

# Healing Words

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Photo courtesy of Metis National Council

## Youth Issue

This issue of *Healing Words* is the outcome of a double promise. When we planned our themes for the year, we thought that a newsletter for and by Youth would offer a timely and interesting perspective on the intergenerational impacts of residential schools.

Descendants of front-line survivors of residential schools also had to survive the ripple-effect of trauma. But there is something special about this generation of Aboriginal Youth: they are the Seventh Generation, and on them rest the healing hope of communities. We promised ourselves to call on today's generation and ask them to share with other youth, and with us all, their experience, their views, their stories.

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## AHF Youth Conference - page 18

The Youth Conference was convened in order to engage youth in a discussion of how the Aboriginal Healing Foundation could most effectively address issues and concerns of youth and increase youth participation in projects which the AHF funds. Youth from current AHF-funded youth projects, and AHF staff and Board Members, participated in facilitated plenary presentations and workshop exercises.

see page 18 for Conference details...

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*“Seven Generations” is a significant term to Aboriginal people across Canada. Our Elders tell us of a legend that was based on the renewal of strength and sufficiency for Aboriginal people. It was told that after the First people lost the battle for their homelands, the people lost a great deal of their strength. However, each generation of Aboriginal people would learn a new teaching and share this new strength with the next generation until we had reached seven generations. The seventh generation would be strong in numbers and have all of the seven teachings of their ancestors.*

## Promises Kept

the youth issue



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In March of this year, the AHF organised a Youth Conference in Edmonton, to consult on different aspects of youth participation in AHF community healing projects. Youth representatives of AHF youth-oriented funded projects and of several National Aboriginal organisations met and shared their vision and hope for increased participation and responsibility. One of the recommendations they made during this very inspiring and rewarding dialogue was that *Healing Words* be dedicated to Youth issues.

*Dedicate one whole issue of Healing words to just youth and have youth share their experiences regarding the intergenerational impacts they've experienced to let the youth in Canada know that they are not alone.*

- Recommendation, AHF Youth Conference, Edmonton

To say the least, we were delighted and found it easy to confirm our whole-hearted commitment: the June issue of *Healing Words* would belong to Aboriginal Youth. We also confirmed that we would be ready to reserve a regular space on each issue of *Healing Words*, in return for a promise that they would send in their contributions.

### **A Special Issue — by, and for, Special People**

*Youth need to be directly involved in the development, implementation and evaluation (accountability) — need to have a sense of accomplishment and the freedom to learn from their mistakes.*

- Recommendation, AHF Youth Conference, Edmonton

The topics chosen by our young contributors are very diverse. Healing, in the context of the intergenerational impacts of residential schools, touches a great number of issues. The Edmonton Conference Report, presented in this newsletter, illustrates the fact that Aboriginal Youth are very knowl-

edgeable about the repercussions on their community and on themselves of the traumas suffered by their parents and grand-parents as a result of physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse.

The articles they have written or suggested also show they are ready to be involved, to collaborate with adults, to learn from Elders, adults and each other, to take responsibility for the part they have to play in the healing process of their families and communities, to take the lead in guiding younger ones. Their hope is to be trusted, to be recognised and respected, so that they can become strong enough to carry forward the hopes of the seven generations that preceded them, and become parents and grand-parents of healthy, balanced and happy children.

*We are the youth of today and we are walking into the future.  
We all have the power of choice and the power to change.*

- AHF Youth Conference 2001, Edmonton

Youth also have a great desire to be understood as persons and also for the special challenges they have to confront. They also want to be understood as members of this special generation, the Seventh Generation. Seventh Generation and Strong like Two People, in particular, explore these challenges and opportunities, as they are specially relevant to the youth of today.

So many times we hear about Youth in a negative way. It has been my experience that given the chance, Youth can show, to a vibrant extent, qualities of heart and mind that can rekindle anyone's faith in human beings and in the future. The Youth present at the conference were but a tiny sample of such Youths, who combine both the universal characteristics of Youth —enthusiasm, dynamism, positiveness, thirst for change and movement, fresh creative powers, uncompromising positioning against injustices, faith in the spiritual and traditional relevance of their cultural values. —with virtues we usually reserve for adults and Elders: maturity, responsibility, compassion, deep understanding through personal suffering, tolerance and wisdom... amongst others.

*To start on a healing journey you need to be aware of the issues and why people act the way that they do.*

- Participant, AHF Youth Conference, Edmonton

Youth is also a period of learning, of trying to make sense for oneself, of the experiences, beliefs, worldviews and behaviours of those who make one's world: family, community, nation, world. During the Conference, many Youth told us that although they saw and understood the many prob- ►

# Promises Kept

the youth issue



lems that affected their families and communities, they had many questions and needed to know more about the connection between the residential school experience and intergenerational impacts. Some of the articles presented in this issue, in particular the project from the Six Nations Social Development Program attempt to answer some of their questions.

## ABORIGINAL YOUTH : A UNIQUE DESTINY

For the survivors of residential school, healing is a personal and collective journey that starts a long way back, and which will continue a long way from now into the future. Reconstructing health and balance is a generational process in which everyone has a role to play. The young descendants of survivors of residential school today have been entrusted with a special legacy: a legacy of hope.

It is impossible to talk about healing and fail to observe in the mirror of time a vision different from the one we see today. Healing is about optimism and hope, and faith that the generations that succeed us will be happier and healthier. We may work for the future each day ourselves as adults and Elders, but the work of generations is done by our children, our grand children and, above all, by each generation of youth. Today's youth are tomorrow's communities; they are the arrows flung from the present and travelling on a true aim, we hope, towards a healthy and happy future.

Aboriginal Youth today are standing poised on the hinge of personal and collective history. They are, as young adults, carrying the legacy of their own childhood while being propelled toward their own future by the irresistible forces of life. For many youth, the present is a time of constant incertitude, insecurity and worry. Yet it is also a time of optimism, great energy, and commitment to just causes.

Aboriginal Youth are also the repositories of a much larger vision of healing. One that, as they are intent on their own healing, they might not yet be aware of. They have inherited a spiritual strength which has vanquished every effort aimed at eradicating their culture. A spiritual legacy that has stood the greatest tests and that allows them to see truth with their own eyes and not with the eyes of others. In a world where spiritual laws have been made to have so little practical relevance, they can walk securely, if they choose, on the solid ground of Aboriginal traditions and spirituality. They can also select, from the Western offerings, those that can enhance the life of their communities and their nations. In a fast disintegrating Western world, in a great need to heal itself, they have the choice to learn, from Elders, how to heal and reconstruct healthy communities. This is not an easy task but this is the task this Seventh Generation has the choice to accomplish.

You, the Youth of today, have a choice of destiny that your ancestors voiced hundreds of years ago, at a time when they had lost the power to make any.

Choices are decisions and healthy choices are enlightened decisions. One of Youth's difficult tasks today is to scrutinise the alluring offerings of contemporary society, and select those offerings through the filter of traditional and spiritual teachings.

Aboriginal communities and nations are diverse and each is unique and complex. The contemporary world is equally complex. This issue of *Healing Words*, like other issues is meant as an instrument of reflexion, offering some direction and, we hope, inspiration.

Together with youth contributors, we explore some innovative healing initiatives and strategies.

**Science**, when it finds and celebrates its original Aboriginal roots, becomes a powerful tool to heal not only the self-esteem of Aboriginal children and youth, but also of their parents and Elders. It can speed up the return to a healing connectedness with the Creator and its creation, and to a deeply satisfying sense of knowing.

**Education**, when it is based on the strength of Cultural values, can then integrate meaningfully the knowledge of the Western world. The result is the raising of a generation strong and balanced in spirit, mind and body, capable and willing to offer their knowledge and energy for the reconstruction of their communities.

**Cultural resilience:** The essence of youth is resilience. It is through their resilience that children of residential school survived, and it is through resilience that today's youth are able to stand up strong and forge their future. Knowing how resilience can be passed on, cultivated, and increased is a knowledge that the Youth of today can use to carry forward the healthy future of generations to come. The article on Native traditional culture and resilience celebrate all survivors, from generations past to today's Youth.

**Peace:** Learning –and learning to apply– the great teachings about the laws and principles of peace among nations, which, before any world conventions or leagues of nations, were laid up in many Aboriginal communities and nations, is a powerful means of healing generations.

Our heart mind and soul go into *Healing Words'* planning, researching, and writing. The issues we choose to explore are often painful or difficult, because any aspect of the residential school experience of abuse is painful and difficult. But our goal is to encourage participation in the dialogue on the issues we present. And we are very glad that in this issue Youth have taken the lead.

On behalf of all our Youth contributors, we welcome you to this issue of *Healing Words*, and hope that it will help renew your faith in the future. Enjoy... *Giselle Robelin*.

**S**trong like Two People, the theme of this issue of *Healing Words*, is dedicated to Aboriginal Youth throughout Canada and was inspired by them.

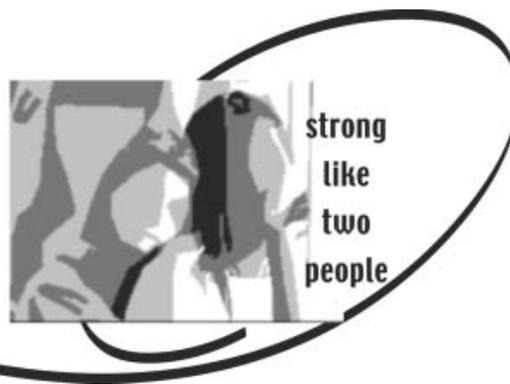
Aboriginal youth in all parts of Canada account for almost 68% of the Aboriginal population—they are, in fact, strong in numbers and are proving to be strong individuals and leaders. They need both qualities in great amount, for their task is not merely to survive as their parents and grand-parents had to do in the face of a massive and unrelenting assimilation process, but to reconstruct communities and nations able to prosper while living a life of balance in a world of duality, and in the face of a more subtle and insidious contemporary assimilation process.

Aboriginal Youth, therefore, are confronted by dilemmas which do not affect other youths in Canada. To some extent, some first generation immigrant youths, caught between the strong original culture of their parents and the conformity pressures of the new society, do find themselves in a cultural predicament. But unlike Aboriginal Youth, their culture and history, on arrival in Canada, begin to hang by a fragile generational thread, and experience shows that it generally takes one or two generations for that thread to disappear into the weave of Canadian society.

But the choices before Aboriginal Youth are of a very different kind. The heart of the matter is that their dilemma has its roots in the fact that the common elements of the diverse Aboriginal views of the world are fundamentally at variance from the Western world views. Aboriginal aspirations, of which youth represent the generational realisation and continuity have always been and are today still, inseparable from their world view.

To be strong like two people therefore requires from Aboriginal Youth a balancing act that is extremely demanding and difficult, and virtually impossible without a clear vision of what those two world views are.

There is a particularly strong vision which Aboriginal youth need to be informed of, about healing, and about the future: the day is fast approaching when the unsustainability of the Western world view and the systems born of it will have reached their limit.



*“The models of society which aboriginal communities are today struggling to construct against all odds on the solid foundation of traditional spiritual values combined with traditional and contemporary knowledge, will be the envy of a ruined world”*

Those who might object to the idealism of this quotation, need to remember: it is through the ideals expressed by visionaries that the world has been inspired to move onwards to greater degrees of understanding and altruism. The Great Law of Peace, the abolition of slavery, the emancipation of women, and reconciliation in South Africa, are just a few example of these ideals. There is nothing wrong with ideals, if they are followed by commitment. Ideals and commitment have always been the hallmark of Youth.

A perfect example of youthful ideals and commitment is Chief Jimmy Bruneau. His vision of a generation *Strong Like Two People* came to him when he was a child of six and took shape when he was a young man. He committed himself to this vision and fought for it from his late thirties. It was not until he was 84 years old that this vision at last became a reality—a reality that turned a hopeless situation around forever.

### **Chief Jimmy Bruneau – Strong like Two People**

The story of Chief Jimmy Bruno exemplifies youth vision and leadership. Although he was born a few generations ago, his vision has fresh pertinence to the dilemmas and challenges faced by today’s youth in Aboriginal communities.

Imagine in 1893 when an American graduate, Frank Russel, from the University of Iowa, came to Dogrib country in search of a muskox specimen he could take home with him. In his journal, he talks about the trip he made to the edge of the woods on the shore of courageous lake. There, he was in a Dogrib encampment a few portages from Lac de Gras in late winter with a dog team. It was the camp of Ek’awi Dzimi, the father of the late chief Jimmy Bruneau, who was the leader of the people in the camp. Chief Jimmy Bruneau was about six years old when he saw this man writing in his journal and heard the language he spoke. He probably did not know what was going on at the time, but it definitely left an impression on his mind. The camp probably talked about this strange man and reviewed his brief excursion with them through stories and determined that there would likely be more encounters with strangers.

In 1913, when Bruneau was twenty-five years old, he accompanied another American, David Wheeler, to the edge of Snare Lake by dogteam. He spent many days with him, listening and watching him write with pen and paper. This left another long lasting impression on his mind. There were many similar excursions over the years.





In 1921, his uncle, Chief Monfwi, sat across from the Treaty commissioner to talk about a treaty. He witnessed the power of the pen and paper and of the written word, and realised the influence it would have forever on the Dogrib people. When Chief Monfwi died in 1936, Jimmy Bruneau became the Chief. As Chief he witnessed Dogrib children being shipped out to missionary schools for years to learn a foreign language and the skill of writing. He also saw the sorrow in the eyes of the people when their children left.

He started to push the government for a school to be built in the Dogrib lands so that the young people could learn without having to give up who they were, yet still learn the new ways.

At the official school opening in 1972, Bruneau said “I have listened to my Elders—Elders such as Monfwi. I have listened to the way they talked. I have listened to their ways and now I am speaking according to their ways. I have asked for this school to be built on my land and that school will be run by my people and my people will work at that school and our children will learn both ways, our ways and the white men’s ways.”

In 1991, when the Elders got together to reflect, Elizabeth MacKenzie spoke: “The old chief, he looked far ahead of us, so that we can be strong like two people.”

In this spirit, we share our experiences with pen and paper, so others may be inspired to follow in the footsteps, so they may do the same.

The message contained in the vision of Chief Jimmy Bruneau was that the white men’s way could be used to make his community stronger. In his day, the challenge and impacts of adopting writing skills were enormous in a culture based on the power of oral tradition. Today, in Jimmy Bruneau School, children learn both ways and the result is not weakness, but strength.

But Jimmy Bruneau used time and wisdom to give shape to his vision. The school is as a result rooted, physically, psychologically and spiritually, in the Dogrib view of the world. It is connected to Dogrib values and traditions, which direct the curriculum.

The story of Jimmy Bruneau is a reminder of another challenge facing Youth and their communities today, and of the vision needed to transform this challenge into a reality based on Aboriginal traditions and values.

Today, writing is taken for granted, but a new challenge has arisen, with a similar transformative potential: technology. Like writing and reading, technology is here to stay. But for communities and nations still in the process of social healing and reconstruction, the lure of technology can be another form of assimilation, more dangerous perhaps, in the long term, that the colonial kind imposed through the residential school system.

In the white men’s world of today, technology is a force used to excess to further economic and materialistic ends. Although it is not within the scope of this article to expand on the idea, Aboriginal Youth, more than any other members of Aboriginal communities, will have to examine closely how they will integrate technology in the healing and reconstruction process of their communities, so that, avoiding this new form of assimilation, they remain Strong like Two People.

What is the vision and what will the changes be? These are the questions that this generation of Aboriginal youth, the seventh generation, have to ask themselves. Their answer will lay the foundation for the life of the generations that will follow them. •

## MY LIFE AND THE SEVEN TEACHINGS

One thing I would like to offer is the seven teachings that help me in the modern world, and allow me to live in harmony with the past. These are Truth, Wisdom, Courage, Respect, Honesty, Humility and Love.

All other feelings, thoughts, and actions are a combination of any where from one to all seven teachings together. When a person is whole, thinking and knowing the consequences of their actions, they are able to help another person with the trials in their lives, keeping in mind that this life is one where we help each other out. In the end we must know who we are as an individual and know what we are capable of offering and doing.

By learning the seven teachings and living the seven teachings we slowly begin to understand and comprehend a little more of who we are as Anishinaabeg.

The seven teachings have helped me in this life time in a way that we learn by association. Growing up in a violent household I have learned the fear of many abuses and learned from the best at the time of the hurts and the pains, the coverups and the silences. Through all this I have to thank a few very strong individuals THAT HAVE TAUGHT ME THESE SEVEN TEACHINGS.

I hope that if any one else is in these situations that we as youth today confront, these people —AND THEY KNOW WHO THEY ARE— will help to answer the questions that they have taught me so I could pass them on without expectations. NO REGRETS.

