

# THE OTESHA PROJECT

www.otesha.ca

National

## WHO THEY ARE:

The Otesha Project is a youth-run charity, with approximately 12 full-time staff and 200 volunteers. They focus on providing sustainability education programs to students primarily in the latter half of high school and beyond. Using theatre, multi-media, and hands-on workshops, Otesha is able to educate and inform students about healthy consumption patterns and how their actions can have a significant effect on Mother Nature. They also organize various bicycle tours to spread their message in an eco-friendly way.

## YOUTH NEED TO REALIZE:

**“We don’t have to travel across the world to solve problems. With the advent of less trade restrictions, faster travel, telecommunication, and technology, important issues that were mostly isolated to certain areas of the world are now interconnected globally with many people on Earth. One of the main issues is consumption, and we can help other people and the Earth by changing even our most minute of consumption habits.”**

–Jocelyn Land Murphy, Co-Founder

## OK, WHAT’S THE APPEAL?

Otesha provides information and opportunities for students that they normally do not find within a typical high school. During days when they come to visit students, they are available after their presentations for students who show interest. They provide students with the necessary training and information they need to start their own club devoted to similar, or the same, goals as those of Otesha. Particularly, Otesha representatives actually sit down and create an action plan with them to help set them on the right track and give them the confidence they need to turn their interest and motivation into a solid initiative. Otesha wants to provide students with opportunities.

**“We give opportunities to young people who show interest in getting more involved and we train them and then they often go off to perform in their own communities and make a difference, empowered by the training and information they learned.”**

–Jocelyn Land Murphy, Co-Founder

This way youth can continue to work from within their schools and communities. Often youth have difficulty meeting the requirements of joining a special organization because of school and financial barriers, which is discussed in the Youth Friendly Guide. Otesha helps to circumvent this issue.

## WHAT ADVICE DO THEY HAVE TO GIVE?

If you wish to successfully incorporate young people into your decision-making and discussion process, don’t bring in just one young person. Alone, they’re likely to feel out of place and intimidated around others who are much older and experienced. It’s also important to make them feel welcome and not just a victim of Tokenism, which is another barrier discussed in the Youth Friendly Guide.

You also want to let them know that their position will be truly meaningful to the organization. Youth don't want to sit around all day and stuff envelopes, even if it's for a great organization. The reason so many people want to get involved with Otesha is because they actually know they'll be able to do something meaningful and that they'll have a voice in the running of projects.

## **WHAT THE YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE SAYS**

This runs parallel to the section in the Youth Friendly Guide on The Ladder of Participation. According to our findings, youth need 1) meaning 2) control, and 3) connectedness. This relates to the fact that youth need to have meaningful work to stay motivated, they need to have a voice in the decision-making and they need opportunity.

This may sound like a no-brainer but once you have successfully incorporated youth into your organization, and you want to engage more, or create a youth wing, you have to send out young people to recruit and inform others. Youth normally feel more comfortable approaching younger people and asking them questions.

**“Lastly, when making a presentation to youth, it’s really important that you stay away from the old speech and power point formula. Young people’s attention is stimulated by music, humor, interaction, discussion and the opportunity to ask questions.”**

–Jocelyn Land Murphy, Co-Founder

After their presentations at schools, Otesha gives out one post card (made of recycled paper, of course) to each student. Each is asked to write down one thing that they would like to do with regard to the health of the Earth, the environment, or their consumption habits, and then mail it to Otesha. They've collected thousands of post cards, many of which are strung up around the office. This is an informal, yet innovative, way to gather information about clusters of youth and what's on their mind. Examination of this information can give valuable insight into the matters that most concern the youth they are focusing on with their presentations.