

Pítawík / Hear Me

Manitoba Aboriginal Women's Gatherings

September 2011 Report



Pitawik – Hear Me
Manitoba Aboriginal Women’s Gatherings

Comprehensive Final Report

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AMR Planning and Consulting prepared this report for the Pitawik Regional Gathering Planning Committee. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the committee

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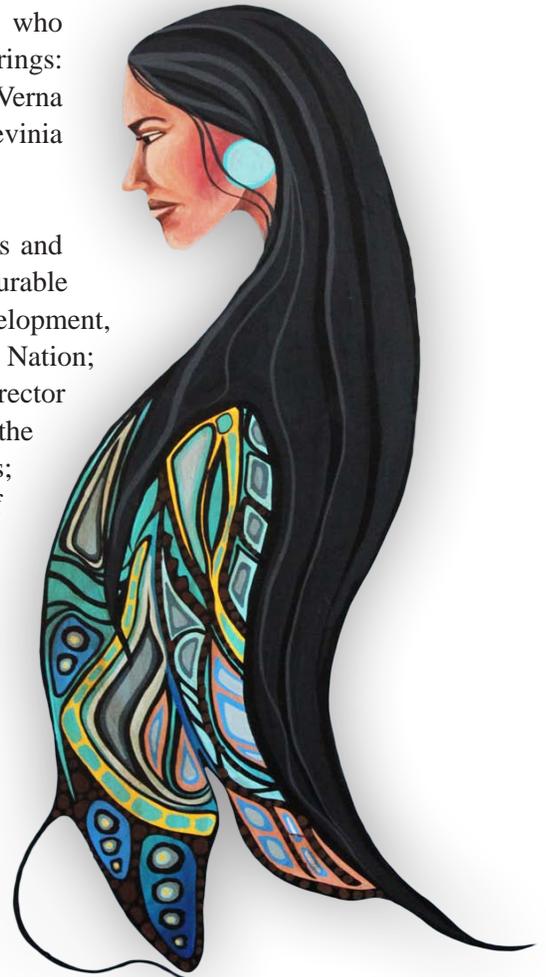
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Miigwech. Ekosani. Mahsi. Wopida. Marci. Thank you. Merci.



Executive Summary

This report documents the voices of the nearly 350 Aboriginal women who attended a series of four gatherings held throughout Manitoba in Opaskwayak Cree Nation, March 2009; Thompson, November 2009; Brandon, May 2010; and Winnipeg, September 2010. The information contained within this report is drawn from each respective gathering report. The purpose of the Pitawik gatherings was to provide women with a forum to voice their successes, challenges and solutions as key components of the Government of Manitoba's Pitawik (Hear Me) Strategy. The strategy was developed in response to the National Aboriginal Women's Summits (NAWS) I and II that took place in 2007 and 2008. The Pitawik gatherings focused on the NAWS themes of Health, Safety and Wellness; Equality and Empowerment; and Strength, Honour and Balance. The following provides key points expressed by gathering participants.

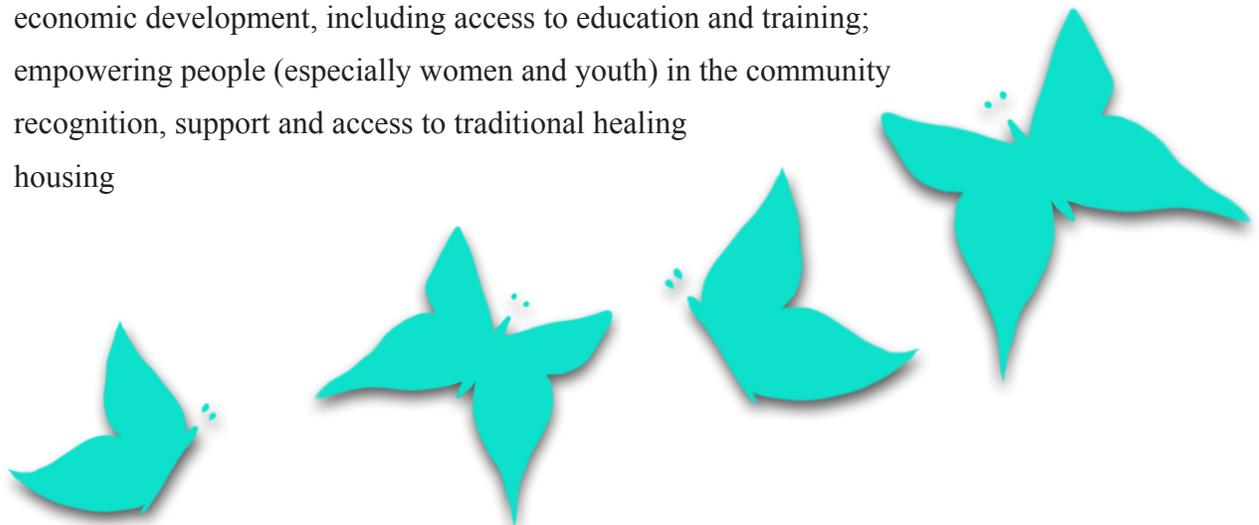
Successes

Though not readily apparent in some instances, the underlying theme of successes identified by participants at all gatherings involved gender and culture. Participants in the gatherings provided a number of different examples of successes relating to women taking on leadership roles (formal and informal) within the community and positions of influence within organizations. They also highlighted the unique leadership style of women. Culture was explained in different ways based on participants' belief system and cultural background. Some identified as a success the increased recognition and provision of culturally appropriate services by non-Aboriginal organizations, including the hiring of Aboriginal spiritual advisors and healers. Additional successes relating to culture were characterized primarily as either community-initiated/-developed culturally appropriate programs and services or community revitalization of cultural healing ways, including participation in sacred ceremonies.

Challenges

Five key challenges facing Aboriginal women throughout the province were identified under at least one theme at all four gatherings, and relate to the areas of:

- access to, and disparities in, services and programs
- economic development, including access to education and training;
- empowering people (especially women and youth) in the community
- recognition, support and access to traditional healing
- housing



Proposed Solutions

The solutions put forward at the gatherings can be broken into the six common themes of: women in leadership; traditional knowledge; youth; housing; communication; and holistic healing/wellness. Additional regionally specific solutions were identified at each gathering that were not thematically similar to others, and thus are identified as “unique” within the report. Recommendations, solutions and challenges are presented in detail within the report, under the following general areas:

- There is a need, stated at each gathering, for women to have some formal, organized bodies that provided a regular forum for them to come together to meet, discuss, share their concerns and build leadership capacity. This is to happen at the community level, allowing for women to gain support and share their stories, but also at the local, provincial, national and international levels, inserting Aboriginal women’s voices into the larger political agenda and securing increased Aboriginal women’s leadership.
- As the keepers of the culture, women are interested in the revitalization of culture and language, paying particular attention to the inclusion of youth and Elders.
- Youth in our communities are struggling with drugs and alcohol, lack of boundaries, intergenerational residential school trauma, and lack of recreation, services and opportunities. A variety of measures are called upon to address these concerns.
- All communities – urban, rural, northern – have serious and urgent housing needs.
- Access to clean water and affordable healthy food are of primary importance for all communities and particularly for northern communities.
- Considerable efforts must be made to end ongoing cycles of family violence.
- Parents need increased and enhanced supports that are culturally relevant.
- Women need more opportunities and supports for education, training and economic development to support a variety of options that include everything from entrepreneurship, to professional education, to training in non-traditional occupations.
- Our health care system must pay attention to a continuum of health needs, addressing a number of specific issues, such as but not limited to: accessibility, holistic healing, local Personal Care Homes for the elderly, grief counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, Diabetes prevention, disability services, and suicide prevention.

As the Pitawik strategy ends this phase and moves to the next, the words of the women in OCN resonate:

“We want to strengthen our voices and be heard. Through self-knowledge, self-management and self-determination, Aboriginal women, in unity, will become empowered to take their rightful places within community life and leadership, as mothers, grandmothers, teachers and bearers of our cultures. Through reclaiming traditional spiritual and cultural values, customs and worldviews, through knowing ourselves, we will help one another to be strong and be heard”



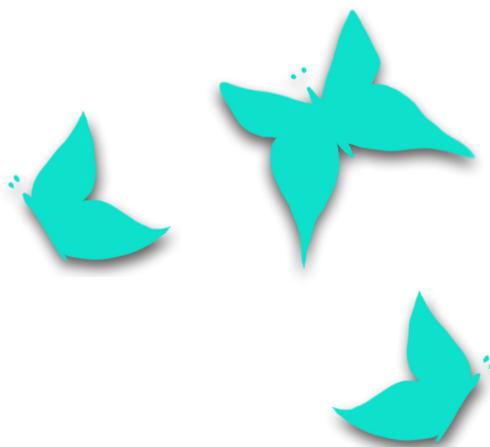
Introduction

A number of significant events at the national and regional levels led to the Pitawik gatherings which are documented in this report. In April, 2004, a national Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable was held in Ottawa. This was an unprecedented opportunity for members of the Federal Cabinet, Senate and House of Commons to engage with Aboriginal leaders from across the country. The Prime Minister made four key commitments at this Roundtable:

- A Report on the Roundtable: Strengthening the Relationship, Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable which was released on May 20th, 2004
- Sectoral discussions in six priority areas with Aboriginal groups, Provincial and Territorial governments, sectoral experts and practitioners
- A Policy Retreat with members of the Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal Affairs (CCAA) Aboriginal leaders
- The development of an Aboriginal Report Card to track progress

In November 2005, a First Minister's Meeting (FMM) was held in Kelowna, British Columbia, with Aboriginal leaders. During these deliberations, Aboriginal leadership identified the need for a National Aboriginal Women's summit. Then-President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Beverly Jacobs, commented that women's issues were not adequately heard in the process leading up to Kelowna, and that requests to have a women-specific table were unsuccessful.¹ Furthermore, the Native Women's Association of Canada's (NWAC) request to have the issue of violence added to the Kelowna agenda was not accepted.² During and following the FMM, support for a National Aboriginal Women's Summit continued to grow. With support from federal and provincial governments and national Aboriginal organizations, the first

National Aboriginal Women's Summit was held in Corner brook, Newfoundland in June, 2007. A National Planning Committee was formed to develop the NAWS II agenda³ for the second summit which took place in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in July, 2008.



