



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

Focus Group #4 – North West, Region 6
Métis Employment & Training Centre, 304-4546 Park Ave, Terrace
Thursday October 6th 2011

Key Findings:

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

- Children and Youth:

As stated by participants at the North West regional focus group, for Métis children and youth to be healthy, they need to be able to trust, feel safe, and have a sense of security. Confidence and a sense of belonging can emerge through the recognition of Métis identity at school, daycare, preschool, service agencies and community functions. Participants in Terrace also noted that Métis children and youth need to be given tools to make healthy choices that nurture physical and mental growth. Tutoring, counselling and Elder involvement can all help facilitate the development of healthy decision-making skills. Participants also considered the importance of play and the “right to be children;” sports, music lessons and other extracurricular activities were seen as vital to a healthy childhood.

- Families:

Participants in Terrace contended that basic needs must be met for Métis families to be healthy; these include ample food, a warm and safe home, appropriate health care, and a feeling of safety and trust in the local community. A range of programs, services and supports must be available from local agencies; participants focused on counselling services and a “crisis drop-off daycare” in particular. Strong and healthy Métis families have an attachment with one another, display acceptance when individual family members make poor choices, and demonstrate unconditional love.



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- Communities:

Terrace focus group participants explained that healthy Métis communities are built on trust amongst and between families, and are places where neighbours embrace and welcome each other. Community gathering places allow community members to participate and feel a sense of community belonging and validation. In a healthy Métis community, community members can receive traditional support from Métis Elders, and youth reps act as role models for other Métis children and youth. Participants also believe that agencies play a role, providing community members with communications, and programs that allow all information shared to be used in positive way.

- Service agencies:

Participants in the North West region envision healthy Métis child and family service agencies as places of respect, where social workers listen with open hearts and are guided by genuine care and concern. Métis agencies should provide Métis children with tools to allow them to grow to be the best they can be. Staff should have a strong knowledge of Métis culture; agencies should adopt a holistic approach to service delivery, in accordance with a Métis worldview. Vital programs and services include addictions services, family planning and education in safe sex practices with Métis youth. Finally, participants noted that Métis service providers need more funding and resources.

Indicators for Success

Indicators allow organizations to measure the progress of work or the effectiveness of initiatives. Participants in Terrace noted indicators for the *Métis Service Delivery Framework* could include:

- A decrease in the number of Métis children in care (CIC), and
- An increase in the percentage of Métis youth graduating high school.

Several strategies for the *Métis Service Delivery Framework* were articulated by the participants in Terrace. The key strategies suggested at the focus group are seen below:

- Establish Métis-specific (but inclusive) community centres in every community in BC
- Adopt a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to service delivery in the provincial Métis child and family service sector
- Put resources and foster parent training into local Métis families so that Métis children and youth do not have to leave their home communities



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Discussion shifted from indicators and strategies to key outcomes that can become possible through the implementation of the *Métis Service Delivery Framework*. Participants in the North West envisioned the following for the Métis children, youth and families in their region:

- Métis families have the capacity to care for their own children
- Community acceptance and awareness of Métis identity and culture
- Métis families stay connected, with each other and with the local Métis community
- Traditional activities continue to be practiced by Métis families and within Métis communities (including fishing, hunting, healing, “natural life ways”)
- Métis families experience a reduction in stress, family violence, isolation, racism, substance misuse, hate crimes, and mental/physical health issues – are healthier and happier people

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):

Use staff expertise and skill-sets to implement strategies recommended by Métis community members. Come to Métis communities for focus groups and consultations as frequently as possible. Provide communications regarding Métis-specific practices, policies, and protocols in a way that is easily understood and readily accessible. Be accountable to the Métis people.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD):

Minimize the number of Métis children and youth entering the provincial child welfare system by building Métis-specific structures within Métis communities. Create designated Métis-specific funding streams and allocate funds accordingly. Provide Métis-specific cultural safety training for front-line workers. “Step back” and let the Métis communities take ownership over the welfare of their own children.

- Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC):

Support Métis community programs and events by providing adequate funding and ensuring consistent communication. Work to ensure a strong Métis presence in every community. Lobby the government on important issues. Utilize Métis Elders.



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- Métis Communities:

Celebrate the local Métis community. “It takes a village to raise a child” – recognize, validate, praise and encourage one another. Make mentoring opportunities available. Develop Métis-specific cultural programs for local families.

- Métis families:

Be there for each other in identifiable and tangible ways. Involvement is key – parents should be significantly involved and invested in children’s lives, and families should become involved as volunteers or as paid Métis professionals in the local Métis community.

- Métis individuals:

Métis individuals need to integrate within “family systems, local systems, community systems and education systems.” Take a greater role in community planning and become more proactive; understand that as a local citizen you have a right to democratically accept or reject decisions that are made. Share in the expertise and knowledge of Métis youth, families and valued Elders.

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

- Relationship building:

Participants noted that bridging needs to take place between communities and cultures. Connections need to be made between Métis communities so that resource sharing can take place. Relationships between law enforcement on multiple levels (Individual, community & MCCF levels) need to be strengthened and/or built. Mentorship programs would serve to strengthen the ties between the youth and elders. Establishment of programs such as “Big Brothers/Big Sisters” would also bring the people together and provide support. Finally a need for a cultural liaison to assist in bridging these gaps was expressed.

- Training:

Participants expressed a need for the public to become educated about the Métis people and their history in general. There was also a need expressed to re-teach the “old ways;” “to bring back what has been lost” to Métis communities. Specifically participants expressed the need to



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have Métis social workers and mental health workers trained to work in their own communities.

- Communication:

With rural areas, the need for communication between communities was seen as extremely important. Making use of the internet with websites specific to Northern Métis communities, women, youth and elders would be useful. A website (or sites) could be utilized to disseminate information on local businesses, professionals, government (municipal/provincial/federal), share invitations to events and workshops, etc.

- Resources:

Participants expressed a need to have an inventory of “people” (elders and traditional knowledge keepers) as well as professional resources available in each community developed which would further serve to strengthen relationships both in and outside of the community. A needs assessment to establish exactly what the community is looking to develop is also needed, as is a community centre or gathering place (specific to the Métis community). The community centre could be utilized by the youth (for example) to gather information and access services such as MSP applications, citizenship documents, make use of computers, take workshops and build in volunteerism in the community.