

ADMINISTRATION
Reinforcing Sweetgrass Road

"REINFORCING THE SWEETGRASS ROAD"

A Discussion Paper Prepared for:
Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Native people moved to urban areas from isolated communities and reserves in search of employment, education, housing and health care. As their numbers grew, so did their understanding that the improved quality of life they were seeking was not immediately available to them in the towns and cities to which they journeyed. Their support systems, friends, language and culture did not journey with them. They were alone, isolated, unequipped to compete in this new environment. Many directed their energy towards creating a "nishnawbe gamik" - an Indian place where they could be among friends, and where those who had gone before could help the new arrivals.

These Indian places became known as Native Friendship Centres and are now, as then, community based organizations governed and staffed, for the most part by Native people. They continue to provide services and support so that Native people can bridge the gap, when they arrive in urban settings.

As time passed urban Native people wanted to do more than bridge the gap that existed between Native and non-Native people in urban areas. Native Friendship Centres were then "to improve the quality of life for Native people in an urban environment by supporting self determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society and which respects Native cultural distinctiveness".

We have the difficult job of following the sweetgrass road, an euphemism for Native ways while preparing our constituents to live and function in a modern urban world.

This is a decidedly difficult function without supportive and intergrated initiatives from the Provincial Government. The time has come for us to establish a new relationship and to "put our minds together to see what life we can make for our children".

Eight years ago, in May of 1978, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) presented a discussion paper, "Strangers in Our Own Land", to the provincial government through the then Minister of Culture and Recreation, the Honourable Robert Welch. The general theme of the paper dealt with "support from the Province, in the past, has been appreciated and well utilized, however it has been stop gap, short term and poorly co-ordinated".

The paper advanced problems affecting "urban and migrating Native people" and suggested that in order for increased, co-ordinated and reliable policies and resources to be brought to bear some meaningful and long range development had to occur. The vehicle for this was to be a joint task force eventually called the Ontario Task Force on Native People in an Urban Setting. Generally stated the Task Force was established for the purposes of:

1. Defining the issues.
2. Gathering relevant information.
3. Mobilizing existing resources.
4. Developing resources where none presently exist.
5. Changing policy and legislation in order to provide ongoing and permanent resources.

Dutifully the idea of this approach received Cabinet sanction and the "members" began a process of joint response to urban Native social conditions. Unfortunately time, energy and resources gave out after the parties addressed issue definition and information gathering. Aspirations of "more co-ordinated and co-operative efforts" to respond positively to the needs of urban Native people

were not to be realized through this process.

Much time has passed; governments have changed, aboriginal organizations' mandates have been refocused and urban and migrating Native people continue to live in the worst social conditions of any group of citizens in this province. There is much more good will perceived, many more good intentions, since this time, but these alone will not improve social conditions, eradicate racism, create employment or develop effective responses to Native peoples' needs and aspirations.

Change has not resulted from the process of aboriginal organizations tabling the negative situation we find our communities and constituents in and outlining how poorly the government responds. In order for us to address an alternative approach, we would like to take an opportunity to describe the role of the Native Friendship Centre(s), some of our long range strategic plans and priorities and their potential interface with the Province's policy framework on Native Affairs.

ROLE OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Friendship Centres were created by Native people, who had personally experienced the struggle innate in moving to urban environments. There are numerous socio-economic reasons which contributed to the development of an urban and migrating Native populations, the most significant of these is the desire for a better quality of life.

In the early development of Friendship Centres (1950-1960) their purpose was simple: basic survival for Native people in their communities. This meant providing or attempting to identify resources in response to needs for food, shelter, clothing and always on a crisis intervention basis. There was neither the time nor resources to indulge in planning, assessing or policy development in this regard. The Friendship Centre was the gathering place for many Native people.

As Native Friendship Centres continued to evolve, the broader issues related to urban problems began to manifest themselves. The phenomenon of regular and predictable migration from reserves and isolated or rural communities into towns and cities was recognized by other non-governmental organizations and in 1970, the Canadian Council on Social Development published a paper entitled, "People on the Move" on the matter.

Native people, with personal experiences and growing support from voluntary organizations and churches approached the federal government for some support. At this time in Friendship Centre history the general public believed Native people referred only to those living on reserve and as such were the responsibility of the Department of Indian Affairs. The Department, with an aggressive policy of assimilation, removed those resources traditionally available to us once we left the reserve. Agencies in towns and cities were either completely insensitive to our needs or were reluctant to provide services since out of ignorance they felt we were the responsibility of the Department of Indian Affairs.

