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Rural Youth: Leading Today, Tomorrow and Beyond

A Discussion Paper on Youth Engagement



“Youth empowerment is based on the belief that young people are actually their own best resource for promoting personal development; they must be both architects and agents in meeting the challenges and solving the problems in today’s world, as well as in the future.”

(Commonwealth Youth Programme – Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment)

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About The Ontario Rural Council (TORC)

As a forum for *all* rural voices, The Ontario Rural Council offers a vehicle for rural engagement and provides a vital venue for the province's rural voices to dialogue, collaborate and act. As a member-driven, multi-sector, provincial organization, the Council strives to foster communication that informs and ultimately influences policy, programs and research that affect rural Ontario.

Members share a commitment to strong, healthy, vibrant rural communities, businesses and organizations. Through Public Issue Forums and Rural Development Conferences, TORC provides the *only* venue dedicated to drawing together the collective rural voice aimed at breaking down silos between the sectors and encouraging effective partnerships for progress.

TORC Members represent non-profit organizations, private sector organizations, the public sector, and individuals with specialized expertise and resources in rural matters. In our role as convenor, TORC brings together these diverse interests and perspectives and offers valuable networking opportunities to link people, information and activities in support of rural community development and capacity building.

The TORC Mission:

To act as a catalyst for rural dialogue, collaboration and action.

TORC Aims To:

- Foster communications that inform – with the aim to influence and shape – policies, program development and research that affect rural Ontario.
- Enhance the understanding of rural realities.
- Act as a broker and clearinghouse of news, stories and research – linking local, regional, provincial and global thinking.
- Build innovative rural networks that stimulate the formation of province-wide collaboration.
- Be an outcomes-focused learning organization.

TORC and Rural Youth: Through the Council's Rural Youth Working Group, TORC's goals are to increase awareness of best practices for youth engagement in rural communities, furnish the necessary tools and networks for youth to increase their capacity to be involved in community and organizational decision-making, provide relationship-building opportunities across generations, develop a concrete set of recommendations *by* youth, *for* youth, to inform rural policy-makers and to share with other rural organizations, and foster the development of a sustainable network of rural youth decision-makers.

Backgrounder – TORC’s Experience with Rural Youth

The Ontario Rural Council is committed to the development and meaningful involvement of rural youth. Recognizing that strong communities require investment in technology, resources, infrastructure and *people*, TORC has sought the input and inclusion of rural youth since its inception. Throughout this dialogue, the Council has witnessed an evolution of issues and strategies.

Initially youth participants focused discussion on keeping and attracting young people in rural areas. Following the Federal Government’s ‘Rural Dialogue’ (2001), the notion of rural assets as a means of attracting young people gained prominence and formed the basis of a provincial forum in July 2001.

Some of the issues emerging from that forum included: *social issues* – isolation, education, health; *employment issues* – business, telecommunications, and funding; *relationships* – agriculture and non-agricultural neighbours, adult/youth partnerships, new residents and diverse cultures; *opportunities for youth* – leadership, sports and the arts in rural areas. This discussion also presented the idea of getting involved in order to get attached to your community.

The Council followed this dialogue with a focus on rural careers, and specifically how communities can better prepare young people to return home to pursue rural careers. Communication, mentorship, job training and cross-sector collaboration were all identified as necessary ingredients to make rural careers attractive. It was observed by the youth participants themselves that youth who have a stake in their community *before they leave* are the youth who are more likely to return to rural careers.

More recently, research and practice has shifted from *keeping and attracting* youth, to *engaging* youth. It is recognized that young people will likely leave their community for educational or experience opportunities, and that can be a benefit for the individual. The process of engaging young people to develop competencies and avoid risky or harmful behaviour is carried out *with* youth, not *for* youth. We have witnessed a change in the perception of youth as “assets” to youth as “agents of change” (Ginwright and James, 2002).

While many of the issue areas have remained the same over time, some increased emphasis on serious social issues has emerged. So too has the ownership that youth participants are taking in affecting change.

The evolution of TORC’s work with rural youth has led to the development of the Rural Youth Working Group following the Council’s Rural Youth Forum in June 2005. This initiative will build on the momentum of TORC’s past experiences, and provide a venue for the Council to take direct action to address key issues.

Executive Summary

TORC Members have clearly identified as a top priority the need to engage rural youth better in their communities and in rural decision-making processes – for the benefit of the community *and* the individual youth. Members understand that rural Ontario will thrive through the civic involvement of its young people, but also recognize that the lives of young people are often ever-changing, which can pose challenges to their long-term involvement in vital community initiatives.

It is within this context that TORC asked the question: *What are the challenges and opportunities for engaging rural youth in our communities?*

By providing a voice and a venue for Ontario's rural youth, the answers to this question came during a public forum held in March 2007. The following issue areas emerged from the dialogue, and formed the basis of a series of recommendations for action:

- Gainful youth employment
- Stereotypes that limit youth / eliminating the negative images of youth
- Transportation
- Teen pregnancy and substance abuse
- Homeless youth
- Little or no consultation of youth in political decision-making processes / lack of youth representation/voice on town councils, boards of directors
- Teen depression, peer counseling
- Youth Entrepreneurship
- Healthy downtowns (no matter how small) and a limit to sprawl
- Lack of sports and recreational activities

*This report begins with an exploration of the **impacts and value of engaging young people in your community**. A comprehensive examination of the **challenges** youth face and **recommendations for action** heard directly from the youth participants will serve to inform provincial and organizational decision-makers on the most pressing issues facing rural youth in Ontario today. A summary of the **best practices** shared by those frontline voices with knowledge and demonstrated expertise working with young people are also highlighted. **Questions for further consideration** and a listing of **related research and resources** conclude this report.*

Participants in this public forum included young people from across Ontario representing a wide range of ages, disciplines, backgrounds and geographic profiles. An extensive network of non-youth also took part, including frontline staff representing youth organizations, related stakeholders, policy- and decision-makers, community advocates, community economic development and information officers, and TORC members.

