

Weaving Our Communities: The Land, The People, Our Future

Conference Evaluation Report



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**For the Inclusive Communities Committee,
A subcommittee of the Grey Bruce Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee**

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Introduction

The Inclusive Communities Committee, a subcommittee of the Grey Bruce Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee, held a two day conference on September 20, 20, 2007 called Weaving Our Communities: The Land, the People, Our Future at the Institute of Outdoor Education and Environmental Studies. The conference had the following goals:

- Address prejudice and discrimination and the barriers they cause between peoples of diverse beliefs, abilities and communities.
- Engage youth, service providers, community in development of new strategies to resolve conflicts between diverse communities.
- Build personal and community skills, increase knowledge and cultural understanding.
- Build new partnerships and networks to address prejudice, exclusion and violence in all their forms.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation provided funding for an evaluation of participant learning at the conference, and participant's commitment to future action and new partnerships to address violence in all its forms. This report is a brief summary of the evaluation process and findings. It concludes with recommendations for the Inclusive Communities Committee, the GBDVCC, and community partners interested in supporting the ongoing work of building inclusive communities in Grey and Bruce.

Evaluation Process

This report is based on four sources of data:

1. Responses from the participant evaluation forms completed at the two day conference. Thirty-seven participants completed the conference evaluation form. A copy of the conference evaluation tool is in the appendix.
2. Minutes from meeting of the Inclusive Communities Committee that took place at on October 17, 2007. The meeting was dedicated to an evaluation of the conference as a whole and included discussion on: findings from the participant evaluations, analysis of the conference highlights and issues from the perspective of committee members, lessons learned, and next steps. The committee took their recommendations for next steps to the January meeting of the GBDVCC.
3. The Weaving Our Communities 2007 Conference Report prepared in January 2008. This report documents the discussion, strategies, action plans, and next steps developed at the conference by participants, and the lesson learned and next steps formulated after the conference by the Inclusive Communities Committee.

4. Responses to a mail out (electronic and mail) of the Conference Report and a Request for Feedback on Post Conference Outcomes through an electronic survey to conference participants sent in March 2008. Twenty respondents completed the survey, and several responded by letter, email, or verbally to the request for feedback. A copy of the evaluation letter and collated electronic survey tool is attached as an appendix.

The data from the above sources falls in two categories:

- Data collected immediately following the conference, and
- Data collected on outcomes 6 months after the conference ended.

We expected the Evaluation data and process to provide information on:

- Participant progress on the stated conference goals at the end of the conference
- Comparison of participant knowledge and skills pre and post conference
- Overall participant satisfaction with the conference
- Level of personal commitment to addressing racism and discrimination 6 months following the conference
- Specific personal action to build inclusive communities 6 months following the conference
- Experience of new connections or partnerships at the conference and after the conference
- Action or planned action taken on Conference Action Plans 6 months after the conference, and any new developments to build inclusive communities.
- Future projects, events, training participants would like to see undertaken to support the development of inclusive communities in Grey and Bruce
- Identification of community needs for planning next steps for the work of the Inclusive Communities Committee and the GBVPCC.

Limitations

- Both the conference evaluation and the electronic survey of conference outcomes were anonymous questionnaires, so some of the data in both may be from the same people.
- There was a relatively low response rate with both the conference evaluation survey (37 out of 165 participants) and the post conference electronic survey (20 respondents), so the analysis of this data is based on a rather small number of responses.
- It was difficult to get the Conference Report and Outcome Survey out to all the conference participants, especially to students who came with classroom teachers. The information was mailed to the Directors of Education (public and Catholic boards), all area high schools (whether they attended or not), and it was sent to every participant where we had a postal address or email address. School staff were asked to make the information available to students who participated at the conference, but we do not know if this happened.

- Conference evaluations and the outcome survey were both completed by conference participants who were also volunteers (committee members, presenters) at the conference. They participated in the workshops, world café and strategies sessions whenever possible, so their input is important, but does include access to more background information than people who simply attended.

Findings

1. At the end of the conference

Participant progress on the stated conference goals

Participants were asked to rate their progress on the stated conference goals on a rating scale of 1 (cannot rate) 2 (poor) 3 (average) 4 (good) and 5 (excellent).

