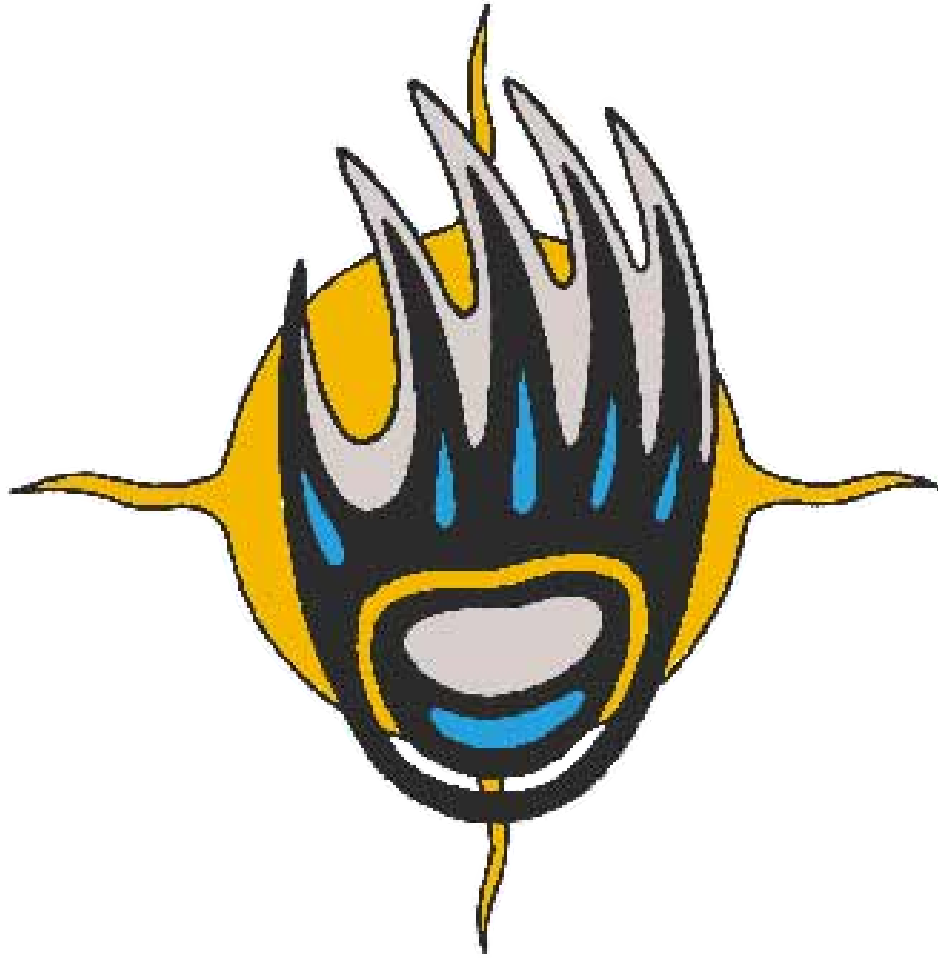


PIHTÂKOSIWIN



VOICE, BEING HEARD

**URBAN YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT
2000**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Section	
1 Barriers to Employment and Training	9
1.1 Lack of Financial Resources	9
1.2 Limited Knowledge of Information Resources	11
2 Retention and Attrition	13
2.1 Educational Goals versus Actual Achievements	15
3 Program Structure	17
3.1 Program Criteria, Recruitment and Assessment	17
3.2 Class Size, Hours, Attendance and Location	19
4 Program Content	20
4.1 Program Curriculum and Format	20
4.2 Work Experience/Placement Component	23
4.3 Inter-Personal and Communication Skills Development	24
4.4 Cultural Component	25
4.5 Cultural Values, Self-Esteem and Identity	26
4.6 Cultural Participation	30
5 Program Staff Credentials	30
5.1 First Nations Staff as Role Models and Mentors	32
6 Post-Program Support Services	32
7 Future Planning for Youth	33
Conclusion	34
Appendix A: Geographic Profile	36
Appendix B: Respondent Demographic Profile	36
Appendix C: Methodology and Data Analysis	37
Appendix D: Summary of Youth Recommendations	38
Bibliography	43

Many people together contributed hundreds of hours in putting together this study. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge them here and extend our appreciation for their dedication and commitment in seeing this project through to completion

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Our First Nations Youth

We would like to acknowledge you for your valuable contribution to this study. We could not have done it without you!

Youth Specialist, Clayton Kootenay

Clayton initiated this Urban First Nations Youth Needs Assessment. Through his years of experience in labour market programming specifically for youth, he recognized the need for innovative approaches in developing effective programs. Clayton, we thank you for proposing this much-needed and valuable project!

The Research Team

Research Coordinator, Marilyn Adsit

Our thanks to Marilyn, who oversaw the entire project. She was responsible for coordination and analysis of all survey data.

Research Technician, Darryl McKay

Darryl assisted with information compilation. Your efforts are appreciated!

Research Technician, Brandi Badger

Brandi also assisted with information compilation, analysis and data entry. Thank you for your valued contribution!

Logo Designer, Chris Chambaud

Chris, thank you for your excellent workmanship in providing the wonderful spiritual logo for this project!

Service Providers: Edmonton Business Community

Thank you to those agencies who took the time to provide information and assist in recruiting participants for the survey and the workshops.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Oteenow Employment and Training Society** is a First Nations authority in the city of Edmonton, mandated to provide employment and training opportunities for First Nations clientele. Under Board governance, the society is committed to working in partnership with business and industry; all levels of government; inter-agencies; Aboriginal organizations; and the private sector in the design, development and delivery of programs and services that meet employment and training requirements of their client base. The Board meets annually to develop a strategic plan, targeting those segments of the First Nations community most in need of employment and training services. The First Nations youth is one such group. Demographic studies indicate that this cohort is increasing at a dramatic rate and this trend is projected to continue for at least the next ten years. This indicates an urgent need to address their employment and training requirements now, so they will be economically self-sufficient in the coming years.

Freehorse **Family Wellness Society** is a not-for-profit organization that has a mandate to provide post-secondary educational funding services to the Aboriginal community and general services to various agencies. Currently, Freehorse provides post-secondary funding to First Nations members who have status under Bill C-31 in 19 Alberta bands and for Inuit and NWT students residing in Alberta. In addition, Freehorse provides post-secondary funding to all members of the Michel General List and Heart Lake. Further services include research studies, such as this, contracted services for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the First Nations community in general. Freehorse, like Oteenow, acknowledges that there is a pressing need to focus on the present and future employment and educational needs of our youth.

The Oteenow Employment and Training Society has had the opportunity to work in partnership with Freehorse Family Wellness Society in conducting this youth needs assessment within the community. Both organizations recognized the importance of gathering key information on the types of programs currently available for youth and identifying gaps in programming. This initiative created an opportunity to learn from our youth, about what does and does not meet their needs.

This partnership arrangement between Oteenow and Freehorse was a strategy born out of a need to maximize resources in assessing the needs of our youth. The project was jointly developed, with a thorough review of methodology prior to its undertaking. Oteenow and Freehorse anticipated that this study would prove an invaluable resource for both organizations for

Freehorse, like Oteenow, acknowledges that there is a pressing need to focus on the present and future employment and educational needs of our youth.



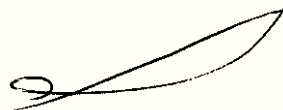
use in both short and long-term program planning. The final product has indeed revealed a wealth of information that Oteenow, Freehorse and other service providers can utilize in annual planning cycles. Our youth provided specific information as to what did and did not serve them well in existing programs. Having this feedback will ensure that all future youth program development will integrate those key components which our youth have identified as important to their training and employment goals. It will also factor out those aspects which our youth say are not serving their needs.

We appreciate the excellent feedback from these young adults in terms of program content, structure and basic principles. This will form a new standard of program excellence in design, development and delivery. As responsible service providers, it is our duty to take into account the specific needs of our clients. Therefore, by engaging our youth in this assessment, we have ensured their input in realistic program development. We have also increased opportunities for long-term success—for the future of our youth and for our respective organizations, as program planners. We thank these young adults for their time, effort and input in providing this information to the researchers. Their insightful feedback will have a positive impact in future programs designed to meet their employment and training needs.


This document is a testament to the work of the researchers who demonstrated commitment, dedication and professionalism in the interests of our youth. Your effort, diligence and success with this project is acknowledged and appreciated by the Oteenow Employment and Training Society and Freehorse Family Wellness Society.

This study also demonstrates the willingness and ability of First Nations organizations to work together proactively in consulting with our communities. We are pleased and honoured to have been able to work with all the participants on the Urban First Nations Youth Needs Assessment, to ensure our youth have direct input into their own labour market programs.

We are confident that this document will provide you with new insight relevant to your needs, whether you are a funding agency, service provider, government body or a First Nations youth.



*Henry Arcand,
Board of Directors Chairman
Oteenow Employment and
Training Society*



*Clifford Freeman,
Board of Directors President
Freehorse Family Wellness Society*



INTRODUCTION

The Oteenow Employment and Training Society in partnership with Freehorse Family Wellness Society identified the necessity of this research and, more specifically, the need to present our youth with the opportunity to provide feedback on existing programs and services. The education and training mandates of the respective organizations complement and balance one another in jointly identifying specific topics and issues of concern, which will be the focal point of this study.

The goal of this needs assessment was to consult with the youth in order to identify gaps in labour market programming and subsequently propose a set of recommendations for consideration in any future planning in relation to youth labour market programs and services. The study comprises four main objectives that include:

- ♦ providing youth with a forum to provide feedback;
- ♦ identifying current, effective youth programs;
- ♦ building a priority list to assist in future planning; and
- ♦ establishing a current and concise body of information.

The *Urban First Nations Youth Needs Assessment* comprises a set of recommendations derived from the youth consultations. This process allowed for direct insight and input from these young adults. It is anticipated that implementation of their recommendations will lead to their greater participation and success in both their educational endeavours and ultimately, within the labour market.

