**COMING TOGETHER TO TALK WITH YOUTH**

***A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION OF HOPE***

**CHI PI KAAKI TOO YANG ᒋᐱᑲᑭᑐᔭᓐᒃ**

at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, April 30, 2019



*Compiled by:* **The Regional Multicultural Youth Council,** *December, 2019*

2

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**1.** Introduction from Chair’s of the Organizing Committee of ‘Coming Together to Talk’ 4

* Preamble  6
* Executive Summary  7
* Coming Together to Talk – The Thunder Bay We Want10
* Conference Agenda 10
* The Film: *“Coming Together to Talk”*   11

**2. Workshops – Small Group Discussions**  11

**3. Comments and Analysis** 14

* Thoughts on the Film 14
* Thoughts on Reconciliation14
* Youth Safety in Thunder Bay16
* Relations with Police: Security and Protection Services 18
* The Government and the Justice System20
* Child Welfare System and Parenting 21
* Racism, Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination 22
* Education24
* Social Issues 31
* Work Skills, Life Skills and Social Skills 33

**4. Plan of Action – A Synopsis** 34

* Welcoming City 34
* Working Together 34

**5. Suggested Solutions** 34

* To connect youths to the land 34
* To prevent women from being seen as prostitutes and treated as objects 34

3

* To create safer neighbourhoods 35
* To stop racism /Systemic racism 35
* To promote reconciliation 36
* To overcome lack of government funding 36
* To improve education 36
* To decrease hate crimes 37
* To welcome new people 37
* To create change, advocate and protest more effectively 37
* To Improve relations with the police 37

**6. General Observations and Commentary** 38

**7. Conclusion: Outcomes and Recommendations** 42

* Safe Spaces for Youths 44
* Engaging Youth & Peer Leader Capacity Development 45
* Community Strategy / Children’s Charter and Resource Needs 46
* Boards of Education 50
* Diversity Thunder Bay 50
* Regional Multicultural Youth Council 52

**8. Appendices:** 53

* A.: RMYC Experience - A Success Story of Engaging Youth in Anti-Racism Work 53
* B. Thunder Bay Indigenous Students/Youth Priorities 56
* C. Thunder Bay Children’s Charter 59
* D. Indigenous Youth Perspectives on 150 years of Confederation64
* E. Reconciliation -- Government of Canada’s Apology 66

**9. Acknowledgements** 68

**10. Photo:** RMYC Facilitators and Note-takers 69

**Photo:** Event Organizing Committee Members 69

4

**INTRODUCTION FROM CHAIR OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF**

**“COMING TOGETHER TO TALK WITH YOUTH”**

*It is with great excitement that the Organizing Committee for “Coming Together to Talk with Youth – A Community Conversation of Hope” presents this report. The event took place on April 30, 2019 at Lakehead University, bringing together students from Lakehead Public Schools and Thunder Bay Catholic School Boards, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, and Matawa Education and Care Centre. Representatives from school boards and education authorities were members of the Organizing Committee, together with Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC), Diversity Thunder Bay, the City of Thunder Bay, as well as others referenced later under Acknowledgements on page 68. We are proud that the report was written in a collaborative manner with members of the RYMC and author of the report, Lakehead University student and past president of the youth council, Wendy Wang. It is in fact the voice of youth.*

*The event brought together students in a setting that was safe and accepting, and all group discussions were facilitated by youth for youth. Only Elders were invited into some of the sessions. None of the adult organizers or teachers were part of the youth-led discussions. This made it a unique experience and for many Indigenous students, it was their first opportunity to be able talk about, and share difficult experiences of racism in a setting of only their peers. First Nation students from remote northern communities and newcomer students were present as well. Non-Indigenous students participated, many of whom had never been exposed to racism or commented that they did not understand how seriously it affected their peers.*

*The facilitators spent many days studying and becoming familiar with the material that was prepared by one of the co-producers of the film “Coming Together to Talk” – Ardelle Sagutcheway. Working together with Anika Guthrie from Lakehead Public Schools, they created the workbook for the facilitators.*

*Michelle Derosier, filmmaker of “Coming Together to Talk” in a December 2016 interview with the CBC Radio at the premiere showing of the film in Thunder Bay explains: "I would love to have people who are interested, committed, and care about Indigenous young people and their lives, and bettering their lives in this community. I would like to see them in the seats Friday night." she said. "And then for us to develop some strategies that will be led by the young people about how we in Thunder Bay can make this city safer for them."*

5

*Ms. Derosier’s comments highlight why the Communications and Education Committee of Diversity Thunder Bay brought their idea to the greater community to make this event happen. It was that committee’s original intent to listen to the youth and give them an opportunity to tell us, the adults, how to make our City the one we all want – a safe, vibrant, culturally diverse and accepting home for all – especially those who currently, tragically, do not find it safe. In reading the report, know that these words are the voices of the youth. They range from those who experience racism, to those who have invested in combating racism with their work at the RMYC, to students who learned about their peers’ reality. It covers a vast scope.*

*As the Organizing Committee met, it became clear that the event would raise awareness of the Seven Youth Coroner’s Inquest, specifically Recommendation 116, which calls on named parties to work together to increase public awareness in the City of Thunder Bay regarding the issues raised during the inquest, including the obstacles, challenges and racism faced by First Nations students from remote communities residing in Thunder Bay. The City of Thunder Bay, a key sponsor of the event, also supported the development of the film “Coming Together to Talk.” We are all proud of the youth who facilitated, gathering the information the students discussed, and developed recommendations for a more inclusive and safer Thunder Bay.*

*Youths from the RMYC also saw that the event could help them get closer to their goal of creating “The Thunder Bay We Want” inspired by delegates they sent to “The Canada We Want Conference” in Toronto earlier in the year. The youth are working on making the City more welcoming, accepting and inclusive, and this was within the reach of the event. The adults on the Organizing Committee were continually impressed and excited by the contributions of the youth during our meetings. It was the youth who suggested that we must have ‘Hope’ in the title. It was indeed a conversation of hope.*

*When reading the report, please bear in mind that the youth themselves are proud of having their voices heard, their experiences read about and shared, and are especially delighted to be the authors of this unique youth-centric document from an event that gave them an opportunity to share and feel empowered. It’s now up to all of us to study their recommendations and work with community partners to make Thunder Bay truly a safer and inclusive place for all.*

**Ellen Chambers,** **Chair** Organizing Committee, “Coming Together to Talk with Youth, A Community Conversation of Hope”, and **Chair,** Communication and Education Committee (Diversity Thunder Bay).

6

**COMING TOGETHER TO TALK WITH YOUTH**

**A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION OF HOPE**

**CHI PI KAAKI TOO YANG ᒋᐱᑲᑭᑐᔭᓐᒃ**

Nelson Mandela: *“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in*

*which it treats its children.”*

**Preamble:**

The audience at the *Diversity Thunder Bay* (*DTB*) Annual General Meeting in December 2017, watched a film by Michelle Derosier: *Coming Together to Talk*. The film spoke for itself about the racism experienced by Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay. The *DTB Communication and Education Committee* decided to use the film and the title for a forum to encourage people to come together and talk and find ways to make positive change.

After months of meetings, the *DTB* *Communication and Education Committee* decided to invite community and Indigenous partners to the discussion and to help make the event come alive. The invitation went out in mid-autumn of 2018. At that meeting an ambitious plan was sketched out to invite up to 300 secondary students from all education sectors to an event that would show the film and have students meet in break-out groups to discuss their feelings, experiences, and come up with suggestions they may have to make our city safe for all – especially Indigenous youth.

The *Regional Multicultural Youth Council* (*RMYC*) was invited to assist with the planning of the event. A team of youth council delegates who had attended the “*2019 Canada We Want”* national youth conference hosted by the Students Commission of Canada in Toronto in early March wanted to organize a similar event under “The Thunder Bay Youth Want” theme. The idea was complimentary to the *DTB* *Communication and Education Committee’s* vision to engage high school students in dialogue about creating positive change in the community. The RMYC represented the youth voice on the organizing committee, and assisted with the recruitment and training of youth facilitators and note-takers.

7

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

George Washington Carver: *“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.”*

*‘Coming Together to Talk with Youth’* event brought together high school students to discuss race relations and ways to move forward with reconciliation. The film shown provided a point of reference for dialogue on racism, safety in Thunder Bay, and the challenges Indigenous students face to get a good education. It was an opportunity for youths from diverse backgrounds to openly talk about racism at school and in the community, and express their wishes for an equitable society where everyone is accepted and treated with respect.

The students reflected on what was happening in their schools, the interaction patterns in a changing community, and how people perceived and treated each other. Indigenous youths had a chance to share their perspectives on race relations, and how they saw themselves fitting into the Canadian multicultural mosaic. The exchange of information and ideas revealed cultural and social gaps that exist in society. Misunderstandings emerge when communication breaks down and people rely on misinformation and assumptions to form opinions about others. Schools responsible for educating the nation about our true history have failed to advance the knowledge needed to enhance social transformation and reconciliation.

In spite of strides made to promote Canadian Multiculturalism, human rights, equity and social justice, there is still a lot of ignorance about our historical past that can be attributed to systemic and institutional racism rooted in the legacy of colonialism and the impacts of Indian Residential Schools. From discussions in the workshops, the present generation offers the best hope for change because they are aware of the Canadian government’s apology for the damage done to Indigenous people, their culture and social structures. In addition, we have the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action* to guide us on what needs to be done to right past wrongs and proceed with reconciliation to achieve a fair and just Canada.

Much information was gathered from the ten workshops that included a separate session for Indigenous students to discuss their priorities and strategies to create the changes they want to see to regain their dignity, skills and confidence to participate as equal partners in society.

8

Indigenous students mentioned disconnection to the land, loneliness and culture shock as key factors affecting their well-being when they moved to urban centres. Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination affected their integration into the social main-stream, and colonial structures and bureaucratic systems imposed on Indigenous traditional ways of life were major hurdles to overcome. Government controls and red-tape took away their autonomy, self-governance and independence to thrive and survive on their own. They became wards of the Crown regulated by the *Indian (Indigenous) Act*, which has perpetuated colonial administration and attitudes.

Many Canadians are not familiar with how our Governments manage Indigenous groups. They assume we are all treated the same. But, in spite of the special status of Indigenous people, and the entrenchment of Aboriginal and treaty rights in the supreme law of Canada according to Section 35 of the *Constitution Act,* Indigenous people are treated as second-class citizens in their own country. From the workshops, students need to know that we are all treaty people, learn more about the agreements, and that treaties are still relevant. These contracts must be honoured, and our governments should not always be appealing against the court rulings.

The students discussed how society sees them as juveniles and treats them all as minors. Indigenous, racialized and other minority youths talked about their experiences with mainstream institutions such as the police and the justice system. They felt that they were treated differently as if they were delinquents, and recommended sensitivity training to enhance the cultural competence of police officers, youth workers, correctional staff and other professionals and volunteers in the legal field working with children and youth. The youth want more opportunities to discuss safety issues, crime prevention and other risky behaviours with the police. This will provide chances to build bridges, establish trust to enhance community safety, as well as encourage minority youths to consider a career in policing as a real option.

Education, child welfare, health, housing, and employment were also identified as fields where Indigenous, racialized and minority groups experienced racism and discrimination. Schools should teach the true history of Canada to eliminate the ignorance that feeds cultural stereotypes faced by Indigenous people and compounds racism, prejudice and discrimination in society. Teaching the facts enlightens the mind and the knowledge makes us wiser, opening doors to more careers and professions that in turn lead to better employment prospects. Good paying jobs are the practical solution to addressing poverty and related social problems.

9

The youth believe that positive change will be achieved by providing appropriate training and orientation with adequate resources for front line workers. Our institutions and operational systems must accommodate the diversity in Canada and ensure that there is equal access, equal opportunities and equal participation for everyone. Professional development for teachers, police officers, child welfare, health, housing, employment agency and other social workers will ensure that they are well prepared to initiate the changes needed for the future.

Feedback from the facilitators and participants revealed that there was little time for ice-breakers, introductions, sharing stories and deep discussion about the issues. Students felt rushed to review strategies and come up with a plan of action to create the changes they want to see. Time was also limited to cover in detail what was happening in their classrooms to make schools more accepting, welcoming and safer for students, as well as examine policies being implemented to accommodate diversity, prevent problems and address grievances.

What transpired in the group discussions was captured by the note-takers and compiled into this report prepared by RMYC Past President Wendy Wang. This was presented to summer students working at the Multicultural Youth Centre in July and August. A total of 32 youths consisting of 13 of the RMYC workshop facilitators and 19 student delegates critiqued the content and edited the report. Half were Indigenous students who elaborated on what was shared in their workshop, adding substance to what was missed by the note-takers.

The RMYC had the privilege of adding comments about the youth council’s operations and initiatives to give children and youth a voice, keep them safe, support them to stay in school and help them to graduate. The work on multiculturalism and anti-racism is included to elaborate on the facilitators’ highlights of youth-led activities to promote equality, teach children and youth to respect each other and learn to get along. This is covered in Appendix A, page 53.

From what the students said and the RMYC’s theme to create the “*Thunder Bay Youth Want”*, the summer team came up with recommendations directed at Diversity Thunder Bay, school boards, and the City of Thunder Bay. The RMYC and other stakeholders are also expected to listen to the youths’ voices, support and empower them to act accordingly, and help to find the resources they need to enhance reconciliation, and be part of the change they want to see.

10

**Coming Together to Talk – Creating the Thunder Bay We Want**

As aforementioned, the topic ‘*Coming Together to Talk with Youth - A Community Conversation of Hope’* was chosen based on a film “*Coming Together to Talk”* produced by Michelle Derosier of *Thunderstone Pictures*. The documentary features Indigenous youths from Northwestern Ontario First Nations talking about their experiences in the City of Thunder Bay. They are portrayed discussing the challenges they face to survive and thrive in the community. The film would be viewed first to raise awareness on the issues faced by Indigenous youths in the city, followed by small group workshops to discuss the problems highlighted in the documentary. The youth were to come up with ideas to address the problems and make a difference.

The target group for the event was high school students. Only a handful of adults were invited-- Elders to support the students, teachers, counsellors and social workers as chaperones, and supervisors to monitor the students. The youth received training to lead the discussions and take notes during the workshop deliberations. Ardelle Sagutcheway, one of the youths in the film, and Anika Guthrie a member of staff with the Lakehead Public Schools came up with questions to guide the group discussions. The RMYCand Ardelle ran a series of training sessions to prepare the facilitators and note takers for their roles.

**Forum Agenda**

On the day of the conference (Tuesday, April 30) volunteers from participating agencies were on hand at 9:00 a.m. to greet and register the students. They also gave each participant *a ‘Coming Together to Talk / Thunder Bay We Want’* light-blue sweatshirt (with a picture of a raven and an Indigenous female shawl dancer) purchased by the RMYC. Wrist-bands were issued to assign students to one of the 10 small group workshops they were to attend.

