

Are You
Listening?



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Final Report of the YouthSpeak Project

March 2004

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The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial, non-profit, organization dedicated to improving the lives of youth in and from government care between the ages of 14 and 24.



Cover by Lacy J. Morin-Desjarlais & Sarah Watson

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Youth Project Staff	1
Acknowledgments	2
Project Team & FBCYICN Support	3
Participants, Special Guests, Facilitators & Regrets	4
Terms of Reference	6
• Commonly Used Abbreviations	
• Definitions	
• Organization Descriptions	
Defining YouthSpeak	8
History	9
Project Purpose & YouthSpeak Diagram	10
Event Overview	11
Consultation: YouthSpeak Surveys	12
Summary of the Needs, Issues & Ideas Session	14
Priorities: Youth in and From Care Speak Out	16
The Needs Assessment Project (2003)	22
Skill-Building: Workshop Planning	25
Summary of YouthSpeak Workshops	27
• Advocacy Made Easy	
• Sexual Health	
• Communication	
• Letter Writing	
• Public Speaking	
• Strengthening Our Locals	
• Medicine Wheel & Wellness Plans	
Event Evaluation	34
Struggles & Successes: An Overall Project Evaluation	40

March 2004

Dear Reader(s):

Thank-you for taking the time to read our final report for the provincial YouthSpeak Project.

This report is a record of what happened at our provincial YouthSpeak (2004); contains a summary of the past Needs Assessment Project Survey (2003); and most importantly it compares youth in and from care's needs, issues, and ideas from the past five years of YouthSpeak events. It's for those decision-makers and influential persons who have a choice to make change for these young people.

Many of the issues that have been identified by youth in and from care over the past five years at various YouthSpeaks, and other consultations with young people from the system, are staying relatively the same. Although previous YouthSpeaks have been focused on individual communities to concentrate on local issues, hosting a provincial YouthSpeak has further confirmed youth in and from care all across the province are dealing with the same needs and issues.

The image of a youth sitting in a shadow on the cover symbolizes our disappointment that very little has changed in the system.

For this reason, we have called this report "Are you Listening?"

The name of this report is not meant to blame or offend anyone, it is meant to make you more aware of and take more seriously the needs, issues and ideas of youth in and from care.

We encourage you to see this report not just as another piece of information but also as the actual voices of our youth in and from the government "care" system. Consider this report as if a real person is sharing their struggles, often with issues that they have very little control over, and how they would suggest solving them.

We hope the statistics provided in this report help you to understand the experiences of these young people and to take action on our recommendations.

To the youth in and from care who have shared their experiences and ideas, thank-you for SPEAKING OUT because we do care and your voices united will influence change!

Yours in Networking,

Lacy J. Morin-Desjarlais & Sarah Watson

Youth Project Staff

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks



Acknowledgements

We had an amazing amount of assistance from the community and participants that helped to make our YouthSpeak event one of the finest! We extend acknowledgements to the following parties:

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- Canadian Tire (Richmond)
- Starbucks Coffee Canada

To all of our special guests, thank-you for your attendance and support.

To the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks' Advisors, Alumni, Resource People and Hospitality Support Staff, thank-you for your continuing support. Without you all, it would be impossible to host great events like YouthSpeak!

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Terms of Reference

Commonly Used Abbreviations

FBCYICN – *Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks*
MCFD – *Ministry for Children and Family Development*
MLA – *Member of Legislative Assembly*
MP – *Members of Parliament*
SCM – *Steering Committee Meeting*
SW – *Social Worker*
YAB – *Youth Advisory Board*
YAC – *Youth Advisory Committee*
YIC – *Youth In Care*

Definitions

Advocacy – Making sure that people's voices, their views, rights, and interests are heard.
(The Office for Children and Youth brochure)

Advocate – A person who supports or speaks in favor of another person. A person who pleads for another or defends another.
(Oxford Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1996)

Bisexual – A person who is sexually attracted by persons of both sexes. (Oxford Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1996)

Caregiver – A person with whom a child is placed by a worker and who by agreement, has assumed responsibility for the child's day-to-day care. (Standards for Foster Homes, 1998)

Heterosexual – Feeling or involving sexual attraction to persons of the opposite sex. (Oxford Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1996)

Homeless – To not have a residence to live at or any other home and have lack of parental, foster, and institutional care.
(Homeless Youth: An Annotated Bibliography, McCreary Centre Society, 2002)

Homosexual – Feeling or involving sexual attraction only to persons of the same sex. (Oxford Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1996)

Social Worker – A person designated by the Minister for Children and Families under section 91 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act to ensure the safety and well-being of children in British Columbia.
(Standards for Staffed Children's Residential Services 1998)

Stereotype – A person or thing that conforms to an unjustifiable fixed, usual, or standardized mental picture.
(Oxford Dictionary 2nd Edition 1996)

Youth – The Federation of BC Youth In Care Network defines youth as a person between the ages of 14-24, who is in or from government care.

Youth at Risk – Youth who is experiencing or likely to experience mental, emotional, or behavioral difficulties and are considered to be "at risk" of not maturing into healthy, well-adjusted and productive adults.
(Homeless Youth: An Annotated Bibliography, McCreary Centre Society, 2002)

[Note: The following is a list of terms used in the report that have no actual definition that we could refer to but have knowledge of the definition or meaning.]

Decision-Makers – People who make decisions or have influence on decisions that are made that affect the youth's life either directly or indirectly.

Hospitality Suite – a place used for a safe and fun environment to be for the young people who wish to out into the night, drink and snacks maybe offered also various activities occur facilitated by the hospitality suite support staff.

Local Networks – A local YIC group or “network” is a group of youth who are or have been in care (ages 14-24) who come together in their community to: take on a project, tackle issues that affect them, or just hang out and talk.

Placement – A residence where a child under the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development is placed with a caregiver to live, e.g. foster home, group home, institute etc.

Questioning – A person who is questioning their current sexuality.

Steering Committee Meeting – The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks hosts a meeting 3-4 times a year, for youth in & from government care to come together from across BC, to participate in the direction of the organization, workshops, and activities.

Transgender – A person in the process of changing their gender that they were born with.

Organization Descriptions

McCreary Centre Society – A non-profit, non-government organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education, and community-based participation projects. (Our Communities – Our Health, McCreary Centre Society, 2001 – Available online at: www.mcs.bc.ca)

Ministry for Children and Family Development – General Responsibilities: this Ministry works to ensure that some of our most vulnerable children and families have the best chances possible to succeed and thrive. This includes the areas of child protection and family development, early childhood development and special needs children and youth, adult community living services, youth justice, child and youth mental health, and youth services. (MCFD Website: www.gov.bc.ca/mcf)

The Office for Children and Youth – One of their jobs is to provide advocacy services for children and youth. They also talk to government about the services that children and youth in this province need and tell the government if they think the services they are providing are helping children and youth in BC. (Know your Rights, A guide for young people in care, 1999) [Note: The name of this agency has been changed to The Child & Youth Officer for British Columbia. For information about the services they provide, please visit their website at www.gov.bc.ca/cyo]

Right Way – A program that runs under The Office for Children and Youth and Save the Children that informs children of their rights as listed under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child. [Note: This project is currently being re-designed in partnership with the Child & Youth Officer for British Columbia, The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, and the Ministry for Children & Family Development (2004 / 2005).]



Defining YouthSpeak

YouthSpeak is an event for youth to talk about their concerns, to gain skills through workshops, and to have an opportunity to speak out in an environment where people are listening. The event consists of time for youth to brainstorm their needs, issues and ideas, attend workshops that address youth's needs, and a chance for youth to express their opinions to the decision-makers in their lives.

- YouthSpeak lets youth know their opinions matter; they have rights, and encourages them to speak out in a healthy and positive way.
- YouthSpeak gives decision-makers a chance to learn first hand information about youth's needs, issues and ideas. This supplies government and service providers with information to make programs for youth more adaptable to youth's needs and more successful.
- YouthSpeak gives youth the chance to inform organizations and other influential bodies about how their services are doing and what they could do in order to help youth more.
- YouthSpeak is also an event that grants opportunity for networking between youth and service providers, allowing youth to know more about the beneficial programs in their communities for themselves and their peers.
- YouthSpeak participants are able to build on skills or learn skills through workshops offered at the event that they then can go back to their communities and use.
- YouthSpeak also lets youth come together, meet new friends, and have a good time!

History

The YouthSpeak Event evolved from two previous projects called “Kidspeak” and “Voices From Within”.

“Kidspeak” took place in 1997 in the City of Calgary. The Alberta Safe Housing Society, Alberta Youth in Care and Custody Network, and National Youth in Care Network partnered on developing this project. These organizations hired a group of youth that were in and from care to interview youth living in care and on the streets about their experiences. The outcome of this project was a report about the experiences of youth in and from the child welfare system in Calgary. This report was sent out all over Canada to politicians, policy makers, and front line workers.

