



TO REBUILD A NATION

Our Wesley Nation Vision for the Future

**“Creating a well-balanced, healthy community through
autonomy, economic independence, wellness,
traditional and formal education, dedication, and commitment
while maintaining our language and traditions.”**

A message from Chief and Council

Our Wesley Nation has a young, fast-growing and continually better-educated population. Yet still many issues continue to plague our community. Issues like the wellness of our people, jobs, and economic opportunity for our young people. We have a large land base, a business sector that is growing and opportunities as a Wesley Nation to further build a future, a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren. We as a people are well positioned to build this future together. It is time for rebuilding our nation within a nation.

The *Wesley Nation Eight Year Plan for Nation Community, Social, and Economic Development* will be developed through a community consultation process, the support of our Elders and the vision of your council members. Once complete your council will endorse the plan at a duly constituted meeting. The Framework for the plan includes a number of actions to improve the participation and involvement of people in telling us what matters to our community and the areas we should focus on.

In order to have a sustainable future several things are important. This includes: skills and training to improve our opportunities to successfully participate in the workforce and develop entrepreneurial opportunities, a willingness to work hard, and good parenting skills that will override many of the poor parenting practices that we learned through the residential school experience. We must also as a Nation be able to make decisions that meet the needs of the Wesley people and in order to do this we must have control of the resources we need to do so.

The approach that we are taking under this Framework comes from the knowledge that Chief and Council need the support of the Wesley Nations membership to be able to act on these matters and that we must plan with you and communicate to you our planned course of action. The Framework will guide us in an action plan that will help us focus on the areas and ways that will ensure a well community and economic opportunities for all Wesley people.

On behalf of the Wesley Council, I want to ask everyone to participate in the community engagement sessions and other meetings. I especially want to thank the community members who will help to lead these sessions and meetings. Your Chief and Council need you to know that your contributions will help to ensure that this Framework will result in meaningful improvements to the lives of our people and community.

Chief Ernest Wesley, BA

Economic Development Framework

The economic development strategy will focus on skills development, job training, wilderness and ecotourism opportunities, wellness and social support and agricultural initiatives. Our strategy will include establishing an 'Economic Development Board' led by members of our community who have run their own successful enterprises. The Board will be charged with reviewing and recommending for approval to the Chief and Council those applications for economic development support for new enterprises they believe can be successful. Other strategies include:

Computer Skill Development

In the employment world of the future everyone will need to have computer skills. Our plan is to ensure that Wesley members who wish to learn computer skills will have every opportunity to do so. Our Youth Centre, our Training Centre and the Elders Lodge at Eagle Hill Landing will be the sites for our bank of computers.

Job Skills and Training

We will continue to work with Treaty 7 and HRD Canada to provide skills development and job training to ensure that our people are able to take advantage of job opportunities that arise on the Nation as well as opportunities in our surrounding urban areas.

Post Secondary Education

For those of our people who have an aptitude and a desire to train in the areas of addictions, teaching and supporting social development - parenting skills, social work, child care and personal care we will be partnering with many post-secondary institutions and in particular Bow Valley College to deliver the programs here at the Wesley Nation. We will seek to ensure that mentoring and job shadowing opportunities are available as part of our skills development and job training.

Ecotourism and Other Entrepreneurial Opportunities

Our Wesley nation is blessed with these '*Sacred Mountains*'. As recent as the decades of the sixties and seventies, before the discovery of oil and gas on these lands, our people had thriving businesses guiding visitors in hunting trips

throughout our territory. Ecotourism is a growing business and Europeans in particular are enamoured by our ways and our culture. We have vast tracts of forests hills and dales and the Bow River and other tributaries run through it. Entrepreneurial opportunities exist for a new generation of our people who are interested in self-reliance. Many of our elders have knowledge of the environment – plants, animals and natural features in our territory. Every step will be taken to re-ignite the knowledge and practice and teach our youth people who want to learn these skills.

Building on the Success of Nakoda Lodge

We will explore new business opportunities to build on the success of Nakoda Lodge. During the summer months the facility is quite busy with visitors coming from worldwide. Entrepreneurial opportunities exist for those of our people who make crafts to sell their items at the trading post at the Lodge. The winter months are slow business months and many workers are laid off at this time. West Calgary has one of the highest household incomes in Canada. We will focus our marketing to these areas to capture this segment particularly during the fall and winter periods.

