

TeLLING OuR SToRY

WOYAKI OWICAJKAPI • TIBAUGI MOIN •
É WÍTAMÁK NITÁCIMOWININÁN

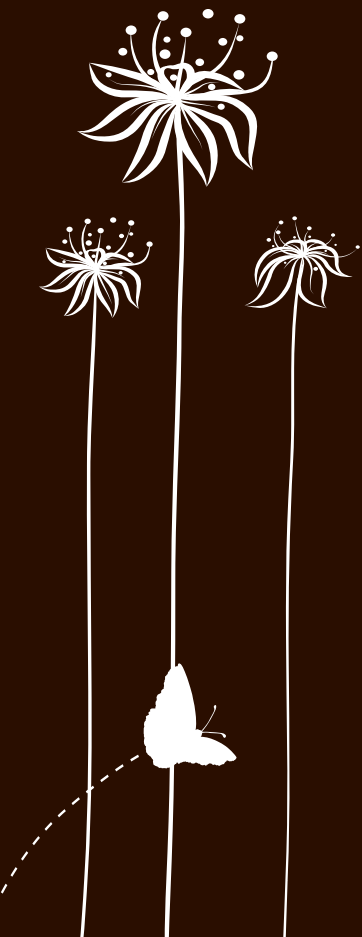
Winter 2012



Narrative Report to the Southern First Nations Chiefs and Councils

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Introduction

The Southern First Nations Network of Care (SFNNC)¹ has undertaken to provide the southern First Nations Chiefs and Councils with an overview report twice a year – summer and winter. The SFNNC is pleased to present the Winter 2012 report. Previous reports can be found on the SFNNC website at <http://www.southernnetwork.org>.

This report focuses on ways in which the southern First Nations CFS Agencies and the SFNNC are working to integrate cultural practices and approaches into the delivery of child and family services.

In *Where the People Gather* you will read about the cultural camps that Dakota Ojibway CFS offers to children, families, foster families, and staff. In the article on Equine Assisted Learning, you will find information on work that is being done to incorporate horses in a teaching and learning capacity, to spiritually help in the healing journey with our families and communities.

In *Governance and the Seven Teachings*, you will see how the Peguis CFS Agency is working to incorporate the seven teachings into their board governance practices and their Agency Code of Conduct.

Ryan's Journey is the heartwarming and compelling story of a young man living with FASD, sharing how the Visions and Voices initiative has impacted his life. *Roots and Wings* provides an overview of a successful life skills program, aimed at youth in care, being offered by West Region CFS. *Eyes for Me (Engaging Youth Empowering Spirits for Mother*

Earth) provides an overview of a Winnipeg based program to “encourage youth to engage with their peers and strengthen their cultural identity as the walk their journey of life on Mother Earth”.

We hope that you find this report informative and useful. We welcome any suggestions you might have about things you would like to see in future reports. Please contact Jim Compton, Director, Community Relations and Communications, at 204-783-9190 (toll free: 1-800-665-5762) or jim.compton@southernnetwork.org.

We would be pleased to come out to your community to meet with you on concerns that you may have with respect to child and family services. Please contact Lorna Croitor at 204-783-9190 (toll free: 1-800-665-5762) or lorna.croitor@southernnetwork.org to arrange this.

You are encouraged to check out the SFNNC website at www.southernnetwork.org. In addition to resource information, you will find copies of annual reports and annual audits.

¹ Southern First Nations Network of Care is the operating name of the First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority, also referred to as the Southern Authority.



Where the People Gather

By Jim Compton

The gentle and calming sound of a singular Indian Chant rises from the mist of the morning dew. It echoes from the morning fire like rising smoke. It blends and intertwines with a sweet grass sage smudge. As the Elder sings the smudge bowl is passed around, one by one to sleepy eyed handful of young boys and girls as they cleanse themselves in the cool morning air. The song rises with the morning sun and it carries over the valley, through teepees, through the pow-wow arbor and through the hearts of the people...the people who have come to gather.

The words sung in the Dakota Language, announce, "People I am standing in the center, with my prayer... People look at me... Our way of life... It's a hard way... You showed me this way of life... Behold I am Scout Boy!"

Then there is quiet and stillness except for the sound of birds chirping. Young eyes rise up and stare at the striking figure of the Elder who emerges clearer with every second of the rising day. His war bonnet of eagle feathers rests comfortably on his head. Zuya Hoksheena (Scout Boy) greets them with a mighty, "Ha Ho!" He stares out over the valley past a giant medicine wheel painted in the four colors of the people.

"This place is called where the people gather. It has been blessed with that name. It is an

old traditional buffalo jump. The people captured and feasted on the buffalo here. As far as your eye can see to the west is where the camps were made. It is a place where babies were born and where Indian names were given to guide you through life. Today we gather here to carry on those traditions so that they will guide you through life."

Those words are delivered here every year by the Elders who assist in with running the Cultural Program for the Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services Agency (DOCFS). Over the past 6 years it has been the cultural gathering place for young men and woman who have found themselves in care of DOCFS. Bobbi Pompana, Executive Director of DOCFS, together with her management team realizes culture has to play a major role in everything the agency





does.

"It doesn't matter what age you are, whether you have a child in care, are an employee or who you are, these cultural camps are here to help. It's here to create more understanding and more pride in who we are and what we stand for. The idea is to help everybody function in their everyday lives," says Pompana.

