

REPORT: *A SENSE OF BELONGING*
SASKATOON REGIONAL VISIT
October 9th – October 11th



Report

A Sense of Belonging aims to promote diversity and combat racism and discrimination in local communities across Canada through community outreach and public education. The United Nations Association in Canada's overall goal is to bridge gaps between distinct minority and "mainstream" groups to promote cross-cultural understanding and collective action and to promote fulsome and equal participation in Canadian society.

Objectives: The *A Sense of Belonging* (SB) project is in its second fiscal year, and, as such, there is a need to return to the nine communities to investigate whether the issues and concerns of the first round of regional planning meetings. Broadly the objectives of these regional visits can be outlined as follows:

- Re-introduce the project to key community stakeholders, including: UNA-Canada's mandate; project history; how *A Sense of Belonging* came to be; Objectives and Methodology; the Community action plan framework.
- Follow up to see how SB has made an impact in the community. Define modalities to evaluate the SB intermediate outcomes (effects) at the local level by the end of the project.
- To draw on expertise of local stakeholders, including:
 - What initiatives are currently underway in the community to address racism and discrimination? What is the SB project actual level of involvement?
 - Where might *A Sense of Belonging* be able to support some of these initiatives (i.e. instead of duplicating efforts)?
 - Where do gaps still remain where *A Sense of Belonging* might focus its resources?
 - Brainstorming for final legacy research product of SB
- Assess how *Sense of Belonging* will continue past March 2008.
- Check-in and reinvigorate Regional Coordinators.

Timeline: October 9th - October 11th, 2007.

Agenda: The regional roundtable was held at the Radisson Hotel. A meeting with Mr. Kent-Smith Windsor, Executive Director of the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce was also held on October 11 at 11:00 am.

Invitees: Invitations were sent to stakeholders including members of Winnipeg's ethnocultural and Aboriginal communities. Representatives from the provincial government and Canadian Heritage were also able to attend. Originally, Minister of Finance Pat Atkinson was to be the keynote speaker for the event. Unfortunately, she was unable to attend as the provincial elections were announced the day prior to the roundtable.

Roundtable Discussion



Figure 1 Project Officer Saad Omar Khan facilitating participant's discussion

The roundtable discussion started off with one of the priority issues of Saskatoon, mainly that of **policing and violence**. A representative of the Saskatoon Police Services stated, for the purposes of coding, assaults and other “bias crimes” are often not described as hate crimes. Statistically it may appear that hate crimes have decreased, whereas the reality may be different. This **institutional change** needs to be present, and needs to be assisted by a greater provincial emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism. **Foreign credential recognition** is an issue in Saskatoon, as it is in most of *A Sense of Belonging*'s communities. One participant, a manager at a local taxi company noted how many of his workers tend to be people with advanced professional experience. The issue of economic disenfranchisement is also closely tied in with community integration. One example given was a program run by a local NGO, the Open Door society, which aids immigrants in finding work in specific sectors ideally with people from their own particular community. The concern that some participants had with such a program is that it may inadvertently inhibit newcomers from integrating into the broader economy. The question remains as to whether the impetus in change should be the immigrant society in particular or the host community. There is this sense, from many of the comments made by participants, that there is an underlying sentiment in Saskatoon that newcomers are reaping more of the benefits of Canadian society than the host society. People fear losing what they have. The word “fairness” comes up frequently, and has even crept into the political rhetoric of individuals such as former provincial MP Jim Pankiw (who has also ran for mayor of Saskatoon). This is not solely directed against newcomers; Aboriginal peoples have also been accused of getting “a free ride”.

Aboriginal realities, as in communities like Winnipeg and Yellowknife, were of interest to Saskatoon. Saskatoon is experiencing a population boom with regards to the urban Aboriginal population. Funds for Aboriginal programs and services have led to accusations of unfairness. The police have received complaints as well that more attention has been given to these issues over newcomer issues. It becomes difficult, therefore, to explain to people why some groups receive funding and others may not, especially when many of these funding mechanisms tend to be “top-down” delivery of monies from the federal government. This being said, many

participants were optimistic about the future of Saskatoon. Awareness of diversity is increasing, and the potential for a strong grassroots movement to combat prejudice is in existence. This emphasis on grassroots, “bottom-up” approaches to diversity was repeated throughout the roundtable. There is a concern in Saskatoon that government funding mechanisms do not pay enough attention to grassroots-level activity.



Figure 2 List of priority areas for Saskatoon

The following gives a summary of some of the group discussion on the three **priority areas** for Saskatoon:

<i>Cultural and Religious Diversity</i>	
General Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Awareness has increased, but this is not quantifiable. ➤ Current economic environment forces companies to hire foreigners. Is this going to be permanent or will it just last until the economic boom is over? Right now there are more jobs than native employees.
<i>Prejudice and Indifference</i>	
Are people more aware of the important issues facing the community with regards to prejudice and intolerance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Many people feel these issues do not concern them
Have relatively more actions been undertaken to fight prejudice, indifference and intolerance in Saskatoon (i.e. more activities,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ “Awareness days” are present, yet not many acknowledge them ➤ Young people are more ignorant ➤ Always the same people attending diversity

