

Initiative:     **Whole Child Program (WCP)**

Location:     École Whitehorse Elementary  
Whitehorse, Yukon

Contact:       Crystal Pearl-Hodgins, Community Coordinator  
Phone: 867-667-8676  
Email: cphodgin@yesnet.yk.ca  
Website: [http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/wes/whole\\_child/start.html](http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/wes/whole_child/start.html)

### Background

The African proverb "it takes an entire village to raise a child" has never been truer than for our community. The challenge we face is how to restructure schools to allow for full participation by all and to ensure that each child has every opportunity to meet his or her full potential. The educational success of our children cannot be assured unless concerted efforts are made to remove barriers to learning created by problems that begin outside the classroom walls.

Schools have an active and pivotal role to play in integrating community and services for children and their families. The need to support new avenues for parent, family, and community involvement with teachers and students, and for school involvement with families, agencies and the community beyond the school day was recognized.

From the understanding that to make significant differences for students will require us to work very closely with the whole family as an integral part of the community, the Whole Child Program was created. Core funding was provided through the RCMP's National Youth Strategy Program in May of 2001. In September 2001 the Whole Child program was initiated with a .7 Community Coordinator position.

### Description:

The Whole Child Program (WCP) resides in Whitehorse Elementary School. However, the program is independently funded. It is governed by a Steering Committee representative of participating partners including the Yukon Departments of Education, Justice and Health & Social Services, the RCMP, non-governmental agencies, and school administration.

Since the beginning of the Whole Child Program, efforts have been concentrated on establishing links to services for families with a specific emphasis on downtown families. WCP activities and services are available to any family in Whitehorse free of charge. A community coordinator and outreach worker provide support services and programming for families during the weekdays. The Family Resource Centre has an information kiosk that provides background and contact information on WCP programs as well as information on family support organizations such as the Child Development Centre, Partners for Children, Learning Disabilities Association, City of Whitehorse programs, and daycare organizations.

Every Wednesday is WCP Night. This includes Open Gym and Computer Lab, childcare, monthly swim nights for the whole family and free transportation for downtown families. Special interest workshops for families such as parenting classes, cooking, literacy initiatives, stained glass mosaics, stenciling, knitting, and scrap booking are part of WCP Night. Additional activities are provided in partnership with organizations such as the Whitehorse Boys & Girls Club Youth Centre, Healthy Families Parent & Tots program, and the Big Brothers & Sisters Association.

Families have been involved in the WCP from the beginning and this has been critical to the success of the program. Door-to-door interviews were conducted in a survey in the fall of 2001 and have resulted in programming reflective of families' input. The initial survey identified the greatest barriers as financial resources, transportation and childcare. WCP continues to draw on families to suggest, develop, access supports, take leadership roles, and to evaluate our success.

### Partnerships:

The RCMP has been a significant partner in the Whole Child Program since its inception. The core funding provided has allowed for a part-time community coordinator (in the first year), an outreach worker to support families, and a recreation coordinator. Since 2001, the RCMP has contributed over \$297,000 to the WCP. Since the second year of operations, the Yukon Department of Education has funded the .7 part-time salary for the community coordinator.

Additional funding has come from the City of Whitehorse, Literacy Action Committee, CPR Yukon, RPAY through Health Canada, the Yukon's Road Not Taken Group, and Yukon's Crime Prevention Victim Services Trust Fund.

The Whole Child Program is constantly seeking volunteers and partnerships. WCP works closely with a wide variety of organizations that support families and has developed partnerships with: Whitehorse Boys & Girls Club Youth Centre, Yukon Family Services, Yukon Healthy Families at the Child Development Centre, Big Brothers & Big Sisters Association, Literacy Action Committee, Canadian Network of Innovative Schools, RCMP Whitehorse Detachment, Yukon Department of Education, BYTE (Bringing Youth Towards Equality), LDAY (Learning Disabilities Association of the Yukon), FASSY (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of the Yukon), Yukon Health & Social Services, Yukon Child Care Services, Champagne Aishihik First Nation, Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation, Salvation Army, Youth Achievement Centre, Yukon Association of Community Living, Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness, City of Whitehorse Parks & Recreation, Recreation & Parks Association of the Yukon, Yukon Mental Health, CATS (Child Abuse Treatment Services), Family Literacy Working Group, Kaushee's Place, Yukon Anti-Poverty Group, Partners for Children, Kiwanis Club, Lake LeBarge Lions' Club, Health Canada, Yukon Road Not Taken Group, Early Intervention Committee, Yukon Victim Services, Yukon Crime Prevention, Yukon Volunteer Bureau, Yukon Arts Centre, and the Yukon Youth Directorate.

### Challenges:

The biggest challenge facing WCP is the amount of time spent seeking funding each year when time could be better spent delivering programs. WCP is presently seeking multi-year federal Crime Prevention funding for a three year term.

### Successes:

The Whole Child Program has been more successful than anticipated with regular attendance between 50 and 76 participants a week. Recognized for its provision of free transportation, no fees for any services or programs, and free childcare, participation in WCP has continued to grow. A van was used for transportation in the first year but use of a full size school bus is now a necessity.

WCP has opened the school to the community. People who might not participate in other recreation programs participate in WCP because they are invited, they feel welcome and they have established supportive relationships with staff and volunteers. Moreover, transportation and childcare are provided, and services, programming, and support are based on the expressed needs of the clients themselves.

In summary, success of the Whole Child Program rests on three key factors:

- ✓ Listening to what the community expresses as their needs,
- ✓ Having dedicated workers and volunteers with strong understanding of issues that go with poverty, and
- ✓ Networking with other agencies and developing partnerships.

### Words of Wisdom:

*Multiple year funding is critical. Always design programs as expressed by the community itself and continue to do so no matter how long your program has been in place. People know what they want or need. Don't do a hard sell! This is all about developing relationships and the more a family is acquainted with you the more likely you will become more aware of what you can do to assist them. So, attending a stained glass mosaic workshop is not just about a night out with the family. It is about creating the informal support networks that are needed by families living in crisis and in poverty.*

### For more information:

Please refer to the independent and very positive evaluation of the Whole Child Program conducted by the *Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family* in the winter of 2004. It is available at: [www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/wes/whole\\_child/documents](http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/wes/whole_child/documents)

Silken Laumann's praise of the Whole Child Program can be found on Silken's Active Kids at: [www.silkensactivekids.com/the\\_inspiration/index.html](http://www.silkensactivekids.com/the_inspiration/index.html)