



CRUW
CULTURALLY RELEVANT URBAN WELLNESS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW



CONTENTS

Mission Objectives **2**

Our Partners **4**

What Happens at CRUW **6**

CRUW Program Structure **8**

Our Shared Journey: Sharing the Successes of
Youth Mentors in CRUW **10**

Why is CRUW Important: A Message from the
CRUW Elders' Advisory Circle **17**

Engaging Cultural Diversity in Vancouver **19**

Supporting Research **20**

Acknowledgments **21**



MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

The CRUW program brings together some of Vancouver's most at risk Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, to discuss and celebrate the diversity of the city, and engage in culturally relevant land-based practices promoting holistic and sustainable urban wellness. Our mission is to empower CRUW participants to identify, achieve and reflect upon personal and group goals that they set for themselves in relation to the four CRUW objectives .

1. **Honouring Our Diversity**, with an emphasis on applying ancestral Aboriginal knowledge and practice to contemporary urban living;
2. **Emotional and Cultural Competence**, with an emphasis on breaking down stereotypes, bullying and discrimination through the development of emotional competencies and skills;
3. **Holistic & Sustainable Urban Wellness**, with an emphasis on the prevention and reduction of substance misuse, positive mental health, and healthy life transitions; and
4. **Mentorship**, with an emphasis on peer mentorship and elder-youth connections.



Our programming demonstrates that culturally relevant land-based engagements provide a space for education, healing and growth. By means of strength-based approaches over a sustained engagement of seven months, CRUW staff and Elders support youth participants in meaningful transitions towards holistic and sustainable urban wellness.





OUR PARTNERS



Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS)

CRUW was initially made possible through funds raised at VACFSS. As the lead agency within the partnership, VACFSS continues to hold the primary responsibility of raising funds to ensure the sustainability of the program. Most importantly, VACFSS facilitates the involvement of Aboriginal youth, and funds the CRUW program manager.



The UBC Institute for Aboriginal Health (IAH)

Provides the garden plots for CRUW participants within their Teaching and Research Garden. The IAH promotes the concept of food and water as the original medicines. In addition to healthy foods, their garden contains over forty Aboriginal medicinal plants that the youth interact with to promote learning around healthy diet and medicines. The IAH also funds the CRUW garden coordinator as an in-kind contribution to the program.



Pacific Community Resources Society

The non-Aboriginal youth participants join CRUW through the Learning is First (LIFT) program at Pacific Community Resources Society. PCRS also provides one program coordinator as an in-kind contribution to CRUW.



The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at the UBC Farm

The Centre became an official partner during the second program year of CRUW, and provides in-kind access to a variety of teaching spaces and other facilities on the UBC Farm.

WHAT HAPPENS AT CRUW

CRUW runs every second Saturday from late March until late October, annually. The program accepts 18 Aboriginal youth and 9 non-Aboriginal youth, ages 12-15. Over this seven-month period on the farm, youth participants work with Aboriginal Elders and knowledge keepers, program staff, and other professionals in a wide diversity of activities. At the farm, the youth engage in three activities each session (one garden-based and two other culturally-relevant activities). CRUW operates within the ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam nation. We are honoured to have the support of Musqueam in providing these services to diverse at-risk youth from across the Lower Mainland.