By 10:00 a.m., participants were assembled in the University Centre Lecture Theatreready to start the event. Ms. Ellen Chambers, Chair of Diversity Thunder Bay’s Communication and Education Committee (also Chair of Lakehead District School Board) welcomed the delegates. She was joined on stage by RMYC co-presidents Yamaan Alsumadi and Heran Zhao. Together, they went over the day’s agenda and house-keeping rules. Elder John Gagnon who had accompanied Denis Franklin Cromarty (DFC)First Nations boarding students to the event blessed the gathering. Then it was time to view the film.

11

**The Film – “Coming Together to Talk”**

Ardelle Sagutcheway introduced the film. She explained the reasons she, and friends Casha Adams, Savanna Boucher, Talon Bird, Chris Ooshag and other First Nations youths came up with the idea to make the 75 minute documentary. They wanted to share their personal experiences as Indigenous youths studying and living in Thunder Bay, and the fact that racism, discrimination and violence are a harsh reality in the city. They talked about various issues including what they were doing to turn things around into something positive to survive, thrive and achieve success. The film also covers stories of what Indigenous people are doing to support each other and create a sense of community in an urban setting.

**THE WORKSHOPS – Small Group Discussions**

After the film, students went to ten separate rooms for lunch and to begin discussions. DFC boarding students had their own session. They all had to respond to questions about the film -- anything new they learned and what can be done to make the city more welcoming and safer. The workshops were lively and covered misconceptions about Indigenous people in Canada, and the myths, stories and feelings of First Nations students coming to the city for school.

The facilitators encouraged participants to express their opinions freely, share any stories, and how they saw things from their perspective. They were also asked to come up with ideas to make things better. Indigenous students compared the film with their own situation, while non-Indigenous students were challenged to reflect on what they saw and the stereotypes they were familiar with. Because there are no high schools in many First Nations communities, Indigenous students some as young as 14 years old must leave home, move to the city and stay in boarding homes with strangers to pursue secondary education. Culture shock and social anxiety were realities among students from small isolated reserves coming to study in large multicultural high schools with populations much larger than their whole community.

The film exposed the ugliness of racism, violence, fear due to safety concerns, loneliness and complex social problems faced by young students studying alone far away from home, family and friends. Indigenous students readily recognized what they saw and identified with what they heard in the film. For many non-Indigenous students proud of Thunder Bay, they were taken aback to see the problems experienced by their Indigenous peers in the city.

12

It was evident that there were gaps in experiences and perceptions between urban students living at home with parents, and those from reserves being billeted with strangers. City-raised students knew their way around Thunder Bay quite well. Some got rides to go places and had no fears using public transit. On the other hand, Indigenous students not familiar with the city were scared to use busses. They were afraid to get lost and also resented using city transit because of nasty verbal comments, name-calling and assaults they had to endure at bus stops or while riding on the bus.

Encounters with cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice and discrimination at school and in the community were common. Many Indigenous students said they experienced unprovoked racist attacks in the city. Objects such as eggs, pizza slices, coffee, water bottles as well as other debris and spoons were thrown at them while at bus stops or just walking on side-walks to inflict pain, damage clothing and instill fear. The incident of a trailer hitch thrown by a white youth at an Indigenous woman (Barbara Kentner) walking home with her sister is still fresh among many. She subsequently died from the injuries sustained after the hit and run. Young Indigenous women also talked about being yelled at and threatened by men who called them “Squaw” assuming they were prostitutes. They were easy targets for abductions and sexual assaults which made them vulnerable to drug traffickers and gangs.

Mistreatment in shops was a regular occurrence. Indigenous students talked about being singled out and followed by security guards and store clerks who insisted on knowing what they wanted to buy. In some restaurants other customers were served first even though they had arrived much earlier. It was also common to see non-Indigenous customers shuffle out of the way, mumble or swear when they approached or joined a queue. What was most upsetting was hearing total strangers they had not provoked complain about their presence in the city and tell them to go back to the reserves where they belong.

The students were aware of news stories and media reports about Thunder Bay being portrayed as a racist city. They knew about the Coroner’s inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students who were attending high school in the city. Testimonies confirmed a lack of safe welcoming places free of racism and discrimination for Indigenous youths to hang out. Even in schools trying to create an inclusive and accepting learning environment to integrate them, Indigenous students said they were often avoided, harassed, ridiculed and threatened. This forced them stay together in their own groups for security and companionship.

13

The students also said that they did not know what to do, how to respond, and where to report racist incidents. In discussion about the local billboards, public service announcements, posters, and social media urging people to call 211 and report any racist incidents they experienced, saw, or witnessed, they did not ready or willing to participate in the *City’s* *211 Campaign*. While being familiar with modern technology and having easy access to telephones and computers to call or file racial complaints, they were not utilizing the free service.

The reasons given ranged from: not fully understanding the process, if it was anonymous, if they would be called in as witnesses, how much time it would take, to uncertainty about the outcome. Some did not want to report on their friends. Others felt that it was a waste of time if there were no tangible results. This reminded the RMYC of the experience with the *Racial Incident Report Forms.* Students were more likely to fill the complaint forms when were assisted by a friend, or encouraged to do so by witnesses. Those involved in RMYC activities at the Multicultural Youth Centre were more likely to use the forms than strangers. However, having the forms inschools was a problem because educators wanted a level playing field in regards to promotion, publicity and handling information gathered from the forms. They did not want to get bad reports and negative comments if their school waged an aggressive campaign to engage students and got more forms filled compared with schools that did nothing.

Personal safety was another concern. Even though group fights and swarming seem to have declined, individual assaults were still prevalent. Students felt unsafe to go to certain areas of the city or walk alone at night. Community housing neighbourhoods such as Limbrick, Windsor and Academy were known high-risk areas due to criminal gangs. The south-core where the RMYC Youth Centre is located - just a block from City Hall - is a drug-infested high-crime area. Indigenous students talked about being jumped, knowing friends or acquaintances who were attacked, assaulted, mugged or robbed in the area. They were aware of youths being pulled from the city’s rivers, but were convinced that the drowning was a cover-up for murder.

Students attending DFC and Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) talked about school announcements reminding them to watch out for each other and walk in groups for protection. But, by walking in groups they risked being seen as, and mistaken for gang members. The gang stigma is a growing problem in Thunder Bay because of frequent incidents of violence, human trafficking, drug dealings, murders and other crimes associated with criminal gangs.

14

**COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS**

W. Clement Stone: *“Thinking will not overcome fear. But action will.”*

**Thoughts on the Film:**

The film connected well with the youth. It highlighted the poor race relations in Thunder Bay and the general ignorance about Indigenous issues in Canada. Many non-Indigenous students did not know about the two-tier funding system where federally funded Indigenous schools get less money than provincial schools. They also did not know that there are no high schools in most First Nations communities, and students must leave home for secondary education.

Indigenous communities are under-serviced with poor infra-structure. Housing, roads, clean drinking water, and recreational facilities are inadequate, and welfare programs and children’s services need improvement. DFC students talked about Dr. Cindy Blackstock visiting their school and explaining how the federal government gave on-reserve First Nations children 38% less funding than anywhere else. In 2007, she took the federal government to court, and in 2016 the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled in her favour. In spite of winning the case, there has been no action to date due to appeals, and Indigenous children continue to suffer.

**Thoughts on Reconciliation:**

Students had divided opinions on whether or not reconciliation is happening. Some felt that reconciliation cannot take place until we honour treaties and remove the barriers to equity, and end racism. There was consensus that we should have more dialogue and listen to each other to get rid of the ignorance, stereotypes, fear and hate, and learn to respect each other. The best way to move forward is getting to know each other better and changing the narrative from the colonial perspective that has shaped race relations and negative attitudes, and reconcile.

Schools and the media have roles to play to educate and empower citizens with knowledge. Students want educators to teach correct information about pre-contact and treaties. The press should be more objective and communicate truths to counter stereotypes in movies and some inaccuracies portrayed in the social media. We should learn why governments outlawed Indigenous traditional practices, pow-wows and potlucks, prevented the speaking of native tongues while teaching European culture and languages in residential schools. We need to know how people who lived on this land and thrived, ruled themselves, and collectively “owned” the natural resources became dispossessed and now depend on the government for survival.

15

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (*TRC*) report details what happened and the ‘*Calls to Action*’ guide us to move forward. The following are the students’ opinions:

* Reconciliation is important for progress, acceptance, forgiveness and respect
* Not dealing with issues or denying the existence of problems does not solve anything
* People forget to talk about the **‘truth’** in truth and reconciliation
* Many politicians do not speak the truth; they are more interested in power and being

elected, and can shift their position on the truth to suit their campaign and constituency

* It is not just governments that need to reconcile; individuals and citizens should join in.
* People should realize and acknowledge what has been done to destroy Indigenous

cultures and their way of life; we need to work together to reconcile, forgive, and not blame the victim by getting rid of the racism, animosity and hatred.

Indigenous students said that many among them do not trust white people because of:

\* Colonization, Residential Schools, the 60’s Scoop, Broken Treaties, Exploitation

\* Intentional destruction of Indigenous cultures, languages and ways of life

\* Superiority complex in relation to race -- they believe that white is better than other skin colours, and want to preserve their status and privilege

\* Past experiences that make Indigenous people have negative opinions

\* Broken promises with governments and procrastination on court decisions

\* Resource extraction on traditional lands without fair compensation

\* Pipelines, mining, flooding, clear-cutting done to exploit natural resources, and expropriation of traditional lands, trap-lines, contamination of the land and water

\* Funding wars and costly weapons that cause suffering instead of investing in people

\* Religion and materialism clash with spirituality and respect for nature

\* Eurocentric/Christian beliefs that other cultures and religions are not (as) important.

Schools in a multicultural society must counter Eurocentric values through education. They must teach the truth about our history to enhance reconciliation. Colonial heroes who committed atrocities should not continue to be celebrated and honoured when we now know the truth. The education curriculum has been slow to incorporate Indigenous historical content, teach about traditional heroes and culture, as well as introduce new ways for Indigenous students to learn and succeed. This will encourage them to stay in school and inspire them to graduate, while educating non-Indigenous students to counter the negative stereotypes and prejudices inherent and taught in the colonial system.

16

1. Indigenous students see their languages as important for identity and the preservation of their culture destroyed by colonization. Indian Residential Schools did not teach native languages and students were not allowed to speak them. The significance of *Indigenous Languages* is formally recognized by the United Nations, and Canada has signed on to preserve them. It is a fact that native languages are rooted here and all others spoken in Canada came from elsewhere. They should be taught in schools and promoted in the community because if they are lost on this land they will become extinct. Ideas to encourage students to learn local Indigenous languages included making it fun and games by using nursery rhymes, names of plants, food and so forth. This would make native language lessons or speaking some words more appealing to non-Indigenous students who may see no value or economic benefits of doing so.

On common negative stereotypes about Indigenous people the list included:

\* Being drunks, addicts, dirty, lazy welfare bums, do not want to work

\* Savages, primitive, uncivilized, backward, violent, lousy parents

\* Do not pay taxes, dependents, irresponsible, and cannot support a family

\* Whiners, use racism as a scapegoat and blame residential schools for everything

**Youth Safety in Thunder Bay:**

First Nations students talked about life on reserves where they felt unsafe because of social issues related to poverty, addictions, wandering (wild) dogs, run-down buildings, drunk drivers, gangs and lateral violence. After moving to Thunder Bay, they did not find the city any safer. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students said there were areas in the city they did not feel safe, especially at night. There were neighbourhoods rife with crime, gang activity, drug and human trafficking, violence and assaults they avoided.

Indigenous youths felt that they were easy targets for violence, racist attacks and exploitation. They were constantly told and reminded that they did not belong to the city. Strangers approached them and to tell them to go back ‘home’. Girls claimed that they were often regarded as prostitutes and sluts,making them vulnerable to sexual exploitation, assaults, violence, addictions and human trafficking. Some students experienced lateral violence from their more urbanized peers who preyed on the younger naïve students, and threatened them for favours or assaulted them to exhort money, designer clothing, etc.

17

Some students recalled the message “Kill Indians” painted in large black letters on the Bank of Montreal sign by Intercity Mall. This was in the fall when boarding students were coming for school, which portrayed the city as an unwelcoming community. Most murders in the city, including youths whose dead bodies were pulled out of the rivers are of Indigenous people. Some First Nations students claim to have been threatened and told to go back to the reserve or end up in the river, creating anxiety about their presence and safety in Thunder Bay. Even though all reserves are located by lakes and rivers, deaths in the water are very uncommon. This makes the drowning incidents involving their peers in the city suspicious, and feeds fears that they are being stalked. The *Thunder Bay Police Services (TBPS) Review Board Report* by Senator Sinclair, and recommendations by the *Office of the Independent Police* *Review Director, Gerry McNeilly*, that several cases of Indigenous deaths in the city be reinvestigated reinforces the fears students have about their safety in the city.

The Coroner’s Inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students attending school in the city highlighted alcohol abuse, racism and a lack of safe welcoming spaces as contributing to the tragedies. While a majority of students regardless of background said they did not trust the police to protect them, it was mostly Indigenous, racialized and minority Indigenous who were uncomfortable to approach police officers for their safety or to report crime. They attributed the mistrust to the negative stories they heard, and saw how officers treated their peers, parents, friends and community groups. They were intimidated by cops to report threats or tip them off about drugs and impending criminal activities. However, some said that they would go to police officers who looked like them because they could relate to their minority status.

Indigenous boarding students talked about their parents’ concerns for their safety in Thunder Bay. They were aware of friends who transferred from the city to Sioux Lookout, Dryden and other towns for school because their families saw the city as unsafe. The Coroner’ Inquest was well publicized in First Nations communities across the region, and the revelations sent shock-waves as to how their children were perceived and treated. The police investigations into the deaths were deemed not thorough and racially biased, further sowing seeds of mistrust.

Students at DFC and MECC remarked that in spite of being invited to the Coroners’ Inquest, no one on City Councillors were to the hear the testimonies. This was seen as a slight to Indigenous groups and grieving parents who trusted them to care of their children in the city.

18

The City’s long delay to put school zone speed limit signs at DFC, and the decision not to support curfews were also seen as indifference. All First Nations Education Authorities have curfews which students must abide by for safety. However, Thunder Bay City Council refused to adopt a curfew by-law based on the *Crime Prevention Council’s* advice that they were ineffective. This was a direct contradiction to Indigenous groups that lost children in Thunder Bay. The RMYCtestified at the Coroner’s Inquest and shared information compiled from First Nations boarding students at the fall reception and orientation sessions, and given to City Council since 1991 with no action. Seeing City Councillors get on board now to implement recommendations from an Inquest they did not attend raises questions about sincerity. Some students wondered if the City’s current interest to act is based on genuine concern, or due to embarrassment and pressure to change the negative image the city now has nation-wide.

**Relations with the Police – Security & Protection Services:**

Youth interactions with the police are generally not always under cordial times or the best circumstances. Students heard about systemic racism within the Thunder Bay Police Service during the Coroners’ Inquest. It was revealed that police investigations were biased and not thorough. Recommendations by the *Office of the Independent Police* Review Director, Gerry McNeilly, and the *Thunder Bay Police Services (TBPS)* Review Board Report by Senator Sinclair further exposed the broken trust between Indigenous People and the TBPS.