In 1998, Ontario's Office for the Child Youth and Family Services Advocacy reviewed the report on “Kidspeak” and created a project called “Voices From Within”. It was similar to “Kidspeak” because it was a survey of youth's experiences in government care. From this project, a report was written about the experiences of youth in care living in Ontario. This report was distributed to various government offices.

British Columbia's Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate read the “Kidspeak” and “Voices From Within” reports and decided it would be worth doing something similar in BC. They began talking to the McCreary Centre Society and the Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks about these projects and from those initial discussions, the decision was made to partner together and plan something for BC based on the survey work of the other provinces. This event's purpose would be to give youth in care a chance to speak out about their concerns.

They agreed immediately that if they were doing an event for youth in BC they should have youth involved in planning it. From this decision came the idea for the Youth Advisory Board (YAB). YAB worked together with the Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate, the McCreary Centre Society, and the Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks to have an event instead of a survey. They decided to name it YouthSpeak and to hold the event in Kamloops because of the high level of youth involvement and Ministry / community support.

The event was held at Sun Peaks Resort in 1999 and from it, the McCreary Centre Society worked in partnership with the Office for Children and Youth and the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks to create a manual that could be used as a guide for those who want to know how to plan a YouthSpeak (or similar event) in the future.

From the great success of YouthSpeak in Kamloops, several other YouthSpeaks took place in BC. Burnaby and Cowichan Valley both hosted their own YouthSpeaks in 2000, and Victoria hosted a YouthSpeak in 2001. The YouthSpeaks each developed a final report that accumulated data from youth in and from care talking about issues or concerns that affect them. All of these reports were circulated through Ministry offices, community service providers, and are now available through the FBCYICN.



Project Purpose & YouthSpeak Diagram

When Sarah and myself (Lacy) first started working on YouthSpeak, we didn't know how to plan a YouthSpeak event and we didn't have a very good grasp of the concept. We looked through past reports and the YouthSpeak Manual to figure out what a YouthSpeak really was and for ideas on how to plan our own provincial event.

We found several repeating themes in the different YouthSpeaks. The main purpose was youth speaking out about their issues but the process of how to do that was not clear. Other components included: youth brainstorming how to resolve these issues with their ideas, having workshops that address youths' needs, and communicating those needs, issues and ideas back to decision-makers. Sarah created a YouthSpeak Diagram that in turn helped me understand the 'how to' process better.

The diagram helped us shape the agenda, helped us decide on appropriate workshops, helped us understand how we were going to make this event happen successfully, and how we could achieve our project goals.

Theory	Brainstorming	Skill Building	Presentation
Purpose	Youth Identifying their Needs, issues and ideas and their suggestions for solutions	Skill building to enable youth to have the skills they need to voice and address their needs, issues and ideas	Voicing needs, issues, and ideas for solutions
Action	Brainstorming	Workshops	Consultations

The YouthSpeak process generally begins with a brainstorming about the youths' needs, issues and ideas. This is one of the first things we decided that would happen at the event because then you can get the different needs, issues, and ideas from the young people before they have an opportunity to become biased by a variety of workshops etc. It also gives the facilitators time to accumulate the data after the session so it can be presented back at the end of the event to special guests and decision-makers.

The second part is providing skill-building workshops for the youth. These workshops will improve their skills related to voicing their opinions to others, and also address the issues they face as youth everyday (e.g. sexuality, body image, anger management, etc.) and educate them about their rights. Since we (Sarah and I) are youth and we directed this project, we already had a good idea of what the needs and issues of youth are (from previous experience with consultations conducted with the FBCYICN membership) and were able to pick appropriate workshops for the event.

The third part to a successful YouthSpeak is the most important because it is making sure that decision-makers that affect the young peoples' lives hear the youths' voices. Because of the ongoing changes in government and Valentine's Day commitments, we were unable to confirm the attendance of many invited special guests (including the Minister for Children and Family Development). Without those decision-makers present, we decided this report would be used to fulfill the third part of the YouthSpeak model.

Event Overview

Participants arrived at the hotel between 3-5pm on Friday afternoon to check-in and register before dinner. Dinner was followed by a welcome, orientation, and the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks' 11th Anniversary celebration! The orientation included an overview of the weekend agenda and information about what YouthSpeak is to get youth thinking in advance about what needs, issues and ideas they might want to discuss. Friday ended with some Valentine's crafting in the hospitality suite and participants getting to network with each other.

Saturday morning, breakfast started at 8am sharp and was followed by the FBCYICN's Annual General Meeting, which lasted until lunch because the youth wanted to have a clear understanding and voice in the direction the organization is moving in. It was also an opportunity to approve the new Board of Directors and elect a passionate and capable Leadership Council (from the membership) that will help with the transition process. Because we wanted to give the youth this extra time to discuss the new direction of the Network, it was agreed that the Needs, Issues and Ideas session would be postponed until Sunday.

After lunch the youth attended the Advocacy Made Easy workshop as a large group, which engaged everyone to know their rights and speak out for him or herself. The rest of the afternoon was dedicated to YouthSpeak's smaller session workshops. Two blocks of workshops were scheduled so the youth would have a choice about what workshops they were interested in attending.

The first workshop block gave them the choice of a Sexual Health workshop or a Communication workshop. The second block gave them the choice of a Letter Writing workshop, Public Speaking workshop, or the Strengthening Our Locals workshop.

Dinner was served and then we had some fun Valentine's games with awesome prizes. The night ended with participants making Valentine's cards and jewelry in one of the hospitality suites, and a competitive trivia challenge that happened later on in the evening in the other hospitality suite.

Everyone enjoyed a slightly longer (and much needed) sleep on Sunday morning until they had to check out and be at breakfast for 9:00am. After breakfast, the YouthSpeak Needs, Issues and Ideas session took place and even though everyone was tired from the jam-packed busy weekend, everyone worked together and brainstormed some amazing ideas.

Lunch was served and was followed by the final large group YouthSpeak workshop, Medicine Wheel and Wellness Plans, that helped youth identify personal attributes and develop a wellness plan for themselves using Aboriginal culture and traditions as a guide to exploring their personal characteristics. Then it was time to clean-up, say goodbye, and send everyone home.

A Few Crucial Facts

60% of youth stated that they had been abused while in care.

67% of the cases where youth were abused in care, the abuse was reported.

59% of youth stated that they had engaged in consensual sex before age 14.

22% of youth did not use any type of protection the last time they had sex.

61% of youth feel safe with their Social Worker.

0% of youth on Independent Living or youth that had been on Independent Living believe that a youth at age 16 is prepared to live independently.

33% of youth would like to stay in care past the age of 19.

22% of youth didn't know what a plan of care is.



Consultation: YouthSpeak Surveys

The first idea we had to gather statistics from the participants at YouthSpeak was to facilitate a survey and have the participants sit down and fill out a booklet like the Needs Assessment Project survey in 2003. The problem with that was time. We didn't have enough of it in the agenda for such a large-scale questionnaire. However, we thought it was too important not to conduct some sort of survey.

So, we ended up dividing our survey into the following five categories:

- General Information
- In Care or When You Were in Care
- Rights and Advocacy
- Becoming Independent
- Sexual Health

The categories were formatted to fit onto small cards that had fewer questions and could be filled out in a shorter amount of time and we handed them out to the youth at meal breaks. These survey cards worked efficiently, saving us time but allowing us to collect the valuable information to develop statistics from.

Summary of Surveys Results:

General Information

This survey consisted of 7 questions to gather information about the youth such as age, gender, location, sexual orientation etc. (24 youth filled out this survey)

- For 75% of the youth, this was their first time attending a YouthSpeak.
- Status of Youth: 54% are currently in care and 38% were previously in care.
- 4% answered that they 'felt they should have been in care'.

[Note: We included the choice of 'felt they should have been in care', to include the youth who have never formally been taken into government care but who felt they should have been taken into care.]

- Age and Gender of Youth: 54% of the youth are in the age category 14-18years, while 46% are in the age category 19-24years. 63% are female and 37% are male.
- Sexual Status of Youth: 66% identify themselves as Heterosexual, 4% identify themselves as Homosexual, 13% identify themselves as Bisexual, 13% identify themselves as Questioning, 4% identify themselves as Two-Spirited.

[Note: From these statistics on sexuality, we conclude that youth in and from care are a sexually diverse group with a little less than half who identify themselves as some other than heterosexual.]

In Care or When You Were in Care

This survey consisted of 8 questions. (18 youth filled out this survey)

- 39% would like to or would have liked to stay in care until they turn(ed) 19.
- The majority of the youth surveyed have stayed in an average of 4 - 7 different placements and have had an average of 1 - 5 different Social Workers.
- 22% don't know what a Plan of Care is.

