

Native worker switched gears to help others

FRIDAY, May 15, 1992

Andy Stevens has now formed his own business called Crossroads Consultants which looks into various aspects of native politics and social needs.

By Don Collins
The London Free Press

At the time, it seemed as if Andy Stevens had walked through the wrong door.

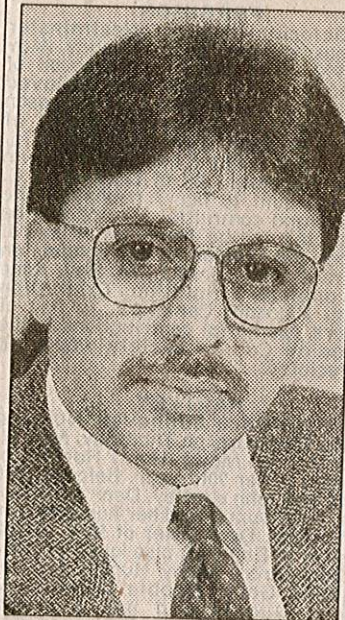
After all, this was Atenlos, a counselling service in London for abused native women, and there he was, sitting there, an exuberant Micmac from Nova Scotia, who found himself executive director.

This was a couple of years ago and a few points should be noted: Stevens, a former native parole officer, had more or less fallen into the job. He had been helping out when the woman director left. And those who knew him realized this was a guy keenly concerned with the plight of others, mainly women and children.

In those days, Stevens agonized over the social ills in native communities. He talked of alcohol and drug problems, of kids coming to believe that death was preferable because people would say nice things about you at your funeral. And, if you were dead, you would be free of all your troubles.

NEEDED REMEDIES: He talked glowingly of programs operated by natives for natives — programs that might one day provide the needed remedies.

A BUSY MAN



At one time Andy Stevens, above, was a native parole and probation officer, then executive director of Atenlos, a service for abused women. Among other things today, he is:

- On the board of directors of the Council for Action on Alcohol and other Drugs.
- On the board of directors of the London Social Planning Council.
- On the board of directors of the Committee on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly.
- In running his own consulting business, he also works in an advisory capacity in the native education field, with the police college at Aylmer, and with the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians.

Today, at 33, Stevens isn't to be found as often in the public eye. His old job at Atenlos is in the efficient hands of Alison McDonald, who, oddly enough, grew up clear across the country from Stevens. She is a Haida from the Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia.

While you may not hear from him as often, Stevens is very much on the run, a victim of his own inward drive to be involved. Since leaving Atenlos, he has formed his own business — Crossroads Consultants — something that has reached into various aspects of native politics and social needs.

CROSSED THE COUNTRY: For a while he was crisscrossing the country at such a rate he half expected to see himself flying in the opposite direction. Some of his work was tied to the plans of the Assembly of First Nations to establish a master data base (the assembly is the umbrella group for Canada's status Indians).

He has also been working with a host of other Indian groups. But his thoughts still remain with the need for strong family ties and a better life for

children. As a result, he puts on a number of workshops.

SOME OF HIS IDEAS:

On children: "I want my children (Shona, 14, Alicia, 1 1/2) to be able to escape some of the things I had to do as a child. I hope that they feel good about who they are, that they're able to say, 'I'm an Indian, I'm a good person and I don't have to prove it to anybody.'"

On racism: It is mostly what he calls a "silent racism" today, something that shows up in such areas as employment. There is, he says, a tendency to keep qualified native people at the bottom of the ladder. There should be more done to hire them at the management level.

On the future of his people: "What is happening right now with the native people is that we've finally got the steering wheel. We used to be relegated to the back seat."

On the future of all people: "We've got to start working together for the benefit of the country." He believes his people and non-natives must rely on wisdom and that there must be a new spirit of sharing.