



Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council

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phone: (604) 255-2394 website: www.mvaec.ca

June 22, 2015

Aboriginal Community
Career Employment
Service Society

Aboriginal Front Door
Society

Aboriginal Mother Centre
Society

Canadian Aboriginal AIDS
Network

Circle of Eagles Lodge
Society

Federation of Aboriginal
Foster Parents

Fraser Region Aboriginal
Friendship Centre
Association

Healing Our Spirit Society

Helping Spirit Lodge
Society

Kekinow Native Housing

Knowledgeable Aboriginal
Youth Association

Lu'ma Native Housing
Society

Native Education College

Nisga'a Ts'amiks
Vancouver Society

Pacific Association of First
Nation Women

Spirit of the Children
Society

Urban Native Youth
Association

Vancouver Aboriginal
Community Policing
Centre

Vancouver Aboriginal
Friendship Centre Society

Vancouver Aboriginal
Transformative Justice
Services Society

Vancouver Aboriginal
Child & Family Services
Society

Vancouver Native Health
Society

Vancouver Native Housing
Society

Warriors Against Violence
Society

MVAEC Speaks Out on Recent Reports

Within the last month three significant reports have been released regarding Aboriginal People in Canada and British Columbia: Aboriginal Affairs under spend of \$1 billion, the Truth and Reconciliation Report and Paige's Story.

All reports show a historic and continued indifference to Canada's Aboriginal population. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that during the 130 years that residential schools were operational, 150,000 children attended and at least 6,000 died while there. The authors of the report, after much careful consideration, termed the system as cultural genocide. Most recently it was reported that the one federal government agency that consistently under spent its budget over the last five years to the total of \$1 billion was the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). And finally there was the absolutely tragic story of Paige, a young, vibrant Aboriginal girl who lost her life to abuse and the indifference of a system that all too often disregards the lives of Aboriginal people while forgetting the horror of what Canada did to its Aboriginal people while in their care at the residential schools.

The Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) represents 23 Aboriginal run organizations that service the nearly 70,000 Aboriginals that live, work and play in Metro Vancouver. It is the largest population of off reserve Aboriginals in BC and third largest in Canada. These organizations are run on tight budgets with few staff and in many cases are expected to deliver the same level of care as government programs but with smaller budgets. In light of the recent reports, MVAEC calls upon both the federal and BC provincial governments to embrace Canada's rich Aboriginal heritage and do the honorable thing by supporting a population it has for too long disregarded with neglect and indifference.

In response to the recent reports MVAEC makes the following recommendations:

Funding recommendations:

1. MVAEC supports all 93 recommendations in the Truth and Reconciliation report.
2. In order to restore the Aboriginal culture that was attempted to be destroyed through the residential school system, MVAEC is calling upon Canada and BC to help restore that culture by matching the budget of the residential school system and providing those funds to Aboriginal agencies like MVAEC and its members.
3. AANDC must strive to spend its entire budget, especially its Urban Aboriginal Strategy (USA) program budget, each and every year.
4. The UAS must set up a system to ensure a transparent and open process for funding proposals.

"Strategically planning for Services within our Community"

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5. In order to access UAS funded programs that service the Aboriginal populations, agencies applying for funding must demonstrate to Aboriginal communities, accountability and linkages to Aboriginal cultures before funding is approved.
6. The timing for funding for UAS programs must change to ensure a funding system that does not continually leave non-profit agencies in financial need. Clear criteria should be set by the end of December with proposals being received by the end of January and contracts and funding in place by April 1st.
7. Fund Aboriginal housing for the homeless should be at a rate proportional to population of homelessness.
8. The Vancouver Native Health Society has been working to develop an Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre for nearly a decade without any funding commitment from Vancouver Coastal Health or Health Canada. This health and wellness centre should be funded without further delay.
9. Provide adequate and consistent funding to the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council so that we can help our 23 member organizations to create a better continuum of care, and to work with non-Aboriginal organizations to make their programs more culturally appropriate, welcoming, and accountable to the Aboriginal community.

