
Fostering Resilience in Children and Youth in Times of Transition Whitehorse , Yukon

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On May 30, 2008 the Yukon Department of Education hosted a regional dialogue on Resilience as part of The Learning Partnership National Resilience initiative. The event was well attended with 58 participants representing a diverse range of interests in the area of Resilience in Children and Youth. Among the attendees were Government representatives from a variety of Ministries (including a Minister, Deputy Ministers, Assistant Deputy Minister) , practitioners from education, justice, health and social services, NGO's, First Nations Elders, as well as parents and youth. Table groupings were pre-set to ensure that each table was comprised of people with diverse experiences and points of view. In the feedback forms people reported that they appreciated the opportunity to connect with a cross section of service providers, teachers, parents, etc coming together to discuss a topic of shared interest. One participant stated emphatically “we need to do more of this!” Another said “Great to have diversity of people here. We must get beyond our towers and find a diversity of ways to meet needs”

Background/Context for Yukon Resilience Dialogue

The Yukon is currently engaged in a process of Education Reform. Over the past three years the Yukon Government along with the Council of Yukon First Nations and other education partners have been consulting with Yukon citizens to consider changes that the public would like to see incorporated into Yukon Education. The resulting Education Reform document has provided an opportunity for the “evolution of Yukon’s education system in order to assist each student to achieve their personal best and to build healthy and strong communities.”. As part of this strategy a Yukon Youth and Resiliency Committee was created. The committee had chosen to focus on “transitions” and their impact on children and youth. They asked the question “what happens to Yukon children and youth during times of transition, and what is being done to support them during these times?”.

It is within this context that the regional dialogue on Fostering Resilience in Children and Youth in Times of Transition occurred.

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The Objectives of the Resilience Dialogue

The dialogue provided an opportunity for participants to Learn, Reflect and Connect.

Learn: Participants became familiar with the latest research on risk and resilience with an emphasis on risk and resilience in times of transition.

Reflect: Participants appraised the support systems and resources that currently exist in the Yukon (so they could build on successes). They were also encouraged to identify barriers to resilience: attitudes, gaps in services and resources, etc.

Connect: Ultimately, the goal was for educators, government, community agencies, business, parents and youth to have a meaningful conversation that results in commitment to concrete actions that will strengthen the lives of all children and youth.

The Dialogue Design

This daylong dialogue incorporated research on resilience, storytelling –including video testimonials - (Case Studies) that depict the real-life stories of resilient individuals living in the Yukon, and dynamic small and large–group discussions.

Research on Resilience – a Presentation

Dialogue Moderator, Maria LeRose, presented background information about recent research findings on Resilience in Children and Youth. Using the Schonert-Reichl and Unger background papers (as well as other Resilience research) the presentation explored the following:

- Definition of Resilience – Including the Question: What is “A good Outcome?”
- History of Resilience – Emmy Werner and others
- What differences make a difference? – early findings in resilience research about the factors that foster resilience
- The Myth of the “Invulnerable child”
- Resilience as a function of both Individual Capacity and Family/Community/cultural Capacity
- The importance of considering the “interaction” between all of these factors
- What is “risk”?
- The misnomer: “the at-risk child”
- Protective Factors (internal/child assets and external assets)
- Emergent Themes: Hidden Resilience, Resilience as “fit”
- Risk factors as steps along a continuum, Timing of Risk
- Transition – a time of risk or a time of opportunity?
- Expand definition of “Transition” – ie. not only entering school system, Graduation, etc. Transitions also include Death/loss, illness, moving, Child leaving Care, Youth entering/exiting Correction Centers

Participants generated a long list of “times of transition” based on their experiences. Their suggestions included:

- Moving from childhood to adolescence
- Parent diagnosed with mental illness
- Divorce
- Changing roles in family
- Relationships – teen
- First time at anything – never been on airplane; never been away, never been to school
- Change in foster homes
- Changing grades, schools, holidays: lack of routine
- Starting a first job or new job
- Daycare – transient staff and children
- Substitute teacher: transition for both student and teacher
- Youth leave community to come to high school

