

# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS YOUTH ACTION PLAN



**FINAL DRAFT**

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*Young people are a major force in the contemporary world. They are at the forefront of global, social, economic and political developments. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, young women and men have a unique perspective. How our societies progress is determined, among other things, on how much we involve youth in building and designing the future.*

*United Nations Youth Agenda*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) first National Youth Conference entitled *Inclusion, Empowerment and Healing*. The conference gathered participants to discuss and identify gaps in services for First Nations youth. Two years later in 1999, a second National Youth Conference was held, and youth recommended actions to address those gaps. It was at this second summit that the AFN *National Youth Council* was established.

The vision that the AFN National Youth Council has set for First Nations future generations is as follows:

*Our people will live as healthy, self-determining First Nations in which they value and respect their individual lives, families, communities and nations. Our future generations will be raised only on truth and they will live and love their traditional roles, family history, and understand how history relates to who they are. Our people will trust – trust within themselves, within the family, trust within the community and with other nations, lands and resources.*

In developing this vision, the AFN National Youth Council aspires to motivate First Nations Youth to take charge and secure a better standard of life.

This Action Plan is a document that is targeted at First Nations youth, First Nations leadership and government. The goal is to create a significant commitment on the part of all stakeholders, especially community level leadership, to work together to improve outcomes for First Nations youth.

The genesis of this document lays in the deliberations that resulted from the third National First Nations Youth Summit *Rebuilding Our Nations – National Unity, Voices from the Community*. This Summit was held between October 30 and November 1, 2007 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The purpose of the Summit was to provide the opportunity for participants to network, discuss and recommend positive action to address issues of major concern to First Nations youth. The Summit was also designed to produce clear directives to be incorporated into a *Five Year Action Plan* for First Nations Youth. First Nations communities and regions were also engaged in the Summit. The outcomes of the Summit included a *National Summit Report* and this *Five Year Action Plan*. The goal of this plan is to direct advocacy and action oriented recommendations targeted at specific policy areas.

This plan sets out several actions that are required to improve outcomes for First Nations youth. The plan builds on social, cultural, political and economic areas of action that aim at better supporting First Nations Youth success. These actions are aimed at improving the socio-economic success of First Nations youth as individuals, within their communities and nationally. Interventions aimed at high risk behavior and to support reconnection and healing in a First Nations context is envisioned herein. Supporting healthy First Nation youth, their families and their communities is the goal of this *Five Year Plan*.

A national *First Nations Youth Policy* is required as a means of addressing First Nations youth related concerns. This must be done as a means of addressing the review and assessment of the situation of First Nation Youth over time.

Formulation of a cross-sectoral *National Plan of Action/Work Plan* in terms of specific time bound objectives and systematic evaluation of progress achieved, and obstacles encountered, is required to ensure that what is contained herein is implemented in a meaningful way.

A framework for integrated youth related policies and appropriate division of responsibilities among governmental and non-governmental institutions for First Nation youth related issues is also required.

Special efforts must be directed towards strengthening national capacities for data collection and dissemination of information related to First Nations youth issues, especially with regard to research and policy studies, planning, implementation and coordination, training and advisory services.

Regional government and non-governmental cooperation is essential to national and global action within existing mandates to ensure the incorporation of First Nation youth related goals in current plans and to undertake comprehensive reviews of the progress achieved, obstacles encountered and to identify options to further regional level action as required.

To encourage widespread awareness and support of this *Action Plan* it is critical that both printed and audiovisual materials related to the areas of concern in this plan are prepared and thoroughly disseminated through national mainstream and First Nation media information channels.

In addition, First Nation youth and youth organizations are urged to identify and plan information activities that focus on priority issues, which they may undertake within the context of this *Action Plan*.

In order to implement this *Action Plan* there are several key undertakings that must occur. They include, *but are not limited to*:

- Establishing short, medium and long term goals for action in the form of a long term work plan.
- Development of realistic working models to sustain and implement this *Action Plan* over the next five years.
- Development of a *Terms of Reference* for the purposes of implementing this *Action Plan* that includes stakeholders at the national, regional and local level.
- Maintain the *First Nations Youth Council* as a mechanism to oversee the implementation of this *Action Plan*.
- Engage expertise to facilitate change and influence social policy, as well as, to identify barriers to change.
- Change current policies *if they are not working* and *maintain those that are*.
- Identify and canvass resources for the implementation of this *Action Plan*. These include human, financial, political, economic and socio-cultural resources that are necessary to ensure implementation is efficient and effective.
- Development of an evaluation tool to establish outcome measures for yearly progression with a work plan that addresses multiple elements of the implementation strategy for this *Action Plan*.
- Maintenance of a communication strategy to continue to engage stakeholders and First Nation youth to maintain the momentum for change within the context of this *Action Plan*.

This *Action Plan* sets out the actions we see as essential to the improvement of outcomes for First Nation youth and their families. The actions contained herein are aimed at improving the socio-economic success of First Nations youth as individuals, within their communities and nationally.

## PREFACE

The resiliency and leadership of First Nations youth is vital to the cultural continuity and self-determination of First Nations peoples and a better Canada. Research shows that when First Nations youth have a standard of living equal to that enjoyed by most Canadian youth they are more likely to become better educated. When this happens, youth are less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors.

At the core of creating opportunities for First Nations is the need for a holistic, sustainable and long term strategy to address their resiliency that also complements First Nations self-government and community development.

This Action Plan is a document that is targeted at First Nations youth, First Nations leadership and government. The goal is to create a significant commitment on the part of all stakeholders, especially community level leadership, to work together to improve outcomes for First Nations youth.

