

# YAC Link:



**Tips and  
Tricks for  
Starting a  
Youth  
Advisory  
Council.**

**A Joint Project By:  
McCreary Centre Society's YAC,  
Powell River YAC, and  
Tla'Amin YAC**



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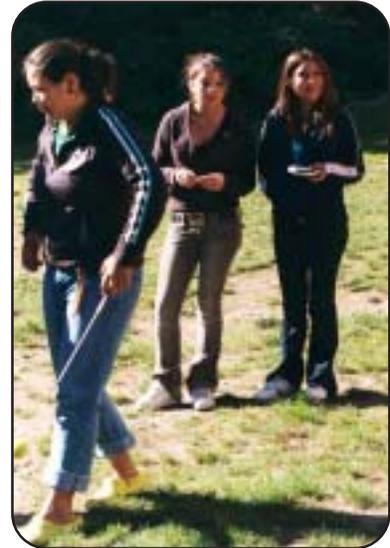
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## Thanks for reading *YAC Link: Tips and Tricks for Starting a Youth Advisory Council*.

This booklet is the resource from the YAC Link project. This project is a partnership between three Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) to develop a workshop and resources about how to start and sustain YACs. The three councils are McCreary Centre Society's YAC in Vancouver, Powell River YAC, and Tla'Amin YAC (Kla-ah-min), also near Powell River.

The information and ideas in this resource came from interviews and workshops with current and past YAC members. This info was organized into four different themes, and in each theme are the tips and tricks identified by our YAC members for starting, running, and sustaining a YAC.



This toolkit is also part of a workshop. If you are starting up a YAC, you can contact us to arrange for YAC members to come and facilitate a workshop with your group as an introduction to the world of YACs.

So, read, learn and happy YACing!



“YAC” (Youth Advisory Council) is a term used to describe a broad range of youth driven councils. These groups give a youth voice to organizations or to communities. They can have an advisory role, a decision-making role and even take on projects of their own. YACs exist all over the place, they are attached to NGOs, service organizations, municipal councils and foundations, just to name a few.

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# YAC History

## Powell River and Tla'Amin YACs

### The Story So Far...

The Powell River YAC developed as a result of a local Next Step Workshop held in May 2000. Coast Garibaldi Health and School District No. 47 (Powell River) jointly sponsored the Mc-Creary Next Step Workshop. The planning committee included representation from: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth; Tla'Amin First Nation; Powell River Child, Youth, and Family Services Society; Powell River Association for Community Living; Public Health Nursing; and counsellors from middle and secondary schools. The Next Step workshop discussions and evaluations completed by youth clearly indicated a need for a Youth Advisory Council to give Powell River youth a voice in planning around youth health and social issues. With the help of a one-year community grant, the Powell River Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was formed in April 2001. A coordinator (Hugh Prichard) was hired to coordinate the project activities. Subsequent program funding has been secured through agencies such as Health Canada and operational funding from a consortium of Powell River area community and social service agencies.



A key aspect of the Powell River YAC's approach is the integration of community members including youth, parents, professionals, and community groups and agencies. Another emphasis is on the mobilization of youth to develop and implement action plans that address the priority youth issues in partnership with community agencies.

Developed three years ago in partnership with the Tla'Amin First Nation and Tla'Amin Health Services, the Tla'Amin YAC is an active component of health and social program delivery on the reserve. With membership of approximately 18-25 youth, programs range from weekly youth-led recreational programs as well as a formal youth council where community issues are discussed in a traditional way. Founded with the goal of building bridges between aboriginal and non-aboriginal youth, the two councils meet and participate regularly on events and workshop opportunities.



Throughout its five years of running, the program has involved dozens of youth in many hours of community based leadership and empowerment. The Powell River and Tla'Amin YACs give youth the opportunity to engage in finding the solutions to the social and health related issues affecting them. While much still is to be done to make BC communities truly youth friendly, this process is a valuable foundation for every community. Youth leaders are our present, and our future.

# YAC History

## McCreary Centre Society YAC

### The Story So Far...

The year was 1995 and sounds of Boyz II Men could be heard blaring through every teenage girl's stereo system. As Generation X sat glued to their television sets eagerly anticipating an episode of "Friends," (the newest Thursday night sitcom) a group of youth with an interest in youth health gathered.

In 1995 the McCreary Centre Society Board of Directors decided that the organization needed to "walk the talk" and involve youth in the organization. A couple of youth who had been involved in a conference of McCreary's were approached and asked how McCreary might involve youth on a more permanent basis. These young people recommended that McCreary support a Youth Advisory Council (YAC). The YAC decided that they wanted to start doing things right away, and decided on a provincial for-youth-by-youth conference which they named the "B4" (Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges). The first B4 conference was held in November 1996 at Camp Squamish. The tenth annual B4 will be hosted by McCreary's YAC in 2006!



