

GET YOUR VOTE ON / CHECK YOUR HEAD

www.getyourvoteon.ca / www.checkyourhead.org

Vancouver, B.C.

WHO THEY ARE:

Get-Your-Vote-On (GYVO) is a youth-led, non-partisan organization that aims to increase youth voter turnout in Canada's elections. Check Your Head (CYH) provides education, resources, training and support for youth, who then facilitate workshops, organize events and coordinate projects promoting education and action around issues of globalization and social justice.

OK...TELL ME MORE ABOUT GET-YOUR-VOTE-ON

“Imagine if we only came out right before elections. It would be so hard to just “grab” youth out of nowhere and all of a sudden start explaining the importance of voting to them. Part of what makes us so successful is that we keep our presence known in between election seasons.”

Kevin Millsip, GYVO

To put it bluntly, a large part of how GYVO attracts and engages youth is by throwing great parties. They're able to mix beer, DJs, bands, dancing and yes- politicians together for some serious fun and some stimulating discussions. Sure, a lot of the youth that show up are there for the party, and that's no problem.

“Part of making your recruitment process a success is by having fun. If the organizers are having fun, and the visitors are as well, you're likely to leave a lasting and favourable impression on youth and they are, in turn, more likely to come back to learn more about you.”

Kevin Millsip, GYVO

By simply showing up and having a good time, the partygoers are still given some important exposure to the issues that affect youth and to the politicians who are acting on them. Sometimes this is a turning point for many who were apathetic or disinterested in the issues being dealt with. Sure, they don't get turned into a full-fledged activist overnight, but for many, during that one night of exposure they may learn something they never would have expected to hit home with them, and from there anything is possible. It's not uncommon to find people who say: “I was really not into politics/art/environment/whatever when ONE DAY I met this person/went to this event/conference and BAM! I found out about stuff I was completely unaware of and now I just can't get enough of it!”

“Your organization can buy COOL, if it has the money, but it can't buy integrity. If you want to be in good standing among today's youth, you have to keep working at your reputation, and stay consistent with your message.”

Kevin Millsip, GYVO

You have to be consistent with your events, keep doing what you say you'll do and don't let people down at your events. Otherwise you'll have a harder time getting people to come back.

WHAT ELSE DO THEY DO?

GYVO has taken a new and innovative approach to learn about today's youth with its text-messaging initiative. People interested in GYVO can subscribe to the program and receive surveys via their cell-phones as often as every two weeks. They send their answers, GYVO tallies the responses and then sends the results to politicians and the media. GYVO is communicating with youth through a medium that is already heavily used by youth. This is still relatively new, but they get an average response of almost 1000 people and subscriber-ship is growing.

OK WHAT ABOUT CHECKYOURHEAD?

One of CYH's main activities is facilitating discussion among today's youth. Their projects include The Democracy Project where they lead discussion groups with youth to facilitate a dialogue on what citizenship and democracy mean to them.

HOW DO THEY FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS?

Walking into a classroom full of teenagers and starting up a discussion and pulling in their interest is no easy task. For starters, one of the golden rules is to avoid the lecture format at all costs. CYH prefers a divide and conquer approach, if you will. The larger the group of listeners, the more people are likely to tune out. Dividing the class into small groups immediately has a stimulating effect on most listeners because they know they will have to play a more active role and that they are more likely to be called upon to do something. They're also armed with workshops (sweatshop bingo, role-playing, quizzes, prizes, etc).

One of CYH's main workshops is called the Sea of Change. It's an effective workshop that runs on a simple formula: identify the issues and goals of your target youth, then identify the barriers to those goals, and then identify ways around those barriers. Helping and guiding youth to create their own action plan for tackling issues they're genuinely interested in is a sure-fire way to get them interested and coming back for more.

WHAT DOES THE YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE SAY

Facilitating is a great way to make meetings meaningful to youth. By giving them the ball, you let them put what interests them on the table, and then you're there to do critical things such as maintaining momentum, not rushing to consensus, and coordinating skills development activities (all of which are discussed in further detail in the Guide).

The Sea of Change also attracts youth by having a presence at all sorts of events such as conferences, parties, and meetings, making them accessible to all who come.