

511 E. Victoria Avenue, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 1A8

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

DENNIS FRANKLIN CROMARTY HIGH SCHOOL

MARCH, 2011 STUDENTS' SURVEY

Prepared by:

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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Table of Contents	2
2.	Introduction	4
3.	Issues faced by DFC Students (Ranked by number of responses)	5
4.	Priorities and Activities that Contribute to Risky Behaviour	6
5.	What can the school can do to deal with students' issues?	7
6.	What students can do to help each other	8
7.	What do you usually do after-school:	8
	* Go home and...	8
	* Go to the mall and...	9
	* Stay at school and...	9
	* Go out with friends and	9
8.	What activities would make you stay at school longer?	10
9.	Other activities you would like to see and help to organize:	10
10.	Reasons students are on contracts, given warnings, or sent home:	11
	* What can be done to reduce risks?	11
	* Who students want to help them	11
11.	Making DFC the best school for First Nations Students	12
	* What is good about DFC? (Ranked by number of responses)	12
	* What is not so good?	12
	* What can be done to make DFC the best school?	12

* What do you need to do differently so that you can graduate?	13
* What subjects do you need help with so that you can graduate?	13
12. Ideas for proposed students' residence at DFC	14
13. Comments on Students' Priorities	15
14. Plan of Action: Focusing on Three Key Priorities	27
(i) Boarding Homes	28
(ii) Peer Pressure	31
* Peer Pressure - Positive Influence in Action	33
(iii) Safe Places	37
15. Concluding Comments	39
16. Peer Leaders, Peer Helpers & Team Members	42
17. Appendices: Newspaper articles & Thunder Bay Children's Charter:	
• 'Kill Indians' graffiti at Intercity Mall	
• RMYC Letter to the Editor (A Response to the Graffiti)	
• Aboriginal youth asked to leave Intercity Shopping Centre	
• Students battle drug addiction	
• DFC takes action on Oxy addiction	
• Getting Buzzed on Information	
• Taking a stand and speaking out	
• Aboriginal Gangs	
• Gangs attract youth with alcohol syndrome: doctors	
• Rally Cries for Action to protect youths	
• Thunder Bay Children's Charter	
• A Message from Thunder Bay Children's Advocate	
18. Acknowledgements	

DENNIS FRANKLIN CROMARTY HIGH SCHOOL SURVEY

INTRODUCTION:

This study is a follow-up to consultations done by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) to mobilize aboriginal youth for the Reggie Bushie Inquest. A Coroner's Inquest was called to examine circumstances surrounding the death of Reggie Bushie, a student from Poplar Hill First Nation attending Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC) High School in Thunder Bay. His body was recovered from the McIntyre River on November 1, 2007. Reggie was the fifth DFC student to die in the city since the school opened in 2000. Since then, a sixth student, Kyle Morriseau from Keewaywin First Nation died in the same river in October 2009.

The Coroner's Inquest for Reggie Bushie has yet to take place due to delays in resolving the jury selection process. In the mean time, DFC and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNECC) have already begun to implement some of the recommendations by the students. A major accomplishment to date is the engagement of students as stakeholders, giving them a voice, and empowering them to be part of the solution to problems they encounter.

The RMYC worked with Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School to select a team of peer leaders to run a pilot project funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). As part of the project, the peer leaders carried out a survey to identify students' concerns, their needs, risks in the city and ways to improve academic performance. The team helped to formulate questions to gather students' opinions about their school, assess awareness of the programs, services, resources and supports available, and how they could be engaged to deal with their issues.

The survey was done just before the 2011 March break. The whole school was targeted for the study, but only half of the students (approximately sixty) completed the questionnaires handed out during morning classes. The other half, who either came to school late, or skipped classes altogether, were engaged through focus groups and individual consultations. The students shared personal experiences, and offered suggestions on safety, social concerns, interests, academic problems and the unique challenges faced by boarding students.

ISSUES FACED BY DFC STUDENTS – Ranked by the number of responses*

** Responses tied*

1. Skipping school
2. Alcohol abuse
3. * Peer Pressure
* Sleeping-in
4. Dealing with anger
5. * Racism
* Crime
* Stress and Depression
6. Drug Abuse
7. * Dealing with police
* Violence
8. * Boarding Homes
* Safe places to hang out
* Problems at school
9. * Family problems
* Lack of skills and trades
* Gambling
* Youth gangs
10. * Jobs and employment
* Love, relationships and dating
* Poverty
11. Places for recreation
12. * Sexually transmitted diseases
* HIV AIDS
* Youth suicide
* Abuse
13. * Bullying
* Mental health

PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO RISKY BEHAVIOUR:

- Students Drinking almost every night
- Drinking close to rivers
- Wondering around intoxicated and by themselves at night
- Staying out late / sleeping late & waking up late in the day
- Abusing alcohol
- Using drugs
- Having unprotected sex
- Homesickness
- Not feeling welcome or appreciated
- Suicide
- Gambling
- Getting intoxicated / Drinking too much
- Not doing school work
- No comment
- Joining gangs
- Crime
- Drinking under bridges, or in bushes
- Talking with the wrong kind of people / mixing with the wrong crowd
- Not going to school
- Hanging out in wrong places
- Hanging out in the mall
- Going places they should not
- Hanging out with strangers
- Personal issues
- Family problems
- Walking alone at night
- Violence / Fighting
- Hanging around dark places
- Talking to strangers

WHAT CAN THE SCHOOL DO TO DEAL WITH STUDENTS' ISSUES?

- Talk regularly with students to gain their trust to say what is really going on
- Connect more with boarding homes to better help students
- Sign agreements on good behaviour and explain the consequences if broken
- Start a club or group for students to talk and help one another with issues
- Have programs for alcohol and drug addicts
- Team building exercises to promote teamwork and co-operation
- Get to new students as soon as they leave home before the city gets to them
- Just give one chance to students seen drunk anywhere in the city to reduce risk
- Constantly remind students about curfews, and to be home on time
- Get students to come to school regularly, and be serious about education
- Educate students on risks in the city, and how to stay safe
- Have more counselors to work with students, and help them to change
- Upgrading courses and get students to do their school work
- Have more extra-curricular activities
- Keep tabs on students
- Encourage students to talk, and support them to get the help they need
- Have regular check-ups on students to understand their situation
- Reach out to students who are struggling with school, or personal issues
- Work with Chief and Council to deal with students' problems
- Make school more interesting and let students have a say
- Have on-call vans at every LCBO / Beer Store
- Have a Suggestion Box
- Develop peer leaders to work with students and help them to deal with issues
- Have people with experience talk with students to share information
- Help students develop self-confidence to speak out
- School is doing as much as it can already, and students need to do more
- Create more positive role models to counter negative peer pressure
- Train students to plan and organize their own activities
- Engage students by consulting with them, and getting them to vote on issues

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO TO HELP EACH OTHER:

- Help each other
- Don't ditch one another, and make sure everyone makes it home safe
- Talk to others about not drinking or using drugs
- Call 'On-Call' staff if you see or suspect that something is happening
- Never leave a person behind
- Walk with a friend, always be with a buddy
- Talk to each other about issues
- Encourage each other not to do stupid things
- Have a 'buddy system' to look out for one another
- Think positive
- Students should interact with each other in a positive way
- Stay in groups
- Have someone who is sober always watching over you
- Hang out in safer places
- Stick with each other, don't abandon students even if they do stupid things
- Get training to be peer leaders / peer helpers

WHAT DO YOU USUALLY DO AFTER SCHOOL?

- Go home and...**
- play with my I-pod
 - cook /bake something and eat
 - baby-sit
 - use laptop
 - study
 - watch TV
 - play games
 - eat supper
 - play games
 - go online
 - visit with relatives

- Go to the mall and...**
- chill
 - hang-out with friends / socialize
 - meet my friends / look for my friends
 - browse / walk around
 - shop
 - have coffee with friends
 - sit around

- Stay at school and...**
- attend tutorials
 - do homework
 - do after-school activities --drama, crafts, movies, drumming, etc.
 - attend meetings, workshops, presentations
 - use computers
 - play games , sports
 - use the gym / judo, volleyball, badminton
 - study, work on school assignments
 - do arts and crafts
 - attend any after-school activities organized

- Go out with friends and...**
- hang out
 - find alcohol or drugs
 - talk, have fun, chill
 - go for bus rides
 - go to the movies
 - drink
 - play video games
 - talk
 - play games / play cards
 - buy weed and smoke it
 - do something / do anything to avoid being bored
 - attend AA meetings

WHAT ACTIVITIES WOULD MAKE YOU STAY AT SCHOOL LONGER?

- * More sports activities
- * More traditional and cultural activities
- * Hockey -- Ice Hockey & Floor Hockey
- * Food / Cooking
- * Tutorials
- * Arts and Crafts
- * Access to Computers
- * Sports and Games
- * Movies
- * Volleyball / Basketball / Broomball
- * Pizza parties
- * Trips

OTHER ACTIVITIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE AND HELP TO ORGANIZE:

- * Hockey Club
- * Fitness Club
- * Travel Club
- * Broomball Team
- * Talent Shows / Karaoke
- * Woodworking shop
- * Music Club / Drumming
- * Debating Club
- * Sports / Games / Martial Arts --Judo
- * Bowling
- * Art / Drawing / Painting Club
- * Sports Tournaments / Paint balling
- * Sliding / tubing
- * Dances / Pow Wow
- * Concerts with Bands from other schools
- * General recreational activities / non-competitive games

REASONS STUDENTS ARE ON CONTRACTS, GIVEN WARNINGS, OR SENT HOME:

- * Abusing Alcohol
- * Drinking and skipping school
- * Curfew violations
- * Not listening
- * Being at risk / Concerns about harming themselves or others

WHAT CAN BE DONE:

- * Help them, talk with them
- * They need motivation / Motivate them
- * Make them sign a graduating contract – that they are serious about school
- * Send them for treatment
- * Provide more recreational opportunities
- * Organize alternative sports/games for students who cannot be on school sports teams
- * Implement a buddy system for them
- * Provide counselling
- * Have boot camps
- * Involve them in after-school activities
- * Arrange presentations and workshops
- * Help students to organize their own events after school

WHO STUDENTS WANT TO HELP THEM:

- * Prime Workers
- * Teachers / Recreation Staff
- * Other students / Peer leaders and peer helpers
- * Families
- * Learn to help themselves
- * Other young people/youth groups such as the RMYC, New Hope, etc.
- * Education Authorities i.e. NNEC, Keewatinook Okimakanak, Shibogama, etc.
- * Chief and Council / Nishnawbe Aski Nation
- * Everyone who can help...Elders, students, counsellors, police, etc

MAKING DFC THE BEST SCHOOL FOR FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS:

What is good about DFC? Ranked by number of responses:

- * Staff and Students / School Environment
- * I feel welcome like home / First Nations staff / Having supportive staff who help you
- * School for Aboriginals / The right to be yourself
- * Not too big, not too small
- * Events and Activities / Cultural & Traditional
- * Free meals / Tutorials / Sports / Favourite classes / Elders' Room
- * Wahsa Distance Education Program / Alternative schooling
- * Leadership Course / Peer Leaders / Training team leaders
- * Learning and Speaking our language
- * Not too strict / Don't have to take off hats

What is not so good? Ranked by number of responses:

- * Skipping class, students don't go to school regularly
- * Drinking, and people using drugs around the school
- * Walk out at any time / Need more discipline
- * Lack of respect by some students / Peer pressure / Fighting / Drop-outs / Discipline
- * Boring Classes / No bus for school / Rumours / Leaving Family
- * Students don't go to school on time / 90 minute periods too long
- * Small school / Not enough activities / Not enough sports

What can be done to make DFC the best school for First Nations students?

- * Dorm Rooms for students to stay and be safe
- * Food – Provide breakfast, lunch and supper at school
- * Support for students / Provide more counsellors
- * More programs to help students with problems (many have issues)
- * House Teams (Like Pelican Falls)
- * Make school bigger
- * Teach more Aboriginal languages
- * Have more cultural/traditional activities everyone can join in

What do you need to do differently so that you can graduate?

- * Come to school everyday and be serious about learning
- * Catch up on missed assignments / Academic upgrading
- * Not skip class / Get help to do my work
- * Do not give in to negative peer pressure / Be myself
- * Take Wahsa courses / Attend alternative education
- * Be on time for school
- * Give me training in sports or anything, and help me stay focused on the right path
- * Need to get my head back into school / Stop slacking
- * Avoid alcohol / Drinking / Drugs
- * Do my work in class and not get distracted / Complete my assignments
- * Stay in school / Do not quit / Work hard
- * Finish homework after school / Do what the teachers tell you to do
- * Do my work / Be serious about school / Stay focused on graduating
- * Use my time wisely / Do not procrastinate
- * Be in class more / Never skip
- * Hand in schoolwork on time / Listen to my teachers
- * Get my marks up / Study hard / Go for tutorials
- * Participate in after-school activities / Healthy lifestyles
- * Be a good student

What subjects do you need help with so that you can pass?

- * Math (Grade 10 Math)
- * English
- * Native language
- * History
- * Science
- * Geography
- * Food and nutrition
- * All of them
- * No comment

IDEAS FOR PROPOSED STUDENTS' RESIDENCE AT DFC*

- * Have activities in the residence/dorm
- * Check up on students all the time
- * Students should sign 'good behaviour' and 'intent to graduate contracts
- * Explain and post residence rules in all the rooms, and enforce them
- * Install motion lights and security cameras / Have 24 hour security patrol
- * Keep the residence clean, and students should be well-behaved and tidy
- * Have peer helpers like 'Natural Helpers' in the residence
- * Have helpful supervisors and counsellors available at all times
- * Search all students coming in and out of residence, bag and body searches too
- * Have strict rules, and use police search dogs regularly
- * Have personal lockers
- * Assign team leaders to help supervise sections of the residence
- * Make sure there is no violence; have peer helpers and peer mediation teams
- * Provide orientation on residence living and good behaviour
- * Have people come to talk to students about sicknesses/illnesses and stuff
- * Proper security / Install security bars on doors and windows
- * Provide incentives or rewards for cleanliness, quietest rooms or wing, etc.
- * Have a Traditional Cultural Room / Spiritual space
- * Have Elders in the residence for emotional support
- * Enforce a curfew and bed-time lights out rule
- * Have a Games room, access to computers, and gyms
- * Check students' background, and give them the help they require
- * Have a section for repeat trouble-makers; Chain them to their beds at night
- * Have smoke detectors / alarms
- * Do not allow drinking or drugs in rooms, and watch for drunks who start fights
- * Have wake up-calls and get students to go to school everyday
- * Teach students to stay away from negative situations
- * Assign cleaning duties and residence chores
- * Have cultural activities/events for those losing their culture
- * House competitions (like at Pelican Falls High School)

COMMENTS ON STUDENTS' PRIORITIES:

Skipping school was a top priority, followed by ***alcohol abuse, peer pressure and sleeping -in.*** These issues are all very closely linked and overlap. Next on the list were ***anger, racism, crime, stress, depression, drug abuse, police, and violence.***

Skipping school is a common habit on reserves. This becomes a problem when students move to the city and are expected to attend school regularly. With little parental involvement, or no encouragement to go to school, students struggle academically with a heavier workload when they attend urban high schools. It is hard to change lifestyles and attend classes regularly while adjusting to city life. High school is more challenging, and students are unable to cope. As a result, they avoid classes altogether, and due to poor school attendance, many fail, drop-out, or are sent back home.

