



# YOUTH: A Call To Action

Back grounder,  
Recommendations, and  
Selective Best Practices:  
The Implementation of a  
Youth Strategy in  
Thunder Bay



# ***Executive Summary***

*by*  
**NTS RESEARCH CONSULTANTS**  
***N. Sakamoto, R. Johnston, R. Workman***

## **Background:**

In 2010 the United Way of Thunder Bay completed a three-year learning project, YouthScape, which included various community projects by youth and youth service providers. During this time it was found that there was an abundance of local research that identified many areas of priority for youth.

An analysis of the project work and research suggested that further systemic, grass roots research was necessary to acquire a comprehensive understanding of our youth in Thunder Bay. This research provided an opportunity for both youth and youth agencies from across the city to provide input leading to recommendations on how youth needs could better be met in the City of Thunder Bay.

## **The Partners:**

Through funding from the McConnell Family Foundation, the primary funder of the YouthScape project and the City of Thunder Bay, the United Way was able to partner with the Lakehead Social Planning Council to conduct a youth needs research study that would provide direction in the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Youth Strategy for the City of Thunder Bay. *NTS Research Consultants* were contracted to complete a research study which culminated in a document entitled, *"Phase 1: Background, Recommendations, and Selective Best Practices: The Implementation of a Youth Strategy, Thunder Bay."* The Phase 1 document was renamed **YOUth – A Call to ACTION: Background, Recommendations, and Selective Best Practices: The Implementation of a Youth Strategy for Thunder Bay.**

## ***Focus of the Research***

This research emphasized:

1. That community, including youth, should be part of the process;
2. The strategies need to reflect cultural aspects of the community;
3. The community should be made aware of youth priorities and potential youth strategies.

## ***Research Methodology***

The research process comprised the following methodology:

1. *Ensure Community Engagement/ input by youth and youth agencies* (i.e., focus groups, interviews, questionnaires);
2. *Review Relevant Documents* on the issues facing youth in Thunder Bay;
3. *Conduct Qualitative Research:* Interview key people or stakeholders in social and educational settings, and conduct a series of focus groups with youth;
4. *Conduct Quantitative Research:* Administer questionnaires to both a number of youth agencies/ organizations in Thunder Bay, and to a number of youth;

5. *Review “Best Practices”* or successful Youth Strategies from cities throughout Canada and Thunder Bay;
6. *Develop a decision- making backgrounder document* for consideration by all stakeholders interested in the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Youth Strategy;
7. *Suggest Recommendations* (derived from the qualitative and quantitative data) to address Youth issues, including the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Youth Strategy.

**The First Phase** of this project (i.e., the research process and development of this document is a result of community input and consultation. Both the qualitative and quantitative data of this research are a result of community consultation.

**The Second Phase** will be a youth- driven process in which youth will organize an “Implementation Forum.” An advisory group (Youth leaders), formed from a cross- section of youth across the City of Thunder Bay, will invite all stakeholders to participate in this forum to realize the many positive youth strategy outcomes associated with the suggested recommendations.

### ***Qualitative and Quantitative Data***

**Both qualitative and quantitative data** are categorized under the following **six domains** that are considered fundamental to this research project:

1. Housing;
2. Education;
3. Employment;
4. Recreation and Youth Hubs;
5. Support to Families and Youth;
6. Racism and Discrimination.

The six domains were identified by youth in earlier local research as catch- all categories for all youth concerns and issues. Thus these six domains pervade this research.

**The qualitative data** comprised six youth focus groups (on six separate and different occasions) involving input from Aboriginal youth. In addition, open- ended interviews were conducted with 32 Thunder Bay youth organizations. Focus groups involving mainstream youth were conducted in some earlier research that did not include input from Aboriginal youth as a distinct entity; thus it was considered redundant and laborious to go through a lengthy process of gathering additional comparable data. *(It was clear from the research that Aboriginal youth in this study did not identify themselves as Aboriginal or Metis, but simply as “Aboriginal.”)*

The six domains were implemented as a framework for discussion in both focus groups and interviews. In addition, all agencies were provided the opportunity to respond to the initial draft of the Phase 1 document. These “briefs” are included verbatim in the Appendix.

**The quantitative data** comprised paper- pencil surveys that were administered to Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal Youth (77 and 80 respectively), and 32 Youth agencies.

The open- ended interviews were designed to focus on two major questions:

1. What are the major issues facing youth today?
2. What sorts of best practices/ strategies for youth are presently being implemented for youth?