After everyone has eaten, and done their everyday chores, the DOCFS cultural camp usually begins with a good old fashioned traditional pow-wow. A group of Sioux Valley singers beckon everyone to come watch, dance and enjoy. Foster parents, children, workers and Elders all take part ...some dance...some sing and some just come to marvel at the spectacular celebration of song and dance.

DOCFS Elder Jean Eagle of

Canupawakpwa has a big smile on her face as she watches the young ones dance. "I'm glad that they are here. I'm glad they have the cultural camps. It's because these kids are lost. They don't know where they have come from. This shows them where they have come from."

But more importantly this mini pow-wow celebration allows for everyone to take part including foster parents who, not so long ago, would never have seen themselves dancing in a traditional pow-wow. Foster parents like Jim and Debbie who dance alongside their foster daughter Neepin. Together with biological parents, children in care and foster parents alike all readily hold hands and perform the traditional round dance.

"We need this agency and what it offers. The cultural camp allows us to learn about this (our daughters)



culture. We're really pleased with it all," says Debbie.

"We now have people who want to get Indian Names for their children. And if you look closely you will see that a lot of the foster parents have gotten financial assistance to make outfits so that their children can dance," says Pompana.

A quick scan around the pow-wow arbor reveals a myriad of tents. Four times throughout the summer everyone involved with DOCFS comes and puts aside three days to learn the culture, the dances, the customs and the skill development (handicrafts) that make up the culture.

Pompana says this cultural renaissance began six years ago with a massive influx of children from the urban areas who did not have an idea of who they were culturally. These children were transferred to DOCFS through the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry/Child Welfare Initiative (AJI/CWI) off-reserve transfer process.

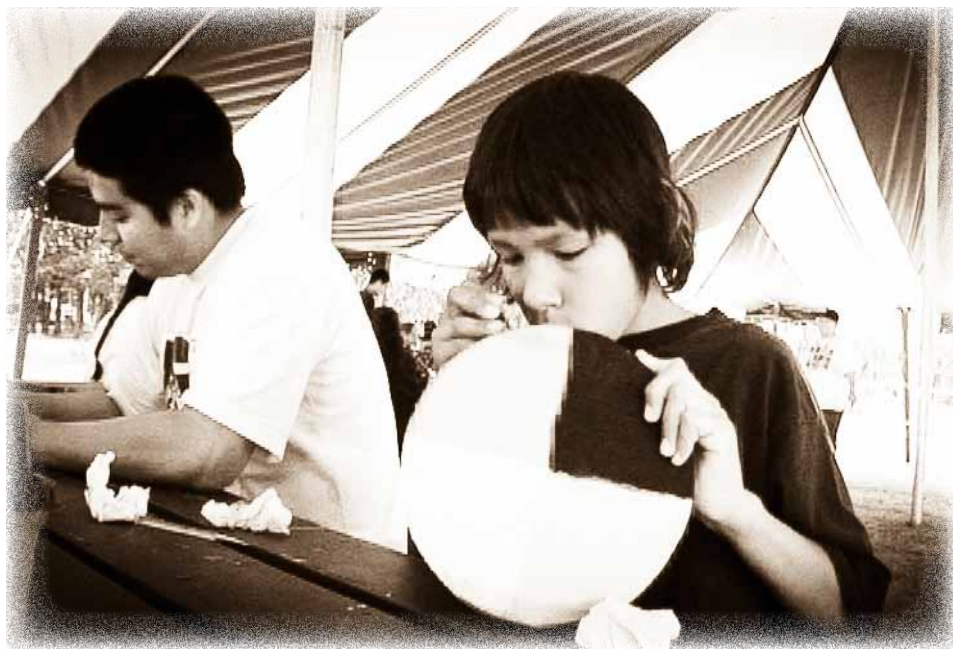
"Because everyone is involved in the activities they get a good idea of the concepts behind the culture. They come to know that culture is important in the development of a First Nations child in care."

Back in the woods, up a winding trail into the deep bush you can find Elder, Mark Hall. Hall runs a sweat lodge for the children and their parents.

"As you can see we're in nature. As First Nations we are always connected to nature. You can hear the birds and sometimes see the deer walking around. This is where we try and help the children connect to nature and their culture and their language. Here they learn that spiritually we are always in harmony and balance with nature," says Hall.

Later in the afternoon, a group of young women and two women Elders trek across the prairie, with paint cans in their hands, to a huge medicine wheel made of rocks. Today they will paint the rocks in the four colors of the medicine wheel.





Elder Debbie Beaulieu explains to the young women that these are the grandfathers. They are living things and have been here for centuries.

“They have a shine in their faces and eyes. It’s beautiful to see that. My spirit just sings. I love being able to help these young ladies.”

One young girl wears a necklace she has made at the camp. At first glance it looks as if she has put together the word “WOW”. That is until she turns the letters around to reveal that she has really made a necklace that says, “MOM”.

Camp coordinators have said, “I know of kids who have come to



every camp. It's their chance to participate in the traditions. It changes their identity and how they express themselves. As cultural workers we keep in contact with them. To help them as much as we can if they have a problem and need somebody to go to."

As the evening pow-wow comes to a close, a handful of young boys stare up at one of their friends who

has just begun to dance. The young man twists and turns to the beat of the drum. His name is Roland. As the dance ends a smaller younger boy expresses his gratitude.

"Today I felt very proud of myself because I thought that I could never dance again. I realized that I could pow-wow dance still. And I'm really proud of myself...and oh yeah...thank you Roland."





