



# Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Four Arrows Regional Health Authority Inc.



## Oji-Cree Traditional Elders and Youth “Gathering”

December 7-8, 2010

Participants:

Elders:	Garden Hill:	Murdo McDougall Tommy Little Lillian Flett
	St. Theresa Point:	Hector Monias Eli Monias
	Wasagamack:	Josie McDougall Andy Wood Eliza Beardy
	Red Sucker Lake:	Norbert Flett Sampson Harper
Youth:	Garden Hill:	Tyrone Munroe
	St. Theresa Point:	Felix Manoakeesick
	Wasagamack:	Ryan Harper
	Red Sucker Lake:	Sean Harper
Facilitator:	Four Arrows RHA: AMC	Byron Beardy/Laurie Wood Ducharme Kevin Beardy

**PURPOSE:**

In the mid 1990's, the AMC Health Information Research Governance Committee (HIRGC) was mandated by the Manitoba Chiefs in Assembly to review research proposals that would promote First Nations Health benefits through the Regional Health Survey. HIRGC directed funding to host meetings with First Nations Traditional Elders to begin the process of exploring what each community /region knowledge on traditional practices. Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs was requested to coordinate territorial meetings for each of the cultural groups (Cree, Oji-Cree, Ojibway and Dene). The purpose of these meetings was to gather information and recommendations on best ways to share and document their knowledge for the benefit of current and future generations.

## **AGENDA:**

### Opening Prayer

### Opening Remarks and Purpose

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs: Kevin Beardy

1. Understanding what is traditional knowledge. What is it? And what does it encompass.
2. How do we share traditional knowledge
  - Present , what is occurring presently
  - Future, what needs to occur
3. Youth: what and where is the best way to learn
4. How do we document traditional knowledge
5. Is it safe to document?
6. Discussion: how to preserve traditional knowledge through community based research and other avenues

### Closing Remarks/Prayer

## **REPORT:**

Island Lake Oji-Cree Elders, youth and spiritual helpers were invited to a two-day forum to discuss the attached agenda. Because the main facilitator did not speak the Oji-Cree dialect, it was feared that some of the content and discussion might be lost in the translation so one of the elders was asked to take notes and agreed. It was difficult to follow the agenda as discussion was done in a roundtable and sharing circle format. This was done twice; to begin the discussions on the first day and closing discussions on the second day. In the interval an open discussion was very informative although, it was noticed that not everyone participated in the open format. In addition, the closing roundtable on the second day was not completed as time expired, and some elders shared extensively and it was difficult to control and manage the time.

Key points were made by several of the participants at this gathering, the language of the Oji-Cree remains quite strong in the region of ILTC and there was a strong sense of unity.

First of the main concerns of the Elders and Youth that were identified was the fact of the interference of modern technology and how the young people spend more time playing video games and watching television at the grassroots level. The other key area made during the first day was the fact that not enough connections to the land and nature that is so abundant in the region of Oji-Cree people does not happen as often as they would like due to the lack of resources. Other key elements was the fact the ILTC region is very rich with medicines, even in winter it remains under the snow and that the spirit of the land is very much alive. The environment also remains of great concern and that more Elders and Youth need to utilize the areas so that the growing gap between them can be closed to a certain degree in order for their languages to be taught and retained by both groups.

The recognition of Inter-generational trauma was also addressed as the people have been devastated to a high degree as a result of many traumatic events both past and present. Multiple losses and trauma exposure, historical trauma response and unresolved grief still affect the health of the ILTC people. First Nations need to mourn those losses not as individuals but as a collective as many First Nations live in complicated grief resulting in poor judgment and negative behaviors and that it is very difficult for many families to be together. Many examples exist where the ILTC First Nations live with survivor guilt; self destructive behaviors, suicidal ideation; psychic numbing which leads to substance abuse; Low self esteem. Dissociation, which leads the young people towards joining gangs because of the isolation they must deal with on a constant basis. Anger is felt by the whole area as a result. It is known that ILTC First

Nations have self hatred and is very much the reason as to why there is so much in fighting at the First Nations level. The ILTC region and communities are in crisis and that was one of the reasons why the gathering was needed as sometimes they are unable to mobilize problem solving skills as there are protective factors, referring to conditions the people live in. There are different levels of crisis and that their whole environment is affected in many other ways such as; Hydro, lack of access to major centers' and the high price of flying people in and out of the ILTC region. The trauma that was felt during the gathering provided people with the support they needed to address issues from their own stories and perspectives.

Other important acknowledgements were the need for more doctors and nurses in the ILTC region and the need for a hospital in the region should be worked on by the Chiefs, Councils, Health Departments, and all departments in their ILTC apparatus.

