



Kevin Allerston/NNSL Photo

Erin Sellek-Chocolate, 20, from Yellowknife, left, and Bhreagh Ingarfield, 19, from Nahanni Butte, were two of the youth Delegates at the GNWT's Forging the Future -- Potential Leaders' Conference at Northern United Place on July 7 and July 8.

Youth tell government what's important

Education, addictions: top priorities for Northerners aged 18 to 25

by Kevin Allerston
Northern News Services
Somba K'e/Yellowknife

Fifty-one young people from across the Northwest Territories who gathered in Yellowknife were in a position to help shape future GNWT policy from July 7 to 8.

The youth, aged 18 to 25 and hailing from every region, gathered in Northern United Place's auditorium to brainstorm ideas, at times working directly with Premier Floyd Roland. The delegates started out with a list of 16 top issues, but whittled it down to just two: education and helping people lead healthy, sober lives.

Bhreagh Ingarfield, 19, learned about the conference after receiving an e-mail from the Government of the Northwest Territories and made the trip from Nahanni Butte to attend.

"It asked if I was interested in participating in helping to talk about issues facing youth today, and of course I was," she said.

As a recreation co-ordinator, the issue of addictions is one that's close to Ingarfield's heart.

"Addictions are something that youth across the North see every day, and it's something I know, working as a recreation co-ordinator. I see the kids dealing with the ramifications of these things every

single day," she said. "So it's definitely just a huge issue in the North that affects everyone's life."

The youth delegates decided they would like to see consultations take place across the NWT toward building regional treatment centres.

"As far as education goes, everyone wants to have that dream to be a doctor, or something like that, and we need to work on making sure kids don't lose these dreams and that they have plans in order to achieve them," said Ingarfield.

Erin Sellek-Chocolate, from Yellowknife, was also at the conference. She believes it is important for the government to focus on education and to help kids to feel empowered.

"School is one of the biggest places where you learn about your opportunities, and a lot of kids don't think that they can make a difference, and they're just from a small town in a far away place that nobody really knows about, when really they can make a difference and they should be told that," Sellek-Chocolate said. "And what better place to do that than in the schools?"

Premier Roland said the idea for the conference stemmed from discussions during last year's Northern Leaders' Forum.

"The youth are the future, and during the Northern Leaders' Forum

we talked about that future and I said that I wanted to speak to the youth and have us hear what they have to say, not have politicians who have been around for a while to say 'well, this is what the youth should have,'" said Roland.

"I was really impressed. For them to come up with real solutions is great."

One of the recommendations youth participants put forward was to have guidance councillors in each school, to help students pick their courses to maximize their chances for acceptance to their desired university, college or post secondary trade programs.

Like Sellek-Chocolate, Roland said he believes it's important for youth to feel empowered.

"I want them to take away the idea that they have a say. They have

a stake and they can have an influence and get involved and show that leadership in their communities," said Roland.

Jenn Sharman with Tait Communications, who co-ordinated the conference, was impressed by what was accomplished over the two days.

"I think it was awesome. And, all the young people were super engaged; they really care about the issues and it was inspiring to see how they built a consensus together," said Sharman.

With the conference over, the information will be compiled into a report that will be tabled at the next sitting of the legislative assembly.

Even after that's done, however, Roland said the youth need to continue fighting for what they want, and following up to ensure action is taken.

"I was really impressed."



Premier Floyd Roland offers youth delegates some closing words of advice at the conclusion of the Forging the Future -- Potential Leaders' Conference Friday, July 8.