ABORIGINAL MENTORING PILOT PROJECTS

PUBLIC EVALUATION REPORT

June 14, 2006

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Produced for:

Aboriginal Mentoring Project Steering Committee

Alberta Children's Services
Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority

Big Brothers and Sisters Edmonton & Area

Child and Youth Advocate

and the Alberta Mentoring Partnership

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CAT RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discussions around mentoring for Aboriginal youth began in 2001 between Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), Alberta Children's Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority, the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton & Area. Preliminary discussions focused on the need to understand how best to serve Aboriginal children through mentoring relationships.

The preliminary discussions led to the initiation of the Aboriginal Mentoring Project in 2002. The main objective of the project was to understand how to provide culturally sensitive mentoring to children and youth. As the project moved into the implementation stage, formal partners included Alberta Children's Services and Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority, the Child and Youth Advocate, Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton & Area, and the Alberta Mentoring Partnership. Through their involvement in this project, partners hoped to see the development of effective mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth within Aboriginal communities and consequently an increased number of Aboriginal children and youth in mentoring relationships.

Phase one of the project was research-based. "Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review" was produced by the Community University Partnership (CUP) and the Aboriginal Capacity and Development Research Environments (ACADRE). This Review documented research and findings on relevant mentoring programs to date and further elaborated on this information with a select number of interviews in the Aboriginal community. Its findings and recommendations were instrumental in the design of Phase II, which saw the development and implementation of four Aboriginal mentoring pilot programs in Alberta. It was the project's intention to share the knowledge gained through these pilot sites with other Aboriginal communities throughout Alberta.

Although outcomes for the project were identified for multiple stakeholders, the priority group was identified as Aboriginal children, youth and their families. The desired outcomes identified were:

- ➢ increasing the numbers of Aboriginal children served by effective mentoring programs;
- ➢ enhancing the health, well-being and skill development of children through the presence of effective mentoring relationships;
- ➢ ensuring mentoring relationships have appropriate supports (e.g. match follow-up) that can also become important supports to families; and
- ➢ creating knowledge and transferring this knowledge to government, the Aboriginal community and other child and youth serving organizations.

Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to document the key findings from each site as they set out to deliver a youth mentoring program focused on Aboriginal children and/or youth. The evaluation was to document the challenges and strengths of each project and highlight the aspects and conditions that make for a successful program. The evaluation focus was on learning what makes Aboriginal youth mentoring projects successful and unique, rather than evaluating the impact of each program. [1]

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[1] Despite this focus, the evaluation did also work with each site to develop outcomes and to support each site to collect preliminary outcome data for an interim report to funders in December 2005.

Because of this focus, an ethnographic evaluation approach was used rather than a traditional program evaluation approach. This methodology was also utilized because it allowed for the authenticity of both the community and Aboriginal voice throughout the evaluation.

Ethnographic evaluation is the process of applying ethnographic techniques and concepts to evaluation in order to identify program impacts and measures of effectiveness that are more representative of unique programs and communities. Key elements of this approach are consultative fieldwork and maintenance of a cultural perspective among the researchers. Other ethnographic tools include using key informants, informal and semi-structured interviews, and triangulation.

Ethnographic evaluation, in particular, has been useful in clarifying contextual factors that enable us to interpret data meaningfully and to communicate effectively with policy decision makers. This approach generates data that is often more culturally relevant and reflective of the communities involved. In this context the ethnographic evaluation approach allowed for the collection of extensive field notes, informal interviews and conversations with program participants and community members.

The Four Pilot Sites

The selection of pilot sites was based on criteria developed by the Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Steering Committee (the Committee). The Committee was interested in the findings from four sites: two rural sites located in First Nation communities; and two urban sites serving off-reserve Aboriginal youth. The Committee was also interested in geographic representation and as such selected one urban site in both southern and northern Alberta (Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society in Edmonton and Métis Nation Region III in Calgary) and one rural site in both southern and northern Alberta (Paul First Nation in Duffield and Kainai First Nation on Blood Reserve).   The other determining factor was that where possible the Committee was interested in supporting and building on existing work and as a result two of the sites were selected because they were already doing mentoring work with youth. The other two sites were selected because they were interested in piloting a mentoring program in their community and/or organization.

Coyote Pride, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society had experience in delivering an evening mentoring program called Coyote Kids, where once a week Aboriginal children come together in their community with adults and elders to learn more about their culture and traditional ways. Bent Arrow approached the Committee because they were interested in taking the findings from Coyote Kids and developing a school-based mentoring program for children ages six to eight. As a result of the pilot funding, Bent Arrow began the Coyote Pride Program in three Edmonton public schools.

Wy-Youth-pi Mentoring, Paul First Nation

An elder of the Paul First Nation approached the Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority and asked for support to develop a local mentoring program. According to the elder and other community members, there was a high need for youth mentoring opportunities, especially in terms of giving youth the opportunity to engage in positive ways with the wider community.

Kainai Community Youth Workers (CYW)/Council Mentoring Project

Kainai First Nation, Child, Youth and Family Services was approached and asked to participate in the pilot initiative based on the work that the community had been doing in developing leadership skills with youth through the Youth Council and also through the mentoring relationships that had been taking place through Child, Youth and Family Services.

Kainai Community Youth Workers (CYW)/Youth Council Mentoring Project is based on the work that had been occurring in the community for a number of years. Particularly it included the expansion of the youth council leadership work, the one-on-one mentoring with high-risk community youth and group mentoring programs for both boys and girls.

Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program, Region III Council, Métis Nation of Alberta

Region III Council, Métis Nation of Alberta was also approached and asked to participate in the pilot initiative because of their previous work in the area of youth mentoring. The Métis Nation had been offering an evening group mentoring program to Aboriginal children and youth for the past seven years. Funding for the program was coming to an end and by participating in the pilot the program could continue to be offered in the community. It was also seen as an opportunity for the findings from this site to potentially inform the work of the pilots.

There were four original outcomes for the Aboriginal Mentoring Project:

1. **More Aboriginal children served by effective mentoring programs.**

   Based on the data collected, this first outcome has been successfully achieved by some of the pilot sites. In one case the numbers of children and youth engaged in the mentoring program have more than doubled from 2004 to 2005. For another, the program was a new addition to their services, and as such by the end of the pilot phase they were offering the program in three public schools with a total of 56 children. According to program staff more kids would like to join the program from other grades, and they have been approached by other public schools as well.

   Some pilot sites did not have as much success in this outcome area. In the case of one site they struggled to increase the numbers of the youth engaged in the project from their original pre-pilot numbers. The challenges for growing the program were two-fold: 1) staff turnover and 2) the ability of the organization to meet funding requirements and effectively support program staff. In the case of another site the program struggled to get off the ground in a structured way. Despite these challenges, existing youth groups were supported through the pilot process, although the exact numbers of children and youth engaged is unclear.

2. **The health, well-being and skill development of children will be enhanced through the existence of effective mentoring relationships.**

   Based on the outcome data collected, this outcome has also been partially achieved in the short-term. More time is required to determine the full extent of the impact in this area. There is significant anecdotal information and stories about the children and youth that have been in the mentoring programs. There are examples where a number of youth from a youth council program have gone on to key leadership positions provincially, federally and in some cases internationally. Teachers interviewed for school-based programs mentioned that they had seen differences in the behaviour and self-confidence of many of the children in the mentoring program. They also noted a difference in how other children in the school treated the children in the program, showing an interest in the program and in Aboriginal culture.

3. **Mentoring relationships will have appropriate supports (e.g. match follow-up) that can also become important supports to families.**

Successful mentor programs offer the appropriate supports that include follow up and parental engagement. The preliminary report from phase one highlighted the need to engage parents in the mentoring programs. All the sites had limited success with this outcome area. The challenge for all sites was in fully engaging the parents in the program. Most sites were successful in recruiting children and youth to the programs, and in the case of one pilot, parents were invited to an information session about the program and some parents participated in evaluation interviews. However, the staff for all sites recognized that they had not been as successful as they needed in this area, and highlighted parental involvement as a key focus area for future attention.

4. **To create knowledge and transfer this knowledge to government, the Aboriginal community and other child and youth serving organizations.**

This objective of the mentoring project was to support the four pilot sites to either develop or expand mentoring programs, and to gather findings for other communities and organizations interested in offering mentoring programs to Aboriginal children and youth. The evaluation was successful in that each site produced a number of key findings that will inform others as they move to offer mentoring programs to Aboriginal children and youth. The richness of the information collected will also serve to inform the government as it moves forward in supporting this type of programming.

