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Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project

Final Report

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Appendix One: Edmonton Aboriginal Community Services
Demonstration Project: Context and Organizational Structure

1.0 Introduction

The long term solution to crime in Canadian cities does not lie in the repetition of past policy and practice failures. A growing body of research clearly points to crime prevention through social development as one of the necessary cornerstones of any comprehensive social and justice policy - one that slowly but surely moves the justice system away from its traditional reactive and punitive mode. Crime prevention means investing in solutions to crime that serve to prevent and diffuse problems before they arise. All too often, the criminal justice system is called upon to deal with the outcomes of social and economic policies which have gone array. With little opportunity to deal with problems before they arise, police, legal, court and corrections staff, as well justice authorities, find themselves powerless to effect real changes in crime related behaviours. Crime prevention through social and economic development will not replace other crime prevention activities, nor will it ever eliminate entirely the need for traditional policing and correctional models. What it promises, however, is a reorientation of the justice system to reduce the social and economic costs of crime by reducing the very prevalence of criminal activities themselves.

The following report summarizes the work of one such crime prevention through social development initiative - The Edmonton Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project. Begun in the Summer of 1994, with funding provided through the Aboriginal Justice Initiatives Directorate, Justice Canada, and through other community partners during the initiative, the demonstration project rested on a collaborative partnership between local agencies and groups responsible for dealing with the conditions and outcomes associated with crime.

1.1 Background

The origins of the demonstration project lie in the Edmonton Inner City Crime Task Force formed in January, 1990. The Task force, comprised of representatives from eighteen agencies experienced in working with inner city residents, came together under the direction of

the Edmonton Police commission in response to local area homicide statistics. The Task Force mandate was to develop strategies to reduce violent crime in the inner city of Edmonton.

The first Task Force discussion paper, complete with recommendations, was released in December 1990, and included a specific focus on the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in crime in the inner city. As a follow-up to these recommendations and discussions, the Task Force commissioned a further study - which was completed in July 1992 entitled Inner City Service Improvement for the Aboriginal Community in Edmonton. This report identified a series of specific issues and needs in the inner city Aboriginal population, including those relating to crime prevention. And it was in this context that the Edmonton Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project was born.

The starting point for the demonstration project was the view that something can and should be done to prevent Aboriginal peoples from coming into conflict with the criminal justice system. The underlying philosophy which supported the proposal was one of crime prevention through social development. Consistent with this approach, demonstration project staff and supporters remained cognizant of the need to address the social, economic and political factors which contribute to Aboriginal peoples' involvement in crime related activities. Instrumental within this approach was the full and meaningful role of the Aboriginal community in all aspects of the demonstration project including its development, implementation and delivery.

2.0 Demonstration Initiative

2.1 Project Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the demonstration project was to stimulate the development, implementation and evaluation of a limited number of concrete programs and projects for the inner city Aboriginal community. These projects were to be introduced within a specified time period,

with the larger goal of reducing the involvement of the Aboriginal community in the criminal justice system.

Three project objectives supported the overall goal:

1. To reduce the number of Aboriginal people who come into conflict with the law and their subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system (courts, corrections, etc.) by developing, implementing and evaluating specific crime prevention projects.
2. To ensure that the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal service agencies not only participate fully in the development and implementation of any projects/programs undertaken, but also in the delivery of such projects/programs using a model of interagency cooperation and coordination wherever possible.
3. To provide a demonstration project on how the needs of Aboriginal people in the urban area can be met for use by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, federal Department of Justice, City of Edmonton, Edmonton Aboriginal community and any other interested parties.

The demonstration project was originally scheduled to run for a three-year period commencing in January, 1994.

2.2 Demonstration Project Structure

a) Steering Committee

An interagency steering committee guided the demonstration project. The committee included representatives from the following agencies and organizations:

- two representatives from the Edmonton Inner City Violent Crime Task Force

(including one service representative;

- two representatives from the Aboriginal community (1 Metis/ 1 Indian);
- one representative from the police service/commission who acted as chairperson of the steering committee;
- one representative from the Edmonton Mayor's Safer Cities Advisory Committee;
- the Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council;
- one City of Edmonton Councilor; and
- one elder.

