

# **In the Best Interests of the Child**

## ***Report on the North Region Community Consultations***

### **Communities of:**

- **Prince George**
- **Quesnel**
- **Stikine Valley / Dease Lake**

**January 2003**

*In the best interests of the child ...*

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

Communities told us the best interest 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**

### **PRINCE GEORGE:**

- Community consultations occurred the week of November 25, 2002.
- Six meetings were held – one each for service providers, stakeholders, and staff, two for youth and one general community meeting. In total 91 individuals participated.
- Planning committee members Cliff Dezell, Greg Beattie and Glen Schmidt attended all but the youth meetings.
- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) management and transition staff members attended all the consultations.
- The format generally used (except for the youth meetings) included providing background information about government decisions leading to the creation of 11 authorities and information about the Planning Committee (membership, tasks, timelines) followed by discussion of community strengths, enhancements needed, service issues and governance advice.

### **QUESNEL:**

- Community consultation meetings were held on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002
- Three meetings were held – one for service providers and staff, one for youth and one general community meeting. In total 65 individuals participated.
- Planning Committee member Heather Peters attended all the consultations.
- MCFD team leaders and transition staff attended all the consultations.
- The format generally used (except for the youth meeting) included providing background information about government decisions leading to the creation of 11 authorities and information about the Planning Committee (membership, tasks, timelines) followed by discussion of community strengths, enhancements needed, service issues and governance advice.

### **STIKINE VALLEY – DEASE LAKE**

- Community consultation meetings were held on December 10, 2002
- Two meetings were planned – one for stakeholders and service providers and one general community meeting. Five individuals attended the afternoon meeting. No one attended the evening community meeting.
- MCFD Community Service Manager and Team Leader attended the meetings.
- The format used included providing background information about government decisions leading to the creation of 11 authorities; information about the North Region Aboriginal Authority and information about the Non-Aboriginal Planning Committee followed by discussion of community strengths, enhancements needed, service issues and governance advice.

## 2. PROFILE OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

**Table 1: Attendance**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Service Providers</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Community</b>
<b>PRINCE GEORGE</b>				
1	November 25th, 2002	14		
2	November 25th 2002	26		
3	November 28th, 2002		5	
4	November 28th, 2002		6	
5	November 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2002	25 (included some community members)		
6	November 29th, 2002	15		
<b>QUESNEL</b>				
1	November 27th, 2002	40		
2	November 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2002	1	5	
3	November 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2002	18		2
<b>Stikine Valley - Dease Lake</b>	December 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2002	5		
<b>Grand Totals</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 2: Participant Profile**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Service Providers</b>	<b>Community</b>
Prince George - #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foster parents</li> <li>- Residential &amp; day program service providers</li> </ul>	-
#2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-MCFD child protection staff</li> <li>-School district counselor, community school coordinator &amp; administrator</li> </ul>	
#3		Youth and staff from Future Cents Program and one Youth in Care
#4		Youth in and from care
#5	Service providers, pediatrician, child development and infant development staff, educators, staff from Youth Around Prince, family advocate	Grandparents caring for their grandchildren, fathers interested in father's rights.
#6	Service providers	
Quesnel #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MCFD social workers</li> <li>- Community Service Providers</li> <li>- UNBC Students</li> </ul>	
#2	- Youth care worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Youth from local youth center</li> <li>- youth from care</li> </ul>
#3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child Development Center,</li> <li>- Corrections</li> <li>- Adoptive parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mayor-elect</li> <li>- Media</li> <li>- Two citizens</li> </ul>
Dease Lake	Service providers, RCMP, staff from Northern Lights College	Staff from Ministry of Transportation

**Table 3: Consultation Forum Team**

Facilitator: Joyce Preston

<b>Community</b>	<b>MCFD / Transition Team</b>	<b>Board Members</b>
Prince George #1	Richard King Peter Cunningham Scott Horvath Rob Rail	Cliff Dezell Greg Beattie
#2	Richard King Jeff Elder Doug Hayman Scott Horvath Rob Rail	Glen Schmidt
#3	Georgie Gerula Scott Horvath	
#4	Scott Horvath	
#5	Doug Hayman Peter Cunningham Karin Strong-Boag Mary Parkin Jeff Elder	Cliff Dezell, Greg Beattie, Glen Schmidt
#6	Rob Rail	Cliff Dezell
Quesnel #1	George Reid Scott Horvath	Heather Peters
#2	George Reid Scott Horvath	Heather Peters
#3	Katherine Smith Scott Horvath	Heather Peters
Dease Lake	Shirley Reimer Renyé Lebel	