Evaluation Findings

When the pilots were first conceived, the question that the Committee was hoping to answer was the following: Can the findings from the pilot sites be transferred to other sites? This evaluation highlighted a number of learning and challenges that can guide the implementation of youth mentoring programs in other Aboriginal communities and organizations. The key learning from this evaluation is that *Aboriginal mentoring programs will look different from mainstream programs and as such they will require different supports*.

The following is a list of overall findings in terms of uniqueness of Aboriginal programs.

- ➢ A group setting is the most effective means to deliver mentoring programs for the Aboriginal community. Both the children and adults are more at ease with group settings and a group setting lends itself well to experiential based learning opportunities.

- ➢ Although a group setting is key, there are times when one-on-one mentoring is also important, especially when working with high risk youth who may not be able to engage in a group setting initially.

- ➢ Mentoring is about more than children in the program. Mentoring in an Aboriginal context requires a commitment to building the capacity of the children and adults in the program.

- ➢ The mentoring program must be part of a larger Aboriginal cultural context and without this the program will not build pride and awareness in Aboriginal cultures.

- ➢ School-based programs are important as they can reach some Aboriginal children that may not be able to participate in evening or weekend programming because of issues such as access to transportation.

- ➢ The mentoring program must be seen as part of a larger community commitment to youth.

- The mentoring program must have the support of local leadership to be successful.

- The findings from the pilot sites suggest that mentoring programs can be important in the development of protective factors in Aboriginal youth. Being a mentee encourages youth to develop the confidence to become leaders in the community. Being a mentor provides youth with many opportunities to engage with other youth and adults in a positive way.

- Mentors should not be seen as experts but rather as participants in the program.

- Elders should be engaged to ensure the inclusion of appropriate cultural and spiritual elements.

- Local protocols must be respected and followed.

- The community must be informed and engaged in the project.

The other evaluation findings are in the area of organizational supports and standards of practice for all mentoring programs. These are the things that need to be in place for any program to be successfully delivered.

The following is a list of overall findings in terms of standards of practice.

- Retention of competent staff is key to programming success and as such staff must receive the appropriate training to run the program and have ongoing support and supervision by more experienced professionals.

- For mentoring programs to work, there is a need for intentional recruitment, screening, ongoing training and support for mentors.

- There needs to be agreement by the community that there is a need for the mentoring program and families must be engaged in the program.

- There is a need to develop outcomes and be able to report on these outcomes.

- There is a need for adequate financial management practices and reporting procedures.

- There must be adequate insurance coverage to be able to deliver a mentoring program.

- If the organization does not have experience with this type of programming, they need to partner with an organization(s) that does.

- If working with organizations and/or communities with limited experience in youth programming, the program funders need to be clear about their expectations of the programs and determine their own capacity to provide ongoing support to the program in order to be successful.

It will also be important for future sites to have a good understanding of what it means to mentor in an Aboriginal context. All sites reported that mentoring needed to be seen in a larger community capacity-building context. Mentors need to be willing to grow and learn with the program, they do not need to come in as experts or cultural guides. This work should be done by program staff and the elders in the program. The mentors need to be open to building relationships with the children and through time they will learn what gifts they have to offer to the children. When recruiting mentors, the type of person becomes more important than who they are or what they do for a living. Good mentors are role models in the most general sense and their connection to the children comes from the relationship they form with the children. With this understanding, defining the qualities of a good mentor is key to a successful program. Staff and mentors participating in the pilots were asked to list qualities they believe define a good mentor. These included:

- a good sense of humour;
- being real, not phoney – the kids will see through phoniness;
- respect for children, not wanting to parent or boss them;
- commitment to the children;
- commitment to consistent participation in the program – mentors need to be there – they offer structure to the children;
- being a role model and understanding the boundaries between adult and child;
- ability to set boundaries – knowing they are still the adult;
- willingness to engage in training – good mentors need training and ongoing support; and
- commitment to build trusting relationships with the children.

The Aboriginal Mentoring Project was developed in response to the need for culturally sensitive mentoring for Aboriginal children and youth. The pilot sites were asked to participate in this initiative in order to further understand what would make mentoring programs appropriate and effective for Aboriginal children. Each site was asked to deliver a youth mentoring program that would be most appropriate for the children of their community. The intention of the evaluation was to monitor and record this process and in particular the findings and challenges faced by each site.   The four sites involved in this project produced rich information for others interested in offering mentoring supports to Aboriginal children and youth. Each site set out to offer a mentoring program that would be responsive to the community. The programs were designed to take into account the richness that is imbedded in Aboriginal cultures and to be most appropriate for the age groups children and youth being targeted.

The goal of this evaluation was to document the findings, and in particular the success and challenges faced by each site. The intention being that these findings would help guide other organizations and/or communities that may be interested in developing mentoring programs. The findings revealed that there are a number of program aspects that can be seen as being particular to Aboriginal mentoring programs – specifically the issues of group mentoring, the role of elders, the importance of community support, building the capacity of mentors and the need to ensure that the programs are grounded in Aboriginal culture and traditions. However, there were also a number of issues that were not only applicable to Aboriginal mentoring programs, but are also good business for all youth programming. These include: ensuring there is the organizational capacity and accountability to deliver the program; ensuring that staff are well-trained and supervised; ensuring that youth are engaged in developing the program; and ensuring there is the ability to measure program impact and sound financial tracking.

This evaluation revealed that attention to all of these aspects is important for the provision of effective mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth. One set of program aspects does not out-weigh the other, and if other jurisdictions want to engage in this type of programming, equal attention will need to be paid to all aspects of sound program development, implementation and monitoring.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Discussions around mentoring for Aboriginal youth began in 2001 between Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), Alberta Children's Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority, the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton & Area. Preliminary discussions focused on the need to understand how best to serve Aboriginal children through mentoring relationships.

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Although outcomes for the Project were identified for multiple stakeholders, Aboriginal children, youth and their families were identified as the priority group. The desired outcomes identified were:

- ➢ increasing the numbers Aboriginal children served by effective mentoring programs;
- ➢ enhancing the health, well-being and skill development of children through the presence of effective mentoring relationships;
- ➢ ensuring mentoring relationships have appropriate supports (e.g. match follow-up) that can also become important supports to families;
- ➢ building the capacity of local Aboriginal communities and programs to support youth; and
- ➢ enhancing the knowledge available to mentoring organizations and the government.

1.1   Mentoring

A mentor is "an experienced and trusted advisor or teacher acting as a guide to another person"[2] and a mentoring program is one that facilitates opportunity for mentoring relationships. Although mentoring takes place in a variety of settings, from academic to corporate to social, of interest to this Project was "social and personal mentoring". In this case, mentoring "occurs within organizations that initiate and support personal relationships between at-risk youth and volunteers from the community.[3] The social development of children and youth is emphasized

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[2] Mentoring. Information Center on Aboriginal Health. Retrieved December 2005 from
http://www.icah.ca/content/en/topics/subtopic/section.php?tcid=101&stcid=117
[3] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A., p. 7.

with the understanding that as youth solve their social problems through friendship and guidance, success in academic and employment are likely to follow.[4] Mentoring "helps level the playing field for kids with so many challenges to overcome"[5] and "offers hope for young people at-risk".[6] Overall, mentoring tries to build protective factors in children and youth. It is a strategy for building resiliency in children, especially those children that would be seen as at-risk for certain challenges.

