



CUISR:

Community – University Institute for Social Research

*Understanding the Strengths of the Indigenous Communities:
Flying Dust First Nation Focus Group Report*

**by Heather Schmidt, Patrick Derocher,
Jeff McCallum, and Yolanda McCallum**



Building Healthy Sustainable Communities

Community-University Institute for Social Research

CUISR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUISR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluates applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUISR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUISR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

CUISR gratefully acknowledges support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through their Community University Research Alliance program. CUISR also acknowledges the support of other funding partners, particularly the University of Saskatchewan, the City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon Health Region, Quint Development Corporation, and the Star Phoenix, as well as other community partners. The views expressed in this report, however, are solely those of the authors.

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CUISR acknowledges the following for their contributions to this publication:

Nazeem Muhajarine, Academic Co-Director, CUISR

Kate Waygood, Community Co-Director, CUISR

D & S Services / Neil Soiseth , Editing, Interior Layout, and Design

Printed in Canada by Printing Services, University of Saskatchewan

ABSTRACT

Flying Dust First Nation (FDFN) is located on the northeast side of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, with a current band membership of approximately 1,000 people, 387 of whom living on a reserve that consists of seven parcels of land totaling approximately 21,000 acres. In 2003, the band agreed to participate in an Understanding the Strengths of Indigenous Communities (USIC) project. Research for this project was derived from a series of eighteen focus groups involving ninety-seven band members. The information obtained provides a snapshot of what aspects FDFN members believe are their community's strengths and potentials, as well as areas needing improvement.

A data analyst who examined the focus group transcripts identified a total of twenty-one main themes. Twenty of these pertained to Flying Dust perceived strengths (the remaining theme related to participants' responses to the USIC focus group method.) Each theme was examined for its scope, complexity, depth, and popularity across the focus groups. The analyst also examined the many relationships among the twenty different strengths to build a model of larger themes and smaller, more dependent themes. Participants were in agreement about the central place of education, economic development, youth, and community development/infrastructure. They clearly want to see increasing band self-sufficiency and ownership in these areas. Regarding education, band members want a curriculum that prepares their youth for entry into the larger world, yet also grounds them in Cree culture and traditional values. In terms of economic development, the band members' goal is to move toward self-sufficiency. People are proud of their band's successes both in negotiations and business partnerships, but feel that there is an immense amount of economic potential sitting untapped. With regard to community development/infrastructure, the focus group participants were pleased with the progress thus far, but nevertheless described this as an area of "continuing development." In particular, the members want to see more housing and on-reserve amenities, continued maintenance, and other services. Throughout the discussions, elders were held as important because of their traditional wisdom and knowledge.

Leaders, past, present, and future, play a central role in the creation and maintenance of all other community strengths. Participants repeatedly spoke about how the band council and staff have brought about significant positive changes in the community and is largely responsible for the community's current successes. Increased support for the leadership—through increased funding, community involvement in band initiatives, or autonomy over their right to direct and determine the band's future—would seem a sensible direction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Saskatchewan Region, Economic Development Division; Minister of Learning, Saskatchewan; and the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR). Chief Mirasty and Chief Derocher and their respective Council, research staff, Patrick Derocher, Jeff and Yolanda McCallum, Judy Bear, Gloria Lambert, and Connie Dufresne, as well as many other community members who generously donated their time, provided invaluable assistance. Flying Dust First Nation wishes to acknowledge the author of this report, Heather Schmidt, for her dedication and willingness, and also Dudley Morgan, Understanding the Strengths of Indigenous Communities (USIC) Western Research Coordinator, for his many trips to Flying Dust and his thoughtfulness and ability to make the research both interesting and useful for the community. Flying Dust would also like to thank National USIC staff member, Jill Finley, for her excellent organizational skills and dedication to the project. The USIC project was made possible by a Strategic Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to Dr. Cynthia Chataway at York University, with supplementary funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. A very special expression of thanks is extended to Flying Dust First Nation band members for their ongoing interest and support for this project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE UNDERSTANDING THE STRENGTHS OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES (USIC) PROJECT

Flying Dust First Nation (FDFN) is located on the northeast side of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. The band has a current membership of approximately 1,000 people, with 387 living on a reserve that consists of seven parcels of land totaling approximately 21,000 acres. Flying Dust First Nation is also one of the nine First Nations that make up the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC). A chief and council who are elected every two years govern the band, and the council has adopted a portfolio and committee system to deal with the everyday functions that arise in the operation of a modern-day reserve. Every year, the chief and council set goals and objectives for the band and work cooperatively with their members toward their achievement.

On 6 June 2003, then-Chief Rico Mirasty received a letter from York University's Dr. Cynthia Chataway asking for confirmation regarding Flying Dust First Nation's participation in the USIC project. Chief Mirasty approached Patrick Derocher to head up a research team for Flying Dust and drafted a letter stating FDFN's desire to participate in the USIC project. After a team of researchers from the band was hired and trained, the project's first phase, the focus groups, began. The Flying Dust community research

team, in turn, was supervised by a diverse group of respected community members called the Community Oversight Team (COT). This team was carefully selected and given the responsibility of advising and assisting the researchers. Flying Dust members were informed about the USIC research project via press releases in the local newspaper, public notices to band members, radio advertisements, and by word-of-mouth.

METHODOLOGY

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Working with the focus groups on Flying Dust was a very refreshing experience. I got to see the members of my home community working collectively to answer an important question: What are the strengths of Flying Dust First Nation? Understanding the Strengths of Indigenous Communities has been a positive learning experience not just for those involved in conducting the research but for the people feeding back the information. People in the focus groups were obviously impressed with the strengths of the community when they were all placed on the table at once. It gave them a sense of pride in the accomplishments of their home community.

I learned so much more than I thought I knew about my community previously. The USIC project and the focus groups taught me how much better it is to collect ideas when you're focusing on positive things. The entire process taught me that the value of this kind of research is rooted in the perspectives of individuals.

*- Jeff McCallum, Flying Dust First Nation, USIC Community
Focus Group Facilitator*

Junior High students: They work very well in a group. Very willing to help each other out when a person is stuck for words. ... I was very impressed with how hard they worked at coming up with ideas and drawing their ideas. They were also willing to volunteer for every exercise.

*- Yolanda McCallum, Flying Dust First Nation, USIC Community
Focus Group Facilitator*

I learned that band administration requires great involvement with the community. ... I was impressed by new ideas coming from individuals dedicated to their work.

- *Jeff McCallum*

Youths in their early teens are family and community-oriented. They are aware of and appreciative of the services of their First Nation. ... I was very satisfied with the focus and attitude of the group. They seemed very eager to contribute good information.

- *Jeff McCallum*

USIC FOCUS GROUPS (OVERVIEW)

The first phase of a USIC research project involves conducting a series of focus groups. Focus groups are often used in qualitative research to elicit individuals' perspectives and opinions on certain topics of interest. Because facilitators are free to ask people to elaborate at length, these groups provide a way of gaining an in-depth and thorough understanding of the issues at hand. The USIC project's major purpose is to learn what First Nations people, in their own words and based on their own experiences, perceive as the strengths of their respective communities, as well as how these strengths were developed and maintained over time. The project is committed to grassroots research and holds the utmost respect for local opinion and participation.

Holding focus groups allows individuals from diverse community sub-groups to participate and make their opinions heard. Each focus group is informed that they are free to disagree with others as long as all opinions are respected and everyone is given the chance to speak. At the end of each focus group session, participants work together to assemble all their ideas into a "group map" that visually presents the results of their session. Because people sometimes get distracted by things that displease them, while also taking for granted those things in their lives that are going well, the rather unique experience offered by the USIC project (i.e. sitting down with other band members specifically to discuss shared community strengths and other positive aspects of community life) often leaves participants with an overall sense of well-being and enhanced community pride.

Selecting and recruiting participants

USIC originally sought to run a minimum of fifteen focus groups, plus one final focus group / timeline group (called an integrated focus group). Before commencing with focus group sessions, the community researchers worked with the Flying Dust supervisor,

USIC project director, and USIC research director to come up with a list of sub-groups within Flying Dust. The researchers sought to facilitate at least fifteen focus groups and came up with a list of subgroups (e.g. youth, elders, band staff, young women, young men, off-reserve members) for inclusion.

Before conducting the first few focus groups, the researchers went to particular sub-groups (e.g. the school principal, teachers, and students) to give a short presentation about the USIC research project and to explain what could be expected from participation in a focus group. This was not done with all the groups because some were put together rather quickly, and so there was no time, or need, for a presentation prior to their group work. Thus, the research team employed flexibility in terms of recruitment methods, depending on the group and situation.

One research team member, Judy Bear, took primary responsibility for organizing and scheduling participants for the focus group sessions. Community members were contacted either by telephone or in person and asked to participate in one of the groups. In the end, the Flying Dust research team completed a total of eighteen focus groups, including the final, integrated session. In total, ninety-seven band members participated in the various focus groups. The number of participants in the focus group sessions varied from a minimum of three to a maximum of sixteen, and a wide variety of community perspectives were included.

Facilitating the focus groups

Focus group sessions began in October 2003 and ran through to the middle of May 2004. There were two facilitators, both members of Flying Dust First Nation, who always worked together to conduct the groups. Yolanda McCallum acted as the main facilitator most of the time, with her brother Jeff McCallum as co-facilitator. The researchers prepared for focus group facilitation by taking a one-week training session offered by the USIC project, reading the USIC focus group manual, and conversing with the research supervisor, Patrick Derocher, and the USIC research director.

Transcribing the focus groups

The main facilitator and co-facilitator transcribed the tape-recorded focus group data from sixteen of the first seventeen focus groups. Unfortunately, the recording equipment failed to properly record one session, and so all that remained afterward was their group map. The project supervisor transcribed the final integrated focus group and timeline session. Completed transcripts were emailed to the USIC director for feedback on the facilitation.

Analyzing the focus groups

Although the facilitator and co-facilitator were originally trained to conduct a thematic analysis of the focus group data, other commitments precluded this possibility. Instead, the research supervisor hired a non-band member who had previously analyzed the focus group data for another First Nation participating in the USIC project. This researcher was able to prepare a preliminary report based on the first six focus group transcripts before she too was called away to another job opportunity. Eventually, one USIC staff member, a PhD student from York University, visited Flying Dust in August 2004 and agreed to analyze and write up the entirety of the focus group data. Because a non-member of Flying Dust, who was also not present for any focus group sessions, conducted the analysis and wrote up this report, some input from the Flying Dust supervisor and others was required to validate the findings.

Focus group transcripts were analyzed using a qualitative analysis technique called grounded theory that was originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss.¹ The first step in this process involves dividing each focus group transcript into “meaning units.” For each newly developed coherent thought in the transcript, a number is placed in the margin beside where it starts and where it ends. This demarcates a meaning unit. The purpose of meaning units is largely organizational in nature and used to divide the seemingly endless streams of dialogue into smaller chunks of text that are much easier to manipulate. The second step in this process involves going through each meaning unit and examining it in-depth for different themes. Each new theme is recorded on a recipe card or computer file, along with relevant meaning units and corresponding quotes taken directly from the transcript that pertain to the theme in question (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Meaning Unit Card Format.

	Theme
2mu 3	[what was said]

2 = Focus group number

mu = meaning unit

3 = meaning unit number

The grounded theory process was used to ensure that the conclusions in the analysis report are firmly grounded in the participants’ own words and opinions. The theme cards were used to construct the analysis and conclusions that follow.

¹ John McLeod. (2001). *Using Grounded Theory*. Sage: London, p.71.

PROCEDURE FOR THE FLYING DUST FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group procedure followed the guidelines listed in the USIC focus group research manual. Some changes, however, were made along the way. The researchers worked with the USIC academic team to refine an approach that would make the focus groups run as optimally as possible in their community. The USIC project director provided feedback and follow-up training as needed.

Throughout the focus group process, the facilitator and co-facilitator used flip chart paper and chalkboards on which to write key notes.

Step 1: Introductions and responding to questions

The facilitator started focus group sessions by asking everyone present to briefly introduce themselves. The researchers then provided a description of the USIC project and its history. Next, they responded to any participant questions and concerns. The researchers also emphasized that any written material derived from the focus groups would be sent to the local COT and members of the community for approval prior to being published or sent out for wider distribution.

Step 2: Informed consent

The focus group facilitator then handed out the USIC consent form as provided in the research manual. The facilitator went over the consent form and, in some cases, read portions out loud. Participants were asked to sign the bottom of the consent form if they agreed to let USIC use their information anonymously. In some focus groups, an additional consent form was passed around to allow the researchers to videotape and/or take pictures of the focus group for use in the final report and/or on the web page. All the focus group participants were all asked for permission to record the session with an audio-recorder and a microphone.

Step 3: The group agreement

After consent forms were signed, the facilitator asked the participants to brainstorm about creating a positive group experience. The facilitator introduced this concept as a “group agreement.” The facilitator learned that the most effective approach to this exercise was to ask the participants, “How can we treat each other today to make this a positive group experience?” and “What can we do to make the group run smoothly and get the most information out of our time today?” The co-facilitator wrote participants’ comments onto flip chart paper. After compiling a list of agreed-upon principles, participants signed the bottom of the flipchart to signify their “group agreement.” This agreement was then taped to the wall where it remained in sight for all participants. During subsequent group

discussions, the facilitator pointed to the group agreement when necessary to remind everyone of the agreed upon rules.

Step 4: Identifying community strengths

The facilitator then posed the question, “What makes Flying Dust First Nation strong?” The focus group participants were asked to work independently and each make a list of what they felt were their community’s strengths. The facilitator then asked them to assess each strength’s level of development by labeling them as large, medium, or small. The co-facilitator distributed a work sheet to the group for this exercise to help them proceed through the steps. Next, the participants were asked to illustrate these strengths on small, medium, and/or large sized post-it notes, the size of which corresponded to the perceived developmental size of each strength. Although participants sometimes expressed hesitation regarding their drawing abilities, they went along with it after some encouragement from the facilitator.

