

CHAPTER SIX

Communities Today

AS YOU READ

Chapter Five described the cultural composition of Canada today and some of the barriers that keep members of some cultures, including many Aboriginal peoples, from fully participating in Canadian society. The degree to which these barriers affect Aboriginal individuals sometimes depends on where they live. Aboriginal people who live in mainstream communities, such as urban areas, generally experience cultural barriers more often. Those living in rural, primarily Aboriginal communities generally experience more cultural acceptance.

Today, more than half of the Aboriginal people in Canada do not live on reserves or in other Aboriginal communities. Many live in urban areas, part of urban Aboriginal communities that are growing each year. The existence of these urban communities increasingly challenges traditional ways of thinking about and dealing with Aboriginal issues in Canada.

As you read this chapter, consider some of the questions that follow: What factors do Aboriginal people consider when choosing where to live? What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of city life? What are advantages and disadvantages of life in Aboriginal communities? How might availability of services affect where people choose to live? What are effective ways of developing and delivering services that address Aboriginal people's rights and needs?

This chapter begins with a song by Shingoose, a singer/songwriter of Anishinabé heritage based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. His thirty-five-year career in music combines European music styles with themes and issues from his First Nations cultural heritage. He often uses humour to depict the conflicts between his First Nations heritage and urban society.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

As you read this chapter, consider these questions:

- ▲ Why do some Aboriginal people migrate to urban areas?
- ▲ Why do some Aboriginal people choose to live on First Nations reserves, Métis Settlements, and in other Aboriginal communities?
- ▲ What knowledge and skills are needed for urban living?
- ▲ What services are available for Aboriginal people and how effective are they?
- ▲ What kinds of issues are involved in the delivery of services to Aboriginal people?

It's Hard to Be Traditional

By Shingoose
(Curtis Jonnie)

Well, it's hard to be traditional
When you're living right
downtown
People tend to look at you
funny
Every time you come around
They like to make fun of you
when you dance
Especially when it rains
It's hard to be traditional
When you're living in the
nuclear age

For instance,
Where do you go when you
want a sweat?
Well, you head down to the
YMCA
They got a great steamin'
sauna there
But they look at you weird
when you pray
Instead of rocks they got a
little box
Of electric coils and wires
And when you throw the
water on and start to sing
Someone always hollers,
"Fire!"



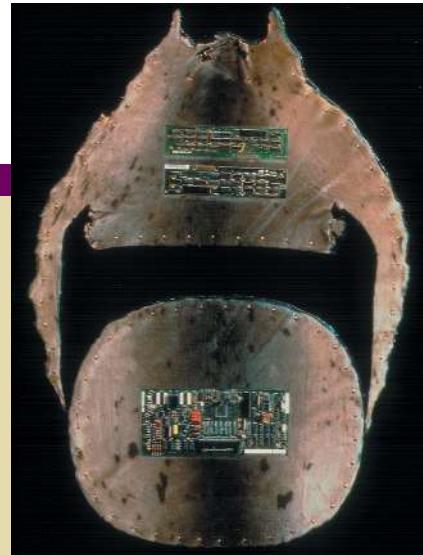
Shingoose

Has anybody seen good old Mother Earth
around lately?
That's 'cause she's living at the public park
But they'd never let you hunt or trap in there
And it's always closed at dark
Yes, and all the animals are fair game
But they're living in a cage
And if you ever tried to skin one
Well, they'd have you on the next front page

Chorus

Way before the hippies grew long hair
We were wearing braids
But then around the turn of the century
All of us got shaved
(or was it saved? I don't know)
But now long hair is coming back again
Just when I got used to it short
It's gotten so you can't tell these days
Whether you're a girl or a boy

What do you get when you rub two sticks?
You get a raging fire
But it's just as easy to flick your Bic
And nobody would be the wiser
Oh, it's hard to stay true to your roots
And only your hairdresser can tell
Whether or not you're traditional and the
rest can go to...



Artist Lance Belanger, who has Maliseet and French heritage, created Culture in Transition out of microchip circuit boards, seal fur, and enamel on canvas. How do you interpret his message?

REFLECTION

1. Shingoose's song uses humour to explore a serious issue. Summarize the main theme of his song in a single sentence. What other methods could Shingoose have used to get his point across? Why do you think he chose music and humour? In your opinion, does his choice strengthen or weaken his message?
2. Using the library and the Internet, research Aboriginal writers and entertainers who use humour to present their viewpoints. Find examples of stories from Aboriginal oral traditions that contain humour. Prepare a three to five page presentation using PowerPoint™, slides, or overheads that compares traditional and contemporary uses of humour.
3. Shingoose describes a cultural transition in his song, although in a very different way from Lance Belanger. What kind of cultural transition do you think Aboriginal peoples are experiencing today? Use song, story, poem, or artwork to express your ideas.



Life in Rural Aboriginal Communities

AS YOU READ

An Aboriginal community is one that is composed of enough Aboriginal people that Aboriginal worldviews, cultural practices, and languages are an expected, fully accepted way of life. This way of life is often distinctly different from that of mainstream society.

This section looks at the benefits and drawbacks of life for Aboriginal people within Aboriginal communities. As you read pages 180–187, think about the aspects of life that you think make an Aboriginal community different from other communities in Canada. What aspects of life are the same?

For First Nations people, Aboriginal communities are generally reserves and areas immediately surrounding reserves. For Inuit people, they can be anywhere in the Arctic, where Inuit people form the majority of the population. For Métis people, the Métis Settlements in Alberta and certain other towns and rural regions across the West have enough Métis population that Métis cultural practices are common.

Some reserves are located within cities or close to urban areas, but most Aboriginal communities are rural and some are far from major centres of population, particularly in the North. This section will focus on rural Aboriginal communities.

BEFORE WORLD WAR II, NEARLY ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CANADA LIVED IN RURAL AREAS. THIS IS BECAUSE TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL WAYS OF LIFE INVOLVED HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING, AND FARMING. TODAY, ABOUT HALF OF THE



total Aboriginal population in Canada live in rural areas.

The 633 First Nations reserves, 8 Métis Settlements, 53 Inuit communities, and numerous other towns and regions in Canada with high Aboriginal populations are diverse in location, level of economic development, social issues, services, size, attitude, and local politics. These differences, combined with individual personalities and situations, create circumstances that either pull people to stay in Aboriginal communities or push them to leave. Sometimes people feel an internal tug-of-war, both pushed and pulled. Many who leave eventually return.

RESERVE LIFE

What draws First Nations people to life on a reserve? The main benefits of an on-reserve lifestyle include being close to extended family and friends and being surrounded by First Nations culture. Elders provide guidance, and others in the community often help families who are starting out or in need. Generally, the atmosphere is supportive and friendships are strong. Being with people who speak First Nations languages and feel a sense of pride in cultural traditions adds richness to life that may be missing elsewhere.

Life's pace is also more free and relaxed in smaller communities. A rural setting provides peace, quiet, and closeness to the natural world. People can fish, hunt, or trap along

The main benefit of life in an Aboriginal community is being near family and friends and attending community events and celebrations, such as this powwow on the Alexis First Nation reserve.

with others who share an understanding of the spiritual aspects of these pursuits. Living in a more natural environment also allows people to practise traditional ceremonies.

Children have fewer restrictions in rural communities. Sometimes, people who have left reserves return after they have children. They want their children to develop a deeper connection to their heritage, family, and the land. Many communities have on-reserve schools, particularly at the lower grade levels, that incorporate the culture and language of those living there.

Reserves sometimes offer other benefits, as well. Some pay power or heating bills for their Elders. A few communities provide rent-free or low-rent housing. Some reserves offer employment opportunities in on-reserve businesses and industries. These businesses are often more culturally sensitive than mainstream businesses, making it easier for people to find jobs that they enjoy.

Resource Development

Many reserves in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada are developing resources on reserve land to create employment and economic benefits for their communities. Many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business leaders believe resource development is the key to Aboriginal prosperity. Dave Tuccaro, a member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and owner of eight highly successful businesses, says "In Canada's northern diamond mines, Aboriginals are doing hundreds of millions of dollars in business, and in the oil sands, Aboriginal businesses did



Drummers helped celebrate a signing ceremony between EnCana Corporation, Saddle Lake First Nation, and Western Lakota Energy Services. The celebration was held at the Keyano-Pimee Exploration Company Ltd. site, which is jointly owned and operated by the Saddle Lake and Whitefish (Goodfish) Lake First Nations. Why do you think many First Nations use joint ventures with other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations to develop their resources?

over \$400 million dollars in 2003 alone. This is the result of good partnerships that are providing Aboriginals with job and educational opportunities — the means to build a sustainable future. It's time for Aboriginals to get busy, the sooner the better."

