



Blueprint for Life
‘Social Work through Hip Hop’

Selkirk First Nation Northern Strategy Initiative
FINAL REPORT prepared and submitted by Nesta Hager

Introduction

On October 4th, 2010, Selkirk First Nation and the BlueprintForLife Company hosted a 5-day workshop for youth between the ages of 10-25 which focused on social issues surrounding aboriginal youth while instilling pride and culture into the daily lives of the participants through active movement and art.

In October of 2009, Sheila Sergy, a contractor for a SFN youth mining project, contacted Steve Leafloor, owner of BlueprintForLife, inquiring about the program and how SFN can go about obtaining the services of this company. After some back and forth emailing, a package arrived in the mail with a documentary, magazine articles and program information. Initially, the plan was set out to have the project take place in May but due to a recent tragedy in the community, time constraints and lack of administrative support, this did not happen. In June 2010, a meeting between Sheila Sergy, Janie Lee Silas (Project Manager) and Nesta Hager (Project Manager Assistant) to discuss the overall youth strategy and work plan. The focus was to prioritize the youth projects that were outlined and recreate the plan. BlueprintforLife was identified as high priority. After a few phone calls and emails to Steve Leafloor, the Eliza Van Bibber School Principle and Chief and Council, the best time to have this workshop was October 2010 which coincidentally was a short school week due to the Friday being a Professional Development day for the school staff.

BlueprintForLife: Company Profile

BluePrintForLife runs “Social Work through Hip-hop” programs throughout Canada’s north and in Canada’s inner cities. Often Blueprint becomes the school curriculum for the entire week in high risk communities. They also offer creative consulting, project management and training in the fields of Social Work and Education. Stephen Leafloor, founder has over 25 years of experience as a social worker in the areas of Probation, Wilderness Programs, Street Work with Youth at Risk, Residential Group Homes, Child Protection and Community Outreach. Stephen has also been an active participant in the Hip-hop Culture since 1981 and completed his Masters thesis on this culture and its importance for educators and social workers. They have worked with over 3600 Youth at Risk in a variety of projects in over 40 communities, and specialize in the education, guidance, and development of youth through the positive elements of Hip-Hop. They have been spotlighted in national media for their work and have been featured in a number of documentaries about their work with Canada’s aboriginal youth.

BluePrintForLife is considered one of the worlds leading companies using HipHop as both a community development tool and as a model for alternative education and healing. They offer dynamic, culturally appropriate programs designed for First Nations and Inuit youth that are founded on Hip-hop, rooted in traditional culture, and centered on community needs.

BluePrintForLife offers 3 major programs and a variety of follow-up activities. Built into the programming is the long-term goal of not only promoting the healing of individuals and communities, but also building long-term sustainability and leaders for tomorrow. These programs presently include Social work through Hip-Hop, Leadership through Hip-Hop and Healing through Hip-Hop. The programming consists of intensive 5-day workshops that become the school curriculum for the entire week in remote arctic communities and in Canada's inner cities. Hip-hop is used as a powerful engagement tool to deal with complex issues such as family violence, sexual abuse, anger management, drugs and alcohol and suicide. Their programs explore the positive elements of Hip-hop while providing youth with a survival toolkit, which celebrates traditional cultural values and provides important leadership skills.

The program chosen for the Pelly Crossing workshop was the SOCIAL WORK THROUGH HIP HOP which was an intense 5-day program where the youth learned to dance, while also discovering themselves and their own culture. There was also opportunity to engage the youth in cultural activities that explored ways of celebrating and bringing their own voices into Hip-hop. Elders were invited to attend to encourage the youth and work with them in creating opportunities to re-build trust and communication between them. BPFL encouraged the youth to use their own story telling and cultural symbols in their activities.

Throughout the week, there were daily themes that sought to address and talk about the many complicated issues going on in the daily lives of the youth. Positive methods of dealing with anger were explored. BPFL emphasized on creating a bully free environment and visualized for the future. The workshop developed healing tools from negative experiences with family violence, sexual abuse, suicide and addictions. The youth learned how to reach out and support each other in a community that has limited resources while also linking them to the few resources that do exist in their community.

At the end of the week, a final community showcase and dance battle was planned but due to three youth having to leave on the Friday, the showcase was moved to Thursday afternoon. Parents and elders had the opportunity to see some of the most shy and reserved youth in Pelly blossom with a new sense of self-confidence and pride. There was also ample opportunity for adults to become more closely aligned with the youth. Teachers, Principals, Social Workers, Police, Public Health officials and Elders were strongly encouraged participate.

Attendees

The workshop was open to ALL Pelly Crossing Youth and Selkirk First Nation youth between the ages of 12-30. The age was then changed to 10-25 as the attendance would have been poor. The youth attending were all from the Eliza Van Bibber School and one female youth from the community. The attendees were *Lyndzee Silverfox, Gavin Joe, Jessica Tuck, Maureen McGinty, Angell Johnnie, Courtney Alfred, Tianna-Lee*

Isaac, Daniel Tuck, Chantel Edwards, Alexia Silverfox, Desiree McGinty, Daylen Alfred, Chantel Edwards, William Grennan, Tamara Silas, Anthony Grennan, Michelle Isaac, Shandal Sam, Georgianne Sam, Raine Silas, Thor Harper, Duran Simon, Kyland Simon, Aaron McGinty, Patrick McGinty and Tyler Charlie.

