

OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON THRIVING FIRST NATIONS

Report on Design with Dialogue August 14, 2013

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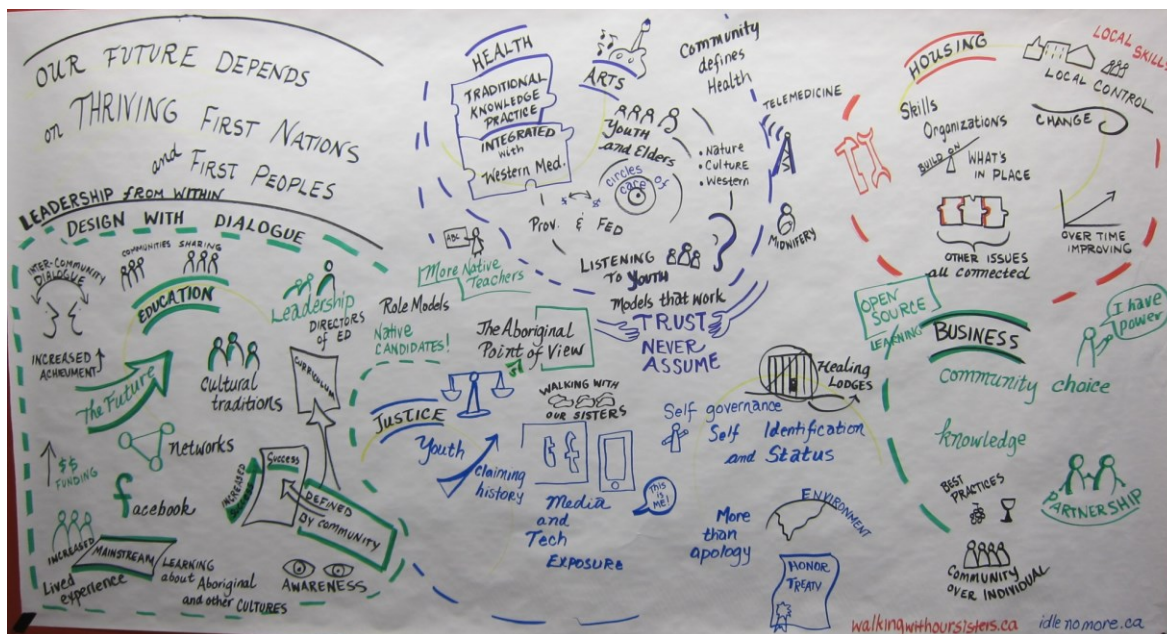
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The August 2013 Design with Dialogue session considered the thought provoking and dialogue enabling question:

How might Canadians help create durable social change with Aboriginal communities in the coming decade for education, housing, employment, justice and health equity, and spiritual connections to land?

About 25 participants engaged to co-create ideas and approaches to help realize durable social change within the coming decades utilizing the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) method. The SOAR method is an Appreciative Inquiry approach that focuses on generating positive approaches and developments, from which action can be taken. The topic areas discussed include education, housing, health and well being, justice, and entrepreneurship.

The report is preceded by a visual summary of the plenary dialogue as sketched live in the session (by Patricia Kambitsch).



The following is a summary of the discussion in the SOAR process, according to the designated group session categories.

1. EDUCATION

Strengths

An important strength in education is that a thirst for knowledge exists in aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities. Canadian and international online education networks enable communication and collaboration between communities. In terms of online networks, social media applications such as Facebook enables communication between individuals. There is a strong desire for change in educational content and there is a revival of cultural traditions taking place in schools, including learning of outdoor skills, art, music, dance, etc. The aboriginal artistic community has a strong common identity and arts provides a powerful medium for constructive engagement with society. Education levels in aboriginal communities are improving, in particular sectors such as law, healthcare and trades professions. There are a number of literacy initiatives such as “raz kids” with a strong emphasis on language preservation. Local leadership in education initiatives enables strong education results.

Opportunities

There are multiple opportunities for online education. There are possibilities for working with existing aboriginal programs at Universities including Brock, York, etc. Communities can share their own experiences and mentor other communities. Opportunities also exist for dialogue between communities about education formats and experiential learning options. There are many educational role models with success stories to share. Communities should also define educational “success” on their own terms.

Aspirations

A key aspiration is a forum or conference combined with online resource on best practices in aboriginal education. Curriculum should be defined and driven by the community, we need to have more community members as educators, and teachers as role models. There is a need for more aboriginal educational initiatives for non-aboriginal Canadians. Canadian curriculum should enhance aboriginal awareness including tradition, culture, history, present day issues since history includes current lived experience. Aspirations include increased mainstream learning about aboriginal and other cultures, as well as increased funding for aboriginal educational initiatives, with at least equal funding for equivalent programs. There is a need to have more high schools within home communities rather than distant locations. Social learning is a useful trend that can be further developed.

