

Speak Out 2011

A Dialogue between Youth and Community Leaders



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Executive Summary:

Speak Out 2011 was the culmination of a yearlong project initiated by the Abbotsford Youth Commission and the Abbotsford Youth Commission's Youth Council. Established as a youth directed project, the Youth Council took the lead to set the direction and delivery of this special event, Speak Out 2011; A Dialogue between Youth and Community Leaders. Initial planning consisted of multiple group meetings and consultations with a selection of four key community members. Based on the information gathered at these meetings, the itinerary for Speak Out 2011 was set around six themes: Transit, School, Safety, Civic Pride, Getting the Message Out and Youth and the Community. These six themes inspired conversation between local youth and community leaders as they shared ideas, thoughts and concerns regarding local community issues as they related to youth.

Key findings:

Transit:

- We need to keep transit affordable
- Expanded hours - especially so that someone who takes a bus to school/work can also take one home

School:

- One of the consistent themes was that graduating high school students were not feeling 'ready / prepared' to transition into university / college
- Youth, especially older youth, would like to see more class activities in their schools that would unite students and motivate youth to be cohesive and work together more effectively

Safety:

- Some areas of the city are viewed as unsafe, particularly during late hours, and especially by female youth
- Youth expressed that they generally feel safe at their school, mall and neighbourhoods

Civic Pride:

- Youth were proud of the cultural diversity in Abbotsford
- The two things that youth were proud of were that Abbotsford is a great place for sports and that we celebrate and embrace diversity. More multicultural events and festivals were encouraged

Getting the Message Out:

- Social Media preferences vary greatly; however, Facebook is likely the most popular with youth. The majority of the youth indicated that Facebook would be their preference for receiving notice regarding events or programs
- Youth expressed that they frequently use 'texting' to communicate with their friends and often with their parents

Youth and the Community:

- The youth were extremely interested in music - an opportunity to have a place to play instruments, make music, have competitions such as the battle of the bands, karaoke, etc
- Having civic facilities (swimming pools, skating rinks) with age-limited (16-19 year olds) times (10 pm to midnight) at a cheap price was suggested

Project Background:

In 1991, the Districts of Matsqui and Abbotsford established the Youth Commission to ensure that concerns and problems regarding youth in the community would be heard. The goal was to actively identify and promote avenues through which resources in the community could better address youth issues. One initiative that was established early on was the Youth Council program. Running from September to June each year, this program offers Abbotsford Youth an opportunity to develop their leadership skills and be involved in their community.

Each high school in Abbotsford is invited to nominate one to three youth who are in grades ten through twelve to be their representative on Youth Council. As an active member of Youth Council each member is a spokesperson both for their school and for the Abbotsford Youth Commission. Their role is to plan projects that are intended to give back to the community, help with AYC events, volunteer with a variety of other local events and act as a liaison for youth. The council comes together at monthly meetings to learn leadership skills and work on youth initiated projects in an effort to make a difference in the community.

At the beginning of the school year, the group participates in an annual retreat where the objective is to bring the group closer together and establish a project that they will undertake. After the retreat, the council meets monthly to organize their projects, share school leadership updates, and provide feedback and a 'youth voice' on various issues for groups in the community.

This past fall, at the annual leadership retreat, the Youth Council explored a project idea that would connect youth and community leaders. The idea was to hold a youth forum during Youth Week 2011, May 1 -7, that would explore various issues in the community as they relate to youth. The emphasis of this project was to allow the youth to gain knowledge and understand the decisions made within the community while offering them the opportunity to have their voice heard on issues that they viewed as important.

Project Description:

This year's Youth Council project, Speak Out 2011; A Dialogue between Youth and Community Leaders, brought youth and community leaders together to share ideas, thoughts and concerns regarding local community issues.

The Youth Council planned this ambitious project with two parts, the first part was an educational component and the second was a youth forum. At monthly meetings the youth council outlined the objectives that they wanted to achieve. These objectives included gaining further knowledge of the issues they felt were most important in our community and ensuring that both adults and youth were well represented at the forum. Six themes emerged as the areas of most interest to the youth. The themes were: Transit, School, Safety, Civic Pride, Getting the Message Out and Youth and the Community.

One very important part of the project that arose during the initial planning stages was the process of consultation with key community members. The group selected four community members who were each invited to attend a youth council meeting. During these meetings the Youth Council asked the community members to share their knowledge on a variety of topics including; what their job entails, how decisions are made, how their position impacts the lives of youth, and what initiatives they are currently working on. By engaging in these meetings the youth gained insight into the jobs these leaders perform; this assisted them in shaping the direction of the forum.

