

*The Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre is proudly located on Treaty Six Territory and Homelands of the Métis People*

## *Anti-Racism Initiative and Gathering*



*Left to Right:*

*Back Row: Robert Doucette, Sam Mark, Allan Morin, Eliana Rocio Zuluaga Valencia, Shay Stevenson, Charleen Cote*

*Front Row: Elaine Findlay, Liliana Dominguez, Rukija Morava, Gedeon Isezerano*



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*Racism is...*

*“Discrimination based on the false belief that one individual or institution is superior than the other, consequently, creating a dynamic of oppression and power.”*

*- Saskatoon Community*

## *The Purpose, The Process, The Preamble*

*The purpose of the Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre's Anti-Racism Initiative Gathering is to engage stakeholders in a collective voice to address and redress the critical issue of community racism through hard-to-have dialogue. The process is designed to promote participation through solution-focussed outcomes, identify racialized discrepancies and determine action items to eliminate racial disparities and racism in the Saskatoon community.*

*Letters of invitation<sup>1</sup> were distributed to a total of 54 Saskatoon community organizations. Of the 54 invited organizations, 38 attended and participated. The 38 organizations that attended include:*

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A – Sample Invitation Letter

*The Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre is proudly located on  
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- Anti-Racism Network
- Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.
- CFS Saskatoon
- CLASSIC
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Family Information Liaison Unit – Justice
- Family Services Saskatoon
- First Nations University of Canada
- Friendship Inn
- Global Gathering Place
- Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools
- Heart Linked
- International Cultural Wellness Society
- Legal Aid Saskatchewan
- Lighthouse
- Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan Inc.
- Métis Nation Saskatchewan
- Ministry of Social Services
- Newcomer Information Centre
- North Thunderbird Counselling and Consulting
- Riversdale Community Association
- Salvation Army
- Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth
- Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies
- Saskatchewan Intercultural Association
- Saskatchewan Polytechnic
- Saskatchewan Sport
- Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service
- Saskatoon Fire Department
- Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre
- Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre
- Saskatoon Open Door Society
- Saskatoon Police Services
- Saskatoon Public Library
- Saskatoon Public Schools
- St. Thomas Wesley United Church
- United Way
- University of Saskatchewan

*Gathering posters<sup>2</sup> were delivered by Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre practicum students to 24 community organizations inviting community members to attend. Another 54 posters were distributed to the 54 organizations which were invited to attend, with the request that the poster be displayed where service users could view them.*

*In addition to invitations received by organizations and the community at large, four elders and four youth were invited to represent the voices of the elderly and youth, respectively. The four elders who were in attendance include Ms. Elaine Findlay, Caucasian, Mr. Sam Mark, Chinese, Ms. Liliana Dominquez, Argentinian and Mr. Allan Morin, Métis. The four youth include Ms. Rukija*

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix B – Sample Poster

Morava, Romanian, Mr. Gedeon Isezerano, Rwandan, Ms. Eliana Rocio Zuluaga Valencia, Columbian and Mr. Shay Stevenson, First Nation.

Days prior to the Gathering, agendas<sup>3</sup> were distributed to the 54 invited organizations. In total, 101 Saskatoon community members and organizational representatives attended and participated in the Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre Anti-Racism Initiative Gathering. As a discrepancy, within the distributed agendas Mayor Clark was scheduled to be in attendance and to make an opening address at the Gathering. Due to event cancellations and the presence of Covid-19 in the Saskatoon Community, Mayor Clark was urgently needed elsewhere. He sent his regrets.

Nutrition was provided by May Henderson, Carrie Dubois and their helpers Mary-Ann Napope and Terry Gossen. Fiji Robinson provided photography services. Door prizes consisted of ten beaded lanyards created by Nathan Stevenson and Beatrice Bellegarde.

The Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre would like to extend sincere thanks to all those who took time from busy schedules to engage and contribute to the Gathering. We deem the initiative a successful beginning to an integral movement in the Saskatoon Community.

## **The Gathering**

The Gathering component of the Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre Anti-Racism Initiative was facilitated on March 12, 2020 from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm in the Saskatoon Indian Métis Friendship Centre gymnasium. Those in attendance formed 13 work groups and answered a variety of racism-based questions. Each question was afforded a 15-minute

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix C – Sample Agenda

time allocation, with additional time to present findings and have question related dialogue. The following is indicative of the collection of voices at the Gathering. The complete compilation of written answers<sup>4</sup> have been reformatted for ease of access. Direct quotes and comments were documented by the facilitator of the Gathering for the purpose of reiterating the strength and solution focussed conversations that occurred. Those notes are reflected in this report. The facilitator/writer remained neutral throughout the Gathering and the writing of this document.

