



# NAHO Bulletin

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## Diversity was strength of conference

By Virginia St-Denis

The diversity of people who came together was one of the strengths of the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) second national conference and health information fair. The conference, entitled *Sharing Knowledge: Aboriginal Paths to Health*, was held in Winnipeg, Nov. 8 to 10. Pre-conference youth and training sessions were held Nov. 6 to 7.

About 1,000 delegates with more than 100 presenters attended from across Canada and beyond. There was a wide representation of health care providers, policy-makers, senior government officials, and most importantly, according to NAHO Executive Director Bernice Downey, community members.

"You all came together—young and old; First Nations, Inuit, and Métis; from urban, rural, and remote areas—to share, learn, and enjoy," Downey said.

"We have had great input from the 72 young people who took part in the youth pre-conference sessions," she said. "It was also a pleasure to have the National Aboriginal Role Models together at one event for the first time. All of the youth here (delegates, speakers, and Role Models) are a wonderful group of young people. I am honoured that they shared their passion and energy with all of us."

The conference included three themes—*Breaking New Ground*, *Traditional Paths*, and *People Paths* (Acquiring the Necessary Human Resources).

On the first day, community groups, educators, and researchers shared innovative ideas from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities in urban, rural, and remote areas across Canada.

Next, Elders, youth, and others talked about the need to preserve, protect, and promote Aboriginal languages and traditions. They also discussed how to use traditional and western knowledge to complement each other.



Photo by Stefanie Arduini

*Traditional panel presenters Sakej Youngblood Henderson, Marie Battiste, and Meeka Mike.*

Presentations on the final day focused on increasing the number of Aboriginal people working in health. They not only discussed the need to recruit, train, and retain Aboriginal people as health care workers, but also shared ways in which to do that.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Elders opened each day of the conference. They also spoke throughout the conference, sharing their wisdom, knowledge, and guidance.

A lot of information was provided about a number of First Nations community-based research projects including the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey. It is an example of communities asserting their ownership, taking control, maintaining access, and keeping possession of their health research.

While various presentations were translated from English to French and Inuktitut, a couple were translated from Inuktitut to English. "It was good to see such a large group of Inuit delegates and presenters here," Downey said. "There was strong Inuit input and participation from the pre-conference through the plenary sessions and breakout workshops."

The Métis reception Monday night was standing-room only. The event had jiggling, storytelling, and poetry reading by well-known Métis authors Joe Welsh, Greg

Schofield, and Marilyn Dumont. At a pre-conference workshop, Elders said they were pleased to have the opportunity to come together and share the Michif language.

Former host of CBC's *Northbeat*, George Tuccaro was the conference chairperson. A member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation in Fort Chipewyan, Alta., the comedian and singer-songwriter entertained delegates while emceeding the three-day conference.

Former Northwest Territories Premier Stephen Kakfwi was the keynote speaker at the conference banquet. Manitoba Minister of Health Tim Sale spoke during the Tuesday morning opening.

Other special speakers included Marie Battiste, Sakej Henderson, Roberta

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# Knowledge transfer:

## What is it and why is it important to Aboriginal health?

By Christine D. LeBlanc

As the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) nears the beginning of its second mandate, it is poised to “make a significant contribution” in the area of knowledge transfer.

“What is really required in the area of Aboriginal health is transformative change and knowledge translation. Getting the word out there to stakeholders and most importantly to communities, is going to be an integral part of the work ahead,” said Bernice Downey, NAHO Executive Director.

The organization’s first mandate concentrated on creating awareness and

establishing partnerships. However, as it draws to a close in March 2005, “NAHO is now poised to really launch into knowledge transfer work . . . a roll up our sleeves kind of thing.”

NAHO is a knowledge-based organization—it generates information on a variety of health issues through research and analysis, then makes it available in various forms. It is a NAHO belief that advancing and sharing knowledge is key to empowering Aboriginal people.

Since colonization, some indigenous health knowledge has been lost through assimilation policies and the effects of negative socio-economic conditions. This loss of knowledge has created the need to ensure future generations receive and protect information.

NAHO promotes this transfer and translation of knowledge by publishing and distributing newsletters, papers, tool kits, and research information so communities, policy-makers, and leaders can take that information and do the work needed to make that change happen.

