



BC FIRST NATIONS
JUSTICE COUNCIL

Bridging Justice:

Indigenous Justice Centre & Crown Counsel Collaborative Event



Date: December 4, 2024

Locations: Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, Chilliwack, Prince George, Kelowna

Report prepared by BC First Nations Justice Council

Overview

Following a recommendation made by former Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory in his inquiry following the wrongful conviction of Thomas Sophonow, on 04 DEC 2024, during the week-long Provincial Court closure, Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) across the province hosted an in-person lunch and learn opportunity to strengthen collaboration between IJCs and Crown Counsel.

It may seem trite, but I recommend that a regular meeting be held once or twice a year for the Crown and Defence Bar. At those meetings, counsel on both sides could put forward their problems, discuss them and seek mutually satisfactory solutions to them. At some of these meetings, high-ranking police officers should attend and explain their position regarding the issues raised. Some members of the judiciary and, perhaps, the media might be invited to attend occasionally so that all would be aware of the problems and could contribute to their solution. In that way, solutions satisfactory to all concerned could be reached. The entire administration of justice has too much at stake to permit any feelings of mistrust to fester and spread, thereby jeopardizing the ability of the courts to arrive at a fair and just result. - former Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory

The Bridging Justice event was rooted in the need to deepen our relationships, raise and discuss issues that can be solved collaboratively, and provide a space for Crown Counsel and IJC staff to advance their learning and action around the presumption of diversion (Strategy 1), Indigenous Justice Programs, and Strategies 18, 19, 25 (Strategies concerning BC Prosecution policies, Indigenous representation, and relationships).

About the BC First Nations Justice Strategy

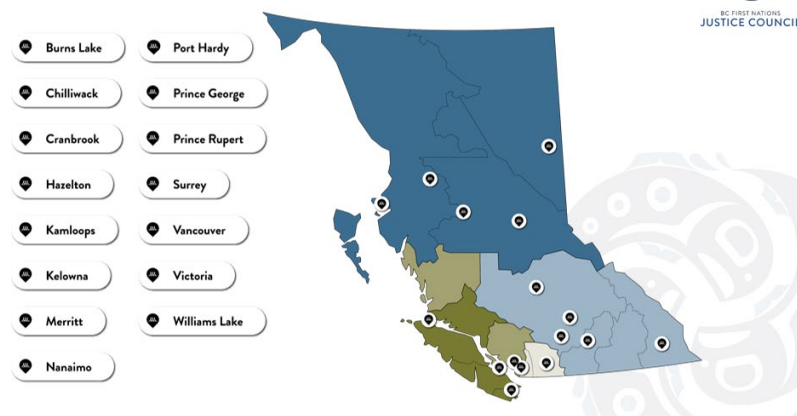
Developed by the BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC), BC First Nations communities, and the Province of British Columbia, the Strategy provides a comprehensive roadmap for justice transformation.

Endorsed by the First Nations Leadership Council and the Province, the Strategy includes 25 strategies that intersect various areas of the justice system, with goals such as:

- **Strategy 18:** Increasing Indigenous representation in the BC Prosecution Service (BCPS).
- **Strategy 19:** Strengthening relationships between First Nations and BCPS.
- **Strategy 25:** Advancing prosecution policies for Indigenous people.

The Strategy also emphasizes the expansion of IJCs (Strategy 4) and the presumption of diversion (Strategy 1), which highlights Indigenous justice and restorative programs as vital alternatives to conventional justice approaches.

Indigenous Justice Centres in British Columbia



Presentation showing participants all IJCs locations.

Event Highlights

The luncheon provided participants with an in-depth understanding of key strategies, programs, and collaborative efforts between BCFNJC and BCPS.

Schedule:

- **11:30 a.m.:** Welcome and tour of the IJC.
- **12:00 p.m.:** Welcome from a local Elder/Knowledge Keeper, introductions, and lunch.
- **1:00 p.m.:** Online presentation covering:
 - Progress achieved through BCPS and BCFNJC partnerships.
 - Development of the Diversion Workplan (Strategy 1).
 - Future expansion plans for IJCs (Strategy 4).
- **1:30 p.m.:** Roundtable discussions with service providers, such as Indigenous Justice Programs, Native Courtworkers and Counselling Association of BC, and other regional agencies.
- **2:30 p.m.:** Closing remarks.

Attendance & Participation

The event was successfully hosted across six IJCs, engaging a total of **135 participants**, including Crown Counsel, Native Courtworkers, and collaborative partners, our respected Elders and staff.

Location	Total	Guests	Staff	Elders
Vancouver	30	15	14	1
Victoria	27	15	10	2
Nanaimo	17	8	8	1
Chilliwack	17	9	7	1
Prince George	23	9	12	2
Kelowna	21	13	7	1
Total	135	69	58	8

Impact

This collaborative event reinforced relationships between IJC staff and Crown Counsel, advancing strategies that promote the presumption of diversion and alternative justice measures. Our staff were able to have passionate, educational, and meaningful discussions with Crown Counsel and other BC Prosecution Service staff regarding BCFNJC, including the Prince George



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Diversion Pilot Program. By connecting service providers and justice professionals with the work of BCFNJC, the luncheon strengthened the foundation for continued progress toward justice transformation in BC.

For more information, visit [BC First Nations Justice Council website](#). And for more information around Strategies, visit [Tracking Justice - Progress](#).