

**GIVE YOUTH A CHANCE**  
***AN ACTION GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH***

***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

This handbook, Give Youth a Chance: An Action Guide for Working with Youth, and a companion handbook for youth called, Youth First, provide suggestions for planning youth initiatives in NWT communities.

They were prepared using information gathered to give government a clear picture of the problems and issues facing youth and direction on how youth can be helped to find solutions.

The two handbooks were a mutual initiative of the following departments: Education, Culture and Employment, Municipal and Community Affairs, Health and Social Services and Human Resources Development Canada. They were prepared with the assistance of the following youth researchers:

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## **GIVE YOUTH A CHANCE**

### ***AN ACTION GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH***

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#### ***INTRODUCTION***

Within every young heart is a dream. Where some dream of fame, others may dream simply - a quiet place to sleep and enough food on the table. As a community, it is our responsibility to find and nourish the dream within every child, not to judge but to support, listen and pay attention.

Every generation of youth has its issues, challenges and labels. These are most often shaped by events and trends in the world around them and society's view of young people's responses. In the 1990s, discussions about youth have focussed on youth unemployment, longer transitions to work and independence, and the despair and frustration which result from perceived lack of opportunities.

The GNWT wanted to hear from youth themselves and community members about the concerns of northern youth and to help identify some possible solutions. An extensive research paper was completed that looked at some of these things. It formed the basis of the Give Youth A Chance handbook. This handbook was developed to help adults work more effectively with young people in their communities.

Although the research paper focussed on identifying problems, there are many young people out there doing very positive things within their families and communities. As well as individual stories, we know from the statistics that people are staying in school longer and returning more often. We know that the majority of youth are happy at home and think positively about the future. But we wanted to make sure that all young people have these same opportunities. So we did the research, and asked young people what was on their minds.

### ***We found out that...***

The needs of young people are as many and varied as the individuals themselves. But their concerns are connected with one another - a dropout issue may be a substance abuse issue which may be a family issue. The needs of the whole child must be addressed. While this complexity is recognized, the research outcomes have been grouped for ease.

### **SECTION ONE - WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES FACING NWT YOUTH?**

NWT youth on average get less than 10 years of education. This reduces their chances of getting a job or pursuing other opportunities.

One third of NWT students need some kind of extra support in school. Some NWT youth do not find school challenging enough and would like more "relevant and optional courses." They say there is a lack of discipline in the classroom and teachers and students are not getting along as well as they should.

#### ***Employment***

Youth expect that they will have jobs in the wage economy. However, the reality is there are a limited number of jobs in the small communities especially for those with low education levels. The unemployment rate for youth in the NWT is high. Youth may need to seek employment outside their community. In addition, many young people are caught in the cycle of no job, no experience; no experience, no job. Opportunities are needed to help young people gain valuable work experience.

#### ***Housing***

There is a shortage of housing in many NWT communities, including a lack of housing for young single people. Overcrowding at home is one factor in students leaving school early. Homelessness among youth is starting to be seen in larger centres in the NWT.

*"Young people who are adequately trained to enter the workforce experience less stress."*

#### ***Health and Social Supports***

Youth experience many changes physically and emotionally. The mental, emotional and physical health of many NWT youth is poor.

- For many NWT youth family relationships are not strong. Friends can provide support, but in some cases friends add pressure to use drugs, alcohol or commit crimes.
- Youth in the NWT have sex younger and more often than most Canadian youth. There are more teenage pregnancies here. Sexually active youth are at risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS.

- NWT youth are among the victims of violence and crime, and also the offenders. Child abuse, including child sexual abuse, can have far-reaching and lifelong effects. In some communities sexual abuse isn't being sufficiently addressed "because it's taboo and people don't understand what it is."
- There is a growing rate of violence and crime among NWT youth.
- The suicide rate in the NWT is five times the national average. Youth say "drinking and drugs are a bigger problem than people think they are." Youth believe that little is being done about the problem, often because adults are just as involved themselves in substance abuse.
- Poor nutrition among NWT children and youth creates problems.
- Recreation and physical activity play an important role in preventing at-risk behaviour and in physical and mental health. Older youth tend to exercise less, and "visit" with friends more.

