

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)

Facilitating meaningful relationships between young adults and their neighbourhood is an important way to create trust amongst residents, help build stronger communities, and create economic opportunities for local youth.

Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY) is a social service organization in Winnipeg's West Broadway neighbourhood that is committed to helping at-risk youth and young adults build these relationships. RaY is non-judgmental and non-partisan, and seeks to employ a harm-reduction approach to all client interactions. Their mission is to "provide youth with what they need, on their terms, to better their lives."

RaY was formed in 2003 when two organizations joined together (Operation Go Home and Powerhouse) in an effort to mutually strengthen their programming. This merger enabled the organizations to stop competing for funding, expand the age range of clientele, and offer proactive programming focusing on prevention, intervention, outreach and support.

Current programs offered through RaY include addictions support, advocacy, emergency youth services, housing support, prevention, street outreach, and employment services. The employment services program, Growing Opportunities (formerly known as Odd Jobs), is offered in collaboration with local businesses and community partners. Through this pre-employment program, RaY offers casual supported employment to youth looking to gain work experience and earn a modest income.

Growing Opportunities is geared towards youth or young adults who are having difficulty entering the labour force, and those who are on income →



→ assistance and unable to gain full or part time work. Provision of work experience and technical assistance — such as developing resume writing skills — helps build experience and confidence, and provides a bit of structure and stability to at-risk young people who are often marginalized and excluded from their community.

Growing Opportunities began through a simple process of responding to the needs of at-risk youth and young people. A young commuter had a bus ticket stolen from them, and approached RaY to see if there was anything that could be done. Staff at RaY knew that their walkway needed to be shoveled, and they had some petty cash to pay this young person to do the work. Recognizing that this was not a unique situation and that many young people struggled to find work and to feel like a part of the community, RaY established this program in order to create economic opportunities for youth while reintegrating them into the community.

Acknowledging that building local relationships is critical in leveraging these local employment opportunities, one of the main goals of this program is to have young people engage with the community at large. RaY also recognized the importance of having business owners and influential people relate to young community members who may have become disengaged from the labour force. This engagement is a way of creating trust and

interdependence amongst all community members.

In 2009, Growing Opportunities assisted in a total of 796 odd job placements in the community, almost exclusively in the West Broadway area, and an additional 416 internal job placements within RaY. These odd jobs were given to about 100 different clients, all of whom were paid hourly for their work. Growing Opportunities also helped 50

people write or update their resumes, and provided training opportunities that included food handling, CPR/first aid, and forklift training.

Staff members have seen a few people find permanent employment through this program, but a more foundational change has been the boosts in confidence seen in participants as they benefit from the economic opportunities created by RaY. Clients are satisfied with their

work, feel good about themselves, and recognize that they are meaningful community contributors. As more and more participants build relationships with staff members, business owners, and individuals, they become increasingly linked to the neighbourhood. These relationships are an essential component of strong and interdependent people and communities.

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