## **The Icebreaker**

Each group was provided with a 24-piece children's puzzle. The puzzle was to be constructed based on group similarities. Each piece was to be linked when the group was able to identify an aspect that they all had in common, such as all having had grown up in Saskatoon, all having had completed a university degree, etc. The common aspects could not include physiological contributors, such as all having red blood, all having a nose, etc. It was apparent that interracial groups had much more difficulty constructing the puzzle and many were not able to complete in the 15-minute time frame. The purpose of the icebreaker was to emphasize the difficulty in completing a task when diverse values, histories and ethnicities were involved. It was communicated that had the icebreaker been reversed, utilizing differences rather than similarities, it would have been much easier to construct the puzzles.

## **Question 1 – What Contributes to Racism?**

The workgroups identified approximately 150 community contributors to racism. The contributors that resonated among many of the

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<sup>4</sup>Appendix D – Written Answers

groups included fear, systems, lack of education, all forms of media, legislation and environmental influence, such as family, school, community and social groupings. Colonialism was mentioned repeatedly as well but new Canadians did not necessarily agree that the process of colonialism in Canada pertained to the racism that they experience. Three pieces of Canadian legislation were identified among the workgroups as being oppressive and racist; the *Indian Act*, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Official Languages Act*. The *Indian Act* is deemed racist because it is a “control document” that eradicates the power of sovereignty and self-determination from Indigenous Peoples. One group identified that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is a racist document because it indicates that it is every Canadian's right to be treated equally under the law but First Nation people were present on these lands prior to the creation of Canada, making them pre-Canadian people and exempting them from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The *Official Languages Act* was found to be racist as well because it only acknowledges the languages of those responsible for colonialism within Canada and further denies Indigenous rights, cultures, histories and diversity. It also denies equality within Canada for new-Canadians who speak their native tongues. Understood as continued colonialism, new Canadians need to pass an official languages test to be permitted citizenship in Canada. It was discussed that much of Canadian legislation is racist because it further perpetuates division and power imbalance, as well as provides a catalyst for the spread of hate through vocalization and written forms.

## **Question 2 – How Has Racism Evolved?**

The groups answered the question using different approaches and different perspectives. For instance, some groups addressed the evolution of racism from a positive perspective by determining the evolution of the

elimination of racism, while others addressed how racism has evolved to become “normalized” and “foundational.” Some groups addressed the necessities to further evolve racism to a state of non-existence. The vast majority indicated that racism remains to be paramount and is based on the privileged positions of the dominant society and the coercion of power imbalance paradigms through systems and legislation. Social media serves as a platform to reinforce the power imbalance paradigms worldwide and growing in magnitude and racialized hate as it expands to more viewers. According to the groups, the concept of socialism contributed much to the evolution of racism as it determines there is a separation between the majority culture and subcultures. That very socialism allows for separation of the races because it is based on values, culture, socio-economic status, location and history. One speaker indicated that socialism is ever-present and only the majority culture is permitted to evolve while the other subcultures remain oppressed. Similarly, another comment was that “racism may appear to dissipate but has an undercurrent that progresses.” What is certain is that racism has indeed evolved, will continue to evolve and is dependent upon each of us to determine the trajectory of that evolution.

### **Question 3 – Who Is Responsible for Racism?**

People, processes, behaviors, groups, systems, thoughts, legislation and social media were identified as the primary contributors responsible for racism. It was further determined that racism is a belief system, usually beginning in the home and grows through environmental conditioning. The environmental conditioning is a result of broken systems and a reinforcement of inequitable value systems inherited from international



levels, specifically systems which have been responsible for colonialism across the globe. Although people from all walks of life perpetuate racialization of various forms through behaviors, it is learned, acceptable and even encouraged to propagate. For racism to be eliminated from Saskatoon Community values, interactions and behaviors, the change would have to include reinforcement by international change. Effort by the Saskatoon Community to eliminate racism will not be futile and will improve the overall health of those who choose to participate in those elimination efforts. It was determined that the Saskatoon Community needs to disallow racism, through punitive action and by utilizing the very tools that perpetuate racism. It was ascertained that social media is the quickest way to spread information, hate, news, gossip and social values. An anti-racism social media campaign would contribute greatly to the elimination of racism on the Saskatoon Community.