“Medicine Horse”

Equine Assisted Learning in Child Welfare

By Jim Compton

Elder Mark Hall, of the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, spoke of a great “Medicine” that was given to his people. It’s contained in an age old legend that was passed on to him from his grandfather, Solomon Hall. It speaks of three scouts who were sent out to find Medicine for the people who had become sick. They came upon an old medicine man who threw powder into the fire. What emerged were three horses...a colt, a mare and a stud. The old man had but one warning. He said, “Take care of these medicines.”

Hall says that story means so much for his people today. “Not so long ago I got together with my uncle, Gus High Eagle of Canupawakpa. With that story in mind we go together to do something with horses and youth.”

“You know a lot of these children were abused. But once they made a bond with these horses they realized a higher power greater than themselves that they could access through the horse,” says Hall.

Hall speaks of one young man in particular who was deathly afraid of horses. The young man had a long list of diagnoses.

*“Let a horse whisper in
your ear and breathe on
your heart. You will never
regret it.”*

Author Unknown

“We finally convinced him to get on the horse and he walked around the corral twice. After that the horse laid down on the ground. Then it got up and went straight for the boy again. We told the boy, ‘the horse was waiting for him.’”

“I know that the horse had taken all that junk the boy was





feeling and put it back in the ground. Today that young man is graduating high school.”

These testimonials of the healing power of the horse are being told more and more as Child Welfare agencies look for the medicine that will assist them in healing broken families and children.

Pretty Shield Equine Program

Recently, Southeast Child and Family Services and the Southern Network of Care took a few of their staff and workers down to Crow Agency Reservation in southern Montana. They wanted to witness firsthand the therapeutic power of the horse in action. Over three days they got to see how Equine Assisted Therapy was used as a tool to teach meth addicted clients and their families how to heal themselves. And because it's also crucial that social workers understand the concept fully,

everyone was asked to take part in the therapy sessions.

Pretty Shield founder, Bill Snell, believes that as Child Welfare Agencies move into intervention and prevention work they should keep in mind the experiential opportunity the horse offers families and children.

“The horse has a history with our people and we know that it works well. Today we know that it's thinking outside the box. What we are finding is that normal interventions like AA, school room settings, one on one and group therapy aren't working that well. So now we are using the horse to teach and it's very spiritual.”

“It's a three legged stool. What we are finding is that what is needed is a three pronged approach. Together with substance abuse expertise, cultural expertise and Equine Therapy expertise Indian people are finding they have the answer and it's just a matter of



practising these principles into reality,” says Snell.

So after three days of grooming, getting to know the horse and then putting it through a few obstacles in the corral, clients and workers alike are finding it is helping in their relationships.

“I can now talk to my kids, before it was like, ‘do this and do that.’ Now I find I can talk to them in a nice way. (The therapy) brings out the gentleness in me. Using the techniques you use with the horse brings out a better outcome,” says one young mother.

Clinical psychologist, Cory Rich, explains why the horse like no other animal is so powerful in these situations.

“Because of our egos we all fear to love completely in that moment. Beautiful thing about the horse is that it does. It doesn’t care who you are or who you might be. The horse is concerned about one thing. How you act in the

moment and how you relate to it as a partner. The horse provides the perfect mirror to reflect how we are choosing to be in those relationships.”

One father put it this way, “I learned patience and how to overcome situations as a family and deal with it a lot better.”

Equine Therapist, Gordon Birch, explains it this way, “Through horses and interaction with them they teach us about ourselves. We learn how to present ourselves in such a way that others will be able to accept us the way we truly want to be.”

Another mother says working with a 1200 pound animal taught her, among other things, to calm down. “Once I calmed down it was awesome. I realized how anxious or how our habits can cause such a problem in our families, with our kids and with our spouse. How we need to take a good look at ourselves and understand what we are doing wrong.”





On June 9th, 2011, the One Arrow Equestrian Centre held its Grand Opening of the Equine Assisted Learning classroom.

Snell feels that the horse has walked side by side with Indian people in food gathering, in transportation, and warfare, for millennia and now it is walking side by side in the therapeutic process. And today it is helping heal the most valuable thing which is our Families and relationships.

Dennis Meeches, Special Projects Manager for the Southern First Nations Network of Care and owner of the Spirit Horse Ranch, says he has experienced first-hand how developing a special bond with horses can help in one's everyday life. "Horses have always been a big part of my life and I chose to carry on our family tradition of raising horses because of how they have helped me as a child. I really believe working with horses can spiritually help in our healing journey with our families and communities here in Canada."

One Arrow Equine Assisted Learning

With that in mind Dennis Meeches and Jim Compton, SFNNC staff, traveled to the One Arrow First Nation, located 90 miles north of Saskatoon to learn more about their Equine Assisted Learning program. We found that the community of One Arrow has embraced Equine Assisted Learning in a big way.

"Essentially we wanted to see what the First Nations were doing with Equine Assisted Learning in Canada in relation to children in care. We had heard a lot of good things about the program at One Arrow," says Meeches.

The One Arrow Equine Assisted Learning Program is located in an old hockey rink that has undergone extensive renovations

to accommodate the needs of an entire community. On the south end it has a couple of classrooms and on the north a hockey size arena with which to carry out its programs. Koralie Gaudry and her husband Lawrence run the One Arrow Program.

“We have reawakened the horse community here. We have made a cultural connection to lost ways. The ways and the teachings of the horse,” says Koralie Gaudry. “The program is rooted in the community wisdom and knowledge of culture.”