The survey questionnaires were administered directly to youth, both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal. The youth agencies were able to access the youth agency questionnaire on the Lakehead Social Planning Council website to be completed voluntarily. Again, as with the collection of qualitative data, all questionnaire items focused generally within the earlier stated six domains.

## **Results**

The results provided:

### ***General Outcomes***

1. *Demographic information* regarding the “state of affairs of youth” in Thunder Bay, including population shifts, resident concentrations, recreation hubs and transportation access of services, etc.;
2. *A literature review of local documents*, reflecting both the state of affairs of youth in Thunder Bay, including a brief description of some of the best youth strategies implemented by various youth organizations;
3. *A literature review of national documents*, identifying some of the best youth strategies implemented by youth organizations across the country;
4. Qualitative Data from the youth focus groups and open – ended interviews with youth agencies focusing on the six domains and existing best strategies;
5. Quantitative Data from survey questionnaire administration (Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth, and youth agencies);
6. Brief descriptions of local and national youth strategies related to the six domains that these strategies address;
7. A list of 58 suggested recommendations to be incorporated into a comprehensive youth strategy; the recommendations are also associated with the six domains that need to be addressed.

### ***Some General Results***

Some of the qualitative/ quantitative results:

- Youth and youth agencies state that education is a major determinant of success for youth;
- In ranking the six domains, Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth ranked Education #1;

- A number of barriers (alienation and marginality, grade gaps for various reasons, racism and discrimination, etc.) exist for both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth;
- 57% of Aboriginal youth and 35.5% of non- Aboriginal youth feel that they are at risk for being discriminated against;
- Mentoring and linking programs required for youth in organizations and companies;
- City should be involved in assisting employment problems of marginalized youth;
- Marginalized youth require both skills and housing for independent living;
- Housing is an issue amongst youth who suggest that revisiting of the Haven House concept for both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth would be valuable;
- 71% of Aboriginal youth “live on their own, while 24% of non-Aboriginal youth live on their own;
- 48% of the 71% of Aboriginal youth who see themselves as living on their own, live in boarding homes, and are thus students from remote communities;
- Access to programs is frequently prohibited by cost, location and transportation to service providers (91% of youth see this as an issue);
- A “one-stop shopping support system (211) for both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal populations would be valuable and cost effective;
- 77% and 56% of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth believe that they have educational opportunities; in addition, they aspire to upgrade and improve their grades at learning centers if they could afford it (79% and 69.5% respectively);
- 82.5% and 93.5% of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth see a relationship between youth activities and health;
- 79% and 91% of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth believe that participation in activities prevents dropping out;
- 50% and 57.5% of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth believe that they lack the social skills to join and participate in an organization;
- 80% and 76% of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth believe that “being on the land” supports their self identities; 80% of these young people would take part in “land- based programs;”
- Aboriginal youth ranked youth engagement (promotes self worth and confidence, including personal growth, empowerment, developing new skills) as # 1;
- Non- Aboriginal youth ranked youth engagement (Involvement in social decision- making, such as structure in life, future personal and future social impact) as #1.

The above are just a few findings on which the recommendations for this study are based.

### ***Author's Brief Comment***

Very generally speaking, the research clearly indicates that youth are critically aware of both the needs of youth and the necessity of their engagement for the implementation of any youth strategy.

Two fundamental aspects of this research are abundantly clear:

1. The terms *youth strategy* and *youth engagement* are one and the same thing; they are synonymous. It is only through the engagement of conceptually aware youth that a youth strategy exists;
2. A Youth Strategy does not exist until a strategy or strategies is/are implemented in a youth-driven process.

In addition, there is no real significant difference between the needs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Their priorities (i.e., ranking of the six domains) may vary somewhat, but otherwise, they experience similar issues.

The research did not differentiate between the various ethnic and visible minority groups within the non-Aboriginal population; nor did the research differentiate between Metis and First Nations within the Aboriginal population in the study. Thus the Aboriginal population expresses the views of both First Nations and Metis youth, while the non-Aboriginal population includes the views of the many diverse ethnic and visible minority groups residing in Thunder Bay and area.

The data is specific, has real and relevant decision-making potential. It is suggested that the data be considered seriously and selectively incorporated in the process of developing a comprehensive youth strategy.

NTS RESEARCH CONSULTANTS

Access to the research document is  
available at:

[www.lspc.ca](http://www.lspc.ca) and  
[www.unitedway-tbay.on.ca](http://www.unitedway-tbay.on.ca)