

**ABORIGINAL YOUTH
IN CRISIS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Abstract
2. The history of Aboriginal Peoples
3. The conditions of the seventh generation
4. The growth of our young
5. Education and our Youth
6. Rebuilding our Nations
7. The traditional way of life
8. The voices of our youth
9. The vision of the future

ABSTRACT

The primary goal in the research is to describe, examine, explain, predict and evaluate the problems and conditions of Aboriginal Youth in Canada. The first section is to examine existing data that are available on issues that concern youth. The data that will be analyzed will be the demographics, socio-economic conditions, education, social issues such as suicide, and cultural issues. The statistical data will give a description of the conditions of Aboriginal youth. The available data will give us an idea of what may occur in the near future.

The second part of the research project is to interview youth, elders, leaders, and program directors. More importantly, to make an assessment of the needs and wants, and seek for solutions to problems of Aboriginal youth. This will give ideas, suggestions and alternative strategies for meeting those needs.

In the following research, it has described the state of aboriginal youth and will give a summary of conclusions and recommendations.

The historic relationship

The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada have inhabited the lands for thousands of years. They lived in peace and harmony with one another and with all of creation. The peoples live and will continue to live a unique way of life with the earth and all life forms. This gave the peoples languages and a strong spiritual way of life.

The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada spoke many different languages and lived in many different cultural areas. There were approximately ten language families: the Algonquin, Athabaskan, Iroquoian, Inuit, Siouan, Kootenayan, Salishan, Tlingit, Tsimshian, Wakashan, and Haida. Within each language family comprised more than fifty individual languages which evolved in Canada. From the languages, which some people believe, evolved the nations. For example, the Algonquin family spoke eight different dialects which created eight nations. These nations were, Beothuk, Micmac, Malicite, Montagnais, Naskapi, Ojibway, Algonquin and the Cree. These nations covered a large part of Canada, from the East coast to the plains and as far north as Hudson Bay to as far south to United States.

All the language families and the nations lived in different geographical areas. Different nations may occupy the same geographical region but may speak a different language. There are generally six cultural areas are identified: the woodland, plains, pacific coast, plateau, sub-arctic and the arctic. The cultural area played a strong role in shaping the cultures. This was where the peoples got their material and spiritual needs by using the resources of their environment. The land, the rivers and the life forms it supported provided clothing, housing, foods, tools, transportation, spiritual needs and other such needs. This is what makes the Aboriginal peoples a unique people, the languages, culture and the relationship with earth.

Aboriginal peoples have a common spiritual relationship with earth and all forms of life that surrounds them. They also have another common relationship which is colonialism and cultural genocide from the Europeans who were greedy for wealth and resources.

The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada all have experienced some type of oppression from the superior white race. This has caused a crisis for Aboriginal Peoples. The land that has been taken away, unsettled land claims, loss of culture and language, poor health and education, injustice, socio-economic issues have a common problem with Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. But before we

examine and analyze the problems and issues we will first look back at the historical relationship with Aboriginal Peoples and European governments.

The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada have and will continue to live in peace, harmony and understanding with mother earth and our ancestors that lived before us. The Peoples of this land have been living here for many thousands of years and inherited a strong spiritual relationship way of life. With all the different languages, values, beliefs, ceremonies, and traditions that the Peoples inherited, they have a common spiritual relationship with mother earth.

Ever since Europeans set foot on this land so called Canada, the Aboriginal Peoples have slowly lost their traditional way of life. It all began with a treaty of peace and friendship, and treaties of relationships. It was understood that the Europeans would live their way of life and would not disturb the ways of our ancestors. However, in the first 225 years the relationship between Europeans and Aboriginal Peoples were strictly trade and commerce. As the Europeans exploited the land and its resources, they broke treaties and promises for greed, power and control. Then they assumed jurisdiction over the Aboriginal Peoples. The result of this kind of attitude was 500 years of genocide and oppression.

The Europeans had an attitude of ethnocentrism over Aboriginal peoples and the land that supported them. This had a strong negative impact on Aboriginal Peoples because they were taken away from their homes and forced to learn the European way of life. They were denied to speak their languages and practice their cultures. This has created loss of languages, identity, and poverty for Aboriginal Peoples. The people who suffer the most are the young people because they will have to live with and become victims of cultural genocide and assimilation.