“We need to promote knowledge transfer and make it happen in a way that is meaningful and culturally appropriate,” Downey said.

The second national conference and health information fair, held in Winnipeg, Man., Nov. 8 to 10, is a good example of how NAHO passes on information.

Knowledge was shared and sparked new ideas in creating new approaches to health. The positive feedback from the conference demonstrates the need people have to come together, to share their own success stories, and to learn from others, Downey said.

“As we look at the future, we need to continue to make those opportunities happen.”

Aside from plans for a third conference, NAHO is also exploring other avenues of knowledge translation such as a knowledge translation summit and an Aboriginal health summer institute.

“We need to understand the pressures related to knowledge transfer that are specific to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people such as language, cultural appropriateness, and literacy, as a few examples,” Downey said.

Forums can bring people together to address these and other knowledge transfer issues.

Distributing information as widely as possible improves awareness of issues Aboriginal people face. Factors affecting the health and well-being of Aboriginal people will change as improved knowledge enables people to make informed decisions about themselves and their communities.

“We look forward to making knowledge transfer happen in a tangible and meaningful way for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.”

## Conference brought nations together

*Continued from page 1*

Jamieson, Dr. Gilles Pinet, and Terry Tafoya.

But it wasn’t all work and no play. The Youth and Elders Gathering on the Monday evening included First Nations drumming and dancing, Inuit throat singing, and Métis fiddling and jigging. The Métis Little Toe Tappers and comedian Leonard Dick (a.k.a. Moccasin Joe) entertained delegates at the conference banquet.

One of the young presenters noted how profound it was to have so many nations attending one event; that by joining together and working together, Aboriginal people are all stronger.

In another workshop, participants discussed how Aboriginal communities have always emphasized the whole, the group, rather than the individual.

“We have made a strong circle and I want to thank every one of you for being a part of it,” Downey told the delegates during the closing activities.

“After the conference, the challenge is to take what you have seen, heard, discussed, and learned here, bring it back to your communities, and build on it. Create new circles, create new strengths, so that the whole is made stronger and every individual part benefits from that.”



## NAHO Bulletin

The National Aboriginal Health Organization, an Aboriginal designed and controlled body, will influence and advance the health and well-being of Aboriginal Peoples through carrying out knowledge-based strategies.

The NAHO Bulletin is an electronic publication produced monthly to provide readers with an update of the activities of NAHO and the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Centres.

If you have any questions or comments about NAHO or its publications, including having this and other publications sent directly to you, please contact us at:

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# Strong response to Centre at conference

By Karine P  pin

The First Nations Centre (FNC) got off to a strong start at the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) second national conference and health information fair, with pre-conference youth and training workshops. Youth representative Jason Whitebear welcomed the youth to their pre-conference activities.

"The speakers knew how to maintain unity and purpose during the workshops," said Whitebear, who believes the increased youth presence at this year's conference was a huge success as well.

Many people were present to see Jane Gray, the National Co-ordinator of the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS), and Brian Schnarch, the RHS Research Analyst, unveil the Survey's latest results. The RHS adult preliminary results reveal that the quality of life for many First Nations people remains substandard when compared to Canadians overall. The RHS team also introduced a unique cultural approach being developed to guide the writing of the national report.

"We want to establish a 'red standard' of research," said Gray, who believes the

existing gold standard must be culturally adapted to First Nations.

Schnarch also presented a workshop on the West Nile Virus Pilot Study, an off-shoot of the RHS. Dr. Vivian Ayoungman, who had supervised the fieldwork in Siksika, Alta., and two students who participated in the data collection process, shared their research experiences. The students plan to continue their work by sharing results from the survey with people in their communities.

Effie Panousos, a policy analyst and current Acting Director at FNC, co-presented with Dr. Ana Bodnar of Montreal's McGill University on suicide prevention among many interested conference participants.

Since the conference, several community health workers have contacted the FNC expressing their desire to take part in testing the suicide prevention tool kit.

