



Chief Red Bear
Children's Lodge
Community Engagement
Report



February 2021

Introduction

Background and Context

In March 2020, Cowessess citizens voted to ratify their own legislation pertaining to child welfare, placing the community as the first Indigenous Nation in Canada to pass its own child welfare legislation – the *Miyo Pimatisowin Act* – which supports its rights and jurisdiction over child and family services for its citizens. To support this historical legislation, Cowessess created a new agency called **Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge**. A Board of Directors was established in 2020, with a CEO hired in the summer. The CEO and staff will guide the agency through its start-up phase and manage its long-term operations.

Community Engagement

A key focus for the Children's Lodge during its start-up and strategic planning process was to engage with all Citizens (on and off-reserve) and ensure the Community voice was heard and informs the future direction of the Lodge. This engagement process (from September 2020 to January 2021) involved organizing a number of Talking Circles, hosting Leadership Interviews, organizing virtual Community Gatherings, as well as meeting with Staff, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Pipe Carriers, Kohkums, and Mooshums.

Next Steps

In order to validate what we heard and honour the input and advice from all of those who participated and spoke up, we are sharing this Community Engagement Report with all Citizens of Cowessess First Nation. And as we proceed with refining the strategic priorities for the Children's Lodge, we welcome and invite everyone to continue to provide feedback.

How to Provide Additional Feedback:

1. Got to www.cowessessfn.com in order to Print a copy of the Report.
2. Fill out the Feedback Form attached at the back of the Report.
3. Email your thoughts and ideas to CEO, Eva Coles at: eva.coles@cowessessfn.com
4. Log-In and Join one of the February Zoom Meetings this month (as posted on Facebook).

Citizen and Community Voices

The information outlined below has been organized in order to express and highlight citizen aspirations, community strengths, key areas for improved wellness and welfare, as well as desired change for children and families within the Nation. During the engagement process, Citizens discussed the following:

1. **STRENGTHS:** What community strengths and assets are you most proud of, that the Lodge can build from?
2. **HOPES:** Envision yourself walking through the doors of Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge in 10 years. Describe your vision and what you hope to see.
3. **FEARS:** Are there any concerns or fears you have about this process? What advice or ideas do you have that would address these concerns?
4. **ONE CHANGE:** What is ONE CHANGE or initiative that you would like to see for children and families?

Based on the above noted engagement process, the following key themes emerged:

1. Strengths & Community Assets

Theme #1 - Community Connection and Pride that is Welcoming and Respectful

A great deal of pride and affinity was expressed by most citizens:

- "There is a great deal of respect and friendship when we get together".
- It is great to see when "Community comes together to help one another and our extended families". We are a "close knit community. Everyone supports each other". I am "proud that individuals in our community step up and help others that are in need". "We are a community that helps and works with each other. When we are together, we only become stronger".
- We are a "family-oriented community". There is a great deal of "family resiliency".
- Our community is "open and our hearts are in the right place". "When there is a crisis in the community, that is when you see our communities' strengths and see everyone come together".
- There is a great deal of connection to our community. We are a "welcoming and caring community". Our community is "caring, helpful and loving".
- A key strength has to be "our community, our people, and our family identity".
- "Even through COVID, we have remained strong and healthy and supportive".
- I am very proud of our lodge. It is brand new, but I see a great future for it".



Theme #2 - Cultural Identity, Traditions, and Ceremony

Cowessess Citizens also expressed how important their cultural practices are for one's identity and sense of belonging:

- "Culture has to be at the centre of our path". Our community has a great deal of strength given our Elders and Knowledge Keepers". "Cultural aspects are in everything" we do.
- "Community and cultural values need to be at the core of the Children's Lodge" as reflected in the Cowessess definition of family and community.
- It is great to such a "focus on cultural rejuvenation for our Nation".
- Our "storytelling provides a strong connection to culture. "Oral traditions help with an individual looking deep within themselves. It's a form of therapy".
- It is great to see the strong "cultural traditions and knowledge being practiced and shared". We need to utilize "our traditional Pipe Carriers and their skills and knowledge to share among our youth".
- "We can't forget the history of colonization and Residential School trauma, as well as the 60's Scoop. But we need to move past and create something new and culture-based".
- It is great to see that we are "reviving our grandparents' roles and history and addressing the impact of colonialism".
- "There is a wealth of elder's and ceremony and cultural knowledge to draw upon for our people and youth".