The Seventh Generation

In modern day society, youth have one of the greatest responsibilities which is to take on the challenge to heal Aboriginal Peoples, find solutions to the problems and bring back the traditional ways towards a vision of peace, harmony and understanding. The people understand the fact that the Aboriginal Peoples are struggling to survive and have to manage with all the obstacles that face their lives. In particular with young people, they are in the middle of the clash of two cultures which creates disorientation of a Peoples. In order to comprehend the issues that face Aboriginal Peoples can only be done by Peoples working together as a family, as a community and as a nation. In a family, the elders, the women, the men and the young people all have a role to play in developing our communities. This is the only hope that young people have is to work together for our children futures.

Considering the facts that the conditions of Aboriginal Peoples are unimaginable compared to the conditions of the general public of Canada. The issues of lack of education, lack of proper housing and sewage systems, high unemployment, lost of identity, and the socio-economical conditions of a people is disheartening for the young people who will have to prepare for their future. The state of the Aboriginal Peoples is some thing that should be challenged by Youth.

If the youth are not being prepared for a living environment of the future, then what is the purpose of life for the future generations. The evolution of Aboriginal Peoples and people of this earth is moving in a path that is uncontrollable, where people do not know where they are going. Just as a man is blindfolded and is running in the woods with no direction. This is what is happening with the present state of the people of the world.

However, in order to understand where we are going we have to look at the evolution of people of this earth and prepare our children what lies ahead. It is the youth who will have to take on this challenge to prepare for a future of peace, harmony and understanding. It is also the responsibilities of the adults to consider youth as a valuable resource in developing and preparing for the future. With the guidance and wisdom of our elders it is possible that we can work together and prepare a future of peace, harmony, and understanding.

In the age of computers, the main concerns of Aboriginal youth are their cultural and personal issues, the concerns about the various education programs and systems, problems with job training and work. There are many other issues that youth have to face in present day societies. Issues that relate to land claims, injustice of the white society towards Aboriginal Peoples. These issues give many youth the uncertainty of the survival of their

culture, language and traditional way of life.

The issues, the problems youth have to face in today's society are uphill and they mature to fight the system. Young people become more aggressive and uncompromising to the extent to fight for their land, beliefs, rights, services for future generations. This is why we cannot afford to overlook the dilemma of our youth not only for reasons of programs and services, but also because these problems will continue to multiply unless serious attention and improvement is made as soon as possible.

The period of adolescence and youth is one of changes, choices, transitions, growth into the adult society. During this time youth are faced with peer pressure, alcohol, to do good in school, to be popular, and to feel good of themselves and to succeed to live a balanced life. When you are born until the age of twelve, is most the productive part of your life. It builds the foundation of who you are. When you become a youth, from the age of thirteen to twenty-four, it is difficult and strenuous time of a young person's life. With all the changes in life young people still have to make difficult decisions in the present and future life.

While young people are going through change, we the people will have to recognize the knowledge, expertise, ideas, and energy that our young people may provide to society. We will have to give youth the opportunity to become involved in decision making, economic development, planning and implementation. Therefore, we may create a society together where we can live in peace, harmony and understanding.

In the following document, we will examine in more detail the conditions of Aboriginal peoples, in particular the youth.

The growth of our young

The Aboriginal Peoples of North America had a population of over one hundred million peoples before contact with the Europeans, but were nearly exterminate by disease, war and policy making. In Canada there is only approximately over 711,725 Aboriginal Peoples according to the 1986 census report. Five hundred and fifty two thousand (552 000), three fourths (73%) of Aboriginal Peoples live off-reserve and the rest live on reservations. This includes status Indians, non-status, Inuit and metis. In 1991, the aboriginal population has increased by forty one percent, to 1,0002,675.

According to the 1986 census, 711,725 Canadians reported some Aboriginal origin, among these were 263,245 registered Indians, 33,460 Inuit, and 415,025 of other origins such as the metis and non-status. Registered Indians comprise almost two fifths of the 750 000 and of the that two fifths, slightly over three fifths of registered Indians live on reserve, sixty two percent (62%) live on reserve (164,315 out 263,245), thirty eight percent (38%) live off reserve (98,930).

