
CALGARY URBAN ABORIGINAL INITIATIVE CONSULTATION REPORT

REMOVING BARRIERS: A LISTENING CIRCLE

1999-2000, 2nd Edition





Executive Summary

The *Listening Circle* was designed to meet six goals. These goals and the degree to which each was met are as follows:



Goal One

Identify needs, issues and potential solutions around barriers to service and systems access for people of Aboriginal descent.

Attending Stage 1 focus group consultations were 57 men (n=21), women (n=36), seniors (n=14), and youth (n=12). We also talked to nine Aboriginal employees working in mainstream organizations. From these focus groups, a number of barriers and issues were identified in the domains of services, housing, education, employment, and justice. Other issues raised by the participants were in the areas of culture, human rights, and health. Solutions to the challenges were offered and all of this information went forward to Stages 2 and 3 of the *Listening Circle* for consideration by service leaders, service providers, and community members.



Goal Two

Identify challenges, successes, and potential solutions for service providers working with urban Aboriginal and Métis communities.

Attending Stage 2 were 129 service providers working in the domains of education (n=13 participants), employment (n=16), health (n=21), housing (n=19), human rights (n=7), justice (n=29), and services (n=31). Focus groups in these domains identified the challenges service providers face in delivering effective service to urban Aboriginal and documented successes they have had and supports they require. They also offered solutions for change. This information was added to Stage 1 and 2 information and went forward to Stage 3.



Goal Three

Engage significant input and involvement from urban Aboriginal and Métis community members.

The Community was involved as much as possible in every phase and stage of the process and much interest and support was generated.



Many more contributed as part of the planning process, and as facilitators, note-takers, organizers, presenters, etc. Treaty Seven Economic Development Corporation and the Métis Nation of Alberta joined the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, The Calgary Homeless Foundation, and the City of Calgary, as conference partners providing additional resources and support to the project. Further, an Advisory Committee, and a Cultural Committee comprised of the conference partners as well as additional community representatives guided the development of the conference.



Goal Four

Develop a forum that would honour, respect, and celebrate Aboriginal traditions.

Respected Elders in the communities were asked to oversee the process to ensure that respect and culturally appropriate consideration were given to Aboriginal peoples and traditions. The foundation of the *Listening Circle* rested on the principles of caring, sharing, honesty and respect which form the basis of Aboriginal law and governance. In Stage 1, prayers and smudge ceremonies were offered as blessings to the process. In both Stages 1 and 2, information was gathered following traditional protocols. In Stage 3, Reg Crowshoe, an elder who holds transfer rights for a Pikanni dispute resolution process, oversaw the extraction of the order of discussion in which discussions between service leaders, service providers, and community members were conducted.



Goal Five

Provide an opportunity for members of the Aboriginal and Métis communities to engage in a solution-focused dialogue with service leaders.

Attending Stage 3 were 175 service leaders, service providers, and community members to discuss the information that came out of Stages 1 and 2. Their task was to work through the barriers, issues, and solutions together, and to develop joint strategies for action. A number of key solutions were identified in this process and solid commitments were made by many of the participants to continue the dialogue and work.



Goal Six

Create an opportunity for the development of joint solutions and action plans from issues and barriers identified.

The verbal and written feedback on evaluation forms from participants at all Stages was very positive.



Most felt that there had been a good opportunity to better understand the concerns of Aboriginal people accessing services and the systemic barriers they face. A majority felt that the process provided a good opportunity for increased dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and a good start on sustainable change.

Written comments indicated that most people liked the format and the process, but did not feel that they had enough time to work through the issues. They were really appreciative of the respect paid to Aboriginal cultures and traditions. Concern was expressed that the momentum and information from the *Listening Circle* not be lost or shelved, as had so many other similar initiatives in the past. Participants wanted to see that this time was different, that some action would be taken.

From the feedback provided on the *Listening Circle*, we feel confident that this project met, and in some respects, exceeded our expectations.



Results and Recommendations by Domain






Apart from the increased dialogue and interaction between groups of people (service leaders, service providers, and members of Aboriginal community) who have rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to sit down and discuss mutual areas of concern, the *Listening Circle* resulted in some concrete proposals for action. A summary of these are presented by domain below.

Justice Domain










The main issues or priorities discussed in the justice domain were the lack of Aboriginal staff in all areas of the justice system; lack of prevention, education, and support; lack of, or inflexible funding; warehousing of Aboriginal people in the prison system; lack of awareness/support re women; systemic discrimination; loss of Métis issues under the First Nations, Aboriginal umbrella; downloading to community without proper support/resources; healing/correction vs. punishment model; non-coordination of services; transportation issues; and lack of attention to social precursors of crime (e.g., poverty, racism, addictions, etc.).

Proposed Solutions included:

-  hire more Aboriginal staff and volunteers at all levels of the justice system and provide appropriate supports (e.g., mentoring programmes)
-  focus on early intervention/prevention models
-  provide funding for transportation and parenting support groups for single parents
-  work together to dispel lack of trust/fear on both sides through education
-  develop on-going, integrated cross-cultural training which includes the historical context and recognition of Aboriginal as encompassing many different cultures, practices, traditions











-  develop a place in the city to practice spirituality
-  focus on home support
-  be open to funding/try new approaches and adjust them as needed rather than disbanding them when they don't work the first time
-  create an Aboriginal Native ombudsman position, mediation vs. adversarial approach
-  create more opportunities for alternative measures involving community (e.g., healing vs. punishment models)
-  provide more access to safe housing
-  implement recommendations in earlier reports (e.g., Cawsey Report)

Education Domain

The main issues in the education domain included the lack of funding and Federal support (e.g., for extracurricular activities, programme, etc.); culturally inappropriate programmes and curriculum including neglect of traditions and language maintenance; racism and discrimination; inadequate participation and support (e.g., unfamiliarity with educational environment; lack of role models/Aboriginal teachers; lack of resources; high drop out rates); and the effects of poverty.

Proposed Solutions included:












-  involve Aboriginal community members and Elders to teach Aboriginal history and traditions and to help revise curriculum and materials
-  address racism through education of staff, parents, students, police, and students in faculties of education
-  educate youth regarding their human rights
-  establish more career planning for Aboriginal youth
-  implement role-model and academic achievement programs
-  hire more Aboriginal liaison workers, teachers, and counsellors
-  make grants and loans easier to access
-  have Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) revisit regulations regarding coverage of tuition fees especially for off-reserve students

Health Domain

The main issues or priorities identified in the health domain were the lack of cultural awareness and respect for Aboriginal health beliefs/practices; service gaps (e.g., transportation, location, information); lack of culturally appropriate services; inadequate emphasis on health promotion and harm prevention; and inconsistent policies regarding medical coverage for Aboriginal people.



Proposed Solutions included:











-  provide cross-cultural training for health systems staff and in health education programmes
-  include/increase Elders and Aboriginal liaison workers as resources in hospitals
-  increase recognition of the Aboriginal Health Council
-  establish more outreach services
-  explore the intricate relationship between health and other domain areas such as education, justice, etc.
-  increase support for spirituality and spiritual traditions in health care including healing rooms
-  develop mentoring programs for Aboriginal health professionals
-  develop an Aboriginal volunteer base to assist Aboriginal people coming to the city for services
-  increase joint planning of programmes and services
-  establish a central health service centre
-  focus on preventive education for Aboriginal people

Services Domain



The main issues or priorities discussed in the services domain were the inadequacies of the service system (e.g., general support services/support for parents, seniors, youth and children, child welfare, youth support); homelessness; lack of culturally appropriate services; breakdown of the family; a lack of Aboriginal staff/decision makers/resources; and lack of involvement of Elders.

Proposed Solutions included:

-  embed cultural practices/traditions in service systems
-  increase subsidized housing for Aboriginal people
-  provide more training for parents regarding traditional child-rearing practices and values
-  increase Aboriginal input into policy development and decisions
-  increase Aboriginal staff in front-line and senior positions
-  provide cross-cultural training for services staff
-  increase early intervention and prevention programmes
-  address discrimination in the system
-  focus on the needs of children and youth
-  teach survival skills for those from rural areas/reserves moving to the urban environment














Funding Domain



The main issues or priorities identified in the funding domain were inappropriate allocation of funds; lack of accountability; under valuing of qualitative outcome measures; inefficiency and unfairness of funding application criteria and procedures (e.g., favoritism); lack of relationship between community and funders; lack of funding; need for one-stop shopping for services; need to expand funding mandates to include holistic services; and sustainability of funding.

Proposed Solutions included:

-  establish longer-term funding for programmes/services
-  establish funding priorities based on needs as identified in conjunction with community
-  develop stewardship, evaluation, monitoring, and leadership skills in fund management
-  develop partnerships with community to better prioritize need and allocate funding
-  support one-stop and holistic services
-  simplify, streamline, and computerize funding applications in collaboration with community
-  create one-stop shopping for funding information
-  remove competition, political agendas, and favouritism from funding decisions
-  expand outcome evaluation beyond quantitative to include qualitative measures of success
-  establish benchmarks for spending across domains, i.e., set standards in each domain for amount of resources allocated to/for Aboriginal people/services
-  explore the feasibility of block funding. This involves allocating total dollars to several agencies which then work together to decide how to spend the money. This reduces competition and allows any savings to be reinvested in the community.

