

Healthy Living Youth Council

A year in review

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The Healthy Living Youth Council (HLYC) is a group of 16 high school students from around the province who share a passion for promoting health. The group first met in Vancouver at the Kick-Off event in November 2012. Since then, the Council has met a number of goals throughout the year including bringing the HLYC vision and mission into reality. They have engaged in various learning opportunities including participation in monthly webinars and attendance at the [Mental Health Youth Summit event](#) in February 2013.

Over the year, the HLYC took on an ambitious set of action initiatives that they planned using the Healthy Schools BC Learning Framework, and implemented in schools and communities across BC. Quinn says, “The action project was one of the best parts of the whole HLYC experience because it let us use the skills we gained from the work with the HLYC group and gain more skills that only ‘hands-on’ work can give.” Council members created school-based HLYCs and engaged youth in leadership classes, and Phys. Ed. Programs, reaching entire high schools, as well as youth at elementary and middle-school levels.

When asked to describe three highlights of their experience on the Council, members had many to share! Shannon recalls “collaborating with students on the HLYC, engaging other youth in my community through a Health Week, and participating in planning activities for the HLYC retreat.” Amber enjoyed “creating a support for youth, celebrating with the council, and receiving recognition for work.” Hayley reports that “creating a Vision and Mission statement for the first HLYC, collaborating with other HLYC members through webinars, and using my project to make a change in my school” were most memorable.

The HLYC recently returned from connecting once again as a group at [Camp Fircom on Gambier Island](#). Although much fun was had, the HLYC took their work seriously and worked together to reflect on their year and brainstorm a vision for the HLYC’s future. At the retreat, the HLYC had many focused discussions to celebrate successes and reflect on the challenges they faced. Shannon notes that “challenges and setbacks are just part of the experiment,” and Jesse adds that “changes in plans mean you have to adapt to move forward.” In the garden, around the campfire, and in the forest, a number of themes were explored, including working together, stepping up versus showing up, managing commitments, and more.

The HLYC identified skill development in areas of leadership, communication, collaboration, and project planning, and reported growth in their understanding of the complexities of affecting positive change. Connor explains that he “learned about health in BC, about making a change, and about how my change will impact the future.”

After their time together on Gambier Island, the HLYC ferried over to Vancouver to attend the Healthy Schools BC Symposium and were involved in a poster presentation showcasing their achievements this year.

Connor, Rylee, and Shannon give further insight into the HLYC year in review in the following interview.

Describe the journey of the HLYC.

R: We were nervous strangers at the beginning of the year and now we are a group of lifelong friends, passionate about the same ideas. I learned a lot about my leadership, and that all leadership doesn't have to look the same – each HLYC member is different and each can lead differently, but effectively.

C: At the beginning, I didn't know what to expect. I wrote my application and then I didn't know.... I was really surprised that there was a bunch of other kids with the same passion and goals to change the health in schools. It was an eye-opener for me.

S: The experience with the HLYC has been amazing. Every step of the way has been exciting and we've seen change happen as the year progressed. The differences we made in our schools, no matter how small, were so rewarding that it made us want to do more. I think the HLYC has taught us so much about health and about ourselves.

How did you engage youth on Healthy Living topics?

C: At the beginning of the year, I was interested in changing food options at my school – there aren't that many choices and the choices that are there are bland and not that healthy. I wanted to change the options in the vending machines. I saw this as the only way to make this change at first, but then I realized that there are so many ways to make changes. Now I'm looking into a salad bar option to reduce the number of students who are leaving school for unhealthy fast food lunches.

R: Starting out, I was passionate about the stigma of mental health. This passion has grown through attending the Mental Health Youth Summit and culminated in my presentation on mental health at the HLYC retreat.

What was the highlight of the year for you?

R: Everything came together for me at the Symposium when we were standing by our posters and other stakeholders were there, making real-life connections; we were moving forward as individuals and as a group.

C: I like learning a lot so it was the ideas around project implementation and the workshops on mental health and peer influence at the HLYC retreat.

Describe the HLYC retreat.

C: The retreat was a bunch of students from November who came together again to learn more about health, brainstorm and discuss ideas about health and about their projects and how to change things and

make the HLYC better for next year. There were fun activities too. Sit spots and being turned off of technology were important – if we had our cells we would have been too distracted to notice how beautiful Gambier Island is.

Describe your experience at the Symposium.

S: During the poster session, everyone was so interested and asked lots of questions. It was really nice to have my work recognized.

R: It was eye-opening to see so many adults that are passionate about something and have the mindset that it doesn't have anything to do with them because they really know that kids are the future.

C: At my table, it was really interesting to talk to adults about the topics; I would like to have stayed for the whole symposium.

What would you say to someone considering applying for next year's HLYC?

R: Don't apply expecting to be a passenger – go into it to be a leader and be prepared to work towards change in the world. Whether your passion changes from school health to the environment, the skills that you can acquire on the HLYC can be carried into other aspects of your life.

S: Use the Council opportunities to your advantage – post questions, email pictures, go to all the webinars. The HLYC is such a valuable resource that many students don't have! Also, don't be afraid to hear 'no' when planning your project; if you have an idea, don't let it go. Anything is possible with the right people.

C: I definitely encourage students to apply. I would really recommend for a student to think of a project ahead of time and take care completing a quality application.

On their retreat, the HLYC collaborated on the next steps for this Youth Council. Stay tuned for the call for new applicants for the HLYC this fall, or email hlyc@dashbc.ca for more information.