

YOUTH SURVEY REPORT

In the fall of 2007, the Yukon Human Rights Commission distributed a general survey to youth in one Whitehorse and one rural high school and it was determined that students had very limited knowledge of human rights and did not generally use the services of YHRC. Following the initial survey we decided to use an online survey as part of our pilot project utilizing a youth related website and blog during May and June 2008. This was developed with the help and advice of youth volunteers and a local youth oriented group, B.Y.T.E. (Bringing Youth Toward Equality). We had hoped for a much larger response to the survey, but we believe that the comments from youth provide some valuable insight into their views and knowledge of human rights.

1. Profile of respondents

We received a total of 142 responses to the survey, 86 of them female respondents and 56 male respondents ranging in age from 13 to 25 years old. The majority of respondents completed the survey online. There were also some print copies of the survey completed, which were inputted into the data. The print copies received were from on-site visits at two Whitehorse high schools, and from rural high schools, where teachers assisted in the distribution. There were 84 respondents from Whitehorse, with the remaining from Destruction Bay, Haines Junction, Mayo, Ross River, Watson Lake and Stewart Crossing. There were also 6 responses from 30 to 69 year olds, but their comments were not included in the results.

2. Survey findings

a) *Knowledge of human rights and YHRC*

Fifty-five percent of those who responded said they knew "a little bit" about the Yukon *Human Rights Act*, whereas 40% said they knew "nothing". Fifty-six percent said they knew how the *Act* protected them from discrimination. Seventy-eight percent of those who responded said they did not know what the Yukon Human Rights Commission does and 94% said they had never used the services. Of those who had used the service, four had received information for a school project, while a couple had mentioned hearing a speaker or receiving advice about what to do about discrimination. Only one had made a human rights complaint.

Seventy-two percent did not know there is no charge for YHRC services, although 71% knew that the human rights process is confidential. Eighty-five percent did not know that there was a 6 month time limit to file a complaint. Only 39% thought that the 6 month time limit was not enough time to file a complaint. Various comments related to the time limitation were as follows:

Some people take longer to be able to come forward and actually admit that they had their rights violated. There are people that don't want to file a report because they don't want to create a hassle, but after some time they need to do something about it, if it's been longer than 6 months.

I've thought 6 months is enough time for [to] put on [in] the complaint, but only when people know well the way how to do it, where to come to make a complaint.

Not for youth learning about it in school. They might not learn it until the end of the school year (Sept-June). Maybe 8 months?

Some youth may feel that it is their fault, and they did something wrong or they are ashamed about what happened so they do not do anything for a long time and then when they finally have the courage to tell someone it has been too long and they can no longer file a complaint.

b) Information sources on human rights

Forty-six percent of the respondents who knew about human rights learned about human rights at school.

To a lesser extent other sources of information included parents or family members and advertising such as posters, TV commercials and You Tube. A very small number gave teacher or counselors or the YHRC website as sources of information.

Ninety-one percent of the youth said that they need to know more about human rights and thought that they should learn about it in school classes. Some students gave the following reasons:

Because you may not be taught it anywhere else.

It's good to be informed about those kinds of things, in groups. It gives everybody an equal understanding of their rights and everyone else's rights as well.

Human rights is an important subject. Students should know about their rights to be payed [paid] and safe at work. Child labour, sexual harassment and all other kinds of stuff like that.

Some suggestions in addition to school, for ways to learn about human rights included:

Informative commercials that are fun and entertaining and not sad or depressing would be a good way to learn about human rights.

...movies or commercials would be great just because youth are glued to the tube. In class is just as great so long [as] the presenter makes it fun – an attention getter!

The best methods to get more information to youth is probably occasional in-class seminars, colourful posters in the community, and easily accessible online information.

...Posters and radio ads would be effective. The target needs to not only be to those who are in school though. A lot of youth who have their rights violated are those who may not be attending school regularly, if at all. Group homes and youth centres would be ideal places as well.

