

# The Kainai Story

Reclaiming Hope through Engagement  
of Head, Heart, Feet and Spirit



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This tool was created by the Focus Three team: youth of Kugluktuk, Parma Court's Youth Vybes, Kainai Youth Council and The Students Commission.





## Case Study: Kainai Blood Reserve

### Short Profile

The Kainai (Blood Tribe) of southern Alberta are proud members of the Blackfoot Confederacy that includes Peigan, Siksika and South Peigan (Blackfeet). The Kainai First Nation reserve is home to about ten thousand people stretched out across a massive reserve covering 549.7 square miles running south-west of Lethbridge. The reserve is bordered by three rivers: the Old Man, St. Mary and the Belly. The land is rural with a mix of open dry grasslands and rolling foothills. There are a number of small towns on the reserve: Standoff, Moses Lake, Lavern, Old Agency, Fish Creek, Fort Whoop Up and Bullhorn.

Over half the Kainai territory is used for agriculture with 10% being irrigated; the rest is left as dry land cultivation. Leasing land to farmers is one way the community raises funds.

Kainai Tribal Council manages the communities long-term economic, social and environmental concerns while working with local, regional and federal governments to protect Blood Tribe rights. On a daily basis, the local council as well as community groups work to address local issues including: housing, poverty, violence in the community, and other social, economic and health issues.

The damaging legacy of the Indian Act, residential schools, and other attempts to assimilate First Nations have contributed greatly to the deep and traumatic range of issues that First Nations communities face.

A recent report pointed to several concerns that face the community: lack of jobs, lack of access to small business loans and high unemployment. Statistics Canada's unemployment rate for the Blood Tribe for 1996 and 2001, are 29.00% and 45.00% respectively. Besides this, the report noted a sense among those interviewed in the community that there was a division between "haves" and "have nots" in the community. The "haves" are those with treaty occupancy rights or connections with chief and council.

### Approach

We had met members of the Blood Reserve community in the mid 90s after a group of youth with their adult allies from Kainai Children's Services attended one of our conferences. After the conference in 1996, a young man named Myron Wolfchild was empowered to start the Kainai Youth Council (KYC). It was formed to create a way for young people to contribute to positive change in their community. When Myron committed suicide after a long struggle, remaining members of the Kainai Youth Council approached us for assistance in helping to carry forward some of Myron's ideas.

### Element 1: Invitation and Initiating

November 16-December 31, 2007 — On the Kainai Blood Reserve, the Kainai Youth Council was struggling to keep its purpose, and wanted to address the issue of youth suicide in honour of Myron and his vision, who had started a project called Reclaiming Hope.

Members of the Kainai Youth Council with their adult support asked us to help them achieve their objectives, through a series of personal telephone calls, building on past connections, conference calls with leaders from the Youth Council and from our organization and emails.

## **Elements 2-3: Relationship Building, Clarifying Objectives**

Contact with members of the community was at least weekly, as we built relationships and talked about what was wanted and needed for the project. The discussions also included identifying and assessing what other resources and organizations existed in the community. Kainai is a large reserve, which takes at least an hour to drive from one boundary to another. The Kainai Youth Council (KYC) knits together four communities in different parts of the reserve: Laverne, Old Agency, Stand Off and Moses Lake. Lack of positive things to do and positive role models were identified as issues, as was the need for more information on suicide and what to do if a young person was worried about someone they knew. The Youth Council faced challenges in reaching these communities with consistent programming, as often the young people trying to run programs were not trained and had inconsistent support from local community leaders in terms of opening up promised meeting spaces. They were good at recruiting young people initially to turn out but often did not know what to do with them in terms of programming when they came out.

Our initial conversations with potential community leaders identified the need for strong support for these young leaders and a flexible timeframe for working with them to shape project ideas. It was important to recognize that the project was seeking to support people who were reacting emotionally to crisis, who were experiencing emotional and mental trauma, and who wanted to make a difference, so that patience and support of them as they took action was the important ingredient.

With the Kainai Youth Council members and adult supports, they looked at the resources that were available for communities around community and youth engagement, as well as community and youth development, as well as what resources were in the community. They also wanted very much to build upon an initial draft framework for a workshop started by Myron. Community politics was a factor in terms of linking with other resources and activities, as competition, and lack of communication and negotiation skills reduced the capacity of the youth group members to connect effectively. We determined that our support in building better connections with others in the community might be useful.

In terms of clarifying objectives and purposes, we worked with the Youth Leaders to write a partnership agreement and a work plan to achieve the goals they set. This work plan would become an ever-changing document and reference point, but it provided a framework for goal setting and measuring achievements against targets.

The elements of relationship building and clarifying purposes, reclarifying, reaffirming and revisiting purposes and objectives were continuous throughout the project. If we relaxed on these elements because things were going well, not too much time would pass before project momentum suffered and on both sides of the partnership we would be reminded that the dialogue, the relationships and the sharing of common purpose were key ingredients to sustaining the project.

## **Elements 4, 5, 6: Building Capacity by Working Together Designing and Executing Positive Activities**

During January to April 2008, a training and planning retreat was hosted by The Students Commission working with the leadership of the Kainai Youth Council in Lethbridge, Alberta for members of the KYC from each of the four communities on reserve. Here, we worked to help the youth participants see themselves as key members of the KYC, and focused on identifying strengths, weaknesses, challenges and resilience in their communities. Through this process, it became evident that an area where we might assist was to help develop the identity of the KYC, and to support the young coordinators to connect their work strategically to each other. It was also evident that better connections with other agencies on the reserve, including those agencies who work in the field of suicide prevention for Blood Reserve residents over the age of 18 would also be helpful to the youth leaders.

A request that emerged in parallel with requests from the Kugluktuk and Parma Court communities were “outside” opportunities for training and development. Both adults in the community and the youth we were working with identified that getting the chance to get outside the community, to see and experience different and new ways of looking at things and meet different types of people would be beneficial for developing youth leadership capacity.

Four members of the KYC and two of the community coordinators were invited to attend capacity building sessions and training in Toronto and at a youth conference. Four additional community members attended another youth conference and training event, joining three youth from Kugluktuk. In the evaluation weekend with youth, these outside opportunities were rated highly as important to the success of the project. Community observers and parents indicated that they witnessed increased capacity, confidence and skill sets in action when the young people returned from these “outside” opportunities.

After some of these training, and experiencing workshops outside the community, the KYC planned and executed a workshop weekend on suicide prevention and cultural awareness in May. Cultural awareness was identified by the community members as a tool for prevention and health. The Students Commission directly trained facilitators for the May workshop weekend hosted by the KYC.

The community request was for Students Commission support in preparing and delivering materials, training youth KYC members to participate, speak and facilitate. There was also support for the community coordinators to liaise with members of their communities, identifying an objective of expanding membership in each of their youth groups.

An ongoing fear among the individuals of these communities as activities were executed is that sustained partnerships and action would not arise from this project. A consistent staff person from The Students Commission was assigned as liaison to the Kainai community members, and ongoing communication by phone, email and face-to-face meetings continued to build relationships and trust. Community members wanted more on-the-ground visits than had been originally scheduled. Individual relationships and bonds started to form between staff of The Students Commission and members of the KYC and the youth in the four communities. Regular calls from the youth leaders in Kainai, sometimes with frustrated tears related to organizational issues and challenges, or personal issues, was an indication that support was being accessed, even from a distance.

During April to June 30 of 2008, we continued to encourage and assist members of KYC to set up meetings and try out partnerships with other groups within their community. As the Kainai Youth Council supported by Kainai Children's Services, worked on developing its Reclaiming Hope initiative, The Blood Tribe Police Service expressed interest in supporting *Reclaiming Hope* and Kainai Wellness contributed substantial time and personnel resources to supporting the initiatives and events the youth planned and executed in the communities. An increasing number of community members contributed their time to the various initiatives of the project. Our presence at some of the organizing meetings helped give credibility to the KYC and helped allay the fears of other groups that the youth were taking on more than they could handle. Assurances re training and support helped build bridges and collaboration.

