

Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol

2024 Youth Strategy



Huron
County
Museum &
Historic Gaol

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land we stand upon today is the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples and is connected to the Dish with One Spoon wampum, under which multiple nations agreed to care for the land and its resources by the Great Lakes in peace.

We also acknowledge the Upper Canada Treaties signed in regards to this land, which include Treaty #29 and Treaty #45 ½.

We recognize First Peoples' continued stewardship of the land and water as well as the historical and ongoing injustices they face in Canada. We accept responsibility as a public institution and as treaty people to renew relationships with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people through reconciliation, community service, and respect.

Background

The following strategy applies to both the Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol, and was written by Museum staff, with consideration of partnerships and relationships with stakeholders and current County and community partners.

Staff will review the strategy annually in the fall when planning activities for the following year.

This strategy builds upon the *Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol Strategic Plan 2019-2023* and that document’s goal to “Engage and inspire the next generation of Huron County by sparking an interest in their heritage and culture.” Identified actions at that time included a strategy to engage with every Huron County student before their graduation and to accomplish this by implementing a strategy targeted towards youth and schools. This strategy provides guidance and description for work already ongoing to achieve these objectives.



Local students enjoy volunteering at Behind the Bars as a fun and creative way to earn required community service hours.

Why Engage with Youth?

Staff identified youth engagement as a priority area during the development of the Museum's most recent strategic plan. The Museum team and partners recognized that youth are the future of the County of Huron. An awareness and appreciation for the region where young people's formative years are spent enhances personal understanding, empathy for others and may increase the likelihood of youth settling in the area.

All strategies to engage youth must align with the Huron County Museum's mission, vision, and diversity statement. The Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol's mission is to engage its community in preserving, sharing, and fostering Huron County culture. The vision of the Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol is to nurture and inspire heritage and culture. The sites' current diversity statement directs that staff and partners design its exhibits, programs, events, and services through a lens that includes a wide range of ideas, voices, and viewpoints that reflect and engage Huron County's diverse community. Any definition of 'community' or these local 'voices' must necessarily consider and include the perspectives and priorities of youth. Young people deserve to access their own local stories, and to also contribute to determining what those representative stories are.

Engaging youth is a current priority of Huron County Council: "Giving a voice and increasing opportunities for youth in Huron County". This strategy recognizes that youth may have different needs, interests, priorities and barriers as compared with adults and seniors, and therefore engaging and meeting the needs of youth and their families requires committing resources and targeted efforts to attract and support them directly and intentionally.

Deliberate consideration of youth in designing programs and exhibits benefits all visitors, as interactives, activities, and participatory opportunities aimed at youth can also engage and enrich the experiences of older people, especially their guardians and educators. A museum focused on engaging youth is a more dynamic and welcoming place for everyone.

Who benefits when youth interact with our sites and collections?

Youth (visitors and program participants)

For example, providing educational and affirming opportunities to learn, play and express themselves in a safe environment, rooted in a specific local context.

Youth (employees and volunteers)

Involved youth gain a diverse range of employable skills and work experience within Huron County and become more familiar and knowledgeable in regards to their surroundings and community.

The County of Huron & its communities

Impacts include supporting youth retention and civic engagement by encouraging youth to connect with local heritage and understand themselves as active members of a community defined by municipal boundaries

Huron County Museum & Gaol

One of the advantages of considering community members when they're young is building long-term relationships between youth and the institution, which may evolve from attending youth programs to more active participation as volunteers, employees, return visitors and ambassadors for the site.

Families & guardians

For example, accessing affordable and trustworthy childcare for drop-off programming like day camps, and a positive environment for shared experiences with their children during drop-in programming like open houses, including vulnerable families engaged through partnerships with Huron Women's Shelter and Huron Respite Network.

Teachers & educators

The services the Museum can provide include resources and field trip opportunities that enrich learning and make it easy to teach to the Ontario curriculum with a local focus.

Who is Targeted?