Since its inception just over a year ago the program has captured the spirit of the community. Everyone from the school, child welfare, the health centre on down to the band office has been involved in the One Arrow program.

“It’s all about community problem solving. Our program is a non-riding program. Essentially we set up obstacles strategically to bring out the different lessons. Things like setting boundaries,” says Gaudry.

Gaudry says her program is strength based. In other words,

the community already has the strength to heal themselves and the horse is just a tool to get them to that realization. She sees the examples of that every day.

“We were speaking one morning and there were horses all around us. One lady complained that she couldn’t hear us and didn’t feel safe. So I told her that people need to do what they feel they need to do to make themselves feel safe. I didn’t tell her to move closer. I gave her the opportunity, that she already knew, to change the situation,” says Gaudry.

“She came up to me after and says she was mad at me, but quickly realized it wasn’t up to me what she needed to do. It was a valuable lesson learned and one that we see every day.”

At the end of the day, the Southern Network of Care is looking at ways to bring Equine Assisted learning and therapy to the agencies for their intervention and prevention programs.

As elder, Mark Hall says, “It is the one gift, the one medicine that the creator gave us to us heal our people.”





Governance and the Seven Teachings

By Robert Allec, SFNNC, Governance Coach

[The Southern First nations Network of Care (SFNNC) convened a three day governance workshop October 5-7, 2011. The theme of this workshop was to, “examine practices past and present and how they relate to Child and Family Services boards today.” Most participants and presenters were grassroots leaders who have taken on the challenge to make a positive difference in their community through traditional practice and application. The following is taken from a workshop entitled, “Developing a Code of Conduct based on the Seven Teachings: The Peguis CFS Journey.”]

In a crowded room, near the beginning of her presentation Peguis Elder, Louise McCorrister pauses – you can tell something is bothering her today. She briefly mentions to the crowd that they’re having a crisis in the family which involves children. And, that it has been a topic of conversation for the last three days. With the crisis weighing heavily on her mind and spirit Louise decides to stay at the workshop and carry through on her commitment to make a presentation.

Holding on tight to the tobacco given to her by workshop hosts she pause once again. On the verge of tears she prays. In her way she is making a connection with the creator to give her strength. All of a sudden she’s back to her old self, a woman who is passionate about her family and her work.

Over the past 17 years, Louise has been a volunteer as a Board Member for the Peguis CFS agency. Although she never refers to herself as an Elder, many think

of her as one. It’s because she’s always sharing her knowledge and wisdom; she speaks the truth and does so in a positive and respectful manner and with humor.

Today Louise will share a little about her journey and the challenges of the Peguis CFS Board of Directors to lead the agency in a good way.

Looking at the reaction of the audience as she speaks its clear many empathize with her story. At



Louise McCorrister



Later in their married life, Louise and Garry got curious about what they were hearing about a traditional way of life. This was new to them and they decided to look into it. At the time Garry was involved in Alcoholics Anonymous and worked as an alcohol and drug counselor. At work, Elders were involved in the programs and he began to listen and learn from them. He also began to take advantage of training opportunities which included Elder teachings on topics such as traditional values and practices. When he would come back home they

talked about what he had learned.

a young age she was forced into residential school for 7-8 years. She doesn't remember being taken away from home and she can't recall anything about three of those years in school. For now though, she's not ready to look into why three of those years are a total blank.

In reflecting on that phase in her life she says, "they tried hard to take everything away from us and to assimilate us, and – they did a pretty good job." As a result, she lost her identity and lost touch with the traditional way of life she had experienced until being taken away from home. Until then, even though they didn't know the name for it, she recalls and gives examples of how her family lived in the spirit of the Seven Sacred Teachings.

At 20 years old she got married and openly shares that in the first 10 years of marriage she and her husband had a dysfunctional lifestyle involving alcohol.

For years, in their quest for more knowledge and to regain their identity, they traveled all over the place to speak with Elders and take part in ceremonies such as the Sundance. Their children and grandchildren always traveled with them. After many years of learning and encouragement from a respected Elder, they eventually set up their own lodges in their own community of Peguis where they host ceremonies, which continue today.

Louise speaks with pride that their family, children and grandchildren, are drug and alcohol free. This doesn't mean they're trouble-free. She is especially pleased that her son has learned the traditional way of life and now works with troubled youth and runs his own Sundance. Along with that, she is also delighted their grandchildren have their own drum group. Over the years they have gladly sang for the people. She says this helps to

ensure their family maintains sobriety.

Louise still vividly recalls the reason why she became involved in CFS 17 years ago. It all began when she met a teenager who came to her home. He told her he had been in foster care all his life and didn't know where he belonged. Frequently, he was moved from home to home, he didn't have anyone he could trust and said he never had anyone who loved him. All she knew about Peguis CFS at the time was that the agency took children from their homes and placed them all over the place. She didn't like that and thought – someone has to try to change these things. So, the second time she was asked by the Chief, she accepted an appointment to the Board of Directors.

Board members are the visionaries of the organization. This is an area where they can influence change. In shaping the future, the Board must paint, for staff, a picture of its dream about the difference the organization will make for the community, families and children.

