



**BCAAFC** | BC Association of  
Aboriginal Friendship Centres

## BCAAFC Executive Director Report to the Board of Directors

I want to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Executive Committee members who have provided me with ongoing support, and who will see us through our transition to a new governance model. It has been a year of changes and firsts at the BCAAFC, internally, and within our province and country. I want to acknowledge the senior leadership sitting here with me today, those senior leaders who have moved on, and the Executive Committee members who have moved on from the BCAAFC.

When leadership changes there is opportunity for reflection and to ask all the basic questions: What have we done? Where are we going? Are we being effective? What missteps and leading practices can we learn from? What is coming our way that we need to prepare for? And how do we best position ourselves moving forward? I look forward to our collectively answering these questions in a way that enables us to continue to learn and grow as a movement.

Changes and transitions are never easy. I deeply appreciate the BCAAFC staff who have graciously and patiently assisted me, and stood beside me in navigating this transition. Their skills and knowledge and willingness to be of service have been key to our moving forward together.

With the discomfort of change comes the opportunity for renewal. Over this last year, you have all engaged in reviewing and redrafting constitution and bylaws for your centres as well as the BCAAFC. These committee folks are Executive Directors and board members of Friendship Centres who have selflessly given up multiple weekends to see this work through to completion. Their professionalism, dedication, and self-sacrifice is deeply appreciated by the BCAAFC. This took far more time and energy than we expected. There is still more to do. We have changed our constitution and bylaws and now we must revisit our values, refresh our policies, renew our strategic plan and from that plan will flow our operational plan. Our values will guide us in how we interact with each other and the way we conduct business with all our stakeholders.

Importantly, our long overdue upcoming work of reviewing our outdated program funding models must be based on updated information. We must begin with fair outcomes in mind, and agree between us that we will make decisions based on the collective best interests of all our urban indigenous people.

I want to tell you a bit about the national work we have done, and then I will end by providing a summary of the work we have accomplished this year.

## The National Negotiating Committee

We've had some big changes in our world with a newly elected national and provincial governments. The NAFC has also seen changes and the new Executive Director, Erin Corston, has done an admirable job. The loss of NAFC President Nelson Mayor was felt from coast to coast to coast. I will hold dear my many conversations with Nelson, helping me to better understand the culture of the national movement.

Last summer Friendship Centres across the nation told the new federal government that the funding model of Friendship Centres administering all urban non-profit (Urban Partnerships and Community Capacity Support) funding was putting us in difficult relationship with our Indigenous non-profit colleagues. We agreed to new funding program which is similar but with a new name, Urban Programming for Indigenous People, (UPIP) which we will administer only to friendship centres.

The National Negotiating Committee met regularly through the last year to negotiate a long-term funding agreement for Friendship Centres. This has been a big year for the committee. The arrival of Erin Corston was instrumental in improving the relationship with INAC. The National Negotiating Committee:

- Developed a policy position,
- Developed principles: Friendship Centres first, Transparency and Accountability, and informed decision making,
- Developed a comprehensive multi year funding proposal,
- Negotiated a carve out of the available federal UPIP funding within a 5-year funding agreement,
- Secured bridge funding for Friendship Centres, and
- Confirmed 2 specific budget streams for 2017: Organizational Capacity at \$23 Million and Programs and Services funding at \$7.8 Million.

## Our accomplishments

There is a lot of good work to report to you from BCAAFC. There is so much talent in our office, and so much dedication and commitment from staff who want to work with our people, who love working for this movement. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the staff who in a year of change and upheaval and steadfastly pushed forward and kept doing their best for the friendship centre movement. Here is what we accomplished this year:

- Increased funding opportunities, (GOV, Research, Anti-violence, Jobs, Gaming scholarships, Doula bursary grants)
- Got scholarships out to students,
- Competed for and won a long-term contract for the Aboriginal Infant Development Program and Aboriginal Supported Child Development (AIDP/ASCD) programs,
- With Kelowna FC's support we held another great Gathering Our Voices Indigenous Youth Training event in Kelowna,
- We are refreshing the Gathering Our Voices format to be more about youth for youth, with a focus on increased exposure to new opportunities, training and innovation additional forms of self healing expression such as art

