

HEALING & WELLNESS

THIS IS A NEWSLETTER OF THE ABORIGINAL HEALING AND WELLNESS STRATEGY



A member of Ottawa's Wabano Street Theatre Company gets ready for a performance of *The Blood Remembers*, a play that tells the story of seven generations of Aboriginal women.

PHOTO: Denis Franco

Lighting Up Community Understanding Theatre educates and heals at Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health

The HIV/AIDS prevention program at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health has taken a creative approach to their programming by using theatre as a means of educating and healing. Over the last year, they have produced two plays: *The Blood Remembers* and *Jay's Story*. Both stories illuminate the issues that underlie disease (and dis-ease) in our communities, relating HIV and AIDS to the much larger historical and contemporary realities that shape Aboriginal lives.

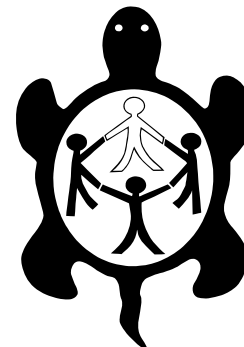
The Blood Remembers tells the story of seven generations of women, using chronological monologues and scenes that allow us to trace what happens from one generation to the next. The play begins with a contemporary youth who is trying to understand her struggle to survive. The Eagle Spirit comes, and the youth is taken as far back as 1860, to the invasion of an Anishnabe village in Minnesota. The story that follows deals with residential school, and from there, we learn about the fallout and abuse through the generations: the loss of extended family, parenting skills, and children to the child welfare system; the repercussions of teen pregnancy, sexual assault, and addictions. The play ties all of these issues together, and in so doing, tells the larger story of colonization and Aboriginal women. It ends with hope: the seven generations of women gather for healing, and sing the "Strong Woman Song".

Jay's Story is about a young man who learns that he is HIV positive after having left his community to live a hard life on the street. It deals with homophobia and social

[CONT'D PAGE 2]

[CON'T FROM PAGE 1]

Healing through the Arts This issue explores how AHWS-funded programs are using visual art, theatre, dance and music to move along the path to healing and wellness. Art allows us to tell our stories as they have happened, and to define our lives as we wish them to be in the future. Whether through traditional forms, such as drumming, or modern techniques such as writing, self-expression and creativity are key to healing!



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.

CONTENTS

FEATURE	
Healing through the Arts	1-4
Cat Lake Wilderness Program	5
Parry Sound Friendship Centre	6
Za-geh-do-win	6
Ontario Aboriginal Health Advocacy Initiative	7
AHWS General Information	7
Sage Words	8
Call for Submissions	8

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. We welcome submissions. 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



Healing Words

I feel that writing is an act of survival. But there is more than my own survival that is at stake.... I think of writing as a way to make questions, ponder, meditate, dream, and locate powerful truths that may enrich the imagination and deepen our desire to affirm life.
– Janice Gould (Maidu)

I write to release emotions to a safe place. To heal myself by seizing ideas and turning them into events that develop into what I want. Writing is therapeutic to me.
– Marla Big Boy (Oglala Lakota/Cheyenne)

Writing can be extremely therapeutic when used as a tool for healing. Some emotions can be too intense to speak of, and writing about these intense feelings offers a release. For people who have no one to listen, writing offers a way to express oneself. Writing can be also be an excellent way of working out problems.

Journal writing has become increasingly popular in recent years as more people discover the healing benefits of keeping a journal. Journals allow people to record thoughts and ideas, to process feelings and to reflect on their situations. Once things are written down, we often find some objectivity to the situation. Some people use fiction writing as therapy, because it allows for further distancing from a problem or emotion. It can be helpful and less intense to look at one's own emotions through the lens of a fictional character.

Writing allows people who have been silenced to tell their stories. It validates who they are, and allows them to envision where they are going. Writing-as-healing is now picking up in community-based Native programs. Some programs promote the use of journals for growth, reflection and goal setting. Others offer writing workshops, in which participants may share their writing as a means of discussion, release, and catalyst for change.

