

# Smithers Quality of Life Research Project

June 3, 2003



Funded by the Vancouver Foundation's

BC Medical Services Foundation

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## **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

- The project was started in 2001 with funding from the Vancouver Foundation and commitment from diverse community groups.
- From the start we wanted the process to be as important as the final product (big survey results).
- The process was to bring the community together around the discussion – what is your quality of life like and how would you measure it?
- We involved over 200 residents in the community to help make the questions for our survey.
- We then spent two months phoning, visiting and surveying nearly 500 people to get the results.
- We're now giving the results back to the community and the decision-makers (politicians, business people, social service advocates) to make sure that we're working together on the issues that are most pressing and celebrating our successes.
- We held a Community Forum in partnership with Make Children First, the Office of the Wet'suwet'en and Moricetown Band Council to familiarize the community with the results.<sup>1</sup>
- The project is being recognized as ground-breaking and a model for the effort needed to properly involve the community.

### **What Was This**

A community-based health research initiative to better understand what we as a community find important, where potential solutions lie to our challenges. Understanding important community perceptions will allow key financial and community leaders to make sound, well-informed decisions.

### **What has come out of this**

The Smithers Social Planning Council has surveyed its members and sought outside advice in designing ways to disseminate the data and analysis. It was passed in Council that Jane Bolton and Nathan Cullen will continue to present to interested parties and generate analysis for groups upon request. A fee for service schedule will be designed and groups given to the analysis already performed on-line.

**"Completing The Quality of Life Survey as a family really provided insight into how they (my step-children) view their world and community, and presented a wonderful opportunity for discussion and idea sharing as we answered the questions together."**

**Cathryn Boucher – Town Councilor**

**It remains our focus that this data will provide an invaluable tool to understand our reality and provide leverage for those seeking to change that reality for the better.**

### **Qualities Used to Design Survey Questions**

- 1) Evokes the truth.
- 2) Asks for an answer on only one dimension.
- 3) Can accommodate all possible answers.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Appendix

- 4) Has mutually exclusive options. A good question leaves no ambiguity in the mind of the respondent.
- 5) Does not presuppose a certain state of affairs.
- 6) Does not imply a desired answer
- 7) Does not use emotionally loaded or vaguely defined words.
- 8) Does not ask the respondent to order or rank a series of more than five items.<sup>2</sup>

## How We Supported Groups

- Facilitation when requested
- How to template of the process
- Professionally reviewed process
- Up to \$500 for costs
- Produce accessible document at end
- Literature
- Include groups & your comments on direction
- Promotion of your group and cause to the wider public

## Professional Support

Throughout the project we received professional support in crafting the process, defining quality questions and indicators, and beginning a sound analysis of the data. Michael Goldberg from SPARC BC, Alex Micholas from UNBC and Mark Anieliski formerly of the Pembina Institute assisted in various way at different times to ensure that the process and product retained high levels of credibility and ethical standards.

## Community Impact

The impact of this project has been felt in a number of ways. What follows is not meant to represent a complete list as we believe that the impacts will continue on into the future.

### Decision-makers

At the commencement of the project we challenged the decision-makers to take notice of this survey and the implications for them. We have presented to our Town Council and many Councillor's have expressed interest and gratitude for the work. Some groups hesitated to become involved at first are now seeking to understand the implications of the work.

**'...the individuals gathered thoroughly appreciated the fact that Nathan was willing to take the time to come to their clubhouse to get their input on issues that are usually left to the 'professionals / specialists' to deal with.'**

**Mark Barnes – Adult Mental Health Worker**

### Service Providers

From the outset it was our intention to involve the part of the community that 'works the frontline'. In this effort we have seen great interest in using the results of the survey in their efforts to bring attention to the key issues and seek funding for their work. Many of the committee meetings to formulate the questions and indices brought

<sup>2</sup> Taken from - <http://www.statpac.com/surveys/question-qualities.htm>

together people who were glad for the opportunity to network and develop new approaches. There was a new found respect for the development of good questions and the need to survey their clientele more and better into the future. Many had missions and visions that hadn't had client input for some years.

## Media Outlets

The media found this project easy to grasp and buy into. The promotion of the survey and the creation of the project was pivotal in gaining community access and legitimacy.

