

## Fairness for Children: A Youth Perspective

UNICEF Canada gathered young people from the Students Commission of Canada to discuss the findings of UNICEF Canada's report, *Fairness for Children: Canada's Challenge*. The following is a transcript of their presentation at the launch of the report on April 18, 2016

### Growing up is hard.

Today there is a gap in income equality in our society. And not feeling financially secure can have negative effects on all aspects of your life, like health, education, and overall well-being.

Most people are meeting basic needs, but it's hard to afford some things, like technology. That's where the gap comes in and it affects young people.

Low family income puts a lot of stress on everyone, even young people, in many aspects of life – making school hard and relationships hard and just complicating life in general.

Youth want the time and ability to explore their interests, but get stressed when their parents are sometimes working two jobs and still can't afford access to things like the technology needed for school today.

This affects young people's responsibilities – they often need to care for siblings or can feel pressure to get a job and contribute to family income.

A lot of adults are focused on steering kids in the one direction that they think is right. They don't focus on our now but instead cause us to worry about the future. This puts too much pressure on us. Our generation is really focused on the future and on doing well. But we also need to remember to focus on the present.

Instead of orienting youth on set paths that focus on the rest of their lives, we need a more supportive and fluid structure. We need to be allowed to find a balance between what we want to do and what we're told we should do. For example, there should be less focus on grades, and more focus on actual learning.

The path you take in education is important, but so is being in control of your own present and future. Adults need to allow youth to make their own choices and to choose their own path. Help them focus on their journey and not the destination.

Health is about feeling good overall – it's not always just the physical things. For example, bullying is an issue that affects health.

People don't talk about the spiritual and mental part of health as much as they should. Mental health is important.

Young people feel a lot of pressure but also feel like they can't make a difference. This makes you feel powerless, and when you feel that way, you need someone to reach out to for help. But finding support and asking for help is hard.

Some communities don't have the resources you need. Sometimes you don't know about the programs that you can use.

Programs should seek out youth, instead of youth needing to be the one to seek out programs.

Young people need more awareness of the mental health programs that do exist. Having a support system can get you to a much better place.

As a society we need to teach our youth that everyone may come from different walks of life, but that you only see the mask people put on in public; you don't know what's going on behind closed doors and how it's impacting them.

It is not okay to judge people based on their socio-economic status.

It's important to know and remember that education, health, income inequality and life satisfaction are not distinct areas; they're all interconnected, and improving in one area will improve them all.

And a balance between focusing on our now and on our future is necessary for our success.

With thanks to the staff at the Students Commission of Canada and the youth who lent their voices to this discussion:

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