Youth, for the purposes of this report, will be defined as children and young adults. Museum admission rates under the current fees by-law defines *preschool* as ages 0-5, *children* as ages 6-12, and *students* ages 13+ and/or presenting a student card. In the case of Museum employees specifically, *young adults* includes students under 30 years of age (as defined by the Government of Canada’s Young Canada Works grant criteria for eligible students at the undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate level or recent graduates in the case of internships).

The youth that access onsite and offsite services at the Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol may be residents of the County of Huron or visitors. Different programs and opportunities will target different segments of the youth audience (e.g. make a mess unstructured play stations aimed at preschool and primary aged children visiting with their families).

The youth category intersects with a diversity of identities, needs and accessibility requirements, and all of these must also be considered and respected in communication and the opportunities provided for youth participation and self-expression.

Age Groups	How they may interact with Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol beyond regular admission	How this segment can be reached
0-4 <i>preschool</i>	School trips (daycares), special events.	Daycare providers, guardians & families.
5-12 <i>children</i>	Day camps, school trips, special events.	Schools, guardians & families, community groups & clubs.
13-18 <i>student</i>	School trips, volunteering, employment, co-op, project partnerships, special events.	Schools, guardians & families, community clubs & groups, direct advertising & communication.
18-30 <i>student/young adult</i>	Employment, volunteering, project partnerships, special events.	Universities & colleges, community clubs & groups, direct advertising & communication.

Current Strengths, Successes and Opportunities

Youth currently interact with the Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol as visitors, students, program participants, special event attendees, guests at onsite rentals, volunteers and employees, guest performers at events, as well as at outreach activities attended by staff or volunteers offsite (e.g. fairs, festivals).

The Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol strives to make it affordable for local youth of all income levels to access our collections, sites and programs through free regular admission with a library card for Huron County residents. The Curator of Engagement & Dialogue and Education & Programming Coordinator make continued efforts to bridge identified financial barriers to youth engagement through sponsorships and innovative approaches to programming. The success of Compass Minerals' generous funding for bussing and virtual access to the Museum, for example, has confirmed that travel costs would otherwise be a significant barrier to accessing our sites; this has been reiterated by feedback from participating teachers.

The Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol currently offers over ten virtual and onsite education programs aimed at grades ranging from preschool to grade 12. Free online tools, available to classrooms and students, include Huron's Digitized Newspapers and other digitized media, the Museum's PastPerfect online collection of artifacts, and the Henderson Digitization collection, among others.

The Museum is positioned to continue to build and expand existing partnerships to plan more ambitious long-term programs and projects. Precedents include the Museum's first Takeover Day event with the SOAR class at Avon Maitland District School Board (2018), and the Canuckstorians video project with youth from Bayfield Guiding and the Enrichment Program at Avon Maitland District School Board (2021-2022). Ongoing initiatives like the Community Curators exhibition space compel the Curator of Engagement & Dialogue to renew or form new partnerships on a continuous basis for a new collaboration each year. Existing partnerships can also be leveraged for better communication and expanding communication networks.

The Museum employs students from the high school to post-graduate levels, and welcomes volunteers aged 11+. The Museum is the first employer for many of Huron's

local high school students. The Museum provides necessary community service hours for secondary students, as well as paid co-op and internship opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students (these partnerships often require Museum staff to work directly with partners at the students' schools to complete additional paperwork, meetings and goal-setting for the position). Staff are often asked to act as references for future academic and professional pursuits. Part-time and seasonal employment at the Museum has helped young people gain confidence and transferable career skills, and to learn more about opportunities within Huron County. Many student employees report experiencing not only a nurturing work environment, but also an increased pride and knowledgeability about their community. Going forward it is important to continue to strive to provide mentorship and learning opportunities for young employees, as well as seeking to integrate their perspectives and contributions into the Museum's work.

Who is involved in youth engagement?

The Curator of Engagement & Dialogue and the Education & Programming Coordinator will be the leads on implementing this strategy and youth engagement generally through interpretation, public programming and education programs. However, all staff and volunteers in the Museum will directly or indirectly influence the experience of youth in our spaces. These may include:

Director

E.g. Policy, budgeting for youth opportunities and reviewing and approving all program proposals and MOUs drafted by the Curator of Engagement & Dialogue or Education & Programming Coordinator for youth programs.