Mentoring programs have demonstrated positive results. A recent evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters concluded that "our research presents clear and encouraging evidence that caring relationships between adults and youth can be created and supported by programs and can yield a wide range of tangible benefits".[7] Benefits such as a "deterrent effect on initiation of drug and alcohol use, and overall positive effects on academic performance" are attributed to Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs.[8] The study cautions, however, that benefits are not automatic but contingent on effective program design and management. Components common to successful mentoring programs include recruitment, screening, matching and the mentorship relationship. The mentor's qualities and behaviours are significant to the success of the mentorship relationship; most important are "respect for the mentee and long-term commitment. Effective mentors are those who do not try to change youth or "fix" their problems but who support and help youth to achieve their own goals…"[9] "Poorly chosen mentors can harm self-esteem in children and decrease their trust in adults, an especially dangerous effect if they already lack positive adult role models".[10]

Although mentoring in a Western context is an evolving concept, it has traditionally involved a one-to-one relationship with a distinct power difference between mentor and mentee. Skills, information and knowledge are transferred from mentor to his/her protégé via the mentoring relationship. The "act of mentoring is regarded as support for individuals so that they can advance themselves" and is therefore very individualistic with little focus on the mentee's family or surrounding community.[11]

1.2   Mentoring in an Aboriginal Context

Mentoring in an Aboriginal context has traditionally involved the whole community. The term mentoring per se is not common in Aboriginal communities, but the concept is "culturally ingrained".[12] "Prior to contact, First Nations people had tribal customary practices for providing mentor-like guidance for children and youth… The whole tribe (community) contributed to raising the children as everyone had their role to play in teaching the young".[13] The traditional form of learning in Aboriginal communities was similar to our concept of mentoring today; much of a child's general knowledge was gained by watching and listening and families shaped behaviours through the use of positive examples. Oral tradition, stories, games and role modeling were used to set examples for the young.[14] Although outcomes for the mentee are

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[4] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A.
[5] Big Brothers Big Sisters website. Retrieved December 2005 from http://www.bbbsa.org/site/pp.asp?c=iuJ3JgO2F&b=14599.
[6] McCluskey, K.W. & Torrance, E. P. (n.d.) Mentoring One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development.
[7] Tierney, J.P., & Grossman, J.B. (2000). Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters. Retrieved December 2005 from http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/publications_description.asp?search_id=7&publication_id=111.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A., p.12.
[10] Ibid. p. 10.
[11] Ibid. p. 7.
[12] Ibid. p. 28.
[13] Ibid. p. 12.
[14] Ibid. p. 15.

clearly recognized by Aboriginal leaders,[15] within the Aboriginal context, "mentoring is not only for the individual, it is for families, communities, mentors and children".[16] Also, "Aboriginal learning and child rearing more commonly take place in a group setting. The latter typically is a more informal atmosphere where there is less distinction between who is teaching and who is being taught".[17]

"Historically, the Indigenous family structure was disrupted by the imposition of residential schooling by the colonial administration".[18] Research indicates that residential schooling had many severely negative effects for Aboriginal communities. Residential schools stripped away culture and parenting skills[19] and left communities with a lack of role models and training for child rearing.[20] Aboriginal youth, therefore, need to re-establish their cultural identity[21] and formal programs are necessary within Aboriginal communities to re-build the "informal social and cultural systems that traditionally guided youth" but were destroyed during the residential school era.[22] Mentoring offers Aboriginal youth desperately needed relationships and support. Poverty and its associated discouragement and despair are also the reality for many Aboriginal youth. This intensifies the need for mentors who can become "talent spotters and developers" that help "mentees envision future possibilities and create positive visions". Aboriginal youth also require additional support in the face of ongoing racism. McCluskey and Torrance suggest that we must confront the fact that the Aboriginal population has clearly been marginalized; "to put it succinctly, the Aboriginal population…. is seriously disadvantaged in many respects". In Canada the suicide rate among Aboriginal youth with Status is five times higher for males and seven times higher for females; the school dropout and unemployment rates are markedly higher for Aboriginal youth than non-Aboriginal counterparts. Positive role models are needed "that can encourage their mentees when they are faced with alienation, exclusion and disenfranchisement caused by societal stereotypes". *Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development* sums up its recommendations for effective Aboriginal youth mentoring: "focus on strengths rather than deficits, be respectful of cultural values and build upon existing personal, familial and community resources".[23]

1.3   Findings from the Preliminary Review (Phase I)

Discussions with Aboriginal leaders and role models with extensive experience in programming with Aboriginal youth informed the design of Phase II of the Project. The necessity to include the family in the mentoring process was a theme that emerged from these discussions. "Indigenous tribes, in the past and the present, hold the extended family in high regard as they assist in mentoring the children".[24] Further, the "need for community involvement from the outset of any program" was strongly emphasized. Feedback suggested that approaching appropriate community leaders and obtaining community "buy-in" is essential to a successful Aboriginal mentoring program.[25] This "buy-in" is not optional according to one participant who

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[15] One Aboriginal leader interviewed defined mentoring as "a process of teaching youth to make healthy choices, become self-responsible and transfer skills to increase self-esteem". (Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A., p. 25)

[16] Ibid. p. 15.

[17] Ibid. p. 17.

[18] Ibid. p. 13.

[19] McCluskey, K.W. & Torrance, E. P. (n.d.) Mentoring One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development.

[20] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A

[21] McCluskey, K.W. & Torrance, E. P. (n.d.) Mentoring One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development.

[22] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A, p. 17.

[23] McCluskey, K.W. & Torrance, E. P. (n.d.) Mentoring One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development.

[24] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A, p. 13.

[25] Ibid. p. 20, 21.

said, "All the Aboriginal teachings say that programs for Aboriginal people have to be developed with the Aboriginal community".[26] "Programs that bring family and community together create an interface for 'community identity' that Aboriginal youth need"; they need to feel a connection that builds a sense of belonging.[27] The importance of youth involvement in the planning process and of Aboriginal mentors who can reinforce traditional cultural values was emphasized. Transporting youth to and from activities is a specific need mentioned by participants.

Sustainability was also a significant issue for the Aboriginal leaders interviewed. One participant expressed his concerns, "They have tried almost every program in the world on Aboriginal people. They last a little while and then there is no sustainability to them". Another participant said "I get frustrated when they bring in new programs, when they can't sustain the ones they have right now". Building on existing programs and substantial budgets that are stable over time was seen as significant in ensuring sustainability of programs.[28] In regards to evaluation, feedback received suggested that "evaluation processes should be appropriate to the community being evaluated and goals are to be defined by the community at the outset".[29]

The Preliminary Review offered the following recommendations:

- mentoring should not be seen as a stand-alone narrowly targeted program, but rather as an activity that is entirely supportive of community values and goals and that is integrated fully with other activities related to community building, education and healing;
- mentoring should be embedded in existing programs; and
- a community advisory group should be established at the outset of any mentoring program to inform and guide the development process.[30]

In its concluding statements, the Preliminary Review also adds "coordinators must be appropriately trained and supported, mentee families should be incorporated, programs should have a flexible structure that includes group mentoring and cultural events" and "program planners must ensure adequate and realistic time for the community to develop trust and commitment".[31]

1.4   Phase II Revisions

In direct response to feedback from the Aboriginal community, it was suggested that the next phase of the project:

- work with programs for youth that already exist in the Aboriginal community;
- include parents and elders in the program design;
- support the development of community capacity to deliver sustainable programs;
- document the conditions that support the growth of sustainable mentoring across different pilots and Aboriginal communities; and
- ensure an orientation is the first step.[32]

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[26] Ibid. p. 24.
[27] Ibid. p. 20.
[28] Ibid. p. 23.
[29] Aboriginal Mentoring Project Phase II: Implementation Plan, p. 3.
[30] Bisanz, J., Cardinal, C., da Costa, J., Gibson, N., Klinck, J. & Woodard, K. (2003, April 14). Prospects for Aboriginal Mentoring: A Preliminary Review. CUP & ACADRE. Edmonton, Alberta: U. of A, p. 29.
[31] Ibid. p. 30.
[32] Aboriginal Mentoring Project Phase II: Implementation Plan, p. 3, and 4.

Based on these suggestions, Phase II included the following.

- A documentation, development/coaching approach rather than the research, design and implementation model originally proposed. The approach was revised to ensure that "effective practices and resources emerge from the pilots verses being defined for pilots".
- A selection of communities that already have some form of mentoring to "enhance mentoring practices and increase the number of mentors in current programs".
- A skill development component to build capacity across individuals and organizations in the four communities involved.
- Realistic and adequate resources and timeframes to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community. This will allow the development of trust and commitment essential to sustainable and successful programs. [33]

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

2.1 Methodology

The objective of this evaluation was to document the key findings from each site as they set out to deliver a youth mentoring program focused on Aboriginal children and/or youth. The evaluation was to document the challenges and strengths of each project and highlight the aspects and conditions that make for a successful program. The evaluation focus was on learning what makes Aboriginal youth mentoring projects successful and unique, rather than evaluating the impact of each program. [34] Because of this focus an ethnographic evaluation approach was used rather than a traditional program evaluation approach. This methodology was also utilized because it allowed for the authenticity of both the community and Aboriginal voice throughout the evaluation.

