

**ABORIGINAL JUSTICE INQUIRY –
CHILD WELFARE INITIATIVE**

**SUMMARY REPORT ON THE
AJI-CWI PHASE 3
PUBLIC FEEDBACK PROCESS**

January 2002





**MANITOBA
METIS
FEDERATION**



**ASSEMBLY
OF MANITOBA
CHIEFS**



**MANITOBA
KEEWATINOWI
OKIMAKANAK**



A JOINT RESPONSE FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In September of 2001, the Executive Committee of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry - Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) invited Manitobans to participate in a public feedback process to discuss changes being proposed to improve Manitoba's child and family services system. The attached report provides a summary of the key themes that emerged from this feedback process.

Over 1,000 individuals accepted our invitation by attending the town hall or focus group sessions, or by sending us their thoughts in writing. We would like to extend our thanks to all of these people.

As the report states, widespread support was expressed for the overall vision for a restructured child and family services system, including the recognition of the right of First Nation and Metis peoples to develop and control their own child and family services province-wide. This support is very encouraging. It confirms that the changes proposed are not only historic but also essential steps in developing a system that is more responsive to the needs of children, families and communities throughout the province.

As well, individuals and organizations offered suggestions on measures to enhance the proposed changes. Careful consideration is being given to these suggestions in the detailed planning activities now underway.

The Executive Committee would like to announce a revision to the timelines for the restructuring initiative. The *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* document stated that the Detailed Implementation Plan would be completed by December 31, 2001 (the end of Phase 3). A three-month extension has been approved for Phase 3 with the Detailed Implementation Plan now expected to be completed by the end of March, 2002. We are aware of the need to proceed with caution and further revisions to the timelines for the work of AJI-CWI will be considered at a later date should they be required.

We again extend our sincere appreciation to those who shared their insights and experiences through their feedback on the proposed changes.

Each of our parties has prepared their own statement in response to the public feedback process, which can be found immediately following this joint statement.

Minister Tim Sale
Family Services and Housing

Minister Eric Robinson
Aboriginal and Northern Affairs

President David Chartrand
Manitoba Metis Federation

John Fleury
Manitoba Metis Federation

Grand Chief Dennis White Bird
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

Grand Chief Francis Flett
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GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT CHARTRAND

It is with pride and pleasure that the Manitoba Metis Federation with our partners in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative have arrived at the end of Phase 3 of this process. It is my belief that we are entering Phase 4 with more knowledge and wisdom, thanks to the many people who took the time to share with us their thoughts, concerns and support during the public feedback process.

During the month of September we listened to many people from throughout our Metis communities and we addressed their many questions and concerns. The issues that were raised during the town hall and focus group sessions are issues that the Manitoba Metis Federation and our partners have spent a great deal of time discussing. As we continue to work towards our goal of a restructured child and family services system, we will not forget the voices that we heard and we will find resolutions to the issues that are near to the hearts of the people of Manitoba.

On behalf of the Manitoba Metis Federation, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all Manitobans who participated in the public feedback process. I would especially like to thank the Metis parents and caregivers who have given a voice to our children. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my most sincere appreciation to the Province of Manitoba for pursuing this vision with the Manitoba Metis Federation and our First Nation partners.

Once again, we will continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to finalize the vision that will be realized. We will do everything in our power to ensure that the future of our children will be one filled with hope.

Meeqwetch,

President David Chartrand

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A MESSAGE FROM GRAND CHIEF DENNIS WHITE BIRD (January 2002)

GREETINGS

In September 2001, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs along with the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, Manitoba Metis Federation and the Province of Manitoba participated in a Province-wide consultation. The purpose was to generate dialogue among our Manitoba First Nation and other Provincial citizens on a new vision for child and family services in Manitoba as stated in the *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* document.

I am pleased to say that this consultation has proven to be both successful and invaluable. It will provide an excellent foundation to ensure that the major common themes are addressed in the Detailed Implementation Plan scheduled to be complete by March 31, 2002. Your feedback will also be instrumental in the design of a restructured child and family services system that better addresses the needs of children and families in Manitoba based on their cultural, linguistic and socio-economic needs.

First Nations have experienced far too much destruction within our family units and communities resulting from the profound effects of government assimilative-based policies that tore families apart. I am encouraged that Manitobans and the NDP provincial government have demonstrated empathy towards the hardships experienced by First Nation children and families and have thus shown support to move forward and make changes within the current child welfare system.

I am especially encouraged to have heard from our young people involved in the system and adult graduates of the system. The vast majority of these participants identified that the proposed changes to the system are positive and "long overdue" particularly as it relates to cultural relevance.

The grassroots feedback process is essential to First Nation leaders. In reflecting on the colonization experience, a participant blatantly stated at the Winnipeg Town Hall on September 20, 2001:

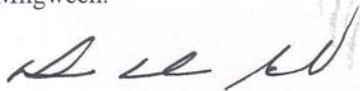
"We need to go back to our own people to find answers and help our people start healing".

I was also pleased to hear from First Nations' and other women share their aspirations and feedback on the proposed changes. Women are traditionally seen as "community caregivers" and "leaders". I respect your feedback and will continue to support and ensure that your "voices" are heard. You are the main caregivers of children, and therefore, deserve meaningful input into the process.

We are aware that the AJI-CWI process has thus far been seen as an ambitious strategy. I would like to reassure you, however, that the partners involved are proceeding in a detailed manner ensuring that the entire community is involved.

Once again I applaud all your efforts and support in working towards a better life for our children.

Miigwech.



Dennis White Bird
Grand Chief



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A RESPONSE TO THE AJI-CWI PUBLIC FEEDBACK REPORT:

GRAND CHIEF FRANCIS FLETT

In July 2001, as a party to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry - Child Welfare Initiative, the Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO), representing 27 First Nations in northern Manitoba, announced its support to take forward for public review the proposed changes to the child and family services system in Manitoba, as outlined in the vision document, *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*.

Based on the public feedback process, which included town halls, focus groups and written submissions, a number of key themes were identified. As well, some members of the public expressed concern regarding specific issues related to the proposed changes. In particular, it was indicated that there is a need for greater inclusion or involvement of community members, and that more attention be given to improving existing service models.

In response to the need for greater community involvement, MKO will continue its current practice of conducting information sessions at the local level upon request with members of the 27 MKO First Nations, affiliated child and family services agencies and tribal councils. In doing so, we will strive to incorporate the values and beliefs of our members throughout Manitoba. In particular, close attention will be paid to the perspectives held by elders, women, youth and foster families in communities.

In response to the concern that more attention be focused on changing existing service models, during the planning and implementation phases, MKO representatives will continue to collaborate with First Nation child and family service agencies to ensure that a holistic, preventive approach is taken in service delivery that effectively meets the needs of Manitobans.