"The presentation was very well-received. People are not just interested

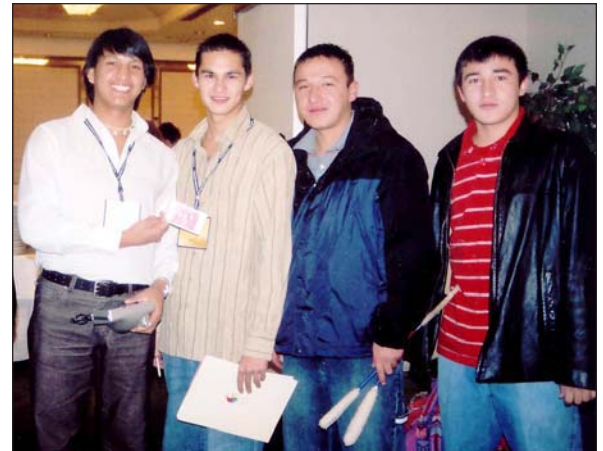


Photo by Stefanie Arduini  
NAHO's Jason Whitebear with youth emcee Jacob Pratt and other participants

in using our material, but also in participating in the process," said Panousos.

Focus groups to finalize the tool kit will be scheduled in First Nations communities early next year.

The FNC promotional items and tool kits were much in demand. Response indicated people found the research tool kits useful in the past and are looking forward to seeing new products from the FNC.

## Tales from the booth: a behind-the-scenes look

By Amy Nahwegahbow

It's a different world, looking at a conference from behind an exhibition table. At the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) second national conference and health information fair, I viewed the exhibitors in a different light and gained a new admiration for the work they do. Most of all, however, I viewed the people who attended the conferences differently. I discovered what attracts their attention and what keeps them away—what works and what turns them off.

Upon our arrival at the Winnipeg Convention Centre, dedicated First Nations Centre (FNC) staff immediately got to work setting up the FNC exhibition booth. We assembled our portable FNC and First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) displays. Then we neatly arranged our handouts, materials, and promotional items.

On the first morning of the conference, late arrivals were busily setting up their exhibitor and craft booths before the crowds arrived. Being but one exhibitor among

many (there were 37 exhibit booths, 23 craft vendors, and 28 poster board presentations), I found my competitive side emerged. I was mentally and physically prepared for the next three days of conversing, educating and schmoozing. No one would escape my spiel on the RHS process and the importance of research to First Nations people's health. I would be relentless.

Conference participants eagerly circulated the health information fair to get

*Behind the booth continued on page 9*



# Ajungginic Centre provides hands-on skills to health workers and communities

By Denise Rideout

Humorous skits, role playing, panel discussions and group projects—the Ajungginic Centre’s creative mix of training methods at the National Aboriginal Health Organization’s (NAHO) second national conference and health information fair provided health care workers and others with information and practical skills to use in their daily jobs.

During the pre-conference activities, held Nov. 6 to 7 in Winnipeg, Man., the Ajungginic Centre facilitated three training workshops. The topics—alcohol counselling, planning health promotion programs, and protecting traditional knowledge—are important to Inuit, First Nations and Métis health professionals and community members.

For Tracy O’Hearn, Director of the Ajungginic Centre, it was important for the Centre to share health and wellness information at the pre-conference session. “Through our work at the Ajungginic Centre, we have gathered information on alcohol problems and counselling, health promotion, traditional knowledge, and other health issues,” O’Hearn said. “We felt it was important to pass this information on to health workers and community members so they can use it in their communities to improve and promote health.”

One of the workshops, Working with Women at Risk, focused on training counsellors and health promotion officers on how to work with women to help them stop drinking during pregnancy. Marja Korhonen, a policy analyst at the Ajungginic Centre, co-facilitated the one-

day workshop with Francene Ross, a health promotion officer with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in Inuvik, NWT.

Korhonen felt it was important to share new and emerging ideas on alcohol counselling. “Prevention seems to have focused only on sending out the message to women: ‘Don’t drink while pregnant.’ But there hasn’t been much focus on actually working with women to assist them,” Korhonen said.

Through role playing and looking at various scenarios, the workshop taught health care workers how best to reach out to pregnant women at risk of having children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), how to offer guidance without being judgmental, how to build trusting relationships with clients, and how to keep working with women during their pregnancies.

“What we’re hoping to do is to make people aware that if we’re going to prevent FASD, then we actually have to work with women,” Korhonen explained.

