

ALBERTA'S FUTURE LEADERS PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY OF ABORIGINAL YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract / Résumé

In this paper, Alberta's Future Leaders Program is used as a case study to identify and evaluate the implementation, or lack thereof, of youth and community development in Aboriginal contexts. Promising practices and potential program changes are also explored. As such we move beyond examination of the links between youth and community development and focus on how culturally appropriate programming can serve to benefit Aboriginal youth and community programs in ways that allow Aboriginal youth to become more connected to themselves, their communities, and their cultures.

L'article présente une étude du cas de l'Alberta's Future Leaders Program pour cerner et évaluer la mise en oeuvre, ou son absence, du développement communautaire et du développement des jeunes dans des contextes autochtones. On explore aussi les pratiques prometteuses et les modifications potentielles du programme. On dépasse ensuite l'examen des liens entre la jeunesse et le développement communautaire pour se concentrer sur les avantages que les programmes sensibles à la culture peuvent apporter aux programmes communautaires et pour les jeunes d'une manière qui permet aux jeunes autochtones de mieux se connaître et de se lier à leurs collectivités et leurs cultures respectives.

Recreation programs for youth have become a popular way of ‘developing’ youth as well as the communities in which they live. These programs are offered in an attempt to engage youth and communities in healthy lifestyles and to enable them to reap the benefits of participation in leisure, recreation, and sport. With an abundance of programs and anecdotal evidence of their success comes the need to assess whether or not these programs are in fact successful and, if so, what factors lead to their success. If common threads between successful youth and community programs can be identified, then criteria for youth development programs can be used to enhance and strengthen existing programs. In this paper, we use Johnston-Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer’s (2004) framework of the “Six Cs” to examine Alberta’s Future Leaders Program (AFL), while also drawing on broader literature pertaining to leadership and mentoring. The AFL links youth development with community development in an attempt to strengthen the ties between the predominantly Aboriginal youth with which the program works and the communities in which they live. The AFL Program will be used as a case study to identify promising practices in youth and community development in an Aboriginal context. Further, we evaluate the implementation, or lack thereof, of these practice within the AFL, and potential program changes are explored.

Introduction

In the past, youth development and community development initiatives were often conducted independently of each other. However, according to London, Zimmerman, and Erbstein (2003), the failure to link youth and community development results in “youth development efforts [that] are stunted in their abilities to cultivate young people’s individual growth, their membership in communities, and their ability to effect institutional and community change” and leads to “young people’s alienation and resentment of the implied low expectations and the cultural and political disconnect from their communities” (p. 34). Community development can be defined as a process intending to “educate and involve citizens in a process of individual empowerment and community change” (Hutchinson & Nogradi, 1996: 93), while, similarly, youth development involves positive change on an individual basis and/or on a societal basis (Baldwin, 2000). Certainly, linking youth programming and community development is important because each one can enrich the other. London et al. state that “when thought of, and practiced together, youth, organizational, and community development can exponentially improve all community efforts” (5). The authors also find that “in partnership, these models of development can create ladders of

responsibility and support that draw youth into progressively higher levels of organizational and community leadership" (35). Indeed, the intention behind pairing youth and community development is that today's youth are going to be tomorrow's leaders. By assisting them now by strengthening their leadership skills, youth and community development programs are arming youth with the best tools for current and future decision-making, both for themselves and for their communities.

While investigations of youth and community development have become increasingly prevalent, what continues to be absent from this literature is the impact that culture can have on such initiatives. As such, in this paper we move beyond an examination of the links between youth and community development and instead focus on the ways in which culturally appropriate programming can serve to benefit Aboriginal youth and community programs in ways that allow Aboriginal youth to become more connected to themselves, their communities, and their cultures.

Literature Review

Youth Programming and Links to Community Development

Previous work (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, & Theokas, 2005) has discussed the "Five Cs" of positive youth development: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring. Lerner et al. argue that the "Five C's are supported when a youth program offers positive and sustained adult-youth relationships, youth skill building activities, and opportunities for youth participation and leadership" (Henderson, Scheuler-Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, and Thurber, 2007: 992).

Johnston-Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer (2004) revised the Five Cs to include another component: contribution. This sixth component recognizes the contributions that youth can make to their community and, as such, serves as an appropriate framework through which youth and community development can be linked. The Six Cs—competence, confidence, connections, character, contribution and caring—were found to be integral for both the short- and the long-term benefits of youth programming. The first "C," competence, refers to having the skills to choose healthy options over risky options; programming that generates feelings of competence among youth has been found to have a very positive impact on health (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). Being able to face a challenge and then successfully complete that challenge produces feelings of competence, which helps to build one's confidence. Confidence is important because it relates to one's self-esteem and self-

worth, both of which have been identified as variables that are integral to the development of a positive self-identity, and is thus identified as the second "C" (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). Johnston-Nicholson et al.'s next "C" is connections, which the authors describe as "providing a primary or secondary support system" (58). Part of a person's support system is one's peer relationships. Peer connections, or friendship connections, have been found to be important in recruiting youth, involving youth, and the overall youth satisfaction in youth programming (Loder & Hirsch, 2003). Furthermore, friendship connections between youth and practitioners have been found to improve the quality of youth programs (Loder & Hirsch, 2003).

