

Election Kit

This kit has materials to help you raise election candidates' awareness of the importance of youth centres to families and to promote your interest in seeing strong youth centres and youth services in your riding.

You have the opportunity to raise this issue during the election campaign.

In this kit you will find:

- The “Investing in Families” flyer on youth centres
- Overview of election campaign
- How to contact Candidates
- Questions for Candidates
- More tips on speaking to candidates

Overview of election campaign

The Government of Canada is having an election on Tuesday, October 14, 2008 for the Federal Parliament. It is expected that there will be at least four candidates running in each riding. In most ridings there will be the current sitting MP or Member of Parliament, as well as other candidates.

Find out about your riding and registered candidates at www.elections.ca

You must be 18 years old, a Canadian citizen and resident in the riding on election day to vote. If you cannot vote, you can still be involved in an election by raising issues with candidates, attending election events or volunteering for candidates.

Here are some party websites: www.conservative.ca www.liberal.ca
www.ndp.ca www.presentpourlequebec.org www.greenparty.ca

How to Contact Candidates

Leading up to the election there are several ways to contact candidates and speak about youth issues.

1. Most ridings will hold “**All Candidates Meetings**” where the candidates attend and answer questions from the public. This is a great opportunity to ask questions about youth issues and youth centres since many people will be present to hear the response. Local news media (newspapers, TV) may attend these events and report on them. You need to be vigilant to learn about All Candidates Meetings in your community. Look for flyers in stores or community centres, or search on the internet.

PROS – Many people will hear the answers and it may be reported on the news.

CONS – Some people, including youth, are intimidated to ask questions in a crowd.

2. Candidates or their volunteers often travel **door-to-door** to ask for your support or ask you to put up a sign supporting a candidate. This is a great opportunity to ask questions because you have their full attention. You can have a discussion with the candidate or volunteer and also ask for more details or written follow-up.

PROS – You can have a real discussion about youth issues.

CONS – The candidate may not come to your door or it may be a volunteer.

3. Candidates and their volunteers often have **headquarters** in the riding where you can go and ask questions or meet the candidate. Often the address, telephone number or website will be on election brochures that comes to your home or on election signs on your street. If you can meet the candidate or speak to them on the telephone you can ask your questions and have a short discussion about youth issues.

PROS – You can speak directly to the candidate.

CONS – You will need to make some effort to find the candidates.

4. Also, many candidates and their volunteers will have a **website and an e-mail address**. This e-mail address may be on election brochures that come to your home or on election signs on your street. You can send an e-mail question and ask for a reply. Some of the website may include standard answers to common questions such as what the candidate will do for young people.

PROS – Many people can do this from home. The reply e-mail is a record of their answer.

CONS – Some people find this impersonal and you may only get a “standard” reply.

5. Finally, as well as individual candidates, there may be helpful websites for the **Federal Parties** (ie. Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Green, etc.) These party websites may include statements of party policy – what they will do if they are elected. You can look for the party policy on youth issues. Sometimes there is a way to send e-mail feedback on the policies.

PROS – Many people can do this from home and answers are official party answers.

CONS – The youth policy may not be specific and they may not answer your e-mail.

5. Another strategy is to ask your local youth centre to hold a “**Non-Candidates Meeting**” where youth and parents can meet and talk about youth issues in the election without having the candidates present. Youth and parents can talk freely and discuss the platforms for the different parties and get ready to vote or to meet with candidates using the other strategies.

PRO – This is a low-pressure and youth-friendly way to discuss the issues.

CON – You still need to act on the discussion and influence your candidates.

Questions for Candidates

You may want to begin with a statement about youth issues in your area. For example: “Youth in this area do not have enough facilities or enough opportunities” or “We have a crisis in my area with youth in big trouble and no help for parents” or “Our youth centre has been struggling for years and had to cancel a popular activity this year for lack of support”. This can be helpful, but keep it short! Sometimes, it is better to just ask the question and skip the statement.

You want questions that are “open-ended” so the candidate must say more than just “yes” or “no”. You want questions that cause the candidate to describe their plans with details. How will the candidate make their plans happen?

- What is your youth strategy for Canada? What is your youth strategy for this riding?
- How would you support youth centres in this riding? Are you aware of any youth centres? What have you done to show your support? How will you increase your support?
- How will you increase Federal support for youth programs and youth recreation in this riding?
- How will your party support families with teenagers?

Sometimes when you ask questions, candidates may refer to current government policy or department that impacts on youth, such as Service Canada, Health Canada or the National Crime Prevention Centre.

- How will this department help our youth centre? What is this department doing in this riding to help youth?
- These departments only support short-term projects, what can you do long-term for youth in this community?

More Tips on Speaking to Candidates

If elected, the candidate will be YOUR representative and they need to know your views. One of the most important jobs of MPs is to listen and respond to the concerns of the people they represent. We know that talking to candidates is important and makes a difference. The things that are promised in campaigns and the actions new government take are often based on the issues that they hear over and over again during the election. Your voice makes a difference.

- Introduce yourself. If you are a volunteer or supporter or staff of a youth centre, it is good to mention it. If you are a parent of a youth, it is good to mention it. If you are a leader in your community, it is good to mention it.
- Make your questions or statements very short, clear and specific. Some samples questions are in this kit.
- Ask for a response. We need a dialogue about the issue. Candidates may not want to make commitments or promises. It is fair to ask about their plans and their priorities. They should be ready to discuss youth issues.
- Don't be disappointed if the response is negative or not what you want. It is helpful to know about their views or plans even if we disagree.
- Be polite and positive in your approach. Even if you say "I will not be voting for you because..." you should still thank them for listening to you and encourage them to think about youth issues.

After you have asked your question and received your answer, you can still do two important things!

- (1) Send a follow-up e-mail or letter to the candidate. If you liked their answer, tell them you liked their answer. If you disliked their answer, tell them you disliked it and ask them to reconsider. We know candidates pay attention and sometimes they change their minds.
- (2) Tell your local Youth Centre about it. If a candidate has made a statement or a promise or a specific plan, it will help your Youth Centre to know. If you are sending letters or e-mail, send a copy to your Youth Centre. After the election, your Youth Centre may want to meet with the MP and share this information to ask for more support for youth programs.