[Note: All youth in care should know what their Plan of Care is, and are entitled to be involved in decisions made about their lives.]

- 50% saw or see their Social Worker "sometimes", while 22% saw or see their Social Worker "rarely", and 17% saw or see their Social Worker "often."

- 22% of youth do not feel safe with their Social Worker (the person who has the most authority about the decisions made about the youth's life).
- 22% said "always", 28% said "most of the time", 44% said "sometimes", and 6% said "never" when responding to the following statement "I have or had control over my life and the decisions made about my life in care."

Rights and Advocacy

This survey consisted of 12 questions. (20 youth filled out this survey)

- Only 70% of participants surveyed knew about their rights while in care (every youth in care has the right to be informed of their rights while in care).
- The top 3 resources youth learned about their rights from were:
 - Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
 - Their Social Workers / Youth Workers
 - Their foster home / group home
- 60% answered "yes" to being abused while in care, and 67% of those who had been abused answered "yes" to having reported the abuse.

[Note: This shows 33% of youth who have been abused while in care have NOT reported the abuse. This may mean nothing has ever been done about the situation.]

- 100% of the young people participating said they now know what to do if their rights are violated.
- 85% of participants say they know what advocacy is.
- 85% know what the Office for Children and Youth is (every youth in care should know what the Office for Children and Youth is when they come into care as it is another of their rights while in care).
- The top 3 resources that the youth learned about The Office for Children and Youth were: the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, Social Workers, and Caregivers.

Becoming Independent

This survey consisted of 6 questions. (24 youth filled out this survey)

- Overall, 40% of the youth surveyed believe that at 16 years old, young people are not ready to live independently, while 12% believe that young people are ready to live independently at the age of 16.
- Of those asked, 75% said "yes", 12% said "no", and 8% are "unsure" in response to whether or not they "have a support system to receive help with my independence."
- The top three people youth participants said they confide in / go for support are their foster family, friends, and biological family.

Sexual Health

This survey consisted of 10 questions. (27 youth filled out this survey)

- Of the young people who responded, 96% said they have had consensual sex, and 60% of those youth had consensual sex before the age of 14.
- 55% of the youth said they "did not use a condom" last time they had sex.
- 11% of the youth participants are parents and of those youth, not one is a identified themselves as a single parent.
- The primary birth control methods youth reported using the last time they had sex was: Condom – 30%, Depo-Provera (injection) – 15%, Condom + the pill – 15%, the pill – 11%, abstinence – 4%.

[Note: A high percentage (22%) of youth used absolutely nothing the last time they had intercourse.]

Summary of the Needs, Issues and Ideas Session

In this session, participants had an opportunity to share their experiences and opinions related to the needs and issues facing young people in and from care in their communities. There was also discussion about ideas for addressing their priority concerns to make positive change.

The first two tables are the complete results of the issue/need information brainstormed by the participants:

Issues of YIC YouthSpeak 2004	Similar Issues/Concerns of YIC at Past YouthSpeaks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → "Bad-ass" stigmas about foster kids <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth 16+ not being taken into care when needed → Stability, bouncing from home to home & worker to worker → Social Worker caseloads are too big <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not having shit when you move out (e.g. furniture) - Less antagonism and gaps in system (kids shouldn't have to find loop holes to get service) → Post-majority services have been cut <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lay-off's of social workers (PT and FT) - Workers retiring early - Private/government support of foster care - Good placements shut down → Independent Living at 16 is too soon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Stereotyping - not all kids who are in care are "bad". → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Passed around too much. → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Social Workers have too large a caseload. → Burnaby 2000 - SPY (Services to former youth in care) not receiving enough money for clothing. → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Independent Living, not enough information about it. → Burnaby 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not taught enough before going on Independent living.
<p>Why are so many Covenant House clients Youth In Care?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth not comfortable Youth don't have enough support Youth don't have enough services from MCFD Safety at home Lose bed at group home No other place to go No family, no care Premature and unsupported transition to independence No independence skills "failure" Running away from somewhere else Kids are using drugs and street life, getting kicked out of foster care with no treatment 	<p>Why are so many Youth in Care going to shelters?</p> <p>This is a arising issue that were are hearing more and more of at Steering Committee Meetings and in the community. The question to the left was proposed at the assessment session and the following are answers youth (too quickly) relayed back to it. Also another related issue is that youth are coming out of care and are immediately going on to social assistance (welfare). Youth are slipping through gaps in the system. If a YIC isn't getting their needs met in care they are taking to living on the streets. YIC are not being able to transition out of care properly because of difficulty finding the services to help them with this transition.</p>

The table above is a comparison of YouthSpeak 2004 and past YouthSpeak consultation results. The column to the left is complete list of ISSUES the youth came up with at this YouthSpeak and the column on the right is a comparison of similar issues/concerns brought up at past YouthSpeaks that relate.

When going through past YouthSpeak reports, complete brainstorm information was not available and most of the focus was on the top 3-5 issues/concerns the youth identified. Because of this, we decided that we would list the complete brainstorm information because we think it is just as important and helpful as the top five issues. (The list of needs is provided in a separate table.)

Some of the common issues or concerns are the "Bad-Ass" YIC stereotypes; the instability of being moved several times while in foster care; social workers having too many cases and not enough time; and that the Post Majority Services funding has been cut (there is no longer a SPY program available to youth from care). The last issue that has been reoccurring through various YouthSpeaks is YIC not feeling prepared to live on their own or in an Independent Living Program at the age of 16. Many YIC feel that they don't know enough information about the program or that they are too young too live independently.

Needs of YIC YouthSpeak 2004	Similar Needs of YIC at Past YouthSpeaks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → More "emotional check-ins" (prevention-not crisis interference) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More motivation to stay in school - Need awareness - More job-finding support/assistance from workers (encouragement and assistance) - More diversity awareness and education for caregivers, workers, community, and young people - Take youth's stories seriously and take into care if needed → The priority should be youth not money, not enough effort into the youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better plans for youth moving out/education/work - More programs to help youth (e.g. tutors) Free (Sylvan Learning Center) - After 19 money support - After 19 human support (one to one) regular weekly - Don't shut down group homes that are needed - Don't do "in home" care if it's not safe for the kid "some families never get better" - No orphanages → Independence allowance needs to be more <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better attitudes/relationships, foster parents calling workers to move you over "small stuff" - More crisis services available in person (not just 1-800 #'s) → Your right to be in foster care, until ready to leave <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One to one counseling when you come into care - Need more semi-independent support - Need "Plan B" when independent, if it doesn't work - More encouragement, not focusing on negative stereotypes - Suitcases to move with "garbage bags got to go" - Need more rehab, waiting lists too long → Need more education about organizations, rights, and opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More support (human) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Kamloops 1999 - Lack of contact with social worker. Lack of personal relationship with social worker. → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Consider child's well being, we're not just a case we're people too. → Kamloops 1999 - (waste money while kids live on the street!), no notice to youth. Being treated like a number instead of a person → Cowichan Valley 2000 - More funding is needed, not reaching the kids that really need help. → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Leaving care before you're ready, not ready to leave when you turn 19 years old. → Cowichan Valley 2000 - Not being told of all your rights in care.

The table above is a comparison of YouthSpeak 2004 and past YouthSpeak consultation results. The column to the left is complete list of NEEDS the youth brainstormed and the column on the right is a comparison of similar issues/concerns brought up at past YouthSpeaks that relate. (The issues and needs have been separated because they should not be confused as the same thing. To clarify, the issues YIC are facing are different from what they need.)

Some of the common needs identified by YIC are: that they need relationships and emotional contact with those who make decisions about their well-being; that YIC need to be treated like people not as a number or case; that YIC need more money when becoming independent to help them set up adequately; that YIC need to be able to decide when they are ready to leave care; and that YIC need to be better educated about their rights, various opportunities available to them, and also about their health.

Priorities: Youth in and From Care Speak Out

From the brainstorming session on the Needs, Issues and Ideas of youth in and from care; the youth were asked to vote on their top five priorities from the collaborative list. These priorities are listed below:

1. Motivation to stay in school.
2. Youth (16 and over) not being taken into care.
3. Lack of support for finding jobs.
4. Instability – Bouncing from home to home or worker to worker.
5. “Bad-Ass” Stigma (stereotypes) about foster kids.

The youth were then separated into smaller groups and asked to further brainstorm these needs and issues by answering four questions as they pertain to the certain priority. The questions were: Why exactly is this a need/issue; who is impacted; what can you do about it; and what can others do about it?

The following tables outline the youths' breakdown from working through these five priority needs / issues. In the caption below each table, statistics are identified that relate to the table. Each need has underlying issues, which have resulted in it becoming a need for youth in care, and this is also identified in the captions.