Another aspect of youth and community development involves instilling a program's values into its practices and therefore into the youth and the community with which it works. This can be developed through the next criterion: character. Character refers to "encouraging a sense of responsibility for oneself and others" (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004: 58). Youth programs often have specific sets of values upon which programs are based. For example, Athletes in Action provides various youth sports camps while promoting Christian-based values, while the Girl Guides of Canada uses activities to deliver programs to facilitate girls "to give leadership and develop their decision-making and life skills" (Girl Guides of Canada, 2006), thus promoting girl/woman-centred values. Presenting values to youth and helping them to discover which ones are important to them will help to shape their characters. Following character, the next "C" is contribution, which involves creating opportunities for youth to give back to their communities (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). These opportunities allow the youth involved in programming to be visible in the community and to represent their demographic in a positive fashion. The youth thus invest in a relationship with the community; this relationship is vital for youth programs and community development.

A program that is driven by considering participants' best interests requires caring to be at its core. As such, Johnston-Nicholson et al.'s (2004) final "C" is caring. If staff members genuinely care about the youth with whom they work, they will promote caring among the program's participants. It is hoped that this caring will continue into other aspects of the participants' lives. Further, a caring environment will create a sense of belonging among the youth, and a sense of belonging will in turn facilitate a feeling of community (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). Karlis defines community as "an association or grouping of people that consists of two or more people" (2004: 137). However, when considering 'community' in the context of youth programming it is important to rec-

ognize the importance of the relationships between community members, as strong relationships reflect a close community. A feeling of 'community' is an ideal environment to foster both youth development and community development because of the perceived commonalities of goals and support.

Youth programs, however, are not always developed in ideal environments. One may encounter opposition and other obstructions, such as a lack of interest or lack of support, when creating or running a youth program. Granger (2002) discusses ways to create change to obtain a positive environment for youth development. Creating change involves creating standards, making data available, rewarding change, social pressure, and marketing the message encouraging change (Granger, 2002). To make change occur there must be both a will and a capacity to change (Granger, 2002). Granger found that improving the accessibility of programs, the quality of supports, and the opportunities for youth improve youth program environments. Undoubtedly, youth programming is a dynamic process that is always in need of renewal and change; as youth evolve so too must programming evolve in order to consistently meet participants' needs.

Consultative Programming Processes

A common trend in the youth programming literature concerns the benefits accrued from creating programs that include input from those for whom the programming is designed. Johnston-Nicholson et al. (2004) find that "young people thrive when we listen to them, respect them as current contributors, and engage with them in meaningful investment in the community" (55). Similarly, Checkoway (2003) discusses youth-initiated programs and the positive outcomes that these programs can have for both youth and their communities. He highlights youth run programs where the youth have developed the program and its focus. The youth he describes organized events and meetings, led various community initiatives, and exercised their role in teamwork, all while using their own ideas and methods. As a result of their inclusion and ownership of the planning process, the youth gained valuable skills by learning through their own experiences. This way, the youth felt that they were not just a part of the program, but rather were the initiators of the program and any success the program found improved the youths' confidence. As youth programs are generally structured to help young people to develop life skills, the inclusion of youth in all steps of program planning and implementation can be considered a best practice for youth programs that include a focus on personal development.

Programming for/with Aboriginal Peoples

While there is a significant body of literature on the development of youth programming, it is problematic to assume that all programs will serve all populations. For example, do the characteristics of youth programming discussed by Johnston-Nicholson et al. (2004) also apply to programming for Aboriginal youth? Dawson, Karlis, and Georgescu (1998) discuss the constraints that Aboriginal peoples face in their recreation and leisure activities. They focus on five issues identified by the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (1996) as having an impact on Aboriginal Peoples' recreation: tourism, substance abuse and crime, cultural maintenance, education, and land and wildlife management.

The third issue, cultural maintenance, suggests that Aboriginal peoples are not only concerned with preserving their cultures, but are also concerned with promoting their cultures. Aboriginal peoples feel the threat of having their cultures saturated by the overwhelming presence of Euro-Canadian culture. Nevertheless, Aboriginal cultures are often overlooked within sport and recreation programming, which is typically viewed through a Euro-Canadian lens. It is implied that Europeans brought culture, including sport and recreation, to Canada after it was "discovered." In the past, notions of culture relied on the ability to reason and, in the opinions of the Europeans, Aboriginal people were seen as 'savages' without this ability, and were thus interpreted as uncultured (Francis, 1992). Thus, the dualism was established of Euro-Canadian versus 'Other', with 'Other' most often seen as uncultured. Of course, Aboriginal people have inhabited North America since time immemorial and have their own culturally-based physical practices; rather than allowing Aboriginal cultures, including physical practices, to flourish, colonialism resulted in their suppression. Thus, it is important to note that Euro-Canadian culture has had and continues to have an impact on Aboriginal peoples' leisure and recreation practices (Giles, *in press*; 2005; 2001).