- Environment change – seasons
- Gay lesbian bisexual queer
- Coming to terms with learning disability

In the feedback forms people expressed appreciation of this exercise because it expanded their perspective on “what is a transition”, and encouraged them to be more aware of these times of transition in children and youth – and to see them as an opportunity to foster resilience (rather than an inevitable “risk”)

- How do we foster resilience? (a brief overview of approaches that foster resilience)
 - Positive Youth Development perspective (a framework)
 - “ABC’s” – Autonomy, Belonging, Competence (ie. ingredients that encourage intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci). This research answers the question: How do you encourage youth to engage in processes, relationships, programs that could foster resilience? How do you find the right “fit”?
 - “Circle of Courage” - Another model used to engage youth & foster resilience – with a First Nation’s focus.
 - Encourage Social and Emotional Learning (5 SEL competencies as identified by www.casel.org). Participants were very interested in knowing more about HOW TO encourage growth in the social and emotional competencies.
- A growing body of research that informs how we can Foster Resilience in Children and Youth
 - Early Child Development (www.earlylearning.ubc)
 - Brain Research
 - Social and Emotional Learning Research
 - “evidence based practice” - Assessment tools re “what works”
- In Summary, Resilience is:
 - The capacity of Individuals to navigate the resources that sustain well-being.
 - The capacity of individual’s environment to provide resources
 - The capacity of individuals, their families and communities to negotiate culturally meaningful ways for resources to be shared.

Videotaped Case Studies- The face of Resilience

Understanding the research on resilience, and applying this information to your work and family/community life is complex. Our objective was to help participants integrate this information in a way that would allow them to reflect on their current attitudes and practices and imagine/plan new strategies that would foster resilience in children and youth. In other words, we wanted them to “get their arms around” the complexities of resilience. To do this we presented two videotaped ‘life stories’ (Case Studies) of women whose lives demonstrated many aspects of resilience in action. These women talked about the adversity they faced in their lives (at different developmental stages) and provided clues about internal assets, and external assets that fostered resilience. These individuals were selected based on the fact that their stories illustrate risks and resilience factors that are common to many young people growing up in the Yukon.

Case Study # 1 - Melissa (a synopsis)

21-year-old Melissa says “my life today is busy I’m working lots at a job that I really enjoy. I am with my boyfriend we’ve been together for about two and a half years now there’s some stability there which is nice. I’m a type 1 diabetic and my health has been really stable now for a while which is nice too. I just bought a new car. I feel like I’m growing up”

Growing up was not easy for Melissa. Hers is a story of adversity, but it is also a story of resilience. As she tells her life story Melissa provides evidence that she possesses many internal assets that helped her deal with challenges and, at times, access support that would help her navigate adverse situations. Some of those assets are: she is good natured, has good problem-solving skills, positive view of self (“people like me”), positive outlook on life (hopeful, future oriented), socially intelligent, asks for help, has a sense of meaning in life, attractiveness, humour, etc.

Melissa encountered adversity in her family life primarily because her parents were unable to provide much stability and support. The eldest of three children, at age 5 Melissa became her mother’s “confidante” when Melissa’s alcoholic father left the family. Her mother suffered from mental illness and relied heavily on a very young Melissa. In retrospect Melissa realizes that this was a huge burden for such a “little person”, but from her perspective the experience “forced me to grow up. And it made me who I am today” (ie. a competent, hard working, responsible young woman). The family moved a lot (to date Melissa has lived in 52 different houses). Melissa recalls that one of the few community supports her family received in the early years was the Jehovah’s Witness church (which her mother joined shortly after her husband left) But, the church also posed risks because in Melissa’s experience the church “really discouraged us to have friends outside of the religion so chances of having another support level are smaller than they would be in other situations”.

The only other constant that Melissa had in her life was an ever-present maternal Grandmother who, to this day, remains a lifeline for Melissa.

