

The Unity Project

Involving youth in making Thunder Bay better

BY PRECIOUS ANDERSON

THUNDER BAY is a diverse community with many languages, customs and world-views. Because of this our city has a colourful history rich in culture.

But where there are differences there is often racism and discrimination. Though much effort has been put into the elimination of racism, our community is still divided.

Unity is the state of being united or joined as a whole. Unity in the context of The Unity Project is about the fundamental need for the people in Thunder Bay to work together for a brighter future. I believe that unity is the strength of the community and we must work together to find that.

In 2015 the City of Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee hosted a community forum entitled *Shifting the Lens: Understanding Racism* which included a presentation on the roots of racism with keynote speaker Becky Saskamoose-Kuffner, cultural diversity and race relations consultant from the City of Saskatoon.

In response to the event, the committee was approached by youth from Algonquin Avenue and École Gron Morgan Public Schools who had a strong interest in attending.

Though the committee was not able to accommodate the youth at the time, the need for their voice to be heard was understood and the concept of an anti-racism forum geared specifically for youth began to develop.

The Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee put forward a Community Action Project proposal to the Leadership Thunder Bay Class of 2016. Following the formation of community action project teams, we reviewed various proposals from different non for profit or



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

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

ganizations and our entire team instantly wanted to host the anti-racism youth forum.

On April 4, Leadership Thunder Bay and City of Thunder Bay Anti-Racism Advisory Council brought

youth from across the city together to exercise their authority and voice their opinions on issues of diversity and racism in their schools and in the community of Thunder Bay.

The Unity Project opened with an engaging and thought provoking presentation, *Unified Minds:*

Working Towards the End of Racial Discrimination by Sasakamoose-Kuffner.

During the presentation, youth learned about social stratification in England, Becky's own experience as a victim of the sixties scoop, and the legacy of racism in institutionalized policy.

Youth were asked to consider the notion of how well-meaning actions can unknowingly and even unintentionally be involved in systemic racism.

Following the presentation, youth participated in a series of sessions designed to get their thoughts and opinions on anti-racism efforts in Thunder Bay.

As a facilitator at the event I was excited to see such enthusiasm and excitement from the youth in our city.

The students were very interested in learning about each other's ethnic background but were afraid about coming across as being rude in a different cultural context.

Many of the youth agreed that speaking out when they see racism happening and educating the older generation will help combat racism.

The youth who took part in the event understand the importance of unity and see changes that need to be made.

I am so thankful I had a chance to

be a part of such a remarkable event where the city is not only listening but asking for help in finding solutions from the youth of our city.

The team Tricia Murdoch, Stephanie Reid, Brook Mainville, Laura Fralick, and I are excited to put together the final

report of our findings to be utilized in future anti-racism initiatives in Thunder Bay.

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