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Red Deer Aboriginal Literacy Needs Assessment

Indigenous Community and Service
Provider Consultation
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2 WHO IS LIFELONG LEARNING COUNCIL OF RED DEER?

Lifelong Learning Council of Red Deer provides leadership in supporting equitable learning and literacy opportunities and removing barriers to both. The organization funds a multitude of programs for adult learners, ranging from English as a Second Language, to Foundational Skills Training. Lifelong Learning Council has the following goals:

1. To advocate for awareness and urgency on program/learning gaps in our community.
2. To convene a “Lifelong Learning Inter-agency” for ongoing networking and enhancing collaboration opportunities for more coordinated efforts.
3. To increase our profile and community’s awareness of what we offer.
4. To diversify our funding so we can broaden our mandate (being mindful of not competing with agencies we fund, but rather enabling agencies we fund to do more by facilitating funding opportunities).

Through the Community Adult Learning Program, Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education provides funding to support the delivery of part-time, non-formal adult learning opportunities in local communities. The Community Adult Learning program promotes a vision that:

Adults acquire and build on foundational learning skills through vibrant learning communities.

In alignment with this vision, a logic model and outcomes measurement framework have been developed to show the relationship among the resources available for the program, the activities performed, and the results that the program hopes to achieve. The logic model identifies the following four ultimate outcomes to guide the program:

1. Adult learners are proficient in foundational skills.
2. Adult learners participate in further learning opportunities.
3. Adult learners navigate the learning system.
4. Adult learners benefit from learning opportunities within their communities.

In 2013/2014, Lifelong Learning Council provided \$87,979 to non-profit organizations to deliver non-credit, part-time adult learning programs for learners with barriers to success which focus on:

1. Literacy and Foundational Learning
2. Family Literacy
3. Community Capacity Building.

Social and Economic barriers faced by these learners may include:

- Low literacy or learning challenges;

- Cultural or social isolation, including English language challenges facing newcomers to Alberta or other barriers to participating in the community;
- Lack of resources or confidence to access information and services to support their own learning, such as participating in learning opportunities for a fee, seeking out information at the library or online, seeking assistance from other agencies;
- Low income, housing, mental health or other personal or family challenges.

3 WHAT IS LITERACY?

“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society.”¹

Literacy is also defined as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.²

4 FOCUS ON ABORIGINAL LITERACY

In 2015, Lifelong Learning Council of Red Deer decided to embark on an Aboriginal Needs Assessment, following suit of communities like Lethbridge and Calgary. The purpose of this needs assessment was two-fold; to determine which community programs are being accessed by Indigenous citizens and to determine the needs and wants of Indigenous learners.

In June 2015, Lifelong Learning Council of Red Deer hosted an Aboriginal Awareness session with Indigenous facilitator Jason Sansregret. The event was attended by 38 citizens, professionals and volunteers. Anecdotally, the session was a great success with several participants stating that it was an excellent learning experience.

Lifelong Learning Council of Red Deer is committed to serving the literacy needs of Red Deer’s population, and is genuinely interested in acting upon the recommendations provided by the community, as showcased in this report.

5 ABORIGINAL DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Needs Assessment, the words Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis and Inuit will be used, along with a number of other definitions related to Indigenous or Aboriginal people. The definitions of these words are as follows:

¹ Adult Learning and Education: Canada progress report from the UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education

² Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education

The following terminology is intended to provide a general understanding of some terms generally used by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)³. The list focuses on some of the important aspects of the relationship between AANDC and the people it serves — First Nations, Inuit and Metis.

Aboriginal: The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people – Indians, Metis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

Band: A body of First Nations people for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act. Each band has its own governing band council, usually consisting of one chief and several councilors. Community members choose the chief and councilors by election, or sometimes through custom. The members of a band generally share common values, traditions and practices rooted in their ancestral heritage. Today, many bands prefer to be known as First Nations.

Custom: A traditional Aboriginal practice. For example, First Nations peoples sometimes marry or adopt children according to custom, rather than under Canadian family law. Band councils chosen “by custom” are elected or selected by traditional means, rather than by the election rules contained in the Indian Act.

First Nation: A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word “Indian,” which some people found offensive. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term “First Nations peoples” refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and non-Status. Some Indian peoples have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace the word “band” in the name of their community.

Indian: Indian people are one of three cultural groups, along with Inuit and Metis, recognized as Aboriginal people under section 35 of the Constitution Act. There are legal reasons for the continued use of the term “Indian”. Such terminology is recognized in the Indian Act and is used by the Government of Canada when making reference to this particular group of Aboriginal people.

***Author’s note: The term “Indian” will be used very sparingly in this report as it carries negative connotations with it, and is used as a racial slur. The term “Indigenous” will be used in its place as “Indigenous” is a word not surrounded by stereotypes, and is accepted by Aboriginal people as respectful terminology.

Indian Act: Canadian federal legislation, first passed in 1876, and amended several times since. It sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, Indian moneys and other resources. Among its many provisions, the Indian Act currently requires the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to manage certain moneys belonging to First Nations and Indian lands and to approve or disallow First Nations by-laws.

Indigenous: The term “Indigenous” has been used by Aboriginal populations to refer to themselves in recent years. The term replaces the word “Aboriginal” - which is starting to have negative connotations.

³ Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada

Status: A person who is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act. The act sets out the requirements for determining who is an Indian for the purposes of the Indian Act.

Non-status Indian: An Indian person who is not registered as an Indian under the Indian Act.

Treaty Indian: A status Indian who belongs to a First Nation that signed a treaty with the Crown.

Inuit: An Aboriginal people in Northern Canada, who are originally from Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador. The word means “people” in the Inuit language – Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.

Metis: People of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Metis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit, or non-Aboriginal people. The Metis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibway and Cree.

Off-reserve: A term used to describe people, services or objects that are not part of a reserve, but relate to First Nations.

Oral History: Evidence taken from the spoken words of people who have knowledge of past events and traditions. This oral history is often recorded on tape and then put in writing. It is used in history books and to document claims.

Reserve: Tract of land, the legal title to which is held by the Crown, set apart for the use and benefit of an Indian band.

Residential Schools: Refers to an extensive school system set up by the Canadian government and administered by churches that had the nominal objective of educating Aboriginal children but also the more damaging and equally explicit objectives of indoctrinating them into Euro-Canadian and Christian ways of living and assimilating them into mainstream Canadian society. The residential school system operated from the 1880s into the closing decades of the 20th century. The system forcibly separated children from their families for extended periods of time and forbade them to acknowledge their Aboriginal heritage and culture or to speak their own languages. Children were severely punished if these, among other, strict rules were broken. Former students of residential schools have spoken of horrendous abuse at the hands of residential school staff: physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological. Residential schools provided Aboriginal students with an inferior education, often only up to grade five, that focused on training students for manual labour in agriculture, light industry such as woodworking, and domestic work such as laundry work and sewing.

6 RED DEER’S ABORIGINAL POPULATION

According to Statistics Canada⁴, 4590 people identified as Aboriginal in 2011 or 5.2% of the total population. Of this total population, 1975 male while 2615 are female. These numbers reflect a 27.5% increase from the 2006 data.

The table below shows how those who identified an Aboriginal identity classified themselves;

⁴ National Household Survey 2011

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFYING WITH GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL ABORIGINAL POPULATION
Metis	2885	62.9%
First Nations (only)	1630	35.5%
Multiple Aboriginal identity	20	0.4%
Inuit	0	0%
Aboriginal responses not included elsewhere*	55	1.2%

***Aboriginal identities not included elsewhere includes persons who report being Registered or having Treaty Indian Status and/or membership in a First Nation, but who did not report being First Nations (North American Indian), Metis or Inuk (Inuit).**

Youthful Aboriginal Population

The Aboriginal population in Canada has higher fertility rates and lower life expectancy than the total population (including Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals). This has resulted in the population having both a lower mean age and median age than non-Aboriginals. In 2011, the mean age of Red Deer’s Aboriginal population was 24.7. In comparison, the mean age of non-Aboriginals was 34.6. These numbers result in the description of the Aboriginal population as youthful. See the chart below for a further breakdown of the population related to age in Red Deer.

AGE RANGE	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL ABORIGINAL POPULATION
14 and under	1215	26.5
15 – 24	1125	24.5
25 – 64	2145	46.8
65+	105	2.3

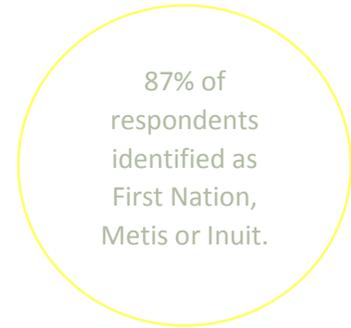
Indigenous Languages in Red Deer

Using the 2011 National Household Survey, one can see that only a small number of individuals reported speaking an Aboriginal language. A total of 230 individuals reported the ability to speak an Aboriginal language, with the majority of those individuals speaking Cree. 195 individuals speak a Cree language which is defined by Statistics Canada to include the following categories: Swampy Cree, Plains Cree, Woods Cree, Moose Cree, Northern East Cree and Southern East Cree. An additional 30 individuals reported the ability to speak Ojibway.

7 METHODOLOGY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

While the nature of this report is a Community Needs Assessment and not an academic paper, methodology was important to collecting responses from service providers, community leaders and Aboriginal citizens.

Data was collected through a variety of methods. The distribution of two separate surveys (one for Aboriginal citizens and one for service providers both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) took place at 5 community events, and through email distribution. A total of 27 citizens and 16 service providers completed surveys online, with an additional 27 people participating in key informant interviews and community consultations. A total of 70 participants provided input into the Needs Assessment through these various methods.



Of the citizen participants surveyed and participating in focus groups, 47 self-identified as First Nation, Metis or Inuit and 7 identified as other, or as part of an Aboriginal community.

8 TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

“Often resources need to be sent home with people so they can take as much time as they need to read the information or have it explained to them by family members. It’s intimidating to come in to non-Aboriginal organizations and admit that you can’t read. People want to be good parents but they are ashamed. How do they help their children when they themselves cannot read? A lot of the good work parents help their children with, happens around the kitchen table. Children face barriers when their parents do not have the skills to help them.” – Service Provider

Communication Barriers

Students stated that significant barriers exist in getting information on programming out to Aboriginal learners. It was stated that more promotion was necessary for learners to find out about programming. Promotion in terms of bus station and bus bench ads, signage and directions, social media advertising on Aboriginal Facebook pages, smart phone applications, and more museum exhibits were ideas that were shared in the group consultation. Further research into applications for cell phone revealed many language apps that could be put on smart phones to assist with cultural literacy learning.

Program Barriers

The Aboriginal School requires more cultural training than it currently has. Aboriginal teachers are difficult to attract to Red Deer, especially those who have the language. Fluency in an Aboriginal language (preferably Cree) would be an asset to the Aboriginal school, and any Aboriginal programming.

The Beyond Employment and Skills Training (BEST) program at Red Deer Aboriginal Employment Services requires some assistance in ensuring culturally appropriate tutoring is taking place. The learners involved in GED training require more assistance from tutors who are Aboriginal, or who have a significant amount of experience in tutoring indigenous students.

“Invites to the community are a barrier because of the lack of marketing and communication. The City is an example of where communication is done well. Invites are sent and information is shared so that individuals have a choice on what they would like to be involved in. However, this is not the case with some Aboriginal organizations.” – First Nations Citizen

The cost of attaining a GED, or doing the Academic Upgrading needed to enter post-secondary programming is a huge barrier. There are limited funding options to access these types of training and the cost has prevented many people from achieving success in their education.

Culture as a Barrier

Elders spoke of barriers that exist within the Cree culture, specifically as they relate to male and female roles. In mainstream society, advances are being made to eliminate gender discrepancy, with an emphasis being on gender equality. However, in some Aboriginal cultures, gender roles in a traditional sense are restrictive to women. We see this through the large number of single mothers. The fathers are no longer going out on hunts or battles, yet they are often leaving the women behind to struggle with raising several children on a limited income, and with limited opportunities for advancement. Aboriginal women continue to leave school earlier due to higher rates of fertility and childbearing. There are also restrictions on women in ceremony.

Cultural literacy in Red Deer is a large issue. More understanding of traditional ways is needed. There are discrepancies in the ways of doing things, especially as they relate to ceremony.

Some organizations expect individuals to participate in sacred ceremonies and do not have exercise enough caution in cultural approaches. Some Aboriginal organizations need to be more welcoming to Aboriginals with different backgrounds and to non-Aboriginals as well.

Young people who are growing up in mainstream society do not respect the ways of the Aboriginal cultures. They are seen as old-fashioned, and they are disinterested in participating (with some exceptions). We need to find ways of engaging youth, to ensure that culture remains strong. We know that schools that offer talking circles, and smudging on a regular (weekly) basis, have higher success rates than those that don't. We need to ensure that youth remain connected to culture, and can pass it down to future generations.

Elders need to ensure that teachings are done in an encouraging way. Residential schools have left their legacy on individuals in a negative way. Some Elders and Traditional Keepers of Knowledge have experienced harsh ways of teaching and learning in their youth and don't have the appropriate tools to share knowledge with the youth. Tradition dictates that teaching is done in a loving, gentle, kind way. We need to ensure that encouragement and love is central in all teachings.

9 ROOT CAUSES OF LOW LITERACY RATES AMONGST ABORIGINALS

Service Providers, Elders, and Citizens all agreed that there were several root causes contributing to the low literacy rates amongst Aboriginals. They include; racism and discrimination, inter-generational trauma, family dynamics, mental health issues, addictions, poverty, and a lack of cultural knowledge.

Racism and Discrimination

Mainstream programs are often not the first choice for Indigenous learners. The segregation that comes with being an Indigenous person is a significant barrier for learners. Programs with a number of Aboriginal individuals are more successful.

“Systemic racism is a barrier to Aboriginal success. We know that many Aboriginal students and adult learners are put in programs that “dumb down” expectations, steering them to “trades” programs in school and toward a GED rather than a diploma. When we work with these people to pace and to coach them, they succeed.” - Service Provider

An incredible amount of studies have been done which support the fact that racism and discrimination are major issues in Canada.

Inter-generational Trauma and Loss of Culture

Residential schools and the cultural genocide that accompanies their legacy, must be taken into account. Generations of Indigenous people and their culture have been undermined by residential schools. The loss of language and culture, and the severing of ties through which Aboriginal culture was taught traditionally are significant factors to consider when discussing root cause of Indigenous social problems, including literacy. Residential schools and the past mistreatment of Aboriginals in society has led to many barriers.⁵

Residential schools and their effects directly correlate with unhealthy family dynamics experienced in many Indigenous households in present day.

Family Dynamics

Residential schools removed children from homes, and traumatized thousands of Aboriginal children through abuse. Generations of Indigenous Canadians missed the opportunity to learn in a family setting, and the opportunity to take part in traditional teachings. Learned behavior from abuse in residential schools is known to have a lasting hold on Indigenous people. This has led to some families facing violence, addictions, family breakdown and mental health issues associated with past trauma.

Families may lack positive role models to provide guidance to young learners. Service Providers report that the value placed on learning by parents is low, and caregivers do not take the time to make sure students have high attendance in school and learning programs. The rates of high school graduates are low amongst Aboriginal people, which does not provide a good example for children. Low self-esteem may result from turmoil in a home environment. A lack of emotional support, and physical safety is a reality for many Aboriginals (of any age, gender or community).

Children learn from an early age how important they are, which is instrumental in developing self-esteem and moving toward a successful life. When families live in poverty and do not have easy access to supports such as education, health and everyday services this prevents them from getting a head start in life.

Mental Health and Addictions

FASD and other brain injuries and learning disorders are prevalent amongst Aboriginal citizens. Substance abuse is also a major factor for many Aboriginals which is directly related to inter-generational trauma and the legacy of residential schools.

⁵ Indigenous Foundations

Poverty

Hunger and stress related to financial and housing instability are very real barriers faced by Aboriginal individuals. Affordable child care is often a barrier for Aboriginal learners – especially those unfamiliar with mainstream daycares or day homes. Poor nutrition is a barrier to a learning mind. Intergenerational poverty is a significant issue facing Indigenous citizens both on and off-reserve. Service Providers stated an example showcasing that, many Aboriginals have poor vision skills and do not have vision aides or they cannot afford them.

10 BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

A total of 21 citizens responded to the question; “If you were participating in adult learning courses or programs, what type of supports would you require?”

The most popular responses to this question were as follows;

1. Weekend classes - 38.1%
2. Childcare - 33.3%
3. Computer training/support – 28.6%
4. Transportation – 23.8%
5. Tutoring – 9.5%
6. Elder Supports – 9.5%
7. Translation Supports – 4.8%
8. No support required – 4.8%

The following information is a breakdown of Barriers to Participation as cited by participants in forums and online surveys.

Transportation

28.6% of survey respondents cited transportation as a barrier to accessing learning opportunities. Transportation is a major issue for many programs. Programs reported working with families that have several children. This may prohibit a parent from attending an event at a school. If she/he has a number of younger children, they are not as likely to use public transportation to attend an event, as the process for transporting everyone is very onerous. This is also a barrier for parents getting their children to half day Kindergarten. When an event is a “one-off” transportation is less of a barrier. But when it is an ongoing program, the barriers to participation increase. Transportation is a barrier for FNMI people living outside of the city limits to access many programs and services that are only offered in the city.

Language

Aboriginal Elders experience barriers accessing legal services. English is not their first language. Younger people often do speak English, but plain language is still very necessary for them to understand the jargon and terms in the legal world. People who have lived their whole lives on reserve may also have barriers related to language. Our service has the ability to phone in, which is helpful for folks needing assistance and not having to travel in all the way from Sunchild or O’Chiese. Maskwacis residents don’t seem to have the same language barriers. However, sometimes we still need younger

family members in the home to help with translation over the phone, because we must gain consent from individuals before further pursuing legal advice.



Documents – especially legal documents - must be translated into more languages to assist those who have limited knowledge of English.

27 citizens responded to a question asking if they spoke an Indigenous language. Of those 27, only two said they were fluent in Cree, with nine others stating they had a minimal understanding of the language. 16 citizens stated that they did not speak an Indigenous language. 4.8% of Aboriginal citizens responding to the survey stated that they felt translation services were necessary for adult learners to be successful in educational programming.

Documentation

Related to language, documentation is a barrier – sometimes transportation becomes a barrier at this point in time because documents need to be faxed and people don't know where to go to get it done at low or no cost. Knowing how to get things done can be a barrier.

Plain language in documents is essential for Indigenous populations with lower literacy levels to understand. One example used by a Key Informant was that books and pamphlets offered by Legal Aid are in plain language – however, they are not translated into different languages.

Cultural Appropriation

Some organizations expect individuals to participate in sacred ceremonies and do not have exercise enough caution in cultural approaches.

Some organizations attempt to provide Aboriginal cultural experiences, but do not do so in an appropriate way – usually this is related to limited funding.

Communication and Technology

In some cases, technology has replaced face to face communication. Information exchanges through technology are needed, but can also act as barriers. Leaders of programs must take this information into account, when attempting to recruit individuals to programs. In person opportunities at appropriate times are needed to ensure availability of busy working parents.

Welcoming and Inclusive Environments

Organizations need to be more welcoming to Aboriginals with different backgrounds. Aboriginal organizations need to be more welcoming to non-Aboriginals as well. Some organizations have to narrow of a focus and need to expand to help people with barriers (examples include involvement with the Child Welfare system) as some people do not have the literacy skills needed to deal with legal issues.

If an individual has an unstable home environment, a school or training program can offer stability. Family instability leads to barriers, but a welcoming environment like a school, library, training program

or group setting with peers can become a place where an individual can thrive, despite challenges they are facing.

Lack of Research

Literacy programs must be backed by research. This is how Aboriginal organizations can gain credibility in the non-Aboriginal community as well.

Self Esteem

It's intimidating to come in to non-Aboriginal organizations and admit that you can't read. People want to be good parents but they are ashamed. How do they help their children when they themselves cannot read?

Historically, colonization of Indigenous people has led to poor self-esteem. The cultural genocide that took place with the removal of Aboriginal children from their homes and their home communities, led to the loss of culture, and the loss of family.

Children and Families

A lot of the good work parents help their children with, happens around the kitchen table. Children face barriers when their parents do not have the skills to help them.

“Fear and distaste of school system resulting from residential school experiences is a major barrier. Parents find it difficult to support their kids, if they are uncomfortable with academics themselves.” - Service Provider

Availability and access to supports and child care can often be barriers to success. One of our barriers to passing on languages to our children is not having someone with knowledge available to teach our children and child care professionals.

Lower attendance in early grades, poverty/hunger, and ability to access support services.

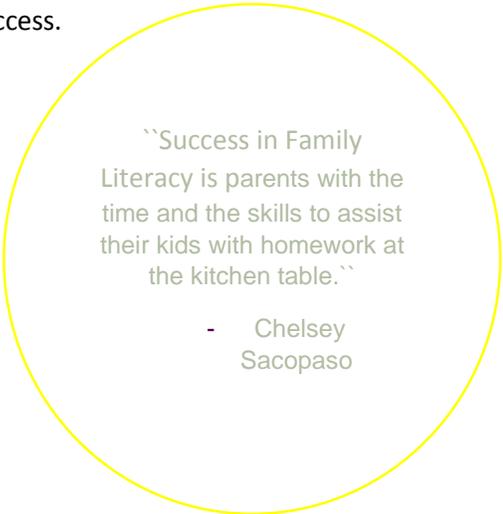
Learner –Centered Programming

Access to programs specific to the needs of the individual. Often the programs are focused on general skills, or GED. While there are programs for Aboriginal learners specifically, they are few in numbers and limited in availability.

Aboriginal learners face the same barriers as other literacy learners - transportation, childcare, financial concerns as well as seeking services at an institution that may not be perceived as culturally appropriate.

Ill-Equipped Schools

In many remote areas, access to quality education is a barrier. In cities, the root cause can be traced to how they are streamed in schools and the level of ability they are "assessed" at.



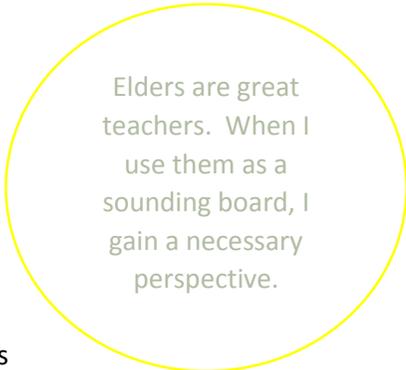
“Success in Family Literacy is parents with the time and the skills to assist their kids with homework at the kitchen table.”

- Chelsey Sacopaso

On-reserve children receive less funding for education than off-reserve children and this may have a large impact on literacy levels.

Traditional Land Use

Significant teachings used to take place through experiences, such as hunting, trapping, fishing, harvesting, etc. It is difficult to put these things into practice in an urban setting. Elders worry that younger generations do not have the survival skills that are needed.



Transitioning

There may be difficulty in relocating from reserve to urban setting, adjusting from different settings, ways, and environment. Often Aboriginals have had an interrupted educational experience and it has not been a positive experience. Students/individuals transitioning from reserve to urban settings may have increased difficulty and may have higher needs

Lack of Volunteers

Volunteer bases may be overwhelmed to assist with programming. This may lead to long wait lists. It may also lead to poor timing of programming.

Lack of Funding

Upgrading between high school and post-secondary is underfunded. Many people try to challenge the tests to avoid the cost. An Aboriginal HIPPY Program would be well received in the community, but it is expensive to run it. It's done wonders for the immigrant community. Literacy is not funded enough for people to access it. Many people try to access funding from their bands to do upgrading, but very few are successful.

It is evident from these many topics, that Aboriginal citizens face a number of barriers which are directly correlated with their success (or lack thereof) in foundational learning programs. Despite these barriers, Service Providers are taking steps to remove barriers as is seen in the next section.

11 SUCCESSFUL BARRIER REMOVAL

Service Providers were asked to share information on the types of options they provided to their client base in order to remove barriers to participation. There were provided with a number of options and responded as follows;

Flexible Program Times/Dates – 75%

Free or Low Cost Programming – 68.8%

Elder or Cultural Support – 43.8%

Childcare – 37.5%

Provision of Meals – 31.3%

Tutoring – 31.3%

Transportation – 25%

Mentoring – 25%

Computer Training – 6.3%

Under the “Other” category, Service Providers also stated that they offered programs that focused on the entire family, assistance with reading documents, extra supports to help Elders with language barriers, appropriate cultural supports, programs for women, housing, regular social gathering, education and training programs, referrals to other support services and research to develop policy and an awareness of Aboriginal limitations. Free Red Deer Public Library cards were also cited as a major asset for removing barriers to Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal citizens.

12 FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY

Non-Aboriginal organizations can offer programming to FNMI populations - with the caveat that they must use their due diligence in ensuring that proper engagement tools are used to attract Aboriginal participants, and that programming takes Aboriginal values into account. An example of a non-Aboriginal organization providing supports to Aboriginals is in housing projects like the Buffalo. They have Aboriginal residents and in a small space like the one they live in, people often become a family. Family is central to all Aboriginal cultures and the safety, structure and values of a family are offered in this type of a program. The staff at their facility have work to do in this area as they have the people right there.

According to participants in this Needs Assessment, programs that seek to attract Aboriginal learners will be successful when they include the following elements; 1. Basic Literacy Skills 2. Family Oriented 3. Child Care (if programs are adult-oriented) 4. Tutoring for new technology 5. Cultural Approach 6. Built in supports for those with very low literacy skills 7. Opportunities for older students to be a part of a program together. 8. The opportunity to teach culture.

13 BEST PRACTICES

When asked to describe best practices in training Aboriginal adult and family learners, Service Providers offered the following responses;

- Elder supports and teacher/tutor support
- Literacyfirst.ca was designed exclusively to help Aboriginal adults develop basic literacy skills and employability tools. The success rate was consistently 70% or over.
- Indigenous instructors, have social workers/counsellors available to help, long term continuity of staff to allow for good mentoring and staff involvement in indigenous community outside the classroom
- Mentorship Programs
- Building family and community relations is an important priority
- Appropriate funding for sustainable programming

- Early (young) access is vital - having a Head Start sets the stage for the future. Ensuring children have a love for lifelong learning comes from those (family members, child development professionals, Elders, community members, etc.) who value children and make the commitment to enrich their lives.
- Community events i.e.: Spring Feast at Fort Normandeau bringing people together, Red Deer Native Friendship Center Programs
- Indigenous populations are a large part of the solution
- Muskowicis schools have had success in the areas of literacy. On-reserve programs will have a lot of success stories to tell. These success stories will often rely on the individuals who are willing to go the extra mile to ensure students succeed.
- Headstart programs are the best start to literacy for Aboriginal children. Red Deer is fortunate to have the Wichinahin Kohopikiwan (Helping Me Grow) Play School. Little Paws is a program run by the Red Deer Native Friendship Center that would also thrive with appropriate funding, to assist with early childhood development. These programs also prepare parents for the expectations that come with school and education, specifically as it relates to attendance and timeliness. Wichinahin Kohopikiwan uses six program components to ensure success for children and families, including; 1. Culture & Language 2. Education 3. Health Promotion 4. Nutrition 5. Social Support 6. Parent and Family Involvement
- The guidance of Elders in all programming is crucial to success.
- Mainstream television programming (ex. Aboriginal People`s Television Network or APTN), computer or smart phone applications and websites are great tools to input cultural practices into. These can assist learners with barriers to access the information they need without them having to leave their own homes.
- The Red Deer Public Alternate School has put good measures into place for Aboriginal students. Courses are offered through modules, so work can be completed both at school, and at home. This delivery option is good for indigenous learners, as it offers flexibility.
- Book – The Whole Country Was One Robe
- Oral traditions play a huge role in the learning styles of Indigenous learners. In the past, repetition of stories were provided throughout the lifespan to learners. Mainstream culture prohibits some of this learning.

“The old ways are the good things. But in order for children to have success, they must now have devices. We need to make sure we are meeting in the middle.”

- Elder Marjorie Daniels

14 INDIGENOUS PROGRAMMING IN RED DEER

Citizens in Red Deer do have a significant amount of programs to choose from. Citizens were asked to share information on the programs they access and know about. Key Informants and stakeholders were asked to provide information on the programs and services they offer and refer clients to. The information they reported is below.

Red Deer Public School District is able to offer family engagement supports to students through their First Nation, Metis and Inuit Learning Services department. The department also has tried various

initiatives through the point people that they have working throughout the district. One example is a “Sew and Supper” at Eastview Middle School where families were invited over the course of a number of weeks to sew a wall hanging for the school. Staff have also worked on the creation of an Aboriginal library in some schools, with the assistance of students.

What type of work is your organization undertaking related to Adult or Family Literacy?

Children

- Summer reading program for children
- School tutoring and one-to-one assistance with courses
- Early intervention, Child Literacy and Early Childhood Development for children ages 19 months to 5 years

Youth

- School tutoring and one-to-one assistance with courses
- SCcyber – education service provider in Centre for Success offers literacy and numeracy courses

Families

- Point people in schools working on family engagement
- Parent, caregiver and family events in the schools
- Aboriginal teachings
- Summer reading group for children and families

Adults

- Adult Learning
- Print materials related to legal advice in several languages – however, none are Aboriginal languages
- Offering extra support to assist individuals needing assistance with translation in a culturally appropriate way.
- Beyond Employment Skills Training (BEST) program designed to assist Aboriginal people attain their GED
- Tutoring three times each week for adult students to prepare for GED
- Safety ticket training
- Job shadows
- Job placements
- Volunteers to meet one-on-one with learners wanting to improve literacy skills
- Small group work for individuals to work on language skills
- English as a second language classes which are tailored to the needs of the individual seeking assistance
- Developing and implementing training and employment services
- Labour market research and professional studies to help build service delivery capacity
- Support relevant studies that will produce a better understanding of Metis culture and identity, the social economic and cultural conditions of the Metis people and the measure that will enhance their individual and collective well-being within Canadian society.

- Enable FNMI individuals to pursue education and enhance their skill level
- High School completion
- Basic Aboriginal culture

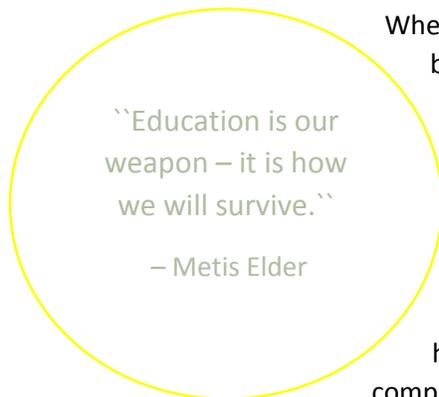
When asked to **share their knowledge of agencies or organizations in the community that individuals can access to assist with literacy related skill building**, the Aboriginal learners shared that they sought out Aboriginal organizations. The B.E.S.T program at Red Deer Aboriginal Employment, and Rupertsland Institute were organizations that all students stated were culturally appropriate and welcoming to people with a variety of literacy barriers. Aboriginal organizations referenced also included; National Aboriginal Day events, the Walking With Our Sisters display at the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, the Red Deer Native Friendship Society and it's many programs (early childhood development, wellness group, tutoring, and potluck lunches), along with the Aboriginal Resource Centre in Rocky Mountain House were organizations with programs that students were likely to seek out assistance from. The non-Aboriginal programs that were also accessed related to literacy was the downtown branch of the Red Deer Public Library and the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery.

15 EDUCATION AND TRAINING - INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

26 citizens responded to the question asking about their highest level of educational attainment.

1. High School Completion – 57.5%
2. Attended college or university – 38.5%
3. Did not complete high school – 11.5%
4. GED – 7.7%
5. Attended Trades School – 7.7%
6. Participated in traditional teachings in my home community or within my family – 3.8%

69.2% of respondents surveyed stated that they were employed with the other 30.8% stating; that they were in school and would be seeking work in the next year; that they were unable to work due to physical limitations or otherwise; or that they were retired.



When asked what type of skills individuals needed to do their jobs better, the following were responses shared by participants; participation in cultural events, Essential Skills, advanced computer training, more training, computer skills in Excel and Publisher, management (2 responses), ability to speak Cree (4 responses), University, all ongoing education is valuable, and more social skills (2 responses).

Skills that employed individuals are interested in learning include; how to participate in cultural events (2 responses), finance and computers, Cree Language (6 responses), Health Care Aide, Psychology, computer skills (5 responses), strategies to assist children born with Fetal Alcohol effects.

Unemployed individuals were asked a number of questions about their career aspirations. The four responses recorded on career goals included; hair stylist, childcare worker, and college mentor. One

person also stated they would like to obtain a higher paying job. When these three citizens were asked to state what type of training they needed to attain these goals, they stated; grade 10 and hair stylist certification, along with high school diploma, and university education. These three individuals also stated that they would be interested in courses on Aboriginal crafts, Administrative Assistant courses, computer and management skills and Employment Counselling.

Individuals that were currently unemployed and not seeking employment were asked about the types of skills they were interested in learning. Responses included; reading and learning Cree and/or Blackfoot (4 responses), learning hair and makeup, entrepreneurship, computer skills (3 responses), and writing skills.

All online survey respondents were asked about their availability for future courses. There was no significant times of the year, days of the week, or times of day that stood out as an appropriate time for courses.

16 SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

When asked, *“What do you see as the literacy, numeracy and/or learning needs of adult Aboriginals in Red Deer?”* Service providers offered a number of opinions. The main need they felt was missing from programming in Red Deer was Life Skills training. It was felt that adequate life skills in an urban setting were necessary for the successful completion of programs. Upgrading for students who had completed high school education was also cited as a significant need. Financial barriers are significant challenges for students wanting to pursue higher education and funding does not exist for Upgrading high school courses.

Service providers suggested that the completion of High School Diploma’s was a very attainable goal for Aboriginal learners. They felt with the proper encouragement and motivation, students would be successful in completing high school. They also know that parental assistance in terms of ensuring students are attending school in the early grades, and high quality childcare in the early years were necessary for students. Educators stated that students believing in themselves and their education were likely to be more successful.

Other ideas that Service Providers contributed as learning needs of Adult Aboriginals in Red Deer included; Financial Literacy training and Professional writing skills (resumes, cover letters, government forms, etc.).

Supports were a significant theme provided by Service Providers. They felt that with proper supports, Aboriginal learners would be successful. Examples of supports include; translators for students who speak Indigenous languages and the recognition of unique Aboriginal learning styles. They felt programs must strive to ensure Aboriginal learners are able to be marked on their ability to speak and listen, and not just on their reading and writing skills. Indigenous learners must also be given the chance to learn through visual cues, to use their auditory senses and to participate in hands-on practice of various topics. Supports for Indigenous learners with learning disabilities were also a theme provided by Service Providers. Early intervention was cited frequently by Service Providers.

“Many of our people are visual hands on learners. Although we use these techniques with children, these approaches are not always used to support adults.” - Service Provider

Policies through school systems (both urban, rural and on-reserve) were cited as a need. On-reserve school systems must follow the same standards as mainstream schools. Advocacy related to Advanced Education is needed for Aboriginal adult learners. Policies to assist Aboriginal learners of all ages were perceived as assets.

17 COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING COUNCIL

Service Providers and Key Informants were asked to share their recommendations for Lifelong Learning Council of Red Deer, as they pertain to Aboriginal learners. Their answers are as follows;

- We need a "work at our own level and pace" program that focuses exclusively on reading, writing, speaking and listening with basic numeracy skills like counting money, writing cheques, reading a budget and for higher levels, financial statements.
- Non-Aboriginal organizations can offer programming to FNMI populations - with the caveat that they must do their due diligence in ensuring that proper engagement tools are used to attract Aboriginal participants, and that programming takes Aboriginal values into account. An example of a non-Aboriginal organization providing supports to Aboriginals is in housing projects like the Buffalo. They have Aboriginal residents and in a small space like the one they live in, people often become a family. The staff at their facility have work to do in this area as they have the people right there.
- Build it in an Aboriginal agency planned and taught by indigenous peoples for free with certification at the end and learners will come
- It would be great if we could build a mentoring system where older students help support (tutoring) younger students. Including college students visiting high schools and providing role model and mentoring.
- Reminders to families about upcoming events and transportation support are key to ensuring they have the opportunity to attend programming.
- We need to continue the conversation regarding lack of knowledge surrounding Aboriginal culture and traditions within our society. We need to acknowledge the loss which has occurred within the aboriginal culture throughout history, and help to revive these cultures and languages. Educating our community regarding this information is the first step from awareness to action.
- Continue supporting Aboriginal people by helping them connected to their culture and having cultural events.
- Provide life skills training and continuous support for barriers students encounter
- Ensure support and access to additional resource & agencies
- Supporting early intervention, grants for adult upgrading, tutoring programs, reading college, etc.
- I strongly believe that we need to develop a stand-alone literacy program. Although Alberta Education claims literacy learning is embedded in the curriculum, most teachers focus on content as they are pressured to "cover the curriculum". We need to offer literacy programs first - before we stream them into courses in which there is a false expectation that they can perform basic literacy skills.

- Upgrading support, basic skills and help for parents who want to help their children, but don't have the tools.
- More education about Lifelong learning program is needed. Unsure myself of what they have to offer. Am planning to meet with a rep this week to become more aware of this service.
- Provide support for those individuals who did not catch on to reading right away.
- Provide culturally based programming presented by indigenous instructors using materials about by and for indigenous peoples and their history and culture, supplement with food, ceremony, and community building in a culturally appropriate manner and provide opportunities to improve literacy as a family
- Supporting and working along-side initiatives within the public education system, or facilitate access to similar supports within the community
- Depending on the findings of this study, there may be some gaps in service that LLC could support.
- Holistic approach needed, increased programming and services in the area of literacy, further supports for Aboriginal Students at all educational levels, Early Intervention Projects and/or Programming and Mentorship programs
- Success for Aboriginal literacy should definitely be a priority. With the government decreasing funding in school, this need will only increase.
- Keeping our culture, traditions and languages alive would involve community supports and easy access to education. Early education should not cost money, this is a necessity for success.
- Provide more supports for Aboriginal peoples (monetary, mental, physical, cultural), broaden Aboriginal awareness in the community (provide information regarding culture, heritage, language etc.)
- Follow up in keeping Aboriginal culture
- An Aboriginal HIPPY program would be well received by the community. It has done wonders for immigrant families.
- Funding is needed to ensure children have the supports to be reading by grade one. Not everyone at home has books – Lifelong Learning can assist with providing books or breaking down the assumption that everyone does have books
- The Red Deer College Reading College is a huge community asset that works to catch kids up on their reading at a sensitive time in their skill development. It is free, provides lunch and offers field trips so it is very helpful to students.
- Aboriginal books are a must for Aboriginal learners – not just Aboriginal characters, but also Aboriginal stories and legends.
- Programs that are for Aboriginals, provided by Aboriginal instructors, in an Aboriginal way, will prove to be the most successful
- If decisions are to be made on Aboriginal Literacy, there must be more than two Aboriginal voices/perspectives represented. An Aboriginal representative on their own does not get heard as often as the Aboriginal community would like. There is strength in numbers for our people when dealing with mainstream organizations.

"Introducing children to a combination of traditional oral stories, storybooks and songs at a young age are important tools for developing lifelong literacy."

- Wichinahin
Kohopikiwan

Assumptions may be made in the community that all Aboriginal people share the same knowledge – this is not the case. Many people have different teachings, various cultures have different ways of doing things. Some people are raised urban and others are raised rural, or on the reserve. Some people have Elders, others do not. Everyone has a unique perspective and we need to be respectful of this in any of the work that is done on Aboriginal issues.

18 SUCCESS AND ADULT ABORIGINAL LEARNERS

When asked ***which factors contributed to their success***, a group of adult learners cited that a number of areas contributed to their success. Traditional familial connections were stated; in terms of role models, the ability to assist children with homework, family history, the values and morals passed on from family, cultural history and assistance from family (child care, moral support) were at the forefront of participant's minds. Western culture education supports included computer skills and classes, resume development, funding, the use of resources in the library and the acquiring of safety tickets. The area where Traditional Aboriginal Culture and Western Culture collided and was cited by students as contributing to their success, was in the areas of culturally appropriate locations for learning and sensitive Aboriginal teachers with patience to assist with learning processes.

When asked ***what things students would like to see changed in programming***, a variety of issues were brought to light by the students that were directly correlated to the areas they felt contributed to their success. Ideas related to technology included; the use of pen readers, and the need for more tutoring on technology. Ideas that were culturally appropriate for Aboriginals included; access to more books on Aboriginal culture, Elders as teachers of various subjects especially cultural topics, Aboriginal teachers who are more understanding, a number of methods used in teaching practices to accommodate different learning styles. A strong statement made by the students was that programs must be specific to Aboriginal learners and must be designed and taught by Aboriginals who have had a similar experience.

19 WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

A number of studies have been done with the Aboriginal population as subjects. The following research relates to Adult Aboriginal Literacy in Canada and the findings of this Needs Assessment.

In 2010 the Urban Aboriginal People's Study (UAPS) Main Report was released. This report was a compilation of surveys done with Aboriginal Canadians in major cities across the country. This is a report that sheds a significant amount of light on Aboriginal perceptions. It is useful to reference it in this Needs Assessment to point out the similarities and differences of Indigenous populations on related topics. Racism and discrimination emerged as a barrier to literacy for Aboriginal people in this Needs Assessment. There is a long history of systemic racism towards Aboriginal people in Canadian society. The report sought better understanding of contemporary urban Aboriginal identities and recognized the best way to find this information was to better comprehend how they feel in a largely non-Aboriginal

urban world. The report also states that, if there is a 'single urban Aboriginal experience', it is the shared perception among Metis, Inuit and First Nations peoples, across cities, that they are stereotyped negatively. There is a very strong perception among urban Aboriginal peoples that non-Aboriginal people had a wide range of negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people, most commonly of alcoholism and drug abuse.⁶

Another significant theme which emerged from discussions with Red Deer Aboriginal citizens, along with professionals, Elders, service providers, and community leaders was the need for programs that are either; 1. Aboriginal (run by Aboriginal agencies, for Aboriginal people, using Aboriginal methods). UAPS stated that regardless of how much interaction they have with non-Aboriginal services, consensus among urban Aboriginal peoples that it is necessary to also have Aboriginal services.

The vast majority of urban Aboriginal peoples perceive non-Aboriginal people as very different from Aboriginal people, especially in terms of their values, culture and socio-economic opportunities. However, when asked, only one third of UAPS participants strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, "I don't feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people." Urban Aboriginal people are more likely to somewhat or strongly disagree when presented with this statement. Metis people were also recorded as having a stronger sense of acceptance of non-Aboriginal people.

An astonishing finding of the UAPS report which directly correlates with the Red Deer Aboriginal Literacy Needs Assessment was that seven in ten urban Aboriginal peoples felt their experiences with non-Indigenous people had a positive impact on their lives. They stated that non-Aboriginals had made them stronger, more accepting, more tolerant, more motivated to succeed, and reinforced their identity as an Aboriginal person in a number of ways. This research is very important to this Needs Assessment as it challenges some of the perceptions recorded by Indigenous Red Deerian's. It is, however, important to note that the study was conducted in major cities and Red Deer citizens were not included in the UAPS research. The UAPS study also states that, "There is consensus among urban Aboriginal peoples that it is important for Aboriginal services to exist in addition to non-Aboriginal ones."

Elders are necessary to reference when discussing research. The wisdom of Elders is necessary to be able to use information wisely.⁷ Elders are seen as professors of life in Indigenous communities in Canada and throughout Indigenous populations worldwide. Elders are used as a sounding board to ensure that appropriate perspectives are considered in decision making. The advice of Elders is gained through years of experience. Impressively, the Elders of today have survived the cultural genocide inflicted by residential schools, the loss of families, and often the overcoming of addictions. The opinions and life experiences of Elders are necessary elements to consider when discussing research. Elders state that "Knowledge can be learned. Wisdom must be lived." This concept relates to the discussion on literacy, when taking Aboriginal learning styles into account – as referenced by Elders throughout the Needs Assessment.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta is an important document to reference related to Aboriginal literacy needs. The document states that, "First Nations in Alberta believe the right to education is an inherent right, granted by the Creator." It also states that, "education is a life-long learning process that requires recognizing both the value of practical

⁶ Environics Urban Aboriginal People's Study

⁷ Native Wisdom for White Minds

educational initiatives as well as the unique circumstances of the First Nations in Alberta, which include, but are not limited to language and culture.” These statements are powerful, and sanctioned by Grand Chiefs in each of the three Treaty territories in Alberta. They align with the statements made by citizens of this Needs Assessment. It is important to note that some Service Providers interviewed felt that parents of students did not have similar beliefs. The UAPS study states that, “Urban Aboriginal peoples strongly believe in the importance of formal education, both for themselves and for Aboriginal people generally.” It’s apparent that discrepancies exist, between professionals and the Aboriginal citizens in Red Deer that they serve.

Also aligning with the statements made by participants in this Needs Assessment is research conducted by the Family and Community Supports Society (FCSS) in the City of Calgary. Ideas related to programs rooted in Aboriginal culture, language and spirituality, and the use of oral traditions (including storytelling) were referenced in this research. The use of family-based programs was strongly emphasized by participants in this needs assessment, along with programs that have mentoring components, and respect for Indigenous knowledge. Calgary FCSS noted these two aspects were necessary in working with Aboriginal citizens. Their statement, “...the importance of finding information that can be applied by and through Aboriginal agencies and groups to serve Aboriginal people...practices, programs, approaches...need to be authentic to Aboriginal people to increase the likelihood of success.⁸ Service Providers interested in further research on these topics can gather a significant amount of details from this report on Aboriginal engagement, learning styles, programming and inclusion.

Urban Aboriginals across Canada stated the following items were important in the Aboriginal pursuit of higher education;

1. Financial assistance
2. Aboriginal resources (teachers, counsellors, courses, programs, cultural centers, student housing and more Aboriginal presence generally)
3. Daycare
4. Housing
5. Transportation
6. Support provided by family and friends, counsellors role models, tutors and one’s Band or home community⁹

These statements made by participants of the UAPS study align with the statements made by all participants in the Red Deer Aboriginal Literacy Needs Assessment.

The 2013, TD Economics report titled “Literacy Matters: Unlocking the Literacy Potential of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada”, also provides further insight into Aboriginal Literacy issues. The report states that “Slightly more than 60% of Aboriginal Canadians do not have the literacy skills necessary to participate fully in the current knowledge-based economy. These Aboriginal Canadians are unable to understand and use the information around them to create a better life for themselves and their families. Discouragingly, this share is ten percentage points higher than registered by the mainstream Canadian population”. This statement is a disheartening one, and provides validity to the absolute need of the

⁸ Aboriginal People Helping Aboriginal People

⁹ Environics Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study

consultations with Aboriginal people in Red Deer, and the need for further programming related to literacy.

Low literacy levels lead to low skill levels and is a known disadvantage of the lower wages and employment for Indigenous Canadians, due to poor educational attainment. Reports state that less than half of First Nations children in Canada read a book every day, despite Aboriginal service providers and educators stressing the need for this simple task. This information points to the fact that if greater attention and efforts are not undertaken, the multi-generational cycle of low literacy rates will continue.¹⁰

Weak literacy skills of Aboriginal peoples will likely translate into poor health prevention, the proper use of medications and overall motivation. This information shared by TD Economics through their report, is information that was not captured by the responses from Aboriginal citizens in Red Deer, but it is important to note. “The relative lack of literacy and its impact on education and health contribute to a gap in Aboriginal employment between the highly literate and the poorly literate of almost thirty percentage points,” TD Economics. The report also stated a number of barriers to higher literacy attainment that do align with Red Deer participants in this Needs Assessment. They include; social and economic barriers (including poverty), cultural barriers, lack of self-esteem, literacy views that are not holistic, education system complexities, underfunding, linguistic differences, limited numbers of teachers and role models, lack of resources, history of trauma, and learning disabilities.

The “Literacy Matters” report stated the following best practices to promote stronger literacy skills among Aboriginal People:

1. Engage parents to dispel the stigma associated with education and improve literacy.
2. Make Aboriginal students feel valued and welcome to improve educational outcomes
3. Incorporate Aboriginal approaches to learning into curriculum and teaching methods to increase literacy levels
4. Increasing access and targeted funding for literacy programs and supports for those Aboriginal peoples in rural and remote areas
5. Deliver teacher support and training to ensure that literacy programs are both sustainable and of high quality.¹¹

These best practices as outline by TD Economics align with the responses provide by Aboriginal participants in this Needs Assessment.

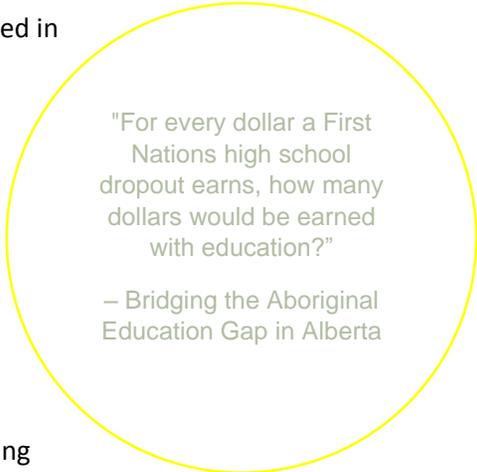
A recommendation from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples also aligns with the views expressed by Red Deer Participants. The recommendation is, “Initiatives to address social, education, health and housing needs, including the training of 10,000 health professionals over a ten-year period, the establishment of an Aboriginal peoples’ university and recognition of Aboriginal nations’ authority over child welfare.” This recommendation (along with several others) was made nearly 20 years ago in November 1996. The report had an additional 439 recommendations which called for changes to relationships between non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people in Canada.

¹⁰ TD Economics Literacy Matters

¹¹ TD Economics Literacy Matters

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is important to note, as it speaks to the research, and consultations done on Aboriginal people in the past, that have yet to come to fruition.

‘Bridging the Aboriginal Education Gap in Alberta’¹², was research conducted in partnership by the University of Alberta Faculty of Native Studies and the Rupertsland Institute in 2013. The research focuses on the Aboriginal Education Gap and outlines benefits to the economy through the further education of Aboriginal citizens. The report is filled with hypothetical scenarios, along with economic data on earning potential of Aboriginal Albertans based on education levels. The research reports significantly increased economic benefits for adults with higher education levels – especially for females. “A First Nations female who finishes university typically earns \$13.00 for every dollar she would have earned as a high school dropout”¹². This information is closely related to this Needs Assessment, as adult literacy programming may act as a stepping stone for adult learners to complete their high school education or move onto trades and post-secondary training. It also points out the discrepancies in earnings between Aboriginal males and females in Alberta. The report suggests that bridging the Aboriginal Education Gap would benefit Alberta by more than a quarter of a trillion dollars. This increase would be measured through increased earning potential over Aboriginal earners lifespans.



Research throughout Canada, supports the comments made by participants through this Needs Assessment. The variety of information showcased in this Needs Assessment all confirms to the idea that education and literacy for Aboriginal people are unique challenges from the mainstream population.

20 IN CONCLUSION

While this Needs Assessment focused on Adult and Family Literacy, children were at the forefront of citizens minds in responding to questions. The Aboriginal Worldview dictates that Indigenous citizens take the history of the past seven generations, and the future of the next seven generations into account when making decisions in the present. This was evident through the responses provided by Aboriginal citizens. Research supports the notion that early intervention and prevention is necessary in raising the literacy rates of Indigenous citizens. With the Aboriginal population projected to increase by nearly one million Canadians by the year 2031,¹³ the time is now to invest in foundations which will assist the population to succeed.

Numerous consultations have been done with, and on behalf of Indigenous Canadians, and Aboriginal serving organizations. The research points to the fact that Aboriginal citizens have been asked to share their input on their needs for several years, yet the programs, services and understanding makes little progress. Improving the literacy of Indigenous Canadians is a necessary step on the journey to success for Aboriginal people across Canada, and specifically in Red Deer. The ideas and statements provided by

¹² Bridging the Aboriginal Education Gap

¹³ Population Projects of Aboriginal people

participants of this Needs Assessment are urgent in nature. The ability of the community in Red Deer to provide the appropriate programs and services will determine the future employability, and readiness of Aboriginal citizens to lead and excel in fulfilling lives.

21 KEY INFORMANTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

16 Key Informants took part in interviews, focus groups and online surveys. The following Stakeholders shared their contact information through the data collection. Three organizations (not listed) chose to remain anonymous.

Red Deer Aboriginal Elders Circle	
Red Deer Aboriginal Employment Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> B.E.S.T Program 	http://www.rdaes.com/ http://www.rdaes.com/contact.html
Red Deer Public Library <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult Literacy 	https://www.rdpl.org/services/adult-literacy
Red Deer Native Friendship Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women`s Wellness BOND to Literacy Craft Circle Four Directions Family Support Aboriginal Youth Centre for Success 	http://rdnfs.com http://www.siafn.com/employment/employment-opportunities/program-coordinator-aboriginal-youth-centre-for-success/
Red Deer Public School District <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FNMI Learning Services Lindsey Thurber High School 	http://www.rdpsd.ab.ca/ http://www.rdpsd.ab.ca/FNMI%20Services.php http://lindsaythurber.rdpsd.ab.ca/
The John Howard Society of Red Deer	http://www.jhsrd.ca/
Legal Aid	http://www.legalaid.ab.ca/Pages/default.aspx
Red Deer Child Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wichinahin Kohopikiwan Aboriginal Playschool 	http://www.reddeerchildcare.ca/ http://www.reddeerchildcare.ca/playschool.html
Rupert's Land Institute	www.rupert'sland.org/

All of the above organizations were cited by Indigenous participants as programs or organizations that were frequented. Additional organizations referenced by citizens included;

Red Deer College <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal Services 	http://rdc.ab.ca/future-students/aboriginal-services/aboriginal-services
Family Services of Central Alberta	www.fsca.ca
Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools	http://www.rdcrcs.ca/

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