

RMYC

MANWO



Regional Youth Link

Regional Multicultural Youth Council

Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

RESERVED AND LOST

(Traumatization of Aboriginal Children and Youth On and Off Reserves)

**A Report on the Consultation Process, Surveys,
Meetings, Focus Groups, Presentations, Reference Information,
and Recommendations for the Reggie Bushie Inquest**

"IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD" *African Proverb*
(It Takes a Healthy Community to Raise a Healthy Child)

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RMYC

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THE REGGIE BUSHIE INQUEST

Introduction:

This report is a summary of activities organized by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) to gather youth input for the “Reggie Bushie Inquest”. An inquest was called to examine circumstances surrounding the death of Reggie Bushie, an Aboriginal 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. He was the fifth DFC student to die in the city since the school opened in 2000.

In the fall of 2008, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (OPACY) contacted the RMYC to organize a meeting for local youths including Students at DFC High School. The purpose was to assess interest to participate in the inquest and provide feedback to understand the situation and what could be done to prevent similar tragedies. Fifteen students from DFC, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Decade for Youth Council, and the RMYC met with the Provincial Advocate, Mr. Irwin Elman in Thunder Bay. He explained his role as the Provincial Advocate, and was prepared to support the youth if they wanted to participate in the inquest.

There was overwhelming interest to be involved in the process. The RMYC was asked to work with DFCHS students to gather information on conditions on reserves, in the city, and at DFC relevant to the inquest. Since the students were under the authority of the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC), it was necessary to get clearance for them to be involved. The Youth Council contacted both DFC and NNEC, and after initial concerns about students’ participation, permission was granted with the support of NAN (see correspondence in Appendix).

The main reference sources used in this report are: The Chronicle Journal, Wawatay News, Corrections Canada, Statistics Canada, and Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series--Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Among Aboriginal People in Canada: Review and Analysis of the Intergenerational Links to Residential Schools, and Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing.

Student/Youth Engagement:

To involve many students in the inquest, the process was well publicized and open for anyone interested to take part and contribute. Potential team leaders including the Student Chief and Council served as the core group for engaging other students.

The inquest was initially scheduled to begin on January 19, 2009, and there was a rush to compile information for the proceedings. The students met regularly to go over background materials and discuss what they wanted to share. There were weekly meetings after school to provide a chance to bond, and learn how to work as a team. The RMYC was invited to participate, and shared information compiled from programs started since 1991 to welcome Aboriginal boarding students to the city, conferences and workshops.

Technical issues forced the inquest to be delayed to June, 2009. This provided more time for meetings and focus groups with the students. Instead of just talking about the challenges of moving from the reserve to the city, they discussed in detail how lifestyles on the reserve had an impact on their safety in the city. They also had extra time to come up with ideas and develop youth-led strategies to succeed in school and complete their education.

Additional time enabled the Ontario Advocate's Office to hold more consultations with both the Youth Council members and DFC students. The RMYC co-ordinated all the meetings and hosted them at the Multicultural Youth Centre and at DFC when convenient.

The Advocate's Office hired Ms. Suzan Fraser as legal advisor. She combined her business meetings with the Coroner and other Counsels in Thunder Bay with regular visits to consult with the youth. She used the meetings for up-dates on the process, and to explain the legal procedures.

She also helped to prepare a questionnaire the RMYC used to gather input for the case. The information below is a summary of the responses from the students.

DENNIS FRANKLIC CROMARTY STUDENTS SURVEY

A total of 18 young people filled in the questionnaire below. Some questions (questions # 4 and 5) were left unanswered by some. In other cases, a complete list of five or more things may not be found under each question. As such, the total number of responses cannot be mathematically derived, by multiplying the number of students by the number of questions. Instead, we have counted each item listed in each question separately.

The categories directly reflect youth's response in that they have been lifted from youth's answers. An attempt has been made to list the issues in order of their significance to youth based on the number of times an issue appears in youth's answers. The figure in brackets beside each category represents that number based on all eighteen questionnaires.

Listed below are all youth's answers to the questions that reflect the category.

1. Please list the top (five or more) most important things facing kids leaving northern reserves to go to school away from home.

Homesick (14)

- * leaving the reserves from our homes, meaning homesickness
- * thinking about our family back home
- * we are going to face missing our family
- * missing their family members, friends, and not being able to be in the community for family, friends' memorials or missing birthdays for my siblings
- * home sickness
- * students feel homesick/lonely
- * homesick
- * home sickness
- * leaving family
- * home sickness
- * homesick is the top priority affecting students
- * leaving important family members behind
- * away from family
- * some would say homesickness

Drugs and Alcohol (13)

- * drinking
- * drugs and alcohol
- * drugs and alcohol
- * alcohol and drugs
- * drug and alcohol problems
- * alcohol/drugs
- * drinking a lot
- * drugs

- * drinking
- * drugs
- * get involved in drugs and alcohol
- * drug/alcohol abuse
- * alcohol/drug abuse
- * drugs
- * booze

Racism (7)

- * racism, assault
- * racism
- * racism
- * racism - learning to ignore it or control it
- * racism
- * racism
- * racism

Adjusting to New Environment (6)

- * develop skills to live in the city
- * coping with new environments
- * living with people they don't know
- * getting used to a new life
- * adjusting to new environments, schools/homes
- * to behave during the time away from home

Assault and Abuse (5)

- * assault
- * abuse/assault
- * getting beat up/jumped/mugged
- * assault
- * getting into fights with people you know or do not know

Loneliness (5)

- * being alone
- * loneliness
- * loneliness
- * being alone
- * loneliness

Skills & Self-Esteem Development (5)

- * struggling with school
- * struggling with themselves (low self-esteem)
- * maybe tough but easy
- * finishing the classes
- * be able to face problems that [is] are social, emotional and physical

Depression (3)

- * depression
- * depression
- * depression

Peer Pressure (3)

- * peer pressure
- * peer pressure
- * peer pressure
- * pressure - alcohol/drugs, gangs, etc.

Rape (3)

- * rape
- * rape
- * rape

Gang-Related Issues (3)

- * gang related issues
- * getting into fights with people you know or do not know
- * gang confrontations

Finding Help (2)

- * what and where is the help? A lot of students don't know how to ask for help!
- * Lack of parental support.

Use of Free Time (2)

- * not much to do in the city for the natives to do
- * At times it could be quite difficult to find positive ways to use their free time!
- * Lack of parental support. A lot of students don't know how to ask for help!

Mixed (4)

- * high school not offered in the reserve
- * religion/culture
- * boarding students are neglected
- * family problems before leaving home, depression/sniffing/drinking, hair spray

2. What are the top (five or more) most important things to know about boarding homes where students stay while attending school in the city?

Boarding Home Living Conditions (6)

- * what is available in a boarding home
- * where [is] the boarding home
- * students should be able to have access to the phone to call home, have 3 meals a day, able to sleep in a bed, a room
- * drug and alcohol use in the homes
- * verbal abuse, emotional neglect or ignorance
- * not enough structure in the home or too many unnecessary rules

Theft (6)

- * things being stolen from your personal belongings
- 1. things getting stolen
- 2. theft from students or boarding parents
- 1. things being stolen
- 2. things get stolen
- 3. things getting stolen

Food (5)

- 1. when there's no food in the house
- 2. no food
- 3. food runs out
- 4. barely no food in house
- 5. your boarding parent supports you with food

Expectations (4)

- * expected of too much
- * high expectations
- * high expectations
- * they expect to adjust on the first day or two/high expectations

Rules (4)

- * following the rules
- * be on time for curfew
- * obey the rules
- * obey rules (e.g. curfew)

Feeling Insignificant (4)

- 1. lowest priority
- 2. being low priority
- 3. being lowest priority
- 4. being lowest priority

Privacy (3)

- 1. no privacy
- 2. no privacy
- 3. no privacy

Boarding Parent/Home Relations - Varied (19)

- * support and help
- * helping out around the house
- * keeping organized
- * keeping comfort from our boarding parent
- * safe and reliable home

- * been treated as a child when you are 19 or older
- * not getting along with your boarding parent/children
- * it may not feel as home as your home back on the rez
- * you'll be supported with everything you need (food and stuff)
- * treat your boarding parent and the housemates with kindness and respect
- * treat the boarding home like it is your own home
- * not getting along
- * it's nice
- * you'll be supported with everything you need
- * help with chores around the house
- * keeping organized
- * talk to your boarding parent (if needed)
- * ask for help if needed
- * listen to your boarding parent

3. What are the top five things adults should know about what it is like to attend DFC?

Positive (9)

- * DFC is a good school
- * attending DFC is helpful
- * DFC has a lot of people same age and Natives
- * it may feel like home because you're in a building full of natives in a large city
- * DFC is awesome
- * DFC is helpful
- * Feels better being at the school
- * Being in a building full of natives
- * To try to finish school

Negative (15)

- * peer pressure
- * friends that distract - slackers
- * not everyone around you is [not] who they seem by their appearance
- * office gossip
- * drugs being sold
- * boarding home problems
- * peer pressure
- * office gossip
- * drugs and alcohol
- * boarding home conditions
- * office gossip
- * drug/alcohol problems
- * drugs being sold
- * students find people to buy alcohol for them
- * some students do not get along, with teachers or classmates

Mixed (4)

- * board homes problems, office gossip, drug problems, gossip around the school, besides all this it's all good
- * students need to be heard or some help 'cause they are shy to speak out
- * lots of freedom
- * to live out on their own or not

4. What are the things you would like people at the Inquest on the death of Reggie Bushie to know to prevent similar tragedies from happening to other DFC students?

Activities that Engage Youth (9)

- * help students keep busy
- * doing something fun
- * be aware, read
- * share ideas, listen, be heard
- * Big Brother, Big Sister
- * more activities to keep students busy for the active and non-active students
- * keep students busy (e.g. more sports, things to do)
- * give kids social skills to avoid the situations or to give the kids skills that could help as self-defence to help them be able to help themselves in any situation that could be preventable
- * help students do something else instead of drinking or doing drugs

Education/Support Re: Alcohol & Drugs (7)

- * talk to the students about how to keep themselves while drinking
- * families at home should tell the school how much money they sent to the student and that students should always present a receipt
- * to hear from other youths to speak up with tragedy stories that we can learn from, youth to youth
- * safest advice given to students for under age drinking is stay away from rivers, lakes, and bridges or don't drink at all
- * I think they should just give a good speaker that will show and will connect with students showing the consequences of drinking
- * educate students on the dangers of drinking outside and inside
- * I don't think there is any sure-fire way to prevent it as no border is ever secure. Students will always find a way to drink. I think the best thing to do is to educate students about drinking and the repercussions of it.

Mixed (4)

- * I would not know what to say. It's the students to make their decisions and you already know you can't make them change their minds. It's up to them, not you!
- * I don't know
- * DFC students shouldn't drink
- * video conference

5. How can we present your ideas to the people (jury) at the Inquest? Should we have students telling your stories, or ask someone else to do it? If so, who?

Students to Speak at Inquest (7)

- * I would say that the students should tell their own stories
- * The students should present their ideas and stories themselves. The school/ Student Chief Shane.
- * If a group of students did it.
- * I think we should videotape or record a discussion about it. They can later watch it and discuss what we talked about.
- * I think it would be better if the students told their stories
- * Yupp! They should but I don't know who but not me
- * yes, they should but I do not know who

Mixed (3)

- * I don't know
- * Hm? No idea.
- * To be open at the inquest about everything, best to have anyone that could understand the situation

STUDENTS' PRESENTATION

The RMYC helped Suzan Fraser to conduct the study, and challenged the students for ideas to deal with their issues of concern. They came up with forty-five (45) recommendations covering the following general areas:

1. Transition from living in small remote homogeneous remote reserves and moving to study in larger multicultural urban centres.
2. Adjusting to staying with strangers in boarding homes away from family, and the lifeskills Aboriginal youth need to survive in a city, and do well in school.
3. Activities to keep students busy while studying away from home, friends, and familiar surroundings.
4. Programs, services and supports to address the challenges faced by Aboriginal youth impacted by the legacy of residential schools.
5. Initiatives and incentives to engage students as stakeholders, develop peer leaders with good character, and positive role models to reach out to other students, and involve them as part of the solution.

The next step was identifying key people to invite to a meeting to hear their ideas for possible action before fall. With Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School closing early in June, Saturday, May 30, 2009 was the most convenient for all the parties involved. The meeting was held in the school's cafeteria and began at 10:00 a.m.

Invited Guests:

Nishnawbe-Aski-Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chiefs, Alvin Fiddler and Terry Waboose; Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC) board chair Chief Joshua Frogg, Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC) High School senior staff—Principal, Brad Battiston, and Site Director Larry Howes, and a representative of the NAN Decade for Youth Council, Ronalda Audley. NAN Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose could not make it, and NNEC board member Jennifer Manitowabi came in place of Chief Frogg.

Student/Youth Panel:

Ethan Brown, Tyrone Fiddler, Correen Kakegamic, Devon Meekis, Steffany Meekis, Ashley Rae, Shane Turtle (Chief), and Janice Kakegamic.

Organizers:

RMYC President, Martin Zhang; Vice President Co-ordination, Tara Kyle-Winters, and Moffat Makuto --Volunteer Youth Advisor

* * * * *

Shane Turtle introduced the student team, and opened the meeting with the following remarks:

"We are a group of Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School Students concerned about the high drop-out rate, numbers of students suspended because of abusing alcohol and drugs, and those being sent back home due to social, emotional and mental problems. We want to help change things for the better. The following are our suggestions to improve the situation so that more students survive in the city, and do well at DFC.

Five of us on this panel will be staying in Thunder Bay this summer, working at the Multicultural Youth Centre. We want to develop our ideas for welcoming DFC students coming to the city in the fall.

We are appealing for your blessings, help and support to make this happen!"

Our ideas for NAN and Band Councils:

1. Barbeques should be held at reserves to send off students, and give information on what they need to know before they come to school in Thunder Bay. Senior students or past graduates in the community can be co-opted to share their experiences and offer advice.
2. Bands should select and sponsor committed and responsible students who really want to learn, are responsible enough to live away from home, and can handle city life. Counselling and mentoring support should be given to those sent back home to help them deal with their issues, and keep up with schooling. A full assessment should be made before suspended students are sent back to school.
3. Have the Band send a 'liaison' to check up on students every month, and have one on one time with them to monitor their performance.
4. Bands should select Peer Leaders from each reserve to watch over other students and report to the 'liaison' on what is happening with them at school. Potential problems can be reported before things get worse.
5. NAN should promote the Peer Helpers program by training and hiring peer leaders (from DFC for DFC students). Peer Helpers can help students to talk through their problems, listen to their concerns, and assist with referrals for counseling and professional help. We recommend that Peer Helpers be compensated for their time and training with honorariums. Gift certificates, awards, coupons or treats like dinner, movies, etc., can be used as incentives to keep them motivated and to retain their services during the school year.
6. Bands should pay a fee for each student at the beginning of the year for extra curricular activities, and for transportation so that students participating in late evening after school activities get home safely.
7. NAN and NNEC should seek more money for education and support services for students. A lot more money is needed to cover expenses for boarding students who leave home to attend schools in towns, help them upgrade their academic knowledge and skills, and keep them occupied and out of trouble.
8. NAN and Band Councils should focus on prevention, and get to students while they are still young to educate them about risks. The NAN Decade for Youth Council should work with DFC students to deal with issues such as suicide, alcohol, drugs, smoking, abuse, gambling, criminal gang activity, fetal alcohol effects, mental health, violence, school drop-out rates, poverty, racism etc. and provide information, resource materials, and support to empower Aboriginal youth and help make a difference. We need hope for a better and brighter future.

9. Bands should share video-conferencing equipment and facilities to link parents, student liaisons, social service workers and other trusted adults in the community with DFC students who get into trouble. This will enable significant others in the community to intervene and collectively play an active role with the school to advise, counsel or discipline students in Thunder Bay before they are suspended.
10. NAN and Band Councils should consult with the youth and work with them to plan economic development in regards to mining, forestry, hydro, health, education, training and other social services. Students should know where jobs will be, the education and training they need to get employed, and ways we can help to improve social conditions and the quality of life in our communities

Our ideas for NNEC/DFC and Students:

11. Hugs!☺ Promoting empathy and caring among students. Some students have been abused and have grown up without love. There is a need to show affection to each other and reach out to students who are lonely and struggling with their emotions.
12. DFC should have an orientation program together with other groups interested to welcome Aboriginal boarding students to Thunder Bay, and introduce them to good things available in the city. The RMYC and Friendship Centre have organized such orientations before. Bringing more agencies to help will provide lots of information and things for students to do. To avoid overwhelming students with so much information at one time, agencies with extra-curricular activities can be invited to make brief in-class presentations on what they can offer, and sign up students before boredom sets in and they end where they should not be.
13. Have Grade 12 or senior students as “greeters” for new students coming to school in Thunder Bay. Train them to meet students at the airport, welcome them at school, and create a ‘Buddy System’ to help them fit in, provide peer support and guidance throughout the year.
14. Students should be regularly encouraged to identify their concerns and asked for input to be part of the solution to problems. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations should be invited to help students work through their issues.
15. Make going to school exciting. Include more fun, social, educational and exciting activities e.g. student clubs, feasts, pow-wows, debates, dances and events (such as trips to Ron’s Virtual World and DDR games, live entertainment, movies, popcorn, playing games, contests etc). Students should sign up for activities they’re interested in at the beginning of the year, before the city gets to them, and get training and support to plan and organize their own events.

16. Hold assemblies and invite motivational speakers (e.g. Turtle Concepts, professionals and Elders who can really help students). Important presentations should be made during school time for all students to benefit from the information and knowledge.
17. More updated sports equipment, and outdoor space for recreational activities. NNEC should arrange for DFC students to share the sports grounds between DFC and Sir Winston Churchill High School. Also make a volleyball sandbox outside DFC so that students can have more fun things to do. We have great sports teams, but we need more space and activities for students who are not involved in competitive games.
18. Have support for students who drink (Alcoholics Anonymous at school) and/or abuse drugs. Create a peer support program such as MAKWA or Girl Power to counter older students who buy cigarettes and booze for younger ones. The school should have a resource centre or special residence for emergencies where intoxicated students can sober up and talk to a counsellor, supervisor or trained peer-helper.
19. Invite past graduates from DFC to talk to students about higher education and setting career goals. NNEC/DFC should create peer mentoring programs with Confederation College, Lakehead University, Oshki-Pimache-O-Win, Seven Generations etc. to provide post secondary education orientation and training for students to realize their dreams.
20. DFC is a special school to help address our social concerns and what our communities need to prosper. There should be more workshops about First Nations identity and Aboriginal Cultures to teach students to be proud of our heritage and who we are. We need special presentations on residential schools to understand how this has affected our communities, and the inter-generations impacts on children and youth, as well as our journey to healing.
21. Offer driving courses. Having a driver's license is an accomplishment that teaches a lot of responsibility, and increases the chances of getting a job.
22. There are academic classes that are too easy for some students. DFC should offer more courses or partner with other schools for the sake of students who can meet the challenge. This can be swapped in exchange for teaching Aboriginal language and culture courses etc. Assessments should be done for students struggling with school-work and remedial programs, upgrading and tutors should be provided to help them.
23. DFC should partner with Confederation College to offer more trade classes for students having difficulties with academic studies. More opportunities to learn practical skills and participate in apprenticeships will improve the chances of DFC students completing their schooling and gaining employment.
24. DFC should have a tuck-shop, bake sales, arts and craft shows etc. to train students how to run a business, market products and raise funds for extra curricular activities.

25. Increase student allowance so that we can afford a variety of recreational activities such as movies, bowling, swimming, etc. To avoid some of the money being abused by students with addiction problems, movie passes, gift cards and coupons can be given instead of cash.
 26. The Students' Chief and Council should have a budget to organize special themed events such as: Welcome Back to School dances, Valentines Day, Halloween, Christmas, Graduation parties, etc. In addition to inter-school sports competitions, DFC students should host activities with other schools for student groups to mix with other youths in the community, and get to know each other.
 27. Create a 'recording studio' using computers at the school. There is a lot of students who enjoy making music. This will help them tell their stories and experiences through their music. We like musical equipment at DFC and the Drama Club is great. But there should be more opportunities for students to perform and show their talents.
 28. Make an art gallery in the Elders' Room or maybe the second floor/balcony, hallways etc. to hang paintings, drawings and other artistic items that students make. There is a lot of talent at DFC. The school should arrange art shows at the Intercity or Victoriaville Mall once in awhile to show what Aboriginal students can do. This will help to raise our school's image.
 29. The school should give awards regularly--every week/month/school term to recognize those doing good work and encourage others to do the same. We need more role models to motivate ourselves to do more and be our personal best. There should be an Honour Roll to acknowledge students doing exemplary work. Some students have never had encouragement. Being acknowledged will make a great difference in how they see themselves, and build their self-esteem to succeed in school.
- The principal and staff should select: Student of the week/month for: Perfect Attendance, Greatest Academic Improvement, Sportsmanship, etc. and display pictures (that can be printed on a school computer) on the wall.
 - Class Teachers should acknowledge students making personal best efforts such as: Most self-improvement: Most points/marks, Best class attendance etc, and display the students' names and pictures in the classroom.
 - A "school improvement committee" made up of students (clubs) interested in graphics, photography, marketing etc. can take this up with support and guidance of staff. The students would photograph and produce the pictures, seek sponsors, solicit gift certificates and coupons for prizes. This would be one positive way to recognize their own peers, build school spirit, celebrate student achievement and promote excellence.

- The Student Chief and Council should promote good personal qualities such as: Peer Helper of the Week, Role Model Award, Humanitarian award, Kindness award, etc. To engage students in the selection process, winners can be chosen by popular vote.
30. Provide on going training for peer leaders and peer helpers. Organize special retreats for team leader from each reserve as part of their professional development. DFC can partner with other high school student councils, youth groups such as RMYC, New Hope, Friendship Centre, Urban Aboriginal Strategy, and other agencies i.e. Health Unit, United Way/YouthScape, etc. (who have worked with DFC students) to identify potential leaders and train them to serve as role models. Joint training sessions to develop leadership skills can be organized. Incentives such as meals, snacks, refreshments, gift certificates etc. will improve recruitment, participation and retention.
 31. Students should earn school credits for special tasks that show leadership and develop special skills and social knowledge to help other students and benefit the school.
 32. No ending school early--DFC students always go home early compared to other schools. Students should not be short-changed. Education is our future and must always be a priority.
 33. All students should attend graduation ceremonies and see how wonderful it is to complete schooling and be formally acknowledged.
 34. There should be special funds set aside for preparing and publishing a DFC yearbook. This is a wonderful legacy to promote the school and to be proud students going to DFC.
 35. *How does NNEC know if people taking boarding students are good, if the home is safe, if there is enough food, if it is a party house, if there are addicts, abusers, etc?* There should be a process for students to report problems, and regular inspections of boarding homes to see the conditions the students are living in.
 36. DFC should have a simpler way for students to complain and have their grievances addressed. There should be a student-friendly process to report incidents (such as the Racist Incident Reporting Form developed by NAN and the RMYC). This offers a way to address issues with students having a say in the outcome. Traditional methods such as sharing circles, and meditation should be encouraged to ease tensions and resolve conflict without students bottling-up anger, carrying on grudges and feelings of revenge.

37. NNEC should buy residences (homes, apartment building etc.) in Thunder Bay for students to stay while attending school--with good caring chaperons for support and supervision. A good home environment is necessary for students to feel safe and not become too homesick so that they can concentrate on their studies.
38. DFC should continue to provide breakfast and lunch for students. Supper after school should be included on weekdays. This will make it convenient for students to participate in after school activities, and ensure that no one attends school hungry. Students can be trained and help to prepare balanced diet meals that reduce health risks such as diabetes, obesity, etc. Boarding homes will then be only expected to provide meals on weekends and holidays.
39. NNEC should provide transportation for team leaders and peer helpers organizing after-school activities and those helping to clean up after the events, so that they get home safely. The current plan to give rides to students after hours should be maintained.
40. Enforce the Dress Code to encourage students to dress smartly and professionally☺. This will improve the schools image and promote neatness. This will help to increase the chances of DFC students getting opportunities to volunteer, and being hired in the city.
41. Revise the School Code of Conduct with student input and review issues such as curfews for younger students, head-gear etc. When breeches occur, students can help as peer mediators, advisors and for some incidents, serve on peer juries. They can offer guidance, support, encourage good behaviour, and help to enforce discipline.

