

# Regional Multicultural Youth Council



Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

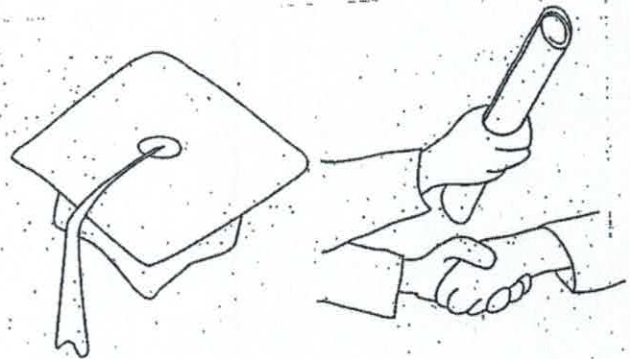
## SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENTS (SFS) TO REDUCE SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES

*(With a focus on Indigenous, Racialized, Minority and Vulnerable Students)*



*Education  
is the most  
powerful weapon  
which you can use  
to change the world.*

*Nelson Mandela*



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

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

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

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## SUGGESTIONS TO KEEP STUDENTS IN SCHOOL AND GRADUATE

FROM THE RMYC STUDENT WORKING GROUP MEETINGS 2020 -- by Gurleen Chahal

### (1) Background:

*A news article published in the local paper dated March 29, 2017 revealed that School boards in Thunder Bay and across northwestern Ontario are confronting a high rate of student absenteeism. Data supplied to the boards by the Ministry of Education showed that nearly 22 percent of elementary school students are chronically absent, a rate considerably higher than the average of 13 percent for school boards across the province.*

*A student is deemed to be chronically absent after failing to attend classes at least twice a month on average over the course of the school year. Research shows students who have high absenteeism in elementary school carry the problem over into their high school years where it often leads to dropping out.*

*"Absenteeism impacts student learning and consistency as well. It's hard to give a student the support they need when there are many absences," said Colleen Kappel, Superintendent of Education at the Lakehead District Public School Board, during an interview with [tbnewswatch.com](http://tbnewswatch.com).*

Our publicly funded education system must appeal to all students and fulfill the needs and aspirations of all citizens. A good education facilitates social mobility. It opens doors to careers and employment, improves the standard of living, and the quality of life. Indigenous and racialized groups as well as other minorities have not been fully accommodated in our mainstream education system that is Euro-centric. Consequently these same groups are over-represented among school drop-outs. Individual teachers and schools have been trying to do their best to encourage vulnerable students to stay in school and graduate. But the policies and practices in place are still colonial designed to promote white values and privilege. The curriculum has been designed to complement and maintain the status-quo. Teachers working in the system have been educated and trained accordingly -- to mainstream values that carry social biases, cultural stereotypes, prejudice, and promote racial discrimination.

Some changes are now being implemented to address racial inequities in the education system well articulated in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, and long amplified by racialized and minority groups protesting to demand racial justice, equity and respect in the Canadian multicultural mosaic. The government, policy makers and educators are responding, but the actions have been reactionary rather than proactive to deal with systemic problems deeply rooted in European colonial values and attitudes. Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and Accepting Schools Act, and local efforts such as the Indigenous Education Advisory Committees, Elder's Council, Graduation Coaches, Aboriginal Achievement Tutors and so forth are welcome improvements. But more work still needs to be done to enhance cultural competence among teachers and staff, teach them about anti-racism, and sensitize them to the unique needs of marginalized racialized and minority groups. This is the way to develop a trusting nurturing relationship with students.

## **( II ) SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENTS (SFS)**

The RMYC wants students to stay in school and graduate and has a Student Working Group (SWG) comprised of representatives from all Thunder Bay high schools to promote Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and the Accepting Schools Act in local schools. The aim is to improve the school climate for every student to realize their true learning potential and attain a valuable education to enhance social mobility and create a brighter future.

During Student Working Group meetings in 2020, students discussed issues that contribute to absenteeism, high failure rates, school dropouts, and came up with the following suggestions:

### **1. Housing, High-risk Neighborhoods and Home Support Concerns**

Community Housing areas such as Academy, Limbrick, Windsor, and other high-risk neighborhoods are filled with loud noises and disturbances at night. This prevents students from concentrating on and completing school work and assignments, and it also disrupts their ability to have a peaceful nights rest. This problem often translates into students feeling too tired, sleepy and unmotivated to attend school. Oftentimes they miss school buses in the morning, and end up not attending classes. If they stay at school longer for tutoring or to catch up on work missed, they will not catch the school bus home -- the easiest way to get home safely.

Students in low-income and high-risk neighbourhoods sense stigma and claim differential treatment because of where they live. Those who move from other areas to community housing projects notice differential treatment after relocating. Some teachers and guidance counselors underestimate their potential because of where they reside. They generalize low income life-styles and judge them as amounting to nothing. They do not acknowledge their talents or nurture their potential. They see teachers going out of the way to assist white students or those from more affluent areas. Consequently, many believe that they cannot perform as well as their peers, give up working hard, and end up quitting school altogether.

**SFS:** Schools should initiate a "period 6" where the library, guidance room or gym, can remain open so that students can catch up on school work and have a safe space to unwind, and relax. Schools such as Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School have initiated an After School Program with safe spaces for students to hang out and participate in extra-curricular activities that include tutoring, food, fun and games. Students find this very beneficial and feel that by having more peer mentors and tutors to help with homework it will increase school retention and graduation.

\* Peer leaders, mentors, and tutors trained to reach out to other students would be an asset, and they should wear special vests, t-shirts, nametags, buttons, etc. for easy identification. They should receive training on communication skills, guidance, support, and incentives for helping others and promoting services among their peers.

\* Creating a nice warm, friendly, and welcoming climate at school with role models to motivate students who are slacking, and inspire those struggling in class will encourage them to seek the help that they need. Knowing where the supports are, who the peer helpers are, and when help is available will encourage access and make a difference.

\* Adding food, snacks, and refreshments will boost attendance and encourage students to stay around longer and benefit from the programs, services, and the activities available. This will certainly increase the number of busy students who are involved in positive extracurricular activities -- and it will decrease the number of students rushing from school to shopping malls, hanging out on the streets and engaging in risky activities.

## 2. **Transportation for students:**

Transportation is a barrier for many students. It is critical to ensure the safety of students participating in extracurricular activities to enhance their academic performance. Most parents will not allow their children to stay at school longer if they do not have a way of getting home safely. Students will also feel more comfortable to stay at school after classes when they have reliable transportation that they know will take them home safely. This is particularly important in the fall and winter when it gets dark quite early and the weather is too cold to walk home.

