



The Students  
Commission  
Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement



# YOUTH SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERISM

FEBRUARY 2018

Being engaged in one's community, especially through volunteering opportunities, is a valuable experience all young people should have. Not all young people have the opportunity to volunteer, however, and not all volunteer opportunities are meaningful. The #CanadaWeWant gives young people the opportunity to explore and identify their interests through volunteering opportunities. The #CanadaWeWant is a place where young people volunteer from a young age. These experiences will reinforce young people's understanding that their voice matters and that they can positively impact change in their communities.



## SUMMARY

Research shows that youth engagement has positive outcomes for young people's health, skills development and personal confidence. This report calls for the youth policy to support strategies that increase youth engagement in communities across Canada through volunteering.

**Community** Highlighting the tangible impact youth can have during volunteering allows them to have ownership over their volunteering and know that they are contributing to strengthening and supporting their community.

**Relatedness** Youth look for opportunities that create connections with others and help build relationships. They enjoy meeting new

people and participating in volunteer activities with their friends. Volunteering can provide opportunities for meaningful relationship development and new connections.

**Meaning and Impact** Youth are full of energy and are aware of social issues. They look for meaningful opportunities to volunteer where they have an impact on their community and are contributing to social issues that resonate with them. Volunteering can empower youth and communities to fulfill their potential and contribute to social change.



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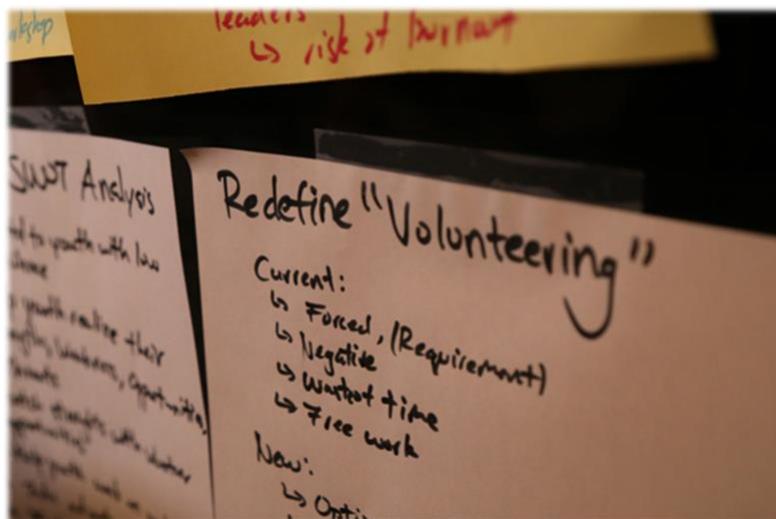
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## Acknowledgments

Thank you first to the courageous young people who traveled from coast to coast to coast to build the #CanadaWeWant so we can have the #CanadaWeNeed.

With representatives from First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities from across the country, we humbly gathered on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, the Ojibway/Chippewas, the Anishinabek, and currently the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. We were also surrounded by Indigenous communities: to the North were the Chippewas of Georgina Island; to the East are the Mississaugas of Scugog Island; and to the West are the Chippewas of Kettle and Stoney Point. Through Indigenous-led ceremony, acknowledgement and respect, we recognized the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land, and were very grateful to have the opportunity to use it as a meeting place, and a space for knowledge sharing.

Thank you to the Canada Service Corps for supporting the participation of youth participants from across the country and for asking us to provide our voice on this topic. Thank you to YMCA Cedar Glen, The Students Commission of Canada, Sharing the Stories Research and Evaluation Platform, Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, RBC Foundation, UNICEF Canada, the Government of Canada and the many other funders of the #CanadaWeWant Conference 2018, and all of the organizers, elders, adult allies, facilitators, and most of all the wonderful youth participants. Thank you to The Students Commission Conference Planning Committee for their hard work. Thank you to the federal government representatives and policymakers that attended the Conference and will continue to support the development of A Youth Policy for Canada.



## Executive Summary

Research shows that youth engagement has positive outcomes for young people's health, skills development and personal confidence. This report calls for the youth policy to support strategies that increase youth engagement in communities across Canada through volunteering. Our report is grouped into three categories related to youth service volunteerism: Community, Connectedness, and Meaning and Impact.

### Community

Volunteering opportunities should emphasize the impact youth have on their communities through their participation. This allows young people to connect to their community by knowing that their contributions are strengthening and supporting it. Through volunteerism, youth can increase their understanding of the issues facing their communities. They can build the skills needed to make the positive changes that they want to see. Communities need to realize that supporting youth to volunteer from a young age can have lasting impacts on both communities and the individuals volunteering. Communities need to be adequately resourced so that young people can be successful in their volunteer opportunities. This resourcing includes training, micro-grants and dedicated funding to support local volunteer programs.