On behalf of the MKO Chiefs, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of those individuals who participated in the feedback process. You have played an active role in shaping the development of the AJI-CWI. Your opinions and recommendations will be given careful consideration in the planning and implementation stages of this initiative.

Sincerely,

MKO Grand Chief Francis Flett

"For as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow"



**MINISTER OF
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MESSAGE FROM MINISTERS SALE AND ROBINSON

The 1991 Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) recommended that major changes be made to the child and family services system in Manitoba. The AJI's recommendations focused on the need for a system that respects the rights of First Nations and Metis people to govern and deliver child and family services for their families and communities throughout the entire province.

Upon its election in 1999, our government created the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission to examine the report and to make recommendations to government about priority areas for implementation. The Commission prioritized the child and family services area for immediate action.

The historic task of addressing these recommendations is now well underway through the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI). The public feedback process, completed in September 2001, represented an important milestone. Through the process, we were able to describe our vision for a very different child and family services system and to engage Manitobans in a public review of this vision.

We extend our sincere appreciation to those who made the time to participate in the public feedback process. The views shared through this process were thoughtful and constructive, and are helping guide the development of an overall implementation plan.

Sincerely,

Minister Tim Sale
Manitoba Family Services and Housing

Minister Eric Robinson
Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern
Affairs



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change was publicly released by the Executive Committee¹ of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) at a media conference on August 9, 2001. The 34-page booklet set out a vision for a restructured child and family services system in Manitoba. This vision had been jointly developed over the preceding 12 months by the parties to the AJI-CWI, with assistance from many agencies and individuals who share a commitment to the well-being of children, families and communities.

The media conference also launched a public feedback process through which the Executive Committee encouraged all Manitobans to participate in a public review of *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* and the vision it described. The feedback process continued over a seven-week period ending September 30, 2001. The process provided the public with a range of ways to learn more about the work of the AJI-CWI and its vision for a restructured child and family services system, as well as to share their comments and feedback on the changes being proposed.

This report presents an overview of this feedback process and a summary of the feedback received from the public.² The body of the report is divided into two sections. The section that follows this *Introduction* provides a description of the feedback process, including its objectives and the major activities that were undertaken as part of it. The concluding section discusses key themes that emerged from the feedback received.

¹ The Executive Committee is comprised of leaders of the parties to the AJI-CWI: the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF), the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO), and the Province of Manitoba.

² This report provides a summary of key themes based on the views expressed by participants during the public feedback process. The report does not attempt to assess the validity of any of the views expressed, nor does it incorporate the responses from representatives of the parties to the AJI-CWI to questions posed or concerns voiced during feedback activities (e.g., remarks made by panel members at the town hall meetings).

2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

As with all other aspects of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI), the public feedback process was jointly planned and implemented by the four parties to the Initiative. This section of the report provides an overview of the objectives of the feedback process and the activities undertaken to achieve them. The section concludes with a brief assessment of the effectiveness of the overall feedback process.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The two objectives of the public feedback process were to:

1. provide those without formal representation on the AJI-CWI with the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed changes to the child and family services system; and
2. identify perceived strengths, limitations and gaps related to the changes which were being proposed to the child and family services system.

The feedback process commenced at the beginning of Phase 3 of the AJI-CWI (see Figure 1 for an overview of phases), a few weeks after the Executive Committee had expressed its support for the *Conceptual Plan*. The *Conceptual Plan* is a detailed planning document prepared through the AJI-CWI during Phase 2 that describes the major changes proposed to child and family services system.

The September 30, 2001 end date set for the feedback process was established to ensure that the feedback received from the public could be incorporated into a detailed planning process being carried out through to the end of Phase 3

While the feedback process was designed to be inclusive, it was not meant to replicate the extensive consultations on related issues that had been undertaken by the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (commonly referred to as the AJI). The AJI was commissioned by the Province of Manitoba in 1988 to examine the relationship between the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba and the justice system, and included an

examination of the historical treatment of Aboriginal people by the child and family services system.

Figure 1
AJI-CWI Phases

Phase 1: Working Groups struck to develop proposals and recommendations for the draft plan.

Phase 2: Implementation Committee prepares consolidated a draft conceptual plan based on Working Groups proposals and recommendations to be submitted to the Executive Committee.

Phase 3: Public feedback process on the proposed changes to be undertaken, detailed implementation plan to be developed and, after endorsement of the plan by the Executive Committee, initial changes to begin.

Phase 4: Plan substantially implemented during this phase.

Phase 5: Stabilization during this phase of changes implemented in Phase 4

Included among the AJI's many activities were 72 days of public hearings in more than 45 communities across Manitoba undertaken in 1988 and 1989. The findings and recommendations from the 1991 Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba have served as the foundation upon which the AJI-CWI was established and the subsequent *Conceptual Plan* developed.

2.2 ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

As described in the *Introduction*, the feedback process incorporated a range of ways for the public to learn more about the work of the AJI-CWI and its vision for a restructured child and family services system, as well as to share their comments and feedback on the proposed changes. These are briefly described below.

2.2.1 *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*

One of the early activities undertaken to support the public feedback process was the development of print material for public distribution on the proposed changes. Though the *Conceptual Plan* was used as the reference for the preparation of this print material, it had been developed as a planning document and was seen as being too long and technical to serve as the public document for the feedback process.

The 34-page *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* booklet and a brochure (which provided a brief overview of information in the booklet) were developed as the primary AJI-CWI public documents. The design of the booklet and the brochure emphasized the use of plain language and graphics, and an accessible layout. English and French language versions of both documents were produced.

Over 8,000 copies of *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* and 15,000 copies of the brochure were printed and distributed throughout the province during the public feedback process.

2.2.2 TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Twelve town hall meetings were held across the province as part of the public feedback process. The selection of communities for the meetings was based on several criteria (see Table 1 for a list communities selected). These criteria included selecting:

- ❖ at least one community per region;
- ❖ communities with large resident and nearby populations;
- ❖ both on- and off-reserve communities; and
- ❖ urban, rural and remote communities.

Table 1
Time Hall Meeting Locations, Dates, Times and Attendance

Community(ies)	Date	Time	Attendance
Brandon	Sept. 12	Evening	60
Churchill	Sept. 9	Evening	11
Cross Lake First Nation/Cross Lake	Sept. 25	Afternoon	30
Garden Hill First Nation/Garden Hill	Sept. 26	Afternoon	50
Opaskwayak Cree Nation/The Pas	Sept. 11	Evening	23
Pinaymootang First Nation/Fairford	Sept. 10	Evening	65
Portage la Prairie	Sept. 11	Evening	65
Sagkeeng First Nation / Pine Falls	Sept. 17	Evening	100
St. Boniface ³	Sept. 19	Evening	75
Swan River	Sept. 13	Evening	65
Thompson	Sept. 10	Evening	60
Winnipeg	Sept. 20	Evening	250

The town hall meetings were facilitated by independent, impartial moderators. While the formats for town hall meetings varied, each meeting included:

- ❖ a welcome;
- ❖ opening and closing prayers offered by a local Elder;
- ❖ an overview presentation on the changes being proposed to the child and family services system;
- ❖ a question and answer period; and
- ❖ a period for presentations by persons in attendance.

