



National Association
of Friendship Centres
Association nationale
des centres d'amitié

HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Friendship Centres Bridge Urban Aboriginal Youth to Employment

Submission to the study on Youth Employment in Canada

April 2014

National Association of Friendship Centres

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) represents the 119 urban based Aboriginal Friendship Centres across Canada and 7 Provincial and Territorial Associations (PTAs) that make up the Friendship Centre Movement. The NAFC's mandate is to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society; and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness. The NAFC is governed by both a volunteer Executive Committee and a volunteer Board of Directors, both of which include Aboriginal Youth membership. The NAFC is a long-standing national Aboriginal organization with demonstrated reach across Canada, from coast to coast to coast, serving First Nations, Inuit and Métis, including Aboriginal peoples living in urban, rural and northern communities, regardless of nationhood, status or Band affiliation. Friendship Centres, the Provincial and Territorial Associations and the NAFC were created by the will and want of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Friendship Centres are Canada's Original urban Aboriginal Strategy

The Friendship Centre network is Canada's most significant off-reserve Aboriginal service delivery infrastructure, with over 60 years of experience working directly with Canada's urban Aboriginal peoples. Friendship Centres began being established in the 1950s as the growing number of Aboriginal peoples moved from their home communities to seek opportunities in Canada's cities. With 2.3 million client points of contact nationwide annually, the 119 Friendship Centres delivered over 1,490 programs and services to approximately 700,000 urban Aboriginal people in 2011/2012, regardless of the client's nationhood, status or Band affiliation. Friendship Centres provide a unified program and national reporting structure through a well-established, well-governed and accountable network that has over 18 years of experience successfully delivering and reporting on nationally managed programs like the Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth and the Young Canada Works program for the Government of Canada. Friendship Centres have achieved lasting client successes using a holistic, culturally-based approach, supporting individual development through a suite of wraparound services, including, for example, on-site child care in Val d'Or, addictions counselling in Yellowknife and on-campus youth mentorship support at Grande Prairie Friendship Centre's regional college location.

Youth-Identified Employment Initiatives

The NAFC's National Aboriginal Youth Council shared their views with the NAFC in 2012 and 2013 on the challenges they see urban Aboriginal youth face in gaining work skills, training, education and work experience, and how Friendship Centres can help meet these needs. A summary of youth-identified recommended employment initiatives includes:

- Cultural programming;
- Resume writing, job readiness, job search, self-confidence development, financial management/literacy, youth leadership and life skills workshops, as well as job shadowing and mentorship;
- Post-secondary education and training access and completion supports, including tours led by Aboriginal mentors, scholarships, bursaries and loans, and application guidance;
- Child care and traditional parenting programs, with guidance from Elders;
- Criminal record check and pardon support and career options for youth with records;
- Diversion programs for youth involved in the justice system;
- Transportation assistance, ranging from bus passes within the local community to long-distance travel or commute to larger communities or cities for post-secondary education;
- Housing supports and linkages with referral agencies for food and other living supports;
- Counselling and addictions workshops and supports.

Friendship Centres Offer Opportunities for Meaningful Youth Employment

Friendship Centres not only understand the multiple barriers that urban Aboriginal youth confront in taking part in the labour market, but they have demonstrated success in helping youth overcome these seemingly insurmountable barriers.

With 122,734 youth client points of contact nationwide in 2012/2013, the 119 Friendship Centres in cities and towns across Canada delivered \$23 million worth of youth programming that year on a status blind basis. Further, 122 Aboriginal youth are directly involved in driving the Friendship Centre Movement, either as staff or serving on volunteer boards of directors, fulfilling meaningful roles from strategic planning and program design, to administration and service delivery.

The Friendship Centre Movement provided internships and jobs for 215 students in 82 Friendship Centres/PTAs in 2012 alone through the Young Canada Works program. Through these summer placements at Friendship Centres, youth gain valuable experience in program administration and the design and delivery of programming, particularly for children and youth.

Friendship Centres served over 30,000 youth through the Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth program in 2011/2012 alone, helping not only First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth but also non-Aboriginal youth gain valuable skills to participate in the economy.

The provincially-funded Partners for Careers program delivered through 10 Friendship Centres across Manitoba helped 542 clients return to employment in 2012-2013, and helped an additional 795 youth clients develop the skills, tools and resiliency needed for taking part in the labour market.

The Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre has consistently achieved an 85% success rate with their provincially funded Aboriginal Youth in Motion program. Since 2008, nearly 85% of all past participants were either still employed or successfully continuing follow-up employability actions three months after the program. Val d'Or credits this success to their whole-person, holistic approach with each and every client.

Since opening their doors in April 2011, the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre's Youth Employment Centre (YEC) in Whitehorse has assisted 162 youth who accessed their services more than 520 times. On average, the YEC engages 13 new clients and is accessed 42 times each month.

