BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STORY OF THE THUNDER BAY INDIAN YOUTH FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

By

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Integrated Studies Project

submitted to Dr. Ken Banks

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

December 2007
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Acknowledgements

I am not sure that it is every possible to identify all the influences and supports that go into writing a final paper such as this. It reflects the teachings that I have received from so many people throughout my lifetime. For all the people such as Brenda Small, Frances Trowsse, Lisa Schmidt and others who are both colleagues, friends and mentors from Negahneewin College of Academic and Community Development, I am eternally blessed and grateful for your gentle guidance and unqualified support through these years. I have always considered myself to be lucky to be surrounded by such amazing and brilliant women.

I also must thank my family, especially my daughters Kesia and Erin, and their father Bill, who have always been there for me and have made their own personal sacrifices to see me through to the end of this journey. My good friends have been ever patient and encouraging as well, and have provided important outlets when I needed a break from the academic world.

There are also some who must be acknowledged for their extra support in these final years and more specifically in this final project.

Anne Lesage, the executive director of the TBIYFS has encouraged, facilitated and supported this project since it was first proposed. I could not have done the work without this, and similarly without the confidence of the community and the Board of Directors of the Centre. I hope that the project will help you celebrate the remarkable accomplishments that have been made by the TBIYS to this city.

Meegwich to Charlene Baglien, Rick Lyons, Ron Lyons, Leonard Dick, Art Wilkes, Frances Wesley, Bernice Dubec, Bev and Sarah Sabourin, Freda McDonald and Real Bouchard who not only agreed to be interviewed but also shared their wonderful stories so generously with me (sometimes twice!). There would be no project without you, and I trust that you find your memories adequately honoured in this work.

I would also like to especially thank Patricia McGuire, my friend and office partner, for all the ways that she has opened my eyes and challenged my Eurocentric biases and whiteness through the years. The healthy discussions, your probing and questions have contributed to my own growth and understanding of the complexities of the Aboriginal-Canadian relationships. Your friendship, openness and generosity in sharing your insights and culture have influenced my work in more ways than I can possibly explain.

For a comma challenged person, with no eye for the finer details of the English language, I am eternally grateful to my good friend Elizabeth Pim. I don’t know what I would have done without your editorial help in this and all my work through the years.

Finally, my gratitude to Ken Banks and all those at Athabasca University, who have all contributed, encouraged and taught me so much. It has been a great journey.
1.0 Introduction

It is often remarked that one of the effects of colonialism is the theft of history. The stories which become etched into the consciousness of society are those of the colonizers, with their own heroes, their own versions of events and their own worldviews. Voices and histories of the colonized are often overlooked or if referenced at all, done so through the ethnocentric perspectives of the dominant group. Canadian history is no different than other countries in this respect. The Aboriginal people of Canada have suffered significantly from the absence of their stories and voices being included in the collective history of this country.

While studying for my Masters degree at Athabasca University, I was naturally drawn to explore topics which focused on the Aboriginal experience in Canada. For most of my life, I have worked with Aboriginal people who have generously shared their experiences and histories with me. So, as I pursued courses in Feminist Studies, History, Adult Education, Leadership and even Community Development, I was acutely aware of the absence of the Aboriginal experience and voice in the literature.

In Community Development, for example, I read about exemplary cases of grassroots development, social movements and organizations in Canada, and eagerly anticipated the inclusion of Aboriginal people’s perspectives and experiences. When Aboriginal people did appear in the literature, it was in work such as Brody’s (1971) *Indians on Skid Row* or Dosman’s (1972) *Indians: the Urban Dilemma*. These and other works often focused a deficit lens on the challenges and struggles of Aboriginal people as they moved to the cities. This left an impression of Aboriginal people and communities...
as being in a constant state of cultural confusion, disarray and chaos. I knew that these stories represented one part of the Aboriginal experience in the city, but the absence of other more positive, strength-based stories seemed incongruent with some of the memories expressed by the Aboriginal people that I knew.

In particular my friends, who had been part of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement, told very different stories. These stories were of exciting days of grassroots organizing, and of people pulling together to assist other Aboriginal families migrating to often hostile cities that were unprepared to service them. Their stories also told of the remarkable tenacity, adaptability and ingenuity of the early organizers of the local Indian Friendship Centre in the 1960’s and 1970’s. My contacts recalled these years fondly, as a time when Aboriginal people came together to build and develop a ‘community within a community,’ that left a lasting legacy of leadership and development in the City of Thunder Bay. My friends also consistently expressed the sentiment that “I would not be who I am today without the Indian Friendship Centre.”

This was not the story of chaos and despair which was so prevalent in the literature of our time, nor was it a story of government intervention or development by outsiders. It was the story of skillful and competent Aboriginal people whose efforts created a viable movement not only in this city, but simultaneously in all the major cities across the country. The collective efforts of these early pioneers of urban development shaped one of the most long lasting and successful Aboriginal organizations in Canada.

It seemed to me that the Indian Friendship Centre Movement epitomized the essence of Community Development as defined by Collier (2003):

“Community development then is about conscious responses to societal trends, forces, issues, economic change and local response. It is about
people with some commonality in knowing that they have a “discomfort” or an issue or threat but are willing to work together to deal with it. It is about people knowing that they belong and who are a part of a collective in which the reasons for them being there are shared and accepted.” (10)

There was however, little mention and no details of this successful organization in any of my texts, and a search of the literature found a similar void. As a result, I found myself asking, “How is it that an organization as successful as the Indian Friendship Centre can flourish in the midst of the urban communities for all this time and not feature prominently as part of the history of Canada, and the theory of community development?”

It is a question that leads back to the discussion of the colonial theft of history. Our world is only recently embracing the stories and voices of others, and as academics we must reconsider the version of history that we have been taught and to provide opportunities to hear the voices of those who have been invisible or silenced.

This final project for my Masters was, therefore, a natural extension of my recognition of the absence of the Aboriginal voice and experience in the literature, and my desire to find out more about the remarkable history of the local Indian Friendship Centre (TBIYFS[1]). It evolved into a collaborative effort with the Centre to capture some of the memories of people who were part of the early movement and to reclaim the history of this particular community.

1.1 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the history and capture some of the stories of the development of the Thunder Bay Indian Youth Friendship Society (TBIYFS) in the 1960’s and 1970’s. In order to do this properly, I believe that the stories

[1] Thunder Bay Indian Youth Friendship Society is the official name although it is commonly referred to as the Indian Friendship Centre or the Centre.
must be told by the people who were there at the time. Their narratives will provide the beginning of an oral history which can be used to further develop the Centre archives.

In addition, this project will add to the emerging body of literature concerning the history of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement across the country. It is further intended to address the gap in the Canadian community development literature on the successful organizing strategies of Aboriginal people in urban Centres. Finally, as an exemplary case study of grassroots development, it will provide an important counter-narrative to the existing historical literature of the time which predominantly represents Aboriginal people’s experience in the cities through the negative bias of the dominant society.

1.2 The Research Question

The question to be explored with individuals who were part of the movement in the early days is: “In what ways did the Thunder Bay Indian Youth Indian Friendship Society (TBIYFS) contribute to the personal and collective development of Aboriginal people and community in Thunder Bay?”

Their responses to this question address both the personal and collective influence of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement as an agent of community development within the local context of the City of Thunder Bay.

1.3 Limitations

This research was undertaken to begin the process of reclaiming the history of the Thunder Bay Indian Youth Indian Friendship Centre. Due to the limited nature of this particular project, it cannot claim to be comprehensive or complete. I have not attempted
to tell all the stories of all the people who were involved or everything significant that has happened. It is simply reflection of the experiences of the people who agreed to be interviewed. There is much more history to be uncovered and many more stories to be told. I hope that by starting this process, others will be inspired to come forward and continue this important research.

2.0 Methodology

Preliminary Considerations: Insider / Outsider Research

I am not of Aboriginal descent and no matter how many years I work with and for Aboriginal peoples and seek to understand their world, I will always be an ‘outsider’. Given this location, I had to do some hard thinking about whether (or not), and how to conduct this research.

Much of the research that has been done “about” Aboriginal people in the past has been similarly conducted by outsiders, often with detrimental effects to the people, communities and cultures. In recent years there has been a concerted effort by emerging Aboriginal scholars to address the harmful effects of outsider research and to carve a space where the Aboriginal voice and perspective are more accurately represented. (Smith 1999; Ermine 2006, Jeffrey, Sinclair 2004; Weber Pillwax 1999)

While some Aboriginal scholars argue that Aboriginal research should be conducted only by Aboriginal people, others concede that there may be a place for the ‘allied other,’ but with certain conditions and guidelines that address issues of voice, and contribute to decolonizing agendas which are beneficial to Aboriginal communities (Bishop 2005; Kirkness and Barnett 1999; Smith 1999; Pidgeon and Cox 2002).
In light of this debate, I carefully considered the concerns about Indigenous research before starting my research and worked to address the issues and protocols that were described. It is important to clearly outline how I have reconciled a place for myself to confidently complete this project as an ‘allied other.’

2.1 Choosing a Project and Approach

My topic; *Exploring the early history of the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre Through the Eyes of the Participants*, appeared to be a good fit with the needs expressed by Aboriginal scholars for research that contributes to addressing the absence of the Aboriginal voice from history. Smith (1999) explains that research which allows communities to give testimonials to their collective stories and struggles is an important step to “teach both the non-Aboriginal audience and the new generation of Indigenous peoples an official account of their collective histories” (144).

As previously noted, the literature written about the early experience of Aboriginal people in the cities has been predominantly done by non-Aboriginal writers exploring ‘the Indian problem’ and the various reasons why these people were having a difficult time making the transition to urban life. There are very few accounts of history which provide insight into the experience of Aboriginal people in their own voices.

This research project will address this issue and contribute in a positive way to Smith’s vision of revisiting history through the eyes and perspectives of the people who lived it. It will also provide an opportunity for Aboriginal and western people to explore and learn from a successful Aboriginal model of community development.

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1 This project was preceded by a 701 project for Athabasca University, called *Journey of an Outsider: In search of a respectful research methodology*, which reviewed the literature.
2.2 Writing With not About: Consultation and Collaboration

A second concern about ‘outsider’ research is that it is frequently done without consultation with or consideration of the people or groups involved. Aboriginal people will not longer tolerate being treated as passive research subjects, and expect to be included and consulted at all stages of the research process.

As a result, I began “testing the waters” a full year before deciding to engage in this research by speaking with Aboriginal contacts in the community to gauge interest in this work. I was already known in the community and had worked with the Indian Friendship Centre for many years, and this was helpful in establishing initial contacts and relationships. People who I spoke to were enthusiastic about the possibility of reclaiming the history of the early days at the Centre.

Next, I approached the Executive Director of the Indian Friendship Centre to determine if she would both support and mentor me through the research. She was also supportive of the project, agreed to work with me, and became an important link to the community. Finally, I wrote a letter to the Board of Directors, outlining the scope and nature of the research, and asking for their formal approval. (Appendix 1) This was granted in April 2006 (Appendix 2) although the project was delayed until the following spring due commitments of both the Centre and the researcher. Throughout the project I provided opportunities for consultation and verification by both the Executive Director and the participants. In this way, I was able to ensure that the document accurately reflected the experiences of those who participated.
2.3 A Respectful Methodology: Qualitative Inquiry

Interpretive or qualitative research is favoured by Aboriginal scholars, as the best approaches for respectful methodologies in working with Aboriginal communities.

Smith (2005) notes that Indigenous research is clearly “anti-positive” and in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, suggests that

“qualitative research is an important tool for Indigenous communities because it is the tool that seems to be most able to wage the battle of representation; to weave and unravel competing storylines, to situate, place, contextualize, to create spaces for decolonization and to provide frameworks for hearing silence and listening to the voices of the silenced.” (103)

I chose to work with a form of narrative inquiry which Chase (2006) suggests allows for

“an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytical lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches… all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the ones who live them” (651).

Chase suggests that “a narrative may be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or naturally occurring conversations.” She also notes that the term ‘oral histories’ can be used to describe interviews in which the focus is “not only on the historical events themselves… but rather on the meaning that the events hold for those who live through them” (652).

This approach appealed to me. If I wanted to avoid repeating the mistake of outsider researchers “interpreting” Aboriginal experience solely through a Eurocentric lens, then the voices and interpretations of the individuals involved must be front and centre to the project. My role in this project would be to organize and draw together the themes that emerged from the stories and to provide a larger context in which these stories could be understood. In addition, I decided that it would be important to include
the names and histories of the people that were interviewed. In this way, their own contributions to the history and storytelling would be acknowledged.

2.4 Reviewing the Literature

I began the research with a detailed search for literature concerning the urban Aboriginal experience and Indian Friendship Centres in Canada. Very little has been written or recorded about Indian Friendship Centres and early accounts of the urban experience such as Nagler’s (1973) *Indians in the City* are outsider views and interpretations of what came to be identified as the “Indian problem”.

Much of the information specific to Indian Friendship Centres is derived from government reports, with the most comprehensive coverage coming from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1986). In addition to the government reports, newspaper and informal documentation held by the IFC itself, I was also able to find two theses written about the Indian Friendship Centres in Winnipeg, and Victoria. These provided the history and evolution of those particular centres and offered a context for comparison and verification of the activities of the larger movement. Both were written by non-Aboriginal scholars and provided solid historical accounts of the activities and history (Miller 1990; Hall 2004). Indian Friendship Centre websites and documents given to me by the TBIYFS also were reviewed.

The TBIYFC did not have any written archival records prior to the 1980’s, although an extensive photographic record was displayed on the walls of the basement. I took the opportunity to view and review these during one of the interviews.
2.5 Research Design

The actual research involved contacting and interviewing 12 individuals who had significant involvement in the early Indian Friendship Centre Movement in Thunder Bay in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Participants for the research were identified by the Executive Director, and a letter explaining the project and inviting them to participate was sent out by the Indian Friendship Centre on my behalf (Appendix 3). I followed up by phone to further explain the project and its contributions to the local centre history, answer any questions and to determine whether people were interested in being interviewed. The response was positive from those who were contacted. There was a genuine interest and enthusiasm in recalling their involvement with the Centre. One elder expressed concern about the reason for the research, how it would benefit her and the community and the fact that it was not being conducted by Indian Friendship Centre volunteers. I was able to answer her questions respectfully and she agreed to be interviewed.

