



Solicitor General  
Canada

Solliciteur général  
Canada

# **Understanding the Role of Healing in Aboriginal Communities**

APC 10 CA (1994)

by  
Marcia B. Krawll

July, 1994

This report was prepared under contract with the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada. The views expressed are those of the author and the participants, and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report attempts to develop a common understanding of "healing" among Aboriginal community members and non-Aboriginal government representatives. "Healing" is a term now widely used but perhaps not well understood. It is used to refer to certain positive developments occurring in Aboriginal communities in Canada and elsewhere.

The **purpose of this report** is threefold:

- to provide the reader with a working definition of "healing" in Aboriginal communities;
- to describe healing approaches that are currently being undertaken or developed which have included offenders as a part of the healing process; and
- to recommend possible government roles and strategies for supporting healing processes in Aboriginal communities.

Chapter II describes how the study was conducted. The report is based on in-depth interviews with Aboriginal community members in five communities across Canada, together with similar interviews with federal and provincial government representatives. In total, 121 in-person interviews were conducted. In addition, telephone and mail contact was made with persons in three other Aboriginal communities. The report relies heavily on the actual words of the people interviewed in order to give life to the analysis.

Chapter III describes a healthy or healing community. Several aspects of the healing process are also common to a concept which is probably better known to non-Aboriginal people under the name **community development**. The author suggests that the language and process of community development may assist governments to understand what Aboriginal people mean when they say "healing".

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants alike identified many of the same aspects of a **healthy community**, or one which has been on the road to healing. These aspects included: people getting involved in their community; a greater sense of trust, caring and sharing among community members; positive parenting and the sharing of intergenerational wisdom; openness and communication among community members, without blaming or shame; clear role expectations and people taking responsibility; and a sense of connectedness and sensitivity to one another which promotes healthy partnerships and collective action.

Chapter IV explores the **process of healing**. Healing was universally recognized to be a very complex phenomenon, and one which was difficult to define. No single definition was found. However, it is suggested that there are three key aspects to the process of healing: that it comes from within and moves outward, often starting with the individual and then moving to the family and then to the community; that to be successful, it must address all parts of life concurrently and keep them in balance; and that it may start from a series of discrete programs such as substance

abuse counselling, but must move into a holistic process involving a community mandate which is more than the sum of these individual parts.

In Chapter V, the report explores the **community's readiness to heal itself**. It is important to be able to recognize when a community is ready, because that is the time when support is critical and unnecessary barriers to development should be removed. Among the signs of readiness are that people recognize the problems, are motivated to change, and are willing to take responsibility. This Chapter also raises the question of who should determine when a community is ready to heal. It is the community itself that should do so, but it is unrealistic to expect that all individuals in a community will reach consensus on readiness at the same time. Often, it is a core group in the community who recognize that the community is ready, and initiate activities which start the process of healing.

Chapter VI outlines some of the **recognizable steps and activities which tend to set in motion the process for healing**. The community's vision crystallizes; people move from a belief that change can occur to a process for making it happen; there is self-exploration, community support and the beginnings of a spiritual journey; a core group of people initiate activities in support of change; and people recognize the value of what is already in place in the community, and begin to build on that in a natural, organic way.

Chapter VII deals specifically with the ways in which a healing approach can apply with **victims of crime and offenders**. Many community members suggested that such an approach can effectively respond to certain concerns about the criminal justice system and provide an ideal community response to crime:

- the healing approach addresses the problems of both victim and offender, not focusing on one to the exclusion of the other;
- victims and their families, often considered "the forgotten players" in the criminal justice system, are supported and protected in a healing model, which sees all community members as critical and interconnected parts of the whole;
- in fact, the healing approach would seek to repair the harm done by the offence, and to address the underlying causes of the offence, within the entire community and for all community members who are affected;
- the healing approach can also act much more quickly than the criminal justice system, whose slow workings can "tear families up";
- healing can deal more directly and effectively with the offender's behaviour than, for example, the imposition of a prison sentence, which is often nothing more than punishment;
- on the other hand, healing can be a trying and painful experience for offenders, who are made to face their responsibility and their problems;

- a healing approach also supports the offender to reintegrate successfully into the community, a process which can be made more difficult by conventional criminal justice approaches; and
- healing victims and offenders can have spin-off benefits for the entire community, restoring community balance and showing the community that it can develop and give life to its own solutions.

**Chapter VIII further explores some of the ways in which "healing" may be understood as a process of community development.** Ways are suggested in which outsiders may be of assistance in the process, but emphasizes that the community itself must maintain control. Some **new ways are suggested for assessing the impact of healing**, which is slow, complex and profound, and therefore invisible to some of the more commonly used measures of change. Perhaps the most important indicator of healing is that people take more responsibility for their community.

**Chapter IX addresses some of the ways in which non-Aboriginal government programs and processes could be made to be more responsive to and supportive of communities' healing.** One of the biggest obstacles is that the narrow confines of many government programs and mandates get in the way of holistic approaches which seek to treat the whole person, the whole family, and the whole community. Some of the most useful things governments can do include acknowledging similarities and differences through open dialogue, being supportive instead of directive, and providing skills training. Most of all, government assistance should be provided in ways designed to support a sustained and integrated community effort, and to build on skills and resources in the community so that people can carry on independently after funding is withdrawn.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>9</b>
The Interview Process	9
How Interviews Were Conducted	11
Design Of The Questionnaire	12
Confidentiality Of The Information	12
Interviews With Government Officials	13
Sharing The Information	14
A Note About Participant Responses	14
Organization Of This Report	15
<b>CHAPTER III. WHAT IS A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?</b>	<b>16</b>
People Getting Involved In The Community	16
Trust, Caring And Sharing	17
Positive Parenting, Good Teachings	18
Openness, Communication	18
Note Being Ashamed	19
Taking Responsibility, Having Clear Expectations	20
<b>CHAPTER IV. THE HEALING PROCESS: A PROCESS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>22</b>
"Healing Is..."	23
"... A Process"	24
Three Aspects Of The Healing Process Are...	24
Moving From Within	24
Balance And Wholeness	26
Moving From "Programs" To "Process"	27
<b>CHAPTER V. WHEN IS A COMMUNITY READY TO HEAL ITSELF: WHO DETERMINES "READINESS", AND HOW?</b>	<b>31</b>
Determining Readiness	31
Recognition Of Problems	31
Motivation For Change	32
Willingness To Take Responsibility	33
Who Determines Readiness	35
A Role Of The Community "Core" Group	35
The Role Of Outside Governments	37
A Caution About Assessing Readiness	38
A Final Note About Assessing Readiness	39
<b>CHAPTER VI. MAKING THE CHANGE: HOW HEALING PROCESSES BEGIN</b>	<b>41</b>

Clarifying The Vision	41
Moving From A Belief To A Process	41
Activities In Support Of The Process	42
Activities In Support Of Change	45
Building On What Is Already In Place	46
<b>CHAPTER VII. COMMUNITY HEALING: VICTIMS &amp; OFFENDERS</b>	<b>48</b>
Working With Victims And Offenders	48
Program Issues	50
Treating The Offender	50
Finding The Balance Between "Too Soft" And "Too Harsh"	52
Protection Of Victims	53
Taking Responsibility ... Taking Control	54
Community Support For Victims And Offenders	55
Restoring Community Balance And Empowering The Community	56
<b>CHAPTER VIII. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A PROCESS FOR HEALING AND A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>59</b>
Community Development And Healing: Common Language, Common Elements	59
Role Of The Community Versus Role Of Outsiders	60
Measuring Change	61
Youth: Creating Their Own Measures	65
Owning The Problem ... Finding The Solution	66
<b>CHAPTER IX. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT: HOW AND WHAT?</b>	<b>68</b>
The Need To Recognize Differences In Basic Perceptions	69
The "Hows" Of Government Work In Aboriginal Communities	70
Listen And Observe	71
Dialoguing	73
Do An "Attitudes Check"	74
Support Rather Than Imposition	76
Greater Flexibility In Exercising Mandates	77
New Ways Of Looking At "Results"; New Ways Of Communicating Results	79
The Need To Increase Skills	80
Keeping The People With The Skills In The Community	81
Steps In The Government Process	81
Funding From Government	82
Suggested Role For Solicitor General And Other "Justice" Agencies	84
Readiness: A Set Of Questions For Governments To Ask Themselves	85
Community Development: Additional Questions For Governments To Ask Themselves	86
<b>CHAPTER X. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>88</b>

## **CHAPTER I.**

### **INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT**

**Several years ago when I was living in the north, I had to go to the community hospital. By the time I left I carried a large bag filled with medicines. I had told the doctor that I had a headache. He prescribed some pills. I told him I had problems with my sinuses and he prescribed more pills. When I told him I had a sore throat, he prescribed throat lozenges. When he heard me cough, I was told to take even more medicine. Finally I told him I was sick to my stomach. He prescribed this liquid that looked like milk but tasted terrible. It was sure a good thing that I didn't have to pay for all these medicines.**

**To me that is not healing. If he had asked why I felt terrible, I would have probably told him that I had been drinking bean juice at a friend's house and had walked around the community without my coat on. It was February when this happened. I believe the doctor would have been more effective as a healer if he had convinced me to stop drinking bean juice or, at least, to put on my coat in the middle of winter. The doctor may have dealt with my health problems at the time, but my problems kept coming back until I smartened up and stopped this behaviour.**

**I often see governments acting like the doctor. Governments will see a problem in our communities and try to fix it with a program or service that addresses only that problem. After a number of years, our communities look like me when I was a patient. Our communities are carrying around a bag full of programs and services that have been developed to address specific illnesses but don't necessarily work together in harmony nor do they address the underlying causes of our problems.**

**In many ways, our communities have supported this approach in the past. When there are so many needs in a community, anything is better than nothing. Quite often, governments will use the "take it or leave it" approach so there is no chance for our communities to adapt these services to meet our individual needs.**

**I believe things are changing now in many communities. They have seen that, even with a bag full of programs in their communities, suicides are increasing, sexual assaults have increased and there is still nothing for the people to do. These communities are taking control over their futures and saying that we must find the causes of our illnesses, both as individuals and as communities, and heal those illnesses in ways that the communities choose to do so. In this way, they are shaking up that bag of "medicines" and making sure they**

**work the way the communities want and that they are blended together. Governments have been invited to participate in this new approach but it has been made clear that, if governments do not or cannot help in healing processes, it would be better if they just stood aside and got out of the way.**

"Healing" is a term which is now heard a great deal, in reference to Aboriginal people and communities. As will be seen in this report, there is no single meaning given to the term "healing." Nonetheless, it is important to try to establish a common basis for understanding the term "healing". Aboriginal people and the governments (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) which work with them, all have a role to play in the healing process.

This report is intended to give the reader a sample of Aboriginal perceptions about healing, to help create a common understanding of healing and to establish the beginnings of a common language by which governments and Aboriginal people can productively discuss healing. Readers are encouraged to examine their own understanding of healing as part of this process. Perceptions and attitudes will differ. This makes it critical to ensure respect for the understandings and experience of others, in order to strengthen the possibilities for creating viable partnerships between governments and Aboriginal people.

The purpose of the project was thus threefold:

- To provide a working understanding of healing in Aboriginal communities and explore the similarities and differences in that concept among several communities;
- To describe healing approaches that are currently being undertaken or developed that have included offenders as a part of the healing process; and
- From the above two activities, to recommend possible roles and strategies for governments, and in particular, the Solicitor General of Canada, within its corrections-related mandate, to support healing processes in Aboriginal communities.

Fundamental questions were raised within this study which are meant to generate further dialogue and exploration about the process of healing and the roles of governments in that process. These questions also served to emphasize the complexity of the issue in the attempt to define healing and to determine specific factors which may be connected to the healing process.

Communities selected for this project demonstrated their willingness to participate and a commitment to the objectives of the project throughout the interview process. Their desire to heal their communities and their willingness to openly participate in another

government study are revealed in the statements and comments made by those interviewed.

The challenge and the difficulty in writing this report reflect the task itself, which was to build a bridge of understanding between Aboriginal community members and non-Aboriginal persons around the concept of "healing". The challenge specific to the writing was to take information which was often expressed in a more circular, story-telling style, and present it in ways which will be understandable to non-Aboriginal people, who often employ a more linear and analytical style. The attempt has been to blend these two styles of communication throughout the report.

The Project Coordinator wishes to thank those who participated and shared the vision of creating an opportunity to work in partnership to develop healthy and responsible communities.

## **CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY**

For this study, community members from selected Aboriginal communities, along with a small sample of government officials, were interviewed on the subject of healing. The selection of these Aboriginal communities was based upon the fact that they have taken concrete steps towards healing their communities. The report does not attempt or serve to represent the perspective or experience of all Aboriginal communities or their members, but rather to identify some patterns or philosophical understandings with respect to healing and the process of healing which are shared by these communities.

Site visits were conducted over a four-month period in five selected Aboriginal communities. Of these five selected communities, the **Nuxalk First Nation** (British Columbia), the **Hollow Water First Nation** (Manitoba), and the **Nisga'a Nation** (British Columbia) were designated as the primary communities for study. As a result, interviews were conducted in these communities on two separate visits. **Grassy Narrows First Nation** (Ontario) and the **Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Nation** (British Columbia) had interviews conducted in their communities during one site visit each. **Iqaluit** (Nunavut), **Conne River First Nation** (Newfoundland), and one Nation requesting not to be identified, were contacted by phone and mail for additional input.

The community asking to remain unidentified did so because they felt that their responses could be "pre-judged" by the readers since their community has experienced widespread media coverage in the recent past. They felt that if they remained anonymous, this would provide the reader with a greater opportunity to embrace the information more objectively.

### **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

The communities selected for participation were all known to the Project Coordinator. It was, however, imperative that the project be formally introduced and accepted through channels identified by the community. The Project Coordinator contacted known members of each community to ask for this direction. Once the channels of contact were identified, a letter about the project was drafted and sent to each community. Initially, eight communities were contacted by mail to request their participation. All agreed to participate. Due to travel budget constraints, however, three of the eight communities could only be interviewed by the Project Coordinator by telephone or mail. The limited scope of participation by these three communities reflects the need for any project of this nature to have resources available to ensure that each community be interviewed on-site for a minimum of two, four-day site visits. Although these communities were willing to participate in an internal interview process, in the end it became difficult for these communities to identify individuals who were trained to conduct interviews with

community members without financial compensation for their time since, in every case, these individuals had other commitments in the community.

The **Nuxalk Nation (Bella Coola)**, **Hollow Water First Nation**, and the **Nisga`a Nation** were visited twice during the project for a total of ten days each. This second opportunity reinforced the commitment and sincere interest to hear what people had to say. It also encouraged more community members to come forth since more trust was built over time. It further provided the opportunity for the Project Coordinator to make revisions to the questionnaire in order to generate more accurate information about the process of healing from a community perspective. In turn, community members could expand on what they had previously shared, creating the opportunity for greater participation and increased information exchange.

This approach reinforced the concept that communities must be full partners in this process if information for this report was to be drawn from the "expertise" of community members. Partnership in this process meant that participation was granted throughout the life of the project. A critical element towards promoting full participation was the opportunity for community members to decide how the study would be conducted in their community. Communities were asked to decide if and how they wanted to participate and how the interview process should be conducted. Community members were also asked to participate in the editing process by commenting on the drafts leading up to the final report.

It was also important to realize that this was a government-initiated project which, by its nature, would create invisible boundaries which have an impact on what information is actually received by the Project Coordinator. Without the full agreement of the hereditary Chiefs, elected leaders and key individuals from each community, it would not have been possible to have engaged the participation of so many band members. It was felt that it was critical to create an atmosphere where all parties involved would experience a sense of ownership in the process and outcome.

Each of the five communities selected for on-site interviews was asked to take an active role in selection of those to be interviewed and to assign someone from the community to assist the Project Coordinator in the interview process. This was to provide the opportunity for any follow-up which might have been necessary with individuals who were interviewed and to make the information exchanged in the interviews immediately available to the community for future planning and development.

Those individuals who were interviewed in the communities included Elders, youth, parents, political leaders, victims, offenders, and government employees. In total 121, individuals were interviewed. All interviews were voluntary; however, communities were initially asked to identify individuals to the Project Coordinator to ensure that a cross-section of the community would be included and a wide range of responses could be generated. Interviews were conducted individually and in groups, depending on availability of the individual being interviewed, the stated preference of location based on suitability for privacy, and the time available to conduct the interview. Participant input

to how, where, and when the interview was conducted provided a greater opportunity for individuals to feel relaxed during the interview process.

### **HOW INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED**

The responsibility of the Project Coordinator, as the primary interviewer, was to set a comfortable tone during the interview process by ensuring that those interviewed understood the following:

- Who the Project Coordinator was;
- The purpose of the project;
- Confidentiality;
- Expectations of the interview; and
- The role of the participants in the project.

As the project developed, more community members volunteered their time to be interviewed. This clearly reflected their enthusiasm and willingness to take part in discussing healing in their communities. Each person agreed to being audio-taped. However, due to the size or, in one case, age of the group being interviewed, a limited number of interviews were conducted more like workshops where questions were discussed in small groups and responses were recorded on paper. In all cases, written permission was granted in order that responses could be used in this report.

Interviews held with youth presented the Project Coordinator with a challenge not experienced with the adults. Youth are often naturally reluctant to speak to adults, particularly on subjects that can elicit feelings of vulnerability or raise issues which may have remained otherwise private. One group of youth, for example, was initially interviewed in a large group setting and only a few youth responded. To encourage responses from more of the youth, while ensuring their own sense of ownership to the study, options were provided about how the interview could be conducted, including whether to continue to conduct the interview in the large group, to break into smaller groups or to cancel the session. The group chose to break into smaller groups and put their thoughts on flip-chart paper in words or drawings. They divided into their own groups and emerged with a wealth of information for the project.

Interviews varied in terms of time and location. In keeping with the objectives of the project the Project Coordinator sought ways to elicit full participation by the community. Time and location for this type of interview process became critical to developing the opportunity for open and honest dialogue. It was recognized throughout this project that the Project Coordinator was an invited guest to the community and that it was the communities which knew best how to ensure the success of the project. Therefore, the length of time of an interview and location was either directed by the community project assistant or by those being interviewed. Interviews were conducted in Band offices, schools, homes, and community halls, and ranged in length from approximately fifty minutes to up to three hours.

## **DESIGN OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Two open-ended questionnaires, reproduced in Appendix A, were developed for community members and government personnel respectively. The community questionnaire was revised part way through the project to stimulate further discussion, to clarify responses, and to elicit the best information possible. During the interview it was at the discretion of the interviewer to tailor questions to individual language and literacy needs. Questionnaires were made available to participants prior to the interview as a way to create a more friendly atmosphere and to reinforce that this project was not meant to be an evaluation or a piece of scientific research.

