

Northern BC Touchstones of Hope

E-Newsletter

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First Nations communities and the Ministry for Child and Family Development take the lead in implementing the evidence based Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous children, youth and families in Northern British Columbia. This movement is designed to improve the child welfare system so it can better respond to the needs of First Nations children and their families while respecting their distinct cultures and contexts.

I am a Witness Campaign

Join the "I am a witness" campaign. This campaign calls on caring Canadians, people from around the world and organizations to sign up to say they will witness the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on First Nations Child Welfare which is reviewing a complaint that the federal government discriminates against First Nations children by providing them with less child welfare funding and benefit than other children receive. Being a witness means you agree to follow the case by either attending at the tribunal in person or following it through the media or visiting our website www.fnwitness.ca. After you have heard all the facts presented at the tribunal you will be in a good position to make up your own mind about whether or not you feel the federal government is treating First Nations children fairly.

Be amongst the first to sign up as a witness - it is free and open to all organizations and individuals and please encourage everyone in your circle to do so as well. A year after the apology for residential schools we want the Canadian government to know that caring Canadians are keeping watch over this generation of First Nations children.

Here is the website - please do spend 2 minutes to sign up! It is free! <http://www.fnwitness.ca>

Program Updates

Tansay! My name is Dianna Mould and I am the Coordinator for the Northern BC Touchstones Project. We are very excited over what is happening in the north in regards to the Touchstones of Hope Project. In July, we had two Touchstones of Hope Train the Trainer sessions. Both trainings were well attended with people from across the north region in attendance. Cindy Blackstock and Andrea Auger came from Ottawa to facilitate the training and all participants were grateful for their knowledge and expertise. Many of the participants left with excitement and energy for the work that is happening in the north and with much enthusiasm to implement the Touchstones principles in their home communities. We had positive feedback from the participants about their experience. Here are some of the comments:

**“ We must keep on with this work!
I am inspired to move forward!
Wall charting the pathway was very impactful to linking the dream to each Touchstone; it connected me more to the curriculum as a tool!”**

This fall and winter is going to be a busy one for those who are involved with this northern BC initiative! With the direction from the Northern BC Advisory committee we are going to be hosting Touchstones of Hope with five of the Northern Delegated Agencies before the next fiscal year. Many of the facilitators will be those who took the training in July. Beginning in May 2010 we will focus on bringing the Touchstones of Hope to some of the northern communities. We will have an applications process that will be available on our website for people/agencies who are interested.

Train the Trainer

From July 13-16, 2009, approximately 30 representatives from child welfare agencies and other organizations involved in the well being of children in Northern British Columbia, attended one of two Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare train the trainer sessions. This training provides facilitators with tools to guide the community based on interpretations of the five Touchstone of Hope Principles (self-determination, holistic response, structural interventions, non-discrimination and culture and language). The ultimate goal of the Touchstones of Hope program is to engage communities in the redesign of child welfare so that it better serves Aboriginal children, youth and families. These two particular training sessions were the first sessions hosted within one region of a province. The benefit of this approach is that the training prepares a whole network of people concentrated in one area to help implement the Touchstones movement. The facilitators, Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and Andrea Auger, CAB Coordinator from the FNCFCSC welcomed the participants on the first morning of the training. The sessions opened with a prayer as well as group introductions. Following introductions, Ms. Auger presented the history of the Touchstones of Hope and the reconciliation movement.

The facilitators lead participants through the activity 'Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope' (PATH). This activity serves as a tool of imagining a different reality than the one facing Aboriginal children in child welfare today. The participants were asked what they think child welfare in Northern British Columbia should look like for Aboriginal children but with two rules: the ideas had to be positive and possible to achieve within 10 years. After time for reflection, the participants' dreams for child welfare in Northern BC were written on the banquet paper. After the dream was created, facilitators took participants through the Indicators of the Dream, Now (the present situation of child welfare), Enroll (who needs to be on board), Building strength (how can we do this) and Next steps. The goal of this activity was to show participants that they could use this activity as a tool to start the discussions when facilitating community workshops.

Not only is PATH an economical resource but also a great planning tool to use with community members of all ages and literacy levels to capture community dreams for children and families. PATH facilitator guides are available to order from Inclusion Press by telephone (416) 658-5363 or from their website <http://www.inclusion.com>.

The PATH activity set the stage for the two days of training as it directly relates to the Touchstones of Hope guiding principles - Culture & Language, Holistic Approach, Self Determination, Non Discrimination and Structural Interventions - and the process of reconciliation - Truth Telling, Acknowledging, Restoring and Relating.

The first day of the training included background information about the need for reconciliation in child welfare and the current situation. Ms. Blackstock presented "What research says about First Nations child welfare" and Learning from the Past. In the first presentation, Ms. Blackstock shared her research regarding the current situation in child welfare. In the talk, there was detailed information on the over representation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children in the child welfare system and how funding inequalities in the child welfare system prevent a solution to the problem from occurring. Ms. Blackstock's research underlines how Indigenous peoples remain discriminated against and that they are more likely to be subjected to systematic structural risk which, in turn, worsens the problem and we are seeing more children in care.

To further illustrate the problem of structural risk and discrimination, Ms. Blackstock talked about the Human Rights Complaint of Canada as well as Jordan's Principle, a child first principle to resolving jurisdictional disputes within and between federal and provincial/territorial governments. For more information on the Human Rights Complaint or Jordan's Principle, please see the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada's website (www.fncairingsociety.com) or the 'I am a witness' website at www.fnwitness.ca.

The facilitators took participants through public speaking and facilitation tips so that participants were able to obtain helpful hints of how to speak in front of others and how to facilitate group discussion.

In the afternoon, Ms. Auger brainstormed the definition of reconciliation with the group and what it meant to them in their own context of child welfare. The group then related how each of their definitions applied to the process of reconciliation. To further demonstrate how the process of reconciliation works, the participants were given the example of Language & Culture and brainstormed what that could look like in Northern British Columbia. After the brainstorming activity, the participants had a chance to explore in further detail the Touchstone of Hope 5 module curriculum.

On the second day, participants were able to put the information and the skills they learned the previous day into practice. With a partner or small group, participants chose a unit from one of the 5 modules and developed their own way of presenting it to the group. Since each group had only 7 minutes to present. The purpose of the activity was not so much about the materials as it was to plan for a limited amount of time and to practice their hand at facilitation. Every participant contributed their own experiences to this activity which made each presentation unique.

At the end of each two day training session, participants were given a certificate. Each group closed with a circle so that everyone was given a chance to recount their experience over the two days.

On the Friday, Cindy Blackstock presented her talk called "Off the Dusty Bookshelves". In it, she shares ways that individuals can make a difference starting from a grassroots level all the way to a national level.

“We must keep on with this work” – Participant comment

Between now and March 2010, the Touchstones program will be piloted in 5 communities in Northern British Columbia. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Dianna Mould, Touchstones Project Coordinator, by telephone 250-565-6314 or by e-mail Dianne.Mould@gov.bc.ca.

For more information on the Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare document, please see www.reconciliationmovement.org.

