

# SON members hold ceremony to remind people of their responsibility to Earth and water

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TEESWATER – Members from Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) held a Mother Earth Water Walk, beginning on the shores of Lake Huron and finishing at the site where the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) will begin borehole drilling in Teeswater.

The SON also came with a message for all people.

“The Saugeen Ojibway Nation was recognized to have free, prior, and informed consent on this project,” the organizers said in an announcement, referring to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The organizers cited Articles 18 and 19 of UNDRIP:

Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 19: States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous Peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent before adopting legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

“We are in ceremony for all of humanity and creation. We have a place in this forever decision being made on behalf of future generations,” the group said in a statement on social media.

“As Anishinaabek we are governed to act from a spirit-led, heart-driven place while understanding that COVID-19 is a teacher. So, we pray also for the protection from this virus, while also receive the important lessons this moment in time offers us. We are deliberating on the risks and our fullest intention, while also being deliberate in our actions as sovereign Anishinaabek Bimaadzijig - Bzauniibiikwe, Grandmother and Ogichidaak-



Cory Bilyea photos

Joslyn Keeshig, from Neyaashiinigiimig (Cape Croker), Emily Dewageshig and Kaylyn Kewageshig, both from Saugeen, carry sacred items on the last day of the Mikwendaagozi Mama Aki: Remembering Mother Earth Water Walk, April 13, in Teeswater.

we.”

Mikwendaagozi Mama Aki: Remembering Mother Earth Water Walk is a grassroots response to the proposed storage of high-level nuclear waste in Teeswater, which is within the Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory, their Facebook page said.

Organizer, Grandmother Bzauniibiikwe, whose English name is Helena (Joanne) Keeshig,

spoke to the walkers after arriving in Teeswater.

“What is happening over there is not OK,” she said, pointing towards the proposed site, “but we are not going to achieve anything by being angry or upset.”

“Mother Earth loves us, no matter what. She continues to give to us, no matter what we do to her,” Keeshig said, choking back emotion.

Biidaabinokwe Jessica Keeshig Martin, one of the organizers of the water walk, wrote her thoughts and shared her knowledge on their Facebook page, asking friends and allies to join the growing movement.

“What we need is a plan to address legacy issues before looking at any long-term nuclear waste storage projects. Legacy issues are the historical and ongoing impacts of nuclear power generation in our Territory,” she wrote.

“We said no to the burial of low and intermediate level nuclear waste in our Territory in 2019,”

adding, “I imagine we are going to say no to the burial of high-level nuclear waste in our Territory as well. I just don’t see this being a yes based on our previous decision.”

Martin provided some background, talking about the legacy issues and the lack of consultation historically.

“We were never consulted when the nuclear power industry came into our territory. Since the 1960s this massive industry has had impacts on our lands, waters, the animals and on our communities,” she wrote.

The Ontario Power Generation (OPG) has committed to working with SON on the legacy issues. Still, when the SON voted no to the proposed low-intermediate deep geological repository (DGR) on their territory, Martin said, “where is that process now? When we said no to the DGR did they walk away from this most important obligation?”

The walkers finished the water walk on April 14 with one final walk to the site where NWMO will begin borehole drilling soon to offer prayers and hold ceremony for the land and the rock.

The group offered sacred tobacco ties (one of the sacred medicines Indigenous people use for various reasons).

“Tobacco offerings taught the people from early childhood to always be respectful and to always show their gratitude to the Creator, to the spirit of the animal, to the spirit of the tree, to the spirit of the rock,” according to sgibnl.ca. This website shares the traditional teachings of Mide People. (Mide, short for Mide-win, is a culturally rich way of life shared by the Anishinaabek People)

“Through the people’s shared belief that everything in creation has a spirit, a life force and is not to be taken for granted or exploited in any way, this teaches an appreciation for all these things. Tobacco offerings are a sign of respect and genuine appreciation for everything in creation.”

