



# The Aboriginal Capacity Café: Listening to Aboriginal Youth Voice

## Three Years of Learnings



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## Background and Purpose of this Document

Seeds have been sown to give Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> people power in matters related to their health and, to some degree, education in British Columbia. With the move toward the new Aboriginal Health Authority and the implementation of Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements arise opportunities for Aboriginal people to have a louder voice. So often, these

### Indian Residential Schools (IRS)

The Canadian federal government became involved in the development and administration of IRS as early as 1874. There were over 130 IRS across Canada. Most schools were closed in the mid-1970s however the last federally-run residential school closed in 1996.

Children were placed in these schools, often against their parents' wishes. These schools were designed to end parental involvement in all aspects of their children's development.

Over 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in these IRS over the years. They were often forbidden to speak their language or practice their culture. Today, there is an estimated 80,000 IRS survivors in Canada.

From: <http://www.trc-cvr.ca/about.html>

voices are those of the adults who are the decision-makers. The youth voice is often quiet. Over the past three years, the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés have created a space for youth voice to be at the centre. Youth have much to say and very shortly, they will be the generation who will become the leaders and carry on the work of increasing the capacity of Aboriginal decision-making.

This document aims to capture the work and the learnings of the Aboriginal Capacity Café, a community-based event that gives youth an opportunity to speak their truth so that adults can learn about the experience of Aboriginal youth. This youth-empowering event aims to bring the community together to support Aboriginal youth, the future leaders of B.C.

<sup>1</sup> While the term 'Aboriginal' is used throughout this document, it is recognized that not all individuals who are First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identify with this term.

This three-year initiative is reflected upon in this document from the perspective of youth, caregivers/community adults and the Aboriginal Capacity Café organizers. This document is not intended to be a Toolkit of how to replicate the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés but rather it is hoped that the learnings will add rich examples to the existing knowledge and wisdom of what constitutes best practices in working with the Aboriginal community and add new best practices<sup>2</sup> unique to this three-year journey which resulted in seven Aboriginal Capacity Cafés.

### **The History of the Aboriginal Capacity Café**

The Community Capacity Café format was created by School-Age Children and Youth Substance Use Prevention (SACY) in their community-based work. Prior to creating an Aboriginal Capacity Café, SACY had hosted several Capacity Cafés for the general community. In 2008, funding became available from Health Canada's Population Health Fund to allow for the creation of the Aboriginal-focused Capacity Café. This funding was administered through the B.C. Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH), the recipient of the funding. BCSTH has a strong interest in working with communities in multi-faceted ways with the goal of ending violence against women and children. The creation of an Aboriginal Capacity Café presented a unique opportunity to build community dialogue and increase understanding among community members about their

### **Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

- ✿ In 2009, close to 67,000 Canadian Aboriginal women aged 15 or older reported being the victim of violence in the previous 12 months. This is three times the rate of non-Aboriginal women.
- ✿ Close to 63% of these victims were aged 15-34.
- ✿ Among victims of spousal violence, 59% of Aboriginal women reported being injured during the five years preceding the survey.

From: Violent Victimization of Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Provinces, 2009. Statistics Canada.

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2011001/article/11439-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup>Best practices are the “methodologies, strategies, procedures, practices and/or processes that consistently produce successful results.” (From: Plate, E., Foy, M., & Kreihbiel, 2009)

## Victimization of Aboriginal Youth

- 25%-50% of Aboriginal Women were victims of sexual abuse as children (compared to 20%-25% of non-Aboriginal children).

Collin-Vézina, D., Dion, J., & Trocmé, N. (2009). Sexual abuse in Canadian Aboriginal communities: A broad review of conflicting evidence. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous community health*, 7, 27-48.

- 30% of youth who are in the sex trade are Aboriginal.

Koshan, J. (2003). Alberta (dis)advantage: The protection of children involved in the prostitution act and the equality rights of young women. *University of Toronto Journal of Law and Equality*, 2, 210.

shared colonized history, shaped in large part by the oppressive and often violent residential school system.

At the invitation of community partners and with the support of the Aboriginal Education Program and Services at the Vancouver School Board (VSB), the School-Age Children and Youth Substance Use Prevention Initiative (SACY) partnered with the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA), the B.C. Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH), the Vancouver School Board (VSB) Aboriginal Education Program and Services, and Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Youth Addictions and Prevention Services. Through in-kind staff time commitments to the events, this initial funding allowed for three Aboriginal Capacity Cafés, two of which were held in hotel conference rooms and one held at a local high school. Additional funding was then secured through funding from B.C. Healthy Communities for the fourth Aboriginal Capacity Café. The most recent three Aboriginal Capacity Cafés were funded through the United Church of Canada Healing Fund.<sup>3</sup> These last five Capacity Cafes were held in Vancouver Public High Schools.

“Women in leadership roles can help restore balance and wholeness to our communities.”

Wilma Mankiller, Cherokee

<sup>3</sup> Note that funding covered the cost of the feasts, transportation, honoraria for youth participants, honoraria for Elders who led cultural protocols, and other materials. Staff time to plan and carry out the event was all given in-kind to the initiative. School facility rentals were in-kind donations by the VSB.

## Five Partner Organizations

Five community partners worked together to plan and host seven Capacity Cafés over the past three years. These community partners represented a cross-section of services that support youth in the community. Bringing the strengths of each partner to the planning and hosting of the Aboriginal Capacity Café was critical in the success of these events. It allowed partners to support and learn from one another. Further to this, by working together across sectors, partners had a tremendous opportunity to strengthen their own connections with diverse community organizations. By developing community partnerships, the end result is that communities are better served through a web of supports and services.



SACY is a shared initiative of Vancouver School Board (VSB) and Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) which is implemented across the Vancouver School District and community. SACY is a comprehensive, strengths-based approach that engages Vancouver students, parents/caregivers, teachers, administrators and the greater community to build up school-based alcohol and drug prevention programs and policies.



**UNYA** is Metro Vancouver's only Native youth program-providing organization working to empower Native youth through 21 programs including education & training, personal support, live-in programs and sports & recreation. UNYA's work also includes community development, training, research, educational materials, and advocacy. The main goal is to provide opportunities for Native youth that will help them reach their full potential and personal goals.



**BCSTH** provides support and training to Transition, Second and Third Stage Houses, Safe Homes, Children Who Witness Abuse programs and other programs in the Violence Against Women sector. Through research projects and partnerships, BCSTH publishes and promotes Promising Practices for supporting women, youth and children fleeing and exposed to violence in the home.



**VSB** Aboriginal Program and Services are delivered to enhance the Aboriginal student's educational experiences which align with the goal areas of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement: Belongs, Mastery of Skills, Culture and Community.



**VCH Youth Addictions & Prevention Services** offers a range of prevention, education, counselling, treatment and support services in collaboration with community agencies. Prevention programming is youth-centred, strengths-based with a focus on meeting youth where they're at and supporting them and their families.

## **Organization Roles**

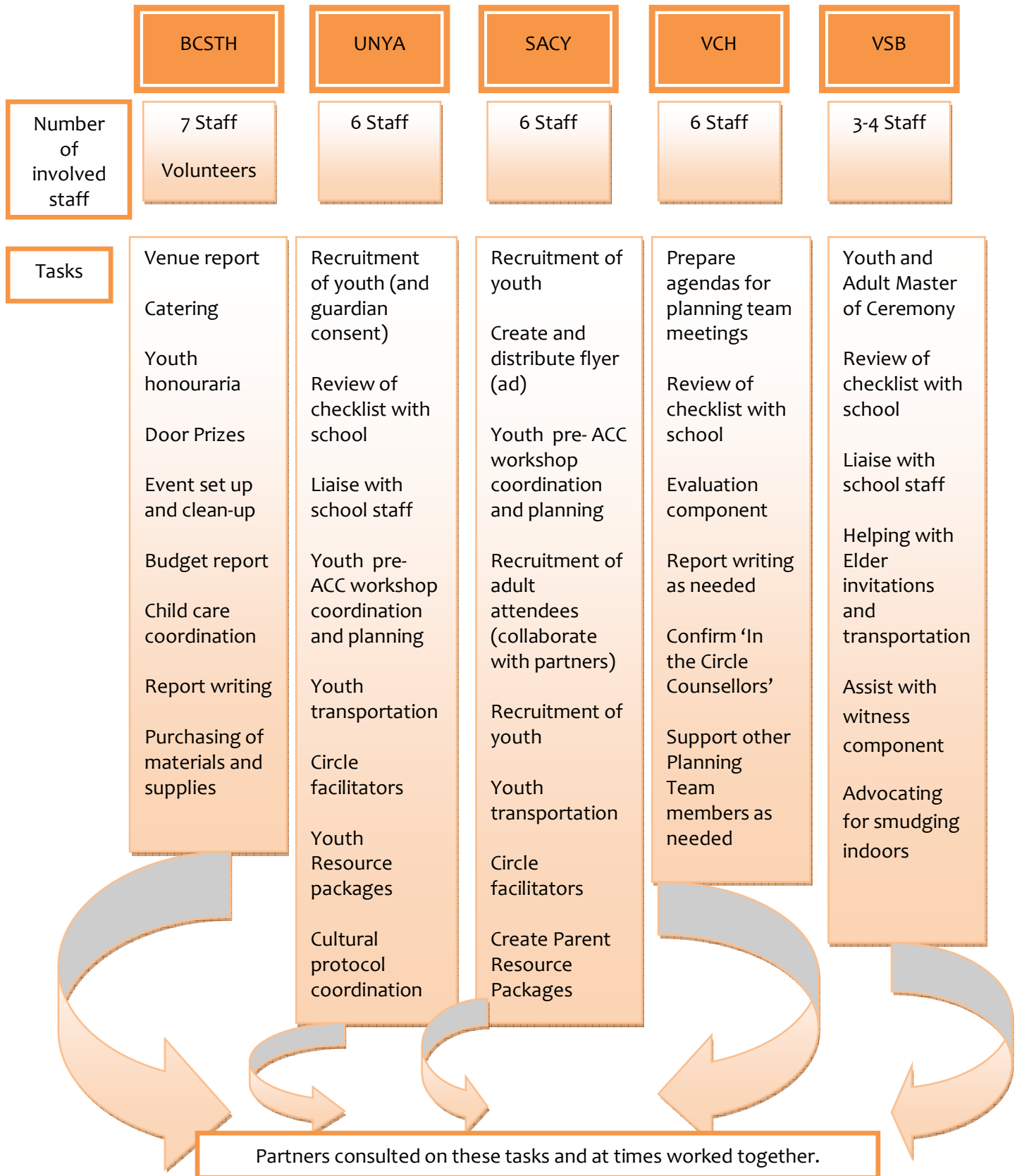
Each organization took on various roles and tasks in preparing and hosting the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés; however, there was also many times in which organizations worked together on one another's tasks in order to complete preparations for and hosting of the Café. Given the number and diversity of tasks, there were several staff and volunteers from each organization who assisted in the planning and hosting of the event. On the following page is an example of a planning charts for one of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Note that as staff changed and the needs of organizations changed, it was necessary to have planning charts for each Aboriginal Capacity Café in order to strive for greater clarity in roles and responsibilities.



## Aboriginal Capacity Café Event Partnership Planning Tree



## The Aboriginal Capacity Café

### What is an Aboriginal Capacity Café?

An Aboriginal Capacity Café is a unique intergenerational opportunity for family members, Elders and other adults invested in youth to hear about the lived experiences of Aboriginal youth in their community. In this event, youth are the ‘sharers of knowledge and wisdom’ about the youth experience. The adults take on the role of a learner through listening and bearing witness to these youth leaders’ struggles, strengths and needs.<sup>5</sup>

*“There is a recognized need to return to and invigorate ancestral “wise practices” and engage community members, from youth to Elders, in a reassertion of fundamental belief structures, values and ceremonial practices.”*

Redpath, L. & Nielsen, M. (1997) A Comparison of Native Culture, Non-Native Culture and New Management, Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, 327-339.



Although the actual event happens over the course of an evening, there is a tremendous amount of preparation for participants before the community walks through the doors into the Aboriginal Café, such as:

- choosing a location;
- inviting youth and assessing youth readiness;
- engaging youth in the planning process;
- creating and distributing adult invitations;
- arranging transportation;
- organizing childminding; and
- attending to feast preparations

<sup>5</sup> The Aboriginal Capacity Cafés are not designed to be group counselling. Steps are taken to ensure that circles remain educational and a way for community members to connect. Participants who request therapeutic services are provided with appropriate referrals to trained professionals.

All these preparations are undertaken over several weeks by representatives from the various organizations.<sup>6</sup>

For two sessions prior to the event, youth work with community adults to prepare for their role of ‘knowledge and wisdom sharers’. Through carefully guided discussions and practice sessions, youth have an opportunity to reflect on the type of knowledge and wisdom to share in an Aboriginal Capacity Café. Some youth have never had a chance to participate in an Aboriginal cultural event and may never have had the chance to experience cultural protocols such as: talking circles, honouring Elders, and Smudging. Youth also have an opportunity to form connections with other youth and adults who will ultimately provide support for them prior to, during and after the event. As family members, Elders and other adults are invited to attend the event, informal conversations emphasizing the purpose of the event take place in order that the youth voice remains the focus.

On the evening of the event, all participants are invited to participate in smudging or cedar brushing. The evening formally begins with a welcoming, an opening prayer honouring the Coast Salish Nations whose land we share, an overview of the evening, an outline of important guidelines (e.g., confidentiality, the role of the adult as a listener), followed by a family feast.<sup>7</sup> Youth learned cultural protocols by serving Elders and honouring them as guests. Youth and adults then move into one or more circles in order to engage in sharing and listening. Once in the circle, trained and skilled facilitators remind participants again about the purpose of the event and the key leadership role of youth participants. Adults take on the role of listener and youth share their experiences. At the conclusion of the circles two or more ‘witnesses’, selected by facilitators, speak as to what they heard throughout the evening. Finally all listeners are given an opportunity to share final thoughts with the group.

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

<sup>7</sup> Each event was tailored to the community as best as possible. As Vancouver is home to many Nations, there was some variations with regard to cultural protocols. For example, drumming was included in some of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés.

## Aboriginal Capacity Café Goals

### Community Goals of the Aboriginal Capacity Café

- ☀ The ACC provides the community a unique setting in which they can come together as a larger family and foster a sense of kinship.
- ☀ Youth and adults experience relevant cultural protocols.
- ☀ The ACC bridges generation and connects children, youth, family, and Elders.

### Youth Goals of the Aboriginal Capacity Café

- ☀ Youth are given an opportunity to share their voice, be heard and exercise their leadership in community.
- ☀ Youth are given an opportunity to belong, participate and be involved in the simple but powerful act of witnessing.

### Family, Elder and Caregiver Goals of the Aboriginal Capacity Café

- ☀ The ACC circle gives family, Elders and caregivers the opportunity to have a strengths-based experience where they can learn about the experiences of youth today; learn what they're doing that is already supporting their youth; and learn additional ways in which they can be supports to their youth.
- ☀ The ACC circle gives family, Elders and caregivers the opportunity to find a place of deep listening by the respectful offering of their own silence and supportive presence.

