

Update for January to December 2024



Youth Engagement Report

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Purpose

In May 2013, Halifax Regional Council directed Community & Recreation Services (now Parks & Recreation) to engage youth in their communities and online to better understand the current trends and issues that youth face across the Halifax Regional Municipality (municipality).

In April 2019, the Chief Administrative Officer was directed to provide an annual information report to the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) regarding trends, issues, best practices and actions taken with respect to youth programming.

The information presented in this report provides an overview of the services and programs offered to youth from January to December 2024.

Executive Summary

The *2024 Youth Engagement Report* highlights the voices, concerns and aspirations of youth across the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), gathered through a variety of participatory engagement sessions, surveys, and youth-led initiatives of the Youth Services Plan wrap-up. This work reflects the municipality's commitment to amplifying youth perspectives in municipal planning, programming and policy development.

Key themes that emerged from the engagement process include:

- A strong desire for more inclusive, accessible and youth-specific spaces.
- The importance of youth feeling heard, respected and supported in their communities.
- Greater opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making.
- Improved transportation options and expanded recreation and employment programs.

Several engagement formats were used, including pop-up events, school-based sessions, focus groups and online outreach. These efforts successfully reached a diverse cross-section of youth, including those from historically marginalized communities. The report also captures insights from the municipality's Youth Advisory Committee and outlines current youth-led actions shaping local initiatives.

Recommendations centre on deepening relationships with youth through sustained engagement, creating formal channels for youth influence in governance, increasing funding for grassroots youth initiatives and integrating youth perspectives into existing municipal plans and strategies.

This report serves as both a snapshot of youth experience in 2024 and a foundation for future work. By listening to and investing in youth, the municipality is positioning itself as a leader in building equitable, youth-centred communities.

The Youth Engagement Report provides an annual update on youth services in the municipality.



Youth Services Plan

halifax.ca/ysp

In 2005, Halifax Regional Municipality's Recreation Programming Division worked with HeartWood Centre for Community Development to create the municipality's Youth Engagement Strategy. This engagement strategy focused on best practice strategies for youth engagement. Since that time, the municipality has worked to ensure youth programs meet the needs of youth.

Reorganization in 2015 led to the creation of a youth-focused section of the Parks & Recreation business unit. The next step in providing youth services was for this new section to conduct a large-scale survey to gather information on the municipality's youth services. The Youth Services Plan was the final product of that year-long, youth-led engagement process. To see a summary of the first plan, visit halifax.ca/ysp.

This Youth Engagement Strategy informed the development of a second Youth Services Plan. By identifying relevant issues for youth, the YSP2 supported decision-making in how best to address the needs of the Halifax region's youth through the delivery of programs and services, as well as working with other business units and community partners throughout the municipality.

This report captures the final update for the YSP2. During the fall of 2025, staff will begin the process for the creation of the third Youth Services Plan (YSP3).

YOUTH SERVICES PLAN 2022-2024

Vision statement

We envision a future where youth have the opportunities and supports to achieve their greatest potential.

Mission statement

We enrich the quality of life for youth by providing a variety of programs, services and spaces that are supportive of the municipality's diverse youth population.

Core values

Core values are the principles or philosophies that guide how we work with youth:

- diversity and inclusion
- transparency and accountability
- collaboration
- youth voice

Strategic priorities

1. Youth have access to spaces in their community where they can take ownership, feel welcome, socialize, obtain support and access services;
2. All youth across the municipality feel represented and included in programs, services and committees;
3. Youth feel prepared to make a successful transition to adulthood;
4. Youth feel empowered to engage in local governance and contribute to shaping their communities; and
5. All youth are aware of the services and programs offered by the municipality.



ACTIVITIES		ACTIONS COMPLETED
	Immediate Outcome 1: Youth have access to spaces in their community where they can take ownership, feel welcome, socialize, obtain support and access services.	
Output 1.1	To focus on an integrated youth service delivery approach	
Activity 1.1.1	- Establish Multi-Service Youth Centre (MSYC) in Spryfield. - Select third MSYC location.	- The Spryfield Youth Space opened. - Third MSYC on hold until Spryfield space moves into new location.
Activity 1.1.2	Conduct partnership recruitment at The Den.	The Den partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Halifax to provide Outreach Worker services during the Tuesday night drop-in.
Activity 1.1.3	Coordinate activities between municipal youth spaces (rooms).	- The Den and Spryfield youth space employees co-participated in employee training to develop employee manuals for youth spaces. - Mobile Youth Support Team (MYST) began offering services at The Den, Spryfield Youth Space and other municipal youth spaces. - Downtown Dartmouth youth service providers round table created in collaboration with Halifax Public Libraries. - MYST provided support to various recreation centre youth rooms and youth centres.
Activity 1.1.4	Promote youth counselling and youth outreach worker services to youth (Mobile Youth Support Team).	
Output 1.2	To ensure youth spaces are welcoming, inclusive and accessible	
Activity 1.2.1	Adapt the Community Safety Office’s Women’s Safety Audit to create youth audits that assess the “youth-friendliness” of municipal youth spaces.	Will carry forward to the next Youth Services Plan.
Activity 1.2.2	Host a design night for the Multi-Service Youth Centre in Spryfield to ensure the space is youth-friendly.	Youth feedback gathered in preparation for the opening of the Spryfield Youth Centre location.
Activity 1.2.3	Deliver accessibility and inclusion training to staff in youth spaces.	Accessibility and Inclusion training for frontline youth centre employees is being designed.
Activity 1.2.4	Deliver <i>Nonviolent Crisis Intervention</i>, mental health first aid, harm reduction and <i>Anti-Black Racism Training</i> to staff in youth spaces.	NVCI training delivered to all youth centre employees.
Activity 1.2.5	- Continue to deliver Friendly Faces Friendly Spaces to front line staff. - Revamp the training to be more trauma-informed.	- Friendly Faces, Friendly Spaces training delivered to four additional recreation centres. - Setting Healthy Boundaries and Conflict Resolution training delivered to the youth centre frontline employees. - Engagement completed at Alderney Gate to get youth feedback on creating a safer environment in the building.
Output 1.3	To ensure youth spaces support the mental well-being of youth	
Activity 1.3.1	Create and maintain a list of services and resources for youth on the halifax.ca/youth webpage.	- Updated 2022, 2023 and 2024. - Employees completed an annual update on resources presented.
Activity 1.3.2	Work with community partners to develop training for employees referring youth to social services, housing, food, employment and counselling.	- Duty to Report training delivered to all multi-service youth centre employees at The Den, Powerhouse and Spryfield. - Daily Life Events training was piloted, and employees identified this training as a core requirement for all full-time employees who work with youth.
Activity 1.3.3	- Expand counselling services in drop-in youth spaces. - Offer community resource navigation support by Youth Outreach Worker.	- Mobile Youth Support Team began offering counselling services and community resource navigation support in youth spaces. - Navigation support offered to recreation centres that operate youth rooms/drop-ins.
Activity 1.3.4	Deliver peer support training to youth.	Not completed, will carry forward to next youth services plan.
	Immediate Outcome 2: All youth across the municipality feel represented and included in programs, services and committees.	
Output 2.1	To learn more about serving underrepresented youth populations and communities	
Activity 2.1.1	- Conduct research on best practices for delivering equitable youth programs and services and provide an update in the annual Youth Engagement Report. - Identify barriers and challenges youth from underrepresented communities experience. - Identify training resources for youth staff to participate in.	- Research on best practices for supporting black youth was conducted. - Work is being done with ANSIAO and D&I to create further employee training. - Review of Youth Engagement Strategy (Y.E.S.) Camp to identify barriers to participation.
Activity 2.1.2	- Review the Multi-Service Youth Centre model. - Review the implementation and evaluation of the Youth Services Plan with an equity lens.	- MSYC Model review -- Staff held several meetings that reviewed the Youth Centre Coordinator job descriptions and current trends facing the youth centres. - Youth Services Plan review will take place before the implementation of the next plan.

