



**Youth Food  
Leaders**  
Nourish Nova Scotia

# 2024 Program Report

A Reflection on Youth Food Leaders Summer and Fall Pilots





## Land Acknowledgement

We live and work in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Mi'kma'ki is covered by Treaties of Peace and Friendship and as treaty people, we humbly commit to the mutual agreements of peace, respect, and friendship that are reflected in these living documents.

We recognize the vital role that First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities play in the stewardship of the lands and waters that provide for our food system, and we are committed to honoring and uplifting Indigenous Food Sovereignty.

## Recognizing the legacy of African Nova Scotians

We recognize the contributions of African Nova Scotian communities and the inequities they face to this day. African Nova Scotians are a distinct people with collective rights tied to over 52 land-based communities in the part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia, whose contributions have been intricately woven into the cultural, economic, educational, and artistic landscape of this province for over 400 years.



# Youth Food Leaders

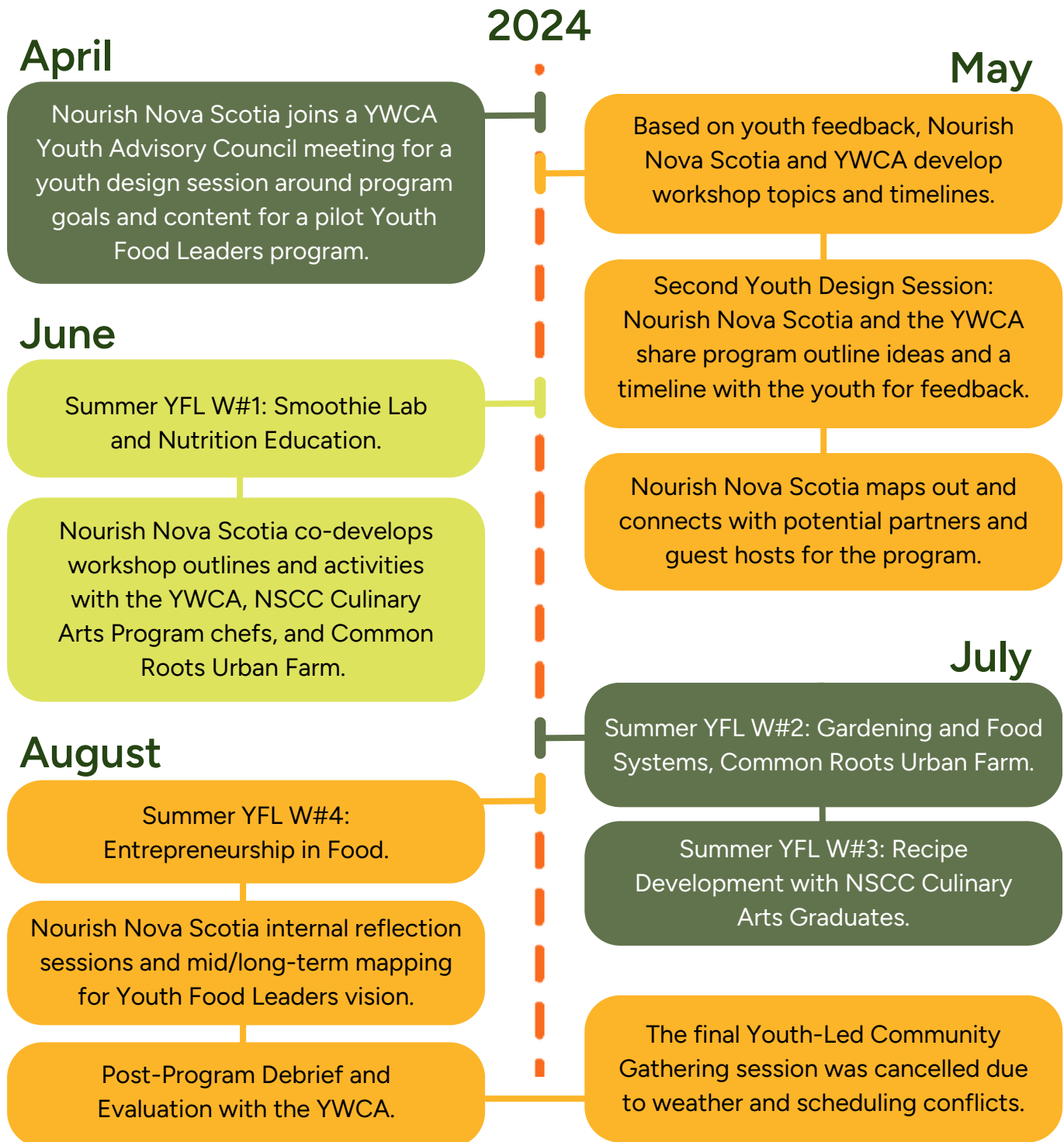
The Youth Food Leaders Program supports youth leadership in food initiatives across Nova Scotia.

