



SAMBAA K'E FIRST NATION

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Sambaa K'e Community Wellness Plan

Introduction

Sambaa K'e is a remote Dene community in the Dehcho region, east of Fort Liard near the Alberta border. The Dene of Sambaa K'e are known as Sambaa K'e Got'lnę. In the 2021 Statistics Canada Census of Population, Sambaa K'e had a population of 97 people, the majority of whom are Indigenous and about half of whom speak Dene Yatié as their first language. The community was founded sometime in the mid 1960s and a school was built shortly after, in 1972.

Sambaa K'e First Nation (SKFN) is a Designated Authority under Dehcho First Nations representing the Dene residents of the community. SKFN administers services in: community wellness; education, training & employment; food security; public works; land and negotiation; and emergency planning and response. Sambaa K'e's previous round of CWP program funding was administered by the Sambaa K'e First Nation to support wellness activities, land-based travel, and to support programming for Elders, Youth, and Recreation.

SKFN underwent a planning process in 2011 which produced a ten-year vision for wellness in the community called *THE WAY SAMBAA K'E WANTS IT DONE: Sambaa K'e Community Wellness Plan*. The plan was created in 2011 by Sambaa K'e Dene Band members and Northern ICE NWT. SKFN has also established a ten-year vision for 2030, which is articulated in a mandate comprised of sets of goals and priorities.

Community Engagement

A community feast and public meeting was organized by SKFN for the evening of March 19th, 2024 in Sambaa K'e to collect feedback for this plan. A consultation with SKFN staff that afternoon contributed to the engagement strategy for the community meeting. A professional facilitator led the community engagement meeting and was supported by a GNWT staff person to record community input.

A graphic facilitation approach was used for the community meeting with an adapted historical scan and strategic visioning discussion generating feedback. Using a visual aid depicting a journey with a halfway point indicating where we are today, residents responded to the following questions:

- What has been working (in advancing community wellness)?
- What would we like to see more of moving forward?

The feedback generated numerous data points which the facilitator recorded, collated and analyzed. From the historical scan and strategic priorities discussions emerged a wealth of data describing successful wellness promotion activities, programs, and ideas that have been established in the community over the years, as well as numerous possibilities for the future. Each question's feedback was condensed into several main ideas, outlined below.

What has been working (in advancing wellness)?

1. Letting the land provide for us
2. Creating opportunities to grow together
3. Investing in our young people
4. Modelling wellness for our community
5. Activating our culture

What would you like to see more of?

1. Upholding our social responsibilities
2. Preparing the way for our young people
3. Strengthening our culture for the future
4. Celebrating who we are and what we have achieved
5. Collaborative regional wellness projects
6. Building awareness and readiness in the community
7. Continue providing services and resources for people struggling with addictions

The results of the historical scan and strategic priorities discussions were combined with the priorities from the consultation with SKFN staff to elaborate on the community's overall wellness priorities. Seven main themes surfaced, describing potential directions for wellness workers to consider in building and supporting existing wellness programming available to residents of Sambaa K'e.

What are the community's wellness priorities?

1. Guiding our youth through cultural education and addressing their needs to secure our future

2. Enabling our people to eat well and enjoy our beautiful territory
3. Establishing Dene governance systems that repair and heal our community
4. Building leadership capacity in the community with collaborative regional wellness projects
5. Providing place-based resources that our community can access to practice our culture
6. Dancing our healing into existence
7. Continuing innovation in supporting our members healing from addictions and trauma

Priority Areas, Goals and Actions

Guiding Our Youth Through Cultural Education and Addressing Their Needs to Secure Our Future

Vision

Sambaa K'e includes every member of the community in the development of young people to ensure cultural continuance and to install a strong sense of identity and self-worth. All members of the community feel that they have something important to contribute to the development of young people as they move through all stages of life, from infancy to adulthood. Traditional Knowledge is carried as the treasure that it is and is imparted on young people to give them everything they will need for the future. Young people grow up feeling oriented in the world around them and confident about the significance of who they are as Sambaa K'e Dene. Reaching to Traditional Knowledge for guidance, healing and holistic wellness feels natural and useful.

Priority Goals

1. Collaborate with Elders and knowledge holders to identify and prioritize key lessons, milestones, rites of passage, and cultural teachings to incorporate into a person's life.
2. Undertake an action planning exercise to identify achievable goals, opportunities for instruction, and to determine measurable targets and timelines for increased cultural activity and language learning
3. Pursue supports to facilitate new housing for young people who are coming of age in the community
4. Seek additional funding sources and in-kind support for program development and implementation.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- A priority for the wellness workers in Sambaa K'e will be to build consensus among traditional knowledge holders in the community on what is needed to ensure that young people have everything they will need for the future, and to come to agreement on how these teachings are implemented over the course of a person's life. Convening a traditional knowledge circle in the community to support this work will be an additional priority, and this may require regular meetings throughout the year.
- Wellness workers in Sambaa K'e might benefit from attending an action planning workshop. This workshop would focus on developing a timeline for organizing the various cultural activities needed to support rites of passage ceremonies, traditional knowledge and language learning, as well as addressing intergenerational trauma and fostering intergenerational joy. Supporting traditional knowledge holders in language, drum making, sewing, harvesting, and spiritual history to install these teachings in new generations of Sambaa K'e Dene will be a priority for wellness workers in the community.
- Securing spaces for young people to grow their own families requires that additional housing be constructed in the community. It will be important for the wellness workers position to advocate on behalf of young people in the community in order to develop solutions and provide housing to accommodate young, growing families and students returning home from college or university.
- An opportunity exists for the community to direct the design and construction of new housing in Sambaa K'e, and to build partnership opportunities with neighbouring communities such as Jean Marie River. In-kind support with the sawmill in Jean Marie River, for example, has the potential to generate skills training and employment opportunities for young people in the region, lowers the cost of building materials, and fortifies inter-community relations around the development of wellness initiatives.

