



A newsletter produced by Prince Albert Grand Council's Department of Health and Social Development

The Heart Beat

Fall/Winter Issue 2014

Strengthening Programs for Expectant Parents through a Culturally Relevant Approach

With a birth rate in northern Saskatchewan almost double the provincial rate, expectant parents from northern Saskatchewan are looking for more comprehensive parenting and family supports than ever before. To provide effective and culturally responsive programs and services, PAGC's Department of Health and Social Development has introduced a new program in Indigenous Parenting aimed to encourage interest in traditional parenting practices.

Currently, H & SD's Maternal Child Health (MCH) program is provided to 94 families within seven PAGC communities. The program consists of reproductive health services, prenatal supports, in-home visiting, and referrals. MCH Supervisor Lena Burns says she relies on the latest research and best practices, such as the Nipissing District Development Screen used for early intervention; yet, she believes it's just as necessary to honour

traditional childcare practices.

"We recognize that when working with families, learning within a cultural and community context is more than providing books and DVDs," explains Lena on the importance of using a holistic, collaborative and creative approach. "We found that we can be more effective in building upon our current tools and resources by also providing parents with access to oral history and traditional teachings taught by Elders and resource people from within our communities."

H & SD's Integrated Wellness Coordinator Violet Naytowhow leads the two-day Indigenous Parenting workshop. She says her objective is to

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Cover photo: Maternal Child Health Coordinator Lena Burns, Angel Ballantyne, Brandi Ross, Lazar Ballantyne, Lorna Halkett and Integrated Wellness Coordinator Violet Naytowhow.

Message from the Director



Welcome back to this edition of the Department of Health and Social Development Newsletter.

Many of you may already know the sad news about the passing of our Elder and Indian Residential School Support Worker Arthur Fourstar. We send our deepest sympathies and condolences to his family and community of Wahpeton Dakota Nation. In honour of his service and commitment, we held a memorial feast for him in our new tipi, which will represent the spiritual heart of H & SD and be used for cultural gatherings and ceremonies into the future.

In this issue of the *Heart Beat*, you will find stories about the interesting ways we are furthering our vision to improve First Nations health, especially for First Nations children and youth. The stories cover topics of how we can learn from past practices in maternal care, myths and misconceptions surrounding diabetes and pregnancy, and the importance of healing unresolved grief in order to break cycles of addictions in our communities and ensure a healthier generation. We also want to encourage mothers and families to “arm themselves” against the influenza virus. To date, 95% of our staff have been immunized, which is said to be the highest at any First Nations organization.

Over the past few months we also produced an information video on the Hantavirus and put together an Occupational Health and Safety Committee for all of the PAGC departments, which will be chaired by Associate Director Penny Constant. At another level, Dr. Gerry Uswack has presented NITHA a case for a three-year Oral health Therapist training program in which graduates would be “dually qualified and licensable” as Dental Therapists and Dental Hygienist. If successful, the program could potentially serve as “a model to other countries.” On another note, we are continuing our work to pursue the design, development and delivery of a new hospital and the services associated with a fully functioning hospital. We are currently in the process of forming a Project Management Team, comprised of Health Commission Chiefs, Elders, health professionals and facility experts.

Finally, as noted on page 8, I’d like to acknowledge our Health Director Ruth Bear and H & SD Associate Director Penny Constant on successfully becoming certified First Nations Health Managers. As well, I’d like to congratulate our dietitian Kelsey Ring for obtaining her Bachelor of Science in Nutrition from the University of Saskatchewan this past summer. As we continue to build on our programming, I’m pleased to announce new additions to our team: Shirley Woods—Assistant Nursing Supervisor for Community Health, Mohamad ElRafihi—Environmental Health Officer, Nancy McMahon—Family Violence Program Coordinator, Wanda Seidlikoski-Yurach—Mental Health Care Provider and Elder Jacob Sanderson—Residential School Cultural Support Worker.

With that, I hope you enjoy this issue and invite you to provide any stories and ideas for upcoming issues. Please feel free to contact me or any of our staff for more info about any of our programming.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Al Ducharme". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Al Ducharme
Director of Health and Social Development
Prince Albert Grand Council

encourage participants in reflecting on their own history and helping them think about how Indigenous parenting was practiced by past generations.

“There’s still a lot of knowledge within our home communities, carried by our Elders, mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties and uncles,” explains Violet.

“For example, kinship was really important for our people so I’m trying to showing them how we used to relate, how we used to share and how we used to support one another.”

“The disconnection of family is a really huge effect of the residential school, and I find that very young parents don't have a relationship with their mom or dad or their grandparents.”