Alcohol: Problems associated with abusing alcohol are prevalent on reserves. Many children are exposed to alcohol at birth, and this affects them emotionally, mentally and physically. In addition to health challenges that result in learning problems, alcohol abuse has serious social consequences that make young people vulnerable and puts their lives in the city at risk. Six DFC students have died in Thunder Bay since the school opened in 2000, and several have been severely assaulted with alcohol being a factor.

Most students are introduced to alcohol at home, so drinking with parents and siblings makes it seem normal. Dysfunctional families and broken homes attributed to residential schools are common, and alcohol is used to cope with stress, escape harsh deplorable conditions, numb pain, and to forget problems. Many students are already addicted to alcohol, or suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome, which affects their ability to comprehend information and learn well.

Students are accustomed to the lifestyles and habits learned at home. Consequently, when they move to the city, they are merely changing location, and the lifestyle and habits learned at home are all they know. Many are already addicted to alcohol and drugs. Availability and cheap prices compared to their reserves makes it easy to succumb to the way of life they are used to at home. Those who quit give credit to religion and churches.

Sleeping in: It is common practice on reserves for children and youth to stay up at night and sleep during the day. A shortage of houses and overcrowding causes families to take turns to share beds. Since adults sleep normal hours, kids are left wandering alone at night, and with no good night's sleep, they cannot make it to school on time. Students used to this lifestyle have a hard time adjusting to the city's schedule, where they have to get up early and catch buses for school. The consequences for sleeping in, abusing alcohol, or skipping school result in students losing the privileges of attending school, and they are sent back home.

Peer pressure: Students trying to make a positive change face enormous negative peer pressure. Put downs, name-calling and labels are used to pressure those who want to quit drinking or to stop using drugs. Comments such as: "You want to be a good boy/girl?", or "Are you better than us?" are used with scorn to get students to join in and change their minds about quitting. The fear of being rejected, alienated or shunned by friends, schoolmates, or siblings can be so overwhelming that it is easier for many to give in than pursue their goals.

Dealing with transition from a small reserve to a large city along with racism, can also put pressure for students to join peers for safety reasons. The need to belong for protection and comfort among vulnerable youths often outweighs the risks and consequences. Hanging out in the company of mates, or home buddies where one feels welcome and appreciated can lead students to compromise their values and take chances for the sake of belonging.

Another form of peer pressure is when older students are pressured or bribed by younger siblings, classmates and friends to buy booze for them. Culturally, it is hard to say "No" to helping friends and siblings. The reverse is also true when under-age students are pressured to pitch-in and contribute by pooling money to buy alcohol. Negative peer pressure is prevalent and there is nothing yet to counter its effectiveness.

Dealing with Anger is a constant challenge for students who have to deal with problems pertaining to what is happening in their lives. They get frustrated over issues they are not happy about and cannot change. The students are caught in negative cycles, cannot find many people they trust, and do not know where to turn to for help and support.

A significant number of students at DFC are in care. Many have horrendous experiences, are living in terrible conditions and feel powerless. This often turns to rage, mood swings, violent outbursts and aggression towards anyone -- siblings, friends, schoolmates, and authority figures such as parents, teachers, social workers, police officers and so forth.

Stress and Depression: *The life experiences of many aboriginal children are stressful. There are serious issues for youngsters living with abuse in confined facilities, isolated communities and impoverished conditions comparable to Third World Countries. In a "Girl Power" study prepared by Melanie Goodchild, RMYC founding President, and NAN Decade for Youth Co-ordinator, published in Wawatay News (June 17, 2004): "Up to 75 percent of sex crimes committed in First Nations communities are against females under the age of 18. 50 percent of those are younger than 14 years of age, and almost 25 percent are younger than seven years of age. The incidence of sexual abuse in some First Nation communities is as high as 75 to 80 per cent for girls under eight years old."*

Life is stressful and depressing for many young people living under such conditions. Abusing alcohol, drugs and solvents becomes a way to escape the misery and cope with the stress. When there is no way out, suicide becomes an option. It is hard to motivate youths caught in a cycle of despair to attend school and plan careers when they have lost hope for the future.

Racism *is a big issue in Thunder Bay. Aboriginal students experience hate crimes, racial slurs, prejudice, and discrimination on a daily basis. There are reports of physical assaults, pizza slices, pop, coffee, etc. thrown at native students on the streets, or while waiting at bus stops. Many have to stay in groups for safety and protection, which in turn creates anxieties among the general public concerned about aboriginal youth street gangs in the community.*

Last summer racist graffiti: "Kill Indians" was painted on a prominent bank sign at Intercity Mall, creating fears of physical attacks and assaults. When schools opened in the fall, DFC students were banned from the same mall. ('Aboriginal youth asked to leave Intercity Shopping Centre' – Wawatay News, October 28, 2010.) There have also been threats directed at people helping aboriginal people, including Mayor Keith Hobbs. He received threatening letters for reaching out and welcoming aboriginal people to the city. Staff and volunteers at the Youth Centre who regularly help First Nations students have been called "Indian lovers".

Crime: Culture shock, addictions, anger, stress, racism and peer pressure all have a role to play in the high incidents of crime among aboriginal students. There are stories of police cells full of youths over night and on weekends, some of them DFC students. Many are held over for alcohol infractions, trespassing, disturbing the peace, or outstanding warrants. These may not be regarded as crimes on reserves, and students learn the hard way about city laws.

It is serious when students are involved in crime to support their addiction. Shoplifting, stealing, breaking & entering, drug trafficking, and providing alcohol to minors are common ways for students to get some money. Involvement with criminal youth street gangs compounds the problems. Aboriginal gangs are a growing influence across the region, and in the City of Thunder Bay. The need to belong, to have a family, poverty, insecurity, looking for protection in an unfriendly community, and addictions drive some youths to be mixed up with gangs. Racial profiling and guilty of association makes good the self-fulfilling prophecy when youths behave as stereotyped. Unfamiliarity with the legal system increases aboriginal crime statistics when students enter guilty pleas as part of plea-bargaining to avoid litigation.

Drug abuse is an ever-growing universal problem, and aboriginal students are not exempt. However, historical factors and social circumstances make aboriginal people more susceptible to dependence on drugs and alcohol. Children are exposed to drugs as kids, and it is easy to follow suit when everyone around them is doing it. Living with physical, sexual, emotional and mental abuse, neglect, poverty and a host of family problems, easily leads students to use drugs to cope. A lack of affordable and accessible recreational activities can also lead kids to rely on drugs and solvents as something to do for entertainment and to alleviate boredom.

Marijuana (weed) is the common drug of choice among students, but injectable substances are also being used. Prescription drugs such as OxyContin have overwhelmed many reserves. They are legal and readily available through friends, family members and acquaintances on medication. The hyper-effects of opiates quickly lead to dependency -- from craving a pill every 4 days to needing one every 3-6 hours to function physically and emotionally. The cost of illicit drugs creates a vicious cycle where dependency leads users to buy and sell to support the addiction. Oxys are legal, but trafficking and selling them on the street is a criminal offense.

Problems of poverty, sexual exploitation, and crime are closely linked to drug abuse. Students have seen the negative consequences when pills take over the lives of family members, friends and neighbours. Getting a fix and being high is a constant preoccupation. Addicts compromise their morals and principles -- lie, cheat, steal, prostitute, rob, sell possessions, pawn stuff, you-name it--to get pills. There are sad stories of home furnishings and personal items being sold or pawned for Oxys. As one student put it: "You get mad and stressed out when you come home and find that the X-Box you got for Christmas has been sold to buy pills"

Pressure to use pills is overwhelming when everyone around you is doing it, and quitting is not easy because of very painful withdrawal symptoms. As we write this report, there is a pilot project going on at DFC to help students quit OxyContin. (Students battle drug addiction – Wawatay News, November 25, 2010; DFC takes action on Oxy addiction – Thunder Bay Source, April 8, 2011). This is an acknowledgement of the problem, and is being done to help students concentrate on their studies.

Dealing with Police: *Contact between students and the police often happens when alcohol and drugs are involved. In an article published by the Chronicle Journal, February 12, 2010, Thunder Bay has the highest number of police arrests involving the use of alcohol in all of Ontario. DFC students who drink and spend time in police custody add to these statistics. Not being at their best while under the influence, stereotypes are reinforced, and the racial profiling that occurs leads to a further deterioration of relations with police officers, and hate crimes.*

Violence: *Since many students have grown up surrounded by violence – family violence, dating violence, gang violence, sexual violence, as well as institutional violence from the police, they consider it normal. Violent incidents increase when alcohol or drugs are involved. Several students have been jumped, and some sent back home for safety reasons. There are also growing incidents of gang-initiated violence against young girls.*

Students are aware of unsolved murders involving aboriginal women, and racially motivated attacks targeting them. Many have experienced various forms of racism in the city and fight back in self-defense, which often lead to assault charges being laid. Racist incidents with violence are a growing problem, which breed tension and resentment.

Boarding homes: Shelter is a basic necessity, and good homes are key to the well-being and success of students. First Nations families sending children to the city rely on the generosity of ordinary citizens, friends, relatives and landlords to provide shelter, as well as guardians or boarding parents for their young students leaving home to pursue higher education.

The prevalence of racism, and a critical housing shortage in Thunder Bay shrinks the pool of suitable homes ideally located for easy student access to and from school. Finding a good match of well-meaning and empathetic boarding parents with experience to deal with children experiencing the intergenerational impacts of residential schools is a real challenge. Students often change homes several times before they find suitable residences and compatible boarding parents they can connect with and trust.

School authorities do their best to screen boarding parents, and inspect boarding homes to ensure that they are suitable, and meet safety standards. Problems occur due to differences in lifestyles and culture, if boarding parents are not culturally sensitive. Students bring baggage from reserve life with them. Growing up in dysfunctional and broken homes, many have problems with discipline, attitude, behaviour, values and beliefs, which do not change overnight. If boarding parents are not aware of living conditions on reserves where kids can stay out all night with no curfew, do not say where they are going, drink regularly, sleep during the day and so forth, then misunderstandings can create tensions that sour relationships.

There are also problems with guests coming to see the students or to visit boarding parents. When friends or family members used to drinking and doing drugs with children visit, they often do the same things they are used to at home, including drinking with students. Similar issues occur when acquaintances of boarding parents move to the city, and stay in boarding homes for long periods while looking for a place to rent. Overcrowding and unhealthy lifestyles they are used to are often replicated, exposing students to risk.

The \$500.00 a month paid to board a student is inadequate to cover shelter and food costs -- supper every day, and all meals on Saturdays and Sundays. Even though breakfast and lunch are now provided at school on weekdays, the allowance of \$16.50 a day is not enough.

Some families are able to enhance the quality of life for boarding students by offering academic support, sharing computers, television sets, and other forms of entertainment. Others tutor students, monitor school attendance and understand the importance of treating them as their own children. But, families trying to make ends meet have a harder time caring and feeding students. Even though they mean well, and have good intentions, they are often too busy with part-time jobs to help students. At the current rate of \$500.00 a month / \$16.50 a day, relying on boarding fees as supplementary income forces some boarding parents to compromise on nutrition and other basic needs. Those who also use students as baby-sitters and house sitters are often afraid to enforce discipline for fear of losing tenants and income.

Safe places to hang out *are critical for the safety and well-being of aboriginal students in the city. A lack of facilities where they feel welcome to hang out without being stared at, offended, or called names is a problem. In the face of racial stereotyping, name-calling, prejudice and discrimination, aboriginal students band together for company and comfort, making them vulnerable to peer pressure. Having no well supervised and accessible facilities they can afford to go to, many hang out on the streets, in alleyways, bushes, under bridges and other strange places. Unfortunately, these are the spaces where temptation to drink, do drugs or be involved in other negative activities that put their lives at risk or get them in trouble is high.*

Hanging out in unsafe and undesirable places after school hours has prompted the need for a curfew to ensure that students are home and safe. On-call services have also been arranged to pick up students wandering about late at night, or those who miss the last bus to go home.

Problems at school: *Academic problems are due to lower educational standards on reserves. Under-funding, and social problems created by the legacy of residential schools contribute to poor schools, addictions, a lack of parental involvement, fetal alcohol effects, and poverty that result in learning problems and low students' performance. High incidents of children with learning disabilities and mental health issues among the First Nations require more supports to help them to learn well, comprehend information, understand instructions, and pass. Poor parenting and a lack of encouragement for students to go to school, study, and value education lowers their achievement and success rates.*

The federal government gives less funding to First Nations students, who need adequate resources to deal with isolation on reserves, and the legacy of residential schools. Many aboriginal children are caught in negative cycles. When DFC students come to the city, they are already at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts well-funded by the province. To level the learning field, aboriginal students from reserves need help with literacy, academic up-grading, tutoring, nurturing boarding homes, and social supports to catch-up.

Family problems: Dysfunctional families and broken homes cause many of the problems students face. Parents are unable to nurture their children, and serve as positive role models because of the impacts of residential schools. Addictions, poverty, violence and abuse take a toll on the children. Unstable family relationships, step parents and mixed siblings struggling to get along often create unhappy and unhealthy home environments where emotional, mental, physical, and sexual abuse is rampant. Put downs by parents, abuse by step parents, and jealousy among mixed siblings undermine the support and encouragement students need to stay in school, focus on education, and graduate. Many students are overwhelmed by family problems, lose hope and give up. A lack of caring, affection and appreciation of kids' efforts, and the high incidents of abuse, neglect, indifference and violence distract children from learning, and realising their true potential in life.

A significant number of students are in care, or are being raised by relatives. According to the Girl Power Survey cited earlier, the high incidents of emotional, mental, physical and sexual abuse at home compound the problems. With nowhere to turn, children feel trapped and stuck in unhealthy conditions. Parents with other priorities such as feeding their addictions instead of taking care of their children exacerbate the situation. Gambling, and preoccupation to get alcohol and drugs divert attention from parenting, and the little money impoverished families on reserves have for the basic needs of their children goes to feed their own addictions.

The current epidemic related to the abuse of prescription drugs in First Nations communities is a new curse on parenting and family relationships. More kids are being neglected or abandoned due to addiction to OxyContin, raising the demand for foster homes. This is creating a new generation of kids in care, and a new set of family problems.

Lack of Skills and Trades: Students recognize the need for skills and learn trades to fill job positions on and off reserves. The need for housing, clean water, sewage, broadband, forestry and so forth is quite obvious. First Nations are also demanding employment in any mining developments such as: the Ring of Fire, Gold-Corp, DeBeers, Musselwhite, etc. on their lands, local institutions, as well as businesses and industries require skilled aboriginal workers.

The high unemployment rates on reserves and a limited pool of skilled trades people create opportunities for good paying jobs while enhancing development in First Nations communities. Career fairs and trade shows are exposing students to an array of jobs that do not rely on academic and literacy proficiency. Learning skills and pursuing careers in trades is a practical alternative for many aboriginal students experiencing problems to compete with their urban-raised and better-educated counterparts for mainstream jobs.

Living with boarding parents working in different areas exposes students to various career options and employment prospects. Role models can inspire boarding students to consider job options in trades and take up new challenges in the work force.

Gambling is a common pastime learned from home. Due to isolation, and limited recreational activities, playing bingo and card games are common pastimes for entertainment. However, there are people who play to win, to get additional income, or to supplement welfare payments. Unfortunately, they gamble with money that is needed for basic necessities children need. Gambling is also time consuming and takes parents and caregivers away from children.