The questionnaires focused on the five specific objectives of this study. All respondents were asked to address the following:

- Define healing;
- Determine "readiness" factors;
- Identify specific healing activities;
- Clarify roles in the healing process; and
- Identify strategies for community development.

The questions were designed to encourage people to share their perceptions and understanding about healing and healing activities taking place in their community. Individuals were also asked to consider healing activities developed for or offered to offenders and victims.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE INFORMATION**

This study respected two levels of confidentiality: that of the individual and that of the community. All interviews were "confidential" in that no-one was asked to identify themselves on questionnaires or on audio-tape. It was felt that what was important was what was said and not necessarily who said it. Some participants have been identified within the text of this document by a particular grouping (eg. Elders, youth, offenders, government). The Project Coordinator, however, has tried to maintain the anonymity of individual participants throughout the report.

The communities, themselves, emphasized that community anonymity is essential to the success of a study of this nature and the degree of community anonymity must be agreed upon by the community and those conducting the study at the outset. Communities raised the concern that outsiders may not be able to remain objective about healing in the face of information they may have seen or heard about their communities in the media. There was also a shared perception that participating in these kinds of studies in the past has

had political repercussions and may result in negative consequences at upcoming negotiations. The communities' requests to remain anonymous or not, in relationship to this study, should not be seen as their "hiding" information but rather as a natural reaction to their experiences with media or other government initiatives and studies.

To capture the essence of what was shared, selected comments made by both community members and government employees are quoted throughout the text of this report. Some comments are quoted verbatim while others, not accompanied by quotation marks, are paraphrased. The project relied heavily on maintaining confidentiality, and any information that identified an individual or specific community was removed from the report. Cultural practices or traditional information, not privy to outsiders, was also deleted from the text except in cases where those interviewed specifically requested that it be left in.

As an example, two community members during their interview raised concerns about the translation and interpretation on paper of activities or traditional practices which Aboriginal people have shared with those outside the community. They have requested that their experience and concern be presented in this document to illustrate why many Aboriginal communities are reluctant to share information.

- "I want people to understand that when we raise a totem pole it is to give thanks to our parents who have gone on, and to those who helped to build this village. It is a time of celebration, and not a non-Christian ritual like so many outside people think. I am not saying that ritual practices have stopped. I know that there are people involved but just not in this area. I can see that ritual practices are coming and it is scary because the people are almost getting taken in. Just like the Whites are with the 'New Age' and stuff. That's how it is for Indians too. So it isn't only the Indians who have all these problems or cults. We are all the same no matter who we are. We are all the same. I know this because I read about what is going on in the world. When healing takes place we will be where we are supposed to be. We can excel." (Elder)
- "A traditional cleansing ceremony is not the old ritual, but we have hung on to the positive traditions in our cultures. The cleansing ceremony is very powerful and needs to be clarified, not as traditional rituals or traditional culture, because outsiders have tended to classify us as being so primitive and non-Christian. Our culture in this village is clarified as a Christian culture and a Christian nation and we don't do Indian rituals. I know this for sure because we banished Indian rituals when the Church came into the village. We have our dancing, eating, and singing but we don't call it rituals, we call it entertainment. I saw write-ups which I wasn't too happy about because they made us look so primitive and so evil. We are not real ritualistic. We are not into ritual acts." (Young Mother)

## **INTERVIEWS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

Government officials also contributed information contained in the context of this report. Most of their responses were obtained by mail. A total of six interviews, however, were conducted in person. Of those who were interviewed in person, two were interviewed in the community in which they worked. It was decided that the views and opinions of federal and provincial government officials would be integrated throughout this study rather than forming a separate section or chapter because their views were so similar to those of Aboriginal community members.

## **SHARING THE INFORMATION**

Although this project was initiated by the Aboriginal Corrections Unit of Solicitor General Canada, the project design ensured that the community was, as previously discussed, a full participant in the process and an equal recipient in the spin-offs. To this end, each participating community was given an opportunity to review all drafts of the report and will receive all the information collected from the community either in writing or by audio-tape. The Project Coordinator also received permission from those interviewed to brief members of the community prior to leaving. This was done in order to provide community members with information which may be useful for continuing their work with respect to healing, and to making contact with other communities engaged in similar activities.

It is hoped that this report will not sit on a shelf, but will be used by both governments and communities. Too often reports are completed but little or nothing is done to ensure their useability. Each community involved with this study has been asked to identify a process for distributing this report and to add names to the report's mailing list. It was felt that these actions would foster a the sense of ownership and collaboration in bringing life to this document.

## **A NOTE ABOUT PARTICIPANT RESPONSES**

It is critical to keep in mind that all comments are those of individuals or groups and do not necessarily reflect the perception or belief of their entire community, or that of all Aboriginal people across North America. It is evident, however, that for purposes of this study there appear to be common perceptions and shared themes about healing and more general community development.

In the struggle to provide a working understanding or definition of healing, the comments are presented in the style or manner in which they were received from the individual or group interviewed. It is suggested that these styles of communication represent individual differences which are found in every community. There are those who are concise, as is evidenced by single sentence responses, and those who are more comfortable with a style

similar to storytelling, as evidenced by the longer responses. Some of the responses are presented under theme headings in order to emphasize ideas or perceptions which may otherwise have been lost due to the length of some of the quotes.

The advantage of utilizing a wide selection of direct quotes throughout this report is to enable the report to speak to a broader audience. This presentation also serves to reinforce that successful community development lies in the ability to listen and to acknowledge that perceptions and ideas of individuals become the building blocks for a community. They provide us with themes and common threads which can both bind and move a community together.

This report will describe the communities' efforts to apply a healing, restorative approach to their problems. As much as possible, through the use of quotations, these sections will be told by the people themselves.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT**

The people interviewed for this study expressed many thoughts about the process and the end result of healing. To some extent the emphasis or focus contained in these comments differed from one individual to the next, but what is more evident is their similarity, and how interrelated the various aspects are.

In the text that follows, specific aspects or meanings attached by various participants to the term "healing" are discussed separately. It is critical to note, however, that these aspects are not seen separately by the participants. Both government and non-government participants spontaneously listed a large number of factors when asked to define healing and what would be involved in the healing process. It was clear to them, as well as to the Project Coordinator, that these various factors or aspects were seen as connected and mutually dependent. Nonetheless, for purposes of this report, an attempt has been made to examine each of the more commonly mentioned aspects in turn, in order to enrich the reader's understanding of each.

This, however, does a disservice to the complexity with which people understand and express the issues. In their various ways the participants in this study are describing a complex process of **community development**. It will be seen in the chapters to follow that this community development process cannot proceed on a single level or within a single aspect of the individual or the community.

### **CHAPTER III. WHAT IS A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?**

**A healed community is people who can work together and play together. Now there are constant little wars going on, people needing to be better than the other by buying something so their neighbours will have to go out and buy it. There are a lot of people in the community, including myself, who do not know what is going on in the community because we have this belief that it is none of our business, and it is sad. If a community was healed the community could talk about these things, and people could feel free to reach out to other people for help.**

When embarking upon a journey of healing, it is critical not only to understand the reasons or problems leading to this journey but also to know where you want to be at the end of the day. It could be argued that the end result of this journey is something which results in a substantial, sustained and positive change to what currently exists or reflects a solution to a problem or concern.

To imagine the end result of this journey provides a backdrop for articulating what healing in a community is about. Participants in this study shared their dreams, their visions of what they believe a healing or healthy community would look like. Examining these perceptions provides the first step in building a common understanding of healing.

#### **PEOPLE GETTING INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY**

- "I would see people becoming involved with all aspects that affect them, be it in education, health, economics, or political structures. It would be a very busy society with respect shown to one another and growth. I would see a buzz of activity where people are very involved."
- "That everybody understands one another, that everybody starts to care for their neighbours and begins to take an interest in where our village is heading and where our people stand today."
- "Parents not getting defensive about neighbours and family cautioning their kids collectively."
- "Everybody getting along, families sharing and the whole community working together."
- "This process is on-going and everyone in the community works together."

- "A lot of our women have to get involved because women are our lifegivers. And it is starting but a lot of our women have been stepped on and put down. So I really believe we have a long way to go."

Part of people getting involved in the community is dependent upon the example set by the leadership in the community. A government, elected or hereditary, which is supportive and involved in ensuring the effective functioning of services for and by the community creates an environment by which people want to become involved.

- "Responsive and dynamic government."
- "Consistent decisions by community as a whole in a circle, not just by or in certain groups."
- "For me the key issue is education. Our people need to be a little more assertive. It is doing things from the heart, not just going through the motions. Education is the key, and some people don't know where to start. Those of us who have had education know how to network."

### **TRUST, CARING AND SHARING**

Another aspect of a healing or healthy community is people becoming involved with one another and with the community as a whole by establishing the trust, respect and concern for one another which makes community involvement natural and spontaneous.

- "Trust, we really need to trust. Backstabbing, there is a lot of it."
- "Confidence in one another and being able to trust your neighbours around your kids."
- "Showing love to one another, trusting each other and not hiding anything but instead being truthful."
- "I see that happening here, people taking an interest and not necessarily just the elected leaders. This shows me a desire to learn and to see what is happening in other communities. It shows me that there is more confidence in a community. When I see that I see a community which is growing. I have recently had an offender who came to me and said that he felt ready to go to another community to help them in their work with their offenders."
- "People getting along. People acknowledging or greeting each other on the street."

This concept of "**people getting along and getting involved in their community**" could apply to or be used to describe almost any community within Canada, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Creating a safe and healthy environment is a concern not unfamiliar to those who pick up the daily newspaper or watch the nightly news. The problem of how life is, versus how we want it to be, is a shared concern among all people in Canada. The desire to ensure that we each have a role to play in helping others, or improving conditions for our children, is a common theme regardless of nationality, geography or politics. Respect is the very core of this understanding.

### **POSITIVE PARENTING, GOOD TEACHINGS**

Many people expressed the importance of youth and the view that a healing community will have set its youth on the right path through good parenting and the right teachings.

- "Family life, good parenting, no strife between neighbours."
- "Hopefully, somewhere down the line, the use of drugs and alcohol will be minimal rather than being predominant as it is today down among our children, eleven and twelve years old. Children are seemingly getting older a lot faster these days because I think parents are letting them be on their own too much. So they have to fend for themselves which means they are gathering their knowledge of survival a lot quicker and they're surviving through gathering. Hopefully down the road our parents can take care of other parents' children like they did in the past."
- "I see our children being left out. People talk about it but that is all they do. I raise it at public meetings and some people get after me about it. We have to start communicating with our young people. We have to talk to our Elders and a lot of people aren't using our Elders."
- "Learning the White system to survive, but keeping the traditional system to be who we are."

### **OPENNESS, COMMUNICATION**

Another articulated component or element to the vision of a healing or healthy community revolves around the "tool" of communication: individuals being able to talk openly while still being heard. Being heard means that listening must take place at all levels within the community and governments. One participant emphasized this component as part of their vision of a healthy community by providing examples of their personal struggle within their own community.

- "Communication. Communication among the community and helping each other. That is the only way I can see a healed community. I have seen it in other places, but it has been hard here. I don't see any communication here. We have a long way to go. In order to have a healed community, people have to be able to help each other rather than compete. We experience that with money, so we have to put money aside in order for our community to heal. People often see only dollar signs."
- "People to be able to talk to each other sensibly. Not screaming or hollering at one another. A lot more calm and people able to say things to one another."
- "I imagine a healed community to be more functional. Until we as a family can deal with things that cause friction and dysfunction, then it is not functional. I imagine a healed community to be able to table all issues and to say: **That is enough. I think we need to do something about it so that it does not go on and on!**"
- "More education and assertiveness where people are speaking from the heart."
- "Showing love to one another, trusting each other and not hiding anything but rather being truthful."
- "A functional community, a community which brings all issues to the `table'."

### **NOTE BEING ASHAMED**

This perception is also connected to the aspect of communication. Many Aboriginal people have been taught not to express themselves verbally or to raise issues in public that may lead to conflict. A part of healing is often empowering individuals to "break their chains of silence" and speak openly and freely about how they feel and what concerns them. It can be a liberating experience which, when shared with others, makes everyone feel that issues are dealt with openly and not "behind closed doors".

- "Dealing head-on with what afflicts you, accepting the pain, deciding what to do about it, then not digging it up again, not letting it dig at you."
- "For people to be positive towards one another. Being able to walk around and not be ashamed of the mistakes you have made. Looking after your community, having it clean and be able to turn to anyone for help."
- "When I think of a healed community I think of a support group where everyone is comfortable with each other and they're open and honest. Long term gains from groups like this. You are able to share without being afraid it will be passed on."

## **TAKING RESPONSIBILITY, HAVING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS**

In a healthy or healing community, people take responsibility, not just for themselves, but for the community. Trust is maintained, the norms and standards which a healthy community values are clear, and as a result, individuals in that community can each do their part to maintain those values.

- "The community demonstrates responsibility."
- "Imagine that the community is organized, not as a group, but in terms of our houses ... that they are kept in good shape and everything kept up."
- "People telling drunks to move along."
- "If our community was healed we would be happy people in our heart. My whole family died before I knew them except for one brother and my mother. I thought about it one time when I was drinking: I thought that I might as well go to the dogs. I could not believe I was saying this but I knew that alcohol brings back the ugliest part of your life, you say things you shouldn't say. That is why we can't get healed: because we tend to be too free with our attitudes and we begin to feel sorry for ourselves. If we were healed we would be happy people and clean in our minds. There is almost one whole generation which was lost. If we have a healed community we could accomplish all the things we want like education."

The perceptions of Aboriginal community members and non-Aboriginal government representatives are strikingly similar. As one government employee described:

- "Healing is not a static state, but a process. A healed community would have reintroduced structure to itself. That is, it will know the roles that individuals will play, the community infrastructure that reflects and supports those roles, will have clearer expectations for individuals, have less focus on or concern about social problems, and more on 'growth issues'. At the family level, families will have gone through a 'process of rediscovery', facing the past. Enough will have been said and done to move on and work productively together. Everyone will have a greater awareness of how interaction with one another can be made to work. There will be a visceral feeling of 'community'."

In the same vein, a community member states:

- "A community that is growing in terms of economics, a community that is independent, a community where people have jobs, and have jobs because there are people responsible enough to hold jobs. A community who is responsible for their own needs, they take ownership of their problems and take ownership of their solutions. They hold people accountable, and people expect to hold others

accountable whether it be the elected leaders, staff, or community people. Here I am starting to see that. People want to be held accountable and to make a contribution to their community by getting involved. A healed community is a community who wants to learn more and wants to know what is happening in the Aboriginal communities across Canada whether it be in sports or other activities."

Although the language or terminology used by these two persons to describe their visions are different, the underlying message is the same. Both talk about a structure or infrastructure which promotes awareness, accountability, and opportunities for growth. Both draw a picture of an independent and confident community which is willing and able to address its problems and concerns by maximizing the use of internal resources.

It is likely that any of the comments quoted in this chapter would reflect the views of most people across Canada about what a healing or healthy community is. It is a common vision made up of parts or ingredients in which no one aspect is seen to stand alone.

What can be gained by this recognition that there is a common vision about the goal of developing healing or healthy communities is the possibilities it opens up to sensitize each of us to one another? This recognition may be one of the first steps to promoting further understanding about the role each individual, group, organization or government can play in healing Aboriginal communities. When these common threads can be drawn or connectedness articulated, and a greater sense of sensitivity to one another can be experienced, the options for the development of partnerships in productive and meaningful ways are increased. In short, people from different communities, cultures, or races can bridge their differences through the recognition of their similarities and common goals.

The dream or vision of a healthy or healing community lies within each individual, family, and community. As one community participant summed it up, "**it comes through the spirit of the community where the community is friendly and helpful.**"

## **CHAPTER IV. THE HEALING PROCESS: A PROCESS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**When you hear the word healing, inside you you feel good and there is hope for us and our people. I feel that healing sometimes can be just a word. We talk about it and we have gone through a lot but there hasn't been much response and they fall back to where they start. The only way I can define healing is to say that there is hope for us. When we talk about healing we forget to remember forgiveness. We have to empty ourselves and leave the past behind. The big word for me is hope for our people.**

**(Elder)**

**There are two different ways of looking at the definition of healing. The Anglo-Saxon terms it as healing of a wound the repairing of damage to the body. We tend to look at healing as a surface heal. From an Aboriginal perspective it goes much deeper. Healing in that context is not only healing of the body but the healing of the spirit, emotional healing, psychological healing that encompasses the total being rather than just at the surface. When I hear the term healing now I tend to think of it in a holistic fashion that instead of isolating different areas of concern or areas of the body that need healing I'm talking about psychological and physical. When I use the term healing or hear the word healing I consider it in the holistic fashion of both the mind and body.**

**(Non-Aboriginal RCMP)**

In the last chapter, we looked at some of the tangible factors and aspects which those interviewed associated with a "healing community". In the present chapter, we will look at healing as a process. How does it unfold? Are there any common patterns to the way in which it unfolds? What mechanisms are involved?

The interviews for this study reveal that in seeking to gain a better understanding about the process of healing in Aboriginal communities, it may assist government officials to turn their attention towards the concept of **community development**, whereby the fundamental steps in resolving problems are addressed by dealing with the underlying causes and not limited to a focus on symptoms.

**Community development can be defined as a process of community action in which the people:**

- **organize themselves for planning and action;**

- **make clear their common needs and problems;**
- **make group plans to meet their needs and solve their problems;**
- **carry out these plans depending most upon local community resources (their own community resources); and**
- **use other resources from outside their own community only when needed.**

**The underlying belief in community development is that the people themselves can improve their community by:**

- **getting together and talking together about what they can do about the problem(s) in their community;**
- **making use of the things people in the community can do; and**
- **finding what experience and skills can be developed as people work together.**

Community development is organization for action. It is a process whereby people learn how to help themselves. In theory, community development is a process which is driven by any community involved in taking action when a problem or concern is identified. The first benefit of community development is what happens to people as they work together in solving their own problems.

For individuals in a community engaged in this process of community development, healing naturally occurs. In building a common language between cultures, the terms or concept used to form a definition or strategy for community development can become synonymous with the concept of healing as defined or described by Aboriginal communities.

### **"HEALING IS..."**

The word "healing" has been widely used to describe the changes that must take place within our society, and in particular, within Aboriginal communities. "Healing" for each of us seems to be culturally based and carries many definitions within the context of different languages. It is a word used frequently, but in many ways lacks a common definition which enhances our ability to work more collaboratively towards its end.

