

SKILLS EXPLORATION PROGRAM

JUNE 2006

P R O J E C T A S S E S S M E N T



A NEW EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

for this June Pilot Project between the Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Yukon College is the outcome of 4 months of collaborative educational planning.

This Pilot Project was based on the Vuntut Gwitchin Government's (VGG) expressed need to work towards their "Support Action" plan for Old Crow's Social Assistance Clients and other community members seeking to explore and engage new and traditional skills.

Yukon College was pleased to assist with this expressed educational need and the opportunity to work closely with VGG - in particular the Education and Health & Social Departments - and other community agencies. Our collective goal was to strengthen existing relationships between the VGG and the Alice Frost Community Campus in order to discover how we could best collaboratively respond to the educational and employment training needs of Old Crow. In particular, the partnership sought specific outcomes (from this Skills Exploration Program) and feedback (from participants and community members) that we could use towards dynamic policy and programming decisions in the future.



**Vuntut Gwitchin
Government**

This report was written by Gabor Gyorgy & James Wood for the Yukon College & the Vuntut Gwitchin Government in order to plan future partnerships for dynamic educational and employment training programs in Old Crow.



WEEKS 1 & 2

Events

This first week saw us create a solid foundation from which to begin exploring together. A great team dynamic quickly emerged as we all got busy butchering caribou for drymeat. On Monday we started with 10 participants excited to get into this program. After some discussion, the group decided on the location of the tent and planned how they wanted to proceed. We also agreed on daily routines and tasks that would keep us motivated and working together effectively. On the second day we set up tent with the guidance of elder of Joseph Kaye. After the tent was up, we prepared lunch and “Sarah Netro” donuts on the new stove. Wednesday saw us dive into dry meat making. We kept a few choice cuts from the smoker and used these on Friday during our celebration bbq. The group organized a community dinner at the College to celebrate this new pilot project and the College’s NEW sign that was made locally by Derrick and Tracy Kapuschak, brother and sister, instructor and participant.

We began this week with an afternoon of intensive planning – evaluating our successes of week one, and collaborating on how we could repeat these in week two. This week our goal was to re-use or recycle locally sourced materials to create something of personal value or use. Tuesday we moved into the woodshop, where we spent the rest of the week working together under Derrick Kapuschak's guidance. For some of the participants, this was their first introduction to a woodshop and working with power tools. By Friday all of us had made an awl for sewing caribou hides and a blade for skinning either caribou or muskrat. All materials were found around town; rusty files and the bottom of an old oil tank was donated by Darius Elias for our steel; recycled wood and caribou antlers were utilized for our handles. The ladies of the group kept the kitchen cooking, and we feasted everyday on traditional foods like caribou, black duck, salmon, rhubarb, and lots of bannock.



On The Land...

On the land outdoor programming helped to bring the group together and share their knowledge of Old Crow...



Elder Joseph Kaye demonstrating how to dry a caribou leg & joints

Transferable Skills

- **Working with Food:**
 - storage, safety, preservation, butchering a caribou, meal prep for 10-50 people
- **Working in Carpentry shop:**
 - shop skills & safety, working with power tools
- **Working with Wood:**
 - carving, finishing, shaping
- **Working in a camp setting:**
 - water safety; paddling skills; outdoor cooking; bear safety
- **Health & fitness skills:**
 - Daily excise routines (Tae-Kwon-Do basics)

WEEKS 3 & 4

Events that fostered growth



This week saw us all over the community; in the wood shop, out at our "base camp," and at the Campus. We continued in our commitment to our previously established routines, as we continued our morning Tae-Kwon-Do energizers, our group lunches, and capped off our days with our group reflection sessions. We started off the week in the wood shop, where we worked together to get everyone's project completed. Team spirit was strong as we all were able to share our new found skills and expertise with each

other. The next day we headed back out to our tent, and enjoyed some quality time canoeing and cooking outside again. The rest of the week was spent hammering out old tin cans to use as safety guards for our blades, and sewing scrap pieces of canvas and leather to use as decorative sheaths. There were many proud faces on Friday, as we all admired each other's finished products, and recounted our accomplishments thus far.

We spent this week primarily at the Campus shop, working again under Derricks instruction to create stained glass projects. We all worked from blueprints to create personalized windows and decorative pieces. We continued delegating cooking responsibilities, and we feasted everyday on caribou and bannock. On Thursday we were joined by community members working with VGFN's Natural Resources and Heritage departments, Parks Canada, and the Community Steward on a boat ride up river to Caribou Lookout. We explored this important site together, and talked about traditional plants and activities here from long ago. Each department described their working roles, the skills they used, and how participants might consider such career paths. On Friday, we hosted an intimate lunch for our friends and family to help us celebrate our program. Derrick showcased our works to everyone, and we all shared lots of laughs together reminiscing. We all pulled together for one final cook-off, and we all feasted one last time. Certificates were presented, our groups' newsletter was presented and distributed, our dry meat divvied up, our new Yukon College shirts donned and a final group photo taken. Hugs and thanks were given all around, a great ending to a great month.



Faye & Tracy enjoy paddling together on Lake beside camp



Each participant made Stained Glass with Derrick @ College



Each participant made Knives & Awls with Derrick @ School

Transferable Skills

- **Working with steel & metal:**

- grinding, tempering, sanding, sharpening

- **Working with bone & antler**

- **Working with glass:**

- working from a blueprint; creating & implementing design principles

- **Working towards environmental sustainability:**

- using & re-using local materials

- **Working with multimedia:**

- Print & image, digital photography basics - story telling through pictures, Newsletter & WebPage design

- **Working with computer programs:**

- Power Point & Word

STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES



Strengths

The key strengths of this project were guided by the strong relationship between the College and VGG's Health & Social and Education Department's. This relationship was fostered through meetings and dialogue since January where initial Educational & Employment Training program planning addressed each agencies' goals and objectives.

