

On June 5th, 2012, **Critical Crossroads: Youth, Criminal Justice and Literacy** brought together a national forum of experts in education, social services, and the justice system to initiate a broad-based conversation and encourage action on the issue of literacy for youth in conflict with the law. Teachers, politicians, police, parole officers, students, community workers, social workers, youth workers and volunteers were among those who attended conferences held concurrently in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto and Halifax.

As context for the conferences, Frontier College provided a literature review and discussion paper, which outlined promising practices as well as gaps in Canadian programming and research and also commissioned a Leger Marketing national public opinion poll.

A keynote panel discussion in Winnipeg was moderated by University of Winnipeg President Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, and featured panelists Justice Murray Sinclair (Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), Chief Dale McFee (President of Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police), YOUCAN CEO Dave Farthing and Frontier College President Sherry Campbell.

The panel discussion was webcast live to each of the other conference locations, with conference participants and online viewers invited to submit questions by Twitter or email.

The Leger Marketing poll revealed, among other things, that the public believes education is more important than employment, recreation, or a stable home life, in terms of keeping youth out of jail.

Here's what happened at the **Local Conferences...**

Edmonton: Kurt Sandstrom, Assistant Deputy Minister of Alberta Justice addressed participants, followed by workshops and discussion

Toronto: an address by the Honourable R. Roy McMurtry was followed by workshops and presentations

Winnipeg: the conference was addressed by Kevin Chief, Manitoba's Minister of Children and Youth Opportunities.

Vancouver: the McCreary Centre Society and PLEA Community Services led a session on building protective factors in the lives of youth involved in the criminal justice system, and Jamie Lipp of the BC Ministry of Justice led a discussion on next steps.

Halifax: research, strategies and programs were presented by Pat Gorham of the Nova Scotia Criminal Justice Association, Lorri Bower, Manager of Nova Scotia's Offender Programs, and Matthew Thomas and Kylene Mellor of the Restorative Justice Society

From the participants:

"I appreciated the holistic and social dynamic approach to literacy factors."

"Thank-you for the day and the reminder of all the hard work that has been done and needs to be done."

"Frontier College does amazing work and I am grateful for the outreach!"

"I appreciated the day very much, and I'm grateful that Great-West Life sponsored this important event. Otherwise, I would not have been able to attend."

FORUM/CONFERENCE RESULTS & SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Attendance: 513

- Halifax – 73
- Toronto – 185
- Winnipeg – 104
- Edmonton – 45
- Vancouver – 42
- Joined by webcast – 64

Local Conference Discussion Results

These were the key issues identified in the local conferences, in discussions and feedback following the webcast panel and other local sessions:

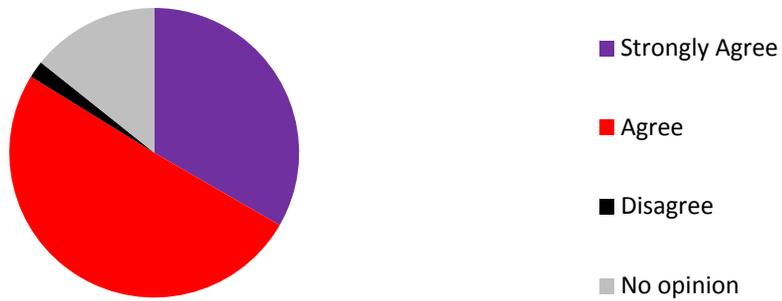
- We all know the challenges. Now we need to focus on practical, concrete solutions.
- Collaboration across sectors and organizations is the only way to tackle the issue and achieve results. A coalition of agencies can have more influence on policy & funding as a larger group (i.e. Peel region's ShareED)
- The most important thing is early intervention and involvement of parents.
- Race is a factor that must not be overlooked. For Aboriginal youth as well as Afrodiasporic & immigrant youth.
- A crucial ingredient for success is offering role models youth can identify with.
- Educators need to make room for learning materials and methods that youth can relate to.
- Youth need to be involved in the discussion.
- The funding system needs to recognize the importance of early intervention and of prevention, rather than providing support only once youth have already entered the justice system.
- It's necessary to recognize the difference between youth who are struggling because of a learning disability and youth who are struggling because of a lack of support at home.

Feedback Results

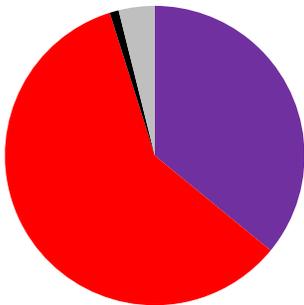
Online evaluations returned - 122

Webcast panel

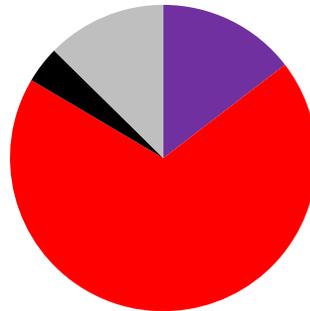
"The Critical Crossroads discussion paper provided relevant and engaging background materials on Youth, Criminal Justice and Literacy."



