



NAHO Bulletin

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Keeping our talk Michif

By Michael Fisher

Language is inseparable from culture and identity. A unique way of seeing the world is woven into the sounds and words people use to communicate with one another. These ideas were paramount at the third national Michif language conference, *Aen kwa ney taa maak nutr lawng Michif* (Keeping our Talk Michif), held in Vancouver from March 5 to 7.

"Traditional knowledge and healing practices lie in Aboriginal languages and associated ceremonies," said Ken Drury, Community Liaison Officer for the Métis Centre. Drury took part in the conference and hosted an information booth along with Research and Policy Officer Michael Fisher.

"So many of the health problems Métis and other Aboriginal Peoples are dealing with relate to loss of cultural heritage and self-identity. Our languages give us a direct line to our ancestors, to a different way of understanding and looking at the world, which I believe is directly related to health and wellness."

The Michif language, like the Métis of western Canada, evolved during the fur trade. It is a unique combination of Cree verbs and French nouns. Dutch linguist Peter Bakker, of Aarhus University in Denmark, has compared it to the duck-billed platypus or the panda bear of central China because Michif defies the norms of linguistic classification. Unfortunately, like the panda, Michif is threatened with extinction.

At one time, Michif was the first language in many Métis homes across the prairies. Socio-political and historical circumstances as well as church-based residential schools



photo: Conrad Desjarlais

A group of teens and children dance a traditional Métis jig.

"forced the language underground" and made it difficult to pass on, said Bruce Flamont. He is the co-chairperson of the Michif Working Group of the Métis National Council, which hosted the conference.

"Traditionally, the educational system was incorporated into the home," Flamont added. "Everything was learned through verbal extraction. Once that system was compromised, the language started dying."

The actual number of remaining Michif speakers is difficult to estimate. On a scale of eight levels of language extinction, developed by the influential socio-linguist Joshua Fishman, Bakker noted that Michif is way down at number seven. This means the older generation is fluent, the middle-aged are partly proficient and children have few opportunities to learn the language. According to Statistics Canada, Métis children age 14 and under are the least likely of Aboriginal Peoples to use an Aboriginal language—only 11 per cent reported being able to speak or understand an Aboriginal language in 2001.

"A language is lost when the people who speak it don't use it," said Bakker, who has devoted much of his academic life to studying Michif. "The way to save a language is to create opportunities for Elders to interact with

children, such as in daycare, hunts, camps, family gatherings, Michif events, and (formal language programs, including immersion)."

Bakker travelled to Métis communities in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the mid-1980s. In 1997, Oxford University Press published his comprehensive study of the language, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif—the Mixed Cree-French language of the Canadian Métis*.

Bakker is working with Norman Fleury, chairperson of the Michif Working Group and one of Canada's foremost Michif educators, to create learning materials to help children learn the language. These materials include computer games, a songbook, a pocket dictionary, and a new CD developed at their personal expense. The CD was distributed free of charge to conference-goers.

Workshop presenters often referred to the spiritual nature of Michif and other Aboriginal languages, which have profound connections to culture. Sharing a language means sharing cultural knowledge, values and beliefs. The loss of language, knowledge and culture impacts on community health and well-being.

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Productive first month on the job for new Executive Director

By Melanie Ferris

Bernice Downey has been working hard in her first month on the job as the new Executive Director for the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO).

The month of March found Downey learning the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Director. Some of her responsibilities kept her busy at NAHO's Board of Directors meeting from March 23 to 25, a strategic planning session on March 25, and NAHO's Annual Public Meeting on March 26.

These meetings resulted in a new Board of Directors for NAHO.

Noreen McActeer was elected as NAHO's new Chairperson. She replaces Dr. Judith Bartlett as NAHO's Chairperson. Bartlett continues to take part on the Board of Directors as a regular member.

"Noreen had been on the board since its inception, so it's wonderful to have that continuity," Downey stated.

McActeer is a Métis from Fort Vermilion, Alberta. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) appointed McActeer to the board. She was the vice-chairperson of NWAC's Board of Directors for two years, a member of the Regional Council for the Métis Association and a director for Alberta Aboriginal Women's Society for 10 years. McActeer is also the Chairperson of the Wildrose Native Women's Association.

"In preparing for the meetings, I learned more about her... she has a lot of leadership experience," Downey explained. "Even though we're both in new positions, Noreen is well-versed in how NAHO has evolved. I'm honoured to be able to work with her as the Chairperson."

The new board continues to work on strategic planning. Downey explained the Joint Governing Committee meeting is being held in April to involve all of the chairpersons of the governing committees and NAHO Directors in the strategic planning process.

"NAHO is in its fifth year of operation, so this is all in preparation for our future."

