

MANWO



Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

RMYC

Regional Link

Regional Multicultural Youth Council

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MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

2021 - 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

(With Youth-led Initiatives by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council)

and

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

July 31, 2022

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MANWO 2021 - 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction:

The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO) is an umbrella organization for cultural and ethno-cultural groups in a region that covers two thirds of Ontario's land-mass, and encompasses some ninety First Nations communities. MANWO serves as a resource centre for information on citizenship, settlement services for newcomers, anti-racism, equity and social justice, and works with community groups to promote Canadian Multiculturalism. The association also engages mainstream institutions to accommodate diversity, address systemic racism and enhance reconciliation.

MANWO is an incorporated not for profit organization linking multicultural associations as affiliate members. The association is the parent organization of the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC), a youth network that supports and encourages children and youth to work together and learn to get along. MANWO and the RMYC are based at the Multicultural Youth Centre in Thunder Bay, a safe space for children and youth to drop-in and access services, programs and supports. The centre is also a training facility for youth leadership and organizational development. The youth learn to plan and organize extra-curricular activities, practice peer mentoring, work together to improve race relations, gain employment experience and lifeskills by participating in after-school programs that enhance their wellness, safety and achievement.

Both MANWO and the RMYC are committed to a just society where citizens have equal access, equal opportunity and equal participation in every aspect of Canadian society. Following the release of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, and the Seven Youth Coroner's Inquest Recommendations, building relationships with Indigenous peoples and collaborating with First Nations in the region to support their students to stay in school and graduate have become priority areas to work on.

MANWO and the RMYC) run the After School Program at Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC) First Nations High School in Thunder Bay. With funding from the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries as part of the 7 Youth Inquest recommendations, we plan and organize activities with Indigenous boarding students to keep them busy and safe in large urban environments. We also introduce them to the diversity in the city using a youth-to-youth approach to enhance communication with peers, and build bridges of understanding to eliminate cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice and discrimination.

We have since initiated a Student Ambassador Program to develop Peer Mentors as role models who use positive influence to motivate, inspire and steer students into right paths. We support students to be involved in activities that alleviate loneliness and boredom in the city, and facilitate their integration into a large diverse urban environment. Working with Indigenous students develops their leadership and organizational skills to build their capacity, to initiate change and be part of the solution to the problems they are facing. This will also enable them to make improvements when they return to their communities.

The After School Program (ASP) is based in Room #115. We provide healthy snacks and meals for students. This entices them to stay at school after classes and use the facilities to participate in healthy extra-curricular activities. We provide a safe space for students to hang out, play games, complete assignments, watch movies, and relax. The atmosphere encourages students from different reserves to mix and get to know each other better. The informal interaction encourages dialogue among students and RMYC team leaders, builds self confidence to speak up, share ideas to support each other and thrive in the city. Access to two gymnasiums, fitness room, cultural room, music room, a classroom for arts and crafts makes the school experience fun and more enjoyable. In addition to peer mentoring, students have access to school staff and Elders after hours.

Finding suitable boarding homes is always a challenge and only 140 students could find accommodation. Unfortunately our After School activities at DFC came to a halt during the Holiday Season. break. Students did not return for regular school after the Christmas holidays due to the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities. Only about half returned for a month in mid-April to prepare and write final exams before the school closed in mid-May.

Most of the students who returned were in the graduating class coming for a live ceremony after two years of virtual graduations. It was a grand occasion for the 24 students who received their Grade 12 certificates with family members in attendance..

Pathways to Education Canada:

Pathways to Education is a national charitable organization working to break the cycle of poverty through education. This award-winning program is creating positive social change by supporting students from low-income communities or living in high-risk neighbourhoods to overcome barriers to education so that they stay in school, graduate from high school and build foundations for a successful future. Through the power of partnerships Pathways to Education's model of support networks prepares youths for a better tomorrow.

After working with Pathways to Education on several projects to assess the challenges faced by Indigenous students in Thunder Bay, we were able to expand the DFC after-school program and peer mentoring (Student Ambassador) initiative to all high schools across the city. We targeted grade nine students and embarked on a recruitment drive to register Indigenous and other vulnerable youths. We used the youth-to-youth strategy and trained RMYC members from different high schools as Peer Mentors to be our contacts in their respective high schools. However, the pandemic slowed our outreach and lowered our initial expectations to sign-up 100 students to half the number of students.

The Lakehead District School Board and the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board welcomed our efforts to improve school graduation rates among Indigenous students. Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) endorsed our initiative and provided a support letter that opened the doors for Pathways to fund the initiative. Pathways to Education Canada provided funding to hire a Program Manager, administrative staff, tutors and we were able to offer a variety of social and academic supports. But since both MANWO and the RMYC are non Indigenous groups, we worked with NAN and the Friendship Centre to find an ideal lead partner to enhance the success of First Nations students in the education system. We are presently negotiating with Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan, the group that runs the head-start program as well as Biwaaseea in elementary and high schools.

Special Projects and Other Activities:

The COVID-19 restrictions limited our ability to work on the Greenhouse Project -- *Minogjin Gitiganis – Gardens Growing Well* led funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and led by Alter Eden a group based in Toronto. Working remotely was a challenge and a lack of in-person contact made practical learning difficult. We terminated the partnership when RMYC members could not access the greenhouses without Alter-Eden and thus could not benefit from the project. But, we were able to work with Roots to Harvest, a local group on community gardening projects at Limbrick Place, the Windsor community housing neighbourhood and at Carrick House. Youth council members were able to learn about growing vegetables, flowers and natural plants and the importance of flowers and bees for pollination to enhance food production. The youth used the opportunity to learn Indigenous plant names to promote native languages and share food security skills in the process. We also initiated a wild-rice growing and harvesting initiative in six First Nation communities with the Carrick Family providing funding for the seed.

Collaboration in Research – Youth Resilience and Success:

We continued our partnership with Carleton University for the research project “*Youth Futures: Bringing together Indigenous and Western approaches to promote youth resilience and prosperity in First Nations communities*”. With contact to remote northern communities limited to virtual networking, it was difficult to maintain the momentum. The project did provide funding to hire two students who worked with the RMYC summer students team on various projects the youth deemed important to cope with the pandemic.

The project also sent 3 students to work with the youth and support them. They were a great resource for the summer students. They made presentations and shared their knowledge and skills to build self confidence and resilience among the youth to cope with the challenges in life. They led workshops and participated in sharing circles to enhance the capacity of the youth and their activities to empower themselves and each other to create the changes they want. They also prepared a report from their observations and came up with recommendations to improve the operations of the youth council. .

Summer School and Summer Work Experience Training:

During the summer, we ran summer school for students who wanted to complete courses they struggled with on line. A generous donation by a retired school teacher from Toronto, Mrs. Evelyn Sharpe enabled us to sponsor 20 students for summer school. A detailed account of our summer school observations are attached to this report.

MANWO hired forty-two students sponsored by the Thunder Bay Service Canada, Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, Pathways to Education, YES Employment Services and Anishnabek Employment and Training Services to develop skills for the work world. A majority were First Nations high school students who had never been employed or worked in the city. With so many young students lacking work skills and experience, we relied on our peer mentor approach to train, guide and coach the youth.

We rented Vale Community Centre for adequate space and kitchen facilities to teach the youth to prepare food and good eating habits. The food security initiative was supported by the Carrick Family. As mentioned earlier we also did community gardening, and ran Girl Power and Band of Brothers day camps. We sponsored barbecues for families and kids to come and participate in clean-ups to pick-up garbage and organized recreational activities to connect with children and youth, keep them active and promote wellness.

We used the community events to consult with residents on the critical issues they faced and asked for their input on solutions and access to services to deal with the problems they face. Safety was a priority for many during the pandemic and we often had to take the necessary precautions. Boredom was a common concern during lockdowns, and isolation created a climate for dependence on social media and abuse of drugs. Addiction and mental health problems continue to mount as well as home invasions among vulnerable single mothers and impoverished families.

Some of the summer students with good communication skills became Peer Mentors for the Pathways Program. They became part of the RMYC Student Working Group to promote the youth councils initiatives in their respective schools.

