

Community Dispatch

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Canada Votes! – Youth in Canada

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VOTES!

“Just one question...”

This publication is intended to help you engage with local candidates in the federal election on October 14, 2008. It's all about social issues that impact your community; questions that matter to you; and the role that the federal government can choose to take in addressing them.

Questions raise issues. Questions require candidates to develop a clear position on where they stand. In this document, we cover thirteen social issues affecting communities nationwide today, provide sample questions you can ask your candidates, and include links to more information. By getting involved, you help shape the kind of community in which you live – all it takes is just **one question**.

Youth in Canada

Canada's youth are growing up in a complex environment. There are many opportunities for employment as the baby boomer generation begins to retire; yet we face an unstable economy, coupled with rising student debt, and rising living costs. The youth of today are also susceptible to many health problems, such as the obesity epidemic. To ensure that the youth of today have a bright future, the government needs to

invest in policies and programs that decrease the burden of student debt, increase access to post-secondary education, improve social inclusion among youth, and engage youth politically and socially.

Post-secondary education is a requirement for almost any job these days. However, long waiting lists and expensive tuition fees are preventing many youth from going on to more training after high school. While participation is on the rise, close to one in seven students drop out, which leaves them with fewer options, lower incomes, and decreased job satisfaction. The cost of post-secondary studies is rising and the prevalence and depth of student debt continues to be a problem. While youth employment growth is healthy, young people are faced with low-wage, low-skill jobs that provide limited (if any) benefits and offer part-time, temporary, or contract work with unstable and unpredictable schedules and little opportunity for advancement.

There are also some troubling trends in the rates of physical activity, obesity, asthma, and sexually transmitted infections among youth. The number of young people who are overweight/obese has jumped from 15% to 26% in the past 25 years. Young people are also more likely than adults to feel their health care needs are going unmet. Evidence shows political and societal disengagement among Canada's youth as younger generations are less engaged in a number of ways – than older Canadians were at their age particularly in political membership, knowledge, and voting.

The government can choose to decrease the burden of student debt and reform the

financial aid system so that all qualified individuals can access post-secondary education. They need to ensure youth can access stable jobs that pay a living wage and that youth are given useful leadership roles. We can choose a government that views youth engagement as a priority for the present and the future.

For More Information:

National Youth in Care Network
www.youthincare.ca

Canadian Federation of Students
www.cfs-fcee.ca

Inclusive Cities Canada
www.inclusivocities.ca

The Progress of Canada's Children & Youth
www.ccsd.ca/pccy/2006

Sources

Human Resources and Social Development Canada/Statistics Canada. 2007. *Canadian Longitudinal Youth in Transition Survey*. <http://www.pisa.gc.ca/yits.shtml> (1 Sept. 2008)

Canadian Council on Social Development. (2006). *The Progress of Canada's Children and Youth 2006*. <http://www.ccsd.ca/pccy/2006> (1 Sept. 2008).

Youth In Canada: Key Points & Questions

Major issues affecting young Canadians today include student debt, lack of job security, and health concerns.

Political engagement and knowledge of the political system is low among youth.

How will you make post-secondary education more accessible and address student debt?

What would you do to help curb the trend of low-wage and unstable jobs for youth?

What steps will you take to include youth in federal decisions and policies that affect their lives?

Canada Votes Papers 2008 is a pan-Canadian collaboration between SPARC BC, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, Community Development Halton, Human Development Council St. John, and Canadian Council on Social Development. Social planning organizations across the country are helping to strengthen communities and work on social justice issues. We also recognize the need to work together around key issues affecting our communities. We have come together to provide this publication on the federal election because we believe that democracy works best when citizens engage in dialogue on important issues.

Canada Votes papers outline key social issues and related questions that are important in this election. Asking questions is a way to make sure these issues are on the public agenda. By reading this publication and passing it on, by asking questions and talking about the issues, and especially by voting on October 14, 2008, you can help shape the kind of community in which you want to live.

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