

WAHTA PEACEMAKING PROCESS UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 2016

During the past few months Ed Connors and Kevin Deer have been conducting the beginning stage of the Peacemaking process that they previously proposed to Wahta community members. The initial response from the community indicated that there was sufficient interest to proceed with introducing this process to the community. We began by conducting group sessions with various interest groups that were identified by community members. These groups included Wahta Fire, Elders, Wahta Longhouse, Youth, Chief and Council, Administration, Staff, Off reserve members, and On reserve non members. We met people in groups at the Wahta Cultural Centre, in their homes and over the telephone. Some members have also chosen to contact us by email. In all we calculate that we have gathered input from well over half of the on reserve community and a smaller portion of off reserve members.

Our initial contact has involved identifying the issues that have been contributing to the growing conflict within Wahta. We have also begun to receive input from community members about the more peaceful and sustainable community that they envision.

On Saturday, August 27th the Women and children of Wahta along with Waneek Horne Miller and her sister conducted a candlelight peace prayer ceremony around the Wahta Administration building and at the same time some of the community men gathered with us at the Cultural Centre for a tobacco burning ceremony in support of the women's prayers for peace. This was meant to initiate the Wahta Peacemaking Process. On Sunday, August 28th we met with Chief and Council and community members to review what we have learned from our involvement to this point.

The following is a summary of our presentation (copies of our powerpoint are available from Martie at the Band office).

We have broken down the information shared with us into five categories.

- 1) Perceptions - or how we think.
- 2) The purpose and meaning of our lives.
- 3) Relationships - how we relate to each other.
- 4) Community Structure - or how you organize your community and your relationships.
- 5) Primary Needs - How you support and sustain your lives.

1) PERCEPTIONS

How we think and make meaning of our lives, the world around us, all of creation and creator is shaped by the language(s) that we use. In all of our First Nations communities across Turtle Island it is becoming increasingly important that our languages are maintained in order that our ways of knowing and our forms of knowledge can continue to guide us. As we regain and reform our ways of knowing it has become increasingly apparent that the forms of knowledge that we have been forced into through colonization have created a different form of thought that is now referred to by many as Two Eyed Seeing or the capacity to think and understand the world from two different perspectives. At times these different perspectives are in clear opposition and as a result create conflict within individuals and between people as we attempt to determine the 'right' answer or the 'best' way.

2) PURPOSE AND MEANING OF YOUR LIFE

These different ways of thinking, supported by our languages have enabled us to make meaning of our lives and to determine our life purpose. From the time of contact with Europeans their forms of spirituality that had been shaped by their languages became vehicles for transmitting to our people their ways of making meaning of life and life's purpose. As we adapted these spiritual practices our ways of making meaning of life and life's purpose changed. In addition, the new forms of spirituality presented teachings that transformed roles and responsibilities of community members. As a result differences in spiritual beliefs have become a source of opposing perceptions that at times have contributed to community conflict.

3) RELATIONSHIPS

How we relate with each other is informed by our beliefs and values. For some our spiritual practices are the source of where our beliefs and values come from. However, for others teachings offered within family and community are the basis for the development of their beliefs and values. However these beliefs and values have formed most of the people we have spoken to stated that they wish that relationships between community members were guided by the following principles.

Honesty

Trust

Respect

Caring

Sharing

Inclusive - that people are generally included in and
feel welcomed to participate in community.

Equality- equal to as opposed to controlled by.

3) RELATIONSHIPS cont'd.

A considerable number of people mentioned that they do not believe that these principles are being adhered to between community members and therefore this is a source of conflict. Some go as far as to demand that Chief and Council submit to a forensic audit in order to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and honesty.

4) COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

All of the above informs how you organize your community and your relationships. The above also forms the basis for answering the following important questions that are related to community organization and relationships. These are questions that came out of our discussions.

- What is culture?
- What is a Mohawk?
- What is community?
- Where do we come from?
- What is family? Who is family?
- Who belongs in our community?
- Are clans important today? How do they apply today?
- What form, structure, shape of governance is right for our community?
- What are the important qualities of good leadership?

By developing commonly accepted answers to these questions you will develop the foundational knowledge upon which you will be able to build your community.

5) PRIMARY NEEDS

The above forms some of the knowledge that visions for Wahta's future can emerge from. However, some of the primary needs that also must be considered when visioning a future include:

- sustainability
- productivity
- self sufficiency and
- economics.