*YAC members at a retreat on Gabriola Island in 1997*



Over the past decade the "B4" has remained the "glue" for MCS's YAC. Every YAC member is involved in organizing the event and many YAC members have been recruited through the B4. YAC members are also involved in other aspects of McCreary: up to two YAC members serve on McCreary's Board of Directors. Some

YAC members have also been involved in the Society's research or project advisory committees and some have been hired as project staff. In addition, McCreary now has a YAC Alumni (past YAC members) for those who want to stay involved by supporting and mentoring the YAC. Currently (2006), McCreary's YAC has 20 youth volunteers ranging in age from 15 to 25.



The McCreary Centre Society is a non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, education and community-based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

# Getting Started... Why YAC?

The information in this section reflects what our Youth Advisory Council members said first got them involved in joining a YAC and what it is that keeps them involved.

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## 1 Make Sure It's Fun, Welcoming and Respectful

### Fun

YAC members said that one reason they were involved in the YAC was because it was an opportunity to have fun with other like-minded youth. Allowing time for teambuilding activities such as games, cooperative contests and social time all contribute to creating a fun environment that people want to come back to.

Ideas for fun:

- ✿ Provide food and time to socialize
- ✿ Games and Icebreakers
- ✿ Teambuilding activities

### Respect

Foster an environment of respect in which members are accepting and respectful of each other, their opinions, and ideas. A group agreement is something you can use to promote respect. There is more information on that later in this resource (page 12).

Ideas for building respect:

- ✿ Group agreement
- ✿ Teambuilding activities
- ✿ Good role modelling by YAC members and adult support



### Welcoming

No one wants to join a group where they feel uncomfortable. It's just common sense. When new members do join, it helps to have a welcoming atmosphere. The new member should feel like a new and valued part of the YAC team, not a burden to the more experienced YAC members.

Ideas for supporting new members:

- ✿ Buddy system (pairing new members with an old member they can talk to and debrief with)
- ✿ Special first meeting (a fun and low stress first meeting that everyone, including the new members, go to. Have ice breakers, games, and activities to get to know each other.)
- ✿ Having an orientation package (information about the YAC for new members)



In Powell River we follow the **Challenge By Choice** principle, which makes sure that everyone participates as much, or as little, as they feel comfortable. Check out appendix page 24 for more info.

## 2 Identify A Common Goal or Purpose

A common goal or purpose is important to a YAC as it gives everyone a larger picture of why they have come together. It also helps give a direction to projects and activities the YAC will take on. This does not have to be a formal or complex agreement, as long as there is a common understanding in the YAC.

You could think about it in terms of goals and objectives. Objectives are activities, sort of like the small steps that lead to the bigger goal.

Here are some examples of goals and objectives:

Long term goal:

The goal of the YAC is to create a healthier community for youth.

Short term objective:

The YAC will organize a local band night. This will give the youth in the community something fun and positive to do.

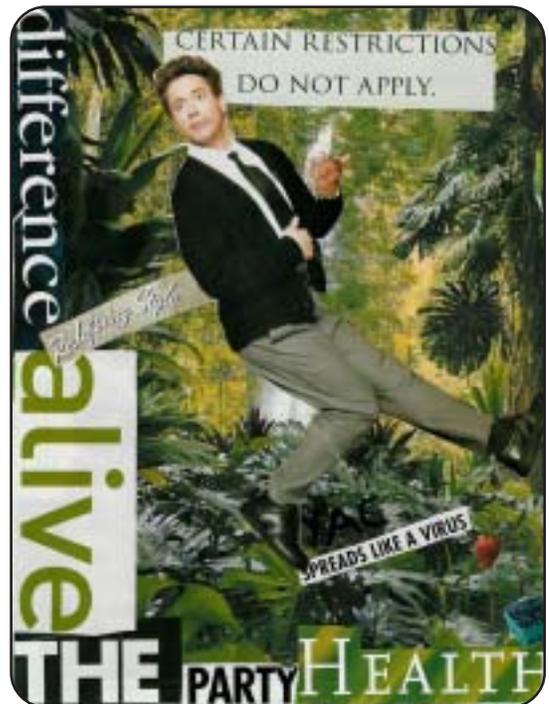
or

The YAC will develop a presentation on discrimination and will perform it at the elementary school.

If eating a drumstick is your goal, then the first bite is an objective...



YACers have said that in the case of disagreement on something, revisiting the purpose of the YAC can sometimes help put things in perspective.