Youth make up almost 20% of the population in NWT, and their number is growing. Getting youth involved and supporting them will make a difference in many lives and in your community. Reaching out today means securing the future for tomorrow.

*"Adults providing community counselling services will only be successful if they are easy to talk to and can be trusted."*

**SECTION TWO - ADVICE FROM YOUTH FOR ADULTS**

**Encourage Us**

Encouragement can help give youth the confidence to try new things.

**Recognize and Support Us**

Youth need to be recognized for what they accomplish and who they are.

**Try not to be Intimidating**

Try to find ways to equalize your relationship with youth, recognizing that adults have more power and resources.

**Provide Options**

Sports and physical activity are great, but not everyone's choice and not all of the time. Be creative in developing a variety of youth activities.

**Work With Us**

Effective teams are characterized by trust, respect and a sense of belonging.

**Make Expectations Clear**

Youth perform better and are more comfortable when the expectations are clear about what should be done.

*"Youth need to be recognized for what they accomplish and who they are."*

### **SECTION THREE - WHAT'S NEEDED IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

#### ***In the NWT youth say they want:***

- Help to deal with abuses in communities and among youth.
- More organized and a better mix of activities in the evenings and summer.
- Help to get an education and deal with problems at school.
- More youth employment opportunities and supports to gain work experience.
- Better communications among all community members.
- More support, encouragement and leadership from adults and the community in general.
- An open, active youth centre - a place to hang-out.
- Clearer expectations and help fulfilling those expectations.
- Chances to be heard and to be recognized.
- Less stereotyping and intimidation.
- More active youth involvement and youth groups.

The success of any youth program or service depends on it meeting a clear need. Work on the issues that youth say are important. Research in your community might make it clearer how to address these issues, or identify needs other than those listed above.

*"Youth initiative should maximize youth input, involvement and recognition."*

#### **Finding Out About the Specific Youth Needs in Your Community**

A needs assessment identifies the gap between what's available and what's needed. If your community already has a youth centre, perhaps more information is needed on the kinds of programs which will increase the participation of youth.

Involve youth as researchers. Involving youth from the beginning will give the research results credibility among young people and help build their skills and confidence.

Here are the basic steps to doing research on needs:

- Decide what you want to know.
- List the people who can tell you what you want to know.
- Divide the research tasks among your work group.
- Set a deadline for information gathering.
- Prepare specific questions to ask people.
- Record clearly and concisely the information gathered.

- Keep track of where you got your information from, including written sources.
- File the research results in a way that makes them easy to find.
- Recognize the need among the youth involved to learn new skills before taking on new tasks.  
Make sure they have the support they need.
- 

### **Why Do Research?**

It is easier to target a project or program and meet with success if needs are clearly identified.

Awareness is created through asking questions and talking with people.

Youth, the community, potential supporters and funders have confidence that decisions made about youth programs or services are based on solid information.

## **SECTION FOUR - WORKING WITH YOUTH**

It is usually in the best interest of the community for adults and youth to work together. Youth issues and needs are not isolated from general community issues. Housing, employment, welfare policy, policing and recreation are just some of the issues affecting youth. Being a part of decision-making allows youth to be included in discussions, rather than simply consulted before or after policies or decisions are made. Involving youth in decisions which affect them also increases the chances that responses to youth issues will meet existing needs.

### **Options for Working with Youth**

Here are some ways to work with youth in your community:

Organize a youth forum to identify key issues or discuss a specific issue like developing an action plan for setting up a youth centre.

Hire students to organize community activities and give them work experience.

Support an existing youth group in a joint project. For example, a District Education Authority (DEA) could work with a local youth group to set up a tutoring program at a youth centre.

Involve youth as committee or board members. A recreation committee or a DEA could reserve a seat for youth members.

Provide opportunities for youth to make presentations to decision-makers. A band council could ask a youth group to make occasional presentations on various issues.

Seek youth opinions on an ongoing basis. A health and social services committee may meet with interested youth one evening a month.

Invite youth to participate in conferences, workshops or meetings. These could be local, regional or territorial in nature and be on topics ranging from land claims to social issues.