All of these themes are tied to ensuring that Wahta remains as a viable community for your children and grandchildren for generations into the future. As we know not all communities remain viable and continue to exist into the future. Generally those that have visions and plan at least seven generations into the future remain sustainable, survive and thrive.

Some consider this as an important activity as our ancestors did and others do not believe visioning is important. Some people recognize that we live within an interdependent world and that what changes in the world around us effects all of us. Some also believe that we must keep aware of these changes if we are going

to adapt, survive and thrive. The fact that some people consider visioning important for Wahta and others do not can be considered a point of conflict.

CONCLUSION

In short the above points that have emerged from our conversations with your community are related to common issues that have existed throughout human history and that have contributed to the survival of human beings. These themes have also re-emerged recently as many of us have been thinking about the survival and sustainability of our indigenous communities in light of the impacts of colonization. These themes are related to four questions that have been considered crucial to human beings since Creator gifted us with thought. These questions are:

- Where did I come from?
- Why am I here?
- What is my purpose?
- Where am I going?

As a community these questions are equally important when asked as a collective.

- Where did we come from?
- Why are we here?
- What is our purpose?
- Where are we going?

The answers to these questions also inform us about four important themes that many of us have discovered are important if we are to live well. These themes continue to emerge as we have conducted dialogues with our indigenous communities in Canada through our various national efforts over the past 30 years (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Healing and Wellness Foundation, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Honouring Our Strengths, The Mental Wellness Continuum) From these efforts we have learned repeatedly that wellness or good living requires at the least four abilities.

1. The ability to make meaning of our lives. For this we require systems that enable us to make sense of ourselves the world around us, all of creation and Creator.
2. The ability to determine our purpose for being. In other words we need to know why we are here.
3. The ability to establish a sense of belonging. For this we need to be able to identify that we have meaningful connections to people, the world around us, mother earth, creation and creator.
4. The ability to have hope that a future exists. For this we must be able to vision a time and existence beyond this moment. Without the capacity to vision there is no hope

The above are the teachings that have emerged through our dialogue and engagement to this point in time.

Our Proposal for a Further Peacemaking Process and Request for your Input

We propose that all of our decisions within this peacemaking process be guided by the principles and teachings that come from the indigenous wisdom of our creation story, ceremonies, the thanksgiving address, our Great Laws for peace, our treaty relationships with our non native brothers and sisters and our connection to our sacred lands. Our next steps for this peacemaking process involves the following:

1. We will create a form that will list the themes that you have identified are important from our discussions to date. This list will then be distributed to all interested band members and we will ask you to identify which themes are most important for you to address first. This process will allow us to create an order for community dialogue beginning with the most important issues as determined by you.
2. We will then stage community forums that will enable you to dialogue about these issues until you reach a consensus on the action that you will take with regards to each issue. We will structure and guide these processes of dialogue. These processes will consist of people taking positions in favour of, in opposition to or in a noncommittal position to each issue. Each group will be given the opportunity to speak fully to the issue and efforts will be made to ultimately define actions to address each issue that are agreed to by all. These processes will be based on consensus building.

We anticipate that this consensus building will lead to community chosen actions to issues that will form the basis for a vision of Wahta into the future.

3. We are open to receiving your comments and suggestions about this process. In fact, we will not proceed with this process until we are convinced that you wish us to proceed. Our work to this point has been based on receiving the support for this process from all those who we had input from. At this point we are asking that anyone who wants us to STOP this peacemaking process to contact Ed or Kevin in one of the following ways:

- In person when we are in Wahta- Ed is in Wahta on Thursdays from 10-4pm
Appointments can be made through Martie.

- By telephone Ed 705-329-0400 or Kevin 1 450 638-5775

- By email Ed econnors0507@rogers.com
Kevin kanah47@hotmail.com
or

- By mail Dr. Ed Connors 360 Grenville Ave., Orillia, Ontario L3V 7P7

If you chose to do this we ask that you provide us with your name and the reason or reasons that you have for wanting us to discontinue this peacemaking process. All that you share with us will be confidential and will be maintained between us. Your comments will be used by us to determine if we should proceed to the next stage of the process that we have proposed above. Those we do not hear from we will consider to be in support of or indifferent to the process.

We will receive your input until Friday September 23rd.

We have appreciated the opportunity to work with your community to this point and look forward to learning if you wish us to continue this peacemaking process.

Sincerely,

Ed Connors and Kevin Deer