



## Study to examine the benefit of horse therapy with youth solvent abusers

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### SIKSIKA FIRST NATION

Healing through “horse therapy” is a way in which a First Nation in southern Alberta is looking to help youth linked with solvent abuse.

Siksika First Nation recently opened a treatment centre for youth solvent abuse and is partnering with researchers from three universities and from the Youth Solvent Addiction Committee, the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse to examine the benefits of Equine Assisted Learning. An Elder from the Siksika Medicine Lodge is among the advisors helping with the project.

Equine Assisted Learning started from the Cartier Equine Learning Centre in Prince Albert, Sask. A partnership was formed with the White Buffalo Centre on Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Sask.

Now, the values of EAL are being researched as a behaviour modification program on the Siksika First Nation.

Siksika First Nation approached the advisory

committee to be part of the process and to get help with their programming, said Colleen Dell, associate professor at the University of Saskatchewan. Universities in Calgary and Regina are also involved.

“It is important to know what we are doing and what is working so that we can replicate those things...if there is no standards then how do we know what is working for the kid? Understanding cultural competence as well is important,” said Dell.

Because horses are part of many First Nation cultures, Tamara MacKinnon, program director for the Cartier Equine Learning Centre and designer for the EAL program, said there are strong positive cultural components naturally built into using that particular animal.

Horses naturally look for and respond to stimulus, said MacKinnon, and that works well with providing a curriculum that enables relationships with the horse and youth at risk. The horse responds according to what the youth does and that immediate response guides the youth in his actions.

“As the person changes and, in that moment makes the right decision, their anxiety is released and the horse immediately responds positively,” said MacKinnon.

The White Buffalo Centre and the Cartier Equine Learning Centre identify the needs of an individual, said MacKinnon, allowing programs to be tailored to fit the First Nation community.

The two-year research study of EAL in the treatment of First Nations youth solvent abuse got underway at the end of June. With guidance from the advisory team, which also includes a youth treatment graduate from Saskatchewan, the outcomes of this specific approach will be evaluated. Taken into consideration will be the potential benefits of including the horse within educational and life skills programs with this specific target group.

The project is funded by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, an innovative Alberta-based resource that supports the development of research evidence and policy for child youth and family health and well being.

Stoney Nakoda Resort and Casino tipi park a place to honour the past, educate, and hold cultural ceremonies.

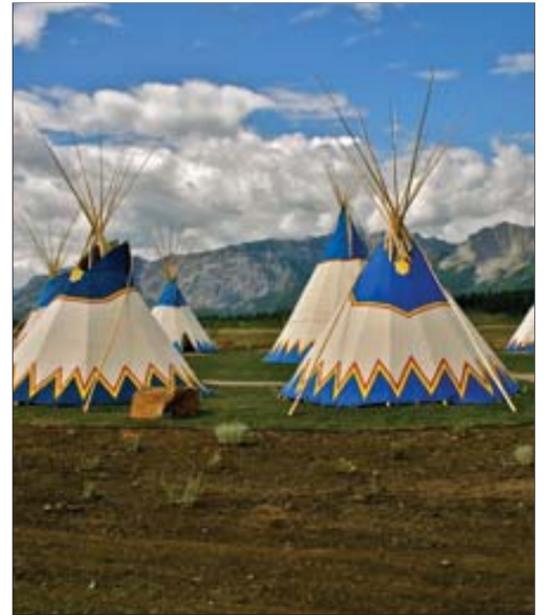


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### Authentic tipis created for new park

The Stoney Nakoda First Nation has created a tipi park near the entrance of the Stoney Nakoda Resort and Casino. Symbolizing the phases of the Stoney lunar calendar moon, the 12-tipi circle reflects a significant aspect of the Stoney Nakoda culture. Annie Wesley passed on the tradition of crafting the tipis to her daughters who helped design and stitch the massive canvases. Together with other contributions from the Bearspaw and Chiniki bands, Wesley and her family participated in the dedication of the three-acre tipi park led by community Elders. The tipi park serves as a centre for the community and a place to gather for cultural celebrations for both First Nations people and non-Aboriginals. Future expansions include a buffalo paddock which will also provide an authentic experience of Aboriginal culture for visitors to the resort.

### Writer's Circle celebrates third anniversary

Award-winning author Yvonne Johnson was the special guest when the Calgary Aboriginal Writer's Circle celebrated its third birthday at the Calgary Central Public Library on Sept. 2. Johnson, accused of working with three others to murder a Wetaskiwin man in 1989, whom they believed was a child molester, spent 17 years at the Edmonton Institution for Women before she was granted day parole in 2008. While in prison, Johnson contacted well known Alberta writer Rudy Wiebe who co-authored the book *Stolen Life: The Journey of Cree Women*. The book, which won a Governor General's Award, recounts Johnson's troubled life which included sexual abuse. The Calgary Aboriginal Writer's Circle meets the first Thursday of every month at the Central Public Library.

### Seventh Annual Sisters in Spirit: Healing our Sacred Circle

In recognition of the 580 plus missing/murdered Aboriginal women across Canada, the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society is inviting everyone to participate in a series of activities on Oct. 4, beginning at 11:30 a.m. at McDougall Centre. Activities begin with a peace walk from the McDougall Centre to Olympic Plaza where honour songs, speakers, smudge and drumming will take place. The gathering includes an open mike for sharing personal stories. All participants are encouraged to bring hand drums, shawls, rattles and warm clothing. Partners for the event include the city's Aboriginal Services, Canadian Red Cross, Chinatown, the Elizabeth Fry Society, Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and the Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth.

### Sunchild E-Learning, Devry Calgary strike new agreement

Sunchild First Nation Chief James Frencheater and DeVry Calgary president Ranil Herath recently signed the Passport2College agreement, which enables the top 25 qualified Sunchild students to begin taking post-secondary classes while completing grades 11 and 12. Sunchild students can access a variety of DeVry's courses online, taking up to four tuition-free courses towards completion of their bachelor's degree. “Sunchild and DeVry share a mission to foster student learning through high-quality, career-oriented education,” said Herath in a news release. Sunchild E-Learning Community has increased the high school completion rate of Aboriginal students by offering online synchronous distance learning programs to remote communities. The Sunchild E-Learning Community celebrates its tenth anniversary this year.

### Barren pantry shelves at the Mustard Seed

The Mustard Seed, which distributes food to impoverished Calgarians, is experiencing a severe shortage of non-perishable items. According to the Calgary Homeless Foundation's Summer 2010 Report, in 2009, 28 per cent of chronically homeless individuals were Aboriginal. As a result of stereotyping and differing cultural needs, Aboriginal people face increased barriers to overcoming homelessness.

Compiled by Darlene Chrapko

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