

Empower the North

BY ALBERT BRULE

WE ALL want Thunder Bay to be a great place to live, a great place to work, a great place to raise a family. But for a community to be truly great, it should be great for everyone.

So let's be honest. For many in our community, it's not all that great. One in seven Thunder Bay residents live below the low-income measure. One in five children experience poverty. One in 10 families report food insecurity. The level of stress experienced by individuals in our community due to low income, unemployment, inadequate housing or food insecurity is on the rise.

The history of United Way is rooted in building strong and inclusive communities. We aim to create opportunities for everyone to reach their full potential. However, for those who lack basic necessities like food and shelter, it's tough to get ahead in life. How do we expect people to reach their full potential when they are struggling to find work, feed their family or pay the rent?

We also know that poverty impacts some groups more than others. Indigenous people, racialized community members, young people, women, 2SLGBGTQ+ people, immigrants, and those with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, and they face significant barriers to getting out of poverty.

To build a thriving community we must ensure that everyone has access to the supports they need. As community leaders, we must work together to make Thunder Bay an equitable, safe, and inclusive place where everyone can obtain the resources required to live a great life, regardless of their race, sexual identity, ability, or gender.

United Way of Thunder Bay's mission is to improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collec-



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

United Way leads creation of inclusive engagement platform

tive action. We work with local agency partners, businesses, governments and thousands of donors to change lives across our region. We know the power of what can be achieved when we help people work together; we can solve and prevent problems and change the conditions and systems that have negative impacts on people.

As we start the new year, in collaboration with several community partners, we are unveiling a bold and exciting initiative designed to empower and strengthen the positive impact of individuals, organizations and businesses that want to make a difference in our community.

Using technology to facilitate citizen engagement and mobilization, we are launching an online community engagement platform called Empower the North.

Empower the North is intended to be a safe space, a place of inclusion; a place where agency representatives, volunteers, those with lived experience and concerned community members can connect, engage and collaborate; a network to foster new relationships and partnerships; a creative environment to nurture new attitudes about the need and the potential for social change and new ways of organizing to achieve it.

We are striving to level the playing field for engagement by recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives. We will empower residents by amplifying new voices, especially those that are often under-represented or marginalized. Empower the North offers an open platform for members to express themselves, tell their own story and reinforce their sense of community belonging.

Through discussion forums, working groups, storytelling and impact reports, Empower the North will raise public consciousness and understanding of important social issues such as poverty, homelessness, mental health and addictions, racism, and overall community safety and well-being. Our goal is to inspire civic engagement, provide focus for public debate, promote opportunities to get involved and encourage every community member to take action.

Once city, many voices. Join the conversation and let your voice be heard. Visit empowerthenorth.ca and be the change in our community.

Albert Brule is CEO of United Way of Thunder Bay and a member of the City of Thunder Bay Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee. For information about Empower the North, visit empowerthenorth.ca. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.