Step 5: Sharing strengths with the group

The next stage involved participants taking turns sharing their list of strengths with the group. This is a very important stage because it allows the facilitator to immediately follow up with participants and ask them to explain their ideas in detail and depth, as well as to clarify confusing or vague points. This stage can be time-consuming, however, if there are a lot of people in the group and they all have a number of strengths to cover. Thus, some compromises between depth and time-efficiency must occasionally be made. How talkative the participants are feeling further impacts on these compromises.

Step 6: Creating a group map

After all the participants have shared their lists of strengths, they are then asked to work together as a group and, using flipcharts, markers and post it notes, come up with a way to show how all these strengths are interrelated. The facilitator suggested that this process start by first grouping similar strengths. Most of the focus groups came up with several groupings of strengths (e.g. culture, self-government, education) and were then encouraged to work with markers to show interconnections amongst the different clusters of strengths. Most focus groups drew lines between the different groupings to show how one was related to the other.

After the project was underway, the USIC research director suggested that if there was time left (and participants were willing) that the discussion be turned to whether any of the strengths undermined each other. By the end of the focus group sessions, however, many participants appeared to be a little tired and eager to return home.

Step 7: Thanks you's and future plan

Focus group participants were thanked for their time and contributions to the research. Before disbanding the sessions, the facilitator asked if one or two from the group would be interested in participating in the final integrated focus group / timeline session in order to create one large community map synthesized from the other maps, as well as to construct a community timeline. They were also asked whether they would like to receive a draft of the results in the mail.

Step 8: Debriefing and reflections

Shortly after each focus group ended, the facilitator, co-facilitator, supervisor, and any other research team members who observed the session sat down as a group and evaluated and reflected upon their experiences using the debriefing form from the research manual.

THE FINAL INTEGRATED FOCUS GROUP / TIMELINE SESSION

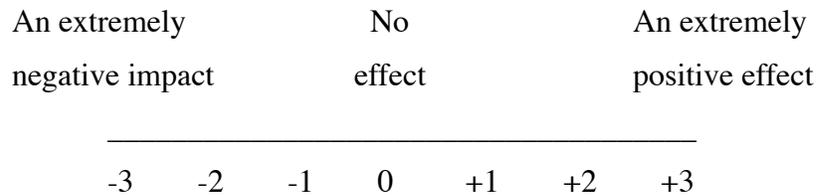
In May 2004, Dudley Morgan, the USIC Western Research Coordinator, paid a visit to Flying Dust to facilitate the final integrated focus group and timeline session with the assistance of the community supervisor and local research team members. A local artist also attended these final sessions. The final focus group was composed of sixteen people from the previous seventeen focus groups, as well as a local artist. These participants were asked to look carefully at the seventeen group maps created by the previous groups and reach a consensus about ten to twelve key strengths that best represented Flying Dust First Nation as a whole. After much discussion, the participants came up with the following list of core community strengths:

1. Education
2. Economic Development and Agriculture
3. Health and Families
4. Spirituality and Beliefs
5. Treaty Land Entitlement Opportunities
6. Youth and Recreation
7. Partnerships
8. Infrastructures

The group then illustrated these strengths and discussed why these strengths were chosen as important for their community. Next, the participants placed the illustrations on a larger piece of paper and were given markers to show how these core strengths related to each other. These drawings were then given to the artist, who later developed a rendition of each illustration.

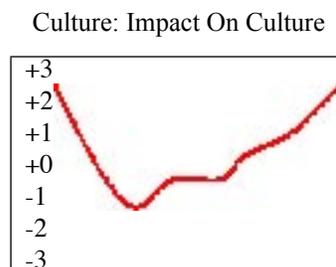
After the integrated focus group exercises had been completed, the community facilitator led a timeline focus group. The group was first asked to compile a list of Flying Dust’s significant historical events and to rate the impact that each event made on the eight key community strengths by using a number scheme (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. Community Strength Scheme.



The participants worked together to draw a timeline that included all the historical events that they mentioned. The timeline was then replicated onto a smaller piece of flipchart paper by one of the researchers. The participants were then asked to think about the eight key strengths of Flying Dust and to consider how each historical event on the timeline had affected those strengths. A clear acetate plastic sheet was placed on top of the timeline for each key strength. Following group consensus, one participant drew a line to demonstrate the impact that the historical events had had on each particular strength over time (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Sample Historic Strength Graph.



After all the strengths had been charted on their own plastic acetate sheet, these acetate sheets were placed on top of each other so that participants could see all the strength patterns over time. One of the researchers copied the results onto a permanent piece of paper for easier reading. The research supervisor created a computer-generated version of the Flying Dust Timeline at a later date (**Figure 4**).

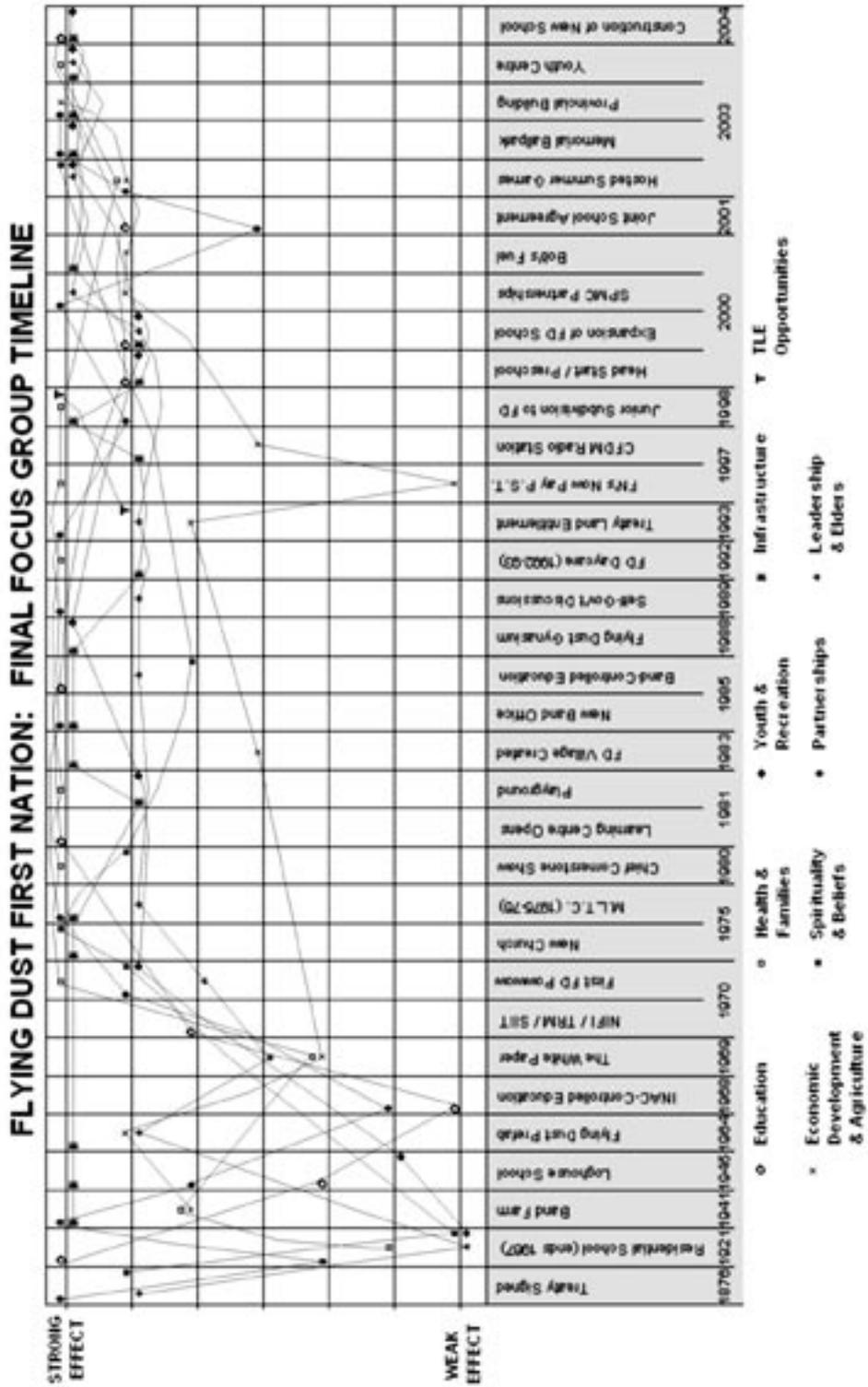
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A data analyst conducted a grounded theory analysis of the focus group transcripts and began by pulling out twenty-one main themes. Twenty of these pertained to the strengths of Flying Dust as seen by the focus group participants, while an additional theme related to participants' responses to the USIC focus group method (as discerned from their comments within the transcripts). The twenty extracted community strengths included the following:

1. Church and Religion
2. Communications
3. Community Development
4. Community Togetherness
5. Culture and Traditions
6. Democratic and Inclusive
7. Economic Development and Jobs
8. Education
9. Elders
10. Environment and the Land
11. Family Ties
12. Financial Stability
13. Health System and Home Care
14. Inter-community Partnerships
15. Leadership and Role Models
16. Off-reserve Support
17. Safety
18. Self-sufficiency / Taking Initiative
19. Sports and Recreation Facilities
20. Youth Involvement / Development

Next, each theme was examined in terms of its scope, complexity, depth, and popularity across all of the groups. How many times was each strength mentioned? Was it mentioned repeatedly within all focus groups or only in some? The analyst also examined the many relationships among the twenty different strengths and sought to determine which smaller, less frequently mentioned themes could reasonably be subsumed under larger, more inclusive ones. For example, a smaller theme like "Financial Stability" (mentioned in only ten of sixteen group transcripts) pertained to the Flying Dust band council's accountability with regard to financial matters. This smaller theme could therefore be included as a subcategory of the larger theme "Leadership and Role Models" because it is related to strong leadership in Flying Dust. The resulting analysis produced eight main themes for Flying Dust:

Figure 4. Flying Dust Strength Timeline.



1. Community Development: Amenities and Services
2. Community Togetherness
3. Economic Development and Jobs
4. Education
5. Elders
6. Environment and the Importance of the Land
7. Leadership and Role Models
8. Youth Involvement and Development

These eight strengths were then compared to those found by a previous analyst of the data. In the preliminary report on the first six Flying Dust focus groups, the other analyst pulled out five key themes:

1. Business/Employment/Economic
2. Community
3. Education
4. Focus on Youth
5. Leadership

The preliminary reports findings were quite similar to those in the later analysis, although the latter included three additional themes, possibly because the second analyst had access to a greater amount of the total data.

Rather than simply discarding or ignoring the remaining twelve themes, all but one became subcategories of the eight main strengths. These smaller subcategories were, when appropriate, included under more than one main strength (see **Table 1**).

Throughout this process, the data analyst also looked for larger themes that seemed to have an overarching presence throughout the majority of the focus group data, even if participants did not specifically identify them. One such overarching theme that emerged was that of “Taking Initiative / Self-Sufficiency.” This refers to the Flying Dust community’s pride in itself for being forward-thinking leaders, role models, and progressive innovators, and, as a result, serving as a positive example for other First Nations to follow. A second overarching theme to emerge from the Flying Dust data was named “Integrity / Accountability,” which can be defined as the pride that community members feel for the band’s ethics, reliability, and other related internal dynamics.

Table 1. Eight Key Strengths of Flying Dust First Nation.

Key Strength	Subcategory Strength
Community Development: Amenities and Services	Health System and Home Care Sports and Recreation Facilities
Economic Development and Jobs	Intercommunity Partnerships
Education	Intercommunity Partnerships Culture and Traditions
Environment and the Importance of the Land	[none]
Elders	Culture and Traditions Health System and Home Care
Community Togetherness	Communications Democratic and Inclusive Family Ties Off-reserve Support Safety
Leadership and Role Models	Communications Financial Stability
Youth Involvement and Development	Sports and Recreation Facilities

Note: An additional remaining category, self-sufficiency / taking initiative, was omitted because the analyst was initially unsure where to place it in the above table.

RESPONSES TO USIC FOCUS GROUP METHOD

As a few of the participants stated directly, one of Flying Dust First Nation’s strength is the people’s good-natured sense of humour. As was observed throughout the focus groups, participants spent a fair amount of time joking around with each other, laughing, giggling, and generally enjoying their time together.

At the top of my list, I have humour. Flying Dust is a place where, I’m sure you’ve noticed already, that [we] just laugh at everything. It makes it makes your day a little bit easier to get by. (2MU13)

Humour. I think our people, our reserve can, uh, laugh about a lot of things, not very serious. They joke around a lot. ... It don’t get too serious. It don’t create blocks, you know. If there’s a problem, they’ll work through. They’ll often joke about it laugh about it, get over, get through it, eh? (3MU7)

This characteristic of the band's people was particularly drawn out during the USIC focus groups when they were asked to illustrate community strengths. They laughed at each other's drawings and made numerous self-deprecating jokes about their own drawing abilities. In fact, the focus group facilitator initiated this approach by mocking her own artistic abilities when she introduced the exercise. This seemed to result in an on-going component of humour and light-heartedness that carried throughout the entire focus group session. This process of sharing drawings often made the group laugh and seemed to significantly reduce participants' initial tension, nervousness, and shyness.

***FGF:** It doesn't have to be anything really artistic. 'Cause I know I can't draw. [She draws a quick picture on the board.]*

***10C:** You're right. You're not much of an artist. [Group laughs] (10MU1)*

***2E:** Okay. These are a bunch of people. I only drew five people but this is, uh,*

this is towards spirituality and towards, uh, what did I draw here?

***2B:** Looks like a septic dump. [Group laughs] (2MU3)*

***FGF:** Okay, stay on topic.*

***3A:** Don't be talking about something else, like talking about a moose you shot*

two days ago.

***FGF:** Okay, I think something you said ... was to have fun.*

***3C:** You just had to put that on the record.*

***FGF:** We'll put that up there. Anything else?*

***3A:** Definitely respect everybody's views and thoughts. No laughing.*

***3C:** No ridicule.*

***3B:** Scratch off the "have fun" thing. [Group laughs] (3MU1)*

A few of the participants also commented afterward about how taking part in the focus group activity had given them a good overview of their community and had left them with the realization that "we're all connected." Others commented that the exer-

cise had given them an incentive for supporting future initiatives and could help them formulate a “vision statement” for the future of the community.

