




WILD MINDS 2018

Welcome to year three of **Wild Minds**, a fun and engaging summer youth gardening program where 14 youth came together to explore, learn, play, and work in the beautiful Strathcona and Cottonwood Community garden in Vancouver's Strathcona inner city neighbourhood.

A key program focus was supporting youth immersion and connection with urban wilderness. This is achieved partially through the teaching of native plant ecology and ecosystem interdependence. Along with hands on skill building work, youth helped nurture and re-wild a beautiful community garden space, transforming it into an even more diverse ecosystem.

A group of six youth are working in a lush garden. On the right, a wooden greenhouse with a translucent roof stands amidst greenery. Two youth are at a black tub near the greenhouse, one wearing a black tank top and the other a grey hoodie. To their left, three more youth (two girls and one boy in a yellow shirt) are looking at plants. A sixth youth in a blue shirt stands nearby. The garden is filled with various plants, including tall yellow flowers and orange lilies in the foreground. The background is a dense wall of green trees.

DAY 1 - The youth learned about native plants, what makes them different from introduced plants and why we need to nurture them. We were reminded that roughly 80% of the plant life in the city are introduced species. Spent time potting up 60 plants including Evergreen Huckleberry, Red Flowering Current, Blueberry, Mock Orange, Dogwood, and Oregon Grape that will later be planted in community and school gardens around Vancouver.

Many of the youth who participated attend nearby Britannia Secondary School. They represented a variety of cultural backgrounds. Some were newcomers to Canada. Most were from lower income households and face barriers due to colonization and racial discrimination. They were all awesome youth.



DAY 2 - Got down to work in the Youth Garden on a very hot day mostly weeding, watering, and harvesting. This semi food forest/food garden is a great place to learn about growing food in the city. As a food forest, there are many plant "stories" so to speak and like a forest there are large trees such as apple, mulberry and other trees, with a secondary story of large shrubs or perennial berries including oregon grape, raspberries, dwarf appless, then with lower, near ground shrubs such as salal and other berries. A special treat was harvesting mulberries and apples which along with store bought plums and blueberries, were cooked up to make fruit leather.

Rewilding Area



project planted by
Strathcona Community Garden Society
Environmental Youth Alliance

DAY 3 - Special guest Senaqwila Wyss joined us to teach about native plants and their Indigenous cultural uses. Senaqwila is Coast Salish Squamish so was able to share some important and interesting knowledge about the local specificity of the plants and their uses. Was such a powerful learning about the healing qualities of plants and the idea that they are here to keep us healthy. We toured the garden and harvested red clover, mint, yarrow, and nettle and made up a thirst quenching ice tea.