On two occasions, additional participants were identified through conversations and recommendations of those interviewed. It became clear that many more individuals would and could have been included had time allowed. It was a difficult decision to limit the participation, but this was necessary given the scope of the project.

The Executive Director and I collaborated on the development of a general interview guide which was intended to focus the recollections of the participants on the history and activities of the Centre, and on how the Centre contributed to community development and impacted their own lives (Appendix 4). Aside from clarifying and steering the participants back to these topics, the interviews were informal and free flowing and those interviews chose their own direction and emphasis. Once people began
to speak, they needed very little prompting to provide rich and thoughtful narratives and analysis of their experiences.

Interviews were conducted at times and places convenient to the individuals. The project and scope of the interviews was explained at the beginning of the meetings, and participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 5). In addition to the standard questions of consent, they were also asked if they wanted to have their names appear in the final document. All informants agreed to be named. In addition, the consent form provided several options for the final transcripts and recordings. Informants were asked if they wanted them destroyed or if they would consider donating them to the Indian Friendship Centre as part of an archival history. In all cases, they indicated that they would like the transcripts donated to the Centre. As a final verification of these wishes, the participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw this consent and withdraw from the project at any time, as the project evolved. They were allowed to read and verify the information, and given the option to withdraw any or all of their stories before the final draft was complete.

The interviews were conducted over a period of six months between March and August 2007 (Appendix 7). Four of the interviews were held at the Centre itself, three at neutral locations, one in my home and two in the homes of the interviewees. Interviews were taped and later transcribed and returned for correction and comment to each of the individuals. In some cases, minor details and clarifications were made.

In four of the interviews the tape recorder malfunctioned and the audio record was not captured. Unfortunately, I had chosen not to write notes during the interviews in order to remain focused on the conversation. It was some time before I discovered that
the tapes were blank, and I was unable to accurately recall details of these interviews. I took responsibility to call all the informants, and inform them. All agreed to rerecord the interview; however because of logistics and timing, I was only able to redo two interviews for the purposes of this project. However, because this project is as much for the Centre as for my course requirements, I have committed to conducting the remaining two interviews again, and transcribing them to add to the Centre’s archives of the project.

2.6 The Research R’s: Indigenous Principles

Aboriginal scholars suggest that Aboriginal research must be intertwined with knowledge of specific local cultural protocols and larger principles of Aboriginal culture. In particular, respect, relationship building, responsibility and reciprocity are commonly highlighted as basic requirements during the research process by several authorities (Kirkness and Barnett 1999; Weber-Pillax 2001; Wilson 2001; Smith 2005).

As a result, I consulted with the Executive Director for appropriate protocols required within this community. My own experience and relationships with the community also provide me with some awareness of what might be expected. In approaching all participants, I remained conscious of my position as an outsider to the community and aware of the possible negative experiences that people may have had with researchers. I approached the elders with tobacco when requesting their participation and brought small tokens of food or other gifts when conducting the interviews. I tried to ensure that the meetings were at times and in locations which were both comfortable and convenient to the participants. I was conscious of keeping in touch with the individuals to update them on the progress of the project, as there were significant gaps between the interviews and the final product.
Several opportunities were provided for the informants to review and comment on the project to ensure that their stories were accurately represented. These included a review of the transcripts and of the final stories of the project, before it was completed (Appendix 6). Finally, as reciprocity requires that the sharing of knowledge is acknowledged and compensated, I have indicated to the participants that I will be hosting a gathering and feast of all those who were part of this project when it is finally completed. My intent is to provide an opportunity for people to come together to reconnect and reminisce about history of the Centre. Participants will be formally thanked and acknowledge at this time, and copies of the final project will be made available to everyone. All of the participants expressed enthusiasm about this gathering as a way to celebrate their involvement and to reconnect with each other.

2.7 Data Organization and Analysis

Once I had transcribed the interviews, I reviewed the stories several times. In the first analysis, I was looking for stories that captured the history and activities of the Centre. With subsequent readings, I looked for common themes expressed by the informants. These themes were contextualized through the literature about the urban Aboriginal experience of the time. They were also and compared to the data presented in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and various other Government documents which discussed the role of the Indian Friendship Centres in assisting Aboriginal people in settling in often hostile and unwelcoming cities. Their stories were also compared to the experiences and history that was uncovered by the studies of the Indian Friendship Centres in Winnipeg (Hall 2004) and Victoria (Miller 1994). Finally, the themes identified by the participants were examined in the context of
community development theory with parallels being drawn between models of best practices of community development and the actual community development success of this particular Centre.

2.8 Completing the Circle: Community Ownership of the Stories

“What will happen to my notes when you die?” was a question posed to Menzies (2003) in the course of her research with the Gitxaala (Journal of Native Education. Vol.28.2: 22). This question addresses Aboriginal concerns with intellectual property and the potential misuse of data collected with a good intent originally, but later used to exploit or otherwise disrespect the wishes of the community.

I was clear in my own mind, that aside from using this data to complete the requirements for my Master’s program at Athabasca University, the stories, tapes and all accompanying research, would ultimately be under the full control and ownership of the Indian Friendship Centre. In this light, the Centre would have full access to all of my research notes, transcripts and information and no further publishing or use of the materials would be done without further consultation and permission of the Board of Directors. As a result benefits of the project will be credited to the Centre, and they will always be able to regulate the release and use of the research by future researchers.

2.9 Final Thoughts on Research

Through careful consideration of an appropriate research topic and methodology, I am confident that my research is a positive contribution to the Aboriginal community both locally and globally. It adds an important missing piece to the history of community development in Canada and more importantly provides oral testimony of this Centre’s early years so that future generations can be know and be proud of its legacy.
Through the active involvement of the participants in reviewing the work, and through the careful guidance of the Executive Director as my mentor and ‘sounding board’, I believe that I have represented the views of the participants to the best of my ability. I have also attempted to follow the Indigenous protocols of this community and apply the principles of respect, responsibility, relationship and reciprocity throughout the project. I will honour and celebrate this project with the community by providing for a final gathering for all of those who have assisted in the project. During the interviews, people expressed appreciation that I was providing an opportunity for telling their stories and exploring the rich history of the early days of the Centre and excitement at the possibility of coming together to reminisce with others about the time. I

Finally, I acknowledge that this research and the product are not mine, but that I am merely a facilitator of storytelling that belongs fully to the people and the community of the TBIYFS.

I believe, therefore that I can say with some confidence, that the project has been carried out not only with “a good heart” but with careful consideration of the issues identified by Indigenous scholars as necessary for “allied others”

3.0 Background: A brief History of Indian Friendship Centres in Canada

The Indian Friendship Centre Movement is approaching its 50th year of official recognition as a major contributor to Aboriginal community development in the urban landscape in Canada. As a non-political, status blind, organization working for the development of Aboriginal people, it is recognized by the RCAP (1996) as “the most stable and viable urban Aboriginal organization” in Canada. (Vol. 4: 535)
3.1 Grassroots Origins

The ‘official’ launch of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement is often seen as the outcome of the Annual Indian and Métis Conference in Winnipeg in 1958 (Hall 2004). However, there is evidence that Aboriginal people had been involved in building informal support networks in urban communities long before this date. Hall’s thesis suggests that the process of informal grassroots organizing was occurring simultaneously across the country in the 1950’s and 1960’s. In Winnipeg, for example, a group known as the Urban Indian Association met regularly throughout the 1950’s, in the homes of its members and organized assistance to new migrants with housing, employment, recreational and referral services (Hall 2004). Hall notes that members of this group “travelled to Regina, Banff, Edmonton and other places” to investigate what others were doing to assist the migrating population. The North American Indian Club registered as a society in 1951 in Toronto, and a similar association formed in Vancouver as early as 1952 (retrieved at www.nafc.ca 03/05/07).

Thus the beginnings of the Thunder Bay Indian Youth Friendship Society were part of an informal network of Aboriginal people finding ways to help each other.

As Miller (1990) points out, voluntary associations like this often arise out of necessity:

For individuals and groups moving from predominantly rural to the unfamiliar, and sometimes inhospitable or indifferent urban settings, the challenges presented by the change may be surmounted through group cohesion. Through this means, individuals with knowledge of or experience in the new environment may provide assistance to the newcomer attempting to succeed in an often intimidating and bewildering locale.”(77)

In addition to ‘necessity’, the early efforts to organize likely evolved from the very nature of Aboriginal values and culture which RCAP (1996) notes are grounded in
principles of community, interdependence, relationships and an ethic of sharing. (Vol. 4: 519-540).

Once established, the main focus and role of the Centres were to act as referral centres and gathering places for newcomers to the urban environment. These efforts were initially voluntary, with funding through a variety of ad hoc means including partnerships with churches, service groups, private donations and small grants from various levels of government. Each Centre was dependent on the tenacity and ingenuity of its organizers and members to keep the organization in operation. This grassroots movement both survived and thrived in this manner through the 1960’s, and by 1968 there were twenty-six Indian Friendship Centres operating across Canada. As Garrow (1992) notes in his government review; “They remained community based, community driven, acting as unofficial, autonomous social and referral agencies until the 1970’s” (5).

3.2 The 1970’s –1980’s: Recognition, growth and expansion

By the late 1960’s the Centres were beginning to organize at the provincial and national levels, and in 1972 the National Association of Indian Friendship Centres was incorporated and began operating to represent the interests of the forty Centres across Canada. Xavier Michon, the founder of the TBIYFS was instrumental in the development of this national network and is often referred to as the grandfather of the national Indian Friendship Centre Movement. (Retrieved at www.nafc.ca 12/04/07).

The growing numbers of Aboriginal people settling in urban areas, combined with the political pressure of this highly effective coalition of Indian Friendship Centres led to pressure on the federal government to acknowledge and address the issues and needs faced by Aboriginal people in the city. They responded by the developing and
implementing the Migrating Native People’s Program (MNPP), funded by the Secretary of State, in 1972. Its mandate was to address the service and program gaps for Aboriginal people in the city. Indian Friendship Centres, which were now well established in most communities, became the natural recipients of this program funding.

For the first time in their history, Indian Friendship Centres were provided with stable core funding which allowed for growth, diversification of services and programs. Throughout this time, the Centres were charged with “providing referrals to existing community services, rather than providing services themselves” (Harvey and McCaskill 1988:10) and this stage of the Centres’ development saw the expansion of their advocacy work and bridge-building with the larger communities. In addition, this was a period of significant growth of new Aboriginal organizations in urban centres such as the Ontario Native Women’s’ Association, Métis Associations, Native housing projects and Aboriginal education and training programs. Much of this activity was generated as offshoots of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement. Individuals who were part of the Centres became key players in identifying needs for their community and building specific organizations to meet those needs. Indian Friendship Centres often provides space for initial meetings and organizations sometimes shared or used the space of the Centres for their early operations.

Throughout the 70’s and early 80’s Indian Friendship Centres continued to thrive, expand and extend their influence throughout the country. By 1982, the Migrating Native Peoples’ Program evolved into the Native Indian Friendship Centre Program which provided stability to the Centres through five year program funding. The 1980’s saw Indian Friendship Centres expand and gradually assume the role of service delivery
as opposed to referral services. In Thunder Bay, the core staff was increased to 6 during this time. The mandate of the Centres during this time did not change as it continued to fulfill its role as providing a bridge for Aboriginal people between the urban and rural environment. The TBIYFS explains “we tried to equip people through services so that they could cope with city life” (2001: 2). Early programming focused in particular on the needs of youth and families and also included literacy programs, court workers and other community support and referral services.

The governments increased confidence in the work of the Centres, resulted in the transfer of the administration of the Native Indian Friendship Centre Program to the National Association of Friendship Centres who had been lobbying for self-determination and self-government. This resulted in a shift in the role of the national association away from advocacy and lobbying, to a role of “financial administration and dispersement” (25).

One challenges for the Centres during this time was that it had become so successful, that it became the logical target for urban Aboriginal programs that were now emerging from the Government. As Centres became the agent for government downloading, they began to shift away from their grassroots community driven origins. Obomsawin-Irwin Consulting (1988) noted at the time, that the Indian Friendship Centres had “gradually decreased its links with the community while dramatically increasing its links with funding sources.” Its report recommended that the Centres “review their long term goals and priorities and prioritize programs and services based on community needs rather than on program funding” (TBIYFS 2001: 2). Clearly, once stuck in the cycle of
government funding, reporting and accountability, Indian Friendship Centres lost some of the autonomy that was so characteristic of grassroots voluntary organizations.

3.3 1990’s: Adapting to Government Demands

The 1990’s provided further funding challenges to the Movement, which made it difficult to respond to the recommendation of the consultant. During this time, Indian Friendship Centres found themselves struggling for their own survival as government restructured and downsized, eroding support for many community organizations.

Significant cuts to the Native Indian Friendship Centre Program funding, for example, resulted in the cancellation of youth programs, the loss of the community support worker position and a reduction of core staff from six to two in the Thunder Bay Centre. At the same time, the expectations of direct service delivery had doubled. Survival now depended on the ability of the staff to write proposals and develop programs, not in response to community needs, but in response to the social planning policies of the government and funding initiatives filtered through the provincial and territorial branches. This was a discouraging time for many who felt that the top down management and policies, combined with the shrinking funding resources, and excessive paper work in applying for grants and writing reports and providing services kept them away from their original work in active grassroots community development. Anne Lesage, Executive Director of the Thunder Bay Centre remembers the 1990’s as a very frustrating time when “the nature of the work had changed, and I felt tied to my desk” (Lesage 15/03/04).

