



NATIVE COURTWORKER
AND COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

“Helping Hand to Justice”
Celebrating over 38 Years of Service

Northern British Columbia Aboriginal Youth Leadership Project

Insight and Perception by Creating Dialogue

Phase 2

May 30, 2012

The Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia's (NCCABC) Mission Statement is "A Helping Hand to Justice".

NCCABC's value statement is "To provide culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal people and communities consistent with their needs. Our services are accomplished by assisting Aboriginal people involved in the criminal justice system; providing access to counselling and referral services for clients with substance abuse and detoxification support issues; advocate services for Aboriginal family and youth. Our dedicated employees are responsive to the needs of the community by providing quality, innovative and educational options where people are treated with dignity and respect."

It is NCCABC's belief that a successful strategy for service must be client-centered, community-based and a safe place for Aboriginal people.

Background

Research statistics from agencies such as Stats Canada have indicated that Aboriginal youth are the youngest and fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. Canada has a general population of 31 million people with 1.2 million people identified as Aboriginal. The general unemployment rate is approximately 7.2% across Canada with the unemployment rate among First Nations communities ranging from 60% to 90%.

There is a real need for a new leadership dialogue that builds capacity from the ground up, and which will lead to stronger community leadership that is specific to the roles and responsibilities that our leaders are expected to manage.

Executive Summary

The original report "*Aboriginal Youth Leadership Project in Northern British Columbia*" (AYLPNBC) is a culmination of a project that was funded by the Department of Justice, Youth Justice Fund - Guns, Gangs and Drug Component, and presented findings from in-depth interviews with Aboriginal youth who have demonstrated leadership qualities in order to provide insight into Aboriginal youth culture in the northern region of British Columbia.

The Aboriginal youth selected were between the ages of 15 and 29 years. They addressed how they have managed to successfully navigate through their developmental years.

The 24 interviews were held in the Prince George area, including Hazelton, Moricetown, Terrace, Prince Rupert and Fort St. John. The selection of these communities was based on the fact that they each have Native Courtworker offices and that these chosen communities have a high Aboriginal population.

The AYLPNBC engaged Aboriginal youth who have avoided the lure of gang life. Through a series of interviews we wanted to learn more about their personal journey, the challenges and the hindrances they faced, by asking the following questions:

What has made them successful?

What resources were made available to them that prevented their involvement with the criminal justice system?

What acted as a hindrance?

What did they believe would be of help or assistance to other Aboriginal youth?

Insight and Perception by Creating Dialogue

In early 2012 NCCABC solicited feedback from other Aboriginal youth interested in the “*Aboriginal Youth Leadership Project in Northern British Columbia*” (AYLPNBC) report.

The report in hand was created in order to assess the value and effectiveness of the AYLPNBC publication. Each of the participating youth from ages 15-18 and 19-29 signed a “Declaration to Participate” form that states:

I have read the Introduction Letter and the consent form. I agree to take part in this REVIEW. I have discussed my participation with my parent/guardian and I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I am free to withdraw from the REVIEW at any time and that the data from the review will be published in the future.

Upon reviewing the AYLPNBC report, the Aboriginal youth were asked to respond to the following set of questions:

1. What are the positives about the Youth Leadership booklet?
2. What other information would you have included in this report?
3. How does this information relate to your life experience?
4. Prioritize and choose two of the role model’s recommendations, then list how you think these can be achieved.
5. List any other suggestions that have not been listed in the booklet report.
6. What resources exist now in your community to meet the holistic needs of the youth? (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual)
7. Who in your community would make a good candidate for an Aboriginal Youth Advisory Group/Committee?

8. What are you currently doing now? What are your goals? How do you plan on achieving these goals?
9. What would hinder your goals?

The first five questions directly solicit feedback on the content of the AYLPNBC report itself, while the final four questions are an attempt to contextualize the youth's answers by seeking their perspectives regarding life in the community. This provides a fitting addendum to the summary found at the end of the report, which states: "Many of the Aboriginal youth interviewed had faced what would appear to be insurmountable odds for survival. Aboriginal Youth that had been raised with neglect, abuse, and poverty often involving drug and alcohol abuse, these particular youth managed to seek out positive networks through counsellors, friends, family members and teachers.

Through utilizing their networks, they managed to make healthy choices in reference to their lives and their futures."