NAWS II built upon and advanced the recommendations developed at NAWS I in three theme areas:

- Health, Safety and Wellness
- Equality and Empowerment
- Strength, Balance and Honour

The Pitawik (Hear Me) strategy began with a Round Table held in Winnipeg in June 2008 and the establishment of a Pitawik Regional Gathering Planning Committee (Planning Committee) whose goal it was to provide Manitoba-specific follow up and input into NAWS III. Members included Aboriginal women recognized as community leaders, representatives of Aboriginal political organizations, and representatives of various departments in the Manitoba government. The Planning Committee offered tobacco and sought the advice of Cree Elder, Mrs. Ruth Spence, in providing a meaningful and appropriate name for these gatherings and the overall strategy. Mrs. Spence offered the Cree word "Pitawik," explaining that this word translates to "hear me" in the English language, and captures the strong yet respectful desire for women to be heard.

This report documents the voices of the nearly 350 Aboriginal women who attended the four Pitawik regional gatherings that took place throughout Manitoba. The initial plan called for a series of three community gatherings that would invite women to have input into the Manitoba strategy which would then be brought forward to NAWS III. The first gathering was held in Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) (March 2009). The mail-out notice for this event took place two weeks before it was held and while almost one hundred women attended, more had to be turned away due to limited space. It was clear that women wanted and needed to be heard. The response to the OCN event was so high that the Planning Committee decided to add a fourth gathering. These subsequent gatherings took place in Thompson in November 2009, Brandon in May 2010 and Winnipeg in September 2010. Following the Thompson gathering, the province learned that there would not be a third national gathering (NAWS III). Manitoba proceeded with the plans to hold all four gatherings, adding the voices of the women to the recommendations of the 2008 Pitawik report, and informing the development of a comprehensive Manitoba Aboriginal women's strategy.

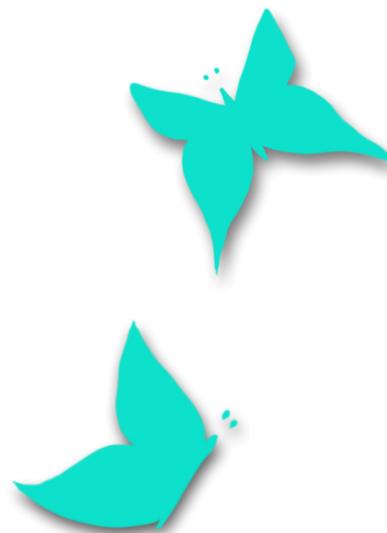
As stated, the Pitawik regional gatherings brought Aboriginal women together for discussions focused on three themes drawn from NAWS II: Health, Safety and Wellness; Equality and Empowerment; and Strength, Honour and Balance. This report summarizes the discussions under each theme, where possible, including common (amongst gatherings) and unique (to one gathering, individually) successes, challenges and proposed solutions⁴ identified by the women.

While some unique challenges were identified at each of the four gatherings, common challenges were also identified, notably in the areas of: access to, and disparities in, services and programs; economic development, including access to education and training; empowering

people (especially women and youth) in the community; recognition, support and access to traditional healing; and housing.

Common solutions developed at the gatherings relate to six areas: women in leadership, traditional knowledge, youth, housing, communication, and holistic health and wellness.

To acknowledge the work that the women had come together for, and to set the atmosphere for the gatherings, each event opened the first evening in celebration. In each community, women shared personal stories and gifts; they came together and drummed, sang and recited poetry. A powerful performance of internationally acclaimed play "The Vagina Monologues," performed by a cast of all Aboriginal women, opened the event in Winnipeg. These activities contributed to an environment of comfort, safety and inspiration, all of which were important to encouraging women to share and engage in discussions. It must also be noted that these presentations and performances, as well as the presence and counsel of the Elders and the smudging and prayers created a culturally safe environment that served to encourage and inspire participants to share freely. Throughout this document, and in the respective gathering reports, the power of women supporting women, and the strength of culture were identified as especially significant.



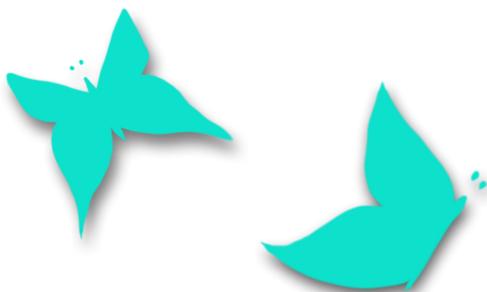
Chapter 1: Successes

The facilitation process used to support the discussion at the gatherings evolved after the first event. Initially, in OCN, women were given the opportunity to review the NAWS reports and recommendations and then asked to identify their major concerns and top needs/priorities under the three theme areas.⁵ Following this event, the Planning Committee reconsidered the process and decided to proceed with a more strength-based approach for the subsequent gatherings, encouraging participants to think specifically about their communities in terms of what is working (successes) in each theme area in addition to what is not (needs). This reframing of the facilitation process led to a reformed structure for the discussions, and consequently the report of findings. Because of this change, only the latter three of the four gathering reports - Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg - identified successes in a clear and detailed way. The successes identified at the Opaskwayak Cree Nation gathering and contained within this section were gleaned from a review of the discussion of “most urgent needs” in that gathering report⁶.

Participants were asked to respond to the following question under each theme for three of the four gatherings:

What is presently working in your communities?

What are the successes?



A. Health, Safety and Wellness

Participants indicated that some headway is being made in this area. Common successes under the theme of “Health, Safety and Wellness” at the Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings included health facilities and human resources. It was explained that in some communities, this means: increased and diverse medical professionals are available more often; new and qualified health technical staff/advocates (e.g. Director of Health) are being hired; and new or expanded health facilities are being established. Overall, these improvements to the health care system have meant that people are able to stay in their communities to receive the health care they need.

Women in each gathering were able to point to examples in their regions that supported and/or promoted health and wellness:

- In Winnipeg there is the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and The Laurel Centre.
- In Brandon, Aboriginal Healing and Wellness (provided by the Brandon Friendship Centre in partnership with the Brandon Regional Health Authority).
- In Swan Lake First Nation (SLFN), the SLFN Health Centre.
- In the North, a Crisis Stabilization Unit is currently under development.

Participants at the Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings also identified supports for maternal child health, focusing on nutrition. A number of specific programs throughout Manitoba were highlighted as effectively providing important dietary information and supports (including meals) to expectant mothers and children. These include the Friendship Centre breakfast program in Winnipeg (which involves volunteer mothers and donations from Safeway); Prairie Health Matters (provides dietary guidance, by, for example, accompanying clients to grocery store to assess food nutrition labels), the Families

First Program (provides pre- and post-natal supports in the areas such as budgeting, self-care and nutrition) in Brandon; midwifery programs that support at-home birth and pregnancy care, and the FASD mentoring program in the north. Throughout Manitoba, the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program has various sites that offer prenatal support for women.

While common successes amongst the Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings under the theme of “Health, Safety and Wellness” don’t necessarily highlight gender and cultural strengths, these were explicitly identified as common successes at the Thompson and Brandon gatherings, and were underlying components of unique successes identified at each individual gathering.

It could be assumed that gender and culture were central to all common successes as is evident in many of the previously stated programs and services. However, participants in Thompson and Brandon explicitly identified a number of common successes relating to culture and gender. These were explained in a number of different ways. Success was described by some as increased recognition and provision of culturally appropriate services by non-Aboriginal organizations, including the hiring of Aboriginal spiritual advisors and healers. One participant stated, “They [non-Aboriginal organizations] are starting to think about healing.” Overall, successes relating to culture were characterized primarily as either community-initiated/-developed culturally appropriate programs and services or community revitalization of cultural healing ways, including participation in sacred ceremonies. Furthermore, they also involve building upon cultural strengths and the knowledge and guidance of the Elders, which are viewed as beneficial to the entire community. The broad impact of cultural holistic healing was aptly expressed by participants at the Winnipeg gathering – “the spiritual base [has] helped men, children, and the whole community.”

Participants at these two gatherings also provided a number of different examples of successes relating to gender, such as women taking on leadership roles (formal and informal) within the community and positions of influence within organizations. It was explained that women’s leadership style is different than that of their male counterparts, in part, because “women tend to be out in the community more.” Further distinction is due to women’s traditional roles as caretakers, of their families, of the water. Specific examples of women demonstrating leadership are: women’s gatherings [such as the annual gatherings in Pimicikamak Cree Nation (Cross Lake First Nation)]; key management roles within the administration of the Brandon Regional Health Authority; the establishment of Grandmother’s Councils; the Grandmothers’ Walk to raise awareness to the issue of violence; the development of women-focused programs or initiatives that facilitate women supporting other women; leadership as resistance (e.g. blocking hydro dam); and women as agents of change at the political level.

Two successes unique to the Winnipeg gathering also highlight the role of women. The first is sustainable and inclusive self-governance, and its positive effects upon health and safety. This type of self-governance was explained as more women taking on leadership roles and also as: a First Nation that had engaged the entire community in the development of a ten-year community plan and the establishment of a Junior Chief and Council (illustrating the importance of youth involvement and leadership development). Participants have observed that this type of self-governance positively impacts the community. Another success highlighted is the role of women building community awareness, involvement and development. The Grandmothers Protecting Our Sacred Children Walk was provided as an example of women demonstrating leadership. Another example includes more women becoming involved in “non-traditional” professions, particularly in accessing training opportunities at Manitoba

Hydro's Wuskwatim Generation Project, demonstrating that there are few limits on what women can accomplish and serving as role models for younger women.