The youth forum provided the youth with the opportunity to meet with community leaders and discuss the issues that they felt were important. The forum was structured in a 'world cafe' format. Tables were setup around the room representing each of the different topics. All participants had the opportunity to rotate to various tables, allowing everyone the chance to engage in the topics of interest to them. At each table there was a framework of questions which was shaped from the information gathered at the earlier educational meetings. Also present at each table was a facilitator to initiate discussion and record results. During the discussions, the youth and community leaders were provided with the opportunity to have their voices heard and provide insight into the topics at hand. At the conclusion of the 'world cafe' all participants regrouped to share the results of the discussions.

Speak Out 2011

Themes emerging from the dialogue

Transit/Transportation

- We need to keep transit affordable
- Expanded hours - especially so that someone who takes a bus to school/work can also take one home
- Ensure that buses, bus stops, and exchanges are safe places
- Female youth especially continue to NOT feel safe when using the transit system
- Youth in Abbotsford find it very 'uncool' to ride the transit, whereas; youth in Vancouver, think it is very cool
- Extended hours, night service
- Transit Role Models
- Promotions - scavenger hunt
- More frequency and better convenience

School

- One of the consistent themes in this area was that graduating high school students are not feeling 'ready / prepared' to transition into university / college
- Youth suggested that perhaps having a job shadow earlier on in their school career – perhaps from grade 9 or 10 would be helpful so that they would feel confident when they do transition out of the school setting
- Youth suggested having a mentor from the university who would be there for them before entering the university and be available for them while they are adjusting

- It was very clear that youth were not feeling confident and not prepared to move into the next phase of their life after graduation.
- Older youth especially would like to see more class activities in their schools that would unite youth and motivate youth to be cohesive and work better together

Safety

- Some areas of the city are viewed as unsafe, particularly during late hours, and especially by females (Meadowfair, Countess, Centre Street; in and around Dragon Fort, and; Essendene/downtown)
- Youth have concerns about safety on transit – especially female riders
- A suggestion was made to have more street lights and increase police presence so that the youth can feel safe attending events and participating in activities..
- Youth expressed that they did not feel safe after dark and in certain areas of town i.e. parks especially after dark.
- Youth expressed that they generally feel safe at their school, mall and neighbourhoods

Civic Pride

- Youth didn't feel valued
- There was reference to research that was done indicating that only 16% of the youth in Abbotsford felt valued.
- The youth would like to have more annual festivals to showcase their talent.
- The two things that youth were proud of was that Abbotsford is a great place for sports and that we do celebrate and embrace multicultural and diversity. More multicultural events and festivals were also desired.
- Many youth find Abby boring – very limited outlets for fun.
 - Look for more opportunities for older aged youth to gather i.e. music nights, clubs for dancing. Youth also feel they are not valued in the community. 16 % of youth feel valued in a recent school study conducted.
- Youth were proud of the cultural diversity in Abbotsford
- Youth liked the AYC presence and other youth programming that is available etc.
- When youth heard about some of the great things about Abbotsford from the adult perspective they were surprised and it made them relook at Abbotsford with another perspective. They commented that these positive attributes need to be better communicated to the youth of the community and the community in general
- Ideas:
 - look for ways to encourage youth to volunteer and contribute to our city so that they are recognized and feel valued i.e. AYC youth council
 - enhance communication with our youth to promote youth programming that is available
 - enhance safety measures in parks and rec centres where youth can hang out
 - enhance transportation – buses so that youth can move around the city and outlining communities

Getting the Message Out

- Social Media preferences vary greatly; however, Facebook is likely the most popular with youth
- Police should utilize Social Media, but Facebook users are unlikely to want to show police as 'friends' so other platforms may work better for the APD.
- Youth use email less than adults
- Youth use facebook for information gathering and sharing info about events
- Youth use facebook/texting for socializing
- not many youth are using Twitter at this point
- It was agreed that how one communicates depends on the relationship that individual has with the person they are communicating with i.e. gender, age etc. . . . for some you may text, BBM, or face book, however; for others you would pick up the phone and call
- It was also agreed that email is mostly used for information gathering and texting, tweeting and BBM are more used for social interactions
- The majority of the youth indicated that face book would be their preference of choice if they were to receive notice regarding events or other related things