One student recalled an incident of police mistreatment when Charles Ash, a man from Eabametoong First Nation was picked up by a police officer on a cold night, driven to the Mission Marsh on the outskirts of the city and abandoned there. Another story involved a police sergeant who was head of the Thunder Bay Police Association. He called 911 mimicking to be an Indigenous woman. This action by a senior officer and how the matter was handled by the Police Service revealed both disrespect for Indigenous women and systemic racism.

Indigenous youths who attended the Thunder Bay Police Service’s public apology for wrongs done to Indigenous people spoke about their personal experiences dealing with some officers. They talked about being treated differently and felt that it was because they are Indigenous. A young student called the police for help to evict a vagrant. When police officers arrived, they automatically assumed she was the problem and began accusing her for being a nuisance before listening to her complaint and investigating the matter. This showed negative treatment by the police and reinforced this perception by the youth who witnessed the scene.

19

Other students talked about being yelled at and roughed up. They felt singled out for scrutiny and ridiculed among their non-Indigenous peers. It seemed the officers assumed they were up to no good and treated them as criminals. The tone of voice was condescending and made them feel inferior. They also noticed that police officers used a harsh voice or shouted when talking to them, used pressure tactics to get information and excessive force to threaten them. It seemed police officers always suspected that they were lying, drunk, involved in delinquent activities or hiding something. Even when they were not doing anything wrong, were being honest, polite and respectful, some officers often always assumed the worst. They were bent on incriminating them, instead of helping to solve the problems or protect them.

What irritated most youths are witch-hunts to find answers quickly and rush to solve problems. Even when the youth cooperated and tried to explain the situation, some police officers kept on buggering them, told them what to say, and tried planting the answers they wanted to hear. Students felt they were being set up, provoked to retaliate or do something to self-incriminate. This way they would be discredited and end up being charged for something quite different from the original case being investigated. After all, it was the officer’s words against theirs. Bad past experiences with some officers led the youth to lie, give different names and aliases to try and protect themselves, and to save their friends.

Incidents of mistreatment, poor communication and aggression were also mentioned during encounters with security guards, interactions with bus drivers, shop-keepers and other public staffers. When irritated and upset, cultural and racial stereotypes about being “Indian”, “Squaw” or “Wagon Burner” spewed out and determined how they were treated.

The history of police control of Indigenous people can be traced to the need to protect colonial institutions, and has been passed on down the generations. The police enforced the laws, took children away to Indian Residential Schools and arrested those who practiced in their native culture. But, even under the ‘system’, there are individual officers who are different, kind and show respect. The youth praised officers who can communicate well with them, have a caring attitude, show empathy and sincerely want to help. They are polite and treat any youth as their own children. The RMYC shared stories of having regular meetings with the Police Chief and hosting joint barbecues with police officers to build bridges. They even organized weekend camping trips with kids from high-risk neighbourhoods to establish trust with officers, foster mutual respect, prevent crime and make the community safer.

20

**The Government and the Justice System:**

*Students discussed that:*

* Government inaction and delays to act on Treaty Rights continues to divide people
* Politicians listen more to white people who vote, business and corporate interests
* Systemic and institutional racism must be addressed for Indigenous people to be

Appreciated and treated fairly. Some Indigenous students are reluctant to join security and protection services such as police officers who enforce colonial laws that contradict Treaty Rights. They feel it will be difficult for them to arrest family or community members who are carrying on with traditional hunting, fishing, and other cultural practices that were agreed to in the Treaties that were signed. Students familiar with the criminal justice system want the over-representation of Indigenous people in corrections reduced. They welcome initiatives such as the Indigenous courts, Gladue ruling for sentencing Indigenous offenders, Aboriginal Healing Lodges and Restorative practices as proactive alternatives to mainstream programs that have failed to make a difference.

* Legal Aid should be expanded because the rich can hire the best lawyers, plea-bargain,

and pay the fines while the poor who cannot often end up in jail.

* Poverty is a major factor contributing to many social problems affecting Indigenous

people. Chronic under-funding of education, child welfare, housing and mental health is part of the problem. Governments need to provide equitable financial resources for social services, community programs and infrastructure to make the difference.

* Allowing more autonomy to indigenize social programs so that they are holistic, and have cultural and spiritual significance will address existing feelings of alienation.
* The present justice system is foreign to Indigenous people and a lack of respect for

their inherent rights and self government marginalizes them.

* Governments have been slow to respond to the United Nations, Supreme Court, and

Human Rights Rulings on Indigenous rights, and need to act accordingly.

* Stereotypes, racism, prejudice and discrimination are still prevalent in Thunder Bay and

it is hard for Indigenous people to argue against police officers and security guards.

* Indigenous people involved with the justice system in the city are more likely to be

homeless. This puts them at a disadvantage because they are often locked-up during remand to keep them in one place so that the courts know where they are.

* It is now very costly to get pardons to clear a criminal record, making it difficult for

poor people to access this service and clear their name in order to secure good jobs.

21

**Child Welfare System and Parenting:**

* Child welfare agencies such as Dilico Anishnabek Family Care and Tikinagan created

by Indigenous agencies to use cultural and holistic approaches to right the wrongs created by Indian Residential Schools and the 60’s Scoop struggle to operate under mainstream Children’s Aid policies. They have to deal with the present crisis of more Indigenous children in-care today than everyone who went to residential schools. Finding enough good foster homes is a problem, and funding is inadequate for effective healing and treatment programs, parent-skills training, community based interventions and so forth. Indigenous communities want to stop this cycle. Just because an apology and payouts were made, does not mean problems and trauma are gone. A lot of healing and after-care still needs to take place to enhance reconciliation.

* When funding allocations are strictly based on the numbers of children in care and not the quality of service, agencies make it a business. This results in a foster care system where children become statistics and they may not easily see other family members—

their parents, brothers, sisters and so forth. Once children are under agencies, it is

hard to get them back. Families are broken, and it takes a long time to get them out of

the system. The ‘crossover’ effect is a growing problem because many children transition from care into the criminal justice system and remain there.

* Platforms and safe spaces are needed for kids and teens to have a voice, provide input

and feedback on how the system affects them, and ways to make things better.

* There should be ways to re-assign incompetent and insensitive staff, or replace unfit

social workers who do not understand Indigenous traditions, the role of the extended family, ties to community as practical solutions for nurturing children, and how to successfully wean them out of the child welfare system. Traditional ways and families are more suited to raising children and keeping them safe than bureaucratic institutions.

* In the light of the TRC recommendations, child-welfare agencies should be proactive

and work hard to stop the negative cycles created by Indian Residential Schools and the 60’s Scoop. There are stories of children not going to school when parents do not have lunch money. This is common among Indigenous families moving to the city. Some teachers keen to protect children see them coming to school without food and report it as neglect. Thus, the poor parents will hold their children back from school out of fear that they will be taken away. Unfortunately, when students miss school and are absent often, they fail in class and many eventually drop out school.

22

* Many kids in care drop out of school leading to poverty and major social problems. According to *Statistics* *Canada,* more than 89% of young offenders in the federal correctional system have below grade 10 education and 65% have less than grade 8.
* Child-welfare agencies must incorporate holistic approaches to the growth and wellness

of children in the context of parenting, the extended family and community involvement. Reducing the stigma of breakfast clubs and lunch programs at school will benefit vulnerable kids by improving their class attendance and academic performance. Adding clothing assistance, food-banks and after-school programs will enhance student wellness, safety, graduation and achievement. The RMYC’s youth-led *Girl Power* and *Band of Brothers* Programs that teach character development and promote healthy lifestyles, offer positive peer influence, guidance and support for kids in care through role models, peer mentors and adult allies.

**Racism, Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination:**

As seen in the film, stereotypes, racism, prejudice and discrimination are prevalent in schools and across the city. There are students who experience racism as part of their daily lives. Indigenous youths in particular feel that they are often judged based on historical racial stereotypes, and are not seen as decent individuals who aspire for a better life. Canadian government policies destroyed Indigenous cultures and they are seen and judged according to mainstream values of post-contact that robbed them their identity and human decency.

Indigenous students talked about the blunt racism they face and being misnamed “Red Indians” which they attribute it to colonization and the *Canadian Indian Act*. All that was taught in the education system celebrated conquest, the need to convert pagans and civilize savages regarded as inferior, dispensable and a social nuisance. DFC students gave the examples of being banned from Intercity Shopping Mall. They saw this as being racially motivated because they were conspicuous and irritants to other clients and descent paying customers.

Racist incidents were also experienced by a cross-section of racialized students. Muslim girls who wore the hijab were ridiculed and teased as terrorists -- even though they were fleeing for their lives from terrorism. Islamophobia and fears of religious radicals infiltrating the refugee system as asylum seekers were evident. Comments about threats of violence from Muslims were common, and utterances that refugees were coming here at tax-payers’ expense.

23

Black students talked about name-calling, the derogatory “N” word, put-downs and being sworn at. Those who had the courage to file complaints felt that most teachers did not have proper training or formal processes to deal with racial taunting. They brushed the incidents off as nothing serious, and only did something if there was a physical fight. One student tired of complaining to teachers with no action taken decided to take matters into his own hands. He retaliated by punching the perpetrator and was suspended from school. It was his way of teaching the racist bully a lesson when no one helped, he said the harassment stopped. Another student wanted to see more diversity among the teachers. He rationalized that -- “If I am facing racism from a white kid and there is white teacher and a black one, which one do you think I will approach to complain? The black one, of course, because they understand what I am going through and will be able to help me.”

Other concerns shared by black students included problems getting jobs or finding descent places to rent due to racism and discrimination. Even when they were well qualified, had better work-experience and good references, they often lost the jobs to their white counterparts. They believed that the ‘mirror-image’ in hiring practices and fear of changing the status quo stood in the way of racialized minorities breaking through the ‘glass ceiling’. The students however acknowledged that some black sports stars, entertainers and performers who became celebrities in the social mainstream got positive recognition and accolades.

Black youths adopted by white families said they found it confusing to be accepted and loved at home while facing racism and ridicule from other white people at school and in the community. It was a frustrating experience that contributed to mental stress and anxiety about their identity. There was an element of ‘skin privilege’ when lighter-skinned blacks received preferential treatment compared to the darker skinned ones. This was the case with children of black immigrants whose parents inter-married and could integrate into the social mainstream more easily than recent newcomers from Africa with strong accents.

It was also brought up that Children’s Aid Society reports and ‘cross-over’ studies reveal that the numbers of black children entering foster care are increasing together with those dropping out of school. Many end up on the streets and homeless, making them vulnerable to crime and violence. Their situation reinforced the cycle of poverty and the negative perceptions of skin colour, racial stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination that resulted in more barriers for them.

24

Chinese, East Indians, Sikhs and other racial minorities were also victims of cultural stereotypes, racism and discrimination. There were similarities in regards to how they were stared at, the name calling and treatment in public places such as restaurants. It was pointed out about the confusion created when the term ‘racism’ is used for Jews who are white, yet they are attacked or discriminated against by other white folks. The rise of white supremacists in Canada was being noticed and linked to current politics in the United States of America.

It was argued that racist jokes, teasing, and name–calling often escalated to bullying/cyber-bullying and physical assaults. Some students transferred schools or dropped out altogether because they could not handle the racial taunts and the bullying. Group peer pressure was a common factor when other students joined in to impress friends. Things changed if someone intervened and challenged the ring leaders to stop. But, oftentimes students stood by or just watched and did not speak up against racism or defend the victims.

One student put it this way: stereotypes, racism, prejudice and discrimination create a cage restricting your movements, access, opportunities, participation and happiness in society.

**Education:**

Students spoke about changes taking place in schools. Those in senior grades (grades 11 - 12) noticed the differences taking place from when they first went to high school in grade 9. There were improvements in programs and more services for the larger student population due to school mergers. The enrolment of First Nations students moving to the city was growing together with the numbers of racialized new immigrant and refugee families from Africa, the Middle East and other visible minorities was increasing, creating more diversity in classrooms.

Schools were responding accordingly with gender-neutral washrooms, special activity rooms for Indigenous students, mental health supports and counselling services. There are also new school clubs and various extra-curricular activities for the students. In spite of the progress, there are gaps in the curriculum and more work needs to be done to enhance awareness, understanding and acceptance of racialized, gay and minority students. Educators such as Mr. Darren Lentz,Principal of Kingsway Public School featured in the film are leaders in land-based teaching methods that incorporate Indigenous culture, traditions, laws of nature and the environment. This approach to learning that includes Indigenous content and perspective should be integrated in the education system to benefit everyone and enhance reconciliation.

25

A majority of students in the workshops were not aware of *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and the *Accepting Schools Act (ASA)* -- adopted to create an inclusive and accepting learning climate for all students. While all publicly funded schools are implementing ASA and there is progress, the initiatives are not well promoted and shared with the students. The role of student councils is well known, but school councils need to do more work to publicize what they are doing to improve the school climate. Educators need special training to communicate with students about ASA and update them on the progress and challenges.

Teachers have the greatest impact on how well students learn in classrooms. Perceptive and culturally competent teachers connect well with their students and help them to realize their true potential to learn and succeed. Those who show empathy and go beyond just teaching class subjects and playing their supervisory role become role models and significant others. They make an impression that can transform the student’s perception of the self and their outlook on life. Teachers who take the time to understand the situations their students are facing, what is going on in their life, make referrals and link them with the resources and supports available do make a difference. Good teachers today are not mere academicians trained to teach specific subjects. In our multicultural and diverse society with changing family patterns, different upbringing and evolving values, they should also serve as social workers, counselors, and mentors who guide, support and groom students to be the best they can be.

The mentioning of traditional inhabitants of the lands we are on at the beginning of classes and formal events lets everyone know the Indigenous groups that occupied the area. This would not be necessary if schools had done their job to teach about the Indigenous people who lived here before contact, and the treaties that were signed for us to coexist. It is time we learn our true history and know the facts. But we should move beyond the land acknowledgements and take real action that changes attitudes, improves relationships and enhances reconciliation.

Students want to learn how Indigenous groups lived and their resilience to thrive in this cold harsh climate. Their stories were intentionally omitted in history and misrepresented in movies because of the Eurocentric and Christian values. Knowing that Indigenous people had their own spirituality, governments and were not welfare dependents challenges the myths created to deny them self-determination to run their own affairs. Learning how they managed natural resources shows respect for Mother Earth compared to how many industrial corporations exploit and contaminate the land with devastating impacts on the environment and climate.

26

Learning about the Grandfather Teachings as universal values, traditional beliefs and spiritual guidance reveals that Indigenous people were not savages. They had their own cultures, languages, and religions that connected them to this country and the universe. *Prime Minister Steven Harper’s Apology* on behalf of the Government of Canada (pages 66 - 67) sums this well. This country was invaded, the land taken from Indigenous groups and the *Indian Act* became the order of the day. This replaced traditional laws and governments, outlawed cultural practices, and destroyed families by taking children away to residential schools. Free self-reliant people who once roamed the country at will and lived off the land were confined to small impoverished reserves and became dependent on the government. This history has created many of the social problems that fuel the poverty, addiction, stereotypes and racism.