- Waabske aanjiniins  
(little white eagle)

### Seven Sacred Teachings

#### Seven Grandfathers • Nezhwahswe Mishomisuk

*Living by and continually demonstrating the Seven Grandfather teachings, Anishnaabek Ogitchiidaag strive to please the Creator. The Seven Grandfather teachings are as old as time. The Seven Grandfathers being:*

*Bravery – aakdehewin  
Honesty – gweyakwaadziwin  
Humility – dbaadendizwin  
Love – zaagidwin  
Respect – minaadendmowin  
Truth – debwewin  
Wisdom – nbwakaawin*

*People who know these teachings understand that Anishnaabe Ogitchiidaa’s actions, conduct, and overall daily life are based on the Seven Grandfathers. Living a good life and serving the people isn’t done dishonestly, disrespectfully, carelessly, haphazardly, or cavalierly.*

- George Martin

## letters

Good morning!

I just saw a copy of your newsletter and would like to receive a copy of my own. Thank you very much!

Congratulations to you and Wayne on the last issue of *Healing Words*! It contains powerful and important information. As the Coordinator of a residential school project I am particularly interested in the article on Manawan. What is the original source of this article; is it taken from a larger document? Where would I get a copy of the original source of this information? Where is the community of Manawan? How does one get in touch with the organization/people behind this community healing strategy?

Thanks for your help. Keep up the good work.

ROSS HOFFMAN,  
Dze L K'ant Residential School Project,  
Smithers, BC.

*Hi Ross,*

*How are you?*

*The Attikameks community of Manawan has as its territory the Manouane Reserve, located on the south shore of Lake Métabeskéga, 72 km north of Saint-Michel-des-Saints, 120 km west of La Tuque, in the Haute-Mauricie region of Quebec. There are close to*

*continued on page 7*



Healing  
Words

*To receive Healing Words, write to us at Suite 801, 75 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5E7 or phone 1-888-725-8886. (In Ottawa, phone 237-4441). Our fax number is (613) 237-4442 and our email is grobelin@ahf.ca or wspear@ahf.ca. Keep in mind that the newsletter is available in French and English and is free. Also available on-line! [http:// www.ahf.ca](http://www.ahf.ca)*

## submissions

You may submit your articles, letters, or other contributions by fax, mail, or email. We prefer electronic submissions in Corel Word Perfect or MS Word. Please send your writing to:

*The Editors, Healing Words  
75 Albert Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1P 5E7*

Our fax number is (613) 237-4442 and our email addresses for submissions are:



grobelin@ahf.ca  
wspear@ahf.ca



Please send email submissions of photos in TIFF grayscale format, if possible. We ask for a resolution of 300 dpi. We cannot be responsible for photos damaged in the mail.

Please include a short biography with your submission as well as a return address and phone number. We may need to contact you about your submission.

The AHF does not pay for published submissions, but we do provide contributors with copies of the newsletter.

The views expressed by contributors to *Healing Words* do not necessarily reflect the views of the AHF.

There is no set length for manuscripts, but please try to keep submissions to a reasonable length (under 3000 words). All submissions are subject to the approval of the editorial team and may be edited for spelling, grammar, and length.

**A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO  
ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS !**

**S . O . S . P O E T S**

Thank you also to those poets whose work we publish here from other sources. Do you know how hard it is to find you? PLEASE, to ALL poets out there in communities, young, older, already published or not – send us your thoughts, your work, in poems, prayers, chants or songs.

It is especially difficult to find poems that we can publish in our French newsletter. But we would love also to get poems and songs in your own language.

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# letters

1,790 people in Manawan, with approximately 1,510 residents on the actual territory of the reserve. Here is the contact:

M. Donat Flamand  
Coordinateur Général  
Tel: 819-971-8813  
Fax: 819-971-8848

Our Website contains additional information too ([www.abhf.ca](http://www.abhf.ca)). I am sure the community would be very pleased to hear from you.

Many thanks for your interest and encouragement, Ross, and good luck.

In the Spirit of Healing,  
Giselle.

\*

Please Check out this song By CreeActive Harmony (Far From Home)  
<http://www.mp3.com/creativeharmony>

Direct link to song:  
[http://artists.mp3s.com/artist\\_song/202/202092.html](http://artists.mp3s.com/artist_song/202/202092.html)

The song is about a native man and his experience in a residential school CD Tribute To The Elders II, Label CreeActive Harmony. Credits: CreeActive Harmony, Julie Robertson & Dawn Ferguson.

### Story Behind the Song:

Hearing about experiences people have had in residential school, the song was written at my home on a Metis Settlement. It took about 1 week to write the song. It took about six hours to record the song.

They performed this song at the residential school Conference in Edmonton, Alberta in February. The response was very good; you might as well say they received a standing ovation from the 1200 to 1500 that attended. It really touched a lot of people. This may be a good song to add to your residential school page.

Thank You,  
MARK R.

\*

Tansi!

I am a Saskatchewan-born Metis. I wrote the attached specifically for the AHF resulting from the implementation of the Metis National Council AHF project and how I felt after a capacity building workshop with Metis persons with

disabilities who live with the legacy of abuse as a result of residential schools and alternative rehab institutions. The title is in the Michif language, the language of the Metis and means Heart Woman (my Metis name actually) In case you are interested there is also a melody composed for Esquao Coeur.

I hope you enjoy it.

LAURA LANGSTAFF.

(Note: See page 35 for the poem.)

\*

Boozhoo Tansii Aanii!

We have received copies of your newsletter for the past two years. It is very informative and provides great inspiration and ideas around issues of community healing and wellness.

We provide services to 14 First Nations communities and I would like to request 18 more copies of each issue so we can share it with them.

We will forward copies to the communities from our office.

Meegwetch!!!  
THERESA.

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### CHANGE OF ADDRESS FORM

The following form will help us to ensure that, if you move, *Healing Words* will continue to be mailed to you without interruption. Please clip this form and mail to:

Healing Words  
C/O Aboriginal Healing Foundation  
Suite 801 - 75 Albert Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E7

Name:

Old Address:

New Address:

Do you have any comments or suggestions for *Healing Words*?

On the move



HEALING WORDS

# featured project

## MI'KMAW KINA'MATNEWAY

### TRADITIONAL WAYS: An Intergenerational Mi'kmaq Summer Camp for Natural Science, Culture and Healing

*Indigenous knowledge is holistic rather than diverse and inclusive of all aspects of life, yet many Indigenous peoples see the need for access to Western knowledge. For Indigenous peoples, education needs to balance culture and diversity with development.*

- Michael Michie

#### Project Description

Mi'kmaq Kina'matneway – *the whole process of learning*. This name encompasses all aspects of learning and education for Mi'kmaq people. The Traditional Ways Project is an intergenerational Mi'kmaq summer camp for natural science, culture, and healing. The project strives to counteract the sense of powerlessness and loss of cultural identity which have haunted the survivors of the residential school, and to redirect the ongoing impact of cultural invalidation upon Mi'kmaq youth. The project aims to empower residential school survivors to help restore the balance for others, to increase youth awareness of the place of Mi'kmaq traditions in the realm of natural science, and to catalyse ongoing bonding in the relationship between Mi'kmaq youth and Elders.

AHF Contribution: \$23,116.00

#### Primary contact

Mr. Jean Jerome Paul  
Director of Programs  
Tel: 902-567-0336  
Fax: 902-567-0337

#### Organisation Address

115 Membertou Street  
Sydney, NS  
B1S 2M9

#### Mi'kmaq Science Cultural Camp Brings Cultural Perspective to Science.



*Their very survival has depended upon their ecological awareness and adaptation... These communities are the repositories of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience that links humanity with its ancient origins. Their disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in managing very complex ecological systems. It is a terrible irony that as formal development reaches more deeply into rain forests, deserts, and other isolated environments, it tends to destroy the only cultures that have proved able to thrive in these environments.*

- World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

It was a busy time for the fifty-six Native youth who attended the Mi'kmaq Science Cultural Camp 2000. Open to Mi'kmaq students in grades 7 through 10, this year's camp drew students from Membertou, Chapel Island, Eskasoni, Wagmatcook, Waycobah, Pictou Landing, Shubenacadie, and Abegweit (PEI) First Nations.

Students were housed at the Coast Guard College near Sydney. Up at 7:00 a.m. every morning, activities included field trips and visits from elders, scientists and crafts people. Students also had a chance to relax, swim, play basketball, watch movies, sing karaoke, and dance.

The Mi'kmaq Science Cultural Camp strives to encourage students to pursue science and to correct the historical under-representation of Mi'kmaq in science related degree programs and careers. Science activities and cultural activities are combined to show students that natural science is a part of their Mi'kmaq heritage and that science is fun and interesting.



A key aspect of the camp is bringing students and elders together, encouraging community and sharing in a positive atmosphere. In one week, students are exposed to activities, places, people, and options they may not have considered before.

Students walked the Mi'kmaq Trail at the Fortress of Louisbourg where one guide explained the historical role of the Mi'kmaq and another showed medicinal plants and told of the innovations in the field of medicine by the Mi'kmaq.

Some students were awed at being on the ocean and seeing a pod of pilot whales beside their boat.

Exploring Kluskap's caves was a big accomplishment to those who completed a rigorous hike through mountainous terrain.

In the laboratory at the University College of Cape Breton, students performed a dissection, enabling them to look at organs, see brains, kidneys, and intestines up close. They learned how to use a microscope, examining tissues and watching micro-organisms as they crawled, ate, and battled. They also learned how to identify insects. ▶

# ◁ featured project

## MI'KMAW KINA'MATNEWAY

TRADITIONAL WAYS: An Intergenerational Mi'kmaq Summer Camp for Natural Science, Culture and Healing



At Two Rivers Wildlife Park in Mira, students saw bears, moose, owls, eagles, porcupines, otters, and learned about each animal. Leroy Denny, Frederica Francis, and Patrick Jeddore led an introductory talking circle for students at the camp, explaining the significance of the talking circle and discussing identity, reasons for being at the camp, and hopes and plans for the future. "It worked well with the kids and showed them what is a healing circle. Some of them didn't even know what it was," explained Frederica. "The talking circle is coming back stronger and it's working for our people."

The camp allowed many youngsters to rediscover traditional knowledge. Traditional crafts were taught by artists and elders. The sweat lodge was explained by Eugene Denny, who showed students a sweat and explained its significance to spirit and community. Dr. Margaret Johnson told a variety of stories, some funny, some scary, many that carried a lesson. Students were encouraged to speak the Mi'kmaw language, and students who weren't fluent were encouraged to learn. Students had a chance to have some fun and make friends with other youth who share an interest in science and culture. "I want to live here," sighed one student, apparently not tired out yet. Can I come back next week?" Hopefully, the science camp will help strengthen pride in culture and help give confidence to those who might consider a career in science.



### Donald Marshall Sr. Memorial Scholarship

The Donald Marshall Sr. Memorial Scholarship Fund supports Mi'kmaw post-secondary students at the diploma, certificate, bachelor and graduate levels. The fund will contribute two annual scholarships for one thousand dollars each on or before October 1 (Treaty Day). One will be for undergraduate studies and one for graduate studies.

<http://www.kinu.ns.ca/newsletter/newsaugust2000.html#1>

# ▷ letters

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Hi Theresa,

*It is very encouraging to know the newsletter is helping and we thank you very much for letting us know. You forgot to give me your mailing address. We will be very happy to send you the number of copies you request.*

*As you know, our newsletters are posted regularly on our Web site also, so they can also be downloaded.*

*Thank you again. (Don't forget to e-mail me your address!)*

Giselle.

\*

Mon dieu que votre projet est noble et courageux. Félicitation pour vos démarches qui deviennent assurément un modèle pour contrer TOUTES violences, qu'elles soient affective, organisationnelle ou sociale.

Félicitation, bon courage,  
SERGE HARVEY,  
Travailleur social, QC.  
stopviolence@pfa-qc.com

\*

Dear Giselle:

I'm a 53 year old Anishinabe artist/writer/storyteller. I'm also a McIntosh Indian Residential School survivor. I will celebrate 10 years of sobriety on August 12th. I've been reading the poetry in your issue of *Healing Words* SPRING 2001, and your S.O.S on page 3. I'm prepared to offer the works on my website for your publication. Please, point your browser to <http://www.catfish.freespace.net> when you got a spare time. I look forward to working with you.

Respectfully,  
RENE.

Dear Rene

*Thank you so much for your offer. We would be very honoured to publish one of your poems. I visited your Website and found it very interesting and inspiring. It contains many poems and stories that we could use! Although we could not advertise the artwork accompanying poems and stories for commercial purposes, we could use them as illustrations and refer people to your Website. Let me know if there is a particular poem or story you would prefer us to use.*

*Do you have poems on this theme, or can we use the poem on your site which in fact talks about the question of choice, from an artist and Aboriginal person?*

*I also have an idea that your life story is very special and perhaps, if you felt it appropriate, you could share it with us and our readers. We would publish it in one of our newsletters.*

continued on page 10

◀ continued from page 9

## letters

Once again, thank you, Rene. I look forward to your response.

Giselle.

Note: René will be featured in our September issue of Healing Words.

\*

Good morning!

I just saw a copy of your newsletter and would like to receive a copy of my own. Thank you very much!

JEANETTE.

Hi! Jeanette,

We will send you our newsletter with great pleasure. I have passed on your contact data to add you on our mailing list.

Is there anything that you particularly liked about the newsletter? Is there an issue you would be interested in us researching in order to publish an article?

Please let us know.

Giselle.

\*

My name is Elaine Kacsmar and I am the Project Coordinator for the Provincial Aboriginal Literacy Project being administered by the Yorkton Tribal council. My request is that would it be possible to have someone do a news article announcing this wonderful project in your newspaper? I look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

ELAINE.

Dear Elaine,

We will certainly look into your request. Space did not allow for any more new material in our June issue dedicated to Youth, but we publish our newsletter every three months and we always welcome suggestions. So thank you very much for your interest. We appreciate your taking the time to write to us.

In the Spirit of Healing,  
Giselle.

\*

I have just read your Spring 2001 edition of *Healing Words* which I really enjoyed. Would you kindly send me all your back copies up to the most recent? Please send to my home address in Prince George, B.C. Thank you very much for your attention to this.

PEGGIE.

continued on page 25

## Chairman's Message



Danet'e:

It is with great pleasure that we present this new issue of *Healing Words* to all our readers, young... or less young. Youth is the time for new ideas, a period in our life when we can see both its immense horizons of opportunities and the numerous obstacles that need to be overcome, and when the strength to deal with the latter takes its inspiration from the former. For some youth in our communities, however, opportunities are scarce and obstacles too numerous. Youth are very much in our mind and heart, and we hope the ideas presented by their peers in this issue will motivate and comfort them.

Never before in the history of our peoples has the question of survival involved so many new dimensions. These new dimensions, complex and all equally crucial, make up the world of our Youth. For them, therefore, healing, means integrating all these dimensions.

In our previous issues, we have concentrated on therapeutic aspects of healing. It is true that the traumas from the Residential Schools system left very deep wounds that have ravaged and are still ravaging Aboriginal communities. We will need many long years to heal, to find for each of us the healing path that suits us best.

Young people know very well the situation of their families and their communities. They suffer also and want to participate in the healing process, because they are the parents, the Elders, and the leaders of tomorrow. For some of them, tomorrow is very close.

This is why we left it to the youth to guide us and offer us some avenues of reflection –perhaps different ones, but which lead toward healing. It has not been possible to retain all these ideas – we will publish them in later issues – but they all reflect both the preoccupations of Aboriginal Youth and their optimism.

This optimism infuses with a new energy we adults who have been fighting for so long, and who often look to the future with tired eyes. Thank you to all the youth for this message of hope, for reminding us that our journey towards the healing of ourselves, our communities, and nations has not been undertaken in vain.

Masi.

Stories from the Field: Experiences and Advice  
from the *Rekindling Traditions* Team

Extract from a document written by  
Glen Aikenhead  
Project Facilitator/Coordinator  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan

Cultural approaches start from the belief that if youth are solidly grounded in their Aboriginal identity and cultural knowledge, they will have strong personal resources to develop intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples p. 478). In a modest way, our *Rekindling Traditions* units support the initiative of strengthening a student’s cultural identity and self-esteem while at the same time, providing students with an access to Western science and technology.

Not only are students advantaged by linking local knowledge to school science, but advantages accrue to the Aboriginal community itself. In Alberta, Tracey Friedel (1999) showed how the vitality and self-reliance of a community improves when the voices of parents and the community are heard and when the school program reflects their values. If you are going to teach a *Rekindling Traditions* unit, you need to listen to the people who hold the knowledge, and you need to make their stories a respected part of your school science content. For instance, families are a rich source of knowledge about the healing power of local plants. At the end of the unit, students are assessed on their comprehension of this local knowledge, as well as their ability to use Western science in the context of their community. With these and other units, parents were genuinely glad to have their child participate in such a school program. Several mentioned they had never thought there was so much knowledge in their community about plants, snowshoes, the heavens, etc. Parents were also impressed to hear that their child had volunteered to stay after school to help make rose hip jelly, or cook wild rice dishes, or work on a project, especially when their child was a boy. Parents appreciated the new rapport forged with their child through their mutual participation in the science unit.