(quotes taken from *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, Harjo and Bird, eds.)

stigma around HIV/AIDS. In one scene, Jay gets beaten up by some homophobic community members, and in another, the band council is split on whether to acknowledge HIV/AIDS as a community issue. Jay is forced to live outside of the community for much of his adult life, where he struggles with homelessness, addictions, and careless sexual practices.

The healing power of these plays is twofold: it works for both the audience and the players. This is experiential education at its best. "The learning is like a slap in the face," says actor Rachel Ward, a Mohawk who was in both plays. "The Blood Remembers educated us younger actors, as we are a generation that had never experienced the residential school system, but we had heard about it." Ward and other actors from Jay's Story talk about how the play greatly enhanced their knowledge of HIV/AIDS.

The seven-generation framework of The Blood Remembers has proven highly educational for non-Aboriginal audience members. In showing how Aboriginal troubles today are linked to previous generations, it may help to refute tiresome claims of "What happened to Aboriginal people is in the past and they should just get over it!" One actor commented, "I hope it will have an affect on audience members – for example, social service workers going into Aboriginal homes, and being able to see the full picture behind the current situation."

Audience members have been profoundly moved by the plays. "When we finished the first time," says The Blood Remembers director Doreen Stevens, "99% of the audience were in tears." The group received a standing ovation, and had heartfelt thanks from many Aboriginal audience members who felt that the play had well represented their own stories.

Wabano has learned from these performances that they must include support for audience members who may be triggered by memory or past trauma related to the subject matter. They have held healing circles after some of the performances, which were well received. The actors participated in these circles, but asked for more support in the future, as they found it exhausting to act and then debrief on the issues. Wabano is looking into ways to develop more extensive aftercare and support on the issues they present.

Wabano actors have experienced deep emotional and spiritual change by playing these roles. In an evaluation of *The Blood Remembers*, several of

the women talked about the healing properties of participating in Wabano street theatre:

You take out and discover the feelings of what your ancestors went through.

It's a great way to lift up confidence, when you can go and stand in front of 100 people and act.

It's the therapy of the art itself that's healing because we can endure the pain as an actor and share it and release it for the audience.

I joined initially as a way of becoming comfortable with public speaking. At a point in the play where the Elder says "This is your life" I just had to cry and hold her. Now I realize we're bringing these stories and experiences to the people.

The actors in *The Blood Remembers* particularly appreciated the way in which the play addresses women's healing. One actor commented "I have come out of a fog of shame and am now clear about who I am as an Aboriginal woman. Now I have more to give to my granddaughters and my community." A second actor talked about how it helped her to re-interpret her life:

I grew up with the notion that Aboriginal women are loose and whores. This is a heavy burden to carry for a 12 or 13 year old and yet this is part of what we've been carrying for a long time. So seeing these stories we can relate to each one: teen pregnancy, no extended family, foster care and there is no one to help you – you are all on your own. Now I have an idea where all that came from – and I know it is not my fault that I drank, that I had my children young. These performances have been a huge give-away – the shame, loneliness, anger, sorrow, grieving are all being released and the teamwork is there for support and being there for each other.

In addition to educating and healing, the plays have created wonderful networks of peer support and friendship among the actors in both plays. Everyone is looking forward to more productions of the Wabano Street Theatre Company.

► **Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health** is located at 299 Montreal Road, Ottawa, Ontario, K1L 6B8
Tel: (613) 748-0657
Fax: (613) 748-9364
www.wabano.com

The Drum as Healer



The Anishnawbe-Mushkiki Thunder Bay Aboriginal Community Health Centre host grandfather and grandmother drum spirit teachings every two weeks.

