



UAKN Atlantic

Navigating Government Services: The “lived experience” of urban Aboriginal families in Fredericton, New Brunswick

KEY FINDINGS

- Three broad headings emerged which encapsulated the abovementioned themes: service gaps and barriers, funding gaps, and impermanence of programs and funding.
- Fredericton’s Aboriginal population is young, highly mobile, and largely female.
- Developing a fully functional Friendship Centre or Family Resource Centre in Fredericton will also be instrumental in offering culturally relevant programs and services to urban Aboriginal people in a safe and comfortable setting.
- Strengthening communication between government and community organizations and building strong partnerships are crucial to the improvement of programs and services for off-reserve Aboriginal people
- There are many gaps in funding that are unique to off-reserve Aboriginal people compared to those living on reserve.
- The impermanence of available programs and services can have a profound impact on urban Aboriginal people

INTRODUCTION

This community driven research project emerged from the need for urban Aboriginal communities to better understand what is and is not working when it comes to access to government services for off- reserve population Aboriginal in Fredericton. This project documents the struggles that local community organizations were seeing first-hand accessing government services. The research findings will aim to find solutions for both community organizations and local government to work together to better meet the needs of Fredericton’s Aboriginal population.

METHODOLOGY

This study conducted literature review on urban Aboriginal people in Fredericton and what statistics were available on this demographic. Focus groups and individual interviews were developed by urban Aboriginal community members where urban Aboriginal community members and frontline service providers, both in urban Aboriginal community organizations and in government. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted through: Under One Sky Head Start, New Brunswick Aboriginal People’s Council (NBAPC),

Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corporation, Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, New Brunswick Housing, and with front-line government employees working in areas such as education, social work, transportation, and employment.

Urban Aboriginal participants were asked about positive experiences they have had accessing government services off-reserve, barriers to services they may have experienced, whether they noticed any differences in accessing services on and off- reserve, and what improvements they would like to see in access to services for urban Aboriginal people in Fredericton. Government participants were asked about their knowledge and perceptions of Aboriginal people and how these impact their dealings with their Aboriginal clients. They were also asked about how they handle situations that have occurred on- reserve and outside of their jurisdiction as opposed to how they handle situations that occur off-reserve and within their jurisdiction. And finally, they were asked about the role that on and off- reserve Aboriginal people play in the design and implementation of programs.

MAIN FINDINGS

Themes such as health, education, parenting supports, mobility, and employment came up repeatedly. Through analysis three broad headings emerged which encapsulated the abovementioned themes: service gaps and barriers, funding gaps, and impermanence of programs and funding. It discovered that Fredericton's Aboriginal population is young, highly mobile, and largely female. Employed Aboriginal Frederictonians made substantially less money than their non-Native counterparts.

The predominant organizations that service urban Aboriginal people in Fredericton, New Brunswick are Under One Sky Head Start Program, New Brunswick Aboriginal People's Council (NBAPC), and Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corporation. Participants identified several areas where they have experienced gaps and barriers accessing services as urban Aboriginal people. What is most striking is that in most cases, had they lived on-reserve they would not have experienced such difficulties. Services that participants voiced concern with includes health, non-insured health benefits, education, and parenting supports.

These experiences underline an on-going problem that off-reserve people face – the persistence of the belief that Aboriginal people live on reserves. In this case, service providers assumed that Aboriginal people should be accessing services on the reserve. In actual fact, not all Aboriginal people belong to a reserve or live anywhere near their home reserve and therefore cannot access services that way. Participants were unanimously concerned with the lack of representation of Aboriginal culture, languages, and historical contributions in the curriculum. It was also noted that there are many gaps in funding that are unique to off-reserve Aboriginal people compared to those living on reserve and the impermanence of available programs and services can have a profound impact on urban Aboriginal people.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerged out of this study. The following require the participation of both urban Aboriginal organizations and government in order to realize these goals.

1. **Build strong partnerships** between urban Aboriginal community organizations and government service providers to work together to improve access to services for off-reserve Aboriginal people. Strengthen communication between service providers and community organizations and commit to working together towards creating programs and services that cater to the unique needs of off-reserve people.
2. **Foster a strong and functional Friendship Centre** or Family Resource Centre in Fredericton to help centralize access to services, to increase the number of much-needed services for urban Aboriginal people, and to create programs and services that are more self-sufficient in their funding model.
3. **Keep data on program participants** in order to have a record of the success rate of programs that face being cut. Such data can be used as leverage in seeking funding renewal or in attempts to fund similar programs in the future.
4. **Provide mandatory “Aboriginal Awareness” programming** to all government employees.
5. **Develop a counselling program for urban Aboriginal families** to nurture strong parenting skills, to help treat addictions issues, and to foster health and well-being amongst the off-reserve population. This could be run through a Friendship Centre or Family Resource Centre.
6. **Incorporate Aboriginal cultures, history, and languages** into all school curricula, not as a side note or module but as a core component of school programming so that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can become better educated about Aboriginal people and the history of this country.
7. **Create an online database or a comprehensive website** where urban Aboriginal people can go to learn about what programs and services are available to them and to find contact information for these services.
8. **Build a mechanism of advocacy for off-reserve people in Fredericton.** A collective of people who will advocate on behalf of off-reserve people, who have the knowledge and contacts to do so in order to ensure that the urban Aboriginal population is receiving access to the services they need, whether it be Non-Insured Health Benefits, Legal Aid, Housing, Social Development issues, or Employment Assistance. Such a mechanism could be provided by a functional Friendship Centre or Family Resource Centre.

PARTNERSHIPS

Under One Sky Head Start
 Skigin-Elnoog Housing Corporation
 New Brunswick Aboriginal People’s Council
 Region 3 Department of Social Development
 University of New Brunswick

CONCLUSION

There has and continues to be programs, services, and organizations working to meet the needs of Fredericton’s urban Aboriginal community. By working together, government and community organizations can reach an even higher level of success. Strengthening communication between government and community organizations and building strong partnerships are crucial to the improvement of programs and services for off-reserve Aboriginal people. Developing a fully functional Friendship Centre or Family Resource

Centre in Fredericton will also be instrumental in offering culturally-relevant programs and services to urban Aboriginal people in a safe and comfortable setting.

For more information on this project visit:

<http://uakn.org/research-project/navigating-government-services-the-lived-experience-of-young-urban-aboriginal-families-residing-in-fredericton-nb/>

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org



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