Almost Three persons out of five (57%) living off reserve were under 25 years of age, sixty percent (60%) for people on reserve and thirty eight percent (38%) for the Canadian

population. Elders who are 65 years and older only represent two percent(2%) of the Aboriginal population living off reserve and five percent of those living on reserve.

The Aboriginal Population in Canada represents three percent (3%) of the total population in Canada as a whole. The registered Indians comprised one point one (1.1%) of the total Canadian population, while Aboriginal Peoples as a whole comprised two point eight percent (2.8%) of the total Canadian population.

The registered Indian population from 1966 to 1989 has increased from 224,164 to 466,337 which doubled in 21 years. Eight out of registered Indians lived on reserve in 1966, but has dropped by 60% in 1989. The increase of off reserve population is because of the migration of young people and the reinstatement of Indians under Bill C-31. In 1985 approximately 1,600 C-31 registered Indians added which represented approximately 15% of the total registered population and is expected to increase.

The Aboriginal population has a high growth rate and will continue to have a rapid growing population. This creates even a higher growing population with young people and also with Bill C-31 registrants. As a result of the current youth population, it will become, a critical issue in the near future. The young people will be the ones to make the changes to build a strong and a healthy society.

Education and our Youth

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are experiencing major changes in its components and conditions of its education. They are demanding quality education in their communities, education that will meet their needs in their respective communities. Education that they may control towards the reality of self-government. Youth are also making the necessary changes to meet their needs by voicing their concern to Aboriginal Peoples, school boards, organizations and other groups. This will give the people the understanding of the needs of youth, but not until we meet those needs Aboriginal Peoples will continue to agonize.

Generally, they have low levels of formal education, the population aged fifteen (15) years and over, a large proportion of the population have less than grade nine (9) education which is over twice that of the corresponding general population of Canada. For status Indians, thirty seven percent (37%) have less than grade nine (9) education, two times the canadian rate of seventeen percent (17%). The majority of the Inuit, fifty three percent (53%) had less than a grade 9 education according to the 1986 census. This creates a high population rate of functional illiteracy of the english or french language.

The question comes to mind whether Aboriginal youth are failing, dropping out, or if they are participating in the education system at all. According to the 1986 census, twenty eight percent (28%) of all status Indians have at least a high school education, one half the rate for all Canadians at fifty six percent (56%). The Inuit, only twenty two percent (22%) of their population have at least high school education. In the 1960's, about three percent (3%) of on reserve Indians reached the final year of high school. This has, however, changed in the past twenty eight years. In 1988 over forty four percent (44%) have reached the final of high school, but only twenty five percent (25%) of the Indian population has at least a high school diploma compared with more than fifty percent (50%) of the non-Indians. If Indians are poor in reaching high school diplomas than it will be even more difficult to attend university.

The growth rate of post-secondary enrolment has increased dramatically according to Indian and Northern Affairs, 1991. Between 1960/61 and 1985/86, the number of registered Indians enrolled in university increased from 60 students to 5,800. The number of Indians enrolled in post-secondary institutions nearly doubled between 1985/86 and 1990/91, from 11,170 to 21,300 students.

In 1986, the crude Participation rate for registered Indians was six point two percent (6.2%). For non-Indians, eighteen point five percent (18.5%) had at least some university education. This

means that almost three times the number non-Indians attended university compared to Indians. In terms of the success rates, only one point three percent (1.3%) of registered Indians had a university degree in 1986, compared with nine point six percent (9.6%) of non-Indians. This means that the non-Indian population are about seven point four (7.4) times more likely to successfully complete a degree program than the Indian Peoples.

Rebuilding our Nations

The total Aboriginal population consist approximately over 1,000,000 and they are more likely not to be in the labour force. If they are in the labour force, they are twice as likely to be unemployed. A person is considered not in the labour force if he or she is not employed and is not looking for work. However, the Canadian rate for people who are not in the labour force age of 15 and over is thirty four percent (34%). For Aboriginal Peoples on reserve , fifty seven percent (57%) or one and two thirds time the canadian rate are not in the labour force.