A smaller advisory committee, drawn from the above steering committee, provided further support to the project coordinator on an Ad Hoc basis.

b) Project Staff

i) Aboriginal Program Development Officer

A project coordinator was hired in June 1994. The coordinator was familiar with community development crime prevention processes and had considerable experience in working with community-based agencies and organizations. The coordinator was of Aboriginal heritage.

The project coordinator worked independently of any one service agency, government department or Aboriginal group. Housed at the Edmonton Social Planning Council, the role of the coordinator was to consult, problem solve and act as a resource in the development of specific projects that had a crime prevention through social development philosophy. The major criteria for supporting individual projects was their potential to serve the best interests of the urban Aboriginal community.

ii) Administrative Support

A support staff person provided administrative support (0.5 FTE) to the project coordinator

and the project itself for the first seventeen months of the project. With the reduction in funding for the second year of the project, administrative support was donated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

iii) Project Supervision

The Executive Director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council assumed direct supervision responsibilities for the project coordinator on behalf of the steering committee, as well as responsibilities for the overall financial management of the project. These management responsibilities were provided by the Council at no cost to the project.

3.0 Demonstration Project Work Plan

The proposed work plan included three main phases:

- Project development and Consultation (January, 1994 to May 31, 1995)
- Project Implementation (June 1, 1995 to May 31, 1996)
- Project Evaluation (June 1, 1996 to May 31, 1997)

The scaling down and termination of the project mid-way through the second year of operation, dictated that project activities planned for phase two be reduced, while the activities scheduled for phase three were not completed in any substantive form.

3.1 Project Development and Consultation

The major goal of the first phase of the project was to develop effective working relationships with the three levels of government, inner city agencies, Aboriginal organizations and community leaders. These relationships were intended to provide the basis for building alliances based on trust, and to keep the focus of the project on serving the needs

of the urban Aboriginal population.

The first task within the development and consultation phase was the recruitment of individuals to the project steering committee. The original schedule of steering committee members laid out in the project proposal was used as the basis for recruitment with the addition of an Aboriginal elder.

Once the steering committee was in place, the second project task centred on the identification of the major issues confronting urban Aboriginal populations and contributing to their involvement with the criminal justice system. This was completed through consultations with agency representatives, and other key informants, as well as through the review of a series of landmark reports and studies which address inner city needs and the operation of the criminal justice system.

To assist in this process of issue or factor identification, the project coordinator worked as a member of the writing team preparing the Edmonton Inner City Violent Crime Task Force Evaluation report. The goals of the team were three-fold:

- to determine which recommendations from the 1990 Task Force report were implemented;
- to identify current issues of concern; and,
- to make recommendations in regard to futures areas for Task Force work.

Participation in the Task Force writing team enabled the project coordinator to meet with resource people from a range of agencies and organizations involved with Aboriginal peoples and inner city populations. As part of these consultations, the writing team met with 45 individuals, groups and agencies during the Fall of 1994.

Based on the review of these sources, a series of critical issues were identified which were then presented to the project steering committee for prioritization. The prioritization of these critical issues was seen as the first step in the planning process of developing feasible projects to promote crime prevention through social development.

In addition to this review of critical issues, the project coordinator completed two further tasks during the first year of the project:

- the identification of possible community partners for future initiatives; and,
- the identification of possible funding sources.

Consultations with local agencies and funders centred on the identification of shared or similar agendas as part of the search for feasible demonstration projects. In meeting with the various agencies and service providers involved in the delivery of social and criminal justice services, the coordinator also helped to cross-fertilize ideas, concepts and models from one agency to another. This networking allowed the coordinator to act as a resource not only to the project, but also to the agencies and service providers themselves.