Youth / Student Engagement and Leadership Development:

We initiated a survey for Youth Centres Canada (YCC) to find out how member groups were faring during the pandemic. YCC is now based in Thunder Bay and uses Carrick House as office space. Comments from the survey confirm that many youth centres have been struggling during the period of social isolation. There is a need to reorganize and rebuild the group so that it can effectively advocate for safer spaces or youths with programs, services and supports to make a difference.

The RMYC worked with the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) on several projects including the Art of Work peer mentoring initiative, No one is Born a Racist, and evaluating the Pathways to Education Program. We also collaborated to promote the Canada We Want” national youth campaign and produced a video sponsored by SHAW Cable titled the “Thunder Bay We/Youth Want.” We participated in meetings and forums virtually but were unable to attend the SCC National Youth Forum in the spring due to the pandemic. We are looking forward to resuming in-person meetings post the pandemic.

The RMYC sits on the Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay to provide a youth voice and perspective on race relations, diversity and racial discrimination. We applied for a city grant to follow up on the issues covered at the “Coming Together to Talk with Youth” and the report follows further bellow.

Settlement Services:

In spite of a lack of funding to deliver settlement services, we continue to provide limited support to assist new immigrants and refugees in the region. Our toll-free telephone number and access via internet kept us connected to our affiliate offices in remote communities across northwestern Ontario. Most of the calls were requests for information about sponsorships of newcomers mostly refugees. There were also inquiries about the new Northwestern Ontario special designation as potential destination for new-immigrants seeking targeted jobs and filling in special employment vacancies. We did our best to provided information, and make referrals.

Complementary Initiatives:

The MANWO executive director sits on the Kairos Community Resource Board of a young offender facility in Thunder Bay. We promote the RMYC's youth-to-youth programs at the Multicultural Youth Centre and connect young offenders with peers who use positive influence to change bad habits. The strategy introduces vulnerable youths to a different healthy environment where they are safe, accepted and feel they belong. If they are in school we link them with peer mentors and tutors and provide youth support circles to break negative cycles from old acquaintances and friends from correctional facilities. We also link them with community resources and supports and make referrals as needed.

MANWO executive director also chairs the Thunder Bay Parole Office Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Even though we are in Ontario, our district is part of Winnipeg and we report to the Prairie Region Head Quarters in Saskatoon. This link to the west introduced Moffat to Healing Lodges and their success at rehabilitating Indigenous offenders. We are continue to be involved in a campaign to establish a Healing Lodge in the Thunder Bay area as an alternative to jails to serve the region. This will be the first one in Ontario.

Chief Peter Collins of Fort William First Nation has offered his community to host a Healing Lodge to serve Northwestern Ontario. The region encompasses 90 First Nations reserves in three Treaty areas: Grand Council Treaty #3, Nishnawbe Aski Nation Treaty #9, and Robinson Superior 1850 Treaty, and we have engaged everyone.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are proud of our on-going accomplishments. We are especially grateful for the national publicity we got through a Globe and Mail article that continues to generate donations to support our youth programs. We are also thrilled that Bobby Narcisse, a past leader of the youth council who currently sits on the MANWO Board was elected Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief further strengthening our relationships with Indigenous groups.



INDIGENOUS YOUTH AND EDUCATION: RMYC 2021 SUMMER EXPERIENCE

by Kamryn Woloschuk, a 19 year old university student from Thunder Bay studying psychology.

Introduction:

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, I have been a Team Leader and Peer Mentor with the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC). The youth council's three goals are: to give youth a voice, to keep youth safe, and to help youth graduate.

In July and August 2021, the RMYC ran a summer employment program for students. With funding from Pathways to Education, Carleton University, the Friendship Centre, YES Employment Services and Matawa First Nations, we hired and worked with forty-two students from different races, cultures, sexualities and religions ranging in age from 12 years to 20 years old. We taught them job skills through practical hands-on activities such as planning and organizing community events. We also discussed personal growth topics such as self esteem, self-confidence, character, setting goals, prioritizing issues and creating work-plans.

We had peer mentors and created a safe space for dialogue on topics that included: education, wellness, safety, careers, two-spirit identities, children's rights and responsibilities, mental health, food security, homelessness, the environment, multiculturalism, racism and reconciliation. The youth set guidelines for a safe and welcoming climate, rules to respect each other's pronouns, giving warnings before possibly triggering stories, no swearing, putdowns and so forth. We encouraged them to talk about their cultures, racial stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in society and the world in a different way than they do at school.

As part of the summer jobs program, the RMYC ran a summer school pilot project with Lakehead Public Schools, and we registered 20 Indigenous students who had struggled with on-line learning and missed getting credits. We specifically targeted First Nations students because locally they have a startlingly high dropout rate of eighty per cent (80%) as reported in a recent study by John Hogson and Nadine Hedican @ 2021: "Educational Challenges for First Nation Children in Thunder Bay Schools – Let the Dreaming Begin".

A generous donation by Evelyn Sharpe, a retired educator in Toronto enabled the RMYC to provide bus tickets, meal cards, refreshments for students attending summer school. We set aside two hours of their work-time for schooling each day, and assigned team leaders and peer tutors to connect with them one-to-one and offer support. We monitored attendance, and only two siblings grieving the loss of their mother dropped out of the program.

Reviewing the issues and analyzing problems:

Our next step was to check in with the students and piece together why they completed the program yet they struggled much with schooling and virtual learning. To hear the truth about why teenagers are having difficulties, you must work hard to build trustworthy relationships with them, which is one of the RMYC's strengths. We held sharing circles for the students to openly share their feelings about the mainstream Eurocentric education system in the city. I was the note-taker, and the following are my reflections on what I heard from the students:

- First of all, the dark history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. Many Indigenous students knew about what happened, or had at least heard whispers of it. But now that it is coming into the mainstream news and is impossible to ignore. Children their age or younger than them were sent to schools far away from their homes to be assimilated into white colonial culture. They could not help but remember this every time they think of schools now, which continue to teach them a white, colonial mindset.
- They are under-represented in academic settings. They can often be the only Indigenous person in their class, which leads to feeling like an outcast. They are afraid to ask for help when they don't understand the work. They struggle to find partners for group projects and feel misunderstood and misrepresented. They do not see many who look like them or has the same history as them among school staff besides their native language teachers.
- School feels stressful with the high school workload and there is added anxiety when moving from a homogeneous reserve to a multiracial city where racism is rampant and culturally insensitive students judge you by stereotypes and you face racial discrimination. Indigenous students struggle to fit in and it is scary to not have a partner in class for group assignments or have to sit and eat alone at school.

- First Nation students coming from a reserve tend to have trouble making non-Indigenous friends in the city. Feeling left-out can lead to a lack of motivation to attend class.
- Anxiety, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other mental health and developmental issues plague a majority of Indigenous students. These issues can be from intergenerational trauma, external racism, sexual abuse, unnoticed genetic issues, poor physical health, neglect, food insecurity and lack of nutrition due to the cost of food on reserves, insomnia, or a variety of other issues Indigenous communities face in Canada. They often are not placed into comprehensive therapy or offered support from adults until it becomes a crisis, which can look like suicide attempts, overdose, homicide, gang activity, etc.
- They experience racism from teachers who are not culturally competent -- like a substitute teacher saying "This is why I don't like teaching your kind" -- when Indigenous students told her that she mispronounced Ojibwe words, or made all of the Indigenous students in class sit in the back corner, away from the other students.
- They experience racism from their classmates, or overhear racist comments from classmates. It can be in the form of "jokes", which teachers do not comment on or correct.
- When Indigenous students suffer from poor mental health, which they often do, it is less likely to be acknowledged as such, noticed or accommodated by teachers or staff.
- Two students said that the Indigenous Culture Room at their school is not respected by the school or other students. It is placed inside the library, so they can't use traditional drums or speak loudly. After lunch, it is locked and inaccessible to the students who need it. And when they have a ceremony with a feast, white students come in and just take food without talking to any of the Indigenous students or respecting the ceremony happening.
- Many Indigenous students feel that their teachers and counsellors often recommend that they take applied or even locally-developed courses without doing a diagnostic test or asking them what their future goals and interests are.

