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Welcoming and Inclusive Communities

Lethbridge Regional Workshop: Full Report
September 13, 2013



BACKGROUND

The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) initiative is a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Alberta Human Rights Commission to create communities with positive reputations, where diversity adds to the social and economic vibrancy of the community and the quality of life enjoyed by all residents. The WIC initiative supports municipalities that have joined the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD).

Through its work on WIC, the AUMA noted that municipalities are particularly challenged by issues related to immigration. As a result, the AUMA partnered with Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education to deliver the Come Together Alberta (CTA) initiative. The CTA initiative works under the umbrella of WIC with a specific focus on providing resources to support strategies for the attraction, retention and integration of newcomers.

Municipal governments function at the most practical level and are most involved in the lives of their residents. They are an ideal place to develop policies, programs and strategies and take meaningful action towards eliminating racism and discrimination.

Through its WIC and CTA initiatives, the AUMA has been working with a number of communities around the province to plan four regional workshops built on topics identified by host municipalities.

On September 13, 2013, the first of these free workshops entitled ***Improving Inter-Cultural Relations with Aboriginal Communities*** was held in the City of Lethbridge. AUMA hoped to provide a neutral, safe environment for participants to come together and discuss racism and discrimination. Specifically, participants discussed trends in Lethbridge and best practices for improving relationships between Aboriginal communities and urban municipalities.

The workshop was well attended with 29 participants representing various community sectors (see the Evaluation section of this report for details).

KEYNOTE

The morning portion of the workshop included a presentation by retired judge, John Reilly, who provided his views on Canada's justice system and its treatment of Aboriginal people.

John Reilly served as a judge for the Provincial Court of Alberta for 33 years. While sitting as a judge first in Calgary, Cochrane and later in Canmore, Judge Reilly's objectivity came into question when he was accused of excusing criminal conduct by Aboriginal offenders and imposing more lenient sentences on them. Reilly also ordered an investigation into corruption of Stoney First Nation leaders, which got him banned from the reserve. Reilly's judicial independence was ultimately upheld. He was motivated by his desire to share what he learned about justice and about the Aboriginal people of Canada to speak on what he sees as effective justice.

In 1985, Judge Reilly took part in cross cultural awareness training but did not see the relevance of it at the time. He now tells people that when dealing with racism and discrimination, the first thing people should do is understand differences. One must make an effort to learn about the "other" people to see where they are coming from.

According to Reilly, the roots of racism towards Aboriginal people lie in land ownership. When the Europeans came, they wanted to justify taking the land. In their eyes, Aboriginals were not really "people." They had no real families (in the European sense of the term) and did not have the Bible. The 1763 Royal Proclamation was meant to stabilize relations with Native North Americans and regulated, among other things, the purchase of land. It allowed the Crown to make treaties with Aboriginal people in order to acquire their land. Canadian policy towards Aboriginal people thus became one of genocide. Getting rid of them meant not having to deal with land claims.

Aboriginal people did not have European-style marriages between men and women; rather, they had a system of extended family. As a result, they saw relationships differently. It was a system that worked before white people came. There were no orphans in this system because children regarded more than one woman as their mother and more than one man as their father. They were, however, orphans according to the culture of white people and such orphans were placed in residential schools along with other Aboriginal children.

Part of the United Nations definition of genocide addresses forcibly transferring children from one group to another (see: [Office of the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide - legal definition of genocide](#)). Reilly stressed that residential schools did just that. The purpose of these schools was to "take the Indian out of the Indian child." The last federally-run residential school in Canada was not closed until 1996. The government paid out settlements to those affected by residential schools, but the trauma continues to manifest itself in the form of alcoholism and family violence. Reilly stressed that the settlement money could have been used for a different purpose, such as to rehabilitate and establish healing lodges on every reserve in Canada.

In the mid-1990s, the criminal code of Canada was amended to contain provisions that instructed judges on what to do when sentencing an accused person. The last provision stated that all sanctions, other than imprisonment, that are reasonable given the circumstances should be considered for all offenders with particular attention given to the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders. This was meant to acknowledge a problem of the criminal justice system – namely that Aboriginal people were overrepresented.



Aboriginal communities are marked with poverty and dysfunction. These underlying causes give rise to criminal behaviour and racial discrimination, and thus can account for part of the disproportionate representation of Aboriginals in the justice system. Crimes that perpetuate conditions are not being investigated. Rather than simply imposing jail sentences, Reilly argued that courts should look to restorative justice and communities should devote more money to preventative social programs and treatment.