Each town hall meeting included participation by a panel of representatives from the parties to the AJI-CWI. On behalf of their respective parties, panel members provided introductory remarks, answered questions, and listened to the opinions and views shared by those attending the meeting.

³ The town hall meeting in St. Boniface was the only designated French language meeting. All other meetings were conducted in English with the exception of the meeting in Garden Hill First Nation/Garden Hill, which was conducted in both English and Oji-Cree.

A range of measures were in place to support public participation at the meetings. These included the availability of child care supports, Aboriginal language interpretation, and food and beverages.

As indicated in Table 1, it is estimated that over 850 individuals attended the town hall meetings. In total, they offered 150 recommendations and viewpoints related to the changes being proposed to the child and family services system.

2.2.3 FOCUS GROUPS

A series of 15 focus group sessions were organized as part of the public feedback process.⁴ The purposes of the focus groups were to supplement the feedback received through other activities and to secure feedback from selected stakeholder groups which would be affected by the proposed changes. These stakeholder groups were:

- ❖ teens currently in care of the children and family services system;
- ❖ young adults who had been in care of the child and family services system as children;
- ❖ families of children currently in care of the child and family services system;
- ❖ foster families; and
- ❖ organizations representing women and/or serving at-risk women as a primary target population.

The locations for the focus group sessions were selected so as to ensure that participants came from a mix of large urban, smaller urban and rural communities, and to provide regional diversity. The locations and numbers of focus group sessions held are presented in Table 2 (on the following page).

Planning for the operation of the focus group sessions was undertaken in conjunction with the independent, external consultants who were retained to facilitate the sessions and to prepare reports on the discussions that took place. Ms. Lesley Lindberg of Lindberg Consulting

⁴ An additional focus group session originally planned to take place in Norway House with teens in care was cancelled due to recruiting difficulties.

was retained to facilitate and report on the sessions with the women's organizations. Mr. Corbin Shangreaux of Spotted Eagle Consulting was retained to facilitate and report on the other sessions.

Table 2
Number of Focus Group Sessions by Location and Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Dau-phin	Norway House	The Pas	Thomp-son	Winnipeg
Teens in care	1	0	0	0	1
Adult graduates	1	1	0	0	1
Families of children in care	1	1	0	0	1
Foster families	1	1	0	0	1
Women's organizations	1	0	1	1	1

The methods used to recruit participants for the focus groups varied among the stakeholder groups. Representatives from women's organizations were directly recruited by the AJI-CWI's Communication Committee. Adult graduates of the system were largely recruited through community contacts and community-based organizations. In conjunction with the Communication Committee, child and family services agencies recruited participants from the remaining stakeholder groups.

Wherever possible, strategies were used to recruit participants who, as a group, reflected the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal composition of their respective stakeholder group within the child and family services system. For example, the majority of the youth who participated in the sessions for teens in care were from an Aboriginal background. In contrast, the majority of foster parents who participated were from non-Aboriginal backgrounds.

As with the town hall meetings, measures were taken to support participation in the focus groups. Except for those who participated in the sessions with women's organizations, all participants received a \$50 honorarium in recognition of their contribution. All participants were also compensated for out-of-pocket expenses related to their participation (e.g., travel, child care). Food and beverages were available at the sessions.

A total of 156 individuals participated in the focus group sessions.

2.2.4 CENTRAL INFORMATION LINE

A telephone-based central information line operated throughout the public feedback process. A message menu system was established which allowed callers to listen to instructions in English or French and to leave messages requesting either copies of written documents and/or information on any other aspect of the AJI-CWI or the feedback process. A toll-free number was available for callers from outside Winnipeg.

A total of 201 callers left messages on the central information line during the period of the public feedback process. While most callers left a single purpose message, five individuals left messages relating to two areas of interest. As Table 3 indicates, the vast majority of messages left were requests for information on the AJI-CWI.

TABLE 3
Purpose of Messages left on the Central Information Line

Purpose of Message	Number	%
Request for written materials on the AJI-CWI	103	50.0%
Request for details about the town hall and other meetings	63	30.6%
Request to register to make a presentation at town hall meetings	23	11.2%
Request for private meetings regarding the AJI-CWI	5	2.4%
Request for child care during the meetings	4	1.9%
Request for information about languages in which print material was available	3	1.5%
Express concern about what will occur to children and staff during the changes	3	1.5%
Offer assistance in arranging town hall meetings	1	0.5%
Request for information about employment/training opportunities in the restructured system	1	0.5%
Total	206	100.0%

A service standard of responding to messages within two working days was set and maintained for the central information line during the feedback process.

2.2.5 WEB PAGE

A major redesign was undertaken of the AJI-CWI web site (www.aji-cwi-mb.ca) in conjunction with the public feedback process and went live on August 9, 2001 (the day of the media conference). The redesign included modified navigation for all material that had already been posted on the site. The redesign also provided the following enhancements:

- ❖ the posting of background material on Phase 3;
- ❖ the posting of electronic versions of the *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* booklet and brochure;
- ❖ the introduction of a feedback page through which visitors could submit comments and feedback; and
- ❖ the development of a French language version of the site containing the same information related to Phase 3 posted on the English site.

Tracking of visits to the web site indicate a steady increase in volume, as measured by the number of hits⁵, through to July 2001 and then a marked increase in August 2001. The number of hits during September and October fell to just over twice the traffic on the site in July (see Table 4).

Table 4
Number of Hits by Month

Month	Hits
April 2001	622
May 2001	945
June 2001	1,201
July 2001	1,309
August 2001	13,446
September 2001	2,916
October 2001	2,854

Only four visitors made use of the site's feedback page during the feedback process.

⁵ Hits measure the number of times any page on the site is visited during a month, not the number of overall visits to the site nor the number of discrete visitors. This information is not available.

2.2.6 WRITTEN SUBMISSION

One final way the public could provide feedback on the proposed changes was to submit written comments by mail or by e-mail. Twenty-five submissions were received by the AJI-CWI over the course of the public feedback process. Most of the submissions received were requests for information or copies of comments sent to support presentations that had been made at the town hall meetings. Only 11 were submissions with substantive feedback that had not already been provided through other methods.