A person is considered unemployed if he or she is not working but is actively looking for work. For the aboriginal

people off-reserve seventeen percent are unemployed which is two and a half times (2.5) the canadian figure. The canadian unemployment rate, according to the 1986 census, is seven percent (7%). On the other hand, the canadian rate for employment is sixty percent (60%) which is lower for the aboriginal population. For Aboriginal Peoples on-reserve have the lowest employment rate of all Aboriginal Peoples, twenty eight percent (28%) or half the canadian rate. Even though the statistics are high in unemployment, it will be even higher as the young population enters the labour market. For example, between 1981 and 1986, the percent of those unemployed doubled from eight percent (8%) to sixteen percent for status Aboriginal. In the same period, the canadian unemployment increased from five (5%) to seven percent (7%) which is a slight increase.

The average income for status Aboriginal 15 years of age and over in 1985 was 9,900 or half the average of the general population, 18,200. In some regions of the country is even lower than that of the status Aboriginal. According to the 1986 census, in 1985, status Aboriginal the lowest average family income at 21,800, slightly more than one-half that of the canadian families at \$38,700.

The question is asked, Aboriginal Peoples have the highest unemployment, and the lowest income of all peoples in Canada. What is Canada and the Aboriginal Peoples going to do to increase the employment and income earnings for Aboriginal Peoples.

A Way of Life

Aboriginal youth are the one's who suffer the most from injustice both in Aboriginal communities and in urban communities. The conditions are characterized by lack of education, economic disadvantages, high youth population, poor health care and social services, loss of cultural identity, discrimination, alcohol and drugs, and the challenges that young people have to face growing in a constantly changing society. It is clear that the solutions to the problems of aboriginal youth can not be accomplished with out their participation.

What are the real problems that youth have to face in today's society? It is not always the fault of youth, but the fault of society. If society does not include young people in planning, organizing, controlling and implementing programs and services, the Aboriginal youth will continue to have serious problems. It is only the youth who can solve their own problems, personally and collectively. Youth need to be given a chance to

exploit their talents, and be given the opportunity to complete their education, participating in community development and establishing a balanced life.

Many aboriginal young people have grown in communities and families with high unemployment, poverty, poor housing and health conditions. These conditions increase social problems and may encourage rebellious behaviour towards society. This may threaten the control and destiny of Aboriginal Peoples to build a stronger nation. Living with these conditions, many problems may occur when a young person is maturing and becoming more independent:

- = many youth migrate to the urban communities to attend school, find work, or just to get away from their problems.

- = from the age of fifteen to twenty-four, this is when young people start to experience alcohol, drugs, sex etc. This is what creates the problems to become more serious.

- = With the high rates of alcoholism and unemployment, abuse to the child and family continues to become a serious family problem. These patterns of behaviour are learned and are past on to the next generation.

= suicide rates continue to be the highest among Aboriginal Peoples, especially youth from the age of fifteen to twenty-four.

These are few of the issues that youth have often try to escape in order to survive. However, many young people tend to escape their problems by drinking heavily or using drugs. Using alcohol or drugs as a solution creates more problems, yet continues to perpetuate the poverty and hopelessness of our young people.

The conflict with the law among young people often happens when they are under the influence of Alcohol or drugs. When young people want to drink they often have to drink in public, especially the youth in urban communities. Often, youth get arrested for drinking in public places. Moreover, young people with out any education or employment usually look for something to do which they end up committing a crime. More serious offenses result from learned violence from the home or the community. As youth become more aware of their culture and way of life, they become more protective of their ancestral lands and will at times rebel against the dominant society. More youth feel that the main stream society is destroying their culture and discriminates them because of their racial and traditional way of life.

Equally important, as young people attend educational institutions, participate in the labour force, and migrate to urban communities resulting in loosing their languages and identity. Over fifty-three languages in Canada, two are already extinct, and many others are on the verge of becoming extinct. Only two or three languages may survive and more and more young people will continue to lose their languages. Language is a strong ingredient of the culture and identity.

Identity is how you view yourselves and how others view you. The young people develop their identities on other peoples expectations that other have on us. Furthermore, a person's age, sex, family status, religion or racial group, education, job, athlete, musician, status or other factors also have a role in how others view us and how we view our self. A person's identity is formed through what you do or what other people expect you to do. For example, the cliché of an aboriginal person is usually considered as a drunk, can not work, or lives in poverty. If people view aboriginal youth as a "Drunken Indian" then that will be the expectation of other people. Therefore, that will be the expectation of the aboriginal person. This is what creates a lot of confusion and frustration among Aboriginal Peoples. If other people think of you as a powerless then you will act and become powerless.

