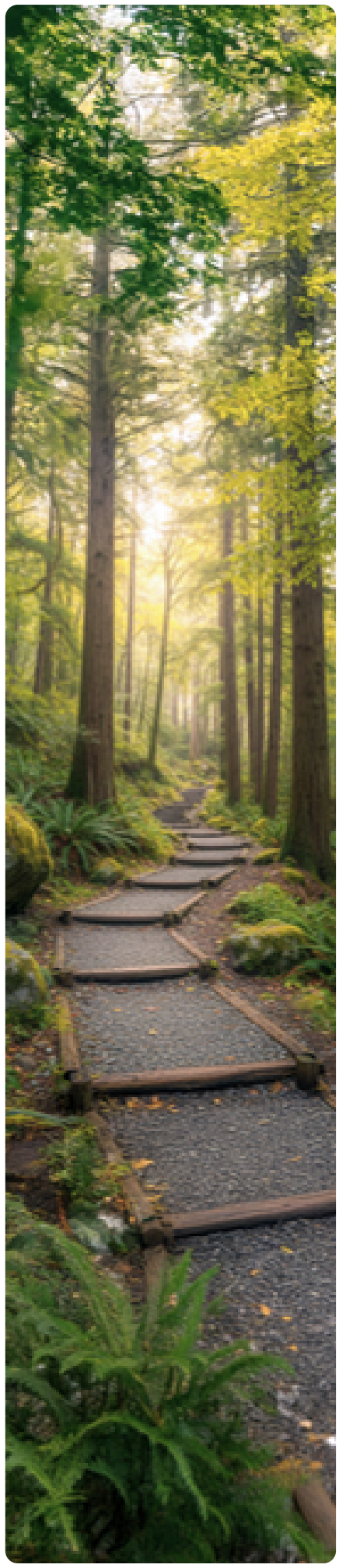
COMMUNITY IMACPT REPORT 2025 NANAIMO YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION CELEBRATING 56 YEARS OF IMPACT



With Gratitude



FRIEND,

For 56 years, NYSA has been a part of the fabric of this community. Whether you've known us for years or are getting to know us now, our work has likely touched someone you care about.

Our focus has always been showing up where we're needed most; helping young people find stability, purpose, and a path forward. That steady, quiet work has changed more than 8,000 lives since we first opened our doors.

What happens here is not charity. It's partnership. It's neighbours standing with youth as they take their first steps toward independence.

As we share this year's Impact Report, we're also looking ahead. The need in our community has grown, and so has our determination to meet it – together.

Thank you for your support and for standing up with us for Nanaimo's youth.

With gratitude,

Keith Wilson
Chief Administrative Officer
Nanaimo Youth Services Association



Standing With Our Youth.

OUR FOCUS IS SIMPLE:

A safe bed and the power to build a future for every youth in Nanaimo.

Together, we're building pathways that give every young person a fair chance at stability, purpose, and belonging, right here in Nanaimo.

We activate this potential using our **Youth Impact Model**:

1. ### Access to safe and stable housing.

   Our houses are more than a roof. They're a stable base with staff support, giving youth the foundation to move forward.

2. ### Cultivate real-world skills.

   Skills that last a lifetime. From job readiness to self-reliance, youth learn to show up confident and stay grounded.

3. ### Forge local belonging.

   Community connections foster a sense of pride, purpose, and commitment and increase the chances of long-term success.

YOUTH
NANAIMO YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION

FIRST, A HOME.

Before a young person can build a future, they need a place to begin.

Youth homelessness doesn't start on the street. It starts when home stops being safe, when rent outpaces a paycheque, when the adults meant to protect them make choices that leave them without one.

Nearly half of people experiencing homelessness in BC first lost stable housing before their 25th birthday, many as young as 13. That's why early intervention matters.

And why creating access to a safe, stable home is a cornerstone of our work.



THE REALITY

On any given night, as many as 125 youth in Nanaimo have no safe or stable place to call home.

A 20% rise in our city's homeless population means more youth than ever are entering adulthood without the stability most of us took for granted. But we recognize the opportunity to intervene early, when it matters most.