Improved Use of our Lands

Our lands are not ideal for crop production however, they are ideal for grazing. We have a Rodeo centre that is under-utilized. Presently horses and cattle roam freely on Wesley territory. We believe there is an opportunity for several animal raising enterprises – some in conjunction with the Rodeo Centre. We will commission a study to explore the agricultural opportunities on our lands as well as how best to harness the resources both in and off the Nation to make this possible. Again there are unique entrepreneurial opportunities whether they are in ranching - animals of all sizes including rodeo stock and possibly small scale processing.

Social Development and Community Wellness

Like so many other indigenous peoples, contact with the Europeans changed our communities, families and individuals. The residential school experience as we all know did much damage to First Nations people's family life and child rearing practices. The Wesley people are no different. Our work ethic has disappeared. We are dependent on the various governments for our daily living. Family violence, drug and alcohol abuse and gangs are an ongoing problem on our Nation. As well, many of our families have lost custody of their children to the Child and Family Services Authority.

Our people are our most essential and valuable resource. Strong, vibrant, resourceful and sustainable communities are the product of healthy and well individuals and families. Our way forward must then address both the social development needs and our community's wellness.

During my last term in office we developed two individual and community self-improvement initiatives: RUN (R____U____N____) and SITE (Self Improvement Through Education). The goals of these initiatives were to rekindle the spirit and promote individual drive and ownership of our people's lives through self awareness and both traditional and formal education. Our goal over the next few months is to reintroduce these initiatives and remobilize our people. Similarly we will have mentoring work and job shadowing opportunities in every aspect of our work force. We will again be providing programs that stir individual drive and are designed to create a balanced, healthy and economically independent Wesley person.

Community gatherings to celebrate festivals or annual holidays are important community building events. Such gatherings bring peoples together and build social networks and social capital. We will provide opportunities for our community to gather together. Youth forums will be organised with a view to have our youth tell us about what they see as the preferred future for Wesley Nation. We will provide ongoing opportunities for our young people to network productively.

Today when some of our young people congregate especially our young men, it's in destructive gang activity. We must face this problem head on. We must meet with the members of the gangs to find out what they think we can do as a community in terms of the right resources and supports to engage them in more productive and positive activity. Perhaps we need a wrestling ring for

competitions vs. fights. Perhaps we can tap into the talents of the gang leaders to have them lead something entirely new and once and for all help rid us of this problem. We won't know what we might do unless we ask.

The issues of family violence and addictions, whether it be alcohol, illicit or prescription drugs or gambling addictions go hand in hand. Perhaps more damaging are the effects these behaviours have on family life, children experiences in these families and child rearing. Our present addictions awareness and referral program is not working. Whatever the reasons our Wesley people are not utilizing these services. We have reviewed the program and have noticed that there is no after treatment support groups, and no AA program. We must look for new ways of providing this service; ways that are more friendly and receptive to our people. We will investigate what other communities who are having success with treating this problem are doing. We will also talk with you through open community meetings in our search for solutions.

Perhaps the most lingering effect of the residential school experience is how it has for several generations impaired our parenting. One of the programs in our Community Wellness is designed to address parenting, early child supports and teaching our culture and traditions to our young ones. We reviewed this program and it is apparent that very few of our residents use these services. We will be revamping how we deliver this program. We must find more effective ways of supporting the many families who are having difficulties raising healthy children.

Finally, we must look at how best to impart our culture and traditions in interesting ways so that our people are motivated and excited to participate in the learning.

We have a lot of work ahead of us – eight years of work – but with all of us working together we can rebuild our nation.

Challenges

Nationhood is about autonomy, the ability to decide for yourself, when you want something done, where you want something done, how you want something done and why you want something done. Our present partnership with the Nakoda nation is with two other bands the Bearspaw and the Chiniki. For us to get anything done we need the agreement of these other two bands. Presently then, our nation does not have the autonomy it would require to act in a timely way and in the best interest of our people. We need to find a way to have the necessary resources when we need them.

We have a heritage fund that came about from saving over the years, monies from oil and gas funds. We believe some of those savings should be used to help with the human and social development, not just social development.