

Tansi ekwa? Niya Pamiwasin, Starblanket niya ochi. Hello how are you? I am Collin Starblanket; I am from the Starblanket First Nation. I am here to talk about three key topics affecting First Nations' youth: child welfare, education, and health. As well as how it affects the daily lives of many First Nations youth. After reading the articles provided, I realized how all governments can be unfair to our youth. I felt discriminated against, not only by a different race, but by our own people. We retained Treaty Rights with the understanding that the spirit and intent of those Treaties, where your forefathers, promised us an equal education, a continuance of our practices, customs, and culture, but also, an equality to live just like everyone else.

However, in child welfare, we should not be fighting through a provincial court case regarding our children; the fight should be through our Treaties. Our leaders should be making cultural jurisdictions through the Treaties, not through a provincial or an entitlement piece of land that we were settled on. Our First Nation's bands should be helping all band members whether they reside in the district of the band or in the region. The entitlement should be for whoever, wherever! First Nations children must have an equal opportunity to be raised with their family, in their community, and in their culture. No First Nation child should have to forego such an opportunity because of poverty or an inability to access basic services. First Nations leaders should step up and make a difference for all generations, and redress the breach of rights for children of generations past. Each family should be provided an opportunity to raise their children in a clean, sober, traditional home, and to live their life in which ever beliefs they follow, but most importantly, by their First Nations beliefs. In my perspective, Canada is not doing its best to provide an equal opportunity for First Nations leaders to guide families to maintain a respectful space, or keep them protected through the Treaties. To an extent, they are protected through the Treaties; however, they are not guaranteed the right of their own jurisdiction to help these families out of poverty and neglect. With all the funding provided for Child Welfare, families are not being motivated to enrol their children in many programs to keep them away from violence or drugs and alcohol. I believe if we keep with the positive instead of the negative, the positive will have a better chance to grow. So why show them neglectful and harmful ways? They should be shown how to live their life to the best of their ability by providing access to community support, by encouraging them to become role models themselves for many generations to come. You may ask, 'how is this achieved', through a proper education.

Education, every First Nations child should have an equal learning opportunity to achieve an education, on and off reserve. Each child should be given that same opportunity to be funded an education of their choice. Motivation should be provided by older/elder people. They should be shown that in todays' modern

world, we should be given equal opportunities to show case our intellect just like every other person who wants to achieve another goal in life. First Nations; communities should be encouraged and provided the funding needed to help with building schools, helping children in their stories, just like in *Shannon's Dream*. It makes me emotional to see how passionate she was about her community, her fellow youth, and how she wanted the best for everyone. This is the same reason why I am here. I want to help and to show our people that we can make a difference if we all stand strong together; we all make commitments we can adhere to, and through it all, we can achieve more than we dreamed by providing an equal education through our schools. Furthermore, funding for a post-secondary education should guarantee every equal opportunity necessary to be a contributing member of society. Canada's government should review how poorly on and off reserve students suffer because they have no motivation, no passion to learn, or a voice to help lead them to success. In my eyes, that all can happen, if we get the right funding for a better education for the students who cannot afford various programs, like space for sociable bonding—the comfort ability, a positive space to work, a place where they will not be distracted so they can maintain that needed focus. Proper funding provides them an efficient way to learn so they can feel good about life, and they can live life to the best of their ability. Our ability to show many generations to come that we all can go to school for—as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the river flows—because in life we never stop learning. “Life will take you a long way, if you make a choice that everyone will benefit from, so everyone can live life to their full expectations,” a quote by me that always sticks in my head to keep learning, open the door for others to succeed where they will be happy! So I ask, why can't we be the same student like every other race in our class? All I ask is for First Nations youth to have a better opportunity than our grandparents, our parents, our aunts, our cousins, or our siblings. How can we have a better opportunity besides an education—through our healthcare?