**In spite of community members having very similar visions about what a healing community would look like, the most striking message prompted by these interviews was, that there is no single definition or description for "healing." And the most common response to the question about healing was that it was very difficult to answer.**

What became evident was not that there was a single definition for healing but rather, a growing consensus of a vision and process for healing. For example, the general

consensus among those interviewed was that healing starts "within the individual or with self". To heal as a community, it is necessary to heal oneself and family before the community. It was also agreed that to heal meant to obtain a sense of "wholeness" or "balance" by addressing all parts of one's life concurrently and not in isolation.

The holistic approach to healing is emphasized throughout the report. Spirituality is part of this approach, not a separate entity. For Aboriginal communities, as for many other cultures around the world, spirituality is the very foundation of their society and the relationships they have with each other. Spirituality concepts, however, are not easily transcribed to paper.

### **" ... A PROCESS"**

Consistent with the language of community development, many participants directly offered the view that healing was not a static state, but rather a process. In the next chapter, this report will attempt to explore further **how** this process unfolds. In the present chapter, however, we will begin with some of the language of **what** is involved in the process.

### **THREE ASPECTS OF THE HEALING PROCESS ARE...**

The following are some of the most commonly expressed ideas and factors offered by the participants. At least three aspects of the **process** of healing emerge from the interviews.

### **MOVING FROM WITHIN**

The general consensus among community members about **how** healing unfolds was that healing starts within the individual or with the self. From the individual, healing expands into the family. Finally, to heal as a community, the process moves from the individual and family to the community as a whole.

Community development rests in the hands of individuals coming together to take action to improve conditions in their community. But, before community issues can effectively be addressed, there has to be the capacity for individuals and families to address their individual problems and begin to resolve them.

- "To understand how healing can take place, you have to think about a chair, with individuals and their families being the legs of that chair which is the community trying to heal itself. If you only have one leg on a chair, it will fall over. The same will happen if you only have two legs. A chair with three legs will stand but can

be pushed over pretty easy. You need at least four legs to make a chair stable. I'm not saying that you need four people, or four families to begin healing a community, but the more people you have the better it can be."

Although healing finds its roots in the individual, this example emphasizes the importance of support and validation which must also come from outside the self. The more individuals involved in a process of healing, the greater the opportunity for creating an atmosphere of unity and growth. Healing is an interdependent process and the more persons involved, the greater the opportunities for change.

To begin the process of healing requires individuals to recognize and address the underlying causes of their problems which, to a large extent, will be the same as the underlying causes of the community's problems. It requires searching within before looking outwards. It means learning to take responsibility rather than getting trapped in "blame," which can easily occur if one looks to the outside for an explanation before looking within. The following comments further describe this concept of moving from within:

- "Healing starts when we begin to look at ourselves, not just physically, but inwards. What is going on in our minds, body, emotions. When we begin to deal with issues we have kept in for years. It can be painful but in our daily lives we don't deal with it and so we go on hurting for years."
- "Healing begins individually and can begin anytime. Every day people are healing themselves because they are letting go of their anger, or doing what we are doing right now in this interview, talking about the healing we have experienced. This is difficult to describe."
- "Individual, family, and community."
- "Recovering your heart, opening up, dealing with the pain."
- "Personal growth."
- "Healing is when you recover from a loss or sickness and maintain a good inner self."
- "Getting better inside and out from a problem that is inside of you."
- "Working to free the pain inside and outside the body."
- "Comes from within you before it can come from anyone else."
- "Starts with yourself."

One important implication of this aspect of the process, as seen by Aboriginal people, is that to be effective, a community healing process cannot come from outside the community. A program that is imported into a community in the hopes that it will take root there is almost certainly going to fail. At the very least, a program must be adapted to the realities of the community and the individuals inside it. Ideally, however, a program grows out of the community itself and the processes which are already at work there.

## **BALANCE AND WHOLENESS**

The second aspect of the healing process is balance. It was agreed that to heal meant to obtain "wholeness" or "balance" by addressing all parts of one's life concurrently and not in isolation. The healing process in Aboriginal communities is a process which encompasses all aspects of one's life: physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

As was seen in the last chapter, balance and wholeness also operate on the community level. The substantive aspects of community healing as they were referred to in the last chapter included involvement, trust, responsibility, positive parenting, openness, communication, and clear expectations, all of which must be re-established, and be in harmony with one another, if the community as a whole is to be balanced and healing.

Some community participants described "balance" in the following way:

- "Mind, body, soul connection: all are equals."
- "Trying to get mind, body, and spirit back together."
- "Clean mind, clean body."

This process of coming into "balance" or "wholeness" was often described by community members as a spiritual process, or a process in which the return to traditional spiritual beliefs and practices was an integral part of healing. The revival of traditional practices has prompted many outside resources, such as media and governments, to study the meanings of these rituals in order to gain an understanding about Aboriginal people. As previously mentioned, many community members have raised concerns that disclosure of sacred beliefs and practices in some circumstances has led to more misunderstanding and created further alienation between the cultures.

In this project, those who were interviewed were asked **not** to reveal or discuss any specifics with respect to traditional practices but rather to describe what their experiences in the process of healing have meant to them. Without compromising this intent, the following quote was offered by a community member who experiences healing by achieving balance utilizing practices from both systems:

- "When you look at our culture the Creator gave us four Laws which are consistent throughout the understandings of Aboriginal Peoples in this country. If you are going to practice 'kindness' it can be difficult, particularly in terms of being kind to yourself. Kindness and honesty are both difficult to practice in everyday life. With honesty you have to allow yourself to first be honest with oneself, and in the case of abuse, it is often the case that we hid from the truth. Just with these two laws you begin to watch how you speak, how you communicate with other people. So when you look at healing the basis for me is contained in the four Laws: kindness, honesty, caring, and sharing. These are the four guiding principles in my life. All parts of you, physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological have to be in balance. My experience in therapy was to realize that it only dealt with two parts, when we need to deal with all parts to bring things into balance. You can check ... I just have to jump on the scale and find out that I am not taking care of my physical self! Spirituality is very personal and they have a connection with kindness and honesty because when you connect with the creator you know what to do.

"The other two pieces for me are my family and community. Starting with myself and determining how I practice these laws to bring balance to my life. These laws are very basic and concrete. You can see how you are changing, how your family is changing, and how your community is changing. When I look at my community in a physical sense I see alcoholism, drug abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse."

This comment and those shared by the other community members illustrate that the control and drive of one's healing lies deep within the individual, becoming stimulated and nourished from the outside. It is a whole experience which cannot be addressed in parts, and which is applicable to healing the family or the community.

### **MOVING FROM "PROGRAMS" TO "PROCESS"**

Participants reinforced the concept that the experience of healing must be addressed "holistically," that it cannot be addressed in parts. Another example of this was in the shared assumption that the healing process, to be effective, needed to get away from the emphasis on discrete "programs", such as substance abuse treatment programs and sexual abuse counselling programs.

It was noted earlier that one implication of the theme, "healing from within," was that programs imported from outside the community, and not at the very least adapted to the realities of that community, were at risk of failing. The "programs-to-process" theme seems to go further and suggest that the most effective approach of all is one of community development from within.

The need to address healing from a holistic framework may best be articulated by one community member who, when asked whether programs should be targeted to specific groups, stated:

- "Yes and no, that activities are focused on specific groups. Yes, it is focused on particular groups like victims and victimizers. But victims and victimizers are so wide-range in that the victim is a child, so we are working with the children, and there are victims who are adults, so we are working with the adults. I don't see them going after any real particular group. Perhaps at that beginning they focused on children, which is part of our natural laws. It is natural to protect the child first. We are a holistic society, we heal as a whole, the whole family structure heals and we believe that, and everything we do embodies that. So we can never separate one from the other. We cannot separate the child from the family. "See, that is the problem with the society we have, institutions today which are separating the child from the family. Oh, we heal this child, we'll work with this child, we'll give him all the tools he wants and then send him back to the home. This is a dangerous process, removing children from their families, because a child has seen what a good life is like, and the child comes back and says this is not a good life, my family is still the same, my mother is still drinking, my father is still beating on me, they are showing me a good life so how do I get out of this? They kept me in a very protective environment, nothing can be worse so I might as well die. Suicide goes up. I wish they would do a study on this. But while the government and even at the Band Council level are discussing this our children are dying, so in our community we no longer want to separate that, and we don't.

"You've got to heal the whole family. There is no unit in Canada to heal the whole family, you have one for children, one for adults, one for mental patients, one for criminals but there is nothing for a family. Then we wonder how come all these programs are not working, perhaps if we bring them together it will work. Because whatever I do affects the whole family. Have all programs work as one. We have individual groups like childrens', men and women because we are stuck in some of this same approach. However, we are slowly changing this."

People often miss the obvious and search for new and innovative ways to deal with problems in their communities. Often, communities do not take credit, or are not given credit, for what they have or for what they have done and believe that they need to find new approaches to problems. But often, these problems can be addressed simply or through the strengthening of resources which already exist in the community. Policy-makers must recognize that healing processes will involve a range of activities, from strengthening existing community resources to taking risks with new and innovative approaches where they are needed. The process of assessing the community's options and deciding what to do is, in itself, critically important and highly useful.

Training could be another avenue for encouraging the transition from "programs-to-process" and for taking down the barriers which exist currently between governments and communities in service delivery and design. Joint training can be especially useful: that

is, using the same training session to bring together people who come from all different fields and agencies, but who all have -or could have - some role to play in healing the community. The experience of joint training for developing community action emphasizes strategies (not programs), cooperative action, and a continuum of care. People need different services at different times, and meeting their needs properly requires the combined effort of many different players, agencies and levels of government. It is now time to create a path for developing services and programs which are client-driven and not "funding-driven".

The following comments reflect on the teachings of many Elders, which suggest that solutions or growth lie in the experience. Without the experience, without the pain it becomes more difficult to recognize the joy or even perhaps the experience. To turn a negative into a positive is a gift for creating opportunities towards building healthy and productive lives, in that there is recognition through these experiences of knowing what one wants to achieve and clues to how one might get there.

- "A person begins taking a look at their inner being, what happened as a child, teenager, and adult. These inner feelings through life say who they are, whether they are positive or negative. The pain in Native communities has been strong, and when I see a person taking a look at that pain and starts working on minimizing that pain and to learn ways to use this pain positively, the healing is taking place. Healing for me is to take a look at yourself and then at your community. Healing is such a broad thing, it is individual healing, traditional healing, for example, but all of them play a holistic role in healing."
- "We were all given tools for healing and we use different ones which seek to achieve the same end."
- "Take the word `healing', `circle', and `holistic' and you apply to self then family, and then community and through this process you have a better understanding about where you want to go, but it is not necessary that everyone must agree on the actual definition.

"There is not one definition or perception of healing. Rather it is like a model which everyone must design for themselves. An individual must define their own healing path, as does the family and community. Each of us has a community within us which we must identify by asking ourselves, `What is my community?' Healing begins but there is no end. Healing involves all four areas of life. Does not mean everyone has to heal in the same way, but we can help each other. For us, healing means so many different things. Healing allows me to grow, and it can change day to day. If you ask me the same question next week with respect to healing, I may answer it in a different way, in a way which reflects my growth. This is the same for family and community. If a community comes up with a basic definition of healing today, it may be defined differently next year as a result of the growth experienced in the community over time.

"I feel you can't `heal' people but you can teach them and provide them with tools to build upon and to make changes. We are dealing with two different systems, one which sees that a doctor can heal you and the other which feels that healing takes place within and that one can only facilitate or help someone to grow. The belief that the tools lies within the individual, family, and community is basic to this philosophy. The word healing is so holistic that it can be anything, and there is no set definition."

- "Healing is a learning process."

These comments were made by young and old, parents, caregivers, and leaders. The theme or common thread once again is that healing comes from within and moves outward, starting with the individual, moving through the family, and on into the community.

In this struggle to define this complex process of healing some participants offered a compelling description through visual experiences. It is perhaps from the following response provided by a youth that healing was most vividly expressed.

**"Healing is an eagle flying free and letting go of everything."**

## **CHAPTER V. WHEN IS A COMMUNITY READY TO HEAL ITSELF: WHO DETERMINES "READINESS", AND HOW?**

**Healing begins at a very small level, it begins with you  
and works its way up. The process has begun.**

For Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments alike, determining when a community is ready to heal or ready to take on the task of healing is a critical first step in bringing about change. In this chapter, we will explore some of the signs or correlates of "readiness". We will also examine the question of who determines when or whether a community is ready to heal, and ready perhaps for some assistance in healing. In the next, and closely related chapter, we will look at some of the ways in which the healing process has been seen to begin in certain communities.

"Readiness", as it is most commonly referred to, has become the barometer for concluding whether an individual or community has the ability to recognize and deal with the problem; readiness also involves taking responsibility for or ownership of the problem, and meeting the challenges for creating change. It is fair to say that determining "readiness" means to take into account the **opportunity for change** which is present for a particular individual, family or community.

### **DETERMINING READINESS**

Perceptions of when a community is ready were varied among those who were interviewed. There was consensus, however, about the factors critical to evaluating "readiness". These include the degree of or significance in the **recognition of problems, the motivation to change, and the willingness to take responsibility for making things happen**. These could only be determined by and within the community, and **not** by an outside resource.

### **RECOGNITION OF PROBLEMS**

Community members emphasized that a community is ready to undertake initiatives towards healing when there is an awareness of what problems exist and the acknowledgement by individuals within the community that the current conditions or way of living in the community are not acceptable or tolerable any longer.

- "I think it begins when people start to feel that there has got to be a change, that there's got to be something better. When people can sit and talk to someone, that is when healing begins. I don't know if a community is ever ready or that there is

a state of readiness. I think people in the community who had experienced and been involved in a lot of terrible things just knew there had to be a better way, a better life for our people in our community."

- "The healing process begins when you begin to look at what you've done. For a community it begins with a group of people getting together and saying 'hey' there is a lot happening in our community. Even before, this healing was occurring, but it was only when the people began to ask these very tough questions that are being asked today about 'what do we do to stop this cycle of destruction', that the cycle is actually being broken."
- "I seen so much pain in people that I was working with I knew the community was ready. Seeing people in pain and people who don't even know they're in pain trying to accept what has happened to them in life. There are different ways to approach the issues of sexual abuse, family violence, and so on but to me the only way was to deal with issues at the community level."
- "For an individual it begins when we start asking ourselves: what have I done wrong, and what can I do to change that? I found out I could not change the past but sure the heck could do something about the people who are living that I have hurt. That I could go to them and say: listen, I know that I have done wrong and I am sorry, and if you ever need help I'll help, or if you ever need to talk I'll talk. I began looking at things and realized how many people I hurt, but part of my healing process is illustrating that path, what led me to that path, and by saying this and illustrating this to you, a lot more of our people may find the path that I found. So when I looked at my life I say WOW! I have hurt a lot of women and men and now it is time for me to make amends. Sometimes that is not always possible. The Creator lets you know the time to approach a person."

### **MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE**

As a result of the recognition of problems, changes in behaviour patterns begin to reflect positive actions taken by the community to assume control over their own affairs.

- "The starvation of the Spirit reached a point in the 80's where **we hit bottom**, and this has caused us to change. The Spirit was strengthening as we recognized the actions of the churches, and that Elders were being sent away in their aged years to nursing homes. The children, the Elders, and the starvation of the Spirit began to wake all of us. There were so many things to look at and so many things to try. The 'vision' was the fourth factor for those of us who had sobered up, and so we agreed upon a vision for our community. And we need to revisit that vision as things keep happening. The vision has not changed."

- "When you are healing you still are in some denial but you are able to work through it because it is not as difficult to look at some of these things when you are attending support groups. Now, it doesn't bother me because even if people talk about me. I see it as their problem that they don't want to face their own garbage."
- "The process begins when people come forward, even if it is in the form of a letter to request funding. This is a big indication that they are ready to begin this process. It takes a long time to reach this process but once it is there, they are going to seek help from anywhere they can find it and most places go to the government. When we started our healing process we went to Chief and Council to ask them to lobby for funds. These requests were not heard right away but we persisted. This process with government took up to two years. When this occurs it feels like our communities have to go through everything again before starting the healing process. Takes a lot of courage to stand up and talk about the healing process, and just writing a letter, or for the people to request Chief and Council to address the issue takes a lot to open the doors. Any requests should be taken very seriously."

A Youth participant strikes at the very core of motivation by stating:

- "For me it began when I began to think about my future, my schooling and I didn't want to be a quitter. I didn't want to be like the rest of my family. I wanted them to be proud of me in finishing my high school, to become more involved in education and to accomplish my goals. I still have a lot of stuff that I have to deal with. I noticed my mother and how she is and I decided that I didn't want to be like that and I could see me slipping into the same pattern, so that is when I decided to get help."

As well, another community member points out, a community is motivated and ready when community members acknowledge that the future lies in the changes which must occur today.

- "I personally feel what happened here is that there were individuals within the community that finally said: **that is enough!** We need to deal with this particular issue in order to deal with other issues. That is where the community said: **that's it.** The experience comes from within the community not from the outside saying that it is time to do something about it. It is the community saying that they want a future for our children."

## **WILLINGNESS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

Thus, people begin to take responsibility for the community, and to influence the behaviour of others, as their awareness increases or grows.

- "I think it can begin when people can start talking openly about it. We start to talk but then people tend to back off because it is difficult to say people's names. I started to talk with my grandchildren, warning them about dope, alcohol, AIDS, sex and what is going to happen to their education. I get right at them and I tell them how I feel. They haven't gone into anything which I feel will mess up their lives. I think if we are to begin healing it has to start in the home. If something happens we have to forget that someone is our friend or relative, we must correct the wrong."
- "It was more or less ready when the people themselves decided that it was time for me to straighten my life out and change the way I am."
- "When the community begins to take responsibility and express its views and doesn't just look to the leadership."
- "I think our community began to heal when we had a big meeting in the hall to decide whether to have a `dry' dance or not. And one individual got up and started to point fingers, saying that I remember when you did this, and you did this and so on, so why are you begrudging our young people to do the same you did? It went to a public vote and we had a `liquor' dance. I don't know what really went on to change this person's feelings, but a number of people began to stand up with him against `liquor' dances and drugs, and that is when I think our community began to heal. We were unaware that we were healing but it is a part of healing. This year the Band Council has taken a stiff hand to drug dealers in the community by confronting them and explaining that they will not be accepted here if they continue to sell drugs."

Many of the youth interviewed echoed these thoughts. Their comments were brief, however, they offer us some key words and phrases which can be used for developing a common language in evaluating the degree or state of "readiness" present in a community.

Although these quotes are provided separately the underlying theme rests with this first quote which speaks to the importance of building or maintaining trust:

- "When people start to **trust** each other."
- "When people start **working together.**"
- "When you **want** to begin."
- "When you **cooperate** with each other."
- "When people start **listening** and **sharing** their problems."

