



2024 - 2025

Annual Impact Report

PLANET
Youth®

PARTNER *Calgary*



A UNITED WAY OF CALGARY
AND AREA INITIATIVE

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PULLING TOGETHER FOR OUR CITY'S YOUTH.

A Message of Gratitude, Progress, and Hope

Forty percent of Alberta parents report their teen's mental health is much worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent statistics show that visits to the Alberta Children's Hospital for mental health concerns rose 36 per cent over a three-year span. Relative to other Canadian provinces, Alberta youth have one of the highest rates of first contact with emergency departments for addiction and mental health issues. Our city's and province's future depends on the decisions we make today: the time to act is now.

Planet Youth Calgary is an initiative led by United Way of Calgary and Area which is a data-driven, evidence-based solution to our current youth mental health crisis. We are leading the way in creating a resilient and caring community where everyone thrives. For 85 years, we've brought together agencies, corporations, donors, volunteers and government to create lasting change in our city.

Through Planet Youth Calgary, we are investing in stopping mental health and substance use crises before they begin. By fostering supportive environments and providing high-quality programming, we can enhance youth well-being, ultimately strengthening families, communities and the future of our city. The Planet Youth approach not only supports youth but also helps reduce long-term costs associated with healthcare, social services and the criminal justice system by focusing on four key social domains — family dynamics, leisure activities, peer connections and school life.

As our largest initiative to date, Planet Youth Calgary builds on the success of our signature initiatives that impact youth, All In For Youth (AIFY) and Community Hubs.

Working together, we are making Calgary the best place on the planet to be a kid and raise a family.

“As we look ahead,
we remain stronger
together, committed
to creating a city
where youth
can thrive.”

ABOUT PLANET YOUTH CALGARY

Planet Youth Calgary is an evidence-based approach built on more than 20 years of research from a successful youth substance use reduction model from Iceland. In 1998, Iceland had the highest youth substance rates in Europe; today, they are among the lowest in the world.

We know that substance use among youth is often a response to the world around them. The Planet Youth model looks at—and addresses—the larger societal issues that contribute to youth substance use, like mental health challenges, only a few recreational outlets or a lack of positive adult support.

We also know that youth are heavily influenced by their environments in four areas: family, peers, leisure time and school. Social investment in these areas has been shown to decrease substance use rates and have a positive, long-term impact on youth mental health.

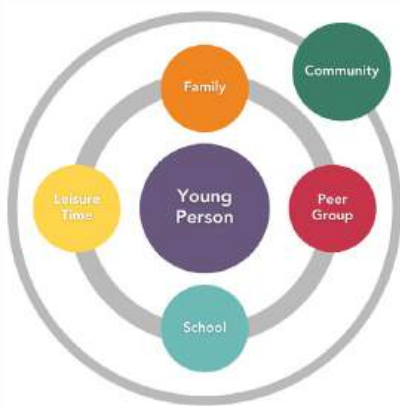
Today, Calgary is leading the way in Canada by adapting this internationally recognized approach to reflect our city's unique context, culture and community needs.

That's where Planet Youth comes in.

A proud initiative of



United Way
Calgary and Area



Since Planet Youth Calgary's Launch

Nearly 17,500 Youth and community members engaged

Almost 800 Events, programs, and activities hosted

Over 150 Youth Council and community coalition meetings held



CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE APPROACH

1

Focus on prevention: Instead of waiting until problems arise, Planet Youth seeks to create positive environments so youth can thrive from the start.

2

Place schools as a conduit: Schools are where young people spend much of their time, so we are bringing them in as natural hubs for gathering community to support youth health, learning and success.

3

Engage and empower local voices: Community members use high quality, easy-to-understand data to make informed decisions about what their neighbourhoods need. This ensures solutions are practical, relevant and locally owned.

4

Build strong partnerships: Planet Youth Calgary brings together researchers, policymakers, service providers, community members, families and youth to break down silos and ensure everyone is working toward the same goal.

5

Match the size of the solution to the size of the problem: Big problems need big, long-term solutions. Planet Youth is designed to last, with the resources and commitment needed to make a real difference over time.

Our focus is on creating environments where young people can thrive, and ultimately reduce the risks associated with substance use and other negative risk factors.

A MADE IN CALGARY SOLUTION

Since the launch of Planet Youth Calgary in 2022, we have made significant strides toward shaping a healthier future for youth and our communities.

