

## **Revelstoke Community Youth Assessment & Youth Action Plan**

In January 2011 with the support of Service Canada, the Continuing Studies department at Okanagan College, Revelstoke, began work on a community youth assessment for Revelstoke. The desired outcome of the project was a “Youth Action Plan”, or series of integrated recommendations that would put forth a progressive and positive vision for youth in Revelstoke while identifying strategies and stakeholders critical to its realization. The Youth Action Plan (to be reviewed and updated annually based on ongoing assessment) would serve as an important reference tool for planners, service providers and other organizations working with youth for the purpose of identifying assets and gaps in programming, facilities, and engagement and moving forward with grant and funding proposals. The plan would also serve as a valuable community self-assessment tool, mapping the landmarks necessary for situating the success of the community in fulfilling the YAPlan vision.

*Why does Revelstoke need a Youth Action Plan?*

- Gaps in youth programming, facilities and services have been identified in a series of planning documents at both the municipal and community level. The Youth Action Plan integrates into the continuum of planning to fill these gaps.
- The Assessment and Youth Action Plan provide current, vital data for future planning concerning youth.
- The plan provides strong evidence, research and focus for non-profit organizations looking to leverage third party funding.
- The plan provides recommendations for eliciting greater youth engagement in decision making which produces benefits to the community via the contributions youth bring to organizations, activities and their relationships.
- Revelstoke has undergone considerable change in the past half decade. A better understanding of how these changes have affected youth in terms of quality of life and opportunity is needed.

*What did the Assessment entail?*

- Four focus groups
- 221 surveys
- 40 interviews
- Research into best practices
- Information sharing with other communities

## **Key Findings**

### *Employment, Education and Training*

Employment is difficult to attain for young people in Revelstoke. This reality was confirmed both statistically and anecdotally by the Revelstoke Youth Assessment. Females experienced slightly more difficulty accessing employment despite higher overall levels of education, consistent with assessment statistics that appear to indicate age as a greater determinant of employment accessibility than education. Younger workers (19-24) vying for the same jobs as older workers were inevitably at a disadvantage as a result of their less extensive work history, and reported the highest rates of difficulty finding work. High school students reported the second highest rates of difficulty finding work, although the numbers are distorted by the proportion of students who have never attempted to access work and thus answered “no” to the question that concerned accessibility difficulty. Long-term Revelstoke residents had statistically less difficulty accessing work than newer residents, consistent with comments that “it is not what you know, but who you know”. A relationship was also noted between individuals who had difficulty finding work and a likelihood of espousing a negative view of the community, tourists, and temporary workers.

While Okanagan College maintains a centre in Revelstoke, lack of a critical mass of students has historically made it difficult for the College to expand its program offerings. However, survey results indicate that there does appear to be considerable interest in the community for locally delivered training and education, especially from individuals who have already completed some higher education. At the high school level, fully 42% of students indicated that they would prefer to stay in Revelstoke to complete their education and training, assuming the program of their interest was delivered locally. While it will continue to be difficult for higher education institutions in Revelstoke to attain the critical mass necessary for extensive program offerings, emerging technology continues to improve the effectiveness and quality of distance education. Expansion of supported distance learning opportunities in Revelstoke could be an excellent way to bridge demand and lack of critical mass.

### *By the Numbers*

- 82% of individuals who had completed high school or more indicated they would prefer to remain in Revelstoke to complete further training
- 42% of current high school students or individuals who have not completed high school would prefer to stay in Revelstoke to complete further education or training.
- Greater correspondence was noted between age and ability to find work then education and ability to find work
- A slightly higher proportion of females were having difficulty finding work than males.
- It is slightly easier for people from Revelstoke to find work than from those outside Revelstoke (with the exception of high school students).
- Those who had difficulty finding work were more likely to espouse a negative view of Revelstoke and of tourists and foreigners
- 68% of 19-24 year olds experienced difficulty finding work, which is much higher than the next age group. High school statistics are lower because a large number had not looked for work

- 70% of respondents who held a college diploma, university degree or graduate degree have been in Revelstoke less than five years. Among this population, the primary reasons they would leave Revelstoke were lack of opportunities for career advancement and cost of living, specifically housing and food.
- 35% of these people indicated they are either working not enough or in jobs below their skill levels.

### *Entertainment, Recreation and Culture*

Revelstoke is a great place for young people because of our incredible mountain setting. Such sentiments were expressed time and again by all youth, regardless of whether they had lived here their entire lives, or were “taking a year off” to enjoy Revelstoke’s skiing and mountain culture. However, many young people face myriad barriers to participation in the activities they enjoy the most. Sixty two percent of youth identified money as being a major barrier to participation, while equipment, training and knowledge, and transportation were noted as difficulties by over twenty four percent of respondents. Also noted in numerous comments was the lack of centralized information on local events and activities for young people. This was especially so for youth new to town who lacked an extensive social network.

Strong support exists among older and younger youth for the proposed skatepark and pumptrack facility, and support for the expansion of the bike trail networks remains universally strong. Increased youth programming in the arts and culture was seen as needed by youth under 19, and many supported the designation of a flexible youth space. Older youth who have been in Revelstoke for over five year (probably indicating they had grown up in Revelstoke) supported the notion that a youth designated space would be a positive development. Longer pool hours, a designated off leash dog park and improvements to the Okanagan Regional Library were also supported.