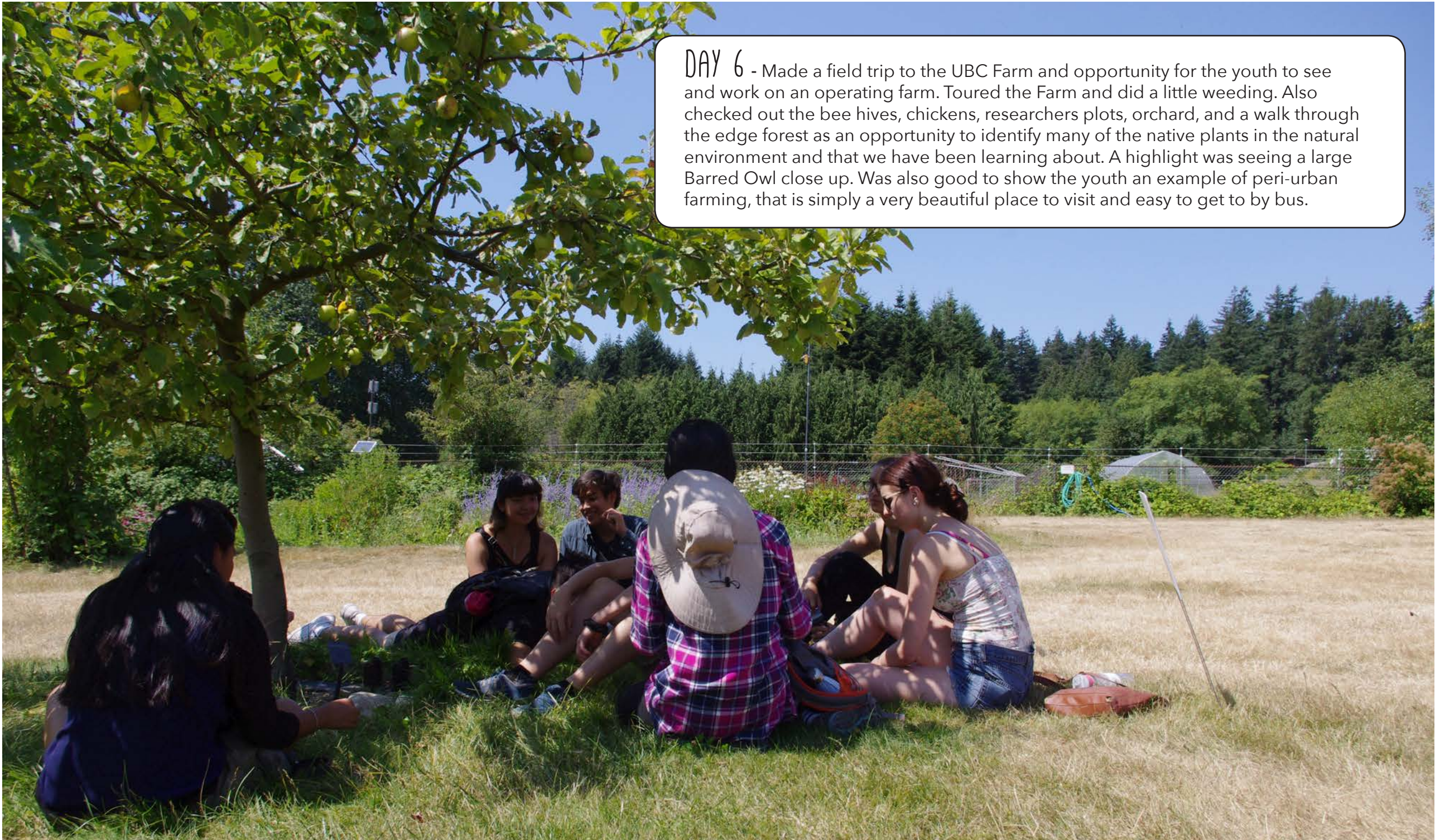
DAY 4 - It was all about the birds today, starting off with some basic habitat concepts and learning about the birds that frequent the gardens. The youth went for a "scavenger hunt" exploring the forest area and searching for bird and animal habitat features and looking for clues where particular birds and other animals nest or spend time. The forest gardens offer exceptional habitat for many animals and provide a fantastic educational opportunity close to where the youth live and go to school. In the afternoon we spent time building chickadee and flicker bird houses with some youth planting in the native plant demo garden.



DAY 5 - It was all about bees today, well actually all pollinators, including butterflies, wasps, flies and a whole host of other creatures that help pollinate and grow us food. Thing is, bees are the best pollinator and with honeybees as the only pollinator that actually collects pollen protein to feed the hive. All others are just in it for the nectar. Marika from Environmental Youth Alliance helped us learn to identify the difference between bees, wasps, and flies with many non bees that look alot like bees, even flies. Even among bees, there are thousands of different species, with many now on the endangered list. Then the youth had a chance to capture some insects and identify them before letting them free, which was a fun activity.