1. More motivation to stay in school	
Why exactly is this a Need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is not enough support or motivation to stay in school - Carelessness - Assisting learning barriers (i.e. ADD, ADHD, Dyslexic)
Who is impacted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impacts youth and the people in their lives. - Youth's futures and the decisions they make - Parents, siblings, friends, community, and children
What can you do about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take initiative - Get an advocate! - Learn how to advocate for self - Educate self on rights about education possibilities - Take ownership and responsibility for the mistakes you have made - Commit yourself to a new course of action - Practice anger management
What can others do about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry can provide more tutoring - More encouragement, no negative input. - Provide stability; help youth stay in same school - Create less distractions and less stress for youth (changing social workers and homes) - Assist youth's interests other than primary education like more desired activities to reinforce less desired school. - Give the opportunity to receive trades, skills, and certificates. - Support financially - Support the more rural communities - Educate school counselors about the ministry - More advocating helping youth get back in public schools - Possibly provide a social worker for this need <p>To Foster Parents: encourage, help w/homework, smile, care, challenge To Teachers: be more motivated, have more respect, passion, and listen To Community: be less discriminating</p>

From our survey card results, the highest grade completed by the majority of the youth who participated in the survey was Grade 10, and only 12% had progressed to College. Participants identified the issue of youth not staying in school because of barriers like learning disabilities and a lack of support and encouragement to continue with their education. The participants identified that YIC need more motivation to stay in school and ideas about how to do it.

Z. Youth 16 and over are not being taken into care	
What exactly is the issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Costs too much money - Not enough money (cutbacks) - Youth not being able to choose Independent Living vs. Foster Care - Too much paperwork if youth is leaving care soon
Who is impacted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth, community, incarcerated facilities, families, and other care placements - Children of youth, young families - Social Assistance system (Welfare) - Everyone is impacted
What can you do about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create more awareness of the issue, knowledge, voice, take initiative/responsibility, spread the word - Write letters to MP, MLA, MCFD liaisons - Know how to ask, have support to do so.
What can others do about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lobby - MCFD can change their intake process - Start doing what's right for youth not what more easy for government.

Of the youth who filled out the Becoming Independent Survey Card, 33% have been or are on Independent Living and not one of those youth agreed that at the age 16, young people are prepared to live independently. The participants expressed concern about the Ministry starting not to take youth into care who are over the age of 16. Instead, they are putting youth on Independent Living (or Youth Agreements) and not giving them the choice of what is best for their situation. Participants were clear that the Ministry needs to continue taking youth over the age of 16 into foster care.

3. More support and help finding jobs

Why is exactly is this a need?

- Youth not knowing how to get a job
- Youth not having resources to get a job
- Being discouraged by social worker to get one because of having money taken away; foster parents lose money if you have a job.
- Having foster parents discriminate against you, having them put you down.
- Your looks and appearance
- You're pregnant
- You're a high school dropout
- Youth ending up on income assistance after care
- Youth ending up on streets

Who is impacted?

- Youth, shelters, taxpayers, police, foster parents, families, and community

What can you do about it?

- Get a drivers license
- Be respectful and less confrontational
- When applying for jobs make self-sacrifices (like removing piercings)
- Start talking to people, how we need programs
- Advocate for better job assistance programs
- Not what you know, its who you know
- Work at it (use newspapers, internet)
- Don't give up and be persistent
- Talk to those who are discouraging you and work it out with them
- Ask for help
- Make good connections with people who can get you a job

What can other people do about it?


- Have more youth friendly places to go for programs
- More low cost courses you can afford
- Guarantee a job at end of programs
- Driver license, more support to develop a plan to achieve one
- More understanding about youth in care to focus on what we need to learn (i.e. wearing clean clothes to a interview)
- Network with people who can make decisions at a higher level
- Foster parents can teach you how to make a resume and cover letter
- They can take you seriously and give us help when we ask
- Develop relationships so you can feel comfortable communicating
- Help us learn how to keep a job, youth in care haven't learned about the "real world"

Of the youth who filled out the survey cards, 25% who have or are on Independent Living work full-time, while only 6% of youth who have never been on Independent Living work full-time. 31% of the youth who have not been on Independent Living go to school full-time, compared to the 12% who go to school full-time who have or are on Independent Living. The issue is that youth are having difficulties finding jobs because of barriers like not having enough education or experience. The need identified by participants is that YIC need more job support.

4. Instability- bouncing from home to home (social workers too)	
What exactly is the issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doesn't make sure all your needs are met - Mismatch placements (putting a low risk child in a high risk home and visa versa) - Cultural differences, religion differences, mental disabilities, and language differences - Judgment, problems in the foster home - Costs money
Who is impacted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth (new youth coming into home, youth already there) - Foster parents, Social Workers, and Community - Family (biological, extended family) - School (teachers and friends)
What can you do about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speak up! - Find someone to advocate for you - Educate yourself
What can others do about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If foster parents and social workers actually listened to the roles! Rights of Children! - Ministry should listen to both sides of the story, including everyone - Teach youth in care to advocate for themselves To Social Workers! - Youth need to be included in decision-making about their lives - Tell youth what they can do and about their rights - Plan of care needs to be done with all parties that are supposed to be done with

The majority of youth who filled out the survey cards have lived at 4-7 different placements while in care. Only 22% of the youth have lived in less than three different placements while in care. Youth in care identified the need for more stability while in care, and not to be moved from home-to-home and worker-to-worker.

5. "Bad Ass" Stigmas about foster kids

<p>What exactly is the issue?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People are misinformed and misunderstood - Even if a kid is a "Bad ass" there is a reason behind it because of the traumatizing experiences that lead them to that. - Stigma also coming from each other, not knowing why we are all in care and making assumptions - Youth are removed from their homes, community, and school, basically sending youth away and "everything is all better" - Moving around so much "you must be the one causing the problem" presumptions on moving to many foster homes.
<p>Who is impacted?</p>	<p>- Everyone is affected</p> 
<p>What can you do about it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being involved in workshops is a great way to start - Write an article in a newspaper, it might be heard and people might learn from it - Make a video, youth driven, youth involved, and youth promoted - Commercials - Youth could be a guest speaker in schools - Promoting successes of foster kids and youth
<p>What can other people do about it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other people could not be "assholes" - Other people could listen to us and not be so judgmental - Be more accepting - Foster parents can stand up for you - Group homes can be more patient; everybody has their own issues. - Properly trained staff in group homes that can handle situations that are tough - Other youth can ask questions - Be better educated - Open minded people - Adults can take the responsibility of reading books, websites and educate themselves towards understanding youth in care and the ministry - Youth be proud of being in care, don't be ashamed - Have a youth in care day!

We had no question relating to discrimination against youth in care on our survey cards, but it was identified as a very common issue in the Needs Assessment 2003, and in past YouthSpeak reports. This group was inspired to create a diagram of how this cycle happens which is shown above. It explains that youth in care who are judged and discriminated against are hurt; they act out against others, who in turn spread the discrimination and the cycle continues. These youth identified the need for more education about why kids are put into foster care, as well as more media coverage of the foster care system, so the public has a better understanding of what the problems, challenges and benefits really are so people don't think foster kids are so "bad."

This is a comparison table of statistics from our YouthSpeak and previous reports. Similar statistics are compared to previous data showing increases or decreased of stats.

Legend	± Kamloops YouthSpeak 1999 ø Burnaby YouthSpeak 2000	* Cowichan Valley YouthSpeak 2000	õ No Place To Call Home! a profile of street youth in BC, the McCreary Centre Society 2001
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PRESENT YOUTHSPEAK DATA		PAST REPORTS	
60% of youth have been abused in care		45% of youth have been abused in care ±	
There has been an increase of youth being abused in care.			
67% reported abuse that took place in care		70% reported abuse that took place in care ±	
35% did not report the abuse		30% did not report the abuse ±	
Still an increased percentage of youth aren't reporting the abuse.			
70% of youth know their rights		77% of youth know their rights ±	
20% of youth don't know their rights		23% Don't know their rights ±	
It's against the law for youth not to know their rights, and the percentage of youth that know their rights has fallen by 7%.			
On average youth have been in 3 homes since coming into care.		On average youth have been in 6 homes since coming into care ø On average youth have been in 7 homes since coming into care *	
Youth are moving to new homes less often.			
22% of youth had no protection the last time they had sex		66% of youth used no protection the last time they had sex; out of these youth 9% thought that withdrawing was a form of birth control ø	
Education about safe sex is paying off many more youth are using protection			
41% used the pill or "Depo"		13% used the pill or "Depo" ø	
41% used a condom the last time they had sex		20% used condom last time had sex ø	
When youth are engaging in sexual intercourse a significant higher percentage are using protection.			
74% have not had a STI		93% have not had a STI *	
More youth are coming down with STIs			
63% Female	37% Male	77% Female *	23% Male *
There has been an increase of male participation in YouthSpeaks.			
Youth brainstormed why so many YIC become Street Youth: - No independence skills - Unsupported transition to independence - Not comfortable - Being abused in care No other place to go - Loose bed at group home		44% of street youth in Vancouver have been in care. õ 22% of street youth that have traded sexual favors living situation when they first traded sexual favors was in foster care õ 48% of street youth that have been in care have traded sexual favors õ	
Youth in care are ending up on the streets because of bad situations and lack of independence skills			

