

A Letter from Howard

“How do I say this...it’s easy at times to be a youth here but it’s also challenging. A little bit of both. It’s an isolated place with not enough resources and no supplies, like equipment for sports. There is no music equipment for dances or concerts. There is no way to get youth to events or activities out of our community. Right now young people rely on encouragement from youth workers to boost up their energy to play and get involved in the activities that we do have. But it’s not enough. The better way is for parents to get involved in their childrens’ lives, for youth to seek help and to make sure that it’s there when they ask for it.

I am starting this thing around fishing and hunting. I want youth to be more open to respect our cultural ways and to keep our cultural ways alive. At the same time we get to talk openly about the problems in their lives... it seems they are more open minded when they are in the bush. It brings them joy when they talk, cook and fish. Not all kids have fishing rods, hooks or other stuff to fish with though. Whatever the reason, it makes it hard for them to get involved without the right supplies. I want to give them something they need for their life...every four seasons...I want to make sure they can be involved in fishing, hunting, sports, and music.

This will make their life a lot better. We have nothing whatsoever to make this work. If a group somewhere else in Canada was able to help us do this project I’d be happy. They would be surprised and shocked that people wanted to help them – because they have never experienced something like this – ever. They don’t know that other young people care about them, or even know that they are here. It’s time to work together to help others. I have won several awards around leadership and as a young person I can offer a lot to others. I think I could make them realize that no one is alone – in the north or everywhere. Because we are one nation.”



Summer Beaver with Judy and Landon for the “Gathering of Stories” project. Pytor invited Howard to Toronto for a conference on youth leadership, where Howard met and developed friendships with our other youth leaders – Darryl, Lindsay and Pam.

The quartet has since been involved in all of our Youth Engagement decision-making, from what initiatives to develop to how to educate southern youth about their lives.

Howard is a gifted storyteller, and offers himself as a motivational speaker, talking to youth as a survivor of drugs and of suicide. This year, Howard had a vision of all the young people in the communities wearing red bracelets, to symbolize unity against the dirge of drugs and alcohol. Howard shared this vision with Ines, who brought it to the attention of Pytor. In February, Pytor traveled with Howard to several communities across Canada to find and train school “influencers,” or natural leaders within school settings, who could speak to their peer group about lifestyle choices.

From the South...

When corporate lawyer Peter Newell heard about the formation of the North-South Partnership, he immediately thought of persuading his colleagues at law firm Ogilvy, Renault to get involved on a pro bono basis. “Children’s rights are important to me,” he explains. With Phil Fontaine acting as a senior advisor to the firm, First Nations issues were already on his radar; so our efforts to honour the rights of the children in our communities proved compelling.

“I pitched the North-South Partnership to our pro bono committee,” Newell says, “and they were all over it.” Three years later, a number of Ogilvy, Renault lawyers have worked on everything from drafting our by-laws to assisting with contracts. “It’s really neat the way people here have fastened on to the Partnership and said ‘this is worth doing,’” observes Newell.



On June 1st, 2011,
Ogilvy Renault joins



Law clerk Donna Moore remembers when Newell first described the challenges in our communities: “I was shocked to hear some of the stories of their conditions.” She wanted to help at once. “It was really exciting getting the North-South Partnership up and running. You feel like you’re contributing a *little*.”

Ogilvy, Renault has contributed a lot. On an entirely pro bono basis, they have done what Newell calls the “legal carpentry and plumbing” that enables an informal coalition of people to transform into a bona fide organization. And this fall, they secured our charitable status, a feat that is challenging and tricky in the current environment. Revenue Canada

fields far more applications than they approve. How many of those applicants are as politically fraught as we were, given that the partners came together because government policies had failed?

NEWS IN BRIEF:

Getting the Message Out

Our staff have been driving hither and yon across southern Ontario, giving presentations about our northern communities to high school kids, to university classes, professional associations, Rotary clubs and to church groups. In the last few months alone we have spoken to over 2000 people about the hopes and dreams of our First Nations friends. We read aloud messages from our youth leaders, and field questions that range from “why don’t they just leave?” to “what can we do to help?”

Often, the groups we address wind up inspired to get more involved. Thus we have been trying to pair them – school to school, for example. The Durham District School Board is already well underway with this process, having twinned five schools northeast of Toronto with schools in North Spirit Lake, Slate Falls, Sandy Lake, K.I. and Moose Factory. Now, Delphi Alternative School in Scarborough is seeking a way to twin with a community.

