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Tikinagan

Child & Family Services

PO Box 627
Sioux Lookout
ON P8T 1B1

P 807-737-3466
TF 1-800-465-3624
www.tikinagan.org

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Meet the four youth who want to empower, advocate for First Nation Youth in Care

Thunder Bay, Ontario – September 21, 2023: Alongside her team members, Reina Foster, a long-time dedicated Indigenous child welfare advocate and former child in care, announced the official launch of Youth Know, Tikinagan Child and Family Services' Youth Team, to 30 First Nation Chiefs at the agency's 2023 Annual Chiefs Assembly today.

Foster, 24, has spent years advocating for better support and opportunities for children and youth with Tikinagan. Having served on the Tikinagan Board as the Youth Rep since 2017, she knew having youth involved needed to be more than just attending meetings.

"As a former child in care, I wanted to make things better for children and youth in our communities," said Foster, a band member of Lac Seul First Nation. "For years, I asked the leadership at Tikinagan, 'Can I do more? What about our youth?' Today, I am excited to stand here and announce the launch of our Tikinagan Youth Team."

This dynamic, youth-led initiative is aimed at empowering Indigenous youth in care and creating positive change within Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities by providing opportunities for children and youth currently and formerly in care from Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities including: opportunities to speak up and share concerns, ideas, and vision for themselves; opportunities to engage with other youth; and to help guide Tikinagan's mandate.

The newly formed Tikinagan Youth Team, known temporarily as "Youth Know," will serve as a voice for children and youth in Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities. Comprising four dedicated members, each bringing unique perspectives and experiences to the table, the team worked collaboratively to outline a shared vision, values, and goals over the last several months.

Tyleen Strang, an 18-year-old from Poplar Hill First Nation living in Balmertown, ON, shared her personal journey through the child welfare system and her determination to give back.

"I joined the youth team to give back and to help support children who were like me going through a difficult today."

Strang stressed the importance of creating avenues for children and youth to seek help, and reminding them that they're not alone.

“I never thought I’d make it to this age, but I made it and I am really proud of myself,” said Strang. “I was five when I first went into care and I absolutely hated being in care for a long time.

“Now that I’m older and know a lot more, I realized that Tikinagan had helped me a lot and made me into a person that I thought I’d never see. That’s why I joined the youth team – to give back and to help support children who were like me going through a difficult today.”

The team has identified eight core values to guide their work: Leadership, Inspiration, Mobilization, Opportunities & Experiences, Being Heard, Advocating, Safe Spaces, and Skill Development. Their values reflect their commitment to creating a supportive environment for all youth, all aimed at empowering and supporting Indigenous youth in and out of care.

Foster said the team is inviting other Indigenous youth, aged 16 to 26, from Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities to join the Youth Team.

"We need the young leaders to join us to make a difference. All that is required is a willingness to commit, a good attitude, and a passion to improve the outcome for our youth."

The launch of the Tikinagan Youth Team marks a significant step towards empowering Indigenous youth in care and creating a brighter future for Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities. The team's dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment to positive change are sure to bring about meaningful impact and opportunities for the youth they represent.

To learn more about the youth team, visit tikinagan.org/projects/youth-know-team.

For more information, contact the Communications Team by email at Communications@tikinagan.org

For over 35 years, Tikinagan Child and Family Services has been serving our 30 First Nations in Northwestern Ontario. The Creator entrusted First Nations with the sacred responsibility of protecting our children and developing strong families and healthy communities.