**SFS:** Schools should petition the city to allow students with high school identification cards to be given free transport from the hours of 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. to allow for easy transport to/from school and school-sponsored activities.

\* Groups such as the RMYC should lobby City Hall and the Thunder Bay Transit to offer complimentary and discount bus passes for students in high risk areas and from needy families who sign up for tutoring sessions, study/homework groups, and healthy events.

## 3, **Poverty and related negative effects:**

Social inequities persist and the gap between the privileged and the impoverished is growing. parents without money to provide breakfast, or lunch for their children to take to school end up preventing them from attending classes regularly out of fear that teachers and staff who notice this may regard it as abuse and neglect and contact child welfare services.

Poverty goes hand in hand with despair and stress, and any trauma contributes to addiction and related dependency problems. Despite the legalization of marijuana, illicit drugs such as crack, meth, and fentanyl are being sold and heavily used. Gangs and drug dealers have taken over some neighbourhoods and are occupying homes for local drug deals and trafficking. Additionally, alcohol abuse adds noise and disturbances that disrupts the peace and makes many low income areas high-risk and unsafe for children and students.

Poverty and addictions affect students' potential to focus on their studies and do well in school. While families seek help and treatment to heal from addictions, police officers should be more tactful in dealing with crisis situations.

Random and haphazard police interventions can escalate situations and threaten the safety of families and ordinary residents, making them reluctant to speak out and provide key information needed to make arrests and get rid of the drug dealers. This has a negative effect on the children's potential to attend school and learn.

**SFS:** There is an urgent need to tackle poverty and address the ripple effects that perpetuate misery and related social problems. Kids born in impoverished homes have the odds stacked against them due to limited exposure and resources to achieve their full potential to learn. They need extra support to get a good education and make it in life.

\* As we wait for anti-poverty initiatives to take root, interventions such as breakfast and lunch programs should be expanded in schools, and after-school programs in targeted neighbourhoods. It is important to engage kids and teens living in poverty, give them food, a voice, hope, and support them to build their self esteem and confidence.

\* When responding to police calls for help, a crisis response team trained to de-escalate the situation without drastic police intervention, violent assaults and arrests should be deployed. This will help to resolve problems and deal with fear, silence and mistrust when residents are caught in between the violence initiated by gangs and the police.

\* Some students from impoverished areas are already involved in using and dealing drugs for income. It is important to support them with counseling and treatment. Those who experience symptoms of withdrawal that prevent them from going to school are in need of tutoring services that work in a way that helps these students learn and comprehend the information, in order to catch up with their school work. They will also benefit from proactive programs such as the RMYC's Girl Power and Band of Brothers programs where they set goals, are exposed to positive peer role models, and learn to practice healthy lifestyles.

\* Harm reduction strategies should be introduced and promoted in schools. Students should be made aware of ways to minimize risks. Knowledge is power all mediums of communication should be utilized to reach diverse youths with relevant information.

This includes education to avoid laced drugs on the streets. In-person informative talks given by past substance users (not just pamphlets and slideshows) will provide first-hand experiences on the consequences. Students want more succinct information regarding the impact of specific drugs. The information should be easily available and accessible everywhere to stop the cycle and prevent more children from starting to use drugs.

#### **4. Boarding Homes:**

First Nations students from remote northern reserves are billeted in city homes while attending school in urban centres. They need boarding parents who treat them as their own children, because some families just want rent money and do not provide the basics they need. Being young and away from home and family, students are often lonely and need parental care and guidance to stay safe in the city, attend classes regularly, and focus on what they came to do – pursue their education.

Students also talked about poor parenting as a factor distracting them from attending classes and doing well in school. Among many Indigenous families, the impacts of the Residential School System destroyed their capacity to parent and nurture children, tutor them or be interested in how they are doing in their studies. There are micro-aggressions with students being yelled at regularly, and being kicked out of the house in the evening with nowhere to spend the night. Homes are often full of people partying, drinking, and doing drugs, and the social environment does not encourage and support them academically.

**SFS:** There should be safer spaces for students to go when facing a crisis at the home where they live or in cases of personal trouble. A well-advertised emergency contact number should be available at school, youth centres, and other facilities serving children and youth for students to call when the need arises. Vulnerable students should be made aware of safer spaces available in the community to help them, how to contact someone, what to do if they do not have a phone, and ways to get transportation to the safe house. Those with phones should log in the information for easy access and share it with other students who need the help. Students should be encouraged and supported to form networks to share advice, tips and knowledge from practical experiences and stories that will make a difference.



\* Safer space(s) should be accessible to students from the hours of 4:00 p.m. to at least 8:00 p.m. every day. Ideally, the space should provide a place to sleep, have private rooms to talk with other youths for peer support, counselors, Elders, and other adult allies for guidance. There should be computers and Wi-Fi for students to do research and homework. Students say that libraries close early, which limits the amount of time that they can use computers. They also say that libraries are not very youth friendly and welcoming for group chats and discussions, especially when they are Indigenous, racialized, or identify as gay.

*SIDE NOTE: A previous youth rep on the Crime Prevention Council did suggest turning libraries to 24 hour operations and child-safe spaces, but this was not pursued for logistical, staffing, and budgetary reasons.*

\* Boarding home parents need orientation to properly deal with new Native students living away from their families. Those billeting young First Nations students new to the city should be culturally competent, assume the nuclear family role to parent and provide support, to address personal issues, as well as guidance to keep students in school.

*SIDE NOTE: Some students have lived in several different boarding homes each school term, which disrupts their studies. They prefer homes with caring families who treat them as their own children. Students attending Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School want a residence for safety and comfort, and do not feel comfortable using public transport to and from school. They claim this will improve school attendance, retention and graduation.*

\* First Nations Education Authorities sending children to the city for high school should have residences to provide safe, caring, well-supervised homely accommodation for young students to alleviate the culture shock, offer peer support, good supervision, and a positive culturally appropriate living environment, which will allow students to concentrate on their studies without commotions and distractions, and it will allow parents to have peace of mind regarding the well-being of their child.

## 5. Counselling on Courses and Mental Health:

Students claim that they are not being made aware early and explicitly on what courses they need to take to pursue their desired careers. Many need guidance on career options and what subjects to study to realize their employment goals. Those from families with professionals have the advantage of exposure to the work world at home and the planning needed for the evolving job market. This enables them to seek specific advice from school counselors and appropriate coaching from the guidance departments on career paths, and how to be prepared for the changing work world of the future.

Students from low income and dysfunctional homes with no graduates lack successful role models to look up to and to advise them. They need more support to complete high school, require encouragement to go for post secondary education, and guidance on career options. They should be engaged in discussions and need a safe space to open up about their needs and wishes as well as get professional advice on what they need to complete high school and pursue higher education to qualify careers, trades and professions for the work-work.

