

RMYC

MANWO



Regional Youth Link

Regional Multicultural Youth Council

Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

A SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

**Youth-to-Youth Initiatives
to Involve, Engage and Empower
Children and Youth**

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)
Multicultural Youth Centre (MYC)
Victoriaville Centre Mall
511 E. Victoria Avenue
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 1A8

Tel: (807) 622-4666

Toll Free: 1-800-692-7692
1-800-MYC-RMYC

Fax: (807) 622-7271

Website: <http://my.tbaytel.net/manwoyc>

E-mail: manwoyc@tbaytel.net

RMYC

MANWO



Regional Youth Link

Regional Multicultural Youth Council

Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

A SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

**Youth-to-Youth Initiatives
to Involve, Engage and Empower
Children and Youth**

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)
Multicultural Youth Centre (MYC)
Victoriaville Centre Mall
511 E. Victoria Avenue
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 1A8

Tel: (807) 622-4666

Toll Free: 1-800-692-7692
1-800-MYC-RMYC

Fax: (807) 622-7271

Website: <http://my.tbaytel.net/manwoyc>

E-mail: manwoyc@tbaytel.net

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction - The RMYC Background	2
2.	Youth-to-Youth Approach to Involve, Engage and Empower Peers	3
	(a) Leadership Training Program	3
	(b) Organizational Development	4
	(c) Youth (Support) Groups	4
	(d) Youth (Drop-In) Centres	5
	(e) Publicity, Promotion and Advocacy	5
	(f) Gatherings, Conferences, Rallies and Workshops	6
	(g) Out-reach Summer Camps	6
	(h) Young Women' Support Groups - Girl Power	6
	(i) Young Men's Support Groups	7
	(j) Role Model Program	7
	(k) Orientation /Stay-in-School Program	8
	(l) Room and Board	8
	(m) After-School Program	9
	(n) Summer School Initiatives	9
	(o) Science and Technology Camps	10
	(p) Environmental Awareness	10
	(q) Recreation Program	11
	(r) Healthy Lifestyles and Quality Life	11
	(s) Job Search and Workskills Development	12
	(t) Volunteering / Community Service	12
	(u) Business Training / Fundraising Ventures	13
	(v) Safer Communities	13
	(w) Teen Courts /Alternative Justice	14
	(x) Peer Mediation /Conflict Resolution	14
	(y) Multiculturalism and Race Relations	15
	(z) Research and Resource Material Development	16
3.	Training Centre	17
4.	Concluding Comments	18

THE REGIONAL MULTICULTURAL YOUTH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION:

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) was formed by youths who participated in activities organized by the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO) to celebrate International Youth Year-1985. Today, the RMYC is an inclusive group linking youths in communities across Northwestern Ontario--a region covering two thirds the land-mass of the province. The aims is to involve children and youth in activities that improve their well-being, enhance their status, and empower themselves to make a difference.

The RMYC experienced its fastest growth during a 3-year pilot project funded by federal and provincial governments from 1991-1993. Membership grew from a handful of students to over 1,000 youths on the RMYC's mailing list. New groups were formed across the region, and formal contacts were established with student councils, youth clubs, and youth centres. Alliances were also established with school boards, municipalities, First Nations, the Francophone community, Native Friendship Centres, multicultural associations, various cultural groups, and social service agencies dealing with children and youth.

To build on the success of the pilot project, the RMYC established the Multicultural Youth Centre in Thunder Bay. The Centre serves as youth drop-in and resource centre for networking, sharing information, and referrals. This is complemented by a training facility to help youths acquire leadership and organizational development skills to run meetings, plan activities, and develop programs that address their interests and/or issues of concern. Positive role models lead by example, teach their peers, facilitate workshops, make presentations, organize summer camps, arrange cultural performances and so forth.

The RMYC's accomplishments so far include: youth representation on several advisory councils, policy committees and decision-making bodies such as: Thunder Bay City's Race Relations Committee, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce Community Issues Task Force, Lakehead Board of Education and Roman Catholic School Board's Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy Development Committees, Community Advisory Committee on Race Relations to the Thunder Bay Police, Coalition on Youth and Crime, Healthy Lifestyles Coalition, and the Aboriginal Interagency Council. This has provided a collective voice, and ensured youth input on issues that impact children and youth.

To date, the Youth Council's work has been acknowledged by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Chiefs-in-Assembly with a resolution of support, Canadian Race Relations Foundation Award of Distinction, the Lakehead Social Planning Council Award for Equality and Social Justice, the Royal Commonwealth Youth Service Award, the the J.S. Woodsworth Award, and the Laidlaw Foundation's Model Youth Group on Governance and Decision Making.

