



In the Spirit of HEALING & WELLNESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALING AND WELLNESS STRATEGY

The turtle represents Turtle Island because Turtle Island is Mother Earth. The people are holding hands because it means they will help each other with their problems. They are standing in a circle because it represents the circle of life. They could be our friends, families and strangers that either need help or are helping.

Girl Power



Inside this issue

FEATURE: YOUTH

Nishnawbe Aski Nation: Girl Power	1
Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle: Good Medicine	2
Native Child and Family Services of Toronto: The Native Learning Centre	4
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health: Cyber Café	5
Lead Your Way	6

COMMUNITY PROFILES

Niwasa: A Recipe for Success	8
Mid-Winter Festival at Tyendinaga	10

AHWS NEWS & UPDATES

SAGE WORDS Gus Hill	12
------------------------	----

Girl Power trainers in training. (L TO R, FRONT) Racheal Fiddler, Sandy Lake FN (standing); Catherine Cheechoo, Moose Cree First Nation; Ashley Kowtiash, Long Lake #58 First Nation; Jennifer Wynne, Kashechewan First Nation; Karen Ossibens, Long Lake #58 First Nation; Gail Anishinabie, Sandy Lake First Nation; Jamie-Lee Ossibens, Long Lake #58 First Nation (standing). (L TO R, CENTRE) Carrie-Ann Meekis, Keewaywin First Nation; Violet Chum, Moose Cree First Nation; Mandy Isaac, Moose Cree First Nation; Dianne Buchan, Bearskin Lake First Nation; Nita Quequish, North Caribou Lake First Nation; Esther Mckay, Bearskin Lake First Nation. (L TO R, BACK) Alana Dixon, Mishkegogamang First Nation; Bev Perrault, Brunswick House First Nation; Rita Kenny, Lac Seul First Nation; Jennifer Cheechoo, Moose Cree First Nation; Mary Jane Archibald, Taykwa Tagamou First Nation. (not pictured) April Cheechoo, Fort Albany First Nation; Susan D. Strang, Pikangikum First Nation; Wand Grey, Pikangikum First Nation; Tracy Peters; Pikangikum First Nation; Marie Quill, Pikangikum First Nation; Wanda Meekis, Deer Lake First Nation.

The Decade program is an initiative that is designed to prevent suicide in NAN territory through youth empowerment and the celebration of their young people. There is recognition that at the heart of a positive youth development approach is inclusion of young people and that they must be treated as a valuable part of NAN society. To this end, the Decade for Youth and Development Office has initiated a number of programs

and events. Among these is Girl Power.

In Canada, the rate of suicide among Aboriginal people for all age groups is two to three times higher than the rate among non-Aboriginal people. Among Aboriginal youth, it is five to six times higher than among their non-Aboriginal peers. Across the lifespan, Aboriginal youth aged 15–25 are at the highest risk of suicide and youth

CONTINUED PAGE 7

Aboriginal Sports & Games: Historic Roots

Lacrosse is one of the most well known Aboriginal games. Every community has its own version and different names. The Haudenshonia people call lacrosse “tewaarathon” or “little brother of war” because it provided valuable skills for young warriors.

Like many Aboriginal groups, Métis people were primarily concerned with day to day survival. Their two main economic activities were hunting bison and the fur trade, from which many sports and games developed. For example, **sharp-shooting, wrestling, running and horse races** honed many essential skills for hunting, defending the community or working in the fur trade.

Inuit people have continued to live in harsh environments, and there was a lack of material for games and sport. **Blanket toss**, is a game where a seal or walrus skin is held in the air by the players and one player sits in the middle and is thrown up in the air. The highest flyer is the winning player!

The **ring and pin game** is an indoor game originating in the Eastern Woodlands of Ontario. The ring is made of bone or leather with holes in it. The pin is made of a sharp stick or bone and has weights on it like caribou hooves. The object of the game is to put the pin through the holes of the leather, which develops hand-eye coordination and accuracy.

Dancing is something we see on the powwow trail today, but has a long history in many Aboriginal communities across Canada. The element of competition dancing is prevalent on the powwow circuit, and dancers can demonstrate their endurance and athleticism in high energy dances such as the fancy dance.

Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle: Good Medicine

The Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle promotes the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health of Aboriginal youth through leadership, positive lifestyles and personal growth.

The fastest growing segment of the Canadian population is Aboriginal youth. In Ontario, more than fifty per cent of the Aboriginal population (on- and off-reserve) is under the age of twenty-seven. Given these numbers, it is no surprise that Aboriginal sport and recreation is becoming a priority in Aboriginal communities across Ontario. Aboriginal youth across Canada participate in sports and recreation not only as an athletic outlet, but as a means of developing social and leadership skills that carry on into all facets of their lives.

Sport and recreation is no longer just “play time” and is recognized in many communities as essential to the positive development of healthy lifestyles. For many years, Aboriginal traditional lifestyles were very physically active, and the role of sports and games was integral to survival. Important familial values and belief systems were emphasized in games, and sports and bonds were built within extended families. Besides the physical benefits, youth participation in sport, games and recreation builds positive self-esteem, leadership development, social interaction skills, and emotional outlets.

Providing access to such outlets and personal development is the basis of the Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle. Founded in 1999, the OASC has emerged as a leader in representing grassroots, community and organizational goals of Aboriginal people involved in sport in Ontario. The reinforcement of family and cultural values, encouragement of youth leadership and the development and promotion of positive lifestyles in individuals and families have provided a foundation for many of Ontario’s top Aboriginal athletes. Kris Johnson, the Leadership Development Manager of the OASC, says that “communities find strength in gathering in family oriented, positive settings”. She says that sports and recreation provides opportunities for youth to develop personal goal setting skills and commitment.

The Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle is a member of the national organization, the Aboriginal Sports Circle. Along with thirteen other provincial/territorial organizations, Aboriginal people have more accessible and equitable sport and recreational opportunities. Through the ASC, the OASC is committed to the development of Aboriginal athletes and coaches by supporting their efforts to achieve personal excellence through sport.

A holistic approach is promoted by offering a more balanced perspective that incorporates both the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional personal development of athletes, coaches and community sport leaders. Integrative programs are created with mainstream sport organizations to bring expertise in athlete and coaching development to Aboriginal communities.

Youth programs

The OASC participates in many sporting events such as the Ontario Aboriginal Summer Games. The OASC also submits hockey teams to the National Aboriginal Hockey Championship (NAHC) by helping with registration, team bonds, assisting with the purchase of warm up suits, and the recruitment of sport leaders. The NAHC took place in Kanawake from April 30 to May 6th in 2006. Developing leadership is an important component of the OASC, and they provide many opportunities to increase leadership capacities such as coaching clinics.

Health Promotion

Physical activity through sport and recreation are important elements of health and well-being. Increasingly, Canada’s Aboriginal population is dealing with an onslaught of physical conditions (such as diabetes) and mental ailments (such as anxiety and depression). The drastic changes to

Carey-Leigh Thomas competes at the >
2005 Ontario Aboriginal Summer
Games held at Laurentian University
in Sudbury.

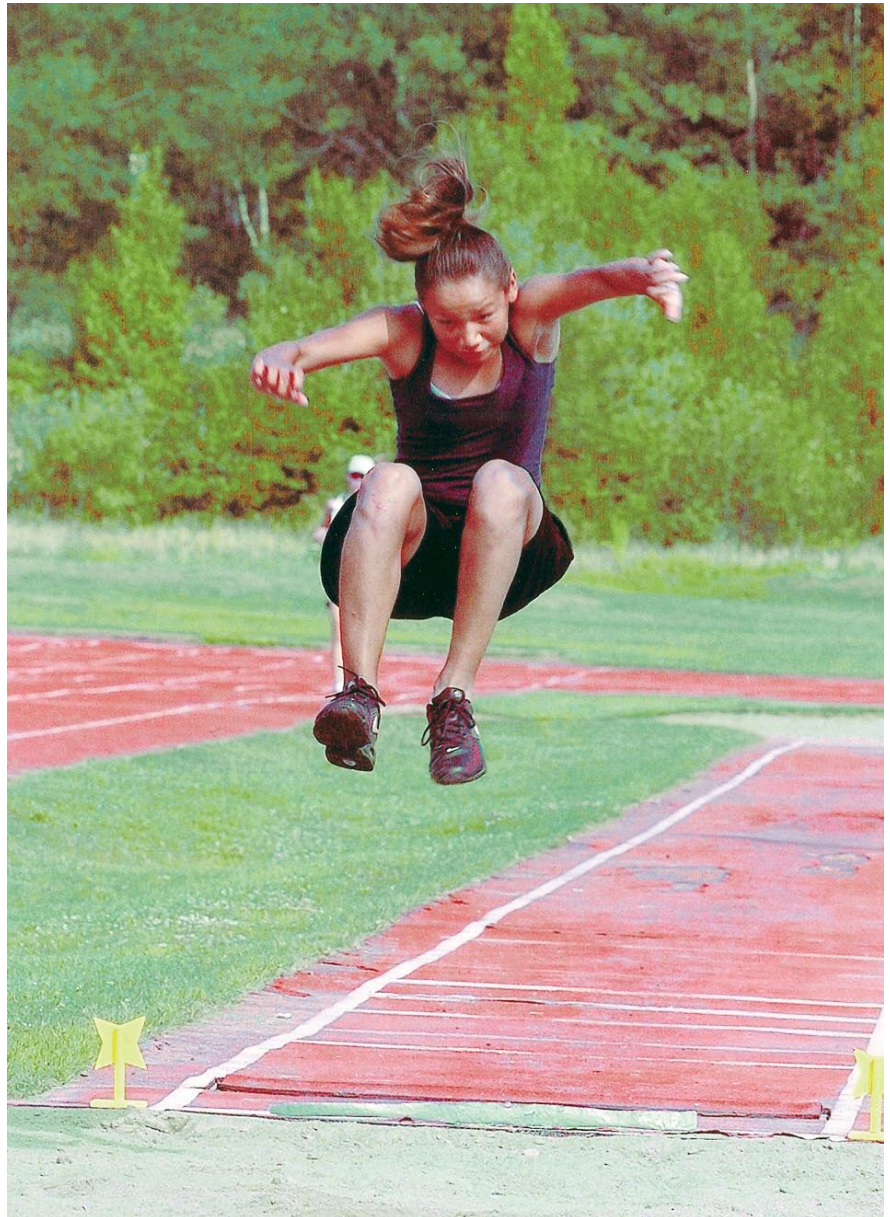
Aboriginal lifestyles have eliminated some of our traditional means of physical activity and food patterns.

The impact of modernization on Aboriginal health cannot be underestimated. As communities were hooked onto the electricity grid, installed running water and built roads, a sedentary lifestyle began. Modern conveniences eliminated the need to chop and haul wood and carry water. Family success is no longer based on the physical capacity of a family to contribute to survival. The expenditure of energy has decreased with modern conveniences.

Aboriginal Identity & Sports

The importance of Aboriginal sports and recreation is evident at the federal government level. In May 2005, the Department of Heritage Canada released a policy for Sports Canada on “Aboriginal Peoples Participation in Sport”. This policy recognizes that there are major barriers for Aboriginal people to fully participate in sport and that participation in sport will continue to make an impact on the healthy, active lifestyles of Aboriginal Peoples. Throughout 2005, the “Year of Sport and Recreation”, the Aboriginal Sports Circle and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport Physical Activity (CAAWS) worked together for the development of community programs funded through Team Spirit: Aboriginal Girls in Sport. For more information on this initiative, visit <www.caaws.ca>.

