

How youth can end racism

Problem as seen through a lens of exclusion, harassment

BY LAURA FRALICK
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THUNDER BAY HAS had an ethnically diverse population for over 200 years, with settlements and groups of indigenous people calling our beautiful location home for thousands of years. As our knowledge grows and attitudes change, it is often wise (and productive) to focus on where we have been, what is helpful and what needs to be discarded in order to build new relationships to sustain our lives and community.

On April 4, I was part of a Leadership Thunder Bay team participating in a Community Action Project for the City of Thunder Bay Anti-Racism & Respect Advisory Committee.

The committee had requested the development of a special conference for youth. The conference, entitled The Unity Project, reached out to high schools in the city with a view to attracting a diverse mix of youth ages 14-18 and giving them a role in guiding our city forward with efforts to understand — and eradicate — racism.

The 83 participants took part in a full day event that featured a keynote address by Becky Sasakamoose-Kuffner, Cultural Diversity and Race Relations Co-ordinator for the City of Saskatoon.

Becky is an indigenous woman who presented an adult version of this workshop in 2015 and provided her facilitation and communications skills for the youth event. She took a global view of history and the legacy of colonization on cultural views and policies.

The participating youth were provided with a comfortable and welcoming space at the Lakehead University Faculty Lounge in which to express their views and concerns. We focused on developing positive, action-based solutions, rather than focusing solely on concerns.



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

The youth came from many walks of life; indigenous people from our city and the distant Northern fly-in communities, other countries as well as diverse religions and lifestyles. A “to do” list of recommendations was then provided to the anti-racism committee in May 2016.

What did youth have to say and recommend?

YOUTH see racism through a lens of exclusion, often accompanied by harassment. They worry that the real person is not seen due to assumptions made about their appearance. They believe that racism is inherited and that youth can get it right, if given the tools and education to do so.

Youth feel comfortable speaking with family members and school personnel who are respectful and who are trained to be sensitive to these topics. They asked for a “safe place” to express concerns or ask questions.

To avoid feeling intimidated when seeking an adult to speak with, they need to have willing adults step for-

ward and be identified, perhaps as part of services offered by school guidance counselors.

A diversity working group or committee in each school is welcome, but they want these groups to have an outreach component that results in an aware, improving community experience.

Youth may remain silent if they feel their questions will be ridiculed or misinterpreted. They won't open up to people who demonstrate closed minds or who judge them.

They would like to see celebrations of other cultures and religions with school events, including zero tolerance of assigning stereotypes to people in the school system. They believe education and sharing of cultural values and traditions will be helpful to teach people about the positive aspects of all cultures.

The youth of our city, region and country are ready to learn, understand and act to end racism. The City of Thunder Bay and its anti-racism committee, along with Leadership Thunder Bay and our CAP committee are inspired and confident about the next generation and the improvement to all

our lives that can occur when these difficult topics include their voices.

We look forward to future events and opportunities to continue the involvement of youth in making Thunder Bay a welcoming, sustaining place for everyone.

Laura Fralick is a lifelong resident of Thunder Bay. She runs a financial planning practice at Investors Group and enjoys volunteering with newcomers, supporting the arts, mentoring young people and supporting economic growth in our area. She is a 2016 alumni of Leadership Thunder Bay.

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