The review of issues contributing to Aboriginal peoples involvement with the criminal justice system, and the steering committee's discussion of these issues, led in March, 1995 to the formulation of six broad priority areas for possible project development:

- Housing.
- Role Modelling and mentoring for Aboriginal youth in foster care or already incarcerated.
- Family violence.
- Transitional care for offenders and ex-offenders trying to move back into the community.

- Employment, education and training. And,
- Cultural support and revitalization.

As guidelines for developing projects within one or more of these areas, the steering committee advised that the following requirements be met:

- that the community be consulted;
- that any projects involve current agencies in their design and delivery; and
- that political support for projects be sought both within and outside of the Aboriginal community.

3.2 Project Implementation

At the conclusion of the project in December 1995, three specific initiatives had been implemented, while two further initiatives remained in the preliminary design stages. The demonstration project coordinator had also acted as a support and consultant to two other initiatives.

The three initiatives implemented drew on the identified priority issues of role modelling and mentoring, employment, education and training, and cultural support and revitalization. The three remained conceptually and operationally linked, and each had a youth focus.

a) Implemented Initiatives

i) Aboriginal Youth Leadership Project

Through a partnership between the Edmonton Social Planning Council, Big Sisters and Big Brothers Society of Edmonton, Ben Calf Robe Society and the Edmonton Young Offenders Centre, 18 Aboriginal youth 14 to 18 years of age took part in a youth leadership initiative.

The project goal was to help Aboriginal youth develop effective leadership skills thus encouraging them to become leaders and mentors within their own communities. This was achieved through their participation in outdoor recreational activities, cultural camps and sports programs. The seven-week long program culminated in two wilderness camps - one for males and one for females.

Youth were recruited to the project through job postings made available to youth serving agencies, Aboriginal organizations and alternate schools throughout the city. To be eligible for the program, youth had to be between 14 and 18 years of age, and be returning to secondary school in the Fall.

Throughout the seven week period, youth took part in personal skill development training; received traditional guidance in Aboriginal cultural teachings; participated in outdoor recreational activities; planned and designed cultural camp activities; and, gained the leadership skills necessary to deliver recreational programs for Aboriginal youth in the future.

The project retained a community development focus which enabled the youth to have ongoing input into the design and delivery of the program. Consistent with this focus, youth received weekly bursaries through the Summer Youth Services Canada program, Human Resources Development, Canada.

ii) Aboriginal Youth Cultural Camps

As an extension of their training, the 18 youth involved in the Youth Leadership project attended two 5 day cultural camps in August 1995 - one for males and one for females. The camps were held in a remote Rocky mountain Centre located to the west of Hinton. At the camps the leadership youth were joined by 17 older youth 18 to 24 years of age involved in a third demonstration project initiative - the Youthworks Community Services Project.

Under the guidance of Aboriginal elders, the participants took part in daily cultural teachings and ceremonies. These teachings helped the youth learn to deal with the complex issues surrounding their own experiences with alcohol and drugs, family violence and in some cases sexual abuse. Youth assumed responsibilities for the maintenance of the camp site as well as its set-up and dismantling.

The camps gave the youth the opportunity to act as resources and supports to each other, while helping them gain a greater sense of their own Aboriginal heritage and culture. In preparation for the camps, youth received training in group leadership, conflict resolution and team-building. In addition, the older youth also received specific training in basic first-aid.

The two camps for the 35 youth were supported with financial contributions and resource contributions from a number of key community partners. Financial contributions were received from Alberta Justice - Aboriginal Justice Initiatives: \$3,000.00; Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife - \$5,000.00 and Alberta Family and Social Services - \$3,000.00. In-kind contributions in the form of staff and resources were received from the Edmonton Young Offenders Centre, City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation, Big Sisters and Big Brothers, and the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

iii) Youthworks Community Services Project

A parallel community services, training and employment program for 17 older Aboriginal youth (18 to 24 years of age) operated in conjunction with the youth leadership training program - although for a longer six-month period.