Aboriginal people have made tremendous contributions to sport and recreation in Canada. Much of “Canadian identity” is closely linked to Indigenous sports and recreation. One can hardly talk about sports and recreation without mention of lacrosse, snowshoeing and tobogganing. While many of these activities have become appropriated into Canadian culture, the true spirit of sports and recreation remains. Aboriginal people today compete internationally in all sports, from cross country skiing (Sharon Anne and Shirley Anne Firth), to rowing (Alwyn Morris), to hockey (Wayne ‘Gino’ Odjick), to long distance runners (Tom



Longboat). These athletes act as role models to our youth and inspire us to succeed.

Whether sport and recreation occurs in an organized manner in hockey leagues and tournaments, in the backyard or in a local gym, there is no doubt that it strengthens the physical aspects of ourselves and reinforces the importance of the spiritual and cultural aspects of our identities. It is important to support organizations like the Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle as important advocates for our health, not only physically, but emotionally, spiritually and mentally.

For more information on the Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle, visit <www.oasc.net> or call (905) 768-9070.

Aboriginal Athletes of Note

Tom Longboat, who was Onondaga from Six Nations, is known as one of Canada’s premiere pre-WWI athletes. In 1909, Longboat was proclaimed Professional Champion of the World after winning a marathon in New York’s Madison Square Gardens.

The 2005 Winner of the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards in Sports is **Sharon Anne Firth** from Gwich’in First Nation in the Northwest Territories. Sharon competed in the 1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympics in skiing. In 1985 she won the overall title in the Great American Ski Chase.

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto: The Native Learning Centre

One of only three alternative high schools for Aboriginal youth in Ontario, the Native Learning Centre is an award-winning program recognized for its contributions to the advancement of the Toronto Aboriginal community.

The Native Learning Centre (NLC), run by Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST), is an award-winning program. It's an alternative high school for Aboriginal youth, one of only three in Ontario, offering grades nine to twelve. In its seventh year of operation, the Centre was recognized in 2005 by the City of Toronto with an Access, Equity and Human Rights Award for the contribution they are making to the well-being and advancement of the Toronto Aboriginal community. In 2003, the Toronto District School Board gave them the Appreciation Award for Innovative Program Enhancements.

Bill Schmut, the Coordinator of the NLC says that while the awards are a good recognition of the work they're doing, he doesn't consider them their greatest success. "These kids are coming to school," he says, "we're keeping them alive. That's our biggest success. Our biggest objective is to keep them off the streets, out of jail, alive, safe and secure. A lot of these students had major attendance problems before in mainstream schools and now they're consistently coming to our program. They wouldn't have a chance anywhere else."

The NLC has grown from ten students in its first year to the current enrolment of thirty-five. Twenty-two are full-time students and cover grades nine to twelve. The rest are part-time students working on their GED on-line and receiving tutoring. From the beginning, NCFST has partnered with Jarvis Collegiate and "...they give us amazing, amazing support", says Bill. Jarvis Collegiate provides four instructors who are up to the many challenges of teaching a full high school curriculum to a diverse student population in a one-room basement classroom.

Bill describes their students as 'at-risk' with some being at 'high risk'. "All of them have dropped out of the mainstream," he says, "because they couldn't

fit in for various reasons. Some of the family backgrounds are fairly stable and in other cases, the parents have difficulty with issues and problems." The students face life-threatening issues like homelessness and substance abuse. Others have financial problems and several are dealing with the justice system. Still others have challenges that include special education requirements, illiteracy and innumeracy. The 'one-room schoolhouse' lacks the space in which to work privately and individually with students who require special attention with, for example, literacy training. NCFST is, however, currently engaged in discussions and negotiations for larger quarters.

We have the social services combined with a school and that's the model that works.

In spite of all the odds, Bill is proud that out of a hundred students who have gone through the NLC over the last six years, eleven have gone on to higher learning. This includes the University of Toronto, George Brown College and the Ontario College of Art and Design. These are youth who might have continued to live on the fringes of society were it not for the intervention of the NLC.

Other communities and agencies are looking at the NLC as a model. A major factor that contributes to their success is the impressive array of support services offered by NCFST. A family services agency established in 1988, NCFST became a child welfare authority a couple of years ago. They recognize that urban Aboriginal youth are among the most disadvantaged in society. Thus, much work and planning has gone into developing programs that address all

areas in the lives of their young clients.

NCFST uses a Medicine Wheel model with inter-related but distinct components to address the physical, spiritual, emotional and mental health needs of the youth. Transitional housing, recreational programs, summer camps and AIDS awareness are among the programs offered for physical well-being. In the spiritual component, teaching circles, drum making and ceremonies, such as the Sweat Lodge, are offered. To help the youth with emotional well-being, anger management groups, drug and alcohol counselling and referrals to treatment centres are among the services provided. The NLC forms part of the mental well-being component along with life skills, outreach workers and an entrepreneurship training program.

NLC students are each assigned a youth worker at NCFST. Meghann LeClair, a trained Child and Youth Worker, does street outreach but she also carries a caseload of ten to twelve students. "We're their primary worker," she explains, "and we act as an advocate for that youth. We can refer them or help them get into services because there's a whole bunch of services that are offered down here." Meghann lists their 7th Generation Art Program, recreational activities, youth in custody advocacy, addictions counselling and cultural teachings. Each of the six youth workers has a specialty, i.e., anger management and anti-bullying workshops, mental health, sports and recreation,

"When there's a problem with the students, I can quickly put a team together", says Bill. "We have the caseworkers and the resources and when I need help, I go to the support systems within the agency to make sure the youth's needs are met and I advocate on their behalf. We have the social services combined with a school and that's the model that works."



