

How they got started:



The Agenda Gap program was delivered in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association (BC Division) and Indigenous Perspectives Society.






The group met bi-weekly, alternating locations between the three schools participating, with ten youth completing the program.

The challenge:

These youth identified education as a critical determinant for their wellbeing – specifically **substance-use and harm reduction education** – and noted how punitive approaches to youth substance use often cause harm.


Here’s how they made a difference:

1. Building a Network	2. Finding Key Allies	3. Focusing their Efforts	4. Crafting a Powerful Message
<p>The group mapped their network and explored Indigenous perspectives on reducing harms associated with substance use.</p> 	<p>Using their network connections, they met with Island Health’s School Health Promotion team to learn more about school substance use policies and effective ways to have their voices heard.</p> 	<p>Learning about previous youth input to school district substance use policies they decided to build on those efforts to change policies in their district.</p> 	<p>Using their lived experience, information from allies about effective policies in other districts, and referencing the previous youth informed-policy recommendations, the youth developed and recorded a narrated presentation to advocate for substance use education and intervention to reduce substance use harms.</p>


Their change action:

The group **delivered a compelling online presentation to the school district’s Operations Policy and Planning Committee**, urging the district to adopt a non-punitive response framework and integrate harm minimization principles into school curricula. Their message was well received and prompted the Committee to request more information.

Ripple effects:



Expanded opportunities
Experiences in the program supported successful university and job applications for participants.



Policy Impacts
The School District Superintendent called a meeting with the youth’s Healthy Schools allies and were invited to contribute to policy changes drafted by the district in the fall of 2024.