

**RMYC**  
**MANWO**



**Regional Multicultural Youth Council**  
Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

## **REACHING OUT TO FIRST NATIONS**

### **REMOVING BARRIERS / BUILDING BRIDGES**

**Youth-to-Youth Initiatives  
for  
Aboriginal Children and Youth**

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)  
Multicultural Youth Centre (MYC)  
Victoriaville Centre Mall  
605 E. Victoria Avenue  
Thunder Bay, Ontario  
P7C 1B1

Tel: (807) 622-4666

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

Fax: (807) 622-7271

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

E-mail: [manwoyc@tbaytel.net](mailto:manwoyc@tbaytel.net)

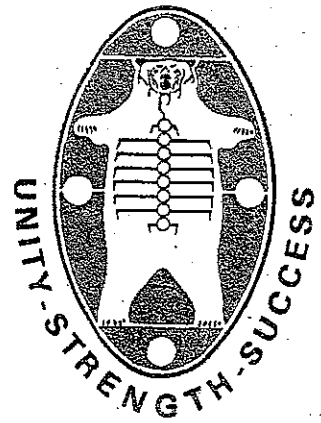
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# NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

100 Backstreet Road, Unit #200  
Thunder Bay, Ontario  
P7J 1L2

(807) 623-8228  
(807) 623-7730 Fax  
Website: [www.nan.on.ca](http://www.nan.on.ca)



## RESOLUTION 03/30 NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION SUPPORTS THE REGIONAL YOUTH CENTRE

**WHEREAS** the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre provides many Nishnawbe Aski Nation Youth who reside in Thunder Bay while attending Dennis Cromarty High School and other secondary schools in the city with safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate services;

**WHEREAS** the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Decade for Youth Council strongly supports the work of the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre;

**WHEREAS** the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre provides youth programming for many members of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, both on and off-reserve;

**WHEREAS** the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre empowers young people by developing leadership skills through social, cultural and recreational activities that are conceived, developed and executed by the youth themselves;

**WHEREAS** the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre receives no core funding from any level of government;

**WHEREAS** in the past the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre had successfully raised all of its operational money for faxes, telephone etc through bingos;

**WHEREAS** the opening of the Thunder Bay Charity Casino caused a dramatic decline in bingo revenues for the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre;

**WHEREAS** the Ontario Government and the City of Thunder Bay have failed to financially compensate the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre for the loss of its bingo revenues;

**WHEREAS** the loss of the bingo revenues has forced the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre to substantially reduce the level of service and programming to its members, including a large number of NAN Youth;

**WHEREAS** without these services and programs, youth may have nowhere to go after school but the streets, where they will be exposed to drugs, alcohol and violence;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that Nishnawbe Aski Nation Chiefs-in-Assembly mandate the Executive Council to continue its work to assist the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre lobby all levels of government to adequately fund this worthwhile youth organization;

**FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED** that Nishnawbe Aski Nations Chiefs-in-Assembly recommend that each member First Nation send in resolutions or letters of support for the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre;

**FINALLY BE IT RESOLVED** that Nishnawbe Aski Chiefs-in-Assembly recommend that each member First Nation donate a small sum of money to the Multicultural Regional Youth Centre to continue its work providing services and programming to urban youth, including those NAN members attending Dennis Cromarty High School and other secondary schools in Thunder Bay.

**DATED AT THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO, THIS 27<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2003.**

**MOVED BY:**

Chief Glenn Nolan  
Missanabie Cree First Nation

**SECONDED BY:**

Proxy Wally McKay  
Whitewater First Nation

**CARRIED.**

  
Grand Chief

  
Deputy Grand Chief

## PARTNERING WITH FIRST NATIONS

### INTRODUCTION:

Northwestern Ontario has a large Aboriginal population living in over ninety small isolated communities. Most First Nations settlements are remote fly-in reserves, some still lacking adequate housing, running water and other basic services many Canadians take for granted. Statistics Canada, research papers and news reports reveal high rates of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and sickness comparable to Third World countries.

Surveys conducted by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC), the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO), Friendship Centres and the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation's (NAN) Forum on Youth Suicide confirm feelings of alienation among Aboriginal youth. Many feel marginalized in their own communities. The situation is even worse when they move to urban centres where they face racism, culture shock and unfamiliar city life with little or no supports.

Many problems identified by Aboriginal youth (including poverty, chronic alcoholism, substance and sexual abuse, violence, crime, school drop-outs, unemployment, poor self-image, a lack of initiative and a variety of other negative lifestyles) can be attributed to the residential school syndrome. Forced removal from home to attend residential schools resulted in a breakdown of families, leaving no one to teach social values, language, and other cultural traditions that shape personal identity.

