

RMYC



MANWO

Regional Youth Link

**Regional Multicultural Youth Council**

Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

# **YOUTH FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES**

## **PROJECT REPORT**

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**Regional Youth Conference,  
Peer Mediation Training,  
and Focus Groups.**

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**RMYC**

**Highlights of Discussions**

**on Youth - to - Youth Initiatives**

**to Create Safer Communities**

**and**

**Recommendations to Prevent**

**Youth Crime and Violence**

**“ IF WE DO WHAT WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE,  
WE’LL ONLY HAVE WHAT WE HAVE GOT NOW. ”**

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## **A CONTEMPORARY FABLE**

### **Upstream / Downstream - by Ardell**

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

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

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

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

#### ***Moral:***

*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We often spend a lot of time and money dealing with problems after the fact. The tendency has been to develop costly rehabilitation and treatment programs, instead of investing resources to address root causes that put children at risk.*

## **YOUTH FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES PROJECT**

### **Executive Summary:**

The Youth for Safer Communities project was initiated by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) in response to growing incidents of youth crime and violence in the region. With financial support from the National Crime Prevention Program, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF), the William Creighton Youth Services, the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO), and local fundraising efforts, the RMYC launched a campaign to create safer communities.

The project was launched during a meeting sponsored by the Ontario's Child and Family Service Advocacy and Voices for Children at the Multicultural Youth Centre on November 14, 2003. Twenty-two youths representing urban centres and surrounding First Nations communities met at in Thunder Bay to discuss current trends in youth crime and violence across Northwestern Ontario, and what can be done to engage children and youth as part of the solution to problems.

The common points raised were:

- \* poverty puts many kids at risk of committing crime, and a lack of positive role models contributes to negative lifestyles and indiscipline.
- \* dysfunctional homes, abusive parents, addictions, a lack of parenting skills, destitution, and other family problems contribute to feelings of impotence, neglect, anger, mental health issues, craving for attention, and stress that drive youths to join gangs and lead a life of crime and violence.
- \* alcohol and drugs are major factors in criminal activity, youth-to-youth violence, sexual assaults, self-mutilation and suicide.
- \* thefts, break-and-enters, vandalism and other petty crimes have the following causes: poverty, addictions, neglect and boredom.
- \* racial tensions are high as more Aboriginal people are moving from First Nations communities to urban centres. Name-calling, stereotypes, and harassment often result in heated arguments, swarming and physical fights.

Following the meeting, a team of young people was created to develop a plan of action for the project. Activities to be organized included: holding a regional forum for youths to express their concerns about safety, share local experiences on youth crime and violence, and brainstorm ideas to reduce risk factors for children and youth engaging in criminal activities. Community leaders, educators, the police, social workers, and Elders would be invited to make presentations, facilitate workshops and share their wisdom and knowledge with the youth.

A team of youths was trained by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to lead discussions, organize focus groups, and run peer mediation sessions. RMYC officers compiled information and resource materials to enable youths to discuss issues and help them to develop recommendations to make our communities safer.

A youth conference was held September 24 to 26, 2004 in Thunder Bay. It attracted over one hundred participants from Northwestern Ontario. Most of the delegates were high school students from urban centres, rural communities and First Nations communities across the region. They were joined by political leaders, professionals and front-line workers invited to share experiences on issues of safety. The information shared assisted the youth to formulate resolutions for follow-up activities.

At the end of the conference, the delegates provided feedback on the different events organized during the weekend. The following are highlights from evaluation forms handed in after the weekend forum to assess the impact of the event:

Most effective:

- \* *YOU CAN's Dave Farthing's key-note address*
- \* *Police and community panel presentations*
- \* *Speeches by the Grand Chiefs*
- \* *Role modeling of peers who lead some of the sessions and group discussions*
- \* *Socializing and networking*

Least effective:

- \* *Rushed scheduling of workshops left no time to discuss issues in detail and get more input*
- \* *Short breaks with no time to network with other delegates*
- \* *Large groups that did not allow much individual input.*
- \* *A few noted that they learned that not much had changed on how politicians treat kids. (i.e. They cited the City of Thunder Bay developing a Children's Charter and not contributing financially for its implementation).*

What the youth participants learned:

- \* *New information on mediation, the Children's Charter, crime trends, the risks involved in using drugs and alcohol, and the importance of believing in yourself and your culture*
- \* *Panel on policing was informative and encouraged more youths to feel comfortable to talk with police officers, rather than avoid them.*
- \* *Information about programs, services and supports available in the community to help offending youth.*

Things to consider next time:

- \* *More youths to be invited to such forums*
- \* *Longer conference with more small group discussions*
- \* *More free time to socialize and discuss things informally.*

Ideas for follow-up:

- \* *There is an overwhelming desire on the part of youth to come together in similar forums to talk about issues of importance to them*
- \* *Workshops on peer mediation, drugs and alcohol and anger management*
- \* *Train more youths on how to make effective presentations.*

### **Peer Mediation to Resolve Conflict:**

Conflict resolution was promoted as an alternate strategy to deal with anger, diffuse tension and reduce aggression without violence. By providing communication skills to children and youth, they learn to resolve conflict by talking things out instead of fighting or using other forms of violence.

Peer mediation training was provided for a select group of students participating in the RMYC youth leadership development program. Youths at the Centre had identified racial and cultural tensions as a problem often resulting in fights. Mediation seemed a practical way to initiate dialogue, encourage communication, and foster understanding among youths. Therefore, Recreation Committee team leaders, RMYC officers and young women participating in the Girl-Power Program were ideal candidates for peer-mediation training, and participated in the sessions that were part of regular group meetings and weekend retreats.

MANWO and the RMYC developed a resource handbook to promote conflict resolution, and audio-visual materials were used to teach mediation skills. The video "Working It Out" acquired by the RMYC from the Madison Series teaching aids was a hit with the youth and helped to illustrate the process of mediation. Skits were incorporated in the training to give participants a 'hands-on approach' to mediation, and to show how youths can play an active part to engage peers in the process. A copy of the Conflict Resolution Manual was included in the information package handed out to delegates attending the regional youth conference.

Initial feedback has been both positive and encouraging. Youths involved in the project see peer mediation as a practical and effective way to settle disputes without fighting and the subsequent need for revenge. They feel that schools should promote mediation and have trained team leaders working with students.

## **Focus Groups:**

In the winter and spring of 2005, the RMYC conducted a study for the the William Creighton Youth Services on youth crime in Thunder Bay. Three teams of RMYC officers and peer volunteers organized focus groups across the city. Meetings were at the Multicultural Youth Centre, local high schools, William Creighton Youth Centre/Bruce J McKittrick Youth Centre, a Children's Aid Group Home, Haven House Youth Shelter, Kairos Youth Resource Centre and Limbrick Place.

A total of 172 youths were involved in formal focus group sessions across the city, and consultations were held with over 100 youths during the Revolution Girl-Style/ Girl Power summer camps, and fall orientation sessions to welcome new students to Thunder Bay high schools. One consultation took place at Pikangikum First Nation during a retreat co-ordinated by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Youth Decade Council.

Common criminal activities mentioned by the youths are: assaults, bullying, robbery, rape, uttering threats, joy-riding, break and enter, vandalism, trespassing, stealing, shop- lifting, arson, counterfeiting, breaching curfews, prostitution, trafficking, using illicit drugs, and under- age drinking.

On violence, the youth talked about youth gangs hanging around bus terminals at Water and Brodie Streets, and neighbourhoods such as Limbrick Place (referred to as "The Hood)". They beat up people for no good reason, fight over gang colours, and 'territory', or rob others for what they want – money, jewelry, cigarettes, booze, disc-players, drugs, clothes, designer jackets, runners and so forth.

During the discussions, we learned that drugs and pills such as weed/marijuana, acid/LSD, cocaine, heroin, magic mushrooms, ecstasy, Crystal-meth, T3's coolers, Oxy-Contin, Valium and percocets, morphine pills and so forth are readily used. Alcohol, beer, coolers and mouthwashes are popular. Gasoline, glue, thinners, white-out and hair-sprays, were common alternatives for kids who wanted to get high.

There is a lot of peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol, or you will be shunned, lose friends, and considered an outcast. The following statements were shared:

- \* *It starts with friends pressuring you to use. When you begin experimenting, it is often free, friends share, and it seems fun. But, before long you are hooked.*
- \* *Once you try, it is very easy to get addicted, and soon after you are stealing, shop-lifting, committing break and enter, extortion, engaging in prostitution or criminal activities to get more drugs and feel the 'high'.*



- \* *Some kids push drugs to satisfy their addiction or to make money. It is easy to sell drugs and make lots of money when you don't have a job, or a good education to do something better.*
- \* *Youth Gangs use drugs to control you. Unscrupulous adults use minors to sell drugs to their peers. Initially, it seems fun and exciting. The stuff you use may initially be provided free. But once you are hooked, they say you owe them, and you have to do whatever they want. You cannot escape the debt.*
- \* *Some of the stuff on the streets is dangerous. You really do not know what is in it, or what it is mixed with. Once you are addicted you use anything, even dirty syringes. You really don't care except to get the fix.*
- \* *Alcohol is provided by care-free parents, or friends who want to forget their misery or problems and try to have fun.*
- \* *There are also adults who provide alcohol to kids for cash, or to get them drunk so that they can have sex and abuse them.*
- \* *Booze-cans exist in the city, and young girls and boys who use them are often taken advantage of while under the influence.*
- \* *Desperate people do desperate things. Addicts and alcoholics will lie, cheat, steal from anyone including their family, or rob to get their fix.*
- \* *Drugs, alcohol and pills are common at parties, dances, and concerts.*
- \* *Legalizing/decriminalizing marijuana will make more youths feel that using drugs is OK. This will create a generation of drug addicts.*

On the things that make it easy for youths to consider criminal behaviour, the comments were as follows:

- \* *Family problems, such as marital breakdowns*
- \* *A lack of parenting skills / indiscipline*
- \* *Domestic violence*
- \* *Poverty*
- \* *Addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, etc.*
- \* *Poor communication*
- \* *Abuse - physical, sexual, emotional*
- \* *Boredom*
- \* *Peer Pressure*
- \* *Mental Illness/Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects/Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/ Attention Deficit Disorder, etc.*
- \* *Low Self Esteem*
- \* *Youth Street Gangs*
- \* *Homelessness*
- \* *Racism / Harassment*

- \* *Frustration, Indifference and Uncaring Attitudes*
- \* *The Media*
- \* *Rebellion and resentment*
- \* *Need for attention*

A lot was said about home situations contributing to many of the factors that drive youth to commit crime. Parents who do not have self-discipline, rebel against authority, abuse alcohol or drugs, always fight, steal or commit criminal acts pass these values and attitudes to their children. The kids in turn become worse than the parents and always get in trouble with the law.

Some of the comments heard during the focus groups on what makes it easy for some youths to be involved in criminal activities are as follows:

- \* *Some kids commit crime to get attention from parents too busy with their own lives to give them the love and attention they need.*
- \* *When you are poor and see nice things around you, you are tempted to steal.*
- \* *There are youths who steal to survive because its tough on the street.*
- \* *Fighting sometimes is self defense.*
- \* *You join a youth gang because you will have buddies to protect you.*
- \* *Kids use drugs and alcohol to cope with stress, escape reality, to try and feel good, and to fit in with others.*
- \* *Kids sell drugs to make easy money.*
- \* *Some adults take advantage of youths and send them to shoplift, break and enter or steal for a small cut in the profits.*
- \* *A lack of self-discipline leads many youths into trouble - i.e. breaking curfews, and breaching court orders.*
- \* *Some kids suffer from mental illness and have a hard time knowing what is right or what is wrong.*
- \* *Friends have a lot of influence, and for some reason, it is hard to say "NO" and turn down your buddies.*
- \* *Peer pressure is very strong, because youths want to belong.*
- \* *Racism and name calling can lead you to beat someone up.*
- \* *Boredom or nothing exciting to do leaves kids with a lot of free time, and if there is no supervision, many will do things that get them into trouble.*
- \* *The media creates many temptations and kids can easily try to imitate what they see in regards to crime and violence.*
- \* *Ignorance can lead to crime when you come from a reserve where there is no curfew or trespassing laws as is the case in the city.*
- \* *Kids who are angry can do a lot of damage.*

The role of parenting was mentioned by many participants who feel that positive parenting -- a loving family where kids are loved and appreciated makes a difference.

Most homeless youths at the Salvation Army's Haven House cited family problems and poor communication with parents as the main reason they were kicked out, or forced to move out. They appreciated the support at the youth shelter, without which, they would be on the streets and doing "tricks" to survive.

The home environment is an issue for youths whose parents are poor and addicts. Some youths at the Centre resent going home after school, because of the drinking. They cannot do homework due to noise from the parties. The situation is worse if parents are unemployed and do not have to get up to go to work. They drink all night using their welfare money which leaves kids to get food from food-banks.

Alcohol and drug abuse, sexual and physical abuse, and neglect result in many parents losing their children to foster care. The problems are quite obvious in Aboriginal communities affected by the legacy of residential schools. The anger, delinquency, indifference, bitterness, a lack of respect, indiscipline, alcohol and drug abuse, teen prostitution, the high rate of suicides, violence and other problems with the law can be attributed to the inter-generational impacts of residential schools.

The media is blamed for contributing to youth crime in many ways. In addition to showing violence which children imitate, advertisements targeting children and youth make it hard to resist the temptation of getting what is being shown as something one needs to be happy, fit in, or be cool. It creates tensions in the home when kids want things parents cannot afford. Stealing becomes a way to get these things.

Racism was cited as contributing to violence. There is a lot of graffiti in the alleys and back-streets of Thunder Bay putting down Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal students say that they experience racism on a regular basis at schools, in the malls or just walking on the street. Racial names are shouted at them, and pizzas, spit, pop cans, coffee cups etc. are thrown at them by moving motorists.

The Youth for Safer Communities Project exceeded our expectations. The input we got from the discussions reveal that youths are concerned about crime and violence. They want to be part of the solution to problems so that they can feel safe.

The RMYC is grateful to all the sponsors, resource people, guests, and the youth who participated in the project. We hope that the ideas and recommendations in this report will be acted on to make a difference .

## **SAFER COMMUNITIES REGIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE**

Over a hundred youth delegates, facilitators, resource people and chaperons from Northwestern Ontario gathered for the Safer Communities Regional Youth Conference, at the Victoria Inn and the Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay.

The forum provided an opportunity for the region's youths to get together and discuss crime and violence, and share ideas to make our communities safer. The event attracted delegates from Dryden, Fort Frances, Geraldton, Ignace, Kenora, Rainy River, Sioux Lookout, Terrace Bay as well as over twenty First Nations communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Treaty 9 area, Grand Council Treaty 3, and 1850 Robinson Superior Treaty area. Many of the Aboriginal youths were students from remote northern reserves attending high school, college and university in Thunder Bay.

### **Opening Address:**

Dave Farthing, Executive Director of YOUNCAN in Ottawa, opened the conference on Friday evening. YOUNCAN is renowned for the promotion of peer mediation across Canada. Dave is a talented motivational speaker who kept everyone up-beat during his address. He talked about the effectiveness of mediation to diffuse tense situations and resolve conflict, and gave examples why talking things out is a better strategy to settle disputes and build bridges of understanding. He believes that mediation as a proactive way to relieve aggression, void physical violence, reduce the potential for retaliation and the need for revenge.

YOUNCAN is working with school boards in Ottawa to establish mediation programs in schools. Encouraging children to learn skills to express themselves, listen to others, and be rational about situations, enhances communication and will break down barriers. This will enable them to solve problems without resorting to violence and minimize misunderstandings.

The RMYC is promoting peer mediation in Northwestern Ontario. Bringing in Dave Farthing, was a chance to learn the strategy YOUNCAN is using to convince Boards of Education to have mediation in schools.

The evening ended with a social for the delegates to mix and network. Music was provided by some friends – Hip-Hop artists and a DJ from Winnipeg.

## **Community Reports:**

Saturday began with ice-breakers to introduce the delegates to each other and get them primed for a full day of presentations and discussions. Then it was time to share their concerns in regards to crime and violence. Each community was asked to prepare and bring a list of local issues that affect the safety, security and well-being of children and youth.

Mary-Jean Cormier, a founding member of the RMYC, now working with the local CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio station, and RMYC President, Michael Sklazeski facilitated the session. Participants told their stories and the key points were recorded on a flip chart.