There was consensus that the *TRC Calls to Action* should be required learning for all teachers. They are at the fore-front of providing knowledge and the facts for citizens today and future generations. Colonization, treaties, the Indian Act, Indian Residential Schools, the 60’s Scoop should not be ‘brushed off’ or ‘skimmed over’. This Canadian history is more important than Columbus discovering ‘Indians’ in the Americas, and the World Wars I and II that are taught in detail with annual commemorations of *Remembrance Day* and pilgrimages to Europe. Events such as *Orange Shirt Day*, *Pink Day,* Canadian Heritage Days and special cultural events that impact our social relationships and collective values should be taught and promoted in schools.

There is agreement among Indigenous students that the education system should go beyond curriculum changes and train teachers and staff to be culturally competent. The TRC report challenges the misinformation and inequities inherited from internalized colonial values and attitudes. Residential schools taught trades and provided technical skills, but destroyed family bonds, social relationships and traditional values. Parenting skills were lost when children were taken away and the intergenerational impacts have been passed on leading to dysfunctional homes where poverty, mental health, addictions and unhealthy lifestyles are rampant.

Indigenous students want adequate resources invested in education, social services, healing and treatment programs with after-care supports to repair the damage. Formal education and knowledge will enhance reconciliation by increasing the numbers of students graduating and improving their quality of life, while knowledge of the facts that led to our present situation will trigger our conscience, reduce resentment, foster understanding and empathy respectively.

27

As mentioned earlier, teachers have a lot of influence in the classroom that determines whether a student passes or fails, enjoys the learning experience, or drops out. They control the climate that makes learning fun or unappealing to students. Good teachers open the mind and create the foundation to address a myriad of social ills, poverty and a lack of hope. Indigenous students have unique needs to deal with Inter-generational trauma and the legacy of residential schools. Local resources such as films: *Coming Together to Talk*, *Walk a Mile*, *Seeking Biimaadiziwiin*, and land-based cultural approaches present an inclusive perspective to teaching and educating students. On-going professional development training and access to multicultural resources will enable teachers to become more competent to deal with diversity, manage racist incidents, and enhance reconciliation. In this context, the promotion and status of teachers should be based on student retention and success rates, and not just on seniority.

Workshop facilitators from DFC and MECC and other Indigenous students who transferred from public schools to these two First Nations institutions were asked to comment on the differences. It should be pointed out that not all Indigenous students attend the two First Nations run schools in Thunder Bay. Of the ninety First Nations reserves in three Treaty Areas across Northwestern Ontario, only a third (32) Bands that belong to Matawa First Nations and Northern Nishnawbe Education Council that run the two schools can send their students there.

The students praised public schools for the wide variety of courses offered and higher academic streams. They liked the opportunities to mix with diverse students, but resented teachers who were culturally incompetent and racist students they had to endure. On the other hand, they had a lot of positive things to say about what they liked at the two Indigenous-run schools. Most of the comments were about respect, culture, the learning environment where teachers and staff made them feel they belong, were committed to teaching their culture, and language, empowered them to be resilient, and supported them to graduate.

*What students said are the successes and best practices at* DFC *and* MECC *include:*

* Teachers and staff who care and have a good assessment of their students where they are from and have a basic understanding of their social situation.
* The teachers are sensitive to the needs of their students and can sense when they are struggling, under stress, grieving and need support or someone to talk with.

28

* The school provides food -- breakfast and lunch, and the Elders’ Room makes traditional meals. The after-school program feeds students after classes.
* Students can approach their teachers anytime to talk about their problems and fill gaps created by missing parents at home.
* Plenty of empathy shown by staff and teachers working in the school, creating a deeper

connection with students and feelings of a close family

* Indigenous culture is promoted and celebrated for identity and a sense of belonging.
* Ojibwe language is taught in creative ways to encourage students to learn and speak.
* There are safe spaces where students can relax, and an Elders’ Room where students

can go to relax, and they can talk with them to relive homesickness.

* Students are taught manners, social responsibility, accountability etc. to make up for

the legacy and intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools.

* Students are constantly reminded of the *TRC Calls to Action*, *Prime Minister Harper’s*

*Apology*, *Orange Shirt Days*, etc. and get involved to build their self esteem.

* Academic upgrading and tutoring supports are available for students who need to catch

up from attending under-funded and under staffed reserve schools

* Traditional outings and nature trips for land-based learning and spiritual teachings
* Teachers mixing modern techniques with traditional ways of teaching
* Teachers making referrals and links with resources for new students to the city and not

familiar with what is available, and helping them to access what they need.

* Teachers go out of their way to arrange volunteer opportunities to introduce students to

working in an urban setting and make up their community hours to graduate.

* Teachers adding more Indigenous content in lessons and incorporating traditional ideas

to connect with students, get their attention, and assist them to absorb the information.

* Teachers putting more effort to discuss the impacts of colonialism and how Indigenous

people have worked to overcome the struggles brought by the colonial culture.

* Teachers who promote Indigenous authors and literature, understand how to teach

First Nations students and take into account the different stages of their education,

* Having formal extra-curricular activities after-school to keep students busy and safe
* Room #115 – *Miinobaamaaziiwin Gaming*, *“A Good Place”* where the RMYC runs the

After-school Program and brings diverse youths to meet Indigenous students, make new friends, and organize activities together to show that not everyone is racist.

29

* The extended family supports available through Elders and Student Support Workers
* Opportunities to try and experiment new things not available on the reserve.
* Teachers who understand and prioritize mental health, trauma and other social

disorders to help students deal with depression, anxiety and stress.

* Everyone cares, and they chase after you when you want to skip class, and follow you

when loitering in the hallways to go to your class.

* Students are given the necessary tools and foundations that encourage them to

express themselves freely, and empowerment to deal with challenges they face.

* The trade classes at DFC to add to what courses students can take.
* There is an addiction program with follow-up supports to help students not relapse
* The school teaches healthy coping skills, mental wellness, encourages students to be

involved in positive activities such as meditation, yoga, music, exercise, drumming, etc.

* There are ‘On call’ services to give rides to students for their safety in the city.
* Teachers offer stability for students who suffer anxieties and detachments from being

moved from home to home in foster-care.

* Teachers smile and reach out to vulnerable students from broken down homes who need assurance to cheer them up, give them hope and sense of purpose
* Teachers respect all students and do not embarrass them in front of their peers
* The school supports students to find boarding homes to stay.
* Teachers who actually listen to students when they need help and support them to deal

with crisis situations.

* Students can talk about anything with teachers — their interests, concerns etc.
* Simple system for students to complain about anything
* School has many social functions for students and staff to know each other and bond
* There are many student clubs and extra-curricular activities to do after school
* Students get training and support to plan and organize the activities they like.
* There is a *Leadership Development and Student Ambassador Peer Mentoring Program*
* The school is open all evenings and on weekends to provide a safe place for students
* The school has a greenhouse for students to learn how to grow vegetables, a Memorial

Garden with natural plants to promote local vegetation, and they teach native plant names to encourage the preservation of Indigenous languages.

30

Indigenous students acknowledged that many of their parents still resent sending their children away to school. They recall being forced to attend residential schools and mistreated once they got there. They were not allowed to return home until the holidays, and empathize with their children when they leave home to attend school in the city. If the students call home when they are lonely or experiencing personal difficulties, the natural reaction is often to advise them to return home – even though conditions are different now than during the old residential school days. Safety is also a major concern, and students want a formal residence in the city to avoid being billeted with strangers and ease their parents’ security concerns.

Mainstream education still conveys a superiority complex by making heroes out of European settlers and celebrates colonialists who destroyed Indigenous cultures. Teaching the view that Christopher Columbus and other European explorers discovered the Americas -- lands already inhabited by locals -- gives credit to settlers without recognizing the presence and contributions of Native people. Education was used as vehicle to civilize Indigenous people and succeeded if they abandoned their traditional way of life, dressed differently, and learned to speak the colonial master’s language. Some teachers continue to patronize ‘poor Indian children’ and still want to civilize them to look more descent. One DFC student recounted having his hair cut while in elementary school by a teacher’s-aid without his consent. Even though the intention may have been to groom the student, it revived memories of residential school attitudes.

In spite of the strides made to accommodate Indigenous students in mainstream education, the outcomes are not measuring up. The underfunding of the system to deal with changes required for the present reality in a post-apology and TRC climate undermines efforts to re-train teachers on reconciliation and prepare them to deal with students facing complex social problems and internalized negative perceptions of themselves. The damage done for over 150 years since Confederation require drastic changes in mindset and concrete actions to reduce Indigenous over-representation in school drop-outs, incarceration, unemployment, poverty, child welfare, and poor quality of life rates that feed stereotypes, prejudice and racism.

On reserve students feel they are in transition from the traditional life of hunting, fishing and gathering to the modern world of technology and diversity. This affects their perspective on education as more than getting a job to make money, but to gain knowledge and learn how to live in social harmony and survive on Mother Earth without losing their culture and identity.

31

**Social issues:**

In a separate session for DFC students, they talked about the issues affecting boarding students. The inter-generational impacts of residential schools contribute to many of the social problems in their communities. Broken families and parents lacking parenting skills lead to dysfunctional homes, child abuse and addiction problems. Reserves are underserviced, and poverty, concerns over jobs, clean drinking water, high cost of living and so forth add to the stress. Life is difficult and with limited opportunities many children lose hope for a happy life and brighter future. This leads to high rates of mental health problems and youth suicide.

Students must leave home to attend high school in urban centres. In spite of the social problems on reserves, moving away for school create feelings of loneliness for the students, and anxiety for the extended family network and community members left behind. While Thunder Bay offers many new opportunities, a lack of urban life skills, living with strangers in boarding homes, and academic struggles pose serious challenges to young naïve students. Transition to city life is made more difficult by racist attitudes, the social baggage students carry, and a lack of social supports to help them heal and integrate successfully into city life.

The students billeted in good caring boarding homes tend to do well in school and have fewer problems in the city. Those in less strict homes and struggling with academic issues, mental health and addiction problems become a safety risk. They are vulnerable to the negative influences in the city and have regular encounters with police officers and security guards. This leads to poor attendance at school and under-performance in class resulting in failure and expulsion. Unfortunately, some of the students kicked out of school do not want to return to their impoverished communities where the opportunities to complete high school are limited, and the chances to get proper counselling services, addiction treatment, trades-skills training and employment are minimal or nonexistent.

School dropouts lose their funding, housing allowance and social supports covered by their education authority when they are enrolled. Consequently, they add to the numbers of homeless and destitute youths in the city. Those under 18 years old do not qualify for welfare, and couch-surfing, panhandling and soliciting become the way to survive. This exposes them to criminal youth gangs, drug-dealers, human traffickers and other negative street influences. Breeches with the law are frequent, generating public security concerns and racial tensions.

32

As mentioned earlier, eighty-nine percent (89%) of young offenders admitted to the federal correctional institutions had not completed their high school at the time they were admitted; 55% had not completed their grade 10, while 19% had completed less than grade 8. Without a good education or urban work experience criminal activities become the option for income. This social situation creates eyesores in the community that lead to resentment, cultural and racial stereotypes, and discrimination. When personal safety is threatened, negative opinions prevail and racist comments thrive. Social media, Facebook, Tweets, letters to the editor, and so forth are filled with vile racist comments against Indigenous people that can be linked to their impoverished social situations, homeless status and addiction problems in the city.

Brainstorming ideas on ways to help youths who are victims of circumstance, find themselves in difficult situations and end up engaging in negative lifestyles generated the following ideas:

\* Have a safe youth-friendly shelter in Thunder Bay with staff and volunteers who connect well with the youth, especially those at risk. Safe accommodation and a youth ‘detox’ with caring staff is an urgent priority.

\* Provide counselling services with Elders and appropriate cultural and spiritual guidance to deal with any mental health and addiction problems. On-going after-care is needed to build resilience and sustain their healing journey.

\* Link the youth with tutors and other academic and social supports to better their chances of graduating and following a trade or professional career of their choice.

\* Work with the police, social service agencies to connect the youth to healthy supports, skills-development training, including life and work-skills to thrive and survive in the city.

\* Engage youths to determine priorities and make them part of the solution to problems.

\* Establish a transition housing program to help at-risk youths move from treatment, correctional facilities, emergency shelters, etc to long-term community housing.

\* Design a youth friendly volunteer program that encourages and supports racialized, gay and minority youths to do community service and contribute to society. This will provide youths with chances to learn practical job skills and new career options. Volunteering establishes valuable contacts for references. Above all, volunteering shows the youth doing something positive to reduce negative stereotypes that feed racial tensions when Indigenous, racialized and minority youths are seen loitering or getting into trouble. Seeing youths helping out is a proactive way to chance negative attitudes about them.

33

**Work-skills, Life-skills and Social skills:**

For Indigenous youths, developing a work ethic, self-confidence and commitment to perform like other young workers is key to being hired and keeping jobs. The massive lay-offs of Indigenous labourers after the World Wars so that European immigrants coming to Canada could find work contributed to the welfare culture of today. Indigenous men were paid an allowance to stay home on reserves and make the jobs they had available for new European immigrants. Since then, generations of Indigenous children have grown up not seeing their parents take up regular employment**.** This has influenced their outlook on work and dulled the appetite and enthusiasm to participate in the labour market. On-going funding is needed to hire Indigenous students to join the workforce, support them to develop a work ethic, and train them to develop relevant skills to qualify for the various jobs on the labour market.

Indigenous students talked about culture shock and barriers to fit into the urban environment. Their experiences are similar to new immigrants and refugees migrating to Canada. Students leaving reserves are merely changing geography and bring along values, attitudes, behaviour patterns and mannerisms they have been raised with. They lack urban life skills and social etiquette to function properly in the city, and require assistance to adapt and learn how to use urban services such as public transit and other services not available on reserves.

Life and nature laws on remote fly-in reserves are very different from living in a large bustling modern city. Family ties are important for survival and nepotism is prevalent for the few jobs available. A casual work culture on reserves does not prepare one for aggressive competition, the resumes, training, safety orientation, work experience and references required for jobs in the city. The diversity is also a challenge if one has not been exposed to working at a fast pace and with people of different orientation, racial and ethno-cultural backgrounds.

Students believe the youth-to-youth approach used by Natural Helpers in schools, and the RMYC’s Ambassadors/Peer Mentors at DFC are proactive ways to train, empower and support the youth to succeed. Positive influence through peer leaders and role models is an effective strategy to teach new habits, modify behavior and motivate action to achieve change. Having the youth teaching each other social skills for success, life-skills for survival, and work-skills for employment will make a difference. Proper orientation, training and support are key to helping the youth to thrive and grow in a diverse community, a changing society and evolving future.

34

**PLAN OF ACTION -- A SYNOPSIS**

Michelle Obama: *“Every day, you have the power to choose our better history – by opening your hearts and minds by speaking up for what you know is right.”*

**Welcoming City:**

From the film and the discussions, the youth want to see a more welcoming Thunder Bay that accepts everyone, celebrates diversity, respects all human beings and supports Indigenous people to realize their true potential. They envision a city where current social problems are seriously addressed and people work together to eliminate racism and negative stereotypes that limit opportunities, undermine trust, create tension and breed conflict that divides people.