Aboriginal peoples look to preserve and promote their cultures in order to allow them to remain vibrant and also to diffuse the influence of southern-based Euro-Canadian culture through a variety of means, including youth programming. If youth development programs are to be provided for Aboriginal peoples by Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal peoples, then the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in all phases of a program's planning is a crucial part of culturally sensitive programming. Silver (2004) demonstrates the importance of inclusion in program planning. He discusses community development in inner-city Winnipeg, Manitoba, where a large portion of the population consists of Aboriginal peoples. Silver's work examines programs that attempt to incorporate

Aboriginal culture into community, for example, the *Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre*, a “prevention- orientated, community based, culturally Aboriginal organization” that offers “preventative programs rooted in Aboriginal cultural values” (Silver, 2004: 37). This initiative is community-based, meaning that the program is run by community members for their community and is “linked in a genuinely close way with the communities with whom they work” (Silver, 2004: 37). The Centre focuses on empowering people by helping them to identify and solve their own problems (Silver, 2004). The program has become a form of Aboriginal cultural revival, attempting to rebuild knowledge of and pride in Aboriginal ways of being, and has been used to combat the feeling/belief that Aboriginal culture is inferior to Euro-Canadian culture (Silver, 2004). As such, there appear to be special considerations that need to be taken into account with designing successful programs for Aboriginal peoples, especially youth.

Condon (1995) elucidates the influence that southern-based Euro-Canadian culture and recreation programs and practices have had on Inuit youth. Specifically, he argues that exposure to Southern culture through television, radio, and sports and recreation has had an impact on the social behaviours of northern youth. Condon finds a connection between many social problems that have arisen for Inuit youth due to the adoption of a Euro-Canadian derived focus on winning rather than on participation. For example, he argues that problems such as alcoholism, physical violence, verbal violence, and issues concerning gender roles have been derived from rewarding winning and competition (Condon, 1995). The values implied through Euro-Canadians’ sport systems are not the same as Inuit values and, as a result, culturally sensitive programming must be considered when creating and implementing programs for and with Aboriginal youth.

Recently, the need to have culturally-relevant programming for Aboriginal youth has been identified as a way to combat a loss of connection between the past and the present for Aboriginal youth, a connection that is cherished within Aboriginal cultures (Heine & Young, 1997). To compensate for this loss of connection, opportunities have been created to use youth programs to help youth to reconnect with their cultures in order to help them to develop both themselves and their communities. Some current programs in Canada have begun to address this need. For example, Dreamcatchers Youth Program offers programming that helps to build the skills and capacities of future leaders by using holistic and culturally appropriate programs to aid Aboriginal youth and their development, while the Native Youth Program, run by the University of British Columbia, provides opportunities for Aboriginal youth to

work in museums and to research and interpret their own cultures. These creative programs are provided by Aboriginal facilitators who are sensitive to the youths' needs and they encourage Aboriginal youth to learn more and to share their knowledge about their own cultures.

Community Development

According to Khinduka, community development is a process that consists of seven parts: educating and motivating people for self-help, establishing local leadership, building a sense of citizenship, solidifying democratic action at grassroots level, enticing growth through self-generating and self-sustaining means, building cooperative and harmonious relationships, leading to gradual, harmonious change (cited in Karlis, 2006). Pohlmann (1996) indicates that "conventional approaches to community development generally involve a group of people in a community initiating a social action process to improve their economic, social, cultural or environmental situation" (3). Both of these definitions highlight the importance of people taking action together as a group.

A community development approach is valuable in enhancing community participation and empowerment (Hutchinson & Campbell, 1996). Empowerment cannot be given to someone, but rather it must come from within the individual or collective (Pedlar, 1996). In many cases, this empowerment is directed towards those who are vulnerable or marginalized, and is thus especially important for Aboriginal communities. The goal of empowerment through community development is intended to "nurture the community's and community members' ability to conceive, pursue, and achieve their own goals" (Pedlar, 1996: 15).

Approaches to community development often include recreation and leisure as a means through which to achieve community development goals. It is said that "recreation and leisure services can make an important contribution to community well-being" (Hutchinson & Campbell, 1996: 20). However, not all recreation and leisure services provide aspects of community development within the scope of their programming. Although there are many approaches to community development, just being community-based does not automatically mean that one is also providing community development (Pedlar, 1996). Community development occurs through a process that entails "discovery, self-understanding, and self-determination" (Pedlar, 1996: 14). These features allow individuals, especially those who are marginalized, to "take control of their own lives and gain a realization of their ability to determine outcomes" (Pedlar, 1996: 15).

In the past, recreation and leisure services were designed to facilitate those in the upper stratus of society—typically Euro-Canadians with

high incomes and the free time to access these services. Youth development programs, on the other hand, have become a means of accessing those in society who are underserved, such as Aboriginal youth (Pitter & Andrews, 1997). According to Health Canada (2000), the suicide rate for Aboriginal youth is five to seven times higher than that for non-Aboriginal youth. As a result, Aboriginal youth represent a demographic that definitely needs to feel an enhanced sense of empowerment. The marginalization of Aboriginal peoples has spilled over and influenced an under-service of recreation programs, which has a direct impact on Aboriginal youth. The need to compensate for this under-service has been acknowledged to some extent, as manifested by the creation of Aboriginal youth development programs and particularly those focusing on leadership, but—as so clearly identified by a plethora of alarming statistics—this area requires further action.

Leadership

Leadership can manifest itself in various forms and places. For example, leadership occurs in sports stadiums, office buildings, and in schools. It is important to note that leadership can be learned and developed and is not reliant on genetics. Effective goal-setting is very important to leadership, but what may be more important is awareness of the demands/needs of a leadership situation. The needs of a situation reflect the needs of the followers and an increased awareness of these needs, through exposure and education, can make all the difference for a leader and his or her followers.

