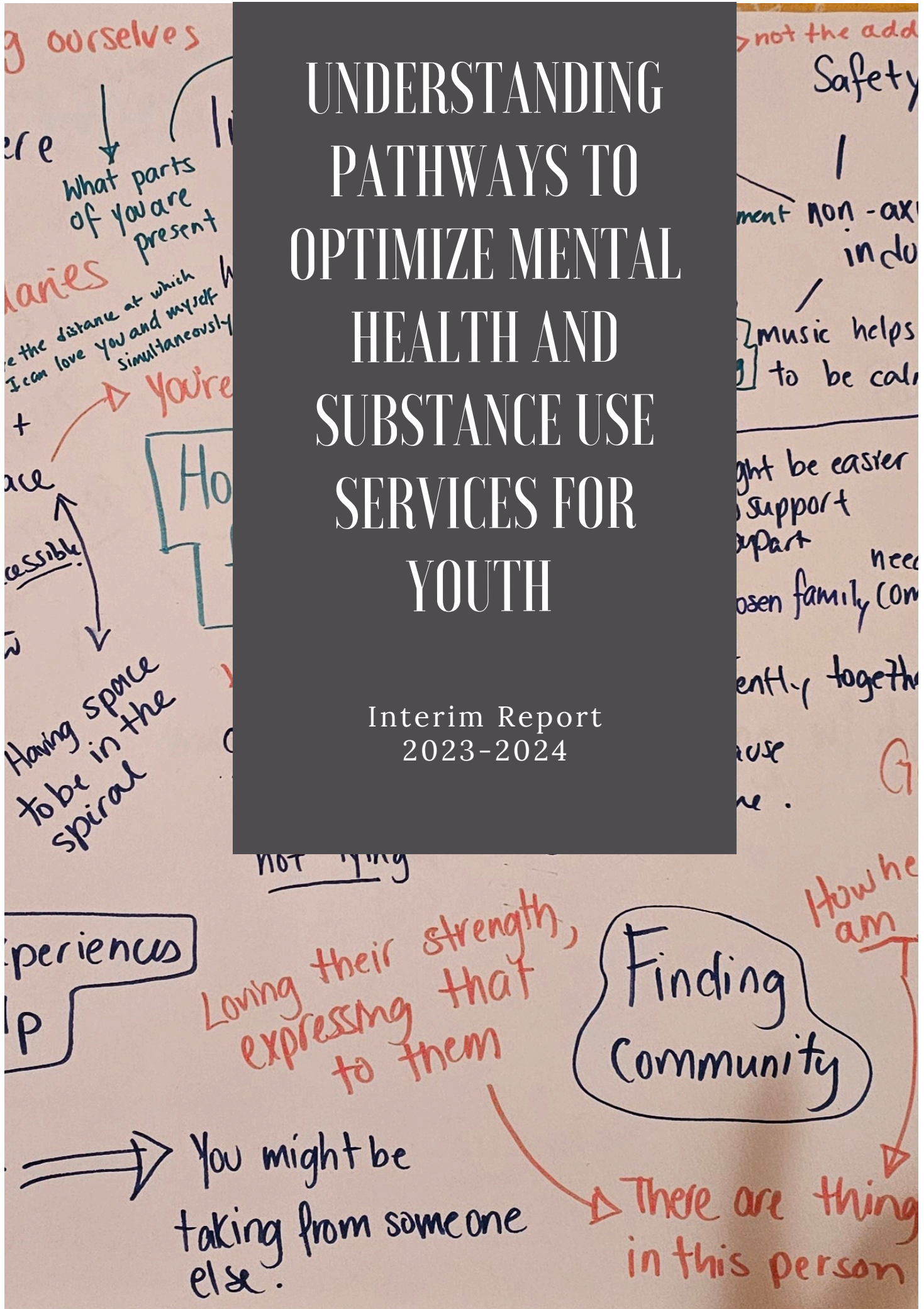


# UNDERSTANDING PATHWAYS TO OPTIMIZE MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES FOR YOUTH

Interim Report  
2023-2024





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THANKS TO OUR TEAM:

