project? Have connections been made to these potential funding sources? The project funding has flexibility built in rather than adhere to rigid criteria.

APPENDIX 7: CONSULTATION REPORT

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

CITY OF VERNON
BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES PROJECT
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

urban
matters

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MARCH 2023

INTRODUCTION

Public Safety Canada has created the Building Safer Communities Fund to "address the root causes of crime by creating safe spaces and empowering young people and communities to drive solutions that set them up for success." To do this, municipalities across Canada are encouraged to build resilience through community-based prevention and intervention initiatives. This includes increasing local knowledge and awareness of challenges associated with gun and gang violence through data collection and public engagement.

As a recipient of the Fund, the City of Vernon has entered a contribution agreement with Public Safety Canada to develop a community-based Prevention and Intervention Strategy that addresses the risk factors associated with high-risk youth and gun and gang violence in Vernon. The goal of the Strategy is to identify priority risk and protective factors as well as outline programs for implementation over the 2023-2026 fiscal years that are targeted at addressing these factors for high-risk youth.

Ultimately, the federal government would like to see recipients of this funding develop prevention and intervention activities focused on youth, one that will be sustainable beyond the four-year program. An important element of this work is tackling root causes and addressing the conditions that contribute to involvement in gun and gang violence, along with other related criminal behaviour.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT AND ROLES

In developing the Prevention and Intervention Strategy, Urban Matters and the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention were engaged by the City of Vernon to collect and synthesize background data, gather community input, and identify the community's priorities for prevention and intervention programs. Urban Matters' role in this work was to conduct community engagement to inform the priority setting process. This report outlines the process and results of the community engagement.

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The engagement period was from February 6, 2023, through March 8. 2023. The process included two meetings with the project steering committee, four key stakeholders focus group sessions, five individual stakeholder interviews, two in-person opportunities for youth input, and an online survey for youth.

Over the course of the engagement, we gathered input from the following:

- Steering Committee Meeting #1 (virtual) – Introduction to the project and review of community engagement strategy (12 participants)
- Four in-person key stakeholder focus group sessions (22 participants total)
- Five interviews with key stakeholders
- Engagement materials and host for in-person youth engagement at Teen Junction and CMHA youth peer support group (10 youth participants)
- An online youth survey with 15 responses (including Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA representation)
- Presentation of project information to the North Okanagan Child and Youth Mental Health Local Action Team
- Steering Committee Meeting #2 (in person) – co-hosted with CMNCP (9 participants)

Individuals who participated in the engagement included representatives from the social, education, health, municipal, and justice sectors. Organizations represented included:

- City of Vernon
- RCMP
- Okanagan Indian Band
- Restorative Justice
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- North Okanagan Friendship Centre Society
- Turning Points Collaborative
- School District #22
- Family Resource Centre
- Community Futures Youth Employment Program
- FASD Okanagan Valley Assessment and Support Society
- Vernon Native Housing Society
- Vernon and District Immigration and Community Services Society
- Interior Health
- NONA – North Okanagan Neurological Association for child development
- North Okanagan Youth and Family Services

LIMITATIONS

The short timeframe of this engagement process placed several limitations on the project. This may have limited participation from some stakeholders who did not have the capacity to meaningfully participate in this initiative. Additionally, it is also fiscal year-end for many organizations, further limiting their availability.

The project's timeframe also limited the ability of the project team to engage specific groups that may be more difficult to build trust and connection prior to engagement activities. The project team was not able to engage with parents, or attend any Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, or immigrant youth groups due to the project timing. However, the youth survey and engagement were able to reach some Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

Vernon's youth are struggling to face the many challenges in their lives. Social service providers are noticing several trends that are increasing the number and severity of risk factors for Vernon's youth. Many of these trends existed pre-COVID but have been exacerbated by the social isolation, social strain, and economic strain that the COVID pandemic put on families already struggling. Across the engagement process, several key themes emerged regarding the key challenges Vernon's youth face.

Mental Health and Substance Use

The prevalence of anxiety and depression is increasing and affecting younger populations than service providers previously experienced. Substance use and addiction are also increasing, especially for products such as vaping. Participants noted that they are seeing these issues arise in younger youth than they have seen previously. The types of substances are also evolving, with younger individuals (as early as 12) using methamphetamines. In the youth survey, the majority of respondents indicated that most or all of their friends regularly use substances such as alcohol or drugs.

As well, there is an increase in the number of high-risk youths presenting to or accessing services. Programs that used to focus on low to moderate-risk youth are now being filled with higher-risk youth.

Affordability and Housing

The cost of living continues to rise in Vernon, putting a strain on more and more families and severely impacting those families who were already struggling to make ends meet. Affordable housing is extremely limited in Vernon. Agencies reported families staying in motel shelters, transitional housing, and overcrowded or poor-quality housing. There are particular challenges for older youth transitioning to adulthood, as there is no supported transitional housing for older youth that provides wraparound services, or housing for youth with complex needs.

This is also impacting staffing capacity in the social sector. Many engagement participants indicated that their organization struggles to attract and retain qualified staff, and that much of this is due to the increasing cost of living while wages in this sector have been essentially static for a long time.

