

This report is made possible through the Department of Public Safety Canada, in co-operation with various First Nations including Ojibwe, Mi'kmaq, Dene, Salish, Blackfoot, along with Aboriginal organisations in Toronto

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants and are not necessarily those of Public Safety Canada

COMMUNITY MOBILISATION  
DIALOGUE WITH ABORIGINAL  
COMMUNITIES  
APC 30 CA (2009)

Aboriginal Peoples Collection

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### Glossary

Aboriginal people(s)	“Aboriginal people” is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution (the <i>Constitution Act</i> , 1982) recognised three groups of Aboriginal Peoples –Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. <sup>1</sup>
Community Mobilisation -	Community Mobilisation is a deliberate, inclusive and participatory process. It involves local organisations, leaders (i.e. Elders, elected and hereditary Chiefs and Council, traditional persons, community leaders), community groups and individual members of the community to organise for united action towards a common purpose. Community Mobilisation in the Aboriginal community is characterised by local customs, tradition and culture and is specific to the needs of a particular Aboriginal community.
First Nation(s)	Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term “First Nations peoples” refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and Non-Status. Some Indian peoples have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace the word

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/pubs/wf/wf-eng.pdf>

“band” in the name of their community.<sup>2</sup>

First Nation

“First Nation” has been adopted by some Indian communities to replace the term “Indian Band.” A band is defined as a body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act.<sup>3</sup>

Frontline Worker -

is the description of an individual whose job is to work directly with community members, i.e. social worker, drug and alcohol counsellor, youth co-ordinator.

Semaganisak -

Semaganis is a Cree word that literally translated to ‘spear carrier’ and is thought of in a modern context as “policeman”. The concept of Semaganis speaks to leadership, and the value of collective leadership, that was traditionally common among Cree people. Traditionally, Semaganisak were responsible for ensuring that everything ran smoothly during buffalo hunts or when the community had to move. While Semaganisak belong to Cree tradition, one could turn to any other Aboriginal nation and find that they had processes to ensure collective decision-making and movement; although the way in which the collective approach was achieved was different. It speaks to the danger of accepting the advice and “wisdom” of someone who does not understand the people or culture. It also speaks to the value of moving collectively in a common direction, with shared responsibility, and a clear idea of the right way to do things

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

## **Executive Summary**

The objective of the gatherings was to dialogue with a cross section of First Nations (Ojibwe, Mi'kmaq, Dene, Blackfoot and Kwakwaka'wakw) and urban Aboriginal groups about community mobilisation - how it is approached within their regions, the cultural context, and the impact that traditional and cultural approaches have on community mobilisation. A number of common themes were identified.

Community Mobilisation is a cultural value for Aboriginal people (First Nation, Métis and Inuit). It creates balance, equality and holistic approaches to support the community in its efforts. Participants acknowledged that the gatherings with the Department of Public Safety's Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit helped motivate communities to continue the dialogue to strengthen their work in this area.

Participants spoke about the critical need to support traditional, cultural and language efforts within their communities to fully develop successful models of community mobilisation. Participants also agreed that key players in community mobilisation are the Elders and front-line service workers within communities.

The participants spoke about different models of community mobilisation that are currently being utilised to support mobilisation efforts. Some of these include strengthening and supporting ceremonies and rebuilding traditional societies and clans. Others include a blending of traditional and modern approaches.

Chapter One of this report describes the common themes that emerged from the Semaganis Gatherings held in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, the North West Territories, Alberta and British Columbia. The chapters that follow provide details of the Semaganis Gatherings held within each community.

The Aboriginal communities that participated in the Semaganis Gatherings indicated that in order for community mobilisation to be effective, it must be a process that operates

under the principles of ownership, control, access and possession. That is, it must be an initiative that is driven locally and it must involve local expertise and local community members. To do this, it is important that community mobilisation consist of a pre-implementation stage that works towards building local capacity. The capacity needs will be defined by each community. Culture and language capacity building are critical to the success of this kind of an effort. The greater the capacity of any given community, the greater the opportunity to undertake community mobilisation efforts.



## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The Aboriginal Correction Policy Unit of Public Safety Canada (formerly known as the Department of the Solicitor General) organised and hosted “Semaganisak” Gatherings with five different tribal Nations and one urban Aboriginal community. These sessions occurred between 2002 through to 2004. The participants were individuals working within First Nation communities or the surrounding areas. A range of stakeholders attended the gatherings, including Elders, front line workers, tribal council, RCMP officers and members of the corporate community. One session was held in Toronto, Ontario and participants from different Aboriginal organisations within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) attended. The participants at all gatherings represented a broad sector of professions including health, corrections, counselling, administration and youth work. Participants were invited to share their knowledge, insight and ideas on what works in their area to support community mobilisation. They were asked to identify the traditional approaches currently in use and the specific characteristics of their local community mobilisation efforts that fed the success of their efforts.

### **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of the convergence report on the Semaganisak Gatherings is to provide a summary of the common themes and unique approaches to community mobilisation from an Aboriginal perspective. It also provides the reader with a comprehensive accounting of the five individual gatherings. The intention is to also continue the conversation and to allow those who were unable to participate the opportunity to benefit from the information that was gathered.

### **Background - Setting the Stage**

Among the Cree people, it is not uncommon for people to begin with a story that puts peoples’ minds in focus before there is a discussion about an issue.

One such story is about Wisakecahk, a mythical being that inhabited the Earth from almost the beginning of time. He could change his form and speak to all of creation. This is a story about Wisakecahk and his advice to the geese.

*One day Wisakecahk was walking along a path when he looked up and saw a flock of geese flying in a V formation. "Those silly geese" thought Wisakecahk. "Don't they know it would be better for them to select one goose to be their leader and have everyone else follow behind him? I had better call a meeting." Wisakecahk called the geese together and asked the assembled geese, "Who is your leader"?*

*The geese looked at each other for some time and finally one goose stepped forward and said, "We do not have one leader. Each of us is a leader, each in our own way".*

*"You silly geese" said Wisakecahk. "Don't you know it would be better to select one goose to be your leader and have the others follow behind him in a straight line? Then you would certainly get to where you have to go". The geese listened to Wisakecahk and then spoke among themselves for some time. Finally, they agreed to think about what Wisakecahk had told them.*

*The next day, Wisakecahk was walking down that same path when he looked up and saw that the geese had taken his advice. They had chosen one goose to be their leader and the rest were following behind him in single file. Wisakecahk smiled and continued his journey.*

*Wisakecahk wasn't the only person to see the geese. Flying high above the geese was an eagle. As he looked down on the geese, he thought "Those silly geese. My family will eat well tonight". The eagle soared down from high above the geese and snatched the goose that was last in line. The other geese in front did not see that the eagle had taken their brother and continued to fly in a straight line. The eagle returned, and once again took the goose that was last in line. Again, the geese did not notice that the eagle had taken their brother. The eagle kept returning until there was only*

*one goose left, the one who had been selected as leader. The eagle finally came back for him, and the geese had no more problems with leadership.*<sup>4</sup>

Whether acting as a benign observer or a calculating trickster, Wisakecakh succeeded in destroying the geese by altering their traditional way of living together and coercing them to accept a foreign way of life.

This story has meaning on several fronts. It speaks to leadership, and the value of collective leadership, that was historically common among the Cree people. It speaks to the danger of accepting the advice and wisdom of someone who does not understand the people or their culture. And, it speaks to the value of moving collectively in a common direction, with shared responsibility, and a clear idea of the right way to do things.

Traditionally, Cree and other Aboriginal people understood their place in the community as a series of interrelated relationships. Because communities did not have “extra” people, everyone’s place had value. They were raised to recognise their responsibility as a contributing member of a family, community and nation.

Two other examples of fundamental Cree laws are shared: first, no family was allowed to move away from the band without permission. The loss of that family would deprive the collective from necessary human resources. Secondly, no one individual was permitted to begin a buffalo chase until all the hunters were ready. Failure to wait could result in the starvation of the community.

The Chief of a community had many responsibilities including the responsibility to ensure that the whole community worked collaboratively on matters of community concern and restoring balance amongst quarrelling parties. However, some responsibilities were delegated to ‘young men’s societies’. Such a responsibility would include the buffalo hunt. The members of the young men’s societies were referred to as “Semaganisak” or “spear carriers”.

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<sup>4</sup> From the National Film Board’s “To Walk with Dignity” by Duke Redbird.

While Semaganisak belong to Cree tradition, one could turn to any other Aboriginal society and find similar processes to ensure collective decision-making. The gatherings were designed to discover the different ways in which Aboriginal people across Canada implemented collective decision making and to what extent the processes or thoughts behind them could be utilised in community mobilisation today.

### **A Period of Change**

Since shortly after first contact with European settlers and traders, traditional Aboriginal societies and structures were placed under stress. With Confederation and the signing of treaties the traditional manner in which Aboriginal societies expressed leadership, membership, spirituality and relationship were fundamentally altered. Successive federal legislation has continued to limit the capacity of Aboriginal people to control the manner in which their future is determined and defined. Federal, provincial and territorial structures are based on western models and have “broken the communities into pieces”<sup>5</sup>. This history, and the impact on First Nation, Métis and Inuit people has been well documented in the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (1996) as well as numerous other reports and commissions.

According to many Aboriginal people, what is missing from the Royal Commission’s report, and governments’ approach to Aboriginal people, is an understanding of the deep and traumatic psychological impact of the loss of tradition, culture and spirituality. To understand these effects, one has only to look at the nature of Canadian citizenry. For more than 500 years, people from various nations have immigrated to Canada and have raised generations of families in this country. These immigrants, and their descendants, have the benefit of a homeland somewhere else on this planet – a place where their culture and language are strong. For Aboriginal people, that is not the case. For Aboriginal people, this is our homeland – *we have no other place to go*. There is no other land where Aboriginal culture is held for future generations. If one element of culture or spirituality is lost, it will be lost forever with no manner in which to retrieve or revitalise

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<sup>5</sup> “A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Hollow Water’s Community Holistic Circle Healing Process” APC 20 CA (2001). Published by the Solicitor General Canada and available on the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada web site at [www.psepc.gc.ca](http://www.psepc.gc.ca).

it.

Aboriginal people came very close to losing their culture and languages due to colonisation and assimilation policies. It is because of this, and because of the hundreds of years of broken promises and broken treaties, that Aboriginal people are fearful of consultation and negotiation processes with non-Aboriginal entities. There is a very strong fear that agreements reached today, may result in the unforeseen loss of Aboriginal title, culture, language, tradition, spirituality and land in the future.

### **The Beginning of a Renaissance and Lessons Learned**

An ever increasing, number of First Nation and urban Aboriginal communities have recognised that the underlying cause of many individual, family and community problems are the result of the colonialist and paternalistic practices and policies sought to destroy the Aboriginal way of life. Unsuccessful in these efforts, Aboriginal people are mobilising themselves and returning to traditional values.

These communities have looked at themselves and recognised that there were several people in their communities who were mandated to help the community improve itself. However, this was generally accomplished by way of government funding and as such, most were accountable, either directly or indirectly, to government departments that held the purse strings. They were also cognisant of the fact that differing levels of government and different government departments often maintained different priorities, which accomplished the goal of further fracturing Aboriginal communities and did little to meet local needs.

Communities are often faced with the question: “Do we accept needed funding for the community and implement programs that do not meet our priorities or do we accept the funds and do what needs to be done?” Both routes have inherent dangers for the future of the community.

One community has identified a third way of looking at things. Hollow Water First Nation in Manitoba developed the Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH). In the development of this program, the community established a resource team comprised of

more than twenty community service providers. They took direction from their community, the needs were identified, and they went ahead and implemented a response – the CHCH – without reliance on outside resources. A community healing process was commenced, and only when it could progress no further, outside support from the government was sought. The resource team exercised true community and collective leadership, and the value of this process was well documented.<sup>6</sup>

The outcomes of community mobilisation can be difficult to sustain. As documented in a case study<sup>7</sup> of Hollow Water it has been noted that their healing process is becoming isolated from other community services. They know that there is a need to maintain a connection with the community but feel they often lack the energy and human resources to carry themselves forward.

This phenomenon is not unique to Hollow Water and is identified as a natural phase of the community healing process.

### **A Strategy to Move Forward**

Any strategy to mobilise communities has to recognise that there are at least two different levels of community involvement in developing a safer community. First, there are those communities that have already undertaken some healing, policing, justice or corrections work, have an established basic infrastructure and are ready for mobilisation. Other communities with little or no infrastructures in place and are beginning to look in that direction, but are not yet ready to undertake a community mobilisation.

One strategy that could improve the connectedness of community services could be to place a community mobilisation worker(s), or Semaganis(ak) within an existing project

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<sup>6</sup> “The Four Circles of Hollow Water” APC 15 CA (1997) Published by the Solicitor General Canada and available on the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada web site at [www.psepc.gc.ca](http://www.psepc.gc.ca).

<sup>7</sup> “A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Hollow Water’s Community Holistic Circle Healing Process” APC 20 CA (2001). Published by the Solicitor General Canada and available on the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada web site at [www.psepc.gc.ca](http://www.psepc.gc.ca).

or program. That person would not be responsible for the direct delivery of a service but would work with the various resources and service providers of a community to support their movement towards a common goal. The purpose would be to develop a symbiotic relationship between a healing process and the community that could support the work of all programs and services. The result would be movement in a common direction but without one program being placed in a leadership position, such as the geese in the Wisakecakh story related earlier.

Among other duties, the community mobilisation worker would share information among programs, organise inter-agency meetings and community gatherings, develop joint strategies and look for further opportunities to expand the community's capacity to address key and emerging issues. Projects sponsored by the National Crime Prevention Strategy's former Community mobilisation Program (CMP) present concrete examples of such activities.

The Strategy was an initiative of the federal government designed to prevent crime through co-ordination of various partner stakeholders, facilitation of community-based solutions to crime, and increasing public awareness of effective social development approaches to the prevention of crime. The Strategy's aim was to reduce crime and victimisation by focusing on the underlying factors that put individuals at risk, such as family violence, school problems, and drug abuse.

Funding was focused on four designated priority areas: children, youth, Aboriginal persons and their communities, and the personal security of women and girls. A large number of regional and national stakeholder groups and individuals play a role in the Strategy.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of this approach, a Semaganis or community mobilisation worker would gather existing community resources together to form relationships, not a new program. That person would initially conduct an environmental scan, conduct community

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/abt/dpr/intaud/\\_fl/ncpc-phase2-2004-eng.pdf](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/abt/dpr/intaud/_fl/ncpc-phase2-2004-eng.pdf)

consultations and provide an analysis of the current situation in the community. The Semaganis worker could work with the community resources to develop a plan for more effective collaboration. This would be a dynamic process that is reflective of historic community practices whereby Aboriginal societies adapted behaviour and lifestyle for survival and overall community wellness.

