



Towards a

# NATIONAL Youth Agenda



**Kingston, Ontario**  
**March 6-8, 2005**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Children's Alliance wishes to acknowledge the energy, knowledge, resourcefulness, creative spirits and contributions of the youth who participated in the symposium from all across Canada. They were an inspiration to the membership of the National Children's Alliance (NCA) in attendance who were deeply touched by their stories, life experiences, insights and voices.

The Honourable Senator Landon Pearson is acknowledged by the NCA for her personal commitment to children and youth. Senator Pearson has made a difference on behalf of children and youth through her tireless work on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and A Canada Fit for Children. Throughout the symposium her personal touch, humour and caring in speaking with youth both individually and as a group was an inspiration to all.

The NCA also wishes to acknowledge the dedication, energy and capacity of the youth facilitators from YOUCAN - Paulo Lobo, Manon Comeau and Pam Louie whose expertise and partnership with the Planning Committee moved the symposium forward as a seamless process.

Appreciation is extended to the contributions of the Planning Committee for their support and guidance throughout the design phase of the symposium Towards a National Youth Agenda. It is their knowledge, passion and respect for youth and their rights throughout the consultation and planning process that shaped the symposium in such a way that the voices of youth were central.

And most importantly, the NCA thanks all of the participants for their many contributions throughout the symposium.



**NCA SYMPOSIUM**  
**"Towards a National Youth Agenda"**  
**Conference Programme**  
**6-8 March 2005**

**Sunday 6 March 2005 - Youth Participants' Pre Conference Session**

- 3:30 – 4:30 PM                      Welcome: Why we're here  
   -Dianne Bascombe, National Children's Alliance
- "Getting to know one another"  
   Orientation and agenda for the next three days  
   -Facilitators: Manon Comeau, Paulo Lobo, Pam Louie  
   (YOUCAN)
- 4:30 – 5:30                              "Getting from protest to policy: making a difference"  
   -Akua Schatz
- 5:30 – 6:30                              "Giving your two "sense" worth: making change"  
   Creating a "shopping list" of what needs to be changed
- 6:30 – 8:00                              Pizza dinner and socializing
- 8:00 – 10:00                            "Getting from the shopping list to the check-out counter:  
   creating common themes"

**Monday 7 March 2005 – Youth Participants' Pre Conference Session (continued)**

- 7:30 - 8:30 AM                        Breakfast
- 8:30 – 10:00                            "Telling a story of Canada's youth: a sense of who you are" –  
   pre-conference day participants continue work on refining  
   and presenting the ideas from yesterday

**Monday 7 March 2005 – Main Conference (youth included in all sessions)**

- 9:00 – 10:15 AM                        Registration and coffee
- 10:15 – 10:45                            Welcome and Opening  
   -The Hon. Landon Pearson, Senate of Canada  
   - Akua Schatz, Youth Issues Working Group



- 10:45 – 12:00      Panel I: Youth challenges and assets in school, work and community  
-Jan Nato  
Sisler High School, Winnipeg MB  
  
-Maryam Toson, Shinars Hoossein  
Pathways Home Base Drop-In Centre  
  
-Danielle Hurley  
PEERS Vancouver  
  
Discussion Period
- 12:00 – 1:00      Lunch
- 1:00 – 2:15      Panel II: Youth challenges and assets in school, work and community  
  
-Cari Gibbons  
Canadian Association for Community Living  
  
-Wuanita Lund  
Community Action Program, R.B. Russell High School,  
Winnipeg, MB  
  
-Chris Beeson, Angie Vowles, Raheleh Saneie  
Planned Parenthood Ottawa  
  
Niki Grant, Ryan “Gitz” Derangé  
Ghost River Rediscovery  
  
Discussion Period
- 2:15 – 2:45      “Issues Facing Youth”: Presentation from Youth about their  
Pre-Conference day
- 2:45 – 4:15      Dialogue and Report-Back from discussion tables
- 4:15 – 5:00      Keynote Presentation:  
-Robert Barnard, D-Code and Emma Rooney, Street Kids  
International
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- 6:00 – 7:00 Reception
- 7:00 – 10:00 Banquet  
Presentations  
"Art Miles Mural Project"

**Tuesday 8 March 2005**

- 7:30 - 9:00 AM Breakfast
- 9:00 –9:45 Keynote presentation:  
-Ginger Gosnell, Assembly of First Nations National Youth Council
- Question and Answer Period
- 9:45 – 12:00 Workshop: Moving Towards a National Youth Agenda
- "Political Policy-making"  
-Bobbi Ethier, Manitoba Teachers' Society
- "International Perspectives"  
-Dave Farthing, YOUCAN
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Presentation by NCA Aboriginal Working Group  
Cindy Blackstock, First Nations Child and Caring Society
- 1:30 – 4:30 Caring Across the Boundaries: an interactive session to facilitate partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, with a focus on youth  
-Facilitators: Jocelyn Formsma and Ginger Gosnell
- 4:30 Closing Remarks  
-Dianne Bascombe, National Children's Alliance
- 5:00 Adjournment



## TOWARDS A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY AGENDA

March 6 to 8, 2005

### Moving towards a national youth policy agenda

The lack of a clearly articulated national youth policy agenda represents a substantive gap in Canadian public policy. Through its strategic planning processes the NCA identified youth issues as a key priority for policy development and action.

Recognizing the fundamental rights of youth to participate in a democratic society is articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The symposium was a first step to explore ways in which youth voices can be heard, to identify issues of importance to them and begin to discuss options to close the youth policy gaps.

The ninety people who attended "Towards a National Youth Agenda" in Kingston, Ontario were part of a dynamic and interactive three days. These were three days of intensive listening and learning. Evaluations indicated that this opportunity to work together resulted in concrete progress to advance youth issues. The depth of the dialogue was reflected in all aspects of the conference from personal stories and presentations on key issues through to the beginnings of policy implications.

It was simply not possible to capture the richness of the discussions, the value of the networking, the intensive process of listening to the youth voices and the commitment to understanding exhibited by each and every participant. A report format cannot do justice to the learning that was achieved, both through collaborative process and knowledge on issues and policy

The National Children's Alliance proposes moving forward by considering how the stories of youth and the issues related to their lived realities will be linked to a wider lens of youth policy development. Thanks to all of the participants this is the beginning of a journey Towards a National Youth Agenda.

**Sunday 6 March 2005: Youth Participants Pre Conference Session**

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## **Day One Objectives**

The 45 youth from diverse backgrounds and geographic regions attended a pre-conference day on March 6<sup>th</sup>. The objectives of Day One were for the youth participants to get to know one another and facilitate dialogue in both plenary and small groups. Youth were asked to identify issues impacting their lives that they would like to change. Dialogue would centre on the connections and implications for public policy.

The agenda started out with welcome and icebreakers. During the afternoon a workshop on policy development was followed by small group sessions to identify important issues. Pizza dinner and informal networking preceded an evening agenda of creating common themes and consensus building in preparation for presentations to the adult participants the next day.

## **Welcome**

Dianne Bascombe, Executive Director of the National Children's Alliance welcomed the youth, who were invited to attend the symposium by their respective organizations from across Canada. Dianne explained that the pre conference was an opportunity for the youth participants to meet to identify key issues and explore how young people can contribute to public policy on issues that are important to them. Day two and three would provide the youth the opportunity to relate their issues to the larger symposium and create a dialogue among all participants. Dianne stressed that the meeting was not about coming out with youth policies but to move towards youth policy.

The proceedings were then turned over to the three dynamic youth facilitators from YOUCAN: Paulo Lobo, Manon Comeau and Pam Louie.

## **"Getting to know one another"**

The youth facilitators introduced an introductory icebreaker called Bingo. Each person was asked to find "someone who is left handed, someone with a driver's license, someone who loves pizza etc. There was great interaction, lots of laughter, name sharing and finding out where people came from. The second ice-breaker was called "Egg-o-lution" where as the players transformed themselves into eggs, chickens, humans and super humans based on rock, paper, scissors.



Paulo, Manon and Pam taught everyone the “dexterity check”, a rhythmic hand clapping exercise. Dexterity check is an activity that gets everyone’s attention, adds to team building and re-focuses the group when necessary.

To begin the process of exploration, dreaming and dialogue, the youth were asked to keep the following principles in mind as the youth lead, adults listen and a space is created for dialogue:

R - RESPECT  
E - ENTHUSIASM  
F - FUN  
S - SAFE

Volunteers were asked to come forward to be designated as journalists (Maryam Toson, Shinars Hoossein), photographer (Raheleh Saneie) and artists (Sherry McPherson, Misty Parent, Mary Ellen Ross). Others volunteered to introduce and thank plenary speakers.

### **“Getting from protest to policy: making a difference”**

Akua Schatz, Policy and Research Associate, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs led a workshop on making change. Akua spoke about the freshness and open mindedness of people in their late teens and early twenties in relation to influencing systemic change at the governmental level. Specifically Akua introduced concepts that would encourage the participants to consider themselves as political beings and change agents.

The Butterfly Effect inspired participants to consider the theory that the flapping of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil could affect the weather in Texas. Small changes have long reaching impacts. The Butterfly Effect manifests itself exponentially when we as human beings become more interrelated and connected. In the world today, we are more connected than ever before due to technology and travel. Thinking globally and acting locally is another example of the Butterfly Effect.

Akua asked the participants to consider how international events impact on their personal lives and how their personal lives impact the lives of others across the world. She also asked them to consider their own special interests, what they



care about, their volunteer efforts and what they like to do or talk about with their friends in their spare time. Each one of these expressed thoughts and activities were an example of the Butterfly Effect as the impact of our words and deeds resonate like waves on the social lexicon of the culture and across the world. The speed of the wave effect depends entirely on the communication strategies put to use, such as internet.

Akua explained that public policy is whatever you choose to do or not to do (Thomas Dye). Public policy can be influenced in the voluntary sector, the place where the social and political entities react. She went on to explain that public policy can influence the private sector as well, the place where the corporate world reacts. Public policy can also influence civil society where we, its citizens, are engaged.

