

A Harvest in June

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by Valerie Brumbelow

My teenage daughter is still in a gang. She recently got beat up by the other members; remember to pray for her.”

That powerful testimony grabbed the attention of the crowd at the Native Youth Conference in southern Alberta last summer. The 160 Native youth gathered at James River Children’s Retreat Centre near Sundre, Alberta. They came from all parts of western Canada – as far away as the Nuxalk Nation in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Over 50 percent were from unchurched families.



The poignant, personal testimony came from Thomas, a former gang leader from Manitoba, one of the conference speakers.

“‘Belonging’ draws kids into gang relationship activities like drug running or petty crimes,” he said, “and leaders make their living with drugs like marijuana, crystal meth.” The youth were riveted to hear directly from someone with Thomas’ background.

“Our purpose [at the conference],” said InterAct’s Dan Mayerle, “was to deal with some of the issues that Native youth are facing; so we had workshops on gangs, relationships and spiritual warfare.”



“The weekend was filled with fun, growth, mosquitoes and the Holy Spirit,” exclaimed Mandy, one of the young Native leaders. “We had so many people come forward to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour and rededicate their lives to Him.”

Mandy and other young leaders from a network of southern Alberta church plants¹ ended this event in earlier years and now are leading it.

“We had a lot of good feedback from the teens,” reported Mandy, “especially from the gang workshop. ... A few gang members attended and were able to learn that the only true ‘homie’ is Jesus Christ!”



“The first night Craig Smith of On Eagles Wings spoke to the kids and gave an altar call,” said Dianne Voth, “and my friend, 16, went forward ... and prayed to recommit her life to God.”

Craig Smith charged the kids with the theme: Are you sure? Taking his text from Romans 1:1, he asked ...

“Are you sure of who you really are?”

“Are you sure of why you are really here?”

“Are you sure how you then should live?”

Nelson Kaisowatum, pastor of the Native Alliance Church in Edmonton, led a workshop on spiritual warfare. Several of the younger leaders were part of a panel to discuss relationships, including Mandy and her fiancé, Brad, who taught that true relationships revolve around Christ.

¹InterAct, Native Christian Evangelical Fellowship, North American Indigenous Ministries and Northern Canada Evangelical Mission are all involved in these church plants.



Calgary Native leader Kene Jackson led the planning committee in an evaluation after the event. They have outgrown their facilities and are now at a crossroads. Soon they will need to decide between finding a larger facility or starting regional conferences.

Whichever option they choose, as Mandy points out, "The work is just beginning! We need to hold up these youth in prayer."