When Melissa was 9 years old her mother remarried and Melissa was replaced in her role as co-parent and confidante. One might imagine that this would be a relief, but Melissa remembers it as being devastating. Who was she if she was not her mother’s partner? Fortunately, at the time Melissa had a grade three teacher who “accepted me for who I was in spite of the fact that I had a really bizarre family life”. The kindness of one teacher was the thing that kept Melissa afloat “he made me feel smart and he made me feel normal, which I was not!”.

Melissa had a rocky transition to adolescence. At age 14 her she quit school, she became depressed and made several attempts at suicide. She remembers that there were not many people there for her at this time, but she also admits that even though her Grandmother reached out to her she did not accept her help “because I was “a teenager and I didn’t want anything to do with anybody . I was a grouchy pants”.

When Melissa was diagnosed with Diabetes at age 15, it might have been a blessing in disguise. Hospitalized, Melissa was forced to eat well and take care of herself in a way she had not done for many years. Her mother visited her regularly and her life took on a predictable and comfortable routine. She felt confident and competent as she managed her insulin and diet. However, this window of opportunity for fostering resilience soon passed. She needed sustained support – which she did not get – and eventually she became overwhelmed by this

life long disease. "It was like getting married to a needle at age 15". One wonders if Melissa had been provided support during this time of transition if she could have avoided what was to come next. Months after leaving hospital Melissa was kicked out of her parents' home, got a job in a restaurant and within 5 days of this transition was sexually assaulted by her employer. Alone and desperate she sank into a deep depression. But, she did accept help from her current boyfriend's mother who reached out to support Melissa. This woman took Melissa under her wings and helped her deal with the fallout from her assault. This woman could give Melissa what a professional counselor could not "I saw a professional counsellor and she was helpful to a point. I think that I probably felt better sitting and talking with the mom than I did talking to the counsellor because she knew who I was. I needed a mom".

Shortly after this incident Melissa's grandmother invited Melissa to return to Whitehorse. In the following months her grandmother helped her "clean up her act". Melissa stopped drinking, smoking pot, doing drugs. "She was there with me through all the withdrawal symptoms, and I was a mean person!". Her grandma encouraged her to return to school. The Individual Learning Centre provided Melissa with the combination of flexibility and structure that she needed "I worked my tushy off. The teachers there are so phenomenal. I have nothing but love for those people. I was still going through a really rough time moving up here and dealing with life and they really helped me. Grandma would come in all the time and bring us cookies and everybody there calls her grandma still. That was the environment. It was a family-oriented environment". Melissa is proud to report that she graduated with a 98% average, a fact about which she is very proud. "I've been through some rough times I admit that but you know what? I went through it, I dealt with it and I went back and I kicked it's butt!"

Case Study # 2 - Shandell (a synopsis)

Shandell describes her life today: "I'm happy with the career choice that I made I'm happy with ah the way that my life has moved forward. Just putting into perspective where I've come from and where I think most people would have expected me to be. I think I've surpassed expectations and that makes me feel good."

Shandell's positive outlook on life is obvious even as she talks about early childhood trauma. Shandell was sexually assaulted at age 4. "Most First Nations children and most children are at risk for abuse and so I've overcome that very early in life and you know it continued for a while. I look at how other people have not been able to deal with that. I think that's a source of pride for me that I was able to overcome that." The abuse took place outside of her family, and she attributes her resilience to her family environment. "I always felt safe when I was at home. "Whenever my parents were around I always felt loved and supported and I could tell them anything even though at that point I wasn't able to express what was going on and didn't actually realize what was going on until quite a while after".

But Shandell remembers that when she was 6 years old she abruptly lost the comfort she once enjoyed with her family. It was then that her 13 year old brother died suddenly (asphyxiation related to drug experimentation). "My mom withdrew quite a bit as you can imagine. My family broke down. I actually went to live with my aunt for a little bit and, my older brother ran away from home. So really it was it was all at once."