This past year has been focused on turning plans into action. We deepened our partnerships across the city, building stronger connections and collaboration among organizations, schools and community groups.

The first phase of the initiative has centered around four priority communities: **Thornccliffe/Huntington Hills, Saddle Ridge, Greater Forest Lawn and Shawnessy**. Planet Youth Calgary is planting deep roots in these neighbourhoods and building relationships with the youth, residents and community leaders to understand the most effective ways to collaborate and make Calgary a great city to be a kid. Working together, we have developed innovative and tailored approaches that have already helped us engage and connect with thousands of young people and their families.

We built community coalitions and launched the research process, including the Planet Youth school survey, focus groups, youth circles, youth programming, activities and targeted outreach efforts. In each community, locally driven action is taking shape, powered by the community coalitions and youth councils who are working alongside the Planet Youth team to identify evidence-based priorities, create solutions and lead initiatives that reflect the unique strengths, needs and aspirations of their neighbourhoods.

We've invested in early solutions like expanding youth mentorship programs, increasing access to safe spaces and strengthening opportunities for youth employment and skill development. These efforts are already making a tangible difference in the lives of young people, opening doors to new possibilities and helping them build the confidence, connections and experience they need to succeed.

OUR PRIORITY COMMUNITIES

Planet Youth Calgary operates in four priority communities and through a city-wide Indigenous Parallel.

- 1. Thorncliffe/Huntington Hills Area** **Over 4,000 adolescents**
Communities: Thorncliffe, Huntington Hills, Beddington and Country Hills.
- 2. Saddle Ridge Area** **Approximately 13,000 adolescents**
Communities: Skyview, Redstone, Taradale, Martindale, Saddle Ridge, Coral Springs and Monterey Park.
- 3. Greater Forest Lawn Area** **Over 4,000 adolescents**
Communities: Albert Park/Radisson Heights, Applewood Park, Dover, Erin Woods, Forest Heights, Forest Lawn, Forest Lawn Industrial and Penbrooke Meadows.
- 4. Shawnessy Area** **Approximately 13,000 adolescents**
Communities: Shawnessy, Somerset, Millrise, Shawnee Slopes, Evergreen Estates, Evergreen, Bridlewood, Midnapore, Sundance and Chaparral.
- 5. Indigenous Parallel:** City-wide across Calgary





Delivering Planet Youth Calgary

Strong leadership and collaboration continue to propel Planet Youth Calgary forward. This year, our governance structure evolved to reflect growing momentum across communities. United Way continues to lead the initiative's implementation, guided by a clear, collaborative governance framework and ongoing support from the Planet Youth Guidance Team in Iceland.

Our Delivery Partners — Miskanawah Community Services Association, Trellis Society and YMCA Calgary — each have a long history of providing community-based programs and services for youth. Working to implement Planet Youth in each of the four priority communities, these organizations lead growing community coalitions composed of parents, caregivers, community members and youth-serving organizations. Their mandate is to steer local mobilization efforts, turning Planet Youth's research-driven insights into action. These teams work to raise awareness of Planet Youth, strengthen community connections and create meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with their community.

Every coalition also includes a dedicated Youth Council to ensure young people are actively heard and meaningfully involved in shaping the work. This approach places youth at the forefront of our efforts, keeping their voices central to the Planet Youth Calgary initiative. We maintain regular engagement with youth, involving them in the planning and development of programs and initiatives.

For research, Planet Youth Calgary continues to partner with the Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research & Education at the University of Calgary, led by Dr. Paul Arnold, and the One Child Every Child initiative at the University of Calgary, where the work is led by Dr. Michael Hart, Dr. Pamela Roach and Dr. Jennifer Markides. Experts in social research, youth development and data analysis, this helps guide our work, ensuring it is rooted in data and responsive to the needs of the communities we serve. Planet Youth Iceland is also an integral part of our research and data analysis. This team is now facilitating training that will help our teams and coalitions turn evidence into action.

Our work is shaped through collaboration with key stakeholders across nonprofit and social sector organizations. These partners offer valuable insights and connections from across the city, helping to inform and guide our efforts to meaningfully engage and support youth in our communities.

Our Community Collaborators include The City of Calgary, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area, Between Friends, The Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth and Centre for Sexuality.

