

Community Conversations

Red Deer – October 16, 2012



Participant Quotes

"People need awareness and education of residential schools – Aboriginal history."

"But I also think we need to do more for the family. The children are taken when the family is in crisis. We need to support them do heal so they can get their children back."

"It will take great time to heal, we should not be discouraged."

"Aboriginal people are as diverse as any society – so many cultures. There exists the assumption that Aboriginal people are all the same and want the same things."

"Need to get communities leading – won't see any success unless communities are leading change."

"Need to educate general public about actual truth of Aboriginal history."

"Balance is provided in the cultural ceremony."

A Space for Change...

Central Alberta Child and Family Service Authority (CFSA) and the Aboriginal Engagement and Strategy division together hosted a community conversation in Red Deer with people from central Alberta.

The event started on October 15 with a feast and pipe ceremony led by Elder Lawrence Saddleback. Elder Danny Montour and other Elders from various

communities in central Alberta supported Elder Saddleback throughout the ceremony. The purpose of the ceremony was to bless the event and to ensure all who attend the conversation come with an open heart and groundedness to discuss the very serious problem of the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child intervention system.

The conversation began on the morning of October 16th with sixty three people attending. Elders, parents, youth, foster parents and people from the fields of law enforcement, education, elected officials, community organizations, business and various levels of government, came to share their stories and perspectives on how we can better support children, youth and families in Alberta.

There was a vast amount of wisdom and experience at the tables. Foster parents shared their challenges and their heart-warming stories of the positive differences they have made for the children who share their homes. There was also a great deal of learning that took place as Elders shared their wisdom about traditions and ceremony, and the importance of keeping children connected to their rich heritage, no matter where they live.

Not only did this conversation help generate some ideas about how to make things better for children, youth and families, but it also forged some new connections among the network of people who care for children and youth. New relationships emerged between the Foster Parent Association and Elders and also between the municipal government of Red Deer and the communities of Hobbema.





Survey Responses

"I will push my case workers to take a more proactive approach with regards to returning children home or at least facilitating family contact."

"I will share my experience from this community conversation and emulate the process within my organization."

"So many perspectives - need more frequent conversations to help everyone learn from each other."

"The best part of the session was learning from Aboriginal people."

"In some ways we may need to consider that change is ongoing - in dialogue we should be talking about guiding or redirecting change."

"What can I do to effect change?"

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

These themes have been notably consistent with what has emerged from other conversations across the province.

Importance of culture, ceremony and the inclusion of Elders

- "The community taught the kids this was their culture and there are supports for you when you need help. These teachings significantly changed the children's outlook and increased pride in their culture."
- "Importance of ceremony was discussed at our table. How do we build that into everything?"

There are many issues and challenges with the current system

- "Sometimes it's what the province mandates -> we've had to split up siblings because of rules."
- "The money is for kids in care. There is much less funding for supports to the family."

Issues, challenges and opportunities with foster care

- "Rules for foster parents about so many beds/rooms for kids are not realistic on-reserves -> big families and band-built houses."
- "As a foster parent, I don't know much about traditional ways but I want to learn. It's great to hear success stories."

Knowledge and understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma

- "Nothing will change until we address the harm caused by Indian residential schools."
- "Many people living on the reserve are living with the effects of intergenerational abuse."

We need to work together

- "I would like us to be able to work as one - together - foster parents and bio parents working together."
- "We need to work with everyone in the picture."

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. Thirty three people completed the surveys for a response rate of 52%.

We heard from participants that the event went extremely well. More than 90% 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, "how do we implement strategies that were discussed?" We also asked, "was there anything in today's session that made you think or feel differently about something?" Most people said that hearing from many different perspectives helped increase their own understanding of the issues.

We also wanted to know, what actions will you personally undertake to create change. We heard three common responses:

- Participants will work to educate others;
- People will take personal responsibility to create and/or support the change they want to see; and
- There was a commitment to implement something that was learned at the conversation.

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.