

# Young Nurses Conference Report

## I. Introduction / Background

### a. What was the Young Nurses Conference?

The Young Nurse Conference was a 2 day fully funded conference held in Vancouver for 150 nurses (BCNU members) and students under the age of 35. Eight BCNU council members also attended.

This initiative emerged out of a recognition (amongst the BCNU leadership) of the aging population of both RN's and BCNU activists and the corresponding need to establish and expand dialogue between young nurses and students and more "seasoned" BCNU members and activists. The BCNU council supported this vision by committing to fund a 2 day Young Nurse Conference in 2003.

For the union to grow and flourish, Council strongly recognizes how essential it is that young people be encouraged to become involved in the BCNU, not only as active members, but as leaders in the organization. As an essential first step in this process, the union needed to create an opportunity to get to know young nurses and students - to hear them articulate their issues and values, and at the same time to provide a non-threatening forum in which to introduce them (many for the first time) to the union and what it does. They would also have a chance to give some feedback to the union on it's direction and activities.

Original funding was for 50 members and 50 students. However, in light of the overwhelming response of 200 applicants, council voted to increase the funding to 75 and 75.

Historically, all of BCNU council would attend a conference such as this. In this case, however, council felt that having all 25 council member (all over the age of 35) attend might stifle some of the discussion, so they made the difficult decision that only 8 would attend.

Their role was to listen to what was said and to be a union resource to the facilitators and delegates. The BCNU Predident Debra McPherson's role was to . . . (Debra define your role here)

## II. Young Nurses' Conference

### a. Process of Creation

The conference was assigned to the BCNU Education Department, and the process of creating this exciting event began.

**Step 1:** consultation with many others who's experience and perspective would help us meet our goals for this initiative.

The labour movement overall recognizes the need to connect, organize and involve youth. Many unions are building relationships with young people through youth committees, youth meetings and/or conferences and organizing drives.

We began by talking to the BCGEU, PSAC, CUPE, CLC, SFL and BC Fed. What did they do? What worked? What didn't? What do young people need and want? Materials were shared. These talks and exchanges helped give us a sense of the terrain. People were really excited when they heard what the BCNU leadership had committed to. No other union had brought together both members and students in such numbers.

**Step 2:** consultation with the conference target group.

We also consulted with members and students under 35 - representatives of the Conference target group. A working group of these individuals met to discuss and share ideas on what participants would be looking for at a 2 day conference and how to meet these goals in conjunction with BCNU's goals for the event. We sent out 50 surveys to people who applied to attend (complete survey in Appendix A). The responses confirmed what we'd been hearing. Conference participants wanted a chance to talk with one another, share their concerns and ideas, find out more about the union - and do all of this without being lectured to! We were thrilled and energized - it fit right with what we were thinking.

**Step 3:** consultation with the CLC.

Now that we had a confirmed sense of what participants were looking for, we worked with Nrinder Nann, CLC Staff Youth Representative to build a design frame for the conference.

#### **Step 4:** designing and planning.

We took the frame to the working group for feedback. Assured by then that we were on the right track and armed with their further input we continued to design and plan over the summer, meeting and consulting with other BCNU staff and Nrinder.

Both the working group and other unions had highlighted to us, the importance of having peer facilitators guiding the conference activities. The challenge this presented to us at the BCNU re-emphasized the need for the very event we were designing!. All our trained, experienced member facilitators are over 35 and all of the BCNU staff, with the exception of 2 are over 35. We put out a call to our contacts in other unions and the community for facilitators and invited conference applicants to apply to be facilitators. At the end of the day the facilitators were an amazing diverse group whose different backgrounds added richness to the mixture.

### **b. Goals for the conference**

BCNU Goals:

- ↳ hear directly from younger nurses & younger students about their need and concerns
- ↳ create a dialogue between BCNU and young nurses on the questions of the relevance of and involvement in the union
- ↳ foster involvement and new union leadership among young nurses
- ↳ network between young students and young nurses

By the end of the conference participants will:

Know:

- ↳ a bit more about what BCNU does and why
- ↳ ways they can become involved in BCNU
- ↳ some key moments in workers struggles and how they connect to our struggles today
- ↳ what's happening in health care and nursing today
- ↳ ways they can make change

Feel:

- ↳ they have something to contribute to BCNU
- ↳ welcomed and encouraged to become leaders in BCNU
- ↳ encouraged to continue to be makers of positive change
- ↳ inspired to share their conference experience with others

Do:

- ↳ become involved in BCNU
- ↳ communicate ways to increase involvement and leadership among younger nurses in BCNU
- ↳ use and work with BCNU as a vehicle for change

## Conference Design

These goals, and all the input collected, provided the foundation for conceptualizing the shape and content of this two-day event. The design created sought to offer a diversity of experiences, information, and opportunities for dialogue. It moved participants back and forth between the energy and unity of full-group plenary sessions and the intimacy and depth of engagement facilitated by time in smaller break-out groups.