NWMO Regional Communications Manager – Indigenous Salima Virani told Midwestern Newspapers in an email, in response to the water walk, “it is important to note, we are on a journey of learning which is reciprocal.

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SON members climb on discarded construction tires to hang a string of tobacco ties from a tree on April 14 at the borehole drilling site in Teeswater.



SON elder, Shirley John, sings a song for the people at morning ceremonies in Teeswater, before the last leg of the water walk on April 14.



# South Bruce councillor questions the need for archeological assessments, importance of Indigenous artifacts

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SOUTH BRUCE – During a recent Committee of Adjustment meeting regarding proposed semi-detached homes in Mildmay, South Bruce Councillor Mark Ireland questioned the need for an archeological study.

The meeting on March 23 was held to discuss a proposed minor variance to adjust the front and rear yard setback to allow the construction of two semi-detached homes on the north side of Adam Street South in Mildmay.

Coreena Smith, Bruce County senior planner, presented the report on behalf of planner Julie Steeper, who wrote the report and was not able to attend the meeting.

Other councillors questioned the bylaw that restricted this project from moving forward, but Ireland's comments were directed at the archeological study.

"I noticed that Mr. Lobsinger was required to have an archeological study looking for Indigenous artifacts, and we have seen that before where people are required to spend their own money and taxpayers' money is spent looking for Indigenous artifacts and I just want to state that I think that's a total waste of money," he said.

Ireland went on to question what could be done if an artifact was found.

"What could we do if we found an artifact? Or if we found an artifact from the person who actually cleared and developed that property into the town of Mildmay? If somebody found a horseshoe there, to me that is more important than if they found something from an Indigenous settlement 200 years ago," he said.

Ireland added that he objects to wasting money.

"I really object to the wasting of people's money on these things. I realize this has nothing to do with this bylaw and variance and it's just me venting, but I just vented my opinion," he said.

In closing, he thanked council for hearing his comments, and in return South Bruce Mayor Robert Buckle thanked Ireland before asking for any additional comments from council. Because there were no additional comments, the mayor called the vote.

Council decided to grant the minor variance, which allows the applicant to proceed with applying for a building permit.

After the meeting, *Midwestern Newspapers* decided to seek out the answers to the questions voiced by Ireland.

## Why is it required?

The 30-page report states that the archeological assessment was triggered by the Planning Act.

When *Midwestern Newspapers* contacted Bruce County for further explanation on the need for the archeological study, Carley Donaldson, Bruce County's marketing and communications coordinator, answered in an email that "archaeological potential is determined through a screening checklist that is established by the province."

She explained that the subject lands in Mildmay are considered to have archaeological potential because they are lands within 300 metres of a watercourse.

"The province's policy directions that apply across Ontario states that development and site

alteration shall not be permitted on lands containing areas of archaeological potential unless significant archaeological resources have been conserved," Donaldson wrote in an email.

"The first step in conservation requires a study by an archaeologist to assess whether there are archaeological resources on the subject lands, and this is why the study was required as part of the application process."

## How much does it cost?

In regard to the cost, Scarlett Janusas, president of Scarlett Janusas Archaeology Inc. – the firm who completed the assessment – said the costs can range depending on the size, condition of the property, and the firm doing the work.

She said all archaeologists practicing in the province are required to follow, what she called, very regimented standards and guidelines set out by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport.

The archeological fieldwork process set by the ministry is a four-stage process.

Stage 1 consists of background lot research to determine archaeological potential which is sometimes supplemented by a property inspection.

Stage 2 includes a general survey of the property to identify if archaeological resources are present. This may include walking plowed fields or test pitting and screening soil every five metres. The guidelines state that if archaeological sites are identified, Stage 3 assessment is required.

According to the ministry's standards and guidelines, Stage 3 may include mapping the surface and excavating several test locations to determine cultural heritage value.

Stage 4 may include implementing long-term protection strategies for the site, and or document the site and remove artifacts before construction begins.

Janusas said some Stage 4 assessments can cost close to \$1 million, depending on the site.