Furthermore, the inter-generational impacts of physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual abuse in residential schools are evident in many Aboriginal communities. Children are raised by parents with no parenting skills to mold behaviour and enforce discipline. Many grow up in dysfunctional and unstable homes where alcohol and drugs are common ways to cope with hurt and numb pain. Some in foster homes do not know their parents and siblings, creating a potential for incestuous relationships. With poverty widespread and high unemployment, welfare does not offer much hope.

Residential schools, patronizing attitudes, inappropriate programs and limited financial resources have led to a cycle of dependency that robs Aboriginal children of their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth. Parents who had negative experiences in residential schools are more likely to empathize with their children when they have problems and not encourage them to stay in school. With little or no support from the family, it is hard to get children motivated and inspired to attend school, graduate and reap the benefits of a good education.

It is unfortunate that the traditional work-ethic and instinct for survival that enabled Aboriginal people to thrive and prosper in this country before colonization have been replaced by social assistance.

Children who grow up with parents on welfare, staying at home, and unemployed will likely do the same. Parents are the best role models for their children. If they stay up all night watching television or drinking because they do not have to wake up early and go to work, the children will develop similar habits, attitudes, values and norms. Consequently, we have Aboriginal youths who stay up all night, and sleep until late in the day, when they should be in school or working. This makes transition into the mainstream education system and integration into a work-place difficult.

The First Nations are doing their best to improve the social conditions in their communities and deal with the concerns of children and youth. The RMYC has joined in to help Aboriginal youth learn to help themselves and empower each other to make a difference. Using the experience of assisting newcomers to settle and adapt to life in Canada, the Youth Council has helped Aboriginal youth integrate into urban life. We have liaised with Aboriginal communities for guidance, and taken advantage of government programs and resources to develop strategies that break negative cycles.

We use a youth-to-youth approach for effective communication. We reinforce positive peer influence to modify behaviour. Training on leadership and organizational development assist the youth to plan, mobilize each other, and organize their own activities. We share information to raise awareness and enable informed decisions. Teachings, presentations, and interactive activities empower them to speak out and request the resources and supports they need to take responsibility for their well-being and prepare themselves for the future.

## YOUTH-TO-YOUTH INITIATIVES TARGETING ABORIGINAL YOUTH

The following is a summary of programs, services and activities the RMYC has developed to empower Aboriginal youths to make a difference.

- (a) **Leadership Training Program:** We provide Aboriginal youths with skills to be good, responsible leaders capable of mobilizing their peers to play a role in community development. Many reserves want Junior Chiefs and Councils to give youth a voice and involve them in dealing with local concerns. Aboriginal youths we surveyed feel that they need help to motivate others and lead them. They want to know how to run meetings, take minutes and develop work-plans.

\* To help, the RMYC developed a training program covering leadership qualities; such as, integrity, patience, commitment, focus, honesty, time management and accountability. Role-playing teaches authoritarian, carefree, passive and democratic leadership styles with exercises to involve children and youth as stakeholders. Potential leaders learn about team-work: how to involve their peers in identifying concerns, prioritizing issues and brainstorming ideas to address these. They also learn to plan events, keep records, write proposals, develop budgets, and prepare reports.

\* Bands help to identify youths who participate in the program and hire them after training to put their newly acquired skills into practice. The RMYC provides resource materials and offers field support when the youth are back in their communities. A toll-free number enables the young leaders to contact the Youth Council at their convenience for information, assistance or help in seeking other supports.

- (b) **Organizational Development:** This enables youths to organize themselves for action. Aboriginal youths participating in our surveys say boredom is a strong contributing factor to problems with the law. Involving children and youth as stakeholders will help to address some of the social challenges they face. Soliciting their input and feedback for on-going reviews of strategies is a critical foundation for organizational development.

- \* The RMYC developed exercises to help Aboriginal youths get organized, and provides guidance to form youth committees, run meetings, plan activities, and establish youth centres. The Youth Council offers organizational information ranging from choosing a name, setting goals /objectives, selecting officers, recruiting members and volunteers and explaining their roles and responsibilities.
  - \* The RMYC assists with creating organizational charts, developing policies, constitutions and by-laws for good governance. We provide information on incorporation, charitable status, social responsibility, financial accountability, insurance and other legal matters with groups that want formal status. Partnering with established and secure groups is recommended for continuity and sustainability.
  - \* Youth need to be well organized to be taken seriously and qualify for funding to carry out their activities. Financial support is dependent on the organization's structure, ability to manage money, as well as accountability to members, funders and the community.
- (c) **Youth (Support) Groups:** Since the RMYC was established as a legacy of the 1985 International Youth Year, it has become a positive example of what a youth group can do. There are many notable accomplishments attributed to the Youth Council as our strength in numbers has motivated and mobilized youths across the region for a good cause. The pool of creativity and talent found in a group inspires change more than individual effort.
- \* The RMYC was formed by an Aboriginal high school student, Melanie Goodchild from Pic River Ojibway First Nation. We emphasize this information to inspire Native youths that they have the potential to form similar groups that can make a difference. The Youth Council's successes, failures and faced challenges are there for reference. Good leadership and interpersonal skills to build team spirit and work together for a common purpose are key to our success. Fairness, mutual respect, and hard work enabled our group to recruit and retain members and volunteers. Choosing ideal group leaders, sharing information, and providing ongoing support gives us strength and viability.