Theme #3 – Diverse and Strong Community Leadership

This third theme is with respect to Chief and Council as well as leadership within the community:

- We are "in charge of our own path for child healing and wellness". Our "Chief and Council are strong and have a forward vision for the community that will benefit all our children".
- "Putting our children, families and culture first takes leadership".
- "As a whole, we are a very forward-thinking Nation". I love the "innovation, and being centred around our culture". We have "strong leadership around our independence, and asserting ourselves as a sovereign Nation".
- "Traditions / ceremony / culture – all guide our Governance and leadership practices".
- It is great to see "Youth representation" in leadership roles.
- We are all "strong ambassadors for our Nation and sovereignty".
- "I am glad to see the Men's / Father's Group leading and getting engaged".
- We have leadership in our "Grandmothers that have worked all their lives, so they will bring a strong perspective and experience".
- I am "very proud of the dedication of our employees, and also proud of leaderships vision and forethought".
- I believe our leadership and elders are "always caring and thinking about what is best for the community".



Theme #4 – Community Infrastructure & Programming

Citizens expressed how infrastructure and opportunity also helps support community:

- It is "great to see what is available now for youth. Seems like way more opportunity".
- There are more "programs and mentors now available – this is great".
- "Our school is strong – good staff, well maintained building, and they offer specific education for a diverse group of children with unique needs".
- Having our own "peacekeepers and our own security in the community".
- There are more "school programs now offered, which helps develop youth as future leaders". It is great to see our "Youth Council continuing to be very active".
- Based on findings from the 2019 Community Needs Survey, a majority of citizens (76%) also noted that the Community Educational Centre is an asset that best supports strong families and a healthy lifestyle. Other frequently mentioned buildings and assets include the community hall (36%), day care centre (29%), gymnasium (24%), pow wow grounds (21%) and health centre (20%).



2. Hopes & Aspirations

Theme #1 – Enhanced Community Programming, Events, and Infrastructure

This theme identified by Cowessess citizens expressed the need for a continued development and enhancement of community programs, events, and infrastructure:

- "Our community is so strong, but it would be nice to have more community events, which would help build relationships in our community".
- I think a "recreational department and director would be great in order to organize more gym nights and game nights". We "need more staff to help supervise these events or hire a permanent Recreational Director (hire both a male and female director)". A "Youth Coordinator position" would also be great.
- More "Kids field trips would be fun. For example, taking kids to movies or the exhibition".
- "Sports programming" is also needed. We "used to have hockey and other sports programs, but this ended because we couldn't find parents and coaches".
- It "would be great to have a Youth Hall / Drop-In Centre. A friendly space with a TV, couch, food, healthy food and drinks and a room to chill. This would show that we are trying to help our youth and that we care for them".
- "It would be great if Regina Cowessess kids and families could come home for an event and ceremony and celebration (and vice versa)". We should organize "a Family Day – we need more days like this outside of school with lots of games and prizes and family activities to bring us together".



- What about if “we hosted an Annual Health Fair: good education for the kids, and would be nice to add in learning around more mental health issues”. We could also “talk about sexual health and health overall”.
- “A Family Resource Centre and Cultural Gathering Place would be great”!

Theme #2 – Revitalize Language and Ceremony, and Connection to Land and our Culture

Cowessess also expressed the importance around language as well as living and practicing their culture, traditions, and ceremony.

- We need to “involve Elders, grandmothers, Kohkums, Mooshums, and Knowledge Keepers in all aspects of what we do in order to teach Traditions, Language and Ceremonies”. “Language needs to be practiced, not just taught”. “Language is key to cultural capacity and knowledge of our traditions”.
- “Language and ceremony and land-based teachings” are critical to our healing.
- We need to “learn and practice our language because that’s where culture is”. Our focus on Language revitalization “needs to be beyond a class in school”.
- Greater focus on everything such as “history, stories, sweats, ceremony, Pow-Wows, culture, language”.
- More focus on “Traditional and cultural ceremonies, such as berry picking, sweet grass, songs and dances. “Empowering and healing others through storytelling”.
- It would be great to see more “Land-Based teachings / wildlife outdoor activities / hunting / culture camps”.
- More supports for “off-reserve families trying to reconnect to family, culture and the Cowessess community”.
- We need to “Utilize traditional values to care for and heal vulnerable families”.
- “Kinship rejuvenation” is critical to healing.
- I am “proud to be an Indigenous person and being able to think in Cree”.
- Enhanced prevention programs centred around “land-based services and teachings”.



