

73 in 8

The Voices of Renfrew County and District Youth

The Renfrew County Youth Needs Assessment Report, also known as *Walking in a Good Way: The Path to A Youth Engagement Strategy* is a 73-page report that shared the voices of youth from Renfrew County and District.

This is an 8-page snapshot of what was learned and the suggestions from our organizations, The Students Commission of Canada and Three Things Consulting about what youth and adults can do to create a strategy that will make all of Renfrew County – the communities, schools and organizations that support you(th), stronger and better at meeting your needs. By working together, Renfrew County will become more youth friendly and a place that ALL young people can feel that they belong!



Renfrew County Youth Network

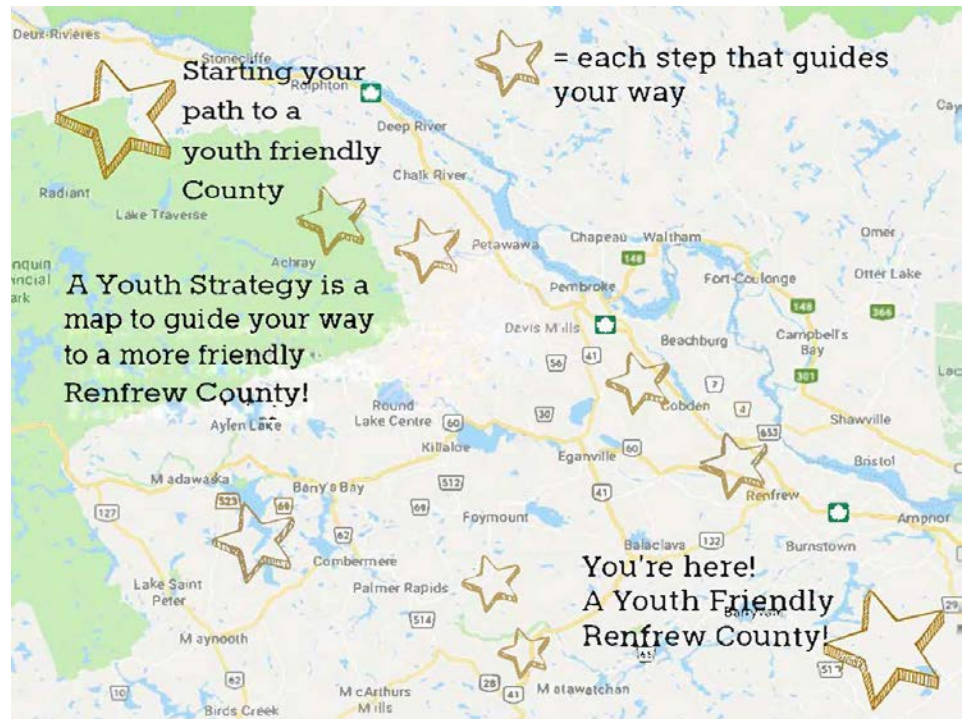
is 52 community partners, including youth, who want to make Renfrew County & District a better place to live for all young people.

The Renfrew County Youth Network (RCYN) wants to create a Youth Engagement Strategy. Youth and adults from RCYN have been talking about it, sharing their idea and gathering support from across Renfrew County for the past several years to move it forward.

A youth strategy is like using Google Maps: a series of steps (or directions) to get somewhere.

Three Things Consulting and the Students Commission were brought in by the Renfrew County and District Health Unit to support the RCYN to listen to young people in

Renfrew County about what they want for Renfrew County and, from that, create the map that can guide the way to the creation of a youth strategy!

