



National Youth Model: Connecting Youth Project

Web Site for CF Family Youth — Part 2

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the consultation process with Canadian Forces (CF) family youth, and with Personnel Support programs (PSP) and Military Family Resource Centres (MFRC) staff that work with youth in Canada and in Europe.

The objectives of the consultation were to evaluate whether a web site would be a useful tool to address CF family youth needs and to define the scope of a web site should it be deemed a useful tool. Recommendations were compiled to determine potential next steps.

The consultation process involved two key stakeholder groups:

1. Canadian Forces family youth: 65 youth aged from 12 to 18 from across the country; and
2. PSP and MFRC staff: 62 MFRC and PSP staff participated.

Summary of the Staff Consultation

A key element of the CF National Youth Model is "Connecting Youth". This element of the Model focuses on ensuring that pertinent resources are made available to Canadian Forces family youth to meet four objectives, namely:

- Embracing transitions;
- Easing the stress of relocation;
- Building and sustaining meaningful relationships; and
- Developing a sense of belonging within the community.

The general consensus during the consultation with both youth and staff across the country is that these four objectives still represent the major youth connectivity preoccupations. Whereas both stakeholder groups consulted validated these objectives, staff highlighted some general trends that have a direct impact on today's interpretation of the four objectives. These trends are:

1. **Fewer families are living on bases across the country:** Staff believe that in all likelihood, PMQs will be phased out in the near term. As CF families relocate, they are no longer part of close knit communities residing on a base. This evolution of the CF community has four important effects:
 - Youth are much harder to reach as there is no formal infrastructure in place to promote or enhance direct contact with CF family members residing in civilian communities;
 - It is difficult for youth to access base facilities because they are not yet independent making transportation even more difficult in many of the locales;
 - In certain instances CF family youth programs are competing with existing services in the community; and
 - Military youth are part of civilian communities. Programs should be made available to civilian friends as military youth are no longer segregated out of the larger community.

Staff believe that changing accommodation strategies increase the challenge of reaching and impacting youth. To better serve youth, a collaborative strategy between both the PSP and MFRC organizations should be nurtured to capitalize on synergies and improve effectiveness. A national strategy should also be developed to reach off base CF family youth.

2. **International deployment is on the rise:** As CF deployments to high risk parts of the world continue to increase, the stress for CF family youth also increases, due to:
 - Deployed parents confront a very real element of danger;
 - Global media reports breaking news 24 hours a day. CF family youth are in need of educational information about the nature of these international conflicts and the role of deployed CF personnel; and
 - Today's youth have grown up in a very connected world. It is difficult for them to understand and accept why they cannot communicate with deployed parents at any time of the day or night.
3. **Integration into civilian communities is on the rise:** Developing a sense of belonging within a civilian community is now equally as important as belonging within the CF community. It is increasingly important to be able to connect CF family youth into existing community resources, wherever they might be found, while avoiding any duplication of effort.

These four "Connecting Youth" objectives were endorsed by all the staff consulted. All were in agreement that if a web site was to be developed, these objectives, and the general trends that affect them, form the basis of what needs to be addressed. For youth living in Europe these objectives are even more critical due to cultural and language barriers. One staff group went so far as to propose that developing a sense of belonging within the community is actually fundamental to the other three objectives, and that addressing this objective first should be the logical first step.

Summary of the Youth Consultation

Most CF family youth consulted believe that there are few differences between military and civilian family youth. The youth stated that their lifestyle is only a 'little' different from civilian youth, due primarily to frequent relocation and deployment, but that they can relate to civilian youth as their needs are very similar. They agree that being part of a CF family does add additional stress, however there are both positives and negatives to having parents in the CF.

When questioned about their specific needs, youth placed an importance on having a place to meet, on activities, and on help in making new friends. As a second priority, they would like to be able to access information and/or support to help with issues that are specific to being in a military family.

