

REPORT: *A SENSE OF BELONGING*  
YELLOWKNIFE REGIONAL VISIT  
JULY 31<sup>st</sup> – AUGUST 2<sup>nd</sup>



## 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:** August 20<sup>th</sup> – August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007.

**Agenda:** August 21<sup>st</sup>: Roundtable; August 22<sup>nd</sup> lunch at Legislative Assembly and meeting with MLA David Ramsay, August 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting with Minister of Education Charles Dent.

**Invitees:** The representation for the roundtable (see Appendix A) was wide and varied, including not only representatives from our partner organization (the Centre for Northern Families), but representatives from the RCMP, Immigration and Citizenship, Education, Cultural and Employment (Government of NWT), Aboriginal and ethnocultural groups, and interested private citizens.

### Roundtable Discussion

A presentation on the *A Sense of Belonging* **March 2007 synthesis report** elicited interesting responses as to the applicability of its contents in Yellowknife. Primarily because of the diamond industry, the community will be becoming multicultural. It was generally recognized that the demographics of the have changed immensely over the past ten years, and as such, one of the biggest challenges has been **individual readiness** and changing people's mindset. People are often hesitant to call new Canadians anything other than "people" ("How long are they going to

be here” tends to be a common statement). **Language issues** are the biggest challenge as are recognition of degrees. This being said, according to one of the participants Lea Martin (government integration services): “In my experience as a front line worker, I find people are really open to new Canadians. I find it great.” A very different opinion on the level of acceptance to newcomers comes from another participant:

“Racial slurs are everywhere and I hear them all the time. It’s huge. People pick and choose where they want to voice those offensive slurs. I see it all the time. People present themselves as caring and non-racist but once they have a few drinks their attitudes completely change.”

The multiplicity of new communities in Yellowknife has impacted many social services, especially when this relates to language issues. Family members (especially younger family members) often act as translators, which becomes problematic as cultural difficulties and consent issues arise. Sometimes the interpreters do not understand the language well enough themselves. Another challenge in smaller communities is for Francophones to be educated in their mother tongue. Newcomer populations do not seem to have a problem being educated in English. Inuvik is a good example. It has a fairly significant Middle Eastern population. Most of the people immigrating are engaging in business; engineers, healthcare, etc. they tend not to move there unless they have the English skills. Education of the general population also is a priority. Most of the non-immigrant population want to know why these immigrants are here. It is necessary to explain to the populace how immigrants benefit the community. The recognition is there but further education is needed.



**Figure 1 Program Manager Vanya Berrouet introducing the project at the roundtable.**

A special session was held in Yellowknife relating to **commonalities between the concerns of Aboriginal and Ethnocultural groups**. The purpose of this session was to investigate whether some overlap could be found with regards to the challenges facing both newcomers to the Yellowknife community and those of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations. Participants were able to identify certain key commonalities. One of these was the issue of cultural identity. Aboriginal groups have historically had to face the trauma that the loss of their culture has had (i.e. through the process of colonialism, the legacy of residential schools, loss of traditions through the death of elders, etc). While not a direct parallel to new Canadians, immigrant populations have also had to deal with the conflicts that arise when interacting with a new culture and the severed links previously had with their country of origin. This lack of a “sense of belonging” for both Aboriginal groups (who have often felt like a “minority” despite

being the majority of the Northwest Territory’s population) and newcomers (who may feel a sense of rootlessness) is thus a common theme.

It should be noted that in this session there was some concern over some of the wordings in the synthesis report summary. It was felt that rather than there being a genuine sense of mutual exclusion between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups, it is in fact the case that Aboriginal groups do indeed want to collaborate with other non-Aboriginal groups in anti-racism activities but cannot do so because of a lack of resources. In subsequent regional visits, this point of view should be kept in mind for future discussions on the topic

Many important discussion points were raised throughout the roundtable. Many revolved around the specific **priority areas** set out for the city. A discussion was held where participants were divided in three groups and given questions based on the priority areas. The following table gives a list of the questions asked in this session and a collection of responses obtained:

<i>Formal Education</i>	
Have schools changed their curriculum to reflect diversity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Yes, change has happened to more practical learning about cultures, northern and otherwise. Language classes available, and cultural activities</li> <li>-Not known whether teachers engage in professional education on diversity. Still a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues, for example.</li> <li>-We don’t even know who is here and what the demographics are. We need to know who is here, what cultures exist here.</li> <li>-Aurora College does have programs on diversity that they offer to teachers and educator about cultural sensitivity. The nursing program does as well.</li> </ul>
How can we approach the education sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Right now schools are not in session. I think they would be very keen to participate, it’s just the time of year. But what about school boards? We’ll see how that plays out.</li> </ul>
<i>Civic Participation</i>	
Do people in minority groups engage in community activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-it depends on which groups you’re talking about. In church choirs and things like that, there are many immigrants represented.</li> <li>-Why is there less civic participation from minority groups? Time – they are working many jobs. - Language barriers – they can’t speak with people so they don’t feel comfortable</li> <li>-People don’t feel accepted and included. It is racism. They don’t feel represented by people who organize these activities.</li> <li>- In volunteer activities, a lot of aboriginal groups</li> </ul>

	have been paid for these activities so it seems like work and it changes the dynamic.
Participation in voting?	-Nobody really votes that much. A lack of representation across the country in polls. Municipally there is a lack of aboriginal representation. They do vote for their Band Councils, but not for the provincial. Voting is still new (only since 1960) so it's not yet part of the cultural. -If you want to promote voting, include food!! Education on civic participation would be extremely helpful
<i>Religious and cultural diversity</i>	
	The diamond industry as the largest catalyst. May 2003 – may 2005 43 new nationalities had an interest in the diamond industry. Awareness of diversity has definitely increased. It has to do with they dynamics of living in the north. When peple move here, it forces people to interact because there is no ethnic enclaving (there are no large ethnic communities)
Have local policies relating to cultural diversity have changed to positively reflect the needs of the community?	-Over the last year, employment (foreign workers) has grown extensively. So BCE and Service Canada, CNFamilies have discussed the issues of bringing in foreign workers. For a 2-year period you can bring in low skilled workers. There is an attitude from employers that they would prefer to hire temporary foreign workers. Employers say Canadians are lazy and have a terrible work ethic. They prefer foreigners who have greater loyalty to employers. Service Canada is trying to dissuade employers from relying on foreign workers and encourage investing in Canadians. -The diamond mines have taken some significant steps to focus more on employing Canadians. If you look at the service industry, you'll see employers using foreign temporary workers. It's a very new project and a new issue.
Have they been steps made to make cultural diversity a greater priority within institutions such as: 1. The school system. 2. The workplace.	-Education, Culture, and Employment we're doing a new initiative a website that lists all the new resources and services that new Canadians can access. Community profiles, sports, healthcare, education. -It is in consultation stage right now and meeting

<p>3. The public sector, local government, etc.</p> <p>4. Others</p>	<p>with community leaders, employers and new immigrants to get an idea of what the experience was like.</p> <p>-Similar to Ontario's site <a href="http://www.settlement.org">http://www.settlement.org</a></p>
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**Figure 2** Participants in "brainstorm" session.

Several items came up with regards to **UNA-Canada collaboration in the Yellowknife community:**

- The RCMP puts out a quarterly newsletter that can highlight SB, using Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as a hook.
- Attempts made to try to get a telephone system in place so people can access services in different languages.
- Community Fact Sheets: we don't have demographics of the region; one example that people gave is a history of the community's waves of immigration. Besides demographical information, the fact sheets should also give a window to new Canadians as to what services are available to them.
- City of Yellowknife has a website that could publish the fact sheet.

Many suggestions came up with regards to the **future of the project:**

- Approaching employers who have already employed new Canadians and aboriginals to detail the success stories in employment.
- More advantage needs to be take of the territorial government and federal departments. The key to industry in Yellowknife is to offer something appealing, thus it was suggested that dealing with private sector should include integration in the workplace to appeal to employers self-interest.
- The North is limited in human resources. A committee should thus be established to meet monthly to promote diversity in the workplace and accountability for employers.
- Newspapers could be approached about including things about different ethnocultural groups who live here.
- There is no nucleus for people to get together and meet. A community bulletin board would be a useful way of keeping stakeholders up to date with regards to events in the community.

## Legislative Assembly

Figure 3 Lunch at the Legislative Assembly



From 11:30-12:30 P.M on August 22, 2007, the Centre for Northern Families was able to hold a lunch at the Northwest Territories where participants from the previous day's roundtable were able to meet with MLA Sandy Lee and hear a brief speech from project officer Saad Omar Khan on the *A Sense of Belonging* and UNA-Canada's presence in the North. Ms. Lee was also able to deliver a members statement while the Assembly was in session highlighting the role of the UNA-Canada in the North (see Appendix D).

The presence of both the Centre for Northern Families and the UNA-Canada in the Legislative Assembly and the recognition of Ms. Lee to the project indicates a great receptiveness at a political level to the goals of the *A Sense of Belonging* project.