This shift to direct service delivery expanded to all Centres and became a permanent part of the Indian Friendship Centre mandate. The Ontario Federation of
Indian Friendship Centres website notes that “Indian Friendship Centres have defined their role in the community as providing a “continuum of care” from infancy to elders” (Retrieved at [www.ofifc.org](http://www.ofifc.org); 21/03/07) For some, this shift away from the original role as a social and recreational community centre has been unfortunate. Lesage notes that even the configuration of the building changed, from the original open concept to closed offices and locked doors reflecting the need for client confidentiality and discrete program needs. She relates the story of an elder, who was very involved in the early movement, coming to the Centre and commenting to her that “this is not a centre anymore. It is a business.” (02/03/04)

3.4 The New Millennium

By the early 2000, program development had slowed down and stabilized and there began a renewed effort to restore the connection to community development. Indian Friendship Centres adjusted and adapted and on a local basis have worked to restore their individual connections to the communities. With no funding for this community work, centre staff and community have again returned to volunteer and unpaid extra curricular time as the way to do the community development work that is ‘outside the box’ of funding proposals.

The Indian Friendship Centre Movement may no longer operate at the informal social level, but its work in community development and its role as an advocate for urban Aboriginal people has continued and expanded as it seeks to be the bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the city. The annual report of the TBIYFS (2003) provides a snapshot of the scope of work that is still done by these centres. It highlights a multitude of partnerships and committee and advocacy work at the local,
provincial and national levels in addition to regular programs and services including life
long care, alcohol and drugs, healing and wellness and community support programs.
The Centre is also active in addressing issues of overrepresentation of Aboriginal people
in the justice system; actively spearheading anti-racisms committees, and working with
the police to develop appropriate training and cultural sensitivity. They also operate court
worker and Aboriginal liaison and diversion programs which provide culturally
appropriate alternative measures to the mainstream adversarial system. Literacy
programs, programs for children, youth and families, summer employment programs for
youth and the sponsorship of cultural and community events are all part of the new reality
of Indian Friendship Centre current mandate.

There are now 120 Centres throughout Canada, in every province and territory.
The Centres operate on the three interactive levels as: local Centres run by a Board of
Directors, provincial or territorial Associations which are charged with the administration
of funding and long term planning and the National Association which still operates as
the lobbying and policy arm of the movement. As Miller (1994) notes, “this structure
provides congruency for Centres across Canada, and ensures effective coordination of
programs services and resources” (7).

There is little doubt that this organization has had a significant impact on the
urban landscape, and that it has shaped the lives and communities throughout its long
history. This research paper is intended to add the voices of the participants to this history
and hear their stories of the history and impact of the Indian Friendship Centre in
Thunder Bay.
4.0 Talking Together: The Stories

When I met with the participants of this study, I asked them to describe their memories of the IFC during its early days of operation which spanned the years between 1963 and 1980. I asked them to recall the activities, organization and people that were important and to explore how they felt the Centre contributed to their own personal development and to Aboriginal community development in general in Thunder Bay.

Many of those interviewed began with their own experiences of being an Aboriginal youth in the city that was both unwelcoming and unprepared to address their needs. They explored how valuable the Centre was in providing a home away from home and a place to belong. Identity, personal empowerment, leadership development and experiences with Aboriginal culture were all highlighted as important to the individuals. Stories also included a recollection of all of the other organizations and community involvement that the TBIYFS contributed to through the years. All participants identified the leadership role of Xavier Michon as the visionary and driving force behind the success of the Centre and drew attention to other early pioneers such as Marlene Pierre and the Lyons family. Memories of the time at the Centre were positive, enthusiastic and nostalgic. Finally, many of the participants drew a direct link between their own current success and their participation and validation through Centre activities. The interviews confirmed the important role of the Indian Friendship Centre in urban community development in Canada. Here are their stories.

4.1 Life in the Cities in the 60’s

“It was rough in those days. It was cops and robbers in those days, there was no doubt about it, cowboys and Indians…. was strictly the way that society saw thing. You were either good or no good” (Lenard: 20/04/07).
Life in the city was certainly challenging for Aboriginal youth in Thunder Bay in the early 1960’s. Many found that they were grappling for the first time with being ‘Indian’ in a community where they were a distinct small minority and where being Indian was equated with inferiority and often greeted with hostility by the dominant society. Racism and exclusion were common experiences that all the informants faced.

Anne recalls how before coming to the city, her life as a child did not require her to think about being different from the other children that she regularly played with. She suggests that there was no consciousness of being an “Indian” as a child, when she was growing up. However the move to the city quickly changed that. She notes that “until Aboriginal people started migrating to urban centres, they never had to face things like racism, or being disconnected from the community or feeling like they didn’t belong” (15/04/07).

Some of the youth dealt with this by minimizing or denying their Aboriginal identity. For those of mixed heritage this became a strategy for survival in the hostile surroundings. One individual notes, for example, that although identifying strongly with her Anishinabe family and culture, she still found it difficult to take that identity openly into her school and community:

“Yah, I was right in between, you know… I always gravitated towards the “anish” side of my life because that how my family was centred. But in many ways I think I hid it, from the community, the non-native community, when I was in high school… you know there was a lot of racism back then, to be known or part of that, it was like… well, put it this way, there was this one time when someone punched me in the eye. You learn really early how to protect yourself” (Charlene: 15/04/07).

\[\text{2 Anish} – \text{slang for Anishanabe or “original people” in Ojibwa.}\]
Another relates how it was not uncommon to be told not to come back, after visiting friends’ homes for the first time because she was an ‘Indian’. In high school, the hostility and peer pressure that she faced about being Aboriginal caused her to avoid acknowledging this side of her heritage. When invited to join Aboriginal youth at the Indian Friendship Centre activities during this time, she notes that she “was not ready to connect or openly embrace that side of her heritage” (Bernice: 10/08/07).

Arthur explains how, as a 12 or 13 year old Native boy, his race brought him in direct conflict with Non-Native youth. He and his brothers and friends tried to join in with other youth in social events in the community:

“Being a young fellow out there, we used to go to dances, and they used to have dances down at Trinity Church… but we always used to get into trouble, being Native, you know… It wasn’t working at Trinity, no matter where we went we were always under attack”. (Arthur: 09/05/07).

Even when it was not overt, the prejudice and stereotyping meant that some Aboriginal youth had to be vigilant and fight dominant stereotypes to get what they needed and deserved. Frances relates how she found herself in grade nine in a room full of Aboriginal children from northern communities, sewing pillow cases. Having lived off reserve, and having won awards for academic excellence in public school, she was had signed up for;

“I was sitting there thinking ‘what am I doing here’. We were all sewing. I had this image of high school that we would have to study hard and work hard and suddenly we are sitting here with sewing machines all around. I don’t sew.”(10/05/07)

As Frances explains, she took matters into her own hands and marched off to the principal’s office where she was told that “she had to be there… because all Native children that come to school go into this course.” She stood her ground and notes that the
principal “did look up our marks, and he said, yes you did have high marks… and he put us in the five year program… and whether we did well or not it was up to us” (Frances:10/05/07).

This scene was repeated when she came to the city for College years later:

And so when I came to college... you needed certain courses to get into the early childhood education courses... but I thought I will try to get in there....and ... But they already had again..., I felt this way anyway, when I came to Thunder Bay... I felt they had set up programs for Native people and they didn’t have enough students to fill the program so that they plunked me into there because {You fit the profile?4)

Exactly...I fit the profile...And that’s what I thought when I came to school in Thunder Bay and then I thought...this program that I was in “community development program” this is not too bad, and I stuck with it. And I really really liked it.”

Although it was not the program of her choice, Frances did complete this program which launched her into a lifetime of community development work with the Indian Friendship Centre and with other organizations in the city. However, her experiences demonstrate the attitudinal barriers and discrimination that made life difficult for Aboriginal youth..

Ann sums up the nature of this challenge for young people in Thunder Bay at the time:

“There were enough challenges for Aboriginal peoples, one of which, I guess is in a sense of being recognized as ‘different people’. I have to make a reference to racism in that regard” (Anne 15/03/07).

4 Words in brackets and italics are mine.
4.2 Theme One: Survival Strategies in the City

These experiences of being isolated, not belonging, being “different” and facing overt and subtle racism and discrimination combined with a lack of services in Thunder Bay, mirror the findings of the RCAP (2006) study which concludes that issues of racism and discrimination, challenges to cultural identity and lack of culturally appropriate services were the most significant impediments to successful transition for Aboriginal people to the urban environment (vol. 4:522).

In response to this hostile climate, and to the influx of Aboriginal people moving into the city in the early 1960’s, some of the Aboriginal residents of Thunder Bay began to organize to provide support for those who were new to the city. This type of response to community needs is not uncommon when populations are faced with a challenging environment. As Miller notes in her discussion of the origins of the Victoria Indian Friendship Centre, “necessity” is often the catalyst for the organizing of voluntary association and leads to a situation where those with skills and knowledge in a community become a natural support and resource for those who are new. (1990: 76)

It was also a natural response for people coming from Aboriginal cultural background which embraces values such as responsibility, reciprocity, sharing, kindness, to come together to help each other survive. The values of community, sharing and responsibility were constant themes which emerged in the interviews in this project.

The success of these early organizers in developing their own responses to the needs of the migrating population illustrates the capacity of Aboriginal people to adapt, cooperate and survive in harsh conditions as they have been doing since time immemorial.
4.3 Stories of Early Centre

Perhaps “the seeds” of the first centre were planted with the exclusion of Arthur and his Aboriginal friends from the youth dances at the church. As they weary of battling with the other ethnic youth at these dances, they began to look elsewhere for a place to meet. Arthur relates;

“So, I bumped into this guy, I think his name is Richard Green, and there were a few other guys, I can’t remember their names. So anyways, we got, I think it’s called St. John’s Church on Pearl Street. We grabbed a bunch of 45’s and we had our little record player and we had a few dances down there, and then we moved up to Volunteer Pool and held a few dances up there…. And that’s where Mr. Michon got involved and he found us that place on Cumberland.” (09/05/07)

Xavier Michon, who is acknowledged as the grandfather of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement in Canada, is similarly credited with his early role and vision in getting the local Centre started. Thus the coming together of Mr. Michon who was already working towards organizing support for the migrating population of Aboriginal people, and the small band of Aboriginal teens who were looking for a place to socialize resulted in the tenuous start to what was to become the Thunder Bay Indian Youth Indian Friendship Centre.

The original building on Cumberland Street was a very small rundown tar paper shack that Xavier Michon was able to get donated around 1964. Arthur remembers his first impressions of the Centre;

“It was in pretty sad shape when we got it… it didn’t have all this fancy stuff… it was basically rundown. We had to go down and clean it, we cleaned it up. I guess it was an old storefront of some kind, an old corner store… but it had heat and lights and it had some room.”(09/05/07)

He goes on to describe the physical layout of the building. “It was a building that had an L shape that went to the back of the building and there was a piece across the
front. In between there were stairs going down into the basement, and there was a little office in the back corner.”

In later years, a craft store was opened at the front of the building. This was one of Rick’s memories of coming to the old centre as a child.

“I remember walking in the front door. And the part that my uncle (Ron Lyons) ran was the store and that was the front… and I remember seeing all the crafts and smelling the sweet grass that was in the birch bark products. And there were toys… all kinds of things for kids, not only adults… all kinds of things hanging from the walls” (15/04/07).

Ron Lyons recalls how the craft store was started:

“There was a winter carnival here once that they city put on and they wanted Native crafts and there were hardly any crafts around here at that time, so me and Marlene [Pierre] borrowed a thousand dollars and we got crafts from Toronto…and we were just going to use them for show and for the festival… but when we were there, a lot of people wanted to buy them… so we started selling them. Then we opened the craft store and it started from there” (18/04/07).

Rick notes that in later years many of the products were donated:

“They were made by volunteers… it was made and most of it was given. … that I remember. It was given to the centre to help with the programs that they ran… to help pay for it… and people gave out of their hearts, donated everything.” (15/04/07)

The profits from the craft store went to help the centre address the needs of the newly migrating people:

“they were using a lot of the funds that we were making at that time for different people that were coming off the reserves… for hotels rooms and for meals and that… so that was how it was used” (Ron 18/04/07).

The craft shop, therefore, evolved into an integral part of the Centre providing a place to showcase Aboriginal crafts to the community and for many a place to see and learn about traditional Aboriginal art for the first time. In addition, it provided an important source of revenue which helped the Centre to assist newly arriving families.
4.4 Bringing Youth Together: The Dances

“It was a hopping’ place for youth” (Anne 12/02/04).

While the craft store occupied the most visible part of the Centre, it was the “basement” that held the most memories for the participants. This became the location of the weekly event, the Saturday night dances, that was widely anticipated and became the magnet that drew the youth from all over the city to the Centre. Ron Lyons, who was to become the centre’s most dedicated youth worker, supervised the dances remembers “the hall was not very big. It was only about 22 feet wide and maybe 30 or 40 feet long… and they used to fit 150-200 kids in there”. All those who I spoke to had nothing but fond memories of these weekly gatherings.

Arthur provides the details of “the scene” on Saturday night:

“Down there we’d have our dances, and I am telling ya… boys on one side and girls on the other side….they would be hopping up and down. You couldn’t swing anyone because it was too narrow. I mean, the only thing you could do in there was maybe waltz, and then you would have to be careful not to step on anybody’s toes, because it was so small…. When they got on one side and a bunch on the other side and they were doing their thing… that floor was going up and down like this… I swear it was at least 6 inches. No kidding! I was scared sometimes that [people were going to go right through]. But it never did, it must have been made of spruce or something with a lot of give… It was fun to watch.” (09/05/07)

Arthur and his friends not only watched but also were part of the live music that played each weekend. He remembers “we used to set up down here by the office and we had one little Johnson amp…about 100 amps. But we had four instruments plugged into it. I was playing guitar originally, rhythm guitar, Herman was playing lead and singing and we had Alan Hardy as our drummer.” Arthur also remembers other bands that played
on a rotating basis, including “George Cook and Clarence Whitman, (also known as Smokey) and Kenny Mahegan”.