The youth identified the following main categories as those program and services initiatives required to address their needs:

<p>Support Services for youth</p>	<p>Programs to help making friends Leadership /mentorship Qualified counsellors Someone to talk to of same age (e.g., teen ambassador program) Help line Welcome wagon for youth Rewarding success programs Youth council Help for integration at school Help to build friendships when relocated Shuttle services Job finder E-mail contact list for help – pen pals Homework club</p>
<p>Activities</p>	<p>Trend specific activities (Paintball, snowboard extreme sports, fear factor games, canoe trips) Exchange with youth from other bases to participate in specific activities Dances and social event for teens only Travel and exchanges Volunteering and working opportunities Fitness programs (weight lifting, aqua program, CAAWS etc.) Gender specific activities (Girls Night In!, Total Testosterone etc.) Military oriented activities to help them understand parents job (Bring your kid to work day) Fund raising opportunities</p>
<p>Facilities</p>	<p>Youth room or center (run by youth and overseen by adults) Access to computer lab Access to fitness facilities (better hours) Equipment for activities Skateboard park Bus or any type of transportation</p>
<p>Information</p>	<p>About program and facilities on every base Event calendar General information about communities for each base including information on schools, universities and colleges Tips about relocation and list of contact persons on every base About deployment and international conflict CF are involved in. About military life and job that parents do To parents and other military about how to get involved with youth How to find work Social issues for youth (drug, sex, STD, divorce etc)</p>

"Connecting Youth" Challenges

During the staff and youth consultation session, several challenges were noted. Consistently, staff expressed frustration with the following:

Existing Culture

One of the main challenges faced by staff, and validated with youth, is the sense that the current CF culture is not very accepting of the youth reality. This is mainly attributed to the lack of resources dedicated to youth programs, the inconsistency of program delivery from one base to another, and the limited access to facilities in some areas. A large majority of youth participating in the workshops confirmed this challenge by stating that they do indeed feel excluded. Current policies and procedures relating to transportation and the use of military facilities do not facilitate the organization of youth activities. Staff believe that a culture change can be started across the CF by implementing new policies and procedures at the national and local levels. The objective of this culture change is to show that CF family youth are valued. The change needs to happen from both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective simultaneously.

Un-collaborative Structure

Staff agreed that the current "silo" approach used by the MFRC and PSP organizations is not conducive to meeting youth client needs. The structure needs to promote collaboration between and within the two organizations, nationally, locally and across different bases.

To do so, consistent program delivery is required to facilitate addressing core youth needs. Currently youth coordinators at some bases work together, not because there is any formal structure in place to encourage such collaboration, but because of their personal networking habits. When polled, staff responded very positively to the concept of working sessions much like the visioning sessions to foster networking and encourage the exchange of information and best practices.

Reaching the Targeted Clientele

A promotion strategy to reach off-base youth clientele is required. As more and more military families live off base, it is becoming increasingly difficult to reach the CF family youth.

Many sites stated the need for some form of transportation policy to help bring kids to existing facilities. In a number of instances, public transportation is either non-existent or simply not practical for youth purposes.

A reoccurring theme during the consultations focused on the ad hoc approaches that are currently used to reach the target clientele, further emphasizing the lack of formal mechanisms to implement services and then measure the corresponding impact.

Lack of Resources

In all sessions, staff was adamant about their lack of resources (budget and staff) to effectively deliver programs to youth.

Lack of Transparency

There were two key themes reiterated time and time again, namely, there is very little understanding in the regions of any of the national level strategies targeting youth, and secondly, the development of the Youth Model set expectations that are not currently being addressed. Reasons for delaying the implementation of the Youth Model are not known. Participants in the workshops felt it important to have a clear understanding of any related action plans for youth program delivery with a reporting system to inform staff of progress on an ongoing basis. Such mechanism would promote regular two way communication and foster understanding in the regions and at headquarters.

Working Together

Some bases are already working together to serve the youth clientele and the most successful programs discussed during consultations were also supported by the community. The current PSP and MFRC "silos", in most cases are viewed as obstacles and barriers to moving forward in the most effective manner. A third silo, for the purposes of youth initiatives, was also defined: headquarters. These three organizations really need to work more collaboratively together. Staff also mentioned that there is a positive impact on program delivery when they involve related community groups and community sponsors.

Lack of Planning Information

In order to become more proactive, the staff identified the need for specific types of information to gain a better understanding of the big picture. A better understanding of the demographic trends of CF families would be beneficial for two distinct reasons:

- to understand who the current youth clientele is from an age group and from a straight numbers perspective; and
- to understand potential program requirements for the next few years.