How can you influence the government to make changes? Influence can happen in ways that are adversarial or cooperative in nature. Thinking about cooperative and peaceful means to influence the government, the youth participants brainstormed their ideas and posted them on the flip chart paper

**Big Ideas for the Double 00's**

What's the big idea?  
We're really glad to see ya,  
And share some food for thought  
Explore some topics that are hot  
Like money in the bank  
We'll put ideas in our think tank  
Sort the ones we think are great  
Invest them at the highest interest rate  
Then challenge ourselves to do some  
giving  
And find a better way of living  
So open your mind and bring your brain  
And climb aboard the vision train.

at the front of the room. There was a comprehensive set of ways to influence the current systems. Governments can be directly influenced by using a targeted approach - contacting decision makers and by voting. The ideas spoke to a wide variety of actions that some of the participants have already engaged in at the educational and community levels.

The ideas were synthesized as follows (please see Appendix I for the flip chart lists),

Getting involved and engaging in a political process is the first step. Complaining alone does not move issues forward. Making your voice be heard and standing up for what you believe in is essential. Express your opinion, raise awareness and create a call to action! Never underestimate the power of word



of mouth. Demonstrate the need for services, support and funds by using statistics and telling the story of individuals first before protest and calling the media.

Talk to others in your union, student group or professional association. Communication through letter writing, petitions, editorials, postering bulletin boards, talking to and teaching others, intranet and e-mailing were clearly familiar avenues to highlight issues of concern and to seek to have those issues addressed. Spreading the word through technology and keeping the pressure on government departments, ministries and senior decision makers is important. Whenever possible create youth advisory committees and volunteer to be on them. Create activist groups for solidarity, momentum and lobbying purposes. Always make connections with the people who have power (MP's, MLA's and Ombudsperson) and act in only positive ways.

Speak up!! Advocate!! And Vote!!!

Participants also wrote that environments could be influenced positively by educating people, through artistic expression such art, theatre and dance. Advertising on student and mainstream radio/TV is a public way to get the attention of governments. Peaceful protest, demonstrations and marches with signage and calling the media's attention to such events was suggested as a way to achieve visibility as well as to showcase solidarity for an issue or concern. It was suggested that embarrassing public figures by emphasizing the just society perspective might be a good approach to influencing the government. Relating the issue or concern at hand to youth rights would offer credence to a call for action.

Participants spoke to the importance of educating and informing themselves so that they did not challenge policies without as complete a picture as possible. Round tables, focus groups, polls and surveys are good ways to gain collective knowledge as well as talking to stakeholders. Fundraising is a way to provide support for disenfranchised groups to take important steps forward on issues that lack financial support. Organizing culturally based groups to highlight diversity issues in positive ways works.

Participants felt it was important to own an issue by taking leadership and getting a lot of people behind you who believe in the same issue. This allows for greater visibility and faster change. Boycotts, protests, rallies and strikes are



effective to make political points. If an issue is important enough and you cannot get the kind of support that is necessary it may be that the only route is to take legal action but strive to learn about legalities and legislation first.

In a third exercise, the youth were inspired to ponder the cost of change and the dollar amount required to make an impact. Participants were asked to first make a list of every item of clothing or jewellery they were wearing. They were then asked to place a dollar figure to everything they had listed. The results varied but for the most part the youth were shocked to find that their totals reached well into the hundreds of dollars. With their personal totals in mind the participants were asked to watch a video by Sarah McLaughlan entitled "World on Fire" (<http://www.worldonfire.ca/>).

The video begins by flashing the question: What does \$150,000 buy? If you're a professional musician, it can buy a music video – the staff, the union workers, the catering, the make-up and lights and travel. It can also buy clinics and medicine in Afghanistan, classrooms and books in Africa, shelter for refugee camps, ambulances, irrigation and scholarships.

Musician Sarah MacLaughan chose to spend the \$150,000 allocated for the video for her song "World on Fire" on service for the world's needy. She made the video for \$15, showing images of what was done with the rest of the money and listing the recipient organizations and programs at the end of her video.

The purpose of the exercise was to demonstrate, in a tangible way, how little money is necessary to make the world a bit more humane. It is empowering because it allows people to imagine influencing change in a very personal way. Alternately, it was also an opportunity to enforce the message that most change occurs with little to no money and rather by the tireless voluntary efforts of people who care.

**"Giving your 2 "sense" worth: making change" and creating a "shopping list" of what needs to be changed.**

The facilitators divided the youth participants into three groups. Each group was facilitated by Paulo, Manon or Pam. The groups were asked to create "shopping lists" about the things they feel 'need' to be changed (not what they 'want' or 'desire') that would make a difference in the lives of youth.



### **Group One (facilitated by Pam Louie)**

This was a diverse group that engaged in lively debate. One of critical issues under discussion was whether issues should be integrated or kept separate for aboriginal youth and visible minority youth. Aboriginal youth spoke about the situation where government talks about human rights in places and ways that mean that Aboriginal people are not included in the discussion. It was a powerful debate.

Aboriginal youth emphasized the need for more cultural programming based on cultural and linguistic identities and the implementation of sharing circles based on traditional beliefs. Aboriginal youth issues are integrated into the needs of Aboriginal communities such as higher standards of living, on/off reserve housing, equal and more job opportunities, food security and educational opportunities. Healing centres for suicide survivors, residential school survivors, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence are essential for Aboriginal community empowerment and to build healthy communities. Accountability is very important in self-governance and the five National Aboriginal organizations should be included in all decisions affecting Aboriginal communities at both the local, regional and federal levels.

Participants in this group spoke to the need for opportunities and second chances as youth are learning how to 'be' in the world. Youth want opportunities to give back to the community. Youth want clean and positive environments, good leaders and "safe" communities. To accomplish this, more funds and more knowledge are essential. Global issues related to human rights and refugees were emphasized. Local injustices in education were cited as an indication that Canada needs to pay attention to this issue domestically as well. Racial prejudice and discrimination, gender roles and disability issues were highlighted.

### **Group Two (facilitated by Paulo Lobo)**

Paulo asked the participants to explore each issue thoroughly, not just make lists. There was discussion about how adults underestimate the knowledge and skills

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of youth. It was also commented that the knowledge of adults is often underestimated by youth.

One of the issues that were explored in depth in this group was sexual health. Education was identified as important and that there is a need for schools to begin teaching at younger ages in elementary and junior high schools. The lack of sexual education in Canada and the accessibility of contraception and treatment were identified as areas of concern. AIDS/HIV in Africa was also discussed. Sexual equality regarding gender and sexual orientation is part of understanding how to negotiate sexual communication and relationships. Higher awareness of critical terms and general knowledge of sexuality inside and outside of schools is essential for youth. More parents should be involved in sexual education.

### **Group Three (facilitated by Manon Comeau)**

Youth participants in this group created long lists of issues that were all equally important to them in the realm of physical and mental health. The issues ranged from sexuality, teen pregnancy, peer pressure, FASD prevention, STI's, body image, and homophobia. There was also discussion of tough issues that had touched the youth in some way such as child pornography, crime and victimization, youth drop outs, gangs, and drugs and alcohol/addiction.

A broad range of concerns was related to youth in care, negative images of teens, child abuse, homelessness, environment, food insecurity, Aboriginal women's rights and Aboriginal rights in general. They identified youth at risk as needing more supports and that by de-stigmatising marginalized youth and bridging the gap between service delivery organizations, youth will be provided with a more robust safety net.

The importance of education, both formal and informal was stressed. Access to good education should be for everyone not just those who can afford it. Community building and nation building take place through education. Multiculturalism is essential to a holistic curriculum in education for youth. Communities and schools need to work on recreational activities and providing more places for youth to meet, such as youth centres and mentoring programs. Tied in with this discussion were the issues of lack of jobs for youth and employment equity.



## **Youth Consensus building: "Getting from the shopping list to the check-out counter: creating common themes"**

In the final workshop of the pre-conference session the groups were asked to prioritise their issues into common themes. (see Appendix II) These themes were brought to the youth plenary session for discussion.

The flip chart entries were reduced and consolidated into a list of fifteen key themes. Youth participants voted on the themes by choosing three separate themes each. The result was six priority issues. The youth were asked to break into six groups, given a priority and asked prepare a presentation.

### **Fifteen key issues:**

- social injustice and discrimination
- education and infrastructure
- teen sexuality
- physical/mental health and addictions
- life/work skills and employment
- youth and politics
- Aboriginal issues
- immigration and human rights
- crime and victimization
- environmental influences both physical and social
- health and family values
- mentoring
- poverty and housing
- youth leadership, support and development
- youth accessibility

### **Final Six Priority Topics/Themes:**

- education and infrastructure
- social injustice /discrimination
- physical and mental health
- Aboriginal Issues
- teen sexuality
- physical and social environments



## Day Two: Main Conference

### “Telling a story of Canada’s youth: A sense of who you are”

Dianne Bascombe welcomed everyone to the plenary and explained that the youth participants had worked very hard on Day One to voice key issues which impact on their lived realities and which, once identified, will provide baseline data for the National Children’s Alliance to move forward in partnership with youth towards creating a national youth policy agenda.

Dianne explained that the goal of the inter-generational agenda planned for Day Two and Day Three was to start by listening to and hearing the voices of the youth delegates in the context of shifting the leadership from adults to youth. She explained that this workshop represented the first step in preparation for dialogue leading to youth ownership of their own issues, youth capacity building and youth access to decision making tables reflecting the demographic and cultural diversity of youth across the country.

### The Honourable Landon Pearson, Senate of Canada

Dwayne Neblett introduced Senator Landon Pearson, recognizing her passion and commitment as Canada’s foremost advocate for children and youth.

Senator Landon Pearson spoke with enthusiasm and respect for the young people she met with the previous evening. She spoke to the issues of youth stereotyping and media portrayal, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and technology. Senator Pearson also spoke of civic engagement and the role of youth.

Young people have found their voices in a variety of ways. The question today is how to get youth voices from here to there - from protest to policy.