In the case of the Peguis CFS Board of Directors, they have provided a directive to the Executive Director on the outcomes they expect to see for children and families, i.e. their vision of the future. They've done this by creating Board policies written in the board's policy manual. For example, one expectation is that children will have a strong sense of identity of "who" they are and "where" they



Elder Garry McCorrister, Louise's husband, presented a session on Medicine Wheel Teachings at the same event.

come from. The Board has set up a monitoring system to track agency progress on meeting such expectations.

Executive Director, Clemene Hornbrook, also took part in the presentation. She explained that, for her part, she has set performance indicators and targets for these outcome policies and the Board has agreed that they consider them to be reasonable. Monitoring progress on these indicators and targets will form part of the basis for her annual performance evaluation.

During the presentation Louise also spoke about their Board's strategy to incorporate culture into their agency, where possible. As a first step the Board has provided a broad directive to the Executive Director stating that the "Seven

Sacred Teachings” will guide agency operations.

In response to this directive the Executive Director developed a “Code of Conduct” for the agency in consultation with staff. This code of conduct, based on the Seven Teachings, clarifies the values which guide behavior within the organization. It specifies how staff should act in decision-making and service delivery. It describes how you treat others, whether fellow employees, clients or anyone with whom you come in contact with.

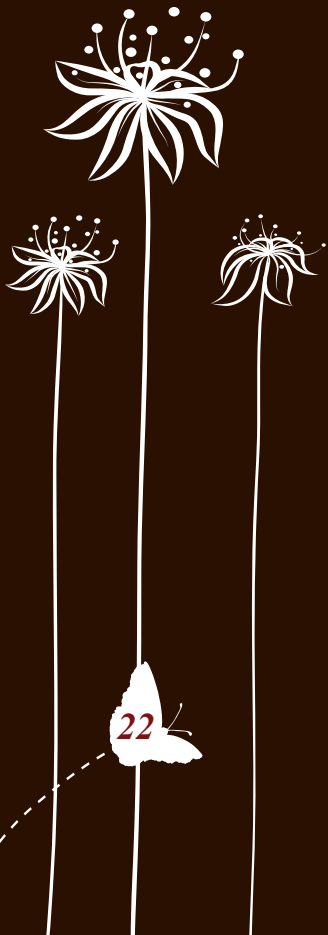
By creating a policy based on the Seven Teachings the Board is going into uncharted territory. They are confident, however, that this policy decision is a good one. And, the Board has decided the code of conduct created by staff will also apply to board members. Since this is a new approach for the agency, questions remain on how the Board will track progress. For example – how does the Board ensure that, in the day-to-day operation of the agency, the treatment of clients and staff complies with the Code of Conduct? This is work-in-progress. For now, the Board and Executive Director are working in cooperation with the Southern Network to develop tools which can be used to evaluate progress on this new journey.

After reflecting on what Louise and her husband Garry had to

say throughout the workshop about culture, it is striking that what they’re talking about is the importance of regaining what First Nations people had for thousands of years. In making a living in their traditional territories their culture guided their way of life, including how they took care of children and one another. The “Seven Sacred Teachings” are part of that culture and culture is what kept their tribal groups or societies from falling into disorganization and dysfunction.

Meegwetch to Louise and Garry for sharing their story. It adds to the narrative and has a clear message. It serves as further evidence that, by learning and striving to live a traditional way of life, people can maintain their identity and at the same time contribute to the community as a whole. Louise and Garry also gave a good reminder that, with support and teachings from Elders, it is possible for families to achieve balance and spiritual health – no easy task for any family these days.

The information Louise shared about the Peguis Board’s effort to have agency operations guided by the “Seven Sacred Teachings” a reminder about the important role that leadership teams, i.e. Board and management staff, of agencies have in shaping the future of child and family services for their communities.



Peguis Child and Family Services

Code of Conduct



The Code of Conduct is the values which guide behaviour within the organization. It specifies how staff should act in decision-making and service delivery. It describes how you treat others, whether fellow employees, clients or anyone with whom you come in contact with.

Peguis Child and Family Services shall maintain a culture which recognizes and values ethical conduct. The following code of conduct along with the seven teachings speak to how the agency operates:



LOVE: Accepting people for who they are, what they believe and loving unconditionally.



RESPECT: Treat others the way you want to be treated, respecting who they are as a person.



WISDOM: Knowing “who you are” by sharing your knowledge and learning from others.



HONESTY: Be transparent, open, clear and act with integrity.