### Relatedness

Volunteering helps young people feel more connected: to themselves, to their communities, and to the people they are volunteering with. Volunteer opportunities should reinforce connection through relationship development. Volunteering opportunities often provide young people with mentors, but also with meaningful friendships.

Young people at this Conference shared that giving back to one's community is an integral part of many Indigenous cultures; every living thing is understood to be intrinsically connected. Therefore, volunteer opportunities are an opportunity to walk the path of truth and reconciliation: non-Indigenous youth can about Indigenous worldviews through service and volunteerism.

Young people feel connected when they share their story. We recommend that the youth policy support a digital platform for youth in Canada to share their volunteering experiences. This platform could highlight "Youth Champions" to influence and inspire their peers. Peer to peer empowerment will help foster a culture in which young people are involved in their communities, especially through volunteering activities.

Volunteering also often connects young people with adults that mentor and support their interests. The #CanadaWeWant is a place where adults support youth service and volunteering opportunities by listening, providing constructive feedback, and valuing young people's contribution without making comparisons to adult counterparts.

### Meaning and Impact

Youth are full of energy and are aware of social issues. Young people desire meaningful opportunities to volunteer where they have an impact so that they can address the social issues that matter to them. This process of contributing to something that matters greatly to young

people is often transformative and empowering. In order for the volunteer opportunities to be meaningful, young people need to be able to identify the positive things they are contributing to. Wherever possible, the impact of youths' contribution should be communicated.

Meaningful volunteer opportunities also allow young people to use and develop leadership skills, as this increases both engagement and motivation to participate. There should be formalized partnerships between school boards and community organizations to accelerate impact on social issues that need the most attention. School curricula, beginning at the elementary level, should evolve to allow youth to access volunteering opportunities that support youth to explore and develop passions. Volunteering from a young age also instills the value of engaging in one's community and by extension, instills an understanding that one's voice matters and can have impact. These values will extend into secondary school, and move the motivation behind volunteering beyond achieving the mandatory hours required to graduate.

## **Our Recommendations**

Through various discussions and activities at the #CanadaWeWant Conference, we have developed nine recommendations to increase youth engagement in service and volunteerism across Canada:

- 1) Create a Digital Volunteer Portfolio Platform
- 2) Develop and Deliver Workshop Programs
- 3) Host National Youth Forums (NYF)
- 4) Create Mentor to Mentee Community Meet Up Programs
- 5) Create an Human Resources Consultant
- 6) Volunteer Opportunities should be accessible to diverse youth
- 7) Community Service Integrated Education in Elementary Education
- 8) Create a Community Champions Program
- 9) Redefine Volunteering



*“I worked with an organization that deals with food security and helping people get back to their roots and food sustainability was really impactful.”*

*“It is important to show youth the positive impact that they can have on their community. Volunteering helped shape my social identity.”*



*“Any service experience can lead to a career. If the site [digital platform] can grow with you, that would be cool.”*

# #CANADA WE WANT



## *The change we want to see:*

- Meaningful volunteer opportunities are accessible to all youth
- A Canada in which long-term community engagement and volunteering exist for youth in their communities
- Volunteer opportunities that emphasize the impact/outcomes participation supports- this allows youth to increase their sense of sociopolitical control
- Ensure anti-racism and Indigenous representation are present in volunteer opportunities
- Youth in Canada are engaged in their communities

## *The way we want to get there (Activity 1):*

Online Volunteer Portfolio Platform

## *Activity 2:*

Workshop Programs

## *Activity 3:*

National Youth Forums (NYF)

## *Activity 4:*

Mentor to Mentee Community Meet Up Program

## *Activity 5:*

HR Consultant/Counselling Program

## *Activity 6:*

Providing Extra Supports for Those Who Need Them

## *What we need to get there (Resources):*

- Funding from the government to support the creation of volunteer opportunities in communities
- An Online Volunteer Portfolio Platform
- Adults that work *with* youth and act as mentors
- Collaboration between local actors to implement the youth policy

## *Activity 7:*

Community Service Integrated Education in Elementary

## *Activity 8:*

Community Champions Program

## *Activity 9:*

Redefining 'Volunteering'

## *The way we want to get there (Resources):*

- Collaboration between all levels of government
- Local governments that support service providers/organizations to create volunteer opportunities that address social issues
- Communities create opportunities based on youths' interests

*What are the root causes of the problems behind Service and Volunteerism among youth?*

## *Understanding*

Youth do not always understand the value in volunteering and the impact it has on our communities.

## *Portrayal of Volunteerism*

Youth often understand volunteering as merely a mandatory activity to graduate high school.

## *Motivation/Engagement/Connection*

Volunteer activities are not always as meaningful as they could be, so engagement less sustained.

## *Opportunities lack accessibility*

Volunteer opportunities are not always accessible to diverse young people.

