

DENINU KUE COMMUNITY WELLNESS STATEMENT

Fort Resolution, NT

“We are social beings and culture, language, tribe and family are our identity markers.” (Rolland Nadijwan, March 2013) Culture as a foundation.

In response to the Department of Health and Social Services’ call for ‘community input and engagement in the development of wellness programs’ we, in Deninu Kue sponsored a community workshop.

- 1. Health Living & Disease Prevention**
- 2. Healthy Child & Youth Development**
- 3. Mental Wellness & Addictions**

As well, Deninu Kue Wellness Program conducted several other gatherings with concerned citizens in the past several months, including a youth workshop, where we received feedback from our young citizens.

DENINU KUE WELLNESS PLANNING PRIORITIES

Feedback from the community recommends we focus on our **ASSETS** before facing our challenges and community needs. In the words of a workshop participant, “in the past, we were stuck looking back at the negatives and we kept making the same mistakes over and over again. We need to learn from these experiences and move on.”

PRIORITY #1

In future program planning we will focus upon our Deninu Kue assets: We have accomplished much in recent years towards wellness in the community and we will concentrate on our many positives, our successes and proven strengths.

- We have the support of our leadership (Chief & Council) and our elders.
- The principal, teachers, and students of our school are in agreement with our objectives and mandates.
- We will reside on our ancestral lands and have ready access to our forests, rivers, and lakes to retreat to in times of need, to be by ourselves or with our loved ones when we need to, or to pray and do our healing.
- Many Deninu Kue citizens have cabins on the land surrounding the Hamlet.
- Summer camp outs which include canoeing competitions and hand games.

- The Elders are our role models. They are the keepers of the Dene Chaniye, the Dene language and protocols (relationship with all peoples and all of creation) and our link to our ancestral territories, our ancestry and, as such, our identity.
- The extended kinship bonds are still strong within our cultures. During times of grief, for instance, it is Dene tradition to support families who have lost loved ones.
- Request that all Deninu Due First Nation, Hamlet and Metis have support with alcohol and drug free activities.
- Less crime by our youth when engaged in wellness activities.
- We have two qualified Community Wellness Workers (minus university PHD's, but empowered by considerable traditional Dene Wisdom and relevant knowledge which cannot be imported from the south.
- Our community is much less isolated. We have a good all season road to the south, as well as cell service.

This is but a short list of assets in Deninu Kue. We are not suggesting, however, that our community is problem free. On the contrary, we are increasingly challenged by monumental living and health related concerns. These challenges, however, are **mere symptoms** of much deeper roots.

PRIORITY #2

We will revisit our previous programs and identify where we have applied '**band aid measures**' in other words, where we have wasted our resources by treating the symptoms rather than dealing with the root cause(s) of the pathologies. In past years we've applied our limited manpower and resources to resolving issues and yet the problems remain rampant. As an example, in recent years, our community has been experiencing ever increasing epidemics of obesity, diabetes, coronary and numerous health issues in all age groups. The primary cause, in reality, is the growing reliance on particular diets imported from the western (southern) societies not compatible with Indigenous physiology. To make matters worse we have begun to ignore or abandon our traditional diets. Our mandate as adapted, we will campaign to have relevant dietary studies done by qualified personnel and institutions and will promote awareness and knowledge of healthy nutrition as well as promoting traditional diets.

PRIORITY #3

Deninu Kue programs will be designed to facilitate rebuilding of traditional culture. The challenges facing us today are directly caused by disappearance of our Dene Chaniye (Dene cultures, traditions, protocols, languages, identity, etc, in our societies) resulting in ever widening generation gaps, the elders can no longer adequately communicate with the younger generations nor the young with the old. The disintegration of Dene Chaniye is a root cause resulting in the weakening of family and community bonds. The consequences are legion.

- A wide chasm has begun to divide the mainly English speaking youth from the elders. In all our programming we will focus on the reintegration of all Deninu Kue age groups, the young with

the old as well as all of the generations in between. This process will begin with recovery of the Dene Souline language and Dene Chaniye.