Students should be consulted regularly on issues that affect our welfare, and encouraged to participate in the decision making process. Depending on the offence, the Student Chief and Council, or support groups such as Girl Power should be given a chance to meet with students and see if there is a way they can help. They can offer support to prevent other students from being suspended or being sent back home.

42. Encourage more social contact and interaction between DFC students and the Thunder Bay Police Service Liaison Officer to improve police/youth relations. Students need to know their legal rights, what to do if stopped by the police, and how a criminal record can affect chances of employment and potential career goals.

Knowing more about policing and learning about law enforcement will convince more students to train as police officers, or join security services. This will help to meet the demand for officers in First Nations communities.

43. DFC students should be encouraged to volunteer in the community to develop a good resume, gain work experience and keep themselves busy. The school should help students to find volunteer opportunities and part time jobs to prepare them for the work-world.

44. Have a schooling program for young mothers to graduate, similar to what they have at St. Patrick High School. DFC should have parenting classes to teach skills to raise and nurture children -which were lost due to residential schools.
45. Students should be involved in all activities that build team spirit and unite DFC. This will help to overcome rivalries that may exist between students from different reserves. Students should be encouraged to participate in community events, and be a part of Thunder Bay. This is the best way to belong and feel included in what goes on in the community.

Meegwetch!

* * * * *

The students took turns to present the recommendations. Each added personal comments on what helped them to stay in school, or graduate, and what they needed to be better prepared for college. They thanked everyone for coming to hear them, and hoped that their suggestions would be taken seriously if things were to change for the better.

NAN Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, and NNEC board member Jennifer Manitowabi thanked the students for the presentation. They were impressed with the ideas to keep students in school, and would be sharing the recommendations with other community leaders.

Jennifer welcomed the RMYC's involvement with the students. She was involved with the Youth Council when she attended high school in Thunder Bay, and had benefited from the leadership skills and volunteer experiences.

Mr. Battiston and Mr. Howes appreciated hearing the comments, and would begin to implement those changes within their authority.

FOLLOW-UP TO PRESENTATION

Copies of the recommendations were distributed to NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy, Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose (who did not make it to the presentation), NNEC Chair Joshua Frogg, and executive director, Mr. William Dumas. Included was a proposal by the RMYC to hire DFC students over the summer to work on the recommendations. They would be employed at the Multicultural Youth Centre under the Summer Student Experience Programs.

Moffat had the privilege of meeting with Mr. Dumas at the DFC Graduation (June 5), and briefed him about students who wanted to work over the summer to plan activities for their peers in the fall. But, since DFC closed a month early (before summer jobs funding could be accessed in July) the Youth Centre needed help to cover room and board for the students in the interim.

Mr. Dumas did not have the budget to extend funding for students once the school closed in early June. But, he was interested to hear what they were going to be working on during the summer, and what they were planning to do in the fall.

Moffat was able to arrange accommodation for the students at the RMYC Training Centre residence (530 Wiltshire Crescent), covered the costs, and was responsible for their up-keep. A contribution by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth towards the inquest helped to pay for meals and incidental expenses.

A meeting with Mr. Dumas was arranged for July 2, 2009 at DFC. The students who were already promised summer jobs at the Youth Centre worked on the original recommendations and summarized their stories in a power-point presentation.

Moffat and Mr. Greg Beckford, the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO) Secretary/Treasurer drove the students to the meeting. MANWO is the RMYC's incorporated parent organization that sponsored the students' summer jobs/experience applications through YES Employment Services, and Human Resources Skills Development Canada.

At the meeting, Mr. Dumas was joined by Dr. JoLee Blackbear, a consultant reviewing student services and supports for NNEC. Mr. Brad Battiston, school principal, and NNEC Site Supervisor, Mr. Larry Howes were also present.

PROJECT DREAM PLAN: Reducing Drop-Out Rates

Shane Turtle chaired the meeting and led the power-point presentation.

Introduction:

Hello, we are students and former students of DFC who have gathered together to help change the school, and reduce the dropout rates. We are working towards solutions for the school to make it interesting, so that more students will come to school every day, stay in school and succeed.

Today we will be sharing with you what we are planning to do, and where we need help to make things work. It's up to all of us to help make this school a better one. We will personally help and volunteer our time to help reduce the drop out rates.

To get the students into pursuing their education, we need people to put their helpful hearts into our situation. The problems are real, and we need all the help we can get. Last school year was one of our worst ever. We had over 200 students arrive to start school. Just as they came, we saw them leave just as fast. In just a blink of an eye, they were sent back home of reasons we feel could have been dealt with. Sending students home is the easy way out, because the problems probably worsened when they went home. This can change, because we all believe that something can be done. We can all work together for the better because DFC is home to us, and will always be.

DFC Students' Problems and Concerns

The major problems with DFC students are drinking on school days, coming to school drunk, doing drugs on school property or even on breaks, being homesick, or sometimes not listening or not doing the work they are told to. Students are often too bored sitting around waiting for things to happen. This is why they get into drugs and alcohol. They think it is the 'best' thing about life. It's like they are not dealing with real life situations. Everything changes when you are high, or not in school for instance. Once they get into addiction of these substances, it influences others, and it is hard for them to pull away, because 'everyone' is doing it.

Another thing is that schoolwork is too easy and not challenging enough for some students. This leaves students bored, and many turn away from working hard.

Our DREAM PLAN involves keeping students occupied to stay out of trouble, and do well in their studies. As students from the school, we are concerned about the school's image.. We feel that all students should be apart of the school because it is like family to us. This summer we are all working at the Multicultural Youth Centre to create ideas to be implemented to make things better!

Shane Turtle:

When I was younger, our elders told us that alcohol was an evil spirit that would make you do stuff you don't want to do. And, that when you drank alcohol you allowed it inside you. Some people just don't think that way. My grandfather went all his life without ever tasting alcohol. But in today's world, its just too easy to get your hands on alcohol. There are beer stores in the middle of neighbourhoods and even right beside our school.

Our students are already effected by drugs and alcohol before they even come out to Thunder Bay. But that is no reason why we shouldn't stop trying to help them. I know they may be a little stubborn at times, but they can be taught what the effects are, and how this could affect their life.

"You'll never soar with the eagles if you hang around with turkeys" I like this saying because, if you want to go somewhere in life, then its up to you to smarten up and pull yourself together.

Steffany Meekis:

Well for anything to get done, I must say that there is a whole lot that you may know or not know about. You should be aware of, for example, that there is drug trafficking in and around our school. Most of these students do drugs just because they have been doing it for so long already.

It is pretty much normal to see and smell drugs around us. Now that I am a DFC graduate, I feel that I have a responsibility to be a role model to younger students, and my peers. I choose not to have that kind of stuff around me, because drinking scenes, doing drugs and trying new pills are not acceptable in my life. I have many important people around me, and better things to do than start doing drugs. Many people start using early, or are addicted so bad that their family and financial life is affected.

But for me to say this, is a really scary thing to do because of what I face as an Aboriginal student growing up in the city. I know that my feelings are probably similar to those felt by others, and many more before me.

I just know that for me, it's a horrible feeling having people you grew up with throwing their life away with alcohol and drugs. To me, this is the problem why students cannot stay in school. I see it all the time, students being rude to teachers because they think they are being cool.

But to me, all I see are GREAT teachers. Probably, when I see some students drunk in the 'On-Call' vehicle, or see someone getting picked up by an ambulance, the reasons are unknown, but its obvious there's a problem. I know there is so much more that DFC students face. I just have not heard all about it, or they haven't brought it up. I know there are so much more to say.

The reason for *this* presentation is to create solutions for the dropout rates. We want to help make DFC not to be seen as a negative place for Aboriginals, because it is more than that.

Correen Kakegamic:

I live here with my family. But, I did experience the feeling of loneliness when I lived with boarding parents while my family lived on a drive-in reserve five hours from Thunder Bay. They lived there for a year. I was in my second year of high school, and I had a hard time coping with different issues.

I didn't know how to cope with problems that I faced, so I abused alcohol. I am telling you this part of my story because I was like those students who go through such issues. Everybody goes through problems. We just need a way to help us cope with the issues. I found my way—getting involved with the right crowd, and volunteering with different clubs and organizations. Now I enjoy working with youth. I want to help them find a way.

Jordan Meekis:

Today I see a lot of teenagers my age, or younger, already drinking or smoking and getting into trouble. I think they are influenced by older people who are role models to them. They just need someone positive to look up to.

I never really had any experiences with any drugs or alcohol, because when I was a child and didn't know any better, I was told not to do any drugs or abuse alcohol by my whole family. Above all, my older brother said "I will beat the crap out of you if ever you do anything like that".

So I never tried it because I was scared of my brother. I only had my first ever encounter with cigarettes after I was pressured to smoke by a friend. I tried it to see what is the big deal. My friends always made it sound so exciting. So there's me coughing, and I was thinking this isn't fun. So today my choice is being smoke-free, and I want to help people to make their lives better.

Drinking, smoking and drugs are not as cool as people think. In the long run, they cause problems. I just want my message of healthy lifestyles to get out there.

Andrea Rae:

In my reserve there are drugs and alcohol. Teenagers start smoking at the age of 11-13. Children experience it from their parents at very early ages of 3-10. That is when they want to be just like their parents, who are our role models. Once they reach teenage years, they start, and think it is cool. But it is not so. It ruins their life. I have experienced that myself. When people drink, they think it solves all their problems, and makes all the pain calm. But, it only makes matters worse.

When I got sent home (kicked out of school), I regretted it so much. I drank to the point where I couldn't handle myself and didn't know what to do anymore. I was almost killed because of it. I was at a point where I stopped breathing for 15-20 minutes. My boarding parents called the ambulance, and I woke up in the hospital. I had no idea how I got there. But once someone told me, I started to cry because I put my self in so much danger and thought of what could have been. Like how many people I would have left, and the people I would have hurt.

I don't want anyone else from the reserves to experience what I experienced. They think they have to drink to solve problems. Even when they feel they have no problems, they think that drinking is fun. But it really is not. Waking up in the hospital is not the best feeling in the world. I want them to learn from my mistakes. And it is up to us to make a difference. That starting with our people is where the DREAM PLAN begins.

Devon Meekis:

Growing up in Deer Lake wasn't always easy being the child who didn't do drugs like the cool kids. But being part of the group still had it's advantages. Even though I was different from them, they still treated me as one of their own.

We all grew up and some of us got our act together, but there was still a presence of drugs and alcohol with the younger ones who came after us. We now worry that our children will end up as we once did. The one who was once called a 'wuss' is now respected, considered the one who is capable of changing young children following behind us.

I now enjoy the praise I get from the friends I grew up with. I am proud of being called the "Smart One", and want to use my influence to help other students at DFC.

BIG DREAM TO-DO LIST

Have a bubble dome connected to the school. Just to throw an idea out there, (we should make our school more appealing to the community. We know that while in Thunder Bay, we tell people we go to DFC, and sometimes they look surprised which is offensive. We always hear people down-talking our school, and we really dislike that.

We really do want our school to be looked at as a positive school -- a good school. Our school shouldn't be seen no better than any other school. But it's not a good feeling being a victim of racism.

Examples:

- DFC - dumb f*cken Children
- I heard that DFC . . . (something negative) from someone who doesn't know DFC at all said "That is where they send all the bad kids"
- There's been a lot of racist incidents in front of the school or around the school.

At least we're trying!

Drop-Out?

Youth today are on computers more often than they were 5 years ago. Does it sound like it's a bad thing? Not so in some cases. But, it can contribute to dropout rates among students with no support, and are at home on computers all day, because they have nothing better to do. The reason for this being brought up is because when you look at social networks such as K-net homepages, Yahoo, MSN, and Facebook, you can easily tell the kids who are better educated, being educated, or who are not, by their poor grammar and spelling.

The level of literacy skills is obvious when you read what the youth are writing and communicating. It is a problem among Aboriginal youth in our reserves who need good English language skills to communicate, read and understand their schoolwork. Many are struggling with reading and writing, and end up dropping out. They need help to succeed in school and in life.

"There are more opportunities when you stay in school. "

"Your education is a reflection of yourself"

WE NEED HELP FOR OUR SCHOOL

The students need something to look forward to, like maybe, some school excursions to see more things, and the bigger world out there.

We feel that if students are looking forward to something exciting at school, they would not feel the need to go out and drink or get into trouble, and ruin their chances of going and doing something cool.

How can we help students to stay in School?

1. A mentorship program should be implemented here at DFCHS, for those students who are struggling. Example; Lakehead Public Schools have a program called Natural Helpers where they train/educate students to be able to handle different situations for peers who are struggling with issues.
2. To choose who is best fit to be a "Natural Helper," students at the school should fill out a survey with questions such as: "Who in your school do you feel comfortable to help you deal with situations/issues of any kind?," etc. Whoever receives the most votes, can be a Natural Helper. Natural Helpers should often be students. But teachers and staff who can communicate well with students can also be included as part of the Natural Helper's support or back-up team.
3. Create a **male version of the "Girl Power Program"** with a different name to deal with male 'student' issues. There is a lot of anger, a lack of structure and not much support out there. Many of us are suffering from the Residential school syndrome!
4. Hold workshops/consultations for building better lifestyles for students attending DFC.
5. Work with youth groups such as the RMYC for DFC students to mix with other youths in the community, feel accepted, and enjoy studying and living in the city.
6. Ways to help students to come to school everyday.
7. Ways to encourage students to attend classes regularly and not skip school.
8. One way to encourage students to attend classes is to give them "points." These points would reflect their good work, attendance, punctuality etc. The points can all add up for a prize from the student council and/or the school as a whole for their efforts.
9. Creating awards and prizes each week/month for good work and perfect attendance can make a difference among students who hardly get any praise, or credit. This will certainly encourage them to keep coming back to school and doing better.
10. Any other incentives to motivate students to come to classes regularly and catch up with their schoolwork are worth trying.

11. Work on getting youth-led programs at school. Have students plan and organize their own activities to engage themselves in positive things. Train them, and give them roles to make them feel important. This will make them like school.
12. Provide meals at school, have curfews, and a flexible timetable with an extended school day. **Create a relaxing environment** such as a Courtyard, Student Lounge, Games room, etc for socializing and entertainment.

Activities at school (We Need more funding).

Example: Sports.

Volleyball and Hockey are the most dominant activities in the school. Students look forward to playing their favourite sport everyday after school. But how can everybody get a fair share of the gym? Almost half the student we surveyed said, “EVERYBODY DOESN’T LIKE VOLLEY BALL AND HOCKEY”. This is why we think some students leave the school right away, and eventually decide to drink for something exciting to do.

IDEA! → Create outdoor Volleyball court (Possibly a sand court). Have students organize their own games/events

Right now there are not a lot of activities at school to choose from. This chases kids away. But, there isn’t a lot we can do without funding. This is where our creativity has to jump in. We can still do some things without money, but, eventually students will get tired of doing the same cheap things over and over again. This is why we need at least some funding for other activities such as paint ball, hiking, bowling, swimming, indoor soccer, broomball, lacrosse, movie nights, dances, pow-wows, computer games, arts & crafts, music, etc.

“If a student misses 2 days of school each month from grade 1 through grade 9, by grade 10 that student will have missed an entire year of school”.

Ideas!

Orientation Day... Student-run Club Booths;

Have student leaders plan and run a “club booth,” to sign up students for various extra curricular activities during orientation activities. This will give students the little push they need to take an interest in what we are trying to do, and help them to know what they can learn and achieve by participating.

Making a commitment to whatever club they choose, or getting involved in activities they enjoy will keep them busy. To be successful at engaging students in activities at school, we need to start very early in the school year to sign them up.

"Education should not be the filling of the pail, but the lighting of the fire."

Conclusion:

As students and former students of Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, we want to decrease the drop-out rate at our school. The current student dropout rate that is more than 60% is unacceptable. So many of our fellow students are being sent back home to the reserves without completing their education. We want to help make a change in the way Aboriginal youth look at schooling. We are spending this summer trying to find ways to engage them to be part of the solution!

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

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Mr. Dumas thanked the students for their presentation. He went on to explain the inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and the need to address the challenges students experience due to poor parenting. As an educator and academician, he was concerned about the education gap of three or more years between on-reserve and urban students. Remedial programs and special initiatives were needed to bring Aboriginal students to par so that they can proceed to post-secondary education and succeed. He wanted to stay in touch with the students, and promised to attend another meeting before schools opened so that he could be up-dated on the progress made over the summer, and their plans for the fall.

He also wanted to know what assistance and resources the RMYC could share to help Aboriginal students. The Orientation Program to welcome and facilitate the integration of First Nations students from small northern reserves coming to study in larger urban centres, Stay in school/after-school initiatives to help students graduate, the Girl Power Program to empower young women, Anti-racism and violence prevention initiatives, and the youth leadership/role model training to develop the capacity of students to plan and organize their own activities, were successful initiatives. Activities such as student orientations have encouraged partnerships with the Friendship Centre, Urban Aboriginal Strategy, and so forth, for the benefit of Aboriginal students. However, a lack of funding has resulted in the scaling back of such helpful programs.

The RMYC will be working with the students hired under the summer jobs/experience programs to prepare a strategic plan outlining the areas the Youth Council could collaborate with NNEC, and the resources the youth would need to engage DFC students and improve their safety, and enhance their potential to do well in school.

FOLLOW-UP TO DREAM PLAN PRESENTATION

After the Dream-plan Presentation, the students sent the following letter to Mr. Dumas. The letter was copied to DFC staff.

Dear Mr. Dumas,

Thank you for coming to see us in Thunder Bay. The words you said about residential schools meant a lot and strengthened our mission of helping DFC students to stay in school and succeed. We worked really hard to prepare our presentation, and we appreciate that you came to hear us out.

We are very interested in helping to change the lives of our fellow students attending DFC. Education is the path of not just changing the student's life, but also the lives of their people as well. We thank you again for your interest in what we are trying to do and for your support. We look forward to seeing you at the meeting in August.

We have been brainstorming ideas to support what you are endeavouring to do at NNEC. We realize that there are many problems students from up-north face, especially when they move to the city. We feel that as young people who have endured these problems, we have to do something to deal with the issues.

1. We want to bring your attention to recommendation #38 presented at the May 30, 2009 meeting attended by NNEC board member Jennifer Manitowabi, Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Mr. Brad Battiston, and Mr. Larry Howes.

From the discussions, we feel that providing breakfast, lunch and supper at the school offers more opportunities to address some of the issues you raised. Boarding parents would only be contracted to provide meals on weekends and holidays. We have been consulting with some of the students at home. Even when we call late in the morning or early afternoon, many of them are still sleeping.

We are, therefore, suggesting that breakfast be served between 9:00 a.m. and 9:55 a.m. Classes would begin at 10:00 a.m. This would give almost an hour for students to make it to class-compared to last term, when classes began at 9:15 a.m. and many students were always late.

Lunch would be an hour later. Formal classes would end around 4:30 p.m., with supper at 5:30 p.m.

From 4:30 p.m. to suppertime, students would get tutorials, and use the time to catch-up with schoolwork. This is an opportunity to make up for the 3-4 years they are already behind when they come to DFC. Those who do not need extra help can use the time for hobbies, clubs, and other extra curricular activities.

After supper, students have more options of continuing with their studies, or participating in fun activities, art, music, movies, TV, computers (supervised) games, sports, cultural teachings, workshops, and any other activities they want to organize for themselves.

We feel that keeping the students longer at school will give them a chance to catch up with their schooling and reduce the risks of getting into trouble. Also, providing supper before they go home will eliminate the problem of those who sneak out to drink, doing so on an empty stomach.

2. For recommendation #36, we want to add that Curfews should be re-introduced so that students are home safe and go to bed early to make it to school the next day on time. This will also enable boarding parents/guardians to monitor the whereabouts of students after-hours and provide a framework to supervise them.

It will be easy to report a missing student early once they miss their curfew. Those breaking their curfew should be reported to parents/ guardians and the school to assess the risks, and prevent potential problems. Repeat offenders should be moved to special homes with stricter discipline and adequate supports.

We are still consulting with more students on the ideal times -- 9:30 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. ? Sunday to Thursday, (school days), and 11:00 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.? Friday and Saturday -- weekends? We should be able to have firm times in time for our meeting the third week in August.

3. We need to present a positive image of DFC students. Recommendation #40 is on a dress code for students to promote neatness and counter the stereotypic image of youth street gang attire generally associated with Aboriginal youth from Winnipeg and Black gangster (gangsta) youth from the ghettos (hood). Unfortunately, it is such perceptions that feed the racial profiling which in turn can lead to racial discrimination and racism.

We feel that a positive portrayal of DFC students will make it much easier to get good boarding homes in Thunder Bay. This will also help to foster team spirit by giving a positive image of the school.

We are very impressed with the 'graduation' portraits on the billboards advertising boarding homes for students. That is the neat image we want to portray to present a positive perspective on Aboriginal students. This will help to reduce the many barriers we often face when seeking accommodation, placements, volunteer opportunities, and jobs in the city.

We have decided on school attire of red sweat-shirts and black pants. Students can buy their own black pants or the school could seek sponsors for those facing hardship. For the red sweatshirts with DFC/NNEC logo, we feel that corporations such as Musselwhite, De Beers or Ontario Hydro, some charitable foundations, or generous donors could be approached as sponsors.

4. We are seeking your support to implement Recommendation #20. We need to create a team of peer helpers. We are presently identifying and contacting potential members to be trained as peer helpers. They will liaise with teachers and staff, and work with students, engage and empower them to be part of the solution. We would need your help to bring the students early and provide the necessary orientation and training for their role.

We have decided to make these suggestions right away so that the NNEC board could discuss them as soon as possible for probable implementation this fall.

We are working on other recommendations and prioritizing them. We are developing a strategic work plan to present at the August meeting when you promised us you would be back in Thunder Bay.

Sincerely,

Coreeen Kakegamic, Devon Meekis, Jordan Meekis, Steffany Meekis, Andrea Rae, Shane Turtle, and members of the RMYC.

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Mr. Dumas acknowledged the correspondence, and confirmed the desire to meet with the students again in late August -- before schools opened.

The meeting was later rescheduled to September 16. He invited the student leaders to a dinner meeting to discuss their summer experience and plans to work with students during the school year.

THE STUDENTS' ACTION-PLAN

Six DFC students involved in the two presentations joined eleven other youths hired under the Summer Jobs and Summer Experience Programs at the Multicultural Youth Centre. Their job description included implementing recommendations to improve the well-being of DFC students, and learning leadership and organizational development skills to recruit other students, and create a larger peer support team. Moffat trained and supervised the DFC team. The RMYC executive and other summer jobs students shared skills and work experience and provided workplace support.

The DFC summer-jobs students liaised with the school principal and staff to plan activities for the fall. The school was already implementing recommendations that did not require new funding, and for the first time, students were involved in organizing welcoming activities for their peers. They had to greet new students and make a presentation during the welcome assembly in the gymnasium. In addition, they were to sign up students for extra curricular activities. This is intended to keep them busy and out-of trouble during the school year.

To create more peer leaders, the RMYC initiated a Leadership Club. The strategy involved training students to network with each other, plan and organize activities that can make a difference in their lives. Twenty-two students signed up, and meet on Mondays after school. The school has set aside Room #208 as a Students' Lounge for the Club. The RMYC provides refreshments and snacks to encourage students to stay in the school after hours. Members of the Youth Council and placement students at the Youth Centre regularly attend as resource people to train the students.

Club members have been reaching out to their peers to identify concerns and interests, and suggest activities they want to see organized. To date, the Leadership Club has hosted a Halloween sleep-over party at the school, and a pre-Christmas Social at the Multicultural Youth Centre. On January 13 and 14 this year, the Club hosted a reception and orientation for new students coming to DFC for the second semester. The Club also organized a St. Valentine's social in the gym for teachers and students. If funding is available there are plans to organize activities for students staying in Thunder Bay during the March Break.

After learning that many Leadership Club members are having problems with school-work, the RMYC started an after-school study group. It is open to all students needing help to catch-up with schoolwork. The Group meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 4:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. for tutoring and to complete assignments. The RMYC provides snacks and refreshments at the end of the study period for the convenience of those staying in the school to study.