The genesis of this document lays in the deliberations that resulted from the third National First Nations Youth Summit *Rebuilding Our Nations – National Unity, Voices from the Community*. This Summit was held between October 30 and November 1, 2007 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The purpose of the Summit was to provide the opportunity for participants to network, discuss and recommend positive action to address issues of major concern to First Nations youth. The Summit was also designed to produce clear directives to be incorporated into a *Five Year Action Plan* for First Nations Youth. First Nations communities and regions were also engaged in the Summit. The outcomes of the Summit included a *National Summit Report* and this *Five Year Action Plan*. The goal of this plan is to direct advocacy and action oriented recommendations targeted at specific policy areas.

This plan sets out several actions that are required to improve outcomes for First Nations youth. The plan builds on social, cultural, political and economic areas of action that aim at better supporting First Nations Youth success. These actions are aimed at improving the socio-economic success of First Nations youth as individuals, within their communities and nationally. Interventions aimed at high risk behavior and to support reconnection and healing in a First Nations context is envisioned herein. Supporting healthy First Nation youth, their families and their communities is the goal of this *Five Year Plan*.

## BACKGROUND

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) first National Youth Conference entitled *Inclusion, Empowerment and Healing*. The conference gathered participants to discuss and identify gaps in services for First Nations youth. Two years later in 1999, a second National Youth Conference was held, and youth recommended actions to address those gaps. It was at this second summit that the *AFN National Youth Council* was established.

The AFN National Youth Council operates as a 20 member council representing First Nations youth from each of the ten First Nations regions (each region has 1 male and 1 female representative).



The establishment of the AFN National Youth Council has been instrumental in ensuring that First Nations Youth perspectives are represented at the national level.



Many successful projects have take place over the past eight years. These include:

- The development of a First Nations Youth Leadership Development Training entitled CEPS (Cultural-Economic-Political-Social).
- An Action Plan for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD).
- Support of the Young Eagles HIV Awareness and Prevention Youth Peer-to-Peer Training Program.
- Hosting of the first National First Nations Youth Suicide Prevention Forum.
- The First Nations Youth Elections Strategy Forum.

The vision that the AFN National Youth Council has set for First Nations future generations is as follows:

*Our people will live as healthy, self-determining First Nations in which they value and respect their individual lives, families, communities and nations. Our future generations will be raised only on truth and they will live and love their traditional roles, family history, and understand how history relates to who they are. Our people will trust – trust within themselves, within the family, trust within the community and with other nations, lands and resources.*

In developing this vision, the AFN National Youth Council aspires to motivate First Nations Youth to take charge and secure a better standard of life.

***Believe in yourself, our ways and the Creator: things will change, things will happen, you just have to believe in our ways.***

*Omegomow Statement October 2007*

## THE GOAL

The rapid increase of the First Nations population of Canada means that thousands of First Nations youth will be entering the labor force in the next two decades. The young First Nations population is a unique resource that could significantly contribute to Canada's future prosperity and global competitiveness. Investing in First Nations youth will mean a brighter future for Canada. Accomplishing this requires an investment in First Nations governments and communities. A long term vision is required to achieve this goal. That goal is articulated as follows:

### THE LONG TERM GOAL:

*Our people will live as healthy, self-determining First Nations in which they value and respect their individual lives, families, communities and nations. Our future generations will honor and live our sacred teachings which are love, humility, honour, truth, honesty, wisdom and respect.*



**TO ACHIEVE THIS OVERARCHING GOAL:**

- *Our vision as First Nation youth is to be self-sufficient individuals, communities and nations. All individuals will have access to empowerment, education and support and will have a high quality of living.*
- *Our vision as First Nation youth is to be self-determining, self-governing nations, exercising our inherent rights. All our Nations will be unified and respect one another.*
- *Our vision as First Nation youth is to have communities that are healthy where youth are empowered, involved, respected in their communities and are free to dream.<sup>1</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> The Assembly of First Nations CEPS: An Overview

## **PRINCIPLES**

Building on the vision, the principles that provide a foundation for government and leadership to respond to the key issues affecting First Nation youth are:

### **EMPOWERMENT**

First Nation youth require the information and support to make informed choices and to build on their skills and have social and political conditions that will facilitate their meaningful involvement.

### **EQUITABLE ACCESS**

First Nation youth must have the opportunity to participate in their communities with equity and access to ensure social inclusion.

### **SELF-DETERMINATION**

First Nation youth will have increased opportunities through holistic programming to build and develop their lives and experiences.

### **DIVERSE REALITIES**

First Nation youth must be respected and celebrated for their rich diversity within our traditional lands which includes urban, rural, remoteness, age, gender, life experience, language, culture, traditions, sexuality, health, income and disability.

### **PARTNERSHIP AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

First Nation youth must be supported within their families and communities through partnerships between community agencies, business, local leadership, government and other key stakeholders with responsibilities for youth related issues.

### **HOLISTIC/INTERCONNECTEDNESS**

Support for the life span in planning and models of thinking that value First Nation culture, life ways, environment, culture and multiple generations from a mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual perspective.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Development of evaluation tools that engage stakeholders to commit them to measures of outcomes over time through multiple spheres of public policy: educational, social, economic, political and health.

## COMMUNICATION

Engagement focuses on communications and strategic approaches that influence movement for change based on short, medium and long term planning.