This report is based on both quantitative and qualitative research methodology, which examined the education, training, labour market barriers and future aspirations of Edmonton First Nation youth, between the ages of 14 and 24 years of age.

ABORIGINAL YOUTH TODAY

Before embarking on this project, we completed a literature review to learn if any other studies had previously been undertaken. We discovered that the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)* had already completed extensive research. We acknowledge this body of work, which proved a valuable resource in our own research.

It is anticipated that implementation of their recommendations will lead to their greater participation and success in both their educational endeavours and ultimately, within the labour market.

Current research suggests that Aboriginal youth are distinct from mainstream youth in Canada. Academics, researchers, politicians and this group themselves maintain that they are different from non-Aboriginal youth, and also different in various ways from other segments of their own communities. The literature suggests that Aboriginal youth face different obstacles and barriers, have distinctive challenges and hold unique goals and values. According to the *RCAP* report:

Aboriginal youth today straddle two worlds. The non-Aboriginal world has become a fast-paced, competitive, changing environment in whichever higher levels of education and new skills are required to survive. These are powerful cultural forces that necessitate a secure, solid identity to balance the conflicting messages and demands created where the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds meet.

Further, our youth need to find a balance between the two conflicting worlds. The high rates of attrition, pregnancy and substance abuse indicate that many in this group have not found that balance (*ibid*).

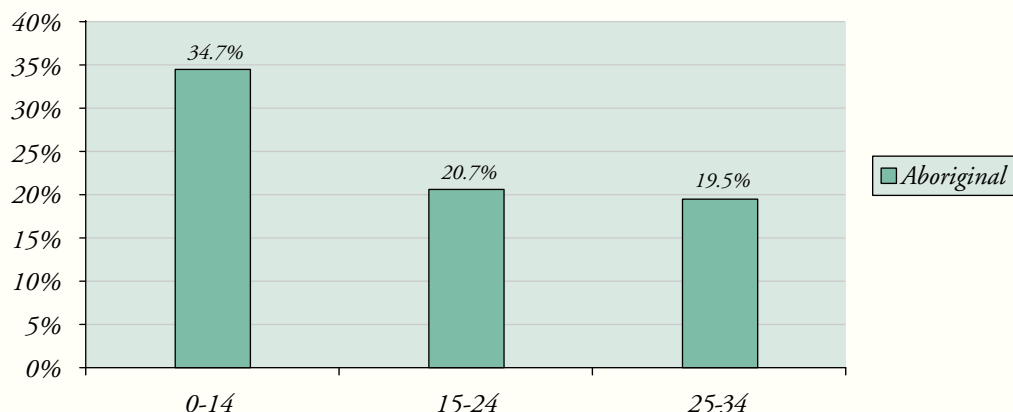
Aboriginal youth in general are in varying stages of precarious development whereby the search for meaning in daily lives is important for all youth. For Native youth however, this is not only very important, but also very problematic. They must deal with a multitude of personal obstacles and social problems that directly relate to instability in their daily lives. This generation is suffering the consequences of cultural genocide, racism and poverty. They are also experiencing the effects of community disintegration, loss of culture and alienation (*ibid*).

These youth feel the pressures of being Aboriginal living in the city. They must not only defend who they are to those around them, but must deal with the alienation and loss of identities while in urban settings. It should also be acknowledged that they face an even greater challenge living in an urban setting rather than a rural on-reserve setting as city life is a fast paced, competitive environment where a high level of education is required and which most aboriginal youth lack (*ibid*).

Many have difficulty attending educational institutes and planning for their futures. Those youth who decide to leave school find an even greater difficulty in finding employment due to fewer options because of their lower level of education.

Youth often do not have the family supports necessary and integral to achieving success in their daily lives. This leads to a lack of motivation and purpose, as they receive no encouragement and direction for their futures.

Figure 1: Edmonton Population by Age Group, 1996 (Statistics Canada)



Despite these obstacles and challenges, these youth do have some semblance of goals. They value hard work and the benefits of an education and hope that they will be able to acquire the tools required for success. Generally, they do not view their Aboriginal heritage as an obstacle but as integral to their identities. They realize this is what makes them unique. They want others to view their Native culture with the same measure of respect (*ibid*).

The 1996 Canadian Census indicates that approximately 123, 000 Aboriginal people live in Alberta and that Aboriginal people comprise 4% of Edmonton's population. The urban Aboriginal population in Edmonton is expected to grow approximately 40% by the year 2006. As *figure 1* above shows, Aboriginal youth populations in Edmonton are significantly higher than the general city aboriginal population, and this trend is expected to continue. This has great significance in terms of both current and anticipated social needs of this growing population of youth. Service providers need to take heed as well in preparing labour market programs to meet this demand.

The urban Aboriginal population in Edmonton is expected to grow approximately 40% by the year 2006.

Several main recommendations from the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* are as follows:

- ♦ **Aboriginal governments and organizations accord higher priority to youth programming, particularly leadership development, sport and recreation.**
- ♦ **Municipal, provincial, territorial and federal governments support, fund and actively provide services and programs for urban Aboriginal youth.**
- ♦ **Aboriginal youth be closely involved in the design, development and delivery of youth services.**

A previous youth needs study had been undertaken by the *Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations* in 1996 to assess the employment and training needs of the youth. However, that study also focused on broader issues. Today, there is a demand for more current research specific to the employment and training needs of today's urban youth. While it is not intended to be an exhaustive effort, this youth needs assessment is more current, in-depth and relevant to our youth in today's world of employment and training.

In summary, current research, literature and youth themselves indicate that Aboriginal youth need creative and innovative programs and services to address their cultural needs. Their circumstances and position in society demonstrate that they are often overlooked due to the fact that they are both young and Aboriginal (Alfred 3). What is paramount, however, is that these youth demonstrate an intense desire to be a part of the community in which they live and a willingness to make a positive contribution to their own Aboriginal community and society in general.



1. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

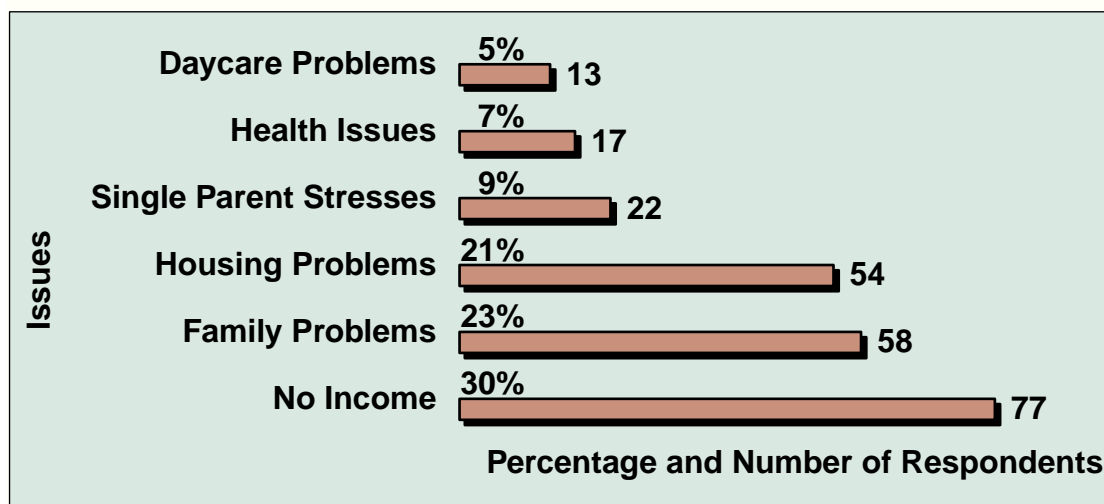
Participants were asked to specify what barriers prevented them from achieving their employment and training goals. The following section discusses this topic according to their responses. Talking circles provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss possible solutions.

1.1 Lack of Financial Resources

A comparison of answers from questions posed to participants demonstrates that lack of money is a major issue that affects personal stability (see figure 2).

This financial lack is also a main reason cited for withdrawing from a program or preventing their participation. These responses indicate that many do not have the basic necessities of life. There is an urgent need to balance their learning with the basic necessities such as food, clothing, housing, transportation and perhaps childcare, if needed, to allow youth to participate in training programs.

Figure 2: Issues that Affect Personal Stability



Respondents indicate that inadequate program living allowances limits their options and opportunities.

More specifically, program funding itself does not allow for meeting these basic needs, nor does it take into account other expenses such as lunches, counselling services and recreation. Respondents indicate that inadequate program living allowances limits their options and opportunities. For example, many must accept sub-standard housing, and the majority of any funding dollars must be allocated to these housing expenses and for basic necessities. They often do not have the funds for recreational opportunities and this leads to further awareness of their precarious financial and social situations in comparison to mainstream youth.

Having adequate and additional resources would enhance their abilities to attend and complete education and training programs. They suggest providing additional resources as incentives and rewards in programs. It should be noted that the youth are not requesting “handouts.” They express belief in the concept of earning that which they receive. Their requests for resources emanate from the fact that living allowances are too minimal to cover their actual living expenses. These hardships can be attributed to training allowance rates being under par with the actual cost of living. Respondents suggest program incentives to help offset these costs.

1.1 Recommendations:

- 1 Provide adequate program living allowances to allow participants to meet the basic cost of living expenses in addition to having enough resources to participate in recreational pursuits, buy lunches and access counselling services.
- 2 Provide accessible information on career opportunities, services and resources specific to youth, low-cost housing, and educational tools and resources.
- 3 Provide culturally appropriate and affordable childcare services to allow lone parents to focus on their training or employment goals.
- 4 Provide additional resources as rewards and incentives to assist with motivation and to alleviate cost of living expenses.
These incentives may include:
 - ◆ Bus tickets for good attendance
 - ◆ Recreational outings for reaching personal and/or academic goals
 - ◆ Friday night sports for group cooperation
 - ◆ Lunch program
 - ◆ Low cost youth housing similar to campus housing or information on where and how to access affordable housing
 - ◆ Day trips to various organizations
 - ◆ Access to computers and fax machines for job searches

1.2 Limited Knowledge of Information Resources

Another barrier to the success of youth in work and educational pursuits is their limited knowledge of information resources. When queried as to what some of the barriers were to their attending any kind of training program, 58% respond that they either lack information about training, employment or funding opportunities. While the majority of the respondents indicate that they do try to access information from the news media, thirty-two percent report that they rely mainly on friends, family or school for information in these areas.