Support and training around positive role-modelling and leadership, for engaging young people "on the fringes" and identifying community leaders and key allies were all a part of this phase.

Creating tangible opportunities for young people who are traditionally not engaged in activities that would benefit their community was a focus of youth as they designed activities. There was also the desire to showcase the efforts of youth, and the community in a positive light so as to combat some of the community, cultural, ageist and racial stereotyping that they have identified as happening in and to their communities.

During this time period we trained 60 Kainai Youth Council members to facilitate workshops, lead suicide prevention workshop sessions and support their peers to participate in these workshops. We also worked with our adult allies to develop their skills as supports to the youth they work with, and to design more efficient programming, using our Adult Allies manual.

There were three community visits during April to June of 2008, with SC staff present in the community for a total of 11 days in preparation for and execution of the *Reclaiming Hope* Forum, held in May. More than 140 youth from the Blood Reserve and surrounding areas attended the Forum held over two days. The event was facilitated by members of The Students Commission and the Kainai Youth Council. Staff also worked closely with the Youth Council Coordinator and the Mentor Recruitment Officer from Kainai Children's Services to develop their skill sets as allies to the young people in their networks.

The momentum of having executed an event motivated and sustained planning activities for Kainai Youth Week in July, with a *Reclaiming Hope* anti-suicide 30 km walk from Moses Lake to Standoff, Alberta. Work also began on developing the *Reclaiming Hope* curriculum that could be used throughout the reserve and in neighbouring areas as well. Youth agreed on a curriculum focussing on the development of identity and cultural resilience as a way to prevent suicide.

During July to September 2008, we began discussions with community members about measuring success of the activities they were undertaking. Members of the Kainai Youth Council began to think about tools to assess current community attitudes around youth suicide. Four of the approximately 60 Kainai Youth Council members are involved in leading the development and delivery of this survey.

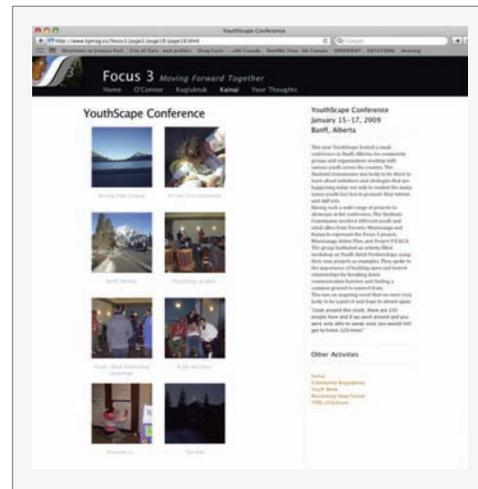
Obvious success was most visible when spending time face to face in the community, as part of the community. Extending our relationships beyond the supportive organizational capacity that we provided

to become integrated into the community afforded a much better opportunity to work with different groups within the communities. We participated in feasts and barbecues, community celebrations and talent showcases, municipal meetings and memorials for individuals who had been lost as a result of the very issues we wished to tackle. Our personal connection with these communities directly correlated with the speed in which the individual projects were developed. However, the less obvious success was achieved when not present, when KYC youth demonstrated the capacity to seek out our help and the help of others as they needed it, without direct face-to-face support and guidance.



In July, a 32km walk from Cardston to Stand Off (two communities on the Blood Reserve) was attended by approximately 30 youth between the ages of 12 and 23, Youth Council support staff, and The Students Commission. The walk was held this year in honour of the memory of *Reclaiming Hope's* founder, Myron Wolf Child, another one of the young men whose story is inspiring this project. CTV Lethbridge covered the story for their 6:00 pm news segment, and was particularly interested in the positive work that young people were doing in their community.

The Blood Tribe newspaper ran photos with a short write up in their community events section. Funds were allocated to support the four community outreach workers and the Youth Council coordinator to plan and program community events, ready youth volunteers, and recruit adult supports. During the Youth Week (July 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>), each community hosted their own fun fair and community showcase with carnival and traditional games available for youth to participate in, and prizes awarded. Messages about healthy decision making and anti-suicide were also delivered to the youth who came out to participate in youth week activities.



The Focus Three website (<http://www.tgmag.ca/focus3/index.html>) documented events, photos and positive stories from each community. Youth were supported to write articles and stories that could accompany images taken at events.

During October to December 2008, the KYC experienced significant upheaval with the loss of three of their four community youth workers, and a severely restricted access to meeting space for each of the community's clubs, ultimately slowing down the resource development process. At the end of

December, KYC's lead met with the Blood Reserve's Chief and Council to resolve the issues. A revised work plan was formalized with the KYC.

During January to March 2009, The Kainai Youth Council underwent some major structural revisions, and in response to decisions made at the Band government level, moved their organization from under the umbrella of Kainai Children's Services. Much of the concern arose from the competing interests of current Children's Services programs which had been recently developed using the model of the Kainai Youth Council, and the Reclaiming Hope pedagogy as a foundation for their programs and interactions with children and youth on the reserve, particularly around the issues of suicide. The Band supported the new programs financially, to the detriment of the Youth Council's budget line, and openly questioned the need for the Kainai Youth Council to be involved in healthy decision making and suicide prevention work in the community. There was much discussion around the capacity of youth and the KYC to be involved in this kind of work versus the professionally trained workers and programs of the Wellness Centre. In many ways, this controversy spoke to the "heart" of the Focus 3 project — about making room for those emotionally moved by a crisis to take action, addressing access barriers that prevent them from doing so. The four community youth worker positions were cut, and the youth clubs staffed by volunteers. Our work shifted significantly from hands-on event support and product development to supporting the changing processes and structure of the Kainai Youth Council to adapt to its changing realities.

Our support was to assist the KYC to develop a strategy that will allow for them to continue the good work of the Youth Council in a manner that was not seen as competitive to the objectives of the programs from Children's Services, developed to address youth suicide. Initially, the Band Council had decided that the programs were duplication and the KYC was not necessary. By the end of March, KYC staff had successfully lobbied the Band to continue with some funding.

Through April to June, we supported the Kainai Youth Council (KYC), through partnership with SC to receive funding for the hiring of four Kainai Youth Council (KYC) members as summer staff through the Canada Summer Jobs program, assisting in training related to fundraising, proposal writing, and project planning.

## Element 7: Celebrating Results

### Highlights from the Website

**Youth Week July 14th to 17th** — a chance for youth to do something positive was kicked off with the Youth Walk-a-thon, geared towards raising awareness about suicide, and promoting suicide prevention.

The walk is a 34 km walk from the Moses Lake Gym to the Standoff Human Resource Building. Tuesday was the preparation day.

Wednesday was the Children's Festival, including various games and activities. The Astro-jump was a 70 foot obstacle course, which was a big hit with the kids. The

dunk-tank was fun until it started to rain. The water was freezing but the kids had fun knocking me into the water. The last day was the tournament day, which is a chance for the young talent to show off their skills.



#### **Reclaiming Hope Suicide Prevention Walk – July 14th**

The walk-a-thon from Moses Lake to Stand Off (a whopping 34 km) was held in memory of Myron Wolf Child, the young man who started the walk-a-thon, and the Reclaiming Hope project. Though we started with only eight youth, by the end of the walk, more than 25 youth were walking with us.



The sun was shining and the Rocky Mountains were amazing in the distance, providing the most breathtakingly beautiful backdrop for the mission that we undertook that day. Walking 34 km is as long as it actually sounds, but by the end of it, many of the youth and a couple of the community workers had the energy to run up the (steep) hill to the finish point at the Kainai Children's Services offices where they were greeted by a barbeque prepared by volunteers.