Access to Assessment for Disabilities and Mental Health Issues

Engagement participants reported that there are significant challenges, including long wait lists, for assessment services. This included mental health assessment for youth who presented as not in crisis but needing services as well as diagnostic services for issues such as learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). The lack of diagnosis can be a barrier for many youth to receive support, and particularly affordable support. Many services for youth with these issues are not available without a formal diagnosis. Without access to timely assessments, many youth fail to get the support they need.

Lack of Engagement

Attachment and engagement with school, key services, and safe spaces across Vernon have not recovered to their pre-pandemic participation levels. Recreation and social programs, drop-in services, and other voluntary programs are not seeing youth return to attending these in-person supports. There has been a pivot to online engagement through and with social media, and this presents a variety of risks. Youth are continuing to experience isolation, and this is affecting their mental health. Some of the community divisiveness over pandemic health restrictions also drove a rise in online harassment, hate, and radicalization.

Lack of Transportation

Access to services is one of the hardest challenges in Vernon. The City lacks a reliable, efficient, and affordable transit system. Families struggle to get to services in Vernon if they do not have reliable access to a personal vehicle. Affordable housing is often outside the city centre where services are, and walking distances are not feasible. This also affects youth access to recreational programs.

Lack of a Healthy Identity

There is a sense that youth have lost hope as a result of the events of the past few years. Youth already dealing with several risk factors can feel singled out as "bad kids." They lack a feeling of accomplishment and hope that can lead them to avoid even trying to access services. In some cases, gangs can then provide that identity and feeling of belonging for them. Indigenous youth across Vernon lack a connection to their traditions and culture due to the ongoing impacts of colonization.

Trauma – Intergenerational, Family, and Community

Supporting high-risk youth can often include supporting their entire family. Many people are hurting and passing that hurt on to their children. Many parents have poor relationships with service providers, which is passed on to their children. Indigenous families, in particular, have

been impacted by colonization and residential schools that remove the family from their community's teachings and cultural identity. Participants also identified that the impacts of the pandemic, as well as wildfires that nearly resulted in community evacuation, have resulted in layers of complex trauma for many youths.

Stigma

Vernon's youth face several stigmas that impact both their need to access supports and their ability to access support safely. These include stigma related to their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age as well as issues related to mental health such as FASD, ASD, and learning disabilities.

SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES

As social service providers work to address these issues, they face several challenges in delivering the services that impact their ability to make change:

Lack of Sustainable and Flexible Funding

Service providers are using substantial amounts of time to chase funding and fit their programs into confining funding requirements that do not always reflect the context in Vernon. The lack of sustainable funding impacts social service providers' ability to provide regular and ongoing programming, hire and retain staff, and maintain service hours. The lack of flexible funding results in staff spending hours creatively solving problems that could easily be solved with more discretionary spending.

Service Gaps

Social service providers noted several service gaps in Vernon, including housing, prevention and early intervention, mental health and substance use, youth with complex needs, recreation programs, funding for activities beyond sports such as arts programs, storage facilities for people experiencing homelessness, and services for youth transitioning into adulthood. Service providers noted youth in hospital for a mental health or substance use crisis are sometimes discharged to the "Mission," an adult-oriented day shelter and service hub for food programs. There is also nowhere for youth to go for detox or while waiting for treatment if they are not able to live at home with their parents.

Long Waitlists

When services are available, social service providers noted the long wait lists that limit access and often deter youth from reaching out for support again. The wait lists were most apparent for mental health support due to the high and increasing demand. Service providers noted that when youth reach out for help and are placed on a waiting list, they are unlikely to re-engage. Wait lists can be up to two years long to access services. A lot can change in the life of a young person over that time.

Lack of Adequate Staffing

Organizations struggle to maintain staffing due to the experience required for the role and limited funding stability, resulting in low pay and high staff burnout.

Lack of Volunteers

Many organizations in Vernon rely on the support of volunteers to function. However, post-COVID, volunteers have not returned in the same number and capacity as before. This has resulted in the collapse of many programs and events centred on youth.

Issues with Outreach and Marketing

Organizations do not always have the resources or skills to market their programs and events to youth in ways that are appealing. They need support to upgrade skills as well as updated organizational policies that recognize the importance and value of using social media to communicate with youth.

Distrust of the System

Many parents and youth have had poor experiences with service providers. They see all service providers as "the system," which, in many cases, has caused them significant harm. They are now less likely to trust these organizations and, therefore, less likely to reach out for support until or even after they reach crisis levels.

YOUTH INPUT

During engagement, Vernon's youth also had the chance to provide input and suggestions regarding specific areas of improvement. The feedback they share included the following:

After School Activities

Feedback from the youth engagement noted a significant need to provide things for Vernon's youth to do. This included ideas such as a rage room, creative outlets such as a "maker space," and drop-in sports.

Mental Health and Harm Reduction Supports

Youth noted a need to increase the number and accessibility of mental health supports, including therapy and harm reduction services.

