



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2022

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Acknowledges the Closure of Agassiz Youth Centre

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba - The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) acknowledges the Provincial announcement regarding the closure of the Agassiz Youth Centre (AYC) but states that more is needed to prevent youth from entering the justice system.

The AMC Acting Grand Chief Eric Redhead stated, “First Nations youth represent youth custody statistics at disproportionately higher rates than their non-First Nations counterparts. Due to the number of structural barriers our young people face, it is critical that we respond quickly and efficiently to ensure prevention and crisis supports are available to them as they might navigate potential hardships. With Manitoba beginning to open after COVID-19, these changes will test how effectively the Province responds to youth incarceration as we witnessed youth being held at the remand centre during the height of COVID-19”

In 2020, the AMC First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO) partnered with the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy to publish *The Overlap Between the Child Welfare and Youth Criminal Justice Systems: Documenting “Cross-Over Kids” in Manitoba* which indicated that involvement with the provincial Child and Family Services (CFS) remains a considerable risk factor that leads to justice involvement. They further identified that youth in care “had the strongest association with being charged with a crime” and that overrepresentation in the CFS and youth justice system were due to many factors all related to structural violence “that operates to deny basic human rights to specific populations from obtaining the resources necessary to achieve their full potential” and this is an area that still requires critical attention.

Cora Morgan from FNFAO stated, “Through our office, we witness the correlation between the child welfare system and the justice system. We also witness children leaving the CFS system to become homeless, living in poverty, missing or becoming murdered. The justice system is only one factor to the overall challenges that First Nation children and youth encounter. At the FNFAO, we have our Rites of Passage Scaabes who work directly with First Nations youth to empower, to guide, and to support them in their journey by bringing out their natural gifts and talents.”

“We must acknowledge that the colonial system does not work for First Nations and the closing of one youth centre is not a long-term solution. The AMC is in a process of developing our own Justice and Law Centre that would be grounded in our understanding of traditional laws that promote diversion and restorative justice as a response to conflict.” concluded Acting Grand Chief Redhead.

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About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Inineu (Cree), Anishinew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.