The specific recommendations for action contained in this report come from the youth themselves on the issues they face. It is our intention that these ideas will be shared with, and utilized by community and organizational leaders, rural youth, policy makers, and citizens concerned with youth issues.

TORC presents this Report to provide valuable insights, perspectives and ideas directly from rural youth, and to inform and motivate community members and decision-makers to engage some of rural Ontario's most valuable assets – our young people.

Why Engagement Matters

“The ultimate goal is to engage people early in meaningful opportunities that prepare them to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood by becoming socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent.”

(Marion Price, Parks and Recreation Ontario)

A preliminary review of the research shows a growing body of literature on youth engagement, outlining innovative work worldwide in areas of planning, policy, social inclusion, and youth development. Expansive examples of best practices in these areas are available and can be adapted and shared between rural and urban settings.

The importance of meaningful youth engagement cannot be overstated.

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement carried out a review of research literature linking youth engagement and health outcomes (April, 2003). This examination provides convincing evidence of the need for efforts aimed at positive youth engagement:

“The research literature we have reviewed provides strong support for the existence of a link between youth engagement and positive health outcomes. Youth who were engaged in structured activities (ranging from extra-curricular school involvements to community service to organizational work in their church or community) were less likely to use cigarettes, marijuana, hard drugs and alcohol, less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour or become pregnant, less likely to engage in violent behaviour or be arrested, less likely to drop out of school, and more likely to complete a college degree, than youth who were not engaged in these kinds of activities. Moreover, there was also evidence that engaged youth were less depressed, had higher self-esteem, were more physically active, obtained higher grades in school, and showed a greater commitment to their friends, families and communities.” (The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, www.tgmaq.ca/centres/litrev2.htm#a3)

Research from both the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement and the Town Youth Participation Strategy demonstrates that engagement may have even stronger links with positive outcomes among youth who are "at risk" than youth who are less vulnerable. (Town Youth Participation Strategy, www.typs.com)

The benefits of engaging young people are being recognized and integrated into programs and policies at all levels.

The question addressed in TORC’s forum is: How can rural communities, organizations and governments engage youth in order to provide opportunities for optimum growth and development of our young citizens?

Emerging Themes

The following ideas arose frequently in the discussion and presentations, and emerged as themes from the dialogue:

- Interest and enthusiasm to “bridge the gap” and work with older generations was very strong. Multi-generational initiatives help to address issues around stereotypes, and build awareness and support for positive actions.
- Mentorship is part of the solution for addressing youth issues; adults are important. Whether it is social, employment, or leadership and decision-making obstacles, connecting with experienced allies is repeatedly seen to be positive, beneficial and necessary to overcome these challenges.
- Youth are the best sources to tap when looking to understand and address youth issues. Youth need to play an integral part in the planning, decision-making and leadership for actions and initiatives that affect them. Do not speak for them; encourage them to speak for themselves. Do not act for them; work with them.
- Technology is where it is at when working with youth!
- Technology, while providing a multitude of benefits, can also create a series of gaps that need to be addressed. For example, there is a technology gap between generations, including abilities (young people are very capable), perspectives (older generations are more aware of, and cautious about the risks), and willingness to adapt and apply new technologies. There is also a technology gap between classes, which often presents itself in access differentials. Technology can also contribute to ‘distancing’ within a community – you know what is going on around the world, but are not connected to what is happening right in your own community. Addressing these gaps will help to harness and maximize the potential of this tool.
- Participants repeatedly raised the issue of municipal support as a necessary component of addressing challenges. This is an integral part of successful initiatives. It is notable that of all the presentations made, only those who lacked support of local government were struggling to move their initiatives forward.
- Be intentional about youth involvement. Make this part of the policies of your organization.
- Flexibility is key.
- Youth are leaders today – here and now!

Challenges and Actions: What We Heard From Rural Youth

During a youth-only session, an “Open Space” concept was employed to tap the thinking, and harness the ideas of today’s rural youth. Through this process youth participants collectively identified the most pressing issues facing their generation in today’s rural Ontario.

Participants were asked “**What are the challenges and opportunities for engaging rural youth in your communities?**”

Through a method of identification, discussion, feedback and voting, 10 key priority areas were articulated, and numerous recommendations for action were developed. A series of recommendations was also developed for actions to be undertaken by TORC’s Rural Youth Working Group.

The following **priority areas** and **recommendations for action** represent creative and easy-to-implement ideas suggested by youth, for youth to work in tandem with their communities toward better engagement and understanding.

Here is what rural youth in Ontario had to say ...

TEN PRIORITY ISSUE AREAS IDENTIFIED BY RURAL YOUTH:

(listed in order of priority as voted on by youth participants)

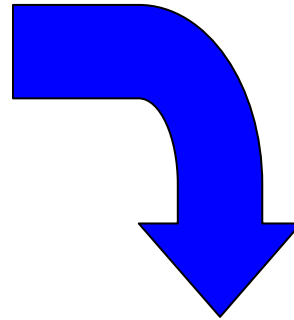
1. Gainful youth employment
2. Teenage stereotypes that limit youth / eliminating the negative images of youth
3. Transportation
4. Teen pregnancy and substance abuse
5. Homeless youth
6. Little or no consultation of youth in political decision-making processes / lack of youth representation/voice on town councils, boards of directors, etc.
7. Teen depression, peer counseling
8. Youth Entrepreneurship
9. Healthy downtowns (no matter how small) and a limit to sprawl
10. Lack of sports and recreational activities (*This issue was identified, but was not discussed further in the Open Space session*)

(Solutions presented below may apply to multiple stakeholder groups.)*

Challenge #1:

GAINFUL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

- Contract work is unsustainable. What's next when the contract finishes?
- Out-dated marketing and advertising used to promote job opportunities.
- The school-to-work gap: Employers want experience that young people do not have yet.
- Recent graduates face high costs of living, debt, and limited work opportunities until they gain experience.
- First jobs often do not provide benefits.
- Volunteer experience often does not match career interests.
- Transportation challenges make it difficult to get to volunteer opportunities.
- Perceptions need to change among employers – young people are ready and willing to work, yet jobs tend to go to older people.



