

# Findings from the Celebrating Abilities Conference Survey

*Thompson, Manitoba*

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## Acknowledgments

CRIAW acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous Peoples.

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# Table of Contents

**BACKGROUND** ..... 4

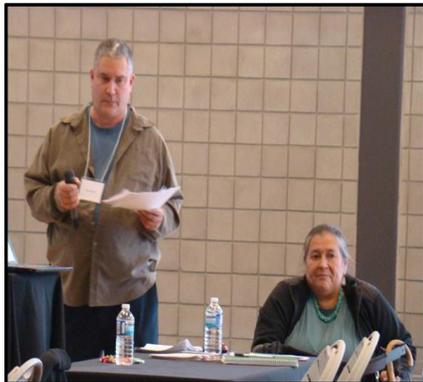
**CELEBRATING ABILITIES CONFERENCE**..... 6

**THE SURVEY**..... 6

**SURVEY FINDINGS**..... 7

**CONCLUSION**..... 13

**REFERENCES**..... 14



## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

## BACKGROUND

New economic development in northern Canada is changing communities socially, economically and culturally. The Feminist North Network (FemNorthNet for short) is a research project interested in better understanding the effects such development has on communities, especially in terms of the inclusion and exclusion of women.

In Thompson, Manitoba, FemNorthNet has looked at a number of issues, particularly related to an economic diversification process which began in 2011. This process was conducted through the Thompson Economic Diversification Working Group (TEDWG) and was in response to Vale anticipation of closing their nickel mine's smelter and refinery in 2016. The TEDWG group developed five strategic action plans focusing on restorative justice, education and training, housing, place branding and economic development. One finding of a comprehensive review of these reports by FemNorthNet was that disability groups were notably absent from the sub-committee, and by extension were also absent from the focus group sessions held with sub-committee member organizations (CIETG, 2013, p. 7). This is not to say that individuals living with disabilities "were not present within these member organizations; however, the messaging and issues brought forward by such individuals may have been different from that offered by an organization with a mandate to advocate for these identity groups specifically" (FNNTCG, 2014, p. 9). It was clear from the FemNorthNet review that little was being done to actively engage and empower women with mental and physical disabilities in the Thompson region, who face additional challenges due to the region's remote location.

During this same period, there was movement within the disability community of Thompson. In 2012 a one-day conference, focused on opportunities for Persons with disabilities, took place in Thompson, Manitoba. During that conference a strong need for services was highlighted. For example, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities Northern Regional Office (SMD) has recently been challenged to provide support for young adults returning to the north after having attended the Manitoba School for the Deaf in southern Manitoba and wanting to pursue educational and employment opportunities. One result of this challenge is that two agencies, Community Futures North Central Development (CFNCD) and SMD began working collaboratively to quantify the need for American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services in the north, to identify a plan for consistent service delivery and to raise general disability awareness in the region. This work along with many other initiatives local organizations have been taking on ultimately led to Community Living Manitoba selecting Thompson as a location for the *Celebrating Abilities in Northern and Rural Manitoba* event in October of 2014.

This was the first time that this conference would take place in Thompson. It would focus on the intrinsic value and economic impact of the disability

community in northern and rural Manitoba. 80-100 delegates (educators, Persons with disabilities/self-advocates, support workers, parents, the business community, employers and community leaders) were expected to attend from across the province. The conference program would offer inspiring keynote presenters and a series of breakout sessions with topics ranging from inclusive education to supported employment/ entrepreneurship options and the future impact of Manitoba's new accessibility legislation.

In the spring of 2014 the planning committee for the conference, contacted FemNorthNet inquiring as to whether they could provide financial support to the conference. Clearly, the focus of the conference was directly aligned to the interests of FemNorthNet. An arrangement was made, considering the research mandate of its funding, that FemNorthNet could provide funding for ASL translation, creating a bursary pool for low income delegates and supporting the keynote presentation. In addition, funding would be provided to fund the participation of a university student who, acting as a research assistant, would attend the conference, complete a short survey with approximately 30 female participants and report back to FemNorthNet in order to deepen our work from a disability perspective.



**CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE**

## CELEBRATING ABILITIES CONFERENCE

The conference took place October 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at the Thompson Recreation Centre Complex (TRCC). Nine organizations from across the province were involved in the planning, with Community Futures North Central Development (CFNCD) taking the lead. In total 113 participants from Thompson, Brandon, Minnedosa, Winnipeg, The Pas, Split Lake, Flin Flon, Norway House, OCN, and Oxford House attended (Kissick, 2014).

The event included two panel sessions with self-advocates telling their life stories and ending with positive motivational words to those in the audience. In addition, there were a number of information sessions on the new accessibility legislation and ideas for customer service standards. Both spoke to a shift in thinking on how simple it can be to be inclusive.

Following on the theme of the conference, the event was inclusive as possible. ASL interpretation was provided throughout the event as was note taking. The TRCC was the perfect event location and there were many positive comments were made about Thompson's new accessible facility (Kissick, 2014).

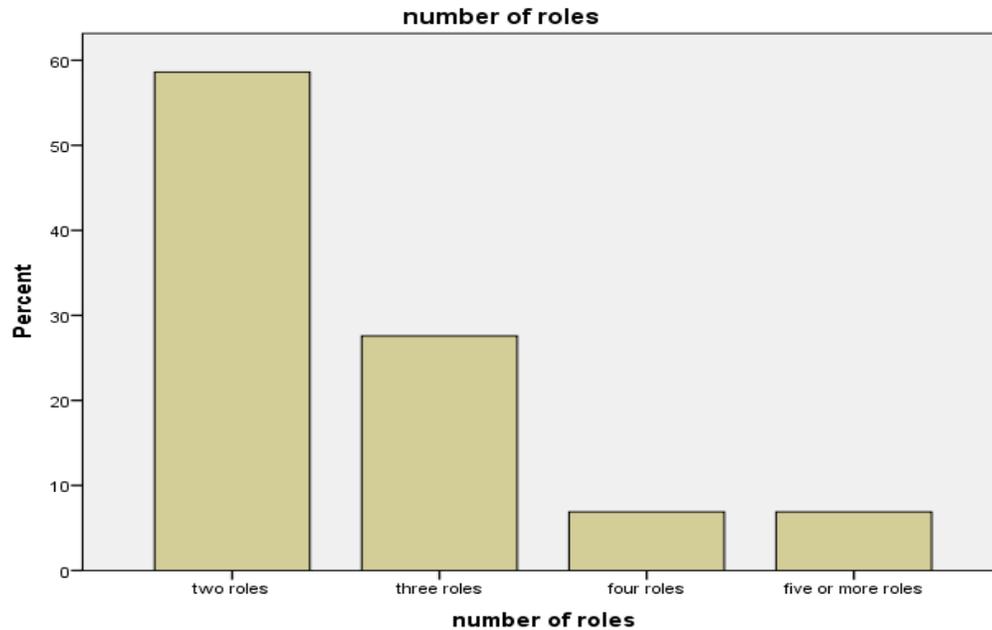
## THE SURVEY

A short survey was developed in collaboration with FemNorthNet, DAWN-RAFH Canada (The DisAbled Women's Network) and SMD. It consisted of a number of closed and open ended questions (see **Appendix A**). Specifically, information regarding female participants' experiences and perceptions of the strategies, barriers and gaps in services and resources in relation to access to a changing northern economy were being solicited. The idea was to keep the completion of the survey to a minimal length (maximum 15 minutes) so that it was not disruptive for participants. A one page flyer was included in the delegate's package, explaining the survey's purpose. In addition, the flyer gave reference to the toolkit produced by FemNorthNet and DAWN-RAFH Canada to assist individuals and organizations with planning and carrying out inclusive processes and events. An information sheet was also produced to provide more specific information about the purpose of the research and about confidentiality. The university student hired as a research assistant to do the survey was allowed to move around the conference and engage in discussion with participants. In addition, the organizers set up a table for the student to work from. In the next section, the findings from that survey will be discussed.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

In total 29 surveys with female participants were completed over the length of the conference. Of these eight or approximately 28% self-declared themselves as a person with a disability. All those completing the survey stated that they played more than one role in the disability community (see figure 1 for breakdown).

