

B.C. men wear out shoes, car parts, but not their welcome on Youth Suicide Prevention Walk

by [Jennifer Ashawasegai](#)

“Life is totally worth living. Live it one step at a time,” advises 25-year-old Edward Meldrum, who is participating in the Youth Suicide Prevention Walk, which kicked off March 14 in Sydney, N. S. The young Chillikolton man from Nanaimo, B. C. has wanted to join the walkers for the last few annual walks to raise awareness and money for youth suicide prevention. The walk is scheduled to end at the parliament buildings in Vancouver on National Aboriginal Day, June 21.

Meldrum has his own story. He tried committing suicide at the age of only seven or eight. He recalls an abusive stepfather: “My stepfather used to tell me I was worthless and wanted my mom to put me and my sister in foster care.” Meldrum tells a graphic tale of abuse, and says he tried to commit suicide on two separate occasions. The first time, he says he tried to overdose on pills while he lived in Edmonton with his family. The second time, he tried to jump off a bridge.

Meldrum’s older sister Gina, was also not immune to the abuse. Edward says his sister tried to overdose on pills just three years ago. In 2003 she also took part in the walk to prevent youth suicide.

Although none of the other three walkers has attempted suicide, all have been affected by this terribly final result. One Squamish youth, 21-year-old Tyler Joseph, struggles to understand why people choose to take their lives. Joseph says he decided to join the walk because he has seen how suicide affects people. “It makes me want to make a difference and (show) that people are not alone in a dark corner.” Joseph adds, “This journey is one of the greatest choices of my life.”

Joseph’s advice to people contemplating suicide? “Still hold on, never let go...We’ve been left with beautiful medicines and traditions. People have fought for us to be here.” And he adds, “Don’t be scared to use those

medicines. When we’re suicidal, we’re not taking care of ourselves, emotionally or spiritually.”

Joseph says the best thing about this walk is having kids walk with them, and talking to youth about suicide prevention. He wants government to increase anti-suicide funding and programs.

Last year, Vincent Watts, President of the Youth Suicide Prevention Walk Society, which sponsors the walk, says Paul Martin’s Liberal government committed \$65-million for suicide prevention awareness. But, Watts says that is still not enough. He wants to see that figure raised to the billions. The group is also encouraging people to write to federal members of parliament to urge government to respond to the epidemic.



Photo by Jennifer Ashawasegai
From left to right - top: Tyler Joseph,
Reno Trimble, Thomas Watts,
bottom: Vincent Watts,
Edward Meldrum



Photo by Jennifer Ashawasegai
From left to right - Reno Trimble, Tyler Joseph, Thomas Watts

The Youth Suicide Prevention Walk press release notes the suicide rate among First Nations Youth is at an epidemic high. "The Nunavut region alone is at a high of 11 times the national average. Between 70 and 80 per cent of all Canadian youth consider suicide before graduation from high school. More than 25,000 youth attempt suicide each year and of those, 250 are successful."

This is the fourth and final year for the walk, with its slogan, Making a Difference One Step at a Time. "Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Walk is a group of youth walkers and their support staff and volunteers who walked from Nanaimo, B.C. to Ottawa, Ontario in 2003, 2004 and 2005. In 2003 we walked for the Red race and in 2004 we walked for the yellow race. In 2005 we walked for the Black race and in 2006, our last year, we will be walking for the white race and our circle will be complete," the press release says.

During their trek in 2004, the youth carried their message to about 50 reserves across the country, as well as to junior high schools, high schools, juvenile detention centres, friendship centres and to Chiefs throughout Canada.

Twenty-one-year-old Reno Trimble, who has participated in every walk so far, says, "It's been rough, but well worth it." Trimble has seen change since the beginning. He says suicide was tough and hard for people to accept, and people were scared to talk about it.

In the beginning there wasn't much support along the way, but over the last couple of years as more people found out, support has been steadily increasing. Trimble says, "It's a little easier this year because more people know about it ... Old people talk to us now and it's really touching." And since the first walk, people now know what they are doing and when they go by, he says people thank them.



Photo by Jennifer Ashawasegai
Reno Trimble relaxes before putting more miles on his feet

Trimble has learned a few things from the innately personal to the practical, along the way. He's learned not to sit down after walking for a long time, he's learned to wear bug stuff [a net], he's learned about Native cultures along the way, and he's learned to stick with older shoes [as he sports his slightly worn Reebok pumps].

A couple of other things he has thought about is that the walk team has never had a very reliable vehicle for Vincent Watts to drive. Both Trimble and Watts mention they have been through six motors and all kinds of car parts along the way. Their most recent van broke down somewhere in Quebec on the way to Sydney. Watts says they weren't sure whether they were going to make their walk launch on time. But they made it, to their relief.

The last walker in the group is 21-year-old Tom Watts, son to Vincent. He participated in the first two walks, but didn't walk last year because of family commitments. He wants people who are thinking about ending

their lives to know, "There's always someone that cares and wants to help. We're only a few of them. We're walking for them and raising as much awareness as we can."

Watts' aunt committed suicide about eight years ago, and he says he's walking as much for his aunt as he's walking for other family members, and adds he's a father and a role model for his son's generation.

And his father, Vincent Watts says this journey has been incredible. A lot of people have been telling the walkers their stories about how suicide has affected their lives. He says, "There's a lot of beautiful people out there." He also expressed thanks to the Mi'kmaq people for their hospitality at the walk's launch.

After this walk is over, Vincent Watts still has another aspiration, to have a day in the year declared Aboriginal/Inuit Suicide Prevention Awareness Walk Day.

The group needs to raise money along the way for gas, food and lodging and incidentals for their vehicle. (Did I mention they went through six motors in the last three walks?)

They gratefully accept donations on the road. Cheques can be made out to Youth Suicide Prevention Walk, and deposits can be made at any Bank of Montreal. The group also has a charity number available. For more information, visit their website at www.yspw.org.