As relationships develop, the community mobilisation worker could facilitate discussions about collective community goals that could be achieved with existing resources. This process would ensure that the Aboriginal community was deeply invested in the process and would maintain control over community mobilisation efforts. The importance of developing culturally appropriate and meaningful mobilisation efforts is succinctly detailed in the following explanation:

The First Nations Principles of OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) means that First Nations control data collection processes in their communities. First Nations own protect and control how their information is used. Access to First Nations data is important and First Nations determine, under appropriate mandates and protocols, how access to external researchers is facilitated and respected.

The right of First Nations communities to own, control, access, and possess information about their peoples is fundamentally tied to self-determination and to the preservation and development of their culture. OCAP allows a community to make decisions regarding why, how and by whom information is collected, used or shared.

These principles are vital to the success of this kind of initiative. It has to be a community driven process that is unique to each community, one can not expect the cookie cutter approach to work. In essence, community development would be approached from the inside out.<sup>9</sup>

Utilising the principles of OCAP, the community would be in a position to well-articulate the type of outside (government) support required. This support could be provided by way of increasing the amount of information a community has access to, training specific to a variety of issues, capacity building or program enhancements.

Collective community action, regardless of its roots (i.e. organisationally or community

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<sup>9</sup> First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Study website (<http://www.rhs-ers.ca/english/ocap.asp>)



based), on-reserve or off-reserve is challenging. Despite its origin or location, it is vital that the support of the leadership be present and effective.

The circumstances of urban Aboriginal communities pose a particular challenge. In most large urban areas, there are a myriad of programs and services delivered by Aboriginal organisations. For the most part, these organisations deliver government-funded specific services to a defined clientele group. Pressure to deliver new or enhanced services can result in conflict between agencies that compete for limited funding. This competition prevents those agencies from working collaboratively which ultimately undermines community mobilisation. Additionally, attempts to facilitate community mobilisation in some urban Aboriginal communities have been unsuccessful as a result of the loss of the leader that originally brought the agencies together.

Despite the challenges faced by urban Aboriginal communities in community mobilisation, there are specific justice related examples of community mobilisation that have been highly successful and speak directly to the content of this paper. The Community Council Program at Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto is a successful example of an individual and community healing, collaboration, and mobilisation. The program strengthened relationships of the stakeholders, respect and collaboration amongst agencies significantly increased as a result of this program and overall there has been great benefit to the Toronto Aboriginal community. Urban Aboriginal communities may pose unique challenge in community mobilisation, but there are examples of urban Aboriginal community processes that have been highly successful.

For communities that have not explored strategies to improve community safety and inter-agency co-ordination, a different approach is warranted. The Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) model in Hollow Water and the Biidaaban healing process on the Mnjikaning First Nation (Rama) point to the merit of a “ground up” process. Commencing with identification of existing human resources in the community, training was completed that developed a core resource team, whose responsibility it was to design a plan of action to bring together various agencies with a common goal and approach.

## Methodology

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit (ACPU) has long maintained the position that the unit must seek the advice of Aboriginal people before a new direction is taken. In the past, ACPU has sponsored gatherings to brainstorm ideas, discuss the potential problems, and reach consensus on how best to approach an issue

This community mobilisation approach supports the core values of Aboriginal tradition and collective action. It allows communities to set the pace and scope of development, builds on existing community resources and recognises the “gifts”<sup>10</sup> of individual community members.

In the design of the Semaganis Gatherings, consideration was given to the fact that the capacity of the Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit was far exceeded by the sheer volume of different Aboriginal nations across Canada. In addition to the numbers, the heterogeneity of the different nations was also acknowledged and, as such, it was decided to hold six gatherings from culturally diverse regions across Canada. It was hoped that this sample would provide common themes in community mobilisation that would resonate with other Aboriginal nations.

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit (ACPU) sent notices to First Nation and Aboriginal organisations seeking local representation to the Semaganis Gathering in their area. Invitations were sent to the following:

- In the Atlantic region, to the Mi’kmaq First Nations;
- In Manitoba, to the Ojibwe First Nations;
- In the Northwest Territories, the Dene First Nations;
- In British Columbia, the Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations;
- In Alberta, the Blackfoot First Nations; and
- In Toronto, various urban Aboriginal organisations.

The organisers felt it was important to organise the Gatherings by tribal affiliation. This

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<sup>10</sup> Every person in a community had a “gift” or unique talent that they contributed to the larger whole. Everyone had a role and function according to his or her gift.

would ensure sensitivity to different traditional approaches between nations. As Toronto is representative of a variety of nations from across Canada the Semaganis Gathering at this location offered a much different perspective than the other gatherings held.

The facilitation of the gatherings was respectful of local culture and customs. Each gathering provided opportunity for free-flowing thought and input as well as brainstorming. Each session commenced with an explanation of the purpose of the gatherings, the origin of its intent and the objectives of the session. The Blackfoot Gathering in Calgary, Alberta was somewhat unique in its approach to its Semaganis Gathering. It was facilitated in a traditional circle/tipi consultation method, a common approach utilised by the Blackfoot Nations in the gathering of the community for input and consultation. Participants at this session were also provided an orientation to the gathering process, which included how the meeting would be facilitated followed by the various roles of the persons in attendance. This was conducted prior to their actual Semaganis Gathering.

Participants at each gathering were asked a series of question about community mobilisation that served to guide the discussions. The sessions were recorded through verbatim transcribing and/or audio recordings, which were later transcribed into hard copies for further analysis and reporting. In many sessions, participants spoke the language of their nation, with their contribution interpreted into English. One of the challenges presented as a result of the use of Aboriginal languages was the inability to translate certain Aboriginal words or concepts into the English language as there are, on occasion, no corresponding English words to relate a specific word or concept.

The following questions were asked of participants:

- From a traditional/cultural perspective - what mechanism brings people together for action?
- What skills are required for community mobilisation workers?
- How many community mobilisation workers are needed in your area?
- How should community mobilisation workers be accountable to the community?
- What are the challenges or barriers to community mobilisation?
- Is there a role for leadership?
- What is governments' role for community mobilisation?

In asking these questions, the Semaganis Gatherings were designed to explore issues such as:

- The skills and qualifications for community mobilisation workers/facilitators;
- Whether or not community mobilisation training be provided in the future and, if so, how could it be undertaken in an effective and efficient manner;
- The role of community leadership in the process;
- The necessary interaction among participating agencies and programs;
- The number of community mobilisation workers required for success;
- The duties of community mobilisation workers, how and to whom should they be accountable;
- Community selection criteria and processes of the community mobilisation workers;
- The length of time community mobilisation workers should work in a community;
- The criteria to measure whether community mobilisation workers have moved communities in the right direction; and
- The role of the Public Safety Canada, other federal departments, provinces and territories in community mobilisation.

Participants contributed to the discussions by telling stories, sharing models, discussing collective concerns and brainstorming ideas. This information provided a glimpse into traditional and contemporary approaches used for support community mobilisation. It was an illustration of collaboration and consensus approaches that can lead to building healthier First Nation and Aboriginal communities.

## **Common Themes**

### *Defining Community Mobilisation workers/facilitators*

All nations that were represented at the Semaganis Gatherings shared traditional practices, stories, words or concepts that were reflective of their understanding of community mobilisation all of which were similar to the Semaganis approaches of the Plains Cree. In British Columbia for the Kwakwaka'wakw Nations, it was described as the “*Sea Worm*” of the ocean. In this story, the meaning translates to “*no matter how many times you cut it, it keeps growing*”. The potlatch tradition was also described as a community mobilisation process. In this practice, the potlatch ceremony is held in a structure referred to as ‘the Big House’ where communities would gather for ceremonies and mobilise around issues. In the Blackfoot tradition it was the use of ceremonies and, in

particular, the circle process is utilised to facilitate resolution to issues or to mobilise community members. In the east, the Mi'kmaq used a very similar word to Semaganis to describe a leader in their communities as someone who *“is a scout, a person or group of people that were sent as forerunners for the people for hunting or settlements near by”*. Today in the Mi'kmaq cultural practice, the youth use this word to describe warrior society or gang, with an unfortunate negative connotation. In Toronto one participant used a Mohawk word to describe someone *“whose job it is to carry the bones of the people and to never leave behind the old ones or the spirits of the new ones”*. For the Dene, or Dog Rib, the Slavey words: *“do ch a tse di do/Dene tsa tes di and K'aowo”* refer to community helper and leader.<sup>11</sup>

### Tradition and Community Mobilisation

There were three distinct areas of importance identified at the six Semaganis Gatherings that spoke to important traditional and cultural approaches impacting community mobilisation. These were: cultural values, ceremonies and language. Participants spoke about traditional teachings, shared through story telling, which play an important role in the passing on of cultural values. Many of the values of different nations are similar in meaning and understanding and are considered to be foundation teachings. Some of these core teachings include approaches to life and circumstances whereby a holistic approach is utilised. Other values include equality, caring and sharing. Through colonisation, significant damage has been inflicted on Aboriginal cultures, traditions, stories and language, which has hindered Aboriginal nations' ability to successfully implement community mobilisation processes. However, the values of Aboriginal societies are regaining strength and community mobilisation supports healing thus it is necessary that efforts in healing and mobilisation be supported.

Many participants shared stories that reflected their own memories of traditional teachings, usually shared by grandparents or parents. One of the valuable foundation

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<sup>11</sup> The Slavey and Dogrib are Aboriginal people of the Dene nation. Slavey people speak the Athapaskan language and live in the subarctic area of western Canada bordered by the Slave, Athabasca and Mackenzie water ways, Fort Nelson, British Columbia in the west, the Hay Lakes region of Alberta in the east and north to a region near Tulita. The Dogrib people are also known as Tlicho. Their traditional lands lie in the area east of the Mackenzie River between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories.

teachings that was shared related to the equality of all creation and the responsibility of mankind to take into consideration all matters and things around him. In Yellowknife one person shared:

“People would chop wood for others to ensure everyone had enough fuel. In the winter and fall people would go up the mountain with a dog team to hunt and in the summer it was time to fish at the fish camp. In the spring time people hunted muskrat. Early in life people would learn to hunt, fish, sew and cook. All understood that they would check on each other to support the community”.

Participants emphasised that it is through teachings and the practice of ceremonies that cultural values are reinforced and experienced. Today, ceremonies are utilised to rebuild knowledge of culture and traditions and they are used to mobilise around important events within nations. Ceremonies not only reinforce cultural values but they also respond to life events such as births, passing of age, or other matters such as a family in need. In some nations, songs held a place of great importance and were ‘held’ by various people within a community. The person(s) holding those songs had very specific and important responsibilities placed upon them by their community and/or culture. When the song holders taught those songs to others, they were seen as passing the authority or responsibility of their position on to either the next generation or someone better able to take on a specific responsibility. Thus song and the traditions associated with it, were and continue to be a very important tool for community mobilisation.

Finally, in many of the gatherings participants spoke about the diminishing of Aboriginal languages but reiterated that the use of language is very important to the interpretation of cultural values, understanding of ceremonies and the passage of songs.

Participants agreed that traditional customs and culture are being used within First Nation and Aboriginal communities. These practices are vital to community mobilisation and it is therefore vital to support communities in their development of capacity concerning languages and cultural teachings to youth, as youth are seen as the leaders of tomorrow. Due to impacts of colonisation, Aboriginal people are often not taught nor prepared for the practice of ceremony of generations past, and the years of training that were previously a part of everyday living is now absent. As a result, ceremonies may be

practised by those who do not have a full understanding of their meaning and significance. This results in a loss of cultural understanding for the next generation. Some communities have recognised this and have implemented measures to ensure that information is passed down from Elders that are recognised and endorsed by the local Aboriginal community. However, other communities are struggling to maintain their language and culture have been forced to look outside their own community to help in the re-establishment of ceremonies and traditions.

### Elements Needed for Mobilisation

Participants spoke about the elements needed within an Aboriginal community to establish successful models of community mobilisation. Some of the common themes are:

- Community empowerment and ownership in the design, development, implementation and training;
- Respected Elders within the community to guide the process and support the teachings;
- Capacity to build training programs to support community mobilisation;
- Sustainable multi-year funding for development and implementation;
- Strong leadership; and
- The capacity to strengthen traditional and cultural practices.

### Priority Issues for Mobilisation

Throughout the gatherings participants expressed ideas about priorities for community mobilisation. The area of highest concern across the country was for Aboriginal youth;

- There is a critical need to involve Aboriginal youth to support healthy communities;
- Efforts must be extended to youthful offenders as well to help them onto a path to healing; and
- It is important to foster the collaboration of Elders and youth in this effort.

Participants agreed that community mobilisation models should be developed through front-line workers. Another suggestion was that programming must be directed toward the family with an emphasis on Elders.

### Models for Community Mobilisation

A number of existing models were identified as best practices. Some of these were

unique in that they blended traditional and contemporary approaches to community mobilisation. These are:

Inter-agency model - a committee of First Nation internal departments, frontline workers and in some areas, representation of outside agencies working with the Nations. They collectively review and determine solutions on issues affecting the community. In some communities these committees collaborate on identifying resources to support funding gaps in programs. In some cases, these committees have been responsible for establishing tripartite agreements with Federal, Provincial and Aboriginal governments and establishing protocols for working relationships. The model works because the committee establishes a community vision and meets regularly to network, share ideas and establish plans and responses on issues.

Council of Elders - a committee of Elders that provides guidance and support or alternative resolutions on issues for the offender, victim and the community program. Many of these groups also provide traditional teachings and support to those who have lost their way and find themselves involved in the criminal justice system and others within the community.

Justice Committee - a group of community volunteers working with local police and other justice professionals to provide alternative justice solutions for the community. The demands for this service may vary; however there is a mobilisation around justice matters by providing collaboration and a holistic approach to crime prevention, criminal matters and reintegration solutions.

Presidents' Council - an urban example of various Aboriginal organisations collectively having their elected community Presidents meet to review and mobilise around issues. This would support an urban strategy and keep the various organisations networking and responding to issues.

### Skills for Community Mobilisation

Participants throughout the gatherings expressed strong ideas about the skill set needed for community mobilisation workers. These include:

- To have knowledge of traditional and cultural ways;
- To lead healthy lifestyles;
- To be able to speak the language;
- To be strong advocates and facilitators;



- To have credibility within the community they serve;
- To be innovative thinkers with a vision;
- To have leadership skills and the ability to work with a team;
- To be fair and neutral;
- To have mediation training;
- To be effective communicators (oral and written); and
- To be have the ability to motivate others.

Many participants identified a lack of resources within the community for the skills development of the community mobilisation workers. Resources are required to support capacity development. In recent years, government funding has restricted the ability of communities to develop capacity, thus inhibiting skill development and ultimately community development.

#### *Lessons Learned for Community Mobilisation*

Successes and challenges were experienced by communities that had engaged in community mobilisation. Participants emphasised the value in taking the lessons from the successes and challenges and incorporating them into future community development endeavours. Participants identified the following recommendations in this regard:

- Community leadership must be part of the long-term strategic planning and community visioning. Support from community leaders is essential to successful community mobilisation;
- It is important that the cultural uniqueness of each Aboriginal community be retained and a recognised and that a pan-Aboriginal approach be avoided;
- Governments must financially support community development/mobilisation initiatives; and
- Multi-year funding from governments to support community mobilisation is required.

