

THE PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

The Commission on First Nations and Metis Peoples and Justice Reform began its work with a commitment to be as accessible and approachable as possible. Reaching out to the numerous and varied communities of Saskatchewan was vital to the success of this Commission. It has been the Commission's mission to create change and make a difference by:

- Listening to people;
- Building relationships;
- Promoting respect and change;
- Recognizing successes; and
- Making recommendations for future justice reform.

Enabling people from all geographic areas, walks of life and ethnic communities to deliver their message to the Commission was important. To this end, the Commission devised several strategies that resulted in dozens of organizations and thousands of individuals dialoguing with the Commissioners over a two-year period. Community dialogues were the most visible and effective means of facilitating a discussion of the issues. Other strategies included: roundtables, presentations, site visits, town hall meetings, in-camera meetings, papers and other written submissions, meetings with stakeholders and personal discussions/interviews conducted by Commissioners and staff. (Please refer to Appendix for a complete list of communities visited, presentations received and other information regarding the process.)

COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

The Commission put a great deal of emphasis on Community Dialogues. This part of the process was considered the best means of gaining the perspective and wisdom of the people of Saskatchewan – the people who are directly affected by the justice system. Three basic but essential questions were posed at every dialogue:

1. What concerns do you have with the justice system?
2. What examples of successes or positive programs have you seen?
3. How do you think the justice system can be improved?



The purpose of the community dialogues – as was the overall strategy – was to generate information and solutions for change that will improve the relationship between First Nations, Metis and non-Aboriginal people and the justice system. Specifically, the Commission sought solutions that will:

- Reduce levels of offending;
- Reduce levels of victimization;
- Reduce levels of recidivism;
- Improve the safety of First Nations, Metis and non-Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan;
- Identify short and long-term implementation strategies to achieve the above; and
- Identify the vehicle to oversee the implementation of the Commission's solutions.

The Commission held community dialogues in approximately twenty communities. These included the large urban centres, as well as remote northern communities such as Black Lake, First Nations communities in all corners of the province and communities in which the Metis perspective could be presented. Often, people spoke in their language, whether it was Cree, Dene or Saulteaux, with translators assisting the Commissioners and others in the room to understand what was being said. The dialogues were recorded and transcripts were printed. In some cases, video records of the dialogues were produced. In La Ronge, Missinipi Broadcasting carried a live broadcast of the community dialogue to its large radio audience in the North.

The Commission was invited to the various communities and local people organized the event, finding a suitable venue, providing meals and generating interest within the community. The Commission assisted with print and electronic advertising and contacting media outlets in the area and throughout the province. In all cases, Elders played an important role and First Nations and Metis culture was respected and embraced. All dialogues were conducted in a circle format with a Commission staff member acting as moderator.

During these community dialogues, many individuals spoke frankly about their personal, often painful experiences with a justice system, which in their experience has failed them. The Commissioners heard their words and acknowledge how difficult it must have been for them to tell their stories in a public format. Many spoke of the importance of having been listened to.



STAKEHOLDERS

Very early in its work the Commission on First Nations and Metis Peoples and Justice Reform determined that it would be important to seek guidance from a cross-section of the Saskatchewan community. For this reason a panel of individuals who would become 'stakeholders' in this process was created. The stakeholders included First Nations and Metis people, non-Aboriginals, justice professionals, community leaders and others with an interest in seeing reforms to the justice system.

The Stakeholders met with the Commissioners on several occasions and were particularly active when the Commission held dialogues or other events in their local communities. Stakeholders included people from the North, urban centres and communities in the southern part of the province.

The Commissioners regard the input of the stakeholders as valuable in providing a strategy for designing an effective process to dialogue with the people of Saskatchewan. Their commitment to the Commission was evident in the meetings as they spoke passionately about issues that affect their communities, their families and themselves. (A list of stakeholders can be found in the Acknowledgements later in this report.)

The Commissioners would like to thank everyone who participated in the community dialogues and the roundtables and made presentations to the Commission. We appreciate the time and effort many people put into organizing site visits and providing the Commission with information and invaluable perspectives of the justice system as it functions on a daily basis. This Commission has succeeded thanks to the co-operation of many people throughout Saskatchewan.