**Working Together:**

Students agreed that Thunder Bay needs to unite and we must work together for a better future. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action* recommendations provide a road-map to right past wrongs that have defined relations between the Indigenous peoples and other settler groups. We cannot continue doing things the same old way that has created misery, poverty, homelessness, addicts, and criminalized many due to alien and unjust laws. We need to help Indigenous people to heal, support them to rebuild their traditional institutions, and open doors for them to progress and take their rightful place in society.

**Suggested Solutions:**

To connect youths to the land:

* We all have to work together to protect Mother Earth
* Follow Darren Lentz’s model *Lakehead Public Schools Academy of Learning--*of nature

-based programs that promote outdoor and Indigenous-oriented land-based activities for all students to appreciate the environment and respect Mother Earth.

To prevent women from being seen as prostitutes and treated as objects for exploitation:

* Police should patrol high-risk areas, monitor, advise and protect vulnerable women.
* Social workers and police should talk with women and girls about safety, engage them

in initiatives to promote schooling and prevent violence, assaults and exploitation.

* Promote programs such as *RMYC Girl Power* to build self-esteem, educate and

empower young women to follow their passions and break free from stereotypes.

35

To create safer neighbourhoods:

* More community-based activities to develop a sense of belonging for everyone
* Invest in youth drop-in centres, after-school programs and stay-in-school initiatives
* Involve grassroots groups to be part of the solution to the problems they are facing
* Promote harm reduction and have police patrols and Neighbourhood Watch Programs
* Create safe spaces for children and youth and offer ideal programs and services
* Teach kids and teens about alcohol, drugs, addiction and crime prevention
* Reduce poverty and provide more affordable housing with social supports
* Recognize addictions as a health issue and not just focus on crime and punishment
* Support neighbourhood groups to develop their leadership and organizational capacity
* More ‘detox’ beds, healing/treatment programs and transitional homes with after-care

To stop racism / Systemic racism:

* Promote human rights and respect for all human beings, and speak out against racism
* Talk about and act upon Reconciliation to know the truth about Indigenous peoples
* Create a dedicated fund to support grassroots initiatives to stop racism
* Report racist incidents to authorities – teachers, parents, community leaders, etc
* Create safe and friendly spaces for all children to hang out, mix and learn to get along
* Train arbitrators to mediate when racial conflicts occur to prevent fights/violence
* Stop the denial! Spread the word that racism is real, dehumanizing and evil.
* Weed out prejudiced teachers and racist police officers from serving the public
* Monitor operations of institutions to rid of systemic racism, the policies and practices
* Have supports for homeless and destitute Indigenous migrants to reduce culture shock
* Organize multicultural events that bring people together to celebrate our diversity
* Advocate for inclusion, equity, social justice and acceptance of everyone everywhere
* Provide cultural sensitivity training to all public servants and public service workers
* Teach *7 Grandfather Teachings* as universal values relevant and applicable to all.
* Teach children and youth about racism, good behavior, manners and respect for others
* Provide grassroots and minority groups with resources to integrate into the community
* Watch out for hate groups, white supremacists and do not join hate speech
* Use tools such as Coming Together to Talk, Walk a Mile and other Indigenous-

produced films and documentaries to initiate discussion on reconciliation.

36

To promote reconciliation:

* Talk reconciliation with friends, family members and neighbours, and act accordingly
* Hire educators, promote workers and support leaders who believe in reconciliation
* Have open truthful discussions about our true history and Treaty Rights
* Assign a special day to commemorate and raise awareness about reconciliation

To overcome lack of government funding:

* Join Indigenous groups to advocate for fair and equitable funding for all programs
* Educate people about current inequities and lobby governments accordingly
* Engage politicians, policy and decision-makers in dialogue about equity and inclusion
* Speak out and advocate on behalf of Indigenous and other marginalized groups
* Promote social justice, participate in political debates and exercise your right to vote
* Encourage industries operating on First Nations lands to invest in developing human

capacity and improving the quality of life in Indigenous communities.

To improve education:

* Monitor implementation of *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy/Accepting*

*Schools Act* to create a welcoming climate and safe learning environment

* Invest in education as a strategy for social transformation, crime prevention, etc.
* Have teachers trained in Indigenous ways of learning and incorporate cultural and

racial sensitivity teaching practices that benefit the outcomes of all students.

* Provide professional development training to change attitudes create the best teachers
* Hire and promote teachers based on merit.
* Schools should continueteaching reconciliation, social justice, equity, and anti-racism
* Engage all students in activities to feel they belong and become good citizens
* Schools should have supports to enhance student wellness, safety and achievement
* More interventions are needed in mental health and counselling to support students
* Residential schools, Indigenous cultures and languages should be in the curriculum,

and *Orange Shirt Day* commemorated just as Easter and other European culture days

* Have peer mediation programs in schoolsto resolve conflict by restorative practices
* Design community service and peer mentoring as placements hours for course credits.
* Close the gap in funding for Indigenous education to enhance retention and success
* Develop easy ways to report racist incidents at school that engage perpetrators.

37

To decrease hate-crimes:

* Use schools and education to reduce ignorance, fear and stereotypes
* Have special anti-racism funding to engage children and youth in anti-hate activities
* Join proactive groups that promote social justice, anti-racism, equity, etc.
* Promote policies, programs and laws that complement multiculturalism and equity
* Use social media to wage anti-racism and hate crime campaigns
* Organize festivals to showcase culture and celebrate our diversity
* Enforce legislation to deal with hate speech
* Invest in youth to reconcile and make a new beginning in racial relationships
* Legislate against hate groups and white-supremacists who incite racial hatred

To welcome new people:

* Organize receptions and orientations to welcome newcomers and help them integrate
* Host inclusive events to provide opportunities to reduce ignorance and racial barriers
* Provide supports and resources to address areas of potential cultural and racial conflict
* Reach out to strangers, get to know them and do not stereotype or pre-judge them
* Be open minded -- with the exception of Indigenous people we are all immigrants

To create change, advocate and protest more effectively:

* Stay well informed on issues and educate yourself of the facts to argue for your case
* Use the democratic process to campaign and vote for the change you want to see
* Use social media, protests, strikes, etc to promote equity and social justice
* Do your part to engage more people to buy into worthy causes and lobby accordingly
* Work with the youth to give them hope and prevent radicalization

To improve relations with police:

* Train the police properly to communicate better with youth and other minority groups
* Be innovative in reaching out and hiring officers from racialized and minority groups
* Promote officers based on merit -- not just seniority, and provide on-going professional

development cultural awareness training to enable police officers to deal with diversity

* Organize social activities for police officers and youths to mix, talk and build bridges
* Work with the police and support them to connect with Indigenous people and youths
* Have police hubs in high-risk neighbourhoods to build trust and positive relationships.

38

**GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTARY**

Alexander Den Heijer: *“When a flower does not bloom you fix the environment in which it*

*grows, not the flower”.*

This report captures what transpired at the *Coming Together to Talk with Youth* forum attended by over 250 Thunder Bay high school students. The event was a true learning experience for the youth. It challenged them to think critically about race relations and how the first peoples are seen and treated in their own country.

Discussions about changes taking place in city schools to deal with diversity included a review of progress in race relations in the country since the *Canadian* *Multiculturalism Act* was passed in 1988. Accomplishments noted include: the introduction of employment equity, Canada commemorating March 21- the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, cultural and racial sensitivity training for the police, professional development days for teachers, formal celebrations of Canadian Heritage Days together with National Indigenous Peoples Day, Black History Month events, and more recently having the face of Viola Desmond (a black business woman who faced racism in a movie theatre in Nova Scotia) on the $10 bank note.

Since the release of the *Truth and Reconciliation of Canada Report*, formal acknowledgement of the traditional lands we are on at public gatherings has become standard practice. But these words need concrete action because Indigenous people are still dispossessed of the land we acknowledge as theirs, are controlled by the *Indian Act* we imposed on them, and face barriers to equitably participate in the social mainstream due to systemic and institutional racism.

Our institutions were designed by those in power to benefit themselves. The policies, laws and practices aim to preserve white privilege. Established mainstream social structures such as education, policing, child welfare, justice, employment, housing, health and so forth have been slow to change to accommodate the perspectives and needs of Indigenous groups, racialized and other minorities. More work still needs to be done to complement the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, The Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, *Canadian Race Relations Foundation, The TRC Calls to Action*, ***Canada’s endorsement of the United Nations Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous Peoples,*** *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, *The* *Gladue Report,* *Supreme Court and Human Rights* rulings already in place.

39

The three recent investigations involving the Thunder Bay Police Service exposed the existence of systemic and institutional racism. Colonial culture and imperial structures created security services to protect their privileged classes and assets. Governments have relied on the police to maintain law and order, including enforcing segregation, restricting the mobility of Indigenous people, apprehending children for residential schools and so forth.

Indigenous peoples who once governed themselves before contact now find themselves powerless and controlled by laws enforced by the police. They have to rely on court rulings to fish, hunt or exercise traditional rights and freedoms they had before colonization. The Viola Desmond Canada reveres today, was once arrested by the police for sitting in a white-only section in a movie theatre. Many police officers are oblivious to the racism embedded in the system and merely follow orders by acting according to rules of the day.

Most of the ignorance, conscious and unconscious biases about certain racial or ethno-cultural groups have been conveyed by an education system taught from a European perspective that sees the world through Caucasian lenses of privileged powerful white men. This can be traced back to the history of slavery, segregated schools, the colour-bar, laws against co-habitation and mixed marriages. Most people responsible for running institutions and implementing policies have been educated in a system of white privilege and Caucasian supremacy. They were taught to praise the successes of the colonizers, celebrate the victories by their armies over natives, and commemorate the accomplishments of European heroes who committed atrocities and gross injustices to Indigenous peoples and other minority groups.

Through content and practice, the education system has co-opted bureaucrats to conform and comply with biases in favour white power and privilege. Policies that appropriated land for exploitation with no compensation, and allowed the extraction of natural resources without the consent of the original inhabitants while keeping the profits, were regarded as normal business practice. Native names were changed to European ones for convenience and with the intention of assimilating Indigenous people. Cultural and racial biases were part and parcel of the system and conversion to Christianity presented as civilization for social advancement. Consequently, when Indigenous children struggled to learn under different modes of instruction and in foreign language, they were left to fail or drop-out, something that continues today.

40

Indigenous groups and other racialized minorities subjugated under colonial structures were coerced to comply or face the consequences. Some went along with the system and accepted their fate, as if they were responsible for the racism and injustices they faced. Internalized mainstream values and the need to conform to social expectations lead them to support the establishment. The system brainwashes the oppressed to think and talk negatively about them-selves, as if they have nothing positive to contribute. It is difficult to think outside the box when incentives and rewards are tied to conforming and serving the status quo.

The social problems Indigenous people face are linked to colonization, the legacy of Indian Residential Schools and *Indian Act*. The push to get rid of their culture and assimilate them has been a disaster. Poverty, broken families and addicts who self-medicate to cope with circumstances beyond their control feed the negative lifestyles we see in society today. Dysfunctional homes after parents lost children to Indian Residential Schools and the 60’s Scoop destroyed family structures that transmit culture, teach manners, discipline, and good behavior. The result has been the social breakdown dividing our communities, and negative activities threatening our safety and security and fuelling racist attitudes and discrimination.

Educators today face great challenges to deal with the new realities in the classroom. There are many children with little or no parental support, lacking discipline and direction. High rates of trauma and addictions in families result in a growing population of children with learning disabilities, mental-health issues, childhood trauma, addiction-related ailments and so forth. Schools once segregated by class and race are struggling to accommodate everyone, including children with developmental complications the system was not designed to handle.

The absence of inclusive curricula and inadequate training to prepare teachers for diversity in classrooms add to the problems of integrating Indigenous and racialized students in publicly funded schools successfully. High failure and attrition rates breed cultural stereotypes, biases on streaming and what minority students can or should study. Hence the calls by Indigenous and other racialized groups to experiment with their own schools along the same lines as privately-run elite schools. The ripple effects of the separate schools have the potential to generate racism and discrimination when Indigenous groups pursue training in professions and trades, and the standards, grades and qualifications for jobs are brought into question.

41

We welcome the federal and provincial governments’ adoption of the *TRC Calls to Action* as the road-map to reconciliation, and the new Anti-racism strategies to combat discrimination. Municipalities, school boards, police services and other institutions are all working on diversity and cultural sensitivity training to enhance acceptance and racial harmony. For Canada’s apology to Indigenous People to be sincere, and the *TRC Calls to Action* genuine, bureaucrats in government and civil servants working in public service institutions such as teachers and police officers should buy into retraining to advance the cause -- or quit. Benchmarks with targeted outcomes are needed to guarantee that all citizens regardless of race have equal access and equal opportunities to participate in various aspects of Canadian society.

The process can be accelerated if community groups and grassroots organizations working for equality have adequate resources. The criteria for and allocation of mainstream public funding has been a barrier because of being designed by the privileged classes based on their priorities. Well established groups easily meet the set requirements which for the most part are self-serving. Issues with the greatest impacts on upward mobility for the oppressed and the destitute do not usually get the attention they deserve or long term financial support to achieve desired results. Indigenous people, racialized groups, children and youth been left outside looking in, and depend on the goodwill of funders and whatever they choose to invest in.

Leadership is required to change course and mobilize society to work on comprehensive strategies to stop racism. We cannot continue doing things the same way, blaming victims and expect different results. This implies adequately funding Indigenous and racialized groups to engage and empower them to be part of the solution. There is an urgent need to level the playing field, build trust and foster understanding for everyone to live the realities of our multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious communities and diverse classrooms.

As governments and institutions work to dismantle systemic racism, individually we should reach out and live by the common values and qualities we share as human beings. Our society is changing with the advancement of civil rights, increasing numbers of integrated schools, sports teams, neighbourhoods and work-places, as well as once scorned inter-racial adoptions and mixed marriages. We all need to do our part and open doors shut to Indigenous, racialized, and other minority groups. This will go a long way to enhance reconciliation.

42

**CONCLUSION: OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Ignacio Estrada*: “If a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.”*

The students enjoyed the forum and would attend a similar event in the future. It was a great learning experience for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The film gave a voice to the plight of Indigenous youths in Thunder Bay, and initiated dialogue on the impacts of cultural stereotypes, racism and discrimination. There were Information gaps between remote rural and urbanized youths which highlighted the need for effective ways to communicate policies and the changes being implemented to address indentified problems.

The event revealed the importance of making classrooms safe for students to talk about stereotypes, and learn the differences between facts and myths. Even though they were schoolmates, outside class many students formed cliques and stayed within their own peer circles. When topics such as racism, homophobia, discrimination, addictions, mental health, obesity and poverty were discussed in class, some students were not comfortable to speak up. They did not feel the space was safe for them to express their opinions and true feelings about racial and minority problems. Mistrust, shyness as well as rude, opinionated, inconsiderate, prejudiced and socially ignorant peers stifled the level of participation in the classroom. Hence the need to create an empathetic climate that encourages dialogue and rational discussion on controversial issues including cultural stereotypes, racism and discrimination.