CTV Lethbridge came out to interview some of the walkers, and two of the organizers, and we were featured on the 6pm news, though none of us got to see it, because we were still walking at that time! (Those family and friends that did see it said that it turned out great though.) The support from passers-by was amazing, with strangers bringing us water, sun umbrellas, and one guy even throwing his hats out the window for us to catch and use. (although he was somehow related to Eugene...) The Blood Tribe police services brought up the rear, escorting us the entire way, with the Children's Services van (affectionately known as Big Red leading the charge as the pace car. Though I don't think it ever went more than five kms/hour, it was a refuge for the weary, and host to food, water and sunscreen for those that needed the supplies. The group moved as a pack, waiting for the stragglers to catch up, while Big Red made sure that the faster walkers never got too far ahead of the rest of the group. All told, it took us nearly eight hours to complete from start to finish.

### **TYPES Conference – March 27th-30<sup>th</sup>**

Four youth (one from each of the communities in Kainai) attended the annual Town Youth Participation Strategies conference in Brantford, Ontario. TYPs is a network of primarily rural youth centres, so there was a lot of opportunity for the four Kainai youth to connect with, and learn from other youth from across the country who face some of the same rural-related barriers to getting and staying involved in positive activities. Along with doing a whole bunch of really cool recreational activities like checking out the stars at the camp's planetarium and making clay tiles as an art project, the four youth got the chance to meet two girls from another community we're working with (Kugluktuk, Nunavut), practiced their facilitation skills, learned all about dancing in an arena, and got to take part in some really cool educational workshops on topics they wanted to learn about. Two community workers came with the youth and helped to facilitate the conference program as well.



### **Reclaiming Hope Suicide Prevention Forum – May 29th and 30th**

More than 140 youth and nearly 60 adults and elders from the community attended the Reclaiming Hope Suicide Prevention Forum held over two days at the end of May. Together we talked about the issues young people on the Blood Reserve face, shared stories of strength and survival, and talked about what needs to change and how. To read more about what we did, read the following report.

# Reclaiming Hope Suicide Prevention Forum Report

*This report, produced by the youth leadership team supported by the Focus 3 project, illustrates how the community members took the tools offered by The Students Commission and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, and incorporated them into their program design and execution.*



## Introduction

The Reclaiming Hope Suicide Prevention Forum occurred at the Sapoyi School in Stand Off, May 29th and 30th, 2008. Youth, adult and elder representatives of the four Kainai communities were present, with more than 140 youth attending sessions throughout the two days and nearly 60 adults and elders participating and supporting the Forum. Just over half of the youth attending were female, while the majority of adults and elders were male. 11 of the youth participating were from a treatment centre in a neighbouring community, where many of them were court ordered to deal with substance abuse issues and anger and violence issues. Members of the Siksika (a neighbouring reserve) youth Band Council were also in attendance with several of their adult supports.

The goals of this Forum were realistic, and the planners involved were candid with their expectations.

**“I know we can’t just hold this Forum and this will fix everything, because we know it won’t, we know it can’t. When our community leaders, when our community elders tell us that we’re in a state of emergency, that our youth are in crisis, it’s not going to take two days of talking about suicide and what’s not working and talking about hope to fix it. We’re dying, our children are dying. My brothers and sisters are dying. I just want us to start talking about it. Start talking about suicide because it’s been a word for so long that we just pretend, we just pretend it doesn’t exist. But it does.” (Community Worker- Lavern)**

The Forum was an opportunity to do three things with and for the community. The first was to bring youth, adults and elders together for the first time in recent memory to discuss the issues surrounding suicide in an open, honest way. The second was to gather information about current youth opinion on suicide, and the realities of living on the Blood Reserve. The third, and final reason for bringing youth together was to provide hands-on training and

leadership experience for members of the Kainai Youth Council. Youth Council members and the four community youth workers were involved in all aspects of the event including planning the agenda, organizing the logistics, supporting speakers, elders and youth to participate in the event, and facilitation small group discussions throughout the two days of the Forum. Youth Council members were also involved in evaluating the Forum at its close, and deconstructing what we learned from participants. What is distilled here in this report, has come as a result of these conversations.

### ***Preparation***

Staff from The Students Commission of Canada attended the Blood Reserve on two separate occasions to help prepare for this event. During the initial community visit in the late winter of 2008, staff met with Youth Council members and adult supports from the four Blood Reserve communities in the nearby city of Lethbridge. During this visit, these Youth Council members and their adult support discussed some of the most pressing issues and concerns facing not only the children and youth of the community, but adults and elders as well. Out of these discussion grew the major focus for the Forum, that is, that there needed to be a space for youth to share their concerns with members of the community, and discuss ways in which action could be taken. There was much discussion at this first community meeting about the power of positive role modeling, and how the perception of youth held by those on reserve and off needed to shift drastically for youth to really succeed. It was decided at this initial meeting that one of the goals of both the Reclaiming Hope Forum, and the Reclaiming Hope project in general would be to shift public perception of the youth on the reserve by showcasing youth doing positive things and standing up to ideas and actions that they believe need to change.

**“We’re not a bunch a creeps, runnin’ around and doing stupid stuff and being all bad. We don’t all drink, we’re not all in jail, some of us are doing really great things with our lives, and I want to show people that, get people to support the good things that can happen.”**

**(Youth Council Member- Moses Lake)**

The second visit to the community by Students Commission staff in the early spring was spent focused on finalizing the program of the Forum, developing the format of the discussions (including the discussion questions) and training youth for their roles as program supports and facilitators. Adult supports, elders and the four community workers were trained in facilitation as well, however the major focus with this group was on how to support the youth facilitators during the discussions, and how to engage with other elders and adults to participate in discussion as well.

In the days leading up to the Forum, staff from the Students Commission reviewed the roles of the facilitators and supports with those involved, and worked closely with the Youth Council to ensure they were prepared for the event. Particular attention was paid to making sure that adequate emotional support was provided for these facilitators, as the community had suffered the loss of two youth, ages 12 and 17, to suicide in the weeks before the Forum.

## Discussion Themes

**“This place has only ten thousand people living on the land, and we’re all connected. We’re all related because we share our culture. But we are a divided people. We fight, we have histories of families that fight, we rarely have the opportunity like this, to reach out to each other, no matter where we are...no matter who we are...and talk. Just talk. We need to think and talk out our ideas because that is what shapes the future.” (Blood Tribe Elder)**

This Forum provided youth, adults and community elders with the opportunity to speak candidly about the many, intersecting issues young people on the Blood Reserve face daily, and challenged both youth and adults alike to provide concrete solutions for positive change in the community.

Modeled on a number of Students Commission’s conference programming tools, the discussions were broken into four themes: *Spirit, Head, Heart and Feet*. The discussions on Spirit asked Forum participants to explore how they felt about themselves, their own stories of suicide and the story of the elder who relied on her culture to cope with the aftermath of finding her child after he had committed suicide. The idea of these discussions was to focus on how participants create something positive out of a negative situation, focusing on the coping skills and resilience of individuals and the community, and exploring how our personal understanding of culture, spirituality and the individual sense of spirit translate into a person’s daily life.

The theme of Head focused on the concept of “strong communities, healthy communities.” The objective of this session was to focus on community strength and resiliency by exploring the positive things that exist on the Blood Reserve. This was an opportunity to showcase the positive aspects of the community, in spite of the negative things that daily present themselves. Heart was a discussion that was designed to move participants from the larger picture of community strength to the reality of themselves as active participants within that community, and champions of hope. Throughout the Heart discussions, there was a focus on stories of survival and strength, and a look at the coping skills that have helped participants themselves overcome barriers to positive living in their own lives. Building on the assets of both individuals and community discussed in the first three sessions, Feet focused on creating positive action for change.

