# THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

## Solutions from Fort Simpson

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FINAL REPORT

*Solutions from Fort Simpson*
A Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs

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## Executive Summary

This Report studied the impact of public spending in a single community, Fort Simpson, NWT. The community includes Dene and Métis peoples, as well as a significant non-Aboriginal population. The study focussed on Aboriginal recipients of social assistance, unemployment insurance, pensions, family allowances, worker's compensation, community harvester's assistance program, and the homeless. Other prominent members of the community were interviewed as well. The study is qualitative in nature and was guided by a community advisory committee.

Aboriginal people in the community are concerned to ensure that their Dene and Métis identities are maintained and passed on. They aspire to have 'the old ways', traditional values and practices, continue. Many of the programs examined worked to promote dependency and discourage self-reliance as well as discourage traditional sharing arrangements. In spite of this, a significant degree of informal sharing continues to be practiced and is a necessary and strategic part of many domestic economies. Much public sector spending insists that recipients stay in the community, and financial aid is reduced if individuals use it support life on the land. Effectively, recipients are encouraged to buy food, and even alcohol, but not to buy gasoline and bullets in order to live 'out on the land', a stated desire of many. Hence, a dependency 'mind set' is frequently encouraged by public spending, and both self-reliance and traditional values are systemically discouraged.

The solutions that emerged involved a basic restructuring of public spending, in design and implementation, so as to promote the subsistence economy and the traditional values the community rests on. A greater degree of community control over design and delivery of social welfare programs would ensure that these programs meet the changing needs of the community. Specific ideas for the kinds of programs that could be developed are also presented.

## Introduction

This research examines the impact and potential of public spending in Aboriginal communities, focussing on the community of Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories, as an example. The 'problem' associated with public spending in Aboriginal communities is framed differently depending on the position of those who frame it. For example, civil servants might be especially and legitimately concerned about whether funds are being used in an efficient and effective manner. Members of the community, however, might be more concerned about whether various social programs are eroding traditional patterns of sharing and self-reliance. Finding concrete solutions or directions can be particularly difficult in this kind of a context, where even the nature of the problem is in question.

This study is oriented towards searching for directions, particularly those that come from the community itself. Attempts at dealing with social problems in Aboriginal communities, which the Canadian public has been aware of for some time, although it may have defined the nature of those problems in its own manner, have frequently floundered in large part because of inadequate consultation with Aboriginal peoples themselves. The most stark example of this was the *1969 Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, known widely as the 'White Paper', (see Weaver) but there are many other examples at both the broadest policy levels and at the comparatively micro level of community development. What has become clear to most working in the field of Aboriginal social and political issues is that, as Menno Boldt put it recently, "economic self-sufficiency and independence needed for Indian self-government necessarily lie with the Indian people" (237). If solutions are to be found within Aboriginal communities, it is crucial to understand how Aboriginal peoples frame the problems.

This Report is divided into two parts. The first part will provide a context for reading the research results that follow by framing them with a discussion of the issues and problems around public spending in Aboriginal communities as these have been discussed in scholarly literature. A second important context will be provided in a description of the community of Fort Simpson itself, situating it in relation to other Aboriginal communities so that the degree of generality that can be deduced from the research results can be assessed. The second part will discuss the research method and the research findings of field work conducted in Fort Simpson in the summer of 1993. Finally, a concluding discussion relating these findings to the scholarly literature will follow. Attached as appendices are summary recommendations, the initial contract and work plan, and a selective bibliography.

## Part One: Aboriginal Communities and Public Spending

Broadly speaking, there are three inter-related factors that distinguish rural northern Aboriginal communities from other rural

communities in Canada. These are: 1. the extent of reliance upon subsistence economic strategies; 2. the extent of attachment to traditional cultural values, norms, and ways; 3. the degree of what are characterized as 'social pathologies', or what I prefer to call social breakdowns resulting from poverty. A few words on each of these is necessary to frame this discussion of public spending in Aboriginal communities.

An extensive literature now exists that deals with Aboriginal subsistence economies and activities (see Brody, Usher, Asch, Rushforth). It is important to draw some distinctions. Most, not all, Aboriginal subsistence activities derive from hunting, fishing, and trapping practices, rather than from agricultural activities. This distinguishes Aboriginal rural communities from most non-Native rural communities, where important subsistence activities are most closely tied to family gardens. Furthermore, as opposed to northern rural non-Native communities, where subsistence activities do frequently take the form of hunting and fishing, Aboriginal

subsistence activities tend to be the locus of the domestic economy, not an adjunct to it.

Furthermore, the subsistence economy is one form of what might be called an 'informal economic sector'. The informal economic sector refers to all economic activities that lie outside the sphere of State supervised and monitored economic activities; also outside the sphere of what are constructed as legitimate, 'genuinely' economic, activity. The informal economic sector includes domestic activity -- frequently women's labour -- but also black market activity and, critically in this context, survival strategies of the economically marginalized. These latter refer to a range of practices such as sharing domestic space, trading labour, sharing welfare benefits, constructing domestic fictions in order to satisfy the requirements of State agencies, and so on. Since Aboriginal people are at the economic margins of Canadian society, they rely on the whole range of informal economic activities available to them as a matter of course. Whether one shares because there is little to go around or one shares because that is an intimate aspect of a subsistence

economic strategy is likely of little importance to those doing the sharing. However, drawing an analytical distinction between the two does have important consequences for our analysis. The viability of subsistence economies is of critical importance in determining whether northern Aboriginal communities can achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Attachment to a traditional culture is the second feature enumerated that distinguishes northern Aboriginal communities from others. This attachment more often than not explains the very existence of these communities. While non-Native northern communities are most frequently created as a result of an effort to remove some non-renewable resource, and therefore community members have a relatively rootless relation to their region, frequently moving on as the resource dries up, Aboriginal communities are made up of people who can trace their occupancy of the region back for centuries. Practicing the 'ways' of their ancestors is a way of living the land, reaffirming ancient bonds, re-establishing identity, for many Aboriginal people.

The cultural attachment is clearly related to the subsistence economy. Cultural activities and subsistence activities are often one and the same for those who practice them. Community cultural events, such as drum dances or feasts, rely on the labour of hunters, trappers, fishers, and cooks, who harvest and prepare bush foods. Those events also can act as mechanisms whereby food is redistributed. In this sense, the culture is as much a material and economic force in the daily life of the community as the subsistence economy. Attachment to it is not 'merely' on an emotive and psychic level: it is a part of a material strategy that conditions relations between people.

Finally, the third feature enumerated above was the degree of social problems in Aboriginal communities. Again, an extensive scholarly literature exists documenting the deplorable social circumstances that Aboriginal people live with (see Driben and Trudeau, Shkilnyk, Wotherspoon and Satzewich, Frideres). Indeed, the literature is so extensive that there is a legitimate concern that focussing on these 'social pathologies' helps perpetuate them by

reinscribing very negative images of Aboriginal people. This latter concern at least acts as a warning that this material or feature need be discussed with caution. Nevertheless, serious poverty leading to poorer education levels, lower life expectancy, higher rates of death due to violence, higher suicide rates, higher infant mortality rates, family violence, remain the facts of life and death in too many Aboriginal communities and cannot be ignored.

Again, there is a link between this feature and the other two. Brody (and Usher) have cautioned against conflating the subsistence economy with poverty: while people may look poor to the average middle class Canadian, they may be living off a diet of fresh meat and involved in a quality of life more rewarding than anything to be found in the dominant society today. Meanwhile, Dosman, in the context of his early seventies study of urban Indians, warns about the concept of the culture of poverty, reminding us today that it would be equally dangerous to conflate cultural practices associated with poverty itself with traditional Aboriginal life ways.