Sponsored by the Edmonton Social Planning Council through Youth Services Canada, Human Resources and Development Canada, the overall goal of this third project was to prepare Aboriginal youth for their future career and educational experiences, giving them

real alternatives to lives of dependency and criminality. Ben Calf Robe Society, Big Sisters and Big Brothers, City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation, Eastwood Community League and the Edmonton Young Offenders Centre worked as partners on the project contributing staff and other resources.

Twenty youth were recruited for the project at the beginning of July, 1995. All the participants were of Aboriginal heritage, and ranged in age from 18 to 24 - the average age was 19. Only seven participants had completed grade 12, with six having a grade 9 education or less. All of the youth had either limited or no work experience. Fourteen had a history of involvement with the criminal justice system. Again, consistent with a community development philosophy, participants received training allowances through Youth Services Canada, Human Resources Development Canada. Project funds were, in this manner, directly invested in the youth and their families.

Under the project staff's guidance, the youth took part in two community service projects:

- the outside renovation, and design and production of two murals on the Eastwood Community Hall; and
- the production and delivery of a dramatic production for local Junior and Senior high school students with a supporting forum on the issues raised by the drama.

The two projects ran in sequence with the outside mural project beginning first, followed by the dramatic production.

The renovation and mural phase of the project tested the participants' abilities to work together as a team on a large scale out of doors project. The painting of the outside of the community hall facility was a physically demanding and somewhat repetitive activity - although the addition of the two murals gave the youth the opportunity to draw on their

own creativity. This community service activity was complete by the middle of October.

The second community service activity stretched the creative skills and capacities of the youth. Production of the dramatic presentation began with a request for help and blessing from elders. This duly received, work began in earnest on developing and staging the production, with specific attention paid to the many tasks involved in getting a successful production off the ground:

- Concept and story definition and refinement;
- Script development;
- Production marketing and performance schedules;
- Rehearsals, set and costume design, lighting and sound system development;
- Play production and follow-up discussion forums.

The concept for the dramatic presentation was drawn from the youth's own life experiences. The play developed - 'Any other night - a family divided' centred on issues relating to drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, racism and suicide.

The play was performed in four local area Junior and Senior high schools to a total audience of over 700 students. Audience response to the production was very positive - and often emotional. Forums following each of the performances generated further discussion and sharing around the complex factors that contribute to family violence as well as the pain and suffering that almost inevitably follows the long slow recovery process.

The final phase of the project centred on the youths' preparation of individual career plans and the enhancement of their job readiness and employability. Youth took part in workshops and seminars on career planning and job search techniques, as well as role play situations and actual contacts with potential employers or future educational opportunities.

At the conclusion of the project in the beginning of January, 1996, 17 youth completed the final career planning and job preparation phase of the program. All 17 prepared and submitted a career plan to guide their future life journeys.

b) Preliminary Project Design - Works in Progress

The premature termination of the demonstration project meant that preliminary design work had begun on a number of initiatives which were then unable to be implemented. The following three initiatives fall within this category.

i) Youth Housing Renovation Project

Preliminary contacts were made with the City of Edmonton, the Province of Alberta and a private developer working in Northeast Edmonton to coordinate a housing renovation project involving youth who had a history of involvement with the criminal justice system. As part of the initiative, youth would receive training in a variety of trades while also assisting in the renovation of a housing project which would include space for a youth centre.

ii) Role Models and Mentoring for Aboriginal Youth

A partnership was forged between the Edmonton Social Planning Council and Edmonton Big Sisters and Big Brothers to develop a role model and mentoring program aimed specifically at Aboriginal youth. Design and planning work for the program was set to commence after the completion of the Youthworks initiative, and intended to build on the work completed through the initial phases of the youth training programs.

iii) Family Violence

A working partnership was developed between the Edmonton Council Against Family Violence and various Aboriginal women's groups to address family violence within

Aboriginal families. The municipal and provincial governments were identified as other potential partners.

c) Additional Project Support

In addition to the specific project initiatives and preliminary design work detailed above, the demonstration project coordinator assumed a consultant role to two initiatives coordinated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The design and delivery of harm reduction messages to Aboriginal youth relating to their and their peer's use of tobacco products, and the design delivery of an educational strategy to reduce the transmission of HIV/AIDS among the female inmate population in two correctional sites.

