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Report by First Nations youth urges action to create safer, healthier communities

TORONTO/OTTAWA/THUNDER BAY (February 24, 2014) – Ontario's Advocate for Children and Youth today released a special report by First Nations youth that urges local, provincial, federal and First Nations leadership to partner with them to create safer, healthier communities for northern remote and fly-in First Nations communities. The report, [Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan](#) includes three main recommendations and a series of 'steps to make hope real'.

"Generations of First Nations youth have been lost to hopelessness and we cannot wait any longer for change to come to end the continuous cycle of pain," says Samantha Crowe, Youth Amplifier, Feathers of Hope. "Our requests are not simply for funding, but for First Nations youth to actively participate in shaping the healing processes in our communities. We want leaders to work with us and act on the five-year road map we have developed so that we can improve the conditions in our communities."

The action plan is rooted in the voices of First Nations more than 160 youth from 64 of Ontario's northern First Nations communities who participated in the [Feathers of Hope youth forums](#) in Thunder Bay and Kashechewan last year. The youth gathered to talk about the realities of their communities and to identify a path forward where they could lead the change.

The youth identified 15 themes and urge all levels of leadership to take immediate action to address these issues:

- Residential schools and their effects: dispelling myths; identity and culture; First Nations culture and teachings; quality of education; education and schools; the tragedy of youth suicide; mental and physical health; drugs and alcohol; sports and recreation; youth opportunity and leadership; role models and mentors; sustainable funding; child welfare, accountability and transparency.

Key recommendations made by the youth include:

1. Provincial, federal, First Nations leadership and other interested organizations must join together and take immediate action to meet the needs and challenges faced by First Nations youth.
2. All actions and strategies to address the issues the youth have identified must be created with First Nations young people as equal partners.
3. A five-year strategy must be created to focus on the themes raised by youth in forum discussions.
 - Within 60 days of the release of the action plan, the Province of Ontario, the federal government, and representatives of First Nations leadership from each treaty area in Ontario's north, (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Treaty 3, Robinson Superior) will publically state their support for and commitment to working together with First Nations youth to ensure the five year strategy remains focused on creating real change tied to the themes.

Quotes:

"I am proud to stand beside and support the First Nations youth from northern Ontario who wrote and created *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*. I hope that their voice galvanizes support across the province for First Nations children, youth and their communities. I believe their action plan provides an opportunity for decision makers at all levels of government - local, provincial, federal and First Nations - to come together with these young people to create real change. I hope more First Nations youth are inspired by the Feathers of Hope process and that they see the champions and

allies who have come forward to support their voices and work with them. I hope they undertake their own initiatives and, when they do, my office will continue to be with them.” - **Irwin Elman, Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth**

“I commend everyone who contributed to the Feathers of Hope forum and the action plan it inspired. The forum and the report together are an important expression of reconciliation to all Canadians from those who are living the legacy of the residential schools.” - **Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)**

“*The Feathers of Hope First Nations Youth Action Plan* is an outstanding contribution to our understanding of some of the most urgent and important issues facing Canada today. Unless and until we come to grips with the challenges facing Canada’s Aboriginal youth, we will remain at risk of losing the unique gift they bring us: the gift of our future. Aboriginal youth represent that future, with all of its promise and prospects. But as the report explains, those young people confront obstacles and challenges that unfairly burden them and threaten the achievement of their potential as fulfilled individuals. *Feathers of Hope* presents a sensible and practical set of recommendations, organised by subject matter, through which we can address those obstacles and help those young people meet the challenges before them.” - **Allan Rock, former Federal Minister**

“It is vital to improve the quality of life for all of us by improving and supporting self-determined outcomes of all youth. In support of this first report and initiative, *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*, the OFIFC looks forward to working with PACY to ensure that Aboriginal youth who live in urban communities are engaged in this comprehensive process. In hope of a better way of life, many youth increasingly are seeking services and education and employment opportunities in cities and towns throughout Ontario. Ensuring that their culture is ever present will ensure a positive future. It is imperative we work together promoting these opportunities and fundamental alliances.” - **Sylvia Maracle, Executive Director, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres**

“Right To Play felt deeply honored to be a part of the Feathers of Hope Youth Forum. The youth at the forum demonstrated the power of their collective voices and the incredible impact they could have on decision making in this country. This Feathers of Hope report is a testament to the integral role of First Nations youth in guiding government, NGO’s, communities and the entire country in efforts to build a better more hopeful future. We urge everyone across the country to take the time to read this report – from beginning to end – and to truly respect, consider and advocate for the incredibly innovative, thoughtful, and achievable recommendations these youth have put forward.” – **Julia Porter, Deputy Director, Aboriginal Initiatives and Education, Right To Play**

“We as a union and as public sector workers support this important project and pledge to support the young First Nations leaders in pressing for action.” - **Joanne Webb, CUPE Ontario Diversity Vice President for Aboriginal Workers and Diversity Vice President for Aboriginal Workers for the Ontario Federation of Labour**

For more information about Feathers of Hope, please visit our [website](#) or connect with us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

Provincial Advocate *for Children & Youth*

L'intervenant provincial *en faveur des enfants & des jeunes*

[The Office of the Provincial Advocate](#) reports directly to the Legislature and provides an independent voice for children and youth, including children with special needs and First Nations children. The Provincial Advocate receives and responds to concerns from children and youth who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act and the Education Act (Provincial and Demonstration Schools). The Provincial Advocate identifies systemic problems involving children, conducts reviews and provides education and advice on the issue of advocacy and the rights of children. The Office is guided by the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has a strong commitment to youth involvement.

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