

FEATURE STORY:



BFHC Land Based Learning Healthy Living Project, Battlefords Family Health Centre

Rose Favel, Program Coordinator

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Through the Land Based Learning Healthy Living Project, children, youth, families and seniors engage in active living while incorporating language, traditions/cultural knowledge, healthy eating, intergenerational interactions, social participation and community supports. Partnerships with other community organizations and services have helped strengthen the program. Partnerships include daycares, schools, Catholic Family Services, the Lighthouse homeless shelter, the Food Bank, KidsFirst, Sask Hospital Industrial Therapies, Assisted Living Homes with Physical and Mental Health needs, BTEC, Immigrant & Refugee Families, BFHC Chronic Disease Patients, seniors, youth, families, and the LGBTQ2S+ Community.

Benefits of the healthy living project are bountiful. Participants have access to fresh food, cultural and spiritual practices, socialization, volunteerism, and many learning opportunities. The program takes place on community lots which were previously abandoned or ignored. At one time attracting litter and crime, the lots have now been turned into productive and safe areas for garden participants and community members, promoting friendships and inter-generational experiences to support the transfer of knowledge between Elders, children, youth and seniors.

The pandemic introduced many program changes and adaptations as we adhered to provincial guidelines to keep everyone safe. This led to creative ways to administer programming. Eight Early Learning Videos were produced at community garden sites. A Cree language video was developed at the gardens by our Cree Language Advisor. Digital QR codes were developed at each site to link participants to fantastic resources, including the Plains Cree Food Guide, 25 Ingredient 50 Meals Recipe Book, many recipes including the Three Sisters Soup Recipe, and information on preventing and managing diabetes. In partnership with Kids First, a two-part salsa making video tutorial was developed and shared. A collection of recipes and COVID tips were submitted by garden participants and developed into a booklet called *Our Family Favourite Recipes*.

The pandemic also led to a decline in participant numbers due to the absence of Elementary and High School students. The project identified a potential need to build several individual social distanced garden boxes that were offered to youth so they would have a greater learning experience, a social outing opportunity and support in the absence of a formal school environment. Community partners and neighbours volunteered to help haul wood, saws and hammers, and the socially distanced garden boxes came to life.

Our learnings and teaching are deeply embedded into everything that we do. The Healthy Living Land Based Learning Community Garden project helped to inspire a greater sense of community belonging, pride and inclusion by broadening the base of programming related to healthy eating and active living, and to increase ownership and capacity through the weekly knowledge sharing and hands on learning.

Participant Quote

My son and I enjoy the smell of fresh turned black dirt and the excitement of putting in seeds and watching them grow. Not only does the physical aspect of planting and tilling benefit us, it also assists us to slow down and take some quiet time together. I value hard work and take pride in a clean, healthy garden and wish to instill these values into my son as well. It is important for me to teach my son how to garden and the benefits it can provide. Being in the outdoors in the garden is also very beneficial to our mental health, coming back to nature and doing what we love to do.

We have also found the meeting of new people, comradery and friendships we have developed while in the garden or during the well planned events Rose puts on, very beneficial. I am always amazed at the events puts on, thoughtful and health and safety conscious, Rose always seems to find a way to make it fun. My son was even able to bring a friend to the garden this year to teach him about gardening, which in turn ended up that he and his mother requested and retained a garden space for their first time.

The program has also allowed for me to make connections in the community. I value the cultural aspect of the environment. We learn new Cree words weekly in text messages from Rose and in the different projects going in the gardens, we have learned some history of the Indigenous people. We are thankful we have been allowed to take part in this program.