- Frustrated elders and disenchanted younger generations (the irony is the younger generations feel the loss of their ancestral language and many have openly expressed the desire to be taught the language).
- Factions are developing between and within the families.
- A weakened identity base resulting in ethnic shame, lateral violence, bullying, addictions, endemic anger, etc.

On the Land Wellness Programs. We in Deninu Kue live within our traditional lands. On these lands many of our peoples have cabins. We will prioritize the annual On the Land Culture Week.

- The programming includes fish filleting, dry fish, bannock making, wild game preparation, crafts, food processing in traditional modes, as well as canoeing, setting snares, hand games, dancing and camping.
- We will encourage all families to participate.
- We will likewise encourage full-time camping.
- Organizations and programs such as administration, probation services, justice coordinator, health and social services, law enforcement, education, etc. will co-sponsor and participate in all events and leisure activities.
- We will utilize the Fort Resolution Canadian Rangers and Junior Rangers.
- We will ultimately utilize Mission Island and all its assests.

PRIORITY #4

We will strengthen our Dene Souline Language.

(when one speaks Dene the language is from the heart." an Elder, March 2013)

At our workshop, the elders explained that the traditional language is much more expressive of emotions and feelings than is English and the other western languages. For instance, stories told in the Dene language can be humorous in conversations but the humor is very often lost in its translation into English.

The revival of the Dene language is a priority. The language is the heart and soul of the Dene Chaniye. Traditionally the Dene Souline language has been the bedrock of the extended family. The extended family in turn has, since time immemorial, been the safety net of the Dene community being responsible for peace keeping, education of the young, governance, keepers of the law, etc. Our wellness programs will:

- Enumerate a list of fluent Dene speakers;
- Will conduct more Dene language workshops;
- Encourage the use of the Dene language in all Deninu Kue activities;

- We will encourage the families to begin communicating with each other in Dene at home. Make it a challenge;
- Storytelling in Dene by elders;
- Return the Cultural Advocate to the Headstart Program (daycare);
- Promote and update the Dene dictionary;
- Revive the Dene Souline language;
- Dene courses on CD and DVD for correct pronunciation.

PRIORITY #5

Deninu Kue is challenged by education needs that are unique to isolated northern communities:

- Students leaving for universities, college or technical training outside the community, very often discover they require additional prerequisite courses not offered in our Deninu school. They are forced to separate from family and home for at least an extra year to qualify.
- Post high school students struggle economically when seeking education in their chosen fields outside the community.
- When applying for upgrading, adult students are often told 'you're too old'. We say 'education is lifelong'.

We will explore more of the traditional elders in our classrooms to share Dene Chaniye knowledge and skills.

PRIORITY #6

Orientation courses for southern-trained professionals.

Some quotes from our workshop:

- "The damage done by social workers have left the community to address many issues"
- "There is distrust and anger within the community as a result of past treatment of children, adults, families in general"
- "We are unique – what works elsewhere does not necessarily work here"
- "Ideas are not written in stone"
- "One size does not fit all"
- "We are being continually affected by racism, stereotyping, assumptions..."

Serious damage has been done to our people by:

- Forced assimilation policies, ie. residential schools and child welfare laws;
- The residential schools are no longer in existence as such. The effects, however, are not only passed down the generations but the destruction continues to grow;
- The enforcement of alien laws and policies by the visitors governments.

Our Deninu Kue community has begun to invest valuable energies in rebuilding a seriously eroded Dene Chaniye and language base. Unfortunately our efforts are being undermined by 'well meaning' southern professionals who continue to arrive in our community with missionary zeal. These professionals find it difficult to accept that the Dene do not need 'saving' nor do they wish to be assimilated into the western ways.

We will continue to have official 'orientation courses' implemented to train southern professionals seeking employment in our community. We will likewise recommend that these courses become the base for 'competencies' qualifying all southern professionals to be employed by northern indigenous communities.