Each participant was assigned to one of these smaller workshop groups ahead of time, with attention given to making the mixture of individuals as diverse as possible. The composition of these groups remained fixed throughout the two days – to allow for continuity of discussion in a program where many of the activities were designed to build on the one before. Each group had a facilitator and a resource person (a BCNU staff or Council member), who led them through the program.

An amazing booklet (in content and design) was created to provide resources for the learning process. To really get a flavour for what was experienced in these sessions, a look at this resource is recommended.

In the opening session to the conference, participants were introduced to a graphic which emerged during the design process – a visual representation of the intention behind the how the conference was being shaped and filled in (this graphic, also page one of the resource booklet, is included here as Appendix A). As this visual illustrates, the design was strongly rooted in a popular education approach. This aims to maximize dialogue/learning between participants; invites them to draw upon their own experiences and questions as the entry point to discussing and analyzing issues; and recognizes and seeks to include the knowledge that all participants bring to the discussion. This approach also emphasizes the importance of connecting this process of learning and analyzing to taking action.

What follows is an annotated version of the conference's agenda, to provide a sense of what participants experienced over the two days. The notes included in each activity section seek to communicate the key goals and intent behind its inclusion and design. An indication is also given as to whether the activity happened in plenary or small groups.

## Young Nurses Conference Annotated Agenda

### Day 1

#### Welcome (plenary)

- welcome from Debra
- review of agenda and objectives (Shea)

#### Values and Purpose of a Union (small group)

**Activity Goal:** Recognizing that many participants had little or no knowledge of BCNU or unions in general, we wanted to create an initial activity that would invite them to consider the concept and value of unions in general. The desire was to have people approach the notion of unionism through a recognition of how it connects to their own values, rather than feeling they were being 'told' it is good.

**Activity Design:** Participants were asked to identify the personal values they connect most strongly with in their lives and/or nursing practice. They formed groups of three with others sharing similar values, and considered scenarios in which they were challenged with 'defending their values' in the context of a workplace issue – in the first scenario acting alone, and in a second acting with the support of a group. Reflecting on the differences between these two scenarios – in terms of how people felt, what they saw themselves able to achieve, etc.– provided a lead in to the main discussion questions:

"How does this all relate to the idea of 'unions'?"

"What are the goals and key values behind the concept of a union?"

#### Steppin' Up (small group)

**Activity Goal:** Moving next into a discussion of 'taking action' on issues that concern us, this first activity aimed to do two things: to consciously broaden our working definition of 'activism' to include many forms and styles of being an 'activist', and to recognize that we all have experience with taking action that we can draw and build upon (and can draw confidence from).

**Activity Design:** Each person thought of a moment in which they had 'stepped up' to speak/act out on an issue they felt strongly about. Participants were encouraged to think as small and personal as they wanted, these moments often being the most powerful (e.g. speaking up on power dynamics within one's own family, tackling issues in a school context, etc.) For example, for some participants, deciding to attend this conference was a moment of deciding to 'step up'!

## Waves of Change – Historical Timeline (small group)

**Activity Goal:** Recognizing individuals (ourselves included) as the makers of change/history, the next activity sought to reinforce this notion while providing historical context and content to the broader struggles we are part of, as union members, health care workers, and members of society.

**Activity Design:** Participants (in 3s) were given information on a ‘moment’ of struggle in history to read and consider (stories from 1880s to present day, relating to struggles for labour, women’s, and other human rights, for Medicare, against privatization, etc.). Discussion was guided by a series of questions: What were the gains achieved? How did they do it? Who did it? Forces against? What is the significance for workers today?

Highlights from these conversations were then brought back into the whole group – each historical moment presented and then placed on a timeline on the wall. The facilitator filled in other ‘moments’, to further complete the progression and consideration of how different struggles for justice have created change over time.

These stories of history are excellent! (check them out in the workbook)

## Lunch

- so Jim Sinclair brought greetings from the BC Fed
- so Booths were set up with vendors and information – these included various BCNU booths where participants were able to learn more about the different departments and activities of the Union, and ask questions of LRO’s, OH&S, etc.

## My Concerns and the Union (small group)

**Activity Goal:** One of BCNU’s key goals for the conference was to hear directly the concerns of young and student nurses. As we put this into the design, we aimed to create a wide open space for any and all input, recognizing this is an area in which we have a lot to learn.

