

# **Youth Voices Survey Summary**

**Submitted by the Ontario First Nations  
Young Peoples Council of the Chiefs of Ontario**



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## **Introduction**

During February and March of this year, the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council of the Chiefs of Ontario conducted a survey in support of the Inquest into the deaths of seven youths in Thunder Bay. The goal of the survey was to learn from the personal experiences of First Nations youth, especially youth that have had to go to school off reserve. The survey asked questions about the experiences of youth in attending school off-reserve, supports or programs that were helpful to them, experiences with drugs and alcohol, experiences living off-reserve while away from their parents, experiences of racism and discrimination, and programs that can help build strength in First Nations youth. Over 100 responses were received from across the province.

## **Overview of Key Messages**

There are many important messages and themes running through the survey responses. We have tried to summarize those important messages and themes here.

### **First Nations youth across the province leave home to attend school**

Many First Nations youth across the province need to leave home to attend a school off reserve. This is most common in the north, but it also happens in the south. For example, students from Beausoleil First Nation and Temagami First Nation often board off-reserve to attend school because their communities are located on islands. One student described their experience as follows:

*I live on an island, so when the lake got bad, we would have to board out (stay) at a friend's place until the ice was safe enough to travel on or melted enough to boat on. Living at home definitely benefited me. Some friends who moved from home I noticed had poorer grades. And for those who boarded out for the whole year, found good places to live, but they weren't great, they weren't home. My brother boarded out and did not like who he was boarding with, which had big effects not on school, but mental health. I feel as though, for remote or semi-remote communities, students that need to leave home to attend school should have a "community house"- a house where students from the same community could board together and be looked after by someone from their community. And no, I do not think I would be happy living off reserve without my parents in my teenage years. It's such a fragile time...*

We believe that the First Nations students that need to leave home to attend school need special supports.

### **The on-reserve education system is often not preparing youth to attend school off reserve**

Many First Nations only have an elementary school. When students graduate to the off-reserve school, they are often unprepared. Two students described their experiences as follows:

*I graduated from Grade 8 with good grades or so what I thought. But when I registered for high school and chose academic classes, shortly after starting my first semester I felt*

*unprepared and behind in most of my classes. I didn't know how to do a lab report, or write an essay. After that I didn't feel good or smart enough and all together school just felt impossible.*

*I did not feel well prepared for school away from the reserve. Not only was there challenges faced with other students regarding race, you then also had to deal with teachers... and in many cases even principals who've already labeled everyone "bad" kids just because of who we were and where we came from. I didn't feel well prepared through curriculum either. We never learned half of what was being taught by the time we'd gotten to the high school level. And for us that either meant pursuing extra help from teachers at the next level or not caring and then not going to class and feeling "dumb" because we weren't up to "par". I have seen many kids dropping out for lots of reasons.*

We believe that the on-reserve education programs need to be improved so that students are prepared to attend school off reserve.

### **Traditional and cultural activities help First Nations youth build strength and stay out of trouble**

The most common message we heard is that traditional and cultural activities are extremely helpful. They build strength and help students stay out of trouble. Here is one response we heard:

*A good thing however that happened all through high school was we had a pow wow every year and invited the surrounding schools. It was good because it was also a way for us to share our culture as well as allow native students to embrace their own culture. ... We grew up with our culture and traditions - hunting, fishing, trapping, ceremonies, teachings etc. As a kid you don't want to do those things or feel like you're parents are making you for no reason. But since I've gotten older my culture has been a source of strength. I'm a jingle dress dancer and truly believe in the teachings behind the dress. ... Bringing back culture and traditions (Teachings, on the land excursions, elders visits) is where I think we need to get back to. Making sure the youth know who they are and where they come as First Nations people so they can develop a sense of identity and pride.*

We believe that *all* First Nations students should have access to traditional and cultural activities and programs no matter where they live and what school they go to.

### **Extracurricular activities help First Nations youth build strength and stay out of trouble**

Another common theme is how important extracurricular activities can be in helping students build confidence, excel, and stay out of trouble. Here is what one youth said:

*I was lucky and my parents always had me in hockey in town so I was kept busy. I believe drinking/drugs stems from having low income parents who can't afford to put their kids in*

*sports, also not having a vehicle to bring your kids to these activities. Then kids are bored and start to experiment.*

We believe that *all* First Nations students should have access to good extracurricular programs free of charge no matter where they live and what school they go to.

### **First Nations counsellors, mentors, and other supports for First Nations students in off-reserve schools make a difference**

A number of youths said that they really valued programs in off-reserve schools that provided special supports such as First Nations councillors, mentors, and so on. For example, one youth said:

*In my first 2 years of high school there was a great native liaison worker. He really helped a lot of students and we never felt judged. He made the native room a safe place for everyone. We had programming, workshops and school trips just for native students and it really helped you feel like you had a sense of belonging and a place somewhere in the school. But then it was taken away - we weren't even allowed to eat lunch in there, there was little programming and it was actually hard because we always had felt welcomed and then suddenly it felt like we didn't have a place in the school.*

We believe that these kinds of dedicated councillors and support workers can really help First Nations students attending school off reserve.

### **Strong families and communities help First Nations youth build strength and stay out of trouble**

Many students said that their families were their best support during difficult high school years. For example, these two youth said:

*Unlike most of my friends in high school I came from a good home with structure, boundaries and love. A lot of my friends didn't have that when they went home which is why they were more heavily into substance abuse.*

*I am good at handling life changes and hard times because I have supports from my family and community.*

We believe that one of the best ways to support young people is to support and strengthen young families and entire communities.

### **Lack of activities and boredom are a major cause of drug and alcohol use**

Many youth talked about turning to drugs and alcohol out of boredom and because there was a lack of other activities to do. For example, these two youths said:

*Boredom was a big reason that we all partied too early...*

*Boredom was the main reason for my drug and alcohol use. Also, it was a way for me to fit in with the crowd. The problem got worse. I ended up dropping out of school.*

This is another reason why we think it is important to make traditional/cultural programs and extracurricular programs available to *all* First Nations youth and to encourage participation at a young age.

### **Intergenerational trauma is a major cause of drug and alcohol use**

Two youths had the following to say about the intergenerational impacts of residential schools:

*I had an alcohol and drug problem growing up. I believe that I have carried the same problem as my parents and grandparents, seeing it as I was growing up and figured it was normal, so it was inherited as an intergenerational survivor of a family from residential school system.*

*The reason we were doing it was because we did have hard lives and this numbed it. I have a mother who's an alcoholic and a father who I see once a year. So I started to do drugs and drink with my friends from my reserve. When we were made fun of at school just for being native, I would cry sometimes and think drinking was a way to numb sadness. The stress of having to deal with a school filled with racism was not helpful, then going home to drunk angry mom was not good.*

The intergenerational impacts of residential schools are real. We believe a lot of work needs to be done to support children and families caught in the cycle of intergenerational impacts of residential schools.

### **Racism and discrimination against First Nations youth is very common and very damaging**

Over and over again, the youth reported terrible examples of racism they experienced in schools off reserve. This was very damaging. For example, these seven students said:

*I was one of the only native students there. Many of my classmates were cruel to me. They made fun of my culture, my facial features, our language and just about everything.*

*I do remember people from the town outside our reserve would call a lot of us wagon burners, squaws, dirty Indians. I don't think they knew any better... I have been called squaw.*

*I did not want to go to school some days because of the racism we faced by the other students and even some of the teachers. I am happy to say I did complete school and will be graduating from college soon, but the high school days were so hard to get through. Travelling 30 minutes a day just to go to a school where natives were made fun of and thought to be bad. I certainly felt unprepared to face all the hate the some people have.*

*Some people when they found out I was native they thought it was "dirty" and that the reserve I lived on was "ghetto" and they thought it was stupid that I didn't have to pay taxes or pay for schooling but it was all plain ignorance.*

*I wasn't personally exposed until I was in high school. One of my friends was not allowed to come to the reserve to visit me because her parents did not like Indians. She was so upset and so was I. Her parents stereotyped me and my home to be run down and thought my friend would be beaten up and robbed.*

*For me, racism happened sneakily. It was never upfront and mostly happened in whispers amongst friends. I overheard a lot of things I wish I hadn't and always felt hurt and unwanted after overhearing conversations like that.*

We believe that racism needs to be combatted and that First Nations students should have the option of attending a First Nations school where they can learn in a supportive environment.

### **Mainstream education needs to spend much more time on First Nations people and issues**

One of the most common recommendations from the youth was to teach non-First Nation's students about First Nations people and issues. One student said:

*Education on aboriginal culture for all the students may help with the uneducated rude remarks some teachers and student say to native kids. ...The only thing I believe that can be done is EDUCATION. Everyone needs to be educated on the facts and truths about the aboriginal people. ... Education is really the key to open people's minds and to end the racism the aboriginal communities experience.*

We strongly believe that more needs to be done to incorporate teaching about First Nations people and issues into the standard, mandatory curriculum.

## **In Our Words – Youth Quotes Regarding the Key Messages**

### ***First Nations youth across the province leave home to attend school***

- I felt unprepared. I went to a provincial school for one semester and because they went out a little later than DFC student there was no student orientation for me to know the city and services provided.
- I moved away to the city when I was 14 to play basketball actually. I stayed with a cousin of mine. The biggest challenges were trying to create new relationships with people, figuring out how major cities work (public transit, etc), finding cultural supports and fitting into a school with a high population.
- We had to move away from our parents and families every winter to ensure our daily attendance in high school
- Yes, I had to "board" away from home in grade 7-12. Because of no parental supervision I drank alcohol and did drugs
- I moved eight hours away from home. I researched the community and surrounding areas well....The only challenge I experienced was not being able to travel home every holiday. I only visited at Christmas and during the summer.
- Yes I did go to school off reserve. As I recall I wasn't to excited about it.. only because I knew I had to meet new people and make new friends and because of that I was extra shy, and very unsociable. I experienced judgment because I was not from town but from the reserve. At one point they tried giving me a hard time about going to school in town because of not having an address located in town. therefore they wanted us to pay a price in order for me to attend school there.
- Yes, I lived off reserve for two years in highschool because if I wanted to participate in extracurricular activities, I had to stay in town because my reserve was so far away from my school. I missed my family a lot, and eventually, my native friends considered me an outcast and didn't include or invite me to anything on the reserve because they believed I abandoned them. It was hard to be discluded from my native friends and also never quite fully accepted by my nonnative friends.
- Yes, I attended some elementary and 4 years of secondary out of my community. I was prepared b/c my family had moved several times out of the community while I was in elementary, it wasn't a shock for me but it was still challenging. The commute was onerous for a teenager, we hop at ferry at 7:30 am each morning (weather permitting), then travel another hour to get to our school on the bus. In the winter months, the weather is constantly inclement in Georgian Bay, and the water freezes a majority of the time, so we all had no choice but to board either with strangers or with relatives (if you were lucky enough) five days a week, away from our immediate families. Some of us who were involved in extra curricular activities boarded all school year which I did for three years. It was tough when I had to stay with a white family my last year. Eating their food and accepting their way of doing things was challenging.