*The comments were open and candid. The following is what we learned from the discussion:*

- \* Violence is a reality across the region – in homes, at school and the community as a whole. Increasing numbers of youths are afraid of being jumped. Some are walking in groups, or carrying weapons (such as knives, razors, scissors, screwdrivers, chains, guns, pepper-spray and so forth), for protection. Unfortunately, armed youths often end up using the weapons in assaults or to commit criminal activities.
- \* Youth street gangs are a serious problem in many communities. West of Thunder Bay and in First Nations reserves, Aboriginal youth criminal gangs from Winnipeg such as Indian Posse, Manitoba Warrior, Native Syndicate and Zigzag Crew are busy recruiting. The gang scene is constantly changing with new gangs being formed and some old ones merging with others.
- \* There are local youth street gangs such as NAN Pride Crew, Family Blood Line, and other home-grown youth gangs that are active in the region. Websites created to link kids in remote northern reserves and reduce isolation are being used to glorify gangsterism, promote drugs, and recruit gang members. One has to look at K-Net home pages of some of the youths and the numbers of hits on the really 'bad' ones to realize what is going on.
- \* Criminal activities by youth street gangs include break-and-enter, car-thefts, drug trafficking, prostitution, extortion, forgery, and violence including fights and assaults with weapons, and murders over rival gang colours, turf and drug dealing. Beatings are common for members who want to leave gangs.

- \* Bullying is everywhere. Most of it occurs between students at school. Teachers are also victims of bullying by students who use verbal threats, scare tactics, obscene language, or vandalize property -- scratching vehicles, slashing tires and so forth--to create fear.
- \* Underage drinking and substance abuse are common problems even on 'dry' reserves. Parents with addiction problems are sharing alcohol, illicit drugs and prescription pills with their children. Some kids are afraid to go home at night when there are drinking parties because someone will sneak into their bed and sexually assault them.
- \* Many young students are drinking on school days. Binge drinking starts right after school. There are students going to school with a hang-over, or high on drugs and pills. If kids cannot get the booze from home, they 'pool' money to pay adults who are always willing to buy alcohol for them.
- \* Drugs such as Marijuana/weed, meth, crack, ice, coke, and pills are widely used in the region. Dealing in drugs and pills is a growing problem. Traffickers are out to make money or to take advantage and sexually exploit kids who are poor, naive, or addicts.
- \* Some traffickers are using kids as drug carriers and sellers to make a living, support their addiction, or to pay off debts. Youths who drop out of school and cannot find jobs are committing criminal activities such as selling drugs, cigarettes, pills, bootlegging alcohol, committing break and enters and selling stolen goods, forgery, extortion, counterfeit, prostitution, and other illegal activities to make a fast buck and survive.
- \* Sniffing (huffing) solvents such as glue, hair-spray, gas, lacquer etc. and drinking mouthwash are common pass-times in small remote communities where alcohol is expensive. This is a cheap way for people to get high to try and escape their problems.
- \* Most of the violence is associated with alcohol and drugs. Fights, sexual assaults and vandalism are common when people are drinking. Youths are raped or prone to engaging in sexual activities with strangers when they are drunk -- risking disease, pregnancy, and mental stress.
- \* Poverty, abuse, and addictions at home contribute to homelessness that puts youths on streets where they are involved in crime and violence to survive.

- \* Sex crimes – sexual assaults, date rape, sodomy and prostitution are occurring in the region. Most incidents are happening at home and on reserves, and the young victims are afraid, scared or feel uncomfortable to go to the police, teachers, band councils, health staff, etc. to report or complain. Some kids end up on the streets to get paid for sex, rather than be sexually abused and taken advantage of at home without compensation.
- \* Women are regular victims of abuse and violence. Many girls are beaten by their boyfriends, and stay in abusive relationships because they are afraid of being subjected to more violence. Some are forced to have sex with other partners for drugs or to pay off debts.
- \* Visits to the court house reveal high numbers of youths being arrested and charged for crimes such as uttering threats, various forms of assaults, arson, car-thefts, joy-rides, shoplifting, robberies, break-and-enters, vandalism, swarming, drug and alcohol offences, and breaches. Some of the sentences by the judges are not stiff enough to deter youths from re-committing crime.
- \* Boredom and a lack of affordable recreational activities leave many kids on the streets, and curfews are viewed as an option to protect property and youths from harming each other. With nothing better to do, and no safe places to hang out many youths end up getting in trouble with the law.
- \* Racial tensions are growing as our populations becomes more diverse. Racially motivated assaults are common in urban centres and schools with growing numbers of Aboriginal people. Consequently, some minority youths band together in gangs to feel safe. Political and religious divisions can be so strong that in some reserves such as Pikangikum, families bury their dead in the yard to protect the graves from being vandalized.
- \* Delegates commented that some police officers, security guards, teachers, priests, chiefs and parents are not positive role models and cannot be trusted to protect children and youth. The results of these situations creates a range of reactions such as: anxiety, anger, and resentment that leads to violence, addictions, suicidal tendencies, self-mutilation, poor social relationships and problems with authority.

There was a general consensus that exposure to abuse, addictions, neglect, violence, crime in the home, and dysfunctions in the family puts kids at risk. Intervention is needed to break an ever-growing cycle of social outcasts.

### **Aboriginal Leaders' Forum:**

Leaders from the Aboriginal community addressed delegates. Charles Fox, Ontario's Regional Chief to the Assembly of First Nations; Alvin Fiddler, NAN Deputy Grand Chief; Stan Beardy, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief and Elder Fred Kelly shared their stories with the delegates who were seated in a large circle. The following is what the youth learned from the session:

Regional Chief Charles Fox was the first to speak. He shared personal experiences about oppression, the legacy of colonization, and the impact of residential schools on Aboriginal people. Highlights of the comments are:

- \* Negative experiences have contributed to deplorable living conditions, high suicide rates, violence, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, disease, alcohol and drug abuse, crime and violence. People who have lost their land, culture, religion, independence and pride are often caught in negative cycles.
- \* Regular assaults, gang-fights, swarming, bullying, stabbings, robberies, sexual assault, date rape, prostitution, racial and sexual harassment, vandalism, shop-lifting, break-and-enters occur in most communities and schools.
- \* Aboriginal youths should aspire to get a good education and not drop out of school so that they can help to change things in their communities.
- \* We should all recognize what has been done to the First Nations, and work together to improve the situation of everyone in our society.

Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, who holds NAN's health and youth portfolio, made the following comments:

- \* Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people need to know more about each other to eliminate the ignorance and barriers that divide us.
- \* The high self-mutilation and suicide rates, crime and violence among the youth indicate growing despair among Aboriginal youth. The youth have to play an active part and stay in school to improve the quality of life.
- \* Aboriginal leaders are concerned about the well-being of their children and youth, and are investing in education, health programs, restorative justice models and self governance to make a difference.



- \* The youth must do something positive in society. He was training for a marathon in Iceland to raise funds for Diabetes -- a disease that is devastating many First Nations communities.

Grand Chief Stan Beady shared his vision to help young people. As future leaders, they had to strive to be the best they can. He urged the youth to get an education, pursue career goals and aim for a better life for themselves and their communities. He was concerned about the growing incidents of violence and the high percentage of school drop-outs among Aboriginal students. He encouraged them to utilize all the supports available to help them realize their dreams and succeed.

- \* As leader of Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), he is concerned about the high incidents of violence in NAN territory which covers thirds of Ontario.
- \* He was disturbed with the emergence of youth gangs, crime and violence in NAN communities.
- \* And on a personal note, he spoke as a parent about losing his only child to physical violence last summer. He recounted the pain as a parent losing a teenage son, a talented hockey player, exemplary student, and a positive role model due to youth-to-youth violence.
- \* Children and youth should value life, learn from the teachings of Elders, utilize various resources available to help them, gain knowledge to make wise choices, set goals and aspire to achieve them.
- \* Youth must watch out who they hang around with, refrain from abusing alcohol, drugs, and anything that impair their judgement.
- \* He was appreciative of such a gathering for youths to discuss violence and crime, find solutions to make our communities safer, and avoid the tragedy that befell his son, Daniel, that is becoming common place on and off reserves.
- \* Nishnawbe Aski Nation has a Decade for Youth Council based in the NAN offices in Thunder Bay. The Youth Council headed by youths is working to address the legacy and inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and the challenges Aboriginal children are facing in a complex changing society.

Elder Fred Kelly closed the Aboriginal Leaders' session. He held an eagle feather, a traditional symbol of respect and shared the following teachings:

- \* Children and youth are the future, and how we raise them will reflect on the next generation and the kind of world we create.
- \* Four colours in a circle symbolize all races united and living in harmony. This is how we should all live together.
- \* Alcohol, violence, crime, disease and other problems common among Aboriginal people today show a wounded nation whose life has been disrupted and damaged. Residential schools contributed to the problems we face, and we need healing.
- \* Aboriginal youth need to learn about their culture, religion and values so that they can be proud of who they are as peace loving people.
- \* Youth are the next generation and it is important to respect each other, learn about the different gifts and talents we have to share to promote understanding.
- \* People should seek inner peace, and make our contribution to the well-being of Mother Earth

### **Community Panel:**

The afternoon sessions featured a community panel with a City Councillor, a Student Trustee, and a representative from the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC) and presentations from three different police services.

Thunder Bay City Councillor, Joe Virdiramo represented the Mayor, and spoke about the Thunder Bay Children's Charter adopted by City Council on June 14, 2004. Commenting on the same issue he added the following points:

- \* He is the Children's Advocate appointed by the City to promote Thunder Bay's Children's Charter, and advancing values and issues that enhance the quality of life for children and youth (from birth to 18 years of age) in the city.
- \* The Children's Charter is now a part of the City's new strategic plan, and covered areas such as health, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social needs, children's programs, services and activities, protection from neglect and abuse, security, and safety from exploitation.

His position involves working with the Thunder Bay's Children's Charter Coalition--a group of agencies and service providers. He is the voice of City Council on the Coalition, and serves as Coalition's voice on City Council.

(A handout on the Children's Charter of Rights outlining what all Thunder Bay children deserve was included in the conference kits.)

- \* Mr. Murray Waboose, Director of Student Services with the NNEC spoke about the services offered to Aboriginal students from remote northern reserves to help them adjust to studying in an urban setting. Mrs. Margaret Kenequanash, chair of the NNEC board was also at the forum. NNEC values education and runs programs to help Aboriginal students do well in school.
- \* NNEC runs three urban schools in Ear Falls, Sioux Lookout--Pelican Falls and Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay, to ease transition of young Aboriginal students into urban mainstream. There are student residences in Ear Falls and Pelican Falls for a home atmosphere. Chaperons are provided for the safety and security of the students. Counseling is provided to deal with social issues and culture shock.
- \* In Thunder Bay, NNEC uses boarding homes for students to stay while attending school in the city. There are guidelines for students to adhere to during their stay. These include policies and procedures that include a code of conduct, and curfews to prevent them from staying out late at night and risk their safety. Vans are provided to ensure that students who are stranded at bus stops get home safely.
- \* NNEC works with the Aboriginal Liaison Unit established by the Thunder Bay Police to orientate native students attending school in the city. They need "street-proofing" to be familiar with city bylaws and law enforcement. For example, loitering and trespassing, gang- attire, and so forth are offenses chargeable in the city, but not an issue on First Nations communities.
- \* NNEC collaborates with other agencies to provide supports Aboriginal boarding students need to deal with issues they face living away from home.
- \* NNEC helps students to deal with the racism they experience regularly in urban centres. The students are warned not to take matters into their own hands if they are called names. They can be charged if they retaliate, threaten, fight or assault perpetrators.

- \* NNEC offers tutoring to help students academically, recreational activities to keep them fit and busy after hours, and brings in speakers on different topics including abuse of alcohol and drugs to help students learn about the risks, and make wise choices.

Michael Sklazeski, a past Student Trustee with Lakehead Public Schools shared what the Board of Education is doing to create a safe learning environment as follows:

- \* The Zero Tolerance policies and Code of Conduct adopted by school boards are there to ensure the security of students and staff.
- \* Students should report fights, bullying, sexual or racial harassment, vandalism, or anything that threatens their safety to school authorities so that they are aware of the problems in order to address them.
- \* New initiatives such as video cameras in school buses, and at Sir Winston Churchill and Westgate High Schools were introduced to monitor student activity and enhance security.
- \* Professional development sessions for Teachers and Administrators such as "Behaviour Supports: Strategies for Defining, Teaching and Supporting Appropriate Student Behaviours", and workshops such as "Closing the Distance", have been organized to promote a safe school environment.
- \* Students are encouraged to speak to social workers, and/or guidance counsellors, teachers, vice principals and principals to deal with situations that may arise. Community supports are in place for students who have witnessed violence in their home.
- \* The board supports the Drug Awareness Committee (DAC) , the Drug Abuse Resistance Program (DARE) with the Thunder Bay Police and participates in the annual SAFE Party event.
- \* The Lakehead Public School Board has formed partnerships with the Ontario Provincial Police, Thunder Bay City Police, and Anishinabek Police Service for supports as needed.
- \* Neighbourhood Police and School Resource Officers are regularly invited into schools for presentations.

- \* Students are encouraged to be involved in school committees, leadership programs, and with the Student Council teams. They work together to develop projects and activities their school needs.

From the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board (TBCDSB), we received the following information:

- \* The TBCDSB endeavours to ensure the school environment is characterized by respect, dignity, and trust which is consistent with Gospel values. All members of the school communities, staff, students, parents/guardians, and visitors are responsible for creating this environment.
- \* All TBCDSB schools have published Codes of Conduct to promote and enhance student safety.
- \* Acknowledging that violence is an issue of concern for the entire community, the TBCDSB participates in initiatives that address local violence and crime prevention strategies offered in the community. This includes being involved with the Anti-Racism Committee work sponsored by Health Canada and the Lakehead Social Planning Council, and participating in the community forums to respond to the new Youth Criminal Justice Act.
- \* The TBCDSB has introduced school uniforms to facilitate bonding and build school pride. Uniforms also provide security in the school as it is easier to pick out visitors and trespassers, reduces the risk of mugging for brand name/designer clothes, and foster team spirit among all students.
- \* Both school boards promote non-violence in schools and are committed to engaging students in creating a safer learning environment for everyone. Student Councils have an important role to play in providing input to school administration on the safety and security of students.

Dave Farthing joined the panel to comment on the merits of conflict resolution to enhance safety in schools. Prior to the conference he met with representatives of the Lakehead Public School Board to discuss peer mediation and what YOUCAN can offer in training and resource materials.

He hoped to work together with the RMYC to promote the program in the region so that more schools can participate and provide their students with mediation skills to reduce violence.

**Police Panel:**

Invited police officers were: Constable Bob Woods from the Aboriginal Liaison Unit of the Thunder Bay Police Service, Nishnawbe Aski Police Service (NAPS) Chief Wesley Luloff, and Sargent Tim McCoy of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).

Constable Woods was part of the Community Panel and shared the following:

- \* He was aware of the negative image youths generally have about police officers, and the barriers this creates for co-operation. He is interested to build bridges, and wants to hear first-hand the concerns.
- \* In his capacity as the Aboriginal liaison officer, he has been working to improve communication between officers and Aboriginal youth, the fastest growing population in the city.
- \* Shortage of manpower, and increasing high priority workload limits time for public relations to get to know the youth better, and help those not familiar with city laws before they get in trouble.
- \* Youths should feel free to contact him with their concerns, and offer suggestions as to how they would like to see the issues addressed so that we can all work together to reduce crime and violence in the city.

NAPS Police Chief Luloff explained the challenges of providing security in small isolated communities with limited officers and resources.

- \* Isolation, boredom, poverty, and over-crowding are all factors contributing to youth crime, violence and assaults on many reserves.
- \* There is a need for more social workers and counsellors to work with children and youth to advise and guide them. Many have underlying issues that need professional help, while others lack family supports.
- \* Limited recreational facilities, a lack of structured social events, and a shortage of volunteers to organized fun activities for children contributed to truancy, delinquency and other negative lifestyles.
- \* Police officers do a better job when they are supported by the community, are backed by the justice system, and get no interference from the local leadership.

- \* Alcohol is a factor in most of the violent incidents his police officers encounter. Booze gets into “dry fly-in reserves” because there are people eager to smuggle it there, and those wanting to buy it. As long as there is a lucrative market, alcohol and drugs will find its way into any community. Solvents
- \* Youth street gangs are an emerging problem and proximity to Winnipeg is a contributing factor on some reserves.
- \* There is a need for more Aboriginal police officers, and youths need to be aware of the qualities, responsibilities and positive aspects of policing.