Bridging the empathy gap is absolutely essential to our mandate, so this progress is wonderful.

Waterloo Collegiate Institute reaches out to Thomas Fiddler Memorial High

When members of the student-run Human Rights Club at Waterloo Collegiate Institute found our website this fall, they read it thoroughly and decided that this



would be the cause they supported for the year. Our volunteer coordinator, Julia Read, drove out to give them a presentation, and then helped them to twin with Sandy Lake’s Thomas Fiddler Memorial High School.

The students have set up a Facebook page so that youth can post about themselves and read about other youth in both schools. The Waterloo students learned about Sandy Lake’s Maternal Child Health program in this way – the mothers are their peers, after all, young women of seventeen to twenty. So they began a donation drive, and sent several boxes via Speroway containing items requested by the mums.

The students will continue to raise money for the rest of the year.

St. John Bosco raises funds for artists in Summer Beaver

The grade eight students at this Catholic school in Brampton organized a Guitar Hero contest and raised more than \$600.00 for wood carving tools, which

had been requested by artist Bob Yellowhead of Nibinamik (Summer Beaver) First Nation.



Yellowhead plans to run carving workshops for the children in his community, reintroducing them to both a practical and a beautiful craft.

Rotarians in Barrie help children in Fort Severn

In 2010, we received a letter from a teacher at Fort Severn’s Wasaho school, conveying her distress that her energetic young charges had no balls or bats or nets or, indeed, *anything at all* to play

with in gym class. We brought her letter to the attention of the Rotary Club of Barrie, where Rotarian Dennis Tuck had been contemplating ways to help the First Nations.

“My wife of 38 years is of Algonquin descent from the Sharbot Lake Community,” Tuck told us. “I have worked on projects in South America, Africa and South Asia. (But) last year I took the idea of supporting communities a little closer to home to my club. Specifically, the First Nations communities of Northern Ontario.”

Tuck persuaded his fellow Rotarians to buy \$4000.00 worth of gym equipment for Wasaho FN School. The principal, Sherri Curtis, is thrilled.

“I look forward to working with The North-South Partnership for Children on future projects in other Northern communities,” Tuck says. We look forward, too.

www.barrierotary.com

Speroway builds bunk beds for overcrowded homes

Three years ago, Karen Ward of FTC Canada, now called Speroway, was visiting the community of Mishkeegogamang when she noticed children roaming about after midnight. Puzzled by the sight of these little night owls, she asked around – and discovered that they were waiting for their turn to use a bed. The housing shortage is so severe that the children of Mish must sleep in shifts.

Karen thought about what she might do to help, and asked Chief Connie Gray-McKay, with whom she has developed a warm friendship, whether bunk beds might be one solution. (The long-term solution, of course, is adequate housing. But in the mean time, entire childhoods are going by, and “children



who can't sleep, can't study well,” as Karen points out.)

Chief Connie thought it was a great idea, so Karen and her colleagues at Speroway researched the possibilities, and ultimately raised enough funds to buy 100 pine bunk beds from IKEA. They took fifty up to Mish this December and assembled them. (We don't have to tell you how baffling and time-consuming it can be to assemble IKEA furniture, so kudos to Karen and her four volunteers!)

Another fifty were slated to arrive in Sandy Lake when Speroway shipped donations this March. You can learn more about this initiative at www.speroway.com/our-programs/first-nations

Ryerson sends students north

Our university Partners continue to fund the travel of young people to our communities, to foster the next generation's commitment to reconciliation and friendship. Next month, three undergraduate students from Ryerson's School of Child & Youth Care will accompany

Judy Finlay to five communities to learn about conditions in the north.

Capacity building continues in Sandy Lake

The concept of collaborative community planning lies at the heart of Mamow Ki-ken-da-ma-win, the ‘searching together’ process that has been underwritten by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. With the monies, a governance body consisting of two Elders, two youths and two Band Council members hired a full-time facilitator in December. Teri Fiddler has proven to be terrific at the job, and some of the needs and priorities of Sandy Lake residents – as *they* see them – are coming to light. After decades of having plans and priorities imposed upon them by bureaucratic edict, this shift in the weight of decision-making is important. The youth leaders, Lindsay Meekis and Konery Beardy, have been inspired and focused participants in the process.

As of April, Mamow Ki-ken-da-ma-win will get underway in three additional communities.