We have witnessed parents dropping into the school to ask what is going on today, where previously they avoided conversations when they picked up their children at school. This stronger bond between parents and the school not only supports student achievement, but it is one avenue for community members to feel less alienated and more in control. This feeling is at the root of Marie Battiste’s (2000) book, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, in which Aboriginal writers describe how Aboriginal peoples can rebuild their communities into productive “postcolonial” societies.

As described in our *Teacher Guide to Rekindling Traditions* (Aikenhead, 2000), each unit begins by establishing an Aboriginal framework about the unit’s theme. The framework reflects local knowledge. In a later lesson in the unit, Western science and technology from the Saskatchewan science curriculum is introduced to students as useful knowledge from another culture (the culture of Western science). The introductory Aboriginal content

## HEALING SCIENCES:



To strengthen the self-esteem of youth, Parents, Elders and the Community

takes the form of practical action relevant to a community; for example, going on a snowshoe hike, finding indigenous plants that heal, listening to an Elder, interviewing people in the community, or assisting in a local wild rice harvest. An introduction seems to be most successful when students feel a direct connection to Mother Earth. Students develop a sense of place. Their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual connection to Mother Earth helps ensure respect for the community’s Aboriginal knowledge. The introduction to a *Rekindling Traditions* unit constitutes an Aboriginal framework for the whole unit. Throughout the unit, students will return to this familiar framework as needed. In this way, the voices and visions of an Aboriginal people become an authentic part of a *Rekindling Traditions* unit.

Not only are Elders’ stories honoured, the stories are included in the curriculum along with stories from Western scientists (science content). Linda Goulet (2000) concludes that such respect helps a community advance beyond a mind set of colonization, to reaffirming the community’s cultural identity as a tribe or nation, a positive process she and Marie Battiste (2000) call “decolonization.”

One of the *Rekindling Traditions* teachers had students conduct research in their community to record its history. This served as part of the introductory framework for the unit under development. When an Elder was asked to comment on the validity of the students’ work, the Elder was almost overwhelmed by the healthy positive images conveyed in that history. The students’ recording of historical facts reflected a decolonizing mind set, in marked contrast to the negative images that had conventionally characterized the people. The unit by itself did not alter the community’s outlook, but the unit did provide one way for students to reaffirm cultural sovereignty and to build a postcolonial community.

## Challenges

Innovations that address important issues, such as decolonization or deciding what is worth learning in school science, can bring some challenges. We believe we need to be forthright about these challenges as we exper-





enced them, so if you recognize one that you face, you will not feel alone as you work through the initial challenge.

A major challenge for many of us was to establish a connection with local people in the community who had knowledge we sought. The challenge has two components: the community and the science teacher. Each component is considered separately.

#### Challenges in the Community

Teachers have rarely involved the local community in determining what is worth learning at school. For example, teachers do not normally ask people in the community, “What should be the content of school science?” Our point here is not to review the reasons for this state of affairs. Our point is simply this: *Rekindling Traditions* units require a change in the status quo because some parents, Elders, and other community people are asked to become involved with the school in ways that depart from conventional practice. Change can create challenges for people, but patience and respect help everyone get through the initial uncertainties.

You will be familiar with the community’s pervasive negative feelings towards schools in general. These feelings are most often rooted in the oppressive treatment that characterised some residential schools, feelings that come from either personal experience or the stories of others. Negative feelings also arise from past experiences in local schools, experiences largely defined by a failure to succeed in a Euro-Canadian academic world. Failure and alienation do not encourage people to have future contact with schools. That is human nature. It is an obstacle to involving community people in a school program. But when these people see one or two community members involved in a science unit, their feelings often soften.

Negative feelings also emerge in reaction to the view that the school continues to be a colonizing force within the community (Perley, 1993). One reaction to this “cultural invasion” is passive resistance (Friedel, 1999). A science teacher can face powerful passive resistance in the community. Unfortunately for the community itself, passive resistance maintains the status quo (i.e. further cultural invasion). To move beyond passive resistance, people require meaningful social change, as Tracy Friedel showed in her work with Aboriginal parents at their Alberta school. According to Tracy Friedel, it is your responsibility as a teacher to demonstrate a degree of social change in your science classroom, but it is the parents’ responsibility to turn their passive resistance into a dedication to make changes in their school.

Ancestral knowledge is located in the collective memories of the community’s Elders. Elders have traditionally given advice to children before they reach adolescence. For more mature adolescents, however, some Elders respect this maturity by letting them learn on their own, and not telling them what to learn. Accordingly, adolescents are expected to take full responsibility for what they learn. This tradition (and other customs discussed in the next paragraph) makes some Elders feel uncomfortable about coming into *high school* classrooms to give knowledge to adolescents who did not personally request it. However, many schools have already resolved this challenge so help is usually nearby.

Part of the holistic character of Aboriginal knowledge is the context in which that knowledge is shared. For instance, the physical sounds that words make

contribute to that context (Peat, 1994). Thus, ancestral knowledge should ideally be shared in an Aboriginal language. Most science teachers do not converse in an Aboriginal language, and so an Elder must be willing to compensate for our deficiency by sharing his/her knowledge in English. Another aspect of context is *place*. Do not assume that your classroom is the natural place for an Elder to talk to your students. It is not. It represents yet another compromise on the part of an Elder. Elders conventionally talk with one person or a few people at a time, at the Elder’s home or on the land. It can be foreign to them to be placed in front of a classroom of 25 students. Coming into classrooms to talk can be a challenge for some Elders. Thus, it may be helpful to invite an Elder with some experience talking in schools.

**You will be familiar with the community’s pervasive negative feelings towards schools in general. These feelings are most often rooted in the oppressive treatment that characterized some residential schools**



#### Challenges within a Science Teacher

Most science teachers (non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal) are outsiders to the community in which they teach and do not have personal histories that connect them to people who hold knowledge. When you go out on a limb and contact a stranger, you risk contravening local protocol, particularly when that person is an Elder. You also risk a misunderstanding in a community in which you are working hard to gain acceptance. These psychological risks can even be greater for Aboriginal science teachers who are more aware of the possibilities of not following protocol.

For Aboriginal science teachers who are ancestral members of a community, the challenge can be a different one. By involving a community person in producing a science unit, the teacher ceases to act as a fellow community member (sharing values such as alienation to schools or passive resistance to academics), but instead begins to act like an outsider (expressing school values). The science teacher must resolve this conflict of roles. This situation is challenging, but with time, patience, and practice, a comfort level is certainly achievable.

Some schools have established procedures and protocols for you to follow whenever you want to involve an Elder in the school. The procedure systematizes respect for Elders, but it creates uncertainties in your mind over what to expect the first time you do it. The procedure’s formality can also distance you from the Elder, rather than forming a closer, more personal relationship. Relationships are highly valued in Aboriginal cultures. This is a challenging situation for most science teachers, but it is easy to resolve the challenge with the help of experienced colleagues.

In a *Rekindling Traditions* unit, Western scientific knowledge is put into a different perspective than it was in your university science courses. Textbooks and university science courses present scientific knowledge in a Eurocentric way that (1) conveys a universality of truth, and (2) privileges one form of rationality and one set of values over all others. A *Rekindling Traditions* unit presents a different perspective, one characterized by a cross-cultural approach to science teaching. This approach is described in detail in our *Teacher Guide to Rekindling Traditions*. The following is a quick summary ▶



of a cross-cultural approach to science teaching embodied in a *Rekindling Traditions* unit.

A cross-cultural perspective on science education is founded on several assumptions. Western science is assumed to be a cultural knowledge system in itself, one of many subcultures of Euro-American society (Pickering, 1992). In a sense this means that Newtonian physics is ethnophysics because it emerged from a powerful subculture within Euro-American society (Euro-ethnicity). Another assumption involves the idea that students live and coexist within many subcultures identified by, for example, nation, language, gender, social class, religion, and geographic location; and that students move from one subculture to another, a process called “cultural border crossing.” Student’s core cultural identities may be at odds with the culture of Western science to varying degrees, and therefore, students experience a change in culture when they move from their everyday worlds into the world of school science.

The challenge for science teachers is to see science in a new light, one that acknowledges that each major world culture has its own science and that Western science is just *one* way of knowing about nature, albeit a very powerful way (MacIvor, 1995).

Another major challenge to science teachers stems from our role as a culture broker for students. This role entails learning local knowledge along with, and sometimes from, our students. When we learn in front of others, especially our students, our egos often play a larger role than normal. Although we expect students to learn from their mistakes, the same expectation of ourselves is a challenge to the egos of most of us. Learning from our mistakes gets easier the more we practice.

#### Working with Elders

The designation “Elder” is earned by a person, based on a type of respect that person receives in a community. Not everyone in a community need agree on a person’s status as Elder. Thus, it is not always a simple process to locate an Elder. The following advice served us well.

Just as each person in a community has gifts and talents, Elders, too, are known for their gifts and talents. Therefore, if you are going to teach the unit *Nature’s Hidden Gifts*, for example, you might seek the assistance of an Elder knowledgeable in the healing power of plants. School board members and school administrators often have a fairly good idea of which Elders hold which knowledge, and which Elders have helped with school related projects in the past. When trying to locate an appropriate Elder, you might ask several people and see whose name comes up consistently.

Elders are usually very approachable through face-to-face contact outside the school. When approached with the intention of showing respect, they are very forgiving of people making an honest “mistake” in protocol. The important thing for them is to see you learn the protocol and to see you respect their values. For a science teacher eager to learn Aboriginal ways, there will be no problem approaching an Elder. Telephone conversations can supplement face-to-face contacts.

The protocol of gift giving reflects key values in Aboriginal cultures. It is not our purpose here to explain these values, but we suggest one idea to consider. In most Aboriginal communities, knowledge is given to another person based on the relationship between the two people. Knowledge is not an

**The designation “Elder” is earned by a person, based on a type of respect that person receives in a community. Not everyone in a community need agree on a person’s status as Elder. Thus, it is not always a simple process to locate an Elder.**

object to be passed around, it is related to human connections and to the interconnectedness of all things. A gift offered to an Elder signifies this relationship and connectedness. By offering a gift, you acknowledge your wish to enter into a relationship.

Gifts can take many forms. We used jams, jellies, and teas placed in baskets made of natural woods (not plastic). We have also offered published books and things produced by students (e.g. rose hip jelly made at school and student-produced booklets about a topic in the unit). Tobacco and blankets may be appropriate for some Elders, particularly the further south you live in Saskatchewan. The protocol of gift giving can change dramatically from community to community.

There are at least two ways to learn what protocol you should follow. One way is to begin by asking an acquaintance about who would know the proper protocol for your community. This may lead you to a friend of a friend’s friend, someone you may not know. When this person appreciates the reason for your asking an Elder to share knowledge with you (and thus, the



motivation for offering a gift), the person will provide good advice. You will be prepared for your first meeting with the Elder. Gifts are *offered*, not given, to an Elder. By accepting your gift, an Elder signifies that he or she has entered into a relationship with you, based on your request. Thus, your request comes before you offer a gift.

Thus, your request comes before you offer a gift.

A second way to learn what protocol to follow is a more direct way. Your first meeting with an Elder will be to introduce yourself, to provide information about what you want to accomplish in your science unit, and to make arrangements to return to talk about your request. During this first meeting, you admit that you do not know the protocol (what gift is appropriate) for making such a request, and you simply ask the Elder what gift would be appropriate. You are being forthright and honest with the Elder, expressing your wish to engage in appropriate traditional protocol. We have always received forthright answers in return. You will be prepared for your second meeting with the Elder in which you request the knowledge or assistance you seek, and then offer your gift.

When making a request for the Elder to speak to your students, negotiate with the Elder over the most appropriate place to interact with the children, given the realities of students’ lives. Your classroom may very well be the most appropriate place, but the important thing is not to assume ahead of time that your classroom is the only place. This gives an Elder a real say in where and when the talk will occur.





**Knowledge is not an object to be passed around, it is related to human connections and to the interconnectedness of all things. A gift offered to an Elder signifies this relationship and connectedness. By offering a gift, you acknowledge your wish to enter into a relationship.**

During our units, Elders have been interviewed by students. Elders have reacted very favourably to this. They enjoyed being interviewed by respectful students and being valued by the younger generation. When Elders come into your classroom to talk to your students, do not expect them to narrowly focus on the topic of your lesson. Our Eurocentric culture values presentations that are logically linear, reductionistic, and focused. Elders value holistic explorations of a topic that show the interrelationship among all things, including how to live your life. Similarly when local business people come into your classroom to talk about their business (wild rice, trapping, etc.), expect them to introduce a wide variety of topics, all related *in their culture* to the topic you asked them to address. These people are not getting off topic. Instead, you are learning about the interrelatedness of an Aboriginal worldview.



#### Working with the Community

If you plan to teach a *Rekindling Traditions* unit, be prepared to learn many new things. Some of what you learn will come from your students. They will be better than you at some things, such as the local language. One of your roles in front of your class will be to model life-long learning. Students learn life-long learning by watching others set an example.

Each community has its unique ways for people to communicate within the community. You need to know these ways so when you involve some community people, you know how to let other community members know about this involvement. In short, it is not enough to do the job well, you need to be seen to do the job well. For instance, a local radio station and a weekly newsletter can be powerful communication vehicles. In the development of one of our units, for example, the teacher wanted to get family members to contribute to the content of the unit. The teacher was familiar with the passive resistance endemic in the students' homes. The teacher first arranged to get Aboriginal stories from a few community people, stories related to the unit's topic. The stories were thoughtfully published in a news item in the local newsletter. The news item described how these community people were contributing to the content of a science class at school. The radio station was also involved. This coverage enhanced the status of those with the specialized Aboriginal knowledge. It also established the acceptability of sharing stories for the purpose of improving school science. When the students began their assignment to record similar types of stories, the whole community was aware of what was happening and cooperated in the students' efforts.

The original stories provided a model and inspiration for students to collect similar stories from a family member. Before students began this activity, however, they were taught the protocol for approaching an Elder in that community, and were primed on how to be a good interviewer. Specific lessons in three of our units are devoted to honing students' interviewing skills. As students collected their story, they made a new emotional connection to their community, and hence their personal identities were strengthened. Their skills at communicating were also enhanced. Meanwhile, we learned this local knowledge ourselves and discussed it informally with people in the community.

We advise you to be sensitive to different factions that may exist within a community over certain topics. Be sure to include all points of view when dealing with a potentially controversial idea. Be sure that students know that their job is to *understand* the ideas, not necessarily to *believe* the ideas. Keep families informed about what will be happening in your *Rekindling Traditions* unit. When information comes directly from you (via a class newsletter or a telephone call), it has less chance of being misunderstood than the same information passed along by students or neighbours.

It is also a good idea to involve certain parents in some of the lessons, especially lessons that deal with spirituality. When parents can see for themselves that indoctrination is not occurring, you will avoid misunderstandings. A parent also has the chance to discuss an issue with you in an amiable proactive context, rather than in an adversarial reactive context. Some teachers actively seek out the parent who may be most opposed to studying certain content and purposefully involve that parent in a lesson on that content.

Gift giving need not be restricted to Elders. Other people in the community who help you in some way feel rewarded and valued when they receive a modest gift in a respectful way. Gifts made by students have a particular charm. Some of our units provide specific suggestions and opportunities to involve students in gift-making activities.

We strongly advise you to connect your students with Mother Earth as early as possible in a unit, and to re-affirm their sense of place. Time and time again, teachers are in awe over how some students' behaviour improves when students are out of doors away from classroom walls. When surrounded by nature, it seems as if many students get in touch with their inner selves and become open to new kinds of learning. The experience is heightened all the more when community people are involved in the event. Elders and others can revitalize students' Aboriginal language and cultural identity.

#### Conclusion

We come to our last bit of advice, something so obvious that it hardly needs stating except that it is of such great importance. Our advice is to go ahead and adapt one of the *Rekindling Traditions* units and learn from your experiences. We learned from our experiences. Is there any other way to learn to teach? When we began this project we had no templates or materials to direct us. Together we developed our own templates, guided by specific values and goals (described in our *Teacher Guide to Rekindling Traditions*). You at least have some templates and materials to help you along your way. You will learn far more from the experience of teaching a cross-cultural science unit than from reading anything we could write.

See Stories from the Field: <http://capex.usask.ca/cstulstories.html>.

References are on page 32.