He also remembers the infamous cloakroom at the back of the dance hall: “that place was dark” he notes “and “boys and girls were doing things they shouldn’t have been doin’…and you know what? …A lot of people got married out of that cloakroom” (09/05/07).

As with any social events, there were times when the gatherings got a little rowdy. However, the Centre had strict rules about alcohol and fighting. Ron notes:

“Sometimes they would get out of hand and they had three or four fights around 9 pm, just when we were going to start… and there would be a few kids drinking. So the director would way “We’ll shut her down for the night” and we would shut it down… We were kind of strict about that.”(18/04/07)

Centre organizers and the youth were conscious of the consequences of any negative images which might create problems for the Centre. Arthur notes that “when things were starting to get out of hand there… like people coming in drunk, you know, we wanted to put a stop to that… because drinking leads to fights, fights lead to police and police lead to shutting us down” As a result, the youth became proactive in addressing this issue. Arthur remembers, “So we had a meeting down the basement one Sunday… we had an election of officers and we formed a constitution.”

Out of the youth meetings “a list of rules” was established and the youth themselves took on the responsibility of rotating as the bouncers (Arthur: 09/05/07).

In addition to coming together to solve their own problems, the youth were also expected to contribute to these weekly events by organizing and planning, fundraising, providing music, running the canteen, acting as bouncers and cleaning up after the
dances. Ron remembers how the youth would return on Sunday mornings after the dances:

“I would go in on Sunday to clean up, after Saturday. I would go in about 10 in the morning and I would just start and the kids would come again…. They would come back and scrub and they would be washing walls and everything. Kids were different then, they did a lot of things and I didn’t have to do too much.” (18/04/07)

Once things were cleaned up, Ron recalls that the kids often remained at the Centre for the rest of the day:

“They would stay there until 12 o’clock or maybe one, and then they would go upstairs and we had a juke box. The director ( Xavier Michon) would go and get the keys and open the door and get quarters out and give the quarters to the kids… and then they would dance again until 9’oclock at night… and he would say “school tomorrow, you have to go.”

4.5 Theme Two: Community in the City

Clearly, the dances were critical to the success of the early Centre. The dances drew the youth to the Centre and gave them a place to belong, to socialize, and to meet other Aboriginal youth. Previously isolated and marginalized youth now had a safe place from which to begin to develop a sense of community in the city.

The development of sense of community and identity is seen as a necessary component for survival and success of Aboriginal people migrating to the City. As Cajete (2000) explains

“Through community, Indian people come to understand their personhood and their connection to the communal soul of their people. The community is the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed: it is the context in which the person comes to know relationship, responsibility and participation in the life of one’s people.” (86)
Many of those interviewed confirmed the importance of being part of this community in building their own confidence and in strengthening their Aboriginal identity. As Charlene explains,

“You know, the Indian Friendship Centre… see… when Marlene [Pierre] invited me to come to the Centre and got me involved in the summer camps and stuff like that and the dances and working at the dances, I felt comfortable. I didn’t feel out of place. In that regard it really strengthened my identity and I didn’t feel ashamed of myself.” (15/04/07)

Similarly, Frances notes how coming to the centre helped her build confidence and a positive self image:

“… Cuz I was shy. I never said boo… but it kind of gave me confidence to help out and to make new friends… We looked forward to the weekends all the time because we knew something fun would be happening.”(10/05/07)

The ability of the TBIYFC to recreate this sense of community in the city was consistent with the role that Indian Friendship Centres were taking on across the country. As the RCAP (1996) notes, “for many Aboriginal people in the city, the Indian Friendship Centre is the heart of their Aboriginal community.” The report also suggested that this sense of community was a necessary component for the survival and successful adaptation of Aboriginal people to urban life (Vol.4: 532).

4.6 Stories of Activities and Good Times

For the next ten years, the Centre was humming with activity. Murals and collages on the walls in the basement of the existing centre show hundreds of pictures of youth and families, parades, winter carnival, Indian princess competition, fashion shows, feasts, Christmas parties, summer camp, car washes, talent shows, powwows, baseball and broomball and many other social and recreational activities. Bev Sabourin who was to be crowned the “Indian Princess” in one of the years’ pageants, remembers this as “a
fun time”. She notes that their activities were constantly in the newspaper (Beverly: 17/6/07).

Seeing positive images of their activities in mainstream media reinforced the sense of cultural identity that the youth gained from being part of the Centre. RCAP notes that “cultural identity is a state of being that involves being wanted, being comfortable, being a part of something bigger than oneself” (vol. 4; 524). This was confirmed by the participants in our discussions as they indicated that the Centre provided for them “a place to belong” “closeness” “laughter” “community”, “home when you had no home” “relationships” and “identity.”

The specific memories of the people interviewed provide a further snapshot of some of the activities at the centre.

One participant remembers the talent shows,

“That’s where I came in because I love to sing…. My sister and I harmonized together and we both played guitars and we liked to sing. I remember that they had a talent show at one of the churches. We had to use the churches for bigger activities… but it was fun. Like I said it would build confidence and we would sing in front of an audience.”

(Frances: 10/05/07)

Another remembers her time at the summer camp;

“So my earliest memory was probably coming to the Indian Friendship Centre as a child and participating in the summer camp program. They had a camp at Kingfisher. And I had family members here that worked at the camp. So my family and Marlene’s family would all go out to this summer camp…. And one of my earliest memories is making plaster of Paris molds of different animals and Indian heads, and then you would paint it….and I remember that I was really really excited making those. They were messy but we would make them and they were a lot of fun. And then I remember making leather bags and arts and crafts and swimming.”

(Charlene: 15/04/07)

For another it was the Lil’ Beavers group,
“Yah, there was Lil’ Beavers… I almost forgot about that… It was like boy scouts, Anishinabe boy scouts. I remember having a lot of fun… running around and learning about my culture…we learned to whittle and to make snares and all kinds of outdoor activities… I remember wearing the little outfits, and the beaver tail. I think I was five… right around that age when I was in Lil’ beavers. (Rick: 15/04/07)

Often it was not the official programs that were remembered but the importance of the Centre as an informal gathering place for families:

“I came with my family. My family all worked here. I worked at the bingos here and I just came to visit my family, drumming and singing here and getting involved in functions and programs. I remember the first thing that I was involved with was bingo. And actually they had pow wows here. I remember when this building was new. I would come to the pow wows and family gatherings, reunions with families. Sometimes it would be four or five families, and they would come together to have a feast for no reason… And they would use the centre as a place to come together…. There was no charge…. We would clean up on our own. Everything was free.”(Rick: 15/04/07)

For many adults it also provided an important meeting place. Leonard adds

“It was a place where you could feel at home, when, if you never had a home…You know it didn’t have steak and pork chops for you, but it had a cup of coffee and you could gather some information with a friend, or get communication with your relatives or meet friends, and… it was this place like home that you could identify with.”(20/04/07)

Rick also observes that

“It was like a drop in Centre… it’s where people came to sit down have coffee and talk. Or meet old friends, because you never knew who you would bump into when you were here… There were no meeting places in Thunder Bay for Anishinabe people… this place was the only place where we could be comfortable to come and be together.”( 15/04/07)

Charlene highlights the importance that the casual drop in function held for the adults:

“Because this place always was… yah… it was the heart and soul. If we couldn’t do nothing for you as an Anishanabe person when you came walking through these doors at least we could give you a smile and offer you a cup of coffee.”(15/04/07)
In addition to the drop in, the Centre was also critical point of contact for referral and for bridging the difficulties that Aboriginal people had accessing services in the city. Lenard states that

“It was a place where we could gather and if we had any smaller complaints about anything in the city… we had advocates that would go there and talk on these subjects to the various municipalities, organizations, law enforcement or whatever it was… because it was rough in those days.”(20/04/07)

Throughout this time, the Centre evolved from a social gathering place for youth dances to an active and thriving centre of Aboriginal activity in a city which offered no other alternatives. These activities were organized and run by and for the people who used the Centre. It became an important place for people to gather and to become validated in their culture and to find the help that they needed to navigate the challenges of the urban environment.

Its impact on individuals is clear from Anne’s perspective:

“It was an opportunity to learn, to be proud of whom you were, where you came from. It was confidence building, self esteem building… helping a person to develop into who they really are, having a voice… realizing that you have a voice and that you have something to offer…and also, recognizing and really feeling a sense of belonging... And having pride.” (15/04/07)

4.7 Theme Three: Cultural Renewal and Identity

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Indian Friendship Centre became a place for individuals to learn about their culture and to reconnect to traditional Aboriginal cultural expression. As Anne explains, the 1960’s and 1970’s were times when Aboriginal culture was re-emerging from the shadows of a century of censorship and disapproval of the Government:
“The other interesting thing that I think about Indian Friendship Centres, certainly in the early days is there was this sense of a loss of culture and a loss of identity… largely due to the old laws, legislation, assimilation, colonization, residential school etc. etc. so there was a real disconnect with Aboriginal culture, language etc.”

She also observed that being confronted with their “difference” in the urban environment was for many the start of exploring their cultural identity:

“I think that one of the things interestingly enough was that until people…Aboriginal people started migrating into urban centres they never had to face things like racism, or being disconnected from the community, or feeling like they belong… … so I would think… so this is my own thoughts or theory if you want to call it that:, because when Aboriginal people moved into urban centres, they were pointed out as being something very different… you aren’t the same as us…. And I think that really helped Aboriginal people in a sense to begin to discover…. Their identity, their culture… what did make us different? Why were we treated differently? and so I think in many respects, culture, spirituality, Aboriginal identity …oddly as it may sound, began in urban centres.”(Anne: 15/04/07)

Anne’s analysis of cultural identity arising from being treated as different is in keeping with the observations of other scholars who have studied identity formation. As Proux (1999) observes:

“Who is us is defined in relation to who is other. Culture, subcultures, societies and everyday practices play a significant role in articulating these gaps and differences through time.” (quoted in Miller 1990:63)

Like Anne, Royce (1976) also concludes that

“if it is true that contact with groups and individuals who are perceived as different from oneself is necessary in order to make one’s ethnic identity relevant, then the context and process of immigration is a prime contributor to ethnicity.” (77)

The Centre therefore became a place where this difference could be explored and validated and where culture began to be explored by many for the first time. One of the participants in the project tells the story of how she became reconnected with her culture,
illustrating how this happened. She commented that she had not been comfortable with her Aboriginal background and did not know about her culture when she was a child or teen. This made her hesitant to identify herself as Aboriginal and prevented her from participating at the Centre as a youth. However, when she found herself placed there for a college work placement she says that she quickly realized that this was a place where she saw her own identity reflected. She also found that the positive activities of the Centre and the role models of the people working and volunteering there were discordant with the negative stereotypes and social stigma that she had experienced and come to believe about Aboriginal people from the dominant society. She then began to learn about the culture:

“I remember in the 1970’s largely through the Indian Friendship Centre and the different gatherings… they d bring in elders to come and talk to the community… It really hit me in my own spirit, in my own heart. This is the way that we should be living. This is how we should be doing our services and our programs. We need to go back to the culture” (Bernice qtd.in Janovick 2004: 4)

She came to the conclusion that Aboriginal people’s strength came from their values and traditional way of life and has followed that path in her lifetime of community leadership ever since. (Bernice: 10/08/07)

Much of the cultural activity of the Centre was embedded in the way that it operated and in the activities that people participated in. By building community, the Centre was also modeling and passing on cultural values and ways of being. As RCAP (1996) explains

“Culture is everything tangible and intangible that people learn and share in coming to terms with their environment. It includes world view, beliefs, values, attitudes and perceptions, common understanding of the everyday
world with its meaning, its symbols and standards for conduct and it communal acceptance of appropriate behaviour in the world” (vol. 4. 523)

Cajete (1999) confirms the important role that community has in relation to cultural development:

“Community is also the context in which each community member assimilates culture and its underlying philosophy. In its most basic sense, culture is the way I which a group of people have come to relate to a place and its natural processes.