**SFS:** Academic counselors should explain the differences between attending university and going to college, the credits required to get into specific programs, and how to obtain the necessary high school credits. The counsellors should be culturally competent, socially sensitive, patient, and properly trained to avoid cultural biases, racial conditioning, stereotypes and prejudice.

\* Academic counselling should be distinct from what mental health counsellors do to ensure that the social and emotional needs of students are adequately addressed. Counsellors need to be explicit on what information will remain confidential, and what will be related back to their parents. Counselling should accommodate the unique needs of marginalized, racialized, and vulnerable students who are not part of the social mainstream. In addition to providing information on prerequisite courses for a variety of careers and professions, academic school counsellors should promote the resources available to help students to complete high school and access post-secondary education and trades. This includes compilations of available scholarships, bursaries, grants and other financial supports to facilitate successful transition from high school.

\* Counsellors should follow-up on students who miss classes before they are expelled. If students skip classes regularly, they should be brought in sooner to see counsellors and explain the root causes so that they do not get too far behind in their school work. Home visits should be organized to reach out and engage students to be part of the solution to the challenges they are facing. Counsellors should compile information and come up with recommendations to make a difference in the students' lives.

\* Students feel that their mental health needs are not being fully addressed. Not enough counsellors are available to meet the demand. New appointments are often cancelled because of those already being serviced and have formed a connection with the counsellors. It should be emphasized to counsellors that appointments should not be cancelled. If possible, have the same counsellors in the same school consistently instead of rotating them between schools. This will allow continuity and build trust.

\* Both academic and mental health counseling must focus on encouraging and enabling all students to realize their full potential, to learn and prepare them for equal access, equal opportunities, and equal participation in all sectors of employment in society. There should be no conscious or unconscious biases, cultural stereotyping or racial prejudices to arbitrarily stream students and assign easy classes simply to let them pass and earn credits. There should be safe places for students to feel comfortable to access services and express themselves freely without fear of stigma and labels.

#### **6. Diverse Curriculum with Universal values, Life, Social, Civil, Parenting skills etc:**

Schools have maintained the colonial legacy by adhering to a Euro-centric curriculum and mode of teaching that reinforces white superiority and privilege. The realities, needs, values, and true history of racialized groups including Indigenous peoples and other minorities have not been given the prominence they deserve in a multicultural society to level the playing field. Thus, our publicly funded educated system has perpetuated inequities that still exist today.

The colonial education system has its roots from a homogeneous society that shares the same perspective about humanity, family backgrounds, and economic status that is incompatible with the diversity in society today.

Students in the classrooms do not have the same experiences, or the same mainstream stable up-bringing that others take for granted. They deserve a curriculum to rectify policies and practices that destroyed the Indigenous families, enslaved black people, and mistreated other racialized minorities to be socially mobile and join the mainstream.

Students from stable affluent homes do well in social-skills, life-skills, and work-skills because they have role models and the resources to experience a successful life from early childhood. Those from impoverished broken and dysfunctional families struggling to make ends meet lack parental role models to encourage, guide and groom them for success. Lacking the basics such as food causes students from more impoverished neighbourhoods to become more vulnerable. It is crucial for students from these neighbourhoods to learn discipline, manners, healthy lifestyles and qualities to prepare them for jobs and formal employment in Canada's competitive economy.

**SFS:** Growing multiracial families, broken homes, and teen moms need a diverse curriculum that includes parenting skills. All children need stable homes and caring parents as the foundation for discipline, development of character, motivation, work ethics, learning life skills, social skills, and life lessons. Schools can fill the gaps created when children grow up in dysfunctional homes with parents who are unable to prepare them for the future, support them to do well in school and make it in the work world.

\* Schools should teach universal values we share as human beings, bring us together as citizens, and eliminate artificial differences that lead to cultural stereotypes and racial inequities. Being publicly funded, the education system should fill the gaps and promote civility, respect, decency, healthy lifestyles, cleanliness, no littering the environment, as well educate the nation about stereotypes, anti-racism, prejudice, and discrimination.

\* Schools should hire qualified and culturally competent teachers and staff who are able to relate to, and communicate well with diverse students, serve as role models, and significant others for growing numbers of kids in care or living in dysfunctional homes to be better. There is a need to focus of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism mainstream society had been conditioned to accept through socialization and the education system.

\* More resources like 'google' classroom should be available for students to catch up on missed classes and school materials. Furthermore, lessons from prior days should be outlined clearly to students with advice on how to catch up. Late assignments with good cause should be accepted for at least partial credit to keep students motivated.

\* Consult students to get their input and ideas on the help they need, provide relevant information to enable them to make wise services and responsible decisions, as well as support and empower them to be part of the solution to the problems that they face.

### **7. After School Programs and Extra-Curricular Activities:**

Our society is divided between the have and the have-nots. Those who can afford to, enrich their children by enrolling them into special programs and affluent extra-curricular activities.

Kids and teens from low income homes lack the financial resources to pay the fees and participate in organized sports and quality recreational activities. This leaves them bored and vulnerable to cultural stereotypes, racial prejudices, and discrimination. This further divides the community, fuels tensions, and fans the flames of conflict and the potential for violence.

**SFS:** Schools should stay open longer after regular classes to provide safer spaces for students from dysfunctional homes and noisy neighborhoods to hang out and do their homework, receive tutoring, participate in positive extracurricular activities, eat healthy snacks, and spend some quality social time. Schools can recruit volunteers, community groups, and social service agencies that enjoy working with racialized, vulnerable, and minority youths to run after-school activities and help to supervise the students.

\* Students should be encouraged to plan their own activities and trained to develop leadership and organizational skills. They need support and guidance to organize fun events that promote healthy lifestyles, enhance character, teach self-discipline, respect, and how to get along. It is a very effective strategy to create peer mentors and role models who can lead by example and use positive influence to engage other students and communicate with them without the barriers and labels often associated with the generation gap.

\* To involve more students who do not normally participate in extracurricular activities at school, there should be more effort placed into making students aware of the different programs that are available to them. This can be done through daily announcements by homeroom teachers, posts on social media, and broadcasted over the public address system. There should be a conscious deliberate effort to target vulnerable students and impoverished areas with appropriate after school initiatives. There should be big calendars located in schools listing events of the week. These posters should be prominently displayed near the counselling and principal's office by the hallway, and kept up to date with lunchtime/after school activities for the week. Social media and word of mouth should also be used extensively to engage students.

