

Premier's Youth Council

2019-20
Summer Meeting

Discussion Overview



The Premier's Youth Council met on June 19, 2019 to participate in a roundtable discussion with Premier Ball. Members were encouraged to share their views on a range of topics through the exchange. At the start of the meeting, Premier's Youth Council Co-Chairs, Mark Murdoch and Raylene Mackey gave a presentation on their recent participation in the Canada Youth Summit, as representatives of Newfoundland and Labrador. This report provides an overview of both the presentation and roundtable discussion.

Discussion 1

Canada Youth Summit

The Canada Youth Summit was held in Ottawa, Ontario in May 2019. Approximately 300 people, aged 16 to 30, attended the conference. Youth make up approximately one third of Canada's population. The purpose of the conference was to launch Canada's first Youth Policy, to discuss key issues raised by youth, to share youth experiences with community services, and to inspire more youth to serve in their communities. Key elements of the conference included:

- Engagement with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ms. Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau, including a discussion with the Prime Minister and attendees on how to remove barriers between youth and people making decisions;
- An Indigenous welcome;
- A keynote address from Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth), Mr. Peter Schiefke;
- A youth marketplace (attended by youth organizations) that enabled networking and promoted ways to get involved in the community and participate in international experience programs/volunteering abroad programs;
- Sketchnotes of the deliberations by artist Jordanna Globerman;
- Health and wellness breaks, including one with Luca "LazyLegs" Patuelli, a motivational speaker;
- A Memorial for Canadian Service Corps Youth who tragically lost their lives on Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET 30; and,
- Community service activities -- groups of youth were assigned to various organizations and causes (e.g., setting up sandbags over manholes during flooding in Ottawa, and Shepherds of Good Hope Foundation's soup kitchen).

The conference also included various breakout sessions with varying discussion cycles; the Co-Chairs reflected on their participation in various breakout sessions. For example, there was a breakout on “Employment and Innovation, Skills and Learning”, which was hosted by Kendal Netmaker. He spoke about growing up with very little, and becoming an entrepreneur with his business, Neechie Gear. Neechie Gear is a social enterprise focused on supporting children to participate in sport. There was also a breakout on gender equality, which included a discussion on intersectionality, and was hosted by Shania Pruden and Asma Hassan. Other breakouts included: “Environment and Climate Change”, which included a discussion on the national emergency on single use plastics and climate change, and identifying less disruptive ways of transitioning to a green economy; and, “Leadership, Social Impact and Democratic Participation”, which included a town hall discussion where questions could be posed to the Prime Minister from the participants.

Take Aways:

Stemming from this presentation, members recommended that in future all PYC meetings include community service activities.

It was also noted that the Prime Minister has established a youth council focused on gender equality. Ms. Raylene Mackey, Co-Chair of the Premier’s Youth Council was appointed to this Council. She would like this Council to work with the Premier’s Youth Council moving forward.

Interest was expressed by members around the new federal policy to require 75 per cent of federal agencies, boards and commissions to have at least one youth member.

Discussion 2

Roundtable Discussion: What Comes Next?

Premier Ball opened the roundtable discussion by noting that the input received from the Premiers Youth Council is shaping public decisions. For example, at the January 2019 meeting food self-sufficiency was discussed and one of the ideas raised by the Council was to encourage more community gardens. In Spring 2019, the provincial government funded 97 groups to support community gardens. This was informed by PYC input.

Premier Ball noted the importance of seeking input from members on issues such as the on-going Public Post-Secondary Education Review, the Towards Recovery Action Plan on mental health and addictions, banning single use plastic bags and undertaking democratic reform. More specifically, Premier Ball posed the following questions:

- Public Post-Secondary Education Review – what thoughts do members have on offering post-secondary education that connects youth to employment?
- Towards Recovery Action Plan – do you have any input on the placement of the new mental health facility?
- Single Use Plastic Bags – the conversation is broadening beyond plastic bags to include all single use plastics; what do you think about that?
- Democratic Reform - what are the key issues that we need to draw attention to as this All Party Committee begins its work?
- Waste management – Government is undertaking a major review of our approach to waste management across the province, what views do you have to share regarding this?

After this introduction, the discussion organically went on to focus on democratic reform and jobs and the economy. The paragraphs below summarize those conversations.

Democratic Reform

One member began by asking why government does not use more referendums to seek input from the public. Increasing the use of referendums was noted as something that the All Party Committee may wish to consider.

Also on the theme of voting, members encouraged the All Party Committee to consider electronic voting. Members noted that Memorial University uses voting over smart phones for issues impacting students, such as the recent vote on the U Pass. Members suggested that electronic voting may increase voter turnout. The complexity of ensuring appropriate identification of voters was noted as one challenge in implementing electronic voting. It was suggested that the province may wish to consider piloting electronic voting in some smaller communities to see if this method works. Alternatively, members suggested that a mock provincial election could be held to test electronic voting.

Members also discussed voter turnout and posited whether making voting mandatory would increase participation. Members also observed that the current K-12 curriculum does not educate young people about civil participation and the importance of voting. This was noted as a gap by the PYC. Members also suggested that the media could do a greater job of educating the public about voting in an effort to increase civil participation, and that social media channels should be utilized to encourage youth to vote.