Downey is planning on getting some ideas and insights from NAHO staff on how the organization is working. A Human Resources Working Group made up of 10 staff from many different areas of NAHO has been set up to address staff issues and concerns.

"I'm looking forward to working with the staff in addressing some of the issues and challenges related to an evolving and growing organization," Downey said.

April will also find Downey at the Social Accountability of Canadian Medical Schools, sponsored by the Association of Canadian Medical Colleges, and the Health Policy Summit 2004 in Toronto.



Noreen McActeer is the new Chairperson for NAHO's Board of Directors.



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 its First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Centres.

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Monthly Reflection

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive.

And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Harold Whitman
www.quickinspirations.com



Raising awareness of Inuit health issues

By Mark Buell

Ajungginic Centre Director Tracy O'Hearn and the National Aboriginal Health Organization's (NAHO) Board of Directors member Larry Gordon attended the Second Canadian Conference on Hepatitis C in Vancouver from March 27 to 30. The conference theme was New Knowledge, New Hope. It brought together hepatitis researchers and clinicians, public health professionals and policy makers, and persons infected with hepatitis C.

Gordon delivered a presentation on behalf of NAHO, highlighting NAHO's work, the health status of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and Aboriginal Peoples and hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is a highly contagious virus that attacks the liver. There are few statistics on rates of hepatitis C for Inuit. However, it is known that rates are high among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, particularly in prisons.

"It is important that hepatitis C be acknowledged as a significant public and individual health issue among Aboriginal Peoples," O'Hearn said. "Although there is no cure or vaccine at this time, it is important for people who may be infected to receive an accurate diagnosis."

O'Hearn went on to say, "There is treatment available that can be up to 75 per cent effective in clearing the virus from peoples' systems and a range of self-care practices that can assist people in living with the disease. For example, it is particularly important for those who do have hepatitis C to abstain from alcohol, not smoke cigarettes and generally take care of their physical well-being."

It is hoped that hepatitis C may be eradicated. There is much medical research being conducted on the illness at this time. While a very serious disease, hepatitis C does not have to be seen as a death sentence, especially if people know how to



Board of Directors member Larry Gordon makes a presentation to the Second Canadian Conference on Hepatitis C in Vancouver.

best look after themselves if they are infected.

Policy Analyst Mark Buell attended a conference in Winnipeg called Communities and the Impacts of Climate Change from March 19 to 22. The CUSO-organized event brought together representatives from 26 countries from around the northern and southern hemispheres, each of which is being impacted by climate change.

Buell co-presented with Scot Nickels of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Chris Furgal of the Université Laval. Their presentation was called Environmental Change and Inuit Communities: Observations, Impacts and Adaptations in the Canadian Arctic.

The presentation highlighted community-based research projects that gathered information on climate change in Inuit communities and ongoing work related to climate change and the northern regions of Canada.

Conference participants were able to share stories about how climate change is affecting their lives.

"Climate change is a key health concern for Inuit," Buell said. "The introduction of new species of insects due to warming temperatures has increased concern about vector-borne diseases like West Nile Virus. Changing migratory pat-

terns of some species of animals, including caribou and geese, has an impact on the diet of Inuit because these animals become more difficult to harvest."

Buell also attended the Dialogue on Northern Research in Whitehorse, Yukon, from March 25 to 27.

More than 100 people interested in research in the northern regions of Canada came together for this three-day workshop. The workshop was organized by Canada's three national research-granting councils: the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council.

"One of NAHO's five objects is to facilitate and promote research and develop research partnerships," Buell explained. "This event—a gathering of many people involved in northern research—was a great opportunity for the Ajungginic Centre to initiate those partnerships."

The goals of this workshop were to increase the networking opportunities for stakeholders interested in northern research; provide an opportunity for stakeholders to identify strengths, gaps and barriers to northern research and ideas for addressing those gaps and barriers; and to identify actions to improve northern research and collaborations between natural sciences, social sciences and health science researchers, research users, and groups that fund research.

Staff at the Ajungginic Centre began distributing a report called 2002 Ajungginic Centre Regional Health Workshops. The report synthesizes the information staff gathered at a series of regional workshops in Inuit communities. The information includes health and wellness concerns, research priorities and the factors and activities that exist in communities to help Inuit stay healthy.