It was identified that community mobilisation must be a grassroots initiative that is supported by the local leadership. Furthermore, it must be staffed by qualified personnel possessing the confidence of the community within which the efforts are being made. These are vital considerations in community mobilisation, as the primary function of this effort is to bring community resources together to address a range of issues or events which may, or may not, be contentious or difficult.

## **Chapter 2 - Southeast Tribal Council, Manitoba**

### **Meeting Summary**

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit met with representatives from the Southeast Child and Family Services (SCFS) and the Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) Program from Hollow Water First Nation to discuss traditional Ojibwe approaches to community mobilisation. It was decided to approach both SCFS and CHCH initially as both have extensive experience in the mobilisation of the Hollow Water community in the area of community healing and wellness. At this gathering, participants emphasised the need for communities to mobilise in an integrated manner, the challenges involved and options to ensure that community healing processes are integrated.

It was identified that mobilisation must begin at the grassroots level with the support of community leadership and must involve an individual or individuals trained in community mobilisation techniques and have the confidence of the community. A key role for this community facilitator would be to bring existing community programs together to discuss common strategies and work towards a shared goal. A community facilitator will need to be a balanced individual with a strong support network to avoid the possibility of succumbing to burnout or stress as a result of the anticipated workload and challenges.

A Semaganis, or community facilitator, could potentially work with several communities in an effort to share services and resources. It was identified that the community facilitator should not be a front line worker with a caseload and other responsibilities, rather it should be a designated position that would focus primarily on developing strategies for community collaboration and the facilitation of the response. Some duties of this position would include responsibility for the identification of issues, conducting research and analysis, identifying possible solutions, conducting consultations, developing traditional approaches and facilitating inter-agency meetings.

## **Discussion Findings and Outcomes**

Frontline workers are often challenged by organisational structures and philosophies that place them in a position whereby they must “tow the party line”. This tends to break down or inhibit spirit and creativity. It was emphasised that when addressing issues that affect a whole community, it is vital that the whole community be given an opportunity to participate in appropriate manners. Workers of the Southeast Child and Family Services identified anecdotal community reports that indicate that, over the last five to six years, community programs are working well together and this is a key to the success of community mobilisation.

### *Organizational Culture*

It was also indicated by the participants of this gathering that a Band Council Resolution would reinforce and sanction community mobilisation processes. In doing so, it was identified that Chief and Council would have a role in community mobilisation however, consensus was not reached as to the level and scope of their role. Some felt that the Council should take a leadership role while others identified that this leadership role and mobilisation process could be challenged or lost, as there are band council elections every two years in most communities. There was consensus that Council should receive regular reports (perhaps quarterly) about the facilitator’s progress and the extent to which community programs are working together.

The participants expanded on some of the strengths and challenges to having band council support. They stated that band councils could be great allies and they could also be obstacles. Many band councils work diligently to ensure that local communities remain good places to live. Yet, others, due to the effects of colonisation, are less capable of advancing community progress. As such, a community mobilisation worker will need to possess the skill of navigating local politics – a difficult but essential task.

It was recognised that many First Nation residents, particularly youth, do not trust local council or band administered programs. This could pose a challenge in bringing the community together. Some participants felt that the community facilitator should be

responsible to an independent community organisation or a Council of Grandmothers. Others believed that a management committee, comprised of representatives from community organisations should be created to oversee the facilitator. Regardless of who undertakes the supervision, it is important to keep council informed of progress and any problems that arise. It is important that the councillors responsible for the various portfolios meet regularly to identify ways in which to work more effectively.

### *Skills and Knowledge of a Facilitator*

The participants reiterated that the community mobilisation facilitator should not be a front line worker however, having previous front line experience would be an asset, as would having roots with the community. This kind of a background would provide for intimate knowledge of the local peoples, services and dynamics of a particular community. It was also suggested that the primary focus of the facilitator would be on prevention rather than intervention and protection.

A facilitator would need to be trusted as a person as well, they would have to be drug and alcohol free to promote community health and wellness and they would require awareness and respect for the community's beliefs and traditions as well as be willing to participate in cultural events. In addition to mobilising the community, the facilitator should be able to organise and participate in community events such as dances, feasts and gatherings. S/he should have the comfort to talk with all community members and not just elected officials or agency heads and finally, they should be able to competently manage an assigned workload.

The facilitator would also need to address the challenge in bringing staff from community agencies together to share program information. This may prove difficult as many agencies are so concerned with the protection of client confidentiality that often a lack of communication between agencies results. However, for the greater good of an individual, family or community, it is essential for front line service providers to meet and keep apprised of mutual concerns. If each agency only has a piece of a greater picture they are unable to effectively respond to situations – an issue that needs to be resolved.

Good communication and negotiation skills are also required to help community members and organisations put aside their differences and work towards a cohesive response to problems. A community mobilisation position could also provide the opportunity to draw attention to pressing social issues that community leadership might otherwise be aware of. By having a position that could increase awareness, the community would be better positioned to mobilise strategically.

Leadership was identified as an important skill for a community facilitator. S/he must be able to seek out the formal and informal leaders in the community and involve them, thereby utilising their gifts in a positive manner. The metaphor of a butterfly was expressed to identify the perception of how a community facilitator would work – each time a butterfly lands, they spread a common message throughout the community and involve greater numbers of people.

It was recognised that any one person selected as the community facilitator may not possess all of the necessary skills required of the position; as such, on-going training of this position is necessary and important. It is particularly important that training be from the Anishnawbe perspective and be culturally appropriate and relevant. It is also important that the community facilitator be able to focus their attention on getting the job done without wondering about how to get funding.

A community facilitator needs to have a good sense of humour and to use this gift as a tool to bring the community together. Many Aboriginal people have experienced pain in their lives and through the use of humour community members would be in a better position to talk about the hurt and to move towards healing.

The facilitator would be expected to have the ability to build trust among community programs in a manner that is not threatening. The concern was identified that local organisations may feel threatened if the facilitator discovered an overlap in services, which could potentially jeopardise funding. A skilled community facilitator would work with programs to help them work more effectively by working as a part of a community

team and helping to identify and decide which agency is best suited to develop and implement programs.

When discussing what skills a facilitator should have, participants agreed that a community facilitator should have the following skills:

- Leadership;
- Motivation;
- Facilitation;
- Communication (writing, public speaking, etc.);
- Negotiation;
- The ability to work with Aboriginal and mainstream agencies, organisations; government;
- Training; and
- Proposal development.

They should also have knowledge of the following aspects of a community:

- Its membership;
- Culture and traditions;
- Resources;
- Strengths and challenges; and
- History.

### Needs Assessment

All too often, new community programs are developed in the absence of a solid needs assessment or without strategic thought. When this happens, community resources become fragmented, agencies struggle in isolation when experiencing growing pains, and there is a lack of co-operation and collaboration from within the community. It is vital to community well-being, that all community members, agencies and leadership are united with the goal of developing a common vision and long range strategic plan.

Participants further explored the concept of a needs assessment in relation to the role of the community facilitator. It was indicated that, in addition to developing strategies to bring various community agencies together to provide integrated programs and services, that a community facilitator could undertake research on behalf of those programs and services. It was identified that communities often do not take the time to identify what works and what is needed and are left pondering the lack of progression despite the

development of new programs or services. It was further recognised that communities are dynamic with the needs of the community changing. Often, evaluations of existing programs and services are rarely examined in great detail, resulting in community stagnation or misdirection. A facilitator could undertake the review of evaluations to determine if programs are meeting their goals and provide feedback and direction as to the outcomes of the review.

### Community Collaboration

Participants also felt that community facilitator should have an educational role by showing community members the relationship between funding sources, programs and service providers, and how everything fits into the community. A key educational element would be to show people that they have the ability to take control over their own destiny and that of the community.

A facilitator should also assist community agencies to develop proposals for new or enhanced programs. This would require good writing skills and knowledge of government funding programs.

When asked to identify possible strategies in bringing the community together, participants identified a number of important elements rather than a specific strategy. Such elements included- starting with families, utilising holistic approaches and inclusiveness. A facilitator will need to be careful to maintain a holistic manner of thinking where healing approaches are required. For example, in justice related matters, it is important, from an Aboriginal perspective, to work with families, victims and offenders together, and not to treat them independent of each other. Participants expressed that insufficient attention is paid to the family's ability to heal itself and that this could be a worthwhile focus for a facilitator.

Participants also stated that there needs to be communication between all people in order for programs to work for the community. A community facilitator would need to work with both program management as well as front line workers. It was felt that it would be appropriate to bring the community agencies together first before the remaining

community could be expected to be brought together.

### Accountability

The approach in selecting an appropriate community mobilisation facilitator would be unique to each community involved given the differences in Aboriginal cultures. Regardless of the process, participants felt that the selection process must not offend community values and standards. For southeastern Manitoba, the position would be posted for competition with the position description, skill requirements and qualifications being included. A hiring board would be established with representation from Chief and Council, the Education sector, CFS, CHCH and Elders. A youth from the community could also be included as well as a funding representative to serve as an observer.

To measure success in mobilisation, there was agreement that one way of looking at this was to examine mobilisation towards a holistic approach towards service delivery and that there should be an annual report. Another measure would be to look at decreasing levels of frustration in the community. Of particular importance is the examination of youth frustration. It was identified that if community mobilisation was proving to be successful, the frustration experienced by youth may lead to diminished gang activity and the youth would be more successfully engaged in a range of programs and services. Other indicators of success included: a reduction in the number of children under care of CFS, the number of times that community agencies met, and their level of satisfaction with these meetings. A reduction in the number, or frequency, of community members gambling could also be an indicator as gambling addiction is strongly correlated to community health.

### Duration of community Mobilisation initiative

When determining the length of time that a facilitator should work in the community, there was consensus that the mobilisation process could not be completed in a short time frame. Some felt that the work would continue until Aboriginal people no longer filled the jails. Others felt that the facilitator's role could eventually be phased out and replaced by other mechanisms, such as an inter-agency council. Regardless of the view, participants felt that a two or three year mobilisation process could only begin to affect



positive changes in the community.

## **Chapter 3 – Mi’kmaq Nations Halifax, Nova Scotia**

### **Meeting Summary**

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit held a meeting with several of the Mi’kmaq First Nations in the Atlantic region of Canada to discuss community mobilisation in the communities – specifically, how it should be done and by whom. The meeting provided feedback and input into the concept of Semaganis.

First Nation members concluded their discussion by indicating that the Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit can provide a key role in their communities by acting as advocate. As well as helping with funding and program and policy development that is more flexible and supportive of the individual needs of each First Nation community.

Participants also voiced strong support for additional consultation to discuss and advance the idea of Semaganis within their communities and inclusive of their Elders to receive direction on the appropriate Mi’kmaq term for community mobilisation.

### **Discussion Findings and Outcomes**

Participants were asked to discuss the meaning of “*Semaganis*” from a traditional Mi’kmaq perspective. Several participants agreed that the term “*Semaganis*” was used to describe a scout: a person or group of people sent as the forerunner to determine hunting, fishing or settlement options. The term could also be used to describe a warrior or soldier that went off to battle.

Participants from the Mi’kmaq Nations agreed that the term “*Semaganis*” has some appropriate definitions that could apply to community mobilisation within their communities. However, there was strong support for further consultation within their own communities with the Elders and other community members to determine the meaning behind this word and if it is culturally appropriate to use it today.

Community participants did agree that “*Semaganis*” refers to leaders who are either men or women, young or old, and refers to many people and not just one person in a

community. The term describes a facilitator or motivator that follows through on issues and has the respect and acknowledgement of the community. They are people that volunteer and may not be elected but have the capacity to move issues. They are individuals that respect the clan system and have the capacity to work with members who do not follow the traditional path.

One inter-agency model practised in Membertou First Nation was highlighted as a potential option for community mobilisation. The model brings together program coordinators from different departments as well as community members to discuss, debate, and recommend approaches that will unite and support program initiatives including the identification of existing service gaps. The initiative combines human and financial resources to facilitate action within the community. It is reported to be highly successful and backed by the local community and elected members.

It was further suggested that the word itself in the Mi'kmaq language breaks down in the following way:

“Sema - the root word, is a person who goes to touch, sema. And it's not just physical touch, but it's coming into that essence of like, becoming real connected”.

Today this term “*Semaganis*” is also being used in a disrespectful manner by young men belonging to warrior societies and has been identified as receiving extensive use in the prisons.

Historically, the term “Semaganis” was not meant to exclude women and could be used to describe women leaders. One participant stated that, “*The women are the keepers of the culture. And we are the warriors.*” A warrior could be described not so much in the physical sense but in the spiritual, emotional and intellectual way of describing a person. Culture traditionally dictates that men and women are equal and balanced. There was honour between the genders that reflected respect, not like today where roles are seen as women's liberation or imbalance between the sexes.

This led the discussion o the traditional practice of the clan system used in communities.

Although this system is almost forgotten historically the clan system reinforced equal value and the worth for all persons. This was accomplished by ensuring that the health of the collective was cared for. Decisions were made through consensus and everyone had a say.

One of the participants shared stories of the social and economic challenges faced by their First Nation, which led the community to organise an “inter-agency” model:

They got all of these people together in our community that were front-line workers and said, ‘ look, we have to start working together. We can’t be doing our jobs separately because what’s happening is that everybody...everybody was being affected by all that was happening’.

The inter-agency model has been very successful in helping the community address gaps in service as well as supporting resource difficulties. To form the model, front-line workers advocated for the approach, gained support from Chief and Council and finally had community sanction, which made it a winning formula:

Chief and Council said, ‘ yes, we have to do something’. We had two community forums in our community over two years. The front-line workers and people that were involved in the community, like the youth, the Elders, those kinds of people got together. And they started to talk.”

Issues are brought to the inter-agency committee to review and determine if, as a collective, they can help the situation. Each participant contributes to the solutions for the issues raised at the inter-agency table:

If we want to put on a program for kids in a school, we all share that from our own little pockets. We put on parenting programs; we put on youth programs, all kinds of programming for our community members.

Collectively the participants that sit on the committee represent different First Nation departments and may contribute funding from their various departments to support a particular initiative. “*We come together, we do it by consensus.*” The model also encourages community participation. When efforts are made to address a situation, the community is aware of it and they are included as part of the planning process. This

model has created community vision and has the capacity to grow and continue to deal with issues as they arise.

Another current community model that was identified as successful is the youth mentoring program. This program provides youth at-risk with support and guidance and includes peer counselling, critical incident stress management and suicide intervention:

...it's what you do for your people. If you empower your people and continue to listen to them, then you're going to have that connectedness and....you're going to start to see change.”

From this point the discussion proceeded to exploring sharing amongst different communities and being able to offer assistance or different perspectives in helping each other. Many community participants spoke about the negative outcomes of trying to fit prearranged government programs with their community needs. Often potential clients do not meet the criteria and cannot gain access into these programs. All participants agreed that flexibility within programs and services will help to fill the gaps that exist within current programming.

Issues around providing service to all First Nation members are becoming more complicated, since members are forced to move off reserve to get housing. This can affect their eligibility for programs and services on-reserve. This can also disconnect the member from the community and their families.