Understanding whether there is an increasing or decreasing number of military youth would help for planning purposes. Having names and family addresses would also help staff understand planning requirements and accurately define the potential and actual reach of the different youth programs.

An understanding of national level programs and schedules for the coming years would help provide direction within the regions. There was a sense in the different working groups that information is shared on a just-in-time basis with very little time allotted for planning or discussion.

A Potential New Web Site

The majority of staff across the country and working overseas confirmed that a web site would be an effective tool to address specific youth needs. The staff emphasized that it is important to capitalize on the interactive nature of a web site and that the main objectives of the web site should be to:

- Provide targeted, customized and updated information to CF youth by using a tool that is very popular with this age group;

- Promote existing activities and services offered to youth by using the internet to target difficult-to-reach clients. The internet could actually help staff promote their programs to youth;
- Build on the interactive nature of the internet to create programs that permit exchanges with and between youth at a national level (mainly to address relocation and deployment related issues);
- Share ideas and expertise between staff at a national level; and
- Provide an anonymous mechanism to better assess youth needs and preoccupations, while soliciting youth feedback. This would enable staff to “keep a finger on the pulse” of youth needs.

Throughout the course of the working sessions, staff realized that a web site would be a useful tool for sharing information and resources. One suggestion was to have a secure section of the web site made available for youth coordinators to share and discuss program information.

An added benefit to hosting consultation sessions with staff from PSP and MFRC organizations was the fact that there was a sharing of information during the sessions. For some participants, this was actually their first time participating in a cross-organization working session about youth programs.

Of the 61 staff participants, 11 felt that the use of technology would not be helpful to address youth needs. The main concern was that this would be sending the wrong message to youth: replace physical activity with computer time. In addition, the staff felt that there were more important elements of the Youth Model that should be tackled first and that “human contact” can not be replaced.

Youth consulted confirmed that if a web site was developed, they would use it. The main role of such of web site would be to:

- Help youth access information about the various offerings on the base, and in the community;
- Find out what’s happening on other bases;
- Communicate with friends, deployed parents or support personnel; and
- Access information about specific subject matter of interest.

Youth pointed out that the site needed to be entertaining. They also suggested including quizzes, games and trivia.

Conclusion

Consultation with CF family youth and staff from PSP and MFRC organizations demonstrates clearly that there is a gap in the fulfillment of youth needs. Given the widespread integration of technology into youth life and the regular use of the Internet as a communications tool, a web site could most definitely address specific gaps.

ANNEXES

Petawawa Trip Report

24 October

Staff Workshop

The Petawawa workshop had eight participants from four different locations. The locations represented were Trenton, Kingston, North Bay and Petawawa. The staff experience with CF family youth ranged from three months to over five years.

The group felt that youth connectivity needs have evolved since the Youth Model was created as less families live on bases and youth are much harder to reach. They indicated that there is a definite need for CF youth to be connected with other CF youth. When reviewing youth needs and available programs and services to meet the needs, it was highlighted that youth are expected to physically attend programs or services.

When talking "connectivity" the staff felt that youth in their areas did not have easy access to computers and that the facilities were not well equipped to handle many Internet users. (The Petawawa MFRC has two computers connected through 56k modems.)

The staff came up with a number of good ideas to address youth needs through a web site, including several "web site musts":

- Must be stand alone – not overly CF controlled;
- Need common look and feel across the country;
- Will need common content directives for national and local sites; and
- The look must be defined by the youth.

The staff also had a number of recommendations to move the initiative forward, namely:

1. There will need to be a change in the culture so that the chain of command believes in CF family youth and want to invest in them; and
2. PSP and MFRC staff will need to learn to work together to address youth needs.

Seven of the eight participants believed that the creation of a web site would help address some of the youth needs. One participant did not see how a web site would help the staff with their job at a local level.

Winnipeg Trip Report

1 & 3 November 2003

Staff Workshop

The Winnipeg workshop had nine participants from four different locations. The locations represented were Winnipeg, Shilo, Esquimalt and Mainland BC. At the beginning of the session, they expressed having significant reservations as expectations were set in the past without much follow up.

Participants' expectations were predominantly focused on having a better understanding of the web site direction, information sharing on successful activities for youth, and exploring strategies to help youth.

