

CO-CREATING COMMUNITY :

**CANADIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
WORKSHOP ON WOMEN'S SOLUTIONS TO
FAMILY VIOLENCE, WHITEHORSE, APRIL 1989**

Report submitted by: Sharon Taylor, MSW

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Introduction

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women organized a workshop on "Women's Solutions to Family Violence". The workshop was held in April, 1989, in Whitehorse. Funding for the workshop was provided by the Secretary of State. This is a report on that workshop.

Participatory Development process was used to facilitate the workshop. The style of participatory development is experiential. It is based upon activities for groups, pairs or individuals that lead to self-discovery and self-empowerment. The activities utilized in the workshop were designed to provide the kind of experiences women might find useful in their own families, groups, and communities or anywhere they might need to begin building networks of support. The outcome of the workshop was dependent on the participants' willingness to develop a sense of community with other group members. Scott Peck in his book, The Different Drummer says that community is the place where the gift of tears is returned, where individuals no longer feel alone and the single most common thing members express is "I feel safe here". He also says that this is a rare feeling. The women at the Whitehorse workshop not only talked about their vision of community, but they experienced that vision. They acknowledged that family violence is a symptom of underlying problems in the make-up of many of our communities. In learning to create the communities of our visions we are creating solutions to family violence.

The purpose of the report is to give the workshop members an opportunity to review the strategies they developed and to aid in the process of using the strategies. Events are written as they occurred with little analysis. Although the sharing of personal

experiences with family violence were an important part of the process at the workshop, they have not been included here.

While the first draft of the report was gathered together by one person, the report itself was be edited, changed, and added to by the participants themselves.

SESSION I

Paula Pasquels began the first session of the workshop with a review of her background in family violence. Originally from Vancouver, she has lived in the Yukon for six years and has worked extensively in communities in Yukon and Northwest Territories on family violence issues. She began by working with women as individuals and moved on to working with groups and communities. She has worked mostly with women who were victims of wife abuse and frequently found these women to have been child sexual victims as well. She pointed out that every community in the North is very different so that there are no single solutions to the problems of family violence.

She asked the participants to give the following information:

- name;
- describe your community;
- describe your project or dream;
- who holds the power in your community and do they back you?

COMMUNITIES, PROJECTS AND DREAMS

Rosina Holwell - Nain

"My dream is that there would be no more battering."

There is a thousand people in our community and we fly more than we walk (because of location). The town council is mostly men and the women who are on it are elderly. We have had a Health and Welfare grant for the last two months to try and start a Transition House in Nain. We tried before but were turned down. Our dream is to have a Transition House in our immediate community.

Kathy Mogun - Watson Lake

"Watson Lake has a population of 4,000. The native villages are separated, 2 1/2 miles apart, 30 people live in one, and eight miles away 200 people live in another community. White people provide the support services. Paula helped to start a support group for abused women here, but it dissolved because they were afraid of being identified. Their husbands punished the women and threatened them when they came to the meetings. Transportation, daycare, and appropriate meeting places are always a problem. There was an anger control group for men, however only the men who were ordered to go by the court attended. Safe homes as an alternative to Transition Houses are not working well because women did not feel like bringing their children into others homes because of their behaviour. My dream is to see a refuge in Watson Lake. A place where people can go without feeling like they are intruding. The power in our

community is with the people at the resource level and in the justice system. They are all reluctant to deal with family violence. They are saying things like - it's a family affair. Everyone is afraid - police, justice, are afraid of becoming involved - their attitude is - she (the battered women) must have asked for it. It's a lot of work, frustrating, one step forward, three steps back. Women refuse to bring it to court since the men get only \$50 fines and six months probation and they continue to beat the women while on probation. The probation officers don't know what to do. Native women are saying, "it's just not enough".

Annie MacDonald - Carcross

"The community has about 250 people, it looks great to outsiders but alcoholism and beating are prevalent. There is no safe house. My dream is for a safe house and for some kind of place for meetings for the women. The source of power is the band and they are supported by the community club. I personally have a lot of back up from the board, I go ahead with what I can and I get a lot of support."

Lise Martin - Ottawa

"I have had no experience personally with family violence. I helped put this workshop together because I saw it as an opportunity for people to work together, to share ideas and to come to solutions. It is an opportunity to recognize differences and commonalities and to facilitate co-operation."

