



Brightening Ideas Youth Conference, March 25, 2010

Proudly supported by the CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee



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Executive summary

The Brightening Ideas Youth Conference was the third in a series of conferences hosted by the Capital Regional District (CRD) Family Court Youth Justice (FCYJ) committee over the past 3 years.

The aims were to:

- Have an understanding of youth serving community agencies
- Identify beliefs about other communities
- Identify how strengths can alleviate gaps
- Create tangible maps for communities
- Work on individual action steps to close gaps
- Contribute to regional & community planning for youth

The event was planned on the basis of principles of engaging youth and maximising engagement with first nations youth and agencies. The event took place at the Saanich Fairground.

The turnout was disappointing, but the proportion of youth representation was high and from across CRD. Those present enjoyed the day and found it highly valuable. The location may have impacted on the attendance rates. In the future it might have been easier to access if held in Sidney. As ever, the time and length of the day was favoured and disputed by different participants. In the future it might be more advantageous to start later and to make sure that the activities are frequently varied.

It is recognised that engaging with youth takes a lot of energy, commitment, time, resources, creativity and patience. It is a credit to our planning group members that so many youth were engaged through the planning process, however, this is intensive work and will always have an impact on the resources needed to plan such an event.

Most of the youth were older youth e.g. grade 12. It is important to ensure that we engage and target younger youth in such events and activities in order to elicit and facilitate the expression of their experiences and views.

As a result of the three conferences it is acknowledge that there have been similar themes emergent and that the focus should now be on planning responses to these identified needs.

These are that youth need:

- More engagement and activities in their community.
- Improved access in particular transport to reach activities and services.
- Improved housing options that are safe and within their community.
- Facilities, such a drop-in, that offer activities and services in their community.

It is recommended to the CRD FCYJ committee that all municipal representatives discuss with their respective councils how to consider the findings from the series of conferences and consider how they are capable and willing to engage with youth and to plan for the needs of youth in their community.

Introduction

This report is primarily prepared for the CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee, as the main supporters of the Bright Ideas series of youth conferences. It is available to all stakeholders across CRD including youth, youth serving agencies, sponsors and supporters of the youth conferences.

Background

Established under the Provincial Court Act, Section 57 24-2, the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee includes representation from thirteen municipalities, three School Districts, as well as several youth-serving organisations across Greater Victoria.

The mandate of the committee is to protect youth in the justice system by:

- educating the public
- reviewing family and youth legislation
- making recommendations to appropriate legislative bodies
- monitoring court hearings and custody facilities

Section 69 of Bill C-61, Young Offender's Act, establishes youth justice committees with the responsibility to target problems and services. The FCYJ Committee is structured on the basis of a number of sub-committees, including the Youth Matters committee. The Youth Matters sub-committee is concerned with matters involving youth in the court system or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system.

The Bright Ideas series of youth conferences

In 2007 the Youth Matters Sub Committee of the CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee identified the need to hold an information sharing session for youth service providers across the Region. So began the series of conferences, starting with 'Bright Ideas'. A full day event was organised for November 29th, 2007, attended by 68 youth serving practitioners representing a broad range of services. Public, private and grass roots organisations and individuals worked collectively to identify strengths, gaps and barriers in the current provision of youth services. As a result of the event, the participants and the youth serving sector increased knowledge, wisdom, experience and networks.

The recommendations from the Bright Idea event included the suggestion that regular events are held in which youth have an active part in planning from the outset; and that these events are to be located on a rotating basis between the downtown core, West Shore and Saanich Peninsula. As a result the second Bright Ideas event: Brighter Ideas, was proposed to the FCYJC. An independent co-ordinator had been hired to plan Bright Ideas in 2007, but for improved value the planning of Brighter Ideas was co-ordinated by staff from the FCYJC resource agency: Pacific Centre Family Services Association.

