

Bringing Youth Towards Equality

www.yukonyouth.com

Whitehorse, Yukon

WHO THEY ARE

BYTE stands for Bringing Youth Toward Equality. Since its inception, BYTE has been involving youth in every step of the process of decision-making. Working in partnership with a myriad of local businesses, governments, service providers and fellow non-profit groups, BYTE has become a leading advocate for youth programs, issues and initiatives in the Yukon Territory.

BYTE holds Conferences every year to mobilize volunteers and launch new projects. These conferences are essentially their life-force and the springboard from which the majority of their endeavours begin. These projects give Yukon youth the opportunities to educate, organize and agitate with their own brand of savvy, style and culture.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THESE CONFERENCES

These conferences are a rallying point for all young volunteers and those interested in getting involved. They are geared toward engaging youth by holding activities that appeal to them, so not only do they attract youth to volunteer, but they're almost a celebration of youth in itself. The youth are met with an abundance of workshops on all sorts of topics from sexuality, to kicking drug habits, heritage learning, self-defense/bullying, dance, arts and crafts, media studies and a slew of other things. Not only that, talent shows are performed, fashion shows, and battle of the bands. Mixed in with all this are opportunities for youth to get involved in areas that interest them and to learn about what they can do to help the community.

HOW DO THEY PROMOTE THESE CONFERENCES?

BYTE created a Yukon-Wide Youth Council called Youth Shaping the Future. This a committee of youth from different communities from all around the Yukon who come together to discuss the major issues facing their home communities and youth. They also participate in the planning of new events and activities, then return to their respective communities to disseminate information, hear from local officials and musicians, give out posters/brochures, announce volunteer opportunities and even conduct surveys. These surveys enable the organizers of the conference to be more in tune with the interests of the surrounding youth and are thus better able to attract and engage them.

BYTE also holds logo design contests, which give youth the opportunity to have a major role in the promoting of the conferences. This is another great way to get youth interested in what you're all about, and at the same time it will give you an edge on attracting youth, since your advertising is partially designed by them.

TELL ME ABOUT THEIR STRATEGIES

“We target youth by informing them that our conferences aren't there as mere recruitment events. We bring in youth by designing conferences that will be truly interesting and appealing to them. They find out that our conferences have much to offer to their knowledge and well-being.”

John Gelinias, BYTE

Once the youth have shown up, they find themselves surrounded by a myriad of activities and opportunities to learn and have fun. Once they've actually shown up and started to participate in the events, they're quite likely to find something that interests them and want to get involved.

“We don't advertise our conferences as Civic Duty sessions, or political education for youth, or anything like that. Our conference attract youth with the prospect of fun, music, learning, meeting others, and learning about things they're really interested in, and through that, they learn about getting involved in their communities on issues of importance.”

John Gelinias, BYTE

BYTE decided to make their latest conference more democratically oriented, so they made a section of the conference called “Dot-Mocracy”. Here, youth could walk into a series of workshop areas and at the entrance receive 5 or 6 dots/stickers. On the walls, there were about 40 issues listed on chart paper, and the youth would go and stick their stickers on the issues that were most important to them. There were moderators and professionals present for the discussion that followed, and they allowed the youth to lead the discussions while lending their knowledge and expertise.

BYTE also uses an interesting “passport” system to motivate the portion of youth who show up who are a little shy or disinterested. After participating in an activity, the activity's coordinator stamps the youth's passport. Once the youth has enough stamps, he or she is eligible to win prizes and other sorts of rewards. A survey is also included in the passport regarding the conference about what the young people enjoyed, what they didn't, and what they'd like to see brought over to the next conference.

WHAT THE YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE SAYS

These conferences can be seen as giant meetings between youth, organizations, and professionals, that are very “real” to youth. The Youth Friendly Guide defines keeping meetings real for youth by making meetings relevant, on topic, swift-paced, effective, and fun. The conferences focus on topics that youth are interested in, and they provide numerous entertaining and educational activities. Thus, both youth and organizations benefit as youth learn and develop their interests, while organizations gain a motivated and informed youth.