
WIDENING THE CIRCLE

Newsletter of the Aboriginal Mental Health Research Team

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Fall 2001

Aboriginal Healing Foundation Regional Gathering

On October 12th, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) held its regional gathering at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Montreal. The gathering in Montreal was one of four regional gatherings held by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, others were held in Toronto (October 10th), Regina (October 24th), and Halifax (October 26th). The regional gatherings represent an opportunity for members of Aboriginal communities, both urban and reserve, to engage in a dialogue with employees of the AHF about Foundation affairs, the allocation of funding, funding criterion, as well as to provide a forum for community members to express their general grievances about the Foundation and projects funded by the AHF.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was formed in 1998 following the designation of \$350 million dollars in federal monies (as part of the Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan) to help heal those Native, Métis and Inuit peoples and

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Dr. Cornelia Wieman at the Institute for
Community and Family Psychiatry

“The Mind-Body Connection: Stress, Depression & Diabetes in the Aboriginal Population”

Margaret Cargo

Post-Doctoral Fellow, Universite du Montreal

Dr. Cornelia Wieman, the first female Aboriginal psychiatrist in Canada, offered an engaging presentation entitled “The Mind-Body Connection: Stress, Depression and Diabetes in the Aboriginal Population” on November 19th at the Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry. In her review of the literature, she noted that diabetes is over-represented among Aboriginal people. She highlighted recent studies showing a link between poverty, stress and status on the prevalence of diabetes and pointed out how stress may not only precipitate the onset of type 2 diabetes but is also a factor in diabetes management. Aboriginal people living with diabetes often cope with stress and depression. This can pose a challenge for psychiatrists as some medications used to treat depression cause considerable weight gain, a risk factor for diabetes and a complicating factor for those living with diabetes.

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AHF continued

communities suffering from the legacy of physical and sexual abuse that took place at church-run, federally funded, Native residential schools in Canada. The AHF is Aboriginally run, independent of both the federal government and representative Aboriginal organizations. The Foundation allocates monies from the abovementioned fund to support healing projects that undertake community-based healing initiatives that focus on, although not exclusively, the early detection and prevention of the effects of the legacy of abuse(s) on Aboriginal peoples.

Representing the AHF in Montreal were George Erasmus, Foundation chairman, Richard Kistibish, Mike DeGagne, Executive Director, Wanda Gabriel, community support worker, and Ernie Daniels, Director of Finance. The gathering commenced with an opening prayer, the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* (loosely translated as “the words that come before all else”), delivered by Mohawk elder Charlie *Otsitsaken:ra* Patton. Charlie spoke first in *Kanienke’ha*, the Mohawk language, before doing an English translation. He explained that he was taught to respect the *Kanienke’ha* language before that of another. Throughout the English translation Patton stressed the importance of having a ‘good mind’ and explained that being *onkwehon:we* (real people, people who came out of the clay of the earth) carries with it the responsibility of carrying oneself in a ‘good way’.

Following the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*, George Erasmus gave a brief overview of the history and mandate of the Foundation. Following Erasmus was a French address, issued by Richard Kistibish and an explanation of the Foundation’s financial statements by Director of Finance Ernie Daniels. The floor was then opened up and questions were received from the community. It became clear during the question and answer period that there is a void in the community’s understanding of the mandate and function of the Foundation, as well as in the Foundation’s ability to convey that information to them.

Wieman continued

Dr. Wieman shared her experiences working with the Iroquois people from the Six Nations Reserve in Southwestern Ontario. The stories reflected her creative integration of traditional ways of knowing in clinical practice. Dr. Wieman’s suggestions for improving diabetes care include taking a holistic approach to treatment by considering the connection between the mind and the physical body, and working with the community “using your heart and your mind”.

Resource Materials

Interviewing Inuit Elders Series □ *Perspectives on Traditional Health, Volume 5 Ilisipi Ootoova, Tipuula Qaapik Atagutsiak, Tirisi Ijjangiaq, Jaikku Pitseolak, Aalasi Joamie, Akisu Joamie, Malaja Papatsie.* Michele Therrien and Frederic Laugrand eds. Iqaliut □ Nunavut Arctic College. 2001.

ISBN □ 1-896-204-35-X

Inuit Perspectives on the 20th Century Series □ *Dreams and Dream Interpretation, Volume 3 Salome Kalasiq, Felix Pisuk, and George Agiaq Kappianaq* Stephane Kolb and Samuel Law eds. Iqaluit □ Nunavut Arctic College. 2001. ISBN □ 1-896-204-481.

Aboriginal Autonomy and Development in Northern Quebec and Labrador. Colin H. Scott ed. Vancouver □ UBC Press. 2001. ISBN 0-7748-0844-6.

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This period demonstrated that there is a pressing need for a more ‘effective’ dialogue between the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and members of the Native, Métis and Inuit communities. Despite this shortcoming, the Healing Foundation has seen its approval rating steadily improve year to year, up to its current high of 81.8% (up from 62.5% in its inaugural year). Up to date, the Foundation has allocated approximately \$135,850,000 of its \$350 million dollar budget, to community- based healing projects.

Among other things, the gathering served as an accountability device. It provided a forum and a dialogic space for members of the Native, Métis and Inuit communities to engage with Aboriginal Healing Foundation staff. Within this dialogue there was a great deal of knowledge and information disseminated **to** and **from** the Foundation and the community, which should ultimately benefit the community in its healing journey.

The McGill Youth Study Team (MYST)

Jake Burack

*School of Educational and Counselling
Psychology, McGill University*

The McGill Youth Study Team (MYST) is directed by Jake Burack and is comprised primarily of graduate students in the school of psychology and special education from the Department of Educational Psychology at McGill University, but also includes researchers from universities across Canada.

