

Alternative justice in planning stages

by Andrea Buna

BRANTFORD - The Niagara Regional Native Centre is spearheading a project designed to see the much-discussed native justice system implemented in area communities.

"Its knowing that our justice system is superior to the iron houses the white man is building. They have never worked before, what makes them think that they will work now?" says Jackie Joco Jocki, who is involved with the already-established Toronto Alternative Justice Program.

Initially the Sentencing Alternative Circle Project aims to address cases involving non-violent offenders charged with crimes that would normally result in sentences of less than two years; provincial offenses such as property, mischief, and theft under \$1,000.

Shari Cust, Sentencing Alternative Circle Co-ordinator, is encouraged by the project's

prospects, saying, "There is a movement in general to keep people out of prison, because prisons are overcrowded, and rehabilitation is not working."

She has been talking to crown attorneys from communities targeted for the project -- Brantford, St. Catharines, Ft. Erie, and

Hamilton. They are a key to the successful implementation of a native justice system as the crown must be in agreement with such a system before it can be implemented.

The new system would differ radically from current court processes. Native court workers

would refer native suspects to a community council made up of community elders and peers. The crown attorney must approve the decision, subject to accused persons admitting their guilt. When the accused has followed the rec-

... Continued on page 2