#### **8. Enhancing Reconciliation:**

Our publicly funded education system has contributed to the ignorance in society about Canada's true history in regards to Indigenous peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action requires curriculum transformation that builds the self-esteem, self-confidence, and capacity of Indigenous children by teaching that they matter. The truth about Indigenous history that has been taught to past generations should be included in a holistic education system centering on human dignity and equity will fulfill our Canadian Multiculturalism goal of equal opportunities, equal access and equal participation by all citizens in every aspect of Canadian life.

The rise in racism reflects major failures by schools to eradicate the ignorance that feeds cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice, and discrimination. The education system has been biased against Indigenous peoples, racialized, and other minority groups by presenting a one-sided story of discovery, colonization, and 'civilizing' the nation. While producing scientists conquering space and inventing electronic gadgets at unprecedented rates, creating a skilled workforce for industries and bureaucrats who have maintained the power and privilege in mainstream institutions, it has failed dismally to practice equity, promote human rights, and foster racial justice.

The education curriculum needs to incorporate more Indigenous content as well as include the history and perspectives of racialised and other minority groups,

to enlighten the nation and reduce the ignorance about the first peoples, and promote land-based approaches to learning that appeal to First Nations students, encourage them to attend school regularly, do well in their courses, and graduate. There should be a conscious deliberate effort to right past wrongs through education by teaching Canada's history from an Indigenous perspective and acknowledging the traditional lands we are on to show respect and complement the nation's commitment to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

**SFS:** Schools should teach everyone about the Indigenous peoples' experiences as part of our true Canadian history. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action -- Recommendations # 62-65 on education should be adopted as the blueprint to guide us on how to proceed in order to transform the education system for the future.

\* Teachers should understand the legacy of Residential Schools and the intergenerational impacts that it had on the students in their classrooms. They should be trained to deal with trauma and participate in professional development sessions to see Indigenous kids and teens for their potential rather than through the social mainstream lenses. Educators should treat them fairly without bias, stereotypical, prejudicial, or discriminatory practices, as is the norm in predominant Canadian society. The goal should be to reduce the 41% High school drop-out rate of Indigenous students compared to the Canadian drop-out rate of 10%.

#### **9. Creating a Climate for Learning:**

Schools should do more work to promote *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and the *Accepting Schools Act* -- adopted to create an inclusive and accepting learning climate for all students to realize their true learning potential. Students should be aware of what is being done to enhance their wellness, safety, and achievement and they should be encouraged to get involved in initiatives to make learning fun and make a difference.

**SFS:** Schools should be more aggressive in promoting *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy / Accepting Schools Act* to the students and constantly update students on what is being done.

Teachers, staff, school councils, and student councils should be actively involved in engaging students and getting them to participate in activities, which will enhance the creation of a more welcoming, accepting, and safer learning environment for everyone. They should also monitor the impacts and create easy ways to provide feedback, and gather input to make improvements.

\* Schools should support inclusive student clubs/groups that reach out and involve more Indigenous, racialized, and minority students in extra-curricular activities that will have a positive impact on race relations, build bridges on social understanding, and create an example of what our future multicultural society should look like.

\* Schools should create easy ways to solicit suggestions, gather input and feedback to change what is inaccurate, and make improvements to teach the truth and be inclusive.

\* Our publicly funded schools should hire and promote teachers who reflect diversity, understand multiculturalism, believe in reconciliation, and inspire all students to believe in themselves and motivate them to enjoy learning and come to school every day.

\* Schools should create easy ways to solicit suggestions, gather input and feedback to change what is inaccurate, and make improvements to teach the truth and be inclusive.

#### **10. Thinking Outside the Box:**

We need to do things differently to get progressive results. Racism has been institutionalized in policies and practices rooted in colonization that promoted European and white culture as superior to all others, and our education curriculum has shaped these values for generations. Schools and teachers have educated generations of citizens using the system that has advanced white privilege and racial biases.

The education system has taught citizens, produced leaders of our country and administrators of mainstream institutions who have maintained the status-quo. Therefore, to get the change we want and achieve equality, we need educators who think outside the box and promote an inclusive curriculum that challenges social biases, cultural stereotypes and racial prejudices.



Traditionally, nuclear families have been responsible for raising children, and this has worked well in homogeneous societies sharing similar parental structures, values, and norms. Homes were the place to teach family values, promote culture, mould character and so forth. Extended family members always stepped in to help when needed to provide social stability, cohesion and bonding.

Unfortunately, society has changed becoming more diverse with growing numbers of homes being dysfunctional due to the legacy of residential schools. Indigenous families were damaged and the intergenerational impact on their children continues to affect their potential to stay in school and learn. The same can be said about the Black families descendants of slaves whose families were broken by the slave trade.

The education system has not accommodated these situations and not prioritized their needs. Unfortunately, more Indigenous children continue to be taken from their homes by Children's Aid Societies more in the present day than were at the height of the Residential School System. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Indigenous children under 15 years of age make up four (4) percent of the provincial population, but thirty (30) percent of the children in foster care.

The facts are 41% of Indigenous youth are dropping out of school compared to the overall Canadian dropout rate of 10%. There is no genetic evidence that suggests that Indigenous students cannot perform as well as other cultural and racial groups. The mainstream education system is certainly failing them. Continuing to do things the same way will only produce the same outcomes we have seen through the years. Hence, we need to 'think outside the box' and come up with strategies to combat anti-Indigenous racism in our current Canadian society.

It is unfortunate that Indigenous groups that resented Indian Residential Schools and wanted them abolished to facilitate the integration of their children in the mainstream education system are now setting up their own schools in urban centres. Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, Matawa Education and Care Centre, and Lac des Mille Lacs Education Centre in Thunder Bay have been established in Thunder Bay to improve the learning potential of Indigenous students and boost their school retention and graduation rates.

The same barriers are similar to what Black youths experience in the mainstream education system. After fighting for desegregation, there is an Africentric School in Toronto established to better engage and support Black students who have historically performed below average, more likely to be labelled with special education needs, suspended and expelled, and streamed into programs that do not lead to university or college. The parents know that a good education is a passport to social mobility and a better standard of living. On the other hand, school drop-outs are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system and correctional services, which undermines community safety and threatens our security. The resulting culture of poverty and lifestyle further reinforces the negative cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice and discrimination.

**SFS:** When families are broken and dysfunctional and fail to inspire, discipline and guide their children, school is the next best place to teach positive qualities using positive role models and significant others who believe in equality and social justice to instill cultural pride and make Indigenous, racialized and other minority children feel they matter and they belong to the society that has excluded them. Our publicly funded schools should fill in the gaps, help to correct the historical damage done, share family values, mould character and teach social-skills to counter the bad habits that have been learned, and the negative lifestyles adopted. Positive role models can help to empower and integrate youth successfully into mainstream society.

