

Sioux Lookout Youth Forum gets to the core and beyond

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LAST week's Sioux

Lookout Youth Forum is being hailed as an overwhelming success by the students who took part in it, the people from the community who assisted with it, and the event's host Mayor Kathy Poling.

Taking place at the Legion November 19 and 20, the event was attended by about 45 youth of varying ages, ethnicities and genders.

The community forum was hosted by Poling, facilitated by New Vision Unlimited, featured an apple logo and carried the theme "Get to the Core." The idea behind the forum was to give young people an opportunity to express their ideas, concerns and dreams for Sioux Lookout.

Over the two days the youth participated in several activities, listened to guest speakers, and had opportunities to ask questions of community members who were there as resource people.

members learning what was on the minds of students, students learned what constraints and hurdles they would have to clear in order to turn their ideas into reality.

Neil Michelin and Laurie Moyer both talked about change being possible and staying positive.

Life-long Sioux Lookout resident Michelin said it was an honour to be asked to speak with the youth. "Having the opportunity to speak to the group of youth that was provided to me through the invitation, I realized something after the fact that I feel is really important.

The time that I spent sharing with them encouraging words and the importance of family and community is an investment.

It's an investment into their lives, into my life and the well being of this community. What I wanted to do was take a dollar and say that I believe in what's happening here today so much that I'm willing to invest a dollar and ask that if anyone agrees with what I'm

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In addition to key community

The kids really said what was on their minds

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saying make the choice and as well pledge a dollar to whatever the mayor and youth feel needs to be done. I think everything that was there was positive and they are the future of this community.”

Moyer, also a life-long resident of the town, stated, “My topic was change is possible. What I focused on just a little bit was growing up in Sioux Lookout and some of the challenges you faced. How sometimes it seemed you couldn’t make a difference. So what I told them is that change is possible and even though it can take a long time to get things done, just little by little things do happen. I kind of challenged them in the end to make a change. What do they want to be remembered for? They were a good group of kids to work with.”

She added of the forum,

“I think it really opened their eyes on how they can be involved and really empowered them.”

Sioux Lookout OPP Community Services Officer Constable Mark Gaudet talked with students about creating a new youth centre in addition to being a part of the forum as a resource person. He commented, “I was pretty impressed. I thought it was a great thing... the kids really said what was on their minds.”

As the forum progressed, the youth were asked to pick six goals they’d like to explore. Students broke into groups to work on them, making presentations during the afternoon of the second day to the public. The students used display boards shaped like apples in their presentations. Community members felt the presentations were insightful and very powerful.

The six goals the youth identified as priorities were:

Educational changes
– outdoor and environmental focus – global learning.

Working on events such as an adventure race and promoting activities for the winter carnival.

Improved youth programming/centre – music opportunities.

A new youth centre in town.

Aboriginal success and cultural sharing.
The possibility of using Cedar Bay to hold pow wows and offer cultural learning opportunities about all cultures.
Hate crimes/not safe/racism/bullying.
Increase safety in town by adding more lighting and ways to deal with racism and bullying.
Support services for youth grieving and suicide.
A powerful presentation on the issue of youth suicide and the need for proper counselling services.
Golden apple
The creation of a youth council to give youth a stronger voice in what happens in the community.
At the end of the forum the youth asked members of the community to sign five steps they'd plotted out to overcome the hurdles in the way of making their ideas happen.
Those steps were:
The youth would like to participate in a meeting before December 31 with town council and community organizations and youth interested in creating a youth council.
The youth would like to host a town council endorsed meeting with town organizations that offer youth counselling services in order to move the new ideas for youth support forward.
The youth would like town council to support and endorse a youth organized fundraiser for

the new youth centre and programs.
Have two youth sit on the youth centre planning team.
Participate in an action team endorsed by town council and develop cultural/creative learning opportunities for the youth of Sioux Lookout.
The apple display boards are available to be showcased by businesses and organizations.
Mayor Poling commented after the forum,
"It was a very powerful two days. We had lots of fun, but there was also lots of serious thinking that went on. They dealt with things like teen suicide, teen pregnancy, racism, bullying. They also wanted to deal with topics geared more toward having a youth centre, having a place of their own. They were also very interested in having a say in community life. They wanted to form a mechanism by which they can have input into the bigger decisions that are made in the community and that's how we arrived at the youth council idea. I'm really looking forward to working with the youth on something like that."
What a Sioux Lookout youth council will look like, what it will do and how it will function are still very much up in the air Poling said, adding that it will depend greatly on what the youth of the community want. For

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Bulletin Photo/Tim Brody

example, she said such a body could be tied in with the youth centre, it could advise town council or perhaps a student representative could be added to town council. "We're going to have to work together as a community to support our youth and start moving some of their topics and issues forward. I think we want to do that in a sort of empowering way where we're facilitating rather than doing for them," Poling said. "I think the steps are realistic and doable. I don't think the youth are being unreasonable at all. They've established what the next steps should be and are willing to help move them forward. We knew that this was going to be the first step in a process, that the forum was just the start of it." The next step will be to work with the youth on the youth council concept. "This is part of social and cultural capacity building and when you're thinking about the future of a community and you're building toward a strong and sustainable future, you have to include the youth because they're the ones that are going to be here long term," Poling added. New Vision Unlimited's Graham Thompson, Erin

Horvath and Beth Dasno facilitated the forum. Thompson said a lot of planning went into it involving more than 40 people from the community. Thompson and Horvath, in speaking after the forum, agreed it was a great success. A coffee house was held the first evening of the forum at the Legion. Part of the coffee house involved organizations and businesses from the community showcasing information relevant to youth. Thirteen-year-old Isaac Giles commented after the forum, "I thought it was a good idea right from the start, just for the youth to see what they need, to hear their opinions. I thought people really liked it and I think lots will come from this, a new youth centre for example. I think that's really going to get going. That thing on suicide was really emotional and I think something will happen with that too." He said of Poling hosting the event, "I think that's great. It shows how good a mayor she is, I think." Seventeen-year-old Samantha Hill said why she got involved in the forum. "There really isn't much to do in Sioux Lookout for youth and I'm incredibly bored every weekend." Her thoughts on the forum, "Very successful

and I'm very proud people showed up to listen to us."

She said of the mayor hosting the forum, "I think it's very good on her part and I'm very excited that she decided to get involved with us."

Seventeen-year-old Tim McKay commented, "I decided to get involved because I thought there wasn't a lot for youth to do."

He stated of the forum, "I think it went really good. There are a lot of ideas and people were open to accepting themselves and the ideas of other youth. I'm pretty confident this is going to work out."

He commented of the mayor hosting a youth forum in Sioux Lookout, "I think it's an awesome idea she did this."