In order to regain the identity of our Aboriginal youth, we really need to change the factors that have negative influence on our culture and languages, socio-economic conditions, families, our self-esteem and other related factors. When young people have the self-esteem, confidence and motivation, it will be the greatest asset that a nation can invest for the future generations.

THE VOICES OF ABORIGINAL YOUTH

Aboriginal Youth of Canada have been struggling to live a stable and healthy life. In the native and urban communities where most youth reside, both have difficulty in living a balanced life. Issues such as education, economics, health, social and cultural need serious attention. As well, Aboriginal youth need to be given the opportunity to confront the issues that face them and need to be given the opportunity to voice their concerns on matters that concern youth and all Aboriginal Peoples.

One of the most important issues that youth need in order to have a complete and a successful life is education. There are two types of education, the education in the main stream society and education through our traditional ways. Our teachers in our traditional ways comes from our elders, in the form of our Aboriginal languages. It is taught through story telling. When an elder tells a story, there is always a teaching, but it's up to the individual to understand the meaning and how it relates to him/her in the past, present and future. This creates a strong relationship with the individual's mind, body and spirit. Equally important, our teachings are also taught through art, dancing, singing, ceremonies, customs, beliefs and thought. This is how our teaching were transmitted into knowledge through the use of tools, languages and thought.

On the other hand, the education system in the main stream society is completely different than our traditional ways. The education system that has evolved from the European religions has created a system of learning a specific skill, but youth were also taught how to disrespect their own culture and language, learn to become a thief, to accept sexual abuse and many other teaching that were not suitable and should not have happened. However, the fundamental skills that are taught in the present institutionalized education system are reading and writing. Moreover, education is the act or process of providing knowledge, skill, qualities of behaviour, or character or providing formal courses of study, instructions or training. Other than leaning the skills to participate in the job market, the values, beliefs and skills that Aboriginal Youth need are not provided.

The youth are in the middle of a clash of to cultures which creates mixed feeling about who they are; they are told to learn the white mans ways and told to learn their languages and traditions. Youth are caught in two worlds, in other words, caught between a rock and a hard place.

Aboriginal youth usually begin their education in a Aboriginal community where their are limited amount of resources. Youth usually begin to learn through what they see, such as other peoples bad habits or what they see on television. Then youth

learn through what they hear through other people or through television or through sound communication. There are so many influences and peer pressure on youth that it seems impossible to break the pattern life style. Many youth say there is nothing to do, no where to go, no events, no jobs, its boring. With all the distractions that modern technologies has brought to aboriginal communities, youth are losing respect for their elders and for their culture. As one youth has said:

You have these barriers in front of you such as alcohol and drugs and all the abuse that you have not dealt with yet, that's just holding you back, once you overcome these barriers and your free to fly and can go anywhere after that, but it takes a lot of hard work to get through all that it does not happen over night.

By returning to our ancient cultures or languages, traditions, that's where your going to find the holistic stability from within yourself, that's how you are going to find out who you are, your vision, your dreams in life is who you are and your purpose of life.

Mark Sayers, Ojibway Nation

Most often when youth finish high school even sometimes before they do, youth migrate to urban communities for education, for jobs, and other pleasures that have influenced them. This is what creates confusion of who they are, where they come from and their purpose in life. However, when they reach the city life, it was not what was expected. They become to experience racism, difficulty in associating with white members, lonesome, and the changes of life patterns in an urban setting. With all these changes, including pressure to succeed in school, creates turmoil and alienation from their respective community and the mainstream society.

Most youth want enjoyment or engagements with friends for the sake of companionship. Moreover, to relate to the interaction of individuals, groups, and society in general. But, if a person feels alienated by society what kind of interaction or enjoyment can that young person have. This limits the well being of a person.

When youth have no assistance to deal with the problems that they have to face or encounter in aboriginal communities or in urban settings, they begin to try to run away from their problems and fears. When this starts, youth tend to run away from their problems and usually run and hide with alcohol, drugs, and others that fallow this kind of behaviour. Once this begins, it is very difficult to stop. The pattern that is created is like

conditioning or practising for a hockey game, it effects the mind, the body, and the spirit.