There is also a Revolution Girl-Style/Girl Power Group to empower young women to follow their passion and realize their dreams. Andrea and Correen are involved with the program using skills they learned during the RMYC REV Girl Power summer camps. The girls have identified self-esteem, alcohol and substance abuse, healthy life-styles unwanted pregnancies, relationships, racism, violence, careers, residential schools, and recreation as priorities. Some students are young mothers and want to learn parenting skills. We also intend to share information about fetal alcohol effects and mental health.

The group meets at 4:30 p.m. in Room #107 (Art & Resource Room) on Wednesdays. Twenty-six girls have signed up so far, and the RMYC provides snacks for them to stay after school. The Youth Council is presently seeking sponsors to contribute food for the Girl Power meetings.

Some members of the Girl Power Group at DFC come to the citywide REV meetings at the Multicultural Youth Centre on Saturdays. This is a chance for all Girl Power chapters in Thunder Bay high schools to get together. They share ideas, learn from each other, make friends, and have fun while empowering themselves as young women.

A group of boys is interested to form a parallel group to discuss drinking, drugs, violence, youth street gangs, jobs and so forth. Several are young fathers who want to learn parenting skills, budgeting, relationships and how to deal with the stress of having a spouse, a child, and managing schoolwork. They have yet to come up with a formal name for their group, as well as set regular meeting times.

There is no student council at DFC this school year. The teacher responsible for the student Chief and Council left DFC for the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board before the end of the year. The Leadership Club has been filling the gap, and performing the students council's tasks. The RMYC is helping to identify potential peer leaders and coaching them to plan activities and make public announcements for general school activities. The plan is to develop the capacity of potential student leaders to become peer helpers.

The school is very supportive of the Leadership Club, and is seeking funding for the group to organize more student-led activities. At the beginning of the second semester, a course in leadership was introduced as part of the school curriculum. Students can earn a credit for taking leadership content in class, participating in the Leadership Club, or for being involved with the Chief and Council. This should encourage more students to be involved as peer leaders and serve as role models. The new leadership course will go a long way to groom young leaders and train them as peer helpers. We believe that this initiative will help to develop pools of trained youths with skills to engage children and youth for positive change in First Nations communities.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Enrolment at DFC was about 160 students last fall (2009). This is two-thirds the number registered in 2008 when sixty per cent dropped out. Retention has improved this year. Approximately sixty per cent of the students (110) are still at school. We are proud of the improvement from the dropout rate last year.

Student-led after-school activities such as the Leadership Club, the Study Group, and REV Girl Power program are making a difference in student success rate. Twenty-one students registered in the Study Group were allowed to return to school for the second semester. Because of their participation, they earned a course credit, which enabled them to get a passing grade, which they needed to continue their studies.

Involvement in the Leadership Club and REV Girl Power also saved some students from being sent home for social infractions. The school has begun to use peer support involvement for reference before students are sent home. Those registered and participating in student clubs are given another chance to see if their peers can help them to deal with issues such as drinking, drug abuse, skipping class, breaking curfews, and other minor personal problems. This has been an empowering experience for the after-school clubs, and encourages students to work together and help each other.

From mid October to the end of the year, both DFC school principal, Mr. Brad Battiston, and NNEC Site Director, Mr. Larry Howes were on sick leave. This is the time the school faced another tragedy. Kyle Morriseau, a 17-year old student from Keewaywin First Nation failed to show up at his boarding home on October 30, 2009. Search parties were formed to look for him. The youth who may have seen him last seemed scared to talk because of some known Native Syndicate gang members he hung around with. His body was pulled from the McIntyre River on November 10, in the same general area as Reggie Bushie. This revived memories of losing another student due to abusing alcohol by the same riverbank.

The funeral service for Kyle was held in the DFC gym on November 13. His father, Christian Morriseau, son of famed artist Norval Morriseau, used the occasion to advise students to watch out for each other. In his comments, he hoped that his son's death would be a lesson for students to concentrate on their schooling, avoid abusing alcohol and other risky lifestyles. A large delegation from the school went to Keewaywin for the funeral. In the press coverage, Chief Joe Meekis acknowledged a prescription drug abuse epidemic on the reserve, and appealed for help. In spite of the tragedy, a majority of students are still being sent home for abusing alcohol and drugs, rather than due to poor school performance. The RMYC has been engaging students in discussions about the problem and challenging them to help their community leaders to find solutions.

2010 began with a new school principal. Vice principal, Mr. Jonathan Kakegamic replaced Mr. Battiston who resigned at the end of the year. Soon after taking office, he met with Moffat Makuto to discuss areas of collaboration to help students train peer leaders and find ways to involve more students in extra-curricular activities. He is already working on several recommendations the students prioritized.

Mr. Kakegamic has pledged to support the Leadership Club financially, and is developing proposals to fund special activities students want to organize. To build the student leadership capacity, he has introduced a Leadership Course as part of the school curriculum. Beginning last January, students can register for the course, and those involved with the Leadership Club can get a credit for regular participation and significant accomplishments.

He is also implementing the recommendations to recognize student achievement, build school spirit, and boost morale. He has introduced monthly pep-rallies with awards for academic excellence, and prizes to recognize students doing positive things at school. There are regular assemblies in the gym, with guest speakers and presentations on the issues students have prioritized. All teachers and staff are very supportive of the new initiatives, and are going out of their way to work with, and help the students.

In January, the school hosted a suicide prevention forum, a traditional Pow-Wow, and a feast. In February, the Thunder Bay Police and staff from Corrections Canada were invited to talk to students about criminal youth gangs. This was partly in response to comments that Kyle Morriseau (the DFC student who drowned in the McIntyre River) was mixed up with street youth gangs. All these activities are helping to impress on the students well-being. Organizing the events during the school day ensures that all students are involved and feel included in what is going on.

The NNEC has also seen some changes at the top. Last November, Mrs. Jennifer Manitowabi replaced Chief Joshua Frogg as NNEC Chair. She is a teacher by profession, but is presently working with the Sioux Lookout Health Authority. She was an RMYC officer and helped to organize the Orientation Program and the Native Friendship Circle at Hillcrest High School in the 1990s. Her involvement with the RMYC and the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre earned her the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award in 2000. She became the first Aboriginal young woman in Northwestern Ontario to do so. The RMYC is currently working with NAN Grand Chief and Mrs. Manitowabi to introduce the Duke of Edinburgh Program at DFC.

As we prepare this report, there is an advertisement for the NNEC Director of Education's job in local newspapers. There is also word that Mr. Dumas will be leaving his NNEC Executive Director's post at the end of the school year.

LESSONS LEARNED & EXPERIENCE GAINED

Participating in the Reggie Bushie inquest was an opportunity for DFC students to have a voice they never had before. Initial reluctance by school staff to get students involved, and the general nature of the inquest made the youth anxious. However, personal visits by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, Mr. Irwin Elman; lawyer Suzan Fraser; and Provincial Advocate staff, reassured students that this was a chance to tell their stories about going to school in the city, share their perspective on education, and offer suggestions to improve the situation.

A \$14,000.00 financial contribution from the Office of the Provincial Advocate enabled the RMYC to meet with students on a regular basis, and gather input and feedback. The Youth Council arranged transportation, meals, refreshments, meeting space, etc. for the convenience of the participants. Providing these amenities encouraged more youths to attend focus groups, talk about their situation, and come up with ideas to make things better. Even though the formal inquest is still on hold due to jury selection issues and jury composition, the students were able to come up with recommendations, some of which are already being implemented for their benefit.

The self-confidence gained by students during the inquest was evident when some of them wanted stay in Thunder Bay to work. But, taking up their first jobs in the city revealed the barriers and trauma many Aboriginal youth have to overcome. Being raised in isolated reserves poses unique challenges to integrate into city life and enter the mainstream work-world. Cultural upbringing and the social environment created hurdles for the graduates/peer leaders hired at the Youth Centre. While none had problems with alcohol or drugs, they all struggled with issues of motivation, punctuality, self-confidence, work-ethic, dependability, and urban-lifeskills acquisition – which affected their performance.

All summer, none of the DFC students made it to work on time, even though we moved back the start time from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. They often showed up for work after lunch, and sometimes missed the whole day because they had stayed up all night chatting on computers, or watching videos. They were also the first to leave at the end of the day without making up for lost time, and expected full wages on their pay cheque. These are traits learned from seeing how folks work on the reserve, and carried through school where lateness and absenteeism are not chastised.

Upon a further review of work habits and performance, it is obvious that a lack of volunteer opportunities, professional training, and jobs in Aboriginal communities has resulted in apathy and stifled the work ethic. On the other hand, dependence on social assistance can create indifference about work, and no motivation to seek or create employment among youths. Unfortunately, idle hands become the devil's playground!

There were also problems to recruit other students as peer leaders. Many slept all day because they had nothing to do, and stayed up at night 'chilling out'. Those we contacted were reluctant to be role models because of problems with alcohol and drugs. They lacked motivation and self-confidence to be leaders. With no treatment facilities for addictions, or adequate counselling services, many returned to school in the fall with the same issues unsolved – only to be sent back home again. In this under-serviced context, those becoming parents risk creating dysfunctional families and passing on fetal alcohol syndrome and related mental diseases to their children. This can become the acceptable norm that perpetuates the cycle of vulnerable kids and an ever-expanding generation of at-risk youth.

The students acknowledged that dysfunctional homes, poverty, addictions, violence, neglect, abuse, lack of support, unemployment, and apathy are common. Alcoholism, prescription painkillers and illicit drugs are causing havoc in regards to mental health, memory loss, attention deficit, and other health problems. Children show up for school sporadically because the living conditions at home are deplorable. When we called to talk to some parents, we were often told to call back when they were sober. This was almost the norm in some homes.

Issues of infidelity, incest, marital break-ups and abuse also divide people. It is common to have siblings in one household with multiple parents, or children in-care separated from maternal parents who do not know next of kin and do not get along. High rates of incarceration and addictions contribute to family break-ups and create potential for incest. Children taken into foster homes are frustrated because they are innocent victims of their parents' mistakes. The mental anguish, anger, pain, stress and depression are reflected by fits of rage, a lack of respect for self, others or property, self-mutilation, suicide and so forth. Indifference leaves some youths with no hope, and they feel that anything goes because there is nothing to lose.

Similar problems exist at the community level where political allegiance, nepotism, corruption, incompetence, family ties, lifestyles, religious differences, infidelity, and abuse can cause conflict or jealousy among neighbours. This creates tension, resentment and bitterness among the children. The problems stay with students when they move to study in urban centres at schools such as DFC. Rather than band together to watch, protect and care for one another, they hardly communicate outside established circles or cliques. Mistrust, shunning, and other exclusionary practices make it difficult to build team spirit and foster positive relationships.

The legacy of residential schools haunts individuals and has a negative impact on personal character and quality of life in Aboriginal communities. There are horrendous stories of trauma due to addictions, vicious assaults, family violence and abuse. With no guidance, discipline, manners, love, and nurturing from parents, kids are joining gangs as family. Instability at home affects attitudes, behaviour and lifestyles making it hard for students to do well in school. For many children the situation is desperate. Current payments to compensate residential school victims are being blamed by some youths for creating more anguish and stress.

Some of the students shared stories of parents taking off and abandoning families and homes after receiving the compensation settlements. We heard of situations where mothers or fathers were using the new-found-wealth to party, binge-drink, gamble, and behave irresponsibly at the expense of their children.

To follow-up on the recommendations to Band Councils, NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy was invited to meet with DFC students at the Youth Centre. They discussed the work-habits, lack of education, lazy attitudes, and insufficient urban life skills, which affected the growing numbers of Aboriginal youth migrating to urban centres finding jobs. The high rates of unemployment, dysfunctional families, and addiction to alcohol, solvents, prescription and illicit drugs compound the problems. Even in some 'dry reserves', alcohol flows freely--smuggled in or homebrew. Others resort to using mouthwash, hairspray, etc. to get intoxicated. The problems keep getting worse.

Many students/youths feel that Band Councils are not doing enough to address chronic problems in their communities, and this is creating a dead-end for aspiring youths. In spite of some progress in regards to self-government, healing programs, a return to traditional culture, spirituality and cultural teachings by Elders, social conditions continue to deteriorate. The high suicide rate, proliferation of youth street gangs, and the sixty percent school dropout rate at DFC last year illustrate worsening situations. Hence a growing trend where more Aboriginal youths are moving to the city in search of a better life. This is why some DFC students wanted to stay in Thunder Bay and work--to break away from the despair.

All students working at the Multicultural Youth Center attended a focus group organized by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in August to develop a Child and Youth Engagement Strategy. The consultation was intended to provide input and feedback on various programs and supports the Ministry delivers. The students commented on services such as the summer jobs programs; youth out-reach workers; protection services; counselling for children and youth, who are, or are at risk of, being abused or neglected; community and custodial programs for youth aged 12 to 18, or in conflict with the law; children's mental health supports; and respite, residential and rehabilitative supports.

The DFC students commended on foster care services from first-hand experience. They suggested more supports for struggling families and single mothers. They also wanted the summer jobs program under which they were hired expanded to serve more youth from under-served areas, and made operational all year as part of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. The students liked the training aspect of the program, which provides valuable work experience for Aboriginal youth to enter the job market and develop a work ethic to be gainfully employed. Including school dropouts in the transition process would also help them determine potential trades to consider for careers. The RMYC also felt that immigrant and refugee youths would benefit from the "Canadian" experience through summer jobs/summer experience programs.

We are pleased that the DFC students hired and trained last summer provided valuable insight into the issues that confront them while studying in the city and at home and on reserves. They appreciated the work experience gained and the money they made in the process. In spite of setbacks in regards to standard work-place practices, they learned lifeskills that will help them to succeed in a competitive work-world.

The RMYC has kept in touch with all students who worked at the Youth Centre. Andrea and Correen are the only ones returning to DFC. Both are actively involved in activities the Youth Council is promoting at the school, and are staying together in a supportive home environment provided by Correen's mother. The same cannot be said about some of the students. They have been moving from boarding home to boarding home in search of a healthy and nurturing place to stay. There are still problems to find good supportive homes to meet the students' social, physical and emotional needs so that they can concentrate on their studies and succeed in school.

The other DFC team leaders who went to College have not fared that well, and were sent back at home. We know that alcohol and drug abuse were not factors, but they all had problems with attendance and academic performance.

Feedback from the students is that they were not well prepared for College. Even though they were enrolled in a transition (entry) program, it was still hard for them to adapt and cope with post-secondary work. College-readiness orientation would have prepared them for their new responsibilities. They also need assistance to deal with issues such as finding accommodation, money management, and a heavier school course-load. Unlike high school where NNEC pays room and board for students, in College they are on their own. They handle their own expenses from the monthly cheques issued to them directly. In addition, after being seniors in high school and enjoying the prestige, it was another culture shock to start afresh in college with little friends and social support.

The RMYC is encouraging the college 'drop-outs' to focus on their post-secondary education ambitions. All want to go back to college, and are hoping to be given a second chance next fall. It is however surprising that the students were not aware of the various youth training initiatives, employment programs, and job opportunities for youth they could participate in while waiting for the school year to begin in the fall. There are communication gaps on reserves. Therefore, the youth lack information to access resources available to help them.

We are delighted that after their first work experience last summer, the youth want to be hired again. They are in touch with the RMYC, and have already asked for assistance to find employment in the city.

The major problem now is finding money to relocate in Thunder Bay. With no family or other relations to live with, it is difficult to find rent-money for accommodation. Unless the RMYC, again, steps in to provide interim room and board until the students get their first pay cheque, it will be difficult to help them to move to the city. We just hope that boredom, despair, and frustration do not set in, and drive the students to engage in negative cycles as often happens to other school drop-outs on reserves.

The RMYC acknowledges that there are complex issues and unique situations confronting Aboriginal youth. Many fail to realize their potential because of social circumstances, limited resources, no encouragement, guidance or support, and a lack of relevant information to make critical choices. However, through empowerment, they can overcome barriers that prevent them from having equal opportunities and equal access to participate fully in activities many other Canadians enjoy.

We believe in developing young leaders and positive role models to mobilize peers towards change. Including Aboriginal youth in the RMYC structure and decision-making process has been our recipe for success. In addition, we have developed a strategy to foster student involvement in extra-curricular activities. The youth-to-youth approach the Youth Council is using for the Leadership Club, After-school Study Group, the REV Girl Power Program has adopted the following 'best practice':

1. A friendly approach to individual students and groups/cliques to complete simple questionnaires for input on the challenges they face while studying away from home, what they want done about it, and the role they can play.
2. Personalized invitations (verbal and hand-outs) to participate in study groups, meetings, special presentations, events or activities of interest. Experience has taught us that more students show up for after-school activities if personal contact is made earlier in the day to remind them, and encourage them to come. The response is often poor if we just use posters with no last-minute reminders.
3. The students need persistent reminders to feel wanted, important and welcome to participate. Offering help and the supports they need to feel comfortable and learn to deal with their concerns inspires positive responses.
4. Arranging snacks and refreshments makes it convenient for students to stay at school after school and be involved in special activities. Arranging transportation for those concerned about getting home safely encourages more students to stay behind and participate in extra curricular activities.
5. Observing the students' interaction patterns, and identifying potential leaders to be trained as peer leaders who can reach out and encourage others to be involved in school activities can boost the numbers of participants.
6. Continuously exploring new ways to reach new students while retaining those already involved in peer groups, and developing strategies to engage them as stakeholders in activities that shape their destiny.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL

Alcohol was a factor in the Reggie Bushie tragedy. We are providing the following excerpts from the *"Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series--Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Among Aboriginal People in Canada: Review and Analysis of the Inter-generational Links to Residential Schools"* by Caroline L. Tait, (2003), to present a historical perspective of the problem, the present day challenges, and what can be done to improve the situation. For more information please refer to: www.ahf.ca

Residential Schools and Substance Abuse: (p. 156)

The white population cannot point smugly at Aboriginals and claim fetal alcohol syndrome is just a native problem. For one thing, we non-Aboriginal people helped to create the problem by refusing to acknowledge Aboriginal culture and by sending Indian Children to residential schools. People with low self-esteem often turn to alcohol for consolation (cited I. Square, 1997:59)

Introduction of Alcohol to First Nations: (p. 30)

Alcohol abuse among the First Nations has been directly linked to intersection of cultural and historical factors in several studies on Aboriginal people. As stated above, indigenous people in Canada prior to contact with Europeans did not possess alcohol. This historical context has been used to explain why excessive drinking patterns developed among some Aboriginal groups. Authors content that because no social rules or conventions existed to control the use of alcohol when it was introduced, consumption was legal unregulated and people drank, and continue to drink, excessively (Sagges and Gray, 1998).

Alcohol -- Learned Behaviour: (p. 31)

A number of studies argue that current patterns of alcohol abuse among some Aboriginal groups may reflect learned patterns of behaviour stemming from cultural and historical roots (Honigmann, 1979; Smart and Ogborne, 1986; Brady and Palmer, 1991). Many of these studies contend that some drinking behaviours were learned from Europeans during the early contact period. For example, Honigmann (1979) suggests that northern 'frontier' culture in which European men binged (drinking large quantities of alcohol in short spans of time) excessively on alcohol, while paying little concern to their disruptive and uncontrollable behaviour, was adopted by indigenous people in their attempts to identify with the frontier culture, resist concession of superiority to European culture, and maintain some autonomy and spontaneity.

Some authors argue that a pattern of binge drinking, which became typical behaviour of Aboriginal men and women who drank alcohol during the fur-trade period, was due to the nature of fur trapping. They argue that Aboriginal trappers abstained, for most part, from becoming intoxicated while on the trap-line because it was too dangerous, and because it was difficult to transport large quantities of alcohol in the bush. Only when they came to the trading posts did Aboriginal trappers consume alcohol, typically in large quantities over a few days.

Mohawk author, Brian Maracle (1994) argues that a pattern of binge-drinking became a typical way for Aboriginal people to consume alcohol during the fur-trade period, a pattern reinforced in 1896 when the Canadian Parliament passed legislation through the Indian Act, which made it illegal for status Indians to buy or possess alcohol. Indian prohibition lasted 117 years, surviving in one form or another in Canada until 1985. Maracle writes that thousands of First Nations people were arrested and jailed because law, and it acted as a form of social control, which allowed Indian agents and the police to arbitrarily arrest and detain Aboriginal people.

He writes: Of course the law didn't stop or prevent Indians from drinking, but it did change the way they drank-for the worse. Since Indians were forbidden to buy liquor, they frequently resorted to drinking other more dangerous intoxicants. The law also reinforced a destructive culture that Indian people evolved after their first contacts with hard-drinking soldiers and scheming fur-traders. Since they were not allowed in bars, or taverns, and since they were not permitted to possess alcohol in their homes, the law forced them to become furtive and drink in bushes and back alleys.

More ominously, Indians also had to guzzle their beer, wine or liquor as quickly as possible to keep from being arrested (Maracle, 1994:44-45).

Some researchers argue that, under the imposed conditions of prohibition, Aboriginal people formed patterns of drinking that are still part of present day drinking cultures among some groups (Beckett, 1964: Smart and Ogborne, 1986.) Explanations such as these have recently been linked to high rates of alcohol-related birth effects (ARBES) among Aboriginal people in Canada, as binge drinking has been shown to be exceptionally harmful to the developing fetus (Tait, 2003).

The ' Drunken Indian' Stereotype (p. 23)

"The detrimental impact that alcohol abuse has in many Aboriginal communities and the significant amount of public attention it has received through the media has resulted in a negative association between Aboriginal people and alcohol use within the general public. The stereotype of the 'drunken Indian', which has been greatly exaggerated within Canadian society, is the clearest and most common example (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996b). At a very basic level, this stereotype implies that individually, Aboriginal people are biologically incapable of engaging in ' responsible' consumption of alcohol and are prone to acts of reckless abandon, often with tragic results (May, 1988). For Aboriginal people collectively, this stereotype has implications on both social and political levels (Maracle, 1994).

The drunken Indian stereotype resonates not only within every level of non-Aboriginal society in North America, but there is evidence to suggest that it resonates within some Aboriginal communities as well. For example, an American study by May and Smith (1988), which looked at opinions about alcohol abuse held by members of the Navajo population, found that only 30 to 42% of Navajo adults drank, compared with 71% of the general population.

Despite this, study participants cited alcoholism to be the number one health problem on their reserve. Sixty-three per cent of the study participants felt that Aboriginal people, in general, have a physical weakness to alcohol that does not exist among the non-Aboriginal population. It is not clear from the discussion by May and Smith what factors influenced study participants to respond this way, but knowledge of the history of Aboriginal-white relations indicates that this response was likely shaped by the dominant historical and social discourse about Aboriginal people and alcohol."

Child Abuse and Alcohol Dependency (p. 45)

Child Sexual Abuse and lifetime sexual abuse have been identified as possible risk factors for problems, such as adult alcohol dependency/abuse, the disruption of normal developmental processes, self-destructive behaviour, anxiety, poor self-esteem, anger, hostility, and suicide (Kirmayer, Hayton, Malus, Jimirez, Dufour, et. Al, 1992; Chandy, Blum et. Al. 1996; Langeland and Hartgers, 1998; Jasinski, Williams et. al., 2000; DiLillo, Tremblay, et. al., 2000). Research examining the links between sexual abuse and the subsequent development of alcohol abuse problems have found it difficult to determine if sexual is an independent predicator of adult alcohol dependency/abuse. However, research has clearly shown that sexual abuse is a confounding factor of adult alcohol dependency/abuse (Fleming , Mullen, et. al., 1998). Langeland and Hartgers (1998) point out that other casual factors include concomitant family dysfunction, childhood neglect, parental substance abuse, and adult victimization experiences.

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Hussey and Singer (1993) studied a group of sexually abused adolescent psychiatric in-patients, with a control group of in-patient counterparts, on measures of social competence, self-esteem, depression, substance abuse and perceptions of family characteristics and functioning. Sexually abused and control groups were similar on standardized measures of psychological distress and family functioning; however, there were statistically significant differences between the two groups on substance abuse measures. Hussey and Singer speculate that similarities between groups on measures of self-esteem, depression, social competence and family structure were probably due to the homogeneous nature of adolescent psychiatric in-patients, a population generally thought to be seriously emotionally and behaviourally impaired.