**For Guiding Principles and Practices of the Aboriginal Capacity Café, please see Appendix A.**

## Aboriginal Voices in B.C.

The Aboriginal Capacity Café calls upon youth to be leaders and teachers in their communities, to work inter-generationally to increase connections and build capacity among their kin. After generations of silencing, we are finally moving into an era in which Aboriginal youth voice is heard. Youth are entering adulthood with new possibilities and opportunities to have their voices heard in B.C.

### Aboriginal Voice in Healthcare

Alongside numerous acts of cultural genocide towards Aboriginal peoples of Canada, The Indian Act of 1867 enshrined into law a severe limiting of voice, decision-making power and options for wellness practices. This loss of culturally relevant wellness models and technologies can be seen in current day health services that are not culturally appropriate or honouring of B.C.'s Aboriginal peoples. Five generations of trauma, the disintegration of body, mind, emotions and soul and ongoing practices of dislocation and foster care have consequently contributed to significant health disparities between Aboriginal people when compared to other populations within B.C. With the goal of recognizing and respecting Aboriginal people's wisdom about their health needs, a B.C. Tripartite

*“Aboriginal health in general is improving, but we still cannot afford to take these issues lightly. There is increasing information and opportunities for us all to work together to improve our own health for our families and communities.”*

**Evan Adams, MD – Sliammon First Nation  
(Coast Salish)**

First Nations Health Plan was signed in 2007.<sup>8</sup> In the fall of 2011, the B.C. Tripartite Framework Agreement of First Nation Health Governance was signed with the overall goal of supporting better health for B.C. First Nations people. These agreements were made among the Canadian Federal Government, the Province of British Columbia, and B.C. First

<sup>8</sup> Please note that this Plan does not include services for Métis people. At present, there is no such formal agreement with the Métis people. For more information, please visit <http://mnhc.ca/health/>

Nations. The purpose of the framework agreement is to support better health for B.C. First Nations people through a new governance model led by the newly created First Nations Health Authority. It is expected that all programs that are funded federally and provincially will be administered by the B.C. Aboriginal Health Authority by 2013.

### **Aboriginal Voice in Education**

The B.C. Public School system has not been successful in meeting the needs of Aboriginal students in a way that allows students to succeed in the provincial economy while maintaining their culture. In response to this shortcoming of the education system, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 1999. Signatories included: the Chiefs in Action Committee; The Minister of Education; Federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs; and the President of the B.C. Teacher's Federation.

*"We the undersigned, acknowledge that Aboriginal learners are not experiencing school success in British Columbia. We state our intention to work together within the mandates of our respective organizations to improve school success for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia."*

From this Memorandum of Understanding emerged a framework for Enhancement Agreements. Currently, 34 of the 60 School Districts which have active Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements in place.<sup>9</sup> The overall purpose of these agreements are four-fold.

1. To continually improve the quality of education as measured by Aboriginal achievement.
2. To support strong collaborative efforts among Aboriginal communities and school districts.

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<sup>9</sup> From <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/agreements.htm>. Note that there are a number of school districts in which the Agreement has expired.

3. To provide greater autonomy to Aboriginal communities and districts to find ways to better support Aboriginal students.
4. To require a high level of respect and trust in implementing the agreement.

### **Vancouver Board of Education's Commitment to Aboriginal Education**

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009, The Aboriginal Education Enhancement Five-Year Agreement was signed by Vancouver Board of Education, Musqueam Indian Band, Métis Nation BC, the Urban Aboriginal community and the Ministry of Education. This agreement aims to deepen the School District's commitment to enhancing Aboriginal achievement by creating stronger partnerships among district employees, Aboriginal students, families, community members, Musqueam Indian Band members and Aboriginal organizations. Underlying this agreement are two guiding ideas<sup>10</sup>:

1. *“Each Aboriginal learner and family must experience a sense of belonging and place within education settings, where their voices are heard, where they have choice and influence in decision making, and where their cultures, histories and contributions are respected and reflected.”*
2. *“The Vancouver Board of Education will provide equity of opportunity for Aboriginal students, and be committed to the ongoing development of best-practice strategies for instruction, improvement and inclusion.”*

### **Equal Funding for B.C. First Nations Students Who Live On Reserve**

After decades of inequity, the Federal Government of Canada has committed to providing stable funding in order that students who attend school on reserves will receive the same amount of per pupil funding as students in other B.C. public schools. This agreement takes effect beginning in September 2012.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From: *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement – First Annual Report – June 2010. Vancouver Board of Education, School District No. 39.*

<sup>11</sup> From: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/bc-first-nations-students-to-get-equal-funding/article2318249/>

## The Aboriginal Capacity Café: Three Years of Learning

111 youth and 277 adults have participated in an Aboriginal Capacity Café over the past three years.<sup>12</sup> Drawing from three years of evaluations and post-Aboriginal Capacity Café interviews, the learnings that came from this process are examined in the following section. From these 388 participants, 190 adults and 110 youth provided feedback via a post-event survey conducted after each Capacity Café. A further 24 individuals (10 representatives from the organizations involved in running the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés; 9 adult participants; and 5 youth participants) participated in an individual interview reflecting on their experience of the Aboriginal Capacity Café.

## The Aboriginal Capacity Café: A Community Development Model

*“Community development concerns improvements to local social and cultural infrastructure. It is most often identified with increasing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of residents to access information and resources and to then use these tools to create strategies and partnerships which can take advantage of changing circumstances.”*

*(From The University of Northern British Columbia, Institute for Community Development)<sup>13</sup>*

Representatives from the five partner organizations (BCSTH, UNYA, VSB, VCH, and SACY) were asked about the strengths of and ways to overcome challenges in using the Aboriginal Capacity Café as a community development model.



<sup>12</sup> Note that some individuals attended more than one event. Numbers reflect a sum of each event participant list.

<sup>13</sup> From <http://www.unbc.ca/cdi/description.html>



## Strengths of the Aboriginal Capacity Café as a Community Development Model

### Strengthening relationships within the community

- ☀ Engages an intergenerational group of individuals who care about youth.
- ☀ Recognizes the diversity of Aboriginal people and strives to create an inclusive environment.

*“It’s a very unique project and a very unique way of working at the community level that involves professionals as well as youth and students and community where we get to provide a very unique project that involves some of the elements from our communities. Vancouver is not just the Coast Salish people. There are Aboriginal people that come from right across Canada and I think the beauty about our project is that we did involve a number of youth from blended to Aboriginal people from right across Canada. Part of the bigger picture was incorporating some protocols that lend itself to recognize people from where they are from.”*

- ☀ Youth receive positive adult support throughout the process of the Aboriginal Capacity Café.

*“The Elders are so highly regarded in the community and it is expected that when an Elder speaks, all are quiet and listen respectfully for as long as an Elder needs. We were asking Elders to come and sit and listen to youth.”*

*“The youth don’t just show up the night of and that’s it. They have this pre-event and do the event and then a follow-up event with feedback given to them and some celebration. Because it’s multi-generational, you start to get some wrap-around where you get a parent talking to a youth about the event.”*

- ☀ Youth and adults were made aware of the many resources (e.g, parent/caregiver support; counselling resources) available to them in the community.

- ✿ Since most of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés were in schools, there were opportunities for youth and adults to have a positive experience in a setting that may be/has been experienced as challenging by some community members.

*“Almost every project [Capacity Café] that we have done, we have gone a half hour to forty-five minutes over. We are actually shooing parents out and scooting them out and asking them to leave. Hugely beneficial on a number of levels for even Elders to come into a school and be invited into a school. We have had two situations, very distinct, in which an Elder approached me and said ‘if it weren’t for this, I would have never come to a school but my granddaughter invited me and she said that it was going to be protocol so I am here. When we do these things, we are doing them in a good way with a good intention. That’s why I am here. I come from a residential school and I have never been in a school before this.’ To be able to bridge that... to be a welcoming person or a welcoming system within a larger school system, it was hugely beneficial.”*

### **Connecting organizers with the community**

- ✿ In the process of inviting individuals to attend the Aboriginal Capacity Café, representatives from the organizing partnerships develop relationships with community members.
- ✿ In preparing for the event in schools, there were opportunities to dialogue with schools about the ways in which Aboriginal culture is integrated into the event and the importance of this integration.

*“One mother said that she felt that the school board understood her children’s experiences were unique enough and different enough from other youths’ experiences that they offered something like this and she said ‘ This would have never happened [in her youth]...no one would have never asked me what was going on for me as a young Aboriginal person. No one asks me what is going on for me as an Aboriginal mother. My children get to speak not about just what it’s like to be young but what it’s like to be an Aboriginal young person in the world today.’ If you ask me who I thought benefitted most, I would say schools. I would say schools had to rethink their school culture in order to host a Capacity Café. Whether they understood that or not, the end result was that was what they had to do. Not always did the shift stick, but for lots of schools, it was a shift. There were big issues that we had to get sorted out before they hosted that they would have never considered before. The smudge room was the big one but there were lots of little things.”*

## Strengthening interagency work

- ✿ Aboriginal-focused partners and other community organizations have the opportunity to focus on a shared vision in order to work together and learn from one another.
- ✿ Organizations had the opportunity to learn about cultural protocols, their implementation and meaning.
- ✿ Larger agencies have an opportunity to work with smaller community agencies.
- ✿ Organizations capitalized on their strengths in their roles as partners.

*“It [The Aboriginal Capacity Café] gave us the opportunity to work with different groups. That was a whole new intersectional area that led to good connections.”*

## Guiding Principles for Successful Programming

1. Understanding and integrating cultural identity
2. Increasing youth engagement
3. Fostering youth empowerment
4. Establishing and maintaining effective partnerships

From: Crooks, C.V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D. (2009). Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: a toolkit for service providers. CAMH Centre for Prevention Science and the University of Western Ontario.

<http://www.bcsth.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Engaging%20and%20Empowering%20Aboriginal%20Youth%20a%20Toolkit%20for%20Service%20Providers.pdf>

## Overcoming Challenges of the Aboriginal Capacity Café as a Community Development Model

### Challenges

Defining roles and responsibilities of organizational partners in order to support the process of organizing and hosting the Cafés



### Strategies to Overcome These Challenges

- Articulating the strengths (e.g., community connections) and challenges (e.g., limited staffing) that each organization experiences in the work.
- Creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to document roles and responsibilities of both management and frontline staff.
- Developing systems and processes for partners (including school staff) to support the event.

Developing appreciation for the different Aboriginal cultural styles in carrying out the work of planning for the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés



- Taking time to reflect on the fact that there are cultural differences between various First Nations.
- Appreciating the strengths and knowledge that each partner brings to the table.
- Learning about each other's styles over time.

*“I think that some of the challenges have to do with intersections of cultural expectations and what some of the Non-Aboriginal organizations who met at the table might have expected as efficiencies or doing things quickly. I think it took people awhile to be okay with the process. I think that putting together the Aboriginal Capacity Café was....the event itself is this amazing huge event but so much learning happens in the process leading up to it. It is eight weeks of outreach and connecting with other organizations and assessing appropriate cultural protocols and connecting with Elders to support the cultural protocols. It's an amazing opportunity for us to learn but if you have no experience in partnering with partners within the community, sometimes Non-Aboriginal agencies have real expectations around what we think is efficient or how many people we think need to be involved. It's just getting used to working together.”*

Incorporating a follow-up session or opportunity for adults to reflect on the experience.



- ☀ Recognizing the need and value of incorporating a follow-up mechanism for adults who wish to debrief the experience.
- ☀ Incorporating this aspect into future budgeting and planning for Aboriginal Capacity Cafés.

*“I don’t feel like it’s a full circle. I felt like the way that we did our Aboriginal Capacity Cafés where we didn’t include a follow-up parent workshop, we didn’t close the loop. We spent quite a bit of time working with youth doing these pre-workshops and then Elders and family members and community came. We never had a follow-up conversation with those people to find out how did it feel to hear those stories from those young people? How did it make you think about your own parenting? What can we assist around parenting? I think that last piece would be much more full circle around developing community but also developing family. It brings that whole piece together.”*

*“I think what was interesting for us was that a lot of the longevity of what we could do existed already with the youth because all of our organizations were youth organizations so they had relationships with young people. They build new relationships with young people. They had every intention of ongoing support and doing other things but on the adult side, this could have been perceived as a one off... that we wanted to get some adults out. Where we were getting to at the end is that we need to do something more for the adults.”*

Finding the necessary resources to adequately prepare for and implement the event.



- ☀ Sharing the workload among individuals in each organization.
- ☀ Reviewing gaps in resources (e.g., staff, finances).
- ☀ Documenting the time involved in order to apply for future adequate funding for the event.
- ☀ Having the project administrator provide the support for all administration.

*“I think that we found that by working with all the partners and having so many people involved, and having schools to pull people into, it really was gaining some momentum in terms of community development but what we found was that we didn’t have adequate resources to*

keep that going continuously. It seemed that the community that was developing around the ACCs wanted that continuous engagement. “

Engaging the community to attend the Capacity Café that honours the rich diversity in the Vancouver Aboriginal community in a safe space.



- Developing relationships with the community over multiple Aboriginal Capacity Cafés.
- Addressing barriers to attendance (e.g., transportation, childminding, physical limitations).
- Creating a special event evening that incorporates a feast, cultural protocols, and presentations.
- Striving to hand over the future leadership role for the initiative to an Aboriginal-led organization.
- Limiting the number of outside people (e.g., researchers) who can attend the circle.

*“Having done seven of them [Aboriginal Capacity Cafés], with every subsequent one, there was more trust that we were actually around to build real relationships rather than popping in to do something fun and then leaving. I think that this is both a challenge and a huge strength.”*

*“There are lots of caring people out there and the big challenge is to get them there. Physically sometimes, sometimes there are financial issues. Poverty in our community is pretty huge. That needs to be considered. A really big draw for people is that a lot of our get-togethers are historically based on food so having that dinner there is a really huge draw for people.”*



## The Capacity Café as a Aboriginal-Focused Event

### Advantages of having Non-Aboriginal people attend the Café

*“When some people aren’t Aboriginal and they’re learning about how much it pains us when the stereotype of Native people shows up.”*

- Youth Participant

*“I think it would be important for everybody to experience the youth because they could understand about the respect in our culture. We do have problems with the passed-on trauma. Everything was taken away. I think it would be important for people to hear about that so that they can have understanding.”*

-Adult Participant

While the Capacity Café was a Aboriginal-focused event, there were non-Aboriginal people who did attend the events. These were most often service providers working in the community or schools and the facilitators of the circles. In a small number of cases, there were non-Aboriginal foster parents of Aboriginal youth. The majority of participants were open to having non-Aboriginal people participate in the event (with the focus of the event remaining on the perspectives of the Aboriginal community). Comments regarding this open format acknowledged the opportunity to increase understanding among non-Aboriginal people about the issues faced by Aboriginal youth.<sup>14</sup>

There are three key reasons for the need to have a separate Capacity Café in the school setting that focuses on Aboriginal youth and community: 1) there is a feeling of safety among members of the community; 2) schools can increase their capacity to welcome Aboriginal people; and 3) and intergenerational focus can be included.