## General Public

Generally research projects impact a restricted number of community members. This project was designed from the outset to connect with as many groups and individuals as possible.

"It was an interesting conversation with the sector concerned about fish. We discussed the impact fish has in the areas of tourism, recreation and as a supply of food. It was apparent that access to fish meant clean water, strong economics and a key lifestyle activity."

Mary Swendsen - Bulkley-Morice Watershed-based Fish Sustainability Planning Coordinator

With over 200 people involved in the making of the survey the 500 who chose to fill it in was in part assured. The vigorous conversations that surrounded the formation of questions and indices set a tone for the importance of the project. Many skeptical participants came away with a new appreciation of community change and the transforming process we were involved with. For the Social Planning Committee this project proved an invaluable tool to access the community with a relevant and interesting project.

## Researchers

For myself the impact of this project has been profound. As a facilitator by training it was very easy to stay out of the debate surrounding the quality of good and bad questions when dealing with the public. What was left was a fascinating observation of how people seek to value themselves and what aspects of community means the most to them.

Many groups went away from the process reconsidering their work in the community and the nature of community development in respect to health. Many a time I felt privileged to be involved with the effort and astounding by the astute and deep insights 'lay people' were able to bring to a difficult topic.

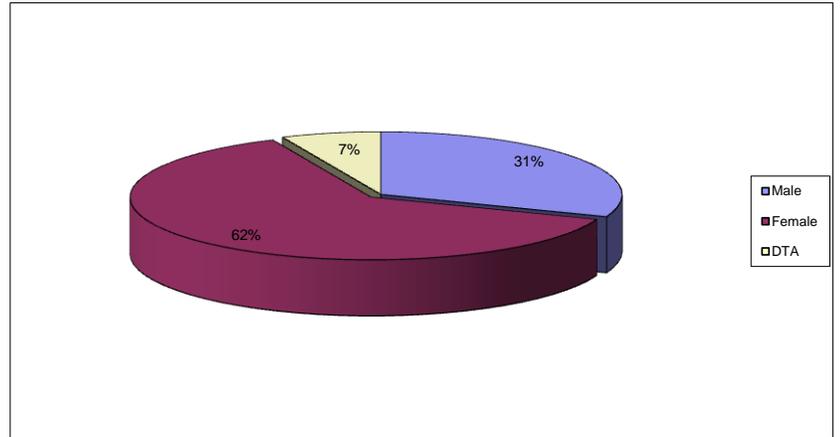
## Key Next Steps

- Post-mortem - completed
- Media, media, media – in process
- Subterfuge - becoming important (groups continue to contact us for analysis)
- Involving those left out – in process
- Database training – considered for Fall and future funding to be sought
- Spreading the word – presentations and strong messaging

## WHO WE SURVEYED<sup>3</sup>

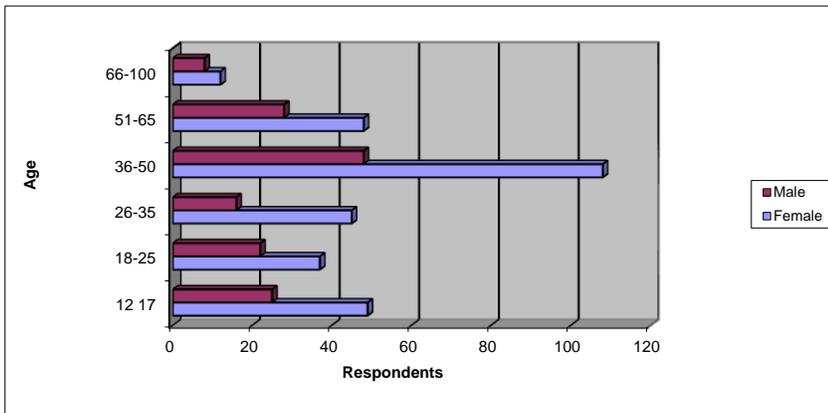
### Methodology

We conducted the survey in a vigorous and thorough way. The results point to a strong level of community involvement and commitment (the survey took between 20 to 60 minutes to complete).