Strengthening Youth Well-Being Through Community Partnerships

Planet Youth Calgary's investment in leisure and recreation—out-of-school activities—delivers meaningful benefits by strengthening youth well-being through practical skills, mentorship and opportunities for growth. In addition to this domain, Planet Youth Calgary also invests in family dynamics, peers, schools and other leisure and recreational programs, ensuring youth are fully supported and their overall well-being is nurtured. Upcoming reports will highlight additional community investments, showcasing the full scope and impact of Planet Youth Calgary's work.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

To support youth across multiple settings, Planet Youth Calgary identified areas of immediate need and invested in strategic community partnerships. One key partnership is with **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary**, which provides mentorship and support to youth both in and out of school throughout the priority communities. Through these programs, mentors help young people build confidence, develop essential skills and access guidance from caring adults—supporting Planet Youth Calgary's goal of fostering positive relationships, leadership skills and a strong sense of belonging.

Planet Youth Calgary also partnered with the City of Calgary's **Youth Employment Centre** to advance the Journey Forward Program. This initiative delivers employment-focused skills and guidance to students and youth aged 14–18 across our priority communities and schools. By hosting workshops and events, the program helps participants build practical skills, awareness and confidence, preparing them for future employment and success.

By investing in these programs, Planet Youth Calgary is helping youth access meaningful opportunities, connect with supportive mentors and build a strong foundation for their future well-being.

Through this partnership,
**Big Brothers
Big Sisters
delivered:**



- School-based and community-based mentoring programs for nearly **150 youth** and more than **100 children** in priority communities and schools.
- **81%** of community-based mentees reported developing social awareness, empathy and acceptance of diversity.
- **87%** of school-based mentees reported developing meaningful relationships in their community.

Through this partnership,
**Youth Employment
Centre delivered:**



- Journey Forward Program in priority communities and schools.
- **More than 400 youth** participated.
- **94%** reported an increased understanding of career and employment opportunities, skills and interests – as well as a greater sense of hope and confidence for their future.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN CALGARY COMMUNITIES.

Planet Youth Calgary mobilizes community action from the ground up, placing youth voice at the heart of every step. From Greater Forest Lawn to Thorncliffe/Huntington Hills, Saddle Ridge, Shawnessy and a city-wide Indigenous Parallel, we engage local communities and empower young people to build resilience and improve mental health and long-term well-being. Through collaboration with communities and schools, informed by research, and in partnership with community organizations, we continue to address the challenges youth face and inspire positive change.

Our community investments support programs and services in priority communities and throughout the city, in collaboration with community coalitions and local youth. The coalitions in priority communities also organize events, programs and activities across Planet Youth's key domains to strengthen protective factors and support youth well-being. Both recurring and special initiatives help build strong community connections, foster trust and create safe spaces for youth, families and communities to come together.

The impact of these efforts has been inspiring, and we are excited to share highlights from this transformative year.



Thorncliffe / Huntington Hills

In Thorncliffe/Huntington Hills, Planet Youth focused on bringing together families, youth and peers by creating spaces where youth, especially young women, could feel empowered and supported. In Thorncliffe/Huntington Hills, the coalition focuses on the Planet Youth domains of peers, leisure and recreation, while also responding to community demand for more programming tailored to girls. By creating more activities for girls, the coalition works to reduce gender disparities in participation and ensure equal opportunities for recreation, connection and belonging.

The community coalition heard from many of the girls that they feel more comfortable and confident participating in sports when they are in an all-girl environment, free from the pressures and dynamics that can come with co-ed settings. Knowing how important sports are to improving mental health, Planet Youth Calgary, in collaboration with the YMCA, launched the All-Girls Sports event at John G. Diefenbaker High School. As many as 40 girls attended this program each week. Over time, the Planet Youth Calgary team observed a powerful dynamic unfolding: girls who attend regularly actively welcome and encourage new participants, who often begin quietly on the sidelines. This is a testament to the program's impact — promoting physical activity while also fostering positive relationships and a culture of care.

By fostering a positive experience in sports from a young age, we're helping girls develop a lifelong interest in fitness and health. By creating access points for all youth to engage in recreation in safe spaces that build connection, confidence and community. From research, we know that involvement in sports helps reduce stress, anxiety and depression, and girls' involvement in sports is generally lower than boys. For these young women, this program provided an outlet to develop leadership skills, connect with others and empower them to make positive choices that could reduce negative behaviors.

