

Kneehill County

May 16, 2024

Scholarship Essay

I believe that youth tend to be undermined within society when it comes to decision-making. Though it is a scientifically known fact that the brains of human beings do not fully develop until the age of twenty-five, according to the University of Rochester Medical Centre. Youth are capable of forming their own thoughts, opinions, and desires and with that, it is essential to remember that the younger generations are the future so to allow the future influential citizens to partake in decision-making while still making an impact on society itself would be beneficial to any sort of contribution.

Why would it be important for youth to contribute to their community and how impactful or beneficial would it be to allow such a thing? Well, to that I answer positive as well as proactive youth development. Youth tend to grow a sense of confidence and responsibility while aiding those around them and this will create a sufficient impact on those individuals who are able to take any skills obtained and in turn, apply them to their daily lives or assist them within their own community. Obstacles are often faced as youth find their way to individuality, and these obstacles are (but not limited to) a lack of experience, peer pressure, stress, and the inability to be heard. While allowing the youth to not only advocate for themselves but also consider the needs and wants of others, and earn a sense of commitment. All of these characteristics are what is essential for an individual to become a functional contributor to society and to not only obtain personal growth but also personal values or goals.

To promote a healthy and welcoming environment for our youth of today would be to seek and listen most importantly. Youth often feel misrepresented, not heard, or just ignored. Establishing or practicing *active* listening would benefit both the youth and the adults in achieving a balanced domain. To also attain more younger people within our community would make it appealing to that group of individuals and this can be reached by directly asking the youth group what would appeal to them directly, rather than assuming or guessing what it may be that would draw them in. Another way to engage the youth would be to involve a diverse range of people- this can include individuals of different ages, races, skill sets, and different interests/ hobbies.

The stigma that the youth of our society cannot or do not contribute to society has been engraved within our culture and we, as a community, must set a goal that shall overcome that stigma. In Kneehill County I have seen a multitude of different ages with such a wide range of skills that would benefit our rural community, and provide a sustainable work ethic while doing so. To promote a healthy and balanced environment when it comes to propositions being projected by adults and youth, I would continue to advocate for the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of the youth and to not only take them into consideration but also put their suggestions into action thus allowing the youth of our community to be heard, gain or grow a sense of responsibility, all while providing the opportunity to allow the youth to assert themselves in this flourishing community.

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A Discussion on Youth Involvement in Local Government

Encouraging youth to participate in local or county government is hard, but extremely important. Along with the practical and emotional barriers young people face when trying to involve themselves in government, a lack of awareness and interest prevents further involvement. By making direct decisions that combat the significant barriers that youth face when it comes to public engagement, such as apathy, a lack of awareness, and practical and emotional obstacles, local governments can work toward a united future where young people are invested and involved in community and regional government.

Perhaps the largest struggle that county decision-makers face when trying to encourage youth involvement is a simple lack of interest. Those determined to involve themselves in civil and political matters will doubtlessly find a way despite many hurdles, but a lack of physical barriers make no difference to those who have no interest in participating. Therefore, before more practical barriers must be addressed, one must first spark interest. Many young people are busy, especially in high school, and do not want to occupy their free time with things they don't think affect them or things that are not "fun". One way to combat this is to foster awareness regarding the role that county and local governments fill; share information as to the decisions that directly affect young people, and speak about upcoming issues and events. This will emphasize the power governing bodies have and show that local governments tackle difficult and important questions. Provide specific examples of opportunities for participation. Another way to encourage youths to want to participate is through school programs and opportunities. Not only can high school billboards and presentations spread awareness of opportunities, but if governing bodies were able to integrate themselves into school curriculum, even in an optional capacity, youth interest and participation would increase. For example, if by attending a particular number of community or governing meetings, a student could earn extra credit in a particular course, such as Social Studies or CALM. Schools could also require a half-day field trip to county events where presentations could be made to explain to youths the importance of local government and community participation. These ideas will require a lot of work, but if local governments wants to see significant increases in youth interest, substantial changes are required. Youths are also shaped in large part by their parents, and by increasing general interest and involvement from older adults, youth participation will also grow. Through dynamic changes and insightful initiatives, regional governments can tackle the largest barrier prohibiting youth involvement, apathy.