Youth and the Community

- Youth would like to see a Youth Club that would cater to older youth such as 16-19 year old, no drinking, and an environment where they felt safe.
 - A suggestion was made that if Youth Commission could have a targeted time from 10pm to midnight for older youth – this would allow for a place to hang out, dance, and play games etc without having the younger youth around
- The youth were extremely interested in music - an opportunity to have a place to play instruments, make music, have competitions like the battle of the bands, karaoke
- Youth were enthusiastic about having a place to learn and play instruments - the idea of having their own sound room would be a dream come true
- The youth would love to have mardi gras type events
- Any activity in the \$5 to \$10 range will be considered affordable by youth, provided it is a decent activity
- Activities must be easily reachable with transit
- Youth were interested in cultural events (3 to 4 times a year) such as Berry Fest, with some activities for teens. A repeated suggestion here was for music—multiple venues with different types of music, Bourbon Street style, or a “Battle of the Bands” competition on one stage
- There was an idea of working with local businesses and using current places—i.e. restaurants—where youth can hang after 9pm without having to spend \$--i.e. buy more food (perhaps have adults approach these businesses)
- Having civic facilities (swimming pools, skating rinks) with age-limited (16-19 year olds) times (10 pm to midnight) at a cheap price

Appendix 1 – Speak Out Participants

Community Leaders

Rod Santiago	Abbotsford Community Services	Executive Director
Shairose Jinnah	Abbotsford Community Services	Manager of Youth and Family Services
Bob Rich	Abbotsford Police Department	Chief Constable
Rick Lucy	Abbotsford Police Department	Deputy Chief Constable
Len Goerke	Abbotsford Police Department	Deputy Chief Constable
Mike Novakowski	Abbotsford Police Department	Sergeant
Cindy Schafer	Abbotsford School District	School Board Trustee
Preet Rai	Abbotsford School District	School Board Trustee
Shirley Wilson	Abbotsford School District	School Board Trustee
Steve Carlton	Abbotsford School District	Assistant Superintendent
Andrea Senft	Abbotsford School District	Manager of Community Development
Stan Petersen	Abbotsford School District	Retired Principal
Louanne Carlton	Abbotsford School District	Youth Worker
Bev Olfert	Abbotsford Youth Commission	Executive Director
Ryan Coreau	Abbotsford Youth Commission	Supervisor of Recreation
Krista Bodner	Abbotsford Youth Commission	Administrative Assistant
Cheryl Unger	Big Brothers Big Sisters	Mentoring Coordinator
John Smith	City of Abbotsford	Councillor
Lynne Harris	City of Abbotsford	Councillor
Patricia Ross	City of Abbotsford	Councillor
Simon Gibson	City of Abbotsford	Councillor
Frank Pizzuto	City of Abbotsford	City Manager
Carl Johannsen	City of Abbotsford	Community Planner
Hillary Russell	Fraser Valley Regional Library	Clearbrook Library Manager
Smitty Miller	Fraser Valley Regional Library	Librarian Children Services
Annie Silver	Fraser Valley Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society	Community Developer
Mark Ward-Hall	Ministry of Children and Families	Community Services Manager
Jason Mar	Old Spaghetti Factory	Manager
Mark Taylor	Parks, Recreation and Culture	General Manager
Jennifer Thornton	Parks, Recreation and Culture	Manager of ARC
Les Stagg	UFV	ECE/CYC Department Head
Maple Melder-Crozier	UFV	ECE/CYC Faculty
Morgan Miller	UFV	Student

Speak Out Participants

Student Leaders

Michele Kushnerenko	Abbotsford Collegiate	Student
Lauren Arthur	Abbotsford Collegiate	Student
Olivia Mann	Abbotsford Collegiate	Student / AYC Youth Council
Jayce Crossen	Abbotsford Collegiate	Student
Desiree Mudry	Abbotsford Collegiate	Student
Amrita Brar	Abby Traditional	Student / AYC Youth Council
Jasmin Chahal	Abby Traditional	Student
Brendan Tae-hoon Ha	Bateman	Student / AYC Youth Council
Shaun Riley	Bateman	Student / AYC Youth Council
Jason Anema	Bateman	Student / AYC Youth Council
Victoria McMillan	Bateman	Student
David Stewart	Home School	Student / AYC Youth Council
Mankirat Grewal	MEI	Student
Manpreet Bajwa	MEI	Student
Ryan Bae	MEI	Student / AYC Youth Council
Dalvir Kaur Bhangu	MEI	Student / AYC Youth Council
Karen Bassia	MEI	Student
Jimmy Kang	MEI	Student
Stephen Smith	MEI	Student / AYC Youth Council
Prem Singh	Mouat	Student
Ashleyn Sarowa	Mouat	Student / AYC Youth Council
Michaela Abey	Mouat	Student / AYC Youth Council
Gagan Mahil	Mouat	Student
Kristine Mitchell	Mouat	Student
Tony Nguyen	Mouat	Student
Sunny Dhaliwal	Rick Hansen	Student
Manvir Bains	Rick Hansen	Student
Manmeet Grewal	Rick Hansen	Student
Kayla Cooper	Yale	Student
Zoe Fenelon	Yale	Student / AYC Youth Council

