

Fort McPherson Community Wellness Plan

1/1/2013

1.0 Community Overview

Teet'lit Zheh translates into "at the head of the waters" is located on the east bank of the Peel River, 121 kilometers south of Inuvik on the Dempster Highway in the Northwest Territories. Teet'lit Zheh is the largest Gwich'in community in the NWT and the homeland for the Gwich'in. Teet'lit Zheh is the gateway to the western Arctic for those driving east along the Dempster Highway. The community is famous as the starting point and burial site of the "Lost Patrol" where four men on an RCMP patrol perished on their way from Teet'lit Zheh to Dawson City, Yukon.

Every summer over 1,000 people gather at the Midway Music Festival, 20 kilometers west of the community to celebrate Gwich'in culture and music. People come in from all over the NWT and Yukon to renew their family ties and participate in the event.

Access to Teet'lit Zheh is primarily by road and scheduled plane service during freeze –up and break-up while charter plane service is available year round. Steeped in history, the community has many modern services and infrastructure including Chief Julius School (kindergarten to high school). Aurora College Community Learning Centre, GNWT Health Centre, RCMP Detachment, Northern Store, Tetlit Co-op Retail Store and Peel River Inn, Nitainlaih Information Centre, Chii Tsal Dik Gwizheh, Annie G. Robert Community Centre (Hamlet), Charles Koe Building (TGC), St. Matthews Anglican Church, Hamlet garage and Charles Geejam Snowshoe Arena and Johnny D. Charlie Recreation Complex. The community is also installing a new and more efficient boiler system at the Charles Koe Building connecting the William Firth Health Centre.

The Chii Tsal Gwizheh is a facility moved into the community from the the TI'oondih Camp 20 miles up the Peel River. This facility will be utilized for delivery of community wellness programs.

Although having many modern amenities Teet'lit Zheh is still a strong traditional community. Community residents continue to practice their traditional lifestyle by harvesting wildlife for food, wood for fuel, as well as gather traditional medicine. Every summer over one thousand (1,000) people gather at the Midway Lake Music Festival which is held 20 kilometers west of the community to celebrate Gwich'in culture and music. The community is home to many excellent sewers and craftsman.

The community of Fort McPherson has implemented successful community wellness programs for many years. Programs for prenatal, postnatal, early childhood, school children, youth, adults and elders have been successfully implemented for many years. These programs are providing excellent services to the focus groups and the community. The children who participate in the early childhood programs are all school ready when they enter kindergarten. There are more residents returning back to school due to the counseling and guidance supports they have been able to access from the community wellness programs.

2.0 Community Consultations:

Despite having a variety of activities to engage the residents, there continues to be a number of drawbacks that keep people from living a healthy lifestyle. The Department of Health and Social Services engaged community leadership and residents in the development of community wellness plans. This consultation provided an opportunity for communities to decide for themselves where wellness funding should be directed. The focus of the discussions was to have the participants answer the following questions related to community wellness in the community of Fort McPherson.

Consultations were held with the following:

- Parents of Infants and Toddlers
- Students of Chief Julius School *
- Teachers of Chief Julius School *
- Elders
- Resource Workers
- Chief and Council, and
- A community workshop for all ages.
- Where are we now?
- What do we have to work with?
- Where do we want to be in the future, and
- How do we get there?

In its entirety, the Teet'lit Community Wellness Plan will identify a broad direction for the community by listing actions that will support the goals, functions and objectives identified.

3.0 Teet'it Gwich'in Council Mission, Vision, Values

The need to ensure both the well being and independence of community residents is what guides the mission and vision statement for the Tetlit Gwich'in Council.

Mission

The mandate of the Tetlit Gwich'in Council is to promote and encourage a healthy traditional lifestyle through leadership building positive relationships and creating opportunities for community growth.

Vision

The Tetlit Gwich'in Council will enhance and preserve the traditional values and beliefs of the Tetlit Gwich'in to promote the language, spirituality, economy, health and education for a healthy vibrant future.

Values & Beliefs

The values and beliefs are the core principles of the Tetlit Gwich'in Council. These values are what ensure the Tetlit Gwich'in Council guides all of its actions on its principals.

- Sharing
- Respect
- Laughing
- Honesty
- Connection
- Caring
- Seasonal Harvesting
- Support and encouragement
- Involvement

- Community spirit

The Teetlit Gwich'in Council through its mission, vision and values/beliefs is a strong supporter of community wellness programs for the community of Fort McPherson. These statements will guide the development of a community wellness plan that incorporates the needs of all community residents.