Members observed that the 2019 Provincial General Election was the first time that robocalls were used in the province. Members questioned the legality of robocalls.

Take Away:

Premier Ball committed that the Premier's Youth Council would be engaged in the work of the All Party Committee on Democratic Reform.

Jobs and the Economy

Members noted that they would like to see a public discussion on ways to retain jobs in the province, instead of losing jobs to other provinces. Members also spoke to the need to make youth aware of skills shortages so they can consider this when making career and post-secondary decisions. The aerospace and technology sectors were noted as both having difficulty in finding qualified employees to fill job vacancies. Members also encouraged government to promote opportunities in natural resources sectors, which tend to provide employment in many rural and remote communities.

Members recommended that improved labour market information supports be provided to the K-12 system to ensure youth are aware of where good quality jobs will be located. Members suggested answering the following question: "Who is hiring in the next three-five years?" The response could then be promoted by the K-12 system to youth by bringing in companies from those sectors into schools to share the opportunities they will have in the coming years. Mechanisms were also suggested to be established to help keep those youth in contact with these companies as they move through the necessary educational programs to support attachment to the workforce.

Members also stressed the importance of co-operative education in schools. Ocean Learning Partnerships and Women in Science and Engineering were both noted as models that could be applied to other regions and sectors. One member noted that SkillsCanada has a mentorship program that may be able to be modified for schools. Members encouraged government to support outreach for organizations and post-secondary programs to come to schools to speak to youth.

The current Career Development Course in high school was noted by members as needing to be revamped. Incorporating co-operative education into the Career Development Course was noted as one potential option to support modernization. Building career education in through multiple grades was also noted. For example, in Grade 9 students could undertake a one day job shadowing activity (with virtual options to connect youth in remote areas) that could then become a more intensive work term in high school. Members also recommended requiring students to have to apply for jobs as part of the career course and analyze job postings (e.g., why would they like to apply, what would they benefit from in this job). Members generally agreed that requiring volunteer activities for completion of the course was a benefit. Members also proposed that they could serve as a working group to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to update the high school career development course.

Another issue raised by members was the need to look at ways to support youth to participate in co-operative education who do not have transportation. Members encouraged government to consider how to bring co-operative experiences to youth, as not everyone has the ability to get there. The establishment of virtual co-operative placements was cited as being important to explore. Further on the topic of barriers to co-operative education, members discussed the importance of removing barriers that youth with disabilities face in participating in co-operative education and other experiential learning opportunities.

On the matter of connecting youth to employment opportunities, members shared that some teachers use email to push out summer job opportunities to students and perhaps this should be encouraged or formalized through the establishment of a targeted job bank for students. A member observed that the Federal Government's summer jobs program is looking at expanding to year round part time jobs, so youth can work outside school hours. Members posited whether this was something the province could also consider.

On the topic of labour market information, members encouraged government to look at ways to use social media to push out information about programs, labour market trends and scholarships to youth. Members suggested this will require government promoting its social media channels, as many youth are not following government accounts.

While discussing post-secondary education, members noted regional differences in access to university recruiters. Recruiters were noted as being better able to come to high schools in St. John's than other areas of the province. Members suggested that post-secondary institutions and government should play a role in connecting with youth in remote areas, and sharing with them opportunities to work remotely (e.g., share career opportunities that can be done from any location). Members also spoke to the importance of encouraging professionals to go into schools to present on their careers, including leveraging technologies such as Skype to share their experiences with youth throughout the province.

While leveraging the K-12 system to support the flow of labour market information was noted as a clear need, members stressed the importance of also identifying youth that are being missed. Members asked questions like "What about the kids that need this information but aren't in school?" Members recommended that barriers be reduced to enter programs such as Linkages. Members also noted that not all kids who are harder to reach are "at risk"; they may just need the information through other channels. Members suggested that virtual experiences do not allow for personal experiences/interactions though, which limits benefits of networking. Members stressed the need to break down those barriers so all young people can benefit from hands on experience.

Women in Leadership

Also during the roundtable, the Premier spoke about the importance of Gender Based Analysis+ to government decision-making and noted that the Office of the Status of Women will be holding sessions related to women in leadership throughout the province. The Premier encouraged PYC members to attend these sessions. Members noted that they would like to see a Daughters of the Vote event held in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Involvement in the Premier's Youth Council

In his concluding remarks, Premier Ball spoke to the foundation that current members have established with the Premier's Youth Council. Premier Ball encouraged members to share the experiences with other young people who want to join the PYC, so they can sustain this momentum.

Members encouraged government to accept applications until fall 2019 for the PYC to enable youth to have time to apply and to promote the opportunity at the beginning of the K-12 school year. As a result, government has decided to accept applications until September 18, 2019. Further government has launched a social media awareness campaign to promote applications to the PYC to ensure as many youth as possible are aware of this opportunity.

Conclusion

At the end of the evening, Premier Ball thanked members whose terms are concluding for their service and awarded them a certificate of thanks. The next PYC meeting is anticipated to be held in 2020, once new members have been appointed to the forthcoming vacancies.