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YOUTH FOR DIGNITY

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

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Introduction

Youth for Dignity in Relationships: An Empowerment Program Against Gender-Based Violence

Project Title: Ts'ídāne á' nezen?: Youth for Dignity in Relationships (YFD)
PHAC Funding Period: February 14, 2019 - December 31, 2023
Lead Organization: Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS)
Partners/Collaborators: Liard First Nation, Watson Lake Secondary School, Victim Services, Watson Lake RCMP, Centre for Response Based Practice, Beringia Community Planning Inc.
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In response to a 2018 call by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) designed an innovative project named "Ts'ídāne á' nezen?" or Youth for Dignity in Relationships (YFD). This initiative, focused on preventing teen and youth dating violence, garnered success with a contribution agreement signed on February 14, 2019. The YFD program, launched on the same day, was set to make a significant impact through to December 31, 2023.

Set against the backdrop of Watson Lake, Yukon, YFD empowers youth through a tapestry of activities aimed at dismantling gender-based and relationship violence while bolstering community safety and justice. YFD is a youth empowerment project designed to address gender-based and relationship violence, and foster community safety and justice in the town of Watson Lake, Yukon. The project focuses on knowledge and skill development among youth in Grades 8 to 12 at Watson Lake Secondary School (WLSS) in order to increase understanding and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and relationship violence and to mobilize youth as anti-violence leaders in Watson Lake (the Community).

The program's design is a symphony of culturally-attuned components, including workshop programming, awareness campaigns, and community events. Rooted firmly in the Kaska values, principles, and protocols, YFD interlaces Kaska Culture with Response-Based Practice to construct an approach that is both culturally respectful and strength-oriented.

The essence of this report centers on three thematic pillars: participant learning, program impact, and a multifaceted review of strengths, challenges, and potential growth. This report casts light on the remarkable strides achieved, notably in the fourth year, underscoring how the program has touched lives, reshaped community narratives, and cemented partnerships that are as enduring as they are transformative.

Background

YFD was created to integrate workshop programming, awareness campaigns, and community events with Kaska Culture and Response-Based Practice. These efforts were anchored in the principles of Dena Au'Nazen (dignity and respect) and involved Kaska Elders at all stages, aiming to foster socially just responses to violence.

YFD operates with a vision that is both expansive and detailed, seeking to weave knowledge and skill-building into the fabric of youth experiences from Grades 8 to 12 at Watson Lake Secondary School. The program's lifeblood flows from five interconnected components: nuanced workshop programming, incisive intervention research and evaluation, dynamic knowledge dissemination, sustainable program initiatives, and the invaluable contributions of partners. These elements stand on the solid ground of Kaska Cultural practices and Response-Based Practice methodologies.

The Dena Au'Nazen—principles of dignity and respect inherent to the Kaska system of wellness—form the bedrock of YFD. The program aims to nurture a socially equitable, culturally sensitive, and impactful response to violence. It cherishes and cultivates positive self-identity during the pivotal years of youth development.

"I never learned stuff like I'm learning in this group. I never learned nothing in residential school. I never had the opportunity you have today. Grasp everything and go for it. I heard you drumming yesterday and I was so impressed. Go beyond your comfort zone and learn everything you can."

Kaska Elder

Activities and Outputs

Inputs

- LAWS cultural heritage and community connections.
- Collaborations partners ranging from the Liard First Nation to Victim Services and the Centre for Response-Based Practice.
- Financial contributions from the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- Engagement of local community members, including Elders, youth, and subject matter experts.

Activities

- Hosting of Advisory Forums and in-person engagements.
- Education through YFD-led workshops and seminars.
- Development and dissemination of educational materials (e.g., Red Handprint campaign, Information Cards).
- Creating spaces for cultural expression and intergenerational teaching.
- YFD participants also participated as a drumming group at community events such as the Fall 2023 MMWIG2S+ potlatches.
- Development of YFD videos

Short-Term Outcomes (Years 1 & 2)

- Enhanced understanding of GBV among participants (100% of respondents reported learning).
- Development of skills to identify and respond to GBV (86% of participants reported using learned skills).
- Increased communication of GBV knowledge within participants' networks (58% noted YFD helped create community change).
- Growth in confidence and empowerment among participants to tackle GBV.

Medium-Term Outcomes (Year 2)

- Strengthened community awareness of GBV prevention and response.
- Expansion of peer support networks among participants.
- Increased knowledge and capacity among partner organizations and collaborators.
- Sustained collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders.

Long-Term Outcomes (Year 3 - 5)

- Continued increase in knowledge about GBV among participants through sustained engagement.
- Further development of interpersonal skills and comfort in discussing GBV.
- Enhanced sense of pride and cultural connection among participants.
- Youth-led initiatives for GBV prevention and awareness.
- Increased recognition of Elders' roles in cultural teaching and GBV education.