\* There is a need to break the cycle regarding the increasing apprehensions of children from families by Children's Aid Societies into foster care. We are aware of the crossover effect, an established trend where more children in care are transitioning into the criminal justice system. Schools can play a key role in this regard considering approximately 90 per cent of young offenders admitted to the federal correctional institutions that they 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. This needs to change because education opens doors to social mobility and progress. Teachers are role models to their pupils and are very influential in imparting knowledge, values and shaping attitudes since citizens of all walks of life, careers, trades and professions all pass through the school system to achieve their goals and realize their dreams.

- \* The education curriculum must promote the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, teach the Seven Sacred Teachings to enhance our multicultural values. Land and nature-based learning that appeals to Indigenous students should be included for rural students to enjoy school, and improve attendance. Mr. 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 is an example of 'thinking outside the box'. Visits to reserves and participation traditional teachings should be part of the curriculum.
  
- \* Schools should teach restorative practices and train student leaders to mediate conflict. This will directly involve students in resolving disputes, solving arguments, and diffusing anger/tensions about racism, homophobia and bullying by talking things out instead of violence. Peer mediation encourages victims and perpetrators to discuss the problem and seek compromises with the help and support of friends. Solutions reached put closure to the case, facilitate healing, eliminate fear of retaliation, and retribution.
  
- \* Course credits and community hours should be awarded to students working on school and community projects that enhance acceptance, inclusion, wellness, safety, and graduation. Students can learn restorative practices, mediation, character development, and ways to improve the school climate for everyone. In-school placement programs should be developed for students struggling with attendance and at risk of dropping out to earn credits for helping to plan, organize, and participate in activities they like and inclusive events they enjoy with the guidance of teachers or peer mentors.
  
- \* School boards should be more aggressive in hiring diverse teachers to serve as role models for traditionally excluded groups. They should work with teachers unions to retain the best educators and culturally competent staff who motivate, inspire, and guide students to be the best they can be. Indigenous and other racialized and minority students need to see significant others they identify with to enhance communication and share teachings that should be done by parents in the home. Having teachers from different backgrounds working together also shows racialized and minority students that it is possible to work together, respect each other, and learn to get along.

- \* Cultural competency should be prioritized in the criteria for hiring, promoting, and retaining teachers and school principals. Biased or insensitive teachers must be let go. Unqualified and racist teachers alienate students, stifle the potential to learn, kill ambition, and destroy the desire to attend classes, and enjoy learning. We believe that the best teachers are those who help students enjoy learning, stay in school, and graduate.
  
- \* There should be adequate investment in kindergarten and elementary education programs for impoverished and marginalized students to provide a strong foundation for learning, and offer incentives to school boards to keep students in school. Research studies confirm that early education lays the base for learning and enjoying school. Culturally competent teachers enhance the detection of problems such as reading, math, and writing among minority students. Poor academic performance in early grade tests can predict school dropouts. Half of all high school drop-outs are identifiable in Grade 7.
  
- \* We need to support proactive youth programs, after-school activities, and provide resources and interventions students want. Having a say in the services and supports they need gives them ownership and a stake in the decision-making process.
  
- \* There should be incentives to motivate under-achieving students and encourage Indigenous, racialized, and other minority students to attend school regularly. Regular attendance leads graduation which paves the way to post secondary education. Schools maintaining high attendance levels should be rewarded with more funding, and those with high drop-out rates should be challenged to improve and funded accordingly.
  
- \* The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should have Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, Canadian Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Charter of Rights, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action integrated into teacher training curriculum, and the best teacher-trainees selected are hired to advance our national values of diversity, equality and respect and 'teach a new generation of students the truth about our shared history'. Schools educate the nation, promote Canadian identity, and shape our collective social values. We need teachers who believe in social justice and racial equality and educate all students accordingly.

\* There should be discussions about school uniforms in public schools to promote inclusion, team-spirit, decency, and neatness. Getting rid of the 'fashion contest' eliminates social class labelling, discrimination, and exclusion due to attire. School uniforms reduce incidents where students from disadvantaged homes skip classes because they do not have suitable clothes to fit in. This is the feedback from RMYC members attending the Thunder Bay Catholic District Schools Board who wear uniforms.

\*.Educators are frontline workers in the system should embrace diversity, believe in equality and mutual respect, be committed to and accountable for producing enlightened citizens, leaders, and a work-force of teachers, police officers, administrators, policy makers and so forth, who break the cycles cultural bias and racial injustice. Thus, teachers should reflect our communities and promoted based on merit.

#### **11. Collaborating to Achieve Racial Justice and Equitable Outcomes:**

For mainstream groups with low drop-out rates, the education system is working quite well and just needs a few tweaks. However, for Indigenous, Black and other minority students with dropout rates as high as 41 percent, drastic changes are needed. They see institutional racism as ingrained in the system intentionally designed to benefit the status quo. The mainstream education system is doing precisely what it was intended to do to preserve white privilege. Calls to wait or proceed slowly as change take time have been going for ages and we now have generations of school dropouts wallowing in poverty and perpetuating negative cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice, and discrimination.

In spite of adopting the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, *The Canadian Human Rights Code*, *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*, various studies, complaints and reports reveal that systemic and institutional racism is still prevalent in society. The disproportionate school drop-out rates among Indigenous and racialized groups confirm a systemic problem which has maintained white privilege, perpetuated poverty, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

Change can be accelerated if people who believe in equality and social justice collaborate to combat systemic racism, cultural stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Education eliminates ignorance and fear of the unknown. It opens doors to careers and employment opportunities that eliminate poverty, improve the standard of living and make a difference.

As mentioned earlier, when homes are broken and families are dysfunctional, it is very difficult for the children to get the basic necessities in life that enable them to attend classes regularly, concentrate on their studies, stay in school, and graduate. Learning becomes less enjoyable and more difficult when the system is racist and promotes white supremacy. The odds are stacked against the colonized, oppressed, and subjugated populations.

Individual teachers can encourage students, make them feel comfortable to learn, and provide basic necessities to help them learn to the best of their ability. Schools should invest adequate resources to accommodate the changing faces among their students, and deal with the complex social issues, mental health needs, and traumatic experiences in the classrooms. However, not much can be accomplished to open doors to opportunities when social structures are systematically arranged as confining cages to create barriers to social advancement. The colonial institutions are interrelated and complementary to preserve the status quo, and benefit those in positions of privilege.