ACTIVITIES		ACTIONS COMPLETED
Output 2.2	To develop and improve programs and services for underrepresented youth populations and communities	
Activity 2.2.1	Deliver youth programming and services specific to underrepresented youth populations, including women and girls, urban Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, African Nova Scotians, immigrants and youth with disabilities.	- The Den and Powerhouse continue to offer specific programming for underrepresented youth populations. - Ready for Rec for youth with disabilities delivered in Spryfield and Dartmouth.
Activity 2.2.2	Ensure rural youth programs and services are aligned with the Rural Recreation Strategy.	- Community Recreation Outdoor Coordinators are reviewing programming in the rural areas, including creating access to canoe/ kayak opportunities. - Adventure Earth Centre offered an overnight camp for youth employees at the Chaswood Educational Wood Lot in Middle Musquodoboit, where employees brainstormed and created program ideas for younger youth.
Activity 2.2.3	Recruit program staff and facilitators who are reflective of the municipality’s youth population.	- Multi-Service Youth Centres have hired specific youth who can identify with the youth who are attending the centres. - Collaborated with Human Resources to ensure adherence to best practices for diverse hiring.
Activity 2.2.4	Conduct a program review of the Youth Advocate Program including its intake process, boundaries and ways youth are supported in the program.	- A review of the Youth Advocate Program was completed, specifically updating the intake process and guiding processes. - Boundary review was completed, and recommendations were put forward as part of the 2025/26 budgeting process.
	Immediate Outcome 3: Youth feel prepared to make a successful transition to adulthood	
Output 3.1	To offer a variety of ways for youth to develop their skills	
Activity 3.1.1	Design and deliver programming and workshops on basic skills such as budgeting, finances and cooking.	- Community Recreation Coordinators offered new cooking and meal prep programs in spring 2023. - Adventure Earth Centre offered training to the youth leadership participants on outdoor cooking. - Youth Worx Program offered budgeting and finances learning course to program participants.
Activity 3.1.2	Partner with external agencies to deliver workshops on science, technology, engineering and computer skills.	Not completed, will put forward in the next Youth Services Plan.
Output 3.2	To develop job readiness by enhancing employment programs and opportunities	
Activity 3.2.1	Collaborate with service providers to offer programming and workshops that increase youth employability skills.	- Youth Worx continues to build employment opportunities for youth as the café model expands. - Summer 2023 review of Youth Leader Modules was conducted by Youth Leadership Coordinators with updates made for future years.
Activity 3.2.2	Conduct a review of the Youth Leadership Program’s employment modules to identify opportunities for improvement.	
	Immediate Outcome 4: Youth feel empowered to engage in local government and contribute to shaping their communities	
Output 4.1	For youth to gain confidence to effectively engage in local governance	
Activity 4.1.1	Host a youth workshop series for youth to learn how the municipal government operates and how they can contribute to local governance.	Youth Advisory Committee passed their first motion requesting a staff report on <i>By-law M200</i>.
Activity 4.1.2	Continue to support the Youth Advisory Committee as an opportunity for youth to learn about local governance.	- Youth Advisory Committee recruited new members. - Youth Advisory Committee hosted a Town Hall to get input from other youth on how the municipality can better support youth.
Activity 4.1.3	Work with the Municipal Clerk's Office to support voter education efforts to reach youth from diverse communities and encourage their participation in municipal elections.	Youth Advisory Committee received a presentation on the 2024 municipal election and provided feedback on ways to engage with youth.
Activity 4.1.4	Utilize the @hfxnextgen Instagram Account to raise awareness about the next municipal election.	Recreation employees offered the use of the Instagram account to the election employees.
Output 4.2	To provide avenues for youth to give input and feedback on municipal programs, services projects	
Activity 4.2.1	Continue to invest resources in public engagements and events that collect feedback from youth about their ideas, opinions and needs.	- Youth engagement was done at Alderney Gate to get youth input on the damages being done in the building. - Youth engagement was done at The Den to get feedback on the Youth Worx café menu. - Youth engagement done by YAC at the Youth Week brunch with the Mayor.
Activity 4.2.2	Create an online dashboard to inform youth on how their input was used and inform them about the outcomes of their involvements in engagements.	Not completed. It will be brought forward to the next Youth Services Plan.
Activity 4.2.3	Continue to support the Youth Advisory Committee as an opportunity for youth to provide feedback on municipal decisions.	Youth Advisory Committee received a presentation on the 2024 municipal election and provided feedback on ways to engage with youth.
Activity 4.2.4	Facilitate formal and informal opportunities to connect youth with their local Councillors and other municipal decision makers.	Youth Advisory Committee held a brunch with the Mayor in May 2023.

ACTIVITIES		ACTIONS COMPLETED
Output 4.3	To prepare youth to become leaders in their communities.	
Activity 4.3.1	Launch a 16-week Community Change Cohort program to build the capacity of youth to initiate youth-led community projects.	The Community Change Cohort was designed but cancelled in spring 2024. Employees instead went to Y.E.S. Camp to provide resources on community action for youth attending this program during the summer of 2024.
Activity 4.3.2	Facilitate How Youth Initiate Change workshops.	Offered in 2023 and 2024 at the Power House Youth Centre.
Activity 4.3.3	Support youth in accessing resources that enable them to bring a youth-led project into action.	How to Initiate Change workbook was created and distributed to youth centres and youth rooms. Information was also posted on the youth website.
Activity 4.3.4	Explore ways to connect youth to the municipal Placemaking Program.	Employees held meetings to identify ways to engage youth to participate in placemaking programs.
Activity 4.3.5	Increase the number of and access to, meaningful youth volunteer opportunities.	Youth Leadership Program was promoted, with the training modules updated, to offer youth opportunities to volunteer during the summer months.
Activity 4.3.6	Recognize youth leaders by nominating them for the Municipal Volunteer Awards.	Employees identified ways to encourage and support nominations for the Youth Volunteer Awards.
	Immediate Outcome 5: Youth are aware of the services and programs offered by the municipality.	
Output 5.1	To target youth with marketing and promotions that are on trend and will catch their attention	
Activity 5.1.1	Review the youth website to ensure content is updated and relevant to youth needs.	- The youth website was updated in 2023. - Branding for “youth” specific material has been created, including posters for youth centres. - The Den and Spryfield received new branding and marketing materials.
Activity 5.1.2	- Work with Corporate Communications to create an annual youth marketing plan that includes promoting the youth website. - Creation of a new Instagram account.	- A social media marketing plan was created and updated for 2023 and 2024. - A new Instagram account was created in May 2022 called @hfxnextgen.
Activity 5.1.3	- Develop promotion material needed for pop-up engagements, including banners and handouts. - Create an annual plan for seasonal pop-up engagements in rural communities.	New banners have been designed to help promote the youth website and Instagram account.



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MISSION STATEMENT

Municipal youth programs, events and engagements



The municipality offers various programs, events and engagement opportunities for youth. This report highlights efforts taken by Parks & Recreation, Halifax Public Libraries, Halifax Regional Police, Office of the Municipal Clerk, Public Safety Office, HaliFACT and external youth service providers.



YOUTH ADVOCATE PROGRAM



halifax.ca/yap

The Youth Advocate Program (YAP) is a family-centred crime prevention program, which means it looks to and works with the family of the youth to provide coordinated support. The program’s goal is to reduce key risk factors such as isolation, stress and negative pressures that make young people vulnerable to engaging in criminal behaviour. By connecting youth to existing community programs and support, YAP increases self-reliance, resiliency, life skills and social skills by engaging youth in constructive behaviours with family, school and community. The program is directed towards children and youth aged 10 to 15 years old.

Youth Advocate Workers work directly with the youth and their family, building on the youth’s strengths and connecting them with support services in their community. Together, they build the skills and confidence required to withstand pressures to become involved in criminal activity. Program employees also work closely with primary caregivers, and anyone who has the youth’s best interests at heart always works privately, confidentially and with the consent of the family.

When a youth “graduates” from the program, it means that they have built enough resiliency to overcome significant obstacles; they are going to school, may have secured employment and have built healthy life skills and relationships with their peers and families.