The Needs Assessment Project (2003)

The purpose of this project was to address the current needs, issues, and ideas of youth in care through a survey. Two youth project staff were hired to work on the project and decided to gather the data through a survey they created called Generation X - 4 Generation Next. The survey took place at Steering Committee #32 over the February 28th – March 2nd, 2003 weekend. *(30 Participants filled out this survey.)*

Participants were from the following communities:

Burnaby	Kelowna	Prince George
Campbell River	Kitimat	Quesnel
Cranbrook	Langley	Vancouver
Delta	Nanaimo	Victoria
Kamloops	Powell River	

A final report for this project was not completed but the results of the survey are included in this report as a comparison point between the needs, issues and ideas of youth in and from care early in 2003 with those young people's concerns and suggestions in 2004. The following statistics and youth comments are a brief summary of what was accumulated from the survey; the survey consisted of over 50 questions, the majority of which required written answers. The written answers were very interesting to read because of how thoughtful and insightful they were.

Sexual Identity Results

- 70% are heterosexual
- 17% are bisexual
- 3% are homosexual
- 6% are 'other'

Drug and Alcohol Results

- 47% of the youth have used drugs.
- 14 different drugs were identified (as being used by participants)
- The top 3 most commonly used drugs were: Marijuana, Acid, and Mushrooms.
- 23% of the youth received counselling for drug or alcohol misuse, but 57% of the youth have not received drug or alcohol counselling in the past.

Dealing With the Issue of Drug & Alcohol Abuse

- "Being their friend and being there for them, speaking to them as an equal."
- "Get more people our age (~19/early twenties) to be counselors. Also, people with experience so we understand everything better."
- "I would inform youth on the effects of drugs but not force them to go to NA."

Free Time Activity Results

- "Hang-out with friends, play some b-ball."
- "Get tattoos, piercing, listen to music, write poetry, shop, hang out with friends, go on swings, sports."
- "Play hack, listen to music, chill with friends, smoke weed, drink, clean room."

Health and Well-being Results

- When asked the question, "In your experience of being in care, how have you been emotionally?" 77% of youth replied "e. all of the above: happy, sad, angry, and confused."

Why You Feel This Way

- "I'm in a stressful and new situation, I'm supposed to feel those things to properly cope and be able to change my situation."
- "The different dynamics of the family as well as where my social workers were at."
- "Your emotions will fluctuate no matter where you are. You have your good things, your bad things, and the decision making, which can be confusing."

Getting Help

- When asked "In your experience of being in care, have you received the information or help that you need?" 63% said "yes" and 33% said "no".
- Information / resources participants described as helpful include: "Homosexual youth groups", "About scholarships", "Youth advocates office", and "Knowing my rights".

Communication Results

- When asked the question "Do you feel your voice is being heard in decisions that affect you?" 70% said "yes", 10% said "sometimes", and 20% said "no".

Of those participants that answered no, participants responded with the following:

- "Um cause no one listens."
- "Don't understand me. Don't listen to the things I need."
- "Ha Ha, who listens to a youth, plus I did not know I could say something."
- Young people would like others to know the following about their needs:
 - "I'm independent but may need assistance."
 - "It's hard for me to talk to people."
 - "That everyone needs support even those that 'look' like or 'seem' like they are o.k."
 - "Listen to me and actually hear what I have to say."
 - "I like to make my own decisions but sometimes good advice is important to my decisions."

Social Worker Results

- 47% said they "rarely" talk to their Social Worker (that's almost half!)
- 20% said they "often" talk to their Social Worker
- 33% said they "sometimes" talk to their Social Worker
- 57% of youth said they "yes" get along with their Social Worker
- 17% of youth said "no" they don't get along with their Social Worker

Of those who don't have a good relationship with their worker, their reasons for this included:

- "I don't exactly know him, I've only met him twice."
- "Never there."
- "She doesn't know my needs."

When asked if they would like their Social Worker to be more involved in their life, participants said: 47% said "yes" because they wanted their worker to:

- "Be more supportive and actually show some interest in me."
- "Help me more"
- "Well she is involved and helpful but I would like help with hard topics in my life."

Family & Parenting Results

- 10% of youth said “yes” they are parents.
- None of these young parents considers themselves a ‘single’ parent.
- When asked how old they were when they had their first child, young parents answered: 21, 18 and 20.
- 73% of the young parents said “no” they do not get enough support.
- 67% said “yes” to having a relationship with their family while 27% said “no”.
- 43% said “yes” and 47% said “no” to being “satisfied” with their relationship with their family.
- When asked whether or not they are angry with or blame their parents for being in care, 47% said “yes” and 43% said “no”.

Discrimination Results

- When asked if they have ever experienced or heard of any judgments about you or other youth in care because of being in care, 79% of the young people said “yes”.

Note: One of the repeating themes in various needs assessments is about judgments and discrimination towards youth in care; the above statistic shows a high percentage of this issue effecting young people in the system right here in BC.

Home Life Results

Where do you currently live?

- 32% live in a foster home.
- 39% live on their own.
- 14% out of care.
- 7% live in a group home.
- 7% live in “other”.
- When asked how many placements the participants had been in, the majority of the youth said they have been in 1-5 different placements while in care.

The last question of the survey was “What recommendations would you make to the following people to help improve ‘the system’ and lives of other youth in care?”

Recommendations for Other Youth in Care

- “Keep on going, never give up.”
- “Hang in there people someone cares.”
- “Stand up for yourself; don’t let other people push you down. You don’t have to put up with everyone’s crap.”

Recommendations for Caregivers

- “Each person is an individual and should be treated that way.”
- “Build trust with youth and don’t take their money.”
- “Treat them like people or family.”

Recommendations for Service Providers

- “More services and more services.”
- “Understand what’s going on.”
- “Get your info to the youth and be patient.”

Recommendations for Government

- “Let youth speak and be heard on all levels of government.”
- “More funding, this is tomorrows Prime Minister you know.”
- “They need to try and give more services and/or money to YIC.”

Skill Building: Workshop Planning

Sarah and Lacy were inspired to design their own workshops when trying to decide what workshops they wanted for the YouthSpeak 2004 agenda. They both had visions of workshops that as far as they knew did not exist and would be custom made to benefit the youth participants. In this section, they explain who they partnered up with to make these workshops happen as well as the planning processes they used.

Lacy's Workshop: The Medicine Wheel and Wellness Plans

I chose this type of workshop because it was cultural and it also had life skills tools youth in care (or anyone) could benefit from. I thought it would contribute perfectly to YouthSpeak's purpose. I partnered with Brionne from Arrows to Freedom Cultural Healing Society, who is one of our Resource People at the FBCYICN, to help me create and build on the vision I had of a workshop in my head. It started off with a rough outline of an agenda that I came up with and then it turned into something else completely when Brionne and I began having workshop planning meetings.

Brionne has a broad-base of experience and knowledge about Aboriginal culture and he is also a pipe carrier, so when he started contributing his resources, the workshop really came together.

I started the workshop with this in mind... at the Network meetings, we encourage youth through workshops etc. to speak up, get involved, and advocate for themselves. That's all really great but how is a youth in care supposed to do that if they are dealing with emotional issues, drugs, and all that other crap going on in their lives?

The purpose of this workshop was to use the Medicine Wheel as a tool to help individuals to develop a personal wellness plan for themselves, so they can be emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally well.

I thought the overall facilitation of the workshop went well; however Brionne and I did not stick to the agenda as planned. I thought it would be interesting to start the workshop with a smudge ceremony, unfortunately it started to bother some of the participants' allergies and the smell was overpowering because it was inside a building. We lost participants and some participants were upset they couldn't smudge.

The first activity involved participants picking some of their favourite animals and naming their attributes. Then we discussed what the participants had come up with and explained how these are qualities we either admire in ourselves or would like to possess. This went over so well with the participants that the activity could have been the whole workshop.

I think if this workshop had been held outside, we would have been able to proceed with the smudge and not force anybody who didn't want to to participate in it. Otherwise the workshop was given good feedback!