Senior Curator

E.g. Ensuring that temporary and permanent exhibit spaces feature immersive and interactive opportunities that serve young people and refresh the gallery spaces.

Marketing & Branding Coordinator

E.g. Targeting print and online promotions to reach youth, their guardians or educators.

Registrar

E.g. Ensuring artifacts in the collection represent youth in Huron County in past and present.

Archivist

E.g. Ensuring documentary artifacts in the collection represent youth in Huron County past and present, and that digitized resources are available to educators and students.

Visitor Services Coordinator

E.g. Facilitating rentals for birthday parties and membership benefits for families; volunteer coordination for youth and volunteers working with youth.

Programming and Community Engagement Coordinator

E.g. Securing sponsorships and funds to help ensure youth access to sites and resources.



Summer Students are vital to the Museum's operations by enabling both sites to be open seven days a week in the high season. They also assist with research projects, documenting and cataloging donations, program and event delivery, and much more.

Youth Engagement in Practice

The following principles and methods, as well as the *Huron & Perth Charter of Rights of Children and Youth* and all current policies and priorities of the County of Huron will guide ongoing engagement with youth.

Preserve successes and core programming

Renew and repeat successful programs and events that have successfully reached and served their audiences. Prioritize staff time and resources to maintain programs that youth and their educators and families may rely on, including education programs and summer day camps.

Collaborative partnerships

Actively seek out partnerships with youth and with organizations that already work with youth. Create mutually beneficial relationships, wherein the Museum can offer to provide spaces, resources or services to complement the partner organization's assets. Use Memorandums of Understanding to clearly outline the scope of partnerships and the responsibilities of each party. One template for this kind of collaboration is the ongoing Dads + Kids program with Rural Response for Healthy Children, wherein the Museum provides space and programming.

Match the resource to the need

Seek out and investigate community needs and gaps in services to identify opportunities where preexisting museum resources and expertise can match those needs. E.g. match online resources, interpretation and education programs to Ontario curriculum. Approach promotional materials and web design with goal to make it easier for educators, guardians and students to find the existing resources and programs most relevant to them.

Strategic scheduling

Design and schedule programming, special events, hiring deadlines, etc conscious of the relevant school year calendars for primary, secondary and post-secondary students. Provide day camps and drop-off programming on days coordinated with Avon Maitland District and Huron Perth Catholic District School Boards' Professional

Activity Days and holidays. Ensure that there are volunteer opportunities during evenings and school breaks for school-age volunteers. Prioritize certain kinds of programs for locals versus tourists when seasonally appropriate.

Direct communication

Target online and print communication with educators, school boards and community groups according to their protocols. Encourage young adults, educators and guardians to follow current offerings through the Museum's website, social media, subscriptions to the museum's newsletter (continue to include this as an option with surveys and evaluations). Communication must run in both directions, with opportunities for youth, their families and educators to provide feedback and ask questions.

Spotlight youth perspectives

Tell stories about youth as part of interpretation at both sites—through artifact displays, panels, group tours and gallery activities. Encourage youth participation and seek out youth as partners, including for temporary exhibits and tie-in research and programs.

Facilitate projects and platforms that do not only include youth as participants, but allow them to demonstrate creativity, self-expression and control as leaders, storytellers, curators and experts.

Cognizance of accessibility and affordability

Identify and anticipate barriers to accessing our sites and resources, and try to reduce and bridge those barriers in the design and conception process, as well as adaptations of existing content. Consider costs of programming, while not undervaluing services and continuing to fairly compensate guest speakers, performers and educators. Make communication and the booking process as user-friendly and easy to find as possible.

Environmental conscientiousness

Approach education programs and interpretation with a lens that considers the importance of our environment in the futures of young people and future generations. Interpret environmental issues in the context of the actions of the past, and include our land, waterways and air quality in stories of Huron County heritage and community.

