

WHAT IS RIGHTS 2 SUCCESS (R2S)?

Creating a culture of children's rights involves engaging the entire community, including children themselves, their parents, caregivers, guardians, service providers and advocates (International Institute for Child Rights and Development, [IICRD], 2005).

R2S is a workshop on children's rights that has been developed by organizations that share a common role and responsibility to educate children and youth about their rights. R2S acknowledges what a community is already doing to support and promote children's rights, and builds on those strengths using a common language and vision. It involves empowering young people to claim their rights, participate effectively in decisions that are made about them, and advocate on their own behalf if their rights are not respected.

Specifically, R2S advances the rights of children and youth as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Child Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) and other legislation in two ways:

- By teaching children and youth about their rights, how to advocate for these rights and participate in decisions that affect them, and;
- By educating parents, caregivers, guardians, service providers, and advocates about their role in actualizing children's rights, teaching young people about their rights and supporting young people to advocate for their rights.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF R2S?

Save the Children Canada introduced a workshop for children and youth called Right Way in 1999, which was delivered across the provinces. When they stopped offering the workshop in 2004 they encouraged the provinces to take on the delivery and offered their curriculum for use and adaptation.

That same year, The Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, and the former Child and Youth Officer for B.C. collaborated to adapt the Right Way workshop and create R2S. This workshop was geared towards young people in government care and "at risk." The most significant addition to the curriculum was the development of an adult workshop, since creating a culture of rights requires engaging the whole community and not just educating young people. R2S was piloted in communities across BC from 2005-2006.

In 2008, the Ministry of Children and Family Development Advocacy Team, the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks and MCFD Youth Custody Services revisited R2S, and worked together to update the curriculum and develop two new modules appropriate for youth in custody and for Aboriginal youth.

WHY IS RIGHTS EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

When children and youth learn about their rights, they identify better with all others because they realize that they all share the same rights. Learning the rights that they share with all others teaches them they must respect the rights of others, and leads to a reduction of behaviours that infringe upon the rights of others (Covell, 2004).

Recent studies report that when children and youth understand their rights, they are able to effectively differentiate between their rights, needs and wants and how to make the connection between realizing their rights and respecting the rights of others. For example, research in Belgium (DeCoene & De Cock, 1996), Canada (Covell & Howe 1999, 2001; Murray, 2002), and England (Hughes & Filer, 2003) consistently demonstrate that when children and youth learn about their rights, they show:

increased self-esteem

adult-like understanding of rights as including responsibilities

more acceptance of children and youth belonging to minority groups

increased awareness of peer and teacher support

increased rights-respecting attitudes and more socially responsible behaviours

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF R2S?

ADULT WORKSHOP GOALS

Provide adult participants with an increased awareness of the rights of children and youth, and the importance of achieving these rights.

Dispel the myths around rights – for example, that teaching children and youth about their rights is dangerous or that rights can be withheld when responsibilities are not properly adhered to. Instead, we promote an approach that supports children's development, their participation in their family and community, and facilitates their respect for, and understanding of, the rights of others.

To increase the capacity of adult participants to educate young people about their rights, to develop ways to incorporate opportunities for meaningful participation and to incorporate views of children and youth in care and at risk about their experiences into policy development.

To bring together service providers, parents, caregivers, advocates, guardians and citizens to discuss the rights of children and youth in their community and the ways they can work together to support the rights, participation and self-advocacy of children and youth.

YOUTH WORKSHOP GOALS

To bring children and youth together in a safe environment in their community and within the context of their culture and provide the opportunity for a dialogue and discussion on

rights.

To nurture the strengths, interests and abilities of young people to become involved in decision-making at an individual level and a systemic level by providing rights knowledge and a chance to develop their advocacy and participation skills.

HOW IS R2S DELIVERED?

The R2S manual includes a core workshop and modules. The core workshop teaches about rights for all children and youth along and is designed to be delivered in the community through a partnership between organizations that share a role in protecting children and youth. The modules focus on the rights of Children and Youth in Care or “at risk”, Youth in Custody and Aboriginal Youth. The modules are not complete workshops on their own and are meant to supplement the core workshop. Facilitators are trained to deliver both the youth and adult workshops. The workshop is designed to be co-facilitated by a youth and an adult.

HOW IS R2S EVALUATED?

Each of the workshop components are continually evaluated using three different levels of evaluation.

1. OUTPUT EVALUATION

Records of where workshops occurred (location, region, who hosted, etc), numbers of participants in all workshops and meetings and where they were from (children and youth in care, social workers, foster parents, etc.).

2. FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Facilitators of the workshop keep notes on “what worked and what did not” for purposes of refining the workshop. As well, youth and adult participants are asked to provide input on the workshop activities and content.

3. IMPACT EVALUATION

The effect of the workshops on participants’ awareness, attitudes, confidence to act and intent to act are evaluation. Pre and post tests/evaluations are conducted with workshop participants

Frequently Asked Questions about Children’s Rights

What are rights and why do we need them?