Reilly was imposing very lenient sentences on Aboriginal offenders on the basis of their history of suffering. Reilly stressed that this did not mean that he treated Aboriginal people more leniently, but that he treated them in accordance with their culture. Aboriginal culture is restorative. Western culture punishes crime because it is part of the culture, not because it works or because it reduces crime. Aboriginal people see wrongdoing as ignorance in teaching or a need for healing. Reilly's biggest lesson was that instead of punishing crime, we should be trying to fix the causes.

Reilly maintained that racism can be overcome by educating the population and simply getting to know each other.

**NOTE: Remarks by presenters are their own personal thoughts and are not necessarily shared by the AUMA.*

PANEL

The panel consisted of Tom McKenzie (Police Chief, Lethbridge Regional Police Service and CMARD committee member), Bob Campbell (Chair, Lethbridge CMARD committee), Jacinda Weiss (Executive Director, Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge) and Jamie Medicine Crane (First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaison Worker, Holy Spirit School Division). Panelists were asked to respond to two questions.

Question 1: In your experience, how have you witnessed Lethbridge's advancement in its relationship with the Aboriginal population?

Tom McKenzie: The biggest change has been the willingness to have conversations about the issues and the readiness to listen. How do our communities want to be served? There is now openness to diversity in the city, exemplified through the establishment of a variety of restaurants and celebrations in the community.

Bob Campbell: Before, the conversation was always uncomfortable, but now the conversations are being had. Once a community is able to name an issue, that issue can be addressed. The employment of more Aboriginal people is a real sign of progress in the community, as is the fact that the community has a CMARD committee.

Jacinda Weiss: Lethbridge schools are now more welcoming. Aboriginal people were not always a visible part of the workforce, but that has changed. It is also important to have a community champion. Former Mayor Bob Tarleck was a champion, but the community now needs a new champion in the municipal government.

Jamie Medicine Crane: Further relationship-building and education are still needed. The community needs to learn about who Aboriginal people are and vice versa. Organizations are working together but more work is needed in terms of programming, collaboration and the planning of events. Aboriginal people are still not getting housing. It is important to have a community champion like former Mayor Bob Tarleck.

Question 2: How as a community can we move forward in continuing to improve on this existing relationship?

Tom McKenzie: Better communication is key. How are businesses and civic leadership being held accountable? The police service has actioned words to recognize diversity. Racism needs to be addressed on the spot so it can be snapped out and eradicated. A community champion is vital, as is encouraging people in the community to be citizens and not customers. It is important that people start giving back to the community rather than just taking from it.

Bob Campbell: The community needs to look for opportunities to build relationships, but when people do not reach out, talk, or invite one another, these relationships cannot be built. Even educated people can lack self-awareness of how they bring judgement and stereotype to certain groups of people.

Jacinda Weiss: It is important to have a leadership voice on advisory councils. The community does not provide enough opportunities for young people to find employment. Build on youth and who they are as people and have them involved in program planning. Community members also need to be able to have frank discussions and need top-down support for grassroots work to be successful.



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Jamie Medicine Crane: The Holy Spirit School Division has a three-year plan with this year's theme being "finding a place at the table." First Nations people have to find a place at the table but must also feel welcomed. There is an education component needed for both sides. Relationships take patience, listening, understanding and a willingness to continue to grow.

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INTERACTIVE SESSION

For the afternoon portion of the workshop, participants took part in a racial equity session with Ian Mathieson from the Centre for Race and Culture. The session provided an understanding of how bias/stereotyping and racial discrimination impact Aboriginal and racialized communities; an overview of the concepts of race and racism in Canada; and provided strategies to facilitate intercultural/racial equity community building.

Part I

Participants were first asked to write their responses to the following three questions on sticky notes.

1. What is the greatest challenge to making the community of Lethbridge more inclusive and free of racism?

- Not very many opportunities to mix and learn from each other.
- Connections, getting the people at the table, engagement.
- Finding champions on City Council who will actively promote inclusion.
- Cultural awareness.
- Engaging community members, getting the conversations started so issues of racism and discrimination can be identified and corrected. More towards correcting these issues and having all community members work towards that correction together.
- Maintaining ongoing leadership.
- Participation.
- Education.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding.
- Have more businesses and agencies hire FNMI (First Nation, Métis, Inuit) people.
- Willingness to discuss issues and move forward.
- Miss-information.
- People need to act as citizens, not customers, in their communities.
- Negative stereotypes and judgements.
- The long-term ingrained discrimination that people have not evolved from.
- People's personal bias (pre-conceived notions about another race).
- Fear of the other.

