



Towards 2020

Canada's Commitment to Children & Youth

April 26th - 28th 2009

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Ottawa

Towards 2020: Canada's Commitment to Children and Youth was presented to 425 delegates on April 26-28th 2009 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Ottawa. The conference featured a number of nationally known speakers, a series of workshop sessions and a several opportunities to hear from youth.

The event was a huge success on a number of fronts. It informed, inspired, showcased youth and allowed participants to connect and share.

The following report outlines some of the themes raised at the conference and highlights a number of recommendations and next steps. Those in attendance were firm in their wish to belong to something bigger, perhaps a constituency of sorts that engages them at different levels.

They wanted to connect.

They wanted advocacy to define what we are *for* and not just what we are *against*.

They wanted to share with other Canadians and not just to other child/youth allies.

They wanted to select a small number of *achievable* issues to address.

They wanted youth at the table.

They wanted to see strong committed leadership on all fronts.

And, they want to get started now!

This is merely a beginning of sorts. The beginning of a proceedings report and, who knows, perhaps the beginning of a national movement! We can only hope that the delegates at the conference and others across the country will stay connected and help shape the dialogue – indeed help shape the future.

We invite you to join us!

Are the Children Well? Are the Children Well-Served?

By the time you get to my age, this is really the only question that is ethically worth asking.

Dr. Robert Glossop

2020 Speaker

(The youth movement) is really no mystical concept! Fact is youth passion is addictive. Our collective energy spreads to adults and peers alike. How will YOU harness the "youth passion" already within your schools, communities and organizations -- and ensure that it infuses passion in everyone?

Adam Moscoe

Youth delegate

Towards 2020 was about connecting, informing and inspiring – nothing more and nothing less!

We wanted to create a conference that would serve as a catalyst. We wanted to ‘stir the pot’ ever so slightly so that Canadians might be compelled to make decisions about children and youth that lead to better partnerships (especially with young people), bigger goals, and bolder more creative strategies.

We viewed this conference as an opportunity to challenge those who care about children and youth to think, and act differently. We strived to challenge assumptions, ‘break moulds’ and consider creative strategies to improve the prospects of children and youth in Canada.

We wanted to promote authentic generational connections!

We wanted to examine how change happens

We wanted to evaluate how we do business in serving and engaging young people

We wanted to explore “critical mass”, leadership and the collective will to embrace a new way of doing business!

What we didn’t want to do at *Towards 2020* was spend large amounts of time re-stating problems - unstable funding, competing priorities, fragmented services (“fragmented children”) and institutional complacency. A clear articulation of the national issues confronting children and youth is important but we preferred to focus on remedies.

Towards 2020 would avoid lengthy speeches, soapbox rhetoric and stay away from pointing fingers! We would try to avoid the blaming of governments and politicians make an attempt at seeing just how committed (or complacent) Canadians are when it comes to the raising of their kids!

People who seek to serve their conscience or find meaning in their lives or simply seek the quiet splendor of moral growth are obliged to get involved when something is wrong in the community, country or indeed the world.

People who do not intervene when something is amiss give tacit permission for injustice to continue...Evil thrives on apathy and cannot exist without it. Hence, apathy is the evil you see when injustice encounters inertia – it uses that passivity exactly as if it were approval and in the absence of protest – evil is nourished and indeed it can flourish. The nature of goodness therefore bears a very keen resemblance to intervention.

Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or even great intelligence but I can tell you that it is the one vital, essential quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change.

That’s what it takes to alter the future for kids in Canada and therefore the country itself.

Sally Armstrong
2020 Speaker

A brief review of the conference presentations and breakout session materials indicate that delegates on some levels are hopeful and optimistic and on others are deeply worried and cynical. Delegates, many of them youth, shared their thoughts on the need for doing business differently. There was a sense that an alternative method of working with Canada's children and youth is needed - one with a new system of checks and balances to counter learned, sometimes antiquated, and tired habits that keep us doing the same things even when they aren't working.