- Engaged in relationship development and proposal writing to increase opportunities to support youth, entrepreneurship and social innovation.
- Hosted a provincial Indigenous funding conference in Richmond
- Proposed a youth entrepreneurship training and are negotiating the details with the funder
- Completed another stage of the Aboriginal Non-profit Strategy,
- Proposed and received funding for a Friendship Centre legacy research project that will focus on the start of the FC movement in BC and our founding leaders
- Worked to address violence towards Indigenous women and girls, and are leveraging more funds to distribute to FC's and indigenous communities
- Increased the numbers of Indigenous groups accessing provincial Gaming funding,
- Increased employment and training opportunities through Canada Jobs Grants and Northern Corridor
- Committed to having our Board meetings wherever possible in Friendship Centres instead of hotels, putting dollars back into our own centres, and our own community
- Supported friendship centres, with individual supports, centre specific and or group training in administration and governance,
- Met with a well established Indigenous agency which has expressed interest in becoming an friendship centre
- Collaborated with your centres regionally to obtain your input on health issues, including, cancer, fentanyl, mental health & substance use, and doula services,
- Retired our server and moved into cloud services, and refreshed our web page
- Continued relationship building and engagement with municipal, provincial and federal politicians, funders, foundations, academia, industry, government, indigenous organizations, our provincial and national colleagues,
- Leveraged our national movement to lobby for funding changes for long term funding – not year to year funding
- Secured a mandate letter commitment from Premier Horgan to the the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation for provincial capacity funding to Friendship Centres
- Lobbied the federal government, our friendship centre supporters wrote and mailed all those letters in support of friendship centres, and we saw the difference that it made.

Friendship Centres are daily addressing the issue of colonial trauma, racism, implementing decolonization, and helping our settler Canadian neighbors understand what reconciliation looks like in practical terms. These are times of unprecedented societal change where social media enables every one of us to speak our truth. For us to continue to reflect, grow and lead as an urban Indigenous community, these truths must be courageously spoken and addressed. More now than ever we are breaking down the shackles of colonialism. Often this is between and with ourselves first. And this is very difficult work. It isn't easy to look inside our souls to see what we need to change, yet this is how grounded and meaningful reconciliation will emerge.

Meanwhile, each of our Friendship Centres continue doing the important front line community based work that needs to be done. Some centres are dealing with unprecedented challenges this year. Some centres were closed due to wildfires while other nearby centres refocused their services to address the immediate needs of evacuees; food, water, shelter, clothing, medications and transportation. Many centres will continue to be challenged with addressing housing, food security, and trauma once the fires have been put out.

Centres have faced yet another year of untold tragic death and loss due to the fentanyl crisis, and some of the staff have experienced burn-out working to revive those that have overdosed.

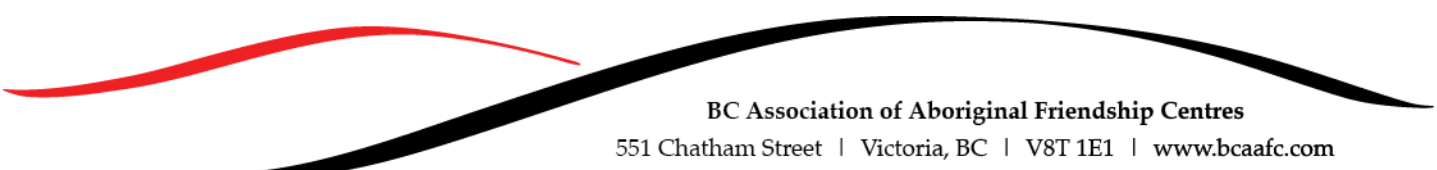
I hold my hands high in humble esteem for the Friendship Centres, for their relentless dedication to being there, adjusting to emergency, and focusing on what needs to be done. We know that the numbers of us moving into urban areas has been increasing over the years without the same increase in funding. But Friendship Centres have been stretching their dollar, getting it matched, and engaging their communities of volunteers so that needs of our people are being addressed within the unique context of each of our communities.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Executive Committee, to our Elders, and to the management team and staff for their support and guidance during my first year at the BCAAFC. With your support, we have made a difference this year.

In Friendship,



Leslie Varley  
Executive Director



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