- Indigenous students feel they have been sent to the 'office' for minor things like standing up for themselves against racists, or wearing their 'hoodie' in class due to shyness. They say teachers would rather punish them than help them, and together with other racially marginalized students are unfairly targeted when it comes to rules like the dress-code.
- Oftentimes, Indigenous students are made to feel that school is not "for them" because they cannot do the hard work and will fail.
- It can be hard when no one from their family has graduated from high school because they cannot ask their parents for help with their school work. Many also feel that if their parents and older siblings did not graduate, how can they?" Also, if parents/grandparents have a negative outlook towards school because of residential schools (residential assimilation camps), that outlook is passed down and will be present in the students as well.
- Although it can be hit or miss depending on the family, oftentimes Indigenous families are damaged and broken. If the family is not healthy, then they do not help you to wake up for school, help you to study or even care if you are attending school. They worry about their own issues first and are struggling with trauma, or could be self medicating to numb the pain and too drunk or high to even notice their children's struggles due to their own addictions.
- Poverty is common and a lack of food or other basic necessities affects school attendance when students fear that relying on breakfast, lunch and used clothes at school can result in investigations by children's aid societies and apprehensions. Homes are overcrowded and noisy to do home-work, while frequent suicides and grieving can lead to dependence on substances. Inadequate counseling services to deal with problems and mental health issues cause students to miss school and eventually drop out when they fail to catch-up.
- Unstable households lead to unstable behavioural patterns to do well in the education system. Some parents/guardians billeting them in boarding homes are not good role models to teach and foster healthy habits. This creates indifference to school because students are not well supported and left feeling insecure, dumb or stupid when they miss classes and get left behind. With no guidance, they struggle to form healthy and productive study habits.

- School feels exhausting, sometimes unnecessary, like they could be somewhere else (maybe with family, hunting or living the traditional way). Sometimes they have a neutral feeling, like it's nice to have education, but the climate at school does not feel welcoming. They may want to learn but the school environment becomes too negative to endure.
- Feelings of shame and humiliation come up when students cannot answer questions and teachers try to force them to answer "for their own good", or to shame them for not studying.
- Indigenous history is not taught properly, and is only an elective, but white history is mandatory creating gaps and misinformation that make Indigenous students feel inferior.
- If there are not "enough" Indigenous students they will not run native language classes.
- Transitioning from small underfunded reserve schools brings up a lot of frustration when First Nation students move to large multicultural city schools they are not familiar with or do not know anyone. This can generate anxiety and triggers without warning.
- It's a cultural issue, not just an individual matter. When an Indigenous student is struggling at school, their peers are having similar experiences and are not likely to lift each other up or encourage each other to study. Moving to the city just changes geography, not values, habits or behavior. Peer pressure lures them to drink or get high, play video games all night and sleep-in, and hangout doing things they are used to doing together on reserves that distract them from focusing on school. They support each other in ways that they have learned and are used to -- to cope with problems, pain, stress and intergenerational trauma.
- Indigenous students experiencing extreme physical and verbal bullying in elementary school grades see the bullies facing no serious repercussions besides a "talking to". Not addressing this can lead to resentment being carried through to high school and impacting their success.
- Schools did not hold memorials for Indigenous students who passed away, offer grieving support, or acknowledgement during announcements. These are significant developments that should serve to educate students about residential schools and enhance reconciliation.

Personal Comments and Recommendations:

From the sharing circles and other casual discussions with the students, everything adds up, creating an impossible weight to carry every single time Indigenous students go to school and step into the classroom. They feel that this is “not for them” and it is too frustrating to even try to fit in. They start to believe that they physically and mentally cannot do it even if they love education. This leads to anger, shame, skipping school, using substances to avoid guilt. Once these outlooks are formed, it is very hard to reverse them, especially if teachers and staff at school do not understand the Indigenous students’ mindset, history and their life on reserves. So even in a more comfortable social environment like the RMYC summer school, they experience negative feelings bubbling up and feel discouraged doing school work. They feel scared to ask for help, lack motivation to continue and lose hope to succeed in school.

As a co-worker and friend, I see how smart and creative Indigenous students are. We need to make the school system work with them not against them. Change is happening in schools but to accelerate progress and graduation rates the following ideas can make a difference:

- Have high-schools on reserves or close to reserves for easy access to familiar supports.
- Native language classes need better funding. They should be inclusive and encouraged for everyone. There should be no discrimination to non-Indigenous students interested in learning the Indigenous languages.
- Indigenous youths as well as all other students should be given more chances to share their cultural practices and learn about each other in safe welcoming spaces. Not all students get the chance to participate in multicultural activities the RMYC plans and organizes to promote multiculturalism, challenge cultural stereotypes, combat racial prejudice and discrimination. Cultural diversity and acceptance should be taught, promoted and celebrated in schools.
- Some teachers on reserves are still in training and culturally incompetent to understand First Nations students and help them to get started on their education journey. Schools on reserves need to do a better job to prepare students for higher education or trades for the changing work world -- or not much will change in high school graduation rates.

- Indigenous studies should be mandatory and true Indigenous history taught in class to correct myths and misconceptions created by the one-sided Euro-centric perspective taught in the existing education system. This is in line with the development of culturally appropriate curriculum as mentioned in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.
- Better student counsellors are needed on reserves and there should be proper orientation for students who will be moving to urban centres to successfully transition into city schools. Past urban high school graduates in the community can share their stories and coach new students how to adapt and stay safe in the city, ways to catch-up and thrive in urban schools to graduate. However, they will need to be connected with significant others and positive peers mentors who advocate on their behalf and support them throughout high school.
- Increase Indigenous representation in schools with Indigenous teachers not just teaching native languages and culture.
- Having Elders in schools as a resource to educate everyone about Indigenous traditions.
- Assignments including Indigenous aspects and characters to raise awareness of Indigenous culture from young ages, and ZERO tolerance for racism of any kind.
- More land based learning, more field trips to Indigenous organizations, Indigenous lands, etc. for ALL students to learn about indigenous history and appreciate their culture.
- Ask indigenous students what they want to learn, what their goals are and support them to enhance success and break the cycle of school dropouts and failure. If they don't know, engage them and explain in culturally appropriate terms.
- Indigenous culture room accessible at all times with mental health supports and Elders
- All school staff and teachers must learn Indigenous history, colonization and the Indian Act, as well as residential schools, the 60's Scoop and the impacts of intergenerational trauma on mental health, performance, achievement, substance abuse and so forth.

- Encourage classes to promote on traditional ways of life, like having Indigenous dishes in “foods” class, as well as opportunities to learn about hide tanning, hunting & trapping, and spirituality. Indigenous students do not see colonial perspectives of success as their version of success, but may not have the resources to learn traditional things from parents or family.

- The urban environment is very different and challenging for Indigenous students. We need to keep them busy and safe by providing safer friendly spaces to hang out and healthy extra-curricular activities after school. The RMYC uses a youth-to-youth approach and trains young leaders and peer mentors who use their influence to engage other students in positive activities. This has been our strategy to enhance the success of Indigenous youths.

- Teachers, school staff, and peer leaders such as student councils should attend professional development workshops to connect with the Indigenous students and how to uplift them. They should actively engage First Nations students to get their input on what teachers, staff and school boards should do to make them feel welcome, stay in school and graduate. Involving them to be part of the solution to the problems they are facing will make a difference in their lives and their future.

- Indigenous students need more mentorship programs with peer role models ‘Student Ambassadors’ to build self esteem, self-confidence, and establish relationships for guidance and one-on-one nurturing support. Residential schools broke Indigenous families and the intergenerational impacts have ripple effects among children and youth. Consequently, many students come from broken dysfunctional families, and when they go home at the end of the day, there may not be someone there to ask “How was school? Are you okay?” and so forth.

