



**Joining Together for the Well-being of
Métis Children, Families and Communities:
Community Dialogue on the Métis Service Delivery Framework**

Focus Group #3 – North East, Region 7
Quality Inn Northern Grand, 9830 100th Ave, Fort St John
Wednesday October 5th 2011

Key Findings:

What is your vision for healthy Métis children and youth, families, communities and service agencies?

- Children and Youth:

Participants at the Fort St John focus group noted that bullying needs to stop, and that children and youth need safe spaces in which to speak, act, and grow. Healthy Métis children and youth must be able to access a good education and have opportunities to connect with Elders. Participants also advised that children and youth need to be listened to and not judged.

- Families:

Unconditional love is a central theme for Métis families. Participants explained that this means sticking together, expressing love every day, and never giving up on each other. Healthy Métis families build confidence and strength in their children through love, support and encouragement. Participants also stated that healthy Métis families need grandmothers and the stories of Elders to grow and learn.

- Communities:

Those attending the Fort St John focus group spoke of the importance of Métis communities coming together, being non-discriminatory, and having spaces for inclusive gatherings, storytelling, education and specific cultural events. Healthy Métis communities can act as a support system for young families, and can help teach children and youth about prevention and social issues.



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- Service agencies:

Participants stressed that service agencies need to be non-judgmental and non-discriminatory spaces. Métis culture needs to be a part of service delivery through both practice and programming; participants considered that a Métis agency would be best positioned to deliver this component. Workers in service agencies should be supportive, helpful and kind to the Métis children, youth and families they serve.

Leading Practices and Lessons Learned

- Language Lessons, Northern Lights College & Métis Offices of Fort St. John and Dawson Creek

Language lessons are being offered in both communities that include a Cree and Michif component that is being taught through the implementation of a “connection box” kit from the United Way. The program is inclusive and opened to all ages. Current participation includes a mixed group including both youth and elders. Participants noted that while some youth are interested in learning their language it was the trust relationships fostered with the elders that increased participation. One contributor noted that once you get the grandparents involved and they trust the work you are doing, they would bring their grandkids to the classes and then those kids would take the language back to the community and increase awareness even further. Valuable outcomes from learning Michif are numerous and include the sharing of culture, fostering a sense of pride, empowerment and a feeling of acknowledgement for Métis people. Implementation is possible in other locations and participants would like to see this happening within School District #59 but the district has been resistant. In order for language programming to be successful fluent speakers who are interested in teaching need to come forward or be identified and a network of other fluent speakers needs to be established to support the language teachers.

Indicators for Success

Indicators allow organizations to measure the progress of work or the effectiveness of initiatives. Participants in Fort St John recommended the following key indicators for the *Métis Service Delivery Framework*:

- Less Métis children in care (CIC);
- More public schools offering language programs ;
- Greater percentage of Métis people fluent in Michif;



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- More programs for the *whole* family;
- Increased number of programs that offer parenting skills;
- More funding for Métis resources; and
- Métis families getting together for meals more frequently.

Participants in Fort St John spoke to the following key outcomes that can become possible through the implementation of the *Métis Service Delivery Framework*:

- Families are more connected to each other and to Métis culture;
- Métis families are supported by and connected to Métis communities; and
- Métis mothers and fathers have the parenting skills to raise their children in a healthy way.

Accountability within the provincial *Métis Service Delivery Framework* was the final topic in this section of the discussion. Participants advised on appropriate roles and responsibilities of the following people, groups and organizations:

- Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC (MCCF):

Be visible and connect with Métis communities. Share information and check-in with communities when new issues arise. Advocate and voice the concerns of community members to political bodies. Work with agencies and communities to develop and implement needed programs.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD):

Start participating in local communities and learn about Métis culture. Act on the community voice and fund needed programs.

- Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC):

Act as a watchdog that holds MCFD accountable. Fight the political battles as and when required and engage in advocacy based on what Métis communities say that they need. Share language kits and support ECD at the community level.

- Métis Communities:

Share perspectives, experiences and voices at focus groups or other engagement sessions; encourage other Métis community members to participate as well. Hire and train local Métis



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people where possible. Share in Métis culture with families and connect families to Métis Elders.

- Métis families:

Come together for Métis community events, focus groups and other gatherings. Share parenting strategies and support one another. Teach Métis children and youth the Michif language and traditional values, including respect.

- Métis individuals:

Speak out, participate, share your voice, and encourage others to do so as well. Engage in self-advocacy and speak on behalf of Métis families and communities when opportunities arise.

What are the next steps in developing a provincial Métis child and family services framework?

- Relationship building:

Participants discussed the need for inter-agency collaboration within communities. Emerging Métis agencies should also aim to establish working relationships with hospitals, schools and other institutions. Métis locals need to clarify their role and convey this to Métis community members.

- Training:

Participants at the North East regional focus group identified a need for more social workers in their communities. Specifically, social workers trained in family support and/or counselling who can do outreach with families, teach parenting skills, and provide counselling services if required. The provision of some form of formal social work training for Elders who work with families was also seen as beneficial.

- Communication:

Métis families were the focus for the Fort St John focus group in discussing next steps for communication. Participants spoke of a need to improve communication between Métis community associations and local families. Effective communication between the MCF and Métis families could involve information sharing through hard copy booklets, or online through



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email correspondences and newsletters. A Métis cultural liaison in the school system could help students and families in crisis; locals could notify families of this service once it was established. By collectively working together, a range of Métis organizations can provide a “wide safety net.”

- Resources:

When considering next steps for resources, participants focused on Métis culture. Ideas included having professionally administered cultural training courses based in the traditional Métis ways; building and making available a Métis-specific cultural resource toolkit; developing a local data base of community resources and cultural information; and mandating foster parents to keep Métis children and youth connected to Métis community and cultural events. Participants also noted that resources must not be only available temporarily; citing the success of Friendship Centres, core funding was recommended for every Métis agency.