Breakout 2A – Communicating and Understanding Treaties: Responsibilities of Generations to Come (Tuesday, November 14, 2017)

Moderators:

1. Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox – Owner, Fox Consulting Ltd.
2. Daniel T'seleie – Student-at-Law, Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP
3. Melaina Sheldon – Program Manager, The Gordon Foundation

This session asked for input from the attendees as to how communities should engage their youth in self-governance. There is a divide between those negotiating and implementing the treaties and the next generation, which is why young people are critical or unaware of the negotiations. Moreover, youth are transient, which makes it is difficult to implement a continuous cycle of leadership transitions within the communities so as to ensure governance does not stagnate.

Now, indigenous communities understand that, in the interests of reconciliation, negotiation is part of an ongoing relationship with government and other overlapping communities. It is therefore imperative to involve the youth as the next generation of leaders. It is also important to understand that these issues are not exclusive to indigenous youth. Non-indigenous people also have an interest in land claims and self-governance and must be involved as well.

Three questions were posed to each table for discussion and presentation:

1. Who is already doing this work? What initiatives currently exist to incite the next generation to leadership? Is there work occurring which we should amplify?
2. How do we go about getting the next generation?
3. Who do we need to communicate and who needs to communicate it?

All tables agreed that youth education must begin early in life in the home. For instance, it is part of the Nisga'a philosophy that, as members grow, they will be involved in their treaty processes. Leadership can only be earned through understanding and responsibility. Elders are crucial as the knowledge keepers to teach the youth.

School curricula must be developed with the teachers using the communities' archives, maps, and histories. Treaties and legal documents must be simplified so as to be easily digested by youth. Lessons must be interactive. Immersion in traditional language will help ensure it does not die out and will give youth a source of pride in their culture. Mock trials and negotiations at high school levels are particularly useful.

Youth often need youth role models to better engage one another at their level of experience. Canoe programs have been successful to educate about nationhood, responsibility and the land as it creates pride in their culture and traditional territories.

Since youth are technologically savvy, information can be more easily disseminated through websites and social media outlets.

Summer student positions can be created in council or in land use/management committees. This will give them an active role, a sense of responsibility, and a deeper knowledge base.