4.0 Our Current Situation

In accessing the current situation of the Teetlit Zheh a SWOT analysis was completed during consultation with parents of infants and toddlers, students and teachers from Chief Julius School, Elders, Resource Workers, Chief and Council and community residents of all ages. The SWOT analysis analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the community of Fort McPherson today. The SWOT analysis allowed the community of Fort McPherson to focus on its strengths, minimize its weaknesses, take the greatest advantage of its opportunities and work towards minimizing its threats.

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were identified through a consultation process with the groups identified.

Strengths:

- Teet'lit Gwich'in are proud people who take pride in their heritage, language and culture;
- Community support is very strong in all areas be it mental, physical, social, emotional or financial. The community is committed to helping and working together when families, youth, elders or the community at large is in need of help;
- Strong leadership is demonstrated in the community. Four Council consist of;
 - Hamlet Council – Responsible for municipal services and recreation programming;
 - Band Council – Responsible for implementation of the land claim and treaty rights through delivery of a justice program. The Band employs elder and youth coordinator, project coordinator, renewable resource coordinator, employment officer and community coordinator who implement specific programs to meet the needs of the various groups.
 - Youth Council fundraises to implement programs and activities for the youth. All youth concerns are brought to the attention of this Council.
 - Elders Council – fundraises to implement programs for the elders. All elders concerns are bought to the attention of this Council.
- Resource people in Teet'lit Zheh consist of Elected Leaders, Mayor, Chief, Teachers, RCMP, Coordinators, Program Managers, Counselors, Mental Health Worker, Social Service Workers, Nurses, Volunteer Fire Department, Rangers and GNWT Employees;
- Teet'lit Zheh is home to many aboriginal people who are talented and educated in a large variety of areas and willing to volunteer their time when help is needed;
- Teet'lit Zheh is home to 102 elders who are 60 years of age and older. The Elders are positive, possess excellent values and great knowledge of the Gwich'in language, tradition and culture;

- Many role models who are sober, caring, respectful and outspoken. We have Gwich'in doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and certified financial officers. We also have many students attending college and university to achieve their undergraduate degrees and students returning to school to achieve their grade 12 diploma;
- Radio Station has been run by volunteers for the past 30 years. The radio station is our best source of getting messages out to people in the community, on the land and living in other communities;
- The community residents have strong faith. The Church is serviced by Gwich'in Ministers and Lay leaders from the community which entices more people to attend Church on a regular basis.
- Traditional dancing is strong in our community. The traditional dances are very well attended by all age groups;
- Traditional craftsmanship and traditional sewing is on the increase. This is demonstrated at the traditional events that take place throughout the year;
- The Annual Midway Lake Festival is attended by everyone in the community. This Festival is well advertised and people from all over the Northwest and Yukon Territories come together to enjoy this alcohol and drug free event. The youth from Teet'lit Zheh attend this event wearing their traditional clothing and dance until the wee hours of the morning. We have youth who participate as musicians and fulfill the role as callers for the square dances;
- High participation in sports activities such as skiing, snowshoeing, hockey, soccer, basketball, Dene sports as well as sporting events hosted by the school. The community is proud of the children since they have to be role models in the community and maintain high marks in school in order to travel and represent the community in sport events hosted out of the community;
- Youth (boys and girls) are very active with the Junior Rangers, sporting events, meetings, volunteering on CBQM as well as singing and fundraising;
- Increase in community residents who are becoming drug and alcohol free are serving as role models and encouraging other residents to live healthier lifestyles.
- A successful 3 day grieving and loss workshop was held in the community. All the participants requested an ongoing session and the facilitator agreed to volunteer her time to continue delivering this program. There were many participant comments about the positive attitude of the facilitator and the positive delivery of the workshop material.

Weaknesses:

- There is a lack of communication. The public made it clear they are not given enough information in terms of what is happening in the community;