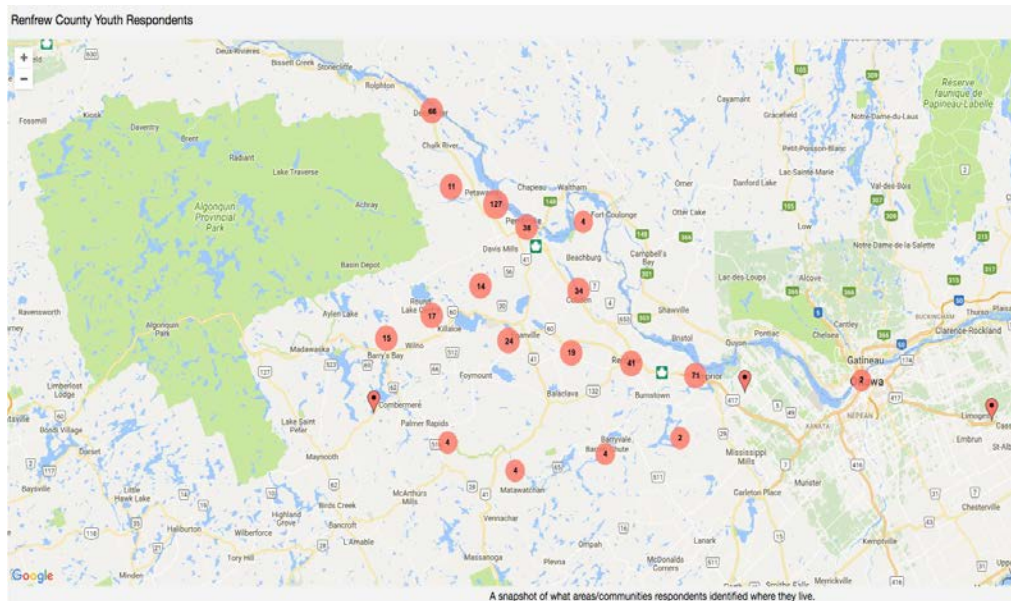


The report you have here are the ideas and experiences we heard through an online survey that **655** youth took part in and the voices of **77** youth who took part in community sharing circles hosted by RCYN members across the County. It also has our ideas about what steps can be taken to create a Renfrew County Youth Strategy – steps that youth, organizations and governments can take together!



In this report we use the terms 'youth' and 'young people' to represent those between 12 and 24 years old.

Through this process we heard from youth from throughout Renfrew County! That's important to make sure that everyone's voices are heard! Moving forward, it's just as important that no matter where someone lives they can take part and are supported with getting to/from activities and spaces!



Key Themes

Young people enjoy growing up in Renfrew County and all that it offers.

We heard appreciation for the strong sense of community found within Renfrew County, the outdoor activities and the positives of growing up in small, safe communities.

There is concern about mental health and wellness amongst young people in Renfrew County.

Adults and young people surveyed both noted substance use/abuse, depression and anxiety are the three biggest issues young people face.

Many young people felt that an increase in diverse activities, space for youth to connect and use their voice, along with additional resources would all contribute to healthier young people.

There is a lack of diversity within Renfrew County and young people know that this is not representative of the world they live in.

Young people shared that being different can be challenging. This can include race, culture, language, gender, sexual orientation and family income.



We were most successful in engaging you through high schools with the survey, so the majority of voices heard were 14 – 17 years old, with more than half of you working in some way and the majority not yet driving or having access to a vehicle. About 10% of you were in elementary school, and approximately 5 % in post-secondary schools and another 5% not in school respectively. We hope the Movement will engage more voices from these groups going forward.

We learned that younger youth preferred more structured activities including sports and arts opportunities and as youth get older, they are more likely to (or want to) take part in unstructured activities (like drop in spaces). We heard lots about space and young people looking for that – somewhere they can ‘be’ – that is safe, supportive and easy to get to.

We opened the Sharing Circles by talking about why we sit in a Circle and used The Students Commission of Canada’s Four Pillars: Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate™ as a guide for how we would meet.

***Respect:** We start with respect for the gift and strength that each person carries within: for young people, their idealism and their capacity to improve the world.*

***Listen:** With respect as our foundation, we learn to listen. We listen not just with our ears, but with our heads, hearts and all of our senses. We listen actively, intensely, not just to words, but to silences, to deeds, to experiences.*

***Understand:** To understand is to go beyond listening, to process what we have heard from others, to reflect upon the new knowledge and gifts given to us.*

***Communicate:** The beginning of action, this is when the obstacles fall away. We create plans with others and implement them to make a positive difference in our world.*

These Pillars are the values of the Students Commission; one of the first steps in Renfrew County will be to determine the values that will move a youth strategy forward.

We used different ways to get input from young people, including *The Web of Strength*, to ask key questions and explore young people's ideas and experiences, while building their comfort in participating. They included:

1. How do you influence your friends to do something you want to do?
2. What matters most to you as a young person growing up in Renfrew County, and why?
3. Have you ever had an experience where you felt genuinely heard?
 - a. If so, how did it happen?
 - b. If not, what would need to happen for you to feel that way?
4. What does a leader look like?



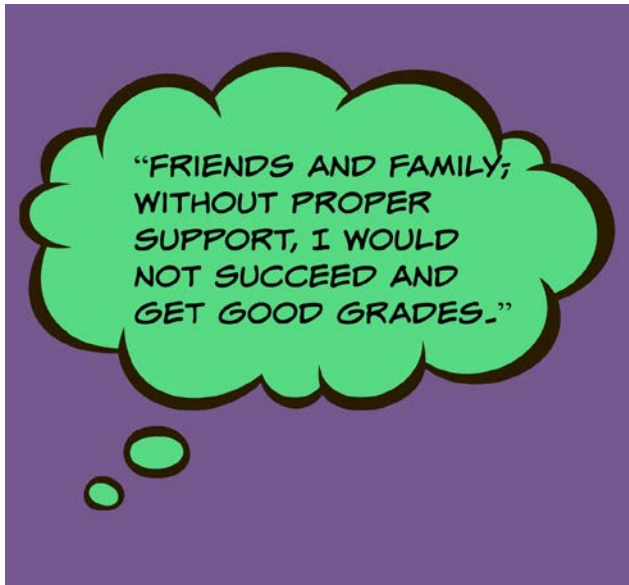
Influencing Friends

Sometimes it takes one young person to get another involved in new things, like creating a youth strategy. We heard youth influenced their friends to get involved by using encouragement, being persistent, telling them the highlights of something and simply asking them to get involved. An important lesson: **just ask!**