Brighter Ideas took place at the Military Family Resource Society centre in West Shore in January 2009. 78 youth serving practitioners attended, and 26 youth. Participants were encouraged to mix with others, and the tables were set up café style with games, pens and items to play with. There were two group discussion exercises, several break-outs with games, and a

youth panel discussion. All activities were designed to maintain the engagement of the participating youth as well as maximise engagement among youth practitioners.

Again, the participants gained knowledge and contacts and made contributions about how to improve our youth services. On the basis of the contributions and feedback, it was recommended that the CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee commissions a further event, to be held in the Saanich Peninsula. The purpose would be for continued networking, planning sustainable ongoing information sharing and promoting youth engagement in service planning and delivery. A key recommendation was to engage local youth and agencies to plan this next event. Support from the CRD committee enabled the Youth Matters committee to form a planning group resulting in the Brightening Ideas conference, March 25th 2010.

Principles

In the planning of this event, Brightening Ideas, we upheld some key principles, which significantly affected our planning processes. We engaged with youth in the planning process, we engaged with local first nation representatives and we gave priority to local engagement in the planning.

Planning

We had support from a number of colleagues in the FCYJ committee, although the timing/location of planning meetings prevented some people attending. The planning group, comprised of volunteers and agency workers, worked very hard to fulfill the principles and the objectives for the event. We were fortunate to have the representation of a local councillor from the FCYJ committee for North Saanich and the contribution of a youth worker from Beacon Community Services, a Sidney based agency. We were also fortunate to have active involvement of youthcore and a practicum student from PCFSA. We did not hire a coordinator and reflected that indeed this model of working with volunteers gave us a greater ability to integrate this work into community. We met regularly as a planning group in order to finalise the details of the day. Sessions were organised to engage with youth, in particular, to prepare for the youth panel component of the day.

In the early stages of the planning of the event we were successful in engaging with local first nation representatives. They were supportive partners in the early stages. However they were planning a youth conference also engaging with youth and pursuing their own objectives, so their involvement with Brightening Ideas was not consistent through the entire process.

As a result of the planning process, some key decisions were implemented:

- Youth and service provider consultations will be an integral part of the planning process
- Intentions will be clearly communicated to all participants prior to the day's events.
- The day's activities will be guided by trained facilitators
- Transportation will be provided to and from the event as needed

- All participants will take part in a team-building ice-breaker activity to create a sense of safety
- Counsellors will be present should participants be emotionally triggered
- Food will be served with vegetarian and vegan options as required
- A disclaimer will be shared at the beginning outlining (1) the intentions of the day, (2) the importance of taking an asset-based, solution-minded approach, and (3) the equivalent value of everyone's perspectives (i.e., "adults" are not there to "educate" youth but to participate in an intentionally reciprocal learning opportunity)

The agreed priorities were:

- Reconciling municipal needs in a regional scope
- Meaningful youth participation
- Intentional collaboration
- Acknowledgement and consideration of diverse perspectives

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives were established on the basis of the findings from previous BI events and evaluations.

The outcomes for the day were that participants will:

- Have an understanding of youth serving community agencies
- Identify beliefs about other communities
- Identify how strengths can alleviate gaps
- Create tangible maps for communities
- Work on individual action steps to close gaps
- Contribute to regional & community planning for youth

In order to achieve these the day was organised in the following format:

9AM:	Coffee & Registration
930AM-10AM:	Ice-Breaker
10AM-12PM:	Community Mapping
12PM-1PM:	Lunch & Resource Access
1PM-145PM:	Panel
145PM-345PM:	Strategic Planning
4PM:	Closing & Evaluation

The format of the day was publicised with fewer time details to allow for flexibility in organisation and an ability to respond to the group through the day.

Budget

The original budget was to run this event for \$5200 with additional in-kind contributions raising the value to at least \$5900. The actual budget is summarised below. The additional in-kind contributions included additional coordination, supervision, administration and printing.

