

First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security

2014 Report and Recommendations and Government of Alberta Response



Aboriginal Women's Initiatives and Research, Aboriginal Relations
March 2015

Advisory Framework First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security

Council's Mission: To engage in a comprehensive approach – in partnership with all parties – to provide strategic advice and recommendations to governments and other stakeholders with the goal of strengthening the economic security of First Nations Women.

Introduction:

The Council was established in December 2013 to provide advice and recommendations to the Government of Alberta and interested stakeholders on strategies to improve the economic security of First Nations women.

The Council held three meetings in 2014.

- March 26, 2014 – a facilitated session to support team building, develop a mission and vision and establish priorities through a work plan. Priorities included missing and murdered First Nations women, education and a communication plan to promote the work of the Council and allow for more meaningful consultation with other First Nations women.
- June 9, 10, 2014 – the Council heard presentations the first day from RCMP, Justice and Solicitor General (JSG) and the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) on missing and murdered First Nations women. The following day, presenters from Norquest College and Mount Royal University spoke about services and gaps in post-secondary education for First Nations students.
- September 10, 11, 2014 – the Council asked for additional presentations on human trafficking as it relates to missing and murdered First Nations women. Representatives from RCMP, ACT Alberta – the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking in Alberta and Marie Delorme, member of the task force on human trafficking and sexual exploitation conducted by the Canadian Women's Foundation also provided presentations. In addition, Alberta Education was asked to attend in light of presentations in June that revealed First Nations students are often ill-equipped to enter post-secondary institutions. Alberta Education was asked to present on services and gaps to improve educational outcomes for First Nations students.

Education Findings

FNMI Education Funding: Presentations revealed Alberta Education provides \$45 million to school districts or \$1178 for each self-identified First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) student; however school districts have discretion to use the funding in their local context. There is no consistency and no guarantee across school districts that funding is going directly to improving educational outcomes for First Nations students.

Recommendation One: Mandate that FNMI funding is directed to improving outcomes for First Nations students in consultation with First Nations parents and the community. School districts must be accountable for this funding and report annually on outcomes.

Rationale: The Council agrees education is a key foundation to improving economic security for First Nations women. The most vulnerable group is First Nations (Registered or Treaty Indian) women, of which 38.5% do not have any certificate, diploma, or degree.

School districts that target FNMI funding to their First Nations students are showing improved results. St. Joseph High School in Edmonton established a High School Graduation Coach Program in 2009. The graduation rate for FNMI students at St. Joseph High School was 14.9 % in the 2008-2009 school year. Today, at 43.8 %, it surpasses the provincial FNMI graduation rate.

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT BUT MODIFY

School boards are empowered to meet the needs of all their students and already report on results for self-identified FNMI students.

Alberta is committed to improving outcomes for First Nation students in Alberta. Alberta Education will review accountability around the FNMI funding allocation to ensure that reporting requirements promote transparency and underscore the need for setting local targets for achievement of outcomes of First Nation students. One of the principles of education funding in Alberta is to ensure that school authorities have maximum flexibility to meet local needs. Parents are able to engage in this process through Parent Councils and through their elected school trustees. Support to empower First Nations parents to engage in their children's education will be addressed in the First Nations Women's Council's Recommendation Two, the development of a parent toolkit.

Resources for Parents: Alberta Education revealed there are significant challenges in some districts connecting with the parents of First Nations children. The current system puts the onus on parents to advocate on behalf of their children for better educational outcomes.

Recommendation Two: Provide better outreach support to make it easier for parents of First Nations children to find the educational resources they need. Alberta Education should develop an FNMI resource tool kit for parents, which includes the name of the designated FNMI coordinator in their district. The kits can be distributed to school districts and sent home with First Nations students to provide to their parents. Ensure the tool kit is available on Alberta Education's website.

Rationale: In 2006, 20% of First Nations women over the age of 15 were lone parents, while this was the case for 17% of Inuit women and 14% of Métis women (Statistics Canada). The female Aboriginal population is growing much more rapidly than the non-Aboriginal female population in Alberta. The period from 2006 to 2011 witnessed a 16.3% increase in the Aboriginal female population compared to an 8.7% increase in the non-Aboriginal female population.

In cases where the mother is the only parent of the household and is impoverished, day-to-day survival to cover the basic necessities for her children overshadows educational advocacy on her children's behalf. The women who want to advocate on behalf of their children are left to work through a maze of contacts and resources. They may not have access to a computer or lack the skills to navigate through Alberta Education's or their school district's web sites. They may be intimidated to approach school authorities directly.

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT

Alberta recognizes the importance of empowering FNMI parents and communities to be key partners to improve their children's success in schools. Resources are available for parents under the Collaborative Framework model which is intended to strengthen collaboration between stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for FNMI students. Alberta Education will build on existing resources by developing a parent toolkit resource to empower FNMI parents to take a greater role in their children's education.

