

Insight for the Future: Saskatchewan's Youth Share Their Thoughts

Introduction

The Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation (CYR) is pleased to be working in partnership with the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy to share with you the thoughts and insight of several talented Saskatchewan youth.

This briefing note shares the top essays submitted to CYR's SaskYouth.net short essay contest. The contest was designed to provide youth with an opportunity to share their thoughts on policy issues currently being addressed by the department, namely youth employment and leadership.

The result was a number of quality essays providing valuable input and shedding light on what we can expect when we ask youth to contribute. Lessons learned from all essays include:

- Youth often are aware of public sentiment but can consider all factors to arrive at their conclusions.
- Youth are far more perceptive, especially in terms of understanding

human nature, than the public gives them credit for.

- Youth are willing to be self-analyzing and look inward for both the contributing factors and solutions to youth issues.
- Youth have a global perspective, can place themselves in the global context and recognize the impact of global events on those around them.
- Youth voices are important even though what they say may not be the kind of advice we are used to hearing.

I hope that in reading the words of these young authors, you are inspired to think about how you can further include youth in the decisions that affect them.

At the close of these essays, my department has provided some additional context regarding the engagement of Saskatchewan youth. If you are interested in further discussion, please contact Culture, Youth and Recreation.

**Barbara MacLean, Deputy Minister
Culture, Youth and Recreation**

Saskatchewan Institute of
Public Policy
University of Regina,
College Avenue Campus
Gallery Building, 2nd Floor
Regina, Saskatchewan • S4S 0A2



General Inquiries: 306.585.5777
Fax: 306.585.5780
sipp@uregina.ca
www.uregina.ca/sipp

WINNING ESSAY**Ms. Brittany Racicot****Age 22****North Battleford, Saskatchewan**

In a world in constant tumult both at home and abroad, the need for noble leaders is greater than ever. A combination of successful qualities is needed to mold one who may lead well. However, one characteristic separates a good leader from a great leader and that is unwavering conviction. Does the rising generation of youth possess this trait? It is rare, but not extinct.

Plentiful are the characteristics that culminate to make a noteworthy leader. A love of the people is vital, for humanity is eager to return love for love. Wisdom is necessary to gauge issues of importance and intelligence follows in order to make and execute plans of improvement. Just as a building without a solid foundation will not survive, neither will the respect and confidence of the people remain with a leader who waivers.

All human beings yearn for direction; it is a part of our nature. As a human race we respect those who will continue undaunted despite obstacles and ridicule; to them we look in

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times of despair for the comfort and courage to move forward. In today's society that fosters selfish gratification, indulgence and materialism, it is difficult to instill in youth the necessity of believing in, and working for, something greater than self. To create a vision solid enough to withstand the onslaught of negativity evident in media and other forms is a daunting task. However, this golden characteristic has not vanished.

Above the norm there are youth stepping forward with determination to make the world a better place. They are aware of the world as a global community, and of their fellow beings as citizens of same. Racism is diminishing as cultures mix and respect grows. Heightened is awareness of the necessity of working together and with it comes a vision that leads to conviction as success is achieved, and even in moments when it is not.

Dynamic leaders must be in possession of numerous positive characteristics in order to obtain and retain the respect and admiration of their followers. The cornerstone trait of such leadership must be a sure conviction in the grander vision they see. While there are obstacles in the production of such leaders, many youth today are proving themselves worthy and

able to take the reins in moving their communities, provinces, and country forward along a path of equality and freedom.

YOUTH BIO:

Brittany Racicot was born and raised in North Battleford. She graduated from high school in 2001. A combination of travel and working for the government has aroused an interest in social issues. Brittany is currently studying at the University of Saskatchewan and plans to pursue her education in journalism or law.

RUNNER UP

Ms. Beki Gummeson

Age 26

Cabri, Saskatchewan

Do book smarts (academic achievement) or street smarts (real life experience) better prepare youth enter the workforce? Today's youth often feel pressure to receive post-secondary education immediately after high school in order to be successful. However, the importance of real life work experience is often overlooked for the values and traits it teaches. Although education opens many doors and may provide the credentials required for certain desired and successful careers, personal

experience has led me to believe that real-life experience is a more effective method to instill a strong work ethic, sound judgment skills and the ability to work in a team setting.

Real life experience is often much more effective in teaching skills such as communication to others, working in a team and the ability to sell one's self. Many employers hire a new employee based on the personality of the selected candidate with the theory someone with the right personality can be trained and taught the knowledge required to perform the job. With this in mind, someone with less experience or less training is often chosen for a job over someone else because of traits such as effective communication skills.

