



Landon Pearson Resource Centre  
for the Study of Childhood  
and Children's Rights



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## **Shaking the Movers VII: Standing up for Children's Right to Play**



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## **PREFACE**

Since 2007 the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights at Carleton University (LPRC) has sponsored a series of annual workshops for children and youth from across Canada and from a variety of backgrounds on themes related to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Since 2011 these workshops have taken place at Ryerson University in Toronto in order to allow students in the School of Child and Youth Care to have the opportunity to work with the young participants in a variety of roles. According to Article 12 of the CRC (which was ratified by Canada in 1991), young people under the age of 18 have the right to speak out and be heard on issues that affect them directly. Shaking the Movers workshops are designed to provide a space for children and young people to "have the floor", to present their unique perspectives and experiences and to provide specific recommendations and input related to the theme chosen for the year. While some adults do attend, they are there primarily to provide support to the young participants, to ensure that the workshop takes place in a safe and comfortable setting, to listen to what the young people have to say and to receive their recommendations.

The outcomes, priorities and ideas presented by the youth are captured in reports like this one and the responsible adults who were present undertake to make certain that the words of the young people reach as many "movers" as possible and that some, at least, of the "movers" respond. Among the rights that have been addressed in the past are children's rights to health and education, their rights in the justice system and in cyberspace, and their right to be informed. The theme of this year's workshop, which was held with the support of Ryerson University, the LPRC, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, and the Public Health Agency of Canada, was the right of children to play and to artistic expression (CRC Article 31). Next year youth would like to address issues related to exploitation in all its forms as it relates to children and youth.

## INTRODUCTION

To see children at play is so natural that it is a little hard to see why play should be considered a right rather than just something children do when they are not doing something more important. Even children's artistic expression, although it is taken more somewhat seriously, is rarely perceived as a right and given the priority that being a right would demand. Yet the framers of the CRC understood, with the help of civil society organizations like the International Play Association and others, that respecting both of these rights is fundamental to the fulfillment of all the other rights of the child and so they added Article 31.

### *Article 31*

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The right to play is primarily a child's right rather than an adult one although several international human rights instruments, not specific to children, include the right of all people to rest and recreation. Unlike these other instruments, though, the CRC is directed to persons under the age of 18 with a focus on healthy development throughout a child's growing years and for this to happen play is essential. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" was a common adage when I was a child and parents were always shooing their children out-of-doors after they had finished their homework. And it is true. Without play the growth of the imagination is stunted and many of us believe that it is our imaginative capacities that make us truly human. Play really begins when the small child is able to transfer meaning from an object to a dream. Small children dress-up and pretend to be adults, they turn blocks of wood into houses and paper into airplanes. They play with words to test their meaning through nursery rhymes and riddles. It is all make-believe yet it is all real as long as the children themselves are in charge.

Later in childhood artistic expression becomes as important as play for a child's personal development. The drawings of small children are quite similar all over the world but as children grow older drawings become more distinctive, indicative of the child's individuality but also embodying, to some extent, his or her surrounding culture. The astonishing thing is that the creativity of children and adolescents will also transform that culture. For this we should all be grateful!

Still, why should these activities, necessary as they are to healthy child development, be considered rights? What is the purpose of article 31? The answer lies, I believe, in the two cross-cutting themes that run through all human rights instruments including the CRC. The first is the theme of empowerment, the second the theme of relationship. While rights are considered to be inherent to the individual they do not exist in a vacuum. They should always be understood as existing in the context of other people's rights. The articles of all the international human rights agreements lay out norms for our behaviour towards one another so that we can co-exist and thrive within a culture of respect. Rights and responsibility cannot be separated. The young people at Shaking the Movers VII grasped this dual nature of human rights very quickly. They could see, so they told us, that it is only in community that you can truly be yourself. But the community, and especially the adults that are part of it, have a particular responsibility for ensuring the protection of children's rights because children have less power and are more vulnerable and need all the support they can get.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a general comment on Article 31 in 2013 with clear instructions to States Parties about their responsibilities with respect to the right to play and the right to artistic expression which is well worth reading. The general comment called upon States Parties to consult with children and youth as an important first step in the development of their governments' response. In compiling this report of what the young people had to say at Shaking the Movers VII we turned to some of the young people involved to write it in a way that would respect the language of the young people, their perception and style. Now please listen to their authentic and emotionally-charged voices.

