

INTERVENOR PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

REPORT BY:

THE B.C. ASSOCIATION OF INDIAN FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

PRESENTED TO:

ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

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**INTERVENOR PARTICIPATION PROGRAM
ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES**

We are grateful as an organization to participate in such an important process as laying the foundation for Self Governance through the Intervenor Participation Program. We have made a serious effort to come together to offer our ideas of how we would like to see future development for our people. A process had to be chosen to gather information. A workshop was organized for May 14, 1993, and was held at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, which was attended by our twenty one member organizations.

The Workshop has provided us with information that we have compiled to reflect priorities in the subjects discussed. With the assistance of our Facilitator we worked in a group and as teams to maximize our time and efforts to produce ideas and problem solve to the best of our abilities, given our limited time.

Concerns arising through our discussions, clearly indicate the enormity of the task of problem-solving and formulating recommendations. Because of the scope of issues around Self Governance we chose to narrow it down to a few, that we feel as a group, are of top priority.

In our search for understanding Self-Governance and what it means to us as individuals, as a nation and as an organization, we decided to look into all of those areas and through the process of cooperation and joint efforts have arrived at these conclusions.

I. WHAT IS SELF-GOVERNANCE ?

What we as First Nations People see in our future:

- A process, whereby we include all the elements of our Culture and Tradition as a recognized format in determining the requirements and process by which we make decisions and administer Education, Health and Social Services to our membership.
- A Membership which is determined by First Nations and is inclusive of all Aboriginal people.
- Equal opportunity for Economic Development and a fair share of the Natural Resources from which to create a sound economic base.
- Governing Systems that operate in the best interests of First Nations people and are recognized as equal to all existing levels of government within Canada.
- Laws and Policies that are consistent with First Nations views on law and order and way of life. Control of Funding for programs and services to meet the needs of First Nations people as determined by First Nations.

Self Governance will be a change for Aboriginal people, a change that will require UNITY as a keystone if we are to be successful. We must organize for this change by educating First Nations people of the meaning of self governance and help them to understand it's concepts, and the effects it will have on our lives. First we must develop a universal definition of Self Governance that is acceptable to Aboriginal peoples and expresses the rights of both urban and on reserve populations. The vision of Self Governance must be a common one with the emphasis placed on the unity of First Nations people.

Communication must be open and on-going: member to member, organization to organization, band to band, band to province, and province to province, and province to nation.

The responsibility to initiate and maintain open communication, lies equally with the various decision-making bodies (government), and with First Nation organizations such as The Friendship Centres to promote more discussion of the key issues that affect our lives so profoundly.

It is important for us to look into the question of Self -Governance, to create a sense of reality and to touch base with our feelings about this important issue so that we may be confident when we add our voice to making it happen and be an integral part of the process.

We must examine the roles we play as individuals, organizations and government. Are we acting in the best interest of First Nations people?

We believe that the Friendship Centres are such an organizations that act in the best interests of First Nations people. We are accountable to our membership backed by a

proven track record that speak to our ability to deliver services and programs consistent with the needs of Aboriginal people, and we are committed to making social change in the spirit of unity.

We feel it is necessary for government to look at Friendship Centres as more than service providers, and recognize our abilities to assume responsibility and control of the funding to provide more needed services on a long term basis.

Recognition of Friendship Centres as major service providers.

The role of Friendship Centres in our country is one of great responsibility to Aboriginal people both urban and rural as both are users of our services. We continually strive to improve and expand on the services provided by our twenty one member centres but are facing serious difficulties in our efforts to provide adequate services, due to the continued erosion of funding and attitudes of government controllers who refuse to recognize us as major service providers.

We have grown as organizations far beyond our humble beginnings as coffee houses and drop-in centres. We provide and administer varied and essential services to Aboriginal people on a professional level, such as:

Drug and Alcohol Addiction Counselling,
Correctional Institution Liaisons,
Court Workers and support people,
Family Violence Programs and workshops,
Transition Houses for battered women,
Low Income Housing for needy families,
Youth Activity Programs (Team sports, dancing, singing and drumming.)
Crisis Hotlines for the prevention of suicide
Job Find support programs and Employment Counselling
Family Support Services
Life Skills
Social and Cultural Awareness

We are strong promoters and sponsors of cultural programs and events such as Powwows, Festivals (First Peoples Festival), Elder gatherings and celebrations and sporting events for our youth, many of which have grown into annual events. Our Cultural Coordinators seek to direct and develop programs leading to the enhancement of our culture and traditions through the involvement of everyone, from the Elders to the children. It is through these events that we learn about each other as people and are able to understand the differences between

tribes, customs and traditions including the sharing of this information with non-native peoples. We actively seek and rely on volunteers to assist us with these events, inviting them to share in the experience of pride and unity.