On almost every measure of substance abuse, the trend was for the group who had been sexually abused to have scores indicative of more serious substance abuse than those in the control group. The sexually abused group were found to be more likely to engage in drug use, to use marijuana and stimulants more often, to report more frequent use of drugs, to be younger when they initiated drug use and to get drunk more often. Hussey and Singer go on to write:

If we look closer at underlying explanations for abused youngsters increased substance abuse, they evidenced higher scores on scales designed to measure use patterns reflecting self-medication and rebellious motivations for drinking behavior. Abused youngsters also reported greater perceived benefits from both alcohol and drug use. Specifically in regard to drinking, these benefits included drinking to relax, to feel good, and to be friendly.

Whether this pattern of suspected self-medication was actually beneficial in achieving this end is unclear ... Perhaps substance abuse was effective in reducing levels of depression and improving feelings of self-esteem and social competence in the abuse group. On the other hand, increased levels of substance abuse to deal with psychological distress may have exacerbated psychiatric symptomatology in the abuse group (1993:958-959).

Hussey and Singer go on to suggest that the relationship between sexual abuse and substance abuse for a sub-set of the sexually abused group may be that substance abuse partially contributed to their victimization experience: "The contribution of decreased inhibitions, poor judgement, and reduced ability to protect oneself due to intoxication and chemical use may have exacerbated the potential for sexual victimization to occur" (1993:959).

Child Physical Abuse and Neglect: (p. 39)

For some Aboriginal families, child physical abuse and neglect are part of a larger picture of family dysfunction and violence. (Jacobs and Gill, 2002). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples points out that family violence in Aboriginal communities is distinct: -in that the unbalanced power relationships that structure the lives of Aboriginal people are not found primarily in the relationships between men and women. The imbalance lies in the powerlessness of Aboriginal people relative to society as a whole, including the social institutions that dominate every aspect of their lives, from the way they are educated and the way they earn a living to the way they are governed (1996b:73).

However, the Commission goes on to add that family violence originating in imbalances of power is not to excuse it and individuals must take responsibilities for their actions.

Child Sexual Abuse (p. 41)

It has been estimated that approximately one of every three adult women in Canada has been the victim of some form of sexual abuse during her lifetime. A large percentage of reported lifetime abuse happens to victims during their childhood. For example, a study by Bagley and Ramsay (1986) found that 22 per cent of 377 women interviewed in Calgary had been sexually abused before reaching their sixteenth birthday. In a review of the literature on child sexual abuse, Green (1993) found that several childhood problems were reported as occurring more often in abused children than non-abused children.

Some of the problems found were anxieties, fears, depression, angry destructive behaviour, phobic reactions, deficits in intellectual, physical and social development, sleep disturbances, insomnia, nightmares, somatic complaints, eating disorders, guilt, shame, increased psychiatric diagnosis, impairment of memory or identity, forgetfulness, excessive fantasizing and daydreaming, sleepwalking and blackouts. While the nature of the links between sexual abuse and childhood problems, such as those listed above, is difficult to precisely pinpoint, several factors, such as the child feeling powerless, betrayed and exploited and feeling a loss of trust have been suggested as important variables. Studies also suggest that individuals may experience several different problems at different stages in childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Adults who experienced sexual abuse as children were found to have increased anxiety, including anxiety attacks and anxiety-related symptoms, such as sleep disturbance and somatic complaints, guilt feelings of detachment, sexual dysfunction, delayed or chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioural re-enactments, depression, impulsivity, dissociation, low self-esteem, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse and personality disorders. Women who were sexually abused in childhood were also at risk of revictimization as adults. The studies reviewed by Green also suggested that adults who sexually abuse children are more likely to have been abused themselves as children (Green, 1993).

Studies in the past decade that have examined fetal alcohol syndrome / alcohol related birth effects among Aboriginal people in North America support findings in other more general studies. Aboriginal women at risk have been found to engage in heavy drinking, and binge drinking appears to be a common pattern of drinking in some sub groups. Aboriginal women also tend to experience high levels of poverty, social marginalization, and psychological distress. Tobacco use and poor nutrition are also common among women with alcohol abuse problems.

Alcohol Dependence as 'Disease' or 'Dysfunction' (p. 24)

Alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence and alcoholism are strongly associated with one another and, in many instances, are terms used interchangeably in professional and lay discussions on alcohol, women and FAS/ARBs. However, it is important to distinguish the specific meaning of each term as, in certain contexts, they imply very different things.

Abel writes: ... to drinking behaviour that adversely affects an individual's health, behaviour, or the society in which he or she lives, but does not necessarily involve impaired control over drinking ... If alcohol abuse progresses to the point that it does become obsessive/compulsive as well, it is called alcoholism or alcohol dependence (Abel, 1998a:11; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993).

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Psychological Distress (p. 29)

"Psychological distress has been a central theme in discussions of Aboriginal drinking. For most authors who examine links between alcohol abuse and psychological distress, an individual's distress is believed to directly contribute to their abuse of alcohol. In this framework, distress is believed to be brought on by various factors, including those which impact upon the group to which the individual belongs (e.g., processes of colonization, social, political and economic marginalization) and by factors that affect the individual specifically and are not necessarily shared by the collective (e.g., sexual abuse). In studies that have examined psychological distress and alcohol abuse among Aboriginal people, the cause of distress is generally explained equally in terms of collective and individual experiences and responses. Saggars and Gray write:

As a result of colonization, indigenous cultures were regarded as having irretrievably broken down and been lost. As a consequence, indigenous people were seen as having lost traditional roles, and as having no social rules to guide their behaviour, nor institutions that could exercise effective social control over behaviour. It was argued that this supposed breakdown of culture was manifested psychologically in loss of individual autonomy, identity and self-esteem, and in alienation from both traditional and colonial cultures (1998:74).

A more specific example is the experiences of Aboriginal people who attended residential schools. In this example, collective and individual experiences of those who attended the schools is believed to have jointly contributed to psychological distress that led many individuals to alcohol abuse as a way to block out the distress they felt (Fournier and Crey, 1997)."

Education (p. 91)

For Aboriginal children, the educational experience varies. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples writes:

Provincial schools have varied in their receptivity to Aboriginal children. In some locations where there are many Aboriginal children, schools have opened their doors to Aboriginal parents and developed vibrant community/school programs. In Toronto, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, school boards have negotiated to establish Aboriginal schools. These are the exception. Most Aboriginal students attend schools where there is no special effort to make them or their families feel part of the life of the school. Aboriginal parents say they are excluded from their children's education. There is a gap between the culture of the home and that of the school (1996b:438).

For some Aboriginal families, helping their children stay in school is an insurmountable task given the multiple family problems they face. Problems, such as chronic unemployment, poor housing and overcrowding, physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, and lack of strong and healthy support networks, can prevent parents from supporting and advocating education for their children. Family dysfunction can also contribute to academic and behavioural problems that a child has in school and, along with school environments that fail to help the child deal with these issues, can contribute to the child dropping out or being dismissed from school by the time they reach adolescence. Multiple foster placements are common among a sub-group of Aboriginal children and may contribute to academic and behavioural problems at school. This maybe particularly true, for children with special needs, such as those with alcohol-related birth effects. The inverse may also be true, whereby alcohol-related birth effects are seen as the cause of academic and behavioural problems in school, rather than the disruption to the lives of children caused by multiple foster placements (Tait, 2003). 75

Assault on Aboriginal Identity and Cultures (p. 73-5)

The institutional violence and sexual abuse that was pervasive throughout the history of the residential school system has been linked to much of the current discord in Aboriginal communities. Often overlooked and minimized by the courts and the Canadian state is the overwhelming assault on Aboriginal identity and culture that students were forced to endure while at the schools. Some scholars have concluded that this attack was so severe at residential schools that it should more appropriately be examined as a form of cultural genocide (Haig-Brown, 1988; Grant, 1996; Chrisjohn and Young, 1997).

The most profound examples are those pertaining to attacks on overt expressions of Aboriginal identity and culture. Indigenous languages, for example, were the focal point of the federal government's assault as they were perceived to be an example of 'cultural backwardness' and, within the residential school system, speaking one's indigenous language represented one of the most punishable offenses for students (Miller, 1987; 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988; Johnston, 1988; Bull, 1991; Ing, 1991; Knockwood and Thomas, 1992; Feehan, 1996; Grant, 1996; Fournier and Crey, 1997; Graham, 1997; Milloy, 1999; Colmant, 2000; Johansen, 2000).

The intense suppression of indigenous languages and cultures at residential schools resulted in several generations of Aboriginal people being unable to speak and/or understand their indigenous language (Haig-Brown, 1988; Ing, 1991; Knockwood and Thomas, 1992; Feehan, 1996; Grant, 1996; Fournier and Crey, 1997; Graham, 1997). Many parents, themselves the product of the residential school system, refused to teach their children their indigenous language as they were conditioned to believe that 'speaking' and 'being' 'Indian' was something to be ashamed of and to be punished for (Haig-Brown, 1988; Ing, 1991; Knockwood and Thomas, 1992; Feehan, 1996; Grant, 1996).

The inability to communicate in an indigenous language created an immediate communication gap between Aboriginal elders and youth. This gap greatly diminished the chance for Aboriginal children to gain respect for their elders, their language and their culture, and often lead to a rejection on the part of younger generations of all things Aboriginal (Ing, 1991). Many former students internalized the inferiority and shame they associated with being Aboriginal, which was then passed on to subsequent generations.

The inability to understand their indigenous language and participate in cultural practices often meant students were caught between two cultures, unable to fit comfortably into either. The practical skills they were taught at residential schools prepared them for little more than menial jobs in a world that was not ready to accept them as equals.

Despite government rhetoric, residential school education did not prepare Aboriginal children to live equally with their non-Aboriginal counterparts, but, instead, the schools provided education and skills that would ensure they remained subservient.¹⁹

The practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families undermined the traditional role of the extended family and kinship networks in many Aboriginal communities. Fournier and Crey argue that it also served to eliminate traditional cultural sanctions against physical and sexual abuse. They write:

Sexual abuse was not unknown historically in [A]boriginal societies. But the consensus among First Nations in BC, as reported by an [A]boriginal panel that travelled around the province in 1992 reviewing social legislation, is that traditional sanctions, laws and the clanship system among disparate First Nations did much to eliminate or control it. Because the laws "were motivated by internalized acceptance rather than external coercion", authors Evan Jacob of the Kwakiutl Nation and Haida [E]lder Lavina Lightbown conclude in the panel's report, "they were much more binding on each individual" (Fournier and Crey, 1997:117).

The first-hand accounts by former students about their experiences at residential schools are, on the one hand, heart-wrenching because they are accounts about children being subjected to severe acts of violence against their Aboriginal identity and against their physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being.

On the other hand, they are accounts that bring forth both disbelief and disgust, as they tell of such a severe degree of systemic violence meted against innocent children, their families and communities by government authorities and the churches they commissioned, to care and keep safe the children who attended the schools.

A review of the historical literature clearly indicates that Aboriginal people suffered greatly because of the residential school system. Widespread abuse at the schools, in its various forms, took an individual and collective toll on the health and well-being of large numbers of Aboriginal people. It should be noted that the resilience of former students and their communities has been quite remarkable in light of this experience and despite the toll it took.

In relationship to the intergenerational links to substance abuse and pregnancy, and fetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol-related birth defects, it is clear that the residential school system contributed to the central risk factor involved, substance abuse, but also to factors shown to be linked to alcohol abuse, such as child and adult physical, emotional and sexual abuse, mental health problems and family dysfunction.

Studies of substance use among adolescents in Canada have found that Aboriginal adolescents are more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to use a range of substances (e.g., marijuana, solvents and other hallucinogens). Alcohol use rates, however, are comparable between the two groups (MacMillan, MacMillan et. al., 1996; Gfellner and Hundleby, 1995; Lalinee-Michaud, Subak, Ghadirian and Kovess, 1991), but high rates of binge drinking, coupled with high rates of adolescent pregnancies among Aboriginal adolescents, has raised concern about FAS/ARBES.

'Best practices' (p. 166)

Within Canada, a great deal of attention and resources have been directed toward Aboriginal youth, particularly initiatives aimed at giving youth more control and input into programs that target them as a group.

Urban and rural youth groups, specifically those that provide outreach to high-risk youth, including youth who have dropped out of school, play an important social, educational and support role in the lives of many Aboriginal adolescents. In some instances, these groups may be one of the only supports accessed by youth who are at risk of substance abuse and/or becoming pregnant. They may also be important sites for the dissemination of information on issues such birth control, substance abuse and prenatal care (Tait, 2003).

- * There is some evidence to support multi-component community-wide initiatives as a means of increasing awareness generally, reducing consumption for pregnant women and promoting referrals. (p. 166)

- * There is some evidence to support multi-component community-wide initiatives as a means of increasing awareness generally, reducing consumption for pregnant women and promoting referrals. (p. 168)
- * There is moderate evidence to support the use of life-skills-based and multi-component school-community substance use prevention programs as a means of preventing or delaying substance use among youth and, in turn, reducing substance use problems among adults.
- * Roberts and Nanson (2000) argue that substance use prevention initiatives could have significant benefit if they delay the age at which children or adolescents begin to use alcohol or other substances. For example, an American study found that age, at onset of alcohol use, was a powerful predictor of later alcohol problems. In this study, researchers found that 40% of those who began drinking alcohol at fourteen years of age or younger experienced alcohol dependence at some point in their lives, compared to 10% who began drinking at age 20 or older (Grant and Dawson, 1997 in Roberts and Nanson, 2000).
- * Life skills training targeting adolescents has been found to be an effective primary prevention strategy in some contexts (Botvin et. al., 1995 in Roberts and Nanson, 2000). Generally, these programs are school-based initiatives that teach personal and social skills, in combination with specific skills, to resist social influences to use substances (Roberts and Nanson, 2000; Botvin et. al., 1995; Pentz et. al., 1989; Perry et. al., 1996). Some programs have involved media, community leaders, parents and the business and religious communities in their design (Paine-Andrews et. al., 1996 in Roberts and Nanson, 2000).
- * Roberts and Nanson add: FAS-specific content should be accommodated in health education and family living courses. Topics at the high school level should include pregnancy planning, the teratogenic effects of alcohol, early symptoms of pregnancy, the importance of routine physical exams of sexually active female adolescents, the problems of confronting parents, and understanding the needs of those affected by prenatal alcohol exposure (2000:18; Murphy-Brennan and Oei, 1999).

These initiatives will also benefit from consideration of local cultural and traditional beliefs about pregnancy and should involve the recognition of competing views about sexuality and pregnancy, which may exist in a community (e.g., Traditional vs. Christian views vs. images seen on television) and impact upon adolescent attitudes and behaviours.

Caution should be taken when implementing FAS prevention programs targeting children and adolescents. Programs should ensure that trained personnel are available to correctly answer questions about FAS/ARBES, in order to avoid the dissemination of misinformation about the illness. Special concern should be given to the possibility that some youth will be labelled by their peers (or others in the community) as alcohol-affected, particularly in communities where histories of maternal alcohol abuse are generally known, once a discussion of FAS/ARBES begins in the community. Informal labelling, particularly among adolescents, could lead to the marginalization and stigmatization of some youth.

1. While there is no evidence to date, there is a consensus among experts that adolescents with FAS and related effects benefit from assistance with basic socialization and communication skills, as well as tailored vocational counselling and employment supervision, money management training, sexuality and birth control education and drug education.
2. There is no evidence to date, but there is a consensus among experts that adolescents with FAS or related effects who become involved with substance abuse treatment, mental health or the correctional system, may benefit from tailored programming.
3. There is no evidence to date, but there is a consensus among experts that families, caring for those with FAS and related effects, benefit from appropriate professional services and mutual support groups that extend over the life span of the person.
4. Although those with intellectual deficits due to prenatal alcohol exposure have not been studied specifically, there is some evidence that cognitive-behavioural family therapies are effective in helping those with intellectual deficits to learn and maintain various basic living skills. (pp 240)
5. There is moderate evidence to support the use of life-skills-based and multi-component school-community substance use prevention programs as a means of preventing or delaying substance use among youth and, in turn, reducing substance use problems among adults. An important component of these initiatives should be Aboriginal youth groups and outreach programs, specifically those that target high-risk youth who have dropped out of school and are accessing few services. Special attention should be given in these programs to reducing the possibility of informal diagnosing of individuals in the community as alcohol-affected once a discussion of FAS/ARBE prevention begins. (p. 168-9)

We are not aware of links between Reggie Bushie and FAS/FAE/ARBE. We are sharing this information to raise awareness on growing problems common among Aboriginal communities. Since 1985, the RMYC has been working with Aboriginal youth, and the feedback on issues such as poverty, addictions, crime, mental health, youth in care, school drop-outs are disproportionately getting worse. Progress is still too slow. There is an urgent need to work together to deal with addictions, poverty, injustice, racism, etc. to prevent problems expanding and situations escalating. Youth need to be engaged in the process.

TRAUMA AND ABORIGINAL YOUTH – The RMYC Experience

The RMYC's multi-year project with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation exposed us to the devastating effects of residential schools and the intergenerational impacts on youth today. Our initiatives to assist Aboriginal students integrate into the urban environment, stay in school, find accommodation and secure employment have provided us with a wealth of information. We are more aware of the complex problems in Aboriginal communities, and major social hurdles they have to overcome to make it in society.

Assistant Crown Attorney in Kenora, Mr. Rupert Ross, in his paper "Traumatization in Remote First Nation: An Expression of Concern" (2006) shares his work experience doing courts in remote First Nations of Northwestern Ontario for 21 years. He gives examples of eight recent cases in seven different communities to illustrate how desperate the situation has become. From the cases, he concludes that:

"Individual, family and community traumatization in a number of those First Nations is now so pronounced that in many respects the criminal justice system has been rendered powerless to effect significant change. This traumatization of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities in northern Ontario clearly began with residential schools.

For two, or three generations, most northern children between 6 and 16 were removed to residential schools, where girls and boys were segregated. No one gained any experience of being a parent, a child, or grandchild. No one learned how to be a brother to a sister, a girl to a boy, or a husband to a wife. All were made ashamed of their culture, their history, their language, and their spirituality. In schools where there was also physical and sexual abuse, that compounded the denigration and pain.

This breakdown accelerated when people went home to find the end of the trapping economy, wholesale reliance on welfare, desperate poverty, increasing resort to intoxication of any kind to escape reality, and an entirely predictable escalation of family violence.

The result is irrefutable: in many communities, it is likely that two generations of children have grown up amid levels of alcohol abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse that are unparalleled elsewhere in Canada. Reliable Aboriginal sources indicate that in many remote communities, 60 – 80% of the population has been victimized by serious sexual abuse (primarily at the hands of extended family members), and up to 50% have been "victimizers". Virtually none of it ever reported, just sublimated.

The Executive Director of an Aboriginal alcohol treatment centre advised that 100% of her clients disclosed childhood sexual abuse as a primary force behind their alcoholism.

Equally frightening is the alarming increase in children being born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and Fetal Alcohol Effects, as their alcoholic mothers continue their escapist addictions through pregnancy. These children are born with organic incapacities to relate in empathic ways and to contemplate that their actions have consequences, making them the very least amenable to the 'normal' responses of the criminal justice system. The issue of young people suffering organic brain damage through inhalation of gasoline fumes, and other solvents only adds to the desperate situation that is now commonplace in some communities.

As a measure of the impact of that cycle of abuse and sublimation on youth, we need only look at the suicide: the youth suicide rate in northwestern Ontario is 398 young people out of every 100,000, while the national average is 12.9.

At present, the first line of social response to these symptoms of community, family and individual traumatization is, unfortunately, the criminal justice system, and it is in my growing conviction that for many reasons, it is substantially incapable of responding productively in this context of unique and deep seated traumatization.

I am concerned that we are seeing growing levels of family violence, sexual abuse and violence by (and against) youth in many Aboriginal communities in the remote portions of Ontario, all of them flowing out of longstanding individual, family and community traumatization. I am concerned that the communities themselves are often understandably, in self-defeating denial about the extent of their difficulties, and frequently complicit in covering up social reality. I am similarly concerned that those realities are not well known to the outside world, and that too many of us continue to believe that the existing criminal justice system is presently able to effect positive change all by itself.

If I sound alarmist in what I have put forward, that is my intent, for the situation in some communities is indeed alarming: there are too many people, especially young people killing themselves, and each other. Virtually every case we deal with involves human beings trapped in prisons of poverty, fear, addiction, helplessness, hopelessness and, all too frequently, a debilitating rage unknown –and likely incomprehensible – to most other Canadians. Their children are our children, and I fear that we are failing them.”

From our perspective, the situation continues to be desperate as reflected through growing poverty, criminal youth gangs, school dropouts, high incarceration rates, increasing suicides, and rampant alcohol and drug abuse. In addition, many reserves are experiencing an epidemic in the illegal use of prescription drugs – a problem acknowledged by Northern chiefs. (Wawatay News, Feb. 19, 2009; Dec. 10, 2009; April 1, 2010; Chronicle Journal, Nov. 22, 2009) This is wrecking homes and putting more kids at risk. We should collaborate to find solutions that will make a difference.

RMYC's observations on challenges faced by Aboriginal youths moving to the city:

1. Poverty, homelessness, addiction, a lack of education and unemployment make many Aboriginal youths moving to the city vulnerable. To help destitute youths new to the city, the RMYC ventured into a project to find accommodation and rent apartments / rooms. We co-managed a 40-unit bachelor apartment block and also rented out rooms above our Youth Centre. This turned out to be an eye-opener on the living conditions among some young people - basic hierarchy of needs -- and how desperate the housing situation in Thunder Bay is. While situations are generally similar for marginalized youth, the issues are more complex and critical among First Nations youths new to the city. Many of the problems are unique to youths trying to survive alone in a 'foreign' environment, and acculturation takes time.
2. Over-crowding on reserves is a reality, and a way of life for many. When Aboriginal youths move to the city, they are changing location and not lifestyle. They tend to live the only way they know, with the same attitude, values and manners they are used to on the reserve. It is hard to live alone with no Band Council's help, or family to look after them. Many become destitute and will do whatever to survive. But, with no job, social skills, or proper supports, it is hard.

When we rented a small room/apartment to one youth, others, sometimes five or more, always came to share the space. They took turns to sleep, cook, wash, rest etc. (the way they are used to in some communities because of housing shortage). School drop-outs had no good education and marketable skills to be employed. To make some money, or supplement welfare, they engaged in risky lifestyles such as prostitution, drug dealing, panhandling, and other criminal activities. For recreation, and to cope with their situation, they often abused alcohol and drugs.

Many people sharing one small room designed for single occupancy is a problem. In the city, landlords are reluctant to allow overcrowding for health and safety risks. Finding accommodation without references or character witnesses was a big hurdle and barrier for many youths who wanted to rent. But, since we work with youth all the time, we used our contacts for cross-references to minimize risks. The Youth Center also offered opportunities for volunteering and activities to engage Aboriginal youth, alleviate boredom, and give them something to do.

3. A lack of 'city etiquette' created tensions that often escalated to name-calling and racial stereotypes. Many young people from 'up north' are not familiar with terms such as trespassing. In the city, walking into someone's space without permission or not respecting other tenants can be a major issue resulting in police being called. A lack of common courtesy, poor manners or bad behaviour easily irritates neighbours. If cultural differences are barriers, this can damage inter-personal relations.

4. Living in an apartment block, or sharing space in a rooming house requires special consideration for other tenants. Noise and rowdiness in close quarters is upsetting to immediate neighbours who need their peace and quiet. This can also be quite disturbing to other tenants resting, because they have to wake up early and go to work well refreshed. Others may want to study, are not feeling well, or do not want to be bothered. Police officers were regularly called to maintain the peace, and break-up noisy parties late at night, or early morning hours.

Up-bringing in dysfunctional and violent homes was very evident as confrontations leading to loud arguments and assaults were commonplace. While there was mutual respect between us, and the youth we rented to, their visitors, friends and relatives were a problem. They often wanted to charge us when we were called to quell down the noise, rowdiness, arguments etc. – citing tenants rights even though they were just visiting. They also did not respect other tenants, or realize that they were inconveniencing those who actually paid rent to live there. We were lucky that the real tenants often intervened on our behalf, asking their visitors to calm down, show some respect to us, or leave.