The OPP's Sargent McCoy shared the following comments:

- \* Policing is a partnership between officers and the general public. Good communication, building trust respect and understanding are important for crime prevention, solving crime and making communities safer.
- \* Police officers are often called to quell disturbances or make arrests, and this gives the perception that they are law enforcers, and not protectors.
- \* Policing in a multicultural society implies meeting unique needs of diverse communities. The OPP has been proactive in recruiting officers from all backgrounds to reflect the diversity in the community they serve
- \* The OPP has an on-going recruitment campaign. There is a targeted effort to reach out to Aboriginal and racial minority youth to join policing services so that they reflect the changing population of the province.
- \* Joining policing services is not limited to front-line officers on. There are some civilian jobs and office support staff who play an important role to enhance our safety and security.
- \* Youths interested in policing as a career should familiarize themselves with the requirements to qualify for the selection process - i.e. educational background, fitness, criminal record checks, and so forth.

After the presentation, some youths wanted to talk with the police officers. We are delighted with the number of delegates who felt comfortable to approach the officers and ask questions. The officers were friendly and spent some time to get acquainted with the conference participants.

## **Reviewing Resource Materials – Facts and Figures**

The last session was a review of resource materials in the Conference Kits and the handouts displayed at the information table. The purpose was to highlight the facts and statistics related to crime and violence from research, studies and reports.

### **1. Violence and Crime Statistics:**

From Statistics Canada, & Correctional Service Canada print-outs, we learned that:

- \* 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.
- \* More than 50 per cent of the current population in federal institutions were under the influence of alcohol and drugs when they committed offences that led to their incarceration. About a quarter of all those incarcerated committed drug-related crimes, and 20 per cent have a history of mental health disorders.
- \* 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.
- \* Aboriginal people represent 3per cent of adult Canadians but 16 per cent of all federal prisoners (and 43per cent for the Northwestern Ontario-Prairie region\* and about 85per cent in the Kenora -Thunder Bay area)
- \* A majority of women offenders are survivors of physical and sexual abuse and trauma.
- \* There are currently 50 separate gangs in federal institutions, and 41 separate gangs and gang types that offenders on conditional release belong to. Outlaw motorcycle gangs, Aboriginal gangs and traditional organized crime are the most prevalent gangs inside institutions, where they pose a serious threat to staff and orderly operation of the facilities.
- \* The federal correctional system alone costs \$1.58 billion a year – \$110,000.00 yearly per maximum-security prisoner; \$70,000.00 for medium; \$69,000.00 for minimum, and \$169,000.00 per woman.



## **2. Violence at School - Bullying:**

News articles produced by the RMYC revealed that:

- \* Bullying is the most common form of violence among students. In a comprehensive study conducted in Toronto schools, a child is bullied every 7 minutes. Teachers are aware of only 4 per cent of the incidents.
- \* In Northwestern Ontario Schools, a majority of students participating in the RMYC survey stated that they do not report incidents of bullying to teachers because they are afraid of retaliation, they will be teased for whining, or feel that nothing will be done.

## **3. Date Rape:**

News articles published by the Chronicle Journal (February 28, 1997, & April 7, 1977) revealed that:

- \* Date rape is a common problem and many cases go unreported.
- \* One in four college age students had been a victim of rape or attempted rape, and 57 per cent of the assaults occurred on dates.
- \* 73 per cent of assailants and 55 per cent of the victims had used alcohol or other drugs prior to the assault.
- \* 56 per cent of high school girls and 76 per cent high school boys believed that forced sex was acceptable under some circumstances.
- \* 51 per cent of the boys and 41 per cent of the girls said forced sex was acceptable if the boy 'spent a lot of money' on the girl.
- \* Among 11 to 14 year olds, 65 per cent of the boys and 47 per cent of the girls said it was acceptable for a boy to rape a girl if they had been dating for more than six months.
- \* 31 per cent of the boys and 32 per cent of the girls 11 to 14 years of age in a school survey (cited above) said it was acceptable for a man to rape a woman if she had past sexual experience.
- \* 80 per cent of boys and 79 per cent of girls said sexual assault was acceptable if the man and woman were married.

- \* Date rape drugs are available in Northwestern Ontario including small isolated communities.
- \* Alcohol is still the most common date-rape drug of convenience and choice.

#### **4. Sexual Assault / Violence Against Women:**

A study published by Wawatay News (June 17, 2004) revealed that:

- \* 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.

A study by Save the Children Canada (Chronicle-Journal, December 5, 2000), revealed the following:

- \* An estimated 90 per cent of teens involved in street sex trade in some Canadian cities were Aboriginal.
- \* Physical, emotional and sexual abuse contribute to the problem along with racism, addiction and poverty.

A report published in Anishinabek News (April, 2004) revealed that:

- \* approximately 500 Aboriginal women have gone missing in Canada over the past 20 years, and their disappearance met with indifference.

A study released by the University of Manitoba, (Chronicle-Journal February 14, 2003) revealed that:

- \* Aboriginal women are up to seven times more likely to be abused by their partners than non-Aboriginal women.

A printout from the Ontario Women's Directorate: Violence Against Women website: <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english/facts/preventing.htm> provided the following facts and statistics:

- \* In Canada, in 1998, 82.6 per cent of victims in reported cases of sexual assault were women; 98 per cent of the accused were men.
- \* In 70 per cent of the reported cases of sexual assault, the victim knew the accused; 62 per cent of the victims were under the age of 18.
- \* Women accounted for 88 per cent of all reported spousal (domestic) violence victims in 1997.
- \* Some 20 per cent of women who leave an abusive partner experience continued (and often more severe) violence during or after the separation.
- \* Children witnessed violence against their mothers in almost 40 per cent of violent marriages.
- \* In 1997-1998, 15,257 women and 13,455 dependent children were admitted to shelters in Ontario.
- \* Four out of every five Canadian victims of spousal homicide in 1998 were female, and six in ten Canadian incidents of spousal homicide involved a history of domestic violence, of which police were aware.
- \* Young women under 25 are at greatest risk of spousal homicide.

A Statistics Canada report (*Chronicle-Journal*, February, 2000) revealed that:

- \* Aboriginal people are over-represented in courts and jails because they are poor, unemployed and have less education.

## **5. Youth Street Gangs:**

The *Chronicle-Journal* (October 25, 1998) stated that:

- \* Winnipeg gangs had established themselves in Kenora during the past few years and were heading east.
- \* The Ontario Provincial Police in Kenora acknowledged that First Nations communities in the Kenora area were already affected by Winnipeg gangs involved in break-ins, thefts, car thefts and assaults.

The Chronicle-Journal, (November 5, and November 6, 2002) quotes Thunder Bay Police Chief, Bob Herman stating the following:

- \* Youth street gangs are a growing problem in Thunder Bay, and the local police service had set up a 'gang unit' to handle gang activity in the city.
- \* Gang members as young as 10 years old are involved in illegal and violent acts. Their level of violence is extremely vicious.
- \* Activities of street gangs in Thunder Bay include running booze cans and selling drugs, and one youth gang in the city is linked to the Hells Angels.

A study by Jane Gilgun for the Minnesota Legislature and Corrections department published in the St. Paul Pioneer Press (November 20, 1994) presented the known risk factors for adolescents joining youth street gangs as:

1. Poverty
2. Abuse
3. Violent role models
4. Racism
5. Absence of fathers
6. Out-of-home placement

## **6. Drugs, Alcohol and Solvents:**

Articles in The Chronicle-Journal (February 15, 2002, December 5, 2003, and February 15, 2004) reported that:

- \* The problem of drug abuse is reaching new proportions in Canada as communities are now embarked on "harm-reduction" programs and resort to offer free needles and some 'drug-centres to monitor users and reduce the spread of infection.
- \* Northwestern Ontario has introduced the harm-reduction program in Thunder Bay which is now being expanded to some of the smaller communities based on need. From the free needles distributed each year, the use of illegal drugs is increasing.
- \* Corrections Canada has a 'harm reduction' program in its institutions to try and reduce health risks in the facilities. The problem is growing and reveals the on-going failure to contain drug use while inmates are in custody.

- \* Kids know when parents do drugs, and youths who start using drugs early are more likely to be regular users.
- \* Youth drug use is on the rise across Canada. In 2001, 75 per cent of students consumed alcohol compared to 59 per cent in 1997, and the use of cannabis rose from 25.5 per cent to 37 per cent among students.
- \* In 2001, 89 per cent of females aged 15 to 49 in Northwestern Ontario consumed alcohol compared to 77 per cent across the province. 10 per cent more students use alcohol than the rest of the province; 7 per cent more students use drugs, and 8 per cent more smoke cigarettes compared to other regions.
- \* Boredom is a common reason youths cite for indulging in alcohol and substance abuse.

## **7. Poverty:**

News articles in The Chronicle-Journal (November 25 & 30, 2000) revealed that:

- \* Between 1989 and 2000, child poverty in Canada rose by 49 per cent, and in Ontario, the number of poor children more than doubled to 538,000.
- \* 52 per cent of Aboriginal children in urban centres are living in poverty.
- \* The emergence of food banks in our communities and regular appeals for food by volunteer organizations to feed the hungry is a reflection of poverty.
- \* The growing numbers of the homeless, and the need for emergency shelters reflect a growing trend of poverty.

## **8. Racism:**

The Chronicle-Journal (March 22, 2002, and April 15, 2004) reported that:

- \* 54 per cent of residents in Thunder Bay participating in a city-wide survey in 2001 had observed racial discrimination in the past year, and 56 per cent of Aboriginal people said they experienced racial discrimination.
- \* In 2005, youths participating in a Health Canada project in Thunder Bay identified racism and its impacts as a top concern in regards to their quality of life, safety and security.

### **Saturday Evening Keynote Address:**

Tara Syed, the Conference Organizing Committee team leader, and RMYC President designate delivered a keynote address after dinner on Saturday evening. She shared her perspective on youth violence, current trends, and what can be done to break the cycle so as to prevent perpetuation of the problem that threatens our safety.

Tara defined violence as any intentional, physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological assault on another person. This is anything that hurts, or makes one feel unsafe or uncomfortable anywhere. There is physical violence which involves throwing, pushing, shoving, grabbing, hitting, kicking, stabbing, shooting and rape. Emotional violence includes verbal abuse and threats, scolding, harassment, sexist language, racial taunts, shouting, yelling and put-downs that are hurtful, painful and mentally damaging. Bullies often use physical and emotional violence to control, manipulate, scare and hurt their victims.

Another dimension of youth violence is experienced through social relationships. Stalking, jealousy, possessiveness, and date rape are examples of unwanted affection and coercive love and sexual contact. It is usually young men who perpetrate sexual violence on female peers, siblings and acquaintances. Victims are often forced to perform sexual acts against their will and suffer pain, injury or emotional damage in the process.

She commented on a general misconception that a majority of youths are both violent and criminals who prey on adults. Contrary to these opinions, it is a minority of youths who commit violent crimes, mainly against each other. Victims of youth crime and violence are often peers, acquaintances, friends, schoolmates, rival youth gangs, and not adults or strangers. However, when adults are victims, it is often robbery and mugging directed at the elderly, women, the physically challenged and other vulnerable seniors in the community.

Tara ended her speech by sharing suggestions to prevent violence. She offered peer mediation as a process that provides an opportunity to resolve conflict by talking things out rather than by fighting. Counseling helps to alleviate anger, frustration and stress, and offers ways to deal with personal problems. Building self-esteem, and learning social skills that reduce tension and aggression will help to promote a culture of peace. Treatment and supports for addictions and mental disorders can help to control behaviour, temper and emotions that have the potential of leading to violence on self or others. Parenting skills, discipline, fairness, social justice, as well as preventive social programs play an important part in creating safer communities.

## **SUNDAY PLENARY SESSION and FOCUS GROUPS**

The last day was devoted to developing a follow-up strategy to the conference. Delegates recapped information shared during the weekend, and brain-stormed ideas to make communities safer. They were also asked to come up with a list of 'best practises' or things that they felt were being done right to prevent as well as reduce youth crime and violence.

Michael Sklazeski led the session. Tara Syed and Farida Abu-Bakare took notes. Below is a summary of points discussed which served as reference for formulating resolutions and making recommendations that appear later in this report.

*The youth defined a "safe community" as one where:*

- ☺ children are loved, feel they belong, and are free from harm, danger and abuse;
- ☺ children are happy, healthy, have their needs met, their rights and privileges respected, and they have hope for a great future
- ☺ there is peace, no poverty, there is no need for fighting to survive and everyone gets along.

There were comments on the qualities of people who make a community or society unsafe. The list included those who are selfish, greedy, irresponsible, disrespectful, inconsiderate, violent, uncaring, as well as anyone without a social conscience about hurting others.

The youth also gave examples of what communicates a lack of caring and safety:

- *basic social uncaring to obvious concerns about violence and serious crime.*
- *littering in areas where children play, dirty and unsanitary streets with broken glass, beer bottles, discarded syringes, used condoms and other health hazards.*
- *pollution, improper disposal of chemicals or other dangerous substances contribute to an unsafe environment.*
- *irresponsible and reckless drivers, or those operating vehicles while impaired.*
- *workers who disregard safety guidelines or instructions and risk hurting others*
- *people who are infected by diseases such as HIV, Aids or other sexually transmitted diseases and knowingly pass this onto others.*
- *stalkers, paedophiles, and those who abduct children and abuse them.*
- *traffickers who give or sell laced drugs that harm innocent victims.*
- *pregnant mothers who drink and take drugs that harm the unborn child.*
- *people who remove road safety signs and other danger-warning signs.*
- *uncaring people who do not warn others of impending danger or disaster.*

## **Highlights from Plenary Discussions and Focus Groups:**

The following are the main themes and comments from the conference delegates and participants in the focus groups:

### **(I) Parenting:**

Youths feel that a family is very important for nurturing and raising children. A safe, loving, and respectful home is conducive to children growing up healthy and well disciplined. As our industrialized society evolves, people are highly mobile in search of jobs, and traditional extended family supports that helped to bring up children have diminished. The social pressures and stress of the workplace lead to family break-ups that leave children feeling abandoned. Kids can become pawns in divorce battles and abductions are a safety concern. Some feel neglected as separated parents often get caught up trying to move on and re-organize their own lives.

Parents are role models for their children. The generation of parents, who, as youths indulged in the 'hippie' culture of free sex, drugs, and rebelled against authority have passed on the same values and attitudes to their children. This has contributed to children who are casual with sex, alcohol, drugs, hard to discipline, and disrespectful of the establishment and authority, creating the potential for more youth at risk.

The wanton promotion of casual sex through mass media without emphasizing parental responsibilities and social consequences exacerbates the current situation. Many immature teens are becoming pregnant without the parenting skills to raise and nurture children. This creates a vicious cycle of dysfunctional families and single parents. The effects are multiplied when education is disrupted, and young parents fail to provide the basics needed for the healthy well-being of their children. More children today end up in care and are more likely to repeat the same lifestyle.

Abuse, violence, addictions, poverty, stress, mental health and neglect are common reasons children become 'wards of the crown'. Foster homes, social service agencies and other institutions are taking over 'parenting' roles for children who need stable safe homes, professional help and care to deal with trauma and mental health issues.

- \* A majority of youths attribute initial problems leading to a life of crime and violence to unstable home environments. Dysfunctional families, abusive parents and violent role models fuel anger, stress, rebellion, resentment and confusion that put children at risk. Many end up dropping out of school, homeless, poor, abusing drugs/alcohol, and vulnerable to life on the streets.



- \* In homes where parents suffer from alcohol, drug or gambling addictions, children are often poor and neglected. Simply giving more money to such parents without addressing the underlying problems will not help the kids. The money will go to feed the addiction, and the situation will not improve.
- \* Situations such as single parents, low-income and destitute families where parents are struggling to make ends meet and cannot afford good quality day-care, leads to the children feeling abandoned. The resentment can lead to insubordination and some children end up in trouble to get attention.
- \* Many Aboriginal people are affected by the legacy of residential schools, and are at higher risk not to succeed as care-givers and role models for their children. They lost their language, traditional teachings, parenting skills and identity when they were forcibly removed from their home. A significant number of Aboriginal children today still suffer from the inter-generational impacts, and many end up in foster homes. Some experience mental and social problems with high risks of violence, crime, self-mutilation and suicide.
- \* Some youths prefer the care and comfort provided in correctional facilities than life in abusive homes. Safe accommodation, three meals a day, an organized lifestyle with a structure, caring staff, life skills training, cultural teachings, cognitive skills, recreation, Counseling, and so forth in detention are better than the harsh reality of unpredictable life in a dysfunctional abusive home, or life on the streets. There are repeat offenders taking advantage of the support services in corrections. Unfortunately, some young offenders end up making negative friends who recruit them to join street gangs.