**Figure 1: Number of roles participants perform in disability community**



These roles included caregiving (41%), family member (48%), advocacy (90%) or other roles (48%). Those other roles included teacher, service provider, support person, volunteer, and policy analyst. Fifty-nine percent stated having two roles while another 28% stated having three roles. The remaining stated four or more roles.

For those that self-identified as a person with a disability, they were asked to check off as many problems that they have faced from a list of 18 possible problems that kept them from living fully in the north (see question 2 in appendix for the full list). Of the eight individuals who completed this question, half stated that they have had problems with 3 or 4 of those listed. Two more had one or two of the problems and the other two had 6 to 12 problems checked off. Of the 18 problems listed, in total 13 were identified by participants and are listed in figure 2.

**Figure 2: Types of problems that kept individuals with disabilities from living fully in the North.**

At home	Homecare	Having medical tests
At work	Poverty	Aids to daily living
Family and friends	Getting around community	Mental health services
Taking part in recreation	Getting from one community to another	Receiving medical help
Taking part in community events		

When specifically asked “*what are the most important problems to living with a disability in the North*”, problems with the following were clearly stated:

- Accessibility to buildings (service, business, recreational)
- Knowledge of, access to and availability of support services. For example, interpretative and note taking services come at a high cost or are not available.
- Plain language for communication and understanding
- Accessibility to employment/education after high school, more EAS
- More resources within the schools
- Mobility (weather, transportation, roads, sidewalks, store entrances, and other community infrastructure)
- Attitudinal barriers (how buildings are built, awareness and understanding inclusion)
- Equal access to services and resources, particularly those readily available in the south (medical care and services, social services, advocate services, specialized equipment)
- Housing and appropriate services to live in bush with one’s family
- Payment for services accessed by First Nation peoples who transition to living off reserve
- Specialized computer training and access to information and internet in smaller communities

Question 4 of the survey asked if “*resources development (mining/hydroelectric) helped to create opportunities for you to access employment or other services in your community*”. In response to this question, only 5 (17%) answered yes and 7 (24%) answered no. That left 17 participants (59%) answering that they were not sure and left the “*why*” space for elaborating mostly blank. More investigation is

needed to understand this high percentage, but it may say something about the current disconnect between the disability community and economic development in the region. Part of the answer may lie in the relations most have to public rather than private agencies and services. As one participant stated, “Agencies/organizations I’ve been involved with has little involvement. They have been government-based.” Advocacy and other work is often focused on governments. It may also be reflective of the earlier findings in the two analysis reports on TEDWG, highlighted above in the background section of this report.

If we focus specifically on those participants who self-declared living with a disability, two answered yes, one answered no and the remaining four answered not sure to question 4. Of the two that answered yes, one provided some insight into their answer:

“Here yes, because the transportation links (i.e., highways, flights, hotels, and infrastructure). It has kept the economics high allowing business to open and potential job opportunities. Without an economic base, we are not going to have opportunities”

The one participant coming from a no position had an alternative take on economic development:

“Vale facilities are not accessible and do not hire many with disabilities. They need to start being proactive. They do bring economic growth to the community and that should allow us to have more job opportunities”

This last point was also reflected in what a caregiver and family member stated, that “more businesses have a duty to accommodate. Legislation helps”.