Not all stages will be necessary for all projects; the purpose of the first three stages are to identify if further investigation is necessary.

## What if an artifact were to be discovered?

If an artifact were to be discovered, it is likely to be during a Stage 2 archeological study.

According to the assessment by Scarlett Janusas Inc., artifacts could range from lance (leaf) shaped projectile points, to chipped stone items and/or fired ceramics.

The archeological assessment explains in great detail the history of the lands near and around what is currently the village of Mildmay, dating back to 11,000 years ago when the first human populations in Ontario lived their migratory hunter-gatherer lives traveling in small groups throughout the region as it emerged from ice.

The archeological assessment also includes the Indigenous historic period from circa 1700 to 1865, as well as the development, surveying, and settlement of what is more recently known as the Township of Carrick in the 1850s, and the formation of the village of Mildmay in 1867.

When asked if the assessment process would differ if an Indigenous artifact or early Canadian

settler artifact were to be discovered, Janusas said, "We give equal significance to both."

According to the archeological assessment, Mildmay was originally known as Mernersville, named after Samuel Merner who had a survey made of part lot 26 of Concession C.

The assessment also includes a detailed history of the ownership of the lands to which council granted the minor variance, including that the crown patent was first issued to Adam Johnston on July 11, 1860.

There is a detailed description of how the land ownership changed hands between the years 1860 and 1887.

## The importance of Indigenous heritage in Bruce County

The County of Bruce is currently redeveloping its Official

Plan, and this new plan will include policies to preserve Bruce County's heritage.

Donaldson said the new plan will include policies that will guide development and growth within Bruce County for the next 25 years.

"Bruce County is rich in cultural heritage resources," Donaldson wrote. "Planning can focus efforts on preservation, creating distance between the resource and new development, or managing the resource. Good planning decisions now will help us inventory and protect heritage assets."

Additionally, just last year, Bruce County and the M'WIKwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre, located in Owen Sound, made a joint declaration of mutual commitment and friendship on Nov. 5, 2020.

According to a release, this dec-

laration aims to improve the quality of life of Indigenous people in urban centres across the region.

"The culture and traditions of Indigenous peoples are woven into the fabric of Canada's heritage and particularly in the historical roots of the Bruce region," Tanya Shute, vice-president of the M'WIKwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre Board said in a release. "We want to set a leading and active example in advancing reconciliation and relationship building locally and raising the bar on community well-being, and resource and expertise sharing."

"This new commitment, set to achieve long-term positive impacts in our Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, is rooted in mutual respect, responsibility, and trust," Warden Mitch Twolan said in the release.

## SON members hold ceremony to remind people of their responsibility to Earth and water

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We are learning how the community wants to include ceremony and oral teachings with us, so we can co-create elements of the project that are built on the reciprocity of learning."

The organization repeated its statement, saying, "they are currently engaging with Indigenous People, but we are working closely with the SON communities, keeping them informed on all aspects of our work in the area. Formal consultation is not required at this point in our work."

Elder Verne Roote, a member of Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation Council, explained that the SON receives "education consultation" from NWMO, which is heard by a committee first, then reported to the SON council.

"A key component of Canada's plan is willingness – this project will only proceed in an area with informed and willing hosts working in partnership to implement the project; this includes Indigenous communities like SON," Virani said.

"NWMO has made a commitment to SON that we would not select a site for the high-level waste deep geological repository without the consent of the SON Communities. This is a commitment that respects their right to free, prior, and informed consent. They are both engaging and consulting with us on the project."

The NWMO released a story in March dedicated to water and Indigenous knowledge.

"Water is the most life sustaining gift on Mother Earth and is the interconnection among all living beings. Water sustains us, flows between us, within us, and replenishes us. Water comes in many forms and is the well-being of all creation. Water shapes the land and gives us the great gifts of the rivers, lakes, oceans, and the life water of women that we all come from," Elder Donna Augustine, chair of the An-



Cory Bilyea photo

SON member Sheila Robson prays for the water on Apr 14, at the proposed DGR site in Teeswater, after participating in Mikwendaagozi Mama Aki: Remembering Mother Earth Water Walk.