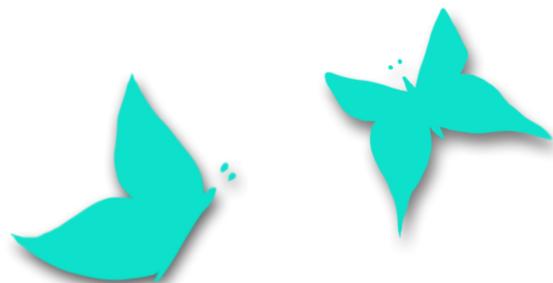
Similarly, two unique successes under the theme "Health, Safety and Wellness" identified at the Brandon gathering highlighted gender. This includes the success of facilitating self-care, supporting families and building communities. Participants at this gathering share the belief that "you cannot take care of others without first taking care of yourself." They recognize the importance of women-centered programs and services, and formal and informal initiatives and activities, many of which are being initiated by women themselves. Examples of the latter include coffee houses, drum groups, and information networks. The supportive nature (i.e. women supporting women) of these environments was highlighted. Women's willingness to be supportive was also observed as extending to the broader community, especially in times of crisis and when volunteers are needed. One participant stated "[during these times] there are a lot volunteers, which makes the communities strong." Another participant stated "it is often the women in the community who are taking on these volunteer roles." Participants also recognize that family wellness provides a connection between individual and community wellness. Specific programs that support individuals and families were highlighted, including, as examples, the Community Kitchen and Baby First programs in Neepawa.

The importance of individual wellness to family and community wellness was recognized at the Brandon gathering through the identification of programs and services that provide women and families with practical knowledge for daily living. Specific examples of this were provided by participants: Prairie Health Matters (provides clients with dietary guidance, for example, by accompanying them to the grocery store to read and assess food labels); the Families First

Program (provides pre- and post-natal supports to mothers in areas such as budgeting, self-care, and nutrition); Brandon 7th Street Access Centre (provides access to laundry facilities, phone services including voicemail and long-distance, tax services and other services); and the Community Watch Program (has been effective in creating a safe environment through partnership between the community and organizations).

B. Equality and Empowerment

Once again, gender and culture are significant in both common and unique successes under the theme of "Health, Safety, and Wellness." A common success amongst the Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings under this theme relate to education. Specific examples were provided: teacher education programs at Brandon University that include a cultural component; Children of the Earth School, which "creates pride and allows children to share with teachers and other students who they are"; the Indigenous Governance (formerly Aboriginal Governance) Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts programs at the University of Winnipeg (U of W)⁷; and the collaborative work between U of W and Red River College regarding different programs. More general comments were also provided: the increased number of Aboriginal women who are obtaining advanced degrees in areas such as law and medicine; the inclusion of Elders in schools; celebrating educational achievements; and changes in curricula, including accurate accounts of Aboriginal history.



Successes identified at the Winnipeg gathering explicitly relate to gender, particularly women's leadership and involvement, and also to culture. The first, sharing the sacred role of women through cultural teachings, relates to participants' recognition of the broader impacts of sharing this knowledge. Not only does this increase awareness and understanding, but also inspires and motivates women to take on key roles in the community, whether as elected officials, professionals or role models. A second success focuses more on gender, and recognizes the leadership style of Aboriginal women, which was also identified as a success under the theme "Health, Safety and Wellness." This success is the increased involvement of women in leadership positions and their distinctive leadership style. Participants described this style in the following ways: "Women just do – they get together, talk about the issues, and find solutions"; and, "Women going into leadership will be good for being fair. Women speak as if they are speaking for their children. They view all children as the same as their own. They speak for all."

Yet, another participant characterized women in leadership not only as a success, but as "our future." Participants have observed an increase in the number of women elected to leadership positions within First Nations and Metis communities. In the case of First Nations, this appears to be occurring primarily in the position of Councillor rather than Chief. It was pointed out that of the 64 First Nations Chiefs in the province, only 5 are women. It was also noted that in one First Nation community, women are responsible for the election and citizenship laws. Although a third success under the theme of "Equality and Empowerment" identified at the Winnipeg gathering doesn't explicitly speak to women, it nevertheless relates to creating a balance in the community, inclusive of everyone's involvement. This speaks to increased community involvement to bring balance and build for the future and relates to participants' recognition that community

involvement is a critical factor in building for the future as it "brings balance." It was emphasized that this involvement must not be limited by reserve boundaries.

Community involvement to make positive change also underlies a success under this theme identified at the Brandon gathering - addressing disparities and divisiveness. A participant commented: "it is truly our people who have made these changes for our communities...[the] focus now is how to put in place systems and supports for these people that are making positive changes. We need to support what is happening in the communities." Although participants recognize that much more systemic change is still needed, they have observed some progress. One specific example is in the area of Child and Family Services, with the creation of First Nations Authorities, attributed to action by First Nations themselves, leading to the development of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry- Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI), which turned responsibility for child welfare in Manitoba to First Nations and Métis communities. As with other successes highlighted in this report thus far, participants acknowledge that this success is also due to the prevalence and effectiveness of Aboriginal women supporting women and the broader community, in both informal and formal ways.

C. Strength, Balance and Honour

Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings both identified successes relating to women's involvement and support to each other and the broader community. At the Brandon gathering, this was in relation to women supporting women, and families. This refers to women gathering to discuss things, as well as their involvement in activities such as drumming, which also can also generate increased community involvement and connectedness. On the evening prior to the full day discussions at the Brandon gathering, the Sweet Medicine Singers, a group of women traditional drummers,

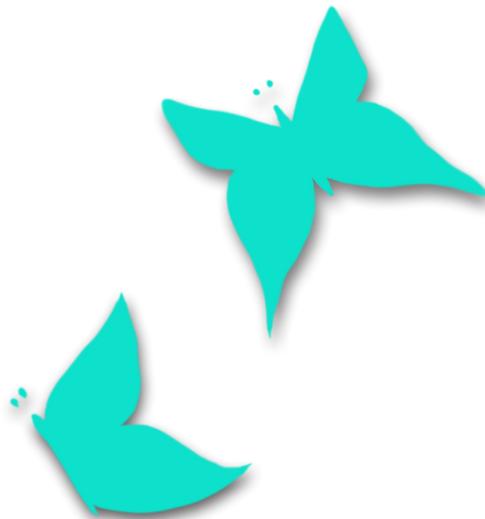
provided drumming and shared their experience of support: “the group members support each other, share each other’s celebrations and offer support to families’ challenges with kids, etc. Once a month we meet and sit in a circle to share stories, but we connect at other times too.” At the Winnipeg gathering, participants spoke of fostering connectedness through community involvement and community-based solutions. This refers to women’s frequent role as catalysts for community involvement in activities or initiatives that have resulted in increased community connectedness. One participant stated that when women get together around any issue in the community, their discussion focuses on “what can we do about this.” Another participant stated that community based solutions are effective because “we know our people, our community history.”

While balance was discussed under the previous theme “Equality and Empowerment” with respect to involvement of men and women, it was also raised under the theme of “Strength, Balance and Honour” at the Brandon gathering. This was with respect to balance of cultural and Western ways, and also relates to gender and culture as underlying success. Two different successes at this gathering together speak to the importance of women and others in the community maintaining a balanced life inclusive of both cultural and Western ways. Participants identified acknowledging the roles and responsibilities of women as a success. While they observe that women are acknowledging and maintaining their traditional roles and responsibilities, they are also working to revitalize activities perceived as outside the realm of women. The second related success is the number of cultural and non-cultural activities that help women and their families maintain a balanced life.

At the Winnipeg gathering, one participant stated, “Women, all around, we give our energy, and in turn, we get strength back. It balances out and makes us feel good...and in doing

so, we honour each other.” Recognition and celebration of achievements was identified as a success at this gathering. While participants acknowledge the value in personally honouring each other’s achievements, they also see the need to do so publically. Participants provided the following examples of how this is being done: Ka Ni Kanichihk’s annual “Honouring Our Grandmothers” awards ceremony; a Tribal Council’s Employee Years of Service recognition dinner; and awards day at schools where students, teachers and parents (including volunteers) are honoured.

In the Thompson gathering report, successes were not clearly identified under this theme, but were mentioned as part of other discussions. Those gleaned from a review of that report include: “healing...[which] has brought honesty and forgiveness;” “Traditional knowledge, spirituality, language and ‘learning about ourselves’;” “standing up for ourselves on issues relating to treaty rights and human rights;” “Brothers in Spirit, a men’s group that works alongside Sisters in Spirit to raise awareness and stop violence against Aboriginal women;” and “the Aboriginal Accord in Thompson.” These successes are similar to those identified at the Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings, in that underlying them are culture and gender.





Chapter 2: Challenges

At each of the Pitawik gatherings, participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. When you think about these themes (“A. Health, Safety and Wellness”; “B. Equality and Empowerment”; and “C. Strength, Balance and Honour”) is there anything you would like to add to Pitawik (A Manitoba Strategy)?
2. What is important for Aboriginal women to bring forward at this gathering? What is important to you?
3. Does the Pitawik document capture some of the same statements that you would have? What are those? Can you elaborate?
4. Are there other things that need to be addressed in order to ensure we bring forth the appropriate recommendations from your perspective?

The responses to these questions can be seen as the challenges that the participating women indicate needed to be addressed. The following overview demonstrates that there are five key challenges facing Aboriginal women throughout the province that were identified under at least one theme at all four gatherings. The five key challenges are in the areas of:

- access to, and disparities in, services and programs
- economic development, including access to education and training
- empowering people (especially women and youth) in the community
- recognition, support and access to traditional healing
- housing

The overview also helps to identify key challenges within each gathering area. In looking at reoccurring themes under “Health, Safety and Wellness,” “Equality and Empowerment” and “Strength, Balance and Honour” by community, we are able to see key challenges facing those in each respective gathering area. This following provides a summary of challenges from all gatherings (Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg) under all three NAWS themes. It must be noted that this is a comparatively more detailed and comprehensive overview than the preceding section on successes because each gathering report clearly identified challenges under all three themes.