Safe Spaces

Youth noted a need to have low-barrier, accessible spaces where they felt like they belonged and could talk to someone to get advice and support.

Engagement at School

Youth expressed a need to engage youth at school, by having someone like the Teen Junction coordinator at school to talk to and get advice.

OPPORTUNITIES

Engagement participants identified several opportunities that exist in Vernon to help tackle the issues youth face.

Youth Integrated Services Hub (YISH)

The YISH is a physical space as well as a collaborative service delivery model currently under development that could act as the main point of connection for youth to access services available across Vernon. It would include 25 different multi-agency services under one roof, with a service navigator to assigned to youth who access the hub to ensure access and coordination of services. It would also help tackle the current wait list problem by ensuring youth get and stay connected to services and any available support while they wait for specific services. The development of the YISH is being led by CMHA and presents a significant opportunity to support early intervention and wraparound services for young people in Vernon.

Youth Program Coordinator through CMHA

CMHA previously had a program that went into schools to deliver workshops about stigma, substance use, and harm reduction. This individual was also the first point of contact for many students to access services. Students built trust between themselves and the coordinator. This position was cut due to funding constraints but there is an interest in re-establishing it.

Youth Leadership and Collaboration

Several youth groups are helping guide youth-focused initiatives and train future leaders in the community, including the YISH Leadership Council and the Okanagan Indian Band Youth Leadership Council.

Youth Achievement Awards Festival (YAA Fest) was a celebration of youth accomplishments – by and for youth in Vernon. This is no longer running due to the high resources and funding required as well as the loss of volunteers to organize the event.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTOR ANALYSISS

While most youth, even high-risk youth, do not join gangs, research indicates that there are a number of risk factors associated with gang involvement that are present before a young person joins a gang. Many of these risk factors are also risk factors for other types of criminal behaviour. Risk factors can be defined as life events or experiences that are associated with an increase in problem behaviours[11] . Public Safety Canada provided an outline of the key risk factors for youth involvement in crime, and particularly in gun and gang violence.

On the other hand, strengthening protective factors can help to mitigate the impact of risks in a youth's life and reduce the chance that they will become involved in gang activities or other problematic or criminal behaviours. Evidence regarding gang prevention indicates that protective factors can be increased through the following activities[12]:

- Building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with mentors and pro-social peers.
- Creating positive social environments through community, family, and service organizations.
- Promoting social and economic policies that support positive youth development.

The Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention provided a matrix of risk and protective factors for youth crime that is slightly different from the factors outlined by Public Safety Canada and requested that we use this for our analysis. Based on the CMNCP matrix, we synthesized the input from all the engagement activities to understand the major risk factors for youth in Vernon. Below is an outline of the major factors in the CMNCP matrix that were identified by participants in the engagement activities.

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[11] Public Safety Canada: Youth gang involvement: What are the risk factors? (publicsafety.gc.ca)

[12] Public Safety Canada: Youth gang involvement: What are the risk factors? (publicsafety.gc.ca)

RISK FACTORS FOR YOUTH CRIME

Land & Waters	Societal level	Community level	School	Peer group	Family level	Individual level
Limited or lack of access/ availability to healthy lands & waters, including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines	Large number of people living in poverty High level of inequity Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism Lack of affordable, appropriate, and safe housing Lack of adequate services (social, health, cultural, recreational, etc.) High unemployment	Presence of street gangs and organized crime Availability of street level drugs Availability of street level firearms High transience in neighborhoods Large number of residents reporting feeling unsafe in their neighborhood Neighborhoods that show neglect and lack of sense of ownership and pride by residents	School environment Lack of dedicated educational supports to students with special needs Too few teacher role models Lack of attention to bullying (including cyber bullying) High number of suspensions and expulsions Negative labelling by teachers Undiagnosed learning disabilities Access to street level drugs within the school Classmates that are gang involved Relationship to school Low attachment to school Low educational aspirations Consistent underperformance	Friends who are part of a gang Friends with problematic substance use issues Interactions with peers who are in conflict with the law Lack of meaningful peer connections Tolerance of violence in peer group Discrimination of peers due to their race, sexual orientation, gender, faith, country of origin Pre-teen exposure to high stress	Intimate partner and family violence Erratic or overly laissez-faire or punitive parenting Tolerance of problematic substance use Abuse and neglect of children Violence between siblings Criminalized or incarcerated parents Lone parent household with limited economic means Family members (including extended family) that are gang involved	Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) Prior delinquency and criminalization Illegal gun ownership Involvement in trafficking drugs High desire for status, recognition, and protection Low sense of belonging Problematic alcohol and drug use Lack of attention to trauma Frequent displays of aggression and violence (including verbal violence) Early sexualization Low sense of self

