



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

The Heart Beat

Fall Issue 2016

PAGC H & SD Encourages Breastfeeding with Support of Peer Counsellors

Long before the introduction of infant formula in the 1950s, generations of Indigenous women practiced the tradition of breastfeeding, coupled with the teachings of the moss bag and cradleboard, as the ideal method of feeding, nurturing and raising their babies. Historically, mothers were surrounded by family and community throughout the birthing process.

But as artificial infant formula became popularized in mainstream society, and as the family unit became more disconnected, largely as a result of the residential schools, today, Indigenous women are less likely to initiate breastfeeding, which is generally viewed as more of the exception rather than the norm.

To support mothers who want to breastfeed, the Prince Albert Grand Council's (PAGC) Department of Health and Social Development (H&SD) has expanded their existing nursing programs for prenatal women by introducing a community-based breastfeeding peer support training program.

Eleven years ago, registered nurse Georgina Quinney first initiated the peer support program at Shoal Lake Cree Nation, following a presentation about the research of Dr. Patricia Martens who studied the barriers to breastfeeding in First Nations communities. In her findings, peer counselling was offered as an intervention, which Quinney wanted to bring back to Shoal Lake.

At the time, Quinney said she was interested in learning new ways to encourage mothers to breastfeed, especially because of her concerns over the negative health effects of formula feeding she was seeing firsthand.

"I noticed that the babies getting breastfed weren't the ones being taken in the taxis and going to town

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Cover photo: Breastfeeding peer counsellor Barbara Bear, Elder Betsy Crane, Peer counsellor Tashina Cook and her baby, Madeline Cook, and Shoal Lake Cree Nation Nurse Georgina Quinney.

Message from the Director



Thank you to the staff in our communities. Thank you to the staff at PAGC. And thank you to all of the staff in the programs at PAGC for making this a wonderful year and a great place to work.

Much has been accomplished in all programs, but in our Department of Health and Social Development, we are particular proud of the fact that our communities are growing and continue to see the future clearly and continue to face it with confidence.

The new government-elected gave us hope. We think that they have a better focus on the issues of First Nations, and have given many indications that they intend to work with us to make the quality of life better in all of our communities and urban settings wherever we live.

We believe that the work we do here is crucial. We believe that the work completed in our communities is, by far the most important work that happens anywhere. Our ability to support that work is paramount to the success of all who receive our services.

There are wonderful visions provided by the Chiefs in the communities they serve. People want to go into areas that have traditionally been foreign to us.

We want to begin to run hospitals. We want to run walk in clinics. We want to learn the technologies that exist within those institutions. We see MRIs, ultrasounds and digital x-rays as areas we will gain expertise in, and be able to provide to our own people.

They come to us because they trust us, and we need to learn their trust. We need to ensure that all that we do will give me them confidence that what we do will be for their benefit.

Having said all this, I believe that we have some very talented people with long years of experience. With that kind of workforce, supporting the work that we do, we will absolutely be successful in the future. I enjoy working here with my staff. I enjoy working with the communities, the Chiefs, the leaders, and I know that each and every one of my staff enjoy it, too.

We look forward to continuing this work into the future with confidence. We will be successful, simply because you want us to be successful and you support us to do that.

With that, I hope you enjoy this issue of the Heart Beat. Please feel free to contact us with any comments and suggestions.

Thank you. Pdamaya. Ninaskomin. Marsi Cho

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Al Ducharme". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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

for problems, such as diarrhea and ear infections,” recalled Quinney. “So, this program gave me hope that we could get more women breastfeeding. Because we have known for a long time that breastfeeding is a good thing but it was difficult to get established.”

In her 40 years of experience as a registered nurse, Quinney believed that that difficulty stemmed from a “big gap in the breastfeeding culture in the 50s, 60s and 70s.”

“Doctors, influenced by big formula companies, were promoting formula, and I know many mothers back from that age were doing what they thought was best for their baby by giving them this formula that had all of these ‘wonderful’ things in it,” she explained. “Then, you add the fact that a lot of these women had parents who had gone through the residential school where the bond between the children and parents and community was broken, so the mothers weren't taught about breastfeeding from the cultural point of view.”

“I tell them I was shy the first time, too. I was scared I'd be laughed at, or judged. But I tell them I overcame that because my baby was hungry,” said Cook.

“Because of this, they were very vulnerable to all of these campaigns from the formula companies, and they had nobody to advise them differently,” Quinney added.

She says she also recognized that the mothers and families faced many of the same barriers, such as the challenges accessing off-reserve services.

“We're isolated because we're 60 miles from town. The health centre's not a big centre, so we don't provide 24 hour service. There aren't any after hour lactation consultants people could phone. Even if they did, many people don't have phones or couldn't phone long distance, so if I wasn't there, there was very little support for these moms.”

