

A united front

*'Our youth need us now more than ever.
Our youth shall be our power.'*

BY ROBYN MEDICINE
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IT was 1990 when my family and I arrived in the City of Thunder Bay from the small town of Fort Frances. I was only one year old when my mother and step-father decided to raise my two older siblings and I in Thunder Bay.

I later learned that my mother had decided long before she had children, that she would do everything in her power to ensure a better life for her children. She knew that the reserves did not have much to offer as far as education, employment and health care, among other things.

It is very unfortunate that even after 26 years, families are still forced to leave their home communities to obtain a higher education, for example. And if this is not difficult enough, youth as young as 13 years of age are leaving their communities for the first time with nothing but fear and sadness in their hearts. Consider this for a moment and the fact that this happens every year.

This beautiful city is located on the western shores of Lake Superior, on the traditional territory of Fort William First Nation, and is home to the famous Nanabijou or better known as the Sleeping Giant. Thunder Bay is also home to various diverse groups including Indigenous Peoples.

More interestingly, the indigenous population has been on a steady rise for the past several years making it the fastest growing segment of Thunder Bay. In 2011, 46.2 per cent of the total indigenous pop-



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

ulation was on or under the age of 24 years (0-14 years: 26.4 per cent and 15-24 years: 19.8 per cent respectively). The rates are significantly higher than the rest of Thunder Bay which has 0-14 years: 15.1 per cent and 15-24 years: 13.3 per cent.

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Thunder Bay claims, "We value our high quality of life and promote a clean, green, beautiful and healthy community that provides economic opportunity, respects diversity and provides affordable and safe neighbourhoods that are accessible to all." What do you think about this statement?

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I could go on about the beauty that surrounds our city, but let's be real. It is the natural beauty surrounding our city that holds our deepest and darkest secrets. Here is a hint: the people of Thunder Bay are now referred to as "The River of Tears." How is it that the very thing that gives us life can be the very source of

our pain and sorrow? I think it's about time we make our presence known.

Our youth are our future leaders. They deserve our love and attention as they are relying upon us to keep them safe. Our youth need us to be strong. It is time we work together. We shall unite like never before. We were placed here with a purpose and responsibility. Creator has always provided us with the things we needed to survive. Our youth are losing their lives, but we are still here. It is up to us to take care of them, protect them, and love them. It takes a community to raise a child. Our lives are our power. Our voices are our power. Our youth need us now more than ever. Our youth shall be our power.

It is my hope that we can work together to identify and address the underlying issues within this community that cause such racial tension and this racial divide between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples as well. We need to re-evaluate ourselves individually and collectively.

I have faith in the people of Thunder Bay. Let's take back our city and honour the lives of the fallen feathers. Miiigwetch!

Robyn Medicine is the youngest daughter of Glendoris Medicine and David Williams. In 2014, she graduated from the Aboriginal Community Advocacy program at the Confederation College with honours which led her to her current position as the Aboriginal Liaison at the Thunder Bay Public Library.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.