Sarah's Workshop: Advocacy Made Easy

At past Steering Committee Meetings, youth have requested an advocacy workshop. Many youth have learned what advocacy is by advocating for themselves. However, a clearer definition of what exactly advocacy is was still needed. The need for an advocacy workshop was reaffirmed for me through my volunteer work on the Right Way Project, so it seemed only natural to do an advocacy workshop.

Although the Right Way Workshop taught young people about their rights, I wasn't aware of an advocacy workshop specifically made for youth in British Columbia. I didn't have any expertise in this area other than interest and some experience advocating for myself and for friends, but I knew it was important to have this workshop at YouthSpeak.

I also knew through my involvement with Right Way, that Jen (a Right Way coordinator) was planning to create an advocacy workshop as part of the next phase of her project. So, I contacted Jen about working together and she then got Kathy involved from the Office for Children and Youth.

After we all agreed to partner on making this workshop, we had several phone conversations and then had an in-person meeting to discuss how we were going to develop this workshop. After that meeting, Jen and myself split up the workload - she typed up and edited the workshop outline and I made all of the handouts for the workshop including: a list of youth rights, rights and advocacy scenarios, general definitions of advocacy, and a rights and advocacy resources list.

Summary of YouthSpeak Workshops

Advocacy Made Easy

Facilitator(s): Sarah Watson, Jen Mantyka and Kathy Berggren-Clive

The purpose of this workshop was to teach participants about how to advocate for themselves in their day-to-day lives and to give them the skills and knowledge needed to be effective self-advocates. The workshop explained what advocacy is, the steps to advocating, and the rights of youth in Canada and youth in care in BC.

Sarah and Jen introduced themselves, discussed youth rights and explained what the 4 B's of advocacy are:

1. Be Heard
2. Be Safe
3. Be Yourself
4. Be Healthy

The area of focus from the 4 B's was BE HEARD. Sarah and Jen encouraged the group to discuss times when they felt they hadn't been heard and the problems they faced with this. The participants then broke into two groups to brainstorm what they came up with these ideas on the following questions:

What stops you from speaking out?

- Authority figures
- Lack of knowledge
- Shy
- No help
- Peer pressure
- Belittlement
- No self-esteem
- Unaware
- Out numbered
- Fear
- Paranoid

What helps you speak out?

- Passion
- Anger
- Self-confidence
- Faith
- Knowledge of rights
- Resources
- Understanding
- Self worth
- Self respect
- Experience
- Responsibility
- Maturity
- Pride
- Safety
- Education
- Bravery
- Concern
- Mentors

The group went on to discuss the positive factors of why it is worth speaking out and how to properly and effectively advocate for yourself. The workshop concluded with another brainstorming activity focused on how to plan a meeting related to advocating for yourself.



Sexual Health

Facilitator(s): Suzanne "Sewy" Hay and Jesse Dostal

The purpose of this interactive workshop was to provide the participants with practical information about sexual health. Participants discussed decision-making, talking about sex, birth control, sexually transmitted infections (formally known as STD's) and methods of safe sex.

The participants started off the workshop with a discussion and brainstorm on why people have sex and good and bad reasons for having sex. After this discussion, the participants then discussed decision-making and talking about sex.

The group then went on to discuss and brainstorm body fluids, which then lead to a discussion on safe sex and the different methods of birth control. The participants also discussed and reviewed the symptoms and long-term effects of the following STI's (Sexually Transmitted Infection):

- Gonorrhea
- HIV/AIDS
- Warts
- Syphilis
- Crabs
- Chlamydia
- Hepatitis A, B, C
- Herpes
- Gonorrhea
- HIV/AIDS
- Warts
- Syphilis
- Crabs
- Chlamydia
- Hepatitis A, B, C
- Herpes

At the end of the workshop, there was a chance for the participants to ask and discuss any questions they might have with the facilitators.

Communication

Facilitator(s): Herminia Diaz and Golda Adjei-Achampong

In this workshop, participants learned the fundamentals of communication and how to apply these in personal and professional situations. They learned about active listening and how to apply it to everyday situations. Some of the key ideas that the participants brainstormed for active listening were:

- You can't listen when you are talking.
- Wait until the speaker is finished speaking before you think of a response.
- Pay attention to the speaker.
- Don't jump to conclusions or argue mentally.

Participants also learned about anger, and how to communicate and express their anger in appropriate ways. They learned how to use "I" statements, how to resolve basic communication conflicts, and learned how to take a "cool-off" period so they won't say something they will regret later.

The group then went on to discuss the proper method of giving feedback to people. Herminia, Golda, and the participants discussed and brainstormed some proper ways to effectively relay feedback. Some of the key points were:

- Don't overload/overwhelm someone with a lot of feedback at once.
- Don't "force-feed" feedback on someone who doesn't want to hear it.
- Share your perceptions and observations of the situation.
- Focus your feedback on behavior and action not the person.

Letter Writing

Facilitator: Sheila Waller

This workshop covered how to write a professional letter, which could be sent to social workers, MLA's or anyone else youth want to get their message to. The workshop was focused on how to organize your thoughts and lay them out on paper.

In this workshop, participants learned the proper method to write a professional and effective letter. They learned a letter is one of the most powerful forms of communication and that most professional letters follow a basic format. The participants also learned that the 3 most common mistakes people make when writing a letter are:

1. Sending it to the wrong person.
2. Not asking for specific feedback within a specific time frame.
3. Not providing the proper contact information to respond to you.

They learned how to avoid these mistakes by doing some research before writing the letter. The participants learned how to address and format a letter and about what important information to include in the letter.

Public Speaking

Facilitator: Nicole Herbert

In this workshop participants learned the basic tools and confidence for effective public speaking. Participants learned 6 Steps for Successful Speaking:

1. Topic – Know the facts and know how you feel about them.
2. Targets – Know whom you're presenting to, you'll have a better idea about how to present.
3. Tools – Know what's appropriate for you audience.
4. Test – Know your flow.
5. Talk – Know you have done the work and know what you're talking about.
6. Truth – Know what worked well and what needs improvement.

They discussed and brainstormed different situations where young people might participate in public speaking. Some of these ideas were:

- Musical Theater
- Graduation
- Video
- Workshops
- Class presentation
- Reporters
- Drama
- Guest speaking
- Weddings
- Political position
- Talk shows
- Interviews

The participants also discussed their fear of public speaking. Some of the key points about their apprehension when it comes to public speaking where:

- Choking
- Forgetting
- Nakedness
- Failure
- Getting sick
- Sweating
- Repetitiveness
- Un-liked
- Loose voice
- Stutter
- Too quiet
- Off beat
- Boredom
- Uncomfortable silences

The participants then broke off into smaller groups to practice public speaking with each other. They had a chance to develop and practice a topic, and then presented it in front of the larger group.

Strengthening Our Locals

Facilitators: John Betts, Ben Kwan, and Yvonne Andrews

This workshop was designed for any participants who are interested in starting a local or who are already involved with a local group. The participants had an opportunity to discuss the challenges they face and strategies for developing strong and successful locals.

The workshop started off by explaining what Networking is (the more people you know, the more support you have and the more input/information you have access to) and the importance of starting or joining a local in your area. The group then went on to discuss how to start a local. Some of the key points to this are:

- Interest from youth
- Network
- Within your community, to social workers, to foster parents
- Get the information out about the benefits of having a local
- Decide what age group (example 14-24 years of age)
- Find a Youth Friendly Space
- Safe
- Handicap Accessible
- Rules and Regulations
- Child and youth-friendly meetings
- Respectful environment
- Find appropriate adult support
- Don't tokenize your adult supporters
- Use a respectful process
- Make the dates and times appropriate
- Make sure the majority of the participants can attend on the selected dates
- Find a place that is easy to get to
- Fun
- Arrange fun outings and activities for the youth
- Work on projects that are important to the participants

Medicine Wheel & Wellness Plans

Facilitators: Lacy J. Morin-Desjarlais & Brionne Asham

In this workshop, the participants learned about basic teachings from the Medicine Wheel and how these teachings can be applied to their everyday lives. This workshop started off by explaining what a Smudge is and the purposes for a Smudge. Brionne and Lacy then went on to explain spirit animals and how they apply to your personality.

The group then discussed how to address each of the following four aspects of the wellness plan (based on the four directions of the Medicine Wheel):

1. Mental
2. Physical
3. Spiritual
4. Emotional

The participants discussed how to prepare a weekly wellness plan for themselves and then the workshop ended with a prayer song by Brionne.

