

New focus on youth



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Text

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Red Deer community and business leaders joined forces on Thursday to launch an initiative to make the city child and youth friendly.

Laurie Lafortune of Family Services of Central Alberta said as part of the project supported by the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce, local businesses will be approached and asked if they are willing to undergo an assessment by volunteer youths ,who will gauge the business on how welcoming it appears to young people.

“What we’re developing is a tool kit that will be a series of check lists businesses can use to assess their child and youth friendliness,” said Lafortune at the official launch of Child and Youth Friendly Red Deer at the Red Deer Lodge. Assessments can include anything from reviews of basic safety measures aimed at youth to a measure of how open a business appears to understanding and accepting youth culture.

“We’re actually hoping to target a lot of businesses,” said Lafortune. “That’s why the partnership with the Chamber is so positive.”

The city has agreed for teams of volunteers check out recreation facilities to see if there is anything more that could be done to cater to young clientele. It is hoped that all services, programs and activities can likewise be tested against a yardstick of youth friendliness and efforts will also be made to raise community awareness.

Ultimately, it is hoped that an appreciation of youth seeps into all aspects of community building, from planning to the delivery of programs and the development of a civic culture.

Danielle Klooster, Chamber manager of policy, advocacy and communications, said a community’s culture can be established by design or default. Putting the focus on youth will be a key initiative in developing the character of the community.

Efforts to create child and youth friendly communities have been around for years.

Calgary started its campaign in 1992 and developed a report card for local businesses on how they related to youth. After working with a co-ordinator, businesses were inspected and the young judges sometimes found ways to improve that had eluded adults, said Penny Hume, executive director of Child and Youth Friendly Calgary.

A variety of programs have now been set up and youngsters devote thousands of hours of volunteer time helping the community. They have advised the city on land usage, helped design a skateboard park and even had a hand in changing food offerings at city facilities.

Hume urged the audience to take advantage of the ideas and energy of the young. "The single most important thing you must remember is to ask young people their opinions and value their opinions."

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