The fluid and open resources, tools & people needed for success were often easily attainable - elders, funding and other agencies (Natural Resources Department, Parks, & Community Stewart). Of particular importance was the local instruction by Derrick Kapuschak offering local skills and methodology that is of and for Old Crow – items produced locally that can be used and sold locally.

There was also a noticeable energetic community vibe where people in the program already knew each other and how to work together; this was aided by elder Joseph Kaye.

Key Points of Consideration:

- Strong initial relationship between VGG & College
- Fluid & open, resources/tools/people needed for success were often easily attainable such as elders and other agencies.
- Local instruction by Derrick & elder Joseph Kaye
- Participants connected & worked well together
- Program structure was flexible & allowed changes & new ideas
- Daily planning decision making controlled by group
- Food preparation & eating brought group & involved community

Set up of the program was fluid as the days and weeks could be altered as required. Flexibility from all partners allowed us to go with the flow to easily incorporate new ideas and concepts (ie: Natural Resources & Parks). By involving the group in all the decisions, the planning process was controlled largely by group which provided good life skills coaching & responsibility training. Finally, food was an essential part of the program, bringing participants together while involving community members. The positive group dynamic was fundamental as people enjoyed being together, sharing their skills & new knowledge with each other.

"What did you like?" Participant Evaluation Quotes:

"Laughing with each other and spending time together. Sitting at the tent, learning and listening...I learned a lot from everyone."

"This was also a new project for me. I enjoyed creating my piece of art. I felt proud of my creation and my contributions to others' stained glass."

I learned about tent setting in bush, cutting dry meat, how to make a knife & awl, & how to do stained glass. I enjoyed helping everybody finish their products. I enjoyed cooking for everyone as well."

"I enjoyed everything. I was hesitant at some things in the beginning, but after I got started I sure enjoyed them."

"I feel confident teaching my traditional skills - butchering caribou for dry meat & cooking. I can teach young people about setting up camp in the bush."

Challenges

The challenges were few, but heavy, as the partnership agreement - roles & duties - was not explicitly clear from the start; the College often felt abandoned in daily planning and activities. Flexibility of activities did allow for innovative adaptations, yet the group often started late and the College felt unprepared since VGG thought it best not to plan, but then offered very little guidance. Accountability also waned on some commitments, for example, this report was to be a collaborative evaluative effort, but VGG did not engage.

LESSONS LEARNED & FUTURE PLANNING

Lessons Learned

As a Pilot Project, the strengths outlined on page 4 demonstrate how successful projects can be when planning collaboratively with other agencies. Lessons include:

- 1) 'Skills Exploration' and 'On the Land' programming are effective in Old Crow at engaging participants and increasing their self-esteem, team work abilities, and sense of belonging towards personal empowerment;
- 2) Signed partnership agreements are required in early stages to have clear roles & duties outlined *in writing*;
- 3) Importance of elder engagement in early stages to offer guidance and direction during fragile first few weeks when group building is occurring;
- 4) Local VGFN instructor(s) generate excitement and engage the group in ways that non-members cannot;
- 5) Community engagement keeps energy high: BBQs, lunches/dinners, and celebration events are helpful;
- 6) Plan for energizing activities when momentum lags;
- 7) Program could be longer - 4 month segments. Time ran short & participants asked for a longer program;
- 8) Adding community volunteer activities would integrate the larger community;
- 9) Products that participants create and take home as part of the program is key;
- 10) Weekly partnership planning meetings are essential to check-in & plan innovative next steps more clearly.
- 11) Partnerships need to be nourished continuously.

Future Opportunities = Partnerships

Partnerships for educational and employment training program planning in Old Crow are essential, particularly between the College and VGG - including Education & Natural Resources departments. The RRC, Vuntut Park, Community Steward and other agencies are also essential. These institutions should meet twice a year to share ideas and collaboratively draft 6 month plans. Monthly follow up meetings to discuss progress should be institutionalized.



Pilot Project's WebSite:

<http://www.criticalthoughts.ca/PilotProject.html>

Key Questions to to ask in a future program...

- Is this program addressing VGG's Support Action Plan?
- Is it targeting youth Social Assistance clients?
- Is it integrating all ages / abilities?
- Are participants finding alternatives to Social Assistance?
- What other organizations could be involved? (local or non-local)
- Is the program integrating elder & local traditional knowledge?
- Is communication between organizations strong?
- Are mandates & objectives clearly laid out?
- Are partners' concerns being heard?
- How is progress being evaluated?
- Are participants able to raise concerns or suggestions during the programs? Are they heard?

GROUP PHOTO & PARTNERS...



Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

Chief & Council, VGG
Glenna Tetlich, Director, Health & Social
Loretta Itsi, SA, Health & Social
Tracy Rispin-Kassi, Director, Education
Joe Tetlich, Justice Coordinator
Ted Howes, Wellness Coordinator
Natural Resources Department
Robert Kaye & Erika Tizya, Game Guardian
Mary-Jane Moses, Heritage
Susan Drury, Human Resources

Community Steward

Jen Smith, Community Steward

Parks Canada - Vuntut Park

Jane Park, Parks Warden
Lance Nukon, Parks Stewart

Tri Nin Tsul Zzeh - Day Care

Elizabeth Kaye

Elders

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