



National Association
of Friendship Centres
Association nationale
des centres d'amitié

Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO)

Economic Security of Women in Canada

National Association of Friendship Centres

Brief prepared and submitted May 15, 2017

By Erin Corston, Executive Director

Introduction

Friendship Centres create economic opportunities for Indigenous women in over 100 towns and cities across Canada. For over 60 years, Friendship Centres have been directly addressing the higher incidence of poverty among Indigenous women through a broad continuum of holistic, client-centered, culturally-appropriate and linked supports on a status-blind basis to all Indigenous peoples. In 2014-15, Friendship Centres engaged in over 2.3 million client contacts through the provision of over 1800 different programs and services in the areas of health, housing, family, education, sports and recreation, language, justice, economic development, cultural, and community wellness. These supports include:

- Programs to address violence and support women in transition, including the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre's domestic violence support program in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia and community organizations
- Housing, including the Red Deer Friendship Centre's 16-unit Asooahum affordable housing complex, the 24-7 Shanawdithit Shelter in St. John's, or the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society's 42-unit housing project with the Province of British Columbia
- Prenatal and early learning and child care programs, including day cares and over 30 Aboriginal Head Start programs across the country
- Cultural and traditional teachings
- Health clinics and health advocacy supports, like the Minowé Health Clinic at the Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre
- Food security programs such as food boxes, food banks, community gardens and nutrition programs
- Clothing banks
- Transportation supports
- Employment and training programs and supports in over 50 Friendship Centres across Canada serving over 19,000 clients, including a multi-partner collaboration with the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre and Irving Shipbuilding Inc.
- Literacy and academic upgrading
- Addictions programs
- Mental wellness programs
- Youth and after-school programs

In addition to these poverty reduction supports, a full 90% of the over 3,200 staff at Friendship Centres in 2014-2015 were women, representing one of the largest employers of Indigenous women in urban areas.

Further, the Centre for the Study of Living Standards estimates that closing the educational gap alone between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous populations could raise the contribution to GDP by 28 per cent for Indigenous women over a 2031 baseline contribution of \$32.9 billion.

According to Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey data, Indigenous women make up more than half of the total Indigenous population. Further, more than half of Indigenous women live in urban areas, while only 36% live on reserves.

The female Indigenous population in Canada could increase to between 987,000 and 1,316,000 by 2036, according to all scenarios of the most recent Indigenous population projections.

Just over half of Indigenous women had a postsecondary qualification in 2011, compared to 65% of non-Indigenous women.

50.4% of Indigenous women aged 15 and over were employed in 2011, which is lower than both their non-Indigenous and Indigenous men. Further, a greater percentage (13.3%) of Indigenous women were unemployed in 2011 compared to 7.2% of non-Indigenous women.

Indigenous women are more likely to work in the sales and service sector, at 31%, followed by business, finance, and administrative occupations (22%), and education, law, and social, community and government services (21%).

Further, according to 2006 Census data, Indigenous women experience higher poverty rates (36%) than non-Indigenous women (17%).

Violence against Indigenous Women

Friendship Centres across Canada work daily to address the links between poverty, access to economic opportunities and violence against Indigenous women and girls. Along with transition housing, emergency services and culturally-appropriate support staff, other initiatives include:

- Kashaya Anishinaabe Niin - I am a Kind Man in Ontario Friendship Centres and developed by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, which provides an opportunity for communities to engage Indigenous men and youth in understanding violence against women and to support them in joining together to end violence;
- The New Journeys website, which lists over 6,000 resources and service organizations in urban areas intended to help Indigenous women, families and students to make plans and find resources and assist in transitions in 118 cities throughout Canada, especially for those women escaping violence.

Further, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) formally endorsed the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) approved by the NAFC membership

at its July 2009 Annual General Meeting. The NAFC is also committed to responding to the calls to action set forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, recognizing that Friendship Centres are sites of reconciliation by their very nature.

