



NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

FIRST NATIONS YOUTH AND RESTORATIVE HEALING PROJECT

The First Nations Youth and Restorative Healing Project was a culturally-based community-based crime prevention strategy.

The project targeted youths, living on and off the reserve, who showed signs of exposure to addiction, family violence and abuse. The objective was to replace anti-social behaviour and criminal activity with conflict management based on resiliency, pride, self-esteem and respect for elders.



The project was coordinated by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN). Based on their high crime rates, the Cote First Nation and Battlefords communities were selected as sites to implement the project. Youth aged 15 to 20 were targeted in Cote and youth aged 12 to 18 in Battlefords.

Project assessment

Process evaluation was conducted on the experiences of the project planning and implementation. Site visits were carried out and interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in both the Cote First Nation and Battlefords communities. Stakeholders included the project coordinator, band councilor, First Nation’s Probation Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers, and the school guidance counselor.

Key findings

- The Project provided cultural and traditional activities in conjunction with sports and recreation.
- Project sites fared well in developing their own restorative healing approaches in tune with community needs.
- Overall about 60 youth in Cote and 28 in Battlefords participated in activities.

- While the activities in Battlefords tended to be planned around cultural events and were often spontaneous, Cote developed the ‘Adopt an Elder’ concept where youth were paired off with Elders for cultural teachings.
- Respondents found the experience very positive and, despite difficulties in engaging the parents, they strongly supported the project.

Lessons learned

The project generated a number of valuable lessons.

- It is important there be a place where clients can go for help, even after regular service hours.
- When starting a project it is important to obtain commitments in writing from sponsoring organizations regarding roles and responsibilities.
- It is important to promote the values of culture such as respect and caring for one another when working with First Nations communities.
- Healing interventions and programs have more impact when they take place with the context of a wider community development plan.



- Given the level of cultural expropriation felt by First Nations Peoples, there is a certain level of distrust associated with outsiders when it comes to providing information that is considered sacred.
- It is important to use a common language that is shared by participants especially when it comes to implementing program evaluation.
- Evaluators need to be cognizant of problems in carrying out evaluations of aboriginal pilot projects where information about youth is not always recorded or written down.
- Sensitivity to cultural norms should be a pre-requisite for evaluators especially when a cultural restoration component is involved.

Toward the end of the project the Battlefords community launched a new coordination initiative with youth agencies titled 'Promoting Youth Success: A comprehensive strategy designed to promote a safer community by reducing youth crime.' This outcome indicated that the 'First Nations Youth and Restorative Project' was well received by the community.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the evaluation encountered a few difficulties, it is clear that the 'First Nations Youth and Restorative Project' succeeded in producing positive experiences for the youth participants. In both the Cote First Nation and Battlefords communities, the general consensus was that children and youth benefited from a program based on their culture.

First Nations youth get involved and participate in cultural and spiritual activities and learn the traditional teachings with the help of Elders and through community programs based on restorative healing.

For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272 or visit our website at: www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc

You can also visit the web site of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations at: www.fsin.com.