Shandell was confused about what was going on. “I think what would have helped me is honesty about the situation. Honesty about exactly what happened because my brother passed away under somewhat suspicious circumstances and I knew that at the time. I knew that something had wasn’t right about the way that he passed away and nobody would give me a straight answer about what happened or why my family was breaking up and I think that that would have helped me feel a lot more grounded than I was.”

The one constant in Shandell’s life was her Grandmother, a woman who Shandell admires and emulates. “She’s very strong willed and determined and she is always finding ways to do things that people tell her that she can’t do which pretty much explains explains me”

Future oriented, strong willed, assertive – Shandell has many personal assets that could help her navigate adversity. But, there were times in her life where some of these characteristics were not appreciated. She recounts the time her grade 7 math teacher didn’t like “the way I think about the world. I’m very stubborn and if somebody tells me that I cannot do something I’ll do it. If they tell me that I have to do something I just dig in my heels”. To some this “digging in her heels” may have been perceived as ‘hidden resilience’, but to this teacher it was insolence. Shandell was kicked out of math class for one month. For the entire month she had to sit in the hall outside the classroom during Math. Shandell’s attitude toward school began to sour and she says she ‘opted out of school before she actually walked out the door’. In retrospect she thinks that one of the factors that contributed to her loss of interest in school was the fact that her mother had been in residential school. The fact that my mother was in residential school played a part in her involvement in my education. Her values around education weren’t the same as most people. The fact that she had had a negative experience and wouldn’t come to the school, she wasn’t involved in my education at all. My mom encouraged me to stay home. She would phone the school and make excuses for why I wasn’t there so I could stay home. If I said I didn’t want to go to school then she’d pick up the phone and say hello sorry she’s not coming in.”

Shandell remembers that there was one teacher who was responsible for keeping her engaged in school. “I had a teacher Mrs Webber who was very stern and very strict and a lot of students didn’t like her. She would come up behind you if you weren’t paying attention and pull the back of your hair just to make you sit up and pay attention. I bonded with her. She wouldn’t take any stuff from me no matter how much I would give out. She never kicked me out. What she did was keep me busy. She kept me very busy. She would give me ah really long poems to memorize and that was my job. If I wasn’t going to be taking part in her class I was sitting at the back memorizing a poem. And I’d try and memorize them as quickly as I could so I could do something else and she would always find another one to do. I cooperated with her out of respect and just the fact that I wanted to prove to her that I could do it. That I wasn’t stupid. The sense that I got from Mrs. Webber was that she believed in me.”

In grade 7 Shandell’s family moved from Edmonton to Whitehorse. “you can imagine at age 13 , this was like taking you from metropolitan to the bush and plunking you right in the middle of nowhere. I didn’t have any friends. I didn’t know anybody other than family. I didn’t really feel like I fit in. I felt a lot of – I don’t want to say racism –but you could certainly sense something close to that. The fact that there were all of these sort of preconceived notions about who I was and where I came from and what I was like. That’s when I quit school”. Shandell never returned to the public school system.

Her father was disappointed but he did not respond with anger. He simply stated that she would have to work. “Nobody is going provide you with a living. You have to provide for yourself, and doing that with a grade 7 education isn’t going to be what you think it’s going to be.” In the following years she worked in road construction – making what she considered a good living. But when she was 18 years old something happened that would change her life’s course. It was the dead of winter and she was flagging at the side of the road. Dressed in insulated overalls and extremely uncomfortable she recognized an old classmate as she drove up in a pick up truck.” She had gotten into a civil engineering technology. Well she was driving around in a really nice warm pick up truck, enjoying coffee and ah you know it it looked like a great job. So I asked her how did you uhm how did you get this job. She said that ah she went to NAIT and I thought well that’s where I’m going then. I’m going to go check out NAIT and see how I can get into this program. And now keep in mind I have a grade 7 education so I went there and ah I’m much like my grandmother and much like my father and my mother. If I want something I’ll find a way to get it”. Propelled by the same “stubborn” nature that got her in trouble in elementary school, Shandell attended NAIT and achieved her immediate educational goal. Since that time Shandell has attained a B Ed. through the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program.