One of the biggest challenges for youth is fighting the negative stereotypes that society has of them and the ones the media tend to emphasize. Senator Pearson believes that the climate for youth is changing.

Senator Pearson encouraged the youth to make use of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a way to legitimize in their voices and to create a Canada fit for youth. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legal instrument of international importance. Every country in world except for the



United States and Somalia has ratified it. Rights are fundamental for all ages of children and youth.

One of the articles of the Convention is the right to privacy. It causes us to ask important questions about new technology. For example, should parents be able to track their children and youth with a monitoring device? What does this mean for a young person's right to privacy as protected in the Convention? Senator Pearson referred the participants to a youth friendly version of the UN Convention on her website - <http://www.sen.parl.gc.ca>.

Education is of utmost importance. Senator Pearson talked about the lowering of the voting age to 16. Having the vote could mobilize change towards democratizing the school system. A younger voting age could make a difference to Canada's political systems. Politicians and senior officials would need to answer about how they are doing to promote the rights and freedoms of children and youth. Today, the Senate Committee on Human Rights is addressing how Canada is doing in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There are four cross-cutting principles as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that affect all the issues youth will be bringing to the decision making tables. 'The best interests of the child' is a principle that is not always easy to define. What does 'the best interests of young people' actually mean? Survival and development is another fundamental right, which can be used in thinking about the right to health care. The third principle is the right to non-discrimination, which is very important to all of your lives. The fourth is participation. You have the right under article twelve to participate in every decision that is made about you.

We need to do much better on these things than we have. The right to have your voice heard - not necessarily to have the final word - but to participate in all decisions that affect you, such as decisions about custody and access. When parents fight about children they are limiting the choices of kids.

Senator Pearson spoke about the importance of the educational system. The federal system doesn't have much influence over education at the primary and secondary level. If youth had the vote you might find that the school boards might be paying more attention to responding to what kids need. Senator Pearson admitted that she has not seen a great deal of progress in the democratization of the school system. "Think about how having a vote would



impact on your educational environment”.

This is a generation that has access to technology in ways that most adults don't. It's like learning a new language for adults, yet you learned in childhood. Huge numbers of you are using technology on a daily basis. From 2002-2004 there was a boom in short messaging service representing a growth higher than 800%. In 2004 Canadians send 710 million short messages to one another -- 31 messages per second are sent from cellphones. Something really important is occurring that did not happen even five years ago. Do not underestimate the power of your technological advantage.

The capacity to link around the country is a way to share and get a collective voice. Part of the fall of the Soviet empire was through technology - hearing about others being, seeing and living. Revolutions have been brought about by the way that people have been brought together through technological connections - not in a negative, angry mob kind of way, but brought together peacefully. You have the capacity to link youth across the country, to influence decisions and to create a collective voice.

This is a very exciting evolution where regimes needing to be changed can become more democratic. This is attributed to a culture that young people created and know how to use. These are very exciting times. You can contribute to a policy of hearing not just a policy of communicating. This is a time to help adults listen and be able to understand what will work for you and the values you want to promote. You're a great bunch of young people. You are the generation that has access to technology. Make it work for you to have your voices heard towards political mobilization.

#### **“YOUTH POLICY CAN DESIGN A WAY FOR ADULTS TO HEAR, LISTEN AND RESPOND TO YOUTH”**

**Akua Schatz** synthesized her presentation from Day One, which included information on advocacy, public policy and getting in touch with a values approach to the intentions of youth mobilizing towards the development of a national youth agenda. Akua emphasized the significance of the essential need to support youth to bridge the realities in their transition to adulthood. Youth need to educate themselves and encourage others to open their hearts and open their minds to the capacity, the enthusiasm and the resourcefulness of youth.



**Youth Panel I: Youth Challenges and assets in school, work and community  
Jan Nato, Maryam Toson and Shinars Hoossein**

**Jan Nato: Sisler High School, Winnipeg Manitoba**

Jan spoke about youth challenges and assets. Although Jan believes the greatest assets of youth are youth themselves, he gave a vote of confidence to the teachers in his high school who are incredible supporters and mentors who motivate students to take charge. Students at his high school began the Generation of Peace projects that raise funds for war-affected children as well as the Overseas Educational Fund.

Jan recommended that all youth take charge in their own schools given that they have the knowledge, the motivation, the capacity and the power to do so. Jan suggested that high schools could run a leadership conference to bring in younger leadership. He said that there is an entire generation of change-makers in each high school and college. One person can begin a peaceful revolution in a minute, and they can ask others to help build momentum. He said that everyone has the ability to raise funds for causes close to their heart or to invite MP's and MPP's to their school for dialogue sessions. Massive communication networks are easily accessible. Jan recommends that every person just start something!

**Discussion:**

In response to Jan's presentation there was an animated discussion about the obstacles and barriers youth encounter in their own schools when they attempt to make changes, raise funds or make conscientious objections to school decisions. Jan encouraged audience members to link the obstacles and barriers to concrete ideas that will create agency and empowerment in their struggles. Participants felt that signing a petition would demonstrate the numbers of students who supported a particular initiative and would provide safety and empowerment in numbers. Getting consensus with parents and students alike would also lend credence and impact on a particular decision.

There was a suggestion from the audience that nurturing relationships with school decision-makers could build trust and ease the difficulties related to suddenly approaching an authority figure with a new and perhaps threatening idea. It was acknowledged that parent councils are now being constructed to



counter-point the perceived power of school administrations, and now youth themselves must create opportunities for action within their educational environments.

It was suggested that getting statistics from other sources and discussing the issue at hand with evidence is a way to encourage cooperation from the school administration. If an issue is serious enough students could approach the media to influence trustees thereby making the issue public and transparent to break impasses.

Concerns were raised that ranged from lack of support for student fund-raising efforts to racism in the schools. It was noted that if schools resist fund raising efforts on the premises that activities such as car washes could be organized outside the school. A story was told from the floor about all black students having been suspended from a school by the vice principal as an example of racism and discrimination. When students took their concerns to the principal, he did not overturn the vice principal's decision. Various members of the audience voiced outrage that such a thing could happen and the following responses ensued, "Suspending black students is a HUGE human rights issue! Go back to school! Be a presence! Start an association. Demand equal treatment! Take a stand!"

One of the adult participants spoke about authoritarian policies in the school system, and that mobilizing the student voice and taking action was an encouraging concept. She said that her daughter was given a detention for snacking at a time other than lunch and was denied being able to go to the washroom when she needed to. She felt schools need to be more responsive to obvious needs of their student body.

A professional associated with the education sector spoke about awareness at the level of senior officials in the Ministry of the need for policy to

High school drop out rates are related to regimented school systems. This is unacceptable. Don't sit there and watch it happen. Demand an apology and object to being suspended or given detention. This kind of attitude hinders creativity. Be heard. Go to the media if necessary. Everyone should bring snacks to demonstrate solidarity! Or stop going to school! Boycott. Draw attention to the matter.



address many of the important issues spoken about. Governments are beginning to recognize the value of including youth voices, but youth must learn how to be heard. It is evident that the best schools are the most democratic ones.

### **Maryam Toson, Shinars Hoossein: Pathways Home Base Drop-In Centre**

**Maryam Toson is originally from Egypt** and has lived in Canada for five years after living in New York. Maryam attends grade twelve at Alexander MacKenzie High School in Toronto. She believes that youth should stay in school as long as possible and that it is also their responsibility to work and help out their families. She believes that work teaches youth many things, mainly responsibility and how to live in the real world. Maryam wants to work and make money for her needs so that she can stop having to depend on her father because he is really struggling working 16 hours a day and still not being paid enough.

Both Maryam and Shinars belong to Home Base, a youth drop-in centre in their community. Maryam has experienced many challenges while looking for work: during the winter there aren't many student jobs, she doesn't always know where to apply, when she does apply she doesn't always get past the stage of submitting her resumé, she's not considered to have enough experience, she's often considered to be too young, the number of hours she is available are limited because she's in school and employers usually want her to take on more hours, and she doesn't always know what she wants to do for work.

If youth have family connections they often get jobs easily. Maryam does not have such connections so her options are limited. When she gets older Maryam would like to study to become a fashion designer as she has a creative spirit. She is already preparing a portfolio of her designs throughout the years, is staying in school as long as possible and keeping up her style consciousness. When Maryam gets a job she plans to spend her earned money on food as she doesn't have enough right now, clothes, school supplies, transportation, movies, going to the club and saving for college. Maryam, in spite of these challenges, remains extremely positive about her future.

**Shinars Hoossein is from Zimbabwe** and has lived in Canada for three years. She is currently attending grade ten at Alexander Mackenzie High School in Richmond Hill. Her parents are currently unemployed, although her mother used to work in a laundromat, and she liked this job very much. All of her life she has



done back-breaking work, and the laundromat job was less damaging to her body and not too difficult. Shinars believes, like Maryam, that youth should work to help out their families. She also believes that work teaches youth responsibility, how to live out in the real world and keeps youth off the streets.

Shinars has been working for four months at McDonalds, her first job, where she is treated very well. Shinars was interviewed and she attended three days of orientation and training. Her responsibilities are supporting food production and helping with the money at the drive through. Shinars spends the money she makes each month (about \$200 a month for 20 hours of work) on sending money back to her home in Zimbabwe, buys some clothes, food, bus tickets and gives her mother \$120 at the end of each month.

Shinars believes school has prepared her for the work place by teaching her responsibility, organization and time management. Now that she's working, she realizes that she must be fast at everything she does, to think fast and never be shy. Before she was working, Shinars was always on the streets and had no direction in her life. Although she loves her job and it keeps her on track, working is not always easy and sometimes can get in the way of school, homework and social activity.

In Zimbabwe youth do not work if they are in school so life is quite different in Canada in this way. Shinars wants to open a spa when she graduates or go into the music business. Shinars is a determined young woman with a vision of her future and confidence that she will get the work she wants because she is working hard on her future. She has been preparing for her future by singing in talent shows and working in the studio. By working, Shinars feels better prepared to enter the work force as an adult and has an understanding of what it is like to work and to support a family.