However, resource development can have positive and negative consequences for Aboriginal communities. For example, in the early 1970s, an oil boom in Inuvialuit territory brought high wages and a cash economy. Many families moved to towns so their children could attend school. The boom ended, but most families remained in towns. Today, many young Inuvialuit have never lived on the land and are missing a vital connection to their cultural identity.

In the 1960s, development of oil and natural gas near Hobbema, Alberta, suddenly increased local First Nations' income and wealth. In fact, the four First Nations in the area became the richest in Canada. The



Dave Tuccaro from the Mikisew Cree First Nation was included in the Financial Post's "Top 40 under 40," a listing of the country's most influential young economic leaders. He received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 1999 for his contributions to business.



The Siksika First Nation is using provincial and federal economic development funding as well as oil and gas resource revenue to build Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, a World Heritage and National Historic Site. The site is scheduled to open in 2005. The \$29 million project is fully owned and operated by the First Nation. The park will have many positive economic benefits for the Siksika reserve, as well as cultural and educational benefits for other provincial residents, tourists, and Canadian citizens.

- ❖ communities distributed some of the money to the people and invested the rest in business ventures and improvements to the community's schools, social services, and medical clinics.

However, the sudden wealth also created social problems in the community. The high incomes and the material goods that the money could buy influenced many members to abandon traditional practices and customs.

For some people in Hobbema, these changes were not welcomed. In 1968, the former chief of the Ermineskin First Nation at Hobbema, Robert Smallboy, led a group of about 125 people to the foothills

Indigenous Knowledge

Research a First Nation in Alberta that has been successful in tapping into resource wealth on their reserve lands (lumber, or oil and gas). Write a short profile of when development began, how it affected life on the reserve, and how the First Nation managed the development and any economic gains. Overall, has the community benefited from development? Explain your answer.

of the Rocky Mountains. They established a camp near Nordegg and pursued a more traditional life of hunting, fishing, and trapping, away from the influences of modern life.

Other communities experienced similar problems with resource development. Most reserves in Alberta now manage development carefully, focusing their attention on re-investing wealth for their community's future. The goal is economic stability, where the community is not dependent on any single source of income. For example, Shell Canada has been working closely with the 400 First Nations and Métis people who live near its Athabasca Oil Sands Project at Fort McKay. Together they have reached agreements on initiatives that deal with education, employment, economic development, culture, and community infrastructure.

Another example is the Siksika First Nation, which began the Siksika Development Corporation in 1995. The company was created to ensure that the First Nation would receive long-term economic benefit from oil and gas exploration and development on its land. Alfred Many Heads, director of the corporation, says that the First Nation re-invests much of its revenue in other businesses to allow it to diversify from the boom-and-bust oil and gas economy. One diversification plan is to develop an industrial park on reserve land.

Tax Status

First Nations people who live and work on reserves do not have to pay personal or property tax. Section 87 of the Indian Act says that the "personal property of an Indian or a

band situated on a reserve” is tax exempt. This tax exemption includes employment income for First Nations people with status who live and work on the reserve for the majority of their time. Today, a few First Nations have a different tax status because of settled land and self-government claims.

First Nations leaders maintain that their right to tax-free status comes from treaties, not the Indian Act. In the Benoit case, Mikisew First Nation member Gordon Benoit asserted his right, under Treaty Eight, to be exempt from federal income tax, even though he lives and works off-reserve. Support for his case included a report from treaty commissioners that stated that they had explained to the First Nations that the treaty “did not open the way to the imposition of any tax.” In 2003, Benoit lost his case at the Federal Court of Appeal, and in 2004 he was denied the opportunity to appeal this ruling.

Drawbacks of Reserve Life

The benefits of reserve life are not always enough to keep people on the reserve. What some people experience as a comforting closeness of family and friends, others feel as a lack of privacy. In some cases, the influences of family and friends are not always positive. For example, some people experience peer pressure to use alcohol or other substances. Moving away can give them the chance to start a new life away from old habits.

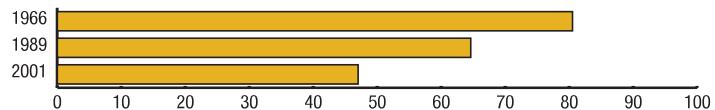
It is worth noting that this drawback, and many of the rest that follow, often apply to many rural communities, not just reserves or other Aboriginal communities. Some

drawbacks are distinctly part of reserve life and others a function of living in a rural area.

Small communities offer fewer employment and educational options. Most people who leave reserves do so to pursue these opportunities elsewhere. Some reserve schools have limited resources and may not be able to provide the same course and extracurricular opportunities as schools in urban areas. Some may not even be able to keep up with repairs to their school facilities. A few rural areas offer post-secondary options, but they are not usually as extensive as those in major cities.

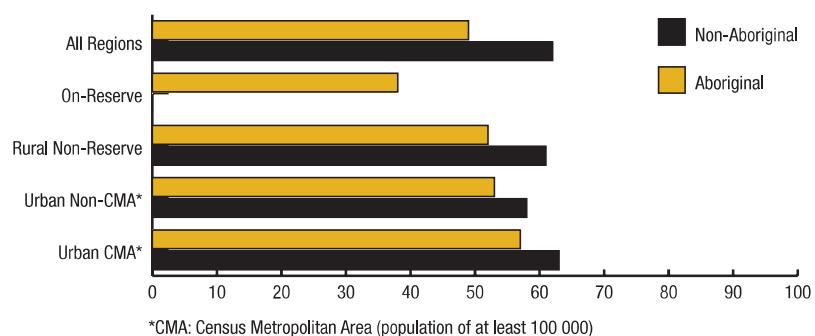
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has a goal of ensuring that people living on reserves have the

Percentage of First Nations People Living On-Reserve



What trend do you see in this bar graph? What factors do you think contribute to this trend? Have you or anyone you know moved to or from a reserve? What were reasons for moving? What effects do you think migration has on communities and cultures? Discuss these questions as a class.

Employment Rates of People Aged Fifteen and Over by Place of Residence and Aboriginal Identity





SELF-GOVERNING COMMUNITIES

Today, many Aboriginal communities have regained traditional powers of self-determination through land claims or self-government agreements. They have more control over aspects of life that reinforce their cultures, such as language, education, and economic opportunities in their communities. These communities can make their own choices about the future. Most have plans to live alongside mainstream Canadian society — a part of Canada, but culturally distinct.

Other communities are still in the process of achieving this level of control over their futures. In particular, most First Nations reserves still operate under the federal government's Indian Act legislation. As you read in Chapter Two, these communities are working in many ways to increase their powers of self-determination. Government attitudes have been slowly shifting to support this goal.

In 2004, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Andy Scott affirmed the federal government's support for Aboriginal self-determination:

I really believe that this [shift to Aboriginal self-determination] is about making available the instruments to the communities that are necessary for them to be successful on their own terms. We need the First Nations community to bring not only value to the decision, but in many cases, to make the decision. That's what self-determination is all about....

The relationship [between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society] is improving because the Canadian public, generally, is coming to understand two things: the entitlement, the contract that is represented by treaties and various claims that First Nations communities have with the Crown, and, perhaps even more important, the public is seeing the resolution of these outstanding issues as being important to everyone.

This is a big piece of unfinished business for this country. I feel optimistic that we are going to make great progress, so that while we're in an uphill journey with lots of baggage, I see the top.

REFLECTION

Where does the entitlement that Andy Scott mentions come from? Review previous chapters with a partner and name as many sources of entitlement as you can.

same basic services as other Canadians. Despite this, in 2000, some reserves still lacked basic water and sewer facilities. Ten per cent of First Nations communities had no access to electric services, and 12 per cent were without year-round road access. Many families are unable to find homes on their reserves and are forced to move or live with other families. Less critically, some people find that reserves offer limited outlets for recreation and leisure.

Social problems — substance abuse, gangs, physical violence, crime — can also drive people away from some reserves. Other reserves might suffer corruption, inequalities, or differences of opinion that divide the community. For example, residents may not agree with local politics or attitudes towards community development.

While some reserves have good economic opportunities, others rely on government grants and social assistance for 80 per cent or more of incoming money. This can demoralize the people who live there. The desire to pursue better economic opportunities is one of the main reasons people leave reserves. This is why so many First Nations leaders stress the importance of developing more on-reserve economic opportunities.