All human beings have the right to live in peace and security, to have their needs for shelter, food and health met and to be involved in decisions made about their lives. “Human rights” is the general term that refers to these basic rights and freedoms. We need these things to be able to grow and develop as individuals.

What are children’s rights?

Children’s rights are a declaration of what children are entitled to. The most widely known set of children’s rights is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Some

children also have other types of national and provincial rights, depending on their age, where they live and their circumstances. However, they are all based on the UNCRC.

What is the UNCRC?

The UNCRC is an international treaty of children's rights to which most countries in the world, including Canada, have committed. The UNCRC has 54 articles. The first 42 articles outline different rights of a child that fall into four main categories: safety, health, participation, and to 'be themselves'.

Why has there been such a push for children's rights in the last 20 years?

Interest and awareness of children's rights has developed as the public's general knowledge about human rights has increased. Although many nations have laws relating to children's welfare and rights, the reality is that there are children in Canada and around the world who still suffer from poverty, homelessness, abuse, neglect, preventable diseases and unequal access to education and justice systems. In November 2009, we will mark the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the UNCRC.

Do children and youth in care have specific or special rights?

Yes. Research clearly shows that children in care are vulnerable and they may be at higher risk to have their rights violated. Therefore, young people in care have specific rights under Section 70 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Children need to know what these rights are so they can be partners with adults in protecting their rights.

Whose job is it to teach children and youth about their rights?

Adults caring for children and youth have a responsibility to make sure children's rights are being respected and to educate young people about what it means to have rights and how to respect the rights of others. In fact, society as a whole also has a responsibility to assist in this process. There are many benefits when children and youth are educated about their rights including:

- increased self-esteem;
- helps in their protection as children know what they are entitled to;
- understanding that rights must come with respect for others;
- more sensitive to children of minority groups;
- more inclined to recognize how teachers and peers support them;
- increased rights-respecting attitudes and more socially responsible behaviour.

Is responsibility taken away from parents and caregivers when children have rights?

No. Children's rights are not opposed to the rights of parents, families and communities in raising children but instead, are integral. The importance of family, community and culture is clearly recognized throughout the UNCRC and in the legislation and policy surrounding children and youth in care of the government. The UNCRC requires governments to protect and assist families in fulfilling their essential role as nurturers of their children, and to respect the role of parents, legal guardians and other caregivers in providing appropriate guidance to children about the exercise of children's rights.

Children have to earn their rights by behaving responsibly towards others, right?

No. Rights are owned, not earned and cannot be taken away. As children learn to exercise their rights on their own behalf, they will also need to understand that all humans have rights and, accordingly they need to respect the rights of others.

Young people do have responsibilities. Legal responsibilities (things you must do, or in this case, must not do), as outlined in laws governing youth such as the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Young people may have social or behavioural responsibilities as set out in their cultural community or family. These responsibilities should coincide with children and youth's increasing participation and capacity. These responsibilities allow young people to grow, develop and contribute to their family and community. However rights are not conditional upon fulfilling responsibilities.

Will teaching children and youth about their rights lead to unreasonable demands and disobedience?

No. There is the potential for conflict when a young person believes they are more capable of independent decision-making than the caregiver does. But, caring environments in which children are listened to, respected, trusted and encouraged to take increasing levels of responsibility as they demonstrate their increasing capacity are less likely to promote conflict. In fact, many caregivers and children talk about strengthened relationships, increased respect for caregivers and positive contributions to the family. Caregivers value children's increased confidence and skills and their increased understanding and respect for other's rights too.

If children have a right to express their views in all matters affecting them, does this mean that children have the final say in decisions affecting them?

The UNCRC and the *Child, Family and Community Services Act* seek respect for children — but not at the expense of the human rights or responsibilities of others. Young people have a right to express their views and to have them taken seriously and be given due weight. However children's views are not the only ones to be considered. The UNCRC emphasizes the need to respect children's "evolving capacities" but does not give children the right to make decisions for themselves at too young an age. This is rooted in the common-sense concept that the child's path from total dependence to adulthood is gradual.

Allowing children to have a voice in decisions that affect them can be more time-consuming. Do all decisions have to include them?

Yes. Children who are capable of forming his or her own views have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, with the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Listening to a young person's perspective is one of the most important ways of understanding their unique needs and circumstances and therefore making good 'best interest' decisions.

Isn't it my responsibility to make decisions for children and youth in my care since I have their best interests at heart? Children may make choices that are not in their best interests.

Decisions that are made should always be in a child's best interests. Deciding what is in a child's best interests is not an easy thing to determine when you don't genuinely consider

their views. Research shows that better decisions are made when children's views have been factored in and that commitment to the decisions made increases. Children and youth have a unique perspective about their lives and they want to be involved in decisions affecting them — it is the responsibility of adults in their lives to help them to do it.

Adapted from materials developed by the Rights 2 Success project partners: Ministry of Children and Family Development, the former Child and Youth Officer for BC, and the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks.2/3

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BACKGROUND

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