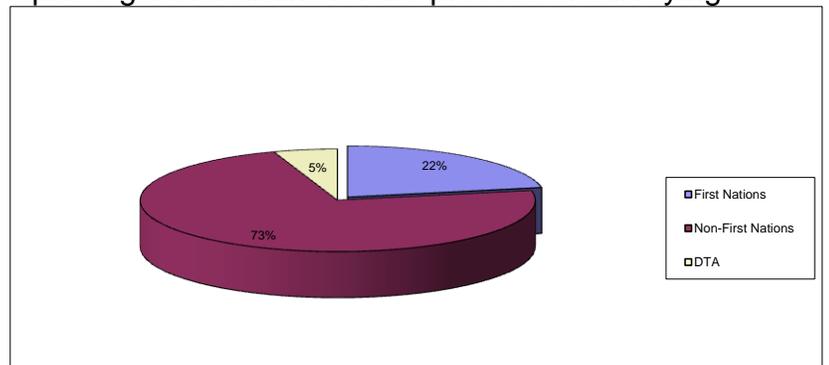
Initially phone surveys were used but owing to the enormous amount of time needed to properly conduct them we switched to written surveys (distributed at events and meetings), polling (in the street and shopping areas) and via the internet. We also had a youth dance put on where a large number of youth were able to access the survey.

In total, close to 500 submissions were made with another significant number coming in after the deadline. We have made provisions to include all surveys in the analysis over the next few months.



As this graph shows we had a healthy representation of ages while women dominated men in terms of total respondents. There was some accounting for the lack of seniors but a lack of effort was not one of the reasons. Further exploration of this issue is deemed of value.

Native representation was particularly strong and this was due in large part to the efforts of some young aboriginal volunteers who endeavoured to go from door to door in Moricetown (the nearest reserve to Smthers). This despite a general dislike for the process of surveying that was expressed from many of the Chiefs due to an experience of surveys being conducted and nothing coming of it. The community forum was a particularly beautiful and powerful manner in which to release the results. Many connections were made and the effects are being felt now.



The percentages shown here are consistent with the Wet'suwet'en's own knowledge of the aboriginal numbers in the community.

<sup>3</sup> For a more complete description of results please see Powerpoint presentation.

## APPENDIX

### Financial Report to June 3, 2003

	<b>Proposed Budget</b>	<b>Actual Expenditure</b>
Revenue		
Vancouver Fdn	50,000	50,000
Total revenue	50,000	50,000
Expenses		
Researcher	24,000	22,500
Assistance	2,400	7,422
Education Event	4,500	3,500
Meeting Costs	11,000	4,827
Survey Costs	600	2,839
Office Supplies	1,000	817
Printing Costs	1,000	1,401
Publication	1,000	1,694
Administration	4,500	5,000
<b>Total     Expenses</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>50,000</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>		<b>0</b>

Book- keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Quality of Life Indicators

The following list of indicators was developed with input from the focus groups as well as using references from a variety of other indicator projects from across Canada. Each indicator represents a currently kept statistic. The numbers for 2002 will become the base line and in subsequent years, changes from the base line will be noted as + or – a number. The indicators will be collected each year in late January.

### Health:

- The number of school days missed by students in the district.
- Incidence of new diagnoses of Type 2 diabetes at local hospital.
- Number of positive Hep C results returned to the Health Unit .
- Number of admissions for behavioral and mental health issues at BVDH .

### Education:

- The annual graduation rate of high school students at Smithers Secondary
- The number of people registered in continuing education courses at the college.

### Social Welfare

- Number of individuals registered with the food bank.
- Number of families receiving Christmas Hampers

### Environment & Resources

- Number of Steelhead returning to the Bulkley –Morice watershed
- Actual annual wood cut

### Youth and Children

- Number of kindergarten referrals to speech pathology by Jan. in SD#54.
- Number of children registered in the soccer club.

### Arts and Culture

- Number of organizations involving volunteers in Telkwa & Smithers.
- Number of items listed in “out and about “ section of the newspaper in the last week of January
- Number of participants at the annual non-denominational Fall Fair service.
- Number of hours dedicated to music classes at Walnut Park Elementary.