From the discussions, it was evident that students were not well informed about the policies and guidelines put in place to improve their learning environment. A majority were not aware of Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and the Accepting Schools Act, and that all schools boards are required to implement measures to ensure an inclusive, accepting and welcoming learning climate for everyone. They all knew about Student Councils, but were not familiar with School Councils and their role. Many did not know that the city had a Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee, a Crime Prevention Council, and a Children’s Charter that outlines what all children deserve to live happy and healthy lives. They also did not know much about the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and the Ontario Anti-Racism Act passed to advance equity and social justice and combat racial discrimination respectively.

43

It was impressive that all the students heard about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and were somewhat familiar with the Calls to Action. Their schools were formally acknowledging the traditional lands they were built on during morning announcements. This reminded everyone that First Nations once occupied this territory, and the treaties signed to co-exist in harmony.

A significant number of delegates knew the RMYC from being part of the Student Working Groups organized by the youth council, and others heard the name through announcements at school to recruit facilitators and note-takers for the forum. A majority were not familiar with the programs, services and activities run by the youth council, the special awards and role played by the RMYC to represent and amplify youth voices on community groups such as Diversity Thunder Bay, the City’s Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee and so forth. .

All the RMYC members who participated in “Coming Together to Talk” were pleased to be part of the planning and organizing committee. Our presence was appreciated, voices heard, ideas listened to, opinions respected and our role valued. We felt safe and were free to speak our minds. It was true collaboration with the adult allies we worked with. They were sincere in their consultations, ready to advise us where we lacked knowledge and experience, gave us time and the space to think and bring back suggestions for further review. We were fully engaged throughout the process and are grateful for the coaching, guidance and trust to make decisions and be responsible for our actions. This enabled us to take full ownership for our portion of the event and be accountable for what we did.

Hosting the forum was a valuable learning experience for all the partners involved. The adult allies gained a lot of information about social issues in the community, current problems and historical factors that have shaped relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups as well as racialized minorities in our society. The RMYC portrayed the youth as leaders, peer mentors and role models capable of achieving great things. This was to motivate the students to be involved in the campaign to create a *Thunder Bay We Want*. The goal was to inspire them to realize they have the potential to act on their passions in life and make a difference.

To build on the success of the event, act on the information shared and the suggestions to make improvements, the youth came up with the following analysis and recommendations:

44

**1. SAFE SPACES FOR YOUTH:**

Young people need safe positive spaces to meet and mix, talk openly without being put down, laughed at, judged and discriminated against. The “Coming Together to Talk” event provided a warm, accepting, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for the youth to get together and communicate freely. It allowed them to have their voices heard, express opinions, share ideas and make suggestions to address issues confronting them. This was particularly important for rural Indigenous students not used to speaking in public and opening up in diverse groups.

Safe spaces are ideal for having truthful discussion on any issue and great for incubating ideas marginalized vulnerable young people want to share. A safe base to plan and organize their own activities encourages them to realize their potential and utilize their talents. Having places they feel comfortable to be themselves nurtures their mental health and wellbeing. They can develop their capacity through training, counselling, receive guidance, supports and access to relevant information to help them make wise choices and responsible decisions. The community can also use the space to meet with the youth and engage them in dialogue.

Safe spaces are more than physical structures. They involve creating a warm, nurturing and respectful social climate where everyone feels welcome, included, accepted and gains a sense of belonging. Friendship, empathy, trust, respect and confidentiality are promoted with the goals of having fair treatment, advancing social justice and treating everyone equitably.

***Therefore:***

The committee involved in organizing "Coming Together to Talk", should build on what students praised about the event -- the safe space provided for effective engagement and meaningful dialogue on important social issues -- and advocate for creating more safer places to solicit their ideas, input and feedback on matters that impact their wellbeing.

\* The event offered space and peer leaders who created a warm and friendly climate for participants to open up on very sensitive and controversial topics they do not normally discuss in public. It was a cordial, educational and informative platform that helped to build bridges of understanding and inspire the healing journey towards reconciliation.

45

\* Youth (drop-in) facilities, schools, recreation centres, community halls, church basements, etc. can be safe places and present platforms for the youth to open up and chat about any issues of interest or concern. However, the right climate is necessary for the youth to feel comfortable to open up and speak honestly about their feelings.

\* Children and youth are a dependent population with no financial capital of their own. On-going funding should be provided to establish and sustain safe facilities needed for healthy interaction, mental wellbeing and proactive ideas to make a difference.

**2. ENGAGING THE YOUTH THROUGH PEER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:**

Young people communicate better with their peers because there is no generation gap. This makes it easy for them to understand what is going on. Therefore training youths as peer leaders (or ring leaders) is an effective way to reach out and connect with other young people. Gangs use this strategy effectively to grow their membership and expand their territory. We can train young leaders as role models who use positive influence to promote healthy lifestyles, good habits, respectable behaviour and character. Positive peer pressure can empower young people to change negative lifestyles and focus on prevention-oriented initiatives.

Youths have energy and enthusiasm to get things done, but lack lived-in practical experience. Feedback from the RMYC members involved in the event confirmed the need for professional development to enhance their capacity as facilitators and presenters. They want more training to learn good communication styles and organizational skills. They also need coaching and guidance to lead interactive group discussions, plan activities, prepare work-plans, run programs, evaluate outcomes and write good reports. They require help to build self-confidence to approach marginalized, vulnerable and disenfranchised youth, give them a voice, collect data and come up with recommendations engage them for positive action.

Young people are a group in transition and require on-going support to keep them involved as they grow from kids to teens to adulthood. Adequate funding is an investment in safe spaces and youth leadership and organizational development is an investment in our future. Positive young leaders can lead by example as role models to counter negative peer pressure, and motivate children and youth to take action and create the change they want to see.

46

***Therefore:***

\* Adult allies involved in hosting the “Coming Together to Talk” event and appreciate the role played by RMYC as peer leaders and mentors should advocate for investment in youth leadership and organizational development initiatives to expand the pool of role models. This requires identifying successful youth focussed and youth-led groups, and supporting them to secure the resources they need to develop pools of peer mentors who reach out to kids and teens with positive influence to make a difference.

\* Groups and organizations involved in hosting “Coming Together to Talk” should work together and secure financial and material resources to engage youths from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and different sexual orientation to develop their capacity as leaders, peer mentors and role models. Trained leaders using a youth-to-youth strategy will mobilize peers to be involved in the *Thunder Bay We Want* campaign.

**3. COMMUNITY STRATEGY: THUNDER BAY CHILDREN’S CHARTER**

Thunder Bay City Children’s Charter and the Child Advocate were established by City Council on June 4, 2004 (pg. 59) to ensure that the beliefs and values enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children were maintained at the municipal level in co-operation with other orders of government. The Children’s Charter is a guide to what Thunder Bay can do to enhance the well-being of children and youth. It aims to improve living conditions for all children, reduce situations that make them vulnerable, support them to stay in school, help them to be healthy and feel safe, and lay the foundation for a better and prosperous future.

Thunder Bay Children’s Charter (page 59) is on display at City Hall by the Council Chambers. But, not much is happening since the Children's Coalition prepared the last report in 2010. During the 10th anniversary of the Children's Charter (2014), the RMYC contacted City Council for a progress report and got no response. Things turned around in 2015 after new Council members were elected into office and Councillor Frank Pullia took over the Children's Advocate portfolio. He met with the RMYC and groups such as the Child Care Task Force and the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. From the consultations he prepared a report presented to City Council on December 18, 2017 that had the following recommendations:

47

"Bring back the Children's Charter Coalition that used to be under the stewardship of the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, but has not been operational since it's last report in 2010. It is recommended that the coalition now be under the leadership of the City of Thunder Bay through the Child Advocate and in collaboration with other community organizations dealing with children and youth, and city departments as needed like the Crime Prevention Council, the Anti-Racism Committee, the Recreation and Youth department, the City Clerk’s office, etc."

The RMYC endorses these recommendations as a strategy for the City to advance the status of children and youth. In the light of what the City has been going through in regards to youth safety, The City’s Child Advocate can play a leading role in monitoring progress with regards to the Thunder Bay Children’s Charter, and recommendations from *Coming Together to Talk,* the *Coroner's Inquest* (into the deaths for 7 First Nations boarding students attending school in the city) ‘*The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence’, ‘Feathers of Hope’ and the ‘Hair Story’* and so forth - the RMYC was involved in to enhance the status and wellbeing of children and youth.

The RMYC is aware of the limited political pressure high school students who run the youth council exert on politicians. Being under 18 years of age and regarded as minors, they cannot use their votes to select Councillors/candidates sympathetic to their causes.

***Therefore:***

Adult allies who worked with the RMYC at the forum should back the youth council’s call for City Hall to implement recommendations by the Thunder Bay Children's Advocate as follows:

\* Thunder Bay City Council should use the Children's Charter as a guide and invest in the wellbeing of children and youth today for better citizens tomorrow. City Hall should show leadership in this regard and mobilize the whole community to support our most valuable human resource for the future. The Child Advocate should be reinstated and tasked to identify groups with a track record of doing credible work to complement the Children’s Charter, then recruit, hire, sub-contract and fund them adequately so that we collectively achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the Thunder Bay Children's Charter.

48

\* The City should conduct on-going audits of what exists in the community in regards to services, programs and supports for children and youth, and convene forums for ‘stake-holders’ (community groups, agencies, individuals, etc.) working with kids and teens to share their successes and best-practices. Gaps and shortfalls should be identified and problems addressed accordingly. Thunder Bay Children's Advocate should prepare an annual report to keep the community updated on the progress.

**4. BOARDS OF EDUCATION:**

The Lakehead District School Board and the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board, The Francophone Board of Education and Indigenous Education Authorities were involved in sending 250 students, youth facilitators and note-takers, as well as teachers, Elders and support staff to the *“Coming Together To Talk With Youth*” conference.

The student delegates discussed the school environment in their schools and what is being done to accommodate racialized and Indigenous students and those with disabilities, gender and mental health issues. They also noticed when teachers were creative and made everyone feel welcome, used teaching methods to make lessons more appealing and exciting for students to learn and understand the material being covered. Some schools did a good job of publicizing the changes they were implementing and new developments taking place.

Many students were not aware of the school policies and procedures to deal with racism, bullying, name-calling and discrimination. They were not sure how their complaints would be handled including matters of consent and confidentiality to avoid retaliation. Consequently they did not bother to complain or chose not to report incidents when they happened. This gave the impression of fewer complaints and problems than what really existed.

***Therefore:***

\* School boards that sent students to the forum should read what they said in the work-shops. While there is progress to accommodate diversity and safe spaces are being provided for Indigenous, 2-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (2SLGBTIQ+) students, more work still needs to be done stop racial discrimination, Islamaphobia, bullying and gender-based violence. More action should follow the land acknowledgements to show that Indigenous people matter and we must reconcile.

49

\* Assemblies and home-room announcements should be used regularly and creatively to inform students about the policies and practices in place such as Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and the Accepting School Act, and to remind them of the procedures in place to make schools more inclusive, welcoming, accepting and safer for everyone. Time should be set aside at the beginning of each school term to familiarize students with the code of conduct and discuss grievance procedures to involve students to be part of the solution to the problems they face.

\* School principals should explore new ways to inform students about what boards of education and schools are doing to make all students feel included, welcome, accepted and safe. Teachers should inform students about the changes in the curriculum and explain the reasons as part of the education process. In regards to Indigenous content, knowing the true history of Canada is important and the foundation for reconciliation.

\* Posters with the school’s code of conduct and positive messages about inclusion, acceptance and equity should be publicly displayed to inform and remind all the students about the need to create a welcoming and safe climate. Leaflets with the do’s and don’ts to promote good school behaviour, and what to do when you see, hear or witness racial, homophobic, violent or bullying incidents should be provided to educate, inspire, motivate and empower students to take appropriate action to improve the situation and make a difference in the school climate.

\* Schools should train students as peer mediators to handle misdemeanors, introduce sharing circles and restorative practices to deal with racist incidents, some bullying behaviour and trivial arguments to prevent violence, the need to retaliate, and alleviate the fear of revenge. Such initiatives should be developed as course credits for students sign up, receive training and successfully complete the assigned tasks.

\* Teachers should be encouraged, acknowledged and rewarded for making classrooms safe spaces for all students, (especially shy, marginalized and challenged ones as well as racialized and minority groups) to talk freely about problems they encounter, discuss social issues with respect, and support them to do well in their studies and graduate.

50

\* Schools should encourage teachers to request the professional development training, special assistance and supports they need to manage new and complex issues in the classroom, share success stories, and learn about the best practices to teach and connect with diverse students, deal with school safety, and internalize reconciliation.

\* Teachers should be supported to create materials and develop resources they need to implement a curriculum that complements multiculturalism, diversity and reconciliation, as well as become culturally competent to deal with the trauma, mental health and learning challenges unique to Indigenous students to improve their graduation rates.

\* School boards should utilize local resources such as “Coming Together To Talk”, “Walk a Mile”, “Seeking Bimadiziiwin” and other films that initiate discussion on social issues from an Indigenous perspective and utilize the expertise of staff like Darren Lentz to expand Indigenous and land-based approaches to learning and sharing knowledge.

\* Schools should work with child-welfare agencies to reduce the cross-over effect and liaise with the police, social and health services to support vulnerable students to stay in school. There is need to reduce the negative stigma about in-school feeding and clothing programs, and introducing after-school extra-curricular activities and tutoring services to enhance academic performance and level the playing field for all students.

**5. DIVERSITY THUNDER BAY**

Diversity Thunder Bay initiated this successful forum, and a follow-up is needed to build on what transpired. The focus on high school students was strategic to give the youth a voice and an opportunity to discuss race relations in the community as well as challenge them to come up with solutions to make improvements and create the Thunder Bay we want for the future.

The RMYC has been part of The Lakehead District School Board’s Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) Student Leaders Conferences attended by delegates from the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board and other boards of education across the region. YEDE has provided opportunities for students to focus on diversity and social justice issues, promoting multiculturalism, and building bridges of understanding to achieve reconciliation and equity.

51

*“Coming Together to Talk”* complements what YEDE has done for several years but involved more students and focused on Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, and ways to build bridges of understanding, reconcile and learn to get along.

Recent reports on policing, the Dial 211 Campaign, social media and press coverage on social interactions in the city reveal systemic racism and confirm the existence of racial tensions with Indigenous people in particular. This was picked up by the national media which has ranked Thunder Bay at the most racist city in the country.

Groups such as Diversity Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee, Indigenous groups and multicultural associations including the RMYC are working tirelessly to combat racism, improve race relations and eliminate homophobia and all forms of discrimination. Unfortunately many people feel that not enough is being done to address racism and reduce racial tensions. A lack of financial resources is the major factor limiting grassroots and volunteer race relations-oriented groups from making visible contributions to improving race relations and significant accomplishments to eliminating racism. The RMYC’s youth-led race relations initiatives have failed to qualify for funding under the City of Thunder Bay’s Community, Youth, and Cultural Funding Program present criteria intended to support non-profit organizations in the social service, youth, and cultural sectors, as well as to individual artists undertaking projects in the community.