Youthful Saturdays

Planet Youth Calgary connected with some young people in the community to co-design an activity that they were interested in. Many young people shared that they lacked safe, welcoming spaces to simply "hang out." In response, the Planet Youth Calgary team worked alongside local partners and youth themselves to co-create Youthful Saturdays – a bi-weekly gathering at the Thorncliffe Aquatic and Recreation Centre. What began as a simple idea to bring youth together quickly grew into a vibrant space, with 24 youth attending regularly and activities like skating and swimming added based on their direct feedback.

In December 2024, we celebrated the one-year anniversary of Youthful Saturdays—a meaningful milestone for Planet Youth Calgary. Over the past year, Youthful Saturdays have played a crucial role in fostering community and connection among youth. As school ended and summer began, interest in Youthful Saturdays continued to grow.

In response to high demand, the coalition expanded the program to include Youthful Fridays, offering youth more opportunities to gather, build friendships and stay engaged in safe, welcoming spaces.

Having consistent, accessible programs during the summer months is especially important — providing structure, social connection and a sense of belonging at a time when many young people are at risk of isolation.



Saddle Ridge

In Saddle Ridge, Planet Youth Calgary created new pathways for youth engagement and future-building.

The Planet Youth Calgary team at Saddle Ridge organized a Youth Employment Fair held at the Genesis Centre. This fair provided youth with valuable skills for job searching, including resume building, interview techniques and networking opportunities. Many of the youth attending expressed concerns about finding employment and rising living costs, which contributed to their mental health challenges.

To address these concerns, the Saddle Ridge community coalition launched a youth First Aid Training session at the Genesis Centre. The training, typically valued at approximately \$200 per participant, was offered free of charge and provided young people with valuable skills and created meaningful opportunities to enhance their resumes and increase their readiness for summer jobs.

For one participant, an unhoused youth, the certification helped them secure a job. They have built important connections by becoming actively involved in the Saddle Ridge community coalition. Through engaging with this program, this young person gained practical skills, improved their employability, strengthened their personal confidence and built positive relationships.

In response to the demand, the Saddle Ridge coalition was proud to expand the program and offer a second training session this year to accommodate more youth.

In Saddle Ridge, we learned that to connect with the local youth, we needed to build strong relationships with the cultural and faith-based organizations, which often serve as leading community influencers. We established a strong tie to these organizations to build trust and leverage their networks to better reach the youth.

For example, the coalition hosted a community event at Baitun Noor Mosque that brought together local leaders, social workers and youth to strengthen relationships and build trust with the Muslim community. This gathering helped bridge gaps in understanding, opening space for shared dialogue and collaboration.

Shawnessy

The Shawnessy Coalition organizes events and programs that bring youth and families together to connect, learn and grow. The coalition focuses on ongoing and recurring events for community to help build relationships, strengthen support networks and foster a sense of belonging. Aligned with the Planet Youth domains of peers, family and leisure and recreation, the coalition promotes positive activities that nurture connection and community.

In Shawnessy, Planet Youth Calgary partnered with Cardel Rec South to enhance their Community Campfire series. Youth and their families are invited to join in and roast treats around the campfire, a recurring event being held **biweekly**. This activity provides young people and their families with a free, safe space, fostering a sense of community and belonging in the summer months and lays the groundwork for our engagement in **upcoming years**.

Moreover, through the Future Cricket Stars Foundation, the Shawnessy community coalition brought cricket to the youth, a sport that sparked great interest and excitement in the community. This activity encouraged youth to engage in recreational activities and build new skills while fostering a sense of community.

Recognizing the popularity of cricket in Shawnessy, the coalition worked with local youth to identify it as an activity that was both relevant and engaging for them. This localized approach reflects the interests of the young people, while creating accessible spaces where they could connect, play and belong.



Greater Forest Lawn

In Greater Forest Lawn, Planet Youth Calgary supported several impactful projects that empowered youth and community members to reclaim shared spaces, build local pride and foster stronger neighborhood connections.

One of these was the Community Clean-Up in July 2024, organized in partnership with the City of Calgary. Youth took the lead in identifying areas needing attention, coordinating volunteers and engaging neighbours, which transformed a routine event into an opportunity for local youth leadership.

This clean-up laid the groundwork for another youth-led project: a vibrant mural painted on a previously vandalized basketball court, turning it into a symbol of unity and belonging. A group of youth came together this spring with a plan to rejuvenate the basketball court at the Forest Lawn Community Park. Connecting with the local Planet Youth Manager, a plan began to formulate. The following has been taken from a blog written by Karma, a young leader in Forest Lawn who led the call to action to create a place where he and his peers could play, learn, create and excel.