Council of Elders and Youth, an independent advisory body for the NWMO, said.

"It is important that the NWMO understands and considers these teachings as it implements a project that may have an impact on that water that we all rely on for life."

Mahrez Ben Belfadhel, outgoing vice-president of site selection at the NWMO, said, "We are fortunate because now we have a deeper understanding of the special spiritual relationship that Indigenous communities have with the land."

He added, "We also understand that this rock is not just a piece of rock like we used to think, like I used to think. This rock represents the Grandfathers. The Grandfathers have a story to tell. It is our responsibility to listen carefully, respectfully, to understand that story."

Elder Roote told people in a video posted on the water walk Facebook page that this was an awareness walk, not just for the people of SON, but for all people in the area affected by this decision.

Speaking about the waters of Lake Huron, he said, "this is the location where our people chose to live, centuries ago. One has to understand that this land was given by Creator, to us, the An-

ishinabek race of people."

"The issue at hand is nuclear development in the Territory," he said. Roote spoke about the recent vote by SON, declining permission to build a low-intermediate level nuclear waste DGR.

The exact process needs to happen in Teeswater, he said, referring to the fact that the NWMO needs to have permission from SON.

The SON (Saukiing Anishnaabekiing) Territory spans from the northern point of the Bruce Peninsula, south to the Maitland River near Goderich, and east to Nottawasaga River near Collingwood.

The NWMO is tasked by the Canadian government to find a location to build a DGR to house Canada's used nuclear fuel.

Their website says the NWMO is responsible for designing and implementing Canada's plan for the safe, long-term management of used nuclear fuel. The plan, known as Adaptive Phased Management, requires used fuel to be contained and isolated in a deep geological repository.

It also calls for a comprehensive process to select a site with informed and willing hosts for the project.



# Truth and Reconciliation calls to action on education continued

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The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) provides regular updates on the progress of the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) calls to action (CTA), keeping tabs on governments, educational and religious institutions, civil society groups, and all Canadians for full and meaningful implementation on all of the instructions given by the commission.

The CTA's regarding educational discrepancies surrounding on and off-reserve schools, the differences that continue to occur in funding process and amounts, and Indigenous rights and culturally appropriate teachings are described by the AFN as making "moderate progress."

"Moderate progress has been made in this area. Most notably, the ongoing efforts toward the completion of Call to Action #11," AFN's website said.

"Future budget announcements must continue to commit further funding as there is still a persistent backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education. Further progress on Action #8 is possible if the government reduces funding discrepancies between on- and off-reserve First Nations."

The *Indigenous Watchdog* said that "between 1996 and 2016, a 2 per cent cap on annual increases was in place; between 2004-05 and 2013-14, provincial expenditures increased roughly 2 per cent a year after adjusting for inflation (during this same period). This is in the context of declining enrollment.

"Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) estimates that, nationally, the total funding shortfall for education programming in all band-operated schools in 2012-13 was between \$300 million and \$595 million. PBO estimates this shortfall grew to between \$336 million and \$665 million in 2016-17."

*Indigenous Watchdog* reported that on Jun. 11, 2021, the federal government posted updates to their "Delivering on the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action" website, as well as an update delivered on Jun. 7, 2021, using the phrase "Date modified."

The problem noted with this is that "not a single word had changed from the last revision to the site on Sept. 5, 2019.

"Those updates, begin-

ning on Jun. 7, began just 11 days after the discovery of 215 unmarked graves in Kamloops and the resulting outcry over the lack of government actions and resolve in addressing the TRC Calls to Action and, in particular, those relating to "Missing Children and Burial Information" (Calls to Action 71 – 76). To consciously draw attention to "modified" sections of the Calls to Action implies that something has been revised or updated and that there is progress in advancing those specific Calls to Action.