Form a youth group linked to decision-makers. A hamlet council could have a youth group which it supports and consults on a regular basis.

Work with youth to organize a social or recreational event, such as a spring carnival.

Give youth a specific responsibility for part of a special event, such as an anniversary celebration or spring carnival.

Involve youth in writing job descriptions or sitting on hiring committees for jobs that directly affect youth, such as the recreation co-ordinator.

**Short term involvement** of youth in specific projects or events can be a first step toward a more long term and on-going commitment.



**A developmental approach** to youth involvement includes the gradual increasing of youth skills, responsibilities and participation within an organization.

The level of youth participation will depend on a variety of factors including: the age and skills of the youth involved; the willingness of your organization to encourage youth involvement; and, the experience of both the adults and youth in working together.

*"Youth issues and needs are not isolated from general community issues."*

### **Forming Partnerships**

However you and your organization decide to involve youth, a partnership approach works best. The most successful partnerships combine youth meeting among themselves with youth interacting with adults.

For example, if your local recreation committee has decided to include youth representatives, youth members should be encouraged to meet on their own or with other youth before each regular committee meeting. This gives young people a chance to find common ground and organize themselves before being involved with committees which form policy or make decisions.

### **Good Partnership Tips**

- Recognize the strengths and contributions which youth can bring to a partnership process.
- Build on existing youth participation. Young people who are already involved should help decide how to expand youth participation in the future.
- Provide different levels of involvement for youth who have varying interest, commitment and time.
- Work to improve relationships by having shared goals and values, keeping open lines of communication, and having clear roles and responsibilities.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring is an ideal way to provide youth with the support they need. A mentor provides advice and guidance. A mentor can help youth get organized, clearly identify issues and to think through solutions.

It is easy to fall into the trap of doing for youth, rather than providing the support necessary for them to take on a task themselves. Effective support encourages youth to take on increasing responsibility for decisions which affect their lives.

### **Effective Mentoring Tips**

- Listen, make suggestions, ask useful questions and make youth aware of pitfalls.
- Present information in concrete ways.
- Facilitate discussions which lead to achievable goals.

- Provide on-the-spot skill development.
- Decide whether more or less intervention is needed.
- Prepare for ongoing negotiations on control and leadership issues among youth and between youth and adults.
- Advocate on behalf of youth.
- Provide a link between youth and adults.

*"Youth groups are used when they are attractive, motivated, active and have leadership."*

These are factors to consider when involving youth in decision making:

- Youth may have misunderstandings about adults.
- Adults may have misconceptions about youth.
- Youth may lack skills and experience in making decisions.
- Adults may lack skills and experience in supporting youth participation.
- There is a tendency to see youth participation as the responsibility of one person, rather than the collective responsibility of an organization or community.
- Youth participation is often seen as a side issue rather than as a core element that should be formalized in overall goals and policy.
- The slow pace of change can be discouraging.
- Youth want to see action NOW!
- Turnover can be high because young people are experiencing many changes.
- Involving a diverse group of youth may conflict with tight time frames.
- Resources and time are needed to train and give youth experience.

*"Advocate on behalf of youth."*

## **SECTION FIVE - GETTING BROADER COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

Once a youth project has been decided on, you will want to get the support and help of others. These may be people within your organization or you may want to approach other people in the community, such as a teacher, school principal, social worker or drug and alcohol counsellor and youth themselves.

By spreading the word about your idea, you can enlist some new team members or develop a support network. Both can be valuable resources. It has been said that it takes a whole village to raise a child.

### **Encouraging Youth Participation**

Recruitment requires personal contact. Newspaper advertisements, radio announcements or posters for general membership drives are rarely successful. Once one or two interested youth have been identified, work with them to recruit others. Youth to youth recruitment works best. Whatever your recruitment method, it's important to be clear about:

- consulting with youth to get their input
- the goals of youth involvement as identified by the organization seeking youth involvement
- the ways youth can be involved
- the resources available for youth (money, people, office use, meeting space)
- the kinds of supports available from resource people
- the concrete benefits of their participation

Whenever possible, involve youth in making presentations to school classes or groups of young people. Contests which are well-publicized are another way to appeal to youth.