When asked what type of information or service would be of benefit to them, 52% of the total respondents report that information in the areas of career counselling with respect to training and employment would be of most value to them.

The participants state that, generally speaking, they are unaware of the agencies which offer programs and services specific to them. They discussed the possible development of a youth directory, which would be accessible through the Internet or in book form.

The youth also suggest dedicating one resource person in their community who is not necessarily linked with the programs they attend, but dedicated to helping youth access information to assist with their employment and educational requirements. This liaison service should be accessible throughout the various organizations that may be utilized by the youth. Potential services provided could include help with resume writing; faxing; driving participants to sites with prospects for employment or to scheduled job interviews; employment and career counselling; post-program support services; assistance with location of affordable and appropriate housing; help with setting up bank accounts; and personal counselling services.

52% of the total respondents report that information in the areas of career counselling with respect to training and employment would be of most value to them.



Participants report that for them to respond to program recruitment and advertising, they need information funnelled through mediums specific for them.

1.2 Recommendations:

1 Respondents recommend that both educational and employment initiatives be posted through the following:

- ◆ Internet website for Aboriginal youth services
- ◆ Billboards in places that youth frequent, such as West Edmonton Mall and billiard establishments
- ◆ Newspaper
- ◆ Youth directory in book form and also accessible via internet
- ◆ Career counsellors, youth workers and youth organizations who will have been provided with information on all programs, resources and services available to assist youth

2 Provide resources to develop a youth directory which would be accessible through the internet or in book form.

3 Provide a youth liaison person to assist youth with access to information and support services after training.

2. RETENTION AND ATTRITION

Of Twenty-five percent of the respondents in attendance at the Abbotsfield workshop, 23% agree that while they should be fully committed to their own training interventions, at times they may need to be absent from class for such reasons as working to earn money to pay for rent and transportation; lack of childcare; and family obligations (*see figure 3*). Another reason respondents give for their absenteeism is the need to sometimes attend cultural events. These youth state that programs should be somewhat flexible in terms of attendances to encourage participants to return to class once issues have been resolved.

Participants state that they may sometimes leave a program to obtain full-time employment. Sixty-two percent of respondents surveyed indicate that earning money while learning is highly valued (*see figure 7*). Some youth report that they feel they are in a “catch 22” situation. They want to complete their high school education or other training program but also feel pressured to obtain paid employment. They suggest that programs, which allow them to work while pursuing their educational goals, would not force them to choose one over the other.

Some respondents indicate that they need help dealing with procrastination and staying motivated. They express a need for programs and services to help them deal with both personal and academic issues before they feel the pressure to withdraw from programs. Respondents state that programs offering positive and motivating environments, are conducive to their participation. They also suggest that a peer support system would keep them motivated, focused and help to prevent their involvement in activities that are non-productive. As many youth demonstrate a sense of powerlessness over their own personal lives, they need a supportive atmosphere to help them through personal issues.

These youth demonstrate a keen desire to prove that they can be as successful as others, and would like the opportunity to do so. However, they report that often they feel that “doors are always shut on Native people” or that potential employers look upon Native people with scepticism. Youth want to take larger control over their own lives but need to feel that their needs are being accommodated and that their opinions are valued. They need programs which are flexible enough to account for their, at times, unstable personal lives and which will provide a positive, understanding and encouraging environment where they will be eager to participate.

Respondents state that programs offering positive and motivating environments are conducive to their participation.

Youth want to take larger control over their own lives but need to feel that their needs are being accommodated and that their opinions are valued.

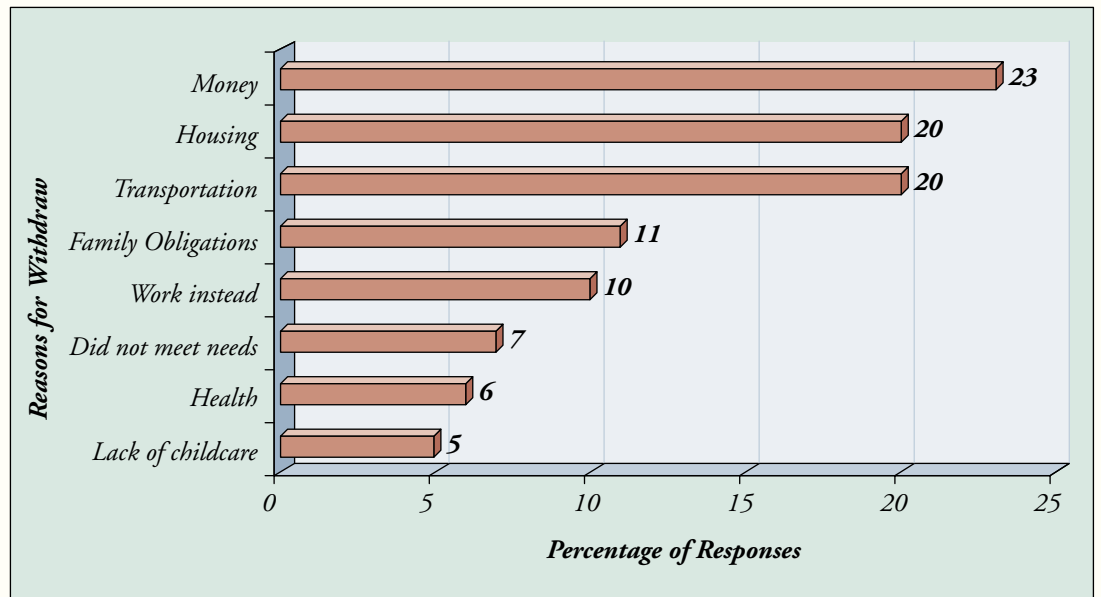


"People want to be encouraged and not feel like outcasts."

(Youth Participant, Boyle Street Workshop)

Some respondents express concern at having been out of the school system for an extended length of time, making their return formidable. Others indicate that to assist with this transition they first attend a pre-careers or alternative-type upgrading program. The youth suggest offering these "bridging" programs to make the transition less difficult and more relevant to their needs.

Figure 3: Reasons for Withdrawing from a Program



2. Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should be flexible enough to accommodate absences for valid reasons such as workforce participation or family obligations.
- 2 Programs should offer positive and motivating environments to encourage attendance and deal with procrastination.
- 3 Programs should offer participants the flexibility and opportunity to earn wages while in training to encourage program retention.
- 4 Programs should offer upgrading courses.
- 5 Provide resources and services to youth while they are attending training programs to encourage them to complete their programs.
- 6 Programs should offer "bridging" type programs to assist participants make the transition back into the learning environment. Programs should incorporate a peer support program for youth to help them remain motivated and focused with their training.

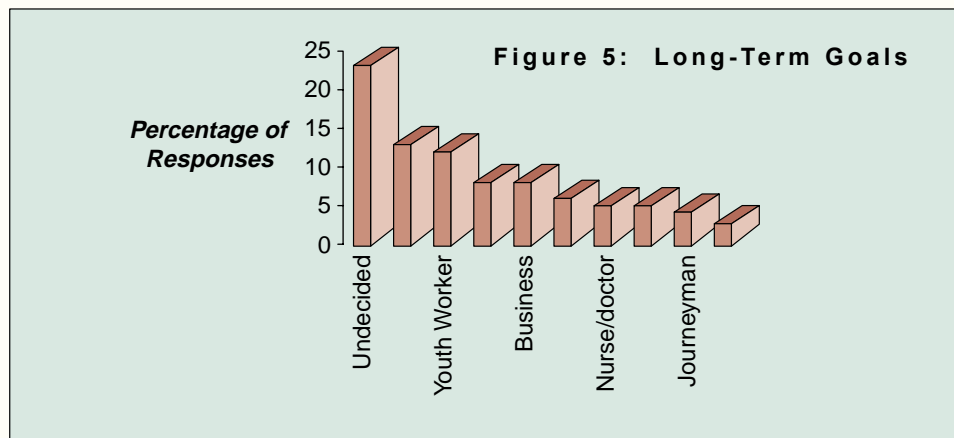
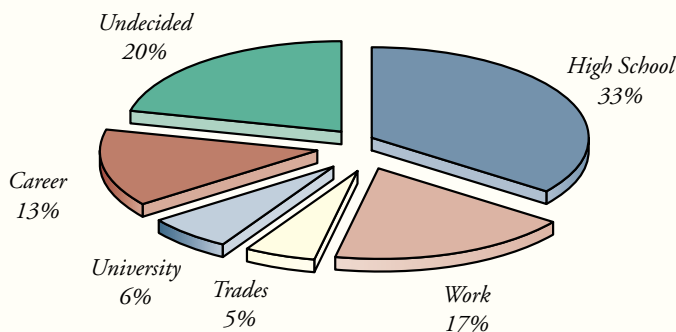
2.1 Educational Goals versus Actual Achievements

Youth agree that it is crucial to obtain an education. As indicated in figure 4, 33% of respondents indicate that completing their high school is of high importance in terms of their short-term goals. However, attainment of this goal is not always possible, as these youth often face barriers that prevent this realization.

In addition to their short-term goals, some youth report that they would also like to pursue a career as part of their long-term goals. They recognize that in order to be competitive in today's labour market, they will require some type of a career with which to support themselves comfortably. These youth exhibit interest in the areas of youth work; law; performing arts; medical; the trades; and teaching (see figure 5). They suggest programs assist them with information gathering by planning visits into the business community to assist with career decision-making and provide guidance on goal setting.