Stella Michelin - Northwest River

"I live in a community of 500 people. We have no Safe House and women have to go to Goose Bay for protection. The power in our community is with the Band Council. My dream is for a Safe House."

Harriet Blackboy - Chisasibi, James Bay

"I am a CLSC community worker with eight communities in James Bay. Our community relocated ten years ago to a new town. It's been very hard for our teenagers. They are involved in break and entries and have lots of alcohol problems. There's more alcohol here now. We don't have a shelter yet, but we are receiving funds from Quebec City to set one up. The nearest safe house is about 600 miles away. Women are afraid to press charges because of what happens."

Dorothy Nicholls - Baie du poste

"James Bay has about 2,500-3,000 people. You reach it by gravel road. It is a dry reserve. Only two or three wife beatings a month are reported to the doctor or police. Child neglect is the biggest problem. Children are often left alone when parents are drinking. Other problems include young people getting into alcohol, gang violence, stories of rape that are not reported to police. Police do not know how to handle family disputes. We have a family violence committee that is supported 100 percent by the Board Council and Chief. They have asked us to form a women's association. They are very much for women having their say in the village."

Rosemary Cairns - Yellowknife

"I am an organizer with the Board of Counselling service. I am here to learn and help in any way I can."

Linda Anderson - Happy Valley/Goose Bay

"I work with justice and corrections for native people. We have a proposed project to establish a therapy group at prison for men who beat their wives. There is no treatment for them in or out of prison. We are proposing to have one group in prison and one for after care. Funding sources and lack of support are our main problem."

Barb Wood - Happy Valley/Goose Bay

"I'm new to the CRIAW Board. I work at the Women's Centre in Happy Valley. Family Violence is part of my day to day work. Our community has a lot to offer. It has a lot of resources, but people are territorial. We need to work closer together. People hold themselves back, are unsure of themselves or are afraid to share the things they have. Also government doesn't want to commit dollars and pay only lip service to the problem. Their attitude is - we support you but don't come to us for money or other resources."

Jackie MacBride - Burwash Landing

We are 177 miles away from Whitehorse. We have a little trouble with husband beaters but most of the men don't come forward. We are trying to educate both men and women that battering is not right. Our main project is to try and stop drinking

and drugs which cause the battering. We have a great chief who is very supportive.

Liz Lane - Whitehorse

I am the Yukon representative for CRIAW. I have been on the Board of Transition House for the last five years.

Jean Crane - Happy Valley/Goose Bay

I'm involved at Libra House - a shelter for women. We were four years trying to establish it and finally in the fifth year we got an agreement. There are two shelters in Labrador that serve all of Labrador. I can share some of the things we did which were helpful and some things that were not successful. We asked for representation from front line workers for a Task Force. Our dream is to access more training for our staff. We are all searching to completely update our service and go beyond our present service to women and children. We have used Whitehorse Transition House as our model. Our Provincial Minister of Social Services says he supports us but doesn't give us enough money. Our biggest problem is housing for people leaving Transition House. We don't have enough funding and we always have to be fund raising.

Janice Johnson - Burwash Landing

I am the native worker here. We work with teens and children, setting up workshops and doing plays on prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.

Kimberly Chemerika - Yellowknife

There's 11,000 people in Yellowknife. The main employees are government and

two gold mines. There is one shelter and it has been in operation for three years. It has seven full-time staff. We are now starting to train people to set up shelters in their communities. Our dream is to develop secondary housing for women leaving the shelter. We also need a resource centre for women who are outside of the shelter. The power, the financial power lies with the Minister of Social Services.

Evelyn Blondin Forrest - Yellowknife

I work with Northern Addiction Services as a trainee and counsellor. I am disappointed that we did not start off with prayers this morning, we usually do in our work. We do a lot of alcohol awareness work and work with alcoholics and children of alcoholics as well as with people who have experienced physical and sexual abuse. My dream is to train every women's group to use the "It's just your nerves" material and to sober up all of the leaders. I have trained with the Nechi Institute in their personal growth and family violence workshops. I'm concerned about the follow-up and after care for victims of sexual abuse after disclosures at a conference like this. Confidentiality is also a major concern. Women need to talk and are often afraid to. The power lies in our talking together.

