



City of Saskatoon

Community Services Report

Youth Focus Group Discussions on Race Relations

January 2009



The City of Saskatoon, Community Services Department identified the need to secure the services of a youth engagement organization to conduct focus groups as a follow up to a youth perceptions survey on the topic of Race Relations, completed in 2007. On December 3, 2008, Youth Launch and IJob of Nutana Collegiate hosted a full-day focus group with thirty youth participants.

## PLANNING & RECRUITMENT

### **Planning**

An initial consultation meeting occurred between the City of Saskatoon (Becky Sasakamoose-Kuffner), Youth Launch (Kadane Headley and Bonnie Heilman) and Ijob (Sarah Loewen and Dave Shanks) to explore the possibilities of partnering up to host a youth focus group. At the initial meeting we looked at the overall objectives of the City of Saskatoon for the Cultural Diversity and Race Relation office. We also discussed ways to involve youth in the planning and facilitating of the focus group.

It was decided that Youth Launch would involve members of its Youth Leadership Development Program (YLD) in planning the agenda and developing the focus group questions. In order to give input on these aspects of the event, YLD members first studied the results of the survey conducted by The City of Saskatoon in 2007.

The agenda and questions for the focus group were finalized during a meeting between Becky, Bonnie, and one of the young people from Youth Launch's YLD.

Food, space, facilitation, and other logistical arrangements were made by Youth Launch and iJob.

### **Recruitment**

Youth Launch created a poster for the event and accompanying letter of invitation for the event and sent them to Centennial Collegiate, Walter Murray Collegiate, Aden Bowman Collegiate, Holy Cross High School, Oskayak High School, The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, and The CRU Youth Wellness Centre

In attendance at the Focus Group were:

Four students from Aden Bowman, four students from the English as Another Language class at Walter Murray, four students from Centennial, and sixteen students from Nutana.

## THE FOCUS GROUP

### **Purpose:**

The main objectives for the day were:

- ❖ To gather recommendations for the City of Saskatoon's Cultural Diversity and Race Relation's (CDRR) Office as a follow-up to the 2007 survey
- ❖ To provide a safe, open discussion for young people to explore race relations issues
- ❖ To engage them in contributing to the future of race relations in Saskatoon

It is hoped that the recommendations gathered on December 3<sup>rd</sup> will influence the future activities of the City of Saskatoon's CDRR office to promote positive race relations and accomplish the City's Community Outcomes.

### **Process**

The day consisted of a variety of small and large group discussions and activities, led and facilitated by the coordinators of Youth Launch, IJob and by young people who participate in these two programs.

When the Focus Group participants arrived in the morning, they were welcomed and assigned to one of four teams. Each team had at least one representative from each of the high schools involved and was led by two facilitators. Each pair of facilitators was made up of one young person and one coordinator from either Youth Launch or IJob.

To kick off the day, facilitators led their teams in an icebreaker to set the tone of a fun, relaxed atmosphere and to get people interacting with each other as soon as possible.

Afterwards, more official introductions were made. Youth Launch explained its objectives of empowering young people and providing opportunities for youth voices. Becky was also introduced to everyone and she explained the purpose of the event and some of the background that has led up to it. Next, a brief summary of the 2007 youth perceptions survey was presented by Youth Launch in order to provide the participants with more of the context of the focus group.

After the introductions, each of the four teams broke off into other rooms so they could begin their discussions, which continued until lunch time.

Over lunch, the focus group participants had the chance to participate in some noon-hour programming at Nutana. Several of them took part in the weekly yoga class and drumming circle.

After lunch, teams were given a bit more time to wrap up the discussions they had begun in the morning and distil the recommendations that had emerged.

For the remainder of the afternoon, an Open Spaces approach was used in order to give participants a chance to get creative about what they had been discussing with their groups.

There were three rooms to choose from: The Writing Room, The Art Room, and The Strategy Room.

To wrap up the day, everyone gathered together as a large group for an open mic session, where people shared their thoughts and their groups' progress.