Enabling our People to Eat Well and Enjoy our Beautiful Territory

Vision

Sambaa K'e's Community Garden program is thriving and providing fresh produce for the community, which is given freely. Community members participate in the gardening program and preserve produce from the garden for the winter months. People feel comfortable walking the local trails in all seasons, and harvest often from the lake and the land. Community members have ready access to traditional knowledge and equipment so that they feel safe and at ease when they are out with the land.

Priority Goals

1. Increase participation in the community garden program

2. Invest in food preservation equipment and present opportunities for community members to learn to use the equipment and create preserves
3. Continue supporting community hunts and seasonal cultural camp opportunities, both in town and with the land.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- Explore the development of a canning program to ensure that excess produce from the gardening program is preserved and distributed in the winter, preventing wastage and facilitating exchange between people in the community.
- Encouraging community members to develop branded goods such as teas harvested from local botanicals and traditional medicines can stimulate commercial activity with specialty products grown in and harvested near Sambaa K'e. Cascading benefits include employing traditional harvesters to walk the land in search of medicines and botanicals for use in developing salves, teas and more. Local artists and technologists can build an online presence and commerce platform. A priority for the wellness department might be to develop a relationship with Entreprenorth to create a model to grow the gardening program into a social enterprise.
- Offering harvesting workshops and investing in more walking trails, hiking poles, community bicycles and harvesting equipment such as pails and trowels can build more confidence among younger harvesters and get more people out with the land.

Establishing Dene Governance Systems That Repair and Heal Our Community

Vision

Sambaa K'e residents use traditional approaches to repairing relationships within the community according to Dene principles of justice, restoration and healing. Residents of the community are aware of the history of colonization in the region and understand the impacts of intergenerational trauma so that they can explore the potential of intergenerational joy and resilience in facilitating healing for members of the community.

Priority Goals

1. Convene an Elder's circle to identify traditional examples of restoration, healing and repair in order to develop contemporary approaches to modern issues such as lateral violence, addictions, abuse and self-harm in the community.
2. Explore opportunities to conduct justice circles within the community to host ceremonies and facilitate dialogues guided by the Dene Laws. These circles would be led by an Elder's council and supported by the community's leadership.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- A priority for the wellness workers in Sambaa K'e will be to create a discussion model for repairing relationships between members of the community. This may require the establishment of an Elder's circle to oversee matters relating to community justice and to conduct ceremonies or talking circles through which community members can address problems, seek repair and feel heard.

Building Leadership Capacity in the Community with Collaborative Regional Wellness Projects

Vision

Wellness is a shared value that regularly brings wellness departments and staff together to address challenges, seize opportunities, exchange best practices, and pool resources to advance recovery and healing. Sambaa K'e actively collaborates with neighbouring communities to establish continuing wellness initiatives aimed at building leadership capacity among SKFN members. Residents have access to various avenues for understanding contemporary Indigenous issues, including 2Spirit identity, climate change adaptation, Indigenous leadership development, health and wellness promotion, and cultural affairs.

Priority Goals

1. Increase access to diverse educational opportunities and resources that promote understanding of contemporary Indigenous issues, including 2Spirit identity, climate change adaptation, Indigenous leadership development, health and wellness promotion, and cultural affairs, within the community.
2. Strengthen partnerships with neighbouring communities to establish ongoing wellness initiatives focused on building leadership capacity among members of the Sambaa K'e First Nation (SKFN), promoting a sense of community and shared responsibility for wellness.
3. Foster a culture of collaboration and shared values among regional wellness departments and staff to address challenges, exchange best practices, and pool resources for collective recovery and healing efforts.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- Establish a working group with wellness workers in neighbouring communities to collaborate on the development of wellness fairs, regional wellness gatherings, and cost-sharing to book motivational speakers for community tours throughout the region.

- Work with public governments and related agencies and organizations to offer skills training opportunities for community members, building leadership capacity and community readiness for emergencies.
- Undertake facilitation training in the community by inviting trainers to visit Sambaa K'e and offer courses for wellness staff and residents of the community.
- Work with local and regional wellness staff to produce a regional wellness fair, with a focus on traditional knowledge, cultural teachings, Dene music, rites of passage, healthy food and safe harvesting, harm reduction, language learning and more.