5. Property damage was a common problem. Losing a key, or locking yourself out of a home on the reserve leaves one with no option but to break a window, or pry a door to gain entry. However, the city has 24-hr. locksmith services for emergencies. Breaking windows or prying doors to enter a residence can result in neighbours calling police. This also gets the wrath of the landlord who has to do the repairs, or pay for the damage. There were regular incidents of broken windows and sliding doors with damages running into hundreds of dollars--all because of lost or misplaced keys. No one had advised the youth about locksmiths.
6. Addiction is a major issue. Many youths used alcohol and narcotics for recreation, to self-medicate, cope with trauma, or deal with neglect and abuse. It is very expensive to buy alcohol and drugs in remote reserves. A 12oz. or 375ml. bottle (mickey) of vodka which costs \$13 in the city, sells for \$150 on reserves. Therefore, city prices are like perpetual sale. When parents, friends and relatives came from reserves to visit, they used the rooms as drinking places offering the youth free alcohol. Some tenants even charged a fee for people to use their room to drink, while others were easily bribed with the free booze. In most cases, the drinking ended up with arguments and fights.

Once the craving set in, the youth often pulled their financial resources together to buy booze or drugs collectively. Pooling cash is an easy way for under-age minors to access alcohol from their older peers, or bootleggers where no age of majority is required and a \$35 case of beer costs \$65. From our experience, mouthwashes (Listerine, Scope, etc.) and hand sanitizers were not commonly used by the youth. But, hairspray, whiteout, gas and other solvents were a problem with kids.

Craving for alcohol was evident among the young tenants we rented to, who turned their space into drinking and partying places. We saw changes in drinking patterns, from consuming alcohol on weekends, to being regular drinkers on school days, or any day. Many had hangovers any time of the day, leading missing appointments, skipping classes, or being kicked out of school.

7. The drug situation was riskier because the youth are not always aware of the quality of what is on the streets. On several occasions we saw kids sick, delirious, or mentally ill. Some mixed drugs, pills, alcohol and other medications, and we had to call paramedics to take them to hospital. On three different occasions we saw young girls passed-out naked in the hallways. They could not remember how they got there, or if anything happened. Often times, they did not know who they slept with because they were too intoxicated or 'high'. They also did not have the confidence to report 'rape' to the police since they did not want to implicate friends, or were not sure of the facts -- who did it, if they consented, etc.

Drug use is rampant in the city. During the Youth Council's community consultations on neighbourhood issues, some people referred to Thunder Bay as 'Pill Bay' because of the amount of drugs, especially prescription pills on the street. Prices fluctuate, but at the time of writing this report, Percocets cost \$7 - \$8 for each tablet. Morphine (Red Morphs) cost \$35 - \$40. Oxycontin: 10; 20; 40; & 80; cost \$10; \$20; \$40; and \$80 respectively. However the \$80 Oxy tablet/pill in the city can sell for \$320 on the reserve. With such exorbitant prices, and many families living on social assistance, trafficking is the only way to sustain the habit. This feeds the cycle of welfare with more problems of poverty, crime, mental stress, vulnerability, sexual exploitation etc.

Many of the youth already have addictions problems when they move to the city. They used them at home with parents. Prescription drugs were more available, more expensive, and more addictive. They made parents lose family and personal belongings by selling or pawning them for pills. Some kids told us that they had to eat at neighbours, or steal food in shops to survive because parents were using all the money for drugs, alcohol or gambling. While it may be harsh and mean to prosecute kids stealing food to escape from hunger, it does not help them to change if long-term solutions are not found to deal with basic needs. This also creates anxiety and feelings of insecurity among children that affects their mental health.

8. Some girls as young as thirteen were already cohabiting with boyfriends, hooking or working for pimps to feed the habits. Many ended up pregnant single young mothers because relations did not last. With no support from the child's father—(if they even knew who it was), or family, they had to go on social assistance. We saw young single moms visiting tenants pushing strollers. The next time we saw them, they had lost their kids to child-welfare agencies. Many had been raised in foster homes, and having their babies taken away perpetuates the cycle of foster care.

9. Many youths did not work, had no work experience or a work ethic. The few who tried often lost the jobs because of attitude, bad behaviour, incompetence, laziness or poor work habits. Money was an issue because welfare does not provide enough for a decent place to stay. They were forced to engage in illegal acts such as selling drugs to supplement income. Girls spoke casually about sleeping with 'boyfriends' or 'hooking' for a place to crash/stay, for booze, drugs, food or cash. The homelessness situation in Thunder Bay is bad, and this was a way to survive. It often progressed to prostitution -- the easiest thing, followed by trafficking, many felt they could do to get money.
10. We also learned that a growing number of young girls were working on the streets because their boyfriends wanted them to. Others were initially given free supplies just to get them hooked. Once addicted, they often owed money to pay drug debts, or wanted cash to buy some. Both young men and girls were doing tricks for cash to feed the habit. Because of alcohol and drugs, violent assaults were common. We regularly called police to maintain order, and had to evict some rowdy youths who regularly trashed things during drinking parties.
11. Most of the Aboriginal youths we rented to were always moving, changing addresses regularly trying to find cheaper places. We were guardians for some minors (under 18 years) to access the Ontario Works program and needed an address to be registered in school. They were cut off if they dropped out. Having no fixed address is a barrier to accessing various services and supports in the city. Our youth center was often storage for the few possessions of those who had become homeless. The youth were always starting over after being cut off social programs -- due to problems of accommodation, easy access to transportation for appointments, etc. Hunger and other basics needs such as a safe place to rest, take a shower, or relax were constant concerns.
12. The culture of poverty was evident, and many Aboriginal youths did not have bank accounts or experience with budgets. They needed help to set priorities. When they got their welfare money, many went on shopping sprees, used taxi cabs, going to movies, buying booze to entertain friends, etc. while over-looking rent, hydro bills, and food. Telephones and hydro services were regularly cut. We encouraged them to make direct rent deposits to avoid being in arrears, and save them from eminent eviction. Many bought expensive designer clothes, and were not aware of second hand clothes shops with good bargains. But, they knew about pawnshops and used them regularly to access cash before month-end.
13. Short tempers and emotions ran high when things did not work out. Vandalism, graffiti, damage to equipment, punching walls, etc. were common among youths upset about something, or at anything. They lacked cognitive and problem-solving skills, and did not care about the cost of repairs. The smell of spilled beer and vomit was common and many never learned to clean up their space or keep it tidy. Vicious fights (with on-lookers cheering) and the use of weapons such as knives, razors etc often led to police and paramedics being called only after things got out of hand.

Youths driven out of apartments, or denied entry often caused damage--breaking windows or kicking down doors in fits of rage. Prank fire alarms were common, set off by irritated kids. They did not seem to realize the inconvenience to other tenants who had to evacuate the building. It is also costly and wastes time for the fire brigade responding to false alarms. This caused tension with other tenants.

14. A lack of character, manners, and discipline were evident among many Aboriginal youths we helped. They did not know how to say 'thank you, lacked common courtesy and empathy-- signs of no parental guidance, nurturing and support. They lied with no guilty conscience and behaved as if they were neither not taught, or did not internalize "The Seven Teachings: Honesty, Humility, Truth, Wisdom, Love, Respect and Bravery." They claimed to be coming from addictions treatment, but soon after signing rental contracts as 'abstainers', we saw them bringing crates of beer to party. Loyalties of their 'supposed friends' were also in question. The friends knew what was in the room, and were often the culprits charged with break-and-enter after stealing stuff from tenants to pawn. Many of the youths boasted about shoplifting with no remorse.
15. We also helped youth in care needing shelter. Some had been moved to many different homes, and assumed multiple identities and names from where they had stayed. They did not have a concept of the nuclear family, and were bitter about their situation. Stress was evident, and they did not seem to care much about life.
16. The RMYC hosted a forum for Cherry Kingsley and Melanie Mark who visited our Youth Centre for national consultations on homeless and street youth. A report entitled "Sacred Lives" prepared from the focus groups, stated that: about "90 per cent of the street sex trade in some Canadian cities is comprised of native teens. Aboriginal children are being forced into the sex trade. Physical, emotional and sexual abuse, contribute to the problem, along with racism, addiction, and poverty, the report added. The future of these children and youth is bleak at best...This isn't only an Aboriginal issue; Change has to come throughout society in Canada because we have let the sexual exploitation of our children flourish". (Canadian Press: Chronicle Journal, December 5, 2000).

In the discussions, a young woman frequently sexually assaulted by boys and men in her reserve rationalized that: at least, working on the streets, she chose whom to sleep with, decided when to do it, and got paid. Another girl said that she had to put on multiple layers of tight clothes all the time to make it difficult for 'drunks' to take advantage of her because they got frustrated and gave up!

All the above can apply to impoverished, marginalized and neglected youths of any cultural/racial background. However, among Aboriginal youth we found a deep sense of spiritual searching. In their rooms, there were various forms of traditional spiritual symbols such as eagle feathers, medicine wheels, dream catchers, sage, sweet-grass, and even modern day crosses. The quest for cultural identity was evident. With a caring attitude and adequate supports, we can help them to build a sense of self-worth to realize their true potential.

OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

Change is taking place at DFC (Change Abound at DFC, Wawatay News, September 17, 2009) due to youth involvement in the Reggie Bushie Inquest. The students were insightful, and provided a wealth of information on the situation on reserves, how the living conditions affect their education in the city, and the supports they need for academic success. To deal with complex issues, the RMYC is offering a wide range of ideas worth trying based on our observations over the past 25 years. The suggestions incorporate recommendations from our studies and various reports beyond the inquest.

(A) Due credit should be given to the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth for engaging youth in the process, and challenging them to offer solutions to improve the situation. The RMYC is grateful for financial assistance from the Advocate's Office to network with stakeholders, and for professional guidance so that the young people's voices are heard. The students learned about the Advocate's role and welcomed the support. Through the process, they critically examined the issues, analyzed what is going on, and came up with recommendations to make a difference.

While there is progress at DFC, the youth involved still want a formal inquest to take place. This will involve more stakeholders and enlighten the wider community on the issues affecting Aboriginal children and youth. We believe that an inquest will lead to binding recommendations and a commitment of resources to address their problems.

1. **Therefore: The Advocate's Office should press ahead for an inquest, ensure that the voices of young people are heard, and help to ensure that conditions that led to the Reggie Bushie tragedy are addressed. Adequate resources are needed to re-engage the youth and sustain their involvement throughout the process.**

(B) The RMYC wants to continue working with Aboriginal youths and encourage them to participate in the inquest. Current involvement with DFC students gives them a voice and a stake in shaping their destiny. A youth-to-youth approach to connect with students in a multicultural setting where everyone feels accepted and equal empowers Aboriginal youths experiencing cultural shock, and concerned about racism, discrimination, cultural identity in the city, to speak up. However, funding is needed to train peer leaders who in turn will involve more students in positive activities.

Youth are a dependent population with no financial capital to sponsor activities, and run their own programs. In spite of developing and implementing youth-led initiatives with notable accomplishments, the RMYC's work is regularly disrupted by a lack of money. It is difficult to compete for grants with well-established adult groups that have voting influence, or seek donations from professional foundations. It is hard for youths, whose priority is school to spend hours continuously fundraising to stabilize our operations. Small fundraising projects for trips and specific items are essential to provide experience on the value of money. But doing this all the time wastes talents and skills that could be better directed at programs, services and activities that have a greater impact on peers.

The Youth Council feels that with adequate funding, we can train pools of young talented Aboriginal team leaders and peer helpers to work on issues that will make a difference in their lives. Harnessing their potential and challenging them to think outside the box raises possibilities of what can be accomplished when we mobilize and inspire students to improve their situation and realize their dreams.

Training DFC students while studying in the city is a convenient, cost effective, and beneficial way to involve the youth in social transformation. This will keep students busy and alleviate boredom—which often leads to problems with drinking, drugs, involvement in criminal youth gangs and other negative lifestyles. Engaging Aboriginal youths through a Multicultural Youth Council is a great opportunity to expose them to new ideas and experiences from a diverse group of peers. This is an ideal chance for them to learn about what exists in the wider world beyond the reserves.

Maximizing the capacity of young Aboriginal leaders requires bonding to form strong teams that can withstand and endure negative influences and pressures on reserves. We should work with the students during the school year and give them the urban lifeskills, self-confidence, the tools and supports they need to break the cycle created by the legacy of residential schools which they are constantly exposed to in their lives. Youth involvement will help to foster positive change.

Collective youth action in teams instead of individual effort is likely to yield better results as a group of youths can resist the overwhelming negative pressures around them. Providing incentives such as course credits, honorariums, summer jobs and so forth will definitely provide positive feedback and maintain momentum to move forward. This is necessary to sustain positive trends needed to facilitate long-term change.

If the Reggie Bushie tragedy is to be prevented, we need to examine the root causes and conditions creating the problems. A total of six students have died while attending DFC since the school opened in 2000. We know that the adults are doing their best to try and deal with the situation, but the recent drowning of Kyle Morriseau after Reggie, raises questions as to why this is continuing to happen. We feel that it is time to collaborate and engage students as part of the solution. Youths communicate better with their peers because there is no generation gap. They know what is going on since they are living similar experiences.

The RMYC wants to help empower Aboriginal children and youth to have a voice and offer answers to problems. They need to explain what is happening in their lives. The key is having adult commitment, support and resources to press ahead with the inquest so that students can share their stories and experiences with others, explain situations from their perspective, and present recommendations to the judge and jury. We believe that first-hand accounts of the issues will provide greater awareness of the problems. What is needed is the resolve to implement the changes necessary, and come up with pledges for adequate resources to make a difference.

2. Therefore: **The Regional Multicultural Youth Council needs financial help to stay involved with the inquest, and should pursue potential funders to support youth-led initiatives to enhance the well-being of Aboriginal students. Maintaining contact with DFC students is important to provide moral support and give them hope that change is coming, and things will improve if they are involved.**

(C) The RMYC is pleased that DFC & NNEC have acknowledged the students' recommendations. We welcome the changes taking place, and feel that this marks a new beginning. But, more needs to be done to reassure students that their ideas matter. With the marginal status Aboriginal youths feel from experiences at home and other encounters in the community, it may take a while to convince them that their opinions matter. It will also require coaching and training to enable the youth to understand the bureaucratic system, how policies work, the time it takes for things to happen, the budget process, funding and personnel requirements.

Student engagement is important. NNEC and DFC should work with all stakeholders to prioritize students' concerns, and develop strategic plans to address key concerns. This complements the course of action supported by the Ontario government... "When students are engaged in their learning and social environment, they are better able to develop the skills and knowledge and grasp the opportunities that can help them reach their full potential, pursue life-long learning, and contribute to a prosperous, cohesive society". (*Reach Every Student, Energizing Ontario Education*, Winter, 2008. Character Development, Page 12.) www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/energize

Student engagement encourages involvement and participation in the learning process. Experience with the RMYC reveals that youths appreciate meaningful engagement as part of a learning process, and helps to shape their world and destiny. Young people should be challenged to address problems they identify, and help to resolve issues they encounter. It should not be the task of school administration alone to deal with school safety and learning issues, but a partnership with students as stakeholders. Their ideas must be appreciated, and opinions respected.

3. Therefore: **There should be innovative approaches to student engagement such as the selection of student monitors for each homeroom class to connect with the students. The monitors should form an advisory committee that serves as Chief and Council. The committee would meet at least once a week to go over issues of concern, safety, and other matters related to the students' and school's well-being. Student monitors should be trained for their role as a voice for their peers, and work with peer helpers, school clubs and administration to involve all students in school matters and extra curricular activities.**

It is important for DFC/NNEC to develop role models and student leaders to regularly consult with all students, and organize positive activities for everyone. Training should be provided to enable the student Chief and Council to lead the student body, represent their wishes, act on their interests, and work with them to address their concerns.

Incentives and resources should be offered to motivate student council members to plan and organize events that promote school pride, keep students busy and safe, as well as help them to do well in school, graduate, and realize their dreams.

4. Therefore: DFC/NNEC should hold regular consultations with students for input and feedback on their recommendations (pages 13-19 & 29-31), and how things are going for them. DFC should take advantage of the input and feedback from youths involved in the inquest, and engage students as stakeholders on school issues. There should be open lines of communication with students who regularly get in trouble, and those sent back home to hear about the help and supports they need to return to school and graduate.

Safety at school for NNEC/DFC students covers their whole experience in the city. The culture shock of moving from small isolated homogeneous communities to a large multicultural city poses many challenges to a young student leaving familiar surroundings and acquaintances. The city has many distractions for youths boarding with strangers away from home. Finding well-supervised residences or ideal accommodation in a convenient location is always a problem. Many students move several times during the school year in search of compatible homes.

Safe places to stay with caring boarding parents concerned about the well-being of students, and not just the fees for the service makes a difference. A homely environment that enforces discipline, ensures that students behave as expected, attend school according to schedule, are home on time, eat well, have the love, nurturing and support they need for emotional well-being, will contribute to their academic success. The survey conducted by lawyer Suzan Fraser for the Reggie Bushie inquest (p. 5) highlights the students' issues. The Boarding home environment (#2) is a snapshot of some realities students have to deal with.

Aboriginal boarding students who have done well attribute their success to home support. This point was driven home by Norman Chapman, the first DFC student to have perfect attendance (a very rare occurrence at the school). He acknowledged the role played by a stable and supportive home environment for thriving in the city and staying focused at school. As is the case with any teenagers, being alone in a large city poses many challenges and temptations. Proper consistent guidance is needed to keep teens on the right track.

Access to abundant alcohol and drugs that are cheaper than on reserves, and exposure to racism makes Aboriginal students vulnerable. Naivety adds the risks of crime, violence, sexual exploitation and trouble with the law. The peer pressure to abuse alcohol, drugs and substances often leads to skipping school, failing in class, dropping out, being sent back home, ending up incarcerated, or dead.

Racial stereotyping, confrontations and assaults at bus stops and on the streets raises safety concerns that can drive students to band together or join youth street gangs for protection and companionship. Measures such as good caring homes and curfews are part of the solution to keeping students safe.

5. Therefore: NNEC should secure safe nurturing homes for students. Hostels or apartment blocks in convenient locations with adequate supervision and supports would be ideal for DFC. Accommodation close to the school would enable students to use the facilities after-hours for recreation and extra curricula activities. Enforcing curfews, and applying the recommendation to provide meals at the school would encourage student involvement in after-school programs for their safety.

Academic differences between on-reserve students and their urbanized counterparts are well documented. Special measures and interventions are required to close the gaps and level the playing field. This will enable more Aboriginal students coming from the reserves to have equal chances to do well in school and succeed.

Up-grading the qualifications of Aboriginal students schooled on reserves must be done, and can be applied in creative ways. For example, many students do not show up for school in the morning. An after-school tutoring program can help students to catch up and close the academic gap. Remedial learning sessions can be organized after-school a few hours a day, two or three days a week. After all, many students on reserves say they have nothing to do and are bored. This can help to keep them busy and out of trouble.

Classes can also be run in summer in a summer camp format. They can include physical exercises, recreation, cultural activities, out-door learning experiences, academic up-grading for reading and literacy skills and so forth. Orientation on living and studying in the city can be included for students who will be leaving reserves to attend urban schools, and should be a pre-requisite before they leave the reserve for urban centres.

To reduce costs, college and university students, or high school graduates can be hired under summer employment programs as teachers/tutors/mentors to help students to catch-up. Information from the local school(s) can be used to assess individual student's academic needs, and what they need to help them improve. Education councilors, teachers and other concerned parents can volunteer as supervisors and resource people.

Academic up-grading is important because there are stories of students so far behind in their classes and grades that they just give up trying. They would rather be kicked out of school for getting into trouble--drinking, doing drugs, fighting, breaking curfew, confrontation with police officers and so forth, than admit to being 'dumb' or failing in class. There is less shame in being sent home for doing what many do on the reserve, than for being ignorant.

It should also be added that in some cases, parents who went to residential schools are part of the problem. When their child gets in trouble or says s/he is homesick, rather suggest alternatives, or encourage them to seek and utilize available resources, local supports and programs that are generally better than what exists on the reserves, the parents often encourage them to come home and drop out of school. They seem to reflect on their personal experiences when they wanted to run away from residential schools but felt trapped, and could not do it.

6. **Therefore: NNEC and DFC should liaise with First Nations sending students off reserves to select ideal candidates with potential to survive in the city and do well in school. Academic competence, upgrading, and remedial interventions such as summer school should be offered to help students to catch up. Treatment and counselling should be provided for students sent home for social problems, alcohol and drug abuse, and mental health issues before they are accepted back. New students should get orientation about city life, and living in a boarding home before they leave the reserve. Street-proofing sessions should be organized when students arrive to prepare them for studying and living in the city.**

Transition from small isolated reserve life to the city has many challenges for Aboriginal youth. Culture shock is a reality and overwhelms many students leaving small reserves to attend school in a large city. Leaving familiar homogeneous surroundings, family supports to face new academic challenges, living with strangers and conforming to city by-laws are all issues students have to cope with. Carefully choosing students who can survive and make it will minimize risks and create successful role models. Assessing academic gaps and coming up with remedial programs and other academic supports when the students arrive will improve their chances of making it in the city.

7. **Therefore: DFC should conduct academic assessments for students when they first arrive at the school in order to create appropriate learning paths, identify the supports they need to catch up, and get their input to develop strategies to do well in school so that they are able to realize their career goals.**

(D) In spite of a formal apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Parliament on behalf of the Canadian Government on June 11, 2008, many Canadians including some Aboriginal people do not fully understand the impact of residential schools, and their role in creating a culture of despair. The breakdown of traditional family units has far-reaching consequences, especially on children and youth. The problem of child sexual abuse is still 'taboo' -- 'the elephant in the room' -- that many people are reluctant to talk about. Yet, this has a devastating impact on the mental well-being of kids. Recreational activities alone will not address mental health issues.

From extensive research studies compiled by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation: "Child sexual abuse in some Aboriginal communities in Canada and the United States is estimated to be significantly higher than national averages (LaRocque, 1993; Nechi Institute, 1988). Canim Lake in British Columbia and Hollow Water in Manitoba, two communities that have conducted systematic research among their members, found that 75 to 85 per cent of people in the communities reported that they had been the victims of unwanted sexual contact as children (Fournier and Crey, 1997). Haig-Brown (1988) and Fournier and Crey (1997) have argued that the increased incidence rates of child sexual abuse in some Aboriginal communities is directly linked to the sexual abuse of students at residential schools." *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Among Aboriginal People in Canada: Review and Analysis of the Intergenerational Links to Residential Schools*. Caroline Tait, 2003. (p. 42) www.ahf.ca

In a 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 per cent of sex crimes committed in First Nations communities are against females under the age of 18. 50 per cent of those are younger than 14 years of age, and almost 25 per cent 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."

The abuse by those who went to residential schools is being passed on to children today. It is unfortunate that government funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for programs to deal with the legacy and inter-generational impacts of residential schools has stopped, yet the issues persist. The RMYC was a recipient of grants from the Foundation for a multi-year youth-led project "*Empowering Aboriginal Youth to Break the Cycle*" (2002 – 2004). This enabled us to learn about the legacy of residential schools, and develop best practices to engage Aboriginal youth in the healing process.

Access to studies and reports by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation provided valuable insight and information for reference. This inspired our work to empower Aboriginal youths to change their desperate situation. But, young people have no capital and depend on adults for money and other supports to plan and organize healing activities.

8. **Therefore: Aboriginal leaders must engage their children and youth, hear their stories, and learn about their pain, hopes and dreams. This is the largest and fastest growing population in NAN communities where 65% of the population is under the age of 26. They should be incorporated in strategic plans. Appropriate interventions should be applied to change situations that are creating despair and causing young people to lose hope, become addicts, drop out of school, commit suicide, susceptible to joining youth gangs, and so-forth.**

The isolation and remoteness of some reserves, the high cost of living and inadequate funding make living conditions similar to Third-World countries. As Aboriginal leaders negotiate Treaty Rights, seek meaningful consultations to secure a fair share on proceeds from local natural resources, and are in dialogue over more equitable funding formula for basic needs and services, innovative ways should be explored to address critical issues confronting their children and youth. In our opinion, education and healing programs are priorities with far-reaching results to improve the well-being of current and successive generations.