- It is important to find good caring boarding homes for students to stay in the city while studying away from home. It is important to screen homes and work with boarding parents to provide parental supervision and ensure that the student feels comfortable to open up and say what is bothering them. Boarding parents should also encourage students they are billeting to attend school regularly, get the supports they need from the school, and link with groups such as the RMYC for after school activities. Joining clubs at school, and participating in sports and recreation can keep students busy, safe and enable them to meet new friends.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Our education system has been desegregated since the last Indian Residential School-- Gordon's *Indian Residential School* located in Punnichy, Saskatchewan -- was closed as recently as 1996. In spite of having integrated schools, the outcomes still reflect disparities along racial and income lines and this needs to change. According to a news article in the Toronto Star (May 16, 2014): *"The number of Aboriginal youths dropping out of high school has improved somewhat from 48% to 41%. However, this number is still appalling when you compare it to the overall Canadian dropout rate of 10%. On reserves, the dropout rate is 58%! Achievement in the Prairies (and Northwestern Ontario) was generally worse than the national average."*

Statistics Canada and reports by Correctional Service Canada reveal that eighty-nine percent (89%) of young offenders in the federal correctional system have below grade 10 education and 65% less than grade 8. The high numbers of school drop-outs make youths vulnerable and susceptible to a life of crime. Many end up in the justice system that is costly to society, feeds negative cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice and discrimination, perpetuates poverty and threatens our safety and security.

Schools may not have the capacity to provide everything diverse students they serve need to realize their true learning potential, but they can build relationships with community groups for supplementary resources to support students. The RMYC and Pathways to Education are collaborating with Indigenous groups to complement what schools are doing by advocating to close the gaps that exist. We believe in peer mentoring and the need for safer spaces for Indigenous students to learn basic study skills without feeling ashamed for not knowing how, and offering on-going support to build such skills into habits that will help them to succeed.

We are therefore appealing to the Minister of Education, school boards, Chiefs, community leaders, entrepreneurs, decision and policy makers to pull together and provide the financial resources, material as well as human supports to enhance the wellness, safety, graduation and achievement of Indigenous students. We believe that education is a strong foundation to build better lives for Indigenous youths today, and for future and successive generations



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EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATION CHILDREN IN THUNDER BAY SCHOOLS: LET THE DREAMING BEGIN

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Describing the challenges faced by Indigenous children in the Ontario system of education can best be understood through three examples that provide a snap shot which reveals the reluctance of the system to evolve to meet the learning needs of Indigenous peoples.

Example 1: Population Count, Failure

Many Indigenous organizations have long argued that Indigenous people are reluctant to participate in Census Canadian and are therefore underrepresented as a percentage of total population of Thunder Bay. The most often quoted statistic from the 2016 census found that 12.7 per cent of the city's population identified as Indigenous (StatsCan).

Dr. Janet Smylie, principal investigator in the research study, *Our Health Counts: Thunder Bay* suggests an adult Indigenous population of 29,778, or three times higher than the 2016 census reports (Murray, 2020).

Indigenous Self-Identification Policy Implementation, Failure

The Ministry of Education's Self-Identification Policy would seem to reflect a similar reluctance of Indigenous parents / caregivers to participate in any initiative that might further stigmatize their children.

With the release of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* in 2007 the Ministry of Education encouraged School Boards to develop "voluntary, confidential Indigenous student self-identification" policies that would assist the Ministry to improve programming and supports.

By 2011 / 12, the Ministry reported that all seventy-six Boards and school authorities reported that thirty-six per cent of the estimated 64,000 Indigenous students had been self-identified by their families. Five years later the number of self-identified Indigenous students had increased to sixty-three per cent of the estimated total population.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATION CHILDREN

In other words, in five years of collective activity only sixty-three per cent of the Indigenous students attending provincially funded schools had been self-identified by their parents / caregivers.

Implications

A local study completed in the 2016 / 17 school year compared self-identified Indigenous populations in selected schools in the Lakehead Public School Board in Thunder Bay (see Table 1.). Given the disparity between the reported and actual population of Indigenous peoples residing in Thunder Bay and the potential population of Indigenous children attending Lakehead Board schools it would seem reasonable to suggest that the total Indigenous population has already exceeded fifty per cent.

Table 1. Indigenous Self-Identified Populations in Lakehead Public District School Board Schools

#	School Name	Total School Pop. 2012-13	Indig. Population 2012-13	Indig. % of Total Pop.	Total School Pop. 2016-17	Total Indig. Pop.	Indig. % of Total Pop.
1	McKellar Park Elementary	300	180	60	179	125	70
2	Ogden Community Elementary	204	144	60	201	109	54
3	Sherbrooke Elementary	124	84	68	124	96	77
4	Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate ¹		Not available		547	145	27
5	St. James Elementary	170	70	41	165	86	52
6	Vance Chapman Elementary		Not available		270	66	24
7	Westgate Collegiate		Not available		775	109	14

Example 2: Graduation Rates of Indigenous Students in Provincial Schools, Failure

At the beginning of the 2011 / 12 the Ontario Ministry of Education directed all Boards of Education to track that year's cohort of Indigenous students for a period of four and five years and then report on the graduation rates at the end of the period. The thinking behind the directive was that there was little accurate data available to base any comparative studies to determine how the Education Policy (2007) was working.

¹ Sir Winston Churchill CVI closed in June of 2018, the student population has now moved to Westgate CVI.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATION CHILDREN

Anecdotal reports suggested that the data was so embarrassing that the Boards of Education successfully lobbied the Ministry of Education to suppress the Board findings on the basis that Indigenous students moved too much and the data were therefore, unreliable. In response, the Ministry choose to release provincial aggregate data that removes the responsibility for failure from individual Boards.

In leu of more accurate individual Board data, consider what the Ministry of Education has published. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) reported that 42.30 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15 and over had less that a high school diploma. By 2018 the Ministry reported that 47.1 per cent of First Nation students earned a high school diploma in four years.

Implications

What the Ministry is admitting is that after a decade of work, millions of dollars invested to increase Indigenous school success the best the entire province – Ministry, Faculties of Education, College of Teachers, Boards of Education, and Principals – could do is move the needle of success a little over 5 per cent across the entire population of 15 to 90 years of age.

More accurate data that reflects the reality of Indigenous school success in Northwestern Ontario is available. According to the 2016 Census, only 38.4 per cent of the population in the age group 18 to 20 years living in private households in Northwestern Ontario had a high school diploma or equivalent.

Example 3: First Nation Tuition Transfers & School Success, Failure

To protect the anonymity of the students involved this particular First Nation and the Boards of Education will remain nameless.

- In 2014 this remote First Nation sent a total of 15 students to grade 9 at provincially funded public and Catholic high schools in an urban centre in Northwestern Ontario. This particular community transferred \$285,000. in tuition / fees at the end of the school year.
- The fall of 2015 only 9 students returned to start grade 10 and that First Nation transferred \$171,000. in tuition / fees at the end of that school year.
- During the fall of 2016 only 6 students returned to start grade 11 and the First Nation transferred \$114,000. in tuition / fees at the end of that school year.
- During the fall of 2017 only 5 students returned to start grade 12 and the First Nation transferred an additional \$95,000. in tuition / fees at the end of the school year.
- At the end of the 2017 school year only 3 of the original 15 students graduated from those provincially funded school boards.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR FIRST NATION CHILDREN

Implications

This First Nation invested some \$665,000. to graduate only 3 students (\$221,666. per graduate) from high school. This eighty per cent drop-out rate is testament to the stunning failure of those School Boards to meet the learning needs of those students.

In comparison the average cost (tuition, books room/board, transportation) of a year of post-secondary education in Canada is \$20,000. (Brown, 2018).

What was the impact of this failure of education on those students that left high school prior to graduation? Anecdotal reports suggest instances of substance abuse, unemployment as well as suicide attempts were all part of the lives of those First Nation learners.

This particular First Nation was left to pick up the pieces of young lives that were shattered, at least partially, by a system of education that is reluctant to support the needs of their children.

CONCLUSION

All three examples speak of the power of a system of education to resist change, ignore the needs of Indigenous youth, the implications of the available data and a body of international research literature that demonstrates how change can occur.

The lack of a high school diploma or equivalent is a contributing factor to much of the disparity evident in Indigenous communities today - increased rates of incarceration, poor health, unemployment, substance abuse, violence in the same 18-to-20-year-old population.

HOW TO IMPROVE TEACHER PRACTICE: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INNOVATION

It will not be the Boards of Education, or Ministries, or the College of Teachers, or Faculties of Education, or Principals that will make change in the classroom, it will be teachers. Teachers, educated to meet the learning needs of Indigenous children, are the greatest contributing factor to school success (Bishop *et al*, 2010).

