



All about the Head Start RAC

In 1998, when the Head Start program initiative got started in Canada, each province was required to organize a committee with community and government representatives to guide decision-making.

THE B.C. ON-RESERVE HEAD START PROGRAM CREATED A “REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE”—RAC FOR SHORT, which at first was mostly government representatives. The committee structure evolved as it became evident that community representation was very important to ensure that regional Head Start program decisions reflect needs and priorities for Head Start projects at the community level.

We now have five members on the Regional Advisory Committee who are elected to represent geographical zones: South Mainland East, South Mainland West, Vancouver Island, North West, and North East. These regional members are responsible for representing their entire geographical area (not just their own Head Start programs) when they sit down at the RAC table and contribute to decision-making about program priorities.

All bands are notified when there is an upcoming vacancy on the RAC. Band or community members nominate RAC candidates, who must have community support backed up by a Band Council Resolution. The RAC then reviews the nominations and selects new members. RAC members serve for two year terms.

In addition to the five regional representatives, other RAC members include an Elder representative, a Canada Prenatal and

Nutrition Program (CPNP) representative, a child care specialist, the BCFNHS program manager, program consultant, and program assistant, the off-reserve Head Start program manager, and the HRDC program manager.

The Regional Advisory Committee meets several times a year in person and several times by conference call, depending on needs. In addition to the full RAC meetings and follow-up, committee members might participate on sub-committees to deal with specific initiatives (such as organizing a training conference or developing policies, tools, or resources).

The main purpose of the RAC is to ensure that decisions being made are community-relevant. Some of the areas the RAC deals with include administrative requirements, policies, procedures and mandates, training, funding distribution (i.e., “How should Head Start spend the surplus this fiscal year?”), and the proposal selection process.

In the past, regional representatives on the Head Start RAC found it difficult to keep up on-going communication and get input from the Head Start programs in their geographical areas. Their work and participation was voluntary, above and beyond the demands of their own programs. They barely had time to phone one another, let alone organize conference calls or gatherings.

The main purpose of the RAC is to ensure that decisions being made are community-relevant.



This year the regional office has decided to pilot a new approach, providing funding assistance to each of the regional representatives so they can host monthly conference calls and have a gathering once in the fiscal year in their geographical area.

The primary goal of this pilot project is to increase communication amongst Head Start programs and between the regional office and communities so that all Head Start programs are updated on regional activities and also so that community issues, challenges and successes can be brought to the RAC table. Sometimes programs feel alone as they struggle with their challenges. The more opportunities to get together and share challenges, ideas, and successes, the further ahead every community will be, and our programs will be even better.

We are all unique, with diverse situations, ways of seeing things and dealing with challenges, ideas about programming, strengths and weaknesses. We are all in a journey of growth as we work together for our children.

We need to keep talking and working together to make sure our on-reserve Head Start programs are community-driven and work with our community needs and resources. We are all very busy—our work is challenging, and we have personal lives which need our attention. It takes extra time to give feedback, share ideas, ask questions. But we will build better programs for all the children if we take the time to communicate with each other.

When you have questions, ideas or concerns, please share them through your regional rep. As the year unfolds, let the regional office staff know how this pilot project is working, and whether having the additional resources for the regional reps for conference calls and regional gatherings is helpful.

You'll find bios and contact info for the regional reps on the following pages.

Thank you!

Kelly

Kelly Terbasket
ECD Project Coordinator
Community Health Associates of B.C.



Coming together is a *beginning*.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.

—HENRY FORD

To work in the world lovingly means that we are defining *what we are for*, rather than reacting to what we are against.

—CHRISTINA BALDWIN