Societal Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Large number of people living in poverty	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Usage at the lunch program at the Salvation Army doubling Youth partaking at the breakfast club who don't normally partake The higher cost of living in Vernon is forcing many parents to work longer hours to make ends meet. Transportation is always an issue for program access. If people don't have access to a personal vehicle, it is incredibly hard to get around Vernon. Families with children living in motel shelter program on an ongoing basis Increasing cost of living and lack of affordability seen across Vernon, making it even more difficult for those with limited means Increase in poverty and increase in people visibly experiencing homelessness
Significant prevalence of discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression such as racism	**Focus Groups/Interviews** *Racism and Intergenerational Trauma* Parents, and as a result, their youth, have a distrust of the system. They see all service providers as part of that system. The social services industry has been a key facilitator of these past traumas. Stigma around race still exists. *Substance Youth and Mental Health* Stigma around substance youth and mental health The general acceptance that everyone has anxiety/depression/mental health due to prevalence, but there is still a stigma with schizophrenia or bipolar stigma. There is also a stigma with treatment. There is a big leap between anxiety and getting support for it (medication, therapy) – once it's medicalized, that's where the stigma is more apparent. **Youth Engagement** Youth Program Facilitator delivered workshops at school – stigma, substance youth, and harm reduction were the most engaged workshops. Youth wanted tools to deal with this stigma.

Societal Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)

	Homophobia and Transphobia
	
	    These stigmas exist in the school system, specifically bullying and not feeling safe for gender diverse youth in the school system.
	    A couple of respondents to the youth survey specifically noted homophobia and transphobia as a challenge in their life.
	Mental Health
	
	    Youth feeling like adults don't know how to deal with their mental illness.
	Teens
	
	    Youth feeling like the community is against them. A survey respondent noted, "There is always going to be crime and violence, but we think sometimes teens can get a bad name. Like when any issues end up all over social media or the news and they only get one side of the story. Everyone just blames the teen."

Lack of affordable, appropriate, and safe housing	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Limited services tailored to youth experiencing homelessness No affordable housing supports for youth transitioning to adulthood There are families across Vernon experiencing homelessness and this only got worse with COVID. Families with children living in motel shelter program
Lack of access to resources to meet basic needs	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Families with children living in motel shelter program Usage at the lunch program at the Salvation Army doubling Youth partaking at the breakfast club who don't normally partake *Transportation*

Societal Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	This is an issue for both parents and youth to connect to services. The lack of good transportation in Vernon makes it unaffordable for many to participate There is poor public transportation and parents don't necessarily have cars. Even bussing to school is a big issue as some parents are required to pay a fee. Access to bus passes would make a lot of difference. *Communication* Some youth need cellphones to book appointments. Access to cellphones can be a barrier because cost is too high. Need access to computers – they are not allowed to use service providers. Have to trek all the way to the library, adding mileage and chaos.
Lack of adequate services (social, health, cultural, recreational, etc.)	**Focus Groups/Interviews** *Challenges for Service Delivery* Funding o There is a lack of sustainable funding for service providers, leading to program, position, and hours cuts. They are constantly having to chase funding. They need that sustainable funding to provide that consistency that will attract more youth to the service. o There is a lack of flexible funding. They need discretionary spending to address immediate and easily solvable issues facing issues with complex needs. As a result, a lot of staff labour is spent trying to creatively solve solutions that could be addressed with some discretionary spending. *Staffing and Resources* o There are issues staffing certain positions. It can be hard to find the qualified and interested individuals given low pay, high workloads, cost of living in Vernon, and constant burnout. There is no infrastructure to support staff and prevent burnout. o The staffing challenges are made worse by the lack of volunteers. Since COVID, the volunteers have not been coming back in the same numbers and capacity. Many only want to volunteer for one off events.

Societal Level Risk Factors	
Risk Factors	**Evidence (what we've heard/seen)**
	o Lack of resources for staff. Turning Points staff are currently using their own vehicles to transport individuals. *Information gaps* o There is no consistent system to track individual cases across service providers. They need a functional database that works inter-collaboratively with service providers (something like input health). *Wait Lists* Once youth get put on a wait list or deferred, they are not coming back. COVID really impacted service delivery and service providers ability to provider that consistency that youth need. Service providers face challenges deferring youth to some services due to the long wait list. They lose youth during the waiting process. This is most seen for mental health services. People are frustrated trying to access the system. *Service Age Gaps* There are limited programs for the 11–14-year-old group. They are too old for daycare, too young for a job, and often left on their own after school hours. The youth transition into adulthood is a big gap in service. This is when they lose contact and connection with youth they have been working with for years. There should be a transitionary period coming out of foster care systems and into homeless realm – and there needs to be more safeguarding. Young adult newcomers are in limbo – they can't access education programs or jobs because of their status. *Lack of Prevention and Early Intervention* There is not enough funding for early intervention. Youth are on the wait list until they hit crisis. The prevention work does not happen because there is so much demand for crisis support. *Housing* There is a lack of youth-specific housing, housing for youth with complex needs, and wraparound services at these housing supports when youth seek help.