#### **Discussion:**

An animated discussion from the floor started with a story from a youth participant about his brother attending university and then not being able to find employment. He concluded students need to come out with skills that give them somewhere to go to for work.

There was lengthy discussion about the importance of school guidance departments. Participants acknowledged the time constraints of guidance



departments to work one on one with each student to help them determine their best educational directions. There was major concern that students are not getting the information, support or guidance they need. Speakers from the floor said it would be best if counsellors had more time to spend helping students choose the right courses for the work they are potentially interested in going into. Helping students discover and most importantly supporting them in finding the appropriate job experiences is critical but for the most part, students are on their own without very little support or real direction.

It was suggested that offering a wider range of high school courses, such as wood working and hair styling, beyond just academics, would also be helpful as many schools do not offer these options. Ensuring that co-op programs in schools continue for on the job experience and setting up opportunities to have co-op students tell other students about their experiences would be highly valued. People should be brought in from the community to talk to students about the work that they do.

Equality between schools is an issue. Schools do not offer the same courses at each location. No standardization. Some schools have trades and some do not and some students may not succeed in the academic stream - they need to be offered trades to succeed. The credit system overrides being there "to learn". I think education is important. Be unique in the world. Nova Scotia has the highest drop out rate in the country and it has great resources. Maybe there aren't enough options.

Another idea brought forward in the discussion was for employers to help youth in their community by sending appropriate job applications and postings directly to the guidance offices in local schools. Students also need employers to provide work

opportunities with fewer hours that are more adaptable to student's schedules. For students that are working, it should be understood by employers that students have a hard time keeping their jobs because of not having been taught appropriate job related social skills. It was suggested that courses to support students for job preparation and job stressors would be helpful.

Youth clearly expressed an understanding of the political realities associated with cut-backs in education funding. The realities are such that there have been cut backs in guidance departments and there is not enough time for guidance counsellors to counsel thoroughly. Privatization and contracting out in the



schools have created issues.

Harvey Weiner commended the youth panel for stimulating excellent discussion - the good, the bad, the ugly. He pointed out that society, as a whole is not more or less democratic than schools. Lessons have been learned and that students should not take "can't" for an answer. He encouraged the participants to believe that every individual can make a difference and that each one can be a leader. We must argue against ridiculous policies. Inequality between schools and school resources are differences that can be resolved within a school context. The challenge is the undervaluing of non-academic education. Lots of interesting and challenging jobs are out there. Harvey told the young people to go with their hearts and leadership is the key.

I wanted to be a famous cartoonist. I was advised to take business administration. I've had my own business since I was fourteen. I air brushed t-shirts and motorcycles. I wanted to communicate in this way - art. Why are schools and guidance counsellors creating such a force? I took media design, started my own company and did not take business administration. I fought the system. I met up with the social planning council and am now doing business with them - now the school wants to take the credit for this! I need to build on my skills. Now many doctors are miserable because they'd rather be artists! Or business administrators! Encourage everyone to do what moves them - do your own thing!

## Day Two - Afternoon

**Youth Panel II: Youth Challenges and assets in school, work and community**  
Cari Gibbons, Wuanita Lund, Chris Beeson, Angela Vowles, Raheleh Saneie, Nikki Grant and Ryan Derangé

### Cari Gibbons: Canadian Association for Community Living

Cari told the participants that it is important to include the voices of youth in the dialogue about disability rights, advocacy and education. Cari has a personal interest in speaking from the perspective of inclusive education specifically for children and youth with disabilities. She believes everyone should contribute to equal citizenship and participation in a society that is inclusive in its values, beliefs and policies. Parents have had to advocate for their children in the classrooms over the years but there is need to bring more voices. Inclusive education is more than just a policy. It is a philosophy, a value, and a belief. It



requires the conviction that all persons, including those with disabilities, have the right to equal citizenship and participation in our society.

Cari shared her story about her good friend Danita whom she met in elementary school. A local advocacy organization sent a speaker to the school to implement a program called the "Circle of Friends". This was a group of friends who met regularly with Danita who had cerebral palsy and helped Danita participate in as many activities in school as possible. She did not have friends her own age nor was she in an inclusive classroom. Danita's circle of friends however, treated her like she was younger, like a porcelain doll. One of her friends sang Baa Baa Black Sheep to her and Danita cried because she hated the song ... she wanted to be accepted as "equal" to her friends in age and stage of development.

After this incident, her friends realized they had treated Danita like a child rather than a peer. The Circle of Friends began to really understand inclusion and advocated harder than ever for Danita to be in the classroom and included in as many activities as possible. Friendships changed ... friends became real, equal friends. Everyone began to understand the concept of inclusion, equality and reciprocity. The Circle of Friends made a video call "Kids Belong Together". After elementary school the friends lost touch with each other and Cari heard that Danita had passed away. Cari wished Danita knew the impact that she had and the friendships she inspired.

Many children are left out of social experiences because of physical disabilities and developmental or learning disabilities. Special needs children are twice as likely to be bullied. They need to be valued by others. Inclusion is about all people. Special needs children and youth are not treated equally or fairly. Inclusive education is essential! The web address and chat room for the national youth movement for inclusion can be found by logging onto Yahoo Groups. Go to <http://yahogroups.com> and search for Youth Said It.

Cari concluded by calling on the youth present to let their teachers, parents and leaders know that inclusive education is a priority for you and she urged those teachers, parents and leaders present to listen and support them.

**Wuanita Lund: Community Action Program, R.B. Russell High School, Winnipeg**

Wuanita came to the conference to speak about poverty and explain to the



participants what it is like to live in poverty.

Wuanita reminded the audience that fifteen years ago, Parliament committed to solve the poverty issue for children. She also reminded the audience that one in six children still live in poverty. These children are at risk of dropping out of school, getting involved with alcohol and drugs, and often have poor health, all of which perpetuate the cycle of poverty. They live in sub-standard housing, rely on handouts, and have limited nutrition. Wuanita is part of the Community Action Program in Winnipeg and works with youth through drama. She believes that youth have to be serious role models for other youth.

Wuanita told the audience that she still couldn't go to the movies or McDonalds because her family cannot do things together that cost money. There are no lessons because there is no money. She is not part of the mainstream teen culture because she has so few clothes - only hand me downs that don't fit. At times she's angry, feels left out and feels that teenagers with more money seem more important. Wuanita also feels helpless to help her mother who has struggled valiantly for years raising her family in a deficit situation. Her mother worked at as many jobs as possible to give her children a better life.

Wuanita believes that youth who live in poverty need more opportunities to speak out to generate awareness about their lives. She wants youth to know about available resources and find ways to eliminate poverty by working together. Wuanita's involvement in the Community Action Program in Winnipeg is her way of raising awareness about children and youth living in poverty.

### **Chris Beeson, Angie Vowles, Raheleh Saneie: Planned Parenthood Ottawa**

Chris, Angie and Raheleh teach sexual health education to students from grade 6 to grade 11. They are peer educators who speak about healthy relationships, responsible sexuality, communication, drugs and alcohol and how they affect sexual decision-making and contraception. They find out about these issues through Insight Theatre that brings sexual issues into the classrooms. They told the audience that kids want up to date knowledge so they allow lots of time for questions and answers.

Chris, Angie and Raheleh believe that it is time for the community to take more responsibility to inform kids about sexual health. They are concerned about HIV and AIDS at home and internationally.



A question that came forward from the audience was: Is there any way Planned Parenthood will be able to reach out to the kids at the Catholic School Board? Planned Parenthood responded that they have asked for permission to advertise in Catholic Schools but they are advised to keep sexual education out of the schools. There are ads on buses that everyone can see.

Another participant asked Planned Parenthood speakers if any work has been tackled on FASD at Planned Parenthood? The panel members answered that there are sexual decision-making workshops available through Planned Parenthood. Youth can be two or three months pregnant before realizing that they are pregnant and still drinking alcohol and doing drugs. There is a program on options and a lot of signs in bars. Planned Parenthood encourages raising awareness and preventive education as the most important aspect of the FASD issue.

You can be involved in Planned Parenthood as a volunteer as a peer educator – it's a great way to experience your 40 hours of community work!

### **Ryan 'Gitz' Derange and Niki Grant: Ghost River Rediscovery**

Ryan and Niki began their presentation by inviting the participants to do a "bear stretch" with them. They explained that the Ghost River Rediscovery program gave youth, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, opportunities to repatriate their identities by attending back to the land camping experiences. Participants tend to be multi cultural and are instructed in traditional, Aboriginal-based skills. Many attendees are street kids. The summer and winter camps provide leadership training designed for young people concerned about making changes for themselves, their communities and the world. The outdoor and cultural education programs are based on Aboriginal traditions and values and promote the tradition of rediscovery and the development of healthy, sustainable lifestyles among children and youth. Personal skills are learned the in four areas of the medicine wheel (physical, mental, spiritual and emotional).

Niki shared her experience with us: Since 1978, Rediscovery has helped people all over the world rediscover themselves, their path in life and their many gifts. Since the time I was 11, Rediscovery has been guiding me through life with the help of countless mentors, elders and the teaching ways of Mother Nature. It re-connected me with the earth to which we belong, it put me in touch with my



native heritage and provided a supportive environment to discover my passion in life. Through the support of a community built through the connections made through my Rediscovery experience it helped me to heal from the hurt my childhood had created. It helped me to take all my hurt and pain and turn it into strength and courage to face whatever life puts before me and to become more of who I really am. This is one story of many, told in different ways by voices all over the world. It has been my honor to share this, with all respect I am, all my relations. Haisla Nation.

More information about Ghost River Rediscovery can be found at <http://www.ghostriverrediscovery.com>.

Barb Coyle of the Canadian Child Care Federation thanked the panel saying the level of commitment of the youth impressed her. Barb said it was an honour to be with such wonderful youth who are building leadership commenting that this is a well-rounded group. She invited the participants to give themselves a round of applause.