Both projects embrace a community development model, and promote the educational and prevention dimensions of service delivery. Aboriginal peoples are the focus of both projects with street involved youth the target population in the first initiative and incarcerated Aboriginal women the target in the second.

4.0 Project Outcomes

4.1 Introduction

The premature termination of the project meant that project outcomes were not substantially developed. Preliminary findings from the youth leadership training project, the cultural camps and the Youthworks initiative reveal that the youth who took part in the project activities self-reported an improved sense of self-esteem, as well as better understandings of the varied career and life choices available to them. Youth who had been involved with the criminal justice system, as well as battling drug and alcohol addictions, were able to put together career plans to guide their future life journeys.

Although the project was still in its critical building and design stages when funding was reduced and then terminated, some key outcomes did result which may be summarized by reference to the three initial project objectives.

4.2 The Involvement of Aboriginal Youth with the Criminal Justice System

In Canada, and especially in the prairie urban centres, Aboriginal people remain over-represented in the prison and correctional systems, while they are under-represented in the workforce and in the student populations of post-secondary institutions.

Within this overall malaise the plight of youth remains especially critical. Aboriginal youth continue to live in marginalized and impoverished conditions, with little chance of any short term improvement. Forty-five percent of all child protection cases in the Edmonton region involve Aboriginal children, while a similar proportion of children in care are also Aboriginal. With 50 percent of the Aboriginal population under 20 years of age, and with the rate of natural increase exceeding that of the population as a whole, it is vital that the social and economic needs of urban Aboriginal youth be met in a preventive fashion if any long term, realistic solution to their involvement with the criminal justice system is to be found.

For those already in the system, the needs are more urgent. Just under half of all inmates at the Edmonton Young Offenders Centre are Aboriginal, despite the fact that Aboriginal peoples make up less than six percent of the total city population. Most of these youth who come into contact with the justice system have special needs. Many youth have no roots in the local community, and lack family support. Indeed, young offender centres often serve as the only available residential alternatives for the youth. As a result they are often refused release and must wait up to six months for a trial.

If they are found guilty and must serve some sentence, many Aboriginal youth do not do well when incarcerated. Although most young offenders are from urban centres, they frequently

want to be placed in less severe settings or institutions such as wilderness style camps staffed by other Aboriginal peoples. The result of young offenders serving time in correctional institutional facilities is frequently further alienation, detachment, anger and despair which in turns contributes to a greater likelihood of recidivism.

One of the major challenges facing any crime prevention initiative is how to break the cycle of committing crimes - with youth interventions a critical component of any such strategy. Occasional crime is frequently sporadic, comparatively less serious and often associated with adolescents or young offenders. By contrast, persistent crime involves a range of offences and is associated with a criminal lifestyle which generally begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood. Research clearly shows that is the small number of persistent offenders who commit the majority of crimes.

Studies of persistent offenders reveal that they often begin crime at an early age - as early as 11 years of age, and that the crimes they commit become more serious with age. The formative years of persistent offenders are commonly characterized by family violence and neglect, problems in school, youth unemployment or underemployment, and poverty.

In recognition of the challenges Aboriginal youth face, and the risks they face for involvement with the criminal justice system, the focus of the three projects implemented was on youth and on breaking the cycle of persistent offending. All three projects looked at working with youth who either had some previous involvement with the criminal justice system or who were at risk for such involvement. Over the final six months of the project, the 35 youth who became involved in the different initiatives all maintained a high community profile and did not reoffend. In the case of the youth leadership participants, all 18 returned to secondary education studies after the completion of the seven-week program. The 17 Youthworks participants who completed the six-month training program were able to make a successful transition to the next phase of their training or employment: six found either full or part time

work (two of whom also planned to return for further schooling), seven enrolled in further education, and four applied for further education or training to commence in the Fall of 1996.