*We want to recognize all of you. So that you know how proud we are of you and you have our support.*

*Omegomow Statement October 2007*

## OUTCOMES

Recognizing the challenges that many First Nations experience socially, politically and economically it is clear that many First Nations children will experience the disadvantages of poverty at some point in their early years. According to the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) in 2002-2003 one in four First Nations children lived in poverty. This compares to one in six Canadian children. There is a direct correlation between lower family income, overcrowding, poor nutrition, lower levels of physical activity and educational achievements among First Nations children, and similarly, among First Nations youth.

Over half (57.4%) of First Nations youth live in households with six or more people. Those experiencing crowded conditions are more likely to report poorer educational achievement and poor overall health. Many are not likely to attend school, experience learning problems or do *not like* school. The factors underlying reduced school performance among First Nations youth are also found to be related to increased alcohol consumption, smoking and sexual activity.

Despite these grim statistics, some youth are resilient and successful. The goal of this *Action Plan* is to assist First Nations and Canadian governments in finding and implementing solutions that are targeted on building youths' innate resiliency. Implementation of this *Action Plan* could conceivably help this generation of First Nations youth realize their potential and be Canada's greatest success story.<sup>2</sup>

**First Nation youth seek to achieve *better outcomes* though this Action Plan via:**

- **Improved health, social, economic, educational and political conditions in First Nation communities.**
- **More comprehensive, coordinated and responsive planning and approaches to issues affecting youth, their families and communities.**
- **Increased capacity of key stakeholders to respond to identified goals.**

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<sup>2</sup> National First Nations Youth Summit *Rebuilding Our Nations National Unity, Voices from the Community* Proposal Submission for Funding AFN 2007.

## PROFILE OF FIRST NATION YOUTH

Despite the rich potential offered by First Nations youth, there are many challenges to overcome. More than half of the First Nations population living in their communities is under 25 years of age. Some of the most serious issues facing First Nations youth today are depression, suicide, family violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and chemical dependency. Empowering youth by involving them in the design and implementation of programs is a way to *improving resiliency*. Some of the issues facing First Nations youth today are:

- 40% of First Nation youth smoke cigarettes.<sup>3</sup> Between the ages of 12 and 14 the smoking rate almost triples.
- 65% of First Nation youth report consuming more than five drinks at once, at least once per month.
- Poorer school performance among First Nation youth is found to be related to increased alcohol consumption, smoking and sexual activity. Overcrowding is also a factor.
- While 82% of First Nations youth consider it important to speak a First Nations language, only about one third actually are able to do it.<sup>4</sup>
- Over half of (57.4%) of First Nations youth live in households with six or more people and they are more likely to report having repeated a grade.<sup>5</sup>
- 42% of First Nations youth are either overweight or obese and only 45% are considered to be sufficiently active.
- Aboriginal youth tend to be infected with HIV at a younger rate than Canadian youth.

An additional factor affecting First Nation youth is the fact that the federal government invests about \$15,000 into programs and services for every Canadian, *except First Nations*. Only half this amount, about \$7,000 is invested into programs and services for a First Nations person. In addition, investments in First Nations health and education are capped at significantly lower levels than the current national inflation and population growth rates.

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<sup>3</sup> First Nations Information Governance Committee AFN First Nations Centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization, RHS 2002-03 Youth Survey Highlights November 2005 pg. 203-205

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

## KEY GOALS

Recognizing that First Nation youth require a strong connection to their culture and traditions as part of their health and healing, the key goals of this *Action Plan* are to improve resiliency by ensuring that there are conditions that allow for:

1. ***SAFE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND COMMUNITIES*** – families, schools, communities, leadership, service agencies and government have key roles to play in improving the health of First Nation youth.
2. ***MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENT IN HEALTH AS A PRIORITY*** (mental, physical, spiritual and emotional) – high rates of drug and alcohol use, depression and suicide rates indicate mental and emotional health in particular must be a priority.
3. ***MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENT IN THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF FIRST NATION YOUTH IN THE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM*** so that programs and services work better as a result of their participation in design and delivery.
4. ***INCREASED ACCESS TO, AND COMMUNICATION OF, AVAILABILITY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES*** that are high quality and youth friendly.
5. ***SELF-DETERMINATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF FIRST NATION YOUTH*** through holistic programming and supporting youth to build on their skills through social and political conditions that facilitate their meaningful involvement.
6. ***EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ENSURE SOCIAL INCLUSION*** and to respect and celebrate the rich diversity within our traditional lands among First Nation youth that includes age, gender, life experience, language, culture, traditions, sexuality, health, income and disability.
7. ***IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOOLS THAT COMMIT STAKEHOLDERS*** to measures of outcomes through multiple spheres of public policy: educational, social, economic, political and health.

***We must work together as a family rather than many individual nations and people to build a better future.***

*Omegomow Statement October 2007*



## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS BY THEME

The following action steps are a summary of required action steps that were pulled from the *First Nation Youth Summit* summaries and *Summit Final Report*.