The nexus of these three elements -- subsistence, culture, poverty -- form a complex whole that characterize daily life in Aboriginal communities. The nexus itself has been partially constructed and feeds off the State, which provides a variety of kinds of funding that often act, whether intentionally or inadvertently, in contradictory ways and can be seen to simultaneously create dependence, support subsistence, undermine tradition, and so on. At the community level, State funding presents an economic opportunity structure that can be taken advantage of but at a cost: it mobilizes people's energies and more importantly their social relations in specific directions.

Elsewhere (see 1989, 1992, 1994) I have argued that the State acts as a mechanism of 'totalization' in Aboriginal communities, working against explicit and implicit resistance to impose social, cultural, political, and economic forms that accord with the forms of the dominant society. As an agent of totalization, the State attempts to reconstruct Aboriginal communities so that the logic of possessive individualism, to borrow C.B. Macpherson's evocative phrase,

dominates everyday life to the same extent it does so elsewhere. These attempts by the State are opposed at every turn by Aboriginal peoples, with mixed success. In the context of this analysis, it is worth remembering that the economic lifeline or opportunity structures offered by the State, in the current historical juncture where physical coercion is no longer acceptable, are also its most important mechanism for inducing people to follow the forms it wants them to follow. Two particular consequences are worth note here: the promise of State funding keeps Aboriginal peoples in the communities, since they have no access to it and are frequently explicitly prevented from gaining it if they are 'out on the land'. Furthermore, State funding strongly encourages people to think and act as individuals, to marshall their resources for themselves, to define their interests separately from other members of the community the State induces them to live in. These two facets of life are critical moments in the totalising agency of the State.

The question of the viability of the subsistence economy is a crucial one for the analysis that follows. If the subsistence economy

is seen as not viable, then public spending must be oriented in a manner that would lead towards the establishment of some other basis of economic self-sufficiency. On the other hand, if the subsistence economy is seen as viable then public sector spending that works to undermine it could be characterized as misguided and it would be appropriate to recommend directing public spending towards the support of subsistence economic activities.

Arguments against the viability of subsistence economies have come from two directions. One line of criticism comes from those who maintain that "what we are witnessing is the most recent stage of adjustment by northern people to modern society and urban life" (Bone and Green 92). In this view, modernization is a virtually inevitable process: "because the traditional economy is at a decided disadvantage in competing for land, labour, and capital, its strength and vitality are slowly eroded and, with this erosion, the participation of the indigenous population in the traditional economy weakens" (92). This approach, however, takes as inevitable what is precisely the site of struggle. Furthermore, the highly quantitative nature of

research generated under this approach effectively blinds itself to understanding the importance of traditional economic activities which tend not to fall within its quantifiable categories of economic endeavour; therefore actual assessments of the viability of subsistence economies coming from this approach remain suspect because it has not developed methodological tools adequate to the task of measuring this question.

A more troubling analysis of the subsistence economy comes from Menno Boldt, who has argued in his most recent book that "to attain economic self-sufficiency and independence Indians must participate fully, at all levels, in the mainstream Canadian economy" (238). Boldt specifically challenges the notion of self-sufficient Aboriginal communities based on subsistence economies, arguing that "Indian leaders who advocate a return to the traditional economy of hunting, gathering, and fishing rhetorically insist that the Canadian government must provide them with a land base adequate for such an economy. However, the notion of an 'adequate land base' is so vague as to be meaningless. Even under the most optimistic, but realistic,

assumptions regarding settlements of land claims and access to vacant 'Crown lands', there will never be a land base adequate to sustain more than a tokenistic traditional economy except, perhaps, for a handful of remote bands/tribes" (259). What is 'token' and what constitutes a 'handful' are questions that deserve serious consideration. Boldt's analysis is troubling because his over-riding concern is the survival of Aboriginal peoples 'as Indians'; that is, he clearly is interested in establishing mechanisms that ensure Aboriginal cultural identity remains intact. Yet he does not acknowledge any specific value or role of traditional economic activities, arguing that "Indian leaders who give legitimacy to the traditional economy as a solution to their condition of dependence, destitution, and social pathologies do their people a great disservice, predisposing them to endure their present condition of unemployment, welfare, and destitution in anticipation of the mythical day when full settlement of their rights, claims, and self-government will restore their traditional way of life" (260). Boldt's analysis is entirely misguided. He offers no substantial research to support his

claim that the traditional economy is unviable, though his case is based on that assertion. It is likely that Boldt's analysis reflects his own (geographic) situation, in southern Alberta, and represents an egregious example of overgeneralization. In any event, much of the thrust of the analysis of this paper works in the opposite direction of Boldt's.

It should be clear by now that, certainly in an analysis of a northern community like Fort Simpson, the subsistence economy will be seen as viable and, indeed, essential. After whatever oil and gas, timber, or minerals, that might be found in the area are gone, there will still be Aboriginal people living in the region and there will still be Aboriginal peoples who have no desire to leave. Their ability to be economically self-sufficient will depend in large measure on their ability to take their subsistence from the land in something like a 'traditional' manner. Public spending in Aboriginal communities at the present time not only does not recognize this fact, but works in large measure, as the research in Fort Simpson illustrates, to undermine traditional subsistence activities.

In the context of this overall analysis, a few of the criticisms of public spending in Aboriginal communities that have been raised by scholars and are of particular relevance to this study can be reviewed. These include funding problems, fragmentation of program and service delivery and responsibility, the issue of cultural sensitivity, and the question of what 'needs' are being met. These certainly do not exhaust the list, and different kinds of criticisms, as well as different inflections on the same problems, emerge from the interviews. These will be discussed in part two.

The issue of funding levels is a complex one, and in fact there are three facets of the issue that are worth touching on here: actual funding amounts, flexibility of funding arrangements, and actual impact of funds. The question of funding amounts is the easiest to specify: given the serious social conditions of many Aboriginal Canadians, are enough resources being directed to the communities that seem to need it most? The fact that it is relatively easy to call for 'more' and relatively difficult to provide it should not prevent a statement of the obvious: more needs to be done and this will likely

require more resources. However, many researchers have also pointed out that more can be done with existing resources. Frank Cassidy and Robert Bish have recently reported that, in interviews with Indian leaders, "one theme was that there were inadequate funds to pursue new initiatives. This was partly attributed to less funding than desired, but it was also attached to the policies of INAC, the categories used for INAC funding, and the nontransferability of funds among categories" (112). In a situation of generally inadequate funding levels, problems around inflexibility in applying funds, the second of the three facets mentioned above, are aggravated. Furthermore, Terry Wotherspoon and Vic Satzewich have noted that "even where benefits accrue to bands and community members, they are not evenly distributed. The development and reinforcement of a class system around newly-created jobs and administrative positions is a mounting problem among aboriginal peoples" (109). Major funding initiatives often seem like a flood at the top end, but by the time funds reach through the layers of bureaucracy and administrators appointed to direct, implement, oversee, co-ordinate, evaluate, and

account for programs, what may reach the community level or bottom end appears as a trickle. Wotherspoon and Satzewich write that "skewed priorities related to economic and political inequalities within bands often heighten the disproportionate disadvantage faced by certain groups such as aboriginal women, particularly those who are single parents or have limited credentials for entry into labour markets" (109). The relatively well off in communities tend to be best positioned to take advantage of what funding opportunities exist, not least because they may have the literacy skills needed to do the necessary paperwork. Again, in a situation of generally inadequate resources, this problem is magnified.