Flexibility and evolution

Staff should be available, within capacity, to meet and discuss partnerships and ideas brought forward by the public. Continue to update and adapt existing programs and activities based on feedback and staff observations during delivery, as well as the needs and requests of interested participants. Allow programs and interpretation to evolve based on the needs of young people, current best practices and changes to Ontario curriculum. Be willing to provide virtual alternatives and travel offsite for groups that cannot easily travel to the Museum and Gaol. Invite guest performers, presenters, educators and speakers to give unique expertise and new perspectives.



Children participating in National Historic Places Day events.

Objectives

- Engage with every Huron County student before their high school graduation.
- Increase onsite youth attendance at the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol.
- Maintain and adequately staff existing programs and annual events.
- Build and strengthen communication channels with key partners and stakeholders, including local school boards.
- Streamline and update administrative procedures, including confirmations, bookings and evaluations, ie simplify booking and payment procedures with online options for registrations and booking requests.
- Increase number of teachers and guardians subscribed to the Museum newsletter.
- Offer educational and learning opportunities targeted at educators and group leaders to teach the teachers and help them make the most of the Museum's offerings.
- Identify gaps or underserved demographics by ages, grades or by geographic regions of the county less encountered in current active programs.
- Offer programs or activities that are targeted at underseen groups.
- Build partnerships with organizations, schools, clubs, community groups that already work with underseen groups.
- Expand partners and number of youth-based organizations using our spaces.
- Increase the number of youth volunteers.
- Increase number of volunteers who help with youth programs to better accommodate and accept school visits and programs with large groups.
- Facilitate growth and long-term relationships with our sites through repeat attendance across various programs (ie, students who visit on a field trip return with their families).
- Provide employment opportunities that directly serve students' needs as well as the Museum's (ie fulfill requirements for academic internships or co-ops, provide professional experience and skillsets).

Required Tools and Supports for Success

The following are required to maintain and build upon current initiatives and move forward with this strategy within our capacity, without the reduction or interruption of current day-to-day operations.

- Adequate full-time staffing capacity (continuation of Education & Programming position).
- Seasonal and part-time staff.
- Continued base municipal funding.
- Ability to for staff to take advantage of training, education and professional development opportunities focused on innovation and best practices working with youth.
- Support from funders and sponsors, including CMOG and government hiring grants.
- A robust volunteer force, including volunteers interested in working with youth.
- Continued collaboration from partners, teachers and school boards.
- Available and appropriate spaces within our sites to learn, play and offer programs.
- Up-to-date & navigable website and online presence.
- Enthusiasm and active involvement of participating youth, educators, and families.

Outcomes, Impacts, and Metrics for Success

Attendance analysis

Continue to track, report and monitor attendance at the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol—including onsite visitors, virtual programs, outreach, renters and volunteers. Continue to delineate attendance metrics based on preschool, child and student admissions, programs, special events, etc. Also track online metrics for interactions with information shared and promotional campaigns.

Monthly reports will also break down not just attendance, but programs delivered and partnership progress.

Record the regional origin of groups and schools that visit, and map places visited during outreach to identify potential gaps in county communities not accessing museum resources.