It will take time to dismantle systemic racism and change the colonial social conditioning and attitudes taught for generation. This will require a collaborative effort by groups, agencies and institutions committed to equity and racial justice. Local school boards have been doing their best to respond to diversity and implement the TRC's Calls to Action. A holistic approach is needed to close gaps and address the nurturing character development and material issues paternal and extended families have traditionally been responsible for. The bureaucratic and silo approaches to dealing with children's had led to growing numbers of juvenile delinquents, school dropouts, and youth in care transitioning into the criminal justice system. Initiatives such as Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) and collaborating with Diversity Thunder Bay, the Indigenous community, the RMYC and other minority groups working for change is making a difference. Learning success stories and adopting best practices and interventions developed by experts such as Pathways to Education will increase graduation rates.

**SFS:** RMYC consultations with Indigenous, racialized and minority youths reveal that many struggle in the mainstream education system. They feel that the system needs to be reconstructed to deal with the legacy of colonization, Residential Schools and slavery. New approaches are needed to right the wrongs and address the damage done by trauma attributed to cultural stereotypes, racial prejudices, and the discriminatory attitudes. A collaborative approach is needed to cover the gaps for vulnerable children and youth, particularly those in care to stop the cycle that has been allowed to continue for years and sometimes generations.

\* Focus groups and consultations reveal that there are many issues the youth identify that they need addressed to make a difference in their lives. Schools need to partner with community groups, social service agencies and professional institutions in a multi-faceted approach to lay a strong foundation to rebuild the lives of students who want to acquire skills to make it in society, develop resilience to thrive, acquire a good education to secure good jobs for social mobility to break the cycle of poverty.

\* The following are suggestions students transitioning out of care, from low-income families, struggling at home or living with dysfunctional adults feel will improve their lives and help them to move up the social and economic ladders. They want special courses, and presentations in class by experienced resource people from diverse community groups to share lifeskills, guide them and introduce them to new opportunities, careers, professions and trades and better paying jobs that will make a difference.

- Reading and understanding rental agreements and contracts, and where to go for help if you're dealing with difficult landlords, employers, and knowing the appeal process. .
- Financial literacy – lessons and discussions about budgeting, banking, opening a bank account, managing credit cards, shopping, living within a budget, debt, the reality of missing payments, credit history; saving money, setting priorities, paying bills, rent, utilities, buying food, bus passes to get around safely, borrowing, loaning money etc. .
- Cooking classes - safe food handling, learn to prepare healthy and low-budget meals.
- Addictions, mental health, dependence, harm-reduction, etc.
- Advocating for self and knowing your rights - human rights, labour laws, etc., discussing racism, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, anti-Indigenous/Anti Black racism.

- Parenting skills and birth control (to prevent kids from having kids and losing them to care -- to break the cycle where children end up in care and perpetuate the cycle.
- Personal hygiene, self-care, grooming and wellness – healthy lifestyles
- Teaching about anti-racism, cultural stereotypes, racial prejudice and discrimination as mandatory courses in schools, as well as conflict resolution and restorative practices.
- Character development, attitude, manners, civility, self-discipline, self-confidence, empathy, anger management, and healthy ways to deal with trauma or cope with grief.
- Employment readiness, resume writing, cover letters, interview skills, and appropriate dressing and presentation for interviews and the work-place. \*
- Part-time job courses such as babysitting, customer service, first aid, WHMIS—workplace safety, work ethic, motivation, pre-job orientation.
- Having personal identity documents (i.e. Social Insurance Number, birth certificate, passport, etc.) keeping them safe and secure, driver's license and other certifications to teach responsibility and open doors to more opportunities and employment prospects.
- Building healthy relationships with ones-self, others and reconnecting with land base teachings for more holistic growth and personal development.
- Affordable extra-curricular activities after school and accessibility (i.e. transportation) to participate in supervised events will enhance student wellness, safety and graduation.

## 12. **Laying the Foundation for Real Change:**

Schools play a key role to educate the nation, promote Canadian identity, develop our collective social values, and enhance racial justice. Teachers are front-line workers in the education system. They open minds, teach skills, impart knowledge that enlightens the population, and eliminate ignorance, which leads to fear of the unknown and feeds social injustice, racism, and discrimination.

Teachers can make or break a student. Bad teachers can shut doors to potential careers, a productive life, and a brighter future. Teachers who encourage, motivate, and inspire their students are social transformers. However, many teachers conform to the colonial system. Consequently, many carry conscious and unconscious biases embedded in the education system. They promote and maintain cultural stereotypes, racial prejudices, and social inequities perpetuated by the education system.



To fully transform the education system, and the proposed changes in the curriculum to take effect, the teachers responsible for producing citizens, leaders, and a work-force of educators, police officers, administrators, policy makers, and so forth, need to be the right candidates who are socially sensitive and culturally competent to break the cycles of racial inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples, racialized groups, and other minorities that are not part of the mainstream.

**SFS:** The Ministry of Colleges and Universities responsible for training teachers who educate the nation should develop new criteria to identify and select the best candidates for teacher-trainees committed to advancing our national values of diversity, racial equality and respect and 'teach a new generation of students the truth about our shared history' without bias. We need to teach, recruit diverse teachers, retain and promote them based on merit and not just seniority, and ensure that they believe in social justice, multiculturalism, support Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and are committed to implementing the TRC's Calls to Action.

RMYC members came up with the following list of qualities, attitudes and values they feel ideal candidates to be trained as teachers should possess in order to educate future generations of children equally and make a difference in the nation.

\* **Accountability:** *Teachers educate the nation, and must be accountable for their deeds and actions. They are role models and hold positions of significance that all students look-up to. They must lead by example, show respect, and treat everyone with the same respect that they wish to receive from their students. they expect students to treat them -- and to promote the idea that it is normal for different races/cultures to mix and get along.*

\* **Empathy:** *Teachers must be open-minded and sensitive to their student's struggles. Even though they may not have personally experienced similar problems, they should learn to relate to the social and mental situations faced by their students. Putting themselves in the student's shoes will help to build trust and bridge the gaps!*

- \* **Cultural Competence, Social Awareness and Racial Sensitivity:** *Teachers should not harbor any racist biases, feelings of superiority, be prejudiced, judgmental, or discriminating. They should appreciate diversity and cultural differences, avoid stereotypes, and racial injustice. They must treat all students fairly and see students from different races and cultures (Indigenous, black, Muslim, white, Oriental, etc) as part of the Canadian mosaic and teach them tolerance. Every student should be respected and valued. Through doing this, teachers can promote positive attitudes towards school, which can help students experience more enjoyment attending all their classes.*
  
