

From: [Maureen Gustafson](#)
To: [Town](#)
Cc: [Douglas Judson](#)
Subject: Support for the renaming of Colonization Road
Date: Tuesday, November 17, 2020 9:57:00 AM

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

I am writing to you as an Anishinaabekwe and a former resident of the Town of Fort Frances to express my support regarding the renaming of Colonization Road. I am pleased to hear that this issue has been raised again, after the previous Council failed to address it in 2017.

As politicians and leaders, I'm sure you know that language carries great power; the power to inspire, to persuade, to condemn, to normalize, and so forth. According to basic communications theory, the impact of a message depends on the context in which it is used, the intent of the communicator, and the characteristics of the audiences (1). As a communications specialist, I have found it enlightening to analyze different scenarios using this model.

In this case, you--as elected leaders of the Town of Fort Frances--are the **communicators**. While you did not choose the name of the road, you have the power to decide what happens to it moving forward. No matter what your decision, you will be communicating something. It therefore follows that **audiences** would include residents of the Town of Fort Frances, members of nearby Indigenous communities, visitors to the area, and those following these developments from other parts of the province, country, and world. Some of these audiences will have a background in Indigenous issues and history, while others will not.

That brings us to **context**. We are talking about a street name, one which is used in everyday conversations, in print communication materials, and on street signs themselves. In this sense, street names are fairly ubiquitous. People speak and write street names everyday without much thought as to their meaning. By using the word "Colonization" in this context, it is normalized. There is no critical reflection regarding its meaning or how it played out, which is especially problematic given that many audiences will not have a background in Indigenous issues and history, as aforementioned.

Given what we know about the horrific and ongoing legacy of colonization in our area, the resulting **impact** is simply unacceptable. In an era of "truth and reconciliation," as we endeavor to teach young children about these issues and begin to mend relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, it would be counterproductive and insincere to keep the name as is. While this may seem like a small piece of the puzzle, the work of Dr. Jeffrey Denis reminds us that small acts of "laissez-faire" or covert racism serve as a foundation for overt racism in the Rainy Divert District (2-4). These processes keep the spirit of colonization alive, contributing to a myriad of negative health and social outcomes as recognized by researchers as well as several federal inquiries (5-7).

Finally, we must consider the **intent** of you, the communicators. I would like to think that your intent is to contribute to a better world by removing a small piece of the foundation that upholds anti-Indigenous racism in our region. Ultimately, however, it's not up to me. Your decision will speak volumes.

Sincerely,

Maureen Gustafson, MPH

Band Member, Couchiching First Nation
Former Resident (1994-2012), Fort Frances

(1) Littlejohn SW, Foss KA. Theories of Human Communication. 9th Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; 2007.

(2) Denis, J. Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press; 2020.

(3) Denis, J. Contact Theory in a Small-Town Settler-Colonial Context: The Reproduction of Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-White Canadian Relations. 2015. American Sociological Review, 80(1), 218-242.

(4) Denis, J. Transforming meanings and group position: tactics and framing in Anishinaabe-white relations in Northwestern Ontario, Canada. 2012. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 35(3), 453-470.

(5) Billie A, Smylie J. First Peoples, Second Class Treatment: The role of racism in the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. 2015. Toronto, ON: the Wellesley Institute. Available at <https://sac-oac.ca/sites/default/files/resources/Report-First-Peoples-Second-Class-Treatment.pdf>

(6) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. Winnipeg, MB: Author. Available at http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf

(7) National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. 2019. Ottawa, ON: Author. Available at <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>