## Discussion Outcomes

Though these discussions were led with strength and asset based questions, for many of the groups, particularly the group of adults and elders, it was very difficult to move participants to this approach. When asked why it was so hard to respond to the strengths of the community, one participant responded *“because we’ve never thought of it this way before. We’re always thinking about what’s not right, we’re always talking about what’s wrong with this place, and why we want to leave it, we always see what’s bad, so it’s hard to talk about what’s good. No one has ever asked us what’s good before.”* (Youth Council member, Stand Off)



## Spirit

**“Spirit is about...it’s about hope, it’s about making choices based on what’s right for you, it’s about hope for the future. You can’t just label it something like, a belief in God or the Creator, or something that like, because it’s so personal to each of us.” (Youth Council member, Old Agency)**

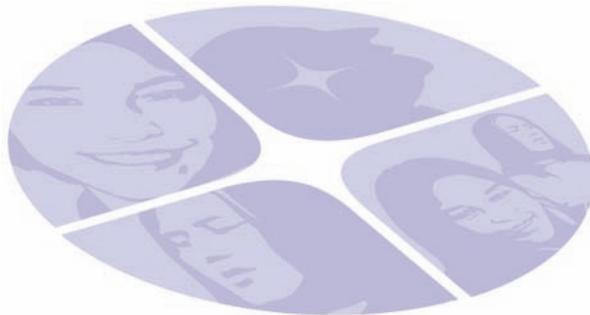
Generally, people responded positively to this particular theme of questioning, and spoke about both personal and community morals and values. It was of interest to note the divergence between these two categories however, with individuals holding themselves to a higher moral standard than they did the community. One youth participant (a recent graduate from a nearby treatment centre) said *“It’s like... I knew what I was doing was wrong, but nobody reached out and stopped me. Not my parents, not the teachers at school, not any of the elders. It’s like, until I messed up in Cardston and the RCs [RCMP] got involved, nobody cared. It’s like they just expected me to be like how I was, all drunk and crazy and stuff, and nobody told me it was wrong, nobody showed me nothing better or different. When I tried to quit, they [the community] still thought I was always gonna be like I used to be, and when my brother died, I wanted to change so I did, but they still think of me like I’m the same.”* Another youth (a current resident of the same treatment centre) said *“It’s hard for me to like...not drink, because those same people who are telling me to grow up are just as hard as I am. This one time, the bootlegger that lives near where I used to stay told me I shouldn’t drink...I think I bought something from him the next weekend.”*

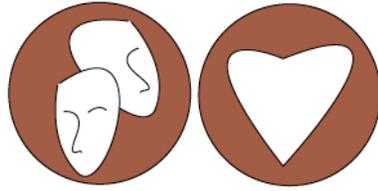
What was also interesting was that all discussion groups reported that they believed a stronger community focus on connecting the spirit (in large part through the reinforcement of culture through traditional cultural activities and events) to the daily lives of people would contribute to stronger, healthier communities. One group suggested that an emotional connection to life was missing for so many members of the community, young and old, and that restoring this balance through the exploration of the spirit with the support of the community, would work to resolve some of the issues of identity and belonging that often factor into suicide and unhealthy decision making. *“We’re caught. Some of us, many of us don’t really know our traditions and our culture, and others, they don’t know anything but...what they learned in the residential schools and from the missionaries. You see...because they sometimes battle, we battle ourselves, and our spirits... We’re caught in the middle of this war for our hearts and minds and souls, and our children, they end up losing out of it all...our children they don’t know where they belong.”* (Kainai Children’s Services Youth Support Worker)



Making the connection between doing positive things as a result of a tragic event was difficult for most Forum participants to articulate, however many of their responses would indicate this is exactly what happened. For many of those in attendance, there was a critical moment in their lives when a tragedy occurred in their lives that led to healthy, or healthier decision being made in theirs. For some, the death of their peers as a result of drinking and driving encouraged them to find sober drivers, for others, the suicides of friends and loved ones made them distinctly more determined to live their lives successfully and honor the memory of those who had successfully taken their lives. This was not the case for all though, and many spoke of the paralyzing despair they felt when the community was dealt yet another loss. *“I don’t know why we do it, but sometimes we don’t do anything but grieve for someone even if you’ve never met them in your life. It’s like...the community can’t be happy for too long before we need to cry again. I think sometimes we get stuck because pain and grief and...and sorrow can be shared with everyone...happiness can’t.”* (Kainai Youth Council Mentor)

Much of the discussion around coping skills also focused on the polarity between the self and the community. Many of the youth were able to speak to countless positive ways in which they cope with stress, anger and sadness, however they were unable to provide such concrete, positive methods of coping found at the community level. The group of adults and elders spoke to the lack of coping skills at this level, saying that *“We as a community, all of us here today too, we have so much anger for old hurts that need to be healed. Our hope is with our children, we have none left for us.”* (Blood Tribe elder)





## Head and Heart

These discussions became closely linked as the groups worked through the guiding questions, and many of the stories that were shared looped through both the Head and Heart themes. Throughout these discussions, though it was still easier for participants to focus on what was wrong with the reserve, when they were asked the question “*Why do people stay?*” there was a clear allegiance to the family, community and cultural ties they saw happening around them. Playing on these strengths, participants expressed their desires to have more, and stronger ties fostered at the community level. They saw these ties as being excellent opportunities to create positive spaces for youth to develop, giving them the chance to make healthy decisions, develop their coping skills and find alternatives to suicide. Participants envisioned their communities providing more spaces for adults to build and sustain their own support systems with each other, creating more opportunities for families in need to receive counseling or other social service programming as required, and offering a greater number of cultural events and activities for youth to participate alone and with the adults on the reserve. What is of particular interest is that the younger participants focused their discussions on the development of cultural activities and the creation of family support programs, while the group of adults and elders focused more heavily on the creation of a greater number of positive spaces and activities on reserve for youth to engage in.

Many participants also called for elders and youth to work together more closely, suggesting that the Band look at implementing programs designed to support positive role modeling and mentorship of youth by elders in the community. This was met with some resistance by some of the youth participants though, with one youth saying “*They tell us that we’re drinking ourselves to death, and that we’re not going to have good lives, but it’s not us kids who bootleg. It’s them that do. The adults.*” (Youth participant, Stand Off) While another said “*It’s like they [adults and elders] think that they can fix us and that solves everything that’s wrong with native people. Where do you think we learn it from? Where do they think that we learn this from? I had more uncles killing themselves when I was growing up than friends [who killed themselves]. Who am I supposed to look up to if the people that are telling me that there is something wrong with us kids are the ones that are doing the same things they don’t want us to do?*” (Youth Council member, Moses Lake) One group felt that role modeling and mentorship should not be limited from elder to youth, instead they felt that programs encouraging inter-generational sharing and learning should be most beneficial to “*the entire community, to all of us, because we’re all in the together, we’re all hurting, we all need to support each other.*” (Youth participant, Siksika)



## Feet

**“Today we face a state of emergency. Yesterday we faced a state of emergency. Our children are dying. This is not our culture, this is a disease that is eating us from the inside. How many more children have to die before we learn that things need to change? Are we really going to have to face another state of emergency tomorrow?”**

**(Blood Tribe elder)**



Contrary to what Forum organizers thought would be the case, discussions about action were the most difficult to facilitate. In some groups, for every concrete example of positive action that was put forth, there was an equally strong reason as to why such an idea would fail. However, the strength of the youth facilitators is to be commended as all of the groups ended with a number of positive opportunities for action and change within the community. Building on the ideas of developing more opportunities within the community groups discussed earlier, participants spoke at length about the role these positive activities could have in the lives of children and youth living on the reserve. They also felt that the school played a major role in helping to develop positive identities as well as educating children and youth. They felt that the school was a place where youth should be able to learn about their culture, and pushed to have greater emphasis on being Blackfoot in school. All participants felt that the Kainai Youth Council was a place for positive youth development, and that the youth leaders being trained in each of the four community youth clubs were strong candidates for peer mentorship, but felt that more sustained programs for mentorship and peer-to-peer leadership should be implemented in each of community. Members of the youth clubs agreed that the clubs' existence was important, but felt that *“they could be so much more if they had a program, or a plan... [club members] hang out, and we're safe and doing good things because we're not doing bad things like drugs and stuff, but it can get boring sometimes when we just do nothing but hang out, that's when we get restless.”* (Youth Council member, Stand Off)

Many participants felt that members of the Kainai Youth Council should be more involved in community decision-making within each of the communities, but also at the Band Council level. *“If we see young people making decisions that effect what we do on the reserve, we'll start thinking that we are valued as part of this community, and want to make a contribution too.”* (Youth Council member, Lavern) Though this idea did not hold for many of the adults and elders.

