

Community Healing and Intervention Program Newsletter: 'Aqsuk'utnamu (Summer) 2001

Where is the CHIP Office?

- 12A-13 Ave. South, Specialty Lane, Cranbrook, B.C.
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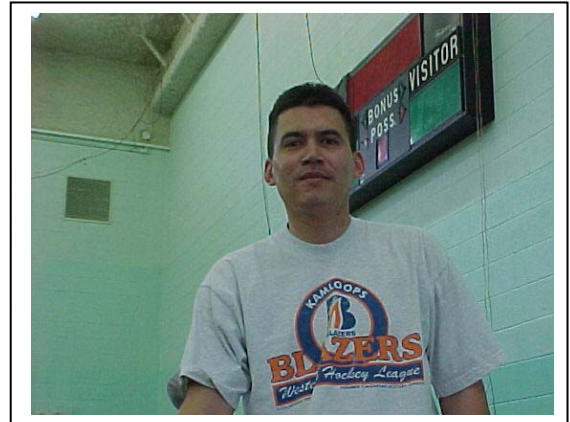
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Ki'suk Kyukyit!

Welcome to the Summer 2001 CHIP newsletter. The theme of this newsletter is **Celebrating Youth**.

Youth with FAS/E face unique challenges. These youth also have gifts and strengths.

This newsletter will focus on understanding these challenges and supporting these gifts and strengths.



Jason Louie, CHIP Worker

Using Language & Culture to Overcome Barriers Associated with FAS/E

By M. Jason Louie, CHIP Worker

The experiences that I have encountered using Culture and Language may not work with all individuals affected with FAS/E. But the methods are definitely worth sharing because they are success stories. The stories of success are few because what stands out are the negative stories. The stories of dropping out of school, trouble with the law etc. It is difficult as parents, Community Members and Leaders to see and hear these stories of failure. At times, it may seem that there is no hope in the future for Alcohol Affected Youth. Where there is a will there is a way. With hope and prayer comes the possibilities for change....

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...Language & Culture cont'ed...

Approximately 6 years ago I was the new kid on the block to the Community Healing and Intervention Program. I had a vision and ideas but had no idea what was in store for me from the youth I was going to work with. An idea was put forward for me to teach Culture and Language. I was receptive to this idea and was ready to try it out. In my first few classes I noticed that some of the students had a hard time sitting in their desks. I noticed that they would have constant movement. Their parents informed me that it was possible that their child may be alcohol-affected. Some of the children were on medication for ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

With FAS/E or ADHD, to make a child with these disorders sit still is an unreasonable expectation. At the same time, it is difficult for teachers to carry on with day-to-day lessons effectively. One day, when I was conducting my language lesson, three students were not having a "good day." They just could not sit any longer! At this point, I was at the end of my rope! I had no idea what to do! Grasping at anything, I took some pelts from my office and placed it on their desks. The result was remarkable! They sat and petted the pelts. I thought at first that they were not listening. Even though they were busy petting, they would answer my questions...

...Language & Culture cont'ed...

When I shared this strategy at workshops with Dr.'s and "Experts", they gave explanations that were very medical and complex. Their thoughts may very well be true. My explanation is simple. We, as First Nations people, have always had a connections to the land and the animals. Some of our Indian names are those of animals. It is the animals' presence that soothes and comforts the souls of these children.

I feel that there is no "right" way to learn how to wardance. Each and everyone has their own style of dancing. I shared some of my knowledge with the students on traditional dancing. Many of these youth, at times, were very clumsy. However, when dancing, they were **always** in sync with the drum beat. The drum is a very powerful tool that helps to overcome deficits and lifts the heart of the people.

In classes such as English and Social Studies, Alcohol-Affected students can have a hard time comprehending these teachings. The end result, often times, are poor grades.

Having poor grades term after term does have an effect on the self-esteem of these students. Although they may give it their all to try and learn, somehow the information is lost in the gaps of memory...

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...Language & Culture cont'ed...

Ktunaxa has been in written form for many years. To learn how to read and write Ktunaxa is quite an accomplishment. Some of the students I have taught caught on well to the reading and writing aspect of the Ktunaxa language. Seeing that this is a strength of the students, I try to build on it. The feeling of success far exceeds that of failure.

Education comes in many forms. Traditionally, First Nations people have always been visual learners. Learn by watching. That is what I have noticed works in teaching individuals affected by FAS/E. At the Yaqan Nukiy School, this theory has been incorporated into the every day lessons.

Who are we without our language? We are here today because of our culture and language. If we are to progress into the future, it will be because of our culture!

M. Jason Louie
CHIP Worker



One Youth's Story

Maia McGillivray is 23 years old. She lives with her adoptive family in Winnipeg. Maia has FAS. Here is part of her story.

By the time I was a teenager, I was having a hard time in school. Each year I tried to start the year well, but soon I would begin to slide. I don't know what part of me caused the trouble. I just felt like I couldn't sit still and the only way I could listen was to play with something while I sat. I'm sure I often looked weird.

I started skipping school and going to the mall or riding my bike or the

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bus around the city all day. I liked to travel around because I could look at new stuff all day and I was never bored.

About this time, I started stealing. I used to steal every day. My favourite things to steal were candy and junk food. I even had favourite stores to steal from. I especially liked stores that were big and that didn't have much security but about once a week mall security or police would catch me. In the beginning, the store would warn me, tell my parents, and ban me from the store. This did not stop me from going back and stealing the next day. Finally, the police came to my school to talk to me. They told me what stealing was and the kinds of things that could happen if I continued to steal from stores. But even that didn't stop me.