- (d) **Youth (Drop-In) Centres:** These provide safe havens for youths to hang out and organize their own activities. Youth centres keep kids off the streets, offer them structure, and help them to learn social responsibility. They are a proactive way to engage children and youth in positive activities during their leisure time, after-school or in the evenings. They also help foster community spirit by mobilizing kids to deal with the "there is nothing to do here" syndrome.

\* In many Aboriginal communities, youths roam about all night because there are no organized activities or a safe place to hang out. Only a small percentage can be involved in team sports such as hockey, volleyball, and baseball, which often involve high costs and stiff competition for the few spots available. Many have nothing to do, and with no safe place to hang out, sniffing, alcohol, substance abuse, and other negative activities seem to be exciting things to do.

\* The Multicultural Youth Centre is a model youth centre offering practical learning experience for youths wanting to run their own drop-in centres. Youth involvement in determining the rules and codes of conduct for using the space gives them ownership of the property, defines behaviour, and teaches how to interact with others sharing the space. Having peers trained to enforce discipline ensures that those using the facilities are sober and abide by set rules.

\* The main challenge for running a youth centre is securing operational funding. While equipment and other supplies may be donated, and volunteers are there to help, the on-going costs of rent, heat, hydro and of course, staff, should be in place to make the centre viable.

- (e) **Publicity, Promotion and Advocacy:** Aboriginal youth need a voice to speak for themselves on issues that affect them. This will help transform the marginal status Aboriginals are in today.

\* RMYC provides training in public speaking, making presentations and dealing with the media to bring out issues and encourage those too shy or afraid to speak. Youths learn networking technology and mediums such as posters, art, poetry, and music to share their stories.

- (f) **Gatherings, Forums, Rallies, Conferences and Workshops:** These bring together Aboriginal youths to discuss issues of mutual interest and share experiences about their concerns. The RMYC organizes and hosts forums to rally support for action among all youths. Such functions offer opportunities for Aboriginal youths to collectively focus on their commonalities, to develop strategies, to come up with resolutions, and to act on their recommendations.
- \* The Youth Council trains youth teams to organize and host their own gatherings. Youth learn to develop agendas, identify and invite resource people, facilitate workshops, make presentations, record proceedings and prepare reports. We also share information on fund raising for events, and help them to plan technical details such as arranging for delegates' travel, accommodation, refreshments, meals, and audio-visual equipment, flip-charts and so forth.
- (g) **Out-reach Summer Camps:** They provide fun and creative learning experiences on and off reserves during holidays. Teams of youths from all backgrounds plan and organize recreational, social and educational activities that promote healthy lifestyles, foster co-operation, build team spirit, and provide social structure. Some of the games, cultural activities and social functions encourage the sharing of culture and expose Aboriginal children and youth to our diversity.
- \* Field-trips to reserves take diversity to isolated communities, while visits to the Multicultural Youth Centre in Thunder Bay provides cross-cultural orientation and urban life skills to better prepare Aboriginal youth for life in larger towns.
- \* Trained young leaders, elders and professionals are resources for issues such as smoking, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, teen-pregnancies, personal hygiene, underage drinking, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS. Topics are discussed in the context of healthy lifestyles to protect unborn children and promote wellness. Other concerns (such as youth street gangs, crime, violence, racism, date rape, mediation) are covered as prioritized during issue identification exercises.

Participants are challenged to share experiences and exchange ideas that will empower them to become part of the solutions to problems.

- (h) **Young Aboriginal Women's Support Groups:** They empower girls (11-17) with information to enhance their understanding of the status of women in society. This helps them to make informed decisions and come up with the choices that challenge them to follow their passions and realize their dreams. The RMYC compiles news articles and studies pertaining to Aboriginal women and prepares resource kits to be used by the girls for reference.

\* Current issues include the increasing numbers of young Aboriginal women committing suicide, the high rates of sexually transmitted disease infections, growing incidents of teen pregnancies and babies being born with fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effects due to drinking, the many school drop-outs that perpetuate the cycle of poverty, above average rates of obesity, greater chances for Aboriginal women to be abused by their male partners, and the challenges of single mothers raising children alone.