### 3. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

Community	What's Important
Prince George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Access</b> to services for special needs children</li> <li>- <b>Smooth transition</b> from youth to adult services</li> <li>- <b>Respect &amp; build on existing strengths</b></li> <li>- <b>Integrate</b> services in neighbourhoods and across education, municipality and social services.</li> <li>- <b>Youth engagement and involvement</b></li> <li>- <b>One stop access for families</b></li> <li>- <b>Continuity of relationships</b> with professionals</li> <li>- <b>Strong spectrum of early childhood interventions and services.</b></li> <li>- <b>Coordination of policies of all ministries</b> whose work touches the lives of children and youth</li> </ul>
Quesnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Use knowledge from previous studies</b> about this community in building this plan</li> <li>- <b>Community building</b> as an essential component of all contracts.</li> <li>- <b>Inclusion of all communities</b> in regional planning exercises.</li> <li>- <b>Sharing of work &amp; positions across the three authorities</b></li> </ul>
Dease Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Close working relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal authority.</b></li> <li>- <b>Use of traditional practices to solve child/family problems</b></li> </ul>

**Summary:** In all three communities consistent themes emerged as follows:

1. The North Region's Plan must build on existing strengths and previous studies that have been conducted.
2. The work of the three authorities – aboriginal, non-aboriginal and Community Living Services – must be coordinated especially at the operational level. Otherwise these new structures will not work for smaller communities.
3. The Authority needs to work with other ministries (Human Resources and Education), other authorities (Health) and local governments as these too affect the lives of children and families.
4. Access to necessary services must be smooth, transparent and based in local communities.

#### 4. IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

<b>Community</b>	<b>Strengths</b>
Prince George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creativity</li> <li>- Youth Around Prince (YAP) Centre</li> <li>- Prince George, as a community, is large enough to have most services yet small enough to be personal and for service providers to know each other.</li> <li>- Community Associations &amp; centers such as Carnie Hill and Ron Brent</li> <li>- A strong spectrum of early childhood development programs</li> <li>- Churches are active and supportive in the community</li> <li>- The University of Northern BC has ‘come of age’ and provides the community with information and research capacity</li> <li>- A broad range of services that are well integrated. There are good working relationships and coordination among agencies.</li> <li>- The diversity of programs and access points for youth</li> </ul>
Quesnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integration of current services including strong working relationships between professionals</li> <li>- Collaboration between aboriginal and non-aboriginal services.</li> <li>- A Post Secondary Council involving the College of New Caledonia, UNBC and Continuing Education which has been operating for 6 years. This collaboration will lead to creating a joint campus in the next year.</li> <li>- Extent of volunteerism in the community</li> <li>- A generous business community</li> <li>- People know each other and this leads to amazing collaboration between agencies.</li> <li>- This community does a good job of delivering services within available budget.</li> </ul>
Stikine Valley – Dease Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High level of volunteerism in Dease Lake</li> <li>- Outreach by residents to newcomers</li> <li>- People’s willingness to become involved in</li> </ul>

Community	Strengths
	<p>child welfare issues ( ie grandparents taking care of their grandchildren)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police are very present and involved in social and community issues.</li> <li>- Local professionals – teachers, health center staff – work well together and with MCFD. All are involved in larger community issues.</li> <li>- The desire to bring back aboriginal culture in all aspects of life including dealing with justice and child welfare issues.</li> <li>- Excellent local service providers such as Three Sisters Society.</li> </ul>

**Summary:** In all three communities consistent strengths were identified:

1. Strong, positive working relationships between professionals in these communities leading to integration of services and appropriate use of existing resources.
2. Two communities – Quesnel and Dease Lake – identified a high level of volunteer activity and supportive business communities.
3. The integration of post-secondary institutions in these communities – Northern Lights College, College of New Caledonia and the University of Northern British Columbia.

## 5. KEY COMMUNITY ISSUES

Community	Key Issues
Prince George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Services for older youth – youth homelessness, poverty and drug abuse were identified by a group of youth people as significant problems. Another group of young people identified the need for job skill training. All young people identified the need for on-going supportive relationships with social workers as they move into independent living.</li> <li>- Lack of transportation making access for families and children difficult.</li> <li>- Need to continue to work on integration (including integrated case management) and build on successes</li> <li>- Lack of integration at both the policy and operational levels with Ministry of Human Resources. Welfare cuts have severely impacted children and families.</li> <li>- The need for support services for family members (i.e. grandparents) who are caring for children.</li> <li>- Insufficient mental health services especially for children ages 0-5 and for adolescents.</li> <li>- Support for integrated neighbourhood service centers.</li> </ul>
Quesnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial support for local youth center</li> <li>- Integration of services across three authorities to ensure retention of good professional staff</li> <li>- Lack of sufficient family violence services</li> <li>- Level of alcohol abuse among young people.</li> </ul>
Stikine Valley Dease Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The need to provide services differently and to help families overcome their fear of child protection and of losing their children to government</li> <li>- The level of service received from the delegated agency</li> </ul>

**Summary:** Each community identified specific service gaps in their community. All participants expressed concern about integration of services among ministries (especially Human Resources and Education) and across authorities.