We are employers of Aboriginal people in most of our professional role requirements and provide valuable experience and training to students in our participation of Practicum programs for counselling and business administration. Some of these same students become permanent employees after their graduation. Our aim is to eventually have all of our services administered by Aboriginal people with credentials equal to and on a level with non-aboriginal services.

The scope of our responsibilities and the professionalism by which we administer them, more than adequately speaks to our qualification as an organization deserved of recognition as a major service provider. The growth of the Friendship Centre movement serves to foster cooperation and unity in our move toward Self governance through the continuation and expansion of services and programs designed and administered by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal People.

History of Friendship Centres is included here as APPENDIX A.

THE IDEAL COMMUNITY

The best way to offer solutions and recommendations is through the process of visioning - what we would like to see in our future and what changes should be made and how.

The ideal community would be one that would be united in it's efforts to build a better future for all it's members. The needs of such a community would be defined by it's members and decisions about that future would be made by the community as a whole. There are many roles to fill in such an undertaking and many people to participate, and it is important to recognize that each member is a valuable asset and can contribute to growth and change in many ways. Total involvement of community members must be actively encouraged from the Elders, women, adolescents, men and young children.

The building of "Community Spirit" was the way of our ancestors. There was great respect for the "old ones", children were considered to belong to the community and were the responsibility of all it's members, to care for, to guide and to teach them. The celebration of an event of one family was celebrated by the whole community and the sorrow of a loss of one of it's members was felt by all. Each person contributed to the functioning of the community in their own way, according to his/her talents, status and abilities. Teaching and sharing was a great part of everyone's existence and was the essence of survival. Our lives evolved in harmony with nature and we lived according to its seasons. We must find our way back to these values and traditions and remember "how" we did this and instill the heart back into the people.

Spirituality was practiced as a way of life, rather than a separated entity such as modern day religion. Life was lived in the spirit of unity, and our people possessed the knowledge and skills to deal with survival, not by the efforts of a few, but by the efforts of every member.

The problems experienced in one Aboriginal community are often echoed in other Aboriginal communities and it is within the framework of unity that we will be able to assist each other and share our experiences and solutions through an established communications network.

Technology and education have provided us with opportunities to learn all we need to know in modern day society. As part of our responsibility to improvement it is important to recognize this and to take advantage of these opportunities.

We can begin this process of change through the establishment of a Community Development organization that is independent of any political affiliation, one that is supported by adequate funding and qualified people familiar with, and sensitive to the nature of Aboriginal people.

The past treatment of The Aboriginal People has left many open wounds and scars which today, we as succeeding generations still feel. We are suffering from our own kind of identity loss and denial of the effects of such a process that was inflicted upon our grand parents and parents. Many Aboriginal youth are still in a state of confusion and denial over the effects of this treatment of our people, each believing that they are unaffected but not understanding why the problems within our communities exist and seem to be continually growing. They come to our Friendship Centres seeking advice and assistance to adjust to urban living and for counselling to deal with the problems they face during transition, either from moving from reserves or release from correctional institutions.

The separation of families and the removal of cultural activities and language has left the Aboriginal People hungry for unity, but there lies an under current of mistrust built up by years of surviving within the "White-Mans" boundaries, his rules and regulations that have dictated to us, how to live. This system fosters mistrust between family groups and community members resulting in anger and hatred toward Band Administrators, other families and even members of their own families. Through Government conditioning, whole communities have bought into the idea, that if a member leaves the reservation they are no longer a part of that band and can no longer share in the resources of the Band. The removal of status for women who married out of the nation was the biggest crime of all, one that served to divide and eliminate our peoples. Bill C-31 is inadequate in that it offers remedial measures to the existing generation but gradually eliminates children of future generations by seeking to eliminate future members on the basis of content. Without these children we will no longer have a future or a nation.