She begins and ends her sessions with a hand-drum prayer and continues on with group discussions, arts displays, craft making activities, and Elders’ teachings shared through video and audio storytelling. When she talks about traditional practices, she refers to the teachings of the cradleboard, moss bag and the swing teachings, which reinforce the understanding of the mother-child bond.

Encouraging the participants to seek out the “knowledge keepers” from within their own communities is one of her core objectives while also hoping to break the cycle of intergenerational



Violet Naytowhow, facilitator for Indigenous Parenting workshop, shares teachings on the cradleboard, moss bag and swing in Indigenous Parenting workshop.

violence and abuse affecting families.

“The disconnection of family is a really huge effect of the residential school, and I find that very young parents don't have a relationship with their mom or dad or their grandparents,” Violet explains.

“There's no cultural knowledge - there's no language being transferred and the lack of bonding has created a lot of the drug and alcohol use that we see today, so I try to teach a little about the residential schools and its impacts on parenting, on how and why they didn't hug or show nurturing, and how kinship relationships were removed because they weren't allowed.”

Eighteen-year-old Angel Ballantyne and her boyfriend Lazar were among the participants at the two-day workshop. Twelve weeks into her first pregnancy, Angel admitted that she’s “scared, overwhelmed and excited all at once.” But now that she’s feeling less nausea and fatigue, she says she and her partner are starting to make plans for the baby’s future.



Participants make moss bags as part of the hands-on activities at the two-day workshop recently held at Little Red River Reserve..

“We're preparing and we've been talking about this for a while, so we're starting to save up for the future so we can provide him or her with shelter and food.”

While she has the support of her partner’s friends and family, she’ll be raising the child on her own since her mother and grandmother have passed on.

Despite her difficult circumstances, Lucy Henderson, the Maternal Child Health Home Visitor for Little Red River Reserve is a source of

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MCH Home Visitor Lucy Henderson shares the Seven Sacred Teachings with women and families at Little Red River Reserve.

support for Angel of whom she likens to her late grandmother.

Lucy is well acquainted with the issues faced by young mothers and families. She currently works with 16 families whose ages range from 15 to 19 years old. She finds that the most pressing concern is the young mothers' general lack of awareness of how the fetus is affected by alcohol, drugs and cigarettes. But, together with the tools and information from the MCH program, Lucy is dedicated to educating mothers about healthy child development and parenting.

While the cradleboard, moss bag and swing may serve utilitarian purposes, Violet says they represent “spiritual vessels” that symbolize First Nations identity and connection to the land.

The Indigenous Parenting workshop gives its participants a learning space to understand how early learning is influenced by a child's relationships with family, community, and the environment.

The workshop, which was recently held at Little Red River Reserve, also gave her an opportunity to present on the Seven Sacred Teachings that illustrate traditional concepts of respect and sharing. To Lucy, there is much that can still be learned from past practices.

“It’s important for the young people to understand the difference between today and when I was born,” Lucy explains. “I always tell them we were raised in moss bags, some of us were raised on the trap lines. We had a different lifestyle of living. Growing up, life was good because we didn’t have all these other things around us.”

While the cradleboard, moss bag and swing may serve utilitarian purposes, Violet says they represent “spiritual vessels” that symbolize First Nations identity and connection to the land. Violet adds, “When you’re talking about family and how to raise children in a First Nations way, it’s really about making the tie to nature, having a relationship with nature and respecting it.”

“Again it is about how we are all connected to the Spirit world and every aspect of our life was about recognizing and acknowledging everything we did,” she continues. “Because if we were recognizing them, then we were always to be respectful, honourable and careful in how we do everything in our lives.”



Until she attended the workshop, Angel said she didn’t fully understand the importance of the first six years of a child’s life, regarded as the most important time for healthy brain and character development.

“That kind of surprised me, because of how they’ll feel like that all their life and then the one video said not to let your kids see or hear violence, and that’s what caught my attention because it reminded me of my own childhood,” recounted Angel on what she’d remind herself as she nears to motherhood. “Now I know what to do to prevent what happened to me from happening to my own child.”

Tackling myths and misconceptions about pregnancy and diabetes

In early October, nurses, dietitians and community workers from First Nations and Tribal Councils across the province gathered for a workshop hosted by PAGC in collaboration with the First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) to work towards improving care for women with pre-existing diabetes in pregnancy and gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM).

PAGC's Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) team, dietitians Jennifer Oldford and Kelsey Ring, and ADI Coordinator Linda Mugford, helped organize the event in Saskatoon.

Supported by Health Canada, the goal of ADI is to reduce Type 2 diabetes among Aboriginal people by supporting health promotion and primary prevention activities and services.