Early Learning and Child Care

Friendship Centres daily see the need for affordable, culturally-appropriate and accessible child care in their communities as key to supporting Indigenous women's access to employment opportunities. To address this need, many Centres house daycares or Aboriginal Head Start sites, or have partnerships with local providers. Further, the Friendship Centre Movement looks forward to contributing to the renewed Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care framework, particularly bringing in the voices of those Indigenous parents and guardians in need who may not currently be able to access early learning and child care services in urban areas. For example, Indigenous youth at the 27th National Aboriginal Youth Forum noted the need for affordable, accessible daycare with extended hours to support young parents working evenings and weekends or pursuing post-secondary studies with extended class hours.

Employment Insurance

Many of the clients who walk through Friendship Centre doors may not even be eligible for EI part 1, or income support, making it a challenge for them to be eligible for EI part 2 or support measures. This does not mean Friendship Centre clients lack the skills or do not have work experience; it just means that they may not have the minimum number of required hours within the last year to qualify for EI.

Further, many urban Indigenous clients, including women, may be working in the service industry and paying into the EI system, but due to the part-time nature of their work, are unable to bank enough hours to claim EI benefits or access EI Part II employment measures. A doubling of the window of time within which to bank EI eligible hours would help everyone, particularly urban Indigenous women, access not only EI Part I, but also make it easier to access the employment support measures under EI Part II that would help them transition back into work after maternity breaks or help them get the training to move from part-time to full-time work.

Recommendations

- Consider incorporating the findings and recommendations of the Study of Economic Opportunities for Women into the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy and across federal departmental programs and funding streams.

- The Federal Government, in response to TRC Call to Action 66, establish multi-year funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices.
- Ensure a renewed Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care framework includes the views, recommendations and needs identified by urban Indigenous women and urban service delivery agencies like Friendship Centres, including accessibility, affordability and extended service provider hours.
- EI Part II employment support measures like targeted wage subsidy and job creation partnership options be accessible to groups like urban Indigenous women who have some proven attachment to the labour force and needing only a certain number of additional hours in order to be eligible for EI Part I.
- Double the window of time within which to bank EI insurable hours for groups like urban Indigenous women.
- Lower the EI insurable hours requirement by at least 25% for groups like Indigenous women that face barriers in maintaining attachment to the labour market.
- EI Part II Employment Benefits and Support Measures be expanded and refined to include interventions that support whole-person development similar to those that are proven successful by the Friendship Centre wraparound services model in helping Indigenous women access jobs and training and related supports.
- Federal Indigenous employment and training programs and provincial LMDAs be extended to include those service delivery organizations, like Friendship Centres, that have a proven track record of working with multi-barriered urban Indigenous clients to access EI Part I.
- When renewing federal Indigenous programs and funding streams that address economic opportunities or poverty across departments like ESDC, INAC, PHAC, Justice, Corrections and Health, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy, use evidence-based policy development approaches that include evidence of urban Indigenous population concentration and locations, proven organizational success in client service delivery, and respect for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in ensuring no discrimination in services provided to Indigenous women whether they choose to live on or off reserve.
- Support the continuation of the Indigenous Friendship Centre Program (IFCP) to facilitate Indigenous women's equitable participation in the Canadian economy through the delivery of proven, culturally-appropriate, linked wraparound poverty reduction services.

