

MEDIA RELEASE

Renfrew County Public Sector Organizations Build Momentum in Advancing Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation Through Continued Collaboration

Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, ON – February 28, 2025 – Public sector organizations from across Renfrew County gathered at the Makwa Community Centre for *Advancing Truth and Reconciliation in Renfrew County – Day Two*, an event focused on its significant journey towards Truth and Reconciliation.

This event built upon the *Day One* event, which took place in November at Algonquin College and featured a powerful *Blanket Exercise* and an address by Marie Wilson, former Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Day Two* continued the journey by deepening participants' understanding of the 94 Calls to Action and the 44 articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) while fostering collaboration on tangible commitments.

More than 50 participants from eight public sector organizations took part, working alongside members of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation during the two sessions. Participating organizations included:

- Algonquin College – Waterfront Campus
- City of Pembroke
- County of Renfrew
- Family & Children's Services of Renfrew County
- Pembroke Regional Hospital
- Renfrew County & District Health Unit
- Renfrew County Catholic District School Board
- Renfrew County District School Board

Papase Youth Drum Group provided the traditional drumming that opened the day, while Pikwàkanagàn students Nevaeh Sarazin, Kylie Two-Axe McMullin, Sandi McGuire, and Keysha Two-Axe McMullin shared various styles of dance, including traditional and contemporary jingle and fancy shawl. The organizations were grateful to have Elder Dan Ross open the day with a traditional smudge, helping to set the tone of respect and shared purpose. Participants received booklets outlining the Calls to Action and UNDRIP articles, which provided a foundation for the discussions.

A keynote address by Riley Yesno of Eabametoong First Nation was a highlight of the event. Yesno's powerful insights on truth, reconciliation, reciprocity, and shared responsibility resonated deeply with attendees, inspiring reflection and action.

"Riley Yesno's message was incredibly impactful, reminding us of the importance of genuine engagement and action in our reconciliation journey," said Kristen Niemi, Director of Education for the Renfrew County District School Board. "Gathering within the Algonquins of

Pikwakanagan First Nation, alongside community members, added a vital layer of purpose, context, and respect to our work.”

Participants then took part in "Co-Constructing Community Commitments", a collaborative session focused on responding to the Calls to Action. Organizations shared ideas on how to address identified growth areas and integrate reconciliation efforts into their work.

After a traditional powwow meal prepared by Rose Marie Commanda Catering, the afternoon focused on action planning, with each organization developing concrete strategies to implement their learning. The event concluded with a closing circle led by Elder Dan Ross, where participants reflected on their commitments and the path forward.

"The success of these first two days, beginning with the powerful experience of the Blanket Exercise and hearing from Marie Wilson, and continuing with the collaborative work on Day Two, demonstrates the strong commitment of Renfrew County to advancing Truth and Reconciliation, particularly on the traditional lands of the Algonquin People," said Jamie Bramburger, Interim Dean of Algonquin College, Pembroke Campus. "We are grateful for the participation of all eight public sector organizations and look forward to seeing the positive impact of our collective actions”.

This continued collaboration represents an ongoing commitment to meaningful action in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. As participating organizations take purposeful steps forward, the focus remains on building respectful relationships, amplifying Indigenous voices, and ensuring reconciliation efforts lead to lasting change.

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Keynote Address from Riley Yesno