Another approach to the same question was offered by a different group of youth from the same community. Their description suggests that communities are ever-changing, and that an indicator for change can be either knowing what you do want for your community or knowing what you **don't** want!

- "People **began to lose interest** in their culture."
- "When the community **stopped** activities."
- "People **stopped getting involved** on special occasions and issues."
- "People **began** to drink alot and do drugs."

Either frame of reference reflects a degree of readiness, surfacing critical factors which serve to bring about change. These factors which are often felt or experienced at the personal level become generalized throughout the community.

### **WHO DETERMINES READINESS**

Although these thematic areas serve to provide a framework for assessing readiness, **who** determines readiness remains a question. Again it raises the issue of whether readiness is determined by the community or from an outside resource.

### **A ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY "CORE" GROUP**

"Core groups", as they have been referred to, are as varied as the communities themselves. In some cases core groups are age or gender specific, others are mixed and glued together by a common skill, need, or mandate. The crucial element which makes these core groups different from any other group in the community is that they have in some way identified and articulated a problem or set of problems in their community which need to be addressed. This is also a group which is prepared to take a risk and initiate some method or approach to dealing with the problem(s). Thus, it is sometimes this core group which, in effect, determines when the community is ready.

For example, one community began their process of healing as a result of an initiative by one adult working with youth to develop a youth group. Part of this initiative was to create opportunities for the youth to be trained in how to coordinate activities and to take responsibility for carrying them out. It was through this process that adults and Elders were confronted by the youth to stop the abuse of drugs and alcohol, suicide, family violence, sexual abuse and other forms of victimization occurring in the community. The youth asked the adults and Elders to become positive role models for the children in the community and those yet to be born. Since this initiative there has been a dramatic shift

in the social problems present in the community today. Although it has not eliminated all the problems, it has decreased the use of alcohol and drugs, and reduced the number of incidents of suicide and abuse.

Another community experiencing a high rate of gun-related violence initiated a community gun control program sponsored by the elected leadership and a small group of community people. Although there was great resistance to initiate this policy, the persistence and determination of these few individuals resulted in opportunities for people to begin feeling safe within the community and to identify the causes related to the violence. As one would expect, this led to other initiatives in the community aimed at improving conditions which will lead to a healthier community environment.

The experiences of Alkali Lake, which have been well documented in the media, provided both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities with the opportunity to observe the influence one individual can have within an entire community.

A more recent approach, which has been initiated by a number of different communities, is a process driven by one person or a small group of people interested in strengthening the skills and resources already in existence within the community itself. The success of any community development initiative rests in maximizing the use of the resources presently in existence in the community. The individuals involved in these initiatives are a combination of band staff and community members at large who have sought training to develop a team approach for responding to community concerns and problems.

A critical point in each of these examples is that readiness is most often determined by a person or a group of people in the community who decide that a change in the community is required and decide that action must be taken to begin the healing process. This notion challenges the belief often held that the whole community must in some way demonstrate readiness and that there must be community consensus to affect any change.

Another community member expressed that the "core group" or motivating force in the community were the children: that although the initial awareness of the problem may have arisen within one individual, it was the children collectively who led the community to the solution.

- "What made me see or think that my community was ready was that I worked for children, and I became aware that the parents can create problems which follow the child. I became aware of the destruction of silence and that our Elders were no longer passing on the teachings, and everyone was keeping the secrets. We were not addressing the issues of responsibility or life cycles, and I knew this had to change for us to change. We had to work on these two factors, parents having to help children and breaking the silence. Workshops held in the workshops in the community provided information on indicators, and these workshops gave children the permission to speak out. Some children disclosed their abuse. I knew the children were ready. The children were the ones who let me know the community was ready!"

All of these examples serve to illustrate and support responses gathered from community members during this study which suggest that readiness is in fact experienced as a result of one or more individuals in the community wanting to effect change or to heal. It is this collective effort that determines readiness. In this way, the presence or existence of a core group becomes another measurement for determining the readiness of the community.

A government employee who was interviewed for this study states:

- "The community is ready to initiate healing when you have a core group of people in the community who recognize a common problem or a number of common problems which effect certain segments of that community. And once that core group is prepared to deal with one problem or a number of these problems, it is very interesting that you can sit back and that you can actually see that core group of people grow, and it perpetuates itself and multiplies in numbers and you see it spreading from a nucleus of a few enlightened people. Consequently, what may have started with a group of a dozen people is now twenty-five or thirty people."

It is the presence of a core group which determines the readiness of a community. In other words, "how" and "by whom" readiness is determined lies in the assessment of the motivation and responsibility taken by a few people.

## **THE ROLE OF OUTSIDE GOVERNMENTS**

Outside governments must, of course, gauge a community's readiness to heal at the time when they are asked to make decisions about putting resources into that community. But are there other roles for outside government in terms of community readiness?

In the words of one government employee:

- "What government can do to assist is to help communities examine what they have done on their own to reduce or begin to reduce the problem? How effective are their counsellors, how many workshops have been put on? In other words, assessing what the community has itself done or demonstrated to address the problem. What this takes is a little bit of research, not studying the community to death! Usually there is a spokesperson for the problem, or hopefully the solution, but rather than just hanging on to that one idea, someone from the outside or government can talk to local agencies serving the community, whether it be police, health representatives, and social services. If within a couple of hours you get the same or similar answers by sources in and around the community that a number of people are pulling in the same direction, then that is where the money should be going. The resources do not have to be outside the community. They can be inside as well, because if they are all telling you the same story then you have a legitimate request in my opinion."

## A CAUTION ABOUT ASSESSING READINESS

In determining the readiness of a community, the question of **whose perception of readiness is accurate and acceptable** becomes a critical element in the process. A number of variables can have an influence on how readiness is determined or evaluated. Not only do the attitudes and values of those evaluating the community become variables in this process; so does the way in which questions about readiness are raised or presented to community members or other critical sample groups.

In this section, examples are given from this study to show the importance of considering how one poses questions which will be used to determine readiness. The following examples illustrate that asking a question in several different ways can provide the opportunity to reach a greater understanding of an individual's response and perception. This technique can also serve to reveal a consistency among different community members' responses which might not otherwise have been apparent.

On a number of separate occasions during this study it became evident how people's perceptions varied on this issue of "readiness."

One example is taken from a group interview with people who had grown up in the same community during the same time period, were friends or relations, and followed a similar path in their involvement with the community. Although the expectation may have been that their responses would be similar, their answers to the same question were in fact strikingly different.

- "I don't think it has begun. I haven't really seen any changes yet, and for myself I'm still struggling to deal with my own problems."
- "I think it has begun. People are now talking about things they would not have talked about before. Before people would walk away. I see a lot of people working on themselves. Before you would have never heard anyone say the words 'abuse' or 'family violence', but today people are speaking the words and talking about the problem."

What we learn from this is that individual responses are dependent upon a number of factors or variables which cannot be ignored if an outside source is questioning whether a community sees itself ready for healing. Variables such as age, status or position in the community, gender, time of day, and current issues or priorities facing an individual at the moment of inquiry must be taken into consideration in the final analysis. It should also be recognized that some individuals felt that they were answering this question by relating it directly to their own life experience(s), whereas others responded by drawing on the experience(s) of the community.

The question, itself, and how a question is asked, may influence what information is generated. For example, one individual's initial response to the question, "When do you feel the healing process begins" was:

- "When each individual becomes aware that there is a problem. Right now there is a lot of unawareness in the community. The trouble that everyone is getting into, the drugs and alcohol, they feel it is normal, so their eyes have to be opened to the problem. Problems that exists there is usually: 'it is not happening to me, it is not happening to my family'. So in order to begin there has to be an awareness of the problem, that all is not well and that we all need to work together to solve a common problem."

This statement may lead a listener or reader to one of many possible conclusions. One such conclusion could be that this individual does not see that the community is ready. However, the communities selected for the project are communities which have been identified for their progress or movement towards change. Therefore, the question was posed another way to the same individual to clarify and confirm their perception. The question was presented: "When did this community begin to heal?"

- "When they started the drug and alcohol program on this reserve. The Council put this program in place because they recognized a lot of our people were drinking. The program struggled and some people saw it as a success and some saw it as a failure, as many people are more willing to condemn than support. I see that the program has survived and that many people have sobered up."

This second answer begins to offer a different picture of the community. The question may have been presented in language which may have influenced the response by suggesting that this community has begun to heal. However, the individual was responding based on experience in the same community referred to in the first question. In order to account for this difference in responses, a third question was asked: "How do you determine readiness?"

- "What more than having a bunch of survivors? They survived the hell they have been through, so what can you put on their plate that they won't survive? The conditions they have lived in, the stresses in their life, and a whole gambit of things. Who is to determine when they're ready? How do you determine when they're ready? Do you decide they're ready when everyone throws their name into a hat that they are ready, or do you start small and hope that it will get big?"

Being attentive to the subtle changes in languaging can create the opportunity for the interviewer to ensure that the responses given accurately reflect what the interviewee is trying to convey. Where English is the interviewee's second language, it becomes equally important to be aware that meanings attached to individual words may differ.

### **A FINAL NOTE ABOUT ASSESSING READINESS**

The state of readiness is a complex yet revealing condition. While it is necessary to address it, it is equally important to be aware of the variables which can be present in determining the degree of readiness or the opportunities for readiness. For example, if the assessment of readiness is focused on a program or project which has no prior history or is new to the social market, it may be difficult to determine readiness in the face of having little or nothing to compare it to.

Posing questions about readiness should serve to generate information about an individual's or community's ability to carry out activities or projects. It can further assist in clarifying the project or activity goal(s) and the steps necessary in developing an action plan for completing the process. In short, raising the question of readiness should serve to encourage communities to take the initiative to deal with their own problems.

This chapter has attempted to review the condition of readiness and to create an evaluative framework which can assist communities and outside agencies. This framework is meant to be a tool for creating an opportunity for dialogue between and within those parties responsible for the development and operations of programs and projects.

## **CHAPTER VI. MAKING THE CHANGE: HOW HEALING PROCESSES BEGIN**

**The ultimate purpose of our life is the vision we have to offer our people. What we need is an overall vision that everyone will wish to follow, whether Native or non-Native. We have to realize that all the problems that we are facing as a people are universal in scope. We have to start living outside of today's parameters, which restrict or confine who we are and give us only a tunnel vision. We have to redefine our present lifestyle. And once we have re-established ourselves as a people, we will be able to take on any trial that this world can throw at us. We are a strong people today and when we have dealt with ourselves we will become a very powerful people.**

The previous chapter examined signs which indicate the "readiness" of a community to make changes, and explored the issue of who determines when a community is ready to begin a healing process. In this chapter, we will examine some of the processes which appear to be associated with the successful beginnings of change.

### **CLARIFYING THE VISION**

The vision described in the quote which introduces this chapter reinforces the view of many of those interviewed that the healing process begins when the community or an individual moves from a "cerebral" or thinking level about healing to a "visceral" or actual motivation towards a process. In other words, the process involves moving from identifying and acknowledging the problem(s) to determining how and what to do to change or resolve the problem(s).

The overwhelming belief is that, to effect change, the impetus must come from within oneself or from within the community. This is not to suggest that outside resources are not required for communities to develop and implement healing activities. Rather, the individual or community is responsible to determine what activities or plan shall be developed and implemented and what priority should be placed on these activities. And the plan is based on the vision.

### **MOVING FROM A BELIEF TO A PROCESS**

Once the vision and the belief has crystallized in the minds of members of the community, communities which appear to be successful in moving their healing process forward experience the beginning of a community development process, a process of learning to work together to make the best use of all available resources.

As one community member stated:

- "It is up to us to build a new foundation for the future of our people, to develop ongoing healing programs to address the sad social conditions that affect all of us in our community. That affects our education, our work, our families, as well as ourselves personally."

The suggestion here is to create a healing environment which, the same informant said, is designed:

- **To reach out** to all those who are **in most need** of healing;
- **To reach** those who **cannot reach out** for help because of the oppressive society they live in. For those who don't know who to turn to or don't know which direction to turn for help. For those who do not have the inner strength to take the first necessary step in reaching out for help;
- **To reach out** to those who **will not reach out** for help unless they are given the vision that there is something there for them, or there are some people willing to take the initiative to overcome the mire in which they live;
- **To reach out** to those who **accept as normal and cannot see their own condition**. We live in a society which has strict guidelines in every aspect of our personal lives, and a lot of things that may be taken as normal, but isn't necessarily so; and
- **To reach out and into past barriers of the fear** that our people live in, the fear that stems from all the oppression that comes from the non-Native society.

In short, this informant, like so many others interviewed, said that Aboriginal people have to start learning how to work together to break down the barriers that are keeping them apart. Outside influences, such as governments, cannot direct this process. It involves examining attitudes, values, and beliefs from within. As one government employee stated:

**"It is movement from a belief to a process."**

### **ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF THE PROCESS**

The responses offered by those interviewed indicate that healing, or the process of healing, was seen to begin when specific activities or events took place that were recognized as having a restorative or healing effect. These activities are as varied as the problem(s) and communities themselves. However, most of these activities involve **self-exploration, community support, and a spiritual journey**.

- "Somewhere along the line, a part of the healing began when we first started our school again, because our cultural identity had sorta been put on the back burner and our kids were getting into mainstream society and they were losing their language, forgetting where they came from, their roots which is imbedded in them. Part of healing is finding out about yourself, where you come from, your roots getting re-established and becoming firm again."
- "When people started coming to the treatment centre."
- "When one person came forward who was about to start repeating the cycle of abuse, this time as an offender."
- "One of the biggest indicators for me was when I was a welfare administrator. All through the years, the people thought that it was a Treaty right to get welfare whether they wanted it or not. That they were entitled to it. Some guys who were working thought they could get it as back pay for all the times they did not collect welfare. So I had a lot of people really angry at me and I knew I had to learn how to deal with it, and the only way I could do that was to be honest with the people. So I had to do some educating and some confronting. Even though people were angry with me, they began asking me to run for Council, so it made me feel that they wanted change. And it has continued like this today."
- "It got its start when we brought in an outside resource person to conduct a workshop in the community. This resource person gave us a lot to think about. The workshop was open to everyone but primarily the members of the community attended. And you could really feel the strength in the community. They came to the workshop because they wanted changes in their lives. It is starting, and it was a good start. But I think the healing process really started as a result of a tragedy in the community. I think the healing began when we had this workshop and opened those doors, people came because they wanted to be there, and many are looking forward to the next one."
- "When the Council tried to get people off welfare. This freed up some money to do 'creative' things."

One community member provided a poignant example of how an activity may start with one agenda and end with another, or something much more intense. The example shows how one activity can lead to further recognition or clarification of problems and ultimately, to solutions or resolutions. This example captures the essence of how these activities support the process of healing. It also acknowledges that with further understanding or recognition of problems, the challenges of meeting the needs in the community and moving in directions that are not shared by the entire community become manifested:

- "We were struggling to understand why we were in this situation, we knew it was something deeper. We also thought that it was the loss of our teachings, we knew it was one of the reasons. We also knew it was loss of identity and loss of spiritually and family. We held a workshop with an outside trainer to help us understand why we had such a problem with alcoholism. He called the workshop 'Nutrition and Sexuality'. I wondered what the hell this had to do with alcoholism. I knew that if you drank a lot you got into a lot of dysfunctional sexuality and you ate a lot ... so maybe it made sense. So that is where we realized that all the caregivers had been victimized and it was hard, but now it all made sense. It became important for us to realize the healthy functions of sexuality, that that is where life begins and that it is sacred, and that because this got mixed up it created a situation of sexual abuse. It was clear after the workshop that we needed a 'facelift'! We have started to work with the young people and we have a long way to go, and still there are those who feel it should not be taught in the school but in the home, yet it is not happening there."

The statements made by these community members further demonstrate that healing is perceived to begin as a result of one or more individuals taking steps to recognize a problem and change a part of their life which has created pain within them and their communities. They have identified indicators or cues which ready a community for change, and begin to design activities which support and nurture that change.

These indicators include the experience, and acknowledgement of loss of self-esteem and self-worth, "starvation of the spirit", loss of cultural identity or rootedness, loss of visioning or goal-setting, and the lack of understanding of how systems work and how they can utilize resources to more effectively meet their needs. Although this is not an exhaustive list of indicators or cues, it does provide a point of reference from which people can begin to design activities which can either deal directly with the issue or can serve to stimulate or motivate further change.

These responses reflect the diversity of events which prompted the process of healing to begin. Again, some of these responses were offered by people from the same community, and yet their perception remains different as to when and how their community began healing.

In one community, change came as a result of funding to establish a community addictions prevention program under the National Native Alcohol & Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP), a program of Health Canada. According to one community member:

- "NNADAP helped to get many communities off the ground. It was not so much what happened in Ottawa but it was the people we got locally to fill these positions. For a few years we raised money for training through the beer gardens. We used people's weaknesses to our advantage! And at the same time many of us who were on staff were drinking too. It took the strong wills of some of our

people to make these changes. Today the beer gardens are gone and family activities have taken their place."

Participants in this study were asked to identify the kind of activities or programs which they felt had contributed to the healing in their community. When asked if these programs were aimed at a particular group or segment of the community, the overwhelming response was that activities and programs were really targeted at everyone, although it was recognized that some activities and programs were gender- or age-specific. The participants were clear, however, that programs or activities serving one target group generally served other groups either directly or indirectly.

### **ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF CHANGE**

Healing activities specifically described by participants in this study included:

- "Physically cleaning up the community."
- "Band kept people on salary while they were in treatment centres."
- "These women's groups where you deal with a lot about yourself, and the circles we have. I'm looking forward to those anger sessions, and the other women's group we started which is more focused on tradition. I am looking forward to this because I, myself, was never counselled or taught in this way. I look forward to learning so that I can pass it onto my children someday."
- "Caregivers getting together to do healing sessions for themselves before they start helping other people."
- "I think it is in the involvement with the educational system and the beginnings of the discussions with the justice system where people are becoming involved with all the areas of life, health, education, and economics. I feel it was the community first and then the leaders came in. I think it starts at the community level where there needs to be consensus. Many people are involved in committee work."
- "Community gatherings during Christmas where gifts are given to Elders."
- "Cultural programs getting stronger, the school is in place, the drug/alcohol program has survived all these years, parents are going back to school, a lot of people are speaking out about what happened to them whether they are ladies or men, a lot of people are going to treatment centres to deal with those particular problems whether they are alcohol/drug abuse. I think more of the young people are taking more of an interest in what is happening in the village today."

