



Australian Government

Attorney-General's Department

**7TH WORLD INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND WELLNESS
CONFERENCE: WARRIORS AGAINST VIOLENCE**

Vancouver, Canada

25–27 September 2006

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1. Executive summary

The 7th World Indigenous Women and Wellness Conference: Warriors Against Violence was held from 25–27 September 2006 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (refer program attached). It was sponsored by Interprofessional Continuing Education at the University of British Columbia in partnership with the Pacific Association of First Nations Women and the Aboriginal Health Program at BC Women’s Hospital and Health Centre. The conference was designed for community health planners, educators, healthcare providers, Indigenous leaders, elders, youth, students, policymakers, police, justice workers, researchers and others who are interested in or who work in the field of Indigenous health. It also provided information, resources and networking opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

Growing patterns of violence within Indigenous families and communities were addressed, including the nexus between violence and relationships. Indigenous communities shared success stories and emphasised effective strategies for the promotion of wellness in communities and home environments. Particular emphasis was placed on hearing the voice of youth and embracing elders to promote healthier and positive futures.

Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) gained international exposure at the conference through the attendance of two representatives— Kim O’Hello, Coordinator of the Many Rivers Violence Prevention Unit in Kempsey and Antoinette Braybrook, Coordinator of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service in Melbourne.

At the commencement of the conference, representatives from each country were asked to stand. This was a proud moment for the FVPLS representatives. Only four women represented Australia: three from Victoria and one from NSW. The Australian representatives were very popular as people from all over the world wanted to meet them to discuss Australian Indigenous issues.

The traditional welcome ceremony featured participants wearing traditional dress, and elders, mothers, fathers and children dancing and singing. Conference participants were invited to join in a traditional dance: the FVPLS representatives described seeing so many people from such diverse backgrounds coming together in celebration as simply breathtaking. Unlike a standard five-minute traditional welcome in Australia, the First Nations people in Canada spend several hours welcoming people to their country.

A wide range of issues were addressed at the conference, with presentations focusing on:

- primary prevention and intervention services for victims
- policy and/or legal frameworks
- youth and children
- engaging men in ending violence
- healing through song, film and video making
- sexuality
- reclaiming traditional cultural knowledge, including spirituality and
- healthy families and community collaboration.

2. Just ask us: conversations with First Nations teenage moms

This workshop was presented by Sylvia Olsen, First Nations Community Development Specialist; Tammy Bill, teen mother, Tseycum First Nation; and Diane Harris, Health Worker, Chemainus First Nation.

In 2003, Sylvia Olsen conducted a community participation research project with teen moms from Saanich First Nations. This project resulted in the publication of *Just ask us: a conversation with First Nations teen moms*.

The discussion centred on teen mothers and described how they became motivated to help others in their communities. The young mothers' book, *Teenagers with babies*, contains stories about things these young women felt they missed out on because they became mothers at such an early age, and how their lives could have been improved through better decision-making.

3. Engaging men in ending violence: the missing pieces of the puzzle

This workshop was led by Bruce Wood, Executive Director of the Men's Resource Centre at Saskatoon and Primary Consultant of Changing Men Consulting. The Men's Resource Centre provides services and resources for anger management, stress reduction, parenting, sexuality, computer skills and life skills.

Bruce spoke of his friendship with Dan Parker and Joseph Fossella, founders of the Warriors Against Violence Society. The Society aims to help Aboriginal families unlearn abusive and violent behaviours and reclaim their traditional values of honour, respect, and equality. It also provides counselling, group work, cultural ceremonies, and public education to increase awareness of family violence issues for Aboriginal communities.

Bruce elaborated on his involvement in men's programs aimed at ending violence, and of the positive outcomes from these programs.

4. Family violence policy for Indigenous Australians

Australian FVPLS representatives Antoinette Braybrook and Kim O'Hello, together with Dr Kyllie Cripps, CIPHER Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, University of Melbourne presented a paper that addressed the history of family violence policy development related to Australia Indigenous communities and described how that policy had been implemented in practice. Dr Cripps has worked on several occasions with the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Section of the Australian Attorney-General's Department to present family violence prevention strategies.

The Attorney-General's Department introduced the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services program, which funds 26 FVPLS units across Australia. The units deliver the program to rural and remote clients of family violence in Indigenous communities. The conference presenters identified the development of the FVPLS units across Australia and showcased two FVPLS units from Kempsey, NSW and Melbourne, Victoria.

The Attorney-General's Department recognises that effective solutions require cooperation and collaboration across a vast network of diverse partners. Further long-term solutions will spring from community-based programs which acknowledge that family violence not only impacts on the health and security of victims but impacts upon the health of entire communities.

The presentation is available from staff at the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Section at the Attorney-General's Department.

5. Engaging men in change: respectful approaches to and with First Nations men

This workshop, led by Bruce Wood, addressed cultural and gender issues and explored why men have been largely absent from the movement to end violence against women.

According to Bruce, the men involved in the Warriors Against Violence Society provide great role models for younger men through the delivery of culturally appropriate programs that encourage men to critically assess their behaviours and make changes to their lives.

6. Tradition, culture and lifestyle contribute to health identity

Dr Mary Lou Louie, a traditional spiritual healer, explained the importance of living a lifestyle rich with tradition and culture, and the influence such a lifestyle has on a person's experience of a healthy identity.

