

## United Way Introduces Canada's First-Ever Aboriginal Relations Strategy

United Way of Winnipeg (UWW) joined members of the Aboriginal community to celebrate the introduction of its Aboriginal Relations Strategy *the first of its kind in Canada* at the Indian & Métis Friendship Centre today.

United Way recognizes that Winnipeg is home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada. It also recognizes that the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg which is comprised of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people -- is the fastest-growing segment of our city's population.

The Strategy is a comprehensive initiative designed to build and enhance relationships, knowledge and capacity within and between the Aboriginal community, United Way and Winnipeg's community at large. It is integral to United Way's mission *to improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collective action*.

The multi-pronged strategy identifies key components to enhance and build knowledge and relationships within United Way, the Aboriginal community and other sectors in Winnipeg while, at the same time, building capacity. Most components will be developed in concert with members of the Aboriginal community. However, some components will be launched early in 2006. For example, United Way will invest in year-round training opportunities in the areas of financial management, stress management, volunteer management, fundraising and conflict resolution for Aboriginal people.

"United Way's Aboriginal Relations Strategy is a major cause for celebration," said Anna Fontaine, Chair, Aboriginal Relations Council, and Board-Member, United Way. "It constitutes another significant step in bringing together the Aboriginal community and the community at large in a positive and meaningful way. The major goal of the Strategy is to merge all the strengths, skills and knowledge of the Aboriginal community into all facets of our city."

David Hodge, Chair of United Way's Board of Trustees, agreed. "This is good news for everybody," he said. "Not only does this strategy formalize our commitment to the Aboriginal community, it encourages continued input and dialogue from all sectors to ensure positive growth and development for future generations. It's an excellent example of how United Way brings people together to improve lives and build community."

The Aboriginal Relations Strategy aligns with United Way's two organizational priorities:

- To create opportunities for civic engagement and strengthen relationships with community groups including youth, seniors, and Aboriginal people.
- To achieve long-term, measurable impact in the community.

To build capacity within United Way, within voluntary sector organizations, and within the community.

Also in attendance was Grand Chief Chris Henderson, South Chiefs Organization of Manitoba. About 150 people attended the event that was hosted by Lisa Meeches, producer and host of The Sharing Circle. The event showcased entertainment by Aboriginal drum singers and a community feast catered by members of the Native Women's Transition Centre which, like the Indian & Métis Friendship Centre, is an Aboriginally-led community organization that is funded by United Way of Winnipeg.



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The next step will be to engage members of the Aboriginal community and other Winnipeggers through a mass mail-out that will take place early in the New Year. The purpose of the mailing is to raise awareness of the strategy and encourage feedback and dialogue regarding the development and implementation of its key components.

The Aboriginal Relations Strategy is the result of four years' intensive work which began in December 2001. At that time, members of the United Way's Board of Trustees joined with members of the Aboriginal community to form its Aboriginal Task Group.

In June 2004 the Task Group produced the *Eagle's Eye View* environmental scan--a comprehensive, holistic snapshot of the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg. The *Eagle's Eye View* provided insight into how the Task Group could build and enhance capacity within the Aboriginal community and the community at large by drawing on the Aboriginal community's considerable strengths. And, like the Strategy, the *Eagle's Eye View* was *the first of its kind in Canada*.

Also in June 2004, United Way increased its support to Aboriginal agencies in Winnipeg from four to twelve; resulting in a 140 per cent increase in funding to Aboriginally-led organizations. UWW also created the position of Director of Aboriginal Relations later that same month. Since then the Director, Crystal Laborero, has been responsible for working with members of the Aboriginal community to develop and implement the strategy as announced today.

In April 2005, the Aboriginal Relations Council was established by United Way's Board of Trustees. Comprised entirely of volunteers from the Aboriginal community and the community at large, its role is to provide strategic guidance and input for the further development and implementation of the Strategy.

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