

Let's start those difficult conversations

So far, the City of Thunder Bay is the only employer participating in useful workshops

BY ROBYN PEPIN

OVER the weekend of Nov. 14-15, I was fortunate to participate in Walk-A-Mile facilitator training, presented by the Aboriginal Liaison Office of the City of Thunder Bay. I wanted to become a Walk-A-Mile facilitator for a few reasons: to help further my own personal growth, network with other people who share the same values as me, and to obtain knowledge from local Aboriginal Peoples that I could pass on to co-workers, family and friends.

Each day began with a prayer and smudging from Elder Michael Morrison. This was a great start to events as the moment of prayer allowed for self-reflection about why I was there and to help me mentally prepare for the discussions that I was about to participate in.

Walk-A-Mile facilitator training is based on the Walk-A-Mile film created by Michelle Derosier and Dave Clement from Thunderstone Pictures. The purpose of the film is to encourage dialogue in the community on the history of aboriginal people in Canada, their experiences in Thunder Bay (and beyond) and how to move forward for other generations to prosper.



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.

Walk-A-Mile is divided into five modules: Coming to Terms; We are all Treaty People; A Legacy of Struggle; Targets and Heroes; and The Way Forward.

The training consisted of learning and discussing the five modules. All participants discussed Coming to Terms and then were divided into groups to discuss the remaining four.

There were discussions about residential schools, government policy and social stigma aboriginal people face.

Participants also discussed varying ways to teach this knowledge and assist with those difficult conversations acknowledging differences in Thunder Bay.

So far, the Corporation of the City of Thunder Bay is the only employer participating in these workshops. There are many employers, organizations and citizens in the city who should also register. Walk-A-Mile training is an important learning tool to begin discussions around topics of treaties, stereotypes, racism and its impact on citizens in Thunder Bay.

The workshops vary in length — some are an hour, two hours or four hours. The length of the workshop will depend on the amount of material covered. A four-hour session would allow enough time to get through the entire workshop.

Additionally, these discussions do not happen in large groups, but rather smaller groups so participants have an opportunity to thoroughly engage with the material presented to them. It also provides a safe space for these difficult conversations to exist.

I encourage everyone in Thunder Bay (and beyond) to sign up for these workshops. They are not meant to push perspectives, but rather

to provide information to assist with ongoing reconciliation and to challenge your thinking.

There are many issues that our city faces, particularly with racism and violence. The information provided through these sessions is intended to provide tools to understand some of the issues aboriginal people face.

If the majority of the citizens of Thunder Bay took part in these workshops, perhaps the negative attitudes and barriers aboriginal people face would be lessened.

Everyone is different; we all face barriers at some point in our lives, however, it is harder for some people to succeed when stereotypes are perpetuated and acted upon in society. Let's start to educate our community.

For those interested in registering for Walk-A-Mile workshops, please contact Aboriginal Liaison Ann Magiskan at amagiskan@thunderbay.ca or Joyce Hunter, Aboriginal Liaison strategy co-ordinator at jhunter@thunderbay.ca.

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