Cyber Café participants with school supplies donated to them by the Ottawa Police. PHOTO TERESA BUCKSHOT

The Cyber Café: A Happening Place

For over three years, the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health has operated the Cyber Café, a culturally based homework club for Aboriginal youth. The program has encouraged youth to stay in school, provided them with the tools to improve their technological literacy, and helped them achieve success in school, while also reinforcing cultural values and beliefs.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health is a happening place for Ottawa's youth. On those days, from four to seven in the evening, youth aged twelve to eighteen show up at Wabano's Cyber Café. They do their homework, write essays, carry out research on the Internet and just generally enjoy working in one another's company.

Current statistics show that First Nations youth school attendance lags behind that of Canadian youth. Two-thirds of Aboriginal youth not attending school report an educational level below high school certification, and only three per cent of Aboriginal Canadians have a university degree, compared to twelve per cent of the general population. Wabano hopes to improve this bleak educational picture, at least for Aboriginal youth in Ottawa, through its Cyber Café.

The Cyber Café, a culturally-based homework club, was initiated three years ago. It was launched in response to feedback from front-line workers including the Ottawa Police Department on both the lack of culturally-sensitive programs for Aboriginal youth and the success of other homework clubs in the area. It's designed to help Aboriginal youth achieve academic success, encourage them to stay in school, improve technology literacy while also reinforcing cultural values and beliefs. It's a tall order but one that Wabano seems to achieve.

The Program Coordinator, Teresa Buckshot, an Algonquin from Kitigan Zibi First Nation, has been on the job for just over six months. She explains that the Café's seventeen computers were

donated by IBM and marked the first major gift from a corporation to the Wabano Centre. Teresa says that, by far, the computers are the most popular feature of the program because many of the students do not have computers at home. The program also provides tutors to help the students with their assignments and with software such as Microsoft Word, Excel and WordPerfect. The tutors are Aboriginal university students and are positive role models for the youth.

The Cyber Café's activities are not restricted to academic work. The program design is based on the Medicine Wheel to ensure that the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of the youth are met along with their mental needs in a holistic and balanced manner. Health promotion, physical recreation, traditional Aboriginal teachings and field trips are offered through the program. Wabano's Nurse Practitioners educate the youth on a number of subjects including HIV/AIDS, addictions and STDs on a one-to-one or group basis. Health promoters provide information sessions on topics such as diabetes.

The Odawa Friendship Centre and nearby parks are used to engage the youth in physical activities. Twenty-nine percent of Aboriginal youth are obese and the rate of diabetes in Aboriginal youth is three to five times higher than the general population. Physical exercise decreases the risk of these diseases and research has shown that exercise also promotes learning and intellectual capacity. Karate, aerobics, soccer and baseball as well as twice-yearly field trips for rock climbing and laser tag are enjoyed by the young people.

Visiting elders and cultural teachers help fulfill the program's mandate to provide knowledge about Aboriginal culture—teachings, values, beliefs and practices. Many of the youth, says Teresa Buckshot, may be disconnected from their home communities and extended families. "They're urban Natives," she says, "and they don't learn about their culture in school so we try to give them as much as we can here. We're just opening that door for them to let them know where they come from, who their people are, how it was and why it turned out to be like it is today."

Speakers who have recently shared cultural teachings with the youth include Liza Mosher, Elder from Wikwemikong Unceded Reserve, and Basil Johnston, teacher, author and Ojibway language expert from Chippewas of Nawash First Nation. There are plans to teach drumming to the youth with a goal of forming a drum group. Wabano's Cultural Coordinator Jason Whitebear, a Saulteaux from Whitebear First Nation in Saskatchewan will be leading this activity.

Informal feedback from parents reveals that youth are completing their homework on time now and they feel the general environment at the Wabano Centre has had a positive influence on their children. Last year, thirty-five youth accessed the program and a resounding ninety percent of these youth successfully completed their grade. A mother of a participant who showed significant improvements at school said, "what Wabano is doing is very positive and should continue".

Lead Your Way: Aboriginal Youth, Extraordinary Role Models

Canada's Aboriginal youth have twelve role models to look up to because of the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) Role Model program called "Lead Your Way". Role models from across Canada are selected annually to inspire Aboriginal youth to dream and pursue their own goals by sharing stories about their own success. The role models share a common story: ordinary youth emerge from their communities as extraordinary role models by putting their community, and families before themselves. Role models attend to achievements in volunteering, school, sports, business or cultural development and commitment.

Lead Your Way highlights the accomplishments of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth across Canada. The NAHO runs Lead Your Way and it is funded by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Canada. The role model program began in 1984, known as the National Native Role Model Program, and has since changed hosts over the years. In 2002, the program was redesigned to become inclusive of First Nations, Inuit and Métis. NAHO was a logical host for the role model program because of their mandate of promoting health and healthy living among Aboriginal Peoples.

The Lead Your Way program promotes youth who aspire to NAHO's vision of empowerment. Every year, community members, peers, and teachers nominate Aboriginal youth between the ages of thirteen and thirty and role models are chosen by Aboriginal Youth. The outgoing role models choose the role models for the following year.

Role models are equipped with promotional material and training in public speaking, interview skills and dealing with the media. On request from communities, organizations and schools, role models travel across Canada to share the story of their journey. Two of the twelve role models chosen in 2004–2005 are Jaime Koebel and



Lead Your Way role model and PhD student Cara Wehkamp conducting research at the University of Guelph: "I try to communicate to students that it is so important to be proud of who you are, where you come from, and that you can incorporate your culture in everything you do." PHOTO MARTIN SCHWALBE

Cara Wehkamp. Both of these young women are pursuing graduate degrees and contributing to their Aboriginal community.