An inter-agency model gives the flexibility to cost-share when resources are insufficient to cover the costs of a service, such as child assessment and/or counselling. Working together helps break down the silos that exist within community and federal programs that are delivered at the First Nation level. Building community ownership is also essential to successful delivery of programs and services.

Bringing together “Semaganisak” (program managers, police officers, etc.) is the first step toward working with the community. These individuals are tasked with meeting with the clan mothers to determine direction and support for approaches, issues and

solutions.

At this point of the meeting, some participants asked for clarification on the definition of “*Semaganis*”, as there appeared to be several different meanings of the word being utilised. One participant suggested that the term could refer to Chief and Council in the community and could also refer to volunteers in the community, as well as women who work tirelessly with children, feeding the community when needed and supporting after-school programming. Another participant shared concern about the current definition of “*Semaganis*” since it does not reflect a true balance between men and women. It may not acknowledge or respect the clan system or women in the communities. After some discussion, participants agreed that women are equal in the meaning of “*Semaganis*”.

It was pointed out that having Chief and Council support on initiatives or the vision of what is to be achieved is essential, but it is not imperative that Chief and Council be actively involved in the day-to-day running of the initiative. “*Semaganis*” is about sharing leadership and taking ownership. Having some political leadership that can champion issues is an excellent way of keeping elected leadership informed and involved in the process as you build approaches. Empowerment is critical to the process of establishing buy-in and support from the community. It gives the community a voice that they understand is being heard. So, “*Semaganis is a champion of the people*”.

The group was then asked to consider necessary skills, roles and responsibilities of the “*Semaganisak*”. If “*Semaganisak*” are catalysts for change, what kind of skills do these people need?

The discussion can be summarised as follows, A “*Semaganisak*” is an individual(s) that:

- Support and fight for the community;
- Have respect within the community;
- Get things done;
- Are good listeners;
- “*Walk the talk*”;
- Have strong voices;
- Are not afraid to tackle community issues;

- Are humble and not afraid to say ‘no’;
- Are able to learn from others;
- Share what they have learned and use it;
- Have courage;
- Have credibility within the community; and
- Are men or women, young and old.

Several participants agreed that the term “*Semaganis*” is a term that best describes Elders as people that have gone through a lot, a person like Donald Marshall Sr. It is also about who you are as an individual, what you were taught, your spirituality, and how you relate to your community. It was also described as an honour system.

“*Semaganis*” is a term that can describe everyone. Stories were shared about how everyone in the community comes together when there is a funeral or death in the community. Everyone pitches in and helps the family. They contribute to the arrangements and help with counselling the family. This can be part of the understanding that “*Semaganis*” is everyone. It can also include caregivers that work in the community.

Concluding the discussion several participants added that “*Semaganisak*” are Elders, the grandmothers, the people who have wisdom and contribute to the community on a regular basis. They are people who are well respected and supported within the community as a result of their leadership.

After discussing the definition of “*Semaganis*”, the participants were asked to address the issue of what kind of skills or training should be available for these people.

Many participants felt that prior to providing input on this issue, there should be broader consultation with the communities about the meaning and definition of “*Semaganis*” including how it can be strengthened and supported in communities.

Some participants suggested that community mobilisation starts with networking and building on existing programs and resources within the community. Some suggested that

current programming does not provide the needed resources to put into place services needed by the community, creating gaps for clients. *“We are lacking financially with what is already out there. And maybe this can be filler for that....”* Perhaps concentrating on current program gaps would meet the needs of the community and invest in much needed holistic approaches to providing services for community members. Many participants agreed that access to training resources is a high priority.

Some of the areas where there are gaps in programming include:

- Affordable nursing homes for the Elders;
- Mental health services,
- Including institutions where Elders can receive services in their own language;
- Training in the corrections field for youth;
- Youth training - specific to traditional and cultural teachings;
- The ability to empower youth;
- The ability for communities to come together more frequently to support one another on issues;
- Lack of opportunity to access self-education –
- Lack of mentoring within the communities; and
- Help for the Elders to teach the children and advise others in the community.

At this point meeting participants started to talk about how the concept of *“Semaganis”* should be explored and supported and it was reiterated that there is need for further community consultation. Since there are many different definitions of the word *“Semaganis”* the discussion would have to commence with its definition, then application followed by how it can be supported within the community.

The group was asked to consider what should be the role of leadership and who should be considered in leadership roles - Chief and Council and/or hereditary leadership or natural leaders?

Several people indicated that the definition of leadership is the starting point of discussion. *“Leadership means the people that are here.”* It can refer to elected participants, the clan system or who is appointed from the family to a council. An important aspect to determining leadership is ensuring that people have regained cultural identity and self-identity. If this occurs, *“that’s going to be a powerful thing”*.



Leadership and its role are defined by how the person or group of individuals acts. It is their reputation and respect from within the community that determines the role. Leadership is elected, it is volunteers, and it is people that have taken on responsibilities that support the collective. The traditional medicine wheel may be one model to apply. This is where the individual in the family that traditionally is the “strong one”, balanced mental and physical health etc., and has the responsibility to be the leader when a crisis happens. Many participants commented that medicine wheel teachings have been lost in many families. Relearning this approach would have to be done to support this option.

When discussing models that work, it was identified that how the model came to be established in the first place is often left out. With this in mind, participants with experience with the inter-agency model were asked to describe how it was established. They stated that the community program co-ordinators reviewed their funding agreements and met with one another and determined that there could be collaboration with one another to support program goals and objectives among the different services. By sharing resources and ideas, program objectives and challenges, collectively the inter-agency model was established. It allowed for greater creative programming that has the potential to fill gaps in service. A planning committee met for eight weeks, with approximately 12 to 15 members involved. It was this group, with their commitment and unified approach that made the collaboration work. A community forum discussed the issue of an inter-agency council, its vision and how it was built on a community holistic healing model. Communication was the key. Presentations continue to be made to the community and input is received from members of the community on issues.

Community volunteers can also be involved and support the model. By keeping the model transparent to the community, the community feels a part of the process and has ownership of the model. They feel that they have a say in their own services and programs:

“So if it’s community driven, the community will buy into it.”

What this module teaches you is that it’s okay not to have the answers,

because we don't have the answers. We learn from each other. What you can teach me, I can teach somebody else.

An important understanding within the inter-agency group is that the group is there to support one another and not to tear down other departments. If individuals have difficulties with one department it is not a forum to hear complaints. Community members are re-directed to the appropriate department to resolve the issues.

Currently the inter-agency council holds monthly meetings. It must have highly motivated members that prioritise accountability to the community as an objective. Volunteers and facilitators are used at each monthly meeting to ensure that they operate smoothly. Chief and Council are welcome to show up at the meetings and are sent the minutes of each meeting. The inter-agency committee has a chair and co-chair and all minutes are recorded and maintained in a location accessible to community members. The process is evaluated as it goes along.

Participants were asked to consider how many "*Semaganisak*" or community mobilisation people are needed in a community. Clarification was requested regarding this question - is this regionally or provincially or community? The suggestion was that it could be all three. What makes the most sense and what would work in the Mi'kmaq nation is the question. Some communities share and mobilise among one another by travelling to different areas. Others work within their traditional territory. The size of the community would determine the ability to reach out to one other. An example of how one community approached this question is Hollow Water, Manitoba, where the community started to share with the Headstart program, which targets children.

Several examples were shared by the First Nation participants where communities have come together to collaborate on funding, training and support on certain issues in the Atlantic region. Some of these initiatives include:

- Crisis intervention training;
- The development of a crisis intervention manual;
- Dealing with crisis in the community; and
- Mentoring training for the youth.

It was again stated by the Mi'kmaq participants that there lingered some confusion with the meaning behind "*Semaganis*" and the need to discuss the interpretation of the word in their local communities. The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit participants commented that in some cases this word describes a community facilitator or community mobiliser who helps to get people moving and get things happening in certain areas. In some areas of Canada the term is used to describe a policeman or a soldier. Some participants disagreed with this interpretation, since they felt that the understanding of the word should be of a non-judgmental context and more like a friend. This would ensure that families in crisis would not feel threatened or inferior.

To help with the understanding of what "*Semaganis*" means in the context of this gathering, the following questions were asked: Is this a person who helps and assists with mobilisation of the community, or works with the agencies that work with the families, or works directly with the families? Could these individuals liaise between the community, the agency, and the leadership?

Comments received were:

- It is non-gender specific;
- The person is an instrument, a catalyst to change;
- They are not an enforcer;
- It is an inclusive term, not an exclusive one;
- It is something that is used with respect;
- To protect the community, to protect loved ones; and
- That it is a non-political and non-profitable position.

Finally, the group clearly indicated that to finalise the meaning of "*Semaganis*", the Elders would have to be consulted regarding the definition. Concern was expressed that in the translation of this word from Mi'kmaq it may lose some of the meaning - it could refer to the "smart one or wise one" and this was further reason why the Elders need to be consulted to determine the meaning within the language. Stories were shared by many participants on how language can change the meaning.

When asked how “Semaganisak” should be accountable to the community, many agreed that “Semaganisak” need to be first accountable to them. Several First Nation participants spoke about the responsibility of coming to this meeting and sharing what has been learned here and going back to their communities and asking others for input, from Elders to youth. Some participants suggested that even the people at this meeting need to go home and educate themselves and others in the community about the meaning of “*Semaganis*” and how it could be used and by whom.

Evaluation circles could be used to help with accountability. Using the circle as a means to bring together the Elders to discuss the concept of “*Semaganis*” and to evaluate the use and purpose of the initiative was proposed. Sometimes an Elders group from within a community can be used to support and ensure accountability on an initiative. Volunteers can record discussion and decisions. However, communities must not tire out their Elders by asking them to help with all their issues.

To facilitate Elder participation, some communities pay and arrange for transportation, ensure that meals are included, or contribute to an Elders’ event, and social or other outing that may include the church.

Tools used in one of the communities to help with communication are the Virtue cards. These cards are used to help remind people of virtues such as kindness, generosity and patience and how they can be incorporated into everyday life. This tool has been very successful in helping to facilitate positive communication. It helps to bring participants back together on issues.

At the end of the two-day session, there was some concern expressed about consulting the Elders regarding the meaning of “*Semaganis*”. It was expressed that the word is already clear with some Elders and going back to them and asking them to redefine it may cause concern with the Elders. Some other participants responded by saying that it may not be redefining the word but clarifying with the Elders the meaning of the word, i.e. soldier - how does this apply, or warrior or policeman. It will be important to have a

definition if using this word or another Mi'kmaq word since not all First Nations members speak their first language of Mi'kmaq.

It was suggested that if the term "*Semaganis*" is going to cause difficulties then perhaps the community mobilisation effort should not use that word. Once further consultation has occurred another name may become apparent.

The meaning of "*Semaganis*" is drawn from a collective not an individualistic perspective, working together and in co-operation. The term has in recent times taken on new meaning, especially with the warriors in the institutions. This can be seen as a negative representation of the word. This has occurred in other provinces, such as Manitoba:

I think we're all pretty open to what it's going to be, the need is there, and that we're going to mobilise to know what...to mobilise, yeah. Perhaps the word should reflect "mobilisers."

One First Nations participants contacted her mother during the break and asked for her definition of "*Semaganis*". She indicated that the word soldier did not apply to this word until after the World Wars. Therefore the veterans may have another understanding of the word.

When asked if there was a role that government could play in supporting "*Semaganis*", many participants felt that the Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit has a strong part and role in networking and supporting the re-integration of men and women coming home from the institutions. This can be accomplished by following through on issues, starting where the crisis began. They want the creative ability to establish their own priorities and access programs that will allow that to happen. Reinvestment with resources is necessary. Participants also shared that programs need to focus on the strengths of communities, not the weaknesses. Programs need to acknowledge that communities as a whole need to respond to returning members to the community from the institutions.

Government departments can help with the following issues:

- Increased contact with community members who are incarcerated;
- Networking and referrals to keep people in the system from getting lost;
- Helping with inter-agency development between government departments;
- Working with other professionals, such as psychiatrists, etc.;
- Conducting sentencing circles when needed, even when not funded for this; and
- Becoming advocates.

This discussion led to participants sharing frustrations, challenges and issues in working within the institutions. Some of the issues were about spirituality and ceremonies, volunteers and Elders, and accessing treatment inside the institutions. Some of the discussion included community attitude and lack of support for returning offenders. This may be a contemporary response to the traditional practice of shunning individuals who had committed crimes in their communities.

Other issues included the overall lack of support for anger-management programs for offenders, which is a real problem for communities.

## Chapter 4 - Dene Nation Yellowknife, North West Territories

### Meeting Summary

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit held a meeting with First Nation participants from the Northwest Territories to discuss community mobilisation from a traditional and cultural perspective. The Dene are the Aboriginal people of an area in Canada which stretches from Hudson Bay through the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory to the interior of Alaska and from central Alberta to the Arctic Ocean. This includes the northern most parts of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The two groups referenced in the gathering report are: the Dogrib (Tlicho) who live between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake. The Dogrib communities today include Rae-Edzo, Wha Ti (formerly Lac la Martre), Rae Lakes and Snare Lake. Yellowknife's Dene is another group of Dogrib mostly made up of people living next to Yellowknife in the communities of N'dilo and Dettah.

The Slavey (Deh Gah Got'ine) were a river people. They lived and travelled along the Mackenzie River (called the Dehcho, or "Big River") to the south and west of Great Slave Lake, from the Slave River area to the Liard, and as far downriver as Fort Norman (Tulit'a). They hunted moose more than caribou. The Slavey people are a large group today, including people living in communities from Fort Smith to Jean Marie River and Wrigley.<sup>12</sup>

The discussion was designed to identify how communities in the north may approach mobilisation by incorporating traditional methods. The meeting provided feedback and input into the focus and concept of "*Semaganis*" a Plains Cree word that describes, in today's translation, a leader as community protector, spear-carrier, or policeman. In the context of these meetings, its meaning was that of a community mobilisation facilitator.

In reference to the word "*Semaganis*" the participants suggested wording from the Dog Rib and Slavey languages that refers to community helper and leader are Do ch a tse di

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.artcanadacarvings.com/people\\_of\\_the\\_deh\\_cho.htm](http://www.artcanadacarvings.com/people_of_the_deh_cho.htm)

do/ Dene tsa tes di and K'aowo. The participants felt that community mobilisation is best approached and accountable through the current Justice Committee. The current committee has a number of Elders and community members that can contribute to traditional and cultural understanding and approaches for community mobilisation.

Some communities reported using an inter-agency model to promote community mobilisation in their region. However it was suggested that this approach would not work in all communities since there are insufficient staff to co-ordinate inter-agency meetings in smaller, more isolated communities.

All participants agreed that community mobilisation should focus on the youth in the north. They should be provided with traditional teachings and skills on how to survive and work on the land. Parents must be involved in the programming and participate alongside their children.

Community mobilisation could be fostered by providing traditional teaching to community members. Training needs to focus on building traditional tools and equipment, such as axe handles, snowshoes, drums and toboggans. Other training could focus on how to skin hides, hunt muskrat, sew clothing and prepare food in the bush. Training should be led by community experts who understand the language, traditions and culture.