Research has identified a skill set that is related to leadership and how it is interpreted is what determines the leadership style that a particular leader will use, and how successful he or she will be. According to Witherspoon (1997) a leader's style is how he or she behaves towards his or her followers. In the past, a leader's style was categorized as being one of two behaviours: autocratic or democratic (Witherspoon, 1997). An autocratic leader gives directions, is task focused, and uses one-way communication, while a democratic leader is considerate of the followers' needs, encourages follower participation in decision-making, and is concerned with positive social relationships with and among his or her followers (Witherspoon, 1997). In contradistinction, where an autocratic leader is task-focused, a democratic leader is follower-focused.

A more contemporary approach to leadership involves categorizing leaders using their orientation towards goal setting and achievement (Witherspoon, 1997). According to this approach, a leader is either short-term orientated or long-term orientated. A leader who is short-term ori-

entated requires frequent feedback, plans for the immediate range, and has tight control over his or her followers. A leader who is long-term orientated requires less frequent feedback, focuses on long-range planning, and has loose control over his or her followers (Witherspoon, 1997). A leader who is short-term orientated would exhibit behaviours similar to an autocratic leader, while a leader who is long-term orientated is more likely to exhibit similar behaviours to a democratic leader (Witherspoon, 1997). While it is important to note that there are skills that are integral to leadership (e.g., communication, decision making, problem solving, etc.), a leader's style is a function of how he or she approaches these skills. His or her approach to these skills is dependant upon his or her values, commitments, and highly dependant upon the situation (Witherspoon, 1997). Therefore, leadership is situational because different situations demand different approaches to leadership. Each situation will have different demands, values, norms, and consequences. These factors, and how they vary, can also be found in different cultures, which would suggest that different cultures have different views of leadership. Therefore, we argue that there are differences in Euro-Canadian perspectives of leadership and Aboriginal perspectives of leadership and that these differences must be considered when examining youth and community development in an Aboriginal context.

The lack of one "correct" universal approach to leadership, youth development, and community development highlights the importance of questioning and observing what is being promoted through one of Canada's best-known Aboriginal leadership, youth development, and community development programs: Alberta's Future Leaders Program. Using the AFL, a program that has been in operation in Aboriginal communities for over 10 years, as a case study allows for an examination of the ways in which best practices in leadership and youth and community development can be integrated into programming, while further allowing for an identification of the challenges involved in attempting to integrate Aboriginal culture into programming.

Methodology

Prior to the commencement of this research project, research ethics criteria at the University of Ottawa were satisfied, thus providing the research access to documents generously provided by AFL Program. To examine the AFL Program, a review was conducted of the AFL's Executive Summaries and a sampling of Community Final Reports from 1996 until 2005. These summaries included background information on the program, a description of the program and its goals, and synopses from program employees pertaining to their work, experiences, and sug-

gestions for future programming.

Although this information comes only from the program itself, it includes multiple sources of data (i.e., final reports) over a 10 year period from the program's youth workers, positions that will be explained below. It is important to note that the AFL is only partially responsible for the Youth Worker's salaries; the Youth Workers are in the somewhat unusual position of having multiple contributors to their salary and program funding, as the communities in which they work provides funding, as does the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks, and Wildlife Foundation and a number of corporate sponsors. As such, the Youth Workers are accountable not only to the AFL, but to the communities in which they work and the program's sponsors. Thus, do not have a vested interest in making the program look better (or worse) than it actually is/was. Furthermore, the second author of this article worked for the AFL as a Youth Worker in 2000 and the data that was provided corroborate her own experiences. The information that was provided was compared to information pertaining to best practices for youth development that were identified through a literature review concerning youth programming, community development, leadership, and programming for Aboriginal peoples.

Results

The AFL was created as a pilot project in 1996 by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; it was designed to meet the needs of Indigenous youth dealing with problems such as incarceration, alcohol abuse, reliance on social assistance, and suicide in rural and remote Alberta communities. The AFL was originally developed out of a concern expressed by the Province of Alberta's Native Justice Initiatives Unit concerning the high percentage of Indigenous youth who were in trouble with the law (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 1998). The Unit's concern was fused with a study by Health Canada, the Inter-Provincial Sport and Recreation Council, and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (1994) (cited in Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 1998) that supported sport and recreation as a tool that could be used for prevention and intervention measures to reduce problems for youth at risk. As a result, the AFL was conceptualized and brought to fruition. The program is a community and youth development initiative that uses sport, recreation, the arts, and leadership initiatives to develop positive situations for Aboriginal youth and their communities over a three year period in each community. The AFL works with communities on an individual basis, helping each community to identify its own goals and outcomes and using this information to guide summer pro-

gramming that promotes a holistic approach to recreation, which is an approach that integrates recreation into all aspects of one's life and can be used to influence youth and their communities to lead healthy lifestyles. Participating communities are representative of a cross-section of Alberta's Aboriginal communities and are selected based on consultation with Aboriginal populations at large represented by various Aboriginal organizations in the Province of Alberta, corporate sponsors and the Alberta's Future Leaders Provincial Support Committee (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2003). The selections must be endorsed by the communities' decision-makers. The program has grown to work with 12 communities per summer and has worked with over 40 communities in total. Community support is vital to the AFL program. Support is sought from community leaders, corporations, Elders, youth, schools, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and some federal agencies. All of these organizations play important roles in the AFL's success. Once support is established, a community is able to commence the steps necessary to become a part of the AFL Program.

