



THIS IS WHAT WE HEARD YOUTH SAY...

A Report from the Listen Up!
Forum



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Do you sometimes feel that as youth, people don't listen to your issues?

On October 10th, 2006, a forum was held in the community to provide youth with the chance to talk about issues that were most important to them. Many different youth were there, representing many different issues.



In the morning, youth got together with other youth and talked about the things that impacted them most. Seven key issues youth face in Hamilton were identified. In the afternoon, service providers (ie. teachers, social workers, and shelter staff) and youth got together to talk about strategies for change.

This report is a summary of those group discussions. For the full report, please see SPRC's website www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca

Do you sometimes feel like you need help but you don't know where to go?

"Food banks are only downtown - we need more in other areas like the mountain"

Youth said that they felt it can be hard to access services in the community. This difficulty was for a couple of reasons: the location of services, food banks, shelters & programs are mostly downtown. Also, there is lack of advertisements about programs, and youth often can not get to services because they do not have transportation.



Youth recommended...

1. Youth outreach programs with youth counselors that deal with a range of issues
2. Teachers should assign projects to students to learn more about their community.
3. Pay people to go to school.

Can you sometimes not afford something you need? Do you think poverty is a big issue in Hamilton?

Youth said poverty was a big issue because they were poor and because poverty affected their neighborhoods and communities. Ontario Works (OW) and employment were two main issues raised. Youth felt they lacked employment opportunities because of their age. Also, young people talked about the issues they had with OW, too little money, penalizations for working and lack of bus passes.



Youth recommended...

"I'm juggling work and school and I'm still broke"

1. Youth can step up for each other. Have youth educate and look out for one-another. "We say it in ways we understand"
2. Have people who can speak up for youth, who know when you are being 'screwed around'. Find people who will go to Ontario Works with youth and who can talk on the same level as youth.
3. Offer incentives to youth to volunteer.

Do you ever feel you are being judged because you are young, because of your clothes, or your gender or race?

Youth explained that discrimination was defined as granting or denying a person rights due to their colour, fashion (how they dress), housing or income. Youth talked about being judged because of their age.

People "assume you're going to steal"

There is "a lack of respect from bosses"

"All youth are treated the same"



Also youth talked about the reality of racism, classism, ageism and hatred in their lives.

Youth recommended...

- 1) Set/enforce boundaries (challenge oppression).
- 2) Schools should undertake group activities: social justice, multicultural, shows, develop a "cultural theme" month/day (Black History Month, LGBTQ Day) - make it fun! Bring food - have longer projects that are interactive with presentations - It makes issues visible.
- 3) Participate in youth advisory committees - take advantage of what's out there - It reminds them that youth are the future.

Do you feel sex is confusing, fun, complicated, important and dangerous all at once?



Youth talked about many different issues related to sex including pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), the pressure to have sex, the pressure to not have sex, lack of support for the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender youth (GLBT), lack of access to condoms.

"with sex there is pressure to have and pressure to not have it"



Youth recommended...

- 1) Talk about sex in peer support groups
- 2) Everyone has a 5 minute private meeting with a public health person - or any health person (and they can do what they want with the time)
- 3) Petition the government for more housing for street-involved pregnant and parenting teens.

Do you sometimes feel unsafe in your school or community?



Gang violence, lack of safety in school and community programs, harassment, and getting in trouble with the law were all talked about by youth as issues in their lives.

Youth recommended...

- 1) Ensure that the school is the centre of every community.
- 2) Find good role models at home, at school, with the police - they need to find trust.
- 3) Peer counselors (for mediation).

“teens feel stress, juggling everything - family, school, jobs, friends”

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed, stressed, sad or really angry?

Youth talked about mental wellness at the forum. Youth at the forum identified stress that comes from various issues (like sex, drug/alcohol, stereotypes, violence, etc) and can be the cause of unstable mental health. Other important issues youth talked about were cutting, self-harm, depression, body image, self-esteem, and using drugs to cope with pain.



Youth recommended...

- 1) Talking with someone else who can relate.
- 2) Guest speakers coming to schools to talk about these issues.
- 3) Point out the positives to show that having a mental health issue is okay.

Do you feel lots of pressure to use drugs or drink alcohol?

Youth definitely talked about how a lot of young people are using drugs & alcohol. Many youth talked about the negative aspects of this use. Peer pressure, easy availability, and low self-esteem were all talked about in relation to drug and alcohol use.



Youth recommended...

- 1) Saying no to drugs makes for less peer pressure and sets a good example.
- 2) Students helping students - link youth with others who have that experience through email, letters, or group meetings
- 3) In school gyms have free recreation services that are planned by youth for youth - advertised by youth (ie. Hockey tournaments).

Do you sometimes feel that as youth, people don't listen to your issues?

Often it is youth violence and sex that make it to the headlines. Although these issues were important to youth, many more issues were uncovered when we gave youth the chance to tell the community what their big issues were. Find ways to get your voice heard!

Keep talking about issues - people are starting to listen.



Special thanks to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for funding this important event.