The Ajungginic Centre also facilitated a hands-on, interactive, two-day training session to teach health care workers how to plan, design and deliver health promotion initiatives in their communities. Catherine Carry, an Ajungginic Centre policy analyst, and Elena Labranche from the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, co-facilitated the training workshop, which attracted public health workers, community health representatives, and others. They presented the health promotion model developed by Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association. It has been used to provide Inuit communities with the know-how to plan health promotion activities.



Photo by Virginia St-Denis

Commissioner of Nunavut Peter T. Irniq and Canadian Ambassador of Circumpolar Affairs Jack Anawak spoke during the Traditional Knowledge and the Convention on Biological Diversity workshop.

Workshops continued on page 9



# Sharing Métis traditional knowledge on medicines

By Christi Belcourt

“Traditional knowledge is defined as knowledge that is owned or shared by everyone in a community or culture. It is passed from one generation to another, usually through spoken word.”

*A Guide to the Convention on Biological Diversity*, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2004

As with any physician, traditional Aboriginal healers take on a huge responsibility when they follow the calling of trying to help others become well. But unlike western medicine, traditional medicine requires the healer to also understand and work with the spirit world as well as the physical body.

At the Métis Elders Gathering in Winnipeg, Alta., on Nov. 7, hosted by the Métis Centre, a group of 16 Métis Elders spoke about some of the aspects of working with the medicines. While modern medicine concentrates on the physical aspects of a person, a traditional healer works with the whole person, including the spirit. The spirit world works through the healer, providing him or her with information on the patient that assists in the treatment of that person.

One of the most important things to remember is to give the healer tobacco when you first go to see him or her. The tobacco is not for the Elder, but it is an offering you are making to the Creator, which the Elder uses to help you. As Tom McCallum, from Burnaby, BC, told the group, “A long time ago the spirits saw how weak we were. The spirits don’t need anything from us, but because everything in the earth works in balance, tobacco was created for us to give something back to the spirit world. Tobacco is about balance.”

George McDermot, from Lumby, BC, spoke about how his grandmother smudged herself before going into the bush to gather

the medicines, and how she taught him to blend and cook them together. “The medicines will speak to you and tell you what to think of. Sometimes a medicine will say ‘What about me? I’m good for the such-and-such.’ You work with the male and female plants and learn how to put them together to heal the whole body,” he explained. “This is not herbology—this is our way.”

“You have to pray to the Creator who put those medicines [here],” said Francis Dumais, from Bonnyville, Alta. “You give thanks to the Creator and ask the plant for permission to use it. And you pray to Mother Earth, because that’s what grows the plant,” added Albert Desjarlais of East Prairie Métis Settlement, Alta.

“A lot of people want to learn and it’s good that we want to start somewhere,” Dumais said. “On the other hand, it’s not that easy to get to understand how we use them. You can’t just go to an Elder and ask them to give you their medicines.”

As with other Aboriginal people, Métis healers are also recognizing that they need to be cautious about how, and with whom, they share their knowledge on medicines. “I’m having a dilemma right now because I’m worried about what if it gets ruined, what if it gets in the wrong hands,” Dumais said.

As Sakej Henderson of the Bear Clan of the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne tribe explained during the morning session of the National Aboriginal Health Organization’s second national conference and health



Photo by Christi Belcourt  
*Métis Elders George McDermot and Marion Larkman*

information fair in Winnipeg, Nov. 8 to 10, the Elders are right to be concerned. “In 10 years, they [the World Trade Organization] want every plant ‘owned’ by a corporation or nation state. It’s a silent battle ground.”

This is a call now being heard by indigenous peoples around the world. Called bio-piracy, the legal rights of indigenous cultures to their resources and knowledge are being overridden by individuals and corporations. For financial gain, patents are being registered worldwide on plants and their medicinal qualities—knowledge that has been held by indigenous peoples for thousands of years.

Traditional healers, however, explain that much of how they have learned to use plants in healing ceremonies comes from the spirit world, which cannot be patented or exploited by greed. Practising traditional medicine involves not only knowledge of the body, but also knowledge of traditional spiritual ceremonies and how to converse with plants and the plant world. Notions such as giving thanks to the Creator and to Mother Earth, wasting nothing, and humbly respecting the source of all life are integral to the practice.

# Youth attend conference in record numbers

By Jason Whitebear

Youth participation increased dramatically at the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) second national conference and health information fair. As a direct result of feedback gathered from the first conference, youth involvement was highlighted as a priority for the second one. About 70 youth attended, up from 10 the previous conference. Very few Aboriginal youth were involved in the first gathering. The lack of workshops or events directed at them demonstrated the gaps.