OUR APPROACH

A safe home is just the start. With the right support and accountability, youth build the skills to stand on their own, breaking cycles and creating different futures for generations to come.

Your Impact.

Your support helped provide a stable foundation in 2025 for young people.
In our 36 units, we saw a steady movement of new tenants and those moving on to independent housing.

58

Youth had a safe, stable home. For 3 new parents, this meant a secure foundation to raise their children.

17

Youth transitioned from NYSA housing to independence in their own private market rentals

37

Youth in housing re-entered education or took the next step towards college or trades

A VIEW FROM THE FRONT LINES



Chris Lakusta, Director of Housing, NYSA

To understand the heart of our housing program, you need to meet our Director of Housing, Chris Lakusta.

Chris has spent nearly 20 years at NYSA helping young people build the skills they need to stand on their own.

He calls his approach the “friendly landlord”: accountability paired with support.

Youth move through three stages of tenancy. As they demonstrate maturity, they gain more independence. By the final stage, they have the same freedoms as any tenant. Mistakes happen. Consequences follow. But Chris and his team don’t give up.

> “My stress used to be, ‘Where am I going to sleep tonight?’... Now that I am here at Waddington House, I have the one thing I alway craved: *a real chance*.”
>
> *– Youth Housing Resident*

When a young person who's only known instability gets their first key, the transformation is visible. “They let their guard down and take a breath,” Chris says. “You can physically feel the relief. Months, sometimes years fall away.”

It's what Chris calls giving someone their boots before asking them to pull themselves up. “People say kids need to get their act together. But it's hard to do that when you don't have a stable place to start from. We provide both.”

Twenty years has taught Chris one thing: this model works. Give youth the tools, hold them accountable, and watch what they build.



Waddington House
Under 19 Youth Housing



Rowe House
Over 19 Youth Housing

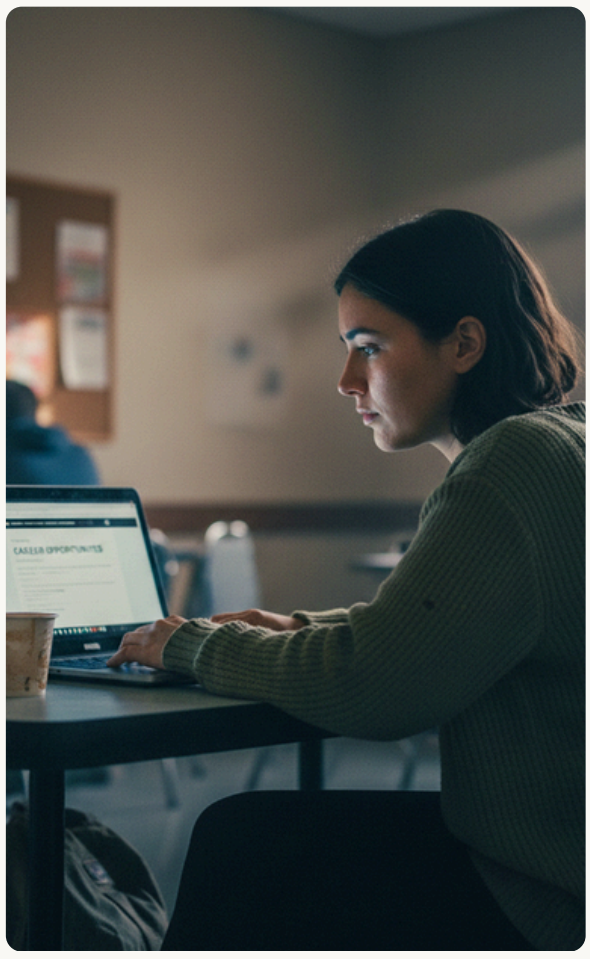
THEN, A CAREER.

A safe home creates stability. A job creates a future.

But today's youth aren't competing on a level field. Nationally, youth are bearing the brunt of the economic slowdown. Opportunities that once belonged to first-time job seekers are now going to laid-off professionals with decades of experience.

