



Alberta Children  
&  
Youth Initiative

# Prevention of Aboriginal Youth Suicide: An Alberta Approach—Spirit of Hope

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## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

The Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy is a cross-ministry initiative of the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (ACYI). This includes the Ministries of Children's Services, Health and Wellness, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Seniors and Community Support, Solicitor General and Public Security, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) and Education.

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## Welcome to Our Newsletter - Summer 2006

Aboriginal communities are concerned about the future of their children and youth. The suicide rates among Aboriginal youth are five to seven times higher than for the non-Aboriginal population in Alberta. As a result of this concern, several Chiefs and Councils approached the Cabinet Ministers asking for assistance to address the high suicide rate among Aboriginal people. The Alberta Government has responded through the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (ACYI), establishing a cross-ministry working committee charged with the task of supporting Aboriginal communities through the creation of an Alberta Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (AYSPS).

The strategy began with the engagement of Aboriginal communities. Three pilot sites were supported in the creation of an action plan that considered individual community strengths, and had a focus on prevention and a recognition of community based resources.

Each of the three pilot sites have created and begun implementing their action plans. Preliminary feedback from the pilot sites is positive and momentum is building to con-

tinue support to children and youth, and in turn support community capacity. Communities are eager to share their learnings, challenges and triumphs with others. It is anticipated that promising practices will emerge and will be shared more broadly.

This is an exciting strategy, one that instills hope and builds on the strengths of individuals and communities.

The vision of AYSPS is that *"Aboriginal youth feel hopeful, empowered and optimistic about their futures."*

Strategy goals are:

- To reduce the number of Aboriginal youth who attempt and/or die by suicide
- To encourage governments and communities to recognize Aboriginal youth suicide as a preventable public health issue
- To promote province wide leadership and shared accountability for an effective, province wide community based, approach to preventing Aboriginal youth suicide and suicide behavior

## Pilot Sites

Three pilot sites have been engaged involving 8 communities:

1. Lethbridge and surrounding First Nations
2. Tri-Settlements — Métis Settlements surrounding High Prairie
3. Eden Valley First Nation.

Members of the AYSPS Working Group have been meeting with the site teams in the three pilot sites to prepare for the action planning process.



## Eden Valley

Eden Valley has a population of over 500 people. It is nestled in the foothills of the Rockies approximately 120 kilometers south west of Calgary.

Eden Valley is a member of the Stoney Nation. In the late 1940s land was purchased along the foothills close to Longview to allow for expansion of the Bearspaw Band.

Although in close proximity to Calgary, Eden Valley has drawn upon its own resources and identified its own strengths to create an action plan with a focus on prevention.

### Action Plan Includes:

- ◆ Develop a community youth lifeskills
- ◆ Talking circles for the Elders, women, men and youth within the community
- ◆ Centennial Book Project— Youth from the Life Skills Program interview Elders in the community
- ◆ Connect with the Future Leaders Program to develop programs for the youth
- ◆ Prepare an inventory of existing program, services and supports available in Eden Valley, including, government programs and services that could be accessed to support The Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy
- ◆ Develop a Girls and Boys Program
- ◆ Build on Susan Aglukark workshop for youth who have at risk factors
- ◆ Host a community awareness workshop.

Eden Valley has drawn upon its own resources and identified its own strengths to create an action plan with a focus on prevention.

A coordinator position was established to oversee the Community Development Program which focused on education and awareness of the social issues facing Eden Valley. Activities included Gamma Girls, resource library, community newsletter, and Warrior's Program. A Community Awareness Workshop was held during the beginning stages of the program to bring the community together and raise awareness, and to provide guidance for program development. A 12 week Youth Leadership Training Program was offered during the summer. Alberta Future Leaders Program was provided for 18—24 year olds (AYSPS contributed a third of the cost).