Human Rights Domain



















The issues and priorities raised in human rights include failure of the system¹ to protect/support families and children; lack of understanding of Aboriginal cultures; racism; lack of recognition/violation of traditions and sacred symbols (e.g., personal bundles being opened in security checks); lack of accountability re hiring of Aboriginal staff; forced conformity to mainstream standards and culture; and lack of understanding of/support for consequences of residential school system.

¹ The term Asystem@ was not further defined by participants when they noted this issue. However, some of the systems that were consistently mentioned throughout the consultations were the education, justice, health, and social services systems.



Proposed Solutions:



-  create more opportunities for advocacy and early intervention, increasing support for Aboriginal voices to be heard
-  provide more education on human rights and responsibilities at early ages in home and schools
-  provide more education about entitlements (e.g., social services)
-  simplify human rights complaints procedures
-  provide education on how to lodge a complaint
-  examine social service practices and policy to better reflect needs of Aboriginal families, children, and cultures in collaboration with Aboriginal communities
-  provide cross-cultural education across systems (e.g., social services and police service/justice system)
-  relocate services closer to communities
-  recognize, acknowledge, and address systemic discrimination
-  work more closely with media to promote human rights
-  write history of Aboriginal peoples
-  create a support network for rural to urban transitions, and for families
-  create an advocate or bridging mechanism (e.g., Elders, ombudsman)
-  create a mechanism to ensure or to generate trust in the confidentiality of private information in the service system
-  develop a cultural centre, a place to practice spirituality
-  develop workplace and in-school policies to allow the practice of spiritual beliefs (e.g., smudges, traditional holidays/ceremonies, etc.)

Housing Domain













In the housing domain, the following issues and priorities emerged: lack of education which leads to poor employment opportunities and results in lack of resources for rental/home ownership; lack of specialized/culturally appropriate housing (e.g., to accommodate extended families); lack of information about/access to funds/financial institutions; lack of knowledge/understanding of rental procedures; lack of protection against discrimination; lack of understanding re the impact of residential schools; transient/nomadic nature of many Aboriginal people; and illiteracy or lack of knowledge (e.g., how to fill out forms).

Proposed Solutions:

-  provide support services to assist people in accessing services, especially transition supports from rural to urban
-  increase information on human rights and put teeth into anti-discrimination laws








-  develop relationships between banks, financial institutions and Aboriginal communities to create more flexible criteria, better procedures
-  develop rent to own models, housing cooperatives
-  ensure that federal housing dollars follow the individual not stay with the band
-  encourage subsidized, emergency and transitional housing to allocate space specifically for Aboriginal people and cultures
-  develop more units for people with addictions, families and seniors, and provide more emergency housing for women
-  hire more Aboriginal people in rental services and create an ombudsman position
-  include Aboriginal people in planning, development of housing
-  develop emergency funds for breakdowns in rent payments
-  ensure Aboriginal representation/participation/partnership on housing committees and initiatives, e.g., CMHC, Calgary Homeless Foundation
-  increase development of transitional housing

Employment Domain

The main issues identified here were lack of cultural awareness; lack of opportunities or access due to rigidity of standards (e.g., education and experience requirements); lack of support in the workplace; lack of role-models; and lack of pre-employment services.

Proposed Solutions included:

-  develop continual cross-cultural training for staff at all levels
-  increase the flexibility of employment standards/hiring criteria
-  create or expand a database of the Aboriginal workforce
-  develop a one-stop access point for employment services
-  develop more support programmes (e.g., mentoring, in organizations for Aboriginal employees)



Major Themes

Many of the same issues arose in each of the domains, suggesting that these may be starting points for any action plans developed. The four most common concerns were systemic discrimination; lack of involvement by the Aboriginal community in policy, program planning and institutional change; lack of cross-cultural training; and lack of Aboriginal role models in systems and at all levels of service. It is expected that using these four areas as a starting point for change, many of the other issues would be resolved and suggested solutions obtained. This would be true especially if these actions



were conducted in conjunction with an on-going, well-integrated cross-cultural training program for staff at all levels in each domain.

Two other common themes for solutions that emerged were creating an Aboriginal ombudsman and developing a cultural or spiritual centre in Calgary.

Finally, the following areas were identified as problematic in most of the domains. These were lack of resources; lack of support; lack of awareness (both of services available and Aboriginal culture); bureaucratic barriers; lack of trust; lack of access; culturally inappropriate practices, services and policies; and lack of collaboration and coordination among services and across domains.

These themes were very similar to those obtained by the *Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Initiative: Partnership in Growth Community Consultation* (1999).



Conclusion

It is evident that the *Listening Circle* was a success on many levels and has provided a foundation for responding to some of the recommendations outlined in the *Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal People* (1994).





I. Introduction and Background

The Community Action Plan - Reducing Homelessness in Calgary (1998) invited community participation to address homelessness in the City of Calgary. The Plan also recognized the challenges facing urban Aboriginal people in this regard, and recommended support for the Aboriginal community by developing, designing and implementing a system of culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal people. The following key recommendations were produced to address the issues.

1. Build and recognize Aboriginal community leadership and develop partnerships.
2. Strengthen the Native Friendship Center as a united Aboriginal resource center.
3. Create innovative and culturally sensitive housing options.
4. Develop coordinated, supportive services based on Aboriginal concepts to support Aboriginal leaders in their efforts to eliminate barriers to accessibility and participation of Aboriginal people in the urban community.

Acting on these recommendations, in 1999 April, The City of Calgary Community and Social Development Department obtained funding from the **National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention** to hold a three day conference entitled *Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle* to review the needs identified in the *Community Action Plan* and identify some solutions to the issues raised. Due to the interest in this project from the Aboriginal community, Treaty Seven Economic Development Corporation and The Métis Nation of Alberta became partners to the conference. Their participation greatly expanded and deepened the nature of the inquiry.

With this additional support, it was decided that the November conference would be the final stage of a three stage process. The first two stages involved consultations with members of Aboriginal community (Stage 1), front-line service providers (Stage 2) in the domains of justice, education, health, services, employment, housing, human rights and funding. The latter two categories were not originally included as domains, but were added as they were raised either in Stage 1 or 2. Needs and barriers experienced by urban Aboriginal people were identified, and current best practices and potential solutions generated. This information was carried forward to Stage 3 where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members and service leaders began the process of identifying ways to work together to address these needs and barriers.

In the spring of 2000, an invitation will be extended to *Listening Circle* participants, and the larger community, to attend an information forum where results of *Removing Barriers, A Listening Circle* will be presented.



This report will provide an overview of the consultation process and structure, the mediation model adapted from Aboriginal tradition, results and recommendations in each domain, as well as a summary of the main emergent themes and some suggestions for future direction. For a more exhaustive look at the data obtained in all three stages, interested readers are referred to the *Listening Circle* web-site at:

<http://www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/81/listening/index.html>
(click on Conference 1999 report)





II. Consultation Process and Structure

This project was directed by and for Aboriginal people. Participants had the additional benefit of working in and experiencing a non-confrontational Aboriginal process.

Two key objectives of the conference were to bring awareness of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture to the forefront, and bridge the cultural gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

A challenge for the consultation process was that many community groups are disillusioned with research methods which objectify their experiences and exclude their participation in the research process. Participatory Action Research (PAR) addresses these concerns by providing a grounded framework for community research which reflects cultural sensitivity and relevance by including all members of the community in developing the questions, and by encouraging community members to define issues and participate in developing an effective plan for response and resolution. This approach allows people to draw on their own experiences to achieve tangible and applicable outcomes, and allows for review, discussion, modification, approval, initiation, and utilization of research activities by community members in ways that will specifically benefit their community.

PAR is guided by two fundamental principles:



Democratization of the knowledge process - people normally shut out from research and information become involved in all stages of the project.



Social change - the goals of research are to engage in action that reverses inequalities, empowers the “have-nots”, and ultimately transforms society so power is based in grassroots organizations and individuals.

We also wanted participants to have an opportunity to respond to the issues intelligently. As such, at least one week prior to the Stage 2 and 3 focus group forums, each participant received by mail relevant statistical and research information about the domain in which they were participating.

Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle, was divided into several stages (see Figure 1). These were:



Stage 1: The Aboriginal Community Voice



Stage 2: Front Line Workers Voice and



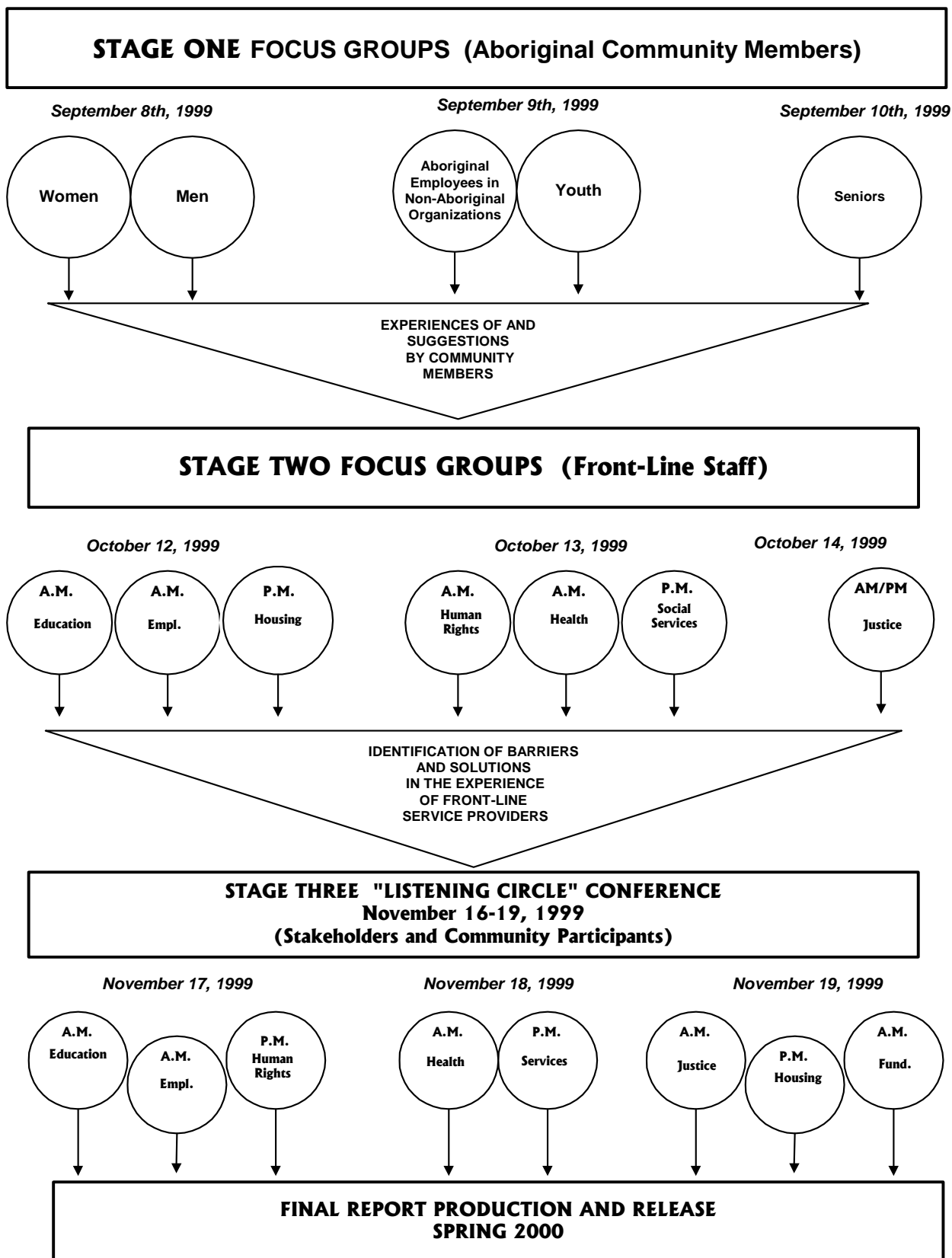
Stage 3: Stakeholders and Community Member Forums



Spring session (2000), Closing Ceremony



Figure 1. Listening Circle Structure





Stage 1 - Aboriginal Community Voice

Over three days (1999 September) members of the urban Aboriginal community participated in focus group discussions. They identified issues and barriers they faced in the domains of justice, education, health, services, housing, and employment. Participants were also asked to share their sense of what works in the urban community and what they thought would help to eliminate or ameliorate the issues they identified.

Sessions were held at the offices of Treaty Seven Economic Development Corporation and the Métis Nation of Alberta: Métis Seniors Association. They opened with a prayer and smudge. Aboriginal facilitators guided all discussions and provided input into the design of the focus group questions based on their own experiences and understanding of challenges in their communities, as well as findings from previous needs assessments conducted in Aboriginal communities in Calgary (see Appendix 1 for focus group questions).

Audio recordings from the focus groups were transcribed and this information was summarized to form part of the information package given to participants in Stages 2 and 3. Following the principles of PAR, all information gathered in Stage 1 of *Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle* was validated by a designated member from each focus group prior to moving on to the next stage of the process.

In total, 57 people (21 men and 36 women) in eleven different focus groups participated in Stage 1. Of these, 14 were seniors, 12 youths, and 9 Aboriginal employees working in non-Aboriginal organizations. Twenty-two self-identified as Métis, 28 as Aboriginal, 1 as Inuit, 1 as non-Aboriginal, and 5 chose not to self-identify.



Stage 2 - Front-Line Service Providers' Voice

Stage 2 (1999 October) took place over a three-day period. Focus groups were held with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers in the domains of education (n=13), employment (n=16), human rights (n=7), services (n=31), health (n=21), justice (n=22), and housing (n=19). In total, 129 people (55 men and 74 women) representing 66 different agencies participated in seventeen Stage 2 focus groups (see Appendix 2).

Prior to the focus groups, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal front-line workers were sent a package that contained research information and statistics pertaining to their specific domain, along with a synopsis of the information gathered in Stage 1. In the focus groups, they were asked to add their perspective to the collected information, outline the challenges they faced in providing effective services for Aboriginal people, and to also note what existing programmes or services they thought worked well. A final task was to identify potential solutions to the issues.



Again, audio-recordings and notes were transcribed, the information was summarized and added to Stage 1 material, and this information was sent to Stage 3 participants along with domain specific research.



Stage 3 -Stakeholders and Community Members Voice

Stage 3 (1999 November) took place over a four-day period. An opening ceremony/ plenary session was held at the University of Calgary Olympic Volunteer Centre, Red and White Club on November 16th, which primarily focused on providing a context and background information to participants about the *Listening Circle* principles and process. A presentation was also given of the Aboriginal extraction from the mediation model that provided the framework.

The scheduled events included a prayer by Annie Bare Shin Bone, welcome addresses from *Listening Circle* partners Ann Manyheads, Treaty Seven Economic Development Corporation; and Ephrim Bouvier, M9tis Nation of Alberta; and a keynote address by Paul Chartrand, former Commissioner to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP). Throughout the afternoon, entertainment was provided by local Aboriginal performers Lesa Odjig, Denty Shingoose, and Dean Malcolm. A feast ended the afternoon's activities.

Domain specific listening circles were held 1999 November 17-19th at La Joie de Vivre conference facility using the decision making model to be discussed in the *Extraction of the Process* section of this report. In total, 175 community members (n=74) and agency's (n=101) participated. The latter group included representatives who were considered to be leaders in their domains from 70 agencies (see Appendix 3).

The issues, solutions, and existing best practices that were identified in Stages 1 and 2 had been itemized resulting in a total of approximately 700 lines (roughly 100 per group) of issues and solutions for discussion. Domains included were education (n=12 agency, 16 community participants); employment (n=18 agency, 10 community participants); human rights (n=14 agency, 19 community participants); housing (n=17 agency, 5 community participants); justice (n=16 agency, 19 community participants); services (n=13 agency, 14 community participants); health (n=24 agency, 10 community participants); and funding (n=16 agency, 7 community participants).





III. Evaluation of the Process

The response rate from mailed-out evaluation forms for Stages 1 and 2 was low. Out of 57 participants in Stage 1, eight responded, and 40 of the 129 participants in Stage 2 responded. From these 48 responses, 39 (81%) participants felt they had a good opportunity to share in the *Listening Circle* and 46 (96%) felt that their issues were heard.

Most participants from Stage 1 and Stage 2, felt the process provided (n=23, 48%) or somewhat provided (n=19, 40%) an opportunity for increased discussion between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and most felt confident (n=14, 29%) or somewhat confident (n=20, 42%) that plans would be developed to address their concerns. Thirty-six respondents (75%) considered the process was respectful to people of Aboriginal descent.

For Stage 3, out of 64 (37%) participants who completed an evaluation form most felt that they had a better understanding of the concerns of Aboriginal people accessing services and the systemic barriers they face (n=59, 92%); the challenges faced by service providers (n=56, 88%); and they were able or somewhat able to identify some possible strategies for removing barriers (n=54, 84%). A majority felt that the process provided a good opportunity for increased dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (n=59, 92%) and a good start on sustainable change (n=58, 91%).

Written comments indicated that most people liked the format and the process, but did not feel that they had enough time to work through the issues, especially in groups where some people dominated the discussion. They were really appreciative of the respect paid to Aboriginal cultures and traditions; “*The native culture approach was the thing that made this process so very meaningful*”. Concern was expressed that the momentum and information from the *Listening Circle* not be lost or shelved, as had so many other initiatives in the past. They wanted to see that this time was different, that some action would be taken:

After all these studies/surveys being conducted for years and things haven't improved. What is happening, or what are we going to do to change the statistics?

Things never change in the city of Calgary. We continue to have a colonial piece-meal philosophy.

From the feedback provided on the *Listening Circle*, we feel confident that this project met, and in some respects, exceeded our expectations.





IV. Extraction of the Process



The Traditional Mediation Process

Aboriginal people have always had laws and government including the means for resolving disputes. North American societies were dynamic societies that adapted constantly to change and circumstances. Aboriginal people were influenced by their relationships with one another and the environment. Daily systemic discrimination against Aboriginal people, however unintentional, demeans and diminishes the importance and relevance of their cultures, beliefs, and practices. Aboriginal people still retain the knowledge of their culture, despite severe persecution. An informant in the Manitoba Justice Inquiry states:

What is certain for Aboriginal people, is that what they have managed to retain to a considerable degree in all this turmoil, is their distinct identity (Province of Manitoba, 1991).