## 6. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGIES

<b>Community</b>	<b>Service Delivery Strategies</b>	<b>Partnerships</b>
Prince George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- -10-12 neighbourhood integrated service centers (including all services) using closed school building where appropriate</li> <li>- continued use of integrated case management approach to services</li> <li>- Better support to young families including outreach, better information, one place to go to tell their 'story' and get all the services they need. Services need to include transportation help, home support and advocacy assistance.</li> <li>- Support services for family members, especially grandparents, who are raising their grandchildren.</li> <li>- Study the last 50-100 'removals' in Prince George to understand where early intervention could have made a difference.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ministry of Human Resources</li> <li>- Educational services</li> <li>- Municipality</li> </ul>
Quesnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service planning needs to look beyond current MCFD programs and include housing, transportation needs and recreational service needs.</li> <li>- Community building is essential and ALL community contracts should require this as part of their work.</li> <li>- Youth Centers need to be created, supported and/or enhanced.</li> <li>- Shared positions MUST be created by the three</li> </ul>	<p>Municipal government Ministry of Human Resources Educators</p>

Community	Service Delivery Strategies	Partnerships
	<p>authorities to ensure that professional staff can be attracted and kept in communities such as Quesnel</p>	
Stikine Valley Dease Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aboriginal people want to create their own services with a focus on family support and prevention. To do this they will need additional resources.</li> <li>- Traditional ways of resolving problems (i.e. Healing Circles) should be used more in both justice and child welfare proceedings.</li> </ul>	Aboriginal Authority Delegated Agencies

**Summary:** In all of these communities these themes emerged:

1. Services need to be integrated and based in local communities and neighbourhoods.
2. Services for children, youth and families need to reach beyond traditional lines and include housing, transportation, recreation and financial support (welfare).
3. The work of the three authorities MUST be integrated and at an operational level create joint position to ensure retention of professional staff.
4. Service planning must be based on research (i.e. look at reasons for last 50-100 removals) and must build in evaluation criteria which is understandable to the public.

**7. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

**NOT DISCUSSED IN ANY CONSULTATIONS**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Fund Raising Strategies</b>	<b>Budget Reduction Strategies</b>

## 8. BOARD COMPOSITION AND LINKAGES

Community	Board Composition	Linkages with Communities
Prince George	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Represent community and geography</li> <li>- Sort out how direct service providers can be involved and clarify potential conflicts of interest</li> <li>- “Board members must be honest, brave and act as advocates for children, youth and families”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create reaction panels and then make these local advisory committees</li> <li>- Hold regular community forums</li> <li>- Provide communities with ongoing community development assistance and education so they are better prepared to become and to remain involved.</li> <li>- Ensure youth engagement</li> <li>- Meetings of the Authority should be open – modeled after local city councils and school boards.</li> <li>- An interactive web site should be created.</li> <li>- A newsletter should be created and distributed by email, web site and by regular mail.</li> <li>- Hold bi-annual town meetings to report on the work of the Authority</li> </ul>
Quesnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selection based on understandable criteria which is well communicated</li> <li>- Use community process to select representative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop an accountability model, publicize it and follow it. The creation of ‘community charters’ may provide a useful model especially around accountability to citizens</li> </ul>

Community	Board Composition	Linkages with Communities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chart the progress of the Board on a web page and post the minutes of the meeting there as well.</li> <li>- Provide complete budget information to community members</li> <li>- Review the use of local council models (like the original community health councils)</li> </ul>
Stikine Valley Dease Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There <b>must</b> be a person on the Board from the far north. There is a lack of understanding of the true realities of remote, rural, northern issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At least one Board member who is skilled and knowledgeable about child welfare must visit this area at least twice a year.</li> </ul>

**GREAT QUOTE: “Whether head office is in Victoria or Terrace – they are not here!”**

**9. Recommendations Regarding Board Decision Making Process and other Advice about Governance. The Authority should:**

1. Play an advocacy role such as advocating for adequate income assistance rates.
2. Have maximum flexibility in funding distribution.
3. Create a code of ethics for themselves and make this publicly available.
4. Have an advocate/ombudsman who is independent and provides services to individuals and advice/feedback to the Board Members.
5. Proactively address the interrelationship between the 'authorities' – aboriginal, non-aboriginal, Community Living Services and Health so a stove-pipe approach to services is avoided.
6. Clarify its decision making policy and make this public.
7. Define what it means by being open, accountable and transparent, make this public and then act on it.
8. Consider giving funding to local communities to design and deliver their own services. While it may not be feasible it needs to be actively considered and publicly reported.

**10. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #1  
November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

**Meeting with Residential Service Providers  
14 present – foster parents, residential staff, day program staff**

Also present where:

Greg Beattie, Planning Committee Member  
Cliff Dezell, Planning Committee Chair  
Richard King, CSM, MCFD  
Peter Cunningham, A/RED, MCFD  
Scott Horvath & Rob Rail, Transition Planning Team  
Joyce Preston, Facilitator

The meeting was structured with initial presentations from Planning Committee member Greg Beattie and from Richard King, Community Services Manager; followed by introduction of the consultation and ensuing discussion. While the four questions were not asked specifically, information gained relates directly to some of the questions and to some sections of the Business Plan.

The wide ranging discussion is grouped into three categories:

- services present and needed,
- coordination & interministerial issues, and
- advice about governance & ongoing relationship between the community and the Authority.