The Solutions*

Employers:

- Provide networking opportunities geared specifically to recent graduates.
- Develop mentor programs between young and more experienced workers within a particular field of interest.
- Utilize current mechanisms to advertise jobs -- websites and databases to link employers and employees, or volunteers and volunteer opportunities.
- Remove the college/co-op stigma.

Community:

- Keep in touch with youth who leave – e-mail job opportunities as they come up.
- “Old” people need to retire to allow young people opportunities for experience.
- A rural transportation network exists for seniors. Extend this network to assist young people with transportation challenges.

Government:

- Develop connections between high schools and Service Canada, Job Connect, and other employment programs.
- Ensure comprehensive, hands-on career planning and education, especially in the senior grades.

Funders:

- Ensure grants provide opportunities for continued employment following contract completion.
- Extend contracts for longer-term employment.

Youth:

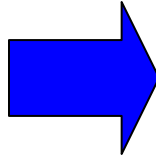
- Develop a youth union to work toward inclusion of benefits within contracts.
- Educate funders to understand better that it takes longer than six months for an intern to gain the capacity/experience he or she needs to apply for a job that always seems to ask for more experience. Encourage funders to include coverage of benefits.

Challenge #2:
STEREOTYPES THAT LIMIT YOUTH / ELIMINATING THE NEGATIVE IMAGES OF YOUTH

- One youth can ruin the image of all young people. For example, a 15-year old shoplifts so the perception is all young people are going to steal.
- There are stereotypes between youth – cliques in schools.
- Teachers may judge students based on older siblings.
- Discrimination toward youth. For example, convenience stores that invoke a two-youth-at-a-time policy serve an injustice by making young people feel they are guilty of a crime before they even enter the store. This would be unacceptable for any other group in society.

Common Stereotypes:

- Youth are rebellious
- Youth drink and do drugs
- Youth are lazy
- Youth are irresponsible
- Youth are not trustworthy
- Youth are disrespectful
- Youth discriminate
- Youth steal
- Youth have no objectives
- Youth are party animals
- Youth vandalize



The Solutions*

Influence, Highlight and Recognize the Positives

Youth:

- Commandeer the front page of your local newspaper once a month to feature photos and stories about the GOOD THINGS youth are doing in your community.

Community & Municipal Government:

- Motivate youth to get actively involved – promote events and opportunities to participate in your community.
- Reward youth for positive contributions to your community. Develop citizen/mayoral/ government awards, certificates, and news stories. Award volunteering, leadership and community involvement – contributions beyond sports and academics. Advertise and promote the awards and those being recognized to incite and motivate others.

Bridge the Gap between Generations

All:

- Show respect for differences.

Youth:

- Facilitate discussions and events (tournaments, dinners) among generations to gain a better mutual understanding. Get all age groups interacting, and showcase youth as people who are recognized as assisting your community.
- Visit seniors' homes and volunteer with seniors. Demonstrate that youth are not all bad.

The Solutions*

Youth / Community / Municipal Government:

- Collaborate with drivers who transport seniors and the disabled in your community to extend the service to include transporting youth to extracurricular and volunteer activities.
- Expand city transportation / bus routes / shuttles into rural areas.
- Move recreational activities closer to rural areas.
- Create car co-ops where people pay a fee to rent a car when needed.
- Promote the development and use of carpooling; for example online 'ride boards'.

Government:

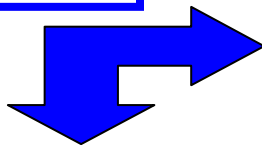
- Address the impacts graduated licensing has had on rural youth versus their urban neighbours.



Challenge #3:
TRANSPORTATION

It is difficult to get to and from recreational and extra curricular activities because schools and facilities are so far from home.

**Challenge #4:
TEEN PREGNANCY AND
SUBSTANCE ABUSE**



Teen Pregnancy

The Solutions*

(Actions cross all stakeholder groups)

Prevention/Education:

- Promote education and prevention within schools, the community, and in general – Invite teenage moms to talk to students; provide parenting classes; inform students and the public about 'safe' sex and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Include mandatory parenting classes in high school curriculum.
- Educate mothers about health during and after pregnancy.
- Educate young women about all of the options, including adoption.

Support Programs for Young Parents:

- Raise financial resources within your community to provide for teens requiring assistance.
- Provide homes to help teen mothers.
- Provide emotional support.
- Provide opportunities for teen mothers to stay in school (i.e. daycare).
- Provide support for teen fathers.
- Create a place for mothers to exchange clothing. Provide free clothes/diapers. Alternatively, provide tokens to moms who attend educational programs, and offer supplies in exchange for the tokens.

Substance Abuse

Drugs are easily available and cheap.

Drug use has a negative impact on physical and emotional well being, and may result in thefts, assaults, violence, deaths, and impaired driving. Drug use can also lead to teen pregnancy and date rape.

Because of the number of young people using substances, it is not considered a big issue, but rather is seen as 'normal'. The use of drugs creates a negative image of youth in the community.

The Solutions*

Community:

- Allow 'kids to be kids' through sports, youth centres, games, and safe 'hanging out'. Increase activities in your community to keep youth engaged and to act as a stress reliever.
- Establish support groups / peer groups led by adults and teens who have overcome addictions. Identify mentors who can be contacted at all times.

Schools:

- Provide more counseling and drug education through schools and the community.
- Increase police presence in schools.

Youth:

- Have youth talking to youth about the issue in and out of schools (skate parks, theatres, concerts).
- Develop commercials on youth-oriented stations such as MuchMusic.
- Encourage adults to recognize youth as equals.
- Educate adults about the issue.