I would just like to see the end result. I could just see this: the whole community making a whole vision statement because you got all different age groups, everybody from different [groups] coming in. (13MU14)

FGF: *Did everyone have a good time?*

10E: *I enjoyed the things that were shared here. It gave me a better incentive.*

FGF: *I think this is a really good research method.*

10C: *Yeah, it gave you a good overview of the whole community system. (10MU23)*

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: AMENITIES AND SERVICES

Many participants cited the variety of services and amenities available within Flying Dust as one of the community’s key strengths. Seemingly referring to the same thing, the final integrated focus group chose “infrastructure” as one of Flying Dust’s eight core strengths. Many participants spoke about how living conditions in many other First Nations are not nearly as good, and that it makes these people feel lucky and thankful to live on the Flying Dust reserve. Furthermore, the participants often stated that there is continuing community development and improvement. For example, several people spoke about the growth in housing in recent years. They spoke positively about both the number of new houses being built and the high quality of band housing. Others mentioned the reserve’s on-site daycare facility, noting the convenience factor, their appreciation for its culturally-based approach to education, and their comfort in leaving their kids with trustworthy and familiar community members. Other community amenities that were mentioned included the good quality of garbage collection and road maintenance, the radio station, carwash, gas station, hair salon, gymnasium, community hall, band office, tribal council building, health station, and the possibility of a senior’s home in the future.

The services we offer I put as a large. Uh, we offer a lot of services in the community. All the sporting and extra-curricular activities the band picks up free of charge to all the members, on reserve and off. Um, we got garbage pick-up, we got plumbing, electricians, everything, the whole works. The band takes care of the people as far as that. Uh, we even go as far as providing food for elders. Um, the freezer always has meat in it whether it be fish or berries. And that's all services provided for elders and, uh, people on social assistance. ... I think that's a strength because no other communities do that much for their people. (3MU7)

The school, the ball diamond, the track... [Laughs] I put that as a strength because our community has grown lots. ... I think housing has grown a lot, too, developed a lot. (8MU2)

Housing. Flying Dust has excellent quality of housing, uh, for its members. Um, they've really, um, I guess purchased a lot of homes in the last few years. Um, they've increased their numbers quite a bit. ... Well, it's not rundown. It's renovated. ... They try to make sure that everybody has, um, healthy living conditions. (15MU14)

Yay for our daycare! [Laughs] I think it was long overdue when the daycare program come out for First Nations people, not just here but across the country. And it allows [not just] an opportunity for parents with kids to get involved in that daycare but also to go to school and not worry about where their kids are being cared for or go into training or whatever. (12MU10)

Health system and home care

Many participants said that one of Flying Dust's strengths is its on-reserve resources that help band members to stay healthy and/or improve their health. In fact, the final integrated focus group chose "health and families" as one of the band's eight core strengths. Although participants agreed that health care services "involve just about every community member" (16MU22), the participants spoke in particular about positive effects on the health and well-being of potentially at-risk or vulnerable community members, such as the elders, pregnant mothers, new babies, children, the disabled, diabetics, and those with addictions. As one person stated, "The young mothers: they know they have support and help if they need it" (9MU27). The on-reserve health clinic has knowledge-

able, well-liked nurses who provide prenatal care (e.g. nutrition and supplements), baby clinics, immunizations, and educational information on various illnesses and other health issues. The health centre also offers parenting classes and workshops on various health education/awareness topics.

There's health, our health, the clinic. They help so you don't have to like go to town and ... you can just go to the health clinic and they'll help you with anything. They give you free stuff, too. (6MU15)

They have workshops and stuff that teaches you about healthcare, and they give you help when you need it if you're pregnant or hurt or got a cold. (9MU23)

We have a clinic here now. We can, we can go and access, you know, medical, medical supplies, you know, and also we have, uh, we have staff there that are, that are willing to go out and look after our elders and disabled. (1MU16)

Certified home care workers assist elders and disabled band members in tasks such as house-cleaning, nutrition (grocery shopping and cooking), basic medical care, and transportation. One elder described his happiness regarding the level of care provided within Flying Dust:

We have our own home on-reserve. Well, we're pretty well looked after. I wouldn't want to move back to the city ever again when I have all the services that I need. (17MU7)

There are also a variety of support groups and counseling services available in Flying Dust that help people recover from drug and alcohol addictions, solve marital and family problems, and leave abusive relationships. Lastly, Flying Dust has an Abilities Council that works to create awareness about people with disabilities, as well as improving their access and mobility around the community.

We've got First Nations members with disabilities. And you go for home visits, they're about taking care of, um, through the home care system provided through our health and our clinics, um. We've got a bus for them now. I don't know if it's working now, is it? [Group

laughs] *You know, and, and we don't forget about them. I mean, they count, right? Um, they got chair lifts, everything like that in, in the home they're structured. You know, we take care of them and I think that's a big plus, too.* (2MU16)

We have a lot of people that, um, want to be ... more active in the community and I think we respect that regardless of their abilities. (12MU11)

Sports and recreation facilities

Participants commented that there are numerous sports-related activities available for children and youth, and, to a slightly lesser extent, adults, and so the final integrated focus group included “youth and recreation” as one of the community’s eight most significant strengths. The band provides financial support to promising local athletes and also supports youth sports by funding hockey registration and team trips. Community members seem to agree that sports give kids something positive to do, thereby keeping them busy and out of trouble. Participants said that Flying Dust has a lot more in the way of sports facilities compared to what other reserves have to offer (e.g. baseball diamond, running track, gym, skating rink). This abundance is due in part to the band’s close proximity to Meadow Lake, but also because a lot of the newer facilities were constructed on the reserve when they hosted the 2003 Aboriginal Summer Games. Because of all the available sports amenities and the recognized positive benefits that sport has on youth, the band strives to host sports-related community events that are targeted toward bringing youth, families, the community, and local bands together. A few people commented that being surrounded by active peers inspires them, in turn, to be fit and active.

Not too many reserves around have, um, three baseball diamonds and a track and a hockey place and a big gym. So I think that's pretty strong. Our sports activities, it's pretty high because, you know, we have, uh, all these grounds and kids can play sports all the time. And we have activities for them like, uh, tae-kwon-do for children, and hockey. (8MU8)

And the Aboriginal Summer Games that we had, it, like, we did a lot of preparing for that and it got lots of students and other people involved. ... And the track, a soccer field, and a baseball diamond. ... 'Cause there's lots of participation in it and it also kept other people in shape. (6MU10)

I have basketball, soccer, and hockey and stuff like that ... football. ... 'Cause it teaches our youth leadership skills and it helps them work in a team environment, working together to be the best they can be, I guess. (5MU14)

COMMUNITY TOGETHERNESS

We're all like one big family. (9MU47)

We're all there for each other when it comes down to it. (9MU31)

The participants frequently mentioned how well everybody in Flying Dust gets along with one another. This generally high level of good-natured and harmonious community togetherness is one of Flying Dust's major strengths. Several people attributed this quality, in part, to the community's small size, which encourages a greater familiarity with each other. Some people mentioned that they felt like everyone in the community is "all like one big family" (9MU47) or like one big team working together. People are routinely helpful to each other, and, in turn, feel as though they can depend upon one another for support. According to the participants, band members treat each other with acceptance, respect, honesty, civility, and consideration. Most people tend to be quite sociable and are also very good at cooperating and working together. Even when people have disagreements, conduct tends to stay civil.

We've always stuck together through hard times, through whatever, trials and tribulations, but we stuck together as a community, and I think that's one of the successes and the strengths of Flying Dust. (1MU3)

We have love ...in our community. ... It's like, sort of like support. They help you and they just encourage you to do stuff. (6MU15)

Everyone knows each other. That's a strength because we all grew up together and [will] be in the same community forever. [Group laughs] ... Everyone helps one another. ... Like if an elder needs their driveway shoveled, you can go there and do it. Or baby-sit the next door neighbour's kids, or I don't know. Whatever they need, if they need a ride somewhere. Just to help each other, so that you know they'd do the same for you. Everyone pitches in and helps to keep the community a safe and clean environment. (9MU53)

The civility of the people: ... Like there's the ability of you guys, like if there's a disagreement there, you can have your disagreement and we can sit down and discuss it, rather than fisticuffs, you know what I mean? ... Like, I know there's not like, not everybody gets along, but there's still that ... mutual respect. (14MU11)

Another big thing is everyone in our community is friendly. Everybody knows everyone else. Everyone is welcome into everyone else's home. It's just nice that everyone, uh, can relate with everyone else and can talk to anybody. (16MU21)

Community pride

A large number of people mentioned widespread community pride as one of Flying Dust's strengths. People are immensely devoted to their band and they are proud to tell others that they are from Flying Dust First Nation. Band members are extremely supportive of each other and they celebrate their fellow band members' individual achievements. The success of one person, regardless of the size of that achievement, is seen as a success for the whole community.

And I thought that wherever I go, wherever I travel, you name it, I am always proud to say that I'm from Flying Dust. I'm proud of our little community. You know that, uh, wherever I go, I always keep in the back of my head that I'm an ambassador of Flying Dust and a role model (17MU2)

We've got a lot of pride and you can see, like, in just in the community. ... Even just the fact that our, our yards are clean and ... you can go to just about any home and they're quite clean. People are proud of themselves and being part of [Flying Dust]. (13MU5)

When somebody from our community succeeds, all the band members are proud of them. They say, "Right on!" You know? (15MU12)

Community gatherings

Participants also spoke about the various community events and annual gatherings that regularly take place in Flying Dust. These social events bring the community together en

masse and are truly loved by band members. The only complaint was that these events did not occur often enough. The gatherings provide an opportunity for community members to talk, have fun, and become reacquainted with one another. Participants cited the following community events as examples: Christmas; Easter; Thanksgiving; treaty days; sports days (e.g. snowmobile rallies and races); round dances; the annual fishing derby; workshops; feasts; and conferences.

Our community events is a strength because it teaches, um, like our treaty days and our Christmas dinners. I think that's cool for us to all come together as one community, and you get five bucks! [Group laughs] It helps us come together as a community and it, um, kind of shows us that, really, we're all there for each other when it comes down to it. (9MU31)

Well, there's quite a bit, but still, I'd like to see, um, more powwows here. ... Well, we have round dances and we have our treaty days and I don't know We have little workshops and things like that conferences. ... Fun, I guess! [Laughs] Community things and something the community can do get together. (10MU11)

Committees

Lastly, a number of the participants pointed to the various committees within the band as another of Flying Dust's strengths. Band members sit on committee boards designed to present and then implement improvements in such areas as education, health, housing, justice, police, and self-government. These committees are very inclusive and often consist of representatives from each of the big families within Flying Dust. This ensures that a majority of the various perspectives from the community are voiced and taken into equal consideration. Anyone who wants to join a committee to better the reserve is allowed to participate. The committees work together toward the shared goal of finding ways of improving particular aspects of Flying Dust so that it will better meet the needs of the entire community.

This is a real strength for us because we have a lot of committees. Like, we have our own individual housing committee, we have a justice committee, we have an education committee, we have a health committee. ... I sit on the [housing] committee, [and] the way we brought the committee together was having each individual, um, family be represented on our housing committee. ... They're there to represent their family's individual needs and ideas and concepts of what they believe should be changed. (11MU14)

The good of all, rather than for one. Where not just one person decides for the community or for anything. Like the committees—they'll decide something and then it's not just the chief or it's not just the health director ... they all decide together and everybody has a say in decision-making, I guess. (14MU15)

Church and religion

The on-reserve church and Christianity was not brought up in all the focus groups nor was it mentioned by a clear majority of people. On the other hand, it came up often enough to warrant the formation of a new subcategory. Interestingly, the two youth focus groups had a number of positive things to say about the church. Not all people in Flying Dust are Christians or attend church, but for those who do the Flying Dust church and their religion are seen as major strengths of the community.

My strength in everything is by prayer. Everything. Everything I do, that's where I get my strength and, it's about prayer. Even when you're working then, you don't have to worry. When you pray first thing in the morning, you put him first, to help you. Otherwise, if you don't pray, you do it by yourself and it's more harder, especially when, especially when you're getting old. (1MU5)

Those who attend church believe that Christianity's "foundation for strong values and beliefs" (8MU3) has resulted in strong families, strong leaders, and a strong community. "It keeps a lot of our people on a straight path, I guess." (9MU38) A number of people spoke positively about the church youth group and how it teaches important values and keeps them both safe and busy (i.e. out of trouble) with activities and trips. Others also described the on-reserve church as a great source of support and a provider of comfort and strength for those in need. The Flying Dust church contributes to community harmony by supporting those who desire its services, as well as by being welcoming and accepting toward everyone else.

I got, uh, religious community on medium-sized paper. ... It teaches people of the community good morals and behaviour and beliefs and stuff like that. And, uh, everyone's welcome there, so that's good. It makes everyone stronger that way. (5MU14)

They do a lot of summer camps ... Sunday school. They do a food hamper, they do counseling, and they work with the youth, and they

have a camp meeting. And a lot of people from outside communities, from the nine bands, um, come to ... the church or phone to the church for support. (13MU9)

Some participants also discussed how the church had given many people in the community the strength to recover from drug and alcohol addictions. The church never turns anyone away and, located on-reserve, is also easily accessible: “It’s such a great thing that we have a church on our reserve to turn to.” (16MU17) Another positive aspect that some participants noted was that both the pastor and youth pastor are Flying Dust band members. As one participant explained:

I think if we want to help our own people, we need our own people there to say that, “I’ve gone through this and this is what the Lord has done for me what God has done for me. And what he can do for me, he can do for you.” ... Your youth pastor is right from Flying Dust. ... She’s young and she’s gone though a lot and she can use that to show other young people and give them hope. (16MU3)

Other participants who attend church services described how they aspire to be role models within the community. The overall theme of this subcategory relates to ways in which the church and religion offer a source of support, hope, and strength to some members of Flying Dust. Some people spoke about how they pray for the band leaders “to have wisdom” (12MU5) as well as for the future of their community. As one church-goer stated, “It’s one of the things for success with the help of God.” (12MU12)

Communications: keeping members well-informed and involved

Many participants commented that one of Flying Dust’s strengths is that members are kept well informed about what is going on in the community. There are various means of community communication, including newsletters, the band’s own radio station (CFDM), letters in the mail, and frequent band meetings. Furthermore, these venues are used by a variety of different groups and people to speak with the whole band. Community nurses, for example, issue newsletters about health education topics.