The *Watchdog* noted that the CTA's that were reported as "updated or revised," were all directly related "to those areas that would draw the most attention from the media, concerned Canadians and Indigenous groups themselves given the context of the last month, the discovery of about 1,250 unmarked graves in four sites and counting."

*Note: the number of unmarked graves is reported to be over 5,000 at the time of writing this article.*

We continue where we left off with CTA #9.

9. We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

The *Indigenous Watchdog* states that as of Sept. 5, this CTA is classified as "stalled."

"Latest public report on the official government website is for the 2016 – 2017 fiscal year. Report does not address federal funding for schools off-reserve vs. on reserve nor educational and income attainments for Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous peoples."

Canadian government stated that "in 2016-17, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), now Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), invested about \$1.94 billion to support the delivery of kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education for First Nations students ordinarily living on reserve. In addition, \$165 million was invested in First Nations education infrastructure for capital projects, targeted projects, and salary or administration expenses."

The full report can be viewed at <https://www.rcaanc.ca>.

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the



Cory Bilyea Photo

Residential school survivor Geronimo Henry holds a homemade tapestry made by fellow survivor, Winnie Ashkewe, on Aug. 27 after participating in a march for one who didn't make it home. The legacy of residential schools continues to haunt survivors and their relatives, while the Truth & Reconciliation Commission presses for quicker action on the 94 calls to action.

full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.

- Improving education attainment levels and success rates.

- Developing culturally appropriate curriculums.

- Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.

- Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.

- Enabling parents to participate in the education of their children fully.

- Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

The *Indigenous Watchdog* reports that CTA #11 is also stalled.

"No specific action on developing Aboriginal Education Legislation other than a \$3.6M budget allocation for "community-level discussions." Government response refers to policy "proposal" and a policy "framework," not legislative action. Also, still no mention of off-reserve or specific needs of Métis and Inuit.

Other issues:

- 31 per cent of the \$2.6B Budget 2016 allocation (\$801M) is only available after the 2019 election

- Budget 2018 allocation of \$815M over ten years to extend funding is actually less than the 2017

budget: \$81.5M annually vs. \$90M annually.

- No details provided on the First Nations Policy and Funding approach

- No details on improving education attainment level and success rates

- No details on developing culturally appropriate curriculums

- No details on protecting Aboriginal languages nor teaching of Aboriginal language courses

- No details on enabling parental and community responsibility

- No details on parental involvement in their children's education

- No details on respecting and honouring Treaty relationships

The *Watchdog* also reports that there has been a significant deletion from federal government response:

Deleted "Any discussion of legislative options would need clear support from First Nations communities for ISC to proceed. The government is open to these discussions should First Nations wish to do so."

A detailed report for progress on each of the principles mentioned above can be viewed at <https://indigenous-watchdog.org/call-to-action-10/>.

The Canadian government website provided the following status report CTA #10:

"Based on the policy proposal for transforming the Government of Canada's support for First Nations elementary and secondary education that was co-developed with First Nations, Indigenous Services Canada has established a new policy framework for First Na-

tions elementary and secondary education."

11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking post-secondary education.

This CTA is classified as "in-progress," the *Indigenous Watchdog* reports.

Both the *Watchdog* and the government website reported similar findings on the progress of #11, with significant improvement being made.

Both sources said that the Government of Canada had completed a comprehensive and collaborative review with Indigenous partners of all current federal programs that support Indigenous students who wish to pursue post-secondary education. The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure that these programs provide Indigenous students with the resources and support they need to attend and complete post-secondary studies.

The most recent update reported on April 19, 2021, said that Budget 2021 proposes \$150.6M over two years to support Indigenous students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the Inuit and Métis Nation Post-Secondary Student Education Strategies, as well as \$26.4M in 2021-22 during COVID-19.