The question of fragmentation of program delivery and responsibility is a serious problem, related to the problem of flexibility in funding arrangements. Frances Abele and Katherine Graham have noted that "Everywhere in Canada, the traditional model for government creates function-specific offices, and often fragmented service-delivery units, each aimed at a particular problem. There are employment offices, training facilities, various economic-

development support programs -- ranging from transfer payments for individuals to various kinds of counselling and direct intervention. On Indian reserves and in rural settlements, the fragmentation is often compounded by jurisdictional divisions between federal and provincial governments" (162-3). This is a problem because of the confusion it creates, the repetition and therefore sometimes wastage of valuable resources, and the lack of co-ordination in dealing with the actual problems. Abele and Graham point out that "many aboriginal people live in small, relatively isolated communities, where this functional differentiation creates more problems than it solves.... [F]or residents of the communities, it is often difficult to make sense of program differentiation: when one is thinking of the well-being of perhaps 50 specific teen-agers, how can their needs be sorted out into appropriate program areas, and how can the officials responsible for program delivery co-ordinate their efforts?" (163). This fragmentation does not correspond to everyday community life in the manner that it might in larger urban areas; it becomes both an excuse for individuals in 'helping professions' to avoid the real problems and

focus on their narrow area of responsibility, effectively 'passing the buck' for community well being to an amorphous conglomeration of agencies, and it becomes a real obstacle for any conscientious individual or group of individuals who want to deal with the underlying problems.

Cultural sensitivity is clearly an overriding issue that has been touched on in many levels of this analysis, but deserves mention in this context. In distinguishing between local governments and Indian governments, Cassidy and Bish point out that "many Indian governments have as a major objective the maintenance of their culture and have preferences for styles of service delivery that are distinctly different from those of non-Indians. These differences do not affect some services a great deal -- water supply or fire suppression, for example -- but may be critical for other services such as education and child welfare" (97). Lack of cultural sensitivity in the construction and implementation of many projects has been a key reason for outright or partial failure of those projects. Lack of

cultural sensitivity on the part of those who deliver programs and services at the community level has also been a serious problem.

Finally, there is the question of what needs are being addressed by public spending in Aboriginal communities. Short term needs to deal with a specific problem or set of problems may conflict with long term needs (to, for example, reduce dependence on outside agencies); the needs of 'traditionalists' within a community may conflict with the needs of emerging elite groups or those who have not acquired 'bush skills' and are looking for wage employment; needs in one area of community development, for example economic development, might conflict with needs for resources in other important areas, such as dealing with social problems; the needs of the community itself may conflict with the needs of surrounding communities and of funding agencies. Abele and Graham have written that "the focus must be on meeting the real needs of aboriginal communities, rather than on merely delegating to communities responsibility for delivering conventional provincial programs" (166). Defining those 'real' needs is a critical first step, and must be the responsibility of the

communities themselves, who will each have to develop a consensus on what balances are desirable and what priorities are most urgent.

The foregoing discussion has attempted to review some of the basic issues involved in the dialogue on public spending in Aboriginal communities. The basic characteristics of Aboriginal communities have been reviewed and discussed, with some focus on the question of the viability of subsistence economies, and some of the general problems related to public spending that have been discussed by scholars have also been reviewed. The research results that follow clearly deal with and relate to the nexus of problems outlined above, and are oriented towards suggesting concrete directions that might, if implemented, offer meaningful 'solutions'.

## Fort Simpson

At this juncture, a few words about the community of Fort Simpson will be useful as a further context of the analysis that follows. While Fort Simpson is, like any other community, a unique place, there are many aspects of it that particularly suit it to a study of this

sort and that make the findings detailed below of more general relevance.

Fort Simpson is a largely Dene and Métis community located at the juncture of the Liard and Mackenzie rivers, in the southwestern corner of the Northwest Territories. The community has a population of about 1000. Of these, about 47% are Dene, and would identify themselves as south Slavey language speakers. Another 13% are Métis. About 39% of the community is non-Native.

The community is a regional centre, and contains government offices with a regional responsibility. The region is called Dehcho, the Slavey word for the Mackenzie River. A Fort Simpson band office represents the local Dene; a Métis local represents the Métis. As well, there is a municiple council that has historically but not always tended to represent the interests of the non-Natives in the community.

The Dene in Fort Simpson include at least two major, distinctive groups of people: the upriver and the downriver families. The Métis in the community include some descendants of the historic, Red River and Batoche Métis who moved north and west during the

Métis diaspora; some descendants of Dene and non-Native mixed families; and some Dene who lost legal status as Indians for a variety of reasons and may or may not have regained their status.

Dene in the region are signatories to Treaty 11, which was negotiated in 1921.

The road has had an enormous impact on Fort Simpson. It has a fairly elaborate infrastructure relative to other NWT Native communities. This includes a bank, northern store, a hotel and a motel, a liquor store, a variety of specialty stores, as well as the government offices, churches, school, and other government buildings. The road has brought tourism and other forms of economic development to the area, but has also created problems. Fort Simpson has a higher proportion of non-Native permanent residents than many other NWT communities. It gained some prominence as a result of being the site of the Papal visit to Aboriginal Canadians in the mid-eighties.

The community resembles many of the small Aboriginal communities in Canada's little or middle north, the band of territory

in the north of the prairie provinces, Quebec, and Ontario. Its problems are not untypical of those that will be found in many Aboriginal communities, and its strengths are also not untypical. Specifying these similarities and differences is probably useful.

By NWT standards, the presence of a road link to the south means that Fort Simpson is not isolated, though by southern standards most of us would probably characterize it as quite isolated. Although Dene in Fort Simpson are status Indians and have a band council, they do not have a reserve; although they are signatories to a treaty they have an outstanding comprehensive land claim. The presence of Dene, Métis, and non-Natives living within the same community in such close proximity is relatively rare in the middle north, where reserves tend to be the focal point of status Indian populations, but is not unique. Most would probably characterize Dene traditional culture and subsistence economies as relatively strong compared to most middle north communities and, perhaps, somewhat weaker than other far northern communities. The community is rich in access to renewable resources that are the base of the subsistence economy and

has not been negatively affected to any great extent by large, non-renewable resource projects. The most significant of these was the Mackenzie Valley pipeline constructed in 1984 and 1984, which passed across the river and to the south of Fort Simpson, providing seasonal wage employment for a few community members.

Among the communities resources are its elders. There is an elder's hostel in the community. An elder acts as a formal advisor to the band council, while other elders run the communities summer bush camp for children (a cultural program called the Dechinta Program). Elders are often called upon to attend workshops and meetings in order to provide advice and counsel, and in my observation tend to be more widely called on than in many other communities.

Finally, it should be noted that the juncture of the two rivers, Liard and Mackenzie (Dehcho) provide a beautiful setting for the community. The community is poised to take advantage of a number of economic opportunities in both the renewable and non-renewable resource areas. Residents of the community feel justifiable pride in

its accomplishments, though they are also painfully aware of the problems that exist.

## Part Two: Solutions From Fort Simpson

### The Research

#### Research Team

This research was conducted by a team of researchers. The team was co-ordinated and directed by Peter Kulchyski, of Trent University. Joseph Muldoon of the Research Office at Trent University was responsible for administrative support of the project. Kathy Fife also assisted with administrative support. Sharon Beaucage, a First Nation's student in the Native Studies program at Trent, was a research assistant with the project, and conducted virtually all of the interviews. She was assisted in the community of Fort Simpson by two research assistants/translators: Irene Deneyoua and Judy Tetso. Peter Kulchyski wrote the draft report, conducted workshops in Fort Simpson to discuss the results, and was responsible

for drafting, revising, and completing a last re-write of the final report.

Community Advisory Committee

Research in the community of Fort Simpson was aided by the establishment of a community advisory committee. This consisted of Herb Norwegian, chief of the local Dene band, Marie Lafferty, President of the Métis Nation local, and Leo Norwegian, a local elder. These people were consulted as individuals and as a group through the course of research, and had an opportunity to comment on a draft of the report discussed with them in the fall of 1993.