Band members are pretty well informed about what’s going on around in the community. And I got, for example, like newsletters are sent out and, uh, we have our radio station and, uh, band meetings, for example, too. I put that as a large, uh, a greater strength because, uh,

it's good for us as band members to know what's going on around in our community. (11MU17)

You know, uh, we find out stuff through letters, through the radio station, through newsletters, through meetings, through gatherings, and everybody knows what's going on. You know, so there's nobody left in the dark about this or that or because there's always somebody out there who knows. [Group laughs] (14MU15)

Participants seemed both impressed and proud that all members, including youth and especially elders, have a right to speak and be heard at community meetings. These meetings are a venue at which to share ideas. People greatly appreciate that chief and council make a special effort to include and inform the band membership about community issues as much as possible. Off-reserve members noted that the band council even holds off-reserve consultation meetings to ensure that they are kept up-to-date on everything important that is happening within Flying Dust. Community togetherness is enhanced through the democratic and inclusive nature of band communications, as is support and respect for community leadership.

Community members feel that they, that they are kept informed ... therefore they support the leadership. ... The membership really become involved, they feel they're kept, uh, informed and they support that, and that's why when some-something goes on Flying Dust it's usually has anywhere from ninety to a hundred percent support from the community. (2MU12)

Community meetings just like this, where people can gather together, share ideas, let their voice be heard, and it's just such a nice thing to just hear what everyone else has to say. (16MU17)

Democratic and inclusive

As one person stated, "Everybody has input or everybody has the potential to have input into community development and all that." (10MU6) The participants discussed how one of Flying Dust's strengths is that every band member is given the power to participate in community discussions and make their voices heard. As a result, everybody has the opportunity to effect change. They also mentioned that not everybody in the band takes advantage of this, but that many do. Individuals can participate by joining committees,

attending band meetings (knowing that their opinions will be respected and heard), and by voting in the band election to elect a fair and representative chief and council. For their part, the band council does not monopolize its power but rather shares it with the community. Even youth are encouraged to participate and speak their minds. Another person noted that the priority is “the good of all, rather than for one,” and further noted how they “all decide together and everyone has a say in decision making.” (14MU16)

We are community oriented, right here. By that, I mean everybody, uh, within the community of ... Flying Dust, uh, we know everybody. At times some people are referred to as the Joneses and whatnot, but in the majority of the community's mind everybody is equal, everybody is treated equal. Uh, you're not given, you know, certain other benefits that some members are because you're who you are. Everybody is, is treated equal. (3MU5)

The focus group participants cited tolerance, equality, and an appreciation for diversity as some of the strengths of Flying Dust. A few people discussed the high level of freedom of expression within the community with regard to the different religions and forms of spirituality that are present. Others spoke about how the diverse talents and skills of band members are celebrated as a source of pride for the whole community. One person commented that they “try to allow them an opportunity to share their diversity with us.” (12MU6) Another person had high praise for the “clean and fair” election process in Flying Dust, and also spoke favourably about how after elections people accept the results, set aside their differences, and once again come together as a cohesive community. Overall, the community prides itself on being friendly, open-minded, and accepting of diversity.

I think our community is quite tolerant. ... We're quite sociable. We try to get along with everybody. (17MU9)

Family ties

A number of participants cited strong family groups as a strength of their community. They stated that there are four or five large extended families within Flying Dust who provide a major source of unbreakable support and encouragement to their members.

All families here are very strong together, and they do lots together as a whole family. And you can just see it in everything that we do. Our

families always come first and we support our families in everything that we do. (13MU7)

I think everybody has a family and they help you and they, they support you on anything you want to do, and they, they go places, you go places with family. They share things, share problems. They share like lots. (6MU17)

I see that there are family groups that have very strong family ties. ... We help each other out. We encourage each other. We, um, get together as a family and celebrate birthdays ... anything that needs celebrating. When somebody leaves to go somewhere else, we have a meal for them 'cause we think that's very important to spend time with them. (16MU1)

Many people talked about the importance of staying in close contact with cousins, parents, and other relations. Other discussed “the importance of seeing ... my nephews and nieces and my own kids and then my grandkids succeeding” (15MU6) as well as the importance of spending “as much time with their kids as they possibly can.” (11MU5) A few said that many adults in Flying Dust have strong parenting skills and cited as an example the high level of parental involvement in their children’s activities, such as sports and recreation. One youth explained why parents are such a strength in the community:

I chose parents because they, uh, they tell you what to do and not what to do. And they tell you, um, to go to school and, uh, they help you with your homework and, and they help. And some of them are block parents. They can help kids when they're screaming and [group laughs] running away from somebody. (6MU21)

Other participants pointed to large family gatherings as evidence of the importance of strong family ties within the community.

A lot of families ... like when there's community events, like a lot of families get together. Like sometimes in the summer time, different families get together, and in the winter times and then Christmas time, you know, like all the families, I always see that. Like you always see

all the families get together. That, I think, that's a strength, um, just to see everyone kind of gathered in their homes and that extended family and people come home from the cities. I just see that family orientation as a strength. (1MU12)

Some participants also discussed their belief that strong and healthy families are the foundation for children who eventually become strong, well-adjusted adults and leaders. One focus group followed this up with a discussion of how parents act as leaders within their families, and serve as examples to their children in terms of healthy values and behaviours.

Strong leaders usually stem from families that have strong values. (8MU14)

It is a strength for ... individual people. Like, to come from family, from a big family like Bears, Derochers, Merastys, the whole works. I mean, they're all so important. (10MU9)

15A: *Probably for me, the centre of everything is the family*

15B: *Families, closely-knit, that are clean, healthy, uh, spiritually, emotionally, giving you the qualities that you need to become leaders within the community. (15MU20)*

Off-reserve support: staying in touch with the band

This topic was only brought up in three of the eighteen focus groups, possibly because not all groups contained band members who live off-reserve. Some of the topics that off-reserve focus group participants discussed include: benefits for them / what they get; benefits for the band / what they contribute; and how they stay informed about Flying Dust issues and events. Even when they are far from the reserve, band members take comfort in the fact that they can always call home if they need help. For example, one person discussed how some off-reserve members turn to Flying Dust leadership when in financial need:

There's quite a bit of off-reserve members that phone in daily and ask for, uh, say they're behind on their power or their rent, they'll ... request chief and council to give them an advance, they call it. ... So, they look to their reserve for assistance. (9MU12)

In terms of what the off-reserve members contribute back to Flying Dust, participants mentioned that they vote in band elections, make a point of patronizing band businesses whenever possible, help out with band events, and provide support to other band members when they leave the reserve to visit their town.

The off-reserve people, they help with our reserve elections and, um, sometimes, there's elders in hospitals, and then there's off-reserve people, like, if you go to the city and you're in the hospital, and it'll be somebody from the city from Flying Dust that'll come visit you. (9MU25)

The off-reserve members stay in touch with their band via friends and family, but also with the help of off-reserve meetings arranged by the Flying Dust band council. Chief and council believe that it is crucial to keep their off-reserve members informed about events in the community. This outreach enables off-reserve people to be active members of the band, even though they live elsewhere. The off-reserve members who participated in these focus groups were also very appreciative for the opportunity because it made them feel like valued and integral members of the community.

It's important we have input into the whole what's happening at the band level ... even if we're off-reserve. (17MU3)

The Chief and council come in and ... inform us about what's happening on the reserve and what kind of land they're buying and what's happening with the people up in Meadow Lake. And I just ... try to attend those meetings at all times whenever I get a phone call. (17MU13)

Safety: low crime rate

Community safety was specifically mentioned in only seven of the eighteen focus groups. A few of the participants mentioned that Flying Dust's nighttime security personnel is a community strength:

Not everybody likes it but, you know, at least we have some security on this reserve and people know about it. (14MU3)

I got nighthawk Maloa here. That's 'cause at night she's surveying the reserve here, making sure no little kids are running around. Pretty good, so I ... I don't know, just because make sure no kids running around, breaking, breaking in, B and E's, so the reserve stays safe. (5MU17)

Along related lines, a number of participants stated that Flying Dust has a very low crime rate, especially when it is compared to that of other nearby reserves. People generally feel safe and protected within their own community.

I think it's good that we have a low crime rate in our community. And you look around [at] some of the other reserves nearby. They're kind of rough and the crime rate, but I think we got some good role models to look up to and stuff so I think that's what kept the crime rate down. ... There's respect, communicating, having fun. (10MU10)

The participants attributed the low crime rate to both the nighttime security as well as to the presence of positive role models for youth within the band. Furthermore, the many on-reserve activities for band youth help keep young people busy with healthy pursuits and away from the trouble that is often associated with youth and boredom. In addition, a few people stated that Flying Dust has a “good working relationship with the RCMP” (14MU3) and that it also has “active justice and police management board committees” (15MU14).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOBS

Leaders and community members are business-oriented. (15MU3)

Most participants strongly felt that economic development is one of Flying Dust's key strengths and that it is improving every year. The final integrated focus group selected economic development and agriculture as one of the band's core strengths. Several people made comments to the effect that “we have a lot [more] things to offer than most reserves.” (8MU8) On the other hand, they also tended to qualify their responses by commenting that although the current state of economic development within the band is generally strong and on the right track, they also saw room for future growth and improvement. The participants felt that there is so much untapped potential for growth and so many promising opportunities available that they appeared to be eagerly, if not somewhat impatiently, anticipating continued large strides in economic growth.

Business development and, uh, also, uh, job creation and work ... I think, it has a big impact but it's a, I think it's on small scale because there's so much more to do. And I think there's a lot, uh, there's a, it's a, it's, it's scratching on the surface right now. There's a big potential that's sitting on and that's why it's not small in terms of, uh, in terms of its impact anyway. (1MU7)

Participants mentioned the following list of on-reserve businesses and off-reserve endeavours when discussing Flying Dust's success in economic development: Bob's Fuel (gas station/convenience store); building a mill; carwash; cattle farming; cleaning; concrete; construction; crafts; grain farming; fire suppression team; forestry and reforestation; gardening; gravel pit; hair salon; home care; laundromat; logging; outfitting; radio station; ranching; real estate (i.e. leasing and renting property in Meadow Lake); renovations; saw mill; septic services; trucking; and a butcher (Weber's Meat Cutting).

We're not at a place yet where we're, you know, where we can quit growing, but we're here. ... Flying Dust has a couple of initiatives now where we're, we're able to generate our own revenues, um, to help with management, general management, general administration to keep our businesses self sufficient. We have our septic service which pays for its own employees, it pays for its upkeep, plus we make some profit. We have, uh, a partnership with Bob's Fuel where we have revenues coming in with the rebate program. We have the daycare, uh, maybe the daycare's not a good, uh, but you know things like that, we're becoming more and more self-sufficient. Like we built the provincial building. We've got, uh, MLTC building, you know. We've got other initiatives that we're working on which will pay for themselves, and then once the principal's paid off we'll make profit. (2MU14)

A number of people commented that because they saw instances of other band members' success with their small businesses, they felt that others in the community, themselves included, would be able to start their own business if they wanted, and that with hard work and the readily available support of the band council they could attain some degree of success. Role models within the community and success stories are a well-known source of band pride, and this appears to be empowering to the other members.

I put our radio station and our carwash and gas station and our hair salon as a strength because it creates employment for one, and, um, it just lets people [know] that there is [a lot of] things out there that we could do. Everything's available. We could do lots. I could start a business or; you know, do something for my kids. (9MU30)

According to the participants, there are many benefits of Flying Dust's economic success to date. On-reserve job creation is one obvious benefit, although the participants frequently commented that more jobs within the community are needed.

For job opportunities, like, we have a lot of jobs in the community. And, like, and we, and the reason why we have a lot of job opportunities because we have good administration. And I put all that, all the buildings that we, like all the job sites or whatever you want to call them, um, bus and gas station, all that stuff, health office, administration office, prefab. But we do have a lot of, um, jobs that we have in the community. And that's from good administration as far as those go. (2MU4)

Bringing money into the community also allows for other things, such as the funding of various band programs and the purchasing of land, via Treaty Land Entitlement, to expand the reserve. As one person noted, "It just builds a big bank account and the money goes around to the band members" (9MU5). Every economic success was seen as a shared victory for Flying Dust as a whole, rather than solely as individual endeavours. Also, the community has built successful business partnerships with other First Nation communities.

Flying Dust's success in economic development was attributed to a number of sources. Many cited the reserve's location, bordering the nearby town of Meadow Lake—"an economic hub of the province" (16MU7). A few people also mentioned community members' achievement in post-secondary education as a contributing factor:

With the higher education comes the better economic development. People are educated to take those positions of authority and make something of their endeavours. (10MU19)

Flying Dust's leadership also actively supports economic development within the community. Participants mentioned that the band council builds community capacity by hiring "their own qualified band members to come and do work for them." (15MU11) The council also ensures that good job training opportunities are made available to community members. Furthermore, some of the leadership is also very business-savvy.

I think we've got some leadership there now who's doing some good things, who's really throwing some business, uh, plans together and really trying to make some things happen. (17MU3)

Very professional, um, we can do business well. Our chief and council are, uh, very professional about the way they do business. (3MU7)

We are aware of our business partners and, uh, deals. ... I think our leadership, we, we kind of watch basically who we get into bed with respect to, uh, businesses and dealings. Uh, we kind of study, we, we do some research, uh, and make sure that the people that we, we do business with are, are who they say. And although some of our own businesses we've ventured by ourselves haven't been so successful, but there are other things that we have done well in, um, and that's very important to, to watch who you surround yourself with, and Flying Dust does that. (3MU4)

A number of participants further cited the strength of character of Flying Dust members as contributing to the band's overall success in economic development. One person described fellow band members as being very self-sufficient and exceptionally good at fundraising, of being "risk-takers who go out there," and who do "not always rely on the band to give us money" (13MU8). Others discussed how band members have extra motivation to succeed because of their strong attachment to Flying Dust First Nation and desire to see the community thrive and prosper.