### Economy

- Average selling price of a 3 BR single-family dwelling
- Number of active business licenses in year
- Average monthly number of work ready Employment Insurance claims
- Annual Crime Rate

Forum Report

# Community Issues Forum III

## BRIDGING TO THE FUTURE

*Creating the future we want for our children  
and family*

Post-Conference Package.

May 2003

Make Children First Initiative  
Moricetown Band Council  
Office of the Wet'suwet'en  
Smithers Social Planning Council

Prepared by: Mary Swendson, Forum Coordinator

## Preamble

For the past three years, the Council has planned and presented the annual issues forum. The purpose of the forum is pull together a wider group of concerned individuals to determine goals and focus for the upcoming year.

In 2003, the Make Children First Initiative along with Moricetown Band Council and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en partnered with the Smithers Social Planning Council to present *Bridging to the Future, Creating the future we want for our children and youth*. The forum was held over two days, April 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> in Moricetown and Smithers.

This forum was the first time that such a dynamic partnership had taken place. First Nation and non-First Nation residents joined together in collaboration and fellowship focusing on our common interest, our children and youth.

The working group who planned and coordinated this event included:

- Jane Boulton, Quality of Life Research Assistant, SCSA
- Nancy Cody, Public Health Nurse, NHA
- Nathan Cullen, Maravilla Consultants, Quality of Life Research Coordinator
- Sandra Harris, Office of the Wet'suwet'en
- Beth Richardson, Northwest Addiction Services
- Mary Swendson, formerly of CFDC Nadina
- Theresa Tait-Day, Moricetown Band Council
- Shelley Worthington, Make Children First Initiative

## Agenda

Several workshops and meetings took place over the course of the forum. Some of the gatherings took place in Moricetown while Smithers was the venue for others. The goal was to build relationships and facilitate understanding for the issues facing the individual communities.

Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup> – Smithers Courthouse, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Meeting Room

Release of Quality of Life Data with Nathan Cullen, Michael Goldberg

This afternoon session for service providers was to review the results of the recent survey and to plan how data can be accessed in the future. Michael Goldberg from the Social Planning and Research Council of BC provided some insight on what the data represents and the areas of greatest concern. He also presented information on current provincial spending and budgets.

People in Attendance: 30

Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup> – Moricetown Multiplex

Celebration Gathering

The first day of the forum wrapped up with a gathering that included a traditional Wet'suwet'en dinner and singing and dancing. Guests were sat feathall style with Chief Hagwilnegh, Ron A. Mitchell, explaining the importance of the feathall and what it represents to the Wet'suwet'en. Dick Alec, an internationally traveled Wet'suwet'en singer and dancer, along with his dance troop performed several songs. Also on hand was MLA Dennis McKay who announced the *Make Children First Initiative* on behalf of Minister Linda Reid, Ministry of Children and Family Development. A delicious traditional meal was provided.

People in Attendance: 175

Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> – Smithers Senior Secondary School

Aboriginal Oral History – Rosalie Tizya

## Forum Wrap-Up – Mary Swendson, Michael Goldberg

Roslie Tizya presented a moving presentation on the challenges that aboriginal people face and some of the history connecting to those challenges. She provided insight on traditional values and the roles that each community member played in the development of healthy tribes and families.

Michael Goldberg gave an overview of the conference that included results from the Quality of Life survey. As an economist and social planner, Michael talked about the importance of being cohesive and looking at ways to improve on the community.

*People in Attendance:* 65

## SWOT

While not complete, this SWOT Analysis is designed to provide some guidance and suggestions on ways to improve on this event in the future. Information is based on feedback received post-forum. Formal evaluations of the event were not completed at the conclusion of the event. If readers would like the full analysis it can be provided.

## Conclusion

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Community Issues Forum, ***Bridging to the Future, Creating the future we want for our children and youth***, provided the community with an opportunity to learn more about their Wet'suwet'en neighbors while focusing on a common interest, our children and youth. Children and youth are our greatest resource and deserve our time and attention. The success of this forum was in the diversity of the working group, the financial support from the sponsors and the participation of the community at large.

