

Uniting for Children 2005 Forum Summary and Evaluation Report

May 17 and 18, 2005
Edmonton Northlands Agricom



“Thanks to all who did a lot to bring in people who work for children, and care about children’s hearts, minds and spirits.”

“Best conference I’ve ever attended.”

“Fantastic organization!”

“It was a lot of fun. I learned a variety of important things that may help me in future situations.”

Delegate Comments

Alberta

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Appendix 1: Uniting for Children 2005 – Program

Appendix 2: Uniting for Children 2005 – Evaluation Form

Introduction

Alberta Children's Services hosts a Children's Forum every two years. The *Uniting for Children Forum 2005* was successfully held on May 17 and 18, 2005, at the Edmonton Northlands Agricom with more than 1,200 delegates from across the province in attendance.

The forum focused on education and brought together parents, youth and service providers to share their experiences and expertise and explore new ways of working together. Participants were offered access to a range of tools, new knowledge, and resources to raise happy and healthy children. Throughout the forum, youth were actively involved in discussions about issues that affect them.

The conference planning team and the 85 youth volunteers helped to ensure the success of the forum by keeping activities running smoothly. Responses to the evaluation questionnaire were very positive and there was a commitment to hold another forum in 2007.

The strong support of Children's Services Minister, Heather Forsyth, and Mrs. Colleen Klein was sincerely appreciated.

Summary of Forum Events

Uniting for Children 2005 marked Alberta's Centennial by including a special program of events. (See Appendix 1 for the Program).

Two noted professionals in the field of children's services delivered the keynote speeches:

- **Barbara Coloroso** – acclaimed author and educator who has touched the lives of parents and children for 20 years; and
- **Craig Kielburger** – founder of the "Free the Children" network who was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In addition, speakers from across Alberta hosted concurrent sessions over the two-day forum about parenting, health, mentoring and advocacy, literacy, bullying, and early childhood development.

A **Community Showcase** included over 80 displays from agencies and organizations across the province. The exhibitors' displays featured information on the wide range of programs and services offered to Alberta's children, youth and families. Some of the exhibitors were the Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton, Roots of Empathy, Hull Child and Family Services, the Edmonton John Howard Society, AADAC Youth Services and Métis Nation of Alberta. To allow delegates more time to visit the exhibits and network with participants, a Showcase Mixer was hosted following the first day of sessions.

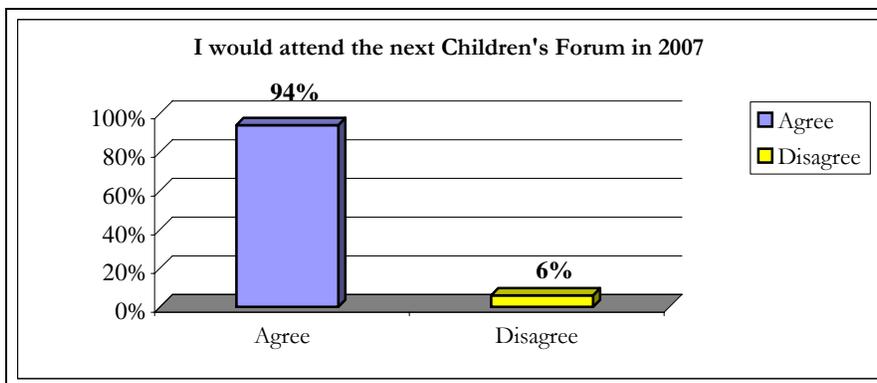
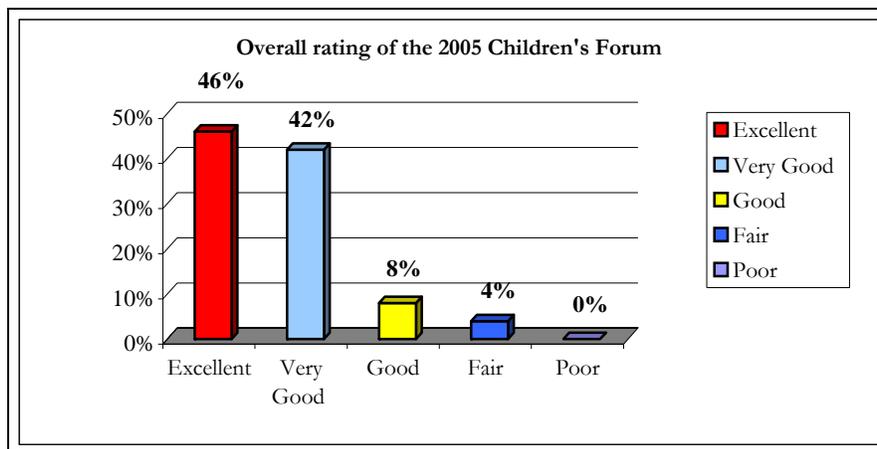
Throughout the forum site, **Celebrating Youth** stations featured performances by talented young artists, dancers, athletes and musicians. Some of the youth musicians and dancers were also featured on the Showcase Stage, which was located in the Community Showcase area.

