



*Removing
Barriers: A
Listening Circle
Renewal Report –
June 2009*



***“Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle”* Renewal Report – June, 2009**

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History

The Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative (CUAI) grew out of *Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle*, a multi-phase, qualitative, community-based research initiative that took place in Calgary in 1999. The first phase of the initiative engaged Aboriginal Calgarians in identifying barriers to service and systems access in Calgary. Subsequent phases focused on bringing together Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal community members and stakeholders to envision solutions to the barriers participants identified. A summarization of *Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle* and the community recommendations is available on the CUAI website (www.cuai.ca).

CUAI is a partnership initiative that aims to support and enhance work across and between eight Domain groups by engaging broad bases of stakeholders in order to affect real and sustainable advances for urban Aboriginal Calgarians. The eight CUAI Domains are Education, Employment, Funding, Health, Housing, Human Rights, Justice, and Services.

CUAI is *not* a service delivery agency, a government department, a funding body, or a not-for-profit organization. CUAI is a true collaborative, and its potential is a function of the degree to which it engages community members, stakeholders and government around common goals.

Process Summary

On June 10th, 2009 CUAI hosted a *CUAI Renewal and Celebration* event to: 1) mark the ten year anniversary of *Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle*, 2) build on the work that was initiated in 1999, and 3) to celebrate the significant successes achieved in the years since.

As with the 1999 process, CUAI facilitated the anniversary event with a traditional Blackfoot dispute resolution model led by Dr. Chief Reg Crowshoe, who acted as cultural advisor for both events. The event was hosted in eight tipis (one for each of the CUAI Domain groups) with CUAI Domain and Committee members filling the traditional roles of Host, Co-host and Recorder and an Elder to provide direction prior to and during each circle. Each position played a specific role within the context of the event and the Elders assisted participants in meeting the goals of the circle process. Participation in each circle was open to CUAI's general membership and any interested community participants.

Each tipi hosted two rounds of sharing circles. During the first round each participant presented an issue relevant to the Domain they represented (i.e. Education, Employment, Health, Housing, etc). Each issue was recorded and participants then identified the top three issues. In the second round each participant presented solutions to these issues. The group then identified the top three solutions (or common themes). The issues and solutions identified were recorded to inform and direct future Domain group work. It should be noted that some Domains were not able to clearly identify three top issues or solutions. In accordance with traditional protocols each Domain circle was opened and closed with statements and prayer from an Elder.

Education Domain

Members of the Education Domain represent urban Aboriginal educational interests from early childhood through adult learning. The mission of the Domain is to

“create, support and advocate for positive change to urban Aboriginal education by striving to provide awareness and a sense of belonging, as well as identifying opportunities to effect change in environmental and policy systems”.

In 2003, interested community members and organizations participated in two strategic planning sessions. One used a traditional approach and the other a more contemporary method. The session outcomes created a foundation for the development of the Education Domain. The Education Domain has since hosted a variety of forums, lectures, open houses and events in the area of education which has led to a better understanding of services, resources and networking for the education sector.

Top three issues:

1. Need strategies to improve student attendance at school (i.e. Cultural relevance of curriculum for Aboriginal students, increase sense of belonging within sector/education community, decrease literacy gap, funding issues can impact attendance, redefine “success” at school).
2. Better communication about how to utilize/support existing resources and funding opportunities while ensuring access to education (including reserve to city transitions).
3. More education/awareness that goes beyond drumming/dancing (i.e. Elder access, storytelling, mentors, etc) in schools and that is made available across the education system spectrum (Kindergarten through to post secondary).

Top three solutions:

1. Address barriers to education access by looking at areas such as: increasing literacy levels, jurisdictional issues/barriers, alternate ways of providing education, increasing awareness of funding (opportunities and cost sharing), extracurricular activities, and improving opportunities for partnerships.
2. Cultural interpretation - move beyond awareness. Support students in their world view by honoring and valuing Aboriginal worldview within current school system.
3. Preserve language, Aboriginal stories and cultural interpretations as these are vital. Increase curriculum that incorporates different worldview.

Employment Domain

The CUAJ Employment Domain's mission is

"to provide a venue to address issues that Aboriginal people face in seeking and maintaining employment and to develop solutions with well-defined outcomes."

With a large supportive membership, the Employment Domain has hosted networking events, learning opportunities, forums, panel presentations and cross cultural sessions for the community. Previous themes include: hiring and retention, employer's best practices, the Medicine Wheel, wellness in the workplace, employment gaps and Calgary area Aboriginal initiatives, programs and services.

Top three issues

1. Lack of partnerships and communication between employers, job seekers and employment agencies.
2. Retention issues.
3. Pre-employment job assistance.