**SERVICES – PRESENT & NEEDED:**

1. There was discussion about where services for special needs children should be – Community Living Services (CLS) or Children and Family Services (CFS). Some participants argued for CLS while others argued for CFS. In all of the discussions it was clear that individuals wanted *access to necessary services when needed, and continuity of services especially in the transition from child/youth services to adult services.*
2. Concerns expressed about supports for youth over age 16. There is a need for ongoing supports for all youth and additional life long supports for youth who have Fetal Alcohol Effect / Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.
3. Short term residential services are needed for families as well as children and youth.
4. One-stop access for all services was discussed looking at the various natural neighbourhoods in Prince George (10-12 natural neighbourhoods identified). Schools that have or are being closed could be used as full service access centers. There was discussion about the inclusion of child protection investigative services in these information, referral and service centers. While there was not unanimous agreement most felt that **all** services needed to be there
5. Cultural differences need to be recognized, respected & worked with.

### COORDINATION & INTERMINISTERIAL ISSUES:

1. There is a need for better coordination with welfare services (Ministry of Human Resources - MHR) at both senior and local levels. Concern expressed that the goals of the two ministries are not compatible yet many of the individuals served by the MCFD are also clients of MHR. Poverty of families remains a major factor in creating vulnerability for children and families.
2. Strong coordination and integration between educational services and child/family services. There are a range of examples – community schools, school based child & youth workers, co-location, and use of ‘closed’ schools as neighbourhood based service hubs
3. Better coordination with community recreational associations. These could become part of an integrated service center and lead some of the community outreach to vulnerable children and families.
4. Ongoing use of integrated case management approaches to work with families & children.

### GOVERNANCE & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ISSUES:

1. Concern expressed that people directly involved in social services or directly affected by them are not represented on the Planning Committee (i.e., youth, foster parents, social workers). Information was given regarding potential conflict of interest for individuals who are appointed (i.e., being employed by the Authority and on the Board) . Questions were raised about how CLS does this with family members being on their Boards who are also involved in direct services.
2. Communities need ongoing assistance with community development and education about how they can be involved.
3. The Interim Authority should have a cross section of people on it reflecting both the North region’s geography and the communities served.
4. ‘Reaction Panels’ are being considered to review sections of the draft business plan. Could these become ongoing advisory committees?

**11. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #2  
November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

**Meeting with individuals who provide services.  
26 present -MCFD Staff & Community Service Providers**

Also present were:

Glen Schmidt, Planning Committee Member

Doug Hayman, Interim CEO

Richard King, Community Services Manager, MCFD

Rob Rail and Scott Horvath, Transition Planning Team

Jeff Elder, Communications, MCFD

Joyce Preston, Facilitator

The meeting began with a presentation by Glen Schmidt on behalf of the Planning Committee and by Richard King, MCFD about changes & budget reductions occurring in MCFD.

The advice and discussion of this group can be grouped into service issues and board/governance issues as follows:

**SERVICES ISSUES:**

1. There needs to be better recognition of what is already being done well in Prince George. The Planning Committee needs to conduct an analysis of what is working and build on those successes. This was a major theme of this meeting.
2. There needs to be a refocus on neighbourhoods with social services, school districts and municipality all working together. Clyde Hertzmann in his community mapping exercise identified 11 natural neighbourhoods in Prince George. Community associations help build the sense of community around schools. They are usually supported by the municipality. However, individual families need to be able to participate without fear of being expected to volunteer, fund raise etc. if they are unable to do this. Many families are transient and this needs to be recognized in a restructuring at a neighbourhood level.
3. We need to look at how to integrate child protection with other community services. MCFD social workers want to work in difference ways. Community service providers are 'nervous' about investigative role and client attitude to MCFD social workers. These can be overcome with training and support.
4. Creativity is a major community strength.
5. Transportation is a significant barrier to participation by many families.

BOARD/GOVERNANCE ISSUES:

1. The Interim Authority should play an advocacy role such as advocating for adequate income assistance rates.
2. The Authority must have maximum flexibility in funding distribution.
3. This group expressed concern about the current budget cuts and whether there will not be enough money left in 2004 to do the essential work.
4. The Board should hold regular forums in communities.
5. The Board should build a code of ethics for themselves.
6. Planning Committee members should meet with MCFD staff in small groups (ie team meetings).

**12. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #3  
YOUTH MEETING  
November 28th, 2002**

Five youth present - four from Future Cents at "Youth Around Prince" and one youth in care.

Also present: Georgie Gerula, Scott Horvath and Joyce Preston (facilitator)

This group of young people all work in the Future Cents program. It was started in 1998 and employ at risk and high-risk youth. They have funding from a number of sources. The goal is to provide community services for Prince George and personal development for the young people. Their website is [futurecents.ca](http://futurecents.ca)

They raised the following issues:

1. **YOUTH HOMELESSNESS:** They expressed serious concern about youth homelessness in Prince George. They see squatting and prostitution. They feel the problem has not been sufficiently studied and see a need for a homeless shelter and subsidized housing.
2. **POVERTY:** They feel that there needs to be a more active stance against recent welfare cuts as poverty is a serious issue for youth.
3. **DRUG PROBLEM:** They described a serious drug problem in Prince George especially in relation to 'crystal meth'. Awareness is the key, especially peer-to-peer education. Treatment needs to be youth driven.
4. **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:** In order to involve youth in consultation events need to be fun, there needs to be food and they should be run by youth themselves.
5. **Youth Around Prince (YAP)** opened in 1996 and has been hugely successful. As services are contracted they are in jeopardy and the youth are concerned.
6. **CONTINUITY OF RELATIONSHIPS:** these youth stressed that the most important thing for young people was continuity of relationships.