This program offers support to youth in:

- Cole Harbour
 - Dartmouth North
 - East Dartmouth
 - Fairview/Clayton Park
 - Bayers Road/Westwood
- Gaston Road/Woodside
 - North End Halifax
 - North and East Preston
 - Lower and Middle Sackville
 - Spryfield

YOUTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM: 2024 STATISTICS
46 participants
14 graduated from the program
8 exited the program
49 program referrals
7 out-of-area program referrals
42 of 46 participants were in school while in the program
11 participants received academic support through the program
All 46 participants received some awareness, education or support on sexual abuse and exploitation
35 participants and their families received some form of mental health support

RECREATION PROGRAMMING

The Youth Advocate Program uses leisure education screening tools to determine the best fit for recreation programming for each participant. Where possible, youth are signed up for municipal recreation programs through the Recreation Funding Access Program. If the recreation service is not available within municipal programming, outside service providers are used. Employees work with other organizations to provide free or low-cost programming for youth.

Research has shown that recreation can be used effectively in a multi-approach toolkit addressing youth gang involvement and violence and provides protective factors against criminal engagement. Recreation programming provides positive role models, development of resilience and pro-social skills, offers safe spaces and opportunities for supervision outside of school hours and meaningful connections to hobbies. By leveraging the resources within Parks & Recreation, employees can connect youth and families to long-term recreation supports, thus decreasing risk factors and increasing protective factors.





The program offers 24 weeks of paid job and life skill building for youth with employment barriers. The program is for youth between the ages of 16 to 24 years old who are not in school and who are facing employment barriers. Youth WORX has two main streams: Business Operations and Mentoring. Business Operations is comprised of on-the-job training and coaching at The Café, located at the Sackville Sports Stadium, The Canteen at the Dingle and Emera Oval and The Cafe at Zatzman Sportsplex, paper recycling services, green cart delivery and repair. The mentoring stream includes working alongside Youth Worx support employees who provide guidance and coaching on their employability and leadership skills. The youth also receive modules on life skills and job skills designed to prepare them for their future. Youth WORX operates two full programs a year, with one starting in May and the other in October.

The Youth WORX program focuses on the following nine employability skills:

- 1. accountability
- 2. adaptability
- 3. attitude
- 4. confidence
- 5. motivation
- 6. presentation
- 7. stress management
- 8. teamwork
- 9. time management



2024 YOUTH WORX PROGRAM STATS	
24 participants	
20 graduates	
BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT:	
All 24 participants lacked job experience	
21% did not graduate from high school	
92% had mental health concerns	
33% had a learning disability	
8% had a history of addiction	
PARTICIPANT LOCATIONS:	
33% from Halifax	
25% from Dartmouth	
21% from Sackville	
21% from other communities in the Halifax region	

PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY

Sukhman came to Canada from India in 2023 to work and study. He struggled to find work in his field as he had no experience and suffered from anxiety. He joined the program in late 2023. He missed some time as he worked through his anxiety, but by the time he graduated in 2024, he had shown significant improvement in confidence and his positive attitude was reflected daily in his performance. He built a high level of trust through his reliability and honesty. After completing the program, he was hired as a casual employee for the Youth WORX program, where he continued to hone his skills and start to focus on his future planning. As a newcomer, he was required to seek work in his field of Pharmacy Technician, for the hours to contribute to his permanent resident status. After applying and attending interviews, he secured employment at a pharmacy in Porter's Lake. Sukhman takes a two-hour bus ride daily to get there and back, which shows his dedication and perseverance.



Youth spaces

halifax.ca/youthspaces

There are many youth spaces within the municipality offering a variety of activities, programs and drop-in times. These spaces include dedicated youth centres (including multi-service youth centres) and youth rooms within municipal recreation centres.

Power House Youth Centre

halifax.ca/powerhouse

The Power House Youth Centre serves as a place for youth to gather, to learn and to connect with others. It is also a meeting space for the municipality's Youth Advisory Committee and the Friends of the Public Gardens.

In 2024, the Power House offered multiple programs for youth 13-24 years of age. There were approximately 1500 youth visits to the space for drop-in activities and registered programs over the year. Participants were typically between 13-20 years old and came from areas of the municipality, including peninsular Halifax, Spryfield, Fairview, Dartmouth, Sackville and Bedford. There were also many youth who were new to Canada attending Power House for the first time this year. Approximately 150 new youth participants attended Power House in 2024.



REGISTERED PROGRAMS

Details: Weekly, each season for 6-10 weeks / Approx. 6-12 participants per program

Program Examples:

- Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)
- Craft and Create
- Gardening Club
- Creative Media

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: GARDENING CLUB

Details: 7 weeks | summer | FREE program

Youth attending the drop-in during the Spring had the opportunity to volunteer and help prepare the garden for the summer programs this year! A few enthusiastic youths helped alongside employees to make sure it was ready for the summer program. Gardening Club allowed youth to care, tend to and plant a variety of vegetables, flowers and herbs in raised garden beds. This was a safe space for the youth who had never gardened before but also provided the chance for seasoned gardeners to teach the others. Youth in this program enjoyed activities like building bug hotels, catching and classifying beetles, visiting the public gardens and painting plant pots. At the end of the summer, the youth collected a huge harvest, including giant zucchinis!



DROP-IN PROGRAMS

PERIOD	DAYS OF THE WEEK	HOURS
September through June	Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays	3 to 7 p.m.
July and August	Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays	10 a.m. to noon (breakfast) 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

DROP-IN ACTIVITY EXAMPLES

Art	• Crochet, screen printing, painting, character design, origami and sign painting.
Cultural	• Themed Chosen Family Meals program, film screenings and art activities during Asian Heritage Month, Mi'kmaq History Month and African Heritage Month. • Weekly PRIDE-themed drop-in programs every week in the summer, Trivia for Trans Day of Remembrance.
Educational	• DIY digital safety workshop, homework help, employment support (resume writing, job application, interview preparedness) and college application support.
Skill building	• Youth volunteer opportunities, including gardening, drop-in and program facilitation mentorship. • Support with learning about health and hygiene and healthy eating habits.
Community Connections	• Mobile Youth Outreach Workers provided support for youth experiencing active crisis or with frequent/higher need for access to community supports, relieving employees and giving youth much-needed one-on-one help. • Support by employees and outreach worker navigating gender affirming care, accessing housing and securing employment. • Co-hosting drop-in events with the Youth Project, including holiday cookie decorating and summer Pride events. • Hosting youth programmers from the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre and visiting their space to learn about program offerings and available supports for Urban Indigenous youth.
Food Security	• Monthly Chosen Family Meal program, free breakfast program during summer, support for how to prepare food safely, cook different meals, how to make a grocery list and go shopping.
Clothing	• Ongoing clothing drive set up with seasonally appropriate offerings. • Support and education for accessing gender affirming gear and clothing.





OVERHEARD AT DROP-IN:

"I felt safe when I was in the drama program and I'm so glad I came today [for drop-in] because I made new friends!"

"This is the most veggies I've ever eaten"

"I invited my friend because there are lots of rainbow flags here, so I knew they'd like it"

"I don't get lost in thought here because I don't need an escape from reality when I'm here"

"Power House is the only place I can 100% be myself"

"You are the first person I spoke to about my study permit and it helped me"

"Friendship is Magic!!!"

**2024 Highlight: Chosen Family Meal
Asian Heritage Month**

Power House hosts a monthly Chosen Family Meal program where employees make a unique or themed dinner for youth. The Chosen Family Meal in May 2024 provided an opportunity for youth to try out new foods while learning about Asian heritage and culture during Asian Heritage Month. Youth were introduced to new and nutritious fruits, vegetables and proteins and created rice paper salad rolls. They also tasted delicious desserts, including mochi. Many youths attending the drop-in experience food insecurity at home and some shared how they don't have the opportunity to try new foods often. The response to the meal was overwhelmingly positive, with youth requesting that Power House offer similar foods in the future and continuing to talk about the meal with excitement long after the event.