The healing properties of the Traditional drum are put to good use at the Anishnawbe-Mushkiki Thunder Bay Aboriginal Community Health Centre. The Centre hosts grandmother and grandfather spirit drum teachings every two weeks. Community members can learn songs, drum teachings and respect for the drum. These teachings incorporate traditional values on how to live a good healthy life. The Centre also offers a place for people who want to work on regalia (“sew your own”).

Traditional Coordinator Alfred Henderson hosts the drum circles and offers teachings. He understands the drum as a healer from personal experience. “At one time in my life, I was contemplating suicide,” says Henderson. “I had even loaded up the shotgun.” It was at this point, that the spirit of the drum came to him, saying, “Grandson, there is no problem in this world that is worth your life. I can not tell you what to do. That choice is yours.” Henderson has been following the drum teachings ever since, and has been able to call on the drum for healing during various illnesses throughout his life. “One time, I had a really bad fever, and nothing could change it. But when my father did a drum ceremony and sang a healing song, I broke out into a sweat. It was just like someone had poured water over my head,” says Henderson.

Being careless with the drum can also cause illness. There is a ceremony to set up the drum each time and community members who attend the circles get teachings, such as the responsibilities for each direction and the role of the colours. The Centre also brings in Elders periodically to do healing sessions and workshops, and to teach hand drumming, dancing, and the meaning of regalia. “Your regalia is part of your

healing,” says Henderson. “Sometimes it comes in a dream – a dream shows you what you are supposed to make – how it is supposed to look – who you are and where your healing path is. Certain colours will help you.”

The healing that comes from drumming and dancing is evident in the stories that Henderson tells about people who attend the circles:

One young girl was so hyperactive she couldn't even sit down. But every time we started singing songs, she was up, dancing around in step. The Elder that was there said that “That girl needs regalia,” and her father started to make her an outfit. We started to see her come around and her behaviour was really changing.

He talks about another woman who had no self-confidence when she first came to the Centre. She is now singing with a woman’s hand drum group and actively participating in ceremonies and

healing workshops. Another inspiring story involves a young man who has recently come back to the circle after straying from the teachings he had been given. Upon his return, the young man sat holding a rock in the talking circle during drum teachings, speaking openly about what he had been through and his belief in the teachings. “Some said they had never seen this happen before,” says Henderson “-- where a man shows his feelings.”

► The Anishnawbe-Mushkiki Health Access Centre is located at 29 Royston Court, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7A 4Y7
Tel: (807) 343-4843
Fax: (807) 343-4728



Aboriginal community members find the making of regalia and drums part of the healing process.

Drum Power

Most people can relate to the notion of drum power. People of all cultures feel drum vibrations at their very core, unable to resist urges to move and dance to the rhythm. Increasingly many are beginning to realize that the experience of making a drum can be equally powerful.

Healing and Wellness Coordinator at Niagara Friendship Centre, Jacquelyn Labonte (Mohawk), organized a hand drum-making workshop for women in her community. "I've witnessed the healing process of the drum with people in the community; some who have tried a lot of other avenues with little success. Drum-making brought people together. Two days of sharing time, experiences and meals together opened minds and ears."

The process of a workshop requires women to come together and hear oral teachings related to the history and purpose of hand drums as well as how to care for them. Women working together inevitably share their experiences, feelings and humour in a supportive environment

that connects them not only to each other but also to their ancestors, who engaged in similar activities. As Labonte notes, drum-making "shows how things within our own background – beliefs, practices, ceremonies, etc. – can help us on our path."

Women hand drummers talk of the bond they develop with their drums. Women often name their drums and become familiar with their personalities and general temperament, demonstrated in the quality and character of the drum's sound, which will vary in different environments. This bond is formed at an earlier stage when a woman works with the materials that later become her drum, a healing tool she can take pride in, share with others and pass on to her children.

In basic drum-making workshops, women stretch and tie cured skin over a drum frame. In Labonte's group women requested a future workshop on how to make the frame and prepare skins.

