

STRENGTHENING
RELATIONSHIPS
FOR SHARED PROSPERITY



Circle Alberta

Dialogues on Aboriginal Futures

Report from the Communities

October 2008



John Humphrey Centre
for Peace and Human Rights
pour la paix et les droits de la personne

The John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights would like to thank the participation of the following communities in our dialogues and for sharing your vision and hopes:

- Grande Prairie
- Peace River
- Lac La Biche
- St. Paul
- Rocky Mountain House
- Medicine Hat
- Saddle Lake First Nation
- High Prairie

You have helped to make this project a success.

We would also like to thank the Friendship Centres in these communities and the *Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association* for their help and support. Special thank you as well to *Wicihitowin: Circle of Shared Responsibility and Stewardship* for their guidance and support.

SPONSORS

Funding support for the community dialogue phase of Circle Alberta provided by:





CIRCLE ALBERTA: REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITIES
TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights	2
Circle Alberta: Dialogues on Aboriginal Futures	
⊗ Circle Alberta's Goal	
⊗ Circle Alberta's Objectives	3
Community Dialogue Process	5
Community Dialogue Results	7
Adult Dialogue Results	
⊗ Celebration	8
⊗ Reflection	9
⊗ Vision	12
Youth Dialogue Results	15
Conclusion	19



About the *John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights*

The *John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights* is a non-governmental organization in Edmonton with a mandate to advance the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights primarily through education, community collaboration and relationship building. The Centre's vision is to create a world that manifests a culture of peace and human rights in which the dignity of every person is respected, valued and celebrated.

One of the prominent events organized in the recent past is the 2006 *Building World Peace: The Role of Religions and Human Rights*, an international conference held in Edmonton. Among the many distinguished speakers at this conference, former First Nations Chief Ovide Mercredi gave a disheartening speech that led the Centre to initiate this gathering in hopes of addressing some of the critical issues facing Aboriginal communities across Alberta and Canada.

CIRCLE ALBERTA: DIALOGUES ON ABORIGINAL FUTURES

The economic, social and human indicators of well-being, quality of life and development continue to be consistently lower among Aboriginal peoples than other Canadians. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that recognizes the important role of all stakeholders including: all levels of government, Aboriginal communities and the private sector.

Circle Alberta is a unique initiative that is unfolding during a critical period in Canadian history. In particular, there are two key factors that lend to the importance and opportune timing of *Circle Alberta*. Firstly, Canada is currently facing a shortage in its labor force. Aboriginal peoples are the fast growing Canadian segment of the population and are a largely untapped resource in the labour market. Secondly, the project builds upon the recent apology made on June 11, 2008 by Stephen Harper on behalf of the Canadian Government to Aboriginal peoples across Canada whose lives have been and continue to be negatively affected by Residential Schools. Since the apology, a question still remains unanswered: Does the Canadian Government's apology represent the first step towards the creation of a new and positive relationship between nations that will ensure continued healing?

CIRCLE ALBERTA'S GOAL

The goal of *Circle Alberta* is to enhance the quality of life of Aboriginal peoples and their capacity for full engagement in the economy and society. While *Circle Alberta's* activities are focused mainly on Alberta, it will provide an opportunity to develop new relationships and address the needs of Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada while drawing on Albertans' experiences.

CIRCLE ALBERTA'S OBJECTIVES

The project's objectives are:

- To facilitate an enhanced understanding of Aboriginal issues among project participants;
- To create new positive relationships between all levels of government, Aboriginal peoples, the private sector and other key stakeholders;
- To showcase and build on current successes and best practices; and,
- To identify concrete plans of action that address Aboriginal capacity development¹, economic engagement² and social development³ in Alberta and Canada.

¹ Ensuring that Aboriginal communities and individuals have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to realize their full potential.

² Aboriginal participation in the economy is a concept of engagement, whereby Aboriginal communities and individuals contribute to, and fully benefit within, Canada's economic growth and prosperity in all regions. (*Strengthening Aboriginal Participation in the Economy*. Report of the Working Group on Aboriginal Participation in the Economy to Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and National Aboriginal Leaders May 11, 2001)

³ Building healthy communities with sustainable goals that enhance educational opportunities, health and well being, family and community supports as well as reduce violence and crime, discrimination, and poverty.