Hon. Landon Pearson O.C.



## OVERVIEW

On November 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights, in partnership with the School of Child and Youth Care and the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University, supported by Ontario's Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and the Public Health Agency of Canada, conducted a 2-day workshop with Canadian young people, for the purpose of:

- Providing an opportunity for children and youth to exercise their right to take part in important civil and political processes with the assurance that their voices will be heard and valued.
- Providing an opportunity for children and youth to prepare comments and recommendations for governments and civil society, with respect to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the themes that arise from this article.

This report highlights discussions that took place surrounding the right to play and the right to artistic expression as described in Article 31 of the CRC. The workshop provided the youth with an excellent opportunity to have a better understanding of the importance to their health and well-being, development and self-expression from a rights-based approach and how play and creative activities of various kinds will enhance all aspects of their lives and the lives of their friends, their families and the wider community.

The children and youth brainstormed solutions to some of the problems currently being faced by young people when exercising their rights to play and to artistic expression. Their authentic participation on an issue of real concern to them presented them with an opportunity to shake up some of the movers who are currently making decisions about them so that planning and programming will better respect their rights and serve their best interests.

The youth were split into four groups of approximately ten, in order to discuss their personal thoughts on children's rights to play and to artistic expression and how they are directly or indirectly impacted by the policies and practices that govern their lives. The workshops were designed to allow a safe space for youth to share their experiences and have their insights listened to by peers and Child and Youth Workers. The youth were provided with an information package prior to the workshops in order to have a clear understanding of what the two days would look like. Later they were given an evaluation form to provide further feedback and present their thoughts on the week-end. They were also encouraged to report later on what they had done to follow up.

The organizers of STM VII have committed to bringing the voices of these young people to adults who are under an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill children's rights including government officials, political leaders, civil society organizations, researchers, to say nothing of parents and teachers, so that they will better understand the importance of these rights and will be moved to do something about them .

## **FEATURES OF THE 2013 SHAKING THE MOVERS CONFERENCE**

During the summer of 2013 two young people (14 and 16 years old) carefully read the General Comment on the Right to Play issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and developed a set of questions that were used by the Ryerson University students as they prepared to take part in Shaking the Movers VII. Three Child and Youth Care classes facilitated activities throughout the weekend. Youth workers from Kingston Community Health Centre (KHCH) were also invited to organize ice-breaker activities and provide support to youth at the conference. This allowed for the creation of a safe and inclusive environment as the KHCH workers were present throughout the entire weekend. A fourth year Child Rights class introduced the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the whole group on the first morning and another fourth year class organized and facilitated evening activities on Saturday night that included art, music and recreational activities. Two representatives from the international development organization, Right to Play, did an activity on Sunday morning with all forty youth. Child and Youth Care students in the Advanced Group Work class cooperated to facilitate the four smaller groups of youth participants throughout the weekend. The group leaders provided opportunities for activities and discussions about the right to play/artistic expression, but took direction from the youth. Because an environment was created that promoted their voices, participation and free expression the youth were able to take leadership in crafting imaginative, resourceful and inspiring demonstrations about their rights under Article 31.

Another feature of STM VII that has now become a regular part of every STM workshop is the closing activity. After the discussions are over on the second day, and before leaving for home, each participant places a gift, which they had been asked beforehand to bring with them for just this purpose, on a table in the middle of a circle they form. This gift is intended to represent



something of significant personal meaning to the giver. Then the participants return to the table to pick up gifts that attract them. Finally, each young person takes a turn holding up the gift they have chosen and the person who gifted it explains how it expresses who they are. Many of the gifts are hand made and all are thoughtful. This is an enriching experience for all about identity and community, the cross-cutting themes of all rights, including the right to play and the right to artistic expression. It also reinforces the participants' understanding of the issues discussed and strengthens the connections they have made.

Another new aspect of our conference was that during break time youth played music through the speakers and were encouraging one another to stand up and dance. At one point every single person, including adults were up doing the 'YMCA'. This was clear evidence that the youth truly felt comfortable expressing themselves and supporting one another to get out of their comfort zones.