We were also interested to hear from participants as to whether (and how) they view the union as a vehicle for addressing different concerns they hold.

**Activity Design:** This process was kept very simple. Individuals wrote their key concerns onto sheets of paper, which were then grouped into common themes as they were posted on the wall. A full group discussion followed, to further explore different concerns, explore which were most pressing for different people, etc.

If time allowed, the discussion also moved into a consideration of “why do unions take up broader social issues?” (e.g. nurses being active around anti-poverty issues)

APPENDIX B: A representative list of the kinds of concerns expressed through this activity is included in this report.

## BCNU 101 (plenary)

**Activity Goal:** To provide some basic information on the BCNU.

**Activity Design:** 20 minute lecture.

## Mini-Workshops on Various Union Topics (selected mini-workshop groups)

**Activity Goal:** A range of topics were offered in this time slot, to allow for participants to select according to interest, and varied levels of familiarity with the Union (i.e. workshops were aimed at a variety of different levels).

**Activity Design:** The workshops offered were: (facilitated by various BCNU staff and others)

- ↳ Unions Working in Coalitions
- ↳ Being a Professional and a Union Member
- ↳ Creative Actions - Breaking Out of the Box
- ↳ Workplace Protections
- ↳ Help!! The Workload is Killing Me
- ↳ Harrassment - What is it and How Do We Respond
- ↳ Bargaining: Fighting for Rights and Working Conditions
- ↳ Ticked off at Privatization
- ↳ Building an Inclusive Union

## Chat Rooms (self-formed small groups)

**Activity Goal:** This activity responded to stated desire for 'time to network and share ideas on different topics with other participants'.

**Activity Design:** Participants were encouraged to post up (throughout the AM), topics they were interested in dialoguing with others on. These were synthesized and posted at 'chat' tables throughout the plenary room. The discussions were self-facilitated, and participants were free to move around the room if they chose. As the time neared to close the discussions, each group was asked to create a 'headline' of what they had been discussing, and write it onto a huge piece of poster paper. These were held up and read out, to share a sense for the different discussions with each other.

## Evening Banquet and Entertainment

## Day 2

### Making Change Today – Panel (plenary)

**Activity Goal:** We had heard that nurses wanted to hear nurse's stories of leadership and action. This panel was assembled to foreground such experiences. The stories told emerged from different contexts and represented different perspectives on the motivations and challenges involved in getting involved in leadership as a nurse.

**Activity Design:** The panel presentations were followed by an opportunity for questions and answers, and some time to discuss "moments that have inspired us to take leadership" at individual tables.

### Medicare & Nursing – The Challenges for Unions & Nurses (presentations in plenary)

**Activity Goal:** These short presentations looked to provide information on further topics participants had most indicated wanting to hear about through the survey/working group process.

**Activity Design:** Presentations were short, with an opportunity for questions and answers.  
Presentations:

- ↳ Linda Silas (President, CFNU) – presented on the nursing situation, focussing on the CNA recommendations.
- ↳ Sharon Costello (Campaigns Officer, BCNU) – presented on the health care situation in BC from her perspective as a member of the BC Health Coalition.

There was also a visit from Slash Gordon!

### Garden of Action – Resistance is Fertile (small group)

**Activity Goal:** Moving back into small workshop groups, the goal was to now work with the 'key concerns' identified the previous day, to further analyze the issues themselves as well as what potential action could be taken in response.

**Activity Design:** Participants grouped themselves according to which of the key concerns/issues they were interested in analyzing and brainstorming around. Using a flower as a visual metaphor upon which to work, each group explored their different questions and opinions on issue, and recorded their ideas. The different parts of the flower corresponded to the elements to be analyzed.

These were, in order of consideration:

- ☞ Centre of the flower: the issue
- ☞ Roots: causes and systems – what are the different causes and systems at play?
- ☞ Petals: actions – what actions could help address / shift this situation?
- ☞ Leaves: allies and resources – who are potential allies, in your school, work, or community contexts? how could these alliances be built? what resources could be useful/required? where could they be accessed?

Each group shared their completed 'flowers' with each other – an opportunity for clarifying discussion and additional input.

The issues different groups analyzed through this activity fell in the following categories. (Full list at start of the Appendix B)

- I. Student issues
- II. Diversity issues
- III. Union related issues in the workplace
- IV. Issues specific to new nurses in the workplace
- V. Issues related to public perception
- VI. Workload / Safety and staff mix issues
- VII. Privatization and Restructuring

APPENDIX C provides a full summary of the information gathered through this activity.