2024 Highlight: Queering The Eclipse

In April 2024, Power House hosted an eclipse party during drop-in. This rare event provided an opportunity for education, creative expression and social connection. Many youths expressed not knowing much about astronomy. This event encouraged them to look up and away from their phones and technology to the skies! Power House offered free eclipse glasses for everyone and introduced youth to new technologies and activities, including a digital telescope which documented and displayed the total eclipse of the sun, using kitchen strainers to create mini eclipse shadows and designing space-themed t-shirts using bleach art. Youths were also supported in creating their astrological chart which was a fun activity that encouraged discussion about their childhoods and more specifically their shared experiences of growing up queer. Many youths in attendance talked about how their friends were travelling with family or attending events centered around viewing the eclipse. By hosting this event at Power House, 2SLGBTQIA+ youths were given the chance to participate and enjoy this rare event too.



Multi-Service Youth Centres

Multi-Service Youth Centres (MSYC) take a collaborative approach to the delivery of youth programs and services. Parks & Recreation and community-based organizations work together to achieve common goals:

- Removal of barriers of access around mental and physical health.
- Provision and implementation of various drop in programs.
- Creation of youth services that are inclusive for all youth.
- Design of physical spaces that are open and welcoming to youth.
- Policies and best practices for service delivery of youth programs.
- Use of partnerships to deliver on non-municipal programs and services.

These dedicated youth spaces offer young people a place to find support and services and a place to hang out with friends!

THE DEN YOUTH CENTRE | LOWER SACKVILLE

www.halifax.ca/TheDen

A safe, inclusive space for youth ages 13-18 from the Bedford/Sackville communities. Working collaboratively with different organizations and groups, The Den provides services and a weekly drop-in space for youth to hang out.

2024 at The Den:

With a strong focus on community safety, restorative practices and youth well-being, youth have accessed the drop-in program 3,396 times. While primarily serving the Sackville area, this year saw participation from youth across the Halifax region, engaging in fun and meaningful activities. The space not only fosters connection but also addresses food insecurity by providing nutritious meals and snacks, all supported by a dedicated team committed to meeting each youth's unique needs.



One of the summer's most exciting highlights was the opening of an in-house music studio. This creative space offers youth the opportunity to write, record and produce their music and beats. It has quickly become a favourite, inspiring artistic expression and boosting confidence through the power of music.

Outreach efforts also expanded this year. In addition to maintaining a regular presence in schools, the team launched a new Junior High Night, an evening dedicated specifically to junior high-aged youth. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with younger youth appreciating a night tailored just for them.

Community partnerships were further strengthened over the past year. In collaboration with SchoolsPlus, a weekly cooking program was introduced at The Den. This initiative promotes food literacy, addresses food insecurity and fosters stronger connections between youth and the SchoolsPlus team, making referrals and support more accessible.

A growing relationship with the Sackville RCMP Detachment has also enriched programming. A local officer visits weekly to spend time with youth, answer questions, build connections and help humanize law enforcement, supporting the development of trust and mutual understanding.

Free, drop-in counselling remains available through an ongoing partnership with the Cobequid Youth Health Centre, ensuring youth have access to mental health support in a space that feels safe and welcoming.

Internally, collaboration with the Sackville Youth Advocate Worker and Mobile Youth Support Team continues to strengthen the network of support available to youth in the community.

SPRYFIELD, HERRING COVE YOUTH CENTRE | SPRYFIELD

halifax.ca/spryfieldyouthcentre

Adopting the Multi Service Youth Centre (MSYC) model, the Spryfield, Herring Cove Youth Centre, a drop-in space in the Captain William Spry Community Centre, opened in spring of 2023, well known for the wave pool, local library and skate park.

The youth centre has grown to be a space for youth drop-in times from Monday to Wednesday from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. and is designed to fit into young people's after-school routine. Youth enjoy grabbing a bite, cooking a meal or saying hi to youth employees.

The space offers various activities such as video games, board games, table sports, TV, art supplies, Wi-Fi, phone charging stations, free snacks and refreshments and comfortable chairs. Additionally, a Youth Counsellor and Outreach Worker are available to provide one-on-one support.

Sports drop-in programs provide a space for youth to engage in physical activities and learn a new sport on Wednesday nights at Rockingstone Heights school (pickleball and multi-sports free play).

Since opening in the spring, the youth centre has seen an average of 10-15 youth participating in the drop-in nights, sometimes reaching as high as 30 on occasions.

Youth Leadership Program

halifax.ca/youthleadership

Recreation programming's Youth Leadership Program is for youth who want to develop leadership skills through fun and challenging learning experiences. Participants help make a difference in their communities by organizing and taking part in special events and assisting employees with children's programs. The program operates with four pillars: volunteering, socials, community action and training. In summer 2024, 494 youth participated in the program.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2024 YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:

Youth Leadership Week of Action: Every year, during Youth Leadership Week of Action, the youth leaders organize activities to benefit their communities.

Halifax Community Carnival at the Halifax Common soccer pitch. Youth Leadership Halifax presented a community carnival! Families came out to enjoy games, crafts, face painting and more on the Common soccer pitch. We invited everyone to join us for fun in the sun. Participants were asked to bring a food donation or a donation of women's shirts to take part. Donations were sent to the Parker Street Food Bank and Bryony House.

Full Backpacks 4 Fall River at the Windsor Junction Community Centre. Gordon R Snow Community Centre participants organized a school supplies drive in association with the Keloose Kids Parade and Fun Day. NEW donations (including: looseleaf, pencils, erasers, duotangs, backpacks, etc.) were collected throughout the day and at the donation tables. The Gordon R. Snow Community Centre youth were spotted in their blue shirts!

Community Popsicle Social at the LeBrun Recreation Centre Playground. All were welcome to stop by for free recreation activities and games! Attendees learned about upcoming recreation programs, facility rental opportunities and Neighbourhood & Volunteer Services supports. The event was brought to the community by LeBrun Centre employees, Youth Leadership program participants, the local Community Developer and 100 youth attendees.

Youth Leadership Carnival and BBQ at DeWolf Park. Visitors enjoyed carnival activities with youth volunteers in support of Feed Nova Scotia. Activities included face painting, balloon animals, bracelet making, potato sack races and more! Non-perishable food items were collected in exchange for carnival snacks like popcorn, hot dogs and snow cones. Monetary donations were not accepted. The event was hosted by the LeBrun Recreation Centre and Bedford Hammonds Plains Community Centre, with 400 youth in attendance.

Bake Sale & Games at Cornerstone Park, "the hummingbird". Guests stopped by for free games such as badminton, corn hole and giant checkers. Tickets were sold for other games like the fishpond, sucker pull, frisbee toss and minute-to-win-it games (\$2 for four tickets or a donation of a non-perishable food item). The bake sale was cash only. Proceeds from the event were donated to Braeside Nursing Home and food donations were given to the local food bank.



Y.E.S. CAMP

2024 stats: 36 youth participants

A sub-program of the summer Youth Leadership Program. It provides youth with a unique leadership experience in an overnight camp setting. The focus at the overnight camp is team building, communication skills, skill sharing, event planning and leadership. A maximum of 50 youth who are participating in the Youth Leadership Program are invited to participate in this overnight camp.

Youth Leadership Coordinators are employed by Parks & Recreation to deliver the Youth Leadership Program to younger participants. Y.E.S. Camp is led and facilitated by the Youth Leader Coordinators, making it a truly youth-led experience.



Mobile Youth Support Team (MYST)

halifax.ca/MYST

Parks & Recreation is working with the Community Safety business unit to assist in the delivery of the Building Safer Communities Fund. Parks & Recreation, through the Youth Section, is providing additional support to youth (ages 13-24) within recreation centres. Throughout 2024, a Youth Counsellor and Youth Outreach Worker have been providing drop-in and by-appointment support to youth (ages 13-24) at various recreation centres across the Halifax region.

