

# Youth Perceptions of the Non-Profit Sector: Sharing a Snapshot of YPI Canada's 2016/2017 Evaluation Results



**SUMMARY:** Interventions can be made in secondary schools to improve youth perceptions of the non-profit sector.

## **CONTEXT: *The Canadian Non-Profit Sector***

- Over the past decade, our sector has grown at a rate faster than Canada's GDP. 170,000 charities and non-profit organizations now employ 2 million Canadians, and contribute 8% of the country's GDP, and rising<sup>1</sup>
- Despite this growth, public knowledge of the sector is ultimately low, with limited media coverage<sup>2</sup> nor consistent, comprehensive public education about the vital role that it plays in our economy and society
- "The sector delivers the social and cultural services that an aging and increasingly diverse population wants and needs." "...There is an ongoing perception that charities exist somehow outside the economy as a whole and a corresponding under appreciation of the role that charities play in sustainable prosperity."<sup>3</sup>
- The sector and government must establish effective ways to work together to sustainably produce this value<sup>4</sup>
- With an imminent wave of retirement in the coming years<sup>5</sup>, there is interest in examining youth perceptions and attitudes towards our sector, and responding to barriers/incentives around their employment
- Youth need more experiential learning opportunities to learn about potential career paths<sup>6</sup> in all sectors

## **YPI CANADA 2016-2017 EVALUATIONS\*: Investigating Student Experiences, Perceptions and Attitudes**

YPI students are surveyed annually to evaluate the impact of our program by looking for perceived changes in student attitudes, behaviours, and skill sets. In 2014-15, we looked at students' perceptions and attitudes towards *careers* in the sector for the first time. We were surprised by the number of students who still seemed to hold negative perceptions about employment in the sector, and we hypothesize that this stems from a fragmented understanding of the value of charities, and the role of the sector at large, and a broader public undervaluing of the work of professionals in the field. Since then, we have continued to track these perceptions, and the trend persists.

## **RESULTS: Student Attitudes Toward Careers in the Sector** (details of evaluation methods on following page)

- 18% of students surveyed had not considered a career in the sector before participating in YPI, but now would.
- The majority (78%) of students reported either indifference or disinterest in careers in the non-profit sector
- Many of these students described the reason as not being able to earn a living by working in the sector.

*The Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) works with 20,000 high school students across Canada annually, connecting them directly to the issues, services and professionals of their local charitable sector through our experiential philanthropy project. Students work in teams to study social issues, select and interview a local charity about its impact, and present their findings to their peers in a polished, 10-minute pitch in a competition to win \$5,000 for that charity.*

We are pleased to contribute the results of our modest evaluations to the bigger conversation. YPI wishes to leverage our program to improve outcomes for youth and the broader non-profit sector. **We seek mission peers who wish to:**

- 1. Improve knowledge among students, educators, and parents about the non-profit/charitable sector**
- 2. Help secondary schools further extend the YPI experience as a useful platform for career exploration**
- 3. Help participating charities use YPI as an opportunity to address the perception of the sector in their community**
- 4. Help deepen our evaluations, and our understanding of the need for/impact of such interventions**

\*Full Impact Report coming Dec. 2017.

<sup>1</sup> Brian Emmett, Imagine Canada, 2015: [Chief Economist Commentary: Charities, the economy and the 2015 federal election](#)

<sup>2</sup> Imagine Canada, 2015: [Charitable Sector, Then and Now](#)

<sup>3</sup> Brian Emmett, Imagine Canada, 2015: [Chief Economist Commentary: Charities, the economy and the 2015 federal election](#)

<sup>4</sup> For example: Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2013: [The Non-Profit Sector, A Key Partner in Change](#)

<sup>5</sup> Imagine Canada, 2015: [Enabling Jobs and Growth in all Canadian Communities by Enabling Charities and Non-profits](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Learning Partnership, 2013: [It's Their Future: A Pan-Canadian Study of Career Education](#)

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## 2016-2017 YPI PROGRAM EVALUATION DETAILS

- In 2016-17, of 8,864 total students who participated in 55 schools, 3,214 students at 46 schools completed our post-program survey, provided to them as an online link by lead teachers at the end of the program year.

## 2016-2017 YPI Student Survey Demographics

The following provinces were represented in the surveys:

- British Columbia: 8% (actual rep in YPI: 9%)
- Alberta: 15% (actual rep: 9%)
- Ontario: 52% (actual rep: 62%)
- Quebec: 24% (actual rep: 18%)
- New Brunswick: 1% (actual rep: 2%)

The following school types were represented:

- 65% of students represented public schools & public faith-based schools (actual representation among our schools in 2016/17: 65%)
- 35% represented independent schools (actual representation among our schools in 2016/17: 35%)

## Related Results

We asked: **“Please describe your experience with the charity you chose.”** With very few exceptions, students who commented at length described extremely positive, and often transformative, experiences:

- *“Our project made me realize that I grow and live in a well-off home, healthy environment, and have people to support me in many different ways. Because of what we learned at [the charity], I see the world differently. I now sympathize with and respect women more for all the hardship they receive on a day-to-day basis.”*

We asked: **“Would you consider a career in the non-profit sector?”** We received 2,398 responses, with the results as follows:

- 4% “Yes, I already planned to.”
- 18% “I would consider it now.”
- 53% “Not sure.”
- 25% “No way.”

We followed up with the open-ended question: **“Please comment on why you would or would not consider pursuing a job or career in the non-profit/charitable sector.”** We received 1,131 responses. The qualitative responses fell into the general themes below:

A) “YES” or “I would consider it now”

- **Desire for professional/personal development** *“I have always had a passion for poverty, especially internationally, and have always wanted to orient my passions and career in a direction where I could use it to work somewhere such as a non-profit charity.”*
- **Desire to help the community** *“Non-profit sectors can have the most impact on the community and help the world in a significant way.”*
- **Desire to help people** *“Because I enjoy helping people and it would be a positive environment to be in.”*

B) “Not sure.” or “No way.”

- **The perception that non-profit employees do not receive any pay/receive a low pay** *“I plan to get a job that would make me money..” “There is not enough money in that industry in order to survive.”*
- **Not interested in sector, or has other career interests** *“It is not my area of interest. I care about others and am sympathetic towards others state of well-being. But, I am interested in science for my career choice.*
- **Would prefer to donate to, or volunteer with, non-profit organizations** *“I don't think it's the right area for me. I definitely want to do not for profit work on the side but do not want to pursue a career in it.” “I want to make a lot of money, then donate a lot of it to the non-profit sector instead of making a career out of it.”*
- **Perception that they don't have commitment or skills required to work in the sector** *“I don't feel I'd be good at organizing everything/helping everyone.”*

**Top three reasons charities participated in YPI 2016-2017** (based on surveys from 149 participating charitable organizations, including 42 grant recipients, and 32 finalists)

ENGAGING YOUNGER GENERATIONS • EDUCATION/RAISING AWARENESS OF ISSUE • RAISING AWARENESS FOR THEIR CHARITY