Ethnographic evaluation is the process of applying ethnographic techniques and concepts to evaluation in order to determine program impacts and effectiveness that is more representative of unique programs and communities. Key elements of this approach include conducting fieldwork and maintaining a cultural perspective. Other ethnographic tools include using key informants, informal and semi-structured interviews and triangulation.

Ethnographic evaluation, in particular, has been useful in clarifying contextual factors that enable us to interpret data meaningfully and to communicate effectively with policy decision makers. This approach generates data that is often more culturally relevant and reflective of the communities involved. In this context the ethnographic evaluation approach allowed for the collection of extensive field notes, informal interviews and conversations with program participants and community members.

2.2 Evaluation Process

Upon initial discussions with the four pilot sites – Métis Nation Region III, Kainai First Nation, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and Paul First Nation, it was determined that for the evaluation to be a useful process for each site, time would need to be spent in a program development phase, along with evaluation data being collected through the ethnographic

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[33] Ibid. p. 7, 8.

[34] Despite this focus, the evaluation did also work with each site to develop outcomes and to support each site to collect preliminary outcome data for an interim report to funders in December 2005.

process. Of the four sites, only one had begun to clearly articulate a program based on clear goals, outcomes, measures and deliverables.

As such, each site requested that the first phase of the evaluation include support in developing a program plan and outcome plan for the project. Based on this information the evaluation was expanded to include work with each site on front-end program development and documentation. The intention of the program-planning phase was to attempt to align the programs, without losing the uniqueness of each site and program.

This was done through developing general outcomes for each site that were compatible with each other and then developing data collection tools that were appropriate for the outcomes being measured. As a result there were a number of outcomes developed that were similar across the sites.

The main shift was in the focus area for the capacity building– originally the evaluation methodology ascribed to a capacity building approach through the training of community researchers - they would be trained to assist in the collection and interpretation of data. However, given that there was a need for capacity building support in the program development and delivery phases of the actual mentoring program, attention was refocused away from the use of community researchers to supporting staff to clearly articulate the program and develop the capacity to measure program impact.

The original deliverables for the evaluation were as follows:

- evaluation process for the four pilot sites;
- final report based on findings; and
- findings for others interested in this work.

By expanding the scope of the evaluation, the original deliverables were expanded to include the following:

- program plans for each site;
- outcomes, indicators and measurement tools for each site;
- outcomes monitoring and reporting processes; and
- outcome data showing program impact.

2.3   Program Development Process

In order to develop program plans and outcomes that accurately reflected the needs of each pilot site, program staff and program participants were included in identifying program goals and outcomes. Each site developed a program plan that included the program vision, program philosophy, program overview, program goals, long-term outcomes, program activities and a program logic model.

2.4   Data Collection Process

Along with the development of program plans, the evaluation data was collected through a series of meetings, interview, focus groups and observations. An ethnographic evaluation process is a fluid process that identifies all information as being relevant to the evaluation process. The process recognizes that to accurately reflect the work of the program, it is equally important to understand the context in which the work is taking place. Effective youth programming in an Aboriginal setting will not look like youth programming in other settings, the key is to understand the importance of the community and cultural context and ensure that this context is front and centre in the data collection process.

Although the process was unique for each site, there was a similar overall evaluation process across the four sites. The first part of the process included an orientation of site staff and volunteers to the evaluation and why it was being done. Once this was clear, the next phase was the development of the evaluation process for each site. This was based on discussions with program staff and a review of existing program materials. The completed evaluation process was then presented to each site for input and eventual approval.

Following the approval process, the program development phase was implemented. Once each site had a draft program plan, a series of formal and informal interviews with program staff and volunteers were conducted. Along with the interview process, the evaluator also took field notes throughout the process which included a record of observations and impressions of the events. In order to collect comparative data – data that would be similar across each site – a series of focus groups were held. Focus group participants included children/youth in the program, mentors, and program staff. This information has been used for both comparative analysis and in the development of overall program findings. It was also determined that the Project Steering Committee should be part of the data collection process and to this end, a focus group with Steering Committee members was held and a follow-up teleconference call for those that had missed the focus group, so they could also provide their insights.

3. THE PILOT SITES AND PROGRAMS

3.1 The Four Pilot Sites

The selection of pilot sites was based on criteria developed by the Committee. The Committee was interested in the findings from four sites: two rural sites located in First Nation communities; and two urban sites serving off reserve Aboriginal youth. The Committee was also interested in geographic representation and as such selected one urban and one rural site in both southern and northern Alberta. The other determining factor was that where possible the Committee was interested in supporting and building on existing work and as a result two of the sites were selected because they were already doing mentoring work with youth. The other two sites were selected because they were interested in piloting a mentoring program in their community and/or organization.

3.2 Program Overviews

Coyote Pride, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society have experience delivering an evening mentoring program called Coyote Kids, where once a week Aboriginal children come together in their community with adults and elders to learn more about their culture and traditional ways. Bent Arrow approached the Committee because they were interested in taking the findings from Coyote Kids and developing a school-based mentoring program for children ages 6 to 8. As a result of the pilot funding, Bent Arrow began the Coyote Pride Program in three Edmonton public schools.

The Coyote Pride Program approaches mentoring from a community-based perspective. It focuses on building capacity and leadership skills within the Aboriginal community. The program is not just about the children, but also focuses on building the capacity and self-confidence of the adults in the program. Through mentoring, Aboriginal community members are offered an opportunity to learn more about their culture and their community, as well as engage with children in a healthy, loving way.

By utilizing a group format for the mentoring program, all participants - children, adults and elders - are able to share and grow together. The program offers the opportunity for children to learn lessons they would not get anywhere else. They learn to respect themselves and others. The program is based on experiential learning - "learning by doing" and is not punitive in nature. Children are encouraged to learn from their mistakes; to understand that everything happens for a reason; and to try and understand why things happen and how to change them for the better.

The program is focused on Aboriginal ways and values. Respect, kindness and sharing are the foundations on which the program is built. The program utilizes an interactive learning style based on storytelling, group activities and games.

It has been the experience of Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, (through their experience with Coyote Pride and their longer-term community-based mentoring program, Coyote Kids), that Aboriginal children engage more effectively in a group setting. There is more comfort for children if participation is collective, and findings are provided in an experiential setting. Mentors are more comfortable in a group setting, where relationships evolve more naturally and there is less pressure for them to immediately engage with the children individually. The group setting provides a more conducive atmosphere for the children and mentors to participate in collective teachings and activities.

The group setting also enables mentors to engage and strengthen their capacities by learning from one another. There is less pressure to be an expert in an area, or to provide cultural guidance to the children. The mentors participate in the group programming in a non-threatening atmosphere where they learn to offer their gifts and strengths to the children.

Wy-Youth-pi Mentoring, Paul First Nation

An elder of the Paul First Nation approached the Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority and asked for support to develop a local mentoring program. According to the elder and other community members, there was a high need for youth mentoring opportunities, especially in terms of giving youth the opportunity to engage in positive ways with the wider community. Following this discussion, Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority facilitated a meeting with Alberta Children's Services, the Child and Youth Advocate, and Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton & Area to determine what support could be provided to the community. Based on these discussions, the Project Steering Committee decided that the Paul First Nation would be asked to participate as one of the pilot sites.

The Wy-Youth-pi program was intended to be an integrated, preventative youth program that would directly support the capacity of the children and youth of the Paul First Nation. Through the mobilization of multiple community resources, the project would cultivate, support and strengthen linkages with the community through the:

- encouragement of responsible mentorship and leadership in the development of healthy individuals, families and communities;
- creation of unity and reduction of social barriers, such as racism, segregation and isolation;
- coordination of resources, funding, planning and service delivery;
- involvement of children, youth, parents, elders and service providers in each stage of the development and delivery of the program; and
- communication and celebration of community and cultural diversity.

Kainai Community Youth Workers (CYW)/Youth Council Mentoring Project

Kainai First Nation, Child, Youth and Family Services was asked to participate in the pilot initiative. This community had been working to develop leadership skills with youth through the Youth Council and also through the mentoring relationships that had been taking place through Child, Youth and Family Services.