- There is a lack of parental involvement and parenting skills workshops;
- Poor economy has a negative effect in the community. The lack of jobs and opportunities leads to an increase in people who are turning to bootlegging and selling drugs as a source of income;
- There is a lack of community infrastructure to deal with issues related to long term care of elders, recreational facilities such as a swimming pool, fitness center, ski lodge to promote and engage residents to in healthy lifestyle activities, a facility for residents who are interested in choir practice and other musical programs;
- School students are faced with daily issues which they find frustrating. These issues are;
 - No in-school tutors
 - Lack of nutrition
 - No School Counselor
 - No school bus service
 - No in-school music programs
 - Lack of travel opportunities to traditional camps, student exchanges and college tours
 - Bullying and peer pressure
 - Alcohol and drugs
- Substance abuse, addictions, gambling, gossiping and bootlegging is still the cause of a lot of problems in our community;
- Increase in health issues related to diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity;
- There is a very low attendance from the public at meetings;
- Lack of communication between Chief Julius School and Aurora College
- Lack of housing, no restaurants, no taxi service or any organized activities held for resource people who come into the community to provide deliver educational services to our children. This lack of services does not allow the resource people to stay for longer periods of time in our community;
- A lack of male involvement in community functions;
- No Alcohol Anonymous (AA) meetings held in the community;
- Insufficient evening activities and programs to keep all age groups busy.

Opportunities:

- The local radio station provides opportunities to the various groups and individuals to provide information on bullying, suicide information, elder abuse, residential school impacts, workshops

being held in the community, deliver Gwich'in language classes on air, send messages to community resident and people out on the land as well as recognition of people who make contributions to their families and the community. The radio station provides opportunities to people to learn the skills to operate a radio station.

- The internet provides opportunities for people to participate in a suite of on-line courses;
- Keep the Tetlit Gwich'in Council updated;
- Economic Development funding available for residents to engage in economic opportunities such as restaurants, taxi services, eco-tourism, harvest and make traditional medicine which can be sold in a traditional medicine store;
- Craftspeople and sewers can set up crafts area where tourists can view and purchase traditional crafts;
- Utilize and set up various sites in the community as tourist attractions;
- Aurora College has the capacity to deliver courses and workshops;
- Elders can be utilized to teach traditional and cultural courses to community residents;
- Continue to promote and encourage on-the land programs between the elders and youth. The community needs to start teaching the youth while the interest is high;
- Set up a camp up river for elders and youth to go on day or weekend trips where the elders can provide hands on training to the youth. This will assist in teaching the youth how to harvest, process and cook traditional foods and decrease the use of processed foods;
- Many opportunities exist to educate and promote the youth to participate in leadership. This training will prepare the youth to take on leadership roles in the future;
- Community organizations support the development of a community wellness plan that will assist community residents to live healthy lifestyles;
- The community is provided with an opportunity to become fully involved in community wellness to develop a community wellness plan that will be owned and implemented by the community for the community.

Threats

- The lack of funding to hold and implement workshops and programs;

- High unemployment in the community;
- People don't have the necessary safety tickets to gain employment;
- Lack of sufficient number of resource people leads to burn-out due to overuse of current resource people;
- Funding cuts are affecting the ongoing management of present programs;
- Drugs, alcohol, gambling and addictions has an in-depth impact on the lives of our people;
- Losing our children to the Social Service system due to continued child apprehensions;
- Loss of language and culture resulting from people not taking opportunities to learn and practice speaking the gwich'in language;
- High usage of processed foods by community residents due to easy preparation and lack of cooking skills. This results in an increase in health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity etc.;
- Lack of knowledge about disease such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity;
- Lack of public buildings to hold programs.

5.0 Where do we want to be in the future?

All participants were provided with opportunities to identify priorities then prioritize the areas they wanted to see in the community wellness plan.

The top priorities identified are as follows:

- Maintain all programs presently delivered through the TI'oondih Healing Society. These include Early Childhood, Prenatal Services, LRP, School Programs, Mental Health Counseling, Adults and Elders (new programming) and Outreach and Mentoring to other NWT communities (new programming). All programs have been implemented for a number of years (with the exception of the new programming) and the funding agencies consider these to be the best programs delivered to meet the needs of infants, children, youth and adults;
- Support education in the delivery of services for at risk behavioral issues that youth are facing by keeping the LRP and SSA program implemented at Chief Julius School;

