

**A REPORT TO THE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION FUND
ON THE SPONSORSHIP OF CULTURAL CAMPS
HOSTED AT CAMP CHRISTOPHER.**



The intent of this project and partnership was to provide the students of Won Ska Cultural School, Riverside Community School and Presbyterians in Northern Saskatchewan an opportunity to take part in First Nations and Metis Cultural activities in a wilderness setting at Camp Christopher. Initially the hope had been that family members of students would be able to participate – this plan was abandoned for logistical reasons. The dates that the cultural camps took place had to be changed from the original plan because of conflicts with the school calendar and bad weather. Won Ska School held its camp on 1-2 September, 2010, and Riverside School on 7-8 October, 2010.

As a partner in this event, Camp Christopher was excited to host the event. Each summer, Camp Christopher sees an increase in enrollment from Aboriginal communities in the area. For many, coming to camp is their only opportunity to be surrounded by creation, away from an urban setting. Each summer we seek educational opportunities for the staff with local Aboriginal Elders in an effort to better support and share cultural experiences with each other and with the campers that join us.

Having a cultural camp at Camp Christopher was phenomenal experience, but also such a natural experience. What a gift to have Riverside Community School, Won Ska Cultural School, and SunTep in our midst. The creator blessed us with amazing people, amazing weather and amazing opportunities for us to walk side by side as we journey to a time of true healing and reconciliation.

Overall this project was a great success and won the praises of elders, teachers, students and others who participated.

Won Ska Cultural School Camp – 1-2 Sept 2010:

The first cultural camp involved the staff and students of Won Ska Cultural School. The intent of the camp was to expose students to cultural activities and teachings in an outdoor setting. Thirty students, with seven instructors including two elders and a drumming group led by Trevor Amyotte took part in the two day camp. Both days started with a gathering on the beach of Camp Christopher, around the fire learning about the teachings of the drum and drumming individually and as a group. Elder Stuart Amyotte with Elder Linda Settee provided teachings about the drum and its importance in First Nations community and life. Both days included workshops in First Nations and Metis crafts, Teepee building and the teachings of the Teepee and games. During the gathering at the fire the first day Elder Amyotte talked about the residential school experience and he gave examples of how people work their way through trauma and pain towards healing and even forgiveness or peace. He acknowledged the work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, of St. Paul's Church and the hospitality of Camp Christopher and how important it is to work together as friends in spite of our history. Rev. Dr. Sandy Scott was present in the mornings during this cultural camp, along with a few other Presbyterians, who observed and in some instances participated.

Won Ska Cultural School is for First Nations and Metis students who have challenges working in a regular school setting. Many of the 30 students who participated in the cultural camp at Camp Christopher are off reserve and do not get to the wilderness often. They benefitted from being out of the city and learning cultural teachings many had not been exposed to before. The intent was not just to teach cultural teachings, but to help the students prepare to help with workshops that would be facilitated when students from Riverside Community School participated in their cultural camp.

Riverside Community School Camp – 7-8 Oct:

The original date of the Riverside cultural camp at Camp Christopher had to be changed because of date conflicts and bad weather. Both days the camp was held in early October were unseasonal – they were sunny and warm which allowed most activities to be facilitated outdoors. All the students and staff of Riverside School participated, which means over two days, in two groups 620 students with teachers and support staff took part in the cultural camp. Leadership and support for the cultural camp was provided by the students, staff and Elders of Won Ska Cultural School as well as other leaders from the area and 20 student teachers from the SunTep teacher's college. (SunTep is a four year degree granting program in education run by the *Gabriel Dumont Centre* in Prince Albert for aboriginal people. It is adjacent to St. Paul's Presbyterian Church).

Each day just over three hundred students from Riverside Community School were bussed from Prince Albert to Camp Christopher, which is a distance of 55 km. The students were welcomed to the cultural camp by Elder Stuart Amyotte, Principal John Schultz and Rev. Sandy Scott. Then the students, in their home room classes participated in a series of cultural workshops set up in various locations around Camp Christopher. Following are a list of the workshops and their leaders:

Local Metis History – led by John Hanikenne a historian and Metis Elder from Duck Lake. Using story and song John gave a general overview of how the Metis people came to be, their culture including the buffalo hunt, and why they live in this area. He gave an overview of the 1885

Resistance and what happened to the Metis community in this area after the Resistance. He also spoke movingly about his own experience in Residential School and his happy memories of going to Camp Christopher as a child.