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Thea's thoughts

By Thea Bélanger

My name is Thea and I'm a high school co-op student here at the FNC, and I was asked to write an article for the *NAHO Bulletin* about the excitement that has been going on here for the past month. I was asked to do a few short interviews with three staff members who have been doing quite a bit of traveling. Luckily, I know them a little better than some and can remember their names (keep in mind I've only been here for a month and a bit). Now the three special people I interviewed were Allen Deleary, Jason Whitebear, and Jane Gray. I'll start off with Allen:

Allen was in Vancouver (lucky duck!) on March 22-24 to present on building partnerships and research towards the development of the First Nations Health Infrastructure. He also set up a booth where he gave out tool kits and other information. On the 26th of March, he co-facilitated with FNC colleagues a National Roundtable on the development of the Health Protection Legislative Renewal. This is a very important proposal for First Nations because of its possible implications on traditional knowledge and healing, the use of First Nations information by the Canadian government, and the inherent right of self-government. The FNC will be publishing a report on the roundtable discussions next month on its website and a detailed briefing note on their legal analysis.

Jane Gray, National Regional Health Survey (RHS)/Skills Enhancement Co-ordinator held a second session of the "How to Use Data Effectively for Community Health Planning" workshop in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, from Feb. 24-26. The session was attended by over 20 participants including community health representatives, nurses and health directors. The participants tackled the hands-on-computer experience in the Data Warrior Internet Safari challenge. Teams of four were

challenged to find hidden data in the vast array of Internet information. A third training session will be scheduled to take place in early summer in the west.

Jane also traveled to Edmonton to present to the Aboriginal Health Reporting Framework (AHRF) Task Group. This Task Group has been mandated to develop a comparable Aboriginal Health Reporting Framework and to consult with the five political organizations in the process, as directed by the 2003 First Ministers Accord on Health Care. This initiative flows from the 2000 Accord in which federal government, provincial and territorial governments agreed to develop comparable health indicators for the national health care system.

As part of the development process, the task group has sought advice from various organizations that have developed similar indicator frameworks and/or can provide advice on the development of the Aboriginal Health Reporting Framework. Jane was invited to present on the RHS as part of the panel on Data/Information Issues: Developing Frameworks—Experience and Advice. The presentation focused on First Nations control of the RHS process and the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession.

Next on my list would be Jason, what a funny guy!

From Feb. 28 to March 4, Jason was in Saskatoon delivering a Suicide Prevention and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) workshop to First Nations youth, as well as to front line workers of Saskatchewan. He also met with the National Aboriginal Role Model Program Co-ordinator, Joyce Spence, to help develop a nominations process for the program. From March 17-19, Jason was back in Saskatoon for more FASD training with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Women's Commission. He trained 120 women, ages 13-15. From March 20-21, Jason was in Winnipeg contributing to the

AFN National Youth Council Cultural, Education, Political, Social Leadership Model. Jason offered input into a possible module on health, and especially, on suicide prevention. Finally (fiew!), he helped Allen, Valerie Gideon, Effie Panousos, Michael Martin, and James Lamouche (Policy Research Unit) facilitate the Health Protection Roundtable. Jason brought a fresh youth perspective to the event. He also invited Barry Sarazin, Elder of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan and members of the Kipawa Community. They played a grandfather drum to make sure that the discussions were respectful and positive.

Enough about them lets talk about me! This is my last year of high school and I am very excited. My plan is to move to Vancouver this August and hopefully go to (if I get accepted) the Vancouver Film School. I will be taking the foundation course, which is Visual Arts and Design (YAY!) But for now I'm concentrating more on graduating and trying to bring my marks up, and I'm also planning for my PROM (which is May 28).

Because of my interest in photography and film, writing this article has definitely given me broader perspective on journalism (since it does go hand in hand with photography) and I just may have found a new love.

Keeping our talk

...continued from front

Along with workshops on traditional storytelling, Michif language instruction, conversational Michif lessons, and Michif curriculum development, the conference showcased traditional Métis dance, music and cuisine.

For more information about the work of the Métis Centre, visit its website at www.naho.ca/metiscentre.

PRU sends its researcher home

By Melanie Ferris

April marked the end of Linda Cree's presence in the downtown Ottawa office of the Policy Research Unit (PRU) at the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO). Cree has left the Ottawa office to work from her home in Kanehsatake, Quebec. She is a researcher and writer.

Cree is a Mohawk with a background in social work, history and education. She is currently putting the finishing touches on her thesis for her Master's in Education from the University of Ottawa. Cree has been working at NAHO since 2003.

"I love working for NAHO," said Cree shortly before she left Ottawa. She explained she enjoys her work because it enables her to work on all five of NAHO's objects. "I'm lucky because I get to dabble in all of them."

Some of the highlights of her work at NAHO include working with Policy Analyst/Legal Advisor Yvonne Boyer on legal papers. She explained she took many classes in law and human rights when she was studying for her Bachelor's degree in Social Work. She wasn't sure why she was taking these subjects, and says her education comes in handy at NAHO.