Question 5 asked “*who do you think is most responsible for making changes to solve problems with barriers to access and inclusion in your community?*” There was a wide variety of answers to this, though most had a common theme. As a couple of participants stated, “Absolutely everyone” or “We all are ... We all have voice”. These are positive statements, in that it brings the focus of responsibility not only onto the levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal, First Nations), but also onto the business community, boards and non-profit agencies, support groups, advocates, service providers, community members, families and individuals living with disabilities. That responsibility for change comes not only from people in leadership roles, policy makers, and employers but also from “the consumers – the general public and those with disabilities need to demand it as well”. These comments reflect the need for both top down and bottom up action. In terms of a top down process, many participants said that a great degree of responsibility should be placed on the city of Thompson. “They are in the best position to write, pass, and enforce bylaws”. In terms of a bottom up approach, another participant stated, “Everyone’s responsibility to be accepting of the fact that different things are needed for different people to be included in all aspects

of life”. Furthering this notion, one of the participants living with a disability stated:

We’re all responsible. We need to speak out and let people know we are able. The general population needs to be educated with attitudinal barriers. Government has a he responsibility that all services/infrastructure are accessible.

This reflects the important consult role the disability community plays, or should play, in decision making and problem-solving barriers to access. They are the ones who experience the problems every day. We can think to the important saying here, “nothing about us without us”.

Question 6 specifically asked “*What are the most important changes needed to improve the lives of people with disabilities in your community*”. Participants responded with a wide range of various answers. It is significant to note that the most common responses amongst participants were accessibility, inclusivity and acceptance, education for all community members regarding disabilities, people’s attitudes and understanding towards disabilities, combating stigma and discrimination and more awareness. Corresponding yet equally important answers included the following:

- Improvement in the medical system
- Employment opportunities and training
- Improvement in regards to occupational and physiotherapy
- Improvement in networking, collaboration, advocating and communication
- Circles of support based on people living reciprocal relationships with individuals with disabilities
- Improvement in physical infrastructures (to make accessible for those with a disability)
- More accessible parking spaces—right dimensions
- Special grants for some devices to help with schools
- Better access to materials in Thompson, such as bikes and fittings from the south
- Equal access to services across the province without delay (for instance, what’s available in Winnipeg needs to be available in the north)
- More services for people who suffer from vision loss, limited vision or blindness
- More reliable transportation services

In general, the aforementioned responses advocated for more supports and services within the community.

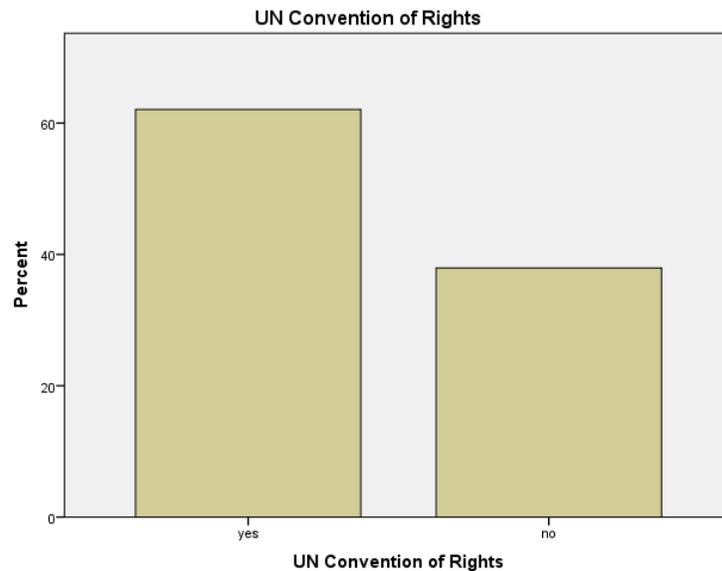
Question 7 within the survey asked “*What else would you like to tell us about your ideas to improve access/inclusion experiences for people with disabilities in the North?*” Ideas stemming from the participants included the following:

- We need improved **orthopedic physical therapy products** for youth in schools. We need to start young to prevent future problems. They would know how to help themselves and what to look for when they’re older.
- More access to massage and physiotherapy in the community.
- Bring the specialists to the community on a regular basis.
- We need to keep in mind that Thompson has an aging population. We want to keep our aging population here as well as include our young people with a disability.
- More education needed to include mental and intellectual abilities.
- There needs to be a central person who everyone in the community can contact to know how to access services and what services are available. Child and Family Services Manitoba needs more involvement within this area.
- Legislation of the province to continue providing support such as training and a tool kit.
- Technology (i.e. websites and blogs would be beneficial).
- Networking having various social agencies and groups coming together annually/quarterly.
- Knowing where to direct people and limit duplication of services.
- It has to be part of education and training because it affects everybody. Include corporations, small businesses, non-profits, post-secondary institutions and the governments.
- Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)—more information and access to prenatal care and prevention.
- Improvements in physical infrastructure.
- Opportunities to access services without judgement.
- Conferences like this raise awareness; get more training and workshops in the schools to expose and educate our youth to reduce ignorance and increase understanding and have people with disabilities to conduct the workshops.
- Get the government organized in regards to adult services as it is overwhelmed with numbers and they can’t keep up with the needs.
- The Public Guardian Trustee Office of Manitoba needs to be more aware of the clients they serve.
- Mentoring—people to people education and support (i.e. parent to parent).
- Understanding, education, awareness, employment and opportunities.

- Employment is a huge concern; providing our participants with adequate work and skills outside JCI would change their lives.
- Education to eliminate discrimination and attitudinal barriers.
- Improved telecommunication services—everybody should have access to the same information (i.e. cell services, internet service, access to computers and computer literacy training).
- The theatre needs a rear window caption (there is also not a ramp for wheelchairs).
- Sign language interpreters and captioning is needed in the North.
- An organization that specifically deals with children and youth and their parents who are differently abled.

Question 8 specifically inquired “*have you heard about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities before?*” As shown in figure 3, of the 29 participants who completed the survey, approximately 60% responded ‘yes’ and 40% responded ‘no’.

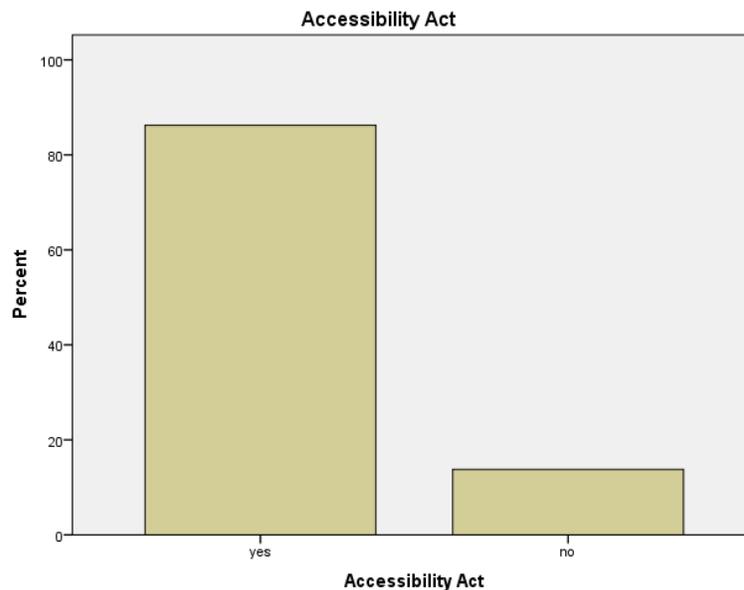
**Figure 3: Number that have heard of the UN Convention**



Of the eight participants that self-declared themselves as a person with a disability, 63% stated that they had heard of the UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a respective 37% that indicated they did not. This could suggest that there is a need for more education and/or awareness in regards to the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The second part of Question 8 asked participants “*have you heard about the Accessibility for Manitobans Act before?*” As shown in figure 4, it is of reassurance that of the 29 participants who completed the survey, approximately 86% answered ‘yes’. This was slightly higher for those participants that self-declared themselves as a person with a disability, 88% answered yes to having prior knowledge of the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act*. In both cases, this high level of knowledge may be associated with the *Act* being part of the conference theme and presentations.