More than ever Aboriginal people must "organize for change", and present a united front to all who would stand in the way of our right to be masters of our own destinies, and live by our own determination.

Membership must be determined by the Aboriginal people. As part of the race, urban Aboriginal people deserve to be included in any negotiations concerning the welfare of our people to strengthen our position.

We must start to build unity at very basis of our existence which is the Self, and from there, include The Family, The Community and then The Nation. If the nation is strong at it's roots and the people are involved in the change, no matter how small, they will take ownership of the process because they will be part of it. The process must be sincere and dedicated to the cause of "unity" for First Nations people of this country.

The healing and building unity lies at the "Grass roots" level and it is at that level where real change must occur through the education of Aboriginal people by Aborigingals ,and through the support of First Nations organizations.

Self Healing:

Our growth and progress will be dependent on our ability to continue the Healing process for self, family, community and nation. We must learn to manage our own lives and the life of our communities and strive to improve the social condition of Aboriginal people.

Holistic Healing would be promoted and sponsored by communities and health organizations as a valid form of medicine.

Healing would include all areas of our lives: the physical, the mental, the intellectual and the spiritual.

Preventative medicine will be viewed as equally important as curative, with the emphasis on the first.

Self-Management:

Education and training on an on-going basis through programs that are adequately funded to be effective to learn about management in the following areas, be it through our own educational institutions on or off reserve, or Aboriginal supported programs:

- Community Development
- Health Services
- Housing
- Social Services
- Business & Administration
- Management & Leadership
- Community Interaction
- Language , Culture & Traditions
- Spirituality
- Education
- Economic Development
- Policing
- Governing systems
- Law & Policy Making
- Resource & Land Use Management
- Aboriginal History
- Information, and Resource Centres

Through continuing education, training and application we will acquire the knowledge and skills to manage ourselves effectively and develop the ability to make information based decisions that are going to serve the Aboriginal People in all facets of their lives.

Government & Leadership:

Government of First Nations, by First Nations must incorporate the following:

Aboriginal People in decision-making bodies in determining Laws/Policies and responsibilities.

Full recognition of Urban Aboriginal

Government recognition of our chosen leaders, urban and on-reserve.

Control and acceptance of the system we choose to select our leaders, be it elections, consensus based appointments or any other method we so choose to use.

Recognition of Urban Aboriginal people as equals with all other Aboriginal peoples but having distinct needs which differ from on-reserve population.

Voting rights for Urban Aboriginal people and equal representation.

Strong political voice structured more as a coalition than individual power structure, but has powers to act on behalf of urban population.

Recognition of our political coalition.

Bottom-up driven process, grassroots membership to leaders.

Culturally sensitive process by which to communicate with leaders on all levels.

Strong network of communications between memberships, political leaders, organizations and Tribal councils and government.

Membership:

We especially are aware of the need for a clear picture in defining membership. Our children are our future and control of the decisions that affect these children should be in the hands of Aboriginal people themselves.

Abolishment of Bill C-31 and total reinstatement of all members and their children, grandchildren and so on, according to our decision as a people with the power to decide these things for ourselves.

Elimination of the word "Status" and "Non-status" or "Treaty" and "Non-treaty" and the development of a system that incorporates all Aboriginal peoples.

Citizenship, or representative term for Urban Aboriginal population.

Land Base & Natural Resources

Equal access to and a share in the resources respective of our place of residence.

Settlement of Land Claims for Aboriginal People.

Expansion of present land base to include equitable shares for our population growth.

Control of Natural Resources, which are situated on our Land base.

A major consultant in the control of Forest and Fishery Management.

Economic Development:

Control of Natural Resources on our Land Base from which we can develop a sound economic base for our communities along with education and training in all areas of management and organization.

First Nations artists' work is sought after by the world and is a proven economic prospect with an even greater future.

The development and support of crafts persons in cottage industries, and cooperative ventures allows mothers, children and the elderly to participate in economic self sufficiency.

Joint ventures with other communities, bands and businesses will provide added power to the dollars invested. This cooperation, along with business and organizational training and skills will ensure that these ventures are successful.

The possibilities are endless and can only be limited by ourselves: with knowledge, skill and know how, we will be capable of expanding our horizons to become world traders.