Native community is the context in which the “affective” dimension of traditional education unfolds; the place where one comes to know what it is to be related. It is the place of everyday acts, through song, dance, story and celebration and of learning, making art and sharing thoughts and feelings where each person can metaphorically speaking “become complete.”(86)

4.8 Stories of the Return of the Drum

At the TBIYFC, the general awareness of cultural community and identity was complemented by the return of more visible cultural expression and practices at the centre. Traditional sewing and beadwork were taught by Freda McDonald, the craft store became a showcase of traditional work; Indian princess contests and summer camps provided opportunities for cultural expression and learning. These tenuous explorations of culture coincided with the return of the drum and the beginning of the resurgence of traditional cultural practices, teachings and ceremonies in the City. As Rick notes “all this had been lost, as far as I know only a few drums had survived the residential school time… they were all destroyed back then.” Rick’s uncle and aunt, Richard and Marjorie Lyons are credited with the resurgence of traditional cultural practices of drumming, ceremonies, dance that started up at this time. Ron, who was also Richard Lyon’s brother, recalls that after many years of working at Northern Woods as a Scaler, Richard told him one day that he wanted to start dancing:
“And I think that’s when he did it, and he went to the States and I think it was North or South Dakota... I’m not sure, but he went down and got the staff from there and the drum from there and he started the Lyon’s Dance Troupe... it started out of the Centre here” (Ron: 18/04/07)

Rick (Richard and Marjorie’s nephew) also remembers bits and pieces of the story which he has heard over the years:

“There was a man in South or North Dakota who gave my uncle the Drum and told him that he had to bring it back here to liven up our people again and to show them what we had, that we still had this good life and we could continue.... And he brought it back. He got a lot of recognition for what he did, and he talked to a lot of people about his philosophy of life, and my Aunt Margie’s philosophy. And that was a strong point... that if it wasn’t for my aunt Margie, he wouldn’t have learned a lot of this stuff, cuz that is where he learned a lot and he talked about it and made sure that you knew where he learned from”(Rick:15/04/07)

The return of the drum and the formation of the dance troupe was a significant event that began the reintroduction of traditional teachings in the region. Anne explains:

“the development of the Lyons Dance Troupe was very instrumental in bringing back culture in Thunder Bay and region and they traveled... the Lyons Dance Troupe was recognized in Canada and in the States... and they traveled to Europe as a dance troupe and travelled to a lot of communities that hadn’t heard a drum for probably all of their lives.”(15/04/07)

Initially the return of the drum and the open display and practice of Aboriginal ceremonies, dance and spirituality was greeted with caution. Anne comments on the hesitation of some to embrace tradition after years of Christian indoctrination

“I think some of my earliest recollections, you know, were that people were sometimes afraid”

{Afraid of cultural...?}

“Yup... and as an Aboriginal person I can understand why... when hear the drum, you feel it in your body... you feel it in your chest and your throat... in your heart.”(15/04/07)

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5 It was also noted by Anne that there are still many Northern communities that have adopted Christianity and are still suspicious of traditional cultural practices and reject the drum and other overt symbols of traditional spiritual culture.
Similarly, Frances explains that her family did not know about or embrace their Aboriginal culture or traditions openly, “We were never brought up to know about pow wows or any other traditional teachings, although I have to say…now when I look back in my life, we were….“She remembers her first encounter with an Aboriginal cultural event and the conflict that it created with her upbringing as a dedicated Catholic;

“And when I came to Thunder Bay, they talked about pow wows… I said what is that… and they said you know …and people dance, and they have the regalia and I said “okay, take me there” and I remember being at the college that was where they having their big first performance... It was the Lyons dance troupe and I remember going there and just sat there just…totally mesmerized… you know it is such a beautiful feeling , you know the drum…. “You just connected and you thought… it’s so beautiful and I wished that I could be part of that whole pow wow thing … and uh my sister did get involved she actually travelled with the Lyons Dance Troupe…”

{She got involved?}
She got involved, and she travelled with them and oh, she just loved it… but we were brought up Catholic, so any time we went to these ceremonies and pow wows we never ever told our mother… but later on, as years went by my mother started to learn too and she felt the same way that we did... you didn’t want to get too close to it but you don’t mind being there, being part of it.” (Frances: 01/05/07)

Rick, who was a member of the extended Lyons family, had no such reservations about the traditional teachings, and drumming became a significant part of his early connection with his culture:

“I remember sitting at the drum and feeling the beat, the beat of the drum and being taught the lessons about mother earth and how that heart beat was our… and um… its hard to remember all the stuff that I learned… sitting around that drum, being with family and learning values… I learned a lot of values about how to treat other people through the way that we were taught to treat that drum. cuz that drum was part of our ancestors… there was a living spirit in that drum so you treated that drum like you would treat your grandfather or your grandmother… with a lot of respect…sitting around there was a lesson… to hear the stories and be taught… like when you were sitting around that drum, it was like sitting
around the kitchen table where your family was where you would talk about things that were important to you and that you were learning about. I guess it was a teaching opportunity when you were there. (15/04/07)

Many of the others also credited the Lyons family with re-establishing traditional teachings in the region. Bernice notes for example that Richard was pivotal in bringing in elders such as Alex Skead, Albert Lightning, Annie Wilson and others to do teachings at the Centre. Long before his passing in 2006, Richard had become one of the most visible and respected elders in Thunder Bay and his ties to the Indian Friendship Centre provided opportunities for many Aboriginal people to reconnect with their culture.

These cultural activities of the Centre and the return of traditional teachings to Thunder Bay can be seen as a critical component to the development and success of the Aboriginal urban population in the city. Although dominant society and many “experts” at the time felt that Aboriginal culture was a hindrance to adapting to the urban and “modern” life, the experience of these individuals demonstrates that just the opposite was true. Evelyn Peters (2005) agrees and has consistently argued that Aboriginal cultures are a major part of the solution, not the problem in urban settings:

“in contrast to views of Aboriginal culture as either incompatible with or irrelevant to an urban environment Aboriginal people have argued that supporting and enhancing Aboriginal culture is a prerequisite for coping in urban environments” These perspectives recognize that Aboriginal cultures and Euro-Canadian cultures that dominate Canadian cities are distinct in many ways, but they insist that Aboriginal cultures will enrich cities as well as make them better places for Aboriginal people” (54).

As a result, the cultural revival at and in association with the TBIYFS can be seen as contributing not only to the individual’s capacity to thrive in the urban centre, but also to the wider growth and acceptance of traditional culture throughout the region.
4.9 Stories: Allies Inside and Outside the Centre

The Thunder Bay Indian Youth Indian Friendship Centre officially incorporated in 1968. Its name reflects how important it was to the organizers that the focus of this Centre be on the youth. There seemed to be a core group of several families and individuals that were remembered as most actively involved in the early organization including the Michons, Pierres, and Lyons.

Charlene and Rick recall the involvement of their own extended families:

“Oh…well, what I do remember is that my parents, my grandparents were part of the board of directors here… the founding board members and my parents were asked to get involved in the starting of the Indian Friendship Centre… but they didn’t want to…. they didn’t but other family member’s did…. Marlene [Pierre], my aunt Donna and a lot of others.”
(Charlene: 15/04/07)

And

“The ones I remember the most were Xavier Michon and my uncle Ronny…. There were others but I can’t remember their names right now… My uncle Ron Lyons was part of the first Indian Friendship Centre. He was there from day one… and he was part of my family.”
(Rick: 15/04/07).

The initial Board, however, was made up of a few Native but mostly Non-Native Directors. The Non Native Directors included people who held significant power and profile in the community at the time and included Mr. Scarnetti, the deputy chief of police, Bruno Maki, a local contractor, Wally Dubinsky, a lawyer, John Bocash from Canada Mortgage and Housing, among other prominent persons from the white community.

Anne explains that this inclusion of powerful people was a deliberate strategy to gain the support of the broader community:
“In the early days, and again, I think that as part of Xavier’s vision, he worked with what I would call a lot of high level, high profile Non-Aboriginal people in the community… business men, lawyers, the chief of police, judges and they became actually the original board of directors … these people who were Non-Aboriginal… and through their support and connections, Xavier was able to develop the Centre, to what it became then and it just grew…. I think there was a recognition that the non Aboriginal sector had to be engaged in order to support a Indian Friendship Centre in the community.”

The recognition that some form of partnership with and support of the greater community was essential was a sentiment also echoed by Leonard:

“There were quite a few… there was Non-Aboriginals, of course you needed that component in those days,. there is no doubt about it, I would say that if there was no Non-Aboriginal participation with the Indian Friendship Centre Movement, it would not have existed today.”

This situation was also common in other communities as well. Silver (2006) explains, in his discussion of Non-Native involvement in the early Board of Directors of the Winnipeg Indian Friendship Centre, “at that time it was believed that Aboriginal people could not run their own affairs” (151). In both theses of Hall (2004) and Miller (1990) Non-Aboriginal involvement was also noted as a necessary strategy for gaining support in the wider communities of Winnipeg and Victoria.

The early Board in Thunder Bay was recognized by the participants as hard working, dedicated and committed to supporting the efforts of the Centre and their presence was acknowledged and accepted to be the way that things worked.

As Leonard explains:

“There were some other community people who were really good people, like Mr. Scarnetti, he was the deputy chief of police... That saw that there could be improvements and they got involved with the Indian Friendship Centre movement”...
“You know there is no doubt about it, there were dedicated people that gave their time to make this organization work… you know it’s like anything else…. You gotta make soup and you got to make it with beef but also all the other stuff that you have to put in it to make a good product, so you have to work on it. (Leonard 20/04/07)

It was clear, however, that although the Board of Directors facilitated community acceptance, funding and support, the real vision, drive and direction for the Centre in the early years came from the community itself under the competent leadership of Xavier Michon, and the hard work of many other Aboriginal members and participants of the Centre itself.

Frances, who first participated as a youth eventually joined the team as the Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director, Xavier Michon. She recalls how things worked around the Centre:

“And it kind of filtered down… Xavier Michon, who was the Executive Director of the Indian Friendship Centre … you know whatever he wanted he pretty much got… um… but he was a fighter and he was very very persistent… and he would have the dream, the vision, Marlene would do the writing, I would do the typing and somebody else would do the [organizing]… We were a team, we had a team going.”(10/05/07)

As with much of the organization of the Centre, people naturally fit in where their skills and abilities were most needed:

“And I remember Marlene Pierre, she was just an awesome writer, I mean, that woman, she wrote as fast… she was so good, but she didn’t have the skills of typing so she would pass the notes to me and I would try to keep up with her, you know, and she was just amazing… she always managed to get the money, you know…” (Frances: 10/05/07)

On the day to day level, Ron Lyons also played a key role in the day to day running of the Centre. He remembers his first involvement with the Centre:
“I was around not really when it first got started, but close to when it was started. I think it was around 1964. I was just volunteering then. I was doing maintenance and cleaning. I didn’t get much money at that time, I think I was working for $48.00/month but it just gave me something to do.” (18/04/07)

Ron explains that his work was “mostly with the young people, and the dances and the cleaning up”. Forty years later, Ron is still involved with the Centre and well regarded for his dedication to the youth and community through the years. In addition to supervising the dances, Ron ran the craft shop and was in charge of the children’s summer camp program for much of the Centre’s history.

In later years, many others families and individuals became part of the core complement who took on important voluntary roles in building the Centre and contributing to the development larger Aboriginal community development in the City.

4.10 Theme Four: Grassroots Development and Capacity Building

Because Indian Friendship Centres such as the TBIYFS operated with no official support, no government oversight and no guidelines or formal structures throughout most of the 60’s their success was solely linked to the creativity and energy of the members in generating the resources that they needed to operate through these voluntary efforts.

One of the participants made the link between the lack of government involvement, and the ability of the Centres to truly focus on activities that were important to the community:

“Yah, that’s the way they did things and that’s the way the Indian Friendship Centres operated in the early days… all through fundraising, there were no government grants at all… so you were able to meet the needs of the community” (Frances: 10/05/07).

Fundraising and volunteering, therefore, became an integral part of the activities of the Centre. These were embraced by most participants with as much enthusiasm as the
other Centre activities, and led to the development of skills, confidence and empowerment.

Bernice notes that

“There was lots of volunteering” and that the Centre was a “wonderful place to be” even though there was work to be done. She says that “it didn’t seem like work when everyone was together” and notes that these times built memories, friendships and connections that have sustained many people through the years. (10/08/07)

Frances concurs:

“I was amazed by the friendship and willingness and commitment that they had when they wanted to do something like fundraising.” (10/05/07)

Rick makes an interesting observation about how the volunteering evolved as a natural extension of the social activities of the Centre:

“I think that a lot of people that came to sit and have coffee were involved with everything going on with the centre… because they talked about what was needed to be done and then volunteered.” (15/04/07)

In this regard, the TBIYFS exemplified the true definition of grassroots community development as defined by Silver (2006) who suggests that true community development is reflected by “a collective undertaking of whatever tasks and the pursuit of whatever goals the community itself may identify”( 40).

The leadership of Xavier Michon is recognized by Frances as setting the tone of the expectations of commitment and involvement of the members and youth. She notes that he wanted to create a safe place for youth to ‘hang out’ but also a place where they could learn to coordinate their own activities:

“Cuz he transferred skills to people… he didn’t want to organize for them, he would just get the money and say, ‘you do it’… And he taught us many things. He allowed us the freedom to do what we wanted to do, as long as it was working.” (10/05/07)
Frances concludes that this early volunteer work, fundraising and active participation of youth and members created a “training ground” where valuable organizational skills were learned and role modeled:

“And that’s one of the greatest things that I learned from the Indian Friendship Centre… is being around the people…. You know I watched them and how they coordinated activities and I though ’maybe I could do that some day.’”

Xavier’s vision of encouraging and empowering youth also included providing more formal opportunities for the youth to not only be volunteers, but to become part-time trainees and contract employees at the Centre. Individuals were hired to help around the centre, to work in the craft store, to work as counselors at the summer camps. For many youth, it was their first responsibilities and entry into the working world

Charlene reminisces about her first experience starting out as a counselor at the summer camp

“You know, I was just thinking about Jarvis [the location of the summer camp]. I worked there for two years as a camp counselor and my brother did also. The one thing I remember is that I was only 16 years old and I was responsible for these children under me, where I actually had to cook, clean, start a fire…. You know, I didn’t know how to start a fire… they taught you those things.”(15/04/07)

She goes on to reflect “that’s what I remember… I had so much fun there and it was my first job… my first real job as a youth.” Frances also recalls the wide range of experiences and responsibilities that those who were hired were expected to fulfill:

“You know, you got taught many things, you know I worked there as a summer student one year, not knowing what I was going to be doing… and you were… Michon put you into everything… if they needed someone to sell crafts at the craft store, you’d be there, and you would learn quick and if he needed someone to write letters you’d be sitting in his office, because back in those days it was dictating
days…eh….He’d be dictating and I’d be writing, and you would go and type the letter and do what you had to do.” (Frances: 10/05/07)

She notes that the expectation to do whatever was needed extended to everybody that ended up there as a participant or volunteer or worker:

“And cleaning too! He [Michon], always said, you have to keep this place clean, and we all did, even the guys were doing dishes, everybody helped in every way they could.”(10/05/07)

Frances concludes that in this way the Centre provided

“Capacity building… you know, it was a training ground. It was never meant to be a training ground but that’s what it was… I think a lot of my generation will look back and say that’s where we got our training, that’s where we got our education and skills. We got everything from typing to cultural…it was all there.”(10/05/07)

Anne’s experience verifies this conclusion. Like many who came to the Centre as a youth, she was also an active volunteer, a youth trainee, an employee, a community leader and has now been the Executive Director of the TBIYFC for over 10 years. She explains how her involvement through the years has added to her own development and sense of empowerment as a youth:

“Well, as a young person, of course finding your way as a young person is always a challenge for any person, but you come to a point where you realize that your own identity becomes very important to you. And the Indian Friendship Centre has always supported a strong Aboriginal identity, a positive self image. So I grew up in the centre in that regard, in terms of really understanding my own culture, my roots and being given a lot of opportunities as a young person here… a lot of young people got access to things that they would never have ordinarily, and particularly in those days, opportunities to be trained, opportunities to develop leadership skills, to become a part of something bigger, and… opportunities for employment.