Today she works with the Council of Yukon First Nations. As she looks back on her life she realizes that being connected to First Nations Culture might have helped her as she was growing up but, “because my mom was in residential school culture was not valued it was actually oppressed. They were beaten for talking their own language and practicing their own culture and they were taken away from home where culture was. So I never got that. I never I never actually learned about ah the first like Yukon First Nations culture and traditions and what that identity was until I moved back up here in my teens. It was something that actually now that I think about it was quite a challenge and it actually is still a a huge challenge for me. It’s something that I’m not sure how to find a way of completely understanding it and it’s kind of odd.”

Small Group Discussion

The Case Studies provided fodder for small-group table discussions. The groups were encouraged to watch the video stories, then discuss questions such as:

- Would you consider this person to be ‘resilient’? why/why not?
- What transitions did the person go through? Now did they navigate those transitions? What internal assets did they draw on? External assets?
- What opportunities to foster resilience were missed by adults in her life? In what ways did family/school/community/culture foster resilience?
- Did this person demonstrate ‘hidden resilience’? How? How did people around her respond to this behaviour?
- How would your community respond to a child like this today?
- What are the implications for how the community can reduce risk and foster positive development for all children based on this person’s story?
- Opportunities for collaboration to create an environment that fosters resilience i in your community?

The 'active ingredient' of the dialogue was the connections that were made among the diverse group of individuals involved in the conversation. Each brought a unique perspective and range of resources to the table. The buzz in the room during small group discussion (and comments in feedback forms) indicated that the videotaped Case Studies were successful in stimulating rich and focused discussions about Resilience.

Large Group Debrief

After the small group discussions, the Moderator facilitated a large group dialogue that elicited highlights from the small groups and challenged participants to consider the complexities of resilience and risk (rather than have the "same old discussion" about what is good for kids). Participants were encouraged to look at children/youth, families and communities from Strengths-Based perspective rather than simply pointing out what was "broken".

Some of the points raised by table groups:

- Some Relationships were protective, so how do we ensure every kid is connected with adults- we have a responsibility to do that (Minister of Education)
- What could the school system have done differently? Be open about believing in Shandell?
- Assistant deputy Minister of education commented that currently there is a process of school growth planning in the Yukon. She believes this conversation about Resilience is going to contextualize the planning process. We need to get parents into the school and develop the sense that all parents are responsible for all kids. Parents come in to support kids and teachers who don't have it in their own homes. Social responsibility performance standards were used in Vancouver and provides a good roadmap for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Much of what we are doing in classrooms is looking like SEL is more important than straight academic learning. Need for teaching and learning at the SEL level and love, and spiritual aspect is helping kids know where they belong in their community. Work here in the Yukon will really foster this Resilience movement.
- What Risk factors did these Case Studies illustrate?:
 - detached from her traditional culture – [upon return] she sensed racism due to preconceived notions;
 - How do you deal with the kids that don't recognize the strengths in themselves?

Protective factors: Protective factors

- "Not too many people are born with these – context impacts the factors" – "may not be able to teach these protective factors, but we can nurture them"
- Key people – Acceptance for who she was – Teacher made me feel smart; unconditional support;
- Roles important – responsibility empowers them / Aspect of caring for more vulnerable child was protective
- Recognizing own maturity ; ability to make friends ; know what her strengths were (Melissa)
- Maintain optimism
- Knew how to find the people

- Structure in religious community and consequences
- We liked her! Endearing personality [Melissa]

- Both girls had combination of internal qualities and adults. One thing that was consistent was the ability to reflect - to step back and understand. These individuals were very aware at a young age. Problem solvers – each had strength one was stubborn and one was social.
- Note – stubborn need not be a negative thing.

Case Study # 3

The Sundog Carvers – a Youth Perspective on Resilience

In the afternoon the dialogue participants had a unique opportunity to hear about Risk and Resilience from the perspective of a group of young adults who are currently part of a native carving program that is run by Sundog Retreat.