### **Discussion Findings and Outcomes**

Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit staff outlined the meaning of “*Semaganis*” and how it was used in other nations. They asked participants to think of a similar word(s) from their indigenous languages that describes community mobilisation from a traditional perspective. This evoked a lively discussion about traditional ways of teaching, policing and learning from Elders and passing teachings on to youth. First Nation participants reminisced about times when there was no formal policing within communities and when the teachings were the responsibilities of the Elders of the community. The Elders advised the Chief and Council and they would gather and make decisions that would impact and guide the community as a whole. When discipline or consequences were



required for the inappropriate behaviour of a community member, the member was taken into the bush for teachings. It was understood that, when out on the land, people/children would have greater learning and the teachings would stay with the individuals. Going into the bush had additional value. The person would be taught how to hunt and trap, how to use a gun, handle a knife and axe or chop wood or make snow shoes - all skills necessary for survival and well-being as well as instilling the important of responsibility:

“...you take them out in the middle of the bush and go about a month and then the parents don’t have to worry because they know everything already.”

Traditional teachings were provided to the individual particularly if that person had committed a crime. They were spoken to “*in a good way and not condemned*”. This reinforced positive learning and the teachings. Leaders and Elders who guided the community did not get paid for their efforts and understood this was part of their responsibilities. One participant shared his experiences of when he was young. He had many eyes watching him, guiding him and giving him direction:

“And if I did something wrong, my parents, the whole day I would hear it. You have done something wrong, this is not right. I get that from my grandparents too”

Many participants shared their sadness and disappointment that today’s youth are not getting this kind of traditional teaching or support. Some felt there are not enough Elders with the knowledge to pass on the teachings to the youth. Other participants voiced concern about the lack of funding and community support to help the youth learn traditional teachings in the bush. It was suggested that the people have forgotten how to work together due to government intervention. Traditionally, youth would learn from their peers and not have to be sent to group homes as they are today. It was felt that correctional centres and group homes are not helpful for the youth in becoming responsible members of their community.

The discussion continued with a question about how people helped support the community. In response, participants shared stories about the ‘old days.’ Communities

organised by season and everyone had a job to do. Life and times were tough in those days. Bannock was only served on Sundays. People would chop wood for others to ensure everyone had enough fuel. In the fall and winter people would go up the mountain with a dog team to hunt and in the summer it was the time to fish at the fish camp. In the springtime people hunted muskrat. Early in life people would learn to hunt, fish, sew and cook. All understood that they would check on each other to support the community.

Teachings came directly from parents or grandparents. Families were too busy with life to worry about gossip or trivial matters. They would ensure that children would not sleep in and would contribute to all the jobs that needed doing to help the family get through the seasons. It was shared that, unfortunately, many of today's youth are not interested in learning these important lessons and do not take advantage of the teachings of grandparents or parents. Some participants felt that the lack of teachings has contributed to youth over-representation in the justice system. Many shared that often youth do not understand why they are going to jail in the first place, which inhibits learning. It was expressed that there is no learning in jail:

“They should go to the Elders, then maybe some camps where we can teach fishing, hunting, trapping and respect! I bet most young people now don't even know how to shoot caribou or skin them.”

Some communities have organised councils of Elders. Individuals may talk with these councils voluntarily or they may be called before them to explain their actions. This interaction results in teaching and retribution. This tradition, along with others, follows traditional laws established through culture. Many participants commented that traditional laws should be re-established in the communities.

Many comments were made regarding the abuse of alcohol and drugs within communities today. This affects the ability of the parents, grandparents and Elders to pass on teachings that support healthy lifestyles. Youth in particular, are unmotivated, lack respect and do not show much interest in learning traditional teachings. This situation concerned all participants at the meeting. Another concern expressed is the lack

of Elders who are healthy enough to work with the youth.

When asked what skills should a person have to work on community mobilisation, participants responded by discussing the traditional laws followed by communities. Two examples included sharing what you have with others and that the whole community is responsible for raising the children. Teaching the youth how these laws are applied is an important priority for the communities. Understanding the traditional belief system could help to revitalise community support and strengthen the family environment.

A moving story was shared by one participant who spoke of her experiences in residential school. She was taught by her parents and grandparents to be careful of her hair, “*never leave it in another community*”. When she entered the school she was forced to have her long hair cut and was not allowed to keep it. This was devastating and made her very sad. She explained how she and her brother were separated and not allowed to speak their own language. This story illustrated how the culture was broken and traditions lost for future generations.

Through story telling, participants shared experiences that led to some ideas about how community mobilisation should occur from a traditional perspective. It can be said that many participants felt that community mobilisation can only be achieved if there is an understanding of traditional ways. Persons must lead healthy lifestyles and have support from the community to help with the implementation and funding of programs. The community mobiliser must know how to live in the bush and be able to teach these skills to individuals. They should have the ability to hunt, fish and trap. Other traditional skills include preparing hides, sewing clothes and cooking indoors and out.

It was also shared that much of the work and contributions provided in the communities are always attached to money. Several participants felt that this expectation for resources has affected the commitments of people sharing their skills.

When asked what kind of training should be provided for traditional community mobilisation, participants talked about the need for training on how to live on the land. In

addition, frontline workers need ideas on how to recruit volunteers and engage families in activities. Some participants indicated that when families participate in activities, the learning and teachings are more effective.

One of the participants shared that the inter-agency model of co-ordinating activities really helps to support activities. Getting frontline workers sharing information and meeting on a regular basis helps to get programs established and implemented.

Participants agreed that training should be offered in the spring and fall when trapping occurs. This is the best time to schedule sessions for the community, since people are heading out to the land during these times. Training should also be scheduled over a three-month period in order to have sufficient time to learn the skills.

Most agreed that youth aftercare programming in the bush would be well supported. All participants agreed that communities themselves had to be responsible for the trainers. *“It is the communities that have the skills, how to make the snowshoes, prepare the hide, skin the muskrat.”* Also, teachings on traditional parenting and the creation story were suggested.

When discussing the role of community leadership in community mobilisation, participants shared a number of stories about how training happened in the past. These stories had a common theme in which the parents or grandparents were the beginning for community leadership. Chief and Council are important to ensure that funding is available for programs. However, in making community mobilisation happen, leadership needs to stem from the community - family and the parents. It was thought that having band councillors sit on committees is a good way of involving elected leadership on issues.

Another problem, which was shared with the group, was that frontline workers often do not stay in communities for long periods, especially if the individuals come from somewhere else. This creates problems with consistency and with the ability to get

programs mobilised. When non-community members arrive they have to learn the culture and traditions of that community in order to be effective in their jobs.

Another obstacle identified was the language barrier. Elders, for the most part, speak in Slavey or Dog Rib. The youth are unilingual (English) in many cases, preventing the transfer of teachings from the Elders to the young people.

Several participants suggested that the word “*Semaganis*” be replaced with a word from the Dog Rib or Slavey language to make the process more relevant for their communities. This would help in describing the outcomes from this meeting and help participants in describing the purpose of the session. After discussion on what the word should describe, participants suggested wording that means community helper and leader. The following words were tabled: Do ch a tse di do/ Dene tsa tes di and K’awo - meaning leader.

When discussing accountability, participants reiterated that the responsibility should rest with the Justice Committee. They felt that a community mobilisation co-ordinator should report directly to this committee and the Elders on this committee to ensure accountability.

The discussion then progressed to the selection of a community mobilisation co-ordinator. The process could happen in each community (using the Justice Co-ordinators to identify names of potential candidates). The community could select these candidates directly or names could be submitted to the Justice Committee for final selection.

Potential criteria for candidates should include that they live a healthy lifestyle, have knowledge of traditional practices and teachings, and have no criminal convictions in the past two years.

When asked how they would identify if community mobilisation was effective, participants indicated that a decline in criminal activity would serve as an indicator. Another indicator would be increased involvement of parents in local programs.

One participant shared her experience in working with youth. She insists on parent involvement. She tells the youth to go home and get their parents and ask them to attend. It will be essential that the youth are the target for community mobilisation activities.

The role of government in community mobilisation was thought to be one of assistance through the provision of resources to build the infrastructure around programming needs, such as building a cabin in the bush and ensuring transportation needs are met. It was also suggested that government program guidelines be streamlined to assist in accessing resources.

Programs should be created in consultation with the youth and the Elders. The programs should be in effect long enough to ensure systemic outcomes and be composed of activities that are appropriate to the area.

## Chapter 5 - Kwakwaka'wakw - Quadra Island BC

### Meeting Summary

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit held a meeting with several of the north and south island Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations of British Columbia to discuss community mobilisation in their communities - how traditional and cultural practices may influence and support community mobilisation.

“Kwakiutl is a very old name meaning ‘smoke of the world’. It consists of four tribes, which collectively make up the Kwakiutl including the K'umk'utis, the Kwixa, the Walas Kwakiutl and the Kwakuitl. They occupy the coastal area of British Columbia from Smith Inlet in the north to Cape Mudge in the south and Quatsino in the west to Knight Inlet in the east.

The Kwakwaka'wakw inhabited many different villages or tribes. These tribes are further divided into groups called ‘na'mima, meaning “of one kind”; individuals belonging to a single ‘na'mima are called ‘na'mimut or ‘na'mima fellows. These were the ultimate units binding its members together by strict social obligations. Individuals were ranked within the ‘na'mima, consisting of the head chief, a direct descendent of the founding ancestor, lesser chiefs, commoners and their families. Head chiefs are responsible for the conservation and management of the resources in his ‘na'mima's territory, in return he receives a share of the goods harvested. Not only were the positions within a ‘na'mima ranked but each ‘na'mima had a ranking within the tribe.”<sup>13</sup>

In reference to the meaning of Semaganis, First Nation participants shared a BC legend of the “Sea Worm of the Ocean” -- *“no matter how many times you cut it, it keeps on growing”*.

The BC Kwakwaka'wakw culture and tradition rely on the laws of the “big house” and

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<sup>13</sup> Kwakuitl Indian Band website - <http://www.kwakiutl.bc.ca/land/beginning.htm>. & *The Canadian Encyclopedia*-<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0004389>. Date accessed: February 12, 2009.

the Potlatch ceremony to guide them in their community mobilisation. These approaches provide the structure for community mobilisation such as the responsibility and accountability of all clan members to support the individual as well as the community and nation. It is a shared responsibility that naturally occurs, in particular with frontline workers within the communities today.

Community participants agreed that more training is needed to support their frontline workers to do effective community mobilisation. The training must be locally facilitated and delivered to be really effective. It must concentrate on recruiting workers who model healthy lifestyles.

A model of community mobilisation shared at the meeting was the North Island Inter-Agency Group. This 17-member group of First Nation and non-Aboriginal agencies includes most service delivery groups such as the RCMP and the local Crown Attorney. The frontline workers meet weekly for one hour to develop strategy, network, to share ideas, and training on common goals. They review and monitor caseloads, but do not conduct case conferencing. It is a community driven process that is not fuelled or guided by funding restrictions. It is highly successful and is backed by the local communities and leadership.

First Nation participants concluded their discussion by agreeing that community mobilisation should be established within their communities. They asked Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit participants to advocate for resources and training monies to get the process started.

### **Discussion Findings and Outcomes**

One participant suggested that a traditional interpretation that could similarly apply as being appropriate include the *“The sea worm of the Ocean - No matter how many times you cut it, it keeps growing”*. The culture in this part of BC promotes prevention and work with children to ensure strong and supportive community mobilisation. It was suggested that *“you cannot separate spirit from policy”* These teachings clearly help the communities to stay focussed on community and their efforts.



Participants were asked to consider what mechanism brings people together for action from a traditional/cultural perspective. Participants agreed that the Kwakiutl Nation culture was governed by the “big house”. The big house was the governing body and family setting – “*where everyone looked after each other.*” The example “*everyone in the community raises a child*” was applied through the Potlatch ceremony, which is very powerful. All aspects of society were governed through the rules and traditions of the big house and the ceremonies practised within.

Some participants suggested that one word may not exist like “*Semaganis*” to describe community mobilisation or leadership, especially within the Kwakiutl Nation. The approach was more the cultural teaching of right versus wrong that applied within the society. It motivated the community to live by these teachings because all people living within the big house assumed responsibility for each other:

If you did something as an individual, you affected the whole Clan”.

This understanding made everyone responsible for their own actions. The whole Clan would be expected to “*pay*” for another Clan member’s mistakes or celebrations, either through action or gifts. The teachings that the Elders provided were applicable throughout life. Children were taught through regular contact and support. Today this practice is not as strong due to the loss of language and traditional understanding.

A number of participants indicated that a “one size fits all approach,” would be inappropriate. Each community experiences challenges and strengths that are unique and levels of capacity to implement community mobilisation also vary “*...community mobilisation means that we have the expertise in the community to help ourselves*”. In regards to community mobilisation from a justice and corrections perspective, the challenges identified included:

- Lack of expertise within the community to support sex offenders and other returning offenders,
- Resources and supports to help offenders build capacity within themselves to become safe and contributing members of the community; and

- Resources and supports for youthful offenders

Resources and supports designed with local needs, culture and capacity in mind will prevent additional offending and address service gaps.

Participants shared that the Potlatch ceremony was the primary traditional practice in maintaining community wellness<sup>14</sup>. A Potlatch is an important ceremonial event originating from the indigenous people of the north west coast. Significant life events were marked and captured by potlatches including the naming of a newborn child, a marriage, a death, ascension of new chiefs, a graduation, opening of a new big house, and raising of totem poles. Due to the importance of these events, the celebration could last several days and were planned months and up to a year in advance. The Potlatch was outlawed in Canada in 1920, which hindered a community's ability to practice the traditional methods of their society. It made it difficult, but the communities survived this assault and still practice the Potlatch ceremony today

#### *Examples of traditional forms of community mobilisation*

The BC First Nations practised a matriarchal system of leadership; within this system was a traditional practice of community mobilisation. This is a process whereby the women in the community provided the lead support and gave advice on many aspects of family life. Traditionally, Elders within the society who practised healthy lifestyles were looked upon for guidance and leadership. Every Elder had a role or job description within the society. Even though there were no titles, one may have had the role of policeman. These roles were defined at birth with the name that was chosen for the individual when born.

Participants shared current examples of how communities' come together to resolve issues or deal with them. The Artist's Pit was an example of how several men in one

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<sup>14</sup> <http://wiki.elearning.ubc.ca/potlatch>

community, through self-regulation, took responsibility for their actions and work product when in public. Another leadership example shared was the financing and building of a canoe for the community. These examples exhibit how culture and tradition guides community involvement and mobilises without having to dictate action or interfere with self-motivation. These are examples of community mobilisation.

Several participants at the meeting agreed that training must occur within communities directly to help support community mobilisation and that alternative training and healing programs must be recognised and supported. There are healing programs that are offered by the Hawaiians, which have been used and are appropriate to the Aboriginal communities in BC and it was emphasised that individual communities know what works best for them:

“Accountability is stronger within the community when our own people are trained and supported. If you do not know the cultural way of life this can hurt programs and initiatives.”