Outcomes and Learnings

With ambitions as heartfelt as they are strategic, YFD sets forth objectives that span the gamut from enhancing understanding and responsiveness to GBV, to fortifying the cultural ties and safety within relationships. The program is committed to amplifying effective practices in addressing dating and relationship violence, particularly among Indigenous youth, and shares its learnings broadly, ensuring adaptability and sustainability are woven into its very core. YFD's year-to-year journey has been a tapestry of engagements that honor Kaska traditions and reinforce community trust.

The strength of collaborations—with partners like the Watson Lake Secondary School and Liard First Nation Chief and Council—has been pivotal, reinforcing the reach and resonance of the program. Knowledge dissemination initiatives, notably the Red Handprint on Face campaign, have been youth-led, galvanizing engagement and leadership among the young participants. From its inception through Year 3, YFD's evaluative insights have shone a light on the profound impact of educational content, with an enhancement in participants' ability to support peers affected by violence. As the program journeyed through Year 2 and into Year 3, it fostered a robust skill set for addressing GBV, kindling confidence in 58% of participants that they could make a tangible difference in their community. This momentum continued, with the final years highlighting a deepening engagement with Kaska values and a notable advancement in communication skills surrounding GBV topics.

The YFD program has established itself as a benchmark in GBV prevention, showcasing the indispensable role of culturally responsive programs. The insights gained affirm the value of intergenerational learning, with Elders imparting wisdom and youth taking up the mantle to champion change. As we analyze the outcomes and learnings, we find that the short-term knowledge gains have manifested as medium-term community engagement and support. By the final years of this funding period, the emphasis on cultural teachings revealed the depth of impact that culturally grounded programs can have. Participants have not only learned about GBV but have embraced this knowledge to enrich their engagement with their culture and community.

The surge in youth-led knowledge dissemination activities has been a beacon of effectiveness. These campaigns and initiatives have instilled a sense of ownership and empowerment in young participants, vital for the enduring nature of the project's goals. The YFD program represents a convergence of LAWS' cultural heritage and sustained collaborative efforts. Inputs from various stakeholders, including Elders, youth, subject matter experts, and partners, have fueled the program's diverse activities. These have ranged from hosting forums to integrating educational sessions into the community's routines. The outputs of YFD are tangible, with conducted forums, reached demographics, disseminated materials, and the integration of regular sessions into community life.

The short-term outcomes observed in Years 1 and 2 have segued into medium-term outcomes, underscoring a growing community consciousness about GBV prevention and response and the expansion of peer support networks.

Long-term outcomes in Year 3 and 4 point to a continued increase in knowledge about GBV among participants, further development of interpersonal skills, an enhanced sense of pride, and cultural connection, as well as the rise of youth-led initiatives for GBV prevention. The impacts are manifold: a reduction in youth/teen dating violence and child maltreatment, the institutionalization of cultural and educational practices empowering youth against GBV, and a supportive community environment conducive to these ends. The learnings and best practices distilled from YFD's journey underscore the program's commitment to cultural grounding, intergenerational learning, collaboration, youth empowerment, and ethical research practices.

Assumptions and External Factors

Underpinning these outcomes are certain assumptions about continued community engagement, the steadfast commitment of partners, and the sustained value placed on cultural teachings. Finally, external factors such as changes in leadership, funding, or broader social-political shifts could influence the future course of the program and its objectives.

Conclusion

As we conclude this report on the Youth for Dignity in Relationships (YFD) program, it is evident that the initiative has not only met its ambitious objectives but has also transcended them, fostering a transformative and lasting change in the town of Watson Lake, Yukon. Through its culturally resonant curriculum and active community engagement, YFD has empowered a new generation to confront and dismantle the cycle of gender-based and relationship violence.

The program's success lies in its deep-rooted respect for Kaska cultural values, its innovative approach to learning and advocacy, and its commitment to inclusivity. By providing youth with the tools and knowledge to navigate complex societal issues, YFD has cultivated a strong sense of agency and social responsibility among its participants.

The dedication of the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS), alongside the collaboration with Beringia Community Planning Inc. and the Liard First Nation Chief and Council, has created a robust network of support that ensures the program's vitality and sustainability. The active role of Elders and the enthusiastic participation of the youth have been the cornerstone of YFD's progress.

As we look to the future, the program stands as a beacon of hope and a model for other communities grappling with similar challenges. The insights and outcomes derived from YFD will undoubtedly contribute to the national discourse on effective practices for preventing gender-based violence, particularly within Indigenous populations.

In closing, the Youth for Dignity in Relationships program encapsulates the power of community-driven action, the strength of cultural wisdom, and the profound potential of our youth. Its legacy will ripple through the lives it has touched and through the ongoing efforts to build safer, more respectful, and equitable communities across Canada.

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