The description of the Sundog Carving Program is like a formula for fostering resilience in youth:

Through funding provided by the Yukon Territorial Government's Department of Justice, Sundog Retreat's carving program has been designed to offer experienced carvers of all ages the opportunity to pursue advanced training, support and mentorship from 'master carvers' in the development and refinement of traditional First Nation artistic skills (e.g. carving and painting). Since 2004, more than fifty young people have participated in traditional First Nation artistic programming offered by Sundog Retreat. The program has been designed to provide each student with approximately 2.5 years of specialized instruction and support in advanced carving and painting, business planning and marketing. All programming is delivered within a milieu of intense social support as most participants typically report a history of "multiple failures" in traditional school, work and social contexts. Recognizing that success in life is typically multi-factorial and related to a complexity of interacting competencies and social and emotional factors, the program attempts to combine artistic training with adaptive lifeskills/wellness programming to support its 10 participants in expanding their capacities for self-sufficiency and improved quality of life.

Many of the young people who have taken part in this native carving (and lifestyle) program report that their lives have "turned around". They stay out of jail, drink less, and focus their lives on being productive and creative.

We invited a group of Sundog Carvers to attend the Yukon Dialogue on Resilience to share their experiences and, specifically, reflect on those things that fostered resilience.

The Moderator (Maria LeRose) and Project Coordinator (Linda Lamers) met with the group several times prior to the Dialogue to establish trust and to ensure that there was a clear understanding about the format and purpose of the Dialogue and, in particular, their role in it. Five artists volunteered to take part (4 men, 1 woman). The conversation was facilitated by Maria. Her questions were meant to elicit insight into what can be learned about fostering resilience from these young people? What people, events, things helped them navigate

adversity in their lives (at different developmental stages?). What were barriers to resilience? And, today, what impact is Sundog having on their lives?

The initial conversation was followed by questions from the Dialogue Participants.

Some highlights from the conversation with the Sundog Carvers

Why are you here?

- Want to see a difference in the education system
- First time anyone has asked me and I have something to say
- Passionate about education reform
- Concerned about education

Do any of you think you are resilient?

[Ben] Yes. It wasn't fair, they didn't give me a chance. They didn't think I was smart and labeled me. I couldn't learn since I was a little kid until I came up here at high school. I didn't learn anything and no-one took the time to teach me anything. In Grade 4 I didn't "get it" for a couple of weeks and so they sit me with a teacher who treated me like I was dumb – I felt humiliated.

What did you want?

I wanted to learn, just like the other kids

(Ben was removed from the regular class and put into a "special class") Was this a turning point?

Yes, people frowned upon me since that day – the next year I was put into a special ed class. I had no reason to be there. I was smarter than the other kids. I wanted harder stuff but they said it was 'too advanced for you'. I'm in grade 6 and this is grade 1 math. I wasn't very talkative and so they thought I was retarded.

Angel: Alternative school was wonderful. Teachers went by their first names; the relationship shifted from dominating me to wanting me to learn. It was smaller and they were able to identify that I was an accelerated student. They challenge me as an individual; tweaking the material so I wasn't bored.

It changed my life. I was a delinquent student; not showing up, doing drugs, lighting things on fire. Alternative school allowed me a lot of freedom socially. Teachers were also administration so they made choices around my education based on me. They were accountable to the students and each other and not a board and so I got more rope. Even though I didn't graduate, it saved my life.

Brian: When I was younger, I spend 10 years in a group home. It was hard. I struggled for 10 years – it was another day, another place to go. Then I was adopted by my aunty and went to school more and worked harder. Family gave me the support that I really needed to go to school. They said 'good work' and so I got the support that I needed and felt better. Quickly, I was getting awards for attendance.

Duran: I was in group homes most of my life. When I returned to Whitehorse (age 18 yrs) everything had changed. My friends in school had turned to drugs and alcohol. I was an outcast – didn't fit in as I was not into drugs and alcohol. I got support from elders and older people I used to hang out with. It was a different mature environment where nobody drank or did drugs. I walked away from bad peers.