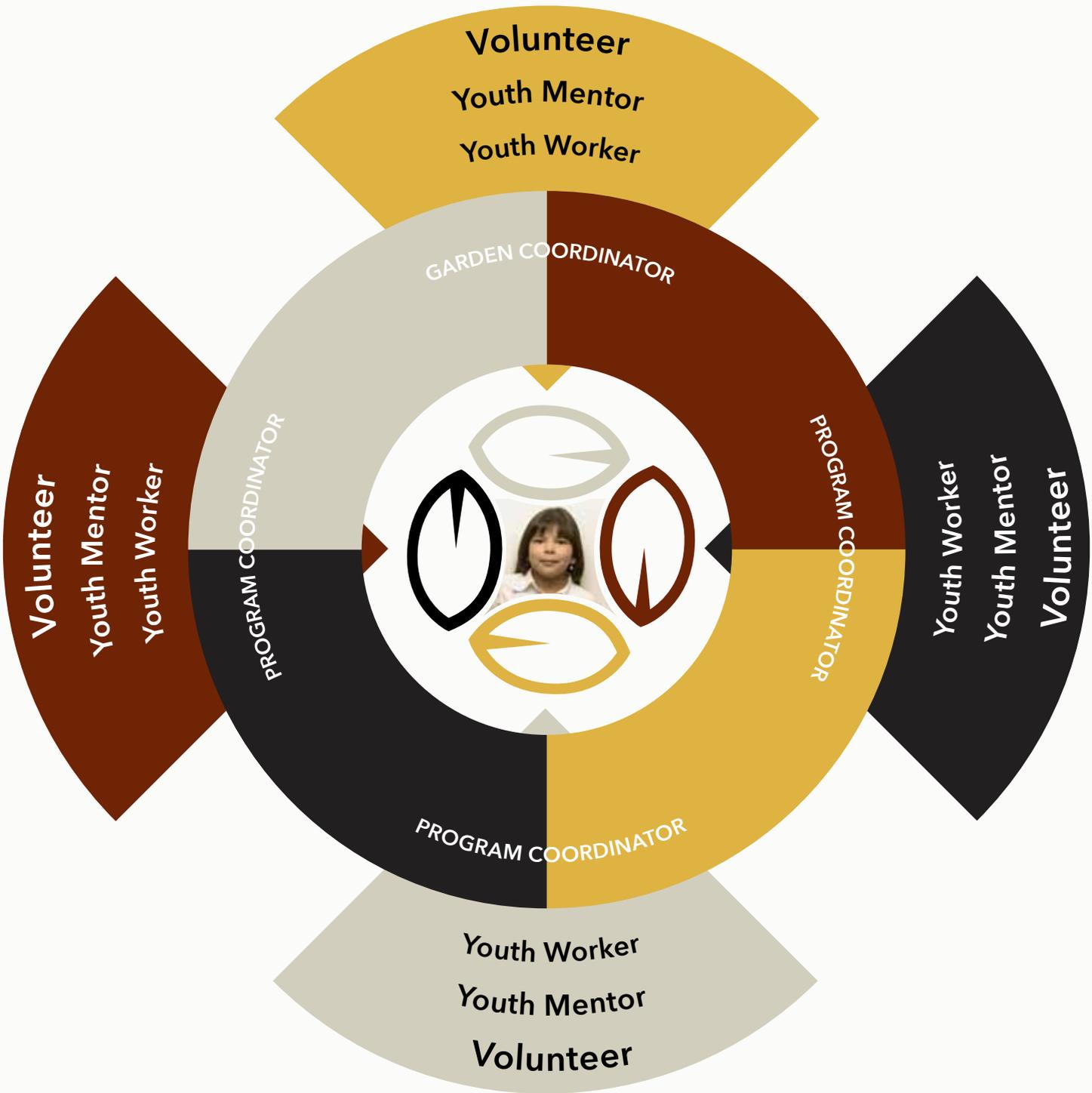


IN THE GARDEN the youth learn to plant seeds in the greenhouse, transplant seedlings into their plots, and care for both edible and non-edible plants. During the harvest period, the youth learn to cook, process and preserve their yields. Non-edible plants are transformed into medicinal teas, salves and other products. Connection to the land serves as a source of wellness, as well as a context for learning about nutrition, food security, sustainability and ecology.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT ACTIVITIES vary from year-to-year and depend on the diversity and interests of a given cohort. Topics include: restorative justice and anti-bullying; media literacy; Aboriginal oral history and dance; honouring our diversity; drum making; smoking salmon; healthy life transitions; substance abuse prevention and reduction; Chinese Canadian History; and African diaspora in Canada.

All activities, garden and otherwise, empower youth participants to direct their own process of developing skills, tools and capacities transferable to their lives off the farm in the interest of supporting their education, career development and personal and family wellness.







CRUW PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The 27 youth participants of each CRUW cohort are divided into 3 groups of 9. Each CRUW group is composed of male and female Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth spanning 12-15 in age.

Each group is led by a Program Coordinator who is supported by a Youth Worker, a Youth Mentor and Volunteer.

The youth work closely with the other participants in their group over the 7 months on the farm, and also have opportunities to engage in activities with the cohort on the whole.





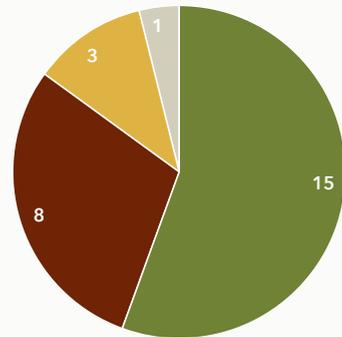
OUR SHARED JOURNEY



Of the 23 graduates from the 2012 CRUW cohort, eight applied to rejoin the program as Youth Mentors the following year. Four positions were available, and the youth hired have offered to share the stories of their journey from participants into mentorship roles. To maintain both anonymity and confidentiality, their stories have woven into a single narrative sharing their growth and experiences as part of CRUW.

Like many youth living in the Metro Vancouver area who do not find many opportunities to engage with nature, CRUW participants generally begin the program with little-to-no gardening experience. In this sense, CRUW has provided youth with a variety of new skills through working in the gardens and out on the land. These impacts have shown to be far-reaching through the various ways in which the youth grow, learn, and transform over their time together in the program.

