

Mission ConPossible

Suggestions and considerations for planning a successful weekend youth event

There are many different ways in which the much loved weekend 'youth Con' can happen. The following is a resource guide for adults and youth leaders to help outline some of the most common possibilities for over-night youth events.

Types of Conferences

1) Social or Community Building Con - aka 'The Youth CON'

- Typically for youth and youth advisors only
 - but could include some special guests, ie) bringing in a resource person to give a presentation/key note or to lead/facilitate a special exercise or activity
- Generally are run from Friday evening to Sunday at mid-day
 - if it is a small event (ie just for a congregation's youth group) sometimes a 1 night sleep-over is a good option to go with, which would have a lot of similar elements to a 2 night/full weekend Con but with less logistical details to worry about.
 - a 1 night Sleep-Over (or "Wake-Over") at a church or home of a church member can be great ways to kick off the new church year or to encourage great bonding amongst a congregational youth group or a cluster of congregations.
 - Be sure to continue to use safe steps policies and get explicit parental consent, **especially** if the event is happening at a private home.
- Can happen at the local/congregational, cluster, regional or national level (ie CanUuddle is the national Canadian social & business Con)
 - <100 youth can generally take place in a church (depending on the church's size)
 - >100 youth (ie for regional Cons like the annual joint Spring PNWD & BC Region Con) are often better suited to happen at a summer camp or a conference centre
- Usually involve a theme and have workshops related to that theme
 - often has youth-led worship on each day, usually at night
 - if it is a Business Con – ie) there are elections of some kind, these may be done instead of a "workshop"
- May be planned by a regional committee/planning team OR could be planned mostly by a local, "hosting" youth group
 - Either way there are usually 2 youth "Deans" who act to oversee the planning of the Con (most often referred to as "Co-Deans")
 - generally the Deans are responsible for the over-all schedule and running of the Con and traditionally, as a privilege of taking on this responsibility, are allowed to pick the theme of the Con
 - the Co-Deans and youth staff should be directly supported by at least 1 youth advisor, preferably from the "hosting congregation"



- Often can happen in conjunction with a Regional Fall Gathering

2) Learning Conference - aka a “Training” or “working Con”

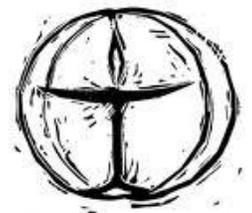
- Typically for youth and youth advisors, but are often open to others including:
 - other adult youth-allies such as Ministers, DREs and other congregational lay-leaders and sometimes young adults,*
- Generally run from Friday evening to Sunday mid-day
 - some programs like Chrysalis are designed to be 15hrs long and might start a bit earlier and end a bit later
- Frequently involve bringing in guest facilitators or presenters to lead the program (ie – a youth and adult “co-trainer team”)
- Most common for the regional level

Here are the most common themes or programs for Learning Cons:

- **UUA Chrysalis training** (there are 5 different courses to choose from)

<http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/youth/leading/chrysalis/index.shtml>

- Leadership Development (recommended youth to adult ratio = 3:1)
- Spirituality Development (1:1)
- Youth Advisor Training (1:5)
- Chaplain Training (which is about peer-listening, not to be confused with Lay-Chaplains)



- **Counter-Oppression/Multicultural Awareness training**

This could include any kind of program that involves learning about being more welcoming/inclusive of sexual and gender diversity, queer & trans people, people of colour and of a diversity of ethnicities, people with different abilities, or how to be open/understanding of people from different spiritual & religious traditions, ie) how to engage in interfaith dialogue or activities

- the program for a Con like this could be pretty wide ranging and could draw on excellent non-UU resources from your local community also

- **Social Justice/Service Learning Con****

There are multiple options here which could include:

- learning about a social justice or environmental issue
- participating in a service action in the community (ie – working for Habitat for Humanity, volunteering at a homelessness shelter, doing a “street retreat,” going to a protest/demonstration, doing a river bed or road-side clean-up, working on a CSA, etc)
 - could also be done in conjunction with a youth group from another congregation or even denomination (which adds in an element of learning about doing interfaith/multifaith work)

Notes:

******about Young Adult participation in Youth Learning Conferences*

Learning Conferences/Trainings are not really “Cons,” they have different goals, with a major one being to help build multigenerational community. Because of this, Young Adults between the ages of 18 – 24 may be invited to attend these events. In addition to community building and learning, these trainings provide an excellent opportunity to help bridging aged youth and emerging young adults, transition positively into their new identity as adults.

- YAs attending, who are under 25, are not allowed to “sponsor” any youth and must follow all the policies and rules that all participants are asked to follow.

*******about Service Learning*

Service Learning, in particular experiences working with and learning from marginalized people, can be incredibly transformative and positive but these experiences need to be planned carefully and with intentionality. Events that put a spot light on one’s own privilege can provoke major stretching and growth which can often be uncomfortable, painful and even scary.

- Plan to include as part of the weekend ample time for “front loading” before hand, as well as individual reflection and group debriefing times during and after the service element. If you are inexperienced or unfamiliar with creating experiences of this nature, *do* bring in someone from your congregation or your community who has this expertise to help with the planning and facilitation of the Con. They can be very powerful and worthwhile experiences when done well.

The CUC Youth budget has funds to support Youth Learning Conferences.

Contact the CUC Youth and Young Adult Ministry Development staff (Ariel Hunt-Brondwin, ariel@cuc.ca) directly for more information about how arrange a training like this.

Please note – to arrange for a Youth Learning Conference to have CUC financial support, the conference organizers must be in consultation with the CUC YaYA staff well before organizing the event

3) OWL Weekends (Our Whole Lives)

OWL weekends are in a category of their own as they kind of break the mold of the other Cons that have been outlined.

These weekends were developed to allow a congregational youth groups or clusters to be able to offer OWL training to the youth in their midst in a concentrated fashion by combining multiple lessons into a weekend. By the book, OWL programming was designed to be run over the course of a year or several months, with sessions or lessons usually held on a weekly basis. Many youth groups don’t have the capacity or commitment from their youth to offer the program in that way so the OWL weekend was born combining the OWL curriculum and the Youth Con into one jam-packed, fun-filled weekend of sexuality education and UU youth culture.

Generally speaking, these weekends work very much like other Learning Conferences or trainings, with the OWL curriculum being the content.

There are few key differences though:

- unless the YA/Adult OWL curriculum is being used, or Young Adults are acting as trained facilitators, Young Adults are not welcome at these weekends, and generally only the youth participants and the OWL facilitators plus enough adults to ensure proper supervisory ratios would be participating.
- OWL programming requires explicit parental/guardian consent for youth to participate in the program which is separate from the usual Con releases forms.
- OWL facilitators also need to have received specific training in order to run the program
- 'OWL Weekends' are not considered Learning Conferences and do not currently receive CUC subsidization

4) CUC Regional Fall Gathering Cons

A youth Con running in parallel with a CUC RFG is not the only option for interesting and meaningful youth programming but it is one of the more common choices. These Cons are included here as another category of their own, because they are often much more multigenerational than a "stand alone" Con would be and so that takes extra care and planning to coordinate between the two events.

Key things to know are:

- Generally these Cons are held in the fall (either October or November) so planning often needs to start in the spring before, to account for low activity through the summer
- Youth Con planners and the RFG planners need to coordinate their plans and schedules early, especially if the two aspects of the RFG are to happen at and between two different sites
 - Often the Youth will be allowed to take over the hosting congregation's building and the RFG will take place at a local hotel, community centre or university campus etc
- Coordinating meals and which ones the youth will be included in is another major consideration that should be receive youth input early on
 - usually having the youth join "the adult" program for the Saturday dinner works well
- the Youth planners should be invited in early, to discussions about how they want to be involved in the various worship offerings of the weekend AND youth Con planners should be supported in their planning of any worship services they will be leading (whether they are to be a multigen or not)
- * no matter what, all RFGs should offer some youth specific programming, unless the whole event is planned to be multigenerational
 - the form of this programming could be in a variety of formats, including: a Con, a Training, an integrated-multigen program created with youth input or a mixture of the above

General recommendations and encouragements for Con organizers:

- Familiarize yourselves with the guidelines and rules outlined in the CUC Youth Safety Policies and plan to adhere to them
- Liaise early with the CUC YaYA staff for support regarding registration procedures and materials, as well as communications/advertising for the event and or any other areas related to your youth event's programming
 - especially if your event is intended to be for youth from beyond your own congregation
- Plan to do your organizational work as an intergenerational team composed of youth and adults, where the youth are encouraged to take the lead being supported by key adult allies
- Be intentional about connecting, early on in the planning process, with other key people within your congregation who might not be directly connected to the youth program (ie – the DRE, Minister, parents of youth, board Treasure/bookkeeper, Church Administrator, Property etc)
- Ensure all event organizers are aware of your congregations own safety policies and build in a plan for how to follow them
- Consider early on, for weekend events, if youth will participate in the Sunday morning service and adjust your event's schedule and registration materials accordingly
 - Attending a service altogether at the end of a weekend event can be a very positive way to allow: youth to be more visible, have youth provide leadership in worship, have nice closure to the event, model being inclusive to the church's congregants, show off regional community building and build interest in your congregation's own youth ministry
- Try to break up the different aspects of the Con and delegate the parts out to smaller planning sub-teams
- Resist the temptation to not set time-lines and deadlines AND be proactive about circulating publicity and registration materials. We, as UUs in Canada of all ages, have developed a culture of being late registrants – let's work to change this!
- Include the parents! Parents' input should be included in the planning process and they should receive concrete info about the event's details and purposes (Don't assume youth will do this adequately – or at all!)
 - When adequately informed in a timely way, parents are also much more likely to be willing to provide support (ie for helping with night time supervision, transportation, billeting, meals etc) while not necessarily being involved directly with the event

Finally, if nothing else remember, these three things:

1) First and foremost, all these events are about fostering healthy and vital **youth** communities.

To that end:

- Youth need to be directly involved in the planning processes for events that are for them. That's one of the most basic parts of our UU youth empowerment philosophy – however part of what comes with being empowered is also being accountable and responsible.
- If there is resistance on the part of youth to take on appropriate aspects of the Con planning process – ask why that might be? Maybe it's the planning structure, maybe there's been a miscommunication, maybe the youth are too busy or maybe the event just isn't quite hitting the mark.
- If making a youth event happen, becomes completely adult driven – it might be worthwhile to step back and re-group. Don't be afraid to cancel or change the plans if things are not working.

2) Failure to plan is planning to fail. Period.

3) **Have Fun!** Youth events are joyous, celebratory events that are meant to create strong bonds of friendship and let people's spirits soar! Try to make your planning process (in whatever form it takes) reflect that joy too.

