

# ABORIGINAL YOUTH LEADING CHANGE: OUTCOMES REPORT



YOUTH LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP:  
October 30, 2010

## Summary:

On Saturday, October 30, 2010, eighty-five Aboriginal youth and adult facilitators gathered at Mount Royal University for a workshop called *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change*. The vision for the workshop was to bring Aboriginal youth from various communities - on reserve and off reserve - to explore their potential as leaders of positive change.

From the outset, the goal of *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* was to launch a relationship-based process to encourage and equip Canadian Aboriginal youth to be change leaders in their communities. Young Aboriginal people between the ages of 15 and 29 from all across Southern Alberta were invited to attend the event, and representatives from Kainai, Eden Valley, Siksika, Piitoayis, Tsutina, and many others attended.

Throughout the day, youth participants heard from several guest speakers - young people themselves with incredible life stories: Senator Patrick Brazeau, the 15th Aboriginal and third youngest senator to be appointed in Canada; Dr. Alika Lafontaine, physician and winner of the "Canada's Next Great Prime Minister" contest in 2008; and Ashley Callingbull, an aspiring astrophysicist and the first Aboriginal Miss Canada. All three



Guest speakers, Dr. Alika Lafontaine, Ashley Callingbull and Senator Patrick Brazeau.

speakers came from humble backgrounds and overcame vicious struggles on their road to success. All three are still striving forward and lead by example. All three had faced discrimination and financial hardships. Their stories certainly resonated.

At the end of the day, participants shared that they are grateful for what they have, and that they recognize the need for community support. Blaise Russell, a young attendee from Kainai High School summarized the sentiments of the event well: "Try hard. Your dreams are your future. They're your keys. Listen to your elders. They're only here for a limited time to guide you like a yellow brick road. Live like this is your last day. We're all the same, but a different name, a different destiny, a different dream, with the same

heart. As human beings, we stand for one purpose. Our mission today is to get ahead, get to our future. “

### **Program Details:**

There is no better way for young people to be inspired in their leadership journeys than to hear the stories of those who went before them. This was the premise on which *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* was based. The workshop was comprised of three primary components, which moved from a focus on “me” to “we” as the day went on: Sharing Wisdom Stories; Listening to Youth Participants; and Supporting Youth as Leaders of Positive Change. In order to maintain a constructive and supportive environment throughout the workshop, ground rules from the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* were adopted: mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual accountability, and mutual trust.



Senator Brazeau speaks with a group of youth participants.

### **Part 1: Sharing Wisdom Stories**

The three guest speakers could not have painted a better picture of the reality of life - its peaks and valleys, joys and sorrows, and the necessity of community. A wide variety of life experience was represented by the guest speakers: Ashley Callingbull, 21 years old, is just beginning her university education; Alika Lafontaine, 27, recently completed his medical degree and is now beginning his career as a physician; and Senator Patrick Brazeau, 36, is established in his occupation and contributing to the decision-making process on a national level. Yet regardless of their life experience, it became clear that

each speaker is committed to creating positive change for the communities they care about. Here is a snapshot of what they shared:

**Senator Brazeau's** path to the senate was by no means an easy one. He faced harsh criticism and racism along the way, and yet with hard work, ambition and perseverance, Senator Brazeau was named the 15th aboriginal and third youngest senator in Canadian history. "If you take advantage of opportunities, you will become a better person. Your family will improve, your community will improve, and your country will improve," the Senator encouraged youth participants. "Ask yourself: Where am I now? What do I want to be when I grow up? What am I willing to do to get there?"

**Dr. Alika Lafontaine** has been in post-secondary school for 15 years; after completing his medical degree he went on to pursue a residency in anesthesiology. In grade four, Alika was told that he would never graduate from high school and that he shouldn't expect to ever achieve much of anything. Alika didn't buy that, and neither did



his mother. Alika's parents continued to pursue options for their son, and along the way discovered that his learning problems were due to persistent ear infections. Once the infections were treated, Alika became an exemplary student, graduating from high school at the early age of 15. Alika attributes his success to the supportive people in his life - his parents, who believed in him every step of the way, and a chemistry teacher who mentored Alika and helped break down limits to what could be achieved. "Mentorship will help you succeed. It's too tough on your own. By drawing on knowledge from people who have experience, and who have accomplished the things you want to accomplish, you can emerge as a positive influence," remarked Alika to the young participants.

