

Kahnawake Youth Forum grows up

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Only months ago, the Kahnawake Youth Forum was holding formal meetings under the purview of the Mohawk Council (MCK) to hear what the youth had to say.

Since the Youth Forum's break with Council last December, different forums have been created that are more dynamic and diverse, all under the leadership of five youth.

The Youth Forum presented their changes and upcoming action plan to the MCK on Tuesday.

"The MCK were very surprised with the progress," said Youth Forum president Shotehra Rice.

Since January, the Youth Forum has formed a new constitution, written by-laws, hosted events, and defined the role Council is going to play in the future.

They have also made connections with other organizations and individuals across Canada including the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, Akwesasne Youth Leadership, and Members of Parliament.

Rice says the Youth Forum is ahead of its plans, having gotten into the habit of organizing three months prior to an event or meeting. He said Council was surprised that the Youth Forum was "getting to that level and meeting these people."

Youth Forum secretary Megan Whyte was the one who proposed writing a constitution, which takes note of the terms of reference from the forum as organized under the Council before the split.

According to Rice, the most significant difference came when they "re-identified and clearly defined the MCK's

role" in the Youth Forum.

In article five of the Constitution of the Kahnawà:ke Community Youth Forum, it is written that the "role of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke is to promote the endeavors of the Kahnawà:ke youth and to generate individual, community, and nation support for youth."

Prior to the Youth Forum's split with the MCK, a chief who held the youth portfolio would run the council with younger representatives. Now, the forum is entirely youth-run.

The Youth Forum's constitution not only solidifies their organization as distinctive and separate from the MCK, but makes the group eligible for funding at all levels of the Canadian government.

They have just received \$500 from the Native Youth Sexual Health Network to start up the forum on their terms.

The forum's own terms include "creating safe places where youth can become engaged," said Whyte.

Having helped organize two Idle No More teach-ins and an Idle No More art exhibit that premiered yesterday and will run until July 25 at the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Centre, Whyte added that it was important to not have events that are "geared toward a certain type of youth."

The concept of safe space is being defined and redefined by the executive body of the Youth Forum as they move forward in their action plan.

"Maybe people who are talking in the forum now, maybe they will be the next council chief," said Whyte, adding, "today's youth are tomorrow's leaders."