

*Private Members' Business*

community, including myself, to have an opportunity to discuss with them what it is they are trying to do.

In the course of preparation for this conference two more of their friends committed suicide. It is not just a problem in the abstraction when people are trying to work things through in their life while their friends are committing suicide. I think there are very few of us in this House who have had to deal so directly with such a pressing problem and had to translate those personal concerns into building or rebuilding a community.

That youth council has made great progress in the last four years and deserves the support of Canada. It deserves the support through programming, through moral support, and through business to the community. The young leadership has to be given a chance by telling them that we will not let them fail and will give them whatever support they need to have a more productive life.

In the middle of my constituency of Winnipeg North Centre a number of different groups are trying to deal more persuasively with the problems of aboriginal youth. Winnipeg probably has the largest concentration of urban aboriginal people in the country. It is difficult to be accurate, but it ranges between 25,000 and 50,000 people. Half of those are under the age of 25 and probably 80 per cent of them are within single parent families.

Most of these families are without employment. The education levels, despite the hard work being done in schools such as R. B. Russell, are very limited. Instead of there being generation after generation of success, with an older brother or an older sister doing well, we find that they are constantly confronted with a lack of opportunity in our society.

We in Winnipeg are trying to deal with this issue. When we set up the aboriginal justice commission one of the observations made by Justice Sinclair after looking at the situation was: "We have to turn attention to aboriginal children. We have to give these children an opportunity to have some hope, to have an opportunity to participate in our schools, to participate in the job market".

One of the projects I most admire in the Winnipeg area is Rossbrook House, which takes a very superficially laid back approach where people can come to visit them. From that, the people who are active in Rossbrook House have developed programming which goes 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They have opened their doors and on that basis they have become increasingly involved in programming, job creation, education support, and family support.

When we are talking about dealing with aboriginal youth, we are not talking about the icing on the cake. We are talking about one of the most fundamental needs in our society. I think what is often lost, as we go through government deficits is that we do not know what to protect. We do not know what is really important to us.

I am pleased to see that the minister responsible for the native communications program is here. There is nothing more important than for native youth to have an opportunity over the next decade to develop the written and verbal capacity to talk to each other in their own language. The fact that we have in times of cut-back not seen that as the greatest priority of our society leads me to wonder whether or not they will maintain hope that we will be able to do it.

The broader question is: Where should there be opportunities for aboriginal children as they become more educated and find their way in the professional world? Which routes should they have available to them?

One positive initiative that has been taken by Canadian governments in the last decade is the attempt to reinforce the opportunity for self-government, to reinforce the opportunity for freedom, and to reinforce the opportunity for self-management. Once the people get the education and training at their community colleges, learn how to manage economic development projects, learn how to manage band offices, and learn how to manage downtown projects in our major cities whether it is dealing with the homeless or dealing with family services or dealing with education, we should let them take control of and learn how to run these institutions. We should freely give it to them and not use the excuse of a lack of learning as a reason for not giving it to them.