Artisans in our communities have described how materials of the natural

world, children of Mother Earth, sacrifice themselves for our benefit in order to provide us with food, clothing, shelter and medicines. These items maintain their spirit, their particular characteristics and personality, as they are incorporated into medicine items, such as drums. Consequently, the opportunity to honour and thank the spirit of the specific tree, animal or plant that will be part of our medicine item further increases the depth of our connection to that medicine and will enhance its power to help us while deepening our respect for living in balance and gratitude with Our Relations.

Drum-making is a powerful ceremony that helps women heal themselves, their families and our communities.

► The Niagara Regional Native Centre is located at 382 Airport Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, L0S 1J0
Tel: (905) 688-6484
Fax: (905) 688-4033

Art Therapy and Wellness

Aboriginal families in Ottawa are finding new ways to bond and communicate with each other through a successful program called the Child & Family Art Project, now in its third year of operation at the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. This twelve-week program brings families with children 7 to 12 years old to the Centre each week for a unique blend of cultural teachings and art therapy experiences*. The goal is to provide a holistic experience each evening by:

- helping children and parents to release emotions through the artwork;
- increasing mental understanding;
- feeding the physical body with nutritious meals; and
- helping participants learn to listen to the wisdom of their spirits.

It is founded on the belief that Aboriginal traditions of art-making and the process of art therapy provide a powerful means for self-expression and access to personal wisdom.

After a snack, an Elder's teaching, and a family talking circle, parents and children settle into their artwork. "When parents and children work together on the same piece of paper there is a silent bonding that happens, bringing parent and child together in a simple and profound way," says Program Coordinator Nancy Currie. Through their drawings, parent-child partners begin to see how they share space and materials, and where the confusion lies in their artwork.

After they have completed their work, the children are given the opportunity to talk about it in circle. By describing their art, the child tells her/his story, and the group listens. Parents often begin to see a different and clearer picture of their child. Later, with the encouragement of Elders, parents tap into their own inner resources of healing during a parenting circle. By

describing the artwork, parents can reframe old problems and discover new perspectives and creative solutions. Participants talk about the artwork and how it could be changed, rather than talking about a person directly. In this way, families take back insights from the artwork in their own time.

The changes are remarkable: staff have seen a significant decrease in the children's anxiety level and/or behavioural problems, as noted by this project Elder:

We saw a change just in 6 weeks in some of the kids, slowing down and listening; it had to do with being in the Circle and talking about respect and feelings.

Elders participate in all components of the project, which helps to build a cultural foundation and strengthen relationships. The project includes homework time, a mini art group for younger siblings, and dinner, so that parents can relax and talk informally with their children.

Participants take home with them the memories of their achievements in their artwork and parenting tools to keep the communication flowing. Most importantly, children go home with parents who can verify their shared experiences and continue the use of new and creative ways of communicating with each other.

The next cycle of the Child & Family Art Project will begin on January 8th, 2003, with in-take done prior to program.

* Art therapy is a non-verbal way of safely expressing feelings and emotions through the use of art materials. It is appropriate for people of all ages and nationalities.

CAT LAKE:

Wilderness Program Helps Adolescent Solvent Abusers

“The land is the primary healing tool; therefore it is on the land where the true healing occurs.” This is the philosophy behind a wilderness program operating out of the Ahki Pimadizewening Weecheewaywin Treatment Centre at Cat Lake First Nation.

The Cat Lake Treatment Centre has been open since 1997, offering 90 day residential treatment for 12 to 16 year old solvent abusers from the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation. Shortly after the Centre opened, local Elders began to ask for a land-based healing program that would teach young people the traditional skills that are necessary for survival. “At the time our community had a high rate of solvent abuse,” says Executive Director Colleen Ombash. “There were even two murders that occurred because of the solvent abuse – and it was a small community of 300 people then. We figured we needed to do something drastic.”