Fifty percent of the "short-term" respondents and 23% of the "long-term" respondents are undecided about their career goals, indicating a need for career counselling to assist them in making this determination and identifying the means to assist in meeting their educational objectives.

Figure 4: Short-Term Goals



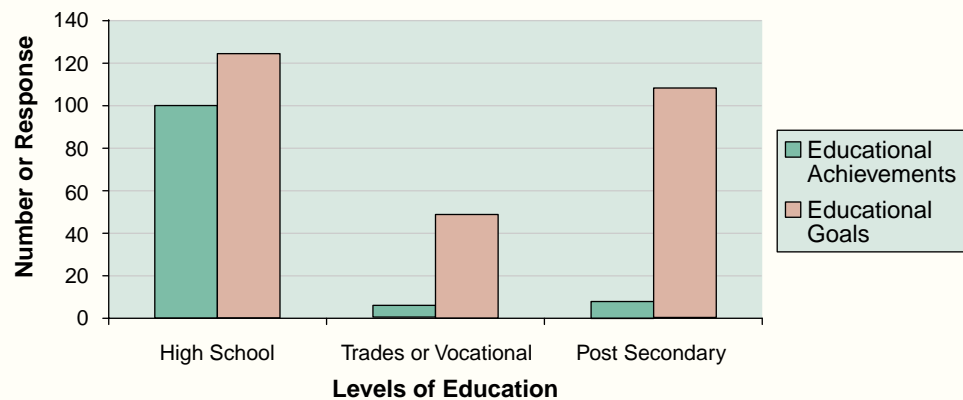
"I really wanted to return to school for a High School diploma, but (First Nations) programs don't offer this."

(Youth participant, Alberta Avenue Workshop)



Respondents indicate they while they aspire to higher education they still need to gain immediate employability skills. Since most within the target group are single and dependent, they feel they must compromise formal schooling for employment. Many found it necessary to quit school in order to work and support themselves but are now realizing that education is valuable and necessary in their work environments. They are eager to participate in training programs that include some type of paid workforce involvement so they do not have to choose employment over education.

Figure 6: Measuring Educational Achievements with Educational Goals



The majority of the respondents report that education is of high importance to them. Yet there is a noticeable gap between levels of education achieved thus far and the levels of education respondents would like to attain, especially within the trades and post-secondary education. In most instances, survey participants have set higher educational goals for themselves than they have been able to achieve. This is in direct correlation to the barriers previously identified by the youth, which they state prevent this attainment.

These young adults express a need for assistance in setting educational goals and following through in achieving them. They state that seeing the larger world and the great potential therein is motivating in terms of seeing opportunities for themselves firsthand.

2.1 Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should offer goal setting as part of its curriculum to assist participants with effective career planning.
- 2 Programs should offer field trips to the business community and cultural centres to assist participants with goal setting.

3. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Respondents were queried as to what they would like to see in terms of program structure. Responses were many and varied and included information relevant to criteria, recruitment and assessment; and class size, hours, attendance and location.

3.1 Program Criteria, Recruitment and Assessment

Forty-nine percent of questionnaire respondents indicate that they have attended a training program in the past and of these, 37% received a certificate upon completion. When asked to comment on the program criteria, recruitment and assessment, the respondents advise that these areas need improvement as many indicate they had trained in programs which were inappropriate for them, and for which they did not receive any academic benefit.

Some respondents state that they often feel compelled to undertake training in order to receive training allowance benefits to offset their dire personal and financial situations. Others said they applied to a program with the belief that any training program would be of some benefit.

Thus, these young adults do not always fully understand what type of training the program encompasses and often register in programs unsuited to their needs, interests or abilities. The youth indicate that having an opportunity to attend an orientation session would assist them in learning about the program criteria and content prior to formal application, so they will have a better understanding of the program.

In addition, they suggest that programs implement a more thorough assessment strategy to screen applicants more appropriately. It is also noteworthy that respondents indicate a need to screen out those unsuitable applicants with less than sincere intentions, during this assessment stage.

Respondents said they feel that they have to be destitute in order to qualify for some of the programs. Many said that some program criteria specifies that only those receiving Supports for Independence (SFI) from Family and Social Services or Employment Insurance (EI) benefits are eligible to apply. Respondents indicate they do not want these training opportunities and the subsequent training allowances to be just an alternative to SFI or EI benefits.

"There are too many programs out there, and I don't know which one will help me."

(Youth Participant, West Edmonton Workshop)



Rather, they stress that they are making a firm commitment to improving themselves through educational development.

Participants suggest that program criteria take into consideration the needs and aspirations of the applicant, through individual assessments, not based on whether or not they are receiving SFI or EI benefits.

The youth state that an advantage to having individual assessments would be the opportunity for them to track their own progress. They suggest that individual evaluations would allow for more empowerment and input by the youth in planning their own employment and career development.

Many also state that it is motivating to trace their own progress so that they are more aware of what they have accomplished and where they need improvement. Ongoing assessments would assist in building ambition and confidence as participants track their own development and see the results of their efforts. Fifty-four percent of respondents state that they would achieve benefit from a personalized skills assessment.

3.1 Recommendations:

- 1 Program criteria should take the goals of applicants into consideration rather than focusing on whether or not they are receiving SFI or EI benefits.
- 2 Programs should provide orientation sessions for potential participants to gather information and decide whether or not the program is suitable for them.
- 3 Programs should include personalized assessments and evaluations to enable youth to monitor their own development.
- 4 Programs should base criteria on individual assessments relative to suitability, interests and abilities as this would help to ensure that only those who are committed to the training would attend.

3.2 Class Size, hours, attendance and location

The majority of respondents (69%) indicate a desire to see larger class sizes to provide an atmosphere of learning which is more “fun and interesting.” In addition, fifty-one percent of the respondents prefer full-time classes, while 39% prefer part-time. The majority prefer daytime to evening classes.

Conventional hours are recommended, Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This format provides the structure and stability that youth state is required, or which they need to learn this structure and discipline.

Many respondents indicate that rules and regulations regarding tardiness and absenteeism do need to be enforced. They are forthcoming in admitting that they need to learn how to be dedicated and committed to their training. All agree that programs should enforce a “three strikes” rule. They maintain that youth should be allowed to make mistakes, however, they should also strive for more commitment to the programs they attend. Respondents agree that providing them with three chances is a fair policy.

Locations of programs are crucial as most rely on public transportation. Respondents suggest that programs be held in central locations or closer to the areas in which they live (*see Appendix A*).

3.2 Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should allow for larger class sizes to make the learning environment more interesting with an increased variety of participants.
- 2 Program hours should adhere to the conventional times of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.
- 3 Programs should allow for a “three strikes” policy with regard to attendance.
- 4 Program locations should be in central locations for easy access.

4. PROGRAM CONTENT

Participants were asked to rate which components of a training program are important to them, on a scale between one and five, with one being of main importance (*see figure 7*). We included this question to specifically identify what youth want to see incorporated into training programs.

Most of the respondents indicate that overall, they would achieve more success in a healthy, welcoming and supportive environment. Further, youth state that appropriate programming would involve an Aboriginal setting.

4.1 Program Curriculum and Format

Information gathered through group discussions indicates that the needs of participants are varied in the type of training material they would like to see incorporated into program curriculum as respondents are often in differing stages of personal and academic development. Participant feedback also indicates a need for a more holistic approach to program development. Mainstream society creates a segregation of training components; however, the youth state they need a more encompassing approach in program design. Their needs are many and diverse and by compartmentalizing their programs they face a quagmire of loopholes and bureaucracy. For example, a skills training program that does not incorporate a much-needed urban life skills segment nor a health and healing component, the latter being highly valued by respondents (*see figure 7*) is not seen to be effective. Rather, to address their needs, they prefer a streamlined, one-stop service delivery mechanism.

In addition, youth would like the opportunity to participate in job shadowing and volunteer opportunities as well as learning important skills relating to parenting, family and relationship skills. These young adults want relevancy in their training programs; they want the programs to be in keeping with their goals and labour market demands. They are aware that they require higher levels of education and employment skills to compete for jobs in today's economy. The types of certificate programs respondents referred to include Safety Training (First Aid, WHIMIS, etc.); Early Childhood Care; training within the service industry; computers; and other technological training.

Respondents also stressed the need for reading, writing and/or math skills. This was especially important for those who lacked completion of their academic training. Some of the respondents had dropped out of school in order to work, but found that due to their low reading, writing and math skills, they could not adapt very well to their employment requirements. They comment that even within the apprenticeships and trades sectors, adequate reading, writing and math skills are a necessary component.

They are aware that they require higher levels of education and employment skills to compete for jobs in today's economy.

Further, respondents express a desire for programs that would offer courses by option, perhaps a module format, to allow participants to select those courses of interest to them while still accomplishing their course requirements. By incorporating the module format, respondents state that this would afford them some variety within the curriculum and address the element of boredom. This would also allow them the flexibility in being able to work while attending programs on a part-time basis.