	<b>ACTION STEPS</b>
<b>INDIVIDUAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth programs targeting healthy lifestyles, diabetes prevention, AIDS/HIV awareness and prevention, obesity, health, fitness, exercise, sports and mental wellness.</li> <li>• Alcohol and drug awareness and prevention.</li> <li>• Self-concept, self-awareness and empowerment.</li> <li>• Language and cultural teaching. Music, art and dance.</li> </ul>
<b>FAMILY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting skills development and training.</li> <li>• Traditional family values, self-esteem, recreation and cultural supports.</li> <li>• Safe home environments based on love, respect, nurturing, resilient and respectful family members who value and support youth.</li> <li>• Equity in relationships, role of women and men respected and honored.</li> <li>• Elders have key roles in the family and community.</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong language, culture and traditional activities and supports.</li> <li>• Workshops, information sessions, healthy lifestyles and strong leadership.</li> <li>• Housing and infrastructure supports that include food, clothing, water and safe environments.</li> <li>• Policing, education, social and health programs and economic development.</li> <li>• Injury prevention and awareness.</li> </ul>
<b>NATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self government and strong political structures based on traditional themes and values.</li> <li>• Treaty implementation and long term nationhood development.</li> <li>• Understanding and encouraging diversity. No more racism.</li> <li>• Healing and rebuilding at the community and nation level. Decolonization.</li> </ul>

## RISKS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Risk factors in First Nation communities include poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment, lack of social and coping skills, family violence, substance abuse, etc. Research indicates that the more risk factors and the greater their severity, the more likely youth will become influenced in a negative way.

Protective factors consist of internal and external strengths that help youth and families resist risky and antisocial behaviors or consequences. They promote self-esteem, achievement, healthy relationships and positive opportunities for empowerment and self-growth.

## RESILIENCY AND FIRST NATION YOUTH

All First Nation Youth have some experiences in their lives that minimize their options for healthy, social, emotional and physical outcomes. This plan acknowledges these risk factors.

	<b>RISK FACTORS</b>
<b>YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES</b>	ISOLATION, LOW SELF ESTEEM , DISCRIMINATION, DEPENDENCY, COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES, ADDICTIONS, POVERTY.
<b>YOUTH ON RESERVE</b>	EFFECTS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, POVERTY, LACK OF EDUCATION, CROWDED HOUSING, POOR HEALTH, LOW SELF ESTEEM, DISCRIMINATION, LOSS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, ADDICTIONS, DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE, LACK OF LIFE SKILLS, LACK OF ACCESS TO SPORTS AND RECREATION, SMOKING AND DRINKING, GANGS AND BULLYING, CORRUPTION AND NEPOTISM.
<b>YOUTH OFF RESERVE</b>	POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT, LACK OF SKILLS, ADDICTIONS, RACISM, LOSS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, LACK OF LIFE SKILLS, POOR NUTRITION, SMOKING AND DRINKING, PARENTS ATTENDED RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, CROWDED HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, HIV/ AIDS, GANGS AND BULLYING, ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS.
<b>TWO SPIRITED YOUTH</b>	PREJUDICE, LACK OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT, ISOLATION, HIV-AIDS, UNSAFE SEX PRACTICES, POVERTY, LOSS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE.
<b>YOUTH IN INSTITUTIONS</b>	LIMITED PROTECTION SYSTEMS, LACK OF FAMILY SUPPORTS, DEPENDENCY, DISCRIMINATION, ADDICTIONS, LACK OF LIFE SKILLS, POVERTY, LOSS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE, CORRUPTION, EXPLOITATION.

## RESILIENCY

Resiliency is a combination of individual, relationship, community and cultural factors that help First Nation youth to feel protected.<sup>6</sup> Resiliency is important at the individual, family, community and nation level. Everyone is a stakeholder.

### RESILIENCY FACTORS

<p><b>Individual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EDUCATION &amp; TRAINING</li> <li>• LANGUAGE AND CULTURE</li> <li>• LIFE SKILLS</li> <li>• EMPLOYMENT</li> <li>• SELF-ESTEEM</li> <li>• NUTRITION</li> <li>• INJURY PREVENTION AND AWARENESS</li> <li>• ADDICTIONS COUNSELING</li> <li>• SPORTS AND RECREATION</li> <li>• HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND FAMILY PLANNING</li> <li>• SUICIDE PREVENTION</li> </ul>	<p><b>Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PARENT TRAINING</li> <li>• FAMILY PLANNING</li> <li>• LANGUAGE AND CULTURE</li> <li>• ELDER PROGRAMS</li> <li>• BEING CULTURALLY GROUNDED</li> <li>• POSITIVE MENTORING AND ROLE MODELING</li> <li>• SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS</li> <li>• HEALTHY BEHAVIORS</li> <li>• PEER SUPPORT NETWORKS</li> <li>• HOUSING, HEALTH AND NUTRITION</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HOUSING &amp; EMPLOYMENT</li> <li>• SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION</li> <li>• INFORMATION AND LEARNING RESOURCES</li> <li>• SECURITY AND SAFETY</li> <li>• LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAMS</li> <li>• SPORTS AND RECREATION</li> <li>• YOUTH BUSINESS OPPORTUNITES</li> <li>• NUTRITIOUS FOOD</li> <li>• LAND USE ACTIVITIES, FORESTRY, AGRICULTURE, FISHING</li> <li>• HEALTHY LIFESTYLE OPTIONS</li> <li>• CHILDCARE PROGRAMS</li> <li>• HOSPITALS AND CLINICS</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TREATY IMPLEMENTATION</li> <li>• LAND CLAIMS RESOLUTION</li> <li>• POLICY RENEWAL</li> <li>• CAPACITY BUILDING TO SUPPORT NATION BUILDING</li> <li>• FISCAL RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY</li> <li>• ASSERTION OF RIGHTS AND JURISDICTION</li> <li>• LAW MAKING</li> <li>• CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL GROUNDING</li> <li>• NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS UNITY</li> <li>• PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION</li> <li>• COORDINATED ADVOCACY</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from the Canadian Red Cross, RespectED: Ten Steps to Creating Safe Environments for Children and Youth 2007

By reducing risk factors, and building protective factors, this action plan emphasizes a strengths-based approach to change. Many of the actions and interventions are family focused (after school activities, community projects, volunteering, etc.), empowering (youth led programs), educational interventions (homework clubs) and problem solving (workshops, cultural and self esteem programs).



