

Cooperative of Indigenous Studies, Students & Alumni - (McMaster University)

Authors: E. Victoria Bomberry
Jill Rogers

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION CALLS TO ACTION RESPONSE: A Summary Report to the Coordinating Circle, Urban Indigenous Strategy (City of Hamilton – November 24, 2017)

OVERVIEW

This summary report highlights the actions and programming of the Indigenous agencies within the City of Hamilton that respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. The Hamilton Legal Clinic was included in this report as the Ye:tene program is unique in its leadership by the Indigenous Justice Coordinator and close collaboration with Indigenous agencies. **The two key opportunities evidenced in our research are for (1) Enhanced collaboration between Indigenous agencies as well as with mainstream agencies, and (2) Cultural training and education of non-Indigenous agency staff and Boards.**

This report will be updated as other agencies share their Calls to Action programming.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. **INDIGENOUS AGENCIES:** The Calls to Action are seen as essential to directing future growth of the Indigenous agencies of Hamilton. The Calls to Action provide a framework for supporting capacity-building within the Indigenous community as well as guiding the development of strategic partnerships and collaborative programming with Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies including the City of Hamilton.
2. **NON-INDIGENOUS AGENCIES:** Further action is needed by Hamilton's non-Indigenous agencies to address discrimination and racism faced by Indigenous peoples by engaging their agency and staff in cultural awareness and safety training. Cultural training and education are seen as key to developing changes at the service level as well as within the agency structure to better recruit, serve and support Indigenous employees and clients. *"Non-Indigenous organizations must practice reconciliation by correcting systemic issues."* - Yen:tene (Hamilton Community Legal Clinic)

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

Several agencies coordinated community consultations to inform their implementation of the Calls to Action and enhancement of their programming. The **Hamilton Regional Indian Centre** and **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic** held multiple in-person gatherings separated by target groups (Service Providers, Community members and families and Youth). The Bundled Arrows Initiative, in collaboration with **Niwasa – Kendaaswin Teg**, held in-person consultations (providing topic questions prior) and allowed input via e-mail to accommodate those unable to attend gatherings in person.

CALLS TO ACTION THEMES:

1. Child Welfare

The Indigenous agencies of Hamilton have many pre-existing and new community supports to address Calls to Action in Child Welfare. **Niwasa – Kendaaswin Teg** is redeveloping culturally appropriate early childhood education programming for Indigenous children and families of Hamilton with support from the **Ministry of Education** and the **City of Hamilton**.

Key work in this area has included key partnerships with mainstream agencies such as **Hamilton Police Services**, **Hamilton-Wentworth Public** and **Catholic School Boards** and the **Children's Aid Society (CAS)**. For example, the **Hamilton Regional Indian Centre** has support and education programming for families involved with **CAS**. In support of Jordan's Principle, **De dwa dehs nyes** has coordinated priority healthcare policies for children involved with **CAS**.

De dwa dehs nyes has also enacted mandatory cultural awareness training for clinicians as well as developed service provider education events including tours of the "Mushhole" Woodland Cultural Centre for clinicians and students to enhance understanding of Indigenous peoples.

2. Education

The Calls to Action for education in Truth & Reconciliation is the most pronounced theme recognized by Indigenous agencies in Hamilton. A vital need is for the implementation of Indigenous content in K-12 curriculum identified by the Bundled Arrows Initiative with **Niwasa – Kendaaswin Teg**

Additional education-based initiatives included and called for:

- Education of newcomers, immigrants and refugees on Indigenous histories and current issues including treaties and their responsibilities as New Canadians
- Further public education and engagement, such as the I AM AFFECTED campaign by the **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic**
- **Niwasa – Kendaaswin Teg** developed a cultural safety toolkit and provides cultural awareness training
- Training for agency Board of Directors on the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action, such as **De dwa dehs nyes** Board which has a standing business item for discussing the Calls to Action and how programming is existing or needed
- Need for enhanced cultural supports for Indigenous learners in public schools

3. Language & Culture

Indigenous organizations in Hamilton have a robust history of providing culturally supportive community programming that answer Calls to Action for culture and language revitalization. For example, **De dwa dehs nyes** and the **Hamilton Regional Indian Centre** provide language programming in Mohawk, Cayuga and Anishinaabemowin as well as traditional teachings workshops. **Niwasa – Kendaaswin Teg** also provides Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabemowin language teachings for young children through their Headstart program.

4. Health

Calls to Action responses under this theme were largely addressed in existing programming provided by the **De dwa dehs snyes Aboriginal Health Centre**. **De dwa dehs nyes** provides numerous Traditional healing-based programming including:

- Grief Recovery
- Ceremonies - Smudging, Sweatlodge, Full Moon
- Aboriginal Patient Navigation (within mainstream agencies)
- Homeward Bound - housing Indigenous residents who are chronically homeless
- Health Promotion
 - Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder programming
 - Nutrition education

5. Justice

Agency responses to the Calls to Action for Justice have included:

- Increased accessibility to legal support, such as mobile legal support hosted at **De dwa dehs nyes** by the **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic**
- Increased education for mainstream groups (i.e. the hosting of an education event to Crown Law Summer School, McMaster University participants - **De dwa dehs nyes** and **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic**)
- New community partnerships, such as **De dwa dehs nyes** and Six Nations Aboriginal Justice Program to improve Six Nations members access to legal services

6. Reconciliation

The primary recurring call is for cultural awareness and safety training for non-Indigenous agency staff to address racism and discrimination.

- Call for enhanced communication with the City of Hamilton (Mayor, Councilors & staff) identified by community consultations held by **Hamilton Regional Indian Centre**
- **Hamilton Community Legal Clinic** organizational shift by re-developing policies, procedures and practices to be in line with Calls to Action and traditional Indigenous principles to justice. Including training for staff & board and implementing hiring principles that encourage and support Indigenous applicants
- **De dwa dehs nyes** current development of Residential Indian School Survivors Support Group, a partnership with multiple community partners
- A need to increase Indigenous staff of the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and the Hamilton Catholic School Board identified by the Bundled Arrows Initiative with **Niwasa – Kendaaswin Teg**