In 1972, the Federal Government began discussion and negotiations which eventually lead to the establishment of the Migrating Native Peoples Programme.

The programme recognized the existence and problems of migration and that Friendship Centres played a major part in addressing these problems, by providing basic funds for the core operations of the Centres. Of special significance was the fact that these funds recognized that Native people were citizens of Canada and were provided for the purpose of citizenship development. They were in no way intended to represent an extension of the Federal Government's responsibility to Native people under the British North America Act.

Although the Friendship Centres initially received the announcement of this programme with relief, we were saddled with the full responsibility of resolving the complex issues and problems of migrating Native people and incorporating this group into the social and cultural fabric of communities to which we were migrating. We were expected to perform this function on minimal operations funds and in some cases with non-existent resources from the provinces and municipalities.

Nevertheless, the work of Friendship Centres began in earnest. With inexperienced and often poorly trained Native staff, we began to identify and respond to the needs of migrating Native people in the general areas of:

1. Counselling and referral.
2. Social and recreational programmes.
3. Cultural awareness programmes.
4. Community development and community awareness.

Given the obviously limited resources at their disposal, the Centres were surprisingly effective in coping with and even in some cases constructively alleviating the problems.

The success of the movement hinged on the fact that even though the focal point changed from a private home to a social agency, this agency was still operated on an informal basis providing a home-like atmosphere.

As a result of the effectiveness of the Centres in reaching so many people and coping with so many problems, pressures to increase their services came from a multitude of sources. Some of these were the private agencies who could not themselves reach the people or cope with their problems and worked closely with the Centres. Others were the government departments who were attempting to devise ways and means of coping with an increased migration to urban centres but were themselves too bureaucratized to offer a relevant service, and finally the people themselves who came to the cities and faced a multitude of problems in so doing.

Throughout the 1970s the Centres, while faced with pressures of coping with the expectancies of the society and government and continuing to provide a meaningful service to its clients, were also pressured to restructure their Boards to include more Natives and to place the decision-making process in the hands of the Natives. As these developments occurred the Friendship Centres continued to expand their role and mandate. They were now a place where one could go for basic survival support, counselling, cultural reinforcement, training, and to a place that seemed like home in this "foreign land".

No one could have predicted the ever-increasing numbers of Native people who would come to an urban environment. Approximately forty percent (40%) of all status Indians in Ontario live off reserve and of course, the Metis and non-status Indians, most of whom live off reserves. But with escalating migration and

generations of Native people now being born in urban environments the role of the Friendship Centre was to be reprioritized and re-focused once again. Training, employment development and cultural reinforcement programmes have become higher priorities. Friendship Centres continue to extend the helping hand to those who come seeking the good life unequipped to compete and unable to communicate but now have a much greater role to play as community animators and cultural preservers.

As Friendship Centres continue on the next part of our journey, we have established some "long range strategic plans". These include:

- ° Development of Diversified Funding Base (through the expansion of existing services and programmes; private sector support; increased and expanded federal/provincial support; capital acquisition; Task Force response and development of a federal/provincial - Friendship Centre co-ordinating mechanism).
- ° Forecasting and Controlled Growth of Friendship Centres (through the identification of short and long term community need; support for the development of specific urban Native services and programmes other than Friendship Centres and development of district or regional services).
- ° Technical Development (through increased training, telecommunications; computers; employment development).

In order to address these priorities the Friendship Centres have adopted the following principles:

- ° that there be provincial recognition of "Native Friendship Centres as legitimate Urban Native institutions responding to the needs of Native people";
- ° that included in this recognition should be provincial recognition of "the cultural environment of Friendship Centres";
- ° that local control and direction of Friendship Centres must be respected and manifested by funding mechanism;
- ° that support to Friendship Centres from community and funding agencies should be adequate to ensure an acceptable quality of service to each community;
- ° that the nature and level of existing federal and provincial funding should not decrease;
- ° that there be more of a recognition and focus on development of human resources within the communities served by Friendship Centres;
- ° that the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres should be provided with greater core support without diminishing monies available to the Friendship Centres;
- ° that Friendship Centres be involved in urban/off reserve self-government discussions including negotiation of service agreements and resource priorities;
- ° that Friendship Centres be involved in the design, implementation, delivery and review of human services to ensure cultural appropriateness;
- ° that a federal/provincial conference on urban Native people occur.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In reviewing the five point Native Affairs policy framework there is no doubt that there is clearly the ability for Native Friendship Centres to achieve their goals within this framework. However, for the Friendship Centres and the Provincial Government to jointly achieve what we have respectively set out for ourselves requires planning, co-ordination and of course, resources.