## INTERVENTIONS

Interventions are required to address the risk and protective factors and ensure resiliency among First Nation youth. They include:

<p><b>Individual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN CULTURAL EVENTS – E.G. POW WOW’S, CAMPS, ART, MUSIC, DANCE</li> <li>• RECOGNITION OF FIRST NATION LANGUAGES, CULTURE AND HISTORY</li> <li>• HEALING AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS</li> <li>• YOUTH SPECIFIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS</li> <li>• NUTRITION AND RECREATION PROGRAMS</li> <li>• PROGRAMS TO INCREASE SELF ESTEEM</li> <li>• INTERCOMMUNITY EXCHANGES</li> </ul>	<p><b>Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BASED FAMILY ACTIVITIES</li> <li>• HEALTHY LIFESTYLE WORKSHOPS, FAMILY CIRCLES</li> <li>• STRENGTHENED CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS</li> <li>• ADDRESS CONDITIONS OF POVERTY AND NEGLECT</li> <li>• EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES</li> <li>• RECREATION AND SPORTS</li> <li>• BETTER HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE</li> <li>• SAFE AND LOVING HOME ENVIRONMENTS</li> <li>• FOOD, CLOTHING, SECURITY</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YOUTH INVOLVEMENT LOCALLY AND PROVINCIALLY</li> <li>• COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING</li> <li>• YOUTH PROGRAMS</li> <li>• MORE ACCOUNTABILITY</li> <li>• GENDER ROLE REBALANCING</li> <li>• REGULAR YOUTH GATHERINGS</li> <li>• MORE CONSENSUS BASED GOVERNANCE</li> <li>• PROACTIVE LEADERSHIP</li> <li>• REVIVE TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS</li> <li>• COMPETENCY TRAINING FOR LEADERSHIP</li> <li>• ACCESS TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES</li> <li>• LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAMMING</li> <li>• HOUSING, SAFE WATER AND SECURITY</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO RAISE AWARENESS</li> <li>• A NATIONAL ABORIGINAL YOUTH POLICY</li> <li>• A BLUE PRINT FOR MARKET BASED HOUSING</li> <li>• A MENTAL WELLNESS STRATEGY TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL</li> <li>• ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS</li> <li>• TREATY IMPLEMENTATION</li> <li>• ADAPT TRADITIONS TO TODAY’S SOCIETY</li> <li>• RECOGNITION OF FIRST NATION LANGUAGES AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGES</li> <li>• ADDRESS RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION</li> <li>• SELF-GOVERNMENT</li> </ul>

The following diagram illustrates the primary components of a First Nation Youth Action Plan Strategy



## A FIVE YEAR ACTION PLAN

The United Nations *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond* states that *young people in all countries are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation.*<sup>7</sup>

The *United Nation World Programme of Action* states that *the ways in which the challenges and potentials of young people are addressed by policy will influence current social and economic conditions and the well-being and livelihood of future generations.* This is our opportunity, therefore, to empower First Nation Youth within the context of this international goal.

Approximately 54% of all reserve residents were under the age of 25. For those living off reserves, 49% were under 15 and half of non-reserve Aboriginal youth were living in urban CMA's.<sup>8</sup>

Of the languages spoken 80% of Aboriginal youths stated that English was their mother tongue and only 4% stated French. 15% stated that an Aboriginal language was their mother tongue with the most common being Algonquin (11%), Inuktitut (3%) and Athapaskan (1%).<sup>9</sup>

First Nation youth have much lower levels of educational attainment than overall youth. First Nation youth, with the exception of university graduates, experience much less favourable labour market outcomes than other youth with the same levels of educational attainment. Over one-half of non-reserve Aboriginal and *North American Indian* youth aged 20-24 indicated that they had *incomplete secondary school* as their highest level of education (52%).<sup>10</sup>

It is critical, therefore, that this *Action Plan* address the factors that prevent First Nation youth from reaping the same outcomes as other youth in Canada.

The *World Programme of Action for Youth* provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youth. In particular the *Programme of Action* focuses on measures *to strengthen national capacities in the field of youth and to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society.*

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations General Assembly Fiftieth session Resolution 50/81 World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, March 1996

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

The *United Nations Programme of Action* is drawn from several international instruments generally,<sup>11</sup> and specifically, related to youth policies and programmes. The *Programme of Action* is significant because it provides a cross-sectoral standard relating to both policy-making and programme design and delivery. It serves as a model for integrated actions, at all levels, to address problems more effectively in various conditions and to enhance the participation of youth in society.<sup>12</sup>

There are ten priority areas identified by the international community in terms of principle issues, specific objectives and action proposed to be taken by various stakeholders to achieve those objectives. The ten fields of action identified by the international community are:

- EDUCATION,
- EMPLOYMENT,
- HUNGER AND POVERTY,
- LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES,
- HEALTH,
- ENVIRONMENT,
- DRUG ABUSE,
- JUVENILE DELINQUENCY,
- LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES,
- GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN, and
- FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN THE LIFE OF SOCIETY AND IN DECISION-MAKING.

This Action Plan *is designed around an adaptation of these themes* bearing in mind that variations of these themes were raised in significant ways at the *First Nation Youth Summit* in October 2007.