The second largest barrier that prevents greater youth involvement is a lack of awareness. Many young people are simply unaware of the opportunities available to them. Not only can they be ignorant of the general opportunities provided to the public, but they can also feel that the offered opportunities are not intended for them. Thankfully, this can be remedied easily through physical and digital announcements detailing specific open meetings and community gatherings as well as clearly stating the topics of discussion and the inclusive invitation. In order to attract young people, the information needs to be practical and specific, so no further research is required. Pamphlets could be placed in local spaces, such as at grocery stores, community centers, and schools. Online posts both to county and community websites and social media accounts can spread the word, especially in this digital age. There are a

multitude of ways to spread awareness about opportunities for young people, and this barrier is easily overcome with thoughtful and organized efforts.

In addition to these barriers, regional governments need to address the practical obstacles that young people face. Often much of the infrastructure surrounding administrative processes is inaccessible for youths whose time is limited and often highly regulated. To promote accessibility, meetings should occur outside of regular school hours and be in central locations so driving time is minimized. The public should have easy access to previous meeting minutes. Online polls and discussion forums can also provide a low effort way to voice one's thoughts and opinions. By implementing changes to lower the barriers that young people face, interested young adults will be enabled to participate in local government.

Finally, governing bodies need to address the emotional and psychological barriers. Many young people do not feel their input is valued outside of student specific roles, such as student president. The limited power these positions often hold can discourage students from participation. Often youth believe they are not heard or respected when reaching into more adult-majority organizations. They might also feel inexperienced and naive when voicing their opinions to those long involved in government. However, young people can offer new perspectives and enthusiasm. Having youth involvement in government not only assures experienced leaders in the future, but it also allows the government to make well informed decisions that affect the lives of all their residents. Governing organizations need to encourage these voices and avoid discouraging those who are less experienced. Practically, this means that young voices should be taken seriously at community meetings and that mistakes should be viewed as learning and teaching opportunities rather than used to put down the inexperienced. Although sociological and emotional barriers can be difficult to contend with, taking practical steps guarantees that everyone feels valued, and ensures that local governments can empower youths.

By facing these struggles head-on young people can be inspired, informed, enabled, and empowered to participate in local government, thus impacting the decisions that affect them and preparing them for future leadership roles in their communities. When it comes to engagement in local governance, the youth of today face many barriers, but through thoughtful and decisive action, these barriers can be overcome.

Kneehill County Scholarship 2024

In an ever-changing society, youth are increasingly affected by various government policies. For example, Alberta's recent mandate to restrict cellular device usage in classrooms starting Fall 2024. Although this policy may not seem significant to many students, it ultimately affects them, highlighting the irony that youth are impacted by rules in which they have limited to no say. Globally, the voting age for having a political voice is typically 18 years old or the age of majority. While this rule ensures that political decisions are made by informed adults, it's crucial to recognize that policies affecting youth demand their active involvement. In fact, as seen in Alberta with these new cell phone policies, children younger than 18 may have the most important voice worth listening to. So, how can a local government involve youth in important decisions that may greatly impact them?

The issue begins with three simple points: youth have a lack of awareness and interest, limited information, and face structural barriers. But what does this really mean? When analyzing these points collectively, the problem arises that children are simply not provided with the necessary information involved in decision-making, and their voices are left behind. It is seen time and time again that youth are excluded from decision-making processes, as evidenced by the voting age requirement in Alberta. Consequently, the government tries to implement policies they believe are in the best interest of youth with little feedback from the youth themselves. Furthermore, many youths can be intimidated by the decision-making process. With wordy, formal

documents, youth may overlook new policies as they do not understand how they may affect them. This ties back to the idea of limited access to information. Although all the information about a given policy may be available, it is not easily accessible or understandable to the younger generation, so they choose not to get involved. Overall, there are several key barriers that youth face regarding decisions and public engagement; however, there are many opportunities the county can take advantage of to prevent this from happening.

It goes without saying that a huge technological advancement right now is social media. With platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter dominating the online space, many younger people spend extensive amounts of time engaging with content on these platforms. Kneehill County could start by engaging youth where they are actively spending a lot of time. From simple 20-second videos to various Instagram posts, the county could target the younger generation by educating them on new ideas that will affect them and how they can get involved. Building off a new online following, the county could use these platforms to market various information workshops where youth can interact with individuals making the decisions. A space like this could promote growth among younger people, allowing them to ask questions and get involved in the decision-making process in real time. By using social media, the county will be able to involve youth much more than before by simply engaging them in new ideas, whether at home or at real-life events.

Getting youth involved at the base level is crucial in providing them access to the world of local government, but the county can go even further by keeping teens involved in the future. By implementing programs such as youth organizations, youth can

participate in the decision-making process firsthand. Many schools have similar programs, such as student councils, which allow students to be leaders and organize events. Individuals with these interests may also find a liking for a county youth council that allows them to get involved in their local government. Whether this involves helping to organize county events or forming a panel of youth to provide input on various topics, an organization like this can be the perfect place for the younger generation to start and potentially join county boards in the future.