It is for these reasons that we have prepared this discussion paper and have outlined the need for us to meet. In identifying our plans and understanding the framework, in which we can expect you to react, we have established a foundation from which planning can occur.

There is much to be done, many areas require attention, however it is those areas where few or no resources exist, that we would urge you to address first. We must realize that while the politics of organizational mandates, self-government, etc., are important, every day needs around education, health and employment must be simultaneously addressed.

We have been encouraged, in the past, to contact individual ministries with specific requests and concerns that fall within their purview. We are making a concerted effort to do so, however, often find that they are unable to meet our needs. Individual ministries still tend to view Native issues in the context of their policies for all people. This incongruity with the Native affairs policy framework makes the process most frustrating; particularly when coupled with a matter that has impact in more than one area of the Ministry. Priority initiatives for Native women, Native youth, Native alcohol, drug and solvent issues don't lend themselves to approaching one Ministry or even one division within a single ministry. Rather than belabour the issue, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres will propose a recommendation, in response to this concern, later in this paper.

Another major concern, in regards to the existing situation, is that of co-ordination. In the past year or so, no improvements in intergovernmental co-ordination have been perceived by Native Friendship Centres. We have not been "consulted" in regards to rôles, responsibilities, priorities of any such co-ordination bodies like the Office of Native Affairs Policy. As Friendship Centres we experienced little success when we turned to this body and the Minister Responsible for Native Affairs to aid the transfer of the Native Community Development Worker Programme and the problems in regards to the Child and Family Services Act and its lack of recognition of an urban Native population. We will propose a recommendation(s) in regards to the lack of an effective co-ordination body later in the paper.

As we outlined earlier, good intention alone, will not result in necessary policies, programmes and resources so vital for urban and migrating Native people. While there are numerous specific concerns, the needs of urban Native people are well documented in the final Task Force on Native People in an Urban Setting report, "Native People in Urban Settings" and we will recommend that this be initially used to plan and prioritize our response to these unmet needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have identified several areas thus far, where recommendations from our perspective, are necessary. There are additional areas which will also be raised in this section as well. Many specific concerns have already been raised with individual ministries, or will be at some future point.

1. That the Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs (CCNA), through Cabinet, adopt a policy which requires each Ministry of the Provincial Government, and Management Board, to prepare a plan of action outlining their internal priorities and processes for resolution of Native issues. Specifically, the plan of action should be developed in concert with Native organizations and should include short and long range priorities and a clearly defined process for communication and issue resolution.

Further, these plans of action should be public and progress should be monitored by CCNA through a regular reporting process.

2. That, in concert with the above, the Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs direct the Office of Native Affairs Policy to develop a conflict resolution process so that issues which require inter-ministerial co-operation can be successfully facilitated and further that this process be supported by individual ministries.

3. That Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs meet at least once every twelve months with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) to address substantive issues of concern to urban and migrating Native people and that a more frequent involvement with the Minister Responsible for Native Affairs and relevant policy bodies occur.
4. That the final report of the Ontario Task Force on Native People in an Urban Setting, "Native People in Urban Settings", be used to begin to develop positive responses to ameliorate urban Native social conditions.
5. That Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs institute a requirement for individual ministries to present annual financial estimates in regards to specific Native initiatives so that requests for enrichment, expansion or new programmes can be supported collectively.
6. That an aboriginal people's employment programme be implemented including throughout the public service.
7. That Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs support the core funding programme for provincial Native organizations being developed jointly by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and those core funded organizations and more particularly the provision of new monies for these groups.

8. That Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs direct that resources be provided to the OFIFC and individual Native Friendship Centres to implement alcohol, drug and substance abuse programming for urban and migrating Native people.

9. That Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs undertake a federal-provincial conference on urban Native people to clarify the jurisdictional roles and responsibilities for Native people in the urban and non-reserve settings and to examine the fiscal arrangements involving the Established Programmes Financing Act, Canada Assistance Plan and such social programmes as are relevant to determine whether specific portions can be provided directly to the individual Native Friendship Centres for their services.

10. That the Cabinet Committee on Native Affairs encourage the Ontario Government to support institutional self-government arrangements for Native Friendship Centres and further that this negotiation process involve all relevant parties.