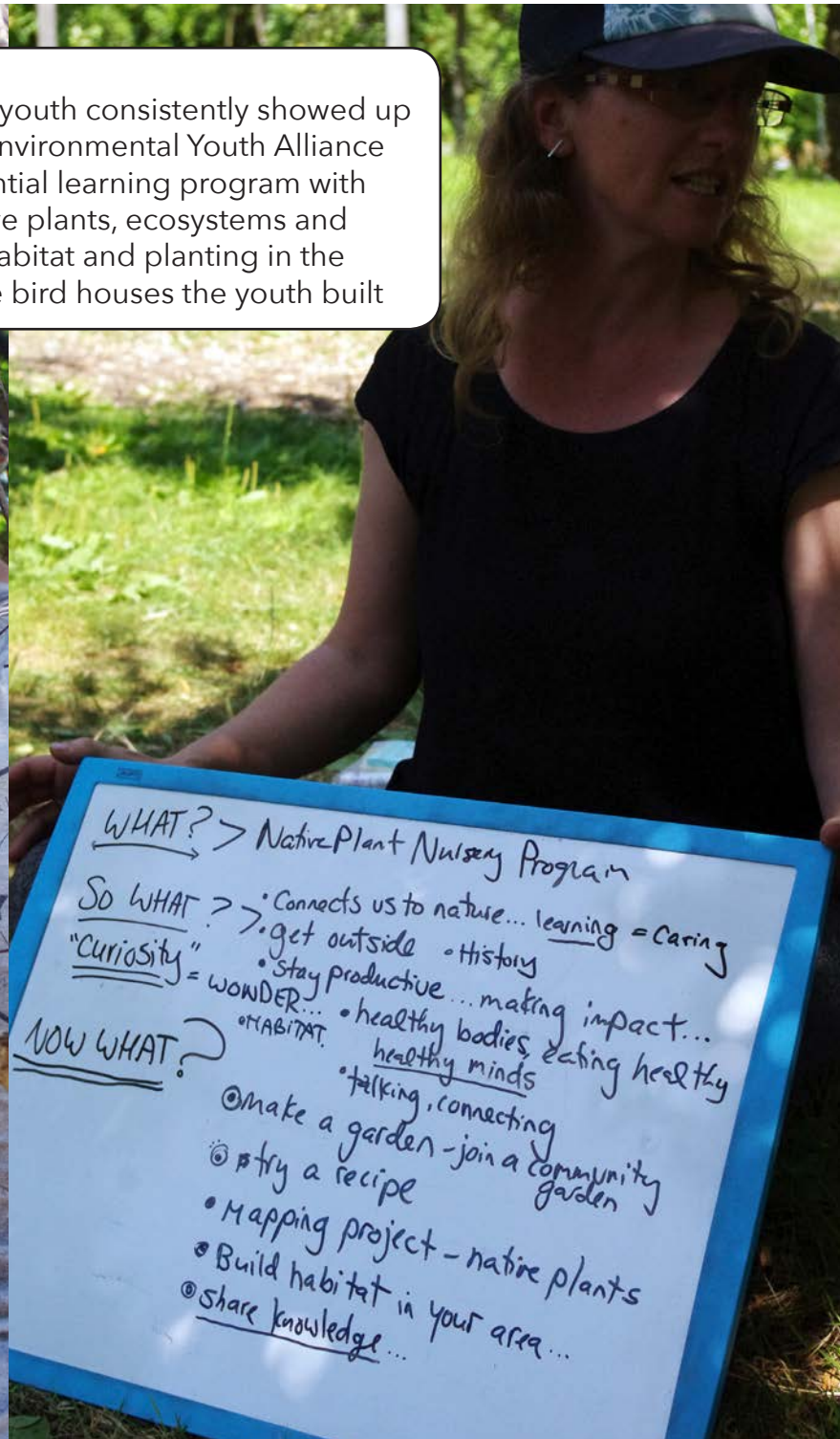
DAY 6 - Made a field trip to the UBC Farm and opportunity for the youth to see and work on an operating farm. Toured the Farm and did a little weeding. Also checked out the bee hives, chickens, researchers plots, orchard, and a walk through the edge forest as an opportunity to identify many of the native plants in the natural environment and that we have been learning about. A highlight was seeing a large Barred Owl close up. Was also good to show the youth an example of peri-urban farming, that is simply a very beautiful place to visit and easy to get to by bus.