Angela Senfit - Dawson City

I work with the Dawson Shelter and do the administration and volunteer training. My dream is to incorporate a multi-purpose centre to provide housing for battered women and pregnant teenagers and to have programs like life skills.

Dorothy Mesher - Kuujuuaq

I am a Quebec native coordinator for seven communities and we opened up a group home six months ago that is closed now because we were working under the hospital and they have a deficit now. We need native people to work with native people because they understand the culture and its problems. I work with girls on the street for the Department of Social Services. These girls have no identification. I get to be a street girl myself, I go in bars, I find them. The girls on the street really look out for each other. Natives are like that. If she goes home, she's battered so she feels safer on the street. We send our girls to Montreal for help and that causes other problems. A Cree lady is more comfortable with her own people. There is an awful lot of sexual abuse coming out. There are a lot of reasons for the high suicide rates among the young people. And then there's the young boys who pick on older women who have no place to go.

Sharon Taylor - St. John's

I grew up in a small community on the Southwest coast of Newfoundland at a time when people had a strong sense of belonging to their community and a connectedness with each other and the environment. During my growing up I watched the community grow apart and alcoholism and battering increased. There were always elements of pain and destruction but things got worse as the economy worsened and new values around ownership and status were introduced. My dream is to develop a holistic approach to development that reclaims values critical to the growth of individuals

and communities and focuses on political, social, economic and emotional development with a strong spiritual foundation.

Annie O. Kenuayuak - Povungnituk

I am the director of Social Services which serves the whole Hudson Bay coast. I have been working with Social Services since July of last year and can now begin to see some results. The people I work with are really working hard to get an emergency foster home in each community. The power in the communities is with the community council. There has been a lot of changeovers and everything seems to be working better now.

My dream is that women will stand up for themselves and be equal to the men. The man is the head of the house now. There is a lot of family violence. It is very visible. This came out of a Department of Social Services annual meeting on foster homes and shelters. We did not go to the people because they refused the last time. They are afraid that it will break up their families and homes if they take trouble into their own homes. Young women who are having trouble do not have a place to go to in these communities. Local police try to be helpful but the groups in the community have said no when we have asked them for help.

Carolyn Niviaxie - Kuujuarraapik

I am really happy to be here. I am a board member for the Inuit Women's Association of Canada and Quebec Native Women. My community has four names because it has four different groups. My husband is the mayor and we both are

involved with social problems. The Council holds the power and is just beginning to understand about social problems. My dream is to make families aware of their culture and the importance of their traditions. When we have meetings we always talk about problems but we have to think about educating our people about their culture and make them aware of who they are. This is the dream of the Inuit Women Association of Quebec. We are acknowledging that we (the different groups) are different from each other, but we share the same problems and can work on them together.

Lizzie Nowdluk - Iqaluit

I have worked at a shelter for 1 1/2 years. We have a full-time staff and are doing different projects. My work is with lawyers around divorce, etc. Another does counselling.

I grew up in an abusive family and I try to help some of the women who are being abused. Men who are beaten go to the Catholic Mission. They have groups for batterers and for battered women. Some are forced to go by court and some are from correction centres. We are doing a lot of things but we need more training. A lot of us who work there grew up in violent situations. Some people are against us and say we break up families but we give them a choice. Most go back home. My dream is to help the women and their husbands in violent situations and those who want to commit suicide because of it. Most of our kids are hyper. We can't control them because of their family situations. We want to help them.

Alice Vittrekwa - Fort McPherson

We have about 1000 people in our community. We have an alcohol centre which has helped a lot of people to sober up. There is a lot of violence in the home, marked faces, shiners, people wearing sun glasses. I have been a counsellor at the Alcohol Centre for two years. The power is with the council. Our chief is sober and most of the counsellors are also sober. They are trying to be an example. Since the centre started, about 140 people are sober but there are still a lot of alcoholics.

One of the things I do is deal with people one to one, people with any kind of problem. We sent people away for a twenty-eight day program. There is no shelter, people are sent to Yellowknife. We use anger therapy. It is important to know our people and their problems. Before we brought in outside people now we realize it is important to do these things ourselves.