#### **Question 4 – What Allows Racism to Thrive?**

The groups determined that silence, government, religion, the economy, social media and lack of education and awareness are the principal reasons that racism thrives in the Saskatoon Community. Racism is deemed to have a hierarchy and the more crucial an aspect is, such as the economy, the more racism is utilized as a tool from international, national and community governments, leaders, stakeholders and members. One group identified a former Prime Minister and a current President the chief culprits of racism and indicated that both leaders utilize racism to ensure governmental plans are executed. Ultimately, any person in a position of power has the ability to use racism for gain. Rather than oppose racism, most people remain silent even if they understand the presence of racism and disagree with it. It has been a pointless task to address racism at the governmental level because governmental racism is enacted by a system and

determining who in the system is responsible is a daunting task. Groups further determined that eliminating racism in their own families has proven to be without success and many did not know how to initiate the conversations among family members, friends, colleagues and employers. The evolution and utilization of hierarchal racism, the hard-to-have conversations about racism and the silence of racism exist due to “ancient racists” who have told the same lies repeatedly. For the Saskatoon Community to be “racism free we need to begin questioning what we are taught and begin teaching our children and grandchildren the truth.” In finality, it was indicated that due to a position of privilege, distinguishing racism from reality is difficult, especially for the older generation (some) who have always maintained values infiltrated with racism, likely unintentionally.

### **Question 5 - Determine How A Community Definition of Racism Could Empower Our Communities.**

A Saskatoon Community definition of racism could ensure a minimum standard of accountability through common ground creation, exposing flawed thinking, opening a platform for meaningful conversations and a point of reference to refer to when addressing racism and racist behaviors. The Saskatoon Community definition could be built upon to include a community vision statement and develop a strategic plan to ensure that anti-racism continues in Saskatoon and becomes a part of the Saskatoon culture. A definition could be the initiation to a movement that stresses community education and awareness offered on a regular basis with the goals of changing attitudes, dissipating stereotypes and creating a more productive value system for the Saskatoon Community. The groups indicated that moving forward the process should begin in a simple manner; the poster campaign at the conclusion of this initiative is a great start,

followed by a continuum of initiatives that involve all the Saskatoon Community. The final objective would be for a paradigm shift from the prevalence of racism to the celebration of diversity.

### **Question 6 – What Can You as A Community Member Do to Eliminate Racism?**

“Ending the silence will end racism” is the theme that resonated when asked “what can you as a community member do to eliminate racism?” Each group identified education and awareness as a necessary component to the elimination of racism, through facilitated gatherings and the opportunity for groups of ethnic diversity to be engaged and interacting. A strong sense of accountability echoed as participants stated that the elimination of racism included self-reflection, support in educating the self, creating safe spaces for people to decolonize their thinking, internal research, the inspections of personal values, being self-aware of racist contributions and seeking help to change personal biases. Being an advocate of anti-racism by speaking out in all contexts, not engaging in racist-based social media and filing complaints with the Human Rights Commissions of Saskatchewan and Canada were identified as possible ways of decreasing the use of racism in Saskatoon homes, organizations, places of employment and the community at large. In finality, there are Saskatoon organizations that currently facilitate anti-racism initiatives and it is often challenging to engage populations outside of those with a vested interest, such as membership or alliance. One group commented that development of a community wide website would be convenient and benefit anti-racism initiatives, as events and reminders could be posted, while others indicated that there are currently organizations with this mandate. As an action item, it was determined that anti-racism organization sand initiatives need to be

marketed to a wider audience and those receiving information of initiatives and events need to include their contacts in the distribution of information.

### **Question 7 – What Can Organizations Do to Eliminate Racism?**

Education, promotion of awareness and accountability were the considerations most represented in the answers when asked “what can organizations do to eliminate racism?” Deliberate punitive actions through policy and the enforcement of such were deemed to be internally necessary when dealing with employees. However, prior to punitive internal action, employees need to be afforded cultural awareness and sensitivity training. A zero-tolerance for racism and racism-based behaviors policy must be compulsory for service users as well. Service users must also be afforded the same cultural and sensitivity training prior to the revocation of services. Punitive action would be a last resort and utilized only for the safety of employees and service users. Repercussion-free reporting and resolution must be available and obligatory in all places of employment. All staff members and service users must feel safe reporting racism and racism-based behaviors. It is important to break the silence within organizations and disallow racism; take a stand against racism, through advocacy, reporting, addressing racist comments and behaviors and promoting equality. Organizational equality would include a representative workforce, inclusive of an environment that welcomes the teachings and values that come from different ethnicities and cultures.

### **Question 8 – How Will the Elimination of Racism Help Us?**

The elimination of racism would ensure equality in all aspects of life, such as in equal access to opportunities and allow for a better standard of living for everyone in the Saskatoon Community. Some examples of an improved standard of living include consistent healthcare outcomes, a

reduction in criminality, an equitable distribution of resources, fewer barriers to employment, education and training and a decrease in deaths due to bullying, suicides and substance abuse. With the elimination of racism, the Saskatoon Community would have more time and resources to work on additional integral components to ensure community health and wellbeing. With the assistance of marginalized populations the Saskatoon Community would understand more diverse needs of marginalized populations and become aware of how to best support and ensure inclusivity, incorporate resolutions into all aspects of community service provision without judgement and develop strength-based relationships promoting equitable collaboration. From an economic standpoint, the elimination of racism would be the most financially responsible direction community members, organizations, leaders and the City could endorse, as it would reduce division, reduce subculture socialism, reduce crime and reduce the lack of accountability and transparency of those disseminating racism.