- Utilize community resources to put in place supports for after school tutoring, student peer support groups, and youth leadership programs for youth attending Chief Julius School. Work with the NWT Literacy Council to schedule training for community residents who are interested in working with the school students.
- Increase communication within all organizations to ensure the residents of Fort McPherson have full access to all services and are fully aware of all new programs implemented;
- Enter into discussions with the Government of the Northwest Territories to have a Government Services Officer position allocated to the community of Fort McPherson.
- Increase access and opportunities for on-the-land training programs between the elders and youth and families where all groups are mentored by an elder and have an opportunity to learn about traditional and cultural skills;
- Establish an on-the land day program for children in early childhood programs where the parents can learn how to cook traditional foods with their children;
- Establish a community health board composed of members from the each organization (i.e. Tetlit Gwich'in Council, Tl'oondih Healing Society, Hamlet of Fort McPherson etc.) to address all health concerns which will be brought forth to the Department of Health. Once the Health Board is established post and advertise the names of members so the community residents knows whom they can contact with their concerns;
- Provide training for individuals who escort elders to the hospitals to ensure the elders are fully aware of the treatment they are going to receive, the escort understands medical terminology and fulfills the role of liaison between the elder, doctor and health centre;
- Promote the Department of Health to hire a Translator at the Health Centre in Fort McPherson. This individual will act as the liaison person for the elders and other residents who need assistance speaking with the medical personnel;
- The use of traditional medicine is practiced by most residents. Utilize the elders to teach people about the different types of traditional medicines and their uses. Promote the Department of Health to utilize traditional medicines in the treatment of clients.
- Provide increased opportunities for elders to continue practicing their traditional skills (i.e., dry fish making) through the utilization of the old camp site by the Old Folks home. Hire individuals to provide fish to the elders for this program. Extend this opportunity by taking the elders on day trips to go on picnics, pick berries as well as boat trips to Wind River etc.
- Increase active living opportunities for youth, families and elders to participate in drug/alcohol free activities where community residents have access to information on other programs they can participate in;

- Expand existing recreational options for more family activities and activities for moms and tots;
- Help children and youth to develop healthy lifestyles by delivering programs where they make healthy food choices, participate in community literacy programs and engage in sport programs to develop strong healthy bodies and minds;
- Support education in the delivery of programs that focus on teaching community residents skills they will be able to use in their daily lives. Promote and work with Aurora College to deliver programs related to computer training for elders, accounting, how to read and work with a GPS, administration courses for residents to be hired to work as receptionists, on-line courses for older people and refresher courses for people in the workplace;
- Encourage each organization to volunteer to cook a hot lunch for the community residents once a month to provide a healthy meal to those residents who need it.
- Promote and encourage community organizations to host monthly open houses to build a connected environment where our community members get to know what services are available to them and have a sense of belonging in each organization;
- Increase the use of local resources for service delivery that promotes ongoing community education. Utilize visiting doctors, nutritionists, public health, justice, RCMP, education personnel, Anglican ministers/lay readers to increase community profile by offering regular training sessions. Spiritual Growth, elder abuse, residential school impacts, Alcohol Anonymous, FASD, Alcohol & Drug abuse, teen pregnancy and sex, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, delivery of Gwich'in language programs, parenting and relationships workshops, on the-land programs to learn traditional skills were identified by the focus groups as areas that need attention;
- The need to establish a crisis line for community members dealing with elder abuse, family violence, suicide, bullying, alcohol and drug abuse, being addiction free, gambling;
- Work with other groups to remove obstacles to healthy living. Work with groups to find solutions to remove obstacles to participation;
- Engage the community in ongoing discussions on wellness to keep this issue at the top of every organization's agenda.

6.0 How Do We Get There?

Since all the priorities need funding to be fully implemented the Teet'lit Gwich'in Council will:

- Submit proposals to access program funding from all agencies that support community wellness

- Submit funding proposals to Industry, Tourism & Investment, Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development, NWT Literacy Council, as well as community agencies who have funds to support additional healthy living activities (ie, Take A Kid Trapping; Career Fairs/Development; Student Exchange, Tutor training/mentoring);
- Maximize information sharing and joint facility use among agencies to promote community wellness;
- Incorporate community strategies into the Teet'lit Gwich'in Council work plans,
- Work in partnership with community agencies to raise funds for specific programs and seek program sponsorship from businesses in the Fort McPherson and the surrounding communities;
- Expand existing programs to include community members willing to volunteer their time to work with at risk youth, at risk families, pregnant mothers or mothers who might need mentoring support for current situations, elders who need assistance;
- All organizations will continue to work together to utilize CBQM (local radio station) to inform the community residents about community wellness activities and increase communication between organizations and residents;
- Seek financial donations from businesses to keep programs (daycare/aboriginal head start) operating during the Christmas and Easter break;
- Work in partnership with all organizations to host healthy role model campaign in the community to recognize people who have made positive changes to their lives and are now encouraging others to live a positive lifestyle;
- The Chii Dik Tsal Gwizheh Facility will be utilized for community wellness programs;
- Measure and share our success stories with others so Fort McPherson can be looked at as a community where positive changes are being made and serve as a model for others to follow.