

# Welcome to the purple-striped and pink-spotted

BY GURLEEN CHAHAL



ONE CITY  
MANY VOICES

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

about discrimination in Thunder Bay, it must be some form of admonishment or reprimand.

I ask that you rid yourself of that predisposition, because this article is not a reproach nor is it a cautionary tale.

Instead of writing about a child subject to discrimination in the past, I am going to show you about how our youth today are working relentlessly to build a brighter and more inclusive city. I am going to reveal how, each and every day, Thunder Bay students aged 13 (and even younger) are becoming more international in their beliefs and adopting a global mindset.

Jeevan Chahal — my younger brother — is one of many students who attend weekly Regional Multicultural Youth Council meetings and has been doing so for just over two years. The RMYC is an anti-discrimination youth group headquartered right here in Thunder Bay. The remarkable youth in this group work year-long to promote equality.

RMYC youth create city-wide workshops, run after-school programs, write reports using first-hand data collected via surveys, meet with officials such as the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the city mayor, and do so much more.

As a new member, Jeevan strongly recommends this group for all youth. "The RMYC made me think," he says, "Through the group, I was exposed to different cultures. I met so many new people . . . and learned more about the world."

I WAS being truthful when I claimed that this article would not be a criticism. However, I will still take this chance to make a very strong recommendation to parents.

The world is diverse, and Thunder Bay is making many valiant efforts (one of which is supporting the RMYC by finding them a safer location) to grow into an international

and multicultural hub. That being said, involving your children in organizations such as the RMYC, or even just educating them yourself on different cultures is invaluable.

By encouraging diverse opinions and beliefs, you make them stronger individuals, less likely to get into conflicts regarding discrimination, and help them gain more skills to become knowledgeable contenders on the global level when they grow to be adults.

Through youth like Jeevan and all of the other RMYC members I have come to know, I strongly believe that the future of Thunder Bay is in good hands.

Likewise, I know that my fifth-grade self can rest happily because we as a city are approaching the day when we will freely give warm welcomes to the "purple-striped" and "pink-spotted."

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*Gurleen Chahal is a recent graduate of Sir Winston Churchill C&VI. She was the youth representative on the city's Crime Prevention Council, member of the Anti-Racism Committee, and RMYC president for two years. She will be entering Western University in the fall for the Bachelor of Medical Sciences Program and Scholar's Elective Program.*

*"If he was purple, would we care?  
If she was pink, would we stare?  
I think we would, but prove me  
wrong.  
Show that stripped or spotted, we  
all belong.  
One day (soon), I hope we'll both be  
blind.  
To pattern, to colour, to mind and  
kind."*

THE EXCERPT above stems from my fifth-grade self. Specifically, it comes from a poem I wrote a few short months after arriving in Thunder Bay. I think I was trying to write about diversity, without fully understanding what it was myself.

At the time, I had just moved here from Toronto and experienced the largest culture shock of my life.

Not only did I leave a city with over two million inhabitants to a city with just over 100,000, but I also left a classroom with a variety of races and joined one where I was the only coloured student in my entire grade.

Before I continue, I am going to address a common misconception that you may have. You may be thinking that, since this article is