Limitations of the Methodology

The communities selected were not the full representation of all northern communities; subsequently the findings may only apply to the particular communities that were visited.

FINDINGS

Note: All answers provided by the respondents are published here verbatim.

Question 1:

What are the positives about the Youth Leadership booklet?

The majority of answers focussed on attributes of the youth themselves:

- the positive is that youth are taking responsibility of leadership roles
- it is positive to know that other youth are becoming active leaders in their communities
- that youth are good with leadership
- that youth help out with leadership
- that you can go for your dreams
- that the role models in this booklet are youth who model their lives by getting educated
- that the youth are directly involved with the report
- it is a hopeful change to read something positive about Aboriginal youth instead of all the negatives of suicide and addictions and school drop out statistics

Many answers noted the role of family and community:

- It was confirmed for me that families do make a difference whether they are foster parents or extended families
- that when families don't give up it pays off in the long run
- nice to know that there are people out there to rely on for help on just about anything
- the report shows that adults are standing up to improve the youth to include the older youth and to improve life skills
- it shows that no matter what community you come from, you can become whatever you want. You just have to use the resources in your community
- the positives are the pie charts. It shows me where the young adults are in their thoughts and ideas. It also shows family support
- that family is still a major influence to our youth

Question 2:

What other information would you have included in this report?

A significant number of respondents (six) said that the report was thorough and that they would not change anything. Others made specific suggestions including the following:

- I would have included information on what programs are available for all family members to help teens through the difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood
- more suggestions from youth about what the next steps should be
- the youth's full names so we could get to know them and relate to them
- I would have liked to see a website created so we could continue to have input into this project
- do (more) oral interviews and workshops and get more youth from each community to voice what they want in their community
- names and ages of the people who are just as important at the end

Question 3:

How does this information relate to your life experience?

- Two respondents frankly admitted that they did not relate to the information given in the booklet.
- One of them stated: "it actually relates very little to my life experiences."
- Another expanded by saying: "this information doesn't relate to my life experience because this kind of possibility was not offered to me".

Other respondents took the opportunity to offer insight into their past:

- the stories of the youth in this booklet touched on parts of my life experience. There was no outside support but family.
- I wished I had role models like them when I was growing up.

- I did not know any aboriginals who were successful in careers except for my best friend's older sister who went away to be a nurse and she never returned. She worked in the city and she still does not come back to the village. That puzzles me because she could have helped more of us become nurses.
- My mother's learning came from the land She was a gardener, a hunter, a fisherwoman and a storyteller. She only attended up to grade two of church school. . All I saw while growing up us was my mother and my aunts and uncles living off the land to feed us then the kids starting disappearing on buses to go away to school. I found out that they were sent to residential schools. It was a very sad time but exciting when they all came home for the summer with red hair. Most did not have careers but some did when they got much older.
- I dropped out of school and my parents are alcoholics. But I do have positive family member role models
- it related to my experience because feelings of failure and feelings of success. All were the same and I was supported by family
- my life experience was similar in that as a youth I didn't have opportunities that they have nowadays, but I have learned leadership skills through university where I was a mentor and peer support for fellow students

Question 4:

Prioritize and choose two of the role model's recommendations, then list how you think these can be achieved.

This question had by far the most feedback. Responses can be categorized by the following themes: "culture and tradition", "entertainment and recreation", "parental and elder support" and "other".

Culture and Tradition:

- Learning Culture; it would be good to know your own culture and other cultures
- Culture: traditional dance and singing, berry picking, hunting and fishing. Music. Traditional Spirituality and language which is the backbone of any culture. Without culture a society is dead. To promote a healthy thriving culture language is required.
- Language: Demonstrate that learning our own people's language is cool and interesting to learn. Show that is the key to learning culture. Set up numerous activities revolving around language
- Traditional Dancing & Singing: learn about history and family
- Learning Culture: Important because having knowledge of where you came from gives you identity. Easy to set up. Need commitment by those who put it together and run it. Both youth and elders can run it. Some youth are too shy to talk to elders so both could run it

- Culture & Traditions: Traditional dance/singing, berry picking, hunting & fishing, learning culture, beading, traditional spirituality, language
- Culture & Tradition: Role modelled through aunts, uncles, grandparents and parents, mentors, workshops and cultural activities, cultural centre for all ages and activities to teach self-identity and self-respect, peer support, life skills, workshops, teach respect and honesty via Grandfather Teachings. Youth need more networks.
- Culture & Tradition: Activities and learning about culture is very important so it doesn't get lost.