**The working group would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the following:**

### Sponsors

Make Children First Initiative  
Moricetown Band Council  
Office of the Wet'suwet'en  
Smithers Social Planning Council – Quality of Life Research

### Presenters

Nathan Cullen, see attachment  
Michael Goldberg, Social Planning Council of BC  
Rosalie Tizya, see attachment  
Maisie Wright, see attachment  
MLA Dennis McKay, on behalf of the Honorable Lind Reid, Ministry of Child Development  
Chief Councillor Warner Williams, Moricetown Band Council

### Entertainment

Dick Alec

### Catering

Mountainside Café  
Shirley Joseph  
Christine Williams

### Door Prizes & Donations

BC Web  
Catholic Woman's Group, Moricetown

Goodacre's Super-Value  
Make Children First Initiative  
Smithers Family Literacy Program  
Smithers Social Planning Council

Transportation  
Barney Middleton

Additional Support  
Ministry of Transportation, use of boardroom  
Northern Health Authority, Proxima projector  
Office of the Wet'suwet'en, use of van  
Smithers Secondary School

### **Article for Connections Magazine** (- appearing in Spring 2003 issue)

#### **"If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else." – Yogi Berra**

Imagine embarking on a great ocean voyage. You are the captain of a magnificent ship, one built by your own hand and with a crew of your friends, family and community. The voyage may be perilous, you will be called upon to make difficult decisions and in the deep ocean lay many unforeseen dangers. Now, imagine that your compass doesn't work. You will be making decisions on direction without really knowing where North may lie. As captain of this ship you're lost.

For more than a generation our governments and business leaders have been relying upon a compass that not only is broken but, never really worked in the first place. Many of us have heard of the Gross Domestic Product or GDP but don't consider it much in our day-to-day musings. Yet the great wheels of society turn and change direction on the measuring of goods and services. It has been described as the "official measure of total output of goods and services in the U.S. economy, represents the capstone and grand summary of the world's best system of economic statistics." (Lincoln Anderson in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*.) In economic prediction models, and the halls of the halls of power it has been considered gospel.

The problem with this particular compass is the needle swings wildly. It attempts to measure the "total output" and in doing so makes no distinction between what we might consider a good output and a bad output. Any time money exchanges hands in our society, for any reason, the GDP will rise. As it measures your purchase of a loaf of bread it will also measure your stay in a hospital, as it measures your fee for banjo lessons so too will it measure increased policing costs during a crime wave. Positive and negative indicators are not separated (or measured differently) to identify which policy changes should be made.

Over the past few decades many, including, Simon Kuznets and other original authors of the GDP, have warned against relying on this faulty compass. A great movement has begun to measure things that matter to people. Using quality of life as a guiding principle, economists, community agencies and government policy thinkers have begun to develop alternative indicators (not simply the exchange of cash between hands) to help us make decisions. To correct the compass and guide us across troubled waters.

## **But, what does that mean to our communities?**

The Smithers Social Planning Council embarked on this voyage almost two years ago in an attempt to design and conduct a Quality of Life survey for the community. In what is being recognized nationally as an innovative and unique process, the Bulkley Valley has been asking itself how we might measure something as subtle and vague as 'quality of life'.

We involved over two hundred community members in focus groups to help us design two important tools to help answer that question. Firstly, we designed a survey that was put to over five hundred people in the community and then identified a set of indicators (numbers) that we could research each year to understand how our community is faring.

This took an incredible amount of effort. Talking about what mattered in our lives with respect to the economy, music, health, education and other key facets of our community was no small challenge. We asked each interest group to design two questions and an indicator that when put to the community would reflect back to us all how well we're doing. The results have been transformative for many involved.

## **Where Are We Going?**

Changing the way we do things, the way we consider one another and the community has become the focus of this exercise for those involved. We have compiled our results from the survey and are designing ways for the community to have the best access to it. When we look into that mirror, like all mirrors, some angles are more complimentary than others. Getting the numbers into the hands of people who make a difference in our community (faith leaders, policy makers, service deliverers and volunteers) is the next step. Making sound decisions based on what our community values will be the on going result.

## **Where will we end up?**

Well, that's not up to any one person or group to decide but through the development and analysis of this important tool we've embarked on a course that uses a compass that reflects our community's unique perspective.