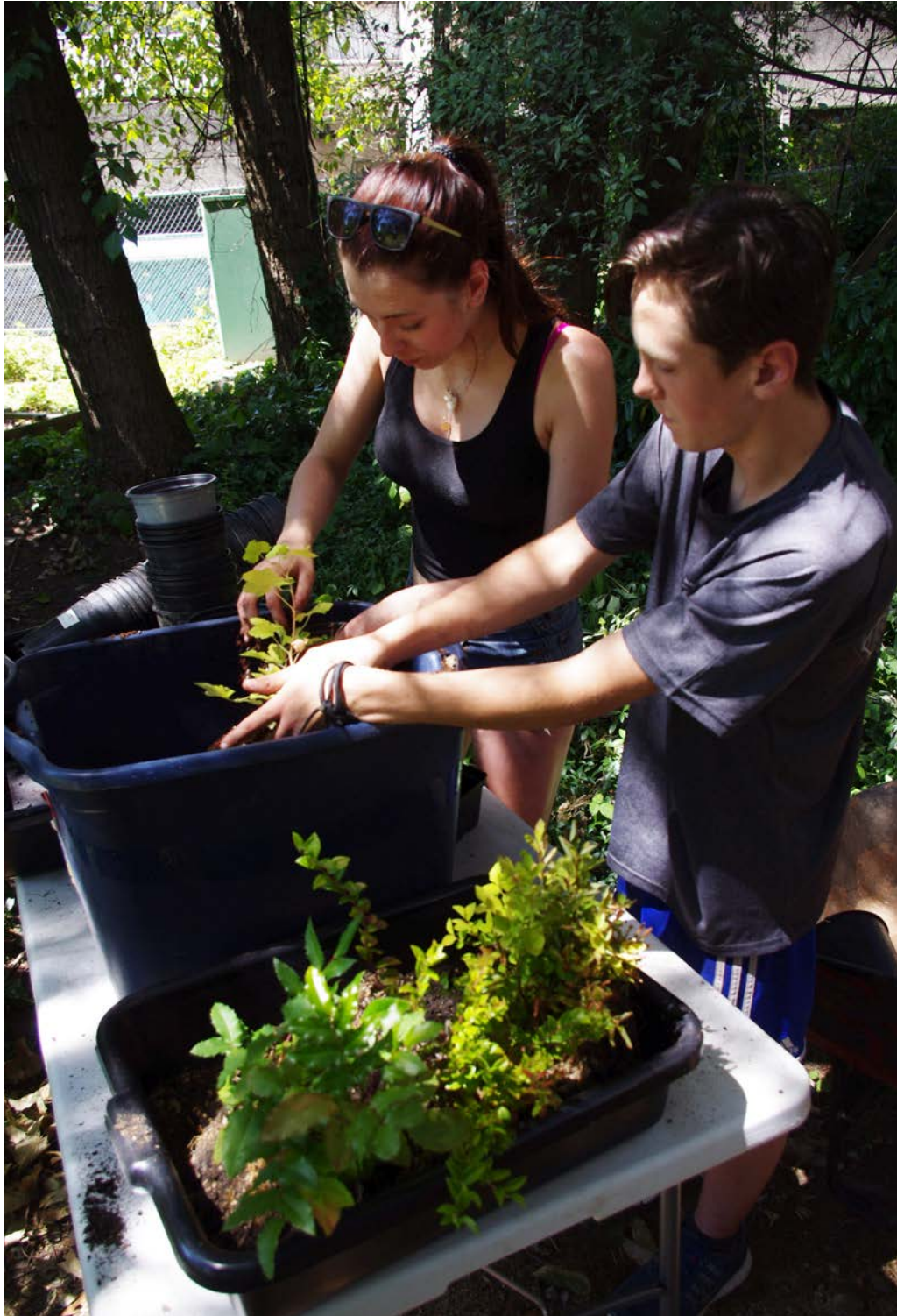


DAY 7 - Learned more about the healing benefits of plants and made oregon grape and cedar healing salve with olive oil and beeswax and which is applied cuts, scrapes, & wounds to prevent bacterial, viral & fungal infections. The afternoon was spent preparing and planting in one of the new native plant garden areas,



DAY 8 - Last day of a very successful program. All the youth consistently showed up and remained motivated and engaged. Big thanks to Environmental Youth Alliance Jess Henry for providing a rich and interesting experiential learning program with the youth gaining lots of great knowledge around native plants, ecosystems and sustainability. Spent our last day learning about plant habitat and planting in the Native Plant Garden. Also took some time to put up the bird houses the youth built





WILD MINDS PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Wild Minds builds on 10 years of food growing education with students in the Britannia School gardens and surrounding community garden spaces and provides valuable hands-on skill building and understanding of food growing, healthy eating, environmental sustainability, and community leadership in their school and community gardens.

Wild Minds emerged in 2016 as a program collaboration between the Grandview Woodland Food Connection, the Environmental Youth Alliance, and Evergreen Foundation BC in order to expand Britannia Student's connections to the much larger Strathcona and Cottonwood community gardens where EYA works and youth would be exposed to considerably more learning opportunities than at the smaller school gardens.

This year, 13 Britannia youth joined the program, many of them from Streetfront Alternative and who have been labelled "at-risk". The youth received minimum wage honorariums for attendance. For many youth, Wild Minds provided their first paid work experience and were given a program certificate upon completion.

The opportunities to learn in the gardens were varied and unique, keeping the youth engaged and interested. In fact, the youth showed a lot of interest in the 4.5 acre gardens which include orchards, bee hives, community gardens, pond areas, animal habitat, food forests, herb gardens, and existing wild areas. The beauty of these gardens provided the youth a new perspective of food growing and nature in the city.

Over the 8 sessions that the youth participated, they learned about bees and pollinators, native plants and soils, seedsaving, composting and mulching, permaculture practice, animal habitat, food growing and garden maintenance, urban farming, herbs and medicinals, and fruit growing, to name a few.