People ... more or less, you know, want to do something for the community that we can be proud of and [so] we can be proud of our community. (16MU7)

Intercommunity partnerships: working cooperatively with other groups

According to the participants, one of Flying Dust's strengths is its skill at forming cooperative partnerships with other groups, both First Nations and non-First Nations, from outside the reserve. The final integrated focus group selected partnerships as one of the community's core strengths. Among these advantageous partnerships that Flying Dust has formed include those with the town of Meadow Lake, and with the other eight bands that also belong to the MLTC.

Like, we're so close to town, we can be involved in there. They can belong to, to us, too. There's a lot of groups that combine together. ... You know, with your golf and your hospital, your curling club, your hockey, your restaurants, RCMP, your hotels, and your swimming pool. So the central gatherings. And also that we're so close to town, the other reserves around us feel, feel like they're at home when they come up here, like, to gather for things social functions. (14MU9)

The close proximity of Meadow Lake to the Flying Dust reserve makes it possible for band members to become involved in various aspects of the town's life. It also means that non-band members are attracted to Flying Dust for meetings and events because of its location. The band and town have partnered together to host big public events, such as the 2003 Aboriginal Summer Games in Flying Dust. In addition to making Flying Dust a social hub of west central Saskatchewan, the band has also successfully negotiated several business agreements within the town of Meadow Lake, as well as with other non-First Nations.

We're able to do business with non-First Nations. Um, out in the community, we got several joint ventures with, with, uh, non-First Nations. ... There's the oth-, the one in town we built ... Inland and the provincial building. (3MU8)

Our partnership with industry, for instance, a gravel company with, uh, with a cement company, that's a partnership that we, that we, we, we've had. NorSask. ... We sit on that board because we have ownership of it, and that's the same thing with industry when we go sit at NorSask pulp. It's not a token Indian sitting there anymore, it's an Indian who has a ownership in that company. ... Here, it's your dollars that go out the board if you make the wrong decision. So you sit up and listen to these, what's going on at, at those board meetings. And that's the industry. Uh, Sask government, we just built, built them a new office uptown worth six million dollars. And the local government, we have, uh, we have a partnership with them too, mainly in water and sewer. They supply us with our water and sewer and we, in turn, bump some money into their capital when, when they do things. But I think one of the great strengths that, that we, that we also, that we also have is the contacts with people that hold, people, the contacts we have with industry. (1MU18)

In terms of their partnerships with other First Nations, participants cited successful economic development partnerships, such as the formation of the Mistik business endeavour.

'Cause when you develop a relationship with another First Nation, you work together ... and you work on the pros and cons of bettering your community giving economic development and training to your people. (9MU16)

Some of the focus group participants spoke about the advantages of having the MLTC office located on their reserve. They described how the MLTC regularly provides youth activities and training workshops that draw members from all nine reserves to Flying Dust. One person mentioned that the Flying Dust church also draws people from all nine bands and provides an on-going source of support over the phone and in-person for those in need. Furthermore, having the MLTC on-reserve provides jobs for Flying Dust band members. A few people also stated that the MLTC has contributed to Flying Dust's successful dealings with the federal and provincial governments.

I think having MLTC here on Flying Dust land is a bonus. And it's [a] building that continuing to build that relationship with, um, MLTC and the different nine bands. Because ... the nine bands have to come here and so they see Flying Dust all the time. ... I'm proud to be a Flying Dust person. (13MU9)

EDUCATION

The key to the future, to a better community. (8MU3 and 9MU6)

The participants overwhelmingly endorsed education as one of the biggest strengths of Flying Dust and referred to it as "the key to our future." Further reflecting this sentiment, the final integrated focus group chose education as one of the community's eight core strengths. People felt that the band's education system is strong, has come a long way over time, and is continuing to develop and improve. Many spoke about their pride in the number of highly educated people from Flying Dust, and about how this provides positive role models for others in the community. At the same time, they also recognized the need to continue to improve.

I know there's a lot of a lot of our people that are getting educated, but it would be nice to have everybody educated, eh? (8MU7)

Participants discussed several different aspects of education: (1) benefits of higher education and of a highly educated band; (2) encouragement and support; (3) educational opportunities; (4) partnerships with the Meadow Lake School District; and (5) benefits of the new on-reserve school.

Benefits of higher education

Participants emphatically stated that pursuing as much formal education as possible is the key to band members getting better jobs, increasing the amount of local economic development, and enhancing the overall quality of life on the Flying Dust reserve.

Education is the vehicle by which people attain higher standards of living. And if everybody was educated, the quality of life for everybody would be significantly higher. (10MU5)

Along related lines, some people spoke about how higher education allows parents to “get ahead,” “make a better living for their children,” and not be “dependent on the social system” (9MU6). Thus, education is seen as an empowering tool that band members can use to become self-sufficient and enhance their family’s standard of living. Furthermore, parents who adhere to this ethic provide positive role models for their children to follow. Because band members must currently leave the reserve to attend post-secondary institutions, many participants spoke about the benefits of having highly educated people return to Flying Dust after receiving their degrees. Some said that post-secondary education helps to build strong leaders—such as Flying Dust’s current chief—who are skilled at successfully negotiating with the government on behalf of the community. Others spoke about the importance of “recruit[ing] your own people who are educated and hir[ing] them for their expertise.”

I think it’s so important that you bring those people back to the community, because when you do that your young people are seeing these people—they’ve gone out and got an education. And it gives them hope and they think, “I can do that,” you know? “This person did it. I can do that, too.” (16MU2)

Lots of educated people. Like post-secondary education. And the reason I say that is because the standard is set for the chief and council and the administration to live up to the standards of our educated people. Um, when our people go out and get educated they learn, sometimes they learn more than, than in a lot of times they learn more of the out-

side society than it used to be the way things used to be. So we have to adapt and grow with the, with the outside community of Meadow Lake. And that's what I meant by lots of educated people: the standards is set by these educated people in our community. (2MU7)

Encouragement and support

Because the community agrees that higher education is a vital part of their future, the band leadership and many community members go out of their way to “encourage people not to drop out of school and just go the distance” (16MU17). With regard to youth, the band provides fieldtrips as encouragement for those who are doing well academically.

[In] this up-and-coming generation, we are enforcing education. We are, we are encouraging them to have better math skills, better literacy skills. And education is, is definitely the key to the future to a better community. (8MU3)

An elder from one focus group session contrasted the current level of support for education to that which she had experienced as a child:

When I was going to school, there was no such thing as, uh, uh, you had to go to school. I could have quit school when I was thirteen. Nobody, nobody pushed you to go, uh, um, it, uh, which you call, Indian Affairs were running the, the show then, and they didn't push any kids to be going to school from reserves. 'Cause I think they just wanted to keep us down without nobody get an education. See, since people started get-, getting educated now, what happened to Indian Affairs, you know? They, the bands took their own, their own, uh, that's what I think anyway. ... But I think the parents more or less has to kind of push their kids more into, uh, telling them about how important education is. 'Cause without education today you're, you can't work anywhere, unless you go to work in a, a beer parlor. [Group laughs] (4MU3)

Other people commented on the number of on-reserve training programs (e.g. CPR, carpentry, computer skills) that the band has initiated to encourage adult members to expand both their horizons and job prospects: “They're always trying to get their community to encourage them to, to further their training” (13MU9). Another person stated that Flying Dust provides “a support system you don't find any place else” (17MU10).

Several people said that the band does its best to provide financial assistance to any member who wishes to further their education. In Flying Dust, the leadership feels that a lack of financial resources should not be a deterrent to achieving a higher education. In addition, the whole community provides a great deal of encouragement and support to its members in all their educational endeavours:

The education of the people. That's like, like at all levels, like with kids, to the grads and everything. And what I notice is ... Flying Dust is proud of their Flying Dust band members who finish anything. Like even it can just be a little two-week program or a one-week, you know? But they're, the opportunities are there for them and they're behind them. (14MU12)

Educational opportunities

In addition to on-reserve job-training workshops, several participants also stated that Flying Dust is relatively close to a number of post-secondary schools, which they felt provided band members with an added incentive to pursue higher formal education.

Like we're in a prime location here. 'Cause I work in a post secondary education, so we're trying to bring more programs in ... Try to send more people to school. ... You know, somebody really wants to go to school, well, we'll try and help them out as best as we can. (17MU7)

Partnership with the Meadow Lake School Division

Some focus group participants cited the partnership between Flying Dust and the nearby Meadow Lake School Division as a strength. One person described how this arrangement reflects the progressive and independent nature of Flying Dust:

We've gone to the tables with, uh, Meadow Lake School Division and sat and talked about, you know, our education, about taking control of it. (15MU8)

The partnership between Flying Dust and the Meadow Lake School division is one of, I think, our biggest attributes. Being a First Nation, being on an even playing field with, with the whole school division, not

just a school but a whole school division. They see us as partners, we have, uh, we have voting, a voting member. We have, we have a voice on the school division so anything that, that's going to, that they're going to talk about that's going to affect us, they'll listen to us and they'll take our, you know, our suggestions, our considerations that we have. (2MU15)

Others described how the partnership “built good relationships with the town [and] gained us a lot of acceptance” (13MU2) that didn’t exist previously. Some felt that more local students have been graduating from high school in Meadow Lake because the band has more control of the education system and there is wider-spread respect for Flying Dust members outside the reserve. Because education is such an important asset to community members, this achievement was seen as a big source of pride for the band.

Benefits of the new on-reserve school

A vast majority of the participants were very excited about the recent establishment of an on-reserve elementary school, regarding it as a sign that the band was taking even more steps to regain control of their education system. They felt that the new Kopahwakenum school would be a huge source of strength for Flying Dust. They foresaw a number of benefits stemming from the new school, as well as from the on-reserve Headstart and preschool programs. Indeed, some band members with education degrees are already being employed as teachers at the school. Participants saw the fact that educated members had been drawn back into the community via employment and were now providing healthy role models for the children whom they teach as a strength. Many people were enthusiastic about expanding this opportunity to build community capacity even further, and speculated about the possibility of one day having a whole school system run and taught by band members.

Another advantage of the new on-reserve school is that Flying Dust exercises more control over the curriculum that is taught to their children. In particular, the participants were excited about elders regularly coming into the school to speak to the kids in Cree and teach them the band’s cultural practices and traditions. Thus, independence from the Meadow Lake School District was seen as a very positive step.

Not every reserve has a school and I'm just glad we have one. ... It gives us Natives, like, our strength, like, we could do it, like, we don't have to go into Meadow Lake and depend on them and we could do it ourselves. (9MU40)

I think it is a strength that we are concerned about our kids' education because the kids are the future, so we got to educate them. (3MU3)

Participants saw the new on-reserve school as a safer and more nurturing place for the band's young children to begin their educational experience. They reported that it encourages kids to bond and "be more involved with each other on-reserve" (13MU10) before heading off to the Meadow Lake school system. As one person explained, "You need family and togetherness for the first few years of your life" (14MU7). A few people mentioned that an on-reserve school allows them to protect and prepare their youngest from the racism that they might eventually encounter in their later schooling off-reserve. In addition to bringing children closer together, others described how the school is also bringing adult band members together, in addition to strengthening the bond between elders and youth.

We have our own school on this band, on this reserve. And that's something not just to be proud of but something to keep that keeps the community together. (14MU3)

The convenience factor of the on-reserve school was also mentioned several times by participants. The school is close enough that most children can walk from home, and it also makes the school much more accessible for parents who do not have cars. Parents have the comfort of knowing that they can get to the school quickly in the event of any problems, and it also allows them to drop by the school more easily and become more involved in their children's education. The school's close proximity also:

gives a person more incentive to attend. If I had to, if I was attending a school that was two blocks away, I'd be more inclined to go there and keep going there. Whereas if the school was ten miles away, there's a good chance I probably wouldn't go. (10MU7)

Others felt that by cultivating an early interest in school (i.e. making it friendly and accessible), more youth would enjoy their educational experiences and eventually graduate from high school, and perhaps even go on to post-secondary education, thereby ensuring a higher quality of life for the whole community. One of the students from the youth focus group summarized the importance of education in Flying Dust:

Educational facilities, there's like different types, like, uh, elementary schools, highs schools, post-secondary places, and daycares maybe. ...

They're important, very important to the community. I can't emphasize that enough. ... 'Cause, 'cause otherwise, uh, the population of the town would be under-educated and ignorant, and it would be bad for the economy and stuff like that. [Laughs] (5MU13)

ELDERS

Participants stated that the Flying Dust elders are very important and highly respected community members because of the traditional wisdom that they possess and can pass along to the younger generations. When talking about elders, the words “teach” and “educate” were used repeatedly. Elders were cited as being the teachers of the traditional values, beliefs, and wisdom necessary for health and well-being. One person said, “Kids [who] grow up with good health, they're going to be elders” (9MU65). The elders in Flying Dust teach other band members how to live right and be good people, and about the importance of respect for oneself, for others, for the community and culture, for the natural environment, and for the Creator. It was noted, for example, that the elders were behind Flying Dust's very successful community cleanliness initiative.

There's elders, and I, I picked it because ... they can tell us long-time stories and they're teachers to us. It's just like learning about respect. (6MU5)

One participant commented, “If it wasn't for them, we would have lost our culture a long time ago” (17MU12). In addition to passing along traditional hunting and trapping skills, Flying Dust elders speak Cree and therefore hold the key to the language's survival. Furthermore, they teach about the past and can share the wisdom that they have accumulated throughout their long lives. One participant (15MU7) commented that Flying Dust's elders set the tone for the community's development and its present success. This person described how several people in the 1960s and 70s made a life-changing decision to quit drinking and devoted themselves to both self-improvement and improving life in general on the Flying Dust reserve. Consequently, the elders today provide excellent role models who can show younger generations how to be strong and wise. As one participant expressed, one needs to know the past and be well-grounded “to know where you want to go” in the future (17MU3).