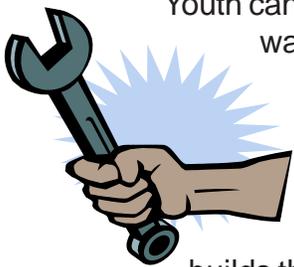
Garett's artistic expression of a YAC

# 3 Focus on Meaningful Involvement

Meaningful activities are something that all YACs need to feel valued and fulfilled. YAC members believe that projects and hands on activities are important to getting and keeping youth interested. Each YAC will do its own thing, depending on the goals they have agreed on. The important thing is that the YAC members themselves decide what they want to do and have the opportunity to be the ones to do it.

In Powell River and Tla'Amin the phrase "by youth for youth" is used to describe this way of being.

Your YAC may have an advisory role, where an organization listens to the YAC's opinion on issues, or perhaps your group will undertake its own community project. Or both! For example, McCreary's YAC advises the Board of Directors and organizes a weekend youth conference each year for youth from around BC. Powell River and Tla'Amin organize drug and alcohol free events for youth in the community to attend.



Youth can be involved in a variety of ways in the functioning of a YAC.

They can fundraise, plan and facilitate meetings, develop workshops and presentations etc. Being involved in different ways

builds the sense of pride and ownership that YAC members feel about their experience, and gives them more chances to develop capacity and skills.



Through my involvement with the Powell River Youth Advisory Council I have had countless opportunities to meet and join with different community groups and organizations. I would have to say that getting to know these other people and working alongside them in my community has meant the most to me out of all my volunteer work. My most memorable experience was

volunteering at the United Church spaghetti dinners. Every Monday night the church would host this dinner for anyone in the community to attend at a very low cost. Someone from the church had approached the YAC and asked members to help with the dinner. Almost every Monday for a year I would go and stand in the kitchen for two hours washing the dishes. It was great to see and be a part of different people of all ages coming together, talking, laughing and sharing a great meal. I learned that giving even just a little bit of your time on a regular basis can have great ripple effects in a community.

Tawnya, Powell River YAC



Tawnya's artistic expression of her YAC

# 4 Provide Opportunities to Learn

Being on a YAC provides the opportunity to learn new things in many different ways. YACs that provide opportunities to learn new things have a better chance of keeping their members interested, engaged and involved. YACs are a great place to learn, and practice, leadership skills.

## Learning from peers

Having the opportunity to meet a wide range of people with a variety of experiences is important for everyone's personal growth.

## Learning by training

Training opportunities really help a young person develop skills. More is said about this on page 20.

## Learning by doing

Getting your hands dirty is another way that YAC members learn skills and grow capacity. For example: facilitating a workshop, making posters, or organizing a dance.

## Learning through participation

Another opportunity that is great for YACs is attending workshops and conferences organized by other groups. Even just being at different events will contribute to a YAC member's growth.



Being on a YAC can provide opportunities to:

- ✓ meet diverse people
- ✓ attend workshops and conferences
- ✓ get skills that may help in your personal life or at a job
- ✓ boost your resumé with volunteer experience

# 5 Personal Fulfilment, Success and Discovery

One of the important things that youth said that they gain from being involved in a YAC is a sense of personal fulfilment. They feel that they are accomplishing great things and are contributing to their community.

Allow opportunities for the group to self-reflect on how they are doing as a group. Checking in on how members are personally feeling about the YAC is also a good idea. Personal reflection helps members understand and appreciate why they are involved.

Tons of personal fulfilment, happiness and growth comes from facing challenges and overcoming them. This is why it's important that YACs have the opportunity to challenge themselves. But of course, how you and your YAC chooses to challenge itself depends on what you are willing and able to undertake.

A challenge could range from raising money for a local charity, going on a teambuilding retreat, facilitating a workshop, organizing a conference... or more! The group will have more opportunities to improve skills and grow if it is doing more than just coasting along.



At McCreary, after the B4 conference McCreary's YAC has a celebration dinner. They debrief highlights and lowlights of the event and members reflect on their personal experience, what they contributed and what they came away with.



Being part of the YAC has helped me to open myself up to people and allow them to see more of me. When I'm with my YAC I can just be myself and not worry about them dissing me behind my back. Through the time I have been with YAC I have become more alive. I've gone to AMAZING conferences that I otherwise would not have been able to do.

Garett, Powell River YAC

# 6 Being A Voice for Youth

The last reason that our members say they got involved is that YACs give youth the opportunity to have a voice in the community. Lots of youth are interested in contributing to their communities and a YAC can help them do that.

I became involved with the YAC in 2003. I had just started volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club after becoming interested in community leadership and making a personal change in my life that was necessary for my growth. A worker with the club showed me a posting about a leadership conference held by the McCreary Centre Society. I was intrigued. It seemed to be just the thing I was looking for. The workshops looked very interesting. The theme was social awareness, and the workshops were on leadership and other youth issues. I didn't have much money so I phoned a community assistance program and they told me to write a letter to the Lions Club. I did and they granted me the money to attend! I was happy but a little scared about my new adventure. I decided to believe in the best and get out there. It proved to be a great decision when I met a lot of awesome people who were interested in making a difference and helping others. I had a great time. The people were creative and outrageous. I learned a lot while having fun at the same time, and enjoying the outdoors. It was cool. After that I joined the YAC in helping to plan and organize the next conference. We have fun and build skills such as teamwork, organizing and communication skills and I believe we make a difference in being role models for others. We make improvements each year and it just keeps getting better.



