



#CanadaWeWant #leCanadaquenoussouhaitons

NATIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENT | MOUVEMENT NATIONAL DES JEUNES



#MyEnvironment

Conference Report



The Students
Commission
Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement

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Canada



RBC Future Launch

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Purpose

This report presents the findings of the #MyEnvironment theme team from the #CanadaWeWant 2021 Virtual Youth Conference. This conference theme team focused on exploring issues related to the environment and climate change with a particular focus on exploring the effects of climate change on individual community environments. This theme team is part of a larger project funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Youth Take Charge program. A group of youth have been working since last year's conference to design community engagement processes so that youth better understand the impact of climate change on their communities. The goal of the #MyEnvironment project is to make Canada better. We want better access to clean water, access to the internet, affordable and clean energy, and to provide a more sustainable and improved environment for future generations.

Vision for Change – Theme Team Recommendations

1. Educate children and youth on the environment and climate change through the formal education system.
 - a. Collado et al. (2020), discuss the importance of using nature-based environmental education to shape children's beliefs and attitudes about the environment. By using a method like this, children can better understand their impact on the environment and recognize the importance of preserving the environment.
2. Use technology to reduce the use of paper.
 - a. This is a very easy step to take as many schools have shifted to an online format due to the COVID 19 pandemic (Onado, 2020), which is reducing the amount of paper waste that schools would normally use. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done for some groups, such as Indigenous communities, as they often do not have reliable access to the internet. This issue has been an even more pronounced struggle during the pandemic (United Nations, 2020).
3. Monitor air pollution and make companies accountable.
 - a. DeLuca et al. (2012), discuss how their company in Hamilton Ontario uses mobile pollution surveys and this is a way for them to monitor the pollution that is emitted from their work on the sites.
4. Improve support and opportunities for Indigenous communities to build infrastructure to have more sustainable systems.
 - a. Downing and Cuerrier (2011) discuss the negative impact of climate change on First Nations and other Indigenous communities. As Fenelon and Hall (2004) state, the Indigenous have had a struggle to be autonomous and have control over their own living choices, which unfortunately is still not the case for some living on reserves. There is restricted access to necessities on some reserves, such as clean water and internet, preventing these communities from achieving autonomy.
5. Ensure all Canadians have access to essentials such as clean water, affordable energy and internet access.

- a. As discussed by Lam et al. (2017), there needs to be more reporting in the media on the water crisis on Indigenous reserves. This also means that there is inequity and this needs to be changed so that we can all live with equal access to necessities.

Dream Tree

The Dream Tree is a tool that is used to synthesize young people's ideas into a youth-friendly logic model for a given topic. When building a Dream Tree, the roots represent the foundation: the inputs, resources and values that are needed to work towards a goal. The trunk of the tree represents the activities that are needed, while the leaves are the outputs and indicators, highlighting what we will see as a result of the activities. The fruit represents the desired outcomes (the dream!). The visual below represents the Dream Tree that the theme team worked on.

#CANADA WE WANT

Fruit: the change we want to see (our dream)

- All Canadians will have access to the essentials to live a high-quality life in our current society. This includes access to clean water, affordable energy, and internet access, etc. Lam et al. (2017), discuss how there is not equal access to clean water on Indigenous reserves.
- More opportunities for Indigenous communities to work on building infrastructure.
- Include environmental science and sustainability theories into the elementary and high school curriculum.
- Accessibility for everyone in Canada.
- Corporations to be held accountable for their impact on the environment.

Leaves: outputs & indicators (how we know it's working)

- Community leaders and municipalities are creating opportunities to produce in a more sustainable way and learn about sustainability at the same time.
- Support for community-led initiatives is seen through with cultural sensitivity.
- More leadership programs for Indigenous communities to help build the skillset necessary to solve issues and build infrastructure.

Trunk: activities (what we need to do)

- Community outreach with schools, work closely with school boards.
- Work with organizations already in place in those communities and look at their needs to support them in their activities.
- Reach out to community organizations and schools so that more youth are aware of those opportunities.

Leaves: outputs & indicators (how we know it's working)

- Implement stringent emission standards across the supply chain for corporations who do business in Canada. As seen in the article by Deluca et al. (2012), they introduced mobile pollution surveys so that they were aware of the emissions they were releasing.

Roots: inputs (resources) and values

- Guiding lenses
 - Rural and remote experiences
 - Addressing structural racism
 - Truth leading to reconciliation
 - Children's rights
- As well as:
 - Empowerment, collaboration, accessibility, equity, and mindfulness

The 2021 #CanadaWeWant Conference

This year's #CanadaWeWant Youth Conference was a virtual gathering that took place March 1-8 2021 (adapted for the social limitations of COVID-19). Over the week, eight youth participants and adult allies from coast to coast to coast came together online to share their experiences, concerns, ideas and hopes for the #CanadaWeWant and the #CanadaWeNeed.

At the beginning of the conference, youth participants were invited to choose a theme team that interested them. They then worked in small groups through the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement's (CEYE) Young Decision Makers process. Some explored their topics quite broadly, discussing the issues and challenges that young people face and identifying possible solutions. Other teams were tasked with working directly on specific questions or on various creative products and deliverables that were brought to them by different organizations or government departments who were eager to hear directly from the youth. By the end of the week, all theme teams arrived at a set of recommendations that would help achieve the #CanadaWeWant. These recommendations were presented at the virtual National Showcase Event hosted by RBC's Future Launch Strategy to an audience of community stakeholders, policy makers and decision makers. All teams also created a theme team report, such as this one, to present their process and contextualize their recommendations.

The Process

In each session, the members of the theme teams introduced themselves with their pronouns, described how they were doing that day, and shared some fun facts about themselves. We engaged in some online games, which acted as community builders within each session. The games we played were Among Us, Skribbl.io, and Sandwich or Salad.