We will recommend that these orientation courses be made available not only within the jurisdiction of our isolated communities but in larger settings as well, such as Yellowknife or even in Edmonton, ie. the University of Alberta.

The reality is, Deninu Kue will always need non-Dene professionals from outside of the community to deliver certain essential services, ie. teachers, social services, and law enforcement personnel, technical professionals, medical staff, vendors, etc. The difficulty is the majority of these professionals arrive in the Dene community with scant knowledge of the Dene Indigenous world view.

Recommendations:

- "Involve the industries. We have been severely impacted, these are our traditional territories and all non-traditional developments impact our lives"
- "Even if some of these orientations are conducted in Yellowknife or other places, they need to understand that we are uniquely different from other communities whether they be nearby or far away"
- "Make it compulsory for all southern professionals. There are huge cultural gaps between the Dene and visitors' cultures"
- "We would much sooner take direction according to our own ways of living than take direction from government policies"
- Deninu Scool has an excellent language program and Teacher in place, and encourage them to continue.

MENTAL WELLNESS & ADDICTIONS Needs:

Mental health (recognize, understand and break stigma). Better training for the community and within the community.

Provide programs and activities that will promote and support community wellness. To serve those struggling with addictions, grief, trauma, and mental health issues.

Unresolved trauma:

- Loneliness;
- Coping when nothing else works;
- Low self esteem, ethnic shame, shyness;
- Stress, burn-out, depression, unresolved grief;
- Family roles are often reversed, confused.

Walk way to the lake

Family Fun Nights at least once a month

Invest in our people

Programs geared to family as a whole

Cultural activities such as hand games, feasts, and gatherings, other traditional games, and crafts

Alcohol and Drug Free events and programs – NO BOOZE DANCES

To promote and support cultural identity and traditional values

On the land Programs, workshops, etc. (family healing, loss & grief, anger, self-esteem)

Combat and stop bootleggers & drug dealers

No gambling

Family support gatherings for clients who have completed treatment programs

Support groups – all types

Regular visits from specialists, ie. Psychologist

Parenting workshops

HEALTHY LIVING & DISEASE PREVENTION Needs:

To provide activities that will promote healthy lifestyle choices and early disease prevention

Seasonal hunting for food

We will utilize the land and cabins

Participate and organize events to coincide with community events

Utilize elders

Alcohol and drug free events

Prepare a community based traditional food cookbook

More gatherings and feast

Promote active families

Diabetes Counseling

On the land gathering (berry picking & food preparation)

Nutritional shopping

Traditional food nutrition

We will continue to incorporate these needs into programs.

HEALTHY CHILD and YOUTH DEVELOPMENT Needs:

Parenting skills, nutrition education, healthy pregnancies, language and culture, as well as social skill development for mothers, fathers, and children

Include a holistic family approach

Cultural Advocate

Midwifery (Pregnant women need choices of where they give birth) Support them in everyway possible.

Enhance and support Minor Hockey

Utilize Elders and language & dictionary

Alcohol and drug free activities

Drug Free Zones in the community

Breast feeding support

Birth control education

Traditional foods

Elders Need:

Elders Programming

Elders's facility in the community because they are our libraries of knowledge, language, culture, traditions, etc

Elders programs at Senior centre, senior society. Would like to see Elders more involved in programs

Elders calendar, birthdays

Book Re: Elder's history

Geneology

"Our Dene Elders, Dene Journey"

Traditional recipes & traditional sewing

The final word:

We will continue to enhance the work of our plan, we are not worried about the language part of our plan, as the school has an excellent teacher and program in the school. We will continue to support them.

We will also incorporate the TRC's recommendations where ever possible.

With Mission Island being well established, all program will utilize the site whenever possible.

We would like to be invited, invite them, and visit other programs within our regions, when they do community events and activities. And have travel support to attend.

We will continue to strive and move forward with our plan.