## Meetings

Our first meeting with **Minister of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) David Ramsay** revealed a great interest in the project and other proposed UNA-Canada initiatives such as the Model United Nations. It was suggested that for the Model U.N., invitees should be students from all communities in the NWT. There is also a possibility that the Assembly itself could be used as a staging ground for the event. With regards to issues specific to the *A Sense of Belonging* project, Mr. Ramsay highlighted the workplace and employment as the biggest point of overlap between Aboriginal and Ethnocultural groups.

Our consultations with **Minister of Education Charles Dent** revolved around helping our regional coordinator Ana Perdomo establish connections with school boards and a discussion on the setting up of UNA-Canada sponsored Model UN. There have been some difficulties with trying to implement diversity education in the Yellowknife district school boards. Few diversity and anti-racism programs exist in schools. It has been found (by Ms. Perdomo) that it is often difficult to include these in schools as there is a feeling that there is no desire to change the curriculum. Minister Dent suggested that district school superintendents should be the main focus for any contacts regarding curriculum changes. Minister Dent gave many suggestions with regards to a proposed Northern Model United Nations. It was suggested that, in terms of support and funding, the best avenues are the E.C.E. (Education, Culture, and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories) and M.A.C.A. (Municipal and Community Affairs), the latter responsible for youth development under the aegis of Minister Responsible for Youth, Michael Mcleod. Financial support from the latter organization would be more forthcoming than the former, although the E.C.E. would be a natural starting point when approaching students to participate in the M.U.N.

## **Conclusion**

The Yellowknife visit can be considered successful in two ways. The large turnout of participants was considered by people in the roundtable as an indication of general community interest in the subject. Roundtable discussions brought to light the many challenges faced by both Aboriginal and Ethnocultural groups in a rapidly changing community, one where the local industry (mining) has a powerful influence in changing the city's demographics. Secondly, the visit was a means of promoting the project and thus the concerns of stakeholders to a wider public. Local CBC reporters were able to come to the roundtable, and footage was shown on local Yellowknife news (6:00 P.M. on August 21, 2007). Further promotion of the project came through the members statement given by MLA Sandy Lee at the Legislative Assembly. Beyond the Sense of Belonging project the visits yielded further connections for the UNA-Canada's Model United Nations.

Appendix A: Action Plan Items for Yellowknife

3 Community Events/Youth Forums

Community Fact Sheet

Supporting Organization

3 School Workshops

Community Fact Sheets

3 Community Events

1 Community Directory

**Appendix B: Attendance Information, August 21<sup>st</sup> Roundtable**

NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL
Gayla Wick	Vice President	Union of Northern Workers	<a href="mailto:1stvp@unw.ca">1stvp@unw.ca</a>
Palesa Yaxley	Summer Student	Centre for Northern Families	<a href="mailto:palesa_yaxley@hotmail.com">palesa_yaxley@hotmail.com</a>
Randi O'Brien	Summer Student	Centre for Northern Families	<a href="mailto:randiobrien@hotmail.com">randiobrien@hotmail.com</a>
Kerry King	Advocate	Centre for Northern Families	<a href="mailto:kerryk_yellowknife@hotmail.com">kerryk_yellowknife@hotmail.com</a>
Julia McIntyre	Summer Student	Centre for Northern Families	<a href="mailto:happy_buddha@hotmail.com">happy_buddha@hotmail.com</a>
Doug Ritchie			<a href="mailto:doug@dougritchie.ca">doug@dougritchie.ca</a>
Jim White	CEO	Yellowknife Housing Authority	<a href="mailto:jim_white@gov.nt.ca">jim_white@gov.nt.ca</a>
Ben Mcdonald	Co-chair	Alternatives North	<a href="mailto:benmcdonald@mac.com">benmcdonald@mac.com</a>
Ana Perdomo	Directory	Centre for Northern Families	<a href="mailto:carona_c65@hotmail.com">carona_c65@hotmail.com</a>
Debra Buggins	Director	Centre for Northern Families	<a href="mailto:debra.buggins@hotmail.com">debra.buggins@hotmail.com</a>
Jill Christensen	Manager Integrated Services	YHSSA	<a href="mailto:jill_christensen@gov.nt.ca">jill_christensen@gov.nt.ca</a>
Roxanne Dreilich	RCMP constable	YK detachment community policing	<a href="mailto:roxanne.dreilich@rcmp.grc.gc.ca">roxanne.dreilich@rcmp.grc.gc.ca</a>
Ken Morrison	RCMP Sgt.	"G" Div. Criminal Ops.	<a href="mailto:ken.b.morrison@rcmp.grc.gc.ca">ken.b.morrison@rcmp.grc.gc.ca</a>
Ozgur Culha	Office Manager	Northern Arts and Cultural Centre	<a href="mailto:nacc@northwestel.net">nacc@northwestel.net</a>
Ernie Lennia	Men's Support	Centre for Northern Families	n/a
Bob Bromley		n/a	<a href="mailto:bbromley@wholearctic.ca">bbromley@wholearctic.ca</a>
Christopher White	Researcher/Project Manager	GNWT-ECE/WAMP	<a href="mailto:christopher_white@gov.nt.ca">christopher_white@gov.nt.ca</a>
Kate Wilson	Director	YWCA of Yellowknife	<a href="mailto:KateWilson@yellowknife.ywca.ca">KateWilson@yellowknife.ywca.ca</a>
Soila Tessema	Student	n/a	<a href="mailto:soilatessema@yahoo.ca">soilatessema@yahoo.ca</a>
April Alexander	CPNP coordinator	Centre for Northern Families	n/a
Mira Hall	Community Outreach	Centre for Northern Families	n/a
Lea Martin		Immigration	