Kainai Community Youth Workers (CYW)/Youth Council Mentoring Project is based on the work that had been occurring in the community for a number of years. Particularly it included the expansion of the youth council leadership work; the one-on-one mentoring with high-risk community youth; and group mentoring programs for both boys and girls.

Mentoring is understood by the Kainai First Nation as part of Aboriginal traditions. The Kainai First Nation has a rich history of societies - groups of people based on age and gender - which were trained and mentored by elders and other adults. For the Kainai the focus of mentoring is on teaching and guidance for children and youth. The pilot project expansion remained committed to this cultural heritage and expanded based on the experience of the mentoring that had already been going on in the community.

The Kainai program includes the following mentor supports.

➢ Gender-based Youth Clubs – Older youth mentoring younger youth. The focus of the youth clubs is on addressing personal issues and supporting a successful transition to adulthood.

➢ Youth Council Supports – An opportunity for Kainai Youth Council members to mentor youth clubs throughout the community. The main goal of this program is to develop leadership skills in the youth and to engage them in their communities.

➢ One-to-One Mentoring – An intensive mentoring program for at-risk youth. The focus of this component is on engagement and relationship building with trained adult mentors.

Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program, Region III Council, Métis Nation of Alberta

Region III Council, Métis Nation of Alberta was also asked to participate in the pilot initiative because of their previous work in the area of youth mentoring. The Métis Nation had been offering an evening group mentoring program to Aboriginal children and youth for 7 years. Funding for the program was coming to an end and by participating in the pilot the program could continue to be offered in the community. Its inclusion in the initiative was also seen as an opportunity for the findings from this site to inform the work of the other pilots.

The Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program focuses on four aspects of development - the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical. This includes enhancing life skills and increasing awareness of available resources, informing youth of multiculturalism and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures.

Youth attend weekly youth group meetings where topics of interest and concern to youth are discussed and activities planned. The topics discussed have emphasis on the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects of ones self. The youth program also emphasizes increasing knowledge and awareness of the diverse cultures in and around the Calgary area. This is achieved by inviting guest speakers from different cultural organizations to youth group meetings. The goal of the guest speakers was to increase awareness of diversity and to demonstrate ways to reduce discrimination.

In the absence of formal support groups for Aboriginal youth, the "Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program" provides support, guidance, companionship and encouragement to Aboriginal youth by matching them with other Aboriginal individuals who have successfully met life's challenges. These individuals are the Mentors of the Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program. Through training

and exposure to more experienced mentors, youth involved in the mentoring program are more likely to develop the life skills necessary to be successful in future endeavours.

4.   EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation findings will outline the overall achievements and challenges of the mentoring pilot sites.

4.1   Program Development

Program goals for each pilot were identified through discussions with program staff and volunteers. The program goals were identified as the focus areas for program activities. Although the goals represent the uniqueness of each pilot site, there were similarities across the sites. The goals for each site fall into the following categories:

> ➢ to improve the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical well being of Aboriginal children and youth;
> ➢ to provide a safe and loving atmosphere for Aboriginal children and youth to come together with adults;
> ➢ to provide leadership training and opportunities for Aboriginal youth; and
> ➢ to provide culturally appropriate programming for Aboriginal children and youth.

Each of the sites also identified 3 or 4 long-term outcomes for their program. Although each site identified their outcomes independently, it is interesting to note that the long-term outcomes are essentially the same across the four pilot sites. The long-term outcomes for the youth mentoring pilots are:

> ➢ to increase self-esteem and self-respect of Aboriginal children and youth;
> ➢ to build leadership skills in Aboriginal youth; and
> ➢ to increase understanding and pride in Aboriginal cultural and language.

From these long-term outcomes a number of program specific short-term outcomes were developed to enable each site to measure the more immediate effects of their program. The short-term outcomes are not the same across the pilot sites, but continue to be similar across the sites as they relate to the longer term outcomes.

4.2   Initial Project Outcomes

There were four original outcomes for the Aboriginal Mentoring Project:

4.2.1   More Aboriginal children served by effective mentoring programs.

Based on the data collected, this first outcome has been successfully achieved by some of the pilot sites. In one case the numbers of children and youth engaged in the mentoring program have more than doubled from 2004 to 2005. For another, the program was a new addition to their services, and as such by the end of the pilot phase they were offering the program in three public schools with a total of 56 children. According to program staff more kids would like to join the program from other grades, and they have been approached by other public schools as well.

Some pilot sites did not have as much success in this outcome area. In the case of one site they struggled to increase the numbers of the youth engaged in the project from their original pre-pilot numbers. The challenges for growing the program were two-fold: 1) staff turnover and 2) the ability of the organization to meet funding requirements and effectively support program staff. In the case of another site the program struggled to

get off the ground in a structured way. Despite this challenge, existing youth groups were supported through the pilot process, although the exact numbers of children and youth engaged is unclear.

4.2.2   The health, well-being and skill development of children will be enhanced through the existence of effective mentoring relationships.

Based on the outcome data collected, this outcome has also been partially achieved in the short-term. More time is required to determine the full extent of the impact in this area. There is significant anecdotal information and stories about the children and youth that have been in the mentoring programs. There are examples where a number of youth from a youth council program have gone on to key leadership positions provincially, federally and in some cases internationally.   Teachers interviewed for school-based programs mentioned that they had seen differences in the behaviour and self confidence of many of the children in the mentoring program. They also noted a difference in how other children in the school treated the children in the program, showing an interest in the program and in Aboriginal culture.

4.2.3   Mentoring relationships will have appropriate supports (e.g. match follow-up) that can also become important supports to families.

Successful mentor programs offer the appropriate supports that include follow up and parental engagement. The preliminary report from phase one highlighted the need to engage parents in the mentoring programs. All the sites had limited success with this outcome area.   The challenge for all sites was in fully engaging the parents in the program. Most sites were successful in recruiting children and youth to the programs, and in the case of one pilot, parents were invited to an information session about the program and some parents participated in evaluation interviews. However, the staff for all sites recognized that they had not been as successful as they needed in this area, and highlighted parental involvement as a key focus area for future attention.

4.2.4   Create knowledge and transfer this knowledge to government, the Aboriginal community and other child and youth serving organizations.

This objective of the mentoring project was to support the four pilot sites to either develop or expand mentoring programs, and to also gather findings for other communities and organizations interested in offering mentoring programs to Aboriginal children and youth. The evaluation was successful in that each site produced a number of key findings that will inform others as they move to offer mentoring programs to Aboriginal children and youth. The richness of the information collected will also serve to inform the government as it moves forward in supporting this type of programming.

4.3   Overall Findings

The Findings from this evaluation can be organized according to the following categories:

4.3.1   Organizational and/or Community Readiness

Programs must have the support of a host organization and the wider community in order to successfully operate. An idea about what is needed and an understanding of how to address a need is only part of the service delivery equation. The experience of the pilots demonstrates that youth mentoring projects must have the backing of the community and the support of an organization in delivering the project. Those sites that ensured that the mentoring program was fully integrated into the community and/or organization were most successful in meeting program outcomes.

A.   Internal Leadership / Advocacy

Internal leadership refers to the commitment of either the political leadership in the community (for example, Chief and Council) or the leadership of the upper management of the organization to support the project. Mentoring programs require internal leadership if they are to be successfully implemented. Again the sites where internal leadership was not just a verbal commitment but where leadership was actively involved in the development and delivery of the program were the sites with more effective programs.

B.   Community Awareness and Understanding

When working with Aboriginal youth, community understanding and awareness of the project is central to successful implementation. For mentoring projects, especially those based in First Nation communities, community awareness is key for the recruitment of mentors and elders, and to ensuring children and youth participate in the program. Part of the success of the program is making the community aware of what mentoring means and how it can support the children, youth and adults in the community. Often external initiatives are introduced into a community without sufficient preliminary work being completed. If a community is not aware of a program and why it is important, the community will not engage with the initiative.

Successful recruitment of mentors only occurred in those sites where the program had a profile in the community and where there were existing relationships with people who were potential mentors. Participation of children and youth were also closely tied to the awareness of the program. Sites where awareness was actively fostered saw participation rates in the mentoring program more than double over the course of the pilot phase.