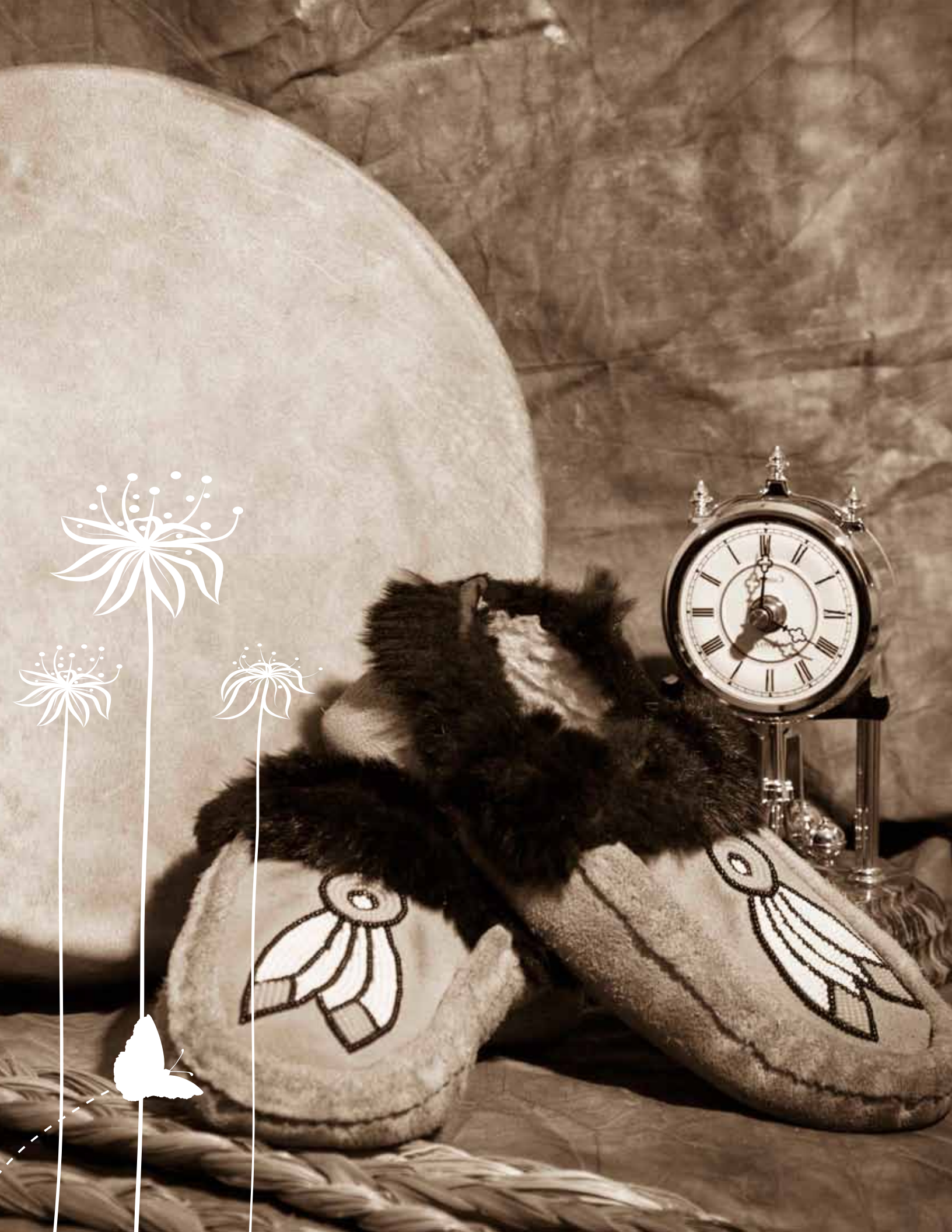
TRUTH: Be accountable and recognize trust as an opportunity to grow.



COURAGE: To be honest and speak up for what you believe in; moving forward.



HUMILITY: Understanding others' strengths, knowing your own limitations and an ability to ask for help.



Ryan's Journey - Surviving FASD

Visions and Voices Speakers Bureau

by Jim Compton

Talking stick in hand, a young man named Ryan stands in the middle of a giant Medicine wheel and readies to speak to a crowd of social workers and care givers about his life. He walks to the north quadrant of the wheel and stands on the words that say “who am I.” Here he begins to tell his story.

“My name is Ryan and I’m from Manitoba. I’m just a person who wants to live a life but having FASD is getting in my way.”

He then heads south to a section that says “community”. “I’m staying out of trouble as much as I can. I’ve been involved in stealing cars. Sometimes I can’t control it.”

Just moments before, “Ryan’s Story” had been projected across a giant screen. It is a 10 minute video where we learn that Ryan was one of the most notorious car thieves in the history of Winnipeg. In a three year span Ryan had stolen well over 3000 cars. By 15 he was convicted of stealing 10. The police had designated him a type “A” car thief ... the highest level in the city of Winnipeg.

For Ryan his descent into a world of crime began at a young age. “I used to like to have fun when I was younger. It all went apart when

my mom lost us to CFS and stuff. Because of the problems she had. She straightened out her life to get us back. And like, I never had a dad around. He passed away when I was six and I felt that I had nobody. I felt like giving up because that was the person that was really, really close to me.”

These were some dark days in Ryan’s life. He found himself growing up in a very dysfunctional home with a younger sister, older brother and now single parent mom. And as he says, “I ended up with the wrong people and the wrong crowd. I got into (them) and started liking it.”

However, two realizations changed Ryan’s life. The first was when he made headlines when the stolen hummer he was driving rammed into a police car and put a police officer in the hospital. The second was when he was diagnosed with Alcohol Related Neuro Developmental Disorder (ARND), which is also





a diagnosis within the spectrum of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder ... or FASD.

Relating his story is all part and parcel of a new initiative that strives to put perspective and a face to something that social workers and care givers desperately want to understand and deal with. That initiative is called the “Visions and Voices Speakers Bureau.”

“The genesis behind Visions and Voices began with a need to create an awareness and an understanding of FASD and the myriad of peoples affected”, says project coordinator Jewel Reimer, who runs the program, called “Initiatives for Just Communities,” through the Mennonite Central Committee of Manitoba. Funding is received through a grant from the Province of Manitoba’s “Changes for Children Initiative.”

The Visions and Voices prevention team is comprised of youth and adults like young Ryan, who live with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and their circle of support. Visions and Voices presenters are role models willing to share their stories of hope and

accomplishment with the public. Each presenter has worked in partnership with Strongfront Studio and Media Specialist Jim Compton to develop, edit and produce a life story vignette that they are able to use as an ice breaker when presenting to the public.