*Suggestions to address parenting issues are:*

- \* Parenting should be recognized as essential for the healthy development and growth of children. Cultural groups, churches, and social service agencies should be mobilized to help prospective parents learn parenting skills.
- \* The school curriculum on sex education should be expanded to include parenting courses for both boys and girls to compliment community efforts in teaching young couples and single parents responsibilities of raising children.
- \* Proactive youth centres should be supported as havens for youths in problem homes to hang out, get help, learn life skills and ways to deal with their situations in the support of positive role model and peers.

- \* There should be an affordable, standardized and readily accessible daycare program in local community centres, neighbourhood schools, and workplaces for parents who require the service. This would help many struggling families and help to instill and foster basic Canadian values among the next generation.
- \* Parents should be made more accountable for the well-being of their children. The parents also need to take some responsibility for the problems their children encounter and any criminal activities they are involved in.

**(ii) Media:**

- \* Mass media is a popular and convenient way to disseminate information, promote ideas, communicate messages that create demands and set trends. The media today is a powerful tool with the potential to influence attitudes, values, and behaviour. New technology is enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the media to communicate with kids.
- \* Our society is commercially driven, and the media is a very effective tool to advertise and sell goods and services. The idea is to manipulate minds and create a demand to make money, with little or no regard for social outcomes. Consequently, violence and crime are marketed on TV shows, in movies, electronic games, toys, comics, magazines, books, and so forth as fun and entertainment to generate revenue.
- \* Children and youth are surrounded by visual images of crime and violence on television, computers, magazines, comics, and electronic games. The radio fills airwaves with songs that have explicit lyrics on sex, drugs, crime and violence. Some television and radio programs even give the audience ideas of what went wrong when crime is committed—as if to challenge the audience not to make the same mistakes and avoid being caught. This can be appealing and exciting for youth who are easily tempted to try anything.
- \* Each day, we are bombarded with graphic news reports of wars and killings, incidents where husbands kill spouses, employees shoot workmates, students attack school-mates, youths assault their peers and so forth. We are seeing children being trained as soldiers to kill, gang attacks, and suicide bombers creating havoc and mayhem. This has a desensitizing and dehumanizing effect on children who grow up seeing fighting and murder as 'normal'. Consequently, when tempers flare and youths are angry, it is easier to resort to violence than try to resolve disputes through peaceful ways.

*The following suggestions can reduce the impact of media violence and manipulative advertising on children who are easily influenced by what they see, read, or hear:*

- \* There is a need to control the violence children are exposed to through the media so that they do not grow up thinking that it is acceptable to fight, use guns and other weapons as they see on television, in movies and video games. There should be responsible advertising as not to create potential thieves, shoplifters, reckless drivers, drunks and potential criminals.
- \* There is support for labelling movies and rating television shows, videos and electronic games where parental guidance is necessary.
- \* There is support for the current scheduling of programs for mature audiences late at night, and parental advisory notices for movies, and music with lyrics that are offensive, violent or have obscene language. Age-code labelling on video games and toys, and restricting the sale of violent video games, violent movies, books, magazines and comics to minors, as is done with adult magazines, cigarettes and alcohol should be enforced.
- \* The government should set standards and work with producers, broadcasters, and concerned citizens to encourage self-censorship of violent content on:
  - ☺ *Children's commercials and related advertising*
  - ☺ *Children's television shows, movies, and commercials targeting kids*
  - ☺ *Children's computer programs and video games*
  - ☺ *Children's comics and magazines*
- \* There should be a concerted effort to educate parents on the importance of monitoring what their children are watching on TV, the sites they visit on the internet, video games they are playing, and the music they are listening to on CDs, MP3s, Ipods, etc. Communication with children and youth is important to show a caring relationship.
- \* Stiffer penalties are need for producers of child pornography, those who abduct children and youth or lure them via the internet for sexual exploitation.
- \* Advertising works. If we are serious about stopping violence, the media should be engaged as a partner to educate and inform kids about the risks and consequences of regular exposure to violence, electronic games and toys that present and promote violence as fun and entertainment.

### **(iii) Sports:**

Any sport activity should emphasize sportsmanship, entertainment, fitness and fun, instead of the brawls, fights, hooliganism, indiscipline and drugs that now seem to be part of the game. There is no need for violence in sports, particularly among the sports heroes kids look up to as role models. Drugs, whether recreational or performance-enhancing should not be promoted. Youths should not get mixed messages that it is OK to beat someone up, intentionally hurt another player, or swarm on your opponents in a game, and not at school. They should also be discouraged from feeling that it is “cool” to use drugs.

*To teach children the ideals of sportsmanship, good character and discipline as promoted by the Olympic games where violence and drugs are not tolerated it is suggested that:*

- \* Assault charges should be laid for brawls at hockey games and other sports as would generally happen if there is a fight anywhere else. Stiffer penalties should be levied against those who want publicity and notoriety for aggression, assaulting, or injuring other players.
- \* Concerned citizens and parents should monitor violence in sports and lobby governments, team owners, coaches, referees and players to ban fights and other actions where players deliberately hurt each other. Young athletes should be encouraged to improve skills instead of trying to beat each other up or hurt opponents.
- \* An aggressive awareness campaign should be developed to discourage children and youth from using drugs to enhance their performance in sports.
- \* Commercial wrestling which is popular entertainment with violent acts should be scheduled for late night viewing, and advisory messages should be included that the performers are actors and entertainers.

### **(iv) Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault:**

Statistics Canada report for 2003, reveals that people under the age of 18 were victims in 61 per cent of sexual assaults reported to police. The numbers should be higher as not all assaults are reported. The consequences are serious, and victims will not have a normal life. Corrections Canada reports indicate that a majority of women offenders are survivors of physical and sexual abuse and trauma.

*Suggestions to reduce the risks of sexual assaults and address the problem are:*

- \* Society must send a message that sexual abuse, date rape, and sexual assault are not tolerated, and continue the current campaign to prevent domestic violence.
- \* Support and continue current efforts to sensitize police officers, teachers, youth workers, health personnel and other members of the community to be approachable by victims of assault.
- \* Adults who sexually abuse, exploit and assault youths should receive stiffer sentences, and youths who do the same to their peers should get Counseling, and appropriate penalties that deter them from committing similar crimes.
- \* Young women should be empowered with relevant information to enable them to make the right choices and wise decisions about relationships, the risks of abusing alcohol and drugs in relation to health, addictions, abductions, gangs and sexual exploitation. Supporting and expanding youth-led initiatives to raise awareness on safety will make a difference.
- \* Victims of sexual assaults should be provided with easy access to professional help and supports to deal with the pain and trauma. Communities should provide safe places for children who are abused and to report assaults when they occur to help stop the abuse.
- \* All females should be made aware of resources and supports available to help them deal with sexual abuse, date rape and sexual assault. They should also be taught about risk factors such as alcohol and drugs, rape, infections, etc., learn to be assertive, and take the necessary precautions to protect themselves.
- \* Women should be encouraged and supported to pursue their education goals and choose careers and professions for independence to avoid being trapped in unhealthy, oppressive and abusive relationships for survival and sustenance.
- \* Mothers should play an active role in raising their sons to respect women and educate them not to abuse females.
- \* Young men should learn about healthy relationships with women, gender equality, and mutual respect, and all parents should endeavour to be positive role models in this regard.

**(v) Bullying:**

Bullying is a common form of violence among children and youth. Most youths have personally experienced bullying or seen incidents where their peers are bullied on a regular basis. A recent comprehensive study conducted in Toronto schools reveals that a child is bullied every seven minutes, and teachers are aware of only 4 per cent of these incidents.

In a survey conducted by the RMYC, students in Northwestern Ontario high schools said that bullying, assaults, harassment and other forms of aggressive behaviour are common at school, in playgrounds and on school buses. Many students do not report incidents of bullying to teachers, the police or other authority figures because they do not want to be witnesses, are afraid of retaliation and do not feel protected against revenge attacks.

Kids bully because they see others do it, and may feel that it is “cool”. Some like to feel stronger and have power and control to order others around. Others bully in self-defense, to enhance their self-image, or to deal with personal issues, family problems, or due to their social circumstances.

Punching, grabbing, hitting, pinching and shoving are examples of physical ways bullies hurt their peers.

Emotional ways to bully include verbal threats, yelling, shouting, name-calling, put-downs, shunning someone or excluding them from a group. Forcing others to do things they may not want to do, ganging up on the victim, and scare tactics such as breaking, destroying or punching things to intimidate someone can also be included.

Other ways involve teasing in a mean way, gossip, spreading bad rumours which can be done directly or by telephone, the internet (cyber-bullying).

Teachers and staff are not immune to bullying, as some students threaten them and create fear by damaging the staff's vehicles and other personal property.

*Suggestions to deal with bullying in schools are:*

- \* Teachers and parents should learn to detect bullying, and be trained to deal with the problem in a non-combative way to protect the victims. Rushing to solve the issue may make things worse, and suspension of the perpetrator does not usually address the victim's concerns or fear of reprisal.

- \* Victims being bullied should be consulted for input on how they would like the matter resolved so that they can feel safe and comfortable again. Parents, friends, and other resource people should be brought in as needed for comfort and follow-up support.
- \* Bullying on the internet (cyber-bullying) should be recognized as a growing problem that is just as harmful. Teachers, parents, computer-site supervisors and the police should be trained to deal with this when it is reported.
- \* Governments should implement a study about what is happening with new technology and develop guidelines for the use of internet to limit the use of computers to bully, intimidate, threaten or harass others.
- \* Parents can be positive role models and play an active role in anti-bullying initiatives, have an open mind when allegations are made, and seek the help and support their children need – as the bully or victim. Acknowledging the problem is part of the solution to healing.
- \* Children and youth should be encouraged to talk openly about what is happening in regards to bullying, and sensitive staff should be in place to provide victims with the security they need against retaliation. Enabling children and youth to speak up will also help the perpetrators get the help they need to deal with underlying issues.
- \* Bullies are potential criminals. Being proactive is an effective way to stop the violence and break the cycle that has far reaching consequences when some students drop out of schools or are mentally traumatized due to bullying.
- \* Peer mediation programs should be implemented as one way to involve more students in dealing with the problem of bullying, and offering positive peer support to both the bullies and victims will help to create a safe learning environment for everyone.

#### **(vi) Youth Street Gangs:**

Youth gangs are not a new phenomenon. Children have always hung out in groups with their peers for fun, play and support. However, it is criminal youth street gangs that are a social problem as the fastest growing criminal element in our society today. There are youth imitating criminal biker gangs, and some are working for them. This poses a serious threat to innocent civilians, and affects our safety and security.

Street gangs are highly effective in their ability to recruit new members both inside and outside correctional facilities. Through their ingenuity, youths are copying structures and models of organization, team-work, management and loyalty used successfully by adults. Youth street gangs are highly motivated, intelligent and well focussed on their goals. They function as a family and provide support, protection, friendship, role models, excitement, financial benefits and other material things that appeal to youths.

Present-day technology such as computers and cell-phones has enhanced the ability of gangs to recruit new members, share information, and get organized. According to Corrections Service Canada (CSC), as of March 2004, 1,725 offenders under federal jurisdiction were associated with gangs or criminal organizations. This represented 8 per cent of the overall CSC offender population. There are currently 50 separate gangs in federal institutions, where they pose a serious threat to staff and the orderly operation of the facilities.

Police Services in the region acknowledge that youth street gangs are a growing problem. Today, children as young as eight are being lured into gangs and commit crime and violence once associated with older and streetwise trouble-makers. They are used as puppets by outlaw biker gangs such as the Hells Angels, and engage in drug trafficking, sex trade, shoplifting, extortion, arson, break-and-enter, and so forth. Some unscrupulous adult criminals take advantage of youths by using bribes, threats, intimidation, threats or violence.

- \* There is a strong influence of Winnipeg youth street gangs targeting Aboriginal youths across the region. Inter-generational impacts of physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse in residential schools affect many Aboriginal children growing up in homes that are unstable, violent, poor, and without positive role models. Discipline is an issue when parents do not have the skills to raise and nurture kids allowing for youth to look for family ties in a gang situation.
- \* There are also white youths who belong to skinhead gangs that commit racially motivated violence against non-whites. In Northwestern Ontario, the targets have been mainly Aboriginal and Black people. Some Jewish students have also reported swastikas being marked on lockers at school.
- \* School drop-outs, dispossessed, marginalised, homeless and jobless youths are likely to join youth street gangs for company, family, friendship, security and survival. While joining a criminal gang may be easy after the initial initiation, getting out is often very difficult, and can only be done at great risk.



- \* Drug trafficking is an easy quick way to make money and satisfy addictions. Drug sales and related activities often end up in disputes between dealers and buyers or between rival gangs, setting the stage for fighting and violence.

*To help youths stay out of gangs, or to discourage them from joining street gangs, the following suggestions were made:*

- \* Addressing conditions that contribute to the proliferation of youth gangs in schools, neighbourhoods, communities and institutions by eliminating the social environments that create and nurture situations where youths are lured or feel the need to join criminal street gangs. Known risk factors for adolescents joining youth street gangs are:
  - (a) Poverty
  - (b) Abuse
  - (c) Violent role models
  - (d) Racism
  - (e) Absence of fathers
  - (f) Out-of-home placement
- \* Engaging youths in meaningful ways to be part of the solution to problems, giving them a voice to say what is bugging them, trying to see things from their perspective, and helping them to deal with their concerns.
- \* Creating more opportunities for youths to learn parenting skills, provide the security, guidance, social skills, values, norms, attitudes, discipline, respect for self, others, authority and property they need as responsible citizens.
- \* Encouraging and supporting parents to be positive role models for their children, supporting them to stay in school, and helping them to set and achieve their goals.
- \* Children from abusive homes, dysfunctional families, or those living in poverty should get help to realize their potential. As dependents, it is up to society to provide necessary supports to reduce the risk of being alienated from society and being involved in crime for survival.
- \* The legacy of residential schools needs to be addressed so that the youths can heal and not become fertile ground for gang recruitment and subsequent involvement in crime and violence. This is a matter of urgency to prevent the negative cycle being passed on to the next generation.

- \* There should be more anti-street gang campaigns and supports for youth who want to leave gangs. Youth groups, recreational activities, curfews, and youth centres should be explored as investments and positive alternatives to protect youth, keep them busy with positive peer influence and adult guidance.
- \* Communities should establish youth centres as safe havens for kids to hangout after hours. While such facilities cannot change the poverty, abuse, addictions, violence and other negative home environments for children, they can offer programs and supports that enable children to deal with these problems and offer them alternatives to break the cycles.

### **(vii) Poverty:**

Children are victims of circumstance. Their race or economic status is not a matter of choice. The number of kids living in poverty amidst the affluence in our society is increasing. According to Statistics Canada, in 2001, one in six children (1,071,000) experienced poverty. Not addressing the causes of poverty puts more kids at risk of joining gangs and being involved in criminal activities for survival.

Children from poor families are exposed to material affluence: clothes, toys, good food, etc. advertised on television, magazines, radio, flyers, supermarkets and shops. They also see their peers with designer clothes, and the latest electronic gadgets. But, because they lack money, many resort to crime—stealing, robbery, looting etc. to get what they cannot afford to buy.

Due to their economic status, poor kids are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and many engage in risky behaviours to survive. Some have physical and mental health concerns, and a sense of hopelessness raises the risk of harming themselves or others.

Boredom and having nothing better to do raises the risk factor 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. As a result, many lack structured excitement and supervision, often resulting in problems with the law.

*Suggestions to reduce the number of children and youth living in poverty include:*

- \* More employment opportunities for families instead of welfare, and training in budgeting for better financial management.