Results

Educational activity results include implementation of best practices. Educational improvements will also result in more enabled effective participatory community members, and an increase in emerging leaders, native candidates in education and political representation and participation among aboriginal people. Appropriate education will also increase in achievement in arts, entrepreneurship, employment, and all other fields. Education will also result in increased success, where “success” is defined by the community.



2. Housing

Strengths

One of the strengths of housing issues is that it is a tangible problem understood by all Canadians. There are models of local control of housing that are prevalent in British Columbia. There is existing infrastructure ready to contribute once opportunities are provided, and there are some Government programs to aid in home ownership. Housing is a hyper local problem and local citizen consultation enables reduction of community issues originating from poor housing. Local citizens are often given work opportunities to build housing and many aboriginal organizations own their buildings in Toronto. Housing stock in some communities has generally improved over time, and recognition of sub-standard housing is short-term advantage to demand urgent resolution for a critical issue.

Opportunities

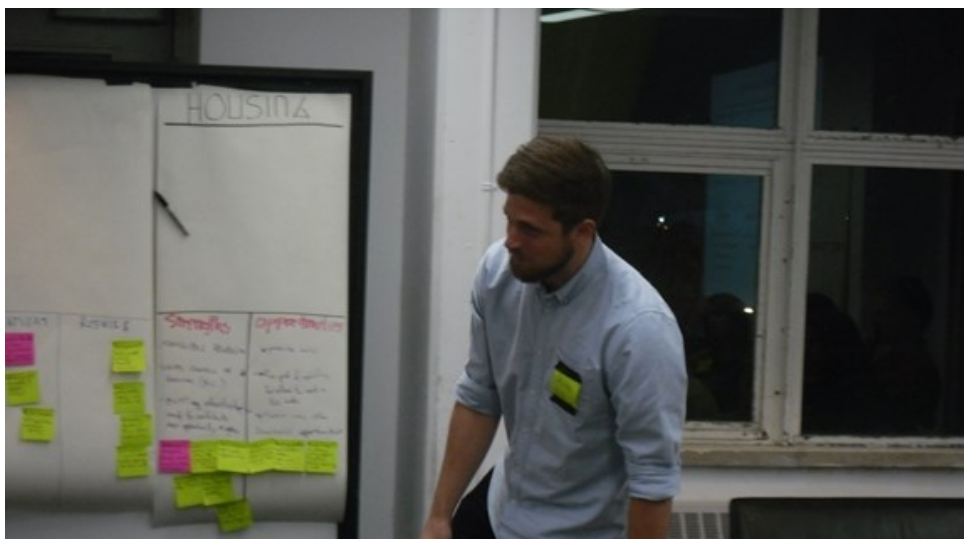
There are opportunities for local skill development through training and employment in home building. Housing development also provides opportunities for spillover into other financial opportunities. Local control of housing in British Columbia provides proof of capability, for other communities to invest in this model. Increased aboriginal influence in industry/politics would provide direct influence on housing requirements and activities. Since housing problems lead to other problems, it can be easier to justify investment in housing. Aboriginal organizations can leverage existing property they own to develop housing investments. Opportunities exist to build on infrastructure that is already in place.

Aspirations

An aboriginal housing policy with political will and financial backing is important. There is also an urgent need for funding for home improvement and financing opportunities. Another aspiration is the ability to link interconnected issues and highlight the fact that housing is effective in mitigating broader social problems. One of the aspirations is to balance private ownership and collective interest across different communities. Communities also aspire to have higher economic skill levels from employment and entrepreneurial experience in the housing and construction industry.

Results

A useful result in improving housing is the development of locally owned vertically integrated businesses in aboriginal communities. An immediate result is home modernization, including heating water, insulation etc. where these amenities do not exist. A long-term result is increased standard of life in communities based on improved housing. The percentage of individuals in transit between communities will also be reduced with appropriate housing, therefore reducing other social issues related to individuals being in transit between unstable housing situations.



3. HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Strengths

Traditional medicine has provided benefits for aboriginal communities for centuries. Community knowledge remains strong as elders provide oral transfer of knowledge. There are a number of existing organizations, aboriginal and grassroots that provide health and well being services. For example, there is a midwifery program model based in Toronto that is based on aboriginal principles. There is a role for arts, including music and dance, in health and well-being, including traditional and modern approaches. There are a number of positive aboriginal role models in healthcare. Access to healthy food is critical, as well as a combination of western and traditional medicine.