Recommendations in Response to Paige's Story:

MVAEC is shocked over Paige's story and applauds Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth for telling such a difficult and tragic story. Unfortunately this story is all too common and shows the continuing intergenerational impacts of the residential school system. Paige was lost to a system that was indifferent to her situation. The report shows that the one time her needs appeared to be understood and be a positive reflection of culture was her stay at Young Wolves Lodge, which was the only Aboriginal run MVAEC member organization she interacted with. Unfortunately that positive influence was eliminated when funding was cut off resulting in Young Wolves Lodge closing its door in March of 2015.

MVAEC is also able to report that it is conducting a comprehensive inventory of Aboriginal service providers who are members of MVAEC. This inventory will help show not only what services are available to Metro Vancouver's Aboriginal community by MVAEC member organizations but where the gaps are. Of note is the fact that service is provided to all in a "status blind" approach. In other words, regardless of one's Aboriginal status, all are welcome. Paige and her mom would have been welcomed at any one of MVAEC's member organizations if they had only been told about them.

MVAEC supports all of the Representative's recommendations with the following additions.

1. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) should include in its protocol for Aboriginal families and children information and referrals to Aboriginal run organizations such as MVAEC's members.
2. Appoint an Aboriginal Advocate/Representative to work with Aboriginal families to ensure they have meaningful access to the programs and services they need, and are able to raise their children safely in their own home. This position should be hired in consultation with MVAEC through development of the job posting, job description, short-listing and interviewing of candidates, and evaluation of their efficacy.
3. Often there is only a very short window of opportunity to assist people who are in crisis. There is a need to have a Rapid Response Team, but it cannot be effective without rapid access to services such as detox, alcohol or drug treatment, safe housing, counseling, or safe return to family or home community. Previously in times of crisis, contractors have been forced to free up beds for individuals who are not appropriate or ready to be in specific programs. This is disruptive to the programs, displaces other individuals who are willing to be in those programs, and does not meet the needs of those being dumped into those programs as a temporary response.

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These services must not be used as a dumping ground so that government and organizations can say they provided a rapid response.

4. Government departments need to find a way to not let 'confidentiality' stop them from working with others to ensure that children, youth, and families get the support that they need in a timely manner.
5. The site at the corner of Hastings and Commercial Drive has been sitting vacant for thirteen years while the Urban Native Youth Association awaits a funding commitment from the Province of BC through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, BC Housing, and Vancouver Coastal Health to build a Native Youth Centre. This despite the fact that two other non-Aboriginal youth hubs have already been built. MVAEC recommends this project be given priority before other youth hubs be considered.
6. Schools of Social Work and Social Workers should teach about residential schools and its inter-generational effects and how to provide culturally appropriate programs or services.
7. The Aboriginal Focus School (Sir William Macdonald Elementary School), Vancouver's only Aboriginal whose curriculum is respectful of local First Nations and the shared values, experiences and histories of all Aboriginal peoples, should be kept open.
8. MVAEC supports the Advocate's call for a rigorous review of urban Aboriginal program funding with the following conditions:
 - a. The review include not just downtown eastside programs but all programs within Metro Vancouver.
 - b. In order to be transparent, unbiased, and evaluated critically, the review must be done by a third party such as the Aboriginal Representative mentioned above or the Representative for Children and Youth.
 - c. Aboriginal service organizations must be a part of the planning process to ensure that the reviewer is aware of what to look for and how to critically evaluate the information.
 - d. The review include all programs including those run by non-Aboriginal organizations and governments.
 - e. The review include an evaluation of financial efficiencies that can be used to compare the amount of funding that is being provided to non-Aboriginal organizations against those provided Aboriginal organizations.
 - f. The review also include conversations with youth and families to identify how service providers can work better to get beyond an individual or family's 'service resistance'. The term 'service resistance' implies that there is only a problem or issue with the person who could benefit from programs and services, when in reality there is often a problem or issue (barriers) that service providers create or contribute to. We must all be willing to be self-reflective on how to best meet the needs of those we serve.
 - g. The review include an evaluation of the agency's Aboriginal cultural awareness and programs.
 - h. The review include programs funded by AANDC's UAS funding programs.
 - i. The review provide recommendations for providing seamless services to Aboriginal people living at or below the poverty line and a plan for bringing the number of Aboriginal people living in poverty to equity with the Vancouver average.