## **Discussion Questions**

The questions that facilitators posed to participants during the discussion groups were divided into three categories:

### *“Our Personal Experiences”*

1. Do you remember your first cross-cultural experience? That is, your first experience with someone from an ethnic background other than your own? Would you share it with us?
2. Have you ever experienced racism or the effects of racism?
3. Have you ever had an experience that has changed how you see people of a certain ethnicity?
4. The survey shows that there seems to be a difference in the way people view race relations in Saskatoon depending on what their ethnic background is. Why do you think that is?

### *“Our Views about Our City”*

5. What's your perspective on race relations in Saskatoon? Are they good? Bad? Average? Do you feel that they need improvement?
6. What causes racism in Saskatoon? Do you think it is a learned thing? What reinforces racist attitudes in Saskatoon?
7. Why is it important to have positive race relations?
8. What do you think would happen if no one cared about race relations?
9. Whose job is it in our community to improve race relations?
10. Do you know of any current programs, activities, or movements that are working to improve race relations in Saskatoon? What do they do? Do they work? Why or why not?

### **\*\*\*RECOMMENDATIONS\*\*\***

#### **11. What do you think the City of Saskatoon should do to help foster positive race relations in our city?**

The purpose of the first set of questions was to get the participants reflecting on actual experiences from an individual perspective. Those who devised the questions felt it was important to begin the dialogue from an individual perspective before delving into the second set of questions which address the topic of Race Relations from a social perspective.

In order to ensure a comfortable and safe atmosphere, two of the four teams chose not to have their responses to the first set of questions recorded. The other two teams did record responses to

these questions; however, the majority of the notes are not adequate in conveying the meaning of each story that was told. Therefore, due to the personal nature of the stories, the way in which they were recorded, and the fact that there are only notes from two of the groups, there will be no summary of Questions 1-4 in this report. However, posing this first set of questions was a crucial component in preparing the participants for the discussion that was to follow.

It should also be noted that the quotes in this report are taken from the notes taken by facilitators during the discussion groups. They do not necessarily reflect verbatim the exact words of the participants, but they do capture the general message and sentiment of the participants' responses.

## DISCUSSION GROUP RESPONSES: A Summary

### **Question #5**

“What’s your perspective on race relations in Saskatoon? Are they good? Bad? Average? Do you feel that they need improvement?”

In the responses to these questions, two main themes emerged:

#### **1. Perceived levels of racism in Saskatoon**

The participant responses that fall under this theme show that young people’s perceptions of race relations in Saskatoon are varied. Some participants stated that race relations are “bad,” “poor,” or “need improvement,” and that there is “a lot of racism in Saskatoon.” Others, however, expressed a different view with statements like, “It’s alright in Saskatoon because it’s so diverse” and because “these types of talks are now starting to tone [racism] down.” Two other, seemingly opposed responses, highlight the varying of opinions about race relations in Saskatoon; while one participant stated that Saskatoon is “worse than other cities,” another states that it is “Good compared to other places.” One of the discussion groups discussed something that may explain why different young people have varying perceptions about race relations in Saskatoon. They said “it depends on where you go,” what neighbourhood, and what school. One school was described as having less racism because it has a high level of diversity within its student body, while another school was described as being “more racist because there are not a lot of native people” there. Although the responses of the participants reflect varying perspectives about race relations in Saskatoon, not one stated that race relations are good or that they are not in need of improvement.

#### **2. Forms of Racism & Definitions**

##### **a. Racism Towards First Nations People**

In response to question #5, racism towards First Nations people emerged as a prevalent theme in two of the four discussion groups. One participant brought up the stereotypes held about neighbourhoods with high populations of First Nations people, stating, “People say, ‘oh no I’ll get mugged at the Roxy because there are so many Aboriginals.” Another participant commented, “I’m native. There are lots of stereotypes about my people,” and asked fellow participants, “Why are we seen like that?” Another participant responded by saying, “Because

everyone is so used to Aboriginal people doing bad things. We are always being busted for crimes. It's always other people giving us bad reps. So automatically when a Caucasian sees an Aboriginal guy they think he's a criminal because he assumes all Aboriginal people are bad." This comment alludes to the connection between racism, crime, and socio-economic status, a connection that was stated more explicitly by another participant who said, "More aboriginal people are hungry, homeless, and poor – but they don't see this as connected to racism."