***Therefore:***

\* Diversity Thunder Bay (DTB) as the lead group for this initiative should connect with the various institutions mentioned in the report for feedback and develop a plan of action for follow-up. We need to develop strategies to implement ideas and suggestions from the forum so that the youth voices and recommendations are not in vain.

\* DTB should link with the Lakehead District School Board and explore ways to collaborate in co-hosting a follow up event. This can be another *“Coming Together To Talk”* as part of, or in place of YEDE. A joint venture with stakeholders will pull resources together, show interest to work with the youth, and support their involvement in reconciliation and social justice issues to create a fairer and more equitable society.

52

\* Diversity Thunder Bay should liaise with the City of Thunder Bay’s Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee to publicize the work being done to improve race relations, and jointly approach Thunder Bay City Council to create a special fund for local groups working to combat racism and discrimination in the city. Thunder Bay has been labelled the most racist city in Canada. Dedicating funds for specifically fightig racism will improve the chances of waging an effective anti-racism and racial harmony campaign.

\* Diversity Thunder Bay should work with the RMYC and other “*Coming Together to Talk”* partners to review the status of Thunder Bay’s Children’s Charter and the City’s Children’s Advocate. The document is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is a special reference guide for the community. There has been no action on the Thunder Bay Children’s Charter since the current City Council took office in 2018, and no-one has been assigned the Children Advocate’s portfolio. The RMYC is appealing to DTB and all the adult allies to advocate for the Children’s Charter and lobby City Hall to implement the Children Advocate’s recommendation. (Pg. 60-63)

\* The Diversity Thunder Bay Education Committee should lead the way and continue exploring opportunities to engage the youth in dialogue about their priorities, advocate for safer spaces for kids and teens to grow together and learn to get along, network with partners and adult allies to involve institutions such as schools, social service agencies, the police and so forth as vanguards for multiculturalism, diversity and equity, and mobilize the general public to play an active role to enhance reconciliation.

**6. THE RMYC / YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES**

After being involved in planning, organizing, facilitating and preparing the *“Coming Together to Talk”* report*,* the RMYC will work on the issues identified by the students, and collaborate with other partners to address the problems discussed that impact children and youth.

**Therefore:**

The RMYC should serve as an inclusive voice for the youth, consult them regularly to amplify their priorities, represent them on advisory boards and committees to advance their interests and concerns, and mobilize them to act accordingly to create the Thunder Bay we want.

53

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:**

**THE RMYC Experience – A Success Story of Engaging Youth in Anti-Racism Work:**

Since being formed as a legacy of *1985 International Youth Year*, the RMYC has been working with children and youth to promote Multiculturalism and advocate for social justice and equality. The youth council runs a Multicultural Youth Centre as a safe place for young people from different backgrounds to meet, mix, socialize, grow-up together and learn to get along. The norm is to include everyone in the circle, and there is a conscious and deliberate effort to reach out and recruit members from diverse groups when old ones become older and move on.

No one is born a racist or hating other human beings due to the colour of their skin. Racism is learned, and ignorance and fear of the unknown contribute to the problem. There is hope for the future if we work with children to make a fresh start. Generations not taught true Canadian history or those not aware of the *TRC Calls to Action* may not know the facts to change attitudes and opinions. Teaching children about multiculturalism and human rights during their formative years will instill in them appreciation of diversity and respect for all cultures/races.

The RMYC has seen the anxieties, apprehensions and fears when new members first meet. They have their opinions, biases, prejudices and bring along baggage from their background, wherever they come from or whatever they have done. Our strategy is to create a warm and welcoming social environment for them to feel they belong and accepted as special individuals. We have ice-breakers to get members to feel comfortable with each other, and exercises to build bridges of understanding and develop team spirit.

Once trust is established they start to share stories, talking about their interests, concerns, fears, goals, the challenges they face, vision for the future and so forth. In no time, they begin working together to plan and organize their own activities and getting involved in areas they are passionate about. Alliances soon form for on-going support, and it is remarkable to see how new relationships are established between youths from different cultural and racial back- grounds. This is an effective way the youth council breaks down racial and gender barriers, teaches tolerance and respect, and how we can all learn to get along.

54

*The RMYC’s three main goals are:*

1. Giving the children and youth a **voice** so that they have their say to ensure that we understand them, and are not guessing or assuming what they want. An example is asking Indigenous youths/ students to identify their priorities listed on pages 56 - 58.

2. Keeping youth **safe** and making them feel loved -- that they are not alone, are part of a team with friends to protect them for their safety and security.

3. Encouraging and supporting youths to **stay in school and graduate**. Statistics Canada and Correctional Service Canada figures reveal that 89% of young offenders in the federal correctional system have below grade 10 education and 65% have less than grade 8. With such high numbers of school drop-outs ending in the criminal justice system, a good education can make a difference by stopping the negative trends and changing the narrative that feeds cultural and racial stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. The youth council endeavours to nurture the social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of students to realize their true learning potential. At DFC the RMYCruns the After-School Program, and trains ‘Student Ambassadors’ as Peer Mentors to engage them in extra-curricular and academic activities. The peer-to-peer approach has been an effective strategy to enhance the wellness, safety, graduation and achievement of the students involved.

To the RMYC, the Multicultural Youth Centre is a success story of providing an ideal facility for children and youth from diverse backgrounds to hang-out together and be themselves. Since being established in 1992, it has been a safe space to hold meetings, plan and organize activities and host events. It is the base of the youth council’s operations and has been the cradle of creativity including the current initiative to mobilize the youth to engage the community in creating the Thunder Bay we want for the future.

TheRMYC sits on the City of Thunder Bay’s *Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee* and *Diversity Thunder Bay*, and makes multicultural bows of black, red, white and yellow ribbons intertwined to symbolize the beauty of the different colours of the human race united in harmony. The bows are part of the RMYC’s March 21 campaign to commemorate *The* *International Day of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,* and are distributed to Parliament Hill, Queens Park and in Thunder Bay to initiate conversations on racism and racial harmony.

55

Getting youths to share personal experiences about racial discrimination makes the problem real, and silences deniers who want to brush racism aside. We discuss how racism creates barriers that hurt individuals, destroy ambition, stifle talent, impede potential, stir up conflict and divide communities. We challenge the youth to come up with practical ideas to reduce stereotypes, racist attitudes and acts of discrimination. The youth-to-youth approach improves communication among peers and mobilizes them into action. Youth-led programs such as *Girl Power* and *Band of Brothers* enable the RMYC to reach out to kids and teens at risk and guide them to make wise choices and responsible decisions that will improve their lives.

From our discussions, racism and discrimination can sometimes be misunderstood by young people. Actions of incompatibility can be misinterpreted as racism and prejudice. Systemic and institutional racism, out-right blatant racist attitudes, hate speech and hate crimes by white supremacists or skin-heads are different from people exercising personal preference where race, power, control or oppression is not the primary motive. The freedom to choose friends, select who one wants to socialize with, or folks they prefer to hang out with does not have to be interpreted in the same way as racism or acts of racial discrimination.

How people are raised, their behavior, mannerisms, values, beliefs, clothes people wear, basic hygiene, personal tastes and so forth can make individuals incompatible. Thus, when Indigenous or racialized youths are shunned or avoided, they may see it as racial discrimination when it is really differences in interests, tastes, habits etc that is the issue -- not their race. How young people behave and efforts to refine their manners can improve their image and how they are perceived. Polishing up on personal image and behaviour can help to counter cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice and discrimination.

The RMYC encourages the youth to talk about social issues of interest or concern to them. Schooling, literacy, careers, goals, volunteering, social skills, jobs, climate, recreation, racism, fun etc. are all part of the discussions. The idea is to give youth hope and engage them in creating the changes they want to see in society. We are grateful for the United Nations, Human Rights Tribunals, Supreme Court rulings and Commissions of Inquiry that have emboldened community groups fighting for equality and social justice. This has compelled reluctant political leaders to comply, and take a stand against racists and white supremacists.

56

**Appendix B:**

**THUNDER BAY INDIGENOUS STUDENTS’ PRIORITIES**

*The following priorities were identified by Indigenous youths surveyed by the RMYC in 2018. Peer focus groups, social media, and questionnaires were used to gather data in schools, city neighbourhoods and at the Multicultural Youth Centre. The aim was to give Indigenous youths a voice and engage them in dialogue on ways to help them integrate successfully into society.*

1. **Education: staying in school and graduating, job-readiness, careers, professions, trades and work-skills development**. Indigenous youths recognize the value of good formal education to compete for jobs, break the cycle of poverty, and reduce the high incarceration rates among school drop-outs. From a May 16, 2016 article in the Toronto Star, the drop-out rate of Indigenous students was 41% compared to the overall Canadian dropout rate of 10%. On reserves, the dropout rate was 58%. Therefore they need to work harder to close the gap when they move from underfunded reserve schools to city high schools. They also require special programs and supports to transition from school into a more diverse and highly competitive global work-world.

2. **Addictions: dependency on alcohol, drugs, prescription pills and coping with related mental illness.** Colonialism, residential schools, the 60’s scoop, and patronizing policies that destroyed traditional structures with no respect for sovereignty created cultural voids, intergenerational trauma and a sense of hopelessness. With no proactive intervention, dependency on substances and medications to cope with the loss has become a big social problem and health issue among Indigenous people.

3. **Racism / Discrimination / Homophobia**: Racism and hate crimes top the list of negative experiences First Nations youths face in the city. Name-calling, the throwing of objects such as food and beverages (eggs, pizza, coffee), waste, debris, spoons and so forth, are common occurrences and are done with the intention to hurt, humiliate and/or disrespect them. The racist graffiti such as “Kill Indians” painted on a billboard at Intercity Mall -- the same shopping centre that once barred First Nations students from the premises shook many up, and made them feel unsafe. Racism and discrimination by police officers, teachers, store clerks, landlords and so forth, create problems for them in the city. Homophobia is another problem, and two-spirited youths experience discrimination, from all sides -- the social mainstream and their own community.

57

4. **Teen pregnancy:** The youth want more sexual education and counselling to prevent young girls from getting pregnant and having babies they cannot take good care of. Many are familiar with foster care or have not been raised by their biological parents. They have friends dropping out of school to have babies who end up being taken away because they lack parenting skills. Child welfare statistics reveal that there are more Indigenous children in care today that those who went to residential schools, creating a crisis for good foster homes. There are also many newborns with preventable diseases such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), or suffering from drug-addiction withdrawal symptoms. This creates a cycle of kids with behavioural and mental-health problems, thereby contributing to recurrent social problems and welfare dependence.

5. **Safe spaces to hang-out -- free of the temptations of alcohol and drugs, violence and criminal street gang influence**: A lack of good welcoming places to feel safe, meet and mix with positive peer role models and enjoy life in the city drives some youths to hang out with the wrong crowds, or join gangs to avoid loneliness and gain a sense of belonging. First Nation students want to be accepted for who they are, and supported to advance in the social mainstream as everyone else, and not stereotyped or judged as lazy welfare bums, addicts, criminals and so forth. (See page 16)

6. **Peer Leadership Training, Mentoring and Role Model Development:** The impacts of residential schools destroyed families and robbed children of ideal parents and positive role models. First Nations youths in search of families to belong need good peer leaders and mentors instead of gangs. They appreciate positive peer role models who can lead by example and engage them in promoting healthy life-styles to counter negative peer pressure and involvement in self-destructive behaviour. They want positive peer influence through mentoring, guidance and support to make a difference.

7. **Bullying – Cyber bullying, Mental stress, Trauma**: Bullying and lateral violence are common problems among Indigenous youths. This is compounded when they are picked on and harassed because of their culture and race, further creating fear and stress. Cyber-bullying done privately and anonymously using social media is also a growing problem. The shame, embarrassment, annoyance and pain due to spreading falsehoods or sharing private information publicly can result in depression and trauma, making victims vulnerable to depression, self medication, self-harm, and even suicide.

58

8. **Gangs: crime and violence** – Proximity to Winnipeg, home of many First Nations gangs makes Thunder Bay an easy target for recruiting members, some as young as eight years old. Many Indigenous youths are vulnerable to gang influence due to poverty, broken families and addictions, and crime, drug-dealing, prostitution become the means to make a living. Violence, threats, intimidation and extortion are the means to survive. But gang life is not glamorous and feeds the fears and stereotypes in the community. With 89% of young offenders in the federal correctional system having below grade 10 education and 65% with less than grade 8, high numbers of Indigenous school drop-outs lead them to jails which are the major breeding ground for gangs. Staying in school will help to stop the gang cycle.

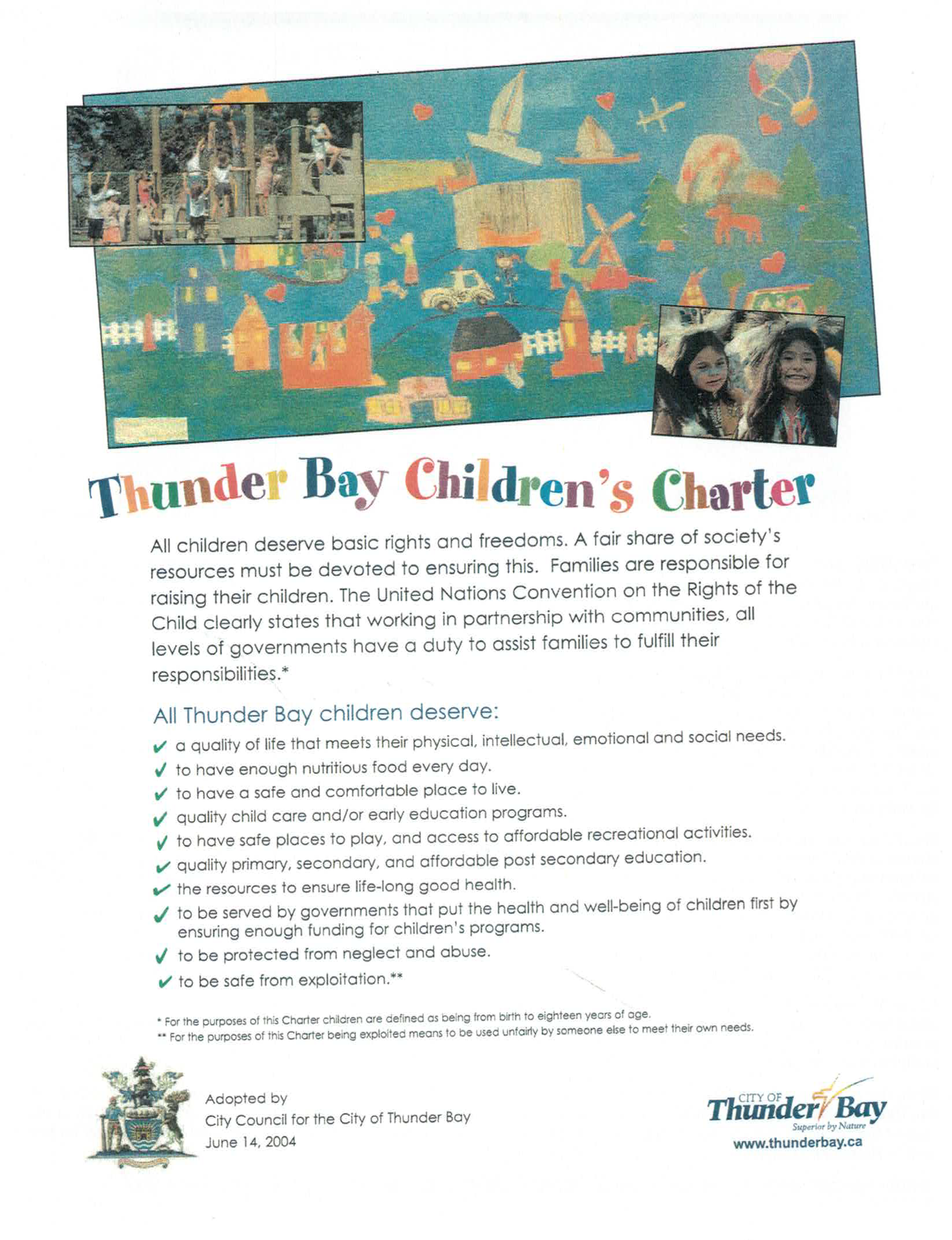
9. **A residence / Living Centre to house boarding students** new to the city will go a long way to help them transition to city life safely. This will address the acute shortage of good housing and related problems due to unsuitable boarding homes that do not encourage or support students to stay in school and graduate. First Nations students want a communal living centre that is well supervised and has adequate resources and supports to create a safe and healthy experience for learning. A homely residence in the city is a priority.

