



L.U.N.C.H. @ Volunteer MBC

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# Youth Engagement



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# Youth Engagement

L.U.N.C.H @ Volunteer MBC Session | 2012, March 13<sup>th</sup>  
Facilitated by Shaminda Perera, Referral Specialist, Volunteer MBC



**Meaningful and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity focusing outside their self can be identified as “youth engagement”.** However, youth are also a unique group of individuals where engaging them in such activities requires careful planning and implementation. Sometimes it only takes a moment to reflect and go back to basics. For instance, we need to realize that the foundation in the effort to understanding youth is to accept that youth hold the expertise in youth culture.<sup>1</sup> I applaud you in taking an important step forward in advocating youth engagement by attending the L.U.N.C.H session today. It is designed to collaboratively explore today’s best practices of engaging youth volunteers. I am delighted to be a part of it. ChangeTheWorld 2012 – Ontario Youth Volunteer

Challenge is just around the corner (April 15 – May 6) and it is an excellent opportunity for us to embark on reviewing and/or search for that ideal youth engagement strategy that suits your own organization/agency. I am confident that you will take back to your own desk at least 2 action points inspired by today’s session.

## The aim of the session:

The aim of the session is to by sharing the best practices from amongst the participants;  
to understand the motivations of today’s youth volunteer and create a synergy amongst the participant group to engage youth in high schools to volunteer in their communities.

## Objectives of the Session is;

- to explore today’s trends in youth volunteering,
- to understand the youth culture and optimize their talents and skills,
- to capitalize on the opportunity created by the ChangeTheWorld – Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge to organize events that engages high school teens in volunteer initiatives.

## **Learning points from the Icebreakers;**

Why would skate boarding attract youth over golf?

What are the challenges that we face today when trying to engage youth?

What do youth volunteers bring with them?

Your own thoughts:

# Understanding Our Youth

## Defining 'Youth'

Our focus today is on high school teens aged 14 to 18 years and hence forth will be referred to as 'youth'. However, Volunteer Canada, United Nations General Assembly and World Bank defines youth as those within the age group 15 to 24 years.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that youth within ages 15 to 18 years generally portray a different life style than those within 19 to 24 years.

**Figure 1: Human Development Landmarks from Age 12-20**

Age	Physical	Cognitive	Language	Emotional	Social	Identity	Moral
<b>12-15</b>	Average boy enters puberty, shows growth spurt.	Adolescent may achieve stage of formal operations; use of abstractions and hypothetical-deductive reasoning. Memory span extends to six digits.	Main growth continues to be in pragmatic skills. Teenage slang is a marker of identity development.	Mood swings may become increasingly frequent; may include feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, loneliness, and depression.	Growing desire for autonomy coexists with need for parental intimacy and support. Parent-child conflict peak.	Identity development becomes central issue. Sexual identity becomes a primary concern.	Moral reasoning reflects increasing awareness of equity and cooperative rule-making.
<b>16-20</b>	Following puberty, circadian timing system and biological rhythms shift, affecting sleep-wake cycles. Boys and girls reach virtually full height.	Ability to use hypothetical-deductive reasoning increases. Knowledge base continues to grow.	Adolescent understands about 80,000 words.	Mood swings become less frequent and intense. Adolescent is increasingly able to express own emotions and understand feelings of others.	Independence from parents increase. Sibling relationships become more equal, less intense, and less close. Friendships are more intimate than at any other period. Intimacy may shift to romantic relationships.	Most adolescents have engaged in sexual activity.	Relativism may play a key role in moral reasoning.

Source: Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2007

### Development stage of youth

The human development period of 'youth' is a period of life when a person is making a transition from being taken care of to taking care of themselves. It is a stage in life that is adjusting to many changes physically, cognitively, socially and morally (see Figure 1, the human development landmark table). These development traits, in high school teens, are rapidly accelerating.

I remember when I was about 14 years old, I hated being introduced at social gatherings as my dad's little boy. I looked forward to the day when I move away from my father's (parent's) shadow and be introduced to people as "me" my own self. It is true that I wanted to be so much like him, but I wanted to be "me". Establishing a self-identity becomes increasingly important to youth.