Throughout Shaking the Movers conferences our main goal is always to hear the voices of young people. This year we heard the voices of young people in an unique way; through their dancing, singing, artwork, discussions, and presentations. The most meaningful part of our conference was seeing youth supporting and encouraging one another to express themselves and be who they are. Shaking the Movers creates an inclusive, non-judgemental, open and youth-friendly environment where everyone can be the "kid" inside, but can also have meaningful discussions.

## GROUP INTRODUCTIONS

Summer Group: Ages 10-14



Fall Group: Ages 14 -18





Spring Group: Ages 14-18



Winter Group: Ages 17+



# **SHAKING THE MOVERS VII PROGRAM**

## **Introduction to the CRC**

The first day of the workshop was devoted primarily to the right to play and the second to the right to artistic expression although, inevitably, the two were difficult to separate. Day One began with a presentation to the participants by a child rights class on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with a special focus on both rights . The presenters did this in language the children and youth could understand, appreciate and employ in the small group discussions and activities were about to take place. Many of the youth were unaware that they had any rights and had never heard of the CRC. Others had some knowledge but their awareness was limited .

This is what the youth had to say in response to the presentation:

“Rights are made to protect us”. (16 year old female).

“Right to play is meant to make sure that we live a happy and healthy life.” (18 year old male).

“We need to educate each other and have more knowledge of what our rights are, this was the first time I heard about my rights.” (16 year old female).

Throughout the conference youth expressed that they truly learned the value of their rights and felt inspired to continue learning and teaching their peers.

After being introduced to the CRC the participants proceeded into their small groups to talk about or enact their new understanding of their rights, particularly those articulated in Art. 31.

## Article 31: THE RIGHT TO PLAY

**The BIG picture...** What is meant by the ‘right to play’ and what does it mean to you?

**How WE fit in...** Do you feel like you have the right to play? What prevents you from being able to play?

**Playing a role...** How can you overcome these barriers? How can we stand up or advocate for children and youth who may be facing challenges or barriers to accessing their right to play?

### What is the ‘Right to Play’?

Youth were really interested in learning more about their right to play. Some youth were surprised that such a right even existed. Many said that, to their knowledge, the right to play is not talked about on a regular basis if at all. Youth recommended that there be more accessible information and resources about all their rights including training to help them advocate for themselves and others in schools, at home and in the community.

#### Here is what the youth had to say:

“The right to play is the right to be yourself”. (14 year old male).

“When you’re younger it allows you to form who you are”. (17 year old male).

“It’s human to express yourself”. (18 year old male).

“Knowing that every child has to have the opportunity to play, explore and be a kid”. (15 year old female).

“I never have heard of the right to play before, I just thought it was something that kids do.” (16 year old male).

“The right to play is being able to express yourself without being judged”. (17 year old female).

“This is my first time learning about the right to play”. (18 year old female).

“Freedom to imagine: imagining stories, songs, arts, plays. It starts in the head where freedom of expression, express yourself through how you socialize and emotions”. (17 year old female).

“Sports, connecting your life with being social or being artistic, expressing yourself with different things or people.” (15 year old female).

## **What does the ‘Right to Play’ mean to you/impacted your life?**

The right to play means different things to different people, but that is the beauty of the right to play. The youth shared that it means expressing themselves and who they are and doing so without judgement. Youth brought up discussions about their art classes in school and how they strongly feel that art is also a way to express themselves, but that by being graded poorly on self-expression takes away from their passion.

“The right to play means expression – it brings people together, everyone expressing themselves together”. (19 year old male).

“Friendship, playing with children, dancing.” (19 year old female).

“Doing this you enjoy”. (14 year old male).

“Getting to explore your surroundings and getting to know yourself”. (17 year old female).

“Not being forced to do something you don’t want to do”. (12 year old female).

## **Barriers to the Right to Play**

Youth were asked what they feel prevents them from ‘play’? Here are some of their responses:

- School

Ourselves : Taking on extra responsibilities ,Pursuing own interests prevents other interests ,Want to do piano, but have exams coming up, need to see friends, etc

Money : School trips; Teams; Jerseys; Equipment; We have the right, but can’t afford it .