Challenge #5: HOMELESS YOUTH

Three main contributors to homelessness were identified by youth participants:

- **Family problems**, such as absentee parents, abuse, neglect, a lack of education regarding responsibility/discipline, and individuals born into poverty.
- **Falling into the wrong crowd**, which can lead to peer pressure, poor decisions causing family fractures, drug and alcohol problems, and a lack of motivation and self esteem.
- **Difficulty getting or holding a job** because an individual lacks knowledge of community services or the stability, maturity and accountability necessary for employment.

The Solutions*

Community / Social Services:

- Help others to actually SEE homelessness in rural areas. Engage through candid discussion and key identifiers. For example, although the homeless are not sleeping on heating grates, they may be sleeping in their cars or 'couch-surfing' or finding their way into abandoned buildings. These actions may provide the necessary ammunition for beds in churches or the creation of a shelter.
- Homelessness is considered to be an embarrassing issue, but needs to be addressed in a positive way. Be pro-active. Get volunteers in your community from the social and professional sectors to take an interest in making change.
- Provide shelters with programming (life skills training, counseling services, job skills training) to help homeless youth gain employment or return to their family homes.
- Offer follow-up care.
- Prevent *new* homeless cases:
 - Plug youth into community programs (Big Brothers/Big Sisters, youth centres, clubs)
 - Develop family-oriented community resources (free counseling, seminars and assemblies, motivational speakers, community-wide newsletters).

Challenge #6:

LITTLE OR NO CONSULTATION OF YOUTH IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES / LACK OF YOUTH REPRESENTATION / VOICE ON TOWN COUNCILS, BOARDS OF DIRECTORS, ETC.

Currently decision-makers base decisions on the short term, yet these decisions will affect our current youth generation in the long term.

The Solutions*

Youth:

- Mobilize your municipal council. Youth can ask for meetings with Mayor/Reeve/Councillors to help educate them about youth-identified issues AND possible solutions.
- Work to gain support from your municipal council through positive contributions.

- Develop a mentorship program. Establish community partnerships with pre-existing municipal, provincial, and federal positions.

Municipal Government:

- Develop Youth Advisory Councils so youth can engage other youth, and so youth are part of the consultative process.
- Establish policy to retain a Youth Council and develop ongoing consultative methodology.

Challenge #7:

TEEN DEPRESSION, PEER COUNSELLING

- Many people do not realize this is a pressing issue.
- A teen experiencing problems is much more likely to confide in a person close in age than an older adult; they won't feel as though they're being judged.
- Confidentiality and issues of trust re: school counselors.
- Pressure around social cliques is underplayed.
- Stereotyping.
- Depression can be triggered by many things – school, home life, social life, bullying, abuse (physical, sexual, emotional).

The Solutions*

Youth:

- Establish a peer group in high school offering young people a forum for expression/discussion. This group should be led by students who have received training from professionals in the community.
- Promote volunteer Help Lines vis-a-vis school newspaper, announcements, school presentations, motivational speakers on mental health issues, etc.

Schools and Community Organizations:

- Assist in building relationship and communication skills to encourage teens to talk to others about their problems and improve interpersonal social communication at school.
- Offer innovative initiatives for students to focus on other than extra-curricular activities that are strictly associated with the school.

Challenge #8:

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Solutions*

- Hold a community forum or pool information so youth, and those working with youth, are aware of available resources (entrepreneurship, counseling, employment).
- Promote entrepreneurship as a viable career in schools and youth centres.
- Recognize the importance of gathering people together to network; build networking opportunities.
- Provide and promote entrepreneurship programs for all levels (camps, FedNor business plan challenges, summer company, youth entrepreneurship programs through Service Canada, the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, and others).

Challenge #9

HEALTHY DOWNTOWNS (NO MATTER HOW SMALL), AND A LIMIT TO SPRAWL

How do you engage youth in the development of a vital downtown area?

The Solutions*

Municipal Government:

- Form a Youth Advisory Committee to work alongside town council on town planning, economic development, arts and recreation planning, downtown beautification, etc.
- Work with Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC), youth centres and schools to get things started.

Youth:

- Host a bi-annual general meeting; conduct a youth survey to set policy for the Advisory Committee and give voice to youth issues.
- In order to set up committees and groups, go to your high school and present the idea to everyone (through classes). Advertise in local newspapers, on television and on the town website. Contact the Mayor – his/her support is needed to make it work.
- Provide case studies and examples to engage youth and share Best Practices between neighbours.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED BY YOUTH FOR TORC'S RURAL YOUTH WORKING GROUP:

The TORC Rural Youth Working Group is a volunteer group of The Ontario Rural Council. It features a wide membership base and strong networks, including connections to funders featuring youth agendas.

The TORC Rural Youth Working Group is recently formed and welcomes participants and input regarding directions and actions as we move forward.

Suggested Actions:

- Distribute The TORC Report emanating from this forum with an accompanying letter encouraging participants to distribute it further within their own communities. Include contacts who can help with identified issues, links to resources, and demographic information of participants.
- Disseminate The TORC Report as a package to Mayors / Reeves and Councillors to gain support. Work to ensure they 'get it' regarding Youth Councils and youth activities – their support is critical!
- Keep the momentum flowing following the forum.
- Make future forums more accessible to other youth participants. Host more forums across the province.
- Develop small pamphlets with a couple of questions aimed at gaining input on questions discussed today. Participants can then distribute these within their own communities and networks to garner more input.
- Ensure strong representation across regions and geographies for future dialogues.
- Initiatives to gain funding and policy support for youth activities are useful.

Key Principles & Best Practices for Working with Youth

In addition to the extensive recommendations for action developed by the youth, participants also heard many best practices learned by frontline workers and forum presenters. A summary of these lessons follows.

Key Principles for Best Practices:

Youth Voice and Youth Inclusion – Consider carefully your process for youth inclusion and devise mechanisms to ensure it works.