- I feel I was no prepared to live away from home with such little authority. I didn't like school because we had to travel so much and school was an all day thing. By that I mean we woke at 6 am to catch boat get to school at 9 leave school at 3 to catch boat to get back to the island at 5. Do homework sleep, repeat. I dreaded the travel, and boarding in the winter. 10months out of the year we had to live at a strangers home while we attended high school. My challenge was living away from home...I also had little auntority boarding and that led to bad decisions... Having little authority were I lived (boarding home) i was introduced to alcohol, my landlady was an alcoholic so it was accessible to me at the time. I moved a lot and there always seems to be something wrong with the person I was living with. Either they were an alcoholic or they had gambling issues. Moving made my experience bad....I was not happy and safe living without my parents, I felt alone.
- Yes, my dad took me off reserve for highscool because he wanted to show me that I wasn't stuck on reserve. I left grade 8 as a valedictorian. The highest mark in my grade. I didn't want to leave but I obeyed my dad. .. Moving off reserve was really hard because I missed everyone and didn't even want to be off reserve. I wanted to be with my family. I felt as if the depression of leaving home was affecting everything with my schooling. I didn't want to go to school, I felt as if I didn't have any support, and felt as if I was living in a town by myself
- I was 14 when I moved away for high school. Our school back home only goes to grade eight. You then either board out in town, or travel daily. Traveling consists of crossing the lake or ice early in the morning to get on the bus, only to transfer buses in town, then making the trip to the next city. These are long days and which most high school students are choosing to do nowadays. I boarded out when I went to high school. I was fine living without my parents because I was boarding with family.
- I didn't live apart from my parents for long periods of time, usually only two months out of the school year. I live on an island, so when the lake got bad, we would have to board out (stay) at a friends place until the ice was safe enough to travel on or melted enough to boat on. Living at home definitely benefited me. Some friends who moved from home I noticed had poorer grades. And for those who boarded out for the whole year, found good places to live, but they weren't great, they weren't home. My brother boarded out and did not like who he was boarding with, which had big effects not on school, but mental health. I feel as though, for remote or semi-remote communities, students that need to leave home to attend school should have a "community house"- a house where students from the same community could board together and be looked after by someone from their community. And no, I do not think I would be happy living off reserve without my parents in my teenage years. Its such a fragile time and kids are so uncertain, they need their parents or guardians to help them get them by.
- We couldnt do to much sports or leisure clubs because we were on an island and had to rely on a set schedule. That was disappointing because i wanted to play rugby. The only way i could was to live in Midland at a strangers home for 10 months... Yes, it was a requirement for the winter months for us. I had to move in with complete strangers every year, as i had no family in the same community as my school. The first few places were a nightmare. I missed home, i missed my mom and my dog. I missed my moms meals and

just being in a familiar place. There are a lot of challenges with living with a family you don't know. The list is endless.

- I went to school on reserve up to grade 4, then went off reserve from grade 5 and up.
- Yes I went to school off reserve, the community I lived in didn't have its own school.
- Yes , 18-19 , terrified and unsafe and misunderstood
- When I first went to school off reserve I was in grade 4 and I went to Jefferson Elementary in Massena. I was the only native in the school so I didn't feel prepared for that.
- No, but now I am because of the evacuation. It was hard but now I like it here in Kap, even though it's boring.
- I felt I was a little more prepared than the ones I grew up with, many didn't have the support they needed. We stayed in the town for the winter without seeing our parents for the week. Many could not cope with this, didn't go to school, got kicked out, using drugs. Some just chose to stay home and not go to school at all. Many in the town we stayed were prejudice, that made it difficult to stay there. My parents were great supporters at this time but even that not being able to see them when you wanted to, was hard.... Not being able to be in my own home! I myself fell into using drugs and alcohol during this time. If it wasn't for my supporters I wouldn't have made it through high school at all. ... I didn't like it but I knew I needed to do it to succeed later in life.
- I went to a small christian school 20 minutes outside of the reserve. The only challenge really was wanting to do after school programs but not being able to because we lived so far away.
- Half way through Grade 10, my mom completed school and went back to the reserve, I wanted to stay so I boarded with a family (our landlord of our apartment building) allowed me to board in their home. My hard times usually set in the winter, the winter blues, being away from my family. I was two hours from the nearest relative in Toronto, and two hours by ferry from home reserve from Sept-Oct and May-June, other than the ferry months I was 6 hours from my reserve if you drove....Living with boarders from Grade 10, Grade 11, Grade 12 (Grade 11-back home), I stayed another year at high school and got my own apartment....Living with boarders my mom supported me financially, it was also up to me to spend my money appropriately and be responsible while living away from my family, my boarders never had to worry about me because I was a very mature and good kid....Living on my own on my last year of my high school, I lived off Ontario Works, I did what I could to survive on my own with very little help. I tried not to ask my mom for too much because she's always supported me on her own financially while living away. So being on Ontario Works would off-set the cost of me receiving help from my mom, which is what I wanted.
- I was raised in a big city, but when I came back home, that also included finishing high school - at 18/19. The one thing that hit me hardest was travel - we're an island, so travel (one-way) can take up to 2 hours... Missing the 7:30 boat meant you missed the bus, missed your ride to school and missed out on the day's lesson. It wasn't until only recently that our isolation played a huge role in having an off-site school for the kids when this

happens. It was a sad situation before then, what other positive options were there if you didn't have access to transportation? and funds? None.

***The on-reserve education system is often not preparing youth to attend school off reserve***

- I thought I was prepared, but I think that the preparation for highschool lacked. Once you reach highschool students are left to be a lot more independent (what we weren't taught in smaller on reserve elementary school) and I think that's a shock for a lot of us. We don't know how to deal with the heavy course loads and pressure. I also do not see proper cultural representation in the off reserve schools where there are non-First Nation and First Nation students.
- I found most of kids were educated more than I was. It was a cultural shock from a class of 10 to 1000 or more children.
- No I was not prepared. A lot of cultural differences and racism
- Off reserve I felt as if I was exposed to a much faster moving society. I was bullied for things like not wearing the most up to date fashion, or knowing about the newest most popular trends. It was also frustrating because I was in school with a lot of born-again Christian children, and my school catered to them as opposed to my culture, so I was forced to live by their standards and rules.
- Was not well-prepared. At all. Our home community is so small going from a class of 10, school of like 60 to several classes of 30 + and a school of 600 was terrifying. You either fought and won or fought and failed. There was racism....so much racism. You had to learn how to defend yourself, with words and fists because if you didn't you would get hurt. Drugs and booze was easily found and the crowds that ran with that were even easier. Running into the wrong crowd was easily accessed...the support system needed for one so young was few and far between. Once in a while you would run into a teacher who see your strengths and view you as important and one who would go places...they would fight for you. But by this time you were already so far into shit that whatever some "white teacher" thought of you, didn't matter, because, well you were busy out in the bush getting messed up with "your friends". Only being able to go home every other weekend was also difficult. If your parents didn't teach you values of hard work or how to earn money you were left to steal or whatever to get what your white friends had. Vicious circle.
- No because I was considered the kid who came on the rez bus. I would spend the whole summer learning about culture, language, and then put into a school setting that wouldn't support anything of what I had been learning all summer.
- Yes I attended highschool off-reserve. I do not feel I was well prepared to attend highschool. We had gone to school with the same kids from kindergarten to grade 8. It was a true culture shock to go to highschool where there was only one other student from my reserve. I went into a place where I did not know anything about my fellow students and they presumed to know everything about us.
- Yup, I faced a lot of these things, difficult classes, unprepared, under-educated, racist teachers, bad influences, drugs & alcohol.

- Highschool was tough. I was in academic classes and had a 50%-60% average meanwhile on reserve I was getting 80%-90% average. I felt as if I wasn't prepared for highschool because I didn't know a lot. I was really bad in a few subjects and felt as if some things I was learning from scratch.
- Not up to par with the curriculum
- Yes I went to school off Rez for High School. I didn't really feel prepared for it...
- Yes, I went to high school off-reserve. I found it challenging as I was unprepared for the mainstream curriculum. I graduated from Grade 8 with good grades or so what I thought. But when I registered for high school and chose academic classes, shortly after starting my first semester I felt unprepared and behind in most of my classes. I didn't know how to do a lab report, or write an essay. After that I didn't feel good or smart enough and all together school just felt impossible.
- Yes, went from triple grading into an all grade 8 class. Was behind a lot compared to town students. Failed Ojibway because it was not the dialect my band used. I knew the words but pronounced and spelt different and was penalized for that. Went from participating in cultural teachings to only language. No smudging, feasts, prayers, songs, etc. ... I left the reserve school with straight A's and ended up with C's and D's in town school, took 6 months to get to where I was supposed to be. ... I think major problem lies with the lack of funding for First Nation schools and the fact that they have to triple grade. Triple grading means a teacher is teaching 9 different levels ie. basic, regular and advanced for each grade. This is why so many students fall behind but because class sizes are so small funding for teachers for each grade is not seen as necessary but it really does affect students and their futures.
- I did attend high school off-reserve and to be completely honest I felt my education was below standards. I felt as if going to elementary on-reserve wasn't good enough of quality as it should have been. I struggled through high school. There was also a lot of racism that took place.
- Yes. I felt prepared only because the majority of the students at my school were also Mohawk students.
- I did not feel well prepared for school away from the reserve. Not only was there challenges faced with other students regarding race, you then also had to deal with teachers... and in many cases even principals who've already labeled everyone "bad" kids just because of who we were and where we came from. I didn't feel well prepared through curriculum either. We never learned half of what was being taught by the time we'd gotten to the high school level. And for us that either meant pursuing extra help from teachers at the next level or not caring and then not going to class and feeling "dumb" because we weren't up to "par". I have seen many kids dropping out for lots of reasons.
- I didn't really find the classes hard but the school I went to was a catholic school and there was a big cultural difference.
- I felt prepared academically but culturally it was a shock.