Notably, on Oct. 23, 2020, according to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, a 13-member Task Force on Northern Post-Secondary Education will assist in delivering on objectives identified in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework that seek to close gaps in education and skills training that exist between the North and the rest of Canada. The government of Canada is working with Provincial, Territorial, Indigenous, and community partners in the North and Arctic to develop long-term changes that provide greater access to quality education, build healthier communities, and support a sustainable and dynamic economy. The committee will deliver recommendations on how to improve education.

The full details can be seen at <https://indigenouswatchdog.org/call-to-action-11/> and [www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca](http://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca).

12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

*Indigenous Watchdog* re-

ports this CTA as stalled.

"As of Jun. 14, 2021, the National Progress Report on Early Learning and Childcare has not been updated since Aug. 22, 2019, and there has been no update on the Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Framework other than "Canada Country Background Report – Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care" released by Employment and Social Development Canada in July 2021 that explored:

- Early Childhood and Education and Care (ECEC) Quality in Canada

- Policy Context

- Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Workforce Development

"The above report touched on the Indigenous Early Learning and Childhood Framework as part of a historical analysis."

The government website reports no updates since Apr. 1, 2019, when "Indigenous Services Canada implemented a new approach to First Nations elementary and secondary education, which was co-developed with First Nations education leaders and experts from across the country. On top of new formula-based regional models for First Nations education, this new approach will provide added funding to on-reserve schools for language and culture programming and full-time kindergarten for children aged 4 and 5."

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's (NCTR) 2019-2020 Annual Report provided the following information.

"The NCTR was unrelenting to make progress on projects throughout 2020. We continued to engage Survivors, communities and partners as best we can to move our work forward.

"Despite the dramatic changes 2020 has brought, the NCTR has successfully delivered Every Child Matters: Reconciliation through Education on Sept. 30, 2020.

"This virtual event reached over 500,000 teachers and students across Canada and won two international awards and a Canadian Screen Award nomination.

"The NCTR is also working hard to implementing the Calls to Action. We supported the work and Bill C-5 to make the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation a reality."

*The following article in this series will cover the CTA's 13 – 17, language, and culture.*



# SON residents take matters into their own hands after suicides and the opioid addiction crisis surge

*‘Let’s all be determined to make a difference in our homeland’*

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NEYAASHIINIGMIING – Opioid addiction, suicide, and intergenerational trauma are a genuine and deadly reality for Indigenous People.

These things directly result from the damage and destruction that happened to the people when their very lives were torn apart by the pain of genocide.

It is even more prevalent now as more and more Indigenous children and youth’s unmarked graves are revealed, and the pain of loss is felt deeply, collectively across Turtle Island and beyond.

Twelve months ago, after her son died by suicide, Helena (Joanne) Keeshig and a small group of other concerned mothers decided that they needed to talk, so they sat down, and they did just that. They talked and talked, around and around until they realized that the answer was right there.

Keeshig explained to Midwestern Newspapers that she declines to use the term “committed suicide” because she feels those words refer to something illegal. She doesn’t think that an individual’s decision to leave this world should be classified as such.

When she realized the decision her son had made, as she stood and watched her son leave this world, Helena

whispered, “I love you, no matter what.”

She realized at that moment that he had made that choice to end his life and that she had to accept that.

She didn’t have to accept the lack of available help for people who, like her son, felt there was no other option.

During the conversations about what they could do, as mothers and aunties who had tried so many different avenues of “mainstream help,” they realized that many of the people they were losing were young men, traditionally known as the firekeepers for events and ceremonies.

With that thought, they lit the sacred fire and formed into a determined group of people who care about what is happening and are going to do something about it.

No Matter What is a grassroots initiative in Neyaashiinigiing to address addiction impacts, including offering a safe space for harm reduction and support for those impacted by a loved one’s substance use.

The sacred fire is a long-practiced ceremony that Indigenous People hold for various purposes; the fires offer remembrance, healing, and togetherness.

The sacred fire is an essential part of Indigenous spirituality. It sends prayers to the ancestors, prayers for the living, and the recently departed.