PRESENTATIONS

The Commission received more than 40 presentations from organizations ranging from First Nations and Metis organizations to government departments to police services. The voices of youth, women and special interest groups were heard through these presentations. Generally, these presentations were made in a public forum with members of the community and media in attendance. Many of these presentations were received at public events held at such venues as Sask. Native Theatre Co., the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre in Saskatoon, and the White Buffalo Youth Lodge in Saskatoon. Presenters usually left the Commissioners with a formal written presentation that accompanied an oral presentation followed by a question and answer session that enabled a dialogue with Commissioners and members of the audience and media.

ROUNDTABLES

Twelve roundtables were held with six designed to deal specifically with the critical areas identified by the Commission. These six roundtables included Racism, Victims and Violence, Policing, Restorative Justice, Crime Prevention and Governance and Community Development. Roundtables were not held for the



other two critical areas, Justice Institutions and Youth. However, a roundtable that focussed on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) was held in August 2002, eight months prior to the implementation of the new Act on April 1, 2003.

Three roundtables involving the Commission's stakeholders were held, with one dealing specifically with the issue of implementation of this Commission's recommendations. Roundtables dealing with research and the importance of private industry and economic development were also held.

Participants in these roundtables brought expertise and passion for the specific issue to be discussed during the daylong event. With a Commission staff member acting as facilitator, the room was usually divided into three or four tables in order to better facilitate discussion. Each table would report to the entire group. The roundtables were recorded and transcripts generated. Summaries of these roundtables are contained in the Appendix of this report and also appear on the Commission website: www.justicereformcomm.sk.ca

The roundtables were held in Regina and Saskatoon with Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon a favourite venue.

SITE VISITS

Visits to youth centres, correctional centres, prison institutions, courts and other facilities provided the Commissioners with graphic evidence that all is not well in a system that incarcerates too many First Nations and Metis people, particularly youth. In some instances – notably certain areas of the Regina Correctional Centre – the conditions in which some of these people are being held are unacceptable. Holding men in the segregation unit of the Regina Correctional Centre was deemed to be inhumane, prompting the Commission to recommend immediate closure of this unit.

The site visits put a human face on the injustice that is being suffered by too many members of the First Nations and Metis community. Sixteen site visits were conducted and the Commissioners had the opportunity to hear from inmates, patients and clients of these facilities as well as staff. Often, staff excused themselves from the meetings, allowing inmates to speak candidly to the Commissioners. In many cases, Commissioners were able to have one-on-one conversations with individuals in these facilities.

As well as correctional centres, the Commissioners visited centres such as Rainbow Youth Centre in Regina, Youth Outreach in Prince Albert and EGADZ Youth Centre in Saskatoon and learned about the various programs and initiatives that have been designed to provide young people with a safe environment, counseling, employment and, most important, hope for their future. The Commissioners were impressed by the commitment of staff and youth in these and other youth centres and pleased to see the successes that are being achieved.



TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Three town hall meetings were held early in 2003. The purpose of these events was to allow people in the urban centres of Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina to express their opinions on justice issues to the Commission and, through the media, to a wider audience. The town hall meetings attracted large numbers of people from the community at large and were well covered by the Saskatchewan media. Moderated by broadcast journalist David Kirton in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, and by Regina Friendship Centre director Ernest Lavalley in Regina, the format allowed audience members to express opinions and ask questions of the Commissioners. Local cable companies assisted by taping the town hall meetings and broadcasting the proceedings at a later date. As usual, these events were recorded and transcripts produced.

IN-CAMERA MEETINGS

When requested, in-camera meetings were arranged with the participants encouraged to present their perspectives and opinions in a safe environment. These sessions were held with only Commissioners in attendance with staff present only when invited to do so.

PAPERS AND REPORTS

A number of papers and reports from organizations and individuals with expertise in various areas were commissioned. This included papers that offered guidance in the planning stage and provided background information regarding previous commissions and inquiries. Later, papers that would enhance the in-house research were commissioned. Volume II of this Final Report contains some of the papers that have been presented to the Commission.