Participant Ratings

Delegates were asked to complete an evaluation form (see Appendix 2) at the conclusion of the forum rating their satisfaction on a five point scale, with “5” indicating the strongest level of satisfaction. 315 out of 1011 delegates completed the evaluation provided.

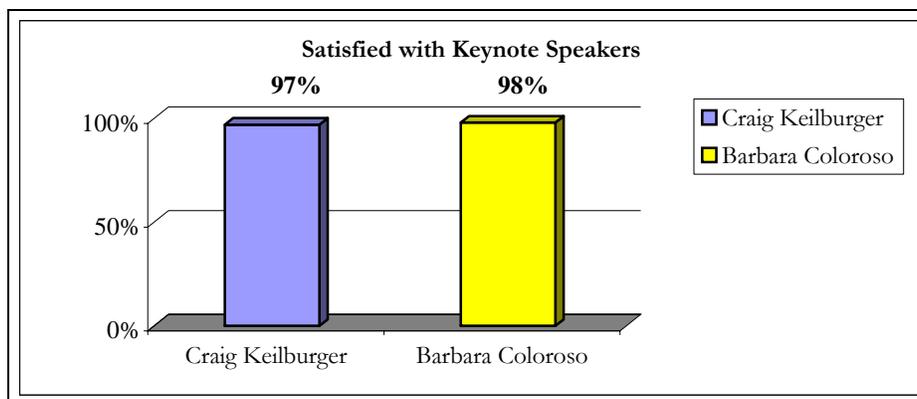
Overall Satisfaction

Of the 315 delegates who responded, 96% rated their overall experience as good, very good or excellent, and 94% agreed or strongly agreed they would attend the next Children’s Forum in 2007.



Keynote Speakers

According to respondents, the keynote speakers were a highlight of the Children's Forum.



Barbara Coloroso: Most respondents strongly agreed that Barbara was an outstanding addition to the forum. Pleased with her level of knowledge and expertise, they found her presentation to be entertaining, informative and practical.

"I have read Barbara's books, listened to her tapes, seen her on television, and today, I got to meet her in person. THANK YOU for providing me with this incredible opportunity!" (Delegate)

Craig Kielburger: Most respondents were enthusiastic about Craig's energy and passion. They felt that his message on global awareness, poverty and developing a selfless spirit was powerful and inspirational.

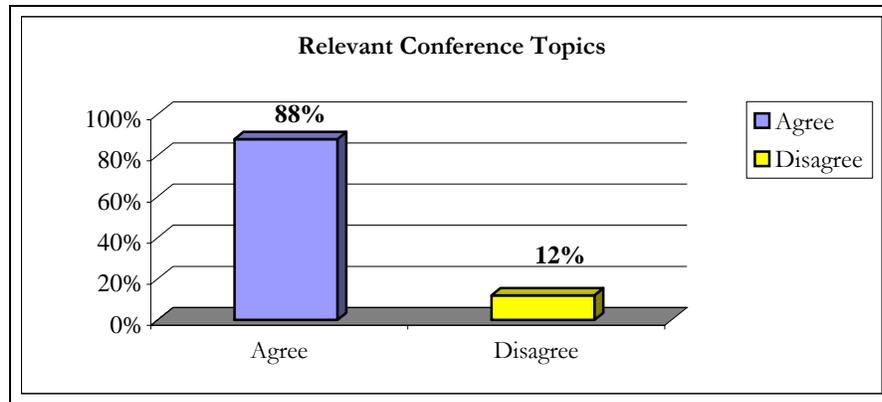
"Craig helped us to see the 'power of one' and imagine a purpose bigger than ourselves." (Delegate)

Concurrent Sessions

In total, there were 35 Concurrent Sessions and 44 speakers. The following is an analysis of the responses about the concurrent sessions. (See Appendix 1, pages 3 to 5, for a complete listing of current sessions and speakers.)

