

## Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver

### Dialogues Circles Summary Report - DRAFT

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver* is a project that aims to strengthen relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities. A series of dialogue circles were held as part of the project. As one of the key initiatives of the project, the circles brought together members of the Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities to share stories and perspectives on social inclusion and community relations.

- Nine dialogue groups (including two youth groups) met between April–July 2010 at various locations around Vancouver.
- Four circles were held at Aboriginal host sites; five were held at other community sites.
- There were 123 participants in total. About one third of them were Aboriginal.
- Each group met three times to discuss past relations, present relations, and future relations.
- Each dialogue group had a facilitator to guide the circle.

In general, participants were remarkably open about sharing deeply personal and emotionally dense stories about themselves. Many of the circles took on a greater emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal communities. Many of the non-Aboriginal participants expressed a desire to learn more about Aboriginal communities.

A number of themes emerged from the circles:

- Issues around racial and cultural identity were very prominent. Some people felt challenged or conflicted about their identity; some had mixed ethno-cultural backgrounds and had a more fluid sense of identity. Others felt their sense of identity shift as they immigrated to Canada.
- Identity also hugely affected people's experiences of marginalization, exclusion and racism. Participants described both extreme instances of institutionally entrenched racism to every day experiences of exclusion.
- Participants felt that education has a significant role to play in teaching students about Aboriginal histories, issues and perspectives.
- Participants also felt newcomers must be provided with information about the country's Aboriginal peoples.
- Stories were shared about the challenges of settling in a new urban setting. There were common challenges for Aboriginal people moving from reserves to the city and immigrants settling in a new country.

- There was significant discussion around popular information about Aboriginal and immigrant communities and how the media plays a major role in shaping public perceptions.

A final closing dialogue session was held on July 15, 2010 to bring participants from all circles together. During this session participants had an opportunity to discuss the ideas that had been brought forward at the previous circles regarding strategies for strengthening relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities. A number of key strategies that had come out during the dialogue circles were discussed at the closing session:

- Include Aboriginal content in the school system and provide newcomers immigrating to Canada with more comprehensive information on Aboriginal history, culture and issues.
- Encourage inter-cultural sharing between Aboriginal and ethno-cultural or immigrant serving organizations.
- Take advantage of existing public events and initiatives (such as community or cultural celebrations) to bring communities together. Establish a multicultural centre for people from diverse communities to engage with each other.
- Use technology, new media tools, and film to share stories from Aboriginal and immigrant communities.
- Use the arts to bring communities together (e.g. address social issues through interactive theatre, sharing through forms of cultural expression, like song and dance).
- Support and advocate for government programs that build inter-cultural ties between Aboriginal and immigrant communities.

Themes arising from participants' stories and ideas for building stronger inter-community relations will inform the content of a 'Story' document. The 'Story' document will be produced as part of the Dialogues Project and will include the stories of the communities involved, as well as highlights of the key events and achievements of the project.

Participant feedback indicates that they greatly appreciated the opportunity to share and hear very personal stories from others. They felt the circles were very open, respectful and included a diversity of participants. In suggesting how the circles could have been improved, much of the feedback indicated that more Aboriginal participants were needed, particularly as so many of the non-Aboriginal participants were interested in learning more about Aboriginal perspectives and issues.

The dialogue circles brought out a great deal of rich discussions around issues relating to identity, social inclusion and how to build community relations. The circles were an integral part of the Dialogues Project and helped to initiate greater communication between members of Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.