Education:

How can First Nations people be sure that Indian Control of Indian Education is the direction we should take? Verna Kirkness (1979) stated

" We can't be sure but we have no other alternative. We have been subjects of experimentation by others for many years. We have never before had the opportunity to decide our own destiny. We have witnessed years of failure in Canadian schools. We can not allow it to go on. We must design a system that will ensure our children maximum success. Our chance of success are great if we unite our efforts, seek the council of our elders and strive forward even in the face of adversity. "

We must have the following in place:

1. Sufficient funding to carry out necessary educational programs in all areas.
2. Trained First Nation people in the roles of teachers and administrators.
3. Trained board members.
4. Recognition of school boards.
5. Funding for training or upgrading.
6. More funding for First Nations language and culture curriculum development.
7. A support mechanism for teachers, administrators, and boards.
8. Capital funding to build new facilities or renovate/expand existing structures. We are presently hampered by a 20 year wait list.

The traditional methods of education are holistic, and provide instruction in all areas of individual life: personal worth, pride in ones culture, humility, trustworthiness, language and culture, bravery, cleanliness, kindness, respect for the elderly and one another, self-respect, and for nature, independence, self-reliance, as well as food gathering and preservation. With all of these principles firmly entrenched within our nation, we will experience few problems on the road to Self Governance and Independence as human beings and a Nation.

We are grateful that we have existing organizations such as " First Nations Education Services", that fight ceaselessly on the behalf of First Nations people to take control of our own education. And we as Friendship Centres will do all we can to support Education for First Nations by First Nations.

THE COMMUNICATIONS LINK

A major communications link is needed throughout "First Nations country". The establishment of such an exchange medium and information base is vital in the process of unity. Individual organizational information needs for demographics, statistics, service providers, funding agencies, employment opportunities, resources - technical and human, educational opportunities, cultural and recreational functions could all be made available from such a base. Information exchanges would eliminate the need to constantly re-invent the process for development.

Many First Nations students are now entering and graduating from post secondary institutions and will be coming into the work force, many of them seeking employment in First Nation organizations. Communications and Professional development are a major component of their study and training. These skills are required in the organization and maintenance of such a communication system. The continued training and development of our Human resources and the development of a resource centre would be of primary importance in establishing a functioning communications network.

A nationwide sharing of information from a centralized location would help to serve peoples informational needs for:

- Native Help organization,
- Educational Institutions,
- Community organizations,
- Emergency Assistance,
- Employment opportunities, province wide, nation wide.,
- Upcoming Activity and Event information, nationwide.
- Statistics, Demographics of other communities,
- Governmental data
- Completed and on-going studies and results around First Nations issues.
- Economic Development opportunities and services,
- Legal and professional organizations that specialize in First Nations issues.
- Conferences being held regarding First Nations issues,
- Exchange programs etc.

The Information Resource Centre would be a vital link for communities and organizations from which to share and develop cooperative ventures and the building of unity for First Nations people.

The process of unity itself, would open doors to self sufficiency for First Nations people. Information is knowledge, and knowledge fosters understanding and commitment and provides a base on which to make informed decisions about our lives as a community and a nation capable of Self-Governance.

Gathering and Sharing of Resources:

There are many roadblock and hurdles still in our way on the road to Self-Governance, but First Nations people are strong and durable; resourceful through necessity. Our biggest resource is the people and it is through reaching out to communities at the grass roots level, we can start to utilize our greatest source - people, and present a united front to the government and demand that we be recognized as a people capable of Self Governance.

The biggest responsibility will be in the hands of First Nations people to seek for, and find ways to make the best use of the resources we now have and stand by our principles in demanding what is rightfully ours, through well researched and documented information.

Such steps to gathering resources would be:

1. Utilizing community members such as the Elders and mature adults, expanding their role within the community for the purpose of structuring and teaching of programs such as language, culture and tradition.
2. Active recruitment of the youth and other community members to help in volunteer roles which provides training to take responsibility of future projects and which in turn builds feelings of self- accomplishment and self-esteem.
3. Women of the community to work for women's issues and create cooperative services and support programs to meet the day to day needs of families.
Women are the influencers of tomorrows leaders.
4. Community leaders to support progressive thinking for the community.
5. The use of role models from within the community and inviting others from outside to come into the communities to share their experiences with the people. Many of our high profile people have made themselves accessible to help communities and people come together.
6. Networking with other organizations, bands and urban communities to share information and exchange ideas to formulate solutions to problems and issues within the community.

