

**Youth Citizenship Conference and Youth Town Hall Meeting  
with Ministers  
November 1 & 2, 2007  
Viscount Gort Hotel, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**Introduction**

Annually, the MB4Youth Division hosts a Youth Citizenship Conference in various regions across the province and a Manitoba Youth Town Hall Meeting with Ministers in conjunction with the Rural Forum in Brandon, Manitoba. This year a two-day event was held on November 1 and 2 combining both the Annual Youth Citizenship Conference and the Manitoba Youth Town Hall Meeting with Ministers.

Over 100 youth from 29 schools throughout Manitoba participated in the two-day event. Broad representation from across Manitoba led to engaging and participative discussions about the priorities and issues facing Manitoba youth.

**Youth Citizenship Conference – Day One**

The theme of this year's conference and town hall was *Democracy in Action* and the event featured a keynote address by the Honourable Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth. Minister Bjornson described the importance of youth engagement in citizenship activities and highlighted that the youth participating in the conference were demonstrating citizenship and a commitment to community. He also spoke about the sacrifices our elders have made in the past to ensure that we have a free and democratic society today.

The conference focused on giving youth the opportunity to explore the democratic process through small group discussions, a meeting with Ministers, informative presentations and various activities focused on democracy and the democratic process.

## **Small Group Discussion**

In five groups of twenty, youth were given a questionnaire to complete that asked the following four questions:

1. What are three key issues or priorities for you right now?
2. What are three key issues or priorities for your community right now?
3. What are three key issues or priorities for Manitoba right now?
4. What are three key issues or priorities for Canada and the World right now?

Youth had the opportunity to share and discuss their answers with their group. They were also encouraged to brainstorm additional issues and priorities for them, their communities, the province and the world.

Complete results for the questions are included in Appendix “A”. Below are the top 3 results for each question discussed (with the percentages in parentheses), and the potential solutions as identified by the youth participants.

### ***Question #1— What are three key issues or priorities for you right now?***

#### **1. Education (49%)**

- scholarships and student loans
- course options in rural communities
- healthy food options in schools

Youth brainstormed potential solutions to address these concerns which included increased awareness of scholarships and bursaries available to youth, offering more on-line/distance education courses for youth in rural communities and more education in schools about healthy food options.

#### **2. Community Involvement (9%)**

- engagement in community
- youth groups
- volunteer opportunities

Youth brainstormed potential solutions to address community involvement concerns including identifying a community coordinator to organize activities for youth and making volunteering mandatory for every high school student.

#### **3. Environment (8%)**

- global warming
- use of plastic bags
- natural gas

Potential solutions identified by youth for addressing environmental concerns included carpooling, having more student led initiatives in schools and communities and using eco-friendly/hybrid vehicles.

***Question #2 – What are three key issues or priorities for your community right now?***

**1. Safety/Crime (21%)**

- Gangs/violence
- Bullying
- Safety in schools

Youth brainstormed potential solutions to address safety/crime concerns including having more presentations and awareness programs presented by youth and role models that have been involved in crime and learned from their experiences. In addition, youth recommended having more police presence and town patrols in small communities to reduce the risk of crime and address safety concerns.

**2. Teen Issues (12%)**

- lack of activities for teens outside of school
- teen pregnancy
- teen suicide rates

Youth participants identified potential solutions to address teen issues which included having more teen help lines, peer helpers, support groups and community speakers. Youth also expressed a need to address problems and concerns on an individual basis.

**3. Economy and Development (11%)**

- community improvements/rejuvenation
- small business/entrepreneurship
- Manitoba's growing population

Youth brainstormed potential solutions to address concerns around the economy and development and identified supporting local economy, focusing on roads and sustainable development and less importing of products available in Manitoba.

***Question #3 – What are three key issues or priorities for Manitoba right now?***

**1. Safety/Crime (18%)**

- safety in schools
- car theft

- youth justice system

Youth participants identified mandatory sentencing, harsher punishments, accurate media portrayals, curfews for youth and funding for responsive action as being potential solutions to safety/crime concerns in Manitoba.

## **2. Health (10%)**

- nursing/doctor shortages
- hospital wait times
- healthy living

Discussions around potential solutions to health concerns focused on increasing incentives and job security for nurses, decreasing the cost of medications and increasing the focus on healthy living and healthy communities.

## **3. Environment (10%)**

- global warming
- renewable resources
- phosphorous in detergents
- green energy

Youth participants identified potential solutions to address environmental concerns such as recycling programs, more buses in rural communities and banning of hazardous products.

### ***Question #4 – What are three key issues or priorities for Canada and the World right now?***

#### **1. War (26%)**

- peacekeeping
- Canadian troops in Iraq
- awareness and information sharing

Youth participants brainstormed potential solutions for their concerns on war which included more education and knowledge sharing, ambassadors to speak with youth in schools and more curriculums focused on history outside of Canada.

#### **2. Environment (21%)**

- climate change
- environmental effects of war
- protecting natural resources

Potential solutions identified to address global environmental concerns included fines for environmental offenders, legislated waste management, scholarships for eco-friendly practices and strict laws for large companies/organizations.

