



TORONTO ABORIGINAL SUPPORT SERVICES COUNCIL

Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) Report

Aboriginal Middle Class Research Summary

What is the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council?

TASSC is a not-for-profit policy and research organization that addresses social determinants to improve and enhance the social, economic and cultural base of Aboriginal peoples in the City of Toronto.

TASSC is comprised of the following ten member organizations:

- ❖ 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations
- ❖ Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto
- ❖ Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto Clinic
- ❖ Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment
- ❖ Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
- ❖ Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
- ❖ Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence)
- ❖ Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- ❖ Nishnawbe Homes
- ❖ Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre

What is the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) Report?

The TARP Report is the largest and most comprehensive study of Aboriginal people ever conducted in the City of Toronto. With a sample of over 1,400 individuals, 14 topics studied and seven methodologies utilized, the TARP Report provides an important picture of the current situation, the aspirations and the challenges facing Aboriginal people.

*I think that it's pretty challenging for an Aboriginal person to live in this Eurocentric world...When I think of middle class I am not sure what that is... Because I think we are at that point... and we are middle class.
(Middle Class Focus Group)*

There is very little research on social class among urban Aboriginal people. This is partly because the phenomenon is relatively new; the result of recent trends of increasing economic success among Aboriginal people living in cities. At the same time, there has been a degree of reluctance by some to recognize the emergence of an urban Aboriginal middle class. There are some who regard the concept as 'Western' and not applying to Aboriginal people who suggest that the common history, cultures and experiences make class distinctions meaningless.



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Key Issues Affecting the Aboriginal Middle Class

The Aboriginal middle class is characterized by a stable social and economic existence including secure housing, high levels of education and a stable family. They live in neighbourhoods scattered throughout the GTA, so there is no 'Aboriginal neighbourhood'. There are roughly equal numbers of middle class individuals who are involved and who are not involved with the Aboriginal community in Toronto, but lack of involvement is a problem in terms of long-term viability of an Aboriginal community in Toronto.

There is a low level of 'institutional completeness' among Aboriginal people in Toronto in terms of social, cultural and recreational organizations that meet the needs of middle class Aboriginal people. As well, there is a significant amount of 'lateral violence' against the Aboriginal middle class by other members of the Aboriginal community. While the majority of middle class wish to maintain their Aboriginal culture and identity, there is a danger that they will be lost to the Aboriginal community if new organizations are not established to meet their needs.

TARP Report Recommendations for the Aboriginal Middle Class

- ❖ Establish a cultural education centre in Toronto.
- ❖ Make a special effort to attract members of the Aboriginal middle class to get them to participate in programs and activities in the Toronto Aboriginal community.



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