A YOUTH-TO-YOUTH APPROACH TO INVOLVE, ENGAGE AND EMPOWER PEERS.

The RMYC uses a youth-to-youth approach for effective communication and to reinforce positive peer influence. Having young leaders planning and developing programs that engage their peers in the decision-making process ensures youth participation in the activities being organized. Positive role models inspire others, encourage their peers to be part of the solution to problems, and make them proud contributing members of society.

The RMYC believes that children and youth can play an active role to prevent their peers getting into trouble. Providing opportunities, resources, supports and guidance can enable youths to participate in positive activities that challenge negative stereotypes that alienate and marginalize kids.

The following is a summary of the RMYC's programs, services and activities to engage children and youth, share information to enable them to make wise choices and informed decisions, involve them in the community, and empower them to be accountable for their actions and become responsible citizens.

(a) Leadership Training Program: We provide youths with skills to be good, responsible leaders capable of mobilizing their peers to play a role in community development. Many communities want to give youth a voice and involve them in dealing with local concerns. Youths we have surveyed feel that they need help to motivate others and lead them. They want to know how to run meetings, take minutes, and develop plans.

* To help, the RMYC developed a training program covering leadership qualities; such as, integrity, patience, commitment, focus, honesty, time management and accountability. Role-playing teaches about authoritarian, carefree, passive and democratic leadership styles with exercises to involve children and youth as stakeholders. Potential leaders learn about team-work: how to involve their peers in identifying concerns, prioritizing issues and brainstorming ideas to address these. They also learn to plan events, keep records, write proposals, develop budgets, and prepare reports.

* Bands help to identify youths who participate in the program and hire them after training to put their newly acquired skills into practice. The RMYC provides resource materials and offers field support when the youth are back in their communities. A toll-free number enables the young leaders to contact the Youth Council at their convenience for information, assistance or help in seeking other supports.

(b) **Organizational Development:** This enables youths to organize themselves for action. Youths participating in our surveys say boredom is a contributing factor to problems with the law. Involving children and youth as stakeholders will help to address some of the social challenges they face. Soliciting their input and feedback for on-going reviews of strategies is a critical foundation for organizational development.

* The RMYC has developed exercises to help youths get organized, and provides guidance to form youth committees, run meetings, plan activities, and establish youth centres. The Youth Council offers organizational information ranging from choosing a name, setting goals /objectives, selecting officers, recruiting members and volunteers and explaining their roles and responsibilities.

* The RMYC assists with creating organizational charts, developing policies, constitutions and by-laws for good governance. We provide information on incorporation, charitable status, social responsibility, financial accountability, insurance and other legal matters with groups that want formal status. Partnering with established and secure groups is recommended for continuity and sustainability

* Youth need to be well organized to be taken seriously and qualify for funding to carry out their activities. Financial support is dependent on the organization's structure, ability to manage money, as well as accountability to members, funders and the community.

(c) **Youth (Support) Groups:** Since the RMYC was established as a legacy of the 1985 International Youth Year, it has become a positive example of what a youth group can do and achieve. There are many notable accomplishments attributed to the Youth Council as our strength in numbers has motivated and mobilized youths across the region for a good cause. The pool of creativity and talent found in a youth group inspires change more than individual effort.

* The RMYC feels that it is important for youths to learn to be self-reliant and work together to make a difference. With so much negative peer pressure around kids today, the desire to conform is so strong that some youths end up drinking, doing drugs, smoking, skipping school, joining youth street gangs, being involved in criminal activity and doing other things they would not normally do just to "fit-in". Having a youth support group where youths talk about issues that affect them, learn to watch out for each other, and encourage each other to do good can make a difference. The RMYC helps youths to form their own support groups as a resource to organize activities, brainstorm ideas, offer guidance, build team spirit, foster interpersonal skills, and help kids realize their potential.