With a rate up to four times higher for First Nations women in the northern communities, Jennifer says GDM, defined as "any degree of glucose intolerance with onset or first recognition during pregnancy," is a top concern for the ADI team at PAGC.

"Most women can deliver healthy babies if GDM is diagnosed and managed properly throughout pregnancy, but if it's left untreated, it can cause serious complications to the unborn baby."

Her biggest challenge is increasing its visibility as a serious maternal health issue.

"There's a misconception that diabetes and pregnancy isn't serious because it often goes away after the pregnancy is over," said Jennifer. "However, it can cause serious health effects to the baby during the pregnancy, which could result in premature births, babies born with a high birth weight or low blood sugar, and in more serious cases, miscarriages and stillbirths."

In the long term, uncontrolled blood sugars can increase the risk of Type II diabetes in babies later in life.

To help bring a better understanding of the true scale of GDM, the gathering of health professionals and community workers discussed key ideas that



"Most women can deliver healthy babies if GDM is diagnosed and managed properly throughout pregnancy, but if it's left untreated, it can cause serious complications to the unborn baby."

emerged from a Quality Improvement workshop held in March of this year. The theme areas included: promotion, awareness, interdisciplinary communication, culturally appropriate materials for general distribution, and referral processes.

Kimberly Engel, ADI dietitian with FNIHB, facilitated the meeting. She said one of the misconceptions surrounding gestational diabetes and pregnancy is that most people don't associate pregnancy with sickness because it's not considered an acute state.

She explains, "Pregnancy is a time where you really need to be focusing on the mom and the baby -- it's an amazing time of life but a time that we need pay special attention to."

The participants used the time to set out steps toward processes and resources that could be developed or used in their own communities.

"What I will do is work with the groups or whoever commits to doing those actions to provide the support and circulate those referrals, resources or processes around the province and support communities with what they have created and what they've identified as their need." 🍏

Free Flu Shots Now Available to the Public

The 2014/15 influenza immunization campaign began on October 14, 2014 and will end on March 31, 2015. The Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA) is encouraging on-reserve First Nations to “arm themselves” against the influenza virus.

Medical Health Officer Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka, reminds all First Nations to get their flu shot in order to protect themselves, their families and other community members.

“Beyond vaccination, frequent hand washing, cough etiquette and regular cleaning of surfaces can further reduce the risk of contracting and spreading influenza virus,” said Dr. Ndubuka.

Influenza vaccines (including FluMist) are available at no cost through community health centres and primary care clinics. The flu vaccine is available to everyone, but it is particularly important for people at high risk of complications from influenza, including the following:

- Children under five;
- Pregnant women;
- Adults 65 years and older;
- Nursing home residents;
- Health care workers;
- People with compromised immune systems;
- People with a chronic health condition; and,
- Caregivers and contacts of people at high risk.

For additional information on the flu vaccine, please contact your community health centre.



Bereavement camp helping to heal grieving hearts

“This happened seven years ago. This one's father died. His heart is broken and now he's a teenager and this is how he is now. He's sad and confused and he's experimenting now with drugs, or he sees people like that,” observed Elder Mary Rose Naytowhow on the artwork of one of the participants attending H & SD's Holistic Wellness Centre's Good Grief Camp for youth.

Mary Rose found clues of the youth's feelings in the art collages, made from pencil crayons, crayons and magazine cutouts. The collage was part of three days of activities held for 35 youth from nine PAGC communities.



Looking at the drawing, she asked out loud: “Maybe he lives in an area where there are a lot of drugs and addictions? This is what his drawing says and it saddens him and he's saying, ‘This is insane.’”

Mary Rose is an Elder, a community worker for Sturgeon Lake First Nation's Healing Lodge and Health Clinic, and one of the nine chaperones who brought youth to the camp to help work through their issues back at home.

“There's a lot of death within the family, car accidents and suicides, and also losses of family, breakups and divorces,” Mary Rose explained.

She's concerned that the negative health effects of drugs and alcohol on reserve are worsening.

“It used to be solvent abuse and gas sniffing, but today it's everything from pills, cocaine and crack.

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The kids are living like that in their own homes. This is what they're seeing. These kids are going through so much."

To help them deal with unresolved grief, which is often what leads to an unending cycle of drugs and alcohol, H & SD's Embrace Life Coordinator Linda Cairns said the camp provides the youth with new coping skills, especially for those at risk of suicide.

"They don't know how to grieve and we want to acknowledge the pain that they're feeling and show them that we care, and that there are good and healthy ways to deal with that pain, and that there will be adults who will listen," Linda said.