Real life experience is also more conducive to enhancing adequate judgment skills than academic experience. This becomes a valuable resource in all careers, and is often sought after by employers. For example, someone with an Animal Science degree may know the entire physiological functioning of the animals they are working with, but unless they have previous experience working with the animals, they may not have the judgment to work with these animals safely and thereby endanger both themselves and those working with them.

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Real life experience is also often a more successful method for the development of a strong work ethic. Once developed, a strong work ethic will often lead to success, given that once dedicated to a task, learning the required information is an easily overcome challenge. In conclusion, I strongly recommend that today's youth enter the work force before attending post secondary education. This ensures development a strong work ethic and dedication before they enter their chosen field of education that will open doors for the individual. These youth will be able to enter the workforce with their employers being reassured that their employees have the ability to work in a team, have sound judgment skills and a strong work ethic due to reference from previous employers.

YOUTH BIO:

Beki Gummeson grew up on a mixed farm near Cabri Saskatchewan. Beki is in her fourth year of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan. She is majoring in Rangeland Resources with a minor in Animal Science. Beki is Chair of the University of Saskatchewan range team and a member of the University of Saskatchewan Stockman's

and Rodeo club. She curls and plays soccer and football. Upon completing her education Beki hopes to work in Saskatchewan in a rangeland related job.

RUNNER UP

Mr. Dan Jungwirth

Age 20

Regina, Saskatchewan

A leader is unique, an individual who is like no other. Sometimes they are at the forefront of the activity, yet they can step back into a guiding role like the coach from the sideline allowing his or her players to shine. With good leaders, it is common to see their accomplishments, but you never truly realize, respect or appreciate their work until after they have gone.

A leader is motivated and motivates. They look beyond themselves to see the whole and the future. Think of leaders as scientists: they begin with a hypothesis, a vision. They take the necessary steps to carry out that vision in hope of its actualization. But as in science, the results may not be as expected, thus a component is altered and the experiment is attempted again.

Anyone can be a dreamer, with hope of a greater tomorrow. But it is the leader that turns this dream, this vision, into a reality. That is the single most important quality of a leader.

Leaders have an undying determination and persistence. There lies truth in the notion that a leader is a heart, the heart of whatever he or she is involved in. Although this notion is somewhat cliché, it is the heart that drives the system. And this is what separates the dreamers from the leaders. Anyone can be a dreamer, with hope of a greater tomorrow. But it is the leader that turns this dream, this vision, into a reality. That is the single most important quality of a leader.

I believe youth have the visions; they have dreams that reach further than anything possible. Our dreams can be larger than life: a positive and negative factor. Youth also have the potential, but we lack the experience. Because of this, some doors may be closed to us resulting in doubt and discouragement. Sometimes we just need someone to open a door, an opportunity.

We also may need to act as apprentice, to be led by someone. As well, inexperience leads youth to stray from the path to the goal. We may become distracted or engrossed in another vision. But we, as youth, have time to develop: develop ourselves into mature, knowledgeable, experienced adults and develop our

vision into the possible, as long as we don't lose sight of what we're working toward.

YOUTH BIO:

Dan Jungwirth was born and raised in Humboldt, Saskatchewan. Dan is a fourth year student in the School of Journalism at the University of Regina and is currently completing an internship at the Saskatoon Star Phoenix. Dan is interested in all aspects of journalism and is looking forward to exploring his options as a young journalist.

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RUNNER UP

Ms. Robin Canham

Age 24

Regina, Saskatchewan

Leadership comes in many forms – from a sister leading her little brother, to a captain of a hockey team, head surgeon, or Premier of Saskatchewan, different leaders possess many different qualities. Consequently, the list of character traits that describe good leaders could go on forever – leaders are trustworthy, committed, dedicated, honest, knowledgeable, positive, determined, insightful, and courageous (just to name a few)! However, the key to being an

exceptional leader, in any type of leadership role, is the leader's connection with other people.

That is why communication is the most paramount leadership quality. Without high-quality communication all other leadership skills break down. Unfortunately, most people think they are better communicators than they actually are. This is especially true when it comes to listening skills. Listening has become such a basic skill that people take it for granted – not the simple obligatory listening we concede automatically as part of the give-and-take of everyday life but the unrelenting art of careful and perceptive listening.

This type of listening is highly demanding but in order to communicate ideas effectively leaders must be aware of it. While listening, leaders need to forget themselves and submit to the other person's need for attention and understanding. When leaders effectively listen, they can express themselves clearly to the people around them, inspiring success. This understanding of others is important because no two people respond the same way, especially if they are on two different sides of a contentious problem. A leader triggers positive responses and this connection with others is vital to successful leadership.