Children and youth are greatly influenced by adult role models. Kids who grow up seeing parents and relatives enjoying themselves gambling are more susceptible to engaging in such activities themselves. Card games, bets and computer gaming are popular among students who play for cash. Gambling can easily turn into an addiction. There are students carrying cards all the time and play for cash any chance they get. It takes up school time and they easily get behind in their studies. Taking risks becomes a habit, and simple bets on-line, on sports scores or card games lead to debts and money problems. Things are serious when students borrow money to gamble, or when gangs are involved. They are often pressured into criminal activity to pay for their gambling habit.

Youth Gangs: *Aboriginal youth street gangs exist in Thunder Bay, and are steadily gaining influence on native youth. The Indian Posse, Manitoba Warriors, Native Syndicate all from Manitoba are the major gangs staking territory in the city and in northern reserves.*

Lonely and naïve students searching for identity, family, friendship, protection, income or excitement to escape misery, are vulnerable to youth street gangs. Unemployed youths are lured by easy cash from drug trafficking, and those with mental health issues are susceptible to gang influence and manipulation. (Gangs attract youth with alcohol syndrome: doctors - Chronicle Journal, March 17, 2010). Wearing gang colours, wrong gestures, bad drug deals, or failing to pay-up can lead to serious consequences. There are stories of abductions, assault, intimidation, and murder attributed to local gangs. Some DFC students have been implicated, and others visiting our youth drop-in centre downtown, have been threatened by gangs.

Jobs and employment: *Exposure to jobs and working life in urban centres is encouraging students to think and talk about jobs. Moving from reserves where jobs are scarce to the city where there are more opportunities to work allows students to see that looking for employment is the norm. This inspires students to change their attitude about work and welfare. As they learn urban lifeskills and develop self-confidence to integrate in the urban environment, finding jobs is becoming a new priority.*

Just a few years ago, it was hard to find students interested in part-time work, or summer jobs. After a pilot project to hire DFC students under the Summer Experience Program to work at the Multicultural Youth Centre—planning and organizing orientations to welcome students from remote reserves to the city -- things have changed. More students are seeking work, and the Youth Council is receiving more requests for part time and summer employment.

While interest to find work is growing, issues affecting their school performance—punctuality, skipping, sleeping in, addictions and so forth, are still problems in regards to securing and retaining jobs. Other factors such as a lack of: work-skills, social skills, motivation, commitment, dependability, etiquette when dealing with diverse clients, create barriers to pertaining to employment. A high number of youths have criminal records, which, depending on the offences, can limit their job prospects, where they can work, and what they can do.

Love relationships and dating: *Students are seeking out stable and loving relationships. They are concerned about bad situations involving their families and communities. Violence, infidelity, cheating, abuse and addictions are common and lead to family break-ups. Mixed parents, adopted siblings and estranged spouses create complicated relationships with conflicting loyalties. Dysfunctional families due to the legacy of residential schools, is what students have been exposed to and is all they know. This is what they want to avoid.*

The students want to break the cycle of bitter feuds and failed relationships that have divided families and communities. Some have personally experienced the pain of loveless and abusive relationships. They want someone they trust to talk to about relationship problems, and feel that a loving and healthy relationship will save children from anguish.

Poverty *is a serious social problem on reserves. The cost of basic necessities is high due to isolation and the remoteness of communities. Nutritious food is expensive, making it difficult for families to afford healthy diets that help prevent sickness. Poverty on many reserves is comparable to the Third World, and some people turn to alcohol, drugs or gambling to escape misery. Addiction becomes an additional problem that gets in the way of dealing with original issues precipitating dependence. Once alcohol, drugs and/or gambling become priorities, most of the money available goes to feed the habits, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty.*

Poverty creates a subculture and a lifestyle that is passed on to the children. Being poor on a reserve is terrible because not many social supports are available. Aboriginal youths are choosing to stay in the city for a better quality of life, but a lack of a good education and limited work-skills are barriers preventing them from getting jobs to escape poverty. In addition, racial discrimination makes it harder to find jobs, and colonization contributed to destroying their work-ethic and motivation, creating dependency on welfare. Problems are compounded by a lack of budgeting skills to manage any money or allowances they are able to get.

Decent accommodation, healthy foods, entertainment and recreation are beyond reach for a rapidly growing impoverished aboriginal population in the city. Couch-surfing, drug trafficking, prostitution, stealing, extortion and other criminal activities have become a means of survival for impoverished youth, while adults resort to selling their prescription medications for income.

Recreation is important to alleviate boredom. Students want more recreational activities for fun, good health, and to keep busy while living away from home. They complain that competitive team sports take attention away from other activities. Students who are not good enough to be on teams are often ignored, and many do not have the skills to organize their own activities. It is essential for them to learn how to connect with other students, involve their peers in sports and games, take care of equipment and facilities, and supervise themselves.

From the survey, there is a need for more extra-curricular activities that can be played or enjoyed by a wider cross section group of students. This will reduce the idle time students have at their disposal to engage in risky behaviour that gets them into trouble.

Sexually transmitted diseases including HIV Aids are growing concerns in First Nations communities. Various studies reveal above average rates of infection compared to other Canadians. There is a need for more education to raise awareness of risks, and the high numbers of youths infected by sexually transmitted diseases. Many students are still not practicing safer sex, as evidenced by three unplanned pregnancies involving our peer leaders since the new year. None of these students were tested for possible infection, and would have passed any diseases they had to their partner. Casual relationships for sex, affection, while drinking, doing drugs, or as gang initiation, are examples of behaviour that puts youth at risk.

Abuse and Suicide were evenly ranked. There is a co-relation between emotional, mental, physical and sexual abuse and suicide. The incidents at which both occur in aboriginal communities are above average. Children who experience abuse, need help to deal with the trauma, as they may use alcohol, drugs or self-mutilation to deal with anger and depression. Without intervention, they can lose hope, give up, and choose to end it all.

Bullying and mental health were also evenly ranked. Bullying is a learned behaviour, often learned at home. Students acknowledged that physical, emotional, mental bullying are common problems at school, and in the community. The problem is exacerbated when racism and hate crimes are involved. Cyber-bullying is also a growing problem adding to mental stress and anguish. Life is made difficult and unbearable for victims, and this contributes to mental health problems, raising the risk of suicide.

PLAN OF ACTION: FOCUSING ON THREE KEY PRIORITIES

From the survey and the focus groups, DFC students are proud of their school. They like the homely environment and social atmosphere created by the new school principal, Mr. Jonathan Kakegamic (they cordially refer to as JK), vice principal, Sharon Angecone, as well as the teachers and support staff who go out of their way to act as their guardians. They appreciate the presence of Elders, On-call Workers, and various agencies (including the RMYC) at school to help them deal with issues and keep them busy. They like tutorials and mentoring supports that enable them to catch-up and do well academically. Students also look forward to breakfast and lunch served at school on weekdays -- ensuring that no-one attends classes hungry.

Despite the limited financial resources due to chronic under-funding of First Nations students by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), DFC is doing its best to provide quality services for students. (AANDC pays about \$2,000.00 less for each student compared to the province.) This affects the fees paid to board students, support services, and remedial programs for academic up-grading. Students acknowledge that educational standards at DFC and the quality of life in the city are far better than on reserves. Living away from home with strangers presents challenges for young teenagers who see it as an adventure and a "rite of passage" to integrate into the Canadian mainstream.

Going to school in the city offers students from remote First Nations communities another perspective on life, and what things can be. The city has a wide range of resources, services and supports that are not readily available on reserves. Good homes with caring boarding parents as role models can mark a new beginning for students raised in dysfunctional families. Mixing among motivated youths with goals to succeed can inspire aboriginal students to change lifestyles and break the negative cycles that trap them. Safe friendly places to hang out can help vulnerable students stay out of trouble and reinforce positive behaviour.

From the study, students are aware of the problems they face, and what needs to be done. They also recognize the personal commitments and sacrifices required to improve their situation. The challenge is engaging them to set higher goals, and aspire to achieve them.

An analysis of the issues reveals three remedial and prevention-oriented priorities with the potential to make life-style changes for DFC students. The RMYC feels that **(i) good boarding homes**, **(ii) positive peer pressure**, and **(iii) safe places to hang out** can have far-reaching effects on the quality of life, safety, and success rates of aboriginal students.

(i) BOARDING HOMES:

Boarding homes provide a different perspective on life that can be a new beginning for students moving from dysfunctional families and overcrowded impoverished homes plagued by negative lifestyles. Students who attend school regularly, stay safe and sober, credit boarding parents for their support and encouragement. Those who are treated as part of family, are appreciated, given guidance and adequate supervision, get motivated to make it to class consistently and on time. Once at school, it is easy for teachers to help them learn, and catch up with their studies. They can also access programs, services and supports available to deal with personal issues, and they can participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities on site.

Many students come from homes where there are no successful role models to inspire them. A healthy and nurturing boarding home provides a transforming experience that motivates students to be the best they can be in whatever they choose. Such exposure can be the intervention needed to break the negative cycles, and create a chance for a new beginning.

Students welcome the building of a residence at DFC to alleviate a shortage of ideal boarding homes conveniently located for easy access to school. They want a homely atmosphere with services, programs, and supports to meet their special needs. Orientation in urban life-skills will reduce culture shock and ease transition into city life, while counseling services can help to relieve stress of schoolwork and being away from home. Cultural events and after-school activities will keep students busy, promote healthy life-styles, and enhance their well-being.

Plans to use the residence for vulnerable younger students, (i.e. grade 9-10), who need intensive support, formal structure, and a caring, well monitored and adequately supervised home. This will reduce the risks and relieve parents' safety concerns. The students' residence has potential to instill new values and provide positive experiences than change lifestyles.

Providing charismatic staff students can identify with, trust, and feel comfortable to be around, will facilitate connections needed for effective communication to modify behaviour. Students who quit drinking, doing drugs, etc attribute their resilience to significant others, religion, faith and spirituality. Thus, Elders, chaplains and culturally sensitive staff can nurture students to heal and adopt healthy lifestyles. Implementing discipline, schedules, and structured activities using hockey camps, cadets and ranger programs as best practices for engaging aboriginal youth in positive activities will foster team-work and guarantee success. This will improve the chances of troubled students accomplishing what they left their communities to do.

The idea of placing senior or graduating students, as well as those mature and responsible enough to avoid risky behavior, will ease the critical shortage of suitable boarding homes. This strategy will prepare students for independent living when they pursue post secondary education, trades training, or enter the work-world. They will learn how to fend for themselves with little or no institutional support. This has been a constant challenge for DFC graduates who lack the necessary life-skills to survive in the city, and thrive in the social mainstream.

Having aboriginal students with similar issues staying together will enable DFC to pool together resources needed to address the intergenerational impacts of residential schools, teach life-skills, and provide necessary interventions for academic success. Incorporating their ideas to create an atmosphere to do well in school and graduate, makes students stakeholders responsible and accountable for the outcomes. With adequate financial resources, culturally appropriate supports, and a healthy social environment, it is possible to work with many students in a residence setting, and deal with lifestyle issues they bring from reserves.

1. ***Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada should work with other government ministries and stakeholders to secure funding for a students' residence at DFC, ensure that it is adequately staffed with essential programs, services, and supports to guarantee their safety, enhance their well-being, improve their educational performance and increase graduation rates.***

During the NNEC's community consultations on the proposed students' residence at DFC, people in the neighbourhood were concerned about the presence of aboriginal youth at the school day and night. The comments expressed reflect general attitudes and prevailing stereotypes towards Aboriginal people in the city. Issues of gangs, drugs, drunks, loitering, litter and related safety concerns were brought up. There were also worries about the devaluation of property, a lack of privacy, and the social transformation of the neighbourhood. These sentiments do little to forge positive race relations and bring people together.

The RMYC participated in the hearings, and is taking a proactive approach to engage students in dialogue on positive ways to promote the residence, so that it blends in the neighbourhood with minimal disruption. Any Concerns should be acknowledged without prejudice, and outstanding issues addressed fairly. It is essential to build bridges of understanding with neighbours so that aboriginal students feel welcome to study, live and play in the area

2. *The City of Thunder Bay through its Anti-Racism Committee should liaise with residents around DFC, and the general public concerned about the presence of Aboriginal youth in city neighbourhoods to allay their fears and social concerns.*

3. *DFC should establish lines of communication with city and area residents for input and feedback on social issues, and engage students in the process.*

The RMYC worked with the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (PACY) to prepare a report for the Reggie Bushie Inquest. While waiting for the Coroner's Inquest to proceed, the Provincial Advocates Office has assisted DFC students to form a Boarding Home Advisory Group and hold regular meetings to come up with new ideas to improve living conditions so that all students have good boarding home experiences while attending school in the city.

4. *The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth should support the youth to participate in the Reggie Bushie Inquest when it gets underway, and assist local efforts to secure resources needed to ensure that aboriginal students have safe places to stay with appropriate services to enhance their well-being.*

(ii) PEER PRESSURE:

A very critical issue identified by students is **peer pressure**. A review of the comments on what students do outside school reveals very few positive things they do together with friends after hours. Being in a new place and away from home, the tendency is to go along with whatever friends are doing. If there is nothing organized, or someone to steer them in a positive direction, they follow each other and do what they are used to, such as: staying-up late, drinking, abusing drugs, sleeping-in, and so forth.

Most students are introduced to alcohol and drugs in the home with parents and other family members. Once addiction sets in, they will go anywhere and do anything to get the fix. Peer pressure feeds and sustains the problems of alcohol and drug abuse. Loneliness in the face of racism and discrimination from the mainstream adds lure to conform and join in on what friends and buddies are doing. Fear of being ignored, avoided, or shunned also forces many students to go along and follow suit in spite of the consequences. As one student put it, "I would rather get in trouble with my friends, than be all alone".

A growing concern to students is negative peer pressure. Things can be turned around once positive peer influence is applied. Criminal youth gangs use peer pressure to recruit members and train them to do what the gangs want. This is an effective strategy to win over followers and keep them on track. Gangs have mastered the peer pressure approach as evidenced by the steady growth and influence of the street gang culture among youth.

On the other hand, the RMYC has also used the youth-to-youth strategy to connect, communicate and reach out to peers successfully. For the past twenty-five years, the Youth Council has produced peer leaders to lead the group and use their influence to celebrate diversity, combat racism, promote healthy lifestyles, and foster social justice.

When parents and guardians fail to be positive role models, peers are the next best alternative to influence behaviour and change habits. While good boarding homes can set an example of caring and nurturing for students lacking positive role model parents, friends can use positive peer pressure to initiate change, introduce new values and promote different lifestyles.

Youths communicate well with peers because there is no generation gap. They are familiar with what is going on among their peers, and this gives them considerable power of control to manipulate situations in their favour. Unfortunately, most of the peer influences among bored, marginalized, alienated, impoverished, neglected or at-risk youth kids are negative. Because peer pressure is contagious, if there are no positive alternatives to counter the bad influences and improve hopeless situations, the negative cycles formed become self-sustaining.

The challenge is finding, training and supporting capable students who are motivated and willing to become peer leaders. Working with them to set goals and matching them with other youths will facilitate the sharing of positive energy to make a difference. The students need relevant information to make informed decisions and wise choices. Therefore, providing peer leaders with communication skills and building their self-confidence to use positive influence, will encourage changes in lifestyles and reduce risks. Students breaking ranks with peers to start new courses in life need help to resist temptation and remain steadfast.