10. **Safer schools and safer neighbourhoods:** First Nations students from small isolated reserves are overwhelmed by the city, scared to use buses, and attend diverse schools much bigger than their whole community. Racism, discrimination, threats and assaults are common and make them feel unsafe. They are afraid to walk in some neighbourhoods and do not report threats, bullying or racial incidents at school or in the community because they feel no one will believe them, nothing will be done, or are afraid of revenge. Consequently, First Nations Education Authorities have curfews to protect their students in the city.

11. **Homelessness / Addictions / Prostitution / Panhandling:** Indigenous youths have a hard time finding good places to rent or stay and decent jobs in the city. Poverty, stereotypes, racism and discrimination lead many to end up on the streets or couch-surfing. Many become vulnerable to crime -- shoplifting, panhandling, prostitution, addictions, drug and human trafficking and so forth for money, a place to stay, or to feed their drug habits.

12. **Cultural (Seven Grandfather) Teachings:** There is growing interest among Indigenous youths to learn and speak their language, and know their culture and traditions for successful integration (not assimilation) into the social mainstream. They want to live by the Grandfather teachings which areuniversal values for humankind that build character, self-worth, self-discipline and collectively enhance the quality of life for humankind.

59

Appendix C

60

**THUNDER BAY CHILDREN’S ADVOCATE REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL**

***December 18, 2017***

**Introduction**

The Thunder Bay Children Charter and the Children and Youth Advocate were established by City Council in 2004 to ensure that the beliefs and values enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of children were maintained at the municipal level in cooperation with other orders of government (See Appendix A).

The role of the Children and Youth Advocate was established to primarily advise City Council about children’s issues in the city, and as such it has no budget and functional authority. Councillor Virdiramo fulfilled the role of Child Advocate from its inception in 2004 until 2014 when councillor Pullia took over the role.

While verbal reports and updates were provided since 2014, the escalation of events dealing with children and especially youth issues in the city in the last year required a more comprehensive report and recommendations to City Council.

**Evaluation and Assessment**

Fulfilling the role of the City’s Child Advocate has been a demanding but rewarding experience with extensive interaction occurring with three major organizations like the Child Care Task force, the Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC) and the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) (see Appendix B) during 2015-2017. Recent tragedies and issues involving Indigenous youth, extended the level of engagement with all major children and youth organizations as well as a multitude of events and meetings as outlined in Appendix C, especially as they relate to at-risk areas and groups in the city.

This intense level of engagement has produced a better understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks being confronted by our city in regards to children and youth. The key ones are identified below and supporting evidence is provided where possible.

61

**Strengths:**

A renewed effort and focus by all children and youth organizations in the city as well as Provincial and Federal government on key issues related to children and youth (ex. Youth Hubs proposal by the Province of Ontario Ministry of Health (youthhubs.ca) and application being led by the Thunder Bay Children Centre as well as an application by the City of Thunder Bay and various stakeholders to the Federal government for a 5-year funding to deal with related issues).

A renewed level of collaboration with Indigenous organizations and political representative as a result of the City’s response to the Indigenous Youth Inquest, and the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations: Examples are the Friendship Agreement with Caribou Lake First Nation; Audit of waterways by a safety committee comprised of community stakeholders and Indigenous representation; the gifting by the City of the former Grandview Home for the Aged to the Matawa First Nation Educational Council for a residence that would include a holistic approach for their high school students attending school in Thunder Bay, and many more.

A heightened awareness and willingness by all children and youth organizations in the city to work together for the benefits of children and youth: This and the areas of weakness and opportunities are the driving force for the request to bring back the Children Charter Coalition.

**Weaknesses/Risks:**

Many gaps in reaching the at-risk groups of children and youth still exist especially in the neighborhood areas like Limbrick, the Blutcher/Windsor/Picton and other (gap analysis recent completed by the HKCC and the report can be provided if requested at healthykidstbay.com).

Inability by some organizations like the Underground Gym and RMYC to access program funding through the regular process as a result of their organizational structure that does not fit the conventional regulatory and accountability process.

.

62

Growing impact of social determinants of health, mental illness, homelessness and poverty in children and youth and limited opportunities by the conventional efforts to reach these groups at risk

The at-risk areas are now seeing an infiltration of gangs with resulting addiction and other dependency problems that make it more difficult for conventional approaches to work.

**Opportunities:**

Protective services are now becoming more proactively engaged with children/youth to bridge the gap of trust and relationship building.

The extensive review and analysis of the many studies done over the years (especially the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and Social Risk Index Data to determine levels of vulnerability in children by the Communities Together for Children (ctctbay.org), and the new emerging trends in successful neighborhood approaches like the Evergreen United Neighborhood in the Simpson/Ogden St. area ([www.evergreenunited.ca](http://www.evergreenunited.ca/)) , are now allowing a deeper understanding and insight in collaborative solutions.

The high level engagement with a wide number of children and youth organizations by the City Child and Youth Advocate, has established a high level of trust and commitment to a more collaborative approach in the community of Thunder Bay and the desire to bring back the Children Charter Coalition.

The Child Advocate has been an active participant and community champion to the Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC) and has raised the issue with the group and discussed the need to bring back the Coalition to fill the gaps that currently exist as the HKCC role does not deal with the social determinants of health and other at-risk issues.

As most of the previous participants are still at the table and to avoid duplication, the Coalition would only meet quarterly and its role would be expanded to include issues that the HKCC is not mandated to cover

63

The Children’s Coalition would include all agencies and organizations that work with children and youth in the city.

A resolution has been provided for City Council consideration for the Committee of the Whole meeting of December 18, 2017. This report should be considered as an addendum to that resolution as it provides the context, analysis, and supporting documentation to the recommendation being made.

**Recommendations:**

Bring back the Children Charter Coalition that used to be under the stewardship of the Thunder Bay District Health Unit but has not been operational since its last report in 2010. It is recommended that the coalition now be under the Leadership of the City of Thunder Bay through the Child Advocate and in collaboration with other community organizations dealing with children and youth, and city departments as needed like the Crime Prevention Council, the Anti-Racism Committee, the Recreation and Youth department, the City Clerk’s office, etc.

Councillor Frank Pullia

Thunder Bay Children’s Advocate

December 18, 2017

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

**QUOATABLE QUOTES**

Nelson Mandela: *“Fools multiply when wise men stay silent”*

Muhammad Ali: “*A man who views the world the same at fifty as he did at twenty has wasted thirty years of his life.”*

George Bernard Shaw: *“Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything”*

Frederic M. Perrin, [Rella Two Trees:](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/26748460) *“School teachers teach what they and others know. Forest teachers - bear, wolf, lynx, beaver, bird, every flower and tree - teach us how to live, love, and grow.”*

64

**Appendix D:**

**INDIGENOUS YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON CANADA 150 (2017)**

1. In 2017, Canada celebrated 150 years of confederation. ‘Settler’ Canadians have benefitted from the land and prospered while Indigenous people, the original inhabitants, have been devastated by colonization and residential schools. They are at the bottom of the social and economic ladders, and barriers continue to exist for them to progress.

2. Colonization resulted in Indigenous people losing their independence, right to self government and self-determination. The government of Canada is responsible for the governance and well-being of Indigenous people and has not always acted diligently.

3. Indigenous people were sent to Indian Residential Schools to be assimilated into European culture. Children as young as five years old were forcibly removed from their parents and communities to attend church and government-run schools far away. They were forbidden to speak their language, practice their culture, and punished for doing so. Many were physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually abused, and some died at school. The legacy of residential schools haunts survivors and the intergenerational impacts have traumatic effects on Indigenous people and their communities today.

4. 60’s Scoop took thousands of Indigenous children from their parents and put them in foster homes or had them adopted away from their communities. This broke families, created an identity crisis and caused attachment problems we see everywhere today.

5. The fate of Indigenous people is determined by the Canadian government. Treaties and Land Rights take a long time to be resolved through the costly legal system, and Indigenous groups are often short-changed in their dealings with governments and corporations seeking to exploit natural resources on traditional lands.

6. The Federal Government is responsible for First Nations’ education and the level of funding provided for Indigenous students is much less than what all other students in provincially-run schools get.

7. On-reserve First Nations children get 38% less funding compared to all other children elsewhere. In 2007, child welfare advocate Dr. Cindy Blackstock took the federal government to court. In 2016 the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled in her favour. In spite of winning the case nothing has changed due to an appeal by the government.

65

8. Murder, violence and social problems are high among Indigenous groups as confirmed by the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

9. Many First Nations reserves are under-serviced with living conditions comparable to Third World countries. They lack basic services such as clean drinking water, high schools, adequate housing, good health-care, recreational facilities and so forth.

10. There are remote reserves are only accessible by air or winter roads. Flying in basic supplies such as food makes livelihood very expensive. This has an impact on health, education standards, quality of life and life expectancy among Indigenous people.

11. Indigenous suicide rates are the highest in Canada. Immigrants and refugees flock here because of opportunities and the potential to prosper while Indigenous children have lost hope and are ‘killing’ themselves to ‘exit’ a country others see as “paradise”.

12. High school drop-out rates and poor social conditions lead to the over-represented of Indigenous people in jails. In Northwestern Ontario, 75 to 90 per percent of offenders in the Criminal Justice System are Indigenous while their population in Canada is 4%.

13. Indigenous languages and culture are tied to the land and need protection. All groups that have migrated here have their traditions rooted and preserved in their countries of origin. Loss of Indigenous languages and traditions in Canada will make them extinct

14. High poverty rates in a rich country and marginalization from the mainstream are realities among Indigenous people since colonization. The over-representation in numbers of school drop-outs, unemployment, homelessness, mental health, addictions, preventable diseases and so forth make Indigenous groups vulnerable and put them at greater risk compared to other Canadians. There is a lack of commitment and willingness to invest in addressing the economic and social disparities while we profit from the natural resources on their lands.

15. Indigenous people face racism and discrimination in their own country. Since colonization, Eurocentric values of superiority and privilege have presented Indigenous groups negatively in spite of their contributions to the development of Canada. Their stories are not in the school curriculum, and our history is biased from a colonial point of view. The media and movies perpetuate stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes that exist to this day. Governments have been reluctant to address the inequities were it not of pressure from the United Nations, Human Rights and Supreme Court rulings.

66

**Appendix E:**

**RECONCILIATION: PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER’S FULL APOLOGY ON BEHALF OF CANADIANS FOR THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**

“The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history. For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools.  Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.  These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child".  Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.  Most schools were operated as “joint ventures” with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches.  The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities.  Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed.  All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities.  First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools.  Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language.  While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

67

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered.  It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures.  Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation.  Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this.  We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this.  We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this.  We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you.  Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long.  The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country.  There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly”.

*The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada House of Parliament, Ottawa Wednesday, June 11, 2008*

68

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Barack Obama: *“Learning to stand in somebody else’s shoes, to see through their eyes, that is how peace begins.”*

**The “Coming Together to Talk With Youth” planning and organizing committee members:** Ayoola Adewuyi, Yamaan Alsumadi, Cornelius Beaver, Walid Chahal, Ellen Chambers, Anna Chief, Lee-Ann Chevrette, Jayal Chung, Jackie Corbett, Allison Fiddler, Jocelyn Fiddler, Tesa Fiddler, Amir Golrokhian, Leslie Hynnes, Brian Hyytiainen,Violet Kitakijick*,* Daniel Lee, Ann Magiskan, Moffat Makuto, Francine McKenzie, Skylene Metatawabin, Levina Mishenene, Ashley Nurmela, Jerri-Lynn Orr, Kay Ostamas, Annette Pateman, Brenda Reimer, Aarianna Roberts,Ardelle Sagutcheway, Tim Shelley, Harasees Singh, Anna Torontow, Rhonda Turbide, Wendy Wang, and Heran Zhao -- **want to thank…**

**… our sponsors:** *Diversity Thunder Bay, Lakehead University, The Lakehead District School Board, City of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario and The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)****…* and**

***…*the following RMYC members and volunteers who worked on the project as facilitators, note-takers, resource people and summer students to review, proof-read and edit this report:** *Ayoola Adewuyi, Zahraa Alsumadi, Chance Angus, Jadyn Bellavance, Deborah Benjaw, Liette Chapman, Mya Dixon, Gillian English, Benjamin Fedoruk, Allison Fiddler, Amir Golrokhian, Nelson Hamilton, Jaron Howels, Jacie Indian, Heva Ismail, Alexis Kakegumick, Violet Kitakijick, Hailey Keough, Linda Kwandibens, Julian Mamakeesic, Cody Michel, Levina Mishenene, Bryce Meekis, Illa Meekis, Zeyad Mohammed, Kaia Monias, Meghan Nadin, Sam Nodin, Dennis Orr, Mathew Ostberg, Ulyssia Susin, Euan Pound, Alexis Sakanee, Harasees Singh, Abby White, Danyka White and Heran Zhao.*

**Special thanks to:** *RMYC Past President Wendy Wang for compiling the data, preparing the drafts for review and publishing the document.*

***For more information or inquiries about this report please contact:***

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) Multicultural Youth Centre, 511 E. Victoria Avenue .Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 1A8

Telephone: (807) 622-4666 Fax: (807) 622-7271

E-mail: [rmyc.help@gmail.com](mailto:rmyc.help@gmail.com) [or manwoyc@tbaytel.net](mailto:%20%20or%20%20%20%20manwoyc@tbaytel.net)

 RMYC Team: Facilitators and Note-takers at a pre-conference orientation session.

.Conference Organizing Committee members wearing “*Coming Together To Talk -- Thunder Bay Want”* sweatshirts provided by the RMYC and distributed to all the participants