Cree stated the most challenging thing about her job is synthesizing research. She must analyze comments and ideas from a wide range of colleagues. She is responsible for ensuring that all of the ideas are clear and easy to understand.

Part of her work of making things easy to understand is using everyday examples to demonstrate the importance of research. For example, she has been working on a paper with Boyer about women and discrimination. She explained she used a couple of examples of real women who lived in the Mohawk community of Tyendinga. Having the women's photos and real names helps bring the research to life.

Most of Cree's work is done on computer, so to help accommodate her needs, NAHO offered Cree a teleworking position.

Money for Aboriginal post-secondary students

The Dr. Christine Egan Memorial Scholarship Fund is a new scholarship being offered to students who are Inuit, pursuing a nursing degree, and who are residents of Nunavut. The scholarship is worth \$5000. You must send your completed application by **June 20, 2004**, to be eligible. Information and downloadable applications are available on the Internet at www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/medicine/mmef/egan_scholarship.html.

Canada Post is offering a new \$1000 education incentive for Aboriginal students who have returned to school after a prolonged absence. Applicants must have completed one full year of education, vocational, or trade skills training. Applications for the incentive are being accepted between May 1 and **July 31, 2004**. For an application form or for more information about the Aboriginal Education Incentive Award, contact Dwight Powless at (613) 734-6442 or e-mail dwight.powless@canadapost.ca.

Job Opportunity

The Métis Centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) is looking for a Communications Officer.

The ideal candidate has a post-secondary education in Journalism, Communications, Public Relations, or a related field. Preference will be given to Aboriginal candidates. The last day to apply is **April 30, 2004**. Send your resume and a cover letter to gpoirier@naho.ca. To see the job posting, visit www.naho.ca and click on "About NAHO."

Upcoming Events

Collaborative Policy Development for Aboriginal Peoples Conference

April 27-30

Edmonton, Coast Terrace Inn

Two-day conference on how government and Aboriginal Peoples can work together to ensure the most appropriate policies are put in place to support key initiatives. Pre-conference workshop on April 27 featuring Aboriginal awareness presented by Robert Laboucane as well as a post-conference workshop on April 30 on Getting Results from a Collaborative Approach featuring Chris Corrigan. For more information, e-mail info@iqpc.com or call (416) 542-1818.

Indigenous Knowledge Symposium

May 10-14

Saskatoon

Wanuskew Heritage Site

This four-day symposium will hear from a panel of Elders, international and national keynote speakers and two days of projects from the field. A day is also dedicated to building strategies and alliances. Registration is limited to 30 places. Contact Priscilla Settee, Director of the Indigenous Peoples Program at the University of Saskatchewan by e-mail at priscilla.settee@usask.ca or call (306) 966-5556.

National Conference on Aboriginal Forestry 2004: Creating a New Climate for Aboriginal Forestry

May 11-15

Thunder Bay, Ontario

To register for the conference or for more information about exhibiting or accommodation, contact Elizabeth Muckle-Jeffs at 1-800-868-8776 or by email at profedge@renc.igs.net or visit the website at www.aboriginalforestry.org.

Lead Your Way!

“The sky’s the limit,” says 21-year-old Jordin Tootoo, NHL player and proud Inuk, when asked about his motto in life. Tootoo is the national spokesperson for **Lead Your Way!**, the new National Aboriginal Role Model Program.



The National Aboriginal Health Organization is looking for Canada’s top Aboriginal youth role models. **Lead Your Way!** highlights the accomplishments of First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth. It encourages Aboriginal youth to pursue their dreams.

Lead Your Way! recognizes Aboriginal youth who demonstrate a significant level of innovation, achievement and leadership and who are considered role models by their peers and community members.

Through **Lead Your Way!**, 12 Aboriginal youth will be chosen as role models for a year. The role models are being chosen by a youth working group made up of representatives from national Aboriginal organizations and Aboriginal youth councils.

The **Lead Your Way!** program will produce posters and trading cards that feature each of the 12 role models. The posters and trading cards will be available to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and organizations. As well, the youth role models will visit Aboriginal communities to attend celebrations, school functions, workshops, and conferences. The role models will share their stories and experiences with other Aboriginal youth in the hopes of inspiring others to pursue their goals.

What: **Lead Your Way!** is an opportunity for Aboriginal youth to be recognized for their achievements. Role models may be First Nations, Inuit or Métis youth between the ages of 13 and 30.

Who: Aboriginal youth can nominate their role model by filling out the nomination form. The nomination form has various attributes that fit your role model.

When: Nominations close on **May 21, 2004.**

How: You can nominate your role model online by visiting www.naho.ca and clicking on “Lead Your Way!”