



Pathways to Education



Pathways to Education is a national, charitable organization breaking the cycle of poverty through education. Its award-winning program is creating positive social change by supporting youth living in low-income communities to overcome barriers to education, graduate from high school, and build the foundation for a successful future. Through the collective power of partnerships, Pathways to Education's innovative program is preparing youth for tomorrow.

The Pathways Program operates in 20 different communities across the country, serves more than 6,000 youth each year and has more than 5,000 alumni. The Pathways Program has improved high school graduation rates in the communities we serve by an average of up to 85%. There are three Indigenous led Pathways to Education programs across the country, in partnership with a First Nation, a Tribal Council and a Friendship Centre.

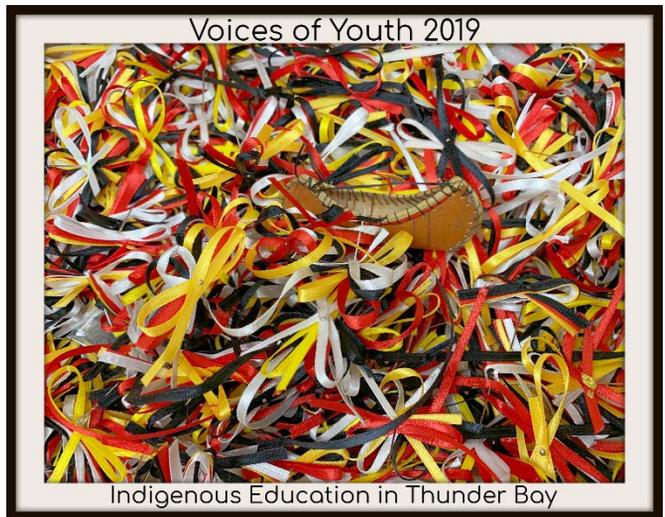
We first engaged in Thunder Bay in 2016-2017 to explore the need and interest for a Pathways to Education Program. At that time the readiness level for the Pathways Program was not there given multiple competing priorities in the community and changes in leadership within the organizations involved. We subsequently refocused our attention on other Indigenous communities in Canada and monitored for an opportunity to re-engage in Thunder Bay. In the summer of 2018, an opportunity presented itself to continue to explore the discussions and building on the relationships created in the previous year.

In the fall of 2018, we supported a youth-led approach to community engagement. This resulted in capturing the input from a greater number of First Nations students studying in Thunder Bay and effectively engaging the adult allies through the youth. We worked in collaboration with Moffat Makuto and youth members of the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) who became a critical partner for us given their existing presence, credibility and relationships in the community.

Youth clearly articulated their aspirations to succeed in high school and in life, recognizing that success in one will lead to success in the other. Moreover, they want to ensure that the generation that follows them have what they need to succeed. In these conversations with young people at RMYC, it became clear that the most effective way to capture the ideas of a broad range of Indigenous youth would be to convene a gathering designed by and for youth. As a result, a Youth Planning Team was established, beginning with members from the RMYC, including Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC) students. Over a five-month period they met each Friday evening and for three full-day sessions. Smaller working groups were formed and met to plan out key components of the gathering. As the meetings progressed the team grew to 15 and, by the time the gathering was convened in February, the majority of youth on the planning team were Indigenous and represented each of the three school boards. This was a powerful outcome of the youth-led approach.

We attribute this increased level of engagement to the strategic decision to host the majority of the planning meetings at DFC, thereby making the process visible to a larger group of Indigenous youth. As word spread, more Indigenous youth engaged, which we were very grateful for.

The Youth Planning Team decided on the theme, The Past, Present, and Future. They wanted to ensure youth participating had the opportunity to reflect on the past and the role education has played in Indigenous families and communities since contact, in a safe space.



Over two days more than 100 Indigenous students gathered at DFC to take part in a series of youth activities that were rooted in ceremony, community building, capacity building and content. It reinforced the connection Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth have and built a common and shared understanding of their lived experiences while offering spaces for experiential learning to address the opportunities and challenges facing Indigenous students.

The young people generated key messages for educators, decision makers and community-based organizations during the gathering. From the Voices of Youth 2019 gathering, Indigenous youth and their allies in Thunder Bay are calling for:

- 1. Increase in after-school supports including, tutoring and mentoring**
- 2. Increase in school-based supports, including Indigenous staff (e.g., teachers, guidance counsellors)**
- 3. Cultural activities and resources that are representative of all populations and that facilitate both learning and connection**
4. Greater diversity of learning opportunities that assist in making important life decisions (e.g., healthy relationships, sexual health, money management, transitioning to life after high school)

Building off these important calls from students in Thunder Bay, Pathways to Education Canada, Three Things Consulting and RMYC are supporting a team of summer students in 2019 who will lead a community mapping project to identify and determine what activities, supports and resources are available for Indigenous students in Thunder Bay, and in doing so, confirm specific gaps that exist. A final tool will be available to all Indigenous students in the fall of 2019 to ensure they know where to access physical, mental, emotional and spiritual supports. We believe that this tool will provide Indigenous students one more support that can help them have a safe, satisfying and successful educational experience.

For more information on the activities and outcomes through this process of relationship building and youth leadership or for the full report from Voices of Youth 2019, please contact Three Things Consulting at yomatter@3things.ca.