## River of Change (small group)

**Activity Goal:** Like the Garden of Action, this activity sought to hear from participants' on their concerns and concrete action ideas. In this case, however, the focus was squarely on exploring the current relationship between young/student nurses and the BCNU. The gathering of this input was considered very important, a key goal underlying the whole conference.

**Activity Design:** Again using a visual metaphor to work upon (a 'river of change'), participants were asked to brainstorm their ideas around the question of their relationship to the union. Ideas were written onto differently shaped cards, and posted up as they emerged. The three questions for consideration (and their corresponding card shapes) were:

Boats: positives.

- ☞ What things exist that invite and facilitate young and student nurse participation with the union?
- ☞ What is the BCNU doing well in terms of building this relationship?

Boulders: obstacles & barriers.

- ☞ What obstacles & barriers do young and student nurses encounter around becoming active with the union?

Fish: strategies & ideas

- ☞ What kinds of actions could be taken to tackle the obstacles and barriers we have identified (\*participants were requested to make these as concrete as possible)

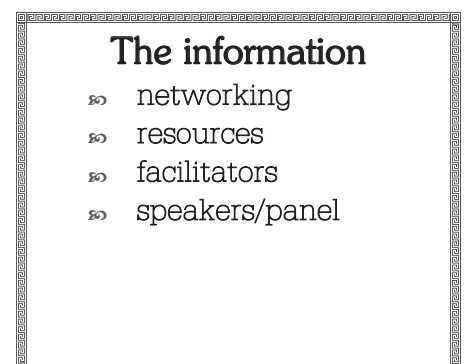
APPENDIX D and E provide a full summary of the information gathered through this activity.

## What Happened?

### a. Overall

- Feedback from conference delegates was overwhelmingly positive. We've tried to capture the essence of the feedback we got from the conference evaluations:

### What I really liked about the conference was:



### Quote

"Time flew . . . true sign of a great experience"

## A light bulb that went on for me was:

### Act collectively

- ☞ we have similar concerns
- ☞ a little effort by everyone can make a large effort

### The union

- ☞ the union is here for me
- ☞ union history helped pave the way for us
- ☞ unions belong to the members
- ☞ I have rights

### Leadership

- ☞ I can make waves
- ☞ you can be politically active without the rhetoric
- ☞ small steps count

### Quote:

“Standing up for yourself does not make you a troublemaker.”

“I’m not the only “newer” RN who feels cautious about getting involved in the union before the conference, but now I’m excited about it”

## If I were to describe to someone what we did at the conference I’d say: I appreciated:

### Got connected

- ☞ we learned, laughed, shared, and cried - we had a fantastic weekend
- ☞ we all were treated equality and felt our voice mattered
- ☞ built union solidarity
- ☞ networked
- ☞ built bridges across generations

### Learned

- ☞ about the BCNU and how to become involved and how to influence it
- ☞ ways to make change
- ☞ I have a professional responsibility to become more active
- ☞ realized our own power to change

### Quote:

“We came together with a common spirit and worked towards the relationship building between the union and young nurses and/or students”

### The hotel

- ☞ food
- ☞ great service

### The access

- ☞ having expenses paid
- ☞ being allowed to register late
- ☞ organization
- ☞ childcare on site

### The climate

- ☞ supportive
- ☞ thought & consideration put into the conference
- ☞ Friday night meet and greet
- ☞ welcoming
- ☞ respectful

### Quote:

“The BCNU listens and takes in what we say”

### My next step will be to:

#### Get involved

- ☞ attend a regional meeting and bring more colleagues
- ☞ keep a closer eye on politics and health care funding
- ☞ register my entire school into BCNU student membership
- ☞ become a BCNU student mentor

#### Get active

- ☞ fill out a PRF
- ☞ apply to the BC Health Coalition for membership
- ☞ do a class presentation on this weekend
- ☞ fight against bed closures
- ☞ talk to family, friends and the public

#### Get educated

- ☞ attend a BUS workshop

### Quote:

“Be my own kind of leader”

## I would come to another BCNU function:

all but 1 said yes - the one said maybe depending on the topic and time constraints

### To learn

- ☞ knowledge is power
- ☞ growth experience

### To connect

- ☞ meet others
- ☞ helps keep me from being burnt out knowing the issues I'm facing are larger than myself but my allies gives me hope for the future of nursing
- ☞ supportive environment

### Quotes

"I want to have a voice."