We were able to build a strong foundation of trust on Zoom by including everyone and ensuring respectful communication for everyone. We were able to discuss #MyEnvironment (ou #MonEnvironnement) in a comfortable setting where participants were able to ask questions, raise concerns, and engage in discussions. In addition to the discussion of #MyEnvironment, we also opened the conversation to how participants felt about the conference being online, and we let them know how we felt about it.

Key Findings

Discussion

During the #CanadaWeWant Conference, the #MyEnvironment theme team discussed global environmental issues. The recommendations they made can be divided into three perspectives; environmental education, inequities faced by Indigenous communities, and responses to the possible stewardship issues in Canada.

“Ensuring all First Nations communities have access to affordable clean water and clean energy through infrastructure developments and subsidies.”

Highlights

For environmental education:

- The #MyEnvironment theme team wants to implement environmental education in the early education of children. This measure would allow children who wish to be involved in environmental causes to be more successful in their careers.
- The #MyEnvironment theme team hopes that environmental organizations will work with the school board to provide a higher quality of environmental education.

Targeting the Inequities experienced by Indigenous people:

- The #MyEnvironment theme team wants all Canadians, especially Indigenous communities, to have access to clean water, sustainable and affordable energy, and the internet.
- The #MyEnvironment theme team is looking for Canada to meet its obligations to Indigenous people to have the opportunity to build their energy facilities to ensure self-sufficiency.

In response to possible environmental stewardship issues within Canada:

- The #MyEnvironment theme team wants Canadian factories and businesses to implement environmental norms and take responsibility for their impact on the environment.

"We want to see more environmental studies in our elementary and high school curriculum, thus juniors can become more knowledgeable as they move on to their future careers."

- Youth Participant 2021, #CanadaWeWant Conference

"For there to be an increase in the environmental education, there needs to be a collaboration between environmental organizations already in place [in] school boards. This will allow students to become more knowledgeable and more environmentally conscious."

- Youth Participant 2021, #CanadaWeWant Conference

"Every Canadian needs to have access to clean water through sustainable and affordable energy internet access, especially in remote communities."

- Youth Participant 2021, #CanadaWeWant Conference

"We also want to see more opportunities for Indigenous communities to work on building infrastructure so that they can also become more self-sufficient, as many Canadian communities are."

- Youth Participant 2021, #CanadaWeWant Conference

"We want to see corporations and companies [being] held accountable for their environmental impact by implementing a strict carbon [tax]. In mentioning standards, especially for corporations that do business in Canada."

- Youth Participant 2021, #CanadaWeWant Conference

"The Canada that we want is a Canada that is environmentally sustainable, where all Canadians have access to essential things."

Guiding Lenses

The #CanadaWeWant Conference uses four guiding lenses to explore conference topics and to frame recommendations. These lenses were selected based on recurring themes that emerged during previous youth conferences and encourage young people to take an intersectional approach to understanding and tackling their topic area. The four guiding lenses are:

- Rural, Remote and Northern Experience
- Addressing Structural Racism
- Truth Leading to Reconciliation
- Children's Rights

The following summarizes young people's experiences and reflections related to exploring their topic area through these lenses.

Rural, Remote and Northern Experiences

Youth participants discussed the need to create a way for rural, remote and Northern communities to have access to clean water, sustainable and affordable energy, as well as internet connections. Sustainable resources need to be expanded to rural, remote and Northern communities in order to create a stronger environment. Broadband internet access is a critical piece of the puzzle in addressing these inequities as some remote communities do not have access to the same knowledge or learning on sustainable development due to internet accessibility challenges.

Addressing Structural Racism

Youth participants highlighted that they had a lack of understanding when dealing with structural racism, and how it will eventually affect the environment we live in. Education is needed to bring awareness to this situation, allowing all individuals to make Canada a better place, not only for us but also for future generations. In Canada, environmental studies in the school curriculum is often missed in both elementary and secondary school systems. More consideration needs to be given when looking at the physical location of schools, as well as lower income neighbourhoods. For example, the quality of the schools and the education provided in communities with high rates of minorities and/or families on government assistance is much lower than that of wealthier, white neighbourhoods. An article written by Smalling (2020) discusses flaws in the current theoretical approaches to incorporating structural racism into the mainstream curriculum. Smalling further touches on the existence of white privilege and the increased rates of unemployment and lack of higher education among minorities. Educating white students about the challenges faced by minorities without further oppressing people of colour or other ethnicities can pose difficulties (Smalling, 2020).

Truth Leading to Reconciliation

Youth participants identified that many Indigenous communities in Canada lack the resources to maintain healthy environments for their communities. This is a result of centuries of colonialism. Many communities experience a shortage of clean drinking water and stable, safe housing. It is vital for these communities to be supported in developing culturally relevant community investments and programs that foster sustainable practices. This avoids outsiders thinking what they know is best. Communities should be at the forefront of deciding and directing how resources for sustainable programming are allocated.

Children's Rights

There are a limited number of courses around climate change that are available to students, however, it is important to address this issue with children and youth so they can be educated on this topic. For example, in many Ontario schools, environmental courses are not offered because there is low demand for courses, or if there is demand, then there are not enough resources to provide children with those courses. One example for school boards to implement environmental teachings is through a gardening club, which is an interactive way for children to learn about their environment. In regards to children and youth advocating for environmental change, adults and members of community programs tend to overlook the ideas and beliefs of children because of their age and lack of experience around these issues. Instead of overlooking and failing to acknowledge their ideas, adults should help children to have their voices heard by the larger institutions and assist them in guiding a path for themselves rather than suppressing their voices, ideas, and beliefs.