All of the participants were able to express their concerns about the loss of so much, more importantly the family connections and the language that keeps those families of the ILTC region together. It was made clear that epidemics have decimated their people for many years and now there are other factors that destroy families and environment as a whole. Cancer, Diabetes, Substance abuse, physical abuse, among other concerns plague the region and more people from the ILTC need to now address those concerns, not as individual First Nations but as a collective. Families need to start to walk together; more spiritual connections need to be made by both young and old alike. There was consensus made that more community support is needed in order for the language and other concerns to be addressed and dealt with in a healthy manner.

Providing solutions was the key word for the second day of the Oji-Cree gathering. Protocol is misleading the elders was one of the concerns made at this gathering, because there are different methods used by different First Nations even in the ILTC region.

Other issues that needed solutions were the fact that too many young people don't get married but instead live in a common-law relationship which weakens the fabric of families which leads to abuse issues in many life areas of the young people of ILTC. It was mentioned that the leadership allow too many things happen in the communities and are not representative enough for the people. Each First Nation of the ILTC region has its own unique problems and that solutions are needed now.

The people of the ILTC are very resilient and have been able to adapt to most of the changes over a long period of time. Their strength is the language and was made clear they need to retain it by any necessary means and was also made clear that the people of ILTC region have been able to recover from setbacks and to meet challenges, and to also challenge oppressing forces. The ILTC First Nations need to enhance local control in order for group effectiveness to work. For example; Infrastructure, support for women and young people. Their First Nations need to examine many life areas in order to get past community protective factors of their First Nations. There is a need to look at the issues from a holistic perspective and that requires a team approach that is flexible in order for; cultural continuity, spirituality, education, and fact based evidence to move the ILTC First Nations forward beyond the problems. It's important to note that the Elders and Youth will be heard from their unique experiences. The people have to walk in both worlds and that education in every aspect is very important through the Oji-Cree language base and it needs to be implemented into more school curriculum.

More solutions that were identified are respect and forgiveness which opens the doors towards re-building the spirit in the ILTC First Nations communities from within, not from the outside. More resources are identified as one of the major concerns of the First Nations of the ILTC region. Solutions towards more access for funding sources need to be followed up on by each First Nation of the region. The solutions and recommendations that are presented require very personal contact by each respected First Nation in the ILTC region.

The need for commitment from the Elders became very apparent as the Oji-Cree Elder and Youth gathering progressed. The group identified that modern western medicines are hurting their people and that it takes away family values i.e.: drug abuse, trauma, emotional, spiritual, body and mind are all negatively affected. The challenges exist and the Elders and Youth have a duty to take and give the teachings to all people, not only choosing certain people of the ILTC region. It was made clear that the young people need to preserve and have patience in their lives and that this way of living may fill that gap between their people. The identification was made that the schools are playing a negative role as they presume all kids who have some type of learning disability is a bad child, that needs to be addressed from the ILTC grassroots level and that all First nations departments need to play an important role towards addressing such issues. The need to start at individual First Nations and then moving more towards a gathering of all four First Nations may provide further solutions and that commitment is very crucial. Respect needs to be instilled and that love will play an important role in that move towards positive changes.

The message is clear there is needs for more healing processes and to think of the wide open spaces, the land, the piece and serenity and to never forget the ancestors that came before them as they witnessed and bared a lot of the imposed changes created by the dominant society. History matters, changes are needed and this may relate to creation of focus groups; analysis meetings and should begin from the participation by Elders and Youth of the ILTC region. This history towards change involves respect from all community members which is essential for language; spirituality and culture moving towards First Nations based solutions in the ILTC region. The success of the Oji-Cree gathering with the Elders and Youth has created a teaching path towards teaching people their language of Oji-Cree and does a lot towards engaging the ILTC First Nations in creating further solutions in future.

*Thank you to Kevin Beardy for your assistance in this report*

#### **ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS:**

**The following are comments made by elders and youth. Names were not identified but the thoughts and ideas were a shared concern:**

The youth indicated that there are language issues and concerns: Oji-Cree retention should be a priority. There is a clash between too much TV media, internet etc and those who still learn on the trap line and live off the land.

An elder feared too much loss of tradition, including religion and language spoken and written. Hunting, fishing and trapping off the land were good traditions, but people fearing sickness and illness threat started staying in and around the communities. No idea that staying and living off the land was the healthiest life. Elders are finding it hard to teach traditions and concepts because of the language barrier. There is no communication between the young and old, it is important to teach love, kindness and respect for one another.

