

**Oct. 29, 2009**

## **Speech by Penny Hume, Executive Director of Child and Youth Friendly Calgary at the Red Deer CYF Luncheon Launch**

Thank you. I was asked to come and speak to you today about Child and Youth Friendly Calgary and to encourage you to embrace the Child and Youth Engagement philosophy that is so much a part of the Calgary community.

Child Friendly Calgary began in 1992 with the Business Accreditation Program. We worked with a team of local business leaders (such as yourselves) and created a set of criteria that must be met before a business is considered "Child Friendly". Volunteer parents and children then carried out inspections of restaurants, hotels, dentist's offices etc. and through a report card system deemed businesses Child Friendly. These were very real inspections, however, the coordinator of this program worked with the businesses to make sure they would do well. But even with the coordinator working with the businesses the children would find problems that the adults hadn't thought about.

The concept of a Child Friendly City originated in Edinburgh, Scotland as a tourist initiative but has now come to mean a city where young people are given the opportunity to engage with all aspects of city life.

Today Child and Youth Friendly Calgary is a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring, engaging and celebrating youth. We envision a city where all youth participate in shaping a vibrant community and through our twelve youth-driven programs, we are able to engage over 2200 youth in this goal. Over the past summer alone, Child and Youth Friendly Calgary volunteers gave more than 5000 hours of their time to help out at projects across the city, and in 2008, these young people contributed a total of 40,000 hours to countless events and valuable causes in Calgary. Our programs include:

The **Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative**, which targets youth who face barriers to their involvement and assists them in community engagement;

The **Calgary Youth Foundation** which gives youth the opportunity to sit on a granting committee and distribute money to important youth-driven projects;

The **Child Friendly Calgary Business Accreditation Program** which deems businesses 'child friendly' based on inspections and reviews executed by a team of children, youth and parents;

The **Mayor's Youth Council**, an expressive group of youth who advise City of Calgary officials on issues and share their viewpoints, adding a youth perspective to municipal decisions;

**Teen Critic** a partnership with CBC Radio, which gives two articulate teens a forum to represent the views and concerns of youth;

**Youth Are Awesome**, a blog-based site run by youth for youth, focusing on the great things they are doing and the great things they could be doing in Calgary;

The **ConocoPhillips Youth of Distinction Awards** an annual city-wide award program that recognizes and celebrates the amazing ways in which young people have chosen to live their lives—and the difference they make to our community;

The **Youth Volunteer Corps and Youth Volunteer Corps in Schools** which offers a variety of interesting team-based volunteer projects for youth;

**Youth Week** an international event that's like one big open house for you offering cheap or free events across the city; and,

**YouthScope** an initiative that brings together local youth and adults to work side by side on community-based projects that make Calgary a stronger city!

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### **Why do young people want to volunteer and become engaged.**

Well we carried out a survey amongst our volunteers and the top ten reasons they identified for volunteering were:

1. someone asked me to
2. something to do
3. earn school credit through volunteer hours
4. interest in an issue or cause.
5. opportunity to voice my opinion
6. feels good
7. great for my resume
8. my friend volunteers
9. meet new people
10. have fun

This generation of young people are very aware of their community and the world around them. Technology has played an important role in connecting them to information about their own community and finding connections to those around the world. They are far more interested in their community and global issues than many people may believe and they have the capability to address these issues. Technology has also made our next generation of leaders adaptable and resilient. They grow up with the ability to learn quickly. They are also reliable, committed, passionate, caring and have innovative ideas that constantly surpass expectations. They know no boundaries and have not been fettered by limitations placed upon them by previous experiences, failures or successes. Everything is possible! — and they believe they can do anything.

When I began to think about involving young people in our community I thought we should simply provide opportunities for them to help others. Over the years I have learned that youth have the ability to provide answers to some of our most pressing problems and are more than willing to take on this challenge. We try to instill youth with the belief that they have an infinite capacity for growth and achievement and that there are no age limitations for becoming active and involved citizens.

#### **How does the community benefit from engaging youth?**

The community gets a new perspective on how to deal with issues. Youth bring fresh ideas to issues and problem solving. Young people have energy, creativity, new ideas, and they build capacity within the community They can get things done. Engaged youth are much less likely to get in trouble. Youth involved in volunteering just one hour a week were found to be half as likely to be involved in at risk behaviours according to the Search Institute.

#### **How do youth benefit from being engaged?**

Their self-esteem increases. When you feel you are accomplishing something useful for someone else you feel good about yourself. Their tolerance and empathy increases. Working with others who are not as fortunate as themselves allows them to understand another's perspective. Their outlook on the community is more positive. They have a different perspective.

Their confidence in the future is increased. They learn that they have the power to make changes.

They increase their ability to make connections. They learn to work better as a team. They can get career related experience.

I would like to now show two brief videos.

Over the years we have asked youth in our programs what Child and Youth Friendly Calgary means to them. Here are a few quotes:

The impact Child and Youth Friendly Calgary has had on my life is seriously too profound for words. I've made life long friends with people I have worked with, but most importantly I now have a perspective of what it means to be an engaged citizen.

**And**

My mom's favourite Chinese proverb is "There are skies beyond our skies" and coincidentally, that is what Child and Youth Friendly Calgary helped me realize. It opened my eyes to the world of possibilities beyond what I could see and comprehend.

Child and Youth Friendly Calgary offered me opportunities for growth that could not be duplicated anywhere else. In the beginning we thought we were starting a small nonprofit organization that would help make Calgary more Child Friendly and provide ways for youth to volunteer and be more involved citizens but it has grown into something much more. Very early on Child and Youth Friendly Calgary became the go to organization when people or organizations had programs, projects or ideas for youth inclusion - not only in Calgary but in cities across Canada and around the world. We have earned our reputation by consistently accomplishing our three main goals. To create opportunities for young people to participate, volunteer, and practice philanthropy. To raise the self esteem of young people by encouraging them to understand they have infinite capacity for growth and achievement. And To enable youth to be more active citizens by encouraging the Charitable, non-profit, business and government sectors of our community to welcome them and value what they can offer.

Allowing youth to engage in the community is not an easy task. Adults must give up some control and allow young people to grab the reins and youth must prove that they are responsible. Working as mentors adults can teach, support, and guide this process. Adults and youth must be flexible -change is exciting. However, the single most important thing you must remember is to ask young people their opinions and to value those opinions. There have been instances where organizations have asked young people what they would like to have made available to them as programming options. The young people have given their opinions as to what they want and then the organization turns around and implements what they think is best for youth. This not only creates mistrust in the youth but increases the likelihood that no one will show up for the program.

Young people in our many programs have contributed to the city in so many ways. They have done everything from advising the planning department on land usage, to designing a skateboard park, to changing the food offered at city run facilities. They also have prepared food for the homeless shelters in Calgary, looked after children at day camps, and granted funds to other young people. They have produced the art work for all of the Calgary Transit systems bus passes and made dog biscuits for the Calgary Humane Society. The Chair of Child & Youth Friendly's Board of Directors (my boss) is a former CYFC volunteer.

We value all young people and their importance in our society and strive to create meaningful opportunities for them to become involved and engaged. Youth have great ideas to contribute and Child and Youth Friendly Calgary gives them a way to share their creativity and make change. We want to see a community in which all children and youth are equal and respected, and are encouraged to be active citizens. Child and Youth Friendly Calgary, with each of its programs, develops youth who have a sense of pride and commitment to their community -youth who will become adults who have a sense of ownership and a responsibility to their community.