Job creation for youth was an oft-repeated step for positive action, however according to many of the youth participants, a major barrier to getting and keeping a job, particularly during the

summer months was a lack of reliable transportation. As one of the largest geographical reserves in Canada with only a modest 10,000 residents, Kainai faces the challenge of many rural communities. For many youth, a lack of affordable, reliable transportation is a major barrier to getting a job, or getting involved in many of the activities that are currently offered for youth, and it is particularly difficult for those youth who reside in outlying regions away from the four townsites.

## **Challenges and Plans for the Future**

**“Suicide is an option for our children because it’s out there. They see it happening to their peers, to their friends, and all of a sudden, it’s a choice they can make. If they don’t know what it is, they don’t think about it. If they don’t see it everywhere, they won’t think about it. Everyone here, all of us have been wounded because we’ve lost someone.”**

**(Kainai Children’s Services Youth Worker)**

The challenge for the future is to remove suicide as an option for youth and adults of the Blood Reserve alike. Kainai Children’s Services and the Kainai Youth Council have committed to continue to review the outcomes of this Forum and any resulting discussions, and will work to reinforce their programming for the youth of the community based on what has been called for. Currently, there are plans for Kainai Youth Council members to develop a curriculum for youth that would address issues of culture, identity, and self esteem which is slated for completion and pilot-testing in the fall of 2008. With the continued support of The Students Commission of Canada, the Kainai Youth Council will continue to build the Reclaiming Hope project, using it as an avenue to engage youth in the development and delivery of its events and outcomes, ultimately providing positive opportunities for youth to get and stay involved. The Kainai Youth Council will also continue to act as a liaison between Kainai Children’s Services and the children and youth of the Blood Reserve, advocating with and for all youth on issues that are important to them and their future.



**“Hope is....it’s about something special, it comes from within, and is reinforced by the people we are surrounded by...Reclaiming Hope is...it’s about standing up and telling the world that you can’t take hope from us, though people have tried, and every time another one of us dies, and every time there is another tragedy, they try...they try and take it from us, but they can’t. It’s ours, and it’s time to reclaim it.” (Kainai Children’s Services Youth**

**Placement Staff)**

## Tools and Resources by Kainai Youth

The following tools were developed.

### TOOLS AND RESOURCES BY KAINAI YOUTH

- What we've learned. Tips on Creating Successful Youth Programs — a four-page tip sheet for youth leaders by youth leaders.
- Keeping Us Safe — a two-page tip sheet written by youth for adults.
- See, Think, Do: How to Take Action on Issues — for youth by youth.
- Being Safe: Tips on Being Safe — for youth by youth.
- Suicide Awareness: A Fact Sheet for youth by youth.
- Reclaiming Hope Workshop. Please see Appendix for full workshop manual.

This tool was created by the Focus Three team: youth of Kugluktuk, Parma Court's Youth Vybes, Kainai Youth Council and The Students Commission.



# What We've Learned

(For program leaders by program leaders)



## Tips On Creating Successful Youth Programs

So you want to run a program for young people in your community, but you're not sure where to start? We've been supporting young people in the Youth Clubs on the Kainai Blood Reserve for more than 10 years collectively, and have learned from some really amazing youth programmers. We don't always get to share our thoughts about how to put a program together, and how to be a good youth leader, so we thought we'd do that here.

### Step One:

#### Keep it simple:

Programs often fail when they are too complicated, or there are too many hoops for participants, parents and/or guardians of the participants and even the program leaders to jump through. The simpler you can make the program, the better, especially if the program is something that is run by volunteers or isn't super formal. (An example of a formal program would be something they run at school, but the youth clubs that meet once a week on Kainai are less structured and would be simpler. The clubs don't grade your participation, you don't have to try-out to get into the program and you don't need to fill out a checklist to see whether or not you qualify for the program.)

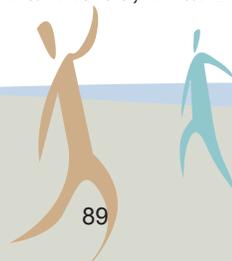
Keeping it simple might also mean keeping the activities you do appropriate to the space. The more equipment you have to rent or buy or bring in, or have the youth bring in, the more difficult it will be. It's much easier to run a basketball game if you've got a ball and a basketball court or it's easier to run a video club if you've got an editing suite - if you don't have a ball and net, or editing equipment and have to organize to get it in, it makes it much harder.

### Step Two:

#### Keep it interesting:

Watch your audience. If you pay attention, you'll notice soon enough when they're not interested in what you're doing. Sometimes people just have to suck it up and do things that they don't like, but if you want to keep people coming back, you've got to start making it interesting. If people are restless and talking to one another and not paying attention to what they're supposed to be doing, don't be afraid to switch it up. To do this successfully, you always have to have a back-up plan. Make sure there's an activity that you can do, whether it's an ice breaker or an improv game or whatever that you've got up your sleeve. They're more likely to stay tuned to what they're doing if you mix it up a bit. But be warned, it can be tricky to balance too much chaos with too much dullness. Each group will have their own balance, so you'll have to find it on your own.

One way to make sure that it's interesting, is to make sure their input is both asked for and taken into consideration. They will know better what they want to do, what they want to talk about and what they need.



So let them tell you! Eventually, you'll get pretty good at guessing, but even then, make sure they take a lead role in determining what's going to happen.

### Step Three:

#### Keep it meaningful:

Part of keeping it meaningful is to make sure that it's interesting to them, but it's also about making sure that



you're offering programming that is somehow meaningful to them in their minds and in their hearts. If the people in your program aren't invested with their minds, and their emotions, they're not going to stick around very long. People find meaning in different things, so it will be important to check in with your participants to see what they are finding valuable about the program. You might not want to ask them "what do you find meaningful about this program?" but you

might ask something like "what do you like most? Why?", and explore more about the things they identify as giving them the most enjoyment, and the most opportunities to learn.

### Step Four:

#### Keep it challenging:

Running programs for youth can be super fun, but a lot of people think it's just about letting kids run around while you watch them. Though that might be a part of what you end up doing, that's not all of it. Working with young people is actually very difficult, and it takes a highly skilled person to do it well. One aspect that is particularly hard to balance is how challenging to make it. If you're running a community program that is open to everyone, chances are you will get a lot of people with varied skill sets. That right there can be a challenge for you! Challenge doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. We don't mean challenge like, for example, negotiate world peace, or invent a car that runs entirely on air. No, when we say challenge we mean things like learn how to public speak, or raise some money to attend a conference or event or something like that.



Because everyone is different, it will be hard to keep things challenging enough that young people will learn something, but not so challenging so that that the youth are overwhelmed and have no feeling of success at the end of the activity. There is a fine balance between the right amount of challenge and too much of it. What you don't want to do is create so many impossible barriers that you end up with a group of youth that feel defeated, but almost as bad is when something is so easy, youth lose interest quickly. Continue to ask your group questions, they'll be able to tell you in words and actions how they are doing.



