

# A Trip to Pikangikum First Nation

## Youth On The Loose



A “small” fire to warm up around.

**A**s soon as the last class finished students rushed home to finish packing their bags and get ready for the 7 hour drive to Red Lake, Ontario. Not their final destination, just a stopover to get some rest before supporting a group of over 60 bikers on a 120+ kilometre bike ride from Red Lake to Pikangikum First Nation.

Developing leadership skills takes time, concerted effort and a willingness to learn on all sides. This weekend would be one where I would be learning how to step aside and encourage youth who love Jesus to minister with the gifts God has given them



*Youth on the New Hope Youth Centre Yukon in front of Pikangikum First Nation*

We arrived in Red Lake after midnight after many hours of deep theological conversations, roadside shenanigans, and a well needed slushy stop at the 7-11 in Dryden. We settled in and got some sleep not knowing exactly what the weekend would hold.

## Friday

We awoke to -27 temperatures, and after breakfast we traveled along Nungesser road. We quickly encountered the cyclists who had started before sunrise on their 12hr journey towards Pikangikum First Nation. With cheers and encouragement we drove past the convoy and into Pikangikum so we could off-load our gear, music equipment and get our winter gear on. Friday's challenge was to build a couple fires for the riders at two of their checkpoints. We didn't have the wood with us... our task was to cut trees down (recently seasoned by the forest fires in the area) and build some bonfires. The crew worked so well together, there were laughs, some songs shared, smokies cooked over the fire for



lunch. We had an amazing day serving the cyclists and we even got enough wood to bring a truck full to Nick's trailer for heat.

We were encouraged to hear how much our fires were appreciated by the bikers and it was great to see longtime friends on bikes riding up to the checkpoints persevering through brutal cold conditions. Despite the cold and how tired the bikers looked, some of the youth mentioned they'd be interested to ride in the next years challenge... I'm excited to see them taking up the challenge.

As the sun set the last of the bikers rolled into the final checkpoint before embarking on the last leg towards the community. It was amazing to see all the



local support that the bike ride had and it was beautiful to be led in a convoy into the community with what seemed like over a hundred vehicles lighting the way.

We finished off the day with some fancy ramen soup and some hot banana bread baked by Colleen Estes. We went to sleep with full hearts and bellies.

## Saturday

We woke up to slightly warmer temperatures and made our way to the school where we made another couple fires for community events, boiled some water on a tripod fire for snowshoers and then made a fire by the rink for local youth to warm up between skating and playing hockey at the outdoor rink. There was so much to do on Saturday our group split into helping bbq lunch, tie skates, keep the fire going and getting ready for a worship night that we were hosting. After a community dinner we made our way back to the Eagles Nest and hosted a worship night put on by the youth themselves. Big shoutout to Jared Visitor who led the night and he was effortlessly flowing between worship songs and sharing part of his story between praising God. He spoke about how he is learning to be vulnerable, to embrace who he is and his identity in Christ; how you can be Native and a Christian, and how there is value in each and every one of the youth



that were in attendance.

Needless to say we didn't want to stop singing and worshipping, it was such an uplifting time for myself and those in attendance. There were a couple youth who shared their testimonies and I'm praying that we left a lasting impact on those in attendance.

We finished off the night piling into Colleen's place and spent some time reflecting on the weekend so far, talking about our high, low and buffalo moments (best, worst and oddest/unexpected moment). We had some laughs, a time of prayer and then had to call it a night.

## Sunday

I had an early morning coffee time with Nick and then we all went to Colleen's for breakfast, and then prep for our Sunday service. Our youth worship team did an amazing job leading the praise and song time, we also spent time in prayer led by Colleen for local people in the community, struggles, health issues and asking God to intercede in situations that seem hopeless without God. One of the youth



on the trip, Antoine, gave an excellent message on 1 Corinthians 13 speaking about love, and how we are to love each other. It was amazing to be in the room, hearing the amins and agreement from the congregation.

There were elders, young people, teachers, visitors and regulars all piled into the Eagles Nest for the service. After the message closed I saw people mixing up who they were talking to and it was a beautiful picture

of partnership and the kingdom of heaven people from all different backgrounds, economic status and age all fellowshiping together united by the God we worship.

As we said our goodbyes and headed across the ice towards Thunder Bay our cars murmured of excitement to do something like this again. All of the youth having grown in confidence in the Lord a little (some a lot) and I could see glimpses among them of the people God is calling them to be. I admonished the group that they are the future and I'm excited to see how they will go from here and change the world! Our young people are resilient, they are strong, skilled and have a passion for serving God. Let's continue to pray for them, equip them and release them to do the work God has laid out for them to do.



Ephesians 2:10 says “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” I believe that our youth are simply needing people who believe in them and give them opportunities to fulfill their purpose.

I’m excited for the next time we hit the road. We’re so thankful for everyone who prays and supports us. We couldn’t do this work without your support, and we feel so supported in our efforts.

Andrew