In fact, despite attempts to eradicate Aboriginal culture, cultural distinctiveness remains a hallmark of Aboriginal life. The distinctiveness of Aboriginal practices and beliefs is located at a fundamental level; and forms the core of Aboriginal social systems and governing processes. For instance, Aboriginal law is based on the four principles of caring, sharing, honesty, and respect. This differs from Canadian common law which is based on a single principle, that is, the test of the “reasonable man”, an individual rights-based philosophy. The principles and tests in law reflect the foundation of socially accepted cultural practices that serve to reinforce social standards and that become the benchmarks for acceptable behaviour. The Aboriginal worldview is not ‘individual rights’ based, instead, the philosophy instills collective (sharing) and interactive (caring) principles. From this comparison, we see that the Aboriginal foundation of law is radically different from that of European law.

The *Listening Circle* incorporated as its foundation the four principles of Aboriginal law by:



Including Aboriginal youth, seniors, men and women in all aspects of the *Listening Circle* discussions, planning, workshops, and community capacity building forums. The organization of the project provided the space and opportunity for urban Aboriginal people to participate in a traditional non-confrontational forum. Direction was given by an elder prior to the forums and during the planning of the forums to enable participants to meet the stated goal of listening to the voices of the urban Aboriginal community.



-  Selecting knowledgeable elders as the key community figures in the forums.
-  Having the forums co-facilitated by members of the Aboriginal community.
-  Ensuring that Aboriginal delegates were central to developing solutions and recommendations for change. By including community delegates alongside government and non-community delegates, all parties had an opportunity to learn and exchange their views on the existing structures, and talk about bringing about change.

An Aboriginal mediation model, described next, formed the structure and process for Stage 3 of the *Listening Circle*.



The Historical Operation of the Mediation Circle

Historically, pipe ceremonies or mediation circles, were activated when a community member approached a ceremonialist for help with a problem. The ceremonialist always held transfer rights that permitted him to operate or talk about and use the process of the circle. The community member who asked for help became the host in the circle.

The ceremonialist always selected his helpers in the circle. The selection process was the sole responsibility of the ceremonialist. The host(s) could bring his/her supports. The helpers in the circle were important for successful discussions and productive work. When all the participants were chosen and seated in the circle, the process formed an intricate arrangement of interactional relationships. Each person was selected because of an obligation and/or a responsibility he or she might have had within the community or to the hosts on the subject. One of the key roles of the ceremonialist was to construct this arrangement of relationships which were not always fixed, but were subjective and socially constructed.

The first physical action in the circle occurred when the host presented the issues. After the issue(s) were heard, the ceremonialist called upon the specialists he selected to clarify or respond to the issues raised. These specialists were formally called drummers and are the equivalent of today's service providers. After all the parties had spoken in the circle, the ceremonialist stated what he believed was the consensus. When consensus had been reached, an agreement was formed. The ceremonialist had the recorder do a "read out" of the commitments. In a traditional circle the pipe would be smoked to seal the agreement.

For the *Listening Circle*, three stages of discussion were extracted from this model: (1) issues, (2) drummers (service providers) and, (3) the consensus of issues and solutions. In applying the extraction, every effort was made to ensure that the integrity and principles of the process were followed.



Reg Crowshoe, ceremonialist and conference leader, directed the operation of the extraction. He holds the transfer right to teach and run the traditional mediation process. Aboriginal elders and/or bundle owners who have transfer rights are the only people who have earned the knowledge to use this process (see Crowshoe & Mannes Schmidt, 1998).



Transfer Rights

In the traditional Aboriginal milieu, specific knowledge and understanding is taught. For instance, the European world recognizes the authority embedded in a trademark symbol. It also accepts as standard the restrictions to certain employment positions dependent on educational background, e.g. BEd, BSW, LL.B. etc. Aboriginal society also has lines of authority that are equally specific and separate. Each field has a specific knowledge base and extensive teachings that qualify an individual to practice in that field.

Qualifications, in the Aboriginal world, are symbolized by and in material objects. The material objectification of authority can appear or is physically represented in forms such as bundles, rattles, drums, a headdress, or as other objects. All of these objects differ from community to community, but, in general, there are always dispute processes, government and headmen who know or can teach the knowledge held in the objects for which they are hold the responsibility. Each item has a place in the traditional world and a purpose. Some items represent social functions and/or symbolize authority while others contain directives and process. All are based on principles enshrined in all Aboriginal practice, that is, caring sharing, respect, and honesty. Only people with the knowledge and the background can sing certain songs or talk about a process or objects, with any authority.

The Aboriginal world reached a significant degree of specialization long before contact in the 1400's, and developed and exercised their knowledge in highly specialized fields. For example, some Elders were gifted with very unique abilities, while others are gifted with more practical abilities. Some even had connections with the air, water, rocks and other life forces that were only accessed for the group's survival. Other gifted people might be charged by the community with the responsibility of following and preserving the knowledge contained in processes such as that found in mediation bundles or other government knowledge bases.

When people receive transfer rights, this means they have a right to teach and act like they know about that part of the process. They may even be responsible for overseeing the continuation of all knowledge attached to a certain process. No one else in the community has a right to discuss this process as though he/she knows about it or the knowledge within.



The purpose of this restriction is to ensure that the knowledge base is intact. If people talk about the process who have no training or do not hold a right to act in this way, they will embarrass themselves. Aboriginal people know who hold these rights and they will always ask if this person is working with the Elder or if he/she have been given the right to talk about the process. Worse than the embarrassment to individual is the cultural confusion around the improper application of the processes.

Similarly, in the non-Aboriginal world, people claiming to have or attempting to practice medicine without a medical certificate are frowned upon and face serious repercussions. Specialization and licensing has developed to ensure that the public is receiving a standardized level of care in all instances where professionalism is required, where serious issues are being dealt with, such as psychology, medicine, law or other areas where people need to have expert help.

In the next section, the results from each of the stages in each domain are presented along with recommendations from Stage 3. These are preceded by a brief exploration of previous research in the domain area for Canada and the city of Calgary.





V. Results and Recommendations by Domain



Justice



Literature Review

In the *Listening Circle* process, the justice domain included police, courts, and correction services. As has been found in numerous other research documents over the years, Aboriginal people felt that the justice system in Canada is unresponsive to their needs and often discriminatory. These perceptions are supported in the research.

Overall, Aboriginal people are increasingly over-represented in the prison population and this is getting worse in Alberta. Alberta has the second highest rate of imprisonment per person charged in the country. Aboriginal men represent 30% of the population in provincial jails and Aboriginal women 45%, despite making up only 3.5% of the population in Alberta as a whole (Task Force, 1991; Royal Commission, 1996). By 2011, it is projected that Aboriginal youth will account for 48% of the young offender population. In Calgary, Aboriginal youth have more than twice as many cases filed despite their small percentage of the population, and young Aboriginal women are more likely than young non-Aboriginal women to be charged as young offenders (Community and Social Development, 1999, see Appendix 4).

Other findings show that Aboriginal people accused of a crime are more likely to be denied bail, spend more time in pre-trial detention, are more likely to be charged with multiple offences, and are twice as likely to be incarcerated (Task Force, 1991). In addition, their lawyers spend less time with them, and while the average aggregate sentence for non-Natives is 22.1% higher overall, Native offenders are found to be more likely to serve fewer 1-7 day sentences and more 93-184 day and 185-365 day sentences (Task Force, 1991).

Many of these admissions are due to fine defaults. Despite a 1987 Canadian Sentencing Commission recommendation to reduce the use of imprisonment for fine default, there is little evidence of this being implemented in Alberta (Task Force, 1991). In 1989, of offenders admitted to Provincial Correctional Centres for a hold reason of fine default, 66.4% were non-Native males, while 33.6% were Native males. However, of those released because they satisfied the fine, 81.9% were non-Native while only 18.1% were Native. This means that non-Native fine default offenders spent only 7.3% of their aggregate sentence length in custody compared to 14.3% for Native fine default offenders (Task Force, 1991).



The reason for these differences has not been ascertained, but would certainly include differential: ability to pay fines; participation in the institutional fine option programme; and behaviour while incarcerated. Temporary absence release figures for adult offenders at Alberta Correctional Centres during 1989, show that non-Native offenders are twice to three times more likely to gain a day release (65.1% vs. 34.9%), and a temporary pre-release (72.1% vs. 27.9%), than are Native offenders (Task Force, 1991).

These data confirm what has been recognised for a long time. Programmes need to: be culturally appropriate; recognize the extremely disadvantaged socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people; and address the systemic discrimination inherent in the system. No long-term solutions to the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system can be obtained without actively addressing the overall position of Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Doob, Grossman, & Auger, 1994). A number of recommendations have been offered in several reports over a 23-year span (Task Force, 1991). These are available in Appendix 5.



Focus Group Summaries Stages 1 & 2

The community as a whole was not satisfied with the justice system. While it recognized that there have been many positive strides, the most common issues were distrust of the system due to the systemic discrimination they found inherent in it, and the unresponsiveness of the system to the reality of their experiences and cultural needs.

We need a different system. Didn't work – never did. Our kids are going to jail. Everything -police, courts etc., against them. This is not good (Aboriginal woman).

If the system were to say, OK, Aboriginal people are invited, not only to work in the front line, but to help redesign some of it on behalf of your people, you would get guys lined up (Aboriginal man).

We need to teach our parents on how to protect our children. How are we going to prevent the abuse that happened to many here? The answer could be about talking about it (Aboriginal senior).

Young and native; two strokes against you (Aboriginal youth).

They felt that there was a need to look beyond the individual to the circumstances that landed them in trouble in the first place, be it violence, family troubles, or abuse.