## Step Five:



### Keep it fun

This one is simple. If youth aren't having fun, for whatever reason, they're not going to come. If you're having trouble keeping it fun, check in with them, see what they want to do and support them to pull it off. Just make sure that the fun they're having doesn't interfere with what you're trying to do with the program. What we mean is, make sure it's something positive, and nobody gets hurt at the expense of having fun.

## Step Six:

### Keep asking them:

This program is for them, and they will be its biggest fans, or its biggest critics. Or maybe, sometimes both. Your role is to provide structure and support to the program and the participants, and to make sure that everyone is safe. It's also to make sure that the voices of the participants are included when you make decisions about the program. This is, after all, about them, for them, and they are going to have to be the ones to live through it, so it just makes sense to involve them in the decision-making aspect of the program too. Plus, as we all learned, it makes our jobs easier, because they are way more creative than we could ever be, so they pitch us an idea, and we make it work as part of the program, as often as we can. It saves us some time and sometimes saves them from suffering through some terrible activities!

We also need to make sure that we're asking them not only for ideas about the program, but also for feedback on the program, on yourself, on their day. Constantly ask questions. It's the only way you're ever going to learn from them.

## Step Seven:

### Keep it flexible (but have a plan).

When we tell people that we work with teens, we seem to get a lot of "wow, that's a sweet job. Must be easy, doesn't take much work, does it?" We just laugh now, and shake our heads. The truth is actually just the opposite. Yeah, it does take a lot of work. There's a lot of planning involved, and it can be stressful. But nothing is more stressful than showing up for your hour or two with these kids, and having no idea of what you're going to do. It shows when you have a plan, and it shows when you don't, and nothing says you don't value the time that these youth are giving out of their weeks to spend with you than showing up unprepared. One really important thing to remember though is that, though you have a plan, be prepared to abandon it at any moment. Sometimes a better idea hits, or someone suggests something that might be more interesting than what you've got planned, or maybe someone just really needs to get something off their chest. Whatever the reason, on occasion, you're going to have to let go of your plan, and go with it, whatever "it" is. Don't freak out, it's okay, and perfectly natural. Sometimes the best times you have with your program will be those that are unexpected and unplanned.



# Things that you can do to be a better youth leader:



- Be positive! You can have a bad day, but never take it out on them.
- Remember that it's not about you. It doesn't matter if you hate icebreakers, or whatever activity they're doing, if they love it, you need to suck it up and pretend you love it too. Or at very least, pretend to like it.
- Help eliminate the barriers to their participation. If you need to help get them to the program, help get them there. If you need to meet with their parents in order for them to get permission to come to program, meet with their parents. Whatever you can do to help get them there, do it.
- Role Model positive behaviours all the time, not just during program. Remember that they're always watching you and will be looking up to you whether you're "on" or not.
- Lean on them when you need to, don't be afraid to include them in programming opportunities and development. This will help you out, while helping them to build their own capacity and skills.
- Be consistent. With your meeting times, with what you say, with what you do, with how you hold people accountable, and with how you treat everyone. No one likes to figure out that they're not the favourite.
- Know your boundaries, and make sure you don't step over them. It can be tough, especially if you're not that much older than the youth in your program, but your role means that you have to be held to a higher standard. Things like drinking and partying with or dating participants are generally considered to be crossing the line, even if they are of legal age.
- Remember that you're not their friend, you're their leader, role model and support. It can be tough to see the difference because you should be friendly with them, but to treat them the same way as your friends, telling the same things, hanging out and doing the same things, that sort of thing isn't always useful or productive for them.
- Involve others with more experience when you need to. Look up to your elders and use the skills and knowledge of your mentors when you need to. Not everything has to be decided or handled by you, and it helps to lean on people with more experience than you sometimes.
- Hold them accountable. If they said they were going to do something, make sure they do it. Hold yourself accountable too. If you said you were going to do something, make sure you do it.
- Never ask them to do something that you wouldn't do yourself.
- Be honest with them. Always.



## How to Keep the Children of Your Community Safe

### Dear Adults and Elders in our community:

We (members of the Kainai Youth Council) sat down with a bunch of our friends and started talking about safety. Now you're probably thinking that safety isn't really something that a lot of people talk about, especially us being teens, but we can promise you that we think about it even if we don't say much about it. Sometimes it's hard to really understand what being safe means, and for us living on Kainai, being safe can take on a whole bunch of different meanings. This letter has been broken into the four points of the Medicine Wheel to help us better explain what we're talking about. Why are we writing this letter to you? Well, sometimes we don't make the best decisions, so we need your help to keep us safe. We hope you read on and put into action some of our suggestions.

If you want to know more about the KYC, get in touch with us at the Youth Council office. We're in the Children's Services building, and you can call us at 737.2900 and ask for the Youth Office!

### How can you help the kids in Kainai stay safe?

#### Physical

- Watch the road for bikes and people when you're driving! Give them room as you pass.
- Prepare meals for your children that are healthy. Canada's Food Guide is actually a great tool to help you make sure that we're getting all the nutrients that we need!
- Encourage your kids to get outside and PLAY. Recreation is the key to staying healthy, and being physically fit decreases the chance of injury because we get more used to being up and moving.
- Role-model good behaviour around drinking and safe partying. If your kid parties, make sure they know who to call for a safe ride home, and make sure they know their limits.
- Don't supply your kids with booze! Too many kids get sick and some have died when their parents give them alcohol to party with. That's not responsible parenting, and it hurts us.
- Don't smoke indoors or in cars, even if you're not with your children. The smoke lingers. Not only does second hand smoke make us sick, but watching you smoke encourages us to smoke, even if you tell us not to.
- Encourage your kid to wear their seatbelt and follow the rules of the road. Speeding can be fun, but it can be dangerous too, especially in the winter and on the gravel roads that crisscross all of Kainai.
- Make sure you know who to call if there's an emergency, and teach your kid who to call if there's an emergency. You never know when something might happen.
- Don't be afraid to talk to us about sex and sexuality. And if you can't do it, find someone who can. Nothing's worse than making us figure it out on our own. That's when things can get out of hand.
- Find ways to deal with conflict other than hitting us. There are so many options, find the strength to choose one.

## Emotional

- Tell someone you love, that you love them. Give them a hug and tell them they're beautiful. It just might make someone's day, or it just might make their life.
- You never know what kind of day your kid is having until you ask, so ask us!
- Remember to forgive us when we make mistakes. If we feel like a failure, we're not going to be anything more than that.
- Be strong for us. Your strength teaches us to be strong.
- Encourage us to be brave in the face of our mistakes. If we do something wrong, make us own up to it and take responsibility for it.
- Give us choices. Whether it's a choice about what time we want to go to bed, or the choice to go to a movie or a baseball game, practicing choices will help us out in the long run when it comes to really hard decisions like whether we want to smoke drugs or not, or get behind the wheel of a car when we're drunk. It might not seem like much, but it helps.
- Don't be afraid to admit when you're wrong.
- Don't punish us for things that are beyond our control. Depression isn't our fault, and it isn't your fault either. We need help, not to be told to "deal with it".



## Mental

- Encourage us to go to school and constantly learn. Even if you didn't finish school, learning is important.
- Talk to us about the things that are happening in your lives. We probably see what's going on anyway, and we'll thank you for including us in the discussion.
- Take an interest in what we're learning at school, at work, from our friends, from wherever. If you're interested in what we're doing, we're more likely to stick to it.
- Let us participate in making decisions about our future. At home, at school, at the Band level. You would be surprised by what we can come up with!
- Ask us what we think. About anything. Listen to us when we respond.
- Take action on our suggestions, even if it's just about what colour shirt you should wear to the Feast.
- Help us work with you through some of the issues we all face as a community.