Impact of the Contemporary World on Reserve Life

Life on reserves has changed greatly in the last few decades, in many cases improving dramatically. First Nations are gaining more control over their affairs, and governments have become increasingly respectful of cultural needs.

Unfortunately, not all changes taking place on reserves are viewed as positive by community members. Reserves, like many other rural communities, are experiencing problems that were once found only in urban areas. These problems include

- **Pollution.** Many reserves suffer from the effects of polluted land and contaminated water due to mining, agriculture, and other industries.
- **Youth at risk.** Abuse of alcohol and other drugs or substances can be a problem that affects

young and old. In some places on the prairies, alienated young people have formed gangs that reinforce their sense of alienation from wider society.

- **Television.** On reserves today, as in other locations in Canada, children are drawn to the ideas and values reflected on television.

Self-government provides the most promising means of addressing these issues, because it will allow communities to address their problems in culturally appropriate ways.

OLD LANGUAGES ADAPTING TO THE MODERN WORLD

Blackfoot

aisaiksistto (television/movie,
literally “becoming visible”)
aikkamiksimstaa (computer,
literally “quick thinker”)

Cree

kîwîpahkamâhowin pîhwâpskos (telephone,
literally “tap the line,” referring to the early
telegraph wires)
pîwâphskos icîkaân (cell phone, literally
“unbelievable or extraordinary thing”)
pîwâpiskatahk (satellite, literally “iron star”)
masinatahikan kâ ìnîsîmakahk
(computer, literally “smart typewriter”)

Dene Sųłiné

tsi chok hetai (plane, literally “a big boat that’s
flying”)
beschene chok (bus, literally “a big wagon”)
eri ‘tis net’i (movie, literally “watching or looking
at paper”)

Dené Tha'

wok'luitse tani (car or contraption)

Dunne-za

woosloozhy kyaytanee
(a vehicle, literally “stinky wagon”)

Métis Cree

kosa pâchi’kun (television)

Nakoda

bahborgin (car, literally “covered wagon”)
tahnuska tahpi tin (computer, literally
“power needed to work”)

Saulteaux

masinâtêpicikan (computer)
masinâhtêsicikan (movie)
otâpân (vehicle)

Tsuu T’ina

dat’i shi cha t’i ni (movie, literally
“dancing/phantom/strange images”)
idini t’uga yii tla’li (car, literally “running on
its own power”)
dzalagha tla di ta shi (plane, literally
“flying above/up there”)

REFLECTION

Part of a culture’s adaptation to new situations involves an evolution of language as people use the words they have to describe the unfamiliar. How can you see this process in the examples above? Find an Aboriginal language speaker who can help you learn a word to share with your classmates that reflects a similar linguistic evolution.

MÉTIS AND INUIT COMMUNITIES

Many of the positive attributes of reserve life — closeness to family, use of Aboriginal languages, cultural acceptance — are also true of life in other Aboriginal communities, such as the Métis Settlements.

The Métis Settlements are unique among Métis communities because they have collective title to their land and legislated self-government. However, they are not the only Métis communities in Canada. Many Métis people continue to live in or near the Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta towns that are part of their cultural history. Unlike reserves or the Métis Settlements, such communities are not restricted to people with particular Aboriginal ancestry. They have an

Aboriginal character because Métis people and Métis culture form a significant part of the community.

For example, St. Laurent, Manitoba, has the largest Métis population in the province. St. Laurent was among the towns settled by Red River Métis people after the 1870 Red River Resistance. Today, Métis culture is still very much a part of the community. Michif is widely spoken among community members.

Life on reserves differs from life in other Aboriginal communities because of the Indian Act and treaties, which only affect First Nations. For example, Métis residents of a Métis Settlement are not exempt from paying taxes. Neither are Inuit residents of an Inuit community.

In many other respects, rural Métis and Inuit communities face



In 2004, St. Laurent, Manitoba, was recognized by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, for its vibrant French Métis culture.

The community is one of ten Aboriginal communities in North America profiled in the Smithsonian's new exhibit.



Individuals such as Clarence Houle, shown here logging with his horses on the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement, can be free in an Aboriginal community to choose more traditional ways of making a living. Selective logging using horses is an ecologically sound method of harvesting. It leaves the forest ecosystem intact.

many of the same challenges as rural First Nations communities. For example, like reserves, Métis and Inuit communities face pollution, contaminated water, and social issues. In 2002, Inuit villagers in northern Quebec reported over 600 sites where mining and exploration equipment and materials, including toxic chemicals, had been left in their territory.

In the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, Statistics Canada found that water quality problems were a particular problem for Inuit communities in northern Quebec. In that region, 73 per cent of Inuit people reported that their water was contaminated at certain times of the year. Across the Arctic, 34 per cent of Inuit people reported water quality problems. In comparison, about 19 per cent of other Aboriginal people in rural areas outside the Arctic reported water quality problems. It is important to note, however, that this survey did not include First Nations people living on reserves, where water problems are more common.

Throughout their traditional territories, Inuit people now have land-claims agreements that give them post-secondary education, health care benefits, and hunting rights. These benefits are in many ways similar to treaty rights received by First Nations. To continue receiving their land-claims benefits, Inuit people must maintain a link with their home region. If they lose this connection for a period of ten years, they lose their benefits.

As yet, Métis people have few benefits compared to First Nations and Inuit peoples.



Modern communications technology means that even isolated communities such as Grise Fiord, which is Canada's most northern civilian settlement, can be connected to television and Internet services by satellite. How do you think these connections affect life in isolated communities?

Two contemporary world luxuries that have negatively impacted Inuit people are the widespread use of televisions and video games. These luxuries have had a significant impact on social customs. For example, the pastime of visiting family and friends and social fundraising events such as family movie nights are no longer popular. Children, in particular, are “glued to the tube.” But so are adults. When I visit someone today, the television is nearly always on in the background and sometimes homeowners even continue to watch while we visit, so it is very difficult to sit and chat. Traditions of socializing have almost died and people have become sedate and inactive, contributing to poor health.

— Edna Elias, (Kugluktuk, Nunavut) Barrhead, Alberta

LOOKING BACK

What are the main benefits of living in an Aboriginal community? What benefits do reserves offer that other Aboriginal communities do not? What are some of the drawbacks of life in an Aboriginal community? If you have experience of living in an Aboriginal community, write your own list of benefits and drawbacks.

Urban Communities

AS YOU READ

While many Aboriginal people continue to live in communities where Aboriginal ways of life are dominant, a growing number of Aboriginal people face a different reality in Canada. Almost half of the 976 305 people in Canada who identified themselves as Aboriginal in the 2001 Census made their homes in urban areas.

For people accustomed to life in a rural or mainly Aboriginal community, urban life can be a shock. With a partner, brainstorm words and phrases that describe urban life to you. Are your impressions as a long-term resident of an urban area or as a visitor? How might this make a difference in your impressions of urban life?

URBANIZATION AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA HAS STEADILY INCREASED SINCE THE 1940S. AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II, MOST FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE LIVED MAINLY ON OR NEAR RESERVES. IN 2001, 47 PER CENT LIVED ON

- reserves, 24 per cent in urban areas, and 29 per cent in rural non-reserve locations. This urbanization trend is true for Métis populations as well. In 2001, 68 per cent of the Métis population in Canada lived in urban areas, with 29 per cent in rural regions.

- Inuit people are also drawn to cities, although not to the same extent as First Nations and Métis people. About 10 per cent of the Inuit population lives outside the

The Blackfoot language has several ways of indicating that someone lives off the reserve: *aya'piopiaksi* (those who are living among *naapiikoaksi* [Caucasian people]), *itsa'pao'takiwa* (working on the outside), *aisaitapiiksi* (those who become outsiders), *aikippitasa'pitapiiksi* (those who are temporarily on the outside), and *aisaissksinima'tasaawa* (he/she is going to school on the outside). What do such phrases reveal about the most common reasons for living off-reserve? If possible, find someone who speaks another First Nations language to explain how that language would describe similar situations.

Indigenous Knowledge

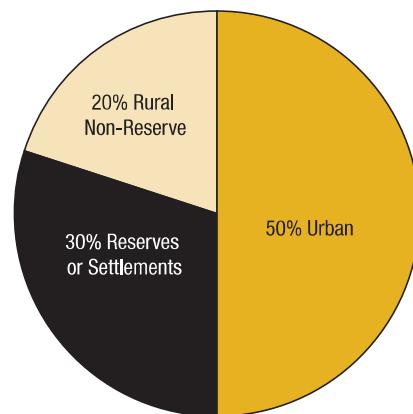
Arctic. Most of these people live in urban centres, such as Yellowknife, Montreal, Ottawa, and Edmonton.

