

From: [Karyn Wilson](#)
To: [Board of Education](#)
Subject: 15 West Kelowna Youth Dead Since 2016 – We Cannot Wait Any Longer
Date: Friday, November 21, 2025 12:22:57 PM
Attachments: [Integrated Youth Hub.docx](#)

WARNING: This email originated from outside Central Okanagan Public Schools. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

I am sending you this email to bring awareness to this crisis. I sent the first part of this email yesterday to the City of West Kelowna Mayor and council, my local MLA and MP. The second part is my response to the city's email I received today saying "they are working on it".

November 20, 2025 email:

I want to bring to your attention that 15 youth that I am aware of have tragically lost their lives to mental health and addiction issues since 2016 in the City of West Kelowna, four of those lives have been lost since I first raised this concern with the City in April 2024. All of these young people accessed the Boys and Girls Club youth center located in West Kelowna. Our city is failing them, and immediate action is urgently needed to prevent further losses. The current system is not working. Our youth must currently rely on Kelowna programs, which are overstretched, inconsistent, and rarely reach our community effectively. Recreation-based programs cannot meet their mental health, addiction, or trauma-related needs.

Other communities of our size already have solutions:

- Moose Jaw, SK (~33,000) – HOMEBASE youth hub
- Humboldt, SK – HOMEBASE youth hub
- Kenora, ON – Youth Wellness Hub
- BC communities: Mission, Vernon, SD 53, SD 58, SD 83 – ICY Teams delivering local, integrated services

These examples prove that West Kelowna can have its own lifesaving, locally accessible youth support services.

Attached is an example proposal for the city of West Kelowna to utilize and expand on for a Youth Well-Being Hub, designed to provide evidence-based, trauma-informed, and accessible support locally, rather than sending youth away. I am presenting this as a mother of three sons, who have had to bury too many friends, and as a professional who works with at-risk youth and families. I urge you to review this proposal and take urgent action before more lives are lost.

Sincerely,
Karyn Wilson

Thank you for your response. I truly appreciate that these processes take time and that there are layers of procedure and red tape that must be worked through. However, I cannot overstate the urgency and gravity of this situation.

As of this weekend, the City of West Kelowna and Westbank First Nation have lost **five youth this year alone** to this crisis. Because many of these deaths are classified as “accidental” rather than drug-related, the true scale of youth fatalities is being severely underestimated. I am certain there are additional young people whose stories I have not yet learned—yet even with what I do know, the number of youth lost in West Kelowna has now reached **sixteen**.

This does not include motor-vehicle fatalities in which substance use was a contributing factor. When those are considered, the picture becomes even more devastating: **three youth gone in just the past two months, five so far this year—and seven if we include substance-related vehicle deaths.**

To show the trajectory clearly, here are the youth drug-related deaths by year (excluding vehicle-related incidents):

- **2016 – 1**
- **2018 – 1**
- **2020 – 2**
- **2021 – 1**
- **2022 – 1**
- **2023 – 2**
- **2024 – 2**
- **2025 – 5** (and the year is not even over)

These are not numbers on a page—these are children, families shattered, futures stolen. Every delay risks another young life.

Thank you again for acknowledging the issue. I hope this information underscores just how critical timely action truly is. Lives are being lost right now, and our community cannot afford to wait.

I would like to explain why West Kelowna needs an Integrated Youth Hub, even though we currently have a youth drop-in centre operating in our community. This is not about replacing any organization. It's about filling system gaps that our current model is simply not designed or mandated to meet.

Right now, West Kelowna youth must still cross the bridge to Kelowna to access mental-health care, substance-use support, harm-reduction services, and walk-in counselling. The existing youth centre provides social and recreational programming, which is valuable, but it is not equipped — and is not expected — to provide professional early-intervention services, clinical supports, or evidence-based prevention.

A Youth Hub is a fundamentally different model. It includes trained mental-health staff, prevention specialists, youth outreach workers, and partnerships with Interior Health and Westbank First Nation. It includes trauma-informed practice, safety standards, harm-reduction protocols, and a direct pathway to care. Those requirements simply do not exist in a general drop-in recreation program.

This is not duplication. It is expansion. It is meeting needs that are currently unmet. A recreation-based youth centre offers one type of support; a Youth Hub provides another. Both are important, but they are not interchangeable. Young people in West Kelowna deserve local access to prevention, mental-health care, and cultural supports without having to travel to Kelowna or rely on those services attempting to support West Kelowna youth but do not have the capacity to do so in a way that builds ongoing relations with the youth.

