



Clippings From the Stardale Women's Group

Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation

Non- Profit #: 212663

Registered Charity #:894942622RR0001

P.O Box 1752 Melfort, Sask. S0E 1A0

Phone: (306) 752-1802

6159 Bow Wood Dr. N.W. Calgary, Alta. T3B 2G1

E- Mail: stardale@telus.net

Website: www.nald.ca/stardale

Contact Person: Helen McPhaden Project Director

“Breaking the cycles by creating the circles”- our motto



The Alberta Seventh Step Society

1820 - 27 Avenue S.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2T 1H1 • Telephone (403) 228-7778 • Fax (403) 228-7773
Toll Free (Canada Only): 1-888-996-7778 • E-mail: info@albertaseventhstep.com

April 5, 2006

Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative
Justice Domain

Re: Letter of support
Project funding proposal
Stardale Women's Group, Inc. Foundation

To whom it may concern:

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I have the opportunity to offer this letter of support for the special funding request to be submitted to the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative. Stardale Project Director, Helen McPhaden, has related her ideas to me in detail, and frankly, I can think of few endeavors that would be more worthwhile.

While my current position finds me working with adult male offenders, the bulk of my professional experience has been in direct service to young people. From 1987 to 2004 my focus had been with at risk/high needs, disenfranchised adolescents in residential, clinical, and correctional settings. I certainly agree that Aboriginal young women, in particular, have been and continue to be marginalized by the community at large. This is an unfortunate issue that will not improve unless a concentrated effort is exercised to address concerns. It is my opinion that the legal education research the Stardale Foundation is suggesting will be an excellent start toward meaningful change in the lives of these young people.

I sincerely hope you will consider Ms. McPhaden's request for project funding and I wish the best in her endeavors. Please feel free to contact me directly should you have any further questions.

Yours truly,

Bob Alexander. BSW, RSW
Acting Executive Director
The Alberta Seventh Step Society



NATIVE COUNSELLING SERVICES OF ALBERTA

February 27, 2006

Alberta Law Foundation
300-407 8 Ave SW
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 1E5

Attention: David Aucoin

Re: Letter of Support for the Stardale Women's Group Proposed Research Project

Native Counseling Services of Alberta, Calgary office has had the opportunity to meet with Helen P.A. McPhaden to discuss the above project and understand the importance of it.

Through this letter, we are pleased to have an opportunity to convey our support for the above project.

We see this project not only helping Aboriginal women but all Aboriginal people. To take the criminal code of Canada and make it user-friendly would benefit all.

The Aboriginal community in Calgary is comprised of very knowledgeable, compassionate members who are willing to share their expertise and are willing to share take the time to make an endeavor, such as this, a milestone that the whole community can benefit from.

I support this valuable initiative.

Sincerely,

Colin Campbell
Regional Supervisor



TSUU T'INA NATION/STONEY CORRECTIONS SOCIETY

Box 70, 3700 Anderson Road S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2W 3C4

Telephone (403) 238-5649, Fax (403) 238-5864

March 1, 2006

Alberta Law Foundation

#300-407-8thave SW
Calgary, Alberta
T2P1E5

To: whom it may concern

This is a letter of support for the grant application for the Stardale Women's Group. Tsuu Tina Nation Stoney Corrections Staff have had the chance to meet with Helen Mcphaden in regards to issues faced by young aboriginal females. The importance of looking at the female aboriginal population involvement with the current legal system would be beneficial. The information of gathered could enhance the current services in which young aboriginal females utilize, for example; the measures of poverty and education.

Through looking at the issues at hand and then looking at positive changes to deal with the overrepresentation of aboriginal females with the current Justice system would be the ultimate goal.

The following information that is gathered would assist other resources in looking at the issues to be address through the following:

1. The needs to address enhancement within the current services that aboriginal females deal with on a daily basis.
2. Overall improve rehaolitation to address the issues surrounding the aboriginal female involved with the current legal system
3. The ultimate goal of the project should be to prevent future involvement with aboriginal females in the justice system.

Sincerely,

Monica Onespot

Tsuu Tina Nation Stoney Corrections Society

Stardale Women's Group offers education, support



By Carol Pollock
OF THE JOURNAL

Displayed in the main office of the Stardale Women's Group are many pieces of original artwork.

The clay objects are more than art, however. Each represents a critical stage in the life of its creator.

It's here in the McLeod Avenue East offices that you'll find women of poverty working to better their individual situations.

Helen McPherson, co-ordinator of the program, says the Stardale Women's Group grew out of another group she worked with.

McPherson has done a needs assessment on which to base the programming offered by Stardale. She interviewed twenty-five women of poverty (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and spoke with many area businesses and organizations.