The project will meet these objectives through three unique and sequential phases:

1. Phase I will involve creating a space for dialogue and development of trust with Aboriginal peoples, defining the issues and creating a common understanding of the challenges, while ensuring youth engagement and participation in the dialogue. Hence, dialogue will be conducted with both youth and adults in each community.
2. Phase II will involve relationship building through sharing and building on existing initiatives and experiences, creating a space for effective dialogue among key stakeholders, while enhancing partnership and collaboration.
3. Phase III will focus on moving beyond the dialogue to highlight key solutions to the challenges as well as to support the implementation of activities identified in Phase II. This phase will take the newly formed partnerships beyond the dialogues. It will inform policy development and intergovernmental collaboration and it will also support awareness building of Aboriginal issues among project participants and the public.

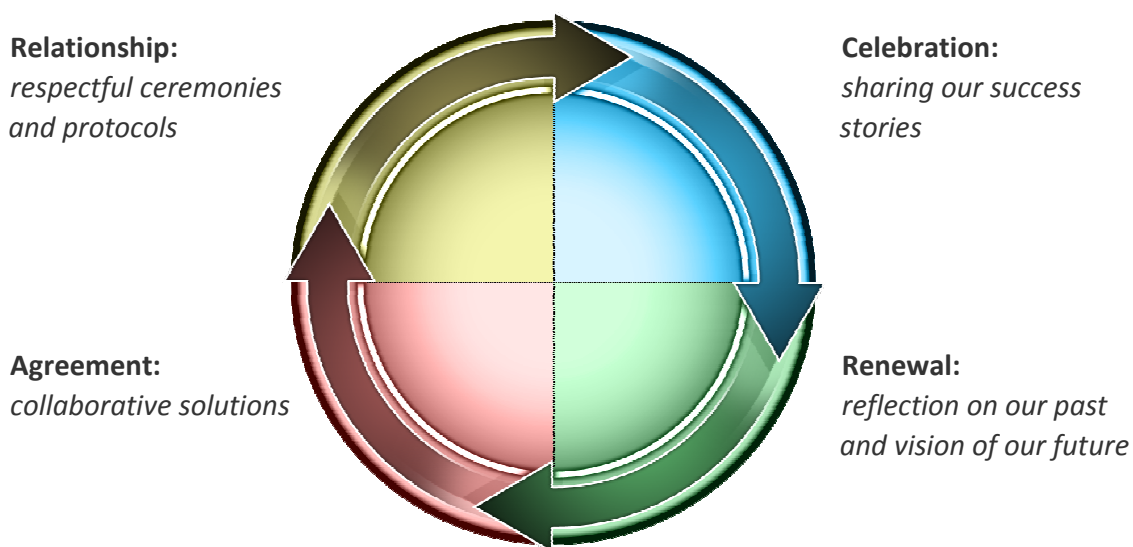
The following report represents the thoughts and experiences of 150 adult and youth dialogue session participants that took place in eight communities throughout Alberta. Each dialogue session focused on three key themes: celebration (community successes), reflection (community challenges/gaps), and vision (future goals). The community dialogues allowed the project to get a clear understanding of the critical challenges that many Aboriginal peoples face from the perspective of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples on the ground.

In parallel with the adult dialogues, youth dialogues also took place. The intention of these dialogues was to engage youth and highlight their perspective on the issues that they face in their communities, particularly around their own individual long-term development and their educational and employment prospects. The youth dialogues were also an opportunity to bring creative perspectives to the table and to engage youth in understanding their role in taking action to address some of these issues in their communities.

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE PROCESS

Each community that hosted a *Circle Alberta* community dialogue followed the process outlined below. Prior to each dialogue three stakeholder groups received invitations to participate in the community dialogue. Aboriginal community members residing within the urban limits as well as First Nation and Métis communities in surrounding areas, the private sector and municipal governments were invited to participate.