"The basketball court in my neighbourhood has always been a place for me and other kids like me to lay back and enjoy ourselves. Every day after school, near summer, all the kids in the community would gather around the court to play basketball. I think one of the reasons people like basketball as a sport is because it doesn't matter whether you are small or big, tall or short, fast or slow, it just doesn't matter. It is a great way to have fun with friends and overall, just a great place for the community to gather.

Due to constant playing over time, the court paint had faded to the extreme. At one point the lines started to completely disappear, and graffiti became a huge issue. Inappropriate drawings had been made time and time again, but most of them faded away. Gradually as the paint faded, so did the number of children and youth playing at the court. At one point I stepped outside expecting to see a few people at the very least, but there was no one, and I kind of just stared at the ground for a little. I didn't have an idea besides wanting to bring my community back together again with a sport we all enjoyed.

I emailed my Team Lead, the Community Social Worker at Bob Bahan Community Hub, about the idea, I expected nothing more than a simple "yes" and that I would have to spray it on myself, but thank goodness she's smart, and she transformed my tiny dream into a reality. With her help and connections, we got to turn my idea into a whole event and brought the whole community together."

Karma collaborated with Planet Youth Calgary and our partners to transform the space for himself, his peers and future generations in the community. Youth in the community took part in revitalizing the court that had long been a space to come together. What started as one youth's idea quickly grew into a community-wide effort. Youth from the neighborhood came together to repaint the court, transforming it into a vibrant mural celebrating unity in the community.

This project didn't just restore a physical space—it reignited a sense of connection, ownership and shared purpose. The court became a powerful symbol of resilience and youth leadership, once again serving as a hub for play, friendship and community building.

"Now, when I step outside, the only thing I can hear is laughter from kids enjoying the sport. I now enjoy the court myself and to see such life grow from our community, neighbourhood and even the Forest Lawn area gives me just an overwhelming sense of happiness. Now that the graffiti has been covered up, the lines are painted back and the youth have something to look forward to after school and on weekends.

When we painted the mural, it wasn't just about the art, it was about bringing that sense of community."
- Karma, a Youth in Greater Forest Lawn



A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

Data is critical to understanding and addressing the needs of Calgary's youth. In partnership with the Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research & Education at the University of Calgary, Planet Youth Calgary collects timely, relevant data to understand the real-world challenges youth face and equip communities to respond with practical, evidence-based strategies.

Over the past year, this partnership has delivered powerful insights from mental health and well-being to safety, stress and belonging, helping community leaders shape solutions that meet youth where they are.

In Fall 2024, Grade 10 students from seven high schools in our priority communities contributed to the first Planet Youth Calgary school survey. Administered in collaboration with the University of Calgary's Mathison Centre for Mental Health, the survey was conducted with support from the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and the Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD). Youth focus groups and a secondary analysis of the survey data were conducted to gather deeper, first-hand perspectives. Together, these different research methods help create a more complete picture of what young people are experiencing—and how best to support them.

Key insights revealed low adolescent well-being, especially in areas such as sleep, mental health, and physical health. We also identified differences in levels of peer and family support, as well as access to recreation, across the priority communities — underlining the need for tailored, local responses. The survey also showed significant differences between genders in how youth felt about community safety, mental health and physical well-being, with girls scoring lower than boys. Additionally, the data highlighted a connection between how youth felt about their family life and peer group and their likelihood of substance use.

Building on what we learned through the survey process, Planet Youth Calgary developed and activated a complimentary, summer research and engagement strategy designed to enhance our data set, broaden participation and reach additional youth voices through community-based methods. This approach allowed us to engage young people who are often underrepresented, may not be attending school and could be at greater risk of experiencing negative influences, yet remain active in the community or present at local events and activities. Our goal is to meet youth where they naturally gather, hang out, play, and connect.

In collaboration with our partners in Iceland, we adapted the Planet Youth school survey for the Calgary community. This approach ensured that our strategy remained methodologically sound and connected to the broader international Planet Youth framework, while allowing us to respond to the unique needs and realities of our local communities.

This strategy helped us collect richer, more inclusive data by layering insights from youth in diverse settings and circumstances. The three-part approach included:

- Administering the Planet Youth survey at community events;
- Hosting Youth Conversations across Calgary;
- Conducting focus groups with equity-deserving youth.

The 2024–2025 data collection cycle successfully engaged over 1,000 youth participants, marking the first full round of research successfully complete.