The AFL employs two youth workers per community. The youth workers are typically university students from outside of the participating communities; these individuals work with the community to establish a recreation program for the community's youth. The youth workers are also intended to act as role models for community youth. Each community has a community-based committee that includes the two youth workers, who select two Aboriginal youth from the community who display leadership potential, and a formal mentorship relationship is then established between these youth mentors and the youth workers. Ideally, the goal is for the young leaders to become mentors for others, and then continue the recreation programs established by the AFL and use their leadership skills to continue community development activities.

Leadership development is a very important component to the AFL Program. There is ongoing leadership development that occurs throughout the summer simply through the influence of the relationship between youth worker and the youth. However, leadership development also takes on a more formal form when the program uses retreats to demonstrate and teach leadership skills and train the youth mentors. The AFL uses two phases to train the "youth leaders of tomorrow" in leadership development. The first is a six day Youth Leadership Retreat that incorporates activity-based theory sessions and outdoor adventures to teach lessons pertaining to personal growth. The youth and their mentors, the youth workers, participate in activities such as rock climbing, kayaking, and hiking, activities in which the group encounters issues such as deal-

ing with conflict, communication, working in groups and coping with differing opinions. These activities challenge boundaries and encourage self-reflection and self-awareness. The second phase is a return retreat for “specific training in effective communication, personal habits, maintaining a positive attitude, promoting [their] reputation[s], responsibility, accountability, authority, perceptions, working with others, community development, youth action, decision making, and problem solving” (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2005: 6).

The AFL attempts to embody the words “together we can make a difference.” The program harnesses the impact of positive role models and the opportunities provided through sport and recreation to influence youth, especially at risk youth, and by doing so it hopes that the results will extend out into the community, thus making a difference for all community members. The youth of today are going to be the leaders of tomorrow, and the AFL program hopes to encourage youth to be involved in making life better for themselves and others.

Discussion

Analyzing community and youth development programs such as the AFL can be a difficult task because of the type of data that is often collected. One can be misled if one simply analyzes empirical data such as attendance records or revenue generated. For example, attendance is based on the size of the population of a particular area and low attendance may simply reflect the size of the available population. Revenue is also a function of demographics, and a low income community may not have resources available to pay for services, so the services are provided for a low cost. Simply accounting for attendance, revenue, or other quantitative data does not allow for a complete picture of the success, or lack thereof, for a program. To determine a program's true success, one must analyze the program's goals as well as conduct a comprehensive evaluation of final reports and programmers' experiences; these factors allow for a better, more complete representation. This discussion examines the AFL within the context of best practices in order to provide an analysis of the program.

A community and youth development program's goals should be clearly defined to allow for distinct comparison between its goals and results. If the results reflect the goals, then the program is successful based on the criteria that have been set for the program. For example, one program goal may be to have success with participants and, therefore, the participants' opinions must be taken into consideration. Collection of this type of data can be difficult, as the data to be collected is qualitative and may not have a numerical representation. Certainly, col-

lecting and analyzing this data can be costly and time consuming; however, it is critical in obtaining a true measure of a program's success. While it was beyond this research project's scope to interview program participants, we feel that a great deal of this data can be gleaned from the reports with which we were provided.

The AFL and the Six Cs

As mentioned earlier, Johnston-Nicholson et al. (2004) identify six criteria that are viewed as critical for both short-term and long-term benefits for youth programming: competence, confidence, connections, character, contribution and caring. Does the AFL provide these aspects in its programming? Competence refers to having the skills to choose healthy options over risky ones (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). This point is vital to the AFL Program because the entire program was created to deter youth from making risky decisions. Through education and community involvement, the AFL attempts to encourage youth to make healthy choices. Increasing youths' feelings of competence improves their self-worth, which can map onto the next aspect, confidence. Confidence helps build a positive self-identity (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). Certainly, leisure and recreation have the potential to improve one's self-esteem which, as previously stated, is related to confidence (Karlis, 2004). The AFL Program attempts to improve youths' confidence by exposing them to healthy leisure and recreation. What follows next is connection, which refers to the youths' support system. The AFL has paired youth development with community development in the hope of strengthening the relationships between community members. The AFL hopes that in coming together for recreation and leisure, a sense of community will be fostered or improved. By improving relationships between youth and peers and youth and community, the AFL is improving the youths' support systems, thereby improving the youths' access to help and support.

The next criterion, building character, refers to building "responsibility for oneself and others" (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004: 58). The programming is intended to establish youth leaders that are able to make healthy choices and thus take responsibility for themselves. Once this has been accomplished, the youth can facilitate and maintain the recreation program for the community, thus making the youth leaders responsible to not only themselves, but also their community, which reinforces the value of helping others to help themselves. Creating opportunities for youth to give back to their communities enables contributions, another "C" (Johnston-Nicholson et al., 2004). The AFL gives youth an opportunity to build feelings of community by providing various oppor-

tunities for youth to contribute positively to their communities through recreation and the arts. Finally, the last aspect is caring. The AFL hopes to change youths' lives and improve the communities in which they live and work, and a program cannot achieve these goals without sincerely caring about the youth with which it works.

While the six Cs may be present in the AFL, is it problematic to immediately assume that the six Cs are appropriate for all cultures? For example, some cultures may have a different understanding of youths' role in society. Though differences certainly exist between cultural groups, we argue that improving a child's self-concept, encouraging a broad support system, and providing a caring environment would be of value for all youth and youth programs. Thus, according to Johnston-Nicholson's et al.'s criteria, the AFL meets best practice guidelines in terms of short- and long-term youth programming.