The group hopes that by be-

ing available for the youth and others who are struggling with addiction, mental health issues, or anything else where prayers are required, they will help prevent another suicide or drug overdose.

They hope that the sacred fire will provide a safe place for anybody to come, regardless of their state of sobriety or any other roadblock that people may feel.

Cots are available for anybody to use during the sacred fire. If people are at a party and can’t make it home, they are welcome. If people are drunk or high, they will be

welcomed to rest, as it was told that sometimes people fall asleep on the road and get hit by cars.

“Everyone is encouraged to come and visit, offer your prayers for loved ones, for those who are grieving the fire is here to offer comfort. If you’re struggling with life, come and talk with the Grandfather, Mshoomis Ishkode,” states the group.

The group also has a Facebook page titled No Matter What.

The most recent Community Fire Drop-In was held on June 30. It was the first anniversary of the sacred fire event.

It was a 24-hour community fire with some of the Nawash youth hosting the first 12 hours.

The Facebook page includes the following invitation.

“I hope you will come and join us and support our youth as they learn how to pick up this responsibility and community leadership, as well as support the families and their loved ones who are struggling with addiction.

“Yaangkwaamizik, let’s all be determined to make a difference in our homeland.”

The group holds a sacred fire at the end of every month at the community gardens on Neyaashiinigiing territory.

## New chief and council elected at Neyaashiinigiing

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NEYAASHIINIGMIING – The band members from Neyaashiinigiing (Cape Croker Reserve) elected a new chief and council on Aug. 6, choosing a female chief this time.

The incumbent chief, Veronica Smith, won by a majority, winning 255 of the 503 valid votes.

“Chi-Miigwetch Everyone. I am humbled and honoured,” Smith said on social media shortly after the counting of

votes was completed.

New councillors voted in are Anthony Chegahno, Sydney I. Nadjiwon, Arlene Chegahno, Carlene Keeshig, Norma Tobey, Beverley A. Nadjiwon, Nick Saunders, Randa Keeshig, and Kathy Jones.

The new chief and council were sworn in on Aug. 9 at Cape Croker Park.

Contributed Photo

Veronica “Cha Cha” Smith learns that she has been elected chief of Neyaashiinigiing Territory on Aug. 6.



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# Language, culture stolen by residential schools now part of reconciliation process

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The United Nations (UN) named 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages to highlight the need to preserve, revitalize and promote the use of the world's estimated 7,000 Indigenous languages - 2,680 of which are considered to be in danger.

"Languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory," the UN said in a news release.

At the end of the International Year of Indigenous Languages, the UN declared an International Decade of Indigenous Languages to begin in 2022.

The resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly on Dec. 18, "to draw attention to the critical loss of Indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize, and promote Indigenous language" and to "take urgent steps at the national and international levels."

The 2011 Census of Population recorded over 60 Aboriginal languages grouped into 12 distinct language families - an indication of the diversity of Aboriginal languages in Canada.

According to the 2011 Census, almost 213,500 people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue. In addition, nearly 213,400 people reported speaking an Aboriginal language most often or regularly at home.

The Indian Residential School system attempted to completely wipe out all Indigenous languages and culturally specific traditions, like ceremony, dancing, and feasting.

When the children were brought to the schools, the first thing that happened was that their hair was cut off. This may not seem like a big deal, but Indigenous people



Cory Bilyea photo

Residential school survivors participate in a memorial walk for Joe Commanda, a young boy who ran away from the Mohawk Institute and was killed by a train in Toronto. The survivors recall their language and culture being stripped from them and work hard now to revitalize both, in honour of those who did not make it home.

value their hair differently than mainstream society; their hair is an extension of themselves, an extension of their nervous system, and very sacred.

Many Indigenous people never cut their hair, choosing instead to wear braids or let it flow naturally. However, when a loved one passes away, many people cut their hair to honour the person and to offer up their grief to the Creator.