A number of delegates and presenters expressed concern that planning efforts for children and youth are scattered, fragmented and contained within narrow silos. Some spoke of a need for new leadership; leadership that transcends silos and listens to, hears and embraces, the voices of youth. Many delegates said that we must work better together with a common language and in a strategic, coordinated, and results-focused manner if Canada's young people are to reach their full potential.

It became clear during the conference that *Towards 2020* was indeed about **connecting** people from across our great land and across the generations, **informing** them about the work, policy and practices carried out by ordinary and extraordinary Canadians; and **inspiring** them to partner with others (particularly young people) to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth – and in so doing perhaps make a difference in the lives of us all!

There were no resolutions made at *Towards 2020* but there were some strong underlying themes relating to how we should proceed in the future. These included a focus on enhanced national leadership, authentic youth engagement and child rights and Canada's commitment to the UN Convention

A generation that thinks its own interests are paramount, that its own needs and desires come first, is selfish. A culture based on heedless consumption is hollow - but a society that considers the raising of a child a purely individual responsibility, sort of a lifestyle choice, is suicidal. A country that gives primacy to the interests and needs of adults over those of its children is bankrupt.

Tim Brodhead

2020 Speaker

Tomorrow starts today!

Calvin Mitchell

Youth delegate

National Leadership

“Taking responsibility for Canada’s kids... It’s always somebody else’s job”

Both delegates and speakers identified the need for a new form of leadership for Canada’s children and youth. Some expressed concern about the creation of additional levels of bureaucracy while others spoke of the strategic action that would come through the establishment of a National Commissioner for Children and Youth. Delegates felt that this position would provide coordinated leadership and vision across federal departments and national agencies and ensure a strong mandate to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Commissioner would speak on behalf of all Canadian children and youth, making sure their voices were heard on the national issues that affect them.

Youth Engagement

“When it comes to meaningful youth engagement we still don’t get it”!

We tend to publicly herald young people but privately dismiss them as problems that require fixing. We engage them but often our efforts are token at best and dismissive at worst! Youth told us that they want increased involvement in areas of self-determination; shared power in decision-making and problem solving, and increased opportunities to influence change. A number of delegates spoke of the need for the promotion and development of a National Youth Advisory Council while others addressed the need for a Canadian Youth Senate.

Child Rights and Canada’s Commitment to the UN Convention

“Who is doing the monitoring and does anybody care”

There was much discussion relating to U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, “the most ratified of all the United Nations Human Rights treaties yet perhaps the most obscure, misunderstood and underused”, according to one delegate. The conference heard that despite ratifying the treaty in 1991, Canada continues to fall well short of meeting its obligations and yet sadly few Canadians seem to notice or care! There was much discussion relating to the development of a national action plan aimed at bringing Canada into convention compliance, and the need to improve the way we educate children and others on the importance of the Convention articles.

By working better together we can create a Canada where success is contagious. A Canada where First Nations youth are healthy, safe and fully employed across all sectors of the economy as artists and entrepreneurs, politicians, and policy makers, office workers and engineers. That is a vision worth fighting for.

Bob Watts

2020 Speaker

*If we say,
You are safe
You are valued in this
community
You are a unique individual that
has a gift to offer all of us
And if we can figure out a way
to say this to every young person
in the country
We will have gone a long way to
fulfill our commitment to
Canada’s children and youth.*

Sherri Torjman

2020 Speaker

Towards 2020: The Next Steps

It would be imprudent for conference organizers to speak for the delegates in attendance other than to say that there was a “collective buzz” and a strong sense that Canadians can do more to improve the prospects of Canada’s children and youth. There was also an occasional embarrassing sentiment expressed by adult delegates that many in the professional community have been immersed in status quo planning for far too long. It became clear that we can and we must, become stronger, more effective advocates and develop greater national leadership representation. We can and we must coordinate our efforts, engage youth as partners and do a better job of bringing Canada into compliance with the Articles in the UN convention.