The following section captures the highlights of presentations on the key topics from Day One by the youth to all participants:

### **Physical and Social Environments**

Physical and social environments strongly influence youth development. As youth venture into society as full participants, the opportunities that are accessible to them shape their experiences. One of the most critical influences discussed in this group was the education system. The need for quality public education was talked about. Accessibility to post-secondary education and training needs to be a continuing call for action to governments.

The group as an area of importance touched on environmental issues. The group looked at environment as part of their discussions about the importance of safe communities. Being connected and feeling secure in your neighbourhood is part of a safe community.

### **Sexual Health**

“Stars”, Students Talking About Responsible Sexuality, is the name the youth sexual health team called themselves and made their own t-shirts that they wore



during their presentation. They asked how effective are the sexual health materials used in schools. It is necessary to move beyond education that is only scientific in nature -- what's important is negotiating healthy relationships. Youth must talk to youth. Youth must know the issues and learn the language of sexual health. Stay safe! The sexual health information the Stars have is very practical. They showed the power point slide for the twelve STI's that we sang together amidst great laughter.

The Stars emphasized early sex education as extremely important. HIV/AIDS is a human rights issue that encompasses sexual equality, sexual orientation and breaking sexual stereotypes. At least 10% of the population is gay; yet killing a gay person is still not recognized as a hate crime. Teen pregnancy is a by-product of sexual activity. Awareness is the first step to healing. More parental involvement is needed in sexual and reproductive health. It is important to know about statistics, such as that 50% of high school students think that HIV/AIDS is curable or that Aboriginal women have the highest rates of HIV/AIDS next to developing countries. Knowledge allows you to choose the right direction when taking political action.

### **Social Injustice and Discrimination**

Responsibility for social inclusion has always been put onto those who are excluded. How do we engage all Canadians, and all people of the world to take responsibility? Everyone experiences social exclusion at one time or another in his or her lives.

Discrimination and injustice are particularly acute for refugees and newcomers. Immigration and issues of exile are global issues related to human rights. There is a refugee crisis in the world. Students from one school set up a 12 hour exile to experience this phenomenon. Prejudice, racism and discrimination need attention in the educational system. Bullying and verbal abuse are all part of this. It affects many of Canada's children. Aboriginal children feel that they are "not good enough". Children with learning disabilities such ADD and ADHD are discriminated against.

Today, Aboriginal youth experience the intergenerational effects of residential schools, abuse and alcoholism on their lives. We are all on our own personal journeys but we can benefit by sharing information. Everyone has to open up his or her minds as the first step. There are always people saying what you are doing



wrong. We must get past this. When we don't get it right we are socially excluded. In Canadian history we have excluded the Japanese Canadians, First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Is colonization over? We have to know about our past to know where we are today. We cannot help what happened in the past. Youth just want to keep the culture active. We are happy to shoulder the responsibility.

### **Physical and Mental Health**

A series of personal stories were related by the presenters that illustrated the connectedness between health and a youth's circumstances of life. Stories were told about memories of knowing the neighbourhood you grew up in; pregnancy of a friend and fear of parental reactions; alcohol abuse and how it effects youth; Inuit suicide and the effect on communities; experiences in foster care; the cultural inappropriateness of the Canada Food Guide in meeting the needs of traditional Aboriginal peoples; and the children and youth who are "not as successful" when they have learning disabilities. In conclusion, the presenters talked about the need for community responses to issues concerning mental and physical health.

### **Access to Education & Infrastructure**

Equality of opportunity is essential in education. Young people need to be able to access more trade-based educational opportunities. We need more scholarships and to reduce financial barriers. The pressing reality of the lack of readily available career counsellors was discussed. School curricula should have inclusion components and emphasize multi cultural appreciation. Appreciation should increase for differently abled people and their experiences in school.

There is a need for change in our educational systems and students need to take action to get for the kind of educational opportunities that they want. This kind of action must be a broad based movement.

Participants were introduced to a group called The Flying Squad and recommended their published article in a book entitled "Passing the test - the false promises of standardized testing" through the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in Ottawa. There are two ways to get a copy of the article:

[www.maritamoll.ca](http://www.maritamoll.ca) (the author's website about the book) and/or [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca) to order a copy of the book online.



## Aboriginal Issues

More cultural programming and cultural training is needed. Tribal Councils are important to Aboriginal youth, as is a culturally appropriate justice system. Healing, talking and sharing circles are essential for Aboriginal youth. We need higher standards of living, more and equal job opportunities, better housing both on and off reserve, food security and bridging the gap of the misuse of power.

## Discussion

The discussion from the floor was stimulated by the six presentations. A youth participant spoke about the meaning of being included - it means having opportunities to make friends, be part of society, be part of a community, part of a drama club. A northern participant asked the audience to acknowledge that harsh physical environments such as in the north generates a high calibre of commitment and integrity in youth pointing out that these youth have amazing ancient wisdom to offer and they live the cultural values (the Pauktuitit.ca website was identified).

A youth from the prairies spoke about the need for community living opportunities instead of expensive institutional solutions. Another youth spoke about the importance of programs for new immigrants to benefit from ESL opportunities, such as a particular United Way funded program for youth. She highlighted the fact that with this kind of funding, Canadian youth are able to meet refugee and immigrant youth to help create better social environments for them, to have fun and go the movies.

The issue of poverty was considered to be a cross-cutting issue that leads to social exclusion. A speaker from the audience said that poverty is often clouded by personal shame and that it is important to engage with the government on policy issues related to poverty. Poverty was considered to be a link to student employment in terms of the hierarchy of needs. If your family is poor you need to work. How can you be included in your school and community if you are working a lot to offset the impact of family poverty?

## Keynote Presentation

**Robert Barnard** is the founder of D-Code, seeking to break new ground and change the way Canadians think and "do". In 1991 he founded Generation 2000, a national youth organization whose mission was to get young people



more involved in determining Canada's future. Robert referred to a document called Citizen Re: Generation (15 - 34 year olds), which is about understanding active citizen engagement among Canada's information age generations and is available at <http://www.d-code.com>.

In his presentation, Robert used data to describe trends in Canadian society. Robert explained that people are voting less but are more educated. Political engagement is low, youth employment is the lowest it has been in years, and social engagement (volunteerism) is relatively low. High schools are the worst example of providing opportunities for political engagement. Student councils have very little influence in affecting change. The same kids basically run for student council all the time and being a "leader" is not considered to be "cool". Youth believe their votes do not count and as a first experience of voting they soon find out it's really a popularity contest. Why bother to vote?

Many students are moving towards action and away from voting. Why are youth not voting? It's a political decision not to vote. Some youth choose not to vote, they spoil the ballot, they don't know where to vote, or are part of a transient population and are often not registered for voting. Voting is not a priority. Getting an education or a job is a priority. This is often not a conscious protest, just low on the level of priorities. We really don't know about the "whys". We do know that youth think those elected will forget their issues. We do know that "civics education" is not linked to high school politics. Youth detachment is related to the de-politicizing of schools. Teachers are not allowed to talk about politics in school.

What works? Making the link between the federal, provincial, territorial political systems and the political systems in high schools would make a difference for youth understanding political processes by engaging in identifying the issues, voting and decision making within their own schools. Mock elections would prepare youth for the realities of the voting process outside school. Inviting politicians to schools, colleges and universities especially at times other than when they are on the election trail would begin to break down the barriers between youth and the political process. Youth-friendly dialogue is essential, and placing the voting polls during elections where students hang out would ensure a higher turn out, as would lowering the voting age.

Everyone is responsible for raising political awareness including youth. Still we need a deeper analysis to find the answers. Youth feel like they cannot make a



real difference. There is an absence of issues in a campaign that youth can relate to. Initiatives need to be created related to engaging youth in activities that will lead to voting.

Youth delegates in the traditional political parties are extremely active but they are not visible at conventions. The average age of political party members is 59 years old. Should youth create their own political parties?

## **Day Two Evening**

Participants took a break between the end of the conference Day Two and participated in banquet activities, door prizes, Karaoke and The Art Miles Project. Dianne Bascombe welcomed everyone to the sit down dinner and much fun was had throughout the dinner by handing out many, many door prizes. Dave Farthing encouraged everyone to participate in Karaoke for the evening and Dianne Rogers introduced The Art Miles Mural Project.

## **Creating Global Harmony, One Mural At A Time, One Mile At A Time**

Dianne Rogers brought the opportunity to contribute to The Art Miles Mural Project for the youth participants. The Art Miles Mural Project is an official project of The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Decade of the Culture for Peace and Non Violence Among Children of the World (2001-2010). The youth participants were invited to paint a twelve-by-five foot mural to represent the issues they have been discussing during the conference in the spirit of world peace and healing.

Dianne explained that the mural would become internationally recognized as an effort to document, educate and awaken the level of understanding that interdependence can create a world where peace and belonging and harmony is possible in a context within which diversity is truly valued. The completed canvas will become one of twelve miles of murals from countries around the world destined to wrap the pyramids in Alexandria, Egypt in the year 2010.

## **Day Three**

### **Key Note: Emma Rooney, Street Kids International (SKI)**

Emma Rooney spoke to the gaps in services and support for youth. A full reality of

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being young in Canada has emerged through the voices of youth at this conference. It's clear that there are a lot of strengths in this generation of youth. Emma graduated from high school just over two years ago and decided to take a year off to work and get involved in volunteering. She got involved with Street Kids International (SKI), which is a non-governmental organization and a global leader, providing opportunities and supports the choices and skills of street kids. SKI represents a large interconnected global community. SKI deals with critical issues of the sex trade, HIV/AIDS, youth entrepreneurship, being largely ignored by the communities in which they live and the transformation of individuals to global citizenship.

Emma returned to her high school to make a presentation and showed one of Street Kids International's animations, Karate Kids. Emma noticed that something very different happened to the audience of students than she expected. While Emma wanted to talk about the horrible challenges and "issues" faced by kids on the street, the students saw a story of resilience not hopelessness. They recognized the street smarts possessed by the kids in the film and this validated their own experiences. Emma realized that during the ensuing discussion, they were talking about the interconnectedness of local, national and international realities. The ability of people to ignore and walk by the street kids in the movie represented the response of many communities the youth in the classroom associated with.