Accessibility/transportation: Parents can’t drive or don’t have a car; Lack of or no public transportation

- Family’s view/perception/influence
- Negative people
- Time
- Life
- Drugs/alcohol

Given the diversity of the youth there were clearly other issues in their lives that interfered with their right to play but this was not a setting in which they wanted to elaborate on the barriers created by deep poverty or by dysfunction in their families nor did the facilitators wish to push them. Youth felt strongly that there ought to be more adult allies and supports for youth to overcome these barriers and would probably be more prepared to identify them if opportunities were available. In the meantime, they were happy to dream. One of the glories of play is that it takes you out of the hard realities of daily life into the world of the imagination and when you can see how things might be you are more inclined to try to make them happen..Youth are knowledgeable about advocating for themselves and others. However, they felt it was and is much easier to advocate on behalf of a friend or peer instead of themselves. This is significant as it shows the need for more individuals and groups who prepared to advocate for young people and to listen to their stories.

On the Sunday morning the ‘Right to Play’ representatives reflected upon themes from the first day and asked the youth to write answers on sticky notes to the following questions:

- 1) Why is the right to play important?
- 2) What are barriers to the right to play?
- 3) Who has the right to play?
- 4) What can you do to advocate for your community on the right to play?
- 5) What is something new you learned about the right to play?

The youth wrote their answers and placed their sticky notes on the corresponding flip chart paper. Next, they were asked to form small groups to answer each question and discuss the themes that emerged from the sticky notes.

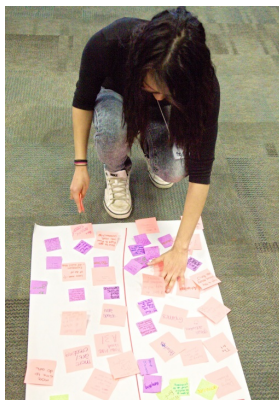




Here are some of their answers:

**The right to play is important because...**

- Equal opportunities for everyone
- It allows kids to express themselves and discover who they are
- Gives us identity
- It helps you build confidence
- To have a good life
- It increases a child's personal standard of life and thus, their quality of life
- We need it
- Some kids don't have it
- So kids won't grow up too fast
- So kids get the chance to play and to be a kid
- The freedom to be ourselves
- Freedom of expression
- Playing builds character and educates people while helping them to grow
- Helps us learn and grow, socialize, be creative and explore
- Playing allows people to have a break and refresh and allows them to be happy.
- They may be nicer or more positive with play.
- Health
- Positive outlet
- Develops people's social skills





### **We can advocate to our community about right to play by...**

- Letting people know about it
- Educating others/protest/advocate
- Bringing your friends together
- Volunteering
- Starting a rights club at school
- Creating 'play' opportunities
- Sharing resources
- Help improve other's rights and communities
- Making our voices heard



Before they finished the 'Right to Play' representatives offered a final activity to challenge the participants' imaginations.

#### **Stage 1:**

Youth were asked to close their eyes and imagine their most comfortable place, with family and friends, anywhere that they felt safe. They were then asked to imagine if all of their favourite things were taken away (ie: sports, games, Facebook, etc.). Then they were asked to show with their body and eyes closed how this made them feel. Next they were asked to open their eyes to see how others expressed themselves and what the similarities and differences were.

**Stage 2:**

Youth were asked to do the same activity but the opposite – if they had access to all of their favourite things and to show with their eyes closed how this made them feel.

**Discussion:**

Youth shared that when their favourite things were taken away they felt small, like their voices didn't matter and weren't heard. When they had access to their favourite things they felt positive, open and colourful – like everyone was who they were meant to be and that they were able to express themselves.



## Artistic Expression

**The BIG picture...** How do you express yourself artistically?

**How WE fit in...** What prevents you from expressing yourself?

**Playing a role...** How do you overcome these barriers? Why is it important to express yourself? How can you find creative ways to express yourself?

Youth express themselves in many different ways through art, music, cooking, singing, being themselves, talking to others, etc. Expressing themselves artistically is a way to share with others who they really are and also have a deeper understanding of their inner feelings/thoughts. Many youth shared that they don't always have people to talk to that they trust or that they don't feel as though people actually care to hear what they have to say—in turn they use their passion of art/music/etc. to express what they can't always say.