These types of youth-elder sessions are very valuable in filling the gap between the two. There is healing and wellness in the inter-action: to obtain wisdom and experience from elders and the youth provide strength and willingness to learn. The two have to respect and support each other.

Attendance at these learning sessions is very important and needs to encircle the extended family, grand children and great grand children. Prayer, giving praise and thanks are required. Offering and asking for blessings, and giving help and support. There are different forms of prayer and different ways but people have to understand and mean and dedicate their thanks and prayers. The elders used to dream of medicines during times of sickness (mint) in the community. They offered thanks for the medicines; medicine is living and has a life and a spirit of its own. Prayers were offered before the Hunt, prayer to

the spirit of the animal for help. Sickness also is a living virus and the right medicines need to combat the illness. There was not enough done to teach and combat the Fear of the illness.

**There is not enough teaching, the difference between then and now.** Our forefathers raised and taught us everything. They gave us wisdom, spiritual teachings, traditional medicines (plants). The teachings and religion were based on traditional ways. There are too many present negative influences; no one teaches their children to be bad. Presently there is no respect for the elders and the teachings therefore there is a loss of culture and tradition. How do we fight these negative influences and impacts on everyone, even our elders?

There were large extended families that were taught the way of life including the ways to survival, thought and spirituality. Spanking was part of the teaching but in today's world that is considered to be negative. The white education system destroyed our way of life and teaching. We had our own education and teaching system, our own ways of life which was living on the land. The Residential School System destroyed a lot of our people. We need to search and find our way back together. Too many people are away from their home and their family life and the Circle of Life has been destroyed. We need to return to our peaceful existence, our way of life, away from the outside influences. There is not enough teaching about their social ills and these are foreign to our way of life and existence.

Some parents today support their children even in a negative manner. Parents have to take ownership and responsibility for their children and for how they turn out. Proper teaching and parenting is required, which is obtained from elder teachings and wisdom from the way of life. It is important to teach about the Good Road, the good way. People have to live according to what they teach and they have to be good role models. There needs to be respect, acceptance, unity and searching together for "minoayawin".

The best way to learn is living on the land, in the bush and the teachings come from the old way of life, how to learn to live a good life. Everything was about life and survival and in order to survive, people had to know all the teachings about respect for everyone and everything. The white education system seems to disrupt our way of life, our teachings and how we taught and raised our families. Respect is very important, but it has to go both ways, elders have to respect youth. There has to be proper communication: don't use your elder status to disrespect or dismiss the youth. In your teachings, don't be boring and don't spend too much time on life stories. The old way of teaching was by doing, by example, by showing how. The traditional way of teaching is by living the life, by doing, by supporting. There is a lot of wisdom, experience, knowledge and teaching in the elders and there is a loss if the teaching and information is not passed on.

In medicines, we have to believe in the spirit, to have faith in the power. There are traditional ways of gathering and there are traditional spirits of healing and how to heal. **Minoayawin is knowledge** and a way of life and **pimachiwowin is survival**, using that knowledge. Let's change our way of thinking, positive thoughts, and let's offer and ask for blessings and guidance.

I offer thanks for this gathering. The white, western and dominant way of teaching, thinking and way of life is destroying our lives. I had no formal education and my family upbringing was through the extended family. I learned the traditional way of living. I cut wood, learned fishing, snaring and .trapping. It was a hard life but I grew up strong and healthy. Survival is the traditional way of life was full of hardships but it was necessary in order to live. We were raised through good teachings, to give thanks and to honor the holy days. Now days there is no respect for spiritual or holy days. Elders and parents taught families and children how to respect and how to give thanks, how to respect one another and not to dismiss or disregard anyone, not to judge, to be kind and to love.

Today's world is a hard world we are facing with illnesses and sickness. We need to face these together, with one mind and one effort. We are all leaving the old ways and traditions behind and we need to

remember the teachings. I remember tobacco offerings and praying before harvesting of medicines and praying and giving thanks before taking the medicine.

I was taught to respect and to stand when presenting, and to cover head and shoulders, as a woman. I offer respect to the youth and the other participants. Our youth will take us to our future. Youth, please do not get bored with our elders and how they speak. We have lost our family ties and traditions through the RSS and our elders, youth and women need to work together to make sure our traditional knowledge and teachings are passed on. We cannot give up even though it seems our people and our communities seem lost. Traditional medicines are still abundant but there are not enough teachings. There are still choices, western and traditional medicines, ka ki kay puk, (muskeg tea) and wee kanz are very powerful, traditional foods are healthy and still in use. We need to be careful in the harvesting and preparation of traditional medicines, not to share these openly as there are a lot of unscrupulous people out there who want to harvest and sell these medicines. Where do we go from here? How do we help people and one another?? We need to believe and to have faith. We need to help everyone and to listen to one another. We have to learn to listen.

