

Pehdzeh Ki First Nation (Wrigley)



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



Introduction

Pehdzeh Ki First Nation has worked on community planning with Peter Redvers, Crosscurrent Associates Ltd. since 1998. The difficulty in bringing the community plan to reality as stated in the 2004 Action Plan, “Lack of resources, management instability, internal disputes and ongoing pressure to respond to compelling resource development,” still exists today. The community has had a detailed community plan in place for over a decade. Pehdzeh Ki First Nation has repeatedly identified the need to return to the land to get started. With adequate resources and the appropriate personnel, a healthy start can be made on achieving their mission statement of being self governing. The mission statement and main goals from the 2004 Action Plan follows:

Mission Statement

The 1998 Community Visioning workshop resulted in the development of the following draft mission statement for the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation. Although it was never formally ratified, this mission statement is worth carrying forward as a broad expression of direction and intent¹.

The Pehdzeh Ki First Nation represents a self-governing people and has full authority over and responsibility for the management and delivery of programs and services to all residents within its traditional territory.

Self-governance is based on inherent right² and will be recognized and established through a Deh Cho Constitution. The Pehdzeh Ki First Nation, as a Deh Cho First Nations government, will have primary jurisdiction over economic, social, cultural, and political development within its territory.

With this self-governance authority and responsibility, the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation will ensure that:

- *all programs, services, and activities within its territory reflect the cultural traditions and aspirations of the Pehdzeh Ki people; and*
- *all programs, services, and activities are planned and coordinated in such a way that local social and economic benefits are maximized and problems are minimized.*

Through a long-term process of healing, education, and training, members of the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation will fully prepare themselves for the increased level of authority and responsibility associated with renewed self-governance and self-reliance.

Main Goals

In order to achieve this mission, the PKFN have identified the following long-term goals:

- *An effective Dene governance system encompassing all Pehdzeh Ki First Nation lands.*
- *Sustainable employment, business, and traditional land use opportunities for PKFN members.*
- *Healthy and culturally-strong families.*

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 Lennie sent a letter requesting Northern ICE's assistance to work on Pehdzeh Ki First Nation's Community Wellness Plan in September 2012 (Appendix A). The four questions for NWT Health and Social Services were a good lead to working on a more comprehensive plan. Chief and council were shown and explained the wellness plan work that was completed in Sambaa K'e. Northern ICE was in Pehdzeh Ki for 12 straight days from December 10-21, 2012. Northern ICE had posters (Appendix B) of the agenda for the wellness plan meeting delivered to all the post boxes at the band office. Smudging ceremonies were done to start each meeting that was held in the gym. Meetings were done in the gym on the weekdays in the afternoon from 1 to 4 and in the evening from 7 to 9. Home visits were made to a few Elders that were not physically able to get to the meetings. Two definite assets with the visits to the Elders were that they knew Be'sha and that she could speak with them in the Slavey language. The comfort level of the Elders was such that they felt safe to say what they truly felt about the wellness of the community. The children were visited at the school and they too felt free to voice their opinions on the state of community. The children's opinions were posted at the meetings for the adults to see. The children's opinions are included in the summarized community response. Wrigley high school students were in attendance for Northern ICE's meeting at the high school in Fort Simpson. Community people

¹ The 1998 mission statement has been modified slightly to accommodate new information.

² As stated in the PKFN Declaration of Rights.

also came by to visit at the health centre where Northern ICE was staying. Attendance at the meetings in the community in the gym varied from about 5 to 20. In returning to meet in the Dene way, no honouraria or door prizes were made available. A private local caterer was hired to provide food.



Where are we now?

The community exists without a sufficient amount of satisfactory health, education, and the job skills necessary to succeed. The impact of residential school trauma is one of the main reasons for the poor health in the community which ultimately has a negative effect on education and job skills. Some of the poor health includes poor parenting skills, distrust amongst the people, unhealthy interaction between people, and limited healthy community gatherings. Reviving the social health of the community is an absolute necessity. There are currently no local program resources such as counselling services, prevention or intervention programs, alcohol and drug programs, social support systems, talking circles, justice committee, or a sentencing circle available or being used to address the social issues.

The community is not learning and using all the available teachings from the Elders. The traditional values are not being respected and lived. Traditional healing and medicine are also not being taught and used.

What do we have to work with?

The present state of the system, people, and resources that the community has to work with has no hope for success. The bureaucratic government system is culturally insensitive, has a restricted mandate and no traditional programs. Many government workers do not care for or know the culture of the Dene or the north and are only here short term to make money and move back south. The amount of time government workers are in the community is not adequate for the insufficient services that are provided. The lack of local program resources is mentioned in the previous section. Sub-standard housing is another problem local people have to work with.

The community has to work with part of its local human resources suffering from rampant alcohol and drug abuse, sexual abuse, family violence, suicidal tendencies, low education attainment, and a limited amount of training. The current state of the local human resources does not help the vision of self governance and self sufficiency.



Gathering input from students from smaller communities including Wrigley at high school in Fort Simpson

Where do we want to be?

This community wants to be healthy and self sufficient. The goal is to have a beautiful community with healthy homes and families, respect for each other, open healthy spontaneous communication, sobriety, and traditional gatherings. Self sufficiency will be the method and benefit of a healthy community.

How do we plan to get there?

Getting treatment for addictions and residential school is the first priority. The preferred method of healing is a treatment centre on the land that includes traditional healing. In time, the treatment centre would be run entirely by local or regional Dene people. Men's and women's talking and healing circles in the community are necessary to support the healing path after treatment. Family violence and addictions counselling programs need to be in place locally so that they are readily available when necessary.

Reviving the practice of community social gatherings will help with culture, teaching and wellness. The social gatherings will be a setting to enjoy cultural feasts and games, acknowledge each other, and celebrate success. People including youth getting into the practice of providing care for the Elders will be a symbiotic relationship with the Elders passing on the stories, culture and language.

The approach to progress needs to be done from the Dene perspective. Studies being done on Dene people need to stop. The youth need a reliable program that supports culture, recreation, sports, education, and personal aspirations. Adults need training programs to learn the skills necessary to build the community and for their own vocation. Building a cultural centre with the identity of Pehdzeh Ki First Nation will be instrumental with the process of revitalizing the community.

Self determination and self government will be re-established through living more of the Dene traditional culture within the community and out on the land.

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 Counselling skills

- Local or regional Elders to teach traditional knowledge.
- Other resources will be invited to teach their skills of healthy living, counselling 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 counsellors 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 want 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.