**2024 – Year In Review**

**November 28**

Victoria [Youth Empowerment Society](https://www.vyes.ca/) Operations Director [Kisae Petersen](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kisae-petersen-926089250/?originalSubdomain=ca) hosted an inspiring tour of its 533 Yates St. drop-in centre prior to this month’s meeting, then joined us in the CRD boardroom to present the [outcomes report](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Summer-Opportunities-Program-Report.pdf) from the VFCYJC grant that partially funded the YES [Summer Opportunities Program](https://www.vyes.ca/programs/#summer). Hungry, cold, isolated and often desperate youth from across the region find safety and solace at YES, she told us. There they can access basic needs (shelter, food, clothing, hygiene), navigator services, life skills workshops, hot lunches and a relaxed, non-judgemental hang-out space. Newly established with assistance from the Victoria Foundation is a food pantry stocked with donated dry goods and matched with food-prep training classes. (Independent youth under 19 often cannot access food bank services.) [Donations](https://www.vyes.ca/make-a-donation/) are always welcome.

[CRAT’s Bill McElroy](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bill-mcelroy-b3304656/?originalSubdomain=ca) reported out on a new ad hoc Westshore group working to help the Mobile Youth Services Team overcome still further heightened funding challenges following [Westshore RCMP’s decision](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Letter-Westshore-Police-Withdrawl-from-Regional-Units.pdf) to withdraw support for Regional Integrated Units given other localized initiatives. [Treasurer Esther Patterson](https://crest.ca/board_members/councillor-esther-paterson/) presented and received approval for the [2025 draft budget](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2025PreliminaryBudget.pdf). The VFCYJC-funded [MYST Policy Report (Sept. 26)](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/MYST-Policy-Report-26-September-2024.pdf) will be circulated to a full range of provincial and other decision-makers thanks to a motion by Priorities/Grants Subcommittee Chair [Marcie McLean](https://www.timescolonist.com/2022-civic-election/marcie-mclean-highlands-council-candidate-2022-5896290). Chair [Marie-Térèse Little](https://www.metchosin.ca/council/council-members/mayor-marie-terese-little) welcomed first in-person attendance by two pending 2025 VFCYJC appointees, Colwood councillor [Misty Olsen](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mistyolsen/?originalSubdomain=ca) and Central Saanich Councillor [Sarah Riddell](https://www.sarahriddell.ca/). Special thanks was extended by Communications Subcommittee Chair [Jeff Bateman](http://www.jeff4sooke.com/home.html) to VFCYJC secretary [Marnie Essery](https://www.royalroads.ca/events/accessibility-advocacy-voices-community) and the CRD's [Sharon Orr](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sharon-orr-98176426a/?originalSubdomain=ca) for their exceptional work in delivering the committee's [minutes and agendas](https://www.crd.bc.ca/about/board-committees/board-committees-and-commissions/victoria-family-court-and-youth-justice-committee).

**October 24**

The Times Colonist has published the Committee's Op Ed expressing strong support for the Mobile Youth Services Team --[*"The most vulnerable youth are about to lose their most valuable support team."*](https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/comment-the-most-vulnerable-youth-are-about-to-lose-their-most-valuable-support-team-9697149) It was signed by Chair Little and written by the VFCYJC's Communications Subcommittee. Meeting guest [Cathy Peters](https://westvancouver.ca/sites/default/files/dwv/council-agendas/2020/jun/08SpOpen/20jun08-4-2.pdf) discussed the [Be Amazing](https://beamazingcampaign.org/) campaign. Her urgent message: "Organized crime and international syndicates operate freely in British Columbia. Drug and sex trafficking are lucrative and increasing with no deterrent. Currently, gang recruitment is occuring around the province. I am in touch with all 60 School Districts to warn them that youth are being aggressively targeted (online and in person)." Her suggested next steps: 1. Funding/training for law enforcement to better enforce the federal [Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2014_25/page-1.html).  2. A provincial public awareness campaign. 3. A human trafficking task force in BC similar to those in [Alberta](https://www.alberta.ca/human-trafficking-task-force), [Saskatchewan](https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/justice-crime-and-the-law/victims-of-crime-and-abuse/human-trafficking-and-sexual-exploitation), [Manitoba](https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/traciastrust/initiatives.html) and [Ontario](https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-anti-human-trafficking-strategy-2020-2025).