In addition to these specific outcomes, the youth involved in the initiatives also left with a greater sense of self-esteem, and a greater understanding of their possible contributions to the community. Seven Youthworks participants, for example, chose to continue their involvement in the dramatic production they staged as part of their community service activities. With the support of the Ben Calf Robe Society and the Edmonton Social Planning Council, they formed their own dramatic company, and have, since the conclusion of the demonstration project, continued to take bookings to put on the play for invited audiences.

Within such a short period, it is not possible to show a city-wide reduction in the involvement of Aboriginal youth with the criminal justice system. The successes of the individual youth involved in the project initiatives, however, does suggest that the overall model of crime prevention through social development has the potential to reduce the involvement of Aboriginal youth with the criminal justice system.

4.3 The Participation of Aboriginal Organizations and Individuals

During the initial consultation phase of the project, the project coordinator as a member of the Edmonton Inner City violent Crime Task Force consulted with 45 individuals, agencies and organizations, regarding the social and economic issues contributing to the involvement of Aboriginal people with the criminal justice system. This broad consultation with key individuals and agencies laid the framework for their continued participation in the project as key project partners.

The following guidelines were used to ensure the participation of Aboriginal peoples and organizations in the specific project initiatives.

a) Partnerships of Equals

Aboriginal individuals and organizations, as well as agencies working with youth, remained key partners in the three initiatives implemented. Within each initiative, the individual agency partners worked together toward agreed ends and goals. Each partner took part in the major decision-making processes that unfolded, and contributed to the project in the ways and means which matched their traditional strengths. Decisions were reached through a process of consensus building with each partner an equal.

In the case of the Youth leadership training and cultural camps, local partners provided funding and donated resources to the project. Similarly, the youth training and community service project remained essentially a cooperative venture, with the project coordinator helping to bring together the various parties involved: the Edmonton Social Planning Council, Ben Calf Robe Society, City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation, Big Sisters and Big Brothers and the Eastwood Community league.

b) Recruitment of Aboriginal Staff and Elders

Aboriginal staff were instrumental in the design and delivery of the three project initiatives. All of the program staff assigned to the three projects were of Aboriginal heritage. Within each initiative, the project partners participated in the recruitment and hiring of the staff.

In addition to the recruitment of Aboriginal staff to individual initiatives, nine elders were involved in the different phases of the demonstration project. Elders were consulted before all major project decisions were reached, and were invited to confer their blessing on all project activities.

c) Respect for Traditional Customs and Teachings

Each of the projects coordinated through the demonstration project remained an Aboriginal initiative. This focus demanded the inclusion of traditional Aboriginal customs, ceremonies and

teachings as an integral part of all project activities. Meetings began with traditional prayers and offerings, elders participated in the design and planning of initiatives and traditional blessings were sought before all major project steps.

The incorporation of these traditions and teachings, as well as the recruitment of Aboriginal staff, validated and affirmed the participation of the various Aboriginal organizations involved in the initiatives.

4.4 The Development of a Demonstration Model (Appendix One)

The demonstration project relied on a model of collaboration between local agencies, government departments and community organizations. This model has the potential to be replicated in other municipal contexts providing the necessary operational structures and processes can be developed and put into place. Within the City of Edmonton there is a history of collaboration among agencies and organizations serving inner city populations. This collaboration has prompted the implementation and operation of a number of successful demonstration models - including the current Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project. While the characteristics of these individual demonstration projects differ, there are some common themes or elements within them which suggest the basis for a demonstration model that acts to reduce the involvement of Aboriginal with the criminal justice system.

The success of the current demonstration project reflects a number of factors:

- The Context for Working Together
- Shared Vision and Philosophy
- Inclusive Operational Structures and Processes

A brief review of these factors provides the basis for a viable demonstration model for replication in other municipal contexts.

a) A Context for Working Together

The service sector within the city of Edmonton has a history of working together in ventures that are cooperative, coordinated and collaborative. The size of the city gives it a community of services large enough for a critical mass of services to develop, and yet small enough for community partners to retain a sense of interdependence and viable relationship.