Physically youth become much stronger and highly active. Cognitive development brings forth the ability to use Hypothetical Deductive Reasoning. A big term, but simply said, it is the ability to creatively draw meaningful or related conclusions using their imagination.<sup>3</sup> One key trait that is gradually establishing itself in the day to day life of youth is the preference and need to establish their social connections. Oh yeah, some of them turn out to be romantic relationships. Morally, they try to establish behaviour that is acceptable within the environment they are in, not necessarily it's inherent right or wrongness. In addition, they are just getting the hang of it and enjoying the freedom of self-expression.

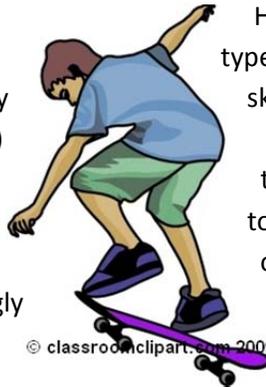
### Uniqueness of youth

Put the characteristics of youth development together and the formula creates the result "try

out new things and do away with the traditional".

As we progress with this handout, I ask you to ponder for a while whether we as adults have understood this situation properly?

In the adult world we call this 'thinking out of the box'. However, somehow we leave the privilege of this term just for the adults and still struggle with it at times.



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Have you ever wondered, about the type of participants in sports such as skateboarding, BMX biking, roller blading, automotive sports and team sports such as but not limited to hockey, soccer, basketball and so on? Reflect for a while and you will realize that these sports mostly attract "youth". Please note; I am talking about attraction in

large numbers. Why these sports? Why not golf, billiards or even tennis? Youths' need for social interaction and building their social network draws them into exciting activities that create avenues for socializing.

I have worked with many youth in the past. It is my passion and I know these dudes and dudettes very well. To share some of my personal observances; youth born and raised in whatever background have few things in common.

- Music and fashion directs their life style.
- Peer and social connections play a key role in acting as their support group.
- Social media are main means of communication.

- They juggle their school work and paid part-time work.
- This balancing act at times has the tendency to create stress. Therefore, social activities become the most preferred stress release methodology.

In a simple sentence, they like to flock together and be free in thought, word and deed.

What can we in the not for profit and voluntary sectors learn from this?

## Engaging youth

Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization commented;

**“Young people are not only the leaders of tomorrow; they can play a leading role in the development of their communities today.”**

Youth of today bring plenty of;

- Enthusiasm,
- Energy,
- Fresh perspective,
- Dreams,
- Peer camaraderie,
- Drive, and
- Technological skills.



Youth come out with many ideas that we adults may have not even thought of in our wildest dreams. What’s more they are not afraid to try out new things.

A study done in the United Kingdom by Katherine Gaskin in 1998 highlighted 8 key characteristics that youth seek in volunteer activities.<sup>4&5</sup> They are;

1. **The Experience** – stimulating, interesting, relevant activities.
2. **Laughs** – enjoyable, satisfying and fun.
3. **Incentives** – tangible rewards, references.
4. **Ease of access** – more information and easy access points.
5. **Variety** – opportunities to fulfill personal interests and goals.
6. **Flexibility** – they seek spontaneity and choices in volunteering.
7. **Legitimacy** – information about the range and significance of the volunteer position.
8. **Organization** – efficient, but informal, relaxed, supportive.

Even though it was done many years ago I presented this study done by Katherine Gaskin, because I like how the 8 points are simplified. A quick glance at the “bridging the Gap” study done in 2010 by Volunteer Canada<sup>6</sup>, will show you that it complemented Gaskin’s study. All of the 8 points re-surfaced and added to them were the facts that youth volunteers of today are;

- more technologically savvy,
- look at volunteering with a more international view, and
- the fact that they very much value volunteering with other youth.

### **Do we need to re-think our strategies?**

The same study of 2010<sup>6</sup> highlighted the following barriers to youth volunteering.

- lack of time,
- not approached or is unaware of the opportunities,
- assumption of being undervalued,
- organizations not optimizing their skills and talents.

How do we perceive youth volunteering? Do we see the youth as members of our community that has a wealth of talent and skills? Or, do we think that we are here to provide them with a service?<sup>6</sup> A question that we may need to reflect a little bit more on. Ty Unglebower a volunteer and a blogger posted an interesting blog in his blog “Too XYZ”. His experiences, even though they may not be the same for everyone, have noticed an unfortunate trend. It is alarming that at least Unglebower had been through experiences that made him identify “8 reasons that volunteering sucks (so far...)”. I respect him for including within brackets the statement “so Far...”. I will list down Unglebower’s experiences. The points itself are self-explanatory.