Nathan, McCreary YAC

# Nuts & Bolts of a YAC

These are 6 things that YAC members feel contribute to having a healthy and well organized YAC. Just like a car, without nuts and bolts things can fall apart.

## 1 Provide for the Needs of Your Group



**Place to meet**  
Have a regular, safe and comfortable place to meet. Meeting in the same place regularly means that people can

plan out their schedules. If you have to move around a lot, it is chaotic and mis-communication can lead to people missing meetings and not feeling included.

### Food

Food is a great incentive. It helps to have snacks or drinks on



hand during meetings. People think better when they are not hungry. McCreary's YAC likes to have a pizza dinner together and socialize before the meeting starts. It also creates a great opportunity for social time.

### Transportation

Another need that your group might have is transportation. McCreary provides bus tickets for members who use public transportation. In Tla'Amin, adult volunteers will drive to pick youth up to take them to the meetings. Also, if you can get your hands on a helicopter, do so, it will come in handy.



There may be specific considerations that need to be addressed depending on who is in your group or which community you are in. An example of this might be child care.

## 2 Create a Group Agreement for YAC Member Behaviour

Creating a group agreement for YAC member behaviour can set the foundation for working well together. Behaviour should be agreed upon by the whole YAC when it is first formed, and the agreement can be referred back to and modified if behaviour becomes a problem. An agreement could be recorded on something like flip chart paper or something more creative – a flag, a ball or another 3D object. Have the group decide.



### How To Do It:

Have the YAC brainstorm an agreement for the group on how they want to work together. Explain that these will be guidelines for making everyone feel safe participating. Take suggestions that everyone can agree on.

If someone suggests a broad concept such as, "I need to feel respected," try to develop the concept into something concrete with more specific examples. Ask the YAC for recognizable ways of acting that demonstrate this idea. For example ask, "what would respectful behaviour look like?" You can also have all members sign the agreement if they feel they can honour the contract.

# 3 Sharing and Dividing the Work

Having roles and responsibilities is helpful in running an organized YAC. It helps keep the YAC on track. Make sure that the required jobs of each role are known to the people taking them on.

Take, for instance, the responsibility of minute taker. For McCreary this does not just mean taking minutes at meetings. The minute taker is also responsible for making sure the minutes are sent out to the rest of the group. This is very important to the YAC. Distributing the minutes makes sure everyone is kept up to date, and there is also a record of any decisions made by the group.

McCreary rotates roles such as the chair and minute taker for each meeting. Decide what works best for your group. You may decide to use more permanent positions. Timelines can also be assigned to these positions so that responsibilities can be rotated around providing more opportunity for learning and also depending on the age of the youth involved, less daunting (eg. chairing for two meetings then switching). Sharing prevents some YAC members from being overloaded. Ask new members to be involved in some roles, sometimes they just need to be asked.

Here are some roles that YAC members say make meetings run well:

## Chair

Keeps the meeting on track, facilitates discussion. Usually works out the agenda before the meeting. McCreary's YAC chooses a chair for the next meeting at the end of the current meeting.

## Meeting Contact Person

Responsible for updating contact information and contacting members to remind them of meetings and events. Keeps track of how many people are expected, which is important for planning food.

## Minute Taker

Takes minutes at meetings to record decisions made. Types up and distributes these minutes to the rest of the YAC and staff so everyone is informed.

## Process Watcher

Powell River also has a role for a thoughtful youth council member who informally keeps tabs on how the group is working and whether the Group Agreement is being followed. This person also monitors for equal airtime (speaking).



When taking on large projects, it helps to break up the tasks.

When McCreary's YAC organizes the B4 Conference they break the project into sub-committees:

### Social Committee

Organizes social activities, ice-breakers, and fun parts of the weekend conference.

### Logistics Committee

Organizes the behind the scenes work, like finding a location, booking transportation, finding resources and money to run the conference.

### Program Committee

Organizes which workshops and presenters will be at the conference.

# 4 Find Effective Ways to Communicate with Your Group

Effective communication within the group is important so that members know important things like when the next meeting is happening, or any special projects that are in the works. This sounds basic, but its really important! Find out for yourself what works well for your group. We suggest that you use more than one way to contact people. Different people may prefer different methods of contact. McCreary and Powell River use phone calling and emailing as the usual way to contact people. It is important that it is clear whose responsibility it is to contact members for events, and how long before meetings or events this contact is supposed to happen.