The city of West Kelowna needs to build a safe, structured, evidence-based, community-supported hub that complements the existing centre, strengthens the youth service system, and ensures that our young people have the right help, at the right time, close to home.

This is about safety, accessibility, and meeting the needs of West Kelowna youth today — and into the future.

Evidence from communities across Canada demonstrates that integrated youth hubs are feasible and effective even in small or mid-sized cities. In Saskatchewan, Moose Jaw (~33,000) and Humboldt operate HOMEBASE youth hubs delivering mental health, substance-use, peer support, and education programs locally. In Ontario, Kenora has a Youth Wellness Hub providing culturally grounded and comprehensive services for youth aged 12–25. Within British Columbia, smaller communities are also successfully implementing local youth services: Mission, Vernon, School District 53 (Okanagan-Similkameen), SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen), and SD 83 (North

Okanagan-Shuswap) have integrated child and youth teams (ICY) or multi-agency hubs that bring mental health, addictions, and social support directly to youth without relying on programs in nearby cities. These examples clearly indicate that West Kelowna has the capacity and precedent to establish its own integrated, life-saving youth services, tailored to the needs of our community.

The existing youth centre plays an important role in our community by providing recreation and social opportunities for youth. However, it was never designed to function as an integrated mental health, harm-reduction, or clinical support hub.

West Kelowna is missing local access to mental-health support, substance-use prevention programs, cultural programming with WFN, harm reduction, and professional youth outreach. Those services cannot be delivered under a recreation model. They require trained clinicians, structured safety protocols, partnerships with Interior Health, and evidence-based approaches.

This type of Hub is not to replace or undermine any existing service, but to build a complementary system of support where recreation, prevention, and intervention all work together. The Youth Hub fills critical gaps that currently require youth to travel to Kelowna. This new model expands the network and strengthens overall outcomes for youth in West Kelowna.

West Kelowna has a youth drop-in centre, but local youth continue to face barriers to mental-health care, substance-use support, and harm reduction. The reason is simple: a recreation-based youth centre and an Integrated Youth Hub serve entirely different purposes.

1. Recreation centres cannot provide clinical support.

A Youth Hub includes trained mental-health workers, prevention programs, harm reduction, and weekly counselling — a drop-in centre does not and is not expected to.

2. Youth still have to cross the bridge for real help.

Services like Foundry Kelowna remain the only place for counselling, addiction support, and crisis prevention. Distance is a major barrier.

3. Youth hubs follow health-aligned safety and staffing standards.

They must have trauma-informed staff, safety policies, clinical supervision, and evaluation. Recreation programs do not operate under the same standards.

4. Prevention needs structure, not just space.

Evidence-based programs like PreVenture and Planet Youth require trained facilitators, partnership with SD23, and measurable outcomes.

5. Cultural programming must be built with WFN.

A Youth Hub creates space for Indigenous-led programs, land-based healing, and youth mentorship.

6. This is not duplication — it is filling a gap.

The existing centre provides social engagement.

The Youth Hub provides mental-health care, harm reduction, and prevention.

West Kelowna youth deserve both. But right now, they only have one.

Examples of Other Canadian Cities / Regions Leading in Youth Overdose / Substance-Use Prevention

Community	Model / Approach	What They're Doing
Peterborough, Ontario	Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) / Planet Youth	The Peterborough Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative (PYSUP) is implementing IPM, using local youth surveys to guide community strategies (schools, family, recreation) to reduce risk and strengthen protective factors. PYSUP+2peterboroughpublichealth.ca+2 Peterborough Public Health received national funding (YSUPP) to support this work. peterboroughpublichealth.ca+1
Haldimand-Norfolk, Ontario	Planet Youth / Icelandic Prevention Model	The Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit got a grant to adapt to IPM locally. hnhu.org Their Planet Youth site is doing community engagement, data-collection (student surveys), and building a long-term coalition to address substance use risk factors. planetyouthhaldimandnorfolk.ca
Timiskaming District, Ontario (Northern Ontario)	Planet Youth / IPM	Timiskaming is running as a 5-year <i>pilot</i> of Planet Youth. tdas.ca+1 Their strategy includes building a cross-sector coalition, surveying students, and using the data to guide youth-friendly prevention interventions. City of Temiskaming Shores
Glace Bay / New Waterford, Nova Scotia	Icelandic Prevention Model + Integrated	The Undercurrent Youth Society is leading IPM implementation in Glace Bay & New Waterford. undercurrentyc.com+1 Also, the <i>New Dawn Youth and Family Centre</i> is being