Armed with the results, McPherson has worked with others to de-

velop a plan of action for the Stardale Women's Group.

Their main focus is to attempt to break the cycle of poverty, the cycle of abuse.

"I'm so proud of these women," says McPherson, as she looks around the group of about a dozen who are turning up each day to work on changing their lifestyle and their outlook on life in general.

"Poverty, literacy and abuse all go hand-in-hand. That's what has been clearly identified," says McPherson.

The women themselves point out that the Stardale program included such areas of interest as anger management, how to break cycles of abuse, sessions on raising self-esteem and dealing with behaviour and feelings, addictions counselling, problem solving, and more.

The artwork mentioned at the beginning of this article is, in fact, a venture into healing. The women reveal much of themselves as they

build clay heads and scenes depicting their home life.

Donna, a student in the program says she's there to build a high self-esteem.

"I'm learning not to be a demand for anybody anymore. I'm a trying to get a better education when I go out into the world. It's not so hard. I am learning I can do it with problems."

Eileen is also attending sessions to build self-esteem. She's also very interested in taking the daycare training that being incorporated into the Stardale program.

Maxine is one of the newer participants and she says she's come out "to better myself, to be able to take control of my life. I'm learning a lot about myself. It's scary, but it's helping me."

Stardale is not working alone. The group has formed partnerships with the Aboriginal Women Council of Saskatchewan and a Please see STARDALE/ Page 1

(Continued from Page 1)

such organizations as James Smill Cree Nation, New Careers, the Human Resources Centre, Cumberland Regional College, Pasqua Health District, Northeast Regional Victim Services, and the Porcupine Opportunities Program.

Says McPherson, "There has been recognition that there are lots of things that keep women in poverty including health, socio-economic status, cultural differences, education, and even transportation in the rural setting. It all overlaps."

McPherson adds, "A lot of good people are willing to work with us to help women have a better life."

Preparing for the future — Each day at the Stardale Women's Group the emphasis is on preparing for the future. Under the guidance of Helen McPherson, the women learn life skills which will help them to improve their daily lives. Education, they believe, is the way to take control of their lives.

End cycles of poverty and abuse

By Peggy Todd

Women living in poverty in the northeast are being provided with an opportunity to make a positive change in their lives through a unique program available through the Stardale Women's Group.

The Stardale Women's Group, comprised of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women from Melville, Star City, Tisdale, Kinistin and Mes Smith, is still considered to be in its infancy but has already made a positive impact on the lives of those involved in the group.

"The Stardale Women's Group came out of a group of women that were past students that I had been an instructor of," explained facilitator Helen McPhaden.

Originally from the Ridgedale area, McPhaden is a social worker, a skills facilitator and is trained in co-dependency. She operated her own modelling agency in Calgary for ten years, remaining actively involved as a social worker at the same time. It was after she was involved in conducting a seminar for young Aboriginal women that McPhaden's interest in working with women of poverty began.

After being involved in two violent relationships herself, McPhaden returned to Saskatchewan where she immediately set about trying to bring the same knowledge and opportunities to women in the northeast that she had been successful in bringing to their Albertan counterparts. Her credibility comes in the form of both her educational background and her personal experiences, many of which are similar to those her students have gone through.

Through the Stardale Women's Group, McPhaden is destroying the myths surrounding women of poverty and, in doing so, is making progress in breaking the cycle of poverty, violence and abuse and the very self-esteem, worthlessness, and dependency that accompany it.

Of the 25 women that McPhaden interviewed for the Needs Assessment she based the Stardale Women's Group program on, 19 suffered abuse. "That's high, high odds. Some women are victims of abuse I don't even realize it. If it's verbal abuse over and over, you don't even know it."

"In some cases, they are the product of their environment. They witness the violence they have been a product of."

McPhaden's aim is to empower women involved in the Stardale Women's Group so that their children will not fall into the same cycle. "I call it a subculture. You know how to live. You've got people first, second, third generation to live it."

In partnership with a cross section of different agencies and organizations, McPhaden developed a formal plan of attack for the Stardale Women's Group. The partnerships were achieved over a period from February to September 1997.

Though McPhaden had hoped to have a program available by the fall of 1997, potential funding sources had not been confirmed at that time. Human Resources would never fund anything or get involved unless we used Employment Insurance but the people we were talking about rarely ever work. If they

they provided the funding necessary for McPhaden to conduct research through the Needs Assessment, the first stage of project development for the Stardale group. Her findings provided the information necessary to move to the second stage - the development and offering of a program.

The program McPhaden now offers involves lifeskills and literacy training. "People in poverty have high levels of illiteracy and if you've been abused, even higher."

