Oxford
YOUth
Matter

The Voice of Oxford County Youth

Being *"stressed out"* was ranked the #1 issue

1744 local High School youth were surveyed on things that matter...in their lives

Mental Health

The ISSUES

· Getting good grades; straight A's for university
· Saving for post secondary education
· Having a part-time job
· Responding to parents' stressful circumstances regarding illness, unemployment, addictions, relationships
· Rumours on MSN/Facebook/Texting/MySpace
· Feeling like they can't meet expectations at home or at school
· Knowing what they want to be when they grow up
· Being like everyone else (and knowing what that means)
· Hang out with the "right" people
· Figure out how to be a teenager
· Relationships with family, friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, teachers
· School work

The IDEAS

· Provide opportunities to de-stress: spas, writing, guidance to make good choices about money
· Have counsellors who say it's confidential and stick to their word; counsellors that don't rush to wrap up
· Increase awareness for parents and teachers about how busy youth's schedules are
· Teach youth how to communicate with parents; how to understand them and their perspective
· Develop parent groups to help parent to understand student struggles and how to help
· Provide counseling groups for students with a younger person of which youth can relate to
· Develop youth centers in rural areas which are open for everyone
· Offer smaller groups for discussions related to sex, alcohol, drugs, etc
· Develop a health unit drop-in centre where students can receive free birth control and talk about their issues (anonymously)

The CHALLENGES

· Curriculum level of difficulty and lack of sufficient support from teachers and/or parents
· Media messages that create expectations about how youth should look or behave
· Lack of opportunities to be with healthy role models
· Not knowing where to go for help
· Lack of places to go where they can fit in, feel safe and have fun without drugs or alcohol
· Lack of trust in counselors (feeling like they will break confidentiality)
· Not knowing ways to cope with stress other than to party, feel depressed or act out in anger
· Lack of trust between adults and youth

Risk Behaviours

The ISSUES
- Prescription drugs were named by youth as most prevalent
- Peer pressure
- Accessibility to drugs and alcohol
- Some adults are ignorant of youths' use of drugs and alcohol
- Drug use can be regular; more than just a 'party' activity

The CHALLENGES
- Difficulty finding venues to have fun where drugs or drug users aren't available
- Parents that abuse drugs or ask youth to sell drugs on their behalf
- Lack of rehabilitation services
- Lack of parental awareness
- Drugs are easily accessible, passed and shared within schools
- No consequences for getting caught
- Youth think "it won't happen to me"
- Students going to class high/drunk, no consequences from teachers
- Parents and/or adults providing drugs and alcohol for youth

The IDEAS
- More places for underage students to hang out (e.g. clubs, concerts, centres)
- More parental awareness
- Increased awareness regarding drugs and alcohol provided at a younger age and keep it interesting (e.g. speakers with the lived-experience)
- Awareness of immediate consequences for abusing drugs and alcohol
- Remove smoking areas
- Zero tolerance in schools
- Increase surveillance at schools
- Anonymous reporting of drug and alcohol incidence

"I've seen a teenage mother smoke crack while breast feeding."

Safety

The ISSUES
- Bullying is most prevalent at schools
- Some youth walk with their cell phones open, ready in case of emergency
- Having a safe place to stay
- Finding used needles in public places
- Lack of overall education regarding resources available to teens
- Being harassed by older adolescents in the community

The IDEAS
- Create a shelter where youth can have a meal, a warm environment and a place to stay
- Increase promotion of available services
- Initiate a "walk-safe" buddy program
- Implement mandatory anti-bullying education program that educates about all types of bullying (e.g. cyber bullying) and what can be done if it occurs
- Have speakers come talk to schools about the affects of bullying on different people
- Have user friendly web sites where teens can anonymously get information or speak to someone via e-mail regarding bullying or other safety issues

The CHALLENGES
- Bystanders witness bullying and do nothing
- Lack of awareness of available shelter services
- Eligibility requirements for shelters such as Salvation Army

"Schools aren't safe enough. There has to be more ways to stop bullying…"

Education

The ISSUES
- Students cheating on tests/exams, projects/assignments
- Bullying
- Insufficient or unavailable technology
- Quantity of homework assigned
- Completing education

