



Métis Commission for Children and Families of B.C.

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

Focus Group #1 – Lower Mainland, Region 2
Compass Point Inn, 9850 King George Hwy, Surrey
Monday Oct 3rd 2011

Key Findings:

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

- Children and Youth:

Participants noted that Métis children and youth need support, nurturing and love from healthy role models in their own communities and families. This type of support allows for the home to become a safe place where children and youth feel comfortable processing their feelings and expressing themselves. Participants also commented that as Métis children and youth learn about their roots – including their family history and cultural identity – through positive role models and healthy family members, they will become proud of who they are.

- Families:

A consistent theme in the Surrey focus group's Vision for Families was the role of Elders as teachers and cultural leaders both within the family and the broader community. Also stated by participants was the importance of Métis family cohesion, unity and togetherness, which was seen to be at its strongest when supported by the nurturing of the extended family. Discipline, rules and expectations were considered necessary to help instill core Métis family values of responsibility and accountability. Finally, in interactions with service providers, participants noted Métis families should be treated with respect and provided with adequate supports to be able to raise their children in a culturally safe manner.



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- Communities:

Healthy Métis communities were seen as capable of providing positive education and learning experiences to Métis children, youth and families through cultural expression in the form of stories, language and activities that support a healthy lifestyle. Participants advised that a central role of community should be to provide cultural safety. The importance of building strong connections between community members was also mentioned.

- Service agencies:

Participants advised that a Métis child and family service agency should be a culturally safe and secure place where Métis families can meet. Workers should focus on listening, being patient, not imposing ideas and being open to different ways of getting to the same place. At the same time, agencies must ensure that theirs is a healthy workplace where steps are taken to prevent burnout. To be able to help empower others, workers must themselves be healthy in the four directions of the emotional, the intellectual, the physical and the spiritual.

Leading Practices and Lessons Learned

- Rapid Response Program, Métis Family Services (MFS), Surrey

In the Rapid Response Program, Rapid Response Workers (RRWs) employed by MFS attend removals with MCFD Child Protection teams, and provide support for both family and child(ren) through the entire process. The RRWs ensure visits with children as soon as possible, help with paperwork and procedures for court, and provide parents with assistance in accessing needed services and supports (i.e. getting on waitlists for drug and alcohol treatment or other programs). This program is very “hands on” and features intensive, one to one support for clients over an initial 3 month period. The goal of the program is an early return of the child(ren) to the family, or placement in a family alternative to foster care (i.e. with aunts, grandmothers, etc).

At Métis Family Services in Surrey, this program has been running for 6 years. Participants noted that though initially it took some time for social workers, judges and lawyers in the community to get to know the program and trust it enough to send referrals, the outcomes have been extremely positive, and now the program is always full.



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Key Outcomes of the Rapid Response Program: children usually return to their home or reside with other family members while their parents receive the services and support they need; being more organic, collaborative and inclusive, the program offers a respectful and validating space where clients can make healthy changes on their own terms; the intensive one to one support provides clients with someone to talk to throughout the process; having the RRWs present in a supportive role from the moment of removal until return “lessens the blow...to both the child[ren] and the parent[s],” the outcome is less trauma for the entire family.

- Personal Healing and Parenting Program, MFS Surrey

The Personal Healing and Parenting Program focuses on sharing, healing, cultivating personal skills, developing self-awareness, and nurturing self-esteem. In the first few weeks, the program facilitator works on group cohesion, and establishing a safe space for participation and sharing. Discussions revolve around a range of topics, including: group norms, values, beliefs and traditions; colonization and its effects on our families; what is needed for Métis parents and children to be healthy – mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually (the wheel of life); and exploring the five senses and our sixth sense (our gut instinct and our intuition) through the lens of an awareness wheel. The group works at addressing anger and engaging in relapse prevention through cultivating awareness of one’s feelings, thoughts, intentions and actions. In both one to one discussions with the program facilitator and in the group setting, clients also work on communication, assertiveness, self-esteem, and relationship building. The program facilitator provides ample resources, information and literature that the clients can take away and consider on their own.

