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FROM/DE: North West Region

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OPP TURNING CREATIVE IDEAS INTO ACTION WITH 'PROJECT SUNSET AND PROJECT JOURNEY'

~Empowering Youth, Inspiring Positive Change~

(FORT FRANCES, ON) – Project Journey and Sunset are two OPP youth-centered engagement strategies taking place in North West Region. Both projects model groundbreaking crime prevention strategies, coupled with third-party process and impact evaluations. These strategies are the first of their kind in support of community safety and wellbeing in Canada.

While Journey and Sunset have similar frameworks, Journey works with youth in the remote First Nation community of Pikangikum. Sunset is inclusive to youth, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, within Fort Frances, Dryden, Kenora and Sioux Lookout detachment areas.

The projects enhance youth resilience by promoting five key areas that are essential to positive development of children and youth. These areas include:

- Education (academic achievement);
- Life and social skills (behavioural development);
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills (cognitive development);
- Physical activity (healthy lifestyle development); and
- Mentorship (positive role models).

These projects are part of that strategic direction; they deliver innovative and proactive youth engagement strategies designed to address the root causes of crime, social disorder and crisis.

"I've been a police officer for over 20 years, with the last seven years as a Community Services Officer. I'll admit, I came into Sunset with a bit of skepticism," said Constable Ronni Grosenick, Kenora OPP. "But now, I'm seeing clearly, this is not Community Service. Rather, it's about using a model that addresses root causes. We are getting ahead of the curve, and I see it starting to work. After only five months, I'm seeing a shift in youth behaviour. Youth are verbalizing in class where it wasn't happening before. Relationships are forming and parents are not only willing to work with the police, but the school is telling me that they've had parents attending school functions – and engaging the school community – for the first time."

How it Works – Fidelity to a Proven Model "Project Venture"

Project Journey and Sunset are based upon Project Venture (PV), a proven curriculum for Grades 6 and 7, developed by the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP) in the United States almost 30 years ago, and implemented in many communities across the U.S. and Canada (www.niylp.org). Outcomes found youth participants demonstrated a marked reduction in substance misuse, especially alcohol, as compared to the control group of non-participating youth.

Projects Journey and Sunset use five Venture components to actively engage youth in weekly nature-based activities, developing those life skills and reinforcing traditional values:



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- In-school activities;
- After-school activities;
- Community service projects;
- Music, arts, and culture activities; and
- Police activity league events.

Paradigm Shift – the Strengths-Based Perspective

Projects Journey and Sunset offer a strengths-based approach. Both Projects are youth-centered which means outputs address needs of youth rather than “fixing the problem.” A strengths-based approach begins by identifying “What is working well” and a belief that every youth has a unique set of strengths and capabilities, as well as the potential for growth, change and success. The teams provide trusted support for youth with encouragement to challenge themselves and be successful through safe risks. Strengths-based facilitation also supports youth through struggles or failures helping youth perceive all situations as learning opportunities for growth, resiliency, self-awareness, and self-worth.

“Activities are not only safe and positive, but they are meaningful to the youth. Experiences provide youth the opportunity to believe in themselves while connecting with role models and mentors that help guide their learning of important life skills which help them feel they have control over what happens in their lives.” said Sgt. Chris Amell, OPP Special Project Coordinator – Project Journey

Honouring the Truth and Reconciliation for the Future

In recognizing the legacy of residential schools and to advance the progress of reconciliation at all levels of government, Projects Journey and Sunset provide opportunities for communities to take action to eliminate the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the judicial system over the next decade. Underscored is the need to embrace, include and intentionally celebrate local culture and traditions.

Both projects components embed local cultural values to ensure youth develop positive self-concept, effective social skills, a community service ethic, and internal locus of control, as well as improved decision-making, problem-solving skills and resiliency as part of restorative healing.

Pathway of Change – Groundbreaking Evaluation Strategies

When community partners are engaged with police, the level of safety, security and well-being in Ontario neighbourhoods is enhanced, and victimization is reduced. At times, however, community engagement can become focused on outputs because they are measurable and readily determined.

Projects Journey and Sunset are distinct because they are designed to take operations one step further, and focus on *outcomes*, rather than outputs. In taking this approach, programming needs to remain flexible, allowing for meaningful relationships to develop before needs of the audience can be discovered organically.

“Meaningful relationships with our communities is our number one issue for policing”, says Chief Superintendent Mark Pritchard. “The projects are ground breaking for policing services in Canada. To inspire positive change, both projects have discovered new processes necessary for leveraged community collaboration. We are seeing incredible outcomes beginning to emerge.”



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As part of the Contribution Agreement funding the Projects, the OPP, in consultation with Public Safety Canada Research Division is conducting a third-party evaluation of both projects to examine the effectiveness of the process used to implement the program, as well as measure the impacts on youth, their family, and immediate community. A key objective of the evaluation is to determine the extent to which the program creates positive outcomes, both intended and unintended, on youth, their families, and their communities.

“Project Sunset is giving these students the tools they need to be successful in life. They are learning about the importance of making healthy connections in the community. These connections are life altering not only for the students but also for the people in the community,” said Kari Lemelin, parent, whose child has been with Sunset for three years.

Although Projects Journey and Sunset are similar in a lot of ways, they are very distinct in many others. Together, they are finding new process to leverage community collaboration. It is expected the projects will not only help transform the operations of the OPP when working to meet needs of communities, but shared best practices will foster relationship when working with community partners to identify new efficiencies.

More information is available at www.projectsunset.ca regarding program schedules, articles, videos and photos.

Media is always welcome to attend Sunset programming for photo opportunities or interviews with the Project Sunset Coordinator or on-site team members and/or youth.

For example, Project Sunset programming for the week of January 24, 2018 includes:

- Kenora – Dreamcatcher & Indigenous Knowledge Activity
- Dryden – Indigenous Crafts Activity
- Fort Frances – Drum Making & Indigenous Knowledge Activity
- Sioux Lookout – Dogsledding & Outdoor Skills Activity

Please contact Sgt. Anne McCoy for more information with respect to dates, time and location.

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