Elders are our strength because basically, in a nutshell, they've been there and they've done it. They've gone through the hard times. They've watched what's been happening, they've learned from their old people

... so they basically have generations of knowledge to pass onto us. Being in Indian communities, the written word wasn't introduced until contact, I guess. Our elders were our teachers. They were, they were our textbooks. They were our libraries. They were our knowledge base, basically. And they still have all that knowledge to pass on and the stuff that they have you can't get out of any books. (2MU16)

A number of participants also described how the elders in Flying Dust are very supportive and encouraging to the younger generations. One person noted that some elders regularly attend youth sporting events to show their support, and they often encourage people throughout the community to obtain as much formal and traditional education as possible. Another commented, "They're always there for us when we need to talk to them" (17MU12). The participants noted that elders give advice and share their insight when it is needed. Some of the elders are very involved in the community and regularly provide input and advice to the band council. Their insights are currently being put to use in some of Flying Dust's community programs.

And the next one, most importantly as well, is our elders. We have a very active group of elders. They are close knit and that, that believe in the unity that supports us in everything that we try to do for the community. (1MU3)

In turn, because the elders are such vital members of Flying Dust, it is extremely important that they are well taken care of via home care, the health system, and community support. Numerous individuals cited home care and more general community support of the elderly as a strength of Flying Dust. One elder stated:

Young, young people, young men that, that hunt, they go hunting for elders. You don't, you don't see that like, like I, I, I, I meant by, by, uh, like I've spoken to my, to my, uh, cousin who lives in, in another reserve. And I ask her "Do, do you, do your young people go hunting and go giving meat to the elders and stuff?" Which this happens here a lot, you know? And that one thing that she said. "Oh no," she says, "you never see that." (4MU5)

Cultural development and traditional activities

Participants described culture as having an understanding of history and one's background, and of knowing "who we really are." Elders were seen as the primary source of

traditional cultural practices and knowledge. Although culture was not cited as a highly developed strength within Flying Dust, one person stated, “That’s one of our strongest points; we shouldn’t lose that” (16MU11). Everyone seemed to feel strongly that there needs to be a greater focus on: restoring the place of culture and tradition within the band; re-discovering band heritage; and making better use of elders’ wisdom and their willingness to teach it to the younger generations.

According to the participants, Flying Dust’s culture is expressed through activities such as the Cree language, sweats, powwows, round dances, traditional games, sweet-grass, traditional medicines, hunting, trapping and fishing for wild meat, drying meat, beadwork, and canning. Culture is also expressed through traditional values, two of the most important being community togetherness and respect. Many of the cultural activities listed above are social events that bring the community together and make band members feel happy and connected to one another. In addition, the participants seemed to agree that culture teaches respect for the earth and its inhabitants, with an emphasis on the importance of respect for elders as the teachers of traditional wisdom. One person stated, “Culture guides us in how we teach, how we teach the youth, how we come up with businesses, our health issues in our community” (16MU28). Culture was seen as a permeating force that strengthens individuals, band leadership, and Flying Dust First Nation as a whole.

Several people noted the particular importance of culture for band youth. It was noted that Cree culture provides good role models in terms of proper values, morals, and resiliency. Many seemed to agree that culture “instills pride within our children because they need to know about the culture and where they come from” (13MU9). Others commented that another advantage of keeping youth preoccupied with a lot of different cultural activities is that it keeps them focused on something positive and out of trouble. A number of participants praised the cultural camps because they allow the younger generations to learn traditional skills and wisdom directly from elders. These camps teach traditional survival techniques, such as trapping, fishing, hunting, orienteering, and riding horses. People also spoke positively about how elders currently go into the on-reserve school and the daycare/preschool to speak Cree, teach traditions, and talk about the history of Flying Dust. One teacher at the on-reserve school described the importance of a traditional education:

Culture and tradition ... knowledge, growing in our community. ... Our cultural like I work at the school, myself. Okay, in the cultural side, it's just a way, our way of life that was, our, our culture is our way of life. How we used to live, how we ate, what we ate, how. And, uh, traditional is some of the things that are beliefs to our people. And the different things they have to, why do they have to have a feast? When do they have a feast? What is involved in it? So it's different things.

I'm also teaching a little bit on sweetgrass to our young children. Tobacco, why is it used? Sage, why is it used? These are a little bit of the things that are, little bits of pieces about our culture and traditions that are now going into the schools. (1MU4)

ENVIRONMENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LAND

"It's where we come from us, as Aboriginal people. Our closeness our close ties to the land." (10MU8)

Across the various focus group sessions, participants discussed four different strengths of Flying Dust that all relate to the environment and the importance of the land: keeping the reserve clean; hunting, fishing, and trapping; the band farm; and the Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) process of reacquiring reserve land.

Keeping the reserve clean

Many participants cited Flying Dust's cleanliness (i.e. the "community beautification" initiative) as a strength. As one person commented, "It creates a positive image" (11MU11), and is a tangible way for people to show that they have pride in Flying Dust. One person stated that the elders were responsible for initiating this movement. It is seen as a community responsibility in which everyone pitches in to help keep the community clean. One person commented that Flying Dust has "little or no vandalism [because] our kids are respectful" (13MU3). Flying Dust also has a good garbage collection service and maintenance operation to assist in this endeavour. A number of people mentioned that Flying Dust is a lot cleaner and nicer looking compared to other reserves that they have visited.

It's a nice clean community and, you know, people take pride in their yards. People take pride in, in the, just the fact that the community is clean. You know, it makes you feel better about yourself when you come outside and you can, you know, you just smile because it looks nice, instead of going outside and the first thing you see is a, you know, you go, "ugh," you shut the door, go back inside. So it makes it easier for people to come out. It's, it just makes people feel better. (2MU15)

Everyone pitches in and helps to keep the community a safe and clean environment. ... They build parks for kids so they stay out of trouble. Because to be a community, you have to have a place to be a community in. And nobody wants to stick around and be a community in a dirty,

gross, yucky place. ... It's there for the kids to keep them ... busy so they're not into drugs or getting into trouble. (9MU53)

We have community beautification. A lot of reserves don't have this. There's people out there in the summer cutting grass and cleaning up and each person cleans up their own yard and keeps it very nice. ... You look good, you feel good. At least I do! (14MU8)

Hunting, fishing, and trapping

Other participants stated that the traditional practice of living off the land is a strength of Flying Dust First Nation. In part, hunting, fishing, and trapping wild game were seen as a means of self-sufficiency and self-preservation. As one person said somewhat jokingly, “Our people, you know, haven’t starved as you can see [from] some of them, you know, walking around here” (16MU9). Even before band members had money and the opportunity to purchase their food, the community successfully sustained itself by living off the land. A continuation of this tradition today connects band members to the past and their culture. Because of this, some people spoke very favourably about the hunting trips that are available to Flying Dust youth, which they regarded as a very healthy bonding activity. In addition to these benefits, Flying Dust has a “community freezer” that encourages hunters to share wild meat with other community members, particularly those unable to hunt/fish/trap themselves, such as elders. A few people also noted that the reserve is in an ideal location for hunting and fishing.

The location of our, of our situation. I got a picture of a river, a picture of lakes, which adds to our economics, our recreational, and our spiritual and cultural stuff that I see here. (1MU17)

The band farm

Agriculture and the band farm is another strength of Flying Dust that relates to the land. The final integrated focus group recognized this as an important community strength by including it in their “economic development and agriculture” category. Farming creates employment, brings money into the community, and is a good source of economic development. Like hunting, fishing, and trapping, agriculture is another potential means of self-sufficiency. People described the band farm as a source of pride, especially with regard to the fact that it remains resilient in spite of the current agricultural crisis on the Canadian prairies. A few participants also noted that the band farm brings in money that can be used to help community members out when they encounter financial problems.

It's helping all the elders, like, you know, paying for their fuel and everything like that. (16MU8)

That [gives] back to the community because it brings in money. ... Whenever you're short of money, they've always got that income there to help out (16MU13)

The TLE process

Finally, another strength cited by the participants was the TLE process of purchasing back tracts of land that originally belonged to the Flying Dust reserve. The final integrated focus group selected "TLE opportunities" as one of the band's eight core strengths. This process is largely funded by Flying Dust's economic development successes. People had a number of different reasons for citing this expansion of band territory as a strength. One person simply stated, "Flying Dust has a lot of land. ... It's there, and it's ours, and that's a definite strength" (12MU8). Another person described Flying Dust's growing land base as an "economy," and explained further that "It gives us gravel to build with and it's the land to eat off of" (13MU10). Reference was also made to self-sufficiency and the traditional ability of band members to live off the land. The land provides everything that is needed for survival, and today its resources allow Flying Dust to prosper:

That's another strength 'cause of, uh, how small Flying Dust originally came out. Now, we're finally getting most of our land back through, uh, TLE, which is great. ... It's where we come from, us as Aboriginal people. Our closeness, our close ties to the land. (10MU8)

LEADERSHIP AND ROLE MODELS

We're all leaders in our own way. (8MU5)

The participants strongly agreed that the chief and council comprise one of Flying Dust's greatest strengths. They often referred to them as excellent role models for the rest of the community, especially for youth. In addition to the band council, however, participants also often spoke about many other people in Flying Dust who provide inspirational and healthy examples for others to follow. Furthermore, some participants discussed how all members of Flying Dust are role models and "leaders in our own way" (8MU5). Although most of the focus surrounding role models pertains to Flying Dust's band council, this central category was expanded to also include other band members. Participants also talked about how the community as a whole is an innovative leader and role model for other First Nations.

The kids need good role models just to stay healthy and for someone to look up to so they know where to go in life. ... To me, a role model is someone who is healthy. I mean, by healthy I mean not drinking or drugging or gambling up all their money. (9MU34)

Positive role models. ... It teaches the kids that, uh, you shouldn't be into negative things. It's better to be positive and think that way by helping out other people and standing for them, letting them look up to you. (5MU15)

Another person commented that Flying Dust's positive role models have resulted in "a low crime rate in our community" (10MU10) because band youth tend to admire and emulate responsible members of the community. According to the participants, good role models are band members who are supportive, innovative, free of addiction, hard working, respectful of others, and highly educated. These are often people who return to Flying Dust after receiving university degrees and then work diligently to make the community a better place. Their very presence creates a lot of hope and inspiration on the reserve. Some people who were named as Flying Dust role models included several MLTC members, the on-reserve nurse and teachers, the pastor, youth pastor, and youth centre director, and the Flying Dust chief and council members.

Those people who have grown up on the reservation here and left to go to college or work ... and then they come back and help us out at the band level. And, you know, they provide that leadership, that role model ... to our youth and our community. And we can say that we do have people who have done that and I can, you know, too. (15MU9)

Participants further mentioned that everyone in Flying Dust aspires to be a leader or role model in some respect. For example, some parents spoke about how they are role models for their children. Parents can also raise their older kids to be role models for younger siblings and other relatives.

Because, uh, a lot of the times growing up, your family, you know, is your role models. You know, it might be your mom, might be your older brother, sister, cousin, whatever, grandmother. (10MU22)

Some participants talked about how young people in Flying Dust are raised to be future leaders and role models. They are encouraged to go as far as they can in the education system, as well as to be hard workers, innovative thinkers, and proud members of Flying Dust First Nation. One focus group came to the consensus that good leaders “usually stem from [strong] families that have strong values” (8MU14).

We also have leadership that supports the youth. I think that's so important because it's our youth that are one day going to take over the positions of these people. ... The leadership provides the, um, finances for them to go places to send them off to leadership seminars. (16MU5)

A number of people talked about Flying Dust's innovation in a variety of different areas and how that has allowed them to serve as a role model to other First Nations communities. One person spoke about feeling like an ambassador of Flying Dust whenever he visited other communities:

Community pride. And I thought that wherever I go, wherever I, wherever I travel, I don't just go into, you name it, I am always proud to say that I'm from Flying Dust. I'm proud of our little community. You know, that, uh, wherever I go, I always keep in the back of my had that I'm an ambassador of Flying Dust and a role model out there type-of-thing. (17MU2)

Finally, with regard to the chief and council in Flying Dust, participants gave several reasons for citing them as one of the community's biggest strengths. A number of people credited leadership with being a big part of the reason why Flying Dust is prospering and doing so well today. Many simply described them as “strong leaders” of whom they were very proud. When asked to elaborate, they praised Flying Dust leadership for being educated and intelligent hard workers who are devoted and dedicated to the whole community.

The leader knows what they're talking about and they're able to make a rational decision based on information and facts and not just like what they want. They're not in it for their own personal enhancement or whatever. Uh, they know what's going on in the community, maybe how to change things. (5MU16)

Band leaders educate themselves. ... One thing that I thought, that I found was that the people who are running the band office, um, that they're ... also trying to educate themselves to keep in tune with what's going on, um, with the government and things like that. ... Some of these people are very, very intelligent and have worked hard to get there. (14MU5)

Leadership ... means to me people who are educated. We have chiefs who have acquired a university education. I think of your present chief, Chief Rico. He has a university education. ... I think it's so important that when you choose leaders that they do have education, because they have to meet with government people. They have to be able to talk to them at the same level and they have to be able to use their terminology when they're negotiating with them. Um, they have to ... be skilled in negotiating. (16MU2)

The chief and councilors done all the work all these years, even way back. And the chief and councilors done all the work and I believe that's why we're, that's why Flying Dust is prospering so good. Stronger leadership. (16MU12)

The band council members are skilled negotiators who can be aggressive and hold their own when dealing with people from various levels of the federal and provincial government. They have taken an active and innovative leadership role with the shared goal of bettering their community. Participants spoke proudly about how Flying Dust has become a leader within the MLTC. Flying Dust leadership also prides itself on providing strong role models for other First Nations to follow.