AFL Leadership

Leadership and leadership through recreation are key concepts for the AFL and the programming that it runs; this makes it important to examine the kind of leadership that the AFL promotes. Because the AFL attempts to develop a skill set to aid the youth in their future and not simply skills to complete specific tasks, the AFL is long-term orientated and is more follower-focused than task-focused, both of which are beneficial for the youth involved in the program. Approaching the program from a participant standpoint, being considerate of participants' needs, encouraging participant involvement, and developing positive social relationships are all important for the AFL because it endeavours to instill in its participants skills that are important for leadership and to improve their lives.

The AFL Program tends to focus on the following skills: personal growth, dealing with conflict, communication, creating a positive environment, working with groups, working with personalities different than one's own, overcoming fears, and trust (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Reports, 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005). Further, the AFL uses a Battle Self Esteem Tool, which is implemented at the leadership retreat to participants, that attempts to create quantitative data measuring changes in leadership capacities. When the youth workers and youth leaders participate in the leadership retreat, the above skills are discussed and highlighted as tools for developing leadership in oneself and others. Nevertheless, leadership is not necessarily an inventory of skills that one has, but rather how people use the skills they have and how they gain more skills. Through its activities, the leadership retreat helps the participants to recognize their strengths and weak-

nesses and exposes them to activities that they perhaps might not have previously experienced, hence broadening their skill set and giving them a chance to utilize and further develop the skills they have acquired.

Personal growth, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses and the desire to improve both, is—as mentioned above—a significant aspect of the AFL Program. The program's Community Final Reports and Executive Final Summaries speak to the ways in which personal growth is attained. In a personal synopsis, one youth worker stated how one particular future leader has "grown personally and he has developed into a strong, independent person with the capability to be social" (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2001: 30). Considering that prior to his involvement in the AFL Program this future leader was previously identified as introverted and anti-social, his personal growth was seen as the result of the training and experience the program provided (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2001). In another account, a youth worker discusses how a youth leader conquered her fear of heights and claustrophobia on one of the hikes at the leadership retreat (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2000). Personal growth for this future leader involved the development of determination and pride (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2000). Awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses gives a person feedback on how she or he copes with people and situations. This is important to the AFL youth, who are faced with many difficult decisions due to pressure from peers, family and society at large. The AFL attempts to improve the youths' decision making skills so that when faced with difficult decisions, they are able to make the best choice, thus further enhancing personal growth. Hence, in this aspect, the AFL aligns with the leadership best practices found in other programs outlined in the available literature.

Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Leadership

While the AFL appears to meet best practice guidelines in terms of leadership, the situation is complicated by the fact that there are often non-Aboriginal youth workers who work with youth leaders and their communities. As a result, one needs to consider both Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal perspectives on leadership development. Grahn, Swenson, and O'Leary (2001) find that non-Aboriginal leadership values vision, the training of others, control, and direction and they value the individualism that a leader exhibits over his or her followers. Conversely, Jules (1999) finds that Aboriginal cultures value a strong leader who possesses cooperative behaviour, personal integrity, honesty, humility, and respect. Further, a leader is close with the people, is to serve the people, and is to inform the people about what was happening in the

community. Within Aboriginal leadership, leadership is directed by the greater good of the group rather than personal desires (Jules, 1999). Aboriginal cultures value collectivism and community in their perspective on leadership. A characteristic that is greatly attributed to leadership from an Aboriginal perspective is that of wisdom, which is defined as "knowledge about the band and its people" (Jules, 1999: 45). Wisdom and knowledge are sustained through the transfer between Elders and the youth. The value of wisdom is also why Elders play a significant role as teachers (Jules, 1999). Jules states that "before one can be a leader one must know one's own culture" (1999: 46). Knowledge of one's culture has been passed along by the Elders, thus their inclusion is critical for knowledge transfer and leadership in Aboriginal cultures and thus also programs that focus on Aboriginal peoples.

Grahn et al. (2001) state that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives on leadership value "vision and training of future leaders" and both expect their leaders "to be role models" (5). When comparing the two perspectives, Grahn et al. (2001) state that "the greatest difference in values... is the individualism" (5). Aboriginal views of leadership value a connection with one's culture, one's history, and with one's community, whereas non-Aboriginal views of leadership do not stress communal aspects to such an extent. In the AFL, Elders' involvement varies from community to community. Nevertheless, we suggest that increased interaction between Elders and youth would help strengthen or re-establish cultural connections and relationship connections. The increased inclusion of Elders in the AFL program has been recommended in various year-end synopses written by youth workers and appears to hold promise for the development of a stronger, more culturally-appropriate program with more culturally-aware leaders (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Reports, 1999, 2000, 2001).

Inclusive Programming

Another important point of consideration in Aboriginal youth and community programming is the inclusion of the opinions of those for whom the program is being run. Checkoway (2003) discusses the benefits of having youth organize meetings, develop initiatives, and fulfilling their role in teamwork. The youth gain first hand experience in programming while also improving their skills in organization, problem solving, communication, and teamwork. It could also be said that inclusion is an important part of Aboriginal views of leadership. The importance of the people to the leader is evident in the way the leader leads. Serving the people, informing the people, and including the people in decision making are evidence of the importance of the people to the leader (Jules,

1999).