“We know many families struggle with alcohol issues and the effects of those choices”, says Sue Mozdzen, FASD Specialist with the Southern First Nations Network of Care. “They come into the care of the child welfare, justice, health and education systems. The goal through Visions and Voices is to reduce the shame and blame of FASD and give people practical information about this complex disorder.”

“The idea behind the videos is to essentially break the ice with audiences,” says Reimer. “We all know how hard it is to speak in front of large audiences on anything. Add to that the stigma of a formerly taboo subject like FASD and the anxiety is there two fold. These videos are hard hitting and pull no punches. They were made to open up the dialogue with the idea of effecting change.”

Today Ryan has become a much sought after speaker across Manitoba. Through his video and by answering questions, he relates the struggles living with FASD has put upon his young life. For him getting diagnosed with Alcohol related Neuro Development Disorder (ARND) was pivotal in turning his life around. And so was getting some much needed help.

“I was court ordered to a program where I met Deen. She kept me away from all that stuff. She plays a big role in my life right now. I give a lot of credit to her.”

The “Deen” Ryan is referring to is Eldeen Spence; known to her young clients as G.G. or the Gang Granny. Eldeen has connected with Ryan like no other person could have. She says that it wasn’t easy. “I chased Ryan for six months. I would go to his home, his school and his hang outs. I knew he was suspicious of me. Finally I waited for him at the Manitoba Youth Centre. I ran up to him and said ‘Hi Ryan I’m your case manager.’ He laughed about it and that’s how we connected.”

Eldeen refers to Ryan as her “superstar.” He has breezed through the life skills, FASD program and work-based programs that New Directions has referred him to. She says he’s never missed a session and has even taken the time to help others in the program.

Turning Point

As Ryan said earlier in his video there were a few major events in his young life that triggered his crime spree. Part of it revolved around his mother but for the most part it had to do with his dad’s passing. But fast forwarding ten years it also served as a positive turning point in his life. Eldeen witnessed that

transformation first hand.

“He had never had the opportunity to meet anyone from his dad’s side of the family until recently. It was a major transformation when he met his father’s family in Sagkeeng. Through his uncle he learned all about his culture. He was given an Indian name and a drum. It has made all the difference in the world for Ryan.”

Today Ryan is very close with his younger sister. It is one of three pictures he carries in his cell phone. His older brother has also been diagnosed with FASD. Eldeen says that Ryan has definitely turned a corner in his life. After two years of therapy and life skills assistance Ryan has never reoffended.

Near the end of the session Ryan responds to a question about his future “What I’ve learned is to not look back on the things that happened. It’s better to look to the future and set your mind on what you know you can do.”

Today Ryan is working at two jobs. Jobs he applied for and got on his own. He knows that if he can pay off a huge bill at MPIC (Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation) he can get a license. If he is successful there will be a pay raise in it for him. He plans to use the money to get a place of his own for himself and his sister.

As the social workers and care givers stroll out they reflect on the session that they have just been a part of.

Laurie Guloway, who works with the General Authority, as a resource specialist says, “It’s fantastic to put a face to something we work with every day. They give us hope with their vivacious stories. They have a disability and they have turned it around. It becomes more of an ability than a disability. They are the real teachers.”





Roots and Wings

by Ian Ross

In February of 2010, the Federal government announced a multi-year contribution to the West Region Child and Family Services Agency in the amount of \$1,095,366 for the implementation and support of the Roots and Wings project. The project's aim was to target approximately 216 high-risk Aboriginal youth between the ages of 12 and 15, in order to reduce substance abuse, drug related crime and interpersonal violence. The crime prevention project will utilize the *Botvin Life Skills Training Program** and is supported by the Bimaadiziwin training program. The name says it all, the "roots" reminds the youth involved of where they come from and the "wings" is to give them the skills to be successful in their lives.

Currently, West Region CFS Agency is in phase two of the project and are starting with a new group with Level 1 of the Life Skills and Botvin programs in February of 2012. Level 1 (which comprises 18 lessons) and Level 2 (which consists of 12 lessons) have been completed by the first group of youth at 5 First Nations locations and one in an urban area. This same group will begin Level 3 in September 2012 and will have completed all three levels. There has been very positive feedback received by all groups thus far and the youth are incredibly

excited about taking level 3 of the program. There is real enjoyment in the hands on activities and interacting with each other more than ever before.

The lessons have been adapted to be more culturally appropriate and significant for the participants, such as smudging, prayer, and other teachings that go along with the lessons learned so far such as the use of tobacco for cultural purposes.

Currently, the new group will consist of Grade 6 students and teachers along with the youth who

*From the website: <http://www.life-skillstraining.com/overview.php>

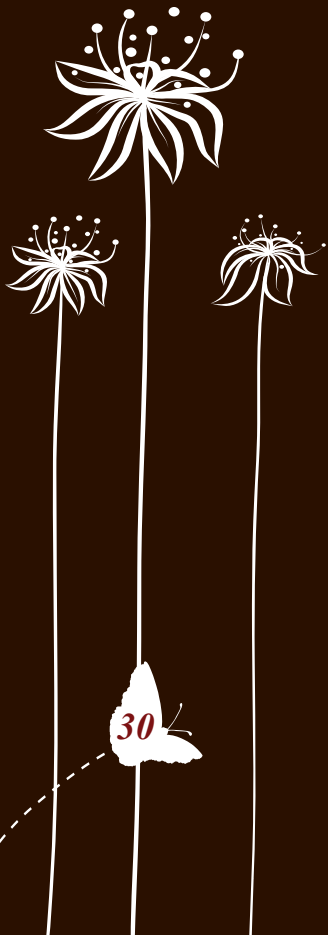


are excited to see their coaches back in their schools.

