

- 69 -

Wuskwi Sipihk First Nation

First Nation Revives Past Practises for Future Health

Gardening and using tobacco for ceremonial purposes are two practises that used to come naturally to the people of the Wuskwi Sipihk First Nation. Today, with the help of CDPI funding, there is a revival of both.

Community nurse Wanda Beaudry said the work plan for the First Nation targeted all three of the CDPI objectives – smoking cessation, increased physical activity and improved nutrition, and also included a fourth emphasis on mental health.

“Young people can learn how to use tobacco the way it was meant to be used, not the way it is used today.”

According to aboriginal tradition, tobacco is a sacred plant symbolizing cleansing and communication with the spirit world. The smoke of tobacco in a pipe or a fire rises up and carries prayers to the Creator. The sharing of the pipe creates a spiritual connection within the group sharing it. Beaudry said CDPI funding assists with costs for sweat lodge ceremonies led by

traditional elders where “young people can learn how to use tobacco the way it was meant to be used, not the way it is used today.”

Another tradition, nearly forgotten, is the practise of gardening. Beaudry said there are people in their 30s and 40s that remember helping with their grandparents’ garden, but it has been many years since growing food was the norm. Beaudry said she got the idea of a garden after surveying children in the school about food in their households. She asked questions, not only about what kind of food was in the house, but about whether or not there was always food available and at what point in the month families were running out of food. “The results from that survey were amazing for this day and age. Kids don’t always have food at home,” she said.

Her own love of gardening, and the fact that community members would ask her for left-over produce from her garden, were the inspiration for a huge community garden in Wuskwi Sipihk. “I thought if I could get them to have gardens, they would have food when they couldn’t afford to buy it and it would be one step towards healthy eating,” said Beaudry. Along with children from the school and a few adults, she planted 32 rows of potatoes, eight rows of onions, 12 rows of carrots, 10 rows of corn as well as cucumbers, dill and garlic. The large garden was quite a distance from the main residential area of the community, so keeping it weed-free was a challenge. However, people did manage to harvest most of the vegetables. The size of the

potatoes and onions became the talk of the community and Beaudry is already getting requests for a similar project next year, perhaps putting gardens in back yards instead of so far away.

Using CDPI funding and working with the diabetes program and pre- and post-natal groups, the CDPI committee is hoping to get a cooking class started that will bring elders, children and young parents

together. They also want to organize a nature walk for children in the community which will incorporate physical activity and a healthy snack as well as cultural information.

Contact Information:

Wanda Beaudry
204-236-4894

Take Note

Traditional tobacco has been used by many First Nations people to:

- Pray
- Give thanks to the Creator and Mother Earth
- Communicate with the spirits
- Purify the mind and heal the body

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada reports the following facts on smoking rates in First Nations and Inuit communities:

- 60% of on-reserve First Nations people between the ages of 18 and 34 currently smoke;
- 70% of Inuit in the north between the ages of 18 and 45 currently smoke;
- Almost half of Inuit (46%) who smoke started smoking at age 14 or younger; and
- The majority of on-reserve First Nations people who smoke (52%) started smoking between the ages of 13 and 16.

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/substan/tobac-tabac/index-eng.php>