I joined the McCreary YAC because I want to give back to the community, and so I can keep out of trouble. I really enjoy being on the YAC because it makes me feel good to help other people. To teach others and gain new skills myself also is another reason why I joined the YAC. Helping people learn different skills and seeing things in a different perspective. Letting people know that they are great the way they are, maybe by blurting out random things or maybe letting someone know they did a good job at something they thought they would suck at. I believe that everyone has a purpose for something no matter what it is. They all deserve props just for trying.



I joined the YAC because Laura forced me to, and I'm really glad that she did, because who knows where I would be now!! It's a really great experience and one hell of an opportunity. I believe it has in some sense helped me become a better person by now wanting to get more involved in my community and becoming closer with everyone and making new friends.

The YAC is great and I think everyone should get more involved in their community.

Julie, McCreary YAC

# 5 Orientation Process for New Members

McCreary's YAC has begun using an application and orientation process for new members. An in-person orientation is a great introduction for new members to get to know the YAC. This is where new members meet with current members and share their experience with the YAC. It can be done one on one or in groups. It is also helpful to potential members because it gives them the opportunity to get a good look at the YAC and see if joining is something they are actually interested in. The orientation can be informal and could include an explanation of what the YAC is, any projects being worked on, norms and procedures of the group, what is expected from members, and anything else that is relevant... And most importantly, make it fun!

McCreary's YAC has an orientation booklet it gives to members once they join. It contains a list of members and contact information, a simple YAC history, what is expected from members, how to run meetings and other useful information.



These are the questions on the application form for McCreary's YAC. They allow the YAC to get a sense of who someone is and why they want to join. The questions are not difficult or long so they won't scare people away.

- How did you hear about the YAC?
- Why do you want to be on the YAC?
- What could you bring to the YAC?

# 6 Be Prepared for Transition

Your YAC should be prepared for transition in two ways: the transition of members, and the transition of the YAC's skills and interests.

The number of members in your YAC will increase and decrease over time. New YAC members join, and old YAC members will leave for different reasons. They might move on to other things, get busy with school or work, move, or their interests might change. Keeping this in mind is helpful, because your group can work to ensure that information about the YAC won't be lost during this process.

Another aspect of transition to be aware of is transition of skill and interest of the YAC. At McCreary the YAC has evolved over the past 10 years. Different groups bring different strengths and interests. The YAC will stay strong if the organization is flexible and can respond to the changes in the group.



# Keeping It Going

Now that the YAC is up and going, the next step is thinking about how to keep the momentum going, and keeping individuals involved and interested. Here are some of the ideas that YAC members identified as being particularly important for keeping them interested. The more of these things that your YAC has, the more likely it will be successful in the long run!

## 1 Committed Members are Important

Having a core group of committed and motivated members is a key ingredient in any YAC. Commitment can mean attending meetings, actively participating in discussions, following through on tasks, and being willing to put the time in to make projects a success.



Commitment starts with members, so the mix of people you have on your YAC can have an impact on what your group expects from its members. There is a balance between keeping a diversity of skill and experience on the council and getting things done. Diversity of skill and experience is important, but having experienced youth who can mentor new members helps in keeping the council running smoothly over the long run.

Commitment can be challenging! Like most youth, McCreary's YAC tries to balance their YAC time with their other activities (school, work, friends, or family). The YAC encourages its members to respond to messages, attend meetings, follow through on tasks etc. But the YAC is also understanding of members' busy and sometimes chaotic lives. Challenges in an individual's life can mean that a youth needs to step back from the YAC for a period of time. In McCreary's experience, having the number of members at 20 youth has worked well for meetings and projects.

What kind of commitment does your group need from its members?

McCreary's YAC doesn't have set terms of membership. Members are encouraged to be active, but can step away for a period of time if other priorities come up like school.

Powell River YAC asks its members to be fully present when at meetings and to follow through on tasks.

Has your group ever asked themselves, what makes them committed?

Our YACs identified what keeps them committed:

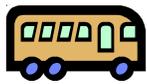
- ✓ gaining skills
- ✓ challenging themselves
- ✓ having fun
- ✓ making a difference

What are the reasons your group is involved?

# 2 Organizational Support

If your YAC is attached to a “parent” organization or group, this organization should be prepared to support the YAC. Having regular support gives the YAC stability.

Support Might Look Like:

-  funding for YAC meetings and projects
-  bus tickets for members
-  adult support people
-  access to computers, faxes or phones
-  providing a meeting place
-  photocopying

Support you can count on keeps a YAC going because it allows the YAC to focus on its goals. It will also allow you to think about the future as you know you have the resources there to back you up.

The McCreary YAC has its own office at McCreary. This is a place the youth can store all their materials and work on their projects with their own dedicated computer.