With the advice of a Lactation Consultant who was familiar with the original research study, Quinney

designed her own peer support program in Shoal Lake Cree Nation with four women graduating from the first training.

A big part of their job is to provide one-on-one counselling and demonstrations. The peer supporters would come to the prenatal classes with their babies and nurse in front of the pregnant mothers in an effort to normalize breastfeeding.

Barbara Bear is a mother of four and one of four peer support counsellors at Shoal Lake Cree Nation. Of the 12 mothers she worked with since 2005, Bear says she finds it helpful when she shares her story with the new mothers about when she first decided to breastfeed.

“I tell them that before my firstborn came into this world, I saw two of my cousins breastfeeding and I liked what I saw -- I remember the bond between them was so mesmerizing, so special and lovely,” recalled Bear. “I can still picture it in my head and I always share that with my new clients.”



Peer Counsellor Tashina Cook and Madeline

Yet Bear recognizes the challenges that come with it.

“Sometimes, as a peer supporter, I'd go for a home visits with prenats or postnats, and I would do checkups on them, and they would tell me they want to give up because of the pain or because they're having a hard

time. That was the toughest part.”

Encouraging the young mothers is also a big part of the job for Tashina Cook, another peer support counsellor. Cook says she relates to some of the fears and insecurities felt by the young mothers, but she draws upon her four years of experience breastfeeding to help her clients through their struggles.

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EHO workshop Focusses on Safe Drinking Water



EHO Team: Nitin Koli (seated), Tahir Muhammad, Mohammad ElRafiha, Victor Odele, and Water Quality Monitor Jeff McLeod

Earlier this year, over 20 community staff from throughout northern Saskatchewan attended a PAGC H & SD Water Quality Monitors Workshop, funded by Health Canada and organized by the Department of Environmental Health.

H & SD's Environment Health Supervisor Mohammad ElRafihi volunteered to host Health Canada's event, which was last held in 2012.

The workshop was based on material developed and provided by Health Canada as part of the Safe Drinking Water Program (SDWP). H & SD, however, raised new topics, not covered in the previous workshops, including boil water advisories, cleaning and disinfecting cisterns, water trucks and wells.

He said he was pleased with the outcome.

"I was extremely happy with the turnout, and I am proud we hosted the event, and this opportunity paved the way for us to do future workshops. Now that we've done this one, we can build up on the next one," said ElRafihi.

Being centralized at one location, the workshop gave water quality monitors and water plant operators a chance to gain more knowledge and skills from the EHOs.

"We showed them how to use different types of equipment," explained Kim Lee who works as an EHO for Health Canada. "We talked about the multi-barrier approach to safe drinking water, basically

how we protect the water from the source, from how it comes out of the tap and all the steps in between."

For participants who may have years of experience to those who may be new to the job, the workshop also gave them an opportunity to share their concerns and experiences, as well as to address their issues and questions.

Jeff McLeod has been a Water Quality Monitor at Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation for the past five years, and said it was important to learn about the new changes within the rules and regulations.


"Presenters were pretty good and it was good to get up to date information and get a refresh on a lot of things that we've already learned."

When he was at the workshop, McLeod showed interest in the Hydrologic Cycle model that was on display, and invited H & SD to set it up at their Sturgeon Lake Treaty Days where he was showcasing his work as a water quality monitor. This groundwater simulator kit sparked a new promotions plan to use it as an educational tool at schools and community events.

"It hasn't been used, so I thought this was the perfect opportunity to take it and use it as an educational tool. I wanted them to think about this whole concept globally and to act locally, meaning to take the precautions necessary to protect their surface and ground water. I know it's important in First Nations culture, and we want to try to protect and preserve it from contamination for generations to come," said ElRafihi.

To McLeod, it's important to learn as much as they can about the water processes, namely because of the cultural significance First Nations attach to them.

"It's important people know where their water is coming from, the difference between ground water and surface water, and the purity of it."

"Because the spirit of the water is in us, since our bodies are made up of 85% water, so it's important that we respect that and learn more about the connection with the lake, rivers and rain. And, as long as we can preserve that clean water for future generations, we'll be okay. But if we continue to pollute it, we'll get sick and our future generations will be affected when they grow older." 

MCH Photography Project Brings out the Best in Families

H & SD's Maternal Child Health Supervisor Lena Burns was trying to figure out new ways to attract the interest of more families in her program, and then she came up with an idea of sharing her skills as a photographer and offering them free family portraits.

"I was just thinking about how can we engage families into this program, and I thought they would like family photos and I had the means to do it," said Burns, who has taken photos of at least 80 families from seven different PAGC communities.