One of the things we didn't do is this or that with the Women's Support Group and left it up to them. It was hard to get women to talk first when we started in March 88. Today they are starting to say 'I'm okay'. They didn't want to talk about themselves. Their self-esteem was so low they didn't realize they held most of the stuff back. From the women's support group they are starting to take the twenty-eight day program and then back for ten days. I had to deal with alcohol first. It wasn't easy. It was up to me to do the talking. Confronting wasn't easy but I did it. I know how it feels. The community wanted us to be everything. The Council asked us to do things like a potluck because we were a women's group. But we have to feel good about ourselves first and then we can do things in the community. I want a shelter and

treatment program in our community. The board is getting a building and so we will have a place to start."

Rose Daniels - Rae Edzo

I used to be an alcohol and drug counsellor, but I had to stop because of my health. My community is supposed to be dry but it's not really, it's too close to Yellowknife. Our women's group started last year but people are afraid to trust each other, it's hard to confront problems that way and hard to bring your problems for help. The population of Rae is about 1,100 and there are three smaller communities, but you have to fly to get to them. We have tried to start Safe Homes, but only three people volunteered their homes.

The Board has the power and we get a lot of support from them. The Friendship Centre is really supportive too.

Trying to get people to listen and believe they can change is the most difficult.

Mary Firth Sr. - Fort McPherson

We have to have more women's groups. Everything about what's going to happen is the Women. Women have more power than men. I would like to see more women working together. Last month we had another suicide. I would like to see more young people doing more because they are the ones who are going to have to take over. When you go to the bar, what are you doing? You are hurting the children. More and more children are suffering. The whole three communities should work against the liquor store. We try to teach little ones about religion. When you go to

church, you see only women, where are the men?

We learn from those who come from other communities. We take from them, they take from us.

Cynthia Hill - Inuvik

I am involved with adult education. My dream is that there would be counselling and assistance available to help people break the cycle of violence. It is one thing to identify a problem, to help people survive is another thing. Women who are in positions of responsibility and power have to be willing to support and help other women who want to do things.

Annie O. Kenvayuak - Povongnituk

We have a maternity ward that serves seven communities and the staff are Inuit mid-wife trainees. This has been very effective. The use of traditional mid-wifery and child birth is treated naturally. It has helped a lot of men too because the men who are involved in the delivery have more respect for their wives. The babies are healthier.

Paula's Summary

It's difficult to summarize the experiences and knowledge of everyone in this room.

There are many differences here - size of communities, mixed, multi and single cultures. Some communities are stable, others are more transient, dramatic changes in some communities and differences in how communities are supported - single

industry towns, etc. There are complexities in delivery services to people in their own language when most of the services are in English. Some communities are dry, some not, and some are in between. The power lies in the board with some, with provincial and federal government in others, and in still others the power base is clearly with the people. Working in a tribal justice system is an alternative to working in a white man's court and is existing at the moment in Greenland. There are some beginnings with Inuit Health Boards and Diversion Committees.

We have heard stories today of political interference and neglect, leadership that is supportive and non-supportive.

There were a lot of similarities - Women are seen to have a lot of power, there were a lot of women's political groups identified. It is in grouping together that we make the use of our skills and knowledge. One consistent theme was the importance of native people working with native people and another area the importance of values particularly native values which will assist us in finding solutions to violence. We identified all forms of violence and have said that we cannot see family violence in isolation and have underlined the importance of acknowledging the relationship between alcohol and family violence. The difficulty with family violence is where to start.

Another emerging theme is funding problems. A lot of time is spent on proposal writing and dealing with rejection letters. There isn't a lot of money. Governments are cutting back. Communities are competing for the same money so if we support each other we may lose. This is very problematic.

We have also talked about volunteers and the extent to which we rely on

volunteer efforts and in so doing bring out our volunteers. It is also very difficult when you start out with volunteers to shift over to paid staff. Some of the other questions raised here include:

Taking care of ourselves - How do we balance taking care of ourselves and others?

How do we cope with the red tape?

The treatment programs that rely on people who are court mandated are not working. What are the alternatives?

In many of our communities, safe houses are not available for women and children. What can be done?

The need for long-term after care was identified. At the moment we seem to have short-term financing with all kinds of conditions on it which means limited short-term care.

Finally, there is a wealth of knowledge in this room. It is important to maintain our sense of humour. Many of us have been personally affected by family violence and this personal experience gives us direction. You don't put it in your resume but it is your greatest strength.