**13. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #4  
YOUTH MEETING  
November 28th, 2002**

Six youth present - all in or from care.

Also present: Scott Horvath (Transition Team)

This was a very articulate group of young people who talked in a real way about their in-care experiences and what they need now. Here is a summary of their messages:

1. They expressed concerns about group homes closing and their being sent out on independent living without sufficient supports. They feel they lack job skills as well as supportive relationships with social workers. One young man described his concerns about living on \$700/month and therefore having to move back to the "Hood" which is not a good environment for him. He was taken away from there and now feels he is being forced to go back.
2. We talked about how youth new to Prince George access resources. This group of young people stated that there were lots of resources but it is hard to find them. They talked about the Welcoming Project and how it is underutilized.
3. They believe that Board Members need to get to know the reality of being a child in care. They suggested that the Board should have an orientation by youth in care.
4. Their final message was not to isolate kids from their families.

**14. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION # 5  
COMMUNITY MEETING  
Thursday, Nov 28th, 2002**

25 present. Most were service providers in one form or another.

Board Members Present:: Cliff Dezell, Greg Beattie, Glen Schmidt  
MCFD Staff: Doug Hayman, Peter Cunningham, Karen Strong-Boag, Mary Parkin,  
Jeff Elder.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Joyce Preston provided background information about this community consultation.

Cliff Dezell introduced the Planning Committee members and described the planning process underway and the roles & tasks of the Planning Committee.

Community members present expressed concern about the separation of aboriginal and non-aboriginal services. They were concerned about the division of funding and possible duplication of services. All present stressed the importance of the two authorities working together as they seek out the professional staff necessary to provide quality services to local residents.

Following these introductions the ensuing discussion focused in four areas - community strengths, ways of enhancing these, service issues and regional governance advice. Here is a summary of the discussion:

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS:

1. Prince George's size, as a city, is an asset. It is large enough to have a variety of services but small enough to be personal and for service providers to know each other.
2. Community Associations that provide neighbourhood services and a focal point for local activity and planning. Carnie Hill and Ron Brent Community Associations were singled out as examples of community associations providing exceptional services to their communities. These are seen to be run by local residents to meet local needs and focus around local schools. Some community associations provide a broad range of services while others are more limited (ie sports programs).
3. A strong spectrum of early childhood development programs including the Child Development Center, Family Resource Centers and the Healthiest Babies Program. There is also a Fetal Alcohol Network based in the downtown core.
4. Churches are active and supportive in the community.

5. Good range of broad services that are integrated. There are not long waiting lists. Services named were Intersect, Youth Around Prince, Alternative School Programs and Go Anywhere Program (life skills).
6. The University of Northern BC and its ability to provide the community with information and research capacity.
7. Prevention programs in schools (i.e., Red Cross Sexual Abuse awareness).
8. Public health nursing program.

#### WHAT WOULD ENHANCE COMMUNITY CAPACITY:

1. Using the strengths of some local community associations (i.e., Carnie Hill) combined with the recent community mapping done by Dr. Clyde Hertzman, look at providing access to services in local neighborhoods. There needs to be community based family friendly programs open to everyone.
2. No program cuts especially to neighborhood school based services such as hot lunch and early breakfast programs.
3. Better support to young families including outreach, better information, one place to go to tell their 'story' and get all the services they need, transportation help, home support and advocacy assistance.
4. Support for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

#### SERVICE ISSUES AND ADVICE:

1. Mental health services are lacking for both the 0-5 population and for adolescents.
2. The constant turnover of social workers and foster parents flies in the face of the attachment needs of children and youth. Children and youth continue to tell us about their need for long term and committed relationships.
3. Welfare cuts have severely impacted children and families.
4. A study should be conducted to understand the reasons that the last 50-100 children/youth were removed to care. This information could provide advice in planning early interventions strategies.
5. There is a lack of long-term assistance for women coming out of abusive relationships.

6. Services for multi-dimensional impaired children must be preserved and enhanced. Additionally the underlying issues (poverty, alcohol and drug use) leading to these problems in children must be addressed.
7. Parenting assessments should be done at the beginning of a family's contact with the child welfare system and used as the basis for permanent planning for children.
8. Work with families, who have lost their children or are at risk of losing them, should be conducted in a non-judgmental, 'forgiving' way which offers help, and support. Quote from local family advocate "Forgive and teach them how to be parents."

#### REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ADVICE:

1. Board members must be honest, brave and act as advocates for children, youth and families.
2. Board meetings should occur in different locations around the region and be welcoming to everyone. They should model their openness after City Councils and School Boards.
3. The Board should consider setting up some form of advisory committee structure.
4. Board members should be prepared to speak individually to small groups of individuals, especially those receiving services. They should also consult with local advocacy groups and pay honorarium to youth who participate.
5. The Board should have a web site that is interactive.
6. Cooperation between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal authorities is imperative. There must be a cooperative model for service delivery so there will not be unnecessary duplication of services.
7. The Regional Authority should have an advocate/ombudsman who would have independence and help with access and feedback.

**15. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #6  
Friday, November 29th, 2002**

MEETING WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

PRESENT: 15 service providers  
Cliff Dezell, Chair, Planning Committee  
Rob Rail, MCFD Transition Team

Joyce Preston introduced this consultation and provided the background information about recent government decisions leading to the creation of regional authorities to deliver services to children, youth and families.

Cliff Dezell introduced the work of the Planning Committee, the process they are using and discussed the tasks before them.

Service providers expressed concerns about the budget cuts that are currently being made, the lack of consultation, and the impact these will have on services for children and families. They were referred to Richard King, Community Services Manager, to discuss their concerns and look for ways to have input.

**This group suggested that the GUIDING PRINCIPLE for the Regional Authority should be: will do no harm.**

The meeting was organized to look at strengths of the community, means of enhancing these, service issues and regional governance issues. A summary of the input of this group follows:

STRENGTHS OF THE COMMUNITY:

1. Excellent services and organizations committed to the community
2. The University of Northern British Columbia has come of age. It provides access to current knowledge and research.
3. The diversity of programs and access points for youth.
4. Good working relationships and coordination among agencies. There is minimal overlap and individuals seeking services have choices.
5. Youth Around Prince (YAP) - is a fabulous program and needs to be kept and enhanced.

### WHAT WOULD HELP AND ENHANCE THESE STRENGTHS:

1. An ethical review process that involves ALL ministries, authorities and agencies whose services touch the lives of children and families. Concern was expressed that the policies of one ministry (ie MHR) undermines the work of another (ie. MCFD).
2. Evaluation of all programs based on outcomes and done in a manner that is community based and visible.
3. Stronger community awareness about problems that exist and services that are available.
4. Support for local community centers such as Carney Hill, Ron Brent and Pine Street Family Center and for the development of family resource centers (note: not sure how these are different or the same).

### SERVICE ISSUES AND ADVICE:

1. The lack of interrelationships between various ministries and the policies and programs they are initiating, changing or eliminating. Childcare was given as an example of services that have three ministries involved without sufficient coordination affecting services to individual families.
2. The lack, in Prince George, of affordable housing, adequate transportation, affordable daycare and affordable recreation.
3. Budget cuts that lead to agencies changing their programs or adding programs that may affect the quality of programs offered.
4. Despite the growth in knowledge about child development and current information about how to help vulnerable families and prevent them from moving to "at risk", current budget cuts appear to be taking services in the opposite direction.
5. This group supported the idea of building services in local neighborhoods using existing community associations and perhaps empty school buildings. They support the creation of integrated service centers.

### REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ISSUES & ADVICE:

1. With the creation of three new authorities (CLS, Aboriginal, Non-Aboriginal) in addition to the Health Authority, there is a huge danger of a 'stove pipe' approach to service delivery. This must be addressed proactively and there must be strong and active liaisons with other authorities.
2. Define and make public the Board's decision making policy.

3. Define what it means to be open, accountable & transparent, make this public and then act on it.
4. Set up an Advisory Committee structure.
5. Consult with people who receive services.
6. Respect that service providers can provide 'voice' for clients who are not comfortable to speak on their own behalf.
7. Produce a Newsletter, have an email list and send information to everyone.
8. When change strategies are defined come and consult again with communities about these directions.
9. Hold regular bi-annual town meetings to report on the work of the Authority. Use agency staff to encourage service recipients to attend.

**17. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
QUESNEL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #1  
November 27, 2002**

**Service Providers 40 present –**

- MCFD staff,
- Community service providers including foster parents,
- UNBC students,
- Health staff including Nursing Program Co-coordinator, public health and youth forensic staff,
- Youth probation,
- Education staff and the director of the local Parent Advisory Committee
- Aboriginal representatives from the Friendship Center, Redbluff Band and the Aboriginal Authority

**Also present:**

Heather Peters, Planning Committee Member

George Reid, MCFD Team Leader

Katherine Smith, MCFD Team Leader

Scott Horvath, Transition Planning Team.

Joyce Preston, Facilitator

The meeting began with Joyce providing a summary of the current context – government decisions that have led to budget cuts, creation of a CLS authority, creation of five regional aboriginal authorities and the creation of five non-aboriginal authorities. Heather then reviewed the development of the Regional Planning Committee including appointment, membership, roles, tasks and timelines. She asked for advice about service delivery issues and about governance, especially about how communities remain involved and included.