Jaime who is originally from Lac La Biche in Alberta is a role model for many youth like herself who manage to juggle family life, academic pursuits and community volunteering. Jaime is currently studying for a Master's degree in Canadian Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, and is busy raising three children while maintaining a close cultural connection to her Cree and Métis heritage. Jaime's academic work reflects her goal to educate people on the issues that affect Indigenous Peoples around the world such as health, youth identity, governance and policy issues. She volunteers for the Department of Canadian Heritage's Aboriginal Language Initiative and is an advisory member for the Aboriginal Youth Advisory Council. She

is also a visual artist whose artwork is seen across the world.

In the last year, Jaime has learned many insights about herself. She realizes that being a role model is about being a "constant work in progress, and not being a role model at every point in your life". The NAHO Role Model program has provided a great opportunity for self-reflection. Jaime recognizes that although she has reached many goals, she still has "a lot of growing to do" and that with her busy schedule, she must constantly seek a balance.

Cara Wehkamp also works towards balance as she pursues a PhD in Environmental Biology at the University of Guelph and continues to lead the Aboriginal Student Association on campus. Cara is the deserving recipient of many leadership awards including the Andre Auger Citizenship Award, a nominee for the ywca Women of

Distinction Award, and is the Science at Guelph Experience (S@GE) celebrity which promotes science to grade 7/8 students through an interactive science camp. Cara's commitment to the promotion of post-secondary education to Aboriginal people has kept her busy as a leader in her campus community. Cara comes from Hanmer, a small town outside of Sudbury, although her Algonquin ancestors hail from the Ottawa Valley. It is important for Cara to show other Aboriginal students that they can leave their communities to pursue education, but that they don't have to leave their traditions and languages behind. University is a place for Aboriginal people, and is a good way to bring back skills and knowledge to communities to empower and increase the capacity within the community. "I like to promote science as a viable career

option. I try to communicate to students that it is so important to be proud of who you are, where you come from, and that you can incorporate your culture in everything you do." The twelve role models learn many things about themselves along the way. Cara has learned that "my peers actually consider me a role model. I now have awareness that I can use my voice for good to promote understanding."

These two women show incredible leadership when it comes to Aboriginal people pursuing post secondary education. For many Aboriginal youth, dreams of a degree or certificate are not within their immediate sights. According to the 1996 Canada census, only 4% of Aboriginal people had obtained university degrees compared to 14 per cent of all other Canadians. Jaime and Cara both show other Aboriginal youth that

completing a degree is within their grasp, and that challenges can be overcome with persistence and commitment.

Canada's Aboriginal youth are increasingly faced with many choices, some negative and some positive. As Aboriginal people, it is our role to place leaders in our communities up high and remind our youth that their own aspirations are within reach. Our communities all have role models, and recognizing, acknowledging and supporting our youth role models will help to empower them to dream, pursue and achieve.

For more information on the Lead Your Way program, visit the web site at <www.naho.ca/rolemodel> or call 1 (877) 602-4445. Nominations for role models in your community are available at the website, as are profiles of current role models.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

living on a reserve are six times more likely to die by suicide than their non-Native peers.

Within the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation territory, an area that occupies between one-half and one-third of the whole of Ontario, the suicide crisis has become a social epidemic that has touched every family and community. NAN represents more than 45 communities with a total estimated population of 25,000. Since 1986, there have been over 300 suicides within NAN territory. In 2000, following a Coroner's Inquest into the 1997 suicide of a fifteen year old girl, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Chiefs passed a Resolution declaring 2001-2010 as the "Decade for Youth and Development". Girl Power is part of the Decade program.

"Girl Power", explains Melanie Goodchild-Southwind, the Decade Office Coordinator, "is geared toward 9-15 year old girls. We saw Girl Power as a way to really address a very vulnerable population who may not be receiving that very special attention. Research has shown that girls engage in risky behaviours very young. They start smoking at age 7 and 8, and they also commit suicide at a very young age. The overall purpose is to really empower young girls and to give them the skills and knowledge and awareness as well as the confidence to protect themselves in dangerous situations."

Training of trainers to carry out the Girl Power program in their communities took place in Thunder Bay over four days in May of 2004. Over twenty-four women aged nineteen to twenty-nine learned how to become proactive in breaking the cycle of young women's oppression. They learned how to speak up against social injustice and how to encourage other young women to do the same by organizing a Girl Power program in their home community.

"We believe it works if it's a peer model or if it's young women in their twenties instead of older adults," says Melanie. "If it's older women, the girls tend to think of them as teachers and they're going to be lectured and not have fun. The girls relate to the younger women more like their friends."

Melanie created the training curriculum for the Thunder Bay workshop and put it together in a binder format. She compiled articles about domestic violence, human rights and healthy sexuality, included games and handouts, tips on how to make their programs 'girl-friendly', and distributed the binders to the trainees. The women were taught group facilitation and presentation skills.

The Girl Power program is flexible, says Melanie. It can work as an after-school program, during the day, a one-day workshop or a camping trip, "as long as they have the resource guide we're working on," she says, "then they have things to do with the girls and things to teach

them." The resource guide makes simple suggestions like having a girls' night with no money, a sharing circle. Nutrition and diabetes, healthy relationships, sexuality, cultural teachings, body image and HIV/AIDS are all subjects that can be tackled through Girl Power. There is a large emphasis on building self-esteem. According to Melanie, two of the women who attended the 2004 training have really flown with the program, one in Moose Factory and the other in Sandy Lake. "They've implemented Girl Power within their own programming," she says, "and that's what we wanted to see."

Ideally, says Melanie, there should be a full-time Coordinator for Girl Power and funding for trainers in each of the communities. Several communities have requested that Melanie go into their community to run Girl Power activities for a couple of days. As the Decade Office Coordinator, her time is limited and so is the funding. The Ontario Women's Directorate is funding the production of the Girl Power manuals but attempts to secure funding for a Coordinator have not been successful.

