

Review of Yukon's Police Force 2010
Preliminary Report on consultation with Yukon First Nations Women
August 18, 2010

Introduction and background:

Two meetings were held with Yukon Aboriginal Women on June 19th and on August 3rd, 2010, as requested and directed by the First Nations Women's organizations. There were a total of seventeen First Nations women who attended the meetings including the Presidents of Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council and the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle. Both meetings were facilitated by Lorraine Netro as the appointed representative for Yukon Aboriginal Women on the Police Review Advisory Committee.

Each of the meetings was well attended by a good cross-section of Aboriginal women from various sectors of our community. The discussions and personal experiences shared by the participants gave a realistic picture of concerns and issues from their perspective of life in our communities.

To respect confidentiality of our participants, only a summary of concerns are recorded here.

Summary:

Many of the First Nations women participants shared personal stories of their experiences in relation to the RCMP. We heard both positive and negative experiences. In reviewing their stories, a number of important themes become clear:

History:

The history of the RCMP in Yukon played a key role in how RCMP is viewed in communities which still holds true today. Measures must be taken to change these negative perceptions.

Respect & Trust:

One of the recurring concerns shared is that there is a real lack of trust in relation to the RCMP and aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are the caretakers and nurturers of our families and pillars of our communities. We take a wholistic approach to process, and we represent all members and generations in our families. We face many challenges. We need to ensure that relationships and institutions that affect our families and communities are shaped through a cultural lens that is respectful and supportive of their interests.

Personal Safety Issues:

In many of the situations where RCMP have to be involved, are usually in vulnerable family situations such as child welfare, domestic violence and reporting personal safety issues. The women do not feel safe in reporting to RCMP, they do not trust that they will be taken seriously, that they will be heard, that their situation will improve, that they will receive the assistance that they ask for.

Access to Resources:

Reporting of these situations in smaller, isolated communities brings negative attention to the individual and their families. This then becomes a safety concern for families as most resources are located in Whitehorse; accessibility to resources is an issue.

Concerns:

In our meetings with the First Nations/Aboriginal women a variety of concerns were expressed – many of these had to do with conditions in the community as they relate to interactions with the RCMP, but also to do with the Policing Review process and the expected outcomes of the review. Following are some of the comments that were made by participants in the meetings:

About the Review process:

- This is not the first time this type of discussions took place between the RCMP and Yukon First Nation's people about improving police relationships. Other similar situations in past forced discussions to take place.
- This is not the first time Yukon First Nations have stepped up and tried to partner to effect positive change.
- It's all about building confidence in the Justice and Judicial system, which is a part of our communities.
- Our recommendations need to be taken seriously and not watered down. What will be different about this process? Treatment of the report, this all comes with an expectation that action will be taken.
- Faith that what comes out of the review is that it will not just be a report, there needs to be action.
- How do we lay a complaint on the RCMP? And feel safe and trust the process for change.

On the history of the RCMP in First Nations communities:

- We must not forget one of the most impactful parts of our history, the era of the Residential School. The RCMP is always remembered as playing a part, going into our homes, searching for our children so they can be sent away.
- They assisted the Social Workers in our children's apprehensions. So the lack of trust was there for a long time.
- RCMP officers arrested First Nations people for practicing their traditional ceremonies and cultural practices.
- People were arrested for liquor offences

First Nations communities' relationship with the RCMP:

- We need to rebuild our relationship with the RCMP. We need access to resources. We need to be involved at all levels.
- New officers/recruits need to educate themselves on first nations culture and traditional territories of their post. Build understanding between cultures. Encourage RCMP officers to get to know the people in their new post, they need to know the dynamics of the community, the leaders, the key players.
- It takes time for people to get to know you. Be visible in community. Walk down the street. Attend gatherings.

Yukon First Nations Culture & Heritage

- Our understanding of Law and order is different. We had our own law and order.
- Perception, attitude and racism is a huge concern on how our people are treated within the institution.
- We need to train and educate RCMP about Yukon First Nations cultures and histories in the Yukon.

Youth

- There is mistrust and attitude with aboriginal youth, more especially for the youth that come to Whitehorse from small outlying communities.
- Many youth who feel they have been wronged by the RCMP feel that they have nowhere to turn to for help, lots of kids don't really have support.
- Alcohol and drug abuse equals more issues for youth.
- Young people in the communities sometimes acquire a lengthy criminal record although they have excellent traditional skills and are a valuable resource in their community.

Recommendations:

At the first meeting with Aboriginal women, the following list of recommendations to the process was formulated and presented to the Co-Chairs and Advisory Committee:

Aboriginal Women's Recommendations:

1. Access to Justice:

- a. Complaint process
 - i. Accessible to individuals
 - ii. Instills public confidence
 - iii. Meaningful/safe
 - iv. Objective

2. First Nation involvement in design and delivery of services

- a. Advisory at community levels – training, recruitment, orientation
- b. Satellite offices
- c. Tripartite agreements

3. Treatment of the Final Report

- a. Drafted with the assistance of Yukon First Nations
- b. Investment in Yukon First Nations
- c. Ensure recommendations are seen/understood through Yukon First Nations and gender appropriate lenses
- d. Meeting with Grand Chief and Yukon First Nations leadership to share recommendations

Respectfully submitted,
Lorraine S. Netro
August 18, 2010