9. **Therefore: Band Councils must set priorities and come up with concrete strategies to deal with legacies of colonization and residential schools that fuel dysfunctional families, alcoholism, drug addiction, poverty, abuse, learning disabilities, mental health issues and so forth. They should identify and engage stakeholders in the development of healing paths for the whole community -- with benchmarks of what has to be accomplished, how and when, and allocate resources accordingly.**

To stop the cycles of abuse, addictions, violence and other negative lifestyles, First Nations need to do a lot more than what is happening now. They should acknowledge existing problems, and reach out to victims to help them in the healing journey. The perpetrators must own their actions, and access help to heal. The RMYC feels that what is happening nationally with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada for residential school victims must be duplicated in Aboriginal communities for the sake of healing future generations.

It is time to build on the NAN Suicide Forum conducted over a decade ago. Then, only a quarter of NAN communities were willing to host gatherings for the youth to speak out. With a host of problems such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, mental health issues, school dropouts, addictions, teen pregnancies, suicide, gangs and so forth, communities should engage children and youth to speak out using the model of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

10. **Therefore, Band Councils should host their own "Truth and Reconciliation Commission forums" to give children and youth a voice, help them to heal, and offer the supports they need to move forward. The youth should be empowered, and encouraged to talk without fear of recrimination. This implies creating youth support groups to help them through the process. Band Councils, Elders, teachers, churches, social service agencies should be involved for comfort and reassurance.**

Aboriginal leaders and Elders should take a lesson from the church hierarchy. Many victims abused by priests and nuns feel that the top church leaders should be held accountable for protecting the abusers. They feel that churches did not go after the perpetrators of abuse because they were more concerned about preserving the good and clean image of the institution. Blame is being directed at top church leaders for turning a blind eye to cover up what was really going on.

Bands should support youth groups and create youth centres to provide space for the youth to get together, empower themselves and build self-confidence to deal with sensitive and painful issues such as abuse, addictions and violence. The community has to protect its children and youth when they come forward to tell all. In the case of sexually abused children, victims should be encouraged to confront their abusers in a supportive and protective environment to facilitate healing in order to move forward. Avoiding, or covering up bad and hurtful incidents by 'sweeping them under the rug' perpetuates the negative consequences that we see today. There is a need for meaningful youth engagement to make them part of the solution.

11. **Therefore, Aboriginal leaders and Elders should be accountable, and encourage the youth to speak out. Trying to silence young victims who are suffering will mean that problems happening right now due to the legacy of residential schools will continue unabated, and incessantly haunt victims and the community until healing occurs.**

(E) Individual bands should follow NAN's example on youth engagement. Ten years ago, NAN created the Decade for Youth Council (recently re-named Oshkaatisak -- Young Peoples Council). The Decade for Youth Council was formed under the direction of RMYC founding president, Melanie Goodchild from Pic River First Nation, to focus on youth issues such as suicide. This was an acknowledgement of the important role youth play in community development. Even though the youth do not vote to select NAN leaders, the Grand Chiefs have been very supportive of the youth, and include them on their agenda at political meetings and social gatherings. The Grand Chiefs regularly attend Decade for Youth as well as RMYC forums to show support and share their wisdom and experience.

Last August, NAN invited the DFC students working at the Youth Centre to address a rally in Toronto on Bill 191 -- The Far North Act. The students were also featured at presentations on the inter-generational impacts of residential schools at Pelican Falls in Sioux Lookout, and at the NAN Chiefs Keewaywin in Chapleau. The gesture is remarkable, and the experience was enlightening to the youth who need to know about First Nations' land and treaty rights.

12. **Therefore: Bands should involve youth in local political and social issues, and support Youth Councils (such as NAN's Oshkaatisak) to engage youth in decision-making and organizational development at the community level.**

As part of the RMYC's Youth for Safer Communities project, NAN Grand Chief, Deputy Grand Chief, and Ontario's Regional Chief were joined by a NAN Elder to address delegates from across the region at a forum at DFC. Grand Chief Stan Beardy, who had lost his only son to violence at the hands of another Aboriginal youth, spoke about the pain of losing an only child, and the need for First Nations communities to heal. Representatives of the Thunder Bay Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police, and Nishnawbe Aski Police Service also addressed the youth about policing, criminal records, and risks of joining youth street gangs. This helped to build bridges with the youth.

NAN has been relentless about improving the well-being of Aboriginal youth in the city, and the RMYC is regularly consulted for input. Grand Chief Stan Beardy invited the RMYC to meetings with the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce on ways to make Aboriginal youths comfortable using status cards for purchases in shops. The discussions resulted in local businesses displaying credit-card size decals on storefronts welcoming customers with status cards. Aboriginal youths appreciate this gesture.

NAN has supported Aboriginal youths facing racism in the city by following up on their complaints. After the RMYC introduced a Racial Incident Reporting Form to monitor racial grievances, NAN Grand Chief requested duplicate copies of the incidents to stay informed on what is happening. (A sample of the Racial Incident Reporting Form is included in the Appendix at the end of this report). He has written letters to businesses, institutions, etc. identified in the complaints for feedback. This has helped to reassure Aboriginal youths that they have the support of their leaders in the fight against racism.

(F) The federal government is responsible of First Nations education and must provide adequate funding as investment in the future of Aboriginal children, families, and communities. The Reggie Bushie tragedy is due in part, to government policies and a flawed funding formula that does not cover realistic education expenses such as decent room and board and other supports young Aboriginal students need to get a good education. First Nations students get less funding per-capita compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. It is also unfortunate that inclusive groups such as the RMYC that are working successfully with Aboriginal children and youth, cannot access Indian Affairs and Northern Development (IAND) funds because of restrictive policies and status issues.

15. Therefore: Indian Affairs and Northern Development should provide adequate funding for 'status' students to meet realistic costs and cover the needs of on-reserve children and boarding students. Addressing this inequity to match the provincial level of funding per student should be a priority.

IAND 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.

Unless we deal with the legacy and inter-general impacts of residential schools, social and health problems engulfing many Aboriginal communities will persist for generations to come. A multifaceted approach is needed to address root causes of poverty, addictions, mental health, abuse, crime, violence, a lack of education and so forth that entrap Aboriginal people like a birdcage. Addiction to alcohol, drugs and solvents creates health problems that affect unborn children. This produces a damaged population with fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, and alcohol related birth effects, that is costly for our healthcare and correctional systems, and overburdens our social security safety net. Addictions also divert the focus from 'real' problems because treatment is needed before the root causes can be properly assessed and dealt with.

16. Therefore: As the voice of Aboriginal people in the Federal government, IAND should capitalize on the national apology in Parliament, and secure more resources for healing programs, treatments and supports needed to deal with the legacy of residential schools, and root causes responsible for the dysfunction, pain and suffering in First Nations communities.

(G) When the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Chris Bentley visited the Youth Centre last February, he was briefed on the inquest and the RMYC's initiatives to engage Aboriginal youth. The Orientation Program initially developed to help newcomers to Canada integrate into a new community was adapted to suit the needs of Aboriginal students moving to the city. This program, and other youth-led activities developed have been credited with reducing school dropouts among First Nations youth, and making them feel welcome in the city, and safe after hours. Unfortunately, a lack of funding has resulted in a scaling down of many RMYC's activities across the board.

(F) The federal government is responsible of First Nations education and must provide adequate funding as investment in the future of Aboriginal children, families, and communities. The Reggie Bushie tragedy is partly due to government policies and a flawed funding formula that do not cover realistic education expenses for decent room and board and other supports Aboriginal students need. First Nations students get less funding per-capita compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. According to Cindy Fisher, Pic River First Nation Education Director, she gets \$8,156.32 per student, while off-reserve elementary and secondary students receive \$15,211.53, and \$17,131.88 respectively (Chronicle Journal, June 19, 2010). It is also sad that inclusive groups such as the RMYC working successfully with Aboriginal kids cannot access Indian Affairs and Northern Development (IAND) funds because of restrictive policies and status issues

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(G) When the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Chris Bentley visited the Youth Centre last February, he was briefed on the Reggie Bushie inquest and RMYC's initiatives for Aboriginal youth. The Orientation Program initially developed to help new-comers integrate into Canadian society was adapted to suit the needs of Aboriginal students moving to the city. This program and other youth-led activities are credited with reducing school dropouts among First Nations youth and helping to make them feel welcome and safe in the city. A lack of funding has resulted in activity cut-backs.

17. Therefore: The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs (MAA), should explore potential resources of funding to support the RMYC's youth-to-youth initiatives targeting Aboriginal children and youth. These include the Orientation Program credited with reducing attrition among Aboriginal students, the Anti-racism and Safer Communities Campaigns, the Youth Leadership training that empower Aboriginal youth. The Ministry should also be the Aboriginal voice in the Ontario government and advocate on behalf of First Nations for social justice.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who is also Ontario's Attorney General, should work with NAN to resolve the Aboriginal representation/jury selection issue, and liaise with the Reggie Bushie inquest stakeholders such as the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth to get the process underway. Other partners i.e. The Ministry of Children and Youth, The Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, The Ministry of Health Promotion, etc. should be brought in to leverage more equitable funding from INAC, and ensure that better success rates for Aboriginal children and youth are achieved.

- (H) There is a need to expedite the resolution of outstanding treaty grievances with Aboriginal people, and recognize their rightful place in Canadian society in accordance with the Constitution Act, 1982.

"PART I; Section 25 of the Canadian Charter of Rights:

25. The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada including

- (a) any rights or freedoms that have been recognized by the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763; and
- (b) any rights or freedoms that may be acquired by the aboriginal peoples of Canada by way of land claims settlement.

PART II: RIGHTS OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

(2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada.

(3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1) "treaty rights" includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

(4) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

35.1 The government of Canada and the provincial governments are committed to the principal that, before any amendment is made to Class 24 of section 91 of the "Constitution Act, 1867", to section 25 of this Act or to this Part,

(a) a constitutional conference that includes in its agenda an item relating to the proposed amendment, composed of the Prime Minister of Canada and the first ministers of the provinces, will be convened by the Prime Minister of Canada; and

(b) the Prime Minister of Canada will invite representatives of the aboriginal peoples of Canada to participate in the discussions on that item."

Resolving outstanding treaty rights and land claims will enhance the First Nation's self-government process. This will help to define the sovereignty of Aboriginal groups, and enable us to understand their status in society. In addition to providing a sense of pride from colonization, respecting historical agreements, assuring self determination will give a sense identity and hope to Aboriginal children and youth who feel dispossessed, alienated and marginalized in their own country.

Understanding inherent rights of Aboriginal people is important to improving relations, and ensuring that Aboriginal cultures are protected in the context of multiculturalism. Concerns about assimilation are still rife given the legacy of residential schools. Aboriginal cultures are indigenous to the land, and cannot be compared to others with roots elsewhere, and brought here by immigrants and refugees. If we lose them, there is nowhere else to find or replicate them. This uniqueness is special, and gives Aboriginal youth something to be proud of.

Dealing with grievances soonest will reduce on-going exorbitant legal costs that drain much needed financial resources for social programs and economic development. Resolving long-standing land issues will reduce tensions and explosive situations such as Oka, Ipperwash, Caledonia, and so forth. This will improve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and facilitate healthier interactions with many side benefits. For example the recruitment of youth as police officers will be easier as some Aboriginal youth are reluctant join mainstream policing services and enforce 'colonial' laws. It is hard to arrest family/community members protesting against broken treaties, or practicing traditional hunting and fishing that are part and parcel of their culture.

18. Therefore, The federal government which is responsible for Aboriginal affairs, should take the initiative and involve other levels of government to engage Aboriginal people in setting timelines for resolving outstanding Aboriginal Treaty issues amicably. Where courts have often ruled in favour of Aboriginal rights, the federal, provincial and municipal governments should expedite the rulings.

From the RMYC's *"Thunder Bay Neighbourhood Profiles – A Youth Perspective"* we learned that a growing number of Aboriginal families are seeking to break the cycle of addictions, family dysfunction, and assaults due to alcohol and drugs. They will sign up to reside in 'dry' housing projects. Local Aboriginal churches are growing in popularity as healing places and provide after-care supports for those coming from treatment.

Designating some spaces as 'dry' residential areas will protect children from potential harm and constant exposure to alcohol and alcoholics. This will also cut down on welcome parties when neighbours bring 'booze' or drugs to celebrate a friend's homecoming from treatment. Creating alcohol and drug-free zones should be tried as a practical strategy to help break the cycle of drinking and addiction by limiting access. It will also make it convenient to provide appropriate services, programs and supports such as Alcoholics Anonymous that promote sobriety, and enable kids to grow up in safer homes protected from regular contact with addicts.

On the other hand, leaving alcoholics and drug addicts in same areas will make it much easier for social service agencies to deliver intervention programs, treatment, and supports for the safety and protection of the kids. This will prevent problems from expanding (the rotten potato syndrome), and affecting innocent victims. Furthermore, police officers, addiction workers, child welfare agencies, counselors, church groups, etc. will be able work in the confined areas to monitor the actions of chronic alcoholics, junkies, bootleggers and drug-dealers for the safety of children.

20. Therefore: The City of Thunder Bay should take a proactive approach and work with First Nations to help Aboriginal people/families who want to break the cycle on addiction. City Hall should liaise with the Thunder Bay District Housing Corporation to establish alcohol and drug-free public housing units/projects for families and individuals seeking to abstain, be sheltered from alcohol and drugs, or are coming from alcohol or drug addictions treatment. The City should convene forums, and work with churches, social service and children's aid agencies, etc to register and screen ideal candidates, and engage them for supports and after-care.

The City of Thunder Bay needs strategies to deal with a rapidly growing population of Aboriginal youth. Many come to the city to attend school. Others join parents coming to access healthcare services and other social supports not available in remote reserves. There are also growing numbers of young offenders released from local correctional facilities who stay in the city in search of more opportunities and a better quality of life.

Unfortunately, most the Aboriginal youth do not have the education, skills, and supports to make in it the city on their own. They struggle in school and dropout, lack work experience and a work ethic to be gainfully employed. Those with no family often end up homeless. The ones from corrections susceptible to learning criminal traits in the system often engage in crime or join youth street gangs to survive in a 'foreign' and highly competitive urban environment.

One has to visit the provincial courthouse when in session to witness the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the criminal justice system. It seems easier for an Aboriginal youth to end up in prison, than graduate from high school. The expansion of Aboriginal criminal youth street gangs from Winnipeg/Manitoba to Thunder Bay and across Northwestern Ontario is contributing to this reality.

The common belief that troubled youth who end up in the correctional system get rehabilitated does not always turn that way. More young offenders are becoming hardened criminals because of association with criminal gangs in prisons for identity, protection, companionship or family. Correctional Services can confirm that prisons are now primary recruiting ground for gang members. There are also some young offenders who feel life is easier and more predictable inside the system than outside.

Prevention is the key to stopping the rapid growth of Aboriginal youth being involved in the criminal justice system, creating safety concerns, and causing apprehension in the community. The RMYC has been advocating for curfews to protect youth from harm and to reduce crime. DFC students have also recommended curfews to ensure that students are safe and accounted for. A community that cares about the well-being of its kids should not let them wander about alone all night. But, to be effective, more supports should be in place for increasing numbers of homeless youth with no place to go, or those without parents or guardians to watch over them.

21. Therefore: The City of Thunder Bay should hold consultations with homeless youths and stakeholders such as the Thunder Bay Shelter, John Howard Society, Dilico, Children's Aid Society, as well as other social service agencies, and develop a strategic plan to deal with homeless youths and prevent delinquency.

The City should work with groups such as the RMYC and DFC students to promote curfews, engage the police and liaise with concerned citizens for compromises on age limits, the times kids should be protected or prevented from roaming the streets at night without supervision, and for effective enforcement.

(I) In addition to working with Aboriginal education authorities such as NNEC, the RMYC also participated on the Aboriginal Advisory Committees of Lakehead Public Schools, and the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board. This is a proactive strategy to engage diverse groups and solicit input and feedback on schooling. The RMYC regards all meetings as an opportunity to advocate on behalf of all students because education is a strong foundation for better careers and a higher standard of living.

The dropout rate among Aboriginal students continues to be very high. Literacy problems and social setbacks affect their potential to learn and succeed. High mobility rates and indifference about school attendance influences the students' ability to do well and stay in school. The education level on reserves that is generally inferior to what is available in urban centres and this contributes to attrition.

The RMYC has partnered with the local school boards on several projects including the "Creating Safer Schools--Schools Acknowledging Safety Solutions by Youth--SASSY" project in 2008. This was youth-led, and students identified bullying, discrimination, drugs and violence as the primary safety concerns in schools. They also came up with recommendations to create a safer and healthier learning environment for everyone. The RMYC has facilitated workshops on racism and discrimination during the Lakehead Public Schools' Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) annual conferences lunched in 2008. The forums are for student leaders and focus on social justice issues. The RMYC has promoted the Racial Incident Reporting Form as a simple way to encourage students to help eliminate racism.

The idea to record and report racial incidents came up so that school principals, teachers and staff, would not ignore the hard evidence. This was intended to give educators a picture of what is really going on, and challenge them to do something. The Complaint Form engages youths to be part of the solution by asking them for their ideas on how the incident should be resolved so that they feel protected and safe from victimization.

School principals seem reluctant to use the Forms because of concerns about community image. They argue that too many complaints on record will be a negative reflection on the school. They fail to see that racism is a community issue, and schools just mirror what exists out there. But, they can play a vital role since racism is based on ignorance.

Last spring there were well publicized racially motivated fights between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and police officers were called to patrol several schools. There was also an incident where a teacher's aid cut the hair on an Aboriginal student without permission. This happened in spite of a partnership with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy to have an Aboriginal Resource Worker in the school.

The RMYC feels that utilizing the Complaint Forms for the above incidents would have provided valuable information for schools to work with. Students would provide feedback and be engaged to find solutions. This would help teachers and staff to come up with practical strategies to resolve the problem. School administration not used to dealing with racism would benefit from students' involvement, and learn from the victims, ways to prevent similar incidents in the future.

There is also the issue of the dress code. A significant number of Aboriginal boys 'hang out' together in schools wearing 'hoodies' that resemble 'gang-style' outfits. This scares many non-Aboriginal students and city residents afraid of street gang affiliation. While such dress may not be an issue on reserves, perception is different in a city where the emergence of Aboriginal criminal youth gangs and publicity is a cause for concern. Schools should engage students in dialogue and come up with a compromise. This will help to ease unnecessary apprehensions and remove artificial barriers dividing students. To avoid dealing with the issue perpetuates the differences dividing students. It should be mentioned that problems of attire are not an issue in Catholic high schools where school uniforms have introduced.

For individuals and families looking for safer places to live, and want to reside in neighbourhoods where the flow of alcohol and/or drugs is restricted, designating spaces as 'dry' residential areas will protect children from potential harm and constant exposure to alcohol and alcoholics. This will also cut down on welcome parties when neighbours bring 'booze' or drugs to celebrate a friend's homecoming from treatment. Creating alcohol and drug-free zones should be tried as a practical strategy to help break the cycle of drinking and addiction by limiting access. This will also make it easy to provide appropriate services, programs and supports such as Alcoholics Anonymous that promote sobriety. And kids will be able to grow up in safer homes protected from regular contact with addicts.

Having alcoholics and drug addicts in same areas will make it much easier to deliver intervention programs, treatment, and supports for the safety and protection of the kids. This will prevent problems from expanding (the rotten potato syndrome), and affecting innocent victims. Furthermore, police officers, addiction workers, child welfare agencies, counselors, church groups, etc. will be able work in the confined areas to monitor the chronic alcoholics, junkies, bootleggers and drug-dealers for the safety of children.

21. Therefore: **The City of Thunder Bay should take a proactive approach and work with First Nations to help Aboriginal people/families who want to break the cycle on addiction. City Hall should liaise with the Thunder Bay District Housing Corporation to establish alcohol and drug-free public housing units/projects for families and individuals seeking to abstain, be sheltered from alcohol and drugs, or are coming from alcohol or drug addictions treatment. The City should convene forums, work with churches, consult with social service and children's aid agencies, etc to screen and register candidates for 'dry residential areas'. The community should be engaged for supports and after-care to help break the cycle of addictions, deal with the legacy of residential schools, and facilitate healing.**

The City of Thunder Bay needs strategies to deal with a rapidly growing population of Aboriginal youth. Many come to the city to attend school. Others join parents coming to access healthcare services and other social supports not available in remote reserves. There are also growing numbers of young offenders released from local correctional facilities who stay in the city in search of more opportunities and a better quality of life.

Unfortunately, most the Aboriginal youth lack the education, social skills, urban lifeskills and supports to make in it the city on their own. They struggle in school and dropout, lack work experience and a work ethic to be gainfully employed. Those with no family often end up homeless. The ones from corrections are susceptible to learning criminal traits in the system and often engage in crime or join youth street gangs to survive in a 'foreign' and highly competitive urban environment.

As a result of colonization and predominant social attitudes, there is a subtle quiet powerful psychic imagery of being told day in and day out that you are not as good, not as worthy, and that you are subordinate. In addition constantly listening to comments that you cannot do it, or you will not succeed creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Youth centres are ideal places for the youth to meet and plan their own activities, train peer leaders, run programs, provide job orientation, share information, and consult with adults in their own space. Such facilities will engage more children in activities that improve their lives.

24. Therefore: The MCYS should develop bench-marks to end child poverty, and play a lead role to implement the recommendations from "The Roots of Youth Violence Report", provide resources to stabilize the establishment of community hubs/youth drop-in centres as safe places for kids to hang out after hours, meet positive role models, and access resources, information, services and supports needed to enhance their well-being.

(L) Concerns about racism among Aboriginal youth involve all sectors of the community-schools, businesses, housing, police, etc. Feedback from youths participating in our surveys and forums reflect strained relations with police officers. Incidents of police bias, brutality, racial profiling, cultural in-sensitivity etc. are common talk, even though some of the youth are at fault. Some kids are rude, talk back, are disrespectful, or provide false names and identity to confuse police officers. This is very frustrating for busy and overburdened officers who just want to do their job.

On police bias and racial profiling, there is a story of the DFC student from Fort Severn First Nation on tour at the Thunder Bay Police Station who was detained for questioning because of wearing an Aboriginal designer outfit mistaken for youth street gang outfit. On brutality and insensitivity, the incident of a drunken Eabametoong (Fort Hope) First Nation man picked up downtown by two police officers and driven to the Mission Island marsh on the outskirts of Thunder Bay and abandoned there, is well remembered across the region. Unsolved disappearances of Aboriginal women in Thunder Bay, and stories of police-radio jokes, e-mails, and verbal comments demeaning to Aboriginal people by some police officers help to feed the distrust. Such incidents breed tensions.

It is important to build bridges between Aboriginal youth and police officers so that boarding students can trust them for protection to feel safe in the city. Confidence in the officers will make it easier to approach police for help and report incidents when the youth are victims or need help. It can be a shocking experience to be standing in a school hallway, walking down a side-walk, sitting on a park-bench, drinking coffee, having a meal, waiting in line at the movies, shopping in a store, or standing at a bus stop to hear people you do not know, or have not offended call you names from the blue. Such incidents are so common and make Aboriginal people feel unwelcome in the city.

There are reports of pizza slices, pop, coffee, eggs, beer bottles/cans etc. being thrown at Aboriginal students walking down the streets, waiting at bus stops, or sitting on park benches. Some students have been jumped, robbed or assaulted, and show up all bloodied and swollen, but are afraid to go to police. Many have prior negative experiences with police officers, or have outstanding warrants. Others feel that it is a waste of time because they will not be believed, will be blamed for the incident, police do not care because they are Aboriginal, or nothing will be done.

However, the high mobility rates, indifference about school attendance, mental health issues, and fetal alcohol diseases together with limited parental support influence the students' ability to do well in class, and stay in school. Furthermore, for students moving to the city, the education level on reserves that is generally inferior to what is available in urban schools is a major hurdle that contributes to attrition.

The RMYC has partnered with the local school boards on several projects including the "Creating Safer Schools--Schools Acknowledging Safety Solutions by Youth--SASSY" project in 2008. This was youth-led, and students identified bullying, discrimination, drugs and violence as the primary safety concerns in schools. They also came up with recommendations to create a safer and healthier learning environment for everyone.