THE DRAW OF URBAN AREAS

What draws people to a big city? A city offers more choices — in schools and educational programs, in recreation and leisure opportunities, shopping, and other conveniences and amenities. Some people go to a city looking for excitement or new friends. Others want to join friends and family who are already living in a city. Some want or need to be near better medical facilities and services. Some people hope to escape from problems in their home community.

The exact reasons an Aboriginal individual chooses to live in an urban environment vary, depending on what the particular city or town has to offer, the circumstances of the

Approximate Percentage of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples by Place of Residence



*Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

In contrast to the Aboriginal population, about 80 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population lives in urban areas.

Aboriginal community the person comes from, and the individual's goals, background, and ability to adapt. Age, marital status, family size, and education all affect people's choices. The most common reason Aboriginal people move to urban areas is the need to find housing and the desire to pursue education, training, or employment opportunities.

URBAN CHALLENGES

Not all people who move from a reserve to a city stay there. Some discover that they prefer rural life after all. Many move back because they miss family and friends. Many move to and from urban areas regularly, as employment or other circumstances change. Others adapt to the urban lifestyle and settle in, raising families who may never know life in any other setting.

Though the experiences of individuals living in urban centres differ, they face many of the same challenges. These include the physical atmosphere of cities, high cost of living, alienation, difficulty accessing services, problems maintaining cultural identity, and cultural barriers (such as stereotypes and discrimination). Each of these challenges is examined in this section.

Physical Atmosphere

Cities are often crowded, polluted, noisy places, with little connection to the natural world. Systems of street addresses, freeways, and public transit can seem alien and confusing to someone from a rural community.

Unemployment and Poverty

City living is often costly and can involve extra expenses for transportation, parking, education, and services.

CITY LIGHTS

Top Five First Nations Populations in Cities

1. Winnipeg 22 955
2. Vancouver 22 700
3. Edmonton 18 260
4. Toronto 13 785
5. Saskatoon 11 290

Top Five Métis Populations in Cities

1. Winnipeg 31 395
2. Edmonton 21 065
3. Vancouver 12 505
4. Calgary 10 575
5. Saskatoon 8305

*Source: 2001 Census, Statistics Canada

More First Nations and Métis people live in Winnipeg than in any other Canadian city. Use the Internet to research an agency or organization in Winnipeg that serves the needs of Aboriginal people. Write a newspaper article reporting what you find. How do these services compare to those in your closest urban area?

On top of this, unemployment is five to six times greater for First Nations people than for non-Aboriginal people living in the same urban area. Reasons for this high unemployment can include lack of training, limited education, discrimination, and conflicts with corporate expectations and values.

Low-paying, low-skilled jobs provide little satisfaction and stability, leading to an increased sense of alienation from the rest of the urban community. They also do not supply enough income to provide a good standard of living. Data from 2001 show that about 28 per cent of Aboriginal people living off-reserve fell below the poverty line, compared to only 13 per cent of non-Aboriginal people. Poverty can create a cycle of dependence from which it is difficult to emerge.

Yet there are signs of hope. Population figures show that the Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. In 2001, the median age for the Aboriginal population in Canada was 24.7 years, compared to 37.7 years for the non-Aboriginal population. The median age is the point where exactly one-half the population is older and one-half younger.

Indigenous Knowledge

How might a government or business owner use demographics to plan for its future labour needs? Brainstorm ideas with a partner and select your best ideas for a class discussion.

One of the untapped human resources of Canada is the Aboriginal peoples, and once we are in a position to prove that we are and always were hard-working people, we will be an asset, and viewed as an asset.

— Wilfred Collins, Chairman, Elizabeth Métis Settlement

This trend will likely continue for some time in the future. Because the Aboriginal birth rate is 1.5 times higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population, one third of the Aboriginal population in 2001 was aged fourteen and under. This compares to 19 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.

In a few years, this demographic could offer a solution to a forecasted shortage of skilled labour in Western Canadian cities. Given the right education and training opportunities, young urban Aboriginal people could reduce that shortage. Statistics already show a decrease in Aboriginal unemployment. In Edmonton, for example, Aboriginal unemployment dropped from 22 per cent in 1996 to 13 per cent in 2001.

Alienation

People who have been raised in families where traditional cultural values dominate, or in communities where hunting, trapping, and fishing remain a central part of life, generally find it difficult to adapt to an urban lifestyle. A city can seem like an impersonal place. For example, people often do not even know their neighbours. If they do know them, they may share few

common values or interests. Urban dwellers without good systems of support can feel isolated and alone.

Access to Services

Urban Aboriginal people do not receive the same level of services from the federal government as First Nations people living on reserves or Inuit people living in their communities.

Few municipal and provincial agencies provide specific services for Aboriginal populations. Those services that are offered tend to be unco-ordinated and inconsistent, with great variations from province to province. Sometimes Aboriginal people have trouble accessing services that are available to other Canadians, so they may not get the help they need.

This situation is partly the result of an on-going disagreement about jurisdiction between the federal and provincial governments. The federal government has assumed responsibility for providing services to First Nations people living on reserves, Inuit people, and Métis people living in the North. This responsibility comes from treaty agreements, the constitutional division of powers, and the federal government's interpretation of these legal responsibilities. The federal government argues that programs and services for all other Aboriginal people are provincial responsibility. In turn, the provinces have usually argued that the federal government has responsibility for all Aboriginal people, no matter where they live.

This disagreement is particularly significant for First Nations people. Those who live in urban areas

receive far fewer services than those who live on reserves. For example, First Nations people with treaty rights are eligible for free alcohol and drug treatment programs, if they receive treatment on a reserve. If they live in an Alberta city, such as Edmonton, they are not eligible for similar programs funded by the province and must return to the reserve for treatment.

There is an irony inherent in this lack of urban access to services. First Nations people on reserves do not pay federal income or property taxes. Urban First Nations people do, but receive fewer services in return. In addition, many urban residents face a higher cost of living.

Technically, chiefs and councils are responsible for band members who live off-reserve. The Siksika First Nation, for example, has an office in Calgary that helps its urban residents. For most First Nations, responsibility for urban members is difficult to fulfill. First Nations leaders find they must deal with local needs first. This often forces them to put the needs of urban band members on hold.

Many Aboriginal leaders say that urban resources for their people exist, but these are usually under-funded and unable to deal with the demand. Administrators of these services sometimes spend more time applying for funding than they do serving their clients.

In 2003, in an effort to improve this situation, the federal government allocated \$25 million over three years to the Urban Aboriginal Strategy. This program distributes money to eight major cities: Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon,

Most of us [services that serve urban Aboriginal people] are always fighting over dollars, to keep our administration going, to house ourselves, and look after our administration costs, whether we're Métis, Treaty, whatever...[W]e give people the runaround now when they come into the city. Well, you're Treaty and you've not been here one year so you go to this place. But, oh no, you've been here a year already so you go to this place. Well, you're Métis, you have to go somewhere else. It's too confusing for people.

—National Round Table on Urban Aboriginal Issues in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*

Regina, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, and Toronto. Each city, in partnership with stakeholders, is expected to introduce pilot programs that better address the needs of urban Aboriginal populations.

Maintaining Cultural Identity

Aboriginal people living in urban areas told the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that maintaining their cultural identity is essential to their sense of happiness and well being. However, this can be difficult. Urban life places demands on people that can cause them to change their values and way of life. In addition,

There is a strong, sometimes racist, perception that being Aboriginal and being urban are mutually exclusive. ... there is a history in Canada of putting Aboriginal people "in their place" on reserves and in rural communities. Aboriginal cultures and mores have been perceived as incompatible with the demands of industrialized urban society. This leads too easily to the assumption that Aboriginal people living in urban areas must deny their culture and heritage in order to succeed — they must assimilate into this other world. The corollary is that once Aboriginal people migrate to urban areas, their identity as Aboriginal people becomes irrelevant.

— *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*



most supports of Aboriginal identity are noticeably absent from many urban areas, such as contact with the land, Elders, family, spiritual ceremonies, and Aboriginal languages.

Some urban Aboriginal people return home frequently, maintaining their cultural ties. Those who cannot or do not, however, must find other ways to maintain their sense of identity.

Cultural Barriers

Some Canadians know surprisingly little about their country's first inhabitants. As a result, they may have stereotyped expectations of Aboriginal peoples. This can lead to racism and discrimination. As you learned in Chapter Five, education is the key to breaking down these barriers. Greater cultural understanding is particularly important for institutions that provide services to Aboriginal people.

