

THE VISION FROM BANFF

We are a group of young people from 24 countries who met in Banff to discuss our common problems with drug abuse, and to share our experience and successes in preventing it.

These are our proposals. We hope that our voices will be heard by our world leaders when they meet at the United Nations in June, and by all those who are in positions to make decisions that influence our lives.

1. Youth Participation

We know that we have problems and that many of us are using drugs. We cannot solve our problems alone, but no one can solve them for us. Like many other young people around the world, we are doing our best to prevent drug abuse. We have some ideas and solutions, which we have learned from experience. We have shown that we can be successful in solving many of our problems.

We would like to have the chance to be heard and to work with our parents, teachers and many others to make our lives better. When governments gather to talk about preventing drug abuse among young people, as they will at the United Nations in June, we ask that youth representatives be called on to present the agendas that we all hope will lead to solutions. Much can be achieved when we have opportunities to participate hand in hand in international forums.

2. Cultural Sensitivity

We came here from all over the world speaking different languages. We sang and we danced together. We listened to each other and learned many things that will remain with us. If our societies could be open to the richness of different cultures and respectful of personal differences (for example, gay and lesbian lifestyles), we think that people would learn to understand each other and to communicate better.

Sometimes drug abuse prevention messages do not

respect the culture and traditions of the people they are supposed to help, and those who promote these messages do not listen to what the people are saying. We think that drug abuse prevention should respect cultural differences, while at the same time respecting human rights. Drug abuse prevention should be based on the language, the music and the colours of the place where it is to be put in place.

3. Gender Issues

As girls and young women, we have special needs and we experience different kinds of problems in our lives. Some of us are abused in our homes, exploited and forced into prostitution. Some of us take drugs to forget all this pain and suffering. People should be aware of this. We need activities and programmes that are directed to us, and that meet our special needs. Proper resources must be made available for these programmes, as well as for special campaigns to tell the world about our problems and issues.

4. Education

Even though it will take some years before we can be called "grown ups", we think that we already know enough to have opinions about our future. Those of us who are fortunate enough to be in school feel that we do not always learn about the things we need to know. We want our schools to teach us in an honest way how to cope with real life. Drug education should be based on accurate information presented in an interesting way by those with knowledge and experience, including people our own age who understand our problems and know how to talk to us.

Many of us do not have the opportunity to go to school and so we must learn to survive on the streets. We think that everyone has the right to go to school and to learn what is necessary to become a responsible citizen. Efforts should be made to provide everyone with meaningful education, and this means reaching out to young people wherever they are, whether in the

workplace or on the street.

We are ready to play our part in the development of our societies, but we need opportunities to put what we have learned to good use and to become actively involved. Many of us, especially those living in the developing world, cannot find jobs and this increases our sense of frustration and our feelings of being lost or abandoned. It is often easy to abuse drugs when you feel this way. Creating employment opportunities which do not exploit us and which give us a role in shaping the future of our societies is one way that governments can show their sincere determination to reduce drug abuse.

5. Alternative Activities

At the same time, all of us - young men and women - like to have fun. We enjoy spending time with our friends. When circumstances prevent us from taking part in normal youth activities, we sometimes find less useful things to do, including using drugs.

Therefore, it is important that every neighbourhood offer young people accessible and low-cost opportunities and places to meet, cultivate an appreciation for the arts, play sports, and do other challenging activities that develop self-confidence in a secure environment.

6. Treatment/Health Services

Drug abuse is a health problem. When we experience problems with drugs we often do not have enough access to health services, including treatment. We need to be offered help that reaches out to us wherever we are - in school, on the street or in jail.

This treatment needs to respect our dignity and must include support for us after we return to our community.

7. Media

Mass media present false images of success and happiness where alcohol and other drugs are seen as improving the lives of young people. At the same time, the media pay little attention to important issues such as violence toward women and children. We would like to be shown more positively in the media. We would also

like to see rules against media messages that promote drug abuse. We believe that products that can harm us should carry warning labels.

8. Information Sharing and Networks

We want to have regular contact with other programmes in our regions and beyond in order to stay informed and to learn from each other. Tools such as directories, the Internet - where it is available - and a centralized resource centre can spread information that is useful to our programmes. Conferences, seminars and training sessions give us time to reflect on the important and complex issue of drug abuse.

9. Evaluation

We believe that we know a lot about what works in preventing and treating youth drug abuse, but we still have much to learn about how to achieve the most impact from our successes. Evaluation of drug prevention and treatment programmes needs to be given more attention, and we need to begin by defining the problems more clearly and applying our solutions more precisely.

10. Conventions, Policies and Rights

Talking together, all of us felt that the problems we young people face with respect to drugs are very similar the world over. We want our leaders to join together with us in taking action to prevent drug abuse among young people. Not only can nations help each other to treat drug addiction and to stop drug trafficking from violating our human rights, they can also provide young people with opportunities to become involved with drug abuse prevention programmes.

Many of us haven't started voting yet, but we will soon. To our respective states we say: Accept the work that we are doing on drug issues, and support us by ensuring our safety, by removing corruption, and by making our police forces more sympathetic to our needs. Realize that those of us who abuse drugs need to be given a second chance. If you must set an example, do so by harshly punishing drug traffickers, not by victimizing the drug abuser.

We know all too well that tobacco and alcohol are huge industries that contribute to national economies, but they also cause great harm to our health. All nations must gradually make it more difficult for young people to obtain these drugs, through taxation, enforcement of age limits and other existing laws, and stricter licensing policies. We also know that young children are abusing legally available substances such as glue, solvents and petrol. We need to think of ways to solve this problem.

11. Resources and funding

Time and again we are told that we are the future of the world. If this is true, we would like to see our leaders make a long-term commitment to this future by giving a high priority to providing youth programmes and centres. We believe strongly that all the money you spend on us is an investment in the future - an investment that will benefit all of society.

We believe that the private sector can do more to help prevent drug abuse in our societies, and we ask the United Nations to encourage and promote a greater role for business and industry in making youth drug prevention and treatment programmes available.

12. Our Vision

We pass this message on to the United Nations, its Member States, other people who are concerned with our future, and to all young people who want to do something about drug abuse.

We look forward to working with all of them to make our vision a reality.

Banff (Alberta, Canada), 18 April 1998

YOUTH VISION JEUNESSE

The Youth Vision Jeunesse Drug Abuse Prevention Forum was a “for youth, by youth” event for young people that was held in Banff, Alberta, Canada from 14 to 18 April 1998. More than 180 young people from 24 countries met to compare notes, exchange experiences and ideas on preventing drug abuse and to establish a network of innovative youth programmes.

The meeting was entertaining as well as informative. Many of the invited groups took non-traditional approaches to prevention, using theater, sports, graffiti, music and other creative activities

as alternatives to drug taking. Many of these skills were demonstrated in performances that transcended language differences among participants.

The collective experience and insight of the young delegates were expressed in the recommendations you have in your hands. They summarize the young people’s vision on how to prevent drug abuse.

The event was organized by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in close collaboration with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), with the support of the Governments of Canada, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.