Societal Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	Transitional housing has limited space.
	There is a lack of low-barrier transition housing for both men & women who are fleeing violence (including those escaping human trafficking, gang affiliations, etc.).
	Immigrants and Newcomers
	Immigrant/newcomer youth are not getting connected to many local services such as the Boys and Girls Club.
	Mental Health and Substance Use
	Wait lists for mental health treatment are very long. You can only be seen immediately if you are in crisis.
	The prevalence of mental health issues is expanding and getting younger. Many children coming to school for the first time with anxiety or unable to return to school due to anxiety. The Alternative Learning Program is seeing a larger increase in these types of students who were not technically what the program was focused on.
	The nearest youth substance youth treatment centre is Vancouver. Waiting for care when they finally decide to get help can be a problem.
	The community needs places for them to go to receive treatment and access other services from there.
	Substance Use - There's different user groups and they need different things. Drug use and non-drug using individuals, and those in between. When we think of service delivery, we need to separate those folks out, because that is a barrier. People won't access services food hygiene based on the people that are accessing the space. They don't want back into gangs don't want to engage and be triggered.
	Youth with Complex Needs
	Youth with complex needs don't get supports early enough and are at high risk for mental health issues.
	Assessment for complex needs, mental health, and disabilities such as FASD, ASD, and learning disabilities have long wait lists. Private assessments are costly.
	They can be turned away from some services because their needs are too complex, or because they do not have a diagnosis.

Societal Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	Recreation
	Access to sports decreases with age. Once students reach high school, they now have to try out for sports. They do not have access to the same training programs that more wealthy youth do, so they are unable to make the team.
	Activities Beyond Sports
	It's very hard to find funding for non-sport related activities like art, music, theatre, etc.
	There is a need to provide cultural activities for youth. It can be hard to find youth who are willing to participate and feel safe to come.
	Youth are "bored to tears." The community needs to focus activities on the older youth and they need to be perceived as worth engaging in.
	Kids don't want to be singled out for a "special support" program. They don't want to feel labelled as a "bad" kid who needs help.
	Storage Facilities for People Experiencing Homelessness
	People who are precariously housed are harder to serve when they can't get basics covered – storage, hygiene.
	Don't access services because they don't/can't leave their belongings. Service providers spend a lot of time dealing with this aspect.
	Spectrum of Services for Increased Acuity
	Staff run courses for mild- to moderate-risk youth, but they are filling with youth who have high acuity. They need another program for the kids that need more support – more breadth of services to meet the wide variety of needs.
	Organizations had social programs that used to be respite for parents with mental illness. Now youth from those families are showing enough issues on their own and are transitioning into needing their own more intensive supports and services.

Societal Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)

	Youth Engagement
	
	Mental Health
	
	    Several comments on the youth survey pointed to a need for mental health supports:
	    "More counselors, and maybe a designated mental health building where people can go to when in a crisis."
	    "Financial support and more accessibility to counsellors, psychiatrists, etc."
	    "Free access to therapy, less judgement, more low barrier programs, access to necessities."
	
	Safe Spaces
	
	    Approximately 15 percent of respondents to the youth survey indicated that they sometimes felt safe in their school and neighbourhood while 69 percent felt safe usually and 15 percent always felt safe.
	    "I think crime and physical violence are dealt well with, but more could be done about verbal violence.
	    "More affordable and accessible maybe private places that can go to and people they can talk to if they can't get help from their guardians."
	    "More places like Teen where I can go to talk about stuff. Easier access to the stuff that's already here"
	    "I think the best way to tackle this problem is to have safe spaces with counselors."
	
	Things to Do
	
	    "There is not a lot to do in the winter."
	    "It's a problem. Like most kids don't have enough to do and when they're bored they go and do stupid [explicit]."
	    "Petty crimes are a problem because youth do not have anything to do here and turn to crime to fulfill the need to do something."
	    "Creative outlets and opportunities for people to harness that aggression into something rather than doing therapy and nothing else."

Societal Level Risk Factors	
Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	"More stuff like Teen [Junction] with fun stuff to do i.e Rage room (where you can smash stuff), drop-in sports (soccer, soft ball), another skate park, "maker" space (where people can come and use computer space for programming/coding etc.)" There was a desire among some youth to have arts-related after school programming.
High unemployment	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Much of the younger demographic is interested in pursuing employment, but the opportunity for gainful employment is limited, especially in Vernon. Newcomer youth – not eligible for employment or post-secondary education due to their immigrant status

Community Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Availability of street level drugs	**Focus Groups/Interviews** The types of drugs, especially street level drugs, are an issue for some youth. This issue is also being seen in younger youth than what was previously. Youth getting these drugs from their parents. Youth as young as 12 using methamphetamines
High transience in neighborhoods	**Focus Groups/Interviews** The transient population has been increasing in Vernon. People moving into outlying areas to access more affordable housing

School Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
School Environment	
Lack of dedicated educational supports to students with special needs	**Focus Groups/Interviews** There is a lack of resources to diagnose and support youth with learning disabilities and complex needs. Once these youth are diagnosed, they are sometimes too old to receive services. There is a stigma with diagnosis, especially for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