The Canadian government thought that if they moved the real people (First Nations) into white society, the government would not have to live up to its treaty obligations. *ha k'i ji t'si ka aa na gu t'ina dinati k'aa ha li ni dza ku yi naa, it'i di kaa ti k'a gi yi di yi t'lishi du ha gi yi la gi yi ni zin.*

The government's plan was to eliminate the real people. *ha k'i ji t'si ka aa na gu t'ina du dinati isti gi di naa ha ta, a na gu gi dis dał gi yi ni zin ni t'i.*

The real people moved into the cities, hoping to find a better way of life, but white society tormented them. *dinati gu ja gi diln na ka gu t'sis t'si gi dis naa, ha t'a, ik'aa ha li gaaw ta za ni aa.*

Unfortunately, First Nations people turned to alcohol and began destroying themselves. *gi maa gu t'a, dinati ik'aa ha li tuwa i sila ist'aa gi di zid.*

— Vera Marie Crowchild and Regina Noel,
Tsuu T'ina First Nation, recounting stories
told by their Grandmother Daisy Otter

THE URBAN POLICY GAP

The rising number of urban Aboriginal people and the difficulties this population can encounter reflect an important gap in the policies affecting and services for Aboriginal people in Canada. Most services offered by the federal government for Aboriginal people address the needs of those living on reserves. In fact, 90 per cent of the money the federal government spends on all Aboriginal programs and services goes to programming for reserve populations (including Indian and Northern Affairs administration costs). Only about 47 per cent of the First Nations population benefits from any of this money. This is only about 30 per cent of the overall Aboriginal population in Canada.

Public policy discussions focus on issues such as treaties, self-government, reserve housing problems, and land claims. Few solutions to these issues benefit urban Aboriginal populations. This does not mean that reserves do not have serious concerns that deserve attention and funding. However, the urban Aboriginal population cannot be ignored or left in limbo forever.

Part of the problem is that urban Aboriginal populations are not well organized as a collective political power, and few Aboriginal people are part of mainstream political processes. Urban Aboriginal people are therefore not included in discussions about the policies and institutions that affect them, including self-government.

There are signs that this situation may improve in the future. The Assembly of First Nations, for example, is currently looking at ways

to restructure its organization to better represent the concerns of urban populations. According to Chief Phil Fontaine, "We represent all our people, regardless of where they live, whether it's in urban communities or in reserve communities. But we recognize that we need to do some things better than we've done up till now, to represent our members in cities. This is a serious undertaking. We may have to re-invent the AFN...so that we can effectively represent all our people, whether they're living in Toronto or Winnipeg, or Onion Lake."

FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

As First Nations and Métis people began moving to cities in greater numbers during the 1950s, local volunteers formed Friendship Centres to assist them. At that time, the centres functioned mainly as referral agencies, connecting individuals to various resources and services to help them adapt successfully to urban life.

When more and more new arrivals showed up throughout the 1960s, the Friendship Centres needed to expand their services. By the end of the decade, the centres had joined together in a network, with provincial and territorial associations providing administrative support. The Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association was incorporated in Alberta in 1970. In 1972, the federal government implemented a funding program to support the forty Friendship Centres then in existence across Canada.

Since then, the number of Friendship Centres has more than doubled, and their services have

The story of my involvement in the Friendship Centre movement goes back to the years of my childhood, when I was involved in the Li'l Beavers Program at the Thunder Bay Indian Youth Friendship Society. I am originally from the surrounding area, from Longlac, Ontario, which is approximately three hours north of Thunder Bay. I am from the Ginoogaming First Nation, which translates to "long lake" in Ojibwa.



Joseph Dore

In 2000, I was eighteen and attending high school in Thunder Bay, when I was approached to attend the annual general meeting of the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre. This is where it all began for me. I ran for the position of Youth Representative on the Board of Directors, where I served for a one-year term. This was the first of many positions I was to hold in the Friendship Centre movement.

I sadly left my home province in 2002 and moved to Edmonton to be closer to my family. Since May 2002, I have been an active member on the executive committee of the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. I am also the Alberta representative on the Aboriginal Youth Council of the National Association of Friendship Centres. Being involved with the Friendship Centre movement as a youth leader has given me many opportunities to grow personally and professionally. The experience has involved training in youth leadership, decision making, policy and procedure development, board governance, lobbying, advocacy, and travel.

Hard work and a lot of good comes out of good hard work. Now I'm an employee of the Red Deer Native Friendship Centre as the Assistant Executive Director. I continue to learn and grow in the Friendship Centre movement. I believe I've been able to help many Aboriginal youth to lead healthy lifestyles, achieve their dreams, and lead successful lives. Friendship Centres definitely helped me achieve my goals.

*In the Spirit of building healthy communities,
Joseph Dore, Oji-Cree youth*



Communities such as High Level, Fort McMurray, and Slave Lake (shown here), have Friendship Centres. Although these communities are not major cities, the centres play significant roles in their communities. Find out the kinds of services they provide and compare these services to those offered by Friendship Centres in Calgary and Edmonton.

- ➊ greatly expanded. More than one hundred Friendship Centres operate across Canada.
- ➋ Friendship Centres have been the most stable urban Aboriginal organization and have significantly helped urban populations in the past few decades. In particular, Friendship Centres do much to promote Aboriginal cultures and languages. They also increase the non-Aboriginal public's awareness and understanding of Aboriginal cultures. They provide a useful model for other agencies that offer services to Aboriginal clientele. While still providing referral services, today's Friendship Centres also focus on improving health and equality through various programs. As well, they provide employment training and job search assistance, organize women's groups, and serve as a vital cultural connection. Sometimes they serve people from nearby reserves as well.

Other Urban Services

Although Friendship Centres are status-blind, which means they are open to Aboriginal people of all cultures, some urban Inuit people have formed their own version. In Montreal, Yellowknife, and Ottawa, Inuit people have established non-profit organizations that operate programs such as the Inuit Tunngasukvingat in Ottawa. Inuit Tunngasukvingat offers a monthly gathering with a feast of traditional Inuit foods, entertainment, and games. It also offers programs such as student tutorials, work search assistance, carving lessons, and counselling.

Other organizations that provide services for urban Aboriginal people include youth centres, housing assistance agencies, Aboriginal student centres at universities, resource centres, health agencies, employment agencies, head-start (early childhood education) programs, business development associations, addiction-recovery programs, women's shelters, Aboriginal media, and more. Services vary from city to city.

Issues for Investigation

RESEARCHING FRIENDSHIP CENTRE PROGRAMS

Alberta has twenty Friendship Centres, from High Level in the north to Lethbridge in the south.

What needs are met by Friendship Centre programs?

WHAT TO DO

1. Visit www.albertafriendshipcentres.ca to find the Friendship Centre nearest to you.
2. Research the services and activities provided by the centre. How do these programs reflect some of the challenges discussed in this chapter? Note any additional needs that have not been discussed in this book.
3. How would these needs be met in rural or other Aboriginal communities?
4. Summarize your findings in a report.

Thinking About Your Project

If you live in or near an urban area, arrange to visit a local Friendship Centre to talk to staff.

URBAN SUCCESS STORIES

The challenges of urban life do not mean success is impossible. Many Aboriginal people adapt very well to urban living. Former Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come was born on a trapline in northern Quebec. MLA Joan Beatty, Saskatchewan's Minister of Culture, Youth, and Recreation (and a former CBC-TV reporter), grew up in Deschambault Lake, Saskatchewan. She did not go to school or learn to speak English until she was ten. Celebrated playwright Tomson Highway, whose Mother tongue is Cree, grew up on a trapline in northern Manitoba. They, like many other urban Aboriginal people who have become teachers, engineers, dentists, doctors, construction workers, business owners, and just about every other occupation available, have found success in urban centres.

For award-winning musician George Leach, living in Toronto helps him develop his career. It also provides other opportunities, including a role in the television series *Nikita*. Toronto is also where his producer and his agent are. Despite feeling settled in Toronto, he retains ties to his Sta'atl'imx community in Lillooet, British Columbia. He believes that he needs both societies to succeed, and accepts that problems exist in both. Whenever he returns to Lillooet, he spends time listening to the lake and cleanses himself by fasting.

John Bernard, a member of the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation, is the founder of Donna Cona Inc., an Ottawa-based computer systems company. Among its many successful projects, Donna Cona designed Nunavut's information technology system and brought high-speed satellite Internet service to many First Nations communities. Nearly half of Donna Cona's employees are Aboriginal. Most work at skilled jobs with starting annual salaries of \$60 000. The company's revenue in 2003 was estimated at close to \$12 million. Bernard believes that none of this could have been achieved had he remained on the reserve in New Brunswick where he grew up.