# 3 Realistic Objectives

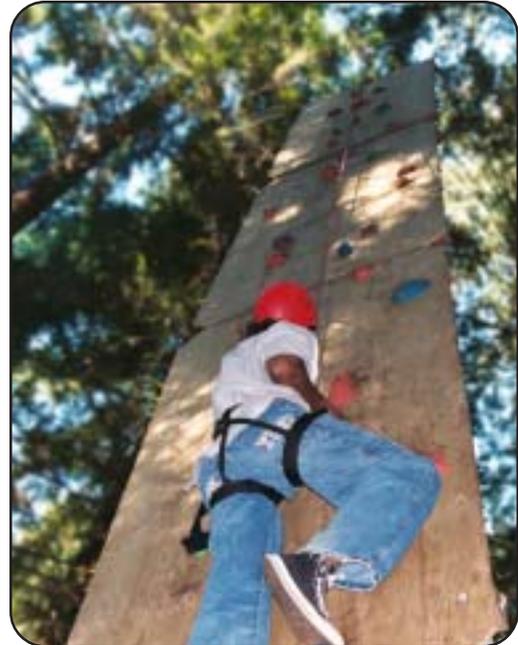
YAC members are more likely to stay involved and motivated if they feel that they are achieving something. Therefore, realistic objectives where YAC members can see the results are important. It's kinda obvious, but achieving things gives a sense of success when they are accomplished. The more things you succeed at, the more confidence the YAC will get. Not all projects or activities have results that you can see and be proud of immediately. In this case reflect with your group on what you are accomplishing over the long run.

Working on achievable objectives creates a common purpose and goal, as well as fosters teamwork.



Teamwork helps make the YAC run smoothly and that allows the YAC to achieve its objectives

Objectives can be very specific, like raising a certain amount of money, or organizing and facilitating a youth health workshop.



Questions to ask yourself:

Keeping in mind any goals you may have, what are 2 objectives for your group?

What will you need to achieve your objectives? (People, materials, meeting space, pens, paper, etc)

What will you actually do to achieve this goal? List specific activities your group will do to achieve this goal. List them in order as they occur.

# 4 Seeking Out Ties and Partnerships in the Community

Creating connections and partnerships in the community, either formal or informal, can increase the YAC's level of support in the community. Networking can lead



to more resources and opportunities. Networking can be achieved through advertising or publicity of events, inviting community members to events, volunteering at public functions or other outreach strategies.



*Powell River and McCreary YAC members at a workshop.*



Powell River's YAC has been successful because of its partnerships. A number of groups that work with youth and those that have financially supported the YAC have representatives on a "steering committee" for the YAC.

McCreary has had success with developing networks through projects. Through the B4 conference McCreary's YAC gets to know youth leaders and groups from across BC.

# 5 Provide Training Opportunities

YACs also need opportunities for training to increase their skills and capacities.

Of course, official training is not the only way that YAC members learn skills. When McCreary's YAC first formed, they immediately started working on a project. By doing this they developed skills. YACers can learn a lot by doing hands-on activities.

