

JULY 4, 2024 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COWICHAN VALLEY YOUTH SERVICES DENIED FEDERAL FUNDING

Cowichan Valley Youth Services (CVYS) is grieving the loss of their Youth Employment Mentorship Program (YEMP) this week following disappointing news from the Federal Government.

CVYS has run a Service Canada funded pre-employment program for youth in Cowichan for almost 20 years. YEMP was a paid 12-week pre-employment program, aimed at youth aged 15-30, which provided group based essential life skills and employability skills, and hands-on work experience with local employers.

“We are absolutely devastated and blindsided by this funding decision,” shares CVYS Executive Director, Zoe Lauckner. “Particularly so, in the wake of two vital community service organizations announcing closures last week, and in midst of a growing youth mental health crisis, and during an election year. Our hearts are hurting for youth in the Valley who need this program.”

Last week, Cowichan Family Life Association and Big Brothers Big Sisters Cowichan Valley announced closures due to financial shortfalls.

“Changes in federal funding, restrictions on grant funds, and challenging economic times are adding to the growing pressure on the nonprofit social service sector right now,” shares Lauckner. “And all at a time when communities need these upstream, preventative services more than ever. This program had a 98% success rate and truly helped young people get started on a new path in life.” She shares there are other youth-serving organizations on the island who were also denied this funding.

Here in Cowichan, 42 hopeful youth remained on the waitlist for this year’s now-cancelled YEMP program, many who experience various vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing employment.



A past group of 'YEMPers' outside CVYS

“This program has been a really safe place for people to land,” shares Elaine Webb, former YEMP Program Manager with CVYS. “Many youth we work with, their families are basically already on the street. We provided food, hygiene products, whatever it takes to help them feel supported. This program truly was preventative, helping to boost confidence, create connection, and help people to bounce back.”

Chris Schultz, Board Chair at CVYS, shares his dismay at the government’s decision. “It is very disappointing. Many youth have benefitted from the program as well as many employers in the valley. It comes as a shock, as Federal Minister Patty Hajdu (former Minister of Employment and Workforce Development) toured our program in 2018 and publicly acknowledged the value and success of the program.”

Numerous local business owners in the Cowichan Valley have collaborated with the YEMP program, which provides 6 weeks of subsidized wages to program

participants. Sandilea Gibson, owner of Gibby's Café and Gibs N' Dots, reflects how this program impacted her business.

"This program was absolutely paramount in the placement and support of us accessing young employees," Gibson shares. "We have seen the major impact this team has had on youth that would otherwise end up in a system that costs instead of lends itself to the health and wellbeing of our youth."

CVYS is a registered charity that serves youth aged 13-18, and their families in the Cowichan community for over 50 years. Each year, more than 800 unique individuals access their free, confidential counselling supports through one-to-one and group counselling, mobile outreach, and other programming for both youth and caregivers. While CVYS receives significant provincial funding for their counselling programs, the agency does rely on grant funds and local community support in order to meet the increasing demand for service.

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