

PEGUIS COMMUNITY STORY THE YOUTH SPEAK



Prepared for:
*The Peguis
Trusts*



Prepared by:
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As part of the Peguis Community Story process, almost 400 students from grades 6 to 12 spent a day in two groups sharing their insights and suggestions. The courageous and forthright responses that these young people made to the following questions are summarized in this section of the report.

What is life like now for children and youth in Peguis?

1. Do all children and youth have their basic needs met (food, clothing, shelter)?
2. Are children and youth always safe? What are situations when they are not safe?
3. Are children and youth involved in any behaviour that is harmful to them (e.g. alcohol and drug abuse)? Which behaviours? Are any young people in trouble with the law?
4. Do children and youth have a voice in the decisions about what goes on in the community? How do they contribute to what goes on in the community?
5. Do children and young people feel valued and cared for in the community?
6. How would you describe the peer relationships among children and youth in the community (e.g. does bullying ever happen, is everyone respected)?
7. Are there enough different kinds of recreational activities so everyone can participate in something they enjoy? Can everyone who wants to participate in these activities? If not, why not?
8. Do children and youth have the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge they need to make good life decisions now and achieve their life goals in the future?
9. Do children and youth feel proud of their heritage and identity as Peguis people? Why or why not?

What would things be like for children and youth in an ideal future?

Regarding:

- Economic opportunities
- Education
- Community politics
- Culture and spirituality
- Recreation
- Health and wellness
- How people get along together
- Community services

What are the most important next steps for creating that future?

- For the next 2 years? For the next 5 years? For the next 10 years?
- What can children and youth do to build this future?
- What do adult community members need to do?
- What does leadership need to do?



1. What is life like now for children and youth in Peguis?

Youth find themselves in a unique situation in their development. They are no longer children who only have their enjoyment and own wellbeing to think about. They are not yet full adults who have a clear sense of purpose and direction. Although youth often share the same difficulties and issues that their families and communities do, they also have their own special concerns. Both adults and youth have provided a great deal of information about the realities of youth in Peguis today and how their lives could be improved.

Health and Wellness

- a. Most youth do agree that they are getting their basic needs met by their families.
- b. Drugs and alcohol problems as well as gambling have impacted many young people when their families run out of money for basic needs.
- c. The health of some youth has been impacted by the poor quality of housing that they live in. Not only are the buildings sometimes in disrepair, but youth and children are often left with very little space that they can call “their own”.
- d. Youth are not aware of any programs within Peguis that provide needed help to parents on social assistance to help provide for their kids.
- e. Many youth are involved in harmful behaviors. 90-95% of Peguis youth use or have used drugs and/or alcohol in the past. The youth admit that this use “makes us make bad decisions” like driving while impaired, fighting, having unprotected sex and even committing break and enters and armed robbery. Youth feel that many parents are in denial about what their children are doing and how much trouble they are getting into. Youth say that they “see lots of adults doing bad things so they decide it is ok to do it too”.
- f. Youth are engaging in unprotected sex and putting themselves at risk for unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Parents are in denial about their children being in trouble. Children are watching adult bad behaviour and then getting into it themselves.

Safety and Security

- a. Children and youth are often left alone for long periods of time while their parents and guardians are out working or even drinking and gambling. This lack of supervision gives youth the opportunity to engage in harmful behaviors like drugs and alcohol.
- b. Many youth expressed that a dangerous area in Peguis is the roads. Youth often do not have transportation and must walk on roads that are poorly lit and that are in poor condition. They feel that “lots of people are driving drunk and they don’t slow down or anything” and some people “don’t even have their license.”
- c. The high number of guns in Peguis worries some youth. They worry that “when people drink and they have guns, who knows what happens.” Provincial law allow people to carry guns openly in their vehicles and this just creates more opportunity for youth to come in contact with them in unsafe situations.
- d. The presence of gangs within Peguis puts many youth in dangerous situations. Youth shared that some kids have committed suicide because of problems with gangs.