The RMYC is a strong advocate for youth-led projects with adult allies to effectively engage youths. Initiatives such as Peer Mediation, Roots of Empathy, Natural Helpers, and Influence in Action are examples of popular programs that empower youths to help each other with adult guidance. These initiatives have inspired the RMYC to concentrate on developing peer leaders and creating positive role models at DFC as conduits for change.

RMYC recognizes that there are youths to work with, and others to work for. Role model peer leaders are those with potential to use their influence to help more vulnerable and at risk youth. From experience comes the trust and responsibility to serve as an exemplary peer leader. After successfully mobilizing DFC students to participate in the Reggie Bushie Inquest consultations, group leaders emerged from the process. The RMYC hired them under the Students Summer Experience Program to work on their ideas to make things better. When school resumed in the fall, they were the core group for a pilot project complementing a Leadership Course introduced by the school principal to teach students leadership and organizational development skills. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) provided a one-time grant for the peer leaders to work with students in the school.

Peer Pressure – Positive Influence in Action:

Students at DFC identified peer pressure as a top priority when the RMYC was running a peer leaders pilot project in the school. This provided an opportunity to directly involve the students in a study on the impact of peer pressure. The plan of action incorporated training sessions for the peer leaders, and hands-on activities to engage students through positive peer influence.

The peer leaders worked with members of the RMYC to learn through 'osmosis' and were involved in a variety of activities that included the following:

- * Conducting the DFC Students Survey. Peer leaders were on the team that prepared the survey question, held focus groups, consulted peers, and tallied the results. They hosted the assembly to share study results and gather feedback for the report.
- * Organizing a reception for students based on personal experiences of how they would have liked to be treated when they first arrived at DFC. They designed welcome posters, hosted a barbecue, and co-ordinated displays with information about the city, social services, supports, and extra curricular activities available. They also participated in a memory walk for DFC students who have died while attending school in the city.
- * Working with the DFC Chief and Council to organize a Halloween party, Christmas social, and St. Valentine's Day get-together for students, teachers and staff.
- * Attending lifeskills training, and workskills workshops facilitated by YES Employment Services, the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Indian Friendship Centre, YES Employment Services, and other agencies, spread throughout the year. Some of the professional development sessions were restricted to the hired peer leaders, while others were open to all students interested to participate.
- * Partnering with the RMYC to co-host Influence in Action (Drug Buzz) training with the Student's Commission of Canada/Centre of Excellence at DFC, March 3-4, 2011. Between sixty and seventy Grade 10 students from different high schools across the city to learn about marijuana, and how to use their influence to discourage drug abuse.

- * Organizing Revolution Girl-Style/Girl Power weekly meetings, hosting a Conference and sleepover at DFC, (March 25-26, 2011), and special violence against women prevention workshops (April 11, 15 & 18). Participants shared ideas about safety, creating girl support groups and forming chapters in Thunder Bay high schools.
- * Forming the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen's Society (LEGS), a support group for young men. This is modelled after the Girl Power program, but designed to help male students bond, discuss their concerns, and learn about the responsibilities of manhood.
- * Recruiting and registering participants for the Kids Help Phone focus group at DFC (April 19, 2011). This was in response to a higher volume of calls from children and youth in remote First Nations who are in crisis situations (e.g. contemplating suicide, found themselves pregnant and alone, are being bullied, physically abused, sexually exploited, etc.) and do not know who to turn to. Eighteen students including six peer leaders participated in the consultation.
- * Participating in the Chiefs of Ontario's (COO) First Nations Young People's Council Policy Forums to discuss the creation of a youth engagement policy for First Nations children and youth. Ten DFC peer leaders were part of a core group of twenty young people invited to the consultation facilitated by the Students Commission of Canada/Centre of Excellence at the Victoria Inn, April 2-3, 2011. The two-day session included adult allies who provided guidance, references and support for the youth to come up with a process to involve aboriginal youth across Ontario in policy development.
- * Hosting a Chiefs of Ontario Indigenous Youth Engagement Policy Forum at DFC, April 28-29, 2011. About sixty youths from northern reserves participated in workshops led by the Ontario's First Nations Young People's Council and the Students Commission of Canada/Centre of Excellence to gather input and feedback on the policy's content.
- * Working with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth to form a Boarding Homes Advisory Group. Twenty students signed up to participate in a series of meetings and focus groups facilitated by Advocacy Office staff to gather input on accommodation and quality of life issues faced by students attending school in the city.

- * Recruiting students to create a wider pool of peer helpers and positive role models who reach out and influence more students. There were six peer leaders when the project began in the fall. The number increased to ten core members at the start of the new year. By the time of the survey, in March, twenty students were attending planning meetings regularly to help organize activities, and encourage their peers to participate.
- * Co-ordinating and promoting the after school program funded by the Ministry of Health Promotion. Peer leaders organized events, made posters and announcements inviting students to participate in games such as floor hockey, volleyball, basketball, etc. in the gyms. They arranged paint-ball outings, use of the fitness room, music room, and other classrooms for extra curricular activities. They liaised with the Elders for arts and crafts, and invited resource people for cultural teachings and drumming. Schoolmates were encouraged to attend tutorials and study groups to catch up with schoolwork.
- * Soliciting food donations and preparing snacks for students staying after classes to participate in after school activities. They took turns making and serving food to an average of forty students who stayed behind to use the facilities and resources.
- * Participating in professional development sessions such as the Drug Buzz, and Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) presentations to hone public speaking skills.

The above activities (some on video: <http://podpeople.ca/index.php?page=viewer&u=9>) are testimonies of what can be accomplished by investing in youths to make a difference. The ripple effects of working with youths to influence peers to act accordingly can create changes needed to break negative cycles. However, young people need incentives, on-going support and encouragement to stay the course and not give-in to the negative peer pressure around them. In spite of the achievements, there were instances when peer leaders faltered and had to be reprimanded for misbehaving. At the end of the project, a quarter of the peer leaders had been replaced for failing to lead by example. A third of the students who signed up to help were sent home for continuing risky behaviour. We are pleased to report that just over half the students enrolled at DFC last fall were still attending school at year-end -- compared to two thirds who were sent home the year before. We believe that having peer leaders reaching out to other students, and their caring spirit contributed to more students completing the year.

Experience with the RMYC has taught us that training, on-going adult support, and generous resources are necessary for developing, nurturing, and retaining group leaders. Keeping good peer leaders over long periods will enable them to share their influence and reinforce positive habits. Stability and consistency are needed for positive influence to take root. Internalized habits and ingrained behaviour do not change overnight. Therefore, one-time grants, and short-term projects undermine continuation of successful initiatives to engage youth.

From the DFC pilot project, we learned that it is hard to find good peer leaders. The intensity of peer pressure to conform, and coercion not to change is overwhelming. Hence the high numbers of peer leaders and peer helpers who failed to lead by example. In this context, it should be a priority to support good peer leaders trying to create change. It takes time and a lot of effort to groom and nurture peer leaders with dysfunctional backgrounds into positive role models. It will take even longer to realize the impact of their influence. As this pilot project ends, we risk losing momentum and the progress so far, if we do not keep the young leaders engaged and acquaintances they influenced to stay the course. Things will not get better if we do not invest in prevention alternatives for aboriginal youth. It is estimated that aboriginal gangs will double in ten years. Gangs have the drive and resources to recruit. We have to be equally committed and resourceful to counter this negative pressure that threatens everyone.

5. ***Federal, provincial and municipal governments, the business sector, community groups and concerned citizens should invest in developing the capacity of young leaders as positive role models who lead by example and use peer influence to make a difference. Training is needed to enable peer helpers to gain skills to reach out and engage others to be part of the solution to their problems, and empower them to initiate the change they want to see.***
6. ***The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, should provide financial resources to create, support and sustain aboriginal peer leaders at DFC who can work with other students to organize activities that reduce risk factors, enhance their safety, improve graduation rates, counter negative lifestyles, and avoid involvement in criminal youth gangs.***

(iii) SAFE PLACES FOR YOUTH TO HANG OUT:

Youths need safe places to hang out and participate in casual and structured activities. Safe havens youth can call their own are needed for easy access to programs, supports, and services that make a difference. Aboriginal students would benefit greatly from friendly and non-racist facilities where they feel at home, meet new people, relax and enjoy life in the city. Such places could provide opportunities for the community to meet with young people on their own turf, hear them out, and engage them as stakeholders in safety issues, community development, and any other matters of mutual interest.

As mentioned in the survey, there is a shortage of non-commercial safe and supervised places for students to hang out after school. The RMYC's Multicultural Youth Centre established in the city's south-core in 1992 was forced to close its drop-in service due to a lack of operational funding. This has taken away a safe popular place for all youths, including aboriginal students studying in the city, to hang out, use computers, access information and resources, be exposed to positive peer influence, and other helpful supports they need. Constant closure of the centre in winter because of limited funds to heat the facility deprives Youth Council officers a regular place to meet, discuss issues, plan events, organize activities, train peer leaders, develop role models, participate in professional development sessions, and so forth.

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The DFC project has enabled the RMYC to use the school as meeting place to consult with youths, and engage them on issues of mutual interest. As alluded to earlier in this report, this survey, and the various activities organized by the Peer Leaders at DFC happened because the students had space to meet, plan, and organize the activities. Safe, inclusive, well supervised and easily accessible spaces young people can call their own, do encourage young people to be involved in positive activities.

As this report was being prepared, there was another tragedy involving a fifteen-year old aboriginal student from Webequie First Nation and attending school at Matawa Learning Centre in Thunder Bay. The body of Jordan Wabasse was recovered from Kaministiquia River on May 10, 2011. He had been missing from his boarding home since February 7, 2011, and was last seen getting off the bus from school. There is suspicion of foul play and possible gang involvement in the last two deaths after Reggie Bushie -- Jordan and Kyle Morrisseau.

Jordan brings to seven, the number of aboriginal students from remote reserves who have died while attending school in the city. With no secondary schools on some reserves, there is no option for the youth, but to leave home for formal higher education. Thunder Bay is the home for many aboriginal students attending high school. Therefore, it is important to provide all children and youth with safe places to hang out, and affordable recreational activities to reduce boredom, promote fitness and healthy lifestyles. It would be a worthwhile investment in the quality of life for the country's most valuable human resource for the future.

- 7. *Municipal, provincial and federal governments should develop a strategy to fund youth centres, and sustain prevention-oriented programs that help to keep kids from crime and off the streets after hours. Safe facilities conveniently located and easily accessible should be supported for vulnerable and at risk children and youth, particularly aboriginal students from reserves to hangout with new friends, participate in positive activities, access services, and be involved in supervised social, recreational, educational and cultural activities.***

But, merely providing safe spaces, does not guarantee that they will be utilized and become popular hangouts. Generally, students stick around places they are welcome and feel comfortable to do what they like and are used to. A strategic plan is needed to have peers the youth know and trust promote the venues, introduce the facilities and the services provided. Otherwise, students are likely to continue hanging out in familiar places, and doing the same negative things they are used to. Old habits die hard, and it will take someone that the youth can connect with, to persuade or convince them to try something new and different.

This is where peer role models and team leaders play an important role to facilitate change. Having pools of trained peer helpers who communicate well with other young people, and can use their influence to persuade them to participate in positive activities will make a difference. As alluded to earlier in the report, providing skills and sharing experiences to enable peer helpers to network and convince other students to do things differently, can help to break negative cycles. The RMYC feels that a youth-to-youth approach with adult support and guidance is the best way to engage aboriginal students, and empower them through positive peer pressure to change lifestyles and resist the growing influence of criminal youth gangs.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This study is a follow-up to consultations organized by the RMYC to prepare aboriginal youths for the Reggie Bush Inquest that has yet to take place. In the absence of the Coroner's Inquest and formal recommendations emanating from the process, students impacted by the tragedy have used the survey to outline their priorities and what they feel should be done to prevent similar disasters. It is taking too long to begin dealing with the issues.

The suggestions to improve the situation supplement recommendations prepared for the Coroner's Inquest. A review of the students' priorities and the latest tragedy involving Jordan Wabasse, confirm that something needs to be done soon. The problems will not go away until the causes and contributing factors are addressed. Students have ideas of what they want done, and what they are willing to do to improve conditions and reduce risks. We should capitalize on the interest, engage them in the process, and proceed to deal with the serious issues that put their lives at risk and their studies in jeopardy.

Working with the peer leaders enabled us to reach and influence more students with encouraging results. But, as the project ends, we risk losing the services of the peer leaders we trained, their skills and experience to make a difference. Youth are a dependent population with no financial capital to sustain projects. The RMYC has no funds to continue with the peer leaders' project and capitalize on the accomplishments. The Ministry of Health Promotion only funds after-school activities three days a week for three hours a day. It is a great setback if we cannot build on the progress to date, and a let down for peer leaders who want to do more.

It is difficult for the RMYC to secure operational funding. Not having charitable status is a barrier to accessing grants from foundations. The City of Thunder Bay has a Children's Charter modeled after United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This covers issues related to DFC's students' safety and well-being, but there is no budget assigned to the Children's Charter to support the RMYC's work. Jurisdictional issues between the federal and provincial governments in regards to First Nations matters also get in the way when it comes to on-going funding for aboriginal initiatives in urban areas. And, the one-time funding criteria for most project grants makes it hard to do follow-up on successful best practices.

Recommendations by the students require collaboration between all levels of governments, and the formation of partnerships with stakeholders, businesses and concerned citizens. This will ensure that there is political commitment, adult support, and adequate financial resources to address the issues. Continuing to do things the same way and staying the course means that there will be no change. Current efforts to improve the quality of life among aboriginal people are failing as evidenced by deteriorating social conditions. The rates of poverty, unemployment, addictions, homelessness, violence, suicide, incarceration, disease, children in care, school dropouts, and so forth, are increasing and undermining meaningful progress.

Education provides a strong foundation and hope for a brighter future. Helping aboriginal students to graduate can be a transforming experience that opens doors to a better world. Engaging them to find solutions for their problems gives them ownership of the issues, responsibility to take action, and accountability for the outcomes. Creating peer leaders and role models who can use positive peer influence to initiate change is an effective strategy to improving the social environment and learning conditions for aboriginal students.

Below is a summary of key recommendations re-printed from the original report prepared for the Reggie Bushie Inquest. As stakeholders directly impacted by the deaths of their peers, DFC students want action on these key recommendations without waiting for the hearings to formally start, so that more tragedies, pain and suffering can be avoided.

