



RANCH EHRLO SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Ehrlo Counselling helping in the north

In the wake of the mental health crisis experienced by northern Saskatchewan, the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) of Health Canada has reached out for help. Ehrlo Counselling Services (ECS) answered the call. The first ones to respond were social worker Amanda Kuckartz and psychologist Sherry Rapley.

ECS is a part of Ranch Ehrlo Society and provides preventative and early intervention services as well as counselling, training, and consultation services to the community at large.

The duo visited La Ronge to provide risk assessment and support for the community. Mainly, they spoke to youth aged 10 to 16 – an age group that is in acute crisis, many struggling with suicidal ideation.

Kuckartz explained that being able to provide aid was one of the reasons she became a social worker. Rapley, too, feels a deep need to reach out to the northern communities. Having spent time working for the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Adjudication Secretariat, she had the opportunity to read the stories of several survivors.

“It is absolutely devastating to realize the extent of the mental health crisis in the northern communities,” said Ehrlo Counselling director

Bree Füssel. “The death of six very young girls by suicide is shattering.”

“As director of several community based programs, I think it is important that we respond in whatever way possible,” she continued. “This work is important to the mission and vision of Ranch Ehrlo Society and it is absolutely essential that we help.”

While there, the counsellors, along with other mental health therapists made in-home visits and remained on-call in case of emergencies.

The group also helped FNIHB organize files to create a system for flagging clients who may need more intense follow-up, ensuring that no one will fall through the cracks of the overloaded system.

ECS employees have made a subsequent visit to La Ronge and will continue to help wherever possible.



Sherry and her dog Wilbur in La Ronge

All Agency lessons



Bonnie, Dianne and Thema Musqua with Andrea Brittin

In November staff from across the agency gathered for the annual All Agency meetings.

The meetings were opened with greetings from CEO/president Andrea Brittin, who explained that the forums are an opportunity to connect with co-workers and learn more about what's going on in our large agency.

She also introduced the guest speakers, cross cultural trainers, Bonnie and Dianne Musqua, who returned to our All Agency meetings for a second year. This year, the sisters brought their mother, Thelma, as well.

“You’re in the business of residential services, and I think it’s important for your staff to look at the history of residential services that our people have received,” Bonnie explained by way of introducing their presentation, which focused on residential schools and their intergenerational effects.

“The intergenerational impacts of residential schools are very real,” she said, explaining that as she grew up her mother, a residential school survivor, never bestowed physical affection or told her children she loved them.

Thelma then took the microphone to share her experience.

“Before residential school, life was just beau-

tiful,” Thelma began. “I had no fear. I felt loved. I was happy.”

By the time she left the schools, which she attended for nearly ten years, Thelma could no longer express love.

Upon returning to her home reserve, Thelma saw first-hand the devastation caused by the removal of the children, whom the entire community had been centred around for generations. Drinking and violence replaced the family gatherings she remembered from her childhood.

“You’re in the business of residential services, and I think it’s important for your staff to look at the history of residential services that our people have received.”

-Bonnie Musqua

“I would think, ‘maybe it’s true what they taught me’ – that my people were demon worshippers, that they were bad,” she said, explaining that she hadn’t realized that Aboriginal communities across Canada were facing similar problems.

Thelma married into a very traditional family, and slowly, through attending ceremonies, visiting elders, and listening to traditional songs, she was able to find herself again. Though she could not physically express her love for her own children, she says she has overcome that barrier and is now able to express feelings toward her grandchildren.

“It’s beautiful to live like that, to have family again. I’m so proud of who I am today,” she said.

Sweat lodge on Pilot Butte campus

Ranch Ehrlo has recently created another place to help clients overcome the obstacles that have placed them in care.

“A sweat lodge is a place for us to go and cleanse ourselves, cleanse our spirits to get rid of the negativity that we build inside,” explained Transition Centre staff John Whitestar. “Our souls are like magnets to energy – we go around and collect the positive and negative, and sometimes we take in too much negative and it makes us physically sick.”

In the fall, Jewison House youth and staff, under the guidance of intake youth care leader Delvin Mooswah, collected willow branches to be used to build the new structure. Later, youth and staff gathered with Elder Harold Lavallee to build the structure.

“We wanted the build to be a teaching component, too, for both staff and



youth. Not all of us are very well versed in what goes into putting together a sweat lodge and the meaning behind each step to putting it together,” explained Curtis Hart, Jewison House caseworker.