Practical Experiential Learning and Asset Building – Essentially, the more assets developed at a young age translates into greater chances for success for youth.

Youth are concrete - Adults need to remember that youth, for the most part, are subjected to a theoretical lens or approach each and every day they sit in school. Outside of school they desire *actions* and *tasks*.

Participatory Action Research and Participatory Evaluation (PAR and PE) – Sit down with people to ask what kinds of questions you should be asking.

Access and Availability - Times, locations, and transportation are major issues in rural communities and adults have been quick to overlook these obstacles.

Mutual Respect

Non-judgmental / Open Door Policy – A must when there is no clear framework or ground rules around who can speak, when, and to whom...as well as, who is to be heard.

Open Participation Structure and Time for Social Interaction

Physical Activities/Recreational Opportunities – Need to expand our concept of what this means, and offer creative new ideas and interpretations of activity (dances, etc.).

Best Practices to Engage Youth:

- Be sure to include fun and social aspects when engaging youth and adults!
- Ensure a social connection for participants by offering lots of interactive opportunities. Youth are 'trying to construct who they are' and will look to be with others who are like-minded.
- Expand comfort zones. Working with youth is all about entering partnerships.
- Allow for a transitional period to let participants first settle into their own comfort zone and then build from there.

- Be mindful of structure. Youth participate when it is offered of free will; once they are told 'they must' or if youth councils/centres become institutionalized/overly structured, success is compromised.
- Age-specific groups do NOT work the best; the best collaborations are diverse.
- Meaningful engagement is the result of youth and adults working together. We need more interaction between the age groups.
- Generally, youth like to work in a free-flow manner versus linear thinking.

Best Practices to Include Youth in Decision-Making:

- Start with baby steps. Who are the young people that you know and how can you transfer these relationships to your Board?
- Put a face to a story. Older people need to meet young people and have the opportunity to build relationships toward gaining a comfort level.
- Don't hesitate to 'institutionalize' youth representation with your Board if it's needed to help ensure youth engagement. Include it in your by-laws, quorums, membership etc.
- Invite other organizations to speak about youth engagement on their Board(s).
- Leverage the risk of possibly losing in the process some adult decision-makers with the advantages to be gained by involving young people.
- Assign an adult the responsibility of mentoring one youth each; this in turn will lead to youth then mentoring other youth.
- Find like-minded people who are in tune with goals of including youth.

Best Practices to Involve Males:

There is a tendency for the female gender to lead the way in community involvement – and to do most of the work. By extension, females are recruiting other young females to community work while young males seeking interaction are more often drawn to sports/activities.

- Make an effort to invite the opposite gender; they may simply be waiting for an invitation.
- Include food!
- Create spaces for young guys to gather and help change the culture of young men.
- Encourage more male role modelling.

Best Practices to Address Youth Out-Migration:

- Capitalize on job creation programs/economic development initiatives.
- Invest in strong local economy and active social/recreational life.

- Rural transit - Provide a shuttle service to and from the nearest urban centre.
- Develop programs to improve the social milieu /make young adults feel wanted and involved (i.e. youth social development officer, youth council).
- Work to increase access to area post-secondary and vocational training opportunities.
- Capitalize on young adult's attachment to the home community; keep the community on their mental radar.
- Encourage CFDC's, Chambers, Economic Development Officers, Recreation Departments, social organizations and youth councils to all work together.
- Stay in contact with youth migrants.
- Alter perceptions of rural living.

Best Practices for Succession Planning and Maintaining Enthusiasm:

- Access technology – capitalize via the forums of communication that youth are already accessing.
- Encourage youth who are interested in venturing afar, but be sure to be equally supportive of their return.
- Stay true to 'youth-driven' focus as it is a natural motivator when it comes to enthusiasm and achievement; young people with a voice want to direct things, but need assistance in getting that voice heard.
- Ensure your youth activity is event-focused; youth councils cannot be limited to just meetings; with the promise of continued action will come the desired attendance – but be patient!
- Youth initiatives must be supported by adults who carry experience and skill sets from which youth can learn and absorb.
- Focus requests and bring people together around a specific 'hot button' issue; build on that relationship when dealing with other issues.
- Give tasks and make people accountable.
- Consider the "What's-in-it-for-me" factor: food, volunteer/probation hours, etc.
- Communication, encouragement, and support from within the group.

Best Practices to Gain Funding Support:

- Present to potential funders favourable statistics to gain their trust and 'buy-in'. For example, since Ingersoll's Fusion Youth Centre opened, emergency '911' phone calls have notably decreased. Leverage these statistics with community leaders and local council.
- Demonstrate any and all faithful fundraising efforts in order to illustrate commitment to a project and diffuse any notion that youth are simply asking for handouts.
- Create partnerships with adults - they have experiences and resources not yet in hand for youth.

Questions for Further Consideration

From the forum discussion and presentations, several questions arose that require further consideration:

1. How do you engage youth on the fringe – those who are not connected, are not “keeners”, or who are non-joiners? How are their voices heard? What mechanisms are most effective in including their voices in the dialogue?
2. Are issues from past discussions changing or being resolved? Where is progress being made?
3. Rural and northern Ontario is so culturally varied and geographically dispersed. How do you engage a larger sampling of these diverse voices in the dialogue?
4. How do the issues vary in different parts of the province and for differing demographic groups?
5. How do you define engagement/participation? What are the characteristics of participation? What do the spaces for participation look like?
6. The discussion included an increased emphasis on social issues such as depression, pregnancy, substance abuse, and homeless youth compared to past dialogues. Does this represent a growing awareness of these issues or a growing prevalence? Does the discussion of these areas as “challenges” imply that they are being under-addressed in rural areas? Are supports available for young people dealing with these issues, and do youth know where to tap into these supports?
7. The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement identified that the main barrier has proved to be a lack of adults willing to engage the youth – and this is especially true in rural communities. What can rural areas do to build awareness and support among their citizens to embrace youth engagement as a philosophy and necessary focus for strong and healthy individuals and communities? What resources are needed to make this happen?
8. Best Practices:
 - a. Is there a mechanism to share *rural* examples of best practices, especially examples that address the rural realities of smaller, more dispersed populations, lack of access to facilities, isolation, etc.?
 - b. There are numerous urban examples for successfully engaging youth. Is there a mechanism to adapt these so they can be pooled and shared with, and applied to rural communities?