BI3 Budget		\$	\$
Revenue	Family Court Youth Justice Committee	2500	
	United Way	1200	
	CRAT	1000	
	Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children	500	
TOTAL		5200	
Expenses	Room rental		307
	Supplies		198.07
	Youth engagement		197.44
	Honoraria		270
	Food/refreshments		855.19
	Coordination and youth preparation		2800
	Administration		150
	Report writing		400
TOTAL			5177.70
BALANCE			22.30

Sponsors

This year in particular it was difficult to raise all of the projected donations in kind. The initial support and contribution from the Family Court Youth Justice Committee was vital to our

success. It was also critical that the work was completed by volunteers and agency staff who were not guaranteed any remuneration for their efforts.

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors who supported us through grants, donations and in-kind contributions all of which enabled us to run the event with such success.

Saanich Common Wealth Place
Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children
Goldstream Bicycles
Two Thumbs Up Video
Panorama Rec Centre
Ocean Discovery Centre
CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee
Boston Pizza- Langford
Pacific Centre Family Services Association
Victoria Native Friendship Centre

Summary

In total there were approximately 17 youth registered as in attendance at the event, from Victoria, Sidney, Saanich and Langford. We also had 35 individual youth workers attend, representing at least 24 different agencies from across CRD; Sooke to Sidney. In addition, there were a number of agencies who presented information about their services in the coffee area. Youth and other agency workers were able to browse and question, absorb and take information from the different stalls to inform themselves of different services available.

The day commenced with a stimulating and inspiring presentation from Marie Campbell, a local first nations elder. She encouraged the group to work together and was proud to contribute to our collaborative effort working with youth. We were also pleased to welcome Cynthia Day, Councillor City of Colwood and Vice Chair of the Family Court Youth Justice Committee, who spoke to the group of the CRD context of the conference.

The main workshops through the day were facilitated by Caitlin Schwartz, youthcore. The key themes and learning are summarised below:

Youth Values

Self:

- Perspectives and experience
- Responsibility and independence
- Autonomy in informed decision making
- Mental, physical, and sexual health
- Self-empowerment around culture and self-identity

- Personal expression: clothes, fashion
- Adaptability, responsiveness
- Innovative, resourceful, energetic
- Technical skills

Support network/Protective factors:

- Friends
- Family
- Recreation
- Trust and empathy

Community Characteristics and Resources:

- Basic needs: food, housing, and transportation
- Education: Traditional and alternative learning and application opportunities
- Employment opportunities to learn and support one's self
- Safety, belonging

Gaps in the Existing Service Models

Social:

- Healthy risk taking opportunities
- Things to do (programming) and places to do them (facilities)
- Aboriginal youth inclusion

Services and resources:

- Accessible and affordable birth control and sex education particularly in surrounding communities like West Shore and North Saanich
- Early intervention and prevention services for youth who act out sexually
- Authentic and effective awareness and education around risks and consequences of drugs and alcohol. There are many programs, but they are not working.
- Emergency/transitional housing without affiliation to spiritual groups

- Transportation within and off the island
- Support structures and resources for sense of safety, belonging, and personal identity development. This was a huge value youth identified, but there are few systems in place to effectively support such a value.

Community Action Planning:

Community Youth Plan: Un-used property should be re-vitalized by turning closed or even active schools into regionally centralized 24 hour youth resource and activity centres

Suggested Elements:

- Place to hang out
- Concession with free/cheap healthy food
- Music with local bands and musicians
- Place to sleep if you need to
- Free computers for social networking, research
- Quiet homework area with tutors
- Integrated transportation planning: Community bus/Rapid transit

Stakeholders Identified for a Collaborative Practice: Philanthropists/Fundraisers; offenders and appropriate support services e.g., community service or alternative measures or Restorative Justice programs; community volunteers; city planners; Mayor and Council; youth programmers; admin team; Youth; Youth Council

Implementation Plan:

1. Survey and inventory where services are needed and how often
2. Design and build it
3. Hire people to maintain it
4. Use it

Panel

An important component of the afternoon session was the question and answer session with a panel of youth prepared specifically for this role. The panel of youth comprised 6 youth from a range of different areas and schools in Victoria

The discussion was led by some basic questions and open discourse, in summary the following points were raised:

What services work?