Through her work Emma began to understand that sometimes the artificial boundaries that are created for youth are limiting. The connections are not made because they do not associate with the framework we usually use to define community. Traditional frameworks of community do not acknowledge the technology that is presently available and being used by youth or the diverse multicultural backgrounds that many of us are coming from.

Emma introduced IMPRINT, a global educational program. This is a consortium of local communities working to end homelessness. Youth leaders bring youth together with teachers, coaches and mentors to work on this profound issue. York Region represents a diverse population in suburban and rural communities with a growing population of homeless youth but this is a national issue with international implications. These youth are largely invisible as they are not on the street and they have made a choice to stay away from formal care. They are creative, resourceful, resilient survivors. Through this global education program youth are engaged in learning and supported to make global issues visible



locally in Canada. This program is partnered with a school board and local community agencies and organizations that are addressing prevalent issues of youth poverty and homelessness.

York region is seen as affluent, young and educated however; many are surprised to learn of a growing community of homeless youth. These youth are on the streets of North York because of mental health issues, lack of acceptance for sexual identity, learning disabilities, lack of economic opportunities and lack of engagement accompanied by a culture of poverty. They often have suffered from physical and/or sexual abuse. Some are kids impacted by total boredom and are often rural kids coming to urban centres. The outcome of these life conditions is ultimately community impoverishment as the path back 'home' becomes more and more inaccessible. Nevertheless, some of these youth are doing quite fine without formal support. Many are managing to stay in school, keep jobs and develop complex networks of support systems.

Local solutions must be found such as Home Base. Home Base represents 1,000 homeless, at risk youth. Home Base provides basic needs, employment and community resources. Youth return time and time again. It is safe, provides recreational opportunities and caring adults. To create community we must enter into relationships with one another. Adults must provide opportunities for youth to enter into relationships. Adults and youth can and must do this together. Youth need support and are great risk during the transition years between adolescence and adulthood. Youth have amazing assets and currently represent an untapped resource and huge potential for responsible citizenship and community contributions.

**Youth Caring Across Boundaries: An interactive session to facilitate partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, with a focus on youth**

**Speakers: Jocelyn Formsmas and Ginger Gosnell**

Jocelyn Formsmas of the Wolf Clan is a member of the Youth Council, National Association of Friendship Centres. Ginger Gosnell is President of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Youth Council. Youth Caring Across Boundaries is a community program that allows each community to add their own cultural flavour in a two-day dialogue which highlights inter generational impacts of colonization. It provides opportunities to create an intention to move forward in a collaborative process with First Nations Youth, the Voluntary Sector and funding



foundations.

Both Jocelyn Formsma and Ginger Gosnell have worked closely with Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada to whom they credit a mentorship relationship. Both presenters have designed and developed a youth version of Caring Across Boundaries, a program exploring relationships among aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups which explores the questions: What does mentorship really mean? What does leadership really mean? What does engagement really mean? (full report and executive summary are available on [www.fncfcs.com](http://www.fncfcs.com)).

Youth Caring Across Boundaries is a national training module. There is a half-day primer during which members of the Voluntary Sector learn about Aboriginal communities and a half-day primer in which Aboriginal communities learn about the Voluntary Sector. A full day collaborative dialogue then follows the learning day. Magic happens at these tables. A follow up after three months ensures that partnership building is on track. Partnerships include mentorships and collaborations between NGO's, funding sources such as foundations and Aboriginal youth.

The process brings out great enthusiasm of First Nations youth towards a shared experience that emphasizes creativity and resourcefulness. Within the process is a discussion of the concept of vision quest. This allows First Nations youth to enter an experience that allows them to remember words, events and connections to one another through the spiritual, physical and cognitive levels using art as a medium. Engagement offers many opportunities and learning is enhanced if there is diversity in the group. The facilitators of the two-day workshop speak to the misconceptions about Aboriginal realities and the opportunities that collaboration can bring forward for both mainstream organizations and Aboriginal Youth.

The learning experience for both communities of people is invaluable. The long-term effects of colonization are seen by indicators: loss of a traditional life style; inter-generational family fragmentation; mass removal of children to residential schools; relocation issues; loss of land entitlement and political self-determination. Issues of addictions, poor housing, food insecurities, high incarceration rates, high rates of Aboriginal children living in care, physical health and suicide are addressed as the direct outcomes of colonization - a multi-generational story of trauma accompanied by great strength. First Nations youth want to be



acknowledged as brilliant, bright, honoured, respected and talented rather than poor and discriminated against. Meaningful dialogue and communication in the two-day workshop bring about understanding and healing with an intention to move forward together.

It was clear from the response of the First Nations participants that they too have experienced heart-wrenching life conditions. Respecting all that is in the past; Aboriginal youth now want to focus on next steps.

Next Steps emphasizes the need for the voluntary sector to share information about workshops, services, programs and supports with Aboriginal youth so that they can strengthen their abilities and skills in becoming agents of change in their own communities and participate and build partnerships with mainstream organizations.

### **Panel III**

**Speakers: Bobbie Ethier, Dave Farthing, Ginger Gosnell, Cindy Blackstock**

#### **Bobbie Ethier, Manitoba Teachers' Society: Political Policy Making**

Bobbie spoke about the link between public policy-making and community activism. Policy-making is a reflective, thoughtful and progressive process. Community-based advocacy gives you influence but advocacy is just a piece of the political process - youth must also get involved as a member of a political party and as a voter. As a member of a political party you can be invited to lobby ministers and have access to government officials. Voting helps to influence decision-making, as does advocacy. Politics is where the "big" decisions are made. Women's voices are missing from political tables for the most part and disenfranchised groups are usually not part of the political process. It's not a gentle process ... it's about survival of the fittest. Youth are gradually finding their voices politically especially if they are affiliated with a particular political party. Issues such as food security, sex trade, student debt, and innovative social justice policy have all been brought forward and would not have been considered without youth members and youth voters.

#### **Dave Farthing: Founder and Executive Director of YOUCAN**

YOUCAN is all about non-violence, consensus building and peace building. How does a national youth agenda become a priority on Parliament Hill? The



national youth organizations can push the agenda forward. Some of those NGO's are clustered under different umbrellas such as the National Youth Serving Agency and the National Children's Alliance. The NCA has been successful lobbying on behalf of children's issues and is now supporting the voices of youth. Youth have their own voices but it's important to have the backing of many other voices in the political process.

Youth policy evolves month-to-month and year-to-year through constant reflections of diversity, developmental transitions and marginalized youth. How do youth get the political voice they long for? One of the ways is through political structures such as the European Youth Forum. This model represents a coalition of youth from across Europe. The European Union brings together national council members and each country has a council of their own. Membership includes political representatives, youth serving groups and the student's commission. The National Council elects youth to represent them.

This model provides a coordinated platform, training, external relations and is consistent and comprehensive in its approach. The European Youth Forum impacts on political, economic and social arenas. Its ninety members have direct access to decision-makers through the Forum. A new forum policy specifically targeting the issues identified here is viable.

National and international forums can empower youth to shape the political landscape by providing challenges and opportunities to act on such issues as citizenship and learning, employment and social affairs, human rights and equality, participation, fighting against discrimination, positive change and youth development work, membership, press and communication, consensus building and ensuring that youth voices are listened to.

### **Ginger Gosnell: Assembly of First Nations Youth Council**

In 1998 the AFN Youth Council came into being. Youth were represented by 20 voices from 10 regions (two from each region, one male, one female for balance). The AFN is funded by the government of Canada but the Youth Council has no funding. We know that funding is driven by policy and since youth policy is fairly scarce, there are no funds. There were two youth seats on the National Executive of the AFN as of 2004. The youth act in advisory capacities but did not vote.



There are six National Aboriginal Organizations in Canada and each one has a youth council as well,

- Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)
- Métis National Council (MNC)
- Council of Aboriginal People (CAP for urban and non status)
- Pauktuutit and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
- National Association of Friendship centres
- Assembly of First Nations (AFN)

There is support from the National Aboriginal organizations to create a National Aboriginal Youth Organization. This could be the beginning of formal youth policy work in Canada. It is important to plant the seed with politicians that youth are essential to the political systems and keep repeating it. There is power in numbers so fill up the room with your supporters and voters. Learn how to lobby and how to be effective. We can be pioneers and trail blazers in the political youth movement.

Ginger spoke to the gift of insight bestowed on her by elders. She has been at many decision-making tables after having applied the vision quest to her life path. As a young person she discovered her purpose and applied it to her commitment of engagement in politics. She left her community through the spiritual journey of fasting and self-reflection. Ginger knows that she must continue to work outside of her community gaining opportunities to learn until she is ready to return. She takes home stories about her travels and experiences to her family and community members. Ginger believes that youth have the job to build bridges and inter connectedness and in this way they can provide real help to Aboriginal communities.

**Cindy Blackstock: Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada**

Cindy told the participants that making a difference begins with acknowledging there is something to learn which emerges from feelings of discomfort. We're here - we don't feel good sometimes and this leaves room to learn. Cindy told a story about an elder who is also a school bus driver. The teachers asked the elder to begin to speak in a circle for the children. One child did not want to be there and the elder accepted the child's decision. The next day the child showed up and requested a second circle. Everyone shared what was important



in their spirits and their hearts. The child who returned explained that he could not respect the adults in the community because of their drinking. The elder acknowledged the child's anger and explained that the adults were teaching him to go to someone who he could learn from.

Children come to the attention of child welfare workers if parents are poor, live in poor housing and/or are involved in substance misuse. Aboriginal organizations need equitable funding, supports and services to attend to these issues for their own people.

The National Children's Alliance had an impact on INAC by asking their members to participate in a letter writing campaign. Many letters were sent speaking to not only Aboriginal issues but also the fundamental issues of equality, democracy and freedoms. As a result, the first increase in First Nations child welfare funds in fifteen years came into being (25 million dollars per year). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people came together to help make this happen.