8. ***The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Ontario's Attorney General should work with stakeholders to expedite the Reggie Bushie Inquest, and provide funding for proactive youth-to-youth initiatives targeting Aboriginal children and youth.***
9. ***Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) should provide adequate funding for 'status' students to meet realistic costs and cover the needs of on-reserve and boarding students. Addressing this inequity to match the provincial level of funding per student should be a priority. AANDC should forge partnerships with other stakeholders (such as the RMYC) empathetic and committed to the well-being of Aboriginal people, and support innovative and proactive strategies for the youth to stay in school and succeed.***

10. *The City of Thunder Bay and Thunder Bay's Children's Advocate should be proactive in promoting the Children's Charter, and have a budget to advance the cause by providing grants to enable community groups with best practices to engage children and youth, mobilize them, and encourage participation in positive activities that complement the Children's Charter.*
11. *The City of Thunder Bay should create a "Welcome Wagon" to meet, greet, and accommodate the needs of a growing Aboriginal population from the reserves. City Hall should work with stakeholders to form an orientation team to introduce aboriginal students to services, supports and facilities available in the city, and offer adults the help and supports they need to be positive role models.*
12. *DFC and NNEC should liaise with First Nations sending students to the city and help to identify those with potential to be peer leaders and role models able to use positive influence to make a difference. A well-funded program should be developed to train and retain the services of peer helpers who will enhance social transformation to break negative cycles and unhealthy lifestyles. While waiting for the residence, DFC should also provide supper at school for all students.*
13. *NAN should partner with band councils and pool resources to prepare and support students coming to study in the city, as well as help them to succeed.*
14. *The Ministry of Children and Youth Services should expand the Summer Jobs for Youth program to cover more age groups, and run the program throughout the year as part of youth engagement and Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.*
15. *The Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion should support more after school programs, and invest in developing and training youth leaders who are able to engage peers in activities that encourage physical exercise, promote healthy lifestyles and wellness. Funding the RMYC's initiatives at DFC will help to keep students busy and safe after school, as well as create a generation of active aboriginal kids to counter preventable illnesses such as obesity and diabetes.*

DFC PEER LEADERS*, PEER HELPERS** AND TEAM MEMBERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Vince Ash* | 24. Aaron McKay** |
| 2. Marita Barkman | 25. Brandon Meekis* |
| 3. Charlene Barkman | 26. Dominic Meekis* |
| 4. Pamela Barkman | 27. Marella Meekis* |
| 5. Randall Barkman* | 28. Jimmy Monias* |
| 6. Jayleen Beardy | 29. Sandy Owen** |
| 7. Joanne Beardy | 30. Mayveline Quill |
| 8. Skye Beardy | 31. Andrea Rae* |
| 9. Davery Bottle | 32. Angela Rae |
| 10. Nicole Bunting | 33. Kerri Rae* |
| 11. Jonathan Crane | 34. Kevin Rae** |
| 12. Brittney Fiddler | 35. Larissa Sakchekapo** |
| 13. Darren Gray** | 36. Michael Semple* |
| 14. Clayton Hudson* | 37. Ricky Strang* |
| 15. Correen Kakegamic* | 38. Jordie Turtle* |
| 16. Stephanie Kamenewetamin | 39. Curtis Winter** |
| 17. Kaneesha Kanakakeesic** | |
| 18. Chantal Keeash* | DFC Chief and Council Reps. |
| 19. Kat Keeash | 40. Darrin Fiddler** – Student Chief |
| 20. Roseanna Kakekagumic* | 41. Harley Anderson -Student Council |
| 21. Linda Kwandibens* | 42. Kevin Anderson “ ” |
| 22. Claudia Linklater | 43. Donny Nayotchekeesic “ ” |
| 23. Taryn Linklater | 44. Naomi Wesley* “ ” |

Thunder Bay Children's Charter

All children deserve basic rights and freedoms. A fair share of society's resources must be devoted to ensuring this. Families are responsible for raising their children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that working in partnership with communities, all levels of governments have a duty to assist families to fulfill their responsibilities.*

All Thunder Bay children deserve:

- * a quality of life that meets their physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs
- * to have enough nutritious food every day.
- * to have a safe and comfortable place to live..
- * quality child care and/or early education programs.
- * to have safe places to play, and access to affordable recreational activities.
- * quality primary, secondary, and affordable post secondary education.
- * the resources to ensure life-long good health.
- * to be served by governments that put the health and well-being of children first by ensuring enough funding for children's programs.
- * to be protected from neglect and abuse.
- * to be safe from exploitation.**

* For the purposes of this Charter children are defined as being from birth to eighteen years of age.

** For the purposes of this Charter being exploited means to be used unfairly by someone else to meet their own needs.

Adopted by City Council for the City of Thunder Bay,

June 14, 2004

www.thunderbay.ca

A Message from Thunder Bay Children's Advocate

The City of Thunder Bay's new strategic plan calls for the need to improve our quality of life. A vital part of accomplishing this Mission is the development of a Children's Charter and Child Advocate for the City of Thunder Bay in consultation with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and other interested groups. On Feb. 16, 2004, City Council appointed me as the Children's Advocate for the City of Thunder Bay.

The Children's Advocate is an elected official who, in cooperation with the Thunder Bay Children's Charter Coalition, will advocate on behalf of children's needs with all levels of government, and the private sector as appropriate. I am honoured to serve in this important new role.

Councillor Joe Virdiramo

The Children's Advocate will:

- provide advice, and advocate on behalf of children's needs, at the political level
- be an active member of the Thunder Bay Children's Charter Coalition
- be kept informed about local issues relating to children's health, social needs, and available children's programs, services, and activities
- provide advice to the Coalition on the best ways of bringing concerns forward at the political level
- keep the Coalition informed about the Corporation's plans that will affect children
- report regularly to City Council on the activities of the Coalition
- endorse the publication of an annual report on the Coalition's activities which includes the Thunder Bay Children's Charter
- act as ambassador to promote the values embodied in the Thunder Bay Children's Charter at every opportunity

The Thunder Bay Children's Charter embraces these values as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child.



VANDALISM: Police believe the graffiti was placed on the sign sometime Saturday night or Sunday morning.

Disturbing message

Police endure weekend of offensive graffiti around Thunder Bay

CRIME

By Scott Paradis - TB Source

Police are looking for the person or people who spray painted "disturbing" messages across the city, including one that read "kill Indians" on a sign near a high traffic area.

The derogatory, anti-Aboriginal message was crudely painted on a retail sign for The Brick and Bank of Montreal at the corner of Fort William Road and Main Street. The message has been removed, but Thunder Bay Police Service officials say they believe the "offensive and disturbing" graffiti was placed on the sign sometime Saturday night or Sunday morning.

Anti-aboriginal

"It would be disturbing to anyone in looking at it," said city police spokesman Chris Adams. "It involved a very strong anti-aboriginal statement ... That graffiti has been cleaned up, but we are seeking the public's assistance."

Three other incidents of offensive graffiti were reported in the Current River area over the

weekend. Adams said the Current River vandalism featured anti-religious messages and also included the name tag of The Hesh.

Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Grand Chief Stan Beardy said the message is troubling but added that it isn't just First Nations residents who should feel uneasy.

"It might be an isolated incident, but anytime there is violence intended toward any group of people I think we should be concerned," Beardy said. "It's one group today, for example in this case it is First Nations people, but tomorrow it could be some other group that's targeted."

"So whenever there's racism involving potential violence, I think we should all be concerned as a society."

Bardey said he hasn't personally experienced racism in Thunder Bay but acknowledges that it does exist, and snuffing out that racism starts inside the province's schools.

"Right now when you look at any textbook in the school system, especially at the elementary level, the First Nations people are always portrayed as savages," Beardy said. "I think that's wrong and I think as

a society we need to work at that."

The Current River locations featured derogatory remarks about Jesus and what police are calling a satanic symbol. While the vandalism was all reported during the weekend, police can't say at this point whether or not the Current River incidents are connected to the graffiti in the Intercity area.

No gangs involved

"We don't believe that these are gang-related messages," Adams said. "The tagging that has gone on in the Current River area is obviously someone who has feelings about religion. There was a satanic symbol left at at least one of those sites."

Police did not give the exact location of the Current River vandalism, but said two appeared at institutions while a third appeared on a residential property.

These incidents are now under investigation by the Community Policing Branch of the Thunder Bay Police Service.

Anyone with information regarding these incidents is asked to call police or Crime Stoppers.

A place for everyone

Racist graffiti stifles inclusiveness

MANY people who drove along Fort William Road at Intercity last month saw the racist graffiti under a bank sign: "Kill Indians." The public does not know who wrote it and we do not know how many people share these sentiments. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a public outcry against this call for genocide or ethnic cleansing.

Canada is a multicultural society and we take pride in our diversity. The Canadian Charter of Rights and our Constitution acknowledge special inherent rights for Aboriginal people.

Racist messages and negative attitudes against the First Nations take us back to the pioneer days of colonization and residential schools. The early settlers wanted to exterminate indigenous people and take over everything, while residential schools were intended to take the "Indianess" out of Aboriginal children, and assimilate them.

At the Rising Aboriginal Voices Youth Symposium attended by over 270 young people in Thunder Bay last year, racism topped the list of priorities.

And, from media reports, various surveys and consultations the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) has conducted in local schools and city neighbourhoods, racial incidents, including violent altercations involving Aboriginal people, are on the increase.

Each fall, the RMYC works with other community groups to orga-

nize orientation sessions to welcome hundreds of First Nations students from the region to Thunder Bay, help them to deal with culture shock and make them feel comfortable.

The message of "killing Indians" does little to ease the fears of these youths in a new place. It also raises anxiety and safety concerns among parents in outlying communities who send their children to schools in our city.

The RMYC is a member of the City of Thunder Bay's Advisory Committee on Anti-Racism. When the committee resumes sitting after the summer break, we hope that there will be public pronouncements by our community leaders denouncing this form of blatant intolerance.

We need to assure Aboriginal students coming to attend school here, as well as the growing Aboriginal population in our city, that we indeed, have a "giant heart" that accommodates everyone.

It is our collective obligation to make sure beyond any doubt that all citizens, regardless of race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, etc., are welcome for the growth and prosperity of our community.

**Amal Abu-Bakare, Correen
Kakegamic, Shane Turtle,
Richard Wirkkunen, Martin
Zhang**

Regional Multicultural Youth Council
THUNDER BAY

I have been witness to racism all of my life

I AM writing in response to the extremely well-written letter submitted by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council about racism in our city (A Place For Everyone; Racist Graffiti Stifles Inclusiveness, C-J, Aug. 28).

I am a registered member of the Mishkeegogamang First Nation and have been witness to racism all of my life.

My mother was subjected to residential school and for the most part, they did succeed in removing the "Indianess" out of her for many years.

However, her love of the land, fishing, hunting and berry picking were just examples of "Indianess" she managed to keep.

I should explain that though I hold status, I appear white. My father is a first generation Swedish-Canadian.

In the past month, I have witnessed two specific incidents that have been very upsetting.

The first was going to a walk-in clinic for a pre-op exam. The doctor was polite, efficient and asked the appropriate questions of me.

The next patient was a Native woman (whom I know to be a well-educated professional) and instead of asking how he could help her, the doctor informed her that they don't give out prescriptions for narcotics. This was said before he even asked why she had come in.

She left there in tears. For the record, she had a bladder infection.

Yesterday, while checking out at a local grocery store, I read a sign saying the store will no longer be stocking Orange mouthwash.

When I asked the cashier why, she answered "I'm sure you can guess" and went on to elaborate that the "people from the Mission" are often waiting outside the store at 7 a.m. to purchase it to drink.

I just replied that any substance abuser will always find a way to get their fix, but in hindsight I should have informed her that she had just served one of those "people."

From now on I will and in the future if I am witness to more racism towards Natives, rest assured I will step in, speak up and most likely humiliate anyone publicly being racist.

Nita McLean
THUNDER BAY

Aboriginal youth asked to leave Intercity Shopping Centre

James Thom
Wawatay News

approaching his students in stores and telling them they had five minutes to complete their transaction and leave, students being told they had a few minutes to finish eating in the food court before they would be asked to leave and a group of students being escorted off Intercity's property. The students weren't allowed to catch the city bus on Intercity's property, Kakegamic said.

Meekis, who is from Keewatin but living in the city while attending school, said he felt targeted because of the colour of his skin.

"We weren't doing anything wrong. We were just hanging out," Meekis said of the Sept. 16 incident.

He said three security guards told them they would have to leave if they weren't going to buy anything.

"My friends had already bought things," Meekis said. "They had shopping bags."

In order to appease the security guards, the group bought coffee and sat down in the food court.

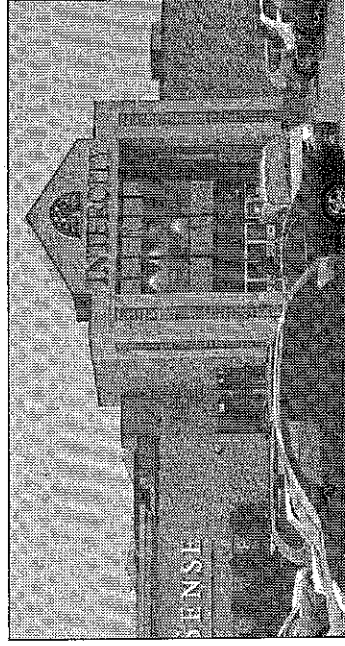
Again, security approached them and told them they were loitering and would have to leave, Meekis said.

"I think they were being really rude to us," he said. "I think they just wanted us out." The incident left Meekis frustrated.

"I was supposed to meet my aunt (at Intercity) that night," he said. "She told me later that she was waiting for me and couldn't find me. She couldn't find me because I got kicked out."

Meekis' story is one of several DFC principal Jonathan Kakegamic heard of during the week of Sept. 13-17.

These include security



James Thom/Wawatay News

Over the course of a week in mid-September, several incidents occurred at Intercity Shopping Centre where security guards asked Aboriginal youth to leave their property. Intercity officials said youth – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – were asked to leave because they were loitering and not following mall rules.

Julier said when the group saw him, they scattered and ran away over the McIntyre River bridge toward the movie theatre.

Stapley said loitering has been a common problem in the past, involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. When there are large groups congregating and not shopping, it can lead to a poor shopping experience for other patrons.

In this case, Intercity had "concerns over the other customers," Stapley said so security started removing people.

Neither Stapley or Julier knew of any of the other specific incidents raised.

"If (patrons) are misbehaving, they may be asked to leave," Stapley said.

Julier said a protocol exists for escorting people off the property.

He said a person may be escorted if security feels the mall, its property or tenant merchandise may be damaged, or if a further incident may occur if the person is not removed.

mall around 8 p.m.

"My daughter and her friends came out," he said. "I asked them if something had happened again with security."

His daughter told him that after they had made their purchases, they stopped in the food court for drinks.

"At that point, they were told they had five minutes to finish their drinks and vacate the mall," Robbie Kakegamic said. "They hadn't done anything wrong. They weren't loitering, they were shopping. I know they were really bothered by that."

He said his daughter and her friends had a card explaining mall rules.

Robbie Kakegamic decided to get out of his vehicle and enter the mall, in part to see if security would give him any problems.

"There were three staff standing right in front of the main entrance," he said. "It looked like they were guarding a prison."

As he entered the mall, without a fuss, he saw an Aboriginal couple sitting on the benches in front of the customer service booth with a full cart of purchases.

"I watched as security approached them and pointed toward the corner," Robbie Kakegamic said. "I don't know what security said to them ... but this was an adult couple that had just done a lot of shopping. They were made to go stand in the corner. I always assumed the benches were there for sitting."

The following day, he approached DFC school officials about what he'd seen after recognizing some of his

students being removed from the mall.

Jonathan Kakegamic and others from the school and KO, met with Intercity officials including the operations manager Sept. 17. Stapley and Jonathan Kakegamic met Sept. 20.

"We're trying to develop a relationship with the school," Stapley said.

Jonathan Kakegamic said some good can come from these incidents, though they shouldn't have happened in the first place.

"I went (to the meetings) because my students came to me and they were really upset about what happened," Jonathan Kakegamic said.