\* To enable them to deal with peer pressure and make right choices, the girls learn about assertiveness, self-actualization and self-control. They work on setting goals and how to achieve them. Age-specific workshops (such as motherhood and parenting for older girls, and menstruation, relationships and actions and consequences for the younger ages) are designed to meet the changing needs of the girls.

\* Young Aboriginal girls are trained to be team leaders and serve as role models. They plan meetings and organize activities that appeal to their peers to get them involved. Because recent studies reveal very young Aboriginal girls are sexually active, we have just added a "Friendship Group" for girls younger than 11 years interested in the program.

- (i) **Young Aboriginal Men's Support Groups:** These raise awareness of ideal roles for young Aboriginal men. The current emphasis of the support group is promoting healthy lifestyles and encouraging young fathers to be positive role models. A breakdown in Aboriginal families due to residential schools robbed many young men of the skills and responsibilities of fatherhood. Colonization and changes in lifestyles due to the introduction of welfare also affected traditional male roles and increased incidents of family violence.

- \* With many teen-pregnancies resulting in single mothers, Aboriginal young males need to support their partners, and help to raise children they father. Ironically, many young men resent the absence of fathers in their childhood, yet, by not taking responsibility for the children the farther, they perpetuate the cycle of fatherly neglect.
- \* Through sharing circles, presentations, and workshops, young men learn parenting skills and ways to reclaim their honourable position in the family and in the community.
- (j) **Role Model Program:** Role models are especially needed where the residential school legacy is parents who are poor role models for their children. With no stable home environment, youth are more apt to drop out of school, join gangs, abuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in other self-destructive lifestyles.
- \* This program supports and strengthens youths who want to be positive examples for others. Children and youth are easily influenced by their peers and will do things to fit in or to impress their buddies. There is a need to create positive "ring-leaders" to counter negative peer pressure that often leads youths into trouble. Applying the same tactics youth gang leaders use to get followers can attract youths to be involved in positive activities.
- \* The role model program complements the Youth Council's leadership training by reinforcing good behaviour and building character. Youths learn self-control, develop self-discipline and a positive attitude. We emphasize staying in school, volunteering, seeking employment, not abusing alcohol, avoiding smoking and illicit drugs, and refraining from negative talk, put-downs and foul language. We thus groom Aboriginal youths to be examples for their peers. They are urged to avoid violence, crime, involvement in street gangs, truancy, and not to wear gang colours or clothing with negative or demeaning messages.
- \* The Multicultural Youth Centre is ideal for creating positive role models. Through policies and guidelines, RMYC officers, team leaders and volunteers get coaching and the on-going support needed to make the right choices and say NO to negative influences.

- (k) **Orientation /Stay-in-School Program:** We welcome Aboriginal students from remote First Nation communities and facilitate their integration into large urban schools. Using the experiences gained from working with new immigrant children and youth to help them adjust to life in Canada, the RMYC reaches out and helps Aboriginal youths to ease transition from small homogeneous reserves to large multiracial towns with new formal laws and social expectations.

\* During orientation, new students learn about the various services, resources and supports available in the city. They are encouraged to meet new friends, share experiences and survival skills about staying in boarding homes and studying in multiracial schools that are often much larger than their home communities. The RMYC challenges students to identify their concerns and come up with ideas that will involve them as part of the solution to their problems.

\* The Orientation Program has been well received by the school boards across the region who are now partners in our efforts to reduce the numbers of Native students dropping out of school. Statistics Canada reveals that Aboriginal people are over-represented in courts and jails because they are poor, unemployed, and have less education. Reducing student attrition will help to improve the quality of life.

- (l) **Room and Board:** Students from remote reserves coming to school in urban centres need this. A safe, clean and nurturing home environment provides a stable base for students to concentrate on their studies and succeed.

\* The Youth Council arranges accommodation, meals and supervision for boarding students, as well as youths participating in leadership development, role modelling, peer counselling and other training programs. Students are linked with the necessary resources and supports to help them catch up academically, adjust to city life, and to deal with their social and emotional concerns. They learn to set goals, stick to schedules, develop and manage personal budgets, and acquire other life skills to enhance integration into the mainstream. A safe caring place to stay, good nutrition, discipline, tutors, and other supports enable youths to realize their true potential.