## Comments on the effectiveness of the facilitator:

### Facilitators

- ☞ flexible
- ☞ positive
- ☞ passionate
- ☞ inclusive
- ☞ knowledgeable
- ☞ funny
- ☞ energetic
- ☞ non-judgmental
- ☞ open
- ☞ respectful

### Quote

"Neat not to have a nurse as a facilitator"

## Did you feel encouraged to participate in the workshop?

- ☞ everyone said yes

### The climate

- ☞ supportive
- ☞ non-judgmental
- ☞ open
- ☞ welcoming
- ☞ inclusive

### The design

- ☞ small groups
- ☞ activities

### Quote

“Not participating was not an option due to the design”

## Anything Else?

### The professional image

- ☞ some of the Gordon Campbell jobs were unprofessional & inappropriate
- ☞ head bobble gear distracting and unprofessional

### The Food

- ☞ more vegetables
- ☞ snacks during refreshment breaks
- ☞ Sunday brunch instead of lunch

### The Design

- ☞ materials and visuals were awesome
- ☞ mini workshops on union topics too short
- ☞ mix the small workshop groups up

### Quote

“Need to continue to implement and support what comes out of this conference, otherwise it will be a waste of money and time”

## Council Comments

"We are currently in a very challenging political climate Provincially and Federally. It is imperative for the future of this union to start empowering the future leaders to become active within it. Recognize that they are their union, and that they have the ability to shape the future. Nurses "advocacy" roles are paramount in their "core being" - that is why it is so imperative that these nurses understand that they have the power and ability to influence a positive environment for themselves therefore making a positive environment for their patients!"

"I appreciated the honesty and brilliance of the young people."

## Key Opportunities

In this document you'll find a lot of excellent input on various topics. The opportunities section speaks to the goals of the conference. BCNU's motivation is to create links with younger members and students to involve them in the union and encourage them to become leaders in the union.

### Outreach

- ☞ BCNU student representatives on undergrad societies (maybe buddy up with a steward in their area)
- ☞ student representative for each year/class (similar to RNABC) - invite to BCNU meetings and educationals
- ☞ create a BC Student Nurses Union
- ☞ connect with new grads through BCNU information packages, job fairs, BCNU sponsored get togethers
- ☞ scholarships for nursing students
- ☞ fund students for conferences and BUS workshops
- ☞ buddy stewards with perceptorships as part of nursing curriculum
- ☞ monthly events for students and nurses at worksites with guest speakers in increase union visibility
- ☞ develop BCNU nurse mentorship program
- ☞ be informal and flexible in time and location of meetings - shift workers and students provide on-site child-minding
- ☞ integrate equity issues into all BCNU work
- ☞ have more young nurse conferences or other events geared to young students or members
- ☞ use younger people in our media strategies

### Nursing Programs:

- ☞ explore student employment programs including coop programs
- ☞ work with students and faculty to include BCNU/unionism as part of nursing curriculum

### Direct Student Involvement:

- ☞ student practicum placement at the BCNU office
- ☞ offer the BCNU office as a clinical placement

## Communications:

- youth page and/or student nurse column in Update
- youth section on website with the ability to communicate with students and young nurse population
- student BCNU hotline
- access student newsletters and magazine
- design BCNU information and outreach for younger audiences - ie: website, Update, bulletins, etc.
- use consistent language, regardless of target audience so we don't feel there is a contradiction in messaging
- communicate directly with students using e-mails, posters
- on-line forums and chats regarding issues

## Union Visibility and Access:

- stewards/council come to the school
- more steward walkabouts
- steward mentors for young nurses
- e-mail connection to stewards for contract questions - shift work creates a problem reaching them
- buddy a new nurse with steward/mentor/ward rep

## Representation:

- youth representative on council
- student representative on council
- youth committee
- examine the diversity of the BCNU elected leadership and staff considering this in relation to the BCNU membership, working towards increasing representativeness by tackling racism, homophobia, ableism, and sexism within the workplace, the union and beyond
- equity seat on council
- human rights committee

## Collective Agreement:

- simplified "lay" terms version
- collective agreement and contract interpretation manuals available at worksites, on wards and on-line
- 15-20 minute contract in-services by stewards
- contract interpretation hotline
- "did you know..." bulletins/leaflets to post at worksites with contract insight

## **Bargaining Issues:**

- ↳ strengthen paid union leave
- ↳ keep benefits - sick/vacation
- ↳ RN/patient ratios
- ↳ create more permanent positions
- ↳ more flexible work schedules
- ↳ incentives for nurses to stay in BC
- ↳ efforts to recruit more men and minorities into nursing
- ↳ BC wide standards for acuity measurements
- ↳ permanent float positions or pool
- ↳ increase preceptorship rations
- ↳ pay for preceptorship
- ↳ increase student participation (with RN present) to help with nurse-patient ratios
- ↳ change to gender neutral language

## **RNABC**

- ↳ find opportunities to work with RNABC