Youth Working Group

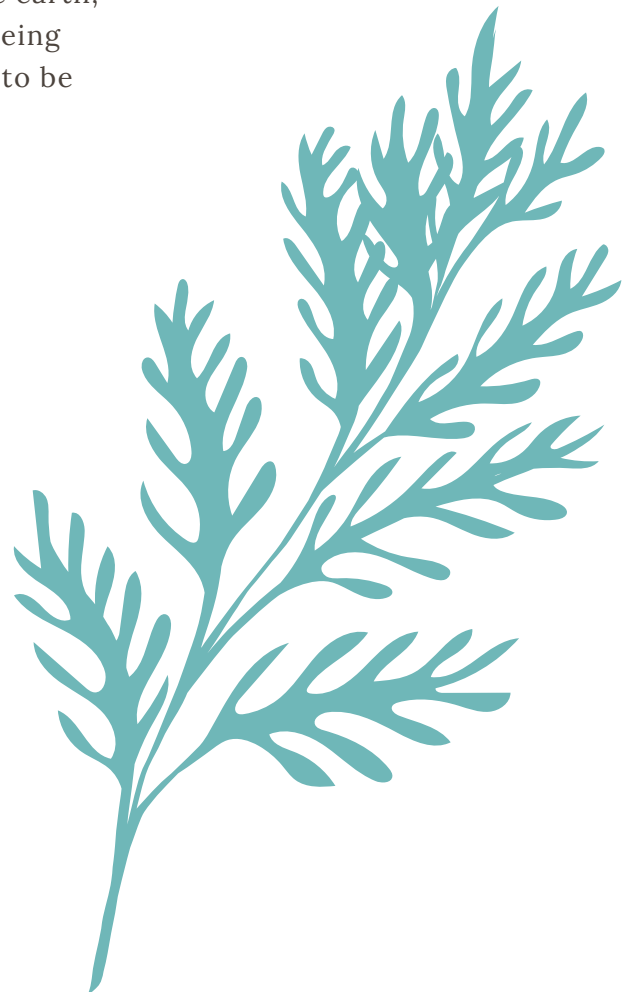
**Project Vision:**  
CISUR (Andrea Mellor, Cecilia Benoit); Foundry Victoria;  
SCCFS

**Project Support:**  
Foundry Works  
Foundry Victoria Peer Support  
Foundry Victoria Practicum  
Youth Empowerment Society

# TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to express our gratitude for being able to conduct this work and gather on the lands of the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, specifically the territories of the T'Sou-ke, Scia'new (Beecher Bay), Xwsepsum (Esquimalt), Songhees, STÁUTW (Tsawout), W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), W̱SIKEM (Tseycum), BOŖEĆEN (Pauquachin), and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat).

We wish to acknowledge the Métis, Inuit, First Nations, and all Indigenous peoples whose stewardship of Turtle Island has protected the earth, water, and sky, as well as the health and wellbeing practices that have sustained us, and we seek to be good ancestors in our work.