Theme #3 – A Traditional Philosophy of Care and Cultural Healing Model

Citizens expressed the need for our own Care Model based on Ceremony, Traditional, and Culture:

- Prevention, counselling, therapy services, family programs, mental health and education “all must be centred around and based off of our Traditional philosophy of care”.
- There is a need for “school supports, supplementary courses, counselling, in-school resource officers, etc.” All of these services “should be based off of ceremony and cultural practices (land-based teachings).
- We need to “use traditional values to care for and heal vulnerable families”.
- Care model “needs to be non-colonial”.



- Programs and Services need to incorporate the following: Whole Family approach; Historical Trauma Healing and Therapy Services; Trauma Based Care; Culture and Ceremony; Family and Community Reconnection; Kinship Homes and Kinship Care; Family Preservation; Building Life Skills.
- Care needs to be "barrier free and a non-judgemental space".
- "Staff need to be highly trained, compassionate, and certified". "We need staff that are compassionate, have an understanding of where families are coming from and have empathy – they need to know how to work with children and families through trauma and healing and coming home".
- "Well trained and caring / experienced staff. Staff that have experience in what families are going through". "Staff need to know how to address and work with individuals who have complex needs".
- What's need is a "Whole Family support and philosophy of care".
- "Both traditional and modern therapy / healing services".
- Everyone will need to have "access to relevant and cultural resources".
- I envision where "every family will get a team of resources around them. And the family is involved in creating this team and they own their own Family Plan. Plus a culture person on every team".
- We will need "professional development for trauma-informed care".
- "Parenting classes / family wellness programs / parenting supports and tools".
- "A Sharing Circle for Families".
- "Value-drive and cultures-driven organization" with high emotional intelligence. Empathy / self-regulate / personal sovereignty.
- Incorporate Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Ensure we have a "Youth voice with staff and youth role and active in community".

Theme #4 – New "Lodge" Welcoming and Healing Space

Citizens also expressed aspirations for the Children's Lodge to be welcoming and inclusive to all Citizens in order to foster holistic health and healing:

- "Families need to feel comfortable and welcomed in a non-judgmental and respectful way".
- I "envision a setting that is comfortable, safe, and highlights our culture and traditions".
- "When you walk in – the space feels open, warm and welcoming. Families and children feel safe and protected. It's open to the entire community".
- It would be great to also have "an Urban Lodge in Regina: a health and wellbeing centre that is a full-service organization".
- "Will likely needs a presence in Regina and urban settings in order to foster and strength the connection to the nation and culture".
- The Children's Lodge "should be full of warmth and culture. You know you are home"!
- "There is Culture in the office every single day".
- "The Lodge is a home-setting in order to be comfortable and heal; it is not a facility or institutional". "Welcoming /open / nurturing / the kitchen is active / food is always made and available / there is a community kitchen area / youth drop-in area".



- The space also needs to support staff and their cultural/healing needs and practices: lead with prayer; go to sweat; prepare for ceremony; practice language; ensure cultural values and spirituality in organization; culturally driven.
- "Staff also need to feel comfortable and safe and need to be friendly and welcoming to really exemplify that they care about everyone who is walking through the door".

3. Fears & Areas for Improvement

Theme #1 – Historical / Intergenerational Trauma and Impacts of Colonization

This theme expressed how historical trauma and colonialism must be addressed and understood in order to start the healing process.

- "Culture needs to be central to the Children's Lodge, in order to avoid repeating and redeveloping colonized practices".
- Given "our history, a trauma-informed care model will be important".
- "Family Plans need to come from and with the family / use a decolonizing process". "We need to take back our lives, families, culture and language".
- "Staff need to be trauma informed. Different models of care and services. Focus on history and underlying issues". There is an "underlying trauma and poverty and history". These layers of trauma need to be understood. "Prevention should be based on trauma informed care and a Whole Family approach.
- There is a great deal of "loss of Traditions and Culture within the home". Loss of identity needs to be understood.
- The "fear of families being separated" is very real.
- Many "forget about culture and traditions". And have little or "no connection to culture and ceremony / lost families and lost children".
- We need to be mindful of those impact by Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's issues.
- "Need time and patience to reconnect and rebuild trust and connection to culture".
- Remember that "once the parents start to heal, the children will also heal".
- "There is intergenerational trauma from this history, and it is time to change this and be more open and let others know that they can speak up and they don't have to be afraid or embarrassed".