Many reported that community members feel more comfortable working with their “own” people. This approach tends to be more practical in comparison with a contemporary practice that involves bringing strangers into the community who do not have the cultural understanding or appreciation to work effectively with a particular community. It was also felt that community mobilisation must be approached from a ‘collective’ or holistic approach.

Participants felt that if training was offered for these workers it was essential it happen within the communities. It was also suggested that most communities would support the idea that existing frontline workers with selected skills and ability should be trained as community mobilisation workers. Most First Nation participants voiced that communities would not want new positions since frontline workers currently provide this service.

The training for the frontline workers preparing for community mobilisation should have the following elements:

- It should be designed to suit the needs and requirements of each community;
- It needs to be shared between communities when appropriate;
- The training must be selected by community, even if it is alternative training modules;
- The facilitators should come from the community itself; and
- It needs to be scheduled at appropriate times of year.

In the selection of frontline workers who would perform the community mobilisation work the following must be considered:

- Front-line workers would need to determine if they wanted to be considered for this work;
- Persons would be selected - based on a healthy lifestyle practised by the individuals;
- Assessment of activity level within the communities or community;
- The selection committee itself needs to be a group of individuals practising healthy lifestyles;
- Local youth should be part of the selection committee; and
- The workers would need to have vision and community development perspective.

“It is not just the responsibility or burden of one individual to mobilise the community.”

When asked to consider what skills were required for community mobilisation workers, participants agreed that “ability” versus “skills” is an essential trait. Ability cannot be taught, therefore it is an essential element for the effective collaboration with the community mobilisation team.

Individuals should:

- Be strong advocates;
- Be culturally aware and know their history and culture;
- Be good listeners;
- Be innovative thinkers with vision;
- Be effective communicators;
- Have strong motivational skills and assertiveness;
- Possess leadership skills;
- Be cultural - understanding of their own strengths;
- Work well in a team, and;
- Be fair and impartial.

The discussion progressed to the selection of community mobilisation team members. It was indicated that the community itself had the primary responsibility in selecting community mobilisation workers. They emphasised the importance finding individuals who lead healthy lifestyles and have integrity and credibility within the community(s).

Training for the community mobilisation teams include:

- Mediation;
- Facilitation and training;
- Effective communication; and
- Working with victims and offenders of sexual abuse cases.

When discussing the role of community leadership and how the leadership should be involved, there was consensus that Chief and Council must be involved and supportive of community mobilisation in order for it to occur. The leadership of hereditary positions and natural leaders may also be involved. However, it is essential that all leadership “*act responsibly*” by modelling healthy behaviour. Communities may want to hold leadership accountable for their actions and behaviour if they are behaving in a fashion contrary to community norms and values. Participants also agreed that grassroots support is essential in its success.

Participants were asked if there were models used to promote inter-agency involvement in community mobilisation. In response, the North Island First Nations participants shared with the group that the Inter-agency Group and The Circle Models are two examples of community mobilisation. Each model co-ordinates and facilitates networking and communication between a large number of frontline service agencies and workers on a weekly basis to discuss common goals and concerns. The model is also used to share strategies and develop new ones, collaborate on training and share funding ideas. Seventeen different groups are represented, including both on and off-reserve social service delivery workers, the RCMP and local Crown Attorney’s office, to name a few. Participants indicated that this model is very effective.

Participants were asked to consider what community mobilisation would look like in their area if given the opportunity to develop a model. They agreed that additional community

mobilisation efforts would require the establishment of teams of workers. These teams could be comprised of 2 to 7 persons from each community. This would provide flexibility to ensure that individuals did not get burned out and/or could travel to more isolated communities if and when required.

This approach works for the First Nation communities because it helps to establish accountability among the players. It is community driven not proposal driven. It is built on the principal that the end-user is the priority. Status quo is not an option - the model facilitates change and elevates issues to a place where change can occur. It is reciprocal in nature and empathetic of the needs of all those represented.

The South Island First Nations told of their inter-agency model within the South Island Health Authority. Here front line community workers share strategies and collaborate on issues impacting their communities.

The RCMP participants indicated that the Restorative Justice model is working well in their detachment. This is because other services are directly connected and housed inside the detachment offices, such as victim services. Another approach working for the First Nation communities and local RCMP are the tripartite agreements. These agreements spell out the community relationships, protocols and services that are expected. However, it was identified that RCMP cutbacks and the closing of detachment offices in the area were negatively impacting on the agreements signed with the First Nation communities.

First Nation participants voiced concern about this particular gathering in terms of the expectations it raises for new programming or funding potential to establish community mobilisation activities. It was explained that the Semaganis/community mobilisation gatherings are intended to gather information and to create opportunities for communities to network and interact. Further, this is an opportunity for government to listen and hear some of the communities' priorities. It is hoped that the learning will influence future government design of programs and services using traditional methods of program

delivery that could support community mobilisation.

The participants at this gathering expressed words of caution to the government about this particular Semaganis consultation. It has been common practice for government participants to enter Aboriginal communities to undertake consultations. In doing so, expectations are raised to the possibility of new funding to address local and specific need. Participants expressed that relationships with governments must be reciprocal in nature – the government must give back to communities when it comes in to take something – even if what they are taking is knowledge and expertise.

Participants voiced frustration that their efforts to gain more programs, services and resources often go unheard in Ottawa, sometimes taking years to respond to one proposal. This leads to mistrust and lack of enthusiasm when asked to consult on issues. However, First Nation participants at this meeting felt that this session had contributed to establishing a new network within the region that can continue to work together and collaborate on funding and training proposals for community mobilisation and other similar needs and requirements for their area.

These needs included:

- Advocate for community mobilisation programs and training resources for these communities;
- Suicide prevention training;
- First Nation crisis teams;
- Establish professional training that is sustainable in supporting community growth;
- More healing and personal growth training;
- Establishing the same level of service delivery regardless of remote and/or geographic location of communities;
- Volunteer training for victim services;
- Cultural programming;
- Advocacy support; and
- Recreational support.

## Chapter 6 - Aboriginal Urban Organisations Toronto, Ontario

### Meeting Summary

A meeting with Aboriginal organisations and agencies from Toronto, Ontario, was held to discuss community mobilisation in an urban Aboriginal context. The session considered how cultural and traditional practices influence or impact community mobilisation, and how it is approached and achieved in a city like Toronto, representative of many different Aboriginal nations.

Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit staff opened the gathering with an explanation of the Plains Cree term “*Semaganis*”. Similar terms have been found in other First Nation languages to describe a person(s) who has responsibility and/or leadership within the community to promote and facilitate community mobilisation. One participant indicated awareness to the existence of a word: Rotinainere (pronounced Lo-di-nya'-nay-lay) "He/They are good (righteous)" which described community mobilisation. The meaning behind this word speaks to the responsibility of a person whose job was to “carry the bones of the people. To never leave behind the old ones or the spirits of the new ones.’

In Toronto, there are many champions of community mobilisation and this mobilisation often arises as a result of a current or impending crisis or other important issue, some examples include the mobilisation around child welfare, poverty and the lack of an urban Aboriginal political voice in Toronto.

These efforts occur in spite of some major challenges. Impediments to community mobilisation the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) have included: the large geographic area, the need and demand placed on social service providers, competition for funding, and differing values and perspectives between agencies and specific individuals.

Participants at the workshop clearly articulated necessary components to community mobilisation in Toronto. These include:

- That board and staff of all Aboriginal agencies be trained to maintain capacity and provide effective response to community needs;



- That there be development of a council of the presidents of the various board of directors to support guide and champion community mobilisation efforts;
- That strategic planning is essential to the development and sustainability of community mobilisation; and
- That it is necessary to have the involvement and support from all levels of government.

It was summarised as:

“Our systems work but let’s integrate other systems that will help us attain self-promotion, self-government, self-care!”

The Toronto Aboriginal community is one of the largest urban Aboriginal communities in Canada. It has seen a high migration of many different nations of Aboriginal peoples. To respond to the high concentration of Aboriginal population and the cultural impact for individuals coming to the city, the Aboriginal organisations began to organise through community development or mobilisation. Often this would start with concerned citizens that would meet around issues. Early on there was a “Concerned Citizens” Committee that met regularly and mobilised around issues.

The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto was identified as one of the first Aboriginal organisations that co-ordinated community mobilisation. This Friendship Centre had been responding to specific issues that affected the Aboriginal community in Toronto and often, as a result, new Aboriginal organisations were developed to meet local needs. An example of such is the establishment of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, which was developed as a result of community mobilisation around child welfare issues.

The City of Toronto was also mentioned as a support for Aboriginal community mobilisation through their community development workers. The City of Toronto’s community development workers commenced mobilisation by connecting with Executive Directors at various Toronto Aboriginal organisations to establish a volunteer process within the organisations that would focus and build on community mobilisation.

## **Discussion Findings and Outcomes**

When asked to describe the mechanisms in bringing people together for action from a traditional/cultural perspective, participants spoke about past efforts in the Toronto Aboriginal community. These efforts were identified as catalysts to a variety of issues, program, and service needs.

When asked how issues are identified and addressed in community mobilisation, participants explained that community mobilisation within an urban setting is much different than in a reserve setting. Band Council structure and *Indian Act* restrictions within First Nation communities result in different approaches to organising and mobilising a community than what one would see for urban Aboriginal organisations. However, most participants agreed that a common community vision must be established first which will focus issues and cope with potential barriers regardless of geographic location.

A number of challenges to community mobilisation were identified including lack of long term vision, financial support and collaboration. Comprehensive planning and the development of a vision are necessary to this kind of effort. Numerous funding issues were raised including the lack of multi-year funding agreements. Also, competition between agencies for funding was raised and it was expressed that when several agencies compete for the same money, the money often gets divided up between a number of organisations, resulting in ineffectual programming.

Workshop participants agreed that community mobilisation requires the support of all levels of government, including the cities. An enormous level of co-operation and involvement of Aboriginal organisations is also essential. If there is a strategic plan, responsibilities can be more effectively identified increasing its opportunities for success.

Some participants voiced concern about the apathy that seems to exist in Aboriginal organisations within Toronto:

“It is a challenge for organisations to work together or even to get people

or the right people to meet on an issue”

There has been discussion among Toronto Aboriginal organisations about having the presidents of the various boards of directors meeting on a regular basis to discuss issues. However, consistent participation of board members is problematic. Many Aboriginal agencies experience a high turn over of board members thus impacting on the capacity of a particular board to contribute to the process. To address this issue, training was deemed a priority.

One community mobilisation model discussed was the Aboriginal community of Thunder Bay. The City of Thunder Bay brought together all of the organisations working within child welfare to address child poverty. The issue was championed by three or four community leaders and backed by a City Counsellor who was very visible and active. Due to the size of Thunder Bay and their cultural homogeneity, they have been successful in their efforts in addressing child poverty.

In Toronto, another model recently organised is the Aboriginal People’s Council (APC). The Council has about 1,000 individual members and does not represent organisations. However, recently it has been asked to represent some organisations on a funding issue. The APC is a forum and political body that is reviewing geographic areas and representation outside of downtown Toronto. If the Council is successful it could be an effective arbitrator that may be able to influence policy, legislation and resources for Aboriginal community distribution.

The Aboriginal People’s Council of Toronto is working on developing a charter, citizenship criteria, a dispute resolution process, and roles and responsibilities to safeguard individuals and agencies. It may be a centralised source that will inform people and bring issues together. The Council was an experiment at the time of this gathering and was working on consensus processes and election.

One participant observed that in order for the Aboriginal People’s Council of Toronto to

be successful and effective, it must hear from the grassroots Aboriginal community. Culturally and process-wise, the Council leadership needs to have community forums in an appropriate setting to hear concerns. Focus groups may be one way of gathering information, but having tea with community members could be much more effective.

Another example of community mobilisation within the City of Toronto occurred when the city amalgamated. Through the efforts of some community leaders, the city affirmed and acknowledged the Aboriginal rights to self-government. They have also staffed an Aboriginal Affairs position that will start to address issues of health, education and child poverty within the Aboriginal community.

When asked if politics within Toronto's Aboriginal organisations stays separate from service delivery, participants felt that it was more an issue of personality conflict that hindered collaboration on issues and between agencies than politics. Currently it is estimated that over 50% of Aboriginal organisations within Toronto are independent and do not use or have affiliation with an established Aboriginal political group. Some of the First Nation organisations are attempting to be 'representative' of their citizens living in the city; however this has not been a practical approach and does not function well.

It was suggested that there is a need for a two-tier system, where a political and advocacy group that does not deliver services functions apart from the agencies that deliver programs and services. If agencies come together they can discuss issues of common concern, such as bidding processes, competition for funds, core services and community planning.

Key requirements for community mobilisation can be summarised as:

- Effective role models need to walk the talk;
- Community mobilisation facilitators require analytical and writing skills;
- Strategic planning is an essential part of community mobilisation;
- Youth should be mentored and shadow Board member positions;
- Presidents of Boards need to meet and collaborate;
- Board training is essential;
- Common goals and vision for the community is required;

- Multi-year funding is very important to support community mobilisation;
- Engage all levels of government in community mobilisation;
- Communities must take control of funding criteria; and
- Aboriginal agencies need to decide priorities and interests.

At the conclusion of the discussion regarding community mobilisation efforts in Toronto, participants were asked to describe the skill requirements of community mobilisation workers. Participants indicated that such persons should possess skills similar to that of an Executive Director. It is important that they be able to work with a variety of stakeholders, that they be skilled in community development, human resources, strategic thinking and facilitation. They must possess honesty and have credibility and influence within the community.

Participants indicated that the processes used to build capacity (training, recruitment) must be culturally appropriate and should be provided by local expertise. Utilising traditional approaches will ensure that ethics and values govern how community mobilisation is approached.

When discussing the role of leadership and how leaders should be involved in community mobilisation, the group agreed that *natural leadership* needs to be acknowledged and supported. However, organising a council of Presidents of Board of Directors would be a starting point in having elected leadership involved in community mobilisation. If all the organisations were involved in this process it could create an environment of solidarity and consensus for the organisations and agencies. Additional ideas concerning the membership of leaders included Elders, youth and members of the two-spirited community. One participant suggested that individuals could be acknowledged as leaders based on their contribution to the community, years of service, trust by the community, or a combination of factors.

Participants indicated the responsibilities for leadership included:

- Oversight;
- Process;
- The addressing of community needs;

- Mechanisms to achieve consensus;
- Ensuring inclusiveness; and
- Ensuring transparency

Participants were asked to define a leader and what kinds of skills they should possess. Participants suggested that individuals who are leaders may be elected and are conscious of the highest good of all. *“In terms of the Creator their job is to service the community.”* Leaders should be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, be public speakers, have interpersonal skills, communicate effectively and be articulate. They need to have vision and clear understanding of what needs to be done within the community with no political agenda. They must be unbiased, altruistic and realistic. Individuals should be able to take criticism, build consensus and have a sense of justice as well as possess mediation skills. They should know when to back down and detach themselves from issues, assume a role of leadership and know when to delegate. They should have faith in the community and have personal credibility and commitment. Their skills should include business planning, marketing, and executive administration. They must be able to work with the local community in an honest way and be consistent. The group agreed that leadership is really about having a spokesperson representing the community.

