



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Attawapiskat students win new school (Shannen's Dream), Ontario, 2007-2012

Time period notes: *Construction has not been completed but the school is expected to be operational in 2013.*

2007

to:

2012

Country: Canada

Location City/State/Province: Attawapiskat First Nation, Ontario

Location Description: On James Bay 220 Kilometres north of Moosonee, Ontario

Goals:

A new clean, safe and quality education facility for the children of Attawapiskat.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 011. Records, radio, and television › youtube video

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 015. Group lobbying

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 050. Teach-ins

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 048. Protest meetings

Notes on Methods:

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Attawapiskat students
- elementary students from all over Canada

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Shannen Koostachin

Partners:

elementary school children all over Canada, students of all ages, Chief and Council

External allies:

other First Nation communities across Canada, Assembly of First Nations

Involvement of social elites:

Assembly of First Nations Chief Sean Attleo, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Attawapiskat School Children elementary school children from across Canada

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Attawapiskat Chief and Council

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Elementary school children from across Canada

Groups in 4th Segment:

- University of Toronto students and faculty

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Students and teachers from all over Canada

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Students from First Nation communities across Canada

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 year*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada now called Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

None Known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

In 2011 the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development John Duncan announced that funding was set aside for the design and development of a new elementary school for Attawapiskat, the school is to be completed by 2013.

Attawapiskat First Nation is a small community located on James Bay approximately 220 kilometers north of Moosonee, Ontario. Attawapiskat was home to a courageous and passionate young woman named Shannen Koostachin. Shannen led a campaign of school children to fight for the right to “safe and comfy” schools and quality, culturally based education for First Nations children all across Canada.

The community of Attawapiskat initially had a school called JR Nakogee Elementary that was built in the late 1970’s and was home to approximately 400 students. JR Nakogee Elementary was closed in 2000 when it was discovered that a major diesel oil leak in 1979 had contaminated the school grounds and posed a significant health risk to the young children attending the school. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) began soil remediation of the site and provided temporary school facilities. These facilities consisted of seven duplex portable classrooms and two four-plex buildings for administration and resource space. The temporary school was ready for the children of Attawapiskat in 2001. The portable classrooms were only meant to be a temporary fix rather than a permanent school for the children of Attawapiskat.

After a few years of wear and tear the portable schools began to show their aging infrastructure. The schools were moldy, cold, and damp; when it rained the roof leaked; and in the winter the temperature often fell below -40 C. Yet the students of

Attawapiskat were expected to learn and thrive in this environment. Throughout the years there had been numerous promises by government officials of a new school in Attawapiskat, but none of the promises came to fruition.

Shannen Koostachin vowed to change that. Shannen's dream was for her and her classmates to be afforded the opportunities that are given to all children of Canada: the right to a safe learning environment. At age thirteen Shannen and her friends created a YouTube video about their school's condition and how they wanted a safe and healthy building to learn in. This video went viral and garnered the support of thousands of school children across Canada as well as other organizations.

Shannen and her fellow classmates also started a letter writing campaign called the Attawapiskat School Campaign. This campaign reached out to non-Aboriginal students across Canada and encouraged them to write to the federal government and demand a new school for Attawapiskat. Thousands of children answered this call for help, which prompted promises of a new school from the Minister of Indian Affairs Chuck Strahl. In 2008, the Minister advised that the federal government could not fund the new school. This prompted Shannen and two of her other classmates to cancel their grade eight graduation trip to Niagara Falls and instead fly to Ottawa to meet with Minister Strahl and encourage him to fight harder to build a new school for the children of Attawapiskat.

In 2009 the children of Attawapiskat held an education rights conference at the University of Toronto that was attended by over 500 other children. It was at this conference Shannen and others delivered heartfelt speeches on why they felt it was important to have proper education in a proper facility. In December of 2009 the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development informed the community of Attawapiskat that a new school would be built in the community by 2013.

In 2010 Shannen Koostachin passed away in a tragic car accident. Her family, friends and community created Shannen's Dream in memory of her work to ensure that all First Nations children across Canada have "safe and comfy schools" and receive quality education that makes them proud of who they are. Shannen's Dream has grown to an annual "Shannen's Dream day of Action" walk that is held in numerous cities across the country in support of equal rights to education for First Nation children. While Shannen was alive her dream of a new school in Attawapiskat was not realized, however with the support of family, friends, and fellow students who have continued her fight, ground has been broken for the new school in Attawapiskat that will be completed by 2013. Shannen's Dream has grown into a movement for all First Nations children to be afforded the right to a quality and equitable education.

Research Notes

Sources:

author unknown, Shannens Dream.ca, <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/shannensdream/gallery> , date accessed 27/02/2012

CBC News, New School Brings Hope to Attawapiskat Residents, CBC News.ca, February 27, 2012, date accessed February 27, 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/story/2012/02/27/sby-attiwapiskat-school.html>

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Felicity Forbister, 27/02/2012

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