Although there are barriers that teens face when it comes to being involved in local government, there are ultimately actions that can be taken to encourage their involvement. By utilizing social media to promote Kneehill County's regular operations and creating junior councils to offer direct involvement in decision-making processes, these initiatives are crucial in fostering a sense of civic responsibility among younger generations. By implementing these strategies, Kneehill County will not only enhance youth participation today but also inspire future leaders who are informed and invested in shaping their community's future.

2024 Kneehill County Scholarship Award

“What are the challenges and opportunities for youth participation in County decisions and public engagements. What barriers do young people face, and how can these obstacles be addressed to enhance their involvement”

My name is _____ and I am a third generation Kneehill County resident. I was born and raised on a farm just west of Three Hills. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to write about Kneehill County; and valuing the opinions of the youth and giving the chance to receive a scholarship. One of the biggest challenges with opportunities of youth participating would be lack of knowledge about the county and the role that they play. **With better education the county can create more opportunities for collaboration and a better sense of community within kneehill county.**

Growing up I didn't know much about the county, I was never heavily involved in 4H due to my commitment to sports and other activities. I have participated in highway clean up over the years but that would be the extent of my involvement. One of the biggest barriers would be the lack of education of how youth can be involved and how their voices can be heard. Something that could work really well would be to have some representatives come to schools and help students form around the county learn and understand more about the county we live in. Having youth ambassadors involved in both the schools and the county would make a huge difference in the knowledge of students. One of the barriers that I have seen is the lack of presence the county has in the schools. Before this essay I did not know that my voice as a youth born and raised in kneehill county mattered. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to have my voice heard.

Another barrier would be the pull for youth to join urban communities. Which is seen more and more as youth move out of rural settings for more education and work; oftentimes leading them to not return. One of the things that will draw our youth to return to rural settings to live, work, and

raise their families would be to create a very strong sense of community. To support this argument would be my personal experience this year. This year was particularly challenging for me as we did not have the numbers to have a Sr high girls basketball team at Prairie Christian Academy. I have been involved with sports all my life and have never faced the reality that I would not be able to play until this year. It made me extremely proud to be a part of this community when we had people reach out to us from all over the county ensuring us that we would find a place to play. We had people who are involved in the Three Hills school, Acme school and the Trochu school reach out and offer us help and support. The Trochu school so graciously stepped up and opened their gym, team, time and coaching to us. This act of kindness made a huge impact on me personally through the kindness shown to me and the fact that I am a part of a greater community, which is kneehill county.

It took me to my grade 12 year and not having a basketball team for me to see the importance of the greater community we have here. The team that was once my rivals quickly became my beloved teammates and some of my best friends. This speaks volumes to the wonderful community we have and how being involved makes a massive difference. This community in Kneehill County is where I want to return to as an adult, to live, to work, and to raise my family.

It would be so valuable if Kneehill County could create events, or opportunities for the youth to get involved with other towns and build these same types of connections. If we can foster these relationships within the greater Kneehill county, it will help develop a stronger sense of community and will be a strong draw for our youth to return and live in Kneehill County.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to write this essay, I appreciate that you value my input. I have loved growing up in Kneehill County, and I hope to one day give my kids the same opportunity as well.

Kneehill County - 2024 Scholarship Application Essay

Q: “What are the challenges and opportunities for youth participation in County decisions and public engagements? What barriers do young people face, and how can these obstacles be addressed to enhance their involvement?”

Both youth leadership and civic activism doubtlessly produce positive youth development, though, modern democracies have received lower voter participation from young people. Young people report little patience for decision-making processes, processes that seem to ignore them. Voters are concerned with pressing social problems they experience firsthand. Research shows that traditional political and civic decision-making, to youth, is barren. Meanwhile, there is a preference for local community involvement that is hands-on. That which is practical, whether it be tutoring or school involvement, regional organizations, or other forms of volunteerism, there lies the potential for desire in civic engagement, an engagement that reaches many levels, from youth development to community service to youth leadership development, civic activism, and the opportunity for full decision making. There are tactics to make youth involvement genuine and meaningful, to better their society, and to set them up for their future.

Too often organizations go through the motions without engaging with youth genuinely, with meaningful outcomes. Tokenism does more harm than good. Empowerment does not follow an agenda or formulate their involvement for their mean, rather it is a dire willingness to give youth a voice in decisions that affect them.