Youth Relationships with Peers and Adults

- a. Many youth (as much as 75%) are scared of bullying. “Bullying is a real problem and kids even get jumped,” says one youth. There have been anti-bullying programs in school, but not in the community itself.
- b. There is “a lot of unhealthy boy/girl stuff” from abusive relationships to unprotected sex. The patterns of these relationships come from viewing the adults and how they interact with each other.
- c. There are many different cliques within the youth of Peguis. “If you don’t belong to the right group then they won’t talk to you.” This creates feelings of alienation and even depression for youth. There are many Peguis youth who feel isolated, alone, depressed and unsupported.
- d. Youth put lots of peer pressure on each other to use alcohol and drugs and to engage in fighting and other harmful behaviors.
- e. Youth feel that most of their teachers and coaches do care, listen, and help them. They feel that “they are always there to help us every day.” When adults are there for their kids, kids notice and it matters to them.
- f. Some parents and grandparents are a source of modeling and guiding for the youth of Peguis.

Recreational Activities

- a. Almost universally, the youth of Peguis feel that they do not have enough recreational activities. The traditional sports of hockey in the winter and baseball in the summer are too limited to provide activities for the majority of youth. Especially absent are opportunities for girls to participate equally with the boys. A new multiplex arena is a huge priority for all young people.
- b. Because of a lack of facilities and equipment, “we can’t all do things.” There is a real lack of non-sporting activities like drama programs and music (both instrument and choir).
- c. Finances and lack of transportation are also limiting factors for many youth to participate in recreational activities. Lack of funds make traveling impossible for some youth and this keeps them from joining some teams. Even getting to practice is an obstacle for some
- d. There are almost no activities for youth with disabilities or for those who do not want a purely competitive environment.

All sports are competitive, and those that don't feel they are good enough are left out. If activities are co-ed, the girls get teased. The boys say they aren't good enough.

Learning Opportunities

- a. The school is providing some good learning opportunities for youth. Most youth feel that the teachers are a positive influence on the youth and are “doing a good job educating us.” Youth can graduate from high school while staying in Peguis. If Peguis youth wish to pursue post secondary education, they must leave the community.
- b. While there are specific life skills programs within the school, youth feel that more should be offered (i.e. caring for babies/dolls program) and that there should be many more resources and options at the school.

Connection to Culture and Community

- a. There is a general feeling of pride from youth towards their community and their culture. “We should be proud that we are the largest community in Manitoba and Canada. We were the first to sign a Treaty. We should feel proud.”
- b. Many youth expressed a strong desire to learn more about traditional stories, history, teachings, ceremonies and practices.

Participation in the Economy and Politics

- a. Youth do not feel like they have a role to play within the political sphere. They feel this “because the adults are too busy to hear what they are asking and they don’t care.” Youth feel that until they have the ability to vote in elections, they will not have a voice. “Adults always say that we are the future but they keep making all the decisions about our future.” The youth feel that they have been made promises (like a new arena) and these promises have been ignored.
- b. Youth have a difficult time participating in the economy because there are not enough jobs in Peguis. It is very hard for them to make money unless they engage in illegal activities like drug dealing and robberies.

This is the first time we have been asked what we think. We are usually only involved when there is a crisis.

2. Lessons from the Past

By taking a look at both the old traditions and the near past, we can gain important insights into today’s issues and problems and can gain a better understanding of some directions that can be taken to address issues and create a better life for youth in Peguis.

Health and Wellness

- a. In the past getting everything that is needed for survival from the land helped youth get self-confidence, life-skills, respect for the environment and inner strength. It also helped them gain an appreciation for their elders and their parents and guardians.
- b. People were much healthier back then. If they wanted to travel they had to use horses or their own feet. There was hardly any junk or processed foods in the community. The constant need to hunt or gather food and tend to animals kept people active and busy. People had important jobs to do to ensure the survival of their family group. Everyone was important and knew that they were valued.
- c. While traditional healers did their best to care for sick or wounded community members, there was very limited access to western medicine and other forms of health care. People were forced to live in cramped and crowded houses and were not as careful about hygiene and cleanliness.
- d. Access to and use of alcohol, drugs and even cigarettes was much lower and therefore its use was less prevalent.

Safety and Security

- a. Peguis youth in the past were not left out of community activities and were seldom left alone for long periods of time. Because of the lack of access of drugs and alcohol, youth were less likely to engage in aggressive risk taking and destructive behaviors.

