



# North Bay & District Multicultural Centre

Immigrant Settlement Services

Dear community member,

Thank you for your participation in the Rainbow Walk, Talk and Play kit. We chose this theme for our youngest community members as we believe it's time to step up as a community and do our individual parts to make our community the best it can possibly be for ALL residents.

Local estimates combined with Statistics Canada latest data suggest that we have approximately 20% of our community made up of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC). The majority of our youngest BIPOC residents were born right here in this town, attended the same childcares as their white peers and are now in the same Kindergarten or primary school classes; yet they continue to face horrendous treatment from their white peers just based on the colour of their skin.

We have very young BIPOC kids who come home every day telling their parents how much they wish they were white, because everyone in their class is white and no one will play with them. We have kids in tears every night as they tell their parents that other kids in their class/school call them ugly and push them away, just based on the colour of their skin. We have our youngest kids who are just starting kindergarten and learning to ride the school bus for the first time, being pushed off the seat on the bus by older white kids who tell them they don't want them sitting next to them because they are too brown and their nose is too big. We have little BIPOC kids walking up and down the school bus aisle with nowhere to sit because the white kids occupy two seats and will not move over to make space for them. We have little kids who don't want to go to school in our community because other kids call them 'poo', simply based on the colour of their skin.

All these incidents that BIPOC kids face every day, many times a day are having a debilitating impact on their health and that of their parents. It destroys their self-esteem and sense of self-worth as a person. This has resulted in our very young kids wanting to commit suicide just to escape the torment of exclusion by their peers. This has resulted in parents moving their families out of our town as no parent wants to consciously choose this for their child.

I urge our community to do some deep internal reflection and ask ourselves, where are our kids getting these messages? Where are they learning these behaviours? And how can we be part of the solution?

I also thank you for being brave enough to start the conversation with your child(ren) so that together we can make our community a safe and healthy space for ALL residents.

In the words of Martin Luther King: "If there ever was a time that silence was a sign of betrayal that time is now."

Thank you,

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