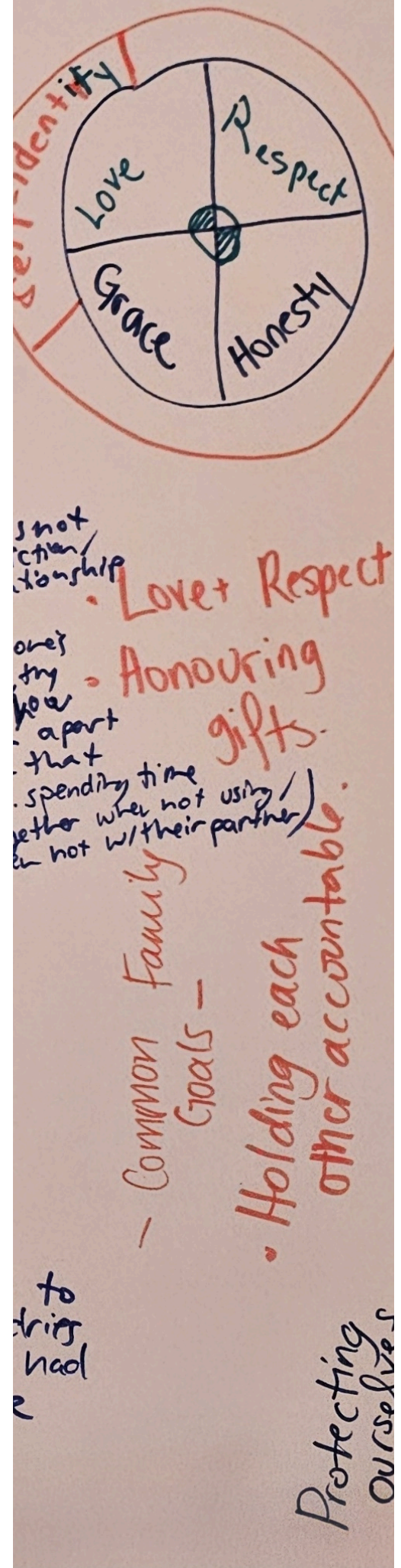


# RESEARCH PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

We wish to express our gratitude to our partners, Foundry Victoria and Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services (SSCFS). We wish to also express our thanks to the Youth Empowerment Society for supporting youth to attend our and participate in our workshops.

The Understanding Pathways research project is housed at the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR), located at the University of Victoria, and led by Dr. Andrea Mellor and Dr. Cecilia Benoit.

We have received financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Health Research BC, and the Canadian Institute for Health Research. We received research ethics approval from the University of Victoria.



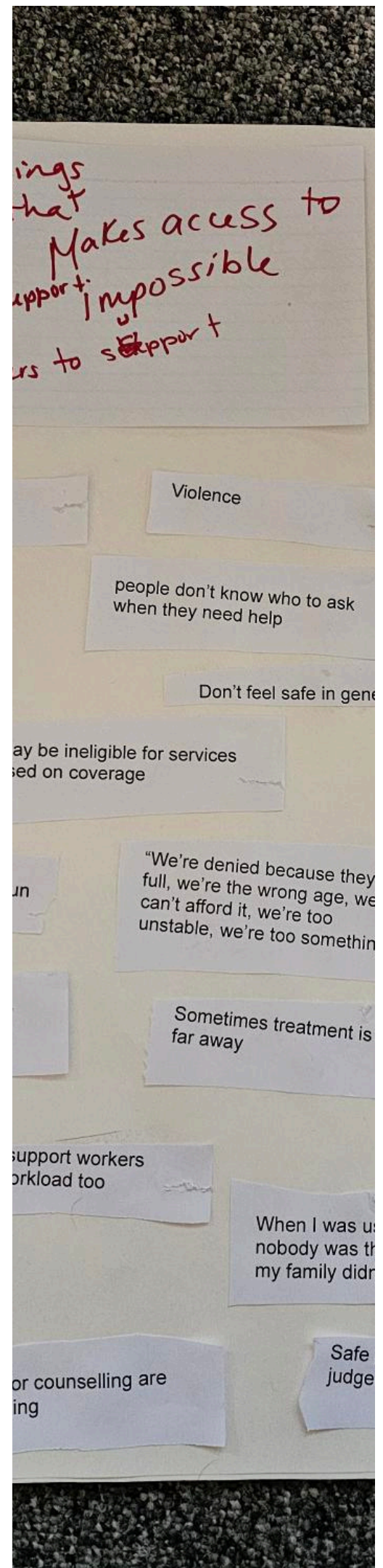


## BACKGROUND

Youth in Canada are experiencing the fastest growing rates of mental health challenges and opioid use disorder compared to the general population. We know that young people who are marginalized based on their sex, gender, sexuality, race, poverty, Indigeneity, and/or have experience with the child welfare system are overrepresented in these numbers. Yet, few resources exist that integrate diverse youth voices into substance use and mental health service design that meet their unique needs. This community-based research project aims to address this gap, by working with youth who have lived and living experiences of mental health and substance use challenges.

Alongside a “Pathways Youth Working Group” we are co-creating a collective vision for more meaningful, non-judgemental, and accessible mental health and substance use services, grounded in each person’s own experiences. This vision will inform a health intervention to pilot, implement, and evaluate at the Victoria Foundry, that will inform best practices for youth services across British Columbia.

The working groups’ core values - respect, love, grace, and honesty - are central to doing our work ‘in a good way’ and ensuring that our pathway forward is grounded in wisdom held by our youth knowledge keepers, and shared in ways that are relevant to them. Our hope is that in working together, we can collectively support community healing, wellness, and resilience among youth, and advocate for systemic change in ways that are meaningful to society’s future leaders, visionaries, artists, and carers.