Flying Dust has always been a, a leader of, uh, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council district, and, and that shows, um, strongly with some of the, uh, implementations that Flying Dust has, uh, started and have, um, have completed thus far with the provincial and national government. (15MU3)

How Flying Dust goes about doing things, partnerships with other people, it's whole sense of, uh, uh, getting results, getting, getting things done even in the negotiations when all the time we'll, we'll

reach a point and pack up and say, "Well, we're not going to win this point, but we'll, we'll win the game type deal, uh, down the road." And I've seen, I've seen that a lot from the, the leadership here over the last thirty years. (1MU8)

Being recognized by the federal and provincial and the tribal council governments as being a good leader within, uh, communities and programs. And being ... I guess aggressive is, is definitely a positive factor within some of the, uh, goals and achievements and accomplishments that Flying Dust did within inter-governmental relations. (15MU5)

At the same time, though, the leadership is also known for being very approachable, respectful, and friendly. The people in the community feel comfortable dropping by the band office to discuss their problems and asking for assistance. Numerous people described the Flying Dust leadership as being very accessible, good listeners, and willing to do their best to help others. Community members feel safe knowing that chief and council are looking after the band's affairs. Trust and confidence in the band leadership has been earned, for one of the council's priorities is to keep band members well-informed about community issues and be accountable about the band's finances. This openness, in turn, invites citizens to actively participate in decisions that will affect the whole band.

I just think they're a good leadership 'cause, um, if you ever wanted to know about something or ever needed [something] or if you're ever in a bind or anything, you can always go talk to the chief and council or even anybody at the band office. They listen and help you out. ... Not like other reserves where the chief is scamming a thousand dollars. ... That's one good thing about our reserve, I think, is everybody is, um, told what's going on. (9MU49)

Over the years we've had, uh, a lot of the same faces, uh, who get elected and re-elected and that helps keep the, the vision of what Flying Dust should be, eh, an ideal Flying Dust and that has been because of the same people being there and continuing on with that, uh, with that plan. (2MU11)

I think we have fairly strong leadership. And they look for opportunities to better the community. And they try and include membership as

much as possible, though I think they probably find that a challenge to get people out but they keep working at it. (12MU11)

People also praised the band council for getting along so well with one another and for always treating each other with respect, even when faced with differences of opinion. The participants sometimes contrasted the positive, success story of leadership in Flying Dust with the negative occurrences that sometimes take place in other First Nation governments. They felt quite lucky and fortunate to have highly competent and responsible leaders who are great role models.

Compared to a lot of other First Nations, our politics are healthy. We don't, you know, we can get back to work and get back as a community after elections. A lot of communities can't say that. They're still fighting. (13MU2)

Our leadership is excellent. I think they try and work together and, and try as best to get along. I don't know, all of them have different agendas but they're, you know, working towards, uh, building a better future for our membership. (17MU7)

Financial security

Although few focus groups mentioned this subcategory it seemed worthy of inclusion because it relates to a number of the other important strengths. The people who named “financial security” or “financial management” as one of Flying Dust’s key strengths were largely referring to the band council’s high level of accountability with regard to the community’s finances. Chief and council are known for being very diligent in terms of keeping the membership informed about how they are distributing the band’s money. This openness, in turn, allows members to participate in public discussions about how the band’s money is being spent. The leadership invites public debate rather than concealing or evading their actions. The participants are aware that financial accountability from their leadership is something of which to be proud when living on a reserve governed under the band council system. People in Flying Dust can trust their leaders to make responsible decisions and keep everyone well informed.

We are financially stable because we have good financial practices. We watch where we spend our money. We do not spend it as foolishly as other people. We only get so much, so we have to watch and we've

been good at that. We, uh, we are undoubtedly one of the first nations, I would think, throughout Canada, uh, that is in the financial position we are. We have invested our money wisely. ... But you know, we don't spend our money foolishly and if we do, if something does happen, you know, we have mechanisms ... to catch that and not only that, the people are, they're so aware of what we do, uh, that they, too, gives them an opportunity to speak when these things happen because they know they are well informed. (3MU6)

Our financial security is well taken care of. ... We have good accountants and, uh, our money is always growing instead of disappearing. (9MU18)

People generally have a pretty good idea what's happening with all the finances that are available through the administration: where the money is coming from and where it's going. ... 'Cause if nobody knows what's going on, then nobody can have any input. If that was to become a weakness, it would become a weakness not only in that area but in other areas as well. So I think there has to be accountability between band members and band administration. (10MU6)

The participants further stated that there are a number of benefits for the community that stem from Flying Dust's financial stability.

You have to play as a team in order to get places and to benefit the whole, not the one. I think we're very good at that. We don't, uh, one person does not benefit more than the other person. Uh, take, for example, our TLE dollars. Sure they're a collective, uh, it's a collective amount of money for the First Nation. Some First Nations gave it out per band member. Not good. Our community didn't do that. We bought things to benefit our future generations, to benefit us now. Uh, there's no real gain for one individual, you know. It's, it's there collectively for the band and the members. (3MU5)

Flying Dust is one of the most fiscally responsible reserves in Saskatchewan. That's a fact. ... If we weren't fiscally responsible we would never get the school. But we had to prove to Indian Affairs that we can handle our money and that we would do right by and

our school would get built. So for initiatives, um, for the community having a fiscally responsible leadership, you know, makes it easier for different projects, different programs any kind of initiative for the reserve. (2MU14)

With financial security, you can support your committees, your economic development. It just feeds into the other programs. And not always asking INAC for money. (9MU18)

In other words, community development and self-sufficiency are some of the positive outcomes associated with good band financial management. A few people also stated that individual band members are particularly good fundraisers and are also very responsible and reliable with the money that they have raised in order to support various community initiatives.

Flying Dust does a lot of fundraising. Lots. They have like their demolition derbies. They have their hockey tournaments. They have their ball tournaments. They have car washes. They have lots of, um, fundraisers, which goes right back to the community. That is where your youth [are] getting, um, their sponsorship for hockey or, um, soccer, for swimming. (16MU23)

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Because they are our future our future leaders. (9MU28)

The final integrated focus group selected “youth and recreation” as one of the eight core community strengths. Throughout the focus group sessions, participants used the phrase “they are our future” countless times when discussing the community’s youth.

They’re our future. They learn from us and they carry on from, it goes from elders to parents to youth, I guess. And it’s just a big circle. (9MU23)

Youth are our next leaders, our next ones in line. And to show them and give them things for them to do to keep busy their minds focused is really good. (14MU8)

We have a young generation coming up. ... It seems to be booming, and I think that's a strength because it shows that our community is not, um, um, like, our community isn't going down like our population. You know how sometimes you used to hear about, you know, certain tribal groups, you know, going extinct or, you know, losing their membership. But here in Flying Dust there's, there's a young generation of band members, um, coming up, um, and that's, that's good to see. I think it's a strength because you're kind of carrying on the community identity. (1MU13)

Because the youth are so highly valued, the community has put in place numerous programs, activities, events, and services intended to keep younger band members thriving and preoccupied with healthy on-reserve pursuits. The participants felt that this initiative was both an enormous strength of their community and a wise investment for the future. They explained that this initiative is meant to instill certain values within the youth and also to ultimately keep them away from the dangerous activities (e.g. crime, drugs, and fighting) that young people often turn to when they are bored and have nothing better to do. A number of older focus group participants said that they wished that they had these opportunities available to them when they were growing up in the community, and that they consider today's young band members extremely lucky.

Our kids are lucky. They know they have lots. ... Trying to keep them out of trouble, that's the main thing. You don't want them out there ending up in jail or drinking and driving and, you know, stuff like that. I want them to be smart. (9MU35)

I just see a lot more youth activity development, most recently, as opposed to the past where there wasn't really much for the youth to do. ... They got things to do instead of doing nothing, going out and committing crimes and breaking into people's homes and all that stuff. (10MU6)

One focus group participant explained how the band had conducted a study several years ago and found that the kids who were involved in even just one extracurricular activity did better in school than those who did not participate in any at all. Because the Flying Dust community is so firmly committed to education, they have also, by extension, become strong advocates for youth extracurricular activities as a means of boosting school achievement.

We as a community are very concerned about the development of our youth. We do a number of programs for them. Uh, specifics would be education program, recreation programming. Uh, we do we spend a lot of money throughout the year with, uh, you name it, we've probably tried it. So our leadership thinks that, uh, in order for, for us to continue to be a good community, we have to focus on the development of our youth. Keep them in, in programs, keep them active, uh, active life, uh, style, leads for a better life altogether. Very important, kids. (3MU3)

In terms of the activities that are offered to the young people of Flying Dust, the new youth centre was mentioned several times. The centre provides young people with a safe place on the reserve to be with friends in the evening. People also spoke positively about the innovative youth director at the centre and described him as a very good role model for the kids.

It's really benefiting the youth, keeping the youth out of town, off the streets, that type of thing. Um, giving them things to do, activities to do, whether it be, um, cultural activities or just hanging out and playing pool or whatever, keeping them out of trouble. (15MU14)

I picked the youth centre. ... It's like a place where we can just relax or just talk with our friends and be with our peers, like a positive environment. (16MU16)

Hunting trips, cultural camps, and summer camps for youth were also cited as positive activities. People described these activities as good intergenerational bonding opportunities and as valuable venues for cultural education where youth are taught traditional activities such as hunting and skinning elk, trapping, camping, riding horses, orienteering, swimming, and surviving off the land.

I like, well, culture camps or youth camp or whatever. I think that that's good 'cause it'll teach us how to, how to hunt deers and things like camp out and live off in the wild, in the wilderness. And to like ... teach us to, like, respect us for who we are and love the earth and all that, you know? (16MU21)

As discussed earlier, other popular activities for the young people of Flying Dust are organized sports and general recreation. The community has immediate access to a number of sports facilities, including a gymnasium, hockey rink, baseball diamond, soccer fields, swimming pool, and running track. One person also detailed how there are “a lot of community events that are brought to the reserve [that are] sports-related or targeted to the youth” (8MU27). To encourage young people to get involved in at least one sport, the band council pays for membership fees and contributes financially to out-of-town trips for teams or individuals. The community also regularly holds fundraising events to sponsor children’s sporting activities. According to one person, “every child is given an opportunity to participate in a sport” (16MU23) within the Flying Dust band.

Flying Dust really supports its youth. I work at the Tribal Council and there’s no other like Flying Dust that supports the youth like they do. ... Flying Dust pays for the hockey, uh, registrations. ... They pay for memberships, so it’s, uh, you know. ... Even if you’re not a band member and you have kids here, they put them through the education system. So very, very, uh, supportive with the youth. (13MU4)

The youth summer employment program was also frequently mentioned. Participants spoke positively about how each summer the band attempts to provide employment for every Flying Dust student who expresses an interest in working. Some participants had previously participated in this program and spoke fondly of their first job. They also described how impressed they had been with the \$200 that they had earned for their hard work and how this had helped to instill a positive work ethic within themselves.

There’s summer jobs for students. I think it’s very important. It helps our youth. It gives our youth something to do during the summer. Also extra spending money to spend, to go do something. And they keep it so that you have to be enrolled in school, so you can get your, you know, summer job. And I think that is a very good thing. ... It’s a strength because, um, it’s a way of life. It’s what you’re going to have to do to survive. ... It’s a responsibility. It teaches you ... the feeling of having a job when you’re that young, like, you know, making your own money. (9MU51)

In addition to all of the on-reserve programs and sources of support offered, several participants spoke of their pride in Flying Dust’s youth. The young people were described as being really nice kids who were seen as being full of potential for future leadership positions and other bright futures.

We have very, very, very good youth on our reserve. ... They're respectful. They, um, they just have good attitudes. I've worked in southern, central and northern Saskatchewan, and our kids are very respectful towards each other and towards others. (13MU7)

And some are already excelling in hockey and soccer. And that's really something to see our young people participating in. And one day, you know, like, we'll probably have some elite athletes coming out of those groups. (16MU5)

TWO HIGHER-ORDER OVERARCHING THEMES

TAKING INITIATIVE / SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Although this particular strength was identified as a larger overarching theme throughout the Flying Dust data, initially only seven of the focus groups directly mentioned the topic of community self-sufficiency. Somewhat complicating matters was that in two focus groups the participants discussed the topic of self-government in some detail, whereas in the other groups the issue was rarely, if ever, mentioned.

On the other hand, all the focus group sessions repeatedly touched on related examples of self-sufficiency and “taking control” within Flying Dust First Nation. The community prides itself on being progressive and assertive innovators with regard to determining their own future. Two people from the same focus group explained:

Flying Dust and the leadership and individuals (i.e. the entire community) [are] always, always able to take ideas and implement them and just putting [them] into completion. (15MU5)

Members striving to do the best at whatever they choose to do. We have people who excel in those areas, you know, in their chosen areas of whatever they want to do. So that just has in self-government, TLE, controls of all the health programs, uh, partnerships, and other developments. We have RCMP, our youth centre, stores, the gym. (15MU12)

Participants were extremely proud of the various ways in which Flying Dust has proved itself to be increasingly self-sufficient, with the ability to follow through on innovative plans and ideas. Participants repeatedly talked about their immense pride in belonging to a progressive, leading community like Flying Dust. They displayed a

palpable enthusiasm about continuing to better themselves and to see their reserve continue to improve and grow over time. They talked about how people in the community frequently voice their opinions when they want to see change, and how many willingly get involved in community efforts to ensure that those changes are brought about.

I believe as a whole our reserve is very vocal in if they're, um, dissatisfied with something or if they want to see some change. Like, they're very vocal. (2MU13)

If you need someone to do it, you just ask them and they'll, if they want to they'll be glad to help, and some just volunteer just when you're asking them. The youth is a big part. There's a lot of kids that do stuff. (6MU16)

The participants shared a great deal of pride in being an innovative and risk-taking community that also serves as powerful role model for other First Nations communities. One participant described the Flying Dust mentality thusly: "Instead of sitting in one spot: moving forward" (10MU22). People in this band pride themselves on taking the initiative, always striving to be better, and on ultimately working toward their shared goal of attaining a responsible and effective self-sufficient community.

Flying Dust is based on individuals being able to grasp and look forth to an idea. And basically implementing that and understanding it, taking on the challenge and putting it forth into completion. (15MU3)

We're working to develop a system that we put in place here with the whole community, with programs and services that [we've] taken control of which, you know, [was] basically non-existent in 1969-70. And they develop, you know, from there to being a leader in, uh, the self-government area. (15MU6)

Participants provided a multitude of examples of the "self-sufficient / taking initiative" attitude within all the strength categories and subcategories mentioned above. In community development, community togetherness, economic development, education, elders, the environment, leadership, and youth development, focus group participants cited examples of Flying Dust as a leader and role model among First Nations communities and as well on its way toward responsible, effective self-government. They

talked about areas such as fundraising, economic development, negotiated deals with the federal and provincial government, control within the Meadow Lake School Division, local boards and committees, leadership, nursing, sports and recreation, MLTC leaders, and self-government.

