

# Youth 4 REAL

---

*Youth 4 Real is a unique mentoring program that matches secondary education majors at Western Washington University with youth from Shuksan Middle School. Through program participation, both youth and mentors benefit by developing leadership skills, having access to safe learning environments, building relationships, and engaging the community through action projects.*

**Partners:** Shuksan Middle School, Bellingham School District  
Center for Service Learning, Western Washington University  
Woodring College of Education, Western Washington University  
Whatcom Community Foundation

**Youth 4 REAL (Relationships, Exploration, Action, and Leadership)** was developed in response to a critical need in Whatcom County to support our students who struggle in school. Situated on the north end of Bellingham, Shuksan Middle School is the most diverse and economically challenged middle school in the city. In the 2006-2007 school year, only 37-45% of students met the academic standard in math and 61-71% met the reading standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Rising concerns of gang involvement has prompted the need for youth to find a safe space after school. Shuksan Middle School demonstrates a need for shifting programming to meet the needs of students in challenging circumstances.

## **The Mission of Youth 4 REAL**

The mission of Youth 4 REAL is “to provide opportunities for self-exploration, leadership and interpersonal skill development, and community engagement for youth and caring adults.” Program participants meet in group format once a week from October to June. In the fall, the program guides youth and mentors to explore their inner lives as well as getting to know one another. Personal exploration and group building provides a valuable foundation for the winter session as program participants shift focus and begin to look out into the community by engaging in service projects and investigating community issues. By spring, participants take action by designing and implementing youth-driven community-based projects.

Through the program, middle school youth gain:

- Positive peer and adult relationship skills
- Communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution skills
- Leadership, self-efficacy, and self esteem
- Community awareness and engagement
- Project planning skills

## ***Youth 4 REAL improves the ability for both youth and adults to help themselves.***

The program creates a supportive and inclusive space for youth voices and action. We feel that youth need access to unrelenting encouragement to speak up for themselves and that in which they believe. The program offers expanded enrichment activities and support for middle school youth so that they can develop health arenas in which to divulge their passions.

## ***Youth 4 REAL nourishes connections among people.***

The program fosters healthy relationships among program participants and provides a spring board for program participants to launch themselves into the community as open-minded, tolerant, and compassionate individuals.

***Youth 4 REAL takes cooperative approaches to community issues.***

Youth and preservice teachers learn about critical community issues, then they collaborate with individuals and organizations in the community who are working to mitigate these challenges through a youth-designed community project. Both youth and adults, through practice, become equipped and confident in navigating community issues and contributing their solutions so they can be effective community members throughout their lives. It is through these means that our program brings diverse populations within our community into partnership to be a part of truly successful problem solving and long-term planning for the future of our community.

***Youth 4 REAL enables community institutions to be responsive to all citizens.***

While the program is a youth development program, it also serves as learning environment for WWU preservice teachers who serve as mentors to the Shuksan Middle School Students. Preservice teachers gain an increased understanding of youth and their life contexts. They gain skills in developing interpersonal relationships with youth, especially those from challenging life circumstances or those that need additional support to succeed in school and beyond.

For further information contact [Angela.Harwood@wwu.edu](mailto:Angela.Harwood@wwu.edu)