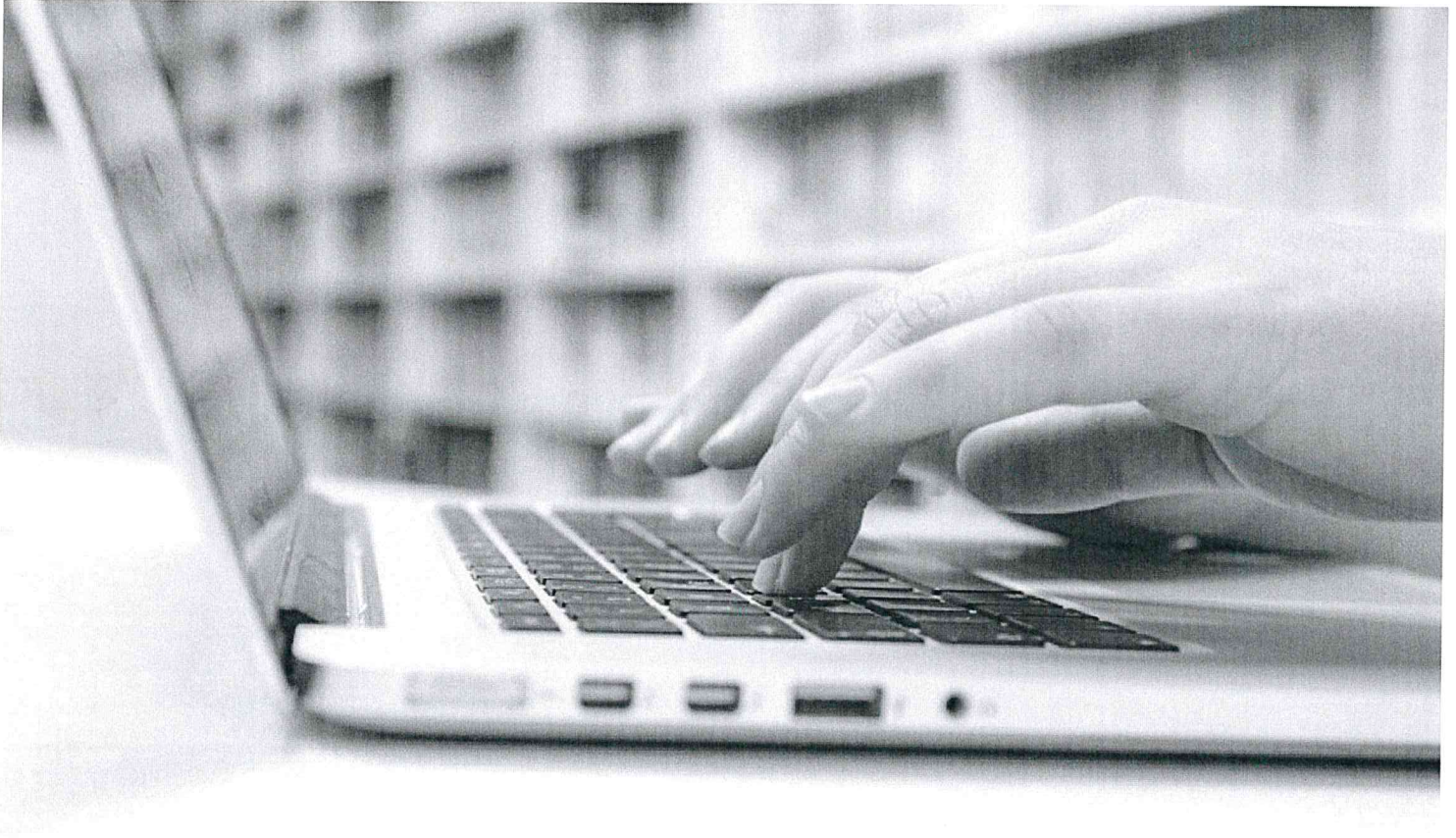


LETTER: Why I'll be celebrating National Indigenous People's Day

Letter to the Editor
2 days ago



| Donatello Trisolino via Pexels

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PelhamToday received the following letter to the editor regarding Indigenous issues in Niagara and beyond:

Why should we be celebrating National Indigenous People's Day?