<sup>14</sup> There were a small number of participants who would have preferred the event be open exclusively to Aboriginal people. They felt that due to the racism that is still present in schools and the community, having non-Aboriginal people attend may lead to discomfort among Aboriginal youth, resulting in less freedom to share their experiences.

☀️ **There is an increased feeling of safety when discussing issues specific to the community and the experience of being an Aboriginal youth.**

*“There is a commonality that brings comfort to a lot of our people. Although we are 200 different bands in B.C., we will still have a lot in common as First People. When we see each other, it’s almost like we know each other already. It boils down to there are people here who get me. People who understand me and my family, my children and all of our generations.”*

*“We hear from youth about how it’s important to have something specific for Aboriginal youth because sometimes they still feel like they are in the margins at school. To have something where their voices are heard, like when we read some of the evaluations and the feedback or even through the Capacity Café, issues of racism and other contexts like residential schools that other youth may not know too much about. So to have something where the Aboriginal community, in particular, the Aboriginal youth, has a safe space for them to speak openly and that everybody there understands or wants to understand more about how they’re growing up or how they feel.”*

**Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 86% of youth and 81% of adults strongly agreed that it was important to have an Aboriginal-focused Capacity Café for their community.**

**Youth Voice on the Importance of an Aboriginal-focused Capacity Café**

*“It makes us feel ‘in’ our community.”*

*“I get to look through another Native’s eyes.”*

*“We have all been through the same stereotypes.”*

*“It lets Aboriginal youth know how important they are and to be proud of their heritage.”*

*“I can be heard by my people.”*

*“You can relate and there is an unspoken bond.”*



**☀ Specific efforts can be made to invite the Aboriginal community into the school that honor their culture while building school capacity to increase welcoming of Aboriginal people.**

*“For schools there were really important learnings each time around how to become more welcoming spaces for Aboriginal community members, families and youth.”*

*“What happened traditionally in the schools is that Aboriginal families have been kept outside. There needs to be some reaching out from the school to the community. And that hasn’t happened. In most schools, it’s really hard to get through and talk to your teachers or even connect. I know that some of that is changing over a period of time.”*

*“When we were at one school, we did a smudge and there were a number of students who were standing in the hallway looking into the cafeteria. They were sniffing and smelling. At one point, I walked through the doors and they were making some comments I didn’t feel comfortable about. So I said ‘Hey guys, what are you doing? What are you looking at?’ They said ‘What’s that?’ I said ‘We are having this amazing function tonight called the Aboriginal Capacity Café. If you heard of the SACY program, they have a Capacity Café. Well, we partnered with them and we are actually doing this Aboriginal Capacity Café. What you might be smelling is something we call smudge. Anyone who is from Southeast Asian cultures or from Buddhism or from some other cultures where they use incense and/or other materials in a spiritual context, we as Aboriginal people, some nations practice smudging. We are doing this smudging and no, it*

**Youth Perspectives of School-Based Aboriginal Capacity Cafés**

From the youth perspective, they liked having the Cafés in their school. They felt comfortable with the setting.

*“It’s something that you’re used to.”*

*“You feel comfortable in your school.”*

**Adult Perspectives of School-Based Aboriginal Capacity Cafés**

Overall, adults thought that schools were the best location for the Capacity Cafés for the following reasons:

- ☀ Fosters connections with schools
- ☀ Builds community
- ☀ Builds school capacity to welcome Aboriginal people
- ☀ Involves youth in meal preparation

is not marijuana. They were ‘Oh...wow... that’s awesome!’ So, to actually have three students who were in high school inquisitive enough to engage with me on this level, I feel it made a huge impact for those three students who had never ever seen it before. “

"We got the Aboriginal community to come out because [it was for the Aboriginal community]. We had drumming, we had Elders speak, we had prayer. Because of the honoring of those processes, the word spread. The Cafes grew from event to event. We started to see familiar faces in the way of Elders coming around. This had meaning for them in some way. Personally, I think it’s absolutely imperative that we recognize that not all of us are the same and that we find ways for groups that are significantly marginalized, that we find ways to build programming that finds ways to give voice to their issues. Then we take those issues and find ways to create space in mainstream culture. That’s what I think we did with the school for example. Whenever we had issues around smudging – that’s something that traditionally Aboriginal people want to be able to do. There is a school on the Eastside that actually had a smudge room. That spoke to me about their understanding of Aboriginal community. In other schools that we went to there was no such thing. They wouldn’t even contemplate allowing that to exist. We had to do it outside. Then people felt really shunned by that. This is my culture. Why is there no space for my culture in your school?"

**In order to promote parent engagement, there must be cultural awareness and culturally inclusive activities.**

**From:** From: Crooks, C.V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D. (2009). Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: a toolkit for service providers. CAMH Centre for Prevention Science and the University of Western Ontario.

**Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 94% of youth and 96% of adults strongly agreed that the Aboriginal Capacity Café led to increased understanding among youth and adults.**

### **3. The importance of the intergenerational kinship in the Aboriginal community can be integrated into the event.**

*“If you were to go to any public events in our community [Aboriginal community], you would see that there are all levels of involvement. There are no barriers for young children. That is why we incorporated children and childminding so that parents could come and be supported and not worry about their child.”*

## Preparation for the Aboriginal Capacity Café

A great deal of preparation goes into hosting the Aboriginal Capacity Café. The organizers spend weeks making sure all preparations are taken care of, invitations are extended to adult community members (parents/caregivers, Elders, other youth-invested adults), and youth are invited and prepared for their important role. Two groups provided feedback about the process of preparing: youth who attend two preparation sessions prior to the event and organizers who must handle all aspects of the Capacity Café preparation.

At the beginning of the initiative, youth were not involved in pre-event sessions. It became clear that it was absolutely necessary to have youth have a chance to meet the other youth who would be sharing their experiences at the Café. Further to this, it was important that youth have a chance to get to know the adults who would be there to support them. This included youth workers, the circle facilitators and two Elders. Two sessions were created for youth who were selected to participate in the circle. The first session focused on getting to know one another and outlining the process of the Capacity Café. This included giving youth the opportunity to practice speaking in a circle, setting personal boundaries, practicing answering the questions that would be the focus of the Café and voicing any concerns that they have with the event. The second session focused on doing an enjoyable activity (e.g., bowling) with the youth in order to build group cohesion and trust.

### Youth Thoughts on the Preparation Sessions

The biggest gains from the preparation sessions, from the youth perspective, were: helping them understand what would happen in the Aboriginal Capacity Café circle and providing them with tools and supports so that they could feel safe.

*“They helped us to know when to say ‘no’ because you feel under pressure when you have to talk. They show you that it’s okay and that there is always support.”*

*“They [preparation sessions] really helped because they went over questions and we discussed them as a group. Then when the Capacity Café came, since we were already in a group it was a lot easier to speak out towards a bigger group cause you practiced in the surroundings. It was a lot easier.”*

*“Well it made me know what the Capacity Café is about and how it’s going to go down. It made me feel better. To know that what you are going to say in the group will stay in the room and stuff.”*

*“It helped me get to know the people that were participating in the Capacity Café and feel more comfortable around them.”*

*“Knowing that we had support there and they’re very friendly.”*

*“They talked to us. They knew how to reach out to us.”*

**Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 95% of youth strongly agreed that they felt good about their participation in the Aboriginal Capacity Café.**

## **Organizational Preparation for the Aboriginal Capacity Café**

The preparation involved in the Aboriginal Capacity Café can be described as a labour intensive process. There are numerous elements and considerations that need to be taken into account in order to create a successful event. Further to this, with five community partners, there is a need for clear communication processes among partners, between management and staff at each organization and between the organizers and the community.

Over the course of seven Capacity Cafés, a great deal of learning has occurred by organizers as to what elements are needed to successfully prepare and host an Aboriginal Capacity Café. As one organizer commented, *“The actual event is only a small portion of the work.”* Critical elements for carrying out a successful Café are outlined on the following pages.

## Critical Elements for Preparing and Hosting the Aboriginal Capacity Café

### Vision

A clear, agreed-upon vision for the Aboriginal Capacity Café that is reviewed regularly to keep all partners focused on the goals.



### Organizational Human Resources and Processes

- ✿ A committed partnership team comprised of members who bring a variety of strengths to the project.
- ✿ A clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- ✿ Commitment from management (or if needed, an alternative representative) to attend all meetings in order to ensure smooth progress on the preparation.
- ✿ Clear processes for communication between meetings.
- ✿ Clear processes for management to communicate decisions to frontline staff.
- ✿ Development of checklists and written processes (See Appendix B for an example of a checklist for school administrators).
- ✿ Engagement of frontline staff to assist with youth preparation, invitations, providing participant support, participant transportation and hosting of the Aboriginal Capacity Café at each organization.

*“By the fifth or sixth time that we did one, I think we fully understood how much work was required, what the roles and responsibilities were of all the different stakeholders in the process. It took a lot of trial and error to get there. Everyone who did this, did this on top of their normal jobs. In the end, it really was like clockwork. That’s not to say that it wasn’t a ton of work but people did know....we found that it was more and more necessary to clearly define the roles of everyone and have that documented because different people would come in and out of the organizing committees. Having the same people be in the leadership position in terms of coordination and managing the tasks and making sure that they were getting done was really important.”*



### Other Adult Supporters of the Event

- ☀ Experienced facilitators to facilitate the circles. Ideally, both are Aboriginal, one male and one female, and have worked together and know each other's style.
- ☀ Elders to inform appropriate cultural protocols, to attend the event to lead cultural protocols.
- ☀ Childminders to care for and plan activities for children ages 0-12.
- ☀ Catering staff for preparing the feast.
- ☀ Youth to serve Elders at the feast.



### Organizational Staff Requirements for the Event

- ☀ Staff to pick up and drop off all youth, Elders, and other community members who may require transportation.
- ☀ Specialized staff (e.g., youth workers, counsellors) to be present at the event to provide support to youth and adults as needed.
- ☀ Staff to assist with the event set up and take down of chairs/tables etc.
- ☀ Staff to assist with the feast, including organizing take-out food to share with people as they leave.



### Ideal School or Facility Characteristics

- ☀ Location that is easy to find and is on a major bus route.
- ☀ Easy parking at the facility.
- ☀ Limited stairs and wheelchair accessible.
- ☀ Rooms that are all on one floor and in close proximity to one another.
- ☀ Working washrooms that are nearby.
- ☀ Rooms that are inviting, have windows and adequate temperature controls.
- ☀ Rooms in which the sound does not echo, making talking in a circle difficult to hear.
- ☀ Chairs (not desks or benches) that are relatively comfortable.
- ☀ Clear contact person at the facility who knows about all the policies and procedures.
- ☀ Facilities which welcome Aboriginal culture (e.g., smudging, protocols) in the Facility.



### Promotion of the Event

- ☀ Allow several weeks of time before the event in order to work on promotion.
- ☀ Clearly articulate the benefit to the community of the Aboriginal Capacity Café.
- ☀ Promote the event as a whole family event, making it clear that there is childminding.
- ☀ Promote all aspects of the event: cultural protocols, feast, activities for children, circles.
- ☀ Engage allies in the Aboriginal community to promote the event.
- ☀ Reduce barriers by offering bus tickets or transportation.
- ☀ Personally invite families and call to check in with families about their needs prior to the event.

*“Really understanding that it really is about not just the individual relationships but it’s about your relationship with the community. So doing the Aboriginal Capacity Café is about creating a relationship with that community as well as it’s most successful when you are authentically in a relationship with that community.”*

*“Very often this is seen as such a great event for youth and we’ll just invite the adults and they’ll just come and I think that’s a challenge if that’s the attitude because some attention needs to be paid as to why adults would come [to the Aboriginal Capacity Café].”*

## The Aboriginal Capacity Café: The Event

Although there was a strong model for the Aboriginal Capacity Café from the outset of the initiative, with each Café arose the opportunity to strengthen elements or add new elements that led to successful Capacity Cafés. There are two key linked processes that occurred over the three years: refining the preparation and hosting of the Aboriginal Capacity Café and deepening relationships with the Aboriginal Community. This section highlights two elements related to these processes: 1) inclusion of cultural protocols and 2) the creation of safety in the circle, including the facilitation of the circle.

### 1. Cultural Protocols

Creating an environment that honors Aboriginal culture protocol is central to the Aboriginal Capacity Café. Given the diversity of Aboriginal people in Vancouver, a great deal of thought and time is spent considering what cultural protocols are most appropriate in order to make the event as inclusive as possible. Cultural protocols that were shared at the Aboriginal Capacity Café included: acknowledging of the Coast Salish territory, opening prayer, smudging or cedar brushing, drumming, singing, feasting, serving of the Elders, and sharing in a circle format, and by call of witnessing by community members.

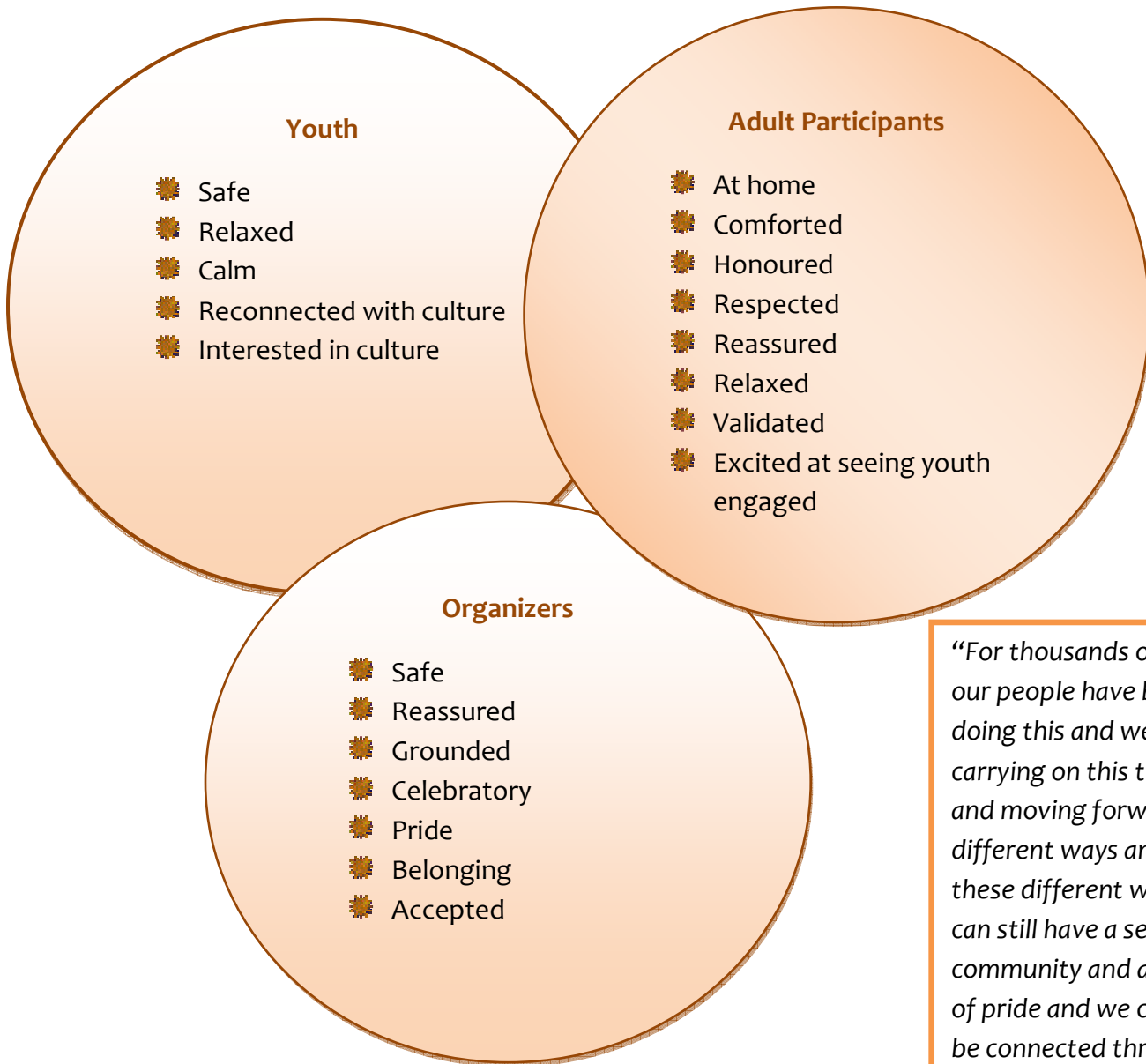
For the most part, participants thought there was enough time dedicated to cultural protocols; however, there were a small number of people who thought that there was too much time dedicated to cultural protocols and as a result the evening ran over time. At the other end of the continuum, there were a small number of people who would have liked to experience a longer event so that more time could be spent integrating cultural protocols and being together with the community.

