



MEDIA RELEASE

**Douglas
College**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Award-winning program empowers youth to do great things

Brian Patel recalls a young teen looking at skateboard ramps in the Neutral Zone, a temporary summer youth centre Maple Ridge Youth Services set up in a thawed-out curling rink.

“He said, ‘They’re not right.’ We said, ‘Okay, you go out and find us a better design and we’ll fix it.’”

That teen was Kyle Dion, and he did come back with a better design for the skateboard ramp. And then he opened a board shop in the Neutral Zone, and eventually expanded into a multi-million dollar business building skateboard ramps.

Patel says Dion is a great example of what he, as Acting Youth Services Coordinator, and his staff at Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Parks and Leisure Services strive for with their award-winning program, the Youth Outreach Initiative. The initiative takes their recreation and social programs at the Greg Moore and Pitt Meadows youth centres and makes them into something more. “We want youth to go from not participating to participating to volunteering. And then we hope they become leaders and eventually employable.”

Patel is another example. He started volunteering with Parks and Leisure, incorporating drug and alcohol abuse prevention into the recreation programs to get the 100 hours he needed to enter the Child and Youth Care Counsellor Program at Douglas College. By the time he started the diploma program, he was getting paid. “I was going to school and getting the theory and applying it to work,” he says. Patel earned his diploma and transferred into the third year of the Child and Youth Care Program at the University College of the Fraser Valley, earning his Bachelor Degree in 1998.

Patel now works out of the Greg Moore Youth Centre, which offers a one-stop shopping concept for youth – whatever they need, they should be able to find it here.

“With any kind of recreation activities for youth, you’ll have to consider social issues. At Parks and Leisure, we’re not experts in social issues, so we formed partnerships with other agencies focused on helping youth.”

Big Brothers and Sisters, Bowman Employment Services – The Job Zone, Community Services’ Reconnect Program for youth at risk, and the Iron Horse Youth Health Clinic are all housed in the centre, making it easy for youth to find what they need.

“Our philosophy is that youth are responsible for creating their own opportunities,” says Patel. “The idea to have youth services providers on-site came from teens.”

Both the Greg Moore and Pitt Meadows youth centres have youth groups that aim to positively promote youth by taking on social causes like Christmas hampers for low-income families, cleaning up vandalism and fund-raising.

“We remind youth that they have the power to make change,” says Patel. “That’s embedded in the core philosophy of the Child and Youth Care Counsellor Program at Douglas College, which teaches you to look at the entire child – their recreation, their education, their family. You put all of these aspects together and try to find the balance.”

The Youth Outreach Initiative hasn’t only been changing lives, it has also been turning heads. The Program won two 2002 Child and Youth Friendly Communities Awards, presented by children and youth advocate Senator Landon Pearson. And now Patel and others at the centre offer consulting services to others in the recreation field. Organizations have come from all over the world to see how their program works.

“The Youth Outreach Initiative is really the model for where youth centres are headed,” says Douglas College instructor Doug Estergaard. “The kids have ownership of it. It’s easy to access and there’s a whole series of services available.”

Patel says: “There’s a long term investment here. Because Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows have a very high youth population – over 16 percent, almost two-and-a-half times more than the B.C. average – we were forced to deal with these issues. When we ran the Neutral Zone in the summer, vandalism and youth crime went down.”

There’s another benefit for Patel – good employees. Some of the kids that he mentored are following in his footsteps, taking the Child and Youth Care Counsellor Program at Douglas College. “At least five students are on staff here now. I can remember when they were 12 and overwhelmed by it all and now they are leaders. That shows our initiative works.”

To learn more about the Child and Youth Counsellor Program, attend an information session in room 1614 at the New Westminster Campus (700 Royal Avenue, one block north of the New

Westminster SkyTrain station) on Tuesday, February 3 at 2 p.m. or Wednesday, March 31 at 5 p.m. For more information, please call Gary Tennant, the Program Co-ordinator, at 604-527-5137.

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cutline for attached photo Brian Patel: Douglas College graduate Brian Patel helps youth reach new heights with the Youth Outreach Initiative.

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