C.   Agreement Regarding the Need

Tied to community awareness is the agreement about the need for the program. There must be a commitment by the community that there is a need for such a program. Without this commitment, the program will not necessarily have the widespread participation required to be successful. Part of the challenge around getting agreement on need comes from the overall lack of familiarity with the concept of mentoring. Once again the successful pilot sites worked very hard at educating mentors, parents and the community at large about what mentoring is and why it is important for the Aboriginal community.

D.   Process for Community Input

In order to build community awareness and commitment to the program, there must be a process in place for community input and involvement. Two successful ways to ensure that the community is engaged in the program is to build a consultative process and/or build a project advisory committee with community representation.

F.   Consultative Process

A consultative process ensures that parents, youth and the wider community are not only informed about the project, but they are asked for their input around issues of program priorities and activities. This is an important way to ensure that communities respect and adhere to protocols. The process does not require formal organization but can rather be part of the larger engagement with the community that may occur naturally. In these instances the program will have the relationships naturally formed through the ongoing work of the organization in the community. Two of the four pilot

sites had processes for ongoing community input and used this information to develop the program and build overall awareness and commitment from the larger community.

G.   Advisory Committee

Another way to ensure that the community is committed to the program is to form an advisory committee with representation from community members and other program partners. This is an effective way of ensuring that the community has constant input into the program and is part of ensuring the overall success in the community. In terms of the pilot sites, one of the four sites had developed a project advisory committee as a mechanism for program awareness, monitoring and supervision.

4.3.2 Organizational Capacity

By organizational capacity, we are referring to the internal processes that are available in an organization to support the delivery of programs. For an agency to successfully deliver a program a number of internal mechanisms must be in place. For the pilot sites, the successful programs occurred on sites where the host or delivering organization had experience in delivering programs for children and youth. In these sites there was the capacity to build a new, or expand an existing, program.

A.   Program Staff

A key component to successful program delivery is staff; sites where program staff were consistent, well trained and supported tended to have more program success than sites where there was a high turn over of staff, or where staff had little or no experience in this programming area.

Recruitment Processes

Project implementation starts with the recruitment of staff. There is an ongoing staffing shortage in social service and not for profit sectors. Well-educated and experienced staff are constantly in demand. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Aboriginal community, where people with experience working with youth are in high demand. One way to ensure that recruitment is successful is to have a recruitment process in place. The sites where programs were effective relied on internal recruitment practices. Staff and/or mentors that had experience working with youth in other program areas were internally recruited into the programs. In these cases, the staff members had an already proven record within the organization and were able to further build their skills with the ongoing support of management.

Training

Once staff are recruited, they must be trained in mentoring supports and program delivery. Whether experienced or not, all staff require an orientation to the program; an overview of expectations; and a complete understanding of program goals and intended outcomes. Once this is complete, the staff must receive further training in the area of mentoring and youth, including what mentoring programming includes; how to support mentors to be successful with children; reporting requirements; and mentoring program organization. Again, the pilot programs that ensured that staff were trained were also the sites that had well-organized projects and were able to report on results.

Supervision

As mentoring programs are new to most Aboriginal organizations and communities, staff will require ongoing supervision to ensure the program is being properly delivered and

monitored. For all of the pilot projects, there was a high degree of program modification as implementation highlights challenges and barriers. Only with close and effective supervision did staff have the support to overcome these challenges and ensure that children and youth receive the best programming possible. All pilot sites had program challenges, from things such as getting school buy-in to ensuring that children and families understood the program and were willing to participate. The sites where these challenges were overcome were also the sites where the programs had formal and ongoing staff supervision.

Retention

Only by ensuring that staff are properly recruited, trained and supervised, will the issue of staff retention be addressed. For the sites with high staff turnover there were additional challenges to successful program implementation. Valuable time and resources were used to replace staff, taking away time and energy from program delivery. As a result, when it came time to report on program outcomes, it was a challenge to do so. Sites where there were well-supported staff were successful in that the staff were able to grow with the program and ensure that they were meeting the needs of the participating children and mentors.

B.   Mentors

Mentoring in an Aboriginal context is different than in mainstream programs. Although the idea of extended family and community support for children is a central foundation of Aboriginal cultures, the more specific idea of mentoring is not a common practice. Most people interviewed originally felt that mentoring was beyond their personal capacity and that to be a successful mentor one must be an "expert" in working with children and youth. Besides wanting to work with children and promote the development of Aboriginal youth, the reason most people agreed to be mentors was often two fold: 1) They believed that in a group mentoring setting there would be less pressure and more support for them to grow and develop as mentors. 2) They were reassured that they would be trained and supported in their role.[35]

Group Mentoring

One of the most interesting and potentially important findings from this evaluation is the importance of group mentoring in Aboriginal communities. All four pilot sites were utilizing a group mentoring process with both children and youth. The reasons behind the group mentoring were various, but all agreed that it was a more culturally appropriate way of engaging with children and youth. It is custom in most Aboriginal cultures to utilize group settings when working with children and youth. Many children learn better in group settings, they are more likely to participate in group settings and the mentoring relationship is allowed to evolve between the child and adult in a more natural and fluid manner. Group mentoring is also more effective for most adults in the program as they do not feel as much pressure as they do in one-on-one situations with children.

Training and Ongoing Support

As mentioned above the second key reason for being able to engage people in the mentoring role had to do with the training and support they received. Mentors interviewed mentioned the need to understand the mentoring role and how to successfully work with children and youth. Appropriate roles and boundaries were identified as important concepts to understand before working with children.

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[35] This information was collected from interviews with mentors.

Once training had been done, the mentors also discussed the need for ongoing support by program staff. Training provides the foundation for being a mentor, but new situations constantly arise and the mentors require ongoing support from staff. The programs that provided the most training and support for mentors also had the highest number of mentors and the best attendance of mentors. In fact, the support of program staff was seen as so central to one program, that they were identified in the program structure as "grand mentors" because of their ongoing support role to the mentors.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting volunteers for any program can be a challenge, and it is particularly difficult for programs that work with Aboriginal children and as such require Aboriginal volunteers. This is not because Aboriginal people are not accustomed to giving back to the community; but rather that giving back is such a common notion in most Aboriginal communities that the idea of volunteering – giving back in a defined and structured way – is seen as foreign. The problem in recruiting volunteers for mentoring programs is that many people do not feel equipped to work with children and there is a feeling that they do not have anything to offer them. This is especially true for the program component that focuses on Aboriginal cultural and traditions. Many mentors interviewed mentioned that they originally declined the request to mentor because they felt they did not have a solid enough grounding in the cultural aspects of the program.

Programs that were successful in recruitment of mentors followed a relatively similar set of guidelines. These included:

- recruit mentors from an inner circle – meaning that they recruited people who already had a relationship to them, this included staff in other program areas, other long-term volunteers and youth from other leadership programs;

- ensure that the volunteer mentors have the support they require to be successful mentors;

- engage elders into the program as spiritual and cultural advisors; and

- ensure that each mentor formally commits to the timeframe of the program.

C.   Program Administration

The administration of the program, although not initially seen as a key component of program success was later identified as important to all four program sites. As all publicly funded programs, the youth mentor pilot projects were required to meet a number of operational requirements in order for the project funding to be released. Although this is standard operation it is often not considered an element of program success. However, these requirements made it a challenge for some sites to offer the program and delayed program delivery significantly. The two key issues for the sites were the screening of volunteers and the requisite insurance coverage needed for programs that engage adult volunteers with children and youth. The programs that had the infrastructure to address these internal issues were best situated to ensure that the insurance required was in place and that all adult volunteers were appropriately screened.

4.3.3   External Program Support

The experiences of the pilots suggest that for programs to be successful, they must have consistent and ongoing external support[36]. This is especially the case for programs that are being developed in communities and/or organizations without much experience in working with youth and/or delivering community programs.

A.   Program Development

All community programs need to develop a program plan that clearly articulates the overall goals, activities and outcomes of the interventions. A program plan describes the program and what it hopes to achieve. This is the first step to successfully implementing a program. Once a program plan is in place, it is much easier to monitor the impact of the program and clearly report on this impact to funders and other stakeholders. All pilot sites required support in program planning.

B.   Training

Once a program plan is in place and the program is in the implementation phase, this is often where external supports end. Again in order to ensure success, many organizations will require continued supports to ensure that program staff and volunteers are effectively trained.