*“We are able to let the community know that we are serious and that having this Café be about them and their experiences. Knowing that we understand where they are coming from and where they are at. It shows respect that we are coming in and working with them.”*



## The Importance of Cultural Protocols

The following are words that participants used to describe how they felt about having cultural protocols included in the event.



*“For thousands of years our people have been doing this and we are carrying on this tradition and moving forward in different ways and in these different ways, we can still have a sense of community and a sense of pride and we can still be connected through these healthy things that we are doing with each other. To be able to come together for one evening like that ... is incredible.”*

## On ‘The Power of Reconnection with Aboriginal Cultural Protocols’

“The blessing and the beauty I think of Vancouver is we do draw and attract Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal, Native, Indian and really it really depends who you are speaking to is how people identify themselves. One of the most amazing things that we have witnessed at these circles is the fact that so many of our kids who are in either foster systems, have been adopted out and removed from culture, students and youth who come from blended families who are not Métis. What I am talking about is introducing very basic cultural protocols on a very basic level to some students and youth who have never had the opportunity to identify with or practice with something that they might have never done. So, we have witnessed students from this level and parents from this level at these circles over seven Capacity Cafés where we are closing where we have actually had numerous parents and numerous students say outright ‘This is my very first... whatever... this is the first time I’ve smudged. This is first time I’ve held an eagle feather. This is the first time I have felt welcome. This is the very first time that I have been able to be a part of the Aboriginal community at this level.”

“It [ACC] might also be an opportunity for an Elder who might have attended a residential school in the past to go into a school for the first time for a cultural event that is unique and welcoming.”

### Adult Reflections on Cultural Protocols

“Within the school, I have never experienced it as culturally sensitive as an Aboriginal person. Just having it in the school was just eye-opening... like ‘these things can happen here too’.”

“I always find the smudging very reassuring. The smell is lovely and it invites you to relax and be reflective. It’s very accepting because it is there for everyone.”

“Just the way the break-outs [community circles] were in a circle is also protocol. Our way of thinking about how we are in this world... or my own way of thinking, is that we hold things in a circle because it creates equality for everyone.”

“Experiencing the cultural protocols made me feel at home. It made me feel closer to the people I was sharing time with.”

“Part of what we are instilling is a sense of belonging and through a sense of belonging, you have a sense of pride. Now we can say ‘Now you are on your way. You had some teachings, you shared some community.’”

## **On ‘The Importance of Preparing and Supporting Youth who have been Disconnected from their Culture’**

When we come forward and introduce ourselves in the circle [with name and territory of origin].....even introducing that basic concept to a student, we have to work with them in advance before that circle even comes because if that student is sitting there and they’re in an adopted family and they’re sitting there struggling...’Oh my Gosh, I have to come forward in this big circle and say what Nation I’m from’. Even that simple act is a huge trigger that we have to work very, very hard in advance to say to that student, ‘If you are adopted and you don’t know where your family is from, that’s okay. You just say you are from Vancouver.’

We say ‘If you have never done this before, come on along. We will help you learn. There is no right way or wrong way. If you feel it’s wrong, ask a question. Someone will help. If this is not your tradition, that’s okay and you want to learn, it’s okay to learn together. It’s inclusive and it’s not exclusive. The inclusiveness is to be able to share these words outright and

### **Youth Reflections on Cultural Protocols**

*“There were people wanted to smudge and people not wanting to smudge. It was good.”*

*“Made me feel good...smudging and stuff.”*

*“I felt that the experience was a very nice environment and definitely you were safe. Culturally to be able to eat together was very nice.”*

*“It made you feel good when you did the smudging before. You feel relaxed. Having the Elder do it.....just the energy they give off.”*

*“I thought it was good. It brought me back....it made me think that I hadn’t done it in a while. It made me feel better. I felt really good.”*

out front. When we are opening that protocol in Coast Salish territory where we might have a Coast Salish territory person do the welcoming. Once that's over, we try to get them to encourage other people that this is a welcoming territory.”

## Challenges with Integrating Cultural Protocols into the Aboriginal Capacity Café

There were two key challenges that emerged in integrating cultural protocols: a) acceptance of smudging in schools and b) using a linear approach to hosting the event.

### a. Acceptance of smudging in schools

By far the biggest challenge was gaining acceptance of smudging in schools which was requested to be allowed at some of the youth pre-events and at the evening Aboriginal Capacity Café. Despite having an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in place and rechecking for approval from the School District, negotiations and discussions as to the importance of this cultural protocol had to occur with some school administrators and engineers. Concerns about smudging, from the school perspective, was around fire hazards and smoke alarms. In the end, there were cases when it was not allowed, cases when it had to be done outside and cases when negotiations were successful. When not allowed to be done at all, cedar brushing was included. When it was

*“There is considerable variation in Aboriginal beliefs and traditions from one Aboriginal community to another.... Therefore, there is no unified set of best practices but, rather, many such practices that emerge from diverse cultures and community experiences”.*

John Hylton (2002) “Aboriginal Health and Healing: A Review of Best Practices”  
[unpublished report prepared for the Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region Working Together Towards Excellence Project, Regina, SK.

only allowed to be done outside, it was experienced by the Elder, leading the smudging, as a rejection by the school of the Aboriginal culture. When it was done in schools, it was experienced as inclusiveness and acceptance.<sup>15</sup>

### **b. Using a linear approach to the hosting of the event**

Although most participants thought that there was enough time for cultural protocols in the Aboriginal Capacity Café, the notion of working on a time-limited linear schedule runs counter to Aboriginal culture. The impacts of this were seen in two ways:

☀ As Elders and community members reconnected with each other, time was very limited for them to spend with each other especially after the event.<sup>16</sup> One possible way to allow for more time for these community connections is to provide an informal space before the event to allow for community members to connect with one another over refreshments.



☀ It was noted by some that at the conclusion of some of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés there was not a formal way to end the evening. It was experienced as a little disorganizing by some participants. The way to smoothly end the evening is challenging due to time constraints<sup>17</sup> and people needing to leave earlier than the event end time. This aspect of the event will need further refinement in order to develop a smoother conclusion to the Cafés.

<sup>15</sup> Note that one of the schools, in which the Capacity Café was hosted, has a smudge room.

<sup>16</sup> Due to financial restraints, schools had a timeframe in which the event had to be completed without further charges for maintenance.

<sup>17</sup> See Footnote 15

*“The closing was always haphazard. It’s really late and the little kids are out of the childminding and they’re yawning and they’re ready to go home. I think we could have worked on what a really grounding closing would look like. It would help.”*

## **2. Creating Safety in the Circle<sup>18</sup>**

Much thought was given to which youth would benefit from sharing their voice in the circle. Staff considered youth readiness in order to ensure that youth would walk away from the event having had a positive experience. Prior to the Aboriginal Capacity Café evening, youth had already participated in two sessions of preparation for the event. Sessions provided youth with the confidence and tools to set limits as to what they wanted to share and whether they wanted to answer unanticipated questions that arose in the circle. With the support of staff, youth had the opportunity to practice the pre-selected questions that would be focused on in the circle. Youth were encouraged to speak in general terms about the youth experience rather than share personal stories. In the event that a youth felt strongly that they wanted to share a personal story, staff took time to have conversations with them to make sure they felt ready to speak about this personal experience in front of a group. Youth safety was at the forefront. Further to this, these preparatory sessions allowed youth to strengthen their relationships with other youth, youth workers, facilitators and Elder allies, all of whom would be present at the event and all of whom would be there to offer support. Staff also checked in with each youth one day before the event to make sure that they were feeling emotionally ready for the Aboriginal Capacity Café.

The smudging (or cedar brushing), welcoming by an Elder, and the feast led to a creation of safety for participants. At the end of these protocols, the community divided into two or more circles in order to listen to youth voice. Every effort was made to ensure that youth were not in the same circle as a family member. If the situation did arise in which someone

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<sup>18</sup> Please See Appendix C for the Aboriginal Capacity Café Facilitation Guide.

the youth knew was in the same circle, the youth was privately asked (by a youth worker with whom they had a relationship) whether they would like to move to the another circle, whether they felt safe to share in the circle with someone they knew or whether they would like to not speak in the circle. (This was more of an issue for one of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés in which most participants were members of the same Nation).

The circles are comprised of community members (Elders, parents/caregivers and other adults), youth workers and counsellors who are there to offer support to youth and adults should the need arise, two Elder allies and two facilitators. The guidelines for the circle are clearly outlined (i.e. limits of confidentiality, the role of adults and Elders to listen to youth, the presence of support counsellors for people in need of support, the timing of the circle) as is the sequence of events for the evening.

Creating a safe-enough space and maintaining this is a key responsibility of the facilitators. For this reason, the selection of skilled and prepared facilitators who clearly understand that this is a ‘sharing of youth wisdom’ and a witnessing of it, and not a therapy group. For facilitators, practising discernment and containment skills to be able to ‘slow youth down’ and invite them to generalize rather than make disclosures was very important for all of the participants in the circle.

It is important to recognize that this kind of sharing of youth voices can be powerful, moving and sometimes ‘triggering’ for some individuals. Focussing on themes of strengths, resources and cultural connection in terms of conversation topics can help move everyone towards a more hopeful and healing place.

The aim of the circle is to be hope-inducing and at the same time, it is critical to recognize that this may be very emotional and moving for participants. It is important for facilitators to be comfortable honouring this with group members.

Several factors were identified by organizers, community members and youth as to the elements that made the experience feel safe. **(Please see Appendix C for a detailed Facilitation Guide).**

### Example of Questions for Youth

When the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés first began, questions were solicited from adult participants prior to the beginning of the circles. These questions were reviewed by Café organizers and selected questions were then posed to youth during the circles. Over time these selected questions continued to be used in the circles along with questions developed by the organizers. Examples of questions include:

1. What things cause youth stress?
2. What are some ways that youth deal with stress?
3. What are some reasons that some youth may use alcohol and other drugs?
4. What can adults do to help youth?



## Critical Elements for the Creation of Feelings of Safety in the Aboriginal Capacity Café Circle



## Challenges in Creating Safety

Although tremendous thought went into the planning and preparation for the actual event, three challenges were experienced in at least one of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés.

1. In one of the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés, there were only female counsellors available for youth who may need extra support. A male youth required support and did not feel fully comfortable with a female counselor.

Important Consideration: Always have a male and female counsellor available. Ideally, it is best to have a support person with whom the youth feel connected.

2. When the Aboriginal Capacity Café is held on a Friday night it is difficult to connect with youth the following day to ensure that they are feeling safe and secure about their participation. If the event is a Monday to Thursday evening, there is a greater likelihood that workers can connect with the youth the following day at school.

Important Consideration: Plan the Aboriginal Capacity Café for a Monday to Thursday evening to increase the likelihood of being able to connect with youth to ensure their well-being.

3. There may be adults or Elders who come to the Aboriginal Capacity Café who really want to speak about their experience; however, the Café is focused on youth voice. Helping adults and Elders remain in a listening position can be challenging but necessary to keep the focus on youth.

Important Consideration: Prepare facilitators to focus on the importance of the listening and witnessing position of adults and Elders. Also, engage the support of Elder allies to help keep the focus on youth voice. The facilitators should address this just before circles begin by stating the intent of the ACC. Finding

gentle and kind ways to keep the focus on the youth is a practice and skill that is very important for facilitators.

## **Critical Elements for the Successful Facilitation**

Creation of safety in the Capacity Café depends on the skill of the facilitation team.

*“Probably any more than one thing, the success of the event rests on the facilitators. Maybe that’s overstating it, but not much. A skilled facilitator does a very, very complex job. Everything from informally putting people at ease and helping people relax and remembering to go through the list of guidelines in a way that isn’t oppressive but clear to not just going through the questions but gauging the temperature, the tone, who is dominating, if anyone who hasn’t spoken, which parents are getting anxious. There is a lot going on and that is why we have two [facilitators]. Usually it works out that one takes more of the lead and the other is doing more of that checking and observing and everything from pointing to a youth who hasn’t spoken. The other really important piece is the delivery of the questions. Fortunately, almost without exception, I didn’t see leading questions.”*

The leadership of this facilitation team can create safety for participants or hinder the safety of participants. Choosing competent and experienced facilitators is critical for the success and well-being of all participants. Facilitators must clearly understand the purpose of the Café (i.e., educational NOT group counselling) and must have an understanding of the Aboriginal culture. Ideally, facilitators should be Aboriginal and the team should be comprised of one male and one female facilitator. In this way, there exists rich opportunities to model healthy and respectful communication between males and females.

Over the course of seven Aboriginal Capacity Cafés, several factors have been found to be very important with respect to facilitators.

- ☀ **Facilitators should have developed relationships with youth prior to the event in order that youth feel safe with these adults. Ideally, these relationships will have been pre-existing even before the preparation for the Aboriginal Capacity Café.**

*“Connection with those young people beforehand is critical.”*

*“It’s always best when the facilitator knows the youth and the youth knows the facilitator. It’s great if they facilitate youth who they work with in schools because there is the added benefit that it strengthens their relationship.”*

- ☀ **Facilitators should have had training and experience in the art of strengths-based, structured, witnessing or ‘reflecting team’ group facilitation with Aboriginal youth and families.**

*“You need to assess and train people. These people need to feel competent.”*

*“We had the luxury to draw upon experienced facilitators who had done the Cafés in the mainstream population. Other people wouldn’t necessarily have that if they were starting out.”*

*“Having experience facilitating a mixed group.”*

*“There were some facilitators who were quite rigid in their approach, like needing to be on time in answering certain sets of questions and others who were much more laid back and let the conversation go as it needs to be. My feelings are that the facilitators who let the conversation go where it needed to go, young people felt more safe with them.”*

- ☀ **Facilitation teams should have had experience working together and have styles that complement one another with ample time given for preparation and practice.**

*“The two facilitators need to figure out what their styles of co-facilitation will be. Will it be co-facilitation? Will one just be there as a back-up? They can decide that on their own – just so that they can come to that conclusion together and come to agree on it and understand how they are going to work.”*

# The Impact of the Aboriginal Capacity Café

## The Benefits of the Aboriginal Community Hearing Youth Voice

Youth, adult participants and organizers were asked about the perceived benefits of hearing youth voice. Eight themes emerged.

