

COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

of

EDMONTON AND DISTRICT

REPORT OF THE INDIAN AND METIS STUDY COMMITTEE

Committee Personnel:

Rev. W.B. Mundy (chairman)  
(Nov. 1960 - Jan. 1961)  
Mr. G.J. Amerongen (chairman)  
(Feb. 1961 - Feb. 1962)  
Dr. S.E. Greenhill  
Dr. G.K. Hirabayashi  
Rev. W.G. Horton  
Mrs. H. Schwam  
Mr. E.I. Taylor (secretary)

Presented to the Board of Directors March 5, 1962

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I. GENERAL STATEMENT

In order to establish the perspective underlying this report the committee would like to remind the reader of certain background factors.

We live in a society which has problems. We have developed techniques and institutions to treat these problems in order to create the society we want. Both our aims and our methods have been developed by and for the dominant part of our society, the white group of largely European origin. This appears to be the major problem of Indians and Metis in Edmonton.

Decided disadvantages beset the person of Indian background who wishes to become part of the Edmonton Community. Adoption and foster home procedures are relatively unsuccessful. So is educational development. Employment is limited. Areas of recreation are circumscribed. Public accommodation seems limited unfairly. Different standards of law enforcement seem to be in practice. Public health measures seem less successful. Generally, the aspects of our community (and of many others) which have been developed to improve the lot of those with physical, psychological, and social disadvantages are unavailing for those of Indian background.

What seems most needed is co-ordination and adaptation of existing services together with mutual cultural adjustments. We think the best way of treating Indian-white problems is by taking steps to make present social services and other normal community resources usable by people of Indian background. The recommendations of our committee are for co-ordination, adaptation, and adjustment on several social levels as well as continuing review to determine and assure progress and possible solution.

## II. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

There were two basic concerns expressed to the Council of Community Services in 1959 and 1960 which related to the Indian and Metis people in our community.

The first concern related to the difficulty of finding adoptive and foster homes for children of Indian and Metis background. In his report to the Youth Services Executive of July 15th, 1959, the Co-Ordinator of Youth Services stated, "As is well known, any gap or inadequacy in youth services is magnified many times in its effect on Indian and Metis children. For example, the finding of adequate adoptive and foster homes is a problem on both the municipal and provincial level. For the Indian or Metis child it often means that he remains in inadequate home surroundings or becomes an institutional child."

In February of 1960, the Council of Community Services received a letter from the Edmonton Citizenship Council concerning the difficulty experienced by Indians or Eskimos in obtaining hotel accommodation when visiting relatives in the Camsell Hospital.

In June, 1960, the Council convened a meeting of representatives of agencies and organizations concerned about and working with the Indian and Metis people in our community.

In October, 1960, the Board appointed a fact-finding committee "to gather further information in such areas as protection, child care, public assistance and recreation". The Committee was asked to present recommendations for the Board's consideration.

Rev. W.B. Mundy was appointed by the Board as chairman of this committee. Other members of the committee appointed were Mrs. H. Schwam, Rev. W.G. Horton, Dr. G.K. Hirabayashi, Mr. G.J. Amerongen and Dr. S.E. Greenhill. The committee met first in November of 1960 and has continued

to meet regularly since that time. In the spring of 1961, Rev. Mundy moved to British Columbia. Mr. Amerongen was subsequently appointed as chairman.

During the past year the committee has met with a number of individuals and representatives of agencies and organizations who are concerned with and working with people of Indian Background in our city. The committee has met with and received reports from the following people during the last year:-

Mr. W.D. McFarland, Superintendent of Child Welfare, Dept. of Public Welfare, Province of Alberta.

Mr. H.F. Irwin, Supervisor, Metis Rehabilitation Branch, Dept. of Public Welfare, Province of Alberta.

Mr. and Mrs. Don Sneddon, Mr. Eddie Bellerose and Mr. S. Johnson and Mr. G. Grandbois of the Canadian Native Society, Edmonton Branch.

Mrs. J.D. Sturrock of the Edmonton Citizenship Council.

Mr. E.H. Copeland, Mr. L. Jampolsky and Mr. M. Sutherland of the Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. R. Deildal, Director, The John Howard Society, Edmonton.

Mr. A.J. Cormier and Mr. W. Wuttunee of the Citizenship Branch of the Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration.

Dr. M. Matas, Superintendent of the Charles Camshell Hospital.

Mr. J. Melling, Director, Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada.

Dr. G.K. Hirabayashi and Dr. S.E. Greenhill presented special reports on the research project dealing with social factors associated with tuberculosis among the Metis sponsored by the University of Alberta and the Alberta Tuberculosis Association. Committee members also participated in the annual meeting and conference of the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada held in Edmonton October 11th to 13th.

The committee sincerely thanks these people who met with the Committee and contributed substantially to the development of this report.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

We are dealing with the adjustment problems of the Indians and Metis as they come to Edmonton seeking to fit into the larger society socially and

economically. The fact that they come to the city in the first place represents a tremendous step in the long road toward successful acculturation; it means that for one reason or another these peoples have become motivated to live in a new and strange environment, even though fraught with many hazards. Whenever anybody moves to a new and strange environment, problems of adjustment are involved. But with the Indians and Metis special attention is warranted.