The education system for parenting, family skills and family life are not what they should be. The western technology, TV, internet, etc... is destroying families, values, culture, traditions and our language. We need to maintain our language.

I am worried about our traditional ways of life. Our forefathers and elders did not accept and take kindly to the negative influences brought by the white society into our territory. Alcoholism destroyed our families and our ways of life. The alcohol influx into our communities is non-acceptable; the liquor by-laws do not seem to be effective. Even our FN councilors are not respecting their Oaths of Office and the traditional law. We do not practice our values and our culture and I question the Indian Act, INAC, the white society and their laws.

Our traditional teachings are not written down. Our elders respect everything- the unwritten laws and teachings. The white man has letters for everything. All we have are our traditional law, our teachings, and our way of life. Live your life in a spiritual way and it will be forever. We have to obey. We have a choice to take these teachings. Our elders teach "listen to me and you will have a good life" This is guidance to heal yourself. We have to pass knowledge to our children. These teachings will come to an end but when? Our children are not carrying these teachings. Life is important. The parents and the elders are worried. Be humble, the white man's system has caused lots of damage.

There is too much negative perception of our youth. Peer pressure has a lot of impacts. There are negative influences even at our political levels. There are a lot of plans and discussions but nothing is being done. Young people have to be taught in the homes. There is also the wrong kind of support where parents are sticking up for the wrongs of their children. And there is the gang influences. Young people and youth have a choice to listen and to move and make changes. There has to be movement on how to heal this disease, this sickness of alcoholism, drugs and super juice. We all have to be instruments of the Creator, to help one another and our neighbor and friend as spiritual leaders.

We all have different views and understanding but we need our youth to be respected as role models. We are taught, save yourself and you can save your family. There is a powerful teaching, to respect all denominations and to love your neighbor, to give thanks and acceptance of what comes to you. Practice your traditions and medicines. We are hearing, hunting, trapping, fishing, living off the land and most important the teachings that come with those activities. Spirituality is nothing negative, no magic but miracles, belief, faith. We are all taught how to praise but we all have that choice. Our youth need to understand the elders and traditional teachings. Big changes have happened throughout the course of one's life. Adoptions, in the traditional way have led to conflicts. Marriage, in the traditional way, means acceptance of your partner and with the traditional teaching that "man is the head of the household." There has been so much misunderstanding of this teaching. Walk with your partner through

understanding of traditional knowledge. How? Through language. Our medicines are not lost but merely forgotten- plants, animals (bear grease). God created everything, so we must respect everything. Everything, our traditional ways, ways of life are gone as livelihoods but we must maintain the healing. In order to stay well, the best way is to learn from an elder. Heal families through feelings and not from books. Don't learn from your mind but from your heart.

Our women are our life, our teachers. They give us warmth and life. In our language, woman is Is ko, and Fire is Is ko tey, which means Heart of a Woman. We come from their life cord.

In carrying the teaching, be hungry for knowledge. We are losing our language and our youth have to learn and to be involved. Don't judge but create awareness. Our people and communities have the wrong perception of youth, not all youth are the same. Share knowledge and feelings. The RSS broke down families. Learn and gain an interest in the traditional ways. Get youth to open up, make friends and to share between the communities.

We have started on a path, like so many paths before. Let's make this path a difference. Let's make this path the starting point for change and let's not give up on our people and our communities.

### **SOLUTIONS: HOW CAN WE USE AND SHARE THIS KNOWLEDGE?**

Follow the traditional teachings and ways of life. These ways are declining but we need to revive, relearn these teachings and share and teach them to everyone, starting with the individuals, the families and then the communities. This process has to be community based and community owned. The individual, the households and the communities need to be involved. With the documentation, all the proper processes have to be followed and this has to be done by the communities. The leadership has to be aware, supportive and part of the whole process. This means the political leadership and the spiritual leadership and the elders and spiritual teachers.

Funding support and other resources need to be available for this healing. Minohaywin, is a Way of Life and includes all living things. Need to look at the family ties and relationships, marital relationships. The leadership need to provide the example, and take the lead role in this healing process.

We cannot lose our traditional knowledge and teachings. Our elders need help in maintaining and handing down these teachings to our families. We need to teach all our people not just the youth and we need to bring our people home.

Leadership has to be committed to continue and to lead the return to traditional teachings, familial teachings of love and forgiveness. All the communities have to come together in one body. We have all lost personal communication and contact. We need to love one another, speak with love, truth and honesty. If you speak true, you should have no fear. There is too much Fear and Dishonesty in our communities.