### **b. Racist Jokes**

Throughout the discussion groups, the topic of racist jokes also emerged repeatedly as a form of racism that is seen by young people in Saskatoon. One participant reflected, "For me, there was no racism until I was thirteen or fourteen years old. Then it became okay. It started as a joke, behind people's back." One participant talked about people making jokes about their own race or culture and asserted that although this kind of "self directed racism" does occur, it is not okay. Another participant observed that "Making racism funny is a good way to suppress racism." Two of the participants who've already been quoted in this report as saying that race relations are alright in Saskatoon also commented on the topic of racist jokes. One of them talked about comedians like Dave Chapel and Russell Peters who joke about race, stating, "Russell Peters – his jokes are not racist because he knows them [the people that he's joking about]." The other participant who was previously quoted as saying that race relations are "alright" in Saskatoon said, "I've never met an actual racist person. Just people joke around about it a lot." This participant then asked, "What is racism anyway?"

### **c. Definitions of Racism**

In response to question #5, two of the four groups spent time discussing what racism is. They came up with several descriptions:

- Disrespecting others because of their skin color.
- When someone looks at you weird like you don't belong.
- Racism: Hate .Discrimination. Unfairly treated. Believe skin color makes a difference in a person's characteristics and / or abilities. Negative judgments. Intolerance of another race. Can be emotional or verbal.

One group also discussed definitions for other related terms:

- Discrimination :racism in action
- Ethnicity: culturally / geographically defined

### **Question #6**

What causes racism in Saskatoon? Do you think it is a learned thing? What reinforces racist attitudes in Saskatoon?

In the response to these questions, five main themes emerged:

## **1. Passed Down Through Generations**

Of the five themes that emerged in the responses to Question #6, this one has the most responses falling under it. One participant stated, “People who are racist think its okay because they were raised that way.” Several participants made comments such as, “Parents and guardians influence attitudes,” but other responses show that young people see racist attitudes being passed down not just from parents, but the community in general. For example, that racism is “passed on through generations” and that it is caused by “society’s standards” were responses from two different discussion groups. One participant also responded that school causes people to be racist; however, the discussion notes do not explain how this participant sees school contributing to racism. Their response could mean something to the effect that school structures and curriculum are ways that racism is passed down through generations, in which case this response would fit under this theme. This participant, however, could also be referring to the social aspect of school and the influence of peers their, in which case their response would fit under the next theme.

## **2. Peers**

Several participants listed “peers” as factors that contribute to the racist attitudes and behaviours of individuals. One participant referred to “high school clicks who stay away from other groups,” and stated that people “see leaders of groups make racist jokes, so they think its okay. Peers make you racist.”

## **3. Past experiences**

There are three responses that fall under this theme, all of which convey a slightly different aspect of it. One participant stated generally that people’s “experiences and thoughts and what they saw before” can cause them to be racist. Another participant observed more specifically that “people who experienced racism think its okay to be racist back.” While both of the responses attribute racist attitudes to the experiences that a person has had, the final response under this theme makes note that some people have racist attitudes because their “experiences are limited.”

## **4. Media**

Media was listed in three of the four discussion groups as contributing to racist attitudes in Saskatoon. One participant referred specifically to “the news,” saying that there are “too many Aboriginal people on the news – people see that and think that all Aboriginal people are bad and they see a white person on the news and apply it to all white people.”

## **5. Fear**

This theme consists of the response from one participant who stated, “Racist people are scared to accept other cultures.” This participant then asked, is it because there’s a “fear of them being better?”

## **Question #7**

Why is it important to have positive race relations?