**Figure 4: Number that have heard of Accessibility for Manitoba Act**



## CONCLUSION

Though the above comes from a small data set, the information presented here provides some insights into the disability world in Thompson, MB, and by extension to northern Manitoba. The conference had a focus on accessibility, and therefore many of the ideas and experiences of the participants were connected to this issue in their answers. Clearly more resources are needed in a number of areas including infrastructure, interpretation services, housing, transportation, employment and education. With this is a great need to connect resource development with accessibility to employment opportunities. More information on the conference can be found in the conference event final report (CFNCD, 2014).

A key theme was the belief that responsibility lies with us all. It was not seen as simply a government responsibility or a business responsibility, though both play key roles. For example, the city was highlighted as being in the best position to make many of the changes seen necessary. That said the participants articulated that we all have a voice in and responsibility to create change in order to build a

more assessable society. Some of these needed changes are listed in the responses to question 6 and 7.

In working towards changes in accessibility, there was a clear message that may serve to complete this report. That message was of the importance of consultation in any discussions that directly affect those living with disabilities on a daily bases. That message is “nothing about us, without us.”

## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX A

### 'Celebrating Abilities in Northern and Rural Manitoba' Questionnaire

October 7-9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

#### Question 1

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are you are person with a disability? | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Member      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate                              | <input type="checkbox"/> More than one role |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other              |

Tell us about your role in the disability community

---

#### Question 2

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> At school                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Receiving medical help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At work                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Having medical tests   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family and Friends                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Homecare               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting around in the community       | <input type="checkbox"/> Aids to daily living   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting from one community to another | <input type="checkbox"/> Poverty                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking part in recreation             | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking part in community events       | <input type="checkbox"/> Addictions services    |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual abuse           |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical abuse         |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Elder abuse            |

#### Question 3

What are the most important problems to living with a disability in the North?

---

**Question 4**

Have resource development (mining/hydroelectric) helped to create opportunities for you to access employment or other services in your community?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5**

Who do you think is most responsible for making changes to solve problems with barriers to access and inclusion in your community?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Question 6**

What are the most important changes needed to improve the lives of people with disabilities in your community?

### Question 7

What else you would like to tell us about your ideas to improve access/inclusion experiences for people with disabilities in the North?

### Question 8

Have you heard about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities before?

- Yes
- No

Have you heard about the Accessibility for Manitobans Act before?

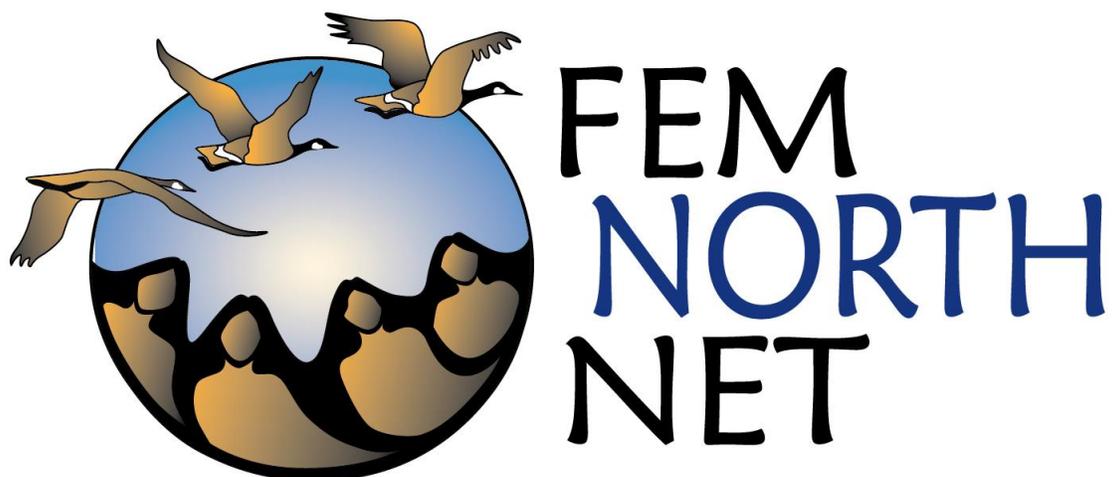
- Yes
- No

Thank You!

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