2024 overview:

MYST supported 64 young people outside of drop-in programs, with around 50 participating in Y.E.S. Camp and other recreational activities. This included 24 one-on-one sessions offering personalized support. MYST attended court 13 times to assist youth involved in the criminal justice system or restorative justice processes and was called upon three times to provide crisis support directly to recreational services. Also, the counsellor spent two days at Y.E.S. Camp, creating a welcoming space where youth could drop in, relax, make fidget or stress-relief toys and have conversations.

Topics for support included peer pressure, suicide intervention support, family conflict, drug use/abuse, restorative justice and conflict with the law, education and employment, relationship issues and support in crises and mental health support. MYST has provided support for:

- Peer pressure and crises.
- Suicide intervention support.
- Drug use/abuse.
- Family conflict.
- Pregnancy.
- Restorative justice and conflict with the law.
- Education and employment support.
- Relationship issues.



Accessibility & inclusion

halifax.ca/rec

Parks & Recreation invites individuals of all abilities to participate in our recreation and leisure programs. The municipality is committed to providing safe and accessible programs for everyone to enjoy. Employees recognize that some residents will require assistance to participate via adapted equipment, program modification and/or through the provision of one-to-one Inclusion support.

Ready for Rec
2024 statistics: 11 youth campers

Ready for Rec programs are designed for youth (13-18) who have diverse needs and require additional supports to be successful in a recreation environment. The program is community-focused and exposes the youth to different community recreation opportunities in a fun and engaging manner.

Registered youth programming

halifax.ca/rec

Parks & Recreation offers a multitude of programs directed to youth ages 13 to 18. These programs and activities are advertised on the recreation website, on printed posters, as well specific information for youth is promoted through social media.

- 2024 statistics:**
- Youth accessed municipal recreation programs **7204 times** in 2024.
 - Number of youth programs offered: **650 registered programs**.



Outdoor recreation

halifax.ca/outdoorrec

ADVENTURE EARTH CENTRE (AEC)

halifax.ca/aec

The Adventure Earth employees provide opportunities for youth to connect with the natural world, pursue a healthy and active outdoor lifestyle, develop personal and leadership skills, give back to the community and connect with other like-minded individuals. The Adventure Earth Centre (AEC) is located in Sir Sandford Fleming Park (Halifax) and Shubie Park (Dartmouth). The AEC also operates the St. Mary's Boat Club. Additionally, the AEC offers overnight camps at Camp Mockingee and youth canoe camps at Graham's Grove in Dartmouth.

H.E.A.T. YOUTH ACTION TEAM

2024 numbers: 15 participants per session

H.E.A.T. stands for "Helping the Earth by Acting Together." It is a youth-driven environmental and leadership group that meets regularly throughout the year. H.E.A.T. provides great opportunities for youth, ages 13 and up, who have an interest in the environment, their community and who would like to make a difference.

H.E.A.T. was created by a passionate group of like-minded youth who cared about environmental causes and taking action. As our world changes, so does our team and what we do but this program is still youth-led and focuses on more than just social programs. H.E.A.T. is a safe, welcoming, caring community, that continues to grow.

H.E.A.T. plans at least one event per week. These programs are usually weeknights or weekends and run out of our Fleming Park, Shubie Park and St. Mary's Boat Club locations. However, the youth also have the freedom to explore the Halifax region, whether it is a local trail, downtown Halifax or helping a local organization. Each season, participants have an opportunity to organize an overnight camp at Camp Mockingee near Windsor. These events are also planned by youth participants.

The youth group comes together each month to plan their activities around the four values of social, health, environmental and community. In 2024, there was a total of 25 events, such as beach clean-ups, donation events, group cooking, outdoor skill programs, social events and ecology information events.

YOUTH OVERNIGHT CAMPS

Youth benefit from participating in an overnight camp experience located outside the downtown core, providing a unique opportunity to disconnect from digital distractions and urban stress while immersing themselves in nature. This setting fosters independence, builds resilience and encourages deeper social connections as they navigate new experiences, develop outdoor skills and forge friendships in a supportive, screen-free environment.

L.E.A.D | Summer Overnight Camp

2024 numbers: 28 participants

This program is one of the most exciting, engaging and adventurous experiences that a youth camper can undergo in one week. The camp incorporates the four elements of L.E.A.D. (leadership, environment, adventure and discovery) through creativity, exploration and hands-on activities. Participants spend most of the camp outside in nature at Camp Mockingee.

L.E.A.D is a dynamic, engaging and life-changing experience that gives leaders a glimpse into the lives of change-makers and community builders working to create a more sustainable future. Supported by experienced employees, the camp emphasizes leadership, environmental learning, adventure and discovery.

Through team building, community service and reflection, youth have the opportunity to develop leadership skills that can be used in their own lives, with family and in the community.

This year, 28 participants contributed to the success of L.E.A.D. camp and developed their skills as part of this overnight experience.



H.E.A.T. | Overnight Camps

2024 numbers: two camps with 30 participants at each session

The group planned and participated in two overnight camps at Camp Mockingee near Windsor, where they spent time practicing their outdoor skills, creating art projects, canoeing and swimming.



ST. MARY’S BOAT CLUB

halifax.ca/smbc

Youth Kayak Paddle Nights

Number of youth participants: 60

St. Mary’s Boat Club paddle nights allow youth to learn paddling skills and safely explore the Northwest Arm. Certified instructors take groups of 15 youth paddlers on the water and show them how to fit safety equipment and find the correct-sized boat. After practicing basic paddle strokes on land, the instructor demonstrates how to get in and out of the boats safely. After the instruction, participants practice their paddling while exploring the shoreline.



Municipal Events



CLAM HARBOUR BEACH SANDCASTLE COMPETITION

clamharboursandcastle.ca

The annual sandcastle and sand-sculpting contest attracts more than 10,000 people every year to the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia. The competition offers cash prizes for children, youth and adults. 11 youth teams entered the 2024 competition. The winning group was "The Pharaohs" (#41) with their Sphinx and the Pyramids piece.

The information and merchandise booth are both operated by the Musquodoboit Harbour Youth Leadership Program.

HOPSCOTCH FESTIVAL

halifax.ca/hopscotch

2024 numbers: The festival employed 10 youth and hosted 2000 participants.

An annual hip-hop event held in Halifax, , recognized as Atlantic Canada's premier celebration of hip-hop culture. Established in 2010, the festival has evolved over the years, featuring a mix of local talent and internationally acclaimed artists. The festival spans multiple days, offering a variety of events such as concerts, dance battles, tribute shows and free community activities. These events celebrate the rich history and evolution of hip-hop culture, fostering both local and international talent and community engagement.



PRIDE SHOW | DARTMOUTH FESTIVAL SERIES

halifax.ca/parks-recreation/events/dartmouth-festival-series

2024 numbers: 800 youth attendees

Pride show on the Dartmouth Waterfront as part of our Dartmouth Festival Series, which boasted approximately 800 youth in attendance, as well as Vibrancy Festival with approximately the same number of youth participants as the Pride event. These community-focused initiatives provide youth with a chance to explore music, culture and community in an accessible space.

Halifax Public Libraries (HPL)



[Halifaxpubliclibraries.ca](https://www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca)

Halifax Public Libraries is committed to serving youth and delivering services and programs at all 14 of its branches, two community offices and at other community locations. The library works with community experts, service providers and partners to offer relevant, high-quality, free programming and services to support youth development and reach diverse teens. This can include programs, events and volunteer opportunities for youth.

Halifax Public Libraries' branches offered more than 1,100 teen programs with over 11,000 attendees across the municipality, along with many more all-ages or adult programs open to teens. In addition, youth aged 13-18 volunteered approximately 7,000 hours at the library.

Below are some highlights from the last year.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Unity Sessions: Hip Hop Hub

Working with Unity Charity, Unity Sessions: Hip Hop Hub provides a barrier-free drop-in space for youth and young adults to experience the elements of Hip Hop through the lens of Unity's values of mental health and resiliency. Guided by multi-disciplined Unity artist facilitators, participants are encouraged to explore the many paths of a Hip-Hop artist and the professional opportunities available to them. The Hub programming includes workshops on DJing, breaking, beatboxing, graffiti and more.