7. Helping the community to take ownership of it's own destiny, through planning, where needs and issues are identified by the prospective communities.
8. Encourage and support of cultural activities within the community.
9. Bands and communities should encourage young people and First Nations trained people to return to the communities through community support programs.
10. Help to develop a "Historic Profile" of the community, members, regions, Tribal groups, etc. It is through knowing who we are that we are able to share with the rest of the world.
11. Create own training and employment opportunities within the community or band through planning for present and future needs.
12. Restructure established programs to include more people and expansion of services and to change attitudes about limitations which are often created by our own failure to visualize.
13. Create new needed services by utilizing human resources.

Solutions and ideas are many and varied. No one solution will be right for every community because of our unique differences but the method devised can be universal.

Government Responsibilities:

1. To continue open communication with First Nations organization.
2. Recognition First Nations organizations capabilities to provide services, and to administer and monitor funds destined for services needed according to First Nations criteria.
3. Admission of First Nations people into Ministries that deal with First Nations issues.
4. Commitment more dollars to First Nations programs on a long term basis.
5. Centralization of funding, to be distributed from that core to First Nations service providers to eliminate middlemen dollars being spent.

The Interim Process:

What process of transformation would we like to see implemented?

Do we want to duplicate the present system of government with it's cumbersome bureaucracy, where funds are eaten up by the machinery of administration which is tied together with endless RedTape, policies, and rules and regulations? Or do we want a simpler method and means of accountability? A method where the true spirit of independence is allowed and encouraged to grow through our culture and traditions which has served our ancestors for thousands of years.

We as a First Nation organization are dedicated to being an integral part in this transformation for our people, urban and rural. The many years that have been spent serving our people have provided us with experience and knowledge to recognize what our members need and want to make a better future for themselves and their families.

The spirit of unity is growing among Friendship Centres and it is our responsibility to see that we continue to grow together. Through the cooperative efforts of all of our centres, sound principles, impeccable ethics and hard work we will be able to make changes that will benefit our people and the nation as a whole.

Government can assist this transition by recognizing Friendship Centres as a major service provider and help the growth of First Nations organizations by

1. Supporting open communication with Friendship Centres on all levels of government.
2. Engaging in meaningful and realistic discussion with First Nation organizations.
3. Refraining from patronizing attitudes when dealing with our issues.
4. Committing themselves to long term funding that is adequate to meet the peoples needs. This process would serve as a barometer, from which to measure growth and allow a period of time to make adjustments to programs and or delivery in which to promote continued growth.
5. Transference of funds to organizations that can meet the needs of urban First Nations people and that have a proven track records of accountability and results, thus eliminating the competition for dollars.

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6. Allowing First Nations organizations to develop own criteria based on membership cooperation and input.
7. Providing adequate funds to meet the needs of urban First Nations people for
 - a. Education, Post Secondary and Technical
 - b. Health - Social/Mental and Social Services
 - c. Housing
 - d. Employment Opportunities

The Interim process will be the proving ground of First Nations peoples, and Government. A place where First Nations will begin the exercise of governing and making decision for ourselves.

APPENDIX A

History of Friendship Centres

History of Friendship Centres

Some landmarks in the history of the Friendship Centre movement:

- *Friendship Centres have their roots in the 1950s when three organizations opened in major urban areas to assist Indians and Metis moving to the city. The organizations were the North American Indian Club of Toronto (1951), the Coqualeetza Indian Fellowship Club of Vancouver (1952) and the Winnipeg Indian and Metis Friendship Centre (1959).*
- *Between 1959 and 1968, Friendship Centres were largely dependant on volunteer labour with funding coming from fund raising events, private donations, grants from foundations and project funding from provincial and federal governments.*
- *By 1968, the movement had grown to encompass 30 communities across Canada, and Provincial Territorial Associations had begun to evolve.*
- *In 1969 a steering committee was formed to examine the feasibility of establishing a national representative body for Friendship Centres.*
- *The National Association of Friendship Centres was incorporated in 1972 to represent the concerns of some 40 Friendship Centres*
- *Also in 1972, the federal government recognized the contribution of Friendship Centres and provided the first of what was to become three five-year funding programs administered through Secretary of State. The Migrating Native People's Program (MNPP) provided Core funding to Friendship Centres.*
- *An evaluation of the MNPP conducted in 1976 concluded that Friendship Centres were far exceeding the expectations that were placed upon them. Recommendation was made for an expanded program in light of this increasingly important role.*
- *In 1978 the MNPP was renewed for five years with the addition of a number of discretionary components intended to further support the expanded role of Friendship Centres.*

These components included funding for Satellite Friendship Centres, training, capital, community interaction and data collection.