The community dialogues were adapted from Wicihitowin's concept of a Circle of Shared Responsibility:



SHARING CIRCLE AND DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

- A circle represents equality and interconnection.
- Everyone has a right to speak from personal experience— “from the heart”—and a responsibility to listen in a circle.
- Address the discussion topic, not the comments of others (either positive or negative).
- The Sharing Circle format will incorporate a facilitated open discussion in an effort to respect Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ceremonies and protocols.

¹ Adapted from: “Wicihitowin” – *Circle of Shared Responsibility: Terms of Relationship*. Edmonton: Urban Aboriginal Strategy, n.d.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Celebration:

Please describe successful and/or cooperative initiatives in your community that advance Aboriginal rights and prosperity?

2. Reflection:

What do you see as the biggest issues facing your community regarding Aboriginal rights and prosperity? Are there differences for Elders, men, women, youth?

3. Vision:

What can be done to advance Aboriginal rights and prosperity in your community for future generations?

4. Explain next steps

5. Offering (John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights) and Closing Prayer

LOCATION OF DIALOGUES

1. Grande Prairie (A)
2. Peace River (A & Y)
3. Lac La Biche (A)
4. St Paul (A & Y)
5. Rocky Mountain House (A & Y)
6. Medicine Hat (A)
7. Saddle Lake First Nation (Y)
8. High Prairie (A & Y)

⁴ Adult

⁵ Youth

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE RESULTS

The results presented in this report summarize the thoughts and experiences of the individuals who participated in the community dialogue sessions. To maintain consistency, the responses are presented to the reader in the same order that the questions were posed during each session.

Prior to each dialogue session invitations were sent to municipal governments, the local Chamber of Commerce and Aboriginal communities within and surrounding each urban centre. Overall, the majority of the participants who accepted our invitation and attended the dialogues were Aboriginal community members who worked in and/or resided within the urban centers. There was an overwhelming lack of non-Aboriginal attendance at each dialogue session. As such, there appeared to be a certain reluctance and/or apathy within non-Aboriginal populations throughout the first phase of the project.

Nonetheless, the report outlines many community successes, challenges/gaps and future goals in hopes of stimulating additional dialogue that can lead to the development of strategic action plans to help bring about full inclusion of Aboriginal communities in Alberta's economy. In addition, three themes surfaced during the community dialogues: social development, capacity building, and economic engagement. These themes are utilized throughout this report to help organize the results to guide future initiatives.

ADULT DIALOGUE RESULTS

CELEBRATION: *Please describe successful and/or cooperative initiatives in your community that advance Aboriginal rights and prosperity?*

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The following items were identified as enhancing Aboriginal peoples' quality of life at home, work, educational settings or in their communities.

- ⊗ EMAI and FMNI Aboriginal liaison workers in the public educational system help to enhance the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the public school system by providing cultural content and context.
- ⊗ Community events that celebrate Aboriginal cultures while also bringing different community members together bring about a sense of community, pride, and help to improve self-esteem and a shared sense of identity. For example, Pow-Wows, Round Dances, History in the Hills, Dream Catchers Conference, and National Aboriginal Day are identified as successful events because they bring a diverse range of community members together to celebrate Aboriginal cultures.
- ⊗ Youth Justice Committees are identified as positive and important community structures. These committees are perceived as beneficial because they are oriented towards a restorative justice process that proactively prevents criminal records and involves the wider community in the Justice system.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The following items were identified as enhancing Aboriginal peoples' capacity to access resources (training, education, housing, employment).

- ⊗ Aboriginal Interagency Committees that actively bring different community agencies and organizations together on a regular basis.
- ⊗ Every community that had a Native Friendship Centre identified the Friendship Centre as an important resource for Aboriginal people in urban settings. These Centres provide access to cultural knowledge, practices, and support networks; community supports, programming and services; basic necessities (food, clothing, shelter); employment services; and, a safe culturally-respectful environment.
- ⊗ Communication between different interest groups based upon respect and listening can go a long way to building common/shared understandings that can then contribute to a more inclusive community and economy.
- ⊗ One-stop shops that can provide various services to all Aboriginal peoples in one location including: housing, employment, education, training, literacy programs, health and justice.

ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

The following items were identified as enhancing full economic engagement of Aboriginal peoples.