## Traditional Native Culture and Resilience



*Iris HeavyRunner (Blackfeet), Coordinator, CAREI  
Tribal College Faculty Development Project  
University of Minnesota*

*Joann Sebastian Morris (Sault Ste. Marie  
Chippewa) Director of the Office of Indian  
Education Programs  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
U.S. Department of Interior*



Cultural resilience is a relatively new term, but it is a concept that predates the so called “discovery” of our people. The elders teach us that our children are gifts from the Creator and it is the family, community, school, and tribe’s responsibility to nurture, protect, and guide them. We have long recognized how important it is for children to have people in their lives who nurture their spirit, stand by them, encourage and support them. This traditional process is what contemporary researchers, educators, and social service providers are now calling fostering resilience. Thus, resilience is not new to our people; it is a concept that has been taught for centuries. The word is new; the meaning is old.

Our world view is the cultural lens through which we understand where we came from, where we are today, and where we are going. Our cultural identity is our source of strength. In historical times the cultures and world views of tribal peoples were regarded by non-Indians as impediments to the speedy assimilation of the young. Regrettably, remnants of such viewpoints continue to be held by some professionals who impact the lives of contemporary Indian youth. It is critical that researchers, educators, and social service providers recognize the valid and positive role culture plays in supporting Indian youth and tapping their resilience.

A culture’s world view is grounded in fundamental beliefs which guide and shape life experiences of young people. It is not easy to summarize fundamental Indian values and beliefs because there are 554 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. alone and an almost equal number in Canada. In spite of tribal differences, there are shared core values, beliefs and behaviors. Ten are highlighted here to guide our thinking about innate or natural, cultural resilience: spirituality, child-rearing/extended family, veneration of age/wisdom/tradition, respect for nature, generosity and sharing, cooperation/ group harmony, autonomy/respect for others, composure/patience, relativity of time, and non-verbal communication. Educators and others must understand that the values held by Native children are interrelated.

Spirituality is a fundamental, continuous part of our lives. In traditional times, spirituality was integral to one’s daily life. Embodied in Native spirituality is the concept of interconnectedness. The spiritual nature of all living things was recognized and respected. The mystical aspects of life were openly discussed. A strong ceremonial practice was interwoven into the cycle of seasons. Ceremonies marked important times in our people’s lives, such as children’s naming ceremonies or puberty rites.

We believe that spirituality is at the core of our survival. Many Native educators agree that our spirituality has been the cornerstone of our survival through generations of adversity and oppression. Most traditional people approach Indian spirituality with tremendous care and respect. It is very important that educators and other service providers recognize its value while also respecting the private nature of our spiritual beliefs and practices. Basil Johnson, (Ojibway), explains the deep personal nature of traditional spirituality.

“To understand the origin and the nature of life, existence, and death, the Ojibway speaking peoples conducted inquiries within the soul-spirit that was the very depth of their being. Through dream or vision quest they elicited revelation-knowledge that they then commemorated and perpetuated in story and re-enacted in ritual. But in addition to insight, they also gained a reverence for the mystery of life which animated all things: human-kind, animal-kind, plant-kind, and the very earth itself.”

- Johnson, (1982, p. 7)

Spirituality is one of four essential parts of our world view philosophy. The others are the mental, emotional and physical aspects of life. All four dimensions must be kept in balance. A child is born with a natural capacity or resilience evidenced in all four dimensions. This resilience is our innate capacity for well-being. En route to unlocking community resilience, our goal is for children to recognize when they are out of balance, understand what caused the imbalance and learn how to regain balance. Dr. Roger Mills calls this “healthy thought recognition.”

We have a variety of strategies or cultural ways to teach healthy balance. Joseph Epes Brown, reveals, “one of the symbols that expresses most completely the Plains Indian concept of the relationship between human beings and the world of nature surrounding them is the cross inscribed within the circle” (Brown, 1988, p. 34). In some tribes we use the medicine wheel to help young people understand the interconnectedness of the mind, spirit, heart and body.

What is often termed the “Red Road” philosophy has been articulated well by Isna Icaiga (Gene Thin Elk):

“The Red Road is a holistic approach to mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellness based on Native American healing concepts and traditions, having prayer as the basis of all healing. Native American psychology is essential in reaching the inner person (spirit) using specific sound, movement, and color. All these essences are present in the Medicine Wheel, which is innate to Native Americans. The traditions and values of the Native American People ensure balance by living these cultural traditions through the Red Road. Healing is a way of life for the Native American who understands and lives the cultural traditions and values”

- Aborgast, (1995, p. 319)

Our traditional philosophy is holistic. The contemporary health realization work of Dr. Roger Mills is very helpful in explaining the role of thinking in our experiences. This is one example of the understanding we want children to have about their natural resilience.

Our culture is rich with ways to teach children the world view philosophy or the good way of life. These include using our traditional languages, ceremonies, dances, blood/clan systems, music/arts, medicine, foods’ clothing, and more. Our children’s cultural strength or resilience can also be fostered by the oral tradition of storytelling. Children learn to listen with patience and respect. Our stories can be told over and over; they are developmental. At every step we learn something new. In essence we grow up with our stories. They are protective factors that convey culturally specific high expectations, caring, support, and opportunities for participation.

The traditional Indian family unit is the extended family. Each child has an abundance of blood and clan relatives to share the responsibility of child-rearing. Elders hand down tribal legends, history and traditions and, therefore, are treated with tremendous respect. Our belief in the sacredness of all creation causes us to view ourselves as caretakers of the natural realm. Recognizing the connection with others, emphasis is placed on sharing material possessions. In our world view, it is more important to be a good person than to acquire material goods. Natural cooperation among group members takes precedence over competition. Harmony within the group is all-important. Balance and harmony are maintained by not imposing on an individual’s rights or beliefs. Being quiet and still is not uncomfortable to Indian people. We are comfortable with silence and talking for the sake of talking was not our way. ▶



## Traditional Native Culture and Resilience

Time is viewed as flowing and always with us. We learn to follow nature's rhythm.

Educators and others working with Indian youth who demonstrate respect for these fundamental values, beliefs and behaviors, foster resilience. They can build on young peoples' connection to all other living entities, encourage and openly discuss their spiritual development; recognize the vital role played by elders, aunts, uncles, and other blood or clan relatives and seek their involvement. We also can make use of the outdoors, encourage generosity of spirit, incorporate more cooperative learning activities, respect the individual, allow for a longer response time, be more flexible with timelines, and respect that learning can also occur through listening and in silence.

Taken as a whole these traditional values and beliefs are the cultural foundation which, if respected, extends high expectations; caring, supportive relationships and meaningful opportunities for participation to Native children. We believe when these innate, cultural protective factors are brought into play, the natural resilience of children will be realized. Our beliefs, values, or philosophy must be incorporated into any work done with our children. Social service providers, educators, and others must help Indian families become safe and secure places for children. Researchers and evaluators need to use culturally competent research and evaluation designs in Native schools and communities to capture and interpret the essence of our growth accurately.

Cultural teachings unearth individual resilience as documented with many personal stories in *Wounded Warriors* by Doyle Arbogast. These interviewed individuals found - "what their ancestors always knew-that the pathways to peace, balance, and living are found by taking responsibility to honor the beauty, spirit, and the mystery of their own heritage"

- Arbogast, (1995, p. 1)

Cultural practices unlock our human potential. Sisoka Luta, (Jerome Kills Small) states, "through the drum I feel the Native American part of my spirituality. I have a special bond with it. I know that a lot of the others find the greater part of their strength in other things like the sweatlodge and the pipe. For me, I get my strength from the drum."

- Arbogast, (1995, p. 145)

Sungmanitu Hanska, (Long Coyote) says, "getting involved and attending things that are part of my people's ways have been incredibly significant. I have a seed inside that needs to be nourished before it will grow. When this seed gets a little nourishment, like permission and encouragement, or an invitation for myself to nourish it, it begins to sprout. I am beginning to understand that the seed is my Spirit"

- Arbogast, (1995, p. 84)

We believe this is the innate health or resilience Dr. Roger Mills, Bonnie Bernard, and others describe.

Candace Fleming (Kickapoo/Oneida/Cherokee), explains, "In an attempt to depart from lifestyles and situations that compromise well-being, Indians... [Native Americans/Alaska Natives/First Nations] have begun to identify for themselves culturally congruent values and behaviors that enhance life for the individual, the family, and the community ... A balanced treatment ... needs to focus on the resiliency, strengths, and significant contributions"

- Fleming, (1992, p. 137).

In our work with 20 national Native educators/trainers we found agreement that our tribal identity, spirituality, elders, ceremonies and rituals, humor, oral tradition, family, and support networks are essential protective strategies. These are the things that have kept us strong. A study in progress with the Minneapolis-based Healthy Nations collaborative surveyed 136 Native program directors and front-line workers. They indicate they draw tremendous strength from family support systems, caring communities, strong identities, spirituality, and cultural values, world view, ceremonies, and traditions. These resources foster our cultural resilience. •

Our recent training experiences indicate Native prevention workers find the term resilience helpful. One participant said, "Now I have a word for what I have always known and struggled to explain to the children and adults I work with." Resilience helps us assist students in reconnecting with our cultural strength. Our work in Red Lake, Minnesota, has been resilience-based. We are pleased to see that a hopeful resilience message, well grounded in local cultural traditions, frees educators, social service providers and tribal community members to view future possibilities with excitement and energy. Our innate human capacity for transformation and change, our resilience, is ever present; like the circle of life it is unbroken and unending. Black Elk describes the circle of strength this way:

"You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves"

- Brown, (1988, p. 35)

We wish to acknowledge our appreciation for our cross cultural collaboration with Kathy Marshall at the University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, Safe and Drug Free Schools Project. It has made our ongoing work and this article possible. Such joint efforts serve the needs of all children well.

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<http://www.youthandu.umn.edu/Rpractice/Spring97/traditional.htm>

# p o e m s

As I was reading the book *Maps and Dreams*, I read a sentence in the book that inspired me to write this poem. The sentence read like this: "If we refuse to acknowledge the past, we conceal the nature of suffering and therefore cannot understand demands in the present."

-Lori.

"Si'ipnsk"

If we deny to recognize the past  
Then we hide the nature of sorrow  
Therefore people cannot understand the demands  
That are in the present and of tomorrow  
It's time for the feeling of inferiority to end  
And begin a healing process where we are willing to fend  
We are a strong nation proud of who we are  
So why did we let the suffering come so far  
As a nation we need to realize the time has come  
Yes, they now know that we are far from dumb  
We are still suffering from our ancestor's pain  
What will it take for people to realize that it's ok to start again  
We are the essence, the fire, the First Nations of this land  
We are destined to survive if we walk hand in hand  
In my language Si'ipnsk is the word for love  
This is what our ancestors give from up above  
It is time for us all to deal with the past  
Because our love will always last  
My heart breaks when I hear of suicides and addicts of glue  
How many more have to die before we are true  
True to help and true to live  
True to love and time to forgive  
We are the essence, the fire, the First Nations of this land  
We are destined to survive if we walk hand in hand  
Si'ipnsk

The next poem was also written by Lori and she tried to write it from a student's perspective.

Dissolve Racism

I attend school so I can get an education  
So why do some treat me like an abomination  
Why is my culture something they condemn  
Why does my skin color matter to them  
It hurts so much to be treated inferior  
I don't understand why they think they're superior  
Education is something I want and I need  
So I can teach others what it takes to succeed  
The obstacles in life are difficult to face  
Even harder when you come from a different race  
I want others to know that judging is wrong  
You have no right to choose who belongs  
The difference in a person is what makes them unique  
It doesn't matter who you are First Nations or Sikh  
Understand that racism causes tremendous pain  
Pain that can make a person cut their vein  
It's time to set all your fears aside  
We all bleed the same color inside  
Racism and fascism are so much the same  
They both end with ugly judgmental blame  
All I ask is for the hate to end  
Because I'm so tired of having to fend  
Racism is not something that is born within  
It is something that is learned from our kin  
So please think of your actions and who you may be hurting  
Racism must stop, it's time for asserting.

*Lori is 26 years old and a teacher. She is from a small First Nations community on the north coast of BC.*

## Regional Gatherings 2001

- **October 10, 2001 Toronto**  
Native Canadian Centre Auditorium, 16 Spadina Road.
- **October 12, 2001 Montreal**  
Crown Plaza Hotel, 505 Sherbrooke St E.
- **October 24, 2001 Regina**  
The Landmark Inn, 4150 Albert Street.
- **October 26, 2001 Halifax**  
The World Trade Convention Centre, 1800 Argyle Street.

Watch our website [www.ahf.ca](http://www.ahf.ca) for details, or call the AHF: 1-888-725-8886. 237-4441 in Ottawa.

The Youth Conference was convened in order to engage youth in a discussion of how the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) could most effectively address issues and concerns of youth, and increase youth participation in projects which the AHF funds.

Youth from current AHF funded youth projects, and AHF staff and Board Members, participated in facilitated plenary presentations and workshop exercises designed to address:

#### **AHF structure and Youth projects**

Mike DeGagné, Executive Director of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, provided contextual information regarding the history of Aboriginal peoples' residential school experience in Canada and the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as a result of the Government of Canada's statement of reconciliation and apology for the residential school experience.

Mr. DeGagné provided further details regarding the AHF's funding process, mandate, and allocation of project funding to date. Information was also provided regarding the AHF's commitment to ensuring that there is equity in the distribution of funding, including ensuring that there is an effective amount of the AHF's funding filtered to the Aboriginal youth in Canada.

#### **Pelican Lake Video**

The Pelican Lake video explored the effects of residential school experiences on the former students who are now adults, the impacts on their children and the former students' efforts to engage in healing. The participants were encouraged to discuss the experience of viewing the video through three questions:

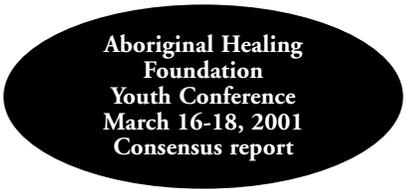
- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- What did you feel?

#### **Participants comments**

- there is still a lot of awareness necessary in order for youth to hear and understand their parents deep-rooted experiences
- the process of breaking the silence and creating increased awareness raises intense emotions for survivors and their descendants which need to be addressed with care and safety
- Aboriginal people are demonstrating the courage and willingness and ability to change and heal from these experiences

#### **Recommendations from the Aboriginal Youth Conference**

The purposes, topics/workshops, and recommendations from previous youth and youth/Elder conferences provided in the Agenda package were reviewed. In general terms the youth conferences were designed to provide forums to increase interaction/networking, to collectively examine the issues and needs of youth and to identify and discuss solutions. The conferences have addressed a wide range of topics and provided an equally broad range of recommendations. Recommendations offered specific activities in various fields such as health, mental health, social and economic conditions, culture and tradition, and the availability of programs and facilities. Other recommendations attempted to build on the momentum of the gatherings by encouraging the development of youth skills, political advocacy and self initiated youth activities.



#### **Workshops in Workshops in targeted areas**

##### **Best practices in current youth programming**

This workshop was asked to identify current examples of programs and initiatives which are beneficial to youth, to examine reasons for this level of success, and to discuss what role the AHF could undertake in support of effective youth programming. In addition to the three questions, the workshops participants felt it was essential that they also discuss the Barriers and Problems with Youth Initiatives which they have encountered. Any future work will need to address these concerns as well.

The participants in this small group workshop identified approximately 30 examples of other cultural, recreational and educational programs and approaches which were seen to be beneficial to youth. The reasons for success related to the positive sense of involvement and influence which the participating youth were able to exert over the programs implementation, and the quality of the youth/adult interactions, support and communication. The participants provided several dozen ideas which could be applied to direct AHF action and/or AHF program goals and content.

##### **Understanding the impact of residential schools on youth**

The participants in the workshop on impacts examined what impacts were being experienced in their communities and organizations, youth roles and responsibilities in addressing these impacts, and areas for AHF action. There were over 40 impacts on youth identified by the participants. Youth roles and responsibilities were discussed as both a personal and project responsibility especially in the area of improving individual self-esteem. The suggested areas for AHF action addressed issues such as youth criteria, youth gatherings and community/youth needs assessments.





### **Increasing youth participation in funded projects**

The participants in this workshop did not include any representation from the 13 youth projects currently funded by the AHF. As a result the participants examined the three questions from the perspective of their experiences with other youth programs and initiatives. The workshop examined areas where youth have direct participation, ways to increase youth participation, and the role the AHF could play in supporting the increased direct participation of youth in AHF funded projects in the future. The majority of the groups' discussions examined ways of increasing youth roles and responsibilities. Examples include increased opportunities for youth project networking, operational responsibilities for youth, and supportive/advisory roles for survivors.