When young people have opportunities to engage in experiential learning around food, this can influence the development of healthy habits and help to nurture positive relationships with food. The Youth Food Leaders Program teaches youth important food skills related to cooking, growing food, food safety, and more.

Through this program, young people learn skills and confidence to support individual, family and community health. They learn about leadership opportunities, from engaging in food projects in their community to careers in food to advocacy. Nourish Nova Scotia works directly with youth to develop unique versions of the Youth Food Leaders program in community spaces. We also build capacity for youth-serving organizations to deliver the Youth Food Leaders program within their unique geographies and contexts - ensuring that more young people can be well-nourished to live, learn and play.



# Youth Food Leaders Pilot Timeline



2024

## September

Nourish Nova Scotia meets with St. Andrews Community Centre staff to discuss a YFL fall partnership.

Fall Youth Design Session: Community Centre youth share their interests, goals and ideas.

Nourish Nova Scotia and St. Andrews Community Centre design workshops based on youth feedback.

## December

Fall YFL W#6: Bulk Baking for Shelter Nova Scotia

Conversations with the Mi'kmaw Native Centre about collaborating for a new YFL iteration.

## October

Fall YFL W#1: Smoothie Lab

Fall YFL W#2: Harvesting and Food Systems, Common Roots Urban Farm

Fall YFL W#3: Foundations of Baking

## November

Fall YFL W#4: Recipe Development

Fall YFL W#5: Mystery Box Challenge

Post-Program Debrief and Evaluation with St. Andrews Community Centre and discussing pathways for continued partnership and impact.

Nourish Nova Scotia internal reflection sessions regarding pilots and vision mapping moving forward.



## Summer Partner Showcase: YWCA Halifax

*During the summer of 2024, with generous support from the TELUS Community Board Grant, Nourish Nova Scotia piloted its first iteration of Youth Food Leaders with the YWCA Halifax and their Youth Advisory Council: a group of 8 youth, ages 16-24, working to uplift youth's voices and provide access to helpful resources.*

### How did the program come about?

In April and May, the YWCA's Youth Advisory Council hosted Nourish for a couple of design sessions where the youth shared their ideas and goals for a program built around food access, skill development, and leadership.

Based on the youth's identified goals, workshops were developed to include topics like food access, nutrition education, skill development in the kitchen, and exposure to food-related careers. This led to a site visit to Common Roots Urban Farm, a recipe development class hosted by NSCC Culinary Arts graduates, and a workshop with local entrepreneur and fellow Nourish staffer Jess Ross.

### What was the impact of the program?

Participants indicated increased food access, improved food literacy and skills, and enhanced self-efficacy and confidence in the kitchen due to their participation. The program allowed youth to gather in community spaces, cook together and participate in food leadership opportunities. Through this program, youth were equipped to be food leaders through mentorship and the development of food skills, along with access to equipment and food.

Throughout the series, I gained several practical skills and valuable knowledge that I will continue to use. I learned how to cut vegetables more efficiently and discovered new cooking techniques that I can apply in my daily life. Additionally, the program also further developed my interest in entrepreneurship within the community, which has sparked my interest in exploring ways to support and empower local food initiatives.

- Mayank, Youth Food Leader



# Fall Partner Showcase: St. Andrews Community Centre

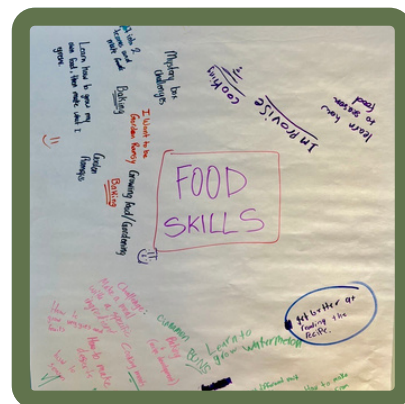
The St. Andrews Community Centre is a vibrant community hub in the West End of Halifax that offers space and programming for its diverse surrounding community. Nourish Nova Scotia partnered with the Centre to meet the needs of their 13- 15-year-old youth, a demographic currently missed by existing programs and facing barriers to food access and food literacy.

