

Native Elders Meet to Help Community

Written by the All Nations Elders Counsel

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Aboriginal Elders in Prince George have been coming together for almost a year now to discuss establishing an Elders Council. They have been healing together and discussing projects that they can work on for the betterment of the entire Prince George community.

Jim Roberts had a heartfelt desire to see change. He wanted to see unity and strength between the Elders, as well as much needed healing. About a year ago he approached the Aboriginal Business Development Centre and asked if they might help him to bring all of the urban Aboriginal Elders together. This project may have had humble roots, but it's getting to be pretty amazing.

The first step was to bring Elders together in a safe environment where they could participate in a facilitated healing process. A three day healing camp took place last October and it was a very powerful weekend filled with healing and cultural reconnection. Winston Wuttunee and five volunteer facilitators helped the Elders to communicate and three main themes came out of the discussions: communication, unity and the idea of forming an Elder's group.

All three ideas were discussed at length, all being equally important. However, without unity and communication, forming an Elder's group would be impossible. The Elders agreed to work at communicating and being united. It was decided that the Elders at the camp would comprise the core Elders to facilitate the next steps.

Not wanting to lose the valuable insight that they left camp with, the Elders agreed to meet on a regular basis at the Native Friendship Centre.

These meetings were open for all Elders to attend. The Elders also formed a newsletter, "Elder's Rock", to share with all Elders and their families. Everyone was invited (and is still invited) to submit articles about upcoming events and activities in the community.

On February 18th to 19th the Elders held a community meeting at the Civic Centre. The purpose of the gathering was to garner community input and to identify common objectives that Elders could work together on.

The first day of the gathering was open to all members of the community. It was great success - about 190 people participated. They brought an Open Space facilitator, Chris Robertson, to guide the discussion. During this portion of the session, 33 discussion groups were proposed and three themes emerged: "Elders in the community", "Health" and "Elders and Youth working together".

The second day of the gathering was for the Elders only. They reviewed the previous day's discussion and decided how to proceed from there. The Elders agreed to change the name of the group from "Urban Aboriginal Elders Group" to "All Nations Elders Counsel", as this group is inclusive to everybody. The Elders also agreed to continue publishing their newsletter "Elders Rock", have formed a facebook group with the same name, and have expanded on their monthly meetings.

The new meeting format is as follows:

9 am to 9.30 am – Talking Circle

9.30 am to 10.30 am – Guest speakers share knowledge with the Elders.

10.30 am to 11.30 am – Open for community members wishing to seek guidance from the Elders.

11.30 am to 12pm – Elders share information and network with each other.

Noon – lunch.

The Elders now meet on the first Wednesday of the month at the Friendship Centre, and whoever attends is a part of the "All Nations Elders Counsel" for that day. This is meant to be inclusive to any Elder in Prince George, Aboriginal or not.

The Elders are very excited about this group and strongly feel that this is just the beginning of great things to come.

We would like to extend an invitation to any Elders who would like to participate, you are more than welcome to attend the meetings. It does not matter if you are not originally from Prince George, do or don't belong to other groups. If you are an Elder or even a junior Elder, we would love to have you participate in the Counsel.

If you have a topic of interest you would like to see in Aboriginal Voices, contact the Aboriginal Business Development Centre at 562-6325 or e-mail an article to abdc@abdc.bc.ca