- job seeking services
- library
- V.N.F.C. – help with different things we need
- Pathways Project-Life skills and job seeking skills

What doesn't work?

- Lack of community events
- not many health clinics
- more activities needed
- more recreational activities needed
- need somewhere to hang out

What would encourage youth to participate more?

- more community events
- more youth involvement in events
- more publicity of what's going on
- sport drop-in – by donation for the public
- action – to be out safe and free

What services are available?

- Beacon Community Services
- Boys and Girls Club
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- John Howard Society

Services no longer provided

- get busy program – eg: food safe and first aid, rock climbing, food, helpful things

What restrictions are there for youth ?

- 11 P.M. curfew
- limited bus service/transit

What would make your community safe?

- safe places to go hang out
- more to do
- drop ins – at weekends and at job centre

Open questions – arising messages

- Youth may use alcohol even if they have their own space – e.g. not only through boredom
- youth who need help should have a service
- youth who drink because of boredom could benefit from activities

Youth can ask for what they want at rec centres, councillors, service clubs
Activities are needed near to home as youth walk home afterwards

Communicate with youth by going around to the schools

Feedback

The feedback forms were completed by adults and youth attending the event at a rate of between 25-30%. The range of responses illustrates the diversity of participation and perspectives. There were however some evident themes.

Overall the engagement with youth was most valued. The feedback indicates that it was the youth contributions and perspectives that were important during the day. There was also a consistent theme that the knowledge and information of resources gathered by participants was valued. Again, the youth panel was a highlight. The final comments reinforced the conclusion that most participants enjoyed the day.

In the future, such an event could be organised to occur at a more central location. However, it was designed as part of a three-series of conferences to be held in different areas of Capital Regional District. The format of the day would be more varied with more varied methods of engagement being utilised. We had tried to engage with more youth and with first nations youth and these were areas commented on in the feedback.

What did you find helpful or useful about the day? (n=27)

Meeting youth. 8

Hearing about community resources/activities (networking/mapping). 8

Hearing the perspectives of youth. 5

Listening to the contributions from others. 4

Other 5 including: Giving the perspective of youth, learning what regulates and influences behaviours, the condoms and release from school for the day.

The youth panel and also the 'The people, the energy, the way it was set up and coordinated' were appreciated.

What would you have changed about the day? (n=26)

Not as long; faster pace, more variety for youth, more games. 8

Timing: later time, being on time, shorter time. 5

Nothing to change, enjoyed it. 4

More panel discussion; more diversity and time. 3

More – people, information, resources. 3

More central location. 1

What did you learn during the day? (n=24)

Resources. 6

Shared perspectives and ideals. 4

Youth needs, e.g. a space of their own, more activities. 6

Commonalities. 3

About organizations. 3

Other; including priorities, the importance of youth in the community, 'a lot of great ideas exist but how we get this information and momentum to policy and decision makers?' and that 'Teens aren't creative and thinking of stuff to do'.

What solutions did you identify? (n=24)

Specific issues e.g. transportation, birth control, places to hang out, clinic, youth centre. 7
Engaging with youth and discussions. 6
Build on existing resources. 3
None, mostly problems. 3
More accessibility for youth. 2

What will you do differently after today? (n=20)

Try more or new things with youth. 5
Try more or new things with community. 4
Go to services or school. 2
Use my influence or initiative. 2
Nothing (probably). 2
Other: keep focused on realistic options, 'try not to only drink for a social life'.