- (m) **After-School Program:** Structured activities for students during their free time in the evenings and during weekends is important. Surveys during orientation reveal that Aboriginal boarding students often lack money to participate in organized sports and recreational activities such as swimming, bowling, going to movies, and using fitness centres. In addition, unfamiliarity with the city, problems of transportation, and safety issues (especially at night) restrict the involvement of many boarding students in after-school activities where they can socialize, have fun and meet friends from different cultural backgrounds. This can lead to loneliness, depression, and subsequent involvement in negative lifestyles.
- \* The RMYC's after-school is part of the Stay-in-School initiatives to provide Aboriginal students with a variety of extra curricular activities to keep busy and help them with their studies. The Multicultural Youth Centre in Victoriaville Mall has computers students can use for assignments, homework, and to network with their families back home. Tutors are available to help with schoolwork.
- \* The Centre is also available for social activities such as dances, concerts, talent shows, movie nights, cultural activities, arts and crafts, sharing circles, and workshops. Students organize their own alcohol and drug free events.
- (n) **Summer School Initiatives:** Upgrade academic and literacy skills of Aboriginal students through formal and informal classes during the holidays is sometimes necessary as educational standards on many reserves are lower than in mainstream schools. The gap often leads to high attrition rates among Natives when they move to urban schools.
- \* In response to some of the students' recommendations, the RMYC has come up with a summer school program as a remedial strategy to address issues affecting their ability to perform according to their academic potential. Because of limited funding and other constraints, the Youth Council tries to informally tackle issues that are often overlooked by schools, or do not generally fall in the education curriculum.

- \* Topics covered include time-management, cognitive skills, critical thinking, budgeting, poverty, healthy lifestyles, choices, manners, etiquette, inter-personal relationships, parenting, personal hygiene, conflict resolution, anger and stress management, accountability, respect, race relations, volunteering, addictions, nutrition, leadership, role modelling, leisure activities. Practical help is given in career planning, computer skills, job search, and resume writing.
- \* Classes are held in a "summer camp" format that includes recreation and field-trips. Sharing circles and presentations are included to discuss urban lifeskills, curfews, culture shock, tenant rights, public transit, trespassing, racism and other issues students feel will help them to adjust and adapt to city life.
- \* Through self-identification, and informal discussions, students who need academic help are referred to special teachers and professional tutoring services. Those requiring counselling, treatment and other supports are referred to appropriate agencies providing the services. Peer counsellors are part of the resource teams that work with students and offer support.
- (o) **Science and Technology Camps:** Aboriginal youths are exposed to science in an informal, fun and exciting way. The aim is to encourage more students to feel comfortable with science subjects and broaden their horizons in non traditional areas of employment involving science and technology. As our society becomes more technologically oriented, demystifying science can open new doors for Aboriginal youth who may not have considered professions in the science field.
- \* Science camps are held at the Multicultural Youth Centre and co-ordinated in partnership with local high schools. Team leaders and science teachers design the material content and compile resource kits. Students tour science labs at Lakehead University and Confederation College, visit paper mills and other industrial sites to see science and technology at work.
- \* Interested Bands send students to 1-2 week camps. Participants are encouraged to share their learning with peers when they return home.

- (p) **Environmental Awareness:** Native youths are trained to take care of the environment and learn to live in harmony with nature. The goal is to empower youths to be aware of the fragile nature of Mother Earth, the need to stop pollution, and preserving natural resources for future generations.

\* Littering in some First Nations communities is deplorable. Kids dump pop cans, candy-wraps, potato-chip packets, paper and Styrofoam containers everywhere. Graffiti and vandalism are common and the youth are responsible for the mess. Very few seem to realize the impact of their actions on the environment.

\* To promote environmental awareness, youth are taught not to litter. They are encouraged to cut down on waste, dispose of garbage properly and keep the community clean. The RMYC has adopted four "R's" as its slogans: Refuse--stop the consumption of unnecessary items. Reduce--cut down on consumption of materials. Reuse--use over and over what you do not consume. Recycle --recycle things when they can no longer be reused. Conscious consumers can create a chain reaction from individuals, businesses and industries.

\* Nature-based tourism or eco-tourism is promoted as a means to generate income from wildlife and nature without destroying them. This is an alternative way to promote conservation. Aboriginal sayings such as: "Only after the last tree has been cut down; Only after the last river has been poisoned; Only after the last fish has been caught; Only then will you know that money cannot be eaten." are used to raise awareness on the need to preserve the environment.

- (q) **Recreation Program:** Games, sports and other fun pastimes are promoted for physical and emotional well-being. Boredom has been mentioned as contributing to delinquency, street gangs, teen pregnancies, obesity and other problems.

\* Indulging in alcohol, drugs and solvents are ways many youths spend their free time. Offering recreational activities to keep children and youth busy after school, on weekends and during holidays is an effective way to foster their well-being and promote healthy lifestyles.



