

ADULT LEARNING KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

CENTRE DU SAVOIR SUR L'APPRENTISSAGE CHEZ LES ADULTES

SUMMARY:

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVE
ABORIGINAL**

2008

SUMMARY

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH REPORT

The Aboriginal Community Outreach Initiative's objectives are to discuss Aboriginal adult learning needs and related issues within Atlantic Canada. Han Martin Associates, a private Aboriginal majority-owned consulting firm was awarded the contract to organize a series of five community-based knowledge exchange meetings to discuss adult learning needs and issues of Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada.

Although adult learning applies to all sectors such as citizenship, arts, culture, and natural resource management, the primary focus for these sessions was on literacy, post-secondary education and employment.

The Aboriginal Reference Group has identified a number of challenges and issues relating to adult learning. The overall and unifying theme underlying most of these issues is the importance of Aboriginal language and culture as it impacts adult learning for Aboriginal people and communities.

The major issues identified by the participants are as follows:

- Participants in all sessions noted that funding is an ongoing and critical issue. There were several major areas of concern expressed.
 - Funding levels for many programs have either been frozen for over a decade or they have been steadily decreasing since 2000.
 - Funding programs tend to focus on employment and economic development and not on adult learning issues.
 - Funding criteria are restrictive and do not allow for any accommodation in learning styles or programs.
 - There is a need to clarify criteria for INAC's Post-Secondary Education program as it is unclear which types of education and training programs would be supported.
 - Existing criteria made it easier for Aboriginal people on EI to receive financial support and services for adult learning than those on social assistance who may require this help more for transportation, tuition and child care.
- There is a trend to shift funding away from front-line service provision.
- The increase in student loans is a concern, especially in light of inadequate funding to communities who then cannot support their post-secondary education efforts.
- Literacy initiatives are not common within Aboriginal communities where the focus has been more on individuals receiving their GED.

- Although younger Aboriginal adults have more access to the outside world than previous generations, their motivation to learn is not as strong as older Aboriginal adults. Instilling the desire to learn among younger Aboriginal adult learners is a challenge and there is a need to find out why this lack of motivation exists. The leadership in First Nations communities or agencies should recognize that they are often doing youth a disservice by making the process of being accepted into adult learning programs too easy, as well as by providing financial rewards just to attend.
- Many Aboriginal students graduating from high school find they are behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts. They are graduating with a weakness in math and science, making it difficult to participate and succeed in regular college or university programs, especially to pursue studies in health, the sciences or technology. Poor self-esteem and identity affect their ability to participate effectively in learning.
- In a majority of the sessions participants identified lack of transportation as a major impediment for adult learners to access or continue training. In order to access services, individuals are forced to move away from their communities. The result is the loss of language and culture as individuals become assimilated into mainstream (mostly English Canadian) society.
- Access to child-care services is an issue for many Aboriginal adult learners. Day cares on reserve do not suit the schedules of Aboriginal adult learners going to training programs in or outside the community.
- Peer and family support is very important and the adult learner experiences a tremendous sense of isolation when that is lost.