Celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day

Canada will be celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21. In Calgary, a full week of events (known as Aboriginal Awareness Week) is scheduled leading up to this day to celebrate the distinct culture and heritage of Indigenous people. Closer to Home (CTH) is thrilled to be part of these celebrations.

CTH’s Strategic Direction to “Continue to Build Ethical Spaces for Meaningful Engagement of the Indigenous Worldview Throughout our Organization” demonstrates our commitment to embracing shared spaces where the two disparate worldviews of Western and Indigenous people can be equally valued and understood.

This day of summer solstice is a perfect occasion to enhance our understanding of the Indigenous worldview. “We have always been working to increase awareness and understanding of the Indigenous worldview in all levels of the agency, and this Strategic Direction will further help us by supporting and guiding us to implement our goals,” says Arlene Oostenbrink, Associate Director at Closer to Home.

One of the key goals identified in our strategic plan is to continue best practices through an Indigenous worldview in the delivery of programs and services for the Indigenous community. CTH’s Kiwehtata program aims to strengthen effective parenting strategies for Indigenous parents within a cultural context. Kristina’s* story is representative of many parents who have participated in the program.

“I am so glad I participated in this program,” says Kristina, mother of a one-year-old girl. Kristina and her husband Peter* were referred to Closer to Home’s Healthy Families program by a Public Health Nurse soon after their baby was born, and they later participated in CTH’s Kiwehtata parenting program.

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Although my son is only 9 years old, he is experiencing grownup feelings he does not understand. As the world around him expands, how do I help him cope with these big emotions and teach him how to express them in appropriate ways?

It is important for parents to be observant of their child’s emotions and be able to communicate calmly and clearly when describing their behaviour to them. Having the ability to notice the changes and respond to them means you are on the right track!

You can help your child understand all the different kinds of emotions he feels by labeling and talking about different kinds of behaviors and facial expressions associated with different emotions. In addition, when he is expressing different emotions, talk about why he is feeling this way and exhibiting certain behaviors. You can also help your child identify different coping strategies like listening to music, colouring or drawing, going to a quiet area, squeezing a stress ball and more to gain control. Role playing may also help him be prepared to deal with upsetting situations.

Children learn a lot from others and are very quick to pick up and mimic behaviors – either positive or negative. Be a good role model and practice what you teach.

For more information, or links to these resources, please contact us at (403) 543-0555.

-Minoush Rafie, Coordinator, West Central Community Resource Centre

Do you have a question for our staff? Send it to jmelnnychuk@closerohome.com and it may be featured in our next newsletter!

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“Since it was our first baby, we wanted to learn about parenting skills and we joined the program primarily to learn those skills,” says Kristina. “But this program not only taught us parenting skills, it helped us broaden our knowledge and learn new things about our culture and traditions,” says Kristina.

Despite being born to an Indigenous family, Kristina had little knowledge about her culture, as she grew up in foster care and got married at a young age. “Since Peter is not from an Indigenous family, it never occurred to me to know more about my culture or learn related skills,” says Kristina.

The Kiwehtata program aims to provide learning, growing and healing opportunities by providing access to supports, ceremonies, smudging and Elders’ teachings. Participants also learn traditional arts and crafts, including beading and making dream catchers.

“Kristina is really good at beading and artwork,” says Marion Redwood, facilitator of the program. These newly acquired skills have added connections for Kristina with her Indigenous culture and traditions. “Both the parents were equally eager to learn parenting skills and were engaged in all activities,” says Marion about the couple’s determination to be better parents. She feels Peter is now even more appreciative of Kristina’s Indigenous background and her culture and traditions.

“We learnt a lot in a fun way,” adds Peter about the program. “We are now more confident in providing good care to our daughter and when she grows older, we hope she learns not only about my culture (Scottish/Irish/Croatian) but also her mom's culture.”

Marion noted that Kristina and Peter’s daughter may already be on this path, as one day in the program, the typically shy baby made an unusual move by crossing the floor, reaching for the Elder while he was teaching. She sat quietly beside him, leaving Marion, Kristina, Peter and the Elder in awe.

* Names changed to protect privacy
Summer in the City: Impacting More Than Just Kids

Growing up, Shahd was a shy young girl. “I kind of had this bubble I was always in,” she recalls.

Then she came to Closer to Home (CTH)’s summer day camp program, Summer in the City.

“I didn’t talk to anyone or participate in anything for the first few days,” she remembers, “but little by little, the camp leaders started to push me out of my bubble.”

Today, Shahd, now 13, is well known in many of CTH’s programs. She and her two sisters have participated in camp, as well as our afterschool program called Homework Club and our lunch supplement program in collaboration with Brown Bagging for Calgary’s Kids. Shahd also recently completed the Babysitting Safety course through CTH’s West Central Community Resource Centre.

“She’s a great mentor for other kids in our programs,” says Minoush, coordinator of the Centre. “She takes feedback really well and wants to help out wherever she can.”

This spring, Shahd started volunteering at the Centre weekly, helping out with administrative and other tasks. She’s excited for the summer, because as a volunteer she’ll be helping other kids experience the joy and adventure of summer camp.

“I feel like anyone who hasn’t gone to camp yet is missing out on life big time,” Shahd says. “Usually in the summer we don’t learn a lot, but this way we can have fun and learn a lot at the same time.”

But it’s not just Shahd and her sisters who have benefitted from Summer in the City. Because she was able to enroll her kids in summer programming, their mom, Magda, was able to focus on studying for her test to become a pharmacist. She passed, and is currently completing 500 hours of her practicum so she can become a full-time pharmacist.

Families like Shahd’s are just one example of how much of an impact summer camp can have on kids and families’ future successes. Each year, over 90 children register for Summer in the City, eager to experience all that summer camp has to offer.

You can help! Donate to Closer to Home today through Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink, and your gift will be matched up to 50%!

Visit closertohome.com to learn more, and to watch Shahd tell her story.
Join Our Team

GROUP HOME WORKER

This permanent full-time position, in Calgary or Airdrie, works closely with a team of professionals to support children and youth in a community group home.

Using the Teaching-Family Model, Group Home Workers encourage the development of close relationships and relevant skills which enable children and youth to successfully integrate back into their families and communities.

FAMILY SPECIALIST

In this part-time position, the Family Specialist works as part of the Family Matters program, to support families in learning skills necessary for them to more effectively meet the needs of their family and life situation.

The Family Specialist assists families and individuals with problem solving, parenting skills, child development needs, budgeting, advocacy and other skills which increase the families’ ability to set attainable goals and create success.

For detailed information or to check out more career and volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at www.closertohome.com.