## **BUILDING ON WHAT IS ALREADY IN PLACE**

One informant offered an insightful view about how both community members and strangers to the community can see when a community may need healing and where healing should begin:

**"Whatever the conditions in any community, it will be the children who act out those conditions and so when you go into a community you need just to watch the children."**

Often the ideas of youth are overlooked because they are seen by some as being self-centred, self-indulgent and the cause of many of the problems in the community. Youth, however, are part of the community and often see the same problems in the community as adults. They often arrive at the same, or similar, approaches for dealing with those problems. If one examines the lists of activities in support of healing proposed by youth interviewed as part of this study, it becomes apparent that they share many of the same views for improving the community's spirit as the adults. The youths' list included:

- Potlatches and Indian dancing
- Structured recreational evening activities and arcades
- Support groups for:
  - Alcoholics Anonymous
  - Sexually Abused persons
  - Parenting
  - Youth
  - Children of Alcoholics
  - Alateen
  - Elders
  - Women's Healing Circles
- Sport programs (Baseball, Basketball)
- Volunteer Fire and Security
- Bingo
- A group called "Rush" which organizes a variety of activities including sports, hikes & outings, movies

When asked what groups were needed to improve the healing process, one group of youth identified the following groups as being critical to improving or maintaining the healing in their community:

- Teen parenting
- Abused women/men
- Elders & Youth groups (Intergenerational communications)
- Sweat Lodge groups
- Community Watch
- Block Parents
- Family Support Group

As mentioned in the previous chapter, people often miss the obvious successes and search for new and innovative ways to deal with problems in their communities. An example of this can be drawn from a statement made one of the youth interviewed in this project:

- "They have night hoops and I don't know if it's a healing group but it does keep a lot of young people from drinking or out of trouble."

These kinds of "healing" initiatives have been present in communities for some time. Programs such as "night hoops" are structured recreational opportunities for youth to: refine their socialization skills and developing their coordination, explore what they value and what they believe, and feel a sense of belonging by giving them a choice to participate. These programs, in practical terms, pass on the values and norms set by communities, for example, by emphasizing that drinking is not acceptable or "cool", by demonstrating an alternative form of entertainment which is acceptable.

Many communities do not take credit for what they have or for what they have done. They believe, or have been told, that they need to find new approaches to problems that are actually best addressed through these simple and practical means or by the strengthening of resources which already exist in the community.

Another opportunity which was capitalized on by design of this project came when communities were asked to acknowledge and articulate what they have and what they have done. It provided the time to reflect on what is working and the accomplishments achieved over time.

All of the activities which are mentioned in this chapter support the healing process in communities. When a community begins to heal and sees the positive results of such activities, the community can and wants to take on more activities. **This is a critical point in time. Once a community begins the healing process, at a pace determined by the community, it is critical that it not be faced with unnecessary barriers to continued development.**

## **CHAPTER VII. COMMUNITY HEALING: VICTIMS & OFFENDERS**

**Offenders have the urge to change their ways of living as an offender, and victims get over their fear of other people and spend more time with the community, if both offenders and victims are included in the healing process in the community.**

Native Youth

We have seen that healing touches on and has relevance for virtually every aspect of Aboriginal communities. Yet it seems to have particular relevance for matters related to crime, and the way in which society deals with crime.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians alike have expressed concerns about the way the criminal justice system works. Among the most frequently voiced criticisms are that it is ineffective in preventing crime or recidivism. It is too slow. It is too lenient (or too harsh!). It "takes over" and it takes away the victim's voice, the offender's accountability, and the community's legitimate wish to deal with its problems. It is too oriented towards the offender (or too oriented towards the victim!). Finally, it punishes the act but fails to treat the offender, address underlying causes, or restore the damage done.

When the participants in this study were asked to discuss how "healing" related to victims and offenders, their responses, in effect, described an alternative means of community justice, one which they felt would address, at least in part, all of the above criticisms of the criminal justice system. "Healing" was seen by the participants to be a summary term for describing an ideal community response to crime. In this chapter, we will explore the participants' views of how a community justice model, based on healing, would look and how it has begun to work in certain communities.

For this study, participants were asked to comment on victims and offenders involved in any type of crime, either against the person or property. Because the current focus in most communities is on victims and offenders of sexual abuse, many of the comments reflect this. These comments, however, could apply to most dehumanizing situations.

### **WORKING WITH VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS**

Perhaps most importantly, it was the view of almost every person interviewed that community healing, where criminal activity is one of the major causes of pain, must include both victims and offenders. A healing-based community justice model starts from the recognition that both offender and victim are part of the same community. Each

victim and each offender is also part of a family. What affects the offender and the victim will also affect families, as well as the community as a whole. Communities involved in healing processes still consider an offender to be an integral part of the community regardless of his or her actions. It is seen as a community responsibility to deal with the offender's actions and the underlying causes of his or her criminal behaviour in the community.

The term "community", when used by Aboriginal Peoples, is an inclusive term. When it is reported that the community is providing an alternative to prison for an offender, the community by definition can often include the victim, the victim's family, the offender, the offender's family and all others who feel they have a role to play in the process.

Aboriginal communities recognize that victims and offenders are both dealing with pain and that, without minimizing the importance placed on the protection and special needs of victims, the pain felt by both parties has to be addressed.

Treating the individual therefore is only a part of the process, even though healing must start within the person him- or herself. Healing must be experienced in a holistic way, whether individually or collectively. This may mean that healing takes place in the individual, the family, or the community as a whole, or all three levels at once. The ultimate objective of healing is to effect change within the family, extended or immediate, and the community at large.

- "I think with offenders one has to think of them as being a family member of some family and that they are part of a community."
- "To work with victim and offenders together. It is very difficult but effective."
- "In our communities we have experienced a large percentage of us being violated or have violated another person whether it be drugs, sexual, the list goes on and on. When I speak of this a twinge in my heart occurs because I realize that this type of devastation occurred in my community and it is still occurring today. About 90% of us have been affected. That is a high percentage and I am being very generous saying 90%. If a lot of us are brought in we have to begin working first with ourselves and then with others. When you deal with one abuse another pops up, so like the Elder said it is a lifelong journey, so I am able to function and to even help another person. We are working together, it is a re-awakening of the spirit. Some of us have been offenders and some of us have been victims and we are part of the devastation whether we want to be or not."
- "I think there has to be programs for both victims and offenders, and in a community this small you cannot ask people to leave forever, so part of the healing process needs to be something where offenders can find a way to integrate back into the community."

Community members stressed the need for quality care and treatment of both the victim, offenders, and families as essential to breaking the cycle of abuse. Perhaps one of the most compelling interviews during this study was with a fifteen-year-old girl who revealed that she is both a victim and an offender. It is her experience which emphasizes the need to include both victims and offenders in a process of healing if the cycle is to be broken and the number of assaults or violations reduced.

- "Victims and offenders should definitely be brought into the healing process. I am a victim and an offender, and as a youth it is kinda scary to have to talk about what happened to me as a child. I was afraid to tell because I did not want them (the authorities) to hurt my mommy. As I got older I began to hurt other people like she did me, and recently I realized what I was doing. It is funny that my Dad and I never really got along with each other but since he went through the program for his own healing we have a great relationship. He was the first to accept and support me through this period. It hurt him to know I was an offender but he really supports me. When my Dad took his program and I saw the changes, I began to feel that if he can change so could I. If he could change the whole community could change and become one big happy family! I noticed that the community began to support one another, not giving up, not quitting. It takes a lot of strength and a positive attitude to do this work."

## **PROGRAM ISSUES**

The following comments reflect the ideas and understandings about how community-based healing functions and why it is such a viable option. As is the style of this report, the comments are presented in the "thematic" sections to assist the reader in identifying critical points towards the development of such an approach.

## **TREATING THE OFFENDER**

For most people, prison is not seen as an effective building block towards healing, as it does nothing to recreate a balance between the victim and offender. This view was shared by people in all communities taking part in this study and could reflect not only an underlying cultural value of the community but also the reality that most offenders have been, or are still, victims themselves.

"Healing" alternatives to jail or prison and to other aspects common to the mainstream justice system were also seen as preferable because they actually sought to treat the causes of the offending behaviour, and to act more quickly and more directly.

- "But I think there are alternative measures to prison because I don't see prison offering anything positive as I think it is more negative for that person. I think

there has been some positive alternatives in the way of the responsibility of a house, a member of a clan. If you are a member of a house or a clan then you are responsible. But human nature is very complicated. I do see there are possibilities and there are beginnings which people have taken and I think it is good."

- "We must recognize from the beginning that there are conflicts in how we resolve things. We have one way and the dominant society has another way. The most apparent for me personally is the example of the case which my son is involved with. It was a torture for us to have had this justice process happen over such a long period of time, particularly when the victim and offender were from the same community. The process of healing for the victim was complicated at the least. You see the offender walking around and not paying for the crime in some way for what he has done. How to explain to a child or victim the concepts of 'beyond a reasonable doubt' and issues of evidence. The system I am familiar with is where families and Chiefs are very involved directly. And the accused is put up in a public forum with both families who are affected to witness the retribution or to determine what the offender has to do to make amends. **It is so much more effective, it is more immediate, more positive in dealing with both sides.** The current system is based on punishment where we lock them up and then think of ways after to rehabilitate them."

When asked to weigh treatment programs offered in the community against incarceration as a way to deal with offenders, the preferred forms of treatment were programs developed by and delivered in the communities. Incarceration is seen as an option for dealing with offenders but, in most cases, it is seen as the last resort. One youth put it this way:

- "Deal with offenders first. Community to be there for them to help motivate offenders to change the way they behave. Better to have our own system. Some people can't be treated and need to go to prison."

Other participants echoed this sentiment that community-based healing programs are more effective in reaching the offender:

- "The circle is a strong part of our culture, and jail is no place to heal. I was able to help someone else who went through what I am going through as an offender, and to help him know he is not alone and that he can make changes. Having a community program as an option is good; although it has been difficult to look at my feelings, I feel much better. Being incarcerated, you do the time and that is it. This type of program is the best way to go through a healing. It would be better to spend money on these kind of programs rather than putting people away. If you really work on yourself it will come."
- "When I was in jail and came out it was OK for a few minutes, things seemed normal but then it passed and I felt out of it, not a part of it. So I turned back to

drinking. One of the things I didn't deal with was my anger, and now as I go through this program I am able to learn and to practice new ways to express it."

- "Our program involves the victims, offenders, and their house leaders to meet a number of times. And it is working very well, because jail often compounds the problem. I do have other views about murder which is totally different but for sex offences or minor offences I see keeping them out of jail."
- "I would like to see more counselling in prisons. I think more healing should take place in the community. Although I was not in prison, I went away from the community but had to return to heal!"
- "I did spend time in a jail at the beginning. What I learned was the basic law of the inmates. The rest didn't help me at all. It didn't help me, it didn't even touch on the deeper problems which are within you. As I began to walk on my traditional path I asked the Creator what I was supposed to learn. I asked some of the older inmates why they were here and they said it is going to be winter and at least here we have a place to sleep and three meals a day. I did not realize the impact of this until seven years later in my own healing.

"These institutions do not help, there are a lot of repeat offenders. When I entered the institution I was told that 'your ass is mine now'. I control you, but they were wrong because no one could control my praying inside me. A nice counsellor I did have there asked me if I knew what I had done and why I was there. Heck I realized that without even having to come here! So what are you going to do about it. I said that I would apologize to the people back home."

### **FINDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN "TOO SOFT" AND "TOO HARSH"**

It was suggested earlier that many Canadians feel that the criminal justice system is either "too soft" or "too harsh". Some people believe it is both: that it severely punishes a few offenders, while failing to do anything at all to prevent crime, or to force most offenders to deal with their problems or face the harm that they caused their victims. The participants in this study felt that a healing-based approach showed promise of restoring the proper balance for all - offender, victim, and community.

- "Whenever someone is identified as an offender or victim they have been given a chance to start healing because, in the past, they were hidden and it was handled in the family. I think the victims are being heard more. The offenders need help but there has to be some sort of message out there to other offenders. If we're too soft on the offenders they will continue, so you are damned if you do or damned if you don't sometimes in smaller communities like this. Sometimes your heart really goes out to the offender because you know that something has happened to

them in the past but unfortunately most of the time the victims are young and begin to think that is how the world is."

## **PROTECTION OF VICTIMS**

The sometimes conflicting issues of protection and support of victims remain paramount to the process of healing in the minds of Aboriginal people. The question both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are challenged with is: **how does a community physically protect victims, particularly if the treatment of choice is community-based, while maintaining a focus on bringing victims and offenders together in working towards a resolution?**

- "We encourage all people to talk about their pain whether they are a victim or offender. Most people are going through a process of healing, so there is support and people understand what is happening. We have been criticized by a lot of local people and those outside that we focus too much on the offenders but we believe if we can stop the offending behaviour then there will be no more victims. My experience is that most offenders have been victims and that there is a lot of help for victims but to our knowledge not a lot of help for the offenders. So we felt we had to develop something to change the offenders' thinking patterns and behaviours. From my experience it is more difficult to get a victim into a support group to start talking about what happened. From my experience once you confront an offender they are so relieved and anxious to change their behaviour that they want to be in a group to get that support and to feel accepted."

Through the interview process, the issue of the protection of victims was raised within the context of the question. Although comments made by community members did not specifically address how a community physically protects victims, they did reinforce that keeping people in the community allows the opportunity for family to participate and for victims and offenders to feel supported.

Not surprisingly, it was also pointed out that the existing criminal justice system often falls short of providing support and protection to victims and their families. Accounts offered by two victims, although different in perception, remind the reader that the responsibility for the protection of victims and their families lies within society, and includes the existing criminal justice system and those systems or programs which are being created to compliment it.

- "After the disclosure many victims feel like everyone is going to judge them, even if you had no control over it; they will probably think you enticed it or something. These kinds of thoughts have pushed me to confront my offender. No one has come out in public it has all been done more hush. We are in the process of changing this with these new court cases. The justice system takes too long. It tears families up."

- "Sexual offenders are totally rejected. Better not to have them around than to worry about them. The victims have been the ones who have been put away but they need to find ways to deal with it in a better way. Some victims learn to deal with it but don't really feel better about themselves. Victims are included in the support group but it is sometimes hard to get them out."

## **TAKING RESPONSIBILITY ... TAKING CONTROL**

Many participants offered the view that a community healing approach was actually "harsher" on offenders than was jail, in the sense of the pain and difficulty involved in admitting your guilt to your community. Being incarcerated may merely encourage the offender to externalize feelings and concentrate on the unfairness of the correctional system:

- "So my stay in jail became a way for me to talk with others who have experienced this [injustice]. Although they tried to take my spirit, it actually made me stronger. Being in jail is just taking care of yourself and surviving. When another person (my niece) who I had offended came to me and threatened to send me to jail, I said jail does not threaten me, but what I am afraid of is you telling your father. I am afraid of what he will see in me, and I am afraid of seeing his pain that I will feel. Anything else I can face.

"People tried to force me to take this [community healing] program, and I said that I was following the traditional way and was doing good and I didn't want to be bogged down by any program because I have always had a wild spirit, but then they said they would have to take me to court. I told them that I have been healing for the last seven years without their help and have stayed clean and sober, so don't threaten me with your program. Then I thought about it and that there are reasons why they wanted me to take the program, and I began to realize it was for the traditional aspect which they wanted brought into the program."

A community healing approach often involves encouraging the offender to openly admit responsibility and to face the community:

- "When we got charged two years ago they really tried to counsel us but being stubborn and into denial which is strong in you, it took eleven months. They almost gave up on us. They pushed and pushed, and finally it came out, and then it was difficult to stop. We know now that we can be better parents to our kids. I didn't even know what sexual assaults charges were when I got them, only now do I understand what it is. In the men's group they talk about the different type of sexual assault charges, and I want to discuss it more in the women's group and learn on my own at home. We have realized the years of drug use on both sides of

the family. It really hit me how much time I wasted and that I don't want my kids to go through this. We have asked the workers to keep counselling our children while they are growing up even after they come back to live with us."

In balance with the view that the community must take responsibility for healing the experience between victim and offender, an adult victimized as a child, reflected the other side of the process. The individual must take responsibility for his or her actions and feelings:

- "The healing process begins when dealing with the issues as an offender or victim. Accepting responsibility for your own actions and not trying to have other people make it right for you. You have to deal with it and make it go away. If you don't your self-esteem will go down and it then becomes difficult to get it back up. If you don't deal with these issues right away you can be destroyed. Being able to confront those who have hurt me and to take responsibility for my feelings is when my healing process began."

This individual, in referring to taking responsibility for actions, is not suggesting that victims take responsibility for the act which violated them. Rather, for individuals, whether victims or offenders, taking responsibility means taking control for their own feelings. Deciding how they want to deal with these feelings can place one back in charge of one's own life, thereby protecting and supporting one from further re-victimization. A case in point, as this individual and another community member point out:

- "You can re-victimize yourself by your own negative self-talk, thinking that people don't like you or accept you because of what happened."
- "To me everybody is either a victim or offender so everyone is included, they just have different roles. I guess it is up to the individual but with offenders I guess it would be different because they would have to earn the trust. The victim would have to learn not to be so dependent on sympathy. But I guess it depends on how much a person wants to heal."

## **COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS**

Corrections personnel know that one of the most difficult obstacles to the successful reintegration of offenders is their social isolation and lack of pro-social supports in the community. Ironically, it is also typical for victims to feel alienated and isolated, first by their victimization, and then by the criminal justice system's processes. The participants in this study placed strong emphasis on the need for the community to support both offender and victim as part of a healing-based model.

- "I think personally that, if an offender has admitted to an offence, I think that this is one of the first steps in recognizing that there is a problem. And that person, by

showing this omission, is giving us a signal that he/she is perhaps ready for a helping hand. What that helping hand would be is yet to be determined."

- "I think there have been some steps to integrating the offenders and victims. I think you have more empathy for victims where they're supported, whereas the offender is not often as looked upon as being welcomed. However, I have personal knowledge where this is taken care of in the feast hall where this has actually happened. So those are some of the steps which will probably be taking place in this community."
- "So that is the focus, to change their behaviour, to educate them, and to help them express their feelings because so many of them cannot put words to their feelings. It is good to see when they can tell you how they are feeling, so often they have described feeling sad and unhappy and at the same time feeling so angry and in a rage inside, this was so confusing for them. So it was good to have people define their feelings but people had a hard time with it, especially the men. From my own experience of being a male and a victim I found it hard to talk about feelings, to cry when I was hurt or sad. I used to tease my great aunt who would cry for herself or other people who were hurting but now I realize that it feels good to cry, and now people tease me that I cry too much! But it is OK, I am not ashamed."
- "We seem to have the most forgiving people here. In the beginning there is a lot of anger and hatred, which is expected. But over time they give everybody a chance to straighten out and change. We have a few offenders in the village. The community will support them if they stay on a path of healing and as long as they abide by the laws and courts."
- "In this village we have meetings with victims' families and draw on each other for support. This has been quite positive. I think this helps them to focus on the issue without having to uncover the whole map. This process is helpful for offenders as well. We have traditional feasts which are used to complete this process of healing for victims and offenders, but the legal system prolongs this process."