He said there have been ongoing issues with students at Intercity long before these incidents came to light. He said the school has never gotten a call about students being in trouble at Intercity though there are on-call workers equipped to deal with it so police don't always need to be involved.

"I know these kids," Jonathan Kakegamic said. "They don't have their mom and dad here to help them with their problems. I need to take that role."

He said Aboriginals, especially the youth, need to start speaking up, but in a positive way.

Jonathan Kakegamic said the matter will be resolved through the meetings he's been having.

He said it would be more productive to work towards a resolution together than take a hard stand.

"If I had gone the political way, this could have been ugly," Jonathan Kakegamic said. "We need to teach patience, teamwork, accountability and operation."

November 25, 2010

www.waw

Students battle drug addiction

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

A pair of Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School students spoke about their addictions during a recent prescription drug abuse conference in Thunder Bay.

"I am a Grade 11 student at DFC and I use Oxycontin," said Anita Meekis, a student from Sandy Lake who started using codeine and Percocets three years ago when she was 16. "I'm just a teenager and I have (had) a lot of issues for the last few years."

Meekis described problems she had with her parents, her boyfriend and her friends.

"The only support I had on my reserve was the healing camp, but I did not attend because I was ashamed of getting help," Meekis said during the Chiefs Forum on Prescription Drug Abuse Nov. 15. "I didn't want certain people to know what I was doing (and) what kind of drugs I was using."

Meekis said she feels bad most of the time, explaining she loves traditional dancing and singing but cannot touch her regalia or hand drums while using prescription drugs.

"I am a fancy shawl dancer and I am a female powwow singer," Meekis said. "I want my traditional life back. I want to be able to dance and I want to be able to sing again."

Meekis said she also wants a better relationship with her parents and friends.

"I want my old friends back," Meekis said. "I want to be drug free."

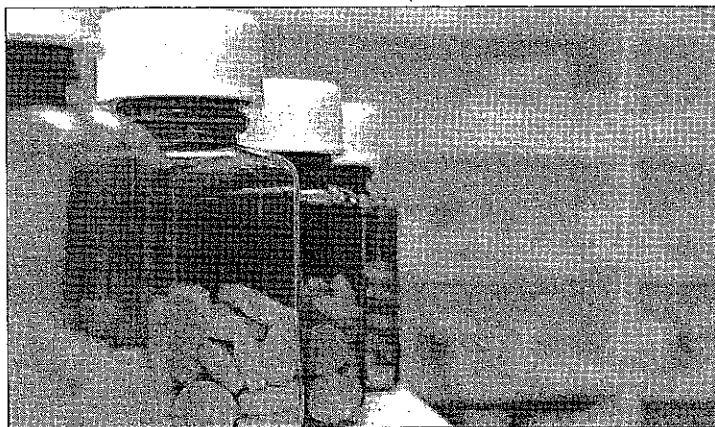
Joanne Beardy, a Grade 9 student from Bearskin Lake, also spoke about her prescription drug addiction.

"I started off using Oxy's when they were first around," Beardy said. "My cousins would always tell me to buy them for them and they would give me a line. They never told me about the withdrawals and the withdrawals are very brutal."

Bardey said she wants help to get off prescription drugs.

Pelican Falls First Nations High School principal Darryl Tinney said while people may have the impression Pelican Falls is a safe school, it has the same issues any other high school has within the province.

"We do have drug issues," Tinney said. "Some of the stories we have heard are just downright terrible, from some of their parents having sold everything (to obtain) their next pill. Some of our students have spent more than \$3,000 from the summertime to now on their drug habits."



submitted photo

Addictions to prescription pills has caused a harmful crisis that is impacting individuals and families throughout the territory in recent years.

Constantly craving prescription pills

Debbie Mishibinijima
Wawatay News

A young child goes to the kitchen to find something to eat, but the cupboards are bare.

Yet again, her stomach grumbles with intense hunger.

The food money has been spent recklessly — as a need for a fix is stronger than feeding the hungry child.

Meanwhile, the parent wonders where her next fix for an Oxycontin ('Oxy') will come from.

This introduction is fictional, but the reality of the crisis engulfing First Nations' people is real.

"In just five short years, prescription pills addiction has become the new deadly crisis that affects First Nations families," said Darlene Angeconeb, Building Aboriginal Women's Leadership project co-ordinator at Equaywuk (Women's Group) in Sioux Lookout.

Like a contagious virus, more and more people have become entrapped in the pills' grip of madness and cravings.

The cost to buy a single 80 mg pill of Oxy can cost hundreds of dollars.

Sadly, it is the kids who end up suffering the most, she said.

The union of marriages is not let off mercilessly either.

Oxycontin, Percocets and Tylenol 3s are all prescriptions that can magically appear with the stroke of a physician's pen.

According to the website www.drug-central.com, Oxycontin/oxydione is typically prescribed for moderate to severe levels of pain, and where constant, 24-hour relief is needed for an extended period of time.

Pills addiction is not limited to young people, to rich people or First Nations' people—the addiction crosses all barriers.

"What people need to be aware of is that they can refuse this type of medication being prescribed, and opt for a less addicting pain reliever," explained Jennifer Desrosier, program director at Equaywuk.

Equaywuk is working with families across the territory in a valiant effort to stop the rapid

spread of drug addiction in the communities.

"Equaywuk as a group, we need more support, lobbying, advocacy," Desrosier added. "If we had more funding for the programs that go to the north, then we can continue doing our part."

The Women's Wellness Program is one such program Equaywuk has to help the families in crises.

The impacts workers have seen in the course of their work are: increased family violence, increased poverty, increased child apprehensions, and increased incarceration—particularly for young women.

The work of the leadership is greatly needed, Desrosier thinks a community action plan needs to be forthcoming from the leadership to address the crises.

At the fall assembly of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation chiefs, a challenge was put forward by Chief Connie Gray-McKay of Mishkeegogamang for other chiefs to take a voluntary drug test. Gray-McKay willingly took a drug test and passed it.

"It starts with us as women leaders, as mothers and aunts; there are young people looking up to us," Desrosier said. "What is important for ourselves and our families to think about is... let's not continue the blaming and move forward in a good way. We can live lives blaming, but how is that helping us?"

Karen Kuzemczak, Nishnawbe Women's Wellness project co-ordinator believes in promoting self-confidence in youth.

"I think for the adolescents, it is important for parents and guardians to ensure that there is confidence and self worth in these kids, and trust and values. If there is good communication, maybe it will break that barrier that the kids feel they have to reach out for a drug."

When it comes to helping people to heal from the cycle of addiction, getting past the denial stage that a problem exists is important.

"We are at a very good place right now," Desrosier said. "We are past that point of denial and

we are talking about it now. I see good things happening within organizations."

Angeconeb has hope that there is a traditional medicine to help recovering addicts with going through the very difficult, physically draining stage of getting weaned.

"There must be some traditional medicines out there to help people off the drug," she said.

To help individuals wean off the drug(s), there was consensus of the Equaywuk staff that it would have to be a grass roots, land-based, community driven initiative that would be the most successful in helping recovering addicts to detoxify his or her body.

"We know there is so much work that needs to be done to support at the community level, and it is more meaningful to actually sit with the people who are seeking support," Desrosier said.

Felicia Waboose is a community wellness worker. She gently reminds concerned family members, however, to find the difference between loving and enabling.

"For example, don't give money to buy some more (pills). You are setting them up to fail."

For Equaywuk, the daunting task of reaching out to families in crisis will continue. After all, the stake of the future generations of children and families are at hand, they say.

For concerned family members wishing to help a loved one wean off the drugs, be forewarned that the withdrawal process from prescription pills can take up to six or more weeks. It does not happen overnight.

A recovering addict will experience intense physical pain, restlessness; particularly at night, loss of appetite and mood swings. The craving to get a 'fix' will not go away.

"It's important for the families not to turn their backs. They (the addict) need to be loved. They need to be helped. They need the support. They are coping with pain, and the cure for pain is love," Waboose said.

Communities looking for treatment options

from page 1

Tinney said prescription drug awareness and help for those who are addicted is provided at Pelican Falls.

"Once we offer them the help, that seems to be one of our biggest challenges," Tinney said. "It's hard to get that help and go through it because the withdrawals are just too great for them."

Tinney said alcohol and marijuana incidents among students have "dropped sharply" this past year at Pelican Falls.

"Our biggest challenge is you can't smell the pills," Tinney said. "They are not as easy to find and I know a number of our students, in talking to the student body, are switching that to their drug of choice."

The Chiefs Forum on Prescription Drug Abuse was held Nov. 15 through videoconference. It was facilitated by Poplar Hill and the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority with Jim Morris, SLENHA executive director, as chairman and Eabametoong Chief Lewis Nate as co-chairman.

Videoconference participants included Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief Mike Metawabin, a number of NAN chiefs and representatives from a number of tribal

councils, Health Canada, Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre, Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Thunder Bay Police Service, and Wasaya.

Wasaya Airways' John D. Beardsley described the airline's plans to install baggage and cargo screening machines to screen baggage and shipments at the Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout, Pickle Lake and Red Lake airports.

"The plan here will affect all the communities we service," Beardsley said. "We plan to screen every bag and every shipment that goes through the airline."

Beardsley said airlines serving northern Manitoba are now beginning to screen passengers as well.

"The security personnel screen passengers using technology to detect metal or chemicals or dangerous goods," Beardsley said. "I think we will be looking at that as well."

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Chief Donny Morris brought up health issues and deaths due to prescription drug abuse.

"As chiefs, one of the things we can't overlook is in our cemetery we have quite a large (number of) small graves," Morris said. "In my community, there are confirmed cases of

hepatitis C. With those, HIV is not far behind as we're told."

Morris said there are other issues besides the people who are using prescription drugs that need to be looked at and discussed.

"You have to look at, as I said, premature births, what's triggering them, and prostitution and hepatitis C, needle sharing," Morris said. "A lot of these communities don't believe needles are an issue but they are."

He said syringes are being sold in his community for \$50 each and the diabetics are asking where all the needles are going.

Sandy Lake Chief Adam Fiddler emphasized the prescription drug abuse issue in the NAN region is not due primarily to prescribed drugs, but due to illegally brought into and sold in the communities by community members.

"The problem is not that our people are being over-prescribed with Oxy's and Perc's," Fiddler said. "The problem is people are buying it on the streets in Winnipeg and Thunder Bay as a street drug in bulk quantities and it's getting into our community. It's not necessarily over-prescribing, it's being sold on the black market out there."

Fiddler said research needs to be carried out on the affects of long-term prescription drug abuse.

"We know the social implications, we know the effects it has on families, the devastation it is causing in our community when people are addicted to these drugs," Fiddler said. "What we don't know yet is the physical effect after five years if somebody is either snorting or injecting Oxy's every day. What is the long-term effect physically?"

Fiddler also expressed interest in the Suboxone treatment for prescription drug abuse brought up during the videoconference.

"I'd like to learn more about this Suboxone," Fiddler said. "From what I'm hearing, I'm interested in being one of the pilot sites ... to see if it can help our people."

The treatment is available, on an out-patient basis in large centres in Canada including Toronto, to treat pain killer addiction and abuse of opiates with minimal disruptions to work, social and family life.

The Chiefs Forum on Prescription Drug Abuse concluded with the testimony of a Sandy Lake prescription drug healing camp client.

"He gave a testimony and it was so powerful," said Tina

Kakepetum-Schultz, one of the organizers of the forum. "He just kept thanking the chief and council for bringing a program like the healing camp to Sandy Lake."

Kakepetum-Schultz said the client and his wife had only known each other while under the influence of prescription drugs and their daily conversation from the time they got up was where could they get their next fix.

"He said he brought so much pain and shame to his family," Kakepetum-Schultz said. "He said when he and his wife attended that healing camp, they were taught to understand how the drugs were affecting them, their bodies and their lives and the whole family."

Kakepetum-Schultz said the client saw the light one day while out on the land with the Elders.

"He said the Elders made him get up early in the morning before daylight and he said he was on the lake when the sun came up," Kakepetum-Schultz said.

"That was when he felt something stirring inside him. He said his spirituality had woken up and he could see the beauty of the sun coming up. He said that is when his life began again."

Why it's dangerous

According to Health Canada, Oxycodone is a narcotic used to relieve pain in patients who are experiencing moderate to severe pain. It produces an opiate-like effect similar to morphine.

In recent years, a long acting dosage form of Oxycodone has been introduced to the market and contains between 10-80 milligrams of oxycodone per tablet. This long acting tablet is marketed under the brand name OxyContin and is made to release the pain reliever Oxycodone over a long period of time.

But, when the tablet is crushed or chewed and either inhaled by the nose, injected or swallowed, oxycodone is released and rapidly absorbed producing a heroin-like effect euphoria. For this reason OxyContin is often referred to as "Heroin."

"Health Canada is aware of increasing concerns about the possible misuse and abuse of oxycodone-based products."

LOCAL NEWS

DFC takes action on Oxy addiction

Off-site detox centre
a first of its kind

EDUCATION

By Leith Dunick - TB Source

Looking to nip a growing oxycodone problem in the bud, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School officials have created an in-house solution designed to wean students off the powerful narcotic.

The school has developed a drug treatment program designed specifically to deal with addiction to the semi-synthetic opiate, a program believed to be the first of its kind in Canada.

Principal Jonathan Kakegamic on Friday said it's no secret there's a Canada-wide crisis with the drug, a painkiller prescribed by doctors, but readily available on the black market and growing in popularity amongst Ontario teens.

Kakegamic denied rumours that upward of 40 per cent of his students were using the drug, but acknowledged it is a problem.

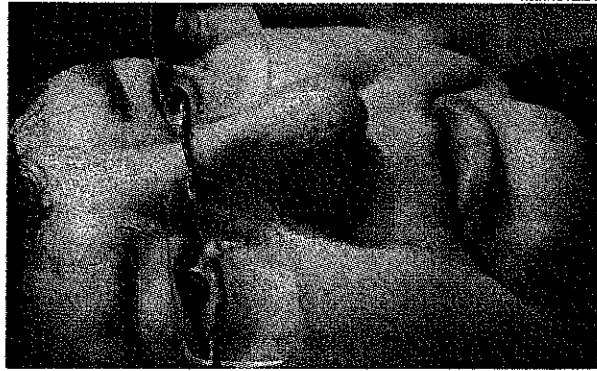
But accepting this as a fact of life just wasn't something he or his staff was willing to do.

"We chose to address the crisis. We're not saying it's a community problem. We're taking ownership and we have the full support of our chiefs. Parents and students are asking for help, and we can't turn them away," he said, noting parents of students at other city high schools might be shocked to learn how prevalent oxycodone is in their hallways.

Still, First Nations youth, many away from family for the first time in their lives, are that much more susceptible. Usage rates are believed to be far higher amongst the Aboriginal teen population than the 1.6 per cent of Grade 7 to 12 students reported in the 2009 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey.

The 14-day program, funded by both the provincial and federal governments, is housed at an off-site physician's office, and tended to by a pair of volunteer doctors and four nurse practitioners paid for through the Local Health Integration Network.

Suboxone pills are used to treat addic-



MAE KATT: Nurse practitioner said teens are surprised how easily Oxy's hook them.

tion and negate damaging withdrawal effects.

From Mae Katt's viewpoint, it's the

best course of action, the solution with the best chance of success against a drug whose addictive forces can capture a user almost instantly. It's particularly effective with teens, she said.