School Level Risk Factors	
Risk Factors	**Evidence (what we've heard/seen)**
School Environment	
	Schools don't know how to manage immigrant kids, or those with language issues – kids don't get the supports they need. Things can go bad very quickly if parents don't understand the system. System doesn't understand the reality for the kids/families who are newcomers. **Youth Engagement** "MORE RESOURCES (sex ed, peer support, teacher reviews, etc.)" "Teacher support" "Someone like Sara [Teen Junction Coordinator] at the schools running fun things and there to talk if you need."
Lack of attention to bullying (including cyber bullying)	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Parents knowledge of social media is not keeping pace with youth usage. This was a pre-COVID problem but increased when youth were not having these conversations in the classroom. **Youth Engagement** Youth who are members (or perceived members) of the 2SLGBTQ+ community reporting receiving bullying.
Undiagnosed learning disabilities	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Youth can go undiagnosed, then they can feel singled out when they have to meet expectations set for everyone else. Without supports, they are not hitting the same developmental mark. There is a lack of resources to diagnose and support youth with learning disabilities and complex needs. The wait lists for non-private assessments are very long.

School Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
School Environment	
	There is little funding for FASD assessments. These youth commonly struggle with other issues including learning disabilities.
Low attachment to school	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Disengagement among the student population is huge. Attendance was down with COVID and has not recovered since, even though student population has increased. The regular attendance is not there and it's difficult to get them to engage for a full day. Students are now more anxious because they have not been coming (fall behind, social anxiety) which is creating a snowballing effect. The high-risk students choosing online school lack the wraparound supports that exist at a physical school. Mental health, especially anxiety, is one of the main contributors. Schools don't know how to manage immigrant kids, or those with language issues. These youth don't get the supports they need. Things can go bad very quickly if parents don't understand the system, or if the system doesn't understand the reality for the kids/families. Immigrant youth, especially older youth, have a harder time adjusting. Ukrainian teens who have graduated at home now have to return to high school because they have limited English.

Peer Group Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Friends with problematic substance use issues	**Youth Engagement** • Approximately 75 percent of respondents to the youth survey said that most or all of their friends regularly use substances and 25 percent said a few. • Responses to youth survey: "Harm reduction spaces for youth - supplies/drug testing for Youth 13-24 age ish (not adults)"
Lack of meaningful peer connections	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Youth are disengaged. They are not connecting with the same friends and social media is allowing them to do that. During COVID, people were removed from their entertainment, friends, faith-based places, which has not fully recovered to same levels. During COVID, pockets of safety and connection like Teen Junction could not provide a consistent service for youth. They have not returned in the same numbers since. They used to see 30+ kids on average but now they're lucky to get a few. They're hearing from youth that they're not going because other youth aren't going. Service providers need new ways to communicate (e.g. not Facebook, now it's Discord and Tik Tok).
Tolerance of violence in peer group	**Focus Groups/Interviews** There is a shift in what youth now perceive as acceptable violence. They are seeing swarming, beatings, weapons. It's making the consequences for the offender and victim far worse. There is a rise in the profile of hate groups. The language out there that's being promoted to youth is troubling. These youth are then being empowered online, where these groups are recruiting from. They are filling a human need for purpose and community.

Peer Group Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Pre-teen exposure to high stress	**Focus Groups/Interviews** For newcomers, the system is VERY different here than any other place in the world. The transition to Canada can be an incredibly stressful time and they can be coming from stressful situations in their home countries. Schools are seeing huge increase in prevalence in anxiety and this issue is getting a lot younger. COVID was a very stressful time and now many students are struggling with social anxiety. The impact of COVID, as well as wildfire risks, represent significant trauma for all youth in the community.

Family Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Intimate partner and family violence	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Families are struggling with the impacts of intergenerational trauma. So many people are really hurting and they can't move on until they address their trauma. Service providers need to help address the intergenerational traumas. Youth need to be taught and shown how to become good adults.
Erratic or overly laisse-faire or punitive parenting	**Focus Groups/Interviews**

Family Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	There are unhealthy expectations set by adults. Youth are trying to catch up with expectations, but they are never going to get that sense of achievement because the bar is set so high. Gangs can provide expectations they can meet or no expectations at all. Youth feel like adults don't trust them or have a negative view of them. Youth are often looking for solutions to their problems online and not finding the right people or answers. There seems to be a lack of boundaries and consequences for behaviour.
Tolerance of problematic substance use	**Focus Groups/Interviews** In presentations, youth were curious about how to deal with living in homes with substance use. Questions like "How do I handle a relationship with Dad who is using?", "How do I stop using?" and "How do I not start?"
Criminalized or incarcerated parents	**Focus Groups/Interviews** There are parents who have a bad relationship with police which leads youth to share that distrust of system.

