

# Saskatoon Community Clinic Strengthening the Circle

## *Program History and Description*

Strengthening the Circle is a health promotion project of the Saskatoon Community Clinic that began in 1992. The program was developed to improve the health and well being of and reduce the health risks for aboriginal grandmothers (kohkums) in Saskatoon.

At the time the program began many kohkums were relatively isolated from others outside of their own families, had significant health care needs, and were disconnected from community resources. It was thought that by bringing kohkums together the kohkums could better identify and advocate for their health needs. We believed, and still believe, that by reducing their isolation and by also providing individual case management, counselling, and interpretation services, the kohkums would benefit from improved health. Because the kohkums are important members of their families and community, we thought that families and communities might benefit as well.

The program has been led by a social worker, who is aboriginal herself, working half time. Using a community development model, the social worker initially brought the kohkums together in small groups of two and three. Gradually she created a large group that has a membership of fifty kohkoms, with an average of eighteen kohkums attending per meeting. This social worker also provides individual service to the participants of the program.

Traditional values and practices, including the involvement of aboriginal elders, use of the Cree language, holding traditional ceremonies, and having healing circles, have been used to conduct the group program.

The kohkums participate in monthly group meetings, group health education, outings, socializing and healing circles. The group uses the services of an Aboriginal Elder who provides spiritual ceremonies and guidance.

The kohkums have been involved in several community projects. They produced a health assessment report called 'Sharing Our Health Circle' and a book called Stories from Kohkom telling their stories about their lifestyle, spirituality and health. Some members of the group have been partners in a health research project with a U of S researcher to develop a means for assessing Alzheimer's' disease in older Aboriginal women. Yearly they participate in the National Aboriginal Day celebrations.

This is truly a strong circle.

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