



*Saskatoon
Community
Clinic*

Community Health Services (Saskatoon) Association Ltd.

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“Strengthening the Circle” Program Evaluation Fact Sheet

History of the Program

- In 1992 Saskatoon Community Clinic (SCC) brought older aboriginal women together in small ‘kitchen’ groups. These groups were then brought together to form a single large group.
- The group enabled kohkums to address their health needs in a unique manner.

Goals of the Program

- The goals of the program were (and remain): reducing isolation, reducing emotional distress, improving or maintaining the participants’ physical health, reducing health service utilization, and maximizing independence.

Program Description

- Louise Dufour, is the Aboriginal Seniors Program Coordinator (18 ¾ hours/week)
- Lynn Harvey, a General Service Counsellor, assists with group meetings
- Volunteers, who are kohkums themselves, assist by sharing, developing relationships with the participants, and providing valuable practical assistance.
- Program uses a client based model; leaders take input and direction from clients.
- The program currently has 52 participants. Age range is 45 to 82.
- The average attendance at meetings is 18 kohkums. The range is from 16 to 26.
- Monthly meetings can include education, outings, socializing, and healing circles.
- Transportation is provided because of reduced mobility and limited incomes.
- An Aboriginal Elder conducts spiritual ceremonies and provides guidance.
- The kohkums have a potluck lunch at each meeting.
- Special events include a winter holiday dinner and a yearly visit to Wanuskewin.
- The Program Coordinator also provides interpretation in Cree, referrals to cultural and community services, counselling and case work, advocacy, information on the health needs of Aboriginal seniors and their families.
- The kohkum published Stories from Kohkom in 1997

Program Evaluation

- Last evaluated in 1997. In April of 2007, SCC commissioned the Community University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) to evaluate the program.
- Maria Basualdo, CUISR Community Liaison Officer, assisted in establishing and completing the research project. Shelley Thomas Prokop, of Thomas Research, was employed by CUISR to

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conduct a qualitative research study and submit a report. Pat Wall, Associate Professor of the College Of Nursing was engaged by CUISR as the research advisor.

Research Purpose and Methods

- The purpose of the evaluative research was to determine how and to what extent the group program is beneficial to the immediate and longer-term health of the kohkums.
- One-on-one interviews with kohkums were recorded.
- A focus group, made up of program participants, was recorded.

Research Results

- The kohkums had an overwhelmingly positive response to the program.
- The benefits reported include: friendships, companionship, validation of feelings, a sense of belonging to a group, opportunity for self-expression, opportunities to know and appreciate others, and formal and informal information regarding health and health services.
- Desirable program characteristics included: consistent and highly regarded staff, a pleasant and suitable meeting space, a positive interpersonal atmosphere for meetings, respect for all who attend the gatherings, interesting and fun activities, culturally-appropriate activities and gatherings, celebration of self and group. Input from the kohkums throughout the year contributed to participant satisfaction and an evolving program direction.

Conclusion

- Participants had reduced isolation and emotional distress and increased knowledge of health information and services.
- These factors are generally associated with improved physical health, lower health service utilization, and increased independence.
- “People who remain actively engaged in life and socially connected to those around them are happier, in better physical and mental health, and more able to cope with change than those who are less engaged and connected” (National Advisory Council on Aging 2004)