In responses to this question, six main themes emerged:

### **1. Harmony**

In three of the four groups, it was said that positive race relations are important because it would create “a happier place,” “more peace,” and “less race-based problems.”

### **2. Cross-Cultural relationships and benefits of them**

This theme has the largest number of responses that fall under it. Many participants felt that positive race relations are important to help “break barriers” between people and increase the levels of “acceptance,” “communication,” and “understanding” between different races. At least two of the focus group participants recognize that the benefits of stronger cross-cultural relationships would lead to new understandings. One participant stated that with positive race relations, everyone could “meet new people and learn what they know. Another one stated, “I feel sorry for racist people. Diversity brings new ideas.” These comments show the value that some of Saskatoon’s young people place on the opportunity for building cross-cultural relationships.

### **3. Improve the lives of individuals**

Improving the lives of individuals, particularly children, was another strong theme that emerged from the responses to Question #7. One participant felt that if positive race relations could be achieved, “our kids won’t have to deal with it and be put through racism.” Another participant believes that with positive race relations, “all kids can grow up feeling equal, capable, and free.” Responses from several other participants also relate to the notion of being free. One participant felt that with positive race relations, people could “do what [they] want without being stereotyped.” Others said, “You could go to other countries without being judged;” and “I could meet others without worrying that they are racist.”

### **4. Economy**

One participant made the connection between positive race relations and the economy by stating, “Good race relations would have a positive impact on the economy.”

### **5. Reputation**

One participant felt that positive race relations are important in Saskatoon because we “don’t want to be known as the racist city.”

### **6. Global Conflict**

Several participants believe that positive race relations would lead to “less wars” like “World War II” and the “Afghan and Iraq war,” which, stated one student, is occurring because U.S. people are racist towards Afghani and Iraqi people.

## **Question #8**

What do you think would happen if no one cared about race relations?

Not surprisingly, this question evoked many responses that directly contrast the responses to the previous question, but there are also some different ones. The responses to this question brought up five different themes:

### **1. More racism**

In all four of the discussion groups, statements were made that fall under this theme. They said that if no one cared about race relations, there would be “more segregation” and a “vicious cycle of racism.” One participant said that “everyone would be racist,” and another said that racism would be “so wide spread, people could be openly racist.”

### **2. Oppression**

Several responses from one of the groups fall into this category. They felt that if no one cared about race relations, there would be “more poverty” because more people would have “no jobs” and “no education.” One participant said that people would live in “fear” because “culture wouldn’t matter,” and another said that there would be “no evolution” if no one cared about race relations.

### **3. Violence/War/Suicide**

This is the theme that holds the highest number of responses. Participants expressed that without positive race relations there would be “riots,” “anarchy,” “more people fighting and dying,” and more wars. One participant also stated, “It would make people go crazy and feel so bad they would take their own life. They would feel as if they weren’t wanted and kill themselves.”

### **4. This Moment**

A couple of the participants talked about what would be different *right now* if no one cared about race relations. One observed, “We wouldn’t be sitting in this group having this conversation.” Another one stated, “I wouldn’t be here right now because my parents wouldn’t have met.”

### **5. Impossible**

In two of the discussion groups, it was stated that for if no one to care could never happen. One participant said that that “wouldn’t be at this point” because that would be “going backwards.” The participant in the other group stated, “Someone has to care about that, it can never be like that.”

## **Question #9**

Whose job is it in our community to improve race relations?

### **1. Government**

In two of the groups, several participants felt that it is the government’s job to improve race relations. One participant stated, “Only government can make change because they control people and have the money.”

### **2. Everybody**

The overwhelming majority of responses fall under this theme. Participants said things like:

- I say everybody
- Everyone because racism is everywhere.
- Everyone’s problem. If we wait for authority to do it no one ever would.
- Yeah , need support from people

- Everyone should care. It's everyone's job
- Everyone should challenge the racists. Treat everyone the way I'd like to be treated.
- Everyone's job to improve race relations by talking, raising awareness and starting a revolution.
- Anyone who cares

### **3. Not Everyone Cares**

In one of the discussion groups, the discussion about who should work to improve race relations led to discussing why not everyone cares to. One participant said, "Some people don't care because they don't know. It hasn't really affected them." Another replied that some people "don't think about it so they don't realize everything does affect everyone." Another stated, "They are selfish and don't care until it affects them directly."