- culture differences, no cultural education/language classes until high school
- When I went to prep school in Massachusetts I was not prepared for that.
- I did not have the opportunity to continue studies in Mohawk as a second language, and was expected to enter into Grade 9 French instead. This was difficult. Many misunderstandings from other students re: culture, much discrimination and ignorance. My school had less support from the local Band than the main 'feeder' school, therefore it was harder to find transportation for extracurricular activities. My school was close to the downtown core of the city (very unstable - crime, drugs, prostitution), and I did not understand the potential "bad influences" that existed because of this proximity. Although I was lucky to not have to face any of these challenges, looking back I was unprepared if I did encounter any dangerous situations.
- Difficult classes, prejudice against natives, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, inter-racial everything, sports, violence
- Attending class in a new environment was challenging
- I was very young so there wasn't much of an adjustment period. It was difficult to connect with teachers on a more spiritual level and I grew up with a very conservative approach to education.
- When I entered high school it was a hard during the first two years. Mostly due to difficult classes.
- I felt relatively prepared but did face cultural difference since the school consisted of
- predominantly white students. The hardest challenge was trying to "fit in" with a culture that was extremely indifferent from my own.
- Classes were difficult, I was an academic student in elementary school. Once I hit high school at the same level my grades plummeted... I think the curriculum taught in FN elementary schools needs to be looked at. It lacks what everyone else already knows... All of my peers succumbed to drugs and alcohol. I did too for a little bit but I kept my head on right and stayed with my goal of graduating high school. My peers told me that school was hard and they felt stupid. They didn't feel welcome and just wanted to stay home and get high.
- Yes i went to school off reserve for high school as well as my college years. In the beginning of grade nine it was tough. I was a shy girl, and only growing up with a small class we had a minimal amount of friends. We were teens, and we all know teenage years are hard. I was slow at making new friends, as all my classmates were either off doing their own thing or making bad choices. I also felt that my knowledge wasn't at the same level as the other kids who were in my class. I never had to focus as much as i had to once i was in high school. I think we were not as prepared as we could have been leaving grade eight. In my grade eight year we had 5 teachers. The whole year was a joke, it was not our fault but we should have been prepared for this challenge.
- no I didn't feel well prepared , I had no social skills

- I dealt with racial prejudice, difficulty with some classes, and figuring out how to adapt outside of my community.
- Did you feel well prepared to go to school off-reserve? If not, what were the biggest challenges? “Nope I wasn't and white people”
- something I observed is that students were not at the same levels of education as off reserve, student seem to be struggling to keep up in classes
- It was difficult as I was used to all natives in my school until grade 8 and high school was mostly non-natives.
- I didn't feel prepared at all, I felt like the native students didnt fit in with the non natives and acted out on that, they were always getting into trouble and skipping classes, they didn't have school spirit and never joined school activities which would have made them more involved.
- Going to school off-reserve is definitely tough. I'm wasn't that well-prepared at first because you're travelling pretty far from home and it's difficult to comprehend that they only way to get back home is by bus, unless your parents are willing or even capable of driving 30 minutes to get you. The challenges I faced included: difficult classes, not being able to join any sports because I didn't have rides to and from practice, cultural differences, and the lack of indigenous education given to us.
- Yes, making friends was hard because I felt like a outsider.
- The challenges I faced going off reserve was the difficulty in catching up with school when I entered Grade 9, I found I was way behind. I remember teachers helping me catch up. I always had great grades in school but found it difficult catching up upon entering Grade 9 academic year.
- I went to school off reserve from 5th grade to 12th grade. I was terrified to go to school off reserve, I didn't feel my education level matched and struggled throughout. I never personally experienced prejudice or racism until I went to high school

***Traditional and cultural activities help First Nations youth build strength and stay out of trouble***

- Elders,outdoor,pow wows. What should help the first nations off reserve, They should have more activities for the children and adults. About learning more about the language and more about our history.
- Never was good at handling anything stressful, in the past i turned to drugs and alcohol but being around spiritual people has taught me how to handle hard feelings in a positive way. Going to powwows and ceremonies has helped becuase I met a lot of positive people and likeminded people and they gave me a positive support system I can call if I
- need help or guidance.
- Growing up we always gathered with our elders. Whether it was through learning programs about our cutler. We have been taught from an early age to respect everyone.

To help those around us. To love everyone! Growing up we had a lot of teaching and mentoring from community members to pass on teachings and stories to us...things that were passed onto them from previous generations...I remember going to a program called turtle concepts that helped with building confidence. I was a shy girl growing up. I think programs within the community helped me a lot. Mentorship programs!

- Ojibwe class was comforting... Some programs or groups would help, cultural event to make u proud of who u are and what u are
- Wholistic education in our communities, plain and simple. Curricula needs to be inclusive of mental, emotional, spiritual and physical education and this needs to be carried on in the mainstream schools where our kids are being sent to. Rights of passage could be incorporated into the final year of elementary for those kids that are going away to secondary. Could you imagine instead of a "traditional" graduation ceremony or class trip, the group builds a canoe together for a week? Elders could come in to teach about vision quests, fasting and sweats, and teach traditional drum songs. Make mocassins for your first day of school even. I wish I would've had that!
- Also trying to learn the cultural aspect of our life helps sometimes. Just smelling the smudge burning on an off day is amazing.
- I would of loved to have traditional activities made available to me at the time.
- I never had mentors or access to any traditional healing. I feel like that is what is lacking in our community. we are only now talking and developing programs like this now. Relating to our culture is what our people gravitate too.
- Have them immersed in their language and culture straight through high school. And allowing them to go to ceremonies year round.
- What supports or programs have been most helpful to you? “Just being proud of who I am and have to live my life being an aboriginal person.”
- They could've had more activities geared towards our traditions. I think that would've helped to feel included and learn more.
- What can be done to support students off-reserve? “Access to cultural activities such as harvesting wild rice, deer, etc.and language classes and sports such as lacrosse, baseball, hockey, etc.”
- Language and Cultural awareness of who they are as well as strong families make a huge difference.
- A good thing however that happened all through high school was we had a pow wow every year and invited the surrounding schools. It was good because it was also a way for us to share our culture as well as allow native students to embrace their own culture. ... We grew up with our culture and traditions - hunting, fishing, trapping, ceremonies, teachings etc. As a kid you don't want to do those things or feel like you're parents are making you for no reason. But since I've gotten older my culture has been a source of strength. I'm a jingle dress dancer and truly believe in the teachings behind the dress. ... Bringing back culture and traditions (Teachings, on the land excursions, elders visits) is where I think we need to get back to. Making sure the youth know who they are and

where they come as First Nations people so they can develop a sense of identity and pride.

- Have workshop on the rez that includes self esteem building, and information sessions on our culture.
- So I think it would be more helpful to provide clubs like the pow wow committee to improve in cultural practices. Also to bring in more traditional activities into the school and encouraging mentors hip with older and younger students would be helpful. Just to have someone to look up to and show them how things go.
- I believe that if there are elders, mentors and traditional activities that can be accessed while in school it would definitely benefit the youth. or even trying to incorporate traditional knowledge and activities into the curriculum would make the biggest positive impact.
- I often attend weekly pow wow/ round dance singing and just being in the environment like that with my friends helps a lot.
- Talking circles and sweats helped.
- Teach children about their background, culture, where their coming from, how to deal with racism and not let it get to them. It's really important to know where you are coming from because then they get older they won't know which path they should go down.
- Proud Native heritage and culture. Stay on the rez, support elder programs and learning traditional ways.
- Additionally, services throughout the year that include traditional activities such as elder visits, teachings, drum making, quill box making, and so on help support the students and make them feel as though their school/environment is trying to incorporate/understand their culture.
- I found that the programs offered by my schools that promoted our traditions - in the form of sweat lodges for myself - really helped. ... Offer opt-in traditional healing services, perhaps a traditional youth leader somehow.
- To help First Nations youth to build strength and decision making abilities, they need to be taught about the culture. Traditional education including self care, medicines, self image, etc.
- I believe I am good at handling different situations. It had to do a lot with my upbringing, with our local Mohawk immersion school, we had a lot of opportunities to meet new people and experiences by participating in student exchanges and doing presentations to community and outside the community.
- Culture awareness helps. teaching traditions, teach ceremonies... need to know who they are, where they come from, creation story, how smudging helps
- More individual/group work around self-concept, identity and cultural teachings can all help to combat racism and discrimination... During hard times, Friendship centres in larger communities, finding kinship and family connections and drawing on traditional

teachings (i.e. Ohenten Karihwaterkwen - Thanksgiving Address) help me to prioritize and feel grounded.

- Ceremony and teachings have helped (smudge, sweats, fasting, dancing). Leadership training has helped. Yoga/meditation has helped. Being on the land (fishing, berry picking, walking) has helped.
- We got to take part in a multitude of workshops and activities on reserve to help maintain our knowledge and experience of our culture.
- Teach children from a young age their culture and who they are, teach them that it is important to find a place you belong and embrace your race.
- I think investing in cultural identity when children are younger could greatly improve strength and resiliency. A person that has pride in their background and abilities is better able to defend them.
- Cultural awareness. I see so many youth with a sense of entitlement claiming "Native Pride" yet do nothing to enhance themselves with language, ceremonies, knowledge. They seem fascinated by the "gang related characters" portrayed in the hip hop music industry.
- I have grown to better handle my own situations. I fall back on my spiritual beliefs and elders to help guide me.
- What can be done to help? "Having more tradition activities at school"
- I took an Ojibway class and found great comfort in that
- There should be more things in the communities in place to fill in the youths free time towards something that is meaningful. I loved the co-op program, it had culturally meaningful activities (making our own drum, our own native clothing and help with our festivals).
- I believe more traditional activities and extra curricular activities would keep FN youth busy going to school off-reserve.
- They can offer traditional teachings. Support to children off reserve, in regards to culture.
- Make them proud to be who they are through their culture, I'm ojibwe and proud to be and want to make a good name for ojibwe people. Even if I can effect a few people and show them that ojibwe people are respectful then I would be happy. If youth know their people history and what they had to go through, from tribes and surviving off the lands, to residential schools and modern day I can see this motivating some youth to carry on traditions and use this knowledge to benefit them selves and others around them. They can think back on these teachings and have strength to over come difficulties and obstacles... I never was educated about my cultures and ojibwe ways, but growing up and seeing some of these ojibwe teachings around my community made me proud. My grandparents all went to residential schools and I never seen them do ojibwe rituals, but seeing others have grandparents that do this and learning from aboriginal teachers Made me want to learn more. When teaching youth aboriginal ways I don't know how you would do it, but when I was younger I never wanted to sit in rooms and listen to some one tell me how

important these are because it would get boring. So community's need to be creative and really find a way to engage youth to learn about their cultures to be proud. And don't make them do stuff that would make them uncomfortable, because then youth will get annoyed and wouldn't want to listen or respect the teacher, or who ever would be educating them about their culture.

- Our school, even though catholic, did everything they good to break cultural barriers and assisted with bringing in cultural resources, events, or activities. I felt although a catholic school, they were willing to work with both spiritual components of catholic and native spirituality. I absolutely had the best 4 years there. Teachers were willing to understand and we've had things to have educate both students and teachers. The friendship centre even works continuously with our high school.
- I find that going to ceremony or smudging helps me.
- There was none available to me at that time. What I sought out, was mentors in the form of community leaders and spending time in the bush.... It could be considered a traditional activity... As years have gone on, I've turned to Elders and teachers to help guide me. I've always been interested in Alternative healing and once I met certain folks and tried living a different way - I learned to love who I was/am. Culture plays a big role in that, my next goal is to begin to learn the language.