- ⊗ Numerous participants spoke about the importance of building partnerships between First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and non-Aboriginals. These relationships can help to enhance the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples through shared understandings, goals and resources.
- ⊗ Métis employment and housing service agencies aid Métis individuals by helping to establish themselves in an urban setting.
- ⊗ Many participants stated that due to high Aboriginal youth dropout rates during high school, upgrading programs are of great importance for attaining higher education or employment training and skills. Upgrading programs are especially successful when they include cultural content, one on one supportive instruction, flexible scheduling, experiential learning and smaller classroom sizes.

SUMMARY

The above summarizes what the community dialogues identified as enhancing Aboriginal peoples quality of life in Alberta. At the core of all of these successful programs/initiatives and integral to enhancing Aboriginal peoples' lives is: active communication, support, respect, sharing, and listening by all interest groups, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Furthermore, when participants were asked why the above programs/initiatives were perceived as successes, they responded, "The programs and services illustrate how we [Aboriginal peoples] are taking control of our lives. These programs and services also help to increase awareness of Aboriginal teachings for white brothers and sisters. In turn, it also helps them to understand Aboriginal culture and diversity within Aboriginal peoples and cultures."

REFLECTION: *What do you see as the biggest issues facing your community regarding Aboriginal rights and prosperity? Are there differences for Elders, men, women, youth?*

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The following items were identified as impeding Aboriginal peoples' quality of life at home, work, educational settings or in their communities.

- ⊗ There is no real change evident in child welfare process/system. One participant shared that everyone needs to have a family and be loved. Many Aboriginal families have been separated due to social service interventions which place many children in adoption situations or group homes outside their community.

-
- ⊗ Another participant shared that group homes and adoptions often repeat the wrong doings of residential schools. The children are separated from the support of their families, culture, identity, and community.
 - ⊗ Affordable housing was an issue in every community.
 - ⊗ Each community reported that the general public needs to overcome misperceptions and realize that Aboriginal peoples do not get every thing for free: “We are like everyone else. We have to work for everything that we have. We come from the same places: all cultures have broken families, addiction, and social issues. We are all dealing with the same issues.” There is also a need to explore the similarities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.
 - ⊗ Not only is there a need to address the changing demographics and needs of Aboriginal people, but also to ensure that within social services the workers are better representative of the client population. “Aboriginal people are the fastest growing population in Canada. Unfortunately, more of our people are in jail and 56% of our kids in care while only 5% of Children and Youth Service workers are Aboriginal.”
 - ⊗ Establishing or rebuilding trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal needs to be addressed. Mistrust is a barrier to constructive relationships and a safe environment needs to be created to build these relationships. As one participant pointed out, “People like to go to where they are accepted like bingo hall, bars and slots. Comfort places.”
 - ⊗ Many Aboriginal youth are not learning to function in the current education system. As a result, many youth participate in home schooling. Home schooling allows for a healthier learning environment; however, these students will carry this inability to function beyond the school setting.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The following items were identified as impeding Aboriginal peoples’ capacity to access resources (training, education, housing, employment).

- ⊗ “People/programs trying to ‘fix us’ and not being allowed to fix ourselves.”
- ⊗ There is no sense of ‘change’ arising from the long-term work to enact ‘change’. This is resulting in a continual sense of frustration within Aboriginal communities.
- ⊗ Some participants shared that the cultural character trait that holds Aboriginal people back is shyness: “Some Aboriginal peoples grow old and still have shyness. This needs to be overcome because shyness can be misinterpreted by authority figures as unintelligence.”