- * The RMYC fosters good leadership and orientation to mobilize youths to work together for a common purpose. We help peer groups to become effective in recruiting and retaining members, train them to listen, make referrals or offer support to those who need help. In today's world of appointments for counsellors and professional social workers, having peer friends with empathy who can identify with your problem and understand your situation can relieve stress and depression. This is one way youths can be part of the solution to problems.
- (d) **Youth (Drop-In) Centres:** These provide safe havens for youths to hang out and organize their own activities. Youth centres keep kids off the streets, offer them structure, and help them to learn social responsibility. They are a proactive way to engage children and youth in positive activities during their leisure time, after-school or in the evenings. They also help foster community spirit by mobilizing kids to deal with the "there is nothing to do here" syndrome.
- * In many small towns, rural communities, and First Nations reserves, youths roam about all night because there are no organized activities or a safe place to hang out. Only a small percentage can be involved in team sports such as hockey, volleyball, and baseball, which often involve high costs and stiff competition for the few spots available. Many have nothing to do, and with no safe place to hang out, alcohol, substance abuse, sniffing and being involved in other negative activities seem to be the exciting things to do.
- * The Multicultural Youth Centre is a model drop-in offering practical learning experience for youths wanting to start a youth centre or learn how to run their own facilities. Youth involvement in determining the rules and codes of conduct for using the space gives them ownership of the property, defines behaviour, and teaches how to interact with others sharing the space. Having peers trained to enforce discipline ensure those using the facilities are sober and abide by set rules.
- * The main challenge for running a youth centre is securing operational funding. While equipment and other supplies may be donated, and volunteers are there to help, the on-going costs of rent, heat, hydro and of course, staff, should be in place to make the centre viable.
- (e) **Publicity, Promotion and Advocacy:** Youths need a voice to speak for themselves on issues that affect them. This will help transform the marginal status children and youth often find themselves in society today.
- * RMYC provides training in public speaking, making presentations and dealing with the media to bring out issues and encourage those too shy or afraid to speak. Youths learn networking technology and mediums such as posters, art, poetry, and music to share their stories.

- (f) **Gatherings, Forums, Rallies, Conferences and Workshops:** These bring together Youths to discuss issues of mutual interest and share experiences about their concerns. The RMYC organizes and hosts forums to rally support for action among all youths. Such functions offer opportunities youths to collectively focus on their commonalities, to develop strategies, to come up with resolutions, and to act on their recommendations.
 - * The Youth Council trains youth teams to organize and host their own gatherings. Youth learn to develop agendas, identify and invite resource people, facilitate workshops, make presentations, record proceedings and prepare reports. We also share information on fund raising for events, and help them to plan technical details such as arranging for delegates' travel, accommodation, refreshments, meals, and audio-visual equipment, flip-charts and so forth.
- (g) **Out-reach Summer Camps:** They provide fun and creative learning experiences for children and youth during holidays. Teams of youths from all back-grounds plan and organize recreational, social and educational activities that promote healthy lifestyles, foster co-operation, build team spirit, and provide social structure. Some of the games, cultural activities and social functions encourage the sharing of culture and expose children and youth to our diversity.
 - * Field-trips take diversity to isolated communities in the region, while visits to the Multicultural Youth Centre in Thunder Bay provides cross-cultural orientation and urban life skills to better prepare rural and Aboriginal students for life in larger towns.
 - * Trained young leaders, elders and professionals are resources for issues such as smoking, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, teen-pregnancies, personal hygiene, underage drinking, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS. Topics are discussed in the context of healthy lifestyles to protect unborn children and promote wellness. Other concerns (such as youth street gangs, crime, violence, racism, date rape, mediation) are covered as prioritized during issue identification exercises. Participants are challenged to bring suggestions, share experiences, exchange ideas and feely express their opinions for self and collective empowerment so that they can deal with problems and realize their potential.
- (h) **Revolution Girl-Style / Girl Power Support Groups:** They empower girls with information to enhance their understanding of the status of women in society. This helps them to make informed decisions and come up with the choices that challenge them to follow their passions and realize their dreams. The RMYC compiles news articles and studies pertaining to women and prepares resource kits to be used by the girls for reference. Young women are also encouraged to do research on topics they feel impacts on them.