### How do you express yourself artistically?

“I don't follow recipes, I make my own.” (17 year old female).

“By singing a song I like, I express myself.” (18 year old male).

“I like to sing”. (16 year old female).

“I like to paint”. (19 year old male).

“Talking to people.” (17 year old male).

“Being your own individual”. (19 year old female).

“Way to connect”. (16 year old female).

“How we communicate”. (16 year old female).

“Connecting through art and music.” (14 year old female).

### **The Summer Group: Ages: 10-14 years old**



Group members each shared one activity that they enjoy to do to ‘express themselves’ that demonstrate who they really are. Then all of the youth would follow and do the same action. This picture shows one youth sharing her enjoyment of ‘dancing’.

## **Barriers to Artistic Expression**

What prevents you from freely expressing yourself?

“People, money, haters.” (17 year old male).

“Negative people.” (18 year old male).

“School, I spend a lot of time doing math that I don’t get enough time to go into the kitchen and cook.” (17 year old female).

“Actions, how you speak, how you present yourself”. (18 year old male).

“Time management”. (17 year old female).

“Cost/money, we cannot always attend art school in order to learn art because of financial barriers”. (15 year old female).

“How you will be judged by others”. (14 year old female).



“How teachers mark based on marking scheme”. (15 year old female).

Youth said that similar barriers exist for both the right to play and the right to artistic expression. The concern for lack of resources, the cost of ‘play’ and ‘art’ being out of reach for youth is something that needs to be addressed and taken seriously. Many youth shared that in their communities or cities they don’t have any art supplies or sports equipment—it’s not that youth don’t want to use art/play as a tool for self-expression, many times it’s that these materials or opportunities aren’t available to them.

### **The Spring Group: Ages: 14-18**

**Theme:** ‘Stand up for Art’



This youth presentation showed what an art class in school might be like. The “lady” standing in front of her class is the teacher and she asked her class to draw a picture of an apple and then one by one they each showed her their apple and she criticized each drawing.



Every youth drew their perception of what an 'apple' is and the teacher said they were all wrong because it did not look like the apple she had drawn as an example. The youth strongly believe that art cannot be judged and that art is determined by the artist, not the audience. At the end of

the presentation, the youth shared that there is no right or wrong when it comes to art, everything is right.

## **Overcoming Barriers to Right to Play and Artistic Expression**

What are some ways to overcome these barriers?

- Educate people
- Write letters to the government
- Gather the community and campaign for youth programs
- Right to Play assemblies
- Fundraising
- Self-led pickup games
- Community resources
- Individuals appealing to community resources and community officials
- Acceptance to overcome judging
- Non-competitive sports
- Re-learning teamwork
- Adult allies standing up for sports and art programs
- Adult allies taking training courses to facilitate programs for youth
- Access to more programming in remote communities
- Getting volunteers to pick up youth and offer transportation
- Bus for youth programs
- Advocate for ourselves and our peers
- Give someone else confidence by teaching and encouraging them
- Making the most out of your experiences
- Encourage others to be themselves
- Invite others to join you
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- **The Fall Group:**
- **Ages: 14-18**
- **Theme: ‘Overcoming Barriers’**





Youth drew pictures and words that expressed all of the barriers and challenges that they face when trying to express themselves artistically. Each youth explained their section of the poster, after everyone shared, the group leaders held each end of the poster and the youth ran through the poster, signifying them overcoming their barriers and realizing that they can overcome them.



## Evening Activities

On the Saturday evening, the youth were introduced to the final fourth year Child and Youth Care class who spent several hours with them having dinner, doing activities and having fun! The youth split into their four groups: summer, winter, fall and spring and did activities like tie dying shirts, graffiti art, creating their own games and an amazing race. Here are some pictures of the evening activities:

### Tie-dye tee-shirts:



### Graffiti:





### Create your own game:



### The Amazing Race:



## Youth Testimonies

Youth wrote anonymous comments in the surveys Shaking the Movers facilitators provided. Here are some of their comments:

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“Article 31 ‘Right to Play’ conference was an extraordinary and insightful experience. Everyone was so friendly and amazing. I had a hilarious fun time. The whole experience was intriguing to the minds of the young ones like us who had no clue about the rights to play’s existence and how it had a major impact on a kid’s life. .. One of the major highlights of this amazingly memorable trip was the friendships and the hilarious bonding times made. In addition, I have learned a whole lot more about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and have now taken a greater interest in knowing more about my rights as a child. Originally, before hearing about this conference, I had no idea that as a child, I was protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Prior to attending this conference, what I thought of Article 31 ‘Right to Play’ was that everyone had the right to play and rest. To me, this meant that the opportunity to play and rest for a child is important because I believe children and youth need time and space to relax, imagine, wonder, create, explore, marvel, or just enjoy the moment of life before growing up and indulging in huge responsibilities like supporting a family or having bills to pay.

After attending this conference, my opinion on Article 31 ‘Right to Play’ has changed. I now have a greater and richer understanding. It was an insightful experience that helped me gain a better understanding that even though every child has the right to play and rest, there are a variety of barriers affecting us now. Through this conference, {I saw that} there are a variety of

steps that can be carried out to break through barriers like for example; a barrier could be fear. Children need to take some risks when they play. Stimulating, adventurous and challenging play environments allow children to test themselves and develop their abilities although requiring a sensible approach, but while also enjoying the benefits of adventurous and exciting play, while not being exposed to unacceptable levels of danger. In addition, I learned what the ‘Right to Play’ means to other and personally I agree it’s important to improve your health, develop life skills, and help foster peace for children and communities as well as most importantly, expressing yourself towards others through play. “

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“It was very good to know the rights to play and expressing yourself. I’ve met new people that were awesome. The Right to Play is new to me because I’ve never learned it before. The conference taught me things that people never told me about. Expressing yourself brings out the inner you. Having the right to play brings out what you could do that was already in you. Having to learn these topics could bring your learning and understanding understandable. The conference was great! I’d love to go again whenever I have the chance.”

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“When I went to Toronto, we went to the Children’s Rights Conference. I really enjoyed it because I got to meet a lot of new people and learned about their communities/home towns. We also did a lot of ‘playing’ like doing group projects on what we enjoy doing and what the right to play means to us. I learned a lot at this conference, I learned that everyone young or old has the right to play. No one should discriminate you on what you look like (weight, colour, etc.) when you participate in an activity. I also learned the different ways to get shy people involved in some

things. I learned a lot by going to this conference and hope to go to other conferences as well. It was an amazing experience and I thank those who made it possible for me to go.”

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“I really liked the conference because I got to meet new people. I enjoyed the stuff those people did for us and I really liked the food they gave us. Now I know I have the right to play.

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“My trip to Toronto was a good one. I got to meet some new friends and got to get to know people from here better. We did some presentations, which I’ve never been very good at, but this helped me which was great for helping my presenting skills in school. So all in all this was a fun and educational trip to be part of.”

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“Meeting youth from very different backgrounds and having conversation about important topics. The variety of opinions and perspectives were immense and very interesting”.

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“I learnt a lot about other parts of Ontario and how we live vastly different lives”.

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“We as youth understand the right to play and all have the ambition to make a difference in our community.”

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“My favourite part about Shaking the Movers was the opportunity to learn more about the rights that we do have and hearing others’ opinions and thoughts on the subject.”

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“The most important learning experience I took away from Shaking the Movers would be that we are entitled to the right to play and our own artistic expression and if one doesn’t feel they are receiving this right there are actions one can take to make it happen.”

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“I loved how a group of very different individuals were able to come together for one main cause.”

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“I thought that this conference was a great opportunity to discuss the CRC and Children’s Rights with other youth. Since attending the conference I am more aware of the value of including youth in discussions about topics that affect them. This has helped me to better understand my role as Student Senator this year at my school. The Student Senate has chosen to make ‘Student Voice’ a focus in our discussions this year. This encouraged me to take what I learned from the STM conference and apply it to my school. I conducted a small survey at my school regarding student voice to see how students felt about the way they are being represented at their school and at the School Board. I have since sent my results to the Superintendent of Instruction at the School Board who is going to share it with his colleagues. Overall I have learned that the CRC isn’t just an abstract document but that it has ideas that are important for me in my own life.”