2.2.7 PROMOTION

Significant efforts were made to promote awareness of the public feedback process and to invite public participation. These efforts included:

- ❖ the media conference on August 9, 2001, held to release the *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* booklet and brochure and to launch the public feedback process;
- ❖ the mailing of one copy of the booklet and multiple copies of the brochure to over 2,000 collateral agencies in the week following the media conference, along with a covering letter and a poster promoting awareness of the feedback process;
- ❖ the distribution of the *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* booklet and brochure by child and family services agencies and regional health authorities;
- ❖ the postering, by local youth groups and/or agencies, of local communities where town meetings were being held with posters advertising dates, times and locations;
- ❖ the placement of paid advertisements and public service announcements in print and electronic media serving provincial, regional and local catchment areas;
- ❖ the inclusion of information on the feedback process in materials prepared by cooperating agencies for distribution to their own constituents.

Cross-promotional strategies were also used. For example, the AJI-CWI web site included the locations and times of the town hall meetings, as well as information on how to contact the AJI-CWI. As a second example, all print material included the telephone numbers for the central information line, the URL address for the AJI-CWI web site, and the AJI-CWI e-mail address.

Finally, each of the parties to the AJI-CWI implemented their own activities to promote awareness of and participation in the public feedback process.

2.3 AN OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The effectiveness of the public feedback process depended on the extent to which planning and implementation could address major challenges posed by:

- ❖ the relatively short period of time between the official launch of the feedback process and its end date;
- ❖ the timing of the feedback process which began in the last month of summer and continued through the busy month of September;
- ❖ the geographically diverse nature of Manitoba's population and of the many groups who would be affected by the proposed changes;
- ❖ the hard-to-reach characteristics of at-risk populations who are involved with and/or most likely to require assistance from the child and family services system; and
- ❖ the tragic events of September 11, 2001, which occupied public and media attention during the latter stages of the feedback process.

While the process was designed to address each of these challenges, with the exception of the last one, it is difficult to definitively assess its effectiveness. For example, it is not possible to determine the level of public awareness of the feedback process achieved. Nor is it possible to estimate the number of individuals who did not provide feedback because they were unaware of the opportunity.

What is clear, however, is that over 1,000 individuals took the time required to either attend one of the town hall meetings or to participate in one of the focus groups. It is also clear that these 1,000 individuals represented a broad cross-section of Manitobans with personal and/or professional interests in the development of a more responsive child and family services system.

In sum, the feedback process was effective in so far as it provided the Executive Committee and others involved in the AJI-CWI with a chance to hear from a large number of Manitobans about how they feel about the changes being proposed by the Initiative.

The key themes from this feedback are presented in the next section.

3.0 KEY THEMES FROM THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

Extensive feedback was received from the public on the proposed changes to the child and family services system. This section presents the key themes from this feedback, with a focus on the viewpoints which have significant implications for the detailed planning being undertaken during the remainder of Phase 3.

3.1 METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The identification of key themes among the hundreds of comments and recommendations received from the public was a challenging task. The following provides a brief overview of the three-step methodology which was applied to the task.

Step One: Development of Component Summaries:

Individual reports were prepared for each of the activities through which feedback was provided by the public. These reports included considerable detail on the recommendations made and viewpoints expressed.

Town Hall Meetings

Draft reports were developed for each town hall meeting. These were revised into final versions based on feedback from reviews undertaken by the AJI-CWI's Communications Committee. The meeting-specific reports were then synthesized into an overall summary report covering all 12 town hall meetings.

Focus Groups

In the case of the focus groups, the consultants prepared draft reports on the focus groups. These were revised into final summaries by the consultants based on feedback from the Communications Committee.

Other Methods

A draft summary report was prepared covering the feedback received from the public via the central information line and written submissions. This report was revised into a final summary

report based on feedback from reviews undertaken by Communications Committee and Implementation Committee.

Step Two: Categorization of All Recommendations and Viewpoints

A comprehensive list was developed of the recommendations and viewpoints cited in the component reports. Each entry on the list included its source. Each entry was then categorized by the topic from the *Conceptual Plan* to which it most closely related. The comprehensive list was then sorted by these topics.

Step Three: Identification of Key Themes

Using the comprehensive list as a base, the Communications Committee identified key themes over the course of two meetings. A set of common criteria was agreed upon for use in identifying the themes. It was agreed that key themes should relate to foundational elements of the proposed changes, rather than to less significant details. It was also agreed that key themes were those which:

1. had been expressed widely through the feedback process;
or
2. had been expressed strongly by a minority of participants, particularly when the minority represented a significant stakeholder group; or
3. represented sharply divided opinion among participants in the feedback process.

Each member of the Communications Committee identified themes they felt met these criteria. Each of the potential themes were discussed by the group with a final listing of key themes developed based on consensus among all members.

As with any methodology, this one had both strengths and weaknesses. Its major strength was that it provided a relatively easily understood and applied process for a group to use in processing hundreds of recommendations and identifying the key themes.

Its major weaknesses were two-fold. First, it filtered out recommendations which may be important but which were made by a limited number of participants. Second, it filtered out recommendations

which may be important, but do not relate to foundational elements of the proposed changes.

3.2 KEY THEMES

The key themes described below have been organized based on proposed changes as they appear in chapters from the *Conceptual Plan*. It is hoped that this approach will assist decision-makers in considering the implications of the key themes for possible revisions or adjustments to the overall set of proposed changes to the child and family services system.

3.2.1 THE OVERALL AJI-CWI

Feedback related to the overall AJI-CWI focussed on two elements: the stated goals of the Initiative; and the AJI-CWI's phases and time lines. The key themes related to these elements are presented below.

○ AJI-CWI's Goals

The major theme from feedback on this element is the strong and widespread support that exists for each of the three major goals of the Initiative. As these appear in the *Conceptual Plan* and *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*, the goals are to:

- ❖ recognize a province-wide First Nations right and authority by extending and expanding off-reserve jurisdiction for First Nations;
- ❖ recognize a province-wide Metis right and authority; and
- ❖ restructure the existing child and family services system through legislative and other changes.

The essence of this support was captured in the comments from a member from one of the focus groups who said, "It's about time." Several participants offered congratulations to the parties to the AJI-CWI for taking the initiative to recognize the rights and authorities of First Nations and Metis peoples over child and family services, as well as for having worked together over the past year toward this

end. Endorsement of the goals also reflected near unanimous support for the provision of culturally appropriate services.

While supporting these three stated goals, strong opinions were voiced that they did not go far enough. Four lines of concern were expressed.

First, a concern expressed most forcefully by participants in the women's focus groups, but implied by others, is that the goals focus on structural and political change but fail to address the perceived need for "radical changes to service delivery" required for the system to become more effective and more humane. In short, changes to the power structure are seen to be only one aspect of the changes required but these are the only changes referred to in the AJI-CWI's stated goals.

