

Progress Report

The *Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform* was introduced to the people of Saskatchewan by Justice Minister Chris Axworthy on November 15, 2001. The announcement was made at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, with First Nations and Métis leaders, Elders, law enforcement personnel, and others interested in the justice system in attendance.

"Dialogues must be safe, people need to know who they will meet with, how their information will be recorded and transcribed."

- Participant in Stakeholders meeting

A key gathering was held in Saskatoon on March 12 and 13, 2002 when the Justice Reform Commission met with a group of individuals at the invitation of the Commissioners. The purpose of the meetings was to seek guidance from people who have significant experience with the justice system and a sincere desire to see improvements to the system. The Commissioners came away from these meetings with a clearer understanding of their mandate and how to implement the process of dialogue with the people of Saskatchewan. (A comprehensive report on the Stakeholders meetings is contained elsewhere in this report.)

"There must be a culture of change. The Commission is an agent of change, but there needs to be agents of change within the components of the criminal justice system for there to be any effect."

- Participant in Stakeholders meeting



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"Yeah, like I was raised traditionally from a very young age, like I smoked the pipe all the time with my grandfather, he taught me and my brothers about the pipe, rainedances, everything. Like, I was raised really traditionally, but once I hit my teenage years and I was able to get out on my own, I started hanging with my friends and smoking pot and stuff."

- Youth at Street Culture Kidz Project

The Commissioners were invited to meet with youth participants in Street Culture Kidz Project, a Regina-based, non-profit organization that operates in the inner city. With a volunteer board of governors and a team of 11 full-time staff and 30 youth who work for Street Culture Kidz Project on a variety of endeavours, this organization has made an important difference in the lives of the young people it serves.

"Never knew ... none of us really knew our parents or our dads or anything like that. You know, like a long line of family violence, family alcoholism or whatever, you know? It's just like all that stuff comes into play in everybody's life and people ... and that's the thing, cops don't understand that, you know?"

- Youth at Street Culture Kidz Project

A meeting with five young men who have had some personal experience with the justice system was arranged by the Justice Reform Commission and Kim Sutherland of Street Culture Kidz Project. The dialogue took place on the evening of Monday, April 15 in the relaxed setting provided by the organization at its centre on Scarth Street. The participants, all young men, spoke freely and openly about their experiences and offered their advice for implementing change to the justice system.

"The charge limit is 12, they're starting to go under that, so those little young kids could do whatever and not even get charged for it. You guys got to like, get to them before the gang does."

- Youth at Street Culture Kidz Project

"I wish you a good journey, your path is leading you in a way that you're going to learn a lot of things from a lot of people and I know that when you have an open heart and you see good things and you hear good things, you will find the solutions."

- Speaker at Regina Friendship Centre Dialogue

The Justice Reform Commission was invited to attend a community dialogue hosted by the Regina Friendship Centre. This community dialogue was held in the gymnasium at St. Andrew's United Church on Tuesday, April 16 and was moderated by Commissioner Glenda Cooney and Conrad Lavalley, Executive Director of the Regina Friendship Centre.

This dialogue was the Commission's first public dialogue. It was attended by more than 150 people and received extensive provincial and national media coverage.

"I think we all have a lot of work to do here. I think the Commission, at this point, is going to go a little further than the one that was conducted in Manitoba a few years back. You know, I think there's a lot of work and I think they're on the right track."

- Elder at Regina Friendship Centre Dialogue

The dialogue was conducted in a circle and opened and closed with prayer from an Elder.

Everyone was encouraged to speak and share their experiences and wisdom. A diverse range of views was shared with the Commission, which heard of some successes, some areas that need further work and some areas where reform is necessary.

"We are of the belief that prevention is better than incarceration. Our institutions, federally, provincially and our youth institutions are full of Aboriginal people. Programs like the Child Youth and Family at Risk program at the Friendship Centre are needed. At the community level we are in dire need of programs that reach the young people, meet them and prevent them from going any further ... teach, through their spirituality and their culture, how to make positive changes."

- Speaker at Regina Friendship Centre Dialogue

Progress Report (continued)

"We still have all these problems. We are still abusing alcohol. We are still abusing drugs. We're abusing each other, you know, spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. We're still doing all these things. It just keeps happening and we don't need a residential school to do that because we're doing it to ourselves. And our governments, right from the band level, right through FSIN, they don't realize how important social development is to our people."

- Youth at Saskatchewan Native Theatre Dialogue

On Thursday, April 18, the *Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform* attended a performance of *The Alley*, a play written by Métis Elder Maria Campbell and a young writer, Robert Naytowhow of Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company. Performed by cast members of the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company, the play was a vivid portrayal of social issues affecting young Aboriginal people in this province.

Following the performance, the Commissioners met with members of the theatre company and other community members for a series of circle discussions on issues affecting the justice system.

"The only two solutions are restorative justice and cultural restoration, giving back to Indian people their identity."

- Youth at Saskatchewan Native Theatre Dialogue

"We will be a solution-driven commission, one that will seek answers to the problems facing the system as it operates now."

- Commissioner Joe Quwezance at Northern Justice Symposium

Mr. Joe Quewezance, one of the Commissioners on the *Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform* was the guest speaker at the opening of the Northern Justice Symposium on Wednesday, April 24 in Prince Albert. Sponsored by New North - SANC Services Inc., the theme for the conference was: Restoring Balance in Our Community - Crime Prevention Initiatives.

"We want to hear the voices of youth, of Elders and of people like yourselves who are determined to bring about a better way of life for your children and grandchildren."

- Commissioner Joe Quewezance at Northern Justice Symposium

Mr. Merv Aubichon, Executive Director for the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform and Mr. Winston McLean, Director of Operations, have finalized plans for a series of Dialogues in the northern regions of the province. These dialogues will take place at the invitation of people in these communities. A schedule is contained in this report.