So, I had all those things as a young person… access to social and recreational activities, access to working for instance as a summer camp counselor, working in the craft shop, and then eventually on to other things in terms of volunteering. I did some… a couple of stints as a board member and worked at the Indian Friendship Centre, actually in a variety
of different positions…. So I had a lot of good experience given to me through the Indian Friendship Centre.” (Anne: 15/04/07)

4.11 Theme Five: Personal and Collective Empowerment

From these conversations, it is clear that what was happening within the walls of the Centre was not just social, recreational, community and culture, but an emerging sense of both personal and collective empowerment as the youth and adults became active participants in planning, decision making and carrying out their own activities.

Rubin and Rubin (2000) explain the dynamic of personal and collective empowerment:

“Empowerment is the psychological feeling that individuals have when they believe they can accomplish chosen goals; it is also the political and organizational strength that enables people to collectively carry out their will” (77)

Quoting Perkins (1995) they go on to suggest that

Empowerment occurs when ordinary people discover that they have the capacity to solve the problems that they face, control the means to do so and have the final authoritative says in decision making”…. (77)

And “Empowerment comes about by establishing a positive cycle where personal and collective successes reinforce one another.” (89)

The positive cycle of personal and collective success was certainly a theme of the people that I interviewed. Inevitably, the success of the Centre in building both personal and collective empowerment spilled over into the larger community as members began to discuss the challenges of life in the city, to identify the needs and to look for other ways to support the migrating population who were still largely invisible to governments and the larger society.

Rubin and Rubin (2000) draw a direct link between collective empowerment and the development of “social capital”. They suggest that “collective empowerment comes
about as people learn that they share a responsibility for one another and by doing so create “social capital”, a resource for community action” (95).

4.12 Stories of Community Action and Mobilization

“It was the seed. That’s what I would call it... it was the seed. Look what we have now.” (Arthur: 09/05/07)

Thus, the TBIYFC became an important source of social capital from which the members of the community began to mobilize on a broader scale. It seems that when a need was identified in the community, individuals or groups associated with the Indian Friendship Centre set in motion the process to begin organizations and set up services to fill in the gap.

Anne explains how this role complemented the other functions of the Centre:

“Developing a sense of community and belonging in an urban centre was part of its vision, and also youth leadership and community development. So the Indian Friendship Centres across Canada were very (not only in Thunder Bay), very involved in community development and starting a wide range of other services and organizations...

So many of these founders including Xavier started, for instance… The Thunder Bay Development Corporation (Native housing) which has existed for a long time… They were also involved in the development of other organizations like the Métis Organization… so you see a lot of the same people involved in the development of different organizations whether it was the Ontario Native Women’s Association, Beendigen which is a Native Woman’s shelter… so the work of these people really expanded in terms of community development, and establishing other Aboriginal organizations to serve Aboriginal people. (15/04/05)

The Thunder Bay Development Corporation was the first of many organizations that was launched by the Centre. In the early days it shared space in the Centre and was overseen by the Indian Friendship Centre’s board of directors. Leonard notes that the organization that evolved was culturally appropriate:
“…we were talking about that one day Anne and I… were talking about….you know the starts in the community… you know we got started with one of the Native housing programs… that we started…And we advanced the Native housing from our own culture, and instead of mortgage. It belonged to an agency.” (Leonard: 20/04/07)

As Charlene explains, this organization eventually incorporated and became independent although honouring its link with the Indian Friendship Centre by continuing to share its logo:

“Yah we both had the same logo because they had their start here and then they moved on and incorporated on their own… but they kept the logo.”

This organization, like the Indian Friendship Centre still exists today and is a critical component of the urban subsidized housing projects in Thunder Bay.

Ron recalls the beginning of another program which was a skills training initiative that started by people working at the Indian Friendship Centre:

“And there were a couple of other programs off the centre… there was a woodworking outfit. They made different treasures and doors, cabinets and everything… They had that for four or five years… down by the tracks.” (18/04/07)

This venture eventually moved to John Street Road and became a government funded independent organization known as Native Education and Opportunities Program (NEOP). Real provides the details of this program:

(And NEOP…was kind of like a woodworking project?)

“Right… up on John street, it was sponsored by manpower…. Basically it was a place of last resort for students… essentially light skills and building work ethic… and gave them life skills at the same time and …Solomon was the coach up there and Reg Wilson was the executive director and a few carpenters were up there to help the kids go through there…. We put quite a few kids through that program.” (Real: 15/05/07)

NEOP, like the Thunder Bay Native Development Corporation, was also initially accountable to the Board of Directors of the Indian Friendship Centre. As Real recounts:
“I was an ex officio board member, because of being the former associate director... and we had to make sure that NEOP at the time, and the housing programs were doing what they were supposed to be doing.”

Many other ideas came from the women at the Centre. A voluntary women’s association which was known as the Thunder Bay Anishnabequek was started. Initially, this group also used the Indian Friendship Centre to organize and meet. These women came together to discuss and address issues that were relevant to them and to Aboriginal women and families in Thunder Bay. In addition to their monthly meetings, they also brought in speakers, elders and organized events for mothers and children. As time went on, they also developed committees to address more specific needs of women in the City.

One of these early initiatives was developed to address the issue of family violence and safety for women and children. The group started up a shelter for women on Syndicate Ave. and later was able to obtain a house from the Thunder Bay Development Corporation. According to Bernice, this shelter was the first woman’s shelter in Thunder Bay and one of the first Aboriginal organizations to take on an Aboriginal name. It was called “Beendigen” which is the Ojibwa word for ‘come in’ or ‘welcome’. Bernice recalls that this organization made a point of hiring women on welfare as part of their staff as a way of building capacity and passing on the lessons of empowerment which had been the model at the Indian Friendship Centre. Other initiatives of this women’s group included opening a lodge for people from the region who had to come to town for medical appointments called Wequedong Lodge, and opening an Aboriginal daycare called Mamowenchike Family Development Centre. Both of these organizations remain today as part of the wide network of Aboriginal specific services.
During her interview, Frances also acknowledged the vital role that the Centre had in forming many organizations, and credits the core members of the Centre as being part of the initial organization of the Ontario Native Women’s Association in Thunder Bay:

“ A lot of organizations evolved from here… the Aboriginal Head Start Program, Beendigan and even the Ontario Native Women’s Association… I don’t know if anyone has said that but… the core people started here at the Indian Friendship Centre in Thunder Bay and it evolved into a provincial body… I was part of the organization for a couple of years and their Vice President, and then on the Board for 8 years.”(10/05/07)

Clearly, the TBIYFS had moved beyond its initial role of community building to that of community development, with many of the people who had gained their organizational experience in the Centres, branching out to become the leaders of these new ventures which make up the Aboriginal landscape of community development in Thunder Bay today.

4.13 Theme Six: Leadership Development

One of the benefits of the Indian Friendship Centre’s years of capacity building and training with its youth and its members was that many of the people who were involved went on to become the leaders of these newly formed Aboriginal organizations or to significant leadership roles and meaningful employment. This theme of leadership development was common to the people who I spoke with. Frances sums up this important role of the Centre:

“I think that the Indian Friendship Centre has evolved some good leaders in the community... and one of the things that Xavier always taught us...that when you receive something, you have to give back.... And I think that what he taught us, like leadership skills, we are now returning back and giving back to the community... and this is probably one of the things that the Indian Friendship Centre has taught us....So a lot of people
that came from the Indian Friendship Centre are leaders in the community now; Bernice Dubec, Anne Lesage, Beverly Sabourin…a lot of people that I know that were involved with the Indian Friendship Centre are doing well.”(10/05/07)

Leonard credits the Indian Friendship Centre for both his personal and others’ successes after leaving the Centre;

I could have probably [ended up in jail], you know… I had nowhere to go… the only place I could go was the Indian Friendship Centre. And it gave me enough time to read the books and learn about other things and go back and get my grades and be who you want…. That’s the Indian Friendship Centre with the seed that was planted…to achieve more things… it done that for me…” “And when you look at today, and you see that so many people that achieved and went on and achieved…there are many people, many people in this community that have their roots in the Friendship Centre and who have continued on going on to government jobs and municipal jobs and even in the public sector jobs and even going into business on our own.”(20/05/07)

Anne (the present Executive Director) reflects with me on her lifetime involvement in the Centre and how it has contributed to where she is today:

“It is interesting, when I first came to the Centre, [to work]... I was their bookkeeper at one time too… and I never would have envisioned myself sitting in the Executive Director’s chair… so to speak… because Xavier was such a big person in my eyes, and eventually doing this job… I never would have thought it would happen ( to me).”

(So there was a real mentorship/ training role there that happened through the years?)

“Definitely, and not only with Xavier, the young people that worked with him in the early days… all…you know, many, many of them became leaders in the community themselves… role models and also mentors for other young people coming up.” ( Anne: 15/04/07)

The list of achievements of people whose stories have been told in this project alone is impressive and confirms Anne’s perception of leaders who have evolved from the TBIYFS. For example Marlene Pierre became the Executive Director and later the
Provincial Director of the Ontario Native Women’s Association. Frances Wesley moved to Ottawa to assist Xavier Michon in starting up the National Association of Indian Friendship Centres. She eventually returned to work in a variety of decision making positions at both the TBIYFS and at ONWA and now heads up the Urban Aboriginal Strategy. Bernice Dubec continued her leadership role in the community by serving over 20 years as an Executive Director at Wequedong Lodge, Aboriginal Head Start and Anishnawbe Mushkiki. Sarah Sabourin, Freda McDonald and Ron Lyons have become respected elders in the community. Bev Sabourin is now the Vice Provost of Aboriginal Studies at Lakehead University. Anne Lesage became the Executive Director of Kinne-Aweya Legal Clinic and now is the well respected Executive Director of the Indian Friendship Centre. Others such as Charlene and Rick have also returned to work at the TBIYFC in leadership positions. Real Bouchard worked for Aboriginal communities on committees and boards, with his own community and with the federal government ever since his initial involvement with the Centre. Lenard Dick is an internationally known comedian. Arthur Wilkes and many others went on to fulfilling work and meaningful lives. Most of these individuals draw a direct link between their time at the Centre and their leadership or success today, echoing the sentiments of Rick, who says:

“I don’t know what kind of person I would be without the Indian Friendship Centre… being here and learning about my culture and being closer to my family and community than I would have been if we didn’t have this place…. I think it’s made a big change in my life.”(15/04/07)

4.16 Stories of The Vision and Leadership of Xavier Michon

“No matter where you go, you are going to bump into the path of Xavier Michon. He was one great man in the Indian movement. I would say one of the top notch persons… there is no doubt about it” (Leonard: 20/05/07)
If leadership development and commitment to community building can be seen to be the most impressive achievements of the TBIYFS, then the participants of the Centre had as their role model one of the most dynamic and influential Aboriginal role models of the time in Xavier Michon. The stories that were told regularly referenced his vision, commitment and dedication to the youth in Thunder Bay. They also credited his tenacity, hard work and skillful networking for not only helping to make the TBIYFS a dynamic and successful model of community development, but also for founding the National Association of Indian Friendship Centres.

Xavier Michon was born in 1920 and was a member of the Fort William First Nation, a reserve located just outside of Thunder Bay. As Miller (2007) recounts “like many Aboriginal people of the time, he grew up in an environment of poverty and discrimination” (1). At the age of 20, however, Xavier enlisted in the army and served in North Africa and Italy. He found himself fighting side by side with other Canadians and treated as an equal. He was distinguished by being awarded five medals of heroism. He returned to Canada, married and worked first as a master baker and later at the Abitibi Provincial Paper Mill. According to Miller (2006), it was there at the Mill that he came face to face with the attitudes of discrimination and racism that he thought he had left behind when he was a soldier. She notes that “he and other Aboriginal workers had only the union to protect them from being run off their jobs” (1). She suggests that this became a catalyst for his remaining life work: “As he became more and more aware of how Aboriginal people were being treated; he also became more determined to try to do something to change the situation” (1).
From this beginning, Michon and his partner Marlene Pierre began to rally the community and develop the early Indian Friendship Centre in Thunder Bay in 1963. Anne acknowledges Michon as the main force in getting the Centre off the ground:

“I think the primary person who really started the Indian Friendship Centre here in Thunder Bay was Xavier Michon. I think in recognizing his leadership then… he really had developed a very strong vision of what Aboriginal people in this community, coming into Thunder Bay needed…He saw the need for transition/ migration services if you want to call it that….helping people adjust to urban living. But I think he recognized that a lot of these young people and adults faced real challenges when they came to the city… culture shock really, coming into the city and trying to find housing, access to services, whatever they needed.”(15/01/07)

His efforts were not limited to the day to day operations of the local Centre. He clearly understood the value of networking and advocacy as he became active on many local boards such as the Smith Clinic Alcohol Treatment Centre, Family and Children’s Services, Welfare Council of Canada, Manpower Task Force on Native Peoples, Ontario Government Task Force on Native People and the Law. As Miller (2007) notes, this was groundbreaking work, as “he was often the first person of Native ancestry to sit on the boards of many of these organizations” (1).

His understanding of the need to find and work with other allies in the community was explored by several of the participants. Bernice explains that it was a time of early activism for Aboriginal people, including the growth of the Company of Young Canadians and the American Indian Movement. She suggests that compared to the more confrontational approaches that some Aboriginal groups were taking to assert their rights and advocate for better conditions, Michon chose quite a different approach. She notes that Michon was “assertive and diplomatic and understood the value of looking for allies, forming relationships and engaging people in a direct and personal manner.” His
charismatic nature combined with well developed critical skills and knowledge to make him an effective advocate.

