



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

The Heart Beat

Winter/Spring Issue

Early Childhood educators connecting with children through *Play and Exploration*

Early Learning and Child Care programs are creating a home away from home for children through a successful pilot project provided for the Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (AHSOR) through Prince Albert Grand Council's Health and Social Development department (H & SD).

Children and families from Little Red River Reserve and Wahpeton Dakota Nation are feeling a new sense of belonging at their Head Start programs with the introduction of a play-based program that takes a child-centred approach.

A mentorship program provided by H & SD and funded by First Nations Inuit Health is supporting Early Childhood educators on how to incorporate the Play & Exploration model into their programming, which promotes a home environment familiar to children.

Cover photo: Early Childhood Educator Michelle Halkett pictured above with Dallas and Tristan Cheekinew.

For Shelly Cheekinew who is raising her four children on Little Red River reserve, she has already noticed a big change in her three-year-old son Tristan from when she first took him to their on-reserve Head Start.

"At first he was kind of scared," said Shelly. "As soon as he would see the van pull up to the house he would try to go hide, but then he started warming up to the fact that this is where he has to come to learn, and now he has fun. He plays and learns at the same time."

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Message from the Director



It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to share information with all our stakeholders by way of this newsletter. This marks a new step in acknowledging, respecting, informing and providing public education related to the wonderful services being offered by our communities, PAGC's Department of Health and Social Development and other sectors in our continuum of health care.

Too often the work of our health care professionals and administration is unknown. We see this newsletter as a way of acknowledging these people and informing our Members in the communities of their dedication.

We also intend to use this newsletter to inform our public of new health research and new methods of providing health care. Our commitment to First Nations health care needs to be shared. Our commitment to the Treaty Right to Health needs to be kept alive and sharing information from a First Nations perspective is the way to do this.

Stories from our communities will be a regular feature. We want to inform you about the work individuals are doing on your behalf.

We will also be able to inform you about events and gatherings that have happened and the results. We will also let you know of upcoming events that are scheduled. It is our intention to keep our First Nation communities informed and aware of the diversity of health care and activities that are happening.

We look forward to a regular sharing of information this newsletter will provide. This newsletter is intended to contribute to our ability to provide better, more informed care to all our communities and the Members who live there. We also will share this with all our partners to provide a forum that will initiate discussion leading to improved care in a broader sense as well.

Please let us know how you feel about our newsletter and how we can improve it in the future. Thank you and please read and enjoy.

Sincerely,

Al Ducharme
Director of Health and Social Development

Memorial garden a model for food security



Bonnie Sanderson, with her husband Mel, described the history of "Jessy's Garden" to H & SD's Maternal Child Health Home Visitors.

When Bonnie Sanderson and her husband Mel first planted "Jessy's Garden," it was designed as a special memorial space set up with a creek and waterfall to honour and pay tribute to her 21-year-old daughter of whom they lost to suicide.

Bonnie shared her story with the Maternal Child Health Home Visitors who were attending a workshop on food security held earlier this year by H & SD's Lena Burns of Maternal Child Health and Eva Ross, Jennifer Oldford and Kelsey Ring from the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative.

Set up on their property located 21 kilometers east of Prince Albert on Highway 302, Bonnie expanded the flower garden grew and it soon sprouted into a vegetable garden. Bonnie said she was inspired by her daughter's past efforts to helping the homeless and less fortunate, she decided to donate the produce to help feed hungry families in the Prince Albert area. Since opening the garden to the public in 2009,

Jessy's Garden has fed about 500 families, individuals and agencies each summer.

"We weren't aware of how so many low-income families couldn't afford to go into the store and buy produce," recalled Bonnie. "We found that the junk food was what people were surviving on. That and sugar, so we're trying to inspire others to plant a garden and come and see us and get their produce."

Today Jessy's Garden spreads across five acres and grows a variety of vegetables from peas, carrots and cucumbers to swiss chard, zucchini and spaghetti squash, which she provides visitors the chance to fill a bag for \$10 if that could be afforded.

Bonnie explained to the home visitors she started from scratch. She admitted that she didn't know how to properly use a shovel when she first started.

"I didn't know what to do with the seeds, actually. I understood that when you put a seed in the ground you had to water it and you hope for sunshine, and just hope that the great Creator would take care of it, but there are other things involved."

She said she mostly relied on the instructions found on the back of the packages, but that the process was mostly "a lot of trial and error."

"I used to take an onion bulb and cover it right up then I learned you don't do that," she said, after reading some gardening tips on the Internet. "You only cover the root, so the sun can touch that onion and help it expand, and as it grows, it actually covers itself and the onion will take care of itself."

Inspired by Bonnie's story on how she set up Jessy's Garden, Home Visitor Jacqueline McGillivray of Cumberland House First

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With the support of Michelle Johnson, H & SD's Early Childhood Program Developer, Lily Robinson has been working closely with the Early Childhood educators in incorporating the model into the Early Learning and Child Care programs.

