ON SEPTEMBER 19TH, SFU PUBLIC SQUARE INVITED YOUTH FROM ACROSS METRO VANCOUVER TO EXPLORE THE ISSUES OF ISOLATION AND DISCONNECTION IN OUR CITY. THROUGH VISUAL ART, DRAMA, STORYTELLING AND ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS, PARTICIPANTS AT THE OUR VOICES CONFERENCE INSPIRED A VISION FOR BUILDING A MORE VIBRANT AND CONNECTED CITY.
Vancouver needs: **CONNECTORS**

We all belong to communities. Our families, friend groups, classmates, co-workers, sports teams and online networking groups are all examples of communities that provide sources of comfort and support. But when we exist solely within these groups, we lose out on the benefits of connecting to our broader society. Indeed, societies rich in social capital are proven to be friendlier, more efficient, and more productive!

Here are some examples of connectors that support links within and between communities:

- **People who bridge gaps**
  - A tech-savvy student teaching a senior to use social media

- **Spaces that enable interactions**
  - Bus stops with interesting art instead of advertisements

- **Food!**
  - Community gardens
  - Cultural exchanges

- **Food: Block party!**
Vancouver needs: **TO RE-SHAPE NORMS**

Social norms and conventions affect the ways we relate to each other. We take cues from the people around us and the experiences we’ve had, as we decide who to talk to, what to say, even how to stand! As a result of existing norms, many of us avoid doing certain things like talking to strangers or smiling at people we don’t know well. Sometimes the norms and conventions we adhere to are good, but many times, they isolate and disconnect us.

How can we (individuals and decision makers) instigate a cultural shift, re-shape norms, and open the door to creating a more connected and engaged community?

Here are some ideas:

**BE AWARE**
- Be present
- Stop, re-consider and evaluate what is going on around you

**EDUCATE CITIZENS**
- Create a larger role for schools in encouraging civic engagement and understanding diversity

**BE A ROLE MODEL**
- Vote!
- Dance-walk on the sea wall

**RE-CREATE AND USE SPACES IN NEW WAYS**
- Use furniture and activities along busy streets to encourage people to switch the pace and re-consider their surroundings
- Take down fences and create open, friendly spaces

Vancouver needs: **A LITTLE INITIATIVE**

It only takes one person, one moment, one change to start something. Why not try it?

Here are some ways that you and your fellow community members can start taking initiative to support community engagement and connectivity:

- Choose to be optimistic and positive
- Be present and involved
- Smile!
- Make eye contact
- Ask and respond to questions

**SHAKE THINGS UP!**
- Invite a neighbor over for dinner
- Organize a clothing or book swap
- Tweet about a public consultation you think your friends should attend

**BE OPEN TO INTERACTION**
- Smile!
- Make eye contact
- Ask and respond to questions

**MORE IDEAS FOR CHANGE!**
Creating opportunities for connections, re-shaping norms, and taking initiative will all help create a situation where Vancouverites feel greater trust, commitment to community, and a willingness to work together in our collective interests. When we are trusting, we are more likely to protect and support each other in times of crisis, collaborate to solve problems, and take on projects that make our communities better places to live.

Vancouver needs: **TRUST**

We can start making our city more resilient today by building the foundations for trust:

**CREATING SAFE, WELCOMING PUBLIC SPACES**
- Putting up art
- Creating and using shared spaces like communal kitchens

**REMOVING BARRIERS TO CONNECTION**
- Spatially, e.g. taking down fences
- Personally, e.g. changing our attitudes

**LEARNING ABOUT EACH OTHER AND SHARING OUR PERSPECTIVES**
- Multicultural events
- Striking up conversations

They are also more likely to band together in times of crisis. In the wake of the Vancouver Foundation’s jarring research highlighting the growing issues of isolation and disconnection in our community, the young people who attended the Our Voices: Youth Building a Connected City conference have shown that Metro Vancouver has the potential to become a vibrant and resilient community!

By creating opportunities for connections, re-thinking and re-shaping some of our habits and assumptions, and by taking a little initiative, each of us can contribute to a foundation of trust that will make Metro Vancouver a better place for all of us to live.
The decision makers who participated in thematic roundtable dialogues:

- **Patti Bacchus**, Chair, Vancouver School Board
- **Laurie Anderson**, Executive Director, SFU Vancouver
- **Jerry Dobrovolny**, Director of Transportation, Vancouver
- **Andrew Brooke**, Manager, Public Consultation, Translink
- **Andrea Reimer**, Councillor, City of Vancouver
- **Kira Gerwing**, Manager, Community Investment, Vancity
- **David McLellan**, Deputy Manager, City of Vancouver
- **Gordon Harris**, President and CEO, SFU Community Trust, Univercity

Tanya Zambrano and the fine art students from Templeton Secondary School who led the dramatic activity

All of the youth who took part in the conference and helped craft these recommendations

The advisory committee of youth representatives who designed the conference program

The event facilitator, **Nadia Chaney**

Our marquee partner, **the Vancouver Foundation**

And community supporters: