

YOUNG Decision Makers

Young Decision Makers Meeting

(Nov. 30 - Dec. 2, 2007)

"Passion for work.
Age did not matter. Equal
voice (felt great)."

- Participant

"...there is a strong and positive push
for giving youth a voice in decision making.
That there is a lot of support."

- Participant



"I learned about the
power of group dialogue to
build innovative ideas and
expand structures."

- Participant

REPORT 1

At the first Young Decision Makers meeting, 60 youth and adults from organizations across the country came together to explore ideas to build and shape a meaningful process and structure for youth decision making in Canada at a national level. In addition, the ideas of those who participated in the online survey and various discussion groups prior to the meeting (approximately 1,000 young people) were brought to the table, bringing other voices into the mix.

The meeting achieved several concrete results:



- Having young people create a process to identify two young people, Joseph Singh and Ashley Teo, to represent Canada at UNICEF’s Children’s Forum and the commemorative high-level plenary meeting, World Fit For Children Plus 5 (WFFC+5), a follow-up to the outcome of the Special Session on Children (New York, Dec. 9-12, 2007).
- Reviewing and affirming core principles for Young Decision Makers gathered from the pre-meeting consultations.
- Identifying some critical next steps and committees for next steps, including a report committee and a web committee.
- Confirming the will and commitment of individuals and organizations to continue to develop the concept and work in collaboration with other organizations, to prevent overlap and strengthen each other's initiatives (examples: TakingITGlobal, Youth Parliament of Canada).
- Committing to hold a followup meeting, likely in March.

In order to develop an infrastructure to support youth in decision making, eight principles were identified through discussion groups and the results from the online surveys, as well as from the discussion held at the meeting, which added the principle of accountability. However, as the summary team looked back on the event, we realized that we began to put the principles into practice at our meeting even before we began discussion; it was just a matter of discovering them.

“I feel like our principles are intact and founded. Everyone is in a really good place to create change.”

- Participant

PRINCIPLES

Results from team ballots identified and prioritized the guiding principles, with the understanding that all are important and interconnected:

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 INCLUSIVITY | 5 ACCOUNTABILITY |
| 2 YOUTH-LED | 6 REPRESENTATION |
| 3 PARTICIPATORY | 7 YOUNG ADULT SUPPORT |
| 4 ADULT PARTNERSHIPS | 8 INFORMAL STRUCTURE |

* INCLUSIVITY

* PARTICIPATORY

"As an immigrant youth, I have always felt like an outsider. But the consistent mention of the importance of inclusivity has made me see that immigrant youth are not alone. So I have learned that while we are different at the same time we are all the same."

- Participant



"We need more time to discuss options for getting youth involved. Youth consultation is great but [what's required is] teaching about social activism. Not many here really understand the issues of poor and marginalized people (e.g. Aboriginal)."

- Participant

"I am going to look into ways to help strong external leaders that have strong support systems to better understand that their voice is disproportionately heard as compared to other youth."

- Participant



"Already engaged youth might not want to share the power that their engagement has provided them. Hide behind "having the correct skill set" as compared to disengaged youth."

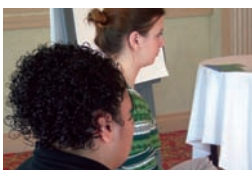
- Participant

Every team involved a variety of ages, organizations, and backgrounds. As we moved from small teams to the large group and back again, participants came together and brought different perspectives to the table. Although there were many differences of opinion, everyone felt comfortable enough to debate and disagree.

Those who did not feel comfortable getting their point across in the large group could have a representative speak for them and have their voice heard. In addition, the large group designated a wall to post ideas to ensure that nobody's voice, particularly minority and less confident voices, would get lost.

* YOUTH-LED

Young people were involved in every group and were supported to speak their minds. In both the small groups and the large group, youth took on leadership roles, reporting back to the large group, facilitating the open mic, and courageously speaking up. This principle was reflected strongly in all ideas generated by the group.



"Many organizations use a significantly more "youth-led" model than ours but still function well. Perhaps we need to shift."

- Participant

* ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

* YOUNG ADULT SUPPORT

"Youth together with adult support can accomplish many things in a short period of time. What other organizations are doing around the province. Other projects that are running in Canada and how you can get involved. Including and value everyone's opinion can help build framework."