If the justice system did work, then they would be out of a job. There would be no judges. There would be no lawyers. There would be no these different programs dealing with young offenders or adult offenders (Aboriginal youth).

Aboriginal community members believe the system would improve by involving more Aboriginal people in policy-making, design, and delivery of service; providing more cross-cultural training for justice services staff; and focussing more on traditional healing models as opposed to punitive models.



With funding and all the cutbacks, there's barely any program to better yourself, and that's less and less each day. It is prison, but the whole purpose of prison is not necessarily the punishment, but to better yourself, to be a better constituent of society and to have some time to reflect and think, and, given the tools, you can be a better person. A lot of time you feel like you're just a number (Aboriginal youth).

And there was a great deal of concern about police harassment and violation of their rights, especially from youth:

Even though I committed a crime, that doesn't give them the right to be - you know, racial slurs and say derogatory words because it's putting all the native people in that boat, not just me 'cause I was the one who committed the crime.

There should be some sort of awareness program that youth can know what their rights and responsibilities are towards the police in case there is a situation in the future.

There was recognition that police had a very difficult job and some were trying, but more needed to be done:

...good cop... He told me how sorry he felt for native people and he grew up close to reserve and didn't really like a lot of them. He wished to point out that there was a distinction between me over the other natives, that he classified me as a "good Native man". That happens quite often when I interact with non-Aboriginal friends, but it's happened three times with police where they've made that distinction. While they mean it as a compliment, it is a very negative thing to say. How am I a good Native and what's a bad Native? (Aboriginal youth).

...just to realize that there are good and bad cops as there are good and bad Native people. There's no difference between the two... I think if there's a rotten apple where there's a bunch of apples, it spoils the rest. A police officer, they have a duty to uphold... dealing with Chinese Blacks, Whites, everybody, Natives... I think they have the responsibility to treat everybody fairly (Aboriginal youth).

...(police) need to get some sort of education to make it easier for cops to say to one another, when talking about that Indian, 'hey, that's not right, that type of policing is old. It hasn't served us well' (Aboriginal youth).

Service providers in Stage 2 shared these concerns and also identified lack of resources and support in the system as their major issue.















They also advocated developing support mechanisms including culturally appropriate services and outreach, early intervention programmes, increased involvement of community and coordination of resources, and increased access to both information and resources regarding the justice system for Aboriginal people.



Recommendations Stage 3

The above issues, barriers and proposed solutions were taken forward to the justice circle in Stage 3 of the *Listening Circle*. In addition to these, the lack of attention to social precursors of crime (e.g., poverty, racism, addictions, etc.) was identified as a concern that required a coordination of policy, services, and resources to address. Other recommendations (not prioritized) included:

-  hire more Aboriginal staff and volunteers at all levels of the justice system and provide appropriate supports (e.g., mentoring programmes)
-  focus on early intervention/preventative models
-  provide funding for transportation and parenting support groups for single parents
-  work together to dispel lack of trust/fear on both sides through education
-  review appropriateness of justice practices/procedures in Aboriginal communities
-  develop on-going, integrated cross-cultural training which includes the historical context and recognition of AAboriginal@ as encompassing many different cultures, practices, traditions
-  develop a place in the city to practice spirituality
-  focus on home support
-  create a Native ombudsman position
-  create more opportunities for alternative measures involving community (e.g., healing vs. punishment models)
-  provide more access to safe housing
-  implement recommendations in earlier reports (e.g., Cawsey Report)



Education



Literature Review

The education domain included primary, secondary, and post-secondary education services. As has been found in numerous other research documents over the years, Aboriginal people felt that the education system in Canada is unresponsive to their needs and often discriminatory. These perceptions are supported in the research.

In Canada as a whole, Aboriginal people have a much lower educational attainment than Canadians overall with only 20% of students finishing high school as compared to 70% of non-Aboriginal students at the national level. This limited education significantly restricts employment opportunities and income.

In Calgary, 40% of Aboriginal people have less than a high school education. In the non-Aboriginal population this figure is 26%. Six percent have a university degree as compared to 19% of the non-Aboriginal population (Research and Analysis, 1999, see Appendix 6).

Mark Twain once said that soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are as deadly in the long run. And indeed, the education of Aboriginal peoples in Canada has generally been an area of controversy, a means by which the culture and worldview of Anglo-Europeans was forced on Aboriginal people. The legacy of this assimilation model has been the destruction of Aboriginal societies, including their social, economic, spiritual, and cultural life. While the rate of functional illiteracy (less than a Grade 9 education) is declining for Aboriginal people, it remains higher than that of other Canadians. This may be due to years of education substandard in curriculum, resources, and quality of teaching. In Calgary, the dropout rate for Aboriginal youths is 60-70% and educational achievement is lower (Native Employment, 1990, see Appendix 6).

Children learn to hate themselves in school, especially in the city, because nobody is teaching according to Aboriginal culture and values. There are not enough Aboriginal teachers and role models (CARE, 1995).

A Native Needs Assessment (Social Services Department 1984) identified the most serious source of problems in school for Aboriginal youth to be socio-economic circumstances, e.g., low income/poverty, cultural collisions, and a systemic lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture. Negative historical portrayals in the curriculum and lack of attention to the support of Aboriginal languages, cultural traditions, and learning styles, continue. Without this type of training, Aboriginal children can not achieve a strong sense of identity or confidence in their own personal worth and abilities leading to a rejection of the system by the learner. Aboriginal youth need a school environment in which the contributions of Aboriginal people to Canada and the world are studied, respected, and validated.



Focus Group Summaries Stages 1 & 2

Education was vitally important to Aboriginal communities. Racism and discrimination by teachers and students, and in the curricula were issues of concern to community participants. They felt that their traditions and history were dismissed, misrepresented, or inaccurately portrayed in the school system, causing Aboriginal children to be ashamed of their ancestry. These barriers were blamed for the alienation of Aboriginal youth and the high dropout rates in Calgary.

And she (a non-Aboriginal student) said ‘I hate all Indians, I just hate you guys’. And it was such a mad look eh? And I asked her why, and she said ‘You killed off all the buffalo (Aboriginal senior).

Our youth need to understand where the generation above them has come from, so that they can understand what’s happened and why they are where they are today. It has to do with our history, or the history of our people. Like colonization, like the residential school, like oppression, like discrimination, like racism, etc. Let’s not dwell on it but understand it and let it go and know that it is there though (Aboriginal senior).

Students should be able to evaluate their teachers. The way the system works, can’t get rid of teachers who are racist, verbally, physically abusive. Kids should sit in on hiring committees. They have an intuitive feel (Aboriginal woman).

I have sent my children to public school not Catholic. I like my children to know about their traditional ways. I stress for children to get a good education (Aboriginal senior).

(In a) math class all Aboriginal students were failed in first semester of last year. [My husband] told me he has encountered racism at college. It is out there (Aboriginal youth).

There’s some stereotyping, I’m sure, you know, I get teased... That’s what stops kids from going to school, it’s that they don’t want to be teased. That’s hard. You have to be so strong, you know (Aboriginal youth).

For adult education, it was felt that the systems were too rigid and there were not enough opportunities for upgrading. Bow River College was praised for its programmes in this area. Lack of access to educational opportunities also arose through lack of funding, subsidies, and ability to focus on more than day to day survival. The needs of children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome were also raised.

You are not looking for those great educational opportunities; you are not looking forward to going to college or university because you are so busy worrying about survival day to day (Aboriginal man).



Solutions again centered on the need for cross-cultural training in all levels of the system, but also on attention to a more holistic model of learning which would go beyond academics to nurture the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental needs of children. The community identified a need for more and better funded schools like the Plains Indians Cultural Survival School (PICSS) where students could learn about and take pride in Aboriginal traditions and culture. They also wanted to see more role models in the school system (both education staff and Aboriginal youth) who could create a climate of acceptance and support for Aboriginal students.









Aboriginal seniors were concerned with preserving histories, traditions, and ceremonies for posterity, and developing awards programmes to encourage youth to learn about their history and culture. Transportation and funding were of particular concern for youth.

Service providers also identified systemic discrimination as an issue in both pre-secondary and post-secondary school systems. In addition, they noted gaps in service; lack of resources; lack of trust; and culturally inappropriate practices, services and policies as areas of concern. Opportunities for improvements include early intervention and involving the community, more collaboration, increased institutional support, and recognizing the achievements of Aboriginal youth.



Recommendations Stage 3

The issues and barriers above noted formed the basis of the recommendations that Stage 3 participants put forward in the education domain. These include (not prioritized):

-  involve Aboriginal and Métis community members and elders to teach Aboriginal history and traditions and help revise curriculum and materials
-  address racism through education of staff, parents, students, police, and students in faculties of education
-  educate youth regarding their human rights
-  establish more career planning for Aboriginal youth
-  implement role-model and academic achievement programmes
-  hire more Aboriginal liaison workers, teachers and counsellors
-  make grants and loans easier to access
-  have Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) revisit regarding coverage of tuition fees especially for off-reserve students



Health

Literature Review



Aboriginal people have a higher incidence of: suicide (5 times), diabetes, tuberculosis, injuries and poisonings, infant mortalities, death by respiratory problems (2 times), and death by injury (3 times), than the national average (Aboriginal Health Unit, 1995). They also experience lower life expectancy by 8-10 years. Many of these health issues are connected to alcohol use and poverty.

