

Nahanni Butte

Community Wellness Plan March 2013
*Prepared by the community of Nahanni Butte and
Northern ICE NWT*



Dehcho Health and Social Services Authority funded Northern ICE to engage community members to answer four questions for Community Wellness Planning. The response of community members is summarized below:

Chief Konisenta signed a letter dated February 8, 2013 to work toward completing a Community Wellness Plan. Northern ICE was in Nahanni Butte from February 8th till the 12th. An agenda (Appendix B) for the meetings was distributed to all the post boxes at the band office. The meetings held at Charles Yohin School attracted only a couple of people. A meeting at the school with the children was welcomed and feedback from the children was noted. The Community Health Representative also provided input. The Chief was unable to meet at the time. Northern ICE was able to connect with Chief Konisenta in March to get his perspective on the wellness plan. The input from the Nahanni Butte high school student was acquired at the meeting at the Thomas Simpson Secondary in Fort Simpson.

Where are we now?

The community is struggling to improve their health because the programs and services do not align with the traditional and current culture of the community. The traditional culture is known for hard work and living respectfully with the environment, animals and each other. The traditional way of living was successful despite the harsh conditions and no outside support because of ingenuity, expertise and spiritual well being. The current culture is severely affected by the residential school experience. Many people still suffer from physical, social, mental and spiritual illness resulting from residential school. Unproductive government policies and a lack of resources have not helped the community recover. The community does not have the resources to properly care for the Elders or provide youth with what they need to be strong in mainstream society ways and their own culture. The social atmosphere is not well due to the alcohol and drugs and the associated problem that come with it. Infrastructure is problem especially with the recent flood. A struggle also exists to keep the traditional territory from being expropriated and destroyed. The traditional culture needs to be supported and the current culture needs the traditional culture to heal.

What do we have to work with?

The problem is what the community does not have to work with and that the resources that are available are not being used. The community does not have satisfactory government support and services. More training is required to help local people manage and implement administration, programs and governance with better effectiveness. There is not enough funding provided for traditional cultural teaching and healing. The community has Elders and other community members with a wealth of knowledge to pass on. Their knowledge cannot be found in any schools. Their teachings will enable the youth to be strong and healthy personally and culturally to lead the community in the future. The culture camps exist, but they are underutilized. Local people with traditional knowledge are here to teach cultural skills that are transferable to western ways.

Where do we want to be?

Nahanni Butte wants to be a healthy, loving, safe, and respectful community. The community wants their traditional culture to be a bigger and stronger part of their identity. Living the culture, the Dene way of life, will help in doing their job of keeping their traditional territory from being destroyed and contaminated.



Input from student level at Charles Yohin School

How do we plan to get there?

Education and health is the core of what's necessary to thrive in both the modern and traditional cultures. Getting where we want to be will be achieved by teaching traditional culture to the youth to prepare them to excel in academic studies, trades training, and professional development. In the beginning of the transition to more cultural teaching, culture camps should be held in each season lasting at least 2 to 4 weeks. Academic studies at the secondary level and lower need to be strengthened by having tutors, mentors, improved library services, career days, science workshops, youth conferences, and student exchanges available for students. Students in trades training and post secondary studies need more support systems to help with the experience of being in a foreign

environment. Regarding health, community people believe the beginning to overcoming the trauma of residential school and addictions is traditional healing done out on the land. The involvement of the entire community, the region, and all levels of government are needed to begin helping people get educated and building a healthy community.



Student input from smaller communities including Nahanni Butte at high school in Fort Simpson

Northern ICE perspective for Government Wellness Plan

Social, cultural and economic wellness of the community depends on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of community members. The general health of community has not been good for many years. Federal and territorial government laws and policies and mainstream society's ways are not helping to improve the health of the community. Community people can regain their health by being who they are. Healthy Dene people is where the Dene Way of Life came from. Not speaking the Dene language and not living the Dene traditional way is not who the Dene are. The traditional way is

living with respect with all creation. Living with respect with all creation is learned through the Dene Way of Life which is healthy Dene people.

The improvement of health needs to start with addressing the mental illness and addictions that people suffer from in a way that achieves a return to healthy wellbeing.

Mental illness can result in different ways and is not being properly dealt with. Sometimes you are born with mental illness. Living in an abusive situation affects mental health. Not being able to process thoughts in a good way leads to negative mentality. Being abused or violated physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually will negatively affect the mental state. Without the appropriate resources to deal with mental anguish, people turn to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. Western science doctors are sought to relieve the mental pain. Too many western science doctors frivolously prescribe pharmaceutical drugs to address mental illness. Prolonged use of drugs, alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs weaken the mind and the body. Another hindrance to recovering from mental illness is the term, "mental health." Many people relate admitting the need for asking for help with mental health to being labelled crazy and therefore will not seek help.