There are many resources we need to live, for example, transportation, homes, and various items we need in our daily lives, but all the extracting of resources causes pollution and contamination in our water, soil, and air. Many people are sick and will continue to be sick with the young ones the most vulnerable to the infected areas of the land that is unhealthy and toxic to our bodies. Every day, children are more exposed to sickness, diagnosed with many diseases, living in unsafe homes or areas, and have no access or a limited access to a hospital or medical clinic. Our First Nation leaders are consistently always fighting for the rights to have the best possible healthcare, or even to have access to these places that many reserves do not have access to. They should be fighting for a local doctor, making sure that we have the medicines for the people and

creating our own jurisdiction through our Treaty areas. Our great, great grandfathers signed for us to have these rights so we can have access to the proper healthcare, at-home care, and for care while travelling. Our leaders need to make that jurisdiction so we will not have babies and children dying because the provincial and federal governments keep debating on who should have to pay for the healthcare. That's where our rights would kick in, and we would have instant care with the funding to look after our sick ones when they need it! These governments should not have to dispute on who pays for a status Indians' healthcare on or off reserve. If there was a settlement long ago, we would have more healthy children and people living longer which would create a better community that could live each day with no responsibilities on taking care of someone sick. Instead, we watch them suffer because the government's battle on who pays for one single Indian to have the proper healthcare. Since 2000, the birth rate was 20.4 births per 1000 population. There should be funding for these families to have safe homes for the children to grow up in. Average incomes per households with children were considered below the Canadian population so through the socio-economic status of a Status Indian would be low compared to a well-off family with higher education and successful jobs. There are many housing concerns that should be looked after by local contractors because First Nations' homes on reserves are said to be at times in need of repairs for major damages/repairs. In general, First Nation children experience poorer health than the Canadian population, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). Health issues include: less traditional foods due restrictions and limitations to gathering the traditional foods, reduced access to proper and safe food supplies, and lack of education concerning nutrition and healthy food choices because of Residential School experiences. First Nations' continue to face barriers such as poverty, low access to healthy foods and clean drinking water, lack of access to proper healthcare, also lack of social supports which reduce their chances to good health. All in all, we need our own jurisdiction to address all the inequalities of First Nation healthcare. What can we do to improve this? A survey for all First Nations communities addressing the needs to be improved so we can have access to better healthcare! However, a better healthcare must include the full circle of health—emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual which is all encompassing of a holistic lifestyle.

Languages and Culture, these aspects of life are of high importance for our way of life. They help in keeping our identity strong. The language helps identify ourselves in ceremonies, names, in everyday use just like English. God and the grandfathers (angels) could understand us as we could understand them—a higher level of understanding. Our children need to be shown that everything in life is animate, everything has a spirit. They need to be shown how much respect we

should have for each tool we utilize in our everyday lives. They need to be shown how we live and survive through the wonderful surroundings of nature that was given to us from god in order to see this isn't just a practice, it is our way of life! A life to keep our nations strong and proud, and with our language and culture, we can have a sense of identity and an understanding of who we are, as Nehiyiwak, as First Nations' people! Our leaders need to create a level of commitment to our young children to teach them the ways of our people. Our grandfathers and grandmothers need to instill the culture when they are young, while their minds are like sponges. The teachings would replace the negativity like drugs or alcohol, violence, gangs, all the matters that hurt our own people in today's modern world. Many young people suffer because they made a wrong choice in life. This where that level of understanding needs to be, the level of creativity and the enjoyment of our way of life needs to be. Then, they will realize that everything in life is given to us for a reason. That is our way of life! It is not hard to be practiced, but carries the same level of integrity as today's society! The laws of the governments insist that we should only do so many things for our people and follow their ways—their laws! However, we should be able to practice our ways at our own comfort level so the younger ones will encounter this and start to tag on through our ceremonies. We should be able to learn our language in school with fluent language teachers. This improvement has already started which is great because we can start to identify and understand the aspects of our ways. With the enrolment of each child, that will be one more person who could speak their language that truly allows them to understand their culture—a true First Nation! I know how it felt to not understand my language but then the hiring of a fluent-speaking teacher made my heart feel that someone did something right! Many people still need to see that culture and language are the two attributes we need to identify ourselves. Once, almost extinct, many people were lost because they did not know what their ways were or how to speak their language. Some of our grandfathers kept it, and today, it continues to grow! In a quote, I was told by my friend who I am proud to say is Grand Chief Shawn Atleo (A-in-chut), “what lies negative will always be there, but if we take the positive and focus on that, it will grow and continue to do so!” Each day I always think about that quote and it has taught me to always look at life and everything in it as a positive—a focus on the good that has been done. Remember, I am still young and learning the rights of our people, but I am speaking from my heart of what I see that our First Nations people need is the opportunity to live at an equality of life as in modern society. Nanaskomon, thank you all for we all deserve to live each day as someone who matters the same as everyone else!