Within this context, the not-for-profit sector has taken on a leadership role within the community and has established successful relationships with the publicly and privately funded sectors in so doing. Agencies serving traditionally marginalized populations, including those living on low incomes and those living in the inner city, continue to pilot new ways of working while remaining cognizant of changes in the local political and social scenes.

This high degree of interaction has in turn contributed to healthy attitudes of trust, as well as a recognition of a continued interdependence. Individual agencies and organizations recognize the value of working together, and even the necessity for it, given the complexity of issues to be addressed. Alliances between not-for-profit community groups and publicly funded bodies such as the local police department have become accepted and normal matters of practice.

In specific regard to the latter, the recent emphasis of both provincial and federal governments on fiscal restraint and the associated reduction in spending on services has necessitated even further collaboration and the sharing of increasingly scarce resources. Indeed, funders have themselves sought to encourage partnerships and collaboration through the definition of funded strategies that include such elements.

One final factor which continues to contribute to the context for collaboration within Edmonton is the considerable stability within the leadership in particular agencies as well as considerable cross-fertilization between agency staff. Senior staff at most of the lead not-for-profit agencies

each have a long history of involvement in collaborative initiatives. In addition, many have, at some time or other worked at other agencies within the sector and thus have a first hand knowledge of how they work and the issues they face.

In short, the context for collaboration as part of the current demonstration project, rested on the development of a series of critical factors:

- a critical mass of community partners from across sectors;
- local leadership;
- previous experiences in working cooperatively and in coordinated manner;
- a sense of trust;
- the support of funders; and
- stability within and between potential partner groups and agencies.

Together, these factors provided the framework and foundation for the demonstration initiative.

b) Shared Vision and Philosophy

Building on the framework or foundation outlined above, the glue that held the demonstration project together was a shared vision and philosophy relating to the value of crime prevention through social development. Working together in collaborative initiatives that involve the sharing of resources demands considerable common ground in the form of a shared vision and philosophy. The starting point for the formulation of this goal and vision must be clearly agreed goal and objectives. Participants must have a clear understanding as to why they are there, and what their role is. As an extension of this focus on an agreed goal, participants must agree to leave other unrelated matters or issues aside, and not try to resolve within the partnership.

The generation of the overall goal frequently requires a substantial amount of time and

discussion. Ideally, initiative partners have the time and option to plan before a crisis situation is upon them; however, this may not always be the case. Time to plan and discuss an agreed goal and objectives, as well as a process to reach these objectives places the initiative on a firmer footing as planning gives way to implementation.

Within the context of the Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration project, the community had the benefit of considerable time and resources to plan together through the work of the Edmonton Inner City Violent Crime Task Force. Individual partners had in many cases had similar experiences and/or reached the same conclusions prior to the submission of a proposal to house the demonstration project. The local police department, City Council in the form of the Urban Aboriginal Affairs Committee, provincial justice staff, as well as inner city agencies and Aboriginal organizations all agreed on the need for a crime prevention through social development model to address the involvement of Aboriginal peoples with the criminal justice system.

c) Inclusive Operational Structures and Processes

As the operational basis for any initiative, the experiences of the current demonstration project suggest that collaborative initiatives supporting crime prevention through social development demand structures and processes which achieve five things:

- a broad basis of support;
- community ownership of local initiatives;
- the recruitment and supervision of appropriate staff;
- the effective allocation of resources; and,
- the careful evaluation of project processes and outcomes .

The foundation for the demonstration project remained a broad basis of support. This was initially gained through numerous forms of dialogue with the broader community which helped

to establish a credibility for the initiative as well as a level of acceptance. Starting with the City of Edmonton's *Safer Cities* initiative, public attention was focused on the need to view crime prevention and public safety in much broader terms.