"I always knew I'd have to leave if I was to get anywhere," he said. His sister, however, remains on the reserve. "She's happy. I go down there and she's on top of the world. And here I am, winning all these awards and all stressed out."

REFLECTION

Through family or friends, find an Aboriginal person who has a connection to a rural Aboriginal community, but who has lived and worked in an urban area. In person or over the phone, interview the person about their perspective on the challenges and benefits of urban life. Write a newspaper article about the person using portions of your interview.



Ventriloquist and puppeteer Derrick Starlight grew up on the Tsuu T'ina reserve on the edge of Calgary. He now has an office in Calgary, a touring show, his own production company, and a regular spot on a local Saturday morning television show.

TALKING CIRCLE

URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

In your talking circle, discuss your response to the statements that follow and issues you've been reading about in this section. In particular, think about the

role that Aboriginal youth play in urban communities. As future leaders, what responsibilities, if any, do you think Aboriginal youth have to their people? What issues do you think are most problematic for urban Aboriginal populations? What are solutions to these problems? Do you think the trend of increasing urbanization will continue into the future, or will more people be drawn back to rural communities? Why?



Active listening is as much a part of communication as speaking. During your talking circle, focus on your listening skills. Try to listen to each participant without judgment or criticism.

I think the most terrible experience for an Indian person in the urban setting is racism in the community. That diminishes your self-esteem, confidence, and everything else. You experience racism every day in the stores and everywhere else on the street. All the other groups discriminate against you.

— Aboriginal Youth Council of Canada in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*

Aboriginal culture in the cities is threatened in much the same way as Canadian culture is threatened by American culture, and it therefore requires a similar commitment to its protection. Our culture is at the heart of our people, and without awareness of Aboriginal history, traditions, and ceremonies, we are not whole people, and our communities lost their strength. Cultural education also works against the alienation that the cities hold for our people. Social activities bring us together and strengthen the relationships between people in areas where those relationships are an important safety net for people who feel left out by the mainstream.

— David Chartrand, President, National Association of Friendship Centres (1992)



WHAT ARE THE
BIGGEST ISSUES
FOR URBAN
ABORIGINAL
PEOPLES?

Natives who grew up off the reserve have ... been looking to reconnect with their heritage, and they've been doing it at friendship centres. What twenty years ago was a place to stop in for coffee and a game of pool has been transformed into a social service organization that has also become the bearer and protector of the fragile Aboriginal culture.

"It's the only base they have as far as a cultural base, and we try to emphasize that in each of our programs," [Cathy General, Executive Director of the Niagara Regional Native Centre in Niagara-on-the-Lake] said. "It's been really successful, but we need ongoing cultural training and teaching and we try to inform the non-native community as well."

Centuries-old native prophecies tell of a strange new people someday rising up to re-establish the nation.

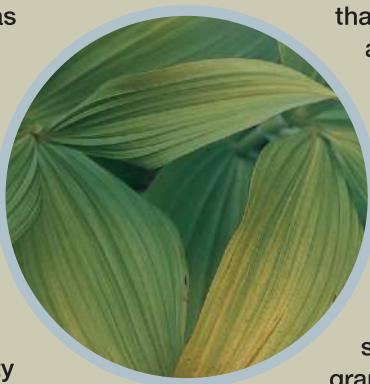
John Hodson, the co-ordinator of the Aboriginal education program at Brock University, believes they've arrived — and they're wearing facial piercings and backward baseball caps.

He said native cultures were "gutted" by residential schools and restrictive government policies until the 1970s, making today's youth the first generation in years to be in tune with the ways of the past, enabling them to "walk in both worlds."

"Aboriginal people are becoming savvy in both our own culture and savvy in maneuvering within the mainstream," he said. "So we're starting to ask ourselves: 'What is it our colonial experience has given us?' and the next stage is 'OK, what do we want to be?'

"It's like finding a place in modern life for ideas that are 45 000 years old."

— *The Standard*, St. Catharines, Ontario



We need for all four levels of government — federal, provincial, municipal, and Aboriginal — to recognize the new urban reality [in Edmonton] and work in concert to provide our city's Aboriginal citizens with all the help they need, from settlement services to English classes to affordable housing to access to post-secondary education.

Finally, and vitally, we need to ensure that such services are, as much as possible "status blind" — that they serve all Aboriginal people who need support, not just status Indians, but also Inuit, Métis, non-status Indians, and those of blended heritage.

We can't sustain a system where people only get services because of who their grandparents were. We need to make sure services are based on need, not on purity of bloodlines alone.

We can't work together on this city's future with a social infrastructure based on a vanished past. We don't need any more commissions or inquiries. We need action, and we need it soon. Neither our city nor our Aboriginal community has much time to waste.

— Paula Simons, *Edmonton Journal*

REFLECTION

Share your own experiences or impressions of urban life with your classmates.

LOOKING BACK

As a class, talk about the challenges that can make it difficult for Aboriginal people who grow up in rural areas to make the transition to city life. How are these challenges currently being addressed? What challenges remain?



Effective Services for Aboriginal People

AS YOU READ

In the last section, you learned that lack of services is one of the biggest problems urban Aboriginal people face. Like other Canadians, Aboriginal people receive many services from the federal government. Some services are only for Aboriginal people. However, these services vary widely in their availability, their accessibility, and their effectiveness.

Pages 198–205 examine some of the services the federal government provides to Aboriginal people and the changes being made to how those services are provided. In addition, it looks at issues and controversies surrounding these services and how they are delivered. As you read, make notes about each controversy and consider your own attitude towards it.

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT PEOPLE IN CANADA ENJOY ALL THE RIGHTS AND BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO OTHER CANADIANS, INCLUDING PROGRAMS SUCH AS THE CANADIAN CHILD TAX BENEFIT, OLD AGE PENSIONS, AND EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE.

Indigenous Knowledge

For a person to be healthy [he or she] must be adequately fed, be educated, have access to medical facilities, have access to spiritual comfort, live in a warm and comfortable house with clean water and safe sewage disposal, be secure in cultural identity, have an opportunity to excel in a meaningful endeavour, and so on. These are not separate needs: they are all aspects of a whole.

— Henry Zoe, Dogrib Treaty Eleven Council,
Brief to the Royal Commission
on Aboriginal Peoples

Is health, as described by Henry Zoe, a right? What factors might prevent a person from being healthy as he describes it? What kinds of programs and services exist to address this problem?

In addition, Aboriginal people are entitled to special services and rights. As stated in the Red Paper (Aboriginal leaders' response to the government's 1969 White Paper) Aboriginal people are "Citizens Plus." When Canada's historical treaties were signed, the federal government agreed to provide First Nations with services in exchange for use of the land they occupied. Among the most important of these services today are post-secondary education assistance and non-insured health care benefits.

Contemporary land-claims agreements, such as those signed by Inuit people, often include similar benefits.

Most of the federal government's programs and services for Aboriginal people are available to First Nations people living on reserves. Some of the government's services are available to all Aboriginal people, including Métis, Inuit, First Nations people without status, and First Nations people who live off-reserve. Provincial, territorial, and municipal governments sometimes offer services for Aboriginal people, typically in response to needs that federal government programs are not meeting.

Governments must consider many issues when making decisions about Aboriginal programs. They must consider, of course, their financial responsibility to all Canadians. The cost of services must be kept under control and the effectiveness of services must be monitored. In general, services are more easily delivered in areas with larger Aboriginal populations. Larger populations make services more cost

effective. Where there are larger concentrations of Aboriginal people, services can be tailored to meet their specific needs. In some cases, Aboriginal organizations can be provided with the resources to design and deliver their own programs.

In general, services are provided in one of three ways. Some programs are delivered jointly by Aboriginal communities and the government. An example of this is the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS), a program designed to help Aboriginal people obtain and keep employment.

AHRDS offers programs in over 400 locations across Canada. Each program is provided through a local Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement Holder. Each agreement holder determines the programming needs of the community it serves. To meet the needs of the largest possible number of Aboriginal people, AHRDS was developed in conjunction with the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, and the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Other services are provided directly by the government to Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal Business Canada is an Industry Canada program that assists Aboriginal entrepreneurs in starting or expanding their own businesses.

Some services are funded by the government, but delivered by Aboriginal communities. For example, the Athabasca Tribal Council operates the Mark Amy Treatment Centre for Addictions. The centre delivers a

MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA

The Métis Nation of Alberta is having great success with its Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy programs. Three people who have received help through this program are profiled below.