"It's such a great program," says Melanie, "and what makes it really special is that communities and community members are calling us. Often, you're trying to sell your latest offering to the communities and hoping that they're interested. In this case, it wasn't like that."

Partnership: A Recipe for Success

Strong and respectful community partnerships contribute to the success of the Niwasa Head Start and Early Years programs.

My goal is to see a generation grow up and feel confident about who they are. I'd like them to feel confident about what they can offer to our community, as well as to their own children. Being healthy and grounded, no matter where they are, knowing the strength inside of them, knowing that being an Indigenous person is a wonderful thing, and that who they are is special and a gift—I hope that they will share that with others throughout their life.

*Tanya Laslo
Executive Director,
Aboriginal Head Start*

Taunya Laslo, a Turtle Clan Ojibwe woman, is Executive Director of the Aboriginal Head Start program in Hamilton, where she oversees several community initiatives. Her program, Niwasa, demonstrates that successful community programming is based on strong community partnerships, rooted in respect.

The success and longevity of the Niwasa Head Start program speaks to this principle. Niwasa means “little ones” in Mohawk—a name given by the community group that formed it ten years ago. Hamilton sits beside the Six Nations and New Credit Reserves; as a result, the ‘city of steel’ has a large Native population. According to Stats Canada, at least 3% of Hamilton’s population is Native. From her experience, Taunya says it feels much higher.

Niwasa started out as an Aboriginal Head Start program and then branched out to become an umbrella for other programs. Aboriginal Head Start is a federal initiative giving urban Inuit, First Nations and Métis families an opportunity to access culturally sensitive programs through early childhood education. Another key Niwasa program is Ontario Early Years, a provincial initiative supporting families with children under six years old to access early learning programs together, as families. Taunya explains that these two key programs have slightly different but complimentary mandates. The Aboriginal Head Start program is in its tenth year; Early Years is in its third year.

Being proactive also contributes to Niwasa’s success. Taunya explains some other Niwasa programs: “We combined funding opportunities from a Challenge Fund with the Ontario Early Years Centre and our city, and proposed an Aboriginal Early Years Resource Program. It’s a library of resources and toys that families can borrow, just like the public libraries, for a very small annual membership fee.”

“It also provides outreach staff with Aboriginal resources so that they can provide culturally sensitive programming for children and families. This outreach involves

various community agencies, organizations and schools, in addition to other Early Years Centres. For example, they might do a family ‘Native Gathering Time’ at a Children’s Aid with a craft and a story, or they might go out to a school to provide educational support on what it means to be First Nations.”

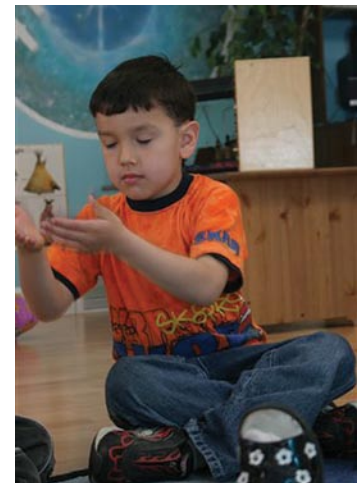
While the Aboriginal Head Start program focuses on Aboriginal families in urban areas, the Niwasa Early Years program delivers to Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal locations and settings, sharing Aboriginal knowledge through cross-cultural education.

Taunya points out that Niwasa is one of the only Head Start programs offering two language classes—one in Mohawk and the other in Ojibwe.

With no dedicated website and a zero marketing budget, it is a wonder that the program has survived and thrived. How do families and agencies find out about Niwasa programs like the Lending library, Early Years Outreach program, language classes and Stay in School initiative? As Taunya says, “We work in tandem.”

Aboriginal Head Start functions as the umbrella program, while Early Years focuses on service delivery supplemented by other mainstream organizations. Taunya elaborates: “What’s happened in Hamilton is quite unique, in that every Early Years Centre allocates a portion of their budget to us and we deliver Aboriginal services for them. This creates two really great outcomes: one, it leaves a lot of decision-making to us, which ensures culturally appropriate programming; and two, it ensures representation from our community.”

“This is really important because it recognizes that First Nations People understand their culture best and should be the ones to share it. It also creates a strong partnership and understanding between the mainstream and Aboriginal communities. They really welcome us into their settings and look forward to us coming and sharing our culture with them. The respect is just unbelievable.”



Students participating in Niwasa Head Start and Early Years programs

“For example, our ‘Native Gathering Times’ are experienced by an array of people, many of them new immigrants. So for us to be able to go and present our culture and choose what we are sharing is wonderful, because it’s relationship building - and more importantly, they are getting information and facts from the right places. We have found nothing but a positive outcome from this.”

When the Head Start programs were created, it was understood that the initial federal funds would be supplemented as each program built its own capacity. Building capacity is exactly what Niwasa accomplished by creating education programs, healing programs and access to other important services for their families and clients. Niwasa’s diversity of services and unique capacities make it very different from any childcare program out there.

“At Niwasa, we refer to it as wrap-around services. While children are becoming reacquainted with or more knowledgeable about their culture, the families are also able to identify what their goals are. We develop relationships with families and support them in reaching their own goals. We work with the gifts that they have. We don’t set the goals for them; we just support them and believe in them.”

“We realized early on that we were a unique program. And although we were dedicated to Aboriginal families, the reality was that our children came from many different backgrounds.”

Growing up in an urban centre certainly speaks to diversity. As a result, Niwasa realized that while maintain-

ing culture was important, it was also important to start building relationships outside their own immediate community.