***Extracurricular activities help First Nations youth build strength and stay out of trouble***

- I joined the volleyball team which kept me busy
- For me I think my confidence to play sports throughout highschool really helped me develop a bigger interest in my studies. Sport has also given me the opportunity to create friendships.
- What has been helpful to you? "I keep busy with cheerleading"
- I played a lot of sports to keep busy and my mind of things.
- I had an amazing experience playing hockey with different classmates off reserve. When you are part of a team like that, it doesn't matter the colour of your skin or the town in which you live, you are working towards one goal and you need each other to achieve it.
- I participated in a lot of after school activities like track, cross country, volleyball and competitive swimming. All this was an outlet for me, I enjoy sports, so I think more after school activities are great for youth.
- I really think students should be encouraged to put themselves out there and join extracurricular activities. I think it would give students the opportunity to open up to new people and keep them away from drugs and alcohol.
- I did run cross country for many years to keep my mind busy.
- The only thing that helped me get through school was playing sports and attending the after school programming that was offered to teens on the reserve.
- More after school activities, cultural classes,etc..

- Sports, youth groups, programs all had a positive effect on my experience.
- I found that sports were a big help for myself.
- I was lucky and my parents always had me in hockey in town so I was kept busy. I believe drinking/drugs stems from having low income parents who can't afford to put their kids in sports, also not having a vehicle to bring your kids to these activities. Then kids are bored and start to experiment.
- Sports and clubs totally help.
- I played sports at school which helped me make new friends and have different influences.
- When I was younger I was involved with our communities youth groups and programs. This also helped me.
- I think the youth groups like Right To Play are very beneficial.
- We also had a lacrosse team that was made up of mostly Akwesasronon.
- What has been most helpful to you? “sports, friends, Mohawk club.”
- What can be done to help? “provide things that are fun and interesting”
- I took part in arts-related extracurriculars - found support in the visual art community in my school and local area. More accessibility to programming - with a focus on transportation after-hours - would help First Nations youth in off-reserve schooling.
- What has been most helpful to you? “sports deffinatly”
- A lot of community activities for youth and adolescents, movie nights, trips to Wonderland, social circles, ceremonies, pow wows, etc... We took part in as many activities as we could.
- “What has been most helpful to you? “I played school sports as well as community sports. I belonged to a youth group.”
- Youth groups are amazing , provides youths with outlets , opportunities to get of the Rez
- What can be done to help? “Sports play sports”
- My main focus during school was music and I went to a centian school just for the music program. Without this I would have had no path.
- What can be done to help? “More programs for youth”
- Hockey also played a big part in keeping me interested in school.
- Effective solutions to help First Nations youth would be to create events in which they can participate in (sports or crafts). If thy turn to safer ways to entertain themselves versus drugs, they'll make better life decisions.
- My hard times, I kept active; I volunteered at the hospital, I was on counsel at school and at the friendship centre, I participated in lots of programs at the friendship centre and wanted to stay close if not more to my roots. I went spend time with the elders there. I

participated in many sports. My guidance counsellor was like a second mom and watching over me at school. My school knew my situation not living with family, often times I got to write my exams a few days early so I had a longer stretch to spend time back at home (on-reserve) to visit....My teachers were outstanding, I participated in a variety of activities and traditional activities at school and friendship centre.

***First Nations counsellors, mentors, and other supports for First Nations students in off-reserve schools make a difference***

- There was a guidance counsellor from our FN who came on once a week to talk to the kids from the reserve. He helped me out a lot when I felt out of place or like I didn't belong.
- Encouraging them to reach out to Student Services, we had a Aboriginal Liaison at our high school who we seen every Wednesday. And our principals were awesome helping us adjust and keep us on the right track. I went to a Catholic high school so we also had a Chaplin, who we could talk too.
- The First Nations office at school wasn't great. I never felt comfortable going there. There was a friendship centre in the area, but it was quite the mission to go there. I also worked, so I never had a chance to go there either. I think southern Ontario colleges need to focus on improving their First Nations student services. I think going to school off-reserve would be best at a northern Ontario college, they have better services.
- There wasn't much support for me when I was in middle school. But I think having Ojibwe class instead of making people learn French would show diversity and let native students feel more accepted. Even having a native resource room, with native student councilors would help students going to school off reserve feel more accepted.
- Having in school supports (someone to talk to, native groups)
- During highschool, there were aboriginal teachers that were hired which helped a lot because hey were able to teach the non aboriginal teachers more, and then the non aboriginal teachers were about to recognize discrimination and racism in classes more easily.
- We had a "Native as Second Language" teacher who taught us Ojibwe and acted as our "Native" student counsellor. She was incredible! She mentored us and would always drop what she was doing if any of us needed to talk to her. We were all also given passes to the YMCA from our community who would also pay for our school sports fees and uniforms (back in the day when the student numbers were lower, there was enough funding for all of us).
- I don't ever recall having any supports when coming into hard times. I remember hanging out at the "Civic Centre" which was a youth drop in centre back in 96-98. It's gone now and is a court house. But we had a couple mentors who introduced us to sports, basketball, volleyball etc. I think having some youth mentors, ambassadors in the schools-visible at all times, with an office like a guidance counsellor. In the schools saying "I'm here, I know how you feel, let's talk."

- There was a native studies office and they would encourage me but I feel they did not try hard enough. I was struggling with my university english courses, not with the content, but with my attendance and expectations of the teacher. He took me aside and wanted me to beg him to stay in his course. I refused to beg because I was full of pride. He said he would kick me out. I went down to the office and the principal was waiting to see me and she said that the native studies had recommended that I be removed. It broke my heart to know that the only people in the entire building who had a hint of knowledge of where I was coming from abandoned me. So the principal asked me also to beg to stay in school. It was no longer a matter of suspension but out right removal. I refused again to beg. Then they kicked me out. I feel that there needs to be a support nest which includes everything listed above. If a student feels strength then they can never fail.
- Have elders in residence, native student lounges, First Nations staff
- I didn't feel better until my sister was going to highschool and she moved with me is where my grades went up. Just having someone there with me. My grades went up to honor roll in highschool.
- The secondary school I attended did have exceptional recourses for all students that also included a First Nation education counsellor & a specific open door area to gather. The school also had an international student program - very diverse in terms of cultural & self-identifying population.
- What helped me was having a guidance councillor.
- We were lucky to have native student liaisons at our high school. ... We had a special room for native students to go to for studying. The student liaison was so nice to us and treated us like her kids. She even let us get away with more than she should've probably be she loved us and we loved her.
- In my first 2 years of high school there was a great native liaison worker. He really helped a lot of students and we never felt judged. He made the native room a safe place for everyone. We had programming, workshops and school trips just for native students and it really helped you feel like you had a sense of belonging and a place somewhere in the school. But then it was taken away - we weren't even allowed to eat lunch in there, there was little programming and it was actually hard because we always had felt welcomed and then suddenly it felt like we didn't have a place in the school.
- During my hard times I always turned to the Native councillors in the school, they've really been a big help with everything.
- I think a native councillor should be placed in schools so aboriginal students have someone to connect with them.
- My First Nations school mentor, helped out in a tremendous way. When I was failing classes and skipping school, he was there to keep me on track and continue to pass classes.
- During hard times in school, we had a first nations mentor and first nations room which was helpful.

- What can be done to help? “Indian ed counsellor in all schools, I'd like to stress more than 1. I know of a Thunder Bay school with a large number of First Nation kids and the 1 counsellor is expected to service all of them. More cultural coordinators in serving agencies ie. dilico family services only has one and is only allowed a maximum number of students each group. School counsellors could be helping locate outside resources for the students to participate in the evenings.
- What can be done to help? “Counselors in the school that were available to FN students.”
- Have someone be assigned to keep tabs on youth who are away from home and help them get on their feet and build up their support.
- first nation centre was my biggest help. a lot of good resources and supports. maybe have a better preparation plan for graduating high school students
- I think having a guidance or First Nation staff in the school made the experience easier to adjust to.
- Youth counsellors at schools are a great way to deal with and talk about any problems you may be having. It's comforting knowing you always have them to talk to. Also mentors from the reserve were often brought into schools which is also a big help.
- We had native workers in the school who were available if we needed to chat or get extra help with school or relations.
- It was nice to have a native counselor who was from our reservation and she was always supportive if we had issues.
- counsellor, teachers, some friends, coaches, sports. Buddy system would help.
- I am overly passionate and this sometimes can cause these events to be more difficult. I felt youth groups with the other kids from my reserve, helped me feel loved, understand others stories, and find a place where I belong.
- In high school, we also had a native student counsellor and office that we could frequent to talk, learn, etc.
- During the hard times I would seek help from our native counselors at the high school.
- we had a native liaison at our school and we had Mohawk classes and also had our sports clubs to help us.
- Also it would be helpful to have a space at schools dedicated for First Nation students where one or two elders are available to our youth in crisis and need a listening ear or/ and who are in need of a private space to do independent studies or assignments with access to an First Nation educator. I had a similar space at my high school and it really helped when I needed a place to calm my anxiety, do independent work and feel a sense of belonging.
- My native guidance counselor helped me alot.
- During the hard times, i always went to my Native Councillor. While in high school i had 3. They were all very helpful and accommodating. I used to be able to take my class tests and work on them in a room all by myself. I realize now that I have anxiety. I never knew

what that was until now. I wasn't able to focus in class and feel the pressure of finishing as my peers were done before me. When I was alone I could do it.

- Our school had a "native student lounge" with a worker to help us when we were dealing with complicated issues.
- I played volleyball, there was NCSTEP, PATS, and Joey Phillips in the native study room. Programs or rooms they can go and talk to someone will help. It was always helpful to be in there... In school native counselors, programs, sport programs, and supportive facility.
- There were a couple classes that my high school offered that were geared towards First Nations students. As well as the Guidance Counsellors.
- Elders and guidance counsellors who would bring in someone from my reserve to talk to me about what was going on. Also, one of the teachers was from the same reserve and she so happened to be my Aunt, so, I could talk to her about such problems.
- Other things that prepared me included a place to go to talk to other First Nations students, the Aboriginal Resource Center. They had people from our community that work there so it was comforting... The Aboriginal Resource Center had multiple activities that included crafts, traditional festivals and a place to smudge. I think that a center that has food (lunch), support, resources for culture and people who are genuinely caring and open make a difference to First Nation youth.
- Always hanging out in the native councillors office during lunch breaks.
- I think schools could have a First Nations guidance/type counsellor, my high school has this and I can see this helpful to many students. They have someone they trust and can talk to, have a place to hang out and feel comfortable, and meet other First Nation students who can become friends.
- Having assistance like that at schools for native students to keep in touch with their roots helps them feel like a sense of reassurance about who and what they are, I believe that would be a big thing to help students off-reserve. If I didn't have that, I think I would have had more challenges. Having those cultural barriers broken and having people willing to educate and learn within the school system is another. Having a relationship between the school and the native friendship centre is the foundation to grow.
- In high school we had elders from my community come and do workshops and traditional teachings a few times a year. We also had a native student council.
- I certainly would have appreciated a student support worker who actually supported the students (like a counsellor)... The one who worked with me, and continues to work for my community - barely knows my name (or anyone else for that matter). Even the touching base/checking in - the 'Hi's', 'How are you's' mean a world of difference. (I felt that I was left unsupported because I did do drugs and drink - small communities = everyone knows your personal life; that somehow, because I choose this - I didn't deserve more help than I ever got).

