

In the Best Interests of the Child

Report on the North Region Community Consultations

Fort Nelson

January 2003

In the best interests of the child ...

This report is dedicated to children living in northern communities and to the families, service providers and community members who are working hard to make a difference in the lives of children.

Communities told us the best interests of the child must remain at the centre of all change. They told us their greatest strength is working together and that the system must strengthen communities, not divide them.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the consultation forums – for sharing your stories, your feelings, your opinions and your ideas.

The challenge is to create a uniquely northern service delivery system that builds on the strengths of the communities, to put resources where they will do the most good and to support communities to work together to build a positive future for all children.

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1. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Three focus groups were held within the community of Fort Nelson. The first focus group was held in the morning and directed at community service providers. The second focus group was held just after lunch and was directed at youth. The third focus group was held in the evening (just after dinner) and was directed at community members (and any youth or service providers who were unable to make earlier sessions).

2. PROFILE OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

Table 1: Attendance

Name of Community	Date	Service Providers	Youth	Community
Fort Nelson Pop:	November 20 2002	7	0	17

Table 2: Consultation Forum Team

Facilitator: Anne Cochran

Community	MCFD/Transition Team	Board Members
Fort Nelson	Scott Horvath	

3. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

Principles:

- agreement with the basic principles outlined in the strategic shifts

Practice:

- greater community access to services and trained service providers
- improved access to specialized services (by bringing specialists in more often or providing transportation to community members needing specialists located outside of the community)
- greater collaboration between agencies within the community – establishment of an interagency group
- possible collocation of agencies and service providers
- greater supports to and enhanced resources for children, youth and families (both permanent residents and transient workers)
- greater mobilization and recognition of volunteers (e.g., seniors) within community

4. COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

- Good community spirit with a strong corps of volunteers
- A strong network of services
- Service providers who are dynamic advocates for the community
- Information about community services that is readily available through a directory of services
- A women's resource centre with a mall location that provides greater anonymity that encourages usage
- A family development centre
- A transition house for abused women and their children.
- An Aboriginal women's centre
- A Native Friendship Centre
- High school and schools that go the extra mile for the community
- An active sports program which includes swimming, hockey, curling, snowmobiling and rodeo

Summary:

The community's strength and spirit lie in the people who are willing to get involved through volunteering; the corps of service providers who are advocates for the community; the schools that go the extra mile for their students; the sports activities that provide an outlet for energies; and the range of services for those in need.

5. KEY COMMUNITY ISSUES

Isolation and transience

- Two types of community – long-term residents and transient workers
- Large income disparities, and a high cost of living
- Lack of affordable housing, and limited accommodations for transients
- Community leaders do not establish community standards for transients
- Difficult for transients to be accepted into the community
- Isolation from extended family means few family supports
- No services available to help children of transients adjust

Violence and drug/alcohol abuse

- Domestic violence a major issue
- High incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)/ Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE)
- Because of much employment, a lower percentage of youth stay in school and graduate
- Rise in sexual assaults, drug and alcohol use by teens, and teen pregnancies
- High suicide rate
- Need for programs for children who witness abuse
- Need for alcohol and drug abuse prevention and counselling for children, youth, and families
- Need for second-stage housing for abused women
- Need for safe housing for youth

Parenting support

- Parental supervision inadequate
- Only parenting program – “Nobody’s Perfect” – cancelled
- Need more affordable, quality day care
- Need continued use of family and youth support workers
- Need support for education for single parents
- Need education for special needs children and youth

Social/home care supports

- Need assisted living for the elderly
- Need enhanced/broader access to respite services
- Need for homemaker services
- Need advocacy services for people on income assistance, disability referrals, outreach
- Need a food bank

Access to services

- Costly to bring services into community – no pediatrician, orthodontist, optometrist, audiologist, and limited access to psychologist/psychiatrist.
- Lack of public transport and restricted transportation outside of community mean that visits to specialists entail a trip south
- High turnover of professional staff
- Lack of faith in the quality of a program because staff are under-qualified
- Confidentiality issues and fear of stigmatization mean some services are not accessed.
- Stronger referral network needed

Territoriality:

- Territoriality affects community agencies' willingness to cooperate and share services
- Agency competition for funding result in under-funded services
- No interagency forum exists for agencies and staff to get to know one another

Summary:

- Isolation and a transient population in the community impose special needs for services and challenges for service delivery
- Domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse are major issues
- Parenting supports are needed in the community
- Enhanced home care supports are needed to help people retain their independence
- Transportation problems restrict access to specialized health care services
- Inter-agency territoriality, competition for funding, and lack of a forum for information-sharing affect coordination and delivery of services

6. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGIES

Attendees identified major areas where services are available and proposed the following strategies to enhance or strengthen those services:

Social services offered through a "one-stop" Family Centre

Existing Services:

- A Family Development Centre
- A Women's Resource Centre
- A Transition House for abused women and their children
- Victims' Services
- Northern Rockies Aboriginal Women's Centre
- A Native Friendship Centre which offers employment services, career and vocational counselling, and counselling on alcohol/drug abuse and HIV/AIDS

Services Needed:

- One-stop shopping to coordinate services and avoid stigmatization of people accessing services.

A comprehensive youth program that deals in all issues and offers a range of services

Existing Services:

- Youth and family support in the schools, and a youth counsellor
- Guardianship through the Ministry of Children and Family Development for infants to three years, with four infant spaces on reserve.

Services Needed:

- Additional affordable quality day care to accommodate shift workers

Support for people returning from drug and alcohol treatment

Existing Services:

- Detox beds in hospital
- A supported recovery bed in the Transition House
- A drug and alcohol worker
- Counselling through the Native Friendship Centre

Better access to health care services

Existing Services:

- A Hearing and Speech program
- Psychiatric services two to three days a month.
- A drug and alcohol worker
- Medical evacuation services

Services Needed:

- Public transportation
- Improved transportation to specialized services
- Improved assessment and treatment services
- Support network for children and youth with FAS/FAE
- Advocacy for people on income assistance, and those with disabilities
- An interagency group that can better coordinate services

Improved communication about services

Summary:

- “One-stop shopping” through a Family Centre would help to coordinate delivery of services.
- A comprehensive youth program could deal with all youth issues and offer a range of coordinated services.
- An adequate supply of affordable housing would benefit both long-term and transient members of the community.
- Parents and children would benefit if more quality day care were available.
- Better transportation and improved assessment and treatment would help people to access the health services they need.
- Better ways must be found to communicate with the community about the services that are available.

7. BOARD COMPOSITION AND LINKAGES

- Fort Nelson has historically been under represented.
- Fort Nelson has been isolated from the regional health board as they have no representation.
- Fort Nelson needs representation as they are a unique community that needs to have their needs heard.