### **8 Reasons that volunteering sucks (so far...)**

By Ty Unglebower, in his blog “Too XYZ”, 2010, April 20

1. Nobody gets back to you.
2. Politics (within the organization).
3. Lack of appreciation.
4. It’s become too much like a job hunt.
5. Proselytization (that limits participation).
6. New people get the shaft.
7. Fundraising (is not preferred).
8. You are given more to do by the hour.

URL to the blog:

<http://tooxyz.blogspot.com/2010/04/volunteering-sucks-so-far.html>

Unglebower is not from Canada and it is unclear whether his experiences included or excluded Canada. So, how about it? Does it happen in Canada too?

**Write down below few of your thoughts on this?**

### In developing a strategy to engage youth

Many communities, academic and public administration groups and advocates of youth engagement have developed strategies that suit their own requirements. It does make sense that there exists a multitude of models and methods. Youth from place to place do differ in their youth culture. However, the following characteristics should be embedded in the best practices of engaging youth in volunteer activities.<sup>1</sup>

1. Creating and maintaining a youth friendly environment.
2. Strong adult support.
3. Opportunities for youth to complete meaningful tasks.
4. Opportunities for youth to learn and use new skills.

### What else can you include to this list?

### A youth engagement cycle

Youth as we have discussed earlier are at a stage where they are adjusting and adapting to many changes that takes place during their youth years. They are being equipped by development to take on the challenges in life. They have many ideas and it will be a tragedy to miss out on the potential of these ideas. However, youth need guidance in implementing them. The adult intervention is required. Therefore, youth and adults should work in partnership for successful youth engagement to take place. Take a look at the Youth Engagement Cycle given below. See if it can be customized to suit your organization. It is adapted from the works of Adam Fletcher an advocate of Youth Engagement in the United States of America.<sup>7</sup>

**1. Listen:** Youth have many ideas and opinions, listen to them. All of them may not be exactly relevant, but listen. There could be things between the lines. Good places to start can be classrooms, informal conversations, agenda items in youth group meetings, or through research studies.

**2. Show you care:** Active listening techniques such as simply nodding the head are not sufficient. Offer feedback on what was expressed can go a long way with youth. Agreeing as well as disagreeing will show them that you heard what they said.

**3. Prepare for their arrival:** When the youth volunteer walks in to your organization; do they have an appropriate workstation to carry out the tasks? Are the necessary equipment and facilities available? Are the stakeholders informed of their arrival, involvement and background? Did the information session take

place before the recruitment? Is an induction program in place?..... are few questions that we ask ourselves to start with.

**4. Coach them:** Giving youth the opportunity to contribute will mean ensuring that they are coached and trained appropriately too. It is going to be challenging to find a youth volunteer with the required exact set of skills that we may have established with an HR perspective. Youth however, are equipped with the fluency of today's technology, so let's create the role with the skills that they already have and, impart what they don't have.

**5. Empower them:** Once they are groomed to suit the requirement, it's time to have complete faith in their abilities. This however, does not mean to let them to the task all by them self. Mentoring and guidance is a necessity.

**6. Celebrate and Evaluate:** Celebrate their success. It need not be a loud bang such as a youth recognition ceremony. Well, of course if it can be done that will be marvellous. If you cannot, celebrate at least in a small way such as going to the nearest coffee shop with the office crowd hosting a thank you get together. This is assuming that the written recognition is anyway in the plan.

objective of making the future initiatives even better than the previous.

A cycle means that you start at one end and continue to the starting point with the conclusion of the first circle. Youth engagement will never be a standard strategy for all time. Youth change, the world change, the environment they live in constantly changes with advancements in technology and communication methods and, the views and opinions of the current generation changes with the experiences of the previous generation. Youth engagement strategies will be a cycle that constantly keeps continuing.



Once you have celebrated then it is time to evaluate. Reflect and review on the things that worked and things that need to be refined. Don't let the celebration be the conclusion. Carefully evaluate each step you took with the

# A Golden Opportunity: ChangeTheWorld 2012



**ChangeTheWorld** – Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge, started as a test project in 2008 and now annually launched along with the commencement of the *National Volunteer Week* and runs for three weeks. In 2012, it starts on April 15<sup>th</sup> and runs up to May 6<sup>th</sup>. The goal of the campaign is to engage high school students in volunteer initiatives in their communities.