**Ashley Callingbull** had a difficult childhood. She lived in poverty, was physically and sexually abused, and faced discrimination. And yet, Ashley has not let the past get in the way of her future; she is now Canada's first Aboriginal Miss Canada, and is working toward completing a double degree in drama and physics. Ashley has been offered a scholarship to Caltech (California Institute of Technology) for astrophysics, and she'll be appearing in a television show this January. She's accomplished, diverse, and only 21. "Be grateful for everything you have" is the advice offered by Ashley to the youth participants. "You don't need life to be handed to you on a silver platter in order to achieve. If you're thankful for what you've been given and work with what you have, you can succeed."

## Part 2: Listening to Youth Participants

A primary focus of *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* was to hear not only what the guest speakers had to share, but also to listen to the young participants. To get them thinking about their own personal stories, each youth was provided with a workbook filled with reflective exercises: they were invited to write a poem entitled "Who I Am"; they were

given colorful handprints with which to reflect on their favorite qualities about themselves; and they responded to important questions such as "Who have been the three most influential people in my life?"

Youth participants were also encouraged to explore their stories on a collective, communal level.



Young attendees work with a facilitator to complete the workshop exercises.

To do this, Dr. Mark Durieux, University of Calgary professor of Sociology and co-author of *Social Entrepreneurship for Dummies*, invited the youth to respond to two critical questions: "What needs to change in my community?" and "What is needed to make that change happen?" Responses to these questions were gathered and used for an activity made famous in the movie *Freedom Writers*: the line game. Workshop participants

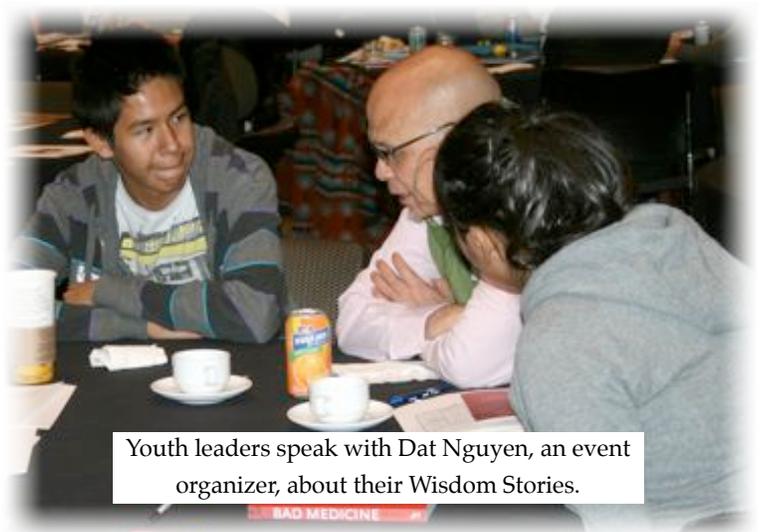
were asked to stand on either side of a line, facing one another. When asked a question by the activity facilitator, they were to step up to the line if the answer applied to them. The idea behind this exercise was that the young people might see themselves as part of something collective; that they would realize they are by no means alone.

Several methods of recording their Wisdom Stories, whether individual or collective, were made available to each youth participant. The reflective workbook was utilized by each and every attendee. Representatives from the grade five class at the Piitoayis Family School came equipped with journals and digital cameras to conduct interviews with the youth attendees and speakers. Combined, these methods proved effective in collecting the thoughts and reflections of participants; most individuals left with a sense that they had been heard. "Thank you for sharing your truth, and for allowing me to share mine; you inspired me! Please continue to work hard for Aboriginal peoples!" commented an enthusiastic young participant.