One journey is just the beginning of further courage and partnerships. Indigenous children experience high rates of discrimination. The Aboriginal Working Group of the NCA is now connecting and caring across boundaries ... care for all children in the name of our human existence. No longer can we care for only the children in our own communities ... we must care about all children. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child tells us not to wait for permission. If you want a voice, take it ... it is a recognized, signed and legislated choice and an important gift.

In white South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created a forum for the oppressed and the oppressors to speak. Many did not want to hear the stories of hurt, as it was painful. When the white people got to the moment of feeling uncomfortable it was the black South Africans who cared and reached out to them by bringing their humanity to the table. They were courageous enough to say 'I too can do harm' and built their new relationships with others and created trust.



We have become  
irrevocably involved with and  
responsible for each other  
-Marshall McLuhan.

Can we be assured that we can make a difference in our own lives? No, but we will stay on the path and do it anyway. Faith is about knowing that when you step in to that place from light into darkness that there will be something strong to stand on. Women do the calling telling men what to say amongst the

Maori. Women stand up and sing when the men are out of line and the men must sit down and shut up when this happens. All have to be involved in the solutions. We must all stand up and sing when government goes off track! Youth included!!

**Alfred Gay** thanked the panel members and commended them on their inspirational messages. He thanked the youth for their generosity so we can all learn.

### **Next Steps**

Participants gathered in table groups to discuss next steps. The youth facilitators highlighted that youth can improve their health and well-being and the health of our communities and empower ourselves to make a difference!! You can do this by keeping up communication with one another, raising awareness about this issues that were brought forward during the last three days, develop web-based chat groups, post information on the web from individual communities, provinces/territories and national events, form provincial committees and form vision/mission statements for youth and by youth about becoming empowered and seeing youth as valued contributing citizens.

**Dianne Bascombe** spoke to the NCA's role in moving forward. This gathering has been the first step, the first dialogue session about youth issues with youth informing us with their voices, experiences and commitment to change. We must link their stories to research in an evidence driven system. How do we get from personal stories to practice and policy? We must find a way to make this happen through a process that may very well take a few years to realize. We welcome more members to join the NCA Youth Working Group and to join the NCA Aboriginal Working Group.

### **Closing**



Paulo, Manon and Pam asked everyone to form a huge circle for the closing. Dianne Bascombe gave out Certificates of Appreciation to each participant with respect and thanks for their amazing contributions.

**Strini Reddy spoke:**

I commend the youth facilitators. I was honoured to be able to sit in on all the youth sessions. The Planning Committee was constantly reminded by the youth members about the importance of taking the needs and views of the young people into consideration at all times, and the Committee was very committed to doing this. On behalf of all of us I express deep appreciation to Dianne and Barbara for their outstanding work and, especially, for being so considerate of the needs of all participants.

I was deeply impressed by the diligence and commitment of the youth. Rarely had I witnessed such energy and enthusiasm. I listened to the youth presenters very carefully and noted some points that they made. We know that we face many challenges but, as was demonstrated at this symposium, there is a wealth of talent and a variety of assets that can be used to address these challenges. I was excited to see how well the youth and adults worked with mutual respect and trust. This was a good example of how we should and can work together without being divided by the many artificial barriers that can so easily separate us - age, gender, ability, race, colour and creed.

Having been born and raised in apartheid South Africa I can attest to the ugliness that results from dividing people in this way. We must make sure that all our efforts and initiatives are inclusive. As I thought about this it reminded me of the words of Martin Luther King Jr who said something to the effect that we live in an interconnected web of humanity and what affects one of us affects all of us. Those of us who are more fortunate must make sure that we work for social justice and equity for all. When Greek philosopher, Thucydides, was asked when justice would come to Athens, he is said to have replied, "Justice will not come to Athens until those who are not injured are as indignant as those who are".

My concluding comments are based on some of the important statements from the presentation by Ginger and Jocelyn, who reminded us that we should convert the pain and hurt of the past into courage and strength, that we should be respectful and solution-oriented, and that we should focus on the next steps and make serious efforts to build collaboration. I encourage you, whether injured or not, to strive forward to right wrongs, to advocate on behalf of others and to



speak up for yourselves when injured. We all live in an interconnected web of humanity and what affects one of us affects all of us.

Finally, I urge the participants to think seriously about what you have learned and experienced at this Symposium and to carry the ideas forward to your respective communities and provinces. I conclude with a quote from Gandhi that one of the youth pinned on the wall, "Be the change you want to see in the world".

### **Dream Catcher**

Paulo explained that the dream catcher is meant to catch our dreams so that we don't forget them. A dream catcher symbolizes how we are all interconnected. Each participant threw a ball of yarn to another with whom he/she had connected during the conference. Once everyone held the dream catcher in his or her hands, a web of solidarity, everyone placed the dream catcher on the floor. The dream catcher was then handed over to the organizers as a reminder not to forget all of the hopes and dreams expressed during the last three days by all of those present. The dream catcher sits in a jar at the National Children's Alliance office.

### **Art Miles Mural Project**

Misty and Mary Ellen carried in the completed twelve foot Art Mural with great pageantry as a testament to capturing the essence, heritage and the spirit of a community and of the world towards healing and peace.

**Ryan Gitz from Ghost River Rediscovery** closed the session with a song he had written about friendships:

VERSE 1:

Fall is here, hear the yell  
Back to school, ring the bell  
Brand new shoes, walking blues  
Climb the fence books and pens  
I can tell that we are going to be friends  
I can tell that we are going to be friends

VERSE 2:



Walk with me, Suzy Lee  
Through the park and by the tree  
We will rest upon the ground  
And look at all the bugs we found  
Safely walk to school without a sound  
Safely walk to school without a sound

VERSE 3:

Well here we are, no one else  
We walked to school all by ourselves  
There's dirt on our uniforms  
From chasing all the ants and worms  
We clean up and now it's time to learn  
We clean up and now it's time to learn

VERSE 4:

Numbers, letters, learn to spell  
Nouns and books, we show and tell  
At playtime we will throw the ball  
Back to class, through the hall  
Teacher marks our height against the wall  
Teacher mark our height against the wall

BRIDGE:

And we don't notice any time pass  
We don't notice anything  
We sit side by side in every class  
Teacher thinks that I sound funny  
But she likes the way you sing

VERSE 5:

Tonight I'll dream while in my bed  
When silly thoughts go through my head  
About the bugs and alphabet  
And when I wake tomorrow I'll bet  
That you and I will walk together again  
I can tell that we are going to be friends  
Yes I can tell that we are going to be friends

A "hugging circle" was suggested as a fitting good-bye. Everybody received a

---



hug and gifted a hug to every other person ... fifteen minutes of hugs, smiles, warmth and laughter all around!!

## APPENDIX



Appendix I  
Transcription of Flip Charts

Youth Plenary, Day One

How can you influence change?

- Protest, demonstrate, march
- Write letters
- Petition
- Volunteer
- Call the media
- Talk to others in your community
- Teach/inform others
- Spread the word and keep the pressure on
- Drama, theatre, art and music
- Email and internet
- Advertise (radio, tv)
- Demoralize public figure



- Round table focus groups to talk about politics openly
- Educate yourself - understand the issue
- Boycott (ie. Walmart)
- Fundraise
- Get involved
- Formal complaints
- Organize culturally based groups to highlight diversity in positive ways
- Make your voice be heard - stand up for what you believe in
- Talk to stakeholders
- Express your opinion
- Raise awareness
- Surveys
- Leadership
- Get a lot of people behind an issue - more visibility - quicker change
- Make connections with people who have the power
- Acting in a positive way
- VOTE !!!!!

## Appendix II

### Flip Charts: Youth Plenary, Day One

#### Getting From Protest to Policy

- Write letters to decision makers in government
- Life style changes
- Protests
- Polls
- Formal complaint
- Journalism
- Public education/awareness
- Legal action
- Media
- Public policy (whatever you choose to do or not to do)



- Rallies
- Surveys
- Fundraising
- Become aware and involved
- Petitions
- Theatre
- Community courts
- Talk to stakeholders
- Demoralize public figure
- Letters (ie. to MP's) signed by many
- Youth advisory committees
- Boycotts
- Educating yourself and understanding the issues
- Literature
- Presentations
- Lobbying
- Annual general meetings
- Hold seminars and information sessions
- Strike/protest
- Word of mouth
- Vote
- Focus groups/round tables
- Post ideas in building
- Understand legalities and legislation
- Educate youth
- Connect and network
- Advertisements
- Music and arts
- Email
- Calls to action
- Opinion editorials for your community and school newspapers
- Make your voice heard
- Personal visits to MP's, MLA's, Ombudsman
- Keep the pressure on
- Talk to others
- Talk to your professional group or union
- Speak up!
- Advocate
- Create activist groups



- Show the need for service through statistics and interviews rather than protest and include the media first

### Appendix III

#### Flip Charts: Youth Dialogue Groups, Day One

##### WHAT R THE ISSUES?

- More sexual health in elementary, junior, and high school
- Lack of faith in the education system and systems in general – mental health, foster care, stigma, more funding
- School bullies – peers, friends, gangs, racism, violence, escalation of violence, patterns of violence, conflict resolution
- Appreciation for the arts, graphics, skateboarding, sub cultures, stereotypes - not many options for alternative recreation
- Needs of youth constantly changing due to transitions – how to keep up?
- Engaging youth
- Funding for schools, teachers, solutions, education and recreation
- Drugs, prescriptions, labelling, ADD, stereotypes
- Youth confused by different messages at school and at home
- False expectations – young people not responsible for the romanticizing of image of young people
- Give group different avenues to feel involved or supported and to be