The subsequent move to the action phase of the demonstration project itself rested on the consolidation of a smaller group of agencies who remained closely linked to the initiative and who formed a management committee. This group, drawn in part from the Edmonton Inner City Violent Crime Task Force, formed the project steering committee. A key requirement for membership on this committee was a clear role and purpose for being involved, as well as the potential to contribute to the project in a positive manner. In addition to agency and political representatives, the make-up of this committee also included public representatives including Aboriginal peoples.

This core group provided the management basis for the project which was then extended through the addition of new members, as well as the formation of additional working or project committees. Each individual initiative was guided by a smaller advisory committee or working group, which included members of the larger committee as well as new members closely linked to the host community or target population.

Within this committee structure, the Edmonton Social Planning Council emerged as the administrative centre of the project. The Council agreed to act as the official project sponsor, to serve as the host agency for the project coordinator and to assume supervision responsibilities for the work of the coordinator. The Council's role as this internal leader or champion, helped give the initiative a specific advocate and supporter, as well as an internal evaluator to ensure the appropriate allocation of resources.

The project coordinator liaised closely with individual initiative advisory or working committee members to ensure the successful implementation of each project. In all three cases, the

Edmonton Social Planning Council acted as the initiative banker, and assumed responsibilities for the recruitment and supervision of staff.

The operation of each initiative under the guidance of a smaller grouping of advisory committee members allowed new partners to work together in a collaborative way. Resources were jointly solicited and shared to ensure the successful achievement of initiative and project objectives. The project coordinator acted as a resource to each project, and helped ensure its consistent focus on crime prevention through social development.

While individual initiative partners worked to generate support for their own projects, the demonstration project steering committee, the project coordinator and the Executive Director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council all helped to promote the larger project goal of crime prevention through social development. This involved contacts with all levels of government, as well as with funders from all sectors.

On the basis of this operational structure, the demonstration project remained focussed on the single goal of crime prevention through social development while working simultaneously at a variety of levels and with a wide range of different groups and partners. Inevitably, the successes of one initiative contributed to the likely success of another. Positive experiences and challenges in one setting were used to inform the actions and practices in another.

5.0 Conclusions

The long term solution to crime means investing in approaches which work to prevent problems in the first place. Crime prevention through social development is one such strategy - and one that formed the starting point for the Edmonton Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project. Long term crime prevention through social development requires the

development of partnerships and collaboration between agencies, community groups, and government departments for dealing with the conditions and circumstances which contribute to crime and criminal activity. This inevitably includes those within the community responsible for planning and development, employment and training, health and social services, schools and education, and law enforcement and the operation of the justice system.

Direct community involvement and ownership remain the mainstays of any successful crime prevention initiative, as does the recognition that results will not be achieved over night. The battle to promote crime prevention approaches is frequently one that relates as much to the prevailing attitudes and values that drive individuals and organizations as it does to the development of specific initiatives or strategies. A community's views as to why people commit crimes, and on what means of punishment are acceptable and appropriate go a long way in shaping the solutions to crime they favour. More importantly, they frequently dictate what solutions are funded and how resources are allocated between competing interests.

At the time of its premature conclusion, the work of the Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project on crime prevention through social development had just begun. While the sometimes difficult task of creating a context in which crime prevention initiatives could be introduced had been achieved, and the partners available to support such initiatives identified, work had only just begun on the introduction of grass-roots community-based initiatives. The early experiences from the initiatives introduced through the work of the demonstration project coordinator suggest considerable promise indeed. The long term sustainability of such initiatives, however, requires some form of sustained funding which can be used to support and add actual form to the will and efforts of the various partners involved thus far. The successful introduction of a crime prevention through social development strategy to reduce the involvement of Aboriginal peoples with the criminal justice system in the City of Edmonton is a long term strategy. The work to date has just begun. While much has been achieved, much more remains to be done.

**Appendix One: Edmonton Aboriginal Community Services
Demonstration Project
Context and Organizational Structure**

Edmonton Aboriginal Community Services Demonstration Project

Context and Organizational Structure