Second, a minority of participants strongly expressed the view that the current goals were inadequate because they failed to address the underlying conditions that contribute to child neglect and abuse. Examples given of such conditions included poverty and substance abuse. Without addressing these factors, the restructured system will continue to be focused on responding to symptoms rather than addressing root causes.

Third, and related to the second, was a concern expressed by some participants that the goals were limited to the restructuring of the child and family services system. Individuals voicing this concern felt that an inter-sectoral approach to system reform was required. These participants called for significantly broader restructuring efforts that respond to the needs of children and families from a holistic perspective and incorporate domains related to education, health and justice.

The final area in which the goals were found to be lacking related to their failure to recognize the rights of Manitoba's Francophone community. This criticism was consistently voiced during the town hall meeting held in St. Boniface (the only French language designated meeting held during the feedback process.). While strong support was expressed at this town hall meeting for the recognition of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal political rights, the AJI-CWI's

goals were criticized for not extending this recognition to the French-speaking population. As one of the submissions stated, participants at the St. Boniface town hall felt that it was, “[a]bsolutely essential that the needs of the Francophone minority be specifically and directly addressed by the restructuring plan. . . .”

It is also important to note that a number of First Nations individuals who participated in the feedback process stressed that the AJI-CWI should not interfere with discussions and negotiations taking place within the Framework Agreement Initiative (FAI) process.

● **AJI-CWI’s Phases and Time Lines**

Two widely held and related concerns were voiced regarding the AJI-CWI’s phases and time lines. Both concerns were expressed consistently throughout the feedback process, with the notable exception of the focus groups with teens in care, adult graduates, families of children in care, and foster families.

The first related to the lack of inclusiveness in the AJI-CWI’s planning and decision-making. In short, many participants felt the phases outlined in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* failed to incorporate any meaningful role for parties external to the AJI-CWI after the completion of this public feedback process. Whereas this concern appeared to be widely held, it was expressed with a range of intensities. A range of measures were also suggested to address the concern.

A number of participants openly stated that the feedback process had not provided adequate time for the public to respond to *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*. Indeed, participants at a number of town hall meetings indicated that they had only become aware of the meeting on the day it was held. Others indicated that they had only a few days notice. These individuals tended to express their concern as a frustration without suggesting measure for redress.

Concern over the lack of inclusion in subsequent planning and implementation phases was also expressed in the women’s focus groups. It was felt that women’s role as “primary care givers, service

providers and transmitters of culture” was not acknowledged in the structure or undertakings of the AJI-CWI. Participants in these focus groups recommended that a Women’s Advisory Council be established and engaged to provide ongoing feedback and insight to the implementation team. It was recommended that the council include representation from past clients, community organization, foster parents and current staff.

Measures were called for by other participants to ensure that consultations were undertaken with many other stakeholder groups during the subsequent phases of the AJI-CWI. These stakeholder groups include but are not limited to:

- ❖ Elders,
- ❖ foster parents,
- ❖ non-Aboriginal child and family services agencies;
- ❖ urban Aboriginal communities and organizations, and
- ❖ Francophone community.

Participants also identified a number of points when further consultations were seen as being most critical. These included:

- ❖ prior to the approval of the detailed implementation plan;
- ❖ prior to the approval of the “script” to be used in the authority determination process; and
- ❖ during the drafting of new or revised legislation.

A second concern related to the AJI-CWI’s phases and time lines, expressed both directly or indirectly by participants, was that the current plans are “ambitious”, “aggressive”, and/or “not realistic.”

The indirect references to this concern were implied by the widespread call for substantially more consultative activities to be built into subsequent phases.

The participants who explicitly expressed this concern grounded their calls for a substantially longer planning and transition period in:

- ❖ the risk that the stressed, reactive nature of the current system would be recreated in the new system if restructuring occurs too quickly;

- ❖ the large number of difficult and time-consuming issues that require resolution; and
- ❖ the need to incorporate “systemic healing” into the transition to address the effects of the system’s history and past performance which were thought to have a profound and continuing effect on service delivery, as well as on attitudes among staff and community members.

3.2.2 GOVERNANCE

Feedback related to governance focussed on the overall governance model, and, to a much lesser extent, legislation, concurrent jurisdiction and the division of powers and functions in the governance model. The key themes related to these elements are presented below.

● Overall Governance Model

At a broad conceptual level, widespread support was expressed for the governance framework proposed in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*.

In general, the establishment of four Authorities was seen to reflect the goals of AJI-CWI, which also received widespread support. As one participant stated, “The plan deals well with the challenge of empowering Aboriginal communities to take charge of their own service delivery system, but to do so as part of an overall system and as significant players in that system.”

Participants in the focus groups with teens in care, adult graduates, families of children in care, and foster families provided the least comment on elements related to system governance.⁶

Many participants, however, registered concerns related to how governance would work in practice. First, some participants were concerned about the costs required to operate the governance structure. The four Authorities proposed were seen to duplicate

⁶ As reported in the summary report on these focus groups, “They preferred to leave the system redesign issue to the parties – ‘who have already made up their minds.’ They were most concerned about whether or not these changes will mean better service for Aboriginal children and families, better workers and better foster homes.”

some functions and infrastructure four times over. It was expected that this duplication would substantially increase the funding required to cover the costs of system administration. Moreover, it was feared that this increased funding would come at the expense of the funding available to provide services to children and families – those most in need and whose interests the system is meant to serve.

Second, some participants noted that the effectiveness of system governance would depend fundamentally on sustained and high levels of cooperation and collaboration among the Authorities and the parties to the AJI-CWI. Some participants expressed doubt and, in some cases, skepticism that this was likely to be achieved. The need for measures to promote cooperation is most clearly stated in the report from the women's focus groups:

“The ability to work together, nurture trust and build meaningful partnerships continue to take time, energy and resources. Vigilance must be exercised to ensure that the Authorities make every effort to work together. They must be resolute in their commitment to break down racial and cultural barriers and resist temptations to work separate and apart when there are opportunities for collaboration and partnering.”

The worst fear expressed regarding system governance was that cooperative intent would break down, leading to competition for funding, influence and clients. Such parochialism and political discord were not seen to be in the best interests of the system nor the province's children and families.

Third, some participants expressed concern over confusion that might result from having four Authorities and many more agencies having jurisdiction for child and family services in the same geographic area.

While not critical of what had been proposed, many participants also felt that the governance framework, as presented, was incomplete. The issue raised most frequently in this regard reflected the same concern that had been expressed over the lack of inclusion in the AJI-CWI's phases and time lines.