The participants of the challenge are the volunteer centres and organizations/agencies that facilitate and create avenues for volunteering in the province. The 2012 campaign has a total participation of 25 volunteer centres and community service organizations/agencies. The target set for 2012 is 25,000 high school students to contribute with a minimum of 3 hours over the three week period. These are remarkable achievements of the campaign considering that in 2008 it targeted only 300 students with a participation of 7 volunteer centres in the province.<sup>8</sup>

The campaign is delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and Ontario Volunteer Centres Network. In 2012 too, making it the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, Volunteer MBC assumes the role as the provincial organizer as well as a participant.

## Past statistics;

Year	Participating Centres	Achievements (approximate figures)
2008	7	900 youth
2009	19	8,500 youth
2010	21	11,000 youth
2011	21	15,000 youth

Source: Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2012

2011 was a true success story where approximately 15,000 youth contributed 70,000 hours. This is a substantial increase in the achievements of the campaign accounting for an over 20% increase in youth and 40% increase in their volunteer hours in comparison to the achievements of the 2010 campaign.<sup>8</sup> In 2011, Volunteer MBC alone engaged 3,360 youth (in 66 events) which is approximately 20% of the provincial achievement.

For more information visit;

### Volunteer MBC

[www.volunteermbc.org/youth](http://www.volunteermbc.org/youth)

### Ontario Volunteer Centres Network

[www.ovcn.ca/changetheworld](http://www.ovcn.ca/changetheworld)

### Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration

[www.ontario.ca/changetheworld](http://www.ontario.ca/changetheworld)

## So how does it work?

Schools, community service organizations/agencies are encouraged to organize and support events/activities that coincide with the campaign, to specifically engage high school students in community service initiatives. And then;

- These events/activities are then registered with the local volunteer centre.
- The local volunteer centres tracks the number of youth and the number of hours that was contributed.
- At the conclusion of the campaign these events/activities and figures are then reported to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Ontario Volunteer Centres Network.

### Value to the Community

That is the process. However, there is more to it than what may be seen at the surface. The campaign is not simply an encouragement to clock in the community service hours for graduation. That is a bonus achievement. The greatest value that the campaign adds to Ontario is that it instills and reinforces a culture amongst the high school students to contribute their time and effort that will transcend beyond the campaign to make their own communities a better place to live in.

### Value to Students

The value of it to the individual student is that, in doing so the student is able to;

- contribute to making a difference towards a healthy future in society,
- visibly display their talents and skills,
- contribute to a cause that they hold close to their heart,
- follow their passion and dreams,

- explore what they are good at and lay their foundations to launch a career,
- and of course, have fun while they are doing it rallying their friends around.

### Value to event organizers

It makes sense to partner with a local volunteer centre as the volunteer centre generally has the expertise and the connections in the community to bring the volunteer and the event/activity organizers together. They are also at most times able to offer consultation and guidance to new community service organizations and to the up and coming professionals in the not-for-profit sector.

Since most, if not all, volunteer centres offer the referral service to interested volunteers, the event/activity organizers whether schools or community service organizations can capitalize on this service to drive the attention of potential volunteers to these events/activities. Now, if you are a member of the volunteer centre who already avail this privilege on a regular basis may think to yourself, “hey, wait a minute, this already happens”. Well, let’s not forget that your initiatives are recorded and reported to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Ontario Volunteer Centres Network. Therefore, the campaign can be an excellent opportunity to highlight the excellent work you do in the community. In addition, to leverage the various programs you offer. After all, these two organizations have good relationships with most of the funders in Ontario’s not-for-profit sector.

### Volunteer MBC the participant

Volunteer MBC offers support in a variety of ways to those organizing events. In general, all events are posted in the centre’s website. This becomes a good promoting tool not only of the

event but, also to the school and organization running the event. Our website in average is visited by approximately over 4,000 unique visitors a month. Further, we promote the campaign and the ChangeTheWorld registered events via Facebook and Twitter. What an excellent outreach opportunity.

In addition, to schools and their student groups and to youth groups, Volunteer MBC is ready to offer;

- New age ideas for potential events.
- Step by step guidance from strategizing and creating an event plan to implementation and celebration of it's success.
- Ideas and tools to handle the paperwork if any. Such as, templates for PSA announcements and support to create posters and flyers with an expert in marketing reviewing it's impact.
- Guidance in establishing a volunteer club within the school.

So, now, there is only one more step to take to getting your idea going. Get in touch with;

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