### **Part 3: Supporting Youth as Leaders of Positive Change**

*Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* began with an invitation, an invitation for each attendee to hear from some inspiring guest speakers and to explore their own leadership potential. The workshop also ended with an invitation, an invitation to grab hold of the opportunities available and learn how to create change. For interested youth, further training in leadership development was made available via Bridges' *Unveiling Youth Potential* program ([www.unveilingyouthpotential.com](http://www.unveilingyouthpotential.com)). Greater exposure to and training in social entrepreneurship was offered via Dr. Mark Durieux.

In addition, all event organizers and discussion facilitators made themselves available and accessible to youth participants by providing their contact information. This way, the young people are empowered to follow up directly with the individuals they met.



Youth leaders speak with Dat Nguyen, an event organizer, about their Wisdom Stories.

## Impacts and Outcomes:

The goal of *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* was to bring Aboriginal youth leaders from southern Alberta together to see how they could inspire one another. The aim was to build relationships between the youth, and between the young leaders and others, that would carry on into the future. We believe we achieved the goal of bringing together Aboriginal youth leaders from southern Alberta together...and the inspiration provided by Senator Brazeau, Alika Lafontaine and Ashley Callingbull was amazing: "Alika, I am so very impressed by all of your accomplishments. You are a true Aboriginal role model and very humble man," commented one young attendee. "Senator Brazeau, you gave me more confidence in life," remarked another, and "Ashley was a very unique and awe-inspiring young lady!"

The feedback that has been received thus far is incredible; we recently learned that two young participants have decided to go back to school after attending the workshop! However, we are hopeful for even more contact among attendees. We look forward to hearing more from each of the youth about what they would like to do next, and how we can all support them as they move forward as leaders in their communities.

Going forward, one goal of the facilitators is to offer and provide additional leadership training to the communities represented at the Aboriginal Youth Leading Change workshop. One community - Kainai - has already identified themselves as interested, and we will most certainly meet their request to the best of our ability. Additionally, another *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* workshop is being planned for Fall 2011 in Calgary, so stay tuned! And, there are lots of other choices for youth leaders: perhaps youth would like to connect with one of the speakers or facilitators to talk about their ideas. The door is open!

In the meantime, we ask you what else you would like to see happen in southern Alberta? Here are some questions/ideas to guide your reflection:

- Would you like to have leadership training at your school or in your community?
- Would you like to come to another workshop in Calgary in 2011?
- What kinds of speakers would you like to hear from?
- Would you like a video of the speakers – Senator Brazeau, Alika Lafontaine and Ashley Callingbull - to share with your friends?

- Do you want to mix youth leaders from elementary, junior high, high school and post high school...or have different training for different age groups?
- Would you like to have a mentor to support you?
- Would you connect with others through Facebook?
- Would it be good to invite non-Aboriginal youth leaders to a future workshop?

Feel free to respond to these questions, and provide additional feedback regarding the *Aboriginal Youth Leading Change* event, by emailing [info@canadabridges.com](mailto:info@canadabridges.com), or on Facebook by visiting: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=89715751874>.



## Event Sponsors:

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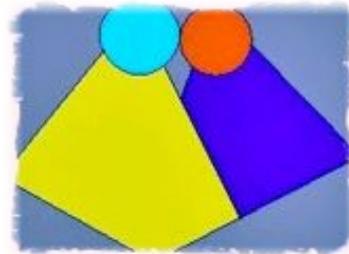


Mount Royal University

## Event Partners:



Bridges Social Development  
[www.canadabridges.com](http://www.canadabridges.com)  
[www.unveilingyouthpotential.com](http://www.unveilingyouthpotential.com)