To remedy this, NAHO ensured a better response by organizing a weekend of youth-specific sessions, in addition to the main conference events. Some of the programs at the pre-conference and conference, held Nov. 6 to 10 in Winnipeg, Man., included a national Inuit youth suicide prevention framework, a youth leadership training workshop, the Assembly of First Nation's Young Eagle Challenge, and a session on traditions and youth. There was also a session on recognizing and responding to violence

against women in Aboriginal communities and the Tipi of Courage workshop.

Participants were able to get to know each other and build relationships that will make a difference in the future. "We provided each other with collective direction in addressing important issues that Aboriginal people here in Canada have to deal with," said Jacob Pratt from Gordons First Nation, Sask.

"Aboriginal youth especially, very rarely have the chance to unite to talk about what they see their communities need."

The National Aboriginal Role Models also participated. "Personally I enjoyed being around the Role Models because it's very rare to be around inspirational friends with such good attitudes and goals," Pratt said. "All of the youth, including the Role Models, were there knowing they had a job to do and each one of us took that seriously."

The youth-directed focus at the conference



Photo by Virginia St-Denis

Participants signed and decorated a scrapbook

led to new opportunities for all those involved.

"We exchanged e-mail addresses so we can all keep in touch. This was an experience that I would really like to see become more frequent," said Pratt.

By coming together in a collective matter, debating, reflecting, and making decisions, attendees helped set the direction and raised the importance of those issues affecting Aboriginal youth across the country, not just for this conference but future conferences as well.

## Role Models Lead the Way at Youth Pre-Conference

By Joyce Spence

The National Aboriginal Role Models led the way at the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) second national conference and health information fair by facilitating and participating in pre-conference youth sessions. They then presented at NAHO's main conference, held in Winnipeg, Man., Nov. 8 to 10.

The conference was the first opportunity for most of the Role Models to meet and work together. They were among more than 70 youth attendees.

Various topics emerged at the sessions, such as suicide, high school dropouts, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and family violence. The discussions not only focused on the social challenges facing Aboriginal Peoples but also listed their accomplishments in areas of health, education, politics and community.

Among the group there was a great sense of urgency to ensure that future generations understand the historical trauma of

Aboriginal people. They repeatedly stressed the importance of keeping culture and language alive, as well as looking to the Elders for guidance. Using their community strength to address socio-economic and cultural problems was also emphasized. The Role Models plan to continue working on the issues raised at the conference.

At the conference banquet, NAHO's Executive Director Bernice Downey presented each Role Model with a memento of their term.

In short speeches, each Role Model present mentioned their surprise at being nominated. They shared their goals and dreams, and talked of their own heroes. They share a sense of working towards giving back what was given to them. As they finished the audience responded with a standing ovation.



Photo by Stefanie Arduini

Role Model Jason Annahatak introducing himself.

The National Aboriginal Role Model program focuses on accomplishments of First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth between the ages of 13 and 30.

For a community visit, contact the National Aboriginal Role Model Program through our website at <http://www.naho.ca/rolemodel>

# Role Model driven by personal experience

By Christine D. LeBlanc

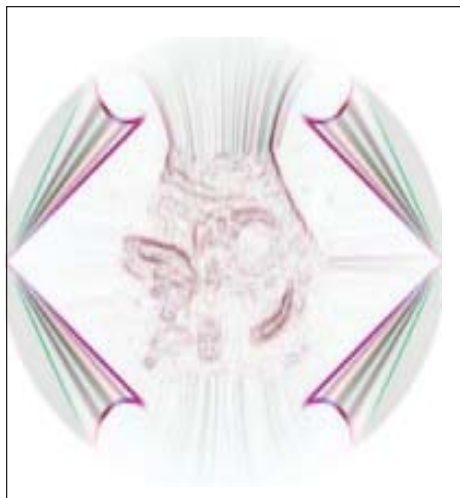
Her list of accomplishments is long. Her dreams of the future are far-reaching. But not easily seen are the scars from a past Jaime Koebel describes as “torturous.”