WILD MINDS PARTICIPANT EVALUATION:

Date: July 26, 2018

After participating in the Native Plant Nursery program:

Do you feel inspired to spend more time in nature?

Yes: 10/14

No: 1/9

No reply: 3/9

Did you develop new friendships and connections through this program?

Yes: 9/14

No: 0/14

No reply: 5/14

Do you feel more confident to participate in nature stewardship in Vancouver?

Yes : 9/14

No: 1/14

No reply: 4/14

What do you think was the most significant change in your behavior through your participation in the program?

- Be more gentle with plants
- I am more happy. Gardening made me relaxed and I always have stories to tell
- After coming home from a two week camping trip, I was missing the forest. I actually frequent this garden often being able to come back to nature and learn about the space that I love was a very amazing experience. I have noticed that I feel more at peace. Spending so much time in the garden has made my behavior alot less self destructive. In a way, it has given me time to live with a clear mind and has lifted weights off my shoulder.
- I have become more caring for bees, wildlife and plants. I appreciate life more form the knowledge I learned.
- I don't think my behavior has changed at all.
- Caring more about nature and getting out of the house more.
- The most significant change in my behaviour is that I am more talkative and I can speak up. I can help others with the knowledge I know.
- I feel alot calmer when I am in nature.



Describe the most significant change in your personal development that has occurred because of your participation in this program?

- I can appreciate all the effort that goes into gardening.
- I am eating healthier. I am learning to be a leader and to be more sharing and connecting.
- The program has helped me with substance abuse and depression. Nature is very good for anyone and their mental health. I also eat way healthier.
- I noticed that I am happier and grateful that I was able to get away from everything while I was in the program and to create a connection with nature in an awesome way.
- I learned how to do a handstand on the soft grass.
- Eating more healthy and getting fit.
- I am more useful and productive.
- I have started growing things myself.

Why are these changes significant for you?

- Helps me enjoy life more.
- Because being happy is my goal in life and this makes me happy.
- I have struggled for years and have been looking for something like this program to remind myself how beautiful life can be.
- I used to hate bees. Having personal problems and needing a release
- I know I am better than I thought of myself.
- These changes are significant to me because I am shy, not talkative, awkward, and anxious. It helped me be a leader and learned more about gardening and pollinators, and the equipment.
- I know a lot more about the plants and how food is made.

Describe your least favorite part of the program

- Is it ending.
- All the talking (just kidding).
- Dumping the compost in the bin.
- I was not prepared for the heat because I did not have a hat.
- The lunch was too simple and wanting more food.

How could Wild Minds be improved?

- I wish we completed a lot more work. I felt like there was a lot of talking and less hands-on stuff
- Possibly longer than 4 hrs/day and longer program
- More garden labour (expressed by 4 youth)

LESSONS LEARNED

- Youth are eager to work. More work and less talk.
- Youth are curious and eager to learn. Engage youth beyond their usual worlds and thinking and you will get their attention.
- Hands on, hands on hands on. As many opportunities to get the youth working on real spaces and concrete projects with a clear and visible outcomes. (ex. building birdhouses, clearing the invasive trees out, planting new native species in their place). Allowing youth to be responsible to themselves and others in the group and use tools to accomplish task goals inspires confidence & leadership.
- Encourage youth to take leadership roles. Build their self confidence.
- Listen to what youth are interested in learning and doing. Make it happen and the youth will be more likely to engage if it is something they want to do.
- New skills gained that they can take away an example of: habitat boxes, rope, plants. If they have something to show for it, the new skill generates pride and confidence. Plan more activities with that follow-through. Successes: fruit leather (show them how a dehydrator works next time), bird and habitat boxes (install on the same day as construction if possible),
- Plan surprises and games to help encourage the keeners and jostle the more resistant youth out of their entrenched modes.
- Get to know the youth. They have amazing stories.





WILD MINDS 2018

Project Leaders: Jess Henry (Environmental Youth Alliance) , Ian Marcuse (Grandview Woodland Food Connection)

Youth Mentors: Belle Barker and Ali Byers (Fresh Roots),

Project Youth: Avalon Scott, Che Clearsky, Braden Young, Tatiana Young, Vina Lobbes, Jonah Andrews, Drey St. Denis, Jeanarah Allen Austin, Ibin Paulo, John Graham, Alejandra Soto, Angelica Jose Gasper, Allanah Haizimsque,

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More Photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gwfc/albums/72157671303155458>

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**Grandview Woodland Food Connection
Environmental Youth Alliance
Contributing to Lives of Inner City Kids (CLICK)**



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