

# Inventory of Aboriginal Services, Issues and Initiatives in Vancouver

## Volunteering

### Relevant Details

Seemingly, there are few Aboriginal people who are members of voluntary organizations or go through formal volunteer training, but Aboriginal communities have always benefited from what is commonly known as volunteerism. Aboriginal communities which are historically communal in nature depend upon individuals helping each other without repayment.

For the most part, Aboriginal people do not see the help that they provide as volunteerism; rather it is a way of life that keeps the community going. For instance, Aboriginal communities could not host their feasts without community members lending a hand in cooking or setting up and taking down tables and chairs. In urban settings, Aboriginal organizations could not function as well as they do without their volunteer board members and program helpers.

In Vancouver, there are many Aboriginal volunteers that mostly go un-noticed, if not un-recognized. Their volunteer activities include service on not-for-profit organization's Board of Directors, on community councils, steering committees, and advisory groups (primarily Aboriginal) and Aboriginal parents volunteering for their child's daycare, schools, sports team, or caring for other's children. Historically, Friendship Centres were based upon volunteerism, although this is not a primary focus today. The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre relies heavily on volunteers to host community events, help fill gaps in program staffing, support Elders, and fulfill many other unpaid duties that would otherwise go undone.

Although there has historically been low volunteerism of non-Aboriginal people in Aboriginal organizations, this is not always due to non-Aboriginal people's reluctance to become involved. Many times not-for-profit organizations are so over-taxed with their current work that they must be very selective when engaging volunteers as sometimes it is a lot of work to educate them on their organization and program issues, train them, provide support and supervision, and answer their ongoing questions. For non-Aboriginal people, there may also be the added work of education of historical and cultural issues, cross-cultural training, and misunderstandings that arise out of cross-cultural differences. However, non-Aboriginal volunteerism in Aboriginal organizations is a good means for cross-cultural interaction within the communities, especially with youth. It is a great opportunity to overcome stereotypes, mistrust, and fear on both sides.

## Who's Involved?

### *Aboriginal Women's Health at BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre - Aunties in Action*

- The goal of the program is recruit volunteers to take part in a "train the trainer" program at BC Children's Hospital and BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre. Once they take the training, they help other volunteers in their communities to run the program.
- The volunteers visit Aboriginal patients and their families when they are in hospital. They help make the health care system more welcoming and friendly for Aboriginal people.

### *First Nations Big Sisters Mentoring Program*

- Goal is to enrich the lives of First Nations girls through one-to-one friendships that offer support, guidance, and exposure to positive life choices and role models within their own culture.
- Programs include storytelling, crafts, cultural dancing, role model panels, and more.
- Recruits First Nations big sisters, but will match non-First Nations women also.

### *Local Aboriginal Organizations*

- Many local Aboriginal organizations recruit volunteers to help run their programs, help with administrative tasks, or to achieve other goals. None of these organizations has the financial resources to hire a Volunteer Coordinator which could greatly increase their ability to engage volunteers to help improve their overall organization.

### *First Nations Caring For Children Society (Ottawa)*

- The Voluntary Sector Initiative researched the relationship between the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies serving on reserve residents in Canada.
- A PDF of this report can be found online at <http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/VSILitReview.pdf>.

### *CESO Aboriginal Services (1999 Marine Drive, N. Vancouver)*

- Over 3,000 Volunteer Advisers (VAs) share their professional experience by serving as mentors, advisers and trainers to clients and partners in areas that range from new business start-up, to mentoring, to advising on governance and housing issues.
- Goal is to build capacity of Aboriginal individuals, communities and businesses to achieve greater self-sufficiency and growth through the transfer skills and knowledge, development of products and services, and the accumulation and dissemination of best practices.

### *National Aboriginal Voluntary Organization*

- Incorporated in 2002 after a community consultation process identified Aboriginal volunteerism as a unique process that needed to be fostered by a unique organization. Produced a thirty minute video called It's Our Way. Unfortunately, the organization has folded. This was likely due to a lack of sustainable funding.

However, reports of their findings can be found online at [www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/about/aboriginal\\_report.cfm](http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/about/aboriginal_report.cfm).

## Partnerships

- UBC's Trek 2010 Program has formal partnerships with a number of inner-city organizations, of which the Urban Native Youth Association was the only one as of 2005.
- A few Aboriginal organizations have formal agreements with volunteer organizations such as Frontier College, UBC's Trek 2010 Program, or Volunteer Vancouver.

## Committees

- None

## Trends

- A few Aboriginal organizations are now working with volunteer organizations such as Frontier College, UBC's Trek 2010 Program, and Volunteer Vancouver to identify and recruit qualified volunteers.
- Aboriginal youth in Vancouver are becoming very much involved in community activities primarily through volunteer activities which include planning and hosting youth activities and serving on boards, steering committees, and councils.
- The Ministry for Children & Family Development's new Mentorship Programs for Aboriginal youth have led to greater volunteer mentorship opportunities. This initiative is led by the Urban Native Youth Association.

## Gaps

- There is a great need for an Aboriginal Volunteer Centre that can recruit, train, refer and support volunteers who want to work within Aboriginal communities, and for Aboriginal people who want to volunteer either within or outside of Aboriginal communities.
- As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the difference of understanding about volunteerism may lead to the conclusion that there are very few Aboriginal volunteers, but this could not be farther from the truth.

## Contact Information

Addresses, phone, fax, email, and website information for any of the organizations above can be found in the Contact Information section of this manual.