- \* Affordable daycare, and enhanced tax benefits for low-income families so that they can have more disposable income to spend on their children.
- \* Creating community and peer supports for children in families where parents suffer from addictions to expose them to alternative lifestyles, show caring and nurture them to help break the cycle of poverty and abuse.
- \* Encouraging parents suffering from addictions to seek help, offering treatment to kids who need healing, and giving coupons or vouchers to enable children and youth from disadvantaged families to access and participate in recreational activities for fitness and wellness.
- \* Reliable core funding for the creation and day to day staffing of community based youth centres. Youth Centres can provide after-school programs as safe places for youths to hang-out, learn valuable life skills, mix with positive role models, be exposed to a different lifestyles, and get peer support and encouragement to aspire for a better life.
- \* Helping children to do well in their studies, supporting homework and study groups, breakfast clubs and offering incentives to encourage youths to stay in school since a good education improves the standard of life by offering a strong foundation to build a way out of poverty.

**(viii) Alcohol and Drug Abuse:**

Using and abusing alcohol, drugs and solvents among youths is a serious public health issue that contributes to violence and criminal activity. Addiction, impairment, fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder are growing problems that put children at risk. This has the potential of creating segments of the population with social, emotional and mental health problems susceptible to criminal and violent behaviour.

- \* Data from the Canada Addiction Survey, the most comprehensive addiction study done in Canada, shows a disturbing picture of a society increasingly dependent on mood-altering substances. Using and abusing alcohol impairs judgement, and can easily trigger conflict, violence and accidents.
- \* Corrections Service Canada reports reveal that more than 50 per cent of the current population in federal institutions were 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.
- \* Youth use alcohol, drugs and solvents due to peer pressure, for recreation, or to escape problems. But, since minors cannot buy alcohol, adults get it for them. Taking advantage of the naivety of kids, they get them “hooked” to alcohol and drugs, and when addiction sets in, youths with no regular source of income often engage in criminal activity to get their ‘fix’.
- \* Youth who use alcohol and drugs often end up abused, sexually exploited, or running errands for drug-dealers and outlaw biker gangs.
- \* Young addicts, and the victimization of youths under the influence can result in anger, and resentment which breeds violence, street kids and potential recruits for youth gangs.
- \* Young mothers who abuse alcohol and drugs put their children at risk, and many will have irreversible physical and mental health problems that can result in unstable temperament.

*Addressing the problem of drugs and alcohol should focus on prevention such as:*

- \* Providing more youth-led education to enhance communication and raise awareness of the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse, sniffing, huffing, and using solvents.
- \* Offering support for kids who want to quit using drugs, and providing readily accessible treatment centres with positive peers involved in aftercare.
- \* Mandatory sentences for drug dealers and stiffer penalties for adults who provide alcohol and drugs to minors. Community-alerts similar to the Crime Stoppers Program, and Neighbourhood Watch should be promoted and supported to clamp-down on drug dealings, crack houses, ‘booze-cans’ and other facilities where kids access drugs and alcohol.
- \* A system of community based youth centres are needed to provide activities and socializing in a safe supportive drug-free environment. This is also a place where substance abuse can be detected and through peer support, rehabilitation can take place.

- \* Youth Centres can play an important role in “after-care” for youth after they have participated in treatment programs. Putting them back into the community where the problem initially originated with no supports or an alternative environment will result in a high recidivism rate, as has proved to be the case time and time again with chronic abusers.
- \* Communities should provide affordable recreational activities to keep kids busy and off the streets where they are easily lured into drugs and alcohol.

### **(ix) Mental Health:**

Youths recognize the impact of mental health on safety and security, and are aware that some forms of mental illness do not pose a threat or danger to society. There are a variety of personality disorders that can create risks to both the individual and others. On the other hand, stalkers and paedophiles are a threat to our safety.

Untreated psychotic disorders caused by Schizophrenia or conditions due to alcohol, drugs and other mind-altering substances can result in violence, irrational behaviour and depression. A depressed state of mind can lead to self-inflicted violence such as self-mutilation or suicide.

Pregnant mothers who drink risk creating potential health issues for the unborn child. Fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder are known to cause physical and mental problems for children.

Corrections Service Canada figures reveal that about 20 per cent of all those incarcerated have mental health disorder.

- \* Solvents, illicit drugs and some medications can create mental health problems that contribute to violence and suicide. Youths are likely to contemplate and actually commit suicide while under the influence than when they are sober.
- \* Dependence on alcohol, drugs and solvents creates its own problems when addicts resort to crime and violence to get their fix, and incidents of vandalism, arson, rape, and sexual assault can also be linked to dependence that threaten our safety and security.
- \* Sniffing or huffing gasoline, hair spray and other solvents destroys brain cells, and creates permanent mental damage to the individual's capacity to act normally and realize their potential.

*Suggestions to deal with the risks associated with mental illness:*

- \* There is a need to raise awareness of mental illness and personality disorders as health issues that require treatment to reduce the risk of those with mental problems harming themselves and/or others.
- \* More Counseling services, and supports should be provided to the mentally ill to ensure that they get the treatment and medication they need to manage their behaviour and the potential for violence.
- \* Society in general, and pregnant mothers in particular, should acknowledge the mental health problems caused by alcohol and abusing drugs to the unborn child. Preventive steps to reduce the risks should be taken and more support should be given to expectant mothers.
- \* Diagnostic services in schools need to be provided to identify students with mental health issues, and provide them with the help they need to address their medical condition. Suspension or expulsion from school for irrational behaviour or violence without assessing the potential of mental illness and recommending appropriate treatment as needed creates more risks to society.
- \* Providing adequate beds and spaces to treat people with mental illness will make our communities safer.
- \* Early education on risks of abusing alcohol, drugs and solvents will help kids avoid using, becoming addicts, and reduce potential mental health problems.

**(x) Schools, Education / Careers and Employment:**

After the family, daycare centres and schools play an important role in the early socialization and personal growth of children. They nurture literacy and academic development in children, facilitate the learning of life skills, and prepare students for careers, trades and professions they need for job-readiness to succeed in the work world. A good education lays a strong foundation for a brighter future. It offers hope for a better life by opening doors to more opportunities and possibilities that can break the cycle of poverty, crime, violence and misery.

- \* Dropping out of school increases chances of youth committing crime to earn a living. According to Statistics Canada, more than 80 per cent of young offenders have below grade 10 education. 65 per cent have less than grade 8.

- \* Employment gives youth pride and a sense of purpose. Having no job robs people of dignity and many resort to criminal activities to make ends meet.
- \* Supporting children to learn, avoiding suspensions and expulsions, and offering special remedial programs to help students stay in school will make our communities safer. In today's society where one needs at least a high school diploma to get into apprenticeships, many high school drop-outs are left out of the job-market. Consequently, the temptation to turn to crime--selling drugs, robberies, theft, prostitution etc. for survival is great.

*Suggestions to help students get a good education and realize their potential include:*

- \* Providing universal standardized daycare and breakfast clubs levels the playing field for all children and offers a strong foundation to succeed in schooling.
- \* Interventions to help children and youth excel in literacy and academic skills and providing after-school activities, study groups, summer school, peer tutors, mentors, and positive role models enhances their learning potential. Alternative education, apprenticeships, volunteer opportunities and job-shadowing for those who are academically challenged can improve their chances of employment.
- \* Investing in youth groups, youth centres that organize after-school activities, and developing young leaders and positive peer role models to work with other children and youth will make a difference. Such centres can complement the education system by providing evening classes.
- \* Providing financial incentives such as lowering tuition for post-secondary education will have long-range benefits to society in regards to raising the standard of living, quality fo life, and subsequently our safety and security.
- \* Governments should play an active role in job creation and self-employment as strategies to foster safer communities. With many businesses down-sizing and laying off employees primarily to increase revenues, government should offer incentives to reward companies and employers willing to for-go extra profits and personal gain for the sake of employing more people. Offering youths start-up jobs and training, instead of giving them welfare is encouraged.
- \* Governments should partner with the volunteer sector to hire and/or train young workers, foster a work ethic, and enhance the chances for employment.

**(xi) Racism:**

Racism breeds violence. Many studies including the Stephen Lewis Report commissioned after the Toronto race riots in confirm that racial tensions can explode into violence and threaten peace and stability. People who are discriminated against due to skin colour will protest or fight for fairness and equality.

Systemic or institutionalized racism, racial profiling by the police, cultural biases in the media, racial discrimination in the justice system, employment, housing, and exclusionary policies that marginalis minority groups from fair treatment. Equal opportunities and equal access to services and supports perpetuate injustices that create resentment, ferment violence and threaten our security.

There are also hate crimes involving violence and vandalism committed by groups such as skin-heads that will not accept other citizens as equals because of race or ethnicity. Hate crimes can include gender, religion, and sexual orientation.

No one is born a racist and children can develop racist attitudes. Racism is learned through socialization, from the media, at home, and on the streets. The education system can promote racism through racially biased content in the curriculum. The mass media promotes racism by maintaining stereotypes and perpetuating archaic values that can result in cultural or racial conflict. Historical factors such as colonization, residential schools, and social policies that do not address injustices and inequalities contribute to crime and violence that threaten peace and stability.

- \* In Northwestern Ontario, most racial incidents are between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Most common are racial slurs, racial jokes, taunting, name-calling, racist graffiti, abuse, fights, assaults and outright discrimination.
- \* In schools, there are often divisions between native and white students. There is not much mixing, and name calling and bullying are common. When fights occur, teachers just separate the students and it is often the native students who get suspended or expelled. If police are called, it is also the Aboriginal students who are blamed for taking matters into their own hands and instigating the assault. When charges are laid, tensions escalate. It is hard to feel safe when there is fear of reprisal.
- \* Youths from a racial minority feel differential treatment by those in authority. In shopping malls, they do not get prompt service compared to their white peers, are followed and closely watched in shops as if they are there to steal.



*Suggestions to create a racism-free learning environment are as follows:*

- \* School boards should incorporate multiculturalism in the curriculum, and hire more staff who reflect the diversity of the student population and the community to promote mutual respect.
- \* Schools should encourage and support students to organize activities that celebrate our diversity and promote racial understanding. Participating in special days and events such as March 21, The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Human Rights Day, Citizenship Week and so forth can promote awareness and help to reduce racist attitudes that stem from ignorance and fear of those who have a different skin colours.
- \* School staff should be familiar with policies on race relations, and racial and sexual harassment. They should also have cultural sensitivity training to enable them to deal with issues of racial discrimination and harassment.
- \* Students should learn to say “NO” to racism, and report racist incidents when they occur so that teachers can take appropriate action to address the problem to prevent the situation escalating into violence.
- \* Educators must make a conscious effort to mix students in working groups and encourage student councils to be inclusive and represent everyone.
- \* Peer mediation should be incorporated in school policies to enable students to resolve grievances and conflicts by talking things out.
- \* Governments, businesses and institutions should be inclusive in their hiring practices, and endeavours to recruit and train qualified employees and staff who reflect the communities they serve.
- \* Governments should promote policies that are inclusive to ensure that all citizens have equal access, equal opportunities, and participate equally in all aspects of Canadian life.
- \* All of society should reach out to marginalised groups, racial minorities and new immigrants. They should provide the special services and supports needed to facilitate integration into the social mainstream and minimize the alienation that can lead to protests, civil disobedience, violence or even terrorist acts.

**(xii) Protection Services, Corrections and the Justice System:**

The youth realize that police officers and security guards are front-line workers who “serve and protect” citizens, to ensure that individuals and our communities are safe.

Correctional services play a vital role in the rehabilitation of offenders, and help to facilitate their reintegration as law-abiding members of society. The justice system ensures that justice is served and the punishment fits the crime. Offenders get a fair hearing, appropriate sentencing, humane treatment, counseling, treatment or training for rehabilitation by the time they complete their sentence.

The justice system also reaches out to help victims of crime and violence. Victim impact statements, compensation and restitution are part of the process to facilitate healing. There are also alternative legal processes to deal with crime and violence in culturally appropriate ways.

There is however, a general feeling among racialized groups that the justice system is “white-on-white”. Even though the system endeavours to be fair, the fact that the judges draw from their own personal experiences and up-bringing creates cultural biases and racial barriers. This also results in the perception that the rich and powerful are better protected by the law. Consequently racial minorities tend to feel that they are treated with indifference if they victimize each other or are victims of white aggression. However, they get stiffer penalties if they are perpetrators of crime against white victims.

- \* Examples of how the police dealt with the occupation of Anicinabe Park in Kenora, the Oka Crisis, the shooting of Dudley George at Ipperwash, and the recent dumping of an Aboriginal man outside the City of Thunder Bay. There are numerous incidents at road blockades on logging roads, mining areas illustrate on-going concerns about how Aboriginal people are unfairly treated by the police when standing up for their Treaty Rights.
- \* Police investigations of missing Aboriginal women, and the aggravated assault of an Aboriginal man in Kenora, where the police covered up the murder to protect a non-Aboriginal man. An incident in Thunder Bay where a local police officer drove an Aboriginal man to the outskirts of the city and left him there on a cold night were also given as examples of why First Nations do not always trust the police for their safety and security.
- \* Current concerns about crime and racial profiling confirm on-going problems of racial discrimination related police brutality against racialized groups.

- \* The limitations of legal aid creates a perception of two justice systems – one for the wealthy and one for the poor. Poor people cannot afford the best lawyers to defend them. Consequently, many end up pleading guilty as part of the plea bargaining process just to close the case.

**Suggestions to create a fair policing service and justice system include:**

- \* Training police officers to be culturally sensitive to the diverse communities they serve in order to build trust and confidence in people who are supposed to protect us.
- \* Providing police officers with skills to recognize hate crime, and investigate racially motivated assaults accordingly so that such offenses can be dealt with appropriately.
- \* Expediting the resolution of outstanding grievances with Aboriginal people, and supporting the healing of the legacy of residential schools to cut down on the frustration, anger, and hopelessness that ferment bitter resentment and perpetuate violence and social instability.
- \* Resolving outstanding Aboriginal treaty grievances would also help in the recruitment of Aboriginal youth as police officers, especially those who are reluctant to enforce 'colonial' laws on traditional hunting and fishing rights, and arrest family/community members protesting against broken treaties;
- \* Implementing employment equity to ensure that police services, corrections and the justice system reflect our diversity.
- \* Giving maximum sentences for violent offences and serious crimes to enable correctional facilities to offer life skills programs, treatment and other forms of training to enhance the rehabilitation of offenders.
- \* Streamlining the federal and provincial correctional systems to avoid duplication, cut costs and enhance the efficiency of rehabilitation to reduce the numbers of repeat offenders. For example, the province would be responsible for young offenders and develop programs and invest resources to provide education for youth at risk to become productive members of society. The federal government would focus on the rehabilitation of adults and provide services that enhance rehabilitation of adult offenders. This would go a long way to help make our communities safer.

### **Best Practices / Successful Initiatives:**

Some time was devoted to discussing success stories and what the youth feel is being done right. The following are examples of local initiatives participants are aware of that are helping to counter youth crime and violence and make a difference:

- ☺ The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) is a model youth group reaching out to improve the well-being children and youth by mobilizing and empowering them to be part of the solution to problems. The following youth-to-youth initiatives by the RMYC are contributing to fostering better and safer communities.
- \* Leadership and Organizational Development Training to provide youths with skills to organize themselves, and plan their own activities to keep them busy, alleviate boredom and enhance their well-being as responsible citizens.
- \* Stay-in-School program that includes study groups, tutors and peer mentors to help students do well in school, advocate for summer school to enhance their academic performance, and hosting workshops and career fairs to provide options on careers, trades and professions.
- \* Orientation program to welcome new immigrant youths to Canada, and introduce Aboriginal students from remote reserves to urban schools, to reduce culture shock, and ease their integration into the community so that they feel they belong.
- \* Programs such as Revolution Girl-Style/Girl-Power program to empower young women to believe in themselves, follow their passions and realize their dreams, and Young Men's support groups to learn about manhood, parenting, gender equality and social responsibility.
- \* Opportunities for volunteering to develop life skills, gain work experience, and have exposure to the job-market through active community involvement.
- \* Multiculturalism program to improve race relations, encourage children and youth to get along and celebrate diversity. The RMYC's Multicultural Bows of black, red, white and yellow ribbons to signify the beauty of the different colours united in harmony is an innovative way to involve children and youth in the March 21 campaign to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

- \* The Safer Communities Campaign incorporates youth centres for after-school activities, peer mediation, healthy lifestyles, recreation to alleviate boredom, promote personal safety and enhance our security. The RMYC is promoting curfews to protect children at night and workshops on various topics are a way to solicit input and engage youth as part of the solution to problems.
- \* The Breakfast club, food bank and used clothing are initiatives to alleviate the impact of poverty among destitute youths, show caring and empathy while supporting children and youth to stay in school and become self-reliant.
- \* The Youth Centre's partnership with Dennis Franklin Cromarty (First Nations) High School to hold gym nights, dances and other functions for Aboriginal students from remote reserves studying in the city helps to build relationships with other youths, and facilitate their integration into the mainstream.