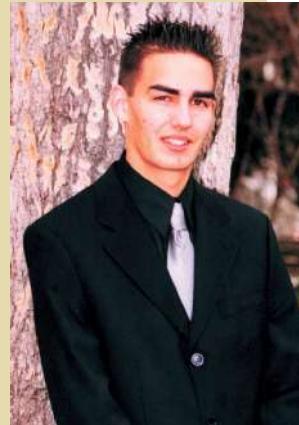
Jennifer and Holly Mueller, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Jennifer and Holly took the Aboriginal Policing and Security Program at Grant MacEwan College with funding from the Métis Nation of Alberta Region VI. After successfully completing the program, they went on to complete their RCMP depot training. Holly is now posted in Rimbey and Jennifer is posted at the Piikani Nation Reserve.



Brandon Bursey, Computer Support Technician

The Region III Métis Employment Services in Calgary helped Brandon access funding for the Computer Support Technician Program at SAIT. Brandon not only completed the program with fantastic marks, he also tutored his fellow students. He was hired by IBM as a consultant and has had two promotions in his short time with the company.



REFLECTION

Research at least one employment or scholarship program or service that you are eligible to receive and report on the program to your class.



There is great diversity among Aboriginal cultures and communities across the country. For example, consider the different needs of an Inuit community and a First Nations reserve in southern Alberta. One-size-fits-all programs do not work. Government programs must have enough flexibility to adapt to local needs.

❶ twenty-eight-day program to First Nations members who are struggling with addictions. The program tackles the issues of addiction from a First Nations perspective.

Whether the government or an Aboriginal community delivers a service often depends on the characteristics of the community involved. A community's ability to deliver services depends upon the size of its land base, its geographic location, its adherence to traditional values, economy, and culture, its local history, and its human and financial resources.

❶ A lack of human resources — people with the specific skills needed to assume control over services — is a significant problem in many communities. For instance, there are approximately fifty Aboriginal physicians in all of Canada, with even fewer people trained in health management. Compounding the problem, many well-trained Aboriginal people leave their communities to seek jobs or further education elsewhere.

❶ Many Aboriginal communities have highly motivated, energetic, and skilled individuals who provide capable leadership, but this core group is often overworked and overburdened. The nature of Aboriginal



community life and the shortage of human resources mean that most communities are able to handle only two or three major initiatives at any one time. This is one reason why Aboriginal services may require significant time to develop.

As much as possible, the federal government's policy of devolution is putting Aboriginal services in the hands of Aboriginal communities. This requires co-operation among Aboriginal political leaders and community members, along with regional, provincial, and national governments.

CONTROVERSIES

The existence of services specifically for Aboriginal people can be controversial. Some non-Aboriginal people hold on to stereotypes that deny the worth of Aboriginal cultures. They continue to believe that Aboriginal people should assimilate and be treated the same as other citizens.

Others deny the special status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. These people argue that Aboriginal peoples are no more entitled to special services than any other minority group. This argument trivializes the unique relationship Aboriginal peoples have with the land that is now called Canada, a relationship that is

fundamental to their cultures, values, and spirituality. It ignores their status as indigenous peoples. In addition, the argument ignores historic obligations that the federal government accepted in treaties and other agreements with Aboriginal groups.

Another argument proposes that Aboriginal people have changed and are now culturally much the same as other Canadians. This argument suggests that if this is true, then Aboriginal people should be treated the same as other Canadians. However, this argument rests on a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of cultures. It is true that some Aboriginal traditions and practices have faded over time, but all cultures evolve. Aboriginal people cannot be expected to behave as they did centuries ago, any more than non-Aboriginal people can be. If other contemporary cultures exist, contemporary (including urban) Aboriginal cultures will also exist.

Some people fear that Aboriginal services place an unfair tax burden on the average citizen. Such views ignore the important economic, social, and moral benefits of encouraging all communities across Canada to fulfill their potential. The costs of not improving services may well be far greater.

Aboriginal people are also divided on the subject of services for their communities. Some Aboriginal people find comfort in the status quo and resist the idea of fundamental change, such as the devolution of services to Aboriginal governments and organizations. Some argue that Aboriginal leadership is not yet prepared to deliver services. They

worry about the consequences of concentrating power in the hands of a small and powerful Aboriginal elite. Others question the government's motives for reducing its role in Aboriginal communities. They fear that the long-standing relationship between government and Aboriginal peoples will be jeopardized, and that they will lose their services as a result.

Another controversy concerns whether services should be status-blind and open to all Aboriginal people, or whether services should be specifically tailored for specific groups of people, such as Métis people or First Nations people with treaty rights. Those who argue for status-blind services make the case that this change would result in less overlap and more cost-effective services. Those who argue against it suggest that cultural identity and historical rights require that specific groups have specific rights.

DE VOLVING SERVICES TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Although some Aboriginal people express reluctance about Aboriginal administration of Aboriginal services, most are highly supportive. Evidence suggests that services designed and delivered by Aboriginal people to Aboriginal people are more effective. In a survey of people who use Friendship Centres, for example, 83 per cent said they were highly satisfied with the service they received.

A major problem with services for Aboriginal people that are delivered by non-Aboriginal governments is cultural bias. In the past, mainstream governments did not



Aboriginal Head Start is an early childhood education program funded by the federal government. This photo was taken at the Wii-jii-waaganesag (Ojibway for “our little companions”) Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve Program at the Pic River First Nation in Ontario. Working with Aboriginal community groups, Head Start programs across the country help teach children to read, eat well, and speak their traditional languages. Research how this program is delivered and administered. Decide whether and how improvements could be made. Write a one-page report of recommendations.

- ⦿ always deliver and administer their programs in ways that respected the values, traditions, and cultures of Aboriginal groups. They did not take into account the effect their programs might have on the people and communities receiving them. For example, residential schools, theoretically an educational service to First Nations, instead caused enormous social and cultural dislocation. Even today, government programs and services for Aboriginal people may contain unintended cultural bias.

One way to ensure that programs are not culturally biased is to listen to the people who receive the services. For example, Aboriginal people have asked that agencies dealing with Aboriginal communities employ more Aboriginal workers and that they offer services in Aboriginal languages. Another solution is to hand over control of services to Aboriginal people.



The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) is offered by the Gabriel Dumont Institute in co-operation with Saskatchewan Learning, the University of Regina, and the University of Saskatchewan. The program ensures its graduates have a solid background in Métis and First Nations culture and history. Research the needs this program is intended to fit.

Many political leaders believe that government-delivered services discourage Aboriginal people from realizing self-determination. Aboriginal leaders also feel that it is important to offer services in their own languages and in ways that reflect and promote their cultural values. For example, non-Aboriginal health care services tend to focus on treating the symptoms of problems, rather than the causes. Aboriginal health care methods look at more holistic solutions to health problems.

Today, governments recognize that they cannot develop effective programs and services for Aboriginal people without their help in designing, delivering, and evaluating them. However, government systems, by their nature, tend to preserve the status quo. Government officials may have little incentive to encourage Aboriginal communities to develop innovative solutions to their problems. Some may resist change, even with significant evidence that suggests the need for change.

ABORIGINAL SERVICES FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Today, many Aboriginal people are designing and delivering services for their own communities. When individuals and communities are given the opportunity to conduct their own affairs, they become more self-sufficient. Individuals learn that they have a role to play in making their communities stronger, healthier, safer, and more productive.

When community members deliver services, the whole community is empowered. Most Aboriginal-led services are based on widespread community consultation, which results in programs that address needs appropriately.



What cultural values might affect the way health care is delivered to Aboriginal populations? How might more Aboriginal health care workers increase the quality of care for Aboriginal populations?

For example, Nunavut Sivuniksavut is an eight-month college program that helps Inuit youth to make the transition from their home in Nunavut to university in southern Canada. The program teaches students about Inuit history, organizations, and the Nunavut land-claim

NATIVE COUNSELLING SERVICES OF ALBERTA

Native Counselling Services of Alberta offers several restorative justice and correctional programs that ensure Aboriginal people are treated fairly and equally in Alberta's justice system. One of its correctional programs, the Stan Daniels Healing Centre, is a service it provides under contract with Correctional Services Canada. Programming at the centre is guided by resident needs under the direction of Elders. One successful program at the institution is the *Oskipi Matsuin* (Cree for "new life") program, which helps residents develop life skills in a culturally sensitive manner.

Native Counselling Services also offers a Criminal Courtwork program, which counsels Aboriginal people in their rights, court procedure, and availability of resources to help them. The program costs are shared between Alberta Justice and Justice Canada. In the 2001–2002 fiscal year, the program had 14 623 clients.