The least engaged sector of youth is reported to exist in more challenged, older, lower-income, distressed communities. These communities do not receive opportunities for youth involvement in the community as a whole aside from connections within their families. Whether or not it is a factor of discussion, the results of access to groups that participate in pressing and relevant issues are evidence of the importance of leadership opportunities that allow them to develop practical skills in decision-making and managing change.

In terms of decision-making, it is not completely alien in the local arena. In Waupaca, Wisconsin, young people serve as voting members of the local city council that makes laws and allocates resources. The Initiative brought about a new skateboard park for the town, volunteer opportunities with community organizations for 6th graders, and a youth-led grant-making committee offering funding for local organizations' projects.

To get youth involved, they need a form of human motivation, certain people, adults, who provide personal support and assistance at many levels. Young people initially need at least one enthusiastic adult in the neighborhood, a community organization, a youth development agency, or local government. Someone with consistent time and the ability to make community decisions.

When youth gets involved with decision-making initiatives, it is often presented as an offer up for negotiation. Negotiations stall when either side locks itself into defending a position, instead of describing its interests to each other. Rather than identifying a position and defending it to the exclusion of others' interests, the goal is to find areas of agreement and common interests.

Getting a young person to find a reason to get involved is sometimes difficult. Though, once one peer has an initiative it is all the difference. Young people can figure out how to get others involved. As one young man at the 2004 Learning Exchange said, "Other youth are the best recruiters. We know how to talk to each other. We know what's important to them. We'll be honest and be ourselves." Opening all doors. Some adults researched in Vermont struggled to find youth willing to share what they needed from the community. Finally, they found an out-of-school 16-year-old who wanted to talk. He was able to persuade other teens to join discussions. Soon, they were hearing from youth on release from juvenile detention as well as honour students.

Getting the attention of the youth and recruiting them for community improvement is scrambled and brings challenges. This initial effort is not all the battle. However, keeping young people engaged can be far more difficult. Both youth and adults have busy lives with polarizing directions. Most young people want to explore many career directions and options for their future. Nothing is for certain but instead moving quickly. Retaining young participants requires a strong plan with specific strategies and tools, as well as the ability to be flexible.

For a member of the youth to be and continue to be involved they need to get something out of it that will meet their personal goals and needs, such as opportunities to meet people, having fun, better job opportunities, or learning new skills. They are motivated by their values or beliefs, such as a sense of social justice or responsibility to others. A friend or mentor is what often keeps one invested. It is the counselor's responsibility to make sure people don't feel like they wasted their time. Participation is cherished, and keeping in touch lets people know their time was and is valued.

It is a major investment to incorporate youth involvement in a meaningful way, that is because people of all ages are incredibly dynamic. The relationship between sectors of age and experience and challenges is meant to be bridged because we are not just outdoing ourselves for the here and now, we are creating a people that is well equipped to take on their future and programmed with the desire to see an honourable system and good change.

"There is a huge gap between the daily world of youngsters and grownups; if we do not bridge this gap, making policy for them is useless and without results."

—Thijs Malmberg - Ordina,
The Netherlands

What are the challenges and opportunities for youth participation in county decisions and public engagements? What barriers do young people face, and how can these obstacles be addressed to enhance their enforcement?

Youth Participation and how Decisions Made Affect Us

A common problem we see today is little to no involvement of the leaders of tomorrow in our communities. This is because many young people feel unprepared about going to these meetings and contributing to these decisions because they feel as if they won't be taken seriously or they don't know about how the decisions made now are going to affect them later. As a rural student myself I have seen how decisions made by the County have affected us positively and why we need a youth voice to contribute.

Contrary to what many people may think, young people are not aware of the opportunities in their area even with their high usage of social media. Many youth don't participate because they don't know due to the platforms it's being posted on. To get more information to students we need to use the media they are on. Many kids today have volunteered for countless hours for community activities because they saw the post on instagram. Another way to provide youth with the information regarding participation in communities is to have the schools they go to announce it. In my personal experience I know lots of people who hear about a chance to volunteer on the announcements before class and often go, myself included. Since many youth also cannot drive they will also need time to plan ahead to get to any activity so the more notice they are given, the higher the chance they will sign up for it.

A positive decision made by Kneehill County which affected youth was the water lines brought out to the rural properties one of which I live on. For a small fraction of the price it would have been for farmers to install their own water lines by themselves; our Country sponsored the project making it affordable. Hauling water is a task many of us were faced with. You would have to watch how much water was used and when we had no power we couldn't use our water. Being able to have practically unlimited use has changed many young people's lives positively and lessened their chore load.