## How did the program come about?

Nourish Nova Scotia had previously run programs at the Centre, including the summer pilot of Youth Food Leaders, facilitating a Baking for Breakfast series, and providing funding for one of the Centre's youth cooking programs. This budding relationship fostered an exciting opportunity to partner on a new Youth Food Leaders cohort and meet the Centre's and youth's needs for food literacy programming. A design session with youth was held in September to learn about their goals and interests for this program. This fun and engaging session led us to co-designing sessions focused on building foundational skills (ie. food safety and cooking skills) and strengthening agency, independence, and healthy habits in the kitchen.

## What was the impact of the program?

Using evaluation tools like feedback frames, surveys, and verbal feedback, participants shared their enthusiasm for the program. They indicated acquiring new skills, such as learning how to safely use a knife, boil, sauté, and peel vegetables and how to follow and develop a recipe. The youth were engaged in a welcoming and well-equipped space in their community and participated in creating a positive food culture for each other that encouraged creativity, learning, and the exploration of new foods. Some of the youth tried foods for the first time, and facilitators noticed a visible increase in confidence and comfort in the kitchen between the first and last workshops, with many of the youth requiring little to no support at the end of the program when using a specific cooking technique.



# Hear from our Youth Food Leaders!



"I learned something new today!"

**What was the most engaging workshop and why?**

"Mystery Box workshop because it was challenging"

"Recipe Development because the pizza was sooo good"

"[Mystery Box] because I liked how we had independence!"



**What the most valuable part of the program?**

"Teamwork"

"Learning to develop a recipe"

"Not injuring myself!"

"Developing skills within the kitchen"



# Sample Workshops

## Smoothie Lab

This workshop explores and experiments with fresh fruits and vegetables, grains and seeds, healthy fats, and other smoothie add-ins to create a nourishing snack or meal on the go. The goal is to inspire youth to try a diverse range of ingredients, expanding their understanding of nourishing foods.



## Recipe Development

This workshop is designed to increase confidence in reading and following a recipe and understand the foundations of assembling a recipe from scratch, such as planning for ingredients, equipment, steps, time management, etc. Iterations of this workshop have included hosting NSCC Culinary Arts graduates to lead participants through a basic soup recipe, which they then adapted in teams to create different flavour profiles of their choice.



## Growing Food

This fun workshop exposes youth to local or community-led food systems and serves as an opportunity to learn about growing and harvesting food seasonally. In the summer iteration, youth planted vegetables and herbs in caja boxes (generously donated by Common Roots Urban Farm) which they took home. In the fall iteration of this workshop, with the end of the growing season, youth harvested and processed vegetables. They used peppers, tomatoes, onions, and herbs from the Take Action Society Garden and Common Roots Urban Farm to make fresh salsas that they could take home.



# Sample Workshops

## Foundations of Baking

This workshop is packed with helpful knowledge about the science of baking, including the role and importance of gluten, leavening agents, ingredient temperature, mixing methods, heat transfer, ingredient substitutions, and more! This “Baking session meets food lab” means double the fun and includes delicious taste-testing!



## Bulk Cooking

Cooking for 10, 50, or 100+ people? This workshop teaches how to scale recipes and adapt them to feed a more significant number of people. Examples of this workshop have so far included youth bulk-baking 250 muffins for Shelter Nova Scotia, making 8 family-size portions of squash mac and cheese for their families, and a youth leadership class making over 300 portions of soup for their school lunch.



## Mystery Box Challenge

This workshop is designed as an opportunity for youth to showcase the skills they have learned throughout the program by inviting them to create a recipe from scratch, in teams, based on a mystery ingredient and a food pantry. With limited time, youth are challenged to research ingredients, develop recipes, and prepare a dish for a panel of judges. Dishes are judged based on creativity, demonstrated skill, taste, presentation and cleanliness. This workshop was a huge hit with our Fall Youth Food Leaders, who loved its spirit of competition and its focus on creativity and independence!



# What Worked Well

## Youth engagement and co-design

Developing workshops WITH youth to ensure engagement with the content and goal alignment.

## Food access

Across cohorts, access to free food has been identified as a key incentive to joining programming consistently.

## Low-barrier programming

No program fees, travel vouchers as needed, inclusive workshop times, equipped program space.