### **Question #10**

Do you know of any current programs, activities, or movements that are working to improve race relations in Saskatoon? What do they do? Do they work? Why or why not?

In response to these questions, each group created a list programs, activities, and/or movements that they were aware of. However, based on the notes, it appears that most of the groups did not discuss the objective of each item on the list, or whether or not they are successful in promoting positive race relations. For future discussion groups, it could be useful to place more emphasis on questions about what makes some programs effective. Thoughtful insight from young people on this topic could assist the City of Saskatoon in determining what activities would be sensible to undertake.

The items that participants listed fall into five themes:

#### **1. Programs/Organizations**

Between the four discussion groups, a list of local programs which participants see as promoting positive race relations was created. They listed:

- This right now, the city is involved and schools are involved
- Youth Launch
- CRU Youth Wellness Centre
- Indian and Metis Friendship Centre
- Core Neighborhood Youth Co-op
- Express Yourself
- Air cadets brings people together from everywhere
- Culture Club at school
- White Buffalo Youth Lodge because it doesn't just try to keep children off the street, they also try to bring relations together.
- Sask Native Theatre Company because their plays are about First Nations culture and they bring different relations together in the play and the audience
- Anti-racism awareness at U of S, but I don't know what they actually do.

- This focus group

## **2. Awareness Days & Campaigns**

“March 21” and “Advertisements images working towards improving race relations” were both listed by participants as things that they are aware of in Saskatoon.

## **3. Obama Movement**

One participant cited that “Obama getting elected is a movement that is currently serving to improve race relations.

## **4. Legal System**

One participant stated, “There are laws that protect us. There are a lot of people out there making sure people aren’t racist.”

## **5. Unaware of any**

Several participants said that they were unaware of any programs, activities, or movements that are seeking to promote positive race relations. One participant said in regards to the community programs that they have heard of, “It’s mostly about youth and poverty. There’s not enough awareness of race programs.” Another participant said, “It’s only about diseases on busses.”

## **Question #11**

What do you think the City of Saskatoon should do to help foster positive race relations in our city?

The participants had many ideas for programs, events, and campaigns that the City of Saskatoon can support in order to promote positive race relations amongst young people. Their responses fall into seven themes:

### **1. Cultural Awareness**

Of the seven themes, the responses under this one are the least specific and concrete, but several participants made general recommendations to the effect that there needs to be more understanding and awareness about racism and different cultures. One participant stated, “Deeper understanding of different cultures is needed.” Another thinks that there needs to be “More educating people (racist people) about racism.”

### **2. Awareness Campaigns / Promotion**

Many of the participants suggested ways to promote awareness. One person said the messages about “anti-racism” need to be “made more noticeable. Many participants had ideas for ways/mediums to do that. They suggested:

- Use radio and try to get messages out.
- Newspaper / Advertisement
- We could do TV, magazine,
- Advertisements targeting young people –magazines, tv, buses , radio
- Racism STOP hand on buses- maybe if we came up with a new logo
- Posters

One group discussed whether or not posters actually work; participants had differing views. One said, “I like to see posters in the classroom. ...they help to remind people.” However, another said, “There are too many posters, when there are too many people don’t read them.” This discussion is a reminder that no single approach to promoting awareness will be effective with all young people.

### **3. Events**

Several participants suggested that large, city-wide events would be a good way to promote positive race relations amongst young people. They said things like:

- Big cultural music thing; City wide; Bands and music.
- New years party at prairie land all kinds of music
- Bigger events – a lot more young people –city wide –send out formal invitations THIS IS AN ISSUE THAT DESERVES IT...DECORATIONS, THEMES , GAMES
- Cultural Diversity events Awareness – more volunteers
- HUMAN RACE DAY

it should be noted that music was mentioned several times as being an important element for events with young people. One participant stated, “Music is a good way to bring people together.”

