Youth Activism and the Union Movement

The biggest roadblock between youth and Union activism is a lack of information. Growing up in the NWT, I learned very little about unions (both within school and otherwise) and even less about how this information was relevant to me. I believe that it is because of this lack of education that youth are often uninvolved in Union matters. Here, I will explore how one can spur youth into activism through education and how youth play a pivotal role in the education of their peers.

What can Unions do to motivate youth into activism?

The first step towards motivating youth into activism is to get their attention in order to create awareness of Unions among them. One way to do this would be to create UNW fliers and posters (preferably colourful ones with visual aids) which could be displayed in youth centers, schools, recreation centers, shopping malls, career councillor’s offices, etc. Another way to reach out to youth would be through different social media websites such as Facebook (the creation of a Twitter account was a great step for the Union!). Social media could provide youth not only with resources and updates about the Union, but also with a way to connect to other youth who are involved with the Union. A different strategy could be to contact schools to see if they would be open to having a UNW representative come in to do a presentation in class about the Union. Such a presentation would likely fit well into the Career and Life Management course (a grade 10 course required to graduate in the NWT). Also, why not host an event specifically for youth? It could be an educational discussion or presentation, or it could just be a movie or game night with Union resources available to read over (such as the posters and
fliers). Either option would help educate and increase awareness of the Union among youth. Offering food during the event wouldn’t hurt either! In brief, there are many ways to grab youth’s attention in order to improve their awareness regarding the Union.

The second step is to provide clear and relatable information in order to educate youth about the Union, its importance, and the challenges it faces. I would like to highlight that it is imperative that the information provided be relatable to youth: it is important for the youth to see how the information is relevant to their lives (and not just to their parent’s lives, which was how my peers and I often viewed unions in high school). From my experience, without this key aspect youth tend to rapidly forget the information provided. So, it is important that there be some resources designed for a younger audience in order to create this sense of relatability. One way that could help youth better understand their relation to the Union could be to include examples of how a union might have affected their (or their friends’) lives so far. Perhaps a union negotiated the Collective Agreement that allowed their parent(s) to have enough vacation time to take them on a trip or maybe a union sponsored the sports team they’re on.

Finally, whether it is at the end of a presentation or at the bottom of an educational flier, I believe it would be helpful to include a guide for youth to let them know what they can do next. How can they find more information? Who can they contact if they have questions? How can they get involved in youth activism? Which leads us nicely into our next subject:

**What role can youth play in the Union movement?**

As well as playing many of the same roles as adults can in the Union movement (such as writing letters to their local MLA and participating in strikes such as the one currently taking place in Hay River), youth can play a very important role in the education of other youth. Youth tend to listen to each other more than they listen to adults and, as I previously mentioned, youth
are more interested in information they find relatable. Who better to help create relatable information for youth than a young person? Youth can help educate each other in many ways: From small things such as discussing Union matters and sharing information about the Union through social media, to big things such as assisting during presentations in schools, helping to design and run a Facebook page, and organising events for other youth.

In conclusion, the key to motivating youth into activism is to reach out to them and educate them in ways that will interest them. By providing information in the places they spend time in and by using information that relates to them, one can build a sense of interest which I believe will inspire youth to become more involved in the Union and in Union activism. As part of the Union movement, youth can play a role in the education of other youth and help further increase awareness on the subject. By working together, youth and the UNW can inspire a generation that is well educated in the world of unions.

Bibliography