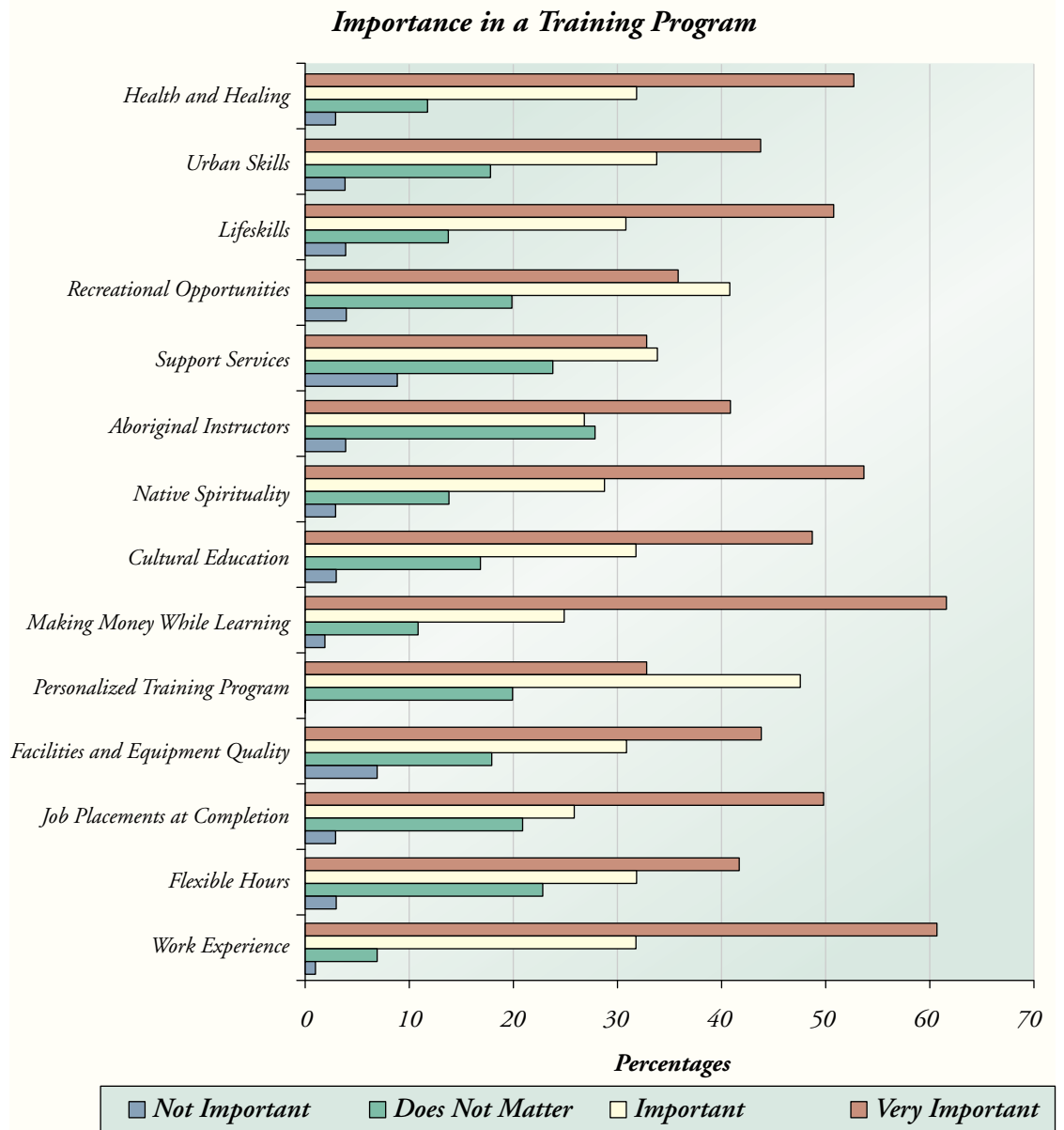
Survey participants express a need for programs that offer certification upon completion which would demonstrate their skills and abilities and strengthen their foothold in the labour market. These youth stress the importance of receiving the certificate to mark their accomplishments and as tangible evidence of their achievements and that they would feel a sense of pride in being able to add this credential to their resumes. The youth also state that the incorporation of various activities throughout the day rather than focusing on one learning component is preferable to sitting all day in one classroom and perhaps losing interest in the material.

4.1 Recommendations:

- 1 Participants recommend that training programs incorporate the following components into the curriculum:
 - ♦ Skills training relevant to today's labour market
 - ♦ Academic education such as high school certification
 - ♦ Job shadowing, volunteer opportunities
 - ♦ Urban life skills
 - ♦ Communication skills (reading and writing classes)
 - ♦ Parenting, family and relationship skills
 - ♦ Health and healing (counselling)
- 2 Respondents advised incorporating various activities throughout the day rather than focusing on one learning component as preferable to sitting all day in one classroom.
- 3 More group involvement was also recommended to allow for greater participant interaction and variety.
- 4 Modules should be incorporated so as to offer participants flexibility in program options and to allow for part-time workforce participation.
- 5 Programs should provide certification upon completion.
- 6 Youth recommend that future programming take into consideration the holistic approach, whereby they may access various components of a program in addition to other services through a one-stop service mechanism.



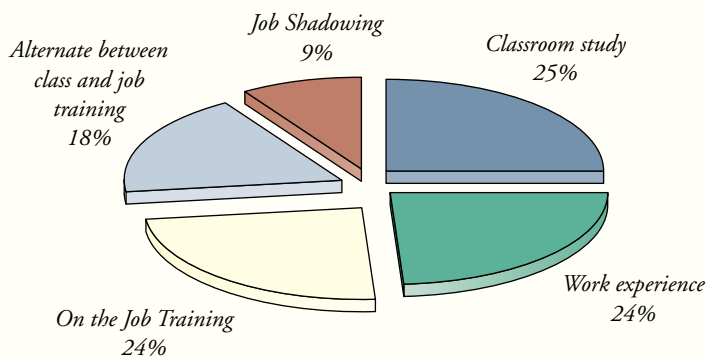
Figure 7: Measuring Program Options



4.2 Work Experience/Placement Component

Approximately fifty percent of the participants are almost equally split between preferring classroom study (25%) to work experience (24%) as their preferred choice for learning (see figure 8), which is again an indication of the high value placed on each by the youth. The remaining respondents prefer various types of work experience including some alternation (18%) with in-class training.

Figure 8: Learning Method Preferences



Respondents highlight the need for a work practicum/work placement opportunity as part of the training program. Many participants report that they live independently of their families, are single youth or have dependents of their own. Since they are the primary providers, participants stress the necessity of having the work experience necessary to be able to obtain employment, as often employers will not hire inexperienced applicants.

This work experience component would ensure that participants are “job ready” and increase their chances of obtaining well-paying employment. Since their predominant concern was obtaining employment in order to support themselves and or their families, these youth recognize that a work practicum is a necessary component to their successful obtainment of meaningful workplace skills. Survey participants also state that program service providers should provide more assistance in linking the youth to employment upon completion of training.

4.2 Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should balance classroom study with on-the-job work experience, either on an alternating basis, or provide a practicum at the end of the theoretical segment.
- 2 Programs should provide job opportunities to participants upon program completion.

Data indicates that youth participants believe Native culture should play a vital role in the programs, along with having a reputable Elder on hand.

(Survey Data)

4.3 Inter-Personal and Communication Skills Development

The youth would like to see a training program that offers inter-personal and communication skills development. They want to develop empowerment and the tenacity to survive and thrive in today's urban workforce.

These young adults agree that personal development is crucial and they want to learn about themselves in positive ways. More importantly, respondents said they must first learn to accept themselves and need to receive encouragement in this area. They stress the importance of learning good communication skills as being equally as important as acquiring leadership skills.

Both are noted by the participants as key components to the building of constructive and positive relationships. These skills are identified as valuable in the workplace as many respondents report that often they lack the ability to forge inter-personal relationships with co-workers or employers and this contributed to their eventual departure from the workforce. In addition, having these skills would provide youth with the ability to work in conjunction with others, both in the classroom and in their place of employment.

Youth believe that the incorporation of leadership and communication skill development into program content will assist them in being better prepared to enter the world of work. They state that leadership skills involve both positive communication skills and the ability to take responsibility over their own lives. Respondents note that talking circles may assist with the practice of communications skills among participants.

4.3 Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should teach inter-personal skills including communication and leadership development.
- 2 Programs should make use of talking circles to assist in the teaching of communication and social skill development.

4.4 Cultural Component

Regaining and retaining their own culture is important to urban First Nations youth as it is the core of their very identities. Many agree that often, Native people lose a sense of who they are while living in the city and mainstream society in general.

They report that this loss of identity leads to feelings of alienation once they are separated from their communities and their own culture. Participants state that programming does not take into account the need for incorporation of their culture into the curriculum to alleviate this sense of separation. The cultural aspect has been marginalized. According to group discussion, the cultural connection is vital to their spirituality and well being as First Nations people.

They stress that it is important for program content to be part of an over-all Aboriginal structure so that they would be able to take more pride in being First Nations.

They state that it is often difficult enough for them when making attempts to become part of mainstream programming where they feel excluded and there is no reference to their own culture. The youth indicate that they would like to participate in programs that offer a connection from their own histories to relevancies of the present.

This will assist them in feeling that they have a rightful place in society and can end their struggles to fit in somewhere. Most youth want to feel that their success has been grounded by their desire to retain their self-identity and being proud of who they are, not who society wants them to be.

The youth stress that they are aware of the differences between authentic cultural practices and those activities mainly for cultural “exhibition.”

Therefore, they stress that they will accept no less than authentic cultural teachings of their culture, which they perceive as dynamic and relevant to them. Moreover, the youth state emphatically that they want more than to be shown their culture. They want to know more about it so that they can incorporate it into their daily lives.

According to group discussion, the cultural connection is vital to their spirituality and well being as First Nations people.

The youth indicate that strong values build a foundation for community cohesion through sharing, participation and respect.

Cultural content is seen as including the teaching of language, ceremony, spirituality, cultural events, protocol, cultural values, and history from the First Nations perspective, taught with an appropriate level of dignity and respect. Further, the wisdom of First Nations Elders must be incorporated into these teachings. They suggest that programs provide an opportunity for Elders to attend as guest speakers to share information with participants.

4.4 Recommendations:

- 1 Participants recommend that programs be based in an Aboriginal setting and that they address the need for an authentic cultural component within training programs so that youth can attain or retain their identities as First Nations people.
- 2 Participants recommend that cultural teachings include history from the Native perspective.
- 3 Participants recommend that all teachings be delivered in a manner respectful of the culture and include spiritual awareness.
- 4 Participants recommend that Native Elders be involved in the teachings.