In 1980, 50-60% of Native illnesses and deaths in Canada were alcohol-related. An Ontario study found that alcohol consumption increased as the Native reserve population increased. This finding was highly correlated with low income.

Official records do not track mortality rates and cause of death specifically for Aboriginal communities in Calgary, but anecdotal reports from these communities consistently suggest that a large number of deaths, particularly in youths, are alcohol-related.

From 1991 through 1993, the Aboriginal Health Unit of Alberta Health conducted a community consultation with Aboriginal people throughout Alberta exploring their health issues and concerns. Over 130 meetings were held with remote, rural, and urban First Nations and Métis communities. Some of the needs are similar to those noted by immigrants including lack of transportation, language difficulties (especially for seniors), unfamiliarity with health services available, and culturally inappropriate services. Mistrust of the health and social services as well as specific concerns are outlined in this report.

A more recent report conducted by the Calgary Regional Health Authority (CRHA 1999), found that barriers to using health services for Aboriginal people included lack of knowledge of services, distance and transportation problems, cultural and language differences, previous negative experiences, and cost. Four-fifths of the respondents (n=532) preferred an Aboriginal Health Care Worker, particularly those who practice Aboriginal spirituality. Reasons given were comfort, safety, and trust.



Focus Group Summaries Stage 1 & 2

Aboriginal participants in the *Listening Circle* focus groups did not discuss health issues to a great extent. What was mentioned did confirm the findings from the *Strengthening the Circle* study conducted by Alberta Health as noted above, but there are a couple of reasons why health may not have emerged as a topic of priority:



As seen above, the CRHA has recently conducted research into this issue with the Aboriginal communities. It may be that they believe attention is being paid to this area and so they wished to discuss domains that have been less available to their input.



Health, as defined in Western European terms, is generally based on a disease and biological model. In our groups, participants talked a great deal about healing, the need for healing circles, and restoring physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual harmony. These cultural differences in how health is perceived and defined may account for the paucity of data. For these participants, a holistic model with spirituality at its core is the road to sound mental and physical health.

Aboriginal women spoke a great deal about needing a place in the city where Aboriginal people could gather to heal, to relearn their cultural values and ways, and to get back on the path. As one woman put it “*We need a central area to go, to be safe, to be able to scream*”. Many saw this healing as needed to help those who had lost their way and got caught up in the justice system.

Start with the sacredness of life. So many ceremonies/teachings we can use.

Seniors were the most concerned with health and discussed concerns regarding their lack of proximity to hospitals, the high cost of medication, and the lack of transportation to health services. They were also concerned about substance abuse among youth, and the lack of respect and support for traditional healers.

Today our young people are very pitiful. They are caught ‘cause they don’t even know their tradition. They ask questions about their spirituality. If they learned more about their spirituality, maybe they wouldn’t drink and take drugs.

We went to pick sweetgrass and sage. It costs gas and money to do traditional ways. My son is a sundancer. He works but isn’t paid. As a traditionalist we should be acknowledged in a special field. Just like a psychologist.

Aboriginal youth did not discuss health issues at all. A few Aboriginal men discussed concerns regarding confidentiality of information when accessing mental health services and the cultural inappropriateness of mental and physical health assessment tools.

If I had an addiction problem and went to Native Counseling Services, I would be a little antsy that next week that someone from NC is having coffee with someone from Social Services or Child Welfare. Does this stuff come up?

One male participant was pleased about the Calgary Rockyview Child and Family Services’ geographic redesign of service into family resource centres with multi-service teams and knowledge of Aboriginal services in the city.

Service providers in the health domain were concerned with cross-cultural communication issues and the lack of culturally appropriate practises, services and policies.














They identified systemic discrimination and bureaucratic barriers which lead to a lack of trust in or fear of the system for Aboriginal people. A lack of knowledge of traditional medicine and healing traditions results in gaps in the system and lack of support and access.

As we have seen before, potential solutions included developing support mechanisms through culturally appropriate services and outreach which involve the community. Cross-cultural training was advocated to increase service access. Service providers felt that if systems, agencies, service providers, and community members could collaborate, they could better coordinate and enhance resources and services to create a holistic and integrated system.



Recommendations Stage 3

Stage 3 participants offered the following recommendations (not prioritized):

-  provide cross-cultural training for health systems staff and in health education programs
-  include/increase Elders and Aboriginal liaison workers as resources in hospitals
-  increase recognition of the Aboriginal Health Council
-  establish more outreach services
-  explore the intricate relationship between health and other domain areas such as education, justice, etc.
-  increase support for spirituality and spiritual traditions in health care including healing rooms
-  develop mentoring programmes for Aboriginal health professionals
-  develop an Aboriginal volunteer base to assist Aboriginal people coming to the city for services
-  increase joint planning of programmes and services
-  establish a central health service centre
-  focus on preventive education for Aboriginal people



Services



Literature Review

The services domain is very broad and includes such things as child welfare, income support, and support services, e.g., counselling, addictions. Many of the comments from the Aboriginal focus groups centred on child welfare.

Aboriginal children are vastly over-represented in child welfare systems. Three generations of children have been lost through residential schools, adoptions, short-term foster placements, and the juvenile detention system. Generations of Aboriginal parents have lost the opportunity to learn or exercise traditional parenting skills. To exacerbate this problem, in Calgary, 41% of Aboriginal children live in lone parent households compared to 14% of all children (Statistics Canada, 1996, see Appendix 7).

A recommendation for culturally sensitive and supportive services and programmes for urban Aboriginal youth operated by Aboriginal service-providers, was made by the Mayor's Task Force on Family Violence (1991). This recommendation could apply to all services for Aboriginal people who experience enormous barriers and racism in the social service system.

Another report, the Native Needs Assessment (Social Service Department, 1984) provides several recommendations in the social service domain that are still relevant today and similar to those we have heard in the *Listening Circle* process (see Appendix 8).



Focus Group Summaries Stages 1 & 2

Parenting, child-welfare (including foster care) and social assistance were some of the service areas about which community groups were most concerned. They did not feel respected when they sought support from services and frequently talked about the harassment they endured when applying for assistance. Discrimination and a lack of understanding of the often extreme physical, mental, and sexual abuse many Aboriginal people have endured made access to services difficult.

No-one trusts Social Services on our reserve (Aboriginal woman).

I'd been on Social Assistance in between school and work... I had been working to better myself. I went to collect at the Social Assistance office. A man walked into the office and slammed my file down on his desk. It was thick. He said – do you expect to collect SA all your life? He didn't even bother to read the file. He didn't see that I had been to school and had been working. I cried, I felt my self-esteem drop. He said, "we're trying to get your kind off of SA" (Aboriginal woman).



The Native Friendship Centre was going to be the place for Aboriginal people... and politics gets into it and they shut them down. But a person comes into Calgary-he's lost... There has got to be one place where every person comes in whether he rides the box car, walks in, or flies in here. He should be able to go somewhere and get it all... You have to have one place, maybe city hall (Aboriginal man).

They just want them to comply [and they'll] give you a cheque. But some of them (Aboriginal people) can't help it. Young women don't know how to be a mother if they have never seen "being a mother". It just doesn't come automatically like they are a wolf or a bear. It's a learned behavior that they have to learn (Aboriginal man).

There was a need for services to be more immediate and more targeted with increased support for Native Social Services and support groups specifically for Aboriginal women and men.

The sooner you intervene and don't treat him like some space creature, and talk to him, and get him counselling, he responds better (Aboriginal man).

There are a lot of men's groups, but they don't look like us. If I had four places to go and one of them had people who looked like me, that is the one I would go to (Aboriginal man).

Seniors raised concerns about the lack of information regarding benefits available, especially financial. They felt that band councils and service providers were not doing enough to keep them informed of their entitlements, and they needed some system of getting their cheques from the reserves as many lacked transportation.

My son went down and found out seniors there are given \$200.00 for utilities. I didn't know. A lot of people seniors don't even know if they are getting all their benefits. It is essential that everyone should know (Aboriginal senior).

The final concern noted by all groups was in regards to foster care. Youth especially felt there was not enough stability in foster homes. Constant movement prevented the ability to establish a firm foundation.

Need to be able to give youth stability... some have been in 8 or more homes. It has an effect on their morals. Catch 22, abused and neglected. Don't understand movement in foster homes (Aboriginal youth).

The focus group members felt that foster homes did not practice nor encourage Aboriginal spirituality and traditions so that these were lost to yet another generation. One of the reasons they noted was that Aboriginal homes may not meet foster care licensing requirements due to the inappropriate use of "white standards" to judge them.



As such, they advocated screening and licensing in accordance with Aboriginal, not middle-class white, culture. Seniors were worried about parenting programmes which were predicated on a “*take the programme or do not get your kids back*” philosophy. They felt that this process sets people up, as there is natural resistance to this level of control or coercion.











Suggestions for change included smaller caseloads, the inclusion of Aboriginal people (including youth) in decision making and the design of services/programmes, more Aboriginal workers and younger social workers who can identify with the current realities of Aboriginal youth, addressing issues of privacy of information and the stigma of seeking help, and more support programmes. Some of this could be achieved through camps to build self-esteem and provide role models, more transitional support for people moving from rural to urban centres, and the development of a single-entry system for services.