According to Dr Louie, reclaiming and reviving traditional cultural knowledge on a personal level is pivotal to maintaining a health identity.

7. Five cornerstones: our understanding of violent and abusive behaviours

Dan Parker and Joseph Fossella, founders of the Warriors Against Violence Society, led this session. The focus was on the factors that contribute to violent and abusive behaviours; for example, drugs, alcohol and loss of dignity.

The presenters provided strategies to assist people who wish to reclaim traditional values of honour, respect and equality.

8. Keynote speaker: policy, politics and mentorship: youth participation for today's generations

Ginger Gosnell, youth advocate, Nisga'a and KWagiulth Nations, was an inspirational speaker who focused on the importance of finding a way for youth to participate in policy and politics.

In the most respectful and eloquent way, she asked elders to begin involving youth at the highest level of politics. She also emphasised the important contributions that elders can make to future generations by acting in a mentoring capacity and passing on to youth their knowledge and skills.

Ginger's speech was reflective of opinions expressed by many young Australian Aboriginal people.

9. Community collaboration: one step at a time

The presenters of this session were Cathy Alisch, General Manager, Waabinong Head Start Family Resource Centre, Sault Ste Marie, Ontario; Jim Baraniuk, Executive Director, Children's Aid Society of Algoma, Sault Ste Marie and Brenda Coombs, Executive Director, Nimkii-Naabkawagan Family Crisis Shelter Batchewana, First Nation of Ojibway, Sault Ste Marie.

The workshop provided a review of processes implemented by several Aboriginal organisations and a child welfare agency to develop programs aimed at assisting Aboriginal families in Sault Ste Marie. The need for these organisations to develop such programs arose from the lack of culturally sensitive services available to Aboriginal families in the area.

The presenters explained how the collaborative partnership was developed, why it was so successful and what had been accomplished through community collaboration.

10. Youth leadership development and empowerment through *Learning who we are: a Squamish community centred project*

This presentation was led by Stephen Kozey, Social Justice Educator and Facilitator; Jackie Gonzales, Manager, Youth Services Division, Child and Family Services Program, Squamish Nation; and Dustin Rivers, Grade 12 student, contemporary Squamish dancer, singer and fine arts practitioner.

The presenters explained the *Learning who we are* project, which looks at reconnecting youth with their culture. The project is run predominately by youth who have survived very difficult experiences, and who are keen to pass coping strategies on to others.

Utilising methods such as storytelling and retelling, focus groups and community forums, the project explores new ways of learning about old ways of knowing in order to document the history of the Squamish people.

11. Keynote speaker: the vision of future is empowered thru' culture and tradition

Dr Mary Lou Louie delivered an emotional address about the difficulties of raising young children as a single mother and the abuse she experienced. Dr Louie's children comforted and supported their mother during her speech.

12. Personal reflection: Kim O'Hello, Coordinator, Many Rivers Violence Prevention Unit, Kempsey

The entire trip was amazing. The people I met were very genuine and I returned to Australia with a lot of fresh ideas and new enthusiasm for the work we do here.

I visited the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in East Vancouver. The Centre resembles a community open house where people of all ages gather for a variety of activities, including meetings, get-togethers, sport, and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Each Wednesday, the Centre holds a Family Night with a big cook-up. Each family brings a dish, and everyone eats together and enjoys traditional dancing and singing.

On behalf of Australia, I presented the conference organisers with a painting I had designed in relation to peace. I also presented a painting to the Aboriginal Friendship Centre.

In addition, our trip also took us to local reservations to see how they work and are managed. The people in Canada are suffering the same as our people here, with drugs, alcohol, poor health and lack of education and housing being all similar issues.

I feel this conference not only lifted my enthusiasm but has set up links to support and guide us all to a brighter and more positive future.

13. Personal reflection: Antoinette Braybrook, Coordinator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service, Melbourne

Kim O'Hello and I arrived in Vancouver on 23 September 2006 and it was the middle of the day, but for us it was really our sleep time. That didn't stop us, though. A friend of mine, Kim Pate, just happened to be in Vancouver so we spent the rest of the day with her—an added bonus. Kim lives in Toronto and is the Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society. She is a strong advocate for women in prison, with much of her work focusing on Aboriginal women in Canada.

We were fortunate enough to be able to spend a day and a half with Kim. She introduced us to a number of people at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre, which we subsequently visited a number of times. It is worth noting that we also attended the Aboriginal Friendship Centre for a POW WOW and were lucky enough to be given a tour of the Aboriginal reserve.

Work aside, Kim took us sightseeing on the day we arrived and the next morning. In this short period of time we got to see many interesting things. Some of the photos were shown at the National Conference in Cairns.

Both Kim and I had cameras but did not take photos of conference participants as we were not sure whether people would be offended.

The conference was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience and I would like to thank the Attorney-General's Department for giving me the opportunity to attend.

14. Conclusion

At the end of the conference, the baton was passed on to the next conference host.

As well as providing inspiration to the two FVPLS representatives, the conference offered insights into strategies and initiatives being undertaken by other communities around the world to eliminate family violence. Importantly, many of those strategies could be adapted for implementation in Australian Indigenous communities.

The conference also presented the FVPLS representatives with the opportunity to develop an international service provider network, and provided a forum where they could inform others of programs currently being funded by the Australian Government, including the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services program funded by the Attorney-General's Department.