A significant initiative for young offenders is a program called *Kochee Mena*, which is Cree for "try again." The Alberta Solicitor General contracts Native Counselling Services to provide the service for Aboriginal male young offenders. *Kochee Mena* is a safe, holistic environment that provides residents with education (in partnership with the Edmonton Public School Board) and cultural programs, as well as recreation and independent living education.



REFLECTION

How do these examples from the Native Counselling Services of Alberta demonstrate the increasing flexibility that governments are showing in order to address Aboriginal people's needs? Why are initiatives in justice important? What kinds of programs might alleviate the need for so many justice services?



Métis Child and Family Services heads a program to provide various kinds of support for Métis children. Here, fiddle instructor Gary Lee gives lessons to support children's cultural education.

I have been in nursing for thirteen years and I have recently returned to university to complete a baccalaureate in nursing. Nursing has given me the opportunity to work in areas such as Auxiliary, Medical Surgical, Emergency, and Labour and Delivery. Through further education I now work in Population Health as a Diabetes Educator and Health Promotion Specialist. My education and work experience has helped me grow professionally and develop my self-confidence and self-esteem. Now, I feel like I have more opportunities than I ever dreamed possible.

I've always been a helping person and was drawn to the medical profession because I saw that I could do so much to help people. I never imagined, though, how much I would learn, because in medicine, you never stop learning. Through medicine I have also gained self-knowledge about my own health and well-being and the importance of preventative health.

I strongly encourage young people to enter the health profession. It's a career that can take you so many directions with endless opportunities. Opportunities that are waiting for you in your community.

— Lee Ann Johnson, Registered Nurse,
Kainai Diabetes Program



Lee Ann Johnson

trained people to communicate land-claims negotiation status to local communities. Since settlement of the land claim, it has become a college transition program.

In Alberta, one successful service began in April 2003, when the Alexis First Nation signed a Community Tripartite Agreement that gives it greater control over policing services. Under the agreement, two Aboriginal members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police First Nations Community Policing Service provide full-time service to the reserve. The two officers work out of a satellite office located in the community. Residents on the Community Advisory Committee consult with the officers to ensure that communications are open and that local policing issues are addressed. This agreement provides the community with professional, effective, accountable, and culturally sensitive services.

Another initiative involves Aboriginal Health Careers, a federal government program designed to address the shortage of First Nations health professionals. The program encourages Aboriginal youth, in particular high school students, to pursue training and careers in health care.

As part of this program, the Treaty Seven Tribal Council has worked hard to encourage young people to pursue health careers. For example, the council provides funding to students to research and develop school projects related to health careers. It also offers Nursing Incentive Awards, financial awards to students who pursue nursing as a career.

- ❖ settlement. It also helps the students adjust to life in an urban environment. The program was initiated in 1985 by the Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut. The original program

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE SERVICES FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

How should effective services for Aboriginal people be designed and delivered?

WHAT TO DO

1. With a partner, visit the Government of Canada Web site (www.canada.gc.ca) to find out more about the various services that the federal government provides to Aboriginal people.
2. Choose one government service that interests you. Why does the government offer this service? What benefits, both direct and indirect, does it offer to Aboriginal people? What could make the service more effective?
3. If possible, supplement your research by interviewing a local person who either receives services from or works for this service. What are his or her impressions of the effectiveness and problems with the service?
4. Prepare similar research on an Aboriginal service that is delivered by an Aboriginal organization, even if it is funded by the federal or provincial government. What are its challenges and accomplishments? How effective do you believe it is? What could make it more effective?
5. If possible, interview someone who receives benefits from this service or someone who works for it. What are his or her impressions of the effectiveness and problems with the service?
6. Design a service to be run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. Be sure to consider some of the challenges and problems you found in your research about the other services you studied. What particular benefits do you see in having this service run by an Aboriginal community? What problems or challenges might communities face in creating and delivering this service?
7. Create a promotional brochure and Web site advertising the service and its goals. Include details, such as what the service offers, who qualifies for the service, and how people may access it.

LOOKING BACK

The examples of services discussed in this section relate specifically to policing, health, and employment or economic development. What other services should have Aboriginal involvement? As a class, discuss the role non-Aboriginal governments should play in providing services to Aboriginal communities. Why are some First Nations communities more active than others in designing and running their own services? What factors might deter some communities from doing so? Why are Aboriginal services for Aboriginal people seen as an important goal by both the federal government and Aboriginal leaders? How does this issue relate to larger questions, such as Aboriginal self-determination?

Chapter Six Review

Check Your Understanding

1. Why do some First Nations people choose to live on reserves? What are the major benefits of reserve life?
2. List factors that might make a First Nations person choose to leave a reserve and move to a city.
3. List factors that can make it difficult for Aboriginal people used to life in Aboriginal communities to make the transition to life in an urban centre.
4. Why might some First Nations people move back to reserves, even if they are adapting well to life in a city?
5. What are the challenges and benefits of developing resources in Aboriginal communities?

Marvin Francis was a poet, playwright, artist, and theatre director who passed away in early 2005. When he was a child, his mother moved him and his siblings away from the Heart Lake First Nation to help them avoid attending residential school. Francis grew up in many locations, but spent much time in Winnipeg and Edmonton.

mcPemmican

first you get the grease from canola buffalo
then you find mystery meat
you must package this in
bright colours just like beads

let the poor intake their money take their health
sound familiar
chase fast food off the cliff
speed beef
deer on a bun
bury in the ground

special this day
mcPemmican “cash those icons in
how about a
mcTreaty”

would you like some lies with that?

6. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has a stated goal of ensuring that people living on reserves receive the same basic government services as other Canadians. What steps is the government taking to accomplish this? In your opinion, has the government achieved its goal?
7. Why do some non-Aboriginal people object to special government services for Aboriginal people? In a table, list some of the arguments in one column. In the second column, examine each argument from an Aboriginal perspective.
8. Many First Nations now take an active role in delivering child and family services on reserves. Why might this be an important area for Aboriginal-led initiatives?
9. What factors can affect a community's ability to deliver its own services?
10. What roles do Friendship Centres play in the urban community?

Reading and Writing

11. Research at least four examples of services now being delivered by Aboriginal people to Aboriginal people. What needs does each service address? For each one, describe why it is appropriate that management of the service is in Aboriginal hands. What differences does it make to the people receiving the service?
12. Read the poem by Marvin Francis on this page. It conveys some of his impressions of life in an urban environment. “McPemmican” discusses the fast-food, disposable culture prevalent on city streets. Discuss the poem with a partner and summarize what you think Francis’s point is and how he makes it.



Air Mikisew is owned and operated by the Mikisew Cree First Nation out of Fort Chipewyan, Alberta. The successful airline has a full range of air services, including fishing charters with its floatplanes. It is also under contract with the Alberta government to provide emergency medical air transportation.



As part of its community initiatives around its Athabasca Oil Sands project, Shell Canada helped construct a new Elders Centre at Fort McKay and agreed to help finance its operation for the first three years.

Viewing and Representing

13. Imagine you are the recruiting officer for a newly established First Nations police service. Create a poster to attract applicants for the position of police officer. Remember to list the qualifications for your ideal candidate and to describe the reasons why people might enjoy the job.
14. Design a campaign to educate non-Aboriginal Canadians about treaties, treaty rights, and services for First Nations. You might plan posters, billboards, radio or television advertisements, or press releases.

Speaking and Listening

15. Air Mikisew, featured in a photograph on this page, is just one of many band- and settlement-operated businesses in Alberta. Research a business run by a local First Nation or Métis Settlement. How does the business affect life in the community? If possible, interview a spokesperson for the business to find specific examples of the business' impact on the community. Give a short (5 minute) presentation about the company to your class.

16. The Elders Centre at Fort McKay, pictured on this page, is one way that resource development has benefited a local community. Write a newspaper article about how resource development has affected a local reserve or settlement. You will likely need to interview people living and working in the community to get a sense of different perspectives on the topic.

Going Further

17. As a class, arrange a visit to your local Friendship Centre. Ask a member of the staff to give you a tour. Talk to the people who work there and, if you can, some of the people who use the facility. Write a report about your visit, describing the role the Friendship Centre plays in your community.

LOOKING BACK

Return to the narrative voice in Shingoose's song on pages 178–179. How does this narrative voice compare to the voice expressed in Marvin Francis's poem? Is humour also part of Francis's work? If so, explain how. Write your own song or poem that describes your experiences of urban or rural lifestyles.