## **RESTORING COMMUNITY BALANCE AND EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY**

Finally, a healing approach was seen to have benefits for the entire community. The balance restored between victim and offender also helps restore the overall community

balance. More importantly, perhaps, the whole process shows the community that it can develop and give life to its own solutions.

- "In this community we are bringing victims and offenders together to work towards resolution. Empowering the community and ensuring that people stay in their homes in working through issues together to repair what damage has been experienced. The community realization that this takes a lot of time. The impact of dealing with abuse within the community has become one of the strongest influences in changing peoples' attitudes."

Throughout the interviews, participants shared that Aboriginal people generally believe that everyone is basically good. The western system of justice, which has developed from a 'punishment' modality, does not promote opportunities to learn how to behave and to bring things into balance. Traditional Aboriginal instruction taught people to know how to behave in concert with family so there is harmony and balance. A person is always a part of community. As it has been described, healing in the community often involves recapturing those teachings and values which highlight the good in all human beings and stress the need to maintain harmony within the individual, family and community. The re-affirmation of those values allows both victims and offenders to deal with their issues and to be supported in the changes they are making. Part of this support or recognition is sanctioned through cultural practices, and by jokes and visual disapproval being stopped.

The focus on resolution and restitution between the victim and offender is more accessible at the community level. It provides the opportunity to enhance self-esteem and self-worth in ways which allow both the victim and offender to feel a part of their community once again. As two offenders from the same community put it:

- "When the community feels like you are trying to deal with what we have done, even though they do not approve of what we have done, the community generally feels good about itself. It seems to rub off in how they accept people back into the community."

When asked the question about how a community deals with both victims and offenders within a healing context, an Elder made the following statement and requested that it be included in this report without changes.

- "Our people have a system. If you have an accident, the community holds a Feast called the 'Thanksgiving Feast' and bring the people together to give thanks for no lost lives. They give out treats and everyone feels good about it. And if you have made a mistake in your life there is another feast which they call the 'Cleansing Feast.' Where a person that has made a mistake like under alcohol and a lot of people know about it, even if there are charges. If you don't have a Cleansing Feast then people are going to continually make fun of you, and when you have a Cleansing Feast you have to openly stand in front of the people and lower yourself to do this. And they actually wash the person's face by someone on

the father's side. They give out gifts to the people that handled this person. They have a big feast and give out tokens to all those at the feast. Right from then you are not allowed to bring it up again.

"We had a cousin who had a good job and when he was younger he must have done some things to a couple of girls and they started talking about it. He never fought it and did his time and when he returned home we put on a huge feast and he had to stand in front of everybody and tell those victims he was sorry. He gave them tokens, and he had to say he was sorry to his wife. This one system we have and it is not that easy to follow because our people live distances from each other. But this is our system for the offenders and after they can hold their heads up because they have been forgiven.

"The victim is there too, so it is the healing process, so the victims can lift their heads up because some of them live in shame and they don't know who knows. But you can lift your head up and you are instructed by the Chiefs to mention it no more and that it will not be talked about anymore. So this stops all the gossip and backstabbing. Victims too experience themselves as being accepted by the community rather than remaining a victim thinking that people aren't accepting you."

## **CHAPTER VIII. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A PROCESS FOR HEALING AND A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING**

**A critical part of healing lies in our recognizing our strengths and in re-claiming our lives through the development of our communities.**

The question raised earlier in this report is whether healing within an Aboriginal context may be best understood as a natural outcome of community development. The patterns and directions described within the text of this report would lead one to assume so. It is with this in mind that one is asked to consider whether the process of community development is the common language which communities and government can speak with respect to healing.

This chapter will attempt to go further in developing the common language of healing and community development; it will also suggest that new ways of assessing or measuring the impact of a more holistic and developmental approach may become necessary.

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HEALING: COMMON LANGUAGE, COMMON ELEMENTS**

Community development is a process of community action. The fundamental basis of community development is found in the community's ability to organize, prioritize, plan, and implement steps to respond to an issue or a shared problem which has been identified by members of the community. This approach maintains that people are more important than projects. In other words, in order to develop healthy communities, people must have the capacity and opportunity to work together to make decisions and to take action on problems or issues which are mutually important to them.

The community development approach engages community members in finding resources needed to solve problems. It motivates people to act and, collectively, becomes a backdrop to develop problem-solving skills and encourage cooperation. Community development creates options in a community by removing the impediments which may hinder the expression of self-will and self-worth. So too, healing activities open doors to a number of options in a community by virtue of the kind of problems or issues which are associated with the need to heal. In whatever definition one uses for "healing", the common thread speaks to "making something better" or "helping that which hurts". If someone or something is not in balance or not doing well, confidence and esteem are compromised.

## **ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY versus ROLE OF OUTSIDERS**

Outsiders to a community can play a useful role in the community development process, but for the outcome to be successful, the community must maintain control. The critical factors in promoting community development initiatives require that **outside agencies or interest groups support activities** by:

- Assisting the community in moving in the direction that the community selects;
- Recognizing that a community must have the opportunity to fail as well as succeed;
- Giving preference to projects or approaches selected by the community;
- Understanding and respecting the rights, traditions, and desires of the community; and
- Assisting the community by awakening discontent, yet letting the community decide its own direction by guiding and not leading.

As one participant shared:

- "We cannot address the social issues within the context of healing unless our communities address their own needs in ways which are specifically designed by our community. Current programming confines the community's ability to design our own programs. As communities we must go beyond where things are at and support each other in learning to say no to specific programs and services which are financially driven."

It has been suggested throughout this study that the answers or resolutions to problems come from within the community and that the leadership in the community must play a vital role as spokespeople in promoting healing initiatives with governments and other outside resources and in impressing upon them the need to act in a holistic manner.

As reflected upon by a government employee:

- "This is not as easy as it may sound. Canada, as a confederation, shares its powers between the federal government and the ten provinces. Over the years, both levels of government have defined and evolved their powers through the creation of legislation and policies which have often inadvertently had the result of creating divisiveness - or at the very least, disjointed efforts - in the communities these governments are intended to serve."

For example, Aboriginal communities, in addressing the abuse of alcohol and drugs, see the solution to their problems of abuse as involving many aspects of the community, including education, health, economics, social services, justice, language & culture, and spirituality. Except for spirituality, the other aspects are mandates of specific departments within either the federal or provincial governments or both. Communities wanting to address substance abuse, therefore, are often required to deal with the issues in a piece-meal approach if they want government funding. The piece-meal approach has unfortunately proven ineffective. There are few opportunities for communities to bring all these pieces together and to have them work in concert according to community demands.

One community member summarized the effect of these government policies and mandates as follows:

- "Through the severely limited use of our resources which resulted in the loss of being an independent people, and being totally dependent on the government for everything, we have been conditioned to live in fear that we are nothing without the government. We live in fear that the limited and restrictive funding will be cut off if we don't jump through the loopholes of regulations and red tape. We have been conditioned to live off the handouts from the government, to always have our hand out begging the government for more money, to accept the poverty in which our people live. We have been conditioned to accept welfare as a way of life. **We are the largest recipient of outside resources!**"

## MEASURING CHANGE

Community development and healing, when successful, are profound, complex processes which are difficult to "measure" in concrete terms, especially in the beginning. Nonetheless, it is necessary and desirable to take measurements from time to time, and so it is important to address the question of how to measure changes. In the ideal world, of course, this process of measuring and evaluating how changes occur will help everyone to better understand what works and what does not.

To determine the impact of community development as it relates to the process of healing, participants were asked to tell "how their communities have been affected by efforts to heal themselves". The common thread was that positive change had occurred in each community as a result of community initiatives which were organized and directed by the community.

One participant's response described how change occurred and how it can be measured:

- "I'll tell you a story. As a teenager we would fund-raise for school and our favourite fundraiser was a bottle drive. Collecting bottles, pepsi bottles, and a large portion of our fundraising would be beer bottles. We would fill up two trucks to the brim. Recently, I tried this and I could not even get 10 cases. That

stood out for me and I am very grateful for those who have helped to make these changes, and I thank the Creator for letting me be here to witness this. Often people want to measure how much someone has healed in a program like this or through our traditional practices. I question how we can measure healing. If you suggested that I needed healing in my case seven years ago I would have slapped you in the face. Today I am sitting here talking to you. I would not have been sitting in the Circle. So if you want to measure it measure it but do it properly. Today we recognize our Elders as part of this program and as counsellors. This is how far we have gotten as a community."

In measuring change by "how far one has come", one has to recognize the importance or significance of small steps, not just the large ones. A common human failing is looking for the major change, or the "big stuff", and thereby missing the more subtle events or changes which may have a more permanent or long-standing effect. Understanding and acknowledging how it was for an individual, family, or community is critical in determining how far one has come. The key to measuring the extent of change, or the success of healing, in a community is to acknowledge and place in perspective the large and small gains made by the individual, the family and the community.

Some participants measured the impact of community development initiatives by recognizing the changes within and among individuals in the community. These changes can be seen in their accomplishments in personal self-growth and the influence that community members began to have on one another through increased participation in activities in workshops or community activities:

- "I see people who are trying to change their minds by the way they are handling things. I think some of the healing workshops have given them skills and a way to cope with anger and crisis. It helps to take a look at yourself in dealing with anger. I see people change and miracles happen. One person told me they never thought they would kick the drug habit but they did. They thought they would live with it the rest of their lives. The change may be small but it involves one whole person."
- "Just by having these workshops in the community maybe fifteen people show up the first day but then each one uses the 'moccasin telegraph' to tell another fifteen people about the workshop in the community. So on the second day of the workshop there was at least thirty people. It is like the drug/alcohol program that provides one-on-one counselling. It has a good effect in the community because people recognize this program and can see how many people have sobered up and that these people are doing good without the drugs/alcohol. Each individual in the community can have a lot of influence on another, and the workshops seem to give people that extra will power."
- "Some people have gone to treatment and stayed sober and have turned to the children, teaching them soccer and basketball. And if it is not to keep themselves

busy, it is to keep the children busy. Right now this is the only change I have seen, but it is important."

It is all too natural for people to have a need to see changes occur quickly. As in the example with weight loss, it has been proven that the more lasting effects are accomplished through a slow and often gruelling experience. In other words, weight which is lost quickly usually returns quickly.

This is often the case with changes in the community. Because the most lasting results occur if the process is deliberate and well thought out, the visible changes are often very subtle in the beginning. In fact sometimes they are unrecognizable until later in the process when they often appear as sudden changes. One implication of this is that **Aboriginal people and governments must resist the temptation to cry failure or give up when no immediate results are apparent or can be measured in the usual ways.**

Participants in this study acknowledged that sometimes they do not "see" the impact of such initiatives but rather feel that things do move too slowly. Generally speaking, one does not take stock of what has changed until asked to do so. In this study some of the participants were able to describe the change readily. Others had to think for some time, and still others were prompted by the experiences of the Project Coordinator who recalled events which were perceived as contributing factors to change within a community.

- "Sometimes it takes an outside person to have us see what has changed but sometimes there is so much energy to make the changes and no one else is helping you make the changes, you might say 'oh, what's the use'. But even if you can get the support of one or two people that's a start. I think our communities are afraid of the change and when change begins or is talked about it hurts. So we need to continue to educate people to know how to take the change, and that we have to go through it."
- "It has really been felt from the outside. Within our own Nation it does not seem that they have time to hear about the program, yet from the outside we are invited to present our program from all over. It does not matter where you are, the house will always look after their house members."

In numerous trips to these communities over the past ten years, the Project Coordinator has been able to observe that the impact or change has been significant. The environment in and around the community now reflects a sense of pride and confidence not evident in the earlier years.

As previously mentioned, change is often subtle. However, it can be measured, as one participant suggested, by observing the behaviour of the dogs living in the community. In one community where healing has been taking place, dogs walk around wagging their tails, holding their heads up high, and are generally more friendly towards one another. Although this example may not appear to be significant, it is seen by some as a very

accurate measure of positive change within the communities, particularly some of those participating in this study.

It was observed during earlier trips to this same community, before the healing had begun, dogs would spend their time fighting one another and scrounging for food and shelter. They were not particular to how they kept themselves even though their instinct was to continually groom themselves for cleanliness. In fact, community members and visitors were often hesitant to step out of the car for fear of being attacked by dogs.

Healing does not take place at the same time and at the same rate for all people in a community. Assessments of whether change is taking place must not rely on observing the same process or rate of change in everyone. However, it is important to recognize the movement to change, as well as actual change, regardless of how small or extensive it is.

- "One of the impacts of the healing process was that it scared some people, and someday they will be more comfortable. But if we wait for these people the healing process may take forever, so we have to allow them to be there. It might mean spiritual progress rather than spiritual protection. Some people look outside themselves for perfection rather than praying to God or the Creator that perfection is found within yourself. Part of the impact is once it has started everyone wants to hurry it along. Everyone has a different opinion about how quickly we are going to get there: 'you guys are going too slow, or you're putting too many rules on the plate'. I think to satisfy everyone is something that will have a definite impact down the line but right now everyone is at different stages."
- "Going back to healing, the size of the community can make a difference, how closely knit they are, but at the same time it may just mean that it takes longer for other communities to heal. Spirituality plays a major force in keeping focused on what we are going through. When it gets tough that is what you turn to. It is the key to this whole process."

Measuring the impact of the healing process in communities is not an easy task. It reinforces the concept that change or healing is initially a very personalized experience. It occurs at varying stages and can be described or perceived in numerous ways.

**A holistic healing process challenges many of the standardized tools which are designed to measure or evaluate programs or projects by raising the question of how to interpret subjective information through the use of objective means. It further raises the question of whether standardized tools can be used effectively to measure change in communities where traditional practices are used as part of the process.**

One government employee commented that:

- "It is suggested that we need a whole new type of research and evaluation respecting the essentials of established social science research while, at the same

time, being inclusive, allowing consensus decision-making about the process. We also need to use new models for negotiation (the old labour relations models don't work here) and training."

Some other participants offered their own measures for evaluating healing in very brief terms:

- "People support people in treatment."
- "People ask for work not welfare."
- "People get their own ideas for their lives and the band."
- "People believe in themselves."
- "People can talk."

### **YOUTH: CREATING THEIR OWN MEASURES**

As stated earlier, comments made by youth are often the most compelling yet, very often, are treated as less credible than those made by adults. Yet, when they are listened to, youth can be as articulate in their own fashion as both adults and Elders and can show a depth of understanding about the healing process. This is probably due to the fact the youth experience the same pain that adults go through when they finally begin the healing process. Not only is there pain, but the speed at which change takes place in and the complexity of their lives is unparalleled in other generations.

- "From my own experience I would not have been able to sit with you and talk with you. I was bad, really bad, but not so much now. Like I am really good in school. I wasn't ever able to talk like this, to express myself and what I was going through. But being here for the last four or five years I feel myself that I have changed a lot, went through a lot of healing. I was ashamed of myself and wondered why I was doing these things. I realized that to have a good life I had to become strong for myself and other people. When I was first confronted about what I was doing I could not handle it. And one night I tried to take my life, but as you can see I did not succeed. Now I am afraid to die because now I have too much for me, things to see in the world."
- "Undescribable! Lots of changes have occurred. People talk more, less drinking, and less fights."
- "The existence of our own school. The school uses a lot of Native ways such as language and dance."

## **OWNING THE PROBLEM ... FINDING THE SOLUTION**

Recognition of personal self-worth is central to the process of identifying the critical elements which contribute to change in a community. A natural outcome of this recognition is that individuals, families, and communities begin to take responsibility for their actions. They become more involved, and accountable to themselves and others. One way to reinforce the value in ownership is by engaging community members at large into the consultation process, thereby expanding the network and creating a greater opportunity for finding solutions. In essence, through this process the community remains in charge of its development. The responses of three participants elaborated on this:

- "It is what I see happening here. When I was fifteen years old, every second house there was a party every Friday and Saturday. I walk down the same road today in the same community and two houses hold such parties. That says a lot about my community and what I am seeing. We were like other communities in the past where we would send our people out of our community for healing purposes, send them into centres whether it was alcohol or drug abuse, or the biggest centre of all, the correctional institutions. Today I am proud to say that my community sends `zero' children out of our community. It is not to say that some of our adults are not being sent out, but sometimes a change of scenery is needed for our people. However, they have support systems within our community when they come back to begin that path of healing. The path of healing is understanding who you are which is based upon our traditional teachings - the `red path'. Today I am proud to say where I come from. This is what I see as an ideal community. That does not mean that we do not have our problems, but at least now my community works with its own, and now others are sending us their own to work with.

"Our plans are for a facility. We already have the centre, it is the community. People sharing, people talking, people believing in one another and people working with one another. That our healing path is forever growing, and your path is never complete. All the healing you ever want will never end, it will always be continual, and once you understand this, then your path will be a good one. My children have never seen me drink and they do not know the meaning of the word drunk in our house. My community allows me to do this by supporting me."

- "I think the impact on the people is that the goals of their responsibility are more clear. The fact that they now have that responsibility, I think, they are more involved. I don't know how to express it but you can feel it by the number of people stepping forward and taking control. I think also that it impacts not just within our people but the whole community, like to the Justice system which has become more interested in taking a look at how we would deal with different issues. We are fortunate that we have a good relationship with the RCMP and the

Judge in looking at those who are in conflict with the law. The educational system too has taken more interest in what we are doing. The impact is people are becoming more involved and are more outspoken about the issues which effect them, they have taken a new look, and so too has governments."

- "I think that people, especially in the political and leadership positions, are expected to be more accountable to the people in terms of what is happening in the community, regionally, and nationally. People want to know and people want to be involved. Our next generation of leaders will have people to guide them because so many of us have been in those leadership roles for so long. We did not have anyone to guide us at the time we started because our Elders had lost so much. Many of us are now looking towards being financially independent, and not relying on the Band to support us all our lives. So it is good to know that people want to get involved and move in a positive direction. The people are wanting to work together to evaluate how to make the systems we have work for us.

"The old people I talk about maybe did not help us in making the system work for us, but they gave us something. They taught us how to survive, to have courage, and to laugh in spite of the misery. We used to bring people in from across Canada and the United States to teach us about our values, but it was here! I never used to see people speak up before, especially the old people. People are asking for all types of training like upgrading and life skills. I never realized how easy it was to get things going, sometimes you just need to ask because people do want to cooperate and help. Things are moving, things are happening, and that is really good."