Class, movies, conferences.

c) *Whether or not youth human rights are adequately protected*

Eighty-nine percent of the youth think that their human rights are protected. In some cases the responses reflect limited knowledge of human rights in the Yukon and comments sometimes referred to human rights issues such as child labour, right to an education, freedom of speech, etc. Other comments that indicated limited protection of youth's human rights were as follows:

Our human rights are protected but polite discrimination still exists.

I think that youth rights are often violated by landlords, employers and police.

They probably are, but human rights aren't as globally accessible, simply because most people don't know about it, so a lot of abuse goes unnoticed since people either can't be bothered to go through with all the paperwork or they just don't know about human rights.

I do think that as a youth there are some disadvantages, people treat younger people with less dignity and respect simply because of age, but over all, I think they are protected.

d) *Suggestions for changes to the Act*

When asked if there is anything that should be included in the *Act*, the following suggestions were provided:

2 comments re: bullying and online threats. *Protection from bullying, some sort of protection from being treated poorly in a school situation (i.e. made to feel dumb or not treated the same as "smarter" students). Protect somehow from online abuse in chat rooms and other such media*

2 comments re: sexual orientation. *Given how old the Act is, sections pertaining to protection of rights for homosexuals and transgendered people probably need to be updated.*

Three comments talked about general education about the process:

Stricter enforcement of rights for youth, proper complaints processes within police and government, education on youth human rights and how to exercise them.

YHRC should have more workshops to get well contact [connected?] with the employee group.

Specific information surrounding youth, especially age based discrimination, would be useful to include and publicize, aimed especially at the youth market.

e) Experience of discrimination by youth

Sixty-two percent of youth 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.

Age discrimination

Forty-four percent of the youth thought they had experienced discrimination based on age. Those who experienced discrimination made the following comments:

Not through wages, but definitely through interactions with other employees - as a young worker I know I have not been taken as seriously as older employees at times.

When I was in my teens it was worse. Like when you're shopping in a store, staff would follow me. And one time they even said I stole something. So I told them to look through my stuff and when they didn't find anything to apologize to me.

I was paid a lower wage "under the table" because I was young.

Sex discrimination

Forty-four percent of the youth said they had experienced sex discrimination. Some comments were as follows:

I've grown up playing hockey and hunting and other activities like that and there have been a few times that I've heard the comment "you can't do that as good as a guy", "girls can't play hockey", and "never send a woman to do a man's job".

I know someone that worked [at] a car company and did the same work as the females but was paid about \$7 more than they were and I knew that because I knew the male personally and he told me that the manager was a racist and sexist.

Sexual orientation

The definition of sexual orientation in the *Act*, limits the ability of youth under the age of 19 to file human rights complaints based on sexual orientation. Ninety-nine percent of the youth who responded did not think it was fair, and 88% thought that the law should be changed. Some comments made by youth were as follows:

School is probably the worst place for someone to be bullied because of their sexual orientation. It is not fair and makes no sense whatsoever.

It is not something that you decide on, your sexuality is the way you are born and can be fully defined while you are still younger than 19.

...people should have that right to be protected no matter what their age. No matter how old a person is, the effects are exactly the same with discrimination, so why not should the help for it be?

Hate messages

When asked if they had been exposed to hate messages, 44% said that they had, but on reviewing their comments, many appeared to not understand the meaning of "hate messages". They did not necessarily link it to one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination or it occurred in settings not protected under human rights (i.e., on the street, general graffiti). Some were cautious about the inclusion of hate messages and expressed concerns about freedom of speech:

...I do fear cutting off creativity and imagination, sometimes free speech and thought cover risky topics, so you have to be careful what areas you enforce.

...I think protection against hate messages (personal or published) and related material is necessary. However, the line between protection and possible censorship, in regards to literature could be thin.

f) Youth response to discrimination

For those youth who had experienced discrimination and the 66 youth who responded to the question, 65% of them said they had experienced it at school, with a smaller number mentioning work as another source. The vast majority, 59% said that they "ignored it, didn't do anything about it". Smaller numbers, 17 to 18% said they "handled it by getting into a fight with the person" or by "talking to the person" or by "talking to a parent or guardian". About 11% mentioned they "talked to a teacher, counselor or adult that they trusted". Fewer than 5% said "someone helped to mediate or settle the issue" and "I put in a complaint to the person in charge."