The Dene way to treat people with mental health problems is to use a different term for mental health. Dene would call them "people that think differently." Sometimes people are diagnosed as mentally ill by western doctors where a traditional healer would diagnose the same person as having spiritual gifts that have need to be mastered. People that think differently are shown respect and are worked with to find out what their learning style is. If people are having difficulty mentally because of self abuse or being abused by others, healing and counseling on the land by traditional teachings and methods have proven successful where other ways have failed. Part of the Dene way which adds to the healing process is that the people are honoured in ceremony for their recovery progress by Elders, family and peers.

Addictions have changed the community's way of life in a dreadful way. People are teaching the culture of drug and alcohol abuse through their own use of drugs and alcohol. The use of drugs and alcohol leads to the abandonment of practicing traditional culture. Some of the illnesses caused from addictions are diabetes, cirrhosis of the liver, and high blood pressure. A few unhealthy behaviours from addiction are loss of pride, damaging relationships, poor parenting skills, distrust, anger, gossip, diabetes, overdosing, and suicide. It also leads to every possible form of abuse. The resources necessary to effectively overcome addictions are not available in the community.

Overcoming mental illness and addiction is dealing with root cause of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual disease which requires a major lifestyle change that will take much time and persistent effort from the entire community to achieve. This major lifestyle change is needed so that the next generations will get the traditional teaching they need to be grounded to face the challenges of learning and excelling in mainstream society.

Community people believe that the way to good health is to return to the teachings, which means going back to the land. **An "On the Land Treatment Centre" is the request of the community and the**

recommendation of Northern ICE. Northern ICE can help facilitate and lead the whole process of making treatment on the land happen.

On the Land Treatment Centre will start with:

- Getting direction from the Elders and Chief and council for decision making for treatment on the land.
- A community meeting would be held to inform community members and to get their input.
- Treatment programs and projects will be determined to deal with the various illnesses
- Develop treatment staff on:
 - o Healing methods
 - o Treatment skills
 - o Counseling skills
- Local or regional Elders to teach traditional knowledge.
- Other resources will be invited to teach their skills of healthy living, counseling and healing.

On the Land Treatment Centre will be there for:

- Our people from jail for treatment to rehabilitate with traditional teaching to survive in the community.
- Residential school survivors to heal themselves and their families to create strong family ties.
- Abusers and violators to express their anger issues, bad behaviours and bullying.
- Supporting alcoholics, drug users and prescription drug users to recover.
- Bootleggers and drug dealers to see the damage and stop the destruction of the people and the culture
- Youth intervention and promotion of living a healthy lifestyle.
- Leadership building of roles and responsibilities.
- Elders to heal to be great role models to the people.

On the Land Treatment Centre will be based on the Dene laws, Dene environmental laws, and spiritual path the Elders were taught on the land from their Elders. The Elders hold the sacredness of the Dene language and how it is used in the rites of passage for girls and boys going into adulthood. The teachings include roles and responsibilities of relationships, marriage, bearing a child, prenatal knowledge, parenting, grand parenting, and most important, being an Elder. The Elders' roles and responsibilities include passing on the knowledge of the culture, self-government, self determination and self sufficiency. Elders are the teachers of survival skills, crafts, drums and songs, social activities, medicine plants, storytelling. Elders' are natural counselors and healers and had a strong justice systems that worked for healing our people

The On the Land Treatment Centre is the beginning of wellness and the base to work with to progress on the other issues the community wants to get started on. The communities desire to work toward healthy child and youth development, well educated community members, monitored and clean environment, self government, and economic prosperity will not be attained unless people return to the land to regain their health so that they can lead and work with their Dene teachings.

The Dene way of doing things is based on four statements established by Dehcho Elder Leo Norwegian. Below is a comparison between Elder Leo Norwegian and the government wellness plan approach.

Elder Leo Norwegian:

Find out who you are
Find out where you come from
Find out why you are here
Find out where you are going to

Government Wellness Plan Ideas:

Where are we now?
What do we have to work with?
Where do we want to be?
How do we plan to get there?

The government's wellness plan approach has been used for years. Housing, health, education and economics have not improved with this approach. Federal, Territorial and First Nations leadership and employees need to support each other to work with an approach that the community will embrace. The Leo Norwegian approach to the On the Land Treatment Centre to return to the Dene teachings needs to be pursued to have healthy self governing First Nations communities.

Northern ICE proposes that an inaugural youth camp be run this summer in the Dehcho. The camp would last for two weeks and be for a group of about 25 youth from the ages of 13 to 21 from the communities of Wrigley, Nahanni Butte, Trout Lake, Jean Marie River, and Fort Simpson. The place of the camp would be at the discretion of community members.