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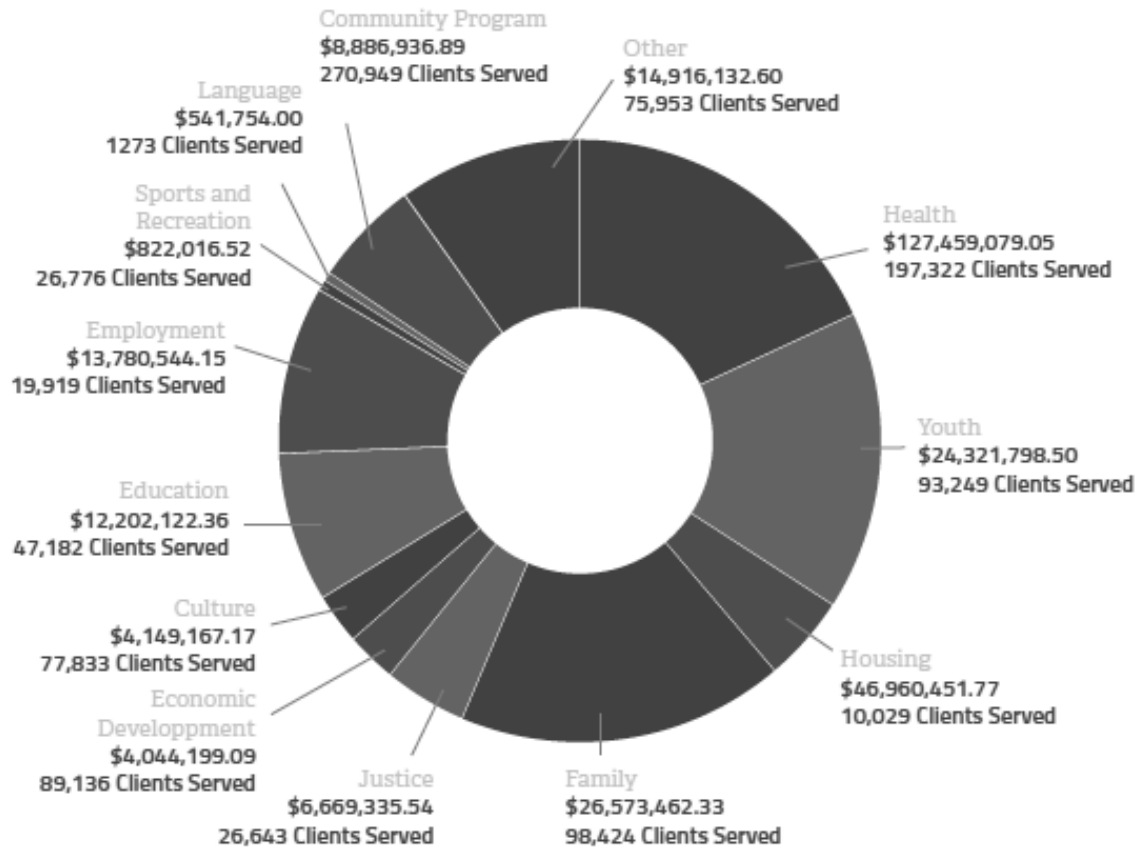
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Our Impact

Fiscal year: 2014-2015
Annual Report data as of March 31st 2015



\$151,327,026.97

Total Revenue



1,034,788

Total Clients Served



\$1 = \$7

For each dollar provided to
Friendship Centres, \$7 is
generated from other sources.



7

Provincial and
Territorial Associations



118

Friendship Centres

Organizational Description

The first Friendship Centres emerged over sixty years ago when Indigenous people living in the city saw a need for a place for fellow Indigenous people to go for support in navigating mainstream systems and adjusting to their new surroundings. These first Centres did not offer much in the way of formal services but rather they helped form a sense of community and belonging that was vital to the successful transition of individuals and families who had made their way to the city in search of a better life.

A movement emerged from these humble beginnings and today there are 118 Friendship Centres across Canada from coast-to-coast-coast. Friendship Centres are Canada's most expansive and recognizable urban Indigenous service delivery infrastructure offering a full suite of culturally responsive and status blind programs and services to the more than 780,000 Indigenous people who call the city their home.

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) represents the 118 urban based Indigenous Friendship Centres across Canada and 7 Provincial and Territorial Associations that make up the Friendship Centre Movement. The NAFC is a long-standing national Indigenous organization with reach across Canada, from coast to coast to coast, serving First Nations, Inuit and Métis, including Indigenous peoples living in urban, rural and northern communities.

The NAFC's mandate is to improve the quality of life for Indigenous peoples in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society; and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Indigenous cultural distinctiveness.

The NAFC is governed by both a volunteer Executive Committee and a volunteer Board of Directors, both of which include a Youth member.