

RAISED VOICES: CARRIERS OF HOPE A YOUTH EDUCATION POLICY FORUM



Second Gathering – February 15 and 16, 2020

Enoch First Nation, Alberta

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 15 and 16, 2020 the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Education Sector together with Sakatay Global hosted the second *Raised Voices: Carriers of Hope* gathering in Enoch First Nation, Alberta. The Forum gathered ten Carriers of Hope from last year's event. The youth (Carriers of Hope) discussed creating an implementation guide for the Youth Calls to Action (Calls) on First Nations Education as well as a strategic plan on moving the Calls forward. The Calls will be presented at a national level and call upon students, teachers, schools, First Nations leadership, provincial and federal leadership to act on creating positive change.

RECAP OF CALLS TO ACTION/LAST YEAR'S GATHERING

Between February 1 and 4, 2019, the AFN Education Sector and Three Things Consulting, hosted *Raised Voices: Carriers of Hope, A Youth Policy Forum on First Nations Education*. The Forum gathered 36 First Nations youth from across Canada between the ages of 13 and 18 years old on Algonquin territory in Ottawa, Ontario for a weekend of ceremony, insight and change-making. The youth processed many ideas and recommendations for education policy. On the fourth day, the youth presented their findings by way of five Calls to Action aimed at all levels of governments (including First Nations governments), First Nations and Indigenous organizations, education partners and average Canadians. The Calls to Action are based on personal experiences and realities shared among the youth and are focused on advancing student success in education by addressing long-standing shortcomings in First Nations Education Policy and supports.

OUTCOMES: CALLS TO ACTION

We are the Carriers of Hope, ages 13 – 18 years old and representing the ten Assembly of First Nations regions: please, hear our voices.

When First Nations youth mental health and wellness are supported, we will achieve more. Our Calls to Action are here to address and support the mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing of all First Nations youth.

These are our Calls:

- 1. We call upon all levels of government to increase funding for education to have male, female and Two-Spirit Elders have a significant role in schools; as counsellors or teaching traditional ways, which will support the mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing of First Nations youth in every school in Canada.*
- 2. We appreciate the significant investment in land and cultural programming announced by the Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada. This commitment matters to First Nations youth because culture and being on the land keeps our traditions alive while connecting us to ourselves, families, Nations and Ancestors. However, we call for the expansion of this current funding to all First Nations students to include the North, and those living off reserve. This becomes another resource to support their wellbeing and success.*
- 3. We call for increased funding for Early Childhood Development (ECD), increased daycare options, and lowering the age requirement for First Nations children to access ECD programs. This will ensure there will be a safe and secure space for our children and sustain young First Nations parents' education.*
- 4. We call for equitably funded Kindergarten to grade 12 schools with a sufficient amount of resources, supports, and culturally aware faculty for First Nations students in every Nation across the country.*
- 5. We call on the Assembly of First Nations, Federal Government, and national organizations to encourage the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to influence and advocate for the inclusion of our shared history and First Nation knowledge into curricula.*

PROCESS AND SELECTION OF YOUTH

At the 2020 Gathering, 10 Carriers of Hope from the previous gathering were selected to participate. These youth were selected to reflect each AFN region, and to ensure diversity of gender/sex identity, age and rural and urban experiences.

COMMUNICATIONS VIDEOS

During the gathering, the youth were interviewed to share their insight on the barriers, impacts and importance of each call. The interviews allowed the youth to share personal experiences in elementary and secondary school, and to voice their suggestions on creating positive change. The video interviews will be used across social media platforms and on the AFN website to share the important voices behind the action plan.

IMPLEMENTATION AND HOW-TO-GUIDE

DEVELOPMENT

The youth took time to discuss the calls to action to review action items and their responsible parties. In a “World Café” exercise, the youth discussed each action in small groups to build on already-established action items, and to brainstorm new ones. The youth, with support from Elders and facilitators, highlighted actions they wanted to emphasize and fostered discussion on why each action item is important. The action items are separated into four target groups: students, teachers, schools and school boards and leadership (both Canadian and First Nations).

“It’s important to have that space where you feel welcomed and have
the weight lifted off your shoulders... It’s a safe feeling”

– Carrier of Hope

CALL TO ACTION #1: SUPPORT FOR ELDERS IN SCHOOLS

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON STUDENTS TO

- Have or become student liaisons in schools to support Elders.
- Become aware of sensitive topics before reaching out to an Elder (i.e. residential/day schools, Sixties Scoop).
- Advocate for the inclusion of First Nations Elders in their classrooms through campaign letters, videos, petitions and/or presentations.
- Create relationships with local Elders by visiting cultural and community spaces.
- Help perform cultural protocol when having Elders in classrooms.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON TEACHERS TO