Top three solutions

1. Target employers to help inform, engage, and develop job shadowing/mentorship programs within their companies for Aboriginal employees.
2. Increase program/partnerships that address life enhancement and workforce challenges, which will improve retention for Aboriginal employees.
3. Better communicate existing networking opportunities and create new opportunities where gaps exist.



Funders Domain

The Funders Domain is not structured like the other CUIAI Domains. The Domain's membership is comprised of funders with an interest in supporting Aboriginal programming, and provides a venue for them to address funding related issues and share information. Formed in November 1999, the mission of the Funders' Domain is

"to promote community support and awareness of resource opportunities and barriers as they relate to programs and services for Aboriginal people".

In addition to hosting regular meetings for the Domain membership, the Domain works towards utilizing opportunities to create public awareness regarding funding processes and opportunities.

Top three issues:

1. Long term issues need increased support by funders (i.e. working more with the other CUIAI Domain groups).
2. Increase capacity at all levels (i.e. within the funders network, within organizations, and within the Aboriginal community)
3. Streamline processes

Top four solutions:

1. Have CUIAI coordinate a meeting for the Funders Domain to discuss the long term issues affecting Aboriginal projects and discuss possible solutions.
2. Have current Funders Domain members make intentional efforts to expand awareness of the CUIAI Collaborative Granting Process (CGP) within their networks.
3. Have CUIAI continue to offer community engagement and learning opportunities through the Domains which will allow for better cross cultural understanding.
4. Have CUIAI create an annual process or opportunity to learn about the priorities of all the CUIAI Domains.



Health Domain

The current Health Domain structure was formed in 2005. Prior to that, CUAJ staff met with the former Calgary Health Region's Aboriginal Health Council and participated as observers in their committee meetings.

The mission of the Health Domain is:

"community coming together in the spirit of trust and respect to improve health by sharing knowledge and influencing change in self, community and policy".

The Health Domain has hosted open houses, networking forums and learning sessions. Collaborations with the Canadian Mental Health Association Street Outreach and Stabilization team (SOS), the Calgary Homeless Foundation and Elder Tom Crane Bear facilitated a 2009 Aboriginal Homeless Awareness presentation. A workshop on healing practices from a Blackfoot perspective was well attended. The session had over thirty health professionals gain insight from Elsie Bastien (Director of Aboriginal Health, Alberta Mental Health Board) and Elder Leonard Bastien. Finally, the Domain partnered with the Canadian Diabetes Association to offer an Aboriginal focused "Living well with Diabetes" workshop.

Top three issues:

1. There is a need to increase health education opportunities to ensure appropriate information is accessible to healthcare workers (i.e. STI's, HIV/AIDS, suicide prevention, sexual health, mental health and addictions).
2. There is a need for more investment in long term supports for youth (including cultural, spiritual, mental health, addiction prevention and treatment, health promotion, sexual education, etc).
3. There is a need to increase awareness in the Aboriginal community of existing health services and programs.

Top three solutions:

1. Create more opportunities for Aboriginal community approaches to health and wellness strategies (i.e. traditional ways of wellness).
2. Create more opportunities for Aboriginal health programs and health workers to come together to discuss longer term strategies and how to support existing and successful programs (i.e. Tipi of Courage, Awo-Taan, Aboriginal Youth Career and Employment Services (AYCES), Elbow River Healing Lodge).
3. Increase awareness of the Aboriginal health centre in Calgary.

Housing Domain

During their formative process CUII conducted a local scan of pre-existing committees to avoid unnecessary duplication of services. The Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (ASCHH) was in existence, and was approached in 2003 to collaborate with CUII to act in the capacity of Housing Domain.

The Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness operational mission statement is

“to seek housing solutions for Aboriginal peoples in Calgary through research, information sharing, outreach, and capacity building initiatives”. (ASCHH, Strategic Plan 2009).

Top three issues:

1. There are multiple, systemic, complex and cultural barriers that exist for Aboriginal people in the securing or retaining of housing and accommodations (i.e. access to properties, registration/application processes and finances – damage deposit, credit checks, high rental costs, etc).
2. There is a need to create more opportunities for Aboriginal people to voice housing related concerns at various systems levels.
3. There is a need to determine how to get equitable and culturally appropriate participation in the implementation of the Province of Alberta’s and the City of Calgary’s ten year plan on homelessness.

Top three solutions:

1. Determine the options around the development of an urban Aboriginal representative seat with housing urban affairs and the Calgary Housing Foundation (CHF) secretariat.
2. Create more opportunities for Aboriginal housing needs and issues to be highlighted in the greater community.
3. Create a resource to better prepare Aboriginal people in their transition to urban Aboriginal citizens in the city of Calgary (i.e. develop website or chat room where people can access the information).