Feeling unprepared for a job, or even a meeting is stressful. Lots of jobs or even volunteering gigs require previous knowledge and more often than not youth don't have the previous skills or experience yet because they've never done something like that before. We need to be able to make young people feel okay knowing that they don't know everything yet. When there are meetings or decisions we want youth to participate in we have to know that maybe they aren't going to be the most prepared, but every

time after that they will improve. Having people help them along the way coaching them and giving them support is what's needed.

This generation is going to be the leaders of tomorrow which means our input is important to the people who are governing us today because of how it will affect us later. Another challenge in youth participation in County decisions is young people not realizing that all decisions made are going to affect them. Just this year on May 14, Kneehill County voted against the proposal of a waste management facility here in our County to preserve our land. And keep it farmable for as long as possible. This directly affects youth as they will be the ones inheriting the land in the future but many of us don't think ahead. To make young people understand the importance of participating and voicing their concerns on opinions we need to show them that it does affect them. Just last year in November Kneehill County helped dig up dinosaur bones in Horseshoe Canyon and were successful in their work with the museum. Many students are passionate about science and history and plan to pursue careers in paleontology. If they knew that it is encouraged to go to the canyon to find bones they may be able to help excavate some of it and would have directly supported something they are passionate about.

Some barriers faced by young people can be financial, a lack of support or a lack of resources they have available to them. Without support from family and friends we cannot be involved in our communities. Especially when we are young we may need someone to drive us to our volunteering or our sports games. We need someone to support us so we can gain confidence in what we are doing and will put ourselves out there more after we feel confident in what we are doing. Which would lead us to be able to support others. Having a lack of resources also creates a barrier due to the inability to complete tasks that could be asked of us. Something that could help with this would be mentors. People who are willing to take a young person on and support them. Making sure that they are taught all the things they need to know about something before they make a decision. A mentor could also help them understand why all County decisions affect them and why a youth voice is important to take into consideration.

Having a youth voice is important because it would ensure that policies being made are also keeping in mind the youth and their needs. An issue with this though is that young people feel as if they won't be taken seriously for important decisions due to the fact that they are inexperienced. We need to let them know that that's what is being looked for. We need to ensure that youth know that their inexperience is okay as long as they are willing to learn for next time. It's also important that we have youth that are actively involved in our communities saying their concerns for decisions because they are the ones who are out there and see what's going on.

As a Kneehill County resident, I am proud that our County fights to keep our land clean and safe for future generations and looks for opportunities to bring new infrastructure such as clean accessible water to our community. Coming from a multi-generational farming family and hoping to reside in rural Alberta once I graduate University, it is extremely important that we have leaders that continue to make strong positive decisions regarding our land. My University goal is to become a geologist and do my part in ensuring safe usage and preservation of our land for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kneehill County Scholarship Essay

When the question of the challenges and opportunities young people within our community face when encountered with participation in County decisions, many thoughts come to mind. First and foremost, I think most of the young individuals coming out of high school have a general lack of knowledge on County matters. This is because most young people are unaware of the everyday workings of the County, its members, and their duties. Of course in school we learn about municipal government, but there is no present day knowledge about our County's decisions being brought forward in the classroom. Thinking about this it truly disheartens me, if I'm the future generation shouldn't I be aware of the direction my County members are taking me. I can see a few possible solutions to get our youth more involved. That being, a possible student liaison between the school and County, someone who can give the County information directly to us youth. Another possible solution to this problem would be an option class that would teach our young individuals about the current County members and their goals. I believe there would be tremendous interest in this topic as there are many students that have rural backgrounds and the County decisions directly affect them and their families future. If this class option was implemented it would destroy another barrier we face as adolescents. To most of us politics can be intimidating, this can lead to very few of us willing to step forward and present any kind of ideas. With this new knowledge base that the class option and student liaison bring forth, it will provide confidence for the youth to feel recognized in the County's eyes. I also think it would be truly helpful if you would be willing to come out and engage with the students within our schools. I do realize this will be a challenge, as being a council member isn't your only job and your time is limited. I do believe though this would create a friendly environment between the youth and your council members. Being able to foster a more personal connection would help our youth be more comfortable and want to become more involved. Unfortunately right now most of us probably have little knowledge on who each of you are and your role in the County. If you could foster a relationship with the schools, I am confident that we would have a lot of questions for you and hopefully vice versa. My last and final thought to help fix this separation would be to have the County expand their social media presence. With the growing technology very few of us read the paper or use facebook, but we are out there and interested in learning more.