Stability is improbable when youth can't find work. Without income, independent housing becomes impossible.

Our programs are designed to help level that playing field.



THE REALITY

Young people in BC face the toughest job market in decades.

BC's youth unemployment sits at nearly 17%, with Nanaimo among the highest in the province. For capable youth ready to work, the gap between wanting a job and getting one has never been wider.

OUR APPROACH

Our employment readiness programs have connected youth with job training, certifications, and employers ready to hire them.

Combined with RentSmart and our L2N driving program, we give youth everything they need to compete *and win.*

Your Impact.

In 2025, you helped put youth on a path to life-long independence.

100%	311	80%
BladeRunners graduation rate	Industry certifications earned	First-time road test pass rate



MEET JOHANN: A NYSA SUCCESS STORY

Seven years of steady support, one powerful result.

Johann is 27 now. He works in tech during the week and helps youth find stability as a member of NYSA’s housing team on weekends. But seven years ago, he was the one searching for a place to begin.

When Johann arrived in Nanaimo in 2018, he was a 20-year-old newcomer with a single goal: “get a job, get cash flow coming in.” Like many young people starting out, he faced an invisible barrier: no experience, no network, and nowhere to start.

He turned to NYSA’s BladeRunners program, where his employment coach, Anthony, became the crucial link to local employers. “If Anthony vouched for you, you had a chance,” Johann recalls. That chance became his first job at Blenz Coffee, followed by a steady role at The Bay, where he met his best friend, John. For the first time, Nanaimo began to feel like home.



Those early steps gave Johann the confidence to study computer science at VIU. Between classes and contract work, life moved quickly, and there were moments of uncertainty. But one thing always stayed the same: NYSA was there.

When Johann realized that not having a driver’s licence was holding him back from better opportunities, Anthony connected him with NYSA’s L2N Driving Program. That’s where he met his coach, Les. What started as driving lessons became something much more: mentorship. “He’s one of the strongest people I’ve ever known,” Johann says. “No matter what happens, he sees the upside.”

Today, Johann has come full circle. He’s part of NYSA’s housing team, helping other youth find their footing while beginning a new career in embedded systems.

When asked what he would tell his younger self, Johann reflects on his journey. “Accept people’s help. Do right by them. Stay calm, things will get better. I feel lucky that I had NYSA.”

> “Accept people’s help. Do right by them. Stay calm, things will get better. I feel lucky that I had NYSA.”



Looking Ahead.

For more than 55 years, NYSA has stood with youth, quietly, steadily, and close to home. Now, as the needs of our city grow, so does our determination to meet them.

Together, we've proven what works: stable housing, real skills, lasting community. Now our responsibility is to make sure every young person who needs that chance can find it.

FirstFuture: Building Solutions to Youth Homelessness

Most housing programs respond too late. FirstFuture provides immediate housing access and the support youth need to stay housed, stopping instability before it becomes a crisis.

Bridge Centre: Building Belonging

Young people are more connected digitally and more isolated personally. Bridge Centre will be a distraction-free space for skill-building, face-to-face connection, and volunteer-led programming that builds belonging.

Your Invitation: Build With Us

The need is growing. We're facing the opportunities with optimism. We know what happens when youth are given a strong foundation.

In 2026, we are launching bold programs to build strong futures for Nanaimo's next generation. Your partnership matters more than ever.

Gratitude.

Thank you to every donor, partner, volunteer, board member, and neighbour who made this year possible. The progress you see in these pages is the result of shared commitment and care. We are deeply grateful for your generosity and belief in Nanaimo's youth.

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OUR COMMITMENT TO PLACE

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional, ancestral territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

We honour the Snuneymuxw people's enduring relationship with this land and are grateful to work alongside them in service to youth.

NANAIMO YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION



IMPACT IS MORE THAN A MOMENT.

IT'S POTENTIAL UNLEASHED.

Thank you.
Community support has made 56 years of impact possible.
We look forward to continuing to unleash the potential of
Nanaimo's youth, together.

YOUTH
NANAIMO YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION

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