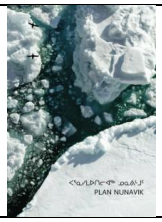

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PARNASIMAUTIK

Our Communities
YOUTH
Information Sheet 5C

Context

Nunavik's population is very young. Sixty-three percent of Nunavimmiut (compared with 35.9% of Québecers) are aged less than 30. Ten years from now, many of these young people will be part of the labour market and many will have dependants. Notwithstanding, 93.4% of students do not finish their secondary education.

A lack of job opportunities, low levels of education, loss of identity, social problems at home, mental health issues and suicide call for actions that are adapted to Inuit youth and will provide the perspective of a better future.

A Few of the Challenges

As part of the Québec government's Public Talks carried out in 2004 and its youth strategy, Nunavik youth, other community members and elected representatives made known the important issues and challenges posed by development of the north.

Poverty and malnutrition have direct impacts on the physical and mental health of youth.

The school drop-out rate is too high. Youth require better support to integrate society, i.e. move out of family homes, get jobs and build autonomous lives.

Children with special needs mixed with regular students diminishes the quality of education for both groups of students.

Nunavik lacks higher learning opportunities (such as a college), while certain training programs (ex. for wildlife conservation officers) are only delivered in French.

Subsistence hunters do not receive adequate recognition for the important work they do.

Youth centres and activities do not meet needs.

Solutions and Priorities

Develop initiatives that help young people to know their culture and who they are.

Promote healthy living, citizenship and family well-being, and provide online services to combat suicide.

Increase Inuit language and cultural teaching-time in schools through practical instruction and more time spent on the land.

Sources: Feedback provided by the Saputiit Youth Association during the Québec government's Public Talks (2004) and Youth Action Strategy (2005) processes.

Improve the awareness of school teachers of life in the north and stimulate interaction between school teachers, youth and elders.

Assist parents to be involved in the education of their children.

Reduce the school drop-out rate through awareness at school and in homes. Make sure that educational infrastructure, human resources, equipment and materials help Inuit students to reach their full potential.

Mobilize young people by promoting music, art and trades training.

Support the special needs of children with learning deficits.

Promote partnerships between schools and employers so youth can gain real work experience.

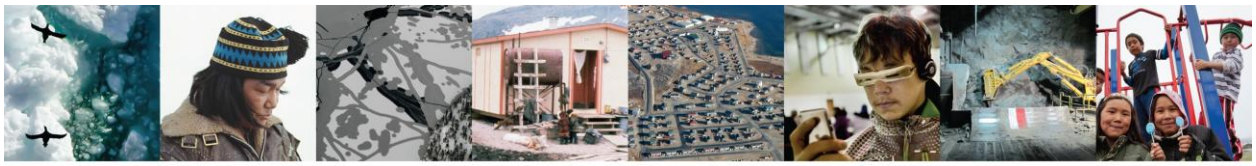
More emphasis needs to be put on vocational training, especially in the mining and construction sectors.

Establish incentives for local hunters who provide country food in the communities.

Improve support for post-secondary education: increase students' exposure to southern culture before they must relocate to Montreal and establish college-level education options in Nunavik.

Develop recreation and sport facilities for youth and all community members. Funding is required in particular to renovate or build youth centres with adequate, structured and safe services.

Government funding for youth initiatives must take into account the proportion of young people in the Nunavik population and the high cost of delivering programs and activities in the north.

Discussion

The young age of the population could be a determining positive factor for Nunavik's future, if efforts are made to raise youth in a healthy and stimulating environment. This process starts in decent homes with focus on traditional cultural activities and involves investments in childcare services, education and youth programs. Parents, communities, institutions and community leaders each have a role to play building the future of our youth. Because youth will inherit the consequences of the decisions made today, they too must be encouraged and enabled to be part of this decision-making.