community collaboration, governmental intervention, etc.)?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> events ➤ School boards should be more open to diversity classes and events ➤ Question remains: does language/religion based schools help diversity or do they exclude
Do we find people thinking that their voices have been heard and that their community is more tolerant?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Generally no ➤ Children more tolerant than adults ➤ It is a matter of being exposed to diversity
<i>Violence and racial profiling</i>	
Do we see growing partnership between organizations around racial profiling awareness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There is a lack of collaboration ➤ Need to create a sense of leadership in communities. Especially new Canadians and aboriginals to step up and create programs for themselves. ➤ Racial profiling is rife in Saskatoon police services – they already know which criminals to find. ➤ We also feel racial profiling is related to immigration. When people immigrate, they may be instantly labeled by bad elements and courted by gangs, etc. ➤ A negative climate is created by the media
Is Saskatoon seeing a reduced rate of racial violence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rate of racial violence here is growing, at least more “subtle” acts ➤ Ex: throwing eggs at people outside of Native Friendship Centres, etc. ➤ Quote (Michael McLean, Saskatoon Police Service): “I see people at the police station complaining about people throwing eggs at my house and painting a swastika. The police just cover it up and don’t report it.... As soon as we educate the police on how to recognize hate crimes and to report it, things will get better”

Meetings

A meeting was held with Mr. Kent Smith-Windsor, Executive Director of the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, the purpose of which was to see what the situation was regarding diversity in the workplace. Most of the work in this field seems to be targeted towards cultural awareness training and the Aboriginal community inclusiveness. An example of a “benchmark business” is that of uranium mining where the province has a commitment to employ “Northerners” as an integral part of the workforce. This policy has been continuing for three

decades and has resulted in a labor force composed of approximately fifty per-cent works of Aboriginal origin. Publications related to workplace inclusivity similarly have focused on First Nations peoples.

The topic of foreign credential recognition was brought up at the meeting. As Mr. Smith-Windsor pointed out, one should keep in mind that the entire issue of credentials not being recognized does not always solely revolve around international degrees. Credential recognition between *provinces* have at times been problematic. The Chamber is a strong proponent of the “portability of education” between provinces and, as such, may be looking into international accreditation as well.

While more immigrants have settled in the community, and there may be some resource conflicts between First Nations and newcomer communities, the immigrant population still remains too low to see a massive sentiment that new arrivals are actively taking jobs away from the local population. Saskatoon is still a more or less homogenous community.

Conclusion

In many ways, Saskatoon is comparable to Winnipeg. Aside from geographic location, the two cities share certain demographic traits, such as a rising urban Aboriginal population. There are certain themes that have come up that tend to be unique to the city. Saskatoonian participants emphasized the importance of having funding (federal, provincial, etc.) that supports already existing grass-root activities. “Top-down” methods of problem solving should be substituted for “bottom up” ones. There is also some concern that hate crimes are increasing, or, at the very least, their existence is becoming more apparent. As in many other cities, media portrayal of these issues tends to be negative, overplaying acts of violence. The discussion on Aboriginal realities and ethnocultural issues brought to light some of the potential challenges when newcomers feel that institutions focus more on Aboriginal concerns than their own. This is a challenge apparent in the private sector, with support systems in place to support Aboriginal participation in the workforce should work in tandem with similar systems that remedy the ubiquitous problem of foreign credential recognition. Despite the perceived homogeneity of Saskatoon, the city is facing the same demographic changes that are occurring elsewhere in Canada. New Canadians arrive constantly; as well, the urban Aboriginal population is rising dramatically. With this change, it seems that there is an optimistic recognition that the community is prepared to meet this challenges effectively.

Appendix A: Action Plan Items for Saskatoon

3 Community Events

1 directory of community leaders/anti-racism/diversity committee

1 Supporting Organization

1 Community Fact Sheet

1 Youth Challenge

2 School Presentations

1 Brochure on Crime Prevention

School Presentations

Appendix B: Attendance Information, September 25th Roundtable

NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL
Mitch Mercredi	Urban Aboriginal Leadership Coordinator	City of Saskatoon	
Lou Medjasi	Editor	Saskatoon Ruthenian Association	
Terri Parent	Loan Manager	Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan	tparent@womenentrepreneur.sk.ca
Cliff Kowbel	Fleet Manager	United Group Taxi	cliffk@unitedgroup.ca
Jim Jones			
Sakura Almeida		Student	
Koreen Geres	ESL Teacher	Saskatoon Public School Board	kgeres@yahoo.com
Yujing Gu	Student	University of Saskatoon	yujing.gu@gmail.com
Dennis Yee	Acting President	Chinese Cultural Society	
James Ijjo		Student - U of S	jai660@mail.usask.ca
Julie Richards	Communications	- Avenue Community Centre	julie@avenuecommunitycentre.ca
Michael McLean	Constable (Aboriginal Liaison)	Saskatoon Police	michael.mclean@police.saskatoon.sk.ca
May Cummings		Saskatoon UNAC	maycummings@yahoo.ca
Julio Torres-Recinos	Professor	University of Saskatoon	julio.torres@usask.ca

Appendix C: Roundtable Agenda



United Nations Association in Canada
Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies



Agenda: Community Roundtable

(October 10, 2007)

6:00-6:15 pm	Introduction to the <i>A Sense of Belonging</i> project and the UNA-Canada
6:15-6:45 pm	Introduction of participants
7:45-8:00 pm	Presentation of synthesis report
8:00-8:15 pm	Discussion of report findings
8:15-8:30 pm	Break
8:30-9:00 pm	Group discussion on priority areas
9:15-9:45 pm	Reconvening on group discussion
9:45 -10:00 pm	Conclusion