Event Evaluation

After the YouthSpeak event, we sent out an Evaluation by email and phoned some of the participants to evaluate how we did on the event through their eyes. Below are some of their comments:

1. What new things did you learn about at the YouthSpeak & SCM Event?

- New directions for the FBCYICN, the importance of the FBCYICN to the young people (relationships, support, knowledge-building through workshops), and issues identified by the youth as relevant to their experience of being in care. (Adult)
- I learned what some of the real concerns are for young people in from care and how to create a strong local. (Youth)
- How to properly smudge, people are really cool, not to judge a book by its cover, people skills, the way to react in certain situations. (Youth)
- I thought that the Sex-ed workshop was really insightful, I know more about the risk and how to prevent them. I enjoyed the AGM and learning about the parliamentary procedures, I enjoyed everything, except for falling on my head. (Youth)
- More about the Medicine Wheel. (Youth)
- I learned not to trust Sarah and Lacy because they caked me on my cheeks. (Adult)
- I really enjoyed the Cultural Workshop and the other workshops were enjoyable even though it was stuff I already learned the information was delivered differently. (Youth)
- I also learned about sexually transmitted diseases and how to speak in public a little better. (Youth)
- It was all new to me, I learned about the kinds of guidelines youth set for themselves (really respectful ones), how much many people enjoy doing crafty things, how much they care about what's going on with the Federation, and how several youth described the Federation to me as their family. (Adult)
- That is actually helps to speak up on the subjects that need to be talked about and you should stand up for what you believe in. (Youth)
- More about executive committee, how the Federation works, more about the youth involvement in the network, more info on how youth drive and help run the organization. How those who age out still have a strong connection with the network. It was also experiential learning, I have never been to a youth conference like it, and it was really amazing. (Adult)

2. What will you do with what you learned at the YouthSpeak & SCM Event?

- Share information with my co-workers, share information with my regional contact on Vancouver Island, work with FBCYICN to encourage them to disseminate the information on a larger scale, and connect young people on Vancouver Island with appropriate MCFD staff so they can come and speak with MCFD staff about what they learned. (Adult)
- My hopes are to become more active with the Vancouver local and attempt to reach some of the young people who have yet to have the opportunity of seeing what the Federation is all about. (Youth)
- Use it in my everyday life. (Youth)
- I will put it into practice in my daily life and never do break dancing again. (Youth)
- I will share it with others. (Youth)
- I will get revenge! (Adult)
- Help myself support, educate, and advocate for myself and other youth in the community. (Youth)
- I'm not sure what I'll do with what I learned. (Youth)
- For one thing, I think I'll use this learning to be a better consultant/support for the Federation, as I have a better understanding of the members' priorities and concerns. (Adult)
- Bring the information about the network back to my organization, keep supporting the local network, share the experiences I had with the youth in my community and try to get their involvement in the network. (Adult)
- I will speak up more and try harder to speak up for what I believe...(Youth)

3. How did you like the workshop selection overall and what was your favorite workshop?

- I liked the workshop selections all though I have probably attended any of those at least once. My favorite workshop was the Local Youth in Care Development Workshop. (Youth)
- Wellness Plans, most of it was really cool. (Youth)
- I like all of them, because they all presented something new and it was really good to have that rather than the same stuff over and over again. I have also learned the next time that I do a workshop I'm going to have it more structured. (Youth)
- My favorite was the Medicine Wheel Workshop I enjoyed all the others except I was disappointed with the delivery of the Communication Workshop. (Youth)
- My favorite workshop was the Letter Writing because it gave me insight on how to write an effective letter to all levels of government. (Adult)
- I thought the workshop selection was good cause it gave us a choice. My favorite workshop would have to be local development and the movie the Yve showed was great. (Youth)
- I liked the workshops and my favorite was the sex-ed one. (Youth)
- Good mix and selection, the topics were timely, and my favorite was Strengthening Locals Workshop. (Adult)
- The workshop selection thing was cool...lol umm I think I liked the public speaking on more...lol I really needed help with that one. (Youth)

4. What did you really like about the YouthSpeak & SCM Event?

- I really liked being able to meet all the youth, as an adult from an organization; I appreciated the networking with the other organizations. I was impressed by how close-knit the group appeared to be; a strong sense of connection; respect for difference; inclusiveness. Well organized conference; dedicated staff who worked very hard. The YouthSpeak (Sunday Morning) was really amazing. Again, I was so impressed how well the youth were able to articulate the issues faced by children and youth in care and the willingness to engage in problem solving. (Adult)
- I really liked the heart game, a side from feeling bad for winning. (Youth)
- I liked the adult supports and alumni. (Youth)
- I liked everything I had no favorites, the best part was being able to see everyone again, it's a great way to build self-confidence. (Youth)
- That it was more focused work oriented less nonsense and fooling around, I liked that there was a lot of work to do. (Youth)
- I liked that everyone took initiative in learning new things and being involved through out the weekend. (Adult)
- I liked that it was a new hotel because it was a new experience, I liked that it was a YouthSpeak because we have been asking for a YouthSpeak for years. (Youth)
- I liked everything. The meetings and stuff were good. (Youth)
- I really liked how warm and welcoming everyone was. (Adult)
- Pajamas at breakfast, energy level was so high it was overwhelming; I was in ahhh, amazing. I liked how the youth talked about their experiences honestly, taking a healthy risk (not complaining) but focusing on improving. Loved the information. I loved it. (Adult)
- The waterslide...lol no I liked that they were trying to help us get our opinions out there to be heard... (Youth)

5. What did you dislike about the YouthSpeak & SCM Event?

- The location and lack of disposable cameras. (Youth)
- The fact that I couldn't go to the hospital. (Youth)

- Hitting my head on the cement floor. (Youth)
- The noise at night. (Youth)
- Not enough time to sleep in. (Youth)
- I disliked how many buses we had to take to SCM. (Youth)
- Uncomfortable sarcastic comments in some of the workshops. The extra time in the agenda, I'm too use to a tight busy schedule, but it was good because I need to learn to appreciate the extra time, doesn't' need to be changed. (Adult)
- I didn't dislike anything (Youth)

6. How were the Hospitality Suites and Hospitality Support Staff?

- Seemed fine...no complaints. (Adult)
- They were awesome, but where were the board games? (Youth)
- Hospitality was good and really good. (Youth)
- As usual it was really great to have them, Vinny has to bring his bongo drums next time. (Youth)
- I didn't really use the hospitality suites I was too tired. (Youth)
- They were a lot of fun I like both the Hospitality Support Staff. (Adult)
- I disliked the Hospitality Suites being on the top floor cause I'm scared of heights. (Youth)
- The hospitality suites were cool so were the hospitality people. (Youth)
- Fine (Adult)
- Excellent (Adult)
- The hospitality suites were cool and the staffs were awesome as usual. (Youth)

7. What did you think of the Hotel and Hotel Staff?

- Seemed fine...no complaints. (Adult)
- I didn't like the hotel but the staffs were friendly. (Youth)
- Absolutely wonderful, but hotel was big and I got lost a few times. (Youth)
- Fabulous, it was exquisite. (Youth)
- Things were too far apart. I like the quality of the hotel and hotel staff. I liked that there wasn't any discrimination. My room's beds weren't made; the house keeping wasn't to my standards because the housekeeping cut corners. (Youth)
- Very nice and accommodating. (Adult)
- We didn't need the fancy cutlery with 2 forks and 2 spoons it cluttered up the table. My blankets had stains on them and it was fucking gross, it took an hour to get new blankets. (Youth)
- The hotel was nice. Some of the hotel staff were asses I heard talking about when were gonna leave and shit like that. (Youth)
- Fine (Adult)
- I thought the hotel was very nice...the staff were pretty nice as well. (Youth)
- The hotel was amazing, hotel staffs were great, really respectful of the youth, and they didn't treat them different. Directions to the hotel sucked, got lost for 8hours. (Adult)

8. How was the food over the weekend?

- It seemed fine...no complaints. (Adult)
- I was the worst hotel food I have ever had. (Youth)
- Different, some of it was good, but the last meal we did have was absolutely disgusting. (Youth)
- I've never had better hotel food; the food was even better than Camp Howdy by far. (Youth)
- I enjoyed the food it was good. (Youth)
- It was the best food serving I've ever had at an SCM. (Adult)
- I disliked the food it was disgusting. (Youth)
- Great (Adult)
- The food sucked ass. (Youth)
- It was great; there was lots to eat and lots of coffee. (Adult)
- I thought the food was pretty good...better than the other hotel. (Youth)

9. What could we do better next time?

- Use a hotel with a more central location as I found there were too many "hiding spots" and the participants were too spread out. (Youth)
- Make sure you can eat other things, maybe a less formal way of travel, organization skills, and room for mistakes and more time in agenda. Overall it was wonderful. (Youth)
- Giving me a helmet. I don't think anything could have been better. (Youth)
- Come up with some sort of way to get everyone's attention without raising your voice maybe it's different because I've been to a lot of adult meetings. The very first workshop we should have is a participation workshop. (What it means to participate.) Otherwise it was great. I didn't even know when the YouthSpeak was going to take place I thought it was going to be over one day during the weekend. (Youth)
- Give away money. (Adult)
- More interactive it was really interactive but you can never have enough interactivity. There were a lot of clicks. (Youth)
- The only thing that needed to be changed was the food. (Youth)
- I thought you guys did a great job of organizing, and you were part of creating such a warm and welcoming environment. (Adult)
- Make the workshops more fun to go to?? I dunno I thought it was fine...the funnest one I've been to yet. (Youth)
- More coffee in the big meeting room. (Adult)

Youth Project Staff Evaluation of the YouthSpeak Event:

What Worked?