- Reach out to Elders on additional resources and invite them in for land-based teachings.
- Take initiative by inviting First Nations Elders in their classrooms, and advocate for them to be brought in as teachers and counsellors.
- Allow Elders to teach from their experiences.
- Respect and honour First Nations Elders' exemption notes for students who are not able to attend courses.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON SCHOOLS TO

- Have course curriculum dedicated to learning with Elders.
- Connect with male, female and Two-Spirit Elders to serve as counsellors and teachers for First Nation students. Schools should complete the costing for these positions.
- Invite Elders to school events and assemblies.
- Pay for tobacco and honorarium for Elders when brought into class.
- Allow Elders to have authority to excuse First Nation students from class, assignments and other school-related responsibilities to promote student wellbeing.
- Make available a physical space for First Nations Elders in their schools.
- Ensure that a female, male and/or Two-Spirit Elder has an active decision-making role in school councils.
- Hold extracurricular activities that incorporate cultural teachings (i.e. beadwork classes, powwow Zumba).

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON LEADERS TO

- Have a large First Nations representation on school boards.
- Have leaders meet with provincial school boards to discuss schools' action plans on how they are including Elders.
- Support core funding for schools to have Elders present in schools and to have Elder spaces.

CALL TO ACTION #2: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **STUDENTS** TO

- Discuss and promote the impacts of how land-based learning affects their wellbeing, and present to school boards.
- Be knowledgeable about the First Nations territory they live and learn on.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **TEACHERS** TO

- Make their own commitments to learning language and culture.
- Create options for outdoor/on-the-land learning integrated into lesson plans.
- Plan season field trips that relate to First Nations culture (i.e. strawberry-picking, maple syrup tapping, snowshoeing, gardening).

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **SCHOOLS** TO

- Edit annual indigenous self-declaration forms so that parents and students are aware that they will receive funding for cultural activities/education to hold the schools accountable.
- Provide cultural sensitivity/awareness training to teachers.
- To hire Elders/Knowledge keepers to teach once a week outside through land-based teaching.
- Offer a credit that focuses on First Nations culture and on-the-land/outdoor learning.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **LEADERS** TO

- Conduct a study for how land/cultural-based learning is different from mainstream learning (in class).
- Lobby provincial/territorial ministries of Education to increase funding for land/culture-based programs.
- (First Nations Leadership) Support lifelong learning for First Nations students and advocate for First Nations control of First Nations education.
- (Chief and Council) can be more involved in the schools and participate in on-the-land learning exercise with students.

CALL TO ACTION #3: EARLY CHILDHOOD DAYCARE

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON STUDENTS TO

- Be mindful of the challenges parent learners face and create a system of support for these learners.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON TEACHERS TO

- Make space available for students' children to visit classrooms.
- Take Indigenous cultural competency training.
- Ensure healthy and culturally-relevant sexual education and healthy relationship education is taught to students.
- Allow students to bring their children to class and work with the student to create alternative ways of learning if need (i.e. working remotely, from home or allowing flexible deadlines).
- Be accommodating for young parents regarding family obligations.
- Post course content online for students that may need to miss class.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON SCHOOLS TO

- To have combined daycare and class spaces.
- Hire Elders to help in daycare programs.
- Ensure there is a safe and reliable daycare available to the students.
- Encourage partnerships with health professionals to provide support and resources to student parents.
- Partner with local daycares to create a schedule that works for student parents.
- Offer baby-sitting, parenting, CPR and First Aid courses.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON LEADERS TO

- Ensure communities provide parenting training and supports.
- Conduct a study of best practices of parenting programs.
- Design school board policy to ensure equality to student parents (no discrimination policy).
- Ensure their community has a Head Start program for all student parents.
- (First Nations Leadership) to ensure the First Nation will pay for student parent daycare.
- Advocate that daycare is accessible to all.
- Look to post-secondary funding models and support to inform a model to fund K-12 student parents.
- Ensure housing is available for young parents and young families.

CALL TO ACTION #4: EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR K-12

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON STUDENTS TO

- Create a student committee made up of First Nations and allies to advocate for cultural awareness in the school.
- Advocate for Indigenous history month, and build awareness.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON TEACHERS TO

- Accept alternative forms of work in lessons (i.e. storytelling, dance, reports from First Nations youth gatherings or personal experiences).
- Encourage regalia to be brought in for show and tell.
- Bring an Elder in to smudge the classrooms when needed.
- Include curriculum mandated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action. Subject areas may include Treaty Education, Residential Schools and First Nations historical and contemporary contributions to Canada.
- Plan field trips to Friendship Centres, Elders' spaces, and other culturally-relevant spaces for First Nations.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON SCHOOLS TO