And again, this issue of lack of inclusion was raised with different levels of intensity by different groups of participants. Some participants noted that the role of community representation in governance was not cited in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*. Others noted that no role had been identified for Elders in system governance. Both were felt to be very important.

Participants in the women's focus groups felt that the design of system governance needed to structurally acknowledge the "primary role" of women. Two recommendations were made to provide for such an acknowledgement:

- ❖ agreement by all parties to a protocol ensuring an equal representation of women within the various structures governance system; and/or
- ❖ the establishment of a Women's Advisory Council reporting to the Minister, the Leadership Council or the Standing Committee.⁷

As with the participants from the women's focus groups, participants who attended the St. Boniface town hall meeting called for special measures to ensure Francophone representation in system governance structures. The specific recommendation made was that membership on the Standing Committee should include a representative of the Francophone community, as well as the French Language Services Coordinator of the Department of Family Services and Housing.

Measures to ensure accountability represent another of the key themes from the feedback process related to the governance model. Participants who voiced this concern felt that maintaining the independence of the Office of the Children's Advocate was critical and that its role should be strengthened. Participants from the North indicated that measures were also required to make the Office of the Children's Advocate more accessible to residents of this region. Other participants called for the establishment of a Family Advocacy

⁷ This council was proposed as a continuation of the same body that participants in the women's focus groups had proposed to play a consultative role during the AJI-CWI's subsequent planning and implementation phases.

Office to respond to the interests of caregivers, both birth families and foster families.

The most detailed proposal to provide for accountability was made by participants in the women's focus groups. They called for the development of a comprehensive performance measurement system that could "tell the story of how well the system is responding to needs and the degree it is able to meet its [service] objectives." Further, the participants recommended that the Provincial Auditor should be consulted on the design of this system, and that an independent, non-political evaluation body be established to play a leadership role in its implementation.

Participants from the women's focus groups also stressed the importance of protecting decision-making within the system from political interference. They indicated that safeguards against such interference were not addressed in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*.

● Legislation

There was widespread support for the drafting and eventual passage of revised or new legislation. Participants identified a number of changes that should be incorporated in the legislation, including that the legislation:

- ❖ provide legal recognition to custom adoptions;
- ❖ be written in language that is respectful and humane;
- ❖ require that children and families are informed of their rights in a timely fashion;
- ❖ have the keeping together of children and their families through prevention services as its over-riding theme;
- ❖ incorporate and reflect Aboriginal cultural values and beliefs; and
- ❖ require that French language services be provided by the general and Metis Authorities.

○ **Concurrent Jurisdiction**

The key themes from the feedback process on concurrent jurisdiction reflect those reported on the overall governance model. Participants, particularly those from small communities, stressed the need for collaboration and partnerships among Authorities and agencies. Participants also felt that special measures would be required to prevent confusion among service recipients and the public.

○ **Division of Powers**

Two divergent sets of opinions were provided on the division of powers in the governance model as these relate to establishing service standards. One set of opinions stressed the importance of province-wide standards. Commonly defined and enforced province-wide standards were seen to be vital to ensure the consistency and quality of services and service delivery in the proposed system of concurrent jurisdiction. Some participants also felt such province-wide standards would offer some protection from political interference.

The second set of opinions stressed the importance of responsiveness and flexibility among the Authorities and their agencies. Participants with these views did not advocate for the absence of province-wide standards, however, their emphasis was on ensuring these standards respected the cultural integrity of each of the Authorities and their agencies and the practical realities of the communities they serve.

3.2.3 AUTHORITY DETERMINATION

All of the feedback related to authority determination focussed on the issue of choice and its importance in the restructured system. In the context of the strong support expressed for this element, the key theme was to ensure that the system provided ‘real’ choice. In order that real choice be available, participants stressed that:

- ❖ the right to choose, the method of choice and the implications of choice be well understood by clients, staff throughout the system, and the public; and
- ❖ clients not face any undue influence in making a choice or punitive consequences inside or outside the system due to exercise of choice.

Some participants also emphasized measures needed to be taken to ensure that meaningful choice was available to marginalized women, particularly those who are isolated and/or in rural and remote communities. Such measures would need to address barriers to choice related to transportation and dependence on local authorities for the provision of basic needs.

While participants felt that choice was critical, there was support for the restructured system incorporating measures to prevent choice being exercised as a means to avoid services or service intervention.

A final key theme from the feedback process was the importance of defining "Metis" and "non-status" as these will apply to the proposed authority determination/ streaming process.

3.2.4 SERVICES

Feedback related to the services under the restructured system focussed on the Joint Intake and Response Unit (JIRU), the overall range of services, foster parents, and the transfer of services during the transition period. The key themes related to these elements are presented below.

● Joint Intake and Response Unit (JIRU)

It appears that the proposal for coordinated intake and response capabilities in the restructured system was not adequately described in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*. Most of those who commented on the JIRU sought clarification on how this unit would operate and, outside Winnipeg, how it would relate to local resources and intake staff. This suggests that considerably greater efforts will be required to support meaningful consultations on this proposed element.

Based on the available information, participants were strongly supportive of coordination for intake and initial response functions. However, concerns were voiced that initial responses through the system should be as locally-based as possible.

● Overall Range of Services

While some participants identified positive features of the services currently provided through the child and family service system, most participants indicated that a significant overhaul of service and approach were required. Some participants expressed disappointment that *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change* had provided so little information on service delivery issues and how services in the restructured system will be different.

Strong support was expressed for the service objectives proposed for the new system. Consistent with the emphasis on capacity building found in the proposed objectives, there was strong support given to a marked move away from the “reactive”, “crisis-oriented” and “adversarial” service model to one that is decidedly “more prevention-focussed”, “less threatening.” and “more community-based.” As noted in the report from the women’s focus groups:

“The system is currently failing in its ability to respond to more than emergencies and is unable, for the most part, to put any resources into prevention activities. If the [I]nitiative is to be more than lip service and have positive social impacts, there must be an increased ability to deliver or support the delivery of non-mandated prevention services.”

Though participants recognized that protection functions would continue to be a critical part of the restructured system, they felt support is what many families need but cannot get from the current system, at least not adequately.

Participants also made recommendations beyond a clear call for a stronger emphasis on prevention. Participants indicated that services should be needs-driven rather than program-driven (i.e., services should respond to the needs of clients, not force client needs into

the services which are available). A related recommendation, echoing a similar concern regarding the AJI-CWI's goals, is that services need to provide for inter-sectoral supports, rather than staying within the traditional confines of supports available through the child and family services system.

Participants, particularly those from rural areas and the North, voiced strong concern over inequities in current resources that, at great costs and with much disruption and questionable outcomes, forced clients to move from their communities in order to access needed services. These participants called for the development of locally accessible resources.