When asked whether or not they thought they had discriminated against another person, 53% said they had, with the majority saying it occurred at school. A smaller number mentioned work as another place where it occurred.

When asked if they knew someone who had been discriminated against, harassed or bullied, or a person who discriminates, harasses or bullies others, 82% said they did. Seventy-nine percent said that they had tried to stop someone from bullying or harassing someone. The kinds of actions that were mentioned are as follows:

Yes, I stopped kids my age on the bus from bugging little kids. It was fine, they stopped. I do not speak up to older people, people I don't know, or people who seem angry because I am afraid they will turn on me.

I have stood up for friends in various situations, and choose to no longer associate with people who harass and bully others.

In high school there are many situations of bullying and while defending someone it just ended up in resulting in a bigger fight.

I once told off a man harassing a woman at the bar. A fight ensued, I won, that time. To be honest, this happens all the time.

g) General comments from youth

Youth expressed appreciation for the survey and an opportunity to respond and included comments such as:

Glad to hear that the Act is being reviewed – I hope that positive changes are made and put into effect.

I appreciate the fact that there is so much room for opinions in this survey.

I think harassment in the Yukon is getting out of hand. People's rights are being walked on all the time. It doesn't matter what colour you are, what religion or how old you are because it [is] happening to everyone. It needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

One person was critical of the survey and thought that the *"question[s] were loaded in such a way that an individual would naturally react in a certain way. . . If the survey is to provide some legitimate information and some legitimate opinions then it needs to be changed. I can say with some certainty that my answers would be very different if the questions were not so offensively weighted and loaded as they are."*

3. Recommendations

a) Human rights education

One of the themes that has appeared in this survey and in previous school surveys done in the fall of 2007, is the need for human rights education for youth. Many youth said they had experienced discrimination based on age, national origin, ancestry, including race and colour and sex. Most of the incidents they said occurred at school.

Youth awareness of human rights was low and many mentioned that school should provide this information. We did not determine whether or not there was any difference in awareness between rural or Whitehorse students. Many youth who said they had experienced discrimination in school said they had largely ignored it. This may be due to lack of awareness of their rights, but also lack of support in dealing with the issue. Only a handful used school or community resources to assist them in dealing with the discrimination. Because of their lack of knowledge of human rights law, the question arises as to whether or not they actually experienced discrimination as defined by the law. Although there is a need for overall public education on human rights, many students mentioned that school is the environment where this education should be provided. Ideally this should be integrated into the existing school curriculum. Human rights is relevant to the learning outcomes under social studies and personal planning.

Discussion of human rights law could begin in Grade 3 if not sooner, in relation to the personal rights and responsibilities affecting the well-being of school and

community as currently covered in the curriculum learning outcomes. Further discussion could occur in Grade 5 Social Studies in relation to discussion of immigration and the contributions of immigrants and the discrimination that has occurred in the past. Grade 6 Social Studies covers the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and Grade 11 Social Studies explores human rights law and issues. As well, Personal Planning in Grade 9 and 10 emphasizes learning outcomes related to “respect for others”, which links to human rights issues such as harassment-free learning and work environments, anti-discrimination, sexual harassment awareness and other issues related to living in an inclusive and respectful community. Youth need to be aware of 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.

Youth also mentioned other ways, other than through school related activities, in which to provide education about human rights. Posters, online resources, workshops and conferences, TV and radio commercials were mentioned. With limited financial and human resources, the Commission has had limited opportunities to provide these in the past. Educational activities have largely been funded through outside grants and contributions solicited from the community. YHRC has responded to requests from teachers and initiated educational activities to promote various international days related to human rights. We have also provided recommendations to the Educational Reform Project regarding the inclusion of human rights into the curriculum.