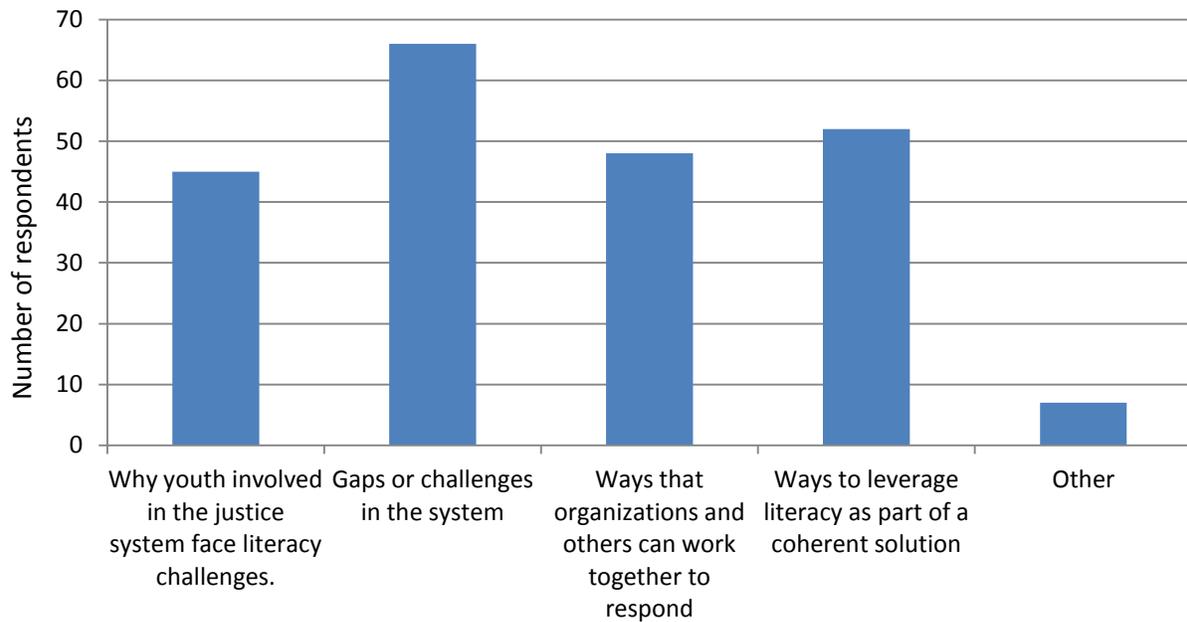
The webcast panelists were informative and insightful.



The discussion paper and webcast panel will help to further our work related to this issue.



"What were the most important points raised during the webcast panel?"



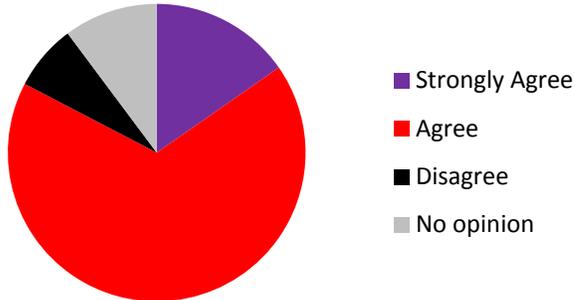
"Are we able to reach and support enough of the youth who are facing challenges? Are there other systemic things that cause problems like the effects of growing social inequality?"

"I'm not sure we (as a community) are doing enough to support our youth with their literacy needs. I think a tighter coordination of programs between agencies would be a good first step."

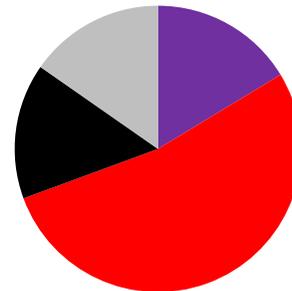
"With the new legislation (in Manitoba) that students must remain in school until 18, the role of the non-profit youth serving agencies could change to become real partners with the schools - as some youth, particularly those involved in the justice system, are school phobic - with good reason."

Local Conferences

The local workshops / presentations / discussions gave me ideas or insights that will contribute to my work on this issue.



I made connections with others that will help me in my work on this issue.



Conclusion & Next Steps

Literacy is critical to both the reduction and prevention of criminal involvement for young people. Critical Crossroads: Youth, Criminal Justice and Literacy is a call to action for holistic and coordinated services and programming for youth in trouble with the law in Canada whether before, during or after incarceration.

As a result of the Critical Crossroads: Youth, Criminal Justice and Literacy panel and conferences we have identified the following next steps:

- Take the discussion to key influencers who can use relevant literacy research to inform decisions on policy and programming for youth at risk of offending and youth living in or moving on from incarceration.
- Establish and share best practices with those who police, sentence, monitor and support youth before, during and after incarceration, so that they are aware of the importance of literacy and have strategies they can use to support literacy development and reduce the impacts of low literacy.
- Conduct further research to clearly demonstrate the correlation in Canada between literacy and youth who re-offend.

Critical Crossroads: Youth, Criminal Justice and Literacy was generously sponsored by Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life through their national corporate citizenship program.