Staff Training

For youth mentoring programs, this training will be two-fold for program staff. 1.) Training in working with mentors, supervising mentors, and ensuring that the mentors and children are engaged appropriately. The sites that were successful in the delivery of the mentoring program ensured that staff understood the mentoring process and how to support volunteers in mentoring relationships. 2.) The other training for staff will be in the broader area of youth program delivery and monitoring. Of the pilot sites, some sites had a system of staff training (both specific to mentoring and more general) and support. These sites had the capacity to ensure that staff were not only trained but were given ongoing support and supervision. In cases where the internal capacity is not available, there is a need to engage with other community partners to deliver the training and help build the capacity of staff to do this work.

Training for Mentors

As stated earlier, the evaluation found that most mentors felt that they were not originally equipped to provide effective mentoring relationships with youth and that the only way they were able to engage was with the support and training from program staff. For programs that do not have the internal capacity to train their staff and mentors, there is the option of partnering with other mentoring organization in order to have them provide the training and ongoing support to the mentors, while internal staff strengthen their capacity in this area.

C.   Program Evaluation

An important element of successful programming is the development of an evaluation process to determine if the program is achieving its desired results. An effective evaluation process is also the best way to support continuous improvement as the program is constantly being

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[36] The phase one report also identified ongoing support or coaching as important for successful program development and implementation.

monitored and improved. In terms of the Aboriginal youth mentoring project, the evaluation support was provided in the early stages of each of the pilots.[37]

Reporting on Impact

In order for programs to successfully maintain funding, they are required to report on their results. This is most commonly achieved through the development and measuring of program outcomes. Outcome measurement has been a challenge for many not for profit organizations and community programs. The successful measuring of outcomes often requires external support for the identification of measurable outcomes indicating change; the development of data collection tools; and the establishment of a reporting system. Although there are many external consultants that can support this work, there is often a significant cost outlay and for small programs, this cost can be prohibitive. The pilots received support to identify their outcomes and measure their results. Without this support it would have been a challenge for most of the sites to successfully report on their impact. Support for the development of outcomes and measurement of results will need to be ongoing for most sites.

D.   Program Funding

Stable and sustainable funding is key to the success of any program. It is however even more important when developing innovative programs in diverse communities. The time required to establish a new program in a community can vary depending on a number of factors. When developing a new program in a unique community, in this case Aboriginal communities, allowances should be made for the relationship building phase of the project. In many cases it can take a project up to three years before it is functioning in a manner that makes it possible to evaluate. It can take well over one year to get community by-in and begin to develop a program plan. In order to support the development of new and innovative programs, there will need to be a commitment by funders that the supports will be long-term.

4.3.4   Expectations for Collaboration

The Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Pilot Project is an innovative collaboration between provincial ministries, the regional children's authority, the not-for-profit sector and Aboriginal communities. Any new collaborative initiative requires clear lines of communication and understanding between each of the partners. Each partner must understand their role in the collaboration and clear lines of accountability must be provided for each player. The pilot sites struggled somewhat around their role in this initiative and who they were ultimately accountable to and for what. There is a need to be clear from the outset with sites about what it is they are being asked to do. They need to understand the funding requirements and their role in the development, delivery and evaluation of program activities.

A.   Rules of Engagement

Part of accountability is a clear understanding of expectations and what each partner is committing to doing for the project. A clear memorandum of agreement may be worth considering for this kind of work – a concise document that outlines what each partner is responsible for and what each partner is agreeing to provide. The evaluation process highlighted a number of misunderstandings between sites. These include: terms of the funding agreement; partners role in the larger initiative; and reporting expectations. For programs to be successful, these issues must be clearly outlined and understood from the outset so that all partners are able to make an informed decision about participation.

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[37] Although the pilots had begun prior to the evaluation team being put in place, there was little program development that had occurred prior to the evaluation team making contact with each site.

B.   Financial Management and Reporting

Another accountability issue is around financial management practices and reporting on project expenses. There is a need to ensure that the funds are being used to develop and deliver a mentoring program and that the host organization can meet the reporting requirements of the funders.

C.   Consistent Contacts

Working with Aboriginal communities comes with a long history of mistrust and misunderstandings.   In order to effectively provide support to future mentoring sites, the importance of a key contact cannot be underestimated.   For many Aboriginal communities, developing a relationship with someone is central to successfully working with them.   To facilitate the effective deliver of the mentoring programs, each site would have been best served if there had been a consistent contact throughout the pilot phase. Someone they could build a trusting relationship with so that when they face the various challenges of this type of programming, they would be at ease to ask for support. Although most Aboriginal communities and organizations have extensive knowledge and experience working with government, they are most successfully engaged when they know exactly who they are dealing with.   In order to support future sites, and ensure they have the information and support necessary for successful programs, it will be important to ensure there are consistent contacts.

5.   EVALUATION OVERVIEW

5.1   Strengths

There were a number of key strengths that were highlighted through the evaluation process - these are factors that were consistently highlighted and seem to make a difference in terms of project success.   The evaluation recognized that each of the four sites was distinct but that despite their differences in terms of: on-reserve - off reserve; First Nation – Métis; urban – rural; there were also a number of similarities between the pilots. What follows is a summary of program strengths that were identified as being important for the successful implementation of a mentoring program.

A.   Build on Existing Strengths

The report from phase one of the project highlighted factors to consider when moving into the pilot phase. One of the key recommendations was to build on what already exists.   The evaluation findings confirm this recommendation in that success was generated from sites with experience doing this type of work.   These were either sites that built upon an existing program, or sites that developed a new program based on other work being done in this area.   For example, Bent Arrow's Coyote Pride, although a new program, was developed based on experience delivering Coyote Kids, the evening mentoring program.   Bent Arrow was able to take the findings from Coyote Kids, the connections with the parents, and the program staff, and transfer these to a new school-based mentoring program.

Another example comes from the Kainai Youth Mentoring Program. This program was directly tied to their pervious work in the area of youth mentoring. Expanding the program afforded them the opportunity to formalize the youth mentoring program, hire more staff and expand their work into other communities within the Kainai First Nation. With the expansion of the program, more youth were made aware of the program, more youth joined the program and ultimately more youth developed leadership skills and became engaged in their community in productive and healthy ways.

B.   Training and Support for Staff and Mentors

The evaluation has highlighted the importance of training and ongoing support to both staff and mentors. Successful programs had formal training and ongoing supports in place. Program staff were able to grow with the programs because they had internal support from senior staff/management to help them understand the day-to-day aspects of delivering a mentoring program. Supervision was provided in all areas of the program, from the delivery of each session, to the supports for mentors, information and communication with parents, and understanding the evaluation and reporting requirements. The support for staff was delivered in much the same way a professional mentoring arrangement would be delivered. The senior staff worked with the program staff to build their capacity to oversee the program. They provided opportunities for staff to learn, allowed staff to take the lead when they were ready and then successfully transitioned these staff into a more active coordination role.

Training and support of mentors was the other key area directly linked to the success of the program across the four sites. Sites that supported and trained their mentors were also the sites that had the most engaged mentors in the program. Not unlike the role of developing staff capacity, the successful programs ensured that the mentors received overall training in mentoring and working with children/youth. Following this training they were given ongoing support to grow as mentors. All mentors commented on the tremendous importance of the training and support. As one mentor stated, "it is important for us to know that when we are in the program we have the help of the staff".

C.   Commitment to Mentoring in an Aboriginal Context

Another area that was highlighted through the program evaluation was the importance of being committed to mentoring as a tool for building the capacity of an entire community. The evaluation findings suggest that understanding that mentoring programs and relationships do not only help children and youth build protective factors, the programs also help strengthen the adults in the program and ultimately the entire community.

Unlike mainstream mentoring programs, Aboriginal mentoring programs have an expanded focus. These programs work to provide children with guidance and opportunities for healthy engagement as well as giving adults the opportunity to grow and build confidence through mentoring. These programs are based on the belief that mentoring is as important for adults as it is for children. Mentoring provides the opportunity for adults in the Aboriginal community to engage with young people in a healthy loving way, to learn more about their culture and history, and to build leadership skills.