What teachers ask for is support to improve their pedagogic practice. What they receive is professional development that focuses on the trilogy of, "cultures, histories and perspectives." If focusing on the trilogy was effective, would we not see the evidence of success? After fifteen years focusing teacher development on knowing about the residential school era, or when the local treaty was signed, or how Indigenous people see the world does little to improve teacher *pedagogical practice*. Doing the same thing over-and-over and expecting a different outcome is the very definition of madness.

A pilot project in 2018 (Kitchen *et al*) that broke from that norm, demonstrated a willingness of teachers to enter into a year-long professional development initiative at a

high school in Thunder Bay.

In total, one-quarter (N=12) of the teachers participated in a professional development pilot project that generated increases in teacher satisfaction but also generated statistical evidence of change through increases in student engagement, less absence, lateness, behavioral issues, and increases in final grades.

Implications

Regrettably, a change in the provincial government and a pandemic halted the expansion of the pilot but, we are eternally hopeful for the future. We fear it will be some time before Indigenous children and youth return to schools after the prolonged disconnection that is a result of the pandemic. Those children and youth will require a reason to re-engage, a reason that addresses their learning needs.

It is time now for Boards, Indigenous Advisory Groups, and teachers to break from the status quo that has demonstrated little in the way of school success and begin planning for that time, an innovative approach to education.

FINAL THOUGHTS: TURN TO THE ELDERS

During a 2018 regional conference promoting Indigenous workplace inclusion, Elder Mr. Terry Bouchard's opening remarks provided a succinct analysis of the realities of Anishinaabe and an alternative vision of the future that can be shared by Anishinaabe and non-Indigenous peoples in Northwestern Ontario.

The young Anishinaabek finds it psychologically difficult to integrate into the mosaic of Canadian society. They hardly have any successful brothers and sisters to identify within the education, economic, and social structure of our place in this country that we introduced, we are constantly informed by mass media and people that we are stupid, undignified, savage who has many, many problems, constantly, we cannot see ourselves adapting to the roles that may exist for us. Unable to be educated and hurdle these barriers, many return to the security of the Reserves to live out their lives instead of participating in the economic growth this country has to offer.

The secondary school process, which has been exclusively designed for middle class white students, has contributed to alienate the young Anishinaabek from the old.

So, these are just some of the barriers that we face, and there may be more. But the opportunity is here, and it is time to seize on this program the presenters are offering.

One Elder once told me, Mi-no bwaa-ji-gen ji-bmaad-zii-yiin. Bwaa-ji-gen ji-mi-no-bmaad-zii-yin.

If one dreams a good life, one can live a good dream (Hodson & Hedican, 2018).



Premier of Ontario
Premier ministre
de l'Ontario

Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Édifice de l'Assemblée législative
Queen's Park
Toronto (Ontario)
M7A 1A1

December 7, 2021

Kamryn Woloschuk
Team Leader and Peer Mentor
Regional Multicultural Youth Council
Multicultural Youth Centre
511 Victoria Avenue East
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 1A8

Dear Kamryn Woloschuk:

Thanks for your letter containing the report you prepared for the Regional Multicultural Youth Council on helping Indigenous youths stay in school and graduate. I appreciate hearing your findings and ideas.

You can be sure that I'll keep your comments in mind. I've also forwarded a copy of your letter to the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, and the Honourable Greg Rickford, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, for their information. I'm sure that they, too, will carefully consider your views.

Working with the people of this great province, we'll build a brighter future for Ontario.

Thanks again for contacting me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug Ford', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Doug Ford
Premier

c: The Honourable Stephen Lecce
c: The Honourable Greg Rickford



Nishnawbe Aski Nation

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100 Back Street, Unit 200
Thunder Bay, ON P7J 1L2



Moffat Makuto, Executive Director
Regional Multicultural Youth Council
511 Victoria Avenue East
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 1A8

April 20, 2021

Dear Moffat:

On behalf of Nishnawbe Aski Nation Executive Council I am writing to extend and reaffirm support for the Regional Multicultural Youth Centre (RMYC) and programs. NAN Chiefs-In-Assembly passed resolution 03/30 - Nishnawbe Aski Nation Supports the Regional Youth Centre. This resolution acknowledged the integral role the RMYC plays in providing a safe space for youth in Thunder Bay.

The NAN Executive Council is also supportive of the Regional Multicultural Youth Council exploring ways to collaborate with the NAN Oshkaatisak Council in developing partnerships to explore strategies to enhance the wellness, safety, and achievements of youth in Thunder Bay. Youth driven strategies and approaches will empower young people to lead the way in creating lasting, sustainable solutions for youth in the city of Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario.

We also acknowledge the former projects led by the RMYC and that have had great impact in NAN First Nations and among NAN youth such as the youth student ambassador program and the after-school programs. These programs are examples of successful activities that could be revitalized as the Oshkaatisak Council and Regional Multicultural Youth Council seek ways to collaborate.

The NAN Executive Council will continue to provide support for the initiatives that are created by the youth as they find ways to collaborate.

Sincerely,
NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

Deputy Grand Chief Derek Fox



Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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ENGAGING YOUTH AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE - CITY-FUNDED PROJECT

"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child"

INTRODUCTION:

This report covers the Regional Multicultural Youth Council's (RMYC) activities to follow up on issues covered during the *"Coming Together to Talk with Youth"* forum attended by 250 high school students at Lakehead University on April 30, 2019. The RMYC helped to organize the event, prepared a report and the recommendations. Under the supervision of the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO), the incorporated parent organization, a Project Co-ordinator was hired to monitor developments and assess progress on the actions taken.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were disrupted and in-class lessons were suspended. The RMYC could not hold in-person meetings and replaced them with virtual events, small focus groups and individual consultations. A breakthrough came during the summer when group-size restrictions were relaxed. MANWO was able to hire students under the summer experience program to work at the Multicultural Youth Centre. A total of forty two mostly high school students were recruited and worked in small groups in 5 different locations for social distancing. We later rented Vale Community Centre to have more meeting space for presentations and discussions when rules were relaxed. The diverse pool of students provided a large sample to gather information for the project. The youth also reached out to their peers for comments, input and feedback as needed.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The Project Co-ordinator formed a project team to interview RMYC officers and members involved with the *"Coming Together to Talk with Youth"* forum, and preparing the report to follow up on the recommendations. They also consulted over forty summer students working at the youth centre about conditions in the city, the problems they were facing and what they wanted to make their lives better for comparison with what was in the report.

1. **SAFE SPACES:**

Since the forum, the RMYC used every opportunity to advocate for safer spaces that are accepting, welcoming, warm and inclusive for children and youth to get together, have their voices heard and access programs, services and supports to enhance their wellness, develop their potential and foster achievement.

The on-going COVID-19 pandemic climate where social isolation was being promoted, schools and public facilities closed or are under restrictions limited the youth council's opportunities to create safer, or make more safe indoor spaces. Consequently there has been no progress in this regard at a time growing numbers of vulnerable children and youth are experiencing poverty, addictions, food security issues, and homelessness due to home-invasions, gangs, drug and sex traffickers, criminals, and so forth in the city.

The RMYC still believes that safer spaces with basic supports vulnerable children need are a proactive investment in prevention that will eliminate problems, avoid damages and cut costs in society over time. Therefore, the youth council will continue to advocate for more youth- friendly facilities where kids and teens have a voice, learn to get along, access services, supports and resources they need, gain valuable life-skills and knowledge to make wise choices and responsible decisions.

The RMYC will run the Multicultural Youth Centre as a model safe space in the community where children and youth are welcome, feel included, are accepted and gain a sense of belonging. The aim is to expose young people to the experience of being in a space where they feel comfortable and safe so that they join the campaign to advocate for similar spaces in the community, at school and so forth. This should motivate them to speak up and ask school boards, municipal councils, and Band Councils to create such spaces and request provincial and federal governments to contribute financial resources and invest in next generations -- up-stream -- to break negative cycles and stop problems downstream.

2. ENGAGING THE YOUTH THROUGH PEER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

The RMYC uses a youth-to-youth approach to reach out and communicate with peers effectively. The youth council acknowledges that peer pressure has a powerful socializing effect, and positive influence can change bad habits, transform negative behaviours for good outcomes and make a difference in young lives.