Other participants called for a greater role for both youth and birth families in service planning and decision-making.

One final area of concern related to what were felt to be longstanding and significant gaps in services that needed to be addressed in the restructured system. These gaps included:

- ❖ services for older teenagers still under the age of 18;
- ❖ transition planning and supports before and after a youth reaches the age of 18;
- ❖ supports for incarcerated women with families, particularly young mothers; and
- ❖ runaway and street “kids.”

Participants who identified these gaps felt they needed to be addressed in the planning phases for the restructured system.

● **Foster Parents**

Issues related to foster parents elicited a wide range of strongly felt views through the feedback process. One of the key themes from this feedback is that the supports currently available to foster families through the system are seriously inadequate. The overall recommendation made was that the restructured system must be more responsive and supportive of these caregivers. Specific areas for which current supports were found to be lacking included:

- ❖ training and professional development opportunities;
- ❖ access to support programs;
- ❖ access to specialized resources;
- ❖ protection from false allegations of abuse; and
- ❖ supports for providing care for special needs children.

Given the number of Aboriginal children currently in the care of non-Aboriginal foster families, participants also indicated that there was a need for much more in the way of culturally-appropriate support services.

Likewise, the financial support available to foster families was seen to be inadequate. Of particular concern were the rates currently paid to foster families in the North and those available to members of extended families.

Participants also noted the need for considerably greater efforts to recruit Aboriginal families to serve as foster families. It was felt that this should include the removal of barriers that limit the eligibility of many Aboriginal families.

Participants at the St. Boniface town hall meeting suggested similar efforts were required to recruit Francophone foster families to provide for the placement of French-speaking children.

Concerns were expressed as to how foster families would be licensed in the restructured system. The recommendation made by participants was for a coordinated or centralized approach.

Teens in care who participated in the focus groups voiced a range of concerns related to their experiences with foster family placements. Recommendations made by teens in care included:

- ❖ child and family services staff to more closely monitor foster homes, including dropping in unannounced to see how things “really are”;
- ❖ closer contact with their child and family services workers; and
- ❖ expanded independent living programs and transition services to help them enter adulthood.

● Transfer of Services

The proposed transfer of services for children currently in care of non-Aboriginal agencies generated substantial feedback. The possibility that such transfers would result in changes to the placements for children in foster care was the greatest controversy.

There was widespread consensus the paramount criterion that should inform service transfers and changes in placement had to be the best interests of the child.

There also was widespread agreement among participants that the process for service transfers had to be carefully planned and undertaken gradually. Moreover, children whose cases were being transferred were entitled to continuity of services and the best case planning possible.

The vast majority of participants agreed that Authorities and/or agencies, to which services are transferred, should have the right to change foster care placements only if this was in the best interests of a child. However, participants expressed strongly that this right must be exercised with great caution. The report on the focus groups held with stakeholder groups involved in the system captures the sentiment of many participants:

“Aboriginal children in care should not be uprooted and moved to other foster homes, just for the sake of optics or so that it appears that they are in Aboriginal foster homes. There are a number of Aboriginal children who are doing quite well in cross-cultural foster home placements, they should not be moved just for the sake of being moved. Almost all of the children in care and foster families that participated in the focus groups were of the opinion that if a child is doing well in their current placement, regardless of the fact that it might be a cross-cultural placement, then the child should remain in that foster home. If a move is to be made, it should be when such a move occurs naturally or when the child is being returned home to their family.”

Other participants emphasized that attachment and bonding which may have taken place between a child and foster family must be given considerable weight in decision regarding current placements.

Many participants also placed emphasis on the need for due process in both service transfers and placement decisions. Teens in care were adamant that they have a voice in this process. As one participant was quoted as saying, “after all, it’s our friggin life that you’re talking about.”

Recommendations were also made that a review and appeal structure be established that provided for both birth and foster families to contest the transfer of services to another agency and/or an agency decision to move a child from a current placement.

3.2.5 HUMAN RESOURCES

Feedback related to the chapter on human resources of the *Conceptual Plan* focussed on the right of Authorities to establish human resource requirements and the education and training strategy. The key themes related to these elements are presented below.

○ Right of Authorities to Establish Human Resource Requirements

As with the feedback on province-wide standards, sharply different opinions were offered by participants on the right of Authorities to establish the human resource requirements for staff.

Some of the participants stressed the importance of each Authority being able to “define ‘skilled’ and ‘appropriate’ and the criteria through which the workforce is hired.” Many of those expressing this viewpoint appeared to feel that a range of skills and abilities would be required in a restructured system and that Authorities would be in the best position to determine the mix of skills and requirements required for the effectiveness of their service delivery system.

Those participants expressing support for a province-wide approach to the definition of human resource requirements based their views on one or more of the following considerations:

- ❖ common skill sets will be required and even essential for some jobs to ensure a high standard of service;
- ❖ concern that some Authorities or agencies will discount the level of skills and knowledge required by field staff; and
- ❖ concern over recent hiring practices in which favoritism resulted in the hiring of unqualified candidates over qualified ones.

Participants in the women's focus groups also called for a system of fair and equitable wages for all levels of workers across the four Authorities. The development of such a system should include consideration of incentives during a transitional period to encourage qualified workers on-reserve to off-reserve as they would otherwise stand to lose income due to a change in their tax status.

● **Education and Training Strategy**

Participants to the feedback process were strongly supportive of a major investment in the development of a culturally-appropriate workforce. They were also very supportive of Aboriginal involvement in and, in among some participants, control over the development of educational and training opportunities.

Participants, particularly those from the North, stressed the importance of having these opportunities not require that interested individuals have to relocate to a major urban centre. It was also felt that education and training opportunities should be available to current staff on a part-time basis so that they could upgrade their skills without interrupting their employment.

Participants at the St. Boniface town hall identified a need for expanded educational and training opportunities for prospective French-speaking workers.

A final, more general, theme expressed during the feedback process was the encouragement from many participants for the AJI-CWI to take a very broad approach to education and training. At its broadest, a number of participants voiced the need for widespread education on the effects of colonization and residential schools

among service providers internal and external to the child and family services system, as well as among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families.

At a more limited level, participants, including those in the women's focus groups, indicated that cultural sensitivity training was required by service workers across all of the Authorities. Other participants highlighted the unmet training needs of foster parents.

3.2.6 FUNDING

Funding represents the final area in which key themes emerged during the public feedback process. The themes relate to the adequacy of current funding, current funding inequities, and transitional funding. These are discussed below.

● Adequacy of Current Funding

One of the most consistent themes expressed through the feedback process is that the funding currently available to support the system will be inadequate to support the restructured system outlined in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*, particularly if the system incorporates the changes called for by most participants.