The Multicultural Youth Centre is an example of a successful youth-run drop-in where young people hang out, hold meetings to plan after-school activities, and organize their own events that engage them in community development.

- ☺ The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO) is an example of an adult organization that is unconditionally supporting the RMYC to continue its work to empower children and youth and a youth centre for youth-led initiatives that are making a difference.
- \* MANWO board members often forgo their expense allowances, and staff have donated their wages to support the RMYC and ensure that the Youth Centre continues to exist.
- ☺ Youth centres in Atikokan, Dryden, Ignace, Fort Frances, Geraldton, Kenora, Manitouwadge, Sioux Lookout and Red Lake, are popular drop-ins for youths to get together and have clean fun under the supervision of adult volunteers.
- ☺ Youth centres help to break negative cycles. Unfortunately, funding is always a problem. Services are often disrupted when funds run out, and youths who have no safe place to go usually end up in trouble.
- ☺ The Thunder Bay Boys and Girls Club runs a variety of positive activities that engage children and youths of all backgrounds to realize their potential. Strict discipline and a code of conduct help to foster respect and good behaviour youth need for self-control and to have a safe, healthy playing environment.

- \* Through partnerships with schools, the city, and other organizations including the RMYC, the Boys and Girls Club has made programs and services readily accessible for children and youth in Thunder Bay. Breakfast in schools, recreation, and access to computers are popular activities making a difference.
- ☺ The Boy Scouts, Cubs, Girl Guides, Brownies as well as various religious and social youth groups provide a variety of programs to teach discipline, promote team-work and organize recreational and developmental activities for kids.
- ☺ The Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Decade Youth Council was praised for endeavouring to tackle the suicide crisis in NAN communities and being a collective voice for youths on social, political, cultural and economic issues.
- \* The Decade Youth Council is providing leadership training to develop capacity among Aboriginal youths as role models, raise their profile in the political arena. Initiatives such as Girl-Power to empower young Aboriginal women to improve their situation, and recreation programs to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce boredom are proactive strategies.
- \* The Nishnawbe Aski Nation Chiefs have been exemplary by showing a willingness to partner with other groups, and passing a resolution supporting the work of the Multicultural Youth Centre and offered to contribute financially to the RMYC's initiatives targeting Aboriginal children and youth.
- \* This support was well appreciated and helped to boost the confidence of the youth because it came at a time the Youth Council had lost its fund-raising capacity through bingos after the Thunder Bay Charity Casino opened. Both the City and the Province reaping the profits were reluctant to share their huge profits to keep the Youth Centre open.
- ☺ The Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres (UMAYC) through local Friendship Centres and Métis organizations in the region are welcome facilities to deal with increasing numbers of Aboriginal youths in our towns.
- \* Programs offered by the UMACs such as cultural teachings and pow wows help Aboriginal youths to regain their identity lost through residential schools. Gatherings, workshops and sharing circles provide peer help and information to increasing numbers of Aboriginal youths moving to urban centres who need assistance to survive in a city. Resources and supports provided enable them to break negative cycles attributed to residential schools.

- ☺ The Community Coalition United for the Protection of our Children and Youth (CCUPCY) in Thunder Bay, offers grassroots initiatives to wage an anti-youth street gang campaign. Local agencies working with children and youth are part of this network to share information on gang trends and educate kids on the risks of joining youth street gangs. Each year, CCUPCY mobilizes youths to 'reclaim the community' by painting over gang graffiti across the city.
- ☺ The Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board is a leader in introducing school uniforms to create a friendly learning environment for all students. Aboriginal students from St. Patrick and St. Ignatius High Schools say that school uniforms make them feel part of the student body.
- \* The presence of an Aboriginal Student Counselor and a Chaplain at the two Catholic District high schools goes a long way to help students deal with their issues and feel safe and secure. This has greatly improved the chances of Aboriginal students staying in school and graduating.
- ☺ The Lakehead Public Schools has introduced peer mediation in elementary schools, but this should be expanded to high schools. Mediation enables students to learn communication and listening skills, and is a proactive strategy to promote safe schools.
- ☺ The Thunder Bay Police Service has established an Aboriginal Liaison Unit, and Aboriginal Youth Crime Prevention Committee to improve relations and enhance communication with native people to promote safety and security. An Anti-gang Unit has also been created to deal with the community's concerns over youth street gangs. The creation of a Community Advisory Committee on Race Relations to the Thunder Bay Police, and having a hate-crime policy to ensure that proper charges are laid for hate-motivated crime and/or assaults will build bridges and make our community safer.
- \* The Neighbourhood Policing initiative enables officers to be familiar with their neighbourhoods, and get to know local kids well to earn their respect. This improves communication when officers give advice, or when they need information to make the neighbourhood safer.
- \* The Tri-Drug Unit's presentations to encourage kids to stay off drugs, alcohol and solvents are an important preventive strategy to curb potential crime and violence. The out-reach to children and youth is a public relations exercise that helps to build trust with the police.

- ☺ Crime Stoppers is an example of an effective community-based program to engage the citizens in reducing crime and making our communities safer.
- ☺ The Mothers Against Drunk Driving is a proactive and an effective campaign to raise awareness on drinking and preventing accidents due to impairment.
- ☺ Thunder Bay City Council meetings are a good example of elected leaders showing mutual respect. Debates are handled better compared to the Ontario Legislature and the House of Commons during Question Period.
- ☺ The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship's Volunteer Service Awards Program to recognize young volunteers, and The Lincoln Alexander Award for youths showing leadership to improve race relations encourage young people to be involved in social issues, while contributing to community development.
- ☺ The creation of a Ministry of Children and Youth is a welcome move to give young people a voice in government. The RMYC has advocated for this since 1991 to enhance the status of children and youth.
- ☺ The Ontario government's Democratic Renewal to engage youth in the democratic reform is a proactive strategy to involve youth in the electoral process and reduce youth alienation.
- ☺ Both the federal and provincial governments are on the right track to fund: summer experience training, youth career programs, co-operative education, job-shadowing, and apprenticeships that provide opportunities for youths to learn life skills, gain work experience, be exposed to various career choices, acquire self-confidence and develop a work ethic needed to succeed in the work-world. Funding student placements, apprentices, and interns enables youths to earn an honest wage while opening employment doors and new opportunities for those who are not academically inclined.
- ☺ Government funding for youth-led programs such as crime-prevention, anti-smoking, safety, and so-forth is an effective way to involve youths as part of the solution to problems.
- ☺ The federal government's support for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to address the legacy of residential schools is helping many Aboriginal children and youth affected by the legacy to heal and break negative cycles.



## **RESOLUTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Whereas**

**the needs of the following groups are not being adequately addressed:**

- \* youths, who want to feel safe like everyone else, but are a dependent population with no resources to develop their own programs, or organize activities to foster safer communities;
- \* children of addicts who are poor role models, lack parenting skills, and fail as emotional and physical care givers;
- \* at-risk youth (victims of poverty, abuse, violent role models, absentee parents, racism, etc.), who are easily lured to joining street gangs;
- \* Aboriginal children and youth suffering from inter-generational impacts of the legacy of residential schools;
- \* the poorly educated (80 per cent + of young offenders have below grade 10; 65 per cent less than grade 8\*);
- \* repeat offenders (90 per cent of offenders have previous convictions; 81 per cent committed a previous violent offence\*);
- \* Aboriginal people representing 3per cent of adult Canadians but 16 per cent of all federal prisoners (and 43 per cent for the Northwestern Ontario-Prairie region\* and about 85 per cent in the Kenora -Thunder Bay area);
- \* young females and males who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and life on the streets, and a majority of women offenders who are survivors of physical and sexual abuse and trauma;
- \* young mothers who abuse alcohol and drugs risking the unborn child to fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder;
- \* approximately 500 Aboriginal women who have gone missing in Canada over the past 20 years, and their disappearance met with indifference;
- \* individuals suffering from mental health or addiction induced behaviours;

**Whereas**

the priorities of some leaders and sectors of our society are illogical and ineffective, and sometimes opposed to our social values:

- \* the vast monies spent on correction (the federal correctional system costs \$1.58 billion a year – \$110,000.00 yearly per maximum-security prisoner; \$70,000.00 for medium; \$69,000.00 for minimum, and \$169,000.00 per woman\*) -- rather than prevention;
- \* the media influencing children and youth but not accepting responsibility for the outcomes of such manipulation;
- \* the Ontario Government (which recognizes studies linking alcohol to crime, violence and addictive behaviour), allows breweries to target youth directly with ads and does not try to educate children on the risks of alcohol with the same marketing strategy proved effective in reducing smoking;
- \* political leaders who shout at each other in Parliament, and fail to set an example of mutual respect to promote mediation among the youth.

\*\*Figures are from Statistics Canada and a Correctional Service Canada - Internet.

**Therefore be it resolved:**

**That the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC)...**

1. Seek resources and support from government departments, foundations, First Nations, the business community, educational institutions, social service agencies and concerned citizens to mobilize youth groups, student councils, youth centres etc. and involve children and youth in discussions on crime and violence prevention, and ways to make our communities safer;
2. Contact Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Stan Beardy for support to launch a region-wide youth-to-youth violence prevention campaign in memory of his son Daniel. Work with the NAN Youth Decade Council to host orientation sessions and after-school activities for Aboriginal youths attending urban high schools, provide training for role models and young leaders to organize workshops, gatherings and other forums that raise awareness on the risks of alcohol and drug abuse, youth street gangs, and other high-risk activities that affect our safety and security are also recommended;

3. Share ideas and experiences gained from helping immigrant youths integrate into Canadian society and do well in school with the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council and First Nations that send students to urban centres to help them adjust to life in towns and studying in large multicultural schools;
4. Work with YOUCAN to promote peer mediation across the region as a practical strategy for youths to resolve conflict and settle disputes by talking things out rather than fighting, and develop youth-friendly resource materials on conflict resolution for youth groups, student councils, youth centres, etc.
5. Expand the Revolution Girl-Style/Girl Power Program to isolated communities across Northwestern Ontario for young women to form support groups and organize their own activities; Develop resource manuals that cover the experiences of women including new immigrant and Aboriginal girls for self-empowerment to deal with violence victimization and other unique challenges that inhibit them from realizing their potential;
6. Initiate the young-men's support groups to complement the Girl Power program, and help young men learn about relationships, fatherhood, parenting, how to be good fathers and positive role models for their children;
7. Advocate for the establishment of youth centres, and continue to consult with children and youth across the region on matters of safety and security such as curfews, gun control, the legalization of marijuana, etc. and encourage them to share their ideas with community leaders and influential people in positions to make decisions that affect their well-being;
8. Work with the Community Advisory Committee to the Thunder Bay Police on initiatives to improve relations with the police, and clean-up anti-police graffiti to encourage more racialized youths to consider careers in policing;
9. Participate in the implementation of the Youth Criminal Justice Act by initiating community programs that offer support to young offenders to break the cycle of crime and violence, and promote Teen Courts and restorative justice programs that engage youths in the justice process and help to reduce the current high rates of first-time and repeat offenders.
10. Monitor press coverage of crime and violence involving children and youth, organize focus groups to discuss the trends and come up with ideas that will make a difference.

**That Boards of Education / Educational Institutions...**

1. Engage students by seeking solutions from their perspective, and encourage schools to involve students in safety and security issues by training them in proper manners, monitoring anti-social acts (violence, bullying, harassment, prejudice), and develop simple ways for students to present complaints as stakeholders in creating and fostering a safer learning environment;
2. Ensure that all staff are culturally sensitive and trained sufficiently to enforce the school's code of behaviour fairly, and deal with any problems of bullying, harassment, racial bias, stereotypes, and prejudice that may arise;
3. Be proactive in dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, bullying, racial and sexual harassment by encouraging student-run activities that raise awareness, and challenge them to find solutions to deal with these issues;
4. Introduce peer mediation in schools and train student team leaders from different backgrounds as mediators to resolve arguments by peaceful means, i.e. talking and listening to each other, and not by fighting;
5. Adapt the education curriculum to reflect our multicultural reality and be inclusive to accommodate Aboriginal and racialized groups;
6. Expand co-operative education, alternative learning and training programs, apprenticeships, job shadowing and volunteer service hours (required for students to graduate) that provide life skills and work experience to enhance the learning potential of students, give the academically challenged a chance to succeed, and offer hope to all youths for a better future;
7. Recognize the contribution of education in crime and violence prevention, and seek resources to implement best practices that enhance the learning potential of students i.e. peer mentoring, breakfast clubs, alternatives to suspensions and expulsions that lead to anger, resentment and create more school drop-outs who are a threat to our safety and security, and so forth;
8. Uphold the role of formal education in transforming communities and society in general, and lobby municipal, provincial and federal levels of government for appropriate legislation and adequate resources to enable schools to impart social values needed to develop children and youth into responsible citizens.

### **That the Ministry of Education...**

1. Mandate schools to implement peer mediation programs to resolve conflict and settle disputes without violence as part of the Safe Schools campaign, and help to produce resource materials that promote mediation;
2. Review the status of Ontario's anti-racism and multiculturalism policies, and include them as part of the school curriculum to create a safe and harmonious learning environment for all students;
3. Recognize that school drop-outs are a risk to our safety and security, and find other ways of dealing with troubled kids since suspensions or expulsions in the context of today's working parents where no-one is home to supervise students sent home, are not addressing the real causes of the problems;
4. Acknowledge that incidents related to alcohol and drug addictions, solvent abuse and related mental health issues are increasing in society, and link with other ministries such as Health, Children and Youth Services, etc. to provide supports for students affected to enhance their learning potential;
5. Support breakfast programs and other innovative pilot projects such as summer school, science camps and after-school study groups for students experiencing learning difficulties to encourage them to do well in school;
6. Explore and invest in new ways to enhance learning potential of newcomer and Aboriginal youths so that more graduate, gain employment, enhance their social status and improve the standard of living by reducing poverty and related consequences in regards to criminal activities, violence, gangs etc.;
7. Consult with the Ontario Parent Council, local School Councils, educators and students on the best way to engage the community in debates on the role the education system should play in creating a healthy learning environment and fostering safer and secure communities.

### **That Municipalities and Town Councils in Northwestern Ontario...**

1. Recognize the importance of keeping youths occupied through after-school activities, recreation programs and youth centres, as a strategy to engage them in youth-led crime prevention programs and provide financial incentives to involve them as stakeholders in creating safer communities;

2. Establish formal ways to communicate with the youth, listen to their concerns and incorporate their ideas as part of the solution to problems;
3. Conduct needs assessments on local Aboriginal people and consult with First Nations on services and supports they need for integration in urban centres.

**That the City of Thunder Bay...**

1. Establish a special fund to promote Thunder Bay's Children's Charter and engage children and youth as partners in implementing the Charter;
2. Commit a part of its 5% Thunder Bay Charity Casino slot machine revenue to support community groups with innovative programs for children of addictive parents, homeless street kids who are victims of gambling parents;
3. Support the Multicultural Youth Centre by donating space to train young leaders and develop positive role models to run peer programs, and organize after-school activities to keep kids busy and off the streets at night;
4. Conduct a needs assessment on the urban Aboriginal community which is the fastest growing population in the city to identify the supports and assistance they need to integrate and contribute to the well-being of the community;
5. Review the Pro-kids program to enable kids from dysfunctional homes to participate with alternative sources of 'parental' consent;
6. Consult with the police, the Thunder Bay Shelter, the John Howard Society and various Aboriginal agencies on the issues confronting Aboriginal people in regards to social needs, individual and public safety;
7. Create more opportunities for culturally sensitive Aboriginal people who speak the language to be hired by the city, work with their own people to integrate into the urban environment and contribute to the economy and community.

**That Aboriginal communities...**

1. Focus on the needs of children and youth who are the secondary and tertiary victims of residential school abuse, and seek both internal and external resources to break negative cycles and patterns of behaviour that make many susceptible to crime and violence including the risk of joining youth gangs;

2. Monitor websites such as K-Net website for negative activities, and invest more financial resources including setting aside a portion of proceeds from Casino Rama for initiatives to combat youth street gangs, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and reassure children and youth that they can have a better life;
3. Provide resources and supports to create junior chief and councils, and youth groups that play an active role in community development, and invest in youth centres as safe positive places for Aboriginal children and youth in remote communities to participate in and break the negative cycles;
4. Create more programs and supports for young Aboriginal parents to learn parenting skills, and related responsibilities of managing a home;
5. Introduce innovative programs such as summer school, science camps, reading clubs, study groups and so forth to reduce the academic gap between on-reserve and off-reserve students and to reduce the high drop-out rate;
6. Hold forums to discuss the impact of alcohol, drugs and gambling in their communities in relation to crime, violence, sexual assault, domestic violence and poverty, and share best practices and strategies to deal with addictions.

