

REPORT: *A SENSE OF BELONGING*
KAMLOOPS REGIONAL VISIT
JULY 31st – AUGUST 2nd



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 of the visit: 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 are still relevant. 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's 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 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: July 31st to August 2nd, 2007.

Agenda: July 31st – Media training; August 1st – Community roundtable; August 2nd – Meetings

Invitees: For the both the media training and the roundtable the focus was inviting members from various non-profit agencies, although efforts were made to invite members of the school board, government representatives, etc. Attendance was lower than anticipated, mostly due to the absence of many interested parties and stakeholders during the summer months.

Media Training

As part of the actions plans (See Appendix A), a media training session was held for members of the Kamloops non-profit/NGO community. The training, led by communications officer Rebecca Cohn, was centered on the UNA-Canada produced media guide. In addition, a directory of media sources produced by Ms. Cohn was distributed alongside the guide to participants.



Figure 1: Copies of the UNA-Canada Media Guide.

The event was held on July 31st, 2007 between 1:00 pm and 5:00 pm and held at the Yacht Club in Kamloops. In attendance were approximately seventeen representatives from a variety of local non-profit organizations. The event was generally seen as extremely useful for participants, many of whom were recently assigned communications tasks in their respective job descriptions and saw the media training session as a way of supplementing their skill sets.

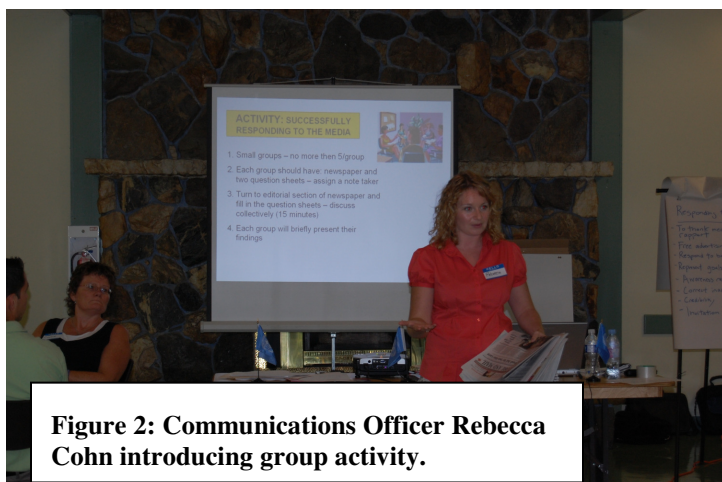


Figure 2: Communications Officer Rebecca Cohn introducing group activity.

Responding to the media was of particular concern to attendees, many of whom felt the media atmosphere in the city was not conducive towards positive social change. For example, the city has recently established “Red Zones” in key areas of the city making them off-limits (on threat of arrest) to street-workers. Most major local media sources have supported the policy, which was seen by most participants as fundamentally a human rights issue. Articles produced by participants

challenging this prevailing perspective tended to be more retroactive “letters to the editor” type pieces responding to previously written articles. It was agreed from the discussion that non-profits/activists need to be more proactive in getting their message out (for example, by asking local journalists to write editorials reflecting an alternate perspective) rather than simply responding defensively to the prevailing journalistic climate.

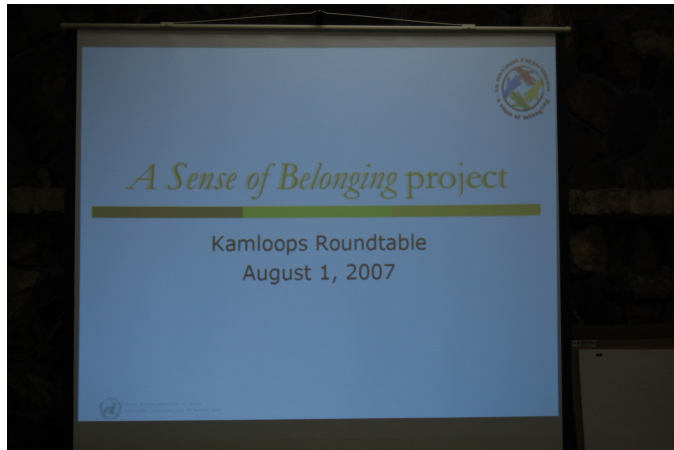
Other points from participants:

- Alternative sources for the media were discussed as a means of getting one’s message across. One example is an online “Citizen’s Journal” (similar to the popular site “Facebook” yet focusing on profiles of journalists) that is becoming more mainstream. Blogging and alternative newspapers were also considered a means of presenting alternative perspectives.
- One suggestion for circumventing the barrier against having one’s editorial published was to ghost-write an article for a journalist already working for a particular newspaper.