The RMYC has facilitated workshops on racism and discrimination during the Lakehead Public Schools' Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) annual conferences launched in 2008. These forums are for student leaders and focus on social justice issues. The RMYC has promoted the Racial Incident Reporting Form through YEDE as a simple way to engage students, and encourage them to help eliminate racism.

The idea to record and report racial incidents came up so that school principals, teachers and staff, would not ignore hard evidence about racism. This would give educators a picture of what students are experiencing and challenge them to do something. The Complaint Form engages youths by asking them for ideas to deal with the problem. By seeking their input on how the incident should be resolved, they have a say in the outcome which should help them to feel protected from retaliation, and safe from victimization.

It is unfortunate that school principals have been reluctant to use the Forms out of concerns about community image. They feel that many complaints on record will reflect negatively on the school, even though racism is a community issue, and schools just mirror what exists out there. Last spring there were well publicized racially motivated fights between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and police officers were called to patrol several schools. There was also an incident where a teacher's aid cut the hair on an Aboriginal student without permission. This happened in spite of a partnership with the Urban Aboriginal Strategy to have an Aboriginal Resource Worker in the school.

Racism is primarily due to ignorance, and schools can play a vital role through education. Utilizing the Complaint Forms would have provided valuable information and feedback for schools to work with. Students' input would have helped teachers and staff to get their perspective on the situation to deal with the problem collectively.

There is also the issue of the dress code. A significant number of Aboriginal boys 'hang out' together in schools wearing 'hoodies' that resemble 'gang-style' outfits. This concerns many non-Aboriginal students and city residents afraid of street gangs. While such form of dress may not be an issue on reserves, perception is different in a city due to the emergence of Aboriginal criminal youth gangs.

Schools should engage students in dialogue and come up with compromises. This will help to ease unnecessary apprehensions and remove artificial barriers dividing students. To avoid dealing with the issue perpetuates the differences dividing students. It should be mentioned that problems of attire are not an issue in Catholic high schools where school uniforms have introduced.

23. **Therefore: School Boards should apply recommendations in the RMYC's Schools Acknowledging Safety Solutions by Youth Report. They must engage students and find creative ways to be inclusive, celebrate diversity, promote multiculturalism and improve race relations. The Racial Incident Reporting Form should be adopted to monitor what is going on, and get input from victims on ways to deal with racism. Peer mediation programs should be introduced to resolve conflict and diffuse tension amicably without fearing retaliation. There should be open discussions on dress code and school uniforms.**

We welcome the hiring of Aboriginal Liaison Officers by the City of Thunder Bay, Aboriginal Resource Workers by the school boards, and Aboriginal Liaison Police Officers by the Thunder Bay Police Service, as positive moves are long over-due. But, such measures, alone, will not solve the problems of racism towards Aboriginal people – just as the election of President Barack Obama does not mean an end to racism against blacks in the United States of America. Centuries of discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice and oppression targeting Aboriginal people cannot be eradicated overnight, or eliminated by the hiring a few representatives of the group. We need a multi-faceted approach to dealing with the problem, backed by strong leadership and pronouncement at City Hall.

(K) The high dropout rate among Aboriginal youth is well acknowledged. In the fall of 2008, the provincial government provided Lakehead Public Schools with a grant of about \$1 million to reduce attrition and improve the success rate of Aboriginal students. Even though the RMYC has partnered with the school board on several initiatives, and our under-funded orientation program is credited for “contributing to the better retention of Aboriginal students in school”, we did not get any financial support from the project funds. A contribution towards our best practices to enhance programs and service delivery targeting Aboriginal students would have been greatly appreciated.

24. **Therefore: The Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should engage stakeholders from targeted community groups as partners, and fund small projects that empower and enable them to mobilize themselves, and engage children and youth to participate in the education system.**

Families have been identified by the youth as a very important institution having the most impact on kids. Children mirror their parents who are their role models. Good parents and stable families create happier and healthier children. But with the legacy of residential schools and constant family breakdowns, there is a need to find alternative ways to teach proper parenting skills and social values nuclear and extended families used to provide.

25. **Therefore: The Ministry of Education should support and promote courses that teach parenting skills as part of developing students, and enhancing their personal growth as future responsible citizens who contribute to the healthy well-being and the mental, physical and social wellness of future and successive generations.**

(L) The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is working on strategies to reduce poverty. More Aboriginal children live in poverty compared to other groups. This affects their lifestyle, attitude, social outlook and expectations. Addressing child poverty is a challenge if parents are addicted to alcohol, drugs or gambling. Simply giving them more money without addressing the addiction does not guarantee that the kids will benefit. Treating addicts is a prerequisite to prevent money being wasted and making the situation worse.

The DFC students who worked at the Youth Centre under the Summer Jobs for Youth program had never held a job before. They appreciated the opportunity, and want the program expanded to serve more youth from under-served areas, and made operational all year as part of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. The students liked the training to gain valuable work experience to enter the job market and develop a work ethic to be gainfully employed. Including school dropouts in the transition process also helps them determine potential trades to consider for careers. This will help to give them a sense of purpose, provide opportunities to be gainfully employed anywhere, and hope for a better life and future in Canada.

26. **Therefore: The Ministry of Children and Youth Services should continue to support the Summer Jobs for Youth program to provide work experience and lifeskills training for the work-world for youths. This is a very necessary program to introduce Aboriginal and other marginalized youth to the job market.**

The Roots of Youth Violence Report covers the issue of poverty in detail. The report also mentions community hubs/youth centres as safe places for kids to hangout, away from addicts, the streets, and dysfunctional homes. Safe spaces alleviate boredom, promote healthy lifestyles to enhance their physical and mental well-being. They complement schools by offering structured after-school programs, peer helpers, tutoring, counselling, and information that can enable kids to make informed decisions and wise choices.

Youth centres are ideal places for the youth to meet, plan activities, train peer leaders, run programs, provide job orientation, share information, and consult with adults in their own space. They engage children in activities that will improve their lives. Investing in education is a practical strategy to break the cycle of poverty that puts many children at-risk.

27. **Therefore: The Ministry of Children and Youth Services should develop bench-marks to end child poverty, and play a lead role in implementing the recommendations from "The Roots of Youth Violence Report", provide resources to stabilize the establishment of community hubs/youth drop-in centres as safe places for kids to hang out after hours, meet positive role models, and access resources, information, services and supports to enhance their well-being.**

(M) Concerns about racism among Aboriginal youth involve all sectors of the community- schools, businesses, housing, police, etc. Feedback from youths participating in our surveys and forums reflect strained relations with police officers. Incidents of police bias, brutality, racial profiling, cultural in-sensitivity etc. are common talk, even though some of the youth are at fault. Some kids are rude, talk back, are disrespectful, or provide false names and identity to confuse police officers. This is very frustrating for busy and overburdened officers who just want to do their job.

On police bias and racial profiling, there is a story of the DFC student from Fort Severn First Nation on tour at the Thunder Bay Police Station who was detained for questioning for wearing an Aboriginal designer outfit mistaken as youth street gang outfit. On brutality and insensitivity, the incident of a drunken Eabametoong (Fort Hope) First Nation man picked up downtown by two police officers and driven to the Mission Island marsh on the outskirts of Thunder Bay and abandoned there, is well remembered across the region. Unsolved disappearances of Aboriginal women in Thunder Bay, and stories of police-radio jokes, e-mails, and verbal comments demeaning to Aboriginal people by some police officers help to feed the distrust.

It is important to build bridges between Aboriginal youth and police officers so that boarding students can trust them for protection to feel safe in the city. Confidence in the officers will make it easier to approach them for help and to report incidents when the youth need assistance. It can be a shocking experience to be standing in a school hallway, walking on sidewalks, chatting in a coffee shop, having a meal, waiting in line at the movies, or shopping in a store to hear people you do not know, or have not offended, insult you from the blue. Such incidents are common and make Aboriginal people feel unwelcome, and unwanted in the city.

There are also reports of pizza slices, pop, coffee, eggs, beer bottles/cans etc. being thrown at Aboriginal students walking down the streets, waiting at bus stops, or sitting on park benches. Some students have been jumped, robbed or assaulted, and show up at our Youth Centre all bloodied and swollen, but are afraid to go to police. Many have prior negative experiences with police officers, or have outstanding warrants. Others feel that it is a waste of time because police do not care because they are Aboriginal, they will not be believed, will be blamed for the incident, or nothing will be done.

During the search for Kyle Morrisieu, young people dropping-in at the Youth Centre talked about his involvement with criminal youth gangs. Some had been in trouble with the law, and were afraid to contact the police. Others were reluctant to 'rat' and share what they knew for fear that police officers would not protect their identity.

Many were afraid of gang backlash if they collaborated with the police. It was a surprise to the RMYC, because we always co-operate with police services, and counted on young people volunteering information to help officers solve crime quickly. From the experience, it became obvious that the trust gap between police officers and the youth at the Centre was widening. It will take time, new ideas, effort, and money to turn things around.

28. Therefore: The Thunder Bay Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers should continue to reach out and familiarize Aboriginal students about police services in the city. They should sensitize other police officers and staff on Aboriginal issues. All policing services in the city: The Thunder Bay Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police, Nishnawbe Aski Nation Police, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as well as the Drug and Anti-Street Gang Units, should collaborate to street-proof students before and when they arrive in the city to cultivate positive relations.

The RMYC has collaborated with Thunder Bay Police Services, The Ontario Provincial Police, and Nishnawbe Aski Nation Police to produce a youth-friendly leaflet: "HEY YOUTH: What to do if you are stopped by the police". This explains how to deal with police officers in a respectful way. The leaflet is handed out at workshops, community events, and is included in the orientation kits to welcome new students to the city.

29. Therefore: Policing services should work harder to engage Aboriginal youth, and collaborate a lot more with youth groups, youth centres, etc to produce and market resource materials that help to establish trust and confidence in protection services among racialized, marginalized and at-risk kids. Training all police officers to better communicate with all youths and treat them fairly will enhance policing in a multicultural society, and facilitate recruitment and retention of officers from diverse backgrounds who will do a better job of protecting everyone equitably.

(N) The RMYC's "Thunder Bay Neighbourhood Profiles – A Youth Perspective" is a call for action. The report presents a bleak picture of areas in the city that need immediate attention to save them from growing criminal elements including Aboriginal youth street gangs. More out-reach and social programs are needed to complement over-stretched policing services that are ineffective in dealing with issues such as poverty, addictions, mental health, unemployment, and so forth. Innovative fieldwork and support services by social service agencies and educational institutions are needed to deal with pressing issues faced by a rapidly growing Aboriginal population from reserves. This intervention is critical to provide urban life-skills orientation, share information and make referrals for appropriate services and supports to ease the transition from reserve life to city living.

30. Therefore, Institutions such as Confederation College (Negahneewin College of Academic and Community Development), and Lakehead University (Aboriginal Studies) etc. should develop programs to train social and community workers who do fieldwork in needy areas to facilitate the integration of Aboriginal people in urban areas. Deploying students for placements in housing projects, etc will help to address a growing need.

(O) Using and abusing alcohol, drugs and solvents is a serious social and public health issue which is very costly to manage. Addiction, impairment, fetal alcohol syndrome, and related health disorders make children and youth vulnerable. This is creating a segment of the population with preventable emotional, physical, social and mental health problems as well as permanent learning disorders.

The tragedies of Reggie, Kyle and most of the dropouts at DFC are all linked to abusing alcohol, drugs, or solvents. There are also many studies across Canada that confirm the devastating effects of alcohol in First Nations communities.

“Health Canada pegs the incidents of the fetal alcohol syndrome in some Aboriginal and Inuit communities as high as one in five. Each year up to 750 (or 2 babies a day), are born with full-blown fetal alcohol syndrome in Canada. About 1,000 are born with a range of alcohol-related damage, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, (FASD) or fetal alcohol effects (FAE).” (Chronicle Journal, March 17, 2010).

But, substance abuse is not just an Aboriginal problem. Data from Canada Addiction Surveys, the most comprehensive addiction studies done in Canada, shows a disturbing picture of a society increasingly dependent on mood-altering substances. Many people may initially use alcohol and drugs for relaxation, entertainment, or to cope. But, once addiction occurs, it creates problems for children, families and society as a whole.

Alcohol and drugs mask problems and exacerbate issues. More resources are required to deal with the addiction prior to dealing with root causes. Addiction can be linked to poverty. As mentioned earlier, strategies to eradicate poverty should recognize the impact of addiction on poverty, creating a vicious cycle. Prevention, intervention and treatment should be part of the strategy.

Young women in particular should be targeted because abusing alcohol and drugs puts unborn children at risk, and creating generations of ‘damaged’ kids. Not addressing this problem will have a devastating impact on ever-increasing health costs. In the publication: “*The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada*”, Rhem et.al (2002) report that health costs related to alcohol were \$1.16 billion, and illegal drugs \$373 million a year in Ontario.

According to Correctional Service of Canada, more than 50 per cent of the current population in federal institutions was under the influence of alcohol and drugs when they committed the offence(s) that led to their incarceration. Eight out of ten young offenders have long-standing substance abuse problems. 80 per cent of offenders enter federal institutions with some type of substance abuse problem, and many have multiple addictions. In addition, more than 80 per cent of young offenders in federal institutions have below grade 10 education; 65 per cent have less than grade 8. 90 per cent of offenders in federal institutions have previous convictions; 81 per cent committed a previous violent offence. *Statistics Canada, Correctional Service Canada & Juristat*

31. Therefore: Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Health Promotion should support youth-led strategies (such as the RMYC’s Revolution Girl-Style/Girl Power initiatives targeting young women) to educate, communicate, and raise awareness on the consequences of abusing alcohol, drugs, sniffing, huffing, and solvents on self, and the unborn child.

- * Produce youth-friendly resource materials on fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and engage youth, especially young women, to warn them about the risks to the unborn child.
- * Expand the tobacco/stop smoking campaign to include alcohol, drug and solvent abuse, and put warning labels on beer, wine and alcohol bottles--similar to the education/information campaign on cigarette packages.
- * Engage various Ministries such as Education, Corrections, Citizenship, Recreation, Labour, Human Resources Skills Development etc. to target youth in campaigns against alcohol and drug abuse and the risks involved.

Boredom, and having nothing better to do raises the risk factors among youths. Poor kids face barriers to participate in organized sports, various recreational activities, and mainstream entertainment due to a lack of transportation and related costs. Many also lack family support to be involved because of apathy, addictions, or the parents are too busy struggling with menial jobs to make ends meet. As a result, many lack structured excitement and supervision often indulge in abusing alcohol, drugs and other substances for entertainment, leading to early addictions, problems with schooling, and troubles with the law.

32. Therefore: **Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion should fund more recreational activities that promote healthy lifestyles and wellness. Support for more structured activities that are affordable and accessible to at-risk youth will have many side benefits ranging from good health, personal and public safety children and academic success for a better and brighter future.**

Reaching out to the growing numbers of inactive, obese, and impoverished children and youth to break the cycle of sedentary lifestyles requires innovative strategies to involve kids. Engaging them to participate is the key to success. Using peers to reach out and connect with them will make a difference. With the shortage of volunteers among families with vulnerable kids who are at risk, developing peer leaders to plan, organize, help to supervise events and take care of equipment, supplies, and facilities will make it easier for staff, placement students and other helpers to run successful activities and after school programs.

The RMYC's idea of training student leaders to work with Aboriginal boarding students and organize appropriate activities to keep them busy after hours, and help them to stay safe, is producing positive results (page 32-33 in this report). This helped more students to do well in school, and cut the student drop-out rate by half. We believe that the skills learned are lifetime experiences which the peer leaders can use for the rest of their lives. This helps to ensure that funds allocated for recreational activities will be better utilized by trained and experienced peer leaders. This will indeed be an investment in the future.

33. Therefore: **Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion should support the development and training of more youth leaders who can plan, organize and deliver youth-to-youth activities that appeal to peers and engage them in mass prevention-oriented activities that encourage physical activities, promote healthy lifestyles and wellness. The Ministry should support the RMYC initiatives at DFC as pilot for the creation of capable and responsible peer leaders who are trail blazers for active lifestyles among Aboriginal children and youth on and off reserves.**

(P) As mentioned earlier, abusing alcohol and drugs is costly to society in terms of healthcare, policing, accidents, tragedies, pain and suffering. The arrest rate of intoxicated people in Thunder Bay is the highest in all of Ontario (Chronicle Journal, February 12, 2010). This is a cause of concern given the tragedies at DFC, and increasing numbers of Aboriginal youths who end up being charged with secondary offences after altercations with officers when they were drunk or high. Children and youth are innocent victims caught in the cycle of addiction due to drinking mothers. But, failure to proactively deal with addictions expands the problems to future and successive generations.

34. Therefore: **The Federal and Provincial governments should support youth centres as spaces to connect with children and youth after school, provide youth-friendly information to prevent alcohol and drug abuse, help to detect substance abuse, offer peer support, and make referrals for counseling, treatment and rehabilitation.**

Charge a tax levy to alcohol manufacturers to support youth centres, and sustain after school programs for youths victimized by addiction. Support safe places for kids to hang out and learn from positive peers. Some funding should be directed towards special programs and low-cost recreational activities for those suffering from the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome, and related diseases.

(Q) As mentioned many times over in this report, racism is a priority concern among Aboriginal youth. This is their land, and Canada is their only traditional home. If they lose their culture here, it cannot be found elsewhere as is the case with other Canadian groups. More should be done to remove barriers that restrict Aboriginal people from equal access, equal opportunities and equal participation in all aspects of Canadian life.

35. Therefore: **The Federal and Provincial Ministries of Citizenship Immigration and Multiculturalism should advance the cause of race relations, and support innovative projects and events to commemorate March 21--International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. They should work through other departments to promote qualities that foster equality, advance social justice, encourage tolerance, and enhance Canadian citizenship and Canadian unity. They should also support Canada's special days such as national Aboriginal Day, St. Jean Baptiste Day, Canadian Multiculturalism Day, and Canada Day -- to celebrate and appreciate our rich and diverse heritage.**

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The Reggie Bushie tragedy reflects a disturbing trend of negative lifestyles and self-destructive behaviour common among Aboriginal youth. The above average incidents of poverty, chronic alcoholism, violence, crime, substance and sexual abuse, school dropouts, poor self-image, a lack of initiative or work ethic, as well as other social dysfunctions can be linked to the residential school syndrome.

Forced removal of children from home to attend residential schools can be equated to the impact of slavery on Black families. This resulted in a breakdown of families. No one was there to teach social values, language, and other cultural traditions that shape personal identity. We are all aware of how family break-ups affect children. Imagine whole communities breaking up and the inter-generational impacts. Children are being reared and continue to be raised by parents with no parenting skills to mold character, enforce discipline and shape behaviour.

Many Aboriginal kids are growing up in dysfunctional and unstable homes where alcohol and drugs are common ways to cope with hurt and numb pain. Some children in foster homes do not know their parents and siblings, and assume multiple names and identities from the different homes they have stayed in. Changes in traditional subsistence lifestyles and high unemployment make welfare the only practical option on many reserves. Many have lost their pride, culture, beliefs, identity, a sense of self-worth, and feel that they have nothing to lose. This is a dangerous and costly trend that needs to be addressed to prevent the growth of a generation of addicts, and it will take time, patience and investment in resources to change.

Residential schools, patronizing attitudes, inappropriate programs and limited financial resources have created a cycle of dependency that robs Aboriginal children their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth. Parents with 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, it is hard to get children motivated and inspired to attend school, graduate and reap the benefits of education.

The traditional work ethic, resilience and instinct for survival that enabled Aboriginal people to thrive and prosper in this country before colonization have been replaced by social assistance. It is sad that Aboriginal youths who are smart and intelligent enough to navigate through treacherous waters fishing, setting trap-lines in the snow, and hunting in the bush, can find their way home with no compass, get lost in our cities. They can survive in the wilderness and are resilient on the land, yet many are relying on social assistance, handouts, food-banks and shelters in our modern cities.

Children who grow up with parents staying at home unemployed will likely do the same—“Monkey see, monkey do”. Parents are the best role models for 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 kids will regard this as normal, and develop similar habits and lifestyles. There are many parents damaged by residential schools leading their kids blindly the same wrong way.

We know of many Aboriginal youths today 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 standard education system and integration into a universal competitive workplace difficult. It also creates anxieties among urban neighbours who are used to a different lifestyle and structured mode of behaviour. Unfortunately, this creates racial overtones.

The First Nations are doing their best to deal with basic priorities including housing, clean water, health, poverty and on going legal land-claim battles. More families are realizing the benefits of a good education, and are sending their young children away to attend school in spite of the risks. However, the good things happening on reserves are easily overshadowed by crises, and recurring problems. The high numbers of children and youth addicted to substances, dropping out of school, in trouble with the law, or see no bright future make the situation look bleak. A lack of positive role models, good educational supports, opportunities for employment, recreation, and wellness programs leaves young people with no hope. It is hard to encourage a young student to concentrate on schoolwork when they feel they cannot do it, are hungry, addicted, and constantly thinking of getting drunk, being high, or want to commit suicide. Migration to the city offers a new beginning and a chance to access higher education, better social services, careers, employment prospects and quality of life. But more appropriate services and supports are needed for a smoother transition.

Creating a friendly atmosphere to welcome Aboriginal youth to urban centres will improve their chances of integrating into city life, doing well in school and joining the workforce. Training and supporting peer leaders to use a youth-to-youth approach makes students part of the solution to the problems they face. In today's economy where the quality of life and prosperity are tied to knowledge, education is an equalizer, and passport to a brighter future. A good education helps to level the playing field and can facilitate the integration (not assimilation) of Aboriginal youth in the mainstream. This will facilitate access to opportunities and enhance their participation in the job-market, which, in turn will improve the standard of living, and accelerate social and economic development in First Nations communities.

Investing in education will save Canada money by reducing dependency on welfare. A well educated Aboriginal population will pay their own way, alleviating poverty, misery, despair, suicide, sickness, pain and suffering. This will also enhance our safety and security by reducing violent crimes and assaults committed predominantly by less educated school dropouts. At a recent Aboriginal policy conference in Ottawa, it was reported that 'Aboriginal youth gangs are the fastest growing criminal element in the country. Their numbers could double in about 10 years ... and jails are acting as hothouses for recruitment' (Chronicle Journal, March 16, 2009). The experts say it is all about education and employment. The RMYC is working with Aboriginal youth in these areas. But, we need financial resources and support to do an effective job.

The RMYC hopes that the outcome from the Reggie Bushie inquest will advance the cause of Aboriginal students seeking higher education. A good education will provide the foundation they need for a better life and brighter future. Even though children have little or no influence on the priorities of politicians elected by adult votes, our issues should also matter because we are the next generation of citizens to take care of the country.

APPENDIX:

RIISING ABORIGINAL VOICES YOUTH FORUM

Victoria Inn, Thunder Bay. April 3 - 4, 2009.

(Notes taken by Thunder Bay City Councillor Rebecca Johnson)

More than 270 Aboriginal youths attended a two-day conference organized through the Thunder Bay Urban Aboriginal Strategy: Youth Outreach and Neighbourhood Capacity Building Program. The event was co-hosted by the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre Youth Council and the Regional Multicultural Youth Council.

Most of the Aboriginal youth invited attend secondary/high schools in the city. Some are permanent city residents, while others are students from northern reserves who live in boarding homes while attending Thunder Bay schools. The youth divided themselves into 10 working groups under Clan names (Wolf, Bear, Rabbit, Otter, Fish, Moose, etc.) to talk about various issues that impact them.

The following are the top priorities, concerns and challenges they identified, as well as suggestions of how the issues should be addressed.

YOUTH PRIORITIES, CONCERNS AND PROBLEMS - TOP PRIORITIES

1. Racism
2. Drugs and Alcohol
3. Suicide
4. Education
5. Abuse
6. Poverty
7. Teen Pregnancy
8. Violence, gangs
9. Family and Friends support
10. Youth Centres
11. Lack of self-identity
12. Culture

IN 3 YEARS, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH IN THUNDER BAY?