Remember that youth participation often involves a small core-group with other youth coming and going as activities or projects interest them. Begin with the youth who are interested. It is not necessary to wait until a large group is involved.

*"It takes a whole village to raise a child."*

### **The Team Approach**

A team approach for mentors or youth resource people allows the sharing of responsibility. Team members can act as a sounding board for each other. They can offer different approaches to working with young people. There is less danger of adults having a sense of ownership or taking credit on behalf of youth successes when they work as a team. Having more than one mentor also creates less disruption if one resource person leaves the community or misses meetings because of illness or other responsibilities.

New team members need to be as committed to the work as you are. That commitment can be developed by making sure they are just as informed as you are and by sharing decision-making. This is true whether your new team members are youth or adults. To make working together more fun and productive try:

**Building Team Spirit** - Successful teams have shared goals and build on the strengths of each member to do more and do things better than they could as individuals.

**Spreading The Work Load** - Avoid situations where someone feels resentful that they are being taken for granted. Respect people and encourage them to honestly set and express limits to what they can contribute in time and energy.

**Motivating People** - Share your enthusiasm. Be a good listener to the ideas and opinions of others. Get to know and understand the views and feelings of each team member.

**Managing Time Effectively** - Most people hate to waste their time. Being well organized can avoid time-wasting activity or hanging around waiting for something to happen.

**Sharing Ideas and Skills** - Most people like to be valued for their ideas and skills. At the same time, they are usually happy to hear the ideas of others and learn new skills. Promote sharing and discourage the creation of an "elite few."

### **A Support Network**

There are a variety of people in each community whose jobs or interests make them obvious youth supporters. A support network can provide ideas or a helping hand. If supporters are involved early in a project, they can offer valuable advice and information. If people have contributed, they are more likely to support a program or service. Try to understand the perspectives of all people. Constructive criticism may be valid and provide valuable clues on how to improve your project.

*"Try to understand the perspectives of all people."*

## **SECTION SIX - DEVELOPING SKILLS**

Successful youth participation means recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests and abilities of young people. Building skills will be part of almost every youth program or service.

Often youth do not have the skills to organize programs and activities or experience in making decisions. The ongoing building of skills as youth mature helps maintain youth involvement over the long term. A continuous commitment to skill development is necessary for new generations of youth as older youth grow up or go away to work or school.

### **Strategies for Building Skills**

Building skills can happen informally, as a program or activities develop.

Individual young people have different learning styles. Learning while doing is often most effective.

Practice and role-playing can be useful ways to build confidence in a new task, such as public speaking.

Role modelling is important. Youth learn by example. Encourage youth to watch or "shadow" you or older youth at work. Explain the steps you take in carrying out tasks, how decisions are made, how organizations work and the budgeting process.

New skills contribute to a sense of self-worth. A large part of developing new skills is having the confidence to try new things. Encouragement helps build confidence. Trust is essential for anyone to feel comfortable with making mistakes, a part of any learning process.

When new tasks arise, check with youth to find out if this will be a new experience. Ask them to think about what it involves and what support they will need.

Build in time for fun and socializing.

Some skills youth may need:

- organizing
- fundraising
- co-operation
- problem-solving
- conflict resolution
- assertiveness
- proposal writing
- communications
- public relations

- public speaking
- leadership

*"Encouragement helps build confidence."*

### **SECTION SEVEN - PLANNING**

Planning is an important stage. It requires patience on the part of people who are action-oriented.

Advance planning reduces the risk of failure and helps things go smoothly. Ideally, youth are involved in all aspects of planning. Involvement in planning creates ownership in the end result.

A plan for any project, event, activity or program will usually include the following steps:

#### **Step 1. Set Goals and Objectives**

A goal states in general terms what you hope to accomplish. For example: Give youth a chance to be heard.

Objectives are the targets you will work toward to achieve your goal. For example:

- Involve youth in decision making on the hamlet council and the recreation committee.
- Provide ways for youth to be consulted by school staff, MLA, DEA, counsellors and health centre.
- Form a community youth group.
- Provide leadership training for group members and a mentor.

Goals and objectives can help keep you on track.