- * Current issues include the increasing incidents of date rape, teen pregnancies and babies being born with fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effects due to drinking, abuse, harassment, school drop-outs, women and poverty, body image, suicide, sexually transmitted diseases and so forth.
- * To enable them to deal with peer pressure and make right choices, the girls learn about self-esteem, assertiveness, self-actualization and self-control. They work on setting goals and how to achieve them. Age-specific workshops (such as motherhood and parenting for older girls, and menstruation, relationships and actions and consequences for the younger ages) are designed to meet the changing needs of the girls.
- * Young girls are trained to be team leaders and serve as role models. They plan meetings and organize activities that appeal to their peers to get them involved. Because recent studies reveal very young girls are sexually active, we have just added a "Friendship Group" for girls younger than 11 years interested in the program.
- (i) **Young Men's Support Groups:** These raise awareness of ideal roles for young men. The current emphasis of the support group is promoting healthy lifestyles and encouraging young fathers to be positive role models. A breakdown in families is robbing many young men of the skills and responsibilities of fatherhood. Changes in lifestyles, peer pressure and welfare have also affected traditional male roles and increased incidents of family violence.
- * With many teen-pregnancies resulting in single mothers, young males need to support their partners, and help to raise children they father. Ironically, many young men resent the absence of fathers in their childhood, yet, by not taking responsibility for the children the farther, they perpetuate the cycle of fatherly neglect.
- * Through sharing circles, presentations, and workshops, young men learn parenting skills and ways to gain their honourable position in the family and in the community.
- (j) **Role Model Program:** Role models are an important part of our socialization. Where parents are poor role models for their children, peer role models are a practical alternative to counter dropping out of school, joining youth street gangs, the abuse alcohol and drugs, and engaging in other self-destructive lifestyles.
- * This program supports and strengthens youths who want to be positive examples for others. The RMYC endeavours to create positive "ring-leaders" to counter negative peer pressure that often puts kids at risk, and leads them into trouble. By applying similar organizational tactics youth gang leaders use to get followers can attract youths to be involved in positive activities.

- * The role model program complements the Youth Council's leadership training by reinforcing good behaviour and building character. Youths learn self-control, develop self-discipline and a positive attitude. We emphasize staying in school, volunteering, seeking employment, not abusing alcohol, avoiding smoking and illicit drugs, and refraining from negative talk, put-downs and foul language. We thus groom youths to be examples for their peers. They are urged to avoid violence, crime, involvement in street gangs, truancy, and not to wear gang colours or clothing with negative or demeaning messages.
- * The Multicultural Youth Centre is ideal for creating positive role models. Through policies and guidelines, RMYC officers, team leaders and volunteers get coaching and the on-going support needed to make the right choices and say NO to negative influences.
- (k) **Orientation/Stay-in-School Program:** We welcome students from rural communities, outlying First Nations reserves, new immigrant and refugee youths to facilitate their integration into the urban environment and larger urban schools. Using MANWO's experience from working with new immigrants to help them adjust to life in Canada, the RMYC reaches out and helps newcomer youths to ease transition into large multiracial towns with new laws and social expectations.
- * During orientation, new students learn about the various services, resources and supports available in the city. They are encouraged to meet new friends, share experiences and survival skills about staying in boarding homes and studying in multiracial schools that are often much larger than their home communities. The RMYC challenges students to identify their concerns and come up with ideas that will involve them as part of the solution to their problems.
- * The Orientation Program has been well received by the school boards across the region who are now partners in our efforts to reduce the numbers of youths, especially Aboriginal and racial minority students dropping out of school. Reducing student attrition will help to improve the quality of life.
- (l) **Room and Board:** Students from rural communities and remote reserves coming to school in urban centres need this. A safe, clean and nurturing home environment provides a stable base for students to concentrate on their studies and succeed.
- * The Youth Council arranges accommodation, meals and supervision for boarding students, as well as youths participating in leadership development, role modelling, peer counselling and other training programs. Students are linked with the necessary resources and supports to help them catch up academically, adjust to city life, and to deal with their social and emotional concerns.

- * They learn to set goals, stick to schedules, develop and manage personal budgets, and acquire other life skills to enhance integration into the mainstream. A safe caring place to stay, good nutrition, discipline, tutors, and other supports enable youths to realize their true potential.
- (m) **After-School Program:** Structured activities for students during their free time in the evenings and on weekends is important. Surveys when we hold orientation sessions reveal that growing numbers of students often lack money to participate in organized sports and recreational activities such as swimming, bowling, going to movies, and using fitness centres. In addition, unfamiliarity with the city, problems of transportation, and safety issues (especially at night) restrict the involvement of boarding students in after-school activities where they can socialize, have fun and meet friends from different cultural backgrounds. This can lead to loneliness, depression, and subsequent involvement in negative lifestyles.
- * The RMYC's after-school is part of the Stay-in-School initiatives to provide students with a variety of extra curricular activities to keep busy and help them with their studies. The Multicultural Youth Centre adjacent to Victoriaville Mall has computers students can use for assignments and to network with their families back home. Tutors are available to help with homework.
- * The Centre is also available for social activities such as dances, concerts, talent shows, movie nights, cultural activities, arts and crafts, sharing circles, and workshops. Students organize their own alcohol and drug free events.
- (n) **Summer School Initiatives:** Upgrade academic and literacy skills of students through formal and informal classes during the holidays is sometimes necessary as educational standards in rural communities may be lower than in mainstream schools. The gap often leads to high attrition rates among minority students when they move to urban schools.
- * In response to some of their recommendations, the RMYC has come up with a summer school program as a remedial strategy to address issues affecting their ability to perform according to their academic potential. Because of limited funding and other constraints, the Youth Council tries to informally tackle issues that are often overlooked by schools, or do not generally fall in the education curriculum.
- * Topics covered include time-management, cognitive skills, critical thinking, budgeting, poverty, healthy lifestyles, choices, manners, etiquette, inter-personal relationships, parenting, personal hygiene, conflict resolution, anger and stress management, accountability, respect, race relations, volunteering, addictions, nutrition, leadership, role modelling, leisure activities. Practical help is given in career planning, computer skills, job search, and resume writing.