Community development / infrastructure

We're working to develop a system that we put in place here with the whole community with programs and services that make, taken control of which, you know, basically non-existent in the 1969-70. And they develop, you know, from there to being a leader in the self-government area. (15MU6)

Economic development

Our gas, our land, our cattle, our reforestation. ... Because if the band membership gathers together to make money for the community, well, it goes back into the community. It makes it self-sufficient. (14MU9)

We know how to do lots of fundraising within our communities. ... We're very self-sufficient. We help. We're always out there, you know. We're not always relying in the band, the band to give us money. (13MU8)

Flying Dust has a couple of initiatives now where we're, we're able to generate our own revenues, um, to help with management, general management, general administration to keep our businesses self-sufficient. We have our septic service, which pays for its own employees, it pays for its upkeep, plus we make some profit. We have, uh, a partnership with Bob's Fuel where we have revenues coming in with the rebate program. (2MU14)

Education

Not every reserve has a school and I'm just glad we have one. ... It gives us Natives, like, our strength. Like, we could do it, like, we don't have to go into Meadow Lake and depend on them and we could do it ourselves. (9MU40)

We've gone to the tables with, uh, Meadow Lake School Division and sat and talked about, you know, our education about taking control of it. And you know what developed. Our local boards here in the community around self-government, you know, health, justice, police management boards. We're really, uh, progressive and innovative in utilizing and developing our own people within our community and giving them the opportunity to sit on boards and, uh, represent the people in the community. (15MU8)

And that boils down to having an educated workforce in, and it's the educated workforce, having an educated person knowing what to do makes a whole lot difference. You're going to research things, you're going to look things, you're going to find opportunities, you're going to find the money. So, it's just being able to, to use and, uh, you know, benefit from the system when it comes to professional services. (3MU6)

Health and wellness

2B: *You look at the, the self-government model. And one of the things that they talk about is wellness. Healthy, healthy people, healthy communities, healthy living. Now, somehow incorporate, I don't know how, but, the wellness into that as well, into the center of it all.*

2C: *I think it, the way that I see it is, it kind of builds from the inside out. You have your strength, you have your wellness, you have your community, and it just keeps growing and growing. (2MU20)*

Leadership

We have a lot of really good things to be proud of, the strengths we have in our community. And it'll only continue to grow as, you know, our leadership and our community members take an active leadership role to kind of lead the way and, you know, bring out the ideas and say, "Here's where we need to go." And, you know, to communicate those ideas to the locals and to talk to them and grow to make Flying Dust the best it can be. (15MU12)

Partnerships

Um, how Flying Dust goes about doing things partnerships with other people, it's whole sense of, uh, uh, getting results, getting, getting things

done even in the negotiations when all the time we'll, we'll reach a point and pack up and say, "Well, we're not going to win this point, but we'll, we'll win the game type deal, uh, down the road." And I've seen, I've seen that a lot from the, the leadership here over the last thirty years. (1MU8)

Self-government

We see the development of self-government now, but once it comes full blown, then we're on our own. We're self-sufficient. We got to ... do this on our own here. (8MU30)

Youth

FGF: *What do you call that, unity and pride and aggressiveness and progressiveness and focus? You think of when you're talking about a person, right*

15C: *Maybe those are the qualities that we need for our, our, uh, vision of how we see our community developing future leaders. (15MU7)*

INTEGRITY / ACCOUNTABILITY

As was previously mentioned, participants listed the following characteristics as strengths of Flying Dust First Nation: acceptance; accountability; community pride; compassion; cooperation; ethics; friendly; getting involved; good-natured; helping one another; humour; integrity; love; respect; support; co-operation; and unity. By this, the participants were referring to the extremely high quality of relationships between people in the community. Many in Flying Dust carry themselves with integrity, abide by a high level of ethics, and treat others and the environment with respect.

Integrity. ... I guess this kind of relates to a little bit about the pride. I mean just being able to look around us and realizing the riches that we do have within the community and, and, uh, being proud of being from a community such as Flying Dust. (15MU5)

We have respect in our community for the elders and for people around us. ... Respect is like, um, listening to your elders and your family and people around you, not, not, like, ignoring them and it's just, um, I don't know. Respect's respect, I don't know. I don't really have a definition. ... Respect's just something that was taught to me. (6MU4)

An interesting pattern was then observed in several of the focus groups' "group map" exercises. Participants would often group several strengths into one common cluster. When the facilitator would ask the group to explain and label the cluster, a common response was to describe the grouping as "characteristics of the community." For example:

FGF: *Respect, working together, mutual respect, close bond, well bonded, unity, reliable. What are all these things?*

5I: *Characteristics of the community. (5MU21)*

2B: *Community pride, getting along together, that kind of stuff.*

2F: *It's a community characteristic. ... This is what makes our community, our per-, like if we were a person, them would make up us. We're friendly, we take pride in our stuff, we're caring, we, um, we accept our elders' knowledge, we have strong ethics. If we were one person, but we're a community. (2MU19)*

As the participants sometimes mentioned, these groupings might more commonly be ascribed to a particular person rather than to a whole community. One participant from the final integrated focus group provided a further example:

P8: *We have strength in the people. And, uh, Flying Dust people are compassionate and, uh, welcoming to other people. And we have lots of volunteers, like volunteerism and, uh, we have good communication with other people. And we have acceptance and respect for one another. And we support, we support whoever, who we supported. Yeah, and the youth are listened to.*

This is rather interesting from a psychological point of view in that the members of Flying Dust First Nation appear to be evoking, and then striving to live up to, a particularly noble and ambitious self-fulfilling prophecy that is shared by the whole group. In other words, because everyone believes that Flying Dust as an entity has this set of dignified characteristics, the individual community members feel a shared responsibility to exemplify and demonstrate ethics, compassion, respect, and so on themselves. Furthermore, being a good and kind person has become a way of demonstrating community pride and strength within the band. Community members are proud to come from such a friendly and helpful place, and this in turn encourages them to perpetuate

these qualities as norms in their everyday behaviour. This sort of tendency fits in well with the previously mentioned community aspirations to be role models and leaders. Everyone is aspiring to be the best that they can be both in terms of ambition and drive, as well as ethics and morality. This makes for a well-balanced combination of goals: ethical self-government and compassionate, responsible economic success. It combines strength and power with morality and integrity—an immensely noble aspiration for the future of this community.

Reliable ... people rely on other people to get things done, jobs done.
(5MU20)

Participants discussed how the “community’s characteristics” are exemplified by leadership decisions and the everyday actions of individuals within the band. For example, one participant talked proudly about how the band had turned down an extremely profitable business deal because the band staff did some research and discovered that the project would have been very harmful to the environment. Acting in the best long-term interest of the whole community, rather than behaving selfishly or pursuing short-term self-interests, was often cited as another highly admirable Flying Dust characteristic.

I put here “learning to work together” to, to work together for the betterment of other of the community. ... I put large for that because I think we’re all trying to learn how to work ... together for the betterment of our community. (2MU3)

A big thing about Flying Dust is teamwork, like how we all work together on whatever. We, nobody in this reserve, like, fights over anything. Just everybody knows everybody and just everybody’s a big team, I guess, on Flying Dust. (16MU21)

My husband’s got a t-shirt that says, “Keep the circle strong.” It’s, uh, got little stickmen all the way around holding hands showing that, uh, a community should be unified, together, working together as a team. You know, whether it’s a band whether it’s, you know, chief and council or band members. We should be all cohesive. (11MU22)

I have basketball, soccer, and hockey and stuff like that, football. ... ‘Cause it teaches our youth leadership skills and it helps them work

in a team environment, working together to be the best they can be, I guess. (5MU14)

One participant (who was born and raised on a different reserve) described the feeling of belonging and acceptance that she has found in Flying Dust:

The freedom to be me, I guess, uh, feeling lost, uh, growing up away from my people and going home, um, turned away from my family because I didn't feel the acceptance of who I was. And I think I was more down on myself than anything. And I felt let down by a lot of people. So I just turned my back and walked away. But now, um, because of my own, uh, soul searching, I finally found that it's okay to be me, and that I have a place, you know, to call home. And I belong somewhere. (17MU12)

Overall, there was just a certain level of civility and integrity that could be observed both in what the focus group participants said about their community, as well as in the way that the participants related to other another during the sessions. People were often heard joking and teasing each other in a good-natured and comfortable manner. They usually seemed at great ease with one another, and everyone was treated with respect. Most groups also seemed cheerfully determined to make the best of what was a long and intensive process. The participants arrived determined to have a good time, and, sure enough, most groups seemed to have quite a bit of fun while also getting a large amount of work accomplished. This positive, good-natured attitude can be seen throughout much of the Flying Dust data.

The civility of the people. This is where I come from again. [Laugh] Like, there's the ability of your guys, like, if there's a disagreement, there's, you can have your disagreement and we can sit down and discuss it, rather than fisticuffs, you know what I mean? Honestly, this is, I come from a place where this happens. It's if, you know, "You step on my shoe, I'm going to, you know, step on your other one harder," and that's a good one. Like, I know there's, like, not everybody gets along, but there's still that ... mutual respect. (14MU11)

Strong ethics. Again, in general, we have a few, but I mean we have those and, but, in general, Flying Dust, Flying Dust people wouldn't,

uh, if they're mad at you, just do something to spite you. They just kind of, you know, they don't pay a moment to you, that's okay. You know what I mean? Like we're not, we're not, whereas on, in some communities if they see you they'll come over and just bug you and bug you just, just 'cause. You don't have to worry about backstabbing and stuff like that. (2MU13)

Our outlook ... on the future of our community: it seems to be bright. Uh, people are, are, uh, uh, like, uh, like [1G] said, there's a pride in the community. Community self-esteem, I think, is, is, is pretty good right now. ... Like, uh, talking to some people during the games we had, uh, people here from all over Saskatchewan, and they're envious of, uh, of our community, uh, and, uh, I don't know. Myself, it brought a pride and, uh, and, uh, I felt, uh, good about ourselves. I felt good about our community and, uh, a lot of people I talked to felt the same. (1MU11)

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to note both the similarities and differences between the results of the above analyses, and those produced by the final integrated focus group. Both are in agreement about the central place of education, economic development, youth, and community development / infrastructure. Community members clearly want to see increasing band self-sufficiency and ownership in these areas. With education, people want to craft a curriculum that thoroughly prepares their youth to be successful in the larger world, yet also grounds them in Cree culture and traditional values. The new on-reserve school, and the elders' involvement in the curriculum, is seen as a massive step toward this goal. In terms of economic development, the band members' goal is to move toward making Flying Dust self-sufficient. People are very proud of the band's successes both in negotiations and business partnerships, yet they still feel as though there is an immense amount of economic potential sitting untapped within the reserve. The trick will be to determine where these opportunities lie and who within the band will take responsibility for pursuing them further. With regard to community development / infrastructure, the focus group participants were pleased with the progress that they had seen in recent years, but nevertheless described this as an area of "continuing development." The members want to see more housing and on-reserve amenities, continued maintenance, and other services. Several off-reserve members spoke about how they would "move back home in a second" if they could find housing and a job on-reserve. This is something for which the band could plan / aim. Perhaps some off-reserve band members could spearhead some of these untapped economic development opportunities.

One slight difference between the decisions reached by the data analyst versus those of the final focus group occurred with regard to elders, culture, religion, and spirituality. Whereas the analyst opted to emphasize the importance of elders in Flying Dust as the primary source of traditional culture and placed the topic of church and religion as a separate subcategory, the final focus group chose to emphasize spirituality and beliefs within the community. Perhaps this reflected the final group's superior familiarity with their community, or maybe they read more into the "group maps" than the data analyst did. On the other hand, the data analyst was more limited by what could specifically be discerned from the focus group data. Ten of the seventeen focus groups chose to talk about culture and traditions as a strength, while thirteen of the seventeen brought up the topic of religion. While some focus group participants spoke convincingly about the need to revitalize traditional culture in the community, it was hard to ignore that seven of the seventeen groups did not mention the subject at all. On the other hand, it was much more common for participants to talk about the importance of elders within the band. All the focus groups had positive comments when it came to the elders. When probed by the facilitator, participants often said that elders were important because of the traditional wisdom and knowledge that they hold. Thus, in the focus groups the participants talked much more frequently about elders than either culture or religion. It is difficult to ascertain what exactly this signifies, but it is nevertheless an interesting observation.

Other differences include the data analyst creating one category relating to the environment and the importance of the land, while the final focus group lumped agriculture with economic development and created a separate category for TLE opportunities. In the focus group data, the TLE process was mentioned occasionally but perhaps holds a greater importance for the community than what could be discerned from the transcript data. The data analyst tended to emphasize the self-sufficiency aspect of the environment and land for Flying Dust. On the other hand, the reacquisition of band territory may be a more concrete and immediate expression of self-sufficiency and community pride within the reserve. Perhaps the emphasis was just framed somewhat differently in the two cases.

Lastly, the data analyst was surprised to find that the final focus group did not include a category on leadership, the band council, and/or role models. This particular topic was central to the analyst's findings and even manifested itself in the over-arching self-sufficiency / taking initiative category. Perhaps the difference, again, is that the data analyst focused more on abstract entities, whereas the final focus group looked more at concrete, immediate examples. Perhaps leaders and role models will each be discussed within the context of the eight strengths that the final group nominated for case studies. Leaders, past, present, and future, play a central role in the creation and maintenance of all other community strengths mentioned in this report, and were selected by the final focus group. Participants repeatedly spoke about how the band council and staff have brought about significant positive changes in the community in areas such as educa-

tion, infrastructure, inclusiveness, communications, economic development, the health system, inter-community partnerships, off-reserve support, and youth development. The band administration is largely responsible for the community's current successes. Increased support for the leadership—through increased funding, community involvement in band initiatives, or autonomy over their right to direct and determine the future of the band—would seem a positive direction.