The Elders envisioned a program that would allow youth to heal through contact with nature, while at the same time learning practical skills they could use for land-based living. The Centre ran a pilot project, and soon found that youth that had participated in the wilderness experience were less likely to relapse after their treatment had finished. They were also more likely to go on to do other things. The program has evolved since that time, with thirty days of every ninety now spent in the wilderness.

The land-based lifestyle is well suited to solvent abuse recovery. “When kids come in, some are really high strung and problematic,” Ombash says. “The wilderness program gets them into a routine. They have to get up early every day to get ready.” The physical nature of living in the bush is key: “When we had only seminars during the day, the kids got easily bored, and by nighttime were restless. They wouldn’t go to bed and would be causing problems,” says Ombash. She points out that withdrawal from gas involves many physical and emotional changes, and it is therefore important to maintain a high level of physical activity to help offset behavioural problems. People who are going through gas withdrawal can also experience intense cravings for sugar, and sugar intake can increase their hyperactivity. Staff have found that the wilderness provides a calming influence. Ombash notes that the youth generally eat well while in the bush because they are hungry from all the physical work.

The youth residents go out to the wilderness for several days to a week at a time, and stay at a cabin that is only accessible by boat or skidoo. During their stay, they learn how to navigate



The land is the primary healing tool; therefore it is on the land where the true healing occurs.

the lakes and rivers and to travel using canoes, motorized boats, snowshoes and snowmobiles. They harvest plants and learn about edible plant roots. They learn about trapping, snaring, setting nets, tracking and hunting. With the help of staff, they manufacture equipment such as snowshoes, bows and arrows and willow drying racks.

A wilderness coordinator and two counsellors accompany the youth and guide them in their learning. “In this kind of environment, clients are responsible for their behaviours,” says Frank Sakakeesic, Wilderness Coordinator. “The use of traditional activities allows the individual to see his/her success through participating in elements of perceived risk. It is learning by doing, feeling and thinking.”

About 50% of the youth that come into the program are familiar with hunting and trapping, but there are many that have never been exposed to this lifestyle before. The program provides safety lessons and instruction at the Centre before sending youth out to the wilderness. The Centre has also built smokehouses with

the youth at the main lodge. When they complete the program, residents take home moose meat and fish that they have prepared themselves.

Ahki Pimadizewening Weecheewaywin works with families and home community workers while the youth are in care. They continue with these relationships once the youth have returned to their home communities, but aftercare continues to be a challenge, as many youth struggle with relapse. Still, there are many success stories, and many are linked to the wilderness component. Colleen Ombash talks about a youth that came to the Centre after everyone had given up on him. “People said that he was never going to get anywhere,” recalls Ombash. This youth had been violent to the point of making his family and community afraid. Yet staff at Cat Lake did not find him violent once he was in the bush. It was there that he experienced a profound transformation that allowed him to go home. He is now doing well, trapping and working as part of a community crisis team.

The wilderness program is so appealing that local youth at Cat Lake have asked to participate, and local health and education authorities have borrowed equipment so they can give it a try. This is health, naturally, that is catching.

► The Ahki Pimadizewening Weecheewaywin Healing Centre is located at: P.O. Box 77, Cat Lake, Ont. PoV 1J0
Tel: (807) 347-2222

Parry Sound Friendship Centre

As the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Coordinator for the Parry Sound Friendship Centre, Karen Pegahmagahbow hosts several activities that focus on family wellness, starting by giving families opportunities to have fun together. With the help of many volunteers, the Centre put together a Haunted House this year on the Saturday night before Halloween. This was followed by a family dance, and both events were extremely well attended. "The family dances are a big hit," says Pegahmagahbow. The Centre also hosts other events such as pow wow trips, Father's and Mother's Day breakfasts, and sweetgrass and strawberry picking as part of a strategy to encourage alcohol-free, family-oriented social events. The increasing attendance shows that families are responding well. "I think it has a lot to do with people wanting change," says Pegahmagahbow, noting that people are now even bringing their babies to their dances.