### 1. Youth feel valued, seen and heard.

*“It gives the message ‘what you have to say is important’.”*

*“Youth say things like ‘I’ve never been listened to by an adult that long in my life. I can’t believe that the adults thought that I had something important to say.’”*

### 2. Through hearing youth voice, adults increase their understanding of youth challenges.

*“My parents have definitely had a greater understanding of my school and my environment and what I go through every day. It was definitely nice that they were able to get that understanding and grasp my tribulations and troubles that I go through every day.”*

*“I think because we hear a lot of what they experienced as kids and maybe they are getting a new understanding of what we’re experiencing because it’s different. They got a second opinion. They kind of looked at it and thought ‘oh we thought it was okay but really a lot of our kids are going through a tough time in high school.’”*

**Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 91% of youth strongly agreed that they felt listened to during the Café.**

*“I think that the assumption is that we were all young people at one time but it’s a different world with the pressures of technology, instant communication are things that most of us didn’t have to consider when we were young.”*

**3. Through hearing youth voice, adults can use their increased understanding to relate differently to youth in order to better meet their needs.**

*“I think that with parents hearing what kids have to say, they will probably do the same thing with their kid – understand what their kid is going through. They will be more kind to their children, listen more and hear what they have to say.”*

*“The youth were saying that they’re not always understood. For the youth to be able to voice that and feel safe in doing and believing that whatever they say could lead to change.”*

*“We need to continue to hear from youth how to interact with them in an effective way. What works for them, what is damaging, how their needs change with society’s changes, and how their needs stay the same.”*

*“This has helped me to be more patient and understanding.”*

*“Helped adults realise that sometimes it’s just as important to listen.”*

**Youth Voice about the ways the Aboriginal Capacity Café can support healthy community relationships**

*“People getting to know another person better and what they go through. It helps them understand what they go through.”*

*“If we talk a lot to parents and Elders, if we talk to youth, it could benefit the community. Basically we are speaking out.”*

*“What they learn from us they will see it in their kid’s lives and kind of understand what’s going on. Now they have a little perspective of what is happening and I think it will be a little easier for them to talk to their children because of it.”*

**4. Through sharing, dialogue and relationships among generations can be strengthened.**

*“I know that we’re teaching adults how we live our lives but sometime you can really learn from adults. Sometimes after the Capacity Café, they’ll tell us things after the Capacity Café. One person came up to me after the Capacity and told me something really touching. I learned a lot from them. I think it’s cool how we’re teaching them but we’re learning from what we are teaching them.”*

*“Relationships become healthier. Promoting and encouraging youth to move forward in a good way.”*

*“It breaks through information exchange and sparks an emotional connection to an important issue.”*

**5. Hearing youth voice creates hope for the community.**

*“From everything I’ve heard, I think it creates some hope for parents. Especially for being second, third generation from residential schools where voices weren’t heard, cries weren’t heard.”*

**6. Hearing youth voice can instil a sense of pride in adults when they see youth who are strong and courageous .**

*“It can be very reassuring and calming and something that they should feel proud about.”*

*“Hearing youth as having lots of wisdom about youth experience. Youth as being articulate, as leaders, as resilient.”*



## 7. Through hearing youth voice, patterns can be recognized and changed.

*“I think the Aboriginal community benefitted because older generations need to be conscious of what our youth are going through. We need to continue to make positive changes. We need to recognize the cycles that have been repeated through generations since the residential school experience, and try to break them. We need to be stronger for our youth and we need to care for them properly.”*

## 8. Hearing youth voice helps adults hear their own youth.

*“The biggest comment that I heard was ‘I heard my son through you’. People would tend to hear their own kids through the voices of other youth. It’s a big eye opener.”*

*“I had one person tell me, weeks later, that the first Aboriginal Capacity Café made her quit smoking and the reason was that she finally heard what her kids had been saying in a way that made her take it really seriously and so hearing the other youth and how they felt about their parents and how they felt about all the other things going on made her think about doing that for her.”*

## Hearing Youth Voice Experienced as the Best Aspect of the Aboriginal Capacity Café

Feedback from the Aboriginal Capacity Café clearly show the value that adults placed on hearing youth voice. They commented:

*“The chance for youth to voice their opinions without people interrupting.”*

*“Hearing and seeing the youth take risks in sharing their wisdom.”*

*“Listening to youth – a reminder as a parent to continue to listen.”*

*“Listening to our youth – how much they have to offer is phenomenal.”*

*“I was blown away by how much she was talking in the group. It gave her skills to be in a leadership position.”*

## The Benefits of the Aboriginal Capacity Café for the Community

Aboriginal Capacity Café participants were asked to reflect on what the benefits of the Café were for the community as a whole. Six themes emerged from these reflections.

- 1. The community has an opportunity to come together in a positive way and share their culture among generations.**

*“All of our cultures, pre-European contact, were oral cultures. Opening up this kind of a venue for even parents to speak out and wanting that for their children to speak out as well.”*

*“It was hugely beneficial for parents to be openly weeping that this was a very moving experience for them. They are sharing honestly about the process. The beauty of the moment that we created in that time, was very magical. It’s unlike anything I have ever seen. This is a very unique ...it harkens back to our Powwows, potlatches, our drum dances, our community events where we are coming together in a good way.”*

*“Connection, education, teachings. Education in all sorts of ways. It can go from the mainstream education or education on how to be respectful, to share connections with your grandparents, your relatives, teachers and whoever you come into contact with. To respect our food. To have that calmness.”*

*“ In the Aboriginal community we often have a circle of support that helps them move forward in life. By encouraging that circle of support at the Capacity Café, it allows those young people*

*“A community-centered, strength-based approach, deeply rooted in traditional practice works as it aims to strengthen leadership and social organization among community members who interact regularly and share institutions of social life. Strengthened social organization is, in turn, a means to enhance the ability of community members to engage in collective problem solving, to improve self-sufficiency and efficacy, bolster internal control, and to make the community a desirable place to live. Such changes benefit individual and family functioning.”*

Wesley-Esquimaux, C. & Calliou, B. (2010) Best Practices in Aboriginal Community Development: A Literature Review and Wise Practice Approach. The Banff Centre.

who have their family members in the circle of support with them to see what they're doing to help them grow and become what we want them to be and that's healthy people."

## **2. The community makes connections with one another.**

"Bringing everyone together...connecting the dots."

"A lot of Aboriginal kids might not know other Aboriginal kids in their school. We did one [Aboriginal Capacity Café] and there was a group of young people who said 'I didn't even know who was Aboriginal at my school until we did this and all of us came together.'"

"The feeling that we are going through similar things and that we are together and we can cope and support each other. It's like building community."

## **3. The community hears in the voices of youth issues that are intergenerational as well as issues that are unique to youth.**

"Quite often in the circle I would hear an adult make the connection about something a youth said and their own experience."

"Youth having a voice and being heard and they're experts in their lives and they know what's going on with other youth they come into contact with and being able to share that with community. Having parents say 'Wow, it's not the same when I was a kid or it's still the same and I pulled through this too.'"

#### **4. The community gives the message to youth that they have an important role.**

*“Youth have felt more confident, a lot more self-respect because they feel connected, they feel needed, they have a role. They actually have something to contribute that parents want.”*

*“Value them [youth] and help them and help them become leaders.”*

#### **5. The community has a positive experience in the school setting.**

*“I think definitely the ability to go to a school, have a function at school where it’s at the end of the night it’s very celebratory and no one wants to leave.”*

*“People felt connected to the school. My school might be a safer place for me today than it was yesterday.”*

*“Some parents never walked into their child’s school and now they are and they are becoming more involved. Bridging those relationships.”*

#### **6. The community makes connections with community organizations.<sup>19</sup>**

*“Finding support with the facilitators and the community programs that were there and having any gaps filled or resources coming in.”*

*“Some of youth have got counselling as result [of the Aboriginal Capacity Café]”*

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<sup>19</sup> Note that community resource packages were handed out to adults and youth at each Aboriginal Capacity Café.

## The Personal Benefits Gained from the Aboriginal Capacity Café by Youth

Youth reported several positive impacts as a result of their participation in the Aboriginal Capacity Café.

### ☀ Youth report increased positive relationships with family members.

*“I have been talking more to my dad and stuff. We’re kinda gaining a little bit of our relationship back and stuff. Slowly coming back. He’s learning how to talk to me and I’m learning how to talk to him. That’s pretty good. Basically talk more to family members.”*

*“I have connected more with my mother.”*

### ☀ Youth report taking on more leadership roles with other youth.

*“I would say that I have taken a step up into a leadership role. I have definitely tried to guide some of the youth who are younger than me and just be there for them, just be a friend, be someone that they can talk to, have that open ear and listen.”*

### ☀ Youth report having more perspective on other peoples’ lives.

*“The way I look at other people. I realise that people can be a good person. I look at other people in that way now.”*

*“I look at younger kids differently now....like they could be going through rough times and I wouldn’t know.”*

Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 80 % of youth strongly agreed that they learned about the worries that parents have for their children.

**☀ Youth report persevering in school.**

*“There are some days where I struggle in school. I have successfully passed all my grades and I am in my actual grade that I am supposed to be in.”*

**☀ Youth report feeling more connected, less alone.**

*“Hearing some of the other youth stories, I don’t feel so alone. You have your own personal issues and then when hearing all the other kids speaking up, it feels really good.”*

*“I have learned that I am not the only youth who goes through things. I’ve been stronger because I know that I am not the only one going through things. It feels more supportive knowing that I’m not the only one. A lot of youth spoke deeply about their lives. It made me realise that if I talk to others they will understand.”*

**☀ Youth report feeling more connected to their culture.**

*“I am more open-minded to hearing new things [related to my background]. I am more open to hearing my Elders talk to me about my culture.”*

*“Since then [Aboriginal Capacity Café], my parents have been doing more smudges with me. I talked to them about it.”*

*“Young people who participate in programs that strive to engage youth on a number of different levels feel empowered, connected, and valued by adults and their communities. If we look carefully at the heart of all successful youth engagement efforts, we will find strong partnerships with adults who recognize and support the inherent value that young people bring to the success of the program.*

*- Centre for Excellence on Youth*

## The Personal Benefits Gained from the Aboriginal Capacity Café by Adults

Adults were also asked what impact their experience of attending the Aboriginal Capacity Café had on their life. Five themes emerged from adult responses.

### 1. Experienced the healing power of seeing youth receive care and support.

*“It reminded me that I had some pretty intense experiences as a youth. No one was there to hear me when I was young though. It was healing for me to hear their stories and to watch them heal while they shared their experiences with us. It brought me to tears more than once. I didn’t care about crying in front of other people. I cried openly. I cried for them, for my daughter, for myself and for all Aboriginal people that have experienced loss in their culture or family because of residential school experiences in older generations. Seeing those youth hurt while they told their stories made me feel physical pain in my chest. It made me wish someone had listened to me when I was young – validated my feelings. It reminded me that I need to help the young Aboriginal girl inside me heal even though I am an adult now.”*

*“For me, the best part of the event was to watch the emotion expressed by the youth. It was so strong, so raw and so honest. It looked like some of them were experiencing a physical relief from telling their story. I believe it was a healing experience for them and for the witnesses.”*

### 2. Reminder about the importance of listening to and speaking with youth.

*“It did remind me to quiet myself and listen in order to be a better mother and educator.”*

*“It continuously reminds me to listen to what the youth have to say and value what the youth have to say.”*

*“Now I speak more openly to my kids.”*

Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 80% of adults strongly agreed that they planned to spend more time talking to their children and youth about day-to-day things. A further 73% strongly agreed that they planned to talk more with their children about alcohol and drug issues.

“Life has gotten better from that day. I am listening more to her. Just really listening to her. Before I would just say, ‘you have to just suck it up’. Just let her release her concerns and be okay with it – not so judgemental.”

### 3. Compassion for oneself in the role of a parent/guardian.

“When I was at the Aboriginal Capacity Café, we were sitting in the circle, the youth expressed styles of parenting and how they felt that parents sometimes go too hard. That was a common thing that the youth expressed. I took that with me and took that home and tried really, really, really hard. I was a miserable failure at it. So I went to another Capacity Café and that theme came up again. So at the end of the circle, everyone gets to say a few words of how they are feeling because we get a chance to feedback to the youth. It was my turn to speak and I expressed how I appreciated getting that lesson again. I was talking about how I learned that lesson before and how I was a miserable failure at it and everybody started to laugh. It was like I got a second chance. I was really appreciative to the youth for that because it made me look, made me think not to go too hard on my daughter as well as not to go too hard on myself.”

### 4. Prompted greater involvement in youth’s education.



“I was trying to help her more with her math which I am totally not good at but we would work it out together.”

“I got more involved in education. I am quite interested in the Aboriginal school. I guess because of my involvement at the Capacity Café, it spurred me to get more involved in the education of my children.”

“It made me seek out some more help and support for my daughter. We started seeing a guidance counsellor and that really helped a lot.”



## 5. Feeling pride in the courage of youth.

*“The thing that I found absolutely most rewarding was that my kid had gone into a public place and spoke out on everything. That he had the confidence to do it. I thought that it was wonderful. It’s something that I couldn’t give him. He felt that confidence and acceptance that was really, really important.”*

*“My thoughts about the Aboriginal Capacity Café ... I am honored to be a witness. It’s something that I take very seriously. The youth helped me and I am excited to make way for the next generation.”*

*-Adult Witness*

Based on evaluation feedback across the Capacity Cafés, 87% of adults strongly agreed that they learned valuable information from attending the Aboriginal Capacity Café. A further 92% of adults strongly agreed that they would like to attend events in the future that brought youth and adults in the same space to share experiences.

## Next Steps for the Aboriginal Capacity Café

### Youth Perspectives on Next Steps

Youth strongly supported the continuation of the Aboriginal Café. They wanted to see continued opportunities for their parents/caregivers to attend the Cafés in order that their parents/caregivers could increase their own understanding of the youth experience. They also suggested expansion of focus for the Aboriginal Capacity Café.

### Continued Parent/Adult Opportunities to Attend a Café

*“Not every parent goes so there should be more so parents understand what youth go through.”*

*“I think the Capacity Café is a good way to start because they are very, very good. They are a good way to talk to people because most of the time youth feel adults get their way because they are older and feel that they are always right but then when we talk a lot...when youth get to talk, it’s more sometimes empowering because parents get to hear what we feel.”*

*“It should continue. If my parents could be there too in another Capacity Café, that would be good.”*



## Expansion of Areas of Focus for the Café

“What should happen next is to slightly expand. What’s going on right now is going very well. Just try to get to the younger generation, grade 8 or 9 where they are especially just learning about where they’re going and who they’re going to be. They are still learning and can get into that wrong crowd.”

