

NORTHERN BC TOUCHSTONES OF HOPE

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TOUCHSTONES COMMUNITY SESSIONS FOLLOW-UP

The Touchstones of Hope community sessions took place in 2009 and 2010 with five different child and family service agencies. The sessions engaged participants with an activity called PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) which allowed them to brainstorm their dreams for their children in their communities with only two rules: the dreams had to be positive and possible within 10 years. Participants shared their dreams and then spoke about the current situation for children and what programs and services could be found in their respective communities. Then the participants came up with the people and resources that would be needed in order to make the dreams a reality for kids. The last part of PATH encouraged participants to create short term and long term steps that would bring them closer to realizing their dreams.

Since the community sessions, the Touchstones of Hope Coordinator for the northern BC Touchstones movement has been working with the agencies to carry out next steps. Northwest Inter-nation Family and Community Services Society (NIFCSS) had their community session in the spring of 2010. They have been actively continuing the movement toward reconciliation and have had several follow-up meetings to implement the next steps through action plans. On October 27, 2011, the agency had the fourth follow-up meeting for those who were at the community session or who were interested in participating. Kathleen Bennett, executive director of NIFCSS, spoke about the follow-up pieces to Touchstones and how participants could engage youth in their communities in culture and language. The session also encouraged participants to think about how to put next steps into action even if there was little or no funding to carry out the activities. One example was one an activity called 'Roots' which showed ways of getting back to cultural and community roots without a large amount of funding.

The participants in the Touchstones of Hope community sessions in northern BC touched upon issues affecting their children like the lack of funding for education, child welfare and health. Although these issues are large scale, change can happen now through all of us, regardless of our age or walk of life. See page 3 for an example of a youth making a difference for First Nations children and youth!

For 7 free ways to make a difference for First Nations children, youth and families, visit the Caring Society web page at www.fncaringociety.com.

*Wishing
you and
your
families a
safe and
happy
holiday
season and
all the best
for 2012!*

Have a Heart for First Nations children, youth and families!

The Have a Heart campaign invites individuals to support culturally based equity for First Nations children on reserve. On February 14th 2012, Valentine's Day, the Caring Society encourages you to engage in respectful activities that support equity for First Nations children so that each and every child in Canada is treated fairly. 'Have a Heart' supports the I Am a Witness campaign for culturally based services and funding for child welfare services on reserves. Earlier this year, Chair Shirish Chotalia at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal dismissed a complaint filed by the Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations alleging Canada racially discriminates against First Nations children by under-funding child welfare services on reserves. Chair Chotalia ruled that federally funded services on reserve cannot be compared to provincially funded services off reserve. The Caring Society, the AFN and the Canadian Human Rights Commission have appealed Chair Chotalia's decision and the appeal will be held at the Federal Court of Appeal from February 13-15, 2012 at the Supreme Court of Canada on 301 Wellington Street in Ottawa, Ontario. The hearing is open to the public and the Caring Society encourages everyone to learn more and to take part in this historic event. The Have a Heart campaign encourages you



to send Valentine's Day cards to Members of Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Premiers to show your support. The Caring Society has cards on their website to download or print. They are selling cards in English or in French in packages of 5 as a fund raiser with all proceeds going to support the 7 Ways to Make a Difference. One package of cards is \$10 or you can buy 3 for \$25. You can also show your support by spreading awareness through your networks or through social media sites like YouTube, Twitter or Facebook. If you cannot attend the hearing and take part in the fun activities here in Ottawa, host a Valentine's Day party! So, we ask you, have a heart and show your love, unity and compassion in creating a better Canada for all. Together we can ensure that First Nations children and youth have a better, brighter future!

Get involved! Go to
<http://www.fncfcs.com/have-a-heart>
for more information!

Touchstones of Hope Evaluation

In November of 2011, Dr. Michael Saini released an Executive Summary, titled *Touchstones of Hope: Participant Action Research to explore experiences of First Nation Communities in Northern British Columbia*. The evaluation is based on the information taken from the community sessions, including recordings of the sessions and a follow-up survey sent to all participants. The main themes in Dr. Saini's evaluation are:

- The importance of community-based collaboration
- Involvement of Elders
- Well-being of children and families
- Importance of Aboriginal Culture
- Learning from the past and moving forward together
- Changing the culture of child welfare
- Changing the role of child welfare with First Nation children and families
- Making a difference
- Barriers to making a difference

The full evaluation will be completed early in 2012. See the northern BC Touchstones website for more details!

A Youth Making a Difference!

Graham Shonfield, a student at Carleton University, spent four days camping out in a tent on campus in December, 2011 to fund-raise for Shannen's Dream. While there, Graham not only raised awareness but also \$1971.20! He brought this generous donation to the Caring Society in Ottawa and had his picture taken with Cindy Blackstock. Thank you Graham for being an inspiration and for helping to make a difference!



**FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON THE NORTHERN BC
TOUCHSTONES OF
HOPE, PLEASE CONTACT:**

Andrea Auger
CAB/Touchstones
Coordinator

First Nations Child &
Family Caring Society of
Canada

251 Bank Street, Suite 302

Ottawa, ON K2P 1X3

Phone: 613-230-5885

Fax: 613-230-3080

aauger@fncaringsociety.com