### **Identification of emerging areas of consensus/recommendation:**

Upon review of flip charts, summary reports and notes on the discussions in workshops and during the plenary reporting session, the main themes which emerged include:

- Recognizing, supporting and trusting in youth empowerment and leadership
- Encouraging and enabling youth/elder and youth/parent interactions within projects which are mutually beneficial
- The need to address barriers and problems which have hampered existing and past youth programming and initiatives
- Examining partnership approaches which could be beneficial to youth projects
- Providing programming and skill development in a wide range of areas such as parenting, management, camps, councils, proposal writing, public speaking, conflict resolution, and self esteem/confidence

A review of the workshop reports resulted in 29 items being identified for AHF consideration. These 29 were derived through a consolidation of the approximately 65 ideas which the participants presented on what role(s) the AHF could undertake to:

- support best practices
- improve awareness of the impact of residential schools on youth
- increase direct youth participation within AHF processes and projects

During the final plenary session of the AHF Youth Conference the participants examined these items with a view to determine that

- 1) all items in the workshop reports which were directed at AHF action, AHF decision making processes and AHF programming criteria have been included in this listing. This resulted in an additional three items being added to the consolidated list
- 2) Utilize a group ranking exercise to list the items in priority ranking, and to provide guidance on additional considerations for how the items might be implemented

The list of items/options as modified in discussion with the participants and with the first 11 items prioritized is as follows:



### **Priority Recommendations**

#### **Priority 1 Recommendation: Develop Unique Criteria for Youth Projects**

Programs for youth need to be different. Appeal to youth –make them feel important. Promote future. Choices for youth. Responsibilities for youth. Gain trust. Different ways of looking at the issues. Unique initiatives. Youth leadership. Cultural aspects. Educational. Fun/interesting. Have youth assessing youth projects.

#### **Priority 2 Recommendation: Teach Youth Proposal Writing Skills**

Teach youth how to write proposals so that they have confidence that their proposals will be considered in a positive light. Put questions and answers regarding the application process on the AHF Website and have a youth contact person on staff at the AHF to answer questions.

#### **Priority 3 Recommendation: Develop a Youth Steering Committee**

Develop a Youth Steering Committee that advises the AHF Board on youth issues. –the Committee to be composed of youth representing the National Aboriginal organizations and also representing each province. The AHF's youth Board member would liaise with the Committee. A general call for applications from youth could be made and also the youth organizations in each province could be invited to submit applications. Develop criteria and send them to the forum participants for review and suggestions.

#### **Priority 4 Recommendation: Fostering Youth Leadership**

Focus on youth initiatives and leadership tying in with the parents and looking at the programs to see how we as peers can go back and get these programs developed –we're the leaders and we can make a difference.

#### **Priority 5 Recommendations: Extend Funding**

Extended time for funding –more than five years.

#### **Priority 6 Recommendations: Increase Interaction Between Communities**

More interactions between communities.





**Priority 7 Recommendation: Follow-up on Approved Projects**

Make sure that there is follow-up commitment in the projects once they've been approved.

**Priority 8 Recommendations: Survivors as Advisors**

Bring in survivors to be advisors to the projects/role models.

**Priority 9 Recommendations: Encourage Joint Youth and Elder Programs**

Joint youth projects. Joint projects getting youth and Elders to work together and talk.

**Priority 10 Recommendations: Use Facilitators With Understanding**

Facilitators need experience with the issue for the understanding –perspective, compassion

**Priority 11 Recommendation: Define Youth**

Provide a clear definition of “Youth.”

**Recommendation: National Communication Distribution**

A national communication distribution so people know what the AHF is doing and what the organization is about.

**Recommendation: Conduct On-Site Visits to Youth Projects**

Have one or two AHF representatives visit our project in an on-site visit. Increase the number of community support workers and have them visit the projects and have them visit youth projects.

**Recommendation: Funding for Hiring Youth**

Provide more funding to hire young people.

**Recommendation: Communicate With Youth Programs**

Being more involved with other youth programs –letting youth programs know what AHF can do for them.

**Recommendation: Host or Participate in National Youth Conferences**

Take a role in national conferences for awareness for youth leaders, not just AHF projects but all youth leaders, to bring them together and give them a better awareness of the AHF and the history and impacts of residential schools.

**Recommendation: Increased Accountability to Youth**

More accountability to youth through increased distribution of information regarding the availability of AHF funding. Accountability to the people.

**Recommendation: Support Development of Parenting Skills**

Allow the youth to lead by example. Help youth lead more positive lives by having healthy lifestyles to assist in developing good parenting skills in the long run.

**Recommendation: Support Parent/Youth Programs**

Parent/youth program. Parent participation. Parents in program –include kids

**Recommendation: Promote the AHF Website**

The AHF needs to promote its Website more, include a youth chat-line/guest book or news group, a mailing list to all the youth –make it more accessible and appealing to youth.

**Recommendation: Schedule Youth Meetings**

Schedule more youth meetings to examine best practices, possibly quarterly or semi-annually or have meetings via tele-conference, web-cam, etc. Have youth representatives from funded projects meet to discuss their projects' successes. Have youth meetings where representatives can meet to discuss the various funded projects. Help raise an awareness of the issues, youth gathering regarding residential school case and effects. Conferences –read follow-up, too many conferences dealing with the same issues, need commitment.

**Recommendation: Fund Youth Needs Assessments**

Fund programs to assess the needs of youth, especially in off-Reserve communities where there isn't the cohesiveness of the Aboriginal culture. Take a role in finding out what their communities need (that they find). Meets needs of community – breaks barriers. Meeting the community needs and have a sense of their background, what they are looking for, what they have in place.



**Recommendation: Fund Youth Motivational Programs**

There are a lot of youth in our community that don't care; there should be funding for developing programs to help motivate them to participate.

**Recommendation: All Proposals Should Address Needs of Youth**

All proposals should address the needs of youth in their criteria.

**Recommendation: Web Forum for Project Administrators**

A web forum for those who are initiating or running programs to meet up and discuss the projects (opens communication across the country).

**Recommendation: Dedicate Newsletter to Youth**





Why not dedicate *Healing Words* to just youth?

**Recommendation: Set Aside a Budget for Youth Projects**

The AHF should set aside a budget specifically for funding youth projects.

**Recommendation: Give Youth Authority and Accountability for Their Projects**

Youth need to have administrative authority over their project funding and more direct accountability to the AHF. The youth don't mind the money being kept for us but we'd like to know where its going.

**Recommendation: Increase Advertising Re AHF Funding**

Need more advertising regarding the AHF funding opportunities.

**Recommendation: Improve the Public Perception of the AHF**

Address the stigma attached to the AHF regarding its funding. There is an attitude to not bother applying because you aren't going to get approved because they aren't presented in the right format –youth are discouraged (could provide technical support to youth)

**Recommendation: Have Youth Contests and Awards**

Have youth contests, awards and forward these to the youth that are on the mailing list to increase youth participation, youth like to participate in these types of challenges.

**Recommendation: Provide Residential School Reference Materials**

Provide educational materials/information regarding the residential school system and experiences.

**Recommendation: Empower Youth to Run Their Own Programs**

Youth need to be empowered to run their own programs for youth. There needs to be youth involvement in the development and implementation of projects.

**Recommendation: More Youth Gatherings**

Have more youth gatherings.



CONCLUSION

The AHF Youth Conference concluded with the undertaking that the Facilitator's Consensus Report would be revised and presented to the AHF Board of Directors at their meeting in late March 2001. It is anticipated that following direction from the Board of Directors the AHF staff will develop a "Youth Strategy" which will include elements identified during this conference.

PARTICIPANTS LIST

- Fred Alunik, Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre
- Matthew Angeconeb, Thunder Bay
- Rhoda Audla, Qikiqtani Inuit Association
- Karl Barker, Neeginan Corporation, Thunderbird House
- Diana Beck, Native Women's Association of Canada
- Crystal Busch, Sexually Exploited Youth, Save the Children
- Sterling Crowe, Yorkton Tribal Administration Inc.
- Joseph Dore, National Association of Friendship Centres
- Cheyenne Doxtador, Six Nations Development Program
- Jamie Gallant, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
- Tracey Brown, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada
- Darla King, Assembly of First Nations
- Ramona MacKenzie, Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario, Regional Multicultural Youth Council
- Kevin McArthur, Hay River Dene Band
- Reggi McKay, Wapekeka First Nation
- Brandon Mitchell, Listuguj Community Health Services
- Tommy Moar, Assembly of First Nations of Quebec
- Wendy Nakagee, Mushkegowuk Council
- Catherine Paul, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
- Shona Sark, Big Cove First Nation
- Trudi Tinant, Metis National Council

ALSO PRESENT:

- Mike DeGagné, Executive Director, Aboriginal Healing Foundation
- Director Cindy Whiskeyjack, AHF Board of Directors (Day 2)
- Jackie Brennan, Executive Assistant, Research
- Angie Bruce, Aboriginal Healing Charitable Association
- Johnny Dayrider
- Rosie Dayrider, Elder
- Sam Dumais, Elder
- Giselle Robelin, Communications Officer
- Harold Tarbell, Conference Facilitator
- Rae Ratslef, Recording Secretary, Raincoast Venture. •

BEST PRACTICES IN CURRENT YOUTH PROGRAMS  
IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS – AHF YOUTH CONFERENCE 2001

**Programs and initiatives that are benefiting youth (cultural, recreational and educational)**

**Cultural**

- Language/cultural camps/programs
- Traditional ceremonies
- Justice cultural camp
- Drum Groups
- Youth rodeo
- Sweats for youth
- Aboriginal Head start
- Programs with elders
- Wilderness camps – elders/youth
- Day Camps

**Recreational**

- Teen drop-in
- Sports
- Skating
- Coffee houses
- Karaoke nights
- Boys and Girls club - Native alcohol and drug programs

**Educational**

- Science Camp
- Leadership Workshops
- Youth sharing and talking circle
- Stay in School program
- Peer literacy centre - high school tutors
- RCMP programs
- Training education centre
- Local role models
- Peer counselling training
- Youth councils
- Police/youth mentorship program

**Barriers and Problems**

- Bringing everyone together
- Babysitters – child care
- Communication barriers, different age groups, advertising
- Participation level in older youth
- Alcohol and drug problems
- Elders not very available in city
- Elders won't volunteer, need to get paid, complain that we don't know enough about culture
- Elders hold back information
- Youth have lack of understanding, patience with elders
- Youth home life – family violence, alcoholism, etc.
- No youth centre
- No long term programs
- Money - funding
- Lack of facilities
- Peer pressure
- Depression in the youth
- Underdeveloped communities, isolated communities especially
- High rate of suicide
- Isolation, culture shock when leaving community
- Parenting skills
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Racism - both sides
  - within own culture
  - not speaking language
  - being half white
  - Residential school victims experienced racism for not knowing their culture and pass down the racism
  - racism against teenage parents

**Some of the reasons why programs or initiatives work well**

- Give youth positive activity
- Everyone gets involved, no one gets left out
- Youth run - comfortable, better understanding
- Youth leaders
- Program run by youth on same level
- Awareness - opening wounds
- Motivation
- Having a facility(ies) for youth
- Community support
- Promotes self-esteem and cultural pride
- Communication with parents
- Help heal

THE IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS  
ON YOUTH

**Residential school impacts on youth in communities and organisations:**

- substance abuse to cover their pain
- loss of culture and language
- denial of who they are
- trouble communicating, don't know how to handle their problems
- need to recognize that this happened and the impacts that are happening now
- loss of parenting skills
- we're the seventh generation, we can make the changes needed
- loss of love, difficulty showing love
- children don't trust the adults and get mad at them
- the education of our people and leaders - the youth look up to our leaders and their limited education
- we have to make education more important for our youth to be educated
- also our education system doesn't allow us to transfer our secondary school credits to a mainstream university course
- sexual abused attributed back to the residential school impacts
- loss of spirituality (culture/religion)
- lack of parental support for children in the schools
- social dysfunction (no longer feeling comfortable in social situations)
- survivors of residential school are discriminated against for not knowing much about their culture or their language
- racism handed down by survivors to youth
- historical abuse - the history of the Aboriginal people has been lied about, misinformation
- segregation - teaching differently between the main stream attendees at schools and what is being taught to the Aboriginal students
- differentiation between the recognition of mainstream vs. Aboriginal programs
- racism within our own people between on- and off-Reserve Aboriginal people (may come from the residential school experience)
- it's wrong to segregate young Aboriginal students from other students because later in life they will need to integrate with other races and will be shy and uncertain

**Roles and responsibilities youth can undertake in addressing these impacts?**

- youth healing circles – youth directed, then after bring in Elders
- seek knowledge, understand history
- acknowledge issues and face directly
- youth mentorship programs
- bridging communications between parents, youth and Elders
- create awareness
- educating people
- healthy lifestyle training
- start with myself to help others
- proper nutrition
- self-esteem, enhance
- acknowledge and break intergenerational cycle – **change**
- power of choice
- make sure there's a youth representative on every council
- conflict resolution training
- peer mediation

*Quotations from the AHF youth conference*

“We have to understand that this happened in our lifetime. Phil Fontaine is a recent Aboriginal leader. It's really good to have people step forward and break the silence to encourage others.”

“I saw people coming in and trying to change the Aboriginal people into what they thought we should be like or who they wanted us to be like. Assimilation. In trying to do that they passed down something that I can't understand, the physical, sexual, mental abuse. They probably thought they were doing a positive thing, to change them and make them better, but how could they make us better if they were passing down something so negative?”

“People are healing, they are coming out and saying 'yes, this happened to me.' And they are forgiving, which is a good thing.”

“We are the youth of today and we are walking into the future. We all have the power of choice and the power to change.”

“At first when I watched the video, I felt empathetic for what our people went through. But as I watched the video, I saw that the video teaches what our people went through and what they're doing to overcome it. And my feelings turn to pride and respect for these people, because they're trying to overcome what could have killed them mentally, spiritually, or even physically.”

“As a former residential school attendee, four years ago I started to heal by looking at my own way of life, my native ways. They were there all the time, my family into its native prayers, but the way I was raised I thought I was a white man and tried to act like one. But four years ago I was reborn when I realized that I could never be a white man no matter how hard I tried.” •

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## featured project

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### Six Nations Social Development Program

“By sharing our cultures with each other we will learn.  
And once we learn we will know.  
And when we know we will understand.  
And when we understand we can appreciate each other.  
This is our vision for our people from the past, to the present, and into the future.

- Aroha Crowchild, Pitaa Native  
Dinner Show artistic director.

#### TO HELP THE CHILDREN OF OUR NATIONS

##### Community Profile - Six Nations of the Grand River

The Six Nations of the Grand River community is the largest populated of the 608 First Nations in Canada and is situated in the centre of the most populated area of Canada. With a total membership of 20,435, Six Nations consists of approximately 45,000 acres of land. There are 10,448 members who live within the community. The Six Nations of the Grand River community is composed of the following Nations: Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca and Tuscarora.

The lands of the Six Nations of the Grand River were granted by Sir Frederick Haldimand on October 25, 1784, being six miles in width on each side of the Grand River from the river's mouth at Lake Erie to its source. This was compensation for the nearly six million acres sacrificed by Six Nations on the Mohawk and Susquehanna rivers, in their alliance with the British during the American War of Independence.

##### Breaking the cycle

Intergenerational trauma from the legacy of residential school abuses displays itself in a cycle of physical, emotional/verbal, and sexual abuse that perpetuates from generation to generation. As a result, children present the symptoms through their behaviour, which may be displayed and identified in the school setting. The Social Development Program works with these children and families to halt the cycle by providing help, healing, and intervention, and by teaching alternative healthy ways of relating to one another, family members, peers, community members and self.

Children identified as victims of physical/sexual abuse are referred to appropriate community agencies that treat children and family members using a holistic approach. Ongoing monitoring within the school system serves as a prevention factor. As well, children are helped at the school level to interact with peers and within school community to function at their highest level capable. Self-esteem is also addressed as aggressive/bullying behaviour is often a result of living with parents who resort to aggressive, even abusive behaviours. When these children are identified in the school, appropriate interventions are implemented to stop the abusive cycle.

The residential school system also effectively destroyed –by way of authoritarian, emotionally flat & distant styles of adult/child interaction– the traditional native parenting knowledge, techniques and ways of relating to children which are transmitted from generation to generation.

Relationships that use techniques of instilling fear, shaming, physical abuse, punitive measures, and other such techniques create self-hate, low self-esteem, confusion, rivalry, denial of identity and culture. This interrupting of the parent/child/family relationship disrupts healthy parenting and, as a result, generates the pattern of parenting techniques listed above. This generation's children present the effects of this within the school system, with their behaviours and lack of concentration, readiness and preparedness to learn, as they may come from a home environment with a family history that traces its roots to the residential schools. Parenting issues are brought forward; therefore we offer healthy parenting programs and information or refer to other parenting programs when identified. We also refer parents to counselling for support/assistance.