The youth leaders of our province exhibit many important leadership qualities, with the exception of one very fundamental area – the acceptance of failure. At first, this notion may seem like an antithetical quality for a leader to possess, but through failure there are always opportunities to learn and grow. At school or in the workforce, Saskatchewan's youth avoid taking risks because youth often feel pressured to stick to the norm and always succeed.

A leader is a person who wants to learn and is not afraid of failure or making mistakes. Young leaders need to realize life does not always go according to plan, there are always going to be bumps along the road. Instead of becoming discouraged, youth should be responsive to their mistakes, learn from them, and most importantly, take risks.

YOUTH BIO:

Robin Canham obtained her BA in English from the University of Regina and now attends the University of Toronto Master's program in Information Studies. Robin plans to return to Regina to work in the Library field following completion of her Masters. Robin enjoys traveling (she has visited 16 countries), reading (especially Harry Potter and Salman Rushdie), jogging and spending time at her family's cottage.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SASKATCHEWAN:

Youth Looking to Contribute

Youth are saying that they want to be meaningfully included in the decisions that affect them.

- When asked if they would like more input in decisions that affect their communities, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, youth give an average response of 3.51 out of 5 (Quality of Life Survey, Culture, Youth and Recreation (CYR), October 2004).

- When asked if government leaders would listen to their opinions, Saskatchewan youth give an average response of 2.50 out of 5 (Quality of Life Survey, CYR, October 2004).

- Currently there are over 120 youth in CYR's youth leadership database who are looking to be engaged in a leadership position.

- Government's Provincial Youth Advisory Committee (PYAC) has told us that youth in their communities are looking for ways to make a difference but are often unable to find suitable opportunities

Youth have suggestions on how to meaningfully include them. PYAC, a group of 25 Saskatchewan youth who act as policy advisors to government, has identified actions and tips which allow for youth to be more meaningfully engaged. These tips include:

- Youth bring enthusiasm and perspective but also have unique schedules. When planning

meetings and activities take into account the needs of youth and be flexible.

- Recognize that youth are learning from the engagement experience and use mistakes as an opportunity to mentor and teach.

- Give youth meaningful responsibilities. Providing youth with challenging but achievable responsibilities will provide greater skills development and produce a high level engagement for youth.

- Recognize youth efforts and reward them with responsibility, trust and a word of thanks.

- Invite youth to meetings, conferences and other events they wouldn't normally go to.

- Freely share your contacts, advice, and experience.

There are a number of government and community resources to assist organizations in engaging youth. CYR has compiled many of these resources on the Internet.

SaskYouth.net, the department's youth website, provides youth with information on a variety of topics. The site includes information for youth and organizations on how to make the youth engagement experience meaningful. Applications for youth looking to find a leadership opportunity and for organizations looking to engage a youth leader are also available on the site.

The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy

Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy
University of Regina, College Avenue Campus
Gallery Building, 2nd Floor
Regina, Saskatchewan • S4S 0A2



General Inquiries: 306.585.5777
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sipp@uregina.ca
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The Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy (commonly known as SIPP) was created in 1998 as a partnership between the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan and the Government of Saskatchewan. It is, however, constituted as an institute at the University of Regina. It is committed to expanding knowledge and understanding of the public-policy concerns in Canada with a particular focus on Saskatchewan and Western Canada generally. It is a non-profit, independent, and non-partisan Institute devoted to stimulating public-policy debate and providing expertise, experience, research and analysis on social, economic, fiscal, environmental, educational, and administrative issues related to public policy.

The Institute will assist governments and private business by supporting and encouraging the exchange of ideas and the creation of practical solutions to contemporary policy challenges. The Founding Partners intended the Institute to have considerable flexibility in its programming, research, contracting and administration so as to maximize opportunities for collaboration among scholars in universities and interested parties in the public and private sectors.

The Institute is overseen by a Board of Directors drawn from leading members of the public, private and academic community. The Board is a source of guidance and support for SIPP's goals in addition to serving a managerial and advisory role. It assists SIPP with fostering partnerships with non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the expanding third sector.

Saskatchewan enjoys a long and successful tradition of building its own solutions to the challenges faced by the province's citizens. In keeping with this tradition, the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy will, in concert with scholars and practitioners of public policy, bring the best of the new ideas to the people of Saskatchewan.

The SIPP Briefing Note series allows the Institute to review and comment on public-policy issues that affect the people of our community. A SIPP Briefing Note will be released several times a year and can be used as an instrument for further discussion and debate.

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