Methodology

Research was conducted to the fullest extent possible following the principles of community based, consultative, research. The research was qualitative; information was solicited and data gathered through the format of key informant interviews. These were tape recorded, and then indexed and partially transcribed. The nature of the research was explained to all interview subjects, and they had an opportunity to refuse to participate. It is worth noting that some

people did refuse to participate, and there was a sense in the community of being 'researched to death'. Nevertheless, 85 people were interviewed for the project. This provided a large enough sample to produce quantitatively significant results, and certainly an excellent data base for a qualitative project.

As noted, the research was qualitative in nature. We asked people an agenda of questions in a relatively open format, and solicited their thoughts and opinions. The agenda of questions was developed by the northern Research Team, though interviewers were urged to follow up any important, unforeseen, issues that might have emerged in any interview. The agenda of questions is attached to this Report. Targeted subjects included, first and foremost, individuals who received some kind of financial support from government -- most commonly unemployment insurance, social assistance, pensions, training and education support -- as well as individuals who have fallen through the social welfare network. Interviews were also held with other key informants in the community including politicians, social service workers, and prominent community workers. An

excellent data base was compiled and indexed as a result of these interviews. Follow up interviews were held in the community to explain the draft report, discuss preliminary results, and solicit suggestions for the final report. The results reported here are based solely on material gathered from the community.

Timing

Research was conducted in the summer of 1993. The Project co-ordinator travelled to Fort Simpson in late May, preparing and setting up the research. The Research Assistant joined him in early June. A community resident was hired within a week, and the community advisory committee was established. Interviews took place through June and July. Progress reports were written and filed with the Commission in August. Tapes were indexed and partially transcribed in August by the Research Assistant in the south. As a draft report was being written in October, the Project co-ordinator travelled back to Fort Simpson to discuss results. A Final Report was written in late November, and incorporated comments on the draft report. However, after this Report was drafted the Royal

Commission asked for elaboration in a number of areas. The Final Report was as a result re-drafted over the summer and fall of 1994.

More information on the research team, advisory committee, timing, and methodology can be found in the work plan and interim report, filed with the Royal Commission in the summer of 1993 and attached to this Report as appendices.

## Results: The Groups

Interview subjects were chosen because they received support from one of a number of federal or territorially funded programs. Most of these are well known national programs, such as social assistance (welfare), unemployment insurance, Canada pension plan, family allowance, or worker's compensation. There were a few individuals on training programs that were either federal or territorial; since there were not enough individuals in any specific training program we did not identify and focus on any. The territorially funded Community Harvesters Assistance Program was the only program that may not be widely known that was examined.

Individuals in need of social support who were not getting any, who had 'fallen through' the social welfare network, were also interviewed where possible. Finally, we did not focus on economic development programs, though there are a variety in Fort Simpson. Some of the trainees we talked to were working on projects funded by federal or territorial economic development programs. Public spending clearly provides a variety of economic opportunities to Fort Simpson residents but, as will be clear from the results of the interviews, informants guided us in a different direction.

## Social Assistance Recipients

Fifteen individuals were interviewed who were on social assistance. All were Dene; there were eleven women and four men in this category. Many of the prominent community members had things to say about social assistance, and an interview with a social worker was also very useful for understanding social assistance in the community. Most of these interviews were held in the homes of the informant. The tendency was for these interviews to be shorter in

duration, although there were some lengthy interviews conducted with individuals on social assistance.

### Unemployment Insurance

Fifteen individuals were interviewed who were or had been on unemployment insurance. Six were Métis (all men), nine were Dene (seven men, two women). Many other people from other groups had relied on unemployment insurance at one time or another and had comments to make about it.

### Pensioners

Nineteen pensioners were interviewed. Sixteen identified themselves as Dene (eleven men, five women), three were Métis (two men, one woman). Almost half were interviewed in the band office. Many pensioners talked more about changes to the community and to the old sharing network than about the provision of pension assistance per se. The prominent community members said almost nothing about the provision of pensions, though they did frequently have things to say about the place of older people and elders in the community.

## Training and Education

Nine individuals were interviewed who were on a training program or were in the process of having their education subsidized through one or another manner. Eight of these were Dene (seven women, one man), one woman was Métis. Training and education was a fairly consistent theme through interviews with informants of every sort.

## Disability and Family Allowance

Three other Dene individuals, one man and two women, spoke about disability support or family allowances. One pensioner was on a disability pension, and one social assistance recipient had also been getting disability support. Little was said by anyone in another group about these forms of support.

## Community Harvesters Assistance Program

The Community Harvesters Assistance Program, commonly referred to as the trapper's incentive program, is funded by the Government of the Northwest Territories and provides financial support to trappers who meet a minimum standard in the size of their

catch. No beneficiaries of this program spoke specifically about it, though a number of people who identified themselves as having been trappers in the past were interviewed. Many individuals, across all informant groups, spoke about trapping and a few prominent community members spoke in some depth about the trapping incentive program.

Unsupported

Two individuals were interviewed who did not have any funding support but were in need. One of these was a woman, and the other a man. A number of key informants across all group areas spoke about the homeless in Fort Simpson.

Other Interviews

Seven individuals interviewed spoke primarily about changes to the community and other general subjects, rather than specific social programs. These were all Dene men.

Fourteen prominent members of the community were also interviewed. Seven of these were non-Natives, four women and three men. Two individuals were of Aboriginal descent but were not Fort

Simpson Dene or Métis (one male, one female). One was a Métis woman. Four were Dene (two men, two women).

Results: Needs and Aspirations

Although many Aboriginal people in Fort Simpson are on the margins economically, and therefore have basic needs like finding a job, or adequate housing, or dealing with serious social problems, there was a clear message that came through the interviews, linking needs and aspirations. This was perhaps best articulated by Chief Herb Norwegian, who spoke at length about needing to re-establish control of people's lives by asserting their identity as Dene and their unsurrendered ownership of land. The most basic needs were tied to an aspiration to assert Dene identity and practice Dene life ways. Education in Dene ways was seen as key to this process.

The need was expressed in many different ways by different people. For example, one of our key informants, the President of the Métis Nation local, said that "there [are] a lot of young people ... who are in their twenties, thirties, up to late thirties that still don't have

any trades and stuff, see, and they're having a rough time. We are often called 'the forgotten people' and it is a fact" (FS 43). The generation that grew up in residential schools and did not learn enough of the bush ways or enough of the non-Native skills 'got lost through the cracks'. Their children, who are now growing up, are the ones most of the older people feared for and wanted to ensure Dene identity and life ways are passed on to. But the need was expressed most commonly by a variety of informants who spoke of 'going back to the land' as an option that more people should be pursuing.

Educating the children in Dene ways was seen as a key by a variety of people. One young woman on social assistance said "I think a lot of people especially students that go to school... they're not talking their own language. They are forgetting how to trap and things like that and it's not like the old days. You know you come to town or you know kids who know their language and they know how to trap and don't have to teach them. But now it's different, you have to teach them how to do that" (FS 78). She pointed to a generational gap created because many children do not know Slavey, while many

elders do not know English. Another informant who works in the education field said that language "really goes hand in hand with culture. There's a lot of elders that are saying the young Dene people don't have knowledge of their culture anymore. They don't look at the world from the Dene perspective anymore and they attribute a lot of the problems that exist today with teenagers to this." (FS 59).

The Chief noted the same problem and suggested: "The solution is that young people that are being educated in schools, they have to understand that the elders are the foundation of the Dene Nation. That these are the people here that need to be talked [to] so that people can get feedback to compare the old ways of life with what's happening today. And the young people today seem to lean towards the real drama way of life, you know, the white man's little world, and that's the thing they seem to be concentrating on" (FS 61). Cultural education was thought of as something not necessarily just for the young. Another informant said "I think it's a matter of approach and empowerment... It's a matter of being able to find programming that can address needs. I mean we've just had an experience here where

we've offered a cultural oppression workshop for staff members. One of the staff involved in that is in her early thirties, has never been exposed to anything like that: coming back out of that workshop saying I had no idea what my own history was. People have to be exposed to it. We have to find ways of opening up saying this is what we are looking at, this is what has happened in the past, this is something you can have power over. And this is then building up confidence and motivation to do something about it. It can be done in any age group, it's a matter of focussing it" (FS 38).

Aboriginal people in Fort Simpson want to assert their identity as Dene and need to continue to pass on Dene ways to their children and to themselves. Education, particularly language education, is seen as a critical component in ensuring that Dene identity thrives. Such education need not be thought of as directed exclusively towards the young; many young and middle aged adults equally need and desire the opportunity to learn about their own past, their own traditions, and their own living culture.

Hence, the issue of cultural sensitivity is clearly one of great importance in the context of a community like Fort Simpson. It is not enough for a program or set of programs to provide so called basic needs to the people there; if they lose their identity as Dene and Métis, and especially if the programs contribute to that loss, then the people will not have a ground to stand on in order to some day re-establish their ability to sustain themselves. One substantial underlying theme of interviews, particularly with key informants but also with many of those receiving financial assistance in one form or another, was that culture matters to people on a lived, everyday level and that being Dene or being Métis was a substantial part of what people's lives are 'all about'.

## Results: Specific Problems and Solutions

Through the course of the interviews many informants spoke about technical or other specific kinds of problems they encountered as beneficiaries of government support. The most consistent of these were the amount of funding, delays in the receipt of funds, the

confusion associated with paperwork and application processes, the fact that funding requirements often act as a disincentive to other forms of support, and undue interference in the lives of those who rely on financial support from the state. Each of these will be discussed below.

Funding Levels

Interestingly, the amount of support provided was relatively infrequently raised as an issue. Only three individuals on social assistance raised funding level as an issue; no one on unemployment insurance raised the issue; five pensioners raised the issue. This does not mean that enough funding is being provided. The existence of homeless people in Fort Simpson, for example, testifies to the need for more assistance. Furthermore, those who were gaining support were often finding other ways of tapping into a sharing network in order to meet their basic needs.

One of the social assistance recipients noted that it did not provide enough support for people who wanted to go to school (FS 3). Another said "I do have a lot of problems with it because they don't

give you enough for groceries to last you for a month. They only give you so much and it can't last you much... It's pretty hard. You have to depend on them because you have no job" (FS 78). Another informant, who reported that she usually runs out of money by the middle of the month, said she relies on grocery money from the odd jobs her brothers and sons occasionally get, from some hides she tans for sale, and from close relatives when they are also on social assistance. A number of informants, while not specifically discussing funding levels, noted that they did odd jobs or crafts to supplement income. As well, there seems to be extensive reliance on an informal sharing network among many of those who receive government support, particularly among immediate rather than extended family members.

Three of the pensioners said specifically that the pensions last for about half a month. One of these said "if a person has to live on a pension itself, it is really hard, it is not enough to live off of" (FS 73). Most supplement their income through reliance on social assistance, or getting food from the bush or from gardens. There is

evidence that children and grandchildren rely on the pension income provided to older people, both as part of a sharing network, but also in a less positive manner. One informant reported that many young people are stealing from elders: "they barge in on them, they threaten them. These people are afraid to come out and say anything. And you can't say a thing. ...nobody will say anything because they don't want to go through court... they haven't got any money... if it isn't the 'ruffians' it is the stores because everything costs so much... the pension would be okay if it was just to provide for the pensioners themselves, it's ample. But it's the way the laws are allows the people that are robbing them to get away with it" (FS 40). A fourth pensioner said simply that the money did not last long.

The dilemma of funding amounts is aggravated by the fact that some people spend their funds on drugs or alcohol. While some of our informants made it clear that they do spend what money they receive on food, including one of those who said that funding was inadequate, one prominent community member reported the dilemma in the context of the question of whether or not to start a community

food bank: "one part of the community says make sure they have food. The other is saying if we continue to give them food they will continue to spend their cheques on alcohol" (FS 1).

There was enough evidence to clearly point to funding amounts as a problem, though a difficult one to deal with. Pensioners seem to often be called on to support other family members, and run out of money for that reason. People on social assistance often get by only by relying on other family members, to supply them with 'bush foods' or other means of support. The problem is aggravated by drug and alcohol abuse, and it is worth noting that the costs of both drugs and alcohol are substantially greater in the north, so those who are abusers are likely spending more of an already badly stretched family income.

Funding Delays

One of the most consistent problems pointed to by virtually every informant group was that of funding delays. This problem was particularly acute for those on unemployment insurance and seems less of a problem for those on social assistance. This relates to a

broader problem that might be characterized as the 'timing' of funding support: financial support is not organized to fit into the subsistence economic cycle, often coming too late to allow those interested in trapping, for example, to outfit themselves in time to take advantage of the trapping season.

One man reported that "I think it's too long of a time because I finish work [at the] end of August and I have to wait six weeks for a cheque, and which I ain't going to welfare... and they usually don't give you money. And I need the money for in September I like to have money. I like to get UIC right there. If would be good to help me get out back on the land to set up my camp and get ready for trapping season on October 16th" (FS 7). At least seven other people raised the length of their wait for a first cheque as an issue during their interviews. One of these said "it seems like claims have to sit on someone's desk for a few months before anyone does anything about it" (FS 26).

For people at the economic margin, delays in funding can be as disastrous as not getting the funding at all; however, in the context of

Fort Simpson it would appear that the sharing network allows people to manage while they wait for funds, which can then be used to repay family debts. However, they can not make up for lost time in a hunting, trapping, or fishing season, and this is where the problem is particularly acute.

### Paperwork and Bureaucracy

One consistent complaint directed at virtually all of the programs was the problem created by paperwork. Many individuals found the paperwork confusing and there is good reason to believe that many were not gaining the support they deserved or needed because of the complications associated with applications and because of their unfamiliarity with administrative procedures.

Two informants on social assistance suggested that 'the rules' were a problem. One of these said he would like to see the 'rules and papers' involving government programs translated, particularly for the benefit of older people because 'right now there are times when they don't understand' (FS 31). Four of the pensioners referred to problems with paperwork as an important issue. One told of being

passed from one administrator to another and not knowing what was happening with her application: "they got ahold of me one morning and he was such a smartass, like, I couldn't understand what he was saying because when he was talking like he wasn't talking slow he was talking fast. So I just turned around and told him, I said, 'I can't understand you'" (FS 65). Two others simply recommended cutting down on paperwork as their recommended solution, while an elder said "if a person lives long enough to get an old age pension, they shouldn't fool around with them... He already earned it" (FS 62).

As was the case with delays in funding, bureaucracy was seen as a big problem for those on unemployment insurance. Five individuals spoke of frustrations with paperwork, the most common complaint having to do with the system of sending in cards. One informant said "well, you've got to be bang on with the cards. If you miss filling out a blank or whatever, they are going to send it back and it'll take a couple more weeks" (FS12). Another reported: "I've had lots of problems with them.. Well, they used to keep sending me cards and everything. Never got nothing. I used to go to Manpower. I was told

to phone them yourself, because they say I keep buggin' all the time. But that's what they're there for" (FS 53). One informant noted that he had applied for unemployment insurance in each of the past nine years, and each time has had to submit a new application.

The frustrations are with the amount of paperwork necessary, the lack of assistance in dealing with the paperwork, the lack of information about rules and entitlements and lack of translated material. One prominent community member said "it's hard for people to go and ask for something in the first place, and then to have to sit down and work through all this paperwork..." (FS 1).

Destroying Initiative

One consistent theme that emerged from interviews with both recipients of the varieties of social assistance and with prominent community members was how the various programs discouraged initiative. This was particularly acute for pensioners. While a great number of people pointed to the broad problem of social assistance leading to dependency (and this is an issue that will be discussed

below), in this context the problem is that attempts to supplement income seem to be punished from the perspective of the recipient.