- * Classes are held in a "summer camp" format that includes recreation and field-trips. Sharing circles and presentations are included to discuss urban lifeskills, curfews, culture shock, tenant rights, public transit, trespassing, racism and other issues students feel will help them to adjust and adapt to city life.
- * Through self-identification, and informal discussions, students who need academic help are referred to special teachers and professional tutoring services. Those requiring counselling, treatment and other supports are referred to appropriate agencies providing the services. Peer counsellors are part of the resource teams that work with students and offer support.
- (o) **Science and Technology Camps:** Youths are exposed to science in an informal, fun and exciting way. The aim is to encourage more students to feel comfortable with science subjects and broaden their horizons in non-traditional areas of employment involving science and technology. As our society becomes more technologically oriented, demystifying science can open new doors for youths who may not have considered professions in the science field.
- * Science camps are held at the Multicultural Youth Centre and co-ordinated in partnership with local high schools. Team leaders and science teachers design the material content and compile resource kits. Students tour science labs at Lakehead University and Confederation College, visit paper mills and other industrial sites to see science and technology at work.
- * Interested communities send students to 1-2 week camps. Participants are encouraged to share their learning with peers when they return home.
- (p) **Environmental Awareness:** Youths are trained to take care of the environment and learn to live in harmony with nature. The goal is to empower youth to be aware of the fragile nature of Mother Earth and the need to stop polluting the environment and preserve natural resources to save it for future generations.
- * The littering in many communities is deplorable as children dump pop cans, candy-wraps, potato-chip packets, paper and styrofoam containers everywhere. Graffiti and vandalism are common and the youth are responsible for the mess. Very few seem to realize the impact of their actions on the environment.
- * To promote environmental awareness, youth learn not to litter. They are encouraged to cut down on waste, dispose of garbage properly and keep the community clean. The RMYC has adopted four "R's" as slogans: Refuse-- stop the consumption of unnecessary items. Reduce--cut down on consumption of materials. Reuse-use over and over what you do not consume. Recycle -- things when they can no longer be reused. This can create a chain reaction from individuals, businesses and industries.

- * Nature-based tourism or eco-tourism is promoted as a means to generate income from wildlife and nature without destroying them. This is another way to promote conservation and raise awareness on the need to preserve the environment.
- (q) **Recreation Program:** Games, sports and other fun pastimes are promoted for physical, emotional and healthy well-being. Boredom has often been mentioned as a factor in increasing delinquency, street gangs, teen pregnancies, obesity and other youth problems.
- * Indulging in alcohol, drugs and solvents are ways many youths spend their free time. Offering recreational activities to keep children and youth busy after school, on weekends and during holidays is an effective way to foster their well-being and promote healthy lifestyles.
- * The RMYC Council provides training and support for youths to co-ordinate and supervise their own recreational activities. They learn new games, sports and other pastimes for indoors or outdoors. They also learn to identify popular activities for teams and small groups, as well as activities they can organize with little or no money. First Aid, refereeing, arranging game schedules, keeping scores, fair play, security, appropriate attire and equipment and various other skills are also covered.
- * Involving youth in planning and managing their own events ensures greater participation. Non-competitive games alleviating pressure to qualify for a team and to win are inclusive and can be just as much fun to play. Providing opportunities for youths to have fun and encouraging them to exercise will reduce the risk of them getting into trouble and being out of shape.
- (r) **Heathy Lifestyles and Quality Life:** This program promotes mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. It reinforces the healing process need to counteract negative lifestyles, and any forms of abuse, violence, and stressful situations that may drive kids into addictions.
- * Given Northwestern Ontario's above average incidence of alcohol, drug and substance abuse in the youth population, the RMYC has created a "Drug Free Kids" campaign. The aim is to provide opportunities for children and youth to learn about smoking, substance abuse, and to become aware of health risks, the cost of addictions and the long-term consequences on ones' health and social life.
- * Messages that one can have a good time without being drunk are promoted. Abstinence and safer sex are promoted to enable youths to make wise choices and informed decisions. Peer support groups are created for networking to build the self confidence, get re-assurance to avoid negative lifestyles, and strengthen the resolve of those who want to live alcohol and drug-free lives.