- . More Aboriginal graduates
- . More cultural activities
- . Equality for all, less racism and discrimination
- . Aboriginal content/curriculum in all our schools
- . Cultural sensitivity training at all workplaces especially in the justice system
- . Young Aboriginals working/employed in the community
- . Support for young Aboriginal parents
- . Fewer teen pregnancies, less violence and crime among Aboriginal youth
- . More confidence and pride in being an Aboriginal
- . Proud to be who we are, our history, culture and traditional way of life
- . A strong community of people who believe that together we move forward

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO GET THERE?

- . Easy access for cultural events, positive activities and supports
- . Affordable activities – accessible to all youths
- . Secured funding for programs to benefit those who need help
- . Stay in school, graduate, and a job, and get off welfare
- . Have respect, attend workshops, sharing circles, AA meetings, etc.
- . Dedicated professionals willing to support Aboriginals to help themselves
- . More conferences like this
- . Encouragement and motivation to get a good education, and learn about our culture
- . Promote and advertise programs and services to help Aboriginals
- . Pow Wow awareness, motivate dancers, singers, and on-lookers to be proud
- . Support from chiefs and band councils, and federal, provincial and municipal governments
- . Be active and learn to be responsible for yourself and your well-being
- . Together we are the future, should support each other
- . Must learn organize the things we want to see done
- . Establish a Youth Councils and provide youth empowerment training
- . More youth centers and safe places for kids to hang-out

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

- . Request recognition for high school grads, awards
- . More interesting classes in school - more Aboriginal content
- . Everyone should work together for a better future
- . Organize ourselves to regain our identity, pride, and shape our destiny
- . Staying school, and encouraging students not to drop-out
- . Have respect for yourself and others

IF WE CAME BACK IN 3 YEARS TO EVALUATE OUR PROGRESS, WHAT IS THE SINGLE CHANGE OR KEY THING THAT WOULD INDICATE THAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE?

- . By the way we are going, it will be a slow progress. But we should never give up and think that we Aboriginals are lost cause -- we can come back, and be leaders of our communities!
- . Progress that I would like to see is more active youth in positive events like this.
- . More high school grads continuing to college/university, and getting into trades/professions
- . Language and culture reverence.
- . Decrease in teen pregnancy and experimenting with drugs/alcohol
- . More positive role models
- . More after school programs
- . Improvement in the family structure through education, awareness, and supports
- . More networking and family gatherings – Pow Wows, feasts, forums

THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION TO MOVE FORWARD TOWARD THIS CHANGE

- . To continue and never give up!
- . Communication and better understanding by working together more effectively.
- . Use of the media with more youth involvement and encouragement.
- . More workshops, information-sharing and supports.
- . Use of our resources such as elders, professionals, etc.
- . Start with small changes such as youth councils, and youth groups.
- . Open the eyes and see what we have to change to improve ourselves.

OTHER COMMENTS PROVIDED FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION REPORTS

- . Lack of winter coats for youth, poverty a big issue
- . More Pow Wow's at Elementary schools and in the community
- . Police are rough, cocky when dealing with Aboriginal youth – need more Aboriginal officers
- . More help lines for suicide prevention
- . More health programs required for addressing teen pregnancy
- . Need to be more active within our culture
- . Be positive role models
- . Leadership and organizational development training for young leaders
- . Make donations, get jobs, adopt a child to help address poverty
- . Need funding to organize groups
- . More art groups and recreational activities
- . Family nights
- . AA meetings for youth
- . Commercial advertising to address drug abuse using youth communication tools
- . Motivators – supporters
- . We must participate, and avoid apathy
- . Need easier access to events and activities – better transportation
- . Cultural sensitivity training to live with diversity
- . Tell stories
- . After school programs
- . Spiritual ceremonies
- . Elders must be respected – look to them for guidance/counselling/teachings, etc
- . Native counsellors in schools
- . Provide free condoms and sex education
- . Help each other to graduate
- . Address inequalities
- . More jobs for Aboriginals, and a better work-ethic
- . Get involved with culture
- . Need anger management courses
- . Be responsible for ourselves and our future
- . Spiritual healing
- . Better physical and mental health
- . Youth Centres across the city a must
- . Racism in police force needs to be addressed
- . All gang violence is NOT Aboriginal
- . Life management and life-skills courses in schools
- . Need a change in thinking, have a positive attitude
- . Change is here – we need to adapt
- . Mutual respect for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
- . More funding for youth programs to maintain them
- . Look to past for solutions and avoid making similar mistakes in the future
- . Youth engagement, empowerment, and involvement
- . Access to positive peer role models

ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR FIRST NATIONS BOARDING STUDENTS

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) recognizes that a good education is a strong foundation for a better and brighter future. Various surveys on student attrition across Northwestern Ontario reveal high numbers of Aboriginal students dropping out of school. The reasons given include: loneliness, homesickness, racism, discrimination, pregnancy, culture shock, having no friends, money problems, violence, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and so forth.

To help Aboriginal students adjust to living in the city away from home, and do well studying in large multicultural schools, the RMYC has developed a special youth-to-youth Orientation Program. The goals and objectives are as follows.

GOALS: Reducing student drop-outs and increasing the numbers of Aboriginal students graduating from high school and proceeding to higher education and career choices that will facilitate their participation in a global market place, improve their quality of life and enhance the standard of living in their communities.

OBJECTIVES:

- * To welcome Aboriginal students from remote First Nations communities, help to ease transition from small homogeneous communities to bigger towns, and offer supports to enable them to do well and succeed in large multicultural schools.
- * To provide new students with urban lifeskills to cope with the challenges of living in an urban environment, deal with culture shock and diversity, learn to survive in a competitive society, and integrate into the Canadian mosaic.
- * To inform new students on the various services and programs available to them in the new community, local agencies where to go for help, guidance, counselling and support, and safe places to hang out and enjoy life away from home.
- * To encourage Aboriginal students to make friends among peers from other racial and cultural backgrounds, learn from each other, and instil pride and self-esteem to deal with racism and the legacy of residential schools.
- * To develop positive role models among Aboriginal students and train young leaders to organize self-help support groups, social events and recreational activities to keep them busy after school.
- * To assist the students to find resources and access facilities to organize activities, exercises and events that foster team spirit, build self-confidence, encourage bonding, reduce tension, conflict, fights, violence, abuse alcohol and drugs, that can affect their potential to learn and do well in school.
- * To challenge Aboriginal students to develop the capacity to engage in positive lifestyles, and support them to plan and organize their own extra curricular activities to stay out of trouble and feel safe in the city.

REVOLUTIONAL GIRLS STYLE – ABORIGINAL GIRL POWER

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) is assisting Aboriginal young women/ girls to form peer groups to deal with the legacy of residential schools.

GOALS:

Empowering young Aboriginal women through peer groups that provide friendship, emotional support, share information and encouragement to follow their passions, reach their potential and realize their dreams

OBJECTIVES:

- * To create young leaders and peer helpers among Aboriginal girls who reach out to other young women and offer support, encouragement and strength to deal with negative influences that distract them from setting goals and reaching them.
- * To train Aboriginal girls to become positive and role models in their schools and communities, and provide them with leadership and organizational development skills to plan and organize their own activities, mobilize each other to be part of the solution to problems, and make an difference.
- * To hold planning meetings, workshops, friendship circles, socials and other opportunities for girls to share experiences, exchange ideas and access information and resources to enable them to make informed decisions and wise choices.
- * To provide opportunities for Aboriginal girls to build self-esteem, learn self-control, foster self-confidence, encourage teamwork and develop the capacity and strength to know who they are, and what they want to be.
- * To create a warm safe environment for Aboriginal girls to feel secure and share their concerns, interests and opinions freely, seek the help they need to heal, and learn about the resources and supports available for them.
- * To raise awareness on the residential schools, review current statistics on the quality of life for Aboriginal women and discuss the social impacts.
- * Invite Elders and resource people to hold teachings for young Aboriginal women to learn about parenting and motherhood, the risks of addiction, as well as holistic health, including spiritual, mental, physical and emotional components.
- * To find resources, facilities and supports for Aboriginal girls to get the help they need to grow, and realize their potential as students, young leaders, positive role models, mainstream employees, community leaders, responsible citizens as well as future mothers with the power and sacred role to bring new life into the world.

RACIST INCIDENT REPORT FORM

This form is for those who want to report racist incidents at school, community centre, store, restaurant, office, police, etc. When completed, please hand it to the school principal, teacher, store manager, recreation supervisor, or senior staff where the incident happened. Keep a copy for your record. You can also fax it to the RMYC/Multicultural Youth Centre (807) 622-7271

Date of Report _____ School/Community _____

Name of person Reporting the incident: _____

Name of person Recording information: _____

Briefly describe the incident: What happened? (Was it verbal, physical, etc?) _____

Where did it happen? (Place) _____

When did it happen? Morning _____ Afternoon _____ Evening _____

Do you know the Name(s) of the person(s) involved? YES _____ NO _____

If YES, Who? _____

Did anyone else see what was happening? YES _____ NO _____

If YES, List the Witness(es): _____

Any other information you feel is important (i.e. whether this has happened before)

How would you like to see the problem resolved? _____

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Office of the Grand Chief

100 Back Street, Unit 200, Thunder Bay, ON P7J 1L2
Tel: (807) 623-8228 Fax: (807) 623-5193 www.nan.on.ca



December 12, 2008

Chief Joshua Frogg, Chairman
NNEC Strategic Chiefs Re-Organizing Committee
Northern Nishnawbe Education Council
21 King Street, Box 1419
Sioux Lookout, Ontario
P8T 1B9

Dear Chief Frogg:

RE: SUPPORT FOR YOUTH COUNCIL CONSULTATION

I am writing this letter to confirm that the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Decade for Youth Council are working together for the up-coming inquest into the tragic drowning of a Poplar Hill First Nation student in Thunder Bay last fall. The RMYC is reviewing its after-school programs and wants input from NNEC students attending Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School on the help and supports they would expect from the Multicultural Youth Centre to enable them to stay in school and succeed.

The Youth Council would like to meet with the students for their input before they leave for the Christmas Holidays on December 19. Since time is of the essence, your permission relayed by telephone or e-mail to the DFC school principal, Mr. Brad Battiston, or Mr. Larry Howes in this regard would be greatly appreciated.

A priority for the RMYC is to help NNEC to get adequate funding for programs and activities to keep students busy and off the streets after hours. Early this year you provided some funding to the RMYC to keep the Multicultural Youth Centre open for DFC students after school. I am aware that at the inquest, the RMYC would like to recommend a new funding formula from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada comparable to how the province funds its students so that NNEC is able to provide the special programs, or purchase services from community groups such as the RMYC to help students survive in an urban environment.

NAN supports the work of the RMYC, and as you may be aware, the Chiefs in Assembly passed a Resolution to help the Multicultural Youth Council maintain its services. Should NNEC have other issues you feel city-based groups such the RMYC can present to further the cause of our students, please contact Moffat Makuto at the Multicultural Youth Centre, (807) 622-4666.

Yours sincerely,

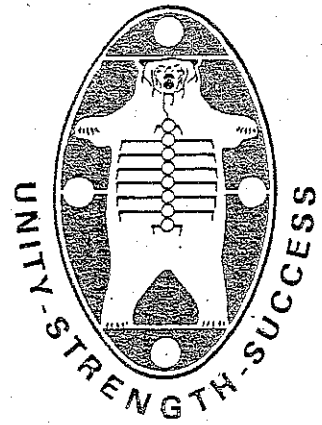
NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

Stan Beardy
Grand Chief

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



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 27TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2003.

MOVED BY: Chief Glenn Nolan
Missanable Cree First Nation

SECONDED BY: Proxy Wally McKay
Whitewater First Nation

CARRIED.


Grand Chief


Deputy Grand Chief

Location set for Reggie Bushie inquest

5 DFC students have died

James Thom
Wawatay News

The province has announced the location of the inquest into the death of Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School (DFC) student Reggie Bushie.

The coroner's inquest will begin at 9:30 a.m. Jan. 19 at the Ontario Government Building, 189 Red River Road in Thunder Bay. Dr. David Eden will preside as inquest coroner.

The inquest will examine

the circumstances surrounding the death and will explore issues relating to how First Nation youths are impacted when attending schools that are a considerable distance from their homes.

The jury may make recommendations aimed at the prevention of deaths in similar circumstances.

Bushie's body was recovered from the McIntyre River in Thunder Bay Nov. 1, 2007, seven days after he was last seen alive on the banks of the river.

Bushie was 15 at the time of his death.

His death was the fifth in a string of tragic circumstances

happening to DFC students since 2000.

The first was Kasabonika Lake's Jethro Anderson, Nov. 11, 2000. Curran Strang, of Pikangikum, died Sept. 22, 2005.

On Remembrance Day 2006, Paul Panacheese, a Mishkeegogamang band member died. Robin Harper, of Keewatin, died Jan. 13, 2007.

All were DFC students.

Dive teams comb the McIntyre River in Thunder Bay looking for the body of Reggie Bushie. An inquest into Bushie's death was granted June 6.

Wawatay News file photo



⑤ Reggie Bushie inquiry

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The call for an inquest into the 2007 death of 15-year-old Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School student Reggie Bushie is the number five news story of the year.

"We welcome the inquest into the tragic death of Reggie Bushie, but it shouldn't stop there, as the deaths of four other First Nation youth who died under similar circumstances in recent years should also be included," said

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy
Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.

"We have to ensure that everything possible is done to understand how these tragedies are occurring and what can be done to prevent them."

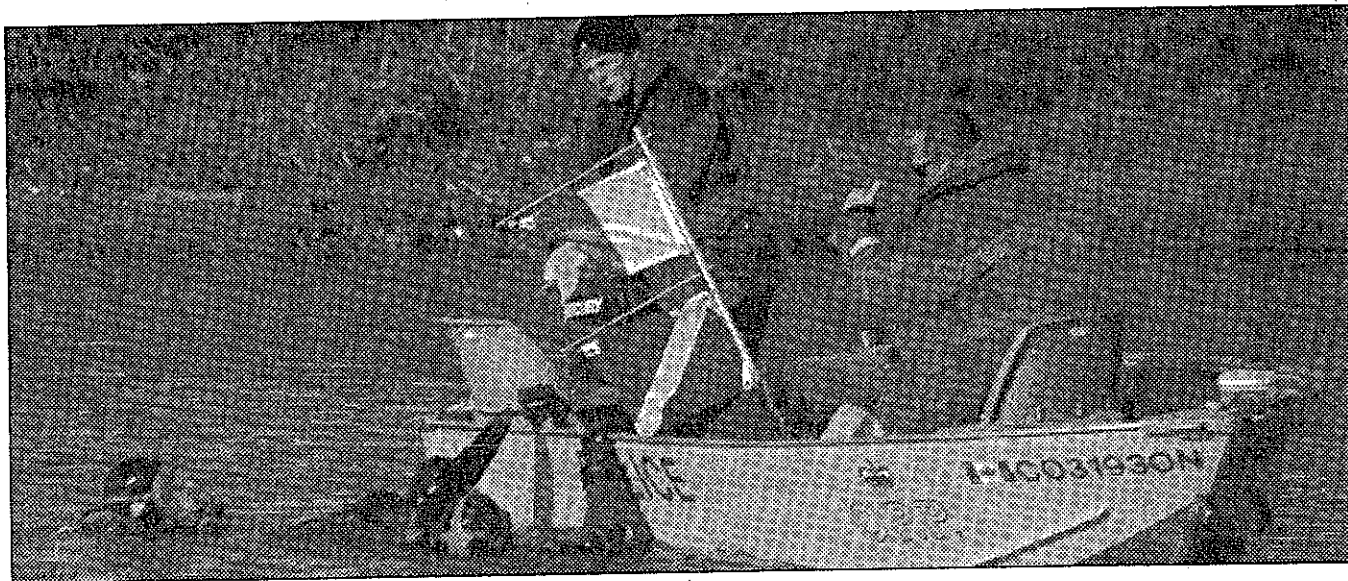
The Jan. 19 inquest will examine the circumstances surrounding Bushie's Oct. 2007 drowning death in the McIntyre River and will explore issues relating to how First Nations youth are impacted when attending schools that are a considerable distance from their homes.

The jury may make recommendations aimed at preventing similar deaths.

Five youth from NAN territory have died in Thunder Bay since 2000 while attending Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, including Kasabonika's Jethro Anderson in 2000, Pikangikum's Curran Strang in 2005, Mishkeegogamang's Paul Panacheese in 2006, and Keewawwin's Robin Harper in 2007.

"One death is too many," Fidler said.

"Five is tragic."



Wawatay News file photo

Dive teams comb the McIntyre River in Thunder Bay looking for the body of Reggie Bushie.

Change abound at DFC

James Thom
Wawatay News

From an empathy club to more extra-curricular activities, change is abound at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School this fall.

Nearly three dozen new initiatives will make this the best year ever at DFC, said principal Brad Battiston.

"These are all things our students identified," he said. "Our immediate goal is to give the school a community feel."

Students, who were worried about the high drop-out rate at DFC, met in the spring to brainstorm ways to make moving away from home more enjoyable and less taxing on themselves.

Deer Lake's Devon Meekis, class of 2008 DFC graduate, was one of the youth involved in offering suggestions about improving the school.

"There are a lot of good suggestions that we're seeing coming into place," said Meekis, who frequently returns to the school to help out and encourage the students to succeed. "I wish a lot of these things had started while I was still a student here."

Meekis is pleased with the speed at which the changes are happening.

"When clubs and programs start too late in the year, students are less likely to get involved," Meekis said.

The initiatives, some of which have already started, will include more weekend and evening activities at the school.

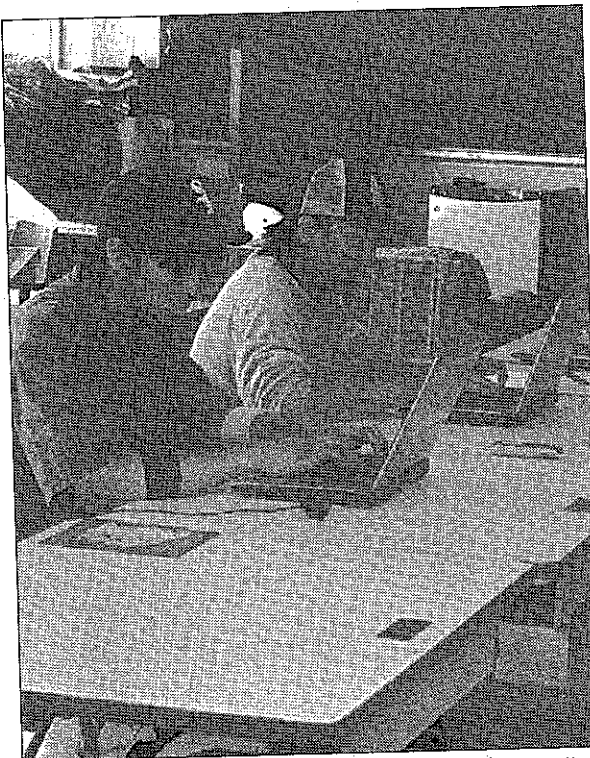
That means more sports in the school gyms, adding an additional video-conference unit so students can call home and see their friends and families and the creation of a recruiting video to highlight the positive activities occurring at DFC.

"The students wanted to make a video to thank the chiefs and the NNEC (Northern Nishnawbe Education Council) Board for supporting their ideas," said JoLee Blackbear, a volunteer at DFC who is working with the staff and students on several of the initiatives. "It can be used to show students what to expect when they come to the school."

The recreation program will be back in full-force, Battiston said.

The school will also be organizing broomball and floor hockey leagues with student, staff and other community group teams. The school also has ice reserved for recreational hockey.

The school is also involved in



James Thom/Wawatay News

Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School students Stanley Barkman, left, and Leonard Kamenawatamin work on lessons in the Paul Martin Business Class. Among the changes students will notice at the school this year are couches and TVs in classrooms to make them feel more welcome.

more varsity sports with other northwestern Ontario high schools. These include golf, volleyball, cross-country running and some students have expressed an interest in playing football through an arrangement DFC has with neighbouring Churchill High School.

For the non-sports fans, clubs being offered include art, media, writing, leadership and lifeskills.

"This is their space and we want the students to feel welcome in it."

— Brad Battiston

"We're prepared to do whatever we can to meet the needs of the students," Battiston said.

"We want to see the students coming to class," Battiston said. "This is their space and we want the students to feel welcome in it. There is a genuine drive to make this a home for the students."

That starts with the student staff relationship, students being on a first name basis with their teachers.

"I've never seen a staff like this," Blackbear said, speaking about the willingness of the teachers to help students and give their time.

"The staff bring ideas about how to make the school feel more welcome," Battiston said.

Each classroom now features a corner with couches and other furniture to give students a break, when they need one.

Several classrooms are setup in a circle or square of desks to facilitate sharing and talking circles.

"Some students don't respond well to teachers just talking and writing on a blackboard," Battiston said, so the school made the move to other means as well.

Added Blackbear: "We're looking at holistic teaching methodologies. There are a lot of bright students here. We want to see them succeed."

The changes seem to be working, Battiston said.

"This is the best start of the school year we've ever had at DFC," he said. "There was something different about these students when they arrived at the beginning of the school year."

The students seem to have more school spirit and their morale is higher, he said.

Blackbear, a master's graduate in education administration, is working with students on leadership.

"We would like to promote student leadership in the school," Blackbear said. "We want to see a shift in thinking ... to the positive."

Students/Youths who participated in Meetings, Surveys & Consultations

DFC Students: * Core Members

1. Charlie Anishinabe
2. Vince Ash,* (Student Council)
3. Esther Barkman
4. Pamela Barkman
5. Clarissa Bottle
6. Ethan Brown*
7. Jorden Beardy
8. Kaiyah Duncan
9. Marty Fiddler
10. Skye Fiddler
11. Tyrone Fiddler*
12. Correen Kakegamic*(Stu. Council)
13. Janice Kakegamic
14. Rose Kakegamic
15. Skye Kakegamic
16. Thomas Kakegamic
17. Lance Kakekagumick
18. Severn Kakekaspan
19. Nicole Kanate
20. Chantal Keash
21. Kirstie Kejick
22. William Mamakeesic
23. Chelsea McKay
24. Manuella McKay
25. Anita Meekis*
26. Dawn Meekis
27. Devon Meekis*
28. Ethan Meekis*
29. Jonathan Meekis*(Stud. Council)

30. Kirk Meekis
31. Kyle Meekis
32. Natasha Meekis
33. Steffany Meekis* (St. Council)
34. Kelly Morrisseau
35. Clayton Pascal
36. Marilane Quill
37. Andrea Rae*
38. Ashley Rae*
39. Eagle-Feather Rae*
40. Valentina Rae
41. Shannon Roundhead
42. Geralyn Tait
43. Shane Turtle* (Student Chief)

RMYC & NAN Youth Council**

44. Ginger Beardy
45. Linda Biedrzycki
46. Alison Bortolon
47. Pauline Fogarty
48. Tara Kyle-Winters
49. Zoe Kawei
50. Stephanie Kawei
51. Esther McKay**
52. Jordan Meekis
53. Nathan Ogden
54. Marcus Ostamus
55. Melissa Skunk
56. Julaine Trudeau
57. Martin Zhang

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council gratefully acknowledges our sponsors:

- * Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth
- * Nishnawbe Aski Nation & Decade for Youth Council / Oshkaatisak
- * NNEC/Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School
- * The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario
- * Northern Nishnawbe Education Council/Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School
- * Mandarin Restaurant
- * Tim Horton's (Waterloo Street)

The following DFC students, RMYC Officers and Youth Centre Volunteers:

Ethan Brown, Marty Fiddler, Tyrone Fiddler, Correen Kakegamic, Devon Meekis, Jordan Meekis, Steffany Meekis, Andrea Rae, Ashley Rae, Shane Turtle, Janice Kakegamic, for the stories and presentations.

RMYC officers: Abu-Bakare, Elton Beardy, Gurleen Chahal, Joshua Chicago, Candace Ferguson, Cassie Matthewson, Stephanie Kawei, Zoe Kawei, Tara Kyle-Winters, Marcus Ostamas, Julaine Trudeau, Richard Wirkkunnen, Martin Zhang for proofreading and editing the *report*.

Pauline Fogarty, Gordie Suggashie & Moffat Makuto for research and write-up.

For more information please contact:

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)

Multicultural Youth Centre (MYC)

511 E. Victoria Avenue

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