Action:

- Financial resources need to be sufficient from the Yukon Government to allow for adequate public education programming covering human rights.
- Yukon Department 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 consistent with the *Charter* and 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).

Conclusion

Although the number of responses are small, the youth survey has provided a glimpse into the experience of discrimination and the views and knowledge of human rights of Yukon youth between the ages of 13 to 25 years old.

The survey indicates a need for more human rights education, especially integrated into the existing school curriculum. Youth knowledge of human rights is limited, and this likely impacted the accuracy of the comments related to their experiences of discrimination. Some of the situations may not have fallen under discrimination based on territorial human rights law.

Education on human rights and responsibilities is an area in which the Department of Education, Yukon Teachers Association, youth groups and the Yukon Human Rights Commission could partner.

The only area in which youth expressed strong support for change in the *Act* is in relation to the protection from discrimination of people under 19 years with regard to sexual orientation.

**Appendix A:
Yukon Human Rights Commission Youth Survey on Human Rights
May 2008**

The Yukon Human Rights Commission (YHRC) would like to get your views about human rights in the Yukon. (You could win an iPod or a gift certificate if you complete the survey!) The survey is completely confidential and your name and other personal information will not be shared.

The Yukon Government is doing a review of the Yukon *Human Rights Act*. YHRC would like to be prepared with some recommendations for changes based on the views of Yukon youth.

We will use your views to help us to identify areas in need of change in human rights law and in the way that we provide services to youth. We will be preparing a report in the spring of 2008.

Please respond to the questions and/or check off the box that best fits your answer. The ones marked with a * must be answered in order to qualify for the contest draw. Add comments if you would like.

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. * Are you male____? Or female ____?
2. * How old are you?_____
3. * What community do you live in?_____

B. YUKON HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

1. How much do you know about the Yukon *Human Rights Act*?
 A lot
 A little bit
 Nothing
2. Do you know how the Yukon *Human Rights Act* protects you (e.g. protection from sexual harassment, or discrimination based on race, age, sex, etc)?
 Yes No
3. How did you learn about human rights?
 I do not know about my human rights
 From my parents or family members
 Learned it at school
 Teacher or counselor gave me information
 Read about it on the Yukon Human Rights Commission website
 Saw advertising (poster, TV, youtube, etc.)
 Other – please explain _____
4. Do you think youth need to know more about human rights?
 Yes No

5. Do you think you should learn about human rights in school classes?
 Yes No Why or why not?

C. THE YUKON HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Please read this scenario and answer the questions below.

The Yukon Human Rights Act is 20 years old and Yukon lawmakers are in the process of reviewing it to make changes to it. It protects you from discrimination in your workplace, in getting public services you receive such as at school, or at a government office or a business (restaurant, theatre, etc.) and in your housing (renting a place to live). And it protects you from many different kinds of discrimination based on your age, race, sex, religion, physical or mental disability and many others.

1. * Do you think that as a youth your human rights are protected?
 Yes No Why or why not?
2. * Can you think of anything that should be included in the Yukon *Human Rights Act*?
3. * Do you think that you know enough about your human rights?
 Yes No
How would you like to learn about them? (movies, commercials, class, posters, etc.)

D. HATE MESSAGES

Please read this scenario and answer the questions below.

The current Yukon Human Rights Act provides NO protection against the promotion of hatred by publication. We recommend that the Act include protection from hate literature, publications, notices, signs, symbols or other representation that could stereotype or have negative effects related to the prohibited grounds of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, disability, sex, etc.

1. *What do you think? Have you ever been exposed to hate messages?
 Yes No Comments:
2. * Should protection against hate messages be covered under the Yukon *Human Rights Act*? Why or why not?

E. PAY/GENDER EQUITY

Please read this scenario and answer the questions below:

Have you experienced discrimination in your wages at work? One youth reported to the Yukon Human Rights Commission that they were paid a lower rate of pay for the same responsibilities than an older teenager, who had the same qualifications. This could be an example of age discrimination.