### **Question 9 – What Are Some Targets That Will Indicate the Reduction in Racism?**

The responses that would potentially indicate the reduction in racism reflected both introspection and an understanding of the effects of racism in the Saskatoon Community. Many groups deliberated that a reduction in racism would include the decline in over-representation in systems such as the justice system and jails, the foster care system, the social services system, and the healthcare system, specifically in emergency situations. On the incline, more people from marginalized groups would be present in education and training opportunities, as well as in positions of meaningful employment. With respect to education, curriculum would reflect truthful accounts of historical transactions and anti-racism values in all educational institutions. The Saskatoon Community will experience a diversification of

persons in leadership positions, such as politicians, executive directors and community stakeholders who will be encouraged to promote varied languages and cultures, in the systems and in capacity building opportunities. Initiatives driven to eliminate racism, increase cultural awareness, end segregation, promote culturally grounded families and terminate stigma will be well promoted, attended and participated in. Additional targets that indicate a reduction in racism might include an increase in engaged and informed community members voting, the ongoing commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action and the movement to eliminate Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The groups discussed the possibility of a differently structured economic system in the Saskatoon Community, determining the likelihood of more widely affective outputs as a result of reduction in racism.

### **Question 10 – What Can We Do to Eliminate Systemic Racism?**

Due to systemic racism spanning nationally, the elimination of such is incomprehensible when examining only the Saskatoon Community. The groups did determine that free education and awareness are prime contributors in the elimination of racism on any level, through social programs, interactions with diverse populations, warranting that culture is integrated into all educational opportunities and making space for more culturally accurate and relevant content in the media and news outlets. Through the review and overhaul of policies grievance and conflict resolution mechanisms will be guaranteed and impartial, equity will become the norm, punitive action will be taken if necessary and racist policies will be targeted and exploited creating a massive and aggressive condemnation of racist instances. The groups determined that the elimination of systemic racism would allow for transparency between organizations, groups and the Saskatoon Community because the process will include addressing and

redressing the reality of racism in social constructs. A decline in systemic racism in the Saskatoon Community will allow for more positions of diversity, raise the standard of living, sanction economic equality and create safety to allow for meaningful, challenging and courageous conversations about solution-focused change. As an ongoing proactive measure, the development and facilitation of ongoing anti-systemic racism would be detrimental to the continuum of Saskatoon Community health and wellbeing.

### **Question 11 - How Can We Generate Interest in Anti-Racism Perspectives, Initiatives and Involvement?**

Catchy slogans, social media, television, internet advertisements, pamphlets, radio, poster campaigns, movies and books containing real stories of racism would benefit anti-racism in the Saskatoon Community and promote anti-racist perspectives, initiatives and involvement. If all people were provided a platform for positive and contributory ideas, it would permit for accountability and community ownership of initiatives. As an attempt to “make it sexy” the Saskatoon Community could employ personnel to develop attractive marketing, utilize spokespeople such as celebrities, share impactful stories, make anti-racism content relatable, mainstream and cool for all populations. Pertaining to community involvement, anti-racism initiatives could include incentives such as free food and entertainment, certificates for completion of training, scholarships, multi-cultural fashion shows, cultural gatherings (such as FolkFest) that are financially accessible for all and providing public speakers in schools and community gatherings. For any community member involved in anti-racism initiatives a type of recognition or reward might ensure continued attendance and participation, such as a name added to a plaque or printed on a social media site. Finally, anti-racism initiatives in the Saskatoon

Community should have a mission statement that includes growing the numbers through community promotion and community members recruiting others to safeguard that anti-racism in the Saskatoon Community transitions from implicit ideas to explicit actions.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

In answering more than one of the race-based questions, the workgroups identified *focus on differences* a contributor to racism. During the icebreaker it was determined that focussing on differences rather than similarities would have made it easier to construct the children's puzzles. So then, is racism prevalent because it is easier? If so, easier than what? Perhaps the deconstruction of racism is beyond the words on these pages.

As the Gathering progressed it was evident that participants more openly engaged, likely understanding that the process was not a platform for blaming. The gymnasium was loud with conversations and enthusiasm. Participants were very excited by the door prize draws, nutrition breaks and contributing positive and solution focussed perspectives. Many great ideas came out of the Gathering permitting for a basis to continue in planning additional anti-racism initiatives.