- c. What are the best practices for combining non-arts engagement initiatives with arts programs?
 - d. What are the best practices for succession planning with the ever-shifting youth population?
 - e. What are the best practices for engaging youth when resources and/or support are limited?
9. Where can entrepreneurship tools that address the rural example be accessed to help youth identify how money can be made locally using their skill set?

APPENDIX A: Agenda Summary & Speaker Biographies

To view the full forum presentations visit www.torc.on.ca and click on “Events”.

Artistic Avengers

And now for something completely different ... no artistic ability required! Participants share your creativity and opinions on the issues that affect you as a person living, working or visiting rural Ontario. Create a piece of artwork that best captures your thoughts on the state of rural.

Sarah Quick, Artist

Ms. Quick graduated five years ago from Mount Allison University with a Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts. She is a recipient of both the John P. Asimakos Award in Painting, and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Award. As a working artist, Ms. Quick shows both nationally and internationally, and currently calls rural southern Ontario ‘home’.

Alec Mathewson, Filmmaker

Mr. Mathewson is a cinematographer, editor, and documentary filmmaker known for his distinctive style and ability to capture ‘life in the moment’. He directed the documentary *Morbidly Obese*, which was nominated for a Golden Sheaf award, and has been the creative force behind a number of award-winning short films. Mr. Mathewson’s work has been acknowledged and well-received by the CBC, BBC, Discovery Channel, Real TV, Entertainment Tonight and E-Talk Daily. He has successfully collaborated with several production companies including the National Film Board, Muse Entertainment, Eyesteel Film, and Fluorescent Hill. Most recently, Mr. Mathewson concluded work on a music video and continues to hunt for innovative projects.

Session A: Getting Involved in Your Community

Young people often feel their voice does not carry influence in decisions affecting community. Getting involved at the local level can result in a sense of community pride, ownership, inclusively and leadership – for all involved. In this session, participants learned useful tips, practical models and proven strategies from youth leaders that serve as ‘best practices’ for ensuring ‘the voice of youth’ carries impact and garners respect.

Oxford County Youth Council – Woodstock, Ontario

Oxford County Youth is representative of two area groups: The Ingersoll Youth Action Committee, which is based out of the Fusion Youth Centre, and the Tillsonburg Voice of Youth. These young people are enthusiastic and entirely engaged in the work they do. They are keen to share success stories and initiatives, as well as pass along best practices based on frontline experience.

Welland Mayor’s Youth Council – Welland, Ontario

Jodi Gauthier, Ryan Swayze, and Kirstyn Moore

Jodi, Ryan and Kirstyn are members of the City of Welland Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council, established four years ago. The group is extremely active, running events throughout the community for youth, taking part in established city-wide events representing youth, and providing the youth perspective at the municipal planning level, addressing issues such as the master plan for the Canal, parks and recreation and downtown revitalization.

Sault Youth Council -- Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

Tara Lappage

Ms. Lappage is a 26-year-old supply teacher from Sault Ste. Marie. She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Western Ontario and gained her Bachelor of Education at Lakehead University. Upon her return home from university, Ms. Lappage felt a desire to get more involved in her community and help direct positive change. For more than three years, Ms. Lappage has devoted time to a little girl through the Big Sisters Association of Ontario and in 2006 won the award for “Big Sister of the Year” in her community. That same year, she was the recipient of a second award, the Ontera Youth Achievement Award for Community Service. Ms. Lappage is currently Co-Chair of the Sault Youth Council, an independent voice advocating for, and encouraging the youth of Sault Ste. Marie to speak and be heard.

Session B: Using Technology to Enhance Youth Opportunities

Access to leadership resources and peer networks are essential for engaging young people. In some cases, these supports can be difficult to access, particularly in more remote communities. Technology can be used to facilitate the flow of information and resources, as well as enhance collaboration between youth. This session explored initiatives that have successfully tapped the world of high tech to connect youth, namely “Creating Local Connections Canada” with its national/provincial/aboriginal focus providing online resource for youth, how-to training in e-resources, and an online forum to address youth issues. A demonstration was provided of the TYPS Recordings Program, which was developed as the result of a youth think-tank and provides an opportunity for youth to track their activities and achievements.

Taking IT Global – Inspire. Inform. Involve.

Medin Admasu, Creating Local Connections Canada / Taking IT Global

www.takingitglobal.org

Mr. Admasu has been active in community development since the age of 13 when he co-hosted a national youth conference for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. Since that time, Mr. Admasu has developed a work history and passion for issues focused in the areas of children’s rights, youth leadership, and volunteerism. A recent graduate of Human Rights and Law at Carleton University, Mr. Admasu is actively involved in community philanthropy and conflict resolution work with the Community Foundation of Ottawa and Youth Canada Association (YOUCAN). His vision in life is to create peace through knowledge and opportunity.

Town Youth Participation Strategies (TYPS) Recordings Program

Les Voakes and Toby Stevens

www.typs.com

Mr. Voakes is the Executive Director of Town Youth Participation Strategies (TYPS), an organization which works to encourage, support, and provide information and training to youth in rural areas, towns, and small cities. Mr. Voakes has an MA in Anthropology and has lived and worked on farms and in small communities most of his life. Mr. Stevens lives near the town of Perth, and began visiting the local youth centre as an occasional visitor in his late teens. He became increasingly involved in programs and eventually became a youth leader. Mr. Stevens currently works for the Perth Youth Centre and is Co-Chair of the TYPS Board of Directors.