**COMMUNITY STRENGTHS:**

1. Collaboration between aboriginal and non-aboriginal services. There has been a positive move to work in collaborative ways and they don't want this interrupted.
2. A Post Secondary Council (involving CNC, UNBC, Continuing Education) has been operating for six years with excellent results. They now have plans to move to a joint campus.
3. Management support for strong positive relationships between caregivers and MCFD staff.
4. Quesnel is "prettier" than Prince George or Williams Lake.
5. Committed caring professional community that is interested in the health and well-being of all residents.
6. Inter-professional collaboration – education, health and social services work very well together.
7. Extent of volunteerism in their community.
8. The business community is very generous.

### WHAT WOULD HELP:

1. Free recreational services for all children, youth and families.
2. Adequate transportation taking into account the transportation needs of those living in rural areas.
3. Discussion of services that focuses beyond current MCFD services but look at the broader base of services – present and needed.
4. To be involved in broader regional planning. Quesnel does not have all the services that residents need so it is reliant on other communities (i.e. Prince George). Quesnel residents need to be part of the broader discussions.

### SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES:

1. Many reports have been written over the past decade about service delivery issues and suggestions in Quesnel. These need to be reviewed by the Planning Committee as part of the review of Service Delivery proposals. UNBC has also looked at broad information about the ‘north’ and this should be used where appropriate.
2. The list of services mandated as part of this review needs to be expanded to include educational services, literacy programs.
3. Community building is so essential that ALL community contracts should require community building (specifically detailed) as part of their work.
4. A strategy needs to be developed for at risk families and youth.
5. This community lacks family violence services and youth services.
6. There is a concern that this community will become isolated from a broad service delivery system and that the province will become fragmented.
7. The local Youth Center has reduced its hours due to lack of funding. It needs to be supported. There are recreational opportunities for youth who have access to financial support but not for many others.

### GOVERNANCE INFORMATION/ADVICE:

1. This community wants genuine consultation on a regular basis in both formal and informal ways.
2. The Planning Committee should consult with people who receive services and with line workers delivering the services.
3. Chart the progress of the Board on a web page and post the minutes of meetings there as well.
4. The Board should provide clear financial information including budget cuts. This community wants information about innovative ways other communities are handling budget reductions.

**17. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
QUESNEL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #2  
November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

**YOUTH MEETING**

**Five youth attended and one youth care worker**

Also present:

Heather Peters, Planning Committee Member

George Reid, Team Leader, MCFD

Karen ?, Community Development Worker

Basha Rahn, guest from Williams Lake

Scott Horvath, Transition Planning Team

Joyce Preston, Facilitator

Four of the youth are board members for the local youth center. One youth is from care and came with her youth care worker.

The youth talked about the Youth Center and its role in their community. They see it as important as it gives young people a place to go. It used to be open six days a week from 2:30 pm to 8:00 pm but due to funding cuts it is now only open two to three days a week. They need \$50,000-\$70,000 a year to pay the wages of the coordinator/supervisor and will be approaching the new City Council. If they were to receive additional resources they would acquire new sports equipment, have more computers and extend their hours of operation.

The Youth Center closes at 8:00 pm as youth then go out and party – often bush parties. They would like to see a Dance Club created which could be an alternative to bush parties.

This group of youth described alcohol use as the biggest problem among their age group. One youth, a Grade 12 student, described half the grad class as having alcohol issues. They state that alcohol is the serious problem, not drug use. Addiction services were offered at the Youth Center but less due to limited hours. There is also an addiction services program located at the hospital.

The other needs they would like to see addressed are:

- More youth workers to do outreach and to help young people change their life style from the alcohol and drug scene.
- Job shadowing opportunities for younger youth. This is available in Grades 11 & 12 but it needs to happen earlier to give young people direction.
- Assistance in finding jobs especially with the changing economic base of the community.

**18. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
QUESNEL COMMUNITY CONSULTATION #3  
November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

**COMMUNITY MEETING**

**20 PRESENT**

- Two citizens,
- Service providers (Child Development Centre, corrections, adoptive parents, MCFD, Women's Resource Center, Youth Outreach),
- The mayor-elect who is also the Alternate School principal
- Two members of the press representing different newspapers
- School District Secretary
- School counselor

**Also present:**

Heather Peters, Planning Committee Member

Katherine Smith, Team Leader, MCFD

Scott Horvath, Transition Planning Team

Joyce Preston, Facilitator

The Community Meeting focused on the impacts of the current budget reductions and on how the new governance structure would work. Attendees were thoughtful and challenging and provided valuable input. There was some (but lesser) discussion about service delivery issues. Community strengths were not specifically identified but came out during the course of the conversation. Here is a summary:

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS:

1. This community does a good job of delivering services within available budgets. Further, there is good integration of current services.
2. People know each other and this leads to amazing collaboration between agencies. It is important they are not placed in the position of 'fighting' over limited resources.

SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES:

1. Gaps in service of occupational therapy for the 0-5 population and physical therapy for the school age population
2. The three authorities (Community Living Services, Aboriginal, Children and Family Development) must at an operational level figure out how to have shared positions. If this does not happen recruitment and retention of professional staff will be a major problem.