Any other comments? (n=17)

Overall good and fun! (9)
The food was good (there were a couple of comments throughout) the location was not central (3 comments through the feedback).
Improved management of contributions. (2)
More contributions from first nations perspectives. Later time to permit more youth to attend.
Bigger budget to allow for more activities and interaction appealing to youth.
A question on whether there will be one next year?

Findings

Overall the feedback from the exercises and activities during the day supported the main themes of identified needs:

- More activities for youth and engagement of youth
- Improved access/transport to reach activities/services
- Improved housing options
- Drop-in access to services and activities

These are recurrent themes evident across the three BI events.

Discussion

It was disappointing that there were fewer attendees than BI2 and the numbers expected for this event. There was a lot of activity on the facebook page and interest in the community, but this was not translated into attendance on the day. The low representation from the peninsula was particularly remarkable. Even though the planning group had worked hard to engage with local youth in the peninsula their representation was low. The level of First Nation participation among youth on the day was high from other CRD communities. Once there, the level of engagement among most of the participants was very high and their feedback overall indicated that it was a valuable experience.

It is recognised that engaging with youth takes a lot of energy, commitment, time, resources, creativity and patience. It is a credit to our planning group members that so many youth were engaged through the planning process, however, this is intensive work and will always have an impact on the resources needed to plan such an event.

The location may have impacted on the attendance rates. In the future it might have been easier to access if held in Sidney. In contrast to previous years we were charged for the venue and yet it was not as easy to work within as others have been.

Most of the youth were older youth e.g. grade 12. It is important to ensure that we engage and target younger youth in such events and activities in order to elicit and facilitate the expression of their experiences and views.

As ever, the time and length of the day was favoured and disputed by different participants. In the future it might be more advantageous to start later and to make sure that the activities are frequently varied.

In the future we would ensure that the ground rules were more explicit at the beginning, recognising that youth may find that personal emotions and issues may be raised for them and how to safely deal with these immediately.

There was a consistent theme that we needed to have more varied activities in the event overall with more diverse elements in the activities to enable the discussion and exploration.

Again, the panel was very well received and in this event it was not long enough. We would increase the length of time for discussion with youth through the panel and build in time for an immediate de-brief in the future.

It would be useful to have more media coverage, including prior to and after the event. We will try to ensure that this is completed as part of this event. The local paper did cover the event in advance. We could also have improved signage, e.g. at local schools or local venues in advance. However it is also recognised that the planning group was working at maximum capacity and we did not have a dedicated resource to this project.

Brightening Ideas was planned during a time of significant financial hardship in the sector and also among potential sponsors. It was more of a challenge to gain support and donations for the refreshments and venue etc. We did secure sufficient door prizes for every youth to take something away with them, but many of these were local to the peninsula.

Recommendations and Conclusions.

This report will be presented to the CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee. It is recommended that the recommendations at least are presented by members to their councils and other governing bodies.

The series of Bright Idea conferences has produced a consistent theme of findings regarding our youth services across our communities in the Capital Regional District. The conferences have

achieved their objectives, however as the conclusions suggest, the committee has now revealed some key areas to be addressed locally and actively.

This sector changes rapidly and regularly. It is important for youth and agencies to find effective ways of networking and sharing information. Regional conferences provide a means for this information to be meaningfully shared.

The other consistent themes are that youth need:

- More engagement and activities in their community.
- Improved access in particular transport to reach activities and services.
- Improved housing options that are safe and within their community.
- Facilities, such as a drop-in, that offer activities and services in their community.

Having completed three events it is clear that the message will remain the same until we take some action. It is recommended that all municipal councils are encouraged to consider the findings from the series of conferences and consider how they are capable and willing to engage with youth and to plan for the needs of youth in their community. For example, in Saanich, consideration could be given to a pilot of a 'youth bus' to transport youth to the Panoramic Recreation Centre.

Respectfully submitted,
Mitzi Dean, Executive Director, Pacific Centre Family Services Association
Chair, Youth Matters Sub-Committee
CRD Family Court Youth Justice Committee
May 2010