Service providers identified systemic discrimination in all areas of service and culturally inappropriate practices, services, and policies as major barriers leading to fear of the system and lack of trust. Bureaucracies were seen as unresponsive providing little support for developing coordination of services. Territorial barriers also hinder cooperation. They advocated more role models and early intervention programmes and strategies. In regards to youth, they wanted the system to be more respectful of youth and to focus on their positive capacities. Again there was seen a need to attend to the social justice issues which are precursors to service need, e.g., poverty, racism, lack of education. This could require a shift to a more proactive rather than reactive service delivery system. It would require more institutional support and involvement from the community to create culturally appropriate services and outreach.



Recommendations Stage 3

Due to the sheer number of services that fall in the service domain, the task for Stage 3 participants was very challenging. Many of their recommendations applied to all services and some were specific to a given service as follows (not prioritized):

-  embed cultural practices/traditions in the service system
-  increase subsidized housing for Aboriginal people
-  provide more training for parents regarding traditional child-rearing practices and values
-  increase Aboriginal input into policy development and decisions
-  increase Aboriginal staff in front-line and senior positions
-  provide cross-cultural training for service and social services staff
-  increase early intervention and prevention programmes
-  address discrimination in the system
-  focus on the needs of children and youth
-  teach survival skills for those from rural areas/reserves moving to the urban environment



Funding

Literature Review



No research literature was obtained for funding issues as they affect Aboriginal and Métis people.



Focus Group Summaries Stages 1 & 2

Funding was not included as an issue domain in the planning of Stages 1 and 2, but funding issues arose across domains in both the community and service provider focus groups which prompted its addition in Stage 3. The concerns included the lack of access to funding for education be that due to government restrictions, jurisdictional issues, or disputes regarding treaty rights. Participants in both stages felt that there needed to be changes in funding requirements and more accountability for funding dollars especially to ensure that less money was spent on administration and more on programmes and services. The competitive nature of funding applications was also at issue because it creates mistrust and infighting. Youth thought that funders need to be more proactive and that youth programmes should be driven and organized by young people. Finally, participants felt that funding should be more secure and longer term rather than year to year.



Recommendations Stage 3

Stage 3 participants identified a number of areas in which funding opportunities could be enhanced and funds better managed and dispersed (not prioritized):



establish longer-term funding for programmes/services



establish funding priorities based on needs as identified in conjunction with community



develop stewardship, evaluation, monitoring, and leadership skills in fund management



develop partnerships with community to better prioritize need and allocate funding



support one-stop and holistic services



simplify, streamline, and computerize funding applications in collaboration with community



create one-stop shopping for funding information





remove competition, political agendas, and favouritism from funding decisions



expand outcome evaluation beyond quantitative to include qualitative measures of success



-  establish benchmarks for spending across domains, i.e., set reasonable and culturally appropriate standards in each domain for amount of resources allocated to/for Aboriginal people/services
-  explore the feasibility of block funding. This involves allocating total dollars to several agencies which then work together to decide how to spend the money. This reduces competition and allows any savings to be reinvested in the community.



Human Rights



Literature Review

Many Aboriginal people face chronic un-or underemployment, poor housing, limited formal education, racism and discrimination, isolation, and a cultural communication gap with service providers. However, due to the historic differences in their interactions with the dominant EuroCanadian majority² and their position as members of Canada's first nations, Aboriginal people have legal and treaty rights which have been the focal point of a whole range of human rights violations. These include forced assimilation policies, e.g., residential schools, banning of traditions and ceremonies; segregation, e.g., reservations; and civil rights violations, e.g., refusal of citizenship and voting rights, among others. The effect of past and present violations continue to have a serious impact on the lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities today.



Focus Groups Summaries Stages 1 & 2

Human rights were not originally included in the Aboriginal focus groups conducted for the *Listening Circle*. However, overarching themes in every domain were discrimination, systemic racism, and prejudice. As such, the domain was added. As one focus group participant noted, "*Blacks ask us how we can handle being discriminated against all the time*". Another noted that, "*if the white man hadn't come over here, I wouldn't be a dirty little half-breed*". Both seniors and youth talked about "the look", the expression that they see on people's faces in the community and in service industries that tells them they are not valued or welcome. The theme of "the look" is a common one when talking to people of colour in Canada and it is very painful for them.

I think it was the meanness in their eyes when they spoke to you. You could feel that undercurrent you know, it was there in the eyes (Aboriginal senior).

² Throughout this report, reference to the "dominant group" or mainstream in Canada refers to the white racial group of English or Anglo-Celtic ethnicity which holds institutional power and is in the majority (James, 1996).



Participants in many community groups talked about the need for a physical space to conduct ceremonies, healing circles, to learn history and practise spirituality, and to just be. They wanted to return to Aboriginal values, embrace healing traditions, and relearn their culture. Participants felt there were not enough Aboriginal people providing services for Aboriginal people: “*we need to learn to help ourselves*”.

Aboriginal employees, in particular, talked about the challenges they face in the workplace in terms of hiring and promotional opportunities; being seen as a “token” or a spokesperson for Aboriginal people as a whole; constantly being monitored, assessed, and viewed with suspicion; and being the subject of stereotypes, e.g., “Indian time”. They wanted to find ways to work with employers to identify and dismantle barriers and systemic discrimination.







We have to be proud of who we are, what we are. We are educated. We have native lawyers, doctors, teachers... We have to start letting people know we are proud.

Service providers also identified systemic discrimination and prejudice as barriers in every domain. The fact that so many participants could unequivocally cite these conditions speaks to the pervasiveness of discrimination in our society. And it is this very pervasiveness, especially at the structural level, that makes human rights issues so hard to address. Service providers suggested involving the community to develop culturally appropriate training. Other suggestions were to focus more on competencies and experiences than on credentials when hiring; avoid tokenism or the tendency to “Pan-Indianism”, i.e., all Aboriginal people are alike; and change human rights reporting procedures to minimize trauma on the complainant.













Recommendations Stage 3

Stage 3 participants focussed on advocacy and dissemination of information regarding human rights as the principle means for organizations and communities to move forward in this arena. They viewed the media as potential allies in the promotion of human rights. Their suggestions included (not prioritized):

-  create more opportunities for advocacy and early intervention, increasing support for Aboriginal voices to be heard
-  provide more education on human rights and responsibilities at early ages in home and schools
-  provide more education about entitlements (e.g., social services)
-  simplify human rights complaints procedures
-  provide education on how to lodge a complaint
-  examine social service practices and policy to better reflect needs of Aboriginal families, children, and cultures in collaboration with Aboriginal communities



-  provide cross-cultural education across systems (e.g., social services and police service/justice system)
-  relocate services closer to communities
-  recognize, acknowledge, and address systemic discrimination
-  work more closely with media to promote human rights
-  write history of Aboriginal peoples
-  create a support network for rural to urban transitions, and for families
-  create an advocate or bridging mechanism (e.g., elders, ombudsman)
-  create a mechanism to ensure or to generate trust in the confidentiality of private information in the social service system
-  develop a cultural centre, a place to practice spirituality
-  develop workplace and in-school policies to allow the practice of spiritual beliefs (e.g., smudges, traditional holidays/ceremonies, etc.)



Housing



Literature Review

Aboriginal people are located in relatively large numbers in all areas of the city but are concentrated in Wards 5 and 10 (NE communities), Ward 8 (downtown communities) and Ward 9 (SE communities of Ogden, Dover and Erinwoods) (City Clerks, 1996).

Like most people, urban Aboriginal people would like to have adequate and safe shelter for themselves and their children. In a consultation conducted in 1997 by the Homeless Initiative Ad Hoc Steering Committee, 60% of the Aboriginal people surveyed (n=51) reported living in a shelter, with friends, or were homeless.



Focus Group Summaries Stages 1 & 2

All groups felt housing was a basic need and one of the biggest concerns for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal participants spoke for the most part about doors being closed to them when landlords found out they were Aboriginal, and to the lack of safe, secure housing for single Aboriginal youth and men. There was also concern about lack of available housing, waiting lists, and non-recognition of Aboriginal customs and culture.

Places have said “no it’s rented”. I have went across the road and I have my white friend go across and the landlord told him a different story... that it wasn’t rented. I’ve then gone back and told them I’ll be there with my lawyer (Aboriginal woman).



Now you can't find a place because you don't have the security deposit. You don't have a house. If you are not settled, you can't heal and if not healing, you know, the whole – it kind of - you are stuck in a little circle – that's kind of the core of what our problem is. Housing, meeting our basic needs... if we could get some of those issue settled ... (Aboriginal man).

We go into treaty housing, but we don't feel free. It's 'you can't do this or can't do that'. We should be able to put in a flower garden to keep us busy (Aboriginal senior).

Places are disgusting. \$800 bucks a month for 2-bedroom. House is falling apart and it is just disgusting (Aboriginal youth).






Community participants wanted to see more affordable rents and subsidies, and opportunities to apply rent towards the purchase of homes. They requested more help from Métis Nation and Band councils to purchase off-reserve housing, and more housing specifically for Aboriginal people that would be respectful of their cultural needs. Seniors particularly disliked the term “overhoused” that is used by social housing agencies when a single person requests two bedrooms. They wanted a guest room for children and grandchildren which would allow a return to the traditional role of seniors looking after children.

Service providers saw discrimination in all levels of the housing system from shelter/transition housing, to market and subsidized housing. They felt that Aboriginal people did not have the information and support they needed to access housing due to bureaucratic barriers and social stigma. They wanted to see more institutional and political support and the development of alternate models such as cooperatives.