The IDEAS
- Institute a 2nd bus or a later one to take students home after practices or receiving extra help with homework
- Offer senior students course about how to apply to post-secondary education and bus tours
- Teachers need to be more aware and observant of cheating methods (e.g. cell phones)
- Ensure that teacher is there for test/exam (not substitute)
- More essays or different versions of the same test
- Uniforms level playing field
- More technology – computers and updated equipment for tech programs
- Share resources/ facilities between schools
- Extend or provide flexible hours of availability
- Increase peer tutor opportunities with incentives for involvement
- Use time effectively - do not procrastinate
- Include youth in development of education curriculum
- Teachers provide more time for homework completion
- Teacher provide access to missed homework (e.g. web page)

The CHALLENGES
- Too high expectations for students
- Insufficient resources and facilities
- Teachers not having enough time to assist students with difficulties
- Parents unable to assist with homework

Employment & Training

The ISSUES
- No clear sense of career direction
- Students do not know what they want to do after high school
- Balancing work and school
- Access to resources of student employment
- Getting into University/College

The IDEAS
- Change the concepts taught in careers class and make it more involving (e.g. Resume building, workshops, coop placements, goal planning, identify students goals)
- Offer group bus tours for students in co-op
- Allow students to choose the classes they want; that will benefit them in the future when they get the career they want. Then they'll have the training for that job
- Create County-based scholarships for students who are unemployed or who come from single parent households
- More courses available geared to a variety of interests
- Speaking to people in occupations of interests
- Making sure students get to take the courses they choose
- Employers and teachers more understanding of student workload
- Online school web site – easily accessible
- Encourage employment centres to work more directly with schools
- More availability and information for various scholarships/bursaries
- More encouragement needed for students to apply
- Need more flexibility around changing courses if needed

The CHALLENGES
- Hearing negative aspects of types of employment/careers
- Access and qualifications for student bursaries/scholarships
- Fear that marks are inadequate for post-secondary acceptance

Home Life

The ISSUES
· Parents not understanding what youth endure today and ineffective communication
· Parental health issues affecting youth (e.g. illness, addictions, etc)
· Stereotyping of youth as many adults and parents perceive youth as 'bad'
· Parents avoiding important issues and feel there is no 'openness'
· Youth fears that parents view them as failures
· Financial constraints on families'
· All youth deal with life stressors

The IDEAS
· Implement back-to-back 'Take your kids to work' and 'Take your parents to school' days
· Create ads focused towards parents, containing points that youth would like to communicate
· Promote the 'good' things youth are doing to create a positive image (involve media support)
· Appropriate help for "bad" youth
· Create responsible environment
· Collaborate with, develop and implement change process with youth, for youth

· Government support and follow-up of families in financial need
· Provide more accessible counselling, support services, mediation, family therapy, and awareness programs for parents and youth
· Provide more courses and community support of 'life skills'
· Banks offer free education sessions including parents, to prepare youth for the future
· More community and government funding for 'family' events

The CHALLENGES
· Youth feel like their voice is not being heard
· Some parents have difficulty in accepting help
· Parents model parenting style they were exposed to as youth
· The media tends to only cover negative issues related to youth

· Inaccessibility of financial resources and support for families and youth
· Youth do not feel that school guidance counsellors are approachable
· Parents may be unable to recognize the signs of distress in youth
· Inadequate education provided for their 'future'

Recreation & Transportation

The ISSUES
· Activities are often not local and/or not well advertised
· Youth report turning to youth-led parties and recreation due to boredom and convenience
· Limited choices and availability
· Youth centres focus on support for disadvantaged populations
· Some youth misuse public parks, children's playgrounds and other inappropriate facilities
· Community respond too slowly to needs of the youth

The IDEAS
· Create a large facility for youth or several locations, with ample supervision, transportation and age limit enforcement
· Consider private sector partnerships (e.g. Toyota) for funding; use buildings that exist and are not used, such as schools
· Extend bus hours to 10pm
· Programs that involve schools, (e.g. monthly dances)
· Rotate event locations to improve access and interest
· Network and develop carpool programs with family, friends, and neighbours

· Develop more aggressive awareness campaigns for recreation programs (e.g. web sites, posters, local events, etc)
· More diversity of recreation programming to cater and attract the majority of youth
· More variety of music
· Create and maintain more reliable and stable programming
· Develop representative recreation youth committee
· Make sports and music programs more affordable, provide equipment and provide intramural-style sports for all skill levels

The CHALLENGES
· Youth are often bored
· Lack of transportation (e.g. rely on friends or family to drive)
· Lack of awareness of available recreation programs and activities
· Lack of program diversity

· Current youth centre populations are intimidating and difficult to join
· Limited and repetitive music
· Very few locations to just "hang out"
· Some successful programs lack sustainability and stability
· Lack of youth voice