5.2   Challenges

As with many pilot initiatives, the four sites faced a number of challenges, from recruitment of mentors, to finding appropriate space to deliver the programs. Most sites successfully overcame these and other challenges as they became more experienced in delivering mentoring programs. However, some sites were unable to overcome all the challenges they faced and as a result were less successful in achieving intended results. The following is a discussion of the main challenges that were faced by some and/or all of the sites.

A.   Consistent Staffing

Finding and keeping competent staff was a challenge for some of the sites. As a result the pilots did not have consistent staffing and as such there were disruptions in the delivery of services. Recruitment and retention of appropriate staff is influenced by a number of factors. Staff in the pilot sites that received clear instructions and supervision were more likely to stay on with the program and to deliver the program based on the goal and activities developed in the

program plan. Sites where there was little or no supervision and very little communication around expectations struggled to keep staff over the long-term and struggled to have staff implement the program according to plan.

B.   Organizational Capacity

Ensuring that there is the organizational capacity to deliver the program was a challenge for some sites. Programs that were offered though existing social service organizations had the internal capacity to ensure that staff were recruited, trained and supervised based on existing practices. These sites had sufficient insurance coverage to offer mentoring programs. They had internal financial systems in place to report on financial accountability and they were most experienced in delivering youth programs to the community. Organizational capacity becomes an issue for organizations that are not traditional social service organizations, or where there is no clear organization to take the lead role in the deliver and monitoring of the program. Organizational weakness will become more of an issue as Aboriginal youth mentoring programs grow in popularity across communities. The more grass roots and/or inexperienced an organization or community is in delivering youth programming, the more challenging it will be to ensure there is sufficient internal policies and procedures in place. Again, this may be an area where partnering with more established organizations may help to mitigate some of these risks.

C.   Communication

Clear lines of communication within the program itself and between the program site and the funder was identified as important to the overall success of the mentoring pilots. The evaluation highlighted a number of communication challenges between the sites and the funder in terms of overall expectations. For successful implementation of mentoring programs, more time and energy will need to be put into developing clear communication practices and ensuring that all partners are committed to ensuring that there is ongoing, consistent communication. This is also the case for internal communication practices; again there is a need for there to be consistent communication between program staff and their supervisors and management. Only with this can staff ensure that the program is being delivered in accordance with the organizations overall goals.

D.   Ongoing funding

Again the preliminary report indicated the importance of providing realistic, adequate and sustainable funding. The Aboriginal community has a history of pilot programming; one participant from the original study expressed this issue: "They have tried almost every program in the world on Aboriginal people. They last a little while and then there is no sustainability to them". The Aboriginal community is cautious about new areas of interest, and starting new programs with limited or short-term funding. For the expansion of mentoring programs to be successful, there will need to be a commitment to long-term funding, or at least an open and honest discussion about funding possibilities and constraints.

6.   TRANSFERABILITY

When the pilots were first conceived of, the question that the Committee was hoping to answer was the following: Can the findings from the pilot sites be transferred to other sites? This evaluation highlighted a number of learning and challenges that can guide the implementation of youth mentoring programs in other Aboriginal communities and organizations. The key learning from this evaluation is that ***Aboriginal mentoring programs will look different from mainstream programs and as such they will require different supports***.

The overall findings in terms of uniqueness of Aboriginal programs are as follows.

➢ A group setting is the most effective means to deliver mentoring programs for the Aboriginal community. Both the children and adults are more at ease with group settings and a group setting lends itself well to experiential based learning opportunities.

➢ Although a group setting is key, there are times when one-on-one mentoring is also important, especially when working with high risk youth who may not be able to engage in a group setting initially.

➢ Mentoring is about more that the children in the program. Mentoring in an Aboriginal context requires a commitment to building the capacity of the children and adults in the program.

➢ The mentoring program must be part of a larger Aboriginal cultural context and without this the program will not build pride and awareness in Aboriginal cultures.

➢ School based programs are important as they can reach some Aboriginal children that may not be able to participate in evening or weekend programming because of issues such as access to transportation.

➢ The mentoring program must be seen as part of a larger community commitment to youth.

➢ The mentoring program must have the support of local leadership to be successful.

➢ The findings from the pilot sites suggest that mentoring programs can be important in the development of protective factors in Aboriginal youth. Being a mentee encourages youth to develop the confidence to become leaders in the community. Being a mentor provides youth with many opportunities to engage with other youth and adults in a positive way.

➢ Mentors should not be seen as experts but rather as participants in the program.

➢ Elders should be engaged to ensure the inclusion of appropriate cultural and spiritual elements.

➢ Local protocols must be respected and followed.

➢ The community must be informed and engaged in the project.

The other evaluation findings are in the area of organizational supports and standards of practice for all mentoring programs. These are the things that need to be in place for any program to be successfully delivered.

The overall findings in terms of standards of practice are as follows.

➢ Retention of competent staff is key to programming success and as such staff must receive the appropriate training to run the program and have ongoing support and supervision by more experienced professionals.

➢ For mentoring programs to work, there is a need for intentional recruitment, screening, ongoing training and support for mentors.

➢ There needs to be agreement by the community that there is a need for the mentoring program and families must be engaged in the program.

➢ There is a need to develop outcomes and be able to report on these outcomes.

➢ There is a need for adequate financial management practices and reporting procedures.

➢ There must be adequate insurance coverage to be able to deliver a mentoring program.

➢ If the organization does not have experience with this type of programming, they need to partner with an organization(s) that does.

➢ If working with organizations and/or communities with limited experience in youth programming, the program funders need to be clear about their expectations of the programs and determine their own capacity to provide ongoing support to the program in order to be successful.

It will also be important for future sites to have a good understanding of what it means to mentor in an Aboriginal context. All sites reported that mentoring needed to be seen in a larger community capacity-building context. Mentors need to be willing to grow and learn with the program, they do not need to come in as experts or cultural guides. This work should be done by program staff and the elders in the program. The mentors need to be open to building relationships with the children and through time they will learn what gifts they have to offer to the children. When recruiting mentors, the type of person becomes more important that who they are or what they do for a living. Good mentors are role models in the most general sense and their connection to the children comes from the relationship they form with the children. With this understanding, defining the qualities of a good mentor is key to a successful program. Staff and mentors participating in the pilots were asked to list qualities they believe define a good mentor. These included:

- a good sense of humour;
- being real, not phoney – the kids will see through phoniness;
- respect for children, not wanting to parent or boss them;
- commitment to the children;
- commitment to consistent participation in the program – mentors need to be there – they offer structure to the children;
- being a role model and understanding the boundaries between adult and child;
- ability to set boundaries – knowing they are still the adult;
- willingness to engage in training – good mentors need training and ongoing support; and
- commitment to build trusting relationship with the children.

7. CONCLUSION

The Aboriginal Mentoring Project was developed in response to the need for culturally sensitive mentoring for Aboriginal children and youth. The pilot sites were asked to participate in this initiative in order to further understand what would make mentoring programs appropriate and effective for Aboriginal children. Each site was asked to deliver a youth mentoring program that would be most appropriate for the children of their community. The intention of the evaluation was to monitor and record this process and in particular the findings and challenges faced by each site. The four sites involved in this project produced rich information for others interested in offering mentoring supports to Aboriginal children and youth. Each site set out to offer a mentoring program that would be responsive to the community. The programs were designed to take into account the richness that is imbedded in Aboriginal cultures and to be most appropriate for the age groups children and youth being targeted.

The goal of this evaluation was to document the findings, and in particular the success and challenges faced by each site. These findings can help guide other organizations and/or communities that may be interested in developing mentoring programs. They revealed that there are a number of program aspects that can be seen as being particular to Aboriginal mentoring programs – specifically the issues of group mentoring, the role of elders, the

importance of community support, building the capacity of mentors and the need to ensure that the programs are grounded in Aboriginal culture and traditions. However, there were also a number of issues that were not only applicable to Aboriginal mentoring programs, but are also good business for all youth programming. These include: ensuring there is the organizational capacity and accountability to deliver the program; ensuring that staff are well-trained and supervised; ensuring that youth are engaged in the developing the program; ensuring there is the ability to measure program impact and sound financial tracking.

This evaluation revealed that attention to all of these aspects is important for the provision of effective mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth. One set of program aspects does not out-weight the other, and if other jurisdictions want to engage in this type of programming, equal attention will need to be paid to all aspects of sound program development, implementation and monitoring.

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