# What We Learned

- **Longer cohorts, deeper impact:** Creating longer cohorts that span 10-14 workshops rather than 4-6, as we experienced during this pilot, allows for deeper connection and better integration of foundational skills and knowledge.
- **Better integration of accessibility** into programming, including but not limited to considerations around mobility, hearing and visual impairment, neurodiverse needs, and other conditions that may facilitate the participation of folks with disabilities in programming.
- **Youth at the center of Program Design:** Our design sessions have taught us that youth are full of ideas and best suited to express their own goals. So, we want more of it!
- **Time management:** Less is more when it comes to planning activities! Fitting everything one thinks is important into a session can be hard, but time is necessary for building deeper connection and better retention of new knowledge and skills.
- **Food safety as a foundational teaching:** Food safety is both a concept and a practice that must be built into every workshop. The concepts may be easily understood, but it takes rigorous practice to embed them into one's routine.
- **Youth are resilient and can rise up to the challenge!** These pilots demonstrated that youth appreciate being challenged and given the space needed to be independent and creative.
- **More leadership opportunities:** Youth are asking for more opportunities to get involved, whether it means taking on mentorship roles, leading workshops or marketing designs, or contributing recipes and activities to workshops, and we are listening!
- **Homework... but by another name!** Creating online resources or take-home activities allows youth to stay connected to the program and build upon their newly acquired skills in between workshops!



# Impact Summary for Year 1

The Youth Food Leaders pilot enabled us to engage in a unique co-design approach with youth and draw essential insights about how we might expand this initiative in meaningful ways. These first two iterations of Youth Food Leaders had positive impacts on all youth who participated, including, but not limited to, increased food access, improved food literacy and food skills, improved self-efficacy and confidence, and the opportunity to participate in leadership opportunities related to food initiatives in their community.

## Food Access & Literacy

Across both cohorts, **17 youth were directly supported with food access, food literacy development, and equipment** to further their learning. This program's reach also extended to the youth's families, with youth taking food and ingredients home and food being donated to 5 Shelter Nova Scotia locations.

## Building Connections

Youth Food Leaders is a collaborative program, and Nourish Nova Scotia is grateful to our partners who helped bring it to life. A big thanks to: YWCA Halifax; St. Andrews Community Centre; Common Roots Urban Farm; and Sarah McLean and Sekinah Alagbe, two NSCC Culinary Arts graduates. We look forward to more collaboration!

## Supporting Local Food

Youth Food Leaders prioritizes local food procurement to support Nova Scotia's local food systems and creates opportunities for youth to learn about local food systems and connect to food initiatives in their community.



# Moving Forward

At Nourish Nova Scotia, our mission is to inspire and equip young people in Nova Scotia to learn about food and transform the food systems around them. Based on the work and evidence that has emerged to date, Youth Food Leaders provides an important foundation for youth to access nourishing foods, build skills and confidence around food, connect to unique food experiences in their community. To expand the impact of this program, we are developing a province-wide framework that can help to reach more youth across the province, and build capacity for youth-serving organizations to deliver the Youth Food Leaders program within their unique geographies and contexts.

## What's Next?

Building on work to date, Nourish Nova Scotia is working with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre and the Native Council of Nova Scotia's Dartmouth office for a new and exciting Youth Food Leaders collaboration!

Spanning three seasons, we will collaborate to create opportunities for urban indigenous youth across the Halifax Region to build food skills and knowledge anchored in traditional Mi'kmaq practices, culture and knowledge.

From going out onto the land to learn traditional Mi'kmaq practices to embedding them in the kitchen with foundational food skills, workshops will be designed with youth, for youth.

Simultaneously, we are working on developing resources and tools that can equip youth-led and youth-serving organizations in Nova Scotia to adapt the Youth Food Leaders Program to meet the needs and interests of diverse youth across the Province - with support and mentorship from Nourish Nova Scotia. If you're an organization working with youth in Nova Scotia and would like to explore a partnership around Youth Food Leaders:



**Reach out to our Youth & Community Food Program Coordinator:**  
[claire.allely@nourishns.ca](mailto:claire.allely@nourishns.ca)



**Visit our website to learn more and discover our resources at [nourishns.ca](http://nourishns.ca)**

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Our work is made possible by the generous support of our donors. We would like to thank the Telus Community Board and the Medavie Foundation for supporting our vision forward of equipping youth across Nova Scotia with the skills and knowledge they need to become food leaders in their communities.