- Participant



Adults and youth worked together in each team and communicated easily and respectfully. Adults were there as equal participants supporting youth and helping them with ideas. Young adults, those that were 18+, worked within each team sharing their experience.

If an outsider was listening and could not see the participants at the meeting, they would not be able to tell who was 14 and who was 41 by the way they spoke. They would not be able to tell our ages, but would find a flow in the conversation because our passion gave us a common language.

* ACCOUNTABILITY

* REPRESENTATION

The first next step of the Young Decision Makers was to take a test run at decision making. Our task was to select 2 youth delegates (17 years and under) to attend the UNICEF and World Fit For Children Plus 5 meetings in New York. A team of young people worked late into Saturday night to design a selection process and prepare. On Sunday morning, candidates were required to answer three questions and the entire group voted for their representatives. The two who were selected, Ashley and Joseph, have committed to reporting back to the group and keeping everyone involved.

"There is a large gap between engaged and disengaged youth. Both groups are misinformed on each other's motives and reason. Proper education is key to community response and success."

- Participant



"1. CONFUSED! Well...not really. (smiley) I've just found myself questioning what I've been doing to engage apathetic youth. 2. I feel like a lot of the youth engagement that I've been doing, and that a lot of people have been doing, is insulting to [some] youth. We are all expected to act the same and fall under the same umbrella of media drones. 3. I feel frustrated. I try to do what I can to change my community to a more welcoming place but there's only so much I can do."

- Participant

"I learned that some people are blind to see different points of view, and they are not willing to change their point of view. Some people like to talk about things they know nothing about and when someone who does know what they are talking about, wants to teach them they don't want to learn. So it's difficult to communicate. I feel like I have still got a lot to say, but at the same time I got a lot off my chest."

- Participant

INFORMAL STRUCTURE

Although the agenda was packed, teams were encouraged to pursue their own processes and explore creative ideas. Teams reported back to the large group in different ways including fun skits, creative presentations, ballot votes and flip chart notes. In addition to the flip charts, our graphic facilitator Todd illustrated our ideas and processes, transforming our words to lively and vibrant pictures, bringing another creative format to our planning.

The creativity flowed into the ideas for developing an infrastructure that supports youth decision making. Some teams developed structures for the big picture while others focused on elements, all thinking out of the box. As a next step, these parts and ideas will be explored and fit together. There will be a second report coming shortly that will outline the various options and models the groups designed.

"Leaders never choose between Option A or B, they choose bits of both options to create the best solution. Tension fosters growth in any group."

- Participant



"LOTS! There were so many opportunities to see good youth engagement at work. Information regarding different processes were so helpful. Also wonderful to see great facilitation. THANKS!"

- Participant

"Diffused thought process. I need lots of time to digest information."

- Participant

Now that the weekend meeting is over, we can look forward to other next steps, including another meeting in the spring of 2008. The next meeting will reach out to organizations that were unable to attend this year and will help move ahead with an infrastructure for youth in national decision making.

We hope that this captures a glimpse into the Young Decision Makers meeting, 2007.

Ankit, Amanda, Jyotsna and Nish
Summary Team

DEFINITIONS

Young Decision Makers: youth 17 and under

Young Adults: 18 - 25

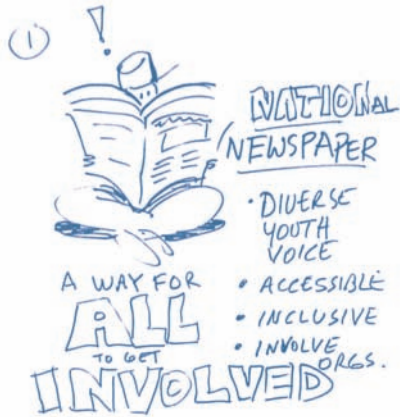
Adults: 25 plus



MEETING OUTCOMES:

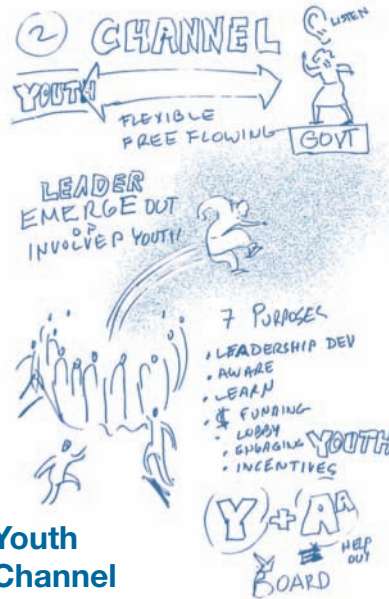
Team Ideas

Report 2 will provide a complete description of each team's model.