***Strong families and communities help First Nations youth build strength and stay out of trouble***

- The occasional trip home to the reservation or when my family visits are what I look to the most, that's how I can refresh my mind, body and spirit. I think the connection to my land and people/family is what helps me persevere through my difficulties.
- It was easy for me to leave home because I had family away from home who let me stay with them. It would have been a lot harder if I didn't and I honestly don't know what I would have done if I didn't have those support people.
- I don't think I would have survived without my parents. They were always there for support and guidance. I don't think I would have been happy living outside of my parent's house hold
- I never lived off reserve as a teenager away from my parents. I can say my parents taught me a lot, and my life would be different not in a good way if I lived without my parents because they are the ones who had rules and boundaries.
- I left home at 13 due to the abuse and alcohol use. I tried to go to school, homelessness and hunger. If I had a safe happy home to go to as a teenager. Childs aid wouldn't even help me.
- Also, parents need to play a huge role too. Touching base with their kids and having a constant daily interest in the scholastic aspect is crucial, as well as liaising with the boarding home lead on a regular basis about emotional health and behaviour is absolutely essential... The key is keeping teens busy and having parents that are involved in a loving and encouraging way and having supports such as a school or spiritual counsellor. I had always noticed that the kids with lax parents were the ones that did whatever they wanted. Most never finished HS or ended up being young parents themselves... I had supports, I had an older sister and Auntie that looked after me when my parents couldn't and an amazing counsellor at school as well as a spiritual counsellor who helped me look after my emotions and incorporate culture into my life.
- I have always had support from my grandmother and my parents and this has helped me greatly during my hard times. Even to this day they are a huge support.
- I had one cousin that would not give up on me and she told me I can't just be a drunk living on the reserve that I was a better person than all that I needed to try. From there I began going to powwows with her and learned more about myself and started college. Without her encouragement I don't know what I would have done
- Family and friends are an asset to have in life when going through changes and pressures. Knowing that you are loved and have support.
- Unlike most of my friends in high school I came from a good home with structure, boundaries and love. A lot of my friends didn't have that when they went home which is why they were more heavily into substance abuse.
- The support of my family from my reserve was the best support I could ever receive.

- Work on the core... the parents bring up children. The cycle that's still going on. Try to work with young parents.
- Strengthen the family unit - strength comes from a foundation that a positive family can provide.
- Talking to my family in order to get through family crisis or demands of school that happens. Being so far from my family it makes me feel like I'm unable to access my support structure and fail to keep up with life's demands
- I do my best. lean on my family a lot, and never give up
- I have had positive elders growing up in my life who also made difficult times easier to cope with.
- Being supported by my home community has been key in my development thus far and finding the people who don't give up on you.
- My family, mostly my mother has been my biggest support. She's taught me to take care of myself first. She's always been open and willing to listen and comfort me when I am down. I come from a very outspoken family so we don't accept answers that don't work for us. When there's a will, there's a way.
- What has been most helpful to you? “Mentors, family support”
- What has been most helpful to you? “At the end of the day, I went home to my family and community.”
- I fought a lot with my parents as a teenager, but that's almost the most important time in your life to have parental love, support, guidance. You're so ready to have the freedoms of an adult, but don't understand the responsibilities. You're experiencing the most emotional relationships (with family, friends and partners) and there is a lot of uncertainty about the future (everything is wide open after high school).
- Strong support from family, husband, friends has helped.
- My Dad was a monumental source of support. He really did try to bridge the gap between being a First Nations member and going to school off-reserve as best as he could.
- My family and close friends have definately helped me the most. They understand how I feel, they know how to help.
- My main supports were family. My parents and grand-parents were able to let me know that it was not just me that experienced those things; they experienced them as well.... My Grandmother helped me by encouraging higher education and that drugs and alcohol could hurt my dream.
- Our youth need positive and supportive role models in their lives. A lot of times our youth do not have a strong connection with a family member or a close friend because of our history of disconnection with strong relationships within our families. We have lost this connection within our communities, we need to empower our youth by understanding that what has happened in their lives is not their fault. A lot of things that have happened through out their lives has to due with the disconnection with our primary caregivers

(mother, father, grandparents). If our youth are educated on the reasoning why certain things happened within our communities it will give them a better understanding why things happen the way they do. For example ... my grandmother is a residential school survivor. She was taken from her parents at a very young age along with her siblings and when she returned from residential school she did not have a mother. Her mother died while she was gone. When she returned she was lost (disconnected) from the community. When she became a mother to her own children she did not know how to have a strong connected relationship with her own children because she was taken from her own parents as a child and she was not able to build a strong connected relationship with her own parents due to being taken to residential school. So when she became a parent she only did what was done to her as a child being in residential school because that is all she knew. Then her disconnected parenting was passed on to my mother which led to me and my mother's disconnected relationship and abuse towards me. When I grew up I remember telling myself I do not want my children to experience what I have experienced as a child. They deserve to feel safe, secured, protected, understood and to have unconditional love with a strong connection relationship with their parent. When you understand the relationships within your own life, you better understand yourself and others around you which help you to be able to handle difficulties.

- My friends, family, focusing on the better things in life helped me while I was in school.
- no I wouldn't be athletic or successful if it weren't for my parents and my free education if I didn't live with them or know my language or my traditions as a native Mohawk woman
- The only support system I had was my boyfriend, my uncle and my mom who I could always rely on. Then and now.
- I relied heavily on the support from my family and taking out anger through many sports. ... It was difficult to stand up for myself against racism I did face. There were times I felt attacked, but my family was a phone call away to help guide.
- Yes, my Totas, parents, friends, and knowing about my culture helped. I think if I didn't have the support it would have made it a lot harder to deal with.
- I believe that I have had good parents that taught me about respect, and how to treat other people. I always try to be the bigger person when it comes to a petty situation.
- My foster mother helps me get through my hard times being away from my hometown and away from my school in kash.
- Most of the time, family helps me the most in hard times
- Family and friends have helped me big life changes, such as moving away from home and living at college and being responsible for myself.
- My parents didn't make racial remarks that I know of while growing. they taught me how to do household chores, and use to go hunting with my dad. we played outdoors a lot, not tv or video games as they have now.
- I am level headed but even a strong person bends and feels low to all the demands of school and life. Being able to talk to my friends and family has helped me with being

away from home. The demands of school and living with strange people had made it so difficult.

- I can handle everything that gets thrown at me... I have stayed true to Myself and am proud of who I am. My mom has been my main support.
- I graduated when I was 17 and went to univeristy but had very supportive parents and they were my biggest support to keep me going in school. Absolutely I would have had a hard time going to school at a younger age without the support of my parents.
- My grandmother was most influential in my success... I wouldn't have been happy if I didn't have my grandmother... Having a close nit support system of friends and family have been most beneficial, I used to feel alone and now I always have someone to turn to.
- During those hard times, the support I received from my parents and guidance counsellors was amendment. It definitely did help me a lot with finding my place in that different environment.
- My parents, grandparents, and life experiences have made me better able to handle tough difficulties. I learn from my past generations' mistakes and do the opposite. I think peer pressure and revenge or envy have made me less able to handle these difficulties because my conscience gets the best of me and I turn to negative actions. Once again, my parents definitely support me the most during these hard times.
- I would have talked to my sisters and mom if i had problems and solved them with them... mom has been a inspiration to help me behave this way, seeing and learning from her as she raised me and my 2 sisters on her own. When in hard times I talk to my mother and younger sister for support.
- I've had hard times my first year on an educational level trying to catch up but I so much support from my mom, my teachers, and my guidance counsellor helping me try catch up and I eventually did.
- I am good at handling life changes and hard times because I have supports from my family and community.

***Lack of activities and boredom are a major cause of drug and alcohol use***

- I think lack of change for after school programs pushed some people to resort to alcohol because they got bored of the same old things.
- Yes, my social group was heavily into drugs and alcohol. Contributing factors could include boredom, lack of programming available for my age group and generational substance abuse. Eliminating most programs for my age group greatly impacted my peer group, we felt there was nothing better to do. Lack of transportation and money to participate in school groups, teams, etc, off reserve made us more excluded from our school peers.
- Most likely boredom on my reserve there's not much here for the children beside the hockey arena in which some kids don't like to skate. Needs a youth building to call their own and hold their own responsibilities and a leader/guardian to maintain

- A lot of the older youth when we were young were examples to us and I think that out of boredom and trying to fit in, we all took that path.
- Friends experimented with drugs and alcohol, mostly out of boredom or lack of youth activities
- My friends and I frequently used both drugs and alcohol, the cause of it was boredom/lack of interest in other activities.
- Boredom was a big reason that we all partied too early, or had sex too early.
- broken family, lack of support, not much else to do on the rez
- What made the problem worse? What helped? "boredom. sports helped."
- Friends experienced problems, trying out drugs, alcohol and abusing tobacco. Isolation from the city our school was in, and lack of transportation were issues that made the problem worse.
- yes, lots of partying due to boredom
- I smoked too much drugs in my last year of highschool, Boredom
- I think boredom had led a lot of people to use drugs or drink.
- Boredom was the main reason for my drug and alcohol use. Also, it was a way for me to fit in with the crowd. The problem got worse. I ended up dropping out of school.
- nothing else to do.
- My grade-school friends did have a drinking problem while in highschool; to be cool or boredom (the phase kids went through), I know because I spent one year back home and that's the mess I got into as well, I moved home for one year because I missed my family, but I didn't like living back home or I moved back to the same highschool I had previously moved to.
- Yes. I did, my friends did. It was hard to escape. For me, I turned to this out of boredom, out of rebellion (feeling as though I could handle it), I was living away from home, away from my immediate family, staying with relatives, couch surfing..... Drugs was an escape, something I turned to 'to keep the party going', to escape that feeling of loneliness. The problem got worse when I kept company I couldn't trust, who used and abused my vulnerability - I ended up being assaulted with no recollection of it... It took me a long time to acknowledge that, try own it and try to heal.... Filling gaps you didn't know were gaps was exhausting..... Getting better meant finding something to focus my energy on - my family in the city needed me, I'm now the guardian of a relative. This keeps me grounded, focused and determined on my success.

***Intergenerational trauma is a major cause of drug and alcohol use***

- A lot of family issues caused my addictions. Smoking at an early age, drugs and alcohol came hand in hand. Being abused as a young girl. Just trying to hide from it all.