Participants rated their progress as follows:

Learning Goal	Rating
Ability to address prejudice, discrimination and barriers between diverse people	4.2
Increase in personal skills, knowledge and cultural understand	4.2
New partnerships and networks to address exclusion and violence	4.2
New strategies to resolve conflicts between diverse communities	4.4

It appears that participants made progress on the conference goals.

Comparison of participant knowledge and skills pre and post conference

Participants assessed their level of skill and knowledge prior to attending the conference as 3 (Average on the rating scale) and 4.2 at the end of the conference. This indicates that respondents improved their personal skill and knowledge level significantly because of their participation in the conference workshops, discussions and activities.

“This was a new experience for me so I enjoyed every moment of it. Learnt there were many organizations and resources to improve our communication skills in our communities”

These findings were supported by the many positive comments made on the evaluation forms and passed along verbally to conference volunteers and members of the Inclusive Communities Committee, at the conference, and on the days following the event.

Overall participant satisfaction with the conference

Respondents rated their **overall satisfaction at 4.6** (where 4 is good and 5 is excellent); a very high rating that was

“The environment, both geographically and emotionally, was a safe place to open and learn.”

accompanied by many positive comments. The workshops and World Café discussion forum were also highly rated (4.3)

2. Six months after the conference

Level of personal commitment to addressing racism and discrimination

One hundred per cent (100%) of respondents in the follow up survey said they were very committed or committed to address racism and discrimination in Grey and Bruce.

“I am now more comfortable leaving my comfort zones. I don’t move away or turn my cheek when discriminatory comments are made. I’m more comfortable addressing them.”

Specific personal action to build inclusive communities

Survey respondents reported on their use of personal action strategies that were developed at the conference as follows:

Personal Action Strategies developed at the conference. Have you used or do you plan to use any in the future?	Yes, I used this strategy	I plan to use this strategy	No, I will not use this strategy
Get to know people without prejudice or prejudice	90%	10%	0
Overcome your fear and leave your comfort zone	85%	15%	0
Challenge derogatory statements in a positive way	80%	15%	5%
Learn about other cultures and communities	80%	20%	0
Organize or attend multi-cultural events	45%	55%	0
Confront racism and discrimination publicly	50%	45%	5%
Create opportunities to meet and communicate with diverse people	65%	30%	0
Express appreciation for people/communities with differences	85%	15%	0

Taking personal action to confront racism, organizing or attending multi-cultural events, and creating opportunities to meet diverse people appear to be the most challenging for respondents. There is however, an expressed wish to use these strategies in the future.

Sixty per cent (60%) of respondents said they would be stopped from taking personal action because they don’t know what action to take. 60% of respondents said they would like to have specific skill development training to help them address racism and discrimination. Seventy (70%) of respondents would like more cross cultural learning opportunities and 73% would like leadership from schools, governments and employers to address these issues.

“ The family has a huge role to play in our outlook and the practice of our lives. Neighbourhoods are also places which shape our personal action on such topics.”

Experience of new connections or partnerships at the conference and after the conference

The following table outlines the survey responses in regards to new partnerships with diverse people or groups that occurred at the conference or after the conference:

	Yes	No
I made new connections with diverse people/groups at the conference	80%	20%
I became aware of new opportunities for connection or partnership with diverse people/groups as a result of the conference	75%	15%
I established new connections or partnerships with diverse people/groups as a result of the conference	55%	45%
I am involved in a new partnership or network to address racism/discrimination/violence as a result of the conference	32%	68%
I plan to be part of a partnership or network to build inclusive communities when the right opportunity presents itself	85%	5%

It appears that many respondents made new connections and plan to be part of partnerships to build inclusive communities as a result of the conference. A much smaller number are currently involved in a new partnership (32%) but they are planning to get involved in the future (68%).

Action or planned action taken on Conference Action Plans

Survey participants were presented with 12 specific Action Plans that were developed at the conference and they were asked if they have taken action on these plans, or if they plan action, or if they are interested, but no action planned. Respondents also indicated if they have no interest in the action plan.

The results of the survey show that some action has taken place on all but two of the action plans (develop an Art Gallery on the Rez, and Community Exchange between Saugeen Nations and Grey Highlands School).