## Our Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: Create a Digital Youth Service and Volunteerism Portfolio Platform

Create an online volunteering portal that would increase access and awareness of opportunities to volunteer, be mentored and attain skills and certifications. This portal would communicate to young people the connection between volunteering and gaining experience that will benefit them in finding employment and determining their educational path. The portal should include:

- A section about bursaries and awards seeking applicants
- A section that links youth with mentors (e.g. “connect with a professional and discuss their career”)
- A section that explains the skills, degrees and certifications required to work in certain careers (e.g. A lawyer must have Bachelor’s Degree, write the LSAT and go to law school, then write the Bar Exam.)
- Potential for further development of portal to include job search engine and job matching based on skills/interests/experiences
- Opportunities for young people to participate in informative webinars about volunteering and career development
- A platform for young people to document their experiences and skills, which could be exported into a resume

Furthermore, the portal should:

- Be advertised in spaces young people gather (e.g. Community Centres, Schools, Libraries). There should be specific outreach about the portal targeted at rural and newcomer communities.

### Recommendation 2: Workshop Programs

Communities should deliver workshops that help organizations understand the types of opportunities and support young people need in volunteering/engaging with community organization. These workshops should include dialogue between young people and should occur annually. These workshops will help ensure volunteer opportunities for young people are meaningful.

### Recommendation 3: Host National Youth Forums (NYF)

National Youth Forums provide diverse young people the opportunity to connect and learn from one another. We imagine a National Youth Forum program resembling something like the following:

- Two age sections, Junior Forums (12-18 years of age) and Senior Forums (19-29 years old)
- Forums should highlight the work young people are doing in their communities, and recognize achievements with awards

- The Junior National Youth Forums could be led and organized by the Senior NYF participants and would focus on skill building and project development (e.g. starting a community garden, finding adults to support your project, identifying decision-makers in your community etc.)
- The Senior National Youth Forums could be organized by previous youth leaders and would focus on advanced skill building (e.g. how to evaluate your project)
- Incentivize attendance of all types of young people. For example, to encourage youth that would not necessarily come on their own, allow for half off fees when attending with a friend.

#### **Recommendation 4: Create a Mentor to Mentee Community Meet Up Program**

Create local programs that match young people with mentors. “Meet ups” between mentors and mentees could be virtual or in person. This program should be delivered through schools, and advertised in libraries, recreational centres (or other places where youth congregate).

#### **Recommendation 5: Human Resources Consultants**

Human Resource consultants should be available to support local organizations with supporting young people in volunteer opportunities. Young people should be able to access this human resources consultant as well. This would reduce the risk of burnout and improve the sustainability of volunteer opportunities.

#### **Recommendation 6: Volunteer Opportunities should be accessible for diverse youth**

Some young people require more support than others to volunteer. The #CanadaWeWant is one in which all young people have the opportunity to engage in their communities through volunteering. Extra supports should be available for young people facing barriers to participation such as:

- Incentives (food, transportation support)
- Childcare services for those that have adult responsibilities at home (i.e. young parents, youth that care for siblings)
- Recognitions such as certificates

#### **Recommendation 7: Community Service should be integrated into Elementary Education**

Volunteer opportunities should be integrated into curriculum for young people beginning in Grade 6. This would instill the value of volunteering in young people. These opportunities should take place during school hours and should cater to the interests of the students.

## **Recommendation 8: Create a Community Champions Program**

Young people's contributions should be recognized at the community level. A Community Champions program should be created to highlight the work young people are doing in their communities; these champions could help support the Online Portal. These champions will do outreach with organizations to find volunteers, and the champions should be from diverse communities. The idea behind the Community Champions program is that youth will inspire and connect with their peers about community engagement. These Champions could also support the workshop programs noted above in Recommendation 2.

## **Recommendation 9: Redefine Volunteering**

There is a sense among many young people that volunteering is merely a mandatory activity required to graduate high school. The #CanadaWeWant is one in which young people value volunteering because of its connection to engaging and making change in one's community. In the #CanadaWeWant, volunteer hours wouldn't be mandatory because young people would be motivated to volunteer on their own accord. This can only take place if volunteer opportunities also change to be accessible for diverse young people, especially young people facing barriers to participation. In this, volunteering would be the vehicle through which young people explore and identify their interests and passions.

## **Conclusion**

Young people have energy and an awareness of social issues that are fundamental to the future of volunteerism in Canada. The #CanadaWeWant is one in which young people are able to volunteer in their community, regardless of where they live, of who they are. Volunteerism should provide young people with the opportunity to explore and identify their passions and interests. Meaningful volunteer experiences should make it clear to young people the impact they are having on their community. In the #CanadaWeWant, volunteerism provides a vehicle for young people's voices to be amplified so that they can take action on the issues and ideas that matter to them.