- * Exercise, recreation, nutrition and balance are part of the healthy lifestyle initiative. Topics such as obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases, fetal alcohol syndrome, stress and so forth are covered to foster quality of life.
- (s) **Job Search and Workskills Development:** We assist youths in acquiring lifeskills to enter the labour market. Current trends indicate more single-parent homes, youths leaving reserves for higher education and better employment prospects, street youths and those living in poverty who need help to get and keep jobs.
- * There is a steady migration of youths from rural communities and First Nations reserves to urban centres. An overwhelming majority of youth we have surveyed see their future in larger towns and cities. However, many lack the education, assertiveness, motivation, self-confidence, self-discipline and work experience needed to do well in a highly competitive mainstream and multicultural workplace.
- * The Youth Centre provides opportunities to volunteer and acquire work skills. We offer opportunities to learn workplace etiquette, gain practical work experience, develop a work ethic, prepare resumes with real work experiences, and establish contacts for reference.
- * RMYC takes advantage of initiatives such as Co-operative Education student placements, hires youths through the Student Summer Employment Programs, and participates in job-search, job connect and other initiatives. We host workshops and participate in career fairs to increase awareness of job trends for youths.
- (t) **Volunteering:** This is a great opportunity for youths to be involved in community service while gaining lifeskills and valuable work experience. Through volunteering, youths get a chance to meet new friends, learn to work with others, and get exposure to different career options. The experience is useful for resumes, job searches and future employment prospects.

We encourage all youths to volunteer at our Youth Centre for free training, acculturation and how to deal with diversity. Developing more volunteers creates a resource pool to help others in the community. With limited funding to hire staff to work with children and youth, our volunteers play an important role. They help to organize functions, supervise kids, and take care of facilities

- * Volunteering builds self-esteem, fosters community spirit and reduces the feeling of alienation among youths. Contributing to the well-being of the community, and being appreciated for the service, makes youths feel they are important. The RMYC gives awards to its volunteers to thank them for the service. Those doing outstanding work are nominated for formal recognition by other organizations, institutions and governments.

- * Special programs, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Awards for youths 14-18 years old who volunteer at the Youth Centre, are promoted for the convenience of youths involved in our activities. Scouts and other youth groups are also promoted as a community service.
- (u) **Business Training & Fundraising Ventures:** Youths are a dependent population and need to find ways to generate revenue to participate in some activities and organize special events. Being involved in fundraising activities is a chance to gain experience as an entrepreneur and obtain valuable work experience. At the Multicultural Youth Centre, youths sort out clothes, toys, books, etc., collected by the RMYC. The goods are shipped to youths interested to host fundraising garage sales, organize flea markets, or run second-hand shops. We run a Crafts Store at the Youth Centre, where placement students and volunteers are trained to operate a small business.
- * The RMYC has developed a manual to train youths to run small business ventures. This covers promotion, pricing and selling items at a garage sale or flea-market, and administering the funds. Youths are encouraged to form fund raising committees, and use the profits as "incentive capital" to cover expenses to host their own activities such as dances, movie nights, bowling events, sports, trips, workshops, weekend retreats, and birthday celebrations.
- * The RMYC also runs fundraising bingos, and organizes various fundraising activities to generate revenue for the centre. Fundraising activities are a great way for high school students to get their "community hours" for graduating while performing a valuable service for the Centre.
- (v) **Safer Communities:** We promote individual and collective security by engaging youth in a personal safety and safer communities campaign. The RMYC agrees crimes against individuals and property are a growing concern, and small towns, rural communities and First Nations reserves are not immune to violence (such as vandalizing schools, clinics, community halls and even band offices). Many youths resent their marginal status, are frustrated by powerlessness, and despise the poverty around them when they are bombarded by affluence on television and see the opulence in urban centres.
- * Many youths tell us they do not feel safe in their own communities. Sexual assaults, fights, break-ins and suicides are common. Youth street gangs are a growing problem, and alcohol and drug abuse contribute to violence and criminal activities related to addictions. The problems of bullying and swarming are also prevalent in schools.

