

- 29 -

Garden Hill First Nation

Targeting Kids – And Moose – to Increase Physical Activity

How many students get to go moose hunting for their fall field trip? Anyone in senior high, if you're from Garden Hill First Nation. And don't feel bad for the elementary school kids – they're going fishing!

Marilyn Wood is on the CDPI committee in Garden Hill. She said children as young as eight years old are developing diabetes in the community and she takes it personally.

"I felt like we failed her, we didn't catch her in time," she said of an eight-year-old child that developed diabetes. "They're getting younger and younger."

Health Care professionals are doing everything they can to prevent more children from developing the chronic illness. They go into the school to try and reach children in their early years with nutrition and physical activity information.

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They have introduced a 'no junk food' policy and teach young people how to cook and bake nutritious food. Visual aids are used to help children understand how much sugar is in a can of pop or how much fat is in a hamburger or french fries. They also use a foot model to show children what happens to a foot when diabetes sets in. Children are shown how sores begin and how, eventually, the foot might have to be amputated. Wood said the children remember a lesson better if there is a visual presentation to go with it and that they ask a lot of questions during these sessions. She said she believes they are gradually making headway with healthy eating in the community.

There is also a gardening program at the school with a small greenhouse and children are given a small garden plot as well as seeds. They grow the basics – lettuce and carrots – which they call their "exercise food." "We try to bring it to their level by using their language," said Wood. Fishing nets were purchased with CDPI funding and the elementary school children are taken out in the winter on the ice to go fishing. The fish are cooked right there so children learn the nutritional value. Wood said this has become part of the curriculum and the students love it.

In the fall high school students are flown out to traditional camps for a week to go moose hunting. They not only hunt the moose, but learn how to dress and prepare the hide. "The meat is better for them than pizza pops and stuff like that," said Wood. "They understand that now." The effort is a collective effort including the Chief and

Council, the school and the parents. Chief and Council go with the students as guides and chaperones. The outing also provides an opportunity for good physical activity. “They’re taught how to move, which is good,” said Wood.

Wood said they provide healthy snacks and also use visual presentations for prenatal clinics. Prospective parents are showed models of babies in various stages of development which include evidence

on how cigarette smoking affects a foetus. “It seems to be working, it’s making them think,” said Wood. “We’re showing them a lot of things they can do to have a healthy baby.”

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Take Note

How Are Unborn Babies Affected?

- Smoking is known to have an effect on babies before they are born. Nicotine, carbon monoxide and other chemicals in tobacco smoke are passed on to the baby through the placenta.
- Nicotine increases a baby’s heart rate and breathing movements. Some of the chemicals passed on through the mother’s blood are known to cause cancer.
- The chances of a baby’s dying at birth or shortly thereafter are increased if the mother has smoked during pregnancy.
- A clear relationship exists between the number of cigarettes smoked during pregnancy and a slowdown in the growth of the foetus. These babies are often smaller than average and more prone to perinatal complications, illnesses and death.

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/body-corps/preg-gros-eng.php>