SESSION II

The Awareness Wheel: A Problem-Solving Process

Evelyn Blondin began the afternoon by talking about prayers and the importance of prayers for clearing our thoughts and focusing our tasks. Mary said a prayer for the group.

Evelyn introduced the Awareness Wheel as a problem-solving process which could be used in individual situations, with families, groups and communities. She selected the issue of smoking in the present workshop to show us how the Awareness Wheel works. Using the flip chart, she outlined the following:

Problem: Smoking

How does it affect senses:

Hearing:	people are saying they are concerned about their health
Seeing:	room is very small
Touch:	smoke soils clothes
Smell:	leaves bad smell in room

Sections on the Awareness Wheel

Seeing: what do we see?

Feelings: spontaneous responses - about your feelings.

Thoughts: thoughts, beliefs, opinions, assumptions, your impression and interpretation of events.

Intention: wants, wishes, intentions for myself and others.

Action: doing, commitment to action.

How the Awareness Wheel Works

The following is Evelyn's demonstration of the uses of the Awareness Wheel for the participants' groups in their home communities. The facilitator goes step by step with the group through the awareness wheel. A flip chart is very helpful when doing the awareness wheel so that people can see the steps they make.

- STEP 1: What do you see?
- STEP 2: How do you feel about what you see?
- STEP 3: What are your thoughts about what you see and feel?
- STEP 4: What do you intend to do about the situation?
- STEP 5: Take the action that is based on your intentions.

The facilitator allows an equal amount of time for each step. She asks the group to brain storm each step by throwing out whatever thoughts, feelings, ideas occur to them spontaneously. Everyone's comments are written down no matter how unusual or inappropriate they seem to be. Everyone is included in the process. The facilitator does not make judgments about what is right or wrong in the statements people make, she just makes sure they are written down for everyone to see. When the group has exhausted all of the comments for one step, she moves to the next step.

The Awareness Wheel is a process which tries to improve communication between people as well as clarifying and solving problems. Evelyn noted that people don't get along because they fear each other. People fear each other because they don't know each other. People don't know each other because they have not properly communicated with each other.

One woman responded to Evelyn's presentation by noting that many times people can be overwhelmed, hurt and frustrated by the complexity of community

problems and fail to see a role for themselves in creating change. However, she said, one person can make a difference with a tool like the Awareness Wheel. Helen Nimco said that we can make a difference by becoming informed through reading materials, watching TV, listening to elders and to other victims.

Evelyn said that it was really important for individuals to take responsibility to bring joy and spontaneity to the group. She talked about her own life experience that had prevented her from really experiencing the child within herself. She told a beautiful story of learning as an adult to enjoy play, to respond to situations with spontaneity and to allow her joy in living to emerge unrestrained.

Evelyn touched a very deep chord in the group with her story. She also did a very risky thing for herself because other people could have withdrawn because of the intimate nature of her story. Instead, people saw Evelyn's story as giving them permission to tell their own story to release their own pain and to reach for the opportunity to form a sense of community with this group. Women in the group began to spontaneously describe their own history of abuse. They described frequently feeling hopeless about making an impact on family violence in their community and how this hopelessness had a negative effect on their own self-image. Naturally and easily the women held each other and allowed their sisters the freedom and courage to feel their strength through sharing their tears. This process lasted for the rest of this session and long into the night as the women took time to validate each other, to empathize and create their sense of community.

Later that evening we visited Liz Lane's home which provided a healing

atmosphere for the process taking place. There was some difficulty in that guests from Yellowknife had been invited to meet and share with the women at the workshop. No one could have anticipated the nature of the process at the workshop and that the process of forming a community was so strong that it was difficult for the workshop participants to withdraw from each other and put an effort into connecting with the new people. An interesting pattern emerged where the workshop participants continued their healing process outside on the patio through singing songs that spoke of their mourning but then moved to songs of joy, love and humour. This process continued long after we went back to the hotel where small groups of women gathered in rooms to continue the holding, the sharing the joy of connecting at a deep spiritual level.