## Spiritual

- Pray with us, pray for us, do something spiritual everyday. It doesn't matter if you pray to God, the Creator, or anyone else: just take time with us and for us everyday.
- Help us understand where we belong in this world.
- Teach us about who we are, and where we come from. We want to learn about our culture and our heritage. Get the Elders involved in teaching us things like our language and our traditions.
- Let us work with you to heal some of the hurts that affect us all. Let us share your burden, one day it will become ours and we need to deal with it now before it overwhelms us.



## How to Take Action on an Issue

This tool was created in partnership with the young people of the Kainai Youth Council (KYC). Working with these youth we were able to pull together a simple “how-to” that would encourage other young people in communities across the country to take action on the issues they see happening around them. It is based, in part on the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement’s Young Decision Makers (YDM) cycle. To find more information about the Centre or YDM, go to [www.engagementcentre.ca](http://www.engagementcentre.ca) or [www.tgmag.ca](http://www.tgmag.ca).

“When you think about the problem, the things that we have to deal with, it can suck because there’s so much, they’re so overwhelming. But I think we make things harder than they should be. See it, think it, do it. That’s it.”

### Three steps to action.



#### See:

Step one is simple. Look around you. What’s happening in your school or your community? What is happening that is really amazing and positive in your community? What is happening that maybe isn’t so positive? This step is where you identify the issues. Try to figure out what you really want to change about your community or the behaviour of your friends and family. Sometimes it might sort of seem overwhelming, but think about those things that you can do. And remember, one small change can have a huge ripple effect on the entire community, so whatever you decide to do, no matter how small it might seem, is going to make a difference in someone’s life.

#### Think:

Step two is a little more difficult than step one sometimes, because it means that you have to actually think about what you want to accomplish. Here is where you get to learn about the issue you are trying to tackle too. We think that the more you know about an issue or a problem, the better you’ll be able to address it. So in this step, think about what you know, and think about all the things you still need to learn. Think about who you could learn from, or who could help you, and then talk about what you want to do, and your ideas with other people. Chances are, you’re not the only one to feel the way you do, and there are other young





people that would jump at the chance to help make your community a better, safer place, and they might help you narrow down what sort of event or project you want to undertake. In one of the communities that we worked with through Focus 3, the youth organized an entire week's worth of positive games and activities, and held a walk between two towns (almost 34 km!) to help raise awareness about the issue of youth suicide in their community. In fact, they've been doing this for almost ten years running, and every year there are more and more youth and adults that are showing up and helping out.

Speaking of adults, it wouldn't hurt to see if you can't find some adults to come on board with your plans. Having an adult ally to a project or an event can go a long way to helping you overcome some of the barriers you might run into. They may have experience doing this sort of thing, or they might be able to help you get access to space or funding. They'll also bring a really different perspective on the issues, and can help you focus what you want to do. Listen and learn from them, but don't be afraid to teach them a thing or two, too!

### **Do:**

Sometimes the actual doing of an event or project isn't so easy, but if you've made it to this stage, congratulations! It can take a LONG time to get to this step, but sometimes the ride is worth it when you reach the destination. There are a number of important things when you get to this stage that you need to think about. You know what you're going to do, but when and where are you going to do it? Who is going to attend? How much is it going to cost? If it's free, right on, but if it's not, who's going to pay for it? Do you have volunteers to help you pull it off? Do people know about what you're planning on doing? What about after it's all over, do you have a plan to keep a program or something going? Or is this a one-time affair? These are all questions (and there are more that will arise as you move forward!) that you need to think about in order to execute an event successfully. To help you plan, we've together a worksheet to get you started. It's the same worksheet that has been used in the two communities of the Focus 3 project that have collaborated to write this document, and it works for us, so we wanted to share it with you.





# See Think Do

(For Youth by Youth)

## Activity Planning Tool Worksheet

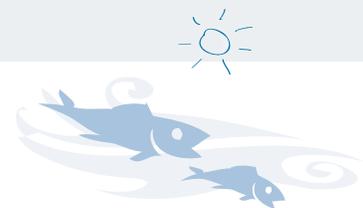
The idea of this tool is to help you pull your thoughts together about what issues you want to tackle, who you want to involve and what action you want to take. This tool is only a starting place! Answer the questions below and feel free to add your own. Take this tool and make it yours!

### SEE:

- 1) What is happening in your community that is really positive?
- 2) What are the top two issues that face young people today in your community?
- 3) What do other people your age see as being an issue in your community? Do they agree with what you think?
- 4) What have you or others like you already done to address these issues?
- 5) What is one thing that you can do to address one of these two issues? (For example: If homelessness was an issue for youth in your community, you might not be able to build a shelter, but you could host a fundraiser or a clothing drive with everything going to organizations or agencies that support the homeless.)

### THINK:

- 1) What do you know about the issue you want to address?
- 2) What else do you think you need / want to learn?
- 3) Where can you learn this from?
- 4) Who do you know that might want to help you, (youth, young adults and adult allies)? What ideas do they have to do something about this issue?
- 5) What do you think you need to talk to them about?
- 6) What organizations or agencies exist to help address this issue?
- 7) What do you want to do?
- 8) Why do you want to do this?
- 9) What do you hope will happen after you do this?



## DO:

- 1) When do you want to do this activity?
- 2) Where are you going to do this activity? Do you need permission from anyone to use this space (for example: city council, family members, permits etc?)
- 3) How much is it going to cost? Where are you going to get the money?
- 4) Who do you want to attend?
- 5) How are you going to get them there? (For example: if you want young people to attend, are you going to go to schools and community clubs to recruit them? What sort of promotion are you going to do?)
- 6) What do you want these people to get out of attending this event?
- 7) Is there anyone else that you should be inviting? What do your peers and your adult supports say?
- 8) How will you know this event has achieved its goals?
- 9) How are you going to evaluate the success of the event?
- 10) What are you going to do after the event is over? (What is the plan for follow-up or long-term action and who is going to lead that?)

Remember, these questions are just a place to start. The young people of the KYC have put them together to start you thinking about all of the things that you will need to do to help you pull together an event that will help your community move forward in a positive direction. Their advice to you is simple, just like this tool:



**“Ask questions, ask for help when you need it, and think big, even if you act small. Everything is connected, and the smallest action can have the biggest impact. Most of all though, don’t give up.”**



## Being Safe – Tips on Being Safe

We (members of the Kainai Youth Council) know that being safe is important to pretty much everyone but we also know that a lot of our friends don't always make the best decisions. When we thought about why this might be, we figured that sometimes it might just be that they didn't know what else to do. So, we've come up with a list of tips to help keep ourselves, as children and youth, safe. We've broken them up into four categories, using the four elements of the Medicine Wheel as a guide.

If you want to know more about the KYC, get in touch with us at the Youth Council office. We're in the Children's Services building, and you can call us at 737.2900 and ask for the Youth Office!

### How can you stay safe?

#### PHYSICAL:

- Party safely! A good time's a good time, but stay safe so this party isn't your last.
- Never take a drink from someone you don't trust.
- If someone's mixing you a drink, make sure you see them do it. If they get you a drink from a bottle or a can, make sure you see them open it in front of you.
- Always plan a safe ride home. Have a back-up plan just in case your first plan doesn't work out.
- Never get into a car with someone who's been drinking or using drugs, even if they say they're okay to drive.
- If you're going to get completely trashed, make sure you've got a buddy there to watch your back. A lot of bad things can happen when people get completely out of their mind on booze or drugs. Your inhibitions can disappear and the action or person that seemed like a terrible idea an hour ago might come across as really appealing, until you wake up with more than a hangover the next day.
- Drink in moderation. Binge drinking is dangerous, especially for teens and can totally mess up the way your brain develops. There's actual science to prove this too: it can be pretty scary.
- Remember: drunk sex is risky sex, because you're not always thinking straight.
- You might think that double-wrapping your condoms gives you twice the protection, you're wrong. Wrap it once, because twice can cause friction and breakage.
- If you don't have a condom, don't do it! Too many babies make babies, and too many other babies give other babies Chlamydia. No one wants to wake up with a venereal disease.
- Drink lots of water when you're drinking or using drugs. Make sure you eat something too.
- Remember that people can make stupid decisions when they're intoxicated. Lots of fights and negative things can occur. Before you start to kick or scream or do something stupid, think about how you're going to feel about it when it's over and you're sober. Booze and drugs aren't worth losing your friends, or your life.

