

Engaging Youth

Why

Youth bring a unique voice and perspective to the work on human trafficking and sexual exploitation that is often overlooked. But if you involve youth from planning to project implementation, your community initiatives will benefit. For example, youth can provide important insights into the most effective ways to educate and reach out to vulnerable youth in your community. Youth-led strategies have proven to be very successful ways of preventing sexual exploitation and engaging with youth who may be at risk of exploitation.

How

An important first step in youth engagement is to determine the boundaries surrounding their involvement in your committee. Youth can get involved with event planning, participation in general community meetings, and developing programming for youth. Regardless of the type of involvement, it is important to set out guidelines for participation. For example, consider the age of the youth that are involved as you develop your approach. Some of the trafficking issues and stories may traumatize and negatively impact youth.¹

TAKING ACTION: Children of the Street Society's TCO² Workshops

Children of the Street Society's TCO²: Taking Care of Ourselves & Taking Care of Others is a workshop for youth, run by youth. Through group facilitation, multimedia and interactive role play, youth facilitators engage students in a powerful and real conversation about human trafficking, sexual exploitation, sex trade recruitment, exploiters, deglamourizing the sex trade, exploiters and traffickers in Canada, the role of drugs and alcohol in sexual exploitation, online exploitation, gangs and girls, the role of young men in exploitation, and healthy relationships and self worth.

<http://www.childrenofthestreet.com/programs/work/tco2.html>

Once you decide to involve youth, and you have set guidelines for their participation, consider the following approaches to reach out to youth within the community, and make the process youth friendly:²

- Contact local schools, youth agencies, community service agencies, community policing offices, religious organizations, recreation groups, etc. Ask if they know of any youth leaders actively involved within the community, or youth who have demonstrated an interest in community services.
- Use forms of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other forms of online media to reach out to youth, and to engage existing youth group members. Youth are frequent users of online forms of communication.

¹ Ministry of Public Safety And Solicitor General, Taking Action: A Series of 6 handouts for communities in British Columbia addressing sexual exploitation of children and youth. Developed by the Justice Institute of BC. (Handout #1: Setting up a Community Action Network, page 3).

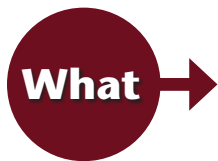
² Ministry of Justice, Youth Gang Prevention: Toolkit for Community Planning. (Features of Successful Youth Programs, Maximizing Youth Involvement, Pages 72, 92) 2013.


How

- Look for opportunities to involve youth in roles other than full committee membership. The time commitment of the entire project may be too much for youth involved with school and other activities. Instead, consider offering youth short-term activities, or one-off projects that they can work on for the committee.
- At the very beginning, and at various points in the project, communicate and discuss with the youth group members about their roles, their expectations, and what the outcomes of their involvement will be. This understanding and awareness is important for a healthy working relationship and effective youth engagement. Youth are more likely to buy in and become invested if you are clear from the start.
- Schedule meetings or planning sessions at times that are the most convenient for youth to attend. Meetings held during traditional business hours possess problems for youth who may be required to attend school, work part time, or participate in volunteer activities.
- Hold meetings in a central location accessible by transit where possible. Expecting youth to travel great distances to attend meetings is another barrier to their participation. Where possible, offer bus tickets or travel subsidies for youth. Try to avoid youth having to pay out of their pockets for expenses related to participation in the project.
- Consider having honorariums and refreshments for your youth group members. Youth should be compensated if possible. This helps them feel appreciated for their time and efforts.

Reflecting

1. What does a safe and healthy community for youth look like?
2. What strengths do you think youth in the community pose when combating issues of human trafficking and exploitation?
3. How can adults and elders in the community play a role in fostering youth action to raise awareness about human trafficking and exploitation?
4. How would youth belonging to Aboriginal communities, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ community be uniquely affected by issues of human trafficking and exploitation?
5. What is the best way to engage youth belonging to Aboriginal communities, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ community?



Resources to help you engage youth in taking action against human trafficking:

- Restoring the Honouring Circle: Taking a Stand against Sexual Exploitation: An information, prevention, and capacity building manual for rural communities in British Columbia**
 (pg.66, 67, 71 -76, 84-91, 96-99, 109)
 A manual created for people working with Aboriginal youth in rural and isolated communities—providing more information on how to integrate education about sexual exploitation into their work.
<http://www.jibc.ca/sites/default/files/research/pdf/Restoring-Honouring-Circle-Manual.pdf>
- YouthScape**
 A Canada-wide initiative to engage youth in social change
<http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/resources/spotlight/youthscape>
- Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement**
 The [Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement](#) brings together the expertise of youth, youth service providers, academic researchers and policy makers to identify, build and implement models of effective practice for meaningfully engaging youth and to document the results.

TAKING ACTION: Youth Art Engagement Project

The Youth Art Engagement Project (YAEP) engages high-risk youth (ages 11-18) in education and the creation of an art project aimed at increasing awareness about sexual exploitation and human trafficking, while fostering youth leadership and youth voice. Youth participants select the type of creative project which may take the form of a visual art piece, poetry, or anything else they choose. Youth participate in nine, two-hour sessions (one per week), facilitated by youth facilitators, who provide ongoing mentorship and guidance to participants.

<http://www.childrenofthestreet.com/programs/work/youth-art-engagement.html>

- Children of the Street Society**
 A Provincial Society and Federal Charity dedicated to preventing the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of children and youth in British Columbia.
<http://www.childrenofthestreet.com>
- YACLInk (McCreary Centre Society)**
 The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and community based projects.
<http://www.mcs.bc.ca>
- Youth Gang Prevention Toolkit for Community Planning**
 (Pg. 105-112 and 61-73)
 These sections of the [Youth Gang Prevention Toolkit](#) provide background and support, and activities for working for gang prevention with youth.