*(In June, the VFCYJC forwarded a*[*motion*](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/1-VFC-Criminal-Code-Motion-Laughton.docx)*to enforcement authorities seeking revisions to*[*sections 152 a*](https://www.criminal-code.ca/criminal-code-of-canada-section-152-invitation-to-sexual-touching/index.html#:~:text=Section%20152%20of%20the%20Criminal%20Code%20of%20Canada%20sets%20out,section%20153%20(sexual%20exploitation).)*nd*[*153*](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-153.1.html)*of the*[*Criminal Code*](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/)*to more effectively stop online sexual exploitation. Lt. Governor Janet Austin spoke at the UBCM conference last month about the establishment of the*[*Human Trafficking Prevention Network of British Columbia.*](https://ltgov.bc.ca/human-trafficking-prevention-network/)*)*

**Hacked!**

Oct. 1, 2024: Thanks for your patience as we restore service. To see the site as it was and will be again, visit the [Way Back Machine](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/).

**September 26**

The Committee hosted a panel focused on issues impacting vulnerable youth in Greater Victoria. Saanich Police [Inspector Damian Kowalewich](https://www.linkedin.com/in/damian-kowalewich-300789226/?original_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egoogle%2Eca%2F&originalSubdomain=ca), Victoria/Esquimalt Police [Deputy Chief Constable Jamie McRae](https://vicpd.ca/2024/02/01/from-volunteer-to-deputy-chief-vicpd-announces-new-leadership/#:~:text=Deputy%20Chief%20McRae%20first%20joined,Resources%20Divisions%20of%20the%20Department.) and MYST's Mia Golden and Gord Magee highlighted two evolving crises: [gang recruitment](https://cheknews.ca/unprecedented-gang-recruitment-happening-in-greater-victoria-schools-says-counsellor-1192722/), always a deep concern in the region but now dramatically more frequent, organized and aimed at younger children; and [sextortion](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/intimate-images/image-removal-resources), in which young boys in particular are lured into sharing intimate images online and then being subject to shame-based blackmail (in at least [one tragic case](https://www.princegeorgecitizen.com/local-news/prince-george-mp-speaking-out-following-local-boys-suicide-7901331) leading to suicide). Cyber crime experts are being employed by local police to investigate and stop online crime, we learned.  The School Police Liaison Officer program (see our latest [SPLO Backgrounder Ver. 7 - Sept 25, 2024](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SPLO-Backgrounder-Ver.-7-Sept-25-2024.pdf)) was again championed as a critical intervention in gang recruitment.

Inspector Kowalewich shared his [talking points](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/KOWALEWICH_SPD_Panel_Discussion_Victoria-Family-Court-and-Youth-Justice-Committee.pdf) for inclusion in a panel summary the VFCYJC is preparing. The committee moved that an [op-ed](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/MYST-Op-ed-Oct.-3-2024.docx) commending recent [Les Leyne columns](https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/les-leyne-youth-safety-threats-mount-as-help-retreats-9585286) in support of the MYST team be prepared for submission to the *Victoria Times Colonist*. The [MYST Business Case Report](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/MYST-Business-Case-28-June-2024.pdf)-- authored by Royal Roads University's [Rebeccah Nelems (PhD)](https://www.royalroads.ca/people/rebeccah-nelems) with VFCYJC funding and presented in July to the Greater Victoria Area Police Chiefs -- was circulated along with a [disappointing funding update](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/659009-response.pdf) from Minister Farnworth.

In other business, Langford Councillor [Kimberley Guiry](https://langford.ca/city-hall/council-committees/mayor-council/) was unanimously elected as VFCYJC Vice Chair and warmly welcomed to the role by Chair Little. The Committee awarded grants to the [Human-Nature Counselling Society](https://humannaturecounselling.ca/) ($5.5k for its 2024 [New Roots](https://humannaturecounselling.ca/program/natures-way/) youth program) and the [Umbrella Society](https://www.umbrellasociety.ca/) ($4,746 for its [Navigating Substance Use and Mental Health for Students](https://www.umbrellasociety.ca/category/community-support/) program).