- \* **Adaptability:** *Good teachers must always be willing to adapt to meet the needs of their students. Children from different backgrounds learn differently and teachers should do their best to communicate and connect with them. For instance, when teaching a class where some of the students do not understand the concepts or cannot comprehend the content, the teacher must come up with different, or innovative ways of delivering the lessons. This way all students can be engaged and participate in the learning process equitably.*
  
- \* **Evolving:** *Good teachers must self-reflect and continuously look for ways to improve themselves as professionals dealing with a diverse student population. They should evolve with the times to meet changing social needs and realities in the community. They should be visionary to educate all students for success and make schools ideal 'factories' for producing open-minded citizens and creating a skilled multicultural workforce for social progress and economic prosperity.*
  
- \* **Advocates:** *Good teachers should uphold our national ideals and social values of equality, respect, and racial justice. They should regard teaching as a calling and duty to educate the nation, and improve our quality of life and standard of living. They should be pro-advocates promoting multiculturalism, human rights, and anti-racism believing that knowledge enlightens citizens and reduces fear due to ignorance. They should also advocate for adequate resources to level the playing field for Indigenous, racialized, minority, and low income groups.*

- \* **Observant:** *Good teachers must be aware of social situations and acknowledge the struggles their students are facing. They should observe gestures and body language for effective communication, figure out the best way to advise their students to be the best they can be, encourage them to dream big, and support them to realize their dreams.*
  
- \* **Firm:** *Good teachers must explain the school's code of behavior well, and do their best to enforce rules fairly. This will help students to develop character, learn self discipline, show respect, and acquire good manners. Character development molds personality, shapes attitudes into habits, and lays the foundation for civility, etiquette, a polished image, and human decency.*
  
- \* **Forgiving:** *Good teachers must be ready to forgive students, parents, and other teachers for hurtful actions, comments, or accusations that can undermine their ability to focus, teach well, and embrace everyone. They should not hold grudges and feelings of revenge that can scare or exclude some students.*
  
- \* **Creative:** *Good teachers should be smart and wise enough to make learning fun! They must find creative ways to teach that make learning enjoyable. They should find ways to make students feel comfortable to learn, participate in conversations, and look forward to going to school every day.*
  
- \* **Dedicated:** *Good teachers should be dedicated and committed to sharing knowledge and challenge all students to recognize their talents and strengths. They should do their utmost best to help all students find their passions, guide them to realize their true learning potential, and stay in school and graduate.*
  
- \* **Caring and Warm:** *Good teachers must have a peasant, warm, and cheerful personality, and should be kind and easy to approach. They should have a caring attitude for all their students regardless of race, culture, religion, gender, and so forth, and not be judgmental to vulnerable and disadvantaged kids who need a good education to open doors for social mobility and a better future.*

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This report highlights the need to support students to stay in school and graduate for a better quality of life. This is particularly important for low income and marginalized groups because a good education is a way out of poverty and a passport to social mobility. Governments know the importance of having publicly funded education to ensure that every child has equal access and equal opportunity to attend school. This guarantees that everyone in society can reap the benefits of acquiring academic knowledge which is the key to opening doors to greater participation in the work world.

According to an extensive study *Breaking the Cycle of Failure* by Charity Intelligence Canada, reveals that a high school education is more important today than 20 years ago, and the costs of not having a high school education are higher. A simple relationship explains the dynamic between education and income: education leads to employment, and employment leads to income. Higher education increases an individual's income potential. High school drop-outs are the lowest wage earners.

Our education system has been desegregated since the last Indian Residential School-- Gordon's *Indian Residential School* located in Punnichy, Saskatchewan --was closed in 1996. In spite of having integrated schools, the outcomes still reflect disparities along racial and income lines. An extensive study *Breaking the Cycle of Failure* by Charity Intelligence Canada revealed that:

1. 40% of all drop-outs leave school by the age of 16 without an adequate education. Aboriginal drop-out rates are extremely high across Canada as well as Black, new immigrants, and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) students. The completion rate for immigrants is comparable to impoverished inner-city levels.
2. Early education is critical. Elementary education lays the foundation for learning. reading, writing, and math basics are essential. Poor academic performance in early grade tests predict one third of high school drop-outs. Half of all high school drop-outs are identifiable in Grade 7.
3. Late interventions are attended by only 16% of high school drop-outs before age 25.

4. Good schools and programs have more influence than all social and family risk factors combined. They are effective in producing higher graduation rates for at-risk students. They engage students in supportive environments which keep them attending classes.

Going to a good school can make all the difference. Good high schools have better engagement, which is shown by higher levels of attendance, resulting in fewer failing students. It is very important that we acknowledge these findings and build on these studies to improve the standards in all schools. According to Jerald, Craig J., (2006). *Identifying Potential Drop-outs: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System. A Dual Agenda of High Standards and High Graduation Rates: Good schools produce successful students regardless of family or personal characteristics. Low-achieving, low-income students benefit the most from schools with smaller enrolments, better relationships among students and adults, supportive teachers, and a curriculum that is focused and engaging.*

We have a publicly funded education system in a country that introduced a Multiculturalism Policy in 1971, and adopted the Canadian Multiculturalism Act as the law of the land in 1988. Ontario has had an Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in place since 2009, which was augmented by the Accepting School Act in 2012, yet we are nowhere near achieving racial justice and social equality. Indigenous, racialized, and minority students have yet to reap the full benefits of an egalitarian education system because school drop-out rates are still disproportionately high. In addition, cultural stereotypes and racial prejudice are still prevalent feeding discrimination and stirring social conflict.

Education enlightens the nation with knowledge that eliminates ignorance and fear of the unknown. Schools are supposed to teach the facts and challenge misinformation, myths, and stereotypes that have been passed on for generations. Teachers raised through the existing education system have been conditioned by the status-quo and internalized the values, policies, and practises inherent in the curriculum. They have passed these on to their students who occupy every sector of our society. It will require intensive retraining and special anti-racism orientation to change attitudes and perceptions so that they can teach all students fairly in order to even the field for Indigenous, racialized, and minority students. This is needed to eradicate the superiority complex, biases, and privileges embedded in mainstream education.

Racism is learned and passed down through the socialization process. Personal observations and social encounters between different racial and ethno-cultural groups documented by individuals of influence with their conscious and unconscious biases have been taught in the education system as facts without critical review. They have predominantly been from a European perspective presenting the world through Caucasian lenses of privileged powerful white men. This has allowed cultural stereotypes and racial attitudes to fester and spread in society. Therefore, Indian Residential Schools, the history of slavery, segregated schools, the colour-bar, laws against co-habitation, and mixed marriages were promoted in schools and reinforced by social structures, administered by mainstream institutions, and enforced by law.