- Having a land acknowledgement in morning announcement.
- Have cultural rooms, spaces and items available for students.
- Offer language classes (i.e. indigenous languages) taught by indigenous teachers.
- Bring in awareness to existing First Nations initiatives and social media campaigns (i.e. Have a Heart Day, Orange Shirt Day).
- Remove offensive campaign/school mascots.
- Create a newsletter section highlighting First Nations initiatives, programs and events.
- Fund more motivational speakers to come into schools.
- Insist guidance counsellors have an additional duty to report and record complaints about teachers/staff regarding cultural arrogance.
- Encourage their cafeterias to make First Nations recipes; First Nations Elders or community members could be invited in.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON LEADERS TO

- Advocate for increased funding for professional development of teachers regarding cultural training.
- Advocate for increased funding to be able to fund round dances at school.
- Advocate for mandatory training on indigenous history for **all** Members of Parliament.

CALL TO ACTION #5: SHARED HISTORY IN CURRICULA

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **STUDENTS** TO

- Write to Members of Parliament requesting to meet on increasing First Nations curricula.
- Write to the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC), sharing their concerns, questions and suggestion for the inclusion of First Nations knowledge into their school curricula.
- Advocate for and be allies to First Nation students.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **TEACHERS** TO

- Use materials written by First Nations.
- Include First Nations curricula throughout the entire year.
- Seek out First Nations content to integrate into curricula.
- Invite First Nations Elders to their classroom and co-develop lesson plans.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **SCHOOLS** TO

- Recognize the importance of First Nations curricula and how it makes students feel welcomed in their school environments.
- Actively acknowledge the territory they're on by raising the First Nations flag.
- Have blanket exercises at the beginning of the school year.
- Invite a member from CMEC to schools so they can listen to First Nations students' questions, concerns, and suggestions for including First Nations knowledge and shared history into school curricula.
- Purchase and use First Nations resources that represent First Nations perspectives.

THE CARRIERS OF HOPE CALL UPON **LEADERS** TO

- Advocate for First Nations cultural understanding for teachers.
- (Education Ministers) to invest in Land-based learning teachings from Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers.
- Advocate for investments in a living Indigenous curriculum made by Indigenous peoples.
- Implement indigenous language-based classes that represents indigenous beliefs.
 - Make indigenous studies courses mandatory.
- Implement the Truth and Reconciliation into syllabi.
- Learn about and include land acknowledgements in their opening remarks.
- Educate themselves on First Nations and Canada's shared history, led by First Nations.

STRATEGIC PLAN

DEVELOPMENT

In a roundtable discussion, the youth shared their ideas on advocacy and potential action items needed to fulfill the youth Calls to Action. The youth identified that many parties need to be involved to move the Calls forward. The youth further discussed where to host information and suggested having a dedicated website to hold the Calls, youth videos, and implementation guide in a digital platform. Upon reflection, the youth narrowed down their ideas into seven key action items:

The Youth have recommended the seven following action items to consider:

1	Identify spaces where the youth can present the <i>Calls to Action</i> .
2	Engage the media (i.e. CBC, AFN Bulletin etc.).
3	Gather youth voices on First Nations education through video and written submissions VIA social media.
4	Print and distribute the <i>How-to-Guide</i> to education entities, community centres, and to the Council of Ministers of Education.
5	Link information on the AFN Education web page to indicate where to access funding sources to support advancing the <i>Calls to Action</i> (i.e. National Indian Brotherhood Trust Fund, Dreamcatcher Foundation etc.).
6	Create a social media “challenge” for First Nations and Canadians to demonstrate how they are creating positive change in First Nations education.
7	Write advocacy letters and share information with education entities.

NEXT STEPS

The Youth have recommended the following strategic timeline to support the Calls:

MARCH 2020

- ✓ How-to Implementation Guide
- ✓ Poster/pamphlets
- ✓ PowerPoint template for Calls to Action
- ✓ Report Card Framework/Heads up
- ✓ Social media buzz

JUNE 2020

- ✓ Website Page
- ✓ Videos launched
- ✓ AFN presentations to Chiefs
- ✓ Calls to Action included at AGA
- ✓ E-Book and Toolkit Plan

SEPTEMBER 2020

- ✓ Videos re-launched
- ✓ Youth Presentations
- ✓ On-going video releases

DECEMBER 2020

- ✓ Youth presentations
- ✓ On-going video releases

MAY 2021

- ✓ AFN youth conference with focus on these calls

CONCLUSION

From the two-day gathering, the youth were able to devote time to generating important discussion surround First Nations education policy. By having the Elders present, the gathering connected the generations to understand the holistic impact of positive change informed by the past, present and future. The youth, in 2019, created five calls to action. Building upon this work, 10 youth informed an implementation guide, and a roll-out strategy to act upon these calls. The youth echo their additional recommendations:

1. Be an influencer.

2. Be an advocate.

3. Be a role model.

4. Be an ally.

5. Be a champion.