Was there any one special in all your years at school?

Yes, teachers sometimes – help out, listens, supports. Role models were all uncles -all artists. They got me started as an artist. I watched them draw and sketch and make the final pieces and sell them for lots of money. I always dreamed about doing it and now I am.

Duran: Being labeled “at risk” felt bad. Good – teachers should encourage students to follow their dreams whatever they may be. When I was a kid I was always drawing in my books – I am now living that dream.

Joseph: no good things to say about school. Dropped out at 16 yrs. Grew up traveling around. After I dropped out and traveled around and experienced life, I started doing First Nation ceremony with my family and learnt more about culture which I didn't get in school. Gave me more of a perspective to look at the world – more happy, whole human being instead of feeling like something's missing. Just had tests in school.

“So many kids have someone that recognizes them – but there is always a maverick that crushed and moulded you – that would go out of their way to make you miserable. You know this guy”.

Anyone on your side?

- elders

Duran, how did you know to go to elders? Duran went to grandparents and their friends. Didn't give up – he had a will to do better than others and didn't want to do what others did.

What about community?

- one teacher helped me out when not many teachers did . He told me I could do it – go the distance

What is “success”?

- Being happy with yourself;
- hard work, determination, the will to go on;
- remembering the person who you are, someone who did a good thing;
- you don't fit in the box- being able to function out of and find a way to navigate the system when it doesn't work for you; not succumbing to fears – caught up against the wall – drop out of school got to figure it out – be creative, imaginative and don't let people stick you up in a corner.
- The will to go on.

What difference does Sundog make in your lives?

- Before I went I had no idea I could carve. Now 1 yr later I am doing it – I wouldn't have believed you before. It's a sense of accomplishment
- Makes you feel proud- puts a smile on your face: I made that – no one helped. I can learn whatever I want to learn. I want to learn spanish and go to Mexico

- They teach you everything: step 1 to re-do step 1 until you get there. Don't do it once – again and again. It helped they are there. If you fall the first time, practice and patience before you walk. I can make something – I can make my name respectful and stronger.
- The structure. It's a practical example of anarchy at work. It's self organizing; there's a lack of policy that stresses out the people in charge but enables the students to self organize – hand held through everything-thrown into environment – need to learn at your own rate on your own to succeed. No test deadline – take your time. Why stay? Everyone learns at a different rate and different style. This is hands on – spoon fed information is useless. Here's a block of wood – go. I was used to structure and stick and chalkboard and deadlines – most of people do so much better – check up routinely and someone be there to check in. hands on learning is better.
- Teaching younger people – Initially, it was a challenge as the group homes learnt – had my hand held. If I needed something it was given. When I left social services /when I went out on my own, I was stuck for a few years with little jobs. Then I came to sun dog and learnt to be disciplined in the right way. Took a process. I had to change from one thinking to another. There are second chances – a lot of chances. Which is good, gives you a chance to rejuvenate yourself - bring yourself back to terms of success. If you mess up you get another chance to repeat. Repeats, they want to see you do your best. It's not about art and work – it's about seeing people succeed. They care about our success.

Does Sundog keep you out of jail?

- Yes. Keeps you busy all week. You friends are there and you don't think about drugs and alcohol. We go fishing. Ask friends to go camping. Clear look on the straight road – the road of sobriety and success.
- [Angel On behalf of Jason] – Jason can't be here today because he is meeting with his probation officer. Sundog kept him out of jail. He was going through a trial process when he joined. Having the program to occupy him, keep him off drugs and alcohol. It was something to show the courts he was excelling. The owners were advocating for him. He has turned out to be an excellent artist. He's not going to jail. He has a curfew and a slap on the wrists. He shows up all the time. He's really into the carving.
- I found a new addiction (carving). I don't do drugs anymore. After a while it was withdrawal, shakes, annoyance, and acceptance.