GOVERNANCE ISSUES/ADVICE:

1. The geographic representation on the Board must be based on visible and understandable criteria. It has to be clear and communicated. Concern was

expressed about communities who have no direct representation on the Planning Committee – Interim Authority.

2. The Planning Committee must develop community accountability mechanisms that are well communicated and then followed. The community charter (currently being developed by the provincial government) deals with accountability to citizens and may provide some useful advice.
3. The group had discussion about the “we vs them” model of service delivery. “Them” is currently Victoria and will switch to the regional authority and the worry is that nothing will be any different. They want to have control over their own service delivery and the debate about whether or how this could be done without full local funding control was inconclusive. The former community health council model was used an example of local control. Nonetheless, this was a central concern of this group.
4. They recommend that a community process be used to recommend (select?) Interim Authority members.

**19. NORTH REGION PLANNING COMMITTEE  
STIKINE VALLEY – DEASE LAKE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION  
Tuesday, December 10, 2002**

INTRODUCTION:

The Stikine Valley encompasses a huge geographic area and has approximately 2,200 residents centered in six communities – Atlin, Dease Lake, Good Hope Lake, Telegraph Creek, Iskut and Lower Post. This consultation was held in Dease Lake. A separate community consultation took place in Atlin November 25, 2002.

Two meetings were planned in this consultation – a service provider/stakeholders meeting and a community meeting. Five (5) community members attended the afternoon session. No one came to the evening meeting.

**Present** at the afternoon session were:

Christine Ball, People’s Haven Family Service Center  
Keri Reilander, Director of Child Development, Three Sisters Society  
Sgt. Tom Roy, RCMP  
Sandy Sandvick, Northern Lights College  
Sueanne Ci, Ministry of Transportation

**Also present:**

Shirley Reimer, Community Services Manager, MCFD  
Renyé Lebel, Team Leader, MCFD  
Joyce Preston, Facilitator

GENERAL COMMUNITY INFORMATION:

- The Ministry of Children and Family Development Office is located in Dease Lake to serve the entire area. It has a staff of one team leader, three social worker positions and two administrative support positions.
- Services for aboriginal people are also provided by the partially delegated Northwest Inter-Nation Family and Community Services Agency (NIFCS). They are currently delegated to Level 12 (support services) and in the process of being approved for Level 13 (guardianship services). Their head office is in Terrace. They have an office in Dease Lake with one staff member.
- The population in this area is approximately 75% aboriginal. The current caseload of MCFD (47 files) is 100 per cent for aboriginal people.
- There is a school in Dease Lake (K-12) which has 149 students enrolled.
- The RCMP has a five-member detachment in Dease Lake to serve the entire area.
- There is a health clinic in Dease Lake including a resident doctor.
- This community is an unorganized area so there is no local government.

Joyce Preston provided an overview of the decisions made by the provincial government leading to the creation of 11 authorities – Community Living Services, 5 Aboriginal Authorities and 5 Non-Aboriginal Authorities. Participants were provided

with a handout from the North Region Aboriginal Authority Caucus: the *North Regional Working Group Progress Report* dated November 21, 2002.

For the purpose of this consultation on behalf of the Non-Aboriginal North Region Planning Committee the group was asked to discuss community strengths, service issues and advice about how the regional authority should operate.

#### COMMUNITY STRENGTHS:

- High level of volunteerism in Dease Lake for fund raising, events for children, planning for the Community Hall etc.
- Empathy/sympathy even towards 'enemies' in crisis.
- Outreach by residents to newcomers to their community.
- People are willing to get involved in child welfare issues (i.e. Grandmothers stepping forward to care for their grandchildren).
- The desire to bring back the aboriginal culture in all aspects of life including dealing with justice issues and child welfare issues. An example was the use of "circles" to make appropriate plans and hold individuals accountable.
- Local service providers such as Three Sisters Society.
- Police are great and get involved in social and community issues.
- Local professionals- teachers, health center staff - are involved in all aspects of the community.

#### SERVICE ISSUES:

- Concerns were expressed about the level of services received from NIFCS in this area. They do not have any presence in Telegraph Creek or on Indian Reserve #9. This group wants the financial resources provided by the various Bands to stay in this area and is concerned this is not happening. Due to the geography service delivery is expensive.
- Some Bands are resistant to receiving their services from NIFCS.
- Aboriginal people want to create own services with a focus on family support and prevention. To do this they will need additional resources.
- Traditional ways of resolving problems (i.e. "Circles") are not used as much as they should be. People need to be encouraged to become involved in these more traditional ways. Procedures, such as case conferences, need to be modified to reflect traditional practices.
- The lack of quality assurance mechanisms.
- There is a need to provide services differently and to help families overcome their fear of child protection and of losing their children to government.

#### REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ISSUES & ADVICE:

- There **must** be a person on the Board who is from the far north. There is a lack of understanding of the realities of remote, northern, rural issues.
- A board member who is skilled and knowledgeable about child welfare who visits this area at least twice a year.

#### **Quotes:**

**"It's a shame of them dividing it up the way they are." "Whether head office is in Victoria or Terrace – they are not here!"**