- I had an alcohol and drug problem growing up..I believe that I have carried the same problem as my parents and grandparents, seeing it as I was growing up and figured it was normal so it was inherited as an intergenerational survivor of family from residential school system.
- The reason we were doing it was because we did have hard lives and this numbed it. I have a mother who's an alcoholic and a father who I see once a year. So I started to do drugs and drink with my friends from my reserve. When we were made fun of at school just for being native, I would cry sometimes and think drinking was a way to numb sadness. The stress of having to deal with a school filled with racism was not helpful, then going home to drunk angry mom was not good.
- What made it worse was being home when my mom wasn't in a good mood. She suffered a brutal childhood, which caused many mental illnesses and she would take it out on me and my siblings.
- Not knowing at the time they had family issues, but looking back it's very clear their home life had a major influence on their drug/alcohol abuse.
- Boredom and complacent adults made it worse. Suffering abuse/trauma as a child made it worse. Low/no expectations for life made it worse. Seeing and understanding possibilities (in life/in the world) made it better.
- Family issues (divorced parents, the reason we went to school off reserve) were a primary source of stress and alcohol as well as the use of marijuana helped with dealing with the anxiety and problems caused by familial issues.
- Yes, I have experienced alcohol abuse while many people I cared about abused drugs every day. I drank because I was bored and depressed. I felt like it would help me feel something. However community members all around me were abusing drugs. A few friends had become addicted due to peer pressure or their parents giving it to them. Most didn't know what it was doing to them and before they knew it they were addicted. I've seen some of my best friends that I have known since Pre K spiral into drugs starting off with pot and are now doing hard drugs. My friend was busted in grade 8 at our school for possession of pot because he was a dealer at 14. Nothing helped them. But his family that was feeding his drug addiction definitely made it worse.
- I personally did not have a problem with alcohol or drugs but I have witnessed friends and acquaintances struggle with alcohol and drugs due to family problems and mental health problems ( anxiety, depression etc). The self abuse is still on going in my community because people outside the social and health sector are willing to turn a blind eye and gossip about them than to be non judgemental and offer help.
- Our parents did the same thing. Continuing my education and having children are what kept me from continuing to use alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms.

***Racism and discrimination against First Nations youth is very common and very damaging***

- Me and a group of friends were waiting at a bus stop outside of silver city, just heading home from a movie we had McDonalds drink containers thrown at us. As well as a glass bottle.
- I attended a school that was in the closest town. They called our bus the "rez bus" and everyday the kids in the school seen us get off that bus. I've heard students refer to the people getting off the bus as "the rez kids." Majority of people hadn't ever been to the reserve and honestly thought it was a whole other world away from their town. Since it was a small town there were a lot of outdoorsy type people and I've overheard many kids complaining about how first nations people get everything for free and how unfair it is that we have hunting and fishing rights. The thing that hurt the most was how those conversations stopped when they seen me and the people having the conversation looked uncomfortable with me being there and overhearing them. I overheard a lot of things, people talking about powwows and braids and ceremony and making jokes about them. These things were never spoken about out loud, they were always conversations I overheard while walking through the hall or while in the library. It made me sad that it was treated as a joke and as gossip, and never talked about amongst the first nation students, it was always done behind our backs. It honestly felt like these people having the conversations didn't want us around or that our presense made them feel uncomfortable. They didn't see us as regular students. We were always the "rez kids" to them.... For me, racism happened sneakily. It was never upfront and mostly happened in whispers amongst friends. I overheard a lot of things I wish I hadn't and always felt hurt and unwanted after overhearing conversations like that. I always felt like I couldn't say anything because they weren't saying things directly towards someone. It made me feel ashamed of who I was. Most of the time it was because people are undereducated about FN people and their rights and culture and they made comments out of ignorance
- I don't feel like I have particularly been singled out or picked on because of my race, other than obvious stereotypes of being on social assistance, having a drunk for a father, or a lack of a father entirely.
- I do remember people from the town outside our reserve would call a lot of us wagon burners, squahs, dirty Indians. I don't think they knew any better... When I was growing up people had no clue. We would get asked questions all the time about if we lived in teepees or wigwams. If we had running water. What kind of food do we eat. Weird questions, as if we came from another world.
- Somehow my Indian name was let out and had a student making fun of it which wasn't nice, we had went to the office to the principle to talk about it, to combat this maybe more cultural events to educate ppl
- I was one of the only native students there. Many of my classmates were cruel to me. They made fun of my culture, my facial features, our language and just about everything. I think schools should be more strict on disciplining racist students. They should also teach why racism is unacceptable. I complained lots of times and nothing was ever done.

- I've been called a Dirty Native, along with a few friends of mine who were with me at that time.
- Most of my life even as an adult. Saying like all Indians are drunks and criminals which I'm neither of these. Will never be anything in life.
- Playing hockey, I was one of the most talented players on the team. During one of my games, I was given a penalty for slashing another player, which is a common penalty during the game. The coach of the opposing team decided that it would be appropriate to tell me, "that is a hockey stick, not a tomahawk, you know." It was so insulting, luckily I used it as motivation.
- I was fortunate not too experience too much racism from students (they were mostly scared of us "Natives"). Although I faced a bit of prejudice from some of the ultra religious teachers, as I was in enrolled in advance classes and this was apparently not the norm for kids from my community.
- Racism and discrimination...I remember being jumped by 4 girls in a bathroom one year. And the following year, I learned to fight back and got into a fight with this girl who was spreading rumours about me. I broke her jaw and got charged.
- I faced discrimination and racism at my school. Unfortunately one of my geography teachers was very discriminating towards First Nation students... I faced discrimination at several high schools, with teaches!
- Watched my darker skinned peers from my community experience racism while attending school off reserve.
- There was prejudice from not only some students but at a point it was even from the Principal of the high school. There was "the look" from some students when we were in the first nations room to do our smudging. Non-native Students even asked a few native kids if they still lived in teepees.
- There was a persona of native students that we were expected to uphold. I was told that I must want to fight the non-native students. There was expected and accepted racism. I felt forced to act in ways that don't align with who I am, by being a bully. I was expected to know what powwows were and I remember being asked what "we" do for Halloween. The other students had no contact with us growing up and we with them. We were expected to be different when we were really much the same.
- I have experienced racism. Mostly in highschool, non-native students would make remarks about us being dirty and having std's,
- Yes, watching people dance around and make war crying noises. Also having teachers say things like "the native Americans were" like we still aren't alive today. Once I had a teacher who excluded me from a heritage project because my family was originally from here and didn't "come from somewhere else" so it didn't count?
- I have been called Racist names, I have been called squaw.
- Yes being called down and talked about!! As a dirty Indian.

- I was one of the few native students in the university prep level classes so I was always asked questions like "why are you doing so well in school" or I remember people making comments like "how come you don't just move from the reserve" another student in my history class said "why do native people have all these problems if they get so much free money". Even from teachers I felt looked down upon or considered less than. I definitely felt discriminated against due to being from the reserve even though I was doing well in school.
- I did not want to go to school some day because of the racism we faced by the other students and even some of the teachers. I am happy to say I did complete school and will be graduation from college soon, but the high school days were so hard to get through. Travelling 30 minutes a day just to go to a school where natives were made fun of and thought to be bad. I certainly felt unprepared to face all the hate that some people have.
- I had a hard time getting an apartment because many of the landlords in my town don't rent to native people
- Yes, during recreational sporting activities during high school, we would get the occasional reference to wagon burners or scalpers.
- Being called a dumb Indian, not being able to answer questions in class or too shy to answer at all. Being left out of a group activity, being the last one to be called for a team in a group activity ie. dodgeball, makes you wonder why, I'm good at dodgeball, things get better when people get to know me but I can see how some people would rather avoid situations and it's easier just to quit so you don't have to go through it.
- In fact I did experience racism all throughout high school that was off-reserve. A lot of it came about due to the amount of attention and support the First Nations students got; all of the FREE lunches, items, etc.
- I got harassed day to day for the way I spoke broken English and had many hard times.
- Racism was a big issue dealt with on a daily basis.
- There were some prejudice against FN students and some cultural differences but our school made sure to include all students.
- Yes, friends parents didn't like us or allow us into their home. being followed in stores.
- I have experienced discrimination (mostly because I was a woman) in high school. I was the only female in my draw & design class.
- Many times. I actually got into a fist fight with another student while attending school off reserve because she was making crude comments about my race and treating me in a way no one should be treated, I understand now that fighting isn't a way to deal with these issues however I feel racism is taught and I can't begin to understand the lengths it would take to combat these issues anywhere.
- A lot of people in the school saw the Native kids as kind of lower class or "ghetto".
- Some people when they found out I was native they thought it was "dirty" and that the reserve I lived on was "ghetto" and they thought it was stupid that I didn't have to pay taxes or pay for schooling but it was all plain ignorance.

- I wasn't personally exposed until I was in high school. One of my friends was not allowed to come to the reserve to visit me because her parents did not like Indians. She was so upset and so was I. Her parents stereotyped me and my home to be run down and thought my friend would be beaten up and robbed.
- Yes, I was volunteering for a local festival and any attempt I made to help out I was criticized in front of my peers by an older man. I think awareness needs to happen throughout Canada. Not all aboriginal people are on welfare or are trying to cheat the system, we don't get a free ride. The idea out there is that we get everything free that we don't need to work for anything that we have. So it's hard to enjoy what we earn. If we buy a new car, after saving up for years or taking out a loan, many people automatically assume you're a drug dealer or smuggler. It's disheartening.
- yes, stared at or slow serve at stores/restaurants
- experienced racism in sports
- I have experienced racism both in my community and off-reserve. I receive and overhear off-hand comments about Indigenous peoples often, and yet when I went to school, I was discriminated against in my own community because I looked "too white".
- yes, forced to fight for my rights.
- yes specific teachers wouldn't let me go to native resource but would allow others to go to a study hall and would allow me to go to study hall but not NR
- A lot of primarily Caucasian communities have a tendency to be more discriminatory and racist. Often making assumptions about the entire aboriginal community as a whole when only using certain individuals as reference points. It leads to a lot of misinformation and difficulties for all aboriginal people and not only those with mental health or poverty issues and do need help as opposed to judgement. A way to combat this would be to try to inform the public about mental health and poverty and the stigmas that shouldn't be attached to them.
- I was not ready for all of the questions constantly being asked about my family and culture. I was not ready for the stereotypes being sincerely asked and me wanting to reply in a negative way due to their poor education on first nation people. I felt like an exhibit at a zoo.
- Transitioning into high school is when the racism I experienced was at its worst. People make fun of my friends for carrying a lacrosse stick, for the boys having braids and us speaking mohawk. My own friends and strangers would ask me why I was so white and how come I had red hair... they said it meant I was not native. I believe they thought that because all the pictures in the history books are men with long dark hair and tanned skin, not of a ginger with pale skin. Also the whole native race has been targeted on social media multiple times by kids in my own school. The school that has the largest amount of native kids in our city. We have been called racists, greedy, dumb, pot heads and so much more. Some have even said that natives get out of the law just because of their race. I strongly believe that the pictures in history books and online should have more images than just of tan men in leather with head dresses and braids. Show the people who we are now, what we know, our accomplishments, our love for one another. Because most

people do not realize native people when they first meet them anymore. I also believe that we should not be shy to embrace who we are anymore.... Help extinct stereotypes. ...I also think that natives should have somewhere to talk about racist events in their past that still bug or worry them today