Yvette Blackbird, first Roots and Wings Project Manager says “The major concern and thrust of the program has been how to give kids in care a better chance of success by preventing them from getting into trouble later on.” Early intervention and prevention to help them deal with the challenges facing so many of our First Nations communities today is needed now more than ever. We are seeing children at earlier and earlier ages becoming involved with drugs and alcohol and this program is designed to help them. Mentors will use the Seven Sacred Teachings as the basis of their involvement with these children who need our help. Empowering our youth through knowledge, the knowledge to stay away from drugs and alcohol will ensure their lives are fulfilling and they will be examples to teach others how to live, continuing a sacred circle of support.

Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST) is a research-validated substance abuse prevention program proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse, and violence by targeting the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky behaviors. This comprehensive and exciting program provides adolescents and young teens with the confidence and skills necessary to successfully handle challenging situations.

Developed by Dr. Gilbert J. Botvin, a leading prevention expert, Botvin LifeSkills Training is backed by over 30 scientific studies and is recognized as a Model or Exemplary program by an array of government agencies including the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.







“EYES for ME”

Engaging Youth Empowering Spirits for Mother Earth

by Jim Compton

EYES for ME or more precisely, Engaging Youth, Empowering Spirits for Mother Earth is an Aboriginal youth engagement and empowerment initiative that is open for all Aboriginal youth who reside in the City of Winnipeg. It is the brainchild of Dennis Meeches, Special Projects Manager for the Southern First Nations Network of Care.

“The primary focus will be on youth who are, have been or are at risk of becoming involved in the Child Welfare System,” says Meeches. “The major thrust of the program is to repatriate our Aboriginal culture back to the youth, parents and grandparents. To show the world that we are not in denial anymore.”

“EYES for ME” will encourage youth to engage with their peers and strengthen their cultural identity as they walk their journey of life on Mother Earth. A program within this project is called “Rites of Passage Envisioned” (ROPE) and will reach out to youth who have been disenfranchised. Through ROPE they will be able to rebuild and repatriate their Aboriginal identity by extending a lifeline into the

community and providing cultural programs to inner city youth.

“If a child comes into care this is an opportunity for them to learn through Aboriginal mentors, cultural customs that will keep them connected to who they are,” says Meeches. “For example they will learn things like the Rites of Passage ceremony, the ways of the pipe and sweat lodge. Cultural practices from our not too distant past that will help prepare them for the journey of life.”

Partnerships will play a critical role in developing and implementing the “EYES for ME” project. The youth will work with governments, non-government organizations (NGO’s), corporations, child and family service agencies, the private sector, and individuals who recognize that



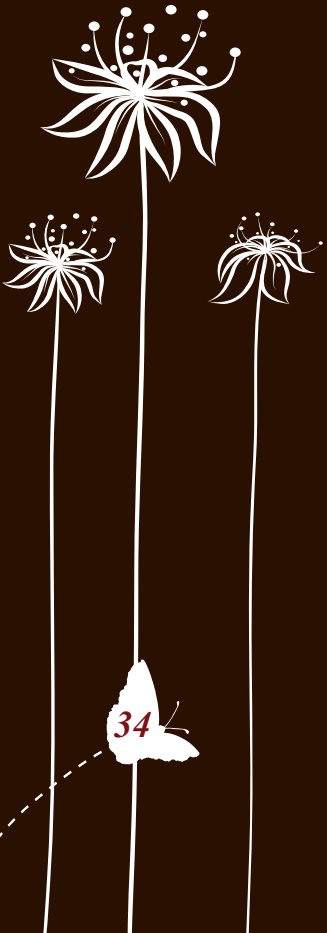
positive changes need to be made. Prevention and leadership will be a mainstay of programming including preventative strategies that put a positive spin on why you should stay clear from alcohol, drugs and gangs. Leadership strategies will focus on encouraging youth to reach their full potential.

“We started rolling out the program in September of last year and we will be ramping up for full roll out in 2012,” says Meeches. “We realize that many of our children are being cared for by non-Aboriginal care-givers. ‘Eyes For Me’ will provide tailor made programming that will strengthen families by offering safe, culturally appropriate and family friendly opportunities to experience Aboriginal culture and customs.”

Some of the programs running over the winter calendar include:

- Traditional Story Telling with Duncan Mecredi
- Aboriginal Film with Daryl Nepinak
- Pow Wow Demo with local dance troupe
- Traditional Aboriginal Games with Youth Coordinators
- Festival Du Voyageur and The Forks host a number of free events for all, including hay rides, two teepees for crafts and many more
- Sledding and Ice Skating with EYES for ME Youth Coordinators @ the Forks
- Hand Drum Making with Shane Patterson
- Pow Wow Program with guests
- Women’s Teachings with Pat Ningwance

The “Eyes for Me” project is available to all First Nations youth in Manitoba. It will operate out of 800 Adele Avenue. For more information, please contact Ray Delaronde at 204-772-9900 or visit the Southern First Nations Network of Care website www.southernnetwork.org under Youth.







Southern First Nations
Network of Care

www.southernnetwork.org

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