Community	Model / Approach	What They're Doing
	Youth Services (IYS)	built (opens ~2026) to house integrated youth services (mental health, substance use, peer support, recreation). New Dawn Enterprises

Why These Models (and Cities) Matter

- These models are data-driven: Communities collect local survey data from youth to understand their risk and protective factors, then design interventions based on that. (IPM principle) [undercurrentyc.com+2PYSUP+2](#)
- They emphasize community-level change, not just individual behaviors — engaging parents, schools, local orgs. [planetyouthhaldimandnorfolk.ca+1](#)
- They're long-term: These are not quick “fixes” — IPM / Planet Youth involves repeating cycles of data collection, strategy, evaluation. [planetyouthhaldimandnorfolk.ca](#)
- They get federal support: Many of these initiatives are funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada's Youth Substance Use Prevention Program (YSUPP). [Canada](#)

What Canadian Youth Programs Have Shown Some Measurable Impact or Promise

1. PreVenture (via Foundry / BC)

- The PreVenture program is being supported in BC through Foundry. [BC Gov News+1](#)
- According to BC's Ministry of Health, PreVenture “has proven effective in delaying the initiation of substance use and reducing it by up to **80%**,” plus reducing anxiety, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation among youth. [BC Gov News](#)
- Why this matters: Delaying substance initiation is a strong protective factor and may indirectly reduce overdose risk later on (though the program's stated outcomes are more about use / mental health than directly overdoses).

2. Foundry's Integrated Youth Services

- The Foundry Impact Report (2024) shows that walk-in counselling is very heavily used: nearly 6,000 youth used walk-in counselling in one year, and about a third of them accessed *other* Foundry services in the same visit. [foundrybc](#)
- Because Foundry is low-barrier and integrated (mental health, substance use, peer support), it likely helps *early intervention*, which could reduce risk of escalation into more harmful substance use.
- However: while Foundry provides harm reduction (e.g., naloxone training / distribution), there isn't public data (at least in their report) showing a measurable drop in overdose deaths among their youth clients. The impact

report focuses more on service access, mental health, and linkage.
[foundrybc](#)

3. Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) / Planet Youth — Canadian Pilot Projects

- The Youth Substance Use Prevention Program (YSUPP) from the Public Health Agency of Canada is funding IPM adaptation in communities across Canada. [Canada](#)
- There's a *guide* for how to evaluate IPM-based community interventions in Canada (developed by PHAC) based on the first pilot in Lanark County, Ontario. [Canada+1](#)
- That said: real impact data (especially on overdose) is still early / limited: media commentary notes that while IPM has strong evidence for reducing use (from Iceland), it wasn't originally designed for opioid / overdose risk. [Canadian Affairs](#)
- Also, PHAC is continuing to fund these projects to learn “what interventions work, in what ways, and in what contexts.” [Canada](#)

4. Youth Harm-Reduction Access (BC)

- According to the *Time to Listen* report (BC Representative for Children and Youth), Foundry sites are distributing take-home naloxone (THN) kits: from August 2022 to mid-April 2023, Foundry centres distributed ~10,620 THN kits. [rcybc.ca](#)
- The same report, though, notes that while there is *some progress* on youth-specific harm reduction, youth-specific overdose prevention (supervised consumption) sites are still very limited: only one youth-specific OPS (overdose prevention services) site is named in the Fraser Health Region. [rcybc.ca](#)
- This suggests harm reduction for youth is expanding in BC, but it's not yet a fully mature system, and the direct mortality-reduction impact is not yet clearly documented in publicly available youth-specific data.