“The topics right now...they are very broad so a lot of the topics focus on a lot so the same topics that we are doing now are very good.”

*“I would like to see more Cafés. I enjoy doing them. I would like to see more....I like the questions now but they are surface questions. I kind of want to see something that goes a little deeper, but not really deep so they’ll understand if their kids are upset or something, what they should do. We didn’t have a question like that and my parents have no clue what to do if I am upset.”*

Based on evaluations across the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés, 94% of youth strongly agreed that they would like to participate in another Aboriginal Capacity Café in the future.

**Note:** The issue of having questions that are more personal and ‘deeper’ needs to be carefully considered. The Capacity Café is time limited and the youths’ well-being must at the forefront of all planning. It is not group therapy, nor are facilitators registered clinical counsellors or psychologists, therefore to engage youth in questions which may leave them emotionally overwhelmed has the potential to do harm. Broad questions were chosen (e.g., What do youth do when they are stressed? What kind of support do youth need from adults?) and pre-event sessions implemented in order to meet youth where they were at in their developmental journey and ensure their emotional safety.

## Community Members’ Perspectives on Next Steps

Community members all wanted to see the Aboriginal Capacity Cafés continue and there was a desire voiced to see the Capacity Café model in every school. There were also suggestions for activities to extend the efforts of the current Aboriginal Capacity Café model.

*“It should be in every high school in Canada and maybe not just the Aboriginal. It’s a good procedure for all to facilitate relationships between all adults and youth. I also think that Canada is a society that’s still in a process of decolonization. I think that the Aboriginal Capacity Café is an important way to creating some kind of social sense of cohesion and understanding. If I compare the ACC that I went to, to some of the parent-teacher instruction, I think I learned about 90% more in the Café. If the Café was a 10, then what I got out of other kinds of other parent instruction sessions would be about a ‘1’. I just got a lot more out of them.”*

### **Suggestions for Extensions of the Capacity Café:**

- ☀ Forming an District Aboriginal youth council;
- ☀ Hosting District-wide gatherings of Aboriginal youth and families;

*“Aboriginal workers are working in isolation so it would be nice if there could be gatherings that we could get together all the Aboriginal kids. Something that involves food.”*

- ☀ Incorporating follow-up sessions for parents/caregivers to work on communication and support skills;
- ☀ Hosting more multi-cultural Capacity Cafés with the primary goal of increasing understanding of Aboriginal culture and breaking down stereotypes;
- ☀ Hosting Aboriginal Capacity Cafés in which only Aboriginal people attend; and
- ☀ Providing opportunities for more Aboriginal youth to develop leadership skills.

*“Opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills for Aboriginal youth who do attend the Cafés. You might want to target Aboriginal kids who are open to doing it, ones who aren’t and ones who aren’t even thinking about it. Have different strategies [for different youth readiness levels].*

## Aboriginal Capacity Café Organizer Perspectives on Next Steps

Organizers are in the role of seeing the tremendous benefits of the Aboriginal Capacity Café while at the same understanding the human and financial resources needed to host an Aboriginal Capacity Café. Organizers all wanted to see the Cafés continue; however, given the limited resources at present, the general opinion was to have an Aboriginal Capacity Café once a year in Vancouver.

*“One [Aboriginal Capacity Café] a year because there is a whole year [each school year] of Aboriginal youth working with strengths-based stuff with UNYA and SACY staff. This is one of the things that creates strong youth and strong leadership.”*

It was acknowledged if there were more dedicated resources, expansion would be possible and ideally, an Aboriginal agency would take the lead role in the ongoing work of the Aboriginal Capacity Café. There was acknowledgment that an Aboriginal agency would need to receive support in order to take on this leadership role.

*“The capacity of Aboriginal agencies....they are struggling right now. Their funding has changed. Lots of things are changing. It’s hard to do that right now.”*

*“I think it would be great if we can hand off something that has been so popular.”*

A particular need is to include more focus on parenting support and education for Aboriginal parents/caregivers that is culturally appropriate.

*“We talked about more follow-up and a series of workshops. In the schools, we do this the other way around [in the general Capacity Café]. We have two workshops and the Café and there is some advantages to that. We haven’t done this with the Aboriginal Capacity Café. I have often thought that even getting in the one workshop on communication because then they get a lot of the ideas and some of the skills and techniques but then they go to the Café and get the motivation to want to change their communication.”*

*“I would like to have seen an Aboriginal parenting group come out of this. Even if it was a self-run group – we facilitated a couple sessions but then we had a space for them to meet in regularly. That alone would have been of value to people.”*

*“I think over time if we could partner with an agency where parent support was part of their mandate – I think there is little to help parents parent adolescents. There is even less in the Aboriginal community. I have certainly looked for it. I have looked for parenting classes for Aboriginal parents with teenagers and I can’t find it.”*

*“ Ideally ,if there is an appetite in this community for these types of events, then we keep doing them. As soon as people stop showing up or the youth become disinterested, then we stop doing them.”*

Another important area identified by organizers (and youth) is assisting youth transitioning to high school through participation in the Aboriginal Capacity Café.

*“We have Christmas, Kwanzaa, we have Chinese New Year. We have a lot of events that are recognized in the school stream so having an Aboriginal Capacity Café really lends itself to highlighting the population, highlighting some really positive elements for the school. There are a lot of positive things that I think about just by hosting a function like this at a school. I think we have the ability and the capacity to build on those strengths and the success of our previous cafés to be able to perhaps host maybe a grade seven and eight Café in a similar capacity. We do have a bit of issues for the transition years for drop out. If we are to think about prevention, it starts at the elementary stream. It’s not uncommon to hear about a grade five student being exposed to marijuana, a grade two student exposed to alcohol and drugs. These are things that came forward from our Capacity Cafés from our youth and our students speaking about their exposure to these things. There might be a consideration to elementary- secondary process.”*

Since the Aboriginal Capacity Café model has been so strong, sharing the model and successes with others would be a goal for the future.

*“We know that a lot of different groups are interested and they want to be trained and they want to know about it. Some of the next steps will be hopefully to support some of them as well.”*

*“We realised that it would be important to reflect on the work done so far. Doing some kind of knowledge transfer and passing on what we learned. There were lots of learnings.”*

## Final Thoughts

After three years of partners working together to plan and host seven Aboriginal Capacity Cafés, it is clear, based on evaluation feedback, that these Cafés have played an important role in the lives of youth, parents/caregivers and community members. They offer a venue for youth to show their strengths, for community to come together and increase mutual understanding, to deepen compassion for one another, and to feel hope for the future. It is a way to honor Aboriginal people and celebrate a rich culture from which many Aboriginal people have been separated through historical injustices. The strength of individuals lies in the strength of communities. From the voices of participants, the Aboriginal Capacity Café has been a part of this powerful process of community development.

***“Attending the Aboriginal Capacity Café was a once in a lifetime experience.”***

*-Community Member*

## Appendix A: Guiding Principles, Practices and Glossary

### Guiding Principles for Consistent Positioning

The following statements indicate values taken by members of the Aboriginal Capacity Café Collective. These principles guide our work in community and specifically in café where space is created for youth to share their voices candidly and safely so that all can learn from their wisdoms.

- **Cultural competency and integration** (Acknowledging and integrating Aboriginal culture with special attention to the Medicine Wheel and locally relevant cultural protocols for the Coast Salish Nations, community Leaders and Elders)
- **Non-judgemental approach** (Creating place and space for individuals to share without fear of judgement and related repercussions)
- **Strengths-based approach** (Valuing the assets, strengths and resiliencies of participants wherever possible)
- **Client-centred approach** (Meeting participants where they're-at and respecting and allowing-for the fluidity of their positioning)
- **Harm reduction approach** (Providing harm/risk reduction education, information and support where [developmentally] appropriate)
- **Non-stigmatizing language** (Being conscious to avoid language that has potential to stigmatize, reinforce oppression, blame or shame e.g. using 'not using' instead of 'abstinence'; using 'mental wellness' instead of 'mental illness/health'; using 'substance use' instead of 'addiction' or 'substance misuse'; using 'substance user' instead of 'addict'; using 'youth' instead of 'child/kid' etc.)
- **Medicine Wheel/ 'Bio/psycho/social/spiritual' model/understanding of substance use** (Taking opportunity to appreciate all of the dimensions that underlie substance use; giving space to recognizing the 'root causes' of substance use vs. focusing on the substance use itself)

### Guiding Practices for Consistent Implementation

The following statements make explicit some key practice guidelines for our collective ACC work. These apply to Café facilitators, ACC youth and parent/family engagement staff and involved Partners:

- Appreciating the intergenerational context of the ACC
- Paying attention to Aboriginal traditional teachings and cultural protocols (Giving ample time and space for inclusion of cultural protocols)
- Creating and supporting an environment that is safe and respectful
- Creating and supporting an environment that is supportive of sharing, listening and learning
- Being aware of potential triggers that may be salient within a given circle group (E.g. Residential Schools legacy, experiences of racism, racialized violence, sexual abuse, domestic violence, substance use within the home etc.)
- Ensuring and modeling appropriate language use (As per above 'non-stigmatizing language' principle)



- Ensuring that personal beliefs, values, experiences and biases do not lead the conversation or limit the sharing space with a focus on creating strong, communicative alliance between facilitator and participants (As per above ‘non-judgemental approach’ principle; to minimize situations that could be silencing or which could stifle open sharing and communication)  
**Note:** We recognize that individuals – inclusive of staff, participants and community members - hold varying beliefs around substance use and that beliefs can be blended/organic/flexible (E.g.: people may abstain from alcohol but decide use cannabis etc. It is important as part of the ACC Collective, and particularly when in Circle, that the diverse ‘beliefs’ pertaining to substance use amongst students be respected, embraced, accepted and heard)

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR ABORIGINAL CAPACITY CAFÉ

**Aboriginal Capacity Café (ACC):** The Aboriginal Capacity Café (ACC) marks an opportunity for youth and family engagement, intergenerational connecting/witnessing and cultural sharing. In a Café youth are given the opportunity to speak to the realities of teen life as adults and Elders listen and acknowledge/validate their experiences. The opportunity for youth to be heard in such a public forum where cultural protocol is appreciated can be a moving and powerful experience for Aboriginal youth, parents, adults and Elders.

**Aboriginal Nations:** The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) used this term in its final report. RCAP defines Aboriginal nations as a "sizable body of Aboriginal people with a shared sense of national identity that constitutes the predominant population in a certain territory or collection of territories." The term has gained acceptance among some Aboriginal groups.<sup>20</sup>

**Aboriginal Peoples:** This is a collective name for all of the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. The Constitution Act of 1982 specifies that the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada consist of three groups - Indians, Inuit and Métis. First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples have unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. The term Aboriginal peoples should not be used to describe only one or two of the groups.<sup>21</sup>

**Ageism:** Discrimination against people on the grounds of age.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Crooks, Claire V (2009) "Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers" p. 114-118.

<sup>21</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>22</sup> (2010) "Glossary" at the BC Society of Transition Houses website <http://www.bcsth.ca/content/glossary>.

**Anti-Racism:** A process that acknowledges the existence of systemic racism and, through policies and practices, seeks to actively identify, challenge and reduce systemic racism in all its various forms.<sup>23</sup>

**Band:** A band is an organizational structure defined in the Indian Act which represents a particular group of Indians as defined under the Indian Act.<sup>24</sup>

**Bias:** An inclination, learning, opinion, perspective, preference, prejudice formed without reasonable justification that then influences a person's or group's ability to evaluate a particular situation accurately or objectively; an unfounded preference for or against. It must be noted, however, that every piece of writing, image and audiovisual production has a bias and it is important that authors, readers or viewer be able to identify this bias.<sup>25</sup>

**The Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Approach:** The bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach asserts that problems with substance use are the net result of a complex interaction among biological, psychological, social and spiritual determinants. Challenges within these domains can create a predisposition to the development of problematic substance use, which in turn can lead to increased impacts in the biological, psychological, social and spiritual realms.<sup>26</sup>

**Caregiver:** somebody who looks after somebody: somebody who has the principal responsibility for caring for a child, youth or dependent adult, especially in the home.<sup>27</sup>

**Client Centred Care:** An approach in which clients are viewed as whole; it is not merely about delivering services where the client is located. Client centred care involves advocacy, empowerment, and respecting the client's autonomy, voice, self-determination, and participation in decision-making.<sup>28</sup>

**Colonialism:** A process by which a foreign power dominates and exploits an indigenous group by seizing their land and resources, extracting their wealth and using them as cheap labour. Also refers

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<sup>23</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>24</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>25</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>26</sup> (2008) Vancouver Coastal Health Clinical Standard and Guidelines

<sup>27</sup> (n.d) "Caregiver" at the <http://encarta.msn.com> website

<sup>28</sup> (n.d) [www.rnao.org](http://www.rnao.org)

to a specific era of European expansion into the overseas territories between the sixteenth and twentieth century's. Racial dogmas that reinforced patterns of superiority and inferiority have often been invoked to explain, justify and promote the exploitation of indigenous minorities.<sup>29</sup>

**Discrimination:** The manifestation of prejudice. The granting and/or denying of civil liberties and opportunity to individual or groups with respect to access to services, goods and facilities, education, employment and health care. Discrimination may occur on the basis of age, developmental or mental disability, ethnicity, gender, marital or family status, nationality, physical, race, religious or political affiliation, or sexual orientation. Discrimination becomes more blatant when two or more facts (ex. Economic status, class and/or racial visibility) coincide. This behaviour results in minorities being maltreated/mistreated or excluded.<sup>30</sup>

**Ethnicity:** A social and political contract used by individuals and communities to define themselves and others. Ethnicity is also a process, which is changed over time both by social conditions and individuals. Ethnicity tends to be based on common culture, language or nationhood.<sup>31</sup>

**Harm Reduction:** As per the BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services Policy and Guidelines (BCCDC) 'Harm reduction involves taking action through policy and programming to reduce the harmful effects of behaviour. It involves a range of non-judgemental approaches and strategies aimed at providing and enhancing the knowledge, skills resources and support for individuals, their families and communities to make informed decision to be safer and healthier.' Guiding principles of harm reduction as outlined in Harm Reduction: British Columbia Community Guide (2005) include the following in summary:

- **Pragmatism:** Harm reduction recognizes that substance use has occurred throughout human history. Acknowledging that while carrying risks, drug use also provides the user and society with benefits that must be taken into account.
- **Human Rights:** Harm reduction respects the basic human dignity and rights of people who use drugs. It accepts the user's decision to use drugs and no judgement is made either to condemn or support the use of drugs.
- **Focus on harms:** Harm reduction prioritizes decreasing the negative consequences of drug use to the user and others rather than decreasing drug use itself. While harm reduction emphasizes a change to safer practices and patterns of drug use, it recognizes the need for strategies at all stages along the continuum of drug use.
- **Maximize intervention options:** Harm reduction recognizes that people who use substances benefit from a variety of approaches and that there is no one prevention or treatment approach that works for everyone.
- **Focus on immediate goals:** Harm reduction starts with 'where the person is' in their substance use with the immediate focus on the most pressing needs. Harm reduction is based on the importance of incremental gains that can be built over time.