Through the completed 2024–2025 research cycle, we were able to gather additional data and insights to build on our understanding of the lived experiences of Calgary’s youth. By expanding beyond the classroom and meeting youth where they naturally gather, we captured meaningful insights and deepened our connection to the communities we serve. This work advances our commitment to equity, relevance and evidence-informed decision-making, helping us shine a light on the stories behind the statistics and identifying systemic opportunities for change that might otherwise remain hidden.

Over the next year, we are working closely with our community coalitions to translate the research findings into tailored, community action plans to meet the unique priorities of youth in each community. These plans will guide targeted funding to empower community-led solutions and ensure that data is actively utilized to create meaningful, lasting change for Calgary’s youth.

“Planet Youth Calgary is about listening to what youth, families and communities are telling us—and acting on those insights together. By aligning research, community insights and lived experience, we’re changing how we think about prevention. This is a shared investment in our city’s future, creating the conditions for young people to thrive, not just today, but for generations to come.”

Monique Blough

Director of Children and Youth
Strategies at United Way

INDIGENOUS PARALLEL

Planet Youth Calgary's Indigenous Parallel addresses the unique needs of the Indigenous population and weaves local knowledge, languages, culture and ceremony into the implementation. It's goal is to foster a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for Indigenous youth and their families. Partnering with Miskanawah Community Services Association, as well as Indigenous leaders and youth, we have created a parallel path that recognizes the complexities of reconciliation and draws upon the strengths of Indigenous communities to co-design the development and implementation of the entire initiative.

While Planet Youth is being implemented across Calgary, the Indigenous Parallel was created to honour the distinct experiences, voices and leadership of Indigenous communities. This approach ensures that prevention efforts are culturally grounded, community-led and responsive to the strengths and needs of Indigenous young people.

Planet Youth Calgary is one of the first Planet Youth sites in the world implementing an Indigenous Parallel—one that will be reflected in every aspect of our initiative. Together, we are leading the way in creating an environment that is safe, welcoming and inclusive for all youth.

Adapting Planet Youth for Indigenous communities

Committed to serving, supporting and honouring the Indigenous communities of Treaty 7, Planet Youth Calgary deepened its collaboration with Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Indigenous community members in co-designing and co-implementing the initiative.

There are two guiding frameworks that lead our work:

- Akak'stiman Indigenous Strategy at United Way of Calgary and Area
- Wahkotowin, Oral Truthing Framework at Miskanawah Community Services Association

The principles within these frameworks highlight the importance of relationships and working with community in a positive way.

Rooted in Blackfoot teachings on active kinship, the Indigenous Parallel engages Youth Elders (ages 18–29) as peer mentors for Indigenous youth. Guided by The Nest, a Blackfoot governance model shared by Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe, Youth Elders connect with young people, advocate for their needs and create safe, supportive spaces for learning and leadership. This approach fosters a ripple effect of mentorship, where youth grow into leaders who inspire others.

Creating Safe Spaces, Fostering Resilience

The Indigenous Parallel creates safe spaces for Indigenous young people by meeting them in schools, connecting them with Youth Elders and building trusting relationships. The Indigenous Parallel is adapting the Icelandic Prevention Model by providing culturally appropriate supports and community solutions. Fostering belonging, resilience and leadership, the Indigenous Parallel aligns with Planet Youth's mission to build healthier communities through Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Indigenous Research & Data

The Indigenous Parallel team works with Indigenous researchers, including Dr. Michael Hart, Dr. Pamela Roach and Dr. Jennifer Markides, as part of the One Child Every Child initiative at the University of Calgary, to respect and implement Indigenous research methodologies. Together, they are leading the secondary analysis of Indigenous students' survey responses and co-creating a community-based qualitative research plan of Indigenous youth engagement, including talking circles, to gather youth perspectives on growing up in Calgary.

The Indigenous Parallel is based on the idea of ethical space—a way of working together that brings Indigenous and Western perspectives into respectful dialogue, without hierarchy or ignoring differences. The Indigenous Parallel is ensuring that Indigenous knowledge, traditions and ways of being and doing are respected and honoured within Planet Youth Calgary.

Guided by Elders & Knowledge Keepers

The Indigenous Parallel has the support of 12 Elders representing different nations in Treaty 7 or those who have made their home in Treaty 7. The Elders provide the Indigenous Parallel and the community coalition with wisdom and direction regarding all activities and areas of focus.