Rick concurs noting that “he was a powerful person. When he spoke, people listened and that was important.” Another participant who was being mentored by Michon to take over the Executive Director position also acknowledges that

“He was a skillful politician. He liked the Blue Parrot Restaurant. He knew how to wine and dine and get people on board. You never felt that he was going to attack you, and people liked that. People who had the money and were funding liked that… and it was also a very well run organization…. And he wore a suit every day, a three piece suit… and I wore a suit every day, and I learned to walk into a room with a suit and tie on and get the respect…” (Real 15/05/07)

He continues to explain the astute tactics that Xavier employed to get what he needed from politicians:

“And Xavier, for lack of a better description always played “the dumb Indian” with a suit on. But never ever was he dumb. He always knew what he wanted and he was always direct when he met with federal and provincial ministries… and he always got what he wanted. He never expressed anger. When he wasn’t getting what he wanted he would say “Jesus Christ… but what about the kids?” and he would follow it with a story, and that would hit home with the officials and the next thing you know they would be saying “What exactly do you need” and he would get his foot in the door.”(15/05/07)

Frances Wesley who worked closely both at the local and national level with Xavier has a similar story of his tenacity and power of persuasion:

“I remember one story. We were going to the House of Commons and tracking down a Minister. He [Xavier Michon] was so casual! He would call them by their first name. He actually cornered the Minister in an elevator, and he wanted an answer…. And after he shut the elevator, he would not let it go anywhere until he got his meeting. I was left standing in the elevator with him. I was thinking “is this how you do business?”… but yah, that was amazing how persistent he was and he was going to go after what he was going to get…. And he got it! That was the program…. the Urban Migration Program.” (10/05/07)
Xavier’s skills were not confined to effective advocacy, but extended to his day-to-day work motivating others and his vision for empowering young people who frequented the Centre. Leonard suggests that it was his own roots in the community that contributed to his ability to connect and empathize with people:

“He could communicate and identify, cuz I know his family life, being part of his family… and I know that he had to achieve, you know… to make things better… He knew because he was a working class Native person, working in the mill. He was a person who saw the need of this community… saw that there could be improvements and got involved.”(Leonard: 20/05/07)

His ability to relate to the desperate conditions of some of the people who came to the Centre led him to find creative solutions to problems. Real recalls how Michon found a way to support people who had no other means:

“And I remember that Xavier ran another program that was not on the books but it was basically like a loan program. It was a little black book with some amount of money. I am not sure if it was his money… but it was the primary bank…loaning money for women and making sure that the money was returned. Definitely a lot of people came into the Friendship Centre to see Xavier specifically and to talk about their difficulties and to borrow money…$10.00, $20.00 or $100.00 and definitely when he wrote it in the book, you didn’t get another penny until you paid it back. It was one of the more creative programs that I saw.”(15/05/07)

While this “off the books” program may have operated to address programming that was not official, Real also notes that the organization was tightly controlled and accountable financially, with the use of regular accountants, and a close watch on finances. He suggests that at this time, this model of accountability was exceptional:

“The ability of an Aboriginal organization to have the kind of respect that Xavier and the Friendship Centre had in the funding community with federal and provincial funders…was kind of like going from the B team to the A team. Here we had the flagship, the showboat organization of First Nations… Federal and Provincial funders wanted to see.”(15/05/07)
However, it was not only his ability to lead an organization that was credible and accountable that people remembered most. It was Xavier’s vision of youth and community empowerment and the way that he ensured that this happened every day at the Centre that contributed to the long lasting impact of his work. Ron notes that Xavier was conscious of involving people at all levels of decision making:

“You know Xavier was a nice director to work with. You know, he had a lot of different ways. If he had to go to a meeting in Toronto or something, he would not go by himself. He would take a bunch of us…. And everything he did was like that. If he had to make a decision he wouldn’t go ahead and make it himself. He would call us all up and he would say ‘and what do you think I should do” and he would listen and then he would make the decision. And that is what I really liked about the director.”(Ron: 18/04/07)

Others remember piling into cars and going on road trips to conferences and meetings and recall these times as exciting and empowering for the youth (Bev: 15/05/07). Michon appears to have been very successful in mentoring young people, as most participants credit his leadership and role modeling for its influence on their own leadership style and views about community development work. Frances sums up this lasting impact on youth who worked with him and how his leadership style is being replicated in the community even today:

“I think the Friendship Centre has evolved some good leaders in the community and one of the things that Xavier always taught us… that when you receive something, you have to give back… and I think that what he taught us, like leadership skills, we are now returning and giving back to the community… It was a training ground. That’s where we got our education and skills. You just had to do what you had to do, in order to get what you wanted” I think what Xavier taught us is being passed on, that’s what Xavier did for us, and that’s what I do for anybody I come across today. You want to organize something? I’ll say “here’s how you do it and you do the work.”(10/05/07)
4.18 Theme Seven: Organic Intellectuals

Rubin and Rubin (1990) note that a good organizer is “partly an agitator, administrator, propagandist, bookkeeper, solicitor of funds, assuager of hurt feelings, public speaker, back room negotiator and in many cases a general handy person” (126).

It is evident from the interviews that Xavier Michon was all of these things. Michon was someone who dedicated his life to social justice and the creation of a safe and positive space for Aboriginal people within the hostile urban environment. His success appears to have been his ability to work both ends of the community development spectrum, both as a skillful advocate with government and other influential people and as a charismatic and dynamic leader who succeeded in creating a vibrant community where youth and adults were empowered to solve their own problems. This successful model of leadership reflects the style of what Antonio Gramsci (1978) termed “organic intellectuals” which Rubin and Rubin suggest are “organizers who build on experiential knowledge to shape future action” (130). They explain:

“From daily encounters, organic intellectuals learn what will motivate people to join in the fight and discover the tools to succeed” (130). They go on to note that “successful organizers have taught themselves how to learn from experience and then share with others what they have discovered” (129).

In his study of community development in the inner city of Winnipeg, Silver reports that the Aboriginal culture of resistance which grew out of the urban experience is frequently headed up by such individuals. He suggests that, “As Aboriginal people have great difficulty in convincing institutions of power to act in their interests… [They] have developed their own distinct Aboriginal ways of understanding the situation and the possibilities for Aboriginal peoples” (138). He explains that
“Gramsci’s term of organic intellectuals, in this case means Aboriginal people rooted in both traditional ways of thinking and the often harsh realities of Winnipeg’s inner city. These are individuals who are using this intellectual framework to analyze and articulate the realities, hopes and aspirations of inner city Aboriginal people.” (138)

Xavier Michon’s success in organizing, motivating and transferring skills to others can be seen as an exemplary model of this type of leader and this tradition of organic leadership combined with the opportunities, training and mentoring that occurred throughout the history of the Centre has provided the community of Thunder Bay with a pool of solid community leaders and organizations which sustain the legacy of urban Aboriginal community development today.

5.0 Analysis: A Model of Community Development by and for Aboriginal People

“Community development refers to efforts to mobilize people who are directly affected by a community condition (that is the victims, the unaffiliated, the unorganized and the non-participating) into groups and organizations to enable them to take action on the social problems and issues that concern them. A typical feature of these efforts is with building new organizations among people who have not previously organized to take social action on a problem.” (Rivera and Erlich 1998:3)

The establishment of the TBIYFS and its long standing success in building and supporting the urban Aboriginal community is by this definition, grassroots community development at its finest. The rich narratives and stories of the participants of this project highlight themes such as the importance of community, personal and community empowerment, cultural renewal and identity, capacity building and leadership development. They also draw attention to the competence and vision of “organic intellectuals” who did this work intuitively from their own cultural understanding of what was needed. These community leaders succeeded in engaging not only their own community but also other allies and partners during what was inarguably a hostile and
indifferent period in the history of the Thunder Bay. They built a ‘community in the city’ where none had existed. They succeeded in training and mentoring their own youth and community members, who have provided ongoing social capital used to develop and lead the many organizations which make up the foundation of the urban Aboriginal community today. They did this from the ground up, without outside development agencies or government bureaucracies telling them how to do the work. They had few resources but considerable courage, commitment and wisdom. The organizers of the TBIYFS were not alone in their success. Similar efforts were being echoed by other Aboriginal people in cities across the country, demonstrating Aboriginal peoples’ collective understanding and competence in the process of community development.

A summary of the processes and strategies used by these Aboriginal ‘pioneers’ offers an important template for future community development and can also provide hope that no matter how many barriers exist, people left to their own volition and ingenuity have the capacity to take action and accomplish community development from their own unique cultural perspective.

5.1 Creating a Culturally-based Community

Early organizers were responding to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of a newly migrating Aboriginal population, which had not yet formed a distinct community, and which faced significant challenges in the forms of racism, lack of opportunities and lack of services in the urban environment.

Their first response was to find and provide a place to gather where individuals felt welcome and safe. As the participants in the project indicated, the TBIYFS provided an important “home away from home” which was critical to their personal and collective
survival. It provided a location where they were surrounded by people who they could identify with, with values and culture that reflected their own and with individuals who were facing similar challenges in the larger community.

Edwards (1992) suggests that community, which has always been such an important component of Aboriginal culture, provides a sense of “solidarity, significance and security” whereby

“Solidarity is exemplified in feelings of cohesiveness. Significance is reflected in the contributions of individuals to the common good. Security is reinforced through the mutuality of relationships and the sense of belonging.” (26)

For the disenfranchised Aboriginal youth, this grounding in solidarity, significance and security was an important outcome of the initial recreational and social activities. The Centre became not only a safe place to congregate and have fun, but a place where positive self image, confidence and pride in their cultural identity were nurtured.

5.2 Strong Leadership and Vision

The importance of having a capable charismatic leader with a passionate vision of what might be possible must also be acknowledged as a key factor in the success of this particular organization. Xavier Michon was a skillful and committed individual who dedicated his life to the vision of building a community in the city for Aboriginal people. His vision included a focus on youth empowerment, an understanding of inclusive development, and the importance of capacity-building, and a consciousness of the need to establish allies and find resources within the wider community. Many of those interviewed recognized his strength as a leader and chronicled his achievements and more importantly his enormous impact on shaping the next generation of leaders.
5.3 Empowerment leads to Community Building

People who were initially drawn to the Centre for assistance, advocacy services or a cup of coffee and companionship found a place where their Aboriginal values were reflected and where they began to develop the solidarity to begin to organize. Initial efforts focused on social and recreational activities and on family and community support. The reintroduction of cultural practices such as drumming, crafts, traditional teachings and powwows, and the camaraderie at the Centre were critical to the individuals interviewed as they sought to replace the negative stereotypes that they experienced outside the Centre with a pride and understanding of what it meant to be Aboriginal.

In the true spirit of Aboriginal community, responsibility was shared, decisions were made by consensus and the community itself mobilized to do whatever was necessary - from fundraising to cleaning. Such cooperation, mutual aid and consensus or participatory decision making are some of the operative principles identified by Camphens (1997) as critical to building empowered communities (32). The success of the TBIYFS during the 1960’s and 1970’s is evident through the many stories of the wide range of activities, services and community events that evolved from the humble beginnings.

5.4 Finding Allies, Building Partnerships

Although the individuals involved in the development of the TBIYFS proved to be capable and competent in organizing their own activities, they were conscious of the need to gain acceptance, support and resources for their efforts from the larger urban community. In doing so, they engaged in what Fisher (1994) describes as a “consensus
organizing model” which he suggests works “on dramatically different assumptions to oppositional movements such as Alinsky or Acorn.” He explains:

“With this model, the goal is “building consensus and unity among all segments of the community; neighbourhoods residents, bankers, business people, religions leaders, politicians and government officials. No one is to be embarrassed, no resentments rubbed raw. Consensual organizing strategy tends to see the fundamental goal as rebuilding community, forging a sense of unity among fragmented elements and gathering specific resources to perform specific community tasks”(qtd. in Rubin and Rubin 2001:150)

Organizers of the TBIYFS did this by consciously engaging high profile Non-Aboriginal community leaders to become part of the Board of Directors and by participating in larger community events, encouraging positive media coverage, and networking with any and all who might be allies in supporting the organization. It was noted by some participants that the Centre would not likely have survived without this strategy of engagement.

5.5 Capacity Building and Leadership Development

Collier (2002) suggests that good community development should provide opportunities for individuals to gain skills, experience and knowledge which will provide a pool of social capital for the group to take future action.

Those interviewed repeatedly commented on how the Centre had embraced this philosophy of capacity-building. They noted that in addition to gaining a sense of identity and belonging, everyone who came to the Centre learned important work skills, cultural values and strategies of leadership and organizing. The inclusive nature of decision making and expectation that everyone was capable to learn how to do new things made this Centre a model of leadership training and personal empowerment. There was a
frequent progression from child participant to volunteer to eventual paid staff which allowed youth to gain critical experiences that they carried on to other jobs. Some came full circle, returning to the Centre to become the next generation of successful leaders.

5.6 Taking Action to Address Community Needs

The best possible outcome of grassroots development, as indicated by Rivera and Erlich (1998), occurs when individuals and groups faced with a threat or challenge come together and build the resources and capacity that they need to take positive action. The individuals interviewed provided many examples of how they came for recreation or advocacy, and later became vital to the operation of the Centre and often went on to build other community groups.

For example, one of the first barriers for many people in the community was housing and as in response to this need, the Centre initiated the Thunder Bay Development Corporation. This was closely followed by other organizations and groups which focused on a variety of other critical needs.

Thus the TBIYFS can be seen as a powerful agent of social change and development which has left not only a legacy of organizations, but also one of capable leaders who are still using the lessons that they learned as youth to continue meeting the challenges that exist today.