- \* The RMYC Council provides training and support for youths to co-ordinate and supervise their own recreational activities. They learn new games, sports and other pastimes for indoors or outdoors. They also learn to identify popular activities for teams and small groups, as well as activities they can organize with little or no money. First Aid, refereeing, arranging game schedules, keeping scores, fair play, security, appropriate attire and equipment and various other skills are also covered.
- \* Involving youth in planning and managing their own events ensures greater participation. Non-competitive games alleviating pressure to qualify for a team and to win are inclusive and can be just as much fun to play. Providing opportunities for youths to have fun and encouraging them to exercise will reduce the risk of them getting into trouble and being out of shape.
- (r) Heathy Lifestyles and Quality Life: This program promotes mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. It reinforces the healing process need to counteract the effects of abuse in residential schools on ex-students and the inter-generational impacts on family members and the whole community.
- \* Given Northwestern Ontario's above average incidence of alcohol, drug and substance abuse in the general youth population, and among Aboriginal youth in particular, the RMYC has created a "Drug Free Kids" campaign. The aim is to provide opportunities for children and youth to learn about smoking, substance abuse, and to become aware of health risks, the cost of addictions and the long-term consequences on ones' health and social life.
- \* The message is that one can have a good time without being drunk. Peer support groups build the self confidence to avoid negative lifestyles, and strengthen the resolve of those who want to live alcohol and drug-free lives.
- \* Exercise, recreation, nutrition and balance are part of the healthy lifestyle initiative. Topics such as obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases, fetal alcohol syndrome, stress and so forth are covered to foster quality of life.

(s) **Job Search and Workskills Development:** We assist Aboriginal youths in acquiring lifeskills to enter the labour market. Current trends indicate more youths are leaving reserves for higher education, better housing, improved social conditions and a wider range of training programs and employment prospects. But because of limited opportunities on reserves, many lack the necessary preparation for employment in urban centres.

\* While an overwhelming majority of Aboriginal youth we have surveyed see their future off in cities, they lack the assertiveness, motivation, self-confidence, self-discipline and work experience needed to do well in a highly competitive mainstream workplace.

\* The Youth Centre provides opportunities to volunteer and acquire work skills. We offer opportunities to learn workplace etiquette, gain practical work experience, develop a work ethic, prepare resumes with real work experiences, and establish contacts for reference.

\* RMYC takes advantage of initiatives such as Co-operative Education student placements, hires youths through the Student Summer Employment Programs, and participates in job-search, job connect and other initiatives. We host workshops and participate in career fairs to increase awareness of job trends for Aboriginal youths.

(t) **Volunteering:** Youth are engaged in community service while gaining lifeskills and valuable work experience. Through volunteering, youths get a chance to make new friends, learn to work with others, and get exposure to different career options. Experience is useful for resumes, job searches and future employment prospects. It would provide more activities for Aboriginal youths on reserves.

We encourage Aboriginal youth to volunteer at our Youth Centre for free training and acculturation into the urban environment. Developing more volunteers creates a resource pool to help others in the community. With limited funding to hire staff to work with children and youth, our volunteers play an important role. They help to organize functions, supervise kids, and take care of facilities

- \* Volunteering builds self-esteem, fosters community spirit and reduces the feeling of alienation among youths. Contributing to the well-being of the community, and being appreciated for the service, makes youths feel they are important. The RMYC gives awards to its volunteers to thank them for the service. Those doing outstanding work are nominated for formal recognition by other organizations, institutions and governments.
- \* Special programs, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Awards for youths 14-18 years old who volunteer at the Youth Centre, are promoted for the convenience of youths involved in our activities. Scouts and other youth groups are also promoted as a community service.
- (u) **Business Training & Fundraising Ventures:** Native youths need to generate revenue while gaining experience as entrepreneurs and developing valuable work experience. Youths sort out clothes, toys, books, etc., collected at our Youth Centre. The goods are shipped to reserves (compliments of local airlines) where they are sold or exchanged for local crafts sold in our Crafts Store. Placement students and volunteers run the store to fund raise for the Centre.
- \* The RMYC has developed a manual to train Aboriginal youths to run small business ventures. This covers promotion, pricing and selling items at a garage sale or flea-market, and administering the funds. Youths are encouraged to form fund raising committees, and use the profits as "incentive capital" to cover expenses to host their own activities such as dances, movie nights, bowling events, sports, trips, workshops, weekend retreats, and birthday celebrations.
- (v) **Safer Communities:** We promote individual and collective security by engaging youth in a personal safety and safer communities campaign. The RMYC agrees crimes against individuals and property are a growing concern, and First Nations communities have not been immune to violence (such as vandalizing schools, clinics, community halls and even band offices). Many resent their marginal status, are frustrated by powerlessness, and resent their poverty when they see the affluence in urban centres where newer Canadians are prospering and benefitting from the resources in their traditional lands.