One elder said that a pension "should belong to them regardless if he's getting ten thousand dollars worth of fur a year, they shouldn't bother with it and cut him off" (FS 62). He also said "the problem with people my age is if you get an old age pension, if you sell some fur they cut you off from the old age pension. That's one of the things holding people back. They're scared they might lose their old age pension so that's why... A lot of people would still be out in the bush but this is one of the things keeping people back" (FS 62). Another simply noted that if you get a bit of work or you trap and make some money, it comes off of your pension (FS 72), while another expressed the fear that if he worked or trapped his pension would be cut off (FS 24).

That this problem is acute for elderly people makes it a particularly aggravating problem. The people who know 'the land' most, who should be out teaching others and passing on their skills and knowledge, not to mention living a healthier lifestyle than the

community provides, are virtually forced by a system that is supposed to be supporting them into staying in the community. These are also many of the people who most want to and feel strongest about living 'on the land' and who could provide the strongest examples to the community as a whole.

Powerlessness

Some fairly strong statements were made about the variety of ways in which acceptance of any form of social assistance allowed outsiders to interfere in the lives of the recipients. One informant on social assistance summed up the problem: "they can leave people alone. That would make it a lot easier. I mean, you know, just because they pay for the rent and give the money to spend on groceries they don't have to run people's lives" (FS 78). There were a variety of specific examples of how the different programs interfered with individual choices. One man on unemployment insurance said "another thing with U.I.C. is that you always gotta be around. You've got to fill out these cards and send them away" (FS 48), while a woman on social assistance complained that she did not qualify for

assistance while her boyfriend was on unemployment insurance (FS 42). One of the prominent community members said that "the social workers have their nice little computers and go through the paperwork and they understand that, but that means [the people] sit there and feel ashamed, because they do. People don't set out on purpose to get social assistance..." (FS 1). The sense of shame was expressed by one woman, who spoke of not wanting her children to know she was receiving social assistance: "I don't want them to know. My older son asks questions, but I just don't tell them anything. He wants to know. Like he knows that I always have money and the money I used to have before was from attending school... Sometimes he can't understand why I don't have money, so I just don't tell him anything" (FS 9). Another prominent community member spoke of dependence on the welfare cheque as a 'mind set' promoted by the social workers. When she wanted support to go to school, she was told she should stay home to raise her children. She saw this as a "way to keep me down" and reflected: "maybe they don't look at it that way but it does happen. Like it does affect the people because they

don't want to get up and try after a while. It's just too easy to sit and wait for your welfare cheque, because you think, 'what if the job runs out, then what am I going to do?'" (FS 43).

While there were many indications that people genuinely appreciated the financial assistance they were getting, or family members were relying on, it's clear that a feeling of powerlessness is not conducive to any individual reasserting their sense of well-being, so necessary if they are going to at some stage reach financial independence. Powerlessness feeds dependence, and shame, while a strong motivation, often can work to finally reduce people's sense of self esteem to the point where they are unable to make choices and unable to believe in themselves.

## Results: Effects and Impacts

Much was said about the changes that have taken place over the past twenty years in the community of Fort Simpson. Some of the changes were directly linked to the provision of the variety of social assistance programs. Others were linked to such events as the road

or pipeline construction, or the liquor store. Our concern was specifically with changes to old patterns of sharing and to patterns of self-reliance through life on the land. The nature and source of these changes can be discussed with reference to sharing, bush life, and other changes.

### Sharing

Informants of all groups were asked about the degree and kinds of sharing that took place in the past and in the present. Although there were exceptions, the general pattern of answers indicated that in the past sharing networks had been very strong, that these networks were deteriorating but remained in operation, and that today food sharing, particularly with regard to wild meat, is still common though very few would share cash. Informal sharing networks, usually among family members, seem to be crucial to the survival of anyone who relies on any form of social assistance. It is not uncommon, and, indeed, often necessary for those on different or similar forms of social assistance to pool their financial resources.

Many informants, particularly the older people, had vivid, positive memories of life on the land in the past. For example, a Dene woman now on social assistance said: "when I was younger, there used to be a lot of people used to live out in the bush and if you killed a moose or anything like that, everyone shared. It was good because nobody said 'well, you can't take any'. All shared everything. It was good in those days, but now it's pretty hard. Not everybody likes to share now because of the price of the gas to get it" (FS 78). Another woman said "it was good. It was quiet. My mother used to teach me a lot of things like how to make dried meat and that" (FS 80). An older woman said "it's worse. Way before it was alright. A long time ago, 1931, 1932 it was good. Everyone would help each other. No trouble. No schooling. Just fishing" (FS 39). There is a sense of loss. An elder man related: "our way is a good way, but we're losing it everyday. Every time we lose an elder that's a loss..." (FS 62). A prominent community member adds, "in the old days, the way things worked was that the families, well off families, even families that weren't too well off, they lived together in the community out in

the bush and the elders were always a central part of that. Over the years the elders were sort of taken away from that way of life. As a result, young people don't see their elders as much as they used to and that's slowly happening here and in other communities" (FS 61). It seems clear that one of the reasons why so many informants have such strong and positive memories of life on the land was precisely because of the amount of sharing that took place.

There was fairly clear agreement that less people were relying on life on the land now than had in the past. One woman said "I learned a lot from it and sometimes I wish I could go back and do it all over again. It's pretty hard now to do something like that... You have to stay in town now and try to get a job" (FS 78). Another woman, a prominent community member, said that the traditional life is difficult to live today "because things are so expensive, I think a lot of trappers and people who live off the land don't have the necessary monies that they need to pay for gas, skidoos, that kind of stuff. They're always in the hole" (FS 60). An older Dene man said: "back then, everyone lived in the bush, now young people go to school and

they don't live in the bush like they used to, if they find a job they can't hang on to their job, they work four or five days and don't think about groceries or how they are going to survive the next day, they drink up their money and they don't buy groceries... it is not like it was in the old days when you had to think about surviving until your hair turns white" (FS 2).

Some people spoke of wanting and trying to move back to a more traditional life on the land. An older woman said: "it's good, you know, I'll tell you, the people here in Fort Simpson are just wasting their lives. Why don't they try to go back to the land? I don't like what I see. I'm sixty-eight and I have ten boys. I lost one. More than half of my sons are good in the bush. You give them books of matches and axe and a gun,... they have everything they want" (FS 13). Others, for example another woman on a pension, expressed a desire to move out of the community and back on to the land (FS 54). One middle aged man, while noting that life on the land had its rewards -- "everything was laid back and you just worked at your own pace out there. There's no such thing as what time is it or coffee break or

anything like that" (FS 14) -- said he preferred the comforts of town life. He did note, however, that "if things fail in town you can always go back. Not like some people. Some people have nothing to go back to" (FS 14).

Many spoke about the difficulties of supporting yourself on a trapping income in the past few years, and how last year's trapping season was particularly poor, both in terms of fur prices and in terms of the catch. One Dene man said: "it's no use. Maybe it's good to go hunting for wild meat and stuff like that, things that you can eat. I mean, as far as fur for selling [goes], it's just peanuts... you end up going more in the hole, either that or you just can't go out trapping or nothing period because gas costs too much, food costs too much and that fur you bring in maybe not even enough to eat let alone buy gas. There is no way you're gonna survive, not now unless the fur price goes up, then you might have a chance" (FS 4). Many others referred to the past season -- 1992-93 -- as a particularly bad year for trapping, with a poor catch. For example, one Dene man reported pulling his traps out early in the season because the trapping was so

poor (FS 75). Another man, a Métis, noted that some of the people who had lived on the land all of their lives were now having problems because they "didn't know anything else" and the poor fur seasons of the last couple of years had made things very difficult (FS 47).