5.7 Implications for the Future

Although the TBIYFS has been the main driver of community development in Thunder Bay for the last 40 years; it has evolved into quite a different organization than the one that began in 1963. It has maintained its mandate of assisting urban Aboriginal people and acting as the all important bridge between communities, however its own
success has resulted in it being seen as an outlet for government programming. This has resulted in a shift from its grassroots, volunteer-based origins towards a model which is responsible to the funding criteria and outcome-based expectations of Government. This has left little room for the informal community building that made its early years so powerful. Consequently there is no specific gathering place or cultural centre in Thunder Bay for Aboriginal people to come together in the same way as they did in earlier years. Some feel that the original spirit of community is missing within the city today (Urban Aboriginal Task Force: 2007).

Meanwhile, the urban Aboriginal population continues to grow as more and more people move from remote regions in search of education and economic opportunities. Statistics suggest that by 2010, twenty-five percent of the population of Thunder Bay will be Aboriginal. Although there are more supports and programs available now than in the 1960’s, the challenges that these new residents face persist (6).

For example, although there is a new all Native high school to support the large number of youth who fly out from the northern communities, there is no tar paper shack with weekly dances or other gathering place for them to meet and learn new skills. Most live in boarding homes and face many of the same issues of racism, exclusion, and other challenges to their identity and culture that confronted earlier generations. Some are turning to gang membership as a way to fill the void and gain a sense of belonging.

As the community grapples with this new threat, it may be time to revisit some of the lessons learned from the stories of the early Indian Friendship Centre. When youth have a place to belong, and are given positive role models and opportunities, they can and will become engaged and motivated and will go on to take control of their own future. In
the process they contribute to building a positive society. Perhaps it is time to find a way
to put the community back into the development formula for the city and some
Aboriginal community members are beginning to consider how this might be done. The
study and publication of the Urban Aboriginal Task Force Report is a good start, and they
have a good model to follow in the TBIYFS.

6.0 Conclusion

When I review the remarkable achievements and model of community
development that is revealed by the stories of the participants in this project, I cannot help
but ask one more time: “How is it that such a significant and enduring model of
community development, which exists in almost every community in Canada, is missing
from the history and literature of community development in Canada?” Clearly, there is
much work to be done.

This project is only the beginning. It is, I hope, the beginning of a more detailed
reconstruction of the history of the TBIYFS by the Centre itself; the beginning of a much
needed acknowledgement of the significant role of the larger the Indian Friendship
Centre Movement in Canada and the beginning of reexamining history in a way where
voices of those whose achievements have previously been invisible are heard and
acknowledged for their wisdom and contributions to our communities.

As I have been all my life, I feel privileged and honoured to have heard the
stories and shared the teachings of the Aboriginal community which surrounds me.
Meegwich!\(^6\)

\(^6\) Ojibwa expression of gratitude.
Appendices

Appendix 1
Letter to the Board of Directors of TBIYFS requesting approval for the Project

Dear Board Members,

My name is Barbara Walberg and I am a longtime resident of Thunder Bay, working for Negahneewin College of Indigenous Studies, at Confederation College. At the present time I am also in the final stages of completing graduate studies as a Masters student at Athabasca University. I am required, as part of my studies to complete a research project. I would like to express my interest in working with the TBIYFC in creating a project that would both meet my academic requirements and that would provide some benefits to the Centre.

My Masters program has provided me with a specialization in community studies. Throughout the 2 years of courses, I have noticed an absence of academic literature concerning urban Aboriginal community development. Many books and journals contain details of Canadian community development initiatives, but little is written about the important work done in urban community development by Aboriginal people. The Friendship Centre Movement was such a dynamic and important community development force in the 1960’s, and continues to this day to be a pivotal focus of the urban community. This story is not represented in the history of community development. This needs to be addressed in order to honour the contributions and people who have done this work, and to reclaim the rightful place of Native people along side the history of others involved in the building of strong and vital urban communities. I am hoping that my research can be a part of this process.

In Thunder Bay, there are still many people who were part of the original movement and who have remained involved in the Centre or in other community leadership and development positions. I would like to have the opportunity to capture and record some of the stories and experiences of these individuals, and to put together the story of the TBIYF as seen through their eyes. It is important to my research that the voices of the participants are incorporated as much as possible. I see my role as facilitating the documentation of their stories. My interest in this project comes from my own work with the Centre as part of the faculty of Negahneewin College and my personal awareness of the important role that the Centre plays in Thunder Bay.

I would like to conduct this research respectfully, with the sanctioning and assistance of the TBIYFC Board and respected elders. I would ask that the centre identify individuals who they believe might be interested in telling me about their experiences and who might be significant to capturing an accurate history of the origins of the Centre. I would like to interview between 6 and 12 people who were participants, volunteers or organizers of the Centre in the 1960’s. Their participation would be voluntary, and they would retain full rights to review, revise and withdraw from the project at any time. The research will also be open to review and input from the TBIYFC Board at the proposal stage and before the
final draft is submitted in order to ensure the accuracy and validity of its portrayal of the Centre. In addition, I would like to ask for permission to view minute books and other archival documents that may be identified by the Centre as having relevance to this research.

In return, I will make all of my research available to the Centre. This could include the audio tapes and transcripts (where participants consent) of the interviews and stories, copies of all articles, documents and information collected as well as a copy of the final project. The Indian Friendship Centre will retain all rights to intellectual property and knowledge produced by this project. If there is anyone at the Centre interested in working with me as a volunteer in this project, I would consider this as a bonus to the project. I see the collection of this documentary material as an important resource for the Centre. I believe that it is important to capture this history for future generations before it is forgotten or lost.

If the Board sees fit to give me their approval to begin this work, I hope to start by the end of April, 2006. My goal is to complete the research and interviews in May and to complete the project by June of this year.

I would be happy to discuss and incorporate ideas from Board members or others interested in this project before and during the project and to discuss any further requirements that you may have. Thank you for consideration of this work. I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Barbara Walberg
683-3004
March 31, 2006

Athabasca University
Research Ethics Board

To Whom it May Concern:

Re: Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre Approval for Research

Please accept this letter as evidence of support for the research project to be undertaken by Ms. Barbara Walberg. At a meeting held on February 6, 2006, the Board of Directors passed a motion supporting the proposed project (The Indian Friendship Centre as Seen Through the Eyes of Participants).

Ms. Walberg will be working in collaboration with me to facilitate the research including identifying participants and providing access to relevant documents and other archival information. I will also be available to assist in ensuring that the project addresses all appropriate community protocols. I remain,

Yours very truly,

Anne LeSage,
Executive Director
Appendix 3
Letter of Invitation to Potential Participants

Boujou!

I would like to invite you to participate in an exciting oral history project which is being conducted in cooperation with the Indian Friendship Centre. The purpose of this project is to capture the experiences, memories and history of the early years of the Indian Friendship Centre Movement in Thunder Bay.

My name is Barbara Walberg, and I am a Masters student at Athabasca University. My interest in working with the IFC for this project comes as a result of my years of working beside and with the Centre as part of my work at Negahneewin College. I am aware of the rich history and contributions of the IFC to urban community development through the years and feel that it would be a valuable project to document how the Centre came to be, and to explore how people involved in the early movement see its impact on themselves and on the urban Aboriginal community in Thunder Bay.

Your involvement in this research will include a face to face interview with me at a time and place of your convenience. This semi structured interview will take approximately 1 hour. I will ask you to share what you remember about your experiences at the Centre, and what you know about its early development.

With your permission, the interview will be audio taped. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview to clarify or make any changes you wish. In addition, the tapes will be returned to you, or alternatively should you agree, donated as part of an oral history library to the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre. You will also be provided with an opportunity to review the draft of the project and provide additional clarification before it is completed.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any point in the project. In addition, the interview is confidential and unless you decide otherwise no identifying information will be revealed in the final project.

I hope you will agree to add your knowledge, memories and stories to this project so that future generations will come to understand the history and important work of the Indian Friendship Centre movement in Thunder Bay. The final product from this research will be turned over to the Friendship Centre for their exclusive use.

Please contact Anne Lesage at the Indian Friendship Centre or me directly, should you wish to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 807-683-3004 or email me at bwalberg@tbaytel.net. My project supervisor is Ken Banks: Associate Professor at Athabasca University. He can be contacted at kenbanks@tallships.ca.

Meegwich,
Appendix 4
  Topic Guide and Sample Interview Questions

A. General Information (all informants)

Tell me a bit about yourself. What do you do? Where did you grow up? When did you come to Thunder Bay?

B. Personal Involvement in the Centre

When and how did you first come to the Indian Friendship Centre
What were your first memories of the centre?
In what way were you involved? What programs, what ways?
How long were you involved.
What do you remember most from that time?

C. Centre History, Activities and Organization

What can you tell me about the history, origin and of the centre?
What programs activities did the centre host?
Who were some of the key organizers?
Volunteers? Paid staff?

Why do you think the centre/ movement was started?
What was its main purpose?

Can you tell me about: lil beavers, Indian princess, youth dances, courtworker, referral services, craft store, fashion shows?

D. Role of the Centre in the Community, significance, effectiveness

How would you describe the role of the centre within the aboriginal community at that time?
What purpose did it serve?
What can you tell me about how the centre was run?
How important do you feel the centre was to the urban Aboriginal community in those days?
What might be some words that you would use to describe the role of the Indian Friendship Centre?

E. Lasting impact of Centre on Community

Can you tell me some of the impact on community development that resulted from the Indian Friendship Centre?
NEOP
Native Housing
Metis association etc.
F. Impact on Individuals at the time

What would you say is the impact of the centre on the youth at the time?

What would you say you gained from your involvement at the centre, what was the significance about being part of the Centre activities?

What did your involvement in the centre mean to you?

G. Reflections concerning lasting impact of Centre on individuals

In what way did your involvement impact on your life since then?
Relationships
Community
Skills training
Identity
Advocacy work
Career
Identity
Values
Activism
Appendix 5
Sample of Informed Consent Form

Barbara Walberg
MAIS Student, Athabasca University
Phone 683-3004

The Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre Movement (1960-1970)
As Seen through the Eyes of Participants

The Indian Friendship Centre in Thunder Bay was one of the first friendship centres in Canada and has continued to be a significant presence in the urban landscape of this city. In spite of its long and distinguished history, there has been no written documentation of its origin, its activities or the impact the Centre had on individuals or the community at large. This research would like to change that by recording the stories and experiences of people who were involved in the early years of the movement.

You are being asked to take part in the project by participating in an interview to reflect on your memories and experiences during the early years of the TBIYFS. The interview will also ask you to comment on the impact of this involvement to you personally and to the community at large.

The interview will take approximately one and a half hours and will take place at a location which is convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped. This will ensure that your words and thoughts are adequately represented in the final product. The tapes will be transcribed and your name or other identifying information will be removed if you so choose. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript and enhance or clarify any information before it is used in the research. At the end of the research, you will be asked to determine whether you would like the tapes returned to you, donated to the TBIYFS or destroyed.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. At any time, you may withdraw from the process and any information already provided will be destroyed and removed from the research project. A copy of the transcript of the interview will be provided for your review. At that time, you may also choose to clarify, delete or change any information that you feel you do not wish to be included in the final project. The tapes and transcripts will be returned to you if you wish, and you will be given a copy of the final project. At that time you will also be asked to approve or deny further use of the project for academic purposes, presentation to conferences or for public access through Athabasca University Library.

Although there is a remote risk of exposure of your identity, every possible precaution will be taken to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. Names and identifying information will not be part of the final research document unless you have given your full consent in writing.
CONSENT
I have been fully informed about the intent and process of this research, and I have read and understood the nature of my involvement in this project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the information provided. I agree to participate in the study, on the understanding that I may refuse to answer certain questions and I may withdraw at any time during the data collection period.

I give my permission to be interviewed yes no

I give my permission for the interview to be audiotaped yes no

I give my permission for my name and identifying information to be included in the project yes no

I would prefer to remain anonymous in the final project yes no

I would like the audio tapes/ transcripts a. returned to me
b. donated to the TBIYFS
c. destroyed

I would like to revisit these questions before the project is finalized yes no

____________________________________________________________________________________
Research Participant Signature Date

____________________________________________________________________________________
Researcher
Appendix 6 – Final Verification Letter to Participants

Dear

Well it has been a long time since we began working together gathering stories for the Indian Friendship Centre project. I have been busy with family and work and had to put the project on the shelf for a few months. However, I am committed to completing this work by Dec 31.2007.

I have now almost completed the first draft, with just some conclusions and summary to go. I am giving you a copy of the rough draft to date, as the “story” part of the project is complete.

I would appreciate if you could read it, and comment on the following issues:

1. Are you still comfortable to be identified (as I have done) in the quotes and in the stories?
   - The option would be to use pseudonyms or other names so that no one would know who said what.

2. Have I spelled names correctly and identified people correctly in the document?

3. Have I represented your stories accurately and respectfully? If not, how can I correct it?

4. Is there anything in the stories that is factually incorrect? If so, can you provide the accurate information so that I can correct it?

5. Is there any additional or clarifying information that should be included?

6. Are there any quotes, parts of the stories that you would like me to remove for any reason?

I will leave the paper with you to read until next week. By the end of next week I will contact each of you by phone to hear your comments, corrections and address any concerns which will then be incorporated into the final draft.

Everyone will receive a copy of the final project. All the transcripts and research will be turned over to the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Society when it is complete.

I plan to host a get together/ feast in the New Year to thank and honour all of the people who have helped me with this project. It has been great fun for me, and I am very thankful for all of your generosity in sharing these stories. I hope that others from the Centre will be inspired to continue collecting stories in the future as they are rich and important.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at 475-6220 or 683-3004.
Appendix 7 – Participant Code

All interviews conducted by Barbara Walberg

Participant One: Lesage, A. April 15, 2007 Thunder Bay.


Participant Seven: Bouchard, R. May 15, 2007 Thunder Bay.

Participant Eight: Mc Donald, F. June 5, 2007. Thunder Bay. (tape malfunction)


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