Though the clients are mainly parents, at select times parents are able to attend program with their children as well. The program also offers the opportunity for children currently living in foster homes to come to Métis Family Services and visit with their parents who are attending the program.

The Personal Healing and Parenting Program has been broadly recognized as a success. The program facilitator has provided workshops and training to service providers provincially and nationally. A training manual for the program will be available soon.

A key recommendation for service providers interested in establishing the program in their own agencies is that the program needs to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the community in which it is situated. The MFS program has a strong drug and alcohol focus; each community



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may require more emphasis in different realms – for example, on education, health, or cultural safety.

Key Outcomes of the Personal Healing and Parenting Program: clients experience healing, increased self-respect, self-awareness, and self-esteem; clients improve their communication and relationship building skills, and learn to be assertive; clients learn traditional, culturally safe parenting skills; the program offers an effective, culturally safe family strengthening tool that can be adopted and used by service providers in other communities.

Indicators for Success

Rather than addressing indicators for success, participants at the Surrey focus group chose to speak to some of the key objectives that should guide the development of the provincial Métis Service Delivery Framework. The framework should:

- Be tailored to the needs of individual communities, whether urban or remote/Northern
- Acknowledge and respect regional diversity while finding cohesion and agreement on provincial approaches
- Recognize “common threads” in Métis identity and culture while staying mindful to the diversity of Métis peoples across Canada
- Support the right of Métis agencies and service providers to practice and implement Métis culture when working with families
- Provide clarity around identification

Following this discussion, participants considered some of the key outcomes that may emerge from this process. The framework will:

- Begin the work for people to believe that Métis people have the right to look after their children, and, more broadly, the right to self-determination
- Support a service delivery model where practice is ‘done’ in a way that respects Métis culture
- Foster self-esteem and a sense of Métis identity

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:



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

Take a lead role in information sharing with Métis service providers and Métis communities. Continue to provide referrals and engage in cultural planning work with Métis agencies.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD):

Ministry workers need education on Métis culture and identity. MCFD needs to forge collaborative partnerships and working relationships with local Métis agencies and each Métis community. Participants noted that this is a process that will take time.

- Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC):

MNBC must advocate politically for Métis communities and service providers in order to be a representative political voice for Métis people in BC. The MOU needs to be supported; Métis children and youth should be priority number one.

- Métis Communities:

Locally-based, people-driven Métis community development needs to occur in more communities. This could take the form of a “Métis hub” or cultural centre for Métis community members to gather and celebrate Métis culture. Prince George was mentioned as the Métis cultural hub in BC. A sense of Métis community identity could be fostered in more remote areas through creative partnerships with other organizations to secure resources.

- Métis families:

With regards service delivery, Métis families can choose Métis-specific programs and support over mainstream services. As well, when Métis families attend and participate at local Métis gatherings, celebrations, activities, and events, they are contributing to building healthy and engaged Métis communities.

- Métis individuals:

Métis individuals can attend with family and friends at Métis gatherings, events, and celebrations. Individuals can and should speak up, organize collectively, and take action to pro-



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actively address concerns and issues. Card-carrying Métis should exercise their democratic rights and vote in Métis elections.

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

- Relationship building:

Participants noted the need to strengthen relationships with MCFD, regionally and provincially. Also considered important were relationships with local schools, police, the civic municipality, Legion and Rotary clubs, and other community partners.

- Training:

Participants spoke to training and education that would further awareness of Métis identity and culture, and advocated for a holistic range of approaches to initiate change. One idea was an inventory of programs and services available, both for clients and for staff. Collaborative practice was seen as key, and participants recommended Métis cultural awareness training for MCFD staff. Finally, participants expressed a need for recognition of the value of traditional knowledge as equivalent to (though different from) that of a college professor's credentials.

- Communication:

Participants noted that developing effective communication will be a process, as it will take time for us to understand each other's needs. More communication amongst Métis agencies and organizations around the province and nation was considered an important next step.

- Other:

The final "next step" category at the Surrey focus group was left open as "Other." Participants discussed the need for "bigger political bodies," and more advocacy from MNBC. As well, participants recommended a clearer expectation of each Métis agency's role. Lastly, participants saw a need for change or amendment to legislation to incorporate Métis values.