This Chapter has attempted to explore some of the ways in which healing may be understood as a process of community development. In building a common language and defining the role of government in the healing of Aboriginal communities, perhaps our greatest strength lies in our ability to identify our similarities rather than differences.

A recent statement made by Chief Leonard George from the Burrard Indian Band at a swearing in of "new Canadians" may capture the essence of this concept best:

- "We can build this Nation with the knowledge that as people we have shared common struggles to feel better about ourselves, to ensure that our children are healthy and happy, and that the communities in which we live are safe. We in fact wish for the same things for our future and the future of our children and our children's children."

## CHAPTER IX. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT: HOW AND WHAT?

**Healing has always been taking place, it is more recent that it has become more visible. Society today would like to be able to put their finger on, 'oh, that is how it began!' But it began long before when our Elders told us what is coming in the future through our prophecies. So the healing process was always there, it was just that there were not very many of us who were visible in our own healing, most of us were swimming in our own devastation, our own destruction, our own pain, and our own self-pity. Only now is it becoming more visible.**

In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the role which non-Aboriginal governments can play in the healing and development of Aboriginal communities. The question which may be raised is: "How can departments create mandates or policies which can offer flexibility in addressing and supporting these initiatives in a more comprehensive or holistic manner, without compromising the need to maintain some semblance of organization for addressing each of these areas nationally or provincially?"

It is probably fair to speculate that the current "lack of fit" between government mandates and community needs was not the original intent of any mandate or policy put forth by government. What happens to prevent government intentions from being effectively translated into action? What are the barriers to creating outcomes which result in healthier and safer communities?

Governments' desire to assist communities in a process of healing requires that government initiatives reflect the fundamental principles and elements of successful community development. This is essential in order for governments to become more responsive to communities' efforts and in so doing, to experience success in fulfilling their own mandates.

In the quotes which follow, it will be seen that a number of different possible roles for government are envisaged by Aboriginal people and government officials alike. These roles are variously described as "advocacy", "partnership", "support", "encouragement", "technical assistance", and so on. Regardless of the role governments will eventually play in community healing processes, there is a protocol, or set of principles, that governments should recognize and adhere to in any relationship, particularly in relation to community development. These principles include:

- Governments must acquire knowledge, appreciation and recognition of the culture of the people in communities with which partnerships are developed;
- Community development must be the people's own initiative;

- A healing process must be based on the self-help principle, but governments must provide opportunities for consultation and technical assistance;
- Government assistance must be of sufficient thoroughness and of long enough duration so that later the people can carry on independently;
- The process must have freedom, with no artificially-created limitation which might hinder the staff from meeting the community's expectations for the process/project;
- Governments must be aware of the community's internal composition, particularly for issues of protocol and consultation;
- Governments must have a clear understanding of their role and that role must be understood by the community;
- Governments cannot behave as a "salesman" who tries to persuade a community to accept a preconceived idea of how to proceed; and
- Governments must not view themselves as being the experts with all the answers.

If one accepts these principles, governments would then take on more of the role of an advocate, which would involve working with the community to encourage, support, and to make available technical assistance and information where requested. The principles of advocacy, as listed above, suggest that outside resources should act as role models by demonstrating a style of leadership which supports the fundamental approach to community development.

### **THE NEED TO RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCES IN BASIC PERCEPTIONS**

Vine Deloria, Jr., in the book God Is Red, suggests that "the fundamental factor that frequently keep Natives and non-Natives from communicating is that they are speaking about two entirely different perceptions of the world." The basic difference lies in the perception of what is "objective" versus what is "subjective."

Carl Jung, in his studies comparing indigenous peoples and Western society, suggests that "both live on the same planet and have in many respects similar types of daily experience. They refer to the same external reality or events outside themselves but the basic difference for indigenous people is that they do **not** differentiate the subjective from the objective and the spiritual from the material." For example, Aboriginal people view land as a "subject", not an "object".

Aboriginal Peoples' social identity - their economy, social structure, political culture, and religion - is tied to the land. In this way the Aboriginal approach to living or life is a holistic process, or as it has often been described, "becoming one with the land."

Aboriginal people perceive that the greatest need to improve the quality of life lies in human development. In contrast, the non-Native response to improving the quality of life is more often perceived as the development of economic standards, often through the use of natural resources.

The difference(s) in approach or definition of the healing process between Aboriginal communities and government departments may find its roots in the explanations offered in previous chapters. A good illustration of this was presented early on in this report by a non-Aboriginal member of the RCMP. This member expressed that Western society describes healing as "wounds needing repair", which presents a more "objective" view of the healing process. By contrast, this same RCMP member went on to say, the Aboriginal definition of the healing process is described as incorporating the "spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional" elements of human life, which cannot be categorized as either a "subjective" or "objective" experience. In fact, the responses offered by participants throughout this report continually illustrate this phenomenon.

Another aspect which often differentiates Aboriginal people from Western society is the degree to which Aboriginal people emphasize the importance of "learning by doing." This learning is based upon the acquisition of wisdom rather than knowledge, and "modelling" rather than shaping. In short, nature is the great teacher which embodies the code of proper living, while the experience of living acts as the basic teacher to each individual.

Further to this is the basic principle of organization on which traditional Aboriginal values are based. Simply stated, survival is the primary goal, which individually is achieved by living in harmony with the universe, and which collectively is the responsibility of all group members. This collective responsibility is met through group interactions based on the principle of sharing one's abilities, talents, and resources as a means for benefitting the group rather than just the individual.

**It is suggested that this Aboriginal concept of living is not completely foreign to Western society if the basic principles of community development are applied.** This process developed by Western authors draws upon the very principles offered by Aboriginal societies. These principles include working together, maximizing the use of personal resources, and taking responsibility as a community to identify the problem and to solve it are all applicable to the guiding principle of organization developed by aboriginal societies.

## **THE "HOWS" OF GOVERNMENT WORK IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

Is it possible to build a **language** for communication between Aboriginal communities and governments which can be used in defining the roles and responsibilities of both parties in the healing process? To reach agreement around "readiness" factors and strategies and activities specific to healing?

To examine this possibility, participants were asked to describe the "role they felt governments played in healing Aboriginal communities". The response which had been expected to be offered most frequently was the least: that of "funding". Instead, participants offered suggestions with respect to the future role that government can play.

Interestingly, the participants offered at least as many suggestions as to **how** government should operate, and what government should not do, as for **what** government should do. Again, this suggests that perhaps the most important contribution may not be a large infusion of money, but rather, something more complex and subtle. As one community member states:

- "I don't always believe that money is the answer. It can be part of the answer, but not totally! I think the need to understand each other is more important."

These responses set a stage for consideration of strategies, discussed later in this chapter, which may be applicable to both defining the role of government and in developing policies which reflect this.

## **LISTEN AND OBSERVE**

A common plea was for governments to understand Aboriginal people better, real understanding being at the basis of better working relationships. In order to do this, governments must listen more effectively and observe first-hand:

- "Listening! Have someone from government sit in on workshops given in the community. Be more active at a grassroots level and take in information to gain a better understanding of what their role could be."
- "One, that I hope that they hear us. They have been good at coating their ears and closing their eyes, turning off their thoughts to us. Hopefully they will open up and hear, and see, and feel what we feel. They are the ones that put us here somewhere along the line, on reserves. When you cramp people into small areas you will begin to have problems, when you isolate one group from the rest of the world, isolation brings problems. But you're not looking for handouts either, they have been giving us that for a lot of years, just handouts. We need their support, their understanding and hopefully to them, our Indian government needs to give them this message. Once it gets out to the larger areas, that they have the same goal and quit fighting among themselves 'cause this `divide and conquer' has been their way of making us stay where we are today. And somewhere along the lines

our people will begin to say `hey', and if anything is common among our people is this healing process, it is not just here it is across the nation. No handouts! Understanding, support ... they need to see it, not deny it. I think the local government [Chief & Council] needs to support it, not just acknowledge. Any time healing takes place pain has to happen first, and some people are afraid to have people hurt again."

- "To come up and listen to our people, to have healing circles. I think government should visit each community to look at the concerns of the people."
- "Government really needs to understand our people. They talk about our people but they really don't understand what our people are. I don't know if government can do anything about our healing except maybe funding because they don't understand our people. In order to understand our people you have to live among our people to understand who we are and what we believe about healing. I don't have any faith in any government because of how they have used our people in the past to get into office. We can get all the housing and stuff but these buildings are not part of the healing so they can dish out money but I think they really need to ask our communities what they really want."
- "For front line decision-makers to visit communities and to experience how it is to be far from services, especially professional services, and to see what we are dealing with."

Listening involves clarifying what is read or heard and not simply referring back to what is familiar or believed to be known. The opportunity to work towards partnership will be reflected in the willingness to compare and review any differences in terminology or concepts which may differ from one's own. The term "forgiveness" is a case in point:

- "I think someone coming to talk about the healing is good. Not too many people come to talk about it. You hear about it, but they don't talk about it because they might have to get involved. Many have not been willing to `forgive' yet, but part of the healing process is learning `how to forgive'. Not so much mean to `forget', but to `forgive'. Some people get those two words mixed up. If they learn to just `forgive' means `to lose their experience with it', which then allows it to become a tool to make their life better, not worse. You have anger and hatred, and if you can't express it you become depressed. It is forever turning."

This state or sense of forgiveness becomes a path for bringing life back into a sense of balance or wholeness. It is not meant to detract from or minimize the experience, but rather, to clear the way to move forward.

Specific to criminal justice operations, another community member points to the difference in "language" between the Western society and Aboriginal communities. In Aboriginal languages, words for "punishment" do not exist, but words for "respect" and "responsibility" do. A fundamental difference in language and concept between the two

groups lies in how one comes to be labelled as "guilty". In most Aboriginal languages, the concept of guilt, as understood within the Canadian legal system, simply does not exist.

- "The Justice system has to be looked at, making changes which make our system compatible to it. That is the biggest part of it. Once this happens I think our people will gain more respect for the law, as right now most things do not apply. At the minimum of any fundamental changes are the areas of who determines whether you are guilty or not. Another difference is how one uses punishment rather than steering people in the right direction so that they will become better members in the community, not so much to punish them for what they have done. Our feasts are used for publicly apologizing to those you have wronged and is more effective than locking them up in a cell where no one is relating to them. These are the fundamental differences which need to be looked at."

## **DIALOGUING**

Along with listening and observing first-hand goes the obligation to talk directly and openly with Aboriginal communities.

- "The need for 'direct' dialogue, most things are communicated by a third party [consultant]. This means we start at square one all the time because the connections are often made through this third party and are not consistent. We understand they have a whole country to look after, so we are like a pivot and our role can be to keep the door open and to welcome all people. If their responsibility is genuinely looking after communities, then their responsibility is to come here since it is difficult for us to maintain contact with them since there are so many people within government to contact."
- "I would like to see government get more involved in the 'circle' approach where people can speak equally and be heard equally."
- "I have no problem with them sending people to get information from communities in order to look at structures and policies. The government has all sorts of resources within their structures which can assist communities. We have to do our part by exploring our power to provide what they need to learn and understand about our communities. An information exchange which builds an understanding about each other, and without this all is for naught."

One participant went further to suggest a specific strategy which government could implement in order to create an open and consistent dialogue between themselves and the communities. This strategy is aimed particularly at governments' natural constraint in trying to serve an entire country or large sections of the population.

- "To maintain communication through an open dialogue using a third party [consultant] if necessary. Perhaps using a third party if the community is comfortable with them, to maintain them in the role of a 'third party' or 'liaison' for an extended period of time. It speaks to the necessity of building relationships, trust, and styles of communication which assist our people and government structures in working together more effectively in partnerships."

### **DO AN "ATTITUDES CHECK"**

Improving communication and understanding involves the examination of attitudes and values. Many have referred to the discrimination which has been experienced in the past, when aboriginal communities have become healthy or appear "too organized." Again, how government thinks and feels about these initiatives will have a direct impact on how roles and responsibilities will be defined and designed.

Many participants suggested that government officials need to look within themselves to see whether they have any fears which are standing in the way of progress.

- "Not to be threatened by our proposals, especially if they are good and we are on the right road to healing. But maybe the word healing is entirely different than the way they see it; then get someone in there that is not threatened by them, someone who understands these proposals. A lot of understanding. And for the people in general, to learn and practice the lessons we have learned about healing. We as helpers need to be patient as well."
- "I know a lot of our people want to heal but they don't know how to go about it. It is fear again. Hey, I guess that is what's the matter with government, they are really afraid of our people. They know the things they have done to our people and they are afraid that we may turn around and do the same thing if we heal. That is the way I see it anyways."
- "It seems like to government a healed community is a dangerous community. They [the government] know that they [the community] are not ignorant. So if you have a community like this it is a headache because it will begin to challenge government and tell them to listen."

The Youth in one community provide this guidance:

- "Take a few steps back and relinquish their control. The community must be responsible for their healing."
- "Politics gets in the way."

- "Each community is unique and it is not possible to create a grand scheme to heal all the community. Power should be given to the community."
- "Help stop racism."
- "Speed up self-government."
- "Whenever we try to heal someone comes along and says you can't."
- "Government employees are people who can help."
- "Local government [Chief & Council] should ensure that people know who can help them."
- "I feel they have a role but I am not sure how to say it."
- "Help make this world a better place to live in; not only for us today, but for our children and their children."

One participant shared their own experience of "looking within" and examining their own attitudes. Through this experience this individual was able to see how attitudes play into the success or failure of opportunities.

- "What the government failed to understand or didn't understand was that society did not want our people. There is a lot of racism, prejudice, and bigotry. I don't want to get into this in full detail but you cannot talk about the issue of healing without touching on this. I must be able to acknowledge where the pain and destruction began, as well as recognizing my own racism. My Elder said that I needed to go beyond my 'blaming' if I was going to heal. So I don't blame as much as I used to, I just know that things happened. And now I know we have to go past that and move forward."

These comments express a need for further dialogue to what already takes place. They emphasize the need for consistency in that dialogue, whether it be direct or through a third party. They suggest that all levels of government including Chief and Council demonstrate a sincere desire and support for healing, that all levels of government examine their attitudes and concerns about communities engaging in a successful journey towards healing.

It is interesting to note that the responses given by adult members of the community were reflected in those responses offered by youth. Perhaps one critical reminder which has been raised by one youth is the fact that it is not possible to create "one grand scheme".

One Elder shared comments which present one of the many challenges faced by Aboriginal today. In describing this situation, the theme of respect remains the underlying issue which is at the core of the healing process. This description also serves

to identify just how far partnerships do extend between communities and a variety of government departments:

- "I think once the government says we are the Aboriginal people, we will be healed. And we won't have anything taken away and we don't want to take anything away from the people in Canada. We just want to be recognized. I think this is one of the biggest healings we can have because we won't have to fight for our rights. And I think the government will spend less money than what they're doing now. I wonder how many millions and millions the government has spent just for our people going to different places in Canada to get what we want, and yet it is going nowhere."

### **SUPPORT RATHER THAN IMPOSITION**

Community members, including government employees who were interviewed, shared the vision that Aboriginal communities must take control of their own destiny and there must be a commitment by all parties, including Ministers and senior officials in governments, to support that empowerment. Their responses speak to how change can only be truly effective if the use of community resources, particularly community members, is maximized. In fact, success can only be achieved if the responsibility for the change is shared collectively and efforts by all are respected.

- "I think the role that government has had up to now is the role of determining our future, whereas it has now changed, where our people are starting to define what it is that is necessary for us, and I think governments have to be aware of what we have lived with for centuries. And now they're finding that what they have imposed upon us has not been working and I think the fact that Native people are taking control of those areas which affect them is going to be more healthy and a better way of life."
- "Band Council needs to be more involved because they don't share when monies come through so we don't feel like they are doing anything. We want to do so much here but we are limited by funds and space. They don't consult us enough."
- "Creating partnerships is critical to this process. One can't do it without the other. The Justice Committee I am involved in is one of those initiatives, but there are other initiatives in communities which also have merit and need to be given a chance. Government to pay more attention to where there is a verifiable need and see where it goes. To not take over the process but to develop some guidelines for government in being able to respond."
- "Start with local government [Chief & Council] and have them understand 'how' it's working and they could support these initiatives better."

- "As Native people we were given the responsibility to manage our forests. The role I would like the government to play is a partnership role with us. These reservations were jails for my people. Where partnership is really occurring is where there is realistic development being done in the community and the only ones who can do that is us. We have survived and we will survive, and the next generation will be better equipped to deal with issues. I really hope that government will ensure that we continue to heal and to not slow down this process by the policies and financial constraints which they apply to us."

### **GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN EXERCISING MANDATES**

Participants have stressed the need for governments to listen and to provide a sense of support. The question to raise is "how do you do that" or "how can they demonstrate those qualities?"

As noted in the last chapter, the participants felt that governments needed to come to grips with the fact that the way in which their mandates and funding structures are organized may be a problem, and may be getting in the way of effective community development approaches.

- "They have to stop deciding for us. They have to be kinda like the children. Governments have become so compartmentalized and rigid. They have to learn to become more human and find the courage to learn to listen to communities."
- "Why programs which are working are not happening in other communities is because the government says it comes down to dollars. We must also remember that government is still to assimilate my people, whether it kills us or not. Everything in our environment affects us. The government still holds on to the 'White Paper', and because of this policy they have not realized how devastating those policies have been on our communities. So they hold on to these policies, and for that reason they do not want our communities to heal. We have to finally say 'stop' if the government is going to put a price tag on our healing."
- "I think the answers are within the community. There is so much sickness and so many programs whose mandates don't fit our communities. For me in communities where you have resource people working for 15 programs all of which have different policies and regulations in how they have to work with people, it leads to a lot of confusion. I think they can help by allowing communities to develop their own mandates of which I see four: Justice, Education, Child Welfare, and Health."
- "When they channel the funds where the real work needs to be done. Like the family violence money, they put it into five different departments and by the time

it filters down to the community level it was \$8,000.00 for one year. What can you do with this kind of money?

"We could have pulled all that money and created a family violence centre and the kind of program we want to expand here. Using the money to make realistic attempts at dealing with the problem and to quit telling our leaders that these monies are 'hand me downs' as if they are doing us a favor."

In addition to calling for a more holistic way of approaching programs and funding, the participants had other suggestions to make as to how government could work differently.