We can! We must! But how - and where do we get started?

Spurred on by the success of the conference and encouraged by the enthusiasm and commitment of delegates organizers have announced a follow up event scheduled for April/May 2010. Planners are challenging others (including youth) to join in the building of a ‘shared space’, one that connects Canadians from every discipline and from every age group.

A space, physical and virtual, that provides information, inspiration and allows for the sharing of creative ideas. The working title is *Better Together: Canada’s Comittment to Children & Youth*.

We believe that our supporters, those who joined us in Ottawa can imagine a better place for Canada’s children and youth. They want to seek a deeper understanding of young people and develop that understanding through greater collaboration at all levels. They have great ideas and seek venues in which to share them with fellow Canadians. *Better Together: Canada’s Comittment to Children & Youth* might just be the start of something bigger!

And so, what are we waiting for?

We must draw on our greatest resource this country has ever known, our idealistic, dreaming, bold, exciting and dynamic young people. When we do that then we finally start building the Canada that we can proudly leave to our children and grandchildren. That’s the kind of Canada we can only build if all of us work together with our young people NOW!

Justin Trudeau
2020 Speaker

Starting Here – Starting Now

Better Together: Canada's Commitment to Children & Youth. will:

- Inspire Canadians to come together to share their creativity, thoughts and ideas about children, youth and communities.
- Garner intergenerational support from across Canada and from all sectors and audiences especially young people and their allies.
- Promote best practices and public policies that support and advance the cause of children and youth.
- Profile and celebrate the successes and accomplishments of young Canadians and their allies.

The Details

- Bring Canadians together in 2010 for the *Better Together: Canada's Commitment to Children & Youth* conference!
- Build a website designed to be a clearinghouse and showcase. We will also produce a weekly e-News bulletin that keeps Canadians apprised of relevant information and distribute a monthly complementary "*Better Together*" e-Zine.
- Establish a Canadian Intergenerational Trust to find common ground on which Canadians can form strategic alliances in support of children and youth. Terms of Reference will include: an examination of barriers and opportunities that inhibit and accelerate the work ahead and a preliminary study relating to the establishing of a National Team of Champions.
- Create a new national program that challenges young Canadians to soar in the areas of technology, culture and the arts.
- Create a Canadian Award that acknowledges the work of Canadians both young and old who 'move mountains' in their support of children and youth.

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"I have never been especially impressed by the heroics of people convinced they are about to change the world. I am more awed by those who struggle to make one small difference after another."

- Ellen Goodman

From the Flipcharts and Questionnaires:

- *Youth are so ill informed and some would say deliberately kept this way!*
- *You can't have an agenda for Canada's children and youth without having a vision of where we want to be in 2020. We can't have a vision unless we develop better conduits across provincial and territorial borders, engage with young people and work within the parameters of the UN Convention.*
- *We need Champions from all sectors and all generations.*
- *It is important that the cohesion seen and experienced at this conference is maintained. We must keep up the momentum.*
- *The fact that we don't have a vibrant constituency for children and youth in Canada is telling!*
- *Why is it so difficult to come up with a one paragraph collective vision statement for Canada's young people? Youth could do it themselves were they given the opportunity.*
- *If we ignore their needs, they will ignore ours!*
- *Canada needs to increase its support for the whole child.*
- *It is important that conference organizers use the data base to keep people connected.*
- *We should acknowledge the kids who are not interested in engaging...some see it as a waste of time. This has been the way throughout history.*
- *Many schools and youth organizations focus on overseas development in the Third World without being mindful of the third world conditions in our own country.*
- *Bureaucracy generally symbolizes blockades!*
- *We expect a collective, collaborative approach or movement and yet we have become a very individualistic society. How do we reconcile this?*
- *When we are afraid to act on something progressive we automatically say, "Let's do more research". Research often stalls action.*
- *It's interesting that our professional constituency might be one of the last to get on board the technology yet the people we work with are leading the way – Interesting!*
- *We have a tendency to select a problem then a solution and go our separate ways hopeful that we might secure resources towards the achieving of a decent outcome. The solutions are often at odds with one another but we plod along each taking a different piece of the child. The more we focus on the smaller, narrower pieces the more we fragment the responses and the more we end up failing the kids.*