Session C: Youth Engagement – Fostered through Sports, Recreation, and Arts and Culture

Youth participation in recreational activities, sports and the arts feeds both personal development and future involvement within one’s community. This session explores Parks & Recreation Ontario (PRO) success stories in engaging youth in their communities. PRO Manager of Youth Initiatives, Marion Price outlines challenges, opportunities and lessons learned from a provincial organization’s point of view. Linda Albright, Executive Director of the Arts Network for Children and Youth, will offer up examples of how youth can, and have, empowered themselves through artistic expression.

Engaging Youth through Recreation Services

Marion Price, Parks and Recreation Ontario

Ms. Price is Manager, Youth Services Strategy & Training with Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO), the provincial voice for parks and recreation that represents a membership of more than 1200 individuals. A past president of this association, her staff role is now focused on managing youth and volunteerism projects and strategies, as well as overseeing the association's training and education activities. Ms. Price fulfills a secondary role as Manager for the Play Works Secretariat. Prior to her work with PRO, Ms. Price was Executive Director of Kinsmen and Kinette Clubs of Canada and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario. Ms. Price has developed and taught course work at Conestoga College in Kitchener. Among the online learning modules developed in Youth Recreation Leadership are: Introduction to Youth and Youth Culture, Facilitating Innovative Programming for Youth, and Sustaining Youth Programs. Ms. Price is also a former member of the Seneca Recreation Leadership Program Advisory Committee.

Arts Network for Children and Youth: Youth Engagement in the Arts

Linda Albright, Arts Network for Children and Youth

Ms. Albright lives in the southwestern Ontario town of Tillsonburg. For more than 30 years, she has been involved in community development and the arts. Ms. Albright played a lead role in the creation of the local Station Arts Centre, a visual art facility located in a restored train station. She was also pivotal in the development of the Participate Community Arts Program – offering art activities to local children and youth – and in coordinating several of the town festivals. At every turn, Ms. Albright has continually recognized the importance of engaging youth and providing them valuable opportunities to showcase their creative talents and contribute to the overall process. From her experience with the local Participate Program, Ms. Albright went on to form the Arts Network for Children and Youth (ANCY), Canada's first service organization specifically dedicated to young people in the arts. Now in its seventh year, ANCY has hosted forums across the county and has collaborated with government ministries, arts organizations and artists in a bid to expand arts opportunities for children and youth at the local level. *The mission of the Arts Network for Children and Youth is to ensure that all children and youth have the opportunity to experience creativity and the arts for their personal growth, social development and community involvement.*

Session D: Fostering Youth Engagement through Improved Employment Opportunities and Enhanced Financial Skills

Specialty services and programs aimed at enhancing employment opportunities and financial skill development are invaluable to young people searching to succeed. For youth – and those serving youth – in rural areas, access to these networks often pose tremendous challenges and limitations. This session looks at rural success stories and offers up best practices to take back to your community. In particular, you will learn of programs offered through the Ontario Co-operative Association that improve youth opportunities for employment in the co-op sector, provide leadership development and educate youth about the co-operative sector. You will also learn about programs offered by Junior Achievement that serve to enhance youth employment and financial skill development.

Ontario Co-operative Association

Cynthia Lushman

Ms. Lushman is Education Officer for On Co-op – the Ontario Co-operative Association. Her primary roles include developing, delivering and evaluating province-wide youth programs and overall strategies for the meaningful involvement of youth in co-operatives and credit unions. She is a catalyst for youth co-operative leadership & co-operative education development. Ms. Lushman holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Memorial University of Newfoundland and has invested more than a decade in the areas of education program development, career counselling, and employment creation. From a community perspective, Ms. Lushman takes an active role,

volunteering with her local Fiddlesticks Neighbourhood Association and Clemens Mill Parent/Community Council.

Junior Achievement of Eastern Ontario

Dawn Kameka-Robertson

Ms. Kameka-Robertson is District Director of Junior Achievement of Eastern Ontario for Kingston, Hastings- Prince Edward County region. In this position, her tasks include fundraising , investor relations, and strategic planning towards the continued delivery and growth of JA programs to schools within the community. Ms. Kameka-Robertson champions the belief that with education comes opportunity! A Communications graduate of York University, she is active in her community and volunteers with numerous organizations. As Chairperson the MS Supercities Walk, she and her committee were instrumental in raising more than \$95, 000 dedicated to research in finding a cure for this debilitating disease.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Sean Twyford, Senior Policy Analyst, Strategic Policy Branch

Mr. Twyford is Acting Executive Assistant to the Assistant Deputy Minister in the Strategic Policy and Planning Division of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Prior to this position, he was a Senior Policy Analyst in the Strategic Planning Branch of the Ministry where he worked on a number of key strategic initiatives including the Youth Opportunities Strategy and the Student Nutrition Program. Mr. Twyford holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Toronto and a Master of Public Administration from Queen's University in Kingston.

Session E, F, G: Open Space – Youth Only Session

Kathy Kaye, Facilitator

Ms. Kaye is a valued Facilitator with InCourage, a corporate teambuilding and leadership development company. She has a well-established research background grounded in a Masters degree in Planning and Development. Ms. Kaye has traveled extensively, having lived and worked in South Korea, India and Zimbabwe. Her international work and travel have provided her a broad perspective on cultural differences and how people realize innovative change in their lives. Ms. Kaye brings to her work a range of facilitation and training experience with various processes in government, non-profit and corporate sectors. She remains committed to sustainable development practices and passionate about inspiring others to reach new heights in their own potential.

Session H: Best Practices for Non-Youth to Engage Youth

Pytor Hodgson, Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Les Voakes, Town Youth Planning Strategy (TYPS)

While previous sessions explored helpful tips and strategies for youth to get involved in their communities, some non-youth also need to increase their capacity to engage youth! Older community members are not always equipped to encourage and enable youth to help address issues of common interest. Mr. Hodgson is the Program Manager for the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement and the Students Commission of Canada. Mr. Voakes is the Executive Director of Town Youth Participant Strategies (TYPS), www.typs.com , an organization which works to encourage, support, and provide information and training to youth in rural areas, towns, and small cities. Mr. Voakes has an MA in Anthropology and has lived and worked on farms and in small communities most of his life.