Youth Project Housing Help

Location: Alderney Gate

The Youth Project Housing Support Program is on hand monthly to meet with 2SLGBTQIA+ folks ages 16 - 30 who need support finding housing or navigating housing insecurity. The Youth Project offers many services, including eviction prevention, emergency shelter navigation, subsidy application support, ID assistance, transition support and community health support.

YWCA Homework Club

Location: Keshen Goodman

Run in partnership with the YWCA, this program provides homework support and a social connection for junior and senior high school-aged youth who are newcomers.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Social Shenanigans

Location: Cole Harbour

Cole Harbour Public Library is hosting a monthly lunchtime program at each of four local junior high schools: Astral Drive, Ross Road, Sir Robert Borden and Graham Creighton. Each month, they bring something different to do, such as bingo, board games or crafts. Youth can also get library cards and request books, DVDs, etc., to be brought to the next monthly event.

Junior High School Pop-ups

Location: Woodlawn

Woodlawn is hosting monthly lunchtime pop-ups at local junior high schools, similar to the Social Shenanigans events hosted by Cole Harbour. These are taking place at Ellenvale, Caledonia, Eric Graves and Eastern Passage Education Centre.

DROP-IN PROGRAMMING FOR TEENS

It Might Get Loud

Location: Central Library

A drop-in program at the Media Studio on the second floor, encouraging youth to get creative and make some noise! Musical instruments, including guitars, bass, drums, keys, synths, mics and more, are available for youth to experiment with. No musical experience is required.

Dungeons and Dragons

Location: Sheet Harbour and Sackville

In Sheet Harbour, the D&D club for teens has been running regularly at the request of local teens for a while now. In Sackville, the D&D club for preteens has turned into a volunteer opportunity for older teens who have aged out of the club and spawned separate teen D&D programming for the summer months.

Teen Nights

Location: Various Branches

Many branches run a weekly teen night, usually for ages 13-18. Teen night aims to provide a safe space for teens to come and hang out with friends, develop healthy relationships with employees, build connections with the library and their peers, as well as have some snacks and participate in an activity.

Chess

Location: Various Branches

Demand for chess programming seems to be growing across branches and across ages. While not all of the chess programs are specifically aimed at teens, they attract a wide mix of ages, making chess a truly intergenerational program. Chess also has a wide appeal across cultures and many participants are newcomers. Most are run as partnerships with local chess clubs, the Nova Scotia Scholastic Chess Association and often also provide an opportunity for teens to volunteer.

CULTURALLY REFLECTIVE PROGRAMMING

Club Quierdo

Location: Cole Harbour

Club Quierdo is the monthly inter-school GSA (Gender-Sexuality Alliance) at Cole Harbour Library that the library supports through providing space, snacks and fun activities.

Drama Llamas

Location: Woodlawn

Drama Llamas is a safe and supportive space to hang out, make new friends and meet other 2SLGBTQIA+ teens.

African Heritage Month Youth Quiz

Location: Halifax North and other branches

The African Heritage Month Youth Quiz is part of the African Heritage Month programming at Halifax Public Libraries. Originally established as a partnership between the Cultural Awareness Youth Group and the Halifax North Memorial Public Library, the program now involves employees from across the library system. Teams of African Nova Scotian students from schools in the municipality are asked a series of questions related to African Nova Scotians, African Canadians, African Americans and African history. With two preliminary rounds determining who heads to the finals, this competitive and fun event is an annual highlight in African Heritage Month.

Food-ology Workshop

Location: Preston Township

As part of the Community Eats grant, HPL offered a workshop at the NSCC community kitchen, in partnership with the Preston Area Food Network and NS Brotherhood Initiative, to African Nova Scotian teens ages 13-18. Engaged participants with discussion around food and nutrition literacy, such as the importance of healthy snack foods for teens in sports and quick and easy meal prep. After the presentation, the teens worked in teams to prepare fruit and protein smoothies in blenders and then at the end of the program, each teen got to take home a free blender, which they were so excited about!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Leading Readers

Location: Various Branches

Leading readers matches teens with elementary-aged children to share a love of books and offer reading support and encouragement. Pairs meet weekly to read together one-on-one and participate in group activities. Youth volunteers assist employees in developing program ideas, help prepare materials for the program and work together with participants to plan and implement the end-of-session celebration events.

Newcomers English Kids Club

Location: Keshen Goodman

Teen volunteers recruited from the local high school work with newcomer children for fun group activities to practice English and foster social connections.

Teen Advisory Council

Location: Central

Teenagers in the community aged 14-18 meet to advise library employees on the teen experience at Halifax Central Library. This can include program/event assistance, youth outreach within the Library and creating displays that reflect the diversity of our community. Most recently, the TAC members have been consulting with employees on how best to shape the teen space to reflect the needs and wants of teens using the branch.

Community Consultants

Location: Cole Harbour

Teens ages 15-18 from underrepresented communities, as well as those keen to learn, meet once a month to discuss what cultural holidays and important events are coming up. They take the lead in recommending ways to highlight or celebrate those holidays within the library, making informational posters for each so that all library patrons can learn about different cultures. They will often suggest ways to incorporate these traditions into other children’s and teen programs, or help with standalone events, create displays and paint the windows.

Video Game Assistants

Location: Central, Keshen Goodman

Teen volunteers are assigned to the gaming section of the branch to assist younger children and families with the gaming systems.

Program/Program Prep Assistants

Location: Various Branches

Year-round but especially in the summer, these volunteer opportunities give teens ages 14-18 the opportunity to participate in planning some library programming and assist in other aspects of library work, including program setup and take down, craft preparation and interacting with children of various ages in the library.

High School Co-op Placements

Location: Various Branches

These are requests coming in from high school students, usually through school programs such as Co-op or O2. Branches will accommodate requests based on employees availability and demand. These give the youth an idea of what library work involves.



HALIFAX REGIONAL POLICE YOUTH PROGRAM

halifax.ca/HRPYouthProgram

2024 numbers: 20 youth volunteers

Founded in 1996, the Halifax Regional Police Youth Program (HRPYP) is a volunteer-based, non-profit program for youth aged 14 to 18 who are interested in community service and working with police. The program offers a structured learning atmosphere and teaches citizenship with an emphasis on leadership and voluntary service to the community.

The HRPYP engages in a variety of youth-driven crime prevention initiatives within our community. Activities can be educational, community service related or just plain fun and may include presentations by guest speakers, field trips, traffic and crowd control, Police Display Day, child identification record clinics, mascot appearances, bike patrols, parades, concerts, tree-lighting ceremonies, etc. Youth members learn leaderships skills, the importance of civic engagement, public speaking and teamwork, to name a few.

There are seven program elements explored during the year: health, environment, community, vocation, justice, education and ethics. These key elements make the program unique and allow for exploration beyond policing, making participation in the program a much broader experience for all members. Regular Thursday evening meetings are held throughout the school year (September through June) and take place at the Northbrook Training Facility.

Youth also participated in community events and activities throughout the entire calendar year; these can take place anywhere within the Halifax region. Youth can apply to become a member by applying on the HRP website, to the Volunteer Programs Coordinator. Their application is reviewed and, if qualified, they are invited for an interview.



YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

halifax.ca/yac

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) was created to give youth a voice at Regional Council. The committee advises Council on how municipal policies, programs, and services affect youth and challenges the areas where we can do better.

In 2024, YAC identified three priorities to guide their work plan:

Priority 1: Youth perspective and engagement on the municipality's social policy priorities- emphasis on food security, housing and the Public Safety Office.

Priority 2: Climate action- advise the Executive Standing Committee on how to continually incorporate input from youth of all races, genders and abilities in HaliFACT, Halifax's climate action plan.

Priority 3: Support youth self-reliance- raise awareness about and advocate for sustainable and affordable resources for youth in the Halifax region, especially when transitioning to self-reliance.