The concern over the inadequacy of funding was voiced by a broad cross-section of participants, with the exception of participants from the focus groups with teens in care, adult graduates, families of children in care, and foster families who did not express an opinion on the issue.

This concern extended well beyond the perceived need for additional administrative resources. Furthermore, while changing the way the system is funded was seen to be necessary to support the restructured system, it was not seen to be sufficient.

This perspective is clearly stated in the report on the women's focus groups.

“There was a great deal of concern about restructuring the system within existing resources, even though additional resources will be made available for the transitional period.

Everyone recognized that the current system is overburdened. Many people who need service are unable to get it and many who receive service cannot access the degree of support required. Participants were quick to recognize that services cannot be delivered with traditional child and family services approaches because (a) they do not work and (b) they cost too much. They agreed that it was time to review the effectiveness of all programs and change or cut those that don't work. They also acknowledged that partnering with other service organizations and Authorities will result in more effectiveness and both time and cost savings. Even with these changes it was difficult to imagine that new services, with new approaches, to a broader client base, would not entail more resources. All Authorities require adequate resources, including the ability to focus on secondary services and prevention work.”

● **Current Funding Inequities**

Participants throughout the feedback process identified what they felt were funding inequities which needed to be addressed as part of the restructuring of the child and family services system. The two most frequently noted included funding and resource disparities between

- ❖ the North and rural areas versus large urban centres; and
- ❖ on-reserve communities versus off-reserve settings.

Participants at the St. Boniface town hall meeting also identified the need for adjustments in the funding available to support French language services and the resources available to French speaking members of the public.

● **Transitional Funding**

Participants provided a note of caution related to transitional funding. First, in commenting on the size, complexity, importance and, for some, perceived fragility of the transition efforts required to implement the restructured system, some participants expressed concern that the level of transitional funding may have been underestimated.

3.3 OVERARCHING THEMES

In reviewing the key themes outlined above, seven overarching themes can be identified which apply to a wide range of the proposed changes described in the *Conceptual Plan* and *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*. These overarching themes are discussed below. The order in which they are presented does not reflect the priority placed on them by participants.

3.3.1 STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE GENERAL DIRECTIONS PROPOSED

Strong and widespread support was expressed throughout the public feedback process for the overall vision for a restructured child and family services system as described in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*.

Support was voiced for:

- ❖ the overall goals of the AJI-CWI;
- ❖ the overall model proposed for system governance;
- ❖ the proposed use of a streaming methodology combined with choice in determining service jurisdiction on a case-by-case basis;
- ❖ the service objectives proposed for the new system;
- ❖ the emphasis placed on the development of a culturally appropriate workforce; and
- ❖ the proposed changes to how the system is funded.

While concerns were expressed relating to each of the broad changes proposed, the concerns do not reflect opposition to the overall direction set out in the public document. Indeed, almost all participants felt the proposed changes would contribute to a more responsive child and family services system and were long overdue.

3.3.2 NEED FOR GREATER INCLUSION

There was a widespread call for revision of the current plans of the AJI-CWI so as to significantly enhance the involvement of parties external to the Initiative.

Revisions called for included:

- ❖ expanded consultation with stakeholder groups who will be affected by the changes during the course of subsequent planning and implementation phases;
- ❖ formal advisory roles and input into system management for external stakeholder groups in the governance of the restructured system; and
- ❖ expanded opportunities for service recipients and care providers to have input into case planning and management in the restructured system.

The additional call for well thought out accountability mechanisms reflect this desire for greater inclusion.

3.3.3 NEED TO REVIEW PROPOSED TIME LINES

Widespread concern was expressed that the current time lines for planning and implementing the restructured system are “ambitious”, “aggressive”, and/or “not realistic.”

Participants expressed concern that maintenance of these time lines may compromise the AJI-CWI’s capacity to incorporate enhanced opportunities for meaningful consultations, provide for the replication in the restructured system of many of the problems plaguing the current system, contribute to non-sustainable resolutions of outstanding issues, and not provide for system healing required to address the ongoing impact of the system’s history and past performance.

Based on these factors, participants recommended that the current time lines be reviewed and adjusted accordingly.

3.3.4 NEED FOR MORE ATTENTION TO CHANGING SERVICE MODELS

Many participants to the feedback process were critical that the vision for a restructured system failed to adequately address the perceived need for “radical changes to service delivery” required for the system to become more effective and more humane.

While the vision includes objectives for services under the restructured system, it does not lay out a plan for how the system will move away from the “reactive”, “crisis-oriented” and “adversarial” service model to encompass one that is decidedly “more prevention-focussed”, “less threatening.” and “more community-based.”

Participants felt that the methods, mechanisms and strategies of how the model of services will change in the restructured system merit equal attention to the structural changes which were emphasized in the public document.

3.3.5 NEED FOR UTMOST CARE IN THE TRANSFER OF EXISTING SERVICES

There is widespread concern that the transfer of existing services and the possible changes to the placement of children in the system be undertaken with the utmost care. Whereas all participants agree that the best interests of the child must be the paramount concern in transfers, transfers must occur through a well thought out, gradual and predictable process that provides meaningful input by the range of affected stakeholder groups.

3.3.6 NEED FOR RECOGNITION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE RIGHTS

Members and representatives of Manitoba Francophone community were very supportive of the vision’s recognition of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal political rights. However, they strongly asserted that the restructuring plan needs to formally extend this same recognition to rights of the French-speaking population.

The formal recognition of French language rights called for has implications for a range of elements in the proposed restructuring plan, including possible revisions or the additions to the AJI-CWI’s goals, the proposed governance structure, services, human resources and funding.

3.3.7 NEED FOR ADEQUATE FUNDING

There is widespread concern that the current level of funding for the system will be inadequate to support the restructured system envisioned in *Promise of Hope: Commitment to Change*, particularly if it is to incorporate the recommendations made through the public feedback process. Increased funding is seen by many participants to the feedback process as required to support the administration of four Authorities and the operation of the many agencies in a system of concurrent jurisdiction, to address existing funding, service and resource inequities, to meet current service gaps, and to provide for an expansion of preventative services and supports.

While changing the way the system is funded and using current resources to support services that are more effective can be expected to provide for some cost savings, many participants to the feedback process believed that the new system will also require increased funding.

INFORMATION ON THE ABORIGINAL JUSTICE INQUIRY – CHILD WELFARE INITIATIVE

For more information on the AJI-CWI:

- ³ Leave a message on our central information line at: 945-1183.
If you live outside Winnipeg, call our toll-free number: 1-866-300-7503.
We will respond to your message as soon as possible.
- ³ Send a message to our e-mail address: ajicwi@gov.mb.ca.
- ³ Visit our web site at: www.aji-cwi.mb.ca.
- ³ Contact one of the parties to the AJI-CWI:

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