

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**SOCIAL AGENDA CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS REPORT**  
**HAY RIVER DENE RESERVE**  
**JUNE 18, 19, AND 20, 2001**

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**CONFERENCE PREPARATION**

The Ministerial Committee on the Social Agenda, chaired by The Honourable Jane Groenewegen, initiated the Social Agenda Conference held on June 18, 19 and 20 2001 on the Hay River Dene Reserve. A multi-sectoral Social Agenda Conference Planning Committee was appointed by the Ministerial Committee to undertake detailed conference planning. This planning committee was composed of representatives from social envelope government departments, non-government organizations and Aboriginal organizations and governments.

**The goals of the conference were as follows:**

- to provide an opportunity for front line workers to meet with government, and non-government, Aboriginal and community leaders and policy makers in order to increase understanding about our social problems, build partnerships and together find workable solutions
- to begin the process of finding solutions to social problems that allow individuals, families and communities the opportunity to benefit from current economic development initiatives
- to balance the government's economic agenda with a comprehensive social agenda
- to kick-start the development of a NWT Social Agenda

**CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION**

The goal in terms of conference participation was to ensure that the full spectrum of front line human service delivery workers were present along with leaders and policy makers from public and Aboriginal governments. The conference planning committee aimed for two-thirds representation from service providers and one-third representation from the leadership. Approximately 250 people attended the conference.

## **CONFERENCE AGENDA**

The Social Agenda Conference Planning Committee made the decision to follow an agenda that encouraged the exploration of the underlying obstacles to universal wellness followed by identifying strategies and action plans that could address these obstacles. The planning committee decided on a balance between presentations, that would inspire creative problem solving and hope, and small groups sessions designed to create ownership, insight and solutions that target the root causes of our social problems. Accordingly, presenters were invited from within and outside the Northwest Territories to describe the situation as they see it and offer a variety of solutions that have worked well in the NWT and elsewhere.

## **CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

The conference was opened by Chief Pat Martel, Mayor Duncan MacNeill, MLA Michael McLeod and The Honourable Jane Groenewegen and Council of Grandmothers. The Honourable Stephen Kakfwi and Dene Nation National President Bill Erasmus gave introductory remarks and a keynote address was delivered by Bill Mussell of Sal'i'shan Institute in BC. The Honourable Jane Groenewegen and The Honourable Stephen Kakfwi closed the conference with summary remarks.

### **Conference Presentations**

In addition to the addresses noted above there were a total of three panel presentations (with 16 panel presenters) including four out of territory guest panelists from Manitoba, Yukon and BC. Conference presentations, in panel and speech format, stressed the following points:

- traditional, holistic healing approaches which focus on reclaiming cultural and spiritual identity, and, personal and community responsibility are an effective means of community, family and individual healing
- we need to revitalize traditional culture, and adapt and develop it, to live in the contemporary world
- there are many successful territorial social intervention programs being delivered by correctional facilities, schools, treatment programs, wellness agencies and other non government organizations, Aboriginal and public governments from which we can learn effective social problem solving
- we need to learn and understand the root causes of our problems in order to address them effectively

- Public and Aboriginal governments Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) and the public need to hold a shared vision of our future and communicate it effectively with all individuals, families and communities
- we all, as individuals, families and communities, need to take ownership of our problems and be accountable in our attempts to solve them
- (moved to above)
- we need to encourage leadership at all levels to be responsible and sensitive to social problems, and understanding of the recovery process
- statistically we have problems with alcohol, drugs and solvents (twice the national rate), suicide (double national rate), violent crime (five times national average), graduation rates (40% compared to 75 % elsewhere), and, half of our children have family stress and are affected by addictions, we have poverty and unemployment issues (50% employment in small communities)
- service providers from every sector find it difficult to cope with this situation given the lack of resources and support they experience
- other regions of Canada and other circumpolar countries (specifically Greenland) have devised effective means of addressing their social problems through an integrated approach which combines: the creation of a shared vision; community education, development, planning and responsibility for social development; a combination of traditional holistic healing and mainstream professional intervention methods; legislation that targets specific issues such as family violence; innovative community level social programming that fully involves community members; comprehensive child and youth educational and development programs; and, a simplified, 'one stop' entry point for the delivery of all social programs

### **Conference Small Group Discussions**

There were three facilitated small group discussion sessions during the conference. Each group had 20 participants, a facilitator and a group scribe who took notes. These groups expressed a wide range of opinions when asked to answer the following questions:

- *"What is causing these problems?"*
- *"What strategies and actions plans will address the causes of our problems?"*
- *"What are the next steps?"*

Delegate responses to these questions are summarized below. (It is important to note that this summary does not represent the sum total of what was said

at the conference). Please refer to the full proceedings report for a complete description of comments from conference delegates.

### *What is causing these problems?*

#### **Colonial History**

- generations of separation, institutionalization, dependence, dislocation and residential school experiences have traumatized people
- the incarceration of offenders, removal of children from homes, use of elder facilities and shelters for women and children tend to mirror this sense of separation and dislocation from family
- these traumatic experiences have resulted in trouble with parenting and respecting women, the loss of traditional skills, difficulties with communication and sharing, language erosion, youth and elder problems, denial and silence, and, in general, the normalization of traumatic reactions
- ongoing colonialism, discrimination and racism, corporate control of land, and, government policies and programs that withhold power and control from individuals, families and communities, are part of the problem
- in addition, the colonized have become colonizers and the previously oppressed are now the oppressors
- in this situation women, children and elders are powerless

#### **Leadership**

- many leaders are divisive and promote racism and fragmentation, they can't share power, work together or support each other
- leaders do not always act as good role models, ignore social issues in their communities and neglect to make social issues a priority