##### The Legacy of Residential Schools that exist in our community

As a result of intergenerational impacts of residential schools and other societal difficulties, there are many changes in our children. Parents and educators note that our children's needs are changing. Teachers are spending an increasing amount of time and effort dealing with social, emotional and physical needs of children and less time teaching the basics. Forces outside our community disrupted our families through the capture and isolation of our children in residential schools. Many generations of our people feel the pain of abandonment, loss of culture and language, the lack of parenting, and, most of all, the lack of love as children. These children grow into adults that are affected to varying degrees. The pain turns inward to become a sickness of spirit and an imbalance. The imbalance of mind, body and spirit plays itself out in many ways. In our community, this imbalance is shown in the form of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, breakdown of families and inability to create and maintain relationships.

The Social Development Program works directly in the elementary school system of the Six Nations reserve. Programming such as individual counselling, group counselling, crisis support and classroom facilitation of social skills and traditional teachings is aimed at meeting the numerous needs of our children. For the adults of the community, the program provides traditional healing circles, parenting groups, and information sessions on topics that the community identifies as necessary. The Program works closely with agencies that specialise in treatment of specific problems. Clients/families experiencing difficulties are supported in their decisions of how they wish to do their healing.

Pooling of talents of all professional and traditional healers is essential to support community members who require a variety of services. A case management model is used to assist children and families in a holistic manner. Direct and intergenerational traumas of physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual and cultural abuse are addressed with parents and children using sensitivity, respect and patience. Pervasive behaviours, which are prevalent and harmful to themselves and to others, are referred to Mental Health Services, Drug and Alcohol Centres, Social Services, Women's Shelters etc. Referrals are made and participation is encouraged in those agencies and programs that specifically present residential abuse activities and counselling assistance. The Social Development Program continues to manage joint cases with all agencies ensuring stability at the school level.

To help the children *is a project under the supervision of Melba Thomas.*  
Address : P.O. Box 5000  
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### TRADITIONAL EDUCATION ENHANCES SUCCESS

By Cheyanne Doxtator, Six Nations.

Growing up in today's society is not an easy task as an Ongwehonweh person. Living in this modern world while trying to hold on to traditional ways is all about balance. ▶



Having balance in your life can be helped by having a strong cultural base, and that is what Kawenni:io/Gaweni:io High school provides for its students. It is a Haudenosaunee culturally based school with a provincial curriculum. The students get a sense of who they are as young Ongwehonweh people, as well as an education they can use in the modern world. The students of Kawenni:io/Gaweni:io High school get an education that will prepare them for their future career choices without sacrificing either contemporary or traditional concepts and values. They also get reading, writing, math, and science skills, among other things, to help them in furthering their education.

They have all learned their language, ceremonies, dances and songs as well as the meaning behind being a Ongwehonweh. Another thing that is very important to the students as well as the teachers is helping them recognise the importance of carrying on our ceremonies in the longhouse traditions.

The basis of the school is to help the children be strong and proud of who they are as sovereign people. This strong base will help them survive in the modern world, as well as overcome obstacles. In order for any people to survive, one must first recognise who they are, and only then will they be able to reach their highest potential as an Ongwehonweh person.

Cheyenne is the Six Nations Youth Delegate who attended the AHF Youth Conference in Edmonton, March 16-18 2001.

### THE LOST GENERATION



Geronimo Henry started a non-profit foundation in 1997 called "The Lost Generation" to raise money for more students. The foundation's symbol is three ribbons of three colours. The red, black, and white ribbons stand for hope and unity for all residential survivors. Anyone who contributes to the Foundation receives the symbolic ribbons.

Henry describes the significance of the ribbons' colours. Red, he says, is for the colour of natives' skin, white is for the former students purity and innocence and black is for the hell they suffered at the residential school. The circle has no significance, as this was added only for identification purposes

The Mohawk Institute was established in 1831 by the New England Co, a Protestant missionary society based in Britain, to convert and civilise the "wild" native. The school was later run by the Anglican Church and controlled by the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. It wasn't until the latter part of the 1800s that Ottawa took a leading role in the "education" of native children and made residential schools part of government policy.

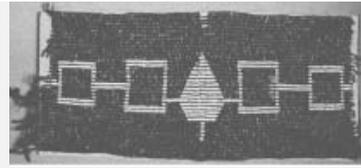
When it opened, the Mohawk Institute was only meant to accommodate Six Nations' children, but its doors were later opened to all native students. The Institute, which now houses the Woodland Culture Centre, was among 80 residential schools across the country.



*Lorna McNaughton is one of hundreds of former students of the Mohawk Institute.*

See:

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/3808/>



### KAIENEREKOWA

The Great Law is the founding constitution of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy). It is an oral tradition, codified in a series of wampum belts now held by the Onondaga Nation. It defines the functions of the Grand Council and how the native nations can resolve disputes between themselves and maintain peace.

The Peace Maker travelled among the Rotinohshonni (Iroquois) for many years, spreading his message of peace, unity and the power of the good mind. Oral history says that it may have taken him forty some years to reach everyone.

The Great Law is like a Great White Mat of Law upon which the Chiefs sit as they deliberate on the affairs of the nations. Burning before the assembled chiefs is the council fire, called "the great light," that never dies as long as the people believe in the Great Law. The kindling the council fire, considered sacred in that it purifies the words of those assembled, obligates the Chiefs to speak the truth. Also holding a council only in the daylight is another cultural mechanism to assure clear thinking. Meetings held at night are considered inappropriate and meant to foster dissent.

The Chiefs are to use the power of their mind to reason, to figure out what is best for the welfare of the people. The three main principles of the Great Law of Peace are: Righteousness (Good News), Civil Authority (Power), and also Mind (Reason). We are to view the chiefs like a circle of standing trees, supporting the Tree of Peace that grows in the middle. They help to keep it from falling over. With each Chief is to be a helper, to keep the Chief standing tall.

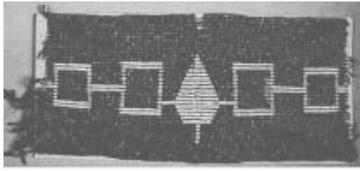
The word Gaihiwoy is has been translated to mean righteousness. Its meaning is more like a wholesome doctrine that is good to be heard, because it teaches ethical behaviour and communal values. But it also denotes the idea of justice, of being right because of the customs, manners, beliefs and ritualistic summations of the past experiences of the people. It is putting words into action.

The hardest part of the Great Law is to understand the meaning of the concept of peace. Peace is not simply the absence of war. In the Rotinohshonni mind, peace is a state of mind. Power, which can easily be thought of as military strength, is more appropriately the one heart, one mind, one head, and one body which allows the Haudenosaunee to remain united in the face of many enemies.

But there is also a different kind of power in the Rotinohshonni universe. Each individual has a base spiritual power. As you go through life as Onkwehonweh, experiencing different things, learning more, comprehending more and tapping into other forms of spiritual power, your own spirit grows as well. The old timers called it orenda. Everyone is thought to have it to some degree. It effects how we do things. Good minds have strong orenda. So the ultimate power of the Great Law rests in how well the individual person develops their sense of self, but develops that sense in regard to the well-being of the others, in the clan, in the village, in the nation and in the Confederacy of the Six Nations.

From earliest times, the unity of the Iroquois was symbolized by a wampum belt fashioned in a pattern that has become known as "Hiawatha's Belt".

"Hiawatha's Belt" is composed of five figures. In the center was what



some have described as a heart. To others it is a great or sacred tree under which the Haudenosaunee meet in council. On either side of the central device is two differently sized squares. The squares are connected to each other, and to the central device by a narrow band.

The symbolism is quite clear. The five devices represent the five original tribes. From left to right they represent the:

- Seneca, the keepers of the Western Door
- Cayugas, the "people of the marsh" and "keepers of the Great Pipe"
- Onondaga, who were the "name bearers" who kept the wampum belt that contained the history of the Iroquois
- Oneida, the "stone people" symbolized by the Great Tree
- Mohawk, the "keepers of the eastern door"

Adapted from <http://sixnations.buffnet.net/Culture/>

Letters: continued from page 10

## letters



Hi! Peggie

Will do, with pleasure. I have given your contact details to our mailing list coordinator. You will receive our Newsletters, beginning with the June issue.

Thank you for your interest.

Giselle.

\*

Hi Giselle,

Thanks so much for printing both my poem and Barney's poem. It means a great deal to us.

THERESA TURMEL.

\*

Hi!

Please visit: [http://www.geocities.com/sun\\_flare\\_4u/](http://www.geocities.com/sun_flare_4u/) The guestbook is now opened to all visitors.

I have been running in my cyber moccasins: inviting all native sites!

Thanking you in advance

MARY FORTIER.

7th  
generation

What is the Seventh Generation?

Legend has it that the Shamans who predicted the arrival of the white man and the near destruction of our people also foretold the resurgence of the Aboriginal people seven lifetimes after Columbus. We are the seventh generation.

We must also recognize that the life in our communities has changed dramatically over the generations. Change is inevitable, but culture is a mechanism to make sure that the changes are not detrimental to the social, ceremonial, economic, educational and political life of the community. Each generation of Haudenosaunee must apply all of the principles, beliefs and values described above to assess the world in which they find themselves, and they formulate a response to their world that allows them to survive on their own terms.

We have even been given a way to accomplish this. It is called the Seventh Generation philosophy. The Chiefs are instructed that when they deliberate on the serious matters of the Council, they are to consider the impact of their decisions on seventh generation into the future. This way, they are to proceed cautiously, thinking of what effect their decisions will have on the welfare of their descendants. It requires a special attention to the future. But it also produces a sense of stability.

Some things will always need remain the same because we still live on the same earth, we still live in same areas, we still have many of the traditions that allowed our ancestors to survive. These very same traditions will be essential for the future generations. Keeping the traditions alive and viable is the responsibility of this generation. Our gift to the future is all of the things that have been described above. But these traditions are not simply words on paper that can be studied when needed. The traditions must be practiced each and every day. The Haudenosaunee way of life requires a commitment to make it happen, sometimes, in spite the current trends and desires of the people to change those traditions.

*We are committed to maintaining our survival as distinct peoples.*

*We believe that the lessons from Creation the guidance of the Original Instructions, the unity of the Great Law of Peace, and the moral imperatives of the Gaiwiiio provide the roadmap to our future.*

## History of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School

“I have asked for a school to be built ... on my land  
and that school will be run by my people,  
and my people will work at that school  
and our children will learn both ways,  
our way and the whitemen’s way.”  
- Chief Jimmy Bruneau (1881- 1975)



*The Chief Jimmy Bruneau Memorial Area of our school has pictures of Elders, traditional artwork, and a statue of Chief Jimmy Bruneau.*

“So if children are taught in two cultures equally,  
they will be strong liketwo people...  
what the old chief talkedabout is for some good time in the future  
he looked far ahead for us, and we gain from it.”  
- Elizabeth Mackenzie



Drumming and hand games are an important part of the cultural tradition practiced at school.

### *The Beginning of CJBRHS...*

For thousands of years Dogrib parents taught their children through the activities of their daily lives. Children learned the skills they needed to survive and the values they needed to live in harmony within their families, their community and with the land. In this century new skills and new knowledge became important. People not only needed land skills to survive and prosper, they needed to have the education that came from succeeding in school, college and university.

Chief Jimmy Bruneau recognized the importance of this new education but saw young people come home from residential school without bush skills, without their language and unable to talk to their parents and elders. It was his vision to world with other Dogrib leaders to get the government to construct a school in Rae that would teach “ both ways”.

In 1971 the Chief Jimmy Bruneau School was opened in Edzo. It was originally intended for all the Dogrib communities, but soon they had their own elementary K-9 schools. However, students continued to have to leave their communities to go to Yellowknife for high school.

In 1991 the Chief Jimmy Bruneau School began to offer high school programs. By 1994 the school had its first grade 12 graduates!

Chief Jimmy Bruneau died on January 16, 1975. He was a chief who had great vision and set the finest example of leadership for our people. In the words of one elder, “He looked far ahead for us and we gain by it.”



*This is a picture of what life was like here years ago.*





## Our Community: Rae-Edzo



Chief Jimmy Bruneau school is located in the small community of Rae-Edzo, North-West Territories, Canada. The community is a one hour drive from Yellowknife. The students who attend the school come mostly from Rae and Edzo, but also from other Dogrib communities.

Rae is on the shores of Marion Lake and Edzo is across the lake along the highway. Rae-Edzo is a Hamlet, governed by Hamlet Council, Treaty 11, and the Rae Band, as well as the Territorial and Federal Governments. The community is made up of Dogrib People of the Dene Nation.

Traditionally the people here hunted caribou and other animals for food and clothing. There are people in the community today who are hunters, trappers and fishers. We celebrate our culture through feasts. Afterwards, we look forward to hand games or drum dances. During the Summer, a group of students and supervisors go on a canoe trip for about 1 week to the outlying communities for the Dogrib Assembly.

Today many people are employed in Government Offices, Diamond Mines, Schools and other businesses in town. The children and young adults attend school and work toward becoming "Strong Like Two People".



As students at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, we learn from our elders. The elders have said that the Dene have lived in a respectful relationship with the land, the spiritual world, with other people and oneself. This is necessary in order to survive as a person. There is a Dene way of understanding education. Education consists of providing the skills, knowledge and perspectives that will enable survival. The educational content has come down to us from generation to generation through our elders in the oral tradition. Our elders are the primary source for any real Dene-based education. (Dene Kede Curriculum Document, NWT Education Culture and Employment).

This page was created by Martina,  
a grade 11 student and Darcy,  
a Junior high student at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School. •



WILLIAM DUNCAN

### *A Concentrated Experiment in Social Engineering*

The Church of England (Anglican) missionary, William Duncan, arrived at Fort Simpson in 1857. In the wake of a small-pox epidemic, Duncan relocated with a group of 50 Tsimshian followers at Metlakhatla, in 1862.



*Fort Simpson in 1873.*

The Metlakhatla settlement was an experiment in social re-engineering. It had carpenter's and blacksmith's shops, a sawmill, and a salmon cannery. Public buildings included a town hall, a trade

hall, a school house, a court house, and a jail. Duncan, appalled at coastal Indian life, imposed Victorian English customs and culture on the isolated community and governed its inhabitants with strict rules relating to Christian religious observance, school attendance, government, industry, and the details of everyday life. Indian customs were forbidden in the missionary's effort to transform the Tsimshian into industrious Protestant citizens.

Eventually, Duncan (who had left a career in business to enter the seminary) opened a trade shop to supply his converts with material goods, entering into direct competition with the Hudson's Bay Company.



*Above: Metlakhatla boasted the largest church north of San Francisco. Photographed in 1881.*

William Duncan's vision of social re-engineering was greatly admired by whites. Among these admirers was the future Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott.

Metlakhatla grew to include 1000 residents and 200 houses. Following a split in the community, resulting from a dispute between Duncan

and the Anglican bishop, the missionary and 800 of his staunchest supporters moved over the border to Alaska in 1887. By 1905, most of the public buildings at Metlakhatla had been destroyed by fire, and the village declined in importance. Today, the population is very small. •

Sources: A Pour of Rain, by Helen Meilleur, and <http://www.civilization.ca/members/fjph/tsimshian/vilintre.html>

## Teaching Canadian youth about the residential school system



(recommended for grade 10)

excerpted from First Nations Schoolnet (see <http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/issues/schools-e.html>)

### Background

Long before Europeans came to North America, aboriginal people had a highly developed system of education. If you think of how difficult it must have been for aboriginal people to survive by earning a living from the land, you may realize that there was a great deal for aboriginal children to learn before they could survive on their own. Aboriginal elders and parents passed on not only survival skills to their children, but their history, artistic ability, music, language, moral and religious values.

When European missionaries began to live amongst aboriginal people, they concluded that the sooner they could separate children from their parents, the sooner they could prepare aboriginal people to live a civilized (i.e. European) lifestyle. Residential schools were established for two reasons: separation of the children from the family and the belief that aboriginal culture was not worth preserving. Most people concluded that aboriginal culture was useless and dying and all human beings would eventually develop and change to be like the 'advanced' European civilization.

Many things combined to make the experience difficult for young aboriginal children. They included the suffocating heat of the buildings; the painful need for someone to talk to; the pain of separation from their families; the bad tasting, indigestible food; the size and unfamiliarity of the buildings; the frightening crowds of people; the concentration-camp style discipline; mental and physical abuse; and the continual loss of personal freedoms and individual control. All of this must have been a staggering shock to the new "student."

The white man's school contradicted everything these aboriginal children had learned at home. Aboriginal society placed a large measure of responsibility on children's shoulders. They were expected to help with jobs such as tending the nets, feeding the dogs, cutting and hauling wood, cutting up meat and fish for drying. The school demanded very little in comparison. A child had no responsibility for the well-being of others. At residential school, the aboriginal child became no one's keeper, not even his own.

Some children were able to return home for two short summer months. Parents found that they had changed.