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“I know that it has been a few weeks since the Shaking the Movers Conference, but I just wanted to thank you again for all of the time and effort you put into it. I truly had a very eye opening experience and enjoyed it very much. I hope all is going well for you and wish you happy holidays.”

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”Attending the conference helped me to understand the idea of rights and responsibilities.

Although I thought I understood before attending, it was helpful to be with a group of youth to share our knowledge. After the conference, I did two of my major projects at school focusing on children’s rights. I think having the opportunity to attend the conference made me more confident in being able to share the importance of knowing your rights with other youth. I am planning in the future to find other ways to share what I experienced at the conference.”

## **Ryerson Student Experiences**

Comments by the Ryerson child and youth care students who facilitated the weekend events:

“The 2013 Shaking the Movers Conference was an enlightening and eye opening experience that showed me that children and youth, regardless of where they are from, or their background, are capable of grand ideas, they are eager to show us their voice, and are wanting change. This experience at the conference completely blew me away as an upcoming CYC practitioner, because every single one of these youth were engaged and passionate about the subject matter. This conference benefited me as a professional CYC because it showed to me that it won't just be myself and my team helping or doing the therapy with these youth. This conference showed me that most of them can and want to lead themselves, with just some



guidance from me. Furthermore, they want their voices to be heard. It showed to me that therapy requires more cooperation than I was first lead to believe. This conference is a great way to experience first-hand working with children and youth. I would recommend attending and would love to attend a second time!”

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“When I first heard that our class would be facilitating an activity at Shaking the Movers, I wasn’t really sure what that meant or what it would look like. Being in my last year of CYC, I was excited to have this opportunity at a real youth conference that has taken place for many years. We prepared in our class for several weeks and it seemed like the weekend took so long to come. At first I was so nervous meeting the youth, then I stopped and thought if I am nervous, they must be nervous too and myself and the other group leaders did everything we could to make everyone feel comfortable. By the end it was like saying bye to people we’ve known for such a long time. It’s pretty incredible the bonds you can make over such a short period of time. I still try and keep in touch with the youth in our group. It was so rewarding to be a part of such a meaningful event; the youth truly lead the way and taught us more than we could ever teach them.”

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“Two years in a row, I have had the privilege to take part in Shaking the Movers in different capacities. The first year I took part in the day group facilitation, which was quite interesting to see how quickly the young people open up and share. This year was different; I was in charge of planning and facilitating evening activities that were fun and related to Article 31 – Right to Play/Artistic Expression. Something that we were told by the facilitator and our professor was that we should plan our activity and have all of the supplies we need, but prepare to change your



plan, prepare to be flexible and open to what direction the youth take you in. I had no idea what that meant, plan – but plan to change your activity. It was exactly right though, we had planned an activity for the youth to create their own game. We had brought materials and thought out what they might create, but it was entirely different. It was empowering seeing young people take the lead and tell us what they wanted to do – it was cool how the facilitators encouraged us to take that approach with youth and it worked.”

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## **Lasting Impressions**

Every year the youth continue to blow us away with their insightfulness, with their voices, with their genuineness and their kindness. We continue to learn more and more from the youth who attend, and every year the organizers get a little bit better at understanding and capturing their voices. Shaking the Movers VII had a group of young people from entirely different backgrounds, regions and interests, which allowed for thought-provoking discussion from many perspectives. This year’s conference was unique in the sense that it was all about ‘play’ and self-expression, which is exactly what it turned out to be. The youth took every opportunity possible to play games, dance, sing and get out of their comfort zones – they even included the adults! It is always interesting to see how the youth may be shy at the beginning of the conference, but by the end it is always hard to part ways.

The youth came from different areas throughout Ontario including Kingston, Thunder Bay, Neskantaga First Nation, Markham, Toronto, Henvey Inlet First Nation, London, Ottawa, Cambridge, Mississauga, Whitefish River First Nation, Deer Lake First Nation and Oshawa. The

diversity in the group stood out this year as one of our most diverse groups of young people came together and united as one.

Last year's conference was quite different and significantly heavier in content as our theme was Children's Mental Health. The youth came together this year through being youth, being themselves, having fun together and just being. It was a stress free weekend with an amazing group of young people, who are dedicated to having their voices heard and ensuring that young people throughout Canada and beyond have the right to play!