The staff group commented on the Youth Model and felt that CF family youth reality had changed in the years since the creation of the Model. They felt there were more deployment issues as more CF members are deployed in dangerous areas. They also felt that moving and relocation were important issues for youth aggravated by the inconsistency of programs and services across bases.

Youth needs were identified in the five categories defined earlier in this report (page 4), with a heavy emphasis on the activities category. Correspondingly, the bulk of the programs and services offered were linked to this category. There was an interesting correlation between the high instance of families living off the bases within civilian communities, and the limited needs with associated programs and services in the facilities category.

The staff came up with a number of ideas and recommendations for a new web site. They wanted to note that the web site is only one of many means to link youth with other youth.

Eight of nine participants felt that the creation of a web site would help address some of the youth needs. The ninth participant felt that the web site is part of the puzzle but that it is not at the top of the list of priorities.

Youth Workshop

Twenty participants from Winnipeg and Shilo attended the workshop. With one exception, all participants have been relocated between 2 to 7 times. There was a good representation from all age groups between 12 to 18 year olds. Two thirds of our participants were girls.

Different factors affected the level of involvement of the youth (ie., late night Halloween parties, lack of sleep and parental mandates to attend). Having said this, the youth participated in all the exercises with their comments providing valuable insight into their world and their needs. The participants validated the need for initiatives around relocation issues and the creation of activities that would permit them to meet and exchange ideas and experiences.

When asked what type of programs or services would be helpful to them, youth focussed mainly on activities that would facilitate relocation. They expressed feelings of being left out on all relocation topics, and not having access to services and

information that cater to their needs. They also expressed the need to have activities for "youth only"(i.e., the canoe trip organized by the Winnipeg base this past year had a positive impact on these youth).

All participants were quick to say that a web site would be useful and well used. One participant did not have internet access at home and therefore would not be able to use a new web site.

Halifax Trip Report

8 - 9 November 2003

Staff Workshop

The Halifax workshop had thirteen participants from nine different locations. The locations represented were from Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario (Toronto). Participants' expectations as captured at the beginning of the session, were predominantly focused on moving the Youth Model forward and on information sharing across the different locations. Throughout the session, participants had a natural tendency to want to discuss staff needs and concerns.

We looked at the 4 key objectives highlighted in the "Connecting Youth" component of the Model:

1. embracing transitions;
2. easing the stress of relocation;
3. building and sustaining meaningful relationships; and
4. developing a sense of belonging within the community.

When asked if these objectives were still the priority, staff indicated that the stresses around deployment have increased since more CF members are presently deployed. Secondly, reaching and engaging youth is a bigger challenge since more and more youth are living off-base. Integrating CF family youth into the community is as important as making sure they feel a sense of belonging to the CF community. The staff felt that resources should be available to support youth around deployment issues and to building a sense of community with other military and civilian youth.

Youth needs were identified in the four categories defined earlier in this report (page 4) Although not consistent across all sites represented, good programs and services are in place to address needs in activities and facilities. Communication/ information sharing and support services categories have fewer initiatives to address youth needs. Educational resources material focussing on youth issues were also limited.

Eight of thirteen staff felt that a web site should be developed to address youth needs. These advocates were quick to point out that a web site is only part of a solution, that it must take all the local concerns into consideration and that the long-term plan for the web site must ensure that there is no additional work that will be passed on to regional workers after the initial start-up of the program. They felt it should be a national initiative, with the possibility to customize for specific local needs.

Five of the thirteen participants felt that a web site should not be developed. Not necessarily because they felt a web site could not address CF Family youth needs, rather there are other priorities in the Youth Model that need to be addressed first.

The staff recommendations were centered on better communication and working together. The staff are looking for a timely follow up on the results of the feasibility study, more regular communications about initiatives, and additional promotional emphasis on whatever is decided and implemented.

Youth Workshop

Eighteen youth between the ages of 12 and 18 were involved in the workshop. Other than one child from Windsor (approximately an hour from Halifax), all participants were from the Halifax region. We had good representation from three different Halifax sites: Shearwater, Greenwood and Halifax.

The participants validated the need for initiatives around deployment and relocation issues and sixteen of the eighteen participants would use a web site if it provided means to address these two key issues as well as information about available activities on each base.

Overall, the youth have had less relocation experience than the participants in the other workshops. Their concerns were centered on deployment of parents, access to youth specific activities, and making friends.