- * Risk factors such as poverty, abuse, violent role models, absentee fathers, makes youths vulnerable and ideal recruits for street gangs. Out-of-home placements are common experiences that make gangs seem a better alternative "home". Many end up caught in a cycle of crime, which leads them to courts and a mainstream justice system that does not treat them fairly.
- * The RMYC has launched a safer communities campaign that involves youths in trying to find solutions to problems of violence and crime. We organize workshops and conferences for youths to learn about their rights, responsibilities and obligations as responsible citizens. Many need to know about regulations that affect them, how to deal with the police, processes to lodge formal complaints, and alternative justice programs.
- * Youths are challenged to speak out and come up with new ideas on what can be done to change things and improve their security. Suggestions such as curfews have been advanced to protect children at night. Ideas such as double dates and avoiding alcohol and illicit drugs are strategies to reduce the risk of date rape. Issues such as poverty, education, homelessness, racism, funding and relevant supports are discussed as policy issues that can go to the root of problems and require government intervention.
- (w) **Teen Courts/Alternative Justice:** Youth need to understand the justice system, how it works, and to respect the rule of law. The RMYC is promoting juvenile courts as a more effective and efficient way to deal with youth crime. In the United States where they have been in existence for years, Teen Courts have reduced the numbers of young repeat offenders. In 1993, the RMYC received federal and provincial government funding to bring resource people from the United States of America to help us to launch the first Teen Court initiative in Canada.
- * The RMYC has compiled information on Teen Courts to promote the concept. We also have copies of a video from the United States to help those interested in the program. We believe that getting the youth to participate in this initiative will help to reduce the numbers of youths in courts and jails.
- (x) **Peer Mediation:** Youths need to know how to resolve conflict and settle disputes without violence. We regularly hear reports of youth-to-youth violence, bullying, and students assaulting each other. Learning to talk things out is better than fighting and being charged. Mediation allows tempers to cool down and let reason prevail. Disputants can express their feelings and listen to each other. This helps them understand what is going on and hopefully they will find out about the underlying issues fueling the anger, resentment, and aggression.

- * The RMYC has resource materials on mediation and provides training for youths interested in mediation and peer counselling. Schools, youth centres and youth groups are being encouraged to introduce peer mediation to deal with racial incidents, name-calling, bullying and so forth. Providing youths with skills to engage in dialogue will reduce tension, avoid violence and foster a culture of peace.
- (y) **Multiculturalism and Race Relations:** RMYC is working to build bridges of racial and cultural understanding in our communities. Aboriginal people form the largest racial group in Northwestern Ontario, and there are increasing numbers of racial minorities immigrating to the region. The First Nations in particular, in spite of their special status in the Canadian Constitution as indigenous people, they face extreme forms of racial bias, discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice.
- * In all the surveys conducted by the RMYC to identify problems faced by Aboriginal youth in urban centres, racism has consistently been at the top of the list. They see racism as a barrier that denies them equal access to services and resources, and limits the opportunities available for equal participation in all aspects of Canadian life. It is unjust to be discriminated against by "strangers" in their country.
- * As a multicultural group, accepting diversity is at the core of the RMYC. Immigrants embrace and appreciate multiculturalism. We encourage all youths to share their culture at multicultural festivals, universal arts concerts, and other cultural events. We see this as a way to build bridges and promote racial harmony.
- * Getting involved in multicultural events challenges children and youth to learn something about their culture to bring and share with others. This has inspired many to attend teachings, pow wows, feasts, sweat-lodges, and other traditional ceremonies. They have shared this with pride. This has helped to foster appreciation and respect for other cultures in order to celebrate our rich heritage in unity.
- * To improve race relations, the Council organizes forums to raise awareness of racism and its impact on victims. Teams of youths from different backgrounds are trained to make presentations, and encouraged to participate in the events and activities for March 21, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- * The RMYC makes "multicultural bows" of black, red and yellow and white ribbons symbolizing the four races in Aboriginal culture. The bows reflecting racial harmony are given out to individuals, groups, institutions and Members of Parliament to be worn as a sign of commitment to eliminating racial discrimination.
- * The RMYC organizes forums on racism to involve youth in race relations campaigns. To help young facilitators and presenters, the Council has also produced manuals and other resources to improve race relations.

