



*Mental Health Consultant
Dept of Health and Social Services
Arctic Bay, Nu. X0A 0A0
Office (867) 439-8980
Fax (867) 439-8910
E-mail iswoboda@gov.nu.ca*

*Charity Marsh, Ph.D.
Canada Research Chair
Interactive Media and Performance*

Sept 28/09

*Faculty of Fine Arts
Ed. 239.12 Media Production and Studies
University of Regina
Regina, SK, Canada S4S 0A2*

Dear Dr. Marsh:

I am pleased and honored to be asked to write a letter of support re: The Canadian Floor Masters and the Blueprint for Life workshops that have taken place in three communities that I deliver mental health services to.

I am the Mental Health Consultant/Psychiatric Nurse for the high arctic and my communities in Baffin region are Grise Fiord; Canada's most northern community; Resolute Bay; Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay. All of my communities are isolated arctic settlements of a low population (under 2000 people), and predominantly Inuit. Two of my communities are relocation settlements and all of the communities have the effects from the residential school historical trauma. The rate of suicide per capita is high. All types of abuse occur. Drug, alcohol, physical, sexual, emotional abuse is high.

The Hip Hop workshops are outstanding and provide a number of services to the communities that have participated. The first benefit is a positive activity and energy for the youth which provides an identity with the rest of Canadian youth. Second, it provides a means of involvement for me as the Mental Health to make contact and develop a rapport with "kids on the fringe" that I otherwise would not see. Third, it is fun and using the methods of learning to dance the youth are taught an analogy for life (i.e. learning in steps, practice, discipline, discovering different means of accomplishing a goal, working as a team, cooperation, trust, positive focus on life issues, increase in self esteem etc). Another benefit is the attitude and education from the Hip Hop team. There is education re: abuse, suicide, drugs, the history of Hip Hop and the various faces of the dance and music, problem solving re issues like alcohol/violence in the home. The Youth become aware that there is a "different way" and understand that there is help and resources for them. The Hip Hop team also values other contributions of the Youth such as the mural/graffiti activity, composing music, the vocal rap/beat rhythm that is developed. Respect for women, religion, race, ethnic groups, nutrition, culture and different belief systems are demonstrated, discussed and practiced. The team provides positive role models for the youth, both male and female, and the youth respond in dramatic and positive ways.

The Hip Hop team also incorporates traditional Inuit culture activities and beliefs. It is great to witness throat singers with a vocal beat from the Hip Hop group. Inuit games are also woven into the dance steps that the kids develop as part of their choreography for the "dance battles" that happen at the end of the workshops in front of the community's at a celebration. This incorporates the traditional and the contemporary; much like the life of the Inuit Youth. The

dance battles provide a method of anger displacement for the youth where no one is hurt but feelings are expressed in a healthy and entertaining manner. The dance battles are enjoyed by the entire communities and the parents demonstrate their pride in their children. This is a community event that improves the entire outlook and health of the community. The Hip Hop workshop results in decrease in crime, drug use, increase individuals seeking help, improve family relations, decrease alcohol use, reduce suicidal ideation, and promote a change in the outlook to a more positive frame of mind of the Youth resulting in a richer lifestyle within an isolated community.

The groups and individuals involved in the organization and planning for the Blueprint Workshops are amazing as well. Mental Health, the Legislative Government, Nunavut Youth Consulting of Arctic Bay, the local government of the hamlets, the RCMP, Social Services, the Elders Committee, the Health Centers, representatives of the federal government, suicide prevention strategies and committees, Churches, Recreational Coordinators in hamlets, the teachers at each community's schools, and private individuals in all my communities are involved and supportative of the Blueprint for Life workshops.

I would also like to acknowledge and compliment the staff working in the Blueprint Workshops. I have had the pleasure of attending three Blueprint Workshops in three of my communities and am amazed. It is thrilling that the idea and practice of Hip Hop has been brought to the youth. It is always gratifying to see innovative events within my communities considering the cost of having the youth travel to the "south" to experience these things. Each community also has a unique flavor to their expression of the Hip Hop. The staff of Blueprint has been flexible and accommodating to the lack of resources in some of the communities and has dealt with the situations with humor, grace and patience. Their attitude presents and conveys an acceptance to the youth and community and provides a shared experience with the Youth.

The second step is the sustainability of the Hip Hop societies within each community and volunteers from the community are the main resource with the Youth. This provides a continual dance practice but it is the social development that is the true accomplishment. Leaders develop and provide a new level of peer expectation with the teenagers. These groups are where issues such as suicide, sexual abuse, drugs, family issues such as violence and alcohol are discussed and attachments with others made and strengthened. I was asked to speak to a Hip Hop group that had a sudden death of one of the members and the cohesiveness of the participants was gratifying and touching. The group grieved as a unit with support from each other.

The third step is the Leadership workshops with Blueprint where five or six Youth from every community attend and the Youth learn new dance steps, choreography and leadership skills. We have had one so far in Pangnirtung and my understanding is the workshop was a success. We are attempting to plan the next Hip Hop Summit in Pond Inlet next spring. Funding is always an issue.

In conclusion; to say that I am in favor of the Blueprint for Life workshops would be somewhat of an understatement. I welcome a study to confirm the impact and significance to northern communities that Blueprint for Life has had. I would be willing to offer any assistance needed or answer any questions that you or your other researchers may have. Please do not hesitate to call.

Thanks you for the opportunity to express my appreciation and opinion re: Blueprint for Life.

Sincerely,

Irene Swoboda RPN