



REPORT TO TIDES CANADA FOUNDATION

Charity: First Three Years – Parenting Resources & Training

Grant # GF0118

Amount donated from The Funding Network – Toronto - \$11,163.73

Project Title: “Make the Connection” Program: Intensive parenting support for fly-in First Nations Communities in Northern Ontario.

Project coordinators: Wendy Trylinski, Community Program Manager for Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) based in Thunder Bay and Claire Watson, Director of Programs and Training for First Three Years based in Toronto.

Dates of Project: Jan – July 2010

Date of Report: March 3, 2011

Achievements of the Funded Project

Six First Nation family support workers were trained during an intensive one-week mentorship in June 2010 to facilitate the “Make the Connection: Birth to One” program with parents and infants. The training was hosted by Wunnumin Lake First Nation, a remote fly-in community 3 hours by air from Thunder Bay with a population of around 500 people.

After several months of long-distance planning, the success of this facilitator training depended on having a real parent group to work with. Thanks to the very effective recruitment of Wunnumin’s host facilitator, 8 families came for the first session, 7 of whom attended consistently for the entire week. This speaks to the interest in parenting support in the north. One teen couple with a history of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder were in the process of separating and left mid-week.

Parents told us that they learned essential things about building relationships with their child such as listening to their baby’s messages, laughing and playing simple games as a way to bond. They were very excited about receiving the personalized Make the Connection photo album as a keepsake and several of them felt confident enough by the end of the week to give signed permission for their photos to be shared at conferences. This says a lot about the trust established between facilitators and the group and about the parents’ positive response to the program.

Facilitators found the week-long training to be highly interactive and collaborative. Under the guidance of the training director from First Three Years, sessions were adapted from the core “Make the Connection” manual to meet the needs and context of the Wunnumin families. Facilitators all had an active role in leading the group and rotated tasks each

day. They ended the week feeling ready to offer “Make the Connection” in their home communities which was the ultimate objective of the week.

A 6-page report on the project was prepared in early July 2010 and circulated among chiefs and health directors of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation as well as to the Board of First Three Years and to The Funding Network – Toronto. (The full report is attached to this summary.)

Achievements subsequent to the funded project

1. During July and August, two members of the facilitation team successfully offered a 9-week “Make the Connection” program to 5 families with babies in their home community of Deer Lake First Nation. They now have a waiting list for a second program.
2. The project was presented in February 2011 by three members of the team at an Ontario First Nations conference on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders generating more requests for “Make the Connection” facilitator training from several Aboriginal agencies.
3. Funding to extend the “Make the Connection” facilitator training and programs to 3 more northern communities in 2011 was obtained from The Webster Foundation. Once again, funds donated to First Three Years will be matched by funding from NAN.
4. The John Howard Society are partnered with three NAN communities and have asked to join the project. They are in the process of finding funds to support the training of 6 additional facilitators.

Significant challenges and how they were dealt with

1. Adapting to ways of life in the North. The week of intensive training at Wunnumin was scheduled and cancelled at the last minute twice prior to actually happening in June. This was due to a death in the host community which, being small, affected everyone and secondly, due to a family obligation which arose with the host. This meant that pre-booked flights had to be cancelled with a certain cost incurred.
2. Trust, confidentiality and privacy in a small community. People in a small community can be reluctant to open up with others particularly around personal issues such as parenting. The facilitation team handled this well by helping parents laugh and loosen up through icebreakers, keeping a positive and non-judgemental attitude, looking after the children, providing food and door prize incentives and holding a special celebration lunch. A montage of photographs of each parent and child were projected on a large screen at the start of every session to help parents feel good about themselves and their parenting.
3. Unreliable equipment. Even though a printer had been flown in especially for the project, it didn't work. Since completing a “Make the Connection” photo album was a major feature of the program, the team spent a lot of time troubleshooting this problem. A working printer was found at the 11th hour and facilitators were up late on the second last night printing photos to give each parent on the final morning.



4. Things happen slowly. Two of the facilitators from Sandy Lake First Nation have been waiting since August 2010 for the new Community Centre to be completed and inspected for opening. This has held up their offering of a “Make the Connection” program. The facilitator from Cat Lake First Nation is waiting until this year’s project to have a co-facilitator trained so he can run a program at Cat Lake.

Learning gained by First Three Years

- Go with the flow. The Aboriginal facilitation team didn’t like being rushed or having too detailed an agenda presented to them. Everyone worked hard but needed down time in between. Playing and laughing during the training week was bonding for the team.
- Taking leadership roles did not come naturally to all of the facilitators, and it was important to provide space for everyone’s contribution. It took a little while to find the right mix of guidance and autonomy for members of the team.
- Being a sole facilitator is a barrier to running a “Make the Connection” program and we will make it mandatory from now on that two facilitators from each community attend the training.
- Since the funded project ended, the facilitation team has kept in touch through monthly conference calls. This is partly to support the facilitators who are still waiting to offer their first program and also to keep the momentum going for the second phase of training in 2011. One of the original participating communities will be chosen to host this year’s week-long intensive. For “Make the Connection” parenting programs to take root throughout NAN communities, it will help if existing connections among the team stay strong.

Many thanks again to The Funding Network – Toronto for the generous grant which allowed us to sew these seeds of parenting support which are beginning to take root in the North.



First Three Years - parenting resources & training

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