The youth council is aware that as minors, young people lack lived experiences earned from doing things over time. To gain knowledge and wisdom, develop leadership and organizational skills and learn etiquette and poise, young people need training, teaching and guidance. The RMYC knows this quite well and grooms Executive Officers and Committee Chairs for their positions when they assume office to lead the group. Likewise, Peer Mentors, Student Ambassadors and Team Leaders are trained for their roles to work with others and serve as role models.

Possessing leadership, organizational and communication skills has been key to the survival and effectiveness of the RMYC. These skills have been gained through hands-on practice shared among peers. The on-going restrictions created by the pandemic have limited opportunities for in-person training and direct contact to teach through practical activities. This has affected peer role modelling and the capacity of new recruits transitioning into office as youth council leaders, activity organizers, advocates, peer helpers and so forth.

Since the pandemic, the RMYC has been operating virtually and communicating with members on-line. Limited access to technology by some youths has affected potential to reach out and involve everyone and equitable access to leadership and mentoring training. The youth council is exploring new ways to build capacity and self confidence among youths as leaders empowering each other to speak up and be part of the solution to their problems. This strategy helps to amplify youth voices and mobilize kids and teens to create the changes they want for their future.

2. COMMUNITY STRATEGY: THUNDER BAY CHILDREN'S CHARTER

There has been no movement to fill Thunder Bay Child Advocate's position and monitor the implementation of Thunder Bay City Children's Charter left vacant by the current City Council since it came to office in December 2018.

After the release of the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth Report*, the RMYC made a presentation to Diversity Thunder Bay and the City's Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee soliciting support to convince City Council to fill the position. The youth council argued that children and youth need a voice at City Hall to enhance their status and invest in essential programs and services up-stream to avoid serious consequences and higher costs downstream. As the saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

During the summer, the RMYC invited Mayor Bill Mauro, Councillors Brian Hamilton and Rebecca Johnson to continue discussions about the vacant Child Advocate post on City Council. The youth council referenced its work with the past two Thunder Bay Children's Advocates, and collaboration with the Ontario Child and Youth Advocate now operating under the Ombudsman's Office to identify service gaps, connect dots to enhance supports for children to improve the child welfare system. The RMYC also talked about working with Senator Rosemary Moodie to establish an Office of a Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada. The youth saw this as an essential voice to improve the quality of life for children across the country. They felt that the benefits of the Office of the Children's Advocate provincially and nationally should be realized in the city also.

The Mayor was willing to have the position filled and wanted someone to volunteer to fill the position. Following the meeting, he sent an invitation to City Councillors to find anyone interested, but no one took the offer. Consequently there has been no movement on the matter and there is still no Child Advocate on City Council.

Lack of interest by City Councillors to fill the post prompted the RMYC to organize the summer students into small focus groups to get input on ways to advance the cause. The consensus was to raise this issue throughout 2022, which is an election year for a new City Council. The youth were to be champions for their own cause and speak up about the need for the City to have a Child Advocate.

The strategy will include using social media to communicate the youth council's message to give children a voice at City Hall to improve their lives, and approach candidates running for City Council about their stand on the Thunder Bay Children's Charter and filling the Children's Advocate position. This will publicize the issue and rally the community to the cause of children and youth and influence community leaders and decision-makers responsible for their fate and wellbeing.

4. BOARDS OF EDUCATION:

Constant disruptions of schooling due to the pandemic and with classes being on-line most of the year the RMYC did not have many formal opportunities to fully discuss with the boards of education what transpired at the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum and suggest follow-up plans.

Despite these challenges, the RMYC was able to negotiate a summer school arrangement with the Lakehead District School Board. Many of the students involved with the youth council complained about virtual classes and a majority of Indigenous students struggled to complete their courses. When the public school board advertised summer school, the youth council inquired whether there was interest among its members and volunteers. In spite of some students not being enrolled with the board, special arrangements were made to take those recommended by the RMYC. A total of twenty students were signed up by the deadline, and the youth council set up a summer school program with technological supports, tutors and other social supports.

The summer school initiative provided a great opportunity for the RMYC to observe and document the issues mentioned by the students at the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum about the challenges they face in the education system. The Engaging Youth Making a Difference Project Co-ordinator (Kamryn Woloschuck) took special interest in the summer school and monitored how everything went. She prepared a special report the RMYC has shared with the Minister of Education, the Premier, Members of Parliament, School Boards and other stakeholders.

The other area where there was progress with school boards involved the RMYC working with MANWO and Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) approaching the Lakehead District School Board and the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board to launch a Thunder Bay Pathways to Education Program targeting Indigenous and disadvantaged students to stay in school and graduate.

The Pathways Program aims to address problems identified by Indigenous youths and documented in a study by Dr. John Hodson and Nadine Hedican titled *“Educational Challenges for First Nations Children in Thunder Bay Schools – Let the Dreams Begin”*. John and Nadine’s research revealed a dropout rate as high as eighty per cent (80%) among First Nations students in local schools.

The RMYC is pleased that both boards agreed to run the youth council’s After School Program in all their high schools. This will be an expansion of a successful initiative the RMYC started at Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC) High School. The RMYC will use Cultural Rooms in the schools and provide tutors to assist students academically. Peer Mentors, the equivalent of Student Ambassadors at DFC will help to recruit students for the program, offer peer support for encouragement and motivation to attend school regularly and succeed. Meals and snacks will be available for students remaining at school after classes to participate in the extra-curricular activities offered by the program. There will also be free rides to ensure that students staying late get home safely.

The Pathways Program will also reach out to parents, guardians and caregivers with incentives to encourage their children to attend school regularly and access the various resources available to help them graduate. The RMYC will provide on-going peer support to make friends, cope with racism and related stresses and peer pressure youth face. The youth council will liaise with social service agencies and Indigenous groups for extra-curricular activities, cultural teachings, lifeskills, social skills, workskills and so forth youths need to thrive and succeed in society.

5. DIVERSITY THUNDER BAY

The RMYC made presentations to Diversity Thunder Bay (DTB) requesting support to amplify youth voices and action to advance their cause. DTB co-ordinated the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* event where many issues were raised, stories shared and recommendations made to move forward. The youth council counted on DTB as an ally and advocate for action to address problems prioritized by the youth. Working with schools was strategic because of key roles they play to educate the nation, eliminate ignorance, and open doors to greater opportunities, progress and prosperity. Schools also have a transforming effect on individuals and society through enlightenment by challenging old beliefs and biases, thereby eliminating cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice, religious intolerance, hate and discrimination due to ignorance.

The RMYC is aware of Statistics Canada and Correctional Service Canada reports that reveal that eighty-nine percent (89%) of young offenders in the federal correctional system have below grade 10 education and 65% less than grade 8. The high numbers of school drop-outs make youths vulnerable and susceptible to a life of poverty and crime. They end up in the justice system which is costly to society and feeds negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination which in turn perpetuate poverty and threatens our safety and security. All these are issues brought up during the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* discussions.

Plans for DTB to work with the Lakehead District School Board to organize Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) Student Leaders events as a follow-up to the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* event were put on hold by the pandemic. The idea to host them virtually was shelved due to logistics. The RMYC will revive the dialogue once opportunities arise to work with schools to organize forums for students to create accepting, inclusive and anti-racist learning environments. The goal is equity for all students to realize their true potential to reach their goals.

6. THE RMYC / YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES:

The RMYC felt very honoured to be part of the organizing committee for the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum. Leading the workshops, taking notes and preparing the final report were highlights. Alone, the youth council lacked the financial resources to host the event. Youth are a dependent population with no financial capital to organize their own activities. But collaboration with adults did it!

The RMYC has relied on sponsors and grants to work on issues the youth want addressed. This can disrupt continuity and successful youth engagement when funds are not available. Even though racism is a major concern to Indigenous and racialized students, the RMYC could not carry out this project alone. Earlier efforts to seek funds from the City had been unsuccessful in spite of Thunder Bay been labelled the most racist city in Canada. The City did not have funding dedicated to combating racism, eliminating discrimination and enhancing reconciliation.