The thing that helped me stop stealing was when I met my friend Jerry who was a police officer. Jerry knew what it was like to have a problem with stealing and he talked to me about it. I wanted to be Jerry's friend and I wanted him to trust me, so I worked hard to stop stealing. Occasionally I still have the urge, but I know that

Jerry won't be my friend if I steal things.

One good thing that happened in high school was meeting my best friend Tina. I liked her because she was interested in the same things I was. Tina was in my classes and she seemed to need a friend too. We both liked going to movies, dancing, and bike riding. We're still good friends and we see each other a few times a year. She's special because we understand each other and like being friends. Seeing Tina every day made going to school easier.

Having a supportive family is really important when you have a disability like mine. I know it hasn't been easy for my parents because they know I'm different, but they have always made me feel special and loved. My mom found out about my FAS when I was three years old and I had therapy before I started school. My mom spent hours helping me to learn to read and write. She was great at calming me down when I had nightmares, or was sick and scared. My dad made my lunches and liked to take me with him when he went shopping or to the lumberyard. I also spent a lot of time with my Aunt Peggy.

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As I got older I learned better ways to calm myself down. I really like to go to the schoolyard and play on the swings. I also like to jump on the trampoline and ride my bike. Basically I like vigorous motion every day...I also have learned to play with balls or small objects when I need to relax or calm myself down.

I have a few hobbies that I like to do. I like to read, write, and draw. My favourite books are about aliens and the supernatural...Another one of my hobbies is playing the chanter. I really like the sound of bagpipes.

In the future, I want to live in my own apartment with my cat, Missy. I'd like a roommate who would help me with housework, shopping and paying bills.

I'd also like a friend who would take me out to places like restaurants and movies. I don't have a friend like this and I miss going out with other people. I need help in being independent, but I can't do it alone and I don't know where to go to get help. I am very vulnerable in the community and need to have my parents' approval before I do anything. Sometimes it feels like I need to be on a long

leash to protect me. Other times this makes me feel too controlled.

Today I am looking for a job. I have a job delivering fliers in my neighbourhood...I like my flyer route because it is quiet and the walking helps calm me down. I'd like another job that lets me move around by myself. I'd also like to work in a pet-grooming store because I love animals. However, I'm not confident that I can find a job, especially since there are no support agencies in town that understand my special needs. There needs to be more support for people with FAS so we can get jobs and find our own apartments.

Excerpt from "Living and Working with FAS/E." L. Mayer (ed.), 1999, Interagency FAS/E Program. Winnipeg. Available at the College of the Rockies Library.

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Lower Kootenay Band Youth Centre

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The Lower Kootenay Band recognizes the importance of the youth having a place to call their own.

The Band has given the youth one of the vacant houses to utilize for their youth centre. The Band supplies the heat and power. The youth fund raise to assist with these expenses.

The youth take pride in the knowledge that they have a place where they can interact. The youth have established their own set of rules for the centre, and a set of consequences that follow the rules.

The youth also participate in work sessions when things need to be done such as yard maintenance, painting, hanging wallpaper, scrubbing floors or other routine tasks.

The youth centre has been and continues to be furnished through donations from the Lower Kootenay community as well as the Creston community. Some of the donations are a shuffleboard table, television, curtains, Nintendo, games, cooking supplies, microwave, couches, chairs, encyclopedias, books, games and craft items.

Some of the activities that are held at the youth centre are:

- Movie night
- Youth meetings
- Craft sessions
- Cooking
- Dances
- Parties

Some of these activities are entertainment-based and others are learning-based. All activities are developed to be fun and enjoyable for all participants.

The Lower Kootenay youth are proud of their centre and utilize it many times per week.

**By: Peter Wegener, Lower
Kootenay Band Youth Worker**

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In-School Work Experience

Staying in school is important for youth with FAS/E.

Learning hands-on skills can help youth with FAS/E (or other learning disabilities or health conditions) to stay in school.

What are some of the benefits of in-school work experience?

- Build self-esteem
- Learn basic job skills.
- A job gives a student a sense of purpose
- For many students, academics do not provide a sense of purpose

B.J. Wise is a school administrator from Washington state who talks about the importance of in-school work experience.

Here are some examples of in-school work experience:

- School recycler
- Library assistant
- Answering machine recorder
- Video production staff
- Video tape reproducer
- Film distributor
- Internet Specialist
- Multi-media trainer
- Flag raiser
- Software loader
- Camera man
- Delivery person
- Kindergarten bus greeter

Youth with FAS/E Speak Out

Excerpts from "Young Adults with FAS/FAE: Experiences, Needs and Support Strategies," Copeland & Rutman

- "FAE feels like I keep running into a very large brick wall. I feel headachy a lot of the time...trying to remember what I was told not 15 seconds ago. I also get very afraid with memory lapses like this. I have been yelled at...and also humiliated."
- "Sometimes I think I feel that my body betrayed me. Having FAS makes it hard for me to figure some stuff out...and all the surgery on my heart and face...It's weird but I'm 18 and in some ways I feel like 80 or something and in some ways I feel like I'm 2."
- "The other schools were so crazy, with so much noise and people, and I just couldn't sit in my desk and concentrate - for me, being in a classroom was like being at Playland Park or what Disneyland must be like - too much to deal with..."
- "FAS is part of me, like an extra arm or something. But it's not all of me. People need to know that."
- "We're not much different than you and we want things that everybody else wants out of life. And we may just need to do things and think through things in just a different way."