- Necessary to have an organizational “media crisis plan” which details how to have a quick response to any pressing community issue that may come up.

Roundtable Discussion

The roundtable discussion was held the following day, August 1st, in the same location from 9:00 am – 12:45 pm.¹ The purpose of the roundtable was to follow-up on the previous year’s regional planning meeting that initiated the project in Kamloops. A list of attendees can be found in Appendix B. Appendix C outlines the agenda of the roundtable. A summary of the *A Sense of Belonging* synthesis report, presented at the Metropolis conference in March 2007, was given to the participants who then provided their own input as to the applicability of the report’s findings to the situation in Kamloops now. Many felt that the report’s findings reflected Kamloops’ concerns. These included:



- **Political correctness:** often a barrier to communication. For example, conversations revolving around Aboriginal communities and students will often be superficial, as defensiveness tends to occur when speaking about racism or poor policies. Because this fear of offending is so systemic and pervasive, it becomes difficult to adequately address the situation.
- **Institutional and community readiness:** admitting a problem means addressing it, and, as such, institutions (as well as individuals) do have a difficulty in implementing policy when that policy has been created. There is also a fear in being seen as “political” when more vocally desirous of change. Some participants raised the concern that Kamloops does not have an environment where it is easy to be politically active.
- **Aboriginal realities:** Social change requires a very personalized form of relationship building that does not exist in many government social services. This is especially problematic when dealing with Aboriginal cultures where this integrated, personal form of social interaction is the norm, and where there is a major need to recognize the history of colonial oppression.
- **New Canadians:** Newcomers often do not say anything when treated poorly out of a fear of creating a fuss. An example mentioned at the roundtable was of a particular post office where treatment of new Canadians was particularly poor. In this example, it was often difficult to intervene on behalf of new Canadians because of the difficulty in knowing whom specifically to lodge a complaint (i.e. at the branch level, to Canada Post directly, etc.).

¹ The original time was until 12:00 pm. Discussions held within the roundtable extended the overall time by approximately 45 minutes. It is recommended that more time be allotted to the roundtable with respect to discussion time.



Figure 3: Discussion of Kamloop's priority areas.

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>Media portrayal and stereotyping</i>	
Do local media outlets frame stories with greater sensitivity with regards to cultural and religious diversity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No, media restricted by corporations -For example the Kamloop's "Daily News" owned by Conrad Black, and thus (from the participant's perspective) reflects a conservative bias -Alternative media not read by the majority of the public -Reporters who write stories with "social conscious" often taken to task for doing so -Land entitlement for Aboriginal peoples not supported
Has positive coverage of stories relating to diversity with local community members increased?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No, often stories not framed as human rights issues -Target groups (including minorities) often villanized -Capitalism and how it factors into media an issue. Felt that business interests supersede human stories in many of the reporting. -Culture of acceptance of negative coverage -BUT dialogue increasing, and there is a small backlash against "negative" reports -This being said, greater pro-activity towards framing stories as human rights concerns needed
<i>Religious and cultural diversity</i>	

<p>Has the awareness of Kamloop's diversity has increased in the community?</p>	<p>-Currently awareness of change of newcomers vis-à-vis financial sector but generally no</p>
<p>Have local policies relating to cultural diversity have changed to positively reflect the needs of the community?</p>	<p>-Lip service to policy; not a lot of understanding on the ground -Policies not always interpreted well by the people who enforce them -Power differentials not recognized -Advocates often seen as rude if more forceful -Advocacy groups often have their own agendas and focus on one group above others</p>
<p>Have they been steps made to make cultural diversity a greater priority within institutions such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school system. 2. The workplace. 3. The public sector, local government, etc. 4. Others 	<p>Schools -"baby steps" have been implemented (ex: zero tolerance in schools); however a lot of what goes on is covert -lack of enforcement of policy by teachers -policies do not always translate into accountability at lower levels -policies not explicit enough ex: with regards to LGBT issues; too much gray</p> <p>Employment -if you are a newcomer almost impossible to find work at appropriate levels -lack of recognition of degrees -glass ceiling for newcomers -seasonal work typical; a lot of direct recruiting for newcomers (as opposed to full-time work) -over-emphasis on Anglicizing newcomers</p>
<p><i>Sexual orientation</i></p>	
<p>Are people freer to express their sexual orientation?</p>	<p>-Some participants felt larger degrees of openness especially amongst the younger generation BUT others felt this openness only exists at the policy level -Social location determines much of this openness, in other words, to be freer in expression one's sexuality often very selective (i.e. to the more privileged, amongst immediate peer groups) rather than to society at large -To be "freer" in expressing sexuality determined by many factors, for example, one might be free amongst their own peer group (a positive change) but not at a larger societal level -Visible outward displays of orientation still not existent</p>