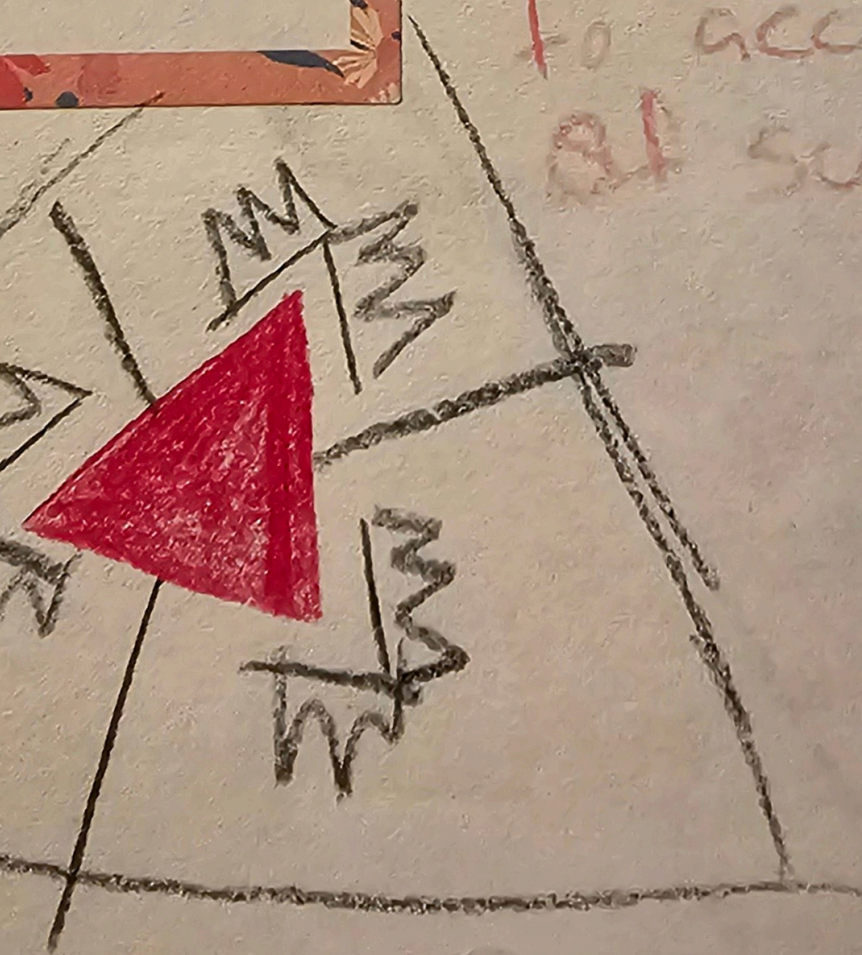


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# 2023-24 IN REVIEW

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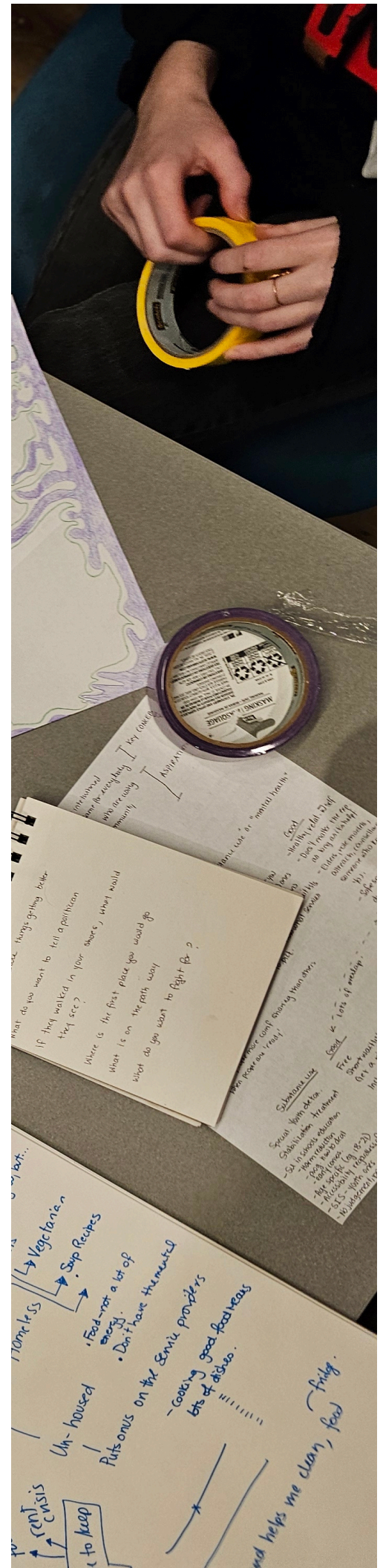
- Why ~~lack~~ youth  
need to struggle  
to access any th  
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# HIGHLIGHTS

