



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: John Barsby Community Secondary **District:** #68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith

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Our focus for this year: *Hey, How About This "Selfie"? [Klick Here!](#)*

To provide a core group of approximately 25 vulnerable, high-risk junior secondary students (Grade 8-10) with story and workshop experiences that run once a week for the school year with the object of reducing the students' risk behaviours, and helping to create positive self-images and self-worth for the students. (Due to a number of factors, our core community of students stabilized at 17 by January 2016; most were in Grade 8 and 9. This core group became our Selfie Community. Our program started Nov. 3, 2015.)

Scanning: During the scanning, which occurred late last year and at the beginning of this year, counsellors, school formal leaders, and Aboriginal education staff held interviews with more than half of our identified 25 vulnerable youth to discover the behaviours and concerns that were impeding the youth's growth, both personally and academically. Learners were being seriously impeded academically by the overwhelming concerns and anxiety the youth had in their personal lives. Our team gelled out of our concern for the well-being of such a young group of students, and we wondered what we might be able to do for the youth inside the school that would give them power to live a healthy lifestyle so that they could begin to focus more on their education. We formally interviewed two key students with the Inquiry four key questions.

Focus: Our team learned the concerns and anxieties of the students through personal conversations, teacher reports, and peer reports. This determined our focus.

Hunch: Our team held informal discussions about how this vulnerable group of young students was a new experience for us. We had not seen such a wave of anxieties and risk behaviours concentrated in such a small group of young students, and had not seen such a number of students overwhelmed by their social anxieties and issues before. Our school recognized the

need for a positive intervention with this group of youth to ensure their successful school experience.

New professional learning: Our team explored new ways to connect the youth with community agencies and resources in relevant, activity-based workshops. This certainly stretched our creativity in service delivery and resource research!

Taking action: Our team developed a series of sessions that for the most part ran once a week for one 1 ½-hour block out of the school day. We rotated the classroom blocks that we pulled students from so that individual teachers lost their students to our program on average for only one class per month. The Selfie program included relationship-building workshops and community activities, interspersed with informative and positive empowerment workshops on drug and substance addictions, suicide, mental health (especially depression and anxiety), issues that lead to crisis interventions in youths’ lives, community resource agencies that aid youth in crisis, sexual relationships and safe sex, identity, street smarts. Some of our relationship-building and self-confidence-building workshops and activities included a Soup and Bannock Day, rock climbing, bowling, ice skating, expressing oneself through dance and movement, a spa day, a nature experience, and the year-end Wildplay outdoor extreme adventure experience.

Checking: Our team collected baseline data from students at the start of the program. This consisted of a word-and-sticker personality portrait, a letter to self, and staff profiles about what we knew already about students from their school files and personal interactions. Throughout the program staff collected feedback from students in a variety of ways including a “how am I doing now” checklist, talking circles, feedback from classroom staff; observations by Selfie staff, especially counsellors, on student behaviour changes and a big final student feedback form that gave students the chance to express their thoughts and also “rate” the program. We took photos to give to students that showed their changes and achievements as well as their personal self-presentation. Students also made a memory book of their progress throughout the program. We tracked retention and attendance stats for our program.

Retention rate of all 32 students who started (end group of 17)	53%
Attrition reasons for 15 students who left program	Moves, located to different academic programs, individual disinterest
Attendance at Selfie workshops and events, core group of 17 students	85%
Attendance Semester 1 compared to Semester 2, core group	41% improved attendance in regular classes
Attendance Semester 2 Terms 1 and 2, core group	47% improved attendance in regular classes
Selfie Student evaluations of program out of 10	91% ranking of “Excellent”
Selfie student qualitative comments that showed significant personal growth & awareness improved happiness self confidence	100% of feedback group (12 of the 17 students provided detailed feedback)

- One Selfie student went from a behaviour designation with mental health concerns, throwing items in school, swearing, and having anger tantrums, to being de-designated, having a high attendance rate in regular classes, and demonstrating respectful behaviour.
- One Selfie student made it onto the Honour Roll (high B average) for the first time in her entire school career.
- Two Selfie students were in the top 10 Barsby library book readers for the entire year.

Some student comments about what the program meant to them:

- "[I] like all of it. that i have something to live for that i have someone to talk to when i have truble's."
- "the group helped me be more happy and more confodernt about myself."
- "I've grown into liking myself more and caring more about my body, making me become more happy. . . "
- ". . . I'm able to talk about myself and my problems more and not hold Everything in so long. The program made me found myself eaiser and helped me Open about my problems more."
- "The Selfie group did alot for me, like provide me with strength and wisdom. Power to speak up on what's on my mind or what I am feeling when i am feeling down. The Selfie group also provided me with direction into the right Path for me to succed in life. I learned that i am really strong, smart. . . "

Reflections/Advice: Based on our experiences we felt we had a very successful year. However, we see many fronts on which we could make improvements. Our selection of the students would be more scrupulous and based on criteria we can build on from this years' experience; not all the at-risk youth we initially chose were ready to change and were therefore not ready for the program so it took us a while to stabilize our Selfie community. We would incorporate more cooking-and-eating together sessions, especially near the beginning to facilitate relationship building and connections. We would do a recreational team-building activity closer to the start of the program. We would share staff life experiences with the students earlier on. We would incorporate more hard-hitting sessions to help students deal with their challenges on a regular basis throughout the program and temper them by alternating with community recreation sessions and personal growth/confidence building sessions. We would ensure that all details around complex planning are in place before the green-light go-ahead for sessions is given. We would be more vigilant about screening presentations and/or presenters (this does not have to do with student safety, but rather one particular workshop this year was advertised to us as interactive, but instead was simply a "talking head" workshop students endured for four hours). We would incorporate more community recreation outings.

Future directions: Whether or not we can continue our program depends on funding, as money is needed for food, field trips, and some presenters. Our staff will be changing quite substantially for the 2016-17 school year, and this may affect who might be willing to do the work again. We are tentatively looking at continuing a different version of this year's program once we see what incoming Grade 7's we have and see if there is funding. Our Selfie team also talked about utilizing some of our very strong students from this year as mentors/touchstones for students who might be coming into the program.