SESSION III

Sharon Taylor began the second day session with a guided meditation. The purpose of the guided meditation and music (sounds of the river) was to bring a sense of peace to the group, stabilize their energies and to continue to create an environment of trust for effectively learning from each other. Sharon summarized the events of the previous day and asked the group for guidance as to how they wished to spend this day. The group identified the following areas for further exploration:

1. **Consensus Building and Problem Solving** - some of the group members wanted to have another opportunity to review the use of the Awareness Wheel.
2. **Participatory Development and Research** (breaking down barriers and sharing strategies) - the group wanted to explore strategies for involving community members in a change of attitude and behaviour related to family violence.
3. **How can we stay in touch** - the group now having a strong sense of community were already struggling with the knowledge that this group or community was ending, at least in this form.
4. **Evaluation** - this came from the facilitators who wished to evaluate the process.

The group prioritized these and decided to begin with Participatory Development which is a process that promotes self reliance in communities and individuals. It involves people in a decision-making, problem-solving, action-taking process. Some of the concepts in participatory development outlined by Sharon were:

1. Involving people at all levels. People need to be included in the design and development of a project as well as in its implementation.

2. There has to be a balance between accomplishing tasks and creating a sense of community. When the group focuses only on the project and its outcomes they lose sight of opportunities to build individual and group self esteem, empowerment and spirituality. On the other hand, group members can spend so much time on discussing their relationships with each other that they lose sight of the tasks needed to be done to achieve their vision of community.
3. Acceptance of our own strengths and limitations is critical as well as acceptance of strength and limitations and differences of others.
4. Validation of individual and community wisdom is essential. People need time to express their thoughts and wisdom in ways and languages they are comfortable with - drawing, painting, songs, etc. Seeing history and culture as a source for wisdom and building strategies is a part of this.
5. Patience with ourselves and others is the foundation of participatory development. Where are we rushing to go? People development and empowerment takes time. You have to wait while someone else does something slowly, offering encouragement and curbing your desire to take it away and do it yourself.
6. Making time for play, having a sense of humour building fun into the process is very important. Using tools like drama and songwriting assist in this.
7. Vision. Having a clear picture of where you are going as a group - what is the reality that you are co-creating. Daydreaming is helpful here.
8. Values. Are your values what you say they are or do your actions demonstrate different values. How do your personal values fit or conflict with your group. How do the values of your group fit with the vision of their future - where are the conflicts.
9. Spiritual, political, social, physical and economic empowerment all have to be balanced, however spiritual empowerment is the foundation for all of the others. Meditations, prayers, affirmations, guided imagery, music, songs, dreams, visions are all tools of spiritual empowerment.
10. Participatory Action Research is a **tool** of Participatory Development. Before we can use this tool effectively we have to be comfortable with the principles of participatory development.

Sharing Strategies of Participatory Development

Empowering Yourself.

Knowing how to empower oneself first is the foundation of participatory development and this begins with looking at how we nurture ourselves and allow others to nurture us. The participants engaged in the following activity in self-empowerment. This activity is done with a partner so that you can experience the positive effects of allowing support into your life. Viewing yourself as a lovable, worthwhile person is best done in the presence of supportive and caring allies.

Workshop participants spent ten minutes identifying characteristics they liked about themselves and then read these characteristics to each other in pairs. As each woman identified a characteristic the other women would repeat it in a strong affirmative voice. An example of an affirmation list could be:

*I am wise.
You are wise. (Respond)*

*I take risks.
You do take risks. I've seen you do so at this workshop. (Respond)*

*I am caring.
You are caring. (Respond)*

This exercise is one that can be done alone. Standing in front of the mirror, you could repeat your affirmations daily as a tool for self-empowerment. It helps you to update the internal picture you have of yourself as well as appreciating your uniqueness and strengths.

Visioning: A Strategy for Individual and Community Development

Following the affirmation exercises the women participated in a second strategy for participatory development - visioning. Visioning is a strong sense of knowing what you want, where you want to go, and how to get there. Clear visions is the basis from which clear goals are formed which lead to powerful actions. As well, visioning allows the opportunity to examine steps to achieve the goal identified. The visioning process strengthens your creative abilities and can give you a sense of control over your future.

The participants divided into three groups to co-create a vision of their ideal communities and to envision ways to achieve their dream. In small supportive groups they have more opportunities to create a detailed and solid vision. The groups began with individuals sharing a description of their individual visions. They soon noticed similarities and initially tried to ignore differences. However, they were encouraged to find ways for their differences to co-exist and support each other.

Presentations of the Visions

The participants were encouraged to use creative approaches to their presentations in an effort to energize the group as well as to add an element of fun.