- *By 1983 there were 80 Friendship Centres, and the MNPP was renewed under a new name, the Native Friendship Centre Program (NFCP). The NFCP was given a five year term, to 1988.*
 - *By 1988 there were 99 core funded Friendship Centres in Canada. The NAFC and the federal government designed the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program in that year, a program that included the addition of components for bilingualism, disabled access and self-sufficiency projects. The AFCP was entrenched as a permanent program.*
 - *There are currently 99 Core funded Friendship Centres, 12 new and developing Friendship Centres, two Satellites and 7 Provincial/Territorial Associations.*
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Fact sheet

Some facts about the NAFC and Friendship Centres:

The Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program

- *There are 111 Friendship Centres across the country, 99 of which are core funded through the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program.*
- *The remaining 12 new and developing Friendship Centres run primarily through volunteer labour.*
- *The Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program is funded by the Secretary of State at \$19.66 million for the 1992-93 fiscal year. It is thought that this money generates \$52.33 million worth of services in urban Aboriginal communities.*
- *Since the inception of the AFCP, 79 Friendship Centres have accessed capital funding for the purchase or renovations of their buildings.*
- *Since 1983, 21 Friendship Centres have used funding from the disabled access component AFCP to make their buildings accessible.*
- *Since 1983, 32 Friendship Centres have made use of the emergency repairs component of the AFCP.*

Services offered by Friendship Centres

Most of the Friendship Centres in Canada offer the following services:

- *referral and information*
- *justice programs such as courtworkers and youth diversion*
- *drop-in centres and social programs*
- *food and housing services for those in need of the basics of living*
- *counselling and social work programs*
- *recreation*
- *employment and training*

- *cultural education programs*
- *life skills and drug and alcohol programs*
- *information resources for the non-Aboriginal community agencies*
- *small business and community economic development ventures*

The off-reserve Aboriginal population

- *In 1986, 552,000 Aboriginal people lived off-reserve. This represents 73% of Canada's Aboriginal population.*
- *The off-reserve Aboriginal population represents 2.2% of the Canadian population. the on-reserve population totals 0.6%.*
- *Only 11% of off-reserve Aboriginal people have an Aboriginal language as a mother tongue. Only 7% of off-reserve Aboriginal people still speak their language at home, suggesting a need for support language retention in urban areas.*
- *In 1986, 21% of off-reserve Aboriginal people were unemployed, compared to 10% of the general Canadian population.*
- *39% of off-reserve Aboriginal people were working full-time and year-round, compared to 60% of the total Canadian population.*
- *Off-reserve Aboriginal people are generally poorer than the Canadian population. 51% had annual incomes less than \$10,000 compared to only 39% of Canadians.*
- *18% of off-reserve Aboriginal people earned more than \$25,000 annually compared to 26% of the Canadian population.*

Sources:

Evaluation of the Native Friendship Centre Program, 1988. SPR Associates.

Canada's Off-Reserve Aboriginal Population, 1991. Department of the Secretary of State.

Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program Capital History, 1991. Department of the Secretary of State.

FRIENDSHIP CENTRES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**HISTORY:**

The history of Friendship Centres in British Columbia dates back to 1954 when a group of concerned Aboriginal people in Vancouver formed the Coqualeetza Fellowship Club in order to provide support services to Aboriginal students moving to the city. Although providing support to students remained a primary objective of this group, the organizers over the next few years found themselves responding to ever increasing requests for services from Aboriginal people moving into Vancouver. In 1963, the incorporation of the Coqualeetza Fellowship Club as the Vancouver Indian Centre Society marked the beginning of the Friendship Centre movement in British Columbia.

By the mid 1960s, the number of Aboriginal people moving to urban areas had escalated to the point where support organizations were emerging in many Centres across the Province. Other Centres whose history dates back to this period include:

Port Alberni (1965), Nanaimo (1968), Williams Lake (1969), Prince George (1969), Fort St. John (1970).

