Zac Johnstone

Community Relations Coordinator

Jer's Vision: Canada's Youth Diversity Initiative

Promoting diversity and ending discrimination

www.jersvision.org

Speaking Notes for the May 15, 2014 Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Canada Fit for Children, Carleton University:

I am here today to discuss issues involving youth discrimination and inclusion/exclusion, how this affects young people, and what kinds of strategies will help in making social change happen.

Key Points:

Marginalized communities are still severely over-represented in homelessness, suicide rates, poverty, imprisonment, drug use, abuse, violent crime and more. This is a clear indication that more must be done.

There is a need to move beyond one-dimensional approaches.

Posters don't solve problems. We must examine how institutions normalize oppression and marginalization. Posters are a start but a multifaceted, dynamic approach is needed.

Approaches need to include youth and engage youth in conversations, rather than talk down to youth.

Dialogue around racism, sexism, queerphobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, colonialism and more does not occur often schools. We need to foster that dialogue and educate young people through discussion-based and youth led means.

We need to move away from binary perspectives on gender and sexuality. Many are left out of campaigns that say "it's okay to be gay", and too many schools still divide classes and class activities based on gender.

Institutional policies must be altered to accommodate diverse youth. Few school boards have trans- and gender non-conforming policies, so how can they know how to deal with issues when they arise concerning these youth or staff?

Increase funding for community organizations (like Jer's Vision) to educate and provide training on discrimination and inclusion.

Schools need to further open themselves up to community organizations and work to educate their youth through sustainable partnerships.