West Kelowna Youth Hub vs. Current Youth Centre Model

(Safe, factual, and focused on service differences)

Service Area	Existing Youth Centre (Recreation Model)	Proposed Youth Hub (Integrated Model)
Primary Purpose	Social, recreational, and developmental programming	Prevention, early intervention, mental-health & harm-reduction services

Service Area	Existing Youth Centre (Recreation Model)	Proposed Youth Hub (Integrated Model)
Staffing Requirements	General youth workers, recreation staff	Clinicians, outreach workers, prevention specialists, Indigenous partners
Mental-Health Services	Not mandated or licensed for clinical care	Weekly walk-in counselling + care pathways
Substance-Use Services	Not provided	Prevention programs, harm-reduction education, youth substance-use support
Harm Reduction	Not part of typical BGC scope	Naloxone access, youth-specific harm reduction, overdose-prevention protocols
Regulation & Oversight	Recreation program standards	Health-aligned protocols, safety policies, clinical supervision
Cultural/Indigenous Programming	Variable	Formal partnership with Westbank First Nation
Evidence-Based Prevention	Not included	PreVenture, Planet Youth, risk-screening, structured evaluation
Health & Social Services Integration	None	Interior Health, Foundry Kelowna, SD23 partnerships
Data & Evaluation	Not required	Annual evaluation + outcome reporting
Gap Addressed	Social engagement	Mental health + substance-use gaps in West Kelowna

The chart shows the difference in mandate, not a failure or shortcoming of any organization.

WEST KELOWNA YOUTH WELL-BEING HUB

Integrated Youth Prevention, Early Intervention & Harm Reduction Project

City of West Kelowna – Proposed Program 2025–2030

Purpose:

To create West Kelowna's first integrated youth hub to deliver prevention, early intervention, and harm-reduction services for youth aged 12–24.

Why Now:

- Growing youth substance use concerns
- Limited mental-health access in West Kelowna
- Reliance on Foundry Kelowna
- Transit and distance barriers
- Increasing youth mental-health needs

What the Hub Will Offer:

- Local drop-in youth space
- Harm reduction + naloxone distribution
- Youth outreach worker
- Weekly mental-health walk-ins
- Indigenous-led and culturally safe programming
- Prevention programs in SD23 schools
- Recreation + arts programming
- Peer support groups

Key Partners:

Westbank First Nation, Interior Health, SD23, Foundry Kelowna, YMCA, BGC Okanagan.

Budget:

Year 1 Estimate: **\$450K–\$750K**

Funding Sources:

PHAC, Health Canada, BC Mental Health & Addictions, United Way, FNHA (if applicable).

Outcomes:

- Improved youth safety
- Reduced high-risk substance use
- Enhanced community belonging
- Reduced reliance on Kelowna services
- Stronger youth–adult connections

Decision Required:

Council approval to proceed with planning, grants, and site identification.

WEST KELOWNA YOUTH WELL-BEING HUB — YEAR 1 BUDGET**1. Staffing**

- Program Coordinator	\$95,000
- Youth Outreach Worker	\$75,000
- Peer Support Worker	\$55,000
- Clinician (part-time / contracted)	\$60,000
SUBTOTAL STAFFING	\$285,000

2. Facility

- Rent / municipal space	\$0–\$60,000
- Utilities / cleaning	\$8,000
- Renovations / furniture	\$20,000–\$40,000
SUBTOTAL FACILITY	\$28,000–\$108,000

3. Program Costs

- Prevention Program (PreVenture/IPM)	\$15,000–\$60,000
--	-------------------

- Youth programming materials \$15,000
- Cultural programming (WFN) \$20,000
SUBTOTAL PROGRAMS \$50,000–\$95,000

4. Harm Reduction

- Naloxone supplies \$5,000
- Harm-reduction materials \$6,000
SUBTOTAL HR \$11,000

5. Operations

- Supplies & equipment \$10,000
- Food for programs \$5,000
- Insurance / admin \$7,500
SUBTOTAL OPERATIONS \$22,500

6. Evaluation

- Annual evaluation \$15,000
TOTAL YEAR 1 BUDGET \$450,000–\$750,000

Why We Need This

- No youth hub west of the bridge
- Transportation to Kelowna is a barrier
- Youth substance-use concerns growing
- Limited early intervention supports
- Desire for safe youth spaces locally

What the Hub Will Provide

- Drop-in youth centre
- Prevention programming
- Weekly mental-health walk-ins
- Cultural programs with WFN
- Harm reduction + naloxone
- Outreach worker + peer mentors

Partners

- Westbank First Nation
- Interior Health
- SD23
- Foundry Kelowna
- YMCA & Boys and Girls Clubs

Budget

\$450K–\$750K for Year 1

Multiple funding streams already exist.

Outcomes

- Reduced high-risk substance use
- Improved youth mental health
- Increased belonging & connection
- Youth safer, supported, and empowered