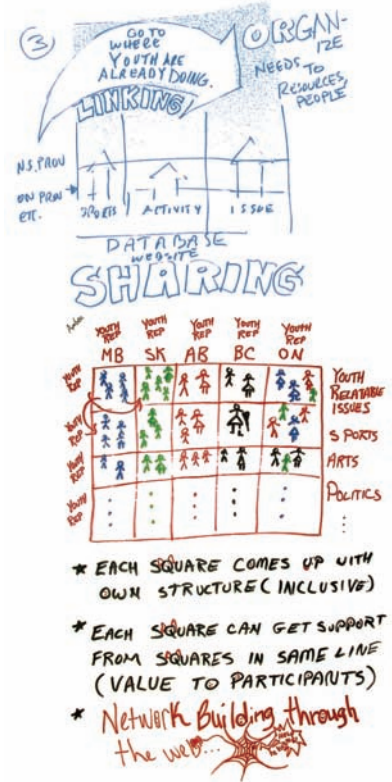
National Youth Newspaper

A youth-led newspaper is a vehicle for youth to express their voices about national issues creatively to other youth and influence adults and formal decision makers. As part of an overall structure, it addresses inclusivity, bringing diverse voices and talents to the table.



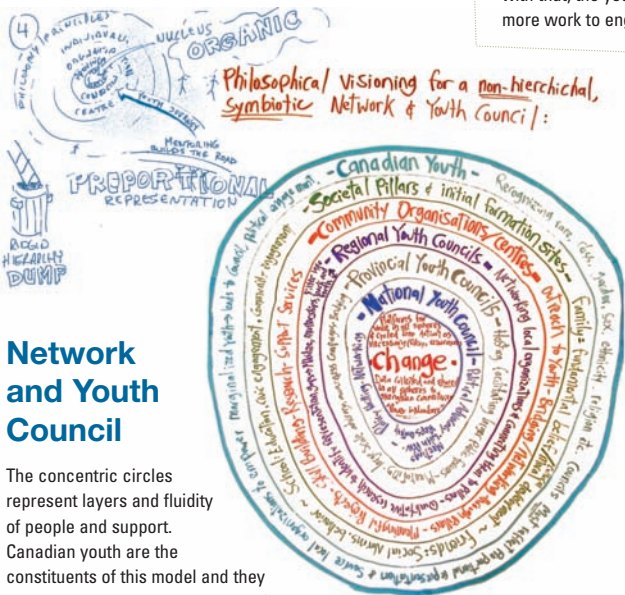
Youth Channel Ideas

Existing decision-making bodies, adult support groups, youth-led initiatives, or the young adult involvement would be a part of this movement to see what they can possibly contribute and for how long. A local network followed by a provincial network would be created as required by the region's particular needs. Ideally, a natural hierarchy of dedicated people would emerge with experience and along with that, the youth would realize where they need to do more work to engage young people.



National Online Youth Network

A nation-wide resource database that existing youth-driven organizations in all provinces/territories can use to communicate continuously matching support capacity to community needs as well as sharing information and expertise locally and nationally. Representatives are chosen for geographical representation as well as interest area, for example sports, social justice issues, arts, politics.



Network and Youth Council

The concentric circles represent layers and fluidity of people and support. Canadian youth are the constituents of this model and they make up the Societal Pillars layer. (Places like schools and families, and fundamental belief systems and institutions.) This layer represents the starting place for recruitment and is an opportunity for us to tap into places often overlooked in traditional council structures. The next layer is where we can expand our outreach and foster community buy-in and support, by involving core community organizations in the process. From here regional representatives are chosen with a strong understanding of constituency and how to appropriately represent the views of their peers. Provincial reps are chosen from these regional groups, and carry forth ideas at the provincial and territorial levels, which then leads into a national youth council. Change is in the centre. We are all working together for positive change.

Youth Adult Support Network

The team looked at building a network of adults and youth who would work together to build skills and create opportunities to develop strong youth leaders and adult allies. They outlined the who, what, why and how of the network.



Youth Space

A funded and supported national platform for youth linking young people to politicians. It would be a space from which youth could share information and raise awareness about issues important to them.