

We asked: What is youth engagement like?

IT'S LIKE CHAOS
because it's unpredictable

RAW ENERGY
because they don't have their values preset
They don't make their decisions based on established norms
They have the freedom to dream, have ideas and are not afraid of them

A RIVER
because it has a start but no end

Exploring engagement with youth organizations: an initial step.

In 2002, the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement surveyed 78 youth-serving organizations across Canada to find out how youth engagement happens in their communities.

Most survey questionnaires were completed via telephone interview by the Centre's youth research team working across Canada. The data was then entered by them over the internet into a central database. Forty-two of the scans described a program or project and 36 described the organization as a whole.

Each scan was comprised of 32 questions, which were coded and analyzed by Community Works, an independent consulting firm. Analysis of the qualitative

information from the questionnaires required the assignment of 'codes' to each answer. Such code words (e.g. barriers, skills learned and youth friendly advocate) were determined from previous research completed by the Centre.

The key questions are repeated here with the findings. Answers to our favourite qualitative question (Youth Engagement is like... because...) stretch along our river of engagement. Please join us in the discovery...



A HOT AIR BALLOON
because the sky is the limit

Do you perform regular evaluations? Why or why not?

Youth are engaged if...

- they are **respected**, valued, **trusted**, feel appreciated, safe and comfortable
- they feel they are working in a **youth friendly environment** and are involved in a **meaningful** way
- their **voices** are being heard
- they are given the chance to be involved and **make decisions**, gain leadership **skills** and see their **ideas realized**
- there's a **social** aspect to their involvement
- they see **change** and **progress** happening
- their imaginations are touched and they are **valued**
- they are in a space where they have **ownership** and control

So how can you get involved?

We have begun to work closely with a variety of organizations to apply Centre's measures and research summaries of best practices to their work. We are conducting in partnership a series of organizational and program evaluations across the country that will add greatly to the collective knowledge and practice related to youth engagement. If you are interested in a collaborative project, please call (416) 597-8297 and ask for Stoney McCart, Director of the Centre or her assistant. Email tgmag@tgmag.ca. Other opportunities are identified regularly at www.engagementcentre.ca.

Partners in the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement led by The Students Commission are: Brock University, La Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-français (FJCF), Youth Launch Saskatoon, Wilfrid Laurier University's Community Psychology Program, Youth Net / Réseau Ado (YN / RA) The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), City of Vancouver, St. Mary's University, University of Regina and First Nations University of Canada

Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being: Youth Engagement

www.engagementcentre.ca

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What is it your organization or program does?

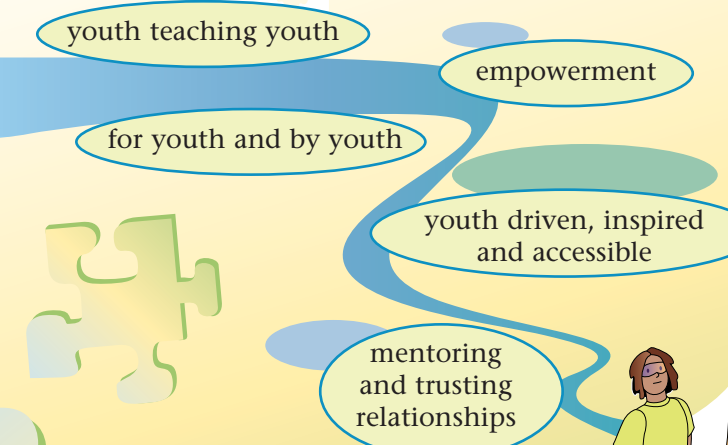
Most of the programs or organizations we surveyed focus on the skills learned by involved youth. For example, specific skills related to culture, recreation, education, life/work or general social skills. Additionally, many programs are specifically targeted towards certain youth populations. The following percentages show the targeted groups for each category.

- Youth communities: at-risk (21%), gay/lesbian/bisexual (12%), physically challenged (11%), mentally challenged (11%), youth with mental-health issues (9%), ethnic (11%), no specific youth (25%)
- Age groups being served: 8-12 years (12%), 13-15 (27%), 16-18 (34%), 19-25 (27%)
- Gender: female only (8%), male and female (92%)

For the issue-oriented program or organization, the greatest concerns are: community, society and the environment. (mentioned in 23 cases)

A PUZZLE
because the pieces never seem to fit

Tell us what you think are the most important components or parts of your program or organization which are key to youth engagement.



A MOUNTAIN
because it's a difficult process

Why do you do the work that you do?

Most people agreed that they feel empowered just by what they do... "It's inspirational, that young people are getting to work with young people."

Another factor is personally seeing youth become empowered from what they do. The concern for a healthy, safe and comfortable community really puts the idea of youth empowerment in context. "When I was in high school, I had a mentor, and I want to continue that tradition." "Giving back to a community that has given me so much." Another person was quoted saying, "You've gotta have fun."

"Youth inspire me, their potential, their energy!"

"It's really important to have a place where you're supported."

A SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED

Longevity of Organizations (years)

- 16-20: 21%
- 11-15: 11%
- 6-10: 6%
- 0-5: 5%

What is the relationship between annual budget and sustainability?

Annual budget (Canadian dollars)

- Missing: 1M-5M (8%), 500K-999K (27%), 250K-499K (25%), 100K-249K (61%)
- ≤49K: 50%
- 50K-99K: 53%

Technology: 92% have an e-mail address and 61% have a web site

Office location: school (35%), community centre (27%), other (38%)

Focus: Geographical - local (31%), regional (24%), provincial (20%), national (13%), international (9%), North American (3%)

Activities - urban (50%), rural (18%), suburban (10%), no specific focus (22%)

Youth involvement as staff...