Appendix 2 – Youth Forum Conversation Starters

Table Topic: Transit

- What are some of the issues around transportation?
- Is transportation easily accessible?
- Are there existing plans for growth?
- How effective is riding the bus in Abbotsford?
- Do you ride the bus?
- Why don't you take transit?

- Ridership
- Rates
- Issues on the bus
- Online access
- Access to information
- Route planning - transit outside the community
- Culture of riding the bus
- Idea - Transit Day

Table Topic: School

- What about the school experience is difficult / positive for you?
- What makes school challenging / inspiring?
- What, in your school experience, has made an impact on you in a positive manor?
- What do you wish teachers knew about students that they don't know
- What do you wish students knew about school / the education system?
- What have been the highlights of your secondary school experience?
- Does your high school 'connect' with you?
 - How? How not?
- Do you feel that you have received enough information about future career options or post-secondary options?
- If you could make one big change to improve your school, what would it be?

- Idea - School exchange

Table Topic: Safety

- What are your biggest concerns regarding safety in Abbotsford?
- Do you feel safe in the community?
 - Why? / Why not?
- What makes a safe community?
- How can you help make your community safer?
- Where in the community do you feel safe / unsafe?

Table Topic: Civic Pride

- How do you feel about living in Abbotsford?
- When you tell people you are from Abbotsford how do you feel?
- What are you proud about in Abbotsford?

- What are you not proud of?
- What makes Abbotsford unique?
- How does being involved and active in your community change how you feel about it?
- What can you do to increase civic pride?
- How can you empower others to increase civic pride, or build a stronger community?
- What are ways to improve the quality of life for Abbotsford residents?
- Do you know what is happening in your community? If not, what are ways to increase your awareness?

- Make a list of things that make Abbotsford a great place to live
- Ideas to increase civic pride

Table Topic: Getting the Message Out

- How do you access information?
- What makes a good youth campaign?
- How can we as adults do a better job of getting the message out to youth?
- How do you like to access information?
 - What are the most popular ways?
- What methods such as social media will work best to maximize community engagement? (APD)
- How often do you pick up the phone?
- How often do you check email?
- How many texts do you send / receive each day?

- Posters
- Social Media
- Technology
- Examples of effective youth campaigns
- Examples of ineffective youth campaigns

Table Topic: Youth and the Community

- How do you spend your time?
 - What about other youth?
- What do you do?
 - What about other youth?
- Where do you go?
 - What about other youth?
- What activities do you wish we had in Abbotsford?
- What would make traditional activities more interesting to you / other youth?
- Do you use our local parks?
 - What do you do there?
- What do other cities have that you wish Abbotsford had?
- What extracurricular programs would you be interested in?

- More options for youth

Appendix 3 –Verbatim Table Notes

Transportation

- Questions like:
 - What are youth needs for transportation?
 - Do you have a specific need by transportation?
- Opinions
- Transit future plan
- Public Transit – Quick and easy
- Expansion of hours needed
- Bus passes for students
- City Chase
- 5 new buses
- How do youth want things like bus lanes?
- Increase ridership for students by offering services at recreational centres
- Transit Future plan for 25 years to surrey, mission etc
- Do youth have a specific set of needs by transportation
- How do we get funding?
- Maglev Trains – Cars with A.I. Electric buses, street cars
- 16 – 18 Drop-in
- Safety issue
- Bus passes for high school students
- Minimum amount is 30% that is covered by fares

School

- Holograms
- More kids should be involved with youth focus
- less scheduling more spontaneity
- when should teachers prepare students for university
- We're not preparing students for fun
- Dialog between university and high school
- Liberal education vs a little bit of everything
- University mentors to support transition
- too much drama, fighting, gossip
- Wifi internet during class
- more "school" activity @ younger grade
- facilitate trust
- More university prep
- Cyber bullying
- UFV/TWU university mentors
- Job shadow more hands on training