Individual Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Prior delinquency and criminalization	**Focus Groups/Interviews** There has been a large increase in sexually based crimes for youth. Staff have seen a big increase in referrals to restorative justice and youth probation, and these issues are affecting younger individuals. The youth connected to restorative justice process are getting younger. Youth are carrying around weapons saying it is for their safety. Social media influencers are encouraging theft.
High desire for status, recognition, and protection	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Youth are carrying around weapons saying it is for their safety.
Low sense of belonging	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Youth in general are disengaged. Increasing burnout, disengagement. At local safe spaces such as Teen Junction, they are not wanting to do much. Disengagement is huge from school, existing social supports, and safe spaces such as Teen Junction. Post COVID, youth are not returning to these spaces in the same numbers. These programs had to limit numbers or not offer services during COVID; this lack of consistency turned many youth away. Youth are disengaged. They are not connecting with the same friends and social media is allowing them to do that. During COVID people were removed from their entertainment, friends, faith-based places, which has not fully recovered to same levels.
Problematic alcohol and drug use	**Focus Groups/Interviews**

Individual Level Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	Substance use is becoming increasingly prevalent, and the age range is getting younger. Staff are seeing methamphetamines use as early as 12. There is high vaping use, and this is pre-cursor to other addictions. The addiction issue is "exploding."
Lack of attention to trauma	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Youth have a lack of information on how to handle issues they're facing (Stigma, Substance Use, Self-Worth, Anxiety, Family Relationships, Conflict Resolution). There is a huge increase in reported anxiety, youth struggling to attend school due to mental illness, low self esteem, and addictions.
Early sexualization	**Focus Groups/Interviews** The prevalence of underage sexting is increasing. The youth involved do not see it as an issue.
Low sense of self	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Staff are seeing a real lack of hope in youth, social isolation and disengagement, and a lack of a healthy identity. The lack of healthy identity is apparent for Indigenous youth who are not connected to their traditional teachings and culture. This is linked to colonization and the disconnection from and loss of teachings. There is a lack of feelings of accomplishment. They are not being praised for doing good, but the gangs are praising them for doing bad. This is one of the biggest recruitment methods for gangs. They target youth who lack that identity and the gang gives them that identity.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS TO PREVENT CHILDREN & YOUTH GANG INVOLVMENT

Land & Waters	Societal level	Community level	Schools	Peer group	Family level	Individual level
Access/availability of healthy lands & waters including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines	Social and economic policies and actions that encourage positive youth engagement Access to resources to meet basic needs for all Strong social safety net High level of equity in all regards Adherence to human rights Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation Visibly valuing children and having a commitment to the future	High level of community engagement High level of volunteerism Access to and participation in traditional healing and cultural activities Availability of barrier-free recreation Strong neighborhoods Strong leadership (both elected officials and "natural" leaders) Investment in community safety through social development	Effective connections between school and home environment Clear behavioral expectations and follow-through on infractions Attention to context in which the school exists. School-neighborhood collaborations Knowledge and utilization of asset-based teaching Availability of diverse extracurricular activities High number of students that graduate	Positive and sustained peer relations Connections to peers who are actively engaged in the community in positive ways High level of intolerance towards violence and problematic substance use Involvement in after school activities Peers that are engaged in recreational activities	Parents that are present and consistent Availability to family dialogues on challenging topics Shared activities between members of the family Parents modeling involvement in recreation Parents whose needs are met and who feel supported in the larger community Multiple and healthy connections to the wider community Sense of agency	Positive self-regard Strong sense of belonging Regular positive acknowledgement from peers and family Conflict resolution skills Intolerance towards violence and coming in conflict with the law Success in one or more significant areas of life (school, recreation, social connections) Access to one significant other outside of the family

Land & Waters Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Access/availability of healthy lands & waters including Indigenous sources of foods and medicines	**Focus Groups/Interviews** • Youth Justice Worker at Okanagan Indian Band is running several programs focused on connecting youth to their traditional practices and culture.

Societal Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Strong social safety net	**Focus Groups/Interviews** • YISH – Youth Integrated Service Hub • This initiative is in a development stage. This building will be one centralized location for youth to access services in Vernon. They will have an assigned navigator who will connect them to the 25+ service providers available onsite. This is focusing on the problem of rejection and long wait lists. If youth get rejected, deferred, or put on a wait list, they are likely not coming back. It took them so much even just to get to that point.

Societal Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	• The YISH will allow for the easy access to services and where there are issues accessing something, they will have that assigned navigator to keep them connected until they can receive help. • YISH needs funding for programming, to hire peer support workers, honorarium, snacks, etc. Everything they need to build community and belonging. • Monthly Pride group for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to connect
Visibly valuing children and having a commitment to the future	• Focus Groups/Interviews • YISH has leadership council of youth making decisions about the new space – Youth Advisory Council (YAC) • YAA Fest is no longer running. It was a celebration of youth accomplishments – by and for youth in Vernon. This is a loss for the community, and particularly for youth. • Okanagan Indian Band Youth Leadership Council - Create opportunities for youth to learn how the community works and prepare them for future leadership. • During our work we need to understand how this work is responding to youth, how we are listening to them, how we are engaging them, and how we are empowering them.