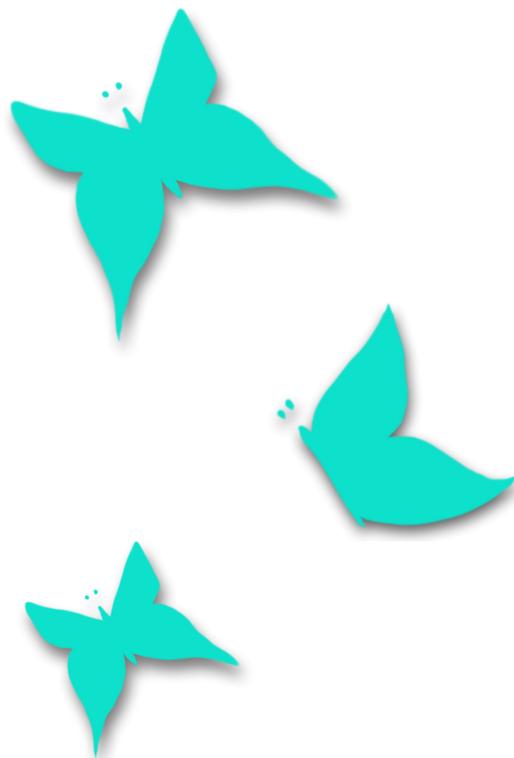
A. Health, Safety and Wellness

Three common challenges were identified at all gatherings (OCN, Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg). The first relates to children and youth. There is shared concern about the poverty experienced by Aboriginal children and youth, which, although it exists in all Aboriginal communities, is understood to be more acute in remote and isolated communities. There is also concern regarding the lack of comprehensive in-community supports, particularly for those at-risk, including for example, girls, those in the care of Child and Family Services, and those with mental health issues or learning disabilities. At the Thompson gathering, participants stated that some parents are fearful of being judged as “bad parents” or that children will “abuse” the CFS system when they “don’t get their way” by “threatening to report them”. Additional concerns when it comes to children and youth are: the negative impacts of mainstream culture (i.e. media, popular culture, gangs, etc.); and the deterioration of the family structure (e.g. lack of respect for parents by children, lack of parental involvement, decreased parental influence, etc.). Thompson participants recommend self-esteem workshops to “empower them [youth] to stand up for themselves.”

The second common challenge is lack of housing and safe environments. This is a concern to those residing on- and off-reserve, in Metis communities, and in urban centres; however, the context for each is slightly different. In the off-reserve and urban centres, particularly in southwestern Manitoba (Brandon area), the current influx of newcomers is putting a strain on affordable housing, and is seen by some participants as having negative impacts on community relations and safety through, for example, disrespectful attitudes towards women and increased presence of gangs. In the on-reserve context, particularly in northern Manitoba, the issue is simply shortages of quality homes, which results in sickness, hidden homelessness, and over-crowding, conditions that negatively impact family relationships. One participant at the Thompson gathering questioned, “How can parents teach boundaries or structure if there are too many people in one home?” Participant comments at the OCN gathering highlight that poor quality housing is financially illogical. Contract services are often sought to fix the many issues associated with substandard housing; however, they “wouldn’t have to pay for these services if houses were built properly in the first place.”

A third common challenge identified at all four gatherings relates to lack of accessibility to, and disparities in, programs and services. This challenge was identified explicitly and clearly, or as part of characterizing other challenges. At the Brandon gathering, disparity in services was observed to be based on Aboriginal status, in reference to unclear lines of jurisdiction resulting in certain perceptions of what Metis do not receive relative to what First Nations do. There was also concern about gender disparities in program and service development. One participant commented that, “programs have been developed by men with no input by women.” At the Winnipeg gathering, the challenge of disparity in access to services was explained as the situation where a person’s residency determines access to services and

programs. It was pointed out that for those residing in remote and isolated communities, this means limited (or no) access. At the OCN gathering participants identified the lack of comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and integrated services and initiatives available in the community, including those that focus on empowering women and children. Participants commented, “currently, we are not given the capacity to nurture all aspects of life.” They feel that they are “doing everything [they] can”, adding that “intervention methods developed by First Nations are not considered or are treated as a priority by government. Furthermore, basic needs must be met first before people will have the “capacity to nurture and care for [their] spirits.” They call for preventative measures to address root causes, rather than “band-aid solutions”. In Thompson, the women identified the need for systemic change, inclusive of addressing the issue of programs typically designed for non-Aboriginal people living in the south and/or urban settings that do not incorporate Aboriginal values.



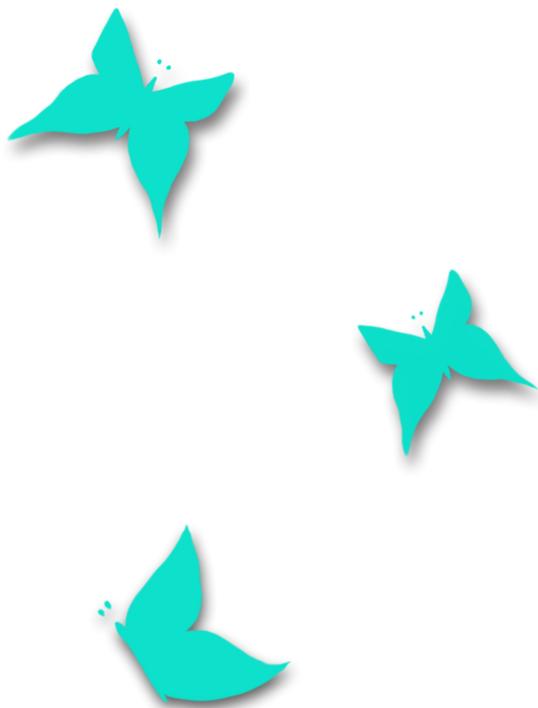
There were nine common challenges identified at the OCN and Thompson gatherings in the context of what is lacking. Four of these challenges involve the area of health. The first challenge, health care staff, relates to the need to increase the availability (i.e. round the clock), and the range of health care staff (including, as examples, medical escorts for Elders) in communities.⁸ The second and third of these health-related challenges are regarding health programming. There is a need for more public education on all types of substance abuse, and in particular, prescription drug abuse, to include not only community members but also health professionals. The third of these challenges has to do with mental health programming. Participants stated that there is a need for more prevention/intervention programs, including those aimed at youth and women.



There were also a number of other issues related to mental health identified, including: to establish on-reserve, community based programs that will help individuals experiencing mental health issues, and the families of those individuals; de-stigmatize living with a mental health disorder; explore the prevalence of “over-diagnosis” of disorders; and provide housing to those living with mental health disorders. The fourth health-related challenge is the lack of recognition of, and access to, traditional healing and medicines. Participants agree that all levels of government need to recognize traditional healing knowledge and support access to traditional healing and medicines, including addressing the minimal funding currently available through First Nations and Inuit Health to access traditional healing. They also stated that Western health professionals need to recognize traditional healing ways and healers. Participants at the OCN gathering called for more support and opportunities for women to learn healing ways, “bring[ing] forward those gifts that have been hidden for a long time because of colonization or because of physical or sexual abuse.”

Three of the nine common challenges identified at the OCN and Thompson gatherings relate to addressing the lack of supports for the most vulnerable in the community. The first of these challenges is lack of supports and protections for elders. One participant questioned, “where are the leaders?” Specific supports identified as lacking are those that should help Elders to manage changes that come with aging (e.g. need for enhanced home care services, transportation, and housekeeping), and education regarding prescription drugs. Financial and other types of abuse were also identified as concerns. An additional concern was that each community does not have its own personal care home that would enable Elders to remain in their home communities.

The second of these challenges relates to a lack of protections for victims of family and domestic violence. Participants identified the need to: revitalize traditional values and roles to heal from the impact of mainstream influences and impacts; establish a crisis shelter in every community, which should provide anger management and self-esteem programs; implement prevention and intervention programs aimed at at-risk youth and females, focusing on addressing risk factors; establishing/increasing the number of peacekeepers; and taking action on recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, National Aboriginal Women Summits and the Pink Paper⁹. The third of these challenges relating to those most vulnerable in the community is the lack of infrastructure and supports for the disabled. Community infrastructure, including homes and community facilities, are not accessible for the physically disabled.



The last two of the nine common challenges identified at the OCN and Thompson gatherings were food insecurity and education. Food insecurity relates to the high cost of food, and lack of accessibility to traditional lands for sustenance. A Thompson participant stated, “People [in the communities] choose Pepsi over milk and chips over food because they’re cheaper.” Similarly, participants at the OCN gathering recognize that “unhealthy foods are cheaper, and are making us sick.” The second challenge, education, includes the need for: adequately funded and certified daycares and programs involving parents and grandparents; increased efforts on the part of school systems to respect student diversity, value student opinions and develop self-esteem in students; “revamping” schools to reflect the ways of the families and community they serve; initiatives to raise student awareness of violence and gangs; and provision of a school bus and bus driver at every school.

A number of different unique challenges were identified at each gathering. In Brandon, for example, racism and cultural differences were associated with issues of job inequity, disparities in access to programs and services, justice issues and lack of women’s shelters. Participants at this gathering observed that the recent influx of foreign workers has had negative impacts on attitudes towards, and treatment of, women, and on community/neighborhood safety. A second challenge is grieving, and the general lack of supports in this area, including those aimed at addressing historical-cultural grief. Participants have observed that this type of grieving is connected to addictions/substance abuse, and as such, substance abuse treatment programs should be connected to grieving supports, as well as to parenting skills programs, where appropriate.

Four unique challenges were identified at the OCN gathering. The first is diabetes, and the need for increased education; preventative care and treatment in communities, with a special

focus on accessibility for Elders; and the establishment of a northern Manitoba Diabetes Centre of Excellence. The second challenge is missing persons, and the need to focus more on the issue, as well as improving the ways in which police listen to, and intake, reports of missing persons and undertake increased search efforts. The third unique challenge identified at the OCN gathering is women's wellness. Participants want increased training and education opportunities in this area; the creation of safe and supportive spaces within the community; and reproductive health education and supports. The last unique challenge identified is waste management. Participants at this gathering commented that their communities do not have adequate human and financial capacity to support effective waste management facilities and programs.

B. Equality and Empowerment

A common challenge identified at all four gatherings under this theme is recognition and building capacity of women as leaders. Some participants have observed and experienced continuation of the "ol' boys club" which has, explicitly denied women's voices in decision-making forums and processes. Attitudinal changes and women's leadership development opportunities, including, for example, training/skills development and the establishment of Women's Council/Committees with, "real power," are needed. Participants at the Thompson gathering discussed the importance of working for "balance", and added that traditionally, men and women had complimentary roles, but now "women are doing everything." They also questioned, "how do we [men and women] support each other and get rid of the patriarchal system?"

Common challenges identified at the OCN and Thompson gatherings are in the areas of economic development participation and education. Regarding the former, participants at the OCN gathering identified the need to focus on women's participation in non-traditional

industries, and providing the supports and training to facilitate this. Thompson gathering participants' discussion of this issue focused on creating and ensuring employment opportunities for local people within Manitoba Hydro's Wuskwatim Generation Project. They expressed their concern with the negative social fall-out of this project, including their observations that gambling and substance abuse has increased since the start of the project, appearing to have impacted young women and men the most. An additional dimension of this challenge of economic development, overall, is the multiple barriers to community people starting up their own businesses.