Aboriginal Achievement Awards inspire our youth

On March 11th, the Partnership arranged for five high school students from Fort Severn, Sandy Lake, Summer Beaver and Bearskin Lake to be picked up by Wasaya Airline and flown to Edmonton to attend the Aboriginal Achievement Awards. We met them as they switched planes in Toronto along with chaperone Teri Fiddler, and provided them with cameras and journals so that they could record their impressions of the three-day trip. As well as the evening awards show, they attended a day of educational workshops.



Thanks to the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs for underwriting this very special journey. Helping youth imagine what they can aspire to is the very best work we can do.

“Third World Canada” raises awareness across Canada

Partner Andree Cazabon, a documentary filmmaker, placed a searing spotlight on suicide when she filmed the children and relatives of a mother who killed herself in the winter of 2008 in our co-chair’s community of K.I. The resulting documentary premiered at the R.O.M. in Toronto in late September, and has subsequently screened at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, and at venues across and beyond the province. Chief Donny Morris, deputy chief Celia Begg, band councilor Darryl Sainnawaap and other K.I. residents have been present at every screening to engage in dialogue with the audience.

Fundraising Efforts

Both the staff of the Partnership and the Ontario citizens we are reaching through our presentations and website continue to raise funds for our communities. We want to thank the students in Sheridan College’s Social Service Workers program for raising funds for our Youth Engagement Committee; the Social Work students at Renison College at the University of Waterloo, for ongoing fundraising and a planned educational event this May; the staff and students of Delphi Alternative School in Scarborough; Hollanderizing Custom Fur Care, and our many private and individual donors.

Volunteer Training begins

Our volunteer coordinator, Julia Read, organized an evening event on March 3rd for a dozen volunteers who had expressed interest in working with us. Ryerson student Rachel Gautreau, who

had flown to Sandy Lake with Judy Finlay in 2008, came by to share her own experiences and impressions. For volunteers, our situation is unusual, in that we can’t afford to fly them north, so what can they do if they wish to roll up their sleeves in the south? We would love for them to be engaged in fundraising, research and public education.

Can they be on call for trips that engage in training and capacity building?

Our impossible dream: affordable flights to the 52nd Parallel.

In the mean time, we are incredibly grateful to all who express interest in offering their expertise. The volunteers are organizing themselves into committees, and plan to meet with us on a regular basis.

Our Staff Grows

Our excellent Youth Engagement Coordinator Ines Lincho has decided to move back to the quieter realm of Kingston, where her family resides. In her stead, arrive two new folks, one of whom will oversee the Ashoka/Small Change Fund training initiative. We welcome Brad Stone, who comes to us from Anishnawbe Health Toronto, and Patrice Benjamin, who is moving over from the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. We look forward to introducing them to you!



A word from our departing youth engagement coordinator, Ines Lincho:

“In this past year, I have had the opportunity to engage with an amazing group of youth and young adults from Sandy Lake First Nation, Nibinamik First Nation, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and North Caribou First Nation.

After I had the honour of visiting three of these communities, I kept in daily touch via social media. Lindsay, Howard, Darryl, Pam and Konery have all taught me something about myself, and the world we live in. Their strength and commitment to youth engagement inspires me every day.

In the upcoming months, the Youth Engagement Working Group, in partnership with Small Change Fund, will begin a yearlong initiative focused on youth leadership and grant-writing skills.

Youth and young adults in our far north have amazing ideas for projects they would like to implement to support their communities; this initiative will hopefully assist them in achieving their goals.



As well, we would like to thank Sandy Lake’s youth council for creating a video message for young people in the south; they walked us around their community and shared what its like to live there. These are just a couple of the things that the Youth Engagement Working Group has been working on this year.

I personally want to thank everyone who has been involved in making this year a success, especially Pam, Howard, Konery, Darryl, Lindsay and Pytor. You guys are the backbone of everything we do and it’s been a privilege to work

with you.

To the staff: Patricia, Julia, Betty-Lou, Judy and Anna, thank-you for all the support you have given me throughout this last year.

Landon and Chief Donny, thank-you for making it possible for me to be a part of this family. Even though I will no longer be the Youth Engagement Coordinator, I still look forward to continuing the relationships I have made throughout this last year :)”

Last but not least, we’ve got new digs!

In the fall, the staff bade farewell to our generous friends at the Ontario Association for Children’s Aid Societies, and moved into a pair of offices at the Centre for Social Innovation on Spadina Avenue. This building enables small NGOs to meet and mingle, sharing knowledge and cups of tea in the common areas. We have already benefited from this space by meeting and learning from NGOs working on water policy, fundraising strategy and uses of social media. Come visit us!

Thanks to our major funders:

