

# Intergenerational Dialogues Final Report

## John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights

November 8, 2012

On November 8, 2012, the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights in partnership with Jasper Place High School hosted a dialogue across generations to explore and discuss the history of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples. Despite the snow storm that threatened the participation in the event, thirty six high school youth from across Edmonton came together with six community elders to learn about the history and impact of residential schools, the present day realities of reconciliation and the role that we each can take in fostering improved relations in our community and province. The day proved to be a fruitful conversation and opened the doors for the non-Aboriginal youth delegates to gain a stronger understanding of Canadian history and present day relationships.

The purpose of this Intergenerational Dialogue hosted and organized by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights was to engage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in conversation about their role in enhancing relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in their community. Given the importance of the on-going work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the lack of curriculum time dedicated to Indian Residential Schools, the day focused on the history of Indian Residential Schools as a starting point for building a mutual understanding of Canada's history.

The day began with a smudge and an opening prayer. Following, the first part of the program "Uncovering the Aboriginal World View", began with an interactive session by Lewis Cardinal, that sought to help non-Aboriginal youth understand how differences between cultures inform how we interpret our world. This session also sought to introduce students to Aboriginal culture so that youth could understand the traditions that would be honoured throughout the day. |

In the second part of the program, "Uncovering Our Shared History", students engaged with Elders and their stories. Each Elder addressed a different impact of Residential Schools – from the experience of the parent and the child to the broader historical and present-day community experience of Residential Schools.

First, Daphne Alexis spoke about the impact on the child which allowed students to gain insight into the experience of students who attended Indian Residential Schools. Students in attendance learned about how those who attended Indian Residential Schools had no contact with their family and community, were forbidden to speak their Aboriginal language, were forced to pray Christian prayers, and were abused, all of

which made it very difficult for the children to return home to their communities once they were finished school. Following, Nellie Carlson spoke about the impact on the parent. Here, students gained further perspective on what it was like for a parent to have their child removed from their home and community. We learned that in some cases the children were taken by force which would be obviously traumatizing for the parent and that in other cases the parents sent their children to these schools more willingly and then experienced alienation that wasn't expected. After a short break, Lewis Cardinal spoke again about the impact on the community. Here, the discussion focused on two aspects - what happens to a community when their children are taken away (does the social order breakdown? how? do relationships between generations change?), and then, what happens to a community when the next generation of parents are survivors of the trauma of residential schools (eg. the documented difficulty that some survivors have when they become parents, since they never learned how to parent after being removed from their parent's care).

The talks provided a good background understanding for the following two talks given by Isabelle Kootenay and Beatrice Morin about intergenerational work in Alberta and reconciliation work in Alberta, respectively. In this third part of the program, "Creating a Shared Future", Ms. Kootenay spoke about the legacy of Indian Residential Schools: problems and barriers that Aboriginal people continue to face in Canada, including how these challenges exist because of the continued impact of Indian Residential Schools and because of the systemic problems with our societies and governments that are still stuck in the mindset that created Indian Residential Schools in the first place. It was important for the John Humphrey Centre and the Elders to leave feeling with a sense of possibility to create a shared future. Thus, Ms. Morin reflected on the question, "Where do we go from here?" and shared her thoughts on how to address the legacy of historical injustices as well as on current achievements and initiatives that are helping to develop relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

After the lunch break, the group "Leading Spirits" spoke to the students about reconciliation in Alberta. Leading Spirits is a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students at Jasper Place High School who started the group to address racism and prejudice in this West Edmonton High School. This group spoke to the participating students about their work to challenge stereotypes and specifically about the stereotypes of the First Nation, Metis and Inuit students in Edmonton schools.

The day ended with a sharing circle which gave students the opportunity to reflect and share their feelings and thoughts with each other about this difficult subject matter.

Given what students wrote on their one-page evaluations of the day, it is clear that they were quite impacted by the stories they heard. Specifically, all of the participating students wrote that they were impacted by the Elder's stories. The most frequently used words to describe their experiences were "inspiring" and "enlightening". Further, with respect to the question "what possible actions can you take?", most students answered "continue to tell people the stories heard today". Lastly, the majority of students wrote that the program "fully" met their expectations.

## Lessons Learned:

This project was incredibly rewarding for us and reminded us of the ongoing need to facilitate a better understanding of Canada's shared history among the non-Aboriginal population. During the planning of this event, the John Humphrey Centre went through some major staff changes however which had an impact on the readiness of the Elders for the day. Elders were incredibly impactful but both our partner and ourselves felt that we needed to spend more time with them to prepare them but also to engage with them in the delivery and facilitation of the experience. If repeating this event in the future, we would ensure that we work more directly with our partners to ensure the Elders were prepared and that the process was mutually co-created to the benefit of the students and to enhance the relationships in a stronger way.

Despite this lesson, the event still went well and there is a keen interest in students to do something like this again which we hope to plan again in the future.

## Detailed Program:

- Welcome and introduce the smudge
- Opening Prayer
- Honour Song
- Lewis Cardinal Presentation: Aboriginal World View - Understanding the unique perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples and how this challenges our thinking about how we live together in Canada
- Daphne Alexis: Impact on the Child - Daphne Alexis shared the impacts of the residential schools and history on Aboriginal children; how being removed from the home affected their connection to parents, the abuse that some faced in the schools, the cultural pay-offs and more.
- Nellie Carlson: Impact on the Parent - Nellie Carlson provided her perspective on what it is like for a parent to have their child removed from their home and community as well as her personal experience with residential schools. In some cases, we know the children were taken by force which would be obviously traumatizing for the parent; and in other cases, we know that parents sent their children to these schools more willingly and then experienced alienation that wasn't expected. Youth, especially non-Aboriginal youth, had the opportunity to understand the impact this loss had (and continues to have) on parents - from the Aboriginal world view. A connection was drawn here between Residential Schools and the current number of Aboriginal children in care.
- Lewis Cardinal: Impact on the Community - Here, Lewis Cardinal discussed what happens to a community when their children are taken away (does the social order breakdown? how? do relationships between generations change?), and then, what happens to a community when the next generation of parents are survivors of the

trauma of residential schools (eg. the documented difficulty that some survivors have when they become parents, since they never learned how to parent after being removed from their parent's care).

- Isabelle Kootenay: Intergenerational Trauma - Here, Isabelle Kootenay discussed the legacy of residential schools: problems and barriers that Aboriginal people continue to face in Canada - whether these challenges exist because of the continued impact of Residential Schools or because of the systemic problems with our societies and governments that are still stuck in the mindset that created Residential Schools in the first place.
- Beatrice Morin: Reconciliation Work in Alberta - Beatrice Morin brought the conversation to a more hopeful space where she discussed the kind of work is currently being done within Aboriginal communities (and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities) to bring about healing and reconciliation.
- Other Elders from the community came to the event and also contributed throughout the day's discussions.
- Youth Group: Leading Spirits hosted a Lunch Fundraiser - Leading Spirits is a group of young individuals that want to make a difference in their school. One of the differences the group group wants to make is to let the people of Jasper Place High School know that First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people work and attend the school of jasper place. We also want to make knowledgeable of the stereotypes present about the First Nation, Metis and Inuit, and that they are not true, many aboriginal students graduate and that we are not dropouts, we can be successful. We plan on achieving this through running cultural, and regular events.
- Regrouping after lunch to reflect and discuss the morning - informal, on thoughts, and any call to action/action ideas
- Journaling Time - allowing students to note their reflections
- Sharing Circle: offering reflections and move into brainstorming - how do we share these learnings?
- Elder offers Closing Prayer
- Day Ends

## Intergenerational Dialogues: Evaluation Results Summary

One word to describe your experience:

	Percentage
<b>Inspiring</b>	22%
<b>Enlightening</b>	17%
<b>Interesting</b>	10.5%

<b>Amazing</b>	10.5%
<b>Informative</b>	5%
<b>Fantastic</b>	5%
<b>Heart-warming</b>	5%
<b>Mind-blowing</b>	5%
<b>Educational</b>	5%
<b>Eye-opening</b>	5%
<b>Awesome</b>	5%
<b>Long</b>	5%

	Fully	Somewhat	Not at All
Did the dialogue meet your expectations?	79%	21%	

### What interested you? What disappointed you?

- The stories that the elders were willing to share (4)
- What interested me was that some of the people that got abused they still hurt today. What disappointed me was that they got hit if they spoke their own language.
- I liked talking with Nellie and hearing stories. Wish we had more time to discuss.
- More breaks
- I really liked the group talk at the end. I was disappointed that there was not more speakers.
- The most interesting life changing part was all the advice that was given to us by the elders.
- It was good how there was an elder.
- The experiences that the people had and how it affected their lives.
- Learning about how peoples' lives were during the Residential Schools.
- I was interested in the stories and history. I wish we could do more interactive things.
- The different experiences interested me.
- What interested me today were the stories told by the elders today, how they reflected the elders thoughts on the questions asked.

- Interest: Listening to people talk about Residential Schools. Disappointed: Listening to people just talk.
- Nothing really disappointed me. For me I found everything interesting.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Overall, how would you rate the Elders' presentations?			10%	58%	32%

	Yes	No	Maybe
Are you inspired by today's dialogue to make change in your school or community?	33%	5%	62%

### What are some possible actions that you might take after today?

- Tell my friends. (2)
- Be nicer.
- Join an Aboriginal group at school.
- Not bully Aboriginal people and treat them like normal people.
- Not judge, accept people.
- I want to spread awareness. More people need to know the effects of Residential Schools.
- Letting people know and be aware.
- Share with friends and families. (2)
- To not take for granted that I can speak my own language in school and be able to be myself.
- Tell people about what I've learned.(5)
- Perhaps telling what happened today, some of the experiences and stories shared with me. Do some more research, then reveal what I've found with fellow peers.
- Help to talk more about this.

### Do you have any ideas for how to improve these dialogues in the future?

- No. (7)
- To get people involved in some activity that tell the cultures and their identity.
- More open discussion.
- Have more speakers, have the speakers in traditional clothing and talk more about how it affected them than what had happened.
- Just to share with people, making them more aware.
- Maybe not talk so long without breaks.
- Adding in some of the Elders' personal stories - they can add some insight on what truly went on during those times.
- Have more Elders to tell their story.

### What is the most important thing you learned today?

- The experiences from the Elders.
- To learn what happens to people and what is being done about it.
- More about Aboriginal peoples.
- How people were treated in Residential Schools. How it made me feel.
- The history and perspectives of those who were on the other end of this disaster. I've heard about the government's side.
- How Aboriginals were treated.
- Respect, hearing peoples' stories, learning about Residential Schools touched my heart.
- I learned that the Elders that got abused still hurt today and that they couldn't be themselves in Residential Schools.
- How the whole experience impacted peoples' lives.
- That the past affects the future.
- Knowing further research about the past about Aboriginal people and their experience.
- How much the effects of Residential School affects people today.
- Most important thing I learned was no matter what no one needs mood changing substances, they just need healing.
- That they still deeply hurt about what happened to them when they were little.
- Stories from the Elders.

- I learned more about the affect of these schools.
- Be a better person.

## Feedback from Partner

- Smaller turnout than expected possibly due to colder weather
- Promotional materials weren't clear on exactly what speakers would be talking about
- Elders were challenging to work with (ex. Translating the definitions of certain words, Elders didn't understand how to describe their transition into the city of Edmonton from residential schools, they were unclear of how to answer questions related to that specific topic)
- Students were more interested in the elders personal stories than in what helpful steps Elders were taking to transition now (stronger focus on past rather than present and future steps that can be taken)
- Idea: clearly and simply communicate to Elders what they should speak about beforehand. Perhaps someone (a relative or Elder) could act on behalf of JHC and go directly to the Elders to do this. More direct contact is needed with the Elders and they also need more preparation time
- Idea could be to break into smaller discussion groups with the Elders
- Elders need longer speaking times, foster a space where they feel appreciated, respected and comfortable