#### **That Northern Nishnawbe Education Council...**

1. Work with the RMYC for peer support to revive a student council at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School to plan and organize activities for Aboriginal students in Thunder Bay, and partner with appropriate service agencies to orientate and 'street-proof' Aboriginal students studying in urban schools;
2. Continue addressing the unique needs of Aboriginal youths affected by the legacy of residential schools, and develop relevant curriculum to close existing academic gaps in order to enhance their learning potential so that they can pursue higher education, realize their goals, hopes and dreams;
3. Provide special programs for students to achieve academic excellence, and opportunities to learn urban life skills to survive in towns and gain work skills to secure 'mainstream' jobs in a highly competitive multicultural workplace;
4. Organize annual forums for local groups concerned about the well-being of Aboriginal students in urban centres and share ideas to help create more positive role models and success stories to inspire and motivate others.

**That Thunder Bay Police Service, Nishnawbe Aski Police, and Ontario Provincial Police...**

1. Crack down on adult providers of alcohol and drugs to minors, patrol booze-cans, beer and liquor stores to make it harder for youths to find patrons to get them alcohol, and intensify the campaign to raise awareness on the impact of alcohol and drugs on crime and violence;
2. Invest in a public relations program to open dialogue with children and youth on safety and security, engage them as partners in crime prevention, and solicit their input on youth crime, violence, and youth street gangs;
3. Continue the campaign to recruit more police officers from Aboriginal communities, racial minorities and women to reflect our diversity, and improve the lines of communication with marginalised groups to enhance the effectiveness of police services in creating safer communities;
4. Participate in cultural sensitivity training to recognize racially motivated violence to prevent the escalation of hate crimes, enhance understanding of diversity, and build bridges with all citizens to build trust with officers.

**That the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services...**

1. Monitor trends in youth crime and violence in relation to alcohol and drug abuse, and use the information to develop preventive strategies that are cheaper and more effective than dealing with young offenders when they are already addicted and caught in the cycle of crime, violence and gangs;
2. Recognize risk behaviours and violent acts by kids as indicators, messages and statements requiring parents, communities and the government to take proactive action by putting in place preventive programs and strategies;
3. Realize that youths with no hope are dangerous. Anger, frustration, impotence and marginalization in a world linked via the internet can turn kids who feel that they have nothing to lose to suicide or committing homicide;
4. Commit funding to enable youth groups and youth centres to build the capacity needed to actively participate in implementing the new Youth Criminal Justice Act by developing and training young leaders who exemplify the benefits of positive role models;



5. Support youth centres as rehabilitation facilities for young offenders released from custody to participate in, break bad habits and negative lifestyles with appropriately trained staff;
6. Invest financial resources to enhance services for young offenders on community placements, provide after-care support to help break negative lifestyles, and offer programs that help to reduce the risk of re-offending.

**That the Minister of Children and Youth Services...**

1. Be the voice of children and youth in government, and advocate on their behalf for legislation and policies that will enhance their status and make a difference;
2. Recognize the impact of poverty and inadequate parenting on children, and the need for interventions targeting children victimized by dysfunctional families, dead-beat dads, abuse, addictions, domestic violence, and so forth;
3. Advocate for a well-funded standardized daycare program that teaches our multicultural values, and gives all children a fair start in schooling;
4. Share best practices that enhance the emotional, mental and physical well-being of kids with other government ministries, youth-serving agencies, community groups and the general public;
5. Work with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Ministry of Health to invest in an addiction prevention program that includes detox centres, and treatment services for high numbers of children and youth in Northwestern Ontario who acknowledge dependence on drugs and alcohol, and need help to stop before they become serious addicts caught in the cycle of crime and violence to support their bad habits;
6. Support the establishment of youth centres as other safe facilities for children and youth to hang out after school.

**That the Minister of Citizenship Responsible for the Ontario Women's Directorate, and the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues...**

1. Continue to educate young women on the challenges faced by young mothers as single parents, and the risks of staying in abusive relationships;

2. Support a role model program of peers to encourage and empower young women to avoid teen pregnancy and stay in school to enhance their status;
3. Uphold the special role of women as child bearers and primary care givers, and partner with girl-groups such as brownies and girl guides, youth centres, students councils, and so forth to develop and promote materials targeting young women on topics such as parenting, self-esteem, teen pregnancy, sexual exploitation, fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effects, assault, etc.

**That the Minister of Culture...**

1. Acknowledge that the budget for the Ontario Trillium Foundation is the same today as it was when only four charity casinos contributed, and add funding to reflect the proceeds from now six casinos and growing community needs;
2. Recognize that youths are a group in transition constantly being replenished. It is illogical to restrict successful initiatives to one-time funding as is the case now. Younger children should be exposed to the same programs and benefit from similar experiences as their older siblings;
3. Assist volunteer organizations such as the RMYC in host communities where charity casinos have reduced gaming and fund-raising campaigns with special grants to enable them to focus on program and service delivery instead of mobilizing staff and volunteers to spend more time trying to raise funds.

**That the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines...**

1. Involve youths in regular consultations to develop programs/services that create safer communities and enhance the quality of life for children and youth across Northwestern Ontario;
2. Create a special start-up fund for youth centres in small communities, and co-ordinate the funding for innovative youth programs in the region that deal with the high rates of school drop-outs, teen pregnancy, above average incidents of drug and alcohol abuse, violence against women, and youth street gangs in the region;
3. Support initiatives that will create employment opportunities and supports for youths in small isolated communities in Northwestern Ontario to keep them in the region and avoid the out-migration and brain-drain.

**That the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services...**

1. Review policies of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (which does not allow casinos to sponsor activities for children under 18), so that some of the gaming proceeds fund youth drop-in centres in host communities as safe places for children and youth to hang out and get the supports they need;
2. Divert some of the gaming proceeds to aid children affected by parents with gambling problems, and fund on-going programs, best-practices and social campaigns to reduce feelings of hopelessness, alienation and marginalization;
3. Monitor gambling trends and support more problem-gambling programs to reduce the risk of increased poverty, crime, and violence which create a vicious cycle of social problems that threaten our safety and security.

**That the Ontario Attorney General...**

1. Invest savings from the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) to fund youth drop-in centres, and support community facilities and services that help youth-at-risk not to offend or re-offend;
2. Sponsor forums and rallies to engage youths in dialogue on how to break cycles of crime and violence in society, and the role they can play to make communities safer for future and successive generations;
3. Support initiatives such as Teen Courts the RMYC is promoting as part of the alternative justice system to engage youth in the meting of justice so that they feel part of the process and have respect for the system;
4. Monitor the impact of the Youth Criminal Justice Act on young offenders, assess the effectiveness of correctional and rehabilitation programs in reducing repeat offenders, and whether the justice system is making communities safer;
5. Designate the correctional facility in Thunder Bay as a treatment centre for Northwestern Ontario to deal with the high population of offenders with addiction problems, including growing numbers of Aboriginal people in over ninety reserves across region to enable them to get the help they need close to their communities and the supports and resources they will utilize as after-care for successful healing;

6. Support after-care programs for offenders to create a healthier environment upon release from corrections to reduce recidivism rates and avoid the 'revolving door' syndrome created when offenders are released back into their communities with no changes to situations that created initial problems;

**That the Minister of Justice, Attorney-General of Canada, and the National Crime Prevention Strategy - Community Mobilization Program...**

1. Recognize the importance of involving children and youth as part of the solution to reducing juvenile crime and violence, and provide ongoing support to youth groups and youth centres working in this direction;
2. Use studies/facts compiled by Corrections Canada on crime as reference, and develop youth-centred crime and violence prevention strategies to mobilize children and youth to change course and make a difference;
3. Ensure that the justice system reflects our diversity and sets parameters for equality and fairness for all citizens;
4. Monitor the impact of the new Youth Criminal Justice Act on young offenders, and provide feedback to the levels of government with recommendations to reduce the numbers of first-time and repeat offenders.

**That Indian and Northern Affairs Canada...**

1. Commit more financial resources to address inter-generational impacts of residential schools, through programs and supports to break the cycle of poverty, crime, violence, addictions and suicides among Aboriginal youths;
2. Invest adequate funding to keep Aboriginal youths in school, and support job-readiness programs to enhance their chances of being employed to enable them to play a more meaningful and satisfying role in society;
3. Offer incentives to encourage potential employers to train and hire native youths so they develop a work ethic to compete in the labour market, earn an income and end the cycle of dependency;
4. Acknowledge that many Aboriginal children and youth are living in poverty, and introduce measures to ensure that there is no additional suffering when there are financial accountability problems at the Band level;

5. Recognize the high incarceration and recidivism rates of Aboriginal people, and use information from Corrections Canada, Statistics Canada, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Friendship Centres and so forth to support best practices and programs that are having a positive impact on Aboriginal people on and off reserves.

#### **That Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health...**

1. Expand the tobacco /stop smoking campaign to include alcohol, drug and solvent abuse, and continue to support youth led prevention strategies, fitness and wellness programs targeting youth-at-risk;
2. Develop more youth-friendly resources on fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder to reach out to children and youth as well as teen mothers and warn them of the consequences to the unborn child;
3. Work with the government to expedite the putting of warning labels on beer, wine and alcohol bottles similar to the education and information campaign on cigarette packages;
4. Support facilities with programs for increasing numbers of children and youth with mental health problems, and launch an education campaign to reduce the stigma attached to mental illness.

#### **That the Canadian Radio-Television & Telecommunications Commission...**

1. Recognize the evolving use of technology and the potential uses of the internet for cyber-bullying, to recruit gang members, potential terrorists, promote illicit substances, and foster racial hatred;
2. Develop media guidelines to balance freedom of speech/expression with social responsibility in regards to hate literature, promoting criminal activities, pornography and profanities harmful to children and youth, as well as threaten our peace and security;
3. Provide guidelines on the use of technology (such as computers, television, radio, electronic publications and other gadgets), that affect values, attitudes, and behaviour during formative years to facilitate the development of healthy minds and the shaping of stable personalities;

### **That the Ontario and Federal Governments...**

1. Look beyond the next election when developing programs and policies that have long-range results, and listen to all citizens and not just the well-to-do, those well connected to the political process, the corporate sector, well-paid lobbyists, and partisan members interested to gain political favours, because it is the impotent, the dispossessed, the poor, and angry youths with no hope that are a real threat to our safety and security;
2. Reach out to kids to show that they are important, and create policies and programs that foster equal opportunities in education, employment, housing, recreation, etc. so that they feel they belong to a safe and caring community;
3. Recognize that youth centres play an essential role as safe havens for kids to hang out after-school where parents are working; are ideal for organizing extra-curricular activities and disseminating information to enable children and youth to make informed decisions and wise choices; and provide opportunities for the community to connect with youths to discuss issues, and solicit input in a non-threatening environment;
4. Provide on-going support for Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres to help increasing numbers of native youths migrating to towns to stay out of trouble, acquire life skills to survive in the urban environment, develop a work-ethic for successful integration into the work-world, and empower themselves to break the cycle of poverty, crime and welfare;
5. Invest adequate resources for the creation of an inclusive affordable daycare program to give all children a fair start, and instill basic values that nurture the kind of Canadian society we want for peace and security;
6. Acknowledge that many of the issues that put children and youth at risk begin at home, and unless interventions are applied, more children will be caught in an ever expanding cycle of social problems passed on to the next generations, and making it more costly to rectify;
7. Expedite the process to address outstanding grievances with Aboriginal people, and settle reparations to heal the legacy of residential schools thereby reducing the numbers of radicalized dispossessed youths with no hope for a better future and nothing to lose;

8. Re-affirm the importance of family, and support good parenting programs for nurturing and to facilitate the development of children into healthy caring well-mannered individuals and responsible law-abiding citizens;
9. Provide adequate funding for education and life skills training, and offer supports for youths with learning disabilities, mental health issues, addictions, or facing difficulties in school as an investment in the progress and prosperity of the next generation;
10. Increase funding for youth employment programs, apprenticeships and on-the-job training to enable more youths to start working, maintain a work ethic, earn a regular income and gain pride from having a regular job-- instead of collecting welfare and developing a culture of dependency;
11. Enable the justice system to enhance a community's safety by passing deterrent sentences that are long-enough for offenders to participate in educational and training courses, and treatment programs to facilitate their rehabilitation and reducing the numbers of repeat offenders;
12. Review legislation governing the well-being of children and youth to ensure their protection from selfish, uncaring and unscrupulous adults. Both the federal and provincial governments should pass laws to give maximum sentences and stiffer penalties for adults who abuse kids, sexually exploit and take advantage of children, engage youths in criminal activities, or recruit them as puppets for criminal biker gangs;
13. Lead the way by creating a civil service that reflects our diversity, and offer incentives to encourage the corporate sector, businesses and institutions implement employment equity so that our workplaces reflect the communities being served. This will create more role models who inspire marginalized groups, open doors for racialized youths and give them hope for better employment opportunities and a brighter future;
14. Charge a tax levy to alcohol manufacturers that goes to support youth centres and after school programs for youths who are victims of parents addicted to alcohol to have safe and comfortable places to hang out and learn from positive peers. Some of the funding should be directed for special programs and recreational activities for those suffering the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effects, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder;

15. Address outstanding grievances with Aboriginal people, settle reparations to heal the legacy of residential schools, and address the negative inter-generational impacts, whose cycle needs to be broken to avoid creating an ever-expanding population of problem kids and youth at risk;
16. Set a positive example on mediation by encouraging Members of Parliament to show respect and not shout at each other when debating in the House;
17. Streamline correctional services to avoid duplication, save money, and enhance the rehabilitation of offenders.
- \* The province should focus on the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and run facilities for young offenders with special programs for first time offenders, Counseling and special education as a priority, and the provision of cognitive skills and life skills to prepare them for re-integration into society and stop them from re-offending.
- \* The federal government should deal with adult offenders, provide adult education, and run special rehabilitation programs that have proved to be successful with adults and repeat offenders;
18. Engage the volunteer sector and charitable organizations by providing grants to create first-time jobs in a labour market that is experiencing massive layoffs through re-organization and downsizing;
19. Offer incentives and rewards to companies that are willing to forgo extra profits and are committed to training and hiring youths, and give them a chance to participate in the work-world;
20. Hold regular consultations with the youth, and monitor trends to acts on potential problems before things get out of hand;
21. Review studies and reports from various funded projects and utilize the wealth of information compiled by the government to take action on issues confronting children and youth so that more can realize their potential as responsible citizens with something positive to contribute to society.



## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Youths want to feel safe, and are concerned about safety and security as everyone else. The family, peers, the media, and society in general all help to create attitudes and mold behaviour in children. There is a lot of information from studies and reports at our disposal which we can use to make our communities safer.

From deliberations at the conference and the focus group discussions, we are aware of the following facts and situations:

1. The federal correctional system alone is spending \$1.58 billion a year to supervise approximately 26,000 offenders. In addition, 90 per cent of offenders have previous convictions, and over 80 per cent committed a previous violent offence. With costs of policing, courts, the justice system, legal support for offenders, compensation of victims, pain and suffering, etc. the Department of Justice estimates the total annual cost of crime in Canada at close to \$59 billion.
  - \* *From our perspective, investing in prevention will reduce the numbers of offenders, the pain and suffering caused to victims, and will subsequently cut the costs of incarceration. Rehabilitation is not effectively reducing the numbers of repeat offenders once one is caught in the cycle of crime and violence. Hence, in our opinion...“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”.*
2. School drop outs and the under educated make up most of the offenders.
  - \* *Therefore, investing in education and providing supports for youths to stay in school is a proactive strategy to reduce numbers of young, and repeat offenders.*
3. Crime and violence escalate when alcohol, drugs and mind-altering solvents are involved. Eight out of ten young offenders have long-standing substance abuse problems, and one half of the current population in federal correctional institutions were under the influence of alcohol and drugs when they committed offences that led to their incarceration.
  - \* *Therefore, effective anti-drug campaigns to prevent kids from abusing and getting addicted to drugs and alcohol will make a difference.*
4. Poverty, abuse, violent role models, racism, absence of fathers, and out-of-home placement are risk factors for kids joining youth street gangs.

