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ROWING TOGETHER

NEWS & RESOURCES FOR THE BC FIRST NATIONS HEAD START ON-RESERVE PROGRAM

BC FIRST NATIONS HEAD START ON RESERVE



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Ktunaxa Head Start Fair

OUR CHILDREN LIVE ALL OVER,
ON RESERVE AND OFF RESERVE.
As they grow and experience the world,
they are influenced by all the people
they have relationships with, regardless

of their community or their place of residence. If we were to work together—on and off reserve, community and community, sharing together—we would have continue to be successful in our efforts

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I think we
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Linda Gravelle
Tobacco Plains Head Start

to reclaim our uniqueness as strong, alive and vibrant Ktunaxa people, like we were at the St. Eugene's Mission Resort the weekend of February 17, 18 and 19, 2006 during the Head Start Fair.

Over 100 people spent that weekend together, learning. Each Head Start site showcased their strengths, invited families to come and join them, facilitated workshops and made space for everyone to participate and be together regardless of age and ability. The sad part was that there were people who wanted to come but couldn't because there wasn't enough room. It was truly a pleasure to have board members, leadership and a few directors and Ktunaxa Nation Council staff pop their heads in to check it out. It was an honour for me personally to have so many people invest their time, effort and belief into this initiative.

Over and over, I heard parents, aunts and uncles and grandparents talk about how much fun they were having, what they were learning, how much fun the kids were having. Everyone seemed to be visiting with people and family while attending the workshops and took part in the events offered.

The feedback I received from resort staff and others in attendance, as well as from the guest workshop presenters, was so affirming and positive. One staff said it was amazing to hear and see the kids playing, to have the language taught, hear the drums, smell the hides and see people together, all ages, in the same place where thirty years ago, St. Eugene's Mission—the old residential school—many of those things were taken away.

We had eight youth who acted as aunts and uncles for the parents in workshops, including a young man that took the time to play outside games with the kids (mostly the



boys) whose parents were in workshops on conflict resolution and speech and language learning. Another man took it upon himself to learn to make his own moccasins. One mom learned to make moccasins while her children learned beside her, making felt moccasins for themselves.

One of our facilitators changed plans to come back the next day and another to stay the night because they were enjoying themselves and were not done teaching and learning and playing together.

We had all generations together, Elders and youth and parents with their children, all learning to do things like make moccasins, understand conflict, find ways to support Ktunaxa language learning at home, and bead a new stitch. People have requested more opportunities to gather in this way, based upon these ideas of learning between and with communities.

I totally see the benefit and would agree that we need to do more things as our ties are usually not only to one community, nor can all of our needs be met in one place or by one person or one age group. Our children learn from everyone they meet; what they learn can be influenced by what we offer in Head Start.

Youth we recognize as becoming parents one day, and so we ask for their energy in our activities. Elders and parents have knowledge to share. Older siblings model learning for the little ones as well as ways of doing. We have all seen it, right? You tell the older one not to walk on the road because the little one will follow. Well, we are showing the older ones to be careful how they walk because they are leading the little ones.

Michele Sam, Ktunaxa Collaborative Head Start

Organizing the Head Start Fair

KTUNAXA COLLABORATIVE HEAD START IS IN ITS THIRD YEAR of funding and has four partner sites located in the beautiful Ktunaxa Territories in southeast B.C.: St. Mary's (a few kilometres from Cranbrook), Tobacco Plains (close to the U.S. border), Akisqnuk (north of Cranbrook near Windermere) and Lower Kootenay. The partner sites are several hours apart by car and generally meet once every other month.

The idea behind the Head Start Fair was simple. Head Start Planner Michele Sam envisioned a weekend-long fair where staff, children, families and community members could come together to support each other, and learn from one another. The hope was that people would see that they don't have to know everything—that they can learn from and share good ideas and resources amongst each other. "We are a collaborative program, and so we should get together and share with each other. People want to participate, to learn, and to share, but it isn't always easy to do so. I wanted to re-create a space of wellness for people to come to."

Michele asked each site, "What could you do?" and left it open for them to plan a half-day sessions. St. Mary's is known for its drumming and singing and shared this with everyone;

Tobacco Plains is known for moc-casin-making and gave a hands-on workshop on making moc-casins. Akisqnuk did beading finger

puppets, and Lower Kootenay shared about how to support language learning, how to build teepees, and talked about the sturgeon-nose canoe that is unique to the Ktunaxa culture. A staff member from St. Mary's hosted two writing workshops for youth. The Aboriginal Youth, Culture and Language Program at the College

of the Rockies brought its entire language class; the 15 students in the class each planned an activity to share with participants at the Head Start fair. "It showed people—see—you can learn the language," said Michele.

Two workshops were brought in: the B.C. Aboriginal Child Care Society came to do the Moe the Mouse speech and language workshop, and Gary Harper (author of *The Joy of Conflict Resolution*) did conflict resolution workshops.

The fair was open to the Head Start communities, but families with children under the age of six were given priority, and in the end 69 children under the age of 12 participated! Each community was asked to bring an uncle or an auntie with them to help with all the children.

To fund the fair, Ktunaxa Head Start first organized a fundraiser. Because they had made a personal connection with her some time before, they invited well-known speaker Barbara Coloroso, who spoke to community and mainstream service providers for \$100 a ticket. Barbara donated her time and the proceeds went to the fair. Ktunaxa also applied for Head Start enhancement funds to bring people together and for help with the development of cultural tool boxes.



Tobacco Plains Head Start coordinator Linda Gravelle found the Fair to be a really positive

experience. "It was fascinating to get to watch all the other Head Starts and get to meet all the other kids, who we hear about, but don't always get to meet. I think we opened eyes to a lot of activities that Head Start is able to bring into the community."

Head Start components

1 Culture & Language

2 Education

3 Health Promotion

4 Nutrition

5 Parent & Family Involvement

6 Social Support