-
- ⊗ Many of the Aboriginal participants shared that the large amount of paperwork required for administrative positions and to access funding contradicts Aboriginal cultural means of communicating through oral traditions. This particular frustration may be heightened by what was identified as a perpetual shortage of core funding that in turn creates staffing shortages. Hence, many non profit organizations are left doing a lot with very little support or resources. Excessive paperwork compounds this issue. Paperwork was not perceived as efficient or effective in grassroots programming and services.
 - ⊗ Non-aboriginal communities want ‘credentials’ such as proof of qualification, while Aboriginal communities generally value life experience and knowledge gained and shared through experience.
 - ⊗ There is a need for more staff support to prevent burnout of non profit and Aboriginal organizations.
 - ⊗ “Aboriginal” is an all-encompassing term that First Nations and Métis people do not relate to in the same way that the non-Aboriginal communities do when discussing ‘rights’ (Aboriginal rights, Treaty rights, or human rights). The general public needs to be made aware that not all Aboriginal peoples have Treaty rights.
 - ⊗ When Treaty Aboriginal students go to university there are different acceptance standards set: 53 % for Aboriginal and 73% for non-Aboriginal. These different standards cause resentment and foster stereotypes. Aboriginal people are equal to others and should be treated with the same standard: “We [Aboriginal peoples] want to be the same as anyone else.”
 - ⊗ Elders need appropriate respect and a place in communities as teachers.
 - ⊗ Geographic isolation is perceived as a barrier to accessing needed services that are only offered in larger centers like Edmonton or Calgary.

ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

The following items were identified as impeding full economic engagement of Aboriginal peoples.

- ⊗ Every community reported that program funding is never enough and is usually piecemeal for one year; therefore, the funding is not long term enough to make a real difference.
- ⊗ Numerous participants expressed that the general public needs to gain a greater understanding of how funding works for Aboriginal communities, agencies, programs and services and the resource challenges that exist: “The general public does not understand why we [Aboriginal agencies] need more money.” The general public has a tendency to assume Aboriginal communities are always, unjustifiably, requesting additional funding. It was reported that the provincial and federal governments have not adjusted core funding for 11 years; therefore, various Aboriginal programs and services are not economically sustainable.

-
- ⊗ One barrier reported by every community was stereotyping. As one participant shared, “even with a degree it is hard to get work as an Aboriginal”. The act of negatively labeling individuals can cause barriers to accessing basic needs like housing, education, employment and justice. Landlords still openly discriminate against Aboriginal tenants with blatant refusal to rent once meeting potential tenant face-to-face.

SUMMARY

The above summarizes what the community dialogues identified as impeding many Aboriginal peoples from accessing and sharing in the quality of life that most Albertans enjoy. At the core of all of the barriers addressed in this section are intra- and inter- cultural barriers that are perpetuated by discrimination and racism. According to participants, barriers need to be addressed first at home and within the educational system. It is therefore vital that programs/initiatives that were identified in the celebration section continue to receive funding to build common/shared understanding, relationship and trust to foster more inclusive communities.

VISION: *What can be done to advance Aboriginal rights and prosperity in your community for future generations?*

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The following items were identified as what can be done to advance Aboriginal peoples’ quality of life at home, work, educational settings or in their communities.

- ⊗ One person who cares can make all the difference to an individual.
- ⊗ “We all need to overcome our apprehensions or fears of interacting between First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal.”
- ⊗ All communities need to engage in dialogue to solve community issues.
- ⊗ “We all need to stop labeling and judging by what we see.”
- ⊗ There are various resources and programs available on reserves for Aboriginal peoples but these same services are lacking in urban centre where many First Nation community members are moving.
- ⊗ Aboriginal communities need addiction counseling services in urban centers that follow Aboriginal practices and ways of understanding. For example, Aboriginal peoples should be guiding Aboriginal clientele.
- ⊗ “We need to find ways to keep First Nation, Métis and Inuit families together.”
- ⊗ “We need to continue building healthy communities through Aboriginal ways and the circle.”

-
- ⊗ “We need to encourage more focused efforts to interact and achieve greater mixing and involvement of all community members.”
 - ⊗ There are unique demands on urban centres due to the urbanization trend amongst Aboriginal populations. There are however limited places for First Nations community members to go and limited to no available resources in smaller urban communities.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The following items were identified as what can be done to advance Aboriginal peoples’ capacity to access resources (training, education, housing, employment).