At the request of a few single fathers, the program is currently hosting a parenting class. They have also been teaching Aboriginal foster parenting in collaboration with the local Children's Aid Society. This initiative was started when Pegahmagahbow learned that there is a large percentage of Native children in care but only one Native foster home in the area. They now have a few more Native families who will be able to foster children in the future.

The program provides plenty of opportunities for talking, with men's and women's talking circles twice a month, and a mental health counsellor who comes in every other week. They have sponsored workshops on topics like depression, stress, conflict resolution and HIV/AIDS. Pegahmagahbow also does crisis management work herself, as she is part of a suicide prevention and awareness team that serves a number of communities on the Highway 69 corridor. The "SWAT" team-work is paying off; suicides in these communities have decreased.

From Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse

Za-geh-do-win is a phrase in the Ojibway language meaning "caring for one another." Our logo was created by artist Leland Bell. Za-geh-do-win symbolizes our holistic mission: to strengthen and support family health, harmony and healing.

Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse opened its doors in May 1996. The clearinghouse is the first and only one of its kind within the province of Ontario that is Aboriginal specific. We are housed on Whitefish Lake First Nation located 20 minutes west of Sudbury, off of Hwy 17 west near Naughton, Ontario.

The purpose of the clearinghouse is to provide information to Aboriginal communities and organizations across the province of Ontario on health, healing and family violence. Our information can help in community awareness and education, community policies and programs and community services and resources. We research, collect and catalogue information in print, audio, video and computer database. The resources include; manuals, books, audio and video tapes, journal articles, reports, and other unbound documents.

How does it work? We are similar to a lending library, in that our service is free and you are able to borrow materials for thirty days. However we also provide many free documents that are available for you to keep for your own information or for your community. You can call our toll free number 1-800-669-2538 for a free catalogue or you can review the catalogue on our website www.za-geh-do-win.com. Once you have reviewed our extensive catalogue, and have chosen the documents that you would like to borrow or have, you can then send in your request either by phone (1-800-669-2538), fax (705-692-9039) or e-mail



Za-geh-do-win staff, from left to right Niki Naponse, Brian McGregor, Marida McGregor, Brandy Wabegijig

(info@za-geh-do-win.com). We try to process and send out your order to you as soon as possible. You can also drop by and visit our library and review the documents that are available.

The clearinghouse staff consciously try to research, collect and catalogue as many Aboriginal specific documents as possible, from a variety of sources: other libraries, and clearinghouses, Aboriginal communities and organizations, and other organizations that provide information and services for Aboriginal people.

Some of our current initiatives include the *Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse Newsletter*, Abuse pamphlet, Stress pamphlet, *Understanding Anger* pamphlet, a survey of services and display information exhibit booths at different events throughout the province. We are currently working on new pamphlets on different topics.

We are always looking for new ideas and stories for our newsletter. If you would like to contribute or would like the newsletter sent to you please do not hesitate to call and we will add your name to our mailing list.

► Za-geh-do-win Information Clearinghouse is located at P.O. Box 40, Naughton, ON, PoM 2Mo
Tel: (705) 692-0420
Fax: (705) 692-9039
Toll Free: 1-800-669-2538
Email: info@za-geh-do-win.com
www.za-geh-do-win.com

Offering a Variety of Training Workshops

The Ontario Aboriginal Health Advocacy Initiative (OAHAI) is an organization that promotes advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal people throughout the province. Over the years, they have produced various educational materials as a way of encouraging greater awareness of standards of health care and the provincial health care system, including its system of redress.