4.5 Cultural Values, Self-Esteem and Identity

Participants were provided with a list of values and asked to rate them in order of importance to them. They rate respect for self and others as being of most value to them (*figure 9*).

Respondents state that the incorporation of cultural values within their daily lives is of key importance to them. They stress that having cultural values assists in the development of healthy lifestyles and is important for good character development and a strong sense of self-identity and personal worth. Respondents state that they want to learn more about building respectful and positive relationships relative to their own culture and that they view most Aboriginal people as having strong values of respectfulness, kindness, and benevolence. The youth indicate that strong values build a foundation for community cohesion through sharing, participation and respect. They believe that this philosophy should not be limited to their culture alone, but take into account all other cultures.

The foundation of First Nations culture is built on the importance of respect for self, other people, animals and the environment, the roots of

which stem from the need to survive. A major concern of the youth is that this respect is not shown to them while they indicate that they are generally concerned about the well being of others. Respondents state that they are respectful in their willingness to consider the needs of other people as well as accommodating differing viewpoints, in addition to their eagerness to participate within the community for the benefit of all members. They also regard their Elders with a degree of respect as befitting their honoured role within First Nations society.

Some participants express that, at times, it is difficult to take pride in oneself as a First Nations youth. Most agree that having a strong sense of cultural identity would elevate their levels of self-esteem and cultural pride. All agree that they need cultural teachings that work toward raising pride in both oneself and one's heritage. The youth note that this is crucial to offset mainstream negativity toward Native people, which the media does much to perpetuate. As one participant noted, "the media does a good enough job of making people feel low about themselves."

Participants state that retaining or regaining knowledge about their First Nations culture is a means to strengthen both individual and community development. The youth feel that all community members need to work together to raise awareness and knowledge of the culture for all to benefit. Being able to return to their own communities to complete their work placements was also discussed as important to participants as they would be able to make a positive contribution to the well-being of their own communities.

These young adults also display enthusiasm in being able to speak to others themselves and share their own cultural knowledge, in turn. They state that they feel a sense of pride whenever they have the opportunity to talk to others about their heritage. This further builds up their feelings of self-esteem and self-worth as First Nations youth. Having a precarious self-identity, these youth have a need to feel valued and part of something larger to create meaning in their lives.

Participants emphasize that cross-cultural sharing within various First Nations cultures and mainstream society is positive and provides an opportunity for people to learn about the traditions and practices of other groups. They suggest that Elders be invited from other Aboriginal cultures to promote cultural awareness among the various communities. These youth express an appreciation of other cultures and would welcome the opportunity to participate in a cross-cultural information exchange. They believe this sharing of cultures would foster understanding and tolerance among all groups.

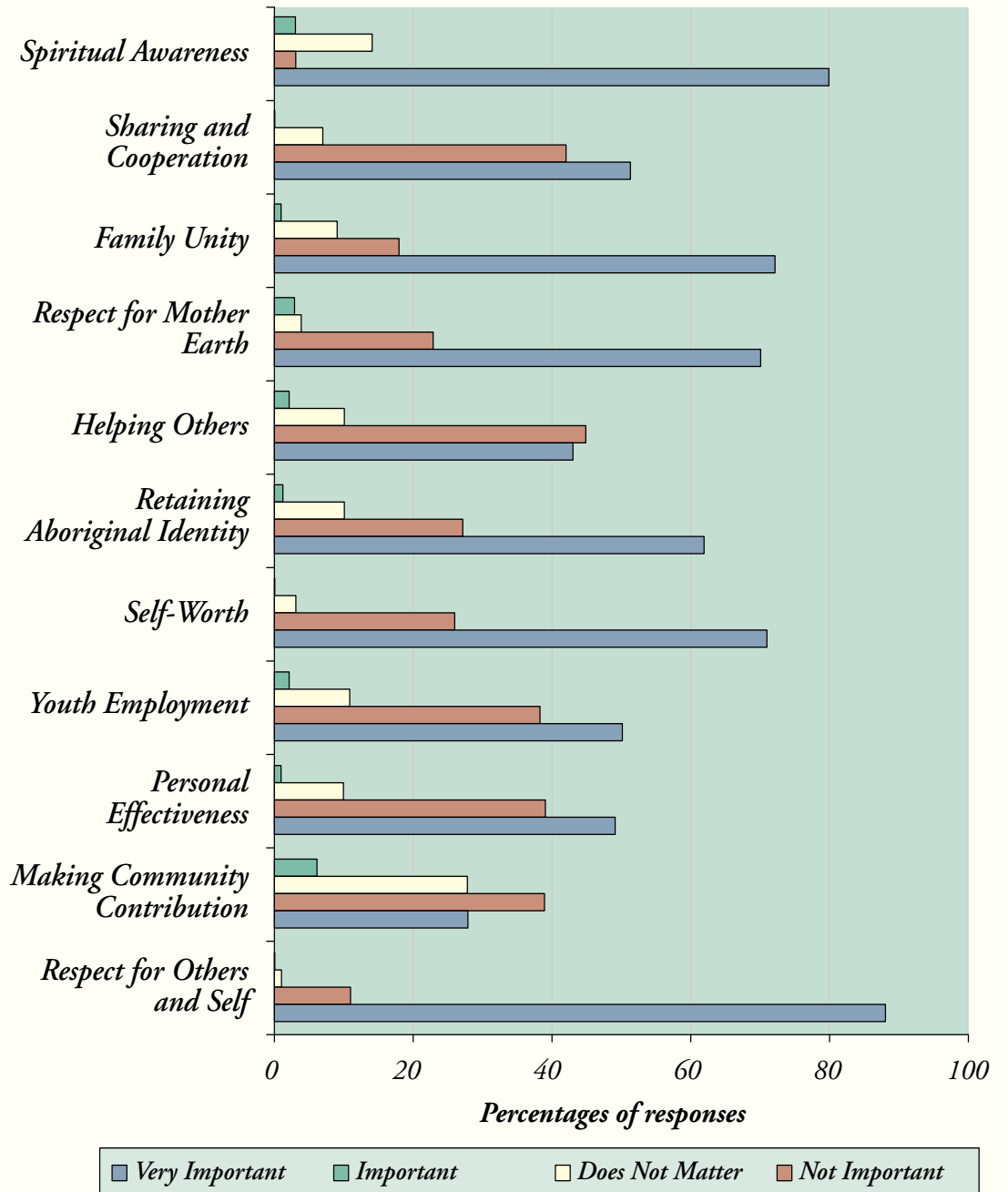
Participants state that retaining or regaining knowledge about their First Nations culture is a means to strengthen both individual and community development.



"It is motivating to see everyone there and helping, it shows that people care."

(Youth participant, Abbotsfield Workshop)

Figure 9: Measuring the Importance of Values



4.5 Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should incorporate the teaching of values from a First Nations perspective.
- 2 Programs should invite the Elders from various First Nations to provide an opportunity for participants to learn about other cultural traditions and values.
- 3 Programs should provide an atmosphere of respect toward the participants in return for the respect shown by the youth.
- 4 Culture should be taught so as to raise levels of self-esteem, self-identity and instil cultural pride within individuals.
- 5 Programs should encourage community participation to allow for the development of mutual respect and understanding between individuals and groups.
- 6 Programs should incorporate a youth ambassador component whereby youth would have the opportunity to teach others about their First Nations cultures.
- 7 Youth should be able to complete the work experience component of a program within their own communities so as to have the opportunity to “give something back.”



4.6 Cultural Participation

While all respondents agree that incorporation of the First Nations culture in everyday life is a positive approach for building strong self-identities and self-regard, they also state that cultural participation is largely a personal choice. As stated previously, participants acknowledge that the wants and needs of individuals are quite diverse (youth are aware of these differences even among the First Nations groups). Therefore, they state, people also differ in how much culture they want to incorporate into their daily lives and, more specifically, some people are unsure as to how much they want to participate within their First Nations cultures. An influencing factor may be attributed to the derogatory stereotypes within mainstream society in reference to First Nations people. The youth report that this sometimes results in people avoiding their own culture in order not to be viewed in a negative light.

Respondents discussed having the option to participate based on their own comfort level. They state that traditional ceremonies and events could be made available within programs for those students who wish to participate. The option should be there, however, for those who choose to abstain.

4.6 Recommendation:

- 1 Traditional cultural practices and events should be made available within programming but participation should not be a mandatory component.

5. PROGRAM STAFF CREDENTIALS

This section is also noted as one of major concern for respondents. They indicate that having qualified staff deliver programming is integral to both the success of the program and the participants themselves.

The youth believe that such success is directly linked to the degree of knowledge and understanding on the part of staff and particularly the instructors about youth issues and concerns. When asked to describe what constitutes “qualified” staff, participants indicate that appropriate educational credentials be in place and that staff and instructors be informed by relevant life experiences in order to relate to and understand the needs of their students. By having this empathy, instructors are better equipped to offer guidance and support.

These young adults stress that they want those mandated to instruct them to be trustworthy. Some youth have had negative experiences with those in leadership roles breaking important trust relationships. This is a serious issue for the youth who would prefer to leave a program if they cannot trust those in charge. The youth state that hiring policies should incorporate stringent selection criteria including criminal record clearances and the signing of confidentiality agreements prior to the hiring of staff to protect the safety and integrity of both the students and the program, respectively.

Following is a list of skills and characteristics the youth believe program personnel should demonstrate:

- / TRUSTWORTHY
- / QUALIFIED WITH APPROPRIATE CREDENTIALS
- / CARING, CONSISTENT AND SUPPORTIVE
- / DEDICATED TO YOUTH
- / HEALTHY AND POSITIVE
- / ABILITY TO PROVIDE DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE
- / ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT AND TEACH GOAL PLANNING
- / MOTIVATING AND AMBITIOUS
- / UNDERSTANDING AND SENSITIVE TO NEEDS; NON-JUDGMENTAL
- / CONFIDENT WITH GOOD LEADERSHIP SKILLS
- / FRIENDLY, OUTGOING AND APPROACHABLE
- / GOOD SENSE OF HUMOUR
- / HONEST AND RESPECTFUL
- / ABILITY TO PRACTICE AND ENLIST COOPERATION

It is evident from the above list that the youth have high expectations for program staff and instructors. Respondents state that staff exemplifying these attributes and skills help to create an atmosphere in the classroom conducive to learning.

