

Building Indigenous-Newcomer Relationships: Visit to Brokenhead Ojibway Nation

Final Report

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Background:

Immigration Partnership Winnipeg's Indigenous and Newcomers Engagement Work, 2018-2019

Immigration Partnership Winnipeg (IPW) acknowledges the importance of enhancing newcomer awareness of Indigenous peoples, their histories, cultures, and ways of life. Therefore, building cross-cultural relationships between newcomers and Indigenous peoples is one of IPW's strategic priorities. To meet this priority, IPW has began collaborating and engaging with several Indigenous organizations such as The Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, Circle of Life Thunderbird House, and Aboriginal Youth Opportunities.

In consultation with its Indigenous Consultation Circle, IPW, with Kairos Canada, collaboratively planned and delivered a bridge-building forum in March 2018, during which Indigenous peoples and newcomers from a variety of ethnocultural communities came together to make connections and bust myths about each other's cultures. This forum will be followed up by a second gathering of Indigenous and newcomer participants, which will focus on exploring treaties, what it means to be treaty people, and what it means to live on the land of Indigenous peoples.

Description of Project, Purpose, and Objectives

IPW initiated and helped to organize a cultural exchange between Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and members of newcomer ethnocultural communities in Winnipeg. The intention was to find an Indigenous community near Winnipeg that would be interested in inviting and teaching ethnocultural communities about their cultures, ways of life, and histories. On Saturday, August 11, 2018, more than 20 individuals from Winnipeg's newcomer ethnocultural communities attended Brokenhead Ojibway Nation's Pow Wow celebration.

The intention of this visit was to avoid being a spectator on Indigenous territories but instead engage in thoughtful and respectful mutual learning. Moreover, the intention was to educate both IPW and newcomers to better address Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action number 93, which calls "upon the federal government, in collaboration with the national Aboriginal organizations, to revise the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test to reflect a more inclusive history of the diverse Aboriginal peoples".²

¹ Hani Ataan Al-ubeady is the Community Engagement Coordinator at Immigration Partnership Winnipeg.

² Truth and Reconciliation Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Many newcomers learn inaccurate and racist stereotypes about Indigenous peoples from the media and non-Indigenous sources. As a result, it is important for newcomers to educate themselves about the land that they live on and call their new home. IPW hopes that this visit can be an opportunity for to learn about Indigenous peoples directly from Indigenous peoples. Educating newcomers about Indigenous peoples can help newcomers explore the commonalities and positive aspects of their cultural narratives, which in turn, can help build bridges and lead to a more inclusive society.

Another objective of this cultural exchange was to create an opportunity for members from various newcomer ethnocultural communities to learn about Indigenous cultures, histories, and ways of life. Moreover, this cultural exchange can help build meaningful connections through experiential learning with Indigenous populations in the latter's communities, which in turn can assist newcomers better understand their Indigenous neighbours in urban settings and widen their perspectives on Indigenous cultures.

Description of the Event

On the morning of August 11, 2018, newcomer participants gathered at the IPW office for breakfast and were asked to fill out a pre-visit evaluation sheet which sought to understand the level of knowledge the attendees had about Indigenous peoples, their cultures, and histories. During breakfast, attendees were given an informative and interactive presentation/orientation by the former Chief of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Jim Bear. Chief Jim Bear discussed treaties, residential schools, Indigenous cultures, histories, and some misconceptions about Indigenous peoples. Before boarding the bus to Brokenhead, attendees had a chance to ask Chief Jim Bear questions about what they heard during his presentation.



Newcomer attendees with Former Chief of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Jim Bear

During the bus ride, attendees mingled with each other and read a pamphlet about Pow Wow celebrations which was prepared by an Indigenous IPW practicum student. That same practicum student accompanied the ethnocultural attendees during the visit and was available to answer newcomers' questions about the Pow Wow celebration. Upon arrival at the Pow Wow, newcomers observed the opening ceremony and began interacting with Indigenous peoples.

During the visit, IPW displayed a banner, which read: “Building Bridges, Creating Ties: A Partnership of Indigenous and Newcomer Communities”. The banner was intended to prompt newcomers to interact with and learn from Indigenous peoples through conversation. Before leaving the Pow Wow, as a sign of respect and gratitude for allowing newcomers to attend this event, attendees presented a gift to the Chief of Brokenhead and to former Chief, Jim Bear.



Newcomer Attendees with Manitoba NDP Leader, Wab Kinew

On the way back to Winnipeg, attendees were asked to fill-out a post-visit evaluation form. The form asked the attendees’ thoughts of the event, what they learned about Indigenous peoples and their histories, and if they had any suggestions for such an event in the future. All evaluations state that attendees would attend an event like this again. Similarly, all the evaluations indicate that attendees learned “a lot” about Indigenous peoples/cultures during this event. When asked how much the participant enjoyed the event, every attendee circled either “a lot” or “medium”. Attendees stated that they learned that Indigenous peoples have different languages, traditions, and cultures; others learned about the different music, spirituality, and regalia of Indigenous peoples. Yet others learned more about treaties, land entitlement, and Indigenous governance. Some stated that newcomers should have been invited to attend such ceremonies “long ago”.

Suggestions

Overall, the event was successful as attendees learned about Indigenous cultures and histories. Nonetheless, there are a few things that could be improved upon. Some attendees suggested to have more activities planned during the day; to figure out a way of inviting more ethnocultural participants; and to visit the Indigenous community before the event to establish better connection and relationship with the community’s leaders. It was suggested that during the next visit participants are given an orientation about Pow Wows and about the etiquette during such events. Finally, it might be beneficial to alter pre-visit evaluation forms to make them less challenging.

Outcomes and Next Steps

One of the main outcomes of this event was to educate ethnocultural participants about Indigenous peoples and their histories and to increase their understanding of how contemporary Indigenous realities



are shaped by legacies of colonialism. Attendees had an exciting opportunity to experience and learn about the cultural practices and history of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation.

With this visit, IPW sought to continue to address stereotypes and debunk myths that Indigenous and ethnocultural communities might have about each other. The event presented an opportunity for ethnocultural participants to better understand the dynamic of their relationship with Indigenous peoples and to consider ways to better share spaces and social and economic resources with Indigenous communities in Winnipeg. It was important for the participants to realize that they should not feel that they are in competition with Indigenous peoples for resources. Rather, many attendees realized that some similarities exist between their culture and the cultures of Indigenous peoples such as dance, spirituality, songs, and food.

IPW hopes that this visit will prompt newcomers to further learn from Indigenous peoples about their histories and cultures, as well as the contemporary relevance of treaties. Similarly, IPW hopes that after this event, members of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation will wish to learn more about the cultures and histories of newcomers. With its focus on the significance of treaties and exploring what it means for non-Indigenous peoples to be treaty people on this land, IPW's second Building Bridges Forum, scheduled for Saturday, November 17, 2018, can serve as another opportunity for mutual learning.