"We know that (the students) have been short-term users, so they don't have a lot of long history of addiction. They're not using other drugs other than the opioid, so for that profile we're looking at detoxification for them as something that's very possible," said Katt, a nurse practitioner who has been working at Dennis Franklin Cromarty for the past eight years.

While alcohol and marijuana continue to be the drugs of choice for teenagers, times are starting to change and for many youngsters in their experimental years, the consequences just aren't thought out thoroughly enough.

They're just as surprised as anyone when they get hooked, Katt said.

"They had no idea they were going to get addicted like this. The addiction profile of this drug is not advertised anywhere. It's a prescription drug that's hit a black market. For these kids, they're adolescents, they're going to try

substances," Katt said.

"We know that about adolescents, even in the mainstream. They're using multiple substances as well. They're going to be experimenting with alcohol, with marijuana and with OxyContin. Unfortunately this is the drug that has gotten some of them addicted."

The program began at Christmastime, Kakegamic said, at the request of students themselves.

"We heard the cries of our youth asking for help," he said. "Anything we do here is at the students' request. We don't force anything on them. All of our programs are from student surveys and talking to our students daily."

He added he's proud of those students who have stepped forward and tackled their addiction head on.

"It takes a solid, human strong soul to say, 'I'm going to quit this drug,'" he said.

Kakegamic said the pilot program is being carefully monitored countrywide, and he expects, if successful, similar models will be rolled out in schools across Canada.



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

About 60-70 high school student peer leaders from schools across Thunder Bay took part in the Drug Buzz/Influence in Action conference March 3-4 at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School.

Getting buzzed on information

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Peer leader students from across Thunder Bay gathered March 3-4 at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School for the Drug Buzz/Influence in Action conference.

"It's an opportunity for all races to communicate," said Elijah Sugarhead, a Drug Buzz/Influence in Action facilitator and role model from Nibinamik.

"This conference is not about telling them don't do this, don't do that; it's about providing them with information about the effects of (drugs and food additives)."

The high school students learned about different additives in foods and drugs, and how those additives can affect them.

"They enjoyed learning some facts, for example, a slice of

pizza contains 1,630 milligrams of sodium," said Cassandra Garrick, a conference co-facilitator. "That is way above and beyond the recommended daily intake of sodium, which is 1,500 milligrams."

How to make healthy choices was the main topic of discussion, Sugarhead said, estimating about 60-70 high school students took part in the conference from DFC, public and Catholic schools across Thunder Bay.

"Drugs is an issue with all our schools - it knows no boundaries and no barriers," said DFC principal Jonathan Kakegamic.

"It's an issue with us and with us taking a lead in partnership with (the Regional Multicultural Youth Council and the Student Commissions of Canada), DFC could play an important role for the City of Thunder Bay for youth.

"We need to stop working in isolation."

Kakegamic said interacting with other students will make the DFC students stronger and give them a voice.

"They enjoyed it," Kakegamic said. "After several hours they are interacting now and feel a lot more comfortable."

Kakegamic said the students have a plan to implement some of the initiatives they developed during the conference.

DFC students Jonathan Crane, from Weagamow Lake, and Davery Bottle, from Mishkeegogamang, have also been chosen to travel to Ottawa March 24-27 to represent DFC at the Students Commission's National 2011 Unite and Ignite Conference where they will share experiences and learn best practices.

"If you work hard, it's worth it," Crane said.

Taking a stand and speaking out

Sandy Lake youth worried drug abuse is deeply affecting his community

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

A Sandy Lake youth said it's time to start taking action against prescription drug abuse.

"Before I came here I didn't really want to do anything about it," said Jonathan McKay, a youth from Sandy Lake who now lives in Thunder Bay and is planning to study business marketing at Confederation College this fall. "But coming here made me realize that we have to do something about it."

McKay joined the Regional Multicultural Youth Centre as a youth worker in early July. The Thunder Bay-based organization promotes youth involvement in positive activities to foster the well-being of children and youth.

"We don't have all the answers but we need to keep doing what we can as a community."

- Adam Fiddler

"It's really hard to do something but you've got to make an effort to do something," McKay said explaining that young and old are abusing prescription drugs. "It affects all ages."

McKay knows the effects of prescription drug abuse first hand.

"I tried it," he said. At first, he felt good he said, but the feeling didn't last.

"I got really sick after I did it. I vowed from that day to never do it again."

McKay is worried how prescription drug abuse is affecting his community, including family and friends.

"When you go back to the reserve you see a lot of changes after being away for so long and that is one of the things that I saw," McKay said.

He said it is difficult to continue playing sports when a group of players leave midway through the game with some other people.

"You know exactly what they are doing," McKay said. "When you have a lot of people taking off it kind of ruins the game."

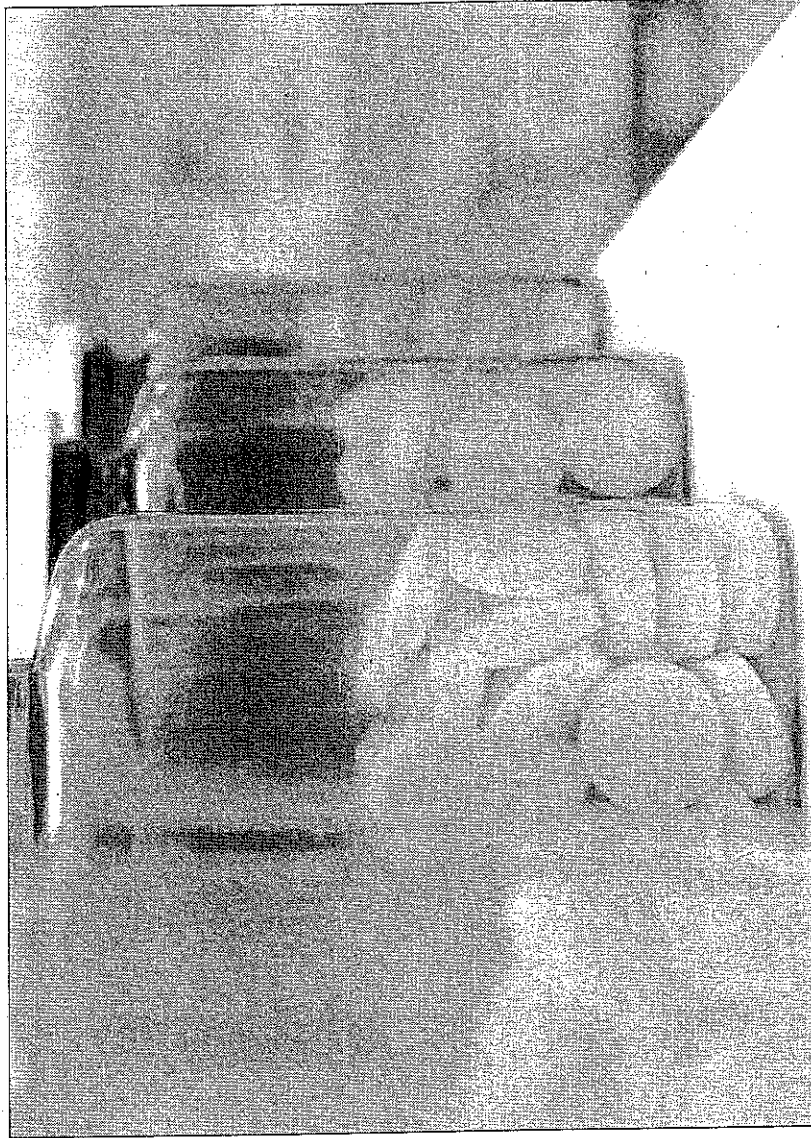
Because of the high cost associated with prescription drug abuse, (an Oxycontin 80 mg pill sells for about \$320 in Sandy Lake), McKay said prescription drug abuse is deeply affecting children and families of abusers.

Sandy Lake Chief Adam Fiddler said the community continues to do whatever it can to stop prescription drug abuse.

"We continue to see the negative effects to community members, to children, to families, to extended families, to Elders," Fiddler said. "Everybody is affected by the prescription drugs and also alcohol in the community."

Fiddler said the community is working with local security and Nishnawbe-Aski Police Service (NAPS). Two different K-9 units were also used to prevent drugs and alcohol from coming into the community.

"The problem still exists, but we continue to do what we can to prevent the inflow of the drugs," Fiddler said. "We have had to take drastic measures



sometimes affecting people. But if they are involved with bringing in drugs and alcohol, they have to deal with the consequences."

There has been a negative backlash about the drastic measures, but Fiddler said the band council needs the support of the community to continue taking action to prevent drugs and alcohol from coming in.

"Preventing the drugs from coming into the community is only one aspect," Fiddler said.

"No matter what you do, drugs or alcohol will always make it in, so the other important aspect is helping those people, providing support for people

based programs, we need to look at structured programs and we need more funding," Fiddler said. "Anything that we do locally is through existing funding, so we need to further develop that as well as something more permanent."

NAPS continues to clamp down on the drug trade. Working with the Combined Forces Organized Crime Unit, police seized about \$25,000 worth of Oxycontin tablets, hashish and marijuana and about \$1,300 in cash Aug. 5 in Geraldton, Ont.

A Geraldton man was charged with possession for the purpose of trafficking a controlled substance.

A Sandy Lake youth said an 80 mg Oxycontin pill costs around \$320 in the remote First Nation. Drug abuse is prompting communities to find ways to deal with the problem. Sandy Lake has taken measures to try and prevent drugs and alcohol from entering the community including the use of K-9 units at the local airport.

Wawatay News file photo

Aboriginal gangs thrive

They're becoming 'sophisticated in how they do business'

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Aboriginal gangs are proliferating across Canada as criminal organizations exploit the intense poverty and squalid conditions that many First Nations youth live in, says a top officer with the RCMP's aboriginal police division.

The gangs' stock-in-trade includes drug distribution, prostitution and theft, and they're only growing more sophisticated, said the RCMP.

"The gangs are brought on by poverty," said RCMP Sgt. Merle Carpenter, who holds the aboriginal gangs file with the National Aboriginal Policing Services.

"They intimidate by violence and these aboriginal youth are just wanting to belong to somebody."

While Winnipeg, with its large aboriginal population, is still the epicentre for native gangs, outfits like the Indian Posse, the Manitoba Warriors and the Native Syndicate have spread from coast to coast and into the far North.

"They are certainly increasing in numbers and becoming more sophisticated in how they do business," said Carpenter, who is a member of the Inuvialuit First Nation in the

western arctic.

The gangs are growing through the country's network of jails, which are acting as hothouses for recruitment and learning the tricks of the trade.

If you're not a member of a gang when you go to jail, police officials in Manitoba say, you will be when you come out. Many prisoners simply cannot survive jail life without the protection of a gang.

Last week, an aboriginal policy conference in Ottawa heard that aboriginal youth membership in gangs could double in the next 10 years.

Dr. Mark Totten, a sociologist and expert on Canadian street gangs, released a study that found aboriginal gang violence has reached "epidemic levels" in many communities.

Totten said female aboriginals are often traded among gang members and, as part of their initiation, are made to have sex with numerous gang members at the same time.

Observers say the explosive growth can't be combated unless the federal government steps up and addresses the woeful conditions underlying the startling trend.

"It's so simple that it's hard to understand why nothing's happening,"

said Steve Koptie, an aboriginal social worker who spent several years working in the mental health field for 21 reserves in Ontario's Northwest.

"It's all about education and employment. If we don't get youth educated and we don't get them... participating in the workforce we're going to continue to watch this deterioration."

Koptie notes there is vast mineral wealth in Canada's North, such as the Ring of Fire in Northwestern Ontario, which can provide jobs for many now-destitute aboriginals.

"The issue is how are we going to share the resources and how are we going to make education a priority," said Koptie, who added schools on reserves get half the funding of schools off reserve.

"The federal government is responsible for education on reserve and they've fallen so far behind, they've dropped the ball majorly on this."

Calls to the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs for comment were not immediately returned.

• Continued on page A5

If there's money to be made, gangs will be there

Continued from page A1

Vancouver and the lower B.C. mainland, with its close proximity to the United States and its oceanic coastline, have become a major gateway for the importation of drugs in the last few years, said the RCMP.

But alarmingly, the native gangs are spreading into rural B.C. as well, including Vancouver Island, the B.C. interior, Fort St. John's in the northwest and Prince Rupert on the northwest coast.

Smaller gangs are springing up there, with names like Red Alert, Cree Boys, Native Blood and Native Posse.

They are now in all corners of the province, said Supt. Dan Malo, the RCMP's officer in charge of the combined forces gang task force in B.C.

"In all the locations and corners of this province, there are people who use drugs," said Malo.

"Where there's a consumer base there'll always be a seller, and that's where some of our native gangs seize the opportunity."

Aboriginal gangs are easily migrating eastward from Winnipeg into Northwestern Ontario as well, often using relatives and friends as drug and alcohol couriers into even the most remote fly-in reserves, via plane or winter ice roads.

"In one of the northern communities I was in, I met a young man with rope burns on his neck, he was 17 years old, and a gang member from Winnipeg had been in the community and he gave him one week to come up with \$1,500," said Koptie.

The young man decided he was

going to kill himself because he couldn't come up with the money, he said.

"This is happening across the country."

The criminal gangs are even spreading as far north as Iqaluit, Whitehorse, Yellowknife, Inuvik and the Arctic, said Carpenter.

Oil and gas exploration meant there was a "lot of money in that neck of the woods."

"If there's money to be made, they're going to be there."

One-time geographic boundaries, in which gangs used to control turf-specific areas of towns or cities, are blurring.

Now, in any given neighbourhood in Winnipeg, for instance, all the gangs will be represented, said Mitch Bourbonniere, a Metis and

veteran social worker who has spent decades pulling aboriginal kids out of gangs in Winnipeg.

"The higher-up guys who are smarter know not to make trouble for each other," he said.

"They've all learned to kind of co-exist because they all know they're all in it for the same reason, and that is to make money."

The gangs are evolving in other ways as well, learning police and Crown attorney tactics across the country, Carpenter said.

"It's just cat and mouse. If you are doing a big operation on one gang and put them all in jail, well another gang pops up," he said.

"It's a supply-and-demand issue and it's just a never-ending cycle."

Carpenter said he thinks much can be done at the community level about the gang proliferation.

"The police can't do it alone."

Gangs attract youth with alcohol syndrome: doctors

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO — A higher incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome among some aboriginal communities in Canada is making their youth more vulnerable to being lured into gangs, experts say.

The syndrome, in which the brain of the fetus is damaged by excessive drinking during pregnancy, can make gang life seem exciting and attractive, say doctors and social workers who deal with aboriginal youth suffering from the condition.

And they worry that if more isn't done to provide support those youth could be lost to criminal life forever.

"If we don't get engaged in a solution for this issue, we are creating a nightmare, because we do know 60 per cent of the aboriginal population is under 25," said Steve Koptie, a veteran social worker and Mohawk.

"This is . . . a demographic tsunami facing Canada."

Koptie, who has spent several years in some of Canada's most remote and troubled reserves, said he's seen gangs in Hamilton use youths suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome to conduct break and enters and petty crimes.

"These kids are vulnerable."

Experts are careful to ascribe the vulnerability only to those youth who have actually been medically diagnosed with the syndrome.

"Kids that are in gangs, that have been medically identified with having (fetal alcohol syndrome) . . . there is still a correlation there," said Mitch Bourbonniere, a Metis social worker who has spent much of his life pulling kids out of gangs in Winnipeg.