- ⊗ There is a need for more visible role models to help Aboriginal youth see themselves in the world around them. There is a need for healthy and positive visibility and acknowledgement.
- ⊗ Aboriginal people need to share more of the changes/successes that occur in Aboriginal communities with the general public to increase awareness.
- ⊗ Classification and descriptors create tension and division: i.e. First Nation, Status, Non-status, on-reserve, off-reserve, Métis, etc. “We need to find a way around these descriptors. For example, promote all people as ‘native’.”
- ⊗ “We need take the time to learn from our children and youth and listen to our Elders.”
- ⊗ There needs to be more celebration/acknowledgement of non-aboriginal efforts to enhance Aboriginal socio-economic inclusion.
- ⊗ Community leaders and anyone in a leadership role needs to be aware of their responsibilities and to lead by example.
- ⊗ There needs to be more collaboration and relationship building between all community members Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.
- ⊗ Education is perceived as the buffalo that will move Aboriginal peoples forward toward shared prosperity and human rights.
- ⊗ Teachers and principals need to enhance their understanding of Aboriginal learning styles and work to provide them.
- ⊗ Need to break down racism and discrimination in general public, schools, programs and services.
- ⊗ Aboriginal parents need to be more aware and involved their children lives and parents need to educate themselves about what opportunities there are for their children in the school system.

ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

The following items were identified as what can be done to advance full economic engagement of Aboriginal peoples.

- ⊗ There is a need for more First Nation and Métis people to be involved in organized community groups, agencies, governments, etc.
- ⊗ “We all need to think of now, not the past.”
- ⊗ Stop placing money as the first priority.
- ⊗ There is a need for creative employment opportunities like job sharing.
- ⊗ More cross-cultural training would help foster a more inclusive economy.

SUMMARY

The above section summarizes what can be done to advance Aboriginal peoples’ rights and prosperity in communities across Alberta. Each dialogue session identified steps that have been taken to develop programs and initiatives that are enhancing Aboriginal peoples’ social development, capacity building and economic engagement. It is evident however that efforts cannot stop here. Current initiatives and programs that are focused on enhancing full inclusion through cultural teachings, practices, relationship building and collaborative efforts need to be furthered if Aboriginal communities are to share in the Alberta advantage. Overall, each community is dealing with similar issues: housing, employment, education training, discrimination, racism and a need for improvement in social services.

YOUTH DIALOGUE RESULTS

Dialogues sessions were also held with Aboriginal youth. A different approach was taken with the Youth Dialogues. *Circle Alberta* wanted to get an understanding of what it is like to be an Aboriginal youth living in Alberta. Hence, the following represents the thoughts and experiences of various Aboriginal youth from across the province.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The following describes what communities offer Aboriginal youth and what is available to help them attain their personal development goals.

- ⊗ Youth/Outreach Centers provide a place where youth can go to feel safe and receive support. The youth identified these Centers as the best, most secure places to gather. Unfortunately, these types of Centers close during the summer months, at which time the youth have no alternative place to go.
- ⊗ Youth/Outreach Centers provide a place where youth can engage in education, where they can be themselves, where they do not have to “leave their issues at home” (as they are asked to do in the mainstream schools), and where they can take breaks from the stresses of their lives when they need to, have bad days when they need to, and lean on the staff and other youth for support when they need to.
- ⊗ Mainstream schools are ‘rule-oriented’, while Youth/Outreach Centres are ‘goal-oriented’. This creates a supportive learning environment for the youth in which they can feel comfortable.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The following describes what youth identified as the biggest issues facing their communities.

- ⊗ The drug scene provides a social support network for youth: the youth admit that this is not the ideal form of support, but it is better than isolation.
- ⊗ It is difficult to escape drug use, even if one tries. Many of the youth expressed a desire to abstain from use, but support services are inaccessible (Edmonton based services are too far, especially for the economically disadvantaged).
- ⊗ In order to encourage abstinence, the youth want rehab centres with youth programs and a street, as opposed to mainstream approaches.
- ⊗ Language was identified as a barrier between youth and adults. Although the youth want to speak about the issues affecting them, they often do not speak the same ‘language’ as adults. This creates an intergenerational tension and usually results in decreased understanding from the adult perspective and decreased confidence from the youth perspective.

