

'Go kill yourself': Social media messages encourage Indigenous youth to commit suicide

WARNING: This story contains graphic content

By Jody Porter, CBC News Posted: Feb 03, 2017 5:00 AM ET Last Updated: Feb 03, 2017 2:17 PM ET



Jolynn Winter, 12, left, and Chantel Fox, 12, centre, from the community of Wapekeka First Nation in Ontario, died by suicide in January. Chantel is survived by her twin sister, Chanel, pictured far right. (Supplied by the Winter and Fox families/CBC News)

A grief-stricken mother from a northern Ontario First Nation is sharing the hate-filled social media messages her 12-year-old daughter received on the day of her death by suicide, in hopes of saving the lives of other girls in her community.

"If I'd seen those earlier, if she showed them to me, I think I could have done something, tried to talk to her, not to believe those words," Sandra Fox told CBC News.

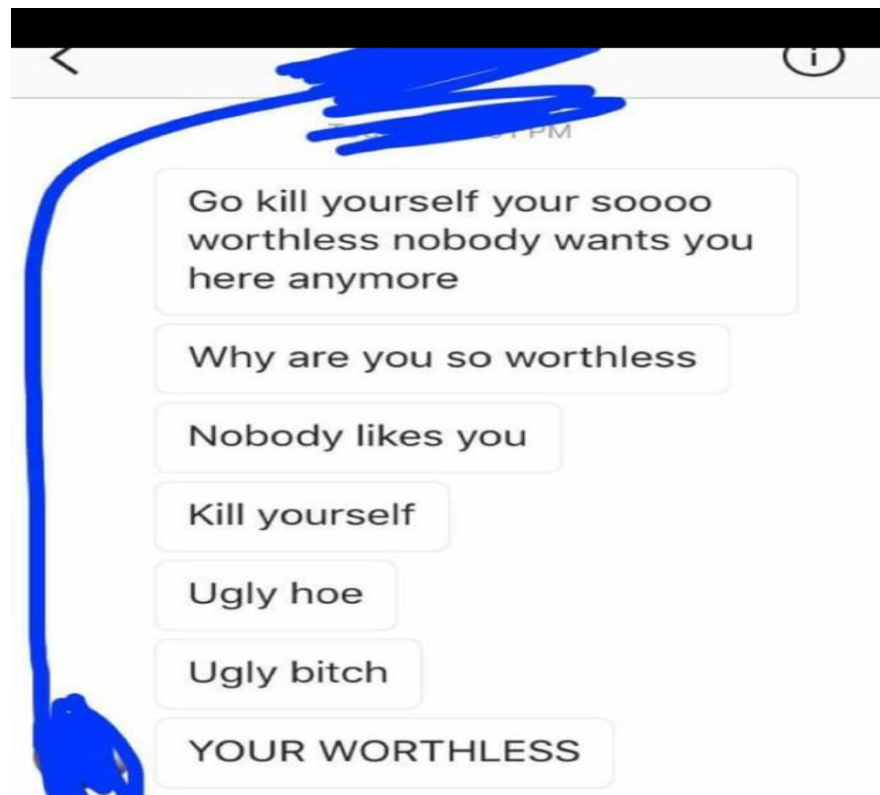
Fox's daughter, Chantel, died by suicide early in January in Wapekeka First Nation, a few days after her friend, Jolynn Winter, also 12, died by suicide. Several other girls from the community, about 600 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, Ont., remain on suicide watch and at least two of them have also received messages encouraging them to kill themselves.

Screen shots of the messages, with some of the identifying information obscured, were obtained by CBC News.



One of the messages received by Chantel Fox, 12, on the day she died by suicide, according to her mother, Sandra Fox. (CBC)

They appear to originate from three different social media accounts that parents from Wapekeka and social workers involved with the community believe originate outside the First Nation and may have been sent under false names.



Sandra Fox says at least one other girl from Wapekeka, who is currently on suicide watch, has received messages like this one. (CBC)

"I'm just concerned so that it won't happen to anybody else's kid, what happened to my daughter," Fox said.

Earlier this week, Fox said she was worried that police weren't taking the matter seriously. On Friday, she told CBC News that officers had followed up with her.

"They're finally doing something," Fox said after a visit to the police station in Thunder Bay, where she signed release documents allowing officers to access the social media accounts on both of her daughters' tablets.

The mother of another girl, who is demonstrating suicidal behaviour, also spoke to police about messages her daughter has been receiving, Fox said.

A third girl from Wapekeka, also at risk of suicide, is getting the hate-filled messages, too, she said.

Provincial police will only say they are investigating, but refused to provide any further details.



Some young people are using Facebook as a diary, leaving them exposed and vulnerable, says Valerie Ooshag, a mental health worker in Eabametoong First Nation. (Jody Porter/CBC)

A mental health counsellor who works with First Nations youth in the same area said that young people are too often using Facebook as a diary, which leaves them exposed and vulnerable.

"Sometimes people on social media just find your problems are entertainment, and I find that really sad," Valerie Ooshag said. "I've seen some nasty stuff on Facebook, like people telling people to kill themselves. It's just horrible."

Creating youth centres in First Nations where young people can reach out for help to mental health counsellors in person could help curb the problem of children revealing too much online, she said.

Since those resources aren't available in Wapekeka or Eabametoong, where Ooshag works, she offered these words of advice to young people who may be tempted to reveal their suicidal thoughts online:

"There are people that care about you that will listen to you, not just reading it on a Facebook status," she said.

Where to get help

Kids Help Phone – 1-800-668-6868 (Phone), Live Chat (online chat counselling)
— visit www.kidshelpphone.ca

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention: **Find a 24-hour crisis centre**

Health Canada's toll-free number for the First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line is 1-855-242-3310.

If you're worried someone you know may be at risk of suicide, you should talk to them, says the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention. Here are some warning signs:

- Suicidal thoughts.
- Substance abuse.
- Purposelessness.
- Anxiety.
- Feeling trapped.
- Hopelessness and helplessness.

- Withdrawal.
- Anger.
- Recklessness.
- Mood changes.