

YOUTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the spring of 2008, the Yukon Human Rights Commission (YHRC) did a survey of Yukon youth between the ages of 13 to 25 and received responses from 84 youth in Whitehorse and 58 from Destruction Bay, Haines Junction, Mayo, Ross River, Watson Lake and Stewart Crossing.

Following are some highlights from the survey:

1. What do youth know about human rights and YHRC?

- 55% said they knew "a little bit" about the Yukon *Human Rights Act*, whereas 40% said they knew "nothing."
- 78% said they did not know what the Yukon Human Rights Commission does.
- 94% said they had never used the services.

2. What are sources of information for youth on human rights?

- 46% who knew about human rights learned about human rights at school.
- Fewer received information from parents or family members and advertising such as posters, TV commercials and You Tube.
- Smaller numbers gave teacher or counselors and the YHRC website as sources of information.

3. What do youth say about human rights education?

- 91% of the youth said that they need to know more about human rights and thought that they should learn about it in school classes.
- Other suggestions for ways to learn about human rights included engaging TV and radio commercials, colourful posters, lively workshops, conferences, accessible on-line information.

4. Do youth think their human rights are protected?

- 89% think that their human rights are protected.
- 98% who answered did not think it was fair that the definition of sexual orientation in the *Act* limits the ability of people under the age of 19 to file a human rights complaint based on sexual orientation and 88% thought that the law should be changed.

5. What is the experience of youth with discrimination?

- 62% said they experienced discrimination based on one of the personal characteristics protected under human rights law.
- The largest number experienced discrimination based on age, followed by national origin and then ancestry, including colour and race, and sex or gender.

- 65% of those who answered said they had experienced discrimination at school with a smaller number mentioning work as another source.
- 53% said they had discriminated against another person mainly at school with smaller numbers at work.
- 82% said they knew someone who had been discriminated against, harassed or bullied, or knew a person who discriminates, harasses or bullies others.

6. What do youth do when faced with discrimination?

- 59% said that they “ignored it, didn’t do anything about it.”
- Next most frequent answer was “handled it by getting into a fight with the person” or by “talking to the person” or by “talking to a parent or guardian.”
- Fewer mentioned they “talked to a teacher, counselor or adult that they trusted.”
- A handful said “someone helped to mediate or settle the issue” and “I put in a complaint to the person in charge.”
- 79% said that they had tried to stop someone from bullying or harassing someone.

Recommendations

a) Human rights education

- Youth awareness of human rights was low and many mentioned that schools should provide this information. Ideally this should be integrated into the existing school curriculum and would be specific and relevant to the current learning outcomes under social studies and personal planning particularly in Grade 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11.
- Youth need to know how to prevent discrimination, but also how to deal with it when it occurs, and how to support others who may be experiencing discrimination and harassment at school or in the workplace.
- Posters, online resources, workshops and conferences, TV and radio commercials are other ways of providing human rights education.

Action:

- Financial resources need to be sufficient to allow for adequate public education programming.
- Yukon Dept. of Education, Yukon Teachers Association, youth groups and YHRC need to partner to explore ways of providing human rights education in the schools.

b) Sexual orientation

The existing wording is out of date and not in line with the *Charter*, current protection in other jurisdiction and leading human rights cases in Canada.

Action:

The definition of sexual orientation in the *Act* should be amended to extend protection by this ground to minors (people under 19 years).