A mistake that commonly occurs is the exclusion of Aboriginal community members from various forums and consultations. Often these events are scheduled during business hours on weekdays. Those who are employed by the Aboriginal agencies, or whom access programs and services at those agencies, are informed and are better able to attend. However, this scheduling practice often excludes those who are not day-to-day consumers of the local Aboriginal agencies and a significant portion of the urban Aboriginal population is excluded from important community events.

The Aboriginal community of Winnipeg was cited as a community that has enjoyed some success in community mobilisation, despite their challenges. For many years, the inner-city Aboriginal population lived in constant crisis. However, the urban Aboriginal community focused on establishing a vision for itself and was subsequently able to mobilise itself. Today; they have enhanced infrastructure, programs, services and

increased community participation on issues of local concern.

When asked how the Toronto Aboriginal community resolved the challenges faced in achieving community collaboration, some participants identified criteria that were important in resolving challenges. It was identified that the leadership, as well as community membership, need to have the ability to be self-reflective and not ‘just preach honesty, but practice it’ as well. There is a need to debate issues publicly while maintaining respect for differing opinions or positions. The values of traditional Aboriginal justice were also cited as important to the process of addressing challenges in community mobilisation in that they help maintain loyalty and unity within the community:

With respect to funding community mobilisation, one participant spoke of frustration with current funding arrangements that do not permit budget lines to cover the cost of community mobilisation:

“Successful partnerships are based on what people bring, but more importantly, champions. Often success is based on a facilitation role. Often the people at the table who are doing the planning process are too busy to do the facilitation.”

Organisations require the flexibility within budgets for community facilitation and mobilisation. Participants indicated that government must be more responsive and aware of the growing needs within the urban Aboriginal settings. Government funding historically has proven itself divisive for Aboriginal communities to move forward by creating effective policy.

If community mobilisation efforts are established and funded, resources must be long-term to allow the goals of the strategic plan to be met and implemented. All agreed that community mobilisation, whether as an activity or position, must be permanent in the community. Community mobilisation is considered on-going and dynamic. Participants also acknowledged that community mobilisation should have the ability to respond to situations as they arise as well as building longer-term efforts.

Inevitably, the topic of accountability and measurement was discussed. Participants strongly agreed that community mobilisation workers and infrastructure should either be a sole entity unto itself or attached to existing organisations.

When measuring success some participants felt that it will be important to measure community mobilisation efforts by a number of standards. These include cultural and traditional practices, input from community members, attendance and participation, and increased collaborations between Aboriginal agencies/organisations. Other conventional evaluation tools may be part of measuring success; these are quantitative and qualitative studies, yearly evaluations and maintaining records of participation and action:

“The underlying principle is the pure spiritual principle of justice and this is above family, nations and money. It is not an abstract principle because it affects every area of our lives. It is not to be confused with what passes for justice out there today. Then people will come to rely on it and recognise that this community has a basis of justice.”

When looking to establish capacity for community mobilisation initiatives, participants felt that community mobilisation within Toronto is complex. It will be important to reach Aboriginal people who do not normally engage with the community, address gaps in service and establish priorities in areas such as cultural retention and education.

Participants then moved to suggesting possible models of community mobilisation. As Toronto has a large Aboriginal consumer base, in a large geographic area, building community mobilisation capacity will require a number of workers. One model that was suggested was to organise by direction – north, south, east, and west. This takes into account a cultural approach in organisation and provides a strategic response in meeting the demands outside the core of the city. The Aboriginal People’s Council of Toronto uses this model and has male and female representation for each direction.

Another model recommended was that community mobilisation workers should include one man, one woman, one youth, one Elder and a two-spirited person. All participants agreed that a centralised co-ordinator to manage the other community mobilisation workers would be essential. Workers could be located in satellite organisations, which



target the four directions.

## **Chapter 7 - Blackfoot Nation Calgary, Alberta**

### **Meeting Summary**

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit met with several individual Blackfoot and Peigan First Nations and other community participants (within agencies and the private sector) to discuss community mobilisation from a traditional perspective. The forum was organised through the Old Man River Cultural Centre, which determined that the meeting would be structured in a traditional circle format. To prepare for the meeting, participants from the government attended a training session on the rules and process, which would be used to facilitate the meeting.

Participants at the meeting shared stories, traditions and cultural approaches to community mobilisation. Understanding the challenges of the translation of Aboriginal languages to English and the de-colonisation effects that created different levels of thinking within communities was discussed. Stories shared within the session illustrated how community structure, through societies, and the transfer rights and use of ceremonies, are the most important in supporting community mobilisation.

Existing community models that help women to survive substance abuse problems were identified, such as the youth programming offered by the Chickadee Society, the RCMP weeklong traditional camp, and the women's program. These models were seen as examples as supportive of community mobilisation as traditional teachings incorporated into their foundations.

An important message from participants was the reinforcement of traditional customs, practices and teachings. These, plus ceremonies, and active participation in the community will lead to community mobilisation.

### **Setting the Stage**

Many participants attended the gathering representing the Blackfoot and Peigan First

Nations A broad representation of these communities were present and included Elders, community workers, law enforcement and private sector representatives.

The Calgary session was unique to the other gatherings in that an orientation day was held preceding the actual two-day workshop. Traditional teachers from Blackfoot communities who provided culturally appropriate protocols that encouraged a non-confrontational approach during the two-day workshop facilitated the orientation day. Some of the teachings and discussions revolved around the structure of Blackfoot Societies, the circle and its protocols, the history of Blackfoot/Peigan culture and its interpretation in contemporary times.

The orientation day goals and objectives are reported in the *Draft Operational Plan/A Non-Confrontational Approach to Facilitation - Exploring Aboriginal Practices the CS Facilitation Model* (drafted March 2004). This report details the historical origins of the Blackfoot/Peigan Nations, integrating European foundations that would facilitate discussion and consensus in an appropriate framework. The model that was discussed detailed values that support a non-confrontational approach to reaching consensus through circle structure process or facilitation approaches. The circle process identifies key players within the circle, with assigned specific roles. Some of these players are host, co-hosts, commentator (responsible for recording the meeting), Elders, as well as facilitators.

Also explained were the roles and differences between female and male ceremonialists, use of the bundle (interpreted as the workshop topic or issue), details on the seating arrangement of the host, Elders and advisors (i.e. the four directions), and finally, an explanation of how to introduce the bundle (topic), discuss the issues, and the use of rounds of discussions (up to three rounds). All of these components are used traditionally in a community mobilisation process for the Blackfoot people.

## **Discussion Findings and Outcomes**

To begin discussion on community mobilisation from a traditional Blackfoot perspective

a process was established (based on Blackfoot culture and tradition) and adapted to accommodate the questions about community mobilisation. Participants had the opportunity to hear about research conducted by the Blackfoot Cultural Centre. This research informed the participants about traditional processes and practices used to build consensus, decision making, mobilisation, and for sharing information among Blackfoot community members. The topics for the first day of discussion were divided into Cultural Who? Cultural What (interpretation)? and Cultural How?

When discussing ‘Cultural Who’ within Blackfoot tradition, it was explained that the foundation teachings of ‘equality for all things and all beings’ was an important part of the decision making process for this nation. This is contrary to western beliefs, where mankind consider themselves to be superior beings.

The following example was given:

“In the white society, God gave dominion of land, plants and animals to man. So God gave dominion to man. The concept of dominion was that man was superior to all plants and animals.”

For the Blackfoot people, all creation is equal - from the rocks, to animals to man. When decisions were made within the community, it was the responsibility of mankind to take into consideration all matters and things around him. After European contact, the Blackfoot society worked with two practices (1) language and (2) oral. The oral system uses of ceremonies to educate and provides tools for governance. The oral system also empowers ceremonies through the use of songs. The songs were an oral representation and documentation of authority and used as a manner of storing and retrieving information. It provided authority to those who learned the songs, which were difficult. It also gave ownership over an issue, a decision to be acted upon. For example, if individuals wanted to change society or join a certain society they would have to learn the song from that society. Once the person had successfully learned the song through ceremony they would be accepted into that society.

De-colonisation contributed to what the Blackfoot traditionalists refer to as “elite

thinkers”. These are Blackfoot members who have been educated through western institutions and have either forgotten or were never taught traditional ways (ceremonies, practices, and tools). This has led to what the group referred to as “third-class” members in the community. There are two other types of thinkers: the “white man thinker”, who believes in the dominion of God where he is superior to man and man is superior to all others and the “Indian thinker”, who believes that everything is equal (the animals, the environment, the human beings). So each of these three different types of thinkers - the white man thinker, the Indian thinker and the elite thinker each have a different view of how the world works and evolves.

The conversation then moved to Cultural What? Which was explained as an example of how things can be misinterpreted. The interpretation of the Blackfoot language into English can result in a meaning different than intended. One of the examples provided was the interpretation of the word Elder. From a western perspective, the Blackfoot people were told that Elders are generally role models with a knowledge of life and are sixty-five years of age and older. This, interpreted from the Blackfoot perspective, would mean that you are looking for someone who is the envy of the community, a teacher and sixty-five years old. However, from the Blackfoot perspective, an Elder is someone who is, or was a bundle holder<sup>15</sup>, they are consultant or associates and there are no age restrictions – a very different perspective from the western interpretation. Therefore from a Blackfoot perspective, *“language is very important, especially in interpreting what we do and how we do it”*.

The Blackfoot example used to describe the Cultural How? related to the interpretation of money. The Blackfoot looked at the physical aspects of money - the meaning never related to monetary value as it does in western society. In the Blackfoot language the words associated with consumerism have not been translated to English. The understanding of concepts like “stay within your budget” is foreign.

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<sup>15</sup> Bundle Holder is someone who has earned the right to carry medicine, a pipe and other ceremonial tools to support ceremonies and/or healing,

When speaking about processes used for mobilisation, participants spoke about a facilitation process designed from traditional practices and used for workshops on sectoral issues, such as housing, justice, homelessness, etc.

The significance of ceremony and tradition can not be emphasised enough. To this day, ceremonies are used to support and strengthen particular initiatives. Participants shared some of these ceremonies The Sundance ceremony, was described as a means for people to gather to strengthen their beliefs in their Creator, language, actions, songs and the transfer of rights. There would be further guidance from Beaver Bundles<sup>16</sup> in the fall and spring on where to set up camps and how to do business. Disputes were settled with the help of Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundles. Gatherings would be structured with guidance on where to sit at meetings, where a tepee should be camped, which circle and beside whom. This created order in a circle.

In contemporary times, there are common practices used in ceremonies that determine how workshops are conducted. A floor plan of a tepee is used, all participants are on the floor plan, the location of the bundle or topic is determined, as are where to place the male and female bundles and the door at which the Elders sit is decided. There are hosts and support people that assist with the bundles. Common tools are used with these at ceremonies including tobacco, pipes and drums. This model creates ownership of the information gathered by participants. It also provides an environment where people are comfortable to express their viewpoints.

For this gathering, seating positions were arranged as described in the tepee floor plan to facilitate the discussion on community mobilisation. Specific roles were described, such as:

- The facilitator will facilitate the discussion and gather consensus;
- The mandate will ensure participants stay on topic;
- The Elders will make sure the process is followed properly;
- The Thunder Pipe owners can speak on your behalf, they provide support; and
- The participants must stay on topic/with the bundle throughout the session.

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<sup>16</sup> Also known as tobacco, water pipe or water bundles

Participants were advised that the process for the discussion included two rounds of discussions for deliberating solutions for community mobilisation. Once the information was gathered, there would be a ceremony to transfer the responsibility of information to the receiving party.

In keeping with the oral traditions of the Blackfoot nations, stories are utilised to relate important customs, beliefs and traditions. The following story relates a number of very important teachings that speak to community mobilisation:

“In a ceremony, or a social function in the Blackfoot customs and beliefs, the Elders would start with funny stories. That is how we start setting the stage. And they’ll soon begin with legends such as Napi stories, Kut-tio-yis. They would make remarks and comments pertaining to the story, for they would use that story as a reference. These stories may contain the concept of Creation, Order, Morals and Values and Bundles and Society. For this reason it helps the visitors or participants focus on the topics and discussion, also for the ceremony itself.”

One such story shared at this gathering was:

“Napi was invited into the mice skull, but before he went into the mice skull he was asking his little brothers if he can join them for a song and dance. In the skull everybody heard someone talking outside. So they sent one person, one mouse to go out and see who it was. The one of the mice went out and Napi asked that mouse if he can join the dance. Then when the mouse went back and told the others that Napi wants to join our dance. The all discussed if Napi should participate in the dance. The community people referred back to the leader and said, you go out and you tell him what we want. So the leader went out and told him Napi, ‘you’re too big to come into the Pow Wow, but we would like you to come in’ – then Napi begged again to go in. So the leader went back in and told the participants Napi wants to come in. So they all had a discussion, and in that discussion all the mice agreed for Napi to come in. When that happened, they all agreed to send mice and do magic, allow through magic for Napi to come in.. So they all agreed. So they went out and the mice did magic and Napi came into the dance. After, when he came into the dance, then they set rules for him.. They told him not to sleep. They had their Pow Wow for four days. And Napi agreed. He didn’t argue or disagree. However, on the fourth night Napi went to sleep, and because the mice believe in their customs, they had to go and eat the hair off Napi.”

The story above relates to community mobilisation from a traditional perspective as it speaks to leadership and the value of collective leadership. It reinforces that Blackfoot culture must be understood, practised and respected by all. It speaks of acceptance of others into their customs and practises. The mice had a collective agreement for Napi to join their dance, with restrictions that he accepted, to take part in the dance. The mice did not have one leader, but everyone agreed for the protocol on decision-making and selected one mouse to speak on their behalf. The mice respected their own values, customs and beliefs and expected that an outsider would also show the same respect.

Traditionally, the Blackfoot people understood their place in the community as series of “interrelated relationships”. It was understood that everyone had his or her special place in the community, because everyone is important. Young children at an early age were taught these values, practises and responsibilities. Everyone contributed to the community and the nation. Responsibilities were essential: everyone had their duties, even the little ones. The ceremony would take place so that everyone kept focussed on his or her task.

Another story portraying a different type of community mobilisation;

“If a little child wants to join the Nimapi society, and belong, the child will go to his parents or one of the members in that society or the older ones and say ‘I want to join the society’. Well, in turn that little child will go to his parent. But he will get a supporter, one of the older members and the supporter will go talk to the parent and will say ‘your child wants to join the society’. So if the parent is willing to support the child, by all means the child will go into a society. And that is how it was practised.”

Blackfoot people also had ‘town criers’ that were used to mobilise the community. This person would go out into the community and announce ceremonies and dances. Soon community members would appear food in hand, and attend whatever event that had been announced.