- Technology ahead of education
- Mouat- Research Paper
 - should all school do this
- Wifi during school hours good or bad?
- Wifi Pros
 - easy research
 - helpful
 - fast communications
- Wifi Cons
 - websites
 - distractions
- using wifi for homework
 - disadvantage for some
- Battle of the bands
- Music
- More AP Classes
- Youth Clubs
 - affordable
- Video Games

Safety

- Bring guest speakers into schools
- Social media & texting
 - poster is limited
- Resources are there for students who are in gangs and want to get out
- Rick Hansen's Fire alarms and lockdowns happen all the time
- Safety is the number one priority of the school district
- Youth don't feel safe in dark streets such as parking lot, closed mall, park
- More on brighter streetlights
- Knowing and keeping contact with your neighbours is safe
- Women in bigger cities might feel unsafe
- it depends on when, where, and who they are with when it comes to measuring how safe we feel
- More police presence would assure the public of safety
- The general consensus is that if you don't engage in criminal activities, you are pretty safe
- "Crying Wolf"
- You don't have to live in fear all the time
- Safety at night
- Abbotsford has one of the lowest crime rates in Fraser Valley
- Text Tip line
- Gang recruitment

- Brighter streets
 - Mt. Lehman no lights
- Fire Alarms Parks
- Dark
- Police presence
- Hate Crimes
 - people have also been targeted verbally & physically because of appearance
 - race identity etc.
 - Sikh Temple on Townshipline burned down.
 - Could it happen again?
 - Completely unacceptable for such crimes to be taking place and not being addressed with preventative measures.

Civic Pride

- Areas to improve
 - something to be really known for – positive way
 - bored
 - have things for youth to do so not bored
 - we need more entertainment/events in our community
 - only 16% youth feel valued
 - promote arts and culture
 - improve
 - things to do
 - gathering places in close areas
 - annual festivals
 - showcases
 - we need good restaurants other than earls and keg
 - youth feel sheltered
- City Pride
 - Diversity
 - Cultural diversity is good
 - Proud
 - volunteer programs
 - diversity
 - expanding
 - growth
 - schools
 - arts
 - athletes
 - music
 - Abby citizens donates the most money and volunteer time across Canada

- lowest crime rate
- citizens are engaged with big social issues
- Nice sheltered environment
- formally volunteer @ Abbyfest
- Proud of Community Services and AYC
- Berry Festival
- I am proud of Abbotsford because we feel united through sports etc.

Getting the Message Out

- Telepresence – Video messaging
- mass text effective?
- APD
 - posters
 - why no facebook group?
 - would youth join?
- As technology evolves, it becomes more capable of aiding in getting the message out
- email-information
 - Texting social
- How do we want to connect to youth in the community?
- texting delivers unemotional context. telephone allows emotion.

Youth and the Community

- Movies
- Sports
 - gym stuff
- Festivals
 - What are known for ie. Berry Fest
- Transportation
 - bus routes
 - shuttle buses
- ARC open till midnight?
 - youth commission = late hours for older youth
- More business connections
 - 1 x month use an adult club
 - trivia night
 - scrabble nigh
 - AYC board create rapport to youth friendly restaurants
 - as long as kids behave
- Age of youth 12 – 19
- Using empty building for underage dances
 - security

- ages
 - no substances
- Lots of local youth talent
 - ag-rec?
- Parks and Rec could have a late night opening @ a cheap price if there's enough kids (Mark said so)
 - marketing needed
 - well open if people come
 - limited age groups i.e. 17 – 19 etc.
- Sports Centre for youth – new!
- Music Activities
 - therapy
- Denny's
 - talk to managers
 - all stores
 - initial contact by AYC
 - restraints open later
- video games
 - where?
 - tournament
 - starcraft
 - people play them together
- Late night activities
 - safe area youth clubs
 - besides food places
 - recreation
 - after 10 pm
 - besides friends houses
 - reasonable prices – like toonie Tuesdays at theatre
 - a way for older teens (not to be around 13 year olds)
 - events at MCA
 - music
 - dancing
 - karaoke
 - operas
 - dance rules
 - id
 - bar / club once a month
- Theatre in Mt. Lehman coming
- teen swims
 - youth only

- cheaper admission
 - more supervision
- attendance crashes after 9 - 9:30
- 40 increase
 - \$1 per person but 40 people
- AP + IB
 - school based at discretion of school not city
 - Collegiate only world recognised
- Battle of the bands
 - arenas