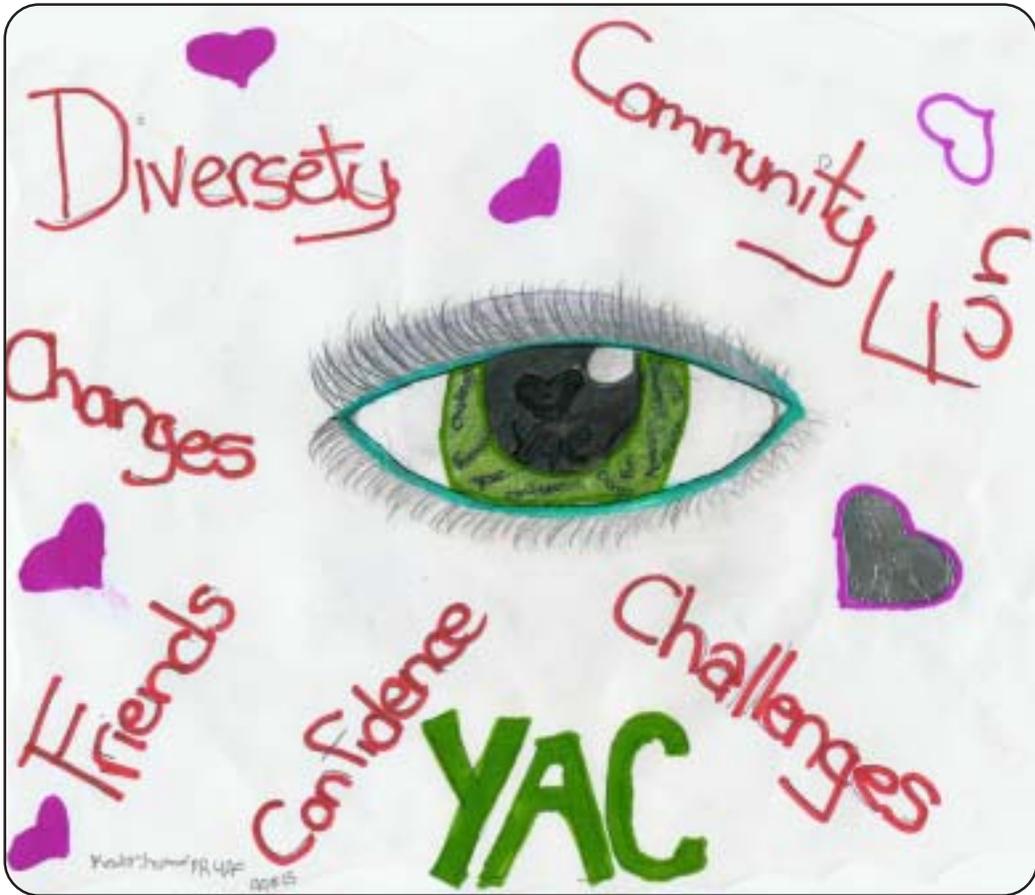


Examples of training that YACs might want are:

- ✓ Presentation skills
- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ Facilitation skills

**...What do you think will be useful for your YAC?**

Think about what kind of training would be appropriate to the activities that the YAC want to do. An example is public speaking training for YAC members who will be giving workshops.



*Kaila's artistic expression of her YAC*

# Adult Support

We use the term “Adult Support” to refer to any adult or staff member who is in a support role to a YAC.

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## 1 Be “A Guide on the Side, Not a Sage on a Stage”

YAC members want adult assistance sometimes, but they don’t want them to run the show. It is important for adult support to recognize the difference between being a support and running the group. “*A guide on the side, not a sage on the stage*” means that the adult support doesn’t tell the youth what to do, but rather stands on the side giving guidance and input where it is appropriate. The adult support should be a role model and mentor to the group.

Sometimes adult support must be there to give a push or keep a project moving. Adult support may also be needed to step in where there is a conflict or problem which is interfering with the group’s ability to function. It might be necessary to work one-on-one with members who are having some sort of issue with the group.

When working together it helps for the adult to use open ended questions, to help reveal the answers that the youth already have.



There are a great deal of resources on skills and effective strategies to engage youth, check in the appendix (page 24) for some resources that we like.

## 2 Managing Administrative Tasks

There are many aspects of running a YAC that are simply just way more practical for a adult support person to deal with. These are mostly logistical things which can be difficult for volunteers to find time to do. They include things such as keeping contact info in a central place, applying for grants, or even phoning people during business hours when most YAC members are in school.

Of course, this does not mean that YAC members cannot be involved in these things, but these are things that YACers have identified as being helpful for the adult support to take the lead on.

At McCreary, YAC members who have been hired in summer jobs often take on these admin tasks while they are in the office.



# 3 Be Open to Ideas

Adult support should be receptive to ideas from the YAC, even if at first glance they seem odd. Really good ideas can appear when they are least expected.

At the same time, YACers have pointed out the importance of constructive criticism. In a non-confrontational manner, adult support should challenge YAC members in thinking through their decisions.

For example, maybe “YAC member Scooter” has a crazy fundraising idea, “Adult Support Casey” should build on Scooter’s ideas and help him develop them into something useable. Casey should not ignore Scooter’s ideas and push his or her own agenda.



# 4 List of Good Skills To Have

Here are some qualities that YAC members identified as being helpful for the adult support person to have:



- ✓ Conflict resolution skills
- ✓ Ideas for team building activities
- ✓ Being encouraging
- ✓ Sense of humour
- ✓ Ability to stay on track
- ✓ Organized
- ✓ Mature, but not too mature
- ✓ Naturally friendly

# 5 Youth Friendly and Building Relationships

Adult support for a YAC has to be youth friendly. This means people who are understanding and supportive of the needs of the youth, and are willing to learn from them. Someone who can relate to, respect and be sensitive to the needs of the group. This person should not be afraid of taking risks, and should be open to doing the same teambuilding games and activities that the youth members do. This includes participating in silly icebreakers at conferences and meetings. And remember, be yourself!

Adult supports are most helpful when they can build a good relationship with the group. Having a good relationship can help a lot if there is ever a problem between the adult support and the YAC.



If possible, it is good to have more than one adult support person. Members may feel more comfortable approaching a particular person over another.

McCreary has four staff members who the YAC can come and talk to.

I was once a YAC member, and now I am adult support. Now I support the



YAC, and us adults support each other as well. Back then us YAC supported each other and we had no idea

what the adults did. But now I know –adults mentor, coach, and listen. They quietly work behind the scenes on anything that needs doing. And adults have to remember to take time out to support each other and to challenge ourselves –we need to keep learning as well!