Following the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum, the RMYC was inspired to make a presentation to City Council requesting funding criteria for initiatives to address racism. The youth council's voice was heard and the City responded accordingly. The RMYC applied and got the funding to carry out this project which has enabled the youth council to run this project and engage youth into action, give them a voice and inspire them to be part of the solution their problems.

This project enabled the RMYC to gather information and monitor developments to date. Discussions with the summer students revealed conditions had worsened after schools were closed due to the pandemic. Supervised activities with peers ceased as well as breakfast and lunch programs. There was no access to caring teachers, counselling services and supports for students in dysfunctional homes, poor families, foster care and high high-risk neighbourhoods. Social isolation, a lack of healthy alternatives and limited opportunities for positive influence impacted mental health.

Tasked to identify current issues of concern, their interests and what they wanted to see done, the students came up with a list that included the following:

- Peer Mentoring/Peer Support Training, Capacity development
- Eliminating violence, bullying, gangs, assaults, cyber-bullying, threats
- Mental health, wellbeing, Counselling for guidance, stress, trauma and suicides
- Anti-racism – dealing with racial slurs, religious intolerance, discrimination
- Substance abuse, addictions, Treatment and Aftercare
- Being safe in the city, access to transportation/transit, avoiding risky areas
- Poverty, food security, homelessness, access to new technology
- Computer literacy, identity theft, phishing, online security, Too much gaming
- Financial literacy, banking, budgeting, paying taxes, credit cards
- Business etiquette, employment, summer jobs, resumes, interviews
- Human trafficking awareness, dating violence, abuse, exploitation
- Homophobia, 2-Spirit gender issues, Pronouns
- Physical fitness, sports, recreation, fun, hobbies, healthy lifestyles
- Cultural sensitivity, Competence training for Anti-racism and Systemic discrimination
- Safer and inclusive spaces at schools and in the community
- Personal hygiene, access to feminine sanitary products
- Youth empowerment, leadership/organizational training, communication skills

- Advocacy – youth voices and adult allies, social consciousness
- The environment, climate change/global warming
- Education, staying in school, careers, After School Activities, Tutoring
- Parenting skills, sexuality, relationships, foster care
- Time Management, Goal Setting, Success and Achievement
- Foster care, Adoption, Transitioning out of care, Independent living
- Volunteering, empathy, civic pride and community participation
- Work-skills, cooking skills, driving skills, home-care skills
- Self-esteem, Self-confidence, Culture, Identity, Spirituality, Faith, Hope, Beliefs
- Land-based learning, Traditional Teachings, alterative education, Trades
- Reconciliation, Colonization, Residential Schools
- Studying away from home, and living in boarding homes
- Arts and Crafts

The information above confirms complex youth needs. Human resources and financial investment together with commitments by political leaders and decision makers are required to address social problems and improve the lives of growing numbers vulnerable children and at-risk youths. Otherwise criminals, gangs and child exploiters will win.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The RMYC is pleased that the project accomplished the following:

- * Reviewing the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum report to see what action has been taken in order to assess progress, and examine the status of the six recommendations to change the status-quo and map the way forward.
- * Getting a youth perspective on problems identified at the forum, gaps in programs, services and supports, and a call for safer spaces to enhance the wellbeing of kids, and advocate for the Thunder Bay Children's Charter to amplify youth voices.

- * The project covered pressing issues affecting youths and how the RMYC is working with City Council, Diversity Thunder Bay, the Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee, school boards, Indigenous groups and other stakeholders to present a youth perspective. Problems of racism, systemic discrimination, poverty, crime, violence, stereotyping and so forth were still rampant and need to be addressed to enhance the wellness, safety and achievement of children and youth.
- * The project revived youth voices from the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum, and the need to act on the recommendations. Consequently, more people are now aware of the status of the Thunder Bay Children's Charter and the absence of the Children's Advocate on City Council, as well as the plight of children and youth that deserves a advocate at City Hall.
- * The project engaged the youth and invited them to speak up about their concerns, fears, interests and desires. The summer students and the project team talked about their vision of the kind of community they liked to live in. This was featured in a video titled "The Thunder I Want" posted on-line and circulated via social media: <https://youtu.be/uEWWSOcddzA> The RMYC also shared the video with Thunder Bay City Council and senior staff, members of Diversity Thunder Bay, the Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders to promote the vision the youth have for the community.

The RMYC will build on this project to advance the issues that need to be addressed and mobilize the youth not give up. The challenge will continue to be securing adequate funding for youth-led activities that are effective at reaching out to peers. Plans are to work with adult allies committed to the cause, and convincing citizens to use their vote as political pressure to get community leaders to be more proactive and invest in prevention. The youth council believes that supporting policies and practices that reduce risk factors among kids, and adequately funding programs for children and youth will break negative cycles and stop more kids from becoming troubled and dysfunctional parents. According to Frederick Douglass "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

CONCLUDING COMMENTS – SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Reports on file and stories passed down among the RMYC members reveal an impressive history and track record of youth-led activism in race relations, anti-racism, and social justice. This has been widely acknowledged locally, regionally, provincially, regionally and nationally with special awards, while individual members of the youth council have recognized for outstanding leadership to mobilize their peers to act accordingly.

In spite of notable accomplishments, the RMYC continues to struggle competing for funds and grants with seasoned adults for the success stories of proactive youth engagement. Dry spells between projects reduces youths to mere spectators, rather than actors and key peer drivers. This was evident in initiatives such as the Multicultural Bows of black, red, red and yellow ribbons intertwined to symbolize the beauty of the human race united in harmony. The RMYC started making the bows manually to involve children and youth in something practical and significant to commemorate March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This annual campaign which involves making and distributing the bows has often been disrupted due to a lack of funds to purchase ribbons.

Likewise, the March 21 Community Breakfast and the Race Relations Image Awards the RMYC initiated to involve the wider community in racism awareness, and to acknowledge and celebrate local champions working to eliminate racial discrimination have both been taken over by adult groups that have access to more resources to organize and host the events. While this has helped to sustain the message, the ability to engage more youths has been diminished. This undermines the benefits of building anti-racism capacity in future generations by sowing seeds of creativity and activism among children and youth in early ages so that they grow up as life-long advocates and promoters of racial harmony.

Giving kids and teens resources to come up with their own ideas about getting along, and supports to act accordingly provides a timely learning process to internalize values. The experience is empowering and has potential to transform perceptions for lasting change.

Being young, RMYC members feel that they learn more from actually doing things and being actively involved than by being told what to do. This is especially true where racism is involved and physical interaction does more to dispel stereotypes, falsehoods and myths that fuel racial discrimination. Racism is a major concern in our community, and it is important for the city to acknowledge the importance of engaging youths to be actively involved in planning their own activities that celebrate diversity and promote acceptance.

For this project, the RMYC applied for the maximum \$10,000.00 under the Anti-Racism and Reconciliation Funding category, but received \$8,000.00 because the city does not cover 100% of project expenses. This level of funding for something hurtful, divisive and generational as racism is inadequate. Despite remarkable anti-Indigenous racism work that has earned the RMYC a unanimous resolution of support by NAN Chiefs in Assembly, (letter attached) the youth group continues to devote valuable time competing for funds with privileged adult organizations -- rather than focus their energies working with peers to combat racism, stay in school, promote healthy lifestyles, share lifeskills and so forth.

News on social media and police reports reveal many social problems in our city. Crime, addictions, gangs, racism and poverty are rampant, threatening our safety and security. We cannot address problems by focusing on harm-reduction when growing numbers of children in broken homes and foster care need a fresh start. We should be proactive and fund prevention oriented initiatives to save children from becoming another generation at risk who will become damaged parents that multiply and perpetuate the same problems.

If we are serious about making our community safer, combating racism, and enhance prosperity by improving the quality of life for children and youth, we must invest in creating safe accessible spaces for kids and teens to flourish, offer public facilities at affordable rates for youth and grassroots groups working on local priorities and high-risk issues, and adopt recommendations about the Thunder Bay Children's Charter presented to City Council by the last Child Advocate, Councillor Frank Pullia on December 18, 2017. This will be an effective and winning strategy to engage the youth and make a difference.