Quote from a Cowessess Citizen during one of several Talking Circles:

There is a "loss of parenting skills through the dark history of residential schools. We lost the ability to trust, talk, and feel from residential schools. We are in an era where we can re-learn and revive our culture, teaching and traditions. This is so crucial for our families to grow and heal. This is going to be a long and hard process for the children and families because of the extensive history. This Children's Lodge home will allow families to go on this journey together".

Theme #2 – Addictions, Substance Abuse, and Conditions of Poverty

This theme expresses the concern of mental health and substance abuse issues that Cowessess Citizens have and their desire for a more holistic approach to healing that involves greater connection between family, community, spirituality, and nature.



- A large majority of Cowessess Citizens (as per the 2019 Community Needs Survey) noted high unemployment and conditions of poverty as the biggest challenge to community well-being (72%) as well as to their family well-being (48%).
- In the same 2019 Survey, roughly half (51%) identified addictions and substance abuse as the biggest challenge facing community well-being
- "Protection and healing as well as prevention services all need to be approached together". We need "holistic services" that help to address "addictions and the underlying issues related to intergenerational trauma".
- We need to "continue to provide the cultural teachings to the youth, so they understand and can participate in the cultural ceremonies".
- "Kids come into care because of addictions – so we need to approach this better and with a more caring model that is less judgmental".
- I think the "harm reduction model / and trauma informed care" is what's needed.
- "Harm-reduction practices" will help in addressing the real issues.
- We also need to focus on "teaching Coping and Healthy Life Skills".
- We "must try to let go of our unhealthy habits that we learned over decades".
- The the 2019 Community Needs Survey also highlighted the most frequently mentioned "one change" people would like to see in Cowessess First Nation is an addiction-free (drug & alcohol free) community.
- We need to be "addictions free / free of all abuse".

Theme #3 – Avoid Replicating Current Child Welfare Model

This third theme expresses the fear that Chief Red Bear Lodge will operate like the current child welfare system and model in Canada.

- "Currently our children are being apprehend and placed in homes. There is terrible follow-up on behalf of the children. This is not a good service and care model for our children. This is how we lose our children"!
- There is a "need to make sure they are being taken care of physically, emotionally and spiritually".
- "More information and communication with citizens. Even though we are a big Nation, we all need to be aware of the process. Don't leave citizens out of process".
- "Must provide for homes where the children are always connected to their community and culture".
- "Need to walk the walk and put the child first".



- If placed in a home, "the home needs to know and understand the child's need to participate in traditions and culture and ceremony. Home has to put the child first".
- I "fear that we are not making sure we have proper files and databases and everything involved. We need a file for every situation and incident, and the information needs to be secure".
- "Strong data system that enables work and security of files".
- And technology and personal "interface with the child welfare system, so we don't lose any kids".
- The "concept of a social worker was not a good one. Can we change this brand"?
- We should also be relying on "our strong and rich culture / be culture centred".
- "Ensure we have a system in place to work with staff. And a philosophy of care. Staff resources and training".
- "Case management concerns – needs to focus on the whole family".
- "Create a different approach and model that is circular. Circle of care model".
- We need our own "Cowessess philosophy of care".
- Meet with family "in circle". "Families get to choose how meetings started and let us know what they believe they need".
- I'm concerned that "families and children that move back feel hopeless and not supported".
- I am "afraid that this will be a typical child welfare system". Let's not hire a "Social Worker", who may not be experienced or have an understanding of our culture.
- "We don't want to hire someone who is just educated. We need someone who wants to follow the Cowessess vision and have a Healing mindset". We "need to approach child welfare differently in order to attract good staff and strong caring employees".
- I'm concerned we have a "shortage of staff and wrong staff being hired".
- I'm worried that the "Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge will operate like the Canadian child welfare system". Fear that this is another Child Welfare System.
- There is a "fear of a lack of resources: Are we capable to take in all these children and families and do we have enough resources"?
- Some are worried that the Children's Lodge "becomes institutionalized".
- There is also a "fear of lack of community and leadership support" over time.
- "Worried that Jordan's Principles and 'TNR Calls to Action' get ignored".
- We "must engage the community and communicate that this Lodge does not reflect the colonial system of child welfare". "Show them how we can work with them and how this Lodge will reflect a healthy and traditional family". And "making sure we have enough staff that can take care of the children and help the families, so staff aren't over worked".