Life is like a tree. It needs roots to stand tall. It needs water and nutrients to survive and be healthy. The same goes for a young person. Youth have organisms and need those organisms to function properly. To have a healthy life youth need the roots of their ancestors, they need to stay physically healthy, they need to have an active thought and have a strong spirituality. This is what makes a person strong, this what builds a structure or a constitution of our bodies, minds, and spirits.

It is not always what events or pressures that causes youth fail or succeed in what they originally intended too. It has a lot do to with it, but it is the person decision that makes them fail or succeed. The starting point to make change is how you look at yourself, not how people look at you. The youth should be looking at themselves and not blaming on other people to make changes because they are the ones to make those decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To establish a structures for youth councils or a youth groups at the First Nation, local, regional, provincial and national level. The councils would voice the concerns and aspiration of youth at all levels. The councils or youth should be included in all decision making processes. To be included in First Nation political structures, organizations, agencies and associations. This would also include the federal, provincial, municipal government on issues relating to First Nation Peoples. Furthermore, the council would administer all projects. Therefore, it would provide experience, confidence, self-esteem, and hope for the future.

2. To form a National Youth Education Centre. This Centre would be gathering of Aboriginal youth in the summer. The gathering would educate them in their language and culture, learn to sing with drums, learn to dance, art, history, painting, carving and other form that will bring out the identity of Aboriginal Peoples of Canada. Moreover, to learn about the political, economical, health and social conditions. To ensure that young people understand what is really happening to our people and why is it happening. To examine the causes and to find solutions where they can participate or implement future projects targeted towards youth.

3. EDUCATION Many students have studied the history of Europeans and the contact with First Nation Peoples in the Americas. The books are written on the perspective of the Europeans. The books do not reflect First Nation perspectives. Furthermore, the curricula do not accurately reflect the historical, cultural, socio-economical, political and other related issues. The recommendation is to develop First Nation Studies by First Nation Peoples in all schools in Canada, from elementary to university.

The First Nation Studies Program would include languages such as english, French and the First Nation Language of the students mother tongues. Instead of using literature of what explores thought of First Nation Peoples, literature may be used written from First Nation Peoples. Furthermore, to provide courses that students may understand the true history of their peoples and to understand the issues the affect them such as language and culture, land claims settlements, socio-economical, political, and other issues. This will give them the identity, the motivation and self-esteem, and the courage and skills to help their people solve the problems in order to have a hopeful future.

This program should be adopted in every public or private school the have a large number of First Nation students. This program should be supported by the federal, provincial, municipal and First Nation school boards, governments, and peoples. They should also have the chance to take part in implementing the program, including the students.

4. To provide funding for those who are not registered under the Indian Act, such as treaty, non-status, disable and those who need skills to find jobs or create jobs.

Furthermore, to provide a higher amount of living allowances for Aboriginal students who have to leave their communities. To have more services such as researchers, councillors, advisors, and support from the families and communities.

5. To create a justice system the laws of our traditional ways may be incorporated.

6. RECREATIONAL To promote and establish recreational programs for Aboriginal youth. The goal of the program would be train professional coaches in Canadian sports such as hockey, baseball, gymnastics, track and field etc. To establish an association where people will have access to recreational information, funding, and other related resources. This will give youth the chance to explore their talents, skills, knowledge and it will

give youth the opportunity to stay in school and be confident of themselves.

7. **MOTIVATIONAL PROGRAMS** To have scholarship program for youth who have succeeded in school, athletics, arts, leadership, volunteer work with organizations, and other related scholarships. This will also give youth a goal and motivation to succeed in what they want to accomplish.

8. **ART** To establish programs and education institutions to encourage youth to explore their talents in painting, carving, tool making, photography, drama, dancing, sing and other art forms. Youth have many talents, and they need to explore what they like or do good at. targeted toward youth.

9. **ECONOMICS** To have on the job training for youth that are unemployed or lack of skills. To encourage youth to start their own business in their respective communities. To create summer employment programs for youth and students.

These programs will not only change the attitudes of youth but will also change attitudes towards the general society, it will also give youth the goal to succeed in something that they enjoy and will create a better future for generations to come.