**June 27**

The Minister of [Children and Family Development](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/ministries/children-and-family-development), the Hon. [Grace Lore](https://www.leg.bc.ca/members/42nd-Parliament/Lore-Grace), graciously shared an hour of her time with the committee for a Q&A and presentation titled [Youth Justice Services: Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/MGL-SAJE-and-YJ-Presentation-Victoria-Family-Court-and-Youth-Justice-Committee.pdf). Youth aging out of care face severely heightened [life challenges](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJtkg_V4hVM&t=13s), and the [SAJE program](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/youth-transitions) provides navigators and income, housing and mental health support for 10,000 eligible  BC teenagers and young adults.  Following Minister Lore’s talk, the committee tackled two motions: MYST advocacy continues with a [request to the CRD Board of Directors](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Staff-Report-Advocacy-to-Sustain-Funding-for-At-Risk-Youth-Counselling.pdf) to write Minister Farnworth given that just six months of renewed funding (until Oct. 1) has been provided to counsellor Mia Golden when long-term line-item commitment and additional staffing is required; and members Krista Loughton and Marcie McLean tabled, with unanimous committee approval, a [motion](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/1-VFC-Criminal-Code-Motion-Laughton.docx) that the Province and other BC enforcement authorities seek revisions to [sections 152 a](https://www.criminal-code.ca/criminal-code-of-canada-section-152-invitation-to-sexual-touching/index.html#:~:text=Section%20152%20of%20the%20Criminal%20Code%20of%20Canada%20sets%20out,section%20153%20(sexual%20exploitation).)nd [153](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-153.1.html) of the [Criminal Code](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/) to more effectively stop online sexual exploitation and grooming of children and youth. The motion concludes that “when children and youth are victims of sexual offences the sentencing is typically the minimum recommended. There should be an increase to the minimum or a recommendation that sentencing should lean to the maximum.”

**May 23**

Thanks were extended to all who attended our lively 2024 Open House, among them reps from 20 Greater Victoria agencies and 15 of our own members. General agreement that the VFCYJC is well positioned to continue hosting these mix-and-mingle gatherings, perhaps next time in a more formal context where each attendee can provide activity updates to the group at large. Discussion at our monthly meeting focused on what role, if any, the VFCYJC might play in further conversations re: the School Police Liaison Officer program ([see our recently updated backgrounder](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SPLO-Backgrounder-Ver.-5-May-2024.pdf)). We concluded it might prove helpful to host a solutions-oriented panel discussion on the subject at our June meeting with invites going to SD #61, Victoria PD, the Minister of Children & Family Development and MYST. The latter’s Mia Golden and Gord Magee updated us on deeply disturbing predatory activities targeting vulnerable local youth, in particular pedophiles operating online through social media. A VFCYJC-funded business case study rationalizing MYST team expansion and, critically, long-term, stable funding will be presented to the [BC Association of Chiefs of Police](https://www.bcacp.ca/) this summer.

Chair Little shared sad news of the sudden passing of Vice-Chair Adam Flint: “Adam was a fierce advocate for children and youth, and was active on the committee since 2018 as our Town of View Royal appointee. He was kind, funny, thoughtful and hard-working, and his positive attitude will be missed. He was also an executive member of the Movember Campaign. Adam leaves behind two children and his wife Kyla. I would like to extend our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.” A [celebration of Adam’s life](https://www.mccallgardens.com/obituaries/adam-robb-flint/) will be held at McCall Gardens, 4665 Falaise Drive, on June 29, 2024, at 2:00 pm.

**April 25**

Chair Little warmly welcomed three new CRD appointees: [Cheryl Chaytors](https://bgcsvi.org/our-team/), Director of Intervention Programs, [BGC South Vancouver Island](https://bgcsvi.org/); [Andrew Holeton](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.linkedin.com/in/andrewholeton/?originalSubdomain=ca), Director of Community Engagement & Impact, [Alliance to End Homelessness in Greater Victoria](https://victoriahomelessness.ca/); and [Samantha Rapaport](https://bhmlawyers.ca/team-2/samantha-rapoport/), Family Lawyer and Partner in the Victoria firm [Brown Henderson Melbye](https://bhmlawyers.ca/). Roundtable discussion covered multiple topics raised by committee members, including the latest developments in the School Police Liaison Officer program (see [SD #61 FAQ](https://www.sd61.bc.ca/splo-faq/#Q14) and comments from [Victoria PD Chief Del Manak](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/vicpd.ca/2024/02/27/statement-from-the-chief-constable-on-student-safety-in-school-district-61/); our [School Liaison Officer Background Paper – Summer/Fall 2023](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Backgrounder-Ver.-2-Sept-15-SD-61-School-Liaison-Officer-program-.docx)will be revised to capture these updates and related recent motions from Oak Bay, Saanich and Victoria). The committee learned about a new [Lantzville treatment facility](https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024MMHA0017-000515) for Indigenous youth that will offer culturally relevant detox and treatment services. Planning is underway for the VFCYJC’s second Open House, set for Wed. May 22 from 3 to 6 PM at Victoria City Hall.