Friendship Centres Provide Educational Supports Crucial for Youth Employment

The innovative After School Tutoring Program at the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre in Whitehorse has helped 25 First Nations youth and youth with learning differences graduate high school since 2008.

The Grande Prairie Friendship Centre in Alberta is the only Friendship Centre in Canada co-located on a college campus, the Grande Prairie Regional College, while the Friendship Centre in Lac La Biche is working with Portage College to support Aboriginal youth enrollment and retention.

The Dauphin Friendship Centre in Manitoba offers both a youth skills development program as well as an Adult Education Centre, both of which cover all nine of the essential skills. Further, Dauphin has partnered with Workplace Education Manitoba to use the Province's Entry to Work in the North training course to ensure youth participants are ready for work by the end of the program. Continued funding depends on a proven 70% success rate of youth job outcomes at two interval points after program completion.

In partnership with the Boys and Girls Club and the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability in 2013/14 the NAFC lead eight after school pilot projects in Friendship Centres and B&G clubs across Canada for the Canadian Active After School Partnership (CAASP). The NAFC is the only Aboriginal organization involved in this partnership, which also includes Physical and Health Education Canada, the YMCA, Active Healthy Kids Canada and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sports (CAAWS).

The NAFC was also the only national Aboriginal organization to receive funding from Public Safety Canada to develop a strategy focused on human trafficking in Canada with a focus on the vulnerability of Aboriginal youth.

Friendship Centres continue to be strong partners with the Public Health Agency of Canada in the delivery of its Aboriginal Head Start program. Since AHS's inception in 1995 Friendship Centres have been long standing service delivery sites for AHS programming for young children.

Social Innovation through Friendship Centres Support Youth Employment

British Columbia is leading the charge in innovation across a number of fronts, from developing a social financing model in partnership with Vancity Credit Union to divert children from foster care through Elder support, to gathering up to 2,000 youth from across the country for an annual leadership conference, called Gathering Our Voices (GOV).

Each year, GOV brings youth together to network and learn new techniques and skills in workshops, share knowledge through cultural activities, witness performances by talented individuals, explore career and education possibilities and participate in sports and recreational activities. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) and provincial officials attended GOV 2014 held just last month in Vancouver. This conference allows for direct communication with youth about their needs, priorities, and recommendations for improving the lives of Canada's urban Aboriginal youth.

Major Urban Aboriginal Strategy Funding Realignment

Young Canada Works, along with the Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth (CCAY), have been streamlined under the recent Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) funding realignment announced by AANDC. Through this realignment the NAFC now has increased responsibility to deliver \$43 million worth of federal urban Aboriginal programming and services out of the total of \$50.8 million under this new UAS. This realigned UAS helps Friendship Centres to increase youth services, and helps to expand partnerships that support increased participation of urban Aboriginal youth in Canada's economy.

Friendship Centres Connect Urban Aboriginal People to the Labour Market

Friendship Centres helped over 28,000 urban and off-reserve Aboriginal people take part in the labour market in 2012/2013. Friendship Centres achieved these results with just under \$3M in provincial funding and only \$4.9M in federal funding, which includes Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC's) Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) and 3rd party agreements with Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) agreement holders.

Friendship Centre Labour Market Strategy

The NAFC, by invitation and dialogue with Employment and Social Development Canada, has developed a Friendship Centre Labour Market Strategy that proposes a national enhancement to urban Aboriginal labour market delivery. As submitted to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), this proposal draws on the over 60 years' experience that Friendship Centres have acting as brokers for Canada's urban Aboriginal peoples and youth. As brokers, Friendship Centres successfully identify a pool of urban Aboriginal labour and connect them with the right education and training to help guide urban Aboriginal peoples and youth to the right jobs. This strategy also addresses identified labour market programming gaps, as 80% of Friendship Centres surveyed in 2011 noted that there was no improvement in urban Aboriginal youth labour market programming under the revised federal Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy.

To address this identified gap in urban Aboriginal youth labour market programming, we envision a total of 85 Friendship Centres across Canada delivering \$50.3M in labour market programming per year (inclusive of administration costs). This will be achieved through a proposed total five year federal contribution of \$230M as submitted to ESDC.

A phased approach of 30 Friendship Centres across Canada in Year One, 65 Friendship Centres by Year Two and 85 Friendship Centres by Year Three would ensure adequate time and support for capacity development and any systems, reporting structure and implementation necessary.

This proposed broker model closely matches the NAFC's delivery model of AANDC's recently realigned new Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

NAFC Recommendation #1: That a national youth employment strategy include provisions for increased urban Aboriginal youth employment programming delivery through the established national network of Friendship Centres and be based on the Friendship Centre Movement's history of success.

NAFC Recommendation #2: That a national youth employment strategy include provisions for supporting partnership development with all levels of government and employers, provisions for wrap-around services, literacy and essential skills training and social innovation using the proven longevity of progressive achievements of the existing Friendship Centre network infrastructure.