The MYST motto is “excellence in the study and education of all children”. One focus of our work is the study of issues of academic, social, and emotional risk and resilience among First Nations adolescents. In particular, we are concerned with these issues within the context of cultural identity, as First Nations youth typically need to function adaptively within both the

majority culture and their own native culture. This struggle to integrate cultures is likely associated with some of the developmental risks associated with First Nations youth, including certain academic, behavioral, social, and emotional problems.

The McGill Youth Study Team is interested in understanding the factors that increase the risk as well as those concerns unique to First Nations youth in rural communities. Thus, in order to better understand the issues and concerns of First Nations youth in rural communities, members of MYST visit First Nations communities to conduct research and to implement educational programs in the schools.

Research projects are generally based on extensive questionnaires of social and emotional well-being, cultural identity, and cognitive development that are administered to students from grade 6 to secondary 5. The visiting team of researchers is multidisciplinary and includes licensed psychologists and special educators who provide workshops for teachers and intervention programs for students with special needs within the school setting. In some settings our group works with school administrators and community leaders to develop social policy plans that include the augmentation of Native curriculum in the schools and the development of programs for community youth. In addition to maintaining our links with the communities with whom we already work, we hope to foster new relationships with First Nations communities.

For more information on the McGill Youth Study Team please contact Jacob Burack by phone at (514)398-3433, or by email at jacob.burack@mcgill.ca

Upcoming Events :

Meeting of the Aboriginal Mental Health Research Team

There will be a general meeting of the Aboriginal Mental Health Research Team on Friday, **February 8th from 12:30-2:30 at the Institute of Community & Family Psychiatry in room G-23**. The meeting will feature a presentation by Tracee Diabo, Research Coordinator of the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project Centre for Research & Training, entitled **“The Challenges and Successes to Community Based Research”**. The Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project.

There will be an advisory board meeting of the Aboriginal Mental Health Research Team on **Monday, March 4th at 12 pm**. The meeting will be held at the **Institute of Community & Family Psychiatry in room 218b**. The advisory board is comprised of members from various Aboriginal community organizations.

6th National Health Promotion Conference - Partnership Research for Health and Social Change - will be held at the Conference Centre in Victoria, BC on 7th – 10th April 2002.

Healing Our Wounded Spirits Conference will be held at the Kah-Nee-Ta High Desert Resort & Casino Warm Springs, Oregon, on May 20th-23rd, 2002.

National Network Initiative Receives Approval for Funding

The National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research (NNAMHR), a project headed by Dr. Laurence Kirmayer, Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University and Director of the AMHRT and the Culture and Mental Health Research Unit at the Jewish General Hospital, and Dr. Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Director of Research at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, has received joint support from the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health and the Institute of Neurosciences and Addiction.

The Network, whose funding will last for four years, will be comprised of community representatives, social scientists, mental health practitioners, public health experts, educators and front-line health and social service workers. Caroline Tait, a Metis graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University will assume the role of coordinator of the Network.

The National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research is an evolution of the current Aboriginal Mental Health Research Team, it will build largely on existing team partnerships with a wide range of community partners. Of critical importance to the National Network is building capacity for mental health research in Aboriginal communities. To promote the capacity of Aboriginal communities to conduct their own research, the Network will provide mentoring at several levels. Graduate research awards and post-doctoral fellowships; undergraduate training programs in mental health; and a summer internship program for students, health professionals and Aboriginal community representatives are all capacity-building mechanisms that will be adopted by the NNAMHR. The Network will also provide research consultation services for and in collaboration with Aboriginal communities. The NNAMHR consists of researchers from many Canadian universities including Alberta, British Columbia, McGill, McMaster, Memorial, Saskatchewan, Simon Fraser, Victoria, Windsor and York.

Announcements

Kaha:wi Jacobs, a doctoral student in the Department of Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University is the recipient of the inaugural Warren Graduate Fellowship awarded by the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (MISC).

Several of the videos from the film library have been moved to the **First Peoples House** which is located at 3505 Peel Street. For information regarding their availability please contact *Katsi'tsakwas* Ellen Gabriel, Director, at 398-3217.

The *Living Dictionary*, a website produced by the Department of Language, Culture, Elders and Youth, Nunavut, was recently announced as the winner of the Technology in Government Week Distinction Award. The site seeks trace changes in *Inuktitut*, allow users participate in its growth, as well as to ensure the healthy future of the *Inuktitut* language. The *Living Dictionary* website is located at www.livingdictionary.com.

There are several scholarships opportunities available at the Kahnawake Centre for Research and Training in Diabetes Prevention. The Kahnawake Centre for Research & Training in Diabetes Prevention is funded by the Canadian Alliance for Health Research, under the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Scholarships are currently available for Masters, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral candidates interested in undertaking research in the area of Type 2 Diabetes. There is also a 3 year Research Faculty Award for a candidate with an interest in research in the field of community based epidemiology and prevention of Type 2 Diabetes among Aboriginal peoples. For more information contact Dr. Ann C. Macaulay, Scientific Director, at the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (450) 635-4374.

The Schedule for the 8th Annual Summer Program in Social and Cultural Psychiatry is now available, as is information on the Advanced Study Institute, entitled Body, Memory and Identity. The Summer Program and the ASI will run from May 6th until June 7th. For more information please contact Kay Berckmans at (514) 340-8222 extension 5246.

***Widening the Circle* is published by the Aboriginal Mental Health Research Team**

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