OAHAI staff include four regional developers and a provincial coordinator. These staff offer training on a number of issues, as listed below:

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario - The Complaints Process

Covers what a worker would need to know in order to assist and file a complaint against a physician with the regulatory body and alternative avenues to address the concern. *Half day*

Advocacy for Front Line Workers Reviews the various types of advocacy and provides workers with useful information and tools on how and when to advocate on behalf of their client. *Half day*

Cultural Sensitivity - Train the Trainer Covers the bases on development and presentation of a cultural awareness workshop, aimed at the 'mainstream' service provider. *Full day*

Meeting the Needs of Aboriginal People Living With HIV/AIDS

Focus is not on education about HIV/AIDS, rather it will assist workers to address the programming and/or service needs of clients infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. The workshop also touches on the aspect of protocol development. *Full day*

Navigating the Conflict Highway Includes what conflict is and is not, practical strategies to deal with conflict and the various aspects of principled negotiation. *Full day*

Breaking the Communication Barrier Includes an overview of effective and ineffective communication and provides information and exercises to increase effective communication skills. *Full day*

Mental Health Services and the Mental Health Act Assists workers to understand current Mental Health status of Aboriginal peoples and avenues of redress. Workers will receive information on the Mental Health system and become more knowledgeable of Mental Health resources. *Half day*

NEW Traditional Health: A Guided Discussion on Access and Issues

Assists service providers in understanding what should be set in place before the development of traditional health programs and services, to learn what is currently available and how to access those programs and services for Aboriginal clients. *Full day*

The OAHAI team is currently working on two new workshops: youth sexual health and report and proposal writing. The team can be contacted through the OAHAI Provincial Coordinator, Gerti Mai Muise at gmuise@ofhfc.org.

► **Ontario Aboriginal Health Advocacy Initiative c/o the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 219 Front St. East, Toronto, ON M5A 1E8**
Tel: (416) 956-7575
Fax: (416) 956-7577
www.oahai.org

AHWS Updates

Longitudinal Study Update

Phase 1 of the Longitudinal Study was completed in March 2001, and Phase 2 is now underway. This six-year study (1998-2006) was commissioned to understand how AHWS-funded projects affect the health and well-being of those who use the programs and services. Phase 1 has documented how AHWS-funded centres set in motion and/or support the healing journey and the process of change that it involves. Phase 2 will build on the understanding of the healing and wellness journey in order to articulate the impact programs are having on improving health and reducing family violence. The focus of Phase 2 is to identify and collect quantitative data that captures appropriate indicators reflecting physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of Aboriginal people.

Performance Measures

The Strategy-Wide Performance Measures plan was fully implemented in 2001-2002. This plan has been designed to answer the questions "What good are we doing?", "How are we doing this?" and "At what cost?" The tools for data collection were the Client Benefits Questionnaire, the Participant Count and the Client Count. This last year, 150 projects including most specialized projects and many specific allocation projects participated.

Most AHWS-funded programs and workers indicate that their responsibilities include providing a variety of client support services, such as primary health care, counselling, support groups, referrals, accompanying clients to appointments, advocating for other support services, and crisis intervention. Preliminary figures from the 2001-2002 Client Count demonstrates that 65

projects provided client-based services to more than 16,500 clients.

The Strategy-Wide Performance Measures Plan (PMP) is a requirement of the Phase 2 AHWS Implementation Agreement. The five-year Implementation Agreement expires on March 31, 2004 and the results from the PMP will be an important resource to inform renewal. The year 2001-2002 was the first effort implementing all three PMP tools (Client Benefits Questionnaire, Participant Count, and Client Count). It is extremely important that there is increased participation by projects in this second round of Performance Measures Tools to inform the renewal process in the Spring of 2003.

Projects requiring additional information are encouraged to contact A.J. Williams, (416-326-1510) at the Strategy office.

Sage Words Dance Medicine

By Zainab Amadahy



Imagine the wood floor you stand on vibrating in perfect rhythm with the stomp of hundreds of feet moving to the beat of a drum.

One of the most powerful moments of my life was the first time I attended a Rotinosoni social. There were about 500 people in the Kanawake community centre that night, and every single man, woman and child moved in perfect sync with the beat of the water drum. The vibrations of hundreds of people, stomping in time, shook the building. It was inspiring to see people gathered from so many communities moving as one, like powerful ocean waves, swelling and waning to the rhythm; cleansing, renewing and washing away any troubles we may have brought into the social with us that day.