- The selection of workshops, because the youth had a choice and the diversity of workshops met everybody's interest.
- The workshop facilitators were all youth or youth-friendly and we received all positive feedback on the workshop evaluations about the facilitators.
- A full agenda because it kept youth engaged and busy.
- Survey's that were spread over meal times, because they were quick, and many of the youth filled them out, which resulted in us gathering some interesting data.
- Workshop evaluations because they were quick (less time away from workshop facilitators) and gave a good description of what the youth liked or disliked.
- Plenty of breaks between activities, because of smokers who ended up on not complaining a lot.
- Late wake-up on Sunday, because it was needed and enjoyed by staff and participants.
- Trivia Game and Valentine's Game went well, good prizes and youth had lots of fun!
- Sarah and Lacy worked well as a team exchanging work load, roles, and break times.

Improvements Required:

What didn't work:	Our suggestions for solutions:
Not knowing people's medical conditions in advance, because staff and youth were unprepared for surprise medical emergencies.	Making a point to youth how important it is to make us aware of medical conditions when they register.
More time for workshops, because facilitators were rushed, we were cutting into breaks, youth not getting the complete workshop agenda information, and running behind in the overall YouthSpeak agenda.	When planning the agenda, to make sure we have a longer time period for workshops, and not have so many events at once.
Workshop rooms were not on youth's agendas, they needed to be because we lost youth and they were taking more time to get to workshops.	Make sure workshop rooms are on agenda and everyone knows where they are (saves time).
Bad weekend, because of Parliament starting and not attracting much decision makers, and it was Valentine's weekend.	It was just an unlucky weekend, better luck next time.
Too many events happening at one SCM to focus on one event, burn out for staff and participants.	Having YouthSpeak separate from SCM, AGM, and an Anniversary, because of time restraints and confusion on behalf of youth.
YouthSpeak rooms too spread apart, because youth were getting lost and they were other events going on in hotel, plus hotel was so confusing to walk around in.	Having more accurate and easier directions to Hotel, perhaps having all rooms more close together and pocket size map of hotel.
Adults were always in one group, and distracting youth from workshops. Made some participants feel uncomfortable because they would stop talking when approached.	Perhaps define adult roles more clearly, if adults need to discuss something in private not sit in heavy youth traffic area.
Having a better run down of agenda, because youth don't carry agenda anyway and didn't know what was going on.	Explain more detailed of what's going on during the weekend and maybe have portable little agendas for youth to refer to.

Struggles and Successes: An Overall Project Evaluation

According to Lacy...

Struggles

I have had an amazing learning experience working on this project, the struggles I have gone through have given me more knowledge than I ever expected to gain working here.

My first challenge for this project was jumping on board to plan such a big event with absolutely no experience. I started working on this project completely by myself and could get very little done. I didn't know how to plan an agenda, to format an agenda, where to find facilitators, and what YouthSpeak really was from a coordinator's perspective. Sarah started working with me on the project in December and that was when the pieces I had no idea how to do, like the agenda, began to come together with her help. We both researched YouthSpeak thoroughly using past reports and the how-to-manual developed in partnership with the McCreary Centre Society.

Our focus was on the workshops at first. It was difficult to decide how many workshops we'd have, what the most important workshops would be, and what we wanted the outcomes of each workshop to be. The workshop list was forever changing was the agenda. This was difficult for me because I never felt they were getting finished, which had me worrying down to the very last week before the actual YouthSpeak.

The next huge struggle was finding facilitators. We had ideas about what we wanted to cover in the workshops but no idea where to find appropriate people to facilitate them. We had to take so much into consideration about whom we could use (eg. are they skilled enough to carry the workshops through).

Sarah and I became so passionate about the event; we were inspired to take on the development of our own workshops. This created some additional challenges for us. We both partnered up with staff from other organizations and it was difficult to create a workshop from nothing in partnership with people who we didn't work in the same office with on a day-to-day basis. We had to develop an outline / agenda, create workshop materials, and find time to meet with our partners during such a busy time of planning and organizational development within the FBCYICN.

I think the biggest struggle I faced was time. I never seemed to have enough time and this has been my biggest enemy before, during and after the YouthSpeak event. To overcome these struggles I just dealt with them the best I could as they came up. With guidance from Nicole, Teresa, and the other staff, we had lots of feedback on our ideas, which helped us a lot. Nicole always kept us strategizing about potential problems that could happen with everything we did, which I think helped us have a fairly smooth weekend. And of course, when I was stressing too much about something, I received advice to relax and not worry because the situation would be dealt with appropriately when it needs to be.

Successes

I had gone to YouthSpeak Burnaby about four years ago so I knew what YouthSpeak was from a participant's perspective. This gave me an idea of what workshops to plan for and what workshops were key items for meeting the event's purpose.

My goals for YouthSpeak were to empower youth to not sit back, but stand up and let people know what they want. I wanted the workshops to help the youth be personally healthy and for them to gain skills. I think the goals I set for YouthSpeak were achieved mostly and from what information we gathered, Sarah and I are going to have a high-quality report.

From the feedback we have gotten so far, I am confident that YouthSpeak was a success in the youths' eyes, which makes it a success to me. Working as a team with someone was actually easier than I imagined it would be. Sarah and I had similar outcomes in mind for what we would like to see from YouthSpeak and that made it easier to decide together about workshops and the different choices we had to make (eg. like if we should do a survey).

I think the biggest success for myself, was that I am now way more confident in what I think I am capable of. The biggest success for the YouthSpeak event was that the youth voiced their needs, issues and ideas, and from that we can spread their voices through our report and hopefully create some change.

According to Sarah...

Working on this project has demonstrated to me a lot about this field and myself. I enjoyed every moment of it, even my struggles, because there isn't one that Lacy and I didn't get through as a team.

Struggles

It was awkward coming onto a project that was already started. I found it hard to find my place. I was self-conscious of what I was working on and was trying to make sure that I didn't take over the project as my own.

My biggest challenge was trying to figure out what a YouthSpeak was because I'd never been to a one before. Though I had read all the previous reports and the manual, I still didn't know exactly what a YouthSpeak was because they differed from each other so much and were very similar to other youth conferences. To overcome this problem, I developed the YouthSpeak Diagram to help me visualize the concept.

The next step was finding out what workshops to have that would address the needs of youth in care at different levels of knowledge / understanding, and a selection of workshops for different tastes or interests and most importantly, all of the workshops had to be fun and interactive. It was hard to decide on the number of workshops to have and balance how much we wanted to get done and how much time we had over the YouthSpeak conference weekend.

A few of the workshops that Lacy and I wanted the youth to be able to participate in didn't exist so we decided to create our own workshops that we would facilitate at the YouthSpeak event. This added to the workload and the feeling of not having enough time.

For all of the other workshops, we had to find facilitators. This was more difficult than we expected because we wanted to get the most qualified facilitator for each workshop. Plenty of these qualified facilitators charge a fee and being a non-profit organization, we don't have the kind of money some facilitators require. On top of that, there was also the problem of one of our facilitators cancelling the day the event started.

I have been blessed and cursed with the amount of letters we have had to write during this project. I have always had problems writing formal letters. This project in particular has given me lots of practice with the invitation letters to MLA's, MCFD representatives, youth and youth-serving organizations as well as letters requesting donations, letters thanking donors, and letters of thank-you to facilitators. I am thankful for the experience because I have built on to my letter writing skills.

Successes

I would have to say my greatest success would be how much I have learned. I've learned about formal letter writing, how to plan a weekend event, and most importantly how much I can actually achieve.

I have always worked well in a team environment, yet I was surprised at how well Lacy and I worked together as a team. We complemented each other's working styles quite well. Even during the event we managed to make sure to give each other breaks.

A success for youth involvement would be that youth put on this event, youth participated in this conference, and youth are writing the report for the YouthSpeak.

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For more information about this project, or the Network in general,
please check out our website at www.fbcyicn.ca or contact our office toll-free at 1.800.565.8055.

The views expressed in this report are those of young people in and from government care. Statistics were generated by the Youth Project Staff based on the number of participants who answered questions on a variety of surveys / questionnaires. The opinions and recommendations derived from the results of consultation with these participants are those of the report authors (Youth Project Staff).