In response to the growing need to provide services to urban Aboriginal people, in 1971 the Federal government, through the Department of the Secretary of State, introduced the Migrating Native People's Program which provided core funding to Friendship Centres. Over the next ten years, this initiative led to fourteen new Centres being established in B.C., attesting to both the need

and community support existing across the province.

In these early years, Friendship Centres were primarily perceived as a place where Aboriginal people could drop in and have a cup of coffee; a place where they could socialize with their own people and receive emotional support. During these formative years, Friendship Centres offered few direct services; their primary role was to refer people to existing social service agencies.

As Friendship Centres became established in their communities and gained acceptance with service agencies and the community at large, a trend emerged in the mid 1970s which saw Aboriginal people being referred from agencies to the Centres. This development marked a major change for the movement as Friendship Centres, in cooperation with government agencies, began to provide a number of client based services in the areas of employment, substance abuse, family support, legal services and cultural retention. During these early years, Friendship Centres also initiated programs and services designed to educate and inform non-Aboriginal people as to the needs, aspirations and culture of the Aboriginal residents in the community. This remains a primary objective of Friendship Centres, which by definition are committed to developing a better understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

Today, in an era marked by continuing high unemployment rates, cutbacks in government spending and general economic uncertainty, Friendship Centres play an even more important role in the Aboriginal community. No longer do they simply provide social,

cultural and recreational services, but they also act as agents of change; they are actively involved in the community development process and play a vital leadership role in their communities.

They promote and provide training and education programs and services, they are becoming actively involved in the economic development process; they operate quality housing programs for Aboriginal people with low incomes and operate health programs which emphasize a holistic approach to treatment; they are committed to providing quality services which provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual well being of their clients.

While each Centre is as unique as the community it serves, all are united in their effort to improve the quality of life of Canada's Aboriginal people and to protect and preserve Aboriginal culture for the benefit of all Canadians. Friendship Centres are reflective of the communities they serve, controlled at the local level and, above all else, responsible to and responsive to, the people they serve.

It is the belief of Friendship Centres that Aboriginal people played an important role in the development of Canada as a nation and will play an even more important role in the future. They support the movement toward Aboriginal Self Government and encourage the full participation of Aboriginal people in Canadian society.

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS:

All Friendship Centres were founded by volunteers, by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal working together to provide needed services. The movement is rooted in volunteerism and despite the rapid growth which most Centres have experienced in the past twenty years, they are still highly dependent on volunteers to provide much needed services. Volunteers play a particularly vital role in the areas of cultural and recreational activities for children and youth which form an essential part of Friendship Centre programming.

THE ROLE OF ELDERS:

Elders play an important part in the Friendship Centre movement. They are both the link with the past and guides into the future. They educate the young on the ways of the past thus ensuring the traditions and culture are not lost. Through their leadership, they point the young towards the future. They promote pride in their culture and in ones self and provide guidance and direction to the leaders within the movement. Friendship Centres recognize and give respect to Elders because they recognize that without the Elders wisdom and guidance, the movement could not be a family united, supportive and caring for one other and the people they serve. They are the glue that binds Friendship Centres together in a common cause based on equality and justice.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH:

Youth have always played an important role in Friendship Centres. Many, if not most, Friendship Centres evolved from organizations providing services to youth having difficulty in making the transition to an urban lifestyle. It is unfortunate but true that those same needs exist today and will continue into the future. While progress has been made in terms of more young Aboriginal people entering and completing post secondary training, there still exists in both the reserve and off-reserve communities, a level of poverty which breeds despair amongst the young. Suicide, substance abuse, incarceration rates and low achievement levels in school remain far higher than the average, attesting to the lack of faith many young Aboriginal people have in the future.

Friendship Centres believe that to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth will require a concerted effort by the Aboriginal community and all levels of government. They believe that to address the needs of youth, to restore their belief in the future, traditional family values must be stressed; belief in the extended family, in one's clan, one's tribe and, finally, in one's self. It is the aim of every Friendship Centre to promote self-esteem, to restore dignity and pride and to work with the non-Aboriginal community so as to dispel the stereotyped image Aboriginal people face every day of their lives. Friendship Centres will continue to advocate for youth, to provide programs and services designed to restore their sense of self worth and to create change in society at large which will allow their full participation.