

## One Suicide can Affect the Whole Community

Hello, my name is Emily McKinnon and I'm in the grade 12 Native Studies course. I'm here to talk about suicide increases in Aboriginal communities because many individuals are not aware of the problem. Whether it be actually committing suicide, or attempting suicide or even having suicidal thoughts, it is an issue (Merriam-Webster). I choose to do this topic because I know LCVI has been impacted from suicide, and we need to come together as a community and nation and raise awareness of suicide and depression. We need to support everyone, including Aboriginals. Did you know that 4% females and 2% of male Canadians suffer from depression, while for Aboriginals the rate is 19% for female and 13% for males (Khan)? But this statistic does not include those who are suffering and have not told anyone. This is what we need to overcome. Depression is common and it is not an illness.

In the past, Aboriginals have been treated very poorly and still today are suffering from the consequences of Canada's actions. In the mid 1800's, Residential Schools were created in order to assimilate Aboriginal children into the English way of living. The children in Residential Schools were in most cases forced to change their names, language, culture, hobbies, and traditions. They were stripped of their identity. The Aboriginal communities were not the same after the children left Residential Schools which closed in the late 1900's. Many were depressed from mental, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as substance abuse, low self-esteem, hopelessness, homelessness, and parental loss because they were outcasts when they finally could arrive home in their teens years (Suicide). Those children could not get good jobs when older because of the impacts which led many into poverty. When trying to find jobs in the city, Aboriginals face racism and were outcasts at home because of their English culture. Not to mention the multiple times that Canada offered good farm land and money to Aboriginals through Treaties, only to end up not following through. Aboriginals were tricked onto reserves and screwed over, if I'm allowed to say that on a school website. But they were and most people don't know that. It is part of our history and we cannot change history, but we can change what happens in the future.

While First Nations have always had a rich culture, traditions, and community, suicide rates among Inuit are shockingly high at 6-11 times the Canadian average (Davidson)? In most cases suicide is a result from depression, which is feelings of low spirits and sadness (Merriam-Webster). A 1997 survey found that 16% of First Nation adults living on reserve experienced major depression, compared to 8% of the general Canadian population (Khan). Adults do suffer from depression, but it is more prominent in youths. Another statistic is that suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading causes of death for First Nations youth and adults up to 44 years of age (Khan). These rates are higher than non-Aboriginals because of their history of oppression. As well, Aboriginal children are forced into adoption and foster care when their families are unable to support, then due to high number of children. Also as stated before, some Aboriginals suffer from substance abuse. Aboriginal men are more likely to be admitted into a hospital for overdose or alcohol poisoning than non-Aboriginal men. By

offering clinics and support, we can help fight depression and substance abuse, which then can prevent suicide.

A community called Wikwemikong (wik-wemikong), which is on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, is an example of one step further into preventing Aboriginal suicide. In the mid 1970's there were 7 suicides in one year; this shocked the community. So they decided to build two centres. One being the Ngwaagan Gamig Recovery Centre which is a substance prevention centre and the second is the Nadmadwin Mental Health Clinic which is a mental health support centre. These centres have increased awareness and helped many individuals overcome depression. As well as allowing individuals the opportunity to find their culture and start living a healthier life. Another example is Big Cove located in Nova Scotia, which in 1992 had 7 suicides and 75 suicide attempts. From this, the community requested to have drugs and alcohol restricted, more job opportunities created, mental health services, and promotion of culture and traditions. Today they have weeklong community gatherings which combine Micmac, Christianity, and psychotherapy, to support individuals who are suffering from depression, substance abuse, etc. They also have sharing circles which deals with anything from racism to personal responsibilities. These two communities have been through so much but they were able to overcome it (Chenier).

Awareness and support have been increasing in communities across Canada. Some help offered is supporting an individual's mental and physical well-being which means being in a state of personal balance of the family, community, environment, and health. Being in a state of balance is taught from the First Nations Medicine Wheel teachings, which provides insight to living a happy life. As well, Aboriginal communities are supporting the idea of reconnecting individuals with their culture and spirituality, if wanted because it provides a sense of identity and pride. But most importantly is having friends and family support. Family is a huge part of everyone's lives and they are there for support and guidance (Common Menu Bar Links).

Due to Canada's past, the Canadian government is trying to reconcile with Aboriginals because that is the least they can do. They have put them through so much that I cannot even imagine being in their shoes. It will also allow Aboriginals to become self-sufficient and not depend on the government as much. A way the government is helping, is with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which aims at sharing the stories of Residential School survivors and then trying to compensate for the outcome.

I must state that I am no expert. I researched most of this information and the rest I learned in class. Keep in mind that there are Aboriginal reserves which are doing fine and are living happily. But it is our job to spread awareness and support those individuals suffering from depression, whether it be on reserves, in communities or in our school. I am here, writing this blog in order to spread awareness. I know this is a small step into helping Aboriginals but anything counts.

## **Works Cited**

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