Level of engagement

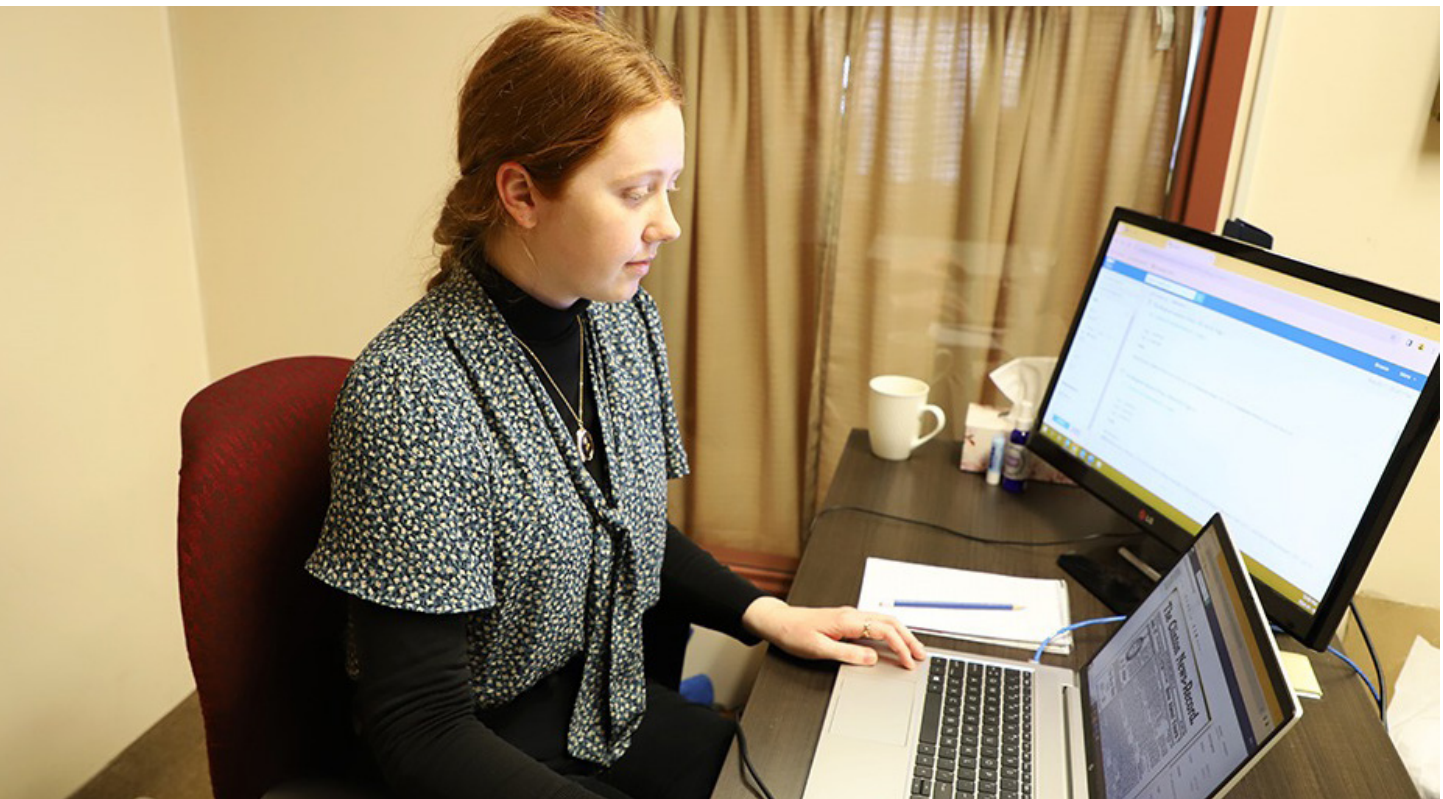
Report and observe not only attendance, but the nature and scope of programming, including empowering programs and employee projects that ask youth to take on leadership roles, build skills, feel ownership over their local history through making decisions, telling stories and creating art and historical interpretation. This can also be appreciated in the content created and ideas shared. These tangible impacts can be observed and shared onsite and online, as well as described and contextualized in monthly reports.

Feedback/evaluations

Actively seek feedback and input from local youth, families, educators and program participants through follow-up evaluations from programs like education programs and day camps, as well as general surveys using Huron County Connects tool. Can use this information to not only evaluate how we are meeting expectations for families and educators, but to better meet needs in regards to content, scheduling, and affordability going forward. Can also use age-appropriate feedback metrics for programs or activities in-museum (E.g. happy to sad face survey for primary children). Use communication channels to actively seek feedback from youth and educators about how they are accessing and using Museum resources. Continue with exit interviews for student staff, and to ask for their suggestions and input throughout their work period.

Goal setting

Continue to include and prioritize youth in ongoing strategic planning, long-term goal-setting and budgetary plans. Review annual revenue targets.



Young Canada Works intern cataloging and documenting donations from local heritage collections.



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