

Community Conversations

Calgary – May 31 & June 1, 2012

Alberta



Participant Quotes

"In order to better meet needs, tap in to collective wisdom, hear the voices - need to have flexibility in contract and service delivery."

"We can't focus on the children alone - we need to focus on the families and the communities - having supportive family homes, having everyone educated on the issues- focus on what the extended families are doing well."

"We need to change how we support these kids - they need connection to some member of their family that loves them."

"Sometimes foster parents are scared to go to Aboriginal communities or participate in ceremony. Support needs to be provided for this."

A Space for Change...

Calgary and Area Child and Family Service Authority (CFSA), Siksika Family Services, Stoney Nakoda Child and Family Services Society and staff from the Aboriginal Engagement and Strategy division worked together to host a community conversation with people from Calgary and the surrounding area.

The event started on May 30th with a calf hide ceremony led by Elder Leonard Bastien. The purpose

of the ceremony was to not only bless the event, but to ensure all who would attend the conversation would come with an open heart and groundedness to discuss the very serious problem of the continued increase of Aboriginal children entering our interventions system.

The next day, 86 people met to begin the conversation in Calgary. Elders shared teachings about the Eagle Feather and all participants contributed to the richness of the conversation by offering their stories, experiences, expertise and opinions.

Throughout the day, new connections were made and relationships formed as people talked about and discovered the common paths they were walking in their work to support children, youth and families. Participants were inspired by the teachings of Elders, for example, Elder Linda Brass' teaching of the Eagle Feather was particularly memorable. The Elders also modeled the importance of humour when gathering together to share stories. As one participant so eloquently stated, "the best part was the honesty and integrity of everyone as they spoke from the heart."

The following day, 41 people met in four different groups to have smaller conversations about the impact, strengths and challenges of services provided to children, youth and families. Front line workers from the CFSA, Delegated First Nations Agencies and community organizations met to talk about the challenges and rewards inherent in their work. Then a group of youth, caregivers and parents met to tell their story about how they have been affected by their experiences in the child intervention system. The presence of Elders throughout the day provided a sense of comfort as they shared their wisdom with all who gathered.



Survey Responses

"I will 'listen' better to what native folks have to say. Invite an Elder to our staff meeting to talk about issues."

"It's always refreshing to hear Elder speakers to validate that we are in it together."

"Made one want to learn more - much of this is new to me."



"How do we heal as a society? How do we support Aboriginal people in Alberta to heal...and what does that look like? What are we trying to achieve?"

"The whole population needs to understand our First Nations history."

Email the Aboriginal Engagement and Strategy Division at:
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What We Heard – Themes & Quotes

The top themes from Calgary differ somewhat from what has emerged from other conversations and is a reminder that each community is unique!

The system needs to change

- "Systems and policies need to be put in place that go beyond housing and clothing kids. They need to look at holistic well-being."
- "It's also a health crisis and/or a justice crisis. One way or another, these people end up in some sort of government system and government will eventually pay."

The system is not compatible with Aboriginal ways

- "Provincial government standards for placing aboriginal children. First Nation communities will never meet the standards."
- "In the U.S. system, most people in the sorrow systems are black or immigrant. You have black people serving black people. In Canada, and here in Alberta, you have non-Aboriginal serving Aboriginal."

Trauma and lack of identity is widespread

- "The native men that were coming into the criminal justice system, were coming from the child welfare system. They didn't know their own language, their relatives or who they were. They didn't know how to pray."
- "Thanks to the Creator, I am healing from the trauma of residential schools. I never learned what love is."

There is a lack of understanding of Aboriginal history

- "We need to educate Canadians on our history so they don't judge us and can better understand us as people."
- "There also exists a lack of cultural awareness, especially around intergenerational trauma."

Desire for improved supports for the child

- "Children need to heal from this trauma so they can learn."
- "Kids need someone to believe in them to turn themselves around."

Survey Results – What You Told Us

At the end of each conversation we asked participants to fill out our survey, sharing with us their thoughts and feelings on how the event went. We want to thank the 37 people who took the time to respond.

We heard from participants that the event went extremely well. More than 95% of the respondents felt: the environment in which the conversation took place was respectful, they were given the opportunity to voice their opinion, their input was valued, the conversation was meaningful and that they have a greater understanding of the issues.

In addition to multiple choice questions, we asked participants several open-ended questions. When asked, "what new questions emerged for you?" people often said, "what's the next step?" or, "how do we implement a particular strategy?" We also asked, "was there anything in today's session that made you think or feel differently about something?" 58% said we need to create a shared understanding and awareness of the current situation faced by many Aboriginal people and how this has been shaped by history.

When asked what actions will you personally undertake, there were four typical responses:

- Recognize the importance of Aboriginal culture/traditions/history;
- Take personal responsibility to influence change;
- Work more collaboratively; and
- Incorporate knowledge gained today into practice at work.

All of this valuable information will be put together with past and future conversations to help set the course to improve outcomes for children, youth and families.