- \* Many Aboriginal youths tell us they do not feel safe in their own communities. Sexual assaults, fights, break-ins and suicides are common. Youth street gangs are a growing problem, and alcohol and drug abuse even in supposedly "dry" communities make things worse.
  - \* The residential school legacy fuels risk factors (poverty, abuse, violent role models, absentee fathers) making Aboriginal youths ideal recruits for street gangs. Out-of-home placements are common experiences that make gangs seem a better alternative "home". Many end up caught in a cycle of crime, which leads them to courts and a mainstream justice system that does not treat them fairly.
  - \* The RMYC has launched a safer communities campaign that involves Aboriginal youth in trying to find solutions to problems of violence and crime. We organize workshops and conferences for youths to learn about their rights, responsibilities and obligations as responsible citizens. They need to know about regulations that affect them, how to deal with the police, processes to lodge formal complaints, and alternative justice programs.
  - \* Aboriginal youths are challenged to speak out and come up with new ideas on what can be done to change things and improve their security. Suggestions such as curfews have been advanced to protect children at night. Ideas such as double dates and avoiding alcohol and illicit drugs are strategies to reduce the risk of date rape. Issues such as poverty, education, homelessness, racism, funding and relevant supports are discussed as policy issues that can go to the root of problems and require government intervention.
- (w) **Teen Courts/Alternative Justice:** Youth need to understand the justice system, how it works, and to respect the rule of law. The RMYC is promoting juvenile courts as a more effective and efficient way to deal with youth crime. In the United States where they have been in existence for years, Teen Courts have reduced the numbers of young repeat offenders. In 1993, the RMYC received federal and provincial government funding to bring resource people from the United States of America to help us to launch the first Teen Court initiative in Canada.

- \* In addition to the residential schools legacy, "foreign" laws in an imposed justice system create resentment that often results in more Aboriginal people being incarcerated. Because Teen Courts directly involve youth in the delivery of justice, a jury of peers passing judgement eliminates the generation gap and the "me versus them" arguments. This also ensures peer support, sensitivity to the age factor, and reinforces accountability for one's actions.
- \* The RMYC has compiled information on Teen Courts to promote the concept. We also have copies of a video from the United States to help those interested in the program. We believe that getting Aboriginal youths to participate in this initiative will help to break the current over-representation of Aboriginal youths in courts and jails.
- (x) **Peer Mediation:** Youths need to know how to resolve conflict and settle disputes without violence. Incidents are increasing of youth-to-youth violence, including Aboriginal students youths assaulting each other. Learning to talk things out is better than fighting and being charged. Mediation allows tempers to cool down and let reason prevail. Disputants can express their feelings and listen to each other. This helps them understand what is going on and hopefully they will find out about the underlying issues fueling the anger, resentment, and aggression.
- \* The RMYC has created resource materials on mediation and provides training for youths interested in being mediators and peer counsellors. The Youth Council liaises with schools, youth groups and youth workers to introduce peer mediation as a positive strategy to deal with racial incidents, name-calling and bullying and so forth. We believe that providing youths with skills for dialogue will reduce tension, avoid violence and foster a culture of peace.
- (y) **Multiculturalism and Race Relations:** RMYC builds bridges of racial and cultural understanding between Aboriginal youth and their non-Aboriginal peers. Aboriginal people form the largest racial group in Northwestern Ontario, yet in spite of their special status in the Canadian Constitution as Indigenous Nations, they face extreme forms of racial discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice.

- \* In all the surveys conducted by the RMYC to identify problems faced by Aboriginal youth in urban centres, racism has consistently been at the top of the list. They see racism as a barrier that denies them equal access to services and resources, and limits the opportunities available for equal participation in all aspects of Canadian life. It is unjust to be discriminated against by "strangers" in their country.
- \* As a multicultural group, diversity is at the core of the RMYC. Immigrants embrace and appreciate multiculturalism. We encourage Aboriginal youth to share their culture at multicultural festivals, concerts, and other cultural events. We see this as a way to build bridges and promote racial harmony.
- \* Getting involved in multicultural events challenges Aboriginal youths to learn something about their culture to bring and share with others. This has inspired many to attend teachings, pow wows, feasts, sweat-lodges, and other traditional ceremonies to learn and share with pride. This has helped to foster appreciation and respect for other cultures in order to celebrate our rich heritage in unity.
- \* To improve race relations, the Council organizes forums to raise awareness of racism and its impacts. Teams of youths from different backgrounds are trained to make presentations, and encouraged to participate in the events and activities for March 21, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- \* The RMYC makes "multicultural bows" of black, red and yellow and white ribbons intertwined to symbolize the beauty of the human race united in harmony. The bows are given out to individuals, groups, institutions and Members of Parliament to be worn as a sign of commitment to eliminating racial discrimination.
- \* The RMYC organizes forums on racism to involve youth in race relations campaigns. To help young facilitators and presenters, the Council has also produced manuals and other resources to improve race relations. With some Aboriginal youths resenting their "Indian" status and not being proud of their heritage, we feel that a collaborative approach will make a difference.