Although a large, extravagant event with music was a popular idea among participants, several others felt that “smaller events more often” would be beneficial.

### **4. Discussion Groups**

In keeping with the idea of smaller events, several participants felt that in order to promote positive race relations, the City of Saskatoon should support more opportunities for youth to discuss the topic. They said things like:

- Spread the word about racism have, talks like this on a larger scale.
- Bigger focus group event; bring more students together.
- Something like this event [focus group]
- Talk about Racism.

That this theme emerged makes it apparent that opportunities to talk about issues pertaining to race relations are important to young people.

### **5. School-based Programming**

Quite a few participants made recommendations for what The City of Saskatoon could support in schools to promote positive race relations among young people:

- Go to different schools and discuss awareness.
- Bringing awareness more than once a year –Cultural diversity day at schools – can’t only go to your own booth.
- More events / programs at schools, especially elementary schools so they can learn young... [This] could be clubs, but not everyone goes to clubs, so have assemblies, bulletin boards. newspapers, classes, books
- Leadership classes
- Bring it into school curriculums – history, law, life transitions, psychology

- Have more presentations in classes and at the cosmo:
  - a play
  - something everyone wants to hear about

## 6. Other/Community-based programs

- Conflict resolution program
- More community groups like CRU (need one on Eastside)

## 7. Who

Several participants had ideas about who should be involved in endeavours to promote positive race relations in Saskatoon. One suggested that “celebrities and athletes” would be good people to get involved. Another participant suggested that young people and students be the ones to “do the talking.” A third participant recommends that it would be effective to have “social/high end leaders to speak more about it.”

Many exciting ideas came from the participants of the focus group. In order to further distil which of these ideas would be most effective and practical, The Community Services Department may wish to further consult with young people. Several of the participants from this focus group expressed an interest in staying involved with any projects or programs organized by the City of Saskatoon. During the Open Spaces portion of the program, some participants made use of their time by strategizing as to how young people could stay involved in promoting positive race relations.

## OPEN SPACES

For the afternoon portion of the program, an Open Spaces model was used as a way for participants to have the opportunity to convey their thoughts and ideas on the topic of Race Relations and Cultural Diversity. Participants were given a choice between three different Open Spaces:

**The Visual Art Room** was a room with art supplies, music, and a helpful, friendly artist named Laura Hosaluk who helped youth created pieces to express anything that was heard or said throughout the day. Several collages were created. Two are at Nutana and one was taken to Aden Bowman by the participants who created it.

**The Writing Room** was a room for those who understand the power of words. Youth were invited to go hear to write rhymes, stories, or press releases, and there’ll be writers there to give help if you want it. Only three people chose this room. One piece of writing was submitted to Becky. The other pieces were kept by their writers.

**The Strategy Room** was a room for people with vision, who like to plan ways to take action. In this room, youth were facilitated in strategizing ways that youth working with the City of Saskatoon CDRR office to improve and positive race relations could be sustained. The folks in The Strategy Room talked about forming a Youth Advisory Committee. Some of their ideas for a Youth Advisory Group are:

- Bring youth together to go to other schools and present things because “youth will listen and take more out of something from other youth.”
- Work with elementary school children
- Get together with other schools (Networking)
- Make poster and commercials
- Weekly meetings @ an open space
- Snacks
- Easy transportation
- Have diversity on committee
- Have university students on committee

## CONCLUSION

This Focus Group successfully initiated the engagement of participants in promoting positive race relations in Saskatoon. Many of the recommendations they made have the potential to be both practical and highly effective in achieving the City of Saskatoon’s goals pertaining to race relations. Youth Launch has both the interest and capacity to further support the engagement of the Focus Group participants in developing the ideas that were created on December 3, 2008. We look forward to the possibility of collaborating further with the City of Saskatoon.