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# ROWING TOGETHER

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

## Learning on the Land

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SODA CREEK HEAD START CHILDREN ON THE SXUSEM PICKING FIELD TRIP

**T**WO SUMMERS AGO SODA CREEK HEAD START joined the Soda Creek community for a weeklong traditional fish camp where fish were canned, dried, and of course, eaten. This was a great experience for the children, who frequently visited the underground pit houses, ate saskatoons till we thought they would burst, and enjoyed the stories and camaraderie of the whole community.

This campout was the impetus for further field trips, which are now an important component of our Head Start programming.

Last spring, with the ice still on Tye Lake, Head Start families, Elders, youth and other community members loaded up vehicles and the band van and headed out to the lake to collect fur cones and roots for birch bark basket making and hide tanning. There were around 28 people from young to elderly that

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CECILIA BOILING PITCH

BARB, SKEM'ICIS AND ERIN PRACTICING NETTING FISH



joined us for the day. The success of this first field trip encouraged us to plan a field trip every month. Our hope was to welcome the whole community—who in turn support our children and families—and to promote our culture and language by planning the field trips to traditional land use areas.

The next month we took a trip across the Fraser River to a traditional site of the Buckskin Reserve. The people from this reserve suffered greatly during the influenza at the turn of the century and the handful of band members that survived were moved beside the Soda Creek band and adopted in. The place we chose to visit had been a long-ago summer camp along the Fraser River, on the opposite side of the river from one of Soda Creek's traditional fishing areas, now the Xats'ull Heritage Site.

We were fortunate to have knowledgeable Elders Minnie Phillips, Jess Mitchell, Cecilia DeRose, John Phillips and Aaron Evans along, who were willing to share some of the history of the area. We explored under the gigantic fir trees and found mossy depressions of long-ago pit houses and cache sites.

On this day we made pitch medicine for families to take home. Everyone picked fir pitch from the trees. The children were quite interested, and with their small fingers, were naturally adept at picking the balls of pitch from between the layers of fir bark. Once the pitch was collected, Elder Cecilia DeRose put it all in an old coffee can and melted it over a fire, stirring constantly with a home spoon whittled from a piece of kindling. Everyone gathered around to watch the process. It took a while for the pitch to melt, but once it did Cecilia stopped stirring and let the tree

bark, sticks and needles settle to the bottom and then poured the clear liquid pitch into another clean coffee can. She added Vaseline, the fresh scent kind, melting and mixing it into the hot pitch. Before the mixture could cool and solidify, it was poured into film canisters. Everyone was happy to take some pitch medicine home to be used to heal minor infections and sores.

This field trip was so successful with the

families and other community members that we decided to extend the learning by making Secwepemc booklets from the pictures taken during the trip, complete with Secwepemctsin phrases provided by Elder Cecilia DeRose.

We used a power point presentation program and instead of viewing it as a show, the pages were printed off on the computer and bound with a spiral bookbinder. This was a fairly inexpensive project and brought many comments from families and community members. Booklets were given out and everyone thought it was great to have a book with pictures of our children and families written in Secwepemctsin to promote the use of our language.

From that point on, it was just a matter of organizing rides for future trips into our traditional lands. The families all chipped in and brought potluck lunches and many trips were supported and partnered with other band departments. We spent the summer picking saskatoons, huckleberries, sxusem, oregon grape, and chokecherries, collecting birch bark and cedar roots, fishing, and touring the land. The fall was time to fish and get ready for winter by canning, drying and freezing meat, fish, fruits and vegetables.

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community



I was amazed at the response that we had from the community; everyone kept asking where we were going next. Our greatest challenge was making sure there were enough rides and keeping to a schedule, because some destinations, like for picking huckleberries, were at least a 4-hour drive. This is a long time for little ones to sit in the heat of summer. We also had to share the band van with other departments, so trips had to be planned around availability. Through all the trials of getting the field trip organized, the rewards were awesome. Many of our families had never traveled to any of these places, or had never had the opportunity to take their children on outings like this. We learned a lot about our environment and our culture and we anticipate many more trips in the future.

Barb McLean  
Coordinator, Soda Creek Head Start

## The Kindness Chain

Our “Kindness Chain” has really increased some positive behaviours. The chain is made out of paper strips, each helpful or kind gesture is written on each strip, with the child’s name. The strips are connected to create a beautiful, colorful chain. Some examples would be: helping a friend with a zipper, pushing the tire swing, or helping someone finish an art project. Now the children are telling staff when their friends are “on the chain” for good deeds—not just the staff are noticing. The children are proud to be on the chain and enjoy watching it get longer.

Peavine AHS, High Prairie, Alberta  
Reprinted from *Creation Stories: Personal Reflections About Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities*, 2002.

## Born to Read Bags

“The more parents, relatives and caregivers read to babies and young children, the more likely the child will develop a life-long interest in reading,” says Audrey Waite, coordinator of the Comox Valley AHS. To reinforce this message, Comox Valley AHS and their partner, the local health unit, developed a Born to Read book bag for newborns. Audrey credits the local Early Literacy program with the book bag idea, which was funded through the CAPC mobilization fund.

The Born to Read bag is presented to First Nations mothers at the hospital or when the nurse makes her first home visit. It contains a tiny newborn t-shirt with the “Born to Read” logo and includes pamphlets on the importance of reading to babies, two videos (AHS *Celebrate the Dream* and *Precious Minds*—[www.preciousminds.org](http://www.preciousminds.org)—about nurturing literacy in the early years); and an aboriginal book.

Reprinted with permission from “Keeping In Touch,” Spring 2002.



## contest what are your favorite aboriginal children's books?

We want to know what Head Start children, staff, and families love to read! Tell us about your favorite aboriginal children's books and why you love them, so we can share them with other sites through the newsletter.

All submissions will be entered into a draw and winners will receive new books for their collections!

E-mail or fax entries to:  
*Head Start Favorite Children's Book Contest*  
Attn: Kelly Terbasket  
Fax: (250) 499-8012  
E-mail:  
[Kelly\\_terbasket@nethop.net](mailto:Kelly_terbasket@nethop.net)

**Entries must be received on or before Friday, April 7, 2006**