“We made a decision to become involved with service partners in our community to raise our own profile, and to develop partnerships so that services our families needed could be better accessed. The more services we can personally recommend or bring in-house, the better! So if we’re able to develop a relationship with our Health Centre, which we have, and have them provide us with a health nurse on-site, then families from our program are more likely to access that service. If we can personally recommend a service partner, they’re more likely to follow through than if we just gave a phone number and address. This outreach is provided by Niwasa’s on-site resource worker, whose aim is to help families access the resources they need to achieve their goals.”

Niwasa also has an on-site Resource Teacher who liaises with schools.

“A couple of our students have needed personal program plans. This extra support was coordinated between the school and the Niwasa Resource Teacher, so the students could have culturally appropriate curriculum incorporated into their school plans. The result was great, and was much appreciated by the school, because they don’t always feel that it is appropriate for them to implement such culturally specific program plans. So for Niwasa to offer that service as part of our program is great, because it builds our relationship with the school

and sets an example to our community that something good is going on.”

“That’s been one of the strengths of our particular program: investing in partnerships with other organizations; so if there’s a family out there that should be using and accessing our services and programs, they know about us because CAS knows about us, or the school knows about us, or the library or daycare knows about us—because we’ve invested the time and energy to build relationships throughout the whole child care community.”

The result for Niwasa is strong community relations both with service providers and with people in need of their services.

“We don’t have a fancy budget for advertising so we rely on the strength of our referrals and the wonderful relationships that we have built.”

Ensuring that everyone has access has made Niwasa an exemplary program that helps families re-engage as a unit and with the community.

When asked what she would like to see, Taunya says, “My goal is to see a generation grow up and feel confident about who they are. I’d like them to feel confident about what they can offer to our community, as well as to their own children. Being healthy and grounded, no matter where they are, knowing the strength inside of them, knowing that being an Indigenous person is a wonderful thing, and that who they are is special and a gift—I hope that they will share that with others throughout their life.” After a thoughtful pause she quietly adds, “That’s our goal.”

Mid-Winter's New Beginnings

Together, the Quinte Mohawk School and the Tyendenaga Health Centre put on a special two-day Mid-Winter Festival to celebrate the school's twenty-fifth anniversary. The Mid-Winter Festival and the advance preparations leading up to it became an unforgettable event for the entire community.

This past year, the community of Tyendinaga celebrated their Mid-Winter Festival by marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Quinte Mohawk School. Kathleen Manderville, the principal, has been at the school for fifteen years. She was a teacher for a number of years and a vice principal for three years. Kathleen is obviously filled with the spirit of her school, and is proud of the way Mohawk culture is reflected in the curriculum. She stresses that, "culture and cultural celebrations have always been a very important part of what we do."

Mid-Winter Festival is a significant time in the Mohawk calendar. As Kathleen shares, "It is like a beginning, because it marks the finishing of the past year and acknowledges all the new life that is going to come in the spring." In Mohawk communities, mid-winter is the traditional time for the naming of children and for sharing stories.

Funding from the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy enabled the school, in partnership with the Tyendenaga Health Centre, to create an unforgettable event for the whole community. In past years, the school's celebration of Mid-Winter has usually occurred over one day, but this time around they were able to extend it to a two-day celebration that involved the entire school, including kids from kindergarten to grade eight.

With seventy-five volunteers and Elders working with the children a month in advance of the Mid-Winter Festival, community was at the heart of the entire event. Every child from the youngest to the oldest was able to participate in the making of a wearable piece of regalia. Some made ribbon shirts, while others made vests, ponchos, drums, and items that they could use for other ceremonies and community events. The outcome was tremendous and resulted in 140 pairs of mittens, 140 vests and ponchos, and drum making for the grade seven and eight stu-

dents. From the children's perspective, Kathleen says, "This was tremendous because it meant that they could make things that were really culturally relevant and that they could also take with them."

Kathleen explains how the older children "made their own water drum, right from cutting the tree to preparing the leather, constructing the drum and painting their own design." She adds, "All through the process they were guided by the cultural teachings that accompany the various stages of drum making. When their drums were complete, they were then taught how to drum."

When your culture is celebrated, and everyone is caught up in that celebration, it becomes a tremendously affirming exercise not just for the children but for everyone.

Kathleen acknowledges the hard work of her staff and of the Tyendinaga Health Centre. She notes that Rita Brant and Cindy Thompson, the Director of the Health Centre, did an excellent job on the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy funding proposal. "We've fostered a partnership with the Health Centre for many years and it's really worked well—particularly for the past four years, where we have had many successful project partnerships. Health and wellness are extremely important to us, because if someone is not well and healthy in their mind and spirit, then learning will certainly become a difficulty. We are very fortunate to have

the Health Centre right next door to our school."

Kathleen adds that community involvement was also a key factor in the success of the project. "Three weeks before the event, the centre hallway of our school was filled with tables of volunteers who came in every day to prepare leather and lacing. The children got to see their grandmothers, aunts—everyone—preparing for this big event. It raised the enthusiasm of the entire school to see so many people from the community committing time and work. It was really gratifying and made the children feel connected and valued. When your culture is celebrated, and everyone is caught up in that celebration, it becomes a tremendously affirming exercise not just for the children but for everyone."

Kathleen points out that the new Ontario curriculum, implemented about nine years ago, created some very difficult times. This was because the school had developed a variety of units that were culture-based, but which suddenly didn't fit within the new curriculum guidelines. The mid-winter event has provided an opportunity to bring culturally relevant material into the school. In many ways it has been a springboard for cultural endeavors, in that teachers are revisiting how to integrate Mohawk teachings, such as those on the wampum, into existing curriculum guidelines. One of the key goals for the school is to find ways to better enhance Mohawk culture and curriculum without losing or compromising on the mainstream curriculum.

Kathleen closes her comments with a heartfelt thanksgiving: "A big Nia-wen to the health centre for their tremendous support, and to AHWS, because without their funding we would never have been able to experience a Mid-Winter like this, and would never have known what we'd missed."