- I had major racist experiences with other students in Thunder Bay. I also felt discriminated against by some teachers in Thunder Bay. My family relocated to my reserve and I finished elementary school in Nipigon. It was a much more welcoming school community because the two communities worked together closely for years. I didn't experience prejudice again until high school in Red Rock when there were other students from other feeder school communities.
- In elementary school, teachers always under-estimated my intelligence. One teacher commented that I was a smart for a native. Some students would call me derogatory names and I ended up missing school without my parent's knowledge for a long time. When the school finally contacted my parents, we had meetings with counsellors but that did not change the students that were mean. In high school, a few students always attributed my intelligence, awards, and travel opportunities to "having a status card." I think that these types of interactions can be combated with early childhood education curriculum for teachers and students. If a student is taught accurate and consistent messages about indigenous people, they are less likely to believe and condone inaccurate information.
- I faced challenges on a daily basis. Not everyone agrees with our culture. Not everyone is nice. I had friends who realized racism towards me before I realized the actions myself.
- Yes almost everyday. Ranging from dirty looks to silent treatments, to being picked last, to having to be in a group with another first nations student...
- yes in the surrounding communities. Remarks are constantly made. I don't know what can be done to combat this, it's due to a lot of ignorance.
- Friends were hard to come by because the non-natives viewed us as drug abusers and stupid.
- I just experienced non-natives wanting nothing to do with me. Which was a deterrent because it was over a stupid topic, race.
- They only place where i faced racism and discrimination was when i tried to work off reserve. I felt like no one would call me back for an interview because of my home address. I started work when i was 12 and was a hard worker on the reserve, i knew i would have been an asset to someones company. It is something that is said in our community, that no one hires us from the Island because they are discriminating.
- There was prejudice against native Americans in high school; often told we don't belong in academic. I stuck in it and had constant reminders that I was the only native in the class... Through elementary and high school I was made fun of for taking part in cultural activities such as pow wows and ceremony. I was the "weird native girl" because I am proud and can speak well of my experiences.

- peers thinking natives get everything for free , and a middle school teacher who called me and the other native kids savages
- We were called names and it just made us very mad. Education about us might help because there were students that did help or stick up for us. It wasn't all the time.
- People keep staring at my family or me everytime I go shopping, it's like they never saw a native before...
- I told people my ethnicity and they were making racial slurs and mocking us, calling Natives "Indians." ... which isn't the proper word we use.
- People in high school had treated me differently because I was native, they called me their "native friend" as if I were different. Other times in the reserve I lived in my own cousin said I wasn't as native as her. The one that really bothered me the most was when I was in a field with a bunch of a friends and someone my boyfriend knew had just started talking about discriminatory and racist things about my background.
- In my college program I was asked in a power privilege and oppression class how it was like to be oppressed by my own people. By the teacher teaching the class!
- I experienced lots of racism and prejudice but from both sides. I was very well educated and held honors so I experienced lots of prejudice from my peers of both first nation and non native
- Some of the teachers were prejudice and even accused our Little NHL hockey team of being in a gang because we wore our hockey team coats...derogatory names, being accused of being an alcoholic because of my race, told im not like "normal" native because I wasn't dirty and in the street. "I'm pretty for a native"
- I have experienced discrimination and racism, not personally, but I have either viewed it or heard about events. An example would be one time, while in the city, I seen two cops approach this First Nation man (who was homeless) and spoke to him, almost accusatory, as if he automatically did something bad just because they only seen his skin colour and appearance versus who he truly was. Another example would be one time someone walked past my friend (this person who walked past was just a random man at the mall), and as he did, he said "dirty Indian."
- Being interrogated by a police officer YOU called in order to assist YOU (instead becoming the accused, not a victim). Followed in stores (grocery, retail, malls) - constantly.... Its come to the point that I ask security to hold my belongings. Labelled as the 'Drunk Indian' even if I'm with my family/children

***Mainstream education needs to spend much more time on First Nations people and issues***

- I believe that more education for non- first Nations people would be very helpful. Having assemblies and cultural events in the school would help people be more open minded, and have an understanding of what the challenges of living on reserve... Education is so important to fight racism, not just for first Nations people, but anyone who has felt these feelings.

- Many people are ill informed about our culture or influenced to have misconceptions
- I feel traditional and native history should be made mandatory at schools. I feel this was help combat racism.
- It also helped a lot when the school was able to have teachings for the non-native classmates in the school, many native children were almost celebrities during these teachings because a lot of the non-native children wanted to know more and more after being taught some interesting facts about my culture.... I believe in order to combat racism and discrimination, education is needed for those ignorant to the native people and their culture. The more that society learns, the more people that will support native culture and racist humans will be ashamed to use words such as the ones that were used on me... I truly believe that everything that has been made easier in life for me would be education on the topic. I have many non-aboriginal friends that still ask questions to this day and I am proud to answer because I educated myself. After experiencing some discrimination and racism, any child wonders why someone would say or believe such things, so I went forward and educated myself. The history of aboriginal people is proof enough why
- Racism and discrimination exist against my people... Educate aboriginal youth on why racism and discrimination exist in Canada against aboriginal people, educate them on why our culture is only now resurfacing, and why as youth of the aboriginal culture we are the future and we have the responsibility of educating future generations.
- I think there needs to be an overhaul on education regarding First Nations people. The veil over people's eyes needs to be removed so that they can see us as people. I couldn't talk to other people because I was so afraid that they would hate me, about my looks, what I say, everything. I was in such a shell that I was afraid to even let people know who I was or even let them get to know me at all. And I had a friend tell me, "they're just people" reminding me that we all need to treat each other the same because we are all just people
- What can be done to help...students of non first nation should have some cultural class or workshop of knowledge of the first nations people. If workers and medical field (nurses/doctors) have to take cultural sensitivity training why not start in it high school.
- It would've been nice for them to include more about our history in our teachings though [at the off-reserve school]. We didn't learn much at all about Native American history.
- Education on the true history of the region, Canada and the world is key to combat racism and discrimination.
- People in general are not knowledgeable in First Nations history or culture leaving a huge gap that leaves room for ignorance and racism.
- I think if schools openly talked about aboriginal people and their culture it would help people understand.
- Education on aboriginal culture for all the students may help with the uneducated rude remarks some teachers and student say to native kids. ...The only thing I believe that can be done is EDUCATION. Everyone needs to be educated on the facts and truths about

the aboriginal people. ... Education is really the key to open people's minds and to end the racism the aboriginal communities experience

- I feel like non natives could be more educated about aboriginals. Possibly have a class in schools to tell what we went thru throughout our history. Our history isn't talked about enough.
- I feel the best way to combat racism is to educate people. Those that are racist usually hold outdated and half formulated ideas or views. The history we take in high school discussed some First Nations history, but not enough to understand the true struggles and break down the stereotypes.
- I think educating non natives about the troubles we face would help.
- The only thing that can combat racism, hate, and discrimination is education and acceptance. ... More conversation needs to be had about difficult situations, and racism. Address the elephant in the room, and get it out in the open. Kids, same as adults/teachers/etc.. need sensitivity training, so to speak. Education and acceptance of others should be the stepping stone to combating racism and difficult on/off reserve situations.
- The world is becoming more culturally diverse and racism is always a growing problem. The only way we can combat it is to educate people more on how being culturally diverse and accepting makes the world a better place.
- I think the best thing we can do is shed light that not all reserves are in the middle of nowhere or without clean water. My First Nation is beautiful with paved roads and decent housing.
- The classes they did offer first nations students (like native history or language) was basic and taught by a teacher who had no experience with either of the subjects. They were taught by non-native people, from a text book.
- What could be done to combat racism and discrimination? "more education to non natives. sometimes nothing at all. stuck in their ways"
- My children go to the same elementary school I did, and I notice that there is so much more awareness of Indigenous peoples and cultures (they smudge, the monthly newsletters often include information about Anishinaabe/Haudenosaunee cultures, the kids bring home books with Indigenous characters etc.) Having someone in the schools to champion this would be beneficial.
- More Indigenous teachers in schools, partnering with local communities to share culture, history with students/teachers...
- A think mandatory curriculum in elementary school can help First Nation youth feel understood and welcomed. Some non-indigenous students learn incorrect beliefs about indigenous students and it would be helpful if there was accurate, mandatory, consistent messages being taught.
- Education would be ideal, but not everyone is willing to listen.

- I think an effective way to combat racism and discrimination towards the First Nations communities is to stop it from the core and educate the people. All children from different races in Canada need to learn right from their elementary school years (the root of all education) about their first peoples that inhabited their land. They need to understand and truly respect this beautiful culture in order to appreciate it and not hate it.

### *Other recommendations and comments*

- Programs that help native students pay for college/ university, alternative learning schools for over aged students, native support workers such as addictions counsellors, nurses on reserve, healthy babies programs, youth activities, beading, movies, etc. Programs that's been most helpful to me have been, Milk Program (for young mothers, elders, etc) Food Bank, Adult Ed, Addictions Counsellors, ASETS, the education department... Turtle Concepts is a good way to give youth confidence within themselves. ANTI BULLYING. More job opportunities for young youth that usually cant get a job till they are a certain age, that will prevent boredom, and kids making bad decisions... I appreciate living on reserve, because things are easier here, with family and friends support.. the only thing is a lot of reserves and the people who live here are stuck living in poverty not knowing what to do or what direction to go. We need more programs supporting getting youth through high school and maybe help with choosing college programs to help youth with an understanding about what it is they'd really like to do in life.
- A wholistic model of education would be beneficial in my point of view. Ensuring that mind, emotion, spirit and physical care is provided. Also, prepping kids by taking them for day or overnight trips out of the community before they leave is essential. The entire community needs to contribute to this to ensure that every child has that opportunity. Also, the boarding home leaders/home owners and parents of the students need to have sessions together before the students leave their homes. This is important to ensure a trusting relationship is built and home rules and boundaries are clearly understood by both the parents and the home leads.
- For those that need to move away from home (from remote communities) maybe have workshops or something to prepare them for life away from home and how to cope with racism/discrimination.
- An LBGTO club would have been nice. Support for queer and two-spirit children would have been great growing up.
- I think continuing to support student exchanges helps people to see what other first nations are dealing with. It gives a new experience to youth.
- My number one source of support was my boarding parent. She was available and open for me. I really felt apart of her family. to this day. 4 years later i still go to her when I feel down.
- There are so many things being done. But i think the best is to just be there. There are many activities planned for students. After school sports and different clubs, but doing it

WITH the student once in a while will show them that you actually care and have time for them.