2. Give one example of how racism operates or has operated in the past in the community of Lethbridge.

- The internationalization and acceptance of being discriminated against.
- Businesses and agencies not hiring FNMI people.
- European interpretation of other cultures.
- Isolation.
- People not being able to get jobs/housing based on race.
- Violence (verbal, emotional, physical and spiritual abuse).
- Learning other peoples' ways as a step to move forward and help integrate.
- Long-term stereotypes are difficult to break down.
- Treat people like less than they are worth and not acting friendly or inclusive of people that are different.

- Grass fire – fragile, stress brings out extremes.
- Racial profiling is huge and people often say things through racial profiling. Most people are not aware of what racial profiling is and what the effects of it are.

3. What is the greatest strength the community of Lethbridge has to address racism and create a more welcoming and inclusive community for all?

- The concentrated commitment of a few people to make a difference.
- The work of Lethbridge as a municipality against racism and discrimination.
- Mayor and City Council promote and support CMARD.
- City support (police and resources).
- People who want the change.
- Arenas of education and employment as an entity to champion everyone’s cause.
- Multiculturalism.
- Collaborative – community willingness for change.
- Recognition that racism is a problem and encouraging open discussion and conversation.
- Goal-oriented leadership who wants to make a positive difference.
- Individuals who are open to these conversations and are not afraid to actually deal with, and admit to, these issues.
- Community and Social Development Group focus to understand and find a way to deal with the problem.
- Collaboration of community organizations.

Part II

Next, participants were placed into groups and asked to write down words, phrases or even draw pictures that come to mind when thinking about a number of common terms related to diversity. The terms were rotated from table to table so that each group would have an opportunity to add to another group’s poster. The following summarizes the definitions that came out of this process.

Term	Definition
Racism	Saying or doing violent or hurtful things based on ignorance of people that are different from oneself.
Inclusion	A community that is welcoming; that celebrates the value in difference while promoting belonging.
Diversity	Many different and unique people add to the social fabric of a community and act as catalysts for social change and acceptance.
Culture	Shared traditions, language, values and beliefs influenced by the surrounding environment. How one understands everything under the water, what flies in the skies and what walks on land. Different plants, animals and lands influence different ways of surviving. Dances and songs come from the animals while oral history comes from the tress, plants, hills and mountains.
Equity	Fairness, justice, respecting differences, diversity and the rights of everyone.

Part III

In the final portion of the afternoon, participants were asked to continue working in their groups and select one of the examples of how racism operates or has operated in the past in the community of Lethbridge (Part I, Question 2) and analyze the causes, effects, systems and solutions for their selected case. The following is a sample of what some groups came up with.

<i>Grass fire – fragile, stress brings out extremes</i>	
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accident, act of God, pre-fire sweat • Comments on social media (hateful posting)
Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powerful ideas about Aboriginal people (e.g. given everything, lazy/ungrateful, undeserved, irresponsible, uncivilized) • Community collaboration (e.g. mediators, mechanisms for crisis response) • Change of heart permanent • Use media (positive portrayals), educate and inform
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media culpability – fanning the flames • Lack of leadership; lack of response from civic/municipal leadership and reserve leadership • Challenge of maintaining relationships • Pangaea café • Address community gaps • Crisis response
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Advisory Committee (healing) • Invite perpetrator to community mediation group

<i>Racial profiling – most people are not aware what it is and what its effects are</i>	
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs within systems – education, communities, health, justice
Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of self-esteem; fearful; families; community; well-being; service delivery; isolation; assumptions
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service delivery, education, judicial • Micro, mezzo and macro
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media (multicultural and social) • Education • Policymaking and implementation – training, awareness, standard of practice • Empowerment to make changes (micro, mezzo and macro)

<i>Personal biases</i>	
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative past experiences; generational; ignorance; lack of understanding; not caring; misinformation (believing the myths)
Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shutting people out; bullying/violence; abuse; unfair advantages; racism; division in communities; perpetuating/ongoing
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judicial/criminal justice; education; family; municipal decisions
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truthful educating