- (z) **Research and Resource Material Development:** We provide youth with relevant information and appropriate materials to use as tools for action. The RMYC compiles information on studies, reports, and news articles on the status of children and youth. This is reviewed regularly for enlightenment on current trends and crises. The RMYC also conducts local surveys on youth concerns and feedback is used to develop strategies that will make a difference.
- * The RMYC involves youth in research to gather information about their situation. Knowledge is power; it provides a source of reference for youths to make informed decisions. Research skills can help youths to examine various issues related to their well-being. Current trends, attitudes, behaviour, and values can provide valuable information to help children and youth understand themselves and their situation.
- * RMYC develops youth-friendly resource materials. All youths are part of the teams developing manuals, handbooks and leaflets of pertinent information. Some resource materials with a special focus on children and youth include:
- Alcohol and Drugs: Does it Affect Me?
 - Taking Care of Mother Earth
 - The Facts About Solvent Abuse
 - Youth and Family Violence
 - Youth and Getting Along at Home
 - Youth and Self Esteem
 - Resource Guide on Teen Courts
 - Peer Mediation to Resolve Conflict
 - Resource Manual for Summer Camps
 - Youth Group Development Resource Manual
 - Activities Handbook for Team Leaders
 - Making Presentations
 - Orientation Manual for Aboriginal Boarding Students
 - Resource Guide on Youth Fundraising /Business Ventures
 - Multiculturalism and Race Relations

TRAINING FACILITIES

Youths interested in participating in our training programs help to identify the areas and topics they want covered. The RMYC can visit their communities to deliver the program, or arrangements can be made for youths can come to Thunder Bay for training, workshops and presentations.

- * Training in Thunder Bay is held at the Multicultural Youth Centre . There is adequate space for presentations, workshops, demonstrations, ice-breakers, sharing circles, displays, socials, dances and other activities. The Centre has an Arts and Crafts Store, and a second-hand shop for fundraising, business training and various material supplies.
- * The Youth Centre is complemented by a residence for trainees. The facility has 6 bedrooms, 2 lounges, a sun room, kitchen, dining room, laundry facilities and an indoor swimming pool/fitness room. The house has a fenced patio for privacy and a terraced garden. Up to 15 youths/participants can be accommodated well at the residence.
- * Youths from out-of-town can bring chaperons to watch over them, and provide support and comfort as needed. The RMYC can also supervise those staying at the residence. Please note that there are strict rules for the safety and security of those using the facilities.
- * Meals and refreshments are provided. Breakfast is prepared at the residence. Lunch and supper are catered by the Mandarin Restaurant. Traditional Aboriginal meals can be arranged as required.
- * Local transportation, sight-seeing tours, social activities, games, recreation, entertainment, movies and access to gyms etc. can be arranged.
- * Resource people, guest speakers, professionals, elders, team leaders, agency representatives and peer role models are invited as needed.
- * Costs are based on the number of participants, length of program, activities, accommodation, meals, refreshments, facilitators and resource materials provided.

(Please contact the RMYC for more information and training details.)

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Children are society's greatest asset. We are the next generation and tomorrow's most valuable human resource with the potential to shape the future and create a better world.

Young people need room to grow, develop their talents and skills, be creative, learn from mistakes, be accountable for their actions and become part of the solution to problems. Experience with the RMYC has shown us that it is much easier for kids who are formally organized to be mobilized and speak up for change. The challenge is enabling them to form viable groups that can reach out and effectively connect with peers.

The RMYC's goal is mobilizing children and youth towards a fair and just society where there is equal access, equal opportunities and equal participation in every aspect of Canadian life by all citizens-regardless of race, ethnicity, or cultural background. We are committed to social justice, and believe that as Canadians, we should accept and respect each other for who we are, treat each other fairly, and learn to get along.

We promote multiculturalism as a source of enrichment and strength, and organize activities that celebrate diversity to combat stereotypes, prejudice and racial discrimination. We challenge children and youth to break negative cycles that divide us and threaten our peace and security. Together we are better, and by pulling together, helping each other and sharing common values, we can achieve racial harmony, peace and progress.

Being youths, we are a dependent population in transition. We do not have the financial resources and capital to run our own groups, operate youth centres or fund programs. The RMYC's youth-to-youth strategy requires the passing of information, knowledge and experience to new members when older youths grow-up and move on. On-going support is critical for continuity and sustainability.

Creating partnerships with the government, businesses, foundations, community groups, social service agencies, and adults willing to invest in children and youth offers the best hope for the security of youth groups and drop-in-centres. Any resources provided to help kids to learn, and engage them in positive activities are a worthwhile investment. Making children and youth stakeholders in shaping their destiny creates caring and responsible citizens for future and successive generations.

More information on the RMYC's youth-to-youth initiatives and resource materials is available from the Multicultural Youth Centre. Please feel free to contact us at the address on the front cover page.