- 28% Core staff
- 75% Seasonal staff
- 53% Volunteer staff

LEVEL OF YOUTH CONTROL in 78 organizations surveyed

- Youth: 78%
- Adult: 22%
- Youth: 63%
- Adult: 37%

* More than 50% of the organizations use more traditional governing structures (ie. Board). Only about 10% of organizations use less formal governing structures (ie. Stakeholders, Other).

What sustains engagement? Sandra's recipe for improving youth engagement.

For one large batch of 'Youth Engagement', you will need several friends, a very large place to mix everything together, time and the following ingredients:

- To create a solid base for engagement, first combine the following:
- 3 cups relevant organizational structure (programs, administration, staff, facilities etc.)
 - 1 3/4 cups good community relations
 - 3/4 cup easy access
 - 1/2 cup youth friendly environment
- Add the remaining ingredients and mix well.
- 2 cups youth in charge
 - 2 cups skills
 - 1 1/2 cups empowerment
 - 1 1/2 cups awareness for community, society and the environment
 - 1 cup advocacy voice for youth

Be sure to share your recipe with everyone involved and don't worry about overindulgence! The great thing about this recipe is that it can be altered over time and passed on to others. Enjoy!!

* Sandra Luken is a youth who read the extensive data report and summarized the data for this publication. The cup measurements used in her recipe are proportionate to the feedback collected from the scan.

WATER
because sometimes it's rough, sometimes it's calm, but it is always needed

WIND
because it gives youth a sense of direction

What attracts youth to your program?

A youth friendly environment that is comfortable (fun, friendly, casual, safe), where youth are treated with respect and can freely contribute their ideas in a non-judgemental atmosphere. Organizations need to be relevant to youth and through their programs and activities promote greater access and meaningful involvement.

BUBBLE TEA
because youth are like the bubbles in the tea, they are tasty and different

Interesting that youth are more involved informally when it comes to governance!?

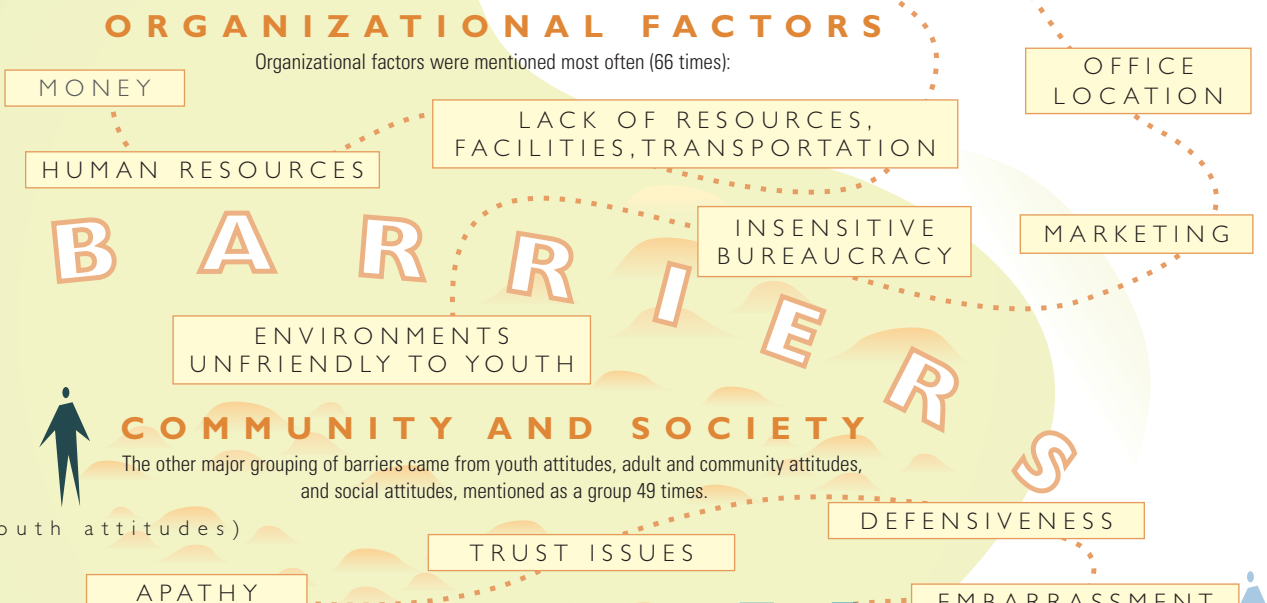
A MAGNET
because the more opportunities that are provided the more youth are committed and involved

Imagine a perfect world where your program reached all its goals. What change would you have effected?

In a perfect world we would notice distinct positive changes in health and social issues, community attitudes and environmental progress. Changes would also be apparent in the empowerment of youth and the structure of the society itself.

What are the challenges or barriers in engaging youth?

It is interesting to note that seven out of the 78 surveyed said that there are no barriers, that the barriers are not significant or that any barriers are managed.



What are the impacts, benefits or changes you want to see from your program in one year and five years?

- One Year...**
- make positive changes in the organization (e.g. more programs, funds and participants, better program access and relationship to the community)
 - community improvements (e.g. reduced violence and crime, increased opportunities for youth, and an overall improvement in society's attitude towards young people and youth issues)
 - a need for young people to become empowered so that they have more confidence and control over their lives

Five Years...
Changes to the organization and community still remain top priority, however, there is a greater concern for program access, survival and maintenance.

A TREE
because there are so many branches where you can get involved

"The world would be a place where young people are accepted for who they are."

"Are we there yet?"