

Canada World Youth - Enhancing Aboriginal Youth Participation in Volunteer Cooperation and Leadership Programs.

Summary from two Debriefing and Evaluation Sessions with Aboriginal Youth Volunteers April 1st 2010 to March 31st 2011.

In March 2011, Canada World Youth hosted two debriefing sessions for the Aboriginal Volunteers who participated in 2010-11 YLA programming. The debriefing & training sessions provided the 71 youth volunteers with an opportunity to:

- learn about CWY initiatives to reach First Nations, Inuit & Métis communities;
- share their experiences in the Youth Leaders in Action program;
- provide recommendations & suggestions to improve programming for Aboriginal volunteers
- identify how to apply skills gained from program into their home community;
- clarify what role they can continue to play with CWY.

Volunteers were invited to attend debriefing sessions in either Yellowknife or Toronto. In total 20 Aboriginal youth participated. The youth were split into two groups and were split by program end dates and geographic locations. Three day sessions were planned in Yellowknife and Toronto.

Sharing Experiences

The three day gathering provided space for volunteers to share their overall experiences with one another. Debriefing sessions touched on issues experienced before and during their program.

Motivation to Volunteer:



Many of the Aboriginal volunteers desired a change in their lives so they applied for to CWY. Some of the volunteers did not do this for themselves, but to show youth in their communities what is possible.

Volunteers were eager to leave their comfort zones & live abroad. They would submerge themselves into another community and culture, while teaching others about their own Aboriginal culture.

The Youth Leaders in Action program sounded well rounded. Youth clearly identified how the program had a long-term impact on their own skill development.

Youth spoke about confidence, travel experience, leadership and employment skills. This included:

- interpersonal communication,
- language skills,
- leadership techniques,
- organizational skills,
- conflict resolution,
- facilitation,
- networking and
- coordination
- gender equity and
- diversity.

Youth appreciated receiving certificates confirming their successful completion in the program and some could also obtain university course credits at the end of their program.

Volunteers agreed the Youth Leaders in Action program was much more than they expected. They learned more about their strengths, weakness and interests. Their comfort zones, patience & toleration levels were tested and stretched. They began to understand how to better express opinions and identified obstacles that could get in the way of personal growth. Many became proud of being indigenous to Canada and being able to break down common stereotypes about Aboriginal people.

Their views of the world around them were broadened and their view of Canada was challenged.

Volunteers became more perceptive of human behaviour, United Nations Millennium Development Goals and common issues facing communities in Canada and the global south.

Among the sources of learning, the host families were seen as having a positive and vital role. A willingness to host, spend time together, and learn created a comfortable and a safe learning environment for the youth volunteers. Host families were also one of the most important sources enabling them to learn about the local culture. Some host families mirrored the volunteers' biological families, even though they were in a different cultural and socio-economic context.

Some teams which included multiple Aboriginal youth on a team. Youth on such teams talked about how the teams showed diversity among Aboriginal communities and helped develop strong links between different Aboriginal communities and provided an opportunity for them to help each other and create a peer support experience..

Post program

Volunteers were asked what changes would be made in their homes if more youth from their communities participated in their community. They responded by saying there would be more youth led initiatives and a stronger sense of community. Youth would be more likely to step outside of their comfort zone and try new things, aspire to do something different and broaden their opportunities. Alumni could network with one another and share their experiences. The community would be more aware of different realities and more open to change.

The youth expressed a strong interest in pursuing other international programs, post-secondary education, volunteer and employment opportunities with CWY and other community based organisations and staying connected to future CWY volunteers and alumni.

Selecting more aboriginal youth in each program will enable to ensure a mutual help and support system to share their experiences during the program and continue networking following their return to their communities .

Vibhor Garg: Manager, Volunteer Support Unit.

September 2011, in Yellowknife and Toronto.
