

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens Canada
Actualité**

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February 28, 2007

Globe and Mail "Plight of natives hits home"

MARGARET PHILP

One woman wants to send hand-stitched quilts. A children's publisher called to donate new books. Teachers have asked to twin their classrooms with those in native schools. And university students have written to volunteer their time once classes end.

Stirred by the suffering of aboriginal people living on remote, dirt-poor, alcohol-ravaged reserves in Northwestern Ontario -- like Third World inhabitants within one of the world's wealthiest countries -- Canadians have flocked to their telephones and computers to donate money, merchandise, time and expertise to a budding cause among Canada's charitable and humanitarian agencies.

Three weeks ago, The Globe and Mail published a story about an unprecedented partnership project to help impoverished reserves in Northwestern Ontario.

Two international relief workers travelled to Canada last month to assess living conditions on two remote reserves and start work on the project. It was the first time humanitarian agencies from overseas have turned an eye to Canada's native poverty.

The partnership, called Mamow Sha-Way-Gi-Kay-Win (an Oji-Cree name meaning helping others without expectation), involves 30 native reserves and a growing roster of social agencies. Their goal is to tap billions of dollars in charitable donations in Canada to tackle poverty and despair on reserves that struggle under a failing regime of federal government funding.

"People didn't realize there were these circumstances in Canada," said Judy Finlay, Ontario's chief child advocate and project co-founder. "They were more than concerned that we had to bring in people from other countries to demonstrate how devastating the circumstances are. So they were somewhat ashamed this was happening in their backyard and they didn't know and they didn't act. So now they're wanting to act."

About \$10,000 has been donated, and the phone lines have been buzzing 'in the past three weeks with Canadians promising help ranging from toilets and plumbing equipment to professional services such as psychiatry, psychological counselling, fundraising and information technology.

In the spring, the Rotary Club in Cornwall will send a former Agriculture Canada bureaucrat who has set up farms in developing countries to sample soil and study growing conditions on reserves with a view to starting small-scale gardening and farming.

Decades ago, a few reserves experimented with growing potatoes, but the crops failed. Nowadays, groceries trucked or flown thousands of kilometres cost more than twice what they would in Southern Ontario, and the modern native diet tends to bypass fruits and vegetables for cheaper processed foods.

Among the club's members, Rotarian David Wood said, are "business people and leaders who are just now finding out what's going on up there, who assumed government was looking after things. When they heard of the conditions up there, as Canadians, they're struck. This is supposed to be one of the richest nations in the world. What are we doing with people in our own family of Canadians?"

In Prince Edward Island, Bruce McCallum wants to explore small-scale, bio-energy projects to replace oil heating on reserves, burning wood chips to heat community buildings and some houses.

"They're surrounded by vast forest with all kinds of surplus biomass," the bio-energy consultant said. "You can usually harvest a small proportion of forest, and do it judiciously, and they'd have a sustainable energy supply that can keep going forever."

In Saskatchewan, the Safe Drinking Water Foundation is offering to help overhaul faulty water-treatment systems. Sue Peterson, who runs the foundation, says that water-treatment technologies are inadequate on most reserves.