You're like a family?

- yes, we joke around, have fun, tease and pick on each other
- I have just started – people come and go. one thing is that nobody's competing against each other. Something to share- other sorts of traditions would be good e.g. traditional healings, basket weaving.
- Students are now the teachers.

The Grand opening of the new Sundog Carving studio was immediately following the Resilience dialogue

What do you want people to know about the Grand Opening?
Bring money!

Final Reflections

Following the Break some of the Sundog Carvers joined the small groups and together they did an activity called “Think-u-bator”. Each person had an opportunity to express a question, concern, challenge they face in their work/family/community lives (related to the discussion of Risk and Resilience), and table mates responded with their suggestions re. solutions. They shared information about resources, strategies, programs, etc

Then the large group came back for final reflections from the day. Following are a few of the final reflections:

Insights? Anything going to be different?

- I was struck by the model of ABC’s and then the generosity circle – The Sundog panel described each of them as they talked about what has helped them in their lives!
- I would like to express support in the diversity of people here today including education and justice. There is not enough of this in the Yukon –it’s obvious, but we are not connecting the dots.
- Maria asked “What’s difference did today make?” Finally a physical space to connect – the way we respond to this resource is greater.
- Impact of relationships can be good and bad on young peoples’ development – we know it and it sounds so simple but the school really is powerful!
- Working in the school system focused on academics – teachers are told they have to teach to the curriculum. We should be developing social skills. The system works against itself – I hope that forums like this make us all aware what this change is – individually and collectively if we have the vision – we need SEL before we can do anything. A child is unavailable for learning if there are external things going on – we have to not forget them – they are important.
- Parents also need to make SEL a priority. Parents feel the pressure to focus on Academics. They know Math is needed to get into best school.
- Finland is a model worth building on.

Assistant Deputy Ministry of Education: Today has been an unusual conversation that has surfaced stories of suffering and that can be uncomfortable – but this kind of disequilibrium can stimulate learning and change. We need to continue these conversations. Lots can be done better These conversations are important even if not easy. Many people truly engaged ALL day- Minister of education attending.

Deputy ministers attended speaks to the commitment from education.

Closing prayer.

Participant Feedback

According to the participant feedback forms, the dialogue on Resilience started a valuable conversation that many wish to continue:

“We need to get back to the issue of resilience again (and again!)”

“Social Services and Education need to continue to develop these working relationships”

“The dialogue reinforced what I believe to be important. I look forward to a larger gathering of YOUTH on the same topic”

For some people, this preliminary conversation about Resilience created an appetite for training in / exposure to specific strategies that foster resilience:

“I would like more discussion/information about possible changes (ie. things that can be done to help children)”

“Bring more resiliency based training”

“We know a lot about resilience, now we need to talk about what we can do together to increase opportunities for youth.”

Many participants reported that the connections and new understandings they gained in this dialogue would help them in the future:

“(the dialogue) has provided me with alternative methods to approach difficulties and a new way to conceptualize what constitutes “risk” and how creative solutions can be”

“General understanding and new perspective on children and difficulties encountered. Interactivity of all aspects of life and how those elements affect life.”

“I made some new contacts. It helped reinforce the reality that I am not all alone in terms of trying to make/facilitate positive change for youth.”

“Has reinvigorated my determination to do more study on resiliency to find the “low hanging fruit” and how it might be applied in the Yukon”

“I can bring this information back to share at my school and hopefully increase connections. Make sure I seen these connections”

“I will draw on Sundog Carvers as resources in many ways. Everyone has a story and learning to pass on”.

One youth participant said the new connections and understandings will help her “to finish my goal!!”

And for some, it was validation for a “Resiliency-based” approach they have taken throughout their lives:

“This has been totally validating for me. This is how I have taught for 35 years”

“This was a reminder of what I now in my heart as an educator. I often feel stressed about not “being good enough” academically but my passion is social/emotional growth and I know it is important. I feel inspired and empowered to continue to educate”