

11th Annual Northern Symposium for Safer & Healthier Communities

Art Hauser Centre, Prince Albert
November 25, 26 & 27, 2014



Executive Summary

The 11th Annual Northern Symposium for Safer and Healthier Communities took place from the 27th to 29th of November, in the Ches Leach Lounge of the Art Hauser Centre in Prince Albert. The event was coordinated by a committee comprising New North SANC Services Inc., a northern Saskatchewan non-profit association representing the northern municipalities, the Ministry of Justice, RCMP, and Prince Albert Grand Council.

Now in its 11th year, this year's Northern Symposium—formally the Northern Justice Symposium—was particularly significant because it was celebrating the 15th anniversary of the signing of the Framework Agreement on Community Policing, an agreement which is both the instigator and ongoing inspiration for the northern symposium. The Agreement is a formal recognition of the need for partnership and co-operation between the northern municipalities, the government of Saskatchewan and the RCMP to work together to reduce crime, encourage and promote community justice initiatives, increase services and supports to victims of crime, and to improve the nature of the relationships between residents and the police.

The organization of this year's event was also significant for its demonstration of a true partnership between the municipal and First Nations sectors in northern Saskatchewan. Indicative of the level of partnership was the holding of a Round Dance and Feast at the PAGC gymnasium on the Wednesday evening.

On the opening of day 1, Masters of Ceremonies Duane Favel and Russ Merasty introduced Prince Albert Mayor Greg Dionne, Ministry of Justice Pat Thiele, James Froh from the Ministry of Government Relations, C.O. Brenda Butterworth-Carr from the RCMP, Vice Chief Brian Hardlotte from Prince Albert Grand Council, and New North Chair Mayor Georgina Jolibois, to venture opening comments.

The keynote address was provided by Justice Gerald Morin, and was a wide-ranging reflection on his career as a lawyer and judge and saw him position himself as a Metis man from northern Saskatchewan, confronting both the historical and lasting legacies of the colonial criminal justice system and his own personal experiences of racism as a lawyer rising through the ranks. The focus of Justice Morin's address was the evolution of the criminal justice system from a time where prisoners could be counted amongst so many bushels of wheat for transportation to one focused on the rehabilitation of the individual and the remediation of the community. Judge Morin also dealt extensively with his sentencing practices and the thought-process he engages in as a judge in his deliberations around alternative sentencing options.

David Gullickson's "Justice and Correctional Trends in Northern Saskatchewan" enabled delegates to form an appreciation of the nature and extent of criminal activity in the north. Rachel Giles' "Life cycle of an offender" detailed a mapping exercise undertaken by government and other stakeholders to trace the "journey" of an offender, with the ultimate aim of determining where gaps and opportunities exist in services and

programs to minimize the impact of criminal justice system on the lives of Saskatchewan citizens.

A similar theme was enunciated in Deputy Minister of Corrections and Policing Dale McFee's alignment of mental health and addictions, community mobilization, serious violence offender responses, education, and sentencing options as representing a vision of a holistic approach to reducing the flow of offenders into the criminal justice system. A significant part of the government's holistic approach is the provincial HUB model, an overview of which was presented by Rae Gallivan from the Ministry of Justice.

Sandra Ericson and Amanda Laboucane provided an overview of the work being done by the "Embracing Life" initiative, a combined initiative of the provincial government and other stakeholders in the area of suicide prevention, intervention and post-vention. The presenters highlighted the community-led initiatives following in the path of "Embracing Life" that have been aimed reducing the incidences as well as the impact of self-harm in the north.

Rod McKendrik's "Our Community, Our Violence" took a "community-up" approach to discussing violence. He noted that Saskatchewan leads all provinces and territories in rates of violence against women and minors, in particular in "partner violence," and emphasised that this violence is ultimately a "man's issue." McKendrick implored communities to stand-up against violence which he said can be accomplished by everyone in their daily practices.

"Strategies to Counter Bootlegging" by Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming's Darryl Rideout looked at the challenges of stopping bootlegging from a regulatory perspective, also touching on the limited effect that police can have to reduce the impact of bootlegging in communities.

Presentations on community policing and justice initiatives included an overview of Community Police Boards and Community Consultative Groups by Gregg McNabb from Aboriginal Policing, who focussed both on the role and purpose of the Community Police Agreements, but also the underlying principle, from the government and policing perspectives, to create empathy and engagement at a grassroots level to remedy the disconnect between communities and police.

Hugh McLaughlin from the Ministry of Justice spoke of the new Community Safety Officer initiative, which is aimed at empowering communities with greater range of resources to engage in bylaw enforcement and to tackle local traffic offenses.

Cpl. Sol Puentespina from the Prince Albert Traffic Services examined the rationale behind the province's new driving legislation, where the summary seizure of vehicles for drinking and driving and other offenses is intended to strike not only at the individual but at the "vehicle" that itself enables the offense to be committed.

Kim Gobeil from Prince Albert Police Service outlined the northern interdiction strategy in relation to drug trafficking which highlighted the work of different teams within the police services, from intelligence gathering to investigation to apprehension.

Victim Services were represented by worker Gabe McKay who spoke of the origin of the victim services program in northern Saskatchewan and the work undertaken by victim services workers. Rene Descottes from the Ministry of Justice provided an overview of the province's Victims Compensation Program.

Over the course of the three days, an unofficial theme emerged—the gendered nature of violence. This issue was taken up directly by Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice Jan Turner who introduced a draft of the government's "Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls" policy framework for discussion and feedback.

The final day Policy Discussion Forum saw RCMP Superintendent Grant St. Germain, Deputy Minister Kevin Fenwick QC from the Ministry of Justice, Provincial Interlocutor James Froh, Fay Ozmun from the Ministry of Corrections and Policing, PAGC Justice Director Rick Sanderson, and New North Chair Georgina Jolibois, address a range of questions and issues brought forward by delegates.

Some of the key questions brought up in the policy discussion were aimed at how governments and communities can work together more effectively to develop capacity and build specific tools to address and improve outcomes. Particular discussion focussed on clarifying the various understandings of evidence as a basis for best practices.

Discussion also centred on the success of the Northern Symposium forum in aligning the priorities of the northern communities, government and the RCMP to improve social outcomes. Spirited dialogue surrounded the regulatory, and policing and policy factors that impede outcomes in alcohol and drug addiction in communities. Discussion also ensued on the use of "Gladue Principles" in sentencing, where the community may be both the cause and solution to the issues invoked by Gladue, insofar as the outcome of following the principles may very well be a community-based alternative sentencing option. The panel was also asked to ponder some of the initiatives that their agencies were involved in that address violence against aboriginal women and girls.

The Northern Symposium for Safer and Healthier Communities was a resounding success. As evidenced by feedback gathered from evaluation forms, delegates found that the forum:

- Improved knowledge relating to the programs and services provided by government and other agencies
- Deepened understandings of the issues around the criminal justice system for northern people
- Generated a level of consensus and understanding of how government, agencies and communities can work more effectively together
- Provided an enhanced level of opportunity for individuals from all sectors and across the service spectrum to network and develop partnerships
- Generated an enhanced level of willingness as well as the inspiration to continue the work to reduce the impact of the criminal justice system on citizens in the north

The overall attendance at the Northern Symposium was more than 270, with representatives from many of the service ministries and community based organizations. Delegates represented many First Nations in the north and surrounding areas as well as most of the northern municipalities.

The event would not have been possible without the support of a number of important stakeholders. These include the Ministry of Corrections and Policing, the Ministry of Justice, the RCMP, the Ministry of Government Relations, PAGC and New North.