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<sup>29</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>30</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>31</sup> See Footnote 3

- **Drug User Involvement:** The active participation of drug users is at the heart of harm reduction. Drug users are seen as the best source of information about their own drug use, and are empowered to join with service providers to determine the best interventions to reduce harm from drug use. Harm reduction recognizes the competency of drug users to make choices and change their lives.  
Full document available here: <http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/publications/year/2005/hrcommunityguide.pdf>

**Heterosexism:** The belief that heterosexuality is the norm.<sup>32</sup>

**First Nation(s):** The term First Nations came into common use in the 1970s to replace Indian, which some people found offensive. Many communities have also replaced "band" with "First Nation" in their names. Despite its widespread use, there is no legal definition for this term in Canada.<sup>33</sup>

**Gender Identity:** The gender one identifies with. A persons' assigned sex does not always match their gender. Although we traditionally see gender as dichotomous, gender can be seen as fluid and as more complex than masculine or feminine.<sup>34</sup>

**Indigenous:** There is no official definition of Indigenous peoples. In part, the term "Indigenous" is described as follows: "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them..." Its meaning is similar to Aboriginal Peoples, Native Peoples or First Peoples. It is often used to refer to Aboriginal people internationally.<sup>35</sup>

**Intersectoral Collaboration:** Professionals from various sectors work with community members to promote the health of the community.<sup>36</sup>

**Mental Wellness:** While we may not all have a clinical diagnosis, we all have varying levels of mental wellness. We use the term 'mental wellness' to draw attention to the fact that our mental wellness exists on a continuum and is fluid and changing. We emphasize that mental wellness itself cannot be considered a problem, but we must consider what problems are created by our levels of mental wellness. This term has less stigma and judgment associated with them than other terms commonly used.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>33</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>34</sup> Haskell, Rebecca (2010) "Reducing Barriers to Support: Discussion Paper on Violence Against Women, Mental Wellness and Substance Use" p. II to IV

<sup>35</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>36</sup> See Footnote 9

<sup>37</sup> See Footnote 15

**Métis:** This is the French word for "mixed blood". The Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes Métis as one of the three Aboriginal Peoples. Historically, the term Métis applied to the children of French fur traders and Cree women in the Prairies, of English and Scottish traders, and Dene women in the north, and Inuit and British in Newfoundland and Labrador. Today, the term is used broadly to describe people with mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis. Note that Métis organizations in Canada have differing criteria about who qualifies as a Métis person. Métis Settlements: in 1938, the Alberta government set aside 1.25 million acres of land for eight Métis settlements, however, Métis never lived on reserves and the terms on/off reserve do not apply to them.<sup>38</sup>

**Oppression:** The domination of one individual or group by another, more powerful, individual or group, using cultural, economic, physical, psychological, or social threats or force and frequently using an explicit ideology to justify the oppression.<sup>39</sup>

**Prejudice:** A frame of mind that tends to prejudge a person, or a group, unfavourably, by attributing to every member or a group characteristic falsely attributed to the group as a whole. These unfavourable are frequently not recognized as such because of the frequency with which they are widely accepted and are used to justify acts of discrimination.<sup>40</sup>

**Race:** A social category used to classify large groups of people according to common ancestry and reliant on differentiation by distinctive hereditary physical characteristics such as colour of skin and eyes, hair texture, stature and facial features.<sup>41</sup>

**Racialization:** Racial identities are not fixed categories. They are shaped by history, nationality, gender, class and identity politics and racial designations often differ from country to country. The term "racialization" makes explicit that this is not about inherent characteristics but about the ways in which we are socialized to differentiate groups of people on the basis of physical characteristics. It emphasizes the active process of categorizing people while at the same time rejecting "race" as a scientific category.<sup>42</sup>

**Racism:** A system in which one group of individual's exercises power over another group on the basis of skin colour. A set of actions, erroneous assumptions and implicit or explicit beliefs based on an ideology of inherent superiority of one racial group over another. Racism is manifested within organizational and institutional structures and programs as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>39</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>40</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>41</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>42</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>43</sup> See Footnote 3

**Reserve:** The Indian Act describes a reserve as lands which have been set apart for the use and benefit of a Band, and for which the legal title rests with the Crown in right of Canada. The federal government has primary jurisdiction over these lands and the people living on them.<sup>44</sup>

**Safe Home:** Short term [generally, not to exceed 5 days] emergency housing in private home [or in rental units].<sup>45</sup>

**Second Stage House:** Long term (generally 3-12 months) secure housing with support designed to assist women while they search for permanent housing.<sup>46</sup>

**Sexual Orientation** Used to refer to romantic or sexual attraction. Like gender, sexual orientation is often seen as fixed and dichotomous (straight or gay), but can be much more complex.<sup>47</sup>

**Status Indians:** Status Indians are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government. Certain criteria determine who can be registered as a Status Indian. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the Indian Act, which defines an Indian as "a person who, pursuant to this Act, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian." Status Indians are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law.<sup>48</sup>

**Strength-Based Care Systems:** The essential idea of strength-based models is that when people are supported by their cultural and social institutions they have an inherent ability to manage and control most aspects of their lives – including their health. Strength-based approaches:

- Have a specific focus on clients' strengths, interests, abilities and capabilities
- Assume that clients can learn, grow and change
- Believe that clients can identify their own needs and can directly participate in the care process.
- Directly involve clients in all aspects of care plan development and decision making
- Recognize that the community is a source of resources and settings where strengths develop and are exercised<sup>49</sup>
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**Substance Use:** Each of us uses substances to some degree, whether it be caffeine, prescription or over the counter medications, or a drink with dinner. We use the term 'substance use' to draw attention to the fact that our substance use exists on a continuum and is fluid and changing. Like

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<sup>44</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>45</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>46</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>47</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>48</sup> See Footnote 1

<sup>49</sup> (n.d) Vancouver Coastal Health 5-day orientation program for community staff

mental wellness, we emphasize that substance use itself cannot be considered a problem, but we must consider what problems are created by our levels of substance use. This term has less stigma and judgment associated with them than other terms commonly used.<sup>50</sup>

**Third Stage House** Supportive housing for women who have left violent relationships and who no longer need crisis service supports.<sup>51</sup>

**Trans:** An umbrella term often used in transgender communities to demedicalize the words used to describe people whose assigned sex does not align with the gender they identify with or who see their gender as more fluid than the traditional masculine/feminine binary.<sup>52</sup>

**Transition House:** Short to moderate term [in BC a short to moderate term is 30 days] first stage emergency housing.<sup>53</sup>

**Two-Spirited:** A term used by some First Nations people to describe themselves in a way that is closer to their cultural construct of sex/gender/sexuality than the dominant Western view. Many of the languages of First Nations of North America include specific terms for gender and sexual diversity; some First Nations people may use both the general term Two-Spirit and the culturally specific term from their nation to describe themselves. The term Two-Spirit can have specific meaning in some First Nations cultures that is not about sexuality or gender, but rather describes the spiritual makeup of a person. In acronyms, sometimes abbreviated as 2-S or 2S. *Access Project A Partnership between Prism Alcohol & Drug Services and BC Non-Profit Housing Association. 2009.*<sup>54</sup>

**Trauma:** The Women Abuse Response Program (WARP) at BC Women’s Hospital and Health Centre notes that the term ‘trauma’ has historically been used in the mental wellness and substance use fields and, in those contexts, has been “devoid of a gender-based analysis”. With its adoption into the Violence Against Women’s movement to describe women’s experiences with violence, some worry that the importance of gender will be lost. Framing violence as ‘a traumatic experience’ may individualize violence against women. WARP recommends that, “trauma, particularly complex post-traumatic stress... be recognized as one of many *impacts* of violence against women”, rather than a description of violence against women in and of itself.<sup>55</sup>

**Trigger:** Trigger’ is used to refer to an event that encourages or prompts thoughts about using substances or, in the context of mental wellness, brings about symptoms related to mental wellness.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>51</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>52</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>53</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>54</sup> See Footnote 3

<sup>55</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>56</sup> See Footnote 15

**Violence Against Women:** BCSTH uses the term ‘violence against women’ (VAW) as it captures violence a woman experiences from her partner but is also applicable for other people she may be oppressed by (for example, family, landlord, co-worker and broader social systems). The term can be applied to many types of harmful behaviour directed at women and girls because of their sex. Violence against women hinges on control and domination. A woman’s experiences with violence are shaped by her social context.<sup>57</sup>

**Youth:** "youth", "adolescent", "teenager", and "young person" are interchanged, often meaning the same thing, occasionally differentiated. Youth generally refers to a time of life that is neither childhood nor adulthood, but rather somewhere in-between.<sup>58</sup>

**Youth Engagement:** the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of oneself. Appropriate and meaningful youth engagement supports individual development and can serve as a vehicle for community contribution and change.<sup>59</sup>

**Women-Centred Care:** *Based on the assumption that women are “experts” of their own lives and that service providers should take the lead from the women they serve.*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Footnote 15

<sup>58</sup> (2010) “youth” at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth> website

<sup>59</sup> Crooks, Claire V (2009) “Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers” p. 20

<sup>60</sup> See Footnote 15



## Appendix B: Example of a Checklist for School Administrators

### Aboriginal Capacity Café Check List for School Administrators

Thank you for hosting an Aboriginal Capacity Café (ACC) at your school. The ACC is an excellent opportunity to bring Aboriginal families into your school community and make them feel welcome. It is also an opportunity for Aboriginal Community to share time together and build connections between generations.

The Aboriginal Capacity Café is an event that is coordinated by several partner agencies including the Vancouver Board of Education, the Urban Native Youth Association, the BC Yukon Society of Transition Houses and Vancouver Coastal Health Youth Addictions & Prevention Services. The event includes many aspects from cultural ceremony to feast and child minding. We also like to ensure that the event is most accessible to the community and ensure that there is attention paid to supporting transportation, childminding etc.

Because you are hosting an ACC and because there are so many aspects to the smooth-running of any café event, it is important that you take the time to work with our VSB liaison \_\_\_\_\_ Aboriginal Education consultant to complete and talk-through this check-list of items.

ACC Contact regarding these items (name, email, cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Item	Confirmed (✓)	Notes
1. Confirmation that the set date of the ACC doesn't conflict with any other school/community events		
2. Feast Room confirmed		
3. Youth Pre-Event room confirmed		
4. Two Circle rooms confirmed		
5. Childminding room confirmed		
6. Smudging and cultural protocols and location confirmed		
7. Microphone confirmed		
8. Sound system confirmed		
9. Staff/engineer to open and lock doors to rooms confirmed with contact details (best to meet them in advance and explain the event)		
10. Staff /engineer to help lock the school up at close time confirmed with contact details (best to meet them in advance and explain the event)		
11. Administrator aware that the event usually runs until about 10pm		
12. Understanding of how garbage and clean up are to be handled following the event.		
13. Confirmation that someone from the school team/an administrator will be present for the full duration of the event in case of emergency or other related issues.		
14. Confirmation that the school team person present is willing to do a very brief opening word of welcome and a quick closing word of thanks.		
15. Confirmation that the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Workers will be available to attend this event (and support planning where possible)		
16. Confirmation that there will be operational washrooms on the evening of the event		
17. Early access to cafeteria for event staff		

18. Identification of school cafeteria staff who will be present on the night of		
19. What does accessibility look like at your school (E.g. for Elders and those with disabilities etc.)		
20. On the night of the event, who is our 'check-in' person and where are they located? (receptionist, someone to give us information when/if we need it etc.)		
<p>21. Can we access the gym and gym equipment on the night of the event (for youth)?</p> <p>What are the insurance issues/considerations that we should be aware of around this?</p> <p>Are there youth from the LINK crew etc. who might be able to help us and collect community service learning hours?</p> <p>Is there a Community Schools Team contact that can help us with regards to the above?</p>		

## Appendix C: Aboriginal Capacity Café: Facilitator Guide

### Aboriginal Capacity Café - Facilitator Guide

This Facilitator Guide has been created with attention to the principles shared by the Aboriginal Capacity Café (ACC) Collaborative and agency partners including the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA), VSB Aboriginal Education, VSB SACY, BC Society of Transition Houses and VCH Youth Addictions & Prevention Services.

Though this guide does not detail every aspect of the ACC Youth Engagement process and Facilitator role it does provide relatively detailed practical considerations and speaking points to be used in preparing youth for an ACC circle and for facilitating an ACC circle.

This document will be updated regularly as feedback is collected from Facilitators and ACC collaborating partners so that the document can evolve as the ACC initiative does.

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- I. PREPARING YOUTH FOR THE EVENT
- II. BIG-PICTURE REMINDERS FOR FACILITATORS
- III. KEEPING THE 'GOALS' FRONT-AND-CENTRE
- IV. SPEAKING POINTS TO OPEN THE CIRCLE WITH
- V. SPEAKING POINTS FOR THE CIRCLE
- VI. CLOSING/WRAP-UP
- VII. POST CIRCLE FACILITATOR HUDDLE
- VIII. POST EVENT YOUTH DEBRIEF
- IX. PERMISSION FORM
- X. PARTICIPATION CERTIFICATE



## I. PREPARING YOUTH FOR THE EVENT

The Aboriginal Capacity Café Event is one that relies on the active participation of youth who self-identify as Aboriginal.

Several Youth Prevention Staff collaborate on recruiting youth to participate in the café and preparing them for this event. After a youth has indicated interest in participation in the Aboriginal Capacity Café there are several aspects of engagement and elements of supported preparation that the Youth Prevention Staff facilitate including:

- One-on-one youth prep workshop
- Youth pre-event (evening) recreation or fun-related activity
- Collecting youth permission slips
- Confirming transportation particulars with youth
- Check-in on the day of the event, mandatory workshop, provide snacks
- Youth post-brief event (evening - detailed later in this document)

Included here are some checklists that can help with facilitating each of the above youth focused components.

### **Checklist for One-on-One Youth Prep**

- Get a sense of each youths' situation (i.e. at school, at home etc.) and determine whether this is or isn't a good time for them to be involved in a Café. Ask them to rate their current emotional stress on a scale of 1-10 and consider.
- Give youth the parent permission form and let them know that it is required for their participation.
- Let youth know what 'participation' involves (youth pre event on a weekday evening; being in the circle for the evening; post event debrief on a weekday evening)
- Explain how the circle will be facilitated and how long the evening will last.
- Explain the goals of the circle: to teach adults; to feature youth experience and voice; opportunity for them to demonstrate leadership and participation in their community.
- Overview what sort of questions will be asked during the Café. Provide youth with sample of the themes and questions - see page 7 of this guide - so they can have a sense of what they'll be asked to speak to and share on.
- Let each youth know that their safety and well being is your priority.
- Give each youth a 'heads up' that being involved in a Café may trigger stuff for them. Let them know that on that day or at any time during the Café they can opt out. Run over what happens on the day of a Café so that youth are clear on the schedule.
- Let each youth know that if now is not a good time for them to be involved there will be other Cafes that they can participate in down the road.
- Let youth know that they should bring their signed permission forms to the Youth Pre-Event (ideally well before the day of the Café).
- You can let youth know that they will get service hours, a certificate of appreciation and a gift (honoraria) for their participation. To be presented at the youth post event.