Entertainment and Recreation:

- Sports Teams: join the All Native Tournament for fun and exercise
- Music: It would be nice to have a place to do music, singing, playing an instrument and everything to do with music
- Entertainment & Recreation: Sports would be beneficial because it keeps youth off the streets and promotes healthy living. FREE sports is the key. Dancing and singing Clubs. Camping. Family nights and Drama.
- Running, Walking, Weight Lifting and set an example for other people.
- Sports: make sports more affordable.
- Sports: make it free and available to everyone. Promote to gain a following. Make it consistent so no loopholes in funding and operations
- Recreational: youth dances, youth centers, bike & skateboarding park, Friendship Center activities, camping, family nights, swimming, skiing, work on vehicles
- Hobbies: Arts & Writing, Music, Drama, Environmental Groups, Working on Vehicles
- Clubs: Cubs, 4H Clubs, Wilderness Camps, Bible Camps, Cadets, School Clubs, School Council & Year Book, Dance & Singing Club
- Training: Sports Teams ie soccer, basketball, baseball, hockey, martial arts, youth council training, running, walking, weight lifting, post-secondary education
- Get more recreational and hobbies set (up), we would have to go to the band and it would be useful because the wide range of activities that can be done (would) keep the youth more busy
- Activity/Sporting Recreation Centre: (is lacking in our community)

Parental and Elder Support:

- Communities need to have tribal police, curfews and a circle of families to deal with kids. They need to get the villages fixed. People need to stand up and raise their standards and protect our children.
- Youth Programs: Involve the parents

- Consult With Youth: parents need to get more involved. Parents have to be more responsible in decisions and be strict. I am talking about myself. I have to set an example. It frustrates me to think about how we don't have a way to help our youth who are drinking and drugging
- Inform, Involve, Inspire and Consult: more participation of parents, relatives and extended family and community. Listen to our youth. Make youth active in our decisions and act on youth concerns. Hear and Listen to what our youth are saying. Respect each other. Our youth want to be treated the way adults are with respect.
- Training: Chief and Council have to be more involved. Training will be good to get the youth ready for the work world.

Other:

- (Ban Drugs and Alcohol from reserves) I would ban bootleggers and drug dealers from the reserves. There have been many suicides, rapes, overdoses etc. I would recommend a probation time to clear or banned from the reserve.
- Get a post-secondary education right after graduation
- Transit systems for isolated communities. People could apply for jobs in different communities and decrease social assistance applicants
- Skills 7 Education: Work on vehicles and Arts and Writing programs
- Grants/Funding for Youth: for after schools and weekends because there is nothing else. To keep them motivated and inspired and to keep them safe and happy
- Form a NorthWest Professional Aboriginal Task Force: Get more funding and contact all villages and have them select one youth to become a member of the Professional Task Force. Initially have the group come together to brainstorm ideas on what the group goals, purpose and responsibilities will be. Then meet at least once per month in each community in the Northwest. Create role model posters. Bring in other roles models and professionals ie. Aboriginal doctors, nurses, actors, etc. Have annual award ceremonies.

Question 5:

List any other suggestions that have not been listed in the booklet report.

An array of practical suggestions was offered by the respondents:

- get funding to motivate youth to finish school
- offer more courses for aboriginal youth
- Empowerment Groups for women and girls
- have pubertal rites of passage ceremonies. Research how it was done historically and how other nations performed their rites of passage.

- Field Trips to other aboriginal communities to meet their elders role models and professionals
- elect youth to band councils
- Have facilities that open door for families to participate and post phone numbers for safe house ie. Churches and teachings about right and wrong
- Sunday School
- Awards Night: appreciation of the things completed
- Celebrations of each stage of development ie nursery, from elementary to middle school to high school and post-secondary
- more youth workers and mentors needed
- Need more culture

Question 6:

What resources exist now in your community to meet the holistic needs of the youth? (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual)

The long list of resources offered by respondents includes (some answers are combined):