Results were mixed about the degree to which sharing still takes place today. The general pattern seemed to be that there continued to be extensive sharing of wild meat and food, but most people were hesitant or outright opposed to sharing money. Many people said that sharing of meat, particularly within family groups, continued to be practiced and continued to be important. A Métis man, when asked about sharing meat, said "yes, especially in winter time if we get a moose, when we come back into town people will ask for dried meat. And we always give it to whoever comes" (FS 48). This answer was typical of many: a Dene woman who sees a lot of sharing when it comes to wild meat and fish within her family (FS 50), a Métis man who shares with anyone who asks (FS 66), a Dene man who believes sharing is no different now than it was when he was young (FS 77), a Dene woman who notes that people share all the time with elders and

within the community (FS 52), another Dene woman who says her family is willing to share meat and fish all the time (FS 51), as does a Dene woman who would share wild meat and fish (FS 42) or a Dene woman who has relatives who bring her wild meat and fish, especially since she had a baby (FS 80), or another Dene woman who would and still does share wild meat with her family (FS 3) or a variety of others who report sharing wild meat and fish (FS 25, FS 9, FS 12, FS 18, FS 23). A Dene woman on social assistance said that "I also think that the sharing is still there even though the people are on that wage economy... So even like if there's one person working you share your wealth so to speak so you never really get ahead financially" (FS 36). Fewer older people were as positive about sharing today. A Métis man did report that there was still a lot of sharing today and if someone goes hunting and shoots a moose it would be shared, though not as much in the past because people have freezers to store their meat in (FS 41). An older Dene woman said sharing takes place all the time (FS 15), while an older Dene man said that while there was a lot of sharing in the past, with anyone, today people shared food

from the bush (FS 33). One prominent member of the community noted that among the traditional families a lot of sharing still takes place, particularly among extended family members, and, "if there is enough", to the elders (FS 60).

This may explain why more of the elders stressed deterioration of sharing practices. An older Dene woman said that "in those [old] days, if somebody living half a mile away [from] you got a moose, you know he was there helping himself to a hind quarter, you didn't think about it. Now things are changing. Oh, I hate that" (FS 13). An older Dene man reported that in the past sharing took place with everyone nearby, now that does not happen (FS 34), while another older Dene man said that now you can not get meat from anybody unless you pay for a tiny piece (FS 17) and, again, a third older Dene man said that now if a moose is killed, nobody shares, you have to buy food (FS 73). This was confirmed by quite a number of pensioners (FS 5, FS 65, FS 83, FS 82, FS 62, FS 72, FS 45). A few of the young people supported this position. One Dene man said that, while a lot of sharing used to take place in the community, there was not much

sharing now because people were "commercialized" (FS 31). Another middle aged Dene man reported that when he gives fish to older people they expect to have to pay (FS 14). A young Dene woman on social assistance said: "when I was younger, there used to be a lot of people used to live out in the bush and if you killed a moose or anything like that, everybody shared. It was good because nobody said 'well you can't take any.' All shared everything. It was good in those days, but now it's pretty hard. Not everybody likes to share now because of the price to get it" (FS 78).

Fewer people from any group indicated that money was or would be shared. A young Dene woman on social assistance explained that "money is sort of different than [wild meat], because that's the main, for me it's the main way of getting the other groceries that I need, and the gas I need to go out in the bush So if somebody needed to borrow they'd have to think twice before asking. But if they really needed it, sure, mom would have loaned it to them" (FS 9). There were those who said they would share money (FS 7, FS 12, FS 48), though, as one put it, it would depend on what the money was needed

for; he would be more willing to share money if it were needed for children (FS 12). A Dene man reported that "they'd lend each other money but they expect it returned" (FS 35) while another reported that people shared money in the past but do not now (FS 53). A prominent community member explained: "when you kill a moose you have a lot of meat. There is lots of meat and you can afford to share it. But a paycheck just doesn't last so therefore no one really shares their money" (FS 60).

The differences in these answers seem to fall into a pattern. More older people, perhaps steeped in an experience where sharing of almost everything was widespread and common, tended to be negative about the amount of sharing that takes place today. Younger people tended to be much more positive. It also seems to be the case that younger hunters may tend to sell wild food to older people, who have a pension, but tend to give food away to other younger people who have less access to cash. The strongest group answer in support of the fact that sharing now takes place came from young women on social assistance.

Information was also mixed about what factors were most important in leading to a deterioration of older sharing practices. One Dene man said that social assistance was the problem: "it makes it easier for people to stay in town and live off of social services especially. A lot of people have given up living on their own. They don't bother going out. Why should they? There is social services. It's not really unemployment, mostly it's that social services. It's too easy" (FS 14). A Dene woman said that cost of living was the problem: "well, I think because things are so expensive, I think a lot of the trappers and people who live off the land don't have the necessary monies that they need to pay for gas, skidoos, that kind of stuff. They're always in the hole" (FS 60, see also FS 5, FS 65, FS 83).

Some of the older people pointed to changing values as the source of the problem. One elder said that in the past, living off the land was cheaper and allowed people to rely on themselves to survive. They could also depend on each other, and share their time and energy. However, adoption of the values of white society changed things. This elder said that funding should have made life easier, but

it does not encourage people to live on the land, so people stay in the community and spend their money on alcohol. That money goes back to the government, and this "keeps the people down" (FS 62). An older Dene woman said that the "kids" today are not content with staying in Fort Simpson, they want to go to the city or to the south, and they are wasting their time. She thinks that government programs "spoil them. It spoils them, except for mother's allowance" (FS 13). Another older Dene man said that people used to help each other and were friendly, this was 'Indian nature', but now they can't do anything without money -- "the liquor store spoiled everything" -- and for that reason people stay in town and don't live off of the land (FS 82). One older man noted that 'when the highway first came through they said everything was going to be cheaper... they lied... the road is through and everything is more expensive' (FS 17). The pattern in these answers, from those who had most experience with the changes in sharing practices, is that values changed, because of the demands of government funding, which forced people to stay in the community,

the liquor store, which attracted people to the community, or the road, which promised that life would be easier in the community.

Clearly sharing remains a crucial aspect of community economic life, even if sharing is not so extensive as it was in the past. Sharing patterns are an essential component of most domestic economies, and most people in the community have, to a greater or lesser degree, access to a broader sharing network. It is also clear that the trappers, hunters, and fishers who provide wild game are generally speaking on the economic margin, barely able to make ends meet, and not being rewarded for their efforts, which in tangible ways allow the community to survive.

## Results: Solutions

### Adapting Programs to Meet Regional Circumstances

Northern Aboriginal realities are dramatically different than those of the southern, urban context out of which many social assistance programs were developed. It is very important that this be taken into account in the design and implementation of social

programs, including the provision of a variety of forms of social assistance.

In the context of this project, it is clear that, while life on the land remains desirable to many people for a variety of reasons, while cash is now necessary to support life on the land, and while many programs offer direct financial support to individuals, these programs as often as not work against supporting traditional, land based activities. For example, unemployment insurance is frequently used in the winter as a source of income. The demands on individuals to fill in cards and apply for jobs, however, limit the degree to which they could be using the income to support greater self-sufficiency for the individuals and families.

Design of social assistance programs should acknowledge the viability and continued importance of life on the land, and its role in community health. They should be designed to support self sufficiency through land based activities. This means social assistance could encourage people to move out on the land, rather than rewarding them for staying in the community, as one prominent

community spokesperson said. Many of the most minor technical requirements involved in gaining unemployment insurance or social assistance benefits serve to keep people in communities rather than supporting self-sufficiency through subsistence economic activity.