MANWO



RMYC

Regional Link

Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

Regional Multicultural Youth Council

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TOLL FREE 1-800-692-7692

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MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

MARCH 31, 2022

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D. Bruno Valente

Chartered Accountant

INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONER'S REVIEW ENGAGEMENT REPORT

To the members of Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario :

I have reviewed the accompanying balance sheet of Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario as at March 31, 2022, and the statements of operation and net assets (deficit) and cash flows for the year then ended, as well as the summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Management's Responsibility for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for private enterprises, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Practitioners' Responsibility

My responsibility is to express a conclusion on the accompanying financial statements based on my review. I conducted my review in accordance with Canadian generally accepted standards for review engagements, which require me to comply with relevant ethical requirements.

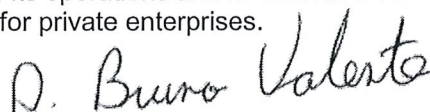
A review of financial statements in accordance with Canadian generally accepted standards for review engagements is a limited assurance engagement. The practitioner performs procedures, primarily consisting of making inquiries of management and others within the entity, as appropriate, and applying analytical procedures, and evaluates the evidence obtained.

The procedures performed in a review are substantially less in extent than, and vary in nature from, those performed in an audit conducted in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Accordingly, I do not express an audit opinion on these financial statements.

Conclusion

Based on my review, nothing has come to my attention that causes me to believe that these financial statements do not present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario as at March 31, 2022, and the results of its operations and its cash flow for the year ended, in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for private enterprises.

Thunder Bay, Ontario
July 27, 2022


Chartered Professional Accountant
Licensed Public Accountant

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO
BALANCE SHEET

As at March 31	2022	2021
ASSETS		
Current		
Cash	\$ -	\$ 70,019
Property, plant and equipment (Note 7)	319,022	306,436
	\$ 319,022	\$ 376,455
<hr/>		
LIABILITIES		
Current		
Bank indebtedness	\$ 36,376	\$ -
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	-	39,100
Due to executive director	162,280	114,601
	198,656	153,701
 NET ASSETS (DEFICIT)		
Net assets (deficit)	120,366	222,754
	\$ 319,022	\$ 376,455

Approved on behalf of the Board

 President

 Treasurer

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO
STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS AND NET ASSETS (DEFICIT)

Year ended March 31	2022	2021
Revenues		
Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries	\$ 33,000	\$ 110,000
Students Commission of Canada	-	2,400
Carleton University Moffat's Fees	12,000	-
Employment and Social Development Canada for Alter Eden	190,441	249,497
Carleton University SSHRC Indigenous Youth Futures Partnership	-	14,033
Donations and fundraising	20,441	308,189
Nu Vision Canada	-	300
Pathways to education	281,700	176,600
Student employment & training programs (Note 8)	48,964	39,139
Youth centre projects	-	2,108
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	586,546	902,266
Expenses		
Advertising	13,725	299
After school material and supplies, arts and crafts	9,006	6,375
Automobile	17,927	19,966
Amortization	7,032	4,578
Food	37,403	56,283
Greenhouse project -Miinogin Kitiganens	64,079	252,772
Honoraria, professional fees, prizes	42,482	1,600
Insurance	13,300	12,060
Interest and bank charges	987	757
Memberships and donation	160,338	3,363
Office space and facility rental	57,995	6,069
Property taxes	17,842	20,297
Pathway initiatives and new technology supports	30,224	30,000
Recreation and socials	308	207
Repairs and maintenance	8,287	2,310
Special summer COVID -19 youth volunteer project	-	18,610
Travel	3,542	1,564
Telephone	9,610	6,866
Utilities	15,343	10,581
Wages and benefits	179,504	166,276
Wiidosem project	-	25,874
Youth-in-transition housing project	-	14,801
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	688,934	661,508
Excess of of revenues over expenses	(102,388)	240,758
Net assets (deficit), beginning of year	222,754	(18,004)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net assets (deficit), end of year	\$ 120,366	222,754

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO
STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

Year ended March 31	2022	
Operating activities		
Accounts receivable and other receivables	\$ 586,546	\$ 902,266
Accounts payable and other payables	<u>(673,323)</u>	<u>(555,733)</u>
	(86,777)	346,533
Investing activities		
Acquisition of property, plant and equipment	(19,618)	(301,408)
Increase (Decrease) in cash	(106,395)	45,125
Cash, beginning of year	<u>70,019</u>	<u>24,894</u>
Cash, (deficiency) end of year	<u>\$ (36,376)</u>	<u>\$ 70,019</u>

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO**NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS****Year ended March 31, 2022**

1. The purpose of the organization

The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario is a non-profit organization with the objective of promoting multiculturalism. The Association was incorporated without share capital under the laws of Ontario.

2. Significant accounting policies

The financial statements were prepared in accordance with Canadian generally accepted accounting principles and include the following significant accounting policies:

Revenue recognition

The organization recognizes revenue under the accrual method of accounting. Revenue is recognized when services are rendered. All other income is recognized when earned.

Any revenues obtained to finance specific projects of the Association are deferred until such time as the projects are undertaken and the associated expenses incurred.

Donation of services and materials made in kind are not recorded in the financial statements.

Income taxes

The organization is not required to pay income taxes under the Canadian Income Tax Act, and therefore, no provision for income taxes are accrued in the financial statements.

Use of estimates

The preparation of these financial statements in conformity with Canadian generally accepted accounting principles requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amount of assets and liabilities, the disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues and expenses during the reported period. These estimates are reviewed periodically and adjustments are made to income as appropriate in the year they become known.

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO**NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS****Year ended March 31, 2022**

2. Significant accounting policies (continued)Cash and cash equivalents

The entity's policy is to disclose bank balances under cash and cash equivalents, including bank overdrafts with balances that fluctuate frequently from being positive to overdrawn.

3. Financial instrumentsRisk management policy

The organization is exposed to various risks through its financial instruments. The following analysis provides a measure of the risks at March 31, 2022.

Currency risk

The organization is not exposed to significant currency risk as it does not deal in foreign currencies.

Fair value

The fair value of cash, accounts receivable, and accounts payable is approximately equal to their carrying value given their short-term maturity date.

Financial commitments

Accounts payable and accrued liabilities - The carrying amount included in the balance sheet approximates fair value, given the short-term maturity of these instruments.

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO**NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS****Year ended March 31, 2022**

4. Capital disclosure

The organization considers its capital to be the balance retained in net assets, which is generally the difference between its assets and its liabilities as reported on its statement of financial position.

The organization's objectives when managing capital are to safeguard its ability to continue as a going concern so that it can continue to provide delivery of its services to the clients. Management maintains its capital by ensuring contributions and fundraising are adequate to cover operating costs of the organization, and actively monitoring operational results

5. Net assets

As is common in organizations of this type, funding is typically granted for specific purposes to be expended within certain periods. Failure to expend the funds as agreed upon could result in demand for repayment by funding agencies. The net assets contain amounts which are subject to review by the funding agencies subsequent to the year-end and thus may be repayable at a later date. Repayments made will be recorded in the year of repayment and not applied retroactively. During the year, no amounts were repaid to any funding agencies.

6. Economic dependence

Approximately 39% of the organization revenue is received from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 18% from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and 11% from Nuclear Waste Management Organization. The continuation of this organization is dependent on these fundings or their replacement under similar terms.

MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO
NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Year ended March 31, 2022

7. Plant, property and equipment

	<u>2022</u>		<u>2021</u>	
	Cost	Accumulated Amortization	Net Book Value	Net Book Value
Paving	36,579	6,711	29,868	15,265
Automotive	11,300	6,594	4,706	6,723
	<u>47,879</u>	<u>13,305</u>	<u>34,574</u>	<u>21,988</u>
Land	284,448	-	284,448	284,448
	<u>\$ 332,327</u>	<u>\$ 13,305</u>	<u>\$ 319,022</u>	<u>\$ 306,436</u>

8. Student Training Programs

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre	10,143	8,979
3-Things Consulting	-	-
YES Employment Services	5,712	6,720
Service Canada Summer Jobs	19,095	23,440
Anishinabek Employment and Training Services	2,014	-
Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen	1,417	-
City of Thunder Bay	8,000	-
Laidlaw Foundation	2,583	-
	<u>48,964</u>	<u>39,139</u>