### **Checklist for Youth Pre-Event**

- Work with other Youth Prevention staff and other Facilitators to set a date and develop an agenda for the youth pre-event. Suggested:
  - o Eating together
  - o Orientation to questions that will come up in circle
  - o Holding your own counsel (only say what you want to say; can pass)
  - o Meet Elder Ally
  - o Fun! Bowling etc.
  - o Collecting permission forms
- Let youth know that it is imperative that they attend this pre-event.
- Let them know what's going to happen at the pre-event (i.e. they'll learn what questions will be asked in the circle)
- If youth don't attend pre-event they can't participate in circle. They can only be present as listening ears and should be encouraged to be involved at the next event.

### **Checklist for Pre-Event 'Mini-One-on-One-Check-In' with Youth**

On the day of an Aboriginal Capacity Café it is important for the Facilitator to check-in with each youth briefly offering reminders of what the event is all about and making sure the youth is feeling strong enough to participate. There is also a little group warm-up that should happen prior to settling in to eat dinner before the ACC.

Checklist for connecting with youth on the day of the event before the circle:

- While picking up youth and bringing them to the event, check-in with each youth to ensure they're in a good place to participate.
- Once the group is together, a smudge and warm-up exercise should be offered.
- 'How's everyone doing?' Group check-in to see that everyone is still feeling good to participate.
- Reminders:
  - o Remind youth that this is an opportunity to teach parents and share youth voice
  - o Remind youth that the circle will last 1.5 hours
  - o Remind youth that they will be seated around the circle in pairs
  - o Remind youth that they can generalize - no need to speak to personal experience
  - o Ask youth if it's okay for you to call on them or is there anyone who doesn't want to be called upon?
  - o Remind youth that you can always pass when called on.
  - o Request/remind youth not to use names or other obvious identifiers
  - o Remind youth that their Facilitators are always scanning the circle and will be reading their body language and eye contact/non-eye contact.
- Let youth know which circle they will be sitting in and let them know that there will be efforts taken to make sure that one of their family members will not be in the circle.
- Let the youth know that there will be in-the-circle counsellors present in the circle who will follow them if at any point they leave the circle. They don't have to talk to these counsellors but the counsellors will there just to make sure they're okay.

## II. BIG-PICTURE REMINDERS FOR FACILITATORS

In preparing to facilitate an Aboriginal Capacity Cafe circle it is important to consider the following points which have been listed because they are practical tips and reminders that reflect the Guiding Principles that guide the ACC initiative.

Facilitators should do their best to:

- Appreciate the intergenerational context of the ACC
- Appreciate the diversity of ancestry and heritage that exists within the urban Aboriginal community (appreciate that youth can identify as being of mixed and blended ancestry)
- Appreciate that people come to the circle with a wide range of perspectives and experiences and ensure that the circle is a place where everyone and everyone's opinion and position can be accepted, respected and included
- Create and support an environment that is safe and respectful
- Create and support an environment that is supportive of sharing, listening and learning
- Pay attention to Aboriginal traditional teachings and cultural protocols giving ample time and space for inclusion
- Model appropriate and non-stigmatizing language use (specifically using 'substance use' instead of 'addiction' or 'substance misuse'; using 'substance user' instead of 'addict'; using 'youth' instead of 'child/kid')
- Be aware of potential triggers that may be salient within a given circle group (E.g. Residential Schools legacy, experiences of racism, racialized violence, sexual abuse, domestic violence, substance use within the home etc.)
- Ensure that personal beliefs, values, experiences and biases do not lead the conversation or limit the sharing space with a focus on creating strong, communicative alliance between Facilitator and participants
- Frame substance use in a way that appreciates the Medicine Wheel and gives space to the many dimensions and root causes of use
- Provide harm/risk reduction education, information and support where [developmentally] appropriate

### III. KEEPING THE 'GOALS' FRONT-AND-CENTRE

Before an ACC circle begins and throughout it is important for the Facilitator to keep in mind and be able to communicate what the 'goals' of the ACC experience are.

#### **The goal of the youth experience?**

- The ACC circle should give youth an opportunity to share their voice, be heard and exercise their leadership in community.
- It should also give youth an opportunity to belong, participate and be involved in the simple but powerful act of witnessing.

#### **The goal of the family/Elders/caregiver experience?**

- The ACC circle should give family, Elders and caregivers the opportunity to have a strengths-based experience where they can learn about the experiences of youth today, learn what they're doing that is already supporting their youth and learn additional ways in which they can be supports to their youth.
- The ACC circle gives family, Elders and caregivers the opportunity to find a place of deep listening by the respectful offering of their own silence and supportive presence.

#### **The goal of the community/broad 'family' experience?**

- The ACC circle is a unique setting and opportunity within which the community can come together as a larger family and foster a sense of kinship and coming-together.



## IV. SPEAKING POINTS TO OPEN THE CIRCLE WITH

Once everyone has gathered in circle and in order to ensure that clarity and safety structures are put in place, it is very important the Facilitator/Co-Facilitator cover several important points at the beginning of the circle experience. As the 'introduction' portion of the circle, here are some key points that should be touched upon. Please know that these speaking points are just guidelines that the Facilitator should adjust as they feel is most appropriate.

### TIME ALLOTTED: not more than 10 minutes

CLOCK: Ensure a clock/watch is visible to make sticking to schedule easier

KLEENEX: Ensure Kleenex box is available

- Facilitator to introduce themselves. Indicate what the role of facilitator is.
- Acknowledgement of **Coast Salish territory**.
- Acknowledgement of all those who are with us today. With recognition that many around the circle might identify as Aboriginal, Inuit, Metis or be of blended ancestry or heritage. All welcome.
- Thank you to all the Elders and Ancestors who have taught us so much.
- Few words about what idea behind the ACC is noting that we have already hosted (number) around the city
- Request to everyone to turn their **cell phones** off or onto 'meeting/silent' mode.
- Let everyone know that it's ideal if people can stay in the circle until it's over but if you must leave for whatever reason please just put your hand up to let the Facilitator know that you have to leave. (We ask people to let everyone know that they have to leave so that the youth speaking/sharing doesn't feel that they said something wrong, or offended someone and so that the Facilitator knows that you're okay and not leaving because you've been upset). Please know that you can leave whenever you want to (take your kids home, go to the washroom, take a breather, whatever)
- **What do youth get out of it?** Youth get an opportunity for their voices to be heard and for them to demonstrate that they are leaders in their community in sharing their knowledge with family, Elders and their caregivers and community supports.
- **What do family, Elders and caregivers get out of it?**
  - o Tonight will be an opportunity for adults to hear the voices of the youth they love and support. And to learn about what they're doing right and how further they can support their youth.
  - o Really want to recognize that that usually in Aboriginal communities Elders speak/teach wisdoms to youth BUT tonight will take a different approach where we will listen to youth voice which so rarely happens .... That youth are given a platform to share their voice.
  - o Overview of guiding principles - clarify that Facilitators have the job of creating and facilitating a space that is safe, welcoming, respectful. Ask that all can support in holding that space as such.
- Acknowledge **Elder Ally** - Elder Ally has been involved with youth preparation process. They are here hold the listening space for the adults in the room and bridge the generations that are gathered here today.

- Inform of the **'themes'** that will be covered in the circle: youth stressors, supports, connection, youth strength
- **Note:** Youth are taking a huge risk to help us understand what they go through. They are demonstrating leadership in their community by so doing. They have volunteered their time to share their voice. They are speaking from a 'youth' not a 'personal' experience or perspective
- **Note:** The adults/Elders bring openness and a listening ear and a want to understand and learn. This listening ear is a gift because it's not something that youth often get from the world at large.
- **Overview of structure:** how long is the circle; how will be close the circle
- **Safety notes:** Everyone in the circle today has to commit to keeping everything shared here confidential etc. *Continued on next page....*
- **Speak to limits of confidentiality.**
- **Introduce in-the-circle counsellors:** They are here for safety. If you leave the room they will follow you should you want to talk.
- Any **questions** before we begin?

## V. SPEAKING POINTS FOR THE CIRCLE

Once the 'intro' and 'safety structure' has been established it is time to begin facilitating the 'youth voice' portion of the circle. Please know that these speaking points are just guidelines that the Facilitator(s) should adjust as they feel is most appropriate. It is important to ensure that each theme is given air time within circle.

**TIME ALLOTTED: About 45 minutes in total** (5 min to start and 10 minutes per 'theme')

- Around the circle introductions:
  - o Youth please say your name and age.
  - o Family/Elders/other please say your name and what's the role you play here today. For example, Parent, Grandparent, Community member, Auntie, Uncle, Learner, Service Worker.
- Facilitator to let everyone know that Youth have been prepared for this evening. Going to ask them questions and give them the opportunity to speak their voice.
- To the youth: Don't have to answer if you don't want to. Reminder that you should speak 'on behalf of youth' in general and don't have to personalize.

### THEME 1 – Youth Stressors

Without being leading, include a few sentences about how youth have lots of things going on in their life then ask:

- What are some of the pressures or stressors teenagers may experience? (Recognize the amount of stress that young people have to deal with on a day to day basis)
- How do you take care of yourself? How do you deal with these pressures and stressors? (Here substances may or may not come up; important to highlight and allow youth to share all the ways they cope and manage their stress)

### THEME 2 – Supports

Without being leading, include a few sentences about possibly who was a support to you when you were a teenager and ask...

- Who is supportive to you in your life?
- What are they doing that is supportive? What do you really appreciate about them and what they do for youth?

Introduce the idea of 'supportive adults' and ask:

- What can adults do more of to support a young person? (Prompt: Any 'tips' or 'suggestions' you might have for adults?)

## THEME 3 – Connecting with Culture/Tradition

Here segue to talking about ‘other things that are supportive’...like culture, hobbies and ask...

- ❑ What are the ways you connect to your traditional culture or what hobbies do you draw upon? Or, what other things do you connect with?
- ❑ What would you like to be connected to (or more connected to)?

## THEME 4 – Your Strength

Here let everyone know that the circle is almost over. Thank the youth for their voice and let the adults know that they will be given a chance to speak in just a moment. First, one last question for the youth:

- ❑ Where do you find your strength and what gives you confidence? (Strong and simple question. Pause and give all youth a moment of silence to think about this before calling on the first person to share)

## VI. CLOSING THE CIRCLE/WRAP-UP

**Facilitators should allow ample time for wrap up.**

### **TIME: 30 minutes - sharp**

- Comment on the strength of the youth in the circle. Remind that every youth is a precious resource. To themselves and to us as adults.
- Thanks to everyone for sharing and for listening. Everyone around the circle plays a role.
- Summarize/highlight some positive things that came from the circle group. (Just a few points)
- Checkout around the circle for everyone. Put forward the following question and ask everyone to speak very briefly – for less than one minute:

**‘What is one thing that you’ll take away from this group? Or, what have you learned?’**

- Ask for the Elders Ally to have the final word (brief again)
- Remind everyone that there are in-the-circle-counsellors who will be around following the event. It’s been an emotional evening so please take care of yourself this evening when you get home.
- Distribute evaluation. Ask everyone to complete it and pass it back on their way out.
- Everyone to head to cafeteria for event closing and Witness sharing.

Facilitator Option to expedite things:

- Facilitators can choose to distribute evaluations while people are saying their closing words around circle while reminding people why they’re doing this (to save time; must leave school on time or have to pay more for )

## VII. POST-CIRCLE FACILITATOR HUDDLE

Youth Prevention Staff/Facilitators are responsible for ensuring youth get home safely following the event.

Because Youth Prevention Staff may sit in/facilitate circles other than those where the youth they are responsible for driving home are, it is important for all Youth Prevention Staff to meet at a designated 'huddle' location for a 3 minutes immediately following the circles.

In the huddle Facilitators can:

- Indicate if any youth had a difficult time in the circle
- If anything came up for youth that it would be important for the drive home to give opportunity for immediate debrief on

Further Facilitator debrief can happen at the ACC Debrief Meeting or as needed otherwise.

## VIII. POST EVENT YOUTH DEBRIEF

A post-event youth debrief should be scheduled early and youth should know that they need to attend this debrief. They may not know that there will be honouraria given but it might be good to tell them there's a good surprise.

The youth debrief is an opportunity to:

- Let youth talk about how they felt about the experience.
- Discuss any issues that came up for them.
- Celebrate.
- Look over/hear about what adults shared in evaluations.
- Thanks – youth to receive thanks and praise for their contributions and sharing.
- Distribution of certificates (listing community service hours)
- Distribution of honouraria



Dear Parent/Guardian;

Because of the strong ability to communicate and eagerness to talk about issues that are important to youth and families, your Son or Daughter has been chosen to participate in an Aboriginal Capacity Cafe happening on the evening Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at XXXXXX.

### WHAT IS AN ABORIGINAL CAPACITY CAFÉ?

- An opportunity for youth to share their voice, be heard and exercise their leadership in community. Through a series of guided questions, experienced facilitators will ask questions that will allow youth to share information about youth culture in their community. All of this will be done in a respectful and safe way within a talking circle setting.
- An opportunity for family, Elders and caregivers to have a strengths-based experience where they can learn about the experiences of youth today, learn what they're doing that is already supporting their youth and learn additional ways in which they can be supports to their youth.
- A unique setting and opportunity within which the community can come together as a larger family and foster a sense of kinship and coming-together.

### WHAT DOES FULL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE FOR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER?

In order to participate fully in the Aboriginal Capacity Café, your Son or Daughter will require your consent for participation in the following:

- PRE-EVENT: Tuesday, November 16 (3:00-8:00pm)** Supervised asset-building workshop which includes preparation for the main event, dinner and bowling. All youth will be given a ride home.
- ABORIGINAL CAPACITY CAFÉ EVENT: Thursday, November 18 (3:00-9:30pm)** Participation in the Aboriginal Capacity Café Circle. This will include ride to the event and full dinner.
- POST-EVENT: Tuesday, November 23 (3:00-6:00pm)** Supervised opportunity for youth to reflect on their experiences in the Aboriginal Capacity Café. Dinner provided.

If you have any questions about this event please contact any of the following people:

I give my son/daughter (PRINT NAME) \_\_\_\_\_, BIRTH DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ AGE: \_\_\_\_\_, permission to participate fully in the Aboriginal Capacity Café at XXXXXX on November 18, 2010. I also give my son or daughter permission to be transported by youth staff to and from all events by Café staff unless where written consent is given otherwise. Nation/Band, Métis, Inuit, Other? \_\_\_\_\_  
Status Y / N? \_\_\_\_\_

Print Parent / Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Home address \_\_\_\_\_

Home Number \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Number \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Name & Contact Number \_\_\_\_\_

Current School \_\_\_\_\_

# Certificate of Appreciation

*This certificate is being presented to*

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For sharing their voice, their experience and their knowledge with  
courage and  
honesty to families, Elders, and caring adult allies at an Aboriginal  
Capacity Cafe.  
Contributed 12 hours of service to the community for their  
efforts.

*Presented by*

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