Recommendations Stage 3

Participants in Stage 3 proposed meeting some of the challenges in the housing domain by inviting Aboriginal people to participate in identifying needs and potential solutions. They recommended more partnerships and relationships with housing agencies, advocacy groups, financial institutions and Aboriginal communities. They recognized the need for more housing geared to Aboriginal people and more support for subsidized/transitional housing. Their recommendations included (not prioritized):

-  provide support services to assist people in accessing services, especially transition supports from rural to urban
-  increase information on human rights and put teeth into anti-discrimination laws
-  develop relationships between banks, financial institutions and Aboriginal communities to create more flexible criteria, better procedures
-  develop rent to own models, housing cooperatives
-  ensure that federal housing dollars follow the individual not the land



-  encourage subsidized, emergency and transitional housing to allocate space specifically for Aboriginal people and cultures
-  develop more units for people with addictions, families and seniors, and provide more emergency housing for women
-  hire more Aboriginal people in rental services creating an ombudsman position
-  include Aboriginal people in planning, development of housing
-  develop emergency funds for breakdowns in rent payments
-  ensure Aboriginal representation/participation/partnership on housing committees and initiatives, e.g., CMHC, Calgary Homeless Foundation
-  increase development of transitional housing



Employment

Literature Review



Employment is an area of real concern to Aboriginal people and many issues were raised in the focus groups around discrimination, access, and opportunity. These concerns are validated in the research literature.

The labour force participation rate for Aboriginal people is similar to that of non-Aboriginal people at 74.7%, but unemployment rates for Aboriginal people are nearly double those of Canadians overall. In Calgary, 11.1% of the Aboriginal population is unemployed as compared to 6.6% of the non-Aboriginal population (Research & Analysis, 1999, see Appendix 9).

Studies have shown that Aboriginal people are over-represented in the lowest socio-economic classes and occupational groups. On average, Aboriginal men earn approximately 25% less than Anglo-Canadian men while Aboriginal women earn 12% less than Anglo-Canadian women. Median incomes in the Calgary Aboriginal population are \$19,412.00 for men and \$12,417.00 for woman. In the non-Aboriginal population median incomes are \$28,224.00 for men and \$16,289.00 for women (Research and Analysis, 1999, see Appendix 10). The incidence of low income is more than double for Aboriginal people (50%) versus the Calgary population as a whole (20%). And poverty rates are even higher for Aboriginal children and youth ages 1-24 at around 61% (Census Canada, 1996, see Appendices 11 and 12).

These discrepancies represent a growing challenge given that the Aboriginal population is increasing while the Anglo-Canadian population is experiencing virtually zero population growth. In Alberta, 58.9% of Aboriginal people were of working age, between 15 and 65 years. Despite this growing labour pool, Aboriginal people have



higher unemployment rates for a variety of reasons including insufficient education/job training, lack of access to the “right information networks,” inadequate knowledge

(or rejection) of white business mores, racism, and devaluation of Aboriginal cultures. One study, conducted at the City of Calgary and two large oil companies in Calgary, showed that 73% (n=48) of Aboriginal respondents perceived promotion opportunities to be more closed to them than to their Anglo-Canadian colleagues.

Some felt that they had to expend extra effort to be seen as equally competent. They were also concerned about the lack of networking contacts and the lack of respect paid to their cultural values (Pruegger, 1994).

These data highlight the need to find ways to increase opportunities for Aboriginal people to enter economic streams in Calgary.



Focus Group Summaries Stages 1 & 2

Community participants were very concerned about the levels of racism in hiring and promotion practices in organizations, and the severe effects of stereotyping and on-the-job harassment, sexual and otherwise. Many talked about hiding their Aboriginal identities on job applications and in interviews to better their chances. Once hired, they felt they had to work twice as hard to prove their worth, as did their white counterparts.

Aboriginal men identified a number of instrumental barriers that precluded access to employment opportunities. These were such things as needing money for decent clothes and transportation in order to go to job interviews, dealing with non-acceptance due to age or criminal records, illiteracy, and no driver’s license. Many worked as casual labour or for temporary agencies who they felt used them as slave labour and took a sizeable chunk of their earnings.

Youth were concerned with the lack of information on how to play the “job game” and access the hidden market. They wanted more information about programmes and grants offered for youth by the government and businesses. They feel that they are often taken advantage of in the work place either not being paid at all, or being underpaid.

The groups found Aboriginal employment agencies to be very helpful as well as agencies such as the Calgary Urban Planning Project (CUPS) which are supportive, non-judgmental, and flexible. Participants wanted support in such areas as life skills, entrepreneurship, computer technology, and employment training and upgrading. They felt that employment circles and a centralized employment centre would be helpful, particularly if they provided role models, opportunities for networking, and mentoring. These types of programmes are needed to build self-esteem and confidence. For employers, they suggested that they honour Aboriginal ceremonies and cultural days in the workplace, and develop information packages about Aboriginal culture and people for employees.



I think we need communication, support and working together... There needs to be accessibility, working with people as they come through the door. Take them step by step. Personal development is a big issue. Developing strong self-esteem at the most basic level. Then they can feel confident to stand up for who they are (Aboriginal woman).

Would you be more apt to participate in something if people looked like you and sounded like you in terms of pre-employment or any service (Aboriginal man)?

I have worked toward trying to establish employment. It's a cycle because you can't get a job without an education, you can't get an education without a job (Aboriginal senior).

Getting, keeping employment is a game – some play better than others (Aboriginal youth).






I went to work with them (non-Aboriginals] as part of the solution, not part of the problem. Time to change it, but [we need] sincere people willing to honour everybody, not only in the form of tokenism (Aboriginal employee).

Service providers demonstrated their awareness of culturally inappropriate services, practices and policies, and of systemic discrimination. They felt there were gaps in employment services and a lack of resources. Waiting lists are too long for pre-employment services and there are not enough early intervention programmes such as Head Start. Instrumental issues such as transportation and child-care must be addressed by employment agencies and employers. And, Aboriginal people are not being prepared adequately for the realities of the job place either in terms of job expectations or the climate of discrimination. At the same time, employers are not creating the support mechanisms needed to help Aboriginal people succeed in the workplace.



Recommendations Stage 3

Participants in Stage 3 offered five recommendations that are simple and straightforward, which they thought would go a long way towards creating a more equitable and inclusive work environment. These were (not prioritized):

-  develop continual cross-cultural training for staff at all levels
-  increase the flexibility of employment standards/hiring criteria
-  create or expand on a database of the Aboriginal workforce
-  develop a one-stop access point for employment services
-  develop more support programmes (e.g., mentoring, in organizations for Aboriginal employees)





VI. Discussion of Major Themes

Many of the same issues arose in each of the domains, suggesting that these may be starting points for any action plans developed. The four most common concerns for community and service providers were systemic discrimination, lack of community involvement in policy, programme planning and institutional change; lack of cross-cultural training; and lack of Aboriginal role models in all systems at all levels of service. It is expected that using these four areas as a starting point for change, many of the other issues would be resolved and suggested solutions obtained. For example, in the education domain, if Aboriginal people were involved in developing curricula, assessing materials for bias, and proactively recruited for teaching positions, much of the systemic discrimination could be eliminated. This would be true especially if these actions were conducted in conjunction with an on-going, well-integrated cross-cultural training program for staff at all levels of the education system.

Two other common themes were creating an Aboriginal ombudsman and developing a cultural or spiritual centre in Calgary. The centre would be a place where “*young people could come, feel welcome, talk and learn about their culture and history*”. It would be a place where seniors and traditional healers could practice their spirituality and ceremonies.

I can't separate myself from my environment, I have no place to go. Yes, we have churches. All sorts of immigrant churches throughout our land here in the city. But is there one place that we can come to as Aboriginal people and sit in circle and council? No! (Aboriginal senior).

Finally, the following areas were identified as problematic in most of the domains. These were lack of resources; lack of support; lack of awareness (both of services available and Aboriginal culture); bureaucratic barriers; lack of trust; lack of access; culturally inappropriate practices, services and policies; and lack of collaboration and coordination among services and across domains.

These themes were very similar to those obtained by the *Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Initiative: Partnership in Growth Community Consultation* (1999). Their consultations with service providers and community identified limited awareness of and sensitivity to Aboriginal culture, lack of programme coordination/collaboration, limited Aboriginal staffing, and lack of resources as areas of concern. Town hall discussions additionally noted concerns with prejudice and discrimination. Community members wanted more information about available services, easier access, more culturally appropriate programmes, and more cultural or spiritual programmes.





VII. Future Steps

It is too early in the process to determine the long-term development of new resources in services and systems for Aboriginal people, either in terms of time, human, or financial resources. However, there are solid indications of new networks between service leaders, service providers, and community members. As well, recognition and understanding of systemic barriers and needs have resulted in proposals for addressing the issue through new partnerships (e.g., expanding the current Multifunders forum to include community members to better streamline funding applications and to allocate funding more effectively). The extent to which new resources arise, or existing resources are strengthened, will depend on the continued commitment of participants in each domain.

It is evident that the *Listening Circle* was a success on many levels and has provided a foundation for responding to some of the recommendations outlined in the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal People (1994).

In early spring 2000, an invitation will be extended to *Listening Circle* participants, and the larger community to attend an information forum where results will be presented and a further opportunity for dialogue provided.



Recommendations

It is recommended that the results and recommendations of the *Listening Circle* be used to provide a foundation for coordinated action among community members, service leaders, and service providers.





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