

49

Young offenders at Ipperwash

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IPPERWASH- A growing problem in native and non-native communities has hit this area. Last week eight cottages were broken into within four days and the culprits were all young offenders. This problem is not unique but the fact that the children involved have a "home free zone" is a major issue to the victims of the crimes. Last week four young offenders did get caught and an 18 year old charged on another incident.

Youth violence and destruction of private property is a growing concern and where the province is recommending "tough love" that kind of band aid does seem to be a solution on the reserves here. The residents say if the police won't patrol the area where the perpetrators live (Stony Point is not patrolled by the OPP) it gives the kids a safe zone to run to after damaging private property at Ipperwash.

"Where else in Canada is there land owned by the Department of Natural Defense that is not patrolled?" asked a resident during a meeting at the home of one of those concerned. Not only are the home owners still afraid of retaliation after six years of harassment, but now it is apparent that of those they fear many are children.

A resident who refused to give her name because her home has been broken into four times and she doesn't know if she can still get insurance said these kids demolish private property and then run back into the former army camp or to Kettle Point without being seen and then the OPP can't investigate. (Kettle Point is patrolled by the Anishnebeck Police Service).

Last week, days before the cottages were broken into a car was damaged to the tune of \$1,800 and a garage door driven into, \$1,500 damage. Nicholas Cattelle, 18 was charged with careless driving. OPP media liaison Luke George said he could not confirm whether Cottelle had a valid driver's license. Local residents saw the vehicle doing the damage but couldn't make out the driver. The incident was reported to the OPP immediately. The four kids who broke into the homes were caught before they got back to the army camp. The members of the native and non-native community aided the OPP with names location and descriptions of the kids so apprehending them was done quickly. The residents credited the OPP for their fast response time to the incidents. The kids are youths under Young Offenders Act and under the law can't be punished. Sunday, one of the accused's father threatened a Town official in his home because his son "got caught."

In a previous interview Glen Bannon, from the Garden River APS headquarters who is the chief over the current KPP officers said the new (Oct 1) police force has a strong working relationship with the OPP and there will be a major focus on youth in the community. It is not clear how the APS are combating youth offenders.

Statistics Canada says that 35 per cent of the native population is under 15 compared with just 20 per cent of the non-aboriginal population. Without programs and future jobs for the youth, communities like Ipperwash may fall victim to the reality of more break-ins and violence from these young offenders.

"We are between a rock and a hard place," said resident Mary Lou LaPratte. "If we yell too loud about the vandalism and destruction the tourism in the area suffers. If we don't say anything these occurrences just keep going on and the kids get away with it."

"How does victimizing your neighbors help your problems with the governments?" asked La Pratte referring to the negotiations and discontent the native community has with the federal government. "What are they trying to achieve by vandalizing our properties? I believe this is an exercise in futility." -30-