The three-day session is based on the Edu-Therapy Grief Resolutions approach, which teaches participants how to complete 'incomplete' relationships and work to resolve unresolved grief. It also has a very strong cultural component built on the medicine wheel that brings balance and healing in a traditional way.

Mental Health Care Provider Wanda Seidlikoski-Yurach was among the staff from H & SD's Holistic Wellness Centre supporting the Good Grief bereavement camp. The goal of the camp activities was to help lift the weight "experienced from losses piling on."

"Sometimes when grief is unresolved and we have other losses in our life, it gets so heavy, it feels like we can't get through it," explained Wanda. "So, when we start dealing with grief, one of the things we start doing is dealing with each of those losses



Trevor Amyotte shares teachings he learned about protocols for using the drum and what it represents.

separately and then once we resolve one of them, we'd have a tool to deal with others."

One of the tools involves writing a letter to a loved one, reading it out loud to a counselor, and then burning it at a Resolution Ceremony conducted by Integrated Wellness Coordinator Violet

Naytowhow and Continuity of Care Coordinator Florence Sanderson.

"It's a very powerful thing – it gives them a good feeling knowing they can walk through this process with someone else," said Wanda.

The camp also gives youth an opportunity to learn about hand drum teachings and participate in a sweat lodge ceremony.

Mary Rose believes the camp has had a positive impact on the youth.

"Usually when they come here, they're not thinking about the future, but then I meet up with them, they're happy and productive and I notice that for the first time they're talking about and making plans for the future."

For Wanda, this is a good start.

"It's kind of like the weather," she explained. "Some days are going to be sunny, some will be a little bit stormy, and some days will be cloudy. So, I tell them we'll experience days where we have strong emotions. But with these new coping skills, we know we can walk through them and be okay and it gives them hope and strength that they have the ability to handle storms that are a normal part of life." 🖋️

The "Healing the Heart" Grief Resolution Outreach Group is open to the public every Wed. from 7 to 9pm.



Sending off burning letters gives youth closure in Resolution Ceremony.

H & SD News Briefs



(L-R: H & SD Director Al Ducharme, NITHA Director Mary Carlson, Penny Constant, Chief Carlton Bear of Shoal Lake First Nation, HD Ruth Bear, PAGC VC Brian Hardlotte and HD Mike Marion of James Smith Cree Nation.

Congratulations to our new certified First Nations Health Managers H & SD Health Director Ruth Bear and H & SD Associate Director Penny Constant. They were among the graduates honoured by the First Nations Health Managers Association at its annual conference in Vancouver. The program focusses on the most advanced and up-to-date health management practices and health services issues facing First Nations organizations. Other graduates included Doris Custer, Teena Dumais-Clarke and Rose Michel from Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation Health Services.



PAGC commends the health staff and community for declaring the Hatchet Lake Health Center a smoke-free zone. The new smoking policy was put into effect on August 26, 2014, making it one of the first smoke-free work environments on reserve.

Use of commercial tobacco like cigarettes and chew tobacco is higher in Northern Saskatchewan than in the rest of Saskatchewan. Organizations taking steps like this encourage a reduction in commercial tobacco use.

Upcoming Events

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)
Stony Rapids, SK | Dec. 1 & 2, 2014
PA Anglican Diocese, Prince Albert | Jan. 15 & 16, 2015

Healing the Heart Trainers Workshop
Prince Albert, SK | Dec. 9-12, 2014 (*tentative*)

Healing the Heart Grief Resolution Outreach Group
Holistic Wellness Centre | Nov. 5-Dec. 17, 2014 | Wednesday evenings (7pm-9pm)

Honouring Our Traditions (HOT)- Women's Program
Holistic Wellness Centre | Jan. 12-16, 2015 & Jan. 19-23, 2015 (10-day program)

Moving Towards a Stronger Future Training (MTSF)
Montreal Lake Cree Nation | Nov. 13 & 14, 2014

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)
Valley Hill Treatment Centre, Prince Albert | Nov. 19 & 20, 2014
Stoney Rapids | Dec. 3 & 4, 2014
Little Red River Reserve | Dec. 16 & 17, 2014

National Addictions Awareness Week (NAAW)
Little Red River Reserve | Nov. 17, 2014
Saskatchewan Polytechnic | Nov. 18, 2014
Cumberland House Cree Nation | Nov. 20, 2014
Sturgeon Lake First Nation | Nov. 24, 2014

National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) Orientation Training
Holistic Wellness Centre | Dec. 1-5, 2014

Responsible Gambling Program
Holistic Wellness Centre | Nov. 24-28, Dec. 8-12, 2014 and Jan. 26-30, 2015 (*tentative*)



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