"It's easier for me to go to the communities than it is for the parents to bring all their children to town to get their photos done, which



can be very expensive," she recalled. "So this way, I'm doing it as part of my job, and I'm giving back to them and doing something I love."

Another reason she enjoys this project is that it also reinforces her work in promoting the good health and development of parents and children.

"It enhances or promotes family connection, and parent child relationship, because you see the mom is looking at her baby and you know there's a secure attachment. It brings out what they already have, so when I'm there, I get to capture that bond for them to see and share with others."

With MCH covering the printing costs, Burns provides each family with about 50 photos and a memory stick of the digital copies, so they can print out their own 5 x 7s or 8 x 10s.

MCH Home Visitor Charmaine Ermine works closely with Burns at Little Red First Nation. For this project she sets up the photoshoot and coordinates the families



Jezebel Bird shares her photos with Maternal Child Health Home Visitor Charmaine Ermine

"For me and my fellow community members, I think it's very important to be able to get your photos done in your own community, and since it doesn't cost anything to the families, I think it's a blessing for family, because we have barriers, such as vehicles, and also the cost of professionally done photos, but now, we're able to beat those barriers with the help of Lena."

Ermine organized the first photo shoot for six families. It was such a success, they plan on extending the invitation to the families who were interested in the service but weren't available.


"I think for the families, it's for keepsake," she said. "And it's for their children when they grow up and they can show their children how special their families are."

Jezebel Bird of Little Red was pleased with how her photos of her and her three girls turned out. So far, she has given half of the pictures to her mother and made a photo album for her daughters and niece, which they keep in a special box. Jezebel said she plans to frame some of them for others to see.

Bird says that when she looks at the photos, she sees their potential.

"I hope for their education -- I hope for a bright future for them. They're full of so much love. I know they'll probably be able to move mountains."

Lena says she's pleased with the hope and pride her photos represent to the mom.

"It was my honour. It's me, doing this out of the goodness of my heart, and me, not expecting anything back," said Lena. 

Green Light Project Encourages Peers to Stop Smoking

Commercial tobacco products including cigarettes, cigars, cigarillos, blunt wraps, pipe tobacco, Skoal, chewing tobacco, waterpipe tobacco and snuffs are highly addictive and harmful to our health.



Use of these tobacco products are of particular concern, given the harmful effects of smoking not only on the health of smokers but also on the health of family and community members through second-hand and third-hand smoke.

To address this, H & SD is currently implementing a Green Light Program in our PAGC communities, which celebrates houses that are smoke-free.

Community members of smoke-free homes are given an environmentally friendly green light bulb to be placed outside the front door.

- It is a way to let the whole community know that your home is smoke-free.
- It generates community awareness about harmful effects of the non-traditional use of tobacco products.
- It is a visual acknowledgement to signal “No smoking in my house” to visitors.
- It has the potential to reduce the number of children exposed to second-hand smoke.
- It has been successfully implemented in some of our communities, including Hatchet Lake Denesuline Nation and Cumberland House Cree Nation, and it is currently in place at Shoal Lake Cree Nation and James Smith Cree Nation.

For more information on the Green Light Project, please contact the PAGC Tobacco Control Coordinator @ 306-953-7283.

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“I tell them I was shy the first time, too. I was scared I'd be laughed at, or judged. But I tell them I overcame that because my baby was hungry. Even though I was in a public place, I started feeding her because she was hungry,” Cook explained.

“And for the first couple of months I felt bad because I wanted to quit,” she admitted. “But now I encourage all of the first time breastfeeding mothers to keep going.”

Elder Betsy Crane plays a major role in the support system offered at Shoal Lake Cree Nation.

Raised in a family of 16 brothers and sisters who were all breastfed, Crane said she drew upon the traditional knowledge she received from her maternal figures in raising her own son.

“My mother had lots of babies. and I watched her, growing up, so I learned at an early age how important it is for babies to grow with their mother's milk, so I was taught from an early age, long before I had my own baby.”

“There is a saying that it takes a whole community to raise a child, and that's how we've been brought up,” explained Crane.

She recalled how her son rarely got sick, except for one time.

“I remember the day he got sick. We wrapped him in a cradle and my granny said I was crying with him, so she said, 'Don't cry, you'll be alright.' And she wrapped him in a cradleboard. She gave him some traditional medicine. A little teaspoon of *maskihkîwâpoy*, a herbal tea from our own muskeg. Not store bought. So, she gave him a little bit of that and when he woke up, he was alright. I was so glad and I continued breastfeeding him.”

Crane believes so much in the younger generation practicing their traditions, her and her husband make and try to sell hand-made moss bags and cradleboards, which she says they usually end up giving away.

She says she treats the larger community as family of her own.

“There is a saying that it takes a whole community to raise a child, and that’s how we’ve been brought up,” explained Crane.