**Citizen Appointees Wanted! April 1 Deadline**

The CRD has issued a call for expert volunteers to join us in our work. [Full details here](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/_default/notice-of-membership-opportunity-victoria-family-court-and-youth-justice-committee.pdf).

**Feb. 22 meeting**

Caleigh Owen, a staff family lawyer at University of Victoria’s [The Law Centre](https://www.uvic.ca/law/about/centre/index.php), and recent graduate Megan Klymchuk discussed their experiences within the family justice system. They spoke of issues with the 2019 [Early Resolution & Case Management](https://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/index.php?title=Victoria_Early_Resolution_and_Case_Management_Model) model, in particular the challenge of  identifying the degree coercion or manipulation is involved in intimate partner violence; additional training for police and judges is recommended. *(See the*[*Jan. 2022 evaluation*](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/justice-services-branch/fjsd/victoria-model-evaluation-report.pdf)*of this prototype program by a panel of BC family law authorities.)* Flaws were identified in [Provincial Court of BC](https://www.provincialcourt.bc.ca/) procedures, including the lack of fillable PDF forms, plain-language guidelines and user-friendly sample forms and files. The pair also noted that the [“best interests of the child”](https://family.legalaid.bc.ca/children/parenting-guardianship/best-interests-child) benchmark in the [BC Family Law Act](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/11025_00) can be problematic due to high costs of private psychological testing. “In the system, youth don’t really have a say,” said Owen. “It’s about third parties making decisions on what is best for them and there is no one system the judiciary use for making that determination.”  Also on the agenda, Chair Little presented the [2024 VFCYJC Orientation](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/OrientationVFCYJC_mtl_2024.pptx); Youth & Family Matters Chair Rose Stanton shared the newly released [BC Adolescent Health Survey](https://mcs.bc.ca/about_bcahs)  based on surveys of 38,500 students aged 12-19 in BC’s 60 school districts; and members were encouraged to listen to a recent [Victoria PD True Blue Podcast](https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/true-blue-podcast/id1542108776?i=1000643643318) on the MYST program and read a [related memo](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/MYST-report-to-VFCYJC-Gord-Magee.docx) prepared for the VFCYJC by Const. Gord Magee.

**Jan. 25 – AGM 2024**

Members welcomed back Marie-Terese Little (Metchosin), Adam Flint (View Royal) and Esther Patterson (Oak Bay) in re-elections as Chair, Vice-Chair and Treasurer respectively for 2024.  Returnee [Sub-Committee](https://web.archive.org/web/20240904105751/https:/www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/VFCYJC-Sub-Committees-2024-.pdf)chairs are Marcie McLean (Priorities/Grants), Bill McElroy (Capital Region Action Team) and Jeff Bateman (Communications/Website) with Highlands Councillor Rose Stanton stepping up to lead Youth and Family Matters. The [2023 Annual Report](https://www.victoriafamilycourt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/VFCYJC-2023-Annual-Report-web-20240212.pdf) was received and approved. Guest speaker [Seth Recalma](https://www.linkedin.com/in/seth-recalma-b53068176/?originalSubdomain=ca)from the [Moose Hide Campaign](https://moosehidecampaign.ca/) spoke of how this Indigenous-led grassroots initiative to engage men and boys in [ending violence towards women and children](https://moosehidecampaign.ca/issue/) has evolved into a nationwide movement. Five million [moose hide pins](https://moosehidecampaign.ca/a-gift-of-medicine/) have been distributed, and many Canadians wear them year-round or on weekly "Wear and Share Wednesdays.” Momentum is building for the annual Moose Hide Campaign Day on May 16.

At our regular meeting, Chair Little set the stage for another year of education and advocacy.  The Committee voted unanimously to offer $5k to the Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) to help fund a business case cost/benefit analysis that would justify stable, long-term support and increased funding from the Province. All agreed that an encore open house for front-line service providers should go ahead later this year.