The Indians and Metis have been reared with a basically different cultural heritage than ours. His way of life, (to describe the archetype) places different emphases on time, savings, sharing, work habits, and in general his orientation to nature. His was the way of adjusting to nature, rather than in shaping nature. His essence of life was found in being and not in becoming. His language would naturally facilitate these emphases and thus, the Indian child would grow up in his society not only learning his native language but along with it the language emphases of his culture (the way life is viewed and evaluated). These growing up and maturing processes occur long before he can appraise what is taking place, so that they are internalized and incorporated into his way of living as "the natural way of living." This, of course is how we became the way we are and how we have obtained our values and our system of logic.

The Indians and Metis who come to Edmonton, in addition to being a unique and different cultural group, are essentially rural. Therefore, they have all of the adjustment problems that confront rurally-oriented peoples as they face urban living.

And most important of all the Indians and Metis, on the whole, are members in our society of the lower socio-economic class, in fact, the lower-lower. All of the tremendous problems of adjusting successfully to a western urban society are compounded by the problems of the lower-lower class. These are characterized in poor education, poor housing, little skills for occupations, little aspirations to achieve, poor health, apathy and depression.

These various factors tend to re-enforce each other in what amounts to a vicious circle.

Without belaboring the above three major background factors, it can be seen that together they form a formidable obstacle to overcome. Any one of these would be serious enough to challenge the full attention of responsible citizens and government. It is essential that this picture of the background be continually remembered as problems and recommendations are discussed.

How do the Indians and Metis meet their adult roles in the rapidly modernizing world? There really is no escape for them. Modernization is creeping out to the hinterland via roads, factories, schools, government agents, and most dramatically by the mass media so that even those who do not migrate to the cities are confronted with changing ways of living. If success in the sense of western urban culture cannot be ignored among these relatively remote peoples, how much more must it be carefully appraised among those who migrate to the cities, like Edmonton. This is not a question of "Do we have the right to impose our ways and values and interpretation of success upon those whose values are different?" Rather, the question is "How can these peoples of different ethnic and cultural background make a successful adjustment to the modern urban living demands?"

Our concern samples the kinds of problems that have come to our attention: it is neither exhaustive, complete, nor necessarily in the proper order of priorities. We are deeply impressed with the complexity of this situation and the awareness that any suggestion for action on any front is probably doomed to failure unless it is a part of a concert of co-ordinated actions. Therefore, each recommendation is, in fact, partial and related to others. Knowing, however, that we cannot begin on all fronts at the same time, we have organized our recommendations so that, first, the existing facilities may be examined for needed service, with perhaps some encouragement for special attention and additional strength in this area, second, that some

new organizational structure may be necessary in some situations, and third, some descriptions of the specific areas of need and suggested directions for action.

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The following recommendations are directed towards the Board of the Council of Community Services:

1. The committee recommends that in view of the fact that there is an increasing number of people of Indian background coming into the City of Edmonton that the Council of Community Services undertake to maintain a continuing emphasis in its work directed toward more effective services being provided to meet the needs of Indian and Metis people resident in the greater Edmonton area.

2. The committee recommends that the Council of Community Services continue to be concerned and active in the area of Indian urban adjustment by (a) continuing to assign staff members to meet and work with groups in the community who are concerned and working in this area; (b) continuing to study the problems of Indian urban adjustment.

3. The committee recommends that the Council of Community Services through the Youth Services Executive convene a meeting to which are invited representatives from the Provincial Welfare Department, the City Welfare Department, the Catholic Family and Child Service, the Department of Indian Affairs, and any other agency concerned with the finding of foster and adoptive homes. The purpose of the meeting will be to explore the methods which could be used in this province to find suitable homes for children of Indian background.

4. The committee is deeply concerned that discrimination against the people of Indian background exists in the province of Alberta. Just as other provinces have taken action to bar discriminatory practices, we feel that Alberta should also take the necessary legislative steps to protect

adequately the rights of all, regardless of their race, colour or creed.

The committee recommends that the Board of the Council of Community Services urge the provincial government to enact a "Fair Employment Practices Act" and a "Fair Accommodation Act" in Alberta.

5. The difficulty which the Indian has in adjusting to life in Edmonton is accentuated by the existence of prejudice. Because other programs which the committee is recommending would not be successful if prejudice continued, the committee recommends that the Council of Community Services takes steps to develop a public education program. The committee recommends that representatives of the Council of Community Services meet with representatives from radio and television with a view to encouraging them to produce programs which would help to give people in the community a better understanding of the Indian and his culture.

6. The committee recommends that the Board of the Council of Community Services participate in the development of a friendship centre in Edmonton, similar to that which has been developed in Winnipeg.

A centre of this type would perform several functions:

- a) It would act as a meeting place for people of Indian and Eskimo background.
- b) It would act as a centre for recreation, informal education and leadership training for the Indian people.
- c) It would act as a referral centre, where people of Native background needing special services could be referred to appropriate services and organizations in the community.

This centre, through its services would help the people of Indian and Eskimo background bridge the gulf between their culture and western urban culture.

There has existed in the community for the past few months a committee which has been working towards the development of such a centre. The committee is composed of both Indians and non-Indians. A representative from the Council has been meeting with this committee. The committee



recommends that the Council continue to meet with this committee, and assist in the development of the centre.

7. The committee recommends that the Council of Community Services promote and encourage conferences, institutes or meetings whose purpose would be to help the people in the community to understand and appreciate people of Indian background, and help to bridge the gap between their culture and ours.

8. The committee wishes to express concern about the negative image of the Indian that is depicted in some school text books. The committee has not had an opportunity to determine whether this pertains to text books used in Alberta schools. The committee would recommend that the Council or other appropriate body examine the text books used in the Alberta school system with a view to determining if prejudice either in subtle or overt forms appears to be expressed.

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February 27, 1962.