#### **Public Attitudes**

- ~~we~~ lack of a collective vision and a sense of collective responsibility for our social problems
- NWT communities have become overly focused on racial and ethnic issues, and are unwilling to accept change ... people are no longer treasured for their uniqueness
- there has been a very rapid change to a wage economy and consumer lifestyle where possessions mean more than relationships

#### **Government Programs**

- past approaches to social problems have entrenched dependency and powerlessness
- the education system doesn't reflect the values of Aboriginal people or validate their knowledge, identity and history
- there are too many 'top down' approaches and too many government structures
- there is inadequate funding for our social problems

- programs often fail to be client oriented, neglecting the overall needs of the client and his/her family

**What strategies and actions plans will address the causes of our problems?'**

**New Vision**

- we should build on our own successes and best practices
- we need to empower people and communities through a shared vision that overcomes negativity, fear and denial
- we should use the 7 principles of healing and health explained by presenters from Hollow Water Manitoba
- we need to realize that healing is a lifetime journey

**New Relationships**

- we need new relationships between all stakeholders, we have to share power and step outside the boxes we are accustomed to working in
- we need to recognize Aboriginal and community governments and share power, resources and control, and let communities decide how money is spent
- NGOs and other non government groups need to have more voice in decision making
- we should take down the program 'silos' (programs planned and implemented from the 'top' to the 'bottom') and find a more cooperative and coordinated approach to social problems

**Holistic Approach**

- we should take a holistic approach and amalgamate compatible services such as was done by the Tulita Wellness Agency, the Dogrib Community Services Board and Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle Healing
- we should challenge departments to work together.
- we should merge the best of contemporary and traditional approaches in multi disciplinary teams

**Community Responsibility**

- communities themselves need to take responsibility for their own needs, programs and services (perhaps with a 5 year plan). These programs need to be offered at the community level with block, multi year funding The creation of a Social Development Fund would hold communities accountable by ensuring that investments are made to address social conditions.
- local agencies at the community level should be connected to regional resources such as healing lodges and treatment centres
- we need to start community healing circles and the sharing across communities of professionals
- we need to institute home based programs

- we need community interagency workers, community wellness coordinators, community family wellness centres and more community health representatives
- there needs to be increased focus at the community level on the wellness needs of youth, income support recipients and victims
- there needs to be an increased focus on community based economic development

#### **Cultural Revitalization**

- we need to focus on cultural revitalization through altering our current education system to include Dene language immersion, culture camps, and an Aboriginal curriculum

#### **Learning**

- we should educate resource people and front line workers, they need to be healthy
- we need to start community based training for front line staff and cross cultural training
- we need to train professionals about our social problems and about community healing
- we need to support family literacy
- women need to be encouraged and trained to take leadership in all levels of government and community work
- a media campaign which celebrates diversity, wellness and positive territorial role models is needed

#### **Legislation, Policy and Funding**

- we need to review and revamp the legislation, policies, directives, regulations and criteria which govern our social programs and social spending
- we need a Family Violence Prevention Act and stronger human rights legislation
- we should follow the recommendations in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People
- previous and ongoing forums and studies regarding our social problems need to be consolidated and acted upon
- we need specific community plans and accurate community profiles
- oil and gas negotiations should include money to deal with health and social issues
- we need to explore, develop and implement alternative funding sources
- there should be a single point of entry for all social program funding

#### **What are the next steps?**

**(summary of small group discussions)**

#### **Personal Commitment**

- individuals, families and communities need to make a personal commitment to healing themselves

### **Implementation Committee**

- a decision was made that a report would be prepared and that every delegate would receive a copy
- an implementation committee, funded by the GNWT, needs to be struck to receive the conference report and develop a clear long term implementation plan
- the implementation committee should be accountable to the GNWT and communities on an annual basis and it should spearhead and sponsor working groups on specific issues
- the committee should have set timelines and have the ability to commit resources to this work on a flexible basis
- the role of the implementation committee is to help communities not dictate to them
- alternatives to an implementation committee include: a territorial steering committee composed of elders; or, a territorial Social Planning Council; or the retention of facilitators in each community who could raise awareness of social issues and lay the groundwork for a social agenda

### **Regional Meetings**

- the implementation committee should be charged with describing the vision, principles, relationships and accounting mechanisms in the implementation plan to communities, and other governments, by way of a territorial tour, regional meetings or mini conferences which focus on strategies and action plans

### **Social Inventory**

- an inventory of territorial social resources should be undertaken

## **CONFERENCE EVALUATION**

The following summary of conference evaluations is based on the evaluation forms filled out by approximately three-quarters of the delegates on the last day.

Conference delegates were in universal agreement that the event was a positive step towards the implementation of a territorial social agenda. They appreciated the opportunities to network with each other, make new contacts and learn about workable programs and approaches from presenters within the territory, and from other jurisdictions. There was an especially grateful response to the presenters from Hollow Water Manitoba who described their holistic community healing approach. Presentations about the innovative approaches to social problem solving in Greenland and Yukon were also highly praised. The keynote address stressing the need for education, and the encouragement of cultural identity, was also much appreciated.

In addition, delegates, on their evaluation forms, thanked MLAs for staying for the entire conference and expressed gratitude that the GNWT was taking steps to focus on a social agenda. The small group sessions were very popular and almost all respondents said the conference was well organized, dynamic and very positive, giving them an increased feeling of optimism and hope about the future.

In terms of suggestions, most conference delegates wished that the conference had been longer and less rushed, with more opportunities for small group discussion. Many felt that there should have been fewer speakers with more time to question speakers after their presentation. There were several remarks that Aboriginal leadership, youth and elders should have been better represented. Many delegates made suggestions that mirrored those from small group discussions.