What worked well

- Most respondents (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that topics were relevant, met their needs and provided new and innovative approaches to providing service in Alberta.
- The majority of speakers were rated as informative and knowledgeable in their subject areas, generally meeting respondents' expectations.
- There was an overwhelmingly positive response for the session "Wasted Angels" and speaker David Roche.



“Thank you for providing us with the gift of David Roche!” (Delegate)

What worked well

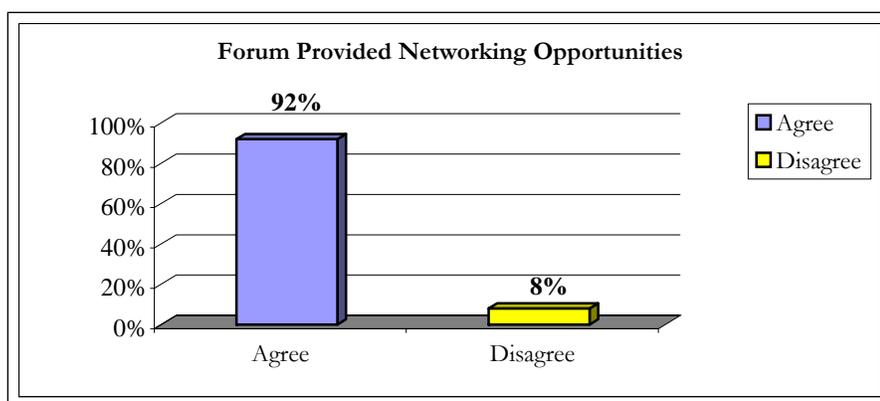
- An excellent conference, very organized.
- I appreciated the conference that much more because there was no cost to attend.
- The involvement of youth throughout the conference was very moving.
- Inspirational speakers provided practical strategies to help kids in the classroom and at home.
- Registration Process was quick and effective.

What could have worked better

- More time for questions and interaction with a speaker following the presentation.
- Some sessions should have taken a more provincial rather than local or regional focus for this event.
- More handouts would have been helpful and few sessions offered reference materials.
- It is important that the sessions offer practical, hands on information and cover the topic outlined in the registration booklet.
- Youth speakers could benefit from more guidance in preparing and developing their sessions' content and format.

Special Features

Community Showcase: In general, respondents found the exhibitors' displays to be informative and educational. However, they would have enjoyed a more interactive environment and more cross-ministry involvement in the showcase. When asked if the showcase provided an opportunity to network, the majority of respondents (92%) responded favourably.



Celebrating Youth Stations: Respondents indicated that the performances by the young Aboriginal artists were interesting and supported the overall theme of the forum. Some respondents noted that representation from other cultures would also help to enhance the theme of the forum.

Youth Volunteers: Comments like “helpful”, “informative”, “approachable”, “enthusiastic” and “energetic” were commonly used to describe the contributions of the volunteers to the forum.

“The kids were super welcoming and friendly. Great work!” (Delegate)

Registration, Venue, and Food

Registration Process: In general, the delegates found the process to be organized, efficient and comprehensive with a good choice of registration options (fax, phone and online). Although many delegates registered online, feedback shows further work on the online process is required to improve accessibility and usability.

Venue: Overall, the respondents found the facility to be attractive, comfortable, and easy to navigate although a site map would have been helpful. Some concerns were expressed about the temperature control in a couple of rooms and the noisy location of Salon 3.

Food: The quality and quantity of food provided was rated as good to excellent. However, the need for healthier options was a recurring theme in the comments.

Recommendations

The information gathered from delegates will be valuable in planning *Uniting for Children and Youth Forum 2007*. Below is a summary of recommendations.

Program

- Provide more time for delegates to visit and network, particularly at mealtimes, by reducing the number of keynote speakers and special presentations.
- Familiarize organizers with the content of each session to ensure it is relevant, has a provincial focus and is accurately described in the registration booklet.
- Reduce the number of sessions so that sessions are longer and of enhanced quality.
- Increase cross-ministry focus at the *Community Showcase*

Speakers

- Continue to bring in renowned and recognized keynote speakers who delegates may not otherwise hear from.
- Prepare concurrent session speakers so they are skilled, organized and engaging presenters.
- Let speakers know in advance who their audience will be, so they can present new and fresh material.
- Encourage speakers to provide reference materials and to check that their audiovisual equipment is working properly.

Venue

- Make sure the main hall is well lit and at a comfortable temperature throughout the event and to ensure audibility, do not locate the salons near high traffic areas.