It is also important to consider the colonial legacy of having Euro-Canadian values and programs thrust upon Aboriginal peoples. This process has been detrimental to Aboriginal cultures and has had negative impacts on Aboriginal youth. Therefore, to improve the development of Aboriginal youth, it is important to move away from prescribed programs and move towards an inclusive programming model that is built on Aboriginal cultures and values. While, as mentioned above, the AFL works with communities on individual bases and communities have input into summer programming, it can be difficult for recreation programmers, particularly young adults, to work outside of the Euro-Canadian recreation paradigm that they are taught and which with they have a great deal of experience, be they Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Thus, while the AFL's week of training provides a valuable service to AFL workers, the lack of exposure to non-mainstream ways of facilitating recreation programming needs to feature more prominently in recreation facilitators' education outside of the AFL (e.g., in universities and colleges).

Having community members active within the AFL makes an important contribution to the program. As London et al. state, "communities that are actively engaged in dialogue with youth are more likely to obtain positive responses from youth" (2003: 36). Although the youth workers are imported into the communities, having community members participate in the selection youth leaders that have shown leadership potential from within the community is important for the community at large. As stated earlier, Aboriginal leadership has been shown to value community, as decision-sharing and consensus among community members is integral to Aboriginal leadership (Jules, 1999). Involving the community in the design, planning, and practice of programs are all beneficial for youth and their community and help to promote the possibility of culturally relevant programming. This, however, necessitates that the imported, often Euro-Canadian youth workers let go of their preconceptions about their own perceived expertise in sport, recreation and the arts and instead rely on the privileging of local knowledge and practices. In the past, Euro-Canadians have proven to be rather poor at respecting Aboriginal ways of being and, as such, this aspect of the AFL program may pose the greatest challenges for its non-Aboriginal youth workers. Notably, however, the AFL's week long training and orientation sessions prior to the youth workers entering the communities with which they will work helps to prepare youth workers for this challenge.

Importing Ideals?

One might argue that importing youth workers from outside of the communities with which the AFL works contradicts the program's community focus, as this practice might be seen as suggesting that there are no candidates from the community that are up to the leadership standard. While the entirety of the AFL Program's hiring process is beyond the scope of this paper and we appreciate the difficulties associated with hiring processes, we suggest that the program would only be strengthened if it hired more youth workers who already live in the communities and that are already familiar with the experiences and challenges faced by the rural, Aboriginal youth. Perhaps there are unidentified skills that are required to have success in a rural location, a skill set that outsiders may not possess, or may not be gained through formal education? It seems contradictory to the goals of community development to import youth workers from outside of the community. Although the youth workers are willing and capable of providing recreation services, the program may be that much stronger if it could provide youth workers from within the communities it serves.

While there are shortcomings and perhaps contradictions to hiring non-local youth workers, there are, nevertheless, also important benefits that can be derived from bringing in external expertise, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal and from other communities, as it can enhance the learning experience for both the youth mentor and the community. As previously stated, community development can be facilitated through an outside source (Pedlar, 1996). It can be important to include an outside source, not to impose his or her views on the community, but to encourage learning through the exchange of ideas. By coming into contact with knowledgeable others through various recreation pursuits, sharing stories of experiences, values and opinions, one can learn about program alternatives, about other cultures, and even about one's own culture.

Another benefit of importing youth workers from outside of the communities is that the outsiders are separate from the community's politics. An outside source can provide a new and unique perspective that is (relatively) free of the political, often family-based biases that exist in some small communities, where each party has its own agenda that it would like to make a priority. An outside youth worker, with the assistance of knowledgeable community members, may be able to sift through agendas and make decisions based on what is best for the entire community, not just a select portion of it.

While there may be benefits to having a non-Aboriginal youth worker, one must be cautious and aware of a Euro-Canadian influence. As men-

tioned earlier, Euro-Canadian sport system, with its emphasis on winning, has arguably led to problems for Aboriginal youth including alcoholism, violence, and suicide (Condon, 1995). These problems can be viewed as effects of acculturation, which is the learning of the culture of an encroaching society (Condon, 1995). It is thus important to note that there may be very real differences between programs that might benefit Aboriginal youth living in remote and rural communities and those that might benefit non-Aboriginal or even Aboriginal youth living in urban centres; thus, programming needs to not only be culturally specific, but also specific to each community and its unique set of circumstances. Those who reside within the communities in which programming is being developed are likely best able to identify their own needs and their ensuing goals and desires, and this is something that the AFL recognizes.

Programming

Each community that is involved with the AFL receives funding in order to cover the costs of the youth workers' salaries and housing, as well as program expenses. Though the bulk of activities occur within the communities in order to enhance sustainable, community-based practices, AFL youth workers frequently take the children with whom they are working to major events and attractions found outside of the communities in which the youth live (e.g., West Edmonton Mall, Klondike Days) and thus enable youth to experience activities to which they have not been previously exposed. For example, one youth worker reported,

the youth have been able to identify skills and interests that they have because of their exposure to new activities. It is through this identification of talents that the youth can begin to develop self-esteem and feel as though they have positive qualities that they can contribute to their community. (Alberta's Future Leaders Final Report, 2002: 23)

While it certainly may be true that youth can gain self-esteem through participation in new activities, that the youth may never before have had the opportunity to participate in these activities, and that these events may give the youth a welcome break from their often difficult lives on-reserve, the practice of taking youth to major attractions and events reinforces the idea that quality recreation does not happen in remote and rural Aboriginal communities and is instead best facilitated by going to the bright lights of the big city. The sustainability of this sort of programming is questionable, as is the benefit. Instead, we suggest that using resources to develop resources, both in terms of infrastructure and human resources, within AFL communities may be a better way to

ensure that communities are prepared to take over recreation programming when the AFL's youth leaders and funding leave the community once the program's three year mandate is over.