Regarding the challenge of education, participants at these two gatherings suggested that poor student performance be explored, focusing on the impacts of the lack of cultural teachings and parental involvement, and issues of access (e.g. where people reside and limited funding). They further suggested that improvements to the education system be undertaken, especially with respect to teaching methods and policy, learning supports, cultural content and parental involvement.

There were five unique challenges identified at the OCN gathering under this theme of "Equality and Empowerment." The first relates to equality. This was described in the following ways: equality of services and programs available to Aboriginal women and other Canadians, regardless of where a person resides; putting an end to racism; all organizations should provide more information on available services, programs and issues, particularly for women living in remote, isolated communities; and recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, NAWS and Pitawik must be implemented. The second challenge is supporting families by providing: more education in areas such as sexual health, meal planning and parenting; increased opportunities for youth to get involved with traditional culture; and provision of a range of supports for

young mothers. The third challenge identified at the OCN gathering is personal development opportunities for women, including: increased access to a range of services, programs and forums focused on, for example, counseling, building self-esteem, violence, substance abuse, suicide and parenting skills; and the establishment of women's centres within communities, which would engage Elders as teachers and link with youth. Participants stated that they need a "place where we can start to heal ourselves and then help our youth." The fourth challenge is improving in-community service delivery. Participants stated that services in communities take a holistic and de-colonization approach, and are integrated with other services. They further stated the need for governments to focus on encouraging healthy lifestyles rather than on budgets. The fifth unique challenge identified at the OCN gathering is unity. Participants stated that, "all of us together is stronger than lots of organizations", and called for unity on a number of fronts – at the national level; amongst the Metis people in realizing their aspirations and addressing their needs; and, at the organizational level, to ensure responsiveness to women's needs, and including as an example, Mothers of Red Nations to work towards representation from each northern community.

There were several unique challenges identified at the Thompson gathering under the theme "Equality and Empowerment." The first is similar to the last challenge identified above in the discussion on unique challenges identified at the OCN gathering in that participants also recognize the need to have northern representation within organizations. However their discussion differed slightly in that they also recognize disparities amongst organizations in the north and south, with those in the north being disadvantaged relative to the south. A second challenge identified at this gathering is lack of control of what happens in their community, as this is in the hands other governments and agencies. There is a need to break away from paternalistic approaches to

governance and programming, both of which are highly ineffective.

Participants added that treaties should be honoured, and community-based programs put in place. Four of these challenges relate to issues of access, with one a reiteration of a challenge identified under the theme "Health, Safety and Wellness":

- 1) Access to health care and wellness supports
- 2) Parents and families: Young and single parent families need more supports such as parenting skills and daycare; families with at-risk children (e.g. gangs) need more supports; violence issues and supports need to be addressed; and an assets-based approach should be taken
- 3) Healing supports: access to traditional teachers and counseling, are needed for residential school survivors and their families, and a healing centre should be established
- 4) Housing: a lack of affordable and adequate housing in the north, particularly for elderly and single parents; and people in low-income housing have been displaced by the current trend of converting low-income housing into condominiums

The remaining three of nine unique challenges identified at this gathering are:

- 1) Cultural revitalization in communities, and resources to facilitate this
- 2) Addressing the dependency mentality created and maintained by the welfare system
- 3) Undertaking activities to empower children and youth to make smart choices, including parent role-modeling and school programs in elementary schools

Six unique challenges were identified at the Winnipeg gathering. Two of these relate to government legislation and policy: (1) participants are concerned with the lack of gender equality policy and accountability measures to ensure implementation of this policy by all levels of government; and (2) participants view the Indian Act and other federal legislation as barriers to equality and have been found to be discriminatory, and as such, there is a need to abolish such legislation and return to traditional laws. Two of these unique challenge identified at the Winnipeg gathering relate to safe environments: (1) for women seeking healing, including as examples, emergency or crisis shelters, women's sweat lodges, and group homes for two-spirited youth; and (2) responsive policing services, including as examples, appropriate response times and lack of First Nations constables within RCMP detachments. A fifth unique challenge identified under this theme of "Equality and Empowerment" at the Winnipeg gathering is lack of comparable standards and rates between on- and off-reserve, with on-reserve having comparatively lower standards and rates in the areas of housing, wages and social assistance. At the time of the Winnipeg gathering, Canada had not yet adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was clearly of concern to the women present. Participants viewed its adoption and implementation as empowering Aboriginal women and nations. Since this gathering, Canada has adopted UNDRIP; therefore, the remaining component of this challenge is implementation.

C. Strength, Balance and Honour

A common challenge under the theme of "Strength, Balance and Honour" identified at all four gatherings is related to empowering and celebrating youth. Participants at the Thompson gathering questioned, "Where are the parents? What are the parents doing?," but most importantly, "How did we get here?"

Participants at the OCN gathering added that, we should find "ways of strengthening our young people so that they have more balance in their lives." Specific actions to address this challenge were suggested, many of which are based on culture: provision of more culturally appropriate programs, such as parenting and substance abuse, as well as youth centres/recreation facilities; sharing family and cultural history; celebrating the "sacred standing" of the youth; and, providing role models/mentors and adequate educational funding.

A common challenge identified at OCN and Brandon gatherings is holistic, traditional healing. Participants at these gatherings identified the need for increased access to traditional healers, space to undertake/provide traditional healing, and women's wellness activities that incorporate these ways. They recognize that healing must start at the individual level, and should include women supporting women in their healing journeys. They see the need for broader community recognition, support and collaboration to facilitate healing and change.

Three of the four common challenges identified at the OCN and Thompson under the theme of "Strength, Balance and Honour" relate to the family. The first challenge is family breakdown, which has resulted in many grandparents assuming parenting roles, poor/ineffective communications between generations, and a lack of a sense of belonging by youth, who may, as a result, turn to gangs. The lack of in-community services means that families are not receiving the supports needed to strengthen families, including, in particular, within CFS programming and the justice system. The second challenge is family and domestic violence. Participants reported that their communities are experiencing high levels of family violence and violence between and against women and girls. Many communities lack crisis shelters and prevention and intervention programs, including those that educate young women about

abusive relationships and domestic violence. The third family-related challenge identified at the OCN and Thompson gatherings is the intergenerational impacts of residential schools. Participants commented on the critical need to address the resulting trauma from this era and to revitalize traditional cultural ways that facilitate healing and support the reestablishment of strong relationships. It was felt strongly that in-community supports must be established, and funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation should continue. The fourth challenge is capacity building for leadership, including measures for increasing accountability and achieving balance.

Participants at the Thompson gathering have observed that some issues that are typically treated as “women’s issues,” when they are in fact community and nationhood issues, are habitually allowed to fall to the wayside by leadership. Participants recognized that addressing this challenge doesn’t fall only on the shoulders of the leadership, but at the individual and broader community levels. Greater community involvement and individual responsibility for healing and community participation must occur. Participants also saw the need for preparing the next generation of leaders, and recommended that youth leadership development include teachings about the physical, spiritual, emotional and mental aspects of a person, and about traditional and customary laws.

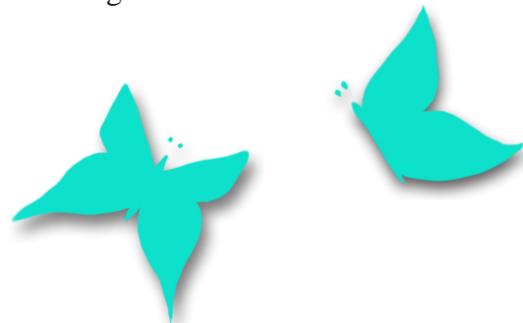
Unique challenges under this theme were identified at each individual gathering. At the OCN gathering, these challenges are: failing to engage Elders to share their knowledge or to provide supports to facilitate this; and environmental degradation, including soil and water contamination, the environmental impact of Hydro development and the lack of waste management resources and facilities.

In Thompson, three unique challenges under this theme of “Strength, Balance and Honour” were identified. The first of these relate to

negative societal impacts of loss of language and culture. Participants expressed concern that: the language gap has contributed to a disconnect between generations; non-Aboriginal values stigmatize being two-spirited; and the displacement of traditional values has contributed to unbalanced relationships between men and women. The second challenge is lack of economic development in the north, which has contributed to elevated rates of welfare dependency; individual inability to manage personal finances; and migration of people out of northern communities. The third of these unique challenges identified at the Thompson gathering is lack of affordable and adequate housing. They added that it is virtually impossible for low-income persons/families to save for a home.

Two unique challenges under this theme were identified at the Brandon gathering. The first is the need to deconstruct prevailing mainstream views of women. The second is to eliminate poverty. Participants recommended re-evaluating social policies that keep people in the dependency cycle, while at the same time de-stigmatizing receiving social supports during times people are attempting to improve their situation.

The Winnipeg gathering identified one unique challenge under this theme of “Strength, Balance and Honour” – lack of respect and acceptance of differences in belief systems. Participants have observed that differences in belief systems, particularly between Traditional and Christian beliefs, are not always respected or accepted. This can cause imbalance within and amongst families and communities.



Chapter 3: Solutions

This section presents, first, the common and unique solutions to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal women, families and communities at the OCN, Thompson and Winnipeg gatherings. This is followed by an overview of solutions resulting from the Thompson gathering, where solutions were identified according to one of the three NAWS themes. In the context of the Pitawik gatherings, solutions refer to participant responses to:

A. In the case where existing solutions were identified by participants:

1. You mentioned at the beginning of the session that there are programs/services that are working in your communities. What has been put in place in your own communities which is considered an action or a solution?
2. What has worked well?
3. What ideas can you share with others?

B. Future, proposed solutions:

1. What can you do?
2. What can others do?
3. What can we do in partnership and collaboration?
4. Who can do this?
5. When can this get done?
6. How can it be accomplished? What do we need in place to accomplish this?