- Elders meet with youth and talk about culture
- Youth workers at the Friendship House Youth Hub; Youth Workers who plan outings ie skiing, swimming and Scared Straight Tours, workshops, summer youth mentorship and shadowing; Drop-in Center plans outings and the Canoe Journey
- Civic Centre
- Family and Friends: Foster Parents, grandparents, peers, youth workers
- Gymnasiums, Weight room, Work outs (exercise) on Tuesday and Thursday
- Doctor's offices
- Hospital & Health Centres
- College
- Employment Centre
- Churches, Preachers of all nations
- Art teachers, Teachers
- Dance practices, Traditional Dance groups
- Recreation programs, Recreation Directors
- Basketball teams
- School Counsellors
- Sweatlodges and Pipe Carriers
- Group Homes
- Workshops on safe sex, bullying, Culture ie the Medicine Wheel, public speaking

- Walking groups, Food Bank, Soccer Fields, Schools, College, Youth Drop-in Centre, Churches
- We have a Fitness room, Starting Smart (pre/postnatal program), PCAP (Parent & Children Activities Program) workers whom I trust with personal issues, Northwest Community College, First Nations Education Centre, Elementary Schools, Nursery, Daycare, Alcohol and Drug Counsellors, Couples Counsellors, several churches, trees, mountains, lakes, rivers, creeks surrounding us, Pathfinders and a Puppet Club

Question 7:

Who in your community would make a good candidate for an Aboriginal Youth Advisory Group/Committee?

Answers are as follows: (anonymous names)

- She works with youth in seven communities. She is organized, a role model, advocates for the youth and communicates well
- Someone with good people skills and a public speaker
- The youth and youth workers in each community should choose who that would be because they know each other. Also choose an alternate to assist and attend meetings when the first youth chosen cannot attend.
- Parent & Child Activity Program workers and someone who voices their opinion, does not judge, positive thinker and knows what the community needs
- All immediate and extended family who are there when I need them and who are great role models
- Parents, aunts and uncles

Question 8:

What are you currently doing now? What are your goals? How do you plan on achieving these goals?

Again, answers are straight forward:

- I am a Youth Worker. I am working on recruiting and waiting for more info on the trip to Haida Gwaii for the Gathering of Nations.
- I am in high school. My goal is to go to post-secondary to get an education
- Goal is to get a job and save money
- My goal is to have my own gold mine. To learn how to pan gold and I hope to hit the mother load
- My goal is to go back to school and back into mainstream school

- I am in high school. My goal is to graduate in 2013 and to make sure I do my homework
- I was told to stay in the current school so I finished the school years there
- I plan to get involved with youth in the community
- Goal would be to get a Youth Centre so there will be a positive place for activities and to learn culture
- My goal is to complete high school and get my Early Childhood Education or Practical Nursing diploma.

Question 9:

What would hinder your goals?

Respondents showed strength of character in their honest answers to this question. Each has its own “story”:

- me not attending school
- lack of money
- no family support
- nobody else finished school
- not too sure
- not finishing school
- not enough time
- too afraid to leave the reserve
- will miss my cultural activities and family if I leave reserve to go away
- I have trouble learning because of my mom’s drinking and drugging
- I turned my back on my foster home support after I turned 19. Now that I am 26 I regret the choices I made because I would have a career by now and not depend on social assistance
- not getting enough help in school so I can go to a bigger school
- There were too much bad influences at school and smoking and drugs at school. Mean kids at school so I sometimes don’t go. Sometimes I don’t have clean clothes and I get hungry. I was too tired because of the parties at my house.
- my addictions hinder my goals
- funding cutbacks hinder affordable activities and transportation

CONCLUSION

The answers provided by these youth respondents reflect a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experiences that have influenced their perspectives on current Aboriginal youth culture.

Their understanding of the AYLPNBC report's content and their connection with the youth's stories in the report emerged as well thought out responses and specific suggestions that should not be taken lightly.

These youth not only have a firm grasp of the challenges facing them both individually and as communities, but they also show a deep desire and willingness to improve society. Their thoughtful responses to each question shows a commitment to the core task of the *Aboriginal Youth Leadership Project in Northern British Columbia* report, which is to illustrate "the dire need for a leadership dialogue engaging Aboriginal youth at a grassroots level in order to prepare them for the important roles and responsibilities of future leadership."

The NCCABC would also like to extend our gratitude to Vivian Smith for undertaking this project. Finally, our sincere thanks is extended to all the participants for their candid and heartfelt responses to this project.

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