2012 RETENTION RATES



- Aboriginal Graduates
- Non-Aboriginal Graduates
- Aboriginal Youth Not Retained
- Non-Aboriginal Youth Not Retained

SHARING THE SUCCESSES OF YOUTH MENTORS IN CRUW



OUR SHARED JOURNEY

Youth Mentors spoke about the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual support they have and continue to receive from Elders at CRUW. This form of mentorship has been especially significant for them, as they do not have regular opportunities to spend time with Elders outside of the program. This further demonstrates evidence that knowledge of ancestry coupled with active participation in cultural practices before and during adolescence can make a significant impact in terms of positive wellness and mental health for Aboriginal youth (Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study 2010).

"I find Elders really sweet and full of wisdom... When I got the chance to sit down and hear stories about all of their experiences, even though you might feel like life is hard, it isn't when you hear about their experiences. I feel like it's given me a chance to think about my life and to be like, 'Hey this person went through this and they're telling me their life stories.' So it's basically shown me which ways not to go and which ways I should try to follow." - Youth Mentor



"Last year we did a lot of gardening and we learned about different things, like Aboriginal cultures... I was open to the idea of learning because I had no clue about anything. I have a lot of Aboriginal friends so I might as well learn some new things." - Youth Mentor

SHARING THE SUCCESSES OF YOUTH MENTORS IN CRUW

One of the most important aspects of CRUW for these youth was the cultural diversity of the program. CRUW was described as an amazing program for all of the youth, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, creating a space for cultural exchange and honouring diversity. It has been an important sharing experience for the CRUW participants to learn about different ways of life through cultural sharing, and to have the opportunity to break down the some of the walls of discrimination.

"The Elders, they've lived a long life and they basically know everything... they give out great advice and they give out very good information about the past and they advise you to do this or to do that. I find that interesting. And when they tell us a story, it affects me... and it makes me really think about the stuff I should change." - Youth Mentor

OUR SHARED JOURNEY

Over the course of the CRUW program year, the youth experienced a high level of personal growth, most notably in terms of building self-confidence, empathy and leadership skills, which contributed to the development of skills, tools and new capacities for emotional and cultural competence. At the same time, the youth also made many new friendships, centered around healthy lifestyles and shared interests.



“Through CRUW, I am actually more social. I used to be really socially awkward with people. I had friends, but not people I would see outside that I would actually talk to. And now that I met people at the farm, that are healthy, that are fun to talk to, that are more like me, I love it! And now that I’m more interactive with them, that’s the reason I go all the time. The people there have such a healthy energy, so it’s really clear and bright, positive.”- Youth Mentor

SHARING THE SUCCESSES OF YOUTH MENTORS IN CRUW

Engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth promotes cultural competency as a foundation for holistic and sustainable urban wellness, positive mental health, and prevention and reduction of substance abuse. We take a direct approach of intervening where people live, work, learn, and grow and strive to promote ecological/environmental responsibility, while empowering youth to develop lifelong connections for service, growth and collaboration within their community.

The youth mentors saw considerable changes in their lifestyles, directly impacting their physical, mental emotional, and spiritual wellness. They noted that they “eat less junk food now,” as they are able to bring home vegetables that they harvest during the CRUW sessions. In this sense, they are given opportunities and encouraged to try new foods that they would have otherwise avoided, such as squash, beets and kale.



“[B]eing able to come on the Saturdays to the farm, it’s actually healthy for me because I detach from drama and all that. I focus on planting and keeping things alive and it’s something I look forward to every time. It makes me really happy.” - Youth Mentor

“I loved how they did that. Like, everything we grew we got to take home. And normally, I wouldn’t go to a store and just buy myself a carrot. But the things is, they let us take it home, what we planted, and to try it out was really good for me. I think that, since last year, I’ve been eating more and more vegetables.” - Youth Mentor





WHY IS CRUW IMPORTANT?

A MESSAGE FROM THE CRUW ELDERS' ADVISORY CIRCLE

CRUW is grounded in ancestral Aboriginal knowledge and practice through the ongoing guidance provided by the program's Elders Advisory Circle. The Elders Advisory Circle is composed of 6-8 Aboriginal Elders and knowledge keepers representing Musqueam- on whose ancestral and unceded territory CRUW operates- and other Aboriginal nations across Canada and the United States.