Human Rights Domain

The Human Rights Domain was established in 2005. Their mission is to:

“advocate for the acknowledgement, inclusion and protection of the human rights of Aboriginal peoples of Calgary; respecting their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being”.

The purpose of the CUI Human Rights Domain is to advocate, promote, and build support, understanding and empowerment of urban Aboriginal Peoples within Calgary, with regards to Human Rights issues.

The Human Rights Domain has hosted open houses, learning sessions and education forums for the Aboriginal population to learn about existing resources and complaint processes.

Top three issues:

1. Systemic Racism (i.e. Institutional: Hospital, Schools, et.al.).
2. A general lack of knowledge and understanding with regards to the Aboriginal community at various levels (i.e. youth, seniors, Institutional organizations, etc).
3. Existing Legislation and the impacts they have on the Aboriginal population (Indian Act, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Individual/Collective rights, Exploitation)

Top two solutions:

1. Increase opportunities for individual and community education and awareness opportunities that focus on understanding the Aboriginal community.
2. Increase opportunities to work with various levels of governance and/or community/corporate decision makers to implement change in policy and/or documentation.



Justice Domain

Developed in 2004 the Justice Domain is comprised of a group of committed individuals representing various sectors within the Justice sector and the Calgary Aboriginal community. Their vision statement is

“to establish safer communities for Calgary’s Aboriginal population through reducing the percentage of Aboriginal people in the justice system, developing a better understanding and trust within the system, and by making sentencing practices more culturally sensitive”.

The Justice Domain has hosted a variety of forums, education sessions and events in the area of Justice which has lead to a better understanding of services, resources and networking for the Justice sector.

Top three issues (prioritized)

1. There is a general lack of understanding in the greater community about traditional ‘Aboriginal’ models of justice; particularly the similarities to and contrasts with established ‘Western-European’ model of justice.
2. There is a need to enhance awareness of and/or expand the scope of culturally appropriate models of justice (particularly ones that involve other sectors).
3. There is a need to develop and/or support existing early intervention/education models representative of Aboriginal peoples (i.e. gang awareness, addictions, family violence, and urban/rural transitional issues).

Top three solutions

1. Create opportunities for program delivery organizations, levels of government and community to come together to collaborate on developing models that incorporate both worldviews.
2. Create more opportunities for the Justice Domain to partner and collaborate with the other CUAJ Domains and applicable stakeholders.
3. Provide more opportunities for the Aboriginal community to learn about justice programs and services.



Services Domain

The Aboriginal Community Coordinating Council (ACCC) was approached by CUII representatives to assist in the development of a Services Domain in 2008. With their agreement and support, a strategic planning session was hosted in 2004 and the Services Domain structure was developed. Their mission:

“the CUII Services Domain is accountable to provide opportunities for the Aboriginal community and identified stakeholders, and to work in collaboration to address the needs of Aboriginal people in Calgary. We will advocate and communicate on behalf of the Aboriginal community as required”.

The Services Domain has hosted a variety of learning opportunities for the community, open houses and information sessions.

Top three issues:

1. Lack of knowledge on how to access basic services.
2. Lack of communication between all service providers.
3. The Aboriginal population is over represented in all facets of social services.

Top four solutions:

1. Create an opportunity for the ‘one stop’ service idea to be discussed by the community and service agencies.
2. Create more opportunities to connect Leaders, Executive Directors and Politicians to discuss issues affecting the urban Aboriginal population.
3. Have CUII continue to facilitate the Services Domain to assist with linking services/agencies together on a monthly/quarterly basis.
4. Find ways to encourage Political participation at all levels of the service sector.



Acknowledgements

The Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative (CUAI) thanks all the volunteers who helped make our June 10th, 2010 *CUAI Renewal and Celebration* a great success. Their time, commitment, and personal contributions helped ensure a successful day. We also thank all current and past Domain members, Committee members, and supporters for their support, participation and dedication who filled the last ten years with various learning opportunities, growth, and forward movement.

CUAI thanks Dr. Chief Reg Crowshoe and Maria Crowshoe for their continued support of the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative. The friendship, guidance and wisdom they have provided over the past ten years has been invaluable and we and welcome our continued opportunities to work together.

Finally, we thank the funders who helped make this day possible. Their support and financial contributions assisted in offering a day filled with learning, networking and future planning for the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative and their eight domains: Education, Employment, Health, Funders, Housing, Human Rights, Justice, and Services.

We look forward to the next ten years and we anticipate that the findings in this report will not only assist the work of the eight CUAI Domains, but others service providers, supporters and community members in their work with the urban Aboriginal population of Calgary.

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