- Have programs, intervene early in youths life and let them know about opportunities
- Want I can encourages is more visitations to the school before going to school off reserve, more activities for children taken out of the reserve to see what's it like in the more suburban areas
- I think just encouraging youth to participate in cultural activities more. Maybe teaching important life skills as well, budgeting, doing taxes, cooking on a budget, etc.
- Start with the parents... educate the parents more
- Better supports off reserve when they attend school. Better supports in the community. Allowing them to have their voices heard and not shushing them when they have something to say. Providing the youth more learning opportunities and providing them with more life skills coaching before they have to live on main land would be beneficial also.
- I believe it would be beneficial if they could learn their culture but also their language. I like to say that my language saved my life. I never knew who I was before I learned my language and I believe there is a special beauty that we are missing out on by not knowing our language and using it to practice our traditional ways. It changes the way you see the world an I think that it does not get the respect that I think that it deserves. I would suggest language programs where elders lead. Cultural practices introduced to school. pet therapy. anything where students are away from home can experience aspects of home.
- Mentorship and self esteem/leadership programs. Involvement with elders, youth need to get their sense of identity back.
- Options to fit every lifestyle of teens
- I would say that awareness programs to teach children, teens, young adults and even elders what a healthy environment looks like. I feel that many elders may turn "a blind eye" to an abusive situation to avoid facing trauma, (PTSD) that he or she may have faced earlier in life.
- It wasn't until I dropped out of school off the reserve and attended "alternative highschool" on the reserve that I felt a part of something. I felt welcomed. And encouraged.
- Having more supports. Groups. Peer support. Local adult support. People who are positive role models.
- Know that not every child fits into the boxes that the government and curriculum for schooling creates. It's not black and white. And children will not respond when they feel they are not listened to or taken seriously.
- Positive role models and seeing people who have succeeded from your own communities helps as well.

- First Nations youth may benefit from programs that come to THEM - even in my community, which is relatively centrally located, I experienced transportation challenges. Mentorship, inclusive programming that demonstrate the immediate relevance of cultural teachings and ways, are all ways that may help First Nations youth to be better able to handle difficulties.
- Peer groups... We need our own high schools. culture shock.
- Programs for students going to school off-reserve (guidance counsellor type advisors, mentors) would help them with the transition. As for the youth, more confidence building camps as well as exciting and creative programs to keep them interested and keep their minds active would encourage them to continue learning and hopefully encourage them to become positive influences in their communities. They need to know that just because they're family members may not have graduated high school or finished their post-secondary education DOES NOT mean they won't neither!! Every person has their own chance to make it. And supporting them and encouraging them to do so would be hugely beneficial... In my experience, not enough youth on reserves are getting enough positive reinforcement. They see the community and its members suffering and assume nothing can be done to change it. But the truth is, it starts with just one person willing to make a difference and with the support of a few more drastic changes can be made quite simply. Efforts just have to be channeled and people need to know that they can make a difference! And be the difference!... There may not be many, but there definitely are aboriginal post-secondary students out there who want to make a difference in their communities! We just need to group together and support others to do the same.
- I have played school sports and talked to professionals about my problems and issues. I think that schools, teachers, and mental health counsellors should be more educated on first nations. How first nation people are today, not the pictures they have seen in the history books. I think they should learn to understand how we stick out walking around school, to watch out for racism, and to be able to educate others that the stereotypes are not true, that we are people.
- I think self worth workshops.
- classes and experiences that will help them education on self esteem and being proud of who they are and where they come from
- The youth program that I attend at the local health centre really helped in giving me a sense of community and support. By interacting with other youth that have faced similar or harder challenges provided me with the confidence to persevere and understand that I'm not alone in the challenges I face... I believe I am fairly good at handling changes, pressure, high demands and crisis due to the support I receive from family and friends. The program that helped me the most during hard times would be the Degrassi youth group at the local health centre since I had access to a place outside my home that I can talk about my issues and de-stress in a non judgemental space... I think having more youth groups centred around open discussion with discretion, cultural practices and fun activities that some families can't afford to do will boost strength and resilience among youth so they can be successful in difficult situations. Since they will have a place to go

to if they are facing challenges and need a listening ear or escape to regain peace and inner strength.

- I think self esteem workshops are vital. FN youth need to be more proud of who they are, rather than hiding it. The curriculum in FN schools also needs an overhaul.
- I think getting all the success stories from your community and having some skill building, life challenges, self confidence programs to help upbuild and prepare the youth for the "real world" would help. It was hard to adjust to not having any free programming in the city. It felt weird not being in an all Native community anymore. There was so much I did not know about other cultures because i wasnt exposed. I think the best thing to do with Youth is to expose us to the world, quit trying to keep us all together in our safety zones. We are not going to make it out there if we are babied. I've got nieces and nephews in their teens and in can tell they are to comfortable on that reserve and wont leave because they dont know whats out here. Its a shame.
- Education. Better financial assistance. Awareness about the world outside of reservations. Easily accessible support for troubled youth.
- I think getting First Nations youth to come together to engage in activities or have talks/meetings where we could talk about our culture would truly help and make us more comfortable.
- I believe that if you engage children at a young age with other nationalities there would be lesser racisms.
- I think would be nice for First Nations youth to have would be maybe big brothers big sister programs. Have someone or programs to teach young ones of outdoor life of ways we use to do way back when instead of buying your child hand held video games, children and a lot of young parents to learn of how things were done back in the day, like for myself my dad on a sat or sun would make us family a nice breakfast. more home cooked meals were the best vs people now a days go thru take-outs more than anything instead of teaching our young children.
- Better ways of communication on all sides between parents, students, house-parents, teachers and counsellors from the high schools.
- Counselling services. And programming to keep the youth busy.
- I think that more exposure to off reserve youth before entering high school would be helpful. More knowledge for off reserve students I think would also break down some of the stereotypes....I think that more focus needs to go on on becoming independent as a young person, learning essential skills, paying bills, budgeting and living on a budget, support groups
- To combat racism we need more positive role models in the media and less media coverage around negative role models.
- A good solution to helping First Nation youth going to school off-reserve would be to make sure they know that there is always someone there to talk to them, in private, when they are feeling down. I definitely think it's important to stress that sometimes you may

want to just bottle up everything inside, but it's always better to speak aloud and open up to others.

- Personally, my friends or I haven't endeavored in alcohol or drugs, but I did see fellow peers around me that did partake in these types of abuse. I think the urge to do that stems from peer pressure and the need to fit in. A solution to this would be pushing students to participate in more sports and teach them how important our education is for our future. A way to make this problem worse is to push them away; you want to walk with us instead of pushing us (when you push us, we back away). Instead of scaring us, you need to show us how it's more fun to participate in group sports versus telling us that we will be complete and utter failures if we don't immediately become good kids; it takes time and effort... Treat and approach teenagers with respect, just as you would treat anyone else, and walk alongside them. Don't push them way or make them back away, these are odd and difficult times for us as we are maturing. We need to grow into the people we are meant to be and sometimes we make mistakes, but when we do, we need to be gently that we messed up, not abusatory.
- By telling them of past experiences from elders, or even their parents, they could learn from those and realize that they need to truly appreciate their lives that they have been blessed with from the Creator.
- Empowering them to make their own decisions. Give them the tools to create a positive life path.
- We need to build up parents/guardians to fully understand and accept their role in their child's upbringing. Stopping the cycle is crucial to begin walking a new path.... We bring kids into this world without healing ourselves, expecting them to just carry on - when - they are carrying on the torch we've left them..... People need to know they are strong, valued, loved, appreciated and that there is something magical only they can offer this world. They need to know there IS a place for them - how would we know what difficulties are if we don't experience the hard times? There is WAY too much stigma in isolated communities... We need to give the tools to people to get back to that simplistic living... That we are all the same.
- A couple of my close friends as well as myself have suffered from drug problems. It started off as kind of a just for fun and then became more consistent as there was stress in my life or negative feelings that I felt the only way I could stop feeling with the distraction of drugs. The problem got better when I started surrounding myself with more positive people and positive environments but the problem worsens when I spend a lot of time alone or away from the people I love.
- I've gone through a lot especially going through high school and the past couple years. I am very open to change I like it, it makes things interesting. I don't however, handle extreme crisis very well or pressure. It gives me a lot of stress but speaking with friends and youth counsellors and helping myself realize that I can only do so much and that's okay has helped me handle this.
- Surround themselves with positive people like themselves and let them know that there are many people like themselves that are always there to help carry them on the journey of life

## **The Survey Questions**

**DID YOU GROW UP ON-RESERVE?**

**DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL OFF-RESERVE?**

The ONTARIO FIRST NATIONS YOUNG PEOPLES COUNCIL invites you to participate in the YOUTH VOICES SURVEY.

If you lived on-reserve and went to school off-reserve (elementary or high school) between the years of 1995 and 2015, then the OFNYPC wants to hear from you!

The Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council (OFNYPC) is participating in the Inquest into the Death of Seven First Nations Youth happening right now in Thunder Bay. This inquest focuses on what happened to the seven youth who died while going to school in Thunder Bay, and also focuses on identifying recommendations so that these types of deaths can be avoided in the future.

Members of the OFNYPC know from personal experience what it is like to grow up in a First Nations community and having to leave to go to school off-reserve – it can be challenging – but we want to hear from you directly about your experiences by filling in the questions below. Note that we will submit a copy of your response to the inquest using only your first name. Let us know if you do not want us to submit a copy or use your first name. Also let us know if you would like to be more involved in this or would like to have a one-on-one discussion about the inquest.

### **YOUTH VOICES SURVEY**

1. What is your **FIRST** name? Which First Nation community are you from?

2. **DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL OFF-RESERVE?**

If yes, did you feel well-prepared for that? Why or why not? What challenges did you face going to school off-reserve (e.g. difficult classes, prejudice against First Nation students, cultural differences and misunderstandings, possible “bad influences,” etc.)?

3. During hard times, what supports or programs have been most helpful to you while going to school off-reserve (e.g. elders, mentors, outdoor or traditional activities, sports, clubs, etc.)? What can be done to help and support First Nation youth going to school off-reserve?

4. **DID YOU OR YOUR FRIENDS HAVE A PROBLEM WITH DRUGS OR ALCOHOL AS TEENAGERS?**

If yes, what caused this (e.g. boredom, family problems, negative feelings, etc.)? What helped this problem get better? What made the problem worse?

**5. HAVE YOU LIVED OFF-RESERVE AND AWAY FROM YOUR PARENTS AS A TEENAGER?**

If yes, how old were you, why did you move, and what challenges did you face? If no, do you think you would have been safe and happy living off reserve without your parents as a teenager?

**6. HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED RACISM OR DISCRIMINATION?**

If yes, can you provide some examples and explain what happened? What do you think could be done to combat racism and discrimination?

**7. ARE YOU GOOD AT HANDLING LIFE CHANGES, PRESSURE, HIGH DEMANDS, CRISIS, AND SO ON?**

What has made you better able to handle these kinds of difficulties (e.g. elders, family, friends, activities, being proud of who you are, cultural learning, etc.)? What has made you less able to handle these kinds of difficulties? During hard times, what supports or programs have been most helpful to you?

8. What can be done to help First Nations youth build strength and be better able to handle difficulties?

**9. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL THE INQUEST?**