The education curriculum designed by the privileged powerful to serve the status quo was taught accordingly, producing more teachers to sustain the system, and professionals to run the institutions, implement policies, and enforce the laws of the day. Protests to the inequities in the system, and legal challenges forced reviews by the courts and acts of parliament to level the field, achieve racial justice, and equity, but old attitudes are hard to change and it will take time to alter internalized perceptions and social values.

As alluded to earlier in this report the education system has a key role to play. Educators co-opted by the social mainstream to produce bureaucrats and citizens with inherent biases based on colonial values of white power and privilege need to teach the facts, correct history, and challenge erroneous myths. Leadership is required to change course by implementing strategies that will require our publicly funded education system to rid of bad and racist teachers. We cannot continue doing things the same way and expect different results.

The Youth Council wants to provide meaningful input and create changes we believe will make a difference. The right teachers who connect well with diverse students, inspire them to realize their true potential, and make learning fun should be hired. We want to be included in the decision-making process to help shape our future. We want to be part of the solution to what is happening now to reduce school drop-outs is critical to create the change we want to see. In the interim, we want to work with school boards and share our experiences with peer mentoring / peer tutors to enhance what is being done in local high schools.

Social transformation to achieve equality and racial justice will require changes to the deep rooted systems that have created and preserved inequities that exist today. Barriers are being broken daily as more individuals move into desegregated neighbourhoods, interact in the community and students attend integrated schools. Fear of the unknown is reduced when people mix freely, get to know each other as human beings, treat each other with respect, and show dignity. This is evidenced by improvements in the work environment that is inclusive, once scorned inter-racial marriages are increasing as more young people accept and love each other. Likewise, cross cultural and multi-racial adoptions are becoming more acceptable.

Significant progress has been made by individuals who have collectively mobilized to fight cultural stereotypes and racial prejudice. We have diverse groups of people signing petitions, organizing boycotts, protesting, and lobbying politicians to change old discriminatory laws. The momentum has driven legislatures to pass statues that are inclusive to promote human rights and introduce new measures to complement our multicultural society.

As the advancement of civil rights takes root many years after there were legal challenges for women to be recognized as people, Indigenous people were allowed to vote and anti-Black racism acknowledged as reality, work-places, sports teams, entertainment and, so forth have all followed suit. However, the greatest hurdle is dismantling inequities and changing racist attitudes ingrained in our social systems and mainstream institutions. More resources are required to eradicate gaps between rich and poor, good and bad schools. In the meantime, investing in peer mentoring initiatives and achievement oriented programs such as Pathways to Education will enhance the learning process and improve student graduation rates.

The process can be accelerated if community groups and grassroots organizations are engaged and support struggling families. There are growing numbers of Indigenous, racialized and minority children in dysfunctional homes, in care, and the impoverished who are vulnerable to dropping out of school and perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The government should improve the education system to even the field for all students, and invest in safer spaces with programs and peer mentors and tutors to enhance academic performance and help all students to have a fair chance of staying in school and graduating for social mobility and a brighter future.

### UPSTREAM / DOWNSTREAM - by Ardell

"It was many years ago that villagers Down-stream recall spotting the first body in a river. Some old timers remember the poor facilities and procedures for managing the rescue. Sometimes, they say, it would take hours to pull just 10 people from the river, and even then only a few would survive.

The number of victims in the river has increased greatly in recent years, and the good folks Down-stream have responded admirably to the challenge. Their rescue system is clearly second to none. Now, most people discovered in the swirling waters are reached within 20 minutes - many in less than 10. Only a small number drown each day before help arrives. This is a big improvement from the way it used to be.

Talk to the people Down-stream, and they will speak with pride about the new modern hospital by the edge of the waters, and the flotilla of rescue boats ready for service at a moment's notice. There are also comprehensive plans for co-ordinating the manpower involved, and the large number of highly trained and dedicated swimmers always ready to risk their lives to save victims from the raging currents. 'Sure it costs a lot', say the Down-streamers. 'What else can decent people do except to provide whatever help and support is necessary when human lives are at stake?'

A few people Down-stream have raised questions now and again, 'What is happening Up-stream? How are these people getting into the river? Why do many of them not know how to swim?' But, most folks show little interest in finding the answers. There's so much to do to help those already in the water that nobody has got time to check what is happening upstream and how these people are getting in the river in the first place. That is the way things are in society sometimes.

**"Moral:** *An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! We spend a lot of time and money dealing with problems after the fact -- developing costly treatment programs and rehabilitation services instead of being proactive and investing adequate resources and supports to address the root causes, and stop preventable problems.*

"It is easier to build strong children that to repair broken men." Frederick Douglass



## THE VALUE OF YOUTH CENTRES AND SAFER SPACES

Some parents are incapable of raising successful children. When your whole family is dysfunctional, how are you supposed to become a fully functional and responsible adult? Who is your example to know what is good, how to behave, learn responsibility, get discipline, show respect and the proper way to behave? If a family is full of school drop-outs, addicts, abusers, gang members and crooks, who is the person to teach you that education is important, that you are a valuable human being and someone special, or that you can rise above that which you see and experience daily?

I come from a broken and severely dysfunctional family. With the exception of my older brother and I, who were not raised by my real parents, my other siblings and the generation after them struggle just to get a grasp on how to be successful at living a normal life. The possibility of an ordinary life is above their realm of thought, and opportunities for a better future are bleak!

Many people assume that everyone has parents who are capable of being positive role models and a guiding force for their children. This may be the case with many of our leaders, policy makers and professionals who take love, nurturing, encouragement, and the support of families for granted. But, for many children in broken, unstable, violent and dysfunctional homes, they lack guidance, lifeskills, self-discipline and encouragement to be successful. Their lives are filled with problems, misery, and despair. Bad parenting is all they know, and they need help and motivation to break free from poor upbringing so that they can see light on the other side for a brighter life.

This is where schools, youth drop-in centres, groups such as Boys and Girls Clubs, boy scouts, girl guides, cadets, junior rangers, church clubs etc. can be of value. Hanging out in safe spaces with positive peers still in school, having healthy after-school activities, and access to counseling, good programs that teach discipline, social skills, manners, and so forth will make a difference. Caring staff and significant adult supervisors who are sensitive to the needs of at-risk youth falling through cracks can serve as role models for children to realize their potential, help them to set goals, build self esteem, and give them hope for a positive outlook on life.

*Jacqueline H.*



WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN THERE, ANYWAY?

OH, THE USUAL... SINGLE-PARENT HOME, POOR NUTRITION, LITTLE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, CHAOTIC HOME LIFE... HOW ABOUT YOU...?

PRETTY MUCH THE SAME THING.

READY FOR SCHOOL

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