This recommendation will also be addressed through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta signed in 2010 by the Government of Alberta, the Government of Canada and the Grand Chiefs of Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7, and Treaty No. 8 representing the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta. A key commitment of the MOU relates to the development of strategies to encourage and support the engagement of First Nation parents, Elders and communities to improve the educational outcomes of First Nation students.

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) currently offers some resources for Aboriginal people, counsellors, educators and others with an interest in education of Aboriginal persons. The material in ALIS focuses on career planning, skills training and upgrading, apprenticeship and other post-secondary pursuits.

Learning Clicks specifically supports the pathways of Aboriginal peoples into post-secondary education by offering free presentations on post-secondary options delivered by Aboriginal Ambassadors. *Learning Clicks* continues to expand on its outreach efforts to assist Aboriginal learners in accessing available education programs and services.

Alignment of a FNMI resource toolkit with existing material on ALIS will help reduce the duplication of efforts.

Collaboration amongst Government Ministries: While the Government of Alberta has made progress towards breaking down silos through cross-ministry committees and an enterprise focus on "one government", the cultural shift has yet to permeate throughout the public service. When questioning education gaps, the Council often heard, "that's not our department."

Council members discussed the need for a life-cycle approach to educating First Nations children. To improve educational outcomes, the Council recommends greater collaboration between Ministries responsible for early childhood development that contributes to resiliency and a strong sense of self and well-being, which carries over to K-12 education and post-secondary education.

Recommendation Three: Establish a working group of decision makers from the ministries of Education, Advanced Education and Human Services to collaborate on seamless strategies to improve educational outcomes for First Nations girls and women.

Rationale: Cross-ministry collaboration will help identify gaps and come up with innovative solutions to improve educational outcomes for First Nations girls and women.

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT

A working group comprised of officials from Education, Human Services and Innovation and Advanced Education (IAE) will be established to collaborate on strategies and improve integration.

Through the working group, IAE will develop innovative strategies and suggest ways to improve integration across Government and with our external partners. IAE also works cross-ministry and with partner organizations to improve apprenticeship opportunities for women. For example, the Women Building Futures program has specific supports for Aboriginal women. Consideration is being given to continue investment with this organization beyond 2015.

Human Services will support and participate on the proposed working group. In addition, Education will continue its work with cross-ministry partners to close the gap in FNMI education outcomes.

Missing and Murdered Women Findings

In August 2014, Alberta supported the renewed call from the leaders of the national Aboriginal organizations and endorsed by the other Premiers for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women. An RCMP report released in May 2014 shows between 1980 and 2012 there were 206 homicides involving Aboriginal women in Alberta compared to 533 non-Aboriginal women. This is 28% of the homicides and Aboriginal women represent 2.7% of the Alberta population. Statistics on missing women is more difficult to track as many are not reported or return home soon after they are reported missing.

In June, 2014, the Council was alarmed by the presentation from RCMP that human trafficking of Aboriginal girls and women is a serious issue and asked for more information at the September meeting. RCMP returned along with ACT and Marie Delorme. The Council heard that many of the women and girls trafficked in western Canada are First Nations. The average trafficker can make between \$250,000 and \$350,000 per year from one girl. Many of these girls are lured and groomed as early as age 12 and there are reports of girls as young as 8 and 10 being trafficked, who will service up to 15 men a day. The purchasers of sex are primarily white middle-class males.

Half the girls do not survive. They are either killed or turned out on the street as young as 18 where they are so damaged mentally and physically, many prostitute themselves to support their addictions and any children they may still be caring for.

In Alberta, RCMP are looking at every missing persons file with a new lens to determine if there are linkages to trafficking.

Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada: The Canadian Women's Foundation formed a task force that spent two years conducting in-depth consultations in eight cities with over 260 organizations, close to 200 young women/survivors of sex trafficking, and all levels of government. A report on the task force's findings and recommendations is forthcoming; however, task force member Marie Delorme was able to share some of the findings and recommendations including:

- Educational awareness campaigns targeted at the hotel industry, the transportation industry and general public to recognize the signs of trafficking.

- Safety campaigns for girls and boys as young as 10 to protect them from luring, particularly campaigns geared toward First Nations youth and communities.
- Decriminalizing girls who are caught in trafficking and ensuring harsher penalties for traffickers and exploiters. There is precedence in the United States where criminal records of girls arrested in trafficking stings have their records expunged to create more opportunity for them to access supports and achieve employment.
- Enhanced support for girls and boys who are rescued or disclose that they have been trafficked.
- Anti-violence programs for men and boys.