I don't know why that is even a question people are asking me, but here are the links to just one of the answers why:

If the federal government was so committed to Reconciliation to Indigenous people, then why have only 13/94 of the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission been fulfilled since 2015? The federal government should take no pride in this, it's insulting really.

And why in a developed and prosperous country such as Canada do Indigenous people continue to live in extreme poverty similar to the extreme poverty we see in developing nations? And why are Indigenous peoples subject to a piece of legislation called the "Indian Act" which is one of the most racist and paternalistic pieces of legislation in the world that allows the state to control an Indigenous person's life from birth to death, and there are people who actually think Indigenous people get "to many special privileges." Please explain to me how this is privilege?

If Niagara Region's politicians are truly committed to Indigenous Reconciliation, then prove it and support my call for an Indigenous mobile mental health crisis unit pilot project for Niagara Region which is under a mental health emergency, then I will know they are truly serious about Reconciliation.

In addition to the Indigenous Crisis unit needed to address the mental health catastrophe, Indigenous people are facing with roughly a three-times higher suicide rate.

Here are my additional calls for Reconciliation to all Niagara's local politicians:

1-Request local winery partners (with the assistance of the Niagara Grape Growers of Ontario) and the Ontario Minister of Finance, responsible for LCBO to add mandatory warning labels on alcohol products sold in the Province similar to legal weed and tobacco- alcohol rates for Indigenous peoples is about double than non-Indigenous peoples.

2-That Niagara Region Council request all Niagara-area municipalities to commit to highlight and showcasing more Indigenous wellness literature in their local public libraries and that all Niagara's Cities/Town's implement this recommendation in their public libraries. That the Cities/Town's Public Library Boards commit to consulting Niagara's Indigenous Community on what type of Indigenous wellness literature they would like to see featured.

3- That all Niagara-area municipalities endorse and commit to Pelham Mayor Marvin Junkin's initiative for Towns/Cities to feature Indigenous languages in the names of future street signs. This initiative is also supported by Councillor Wayne Olson, (Pelham, Ward 1).

4-With about 22% of Niagara's homeless being Indigenous-That Niagara Regional Chair Jim Bradley and Niagara Regional Council through the Niagara Region Attainable Housing Office build a

Niagara-Indigenous Housing and Homelessness Plan.

5-To address the racist and paternalistic Indian Act- That all Niagara-area municipalities request the Canadian government to scrap the "Indian Act," transfer the important Indigenous-treaties enshrined in the "Indian Act" into new legislation, and re-name this new legislation- "The National Indigenous People's Act."

6-With Indigenous overdose rates representing 10% of the total opioid overdoses despite Indigenous peoples only representing 2.6% of the total population- I call on Niagara-area municipalities (under Niagara's state of emergency for addiction- which can be found in Sec 4 of the provincial Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act request that the Lieutenant Governor in Council by emergency order Immediately establish new rehab facilities, beds, staff across Niagara Region.

-Niagara Regional Chair Jim Bradley, (with the support of his Niagara Regional Council and Niagara Regional Attainable Housing Office) make contact with the Ontario Minister responsible for Housing, Steve Clark to determine what Niagara Region's allocation of funding will be for Indigenous-housing from the 10 million dollars announced province-wide from the Ontario's 2023 budget.

-The appointment of a new Indigenous-School Board Trustee seat at both NCDSB and DSBN. It would be similar to student trustees who are selected as Trustees by their fellow-peers.

-As one strategy to addressing inter-generational trauma and as a true apology for the disgusting legacy of the Residential schools - That Niagara Regional Council request the federal government to establish national Indigenous child-welfare legislation.

In closing, I will certainly be celebrating National Indigenous People's day...year after year I thank my friends Mayor Marvin Junkin and Councillor Wayne Olson, and Niagara MPP, Sam Oosterhoff for their dedication and fierce commitment toward Indigenous Reconciliation in the Town of Pelham and their unapologetic support for Niagara's mental health, homeless and addiction emergency which many Indigenous leaders like Wendy Sturgeon of the Niagara Native Chapter of Women or myself view as a collateral benefit in Reconciliation. I take the rose presented to me by Wendy Sturgeon, and I pass it on to my friends Mayor Marvin Junkin and Wayne Olson and Sam Oosterhoff, whom I thank whole-heartedly for motion 55 which calls on expanding spiritual and culturally relevant supports to Indigenous-peoples being (disproportionately might I add) held in an Ontario-correction facility.

Steven Soos

Metis-person