In pre-colonial times our music, dance and other arts were not perceived of as “separate” from anything else we did. Rather they were integrated into our daily lives from the Sunrise Ceremonies that started the day, to the Thanksgiving Prayers at sunset. Making music, drumming and dancing were ceremonies in and of themselves – spiritual acts that connected the “artist” to her own spirit, her community, her ancestors, all her

relations and certainly the Creator. Music and dance, as any other art form in our societies, were not bought, sold, owned or collected. They were not performed by “experts” for the “entertainment” of others. It was not something that one could listen to or produce in isolation from the rest of Our Relations.

Our music and dances had a function. Music and dance were (and are) used in the ceremonies of every medicine society from the False Face of the Rotinosoni to the Haatali of the Dine (Navajo) people. Music and dance were mediums for passing on values, history and news. They were a form of communicating thoughts and feelings. Dancing required people to develop social skills and engage in community activities. Through music and dance we collaborated, cooperated, laughed and healed.

Of Mohawk/Cayuga heritage, dancer, actor and visual artist Jerry Longboat describes many of our dances as forms of prayer. The symbolism and teachings inherent in traditional and contemporary Aboriginal dance help connect us to the Earth, our ancestors and all Our Relations. Dances embodying the behaviours of animals, insects, birds, etc. teach us values and survival skills. Our dances convey a basic respect and gratitude for the role our brothers and sisters of Creation play in keeping us alive.

Jerry notes the role of dance in healing individuals, communities and the Earth. “We’ve experienced a separation from the environment. Our lifestyle has changed; our physicality and diet have changed. [We now have disease, illness, obesity and internalized racism in our communities.] People are walking with sadness and grief as a result of recent history as well as the state of the Earth. ... There is memory in the body; ancestral

memory. Dance allows us to connect with and work through those memories, navigating the blocks. ... As individuals come into alignment and balance it will impact the Earth.”

The physicality of dance and movement helps us stay healthy and balanced. “We have physical, emotional and spiritual bodies. Dance accesses them all.”

It is nothing less than miraculous that our songs and dances have survived genocide, assimilation, missionaries, residential schools and prisons. Today we witness a revival of the dances of our ancestors. We see young and old moving together with pride, honouring the ancestors and role-modeling for the children. In social and ceremonial dancing we see the reclamation of powerful healing forces that can transform our communities.

Call for Submissions!

The AHWS newsletter is seeking submissions for upcoming issues. Please send any articles, poems, pictures, teachings or other AHWS program-related material that you would like to share.

If you know of something you would like us to write about, please let us know!

AHWS newsletter information should be directed to:

Kim Anderson

(519) 823-2614 Fax: (519) 823-0179
Kim_Anderson@sympatico.ca

ABORIGINAL HEALING AND WELLNESS STRATEGY

880 Bay St., 2nd Floor | Toronto, Ontario | M7A 2B6 | Tel: (416) 326-6905 | Fax: (416) 326-7934 | Website: www.ahwsontario.ca

Interim Manager

Kathy Wakeford
(416) 326-6907
Kathy.Wakeford@css.gov.on.ca

Administrative Assistant

Kristine Neglia
(416) 326-6905
Kristine.Neglia@css.gov.on.ca

Financial Officer

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

Community Liaison Officer

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

Program Consultant

Andrea (A.J.) Williams
(416) 326-1510
Andrea.Williams@css.gov.on.ca

Program Consultant

Martin John
(416) 326-6902
Martin.John@css.gov.on.ca

Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program Consultant

Catherine Alisch (416) 212-1511
Catherine.Alisch@css.gov.on.ca

Acting Policy Analyst

Valerie Packota (416) 326-6903
Valerie.Packota@css.gov.on.ca