

# Community Conversations

## Southwest Alberta – March 13 & 14, 2012



**The issue** to be addressed is the overwhelming – and increasing – representation of Aboriginal children and youth in the child intervention system.

### Participant Quotes

*"The wound is deep and we need to let it heal. There are so many gaps between services right now because we haven't owned up to all the hurt."*

*"Our [definition of] success is not the same as mainstream society; it is in community."*

*"I used to have time to sit and engage with families. The system is failing because of the amount of paperwork they put on us. Greater success with families when less paper. I want to help so bad, but legislation/policy is making me do things this way."*

*"All different people coming together. Nice to see that there are people interested in changing this. In the past, our experiences with the Ministry were negative. Coming together allows First Nations into the forefront of legislation, not tiny sections of the act."*



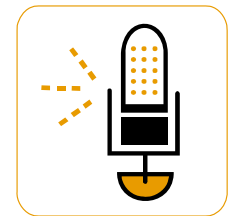
## What Took Place

Our team, the Aboriginal Policy and Community Engagement division is engaging in a process of community conversations throughout the province. Our first regional conversation was held in Lethbridge and Fort Macleod. We were honoured to work together with **Region 1 CFSA, Piikani Nation and Blood Tribe**, to host a community conversation with a **diverse group of people** from southwest Alberta.

The focus of the conversation was on working together to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and youth in the child intervention system.

On March 13, we met with over **70** people in **Lethbridge** to discuss:

- 1) What is happening now?
- 2) What is the desired change?
- 3) What can we do together?



The next day we were in **Fort Macleod**, talking with more than **40** people in small group discussions.

In these small groups, participants shared their personal stories of their experience with the child intervention system, whether they were **Elders, caregivers, parents, youth or front-line staff**,

## What We Heard – Themes & Quotes

### Importance of Culture and Tradition

- "Beliefs, values, culture, traditions give us balance"
- "Ensure cultural identity is maintained, encouraged and passed down to younger generations"

### Recognition of and Education on Historical Trauma

- "Canadians need to learn of our history of oppression and need to experience it to understand-we all have to heal together"
- "Change would mean more education on our true history to mainstream society, without the knowledge of why we are wounded we can't move forward. For example, one worker who became his friend and changed everything"

### Building Community Capacity

- "All the funding that goes to support bureaucracy should go back to communities-to create a structure and space so children can stay home in their communities"
- "You should keep children in their community with someone they trust"

### Aboriginal Participation and Inclusion

- "Need to hear from people who have gone through the situation and build from their experiences. Share their stories and include them in forming solutions"
- "We need to listen to our people"

### Provide Support for Parents and Families to stay together or reunite

- "The kids are not the problem, move the mom and dad and give them support to be better parents"
- "When a child is apprehended, the parents are given a checklist of what they have to do to get their child back, but there is no support to achieve this. We don't need lists of things to do, we need direct supports to work through the issues"

### Least Disruption for the child/children

- "Instead of apprehending a child/children, keep the whole family together or at least keep the children in their home"
- "Children are interconnected with family and community as well as with foster homes. Not feeling this can cause kids to act out and do things they wouldn't normally do. 'If I get in trouble, maybe they'll get sick of me and send me home.'"
- "When a kid is removed from their home and then moves from home to home, trauma escalates"

**Survey Responses**

*"When are we going to start 'doing'?"*

*"Just how we need to focus on keeping families together. Disconnecting is not the answer."*

*"I will look at changing myself to be more mindful to my surroundings and the impact of change I can create."*

*"I can't stress enough about the need for all sectors to collaborate together."*

*"This was very well put together and one of best community sessions I have been to."*

*"Learning from each agency and community members on experiences and troubles they face with the system."*

*"The policies and procedures need to be more inclusive of Aboriginal culture and values."*

*"I had no idea this was such a big problem. I thought it was just my community."*

Email the Aboriginal Policy and Community Engagement division at: [HS.CommunityConversations@gov.ab.ca](mailto:HS.CommunityConversations@gov.ab.ca)

## Survey Results – What You Told Us

At the end of the large group session in Lethbridge, 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 many people who took the time to respond!

Overwhelmingly, we heard from participants that the event went very well (see chart below for multiple choice responses).

In addition to multiple choice questions, we asked participants several open-ended questions. When asked, "what new questions emerged for you?" people often said, "when do we start making change?" Just by hosting these conversations, we're already creating change – questions like this show we're creating momentum and demand to improve the system! And this is just the start.

We also asked what came out of the conversation that made participants think or feel differently about something. Here we heard a few different things, such as:

- a desire to change the system towards a focus on the family, leaving the child in the home and providing better supports to the family.
- people felt they had a greater understanding of the multitude of challenges and issues.
- many had thoughts and questions about how the system/legislation should change.

Because significant improvement will only occur with the collective actions of many, not just government alone, we are compelled to ask, "Was there anything in the dialogue that will influence or change any actions in your work or personal life?" And we're thrilled that there was! We heard:

- overwhelmingly that people were inspired to create change or a positive impact within their own sphere of influence.
- that people reinforced the belief that this is a collaborative effort.

### Percentage of Participants who Strongly Agreed or Agreed with the following statements