Session I: Youth Living and Working In Rural

Why are youth leaving rural and not returning? Why are young people choosing not to move to rural areas? What can we do to reverse this reality? This informative session explored the

statistics by providing valuable insight from a research perspective. Innovative initiatives for attracting young people to rural areas were presented with best practices commentary from Northumberland Youth Advisory Council and the Municipality of Port Hope.

Out-Migration of Rural Youth Adults

Andrew Redden, Main Street Project Coordinator & Youth Issues Researcher

Mr. Reddon is currently undertaking the coordination of Main Street Revitalization Initiative in Madoc, Marmora, Stirling and Tweed. A provisional member of the Canadian Institute of Planners, Mr. Reddon graduated from the University of Guelph with a Masters degree in Planning and recently received his Certificate in Economic Development from the University of Waterloo. His graduate thesis was entitled, "The Out-Migration of Rural Young Adults: A Case Study in the Municipality of Trent Hills."

Northumberland Youth Advisory Council

Jamie Simmons, Chris Berrigan

www.northumberland.yac.ca

Mr. Simmons has been a small business owner and operator, a purchasing consultant to the Provincial government of Ontario, and a communications advisor at all three levels of government. He has successfully developed and delivered programs for both youth and those facing significant barriers to employment for Service Canada and the County of Northumberland. In addition to being a mentor for the Summer Company initiative, Mr. Simmons was involved in the major undertaking of establishing Cobourg's first Cyber Café, a project completely staffed and managed by youth. Mr. Simons then went on to develop a series of programs designed to connect unemployed and marginalized youth in their communities through targeted volunteer projects. He also provided support and input in to the joint Task Force on youth for the former Federal and Provincial Members of Parliament as a result of his work with local youth. Currently, Mr. Simmons is Coordinator of the Northumberland Youth Advisory Council and continues to develop and deliver programs for Northumberland County Social Services in the area of skills development and experiential learning.

Youth Friendly Communities

Marion Price / Brenda Whitehead

See previously listed biographical notes for Ms. Price. To have your name added to a free list-serve featuring internet-based resources, contact Ms. Price at mprice@prontario.org .

For the last six year, Ms. Whitehead has held the position of Program Manager for the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department of the Municipality of Port Hope. Prior to her appointment, she worked as Program Coordinator, Day Camp Direction and the Youth Action Director with the Cobourg Family YMCA. Ms. Whitehead is a High Five Trainer, a Go Girls Trainer, and is on the MBA Symposium for Youth in Recreation Planning Committee. She is also accountable for the Adolescent Youth Development Program Stream for the upcoming Canadian Parks and Recreation Association National Conference in Ottawa. Ms. Whitehead's commitment to community recreation and youth extends to her involvement as an Advisory Committee Member of the Loyalist College Recreation and Leisure Service Program and with the Children and Youth Advisory Committee of Parks and Recreation Ontario.

APPENDIX B: Related Resources & Research

Arts Network for Children and Youth (ANCY)

www.artsnetwork.ca

- ANCY aims to develop sustainable arts programming for children and youth in communities across Canada.
- “Champions of Change” highlights the impact of the arts on learning.

Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

www.engagementcentre.ca

- The role of the Centre is to examine and measure the outcomes of youth engagement. This site includes a full spectrum of summaries of articles from academic and non-academic sources, resources, models, how-to tools, links to PDFs and original materials.

Duke of Edinburgh Awards

www.dukeofed.org

- The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award was founded to help young people develop a sense of responsibility to themselves and to their communities. The Award operates in over 100 countries and has become one of the world’s most prestigious youth programmes internationally known as The International Award for Young People.

Junior Achievement of Eastern Ontario

www.jaeo.org

- Junior Achievement uses hands-on experiences to help young people understand the economics of life. In partnership with business and educators, Junior Achievement brings the real world to students, opening their minds to their potential.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services

www.children.gov.on.ca

- This provincial ministry was established to create a seamless, integrated system of services to better serve children, youth and their families, and to provide a voice for youth across government.
- The ministry provides funding for child welfare, family intervention services, youth justice services, children's community support services, children's mental health services, and child care.

Ontario Co-operative Association (OCA)

www.ontario.coop

- OCA provides programs for and with youth, including the Co-operative Young Leaders Program, the Co-operative Internship Experience Program, and a Co-op Youth Network. Ontario Co-operative Association is

also working with Ontario school boards to enhance students' co-operative experiences.

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO)

www.prontario.org

- PRO has a number of resources available for its members and to the general public, including “*Youth as Decision Makers*” that outlines different ways in which youth are effectively involved in decision making on recreation programs in which they are the participants, providing solid examples and suggestions on how to get youth in your community involved in program governance. “*Together with Youth – 1999*” takes you through the steps of setting up community-based recreation programs with and for at-risk youth.

Taking IT Global

www.takingitglobal.org

- An online community that connects youth to find inspiration, access information, get involved, and take action in their local and global communities. It's the world's most popular online community for young people interested in making a difference, with hundreds of thousands of unique visitors each month.

The Ontario Rural Council

www.torc.on.ca

- Access past youth reports, including “Rural Youth: Leaving, staying or returning” (July 2001), “Giving Voice to our Future” (October 2001), and “Coming Back to Rural Careers” (October, 2002).

Town Youth Participation Strategies

www.typs.com

- A virtual organization which works to encourage, support, and provide information and training to youth in rural areas, towns, and small cities.
- This site provides resources to its network of youth centres and councils across the province and country.
- The “Recordings” tool allows users to track their activities while participating in their youth centre. This information is then available for resumes, certificates of achievement, and youth centre data collection.
- The “Screenings” section provides users with the technology to send a message about various topics.

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