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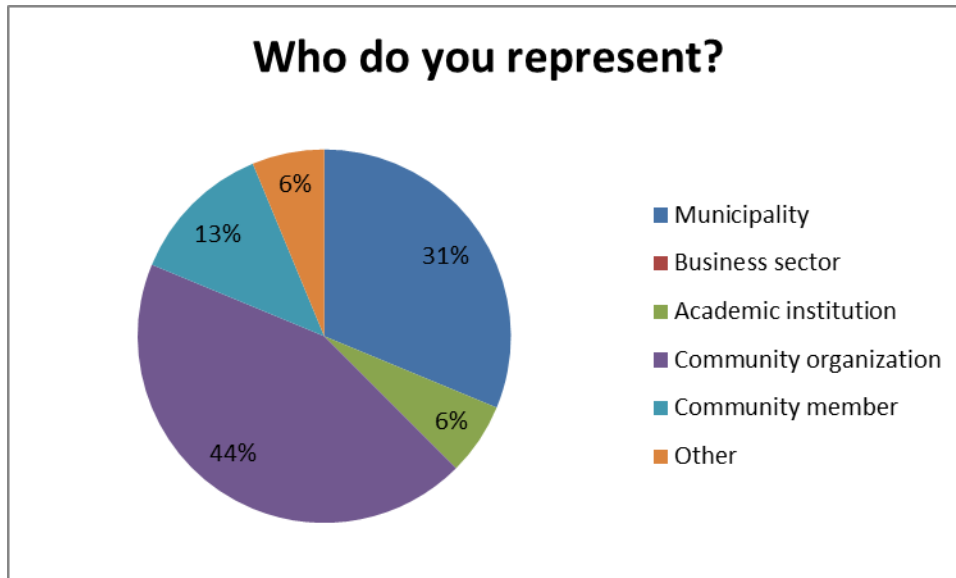
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide racism workshops• Outcomes of workshops – make improvements• “Culture Days” and cultures working together |
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EVALUATION

After the session, participants were asked to complete an evaluation survey to gather feedback and basic participant information. Out of 29 participants, 16 responded to the survey (response rate of 59%). The following summarizes the results of the survey.

Participants came from various sectors. The workshop had representation from 6 different municipalities.



What did you appreciate most about this session?



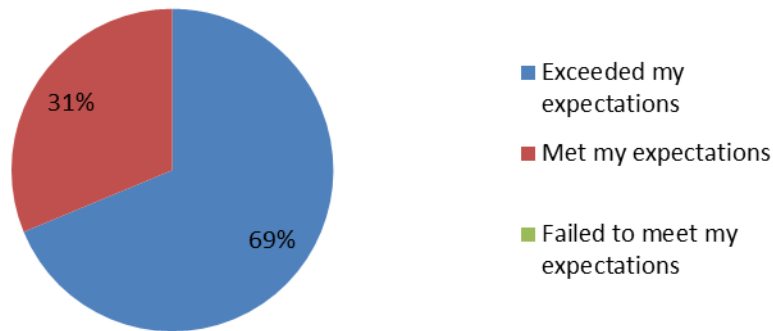
How will this session contribute to your own Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) and/or Come Together Alberta (CTA) work?



Any suggestions for how we could improve future sessions?

- Invite people who are not exposed to First Nations cultures and issues.
- Absolutely not – amazing day!
- Could have gone deeper – even a two day!
- More sessions which include a few racists.
- Just right – good one-to-one and small group.
- Not on a Friday afternoon.
- Great sessions!
- Invite chamber of commerce.

Overall, how well did this session meet your expectations?



Comments:

- The judge's history lessons were great. It was started over land.
- Well done. I really enjoyed the interaction and discussion.
- Loved the line-up/format. Judge Reilly really did a great synopsis and created a good foundation for Ian. It was great to be interactive and talk about our community.
- Things could have flown a little bit smoother. I think if the lunch break was shortened a little you can extend the morning session.
- It was a great workshop – informative and great participation.
- Great presenters – great group presentations.
- Great job! I really appreciated the open-ended activities along with incorporating new information and/or further information.
- Totally exceeded our expectations. Would love to have Ian back in our community.
- It was great to be able to relate to the issues and other attendees.
- Have Roy Pogorzelski do a Jig.

Anything else you would like to share with us?

- Let's crush racism!
- Try an icebreaker to help participants meet each other – inclusion!
- Loved it! Awesome job.
- Really informative event.
- Maybe elder's perspective to help educate.
- It would be great to have a larger follow-up event with the AUMA. More of an action piece.
- Thank you so much for an excellent, informative day.



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