Implementation of this plan requires that government and First Nation leadership take action as stakeholders to ensure that the key elements are strategically addressed. Integral to the success of the implementation of this plan will be the significant participation of First Nation youth at all levels.

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<sup>11</sup>such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development adopted by the UN conference on Environment and Development, The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development and the platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations General Assembly Fiftieth session Resolution 50/81 World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, March 1996 p. 8



## EDUCATION

Education is required for us to revitalize and reconnect to our cultures, traditions and languages. Teaching the history of First Nations people is especially important to facilitate youth empowerment and ownership within the context of nation building. Enhancing skills and knowledge in the areas of culture, social, political and economics is essential to the future of our nations and to establishing united approaches to self-determination.

In order to empower and implement change in our communities and to address the social conditions affecting our First Nations citizenship, education is required. We must break the barriers before us by working towards the goal of improving the prosperity of our nations.

Educational and training systems are required that are in line with the current and future needs of our communities. Basic literacy, job skills training and lifelong education must be the key component of action in this regard.

### WHAT IS REQUIRED

Priority must be given to achieving the goal of ensuring basic education for all, beginning with literacy. Reform is required for education content and curricula in order to celebrate the richness of our traditions, languages and cultures and to facilitate the realization of our goal for self-determination.

Recognition of the *Treaty Right to Education* and adequate resourcing for education programs is required. Safe educational environments are required that promote First Nation language, culture and history.

Mentorship with Elders to increase knowledge of heritage, culture and territory, along with community level supports, are essential to education program success.

Greater opportunities are required for postsecondary education and vocational and professional training that is relevant to current and prospective employment conditions. First Nation youth must be given access to vocational and professional training that will empower them to acquire entry level jobs with growth opportunities, along with the ability to adjust to changes in labour demand.

Training programs for First Nation youth in individual and cooperative enterprises is also required in order for youth to plan and test their enterprise venture concepts.

Training for First Nation youth as leaders, including curricula and staff resources, must be formulated to encourage leadership development through internships, volunteer programs and apprenticeships.

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Anticipated Outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate on-reserve education that meets postsecondary prerequisites.</li> <li>• Promotion of First Nation language, culture and history.</li> <li>• Programs that increase self-esteem and confidence through education, life skills and leadership training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of First Nations languages, culture, traditions and values as an integral element of improving education, and health among First Nation Youth.</li> <li>• Decolonization through education, awareness and empowerment.</li> </ul>

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/EMPLOYMENT**

First Nation children and youth live in unacceptable conditions of poverty which has manifestations in ill health, lack of access to education or basic services, homelessness, unsafe environments, social discrimination and exclusion.

Unemployment and underemployment among First Nation youth is a significant problem. The problem is worse in First Nation communities where there are limited economic and employment opportunities.

It is difficult for First Nation youth to find employment due to illiteracy and lack of life skills and training. Chronic unemployment deprives First Nation youth from the opportunity to secure safe and independent housing, or the accommodations necessary to establish families and participate in society equally.

Advances and technology and communication are challenges for First Nation youth. Unemployment creates a range of social ills and First Nation youth are highly vulnerable to its damaging effects. This is potentially a waste of an enormous and amazing human resource.

### **WHAT IS REQUIRED**

Access is required for employment and business opportunities that are targeted specifically to First Nation youth. Partnerships with the private sector and

individual community membership is key to supporting First Nation business development. Increased funding for youth specific economic programs that support self-esteem and opportunities to learn experientially must be a priority.

Grants to provide seed money that encourage and support enterprise and employment programs for First Nation youth are required. Business and enterprises must be encouraged to provide financial and technical support in the production and marketing of goods and services, especially those that promote traditional based activities.

Treaty implementation is required and environmentally friendly enterprises that are aligned with First Nations values are essential to the success and social responsibility required to empower our nations in the context of self determination and decolonization.

Action Steps	Anticipated Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treaty implementation.</li> <li>• Independent funding for First Nations with the goal of economic and community development.</li> <li>• Communications to promote opportunities and networking among First Nation youth to nurture and enhance employment and economic development undertakings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerational awareness beginning at early childhood through the lifecycle that enhances the mindset of goal setting, leadership, empowerment and economic success.</li> <li>• Recognition of environmental protection as integral to economic self-determination.</li> </ul>

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Poor health is a result of societal conditions. It is often caused by an unhealthy environment, by missing support systems for everyday life, by lack of information and by inadequate or inappropriate health services. Problems include lack of safe and sanitary living conditions, risk of infectious, parasitic and water borne diseases. The consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, unwarranted risk taking and destructive activities often results in unintentional injuries.

Basic health services are required for First Nation youth. They are essential as poor health is caused by lack of information and lack of health services. Critical issues such as obesity among youth, HIV/AIDS, cancer, addictions, FASD,

depression, suicide and teen pregnancy are just a few of the health afflictions that are rampant in First Nation communities.

**WHAT IS REQUIRED**

Preventive education and treatment is required. Access to health care professionals, medications and medical transportation is essential to address the need for quality services. Mental health crisis lines are required and information on healthy behaviors and relationships needs to be developed that promotes culture, language and traditions within the context of health and healing.

Family violence, child welfare, parenting skills, child care, disability supports, racism, housing, healthy diet, recreation and models for healthy families are needed.

Priorities include breaking the silence about abuse, violence and suicide. Peer support networks are required along with cultural and traditional approaches to healing. There needs to be a focus on the spiritual elements of a wholistic balance to health.

Stronger educational curriculums are required to promote healthy behaviors that include Elders and integrate strong connections with community leaders and front-line workers.