A National Aboriginal Role Model, the 26-year-old Métis grew up in Lac La Biche, Alta. Throughout childhood other girls bullied and beat her regularly. Targeted for “acting white” by First Nations, Métis, and non-Aboriginal girls, Jaime was forced at one point to change schools. She speculates they used the term because her mother and stepfather are non-Aboriginal and because she was involved in school activities with the town’s more affluent non-Aboriginal students.

Lacking support at home and in the school system, Jaime tried to hide the damage by participating in school activities, only to find it surfacing in harmful and destructive ways. It was the encouragement she found through the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) that helped pull her through. “I moved on with my life and refused to remain stagnant or trapped.”

Being on the NAFC Youth Council led to many opportunities. “They really honed and shaped Aboriginal youth into leaders,” Jaime said.

Because of her involvement, the Department of Canadian Heritage asked her to be an advisor to the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Status of Women at the World Conference Against Racism. She was also involved with youth peer counselling and was president of the Youth



“Eye of the Beholder” shows a sonogram of Jaime’s daughter Hunter in the womb.

Council for the last two-and-a-half years she was with the group.

It was also through the NAFC she originally came to Ottawa from Edmonton where she attended the University of Alberta. Jaime transferred to Carleton University to be closer to the organization and found a part-time job as a researcher with the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).

Although pursuing a master’s degree in Aboriginal studies, Jaime initially was not interested in the subject. The program she started studying in Alberta required Aboriginal students to take some Aboriginal courses.

“I was the kind of person who was stirring up the class, asking questions. After my first year, I guess I soaked up a lot of knowledge and understanding, so it really made me want to learn more.”

Jaime hopes to finish her degree in the next year. Her thesis focuses on the transfer of traditional knowledge and information sharing among Aboriginal youth. She wants it to be a positive paper, unlike the many that focus on negative topics like addictions or abuse. “I want people to say look, there’s hope . . . We’re still using our traditional knowledge, we’re still passing it on, and we’re still strong.”

Since September, she has been a policy co-ordinator at the Youth Environmental Network where she works with various groups to promote anti-racist, anti-oppressive analysis of environmental issues. She is also involved with the Traditional Knowledge Gathering Advisory Group. It counsels the Department of Canadian Heritage on traditional methods of decision-making and mediation while using them in practice. Jaime counts her co-advisors as her own role models.

She also admires her mother, who involved her in the friendship centre and Aboriginal culture despite being non-Aboriginal herself. Her mom had Jaime at 17. Jaime does not remember meeting her biological father until she was 5. He comes from a long line of Métis and went through the residential school system.

Jaime herself is the proud mother of twin daughters, Hunter and Riley, who turn 3 in February, and a 14-month-old son, Jacob.

Her children led to another passion, digitally enhanced photography. She



Jaime Koebel accepts a memento from Joyce Spence, National Aboriginal Role Model Program manager.

focuses on maternal images to show her children how proud she is of them and to react against the stigma of young pregnancy. “I want people to know that I chose to have children at a young age and that I’m not a statistic.” Her partner, Kyle McKenzie, is a Mohawk from Tyendinaga Reserve in Ontario and helps with her art.

An enthusiastic response greeted her recent art show in Kingston, Ont., and the National Gallery of Amsterdam is exhibiting her work.

Besides her photography, Jaime has also published poetry and short stories, and belongs to the Ottawa Indigenous Writers Group. To balance school, family, and art with something physical, Jaime belongs to a Métis jiggging dance group and makes time to exercise.

On the spiritual side, Jaime received an eagle feather from friends and her community. The feather is given to a person acknowledged by the community as a leader. With it came three plumes, one for each of her children when they leave the nest. “It’s a spiritual tool in reminding me of my place in my community and what I need to do to earn it.”

Jaime continues striving, hoping to one day work with the United Nations on indigenous issues.

Despite all her accomplishments, the memories of her traumatic youth are never far behind. “They are a part of me always. Some days are worse than others,” she said.

Jaime hopes that by sharing the bad along with the good, more people will be able to relate to her, making her a better Role Model.

# Teleworking: Working by Wire

## Part two of a special series

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“As time pressures continue to mount and individuals look for ways to balance work and other commitments, I think that more employers will begin to view telework as a strategic way to recruit or to hold on to their best employees.”

Malcolm Saravanamuttoo, Vice President, EKOS Research Associates, in *Rethinking the Information Highway*, 2001.