A Play & Exploration mentor and Director of the Prince Albert Aboriginal Headstart program, Lily says the program moves away from the intellectual development and focuses more on child's social and emotional development, which means creating an environment for the child and family that supports positive self-identities.

"Once a place is home-like and children see their families reflected in the program, such as pictures of their parents, pictures of their grannies, pictures of their Elders, pictures of their communities, their pow wows, their traditions, then the children feel safe to learn," explained Lily. "It also welcomes the parents because it says it's 'ours' and not 'theirs.'"



Creating an area called "Invitation for Play" responds to the interests of the children by creating an environment for learning through a hands-on approach.

Receiving hands-on instruction from Lily was helpful to Michelle Halkett, one of the Early Childhood educators and also a fresh graduate of the SIIT's First Nations Orientation to Daycare & Headstart.

"When I first came into it, I thought it was about education, so I went in, telling the kids, 'let's do our A-B-C's, our 1, 2, 3's, and our circles and squares.' Then I took some training and I learned to take a different direction in a program where I got to feel the heart of a four-year-old again," she added with a laugh.

Since modifying materials and resources is an important step in creating a stimulating learning environment, the play room was reorganized with furniture provided by the mentorship project where it used to be one big playing area. Now it's divided into separate sections for different stations for colouring, playing with blocks or other themed areas, and relaxing.

"I had some troubles when I first got in. It was overwhelming. I didn't know how I was going to initiate these projects with the children," admitted Michelle, the Early Childhood Educator. "Now I want to go

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April is National Oral Health Month

*Your dentist
is the answer
to complete
health.*

*A message from
the PAGC dental
therapy program*

**Health and Social
Development**

Tel: 306-953-2748



Student in child care committed to improving lives of younger generation

Months of studying are finally coming to a close for Headstart Coordinator Rosalie Waditaka of Wahpeton Dakota Nation. She's one of a growing number of staff from the PAGC communities pursuing a distance education program in Early Learning and Child Care.

"It's been really challenging because I took the accelerated program, which was two courses per week," said Rosalie of her on-line program offered by Credenda Virtual College through a SaskEnergy scholarship, supported by H & SD.

"I would have to work and then I'd have to log in and do all my assignments so it was really tough there for awhile but I got through it."

"I never had a connection to any of the families and I didn't want to raise my kids like that, so I first took the certificate program because I wanted to be a better parent."

In addition to her diploma program, Rosalie has also completed her credits hours required for a SIAST program she first started 18 years ago. Back when she first enrolled in her certificate program in Early Childhood Education, the mother of five said her intention was to learn some basic life skills for the sake of her young family.

"I was raised in foster care so I didn't know how to parent," she admitted. "I never had a connection to any of the families and I didn't



Headstart Coordinator Rosalie Waditaka is nearing the end of her studies in early childhood learning.

want to raise my kids like that, so I first took the certificate program because I wanted to be a better parent."

She said her studies have taught her that early childhood learning is "more than babysitting."

"If you are just sitting at the table, letting them play, you aren't helping them learn," explained Rosalie. "They are very smart and learn very fast, so you have to constantly interact and talk with them and that's why I'm always down on the floor with them."

She added, "And that's what I love about my job... I'm paid to play."

Again, Rosalie explained that not only has her education helped her work better with the children in her community, it has also helped her raise her own family. Having come a long way from when she was a young mother, Rosalie explained, "Now I'm using these approaches with my two-year old grandson."

Nation said she plans to set up their own Good Food boxes and use community gardening as one of the ways to ensure all community members have access to safe nutritious food.

She said food security is a serious issue in her community where it costs up to \$6.00 for a five-pound bag of potatoes.

"Single parents tell me they can't afford to purchase this produce," she explained. "But if they had a community garden going it would be free."

Jacqueline said that gardening can address food security issues while building healthier lifestyles and families. She continued, "What I would like to take back to the parents in our communities is to get them started on their own garden. I'd like to get the children



Home Visitor Jacqueline McGillivray receives a package of start up seeds from Bonnie Sanderson of Jessie's Garden

involved, and hopefully families will make their own garden in their own home. Plus, they would benefit from healthy living."

further (with this model) because I've seen this place come a really long way."

"Taking those first steps" is what matters the most, said Lily. "We encourage educators to take a step a day and see how the children respond to what you've created. After awhile it becomes innate, but it just takes little steps and we don't expect centres to change overnight."

The holistic model adopted in the Early Learning Program Guide is one that resonates with traditional parenting, because it recognizes the importance of valuing and respecting the parent and family involvement in the early learning setting.

"This is saying the child's family is important, Elders are important. You are apart of this community," explained Lily. "It wasn't our approach for kids 'to sit down and be quiet, and that's makes it a First Nations approach and we love it."