### *By the Numbers*

- Among youth who have been in Revelstoke five year or more and youth under 19, substantial support exists for a new skatepark and pumptrack, increased youth programming in the arts, a designated youth space with flexible hours, more bike trails and longer pool hours.
- Among youth 19 and older and youth who have been in Revelstoke less than five years, strong support exists for a new skatepark and more bike trails.
- Youth from all age groups expressed interest in a designated off-leash dog park. Older youth who had been in the community more than five years expressed some support for a youth centre
- The greatest barrier to participation in activities of interest for 62% or respondents is money, followed by equipment (28%), training and knowledge (25%), transportation (24%) and guidance and mentorship (17%). In the attached comments section, a number of respondents noted that a considerable barrier to participation was an inability to access information concerning the time and whereabouts of organized activities that are going on in town. For new residents lack of local contacts was a barrier to information sharing on events and activities.

## *Housing, Health and Community Safety*

Revelstoke is a safe community and the vast majority of youth respondents confirmed this. Over ninety percent of respondents noted they felt safe in both their homes and in their communities, and the majority of young residents were not experiencing personal problems that would require external interventions. Consistent with provincial and national studies however, young people who are experiencing problems in their personal lives are not accessing services to the degree that they are available. Although our statistics cannot be considered exhaustive, it would appear that Revelstoke youth fail to access services at a higher rate than their peers throughout British Columbia. The 2008 BC Adolescent Health survey notes that twelve percent of young people provincially were not accessing mental health services when they felt they needed them, while thirteen percent did not access medical help when they felt they needed it.<sup>1</sup> In Revelstoke, the percentages were much higher, with the caveat that respondents were not asked if they felt they *needed* to seek services. The younger the individual, the less likely they were to have accessed an appropriate service. Comments on the inaccessibility of services in Revelstoke included questions of transportation, confidentiality and location of services. Mirroring national trends, males reported higher problem substance use than females, but perhaps less predictably, reported far higher instances of having experienced discrimination than females.

Poverty statistics in Revelstoke also appear to mirror national data. Females were fully ten percent more likely to have experienced poverty than males and were less likely to own their place of residence. Young people who rented their place of residence were likely living with a number of friends or roommates, with the average renter household containing four residents. As noted in the Revelstoke Community Substance Use Strategy, the higher the density of the household, the more risk factors emerge concerning problem substance use.

### *By the Numbers*

- 20% of female respondents have experienced some form of depression or mental health issues, 1% have experienced problem substance use, 1% have experienced discrimination, 12% have experienced violence, 11% have experienced poverty
- Of all women who reported experiencing mental health or depression, problem substance use, discrimination, violence or poverty, only 29% had successfully accessed services, 19% were unsuccessful in accessing services and 52% did not attempt to access services.
- Of all male respondents, 17% reported some form of mental health or depression issues, 8% had experienced problem substance use, 15% discrimination, 15% violence and 1% poverty
- Female respondents were 10% more likely to have experienced poverty than male respondents and reported lower rates of home ownership than males.
- Of males who indicated they had experienced mental health or depression, problem substance use, discrimination, violence or poverty issues, only 28% accessed services, 16% were unsuccessful in accessing services, and 56% did not try to access services
- Younger respondents were less likely to have attempted to access services than older respondents. This is consistent with the findings of the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey which found that 18% of females and 7% of males across the province reported

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<sup>1</sup> A Picture of Health: Highlights from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey pg 6

they had not accessed mental health services when they felt they needed them; while 15% of females and 11% of males did not get medical help when they felt they needed it.

- Asked why they did not access services, some respondents commented they did not know where to go, were concerned about confidentiality, and could not access transportation.
- Females are more likely to be renters than males
- Over a third of renters (men and women) spent over 30% of monthly income on rent

### *Citizenship, Engagement and Connectivity*

Many young people in Revelstoke socialize and participate in organized groups, clubs and associations from which myriad benefits accrue for both the community and the individual. However the majority of these groups are sports oriented, and we believe there is greater space for social organization around the arts, culture and community service. The Revelstoke Youth Assessment revealed a considerable amount of interest among young people in becoming more involved in community decision making, and new arrivals to Revelstoke especially demonstrated an appetite for greater engagement. Indeed, these individuals are already making an impact at the local decisions making level, with fully twenty percent of newer residents responding that they had contributed to an important community decision in the last year. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that young people have the opportunity to provide continuous input into local decision making. Engaged and concerned youth citizens will make decision making more representative of the community as a whole, as well as create strong community leaders and mentors for future generations.

### *By the Numbers*

- 66% of respondents were members of a group, club, organization, or association
  - o Of these, 65% of the groups were sport oriented, 12% arts, 20% business, 26% education, 13% community service, 11% spiritual, 4% cultural, 2% political
  - o Newer and long term resident's participation rates and the types of groups they belonged to were consistent, except that newcomers were far more likely to be part of a business or work related group
- 87% of respondents felt a sense of belonging in Revelstoke (long time residents slightly more likely to feel this)
- 89% of respondents felt Revelstoke was a welcoming community
- 26% of respondents were interested in becoming involved in the YIC
- 18% of all respondents who have been residents for five or more years had provided input towards a major community decision in the last year compared with 20% of respondents who have lived in Revelstoke for less than five years
- 33% of respondents who have been residents for more than five years wanted to become more engaged in cultural, social, political and economic decision making in Revelstoke vs 66% of respondents who have lived here less than five years.