Six common themes emerged from a review of the solutions put forward at the OCN, Brandon and Winnipeg gatherings: (i) Women in Leadership; (ii) Traditional Knowledge; (iii) Youth; (iv) Housing; (v) Communication; and (vi) Holistic Healing/Wellness. There were also solutions identified at each gathering, individually, that were not thematically similar to others, and these are referred to below as “unique.” The following is an overview of all solutions resulting from the three gatherings, according to common and unique themes by gathering:

A. Common Solutions

1) Women in Leadership

(a) OCN Gathering:

- **Building Capacity:** Provincial Aboriginal organizations (MORN, AMC and MMF), federal and provincial government departments, the private sector (for example, Manitoba Hydro and other companies or individuals who operate on our traditional territories) and private foundations should work together to support the development of Aboriginal women as leaders, including development and provision of leadership workshops for women, including youth. This should be undertaken immediately.

(b) Winnipeg Gathering:

- Establishment of Community Women’s Advocacy Groups: By 2012, every community should have established a women’s community advocacy group comprised of community members who are representative of the population (including Elders and youth). The group should meet quarterly, at minimum, and on a volunteer basis, to ensure that the needs of the community are being met.
- Establishment of a Provincial Women’s Council Executive: It is recommended that a Provincial Women’s Council Executive with balanced representation (with respect to urban, rural, northern and southern, age, abilities, etc.), be established to represent Aboriginal women locally and at the First Nations, provincial and federal levels. A governance structure for the council model was endorsed by participants.
- Establishment of a First Nations, Inuit and Metis Women’s Committee: This would be established by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) and the Manitoba Urban Inuit Association (MUIA) , and would provide advocacy and create awareness (e.g. share success stories, information on resources, etc. through media and other outlets). A specific activity for the group would be to develop a resource handbook for distribution to all Aboriginal communities and households. Additional activities would include partnerships with provincial and federal governments and other service providers. This Committee would be responsible for creating representative sub-committees at various levels. Participants recommended that the Committee be established in 6-8 months.
- Five-Year Pilot Project: Aboriginal Women Taking Action to Improve Quality of Life: Participants called for a five year pilot project which would provide supports for Aboriginal women who are taking action to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal peoples. The project would require an adequate budget and core funding to address key priority needs, and would involve Aboriginal women leaders who speak for the people; the voice of the community (non-elected leaders); and accountability, openness, and transparency in project governance.

2) Traditional Knowledge

(a) OCN Gathering:

- Ma mawi kiskin ‘oa matowinek mino we-nek isi (Cree: Educating ourselves collectively on our traditional holistic ways of life): The objective established in this area is “Community based, community driven and community controlled holistic and culturally focused education and training that encompasses (but is not limited to): grief counseling; drugs and alcohol awareness and prevention; crisis intervention strategies for families and individuals (abortion counselling, suicide prevention, self-harm, parenting); leadership training and capacity building; and traditional teachings and restoration of cultural values.” It would involve education, training, and building awareness (offered through various forums and approaches), and should be funded by appropriate government departments. Community leadership and members should work cooperatively and collaboratively to ensure that the initiative is successful and that the community benefits from it. This initiative should begin immediately.

(b) Winnipeg Gathering:

- Development of a National First Nations/Metis/Inuit Cultural Strategy: In this area, participants envision a Strategy similar in design to the national Aboriginal Economic Development

Strategy. It would include taking an inventory of existing efforts and resources in this area and require collaboration of multiple levels of government. The recommended timeframe for this development is 2-3 years.

- Establishment of a Working Group on Returning to Traditions and Development of an Action Plan: Participants recommended that a Working Group comprised of Elders, youth, community members, education boards/committees and community leaders be established to develop and implement a community-based action plan on returning to traditions (teachings, values, healing, languages and ways of living) at community and regional levels. The principles of unity and respect and acceptance for each other's beliefs would help guide the development and implementation of this action plan.
- Statement of Commitment to Work Collaboratively on Cultural Gatherings: Participants developed the following statement of commitment:
 - 1) We, as the Aboriginal community, will commit to collaborating with other resource providers to support the engagement of ongoing cultural gatherings that focus on knowledge translation, oral history, language and way of life, and also to ensure the survival and revitalization of our identity and achieving overall holistic health.
 - 2) We will work together in unity to promote and enhance our knowledge and education on the initiatives that are important to our people and our culture.
 - 3) We will work together in unity to recognize and practice the Seven Teachings that honour our Nations on an individual and collective level.

3) Youth

- (a) OCN Gathering - Investing in Youth: Youth should be provided with a range of in-community activities, programs, services, facilities and opportunities. Some specific examples include: parenting programs for young families; cultural supports such as Elders, and cultural camps and gatherings, to teach traditional skills; and programs aimed at at-risk (for gang involvement, sexual exploitation, etc.) youth and that engage and support the family. Investments should focus on: youth who are not in school and whose families are struggling with addiction, intergenerational residential school trauma, and are at risk for gang involvement; children in the care of CFS and their families, and the limitations of CFS Agencies' mandates to deliver appropriate services. Other suggestions include the establishment of Crime Prevention Workers in the community to liaise between police, schools and parents. To maximize outcomes, relevant federal and provincial government departments and agencies should support these investments on an ongoing (rather than project) basis.
- (b) Brandon Gathering - Youth-Led Workshop Based on the T.E.A.M. (Together Everyone Achieves More) Workshop to Build Strong Communities: Youth participants expressed their desire to take action and responsibility and contribute to building strong communities. They recommended youth-led, teamwork-based workshops to help youth identify ways in which they can make a difference.
- (c) Winnipeg Gathering - Aboriginal Youth Empowerment Initiative: Aboriginal organizations, in partnership with provincial and federal governments should develop and distribute a standard community survey (ensuring that it captures a population that is representative on multiple levels) to determine why Aboriginal youth are in crisis. The survey would help to identify and create awareness of youth issues, with the overall goal of empowering individual healing.

4) Housing

- (a) OCN Gathering - Development of a Strategic Plan for Safe, Affordable and Quality Homes On-Reserve and in Northern Manitoba Communities: The federal, provincial, First Nations, Metis and Inuit governments and political bodies should work together to develop and implement a strategic plan for safe, affordable and quality homes for all community members, giving special consideration to single people, students and single parent families. This plan should be completed by the end of 2010 and implemented between 2011 and 2016.
- (b) Brandon Gathering - Individual and Collective Lobbying for Affordable Housing: Participants called for individual and collective lobbying efforts (e.g. calling and/or writing) aimed at local Members of Parliament and other federal and provincial government bodies and relevant departments (i.e. Manitoba Housing) regarding the lack of affordable housing.

5) Communication

- (a) OCN Gathering - Ma Mawi wejetoatak, soki kapitak pitagosiak (Cree: Helping each other to stand strong and speak out): The following statement was issued as part of this solution:

We want to strengthen our voices and be heard. Through self-knowledge, self-management and self-determination, Aboriginal women, in unity, will become empowered to take their rightful places within community life and leadership, as mothers, grandmothers, teachers and bearers of our cultures. Through reclaiming traditional spiritual and cultural values, customs and worldviews, through knowing ourselves, we will help one another to be strong and be heard.

Women require more opportunities to gather to share wisdom, knowledge, and information, to network and to learn about Aboriginal histories, experiences and traditional teachings and ceremonies. Government and local community leadership should provide funding to support these learning opportunities. Participants agreed to share and distribute the final Pitawik report to Staff, Chief and Council, peers, radio stations, and Friendship Centres. They also recommended an awareness campaign on NAWS and Pitawik geared towards the community level.

- (b) Brandon Gathering – Establish a virtual Aboriginal Women’s Resource Network – Hear Me: Sacred Seven: Participants in the Brandon area will develop an Aboriginal Women’s group on the E-Brandon web site that will allow members to post information on a range of resources such as affordable housing units, scholarships, social supports, etc. They will also share and distribute information on local women’s drumming groups as self-care opportunities for women, and take advantage of opportunities to increase cultural awareness and acceptance of others.

6) Holistic Health and Wellness

- (a) Brandon Gathering: Linking Existing Services, and Personal Care Homes, Alternative Justice and Grief Recovery: One recommendation was entitled, “holistic healing”, with components focused on linking existing services, personal care homes, alternative justice, and grief recovery. Rather than identifying specific actions to link services, participants identified the need to address accessibility issues between on- and off-reserve or the city. Participants recommended that a Personal Care Home and/or home services for the elderly are established in each community, especially on-reserve, so that Elders can stay in their home communities close to their families. It was suggested that youth be offered opportunities to participate in training that would prepare them to care for the Elderly, an initiative that would enhance both service delivery and skills development. Participants called for the establishment of an alternative justice initiative that would focus on individuals’ needs, and

provide prevention and effective post-incarceration support in the community. Participants also recommended that grief recovery workshops and ongoing support groups (including workers) be established in each community.

(b) OCN Gathering

- o Development of a Strategic Plan on the Social Determinants of Health Based on a Holistic Model: Participants recommended that federal, provincial, First Nations, Metis and Inuit governments and leadership work in partnership with the grassroots population to develop a strategic plan to address the social determinants of health, giving consideration to: justice, suicide prevention, community violence, family violence, sexual abuse, drug abuse, prescription drug abuse, crime prevention, food security, gang prevention, gang violence, physical health, mental health, AJI/RCAP recommendations, restorative justice, band law enforcement committees/Aboriginal women to support election laws, victimization, education, and employment. The plan should employ a cultural and decolonizing methodology, and should be completed for implementation during 2011-2016.
- o Ensuring Access to Traditional Healing - Funding Policies and Supports to Develop the Next Generation of Healers: Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) funding policies regarding access to traditional and cultural healers are not adequate and need to change. Community members should be able to access traditional healing services in their own communities. Where these services are not available in-community, adequate funding to cover the actual costs associated with community members' travel to see traditional healers should be provided through NIHB. Additional changes should be made to this policy regarding the number of maximum allowable visits, as some people require services from traditional healers more than twice a year.

Supports and resources are required to train the next generation of traditional healers and ensure these services continue to be available. Funding to support this should be provided by the federal and provincial governments. The federal government should also allocate to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding that will support the development of traditional healers. These actions should be undertaken immediately.