Providing Place-based Resources That Our Community Can Access to Practice Our Culture

Vision

Sambaa K'e continues to support its people to safely enjoy their beautiful territory and to practice their culture, whether in town or when they are with the land. Residents of Sambaa K'e enjoy a number of activities in town such as the print making shop, youth centre and camps throughout the year. Residents enjoy a wellness facility and fitness programs in a multipurpose community/family centre all year round. Sambaa K'e continues practicing its community hunts, whereby the community is supported to visit their traditional hunting grounds for extended periods of time several times a year. Language is interwoven into all facets of community events and young people are learning their languages on the land and at home as they grow from infancy to adulthood.

Priority Goals

1. Maintain and enhance support for residents to safely engage in cultural practices and enjoy their territory, whether in town or on the land, by continuing to invest in and develop community facilities, programs, and events that promote cultural preservation and engagement.
2. Strengthen language revitalization efforts by integrating language learning into all aspects of community life, particularly through on-the-land experiences and intergenerational learning opportunities, ensuring that young people have ample opportunities to learn and use their languages from infancy through adulthood.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- Ensure that young people uptake the resources and camp opportunities made available to them in order to learn about who they are and to connect with knowledge holders and leaders

in the community.

- Facilitate spaces for safe expression for all members of the community.
- Organize residential camps where community members, particularly youth, spend extended periods immersed in the language while engaging in traditional land-based activities such as hunting, fishing, and harvesting. These camps can be led by fluent speakers and language experts, providing an immersive environment for language acquisition.
- Host regular workshops that bring together elders, parents, and youth to share language knowledge and skills. These workshops can include storytelling sessions, language games, and cultural activities that promote language use and transmission across generations.
- Develop and distribute digital language resources such as mobile apps, online courses, and multimedia materials that make language learning accessible and engaging for community members of all ages, including those who may not have regular access to in-person language instruction. This may require additional funding, regional collaboration, and in-kind support.

Dancing Our Healing Into Existence

Vision

The Drum Dance is alive and well in Sambaa K'e, and drumming for dances and handgames forms a component of the robust cultural offerings available to young people in the community. Young people learn how drums are made, ensuring the tradition continues into the future. Sambaa K'e welcomes visitors to the community during regional gatherings with Drum Dances. Community members know the history and meanings of the dance songs. Drum Dances are used as opportunities to conduct community governance by sharing news, and by celebrating and uplifting one another. Handgames are balanced with cultural teachings about the drum and the history of the community's relationship with Dene music. The community actively works to find opportunities to come together.

Priority Goals

1. Drum Dances in the community are well-attended, and people are encouraged to be present at the dances without the use of drugs or alcohol, or the distraction of their mobile devices.
2. Old songs and dances are resurfaced and given new life as an emerging generation of drummers and dancers learns the history and importance of drum dancing, the Tea Dance, jigging, and square dancing.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- Assemble a drumming group in the community that meets on a regular basis to make and repair drums, to practice drumming and singing together, and to discuss opportunities to expand drumming culture in the community.
- Implement a community-wide education campaign to raise awareness about the cultural significance of Drum Dances and the importance of attending these events without the use of drugs, alcohol, or mobile devices. This campaign can include workshops, presentations, and outreach efforts targeting all age groups within the community.
- Work with community leaders and elders to establish clear guidelines and expectations for Drum Dances, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a respectful and drug/alcohol-free environment. These guidelines can be communicated through signage at dance events, announcements, and community meetings, with community members encouraged to uphold these standards through peer accountability.
- Organize workshops and training sessions led by elders and cultural experts to teach the history, significance, and techniques of traditional drumming, dancing, jigging, and square dancing. These sessions can be open to all community members, with a specific focus on engaging youth and fostering a sense of pride and connection to their cultural heritage.

Continuing innovation in supporting our members healing from addictions and trauma

Vision

Sambaa K'e employs a diversity of measures to address addictions in the community. People facing addictions can actively engage with their community instead of feeling isolated at home. Supportive community members promote recovery without resorting to judgment or shame to enforce sobriety. Instead, they employ harm reduction principles to assist individuals in reintegrating into the community and finding their way back into the circle.

Priority Goals

1. Residents feel that they have resources and opportunities at their disposal to seek help with addictions and to repair relationships with one another
2. Develop and implement programs that encourage active participation of individuals facing addiction within the community. This could involve organizing support groups, recreational activities, or educational workshops aimed at fostering connection and reducing isolation.
3. Advocate for community members seeking access to treatment programs and aftercare.

Programs and Plans to Address Goals

- Ensure access to a range of support services, including counselling, medical assistance, and harm reduction resources. By offering comprehensive support, individuals facing addiction can receive the help they need to reintegrate into the community and navigate their recovery journey effectively.
- Create a parent's circle in order to encourage parents in the community to adopt the SKFN Leadership Wellness Policy within their own homes, being that they are the leaders of their families. Using an online messaging board or a newsletter may help to gather feedback and to direct actions that advance healing and recovery.
- Provide training and education for community members on addiction, harm reduction principles, first response, and supportive approaches. By increasing awareness and understanding, community members can better support individuals in recovery without resorting to judgment or shame.