Traditional games were also an important part of community mobilisation, but in a very



subtle manner. Games in this nation reinforced the benefits of teamwork and helped build strong social skills. The importance of abiding by the rules of the game and leadership were also taught. All of the lessons – teamwork, social skills, leadership and respect of rules, are necessary and invaluable skills and knowledge when involved in community mobilisation. In these modern times, young people play in isolation (i.e. video games, internet) and are missing the value of these lessons.

In the same vein, participants spoke of the challenges in advancing community mobilisation. Increasingly, Blackfoot youth are living off reserve and do not have ready access to the important social structures that historically provided a strong foundation for the youth. For example, the Blackfoot Nation has societies, such as the Brave Dog Society. These societies served as training grounds for youth whereby important teachings were passed along. Without access to these societies, or the teachings they provide, Blackfoot youth have lost their teachings, ceremonies, practices and responsibilities. As well, the youth have lost respect for the societies.

Communication within the community is another challenge to community mobilisation. In the old days, people used to visit one another:

“There were paths from house to house where the people would visit. Now it’s just the dogs that make those trails. Narrow little paths; nobody visits anymore. People who don’t have dogs, they’re even a little narrower for the mice.”

The sharing of information is a much more effective means of communication. Caution must be exercised to ensure that people are not being told what to do. Another new challenge to communication related to ignorance about Blackfoot culture. It is vital that those coming from outside this community take the time to be educated in Blackfoot cultural approaches - this will promote a greater understanding of the issues.

One participant shared a story that emphasised not only the importance of learning about cultural approaches of the community that you are entering, but it also illustrates how different thinking (elite, Indian, and traditional) can influence a ceremony. The story is as follows: As a new employee to his office, he was asked to go out and meet with First

Nation communities on issues related to resources on the land. He went to a community in central BC and was able to meet with the Chief of the community. As the meeting began, he pulled out a pen and paper to start taking notes. The Chief asked what he was doing; the participant indicated that he wanted to take notes to understand what the Chief was saying. The Chief responded by saying, *“you don’t need to do that - I’m speaking from the heart, we don’t have to write things down”*. The participant thought this is a good way of doing business and put his notebook away. A couple of hours later, he had a meeting with another First Nation community not far from where the first one was. To be respectful, he left his pen and papers and business cards in the car and went into the band office for the meeting, thinking he was going to have the same conversation. As he entered the meeting, there were seven or eight people around a table, with laptops. When he sat down, everyone gave him business cards. However, he had nothing to give them, since he had left his items in the car. The group felt that he was showing disrespect to them as a result. *“So in both cases I entered the ceremony, if you will, almost unprepared and not knowing what to expect, and totally different situation”*. This situation shows the traditional approach and elite thinker approach, which exist in many of the First Nation communities today.

One participant spoke about the *“sense of community,”* or lack thereof. When she was growing up she remembers people coming over to help with the horses and then staying to share stories with one another. People pitched in to help with the cattle branding. The strong sense of responsibility and community existed a few years earlier. Today the challenge is getting the youth to regain the community spirit and obligation, to entrench the values and teachings of traditional practice. This would help reduce crime within the Blackfoot communities today.

Progressing from how things were traditionally done to what works today the participants shared some models that are effective.

In the urban setting, the Aboriginal Liaison for the Calgary Police is introducing sentencing circles, along the traditional lines, into provincial courts. *“What works well is the way parallels are drawn between the court system we have now and the circles.”* The

program helps to reintegrate participants into traditional culture. This creates ownership back to the communities and instils pride.

The Chickadee Society, which has a program for young people, was acknowledged as a program that works in helping to get children more involved in the Blackfoot culture. The program is seen as a mobilising effort to support the transfer of culture, ceremony, values and tradition to the youth of today.

Another example of a model that works is the use of an alternative dispute resolution process in child welfare cases. Judges participate in the process and sit across from parents; they have an opportunity to address the issues together. It brings the parties face to face on equal ground.

The Family Services department conducted a survey and determined that, over a 5 year period, 144 women died as a result of alcohol related deaths, including suicide. As a result, the women developed a support program for women to teach skills that would help keep them away from alcohol and drug addictions.

When discussing solutions for community mobilisation, participants stressed that it is something that needs to be taught by “our own people”. The traditional role of Blackfoot people is that they are responsible for teaching their own children and grandchildren, therefore, it is important that outsiders are not hired to teach. When the community does the teaching, in particular by the parents, other important cultural competencies are developed. For example, Indian names are given, culture and ceremonies are taught and parents are more fully engaged. Therefore, parents are the original community mobilisers for their children.

Another suggestion was to mobilise around the concept of “respect”. *“Respect starts from you and you have to respect yourself. And in order to forgive a person, you have to forgive yourself.”* Sharing stories and respecting other opinions helps to understand one another and helps to mobilise one to help others or share ideas among the community.

All family members must be involved to make this work. More attention is needed on communication and socialisation with one another.

The outside societies (beyond the community) must acknowledge traditional persons who have gone through the teachings and have transferred rights as equal to a university student. Acknowledging this respect is an important step to understanding the Blackfoot teachings.

One participant recommended that providing cultural-based curriculum to schools off reserve would help teaching and sensitivity of Blackfoot traditions and culture. Students who live outside of the reserve do not get very much exposure to the Blackfoot customs and this could change with more curriculum development. It was also recommended that programs be designed and implemented by the community. It must be community based.

Respect is not strictly an internal, on-reserve value to be considered. It also relates to off-reserve and non-Aboriginal institutions. As well, western perspectives place little value, and offer little recognition, to the Aboriginal way of teaching and experience. This lack of recognition is a blatant disrespect for the Aboriginal education system.

In the same vein, culture-based curriculum is also missing from mainstream schools. Students, particularly those living off-reserve miss out not only on the manner in which Aboriginal societies teach, but what they are taught as well. These are very significant issues for consideration as the Aboriginal leaders of the next generation do not have the full appreciation of their culture and tradition which ultimately impacts on a community's ability to mobilise.

## **Chapter 8 - From talk to action: Testing the Community Mobilisation Process in the Community**

In May 2002, Solicitor General Canada's (now Public Safety Canada) Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit received a proposal from Hollow Water First Nation to incorporate a community mobilisation facilitator into their current Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) process.

The objectives of the project were:

- To staff a community mobilisation facilitator position for a period of twenty-four months to work in the Hollow Water First Nation, the surrounding Métis communities and, where possible, other communities in the Southeast Area Tribal Council.
- To establish mechanisms and protocols among the various service agencies and programs to improve the co-ordination of services to community members.
- To work with the community's leadership to develop approaches in support of collective action.
- To examine gaps in programming and service that would need to be filled in order to provide a more holistic approach to dealing with problems in the community.
- To provide regular opportunities for community agencies to meet, discuss issues of mutual concern and develop, where possible, joint approaches to community issues.
- To provide regular opportunities for the community to meet agencies, as a collective, and have input into the direction those agencies are taking.
- To provide regular reports to the Solicitor General about the activities, successes and obstacles faced by the community mobilisation facilitator.

In August 2002 a funding agreement was put into place with Southeast Child and Family Services to support the implementation and evaluation of a community mobilisation facilitator in Hollow Water First Nation. Southeast Child and Family Services was specifically chosen as the organisation to manage the contribution agreement instead of Hollow Water First Nation to allow the facilitator the latitude to work with all groups and organisations without any potential political interference. Hollow Water First Nation supported the process through passing a band council resolution.

The proposed work-plan included looking existing services and then considering how these could work more effectively together. Visits and one-on-one meetings were

planned as well as the development of an inventory of community programs and services.

Meetings were intended to take place on a regular basis, sometimes as a large group, but usually in smaller working groups. These meetings were to inform each other of activities, share information, resources and training, to search for and fill gaps in services in the community, to discuss common issues and concerns; and to facilitate more partnerships. After several meetings, it was decided that the focus would shift to where the community could leave collectively over the next year.

It was acknowledged that community gatherings and feasts are important ways for the community to celebrate and honour new partnerships and new beginnings. Community gatherings were planned for every six months to share progress with the community and give the community the opportunity to propose new or improved ways of dealing with issues.

The community mobilisation facilitator also had the responsibility to meet with key partners in the youth and criminal justice systems to explain his/her role in the community and to seek support for improved relationships between the community and the systems. The facilitator was responsible for maintaining a relationship with other key partners over the course of the project and report, on a regular basis, about the nature of those relationships.

Within six months of the start of this project, the community mobilisation facilitator was tasked with meeting with participants of the surrounding Métis communities to explore the possibility of improved collaboration among those communities and the Hollow Water First Nation.

### **The Process**

To make this truly community-based, the initiative was given an Anishinabe name and was based from the Oki chi ta Society to enhance community wellness in Hollow Water. The program was called the Osh ka bai wis Program. 'Osh ka bai wis' is a person in training, an apprentice in ceremonial protocol. It was thought that this way of being and doing

was authentic empowerment for both individuals and organisations. The activities of this initiative were guided by the spirit of this understanding.

To begin, informal meetings were held with band councillors to offer support for their leadership roles in different portfolios. Meetings were also held with program directors to inform them of the initiative and determine their goals. Mapping community resources was also undertaken to determine resources and to be better able to identify gaps.

It should be noted that because this was a new initiative that had not been formally done previously, there was no clear path to follow and the process was somewhat organic. It was determined that conversation was required during which participants would jointly explore how and in what direction to proceed.

Contacts were developed and relationships fostered with organisations outside the community including Justice Canada, Correctional Service Canada, Manitoba Justice, Aboriginal Business Development Canada, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the Aboriginal Gang Initiative, East Manitoba Sports, and the Provincial Department of Education – Frontier School Division. The purpose of the initial discussions was to improve networking and relationships. As time passed, a strategic partnership was formed with Manitoba Justice, allowing for consultation on the new *Youth Criminal Justice Act* as well as an agreement to conduct sweatlodge ceremonies twice per month at a youth correctional centre.

There were also activities that were undertaken to promote involvement and motivation towards community wellness. Such activities included the annual Black Island Days community camp and an annual community gathering for ceremonial fasting.

The Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) process was utilised as a base to move out into the local community. The idea was to ensure that CHCH was strong, had local support and was able to make connections with other service providers both in Hollow Water and the surrounding communities. For more information about the CHCH process

see *“The Four Circles of Hollow Water”* or *“A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Hollow Water’s Community Holistic Circle Healing Process”*.

It was thought that the outcome of this could be a society or organisation that would generate revenue to support local economic and social initiatives such as CHCH wilderness therapy camps or training components of CHCH on a fee for service basis. To that end, CHCH was incorporated during this initiative to allow the organisation to generate revenue by training others and to plan for the future.

As the project progressed there were presentations on the creation story, from an Anishinabe perspective, held at the school and youth were taught how harmonious existence was incorporated into healthy relationships between people and the environment. Other school presentations included the history of the Wanipigow community.

One of the examples of community mobilisation that occurred during this initiative was the response to a significant school absenteeism issue. Meetings were held with the principal, teachers, parents and community members to develop a plan to deal with the issue.

A public meeting was held with over 600 people in attendance. Following this meeting, there was a school/community leadership meeting at which point an intervention team was developed. This team was tasked with meeting every week with students, parents and service providers to work towards solutions to misbehaviour or to support positive action. The intervention team had participants from Hollow Water as well as the three surrounding Métis communities.

One of the outcomes of this response was the development of a course for students designed by parents and community members. This course requires the attendance of students who had been suspended for absenteeism, in order to gain readmission to school. The goal of the course was to provide youth with an opportunity to learn from the



experience and to turn a negative situation into a positive one.

Various activities were undertaken both within the community and at the school to allow people the opportunity to participate in cultural activities and ceremonies. Many of these activities were aimed at youth to prevent crime, promote cultural understanding and to strengthen their knowledge of themselves as Anishnabe people. This knowledge and understanding will help the youth of today become future leaders of their people.

A local Justice Steering Committee was developed comprised of eight members. A local RCMP member who had previously participated on a justice committee provided advice and guidance. This committee was set up in response to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* to provide meaningful consequences to the local youth that were charged with offences. The process involved victims, offenders, parents, police and any others who may have been affected by the crime. The youth that committed the crime would have to apologise face-to-face with the person(s) harmed and some other form of sanction such as restitution or community service would also be given. There would be a one-month period to deal with the consequences of the action (crime) and if the plan was not followed, the youth would have to report back to the committee. This committee had members from Hollow Water and the surrounding Métis communities.

Community meetings that were held as a result of the community mobilisation process led to other ideas such as community conferences, group parenting workshops, a parent support group, obtaining a social worker for the school, and having on-site day care at school. It also identified the necessity for a community survey to determine other needs that existed. As well, individual meetings were held with community members to determine interest for the development of Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP) as a manner in which to promote crime prevention.

Links were also made with Aboriginal political organisations such as the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Southern Chiefs Organisation and Southeast Resource Development Council. It was to inform them about the work of the Community mobilisation workers

and to discuss what is being done to move forward the recommendations put forward by the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry implementation commission.

Over the course of the community mobilisation initiative, there were a number of workshops and conferences. Some provided the opportunity for front-line workers to develop new skills while others provided a forum for community members to share their expertise with their fellow citizens. Both types of information sharing were useful.

Some of the workshops and conferences included:

- A suicide prevention workshop for the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, health, Community Holistic Circle Healing and Child and Family Services staff.
- Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope training; and
- The National Indigenous Sex Abuse Conference. CHCH presented twice a day for three days and responded to many questions and requests for information at this gathering.

## Conclusion

A community mobilisation facilitator needs to be involved with the long-term development of a community. The person needs to be able to empower community members to take action and to own the process regardless of how slow or fast it moves. The person needs to have the trust of community members and this is something that can only be established over time. If the trust is there, people are more willing to move in a particular direction.

It is impossible to separate community mobilisation from cultural awareness, leadership or advocacy, as these are pieces that make up the greater whole. A focus has to be on the youth to ensure that they have the tools and the confidence to take their communities forward and that they know who they are as Aboriginal people. There will be many stumbling blocks along the way but this should not be seen as an impediment to progress. Part of the mobilisation process is to help individuals, organisations and the whole community to develop capacity to effectively address the challenges in implementing community mobilisation and to provide support when it is needed, work through problems and to assist them in moving forward when things are difficult.

One essential priority is to ensure that people have information. While some information may be available, people may have challenges in accessing this information, as such, it is the responsibility of the community mobiliser to access and share that information. This can be accomplished in a number of fashions: community newsletter, local radio, community meetings, or speaking with individuals in their homes. It does not matter what mechanism is used to inform people, all that matters is that people receive and understand the information.

Accountability is often an issue in Aboriginal communities. People want others to be accountable but fail to see their part in the larger picture. There is often a lack of understanding of policies and programs. This makes it difficult for programs to be accountable to the community. This undermines people's feelings of safety and security.

This is an area where a community mobilisation facilitator could make a difference.

Despite the fact that every community is unique, there are some common requirements of a community mobilisation facilitator. This person must:

- Understand administration to be able to deal with band councils, provincial governments and the federal government;
- Know and understand family dynamics to determine the natural leaders as well as the people who want to see and will support positive change;
- Be able to keep people informed, using whatever processes that work in the community; and
- Understand the interpersonal relationships and the family dynamics that exist - both health and unhealthy