New JMC Government Co-Chair

Alexander Bezzina, Assistant Deputy Minister for the Program Management Division, New Government Co-Chair.



Alexander Bezzina

As the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) for the Program Management Division, Alex provides overall leadership and direction for the delivery of social service and children's programs through MCSS/MCYS Regional Offices and Directed Operating Facilities.

Alex began his career in the OPS in 1999

after working for over 15 years in community health and social services in a variety of front line and senior administrative roles. Prior to joining the OPS, Alex also developed curriculum and provided instruction in continuing education programs in the college system.

During his time with the OPS, Alex has held a number of executive roles including: Manager, Strategic Mental Health Policy Unit, MOHLTC; Director, Special Education Policy and Programs Branch, Ministry of Education; and ADM, Human Resources Management and Corporate Policy Division, Ministry of Government Services.

Alex is married and has two children, ages 12 and 7. He lives with his family in Campbellville.

Alex is married and has two children, ages 12 and 7. He lives with his family in Campbellville.

AHWS Project Showcase at Queen's Park

TOP TO BOTTOM: the Lost Dancers, a Métis fiddler, Métis jiggers, the Showcase visitors.



At the 2006 AHWS Aboriginal Leaders and Ministers Meeting.

ABOVE: Aboriginal Partners from the Métis Nation of Ontario, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and Independent First Nations address AHWS successes and challenges.

RIGHT: Minister Sandra Pupatello with a baby.



In the Spirit of Healing & Wellness is a bi-annual publication produced by the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy. It offers news, updates and information about AHWS funded projects. For more information, please contact:

Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy
880 Bay Street, 2nd Floor Toronto,
Ontario M7A 2B6
Tel (416) 326-6905
Fax (416) 326-7934
Website: www.ahwsontario.ca

AHWS Staff

Manager
(416) 326-6907

Team Lead Operations
Martin John
(416) 326-5136
Martin.John@css.gov.on.ca

Financial Officer
Mary Porzio (416) 326-6904
Mary.Porzio@css.gov.on.ca

Specific Allocations Consultant
Ed Bennett (416) 326-7900
Edward.Bennett@css.gov.on.ca

Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program Coordinator
Lucille Kewayosh
(416) 212-1510
Lucille.Kewayosh@css.gov.on.ca

Program Consultant – Specialized Projects
Constance Jamieson
(416) 326-6902
Constance.Jamieson@css.gov.on.ca

Team Lead, Policy & Research
Joanne Meyer
(416) 326-1510

Policy & Research Coordinator
Roberta Pike
(416) 326-9546
Roberta.Pike@css.gov.on.ca

Performance Measures Coordinator
(416) 326-6903

Administrative Support
(416) 326-6905

We welcome submissions to *In the Spirit of Healing & Wellness*. For more information please contact the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy
Tel (416) 326-6905
info@ahwsontario.ca

Sage Words

Gus Hill on finding the voice of youth



If you've never grown up with a model of wellness, then it is hard to know that it exists. I grew up in an alcoholic and drug dependent family and there was some abuse within our extended family. I thought it was normal to grow up to smoke, drink and do drugs. Militant parenting was normal for me. I grew up without a voice because kids were supposed to be "seen and not heard".

A huge part of finding healing and wellness is learning about humility and learning when to ask for help.

My own wellness journey began fourteen years ago. I think health starts with accepting yourself for who you are. I grew up with the stigma of being an Indian and I denied that part of myself for a long time. Once I was able to accept myself as a Native man, and embrace my culture, my family and my heritage, things just sort of fell into place. I stopped abusing myself with alcohol and drugs and starting walking the red road.

Getting to know yourself is so important. For me, that was about revisiting glorious and painful memories, and taking the time to understand how they shaped who I am. I embrace them as positive lessons or relinquish them as negative experiences and learn from them. Attending ceremonies and embracing the healing traditions of my culture is also an important part of my healing journey. I attend sweat lodges regularly, and next summer I plan on going to Sundance. I also attend full moon ceremonies, I'm a fire keeper at a sweat lodge, and I go to all the

social gatherings in the community. This summer I helped with the University of Waterloo Fire Keepers program. I continue to mentor Aboriginal students who go to Wilfrid Laurier University.

I think kids today are empowered, but not necessarily in a good way, to act out and speak out against the chains of authority that hold them down. When they rebel, they are rebelling in negative ways. When I think of the barriers to empowerment, I see a lot of perpetuated behavior from family dysfunction. All I can do is be a role model. I meet a lot of younger people who see me as a role model and I'm still a youth myself! It's a very weird feeling to be a role model and mentor people who aren't that much younger than me. It's been a really tough road to walk but it's been about getting to know who I am and then trying to become the person that I want to be, and trying to become the person I want other people to see. That is what role modeling is for me, trying to be a good person and to demonstrate that it is doable. Young people in my community will send me emails or call and ask to go out for coffee because they are not feeling strong. A huge part of finding healing and wellness is learning about humility and learning when to ask for help.

I try to be a role model in everything that I do, and I try to encourage people to reach their full potential. If that is a college diploma, or being a tradesperson, it doesn't matter as long as you are happy doing what you are doing. For me, I've been driven to get a PhD in Social Work, and I've made my PhD what I wanted it to be, what I needed it to be. For my PhD, I've been researching the experience of traditional healers. That's what I needed for my own healing. That is what has made me happy and content in my life. My own journey has allowed me to find the voice I lost as a child.

Gus Hill is a twenty-nine year old member of Batchewana Bay First Nation on Lake Superior. After receiving a BSW in Native Human Services at Laurentian University, Gus continued with a Master's of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier. He is currently in the final stages of a PhD in Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. Gus and his wife Heather reside in Waterloo.