For more information

Contact

**Sherri Little Chief**

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# Tri-Settlement High Prairie

## Elder's Prayer

*Walk tall as  
the trees  
Live strong  
as the  
mountains  
Be gentle as  
the spring  
rain  
Keep the  
warmth of  
summer in  
your heart  
And the  
Great Spirit  
will always  
be with you.*

The northern Métis Settlements, commonly referred to as the tri-settlements, include the communities of Gift Lake, Peavine, and East Prairie. Initial community consultation sessions were held in 2004 with representatives from the provincial government and communities. During these sessions, the High Prairie tri-settlement communities determined that very few resources existed within the communities and the organizations who worked in the human services field were stretched and their needs would be best met by collaborating and hiring a pilot site coordinator. The role of the coordinator was to develop an overall Action Plan to address the needs in the community. The coordinator's responsibility was to bring the communities together to develop an Action Plan. Métis Settlement General Council continues to hold the contract and is the organization responsible for the project. The Action Plan involved various agencies and community groups to support, identify, and address possible risk situation (schools, addictions centers, youth centers, health centers, and others). A specific activity offered during the first year was the Yellow Ribbon Program.



There has been a strong sense of pride and ownership in the pilot project to date, resulting in a desire to move forward.

**Contact: Carol Carifelle-Brzezicki 1-888-213-4400**

# Lethbridge

Two large community meetings were held in Lethbridge in 2004 with a broad representation of community stakeholders. The AYSPS was presented and stakeholders were asked to provide a response to how this could be implemented locally. At these meetings the community elected to develop a pilot site initiative that included five different communities. All communities with the exception of one had programs in place that they wanted to enhance. The community representatives felt that many organizations and communities “shared the same people” and that there was often overlap between community services. Some community members tend to move around and access services and programs in multiple communities at different times. A cross-community approach would provide more consistency to the initiative.

- ◆ **Medicine Tree Friendship Society—Lethbridge:** Education in suicide prevention for youth aged 18-24 over a four day assembly (approximately 100 participants). From this group 16 delegates were selected for further train-the-trainer sessions. Based on this work a Youth Peer Workshop Model was developed.  
**Contact: Stacy Chief Body—(403) 328-2414**
- ◆ **Napi—Friendship Association—Pincher Creek:** Offers recreation and leisure programming with the intent of strengthening the cultural identity of adolescents in order to provide them with a feeling of security, sense of belonging and hope for the future. Hosted a Gatekeeper Training Program for youth.
- ◆ **Piikani Child and Family Service—Brocket:** Hired a part-time coordinator who, through a community development approach, developed mechanisms for a community driven program to increase awareness and coordination of suicide prevention activities in the community.
- ◆ **Aboriginal Mental Health Program, Population Health—Chinook Health Region:** Worked with urban Aboriginal youth at risk for mental health and associated problems by offering 2 training program sessions. They focused on facilitating improved understanding of wellness and well-being of and by Aboriginal youth (in order to ensure that the underlying values of Aboriginal youth are reflected) and encouraging them to assume more responsibility in their health seeking behaviours.
- ◆ **Blood Tribe Department of Health Inc.—Standoff:** Interviewed Elders in the community and incorporated these teachings into a Gatekeepers Training Program. Offered five workshops and a summer camp. Also provided training opportunities through ASIST and Stress Management Workshops.



2006 PHOTO CONTEST WINNER: DEBORAH NELSON

## Evaluation

In order to ensure full learning from the pilot sites an evaluation is a critical component of the strategy. Preliminary findings are positive and momentum is building to share further learnings from the existing pilots and to welcome the two new pilot sites.



## Next Steps

### **The addition of two new pilot sites!**

- ◆ **Dene Tha**
- ◆ **Hobbema**

With the addition of these two new sites, this will conclude the pilot phase of the Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy. The learnings and promising practices will be published and made available to all communities in Alberta so...

***“Aboriginal Youth Feel Hopeful, Empowered and Optimistic About Their Futures.”***

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