- \* *Therefore policies to alleviate poverty, programs to teach parenting so that children feel wanted and gain a sense of belonging to a real family, a good education to open new opportunities, and jobs to create hope for a better future will reduce the risk of youths joining criminal street gangs--which are hard to quit once one is involved in them.*
- 5. Kids who are bored and left with no supervision often get into trouble.
- \* *Providing youth with drop-in centres to get together and participate in after school programs will alleviate boredom and counter the peer pressure to join youth street gangs.*

We need to think outside the box and do things differently to reduce the numbers of high risk children becoming criminals. We must address the high recidivism rates of offending youths and repeat offenders, and invest more in prevention strategies in order to reduce escalating costs of corrections, rehabilitation and aftercare.

All levels of governments should show leadership and commit the resources required to develop and implement policies and programs that address issues that ferment crime and violence. Instead of being reactive to catch up with the problems, more should be done to help parents, families, social service agencies and communities raise and nurture children so that they become healthy and responsible individuals.

We are aware of 'care-free' parents who freely use drugs, despise authority and pass on negative attitudes to their children, who grow up sharing such values with their peers, and eventually pass them to their own children. This cycle must be stopped.

Governments have long realized the importance of an educated and well-trained workforce for economic growth, and are working with the corporate sector to ensure that the education system fulfils the needs of the business community to enhance prosperity and development. We feel that families and our social institutions need the same attention and support to enhance the capacity of parents to teach, instill and promote basic values, beliefs, norms and morals we share as Canadians. This will help to shape character and mold behaviour that fosters safer communities.

The growing power and influence of corporations and a widening gap between the few 'haves' and growing numbers of 'have-nots' that is widely promoted through today's information technology is having an impact on our security. The growth of the anti-globalization campaigns have the potential to destabilize society. The challenge is for governments to play a proactive equalizing role.

There is growing indifference to our democratic political process as evidenced by the few numbers of voters going to the polls during elections. Youths in particular, seem to be losing faith in the system. There needs to be a conscious deliberate effort to engage them in the process so that they have a voice to express their concerns. Our political leaders should pay more attention to the issues confronting children and youth to give them hope.

The RMYC supports the Ontario provincial government's initiatives to involve youths in the democratic process. This will avoid alienating and marginalizing them into radical extremists undermining our social structures, peace and security. We welcome programs to encourage kids to stay in school. Education is the best strategy to break the cycle of poverty and related problems of violence and crime. The proposed standardized universal day-care will give all children a fair start in life, and provide an early assessment for those at risk. Youth Employment Strategies introduce youths to the work-world, and prepare them for careers and employment, so that they have a purpose in life and contribute to the well-being of the community.

Society must give children and youth hope for a better world. More resources should be invested to engage youths as active partners in creating safer communities. Governments must lead the way by developing proactive policies, implementing prevention-oriented programs and supporting successful youth-led initiatives that enable children to break negative cycles.

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council believes that youth centers are an effective strategy to involve children and youth in structured, positive and meaningful activities. They are safe havens for youths to hang out, and help them to learn and grow together. Youths can organize their own activities to avoid boredom, share experiences, ideas, and opinions with peers within their generation. Youth centres can keep youths off the streets and out of trouble, while positive role models provide at risk youths with support and guidance to break negative cycles.

With adequate funding and guidance, youth centres can organize after-school activities, run training programs, provide information on the risks of alcohol and drugs, teen pregnancies, careers, jobs, bullying and so forth, to help kids make wise choices. There is a saying "You can take a horse to the river, but you can't make it drink." However, knowing where the water is will enable the horse to go for a drink on its own when it wants to. Knowledge empowers kids to make informed decisions.

We hope that this report will inspire those with resources to create and support youth centres as a practical alternative strategy that can make a difference.

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# Toward safer streets

## Regional chief to conference: 'We're all in this world together'

### Youth violence topic of forum this weekend

BY KRIS KETONEN  
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

A group of Northwestern Ontario youths are working to make their communities safer this weekend at a forum on youth violence prevention.

The Violence Prevention Youth Conference is hosted by the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) and running all weekend at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay. About 100 youths from across the region are taking part. They will hear from guest speakers and discuss how to become involved in preventing youth crime and violence.

"Kids are not born violent or racist; it's all learned," said Moffatt Makuto, executive director of the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO). "How can you train them to break the cycle?"

Makuto said young people should be encouraged to communicate.

"The whole issue of racism, how do you deal with that? If someone calls you a name, do you just go and punch them?"

"There are other ways," Makuto said, adding Saturday afternoon a brainstorming session was planned to discuss those other ways.

Funding for the forum came through the National Crime Prevention program, and the RMYC contacted regional agencies they deal with — such as youth centres — and invited them to send youths to the conference, Makuto said.

Yesterday, youths listened to a speech by Charles Fox, Ontario Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

Fox spoke of tolerance and understanding when he addressed the youths gathered in a large circle around him in the school's gym, using traditional First Nation instruments of worship — a drum, eagle feathers and pipes — as examples of how First Nations people speak to God.

• Continued from page A2

But, he said, Christianity lashed back against the traditional First Nations worship methods, saying those instruments are "evil."

The point is, Fox said, different people have different cultures, and an effort must be made to understand each other.

"We all have to live together," Fox said. "We're all in this world together."

Fox was followed by Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Stan Beardy, whose son Daniel died tragically in early August at the age of 19.

Police have said Daniel Beardy died as the result of an assault that caused "serious head trauma." Daniel was found unconscious after being assaulted during an argument on Fort William First Nation territory, police say.

Corey Wesley, 23, was charged with manslaughter in connection with the assault, and is currently out on bail.

In Saturday's speech — which was kept brief due to scheduling concerns — Stan Beardy talked about problems facing city youth, including alcohol and substance abuse, and told listeners to be careful in choosing who they associate with.

It was a small sampling of what the youth participating in the weekend's conference will be exposed to. Other speakers include representatives of the City of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay Police, Nishnawbe Aski Police Services, the city's school boards and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council.

Among the topics were the city's new Children's Charter, trends in youth crime, bullying, racism and peer mediation.

At the end of the forum, the participants will make recommendations as to reducing youth violence and take those back to their communities, said Michael Sklazeski, president of the RMYC.

"Even after the conference, they'll be speaking about violence in their communities," he said, adding organizations



SANDI KRASOWSKI/THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Regional Grand Chief Charles Fox welcomes Farida Abu-Bakere to the Violence Prevention Youth Conference.

and community leaders will learn more about the problem through attending the forum.

Sklazeski, 19, said the RMYC often travels the region doing youth workshops on things like leadership and self-esteem, and has discovered a great deal of youth-to-youth violence in the region's high

schools.

"We felt the best way, the most effective way, to create a difference in a community is to bring the region together," he said. "We give them a forum."

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2004

WWW.CHRONICLEJOURNAL.COM

## Youth speak out against violence

BY CATHI AROLA  
THE CHRONICLE JOURNAL

Startling finds from a recent report have Ontario youth speaking out.

Rampant violence and abuse is becoming more widespread among young people. The report Just Listen to Me: Youth Voices on Violence is based on true stories on the experiences youth have with school bullying, domestic assault, street

[www.voicesforchildren.ca](http://www.voicesforchildren.ca)

violence and attacks within institutions.

A group of Thunder Bay youths also had a hand in the findings of the report. It was prepared by Ontario's Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy and the group Voices for Children.

Results were gathered from round table discussions that brought together 80 youths, aged 13-24, from regions across the province including Thunder Bay, Kenora, London, Manitoulin Island, Ottawa and Toronto. Many of the participants have been exposed to children's aid, group homes, foster care and detention centres.

Tara Syed, 16, and other members of Thunder Bay's Regional Multicultural Youth Council made a presentation Monday based on the first-of-its-kind report.

• Continued on page A3

## Youth council confident report won't be brushed off

• Continued from page A1

Syed, president of the council, said it's about time young people are heard and taken seriously. The centre anticipates that the report will have legacy status rather than be brushed away as just a document.

The report made seven recommendations, including a call for tighter screening on those who work with youth, the involvement of young people at all levels of decision-making and lowering the voting age to 16.

Syed said the report is unique because it profiles different areas of the province rather than focusing on Ontario's most populated pockets.

"As an isolated community there are things that pertain to us more specifically than to everyone else," she said. Issues raised in the report include substance abuse, systemic abuse, peer-on-peer violence, racial and culture issues and inadequacy of the child welfare system.

Thunder Bay's youth are often faced with boredom that can lead to violence and destructive behaviours, she said. Aboriginal youth, who have relocated from remote First Nation communities, complain that stereotypes follow them and often authoritative figures victimize them.

The group Voice for Children believes that youth violence can be reduced or

stopped only when their opinions and experiences are given credence and value.

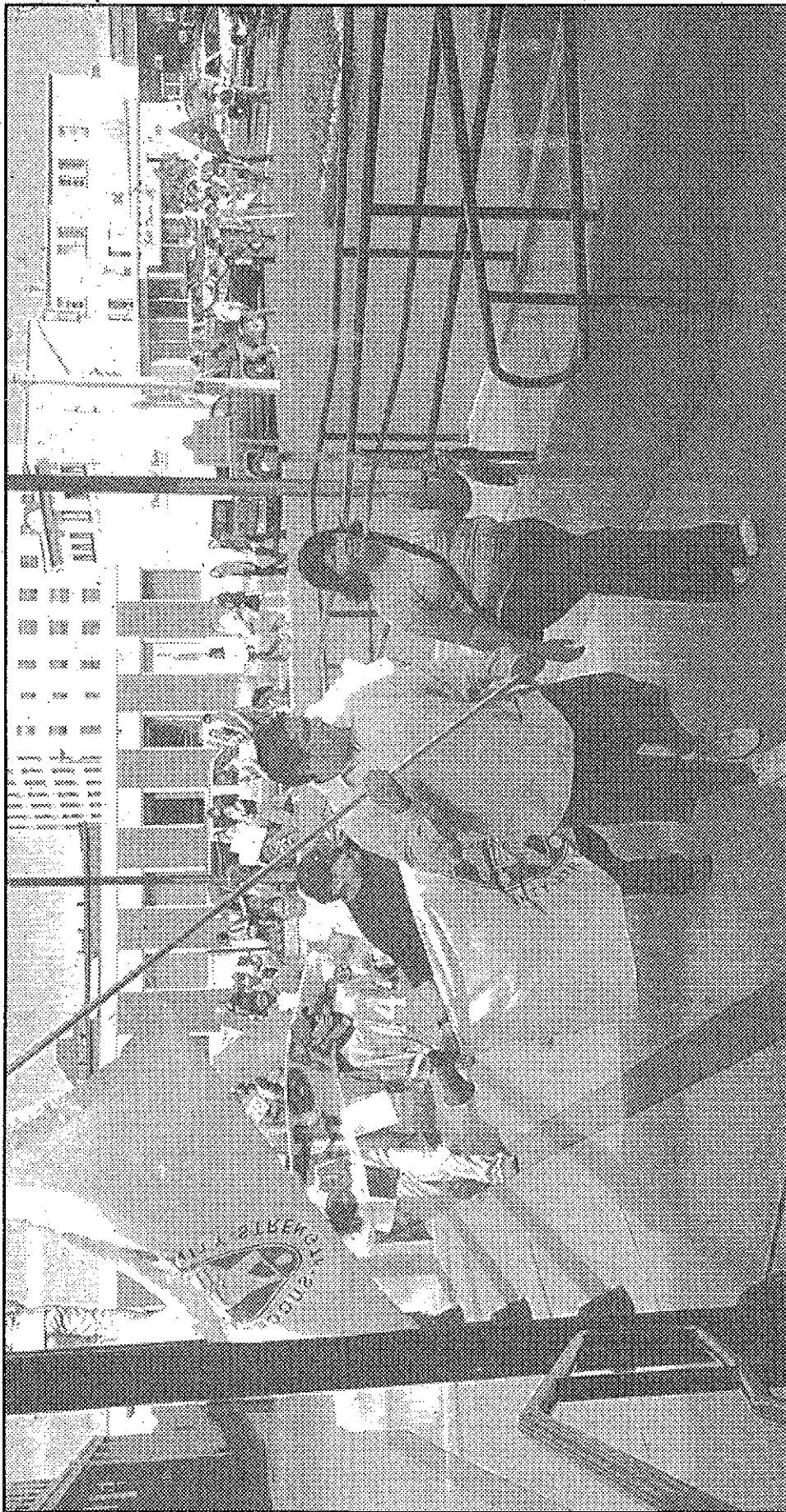
"We must be a part of the solution. Just by listening to youth, society as a whole can come much closer to solving a complex problem that affects everyone, regardless of age," the group's website states.

"As a society we need to create sustainable changes at the very heart of our communities to ensure a future that is marked less by violence and more by respect."

The council is also worried that inadequate funding may see the downfall of the 19-year-old Multicultural Youth Centre. In December 2002 the centre, located in Victoriaville Centre, closed its doors because of outstanding debt and lost revenues. Last Monday the youth council made a presentation to Thunder Bay city council asking for one per cent of the five per cent slot machine revenue generated from the Thunder Bay Charity Casino.

The centre said that since the casino opened, fundraising has been difficult.

For more information on the report go to the Voices For Children website.



SANDI KRASOWSKI/THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

## Walk to promote youth peace

Members of the Regional Multicultural Youth Council and the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Decade Youth Council travelled from the Lakehead Labour Centre to city hall

Friday during a Peace Walk to raise awareness about youth violence and to promote youth peace.

# EDITORIALS

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Thanks to the supporters of the youth for peace march

To the editor:

As organizers of the "Youth for Peace" march, we would like to thank the businesses, agencies and individuals who sponsored the event on September 16, 2005. We are also grateful to all who walked with us to City Hall for the rally to raise awareness on growing incidents of youth crime and youth-to-youth violence.

Children and youth are concerned about crime and violence as everyone else. But who are our role models? We are growing up with domestic violence, sexual assaults, robberies and criminal biker gangs around us. There is wide press coverage when our well-paid sports heroes fight during games. We are bombarded by violence in the media as entertainment. Corporations are directly advertising to kids movies, toys, computer games and music with violence as fun, and parents are buying them as special gifts for children to play with. Our political leaders do not fare any better when they shout at each other in the House in front of cameras for all to see.

Questioning where this trend in crime

and violence will lead us is the beginning of acknowledging the problem. But we need concrete action to address root causes of violence to break the cycle. Angry children grow-up to be angry youths who end up as angry adults. When they become parents, the children do what they see at home, on television and the social environment around them. Add alcohol, drugs, poverty, racism, greed, impotence and a sense of hopelessness to the anger, and our peace and security is threatened. We must be concerned because as we can all see on the news, in some towns, street gangs have taken over neighbourhoods, and in other countries the level of violence has escalated to terrorism and suicide bombers.

At the Regional Multicultural Youth Council's (RMYC) Youth for Safer Communities Conference last year, youth crime and violence were identified as a major problems threatening our peace and security in the city and across the region. To follow up, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Decade Youth Council, the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, the Metis Nation of Ontario and several other agencies working with children and youth banded together for a peace

march and violence prevention rally.

The youth shared the podium with community leaders to wish students a safe school year. We are encouraging youths to resolve conflict through mediation. What begins as a petty argument can lead to name-calling, racial slurs, bullying, assault, gang fight or swarming. We believe that it is better to teach kids communication skills, and learn to talk things out rather than fight it out.

We are challenging schools and the community to promote peer mediation to settle disputes.

There is also the growing problem of addictions in relation to crime and violence. Youths need to be aware of the consequences of abusing alcohol and drugs and the risk to safety, and reach out to each other to create a safer community.

In the mean time, our political leaders should focus on the causes of violence and crime in our society so that we can break the cycle before things get worse..

*Sasha Sky, RMYC President  
Catherine Cheechoo, NAN Decade  
Youth Council*

The Thunder Bay's Source reserves the right to edit submissions for content and clarity. All attempts will be made to preserve the core argument of the author. Opinions, letters and Beefs and Bouquets may be submitted to Thunder Bay's Source by fax at 345-9923, by emailing the editor at [ldunick@dougallmedia.com](mailto:ldunick@dougallmedia.com), through [tbsource.com](http://tbsource.com) or by mail at 87 N. Hill Street, P7A 5V6.



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- \* Northern Nishnawbe Education Council/Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School
- \* Ontario Child and Family Service Advocacy and Voices for Children
- \* YOUNCAN

*...and the following individuals:*

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