4. One Change

Cowessess Citizens, Leadership and Staff were also asked to identify One Change they believe is most important for children, families, and the wellness of the Nation.

Theme #1 – Culture Identity and Connection to the Nation

This theme expressed how the Children's Lodge should allow children and families to heal through culture, spirituality, language, and family.

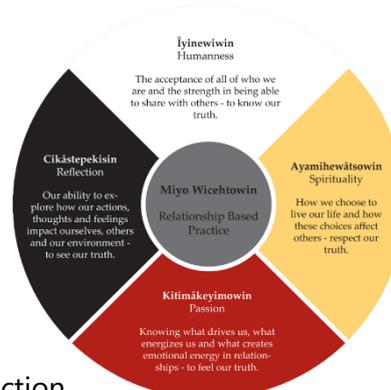
- "For children to never have to leave home"!
- "Cultural identity and practice always bring about positive change".
- A "Whole Community model" should be practiced that celebrates and evolves around culture and tradition.
- "Culture and practice of culture is integral/central".
- We need to also support the "education of all families and Cowessess on their culture and traditions so they know who they are and where they come from – know and take pride in their identity".
- The 2019 Community Needs Survey also noted support for language training and teaching cultural traditions and ceremony.
- It is important that "Cowessess members come back home, and participate in ceremonies at least once per year".
- It would be great to "see more off reserve kids come to on-reserve activities and vice versa. And we should support people to transport the kids back and forth".
- "Strong cultural identity and strong cultural connections – these ceremonies create strong and healthy family units".
- We need to "remove the negativity of our cultural traditions and ceremonies that were created so long ago".
- "We should have more community circles to bring the people together. Seeing that others are feeling the same way gives people hope".



Theme #2 – Traditional Philosophy of Care

This second theme identifies the importance of the traditional philosophy of care and how this model will help strengthen the Children's Lodge and the Community.

- It is important to host "Talking Circles and Support Groups for families that are lost, hurt, feeling alone, unwanted, and dealing with issue of abandonment". These types of gatherings will "start to wash that hurt away and heal the blaming".
- I am reminded of the "Bear and teaching around protection, healing, nurturing, and balance".



- "Addressing issues and being able to talk about it. Come to the forefront and have a discussion to begin the healing process. This must be approached appropriately. Any issues in the home must be acknowledged as soon as the issues arise".
- "This healing might be a scary step for some people as acknowledging issues is hard and the beginning of a healing process is not easy. Talking about abuse, addictions, trauma, domestic violence, abandonment, lack of parenting (all the root problems), etc... must be talked about within the families so they can come to a realization".
- We need a "trauma informed care component" for sure.
- "Open up the borders to have our Nation and children with the same support regardless of where they are. Build the exact same services on or off reserve".
- "Families communicating their issues or concerns to one another to have a discussion in order to heal. Provide tools to families to help work through issues in the household. We need more open communication to share our stories and help heal as a community".
- "Family councillors and Sessions to help families work through issues to achieve a healthy relationship".
- The school needs to have "training to work with difficult children' (anger and trauma). This is vital in order to make these students feel successful and feel heard".
- The Children's Lodge "should have special programming for these problem kids both in and outside of school. Maybe have schools support and Tutors hired".
- The Children's Lodge could provide "support to the school, or supplementary resources (tutors), and more training and education for teachers".
- "I would like to see that children and younger adults aren't allowed to 'age out' in terms of Cowessess supporting them after they turn 18".

Theme #3 – Family and Community Gathering Opportunities

This final theme focused on strengthening families and our community through gathering opportunities to help build strong relationships.

- We need to "respect each other – no longer hold on to the "family wars".
- What about "the arts programming (theatre, film) – introduce and engage the youth and children. Get them excited about this and our culture".
- "Utilize our (Traditional) Elders in every aspect".
- It's great to see the "Men's Group becoming so active – and wanting them to work with these young men to be more involved in Children's Lodge".
- "Strengthening our families through more gathering events. Bring in supports. Bring in more prevention rather than protection".
- It would be good to see a "mentorship program implemented". Or an "Ambassadors Program of community Volunteers to support new families returning to Cowessess".
- "Youth mentorship for the children" would be a good idea".



Chief Red Bear Children's Lodge

"Feedback Form"



Based on what you've read:

[Is there anything you'd like to add?](#)

[Have we missed anything?](#)

[Do you have a new idea you'd like to share?](#)