Better community infrastructure is required to address the need for food, security, housing, employment, education and recreation. Sports and recreation are essential to the psychological, cognitive and physical development of First Nation youth. These activities include games, sports, cultural events, entertainment and community services.

<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Anticipated Outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health careers promotion to build community capacity in health.</li> <li>• Increase First Nation self government in health by establishing First Nation operated hospitals, clinics and other health related facilities.</li> <li>• Promote healthy lifestyle, healthy families and address the intergenerational impacts of the Residential School era.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models of healthy families.</li> <li>• Better connections with leadership, community members and health care providers.</li> <li>• Increased resources for health service delivery.</li> <li>• Better community infrastructure in terms of food, housing, security, employment, education and recreation.</li> <li>• Healthier communities.</li> </ul>

## CULTURE

First Nation history includes the roots of our family history, traditional roles of family, community history, history of First Nations people and the traditions, livelihood, leadership and organization practices of our nations.

Our history is a rich multi-faceted, complex mix of social, cultural, economic and psychological relations and beliefs. The root causes of the high rates of suicide and self-injury among First Nation people are a result of the dislocations that flow from the past into the present. These dislocations lie in the history of colonial relations between First Nations and the authorities and settlers who went on to establish “Canada.”<sup>13</sup> The distortion we are living with today is the result of the history of colonization.

As the youth of today and leaders of tomorrow it is our duty and our job to learn the history of our people. If we are aware of the history of our people we will grow up with the values and belief that we have an important role in the self-determination and protection of our culture.

## WHAT IS REQUIRED.

Elders are the *Keepers of Knowledge*. They share their wisdom in a number of ways to ensure the history and teachings are passed down, such as storytelling, oral history, protocol, traditional codes of ethics and the role of Elders, men and women.

The Medicine Wheel represents the spiritual wealth of our traditions, beliefs, values and strength. These are an integral part of our restoration, identity, pride and dignity as First Nation people.

The Medicine Wheel is used to teach us to live in balance with the land and environment. It also teaches us to live in balance with spirituality – the Creator. The Medicine Wheel teaches us to live in balance with others – to foster respect, love, humility, values, sharing, kindness and honesty. We must live in balance with self and have courage, wisdom, intellectual, spiritual and emotional and physical balance.

We require healing programs to address the intergenerational impacts of residential schools. We need to reconnect with our Elders and to ensure that First Nation children who are in the child welfare system have exposure to their culture and traditions.

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<sup>13</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

We need to recognize and celebrate the diversity of cultures and communities among our nations.

We must have our First Nation languages recognized as the official languages of Canada. We must use traditional values as a decision making basis for our future generations.

Action Steps	Anticipated Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More services and resources for cultural programming, healing and language instruction.</li> <li>• Address discrimination and create cultural awareness through mandatory First Nation history classes in mainstream high schools and postsecondary institutions.</li> <li>• Re-evaluate how Treaties can enhance our cultural revival and revitalization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoring pride in who we are as a people.</li> <li>• Greater use of our traditional lands for transmission of knowledge, learning and culture.</li> <li>• Comprehensive healing through recognition of our cultures, languages and traditions.</li> <li>• Protection of Indigenous intellectual knowledge.</li> </ul>

## POLITICAL

Self-government in a First Nations context has existed long before the arrival of Europeans in North America. First Nations government structures and various tribes exercised their occupation of the land, and sovereignty over their own people long before the advent of colonization. In this sense, Aboriginal self-government is very much rooted in the heritage and culture of First Nations peoples.

Native self-government is recognized in the Canadian Constitution as a basic, fundamental right. It is our vision as First Nation Youth to be self-determining, self-governing nations, exercising our inherent rights.

All our Nations will be unified and respect one another. Our Nations will be lead by healthy leaders and all youth will have knowledge and understanding of political structures and First Nation issues.

Our political structures will be representative of all First Nations populations (women, men, youth, Elders) and be based on traditional governing values.

## WHAT IS REQUIRED

First Nation youth must be full participants in life and society and in the decision making processes that impact them. The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on our capacity and designing of the future. In addition the intellectual contribution of First Nation youth and the ability to mobilize supports, as well as, the unique perspectives we hold must be taken into account.

Access to information is required in order to enable First Nation youth to make better use of opportunities to participate in decision-making.

The development and strengthening of opportunities is required in order for First Nation youth to learn their rights, responsibilities and promote their social, political, developmental and environmental participation in society.

Encouraging and promoting First Nation youth associations through financial, educational and evaluation of national policies and plans is required.

First Nations leadership must rely more on a consensus based governance system and address treaty implementation. There also must be more First Nation input into Canadian policies and a stronger exercise of First Nations jurisdiction on all levels of governance.

Action Steps	Anticipated Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of youth governance systems and the reinstatement of traditional political and justice structures.</li> <li>• More accountability and better communications between youth and First Nations leadership.</li> <li>• More information, training and volunteering opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stronger focus on political restorative justice and ethics.</li> <li>• Measurable improvements in the active involvement of First Nation youth in decisions that affect them.</li> <li>• National First Nation unity.</li> <li>• Raised public awareness and education regarding conditions tied to denial of rights and recognition.</li> </ul>

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Effective implementation of this *Action Plan* will require significant expression of commitment by organizations, institutions, government and leadership, as well as, *all First Nation youth* to see our vision of healthy, self-determining First Nations realized.

Without such commitment especially by government, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities at the national, regional and local level this *Action Plan* will remain little more than framework for what we see as a required strategy to address the critical issues facing our communities today.

