

**Youth @ Together Shuswap
Summary Report
prepared by
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Youth are vibrant, essential members of the Shuswap community, but sometimes opportunities to engage in decision-making and initiatives to improve community wellbeing are not readily available. This is an issue of critical importance as research has clearly shown that when young people have the opportunity to engage in decision-making processes at the local scale, they are more likely to report better overall health, higher self-esteem and greater educational aspirations. In addition, they are less likely to report extreme levels of stress or despair, self-harm, and substance use.

On June 10, 2015, the Fraser Basin Council (FBC) Youth Committee convened a group of youth as part of the 4th annual Together Shuswap community forum. The intent of this youth event was to provide an opportunity for meaningful dialogue and connection among youth from diverse backgrounds and also to identify youth values, challenges, and opportunities in the Shuswap Lake region. 18 youth aged 16-24 years from across the Shuswap participated and shared their perspectives, sparking an open and engaging dialogue amongst a diverse group of active participants.

What We Heard

A number of key priorities were identified during the event with the top priority identified as the need for sustained opportunities for youth engagement, such as a formalized youth council or regional youth advisory group that could help identify effective ways for youth to participate in important community discussions and decision-making processes.

A number of other priorities for youth engagement were identified, including:

- Provision of alternative transportation options rather than private vehicles so more youth can connect more easily with each other and their communities.
- Create open, informal spaces and meeting places where youth can come together with other youth / community members, such as community-youth nights and recreation facilities such as the proposed Chase Skate Park.
- Provide opportunities for intergenerational learning and sharing, particularly around traditional First Nations practices for both First Nations and non-First Nations youth to learn and share with other youth.
- Adults and community leaders enable regular opportunities to listen to youth perspectives, values, and challenges and use this information to inform decisions and actions.
- Increase opportunities for youth-specific fitness and recreational opportunities, such as provision of exercise equipment / infrastructure in local parks or providing organized fitness-based activities for youth after school and during school holidays.

Highlights

Youth participants demonstrated significant courage and openness to share their values, ideas, and challenges with each other as well as with participants of the larger Together Shuswap Community Forum during the afternoon session, which was largely dedicated to youth and identifying opportunities to better enable youth to participate in their community.

A central outcome from the Youth @ Together Shuswap was the chance for youth to interact and share their ideas with leaders in their community. This helped to create meaningful connections and identify locally-relevant ideas for improving youth participation and engagement.

Recommendations

As a result of the lessons learned and priorities identified by youth throughout the Together Shuswap Forum, the FBC Youth Committee has the following recommendations:

1. Youth engagement should not be considered as a one-off conversation or event, but rather as an ongoing, dialogue and a “two-way” street.
2. Different strategies to engage and ensure ongoing youth participation will be required depending on the issue(s) at hand.
3. There is no single “best practice” for youth engagement, but rather a range of engagement possibilities should be considered.
4. Creating an open space for youth dialogue and informal conversation with community leaders will identify topics of interest or issues of concern and is a great way to enable intergenerational dialogue and encourage youth to bring their voice.
5. Encourage *diverse youth expression* when engaging youth in conversation. Do not expect that youth will conform to adult-norms or formalized protocol – especially if they are unfamiliar with formal decision-making processes.
6. Further relationship building, networking and mentoring are necessary to link youth to organizations and institutions that can provide support to move their ideas into action and develop new skills.

Next Steps

The FBC Youth Committee looks forward to expanding the dialogue to engage more youth from across the Shuswap Lake region. The following actions have been identified as vital next steps:

- Host a youth forum, or series of smaller dialogues for youth from across the Shuswap region to build on the priorities and key actions identified at Youth @ Together Shuswap event.
- Take action on key priorities identified by youth. This would include creating space to share priorities and proposed actions with community leaders and decision makers and other local institutions.
- Provide training to adult community leaders on ways to help make space and opportunities for youth to “bring their voice” from the outset of the conversation

A full report from the Youth@ Together Shuswap event will be available on the Fraser Basin Council’s website in the next few weeks: www.fraserbasin.bc.ca