"cold," their parents as dressing "funny" and as smelling "bad." Students began to believe that the ceremonies and rituals which harmonized the spiritual and social life of the community and gave its members a sense of personal significance and group identity, were "heathen" and "the work of the Devil." The organization of the schools and the content of the curriculum conveyed to aboriginal children that the human values, the political institutions, the spiritual practices and the economic strategies of other Canadians were infinitely superior to the "primitive" ways of their traditional lifestyles.

It was disorienting for aboriginal children to spend the first (formative) years of life living in a traditional aboriginal way, and then to be thrust into a foreign, concentration-camp style school. Residential school disrupted the smooth transmission of beliefs, skills, and knowledge from one generation to the next, and deliberately divorced the aboriginal child from her background by discrediting her culture, punishing her for speaking her language and preaching the superiority of European attitudes. The experience often caused severe, and in many cases, unalterable damage to the child, to the family and to the community to which she would eventually return.

An aboriginal elder speaking about his residential school experience said that he wanted to write a book of humour entitled "Tongue Stuck to Fence." He was referring to the residential school he attended, at which the priest made the students who spoke their native language go outside in the winter and stick their tongues to a metal fence. How do you think that person could look back on such residential school experiences with a sense of humour?

Early residential schools were similar to religious missions. Later, the mission-run schools were administered jointly by Canadian churches and the federal government, and for a number of years, residential schools became official Canadian policy for the education of Indian children. Speaking no English, having never ridden in a car or truck, having never eaten anything other than meat, fish, bannock and perhaps the occasional sweet treat, aboriginal children as young as six left the world of their families and were sent into the unfamiliar world of the white man.

Children were usually rounded up in August and transported by train, plane or bus to the residential schools. They were separated from their brothers, sisters and friends and herded together according to age level. They were issued clothes and assigned a bed number. Even though many of the children could not speak any English, the supervisors spoke only English to them. The children were, in fact, punished for speaking their native languages. For as long as a year, and occasionally for several years, children were unable to express to anyone in authority what their basic needs were. Loneliness, sickness, confusion and abuse all had to be borne in lonely silence.

Children were no longer interested in helping the family with tasks such as carrying water and other chores. They had to be told everything, and they often refused to "listen." Instead they "talked back" and in general tended to spend time with children their own age who also attended residential school. Parents noted that frequent, violent arguments (very foreign to most aboriginal cultures) arose and that children seemed as unconcerned about hurting others as they were unwilling to obey elders.

Even more difficult for parents was the children's loss of ability to speak their own language. After several years away at school, children often found it difficult to speak their mother tongue. Parents felt left out when the children spoke English and wondered if their sons and daughters were talking about things they didn't want their parents to understand. Children used English when they were angry and so English became associated with bad feelings and strong language.

The most damaging part of residential schools, from an aboriginal perspective, was that children were taught that their culture was not worth preserving. Students learned that aboriginal traditional values were wrong and primitive, and that white Canadians came from a more "advanced" form of social organization. Students came to see their homes as "dirty" and

There were some positive aspects to residential schools. Without them, most of the students would never have learned to read and write, or learn about other ways of life than their own. It was not education in itself that was bad. It was that the manner in which the residential schools were organized were simply not sensitive to the needs or lifestyle of the aboriginal students.

By the 1950s, the Canadian government began to realize the residential school policy was a failure. The last residential school in Canada was closed some 30 years later.

Today, aboriginal people want recognition of what was done to their communities as a result of the residential schools. Aboriginal people have demanded, and received, official apologies from the Anglican, United and Roman Catholic churches which operated residential schools. As more and more former students of residential schools come forth with stories about the sexual and physical abuse they experienced, several religious authorities who administered the schools are being charged criminally.

The residential school experience continues to plague First Nations education. Many people who attended residential schools, now parents and grandparents, have biases against education for their children because of what they experienced. Furthermore, while the closure of residential schools meant that more and more aboriginal children began to attend regular provincial schools, provincial education curriculums did not change to reflect the educational needs of aboriginal children. Today, the cross-Canada average of the percentage of aboriginal children that complete Grade 12 is about 20%, and even lower in northern regions. Aboriginal children continue to have difficulties fitting in to the existing schools, which are still designed around a culture alien to their own.





You may ask, ‘Why couldn’t the Indian students just fit into the regular school system?’ Consider the following situation. Suppose you are a seven year-old Canadian English-speaking child. How well do you think you would do in a Japanese school? You don’t speak Japanese. The way Japanese is written is very different from English. Still, Japanese schools are considered to be some of the very best in the world. Would it mean that you are a failure if you had a difficult time in that school system?

Many First Nations are taking over the running of their schools from the government. By designing their own curriculums and running their own schools, aboriginal people intend to reclaim the education of their children and put the residential school experience in the past.

### Student Questions

You may ask, ‘Why couldn’t the Indian students just fit in to the regular school system?’ Consider the following situation. Suppose you are a seven year-old Canadian English-speaking child. How well do you think you would do in a Japanese school? You don’t speak Japanese. The way Japanese is written is very different from English. Still, Japanese schools are considered to be some of the very best in the world. Would it mean that you are a failure if you had a difficult time in that school system?

Aboriginal children were forced to make huge adjustments when they arrived at residential school. Try to recall, in as much detail as possible, an experience in which you had to make a huge adjustment. Write a short essay, or start a class discussion, in which you compare your experience to the experience of aboriginal children at residential school

An aboriginal elder speaking about his residential school experience said that he wanted to write a book of humour entitled “Tongue Stuck to Fence.” He was referring to the residential school he attended, at which the priest made the students who spoke their native language go outside in the winter and stick their tongues to a metal fence. How do you think that person could look back on such residential school experiences with a sense of humour? Indeed, if you read Basil Johnson’s Indian School Days, a sense of humour is clearly evident. Why do you think that some aboriginal people respond to such experiences with humour.

The following are examples of the type of punishments given to aboriginal children at residential schools:

For failing a test: no food for a day. For not working hard enough: 4 hours of extra work (in school or garden). For disobedience, and rude or disorderly conduct: no food or water for a day, a beating (with a stick on the back), extra garden work. For speaking native language: first offence – no supper, second offence – no supper and beating, third offence – considered disobedience and punished as such. For going off by yourself (without another student present): several hours of kneeling alone on a rock floor where all can see....

There are many similarities between these punishments and the treatment received by prisoners-of-war. Research some prisoner-of-war camp experiences and compare them to those of Indian children in residential schools.

Consider the following poem by Rita Joe, a Mi’kmaq poet, about attending the residential school in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia:

*I lost my talk  
The talk you took away  
When I was a little girl  
At Shubenacadie school.*

*You snatched it away:  
I speak like you  
I think like you  
I create like you  
The scrambled ballad, about my world*

*Two ways I talk  
Both ways I say,  
Your way is more powerful.*

*So gently I offer my hand and ask,  
Let me find my talk  
So I can teach you about me.*

Write a brief essay discussing what you think this poem means. What is the poet’s opinion of the residential school? What type of emotions is she expressing when she remembers the school? What does she feel she has lost? How does she hope to change the future?

Consider the following quotation, from Brian Maracle’s book *Crazywater* in which the subject is explaining why native alcoholism is connected to the residential schools:

*“Figure it this way, over sixty thousand natives were processed through those schools since they started, and you got generation on generation just piled on top and now we’re trying to figure out, “What is love?”*

*How in the hell are you supposed to know how to f—in’ love when you’re not given love for ten months out of every year? It’s obvious they don’t know how to love. They ran away because they knew there was something missing. They didn’t have it. Same thing with me...*

*The question is not, “Why do we drink?” Ask first the question, “Do you know how to love?” And you’ll find a very thin line between them because they come from each other. You booze because you can’t love and you booze under the guise of pretending that you can.”*

Why do you think that a residential school experience would lead an individual to alcohol abuse?

### Student Activities

Pretend you are an aboriginal student at a residential school. Write a letter to your family at home. Describe to them what the school is like, what type of daily tasks you have been asked to perform, what your opinion is of the administrators (mainly clergy), what (if anything) you miss about home.

Aboriginal students at residential school often had a difficult time fitting back into family life when they eventually returned to their communities. Prepare a short skit in which a family is adjusting to having the children return from residential school. You will need at least two characters (a student and a parent), but you may have more: one or more students, a mother, a father, a grandparent, brothers and sisters. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the character you are portraying. What were some of the problems experienced by the children and their parents when the students arrived home? What effect did the residential schools have on the way aboriginal people, students and parents, felt about themselves?

Aboriginal children who attended residential school underwent a devastating process of attempted assimilation. The normal and healthy process of change and growth stopped for aboriginal children when they were forced to live under conditions that were physically, psychologically and spiritually unhealthy. When the growth and development of a living thing is interrupted, that living thing will still try to keep growing, but under circumstances that are harmful to normal development.

As an example of this, find a section of grass (or plants or weeds) you can monitor over the course of a month or so. Place a small box over the grass. Check the progress of the grass every week and keep track of your observations. For example, describe in detail what the grass looked like before you placed the box there - its colour, the shape of the stalks, the feeling it evokes in you. Compare this to the grass once it has been covered, i.e., any growth, new flowers, etc.

Now, write a short essay with the following thesis: Any society or civilization whose normal development is obstructed will have a difficult time maintaining a balanced and healthy way of life. Be sure to make reference to the field notes of your observations of the grass, and to the residential school experience of aboriginal people.

For a follow-up to this ‘experiment,’ remove the box from the grass and monitor how it fares once it is back in its natural environment. In your essay, compare these further observations to aboriginal self-government.

The elders in aboriginal communities have always been given a great deal of respect. Elders are considered the bridge between the ancient traditions and beliefs of the people and the modern day influences. They are respected for their wisdom and experience. The residential school experience severed the bond between the children and elders in the community, by undermining the role of the elders in a child’s education.

Write a journal entry that explores your own relationship with your grandparents (or another elder who played an important role in your life). Try to remember the lessons and values you learned from that person. If you have not had such a relationship with anyone, describe your feelings about not having such a connection with an elder.♦

# National Aboriginal Youth Strategy

Prepared by the Working Group of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy  
December 2, 1999

*The National Aboriginal Youth Strategy is intended to be a dynamic strategy that can respond to the varying needs of Aboriginal youth and changing circumstances.*

Aboriginal youth are a dynamic component of Canadian society. They are the future leaders, educators, professionals and role models of their communities. They are the links to the history and tradition of the past, but they also hold the knowledge and vision for the future. These same young people will play a pivotal role in shaping Canada's future for the new millennium. Aboriginal youth represent the fastest growing segment of Canada's youth population. However, Aboriginal youth are among those who face the highest levels of poverty, unemployment, suicide, as well as experiencing low education levels and lack of access to basic health care services in Canada. In addition, labour market conditions are deteriorating for Aboriginal youth, aggravating a situation that already presents Aboriginal youth with far more challenges than other youth. The cultural, economic, social and political futures of Aboriginal youth will significantly impact the lives of all Canadians.

Aboriginal and government leaders recognize that focussed attention and strong actions are required to address these social and economic challenges in order to ensure constructive and optimistic prospects for Aboriginal youth. Strengthening the capacity of Aboriginal communities, where programs and services are designed and delivered through established and emerging organizations serving Aboriginal youth, should be encouraged. The delivery of programs and services based on mutual respect, recognition, responsibility, and sharing is in the best interest of all.

The National Aboriginal Youth Strategy is based on the belief that solutions and results can be realized when all stakeholders, including Aboriginal communities, governments and institutions, the private sector, community/voluntary agencies and individuals, work together in true partnership. The Strategy envisions Aboriginal youth having opportunities to pursue career and quality of life goals in support of individual choices as well as supporting the social and economic aspirations of Aboriginal communities.

## Background

In November of 1997, Premiers, Territorial Leaders and the Leaders of the five national Aboriginal organizations called on the federal government to convene a meeting with Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Ministers responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and National Aboriginal Leaders. The purpose of this meeting was to address social issues related to Aboriginal peoples, a comprehensive process of social policy renewal and needs of Aboriginal youth.

In May of 1998, Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and National Aboriginal Leaders met in Quebec City and agreed to develop a National Aboriginal Youth Strategy. A working group composed of representatives of the five national Aboriginal organizations, the federal government (represented by Human Resources Development Canada, the Privy Council Office and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) and the Provinces/Territories of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Quebec was established to co-ordinate development of the Strategy. The national Aboriginal organizations have, or are developing, Aboriginal youth advisory structures. Aboriginal youth committees and advisory councils have provided input into the development of this Strategy.

Premiers and National Aboriginal Leaders met in March 1999, in Regina, and pressed for the timely completion of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy.

## Current Situation

Aboriginal youth and their families require access to opportunities in a supportive environment that encourages them to break the cycle of poverty, abuse, the struggle for cultural identity, the lack of family support, low education levels, crime, and low self-esteem. Without the necessary supports, Aboriginal youth and their families will find it difficult to overcome these obstacles and may not be able to realize their career aspirations or quality of life goals. Statistics on the current situation of Aboriginal youth illustrate the many serious challenges that Aboriginal youth face on a daily basis.

It must also be noted that within some areas where proactive measures have been initiated, some positive trends have emerged. For example, Aboriginal longevity is increasing, the percentage of Aboriginal youth enrolled in post secondary education programs is increasing, and Aboriginal youth full time employment earnings are almost equal to those of other Canadian youth. Governments, institutions and organizations recognize that these improved measures indicate the benefits of working together in partnerships to address the critical challenges facing Aboriginal youth.

## Supporting a Vision for Aboriginal Youth

A healthy future involves building on the diversity of Aboriginal communities and recognizes their spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual and cultural values. Aboriginal youth recognize the importance of knowing their traditions and history. They want to learn about and sustain their cultures and languages as a means of strengthening their well being. This concept is conveyed from an Aboriginal youth perspective in the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report, as follows:

*We believe our heritage, culture and religion are what make us human beings. It is very difficult in the city to learn these things because many of the knowledgeable people who know about it and can help us with it don't live here. We must have help and resources so that we can reach out to these people and build connections between us and them (4-157).*

Aboriginal youth also envision a future that offers equitable opportunities to live successful and fulfilling lives. To do so, Aboriginal youth need to be equipped with the necessary skills, abilities and information to take advantage of the full range of education, training and employment possibilities.

The prospects of Aboriginal youth for economic well being should be equal to those afforded the rest of Canada's youth. In supporting this vision, governments and Aboriginal organizations would envision the following:



**Aboriginal youth should be involved in the development of programs and services for and accessed by Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal youth must be involved in the Strategy to realize true success**

- community economic development, business and employment opportunities that are available and encouraged
- involvement of Aboriginal youth in the decisions that impact their lives and recognition as equal partners in the development of their individual and collective futures
- removal of barriers to social, education, and economic opportunities
- environments that are supportive
- implementation of measures to enable Aboriginal youth to enhance the quality of their lives, direct their future and fulfill their dreams

All of these elements point to the need for solutions that reflect the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal youth and a more integrated approach to addressing issues and challenges.

*Our goal was to move from a 'state versus individual' focus to a 'people versus the problem' focus. We worked from the belief that the health of the child, family and community cannot be separated; that empowerment comes from ownership and accountability; that wisdom lies within each of us; that promotion efforts are essential for ensuring ongoing health.* (First Nation Family Justice: MEE-noo-stah-tan Mi-ni-si-win Project, Awasis Child and Family Agency in Manitoba.)

### Principles

All parties should work to achieve a co-operative vision and adopt a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach both within and between governments. Opportunities should be achievable, practical and realistic so that success is a possibility for Aboriginal youth in Canada. In keeping with this approach, governments, institutions, and Aboriginal organizations are encouraged to use the following principles to guide the development and implementation of Aboriginal youth programs and services (not presented in any particular order of priority):

#### *Inclusive*

Aboriginal youth should be involved in the development of programs and services for and accessed by Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal youth must be involved in the Strategy to realize true success.

#### *Community Diversity and Community based*

The diversity of Aboriginal communities –with communities defined, in this document, as a gathering of similar people– should be recognized. Aboriginal youth programs and services should be tailored to the specific needs of individual communities wherever possible. Aboriginal communities should be involved in the design and delivery of programs and services for their youth wherever possible.

#### *Flexible*

Strategies designed to address the concerns of Aboriginal youth should be adaptable to meet current issues and challenges, and responsive to emerging local and global issues which have an impact on Aboriginal youth. They should also be flexible to address the varying priorities and interests of different jurisdictions, governments, institutions, and organizations.



#### *Respectful*

Traditional Aboriginal knowledge, customs, cultures and history should be valued and reflected in any plan of action around program design and delivery that is developed to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth.

#### *Effectiveness and Efficiency*

Any approach should consider existing Aboriginal governance structures and institutions and utilize their expertise and services wherever possible. Initiatives should be implemented in a manner that reinforces and supports Aboriginal structures and institutions. These initiatives should also be complementary to relevant self-government policies, arrangements and agreements, and consistent with relevant treaties and land claims agreements.