- **July 2023**
  - Meeting 1 (Foundry Victoria)
    - Setting our guidelines and project aspirations
  - 14 attendees
- **September 2023**
  - Meeting 2 (Foundry Victoria)
    - What comes to mind when we think of mental health services and substance use services?
  - 10 attendees
- **November 2023**
  - Meeting 3 (Foundry Victoria)
    - How do we not burn out?
    - How do we support friends and family?
  - 15 attendees
- **January 2024**
  - Meeting 4 (Foundry Victoria)
    - What are day-to-day challenges?
    - What would make life easier?
  - 9 attendees
- **March 2024**
  - Meeting 5 (Foundry Victoria)
    - Co-data analysis (1)
  - 5 attendees
- **May 2024**
  - Meeting 6 (CISUR, UVic)
    - Co-data analysis (2)
  - 10 attendees



# WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

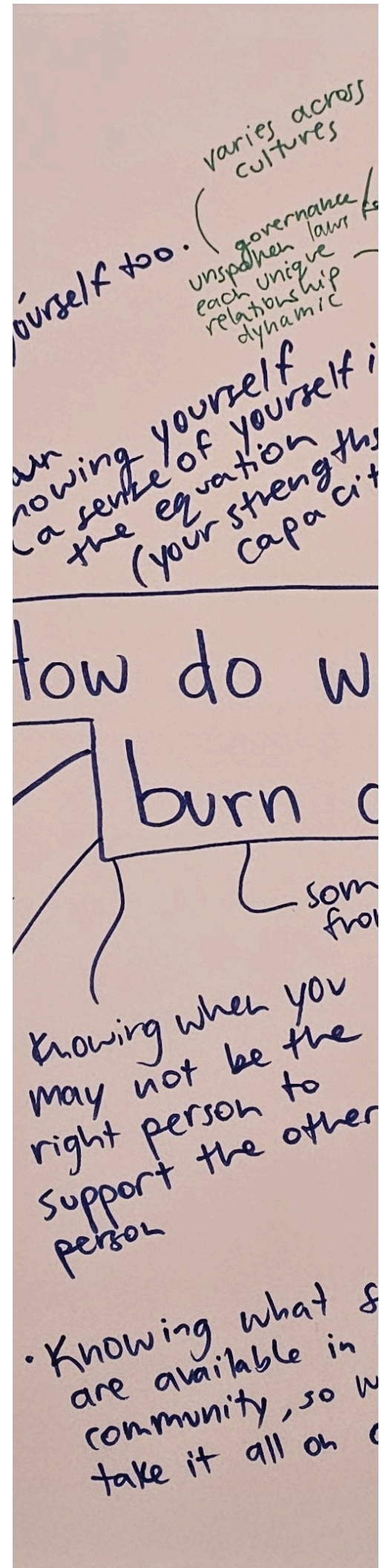
The working group meetings were held every two months at Foundry Victoria and one at CISUR, located on the UVic campus. We started out by having lunch, settling in, and focusing our discussion on key project themes: what is the landscape of mental health and substance use, how do we support ourselves while supporting loved ones, and what are other challenges we face day-to-day.

During the discussions, we had two “wisdom catchers” - note takers - who were responsible for recording notes, quotes, and ideas on large sheets of art paper that could be hung on the wall and added to by the working group.

During the first three meetings, Foundry’s Peer Youth Workers helped us by hosting smaller groups and one-on-one sessions with youth who were less comfortable meeting in a larger group. The Peers asked the same topic questions and recorded youths responses.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Content from the working groups was analyzed by the using the method Collective Consensual Data Analytic Procedure (CCDAP). Phrases recorded during meetings 1-4 were transcribed to individual strips of paper that the working group organized into categories. These categories were gathered and reviewed by the group to identify commonalities and overarching themes.