Teachings of the Teepee – Elder Stuart Amyotte talked about building a Teepee and the meaning of the poles that give strength to the Teepee. The three main poles that give support to the structure of the Teepee are respect, love and kindness and these three poles are bound together by trust. The teaching of the Teepee calls us to trust the Creator and one another. He also shared a humorous story on the origin of the mosquito.

Making Dream Catchers – Metis teacher Darlene Alexson taught students about the origin and importance of the dream catcher and how to make them.

Teachings of the Drum – Trevor Amyotte and his drumming group shared teachings of the drum and taught participants how to drum with hand held drums and on a big drum.

On Day 2 of the cultural camp the workshops above were supplemented with activities facilitated by 20 student teachers from the SunTep program. The student teachers did a workshop on building a small Red River Cart and they did “Buffalo Games” on the beach with younger students.

Lunches were provided by the Prince Albert Metis Woman’s Association and consisted of stew and bannock.

Presbyterians from the Presbytery of Northern Saskatchewan were invited to participate in the cultural camp in October but only a few were able to attend.

Evaluation:

The original proposal said that 150 staff, students, leaders and others would participate in this event. With the changes that were made to the format almost 700 people participated in the cultural camps, many of whom were students.

A debriefing session was facilitated after the project was complete and all aspects of the project won praise. Elders, leaders and teachers were excited about the camp’s success and want to do it again in the coming spring or fall.

Camp Christopher proved to be a great location to hold this event because of its proximity to Prince Albert, the facility itself and the work of staff. Having hosted this event has shown other First Nation and Metis organizations that Camp Christopher is a place they might be able to use for cultural activities. The *Urban Services Program* of the Prince Albert Grand Council has enquired about partnering with Camp Christopher as a result of these cultural camps.

All the goals of the project were met, except 3. Goal 3 was to provide an opportunity for support to vulnerable or isolated family members associated with Riverside School. Family members were not invited to participate in the project for logistical reasons, and because the programming was changed to focus on students.

The project ran over budget in the areas of honourariums, transportation and food. The extra costs were covered by Riverside Community School.

Below are comments shared by John Schultz, Principal of Riverside Community School:

“Today we walk and learn together”. These were the inspiring words of Elder Stuart Amyotte as students, staff, and numerous community members began our fall 2 days of Culture Camp. It truly was a time to learn together, and learn we did...First Nation drumming, Lotelling, beading, games all helped people in different stages of cultural awareness move forward in their personal understanding of First Nation Culture.

“A picture is with a thousand words”. As one can see from the attached photos, this anonymous quote aptly helps signify the importance of the wonderful church camp setting. This special day was only able to happen because of project funding as part of the Healing and Reconciliation Fund through the Presbyterian Church as a small gesture to help the healing process of some of the hurt caused by Residential Schools. St. Paul’s church was also instrumental in helping us learn about First Nations culture too.

“You can’t learn on an empty stomach”. Thanks to generous Presbyterian funding we were able to have a special noon hour feast for all! Students were able to enjoy traditional First Nation food like bannock and the smiles and contented looks in the afternoon made the cultural activities all the more enjoyable.

“Together We Make a Difference”. Our school motto seemed to echo throughout the day as many partners in the community came together to learn. Riverside students, staff, volunteers, community members, St. Paul’s Church, WonSka Cultural School students and staff, SUNTEP local University students all followed the words spoken by our Elder Stuart Amyotte.

On a personal note, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Presbyterian Church for truly reaching out and allowing our students to participate in a learning opportunity they will never forget. I believe these experiences will help shape our future leaders.

John Schultz - Principal, Riverside Community School

Jennifer Bell – Administrator, Camp Christopher

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October 13, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this as a short anecdotal report from the Culture Camp recently sponsored by the Presbyterian Healing and Reconciliation Fund:

Riverside Community School, Won Ska and SUNTEP School recently enjoyed a true “post apology” event that will have significant contribution to cross cultural awareness and understanding. For 4 full days over 400 students, staff, and numerous partner agencies were part of learning activities at Camp Christopher. The wonderful setting enhanced the cultural learning’s which included Tipi Teachings’, Drumming, Elder Stories, Native Crafts, First Nation Games, a special feast and many smiles! The ONLY way a special event like this can take place is through significant support, and we are truly blessed to have your support.

Perhaps the true value of these special days could be explained by harkening to the words of our Elder Stuart Amyotte who helped guide our days at the Camp, “At Camp Christopher Cultural Camp two cultures learned together...we walked side by side”. These eloquent and powerful words truly symbolize what the purpose of the Camp was. A chance to learn from each other...and to move forward!

Thank-you so much for your strong Outreach, you made a real difference in many of our students, staff, and community member’s lives.

Sincerely,

John Schultz.

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