Also, there may be jobs that are better paid than yours at work, even though the skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions are comparable – in other words the work is of equal value but not paid equally. In this scenario, if only youth or women, do the lower paid jobs, it could be discrimination.

1. * Have you experienced discrimination based on your age?
 Yes No If yes, please explain:

2. * Have you ever experienced discrimination based on your sex? (being treated differently because you are male or female?)
 Yes No If yes, please explain:

F. SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Please read this scenario and answer the questions below.

Your human rights are supposed to protect you against all forms of discrimination. It is illegal for someone to discriminate against you because of your race, gender, age and many other things. But what about your sexual orientation?

In the Yukon if you are under the age of 19, you cannot make a complaint that you are being discriminated against because of your sexual orientation. That means that if you are 16 and if every day when you go to school people call you derogatory names such as "faggot", and they spit on you, or push you around, your human rights would not be protected, because you are not a "consenting adult".

1. * Do you think that it is fair that people younger than 19 are not able to file a human rights complaint on the basis of sexual orientation? Why or why not?

2. * Do you think that this law should be changed so that youth in this situation could be protected under the Yukon *Human Rights Act*? Why or why not?

G. THE YUKON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

1. Do you know what the Yukon Human Rights Commission does?
 Yes No

2. Have you ever used the services of the Yukon Human Rights Commission?
 Yes No

3. What services have you used?
 information for a school project
 attended a YHRC event/speaker
 advice about what to do about discrimination
 help in solving a complaint about discrimination

_____ made a human rights complaint

4. How helpful did you find these services ?
___ Not at all helpful
___ A little bit helpful
___ Very helpful
5. Did you know that there is no charge for our service?
Yes___ **No**___
6. Did you know that the human rights process is confidential and your privacy will be respected?
Yes___ **No**___
7. Did you know that the time limit for making a human rights complaint is 6 months from the last time that the discrimination happened?
Yes___ **No**___
8. Do you think that 6 months is a long enough time frame to put in a complaint?
Yes___ **No**___ **Comments:**

H. DISCRIMINATION

1. * Do you think you have experienced discrimination based on any of your personal characteristics (such as age, sex, sexual orientation, ancestry – race or colour, ethnic background, disability)
Yes___ No ___
2. * If you experienced discrimination, why did people discriminate against you?
(Discrimination can include harassment or bullying based characteristic below.)
___ Ancestry, including colour or race
___ National origin (place of birth)
___ Ethnic or linguistic (language) background/origin
___ Religion or creed (beliefs)
___ Age
___ Sex, including pregnancy
___ Sexual orientation
___ Physical or mental disability
___ Criminal charges or criminal record
___ Political belief, association, or activity
___ Marital or family status
___ Source of income
___ Other (please explain)
3. If **yes**, where did the discrimination happen?
___ school
___ work

- business place (eg. restaurant, store, theatre)
- Yukon government office
- City of Whitehorse office/program (multiplex, summer camp, etc.)
- First Nations government office
- Recreation or sports program
- by a landlord or another tenant where I live
- Other places? Please explain.

4. If you experienced discrimination, how did you deal with it?
- ignored it, didn't do anything
 - handled it by talking to the person
 - handled it by getting into a fight with the person
 - talked to a parent or guardian
 - talked to a teacher, counselor or adult I trust
 - someone helped to mediate or settle the issue between us
 - put in a complaint to the person in charge
 - Other. Please explain

5. Do you think that you have ever discriminated against another person?
Yes___ **No**___

6. If **yes**, where did the discrimination happen?
- school
 - work
 - business place (eg. restaurant, store, theatre)
 - Yukon government office
 - City of Whitehorse office or program
 - First Nations government office
 - Recreation or sports program (community group)
 - apartment where I live
 - Other places? _____

7. Do you think you know someone that has experienced discrimination, harassment or bullying by others?
 ___Yes ___ No

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8. Do you know people who discriminate, harass or bully others?
 ___Yes ___ No

9. Have you ever tried to stop someone from bullying or harassing someone? ____
 Yes___No If yes describe what happened:

10. Any further comments?