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As a leading edge knowledge-based organization, the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) has journeyed into the virtual world, employing teleworking staff in the Ottawa region and in locations across Canada. The Métis Centre at NAHO functions in an “E-Centre” environment with Centre staff teleworking from regional locations to better serve and address the health status of Métis in Canada.

“We are always looking for innovative ways to transfer knowledge,” said NAHO Executive Director, Bernice Downey. “We have the technology, so teleworking is a great way of sharing information.”

Teleworking is an innovative way to develop direct links with Aboriginal communities, enabling employees to respond to grassroots community issues while keeping a balance between work and home, family and social life. Working from home helps a staff member retain ties to family, culture and community. These benefits are important factors in retaining staff, especially in a small organization where keeping knowledge and talent is essential to achieving organizational goals.

Technology can pose challenges to teleworkers. They may need to do their own troubleshooting, at home or when travelling, if technical support is not available. Streamlined internal protocols and procedures are critical to the efficient and effective functioning of a virtual office environment, as is identifying evolving staff requirements. Excellent computer skills and familiarity with office equipment is necessary.

There are other challenges to teleworking as well. “[It] can be very impersonal. There can be a lack of communication and a feeling of not being part of a group,” said Guy Poirier, NAHO’s Human Resources Manager. “E-mail is the primary basis of teleworking and sometimes it can be an impersonal way to communicate. The challenge lies in developing clear communication strategies and protocols so that e-mail messages are professional,

objective, and reflect the key discussion points and issues. Being clear and concise in e-mails greatly reduces confusion and extended discussion on specific topics or requests.”

Lois Edge, Métis Centre Director, has worked from a remote service location for the past three years. “Working in a virtual environment allows staff to focus on Métis Centre activities from our respective locations outside of Ottawa, while, at the same time, allowing for our participation in organizational-wide activities within NAHO.

“Being virtually connected as an ‘E-Centre’ strengthens the Métis Centre’s ability to develop relationships with Métis organizations and community members across the country, and to facilitate links with Métis population health professionals and practitioners. Our ability to raise awareness concerning the need for Métis-specific health research, promote Métis population health, and contribute to enhancing Métis community health and wellness is further strengthened.”

Managing a teleworking environment requires innovative approaches. It is important to maintain open lines of communication and foster a collaborative teamwork approach. To work independently, prioritize activities and see deliverables through to completion, team members must be comfortable in their respective roles and responsibilities. Occasional face-to-face interaction among Métis Centre staff and also with other NAHO staff in Ottawa is a must. Métis Centre staff meet on a quarterly basis and attend meetings, community gatherings, and health-related events whenever possible. Staff maintain regular and ongoing contact with one another by e-mail and telephone. The Métis Centre is online for a 12-hour period each day, due to time zones, and is able to maintain a high level of productivity. The motto for Métis Centre members is “creativity, flexibility and responsiveness towards excellence.”

An important consideration for anyone working from a home office is the need for

reliable technology, support, and an ergonomic and comfortable home office environment. Managers must be certain to provide teleworkers with clear timelines and deliverables. A virtual office environment depends on the recruitment of a staff that has the experience, work ethic, time management skills and, most importantly, the ability to work both independently and as part of a larger team.

“If there is one key aspect that determines the success of teleworking for management, it is that onsite NAHO staff consider and have confidence in teleworking staff,” Downey said. NAHO recognizes the need to address teleworking throughout the organization to ensure that both teleworkers and onsite staff understand and appreciate both the challenges and opportunities that come with teleworking.

Building on available technologies that link staff virtually, maintaining direct discussion, and sharing of Centre activities and challenges has strengthened staff’s commitment and dedication. The end result is that each staff member is aware of his or her roles and responsibilities and is committed to reaching shared goals. A cohesive team, regardless of location, is the foundation of a successful organization. While not everyone may be suitable for this type of arrangement, the Métis Centre continues to function as a success story in proving that the recruitment of the right staff and building of a strong team are the two key ingredients of a successful virtual office.

The out of site, out of mind view of teleworking is becoming less and less a notion in Canada and around the world. Employers are becoming aware that teleworking brings to their organization a strong staff base that is happier, dependable, flexible, willing and able to take on challenging and pivotal projects through to successful completion.