- (z) **Research and Resource Material Development:** We provide youth with relevant information and appropriate materials to use as tools for action. The RMYC compiles information on studies, reports, and news articles on the status of Aboriginal children and youth. This is reviewed regularly for enlightenment on current trends and crises. The RMYC also conducts local surveys on youth concerns and feedback is used to develop strategies that will make a difference.

\* The RMYC involves Aboriginal youth in research to gather information about their situation. Knowledge is power; it provides a source of reference for youths to make informed decisions. Research skills can help Aboriginal youths to examine various issues related to their well-being. Current trends, attitudes, behaviour, values (including family relationships/kinships) can provide valuable information to help Aboriginal youth understand themselves and their situation.

\* RMYC develops youth-friendly resource materials. Aboriginal youths are part of the teams developing manuals, handbooks and leaflets of pertinent information. Some resource materials with a special focus on Aboriginal youth include:

- Alcohol and Drugs: Does it Affect Me?
- Taking Care of Mother Earth
- The Facts About Solvent Abuse
- Youth and Family Violence
- Youth and Getting Along at Home
- Youth and Self Esteem
- Resource Guide on Teen Courts
- Peer Mediation to Resolve Conflict
- Resource Manual for Summer Camps
- Youth Group Development Resource Manual
- Activities Handbook for Team Leaders
- Making Presentations
- Orientation Manual for Aboriginal Boarding Students
- Resource Guide on Youth Fundraising /Business Ventures
- Multiculturalism and Race Relations

More information on resource materials is available at the Multicultural Youth Centre.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The RMYC hopes our efforts to work with Aboriginal children and youth will help them break the negative cycles plaguing their families and communities. Meeting and mixing with peers from all backgrounds provides new and unique opportunities to share ideas that expose Native youths to a world that exists beyond the confines of their reserves.

The challenges faced by newcomers to Canada are similar to those faced by Aboriginal youth trying to integrate into the mainstream. New immigrants encounter racism, culture shock, a harsh cold climate, language problems and so forth, yet view Canada as a land of opportunity. Why then are Aboriginal youths at the bottom of the ladder in their own country?

Aboriginal youths need support to be part of the solution to their problems so that they can enjoy benefits other Canadians take for granted. Many fail to realize their potential because they lack leadership and organizational skills to form groups that can earn them respect in their communities. They need relevant information to make informed decisions and a lot of support to deal with the legacy of colonization, and the inter-generational impacts of residential schools.

The RMYC has been building partnerships with the First Nations to collaborate on efforts to address the plight of Aboriginal children and youth. We are pleased to have forged alliances with various Friendship Centres to work with Aboriginal youth in urban areas, and to liaise with band councils to work with those on reserves. We welcome NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly's unanimous resolution in 2003 supporting the RMYC's initiatives with Aboriginal children and youth on and off reserves, as a positive way to build co-operation, understanding and respect in the region.

Children and youth are society's most valuable human resource. They need room to grow, be creative, learn from mistakes, and be accountable for our actions. They have the dreams and energy to get things done. But, as a dependent population, they rely on the community for financial and material resources, advice and guidance. Any help provided to give them hope should be considered as an investment in our future.



## PROGRAM AND TRAINING FACILITIES

Aboriginal youths interested in participating in our programs choose the areas and topics they want covered. The RMYC can visit their communities, or they can come to Thunder Bay for training, workshops and presentations.

- \* Training in Thunder Bay is held at the Multicultural Youth Centre in Victoriaville Mall. The Centre covers over 7,000 square feet, which is adequate space for presentations, workshops, demonstrations, ice-breakers, sharing circles, displays, socials, dances and other activities. The Centre has an Arts and Crafts Store, and a second-hand shop for fundraising, business training and various material supplies.
- \* The Youth Centre is complemented by a residence for trainees. The facility has 6 bedrooms, 2 lounges, a sun room, kitchen, dining room, laundry facilities and an indoor swimming pool/fitness room. The house is fenced for privacy. Up to 15 youths/participants can be accommodated well at the residence.
- \* Youths from out-of-town can bring chaperons to watch over them, and provide support and comfort as needed. The RMYC can also supervise those staying at the residence. Please note there are strict rules for the safety and security of those using the facilities.
- \* Meals and refreshments are provided. Breakfast is prepared at the residence. Lunch and supper are catered by the Mandarin Restaurant. Traditional Aboriginal meals can be arranged as required.
- \* Local transportation, sight-seeing tours, social activities, recreation, entertainment, access to gyms etc. can be arranged.
- \* Resource people, guest speakers, professionals, elders, team leaders, agency representatives and peer role models are invited as needed.
- \* Costs are based on the length of program, activities, accommodation, meals, refreshments, facilitators and resource materials provided.

(Please contact the RMYC for more information and training details.)