Youth Relationships with Peers and Adults

- a. Youth grew to respect and value both their elders in the community and their family groups. Youth knew that they had much to learn from these people so that they could better survive in the future.
- b. Parents and grandparents were all actively involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren. The older generation provided role models for the younger generation.
- c. There was a general sense of respect coming from the younger generation towards the members of older generations.
- d. Although there were still conflicts and fights, youth were not afraid of bullying from their peers. There was a recognition that everyone had a role to play in the wellbeing of a community and all are valuable.

Recreational Opportunities

- a. Youth had less time for recreation when much of their day was spent engaged in doing the chores needed to ensure survival for their families. Very little time was spent in front of the TV or radio.
- b. Traditional recreational activities involved games, dancing and singing, and was often done at the community level. This helped build sense of community and pride in their culture. The available activities were inclusive.

Learning Opportunities

- a. Traditionally, learning was a process of the passing down knowledge from one generation to the next. This was done through stories, role modeling and simple direct teaching. Youth were able to learn everything that they needed to survive from their community.
- b. With the introduction of residential schools, youth were forced to leave their community and couldn't use their language. As a result, young people lost a part of their culture and identity.

Connection to Culture and Community

- a. Because there were no social programs provided by the government, people had to rely on the goodwill of their fellow community members to help in times of crises. This strengthened an already strong sense of community.
- b. Recreational activities revolved around traditional games and competitions as well as stories, visiting, songs and ceremonies.
- c. A youth's identity was rooted in their culture and community. It was what defined them.

We should be proud that we are the largest community in Manitoba and Canada. We were the first to sign a treaty. We should feel proud.

3. What Peguis Youth Want to See

Youth were asked to share what they wanted to see in Peguis so that it was a healthy place for young people to be productive and develop into fine adults. They came up with a number of ideas that represent their ideal community.

- a. Improved housing for all members of the community free of mould and disrepair, and added space for people to call their own and to feel like they have a refuge and safe haven. All homes should have access to utilities and be healthy places to live in.
- b. A better transportation system is needed. Peguis roads need to be repaired and sidewalks must be built. Night lighting must be bright enough so that youth feel safe to travel on foot at night across the community. A transportation system is needed that is available to ferry community members within Peguis when they cannot find other rides or when they are under the influence.
- c. A youth culture that shuns alcohol and drugs and is free of peer pressure and bullying. Youth will value healthy relationships with both adults and their peers, and will embrace and be proud of their culture and community.
- d. Youth would like to see better and more varied recreational opportunities. This will necessitate building some new facilities like a new arena/recreation centre, a swimming pool, fitness centre and well-lit baseball and playing fields. It will also require upgrading the equipment used for all of these activities. The youth would also like to see many more kinds of activities made available. For example, they would like to see greater emphasis on the arts (drama, music, and dance) and have opportunities to engage in non-sporting recreation. Girls and youth with disabilities will have access to many more activities than they do now.
- e. Better access to health care facilities (hospitals, pharmacies and clinics) and health care providers (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, chiropractors, traditional medicine practitioners) and better recruitment of top quality doctors.
- f. Youth would like to see better retail shopping and recreational opportunities in Peguis. This would save time and money traveling to Winnipeg to get clothing and other needed items. This will also provide youth with the chance to get jobs within the community and allow them some financial independence.
- g. Peguis youth will have a voice in the community decision-making processes and feel like Chief and Council actually listen and act with the needs of youth in mind.
- h. Better communication and more unity between youth and community leaders, other adults, elders, their peers, and their families. The adults will stop fighting. When that happens, there will be healthier youth, and adults will be spending lots of time with the youth.
- i. School will provided a quality education, but will also provide lots of choice in courses and in life skill development. There will be access to post secondary education within the community so youth who want more education do not have to leave. Education will be valued by both youth and the community at large. Youth will have access to spoken language classes to help preserve their culture.
- j. The reserve will be clean and free of garbage and debris. People will have pride in their community and will make efforts to keep it a place that everyone can be proud of.
- k. Young people will grow up in families that are free of addictions, violence, and substance and other abuse. They will get guidance from the adults in their lives, and love and support from their families. Parents will become actively engaged in the youth recreational, social, healing and learning programs.

We don't feel valued because there are lots of activities for adults, but nothing for the children until something tragic happens. Then they do something, but it doesn't last long. No one pays attention to what is going on with children and youth.