Also a SIIT graduate and Early Childhood educator, Randy Halkett said they bring in Elders to teach about First Nations arts and culture, such as birchbark biting activities. The Play & Exploration model also encourages children to speak their language with cultural and print materials.

"We try to incorporate Cree as much as we can into the traditional foods and traditional teachings," said Randy. "We have animals written in Cree, we sing songs in Cree, and we play CDs of kid's songs in Cree that go with the pictures of animals."

One tell-tale sign for Shelly that the new program was having a positive effect on her daughter was her heightened sense of curiosity.

"The program was like school for her and I noticed she started asking more questions than ever before."

First Nations youth to lead tobacco reduction efforts in their communities

On March 11 & 12, the Northern Healthy Community Partnership - Northern Tobacco Strategy's "What's Tobacco For?: Building Community Awareness and Action" was held at the Prince Albert Inn.

NTS partner organizations selected four youth and two adult allies to attend the What's Tobacco For? event. The workshop covered topics on the difference between traditional/ceremonial tobacco and commercial tobacco, how tobacco is an addiction, strategies that tobacco companies use to market tobacco to youth, how to resist peer pressure, and how to be advocates for change with their peers and in their community.



Motivational speaker Tala Tootoosis shares her personal story with youth about overcoming addictions.

The Northern Tobacco Strategy (NTS) is made up of representation from Prince Albert Grand Council, Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, Meadow Lake Tribal Council, Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority and the northern health regions.

The NTS works with communities on building environments that are resistant to commercial tobacco use while being respectful of the traditional uses of tobacco.



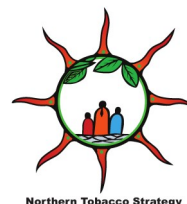
NTS participants: (l-r) Hilary Young, Violet Naytowhow, Lexus Waditaka, Krista Peekeekoot and Ronald Waditaka.

Since tobacco misuse is higher in northern communities than the rest of the country, the Northern Tobacco strategy has developed strategies on preventing the use of tobacco amongst youth.

Studies show that the majority (about 90%) of smokers become addicted to commercial tobacco before they leave their teens.

According to the First Nations Regional Health Survey, statistics show that 33% of youth living on reserve in Canada smoke. The statistics also show that in Saskatchewan, the rates of youth smoking is 19% of youth smoke compared to the national average of 8%.

Although data for northern Saskatchewan First Nation on-reserve youth is limited, one community reported that 54% of youth had smoked during the last month. Another community estimated that 35% of youth had smoked during the last month.



In Memory of Dr. Kenneth Torbert



Dr. Torbert was presented with a special birchbark carving following his retirement.

Dr. Kenneth Torbert first joined PAGC as the supervising Dentist in 2003. During his time with H & SD, Dr. Torbet was committed to his work and passionate about serving PAGC's northern First Nations communities. In all of his years of service, he never once complained about travelling in the rain, snow or mud.

Before he joined our team, Dr. Torbet served as a missionary dentist in Nepal where he helped patients who didn't have access to a dental clinic. He also worked in India where he adopted the now famous singer-songwriter Biff Naked.

On behalf of PAGC, I would like to extend my deepest sympathy and most heartfelt condolences to Dr. Torbert's family during this time. We will fondly remember him for all of years of expertise and his gift of selflessly helping others.

Tiniki- Marsi chogh,
Candace Rediron

Upcoming Events

Evening sessions on Traditional Teachings by Cree, Dakota and Dene Elders

Held monthly at Cottage 10. For more info, contact Julie Naytowhow, 306-953-7428, Family Violence Program

Responsible Gambling Program

Holistic Wellness Centre

March 24-28, April 28-May 2, May 26-30, June 23-27 (tentative)

Contact Holistic Wellness Centre @ 306-765-5305

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)

Montreal Lake Cree Nation

April 2-3, 2014

Contact Holistic Wellness Centre @ 306-765-5305

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)

Montreal Lake Cree Nation

April 29-30, 2014

Contact Holistic Wellness Centre @ 306-765-5305

Youth Against Violence

Travelodge Inn, Prince Albert

May 5-8, 2014

Contact Holistic Wellness Centre @ 306-765-5305

Honoring Our Traditions (HOT)- Men's Program

Holistic Wellness Centre

May 12-16 & May 19-23, 2014

Contact Holistic Wellness Centre @ 306-765-5305

Honoring Our Traditions (HOT)- Women's Program

Holistic Wellness Centre

June 2-6 & June 9-13, 2014

Contact Holistic Wellness Centre @ 306-765-5305



Prince Albert Grand Council Health & Social Development Head Office

Chief Joseph Custer Reserve #201

851 - 23rd Street West

P.O. Box 1775

Prince Albert, SK S6V 5T3

Tel: 306-953-7293 Fax: 306-763-6611

www.pagc.sk.ca

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