Translation of this *Action Plan* into specific plans, targets, policy and law is required so as to inform national priorities, resources and transform our historical experience into one that celebrates health and success.

Enabling mechanisms are required in order for this *Action Plan* to be implemented. Such mechanisms include meaningful engagement with key stakeholders and partners, on a continuing basis, along with the human, political, economic, financial and socio-cultural resources that are necessary to ensure that this plan is implemented in an efficient and effective manner.

A national *First Nations Youth Policy* is required as a means of addressing First Nations youth related concerns. This must be done as a means of addressing the review and assessment of the situation of First Nation Youth over time. Formulation of a cross-sectoral *National Plan of Action/Work Plan* in terms of specific time bound objectives and systematic evaluation of progress achieved, and obstacles encountered, is required to ensure that what is contained herein is implemented in a meaningful way.

A framework for integrated youth related policies and appropriate division of responsibilities among governmental and non-governmental institutions for First Nation youth related issues is required.

Special efforts must also be directed towards strengthening national capacities for data collection and dissemination of information related to First Nations youth issues, especially with regard to research and policy studies, planning, implementation and coordination, training and advisory services.

Regional government and non-governmental cooperation is essential to national and global action within existing mandates to ensure the incorporation of First Nation youth related goals in current plans and to undertake comprehensive



reviews of the progress achieved, obstacles encountered and to identify options to further regional level action as required.

Regional partners, organizations and First Nation youth organizations are invited to consider biennial meetings to review and discuss issues and trends to identify proposals for regional and sub-regional collaborations.

Finally, it is essential to promote conditions conducive to the implementation of this *Action Plan* at all levels. This means debates at the policy level and decisions at the intergovernmental level, national monitoring of issues and trends, data collection and dissemination of information, research, planning, coordination, outreach and partnership among government, non-government and private sector stakeholders.

To encourage widespread awareness and support of this *Action Plan* it is critical that both printed and audiovisual materials related to the areas of concern in this plan are prepared and thoroughly disseminated through national mainstream and First Nation media information channels.

In addition, First Nation youth and youth organizations are urged to identify and plan information activities that focus on priority issues, which they may undertake within the context of this *Action Plan*.

Relevant voluntary organizations, particularly those concerned with education, employment, youth development, health, poverty, environment and addictions can further the implementation of this plan through involvement in the execution and implementation of this *Action Plan*.

First Nations leadership, Elders and community level programs play a significant role as well in supporting the actions described herein. We expect meaningful support and engagement, particularly from our leadership, so that we may jointly plan innovative approaches to the critical issues described herein.

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

In order to implement this *Action Plan* there are several key undertakings that must occur. They include, *but are not limited to*:

- Establishing short, medium and long term goals for action in the form of a long term work plan.
- Development of realistic working models to sustain and implement this *Action Plan* over the next five years.
- Development of a *Terms of Reference* for the purposes of implementing this *Action Plan* that includes stakeholders at the national, regional and local level.
- Maintain the *First Nations Youth Council* as a mechanism to oversee the implementation of this *Action Plan*.
- Engage expertise to facilitate change and influence social policy, as well as, to identify barriers to change.
- Change current policies *if they are not working* and *maintain those that are*.
- Identify and canvass resources for the implementation of this *Action Plan*. These include human, financial, political, economic and socio-cultural resources that are necessary to ensure implementation is efficient and effective.
- Development of an evaluation tool to establish outcome measures for yearly progression with a work plan that addresses multiple elements of the implementation strategy for this *Action Plan*.
- Maintenance of a communication strategy to continue to engage stakeholders and First Nation youth to maintain the momentum for change within the context of this *Action Plan*.

*Spirituality is a foundation for nation building. A spiritual foundation must accompany the building of our nation, it is a foundation built on spiritual principles. The trust, the honesty and sharing will guide and support us. You must continue to pass this message after we are gone.*

*Omegomow Statement October 2007*

## NEXT STEPS



The heart and soul of First Nations is us, *First Nations youth*. We are the driving force of the future generations to come. The quality of life experienced by us now, and our future generations, depends on decisions that are made everyday in our communities, households and in the halls of government.

We must act wisely with the interests of our future generations kept in the forefront of our minds. If we fail in our undertakings we fail to reach the larger goal of health, resiliency and self-determination within the context of nation building.

This *Action Plan* sets out the actions we see as essential to the improvement of outcomes for First Nation youth and their families. The actions contained herein are aimed at improving the socio-economic success of First Nations youth as individuals, within their communities and nationally.

A cultural revival is required so that we may reconnect with our past and forge the path to our future. It is our responsibility to lead the path on behalf of those with us and those that have gone before us.

We do so with open hearts and open minds and with the expectation that you will be there standing beside us. Together we *can* change the future. It is our responsibility and our duty. This *Action Plan* is the road map to our future. We must now go on to the business of implementing it.

*"No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline."*

*UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in his address to the World conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This *Five Year Action Plan* represents the collective input and wisdom of more than 400 First Nation Youth participants who attended the Third National First Nations Youth Summit: *Rebuilding Our Nations – National Unity, Voices From the Community* in Winnipeg, Manitoba October 30 – November 1, 2007, along with the many partners, friends and stakeholders who contributed to the success of the Summit as concerned individuals with the interest of our First Nation Youth at heart.

Many thanks to the National Chief, Phil Fontaine, the Regional Chiefs and Executive of the Assembly of First Nations, the AFN Elders Council, the AFN Woman’s Council, the AFN First Nations Youth Council, the AFN Staff, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) and Staff, the Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) and Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) along with everyone who contributed to making the Summit a huge success.