I WANT TO BE ABLE TO TALK ABOUT REAL THINGS.

INDIGENOUS PARALLEL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Pipe Ceremony

Planet Youth Calgary hosts an annual Pipe Ceremony to honour Indigenous ways of knowing and working. This ceremony is an opportunity to share experiences, successes and challenges of Planet Youth Calgary's previous year's work and set commitments for the year ahead in the presence of witnesses from the community.

In late 2024, we hosted the ceremony at the Grey Eagle Resort on Tsuut'ina Nation, led by Elder Lumm Patrick Daigneault. The ceremony was an opportunity to share experiences, successes and challenges of implementing Planet Youth Calgary in our communities. Stories were shared by Youth Elders and Planet Youth Managers from Miskanawah, Trellis and YMCA through ceremony, honouring the oral practices of Indigenous ways of doing.

“By integrating ceremonial practices into organizational frameworks, Planet Youth demonstrated the importance of reconciliation in action. Their commitment to honouring traditional systems, decolonizing spaces and paving the road for future generations of young professionals, advocates and community leaders is an important addition to this relationship. Reflecting on the positive impact of these ceremonies, it is evident that Planet Youth is committed to fostering reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities under the Indigenous Parallel, allowing the pipe to lead us all in a good way.”

Cadena Brazeau

(From Keeseekoowenin First Nation in Treaty Two Territory and a member of Miskanawah's Diamond Willow Youth Lodge Youth Council)



Washington State Tribal Prevention System Visits Calgary

United Way of Calgary and Area hosted visitors from the Washington Tribal Prevention System, consisting of five tribes: Tulalip Tribes, Jamestown S'klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Along with delegates from Planet Youth Iceland, Páll Ríkharðsson and Robin Katrick, they attended meetings at United Way, participated in a sweat lodge and attended Miskanawah's Annual Round Dance, which featured a special cultural welcome from Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe CM in their honour.

Planet Youth Ottawa Conference

Youth Elders presented at a one-day conference in Ottawa bringing together community leaders, health professionals, policymakers and government officials. Their shared stories of what it is like to grow up as an Indigenous young person and emphasized the importance of centering youth voices and perspectives in shaping the work of the Indigenous Parallel. Calgary's participation in this conference played a crucial role in shaping the national dialogue, helping to inform programs and influence initiatives that support Indigenous youth across Canada.

Youth Elders' School Outreach

Through collaboration with local schools and under the leadership of Miskanawah, there are three Indigenous Youth Elders who are actively engaging Indigenous students during school. These visits can happen within a classroom setting or over lunchtime and respond to what young people are telling us—that feeling heard, valued, respected, seen and supported are crucial for their well-being. We engage with Indigenous young people by meeting them where they are, building connections and fostering a safe and supportive environment to encourage conversation and belonging. Youth Elders hold responsibility to bring the voices and perspectives of Indigenous students to the community coalition, guiding the priorities of the Indigenous Parallel in community.

YOUTH ELDER VOICES

Taylor Bottle

"School outreach as a Youth Elder has been an incredible experience, especially spending time in classrooms for Indigenous students. It's inspiring to see dedicated spaces with supportive staff who want these students to thrive, and it reminds me of how impactful such spaces would have been during my own school years. I'm honored that we, as Youth Elders, are seen as accessible, positive support for the youth."

Summer Wayner

"My experience doing outreach in schools has been amazing. Engaging with the students on their activities and/or work has been a fun experience and just being able to help them with whatever they need. When I first started working as a Youth Elder, the students at Forest Lawn High School in the Indigenous Leadership Program were planning a family night and I was very nervous because I was still new to everything. But it was very fun and seeing all the planning and preparing they did was very rewarding."



IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

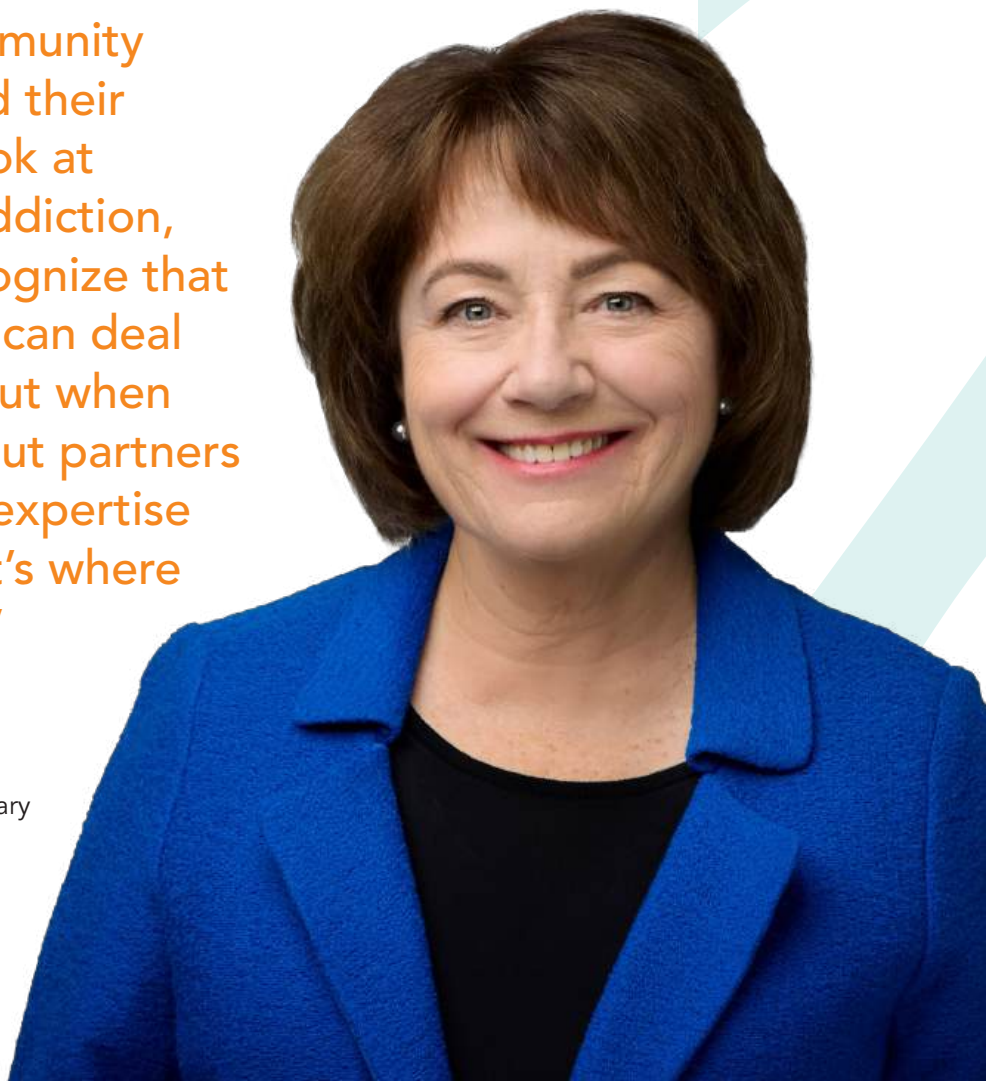
We are incredibly grateful for the donors and corporations who stand united with us to connect with priority communities and help launch and grow this game-changing initiative. Together, we are creating a lasting impact for Calgary's youth today and for generations to come.

A special acknowledgement goes to Sharon Siebens for her leading transformational gift and all Planet Youth Calgary's Founding Investors for their transformational, multi-year commitments. Their investments are a catalyst for change, as we work to positively shape the future of the city and create long-lasting and multigenerational impact.

What is most important about Planet Youth is its timeliness. We are at a critical stage where if we don't make some significant changes in how we deliver mental health support to young people, we could be guilty of losing this generation. Planet Youth Calgary offers us a way to look at doing things differently, and that is important, because we need to acknowledge that things need to change – and that we need to bring in different voices from the community to better understand their needs. When you look at mental health and addiction, it's important to recognize that no one organization can deal with all of it alone, but when organizations seek out partners who bring different expertise and knowledge, that's where the magic happens."

Sharon Siebens

Founding Investor, Planet Youth Calgary



Founding Investors

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In 2024, funding grants were secured from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), underscoring the importance of this priority initiative. Their support and investment reflect both the trust in the program's impact and a shared priority to advancing youth well-being through evidence-based prevention strategies.

In 2025, Planet Youth Calgary and United Way partnered with the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation as a dedicated research funding partner. Together, we will support research at the Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research & Education at the University of Calgary. This partnership plays a vital role in advancing evidence-based solutions that strengthen youth mental health across our communities.

United, we are creating a better tomorrow for young Calgarians.

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