Group I

Group I's presentation came in two forms - a drawing and a song. Their drawing depicted people holding hands with everyone equal, all services provided for a safe community. The people in a circle represent the community's sense of spirit and connectedness. The sun radiates a light that is reflected back from the hearts of

people in the circle.

Carolyn Niviaxie wrote a song while she listened to the others share their dreams. She translated the meaning of her song as "Because we want our communities to be good places to live in, because we want our young people valued, we have to remind ourselves that us women have to help the men, we have to work with them side by side."

Group II

Group II presented a drawing with the following images:

A community where work is plentiful and safe, where all people felt needed and worthy. A community that realized the importance of the environment and treated nature with respect and caring. A community where traditional skills, crafts and knowledge is highly valued. A community that valued children and placed high priority and quality care for children and their caregivers. A community that involved youth and provided a special place for them for their recreational and developmental needs. The special place for the youth is a part of a community centre where people come together and culture is preserved. The community is alcohol free and has recreational opportunities for all. The community is surrounded by trees, ponds, plants, and animal life. There is no hospital in this community but a wellness centre which has prevention as its goal. Everyone in the community has adequate, decent housing. Spirituality and/or religion is an important part of this community. There are numerous places where children can play safely. Water is safe and clear. Schools are innovative and

exciting learning centres. The woods are filled with caribou, moose, birds and lots of fish in the ponds. The store is a co-op. All the doors of the houses are open to everyone.

Group III

Group III presented their drawing with the following comments:

The heart of the community is its community centre. Energy is pumping out of that heart and goes into other aspects of the community. The children are very important to this community and the daycare centre reflects that. The council holds the power in this community and women have equal representation. Employment consists of real work not make-work. Women's centres encourage women to do the kind of work they like to do. Young offenders are highly involved in the community and are seen as community responsibility. Shelters are available with highly trained staff. Seniors are valued and highly involved in community problem solving and decision making. Community has control over radio and TV and are doing their own cultural and creative programming. Media has new uses - problem solving and local information sharing. The community is continually growing and effectively dealing with emerging problems. Spiritual retreats are available and encouraged. People will have opportunities to get away from the community and find the voice within.

Rose Daniels presented her spiritual picture of the community. Her picture showed that everything is round, there is no beginning, no end to growth. We enter the cycle as newborns, unknowing, as we grow into our teens we become more

knowing. As we become older we have the opportunity to become aware of our spiritual relationship to each other, to the trees, the water, the mountains, the animals, the sun, the moon and the highest power -God. We have the opportunity everyday to know who we are and what our connections are but most often we choose to look away and not inside. As we become older we have to learn to take responsibility for the youngest and eldest and finally we reach the point where we ourselves have to be cared for. If we are connected at a spiritual level the caring is not a chore but a natural, normal event of living. It is when we have our sense of belonging to the cycle and to each other that we have community.

Group 4

Group IV created and sang the following song:

What was What is and What is to Come!

What was, what is, and what is to come
 No matter where we are coming from
 We all have dreams to share and see
 That woman can share their liberty.

We need to open up and heal
 So that people are encouraged to feel
 The sadness, sorrow, and the pain
 To make the most of a positive gain.

To pull together and show we care
 Enabling us to go from here to there
 We motivate all of the volunteers
 By educating and supporting our peers.

We are empowered to assume control
 We are confident and set in our role
 Not to limit the extent of our resources

By developing appropriate educational courses.

What we have is good and true
To take the risk to pull us through
To take the challenge and forge ahead
We can learn from our errors and make change instead.

To be one body whenever we meet
The joy and the spirit without deceit
Thru networking, support or whatever we may be
We have regained our dignity!!!

Linking Vision To Action

Through visioning we create powerful positive images for our lives and our communities. But it doesn't stop there. We must go from our visions to weave our aspirations into the simple actions of our daily lives.

In the next session the women discuss strategies, long and short term for achieving their visions.

Group I

It is important to realize we are not alone, that other people have similar dreams and problems. We have to continue to energize each other by staying in touch, writing, etc. Sometimes we isolate ourselves and feel that we are on our own. This kind of workshop boosts us and relieves us and gives us new ideas. It is important for us to get together again to see our successes and failures and to reinforce each other in our work.

We have to spend more time like this in our own community groups doing healing for each other.

