



Have Your Say!

MPP Yasir Naqvi Youth Town Hall Report

Summary

On August 11, 2009 approximately 50 youth ages 8 to 20 from across Ottawa met with Yasir Naqvi, MPP for Ottawa Centre, to discuss their views on issues impacting Ottawa and Ontario. Topics included technology, education, drugs, mentorship, and community building. The group's views and recommendations were insightful and important; this report outlines some of their ideas.

MPP Naqvi opened the discussion by stating that political leaders represent everyone – not just those of voting age. “Don’t buy into the concept that you are only the future,” said MPP Naqvi, “you are changing our community and the world today.”

Highlights from Discussion

Technology

- Using tools such as Facebook to organize groups or events can expand networks into diverse age groups and communities that may not be otherwise reached.
- Face-to-face meetings are still the best way to connect with people. Technology facilitates, but does not necessarily replace, personal meetings.
- Privacy is important: sharing information can be harmful to your personal and professional life (i.e., a potential employer visits your Facebook page).

Education

Participants wanted the opportunity to pursue a wider variety of skills, activities and knowledge, from more courses on media literacy to better support for students who do not want to go to university.

Curriculum:

- Provide high-school students with more opportunities to develop critical thinking skills – this should not only be for university students.
- Introduce practice exams and university-style teaching tools to senior high school classes.
- More arts funding, to create well-rounded students.
- Classes on media literacy should be widely available. Students are forming their identities and must be able to critically respond to media messages.

Career paths:

- Most students felt pressured to attend university by their parents, teachers and guidance counsellors. Part of this pressure is because high school teachers almost always have a university education, in contrast to college professors, who are more likely to have non-academic work experience.
- Suggestion to hire professionals trained in their fields to teach in high schools.
- Students were constrained in their course selection by the need to develop a career path at a young age. If students do have to select career-based courses, they need better support from guidance counsellors to do so.

Extracurricular activities:

- Transportation and money are often major barriers to participation.
- Participation in activities such as arts and volunteering should be credited in the standard curriculum.

Mentorship and community programs

Very few youth felt that they had access to mentors. The group called for small, community-based programs to take precedence over larger initiatives.

- Youth lack access to adults they can talk to without getting in trouble, for example to discuss drug use.
- Youth must recognize their influence on younger peers – they need to be the best image of themselves because their influence is important.
- There are fewer role models coming from within communities, in part because of smaller families.
- Youth were not familiar with their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Social programs are most effective when they start at a grassroots level, by beginning in a community and remaining tailored to that community. This is in contrast to the top-down imposition of major programs.

Drugs

Participants in the town hall discussed their personal experiences, including why youth use drugs and how they can help stop drug use.

- Violence and bullying are major obstacles to stopping the spread of drugs. Drug users and dealers use violence to intimidate others into silence.
- Drug dealers can also provide a sense of family or community to those seeking it. Older siblings and friends who use drugs influence younger peers to do the same.
- Stopping drugs has to be at the community level: community workers, mentors, and police must be present in areas where youth are, such as parks and malls.
- Alternatives to drugs must be provided, such as recreational programs, and programs that teach coping mechanisms to deal with peer pressure

Community Safety

The youth recognized that some communities were safer than others, usually based on income levels in particular communities. They called for different communities to work together and share resources, and wanted better communication and more frequent positive meetings between youth and police.

- Because crime is more prevalent in communities with lower income levels, communities need to work together and share resources.
- -For example, a community centre in a rich area with extensive resources should be accessible to those from less privileged communities.
- Youth don't feel connected to their school resource officers and would like more school visits.
- Regular police visits to at-risk neighbourhoods would reduce crime.

Conclusion

The group expressed an optimism and energy for the future. They were motivated to become more involved in their communities and saw a role for themselves in local projects. They expressed a desire to build on the connections made that evening by networking with each other and meeting again to continue the dialogue on local issues.