Chatelaine Magazine published an article by Andrea Landry, a teacher at the First Nations University of Canada, a mother, a certified life-skills coach, and a freelance writer for Today's Parent. She also has a personal blog entitled Indigenous Motherhood.

The following statement is an excerpt from the article titled, "What my mother taught me about my hair."

"Hair is sacred. The teachings have been passed down by our nokamis (grandmother) to

our mothers, our mothers to our daughters and our fathers to our sons. While hair teachings differ, depending on the family, community and nation, there is an overarching theme. Our hair connects us to our identity, our kinship systems and our life force. Ultimately, how we take care of our hair is a reflection of how we take care of ourselves and our children."

To strip the children of their identities, the schools took their clothing, hair, and language away, and name-calling and berating them and their families/culture began.

When the children spoke the only language they knew, they were punished severely.

Sir John A. MacDonald is quoted as saying the following during an 1883 address to the House of Commons:

"When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and

though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men."

Imagine, if you will, your child goes to school prepared with the only language they may know. Now, imagine your child comes home with their hair cut off (most heads were shaved), with bruising on their little bodies because they spoke the only language they know.

Worse, imagine that they didn't come home at all? But nobody tells you, your inquiries are ignored, and you are advised to

"get over it."

Then 50 years later, they find your child in an unmarked grave behind the school, but you still need to get over it; it was a long time ago.

Call to action No. 13 is the first of five calls under the heading of language and culture:

"We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights."

According to the Indigenous Watchdog, this call to action is classified as complete.

Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous Languages, received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019. Bill C-91 states: "The Government of Canada recognizes that the rights of Indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 include rights related to Indigenous languages."

The Canadian government website states the following regarding Bill C-91:

"The bill has been developed to support the meaningful implementation of Calls to Action 13, 14 and 15 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, elements of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the commitment to a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership.

"This legislation aims to reclaim, revitalize, strengthen and maintain Indigenous languages in Canada and aligns with the commitment to renew the relationship with Indigenous Peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. Under Bill C-91, Canada recognizes that Section 35 of the Constitution Act includes language rights. This is a monumental step in the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples."

Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action series will continue with more from the Language and Culture section in the next segment of the series.

# COVID numbers continue rise in region, four hospitalized due to virus

Continued from page 7  
"What we've seen is that the immune system of our

elderly population of our residents in Knollcrest isn't as robust as those of young-

er people," commented Dr. Rachel Anderson, attending physician and medical di-

rector at Knollcrest. "And so we do have a responsibility as younger people with good immune systems entering these homes and being in the community as well where it is being more transmissible. We do have this responsibility to get vaccinated in order to protect those who don't have a good immuno-response... that is the biggest and the best thing we can do, because this isn't going away anytime soon."

Anyone turning 12 and older in 2021 is currently eligible for the vaccine. As of Sept. 13, nearly 195,000 doses had been administered in Huron-Perth; amongst those residents 12 and older, 81.1 per cent have received at least one dose, while 74.8 per cent of the population has been

fully vaccinated.

Dr. Klassen said the ongoing effort to educate and vaccinate the remainder of the population that has not received one or both doses would be of critical importance to keeping schools running in-person for the entire year. She added that since the province's announcement that vaccine certificates would be required for those accessing certain services after Sept. 22, vaccination numbers have experienced an uptick regionally.

"There are many things working in our favour to help our schools succeed," said Dr. Klassen. "The most important thing is that we continue to drive down local community transmission. We can do this for our kids."

When asked to comment about vaccines and vaccine passports being politicized throughout the pandemic, and particularly as of late during the federal election campaign, Dr. Klassen spoke to the historical proven science of vaccinations.

"I've been passionate about vaccinations before COVID ever started," she said. "I would argue that vaccinations are the number-one medical achievement ever. It is an intervention that pays for itself. The first vaccination was developed over 200 years ago. So, this is building on a long history of understanding how to teach... how to recognize certain infectious diseases and protect people against them. From my perspective, it's an easy choice."

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