- "More money to build facilities for children to go to. To come out more than just during election time. The government has a lot of programs and grants and stuff but there are people who don't know about it. They need to get more information out about what will benefit the community, not just leaving it there."
- "They prescribe things to us, things we need ... if it is happening here, it must be happening there! Being sensitive that community approaches are different. The funding is based on size rather than readiness or need! They expect communities to grow but they won't give communities the space."
- "That is part of our plan, is to make a regional impact about ways which programs can be developed, but that you can't use this to a 'T'. You have to develop your own. But when I do see across Canada how many aboriginal people are incarcerated I feel that the money could be better spent by having our own people helping our people. Sometimes it feels like we are a commodity. Especially when a department is willing to pay \$130.00 per hour for an outside professional to deliver services in the community, but are not willing to pay local people who can operate the program. For a year and a half or two years we could pay some eight people for the same price as this one outside professional."
- "Policies have to address the pain by providing a short- and long-term strategy in the form of guidelines in how this can be done. Not everyone is going to work in the same way. To address the pain, there cannot be many roadblocks [red tape]. Because for everything you need to do there is so much work to do, a lot of hurdles you have to jump, a lot of paperwork, a lot of justification. Do we need to go out and charge a lot of offenders first to open their eyes?"
- "To assist in helping us to understand 'who' we should go to for specific things or needs, it is easier for them because the community is here, but government is so spread out."

One government employee shared how personnel qualifications and department policies must also reflect the will to work with and assist communities in developing, if the role that governments play is to be effective. In regard to personnel qualifications it was stated:

- "Unless government workers become a part of the community in which they work, and are able to treat people and families holistically, then they [government personnel] will not be effective in their work for the community. Employees must be able to give of themselves and to want to be part of the community or they should not be in these positions. This is one piece of community development, one piece of community healing, and these pieces have to come together. `Interest' from the regional offices needs to be experienced by both the government employees and the community."

In relation to this, department policies must go further in supporting their staff if there are to be any real benefits or spin-offs from their work.

- "There needs to be the flexibility by staff to determine how they can and should be involved in the community. In other words, a community should be able to approach an employee and say, this is what we would like you to focus on with us in this community. Many government programs and grants have focused on specific areas (eg. mental health) which has created a "piece-meal" effect in the community healing. It does not work unless you treat things holistically. This too should become policy.

"If the community says what they need from the skills of a particular employee it is supposed to be policy. That the departments listen to the communities and those personnel are given an opportunity to serve the community. I am aware that this policy is not consistently carried out in communities across the country."

### **NEW WAYS OF LOOKING AT "RESULTS"; NEW WAYS OF COMMUNICATING RESULTS**

It was suggested in the previous chapter that governments will need to take another look at how they measure and evaluate programs and processes. The need for patience while awaiting the long-term results of complex initiatives was a frequent theme.

- "Government should realize that not everyone is going to be ready at once. When you look at Aboriginal communities and the pain they have experienced for years, I think it should be OK for government to say that this is a community striving for their community to heal, and that each little sector may not want the program. They should be OK with this because those of us in the community must respect each community member's views and feelings about these concerns. I believe as an outsider to this community that it will be the aboriginal people who will show the rest of us how to get ourselves back into balance."

Comments shared by government employees working in or with Aboriginal communities suggest:

- "Unfortunately, we don't really know enough about what works and what doesn't work to be too categorical."

Once it does become apparent, however, that a certain strategy is working, or has been found to be helpful, it is important to get the word out. One participant suggested that the methods for communication and public awareness referred to above should be used by governments in order to get the word out.

- "I find that many times a government department is doing a good thing, like the initiative that Health and Welfare Canada put forth for family violence, but it could have been advertised more, and more of a big thing made about it. They had a lot of good things to say. I had a few copies which I distributed throughout the community. And I was going around the community saying to people that we often criticize government for doing nothing, but here at least they're talking about real issues. Or at least someone in government is because there were really neat things that they're saying, talking about the different problems of abuse. It came out when they announced the millions of dollars for family violence but it really never got the recognition it deserved. I read it and all the workers here read it, and I challenged other communities to read it because again, we are always criticizing government for not wanting to address these issues and here's their contribution, their ideas, their thoughts on the issues, what's ours? So I think if they really want to make an impact they need to be more public, more immediate."

### **THE NEED TO INCREASE SKILLS**

Participants felt that many community members still required training in some of the skills needed to provide healing and community development. It was considered particularly important to train community people in the delivery of these initiatives, rather than merely bringing in outside "experts" to deliver a program and then leave, taking all their skills with them. When outsiders come to a community, one of their responsibilities should be to leave some of their expertise and skills in the community. Ideally, outside experts should work themselves out of a position in the community as soon as possible.

Training is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate partnership and teamwork between the government and community. It is also an opportunity to move away from compartmentalized thinking to a more holistic approach to service and program delivery.

- "I think that government can play an important role in healing Aboriginal people. They can provide the skills we have lost from language, parenting skills, skills in

being an independent community and I am talking about skills in a holistic approach ... I really believe that communities with proper guidance can really go out on their own. And that is just providing certain skills and training which has to take place in the communities. I really feel that even at the initial start of it it won't be as costly as now."

- "I think the government can help our people if they can recognize the need for funds for more professionals to come into the village and not hold back until we can get the people who have been victims back. Sometimes I know that people don't have the funds. If the government can recognize that just for a few years this is needed."
- "Because there is no one person who can do all the work, it takes a group of people from the community to take responsibility. It was everything, the training, having the training in the community to practice the skills we were learning and designing our own approach or program, whatever you want to call it. Skills training taken from outside the community are not as effective as taken from within the community. Outside you may train with a group of people but you're not going to bring them home, so what we designed was a way to learn these skills at home and not just for one person to learn the skill but to start a new cycle where we would begin to pass these skills on to other people. For me this was the key thing, the skills transfer to the community in order to work together and heal together...and that is where it had to begin."

### **KEEPING THE PEOPLE WITH THE SKILLS IN THE COMMUNITY**

Once skills have been acquired, they must stay in the community. Not taking people out of the community in order to learn and heal, can make a big difference to overall community development.

- "When people come back from treatment or an institution they come back to the same place. The treatment has to take place in the community, it has to happen here. By taking people out of the community the focus is on the individual, not the family where the healing has to take place."
- "We had to develop a way to build our skills, not necessarily the information because the information was here. We looked to develop our skills in proposal writing, negotiations, working with courts and going through the interactions with judges and lawyers. Those were the skills we had to learn instead of hiring outside consultants to do this work for us which has been traditionally what has been happening in Canada."

### **STEPS IN THE GOVERNMENT PROCESS**

One government participant, who has worked with many Aboriginal communities, suggested that there are several important steps in the process which governments must go through when asked to assist with healing initiatives.

- "Government should first determine if there is a consensus [within the community]. That is the beginning step. Government and the community should then jointly agree on how the process can be facilitated, since it is rare that the process can proceed without facilitation. Then it is critical to clarify 'assumptions', a process whereby the parts that create meaning for people are constructed. The key criteria [in making decisions about government support for proposals] are need, readiness, and affordability. There needs to be an understanding of the importance of responsibility and partnership, an equal investment of commitment by government and community. Need to look beyond those in the community whom you hear from, look at quiet communities. Regarding affordability, need to look at what is really needed and assess affordable ways to meet that need."

## **FUNDING FROM GOVERNMENT**

As noted earlier, few participants simply stated that they thought government should act in the role of providing more funds. However, many participants offered views about how a greater return could be gotten from funds spent. In essence, these views suggest that investing in a preventive, healing approach now would reduce the requirement for "band-aid", reactive spending later on. In addition, governments are urged to take a long-term view of problems and solutions, rather than a hasty, piece-meal one.

- "Long-term planning, long-term agreements, funding. We have not used government monies until recently. Governments have to let our communities get involved with our people. What happens now is not working."
- "The money comes from them so there has to be some financial support, they need not be so afraid of the cutbacks in their departments. When there are cutbacks they need to ensure that these cutbacks are not made in areas which are part of the healing process. Cuts in education and health are definitely cuts in part of the healing process. They need to re-evaluate their own understanding of healing and look at how they end up enhancing it through their financing or how they may hold it back. And when they make policies take into consideration the healing process, if they make policy to cut education or health it goes against the gain of our people and the healing process. Programs which are working at the Band level should remain intact. Policies need to address how to help with the pain our people are experiencing, how to get over the pain, and then move on."

- "I also think that government needs to listen to communities. If government keeps looking at dollars and cents then they are closing their eyes to allowing the communities to be the driver. This program has become a cost-cutting measure in that jail is an expensive enterprise and we are keeping these people out. Communities which has shown their commitment and they deserve to receive the money. It is clear that even if we don't get the money we are not giving up the program. But look at the judges making referrals here, that should be taken into account. The ultimate is bringing communities back into balance and government would not be relied upon in the way they have."
- "I feel that monies which are provided to Aboriginal communities today never reach the communities. We could probably get a way with a quarter of what they are spending now if they went directly into the community and provided those skills to begin their own healing process. I don't think we need to have a whole bureaucratic system to do that."
- "When we look at losing 50 kids to the outside system, and the cost of that alone, [the cost of providing healing in the community] is nothing compared to the cost of providing treatment on the outside."

Some participants did present a more cynical side to the development of partnerships and the definition of role. One such participant is an Aboriginal person working with one of the government departments who, unlike the other government employees who were interviewed, does not share the experience of being supported or encouraged by the employer's initiatives.

- "[Governments should] stay clear of what is going on, don't turn around and say this is what we think you should be doing. They should leave well enough alone, things are going good, the community is progressing, everybody is still doing some healing. The attitude in my department has been that we shouldn't have a job if we didn't go to school for it. Although I sometimes can't blame non-Native co-workers for having this attitude. It is difficult to respect one another. I think they don't really give a hoot about what happens in the community, all they care about is that you buy their rules and their rules only. My department is not one I would recommend as one who is encouraging us. In order for our community to heal we have to forgive some of those people who have hurt you."

Another community member shared a similar experience. The program in question is directly federally administered, although the speaker is employed by the band:

- "They can't even begin to give back because we have lost so much. In my generation we can't even speak our language. They caused cultural genocide which has a lot to do with healing when we think about it. I talk with my children every day about who they are and explain that we did not willingly give up everything. I can't really imagine what our ancestors went through, being stripped of their culture and nation. I think the only role the government can play is a

funding role. We do not need to go to them for everything we need, but for programs like the drug/alcohol program it should be included in a budget where we don't have to keep going for the dollars every year."

### **SUGGESTED ROLE FOR SOLICITOR GENERAL AND OTHER "JUSTICE" AGENCIES**

Specific comments were made by government employees with respect to the role or mandate of Solicitor General, provincial Attorneys General, and Justice. Each offer different ways in which these departments can participate in this process:

- "I don't see much of a role of the federal Solicitor General in the community here and the reason for that is that in my stay here we have never had a federal offence, or an Aboriginal person getting federal time. We have only one person on federal parole time, and I don't see this changing in the next little while. At the provincial level, yes, we have a lot of people here who find themselves in difficulty with the law and it can end up that jail can become a disposition of their case.

"However, I don't want to be talking out of turn here, but if this Community Justice Initiative Committee takes roots and gets off the ground, I don't think it will be long before numbers can be attached to the justice initiative concept. And people plead guilty after being informed of their rights and having counsel, but also based on the traditional law where you stand up and take responsibility for your actions. I don't think it will be long before people can put together tangible numbers and go to the Attorney General and tell them that the cases they have dealt with have saved the administration of justice thousands and thousands of dollars in terms of court cost, prosecutors' cost, and incarceration costs. I would hope that someone in the community or attorney general's office would realize the validity of the program and it might be appropriate for us to cut a cheque to that community to be used to further the justice committee initiatives.

"I think it becomes a two-way street. That the government stands to benefit financially from the concept and the community will benefit from the results of their own initiatives. In developing policies it is critical to reinforce the notion of alternatives to sentencing, supervision, etc. As many options as possible must be reflected in these policy statements."

Another participant offered that Solicitor General might play an educative role in bringing together the various parties:

- "As far as Solicitor General: that all Crown attorneys are educated about the program here, all judges that do the circuit. So we don't have to re-educate every time there is a change in the circuit. The Crown should be educated about the program, the group doing a presentation for them and the judges, not just

reviewing it on paper. Even going into the university and presenting to law students. The downfall is how we educate the lawyers to understand what victims and offenders need to heal. Fine they go to jail, but then they return to the community. In other provinces the different communities could be identified to present information to the law schools."

### **READINESS: A SET OF QUESTIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS TO ASK THEMSELVES**

The question of "readiness", although of critical importance in developing strategies for change, has in some circles become the very essence of what "traps" or delays progress from being achieved. As some participants articulated, the roadblocks or "red tape" which have become the guiding principles for developing partnerships between government and communities, or simply the tools for assisting a community in moving forward have, in fact, become the key to locking the door to progress.

What can be concluded from the participants' responses is that outside agencies and government departments have a potential role to play in that they may act as agents for change. Governments can assist communities in examining how they want to address the problem and in reinforcing community approaches which have been effective in the past. For their part, communities can assist governments in assessing the readiness of the community because community members have a feel for the presence and direction of changes in the community, whether that feeling comes through "numbers" or through experience. It is important to recognize that the process of assessing a community's readiness need not be lengthy and exhaustive.

As one community member shared about external and internal systems:

- "If a community allows the systems to be in their community, then they are ready, because they expect these programs, people, and leaders to make a difference in their community, to make a change in their community. If they didn't want change or weren't ready they would not accept these programs."

It does suggest, however, that it is incumbent upon outside resources and government departments to examine this issue by developing a set of questions which can speak directly to the development of mandates and funding of protocols. Such questions are not exhaustive and might include:

- How do we provide consistency in assessing the readiness or capabilities of communities?
- How do we address the differences between urban, rural, and reserve communities in terms of support structures, economic stability or opportunity, the magnitude of the social problem and the access to resources?

- How does one "prove" the readiness of a community which has not tackled this issue before?
- Are mandates or needs assessment set up to "prove" readiness or are they tools to assist communities in discussing or discovering their readiness?
- How do we use the information generated by studies or needs assessment? Are there standards? What are the standards? Are they consistent?
- Are the questions of readiness posed to Aboriginal communities consistent with those posed to non- Aboriginal communities?

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS TO ASK THEMSELVES**

This report has been written from quotations and stories people have shared through the interviewing process. Many statements are presented in ways which appear, on the surface, contradictory in terms. One must continually be reminded that individual perceptions vary as much as each Aboriginal community.

The process of gathering information reflects different views which can be generated from people's perception of healing based upon how the question(s) are asked and how clearly questions are stated. The advantage of a group interview can be that it becomes a forum for discussion of these issues between community members who might otherwise not have spoken to each other either because the opportunity never made itself available, or when they get together they speak of other things.

This was illustrated earlier in this report. A group interview which was conducted and those interviewed shared their perceptions on healing. In this interview, one individual made the statement that healing had begun to take place in the community because people were willing to even say words such as "sexual abuse" and "family violence", which were never spoken of in the past. Given this statement or explanation, the rest of those in the group who initially felt healing had not been experienced in the community, re-assessed their responses. They now agreed that healing had begun, stating that "they weren't thinking in those terms when we were answering the question". They felt they had been more focused on "self", and had not included the bigger picture.

Offering these opportunities can become a powerful tool lent to communities by government and outside agencies. The key is that partnerships between outside resources and communities require some degree of consistency. Governments should try to keep the same personnel or contractors working with the same communities. This is needed in order to build trust and to develop a style of communication and dialogue which is understood by all parties involved.

To begin this process, one must ask, "What is my **own** understanding or belief about how communities develop?" Examining our own attitudes and values about the development of communities will help us to define or clarify how we contribute to this process. The contribution or role we determine for ourselves becomes a reflection of our beliefs and values.

**In this spirit the following questions are raised for reflection:**

- **What is the perceived outcome for Canada of a "healing" or "healthy" Aboriginal community?**
- **What issues, problems, or concerns might this raise economically, socially, legally, and politically?**
- **What does it mean to relinquish or change the role governments presently play?**
- **What is Canada's commitment to this process? How do any of us participate in this process to ensure that the vision is actualized?**

## CHAPTER X. CONCLUSION

This project was both a rewarding and challenging experience in that it provided the opportunity to re-connect with the communities, to experience the developments and progress which have been made, and to draw on the expertise of those often not heard from outside of their community. The challenge, of course, was putting their thoughts, feelings, and ideas to paper.

There is much to be gained from those who participated in the project; however, there are a few points which particularly stand out, and which are offered as concluding remarks to this report.

One critical factor which came out of this report was that it reinforced the understanding that Aboriginal people are not so different from non-Aboriginal people in the priorities they set in seeking to heal their community in order to make it a healthy and safe place to live. All emphasized that the foundation of healing lies within. It is in spirituality. It was not how one defines spirituality which is important but the recognition that it plays a critical role in shaping how individuals and communities develop and grow.

What participants in the study have described as priorities in their communities, such as education, health, economic development, housing and prevention of crime or victimization, are in fact the priorities which are reflected in all cities, towns, and communities in Canada. A central point in this report is that all communities must be given the **opportunity** to take responsibility in developing strategies and for implementing activities which help them to set their priorities and to reach their goals.

This report seeks to provide an understanding about the healing process in Aboriginal communities, and to recommend potential roles and strategies for government in relation to that process. One such strategy is derived from the understanding that the Aboriginal approach to healing, which is holistic in nature, is **transferable** to other parts of Canada. It is this holistic approach which may be the missing link for other, non-Aboriginal communities in their development towards building healthier and safer communities.

In other words, Aboriginal communities do not want piece-meal programs, but rather a process for holistic development. The importance in this idea of linking discrete programs more holistically has been brought to our attention by non-Aboriginal communities, as well as by governments' recent recognition of the need to give consumers "single window" service in government programs.

The project also served to reinforce that Aboriginal communities are excited by the opportunity and willing to share their expertise and knowledge about healing as it relates to the development of healthy communities across Canada. Although there may be cultural differences, these differences need not become barriers to communication

between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities or the sharing of expertise across cultural lines.

This does not suggest that people should drop their differences and all become alike in order to learn from one another. On the contrary, part of developing healthy and safe communities lies in the ability to recognize that every individual has something to contribute to meeting this end and in so doing, cultural, racial and religious differences do not have to stand in the way of building on one another's experience and wisdom.

The process of healing as referred to in this report is a process which "**starts from within and moves outward**". Another point raised by participants was the importance of healing to improve the quality of life. Improving the quality of life requires taking a personal inventory of our own attitudes with respect to particular issues and our feelings about individuals and groups who may be different from ourselves. The challenge for all of us is to bring those attitudes and values into balance so that we can in fact form viable partnerships in building a stronger future for all of our children.

With these thoughts in mind it is hoped that this report has retained the "**spirit**" of those who so graciously shared their experience and vision of how we can continue to bridge a greater understanding of one another in developing and maintaining the quality of life we all wish to pursue.