When asked what type of programs or services would be helpful to them, youth focussed mainly on trendy activities for youth only, places to hang out and someone to talk to.

For the possible content and format of a web site the suggestions included the following preferred sections:

- Information on where parents are deployed;
- Canadian map with information on each base (what's happening for youth at each base);
- Game room;
- Friend-making and relocation help;
- Daily funny (funny stories or situations); and
- Bulletin board or Chats.

Edmonton Trip Report

16 November 2003

Staff Workshop

The Edmonton Workshop had nineteen participants. This was our largest staff group to date. The locations represented were from Alberta, B.C. and Saskatchewan with equal representation from PSP and MFRCs. Once again the overall Youth Model was a "hot" topic.

Staff objectives fell into four broad categories:

1. Information sharing;
2. Moving the Youth Model forward;
3. Learn how to better address youth needs; and
4. Participate in the discussion on website development.

Staff felt that the two key elements of the Youth Model that needed resources were building a sense of community and easing the stress of relocation. They believe that youth moved around less but the stress related to relocation was still very high. Staff believes that youth needs across the country are probably very similar but that the way to address the needs will require a high degree of local customization depending on the community in which the youth live.

A majority of the staff present felt that the military will need to learn to think outside the box to create a healthy partnership model with civilian organization, secure sponsorships and develop a communication network for information sharing.

Twelve participants felt that the website would be useful. Four did not believe the website would be useful and three were undecided.

The four that did not see the value of the web site felt that there were better ways to address youth needs and that there were other aspects of the Youth Model that were a higher priority.

Overall the group was very supportive of a website development initiative with a strong belief that the development and subsequent sustainability must be driven on a national basis.

Youth Workshop

Seventeen youth between the ages of 12 to 17 participated in the workshop. There were slightly more girls in attendance than boys. All participants were from the Edmonton base with eleven youth living on the base. This was the first group with a good number of youth actually living on the base.

About half of the group felt that the military life style was positive but the other half of the group had serious doubts, mainly because of relocation and deployment.

The group was highly engaged in the website development and presentation exercise. They unanimously voted in favor of a website feeling that it would be very useful to them.

The important elements cited for the CF youth website are: information sharing availability for issues around deployment; relocations; and base activities. Promotion of communication with other CF Youth was another important aspect to consider for the website.

Lastly, a show and tell element displaying interesting information about the CF Youth community generated lots of enthusiasm. As in other sessions with youth, the humorous approach was important to include in the development of the website.

Valcartier Trip Report

21 – 22 November 2003

Staff Workshop

The Valcartier Workshop had twelve participants from Toronto, Ottawa, Bagotville, Montreal and Valcartier. As with all other sessions, the staff felt that there were other pressing priorities that should be addressed as a follow up to the work on the Youth Model.

The staff expectations at the beginning of the session fell into two broad categories:

1. Increase collaboration across PSP and MFRC organization; and
2. Explore youth needs and help identify potential solutions.

Of the four key elements of the "Connecting Youth" component of the Model requiring resources, the staff felt that the primary element to be addressed first should be building a sense of community. They agreed that this element, if addressed properly, would provide all the prerequisites to address the other three elements of the Model.

The group stated openly that they are not reaching enough of their targeted youth clientele. One of the main issues is around the lack of factual data about CF family youth (demographics, numbers, names, etc.). The group also recommended that the CF should define a national youth policy to address youth needs. This would promote consistency and uniformity of approaches across all organizations nationally.

All participants believed that a web site could address specific CF family youth needs. Whereas all staff were in favour of a web site, they felt it important to note that they had other priorities to consider before developing a web site. They also felt it important to note that if a web site was to be developed, there should be a maintenance plan and funding in place so that the work is not simply transferred to the regions in the next couple of years.

Youth Workshop

Eleven youth between the ages of 12 and 15 attended the workshop. There was equal gender representation and representation from elementary schools and "le secondaire".

The group validated all four of the key "Connecting Youth" elements of the Model. Youth in this group had moved anywhere between 3 and 8 times. They reinforced the importance of being part of a community as a way to ease the stress of relocation and make the transition easier.

The popular web site elements were mainly related to seeing what's going on at other bases, communicating with friends, and finding information about current activities.

All participants felt that a web site could be useful to them and that it would likely help them address specific needs.