# LEARNINGS

From this, we learned that youth **struggle with setting boundaries**: It is important to know that you don't have to meet all your needs by yourself, that you might not always be the right person or in the right place to help, and remembering we are all valuable humans.

There are multiple **barriers to accessing supports** ranging from out-of-pocket costs, long waitlists, previous traumatic experiences, feeling judged, and not being supported if you are not ready for treatment.

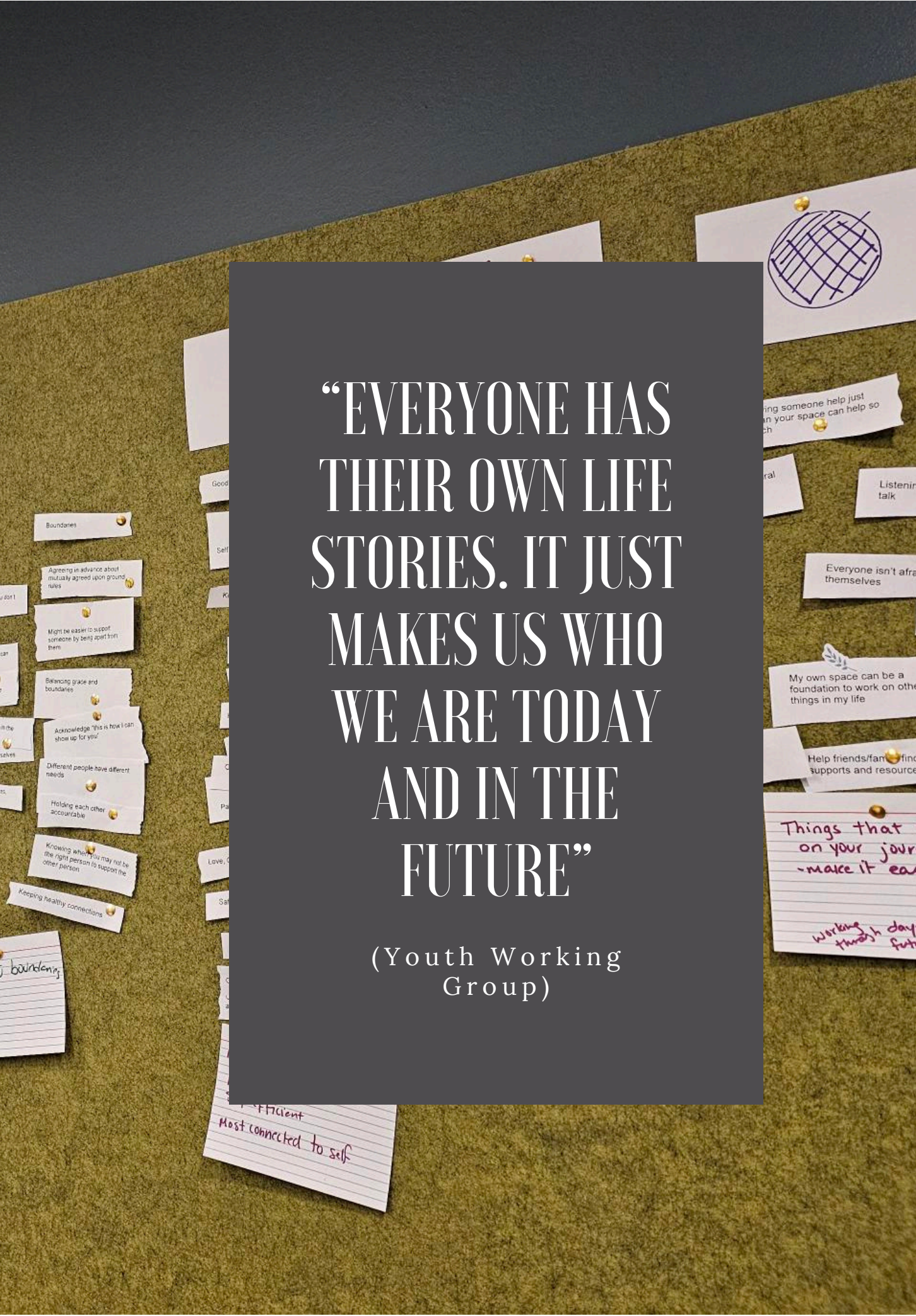
We learned about things that support young people on their journeys - things that make day-to-day experiences less 'struggly' while still having **space to 'hold all the messiness'** of navigating challenging times.