"It's significant, for sure."

Youth with the syndrome often face a double-whammy. Many are dealing with poverty, addictions and abuse in a family that may also be breaking down, factors that can also draw youth into gangs, Bourbonniere added.

Several studies of aboriginal communities

have shown the incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome can be 10 times that of the non-aboriginal population, said Dr. Chandrakant Shah, a pediatrician with Anishnawbe Health Toronto who has worked on aboriginal reserves for 30 years.

Health Canada pegs the incidence of the syndrome in some aboriginal and Inuit communities as high as one in five.

The federal agency says that each year up to 750 babies are born with full-blown fetal alcohol syndrome in Canada. About 1,000 are born with a range of alcohol-related damage, sometimes referred to as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) or fetal alcohol effects (FAE), it says.

"It's not a racial issue so much as rampant use of alcohol," warns Dr. Albert Chudley, a professor of pediatrics and medical genetics at the University of Manitoba.

"It's a disease of poverty," said Chudley, adding not all aboriginal communities suffer from such alarming rates of the disorder.

Dr. Caroline Tait, assistant professor of native studies at the University of Saskatchewan, said she doesn't accept the argument that fetal alcohol syndrome makes youth more vulnerable to gangs.

A child without the syndrome who is raised in multiple foster homes, or is neglected or abused is just as vulnerable, Tait said.

Tait adds she's concerned that aboriginal women will be blamed for feeding the gang problem if the link is made between the two.

"It draws our attention away from the conditions of poverty, the other determinants . . . that I would argue are much more important if we want to understand gang involvement than FAS ever is."

A number of scientific studies solidly and consistently show an over-representation of those with fetal alcohol syndrome among those involved in criminal activity and in jails, Chudley said.

Rally cries for action to protect youths

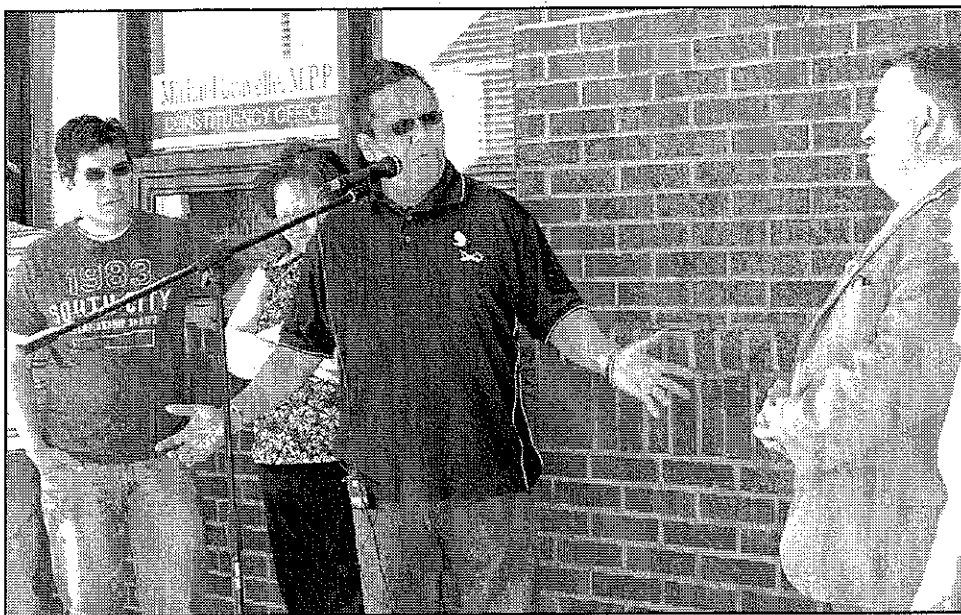
BY KAREN MCKINLEY
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

People are calling on the Ontario and federal governments to do more to protect First Nation youths and give better funding for aboriginal education.

A rally was held outside Thunder Bay-Superior North MPP Michael Gravelle's office on Friday to address the recent death of Jordan Wabasse, First Nations education funding, and to demand an inquest into the death of Reggie Bushie and create a committee to work with the city and education boards to better protect students.

Over 100 people demanded to have their concerns heard in the legislature and Parliament.

"We are here for the four main reasons, plus to tell the provincial (Aboriginal Affairs minister)



PHOTOS BY THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL/SANDI KRASOWSKI

Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School principal Jonathan Kakegamic held back tears of sadness and frustration as he asked Michael Gravelle, minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry, to take a message to Queen's Park requesting help with the safety of First Nations students.

Chris Bentley to proceed with the inquest and will no longer tolerate of delays and excuses and want action now to protect our youth," said organizer Anna Achneepineskum. "We are also here to honour the families of those youth who have left us."

Several youth were named who had died in the last 10 years, Jordan Wabasse, Reggie Bushie, Robyn Harper, Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Kyle Morriseau and Paul Panacheese were among them. All had come to Thunder Bay for high school from their communities and died, their bodies recovered from streets and rivers. Most of their deaths were ruled accidents or suicides, which Achneepineskum said has to be addressed as many believe they met with foul play.

"To me, this is too many, even losing one child is too many, something should have been done years ago," Achneepineskum said. "We have to begin to work together to prevent this from continuing."

"I don't want to be gathering here again next year because we are burying another one of our young people."

Gravelle said he was honoured by the high turnout of supporters and family members of those who lost a family member who was going to school in the city. He said this is not just an aboriginal or political issue, it impacts the entire city and region.

"It's impossible to feel the level of sadness of those who have

lost a family member," he said. "I hear your message loud and clear and will be taking it to Premier McGuinty and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bentley."

Gravelle added there is an inquest the provincial government is working to get underway, specifically for Reggie Bushie, but there are legal and coroner procedures to observe, plus aboriginal involvement in the process is needed. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has also agreed to a First Ministers' summit to address aboriginal education in the future. Gravelle said he is well aware of the funding discrepancies in aboriginal education.

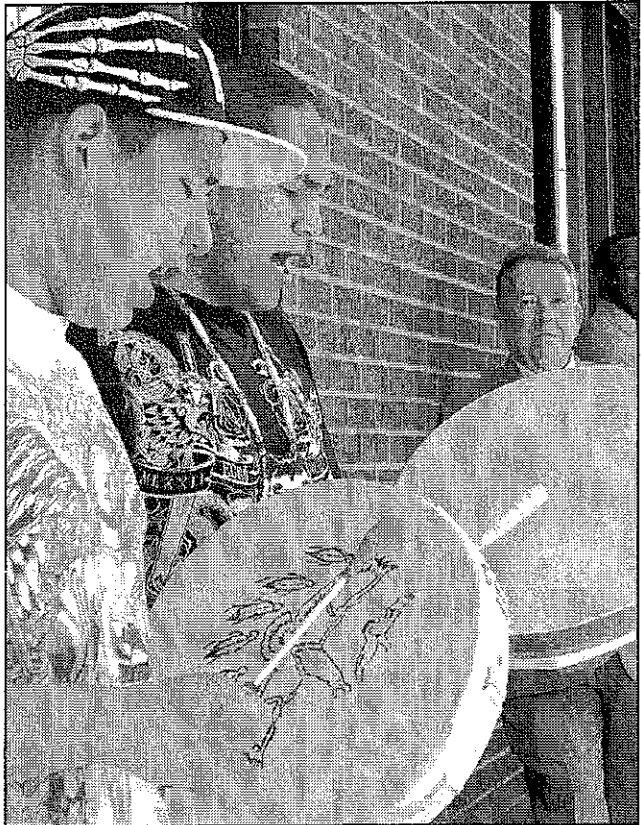
Achneepineskum said what she and others would like to see are high schools in the remote north that serve the northern communities rather than sending students to large urban centres for high school.

The deaths of so many young people, averaging one per year, has far-reaching effects for the city and the school most of them went to, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School. Principal Jonathan Kakegamic struggled to control his emotions while he spoke about the students he knew personally and called on the federal and provincial governments to take action to help their communities.

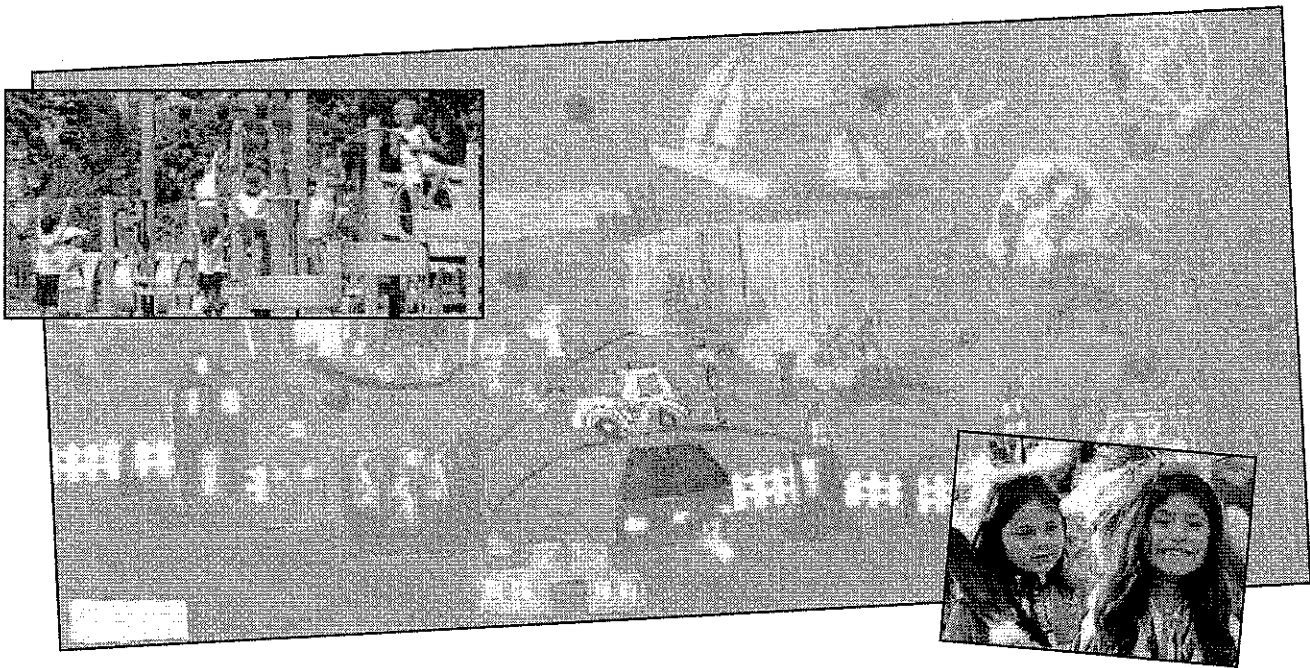
"Seven deaths is too much, after the death of Jethro Anderson something should have been done, nothing was and that's wrong," Kakegamic said. "Too many of our youth are gone because they left their homes to make a better life for themselves and with the position we are in, with no proper funding for services, is wrong."

He spoke warmly about some of the young people that he knew, like Bushie, whom he played chess with in his office and Harper, who was in the school for three days before she died. He said Harper was excited to be in high school.

Seeing so many people together gave him confidence that the city was ready and willing to work together, Kakegamic said. He challenged the crowd to find a way to work together to make positive change and bring justice.



Jared Pemmican, left, and Steve Achneepineskom opened and closed a protest with song and drumming as Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry Michael Gravelle looked on.



Thunder Bay Children's Charter

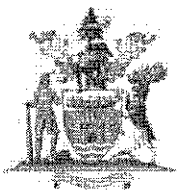
All children deserve basic rights and freedoms. A fair share of society's resources must be devoted to ensuring this. Families are responsible for raising their children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that working in partnership with communities, all levels of governments have a duty to assist families to fulfill their responsibilities.*

All Thunder Bay children deserve:

- ✓ a quality of life that meets their physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs.
- ✓ to have enough nutritious food every day.
- ✓ to have a safe and comfortable place to live.
- ✓ quality child care and/or early education programs.
- ✓ to have safe places to play, and access to affordable recreational activities.
- ✓ quality primary, secondary, and affordable post secondary education.
- ✓ the resources to ensure life-long good health.
- ✓ to be served by governments that put the health and well-being of children first by ensuring enough funding for children's programs.
- ✓ to be protected from neglect and abuse.
- ✓ to be safe from exploitation.**

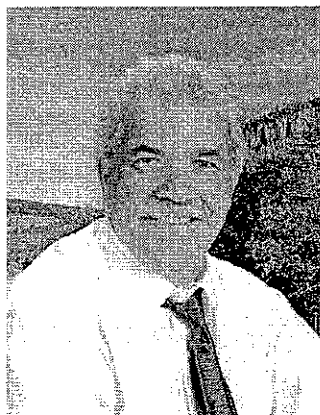
* For the purposes of this Charter children are defined as being from birth to eighteen years of age.

** For the purposes of this Charter being exploited means to be used unfairly by someone else to meet their own needs.



Adopted by
City Council for the City of Thunder Bay
June 14, 2004

CITY OF
Thunder Bay
Superior by Nature
www.thunderbay.ca



Councillor Joe Virdiramo
Residence 625-5547

E-mail
jvirdiramo@thunderbay.ca

Mailing
City of Thunder Bay
City Hall
500 Donald Street East
P.O. Box 800
Thunder Bay, ON
P7C 5K4

A Message from Thunder Bay Children's Advocate

The City of Thunder Bay's new strategic plan calls for the need to improve our quality of life.

A vital part of accomplishing this Mission is the development of a Children's Charter and Child Advocate for the City of Thunder Bay in consultation with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and other interested groups.

On Feb. 16, 2004, City Council appointed me as the Children's Advocate for the City of Thunder Bay. The Children's Advocate is an elected official who, in co-operation with the Thunder Bay Children's Charter Coalition, will advocate on behalf of children's needs with all levels of government, and the private sector as appropriate. I am honoured to serve in this important new role.

Councillor Joe Virdiramo

The Children's Advocate will:

- ✓ provide advice, and advocate on behalf of children's needs, at the political level
- ✓ be an active member of the Thunder Bay Children's Charter Coalition
- ✓ be kept informed about local issues relating to children's health, social needs, and available children's programs, services, and activities
- ✓ provide advice to the Coalition on the best ways of bringing concerns forward at the political level
- ✓ keep the Coalition informed about the Corporation's plans that will affect children
- ✓ report regularly to City Council on the activities of the Coalition
- ✓ endorse the publication of an annual report on the Coalition's activities which includes the Thunder Bay Children's Charter
- ✓ act as ambassador to promote the values embodied in the Thunder Bay Children's Charter at every opportunity

The Thunder Bay Children's Charter embraces these values as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child.

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The Regional Multicultural Youth Council gratefully acknowledges our sponsors/supporters:

- * Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- * Ministry of Health Promotion
- * Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario
- * Nishnawbe Aski Nation & Decade for Youth Council - Oshkaatisak
- * Northern Nishnawbe Education Council/Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School
- * Dr. Darryl Blazino
- * Mandarin Restaurant
- * Quality Market
- * Tim Horton's (Waterloo Street)
- * Wasaya Airways

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For more information please contact:

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

Tel: (807) 622-4666

Toll Free: 1-800-692-7692
1-800-MYC-RMYC

Fax: (807) 622-7271

E-mail: manwoyc@tbaytel.net

Website: <http://my.tbaytel.net/manwoyc>