Role Modeling

Role modeling and mentoring are very delicate issues, especially when they involve different cultures. For purposes of this paper, the terms mentoring and role-modeling are used interchangeably. Mentoring can be very beneficial when a mentor "helps a person become what that person aspires to be" (Appelbaum, Ritchie, & Shapiro, 1994: 62). The delicacy of mentoring is that a mentor does not want to impose his or her views on the person being mentored, yet a mentor wants to be involved in such a way as to be a positive influence and an advisor. When it comes to cross-cultural mentoring, a mentor must be very careful not to suggest that the mentored individual become exactly like the mentor, thus promoting a form of cultural superiority. Mentoring should also not be forced. Appelbaum et al. (1994) suggest that "forced pairing violates the true spirit of mentoring" (63). A mentoring relationship should develop through a shared interest on an informal basis. If both parties feel compelled to further the relationship then a mentoring relationship can develop. The mentor should feel that the person being mentored ought to find his or her own values, ideas, and expectations with some guidance along the way.

We are not suggesting that the AFL program forces mentorship; however, the program cannot expect to have a high rate of success with mentoring relationships that develop by simply sending in a youth worker to a community and by identifying youth leaders who may feel no connection to the youth workers whatsoever. Further, the history of exploitative colonialism may make a mentor/mentored relationship more difficult when a Euro-Canadian youth worker mentors an Aboriginal youth leader. In addition, formal mentoring relationships also have not been found to give the same level of satisfaction as informal mentorship relationships (Appelbaum et al., 1994). Though the program may be sending seemingly very positive, willing, and highly qualified youth workers to the communities, the dynamics of mentoring do not allow for the youth workers' immediate reception as a role model. Therefore, if a mentoring relationship is established, an informal approach, such as casual conversations at the beginning of the mentoring process, should be followed to maximize the likelihood of success for both parties. While an informal approach is used to start most mentorship relationships, we further suggest that employing youth workers who live in the communities in which the program operates would allow for previously estab-

lished mentoring relationships to be strengthened, thus providing even better opportunities for successful, culturally appropriate youth, community and leadership development.

Community Development

How does the AFL as a community development initiative match up with other models of community development? By providing youth workers to the communities, the AFL hopes to educate and motivate, through a mentoring relationship, the future leaders of the community to continue to develop recreation programming in order to provide healthy alternatives to violence, crime, and self-destructive behaviours. Education and motivation, which the AFL provides, tie in with establishing community development because effective knowledge transfer requires that knowledge is passed on to those who will maintain and improve recreation programs.

Nevertheless, community development goes beyond mere education; the next step in the community development process involves building a sense of citizenship, which involves the development of feelings that are tied to making a contribution to others and feeling like a good citizen. While the AFL is providing recreation programming to the communities, the hope is that community members will also have the opportunity to contribute something to this process. This contribution can be made in various ways, from volunteering to simply attending the programs. Either way, what is important is that community members take advantage of the opportunity to invest in relationships within the community. Involving residents in the development of the community also helps to solidify democratic action and contributes to one's awareness of issues that are affecting the community. When one is aware of the issues that are affecting one's community, action on these issues is far more likely to occur because one is better able to make informed decisions. Also, through citizens'—and especially youth—involvement, means of sustainability and growth are able to be found because community residents are able to do collectively what they would be unable to do alone. In the end, it is the sense of citizenship that will ensure that the gains made through the AFL continue once the program has finished its mandate in each community.

Conclusion

The AFL Program has shown great strength in partnering with Aboriginal communities to create youth, community, and leadership development. Of particular note are the ways in which the AFL builds networks of support throughout the Province of Alberta and develops part-

nerships with community members to facilitate their involvement in all parts of the AFL Program. The most prominent weakness found within the AFL Program's approach is the ways in which there are limited opportunities for Elders to make meaningful contributions, its reliance on non-Aboriginal, non-local youth workers, and the practice of taking youth on trips to attractions in major cities rather than investing in local infrastructure (e.g., equipment) that will support future community-based programming. In addition, greater attention needs to be given to incorporating Aboriginal values, particularly pertaining to leadership, into youth and community development initiatives. With these changes, the program will continue gain strength and momentum.

In terms of future research, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews with community members, youth workers, youth mentors, and AFL coordinators. Information gathered from these interviews would allow for broader, more in-depth examinations of the challenges and promising practices that we have discussed throughout this paper.

Despite some shortcomings, it should be noted that the AFL Program and its youth workers make significant differences in the lives of those with whom they work. A youth worker writes, "in a community where there are so many problems, there seemed to be so much hope for the youth when given an opportunity to shine" achieved through "the spirit of the program, and the goals it sets forth" (Alberta's Future Leaders Executive Final Report, 2005: 27). The AFL is what might be described as a "modest intervention" (Benard, 1992: 3); it alone will not solve the underlying problems of social injustice. Issues of racism, suicide, poverty, violence lie within the social structure of society, and must be dealt with in and through areas in addition to sports and recreation. While the full resolution of such issues remains beyond the AFL's grasp, the program is certainly a step in the right direction and further program refinements will help the AFL Program to meet its full future potential.

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