We need to work diligently while we are able, well and capable- elders need to come forth now. We need to follow up good plans, good decisions with commitment and dedication. There has been a lot of effort and cost to have these discussions but we need to follow up. Light a Fire and keep it going.

Things are harsh, youth spend too much time watching TV, games and driving around. Traditional styles, learning and knowledge is becoming lost and there are not enough resources in the community.

Listening and learning, lots of thinking, ONE BODY. Help each other, learned from grandparents, respect for life. Life is precious, important, loss of loved ones, respect our lives, rebuild and close the generation gap. Remember and revive teachings. Forgiveness is in order to heal.

Learning from listening, traditional knowledge is very important. Language retention, programs should not be separated, programs for elders and youth should be done together, Powerful teachings about forgiveness.

Regional and local thrust, grassroots, but how do we start? There is a lot of loss of information. Our elders cannot hear everything.

Feel very honored and thankful. We need to encourage youth to respect and to look for healing, prevention with an emphasis with looking at self. We need help on how to heal. We should offer help and support. Respect Mother Earth, learn gospel through elder teachings. Learn to respect other beliefs and that any good teaching needs to be respected, no matter where it comes from. Healing is not only for you, but for your children, your family. Forgiveness is a medicine.

There is no follow through on plans and discussions. Technicians come, but the directors or leadership with authority are not present.

Recommendation: Leadership should receive information personal contact or first hand. They need to be part of the process.

Traditional elder knowledge, is vast, skills, teachings have to be shown by example. There has to be a willingness to learn, priority incentives, traditional food bank, healthy foods, eagerness. We are losing our elders, sad to say, and some are wasting away. They are a very valuable resource of knowledge and skills.

Life should be a total commitment, with patience, understanding, prayer (acknowledgement), respect all religions. Leading a good life.

Lots of good intentions with religion but the process stalls at the community level and with the leadership. Not enough support from the leadership, no working unity at the regional leadership level - One mind, one body, one unit, one direction, one plan. It's encouraging to see youth involved in this minohayawin process. So where do we go?

This is a good process, honesty, straightforward, truthful. Our forefathers, ancestors and elders led the good life. This generation, we have lost a lot of peaceful existence because of the social illnesses and issues. We are all to blame (at fault) for our present situation, we have not followed the teachings, we have been disrupted by the white influences, system and education process. Physically: diet, lack of movement, sicknesses, disease. Mentally: stressful environment because of the negativity. Spiritually: youth and people losing faith and teachings. There is not enough intervention and corrective action. We need enforcement and strong preventative action.

The Chiefs and Councils and communities need to work together in unity, with a desire and commitment to improve and work towards a good future for our children and grandchildren. Grassroots movements has to start in the community to encourage a return and revival of the traditional teachings, traditional life, and learning from medicines, life experiences, food, sharing all the teachings

We have to teach each other and turn away from the negativity that was put on us by the white system. We have to learn by seeing things and how things are done.. our elders have the knowledge and teachings and we have to return to and maintain those teachings.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The participants asked about a second meeting, up in the communities, to complete the session and to begin planning on how to share the traditional knowledge and on what needs to occur. The elders felt that it would be important for each of the community participants to return home to their communities

and begin another round of discussions. The protocols and how to continue these discussions at the grassroots level is what needs further discussion and completion.

The four components were all touched on by all participants in one form or another were as follows:

- Knowledge Transfer – teaching the young people
- Collaboration/Relationship Building – restoration of relationships of all people
- Organization/Governance – bring all knowledge together
- Knowledge Enhancement – to share their knowledge

**SUMMARY:**

The youth and elders all indicated that this was a first time that this kind of session has occurred. Their desire is to keep this momentum going and continue this process of passing on the knowledge. The elders expressed a concern that we are losing these teachings at a rapid rate and our own people will not even know what traditional knowledge is so the continuing of transfer of knowledge needs to be done. It is too important for our people, for our children and grandchildren and their children because once it is lost, it is gone, and while we have the chance to rebuild and grow, we should take that opportunity to use our elders and youth together. One suggestion was that these gatherings be done in conjunction with the four seasons in the future. Each season has a different role in regards to traditional medicine/food/knowledge etc so to host forums/workshops during these specific seasons, the focus will more defined and this way the youth and communities will also learn about how the seasons work with the elders teachings and knowledge.

We would like lastly to thank the Kevin Beardy, Kathi Kinew Avery, Leanne Gillis, Byron Beardy and Andy Wood for all their assistance and to Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs for this wonderful opportunity. It was well received and as stated in the opening remarks, according to the participants this has never been done and would to continue so from Four Arrows RHA communities we thank you.