Opportunities

There are emerging opportunities for integration of traditional knowledge and practice and western medicine. There are additional opportunities for education of western practitioners about aboriginal health and well-being. There is a need to engage youth, elders in improving health and well being, as well as Circles of care including different professionals and community members. Listening to Youth is particularly important, as they may have solutions to challenges in their community. Retelling history important for well being, particularly for survivors of historical trauma. Mainstream Canadians can ask more questions before making assumptions both aboriginal health issues. Opportunities continue to exist for increased Provincial and federal funding for programs that work well.

Aspirations

Our aspirations as “all Canadians” health and well being for everyone need to be developed further. A holistic model would connect to nature, honour culture, intergenerational care, and western medicine. Community Care approaches need to connect aboriginal communities with similar needs. Communities need increased use of Telemedicine and reduced use of Emergency Rooms, better relationships between healthcare professionals, clients and communities. Another aspiration is to have more aboriginal healthcare practitioners. Equitable Access/Funding for healthcare is important as well as self-determination of health and well being outcomes. Ownership of health and well being outcomes by communities is critical. The healthcare system should provide additional choices wherever possible. A meaningful co-existence of Traditional and Modern Techniques is desirable. Media needs to be more supportive of positive developments, since it is not all “bad news”.

Results

The definition of “health”, “well being” continues to evolve. Health and well being require both quantitative and qualitative measures of success. Recognition of positive change will enable more positive results. Sharing success and “What works” across communities and cultures is an essential result.



4. JUSTICE

Strengths

Aboriginals are the fastest growing population group in Canada. There is increased cultural resiliency among aboriginal people and communities, many individuals are reclaiming indigeneity, and youth are claiming history. Social media has enabled communication and mobilization between different groups and individuals. e.g. Idle No More. Mass media also brought to light the present challenges. A number of heroes have emerged in aboriginal communities e.g. leaders of walkingwithoursisters. Dialogue between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians is happening. Aboriginal solutions to justice issues are being implemented, for example healing lodges are being implemented as an alternative to jails

Opportunities

Opportunities exist for self-governance of communities, for example determine community authority in legal issues. Online forum can be utilized for communities to meetup and mobilize. There are continuing opportunities for more justice, awareness, and respect for aboriginal people. The Canadian population can be educated on history, and contemporize historical impact on current justice issues. Canadians will empathize through increased mainstream media and social media exposure to aboriginal justice issues.

Aspirations

Self-governance is a key aspiration. There is a need for more than an apology for residential schools, i.e. there is an opportunity for government to say "We apologize. How can we rectify our

past wrongs?”. There is potential for effective rehabilitation of those who are incarcerated, with related increased socio-economic status, inclusive of education rates etc. Every land treaty should be honored to the letter, and self-identification of status as an aboriginal person should be enabled.

Results

Results include incarceration numbers that is reflective of percentage of population, and government accountable to high incarceration rates. A long-term result would be Government that is committed to sustainability,



5. BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Strengths

First Nations have some tax advantages and an employable populace available. The Osoyoos First Nation In British Columbia is one of the most entrepreneurial communities in Canada. There is a statistical high proportion of young people and young communities. Aboriginal communities have sustainable cultural practices including story based oral cultural practices. At the same time there is broad use of new technology. Entrepreneurship is particularly strong among aboriginal artists.

Opportunities

There are emerging possibilities for small business and entrepreneurship. Individuals who are isolated and unemployed can be provided with entrepreneurial opportunities.

Entrepreneurship can be developed through different models, including private enterprise and Social enterprise. There are entrepreneurial opportunities for increases in the Value Chain of

goods and services provided by and to aboriginal communities. There are mentorship possibilities e.g. the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) has mentorship programs. Business successes and best practices should be shared across communities. Internet based education opportunities available for at no cost, and there are opportunities for Internet enabled business due to isolated locations. Entrepreneur financing opportunities include grant focused funding and micro-finance. Business opportunities can be enabled in generating new solutions to old problems. There is a need for additional apprenticeships, there are long standing apprenticing cultures in many trades, professions and communities. The power of choice entrepreneurship enables is important, and there possibilities for balancing community over individual benefits.

Aspirations

Aspirations include being provided with outside support is provided when requested. Self-sustaining communities and self-reliance individuals can be enabled by entrepreneurship. An increased appreciation of aboriginal culture through knowledge exchange between aboriginal and non-aboriginal businesses and communities is possible. There is a need for more Aboriginal Banks that can finance aboriginal businesses, and business and entrepreneurship courses through Open Source Learning channels e.g. Khan Academy.

Results

More business and entrepreneurship resources shall be available to aboriginal communities. A medium term result is stronger partnerships between businesses, communities, and governments. Longer-term results including renewable resources used sustainably while protecting the environment and a positive community identity. Successful entrepreneurs can emerge as leaders role models in the community.