We also learned young people want to be themselves - to be authentic, self efficient, and have the tools to connect to themselves. We need space for **'authentic weirdness'** and want to show up how we are to health systems and be better supported

Having **found family** is essential - people that know what you're going through, maybe have been there before, and are the people you can trust and count on during a hard time. Sometimes we have to accept that biological family might not know how to help.





A green corkboard is the background, featuring numerous handwritten notes on small pieces of paper. Some notes are pinned with gold pushpins. The notes include phrases like "Boundaries", "Agreeing in advance about mutually agreed upon ground rules", "Might be easier to support someone by being apart from them", "Balancing grace and boundaries", "Acknowledge 'this is how I can show up for you'", "Different people have different needs", "Holding each other accountable", "Knowing when you may not be the right person to support the other person", "Keeping healthy connections", "boundaries", "Efficient", "Most connected to self", "Everyone isn't afraid of themselves", "My own space can be a foundation to work on other things in my life", "Help friends/family find supports and resources", "Things that on your journey - make it easier", and "Working through day to day". A purple grid pattern is drawn on a piece of paper in the top right corner.

“EVERYONE HAS  
THEIR OWN LIFE  
STORIES. IT JUST  
MAKES US WHO  
WE ARE TODAY  
AND IN THE  
FUTURE”

(Youth Working  
Group)

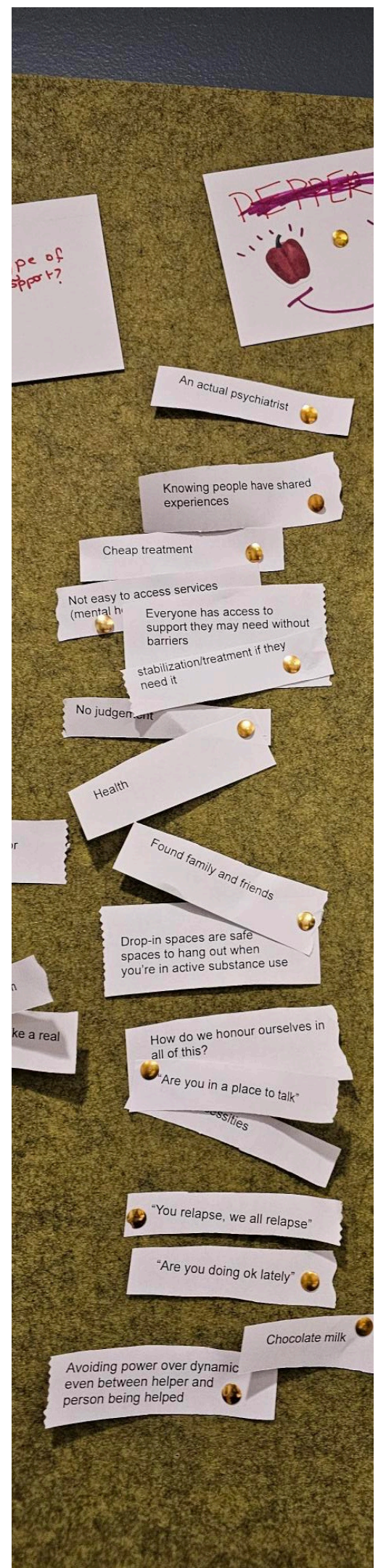


# LOOKING FORWARD


We are mid-way through our study. Our plans are to continue connecting with youth for one-on-one interviews, focusing on questions related to accessing mental health and substance use services and learning what their visions are for meaningful supports.

Building on what we have learned this past year, future working group meetings will focus on charting a path forward to advocate for more accessible and non-judgemental mental health and substance use supports in Greater Victoria.

We wish to express our gratitude to all those who have supported this journey and look forward to sharing more on our next project phase.







“I WOULD LOVE TO  
HAVE A WORLD THAT  
HAS NO STIGMA, NO  
DISCRIMINATION,  
JUST EVERYONE  
GETS ALONG AND  
DOESN'T DISRESPECT  
PEOPLE FOR NO  
REASON”

(Youth Working Group)