-
- ⊗ If a youth drops out or is pushed out of the mainstream school they have to wait until they are older to get funding as a mature student. This is a major barrier for many students trying to engage in educational opportunities and who may want to remain in school in another context.
 - ⊗ Youth stated that housing is unaffordable and unavailable: this was a major issue and was affecting every aspect of life in the urban communities. Couch-surfing was a popular option to deal with this issue instead of sleeping on the street.
 - ⊗ Youth stated that labeling and discrimination often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies: if you are labeled a 'trouble-maker', chances are you will become one, regardless of your intent.
 - ⊗ youth expressed frustration over readily available alcohol on Reservations across Alberta and the continued issues related to addictions; being separated from their families, their communities, their traditions, their Native identity.
 - ⊗ Youth expressed frustration and hurt due to the child welfare system that continues to place them in group homes and/or adopts them out to non-Aboriginal peoples.
 - ⊗ Many youth cannot afford registration fees and equipment costs which are required to participate in most mainstream sporting and recreational activities.

ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

The following identifies how 'we' can bring about positive change and enhanced opportunities for youth.

- ⊗ Youth expressed that they are rarely celebrated for the good things that they do in their communities and would like to be recognized for their achievements and successes.
- ⊗ Many youth want access to a youth centre or a multipurpose recreational centre that is not cost prohibitive.
- ⊗ Participants stated that when adults develop programming for youth without consulting with the youth, more often than not, the programming is not fun for the youth. Therefore, it would be beneficial to engage youth in program development to ensure their engagement.
- ⊗ Youth would like to see Justice Circles used in urban centres not just in reservations.
- ⊗ There is a need for greater understanding of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) in the public educational system.
- ⊗ There is a need for more proactive rather than reactive programming for youth who cannot afford mainstream recreational and sporting activities.

-
- ⊗ Youth want opportunities to speak up and share what they think needs to be done to help their communities.
 - ⊗ Youth want more opportunities to creatively express themselves and heal through music, art, drama and cultural opportunities.
 - ⊗ There is a need for educational opportunities that are flexible and inclusive of different ways of learning and cultures.
 - ⊗ There is a need for individuals who work with Aboriginal communities to have a connection and long-term interest in seeing things change.

SUMMARY

The above section captures what was shared during the youth dialogues. In summary, the youth reported that educational programs which offer alternative-learning environments and that are goal-oriented instead of rule-oriented helps to facilitate the attainment of their educational goals. Similar to the adult dialogues, youth stated that discrimination and labeling was the number one barrier impeding them from attaining their personal pursuits whether they were educational or employment oriented. The youth also had numerous suggestions to help bring about positive change in their communities. The most common response was oriented towards improved communication between adults and youth in order to enhance understanding as well as to identify strategies to improve social services, educational programs, and recreational, sporting and leisure opportunities.

CONCLUSION

In parting, the successes, barriers and future aspirations presented in this report are not new, thus reinforcing that these issues still need to be addressed before Aboriginal peoples' full economic engagement can be realized. During each dialogue session it became apparent that individuals, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, wanted to contribute to the solution but felt limited in their capacity and knowledge of how to do so. In short, each individual has the potential to contribute and be part of the solution. What needs to occur is a consolidation of our efforts and resources in order to align strategies to develop action plans that can incorporate and acknowledge all stakeholders' goals and resources.

The *Circle Alberta Gathering: From Dialogue to Action*, which is a two-day dialogue at the Shaw Conference Centre on October 24 and 25, 2008, will focus primarily on supportive healing and relationship building through dialogue on social development, capacity building and economic engagement. Through dialogue, *Circle Alberta* aims to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal peoples, create healthy communities, and foster meaningful, sustained economic engagement.

The three key groups of stakeholders for this project will be brought together for a second time to break down barriers, foster healing and positive relationships, and support common understanding and goals. It will acknowledge our past in order to understand and focus on the future. It is not a needs assessment. It will provide a space for Aboriginal peoples to speak directly to individuals and organizations that profoundly influence their lives and either deepen existing relationships or build new relationships for a shared and prosperous future. Experienced facilitators will guide the dialogue process in order to ensure that all participants have space to speak and the opportunity to build relationships and solutions. *The Gathering* is a dialogue, and as such, is more about the process of building relationships and envisioning solutions, than outcomes.

JOHN HUMPHREY CENTRE FOR PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

7723-85 Street, Edmonton, AB T6C 3B4

T: 780.453.2638 F: 780.454.1519

www.johnhumphreycentre.org

www.circlealberta.ca