#### **Step 2. Plan an Action Strategy**

An action plan should answer the following questions:

Work plan and Schedule:

- What has to be done to reach your objectives?
- In what order will you do things?
- How long will it take to reach your goal and objectives?
- What deadlines need to be set along the way to reaching your goal?

Personnel and Training:

- What skills are needed to reach your objectives?

- Who has the skills or how can they be acquired?
- Who will be responsible for what tasks?

**Step 3. Establish a Budget**

- What will the costs be?
- How will you cover the costs?

**Step 4. Share Information**

- Who needs to know about your idea for you to reach your goal?
- How will you evaluate your project and share this information?

Once you have put your plan on paper, you have reason to celebrate. This written plan will be a valuable resource for funding proposals, information packages, and as background information for new team members. Build stages into your plan so everyone can see how far they have come, as well as how far there is to go.

*"Give youth a chance to be heard."*

## **SECTION EIGHT - FUNDRAISING**

For many projects, such as a youth centre, fundraising can be a major task. Fundraising should be a shared responsibility. Youth can show surprising amounts of energy, enthusiasm and effectiveness in raising money for something they support wholeheartedly. Fundraising is largely "selling an idea." Who better to do that than the people most directly involved?

Selling an idea and getting financial support for it requires the ability to talk clearly about the goals and need for your project. Until confidence and skills are secure, a resource person should go with youth when they lobby or have fundraising meetings. If the young people have been properly prepared, the role of the resource person will be limited to acting as a backup if needed.

Raising money and collecting donated materials and supplies locally is an ideal way for organizations and businesses to actively demonstrate community support for youth.

Sometimes getting funding may require writing a proposal. It is best to contact funding sources before beginning to determine exactly what they need to know. This will save a lot of time in the long run. Funding sources will also have examples of proposals if an outline is needed. Consideration should be given to identifying more than one funding source to spread the costs.

When seeking funding it is useful to keep in mind the difference between a project and a program. A project is of a specific duration with a start and finish. Programs are usually on-going. Many programs begin as projects, which over time are proven to successfully fill a need. Some programs have small amounts of core, or program funding. Funding agencies are sometimes reluctant to commit themselves to providing on-going funding. Pilot projects, trying something new and innovative, are often more attractive.

*"Fundraising should be a shared responsibility."*



## **SECTION NINE - GOING PUBLIC**

Publicizing youth projects and services helps to:

- attract participants
- gain credibility
- gain supporters
- break down myths and stereotypes about youth

In a partnership, youth will take on their share of the work which could include acting as spokesperson, writing stories and news releases, or making posters. Youth may need some support to tackle certain publicity tasks effectively.

Try having youth make presentations to community groups to get the word out. Public speaking is an opportunity to gain confidence.

### **Working with the Media**

It is a good idea to meet with the media. Before contacting the media it is important that you be well prepared. Anticipate the questions the media may ask and remember that you are in control of the interview.

If there is no local media in your community, encourage youth to write a story for a newspaper such as Nunatsiaq News, News North or send in a photo (with some information). CBC and IBC can be contacted by phone. If there is a special event or meeting happening in your community, out of town media might be there and can be contacted to do a special feature on your project.

Sharing information with other communities may bring support, new ideas or encouragement from surprising sources.

*"Youth may need some support to tackle certain publicity tasks effectively."*

## **SECTION TEN - THINGS TO REMEMBER**

**Recognize the small successes** - These are important victories on the way to meeting overall goals.

**The number of people involved is not the sole measure of success** - A small group of committed youth can be the start of involving more young people.

**Turnover is not necessarily a sign of failure** - There are many factors which can impact on the participation of young people which includes moving on to other areas of interest.

**Balance adult and youth goals for the basis of evaluation** - The respective goals of adults and youth need to be kept in mind when measuring success. Youth must be able to evaluate their own involvement.

**Document along the way** - A written account will help describe how youth involvement has evolved. This information is useful for evaluations, to secure funding, to add credibility to the need for youth involvement, and to other communities struggling to start what you may already have achieved.

**Share Information** - Community decision-makers, parents, other adults, youth, and resource people need to know how their actions and roles contribute to, or detract from, youth participation. Other communities can also benefit from the experience of your initiative.

*"Recognize the small successes."*

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