#### *Holistic*

Enhancement of existing policies and programs and the creation of new ones should take into consideration the spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual and cultural needs and aspirations of Aboriginal youth. It should demonstrate harmony of these aspects and reflect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures.

#### *Accessible*

Programs and services should be transparent and provide information that is clear and easily accessible to Aboriginal youth, taking into account geographic and population realities. Information should be readily available to Aboriginal youth and should provide clear guidance on how youth can participate in or utilize programs and services. Issues of remoteness and costs affecting accessibility must be taken into consideration.

#### *Individual Empowerment*

Aboriginal youth play a key role in helping Aboriginal communities achieve their social and economic goals and objectives. Programs and services should provide Aboriginal youth with the tools necessary to participate effectively in the decisions that affect their lives and enable them to contribute in the key and appropriate institutions and structures of governments, institutions, and communities.

#### *Community Empowerment*

Many Aboriginal youth are raised with a strong belief in community values and view their individual pursuits as contributing to their family, community, governments, and institutions. Initiatives should recognize the importance of Aboriginal communities in assisting Aboriginal youth in achieving their goals and aspirations.



## youth strategy



### Goals

All parties should work together to achieve the following set of common goals:

#### *Education and skills development*

To increase participation and successful achievements in education and training.

#### *Health*

To encourage opportunities for Aboriginal youth to enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

#### *Culture*

To respect and promote Aboriginal cultures and communities including language, history, customs, traditions, self-identity, values and heritage. Many Aboriginal youth wish to reclaim their cultural identity and reconnect with their traditional values.

#### *Sport and Recreation*

To encourage Aboriginal youth to participate in sports, recreation and active living.

#### *Social*

To assist Aboriginal youth in achieving their aspirations for an improved quality of life.

#### *Economic*

To increase the awareness of Aboriginal youth regarding a range of economic opportunities. To increase Aboriginal youth participation in these economic opportunities.

#### *Political*

To support real opportunities for Aboriginal youth to become involved in the political development of their communities and governments, and in federal, provincial, and territorial political affairs.

#### *Process*

To increase the involvement of Aboriginal youth and their communities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services for Aboriginal youth. To develop an approach that strengthens community involvement and results in co-ordination between governments and institutions, Aboriginal organizations, and within federal, provincial and territorial governments concerning programs and services for Aboriginal youth.

#### *Public Education*

To encourage and support strategies designed to raise public awareness of the issues and challenges facing Aboriginal youth.

This article was extracted from the Youth Strategy document to be found at: [http://www.aaf.gov.bc.ca/aaf/pubs/naysdec17-99\\_.htm](http://www.aaf.gov.bc.ca/aaf/pubs/naysdec17-99_.htm)

*The National Aboriginal Youth Strategy was developed by a national working group consisting of representatives from provincial and territorial governments, five national aboriginal organizations and the federal government. British Columbia was represented on the working group.*



continued from page 14

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## Two-Spirited Youth Program by Julian F. Wilson, Saulteaux

*"No commitment we make today will be more important for the long-term prosperity and well-being of our society than the commitment to invest our efforts in very young children"*  
(Speech from the Throne, October 12, 1999).

Since the 1998 announcement of *Gathering Strength—Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* and the subsequent creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, many worthwhile projects have emerged across the country to allow the process of healing to begin. The Two-Spirited Youth Program (TSYP) is one such project.

The TSYP has been in operation since July 1999, specifically designed to focus on "intergenerational" impacts, as referenced in the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's mission "to encourage and support Aboriginal people in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in the residential school system, including intergenerational impacts."

The program is administered under Vancouver's Urban Native Youth Association by Gil Lerat, a chemical dependency specialist by profession. Lerat is the youngest of twelve children and is a member of the Cowessas First Nation of south-eastern Saskatchewan. As the two-spirited youth counsellor, Lerat says, "I work out of the Broadway Youth Resource Centre, a resource for at-risk-youth, youth who have the potential of living life on the streets due to their particular circumstances."

Lerat, says, "My specific role with the program, while we are dealing with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth issues, is focussed on the intergenerational impacts of the residential school system. To best explain intergenerational impacts, you have to refer back, to what we call in psychology 'the attachment phase,' basically from zero to age six or seven. That's the time that a child attaches to their parents, the time when a child learns a set of ideas that are given to him by his or her parents. When children were taken from their parents and put through the residential school system, that very important part of human development was taken away from Aboriginal people, all the while instilling European ideas that shunned cultural beliefs and spirituality."

## **There is no doubt in my mind that every First Nation person alive today has suffered from or has been affected by the residual effects of the residential school system**

"While these children were going through the system, their cultural beliefs, spirituality and attachment to their parents were being lost. So, as they grew up and started dealing with what they endured while attending residential school, without proper healing processes, many of these children turned to alcohol and drugs to hide the pain. What ended up happening was that, when they started having children, their children were also taken away and put into residential schools. So the cycle was continuing."

"There is no doubt in my mind," says Lerat, "that every First Nation person alive today has suffered from or has been affected by the residual effects of the residential school system. By that, I mean the fact that there are children today who are growing up in an alcoholic family or chemical dependent family could be directly attributed to the residential school cycle. At this point in time, when the children are in that 'attachment phase,' they are growing up in alcoholic homes and chemically dependent homes and they're seeing that as a 'normal' way of life. What we have to do is try to break this cycle as we carry on, which is what this program is all about. Healing will take time. So my main focus with the program is to really seriously take a look at the intergenerational effects of the residential school system unique to two-spirited youth."

"The statistics are out there," says Mr. Lerat, "Just look at the number of teen suicides on reserves. It's really hard for two-spirited youth to 'come out' and the statistics show that approximately 70 percent of the Aboriginal teen suicides that are happening on reserves today is by two-spirited youth. That's startling! In a small close-knit community when somebody is two-spirited, because of the homophobia and the ridicule that they may go through, the only natural thing for them, they believe, is death. This is very sad, because most of the First Nation two-spirited people that I have met are very intelligent, smart people. It's scary to think that we are allowing our youth to die because of who they are."

## featured project



"I counsel youth on an individual basis with support group activities scheduled throughout the week. I've also made presentations on the subject at two public schools in Vancouver that have a high Aboriginal student population," says Lerat. The philosophy as noted by Lerat is that "two-spirited youth have the right to a safe, healthy, non-threatening environment in which to learn, grow and enjoy life, regardless of sexual orientation or perceived gender roles. We provide two-spirited youth with a safe, healthy and respectful environment in which to explore issues that affect them — free-of-charge." The program is available to Aboriginal youth between the ages of 13 and 29.

"With respect to partnerships," says Lerat, "if there are any organisations out there that can see some sort of partnership or linkage that could help two-spirited youth, I would urge you to contact me. I would like to work closer with First Nations communities to deal with this issue together. Not only to just help my program, but for me to help them as well. Sort of like a reciprocating relationship. I see our Native leaders as our role models by just being leaders. It's time to start honouring and acknowledging the fact that two-spirited people and two-spirited youth exist. There is nothing to be afraid of. They're human. What I'm saying is, I would hope that most of our Native leaders today have worked through their own issues with respect to homosexuality and homophobia and start advocating for our youth who happen to be gay. That would be something I would urge all our leaders to do."

"The bottom line," says Lerat, "is that I want to work with youth, and this program is for youth. I'm here for the youth. They are our future. If I could save somebody from becoming a burden on society, i.e., save them from living on welfare or doing drugs, and instead got them to lead a productive life where they do start paying their taxes, like everybody else, and become a productive member of society, that's what I want. Then not only do we save ourselves, financially, society-wise, but we also create a person who's healthy and balanced and has a meaningful life, and that's more important!"





The Urban Native Youth Association began providing services to Aboriginal youth in Greater Vancouver in 1989 when it became abundantly clear that a growing number of young people were continuing to leave reserves for the city. An Aboriginal youth with few job skills, minimal training, and little or no knowledge of where to go for help usually ends up on the streets.

#### AHF TWO-SPIRITED YOUTH PROGRAM

The Two-Spirited Youth Program began in July of 1999 and we are now entering our second year. The Two-Spirited Youth Program is for 13 – 29 year old gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning First Nations youth. The services that we provide are individual and group counselling, education, sharing circles, referrals and advocacy. There are three groups which operate within the program: one is an “open” group allowing any two-spirited youth to participate; one is for “sexually exploited” youth for those youth who are involved in the sex trade and the other group is for those who participate in the Aboriginal Ways Accelerate Youth Program. Each of the groups has a different focus, yet the primary objectives of the intergenerational effects of residential school and issues that effect Two-Spirited Youth remain constant.

The goal of our program is to assist Two-Spirited youth in addressing issues that are unique to them in a safe, non-judgmental, supportive environment. Thus, enabling them to make informed choices for a more productive and healthier life. The basic philosophy of our program is that Two-Spirited youth have the right to a safe, healthy, non-threatening environment in which to learn, grow and enjoy life regardless of sexual orientation or perceived gender roles.

The first year saw a number of different types of Two-Spirited Youth accessing the program. Gay male, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual and questioning youth all accessed the program from different lifestyles. We had youth that were street entrenched, homeless, sexually exploited, “closed” in healthy home environments, as well as, students in both high school and college.

The primary focus in counselling sessions is getting the youth to understand the cyclical nature of abuse and how it started with the residential school system. I see this part of the healing process as very important in that we educate the youth about what happened to the older generations when they went to residential school. I begin to explain to they youth that the children that were taken from their parents to go to residential school were taken at the “attachment phase” of human development. From the time that a child is born to the age of 6 or 7, this is when a child “attaches” to his/her parents and this is the point in human development where a child learns the majority of his learned thoughts, feelings, behaviours and emotions. They were being taught in residential school that their way of living was pagan and wrong at this stage in development. When they were returned home to their parents for holidays and such, they began to develop insecurities from what they were being taught. Added to this fact, that many different types of abuses occurred in these residential schools, these children were destroyed on many levels. As these children grew older they

began to use alcohol and drugs as a way of coping with things that cause them great pain. When they had children, they did not know how to “attach” to their children because this phase of development was taken from them. Their children began growing up in alcohol and drug infested homes and began to view this type of behaviour as “normal”, because this WAS normal for them. The cycle continues today. Hence, they can have a better understanding of their upbringing and where they are now.

The next step in our healing process is then to view the Traditional Role of Two-Spirited People. Two-Spirited people in traditional society were very honoured and had special rites they performed within their tribe. We discuss the different roles the Two-Spirited people played in traditional society. Each tribe had a different slant on their Two-Spirited roles, but a lot of similarities occurred. For example, a lot of tribes honoured their Two-Spirited people by allowing them to be pipe carriers within different ceremonies or they began the tree cutting ceremony for the Sun Dance. What we try to encourage through places like the library and net, we try to find information about the youth’s tribe with respect to Two-Spiritedness. When we view the Traditional roles, this allows the youth to feel good and gives them a new perspective on how they view themselves.

Another part of the program is Education. Part of working with the youth is giving them education with respect to safer sex, harm reduction in addiction, relationships and life skills. Workshops are also available to the general population, social service organizations, native, youth and gay communities with respect to homophobia, intergenerational residential school effects, Traditional Two-Spirited Roles and addictions. While educational workshops were available in the first year, it is going to become more of a priority in our second year.

The highlight of the first year was three success stories for our program. After working with two youth in both individual and group counselling sessions, one lesbian youth was reunited with her birth family in Mission and one transsexual youth was reunited with his family in Edmonton. One other youth obtained full-time employment because we linked him up with appropriate services.

In conclusion, the first year of our Program can be described as nothing less than truly successful for this type of first year program. The communities with which we worked with, ie: Native, Youth, Gay and Social Services communities, all accessed our program for different reasons. I look forward to continued on-going success in our second year.

*For more information on the Two-Spirited Youth Program contact,  
Gil Lerat, Two-Spirited Youth Counsellor,  
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email: glerat@unya.bc.ca •*

*Healing Words* is available by mail and from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation website: [www.ahf.ca](http://www.ahf.ca)

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*Healing Words is interested in residential school photographs for publication in upcoming issues. Photographs help us to tell the history of the residential school system, and its intergenerational impacts. If you have pictures you would like to share, please contact the editors: 801-75 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5E7. Phone: 1-888-725-8886.*

# p o e m s

Where does the spirit go?

When your world is taken away  
and you have no choice but to stay  
Where does the spirit go?

When you didn't get to say good bye  
and are not comforted when you cry  
Where does the spirit go?

When you are ridiculed by the way you talk  
and you have not chosen the life path you walk  
Where does the spirit go?

When people disregard the way you feel  
and tell you that your beliefs are not real  
Where does the spirit go?

When the others treat you wrong  
and you no longer hear the inner drumming song  
Where does the spirit go?

When you long for the people that you love  
and for sight of the sacred eagle that fly's above  
Where does the spirit go?

When they kept you until you were grown  
and then told you, you were on your own  
Where does the spirit go?

It's not where the spirit goes  
but how the spirit grows  
for the spirit is a precious seed  
that comes out during times of need  
it will help at times of trouble  
and, more and more, it will double  
people say, the spirit is a special part  
that is deep down in your heart

the spirit does not go  
it can only grow and grow and grow  
Where does the spirit go?

-Trudi Tinant

Trudi attended the AHF Youth Conference in Edmonton as the Youth Representative of the Metis National Council

Esquao Coeur

Everybody said she was a leader, a beauty  
That the sun and summer skies were in her hair  
And in her eyes  
As a child she saw the magic in the spectrum of the rainbow  
Seeking for a pot of gold she knew was needed and desired

She would give each one a fortune, so they'd never be unhappy.  
She would buy each one a pony, for their mansion in the sky.  
Her heart was full of wonder, she was loved by all Creation  
And she gave without resistance, til the day she slipped inside.

Now she walks alone with memories behind her.  
And there'll never be another moments pain  
As the evening dew distills into the misty morning air  
She's a woman and a warrior.....again.

Everybody said she was much stronger than the others.  
That the burdens which she bore were really 'blessings in disguise'.  
She trusted in her elders, in the blackrobes, in the priests  
Til the day her resistance left her and she slipped inside.

Now she walks alone with vision left to lead her.  
And there'll never be another moment's pain.  
As the evening dew distills into the misty morning air.  
She's a woman and a warrior.....again.

Everybody said.....

By Laura Langstaff  
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SOCAN

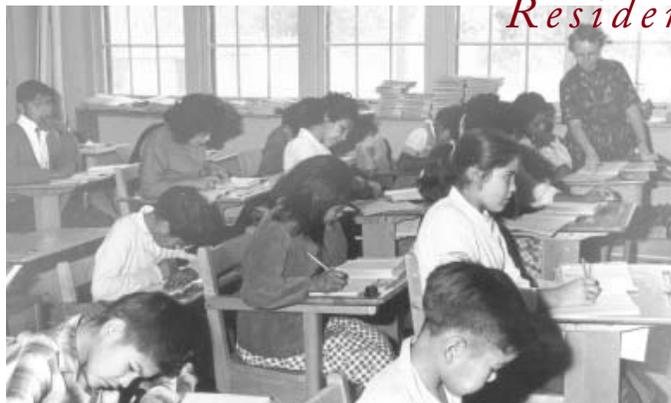
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## Residential School Resources



The following resource list is provided as a public service. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation does not necessarily endorse these materials. Included are books, articles, videos, audio tapes, reports, survivor groups and websites that address residential schools and/or their intergenerational legacy. A resource list with new entries is presented with every issue. See earlier issues for other resources.



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### Healing Words

*The purpose of Healing Words is to be an instrument for honouring the Foundation's commitments to survivors, their descendants, and their communities. It is one of the means by which we demonstrate our respect for the agreements the Foundation has signed. It is also a vehicle for supporting the mission, vision and objectives of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation as well as the goals of the Foundation's Communications Strategy.*

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Porter, E. The Anglican Church and Native Education: residential schools and assimilation. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1981.

### Website - Youth Resources

National Aboriginal Youth Strategy Prepared by the Working Group of the National Aboriginal Youth Strategy:

[http://www.aaf.gov.bc.ca/aaf/pubs/naysdec17-99\\_.htm](http://www.aaf.gov.bc.ca/aaf/pubs/naysdec17-99_.htm)

Schoolnet/Rescol  
<http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/teachings>

Aboriginal Digital Collections  
<http://aboriginalcollections.ic.gc.ca/>

Aboriginal Relations office  
<http://www17.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/BRA/Jeunesse/jeunesse.html>

National Association of Friendship Centres - Youth Website  
<http://www.ausyop.com/>

Aboriginal Youth Business Council  
<http://www.aybc.org/>

The Aboriginal Youth Network  
<http://ayn.ca/>

Metis National Advisory Youth Council  
<http://www.ayn.ca/Metis/about.htm>

**For a complete list of Residential School Resources, call Wayne K. Spear at the Communications Department:**

**1-888-725-8886 – extension 237.**