



Candidate Survey for 2006 Municipal Elections

Dear Candidate:

The purpose of this survey is to gauge your commitment to youth engagement. Over 300,000 youth live in Toronto and their development is imperative to ensuring our city's present and future success. Survey results will be published online and promoted in a media and street campaign. The results will also be used as an education piece for a Toronto high school municipal mock vote.

Please return this survey as soon as possible to youth@toronto.ca. Thank you in advance for your time.

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Name: **Amarjeet Kaur Chhabra**
Age: (your age, or "under 25"/"over 25") – **24**
Ward: **43 – Scarborough East**

1. Youth Engagement and Youth Assets

a) It is said that we are no longer debating "why" youth should be involved, but "how". **What is your workplan for engaging young people in your ward?**

Response (use space as needed):

Being a young person myself, youth engagement and involvement are very close to my heart. Currently I have many young people working on my team, not just as volunteers for my campaign but as people who also have real life experiences and ideas and are active participants in the community beyond election time. If elected, I plan to engage young people by a variety of methods such as going to community organizations and listening to them one on one, organizing town hall meetings that will be run by youth leaders, starting a newsletter specifically for young people in the Ward and working with parks and recreation staff in the Ward to create a advisory role for local youth to make sure that money is being spent on the programs that they actually want. I will also give them opportunities at City Hall to work in my office (e.g. in an internship role) so that they can learn about the political system/process at a young age. Additionally, I will dedicate a section of my website to youth issues and am committed to holding a two hour open meeting at my office, open to youth only, in advance of any vote on an issue of concern to them. As someone who is under 25, I will personally challenge assumptions about youth and their role in decision making.

b) We tend to speak about deficiencies in our communities and what is lacking rather than about what is positive and how we can build on it. **What assets do young people in your ward possess, and what specifically will you do to ensure that these assets are mobilized and used as building blocks for community building in your constituency?**

Response:

I believe that youth in my ward have incredible technical and creative skills. I am committed to using my position as a councillor to promote their development by giving priority on any goods or services that I require to local youth owned and run businesses, provided there is enough lead time. For example, if I need IT support I will first request proposals from youth. If I require catering for an event I will invite young chefs to provide it, etc. I am committed to spending a certain percentage of my office budget on supporting youth business and skills development.

2. Barriers to Participation

Many residents face barriers that prevent them from becoming involved. For instance, meetings are held during work and school hours and voting rights have yet to be extended to 16 and 17-year olds or residents without full citizenship status. **How do you intend to increase participation in critical areas such as council meetings, the budget process, and elections?**

Response:

Noting that council meetings are indeed held during school hours I will contact school principals in my ward to ask if they would like to participate in a program whereby students at their school can, sometimes during school hours, attend key meetings with me and report back to their fellow students. Being a former executive of the Toronto Youth Cabinet, the official voice of youth at City Hall, I will encourage young people to become a member of the organization and gain valuable knowledge (like learning how to make deputations, the budget process etc.). Additionally, I will advocate for more meetings to be held outside of regular work and school hours.

3. Opportunities for Youth

a) Youth bring a lot to the table by sharing their unique insight and experiences, but they are often marginalized from decision-making bodies. The City Manager's Office conducted an analysis of appointments made to Agencies, Boards and Commissions in 2004 and identified youth as a priority group where additional efforts are required to attract youth as board members. **Will you vote to ensure all Agencies, Boards and Commissions have youth representatives on their boards?**

Yes

No

Comments: I will also support the development of guidelines that will avoid tokenism on any level.

b) The Toronto Youth Cabinet organizes a "Councillor-shadowing" program that pairs city councillors with a young person from their ward. Over the course of a day, mutual exchange takes place as young people are able to learn about how municipal government works and city councillors are able to pick the brain of a young resident. **Will you participate in the "Councillor-shadowing" program?**

Yes

No

Comments: As someone who partaked in this program as a youth, if elected, I would most definitely participate in the program so that other youth can get the same opportunity as I did.

c) In 2001 the Toronto Youth Cabinet introduced the concept of an employment initiative to confront the difficult issues of finding meaningful youth employment and integrating marginalized youth into municipal government. Specifically, the initiative asks Toronto City Councillors and the Mayor to set an example in respect to both issues by hiring a young person to work in their office over the summer (\$10/h x 350 h x 45 jobs = \$157,500 + 13% benefits = \$177,975). **Will you vote to support the mandatory implementation of this initiative for the summer of 2007?**

Yes

No

Comments: The City of Toronto is the largest local summer employer. I will drive an initiative to help youth in my ward find out about these job opportunities, assist them in having an opportunity to be awarded these jobs, and set goals around how many youth are hired for local positions.

4. Funding Programs for Children and Youth

Providing adequate opportunities for young people to engage in productive activities is imperative for creating safe communities. With the City of Toronto's Community Safety Plan, new programs and services have been implemented in 13 designated at-risk neighbourhoods. For under-served neighbourhoods not on the priority list, securing grants or support for programs and services has become extremely hard, if not impossible. **Will you vote to determine a minimum "standard of Support" to be provided to all children and youth in the city, regardless of where they live?**

Yes

No

Comments: I fear this will be a meaningless gesture unless more funding is made available at a systemic level.

5. Accessibility to Transit

Over the past three years, transit fares have increased dramatically: student and senior fares rose 23% and adult fares went up 22%. Most alarmingly, child fares have increased by 40%. Further, economically vulnerable populations such as high school students and seniors are offered a worse deal for monthly and weekly passes. Based on the cost of a regular fare, adults with a monthly pass must use it 37 times in order to "break even", while high school students or seniors must use their respective pass 46 times. **Will you vote to give seniors and high school students a fair deal by making their "break even" point for weekly and monthly passes equivalent to that of adults?**

Yes

No

Comments: A more comprehensive approach to affordability of transit is needed. Comparing the deal on a discounted fare to a non-discounted fare doesn't make sense. I think that fares for all users should go down and that deep subsidization of those with very low incomes should take place but I don't think the above proposal is the most effective way to deliver progressive access.

6. Youth Housing and Support

According to the Toronto Youth Profile 2003, 20,000 young people used Toronto emergency shelters at least once in 2003, comprising 27% of all shelter users. Currently, only youth 17 and below are prioritized for subsidized housing. Moreover, when street-involved youth do find subsidized housing they often return to the streets due to a lack of housing supports geared towards youth. **Will you vote to ensure youth up to the age of 24 are prioritized for subsidized housing and to increase aftercare supports, including meetings with housing workers and training in budgeting and other life skills?**

Yes

No

Comments: I strongly support increased supports as described above for youth up to age 24 but would need to learn more before I could say that I would prioritize youth up to age 24 for subsidized housing over other needy groups, for example families with young children or the mentally ill.

7. Representing our Communities

a) It is important for people who have the greatest need and are most affected by the issues to take leadership roles. **How is your lived experience relevant to representing the disadvantaged people of Toronto?**

Response:

I am a young female, a person of colour, a person with a disability and someone who rents a place. I feel confident in representing the needs of the disadvantaged people of Toronto and know and face the same issues and challenges on a day to day basis. Before moving to Scarborough East and upon immigrating to Canada I called Jane-Finch my home for the longest period of time.

b) Toronto is said to have the most diverse population in the world. Right now Toronto City Council does not reflect the diversity in our population. **If elected, how will you be making Toronto City Council more representative of the diverse people of Toronto?**

I have already taken the first step by deciding to run for Council and am dedicated to change the status quo. If elected, me being a woman of diverse background will in itself act as a catalyst in encouraging others to run for Council and making Toronto City Council truly reflective of what it should be.