Are people aware of the existence of community “positive spaces” and school queer-straight alliances?	-In the least year and a half more positive spaces (one student-led, another supported by a teacher) -“Safe Harbor” program in existence
Are institutions (for example, the education system, workplaces, local government, etc) more sensitive to the LGBT community?	-Policies in existence; individual readiness is not

Some suggestions were given with regards to the **future of the project** after its official end in March 2008:

- A greater emphasis should be placed on civic participation and individual empowerment.
- Projects aimed at ensuring accountability rather than merely focusing on policy change should be considered.
- Working with the private sector should involve local business associations such as the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce. There needs to be a conjunction between the “diversity-friendly” policies and the “front-line” realities faced by workers.
- Suggestions for the **final A Sense of Belonging resource** included an online community or a “best practices guide” describing success stories throughout the nine communities.

Meetings

Members of the *A Sense of Belonging* team had the opportunity to engage in meetings with many stakeholders in Kamloops. One of these was with **Deb McClelland** from the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber, voted “Chamber of the Year” from the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce² sees itself as proactive with regards to equity in the business sphere. Many issues in the community remain in hiring practices, however. One suggestion from this meeting was the idea of having a roundtable similar to the original regional planning meeting with members of the private sector in Kamloops discussing issues relevant to the local businesses and diversity, encouraging best practices and investigating where the gaps lie. Another suggestion that arose from this meeting was the creation of an accountability or monitoring committee via Chamber encouraging best practices amongst businesses. At this time, how the *A Sense of Belonging* project will proceed with work in the private sector still remains to be seen.

Other meetings held included one with **Arjun Singh**, City Councilor and **Brenda Aynsley**, Executive Director for the Thompson Nicola-Cariboo United Way. Mr. Singh was interested in having the project’s regional coordinator Kevin Cole as part of the Kamloops Race Relations Committee. Ms. Aynsley was interested in many of the regional coordinators activities, especially an anti-racism video being produced in conjunction with Dr. Paul Tamburro and the Thompson Rivers University.

² http://www.kamloopschamber.bc.ca/ChamberNet/highlights_files/highlight_202.pdf

Conclusion

The visit to Kamloops was the precursor for the rest of the projects regional visits, and served as a template for how best to conduct roundtables and training sessions. The media training and guide were considered extremely valuable, especially with regards to the perceived challenge the local media poses for non-profit workers. The media was also considered to be a significant issue during the roundtable, which brought to light many other issues still pressing in the community, including the lack of a conjunction between policy and implementation with regards to newcomers and the LGBT community. The meetings yielded some interesting avenues for the project's regional coordinators. Support for an anti-racism video as well as access to municipal policymakers via the Kamloops Race Relations committee. Connections were made with the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce with regards to the extension of the project.

Appendix A: Action Plan Items for Kamloops

3 Community Events

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

1 supporting organization for in-kind contributions and local support

5 articles/Op-Eds

1 media training for Regional Coordinators

1 media outreach/advocacy kit for community groups

1 media list/directory of local, provincial and national media

3 school queer-straight alliance

1 Community Positive Space

Appendix B: Attendance Information, August 1st Roundtable

NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL
Denise Cookson	Aboriginal Kinship Social Worker	Ministry of Children and Family Development	denise.cookson@gov.bc.ca
Kelly Gaudon	Program Coordinator	Safe Spaces @ ICS	sspaces@mail.ocis.net
Nadine Mathews	Counsellor	Kamloops Sexual Assault Counseling Centre	nksacc@ocis.net
Karen Irving	NP-Aboriginal Health	Kamloops Urban Aboriginal Primary Healthcare	Karen.Irving@interiorhealth.ca
Edyn Rothenburger	V.I.P.E.R program	White Buffalo Aboriginal Health Society	YouthServices@whitebuffalo.name
Kim Rathwell-Austin		White Buffalo Aboriginal Health Society	
Kevin Cole		White Buffalo Aboriginal Health Society	

Appendix C: Roundtable Agenda



United Nations Association in Canada
Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies



**Agenda:
Community
Roundtable**
(August 1, 2007)



9:00-9:15 am	Introduction to the <i>A Sense of Belonging</i> project
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	Group discussion on priority areas
10:45-11:00 am	Break
11:00-11:15 am	Reconvening on group discussion
11:15-11:45 am	Brainstorming: community collaboration
11:45 am -12:00 pm	Brainstorming: future of project
12:00 – 12:15 pm	Conclusion