Recommendation Four: That the Government of Alberta supports and endorses recommendations put forward by the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls and implements solutions within Alberta’s context. For example, create greater awareness of the *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act* (PSECA). It is the only act of its kind in Canada, yet there is limited awareness of its powers and that there are four dedicated workers in the province who can assist with information and support. Greater awareness will increase the number of children coming forward or being rescued and supports must be in place for survivors. Currently Grimmon House in Calgary is one of the only safe houses for trafficked children and few spaces are available. Government must consider funding more spaces to assist survivors throughout the province. Incorporate information for parents on building resiliency in children and instilling pride in their ancestry in safety campaigns.

Rationale: The Council supports the extensive work of the Foundation. The Foundation’s recommendations are based on what they heard directly from survivors that could prevent girls and boys from being trafficked.

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT BUT MODIFY WITHIN ALBERTA’S CONTEXT

The Government of Alberta endorses supporting a number of the recommendations identified in the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls Report that align with work currently underway.

Making progress on this issue involves collaboration and cooperation of many Government and non-Government organizations to improve access to health care, mental health services, drug and alcohol addictions treatment, social services, employment, housing and other services. Human Services is specifically working on increased action and coordination of community-based services and parenting supports targeted to vulnerable, pregnant and parenting women who are at a high risk of sexual exploitation.

All intervention workers in Alberta are delegated under the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act. Grimmon House is the only voluntary residential treatment program, but there are a number of dedicated group care facilities and placements, particularly in the larger urban centres. Additional public awareness regarding vulnerabilities and recognizing the vulnerabilities related to child sexual exploitation will be considered.

JSG is working with the federal Government on the Victims Services Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women Initiative.

JSG is also working with our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts on a Justice Framework to Address Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls.

Aboriginal Relations will continue to work with other provincial Governments and with national Aboriginal organizations to develop options for ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The ministry will also continue working with the IAAW and other partners to create awareness around MMAW, providing better support for families, and to build collaborative activities in Alberta communities.

Anti-violence Programs for Men and Boys

The Council endorsed launching the Moose Hide Campaign, a grass-roots movement started by the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men to take a stand against violence towards Aboriginal women and children and to honour women and children.

Aboriginal Relations is partnering with the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association (ANFCA), Human Resources and JSG in launching the Moose Hide Campaign here in Alberta. The launch is planned for November 25, 2014, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in which male leaders in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal politics, sports and law enforcement will be invited to participate.

Recommendation Five: Endorse the Moose Hide Campaign. Encourage your Cabinet colleagues to participate in the campaign and for their ministries to support the launch through programs and initiatives aimed at reducing violence against women that involve men and boys.

Rationale: As most perpetrators of violence against women are men and boys, men and boys must be part of the solution. Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to experience violence by a spouse, acquaintance or stranger.

Dr. Jackson Katz, a leading educator and author on gender violence prevention education was brought in earlier this year by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to discuss the issue of violence against women being a men's issue.

In a Huffington Post article Katz states "When it comes to male culture, Katz stresses that the goal is to get men who are not abusive to challenge men who are. He states, "We need more men who have the courage and the strength to start standing up and saying some of this stuff. And standing with women, not against them and pretending that this is somehow a battle between the sexes and other kinds of nonsense. We live in the world together." (Huffington Post, August 29, 2013)

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters launched *Leading Change: the Alberta CFL Project* in September 2014 to engage young men through sports and mentorship from CFL players to recognize and put an end to behaviours that feed a culture of violence towards women.

Government of Alberta Response:

ACCEPT

In partnership with the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, the Government of Alberta launched the Moose Hide Campaign on November 25, 2014. A grant of \$75,000 was provided to the Friendship Centres to expand the I Am A Kind Man program which promotes honour and traditional values among men and boys.

Government of Alberta – Next Steps:

The Aboriginal Women’s Economic Security Cross Ministry Committee will report semi-annually to the Councils and government on the progress made in the implementation of the accepted recommendations.

Indigenous Peoples as Partners

The Council stated that a fundamental change in the relationship between the Alberta government and First Nations is required in order to improve the economic security of First Nations women and families. Reconciliation is needed to bring balance to the relationship. First Nations are not stakeholders. First Nations governments must be recognized and respected as equal participants at the decision making table. They noted that understanding and respecting Treaties and the treaty relationship is a first step in the right direction.

The Council noted that better communication is required from all parties. Organizations that provide programs and services to First Nations women require greater understanding and compassion about the impacts of colonization, residential schools and inter-generational trauma and how this lack of trust prevents women from seeking out and accepting support. This education may help organizations re-examine how they can provide support more effectively.

The Council encourages government and First Nations leaders to engage in meaningful and constructive discussions on moving forward in a good way as honourable people.