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Backgrounder

Aboriginal Population in Metro Vancouver

- Up to 60% of all Aboriginal people now live off-reserve, yet governmental policy and funding has not adapted to this reality.
- Almost 60% of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25, but governmental policy, programs, and funding does not reflect this reality.
- Over 50% of all children in care of MCFD are Aboriginal.
- The Vancouver School Board only recently began to graduate over 30% of Aboriginal students, yet teachers are not required to learn about residential schools and their inter-generational effects, or how to provide culturally appropriate learning environments for Aboriginal learners.
- Vancouver has the largest off-reserve population in BC and third largest in Canada
- BC has the most diverse Aboriginal population in Canada with individuals from many distinct First Nations cultures.
- Aboriginal people represent only 4% of the Vancouver population, yet are over-represented in most negative statistics (homelessness, leaving school before graduation, child welfare, incarceration, unemployment)

Aboriginal Programs in Metro Vancouver

- Aboriginal-funded organizations are in place as there is a great need to provide culturally appropriate, accessible, and relevant programs to Aboriginal people who are seeking them. They are not Aboriginal people's only option, nor should anyone try to require them to access those programs. It is well-known that many Aboriginal people do not access non-Aboriginal organizations or programs for various reasons which include: not being culturally appropriate, not being accessible, experiencing racist attitudes towards them, not having Aboriginal staff, or distrust resulting from the inter-generational effects of the Indian Residential Schools.
- Aboriginal off-reserve organizations in Metro Vancouver are status-blind in providing their services.
- Aboriginal organizations are largely under-funded in general and especially as compared to non-Aboriginal organizations providing similar programs and services. In particular, very few Aboriginal organizations receive core funding or equitable funding for wages that would help to attract and retain the best-qualified staff.
- There are only 3 Aboriginal organizations in the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver Native Health, the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre, and the Aboriginal Front Door all of which are under-funded and over-subscribed. One other Aboriginal organization, ACCESS, has a satellite office in the DTES that offers employment services
- Many other non-Aboriginal organizations are specifically contracted to provide programs to Aboriginal people, but are not being held accountable to the Aboriginal community to ensure that they are offering culturally appropriate programs, hiring Aboriginal staff, and are meaningfully engaging and serving Aboriginal people.
- The Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council has been struggling for six years to obtain consistent and adequate funding from government departments and others interested parties so that we can help our 23 member organizations to create a better continuum of care, and to work with non-Aboriginal organizations to make their programs more culturally appropriate, welcoming, and accountable to the Aboriginal community.

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DTES Specific Issues

- Many Aboriginal people come to Vancouver in search of a job, education, or medical services. Unfortunately some travel to Vancouver to escape abusive situations, family breakup, or to escape from warrants. Many individuals do not adapt easily to the large city life that is often isolating and lonely, financially prohibitive, and sometimes results in cultural clashes and acts of racism being forced upon them. Those who find their way to the DTES are often seeking family, acceptance, and belonging.
- The BC Representative for Children & Youth notes that there are at least 100-150 youth in the DTES, but the number is much larger when you consider those youth who travel to and from the DTES seeking out programs, family, friends, or for many other reasons. Unfortunately, some youth feel that they are more accepted and safe in the DTES than they are in foster homes or with their families.
- Despite the reports of a ghettoization of Aboriginal services in DTES, there are very few Aboriginal specific organizations being funded to provide programs in the DTES. There is a dire need to find avenues to funnel people away from migrating to the DTES and to exit the DTES. This requires more funds for culturally appropriate programs in and outside of the DTES that are provided by and for Aboriginal people. In addition, partnerships with non-Aboriginal organizations are essential to help fill gaps in the continuum of care, and to help non-Aboriginal organizations to make their programs more culturally appropriate, welcoming, and accountable to the Aboriginal community.
- The DTES is not an Aboriginal issue. It is a complex issue involving people with mental health and addiction issues, poverty, affordable housing and other intersecting factors.