

## Me to We engages local youth



By Nate Smelle

North Hastings Youth In Action (NHYA) joined forces with their new partners from Me to We (MTW) over the weekend, to bring their internationally acclaimed community leadership training program to Bancroft. The two day workshop, held in Bancroft on Saturday, April 25 and Sunday, April 26 was originally supposed to be held in Bethany, before being moved to the Club 580 to better serve the needs of the group.

The program is designed to help youth ages 12 to 18 discover their strengths and find their voice so they can actively create the positive changes they want to see in their community and in the world.

‘It was really great to meet other like-minded people in our community,’ said workshop participant Renelle Farr.

‘We learned that there are many different types of leaders and we can take on different leadership personalities in different situations and when working with different people.’

The group was keen to get started working with NHYA on some of their already existing projects such as: the canteen/cafe project in Bancroft Community Transit’s new sustainable building in Riverside Park, community gardening with Harvest the North and opportunities to explore art and media. They are also looking at exploring new ideas. Coming up with fresh ideas during the action planning portion of the workshop is a very exciting part of MTW’s programming, Malloy said, because it always looks so different with every group of individuals.

One of the major issues raised by these youth is Bancroft’s need for more social spaces that youth and the community can utilize to come together.

‘The games we played and discussions we had brought everyone closer together,’ NHYA member Josh Sawdon said.

‘It was a lot of fun and I made new friends. I’m excited for the future of youth in action.’

‘It was honestly just amazing to see such a diverse range of ages mesh so well together,’ added NHYA program coordinator Rebecca Malloy.

‘They were so supportive of one another, understanding and patient. It’s really cool when you put a group of like-minded and motivated young people in a room and watch them work together through leadership challenges, talk about issues they face, and things they want to see change.’

MTW facilitators Tina Ingemi and O’Neil Gaudet were also very impressed with how well the group worked together and at how the older kids helped to mentor the younger ones.

‘This weekend was awesome!’ Ingemi said.

‘A great group of really cool young people who are funny and loud, but also patient and kind. They want to be heard and have a lot of important and impactful things to say.’

Malloy believes that there is always more that can be done to support local youth. For youth to feel empowered they need to feel

respected and valued as contributing members of the community.

?They need to feel that they have a place to come back home to. If they go and they come back they feel connected... and it's a positive connected feeling.?

The challenge for Malloy and the group now is how to keep building the momentum created by these engaged youth during the workshop. The plan, Malloy said, is to re-engage with them every chance she gets.

?I'm going to re-engage these kids and then re-engage them again. Hopefully other kids will be able to feed off of the energy of these kids and it will grow. I think re-engagement is a really important thing because you don't want to let the energy die.?