### **3. Poverty (11%)**

- welfare system
- homelessness

Youth participants identified several potential solutions to address global poverty concerns which included fundraising for local/community programs as well as global initiatives, more education and knowledge sharing about the welfare system and increased resources for foreign aid.

### **Youth Town Hall Meeting with Ministers – Day Two**

Youth participants had an opportunity to develop and ask questions to provincial Cabinet Ministers based on the priorities and key issues identified in the group discussions on day one.

Participating Ministers included:

- Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth
- Theresa Oswald, Minister of Health
- Jim Rondeau, Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines and Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade
- Rosann Wowchuk, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
- Stan Struthers, Minister of Conservation

Each Minister had the opportunity to address some of the key issues, priorities and concerns identified by youth.

#### **Education, Citizenship and Youth**

Minister Peter Bjornson discussed the importance of citizenship education and creation of the *Classroom in the Legislature* to teach students about the democratic system and the importance of voting. The Minister also discussed how an increase in bursaries available to youth, the increase in minimum wage and the decrease in tuition are giving more Manitoba youth the opportunity to attend post-secondary education. The *Safe Schools Charter* and school emergency response plans were all highlighted in response to the demand for safer schools.

#### **Health**

Minister Theresa Oswald discussed the benefits of staying in Manitoba to study medicine such as the increased number of seats in medical school and the funding available to students for return of service agreements. Minister Oswald also discussed the innovative ways that Manitoba medicine is being put on the map with the introduction of the new *Gamma Knife* for use in laser surgeries and the

*Health Sciences Centre Burn Unit.* The Minister also spoke about the importance of preventative programs to improve eating and exercise habits and reduce injuries.

### **Science, Technology, Energy and Mines & Competitiveness, Training and Trade**

Minister Jim Rondeau discussed the impact the province is having on the environment through alternative sources of energy such as using ethanol and bio-diesel fuels, the introduction of hydrogen buses and geothermal heat. Minister Rondeau also discussed the provincial government's commitment to fair trade through their no-sweat policy, incentives for new businesses and increased education. In response to supports for local/small businesses Minister Rondeau highlights the decrease in tax rates for small businesses and improved share buying programs.

### **Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives**

Minister Rosann Wowchuk discussed the need to focus on Manitoba production and Manitoba produce through small loans and incentive programs for young farmers. In addition, programs to recruit foreign farmers are being promoted and a variety of programs to support organic farming are available.

### **Conservation**

Minister Stan Struthers highlighted the incentives available for hybrid vehicles and the introduction of hydrogen buses in Manitoba. In addition, programs have been put in place to help make it easier for Manitobans to make environmentally friendly decisions such as education programs, recycling programs and waste management programs.

### **Presentations**

*Elections Manitoba* engaged youth participants in an interactive activity examining the elections process. Youth had the opportunity to participate in a complete election experience by nominating candidates, doing electoral speeches and voting for the candidate of their choice. Youth learned how to make informed decisions and had an opportunity to experience the impact of their vote.

Serge Kaptegain from *Hand in Hand for Peace* a war refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo spoke to youth about experiences in the Congo and delivered a message of hope. Serge spoke to youth about the millions of citizens that have been killed in his native country and about the importance of democracy and believing in a better future.

Youth participants also had the opportunity to participate in group and individual quizzes and activities around democracy and the democratic process.

## **Conclusion**

The Youth Citizenship Conference provided youth with an opportunity to share their opinions, concerns and ideas about their communities and the democratic process. Youth were given the opportunity to make recommendations and develop potential solutions that they felt could make a positive impact on a local, provincial, national and global level. Participants also had the opportunity to hear stories and perspectives of youth from across the province. Many youth participants left with more than knowledge and awareness, they left with new friends and the motivation to make a difference.

## Appendix “A”

<b>Question #1—What are three key issues or priorities for you right now?</b>		<b>Question #2 – What are three key issues or priorities for your community right now?</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Responses</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Responses</b>
Education	49%	Safety/Crime	21%
Community Involvement	9%	Teen Issues	12%
Environment	8%	Economy and Development	11%
Employment	6%	Education	8%
Politics/Voting	5%	Drinking/Drugs	7%
Drinking/Drugs	3%	Community Involvement	6%
Quality of Life	3%	Environment	6%
Respect for Teens	3%	Employment	6%
Farming/Ranching	2%	Health	4%
Safety/Crime	2%	Roads	4%

<b>Question #3 – What are three key issues or priorities for Manitoba right now?</b>		<b>Question #4 – What are three key issues or priorities for Canada and the World right now?</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Responses</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Responses</b>
Safety/Crime	18%	War	26%
Health	10%	Environment	21%
Environment	10%	Poverty	11%
Government/Politics	8%	Economy/Development	8%
Education	7%	Global Aid/International Relations	7%
Roads	5%	Health	6%
Other	4%	Government/Politics	3%
Housing	3%	Racism	3%
Economy/Development	3%	Human Rights	2%
Rural Sustainability	3%	Education	1%