

A Report on the Drug Prevention Conference hosted by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

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On Friday, July 18, 2008, a handful of staff from The Students Commission and a group from Kugluktuk, Nunavut attended a drug prevention conference that was hosted by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA). We were gathered in order to develop a new anti-drug strategy for youth. Ironically so, the CCSA had never before consulted youth on this subject. The conference was the first event where the council met with youth from across Canada to create a strategy for the National Advisory Group on Youth Prevention.

We arrived there early in the morning and we were immediately seated at round tables, separated from one another, and integrated with the adults. At first there were introductions, and we learned that there were people of high positions from all over Canada seated next to us, which was rather intimidating. There was a large screen where we watched countless PowerPoint presentations, and listened to various people talk about their ideas for their drug-prevention strategy. Our eyes were opened to many statistics regarding drug use, impaired driving, and related injury/death. We had discussion on what we, as young people, believe are some of the factors that lead teenagers to try drugs and alcohol. We also discussed the name of the group, and decided that “National Advisory Group on Youth Prevention” was too broad and misleading, where as the real point was youth drug and alcohol prevention. A presentation that was of particular interest to me was the “Culture of Moderation”, which was presented by Andrew Murie from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). This idea promotes the notion of drinking in moderation in order to reduce the amount of harm that consuming alcohol may have on youth. The speeches were pretty long, but were very informative. However, the only problem with the presentations was that the language used was very hard to understand for youth. All of us agreed that the language needed to be more youth-friendly in order to get us interested and engaged.

The second half of the conference was more hands-on, which we found more enjoyable. We split up into four different groups to discuss the top priorities for the National Youth Advisory Group and for the upcoming meetings. One common theme was the need to incorporate the principles of youth engagement into all future meetings that the group has. An example of this would be providing incentives, changing the language and environment, and allowing youth to be a part of the development of the program.

For future meetings with the National Advisory Group on Youth Drug and Alcohol Prevention, we would like to see the following improvements:

- Provide incentives (food, money, bus tickets)
- Youth friendly atmosphere (no fancy & expensive-looking board rooms)
- Simpler language
- More background information
- More hands-on participation (rather than listening to presentations for hours)
- Have more discussions about personal experiences
- Smaller groups of people for a more personal experience