

# From different pasts to a common future

BY WENDY WANG AND HERAN ZHAO

THE Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) is an inclusive student-led group for children and youth in North-western Ontario. Since being formed in 1985 as a legacy of the International Youth Year, the council has provided a collective voice for youths, and organized initiatives to keep them safe, help them to stay in school and achieve their goals.

Guided by the Canadian Multicultural Act unanimously passed by Parliament in 1988, the RMYC has adopted our national values of diversity, equality and respect. Unfortunately racism and discrimination exist and prevent racialized, minority and Indigenous groups from having equal opportunities, equal access, and equal participation in Canadian society. Most racism is a reflection of ignorance, fear of the unknown and intolerance. It is easy to stereotype groups that are different and marginalize them, thereby fostering a false sense of superiority to justify power, influence and control.

The RMYC is part of the City of Thunder Bay's Anti-racism and Respect Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay — a coalition of community groups and individuals working together to promote acceptance and



## ONE CITY, MANY VOICES

eliminate racism and discrimination. We organize events such as the community breakfast to commemorate March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This was designated by the United Nations in 1966 to commemorate the Sharpsville Massacre in South Africa when unarmed protesters against racial segregation were killed and wounded. The Canadian government joined the March 21 Campaign in 1996, and all provinces and territories followed in 1988.

March 21 activities raise awareness about local efforts, government programs, services and resources to combat racial discrimination. Since 1993, the RMYC has been making multicultural bows using traditional Indigenous medicine wheel colours of black, red, white

and yellow ribbons intertwined to symbolize the beauty of the human race united in harmony. The bows are a symbol of March 21, as the poppy is for Remembrance Day. The purpose is to inspire discussion and encourage everyone to join hands to create an inclusive accepting society where diversity is welcomed and appreciated. No one is born racist. Racism is learned from family, friends, the media, institutions and so forth, and perpetuated through systems and policies created to maintain the status-quo. Many laws developed by ruling classes were intended to enhance their status, protect their wealth and maintain their privileges.

The RMYC uses a youth-to-youth approach to engage peers in dialogue about celebrating diversity and how to get along. Youths connect well with each other and can be trained to make presentations about discrimination and the need to treat fellow human beings the same way we all want to be treated.

Talking about racism and stereotypes opens the mind and helps to build bridges of understanding to make informed opinions and respectful actions. Knowing about other Canadians, our similarities, shared values and common interests reduces the prejudices and hatred that divide us. Positive peer influence makes a difference when kids develop empathy

and realize the pain caused by judging other people as inferior or unequal due to race.

Fighting racism is not confined to March 21. In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the RMYC is working with the Ministry of Education and school boards to have our education system teach the full history of Canada that incorporates Indigenous perspectives on colonization, residential schools and the '60s Scoop so that we are aware of the impacts. And we promote activities that encourage Indigenous and non-Indigenous youths to mix and get to know each other better to improve race relations among present and successive generations.

For people interested in joining the RMYC or for more information about activities, please visit our website: <https://manwoyc.weebly.com>.

04/12/17

Wendy Wang is a Grade 12 student in the International Baccalaureate program at Sir Winston Churchill C&VI. She is president of the Thunder Bay Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC). Born in Waterloo she moved to Thunder Bay to start Grade 1.

Heran Zhao is vice-president of the RMYC and a Grade 11 student at Hammar skjold High School. Born in China she moved to Thunder Bay in 2014.