Municipal Volunteer Awards



halifax.ca/volunteering

Each year during National Volunteer Week, the Halifax Regional Municipality holds an award ceremony to acknowledge and honour the contributions of volunteers and volunteer organizations across the Halifax region. We would like to recognize the volunteers and community groups who were selected to receive a 2024 Volunteer Award. Please join us in thanking the exceptional youth volunteers and organizations noted below:

INDIVIDUAL YOUTH VOLUNTEER AWARD WINNERS

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| • Lillian Arsenault | • Logan MacLeod |
| • Lauren Bishop | • Ella Martin |
| • Maelle Boudreau | • Rhyann Pellerin |
| • Lily Coolen | • Isabelle Pettipas |
| • Abigail Courtney | • Gabriel Prest |
| • Reagan Eagles | • Sam Rideout |
| • Mia Hiltz | • Brady Sampson |
| • Asha Holmes | • Ashley Surette |
| • Claire Hughes | • Amelia Wentzell |
| • Alex Logan | • Henry Zinck |
| • Margaret Lynch | |
| • Ainslie MacKenzie | |
| • Kieran MacLeod | |

YOUTH GROUP AWARD WINNERS

JL Ilsley High School Indigenous Student Program

A vital community hub at JL Ilsley High School, uniting Indigenous students and allies. Through initiatives like school supply drives and cultural awareness events, they promote cultural pride and empathy. Their inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging for all, embodying resilience and generosity. They are a beacon of Indigenous identity and community spirit, inspiring others to embrace their heritage and give back.

halifax.ca/climate

HalifACT is one of the most ambitious climate action movements in Canada, and the municipality's community response to the climate crisis will build a more resilient and healthy future in Atlantic Canada while preparing for current and future climate impacts. HalifACT encourages youth to take climate action.

2024 numbers: 935 youth engaged in the program

HALIFACT HIGHLIGHTS 2024

Youth Climate Action Fund

Halifax Regional Municipality was awarded \$50,000 USD through the Youth Climate Action Fund, a new initiative by Bloomberg Philanthropies and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). As one of 100 cities selected worldwide, Halifax used the funding to support local youth in developing creative, community-driven, youth-led climate solutions. In partnership with the Halifax Climate Investment, Innovation and Impact Fund (HCi3), HalifACT delivered the program and distributed microgrants to 11 youth-led projects led by individuals aged 15 to 24.

2024 numbers: 400 youth engaged

Nova Scotia's Youth Climate Council

One member of the HalifACT team serves as Chair on the second iteration of the NS Youth Climate Council and engages directly with the youth on the council. The Chair also engages with the youth of the Halifax region and Nova Scotia more broadly to provide youth-focused climate education and outreach and communicate the youth perspective to the province.

Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq (CMM) Open House

Members of the HalifACT team attended the CMM Open House in support of the Clean Energy and Equity Network (CEEN) event aimed at encouraging Indigenous youth to join the clean energy sector.

2024 numbers: 30 youth engaged

Earth Fest

HalifACT, partnered with the Ecology Action Centre, Halifax Public Libraries and Every One Every Day, Earth Fest, was a five-day festival taking place across the Halifax region leading up to Earth Day in April 2024. The festival united residents in a celebration of climate action, energy reduction and their love for nature and clean air and water through over 30 community-led events. Earth Fest events included shoreline clean-ups, guided walking tours about invasive species or birds, bike tours and community garden building. Along with the community-led events, a Climate Action Fair was held at the Halifax Central Library for residents to learn directly from climate experts in earth-friendly activities such as bike tune-ups, learning more about container gardening and e-bike test rides. Youth served as volunteers for the festival and many other events hosted by other organizations and participants.

2024 numbers: 100 youth engaged

Nocturne 2024

At the Nocturne Festival in October, HalifACT and the Ecology Action Centre hosted the Climate Badge Chalet, an interactive art experience inviting the public to share their climate commitments and contribute to climate-themed poetry. Participants added drawings and messages to stickers, contributing to a collaborative community commitment board. After engaging in conversations about climate-friendly actions, those who committed received a locally-designed enamel pin designed by local artists—*Climate 101*, *Getting Around*, or *Home Energy*—as a symbol of their commitment. The event highlighted the power of individual action and collective creativity in addressing climate change.

2024 numbers: 375 youth engaged

Mayor's Reception for New International Students

Members of the HalifACT attended the Mayor's Reception for New International Students, which was a welcome event for new international students hosted by former Mayor Mike Savage. The team handed out newcomer resources and connected with first-year students in Halifax.

2024 numbers: the event engaged 30 youth

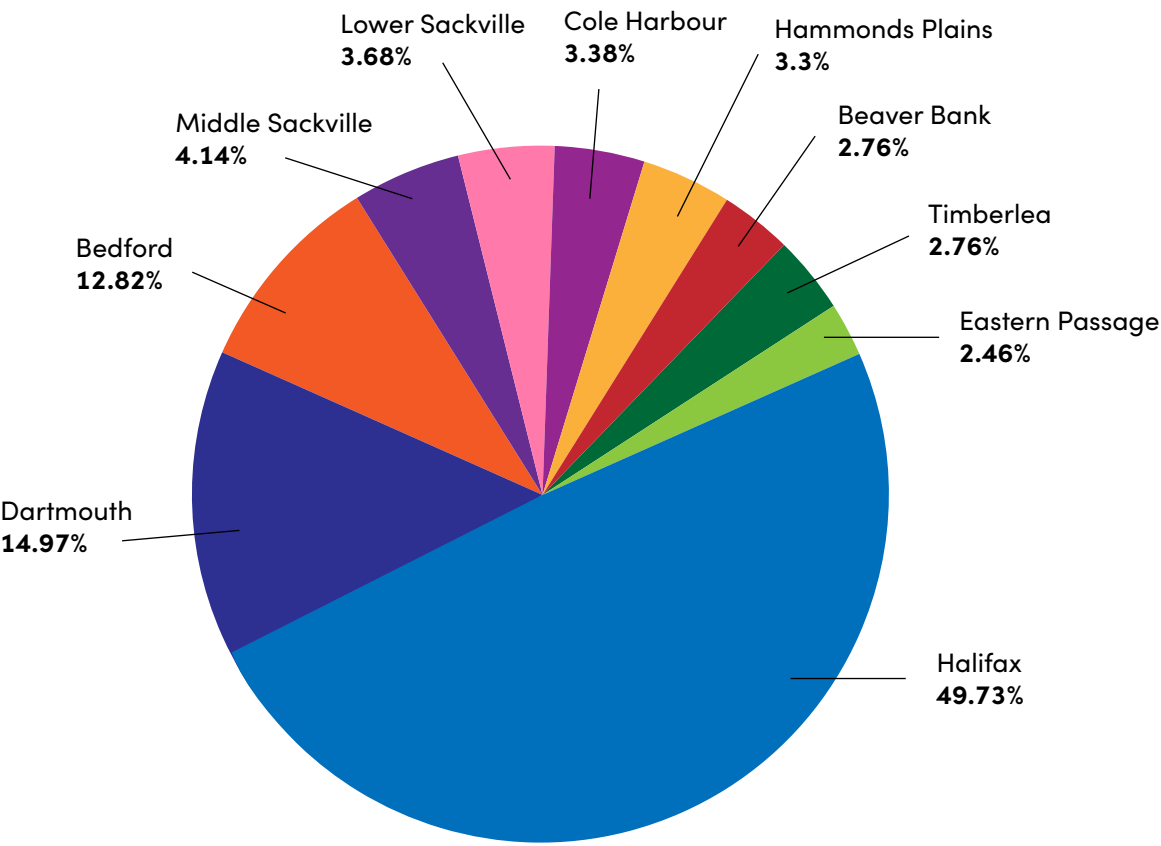


Youth employment statistics

The following section provides an overview of the number of youth (16-24) employed with the municipality during 2024:

TOP 10 POSITIONS	HEADCOUNT
Recreation Program Instructor	812
Aquatic Programmer	497
Front Desk	40
Adventure Earth Casual Staff - Shubie Park	38
Labourer (Student)	33
SMBC Casual Staff	32
Casual Hourly Staff	22
ESAP Participant	16
Election Worker TERM	13
Specialized Inclusion Support Person	13
Total	1,516

TOP 10 LOCATIONS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYEES



External service provider updates



Youth service providers across the Halifax region played a vital role in the overall well-being of youth. This section highlights the work of several youth-serving organizations in 2024. If you are a youth serving organization and want to add your content to this report, email us at youth@halifax.ca, it's free!

