

Call for a community strategy at Idle No More teach-in

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The Kahnawake Youth Forum (KYF) held its first independently organized event last Thursday, with a solid crowd in attendance.

KYF organizers staged their event, a teach-in on the Idle No More movement, in Kateri School's cafeteria.

"There's still people who don't know what Idle No More is about – or all the different aspects," said Jessica Deer, member of the KYF.

She spearheaded the efforts to organize the event by reaching out to the community and beyond in order to welcome speakers with varied experiences and expertise.

Scheduled speakers included Kahnawa'kehró:non Alex McComber of the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (KSDPP), Mohawk Council chief Lloyd Phillips, and *Eastern Door* founder Kenneth Deer (who never got a chance to speak after a fire alarm caused the teach-in to end early).

Visiting speakers were Karl Hele, professor and director of Concordia's First Peoples Studies program (yet to be approved officially by Quebec's ministry of education), and Widia Larivière, one of the core organizers in the Quebec branch of Idle No More and youth coordinator for the Quebec Native Women's Association.

Each speaker weighed in on what Idle No More meant to them, the history be-

hind the movement and next steps. Fittingly the professor (Hele) kicked off the teach-in with an overview of Canadian legislation concerning Native people.

McComber spoke to his work with the KSDPP and how illnesses, from diabetes to cancer, come from unhealthy living that has its roots in a long history of colonialism and oppression.

"We have to go back to who we are," he said. "We are more than we have been told we are; we have rights and we have responsibilities."

The teach-in was targeted at youth in particular. Kanentakienate Jacobs was one of the 20 people who attended.

"To be honest I haven't been part of anything that was part of Idle No More... so I decided to come in today just to learn something," he said.

"I was pretty impressed by Alex McComber's speech and Widia Larivière – she definitely opened up my eyes to it. I didn't know we were in France."

Displaying a headline from a major newspaper from France, Larivière explained how the coverage of Idle No More actions in Quebec initially came from international media before local media.

She is a key organizer in Idle No More actions that have occurred in Montreal – the largest one so far has drawn 1,500 people – but, before the movement began in December, she had no experience organizing actions.

"I'm just a regular person, a regular youth, but you don't need to be elected or experienced to realize the power you have in yourself," she said.

Larivière's participation in Idle No

More and attitude is an inspiring example for Deer. "It really shows the grassroots movement and how you can be an average Joe-type of person and start doing this."

Phillips also touched on the involvement of Kahnawa'kehró:non in Idle No More during his presentation.

"What do we want as a community? How do we fit into this big scheme of a national movement? I think these are key elements and that's a broad-based community discussion that has to take place at some point in time – sooner better than later," he said.

"We all know we're always 'this close' to a conflict with the outside... we're always trying to find that fine line between making our point, loud and clear, and not creating a riot, a war in our community," he said.

Phillips described the movement as being in a period of dormancy compared to the frequent actions nationally in December and January, but "if it ramps back up again I think it's going to a new level, and we have to be prepared for that."

"Are we prepared to move forward... and are we prepared for the potential consequences?"

Deer agreed that Idle No More seems to be in a lull. "That's why I thought a teach-in would be a really good idea – to help inspire youth and to really get the knowledge across."

As for how Kahnawa'kehró:non take part in Idle No More in the future, "if the community as a whole is going to do something, it's to be a group decision," said Deer – one to be made at a different event.



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Mohawk Council chief Lloyd Phillips discusses the future of the Idle No More movement last Thursday at Kateri School.