The agency is hopeful that having a structure on campus will allow for more frequent opportunities for youth and staff to sweat, and more opportunity for both healing and learning about culture.

First house dad settles into role

All you need to succeed in the esteemed position of house parent at Ranch Ehrlo is a love for kids – and cooking.

The agency’s first house dad, Andrew Brown, transitioned from a youth care worker (YCW) to Alex Guy’s house parent recently on the Buckland campus outside of Prince Albert.

House parents work within our homes to help maintain a nurturing, structured, safe, and comforting environment.

With his background as a YCW, Andrew is able to bring a unique set of skills to the position.

“If a new kid comes, I talk to them and explain, ‘if there’s a meal or snack that you want, let me know and I’ll see what I can do about it.’ And it can be as simple as a shepherd’s pie that a kid really likes. So you make it for them, because they have a connection to some foods that remind them of home. It helps them ease in,” he explained.

With 15 years food industry experience, Brown brings a wealth of knowledge to the kitchen. He delights in sharing it with the youth who live at Alex Guy.

Brown believes people shouldn’t let roles that may traditionally be viewed as gender-specific discourage them from applying for a position that interests them.

Skate drive exceeds expectations

To help meet the needs of Ehrlo Sport Venture’s ever-growing Dress a Champion program, which provides the Outdoor Hockey League (OHL) participants with full hockey gear, they recently hosted a skate drive.

“Skates are important because they’re the foundation of hockey. Without enough, we risk having to turn youth away.”

-Amanda McConnell

“Skates are important because they’re the foundation of hockey. Without enough, we risk having to turn youth away from the Outdoor Hockey League,” explained Amanda McConnell, Sport Venture manager.

The program had a goal of collecting 200 pairs of skates by the end of November. At the end of the month 243 pair of skates lined the shelves. Donations are still being accepted to the program. They can be dropped off at the library Monday to Friday from 1-5 p.m.

Ehrlo Counselling at lifestyles conference



Sarah Mayer, and Joey Panko

Ehrlo Counselling hoped to help grade eight students navigate some of the stresses they face by presenting at Positive Lifestyles, a conference put on for all eighth grade stu-

dents in the Regina Catholic School Division.

Ehrlo presenters Dave Wiebe, Sarah Mayer, and Joey Panko held an informative, interactive session focusing on healthy vs. unhealthy stress, healthy vs. unhealthy coping mechanisms, and what to do if a friend or family member is experiencing symptoms of a serious mental health issue.

“Emotional first aid was something we wove in our presentation – making sure they knew how to take care of themselves,” explained Janna Ellis, who helped with research for the presentation.

For Ehrlo Counselling, the opportunity to do presentations within the community is a welcome one. “This is a great way to get out there and talk to kids earlier on – before they get into high school and they have a whole new set of pressures and issues,” Ellis explained.

“It’s important that these kids know things they can do for themselves and for their friends if they are struggling. That’s a big part of what we’re about, providing specific needs for specific demographics; reaching out and meeting any kind of gaps that there are out there,” Wiebe added.

Art from the heart



Ranch Ehrlo’s artists showed off their paintings and pictures at the 12th annual Art from the Heart Reception.

Staff and families had the opportunity to get the first glimpse of the Art from the Heart calendars at the reception held on Dec. 16th at Schaller school. The calendar was unveiled and the artists had the opportunity to showcase their work and sign autographs for those in attendance.

Approximately 1,000 calendars are printed each year and distributed to Ranch youth, staff, board members, and partnering agencies.

Christmas variety show Bake sale



Youth and education staff (pictured above) took the stage at Schaller school on Dec. 16th during a Christmas variety showcase.



Our housemothers held a bake sale in December. Funds raised went to the Mary Miller Fund, which provides emergency financial assistance to former youth.

Sticks for Kids program



The Optimist Clubs of Regina stopped at Ehrlo Sport Library. Every youth who plays in the OHL gets a brand new stick from the Optimist Sticks for Kids program!

Staff wins big



Ehrlo Counselling clinical social worker Janet Miller was the winner of a new truck at the final game in Mosaic Stadium, courtesy of Capital Auto Mall and the Roughrider organization.

Wellness Fair



Approximately 100 Ranch Ehrlo employees and their families made it out to the event, which included an opportunity to get a flu shot and learn about a wide variety of topics related to health and wellness.

Community4Connection



Ranch Ehrlo was again part of Community4Connection, a one-day, one-stop shop for people who are homeless, experiencing housing problems, or hunger issues, to connect with and learn about services in Regina.