

Legislative Assembly of Ontario Pre-Budget Consultations 2020

Standing Committee on Economics & Finance – Valhalla Inn January 21st 945am

Boozhoo, Miinokiishabya – Hello & Good Morning. O Zwa Beenzie Ikwe, Cornwall, Ontario Nindoji. Na'me is my Dodem. The Spirit name I was given by a traditional medicine man is Yellow Thunderbird Woman. I'm from Cornwall, Ontario which is an hour South of Ottawa along the St. Lawrence River. My clan is Sturgeon. My colours are Yellow & White. My pronouns are She/Her. My given name is Tracey Allison MacKinnon.

I would first like to acknowledge that the City of Thunder Bay is built on the traditional territory of Fort William First Nations, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions made to our Community by the Metis peoples.

Who am I?

I am someone's Mother (I have 4 adult Son's). I am a Kokum (Grandmother) to one, Lincoln. I am someone's Sister, Aunt, Friend, Cousin & neighbour. I have been resident of Thunder Bay for almost 10 years. I am someone with Autism. I am someone with Mental Health & Health challenges. I am both a former resident & employee of our local Emergency Shelter. I am someone with "lived experience". I am someone with first hand knowledge of our social (In)Justice issues affecting our most vulnerable and at risk community members. I am one of them. I'm a DV/SA Survivor. I have gone from Victim to Survivor to Contributor. I am also a former recipient of the now cancelled Ontario Basic Income Pilot project. I am also one of the co-founders of a Program called "Women Walking with Women" Program. Which wasn't so much about actually "walking" rather "lifting each other up". Being a Mentor to others. Feeling apart of something. Feeling valued, validated & appreciated. All the while learning from one another.

I am a One Woman FEARLESS Overcoming Adversity Award Winner along with Beendigen's First Nations Women's Day Award Winner. A previous co-presenter at the Ontario Coalition of RAPE Crisis Center's Forum this time last year as part of a project entitled "Honouring Our Stories" & presenter at "Art of Resistance" Conference last year as well. I've been the lead hand drummer for numerous events throughout the City from PRIDE parades, to Take Back the Night Marches, to Memorial & Memory Walks, Rally's, MMIWG Events, Pow Wow, National Indigenous Days Events, Concerts. Even the Lead for the Uncommon Woman Live in Thunder Bay Tour 2018. I'm also an Advocate in the fight for Justice & Truth & Reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples. Also Injured workers events, OBIPP events, STOP the Cuts to Legal Aid Panel, Climate Change Rally's to name some.

I am also a former Candidate for Councilor at Large (2018) I places 20/26 in the "crowded at large race". There were 5 positions available. A former Nominee for the Green Party of Canada Thunder Bay – Rainy River Region (last fall). I withdrew my name & gave nomination to Amanda Moddenjonge. I am also someone living with HIV.

I have been a front line support worker downtown Fort William (the older part of town). I have assisted with programming & sat on Boards for the vulnerable & marginalized community members. Advocating for their needs as someone who has been there with them in their shoes. I have slept outside and in the rain then went to work the next day. I worked when I had no roof over my head. No bed to go to sleep

in that night. Not knowing where my next meal was coming from. I was the Missing Mother of 4 from BC from 2012-2015. I was also almost kidnapped 2 weeks ago last night by 3 guys on my Street as I was walking home. I have thought about suicide more than once. I know that pain well. All to well.

Major challenges affecting our community members are; RACISM, discrimination, homelessness, poverty. Lack of funding for major crimes – Guns & Gangs, Mental Health & Health challenges, lack of affordable housing, lack of resources for Autism, more programming for our youth, more not less recreational options. Funding for our Seniors & Elders. We need funding for more programming. Not less. Cuts hurt. Public transportation, Legal Aid, Education. We have the skilled workers as with Bombardier, however not enough work & contracts. We must tackle these issues. Enough of our Daughter's, Sister's, Mother's, Son's, Brother's, Father's, Aunties, Uncle's, Parents & Grandparents have been lost. We must do better! We can do better! We need funding for Anti-Guns & Gangs. We need preventable measures to combat issues in our neighbourhoods and streets. We don't want to be Murder Capital of Canada again. Were not off to a very good start this year. We must Declare a State of Emergency on the War on Drugs Now!! No more lives need be lost! You don't now something until it happens to you. My best friends daughter was murdered just over a year ago. It's time to Reclaim our City, our Land our Country our Canada.

We can NOT wait any Longer! We must ACT Now! We must invest in our Future. We are worth it. All of Us!

I'm not a Doctor, Lawyer, Politician, Environmentalist. I am an Ally for Indigenous Peoples. My late Father was from Ingonish, Cape Breton, NS. His Mother married a white man & lost her status.

