



B.C. First Nations Head Start **Getting Dads Involved**

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COORDINATOR DEBRA JOHNSON AND THE STAFF AT ESKETEMC HEAD START IN WILLIAMS LAKE NOTICED THAT THEY HAD MANY SUCCESSFUL PARENT PROGRAMS WHERE MAINLY WOMEN WERE PARTICIPATING. “Dads would come in to our program or a workshop and there would be 20 moms and only one dad. We recognized that we needed to offer something that would encourage dads to be involved in the program.

They invited a facilitator from the Williams Lake area to come in and do a “Dads Only Workshop.” “We got older men from our community to talk about their experiences as fathers and the things that they experienced and would like to change. The workshop was designed to get men thinking about the different ways they could be involved in their child’s education.” The facilitator suggested that the Esketemc Head Start use outdoor activities as a tool to get dads involved.

This has blossomed into many different activities where dads can be involved throughout the year—such as walking to the creek and talking about parenting issues, taking the children into the traditional territories to pick sage, fish for trout, talk about plants and animals or whatever the natural landscape offered them while out on a walk, and chores around the center.

The most noticeable change since dads have been involved in the program is that they feel that they are an important part of the programs. “A lot of the men said that they wanted to participate in their child’s upbringing but didn’t know how. The men’s role in our community has changed over the past years. Previously, men didn’t interact with their children, as they were working doing hard labor or in the bush... things have changed and now men are starting to participate in their child’s upbringing. The men now drop off their children and get involved that way. The men have found it very tough. A lot of our men believe that raising children is a woman’s job. They are finding it a struggle to change their own way of thinking to be able to help out with their kids more. It was good for the men to talk together and find out that other dads were struggling with the same thing.

Esketemc Head Start is also brainstorming other ideas to get men more involved. They are planning to start having a male helper volunteer list, asking men to sub at their center, do outdoor activities, work with the children, have lunch with the children. “We always have coffee on and

snacks and lunch to make men feel welcome anytime. It's been a long process, but each little thing is building onto each little piece of our puzzle.

Debra Johnson
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