Similarly, it was pointed out by the Chief that many of the housing programs demanded relatively large incomes, because of the nature of the houses being constructed. People with lower incomes and/or larger families, often those most in need, could not qualify. The Chief suggested a program that would support construction of modest, inexpensive log cabins on the land; this would take much of the housing pressure off the community, encourage people to move out into the bush for longer periods, and be a less expensive program Targeted at those most in need.

### Community Control

A non-Aboriginal social worker summed up the importance of community control of social programs. She said: "in my mind, we should be turning this program back to the community to administer... whatever agency or community group that's willing to take that on.

It gives the community ownership of the program. It provides them leeway to do a little more with the program than I'm allowed to do within the confines of government structure... It's just a program I think the community at this point in time could probably administer better than we can" (FS 79). Community control would enable the community to change programs to adapt to changing circumstances, and to more easily make changes of the type recommended elsewhere in this report. Clearly, people within the community know their own needs best, and also have a sense of how to address those needs. In Fort Simpson, for example, the Dene and Métis communities could and would need to work together and pool their resources.

### Invest in Sharing and Community

Programs could also be designed to promote the traditional values that are the basis of self esteem for Aboriginal peoples and have worked for centuries. This would likely require taking the pool of social assistance resources and restructuring. An amount would be set aside for use by individuals, and a pool would be set aside for programs of benefit to a community of needy people. An integrated,

community approach would be necessary. Individuals might have to sign waivers of normal rights to allow for participation in the process.

For example, a pool of funds to support direct costs of hunters could be established in the manner of the trapper's incentive program. The partial returns from the hunt would be used to establish a community food bank based on wild meats and fish. Ideally, this food bank would substantially meet the food needs of families on social assistance, and it would provide hunters with an additional, non-fur trapping based incentive to return to the land. Similarly, a community market garden could also be established based on the same principles. Both of these ventures, in the view of one of the prominent Aboriginal community members, could be used to supply a food kitchen for the needy.

Or, a community child care centre might be established where single parents could earn additional cash to supplement their incomes or, alternatively, use the time when children are in school to gain training or education.

As well, extra income could be Targeted to specific elders who have responsibility to large family groups. This could help elders regain status within the community and ensure that they can pay for wild meat and fish, thereby also promoting land based activities.

In effect, these are examples of programs that reward sharing and place community needs first. A restructuring of social assistance programs to this effect would mean that social programs would fit in with and encourage traditional values. This in turn might ensure that the programs slowly work towards community health and well being, rather than acting as a band aid for individual problems, often leading to dependency.

It is important to emphasize that such a restructuring would not be easy within the logic of government assistance as it stands. Encouraging families to live on the land, for example, has implications for the delivery of education to young children or for the delivery of health care services. It would be difficult to make these changes without a discussion of the needs of the community as a whole in a wide range of areas, and an attempt to integrate and co-

ordinate these areas. However, there seems a clear sense of direction from this research to move towards centring the community and promoting sharing practices.

## Conclusion

Although perhaps not completely generalizable, much of what was said in Fort Simpson has relevance to other Aboriginal communities, particularly those in the NWT but also many of those in Canada's mid-north, where much of Canada's Aboriginal population lies. The issues raised at the outset of this paper -- those of funding levels, fragmentation of program delivery, cultural sensitivity, and addressing needs -- clearly are relevant in Fort Simpson. It also seems clear that public spending in Fort Simpson at this time is in large part working against a long term goal of helping people achieve economic independence, self-sufficiency, and well-being. While funds are essential to the people's ability to survive, at the present time much of the funding, by promoting individualization and by restricting people's ability and motivation to engage in the subsistence economy,

moves away from and undermines any project of building towards something more meaningful.

Too little of public spending is directed towards projects, like the underfunded trapper's incentive program, that promote self-sufficiency, while too much is tied to restrictive, band-aid programs like social assistance or unemployment insurance. These latter programs simply are not designed to meet the real needs of Aboriginal northerners, and often actually work against those needs. It is remarkable how many genuinely good and creative ideas community members and leaders have for programs or projects that would be of benefit to the community. Most of these -- the community garden or wild meat food bank, housing on the land, community child care -- involve finding ways of encouraging people to work together, involve building on and promoting the rebuilding of traditional sharing practices, and involve subsidizing and supporting the subsistence economy and life on the land. Of equal significance, these ideas look to the long term health of the community and the long term maintenance of traditional Dene and Métis cultures.

The fact of community itself is a crucial component in this analysis. The fragmentation of program delivery, pointed to in Part One of this Report, means that programs are not designed to see the interest of the community as a whole. This is a strategic failing of enormous consequences; not only are programs generally unco-ordinated, have the appearance of make-shift and band aid solutions to long term problems, they also undermine aspects of the community that might lead to longer term solutions and, at times, even work against each other. A trapper's incentive program encourages people to live on the land while unemployment insurance requirements demands that people stay in the community. Furthermore, all of the major public spending programs studied here are oriented towards individuals; therefore these programs promote individualism and undermine the traditional sharing ethic -- not to mention traditional culture that so many in the community pointed to as so crucial -- that remains a critical economic strategy for most domestic economies.

Furthermore, the powerlessness and dependence created and enforced by these mechanisms of social assistance work to perpetuate

themselves. Individuals in the most vulnerable positions are made to feel ashamed; the self-esteem they require in order to be able to put themselves 'back on their feet' is precisely what many of these programs work against. Public spending does not thereby act as an investment strategy that works towards eliminating the need for it; it works as an instrument that perpetuates the conditions that foster its use. Public spending of this sort helps create cycles of dependence and cycles of poverty.

All of this, again, in a context where people at the community have solid, practical ideas for re-orienting public spending in ways that look to the long term health of the community. Obviously, if these programs were to succeed, over the long term public spending on places like Fort Simpson would be reduced, as people become more self-sufficient. Even if some amount of public spending might remain necessary to underwrite a series of programs that worked to promote community well-being, the likelihood of a perpetually growing need, that passes on from generation to generation, each raised in a context of poverty and dependence, each with a weakened

ability to survive on the land, a weakened cultural heritage, a weakened sharing network, that likelihood remains a much more expensive proposition. It also remains one possible vision of the future in Fort Simpson. The people there have other ideas, and other hopes. They do have solutions to offer. These solutions would involve significant restructuring of public spending in their community. They deserve our most serious consideration.

General Recommendations: Summary

1. Design of social assistance programs should acknowledge the viability and continued importance of life on the land, and its role in community health. They should be designed and implemented to support self sufficiency, particularly through land based activities.
2. Community control of social programs should be enhanced.
3. Programs should be designed and implemented in a manner that promotes the traditional values that are the basis of self esteem for Aboriginal peoples and have worked for centuries. For example, programs that reward sharing, support existing informal sharing

networks, and allow the community to put it's needs first, could be developed or enhanced.

Specific Recommendations: Summary

1. Enhance Community Harvesters Assistance Program, and similar programs that support traditional and land based activities.

2. Develop a program that would support construction of modest, inexpensive log cabins on the land; this would take much of the housing pressure off the community, encourage people to move out into the bush for longer periods, and be a less expensive program Targeted at those most in need.

3. A pool of funds to support direct costs of hunters could be established in the manner of the trapper's incentive program. The partial returns from the hunt would be used to establish a community food bank based on wild meats and fish. Ideally, this food bank would substantially meet the food needs of families on social assistance, and it would provide hunters with an additional, non-fur trapping based incentive to return to the land.

4. A community market garden could also be established based on the same principles. Both of these ventures, in the view of one of the prominent Aboriginal community members, could be used to supply a food kitchen for the needy.

5. A community child care centre might be established where single parents could earn additional cash to supplement their incomes or, alternatively, use the time when children are in school to gain training or education.

6. Additional income could be Targeted to specific elders who have responsibility to large family groups. This could help elders regain status within the community and ensure that they can pay for wild meat and fish, thereby also promoting land based activities.

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