I am a Graduate of Advocacy North Social Justice Speaker's School. A former Graduate & Mentor of Lakehead Universities Humanities 101 Program. A Graduate of New Directions Speakers School. People all the time see me, yet don't really know me until I put on my ribbon skirt, pull out my hand drum & start to sing traditional drum songs. I'm "that" white Nish girl. Lol

I have gone from Victim to Survivor to Contributor within my Community. What was missing in my life was connection. It was when I was lost, broken, homeless, hungry, broke & alone did I truly find myself. I was lost in the cycle of poverty. It was when I attended a Mother's Day Memorial Walk years ago at Waverly Library did I finally feel like I belonged somewhere. Hearing the heart beat of the drum as I walked with the crowd towards the Marina did I finally feel like I was home. It was during this walk that I finally let go of tears I had been carrying with me for years since I myself lost my own children due to domestic violence. I lost them all while staying in a Women's Shelter in Victoria, BC & had the Authorities come into the Women's Shelter with ex parte custody order granting him temporary custody. Not being able to see my children for years almost killed me. It broke me. I was never successful in having them returned to me. They are the reason I'm here today. I came from North Vancouver, BC for 2 weeks 10 years ago & I'm still here. They are the reasons I do what I do in the Community, them & my grandson. It was when I cried did I finally start to heal those wounds. Being surrounded unconditionally by my Indigenous brothers, sisters that day made all the difference. They made me feel safe, secure, protected, loved. Not long after this walk I had an opportunity to make a traditional hand drum. I wanted to learn those Healing songs like I had heard. I now sing in Obijwe. I was gifted this White Eagle Feather by a traditional medicine man when he gave me my Spirit name & colours.

When I was lost, alone, broken, traumatized it was my Indigenous friends who loved me back to health. Health is Wealth. When I felt connected, had supports, friends did I find my self confidence. This was when I started to tell my story. I started using my Voice through word & song to tell my story. Only when I felt safe did I begin to heal from all the traumas of the past. I attend Pow Wows, Sweat Lodges, Full Moon Ceremonies, Sharing, Sacred circles, Healing circles, Marches, Walks, Rallies. How does one get over losing children? I still get triggered when I see a family of 3/4 sons even now 18 years later. This is my lived experience. This is how I can relate to Indigenous peoples having lost their own children. We must tell our Stories. This is how we learn from the past.

"RACISM is part of the social landscape of Thunder Bay. It is recognized to be an issue and many people in the City have been standing up against it for years". – Gerry McNeilly Office of the Independent Police Review Director on "Broken Trust".

Powerful words...

"If you have not spent time in a First Nation's Community and listened to their stories then you have NO RIGHT to pass Judgement on them".

"Racism is taught, please be mindful of your "opinions" and think about how you come to your conclusions about our First Nations Peoples. Canada was not discovered. It was Invaded!"

"The truth is that the recent past and current oppression is still affecting our First Nations and the Road to Healing is not going to happen over night, but what can happen over night is the way we all acknowledge the wrong doings, the way we listen to their stories in order to give them closure to help them heal. We all deserve to have a sense that we matter and are all Respected.

- Montreal Canadian Goaltender – Carey Price Proud Member of Anahim Lake First Nation, BC.

Some of us with Mental Health & Health challenges can't just: "get a job!". It's a daily fight to battle those inner demons. Yesterday my mailman says to me "your dressed today Ms. MacKinnon". We both laughed. He has seen me at my worst. I have my good days & bad days.

When I was a recipient of the now cancelled Ontario Basic Income Pilot project I received \$1,915/month. Big difference from social assistance payment of \$1,360/month. Let's take a look at this for a minute. I live in Fort William which is the older part of Thunder Bay and pay \$855/month for rent which is inclusive thankfully. Another \$300/month for cell, cable, internet & security system. All with the same service provider. That's \$200/month left. I have a prescription for medical marijuana. I'm entitled 42.5g/month that's roughly \$425/month not including taxes & shipping. Oh wait! I forgot about food. Surely with all this medical marijuana I'm going to get the "munchies" & will surely need to eat. Oh wait! I can't. I have no money left. I forgot about my 2 credit card payments. One of which I need to pay to

order my marijuana. I'm already in a over draft. I'm still expected to pay child support too. It's just NOT possible to survive. As a single person with no children I'm not a high priority for social housing. I hear the wait is 7 years. That's a \$555/month difference every month. Being a participant of the OBIPP gave me piece of mind knowing my rent & bills were paid. That I would have a roof over my head. A sense of security. A sense of pride. A sense of Hope. I could finally start living again. Since returning to ODSP I've gone in debt. The cycle of poverty has started again. The struggle is real. The cycle of poverty is real. I'm in it. Each & single day. One month away from being homeless. No sense of security. Nothing. No savings.

As someone who struggles daily with both Mental Health & Health challenges getting a job isn't as easy as it sounds. Being part of this project gave me hope to a better Future. Until it was cancelled. I had money left over & didn't struggle mid or end month like I do now.

Community members are struggling. Indigenous people are struggling. When you struggle with Mental Health challenges it makes you more vulnerable. We need more Cultural Programs for our Youth, Seniors & Elders. We need a Holistic Healing Center. We need a traditional Healing Centre. We need a Thunderbird Healing & Treatment Centre for our Indigenous people to Heal from the tragedy of the past.

"We need a clear Holistic 10 year plan to tackle these issues. Leaders need input from Community. We need to tackle these issues now. We move forward to the day when we can govern ourselves" – Glen Hare – Anishnabek Nation Grand Council Chief.

We need a Universal Basic Income. A Universal Medical, Dental, Mental Health, Vision, Oral & Health care. We need a Universal Basic Income for All. This would provide dignity, hope, safety & security. A promise for a better life, a better future.

Tracey Mackinnon