

# “Don’t grow up with regrets,” Youth Forum speaker warns



DANIEL J. ROWE THE EASTERN DOOR

Alex McComber and Kenneth Deer talk to a group from the Kahnawake Youth Forum in the hopes of keeping the Idle No More movement going.

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THE EASTERN DOOR

The Kahnawake Youth Forum continued the Idle No More movement by holding a second teach-in at the Services Complex Monday night.

“For most people, the movement has died down or is in a lull,” said organizer Jessica Deer. “Maybe it’s not as new and exciting anymore with all the round dances and what not, but the issues are still very much there, so that’s why it’s important to continue the movement, using this time to focus on education.”

The night began with a discussion on the current state of the Idle No More movement from Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project consultant Alex McComber.

“In the minds of many of us it’s there and it’s not there,” said McComber. “There’s not an obvious hot potato sitting in front of everybody in that same way that got off the ground, and I think we’re learning that’s kind of how the world works. When there’s a big issue people come around and wake up to it.”

McComber’s presentation focused on personal reflections on the western world’s capitalist mindset.

“The world increasingly is being caught up in the game of making money and the corporations that are at the head of it,” said McComber.

McComber spoke of the “corporate mindset” that he said was focused on getting at resources. He used the DeBeers diamond mining company as an example, and their exploitation of resources such as the Victor mine located near Attawapiskat.

“This corporate mindset is about getting to the resources any which way and they use government mechanisms to do that,” he said. “It’s ever important for all of us as Indigenous people to start understanding this more and more.”

His work with diabetes prevention has put McComber in direct contact with communities in northern Ontario that have trouble accessing affordable healthy food.

McComber was also quick to encourage the seven youth present to let go of hate, and to focus on the future and what can be achieved.

“There’s more questions than answers,” he said of the state of Idle No More. “It’s a good thing to have questions, but we also need to start having the dialogue to find the answers to those questions within our own communities first.”

Kenneth Deer took the floor from McComber and, after a brief autobiography, began a PowerPoint presentation on the creation of the U.N.’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Deer spoke of changing the mindset at the U.N. in the 1990s by distinguishing be-

tween Indigenous people and minorities.

Both groups, Deer said, have the right to language, religion, school, culture and freedom from discrimination, but only Indigenous people have the right to self-determination, land, territory, natural resources and to exercise their rights collectively.

Deer then spoke of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the follow-up Working Group on a Draft Declaration, which ran from 1995 to 2006.

Deer’s lecture highlighted the struggles of the group at the UN after Conservative Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper entered the fray in 2006.

Deer said that after 2006 everything stopped, and it became more and more difficult to get Canada to support the movement.

The declaration was adopted on September 13, 2007. One hundred and forty four states voted for, 11 abstained and Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada voted against it.

Canada endorsed the declaration in November 2010.

The declaration is not a binding contract, and Deer compared the declaration to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in front of the small crowd. He showed how many of the points in the two documents are almost identical.

He finished by focusing on the importance of outcome documents from the various forums associated with the U.N.

“We can’t allow the outcome document to undermine our rights,” he said. “We have to do everything we can to fight for that.”

He encouraged those present to try to attend the Global Preparatory Indigenous Peoples’ Conference in Alta, Norway this June and the World Conference on Indigenous People to take place in September 2014.

Guest speaker Widia Lariviere was unable to make Monday’s event.

“I hope the fire is rekindled as it seems to have died out as people “moved on” so to speak,” said organizer Shotehra Rice. “It is simply not enough to post Facebook status updates, which seems to be the extent of most people’s participation. We – specifically Kahnawake youth – must move past this “passive participation and become a lot more active and involved; not only within the Idle No More movement, but in politics and activism in general.”

Kenneth Deer echoed Rice’s sentiment in his closing words.

“Don’t grow up with regrets,” he said.

The Kahnawake Youth Forum is in the process of planning two events in the upcoming months. Those wanting to be involved in the group can message Jessica Deer or Shotehra Rice on Facebook or join the youth forum group.

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