5. Recommendations:

- 1 Staff must possess a positive attitude and be approachable and trustworthy.
- 2 Staff must be appropriately qualified.
- 3 Staff must sign confidentiality agreements and have criminal record clearances prior to their hiring.

Some youth have had negative experiences with those in leadership roles breaking important trust relationships.

They need to know that service providers are working with and for them, to ensure they have employment opportunities in the business community and that the service agency will be there for them even beyond program completion.

5.1 First Nations Staff as Role Models and Mentors

Fifty-five percent of the respondents state that the presence of First Nations instructors is important as they are better able to understand and relate to the barriers and issues faced by the youth. Moreover, these instructors could offer advice that is constructive and culturally relevant. They could also serve as cultural role models and mentors for these young adults. However, the youth indicate that First Nations descent was not as important as being trustworthy and having awareness of youth concerns.

5.1 Recommendations:

- 1 First Nations staff and instructors should be recruited to programs for youth to serve as cultural role models and mentors.
- 2 Staff working with youth must have an understanding of youth issues and awareness of First Nations culture.

6. POST-PROGRAM SUPPORT SERVICES

Respondents state that once programs are complete they feel they are on their own, without direction and support. Subsequently, they often obtain the impression that service providers are not taking more of an interest in assisting them to find meaningful employment. Participants indicate they often feel pressured to accept inappropriate employment only to find themselves unemployed after a short time and seeking another program to attend. These young adults stress that it is imperative for them to have continued support for employment purposes. They need to know that service providers are working with and for them, to ensure they have employment opportunities in the business community and that the service agency will be there for them even beyond program completion.

Youth indicate that they also want continued access to program services after completion of training as they often feel they have no one to contact for support. Because service providers offer a healthy environment with professional staff, respondents indicate they would appreciate being able to remain in contact with them for further advice, referrals to other agencies, or having someone to discuss their career and employment concerns with on occasion.

6. Recommendations:

- 1 Programs should strive to build partnerships with business and industry so that participants have guaranteed employment once they complete their training programs.
- 2 Programs must ensure youth are receiving meaningful employment when they are finished their programs.
- 3 Programs should provide post-program support services to assist participants make the transition to independence.

7. FUTURE PLANNING FOR YOUTH

The participants were quite enthusiastic about participating in this study and being able to have a voice in future labour market programming to address their needs relative to their own unique circumstances. They also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to this study as they often feel negated because of their youth and being First Nations.

These youth are hopeful that the recommendations derived from this assessment will be given serious consideration and not shelved and forgotten as they themselves have been in the past. They state that they want to be active participants in the design and development of labour market programming for youth and suggest formalizing this process by providing a forum through which they are able to provide ongoing input and guidance to service providers. These participants believe that, with their ongoing input, youth programs will be more successful in terms of addressing their educational and employment requirements.

7. Recommendations:

- 1 Youth recommend the implementation of a youth council through which they would be directly involved in the planning of programs.
- 2 Youth recommend that service providers utilize the information from this study in their future design and development of programs specific to youth employment and training.



CONCLUSION

We have examined the issues and barriers faced by our youth that prevent their full participation in educational and training programs and in the labour market. The youth themselves are aware of these obstacles but recognize that they have better opportunities available to them today than their parents had in the past. However, these youth have inherited a legacy of loss—of culture, language and identity and want to end their struggle for survival within mainstream society.

They have shown that their personal, educational and employment needs are unique and, therefore, they face different challenges than mainstream youth in the city of Edmonton. These young adults often find it difficult to fit in with mainstream society while dealing with cultural alienation from both the dominant society and sometimes their own communities.

They tell us that, due to their unstable personal lives and their precarious economic situations, they find it difficult, if not impossible, to participate in current programs that do not have the capacity to accommodate their socio-economic, cultural and spiritual needs. They emphasize that they are concerned about their respective futures given their current dire social and economic circumstances.

These young adults demonstrate willingness to participate in relevant training programs to learn the skills necessary to adapt to the demands of mainstream society so they can strengthen their foothold and make progress toward socio-economic independence. They want to strive for higher education and to be able to attain their goals.

These young adults are gathering strength and voicing their opinions about what is important and relevant to them. They are adamant about wanting to better their lives by participating in the workforce but want to incorporate their own culture within both their professional and personal lives.

They require solutions specific to their needs in preparing them to participate in the mainstream labour market. Our youth want empathetic educators who will validate, acknowledge and recognize their right to be included as valuable members of the community and in so doing, will take into account the needs of the youth when designing and developing programs and services.

Since our Aboriginal youth population is on the rise, it would be prudent for these service agencies to plan programs now, to accommodate not only the population demands of the youth requiring their services, but also to take into account the specific recommendations these young adults have proposed in this assessment.

Our youth have made a valuable contribution by providing this study with information relevant to their educational and employment needs. We believe we have met our goal in consulting with these young adults and providing them a forum through which to build this priority list of recommendations to assist in future program planning.

Through this process, it is hoped that our youth will be encouraged to continue along their educational and employment path. With our guidance and support, we can help them attain their true potentials and achieve success as healthy, contributing members of society. However, it is imperative that they be given the chance to contribute to the creation of innovative programs and services specific to their requirements.

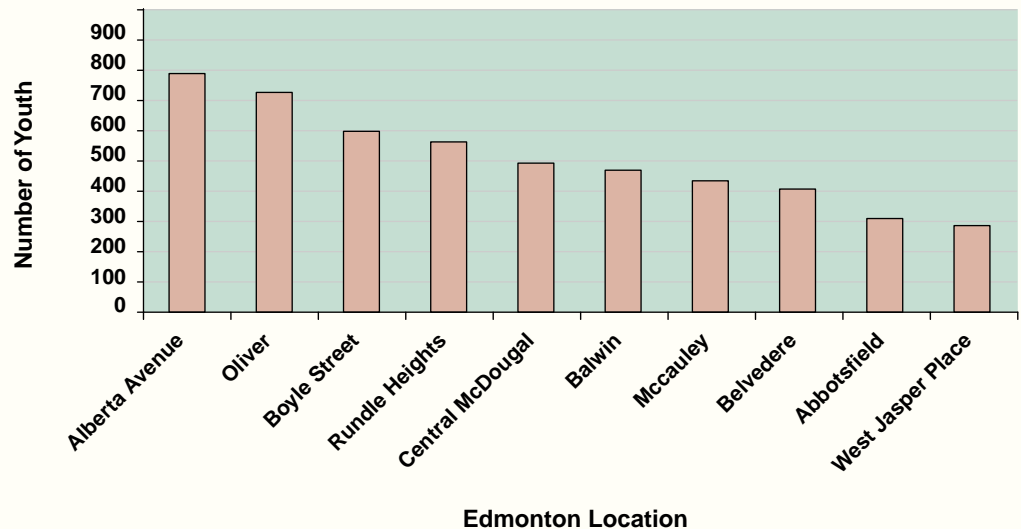
Our governments, business communities, families, and service providers have a vested interest in ensuring programs and services adapt to the needs of our youth today, as they prepare to become our leaders of tomorrow.

The youth asked us to provide them with the tools they need for success: A sense of self-worth, real job related skills and a sense of belonging in the community.

APPENDIX A. GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

This research study was conducted in areas of Edmonton with a high Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population distribution according to the 1996 Statistics Canada census demonstrates that the communities in Edmonton with notable numbers of Aboriginal people are located in the central and northeast areas of the city (see Graph 1).

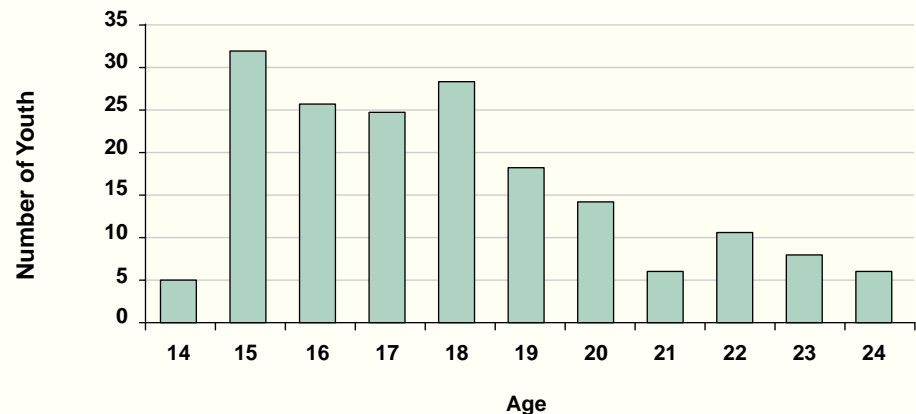
Graph 1: Aboriginal Populations in Edmonton by Community Area



APPENDIX B. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Fifty-one percent of the respondents are female; 49% are male. Respondents are between the ages of 14 and 24, with the majority in the 15 to 19 year-old bracket (graph 2). Thirty-four percent of the respondents are single and independent; 50% are living with family, and 16% are married, or in common-law relationships. Twenty-seven percent have dependent children; 70% of the respondents did not. The majority of the respondents reside in the central, northeast and west end areas of the city. Education attainment was mainly at the junior high (30%) and high school levels (55%).

Graph 2. Age of Respondents by Percentages.



APPENDIX C. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Public notices inviting youth to participate in the study were placed in newspapers, in addition to bulletins posted in agencies frequented by these young adults. Four workshops were held in the areas of Edmonton with high Aboriginal populations: Boyle Street, Abbotsfield, Alberta Avenue, and West Edmonton.

I) QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Due to the scope of the study and the high number of participants, researchers developed a questionnaire to survey respondents with “closed-ended” queries. Several questionnaire samplings were administered before the final product was ready for distribution. The questionnaire was sampled to test for language usage, question comprehension and viability. Each question was reviewed to ensure the survey, as a whole, included parameters to accommodate existing and anticipated requirements of the youth, the Oteenow Employment and Training Society, Freehorse Family Wellness Society and other agencies relative to education and employment programs and services.

II) QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In order to gather more detailed information, researchers conducted interviews with the youth during which they were asked “open-ended” questions. This allowed respondents to elaborate on their responses with regard to current programs and services as well as to provide recommendations for future programming. Questions were general to allow the participants to guide the content and direction of each workshop. However, during group discussions, participants were asked to focus on three areas:

- ✓ Previous experience in training programs, noting especially the strengths and weaknesses of each, as well as what they would change, add, or discontinue about these programs;
- ✓ Identification of the programs components important to them as well as the types of programs in which they might enrol; and
- ✓ Any issues that affected their personal stability and ability to achieve success relative to their education, training and labour market goals.

Group discussions provided the participants with a forum to identify their common concerns with respect to their educational and employment needs and, based on the results, make their contribution to this study.

III) DATA ANALYSIS

A research technician whose primary role was to record the discussion chaired each group discussion. Data was combined from all workshops and an analysis identified common themes. The themes form the outline for this final report.

In addition, data derived from the questionnaires was compiled and analyzed using Microsoft Excel software. A frequency analysis was done on all close-ended questions, whereas, open-ended questions were compiled according to thematic clusters. Information collected from group discussions comprises the narrative content for this report and questionnaire data provides statistical information and frequency facts.

APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

1.1 Lack of Financial Resources:

- 1 Provide adequate program living allowances to allow participants to meet the basic cost of living expenses in addition to having enough resources to participate in recreational pursuits, buy lunches and access counselling services.
- 2 Provide accessible information on career opportunities, services and resources specific to youth, low-cost housing, and educational tools and resources.
- 3 Provide culturally appropriate and affordable childcare services to allow lone parents to focus on their training or employment goals.
- 4 Provide additional resources as rewards and incentives to assist with motivation and to alleviate cost of living expenses. These incentives may include:
 - ◆ Bus tickets for good attendance
 - ◆ Recreational outings for reaching personal and/or academic goals
 - ◆ Friday night sports for group cooperation
 - ◆ Lunch program
 - ◆ Low cost youth housing similar to campus housing or information on where and how to access affordable housing
 - ◆ Day trips to various organizations
 - ◆ Access to computers and fax machines for job searches

1.2 Limited Knowledge of Information Resources

- 1 Respondents recommend that both educational and employment initiatives be posted through the following:
 - / Internet website for Aboriginal youth services
 - / Billboards in places that youth frequent, such as West Edmonton Mall and billiard establishments
 - / Newspaper
 - / Youth directory in book form and also accessible via internet
 - / Career counsellors, youth workers and youth organizations who will have been provided with information on all programs, resources and services available to assist youth
- 2 Provide resources to develop a youth directory which would be accessible through the internet or in book form.
- 3 Provide a youth liaison person to assist youth with access to information and support services after training

2. RETENTION AND ATTRITION

- 1 Programs should be flexible enough to accommodate absences for valid reasons such as workforce participation or family obligations.
- 2 Programs should offer positive and motivating environments to encourage attendance and deal with procrastination.
- 3 Programs should offer participants the flexibility and opportunity to earn wages while in training to encourage program retention.
- 4 Programs should offer upgrading courses.
- 5 Provide resources and services to youth while they are attending training programs to encourage them to complete their programs.
- 6 Programs should offer “bridging” type programs to assist participants make the transition back into the learning environment.
- 7 Programs should incorporate a peer support program for youth to help them remain motivated and focused with their training.

2.1 Educational Goals versus Actual Achievements

- 1 Programs should offer goal setting as part of its curriculum to assist participants with effective career planning.
- 2 Programs should offer field trips to the business community and cultural centres to assist participants with goal setting

3. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

3.1 Program Criteria, Recruitment and Assessment:

- 1 Program criteria should take the goals of applicants into consideration rather than focusing on whether or not they are receiving SFI or EI benefits.
- 2 Programs should provide orientation sessions for potential participants to gather information and decide whether or not the program is suitable for them.
- 3 Programs should include personalized assessments and evaluations to enable youth to monitor their own development.
- 4 Programs should base criteria on individual assessments relative to suitability, interests and abilities as this would help to ensure that only those who are committed to the training would attend.

3.2 Class Size, Hours, Attendance and Location:

- 1 Programs should allow for larger class sizes to make the learning environment more interesting with an increased variety of participants.
- 2 Program hours should adhere to the conventional times of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.
- 3 Programs should allow for a “three strikes” policy with regard to attendance.
- 4 Program locations should be in central locations for easy access.



4. PROGRAM CONTENT

4.1 Program Curriculum and Format:

1 Participants recommend that training programs incorporate the following components into the curriculum:

- / Skills training relevant to today's labour market
- / Academic education such as high school certification
- / Job shadowing, volunteer opportunities
- / Urban life skills
- / Communication skills (reading and writing classes)
- / Parenting, family and relationship skills
- / Health and healing (counselling)

2 Respondents advised incorporating various activities throughout the day rather than focusing on one learning component as preferable to sitting all day in one classroom.

3 More group involvement was also recommended to allow for greater participant interaction and variety.

4 Modules should be incorporated so as to offer participants flexibility in program options and to allow for part-time workforce participation.

5 Programs should provide certification upon completion.

6 Youth recommend that future programming take into consideration the holistic approach, whereby they may access various components of a program in addition to other services through a one-stop service mechanism.

4.2 Work Experience/Placement Component:

1 Programs should balance classroom study with on-the-job work experience, either on an alternating basis, or provide a practicum at the end of the theoretical segment.

2 Programs should provide job opportunities to participants upon program completion.

4.3 Inter-Personal and Communication Skills Development:

1 Programs should teach inter-personal skills including communication and leadership development.

2 Programs should make use of talking circles to assist in the teaching of communication and social skill development.

4.4 Cultural Component:

- 1 Participants recommend that programs be based in an Aboriginal setting and that they address the need for an authentic cultural component within training programs so that youth can attain or retain their identities as First Nations people.
- 2 Participants recommend that cultural teachings include history from the Native perspective.
- 3 Participants recommend that all teachings be delivered in a manner respectful of the culture and include spiritual awareness.
- 4 Participants recommend that Native Elders be involved in the teachings.

4.5 Cultural Values, Self-Esteem and Identity:

- 1 Programs should incorporate the teaching of values from a First Nations perspective.
- 2 Programs should invite the Elders from various First Nations to provide an opportunity for participants to learn about other cultural traditions and values.
- 3 Programs should provide an atmosphere of respect toward the participants in return for the respect shown by the youth.
- 4 Culture should be taught so as to raise levels of self-esteem, self-identity and instil cultural pride within individuals.
- 5 Programs should encourage community participation to allow for the development of mutual respect and understanding between individuals and groups.
- 6 Programs should incorporate a youth ambassador component whereby youth would have the opportunity to teach others about their First Nations cultures.
- 7 Youth should be able to complete the work experience component of a program within their own communities so as to have the opportunity to “give something back.”

4.6 Cultural Participation:

- 1 Traditional cultural practices and events should be made available within programming but participation should not be a mandatory component.



5. PROGRAM STAFF CREDENTIALS

- 1 Staff must possess a positive attitude and be approachable and trustworthy.
- 2 Staff must be appropriately qualified.
- 3 Staff must sign confidentiality agreements and have criminal record clearances prior to their hiring.

5.1 First Nations Staff as Role Models and Mentors:

- 1 First Nations staff and instructors should be recruited to programs for youth to serve as cultural role models and mentors.
- 2 Staff working with youth must have an understanding of youth issues and awareness of First Nations culture.

6. POST-PROGRAM SUPPORT SERVICES

- 1 Programs should strive to build partnerships with business and industry so that participants have guaranteed employment once they complete their training programs.
- 2 Programs must ensure youth are receiving meaningful employment when they are finished their programs.
- 3 Programs should provide post-program support services to assist participants make the transition to independence.

7. FUTURE PLANNING FOR YOUTH

- 1 Youth recommend the implementation of a youth council through which they would be directly involved in the planning of programs.
- 2 Youth recommend that service providers utilize the information from this study in their future design and development of programs specific to youth employment and training.

There are a total of 56 recommendations from the youth as a result of the Urban First Nations Youth Needs Assessment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“A Review and Analysis of the Major Challenges and Concerns of Aboriginal Youth in Canada.” Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, Ph.D. Report prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. October, 1995.

Aboriginal Housing Forum: On the Real Road to Housing. Background Information Paper, Prepared for the Aboriginal Housing Forum. March 2, 2000.

Aboriginal People in Canada’s Labour Market. Michael Mendelson and Ken Battle. Caledon Institute of Social Policy. June, 1999.

“Aboriginal Population by Age Groups.” Statistics Canada Census. 1996.

“Aboriginal Population by Neighbourhood: City of Edmonton.” Department of Planning and Development. Statistics Canada Census. 1996.

“Aboriginal Youth Policy: An Analytical Framework.” Chapter 1: Public Policy and Aboriginal Peoples 1965-1992: Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. Final Report, 1996.

“Edmonton Youth Perspectives Project.” Report presented to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996.

“Mohawks of Kahnawake Community Study.” Report presented to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996.

“Old Masset Youth Report.” Report presented to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996.

“The Search for Belonging: Perspectives of Youth” in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Volume 4: Perspectives and Realities. Final Report, 1996.

“Urban Perspectives” in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Volume 7: Perspectives and Realities. Final Report, 1996.

“Youth Perspectives Community Studies: Synthesis Paper.”
Monique Godin-Beers. Report prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. August, 1994.