- engaged and for adult/youth interactions (generalizations on both parts)
- Equal opportunities for youth
- Treatment of eating disorders and mental health issues
- Minimum wage jobs and employment opportunities
- Low self esteem and image
- Poverty
- Access to education
- Family/society, behavioural problems, parenting, family values and structures
- General knowledge accessible to youth
- Give youth a chance to change
- More youth conference awareness
- Chances to be heard
- Not everyone fits into the mainstream education system
- Labelling in mental health issues – mental health issues are ‘normal’
- Dealing with violence on the streets
- Mutilation, suicide, break the stereotypes, don’t just diagnose – counselling
- Most urban centres do not have drop-ins or shelters for youth
- Adults/parents create negative environments, too much work – family counselling is necessary, parenting gap
- Providing safe homes instead of shelters for youth
- Responsive governments
- Teaching techniques of the 3<sup>rd</sup> world
- Keep supporting youth past 18 years old – don’t stop there!
- Awareness of homosexuality – too many sexual and racial comments; don’t teach kids about diversity; look at HOW we educate about diversity – terms need clarification – point out good differences
- More opportunities for youth to demonstrate their skills and attributes
- Offer media awareness classes to children and youth
- Capture potential and make sure positive issues are highlighted
- Bus money? Tuition costs?
- Gender issues and discrimination
- Educate youth about forms of abuse so they recognize that they can do something about addictions and don’t have to stay involved in dependency
- Younger voting age of 16
- Don’t let them cut contraception funding – international education – HIV AIDS
- Shelter 9 – super! – co-ed, pets, inclusive, teach basic life skills for reintegration into the community
- More access to condoms at lower prices
- Self awareness- it’s okay to be ‘you’
- Teach children not to bully



- More access to technology
- Racism still rampant in schools
- Teachers need to be more involved to help students grow, school get kids to feel welcome
- Poor job market for youth
- Harassment
- Less care about education
- Prejudice
- Drugs, drinking, substance abuse
- Systemic assimilation
- Clubbing
- Being treated as criminals, growing up to be criminals
- Depression
- Discrimination
- Exclusion
- Loss of identity
- Poor health
- Money problems
- Sex
- Lack of proper nutrition
- Lack of physical activity
- Materialism
- Sexual harassment from cops
- Peer pressure
- Child pornography
- Lack of national networking
- Lack of resources and access to resources
- Sexual exploitation
- Negative stereotypes
- Lack of positive role models
- Cultural influences
- Media
- Apathy and indifference
- Misogyny
- Sexism
- Poor body image
- Sadism
- Family issues
- Popularity rate of suicide



- Gang violence
- Gang involvement
- Power tripping
- Poverty
- Eating disorders
- Teen pregnancy
- Growing rate of STI's
- Lack of leadership
- Worry about environment in the future
- Growing up too fast
- Need for instant gratification
- Diabetes
- HIV AIDS
- Starvation
- Bullying
- Not having needs met for disabilities
- Need more specialized services for disabilities
- Need more awareness of disabilities need more services to integrate street youth
- Lack of funding and loss of services
- More preventative services
- Internet insecurities
- Cultural genocide
- Popular culture doesn't reflect our values
- Injustice from legal system
- Improper allocation of funding
- Need more core funding
- No place to live
- Stress
- Loneliness
- Lack of extended family and intergenerational interaction
- Generation gaps
- Lack of action
- Egocentrism
- Popularity/social status
- Disconnection with nature
- Bad influences from within the family
- Homelessness
- Lack of education for working with youth



- No direction, overwhelming choices
- Lack of interest
- Too much freedom
- Lack of male resources
- Need a directory of services for youth locally, regionally and nationally
- Political awareness
- Physical abuse
- Emotional/mental abuse
- Neglect
- Children's resources
- Better school resources: textbooks, supplies, lockers
- More street protection from drugs and crime
- Youth crime
- Prostitution
- Gender issues
- More support for gay kids
- Need alternative ways of dealing with crime
- Teen sexuality and healthy relationships
- Physical and mental health
- Education infrastructure
- Social injustice
- Immigration and human rights
- Crime and victimization
- Life/work skills
- Family values
- Mentoring
- Poverty and housing
- Youth leadership support and development
- Youth accessibility

### **Day Three -- Next Steps**

- A community approach
- Keep up communication with one another
- Raise awareness
- Develop web chat group
- Post information on the web from individual communities, provinces etc.
- Form provincial committees
- Form vision and mission statements for youth and by youth, becoming



- empowered, seeing as valued contributing citizens
- Welcoming, open support and mentorship from adults
- Collaborate to discuss responsibilities of individual committees
- Work with people strengths and talents
- Hear youth voices
- Bridge the gap!
- We need to advocate for change
- Restructure high schools and other community environments to welcome youth
- Use your voices ... continuous engagement
- Break down adults/youth stereotypes ... it's a two-way thing!
- Create effective and accessible platforms for youth
- Use national youth voice at the expense of local/sectoral voice
- Input without spreading too thin
- Multi phase approach and continuity: Phase I – Build Awareness/network, Phase II – Develop the platform, Phase III – Move it forward
- Develop networks
- Get going!
- Make sure diverse voices are heard and engaged
- Discussions at your home base
- Encourage youth to get involved
- Plug into resources in your community
- Action starts at the grass roots, bottom/up, inclusive, representative networks
- Help each other create forums
- Need good presenters/public speakers
- Language is powerful, pay attention – get messages across
- Create codes of ethics for forums and do not impose your ideas on others
- Diversity and difference is ok; we don't need common ground to move forward
- Be courageous
- Celebrate and recognize successes
- Standing committees on human rights
- Hold forums across Canada
- Find out from Senator Landon Pearson where important meetings are taking place and try to plug in
- Provide a structure where youth voices can be heard
- Make politics more accessible to youth by using more youth friendly language
- Break stereotypes and have adult support to acknowledge valuable insights of youth



- Learn from what's already been done in Canada and in the world
- Highlight what has already been done and take it to the next level
- Build on expertise and work already done
- Youth working groups
- Initiate regional forums
- Young people need to be meaningfully involved in follow-up activities
- Connect VSO's to work towards the same goals in regions
- Educate youth and give them ongoing support
- Connect media groups to our work (tv, radio, news, magazines)
- Lobby provincial/territorial and federal governments to take their own first steps
- Stop the rhetoric
- Need political leadership to make efforts on our issues
- Focus on the real solutions
- Create a movement
- Don't reinvent the wheel
- Environmental scan, who is not at the table? What is working?
- Bring organizational development to Boards of Directors to employ youth in individual organizations
- Engage adversaries and people who have a stereotypical view of Canadian youth
- Use an integrated approach; include youth issues on a variety of themes; mosaic method
- Changing environments (social and physical)
- Inter generational approach
- Seniors and elders need to champion youth
- Redefine youth to change stereotypes
- Engage private sector
- Direct action/dissemination of information (ie. UNCRC)

## Appendix II

### Evaluation Summary

More than 50% of the participants submitted evaluations to the organizers. Generally it is clear from the responses that the conference represented a successful first step in bringing youth together to voice their issues and for the NCA membership to hear what they youth were saying.



- Almost without exception respondents felt very connected and engaged with this conference.
- Most respondent felt that the conference made concrete progress in advancing youth issues.
- Most respondents reported that they were very confident that the ideas developed were realistic and achievable.

Most respondents understood that the identified issues at the conference represented a good first step in a much longer process however were anxious for follow up to the conference and getting to the next stages towards influencing policy change. Several respondents saw the value in having provincial conferences to mirror this national conference. A few respondents expressed concern about not getting to solutions. Some respondents acknowledged that partnership between youth and adults was essential as would be federal and political leadership to make ideas achievable.

Factors critical to the success of the ideas worked out in this conference relate to follow up, setting targets, more youth friendly language and deadlines. It was suggested that members of the NCA should develop programming around the crucial issues that surfaced during the conference and that all those participating are responsible for keeping track of the ideas and communicating them clearly to as many policy makers as possible. The young people who participated in the conference were enthusiastic about continuing to connect with the process by maintaining the network and spreading the word when they returned home. Engaging other 'youth' serving organizations and other child/family/poverty groups in the membership and process could enhance this energy and connectedness.

One evaluation suggested that youth should be invited to share the outcomes of this conference with Parliamentarians. Youth want to stay involved directly in the delivery of these issues to government. It was recognized that passion is a key ingredient for advancing political causes and that participants should stay connected via email updates, chat rooms, website with links to programs and services of participating organizations. It was acknowledge by an NCA member that commitment by youth has been demonstrated at this conference and now it has to be matched by adults, professionals and governments.

Generally the respondents felt that most issues were covered well and that it was too early in the process to address all issues and common interests.



Developing a continuing process for youth input for the next steps on the issues identified and having youth representation on the NCA steering committee would be a good way to keep the issues alive. It was suggested that if more youth with 'diverse abilities' were to be included in the next conference that more issues would be identified and that more marginalized youth should be engaged in the process for the same reason. Nevertheless it was noted by respondents that Aboriginal youth were well represented and that participants learned a lot about their realities. Two neglected areas of representation are gay teens and the inclusion of environmental organizations.

"All" the issues that surfaced were considered particularly relevant to theme of the conference. Youth panels and presentations were much appreciated by respondents. The evaluations expressed that the pre-conference day was a huge success and that even more time to discuss the issues, identify solutions and prepare presentations for the NCA membership. It was stated that adults listening is not enough and that to get to the stage of identifying concrete steps is critical.

Aspects of the conference that should have been done differently related to having more time to devote to solutions, better time management, more free time for youth participants, more support/training for youth who shared their personal stories and more time in general to dialogue. On the whole the evaluations reflected enthusiasm for the agenda and respondents were satisfied with the process. The majority of respondents said that they would attend a larger conference on youth issues next issues given the opportunity.

Other comments reflected appreciation for the skills of the youth facilitators, good representation of marginalized youth, the need for follow up and the need to hear from policy makers about how to influence political change. It was noted that training on issues of disclosure and advocacy would have helped during the pre conference day to orient and support youth participants. There was a fair amount of concern expressed about the next steps although this concern was well balanced by enthusiastic support for the whole conference, the agenda, the welcoming atmosphere and the fun, the empowerment, new friendships and solidarity youth are taking away with them from the conference.

"Thank you for a great time. I am going home a new person who understands youth issues and that WE HAVE A VOICE."