B. Unique Solutions

i. Brandon Gathering

- (a) Social Supports for Babies and School-Aged Children: Participants recommended that an effort be made to promote and raise awareness of initiatives or programs such as Community Kitchen and Baby First, and that the school meal program be expanded to make it available to students of all ages.
- (b) Self-Responsibility: Participants developed the following action statement: “In recognition of our sacred and essential role and responsibility as lifegivers and caregivers, we will take responsibility for our own health - spiritual, physical, emotional, mental well-being.” It was noted that the term “caregiver” in this sense, is to be understood in the broader sense in which it is used in Aboriginal communities. Participants provided a number of guiding principles, such as: be kind to everyone; follow the 7 Sacred Teachings; and be a role model. As well, participants identified a number of activities, including: get engaged in informal networking (accessing resources, reclaiming cultural identities); get involved to make changes (community

involvement feeds our spirits); and get together informally.

ii. OCN Gathering

- o Environmental Protection: The Manitoba Government should provide recycling depots in all First Nations, Metis, Inuit and other communities, and place well-marked garbage cans or bins along highways in the province. It should also monitor any industry and/or crown corporation whose operations within the province may cause environmental contamination, and should not allow such entities to operate until a mutual agreement is reached with affected First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities. This should be effective immediately.
- o Ensuring Access for the Disabled: Participants recommended that all levels of government takes steps to improve accessibility in both homes and public facilities and walkways, so that disabled community members have equitable opportunities for social participation, including employment, training and education, accessible workplaces and accessible recreation facilities. These actions should be undertaken immediately.
- o Addressing the Diabetes Epidemic in Northern Manitoba Communities: All levels of governments should work with service providers to increase diabetes-prevention and education activities, address issues relating to the accessibility of care, and resolve jurisdictional issues that affect the availability of health services. A Diabetes Centre of Excellence that focuses on diabetes-related education, prevention, services and research should be established in the north. The centre would link closely with and conduct research in partnership with northern communities, with a focus on generating actionable recommendations. More funding should be provided to support the diabetes-related needs of community members, including resources for nutrition, foot care, etc. Sustainable funding should be developed for successful pilots, such as the Diabetes Integration Project. These actions should be undertaken immediately.
- o Eliminating Family and Domestic Violence: Increased understanding and sensitivity by police, the establishment of shelters in northern and rural areas of Manitoba, broader community awareness and women's networking, were identified as key to eliminating domestic violence. Participants recommended the following specific activities and actions:
 - Police should be on the side of women experiencing violence, and should be educated about family and domestic violence, with the goal of changing police attitudes and practices.
 - Shelters should provide an environment of trust and respect and should offer healing supports to the entire family. First Nations Chiefs and Councils, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) and the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF), along with federal and provincial governments, should provide appropriate financial and other supports to establish and maintain these shelters.
 - Existing support services should educate themselves and others about family and domestic violence and work together more effectively to address these issues. Public education initiatives on family and domestic violence should get key messages out, including: family and domestic violence affects everyone; it is time to break the silence on family and domestic violence; women who experience domestic violence do not deserve this violence and they are not alone; and we need to understand the factors that contribute to family and domestic violence.
 - Women should come together to address family and domestic violence. A networking group to help women educate each other in this area should be established. Mothers of Red Nations (MORN) should lead these networking activities.

- o Supports for Women Entering the Trades: Federal and provincial government departments (such as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training) should provide funding to support the entry of women into the trades. Provincial Aboriginal organizations (MORN, AMC and MMF) should lobby and advocate to government on this issue. These actions should be undertaken immediately.
- o Support of First Nations Legal Systems: Federal and provincial governments must immediately support First Nations legal systems.

iii. Winnipeg Gathering

Adequate Levels of Funding from All Levels of Governments: Participants recommended that Federal, Provincial, and First Nations and Métis governments provide appropriate/required funding and resources (based on negotiated timelines) in a range of areas:

- Education, including curriculum development on par with off-reserve and standards, history, and treaty rights.
- Education/promotion of mental health.
- Drug and alcohol awareness campaigns in middle schools.
- Student funding for post-secondary education and privately-owned placements (high school).
- Program development in the areas of mental health, suicide, diabetes, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Housing needs, particularly with respect to safety, mould, affordability, accessibility, overcrowding, and housing for families.
- Special needs, including, safe drinking water, sewer, medical transportation, relocation, funerals, and compassion travel.
- Programs to prevent family violence, targeting men, women and children.
- Resources and activities for youth and children, such as hockey and recreation.
- In-community preparation for post-secondary education, e.g., helping students dispel fears around moving to Winnipeg to attend university or college.
- Comparable/on par wages for teachers and other employees.

Participants also called for First Nations and Métis governments to communicate openly and freely with their community members (and enable community members to communicate with them), regardless of their place of residence. First Nations and Métis governments should be transparent and accountable to their members and promote unity to create a stronger voice. Leadership should consult with its community members on matters of importance, keep them apprised of issues, and hold referendums before major decisions are made.

- iv. Thompson Gathering – presented and reported their solutions under each of the three NAWS themes, following a format different from the other gatherings. They are reported here in a format similar to the way they were presented. Solutions identified at the Thompson gathering relate to five of the six common themes identified at the other three gatherings. These are in the areas of: women in leadership, traditional knowledge, youth, housing and communication.

A. Health, Safety and Wellness

- i. **Strengthening Parenting Skills and Parental Involvement:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Aboriginal parents in northern Manitoba will have the skills they need to parent well and to be actively involved in their children’s lives, education and schools.” Suggested actions and activities to be undertaken immediately include, for example: “formation of peer support groups for parents, where they can talk about their issues and concerns, advocate for themselves (for example, with schools) and learn from each other and invited Elders;” and “culturally-based parenting skills workshops that reflect the distinct needs of our communities available in all northern communities.” Participants also called for accountability actions and measures for schools, such as: “supporting equitable outcomes for all children who attend their schools” and “communicating with parents about their children through, for example, regular progress reports to families and student-involved conferencing with parents.”
- ii. **Enhanced Supports for Youth:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Youth in our communities will be able to access the supports and services they need to lead healthy and positive lives.” This solution was developed to address the lack of supports and services for youth (including single mothers) in northern Manitoba and the failure by a number of existing programs and services to engage youth in the development of meaningful and appropriate supports. To fulfill this objective, a number of youth consultation activities were proposed, including: as a first step, “Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre staff, at the annual youth gathering it hosts, ask youth to share their needs and priorities with community leaders and to help them learn more about effective ways to engage with youth;” and more generally, “youth should be represented at all community consultations and engagement strategies, including the regional Pitawik gatherings.” Participants advised that, “consultation should empower youth, i.e., youth should assume a lead in the development and facilitation of the consultation and all recommendations put forward from the consultation should come from youth.”
- iii. **Affordable and Adequate Housing for All:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Every family living on-reserve will live in and have a realistic opportunity to own a well-built, appropriately serviced (including water and sewage) home that is not overcrowded.” Roles for First Nations, Provincial and Federal governments were acknowledged, as well as the need to pursue economic development to support building infrastructure.
- iv. **Women’s Health Days:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Regularly scheduled activities in our communities will focus on women’s health and wellness.” Activities to be undertaken would involve a number of partners, including traditional healers, nursing stations, health and wellness centres, health authorities, hospitals, public health educators and others. Participants noted that, “Manitoba Health and First Nations and Inuit Health Branch would need to work together and provide financial support to these activities.” They recommended that Women’s Health Days begin in the next year and would “ideally...occur once a week; realistically, they may occur only once a month, and, at minimum, they should be held quarterly.”

B. Equality and Empowerment

- i. **Women Taking Leadership in the Process of Decolonization:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Aboriginal women and their allies will develop the skills and resources to address the historic and present-day impacts of colonization on our people.” A series of actions to be undertaken by Aboriginal women and partners were identified to achieve this objective, including, as examples: Aboriginal women “Train the Trainer” cultural historical programs (to be supported financially by all levels of government, and to begin within the year); the establishment of a Wellness Centre and Gathering Place in Thompson, which would provide a politically-neutral community space for meetings, forums and celebrations and other activities that support the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional wellness of Aboriginal people (to be supported by all levels of government); and formal establishment of an Aboriginal Women’s Movement (AWM), responsible for action and following up on activities identified in this solution, and engaging men as allies. Several participants committed to work on the development of AWM.
- ii. **Establishment of a Formal Northern Aboriginal Women’s Group:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Aboriginal women from northern Manitoba will formally organize as a group.” Immediate activities identified include outreach (through advertising on radio and/or other media), networking and promoting the group with other women and local and provincial organizations, with the goal of holding a first meeting in Thompson within one year.
- iii. **Cultural Revival in K-12 Schools:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “cultural activities and teachings into each school day in our communities.” Activities identified to achieve this objective include revising curriculum to integrate cultural education, activities and awareness through traditional languages and across all subject areas (e.g. math, science, etc.) and bringing Elders into the school to assist with administering this revised curriculum. Supports should be provided by local school divisions and education authorities, Frontier School Division, the Aboriginal Education Directorate and Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. Additionally, post-secondary institutions such as the University College of the North, University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba, Brandon University and Red River College should provide courses for educators on teaching from an Aboriginal perspective.