Community Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
High level of community engagement	**Focus Groups/Interviews** • The Queer Field Trip program saw drastic increase in attendance when they brought in a first-year university student to brand and do outreach – they were better able to connect with the youth. • Vernon has an "underground" population of 20-somethings who are doing amazing things and could be great examples and mentors to young people; starting businesses, doing creative arts, and might be working "joe jobs" to survive but also doing amazing things in the rest of their lives. Local Losers is one example of a business really doing great things
Visibly valuing children and having a commitment to the future	**Focus Groups/Interviews** YISH has leadership council of youth making decisions about the new space – Youth Advisory Council (YAC) YAA Fest is no longer running. It was a celebration of youth accomplishments – by and for youth in Vernon. This is a loss for the community, and particularly for youth. Okanagan Indian Band Youth Leadership Council - Create opportunities for youth to learn how the community works and prepare them for future leadership. During our work we need to understand how this work is responding to youth, how we are listening to them, how we are engaging them, and how we are empowering them.
Access to and participation in traditional healing and cultural activities	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Youth Justice Worker at Okanagan Indian Band is running several programs focused on connecting youth to their traditional practices and culture.
Availability of barrier free recreation	**Focus Groups/Interviews**

Community Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
	Schools have funding for youth to get involved in sports BUT it can often be challenging for low-income youth to compete with others who have taken expensive training programs. In high school, they must try out to get on the team and that can impact participation.
Strong leadership (both elected officials and "natural" leaders)	**Focus Groups/Interviews** There is engaged and dedicated leadership in the social sector. YISH and OKIB leadership councils foster future leaders in Vernon.
Investment in community safety through social development	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Vernon has Local Action Teams and a Social Planning Council that continue to address risk factors in Vernon

School Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
School-neighborhood collaborations	**Focus Groups/Interviews** The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) used to have a Youth Program coordinator who would go into schools and deliver workshops about substance use, stigma, harm reduction, and other issues. This program was able to build a rapport and trust with youth. Many youths accessed services through this position. CMHA lost the funding so they're no longer able to hire for that position.

Peer Group Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Involvement in after school activities	**Focus Groups/Interviews** Teen Junction provides a safe space for youth in Vernon after school hours. There are opportunities and funding available to support youth involved in sports.

Family Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)

· Parents that are present and consistent · Availability to family dialogues on challenging topics · Shared activities between members of the family · Parents modeling involvement in recreation · Parents whose needs are met and who feel supported in the larger community · Multiple and healthy connections to the wider community · Sense of agency	**Focus Groups/Interviews** We did not hear feedback about family level protective factors in our engagement sessions, however we did not have specific discussions with adults as parents in their family role.

Individual Level Protective Factors

Protective Factors	Evidence (what we've heard/seen)
Access to one significant other outside of the family	**Youth Engagement** 100 percent of respondents to the youth survey noted that they have an adult they can talk to when they have a problem

ACTION PLANNING AND PRIORITY SETTING

On March 8, 2023 the Steering Committee met to review the community engagement results and discuss priorities for the Building Safer Communities Strategy. The session was facilitated by the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention, with support from Urban Matters. The community input from that session will be synthesized by CMNCP to guide the development of the final BSC Strategy.

During the session, there was a prioritizing process for the key risk factors identified through the community engagement and background research. Based on those priorities the following ideas were put forward for action:

Prioritized Risk Factor	Action Idea
Lack of Attention to Trauma	Community Education and public awareness regarding trauma and the impacts of adverse childhood events (ACE's) Grants for community awareness and education Work with Oak Centre to facilitate education
Low Sense of Belonging	Increase equitable access to recreation activities Provide a grant program for organizations to deliver recreation programs (particularly arts based), that meet criteria related to equity and sense of belonging Increase access to transportation for youth Free bus passes for youth aged 13-18 Coordinate partnership with BGC to use their vans to support transportation access to youth recreation programs
Lack of Adequate Services: Recreation	Facilitate subsidized and sliding scale fees to improve affordability of recreation and arts programs Provide arts and recreation grants that have equitable access Plan youth engagement activities to help us understand what kind of activities youth want Host a youth conference for youth from equity groups, and who may have barriers to access, or who have higher risk levels Re-invigorate the Youth Achievement Awards event
Lack of Adequate Services: Waitlists	Provide support for implementation of the Youth Integrated Services Hub (YISH)

	Fund a nurse home visiting partnership program to provide intensive support for young parents with infants, with a goal of reducing risk factors at a very early age
Lack of Adequate Services: Barriers to Service	Host a youth-focused cultural festival in partnership with organizations that support people from a range of cultures (VDICSS, CFNO, OKIB) Partner with Local Immigration Partnership program (LIP) to support multi-cultural ambassadors' program
Lack of Housing	Develop supports for youth aging out of care or transitioning to adulthood with limited support
Low Sense of Self	Work with OKIB Leadership Council to identify priorities and explore opportunities to create a peer based cultural awareness program
Abuse and Neglect of Children	Fund a program to provide daytime support for youth using the Friendship Centre Youth Safe House program when they are not able to be at the shelter, focused on helping them access community programs, health care, education, employment supports, and other services.
Discrimination and Lack of Safe Spaces	Support organizations to build peer support and peer-driven initiatives • Training for service providers • Training for youth to support creating safe peer spaces Create safe spaces for youth that are 2SLGBTQIA+ and co-develop programming and skills development • Family Resource Centre with CMHA
Lack of Educational Supports	Support a harm reduction/mental health navigator position/role in schools • Could be a peer-based model paired with professional • Build on lessons learned from previous CMHA program

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