



**Youth Food
Leaders**
Nourish Nova Scotia

2025 Program Report

Growing Youth Leadership Through Food





Land Acknowledgement

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

We acknowledge the many harms caused by colonization to Indigenous foodways—including the dispossession of land and the disruption of traditional knowledge. Despite these past and ongoing impacts, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across Turtle Island continue to resist, innovate, and protect these lands with strength and resilience.

It is our collective work to honour and uplift Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and we invite all those who engage with us to reflect on the historical and cultural influences that shape our food systems, what we eat, and our unique connections to food.

Learn about the Treaties: [Treaty Education Nova Scotia](#)

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.





Program Summary

The Youth Food Leaders program expanded significantly this year, forming four unique program iterations with seven partners across Nova Scotia and engaging diverse groups of youth. From Halifax’s West End to Membertou First Nation in Cape Breton and the South Shore, support from the Medavie Foundation, Feed Nova Scotia, and the TELUS Atlantic Canada Community Board has enabled the co-creation of spaces where youth connect, learn, and lead through food.

Through these partnerships, we supported youth in building practical food skills, deepening cultural connections, and fostering confidence and leadership. To explore the full journey and impact in each community, visit our blog:

[A Youth Food Leaders Program Update and Heartfelt Thanks to Our Participants and Supporters: Growing Youth Leadership Through Food](#)



Impact on Food Access

Program Summary

- 67** **Direct Youth Participants** as Youth Food Leaders
- 200+** **Indirect Participants:** including youth cooking with families at home, community feast attendees, and event participants.
- 7** **Program Partners:** St. Andrews Community Centre, Common Roots Urban Farm, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, Native Council of Nova Scotia, Membertou Youth Centre, Island Food Network, YMCA of Southwest Nova Scotia

Activities and Impact

- 41** **Workshops Delivered** across 4 program iterations, including 6 field trips focused on land-based learnings
- 42** **Meals Shared:** made by youth, and including take-home meals for families and community members.

Program Highlight:

A recipe book created by urban Indigenous youth featuring traditional and contemporary recipes, stories, and testimonials.



Program Locations

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM):

- 📍 Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre;
- 📍 St. Andrews Community Centre

Unama'ki (Cape Breton):

- 📍 Membertou Youth Centre

South Shore:

- 📍 YMCA of Southwest Nova Scotia



Extended Impact



Extended Skills Development:

Based on feedback from youth, their families and our partners, youth are cooking program recipes at home and using program spaces outside program hours to practice and strengthen their skills.

Youth Contributing to Community Food Access:

As the program concludes, youth in Membertou have developed plans to cook monthly for community feasts — preparing food for elders, single parents, and families.



Expanding Youth Engagement in Community:

We have created pathways for youth to participate in community spaces and events, with many now joining partner-led activities on their own time, contributing to cultural food initiatives in their communities while fostering intergenerational connections.

Ongoing Support for Food Literacy Initiatives:

Over the course of this work, we have developed more than 50 professional resources to support continued learning and programming—ranging from workshop planning documents and facilitation guides to practical activities and tools.



Program Learnings

Youth-Led Co-Design Strengthens Relevance, Trust, and Engagement

Starting any program iteration with youth co-design sessions ensured that programming was tailored, relevant, and engaging for diverse groups of youth with varying interests and experiences. While this approach takes more time, it strengthens relationships and builds trust—both vital for success. **Youth-led design supports confidence, independence, and pride, with youth reporting greater comfort in the kitchen, experimenting with new recipes and cooking for their families at home.**

Strong Relationships Are Foundational to Program Success

Across all contexts, program success depended on the support and mentorship of trusted adults and community partners. **Intentional relationship and trust-building with partners—particularly prior to program delivery—is essential for securing community buy-in, engaging knowledge holders, and ensuring cultural teachings are meaningfully integrated.** Over time, this investment strengthens connection, collaboration, and community participation.

Cultural Reconnection Deepens Engagement and Community Bonding

For Indigenous cohorts, integrating traditional practices and cultural knowledge—such as eeling, maple tapping, and land-based learning—fostered pride, creativity, and community bonding. **This work was made possible through close collaboration with trusted community staff, reinforcing the importance of culturally-grounded programming rooted in relationship and respect.**

Supportive Food Environments Build Confidence and Agency

Emphasizing the creation of positive environments is essential for learning about food in safe, supportive ways. **A culture of peer support—where youth can explore food skills and build relationships in group settings leads to greater confidence, comfort, and positive attitudes toward cooking, learning, and collaboration.**



Planning Must Align with Community Rhythms and Ways of Working

Effective delivery requires planning that is deeply attuned to community context, including cultural ways of working, seasonal dynamics, and existing community initiatives. Rather than rigid timelines, flexible planning that creates space for cultural practices, land-based-learning, and local priorities ensures programming complements—rather than competes with—community life.

Capacity Building Enables Lasting Impact

Sustainability relies on equipping community partners with the skills, resources and support needed to lead programming independently. Structured, youth-led delivery models—supported by facilitator training, professional development, mentorship and practical tools—strengthens long-term capacity and expands program reach.

Future Pathways for Youth Through Skills, Exposure, and Leadership

Youth are seeking more meaningful pathways that connect to real-world experience. Through repeated, hands-on skill development, exposure to professional environments, and leadership roles within and outside of programming, youth build confidence, transferable skills, and a clearer sense of possibility. **Co-designed curriculum aligned with job-related competencies and career connections creates pathways towards employability, continued education, and long-term engagement in food systems and community leadership.**



Sustained Partnerships

We deeply value the partnerships that make this work possible and remain committed to nurturing them for the long term. Together, we sustain meaningful connections through collaborative resource development, ongoing support for program design, and continued youth engagement in food programming. By creating opportunities for youth to participate in Nourish and partner-led activities, we strengthen relationships that are essential to building vibrant, resilient communities.

Key Highlights

We continue to support Membertou Youth Centre staff and youth in leading monthly feasts and cultural sessions, while collaborating with staff and youth from the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to develop a recipe book. In addition, we are expanding food literacy programs at the St. Andrews Community Centre and the YMCA of Southwest Nova Scotia by sharing tools and resources and fostering connections with other community partners.

Our youth look forward to this program every Wednesday evening, and their enthusiasm continues to grow each week. The skills they are gaining through the Youth Food Leaders initiative are already making a real impact. Many of them have begun cooking on weekends during our regular programming, preparing meals for other youth and showing increased confidence in the kitchen. We also have several youth asking for additional opportunities to support our weekly hot meal program, showing how eager they are to apply what they've learned. What's even more exciting is hearing their personal stories—youth proudly sharing that they are now cooking at home for their families, trying new recipes, and feeling more independent. This program has sparked genuine interest and empowerment. Since launching it for our project, we've welcomed five new participants, bringing our group to a total of 15 youth who are actively engaged and benefiting from this experience.

- YMCA of Southwest Nova Scotia Staff



Looking Ahead

This year's Youth Food Leaders program delivered rich and meaningful impact—building confidence, cultural connection, and leadership among youth while strengthening community partnerships across Nova Scotia. At the same time, working closely with partners and youth taught us invaluable lessons about delivery: the importance of capacity-building to sustain programs locally, the opportunity to foster long-term relationships with youth, and the value of co-design for curriculum development and delivery. These insights are shaping the next iteration of Youth Food Leaders, which will embed stronger partner-led models, enhanced training resources, and even more opportunities for youth voice and leadership. Together, we are evolving to ensure the program continues to grow in relevance, reach, and impact.

