

# Government of Alberta Social Policy Framework Public Consultation

Focus Group Summary Notes: Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE)

Facilitated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

With support from the United Way of Alberta Capital Region, the City of Edmonton, and FCSS

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## VISION

Question 1: What words would you include in your vision for social policy?

Probe Questions:

a) What do the words in the proposed vision mean to you?

“Alberta is one of the finest places in the world to live, work, and raise a family because all Albertans have the opportunity to engage in our economic, social, and economic life.”

1. The words that I would include in a social policy vision:

- Equality (where everyone is treated equal)
- Accessibility (to programs, resources and support services when needed)
- Choices and options (regarding decision that individuals make)
- Respect and honor (respecting Aboriginal culture and spirituality while honoring their place in Alberta)
- Working hard.
- “to live, work and raise a family” is a given, and I have problems that economics is emphasized first as if it is the most important aspect of Alberta. It should be “cultural, social and economics”. As well, we always need some form of entertainment in our lives. Add in the word “play” so it would be “to live, work, play and raise a family”. Take the word “all” out and substitute it with “everyone”. Spirituality is a large part of our community and it would be nice to see that recognition in the vision.

a) The words in the proposed vision mean the following:

- Booming economy.
  - Fort McMurray is the first thing that comes to mind where there are all sorts of people who go to work.
- Promoting a province of destination – an advertisement to encourage people to move to Alberta.
  - Sounds very liberating to someone who’s moving to Alberta for the first time. However for those who know the history of Alberta from the native people’s perspective they do not agree with this proposed vision. No one hears our cultural cries or our social and economic worries. The words don’t reflect the Aboriginal ways.

- Very encouraging and possibly motivating statement for someone who may not have hope for their current situation.
- Alberta is a better place to live (than Saskatchewan, for example)
  - I believe my children are safer here and have better opportunities.
  - We have it pretty good, so there is a lot of truth in that statement. It's what you make out of your life, not your background. I'm looking to better myself as a person, that's doing my part as an Aboriginal and as a citizen of Alberta. I see how people see this as propaganda. There's so much stuff going on in different communities that people don't hear about us.
- The proposed vision statement is missing important key values pertinent to the Aboriginal community.
  - My issue with that statement is that the word 'spiritual' is missing and I feel discriminated against as an Aboriginal. Where are my spiritual liberties and freedoms in Alberta? So I don't agree with the statement. We have a declaration statement for Aboriginals in City of Edmonton but it's now overtly acknowledged. In low income programs, but we as Aboriginals do not. The Treaties are not being honored in Alberta so I don't agree with this statement. When people become new Canadians, they have to read a book and take a test, and the information about the Aboriginal peoples doesn't accurately reflect reality.
- I disagree with this proposed vision statement, that "Alberta is one of the finest places in the world to live".
  - There was a time many years ago in Peace River when I could drink directly from the river. Now if I was to do this, I would burn my face from all of the chemicals and pollution. It might be a good place for some. However, ethical space and sacred space is not being honored. We are not consulted very often when decisions about our lands are made. When they do, it hinders us; there is no cooperation and collaboration with us. And, when we are consulted, they edit our words and force us into silence. Our own people are doing that too, our own are becoming just like them. We've spoken about these ideas 30+ years ago and we're still talking about it now – our voices are not being heard. We want cooperation principles adhered to. It might be a good place to live in Alberta in terms of economics, but for the permanent residents, they suffer because of the state of our land and our water – repercussions of the "oil sands" on the people of the land. Broken treaties and broken promises are also still a problem. The residential schools are a multi-generation problem because it's a "blood memory".
- I disagree with the proposed vision statement, that "all Albertans have the opportunity to engage"
  - It's hard to find work as an Aboriginal youth, it's frustrating because we are often told that youth are lazy – no, you're not hiring me. How do we both live and raise a family here? It's too hard. There are babies raising babies and they don't know how to. Even now our Aboriginal culture is not respected. At Capital Ex, there was a multinational venue and Aboriginals were included with that venue. I take offense to this as we are not with them, we are our own and we had our own venue. In schools, there is a lot of celebration of other people's faith but not ours. It seems Christians are not permitted the same religious

liberties as others. I put up a Christmas tree in my school and within a few days it was taken down as it was considered offensive.