Staffing/Contributions

Many people were approached with offers to the positions below but due to prior commitments, personal choice or other factors they did not choose to do so. Employment conditions were specific to reliability, quality of work and family needs. It was also very important that the employees show teamwork and professionalism to inspire the youth to do the same.

Coordinator:	Nesta Hager
Advisor/Assistance:	Janie Lee Silas, Sheila Sergy (preliminary)
Youth Coordinator:	A posting for a youth coordinator was posted but no one applied. Luckily, the grade 12 students (Patrick McGinty and Georgianne Sam) helped out through their Grad Transitions program.
Cooks:	Patti Isaac, Lucy Carrier and Margaret Isaac
Catering:	Jessica Alfred and Michelle Isaac
Cleaners:	Terry Curry and Devin Sam
Driver:	Leslie Van Bibber
Canvas Frame for mural:	Norman Silas
Volunteers:	Donna Conley, Julia Joe and Candice Menzi
Contributors:	Eliza Van Bibber School, Selkirk First Nation Chief and Council, Pelly Crossing RCMP, Bringing Youth Towards Equality (BYTE) Society, Yukon Health and Social Services, YTG Youth Directorate as well as parents and community members.

Benefit to Selkirk First Nation

The youth of Selkirk First Nation are one of SFN's most untapped resources yet is bustling with knowledge, innovation, and potential. Opportunities like the BluePrintForLife workshop are the gateways to success for our leaders of tomorrow. By assisting in addressing core issues such as bullying, substance abuse and emotional health among other important issues, BPFL and SFN are prepping the future leaders by starting with the basics to positive leadership; wellbeing. The participants filled out a survey explaining what their thoughts and feelings were about the workshop. A summary of the results is attached.

Highlights

- Seeing the youth come out of their shell and participate.
- Youth Group Dance Off
- Several youth tried freestyle Beat Boxing. Three youth even attempted Beat Boxing while singing the Selkirk Song, with the help of Carmen Baker.
- Seeing the amount of teamwork and support throughout the week.
- BPFL talked about the importance of Emotional Health for both male and females
- Daily community lunches and dinners with the youth and BPFL crew.
- Community Showcase
- Large Mural created showcasing the pride of Selkirk First Nation

Challenges

- Lack of parental presence/support
- Lack of leadership presence
- Tight timeframe to coordinate
- Not enough staff
- No accommodations in community
- Youth not attending school did not participate
- Some youth gave up and didn't come back or didn't try all together

Recommendations

- Social Assistance clients under 30 should be required to attend such functions in order to be eligible for claim
- A community parent advisory committee/support group should be formed to assist in projects/programs involving youth
- Parents should encourage their children to be actively involved
- Parents need to make more effort to be present. It makes a huge difference to the youth when their parents are there and showing their support

- Leadership should make at every effort to be present for their youth
- Community needs to look at the positives of projects like this as opposed to the negatives. Youth prosper in positive environments.
- There should be a team of about 3-4 people who work collaboratively on these types of projects
- The youth have requested that another BPFL project take place during the summer so that all the youth who are attending school in Whitehorse have the opportunity to participate.
- A youth council or some alternative voice should be created so that more programs and services aimed at youth are planned by the youth so that they learn how hard/rewarding it is to coordinate events.

Closing

After all the trial and error of coordinating this project in under a month, the payoff was substantial. The BluePrintForLife crew was remarkable to work with. I have coordinated many events for the youth over the years but never worked with a group quite like BPFL. They connected to the youth so quickly and created a safe haven for fun and learning. The youth were amazing. I am so honored and privileged to work with the youth of Selkirk First Nation/Pelly Crossing. These are a group of young boys and girls that SFN should be proud to call their own. There were times when some wanted to walk away but they stuck it out. They reported back that they were really glad they did as they gained very valuable lessons, learned awesome dance moves, created new friendships and connected as a youth body.

I would like to thank Buddha (Steven Leadfloor) JustsiK, Frost, Cree-asian, Rau and Breaker Nick for their awesome work. I would also like to thank my supervisor Janie Lee Silas who kept my head on for me when I would have surely lost it on my own. Big thanks to Chief and Council for their support as well as the help of all my staff and especially the volunteers; Donna Conley, Julia Joe and Candice Menzi. We all made it happen and it was the best project I have ever coordinated.

To the youth of Selkirk First Nation, MUSSI CHO for your dedication and effort! You were all so amazing and are such wonderful young people. Selkirk First Nation faces many challenges and obstacles ahead but in working with such promising young men and women, I know that you will lead the way to a future full of promise and sunny days.

Best Wishes,

Nesta Hager
Project Manager Assistant
SFN Northern Strategy Initiative 2010/2011