She remembers one example of how the women helped each other in their time of need.

“There was one time my Mom got sick when my sister was a baby. The doctor had to fly her out to go and get treated her and we were left with this little baby. My mom was not allowed to take my sister. But before she left, she went to my Auntie. She had a baby at that time, and my sister and my cousin were the same age. So my Mom asked her sister, ‘Would you be able to breastfeed my baby while I’m gone?’ And she did. Isn’t that wonderful how people supported and helped each other so the baby doesn’t have to suffer? I don’t know how my sister would have ended just being with us, and the shock of going into bottle feeding. But she didn’t have to, because my Auntie was there for her.”

Currently, PAGC Nursing follows the guidelines of the World Health Organization, which recommends “exclusive breastfeeding up to six months of age, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods for up to two years of age or beyond.”

Given the program’s success at Shoal Lake, H & SD’s Assistant Nursing Supervisor Shirley Woods said that they wanted to build off of their model.

“We already provide regular nursing programming, but this peer support program is a way of enhancing the work of what we are already doing,” said Woods.

“We’ve known for a long time that breastfeeding is best for baby and mom, and with the low rates in our community, we know that we need to look at different ways of promoting breastfeeding.”



Elder Betsy Crane of Shoal Lake Cree Nation

“Just as Georgina has experienced, we recognize that moms are more likely to continue with the support of other moms from the community, because they are there all the time compared to nurses who are only there during working hours.”

With funding from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, H & SD will be holding 2- four-and-a-half day workshop in Prince Albert and Regina, to bring in interested breastfeeding moms, nurses and peer support workers. It will open to all First Nations throughout the province.

The workshop is being offered through PAGC’s Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) program, which recognizes that Indigenous women experience a disproportionate burden of adverse maternity experiences, including higher rates of gestational diabetes.

H & SD’s dietitians Joanna Thich and Kelsey Ring are organizing the workshop.

The dietitians agree that the nutritional benefits of breastfeeding are understated.

“Breastmilk is the best milk, because it has everything a baby needs,” explained Thich.


“It’s magical, because as the baby’s needs changes, so does the breast milk. For example, if a mother gets sick, she builds antibodies, which she gives to the baby, so the baby is less likely to be sick.

“And, even though, some may need baby formula, most women who breastfeed can succeed with a little bit of help and support.”

Thich added that increasing the rates of breastfeeding can also be an effective food security and diabetes prevention strategy for babies, families and households.

“As dietitians, we work on the prevention and management of diabetes, and a part of that is eating healthy and having enough to sustain yourself, so, not only is breastfeeding the best nutrition for an infant, it’s free.”

The workshops will be held from Jan 30-Feb 3 in Prince Albert, and Feb 27-March 3 in Regina. There will be 20 spots per location. Registration is on a first come, first serve basis.

For more info, please contact PAGC’s office at (306) 953-7283. 

Upcoming Events

Responsible Gambling Program

Holistic Wellness Centre | Oct. 24-28, 2016, Nov. 21-25 & Dec. 5-9. Call 306-953-7285 for more info.

PAGC Residential School Gathering

Senator Allen Bird Memorial Gym | Nov. 2-9, 2016.
Call 306-953-7283 for more info.

PAGC Breastfeeding Peer Support Training Workshop

Prince Albert—Jan 30-Feb 3 & Regina-Feb 27-Mar 3 | Open to all First Nation communities. 20 spots per location. Registration is on a first come, first serve basis. Call 306-953-7283 for more info.

Prince Albert Grand Council Residential School Gathering

November 2nd & 3rd, 2016

Senator Allen Bird Memorial Gym

SPEAKERS



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Betty Ann Pottruff - Executive Director
Ministry of Justice (Counsel for Children)



Grant Severight

Grant Severight is an approved Mental Health Therapist with Health Canada.

Chief Rodney Brass

Youth - "Overcoming Obstacles"



Eugene Arcand

The History of the IRS and "Calls to Action"

Lateral Violence Workshop

Marcia Mirasty
Marcia Merasty is a member of the Canoe Lake First Nation



FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron

Day School / Day Scholars

Lunch/Entertainment

Moccasin Joe
Healing Through Humour



THEME

Moving Forward Together For A Better Tomorrow



For More Information You Can Contact:
George Mirasty, Marianne Robilliard,
Richie Bird or Elder Gordon Keewatin
from PAGC at 306-953-7283

H & SD News Briefs



On September 30, staff from PAGC and NITHA joined together of Orange Shirt Day to honour and remember the experiences of the thousands of children who were taken from their families and placed in Indian residential schools.



On August 10, the Women's Commission presented a starblanket to H & SD Director Al Ducharme for his contributions and support.



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