The list below sets out some of the action items that appear to be moving forward:

- Seven of the respondents reported that they have taken action to “implement a personal ‘no tolerance’ to racism and discrimination”.
- Five respondents have taken action on “cultural awareness events at school (music, food, history, multicultural events.)”
- Three respondents have ‘developed strategies to engage the people who don’t want to address the issues or learn”
- Two people are taking action “to increase cultural awareness in hospitals”
- Two people are taking action to organize a “tripping experience on the Saugeen River.”

There is an interest in following up with Action Plans from the conference. Between 11% and 37% of respondents indicated their interest in action plans, but noted that there is no plan in place at this time. This indicates support for some of the event and activities that were developed at the conference, but that conference participants need leadership and support to help take the plan to action.

Several respondents said there are other action items underway that were not developed at the conference:

- A faith community will work on equality issues and poverty issues in April and May.
- One respondent want to see that staff attend cross culture workshops
- One respondent noted that some of the action items have occurred or are in the planning stages and wants to see the community exchange between Grey Highlands School and Saugeen happen.

Future projects, events, training participants would like to see undertaken

The four top projects/events that survey respondents would like to see happen to support the development of inclusive communities are:

- Work with schools to educate and support youth
- Plan community forums to acknowledge diversity and build on similarities
- Develop training workshops on how to deal with racism and discrimination
- Plan another Weaving Our Communities conference

Next steps for the work of the Inclusive Communities Committee

The Inclusive Communities Committee has used the information from the conference evaluations to begin to plan for the future. Immediate plans include:

- Support a local project as a direct follow up from the Conference. The Inclusive Communities Committee is sponsoring a community screening of **Niigaanibatoowaad: FrontRunners on May 13, 2008**. The writer and director of the film, Laura Robinson, presented at the conference in September. The Inclusive Communities Committee is working with schools and community partners to hold three performances for high school students and the general public, and another presentation at the Warton high school. The film deals with the legacy of racism and the residential school system and the impact on Aboriginal runners who carried the torch to the Pam Am games in 1967. Three of the original runners and the young star of the film, along with Laura Robinson will be present at the screening. A copy of the event poster is in the appendix.
- A decision to **hold another Weaving Our Communities Conference in the fall of 2009**. We would like to work with the Public and Catholic boards of Education and involve Georgian College students as well in this conference.
- **Develop training workshops** that can be delivered locally on dealing with racism and discrimination in 2008/2009.

- **Support action plans** developed at the Weaving Our Communities conference as resources permit.
- Participate in the local **Truth and Reconciliation Process** meetings, part of a federal government initiative to address the legacy of the residential school system in Canada. Inclusive Communities Committee members attended the first meeting on the local process on April 9th, 2008.

Conclusion

The Weaving Our Communities: The Land, The People, Our Future conference was a very successful event that brought together diverse people to plan strategies to address racism, discrimination and violence in all its forms.

The evaluation data indicates that there is strong support for another conference and a range of community action to build more inclusive communities. The action plans developed at the conference appear to be relevant to the broader community, and provide a plan for follow up.

The Conference Report has been distributed widely, and will allow communities and individuals to follow up on personal action plans, and broader strategies and events to bring diverse people together. Some action has been taken on Action Plans and there appears to be a commitment to follow up.

“ You have a roadmap laid out that shall bring about more positive results and make significant differences in how children, families, communities work, play and interact with each other in the Bruce-Grey Region. You also have so many people who are interested in working together to do this.” (Comment on the Conference 2007 Report)

The Conference Report was very well received locally and in the area. The Coordinator of the Children’s Alliance will present a summary of the report to that Grey Bruce intersectoral group for consideration in their two county planning for children. The Victim Services Coordinator of the Métis Nation of Ontario would like the report sent to all MNO offices (letter attached in the appendix).

The Inclusive Communities Committee has the support of conference participants for ongoing work to address these issues in the Grey Bruce area. The committee has a significant level of expertise after two very successful conferences, and can build on the positive energy and outcomes from the work to date.

The financial support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Bruce Power and Ontario Power Generation is very much appreciated. Ontario Power Generation has indicated an interest in supporting future initiatives.

Appendix

1. Conference Evaluation Tool
2. Evaluation Letter
3. Weaving Our Communities Outcome Survey Summary
4. Niigaanibatowaad: Front Runners poster
5. Letter from Métis Nation of Ontario