CAMP COURAGE: A LEGACY OF EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP

campcourage.ca

A well-established program, nearing two decades of inspiring and empowering diverse young females aged 15 to 19. It opens their eyes to boundless possibilities, expands their minds beyond self-imposed limits and connects their hearts to a lifelong support network.

Graduates leave with a heightened sense of confidence, accomplishment and pride, often calling it the best experience of their lives. Many attribute the camp to shaping their future, with 36 per cent becoming involved in emergency services as firefighters, paramedics, police officers and military personnel. Others break barriers as top students, bursary recipients, community leaders and pioneers in male-dominated fields.

Beyond career success, Camp Courage fosters changemakers — graduates who advocate for suicide prevention, combat human trafficking and champion women's safety worldwide. They return as mentors, board members and even founders of new camps, ensuring the program's impact extends far beyond their journeys.

With nearly 20 years of proven success, the program provides ongoing support, including credentialed education, specialized workshops, bursaries and mentorship tailored to the rigorous demands of emergency service recruitment. Graduates gain access to ride-alongs, junior firefighter programs and volunteer opportunities, equipping them for careers and life's challenges.

As the years pass, the ripple effect of Camp Courage continues to grow. A thriving, supportive community has emerged—one built on empowerment, education and mentorship. The result? A diverse, confident and compassionate future workforce dedicated to the safety and well-being of our communities for generations to come.

Quote from a 2024 participant: The supportive environment, mentors and diverse activities made this camp the best experience of my life.

CHEBUCTO CONNECTIONS

chebuctoconnections.ca

We know from various sources that our youth, especially our male-identifying youth, need additional resources and guidance. The increase in diversity, of gender-based violence, violence between ethnic groups and between groups is rising. All of this is further exacerbated by the context many of our community members are living in, such as poverty and their households

struggling to meet the rising costs of basic survival needs. Our goal from the Mancave program is to increase awareness, build empathy and understanding, as well as build social capital.

Mancave is a program that provides self-identifying young men a safe and supportive space to discuss their feelings without fear of judgment. It fosters an environment where participants can express themselves openly and honestly, exploring topics like mental health, relationships and personal growth. Through guided discussions and activities, Mancave encourages emotional resilience and empathy, helping young men build stronger connections with themselves and others. The program offers mentorship opportunities, allowing them to learn from positive role models and develop essential life skills. By creating a nurturing community, Mancave aims to break down societal stigmas around masculinity and promote a healthier, more inclusive understanding of what it means to be a man.

It all started with a few chin nods and dabs with the alpha males and now we have between 21 and 30 regular weekly attendees. The group set out to bring in topics every week that spur discussion and build the students' self-respect and respect for others. We created a place where these young men could express themselves and feel heard.

Quote from 2024 participant: *"There are a lot of stereotypes about how men are already privileged and have it great. There is also a huge mental health stigma. Finding it hard to be a man lately because I'm getting really lonely and it's starting to hurt, it's starting to get hard to talk to people like women."*

ST. GEORGE'S YOUTHNET

stgeorgesyouthnet.ca

In 2024, St. George's YouthNet operated 10 programs and services, cultivating relationships between over 80 youth in the north end, six employees, over 50 volunteers and 25 community organizations and collaborations within the neighbourhood.

We continue to develop our vision of a welcoming and supportive environment which invites kids to learn, play and grow together. We offer educational and recreational opportunities for the youth to participate in various creative and cultural activities. YouthNet fosters a space to support each youth in their development, encouraging and empowering them to be the best versions of themselves.

Program services include: Breakfast Club, Drop-in Day, After-school program, Maritime Conservatory Music and Dance program, King's Tutoring program, Teen program, Junior Leaders Training program, Mindful Horse Program, Summer Camps and YouthNet Wilderness Camps.



Current best practices, trends and research

This section highlights best practices, emerging trends and youth-related research. This report was focused on youth and the use of artificial intelligence.

YOUTH AND AI: DAILY USE, ADAPTATION AND EMERGING TRENDS (2024)

Overview

In 2024, artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly integrated into the everyday lives of Canadian youth aged 13–24. From education and content creation to mental health support and career exploration, youth are increasingly adopting AI tools like ChatGPT, Snapchat AI, Google Gemini and text-to-image/video generators. This trend reflects a generational shift in how technology is shaping youth culture, creativity and learning, while also raising important questions around ethics, misinformation and digital equity. (MediaSmarts, 2023; Brookfield Institute, 2024).

HOW YOUTH ARE USING AI TODAY

Education & Academic Support

ChatGPT and similar tools are widely used for:

- Research summaries and study help.
- Explaining difficult concepts in plain language.
- Drafting essays, lab reports, or reflection pieces.

Trend: Students see AI as a digital tutor or 'study buddy', especially helpful when school resources feel limited (CBC News, 2023).

Challenge: Educators are grappling with how to balance AI use with academic integrity (University Affairs, 2023).

Creativity and Self-Expression

AI tools like DALL-E, Runway ML and Lensa AI are used to:

- Create custom art, avatars and memes.
- Edit videos and design social media content.
- Explore fashion design, game development and animation.

Youth view AI as a creative collaborator—an accessible way to explore identity and share their voice (Brookfield Institute, 2024).

Social Media and Digital Communication

Platforms like Snapchat and Instagram are embedding AI chatbots and filters. Youth use these to:

- Ask casual or existential questions.
- Draft messages or replies.
- Access daily “life hacks” or personalized suggestions (MediaSmarts, 2023).

Mental Health & Peer Support

Some youth turn to AI (e.g., ChatGPT or Woebot) to:

- Talk through feelings or journal thoughts.
- Receive mindfulness prompts.
- Seek non-judgmental support late at night or in moments of anxiety.

Caution: While AI can offer comfort, it is not a substitute for licensed support and may present risks of misinformation (CAMH, 2023).

Job Preparation and Life Skills

Youth are using AI to:

- Write or edit resumes and cover letters.
- Practice interview questions.
- Explore career pathways and understand workplace trends.

As the future of work becomes more AI-integrated, youth are preparing earlier for tech-enabled jobs and entrepreneurship (Future Skills Centre, 2024).

Equity & Access Considerations

Digital Divide: Youth with limited access to high-speed internet or devices risk falling behind in AI literacy (CIRA, 2023).

- Bias & Misinformation: AI tools can perpetuate harmful stereotypes or produce inaccurate content without proper guidance (UNESCO, 2023).
- AI Literacy Gap: Many youth use AI but lack a deep understanding of how it works or how to evaluate its outputs critically (MediaSmarts, 2023).

Local Implications for Halifax Youth

1. Recreation Programs: Opportunities to integrate AI learning labs or workshops in youth spaces.
2. Youth Centres: Potential to partner with community groups to teach responsible AI use.
3. Digital Equity: Investing in device access and digital training can help close the gap for underserved youth communities.

Conclusion

AI use among youth is no longer a fringe trend, it is a core component of how they learn, express themselves and navigate the world. Halifax has the opportunity to lead in creating safe, inclusive and future-ready spaces where young people can harness AI’s potential responsibly.

References

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Conclusion and next steps

This report highlights many I youth programs and events that have taken place within the municipality. The feedback received from the youth at virtual and in-person engagement events was positive. This shows the positive impact that the municipality and their partners, are having on the youth in communities throughout the municipality.

Next steps:

1. Continue to provide an annual information report to Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (CPED) regarding trends, issues, best practices and actions taken with respect to youth programming.
2. Begin the work on the next Youth Services Plan (YSP3).
3. Continue with the implementation and support of youth-dedicated spaces.