It is important that we emphasize patience and persistence. We have to be realistic about our limitations and not become too caught up with outcomes. What we are doing in the moment is always the most important thing. We need our visions but we cannot be frantic about them.

Group II

The most important strategy is to focus on our own mental, emotional and spiritual health. We cannot be leaders or role models if we are falling apart ourselves.

It is vital that we maintain the open communication with each other and develop it with others.

We must also share ownership of responsibilities, decision-making, problem solving, successes and failures with others in the community - NOW!

We must learn to love ourselves accept our strengths and weaknesses daily.

We must learn to prioritize tasks.

Timing is critical and we will have to take responsibility to say no when the burden becomes too great.

Persistence is the key but the most important thing is knowing and caring for self.

Group III

Much of what we talked about has been said already. This particular workshop was created for Northern women particularly native women but it is important that we do not forget the other women, they have so much to share and give. An important

strategy is to think like Canadian women that we are Canadian and connected to all other Canadian women.

Group IV

People have already said many of the things we talked about.

Networking with other communities is very important so that we can share information and other resources. Socializing is important and we should include parties and dances in our activities. We will organize support groups for our caregivers. We will be realistic in our expectations of caregivers in our shelters and help them to be realistic for themselves. Men cannot be left out of the healing process. We have to begin to include them. They are resources too.

Recreating Community - Getting Together Again

Finally, everyone has identified that they wish to get together as a group again. It is not unusual for a group that has formed such an intense feeling of community and completed so much work to want to get together to recreate the community and work on other tasks. The women were asked to identify the purpose of coming together.

"We should get back together, we find strength in each other. We share a lot of the same experiences, pains and dreams. We are not alone in such a bad world. We may have our differences but our problems, our lives are the same. Our cultures may be different but we are the same. The women here have taught me a lot. They are proud, it makes me more proud. It makes me want to be very active. If I went to these meetings more, I would have more of a bond with myself and others."

Annie

"If we did this again it would be important to spend time evaluating strategies to have more of an evaluation of putting their strategies in place."

Angie

"We are going back to our communities, putting in place what we have learned. This is a start. We need more time. We need to reassess ourselves."

Julie

"If you think the purpose of a workshop can be charging, I am recharged or charged for the first time. Through meetings like this we come together. A follow-up is needed. I don't want to go back Friday thinking that this group of women is going to dissolve. We are going in a good direction. I'd like the power and unity to grow together."

Dorothy

"If we get together, we could do a progress report."

Roslyn

"We could go back to our communities and identify what strategies worked and what didn't, we could tell others."

Barb

"We need this group to help us with our personal growth."

Evelyn

"We are here because we are of the CRIAW board. Many people worked hard to get us here. It is important to give credit to these people and to the funding people, Secretary of State."

Cynthia

"We are getting to know and help each other through the problems we are going through. We feel light. We feel good. There is hope and trust with this group. It is hard to break that."

Rosa

"We could do further work on developing action plans and tasks for our strategies, a re-evaluation as someone said of strategies and also further work or tools for spiritual and personal improvement. We did not get to participating action research in this session either."

Sharon

"It is important for everyone to become involved if we want to get together again. We need to keep touch of what we are doing and continue to share experiences maybe by newsletter. You can send material to me if you want."

Lisa

Some of the other comments made in this summary include:

Which of us will have succes in applying thes techniques? How will they fail? How can we share this with each other?

How is leadership defined in our groups? How did we continue to maintain our groups? Maintain funding? Who really is the helpful people in our community? How do we continue to deal with the demands of family and work?

Confidentiality and trust are major issues. What are the limits of confidentiality in our groups?

Doctors, Social Workers, RCMP, when you are starting to get to know them and they are starting to get to know you, they are transferred. This impacts negatively on community groups.

It is important to maintain our energy, to give to ourselves, we are leading the fight.

Ending

For the final event of the day Evelyn and Sharon had gone outside to gather stones. The stones were carefully washed and presented to the group on a tray. Group members were asked to select a stone and explain to the rest of the group how

the stone represented their feelings about the meeting. The purpose of this exercise was to allow the women to focus on the groups' ending, to express their sadness at the loss of the sense of community, to validate for each other the important impact they had had on each others lives and finally the stones allowed them the concrete realization that they were taking the experience on oneness in community home with them.