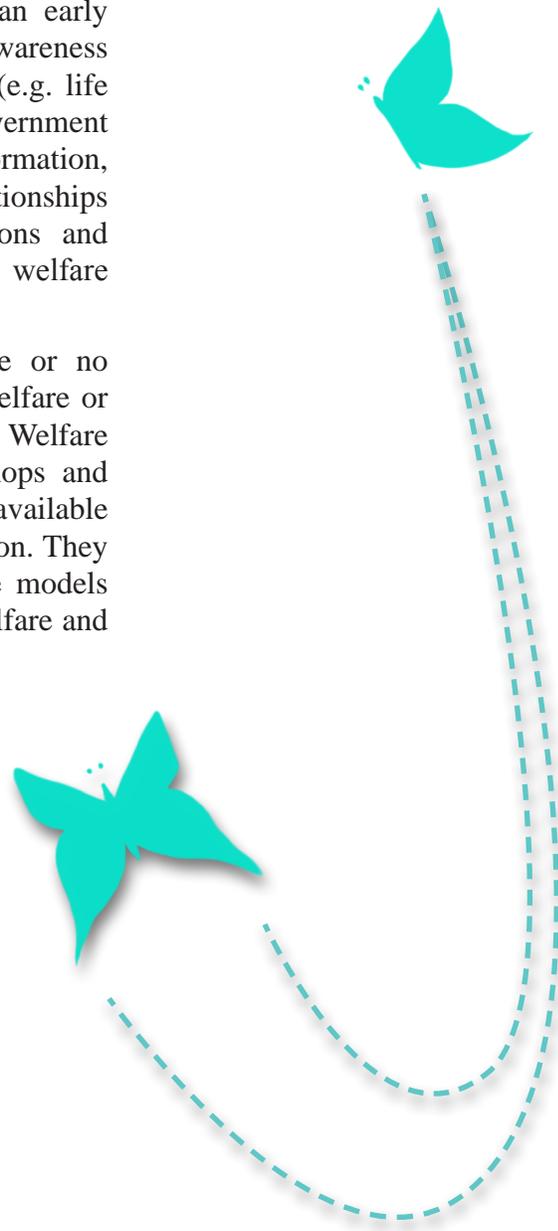
C. Strength, Balance and Honour

- i. **Restoring and Reviving Traditional Ways:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Aboriginal people in the north will resume traditional ways in which men and women were equally powerful and valued and society was organized around egalitarian principles.” All community members, from children to Elders, would have a role and opportunity in this solution, which focuses on teaching, establishing and maintaining respect and responsibility. Women would take a lead by establishing information and awareness networks, and organizing forums. The role of the provincial and federal governments would be to provide resources and to undertake gender-based analysis of their programs and services.
- ii. **Addressing the Ongoing Impacts of Residential Schools:** Participants established the following objective for this area: “Community members will have increased awareness of and heal from the ongoing impacts of the residential school system.” A number of activities

by different entities, governments and community leaders and members were identified, including these examples: changes to curriculum to include history and impacts of residential schools and use of North American holocaust awareness models, with supports and funding for these changes from schools and all levels of government; counseling and healing supports for those affected to be offered through regional health authorities; and community leaders working cooperatively and collaboratively with community members to ensure success, access to education and training in this area, and the benefits of holistic community health. The wisdom and teachings of community Elders/Traditional Healers should be integrated throughout activities.

- iii. Achieving Our Potential Together: Participants established the following objective for this area: “Aboriginal community members in northern Manitoba will have the vision, opportunities and support they need to make the most of their own potential through education, training and/or employment.” Roles and actions identified for individuals, parents, schools, community organizations, and governments include: parents and schools need to focus on preventing dependency from an early age; education is essential, including awareness of risks (e.g. gangs) and empowerment (e.g. life skills); and, community organizations, government agencies and individuals should share information, expand their networks and build relationships among programs, resources, organizations and people. Specific actions regarding the welfare system were identified:

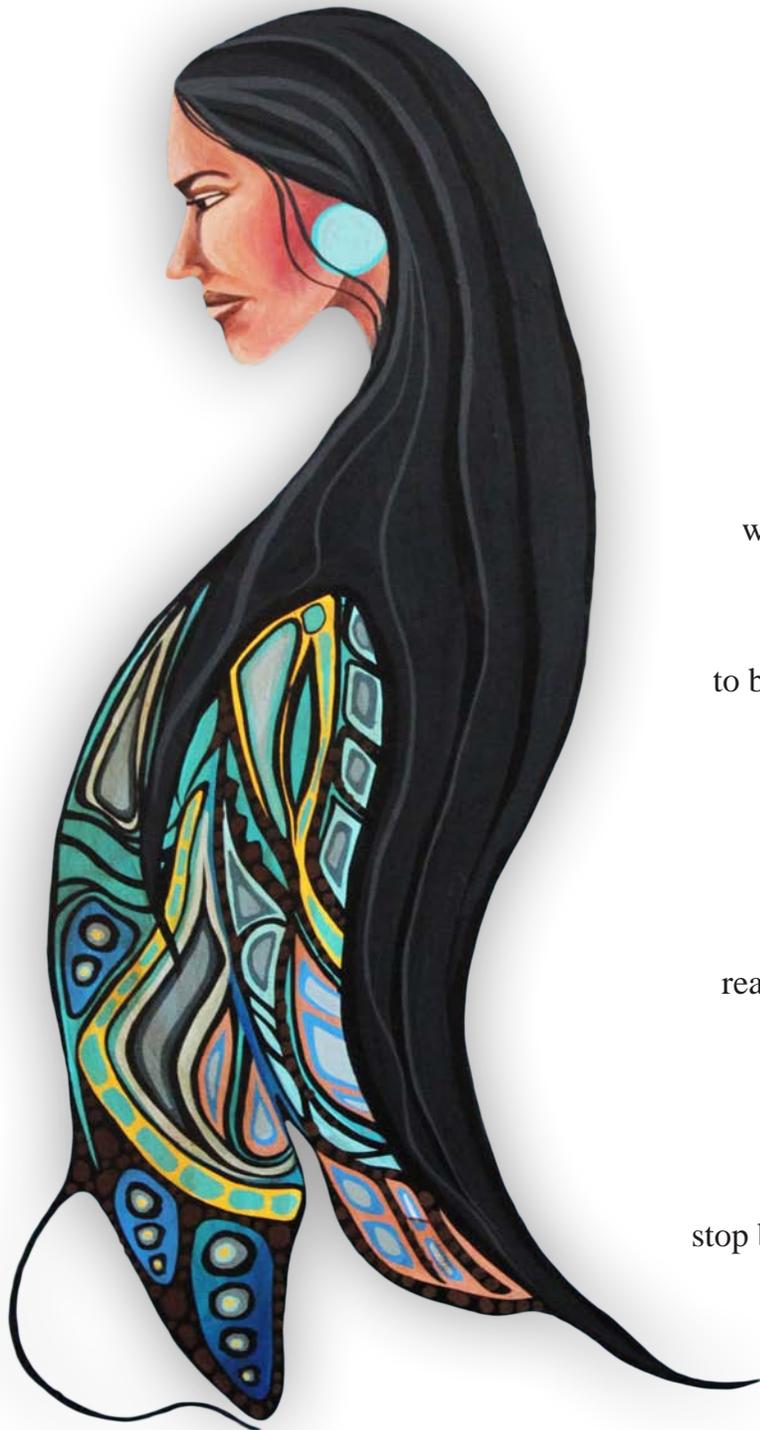
The welfare system currently provides little or no meaningful support for people to move off welfare or build their self-worth. This needs to change. Welfare programs should offer presentations, workshops and other education activities in areas such as available supports for employment, training and education. They should also help clients to connect with role models and mentors, such as people who have left welfare and established successful careers.



Chapter 4: Conclusion

In developing an effective, appropriate and meaningful strategy to address the needs of Aboriginal women in Manitoba and to improve their situation, the key challenges identified in this report provide clear direction on priority issues that must be addressed. As was stated earlier these relate to the areas of: access to, and disparities in, services and programs; economic development, including access to education and training; empowering people (especially women and youth) in the community; recognition, support and access to traditional healing; and housing. Understanding that the intent of these gatherings was to be solutions-orientated, it is important to consider the highlights of the discussion on successes, and of course, of solutions. From the perspective of the almost 450 women who participated in these gatherings, successes are defined by the extent to which gender and culture are recognized and integrated. This was evident in the proposed solutions, especially with respect to the clear message that Aboriginal women must be at the helm of the change and future they envision for themselves and for their communities. It is absolutely critical that women mobilize and are empowered to be involved in decision-making – their strengths and assets position them as true agents of change.

In closing, it is appropriate that this report end with the voice of one of the participants. The following poem by Lydia Bland was composed at the Thompson *Pitawik* gathering.



We are gathered here....
as one unity
one strength
one voice
Hear us....
For we have been silenced
too long
without respect
without dignity
it is our time...
to take back
to fight back
with Mother Earth's intentions
to nurture
to care
to be respected as the givers of life
Taking pride in her beauty
in our beauty
The beauty of women
in our strength
in our abilities
realizing we have the divine right
to stand alongside
our male counterparts
to have voices
to be heard
stop being victims in our own domain
And stand united
stand strong
stand honored

--- Lydia Bland

Glossary of Acronyms

AJI	-	Aboriginal Justice Inquiry
AMC	-	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
AWM	-	Aboriginal Women's Movement
CAP	-	Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
CCAA	-	Cabinet Committee of Aboriginal Affairs
CFS	-	Child and Family Services
FASD	-	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FMM	-	First Minister's Meeting
ITK	-	Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
MMF	-	Manitoba Metis Federation
MNC	-	Metis National Council
MORN	-	Mother's of Red Nation
MUIA	-	Manitoba Urban Inuit Association
NACAFV	-	National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence
NAFC	-	National Association of Friendship Centres
NAWS	-	National Aboriginal Women's Summits
NIHB	-	Non-Insured Health Benefits
NWAC	-	Native Women's Association of Canada
OCN	-	Opaskwayak Cree Nation
RCAP	-	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
RCMP	-	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SLFN	-	Swan Lake First Nation
STI	-	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TEAM	-	Together Everyone Achieves More
U of W	-	University of Winnipeg
UNDRIP	-	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WMN	-	Women of the Metis Nation

Notes:

1. “National Aboriginal Women’s Summit: Strong Women, Strong Communities” Summary Report (June 2007), available at: <http://www.laa.gov.nl.ca/laa/publications/summaryreport.pdf>.
2. Ibid.
3. This planning committee included representatives from the NWAC, Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Métis National Council (MNC), Women of the Métis Nation (WMN), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC), the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (NACAFV), and the Government of Northwest Territories.
4. The process and reporting for the Pitawik gatherings was revised slightly over the year and a half period in which the gatherings were held. Because of this (and as presented in this report), participants at three of the four gatherings specifically identified “successes”. Participants at three of the gatherings proposed “general solutions”, while participants at one gathering proposed “solutions” specifically related to each theme area.
5. Health, safety and wellness; equality and empowerment; strength, balance and honour.
6. See pages 2-12 of “Pitawik Northern Regional Gathering of Manitoba Aboriginal Women, Report on Proceedings, Opaskwayak Cree Nation” (March 28, 2009).
7. During the writing of this comprehensive report, this program received departmental designation at the University of Winnipeg, and is now the Department of Indigenous Studies.



Thank you

Meegwetch

EKOSANÍ

WOPÍDA

Mercí



AMR

Planning & Consulting