What Youth Value in Renfrew County

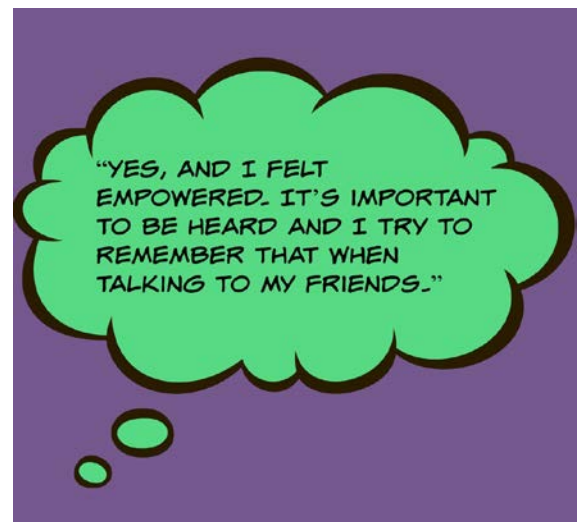
What young people from Renfrew County valued most about where they are growing up were their family and friends and the small communities in Renfrew County, in particular what comes with that such as feeling safe, having access to the outdoors and freedom.



Some shared what mattered to them to make Renfrew County more youth friendly were having spaces for youth to hangout and relax, some with planned activities and some that were just open for youth to 'be'. We also heard about a need for more mental and physical health services for all young people.

Being Heard, Not Heard

The young people said that they felt being heard, understanding the hurt of not being heard properly and having a good open space to be heard were all important for a youth strategy.



They also talked about past choices and how they have acted in the past made being heard difficult sometimes; they felt adults wouldn't listen to them because of that. They expressed the need for people to listen and understand them regardless of their past choices and that their voice and needs mattered.



Youth Views on Leadership

We heard from the young people that leadership could be seen in many young people (and adults). In their view, leadership is when someone assigns tasks to everyone while still doing things themselves. Leadership is being on the same level as each other and being a good role model for everyone else. Many young people see themselves as potential leaders in

moving forward with the creation of a youth strategy in Renfrew County.

Key Recommendations

Creating a youth strategy is about creating a movement where young people are valued, celebrated, honoured and the importance of working together with youth and adults matters. To do so, there will need to be a group of diverse youth AND adults to help support your ideas and the development of the movement. This means **YOU** have something to share and your voice matters! Some key recommendations were made based on what we heard and learned and are our suggestions to help the RCYN move forward on this journey.

Recommendation 1: Create a movement which is rooted in shared values and shared goals with a diverse group of youth and other partners.

Recommendation 2: Build upon the strengths of the RCYN and its membership to work together on creating the youth strategy while members identify how/what they can share to help create the movement.

Recommendation 3: Continue to create space for youth to share ideas and experiences to influence a youth strategy while recruiting and engaging diverse youth. Be creative. Be respectful. Be intentional.

Recommendation 4: HAVE FUN! Relationships will be developed, and some will be life-long. Foster those between youth and those between youth and adults, where both benefit from each other greatly! Make sure to have fun along the journey!

What Can You(th) Do?

Here are our ideas how **you(th)** can continue walking in a good way to the creation of a Renfrew County Youth Strategy!

1. Volunteer with the RCYN to organize meetings and activities to keep youth voices being heard.
2. Invite your friends to come with you to these activities!
3. Follow RCYN on social media and encourage your friends to do the same: Snapchat events and activities, share opportunities online and help increase the number of followers of RCYN social media channels!
4. Ask your friends and adult allies in your life to get involved with promoting and supporting the movement in different ways, helping drive, volunteering, doing survey's, etc.
5. Take a role in the ongoing meetings that are organized: offer to drive others, help keep track of who comes, organize community building activities, or share your ideas in the discussions!
6. Help determine the goals, mission, vision and values for the movement.
7. Organize, plan and host specific events that work with what you like to do to get more diverse youth out sharing their ideas!
8. Keep taking the opportunities to have your voice heard, share and learn.
9. When it comes time to create the strategy be a part of the writing sessions to help with making sure that the youth voice is driving it forward.
10. Help support getting different groups like schools, businesses and governments involved with the youth strategy.

Finally...know that you and your voice matters. You are important and so are your experiences, ideas and expertise (yup – you are the expert on growing up in Renfrew County today). You belong in Renfrew County AND as part of the process that will make sure your younger siblings, cousins and friends – that they too know that they belong.