Minda, McCreary Adult Support

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## The END (of the toolkit ...and the start of your YAC)

That's it! That's all the tips and tricks that we have to give. We want to remind you that there is no perfect model for a YAC that works for everyone. We don't want to tell you how to run your group, but rather share what we have found useful from our own experiences. Chances are some of it will be helpful. You may find that your YAC is completely different from ours, and that's cool.

So have fun and good luck.

# Appendix

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## TeamBuilding

### Challenge By Choice

This principle gives each participant the option to choose his or her own level of participation in activities. It's not an opportunity to withdraw from activities, but a chance to find alternative ways to participate that are more comfortable, for instance, observing a game instead of playing it.

For more info on Challenge By Choice:  
[www.wilderdom.com/ABC/ChallengeByChoice.html](http://www.wilderdom.com/ABC/ChallengeByChoice.html)

## Youth Resources

### Sharing a New Story: Young People in Decision Making

A report produced by The Foundation for Young Australians, which focuses on young people in decision-making. It offers a reflective toolkit for people working alongside young people in decision-making roles.

[www.youngaustralians.org/resources/downloads/sharing\\_a\\_new\\_story.pdf](http://www.youngaustralians.org/resources/downloads/sharing_a_new_story.pdf)

**Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement**  
A Canadian website and organization with lots of information about youth engagement.

[www.tgmag.ca/centres/](http://www.tgmag.ca/centres/)

### McCreary Centre Society

Yeah, it's us. Lots of information about youth health trends and reports, as well as interesting youth engagement projects (if your YAC needs a fun and informative project to do, check out *The Next Steps*).

[www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca) 😊

## Simple Icebreakers

### Move Your Butt (Active)

Have the participants sit in a large circle, with the facilitator standing in the middle. The facilitator says, "Move your butt if \_\_\_\_\_", (e.g. you have a tattoo, you like to dance, etc.). Then everyone who meets the description must stand up and try to find another empty chair somewhere in the circle. They are not allowed to choose the chair immediately next to themselves. The facilitator will also try to sit down in a chair that someone vacated. After everyone has settled into chairs, someone will be left standing. It's now their turn to say, "Move your butt if \_\_\_\_\_".

### The Squeeze Game (Cooperative)

Have participants stand in a circle and join hands. The leader then squeezes the hand of the person sitting on his or her right hand side. This person passes the squeeze on to the person sitting on his or her right side by squeezing his or her hand. The squeeze continues around the circle until it comes back to the leader. The leader then starts the squeeze again, this time challenging participants to squeeze as fast as they can. The leader can time how long it takes for the squeeze to go around the circle once and encourage participants to beat their record.

### Clothespin Chaos (Active)

Everyone gets three clothespins which they attach to their back. When told to, everyone runs around trying to take others' clothespins. If they grab someone else's they have to then clip it to their back. The person with the most clothespins on their back after 5 minutes wins!

**These are just some sample games your group could play. Type "Icebreaker Games" into any search engine and you will find lots more.**

# Project List

Here is a quick sample of some of the projects our YACs have done.

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## McCreary's YAC

### Breaking Barriers & Building Bridges Conference (The B4)

The YAC's pride and joy -a full weekend skill-building and leadership conference for youth. All workshops are led by youth, and cover a wide variety of skills and issue topics. The YAC is in the 10th year of running this conference.

### B4 on the Road

The YAC also facilitated B4 conferences around the province, first in Prince George, but also Williams Lake.

### Open Door Project

YAC members were hired to develop a survey for youth to grade how "youth friendly" the services in their community were.

### Doctor Project

A YAC member conducted a research project concerning youth in care and their experiences with doctors.

### Various Conference Presentations

On many occasions YAC members have presented at a variety of conferences, both for youth and for adults, on a variety of youth participation and health topics.

## Powell River & Tla'Amin YAC

### Girls Inc.

Self esteem workshops for teen girls.

### Opt for Straight Talk

Youth led workshop series and training covering exploitation and healthy relationships.

### Let's Educate About Drugs Carnival

Carnival event put on for more than 500 youth.

### Your Body, Your Mind! Let's talk About It!!

Youth led healthy relationship and communications skills workshops for grade 8 students.

### Powell River Idol

Hugely popular talent show!

### Youth Mental Health

Development of award winning puppet plays designed to raise awareness about mental health disorders in young adolescents.

### Youth Participation in Community Groups

YAC members have also been regular delegates at municipal meetings, chief and council meetings, Vancouver Coastal Health Community Advisory Committee, Building Blocks Committee for youth 13-19, Community Crime Prevention and Justice Program (Tla'amin Health Services), School District #47 Youth Health Committee, and the Let's Educate About Drugs Committee.