LaVie Society  
<http://laviesociety.blogspot.com>

### **Event Organizers/Facilitators:**

1. Donna Kennedy-Glans, Bridges Social Development
2. Nicolle Hans, Bridges Social Development
3. Jennifer Kohlhammer, Bridges Social Development
4. Dat Nguyen, LaVie Society
5. Rod Blair, Energy Industry Advisor
6. John Young, Energy Industry Advisor
7. Judge John Reilly, Alberta Judge
8. Dr. Mark Durieux, Sociologist
9. Dr. Andrea Pritchard Kennedy, Mount Royal University
10. Dr. Andreas Tomaszewski, Mount Royal University
11. Lisa Semple, Mount Royal University
12. Dr. Marlene Kingsmith, Mount Royal University
13. Keisha Many Wounds, Mount Royal University
14. Brett Husband, Mount Royal University
15. Brenda Lee Ann Juby, Mount Royal University
16. Lori Pritchard, Piitoayis Family School
17. Sophia Lebessis, Piitoayis Family School
18. Allan Pedden, Calgary Stampede
19. Brendan Miller, Alberta Lawyer
20. Brett Maronda, Woodridge Ford
21. Glenda Dubiensi, Counselor
22. Barbara Webb, Calgary Journal
23. Janetta Soup, Treaty 7 Youth Careers Advisor

### **Invited Guests:**

*Len Webber, Aboriginal Relations Minister, Legislative Assembly of Alberta*

*Rob Anderson, Airdrie-Chestermere MLA, Legislative Assembly of Alberta*

*Katy Isaac, Aboriginal Friendship Centre*

*Lawrence Gervaise, Aboriginal Friendship Centre*

*Myra D'Souza Korman, Government of Canada, Department of Labour*

## Youth Participants:

NAME	COMMUNITY REPRESENTED
Josh Nash	Alberta Health Services
Melissa Creyka	Alberta Health Services
Reno Nash	Alberta Health Services
Ashley Hunter	Bow Valley High School
Brittany Fox	Bow Valley High School
Hannah Ear	Bow Valley High School
Jacque Simons	Bow Valley High School
Kaylie Ear	Bow Valley High School
Lorna Smith	Bow Valley High School
Alexander Kormann	Clear Water Academy
Child Left Hand	Eden Valley
Desiree MacAuylay	Eden Valley
Mary Ellen Left Hand	Eden Valley
Seth Leon	Eden Valley
Shay Left Hand	Eden Valley
Michelle Dow	Eden Valley
Avery Delaney	Kainai Children's Services
Bradley Holy Singer	Kainai Children's Services
Chataya Holy Singer	Kainai Children's Services
Cherish Twigg	Kainai Children's Services
Jasmine Shouting	Kainai Children's Services
Kal Holy Singer	Kainai Children's Services
Katelyn White Man Left	Kainai Children's Services
Michelle White Man Left	Kainai Children's Services

NAME	COMMUNITY REPRESENTED
Shay Mills	Kainai Children's Services
Terrence Black Forehead	Kainai Children's Services
Vanessa Holy Singer	Kainai Children's Services
Brandon Knife	Kainai Community Correction Society
Dedlious Daychief	Kainai Community Correction Society
Girlee Russell	Kainai Community Correction Society
John Chiefmoon	Kainai Community Correction Society
Kendall Sun	Kainai Community Correction Society
Nikeah Chiefmoon	Kainai Community Correction Society
Richard Calfrobe	Kainai Community Correction Society
Tara Shade	Kainai Community Correction Society
Blaise Russell	Kainai High School
Caroline Russell	Kainai High School
Deanna Shouting	Kainai High School
Annett Pon	Siksika Nation High School
Mason Weaselchild	Siksika Nation High School
Maggie Nielson	Treaty 7 Management Corp.
Avi Schiebner	University of Lethbridge
Charnelle Blood	
Jodie Big Bull	
Taylor Beebe	
Taylor Metchewais	

## Budget Information:

In the interests of transparency, here is an accounting for costs expended in organizing this workshop. And, know that many volunteer hours made this possible - 568 hours were donated!

ABORIGINAL YOUTH LEADING CHANGE EXPENSES	
Mount Royal University Conference Room Rental	\$1400
Catering	\$2700
Printing Costs	\$400
Website Development	\$200
Communications Services	\$1800
Guest Speakers' Travel Expenses	\$850
Honorariums	\$900
Insurance	\$50
Video Rendering	\$1000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$9300</b>
<b>Volunteer Hours Donated</b>	<b>568 hrs.</b>