- The words in the proposed vision do not reflect my past reality and I suspect the current situation for many folks in foster care.
  - My right to choose was not respected as a child. I didn't want to take my medication, so they [my care workers/guardians] took away my T.V... for eleven years. No new clothes. There are foster children being thrown around – they don't have a say, they just move... The horror stories I hear about foster parents killing kids – that's the bad stuff. There's good stuff, but there also the true horror stories... I had a [brother], and they [government officials] promised he would come back to us. But, he didn't... He used to smile, but he's different now... Another girl was born addicted to drugs. You know how hard it was for her mother to wean her off drugs as a baby?
- I agree with some of the proposed vision statement.
  - I was born and raised on the reserve and when I came to the city my artwork has been well received. It's a great place to live. But there's a flip side with the violence. When you first come here it's hard because you don't know anyone or have any resources and you need to work hard. I've met so many people in Heritage Days and they were so interested in my culture and I could share my stories with them. We have to get our stories out. As long as the lines of communication are open and there's no discrimination or levels of hierarchy, there will be equality and this vision can go far.
- Cultural learning is a route towards creating more inclusive, equitable communities.
  - I think it's important that people know our history... the thing I still hear a lot is "what's the matter with you people? Get over it." ... People ask that because they don't know our history.
  - I'd like to see treaties being honored. People communicating and listening... children and youth being heard and having a say...
  - There's been a huge injustice done to the survivors of the Residential Schools. The federal government only recognized certain schools that were funded federally. But those funded privately and provincially have not been acknowledged at all. And there's an interconnection with nature and spirituality. You don't find the natural beauty in this province in other provinces.
- Take issue with the word 'opportunity'.
  - The word 'opportunity' stands out. I came here thinking that everyone has the opportunity, but when you get here you don't even know where to go or how to find resources. You need to find your own way.

## OUTCOMES

Question 2: What results are needed in order to achieve your vision for Alberta's social policy?

Probe Questions:

- a) Where could significant improvements be made?

## 2. What results are needed in order to achieve your vision?

- Policies that encourage a more eco-friendly approach to decisions about the environment.
  - We are taking resources out of mother earth.
- More focus on building community and moving away from segregation. We seem to have so many pockets of groups yet we are supposed to be one community.
- No discrimination.
- Encouraging all people to live a healthy life
  - We would be able to drink from the river. People would get along, helping our neighbors. It used to look like that when I was younger. No abuse, no hierarchy. Being able to talk about these issues. Everyone would take care of each other. Earning the right to have a mate, one mate. We need to be listened to.
- Poverty and homelessness would not exist.
- More opportunity for people to get education because that is what is going to make a difference.
- More Aboriginal people working within the government.
  - The system is really one-sided. We need more Aboriginals in every department in the government and they need to be able to work with the Aboriginal people and to listen to them. Maybe a central body to be able to answer the questions that non-Aboriginals can't. They seem to ask us questions anyways but they take our words and claim them. So why not let us share our words by having our own representation within each level of the government. We are not the same as the rest of society – we are unique.
- Wholistic Aboriginal resource centers.
  - Aboriginals coming from reserve having access to resources when they come to urban centers. We have all these kids coming into the cities to enhance their lives, but where do we go? There are resources available but where are they? If you don't know anyone here you're going to attach yourself to those who will accept you – gangs and fall into alcohol and potential homelessness. There's a big need for getting access to the resources so people/youth knows where to get the resources.
  - A welcoming place to support our strengths.
- Support for individuals who have made poor choices in the past.
  - A lot of things need to take place to combat poverty, homelessness, drugs, incarceration.
- A greater Aboriginal presence.
  - Every quadrant of the city that would have an Aboriginal resource center/ welcome center. Everyone would be welcome there. Aboriginal co-op housing. All levels of the school curriculum would be accepting of all opinions – equality. More holistic healing centers.
- Treaties being honored.
- People communicating and listening. Youth being heard and having a say.
  - I have a history of having choices made for me because I was under 18 and I am not alright with this. Having and making choices is my right.
- More attention to the aging population – the need more and better accessibility to plenty of resources.

- I think coming together as a community, paying it forward.... Doing right when no one was looking would give Alberta a better reputation, make it a better place to live... instead of, as the media calls it, the murder capital of Canada.
- a) Significant improvements could be made in the following ways:
- More reserves having offices in urban centers to respond to the needs of Aboriginals coming to the city. Assisting with orientation, job training and placement, housing, etc.
  - Better history telling about Aboriginals in Alberta. We want people to know the truth, so we need to be involved in writing and telling it. We want people to have an accurate vision of Aboriginals in Alberta.
  - Retention of more green space. Recognition of sacred places, specifically the River Valley where there are many burial sites that are unknown and unmarked. We are aware that these areas are being encroached upon by developers.

## FACILITATOR'S FEEDBACK

If you wish, please provide your personal feedback on facilitating this conversation or advice you may have to the project team regarding the discussion resources or process.

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- Our team rephrased some of the questions to facilitate a more meaningful discussion around the needs of the population we engaged with. The questions we used were as follows:
  - What do the words in this vision mean to you?
  - For Alberta to become the best place to live, work and raise a family ...
    - a) What would it look like?
    - b) Why is that important to you?
  - What has to happen in order to achieve what you described?
  - What's currently working and what could be improved?
- Some of the participants expressed frustration stating that they were skeptical that their feedback would be taken seriously. Some expressed the opinion that they are frequently asked for their input and feedback but that these individuals rarely see any results from their feedback.