*To learn more about the work of the Métis Centre, visit our recently upgraded website at [http://www.naho.ca/metis\\_centre](http://www.naho.ca/metis_centre)*

# Behind the booth at the health information fair

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first pick at popular promotional items. Upon careful observation of the other booths, I determined that our FNC promotional items were impressive. This proved true when conference participants flocked to our booth on every health break. Health breaks, if you don't know, are really coffee breaks, bathroom breaks, or smoke breaks (yes, some people who attend health conferences and are very interested in health and wellness still smoke).

I noticed a difference in how people approached our booth. Women gathered promotional materials first, saying they made "good stocking stuffers and gifts." Men, on the other hand, were more likely to ask questions before snapping up the materials.

FNC materials and information were very sought after. Participants were seeking information on the RHS and the West Nile Virus and Suicide Prevention presentations. They were relentless. It was a challenge keeping up with their requests for FNC documents and, eventually, we had to

swiftly make the journey to the nearest printing shop to make enough copies to satisfy the demand. It should be mentioned that many were not familiar with the acronym RHS. However, they were familiar with a health survey that was conducted in First Nations communities and they were anxious to receive a copy of the preliminary results from the 2002-2003 survey.

It should be no surprise that the most desired documents at the FNC booth were the tool kits on ethics, surveillance, research and privacy. People had a lot of extremely positive feedback to give about these documents. They also made sure to tell us that the tool kits were being put to good use in First Nations communities across Canada. Many commented on how the FNC booth was the most organized and had the best promotional items. (I'll bet they say that to all the booths.)

So, my experience sitting at the FNC



*Photo by Stefanie Arduini*

*Craft vendors exhibit their wares.*

booth was both refreshing and exhausting. I really enjoyed getting out of the office, meeting hundreds of new people and engaging in meaningful conversations. Although much of the work was repetitive, each individual conversation was a unique experience.

In the end, I learned that the promotional giveaways might attract people, but it was the information in the documents that made them stay. Overall, the FNC exhibition booth and materials were a rousing success.

## Workshops offer practical information

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The workshop was geared to Aboriginal health professionals, such as community health representatives and public health workers, who may be in the position to design projects in their communities or write proposals to access project funding. Over the two-day session, participants learned how to develop culturally-appropriate, community-based health promotion programs. "I hope this training will help them develop better projects," Carry said.

She taught participants how to take an idea, such as trying to prevent diabetes or encouraging people to quit smoking, and turn it into a well-planned health promotion program. Participants came up with mock health promotion programs. By using planning worksheets, Carry and Labranche walked participants through defining the program's goals, principles, and target audience, identifying research methods, outlining the program's desired outcomes, budget and timeline; and evaluating the program.

In all the discussions, Carry emphasized to participants that any health promotion initiative they design should include capacity building so community members could benefit. "I would hope that their proposal-building and project-planning skills have taken a leap after this training," she said.

In addition to hands-on training, the Ajunnginiq Centre ran an intensive information session to expose community members to issues surrounding the protection of traditional knowledge and the Convention on Biological Diversity. This session was fitting, as an objective of both the Ajunnginiq Centre and NAHO is to affirm and protect Aboriginal traditional knowledge.

"Anytime one raises the issue of traditional knowledge, issues of protection come up," O'Hearn said. "One can't talk about preserving and promoting traditional knowledge without protecting it." O'Hearn, along with Roberta Stout and James Lamouche from NAHO's Policy Research Unit, facilitated the two-day session.

Participants learned about national and international efforts to protect indigenous traditional knowledge and how the Convention on Biological Diversity aims to assist in this protection.

Of particular interest to the Ajunnginiq Centre were the discussions on Inuit traditional knowledge. For instance, participants voiced concerns about how western society has adopted and modified aspects of Inuit culture, such as the inukshuk. Traditionally used to guide people on the tundra, the inukshuk is a rock structure that marks sacred or special places.

Two prominent Inuit leaders—Jack Anawak, the Canadian Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs, and Peter Irniq, the Commissioner of Nunavut—provided an Inuit perspective on the importance of protecting traditional knowledge. "These Inuit speakers both have long histories of involvement in the preservation and promotion of Inuit culture and language. Their insights were inspiring and thought-provoking for all participants," noted O'Hearn.