"The CRUW program is an important contribution to Aboriginal youth, the fastest growing demographic in Canada, because it connects youth to Elders' knowledge and Aboriginal cultures, strengthening relationships that promote the development of skills, competencies and capacities that will help youth to embrace an exciting future. In addition, CRUW nurtures respect for all peoples through inclusion of youth from a variety of cultural and racial backgrounds. CRUW also provides the opportunity for youth to guide other youth and thereby learn mentoring skills that enhance the development of leadership capabilities"

- DR. LEE BROWN

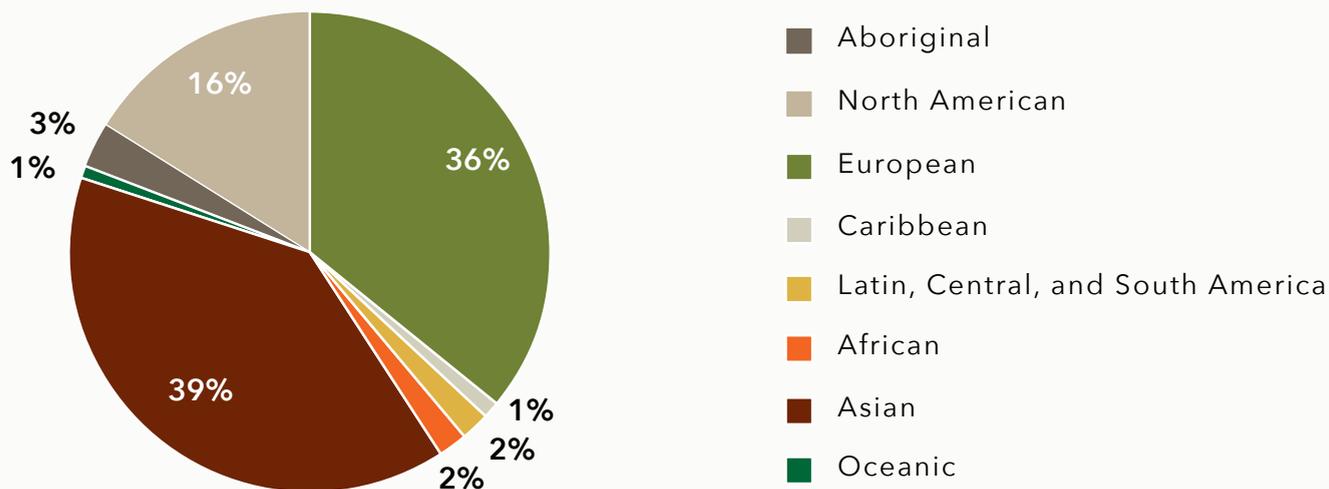


ENGAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN VANCOUVER

At CRUW we both honour and engage the diversity present in Vancouver. The Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) estimates that there are 40,000 Aboriginal people residing in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), from more than 100 Aboriginal communities across Canada—representing a huge diversity of Aboriginal cultures. The non-Aboriginal peoples who have settled in Coast Salish territories also represent vibrant and diverse populations. The diversity of youth in Vancouver which CRUW engages is represented in the chart below (National Household Survey, 2011).



CULTURAL DIVERSITY AMONG YOUTH (AGE 24 AND UNDER) LIVING IN VANCOUVER, BC





SUPPORTING RESEARCH

CULTURALLY RELEVANT LAND-BASED PRACTICE AS A PATHWAY TO HOLISTIC AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN WELLNESS

As Richard Louv popularized in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (2005), interaction with gardens and natural spaces offers a variety of mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and social benefits, including: stress reduction; improved concentration; quicker healing; mitigation of Attention Deficit Disorder; decreasing crime; enhanced health; Improved environmental conditions; Increased workplace productivity; Safer driving; and economic stimulation.

Research by Dr. Lee Brown, Director of UBC's Institute for Aboriginal Health, suggests that culturally relevant practice in IAH's Teaching and Research Garden builds both Emotional and Cultural Competence in Aboriginal Youth. These competencies nurture pride in Aboriginal ancestry through connection to the ancestors- addressing inter-generational trauma, and other

impacts of colonization. Through the inclusion of non-Aboriginal youth this process is deepened to support and empower new generations of youth towards sustainable and holistic urban wellness that honours cultural diversity.

Research continues to demonstrate that the teenage years are critical for cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual development (The Nature of Things, The Teenage Brain). Culturally relevant land-based practice during these formative years provides youth with ancestral knowledge in contemporary ways, fostering innovation that honors our diversity rather than privileging postcolonial forms of language, epistemology, practice and relationship. CRUW has identified research as a priority; and will be conducting further evidence based research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funders

CRUW has been made possible through generous grants provided by the Community Action Initiative (CAI), through the Province of British Columbia, and through the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity at the Earth Institute, Columbia University.

Funding provided by



Community
Action
Initiative



VACFSS

Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS): Is the lead agency, responsible for raising funds to start the program. VACFSS also facilitates the involvement of Aboriginal youth, and funds the CRUW program manager. A special thanks to Freida Gladue, *VACFSS Communications and PR Associate* and Clarissa Poernomo, *VACFSS Communications and PR Assistant*, for the design of the Culturally Relevant Urban Wellness (CRUW) Program Overview.





CRUW

CULTURALLY RELEVANT URBAN WELLNESS

3284 E Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5M 1Z8
604.216.6103

www.vacfss.com/programs/cruw