It's not just when you're partying that we want you to be safe though. There are other things that we want you to do.

- If you're biking or walking on the road, remember that not all cars are going to care or even notice that you're there. Wear visible clothing, and make sure you've got reflectors and lights when traveling by night.
- Keep one ear open to the sounds of traffic when you're biking, walking or running with your MP3 player in.
- Wear the appropriate safety equipment! That stuff's made for a reason, and you only think you look like a dork.
- Wear your seat belt!
- Eat healthy foods. If you stuff yourself with junk, chances are you're going to feel and be pretty useless.
- PLAY, get up, get active, get outside and be enjoy exercise. Do it often.

## EMOTIONAL

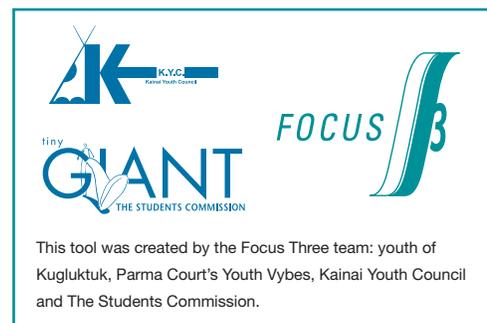
- Surround yourself with positive people.
- Show affection.
- Try to resolve conflict with something other than violence.
- Ask for help when you need it. You can get hurt if you let your pride get in the way.
- Apologize when you're wrong.
- Talk to someone when you're depressed, sad or just need a friend.
- Listen to music! It's powerful.
- Don't tell others things about you you're not comfortable telling. Some things can be kept to yourself.
- Tell someone if something is wrong, like you know about abuse, or you've been abused somehow. If you can't tell someone you know and trust, tell a stranger. Call Children's Services or the KYC (737.2900) or the Kid's Help Phone at 1.800.668.6868

## MENTAL

- Go to school! In the bigger picture of your life, it's not that long. Stay in school and exercise your brain!
- Ask questions! Be curious! You'll never know what the answer is if you never ask the question.
- Learn from everyone that you can. Knowledge isn't just about what you learn in school.

## SPIRITUAL

- Take time to make peace with yourself and your spirit, whatever that looks like to you.
- Learn about your culture and your traditions.
- Be proud of your Blackfoot heritage. We are a proud people who cannot be beaten.





## Suicide Awareness – What to do

Suicide is an issue that is out of control here in Kainai and in our First Nations communities across Canada. Aboriginal populations are three to four times more likely to suicide than any other population group in Canada, and as we have first hand experience in our communities, no one has been unaffected by the self-inflicted death of a loved one. Death surrounds us like an inescapable fog, and though no generation in our community is untouched by suicide, it is the youth we are most concerned about. Too many of our friends and sisters and brothers are dying. Too many of us are trying to take our own lives before we have truly lived. Too many of us feel that suicide is the only option available. Too many of us feel that there is nothing else, no one to turn to, no one to listen, no one to care.

We, as members of the Kainai Youth Council (KYC) want to stand up and declare to all the youth of our communities that we are listening. We care. We believe you are worth it. Because we live in a community where suicide has touched so many, we thought we would put together a pamphlet to answer some of the questions that we had as a group, and the answers that we came up with.



### How do you know someone might be thinking about suicide?

It can be hard to tell, and often, when someone dies, we think, oh god, there weren't any signs. But most people give some sort of signal, however subtle it might turn out to be. One of the biggest indicators that a person is thinking about suicide is if they have actually attempted it at least once before. Sometimes it takes people several attempts before they actually die, and if you're paying attention, these attempts won't go unnoticed.

Listen to what the people around you are saying. Statements like "I wish I was dead" or "no one would miss me if I wasn't alive" are often pretty good indicators that a person has been thinking about suicide.

Take cues from a person's behaviour. Have they been acting depressed or irritable lately? Have they been having trouble sleeping and eating lately? What about the way they socialize? Have they suddenly completely changed the way they dress, who they hang out with, where they go and what they do when they're out? These might all be signs that something is wrong.

### What do you do if you think someone you know might be thinking about suicide?

Be direct. Ask them up front if they are thinking about suicide, and if they've ever attempted it before. It might not be easy, but it's a good way to start talking to them about it. If they say yes, ask them if they have a plan. You're not going to plant suicidal thoughts in someone's head by asking them about this, so don't be shy. Someone's life could very well be on the line, so it's important to dive in. Listen to what they tell you about the plan, ask them if they thought about where they could get the materials (guns, knives, rope, drugs, etc). If they're pretty detailed, it's usually a signal that they're having serious thoughts about killing themselves, and they need to get some professional help right away. If their plan is sort of loose and not

quite thought all the way through, make sure you still get them help. Walk them to the councilor's office or to the phone where they can call a hotline. Stay with them until they've made the call if at all possible. Above all, stay calm. They don't need to see you freak right out.

Sometimes people make rash, stupid decisions when they are drunk or high, so if you're worried about a friend, and you're out at a party, keep an eye out for them. Be their buddy and watch their back.

## Who can I go to for help? Who can I refer my friend to?

There are a number of resources that you can call on that are available 24 hours a day. If you think that there is an immediate risk of suicide, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency room with your friend.

### You could also call:

**The Kid's Help Phone** at 1-800-668-6868 or visit their website at [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

**The Alberta Mental Health Board Help Line** at 1-877-303-2642

**Blood Reserve Crisis Response:** (403) 327-7905

**The Distress Centre/Drug Centre Crisis Line:** (403) 266-1605

**Teen Line:** (403) 264-8336

**Lethbridge Crisis Line:** (403) 327-7905

**Canadian Mental Health Association, Suicide Services Line:**  
(403) 297-1744

### Some places online have really great counseling and information.

- [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)
- [www.befrienders.org/](http://www.befrienders.org/) (an anonymous email counseling service)
- [www.casp-acps.ca](http://www.casp-acps.ca) (Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention)
- [www.suicideinfo.ca/csp/go.aspx?tabid=40](http://www.suicideinfo.ca/csp/go.aspx?tabid=40) (Centre for Suicide Prevention has a lot of great information and links for those in crisis)

## What else can I do?

**Be calm.** The last thing they need to see you do is freak out.

**Ask them how they feel,** and whether or not there was an event or incident that triggered these thoughts and/or attempt(s).

**Try to get them to share** their feelings with you.

**Try not to say things like "well I wouldn't do that if I were you".** To tell them what you would or wouldn't do is passing judgment and that's not what they need to hear. Reassure them instead.

**Let them speak.** This isn't about you. Sometimes people just want someone to listen, and this is the only way they can get people to do that.

**Let them know that their life means something to you.** Tell them that you value who they are and what they bring to the world.

**Encourage them to get counseling** and seek support.

## What if it doesn't work?

Unfortunately, talking to someone about their suicidal thoughts doesn't always prevent them from actually going through with it. The most important thing to remember is that it's not your fault. If someone does end up taking their life after you've tried to intervene, do not blame yourself. You did the best you could with what you were given. Ultimately it is not your decision whether this person lives or dies, they made the choice, and it had nothing to do with you.

Seek some counseling for yourself. Call one of the numbers listed up above, or make an appointment to see a counselor. Allow yourself time to grieve. It can take a while to get over the death of someone you love, so remember the wonderful things they brought to your life and honour their memory by living each day as an active participant in life. Focus on the good things and remember that life will continue and it will get easier as time passes.