Appendix C: Roundtable Agenda



United Nations Association in Canada  
Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies

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**Agenda:  
Community  
Roundtable**  
(August 21, 2007)



9:00 – 9:15 am	Introduction
9:15 – 9:45 am	Introduction of participants
9:45 – 10:00 am	Presentation of Synthesis report
10:00-10:15 am	Discussion of report findings
10:15-10:45 am	Discussions on Aboriginal and Ethnocultural issues
10:45-11:00 am	Break
11:00-11:45 am	Group discussion on priority areas
11:45-12:00 pm	Reconvening on group discussion
12:00-1:00 pm	Break
1:00-1:30 pm	Update on UNA-Canada/CNF activities and brainstorming for community collaboration
1:30 -2:00 pm	Brainstorming: future of project

#### Appendix D: Member's Statement, MLA Sandy Lee

Over the past several years, large numbers of Aboriginal people from small, northern communities as well as newcomers to Canada have migrated to Yellowknife in response to the boom cycle of the mining and oil and gas industries. Some families have been able to adjust to urban living or in the case of newcomers to Canada, a vastly different lifestyle, but many have not and struggle with the cultural, social and spiritual losses related to living apart from the natural support of their families and communities. Challenges Aboriginal and Ethno-cultural families face in coping with transition can be aggravated by a lack of understanding and acceptance exhibited by the mainstream community which is sometime revealed in racist and discriminatory attitudes and actions.

In 2006, the United Nations Association in Canada established a national initiative designed to promote diversity and reduce racism in Canada. UNA-Canada launched a project entitled *A Sense of Belonging* and established partnerships with local agencies in nine communities across Canada, one of which was the Centre for Northern Families in Yellowknife. The United Nations Association is a Canadian non-governmental organization mandated to promote UN programmes and activities within Canada. UNA-Canada sees itself as the "people's movement for the UN".

In fulfilling the mandate of the *A Sense of Belonging Project* in the NWT, UNA-Canada and the Centre for Northern Families Immigrant and Ethno-cultural program directed by Carolina Perdomo with the support of UNA-Canada and funding from Heritage Canada has partnered to offer several information sessions to the public and carried out a consultation process with young people from both the Aboriginal and Ethno-cultural community. Yesterday, a film presentation of the youth consultation was highlighted at a UNA-Canada Roundtable session which was a follow up of last year's regional planning meeting. The Roundtable explored priority areas and identified action items related to building a cohesive community, increasing civic participation by all sectors of the population and promoting religious and cultural diversity.

The work of the UNA-Canada and the Centre for Northern Families on this exciting project in the NWT will be highlighted at a national conference in the spring of 2008.

In addition to the Sense of Belonging Project, I am pleased the United Nations Association in Canada continues to expand its commitment to the North on several other fronts last year. UNA-Canada appointed a National Board Director to represent the North and included the communities of Bechoko and Yellowknife in a national consultation process related to community perceptions of children's health. Children 9 – 12 years old in both communities were directly involved in providing input into the *Healthy Children, Healthy Communities* project which identified social determinants of health among Canada's children.

As well, this year, UNA-Canada hopes to create a Northern Model United Nations conference that will involve college-level youth from across the Territory. This Model UN will simulate the activities of various UN bodies and be a significant opportunity to help Northern youth realize their own sense of global citizenship.