- *We need to be unrelenting in asking ourselves and others 'is what we are doing to our children benefiting or harming them'*
- *We must advocate on an intergenerational basis...boomers and grandparents have lots to offer yet are rarely asked.*
- *Stop all the talking at tables and act!*
- *We must invest early and often.*
- *We should be doing more at coordinating services that are designed to facilitate a holistic approach to serving children and youth. This will only happen with stronger partnerships between governments and the non profit and private sectors."*
- *We need to enhance opportunities for young people to give back.*
- *A "Ministry of the Child" could go a long way to addressing issues such as fragmentation, duplication and replication. The Ministry could also be responsible for the establishing and maintaining of a National Youth Agenda.*
- *Our policies in Canada have not kept up with changes in society.*
- *If local networks can't come together then how are we to ever expect it to happen nationally?*
- *If we want to increase youth engagement then we need to start with education...ironically it is education where youth engagement is often most absent or token! Check out the way youth Trustees are patronized on school boards and look for it in the curriculum.*
- *We have a tendency to make things far more complex than they need to be – analysis paralysis!*
- *What do you as adults want, need and expect from us? This is what conference organizers should be asking of youth. We the youth need to be seen as "on the ground" experts.*
- *We must not lose the momentum generated at this conference...important to move the ideas into action.*
- *We should be challenging our leaders - are they tired and bankrupt? Are they employing the full range of strategies necessary to really make a positive difference? What strategies are missing?*
- *Our attention must be directed to those most in need.*
- *We need to find a common theme and get behind it – When it comes to advocacy we fail our children and I suppose we fail ourselves.*
- *You want to engage the hierarchies not fight against them!*
- *If you need a solid example of the power of youth in advocacy look no further than the tobacco campaign.*
- *We need to look at things through the eyes of children and youth.*

- *We must acknowledge that children and youth don't grow up in programs.*
- *Missing at this conference and others is the involvement of the corporate world...We need to stop seeing them exclusively as dollar signs and more as parents and family members committed to contributing in other ways to the welfare of Canada's children.*
- *Our children need a champion for their cause...maybe a team of champions...people who are independent of government.*
- *We need a new narrative...new voices telling stories...young people should be telling their stories to politicians and policy makers...We need to do things that stir passion.*
- *Has there ever been a formal constituency or movement in Canada? The fact that we have to ask the question means that previous efforts were neither broad nor deep nor lasting! Lobbying has been tentative and generally fragmented – we are not always sure who we should be lobbying!*
- *There is cronyism in Canada's kids sector...we have not always been strong at embracing the other players. Wee have generally ignored parents and the others considered outside of the tent – business, faith groups, seniors, and strangers! To a certain extent the isolating of key stakeholders might have contributed to a degree of complacency or dependency throughout the society.*
- *Everyone knows that the patchwork approach to Canada's children has never worked and yet, people who should know better still do it. Rather than ask why they do it, they point fingers...no one is prepared to take the blame or responsibility.*
- *Remember the "whole" child is more than physical, mental, intellectual, we forget about spiritual.*
- *There are far too many examples of reports being commissioned to gather dust on the shelves of corner offices and never be heard of again!*
- *It seems as if our past national discussions most often lean to the parochial – legislation, policy and most often on public funding and the lack thereof! ("Money – yes, if only we had more money", and yet we are not particularly creative without it!).*
- *It is the stories of children and the presence of children that have moved us at this conference.*
- *Youth have to ask, "What is our cause...What is our rallying cry"?*
- *Enough talk, already!*