The rate of illiteracy among the 25 women interviewed for the Needs Assessment was high, a fact McPhaden blames on several different factors. The genetic makeup of the women and the effect behaviour their parents were involved in, such as smoking and drinking during pregnancy, had on their early development are factors. Poor nutrition and lifestyle also play a role.

In many cases, the women have already subjected their own children to the same circumstances. The program McPhaden developed is targeted at helping the women become literate, self-sufficient, and employable and thereby, destroying the chances that their children will continue the cycle.

The lifeskills component of the program is essential to bringing an end to the cycle. It is through lifeskills, that the women work on achieving their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being, recognize co-dependency in their lives, and identify different areas of abuse and harmful behaviour. They also learn different methods of communication, feedback, problem solving skills and anger management.

Taking that information back and applying it to the lives they lead outside the classroom is one of the most challenging aspects of the program for the women however, it is also the most rewarding. It is through the application of their newfound knowledge and skills that the women accomplish one of their primary goals.

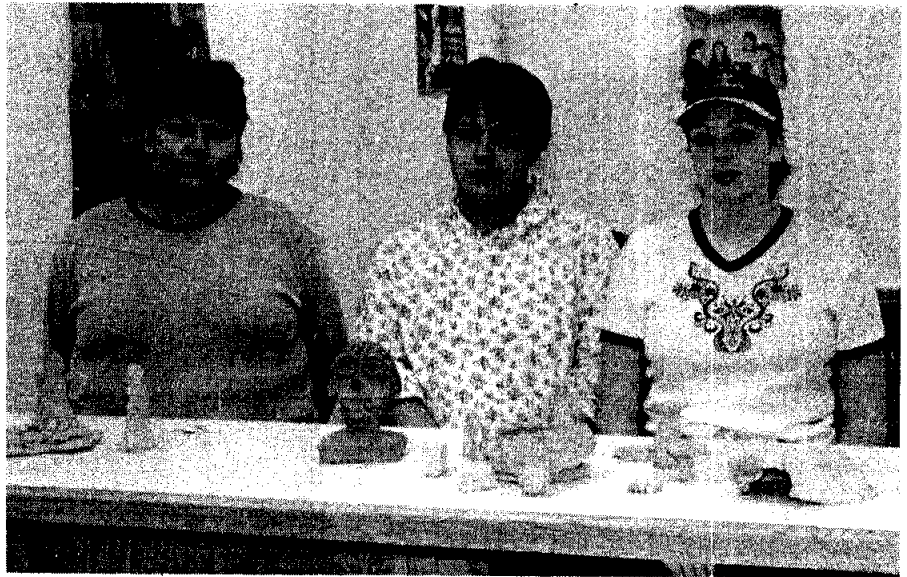
"One of the key things we have to do here is to empower and educate and get out of the denial and recognize these behaviour traits. You have a choice and you know that you can get strong."

"The women recognize that in their lives changes have to be made so they always have to be practising these skills," McPhaden continued.

"There are so many different exercises. They're always re-evaluating and assessing themselves and getting feedback. They know in a lot of cases that they may have to move out of a relationship. They're getting their spouses to work through it with them."

Through the Needs Assessment, McPhaden also determined daycare or childcare was a significant concern among the women interviewed and was also an area many expressed interest in pursuing a career in. The first program available through the Stardale Women's Group, which began in January in 1998, offers certified daycare training in addition to lifeskills and literacy training.

By relating the career training directly to an area identified through the Needs Assessment, McPhaden believes funding for the program is being more efficiently utilized. "In



(L-R) Melissa Sanderson, Juanita Stonestand, and Jolene Richardson of the Stardale Women's Group display some of the clay work completed by the group. The clay faces were designed to represent the women's soul while the other clay work was designed as expressions of the vessels representing the abuse and co-dependency the women have experienced in their lives. A variety of the artwork completed by the women will be on display at the Doghide River Festival.

to place all of the 12 women involved in the current program, which will conclude in July, in daycare related jobs. She also intends to offer different programs beginning later this spring and in the fall.

At the midway point in the first program, McPhaden has already witnessed positive transformation among all of the women involved. The same women who came into the classroom in January, shy and uncomfortable around others, are now openly expressing themselves,

sharing their thoughts and feelings, and exhibiting confidence.

"These women want to speak out more publicly. They feel the public does not know enough about violence and abuse. It's been paid lip service to and that's as far as it's gotten."

The program is making a positive impact on their lives and, just as important, on the lives of their families. "It has made a difference in their interaction with their children, their conflict resolution within the family, better relation-

ships with their spouses, knowing their spouse has to go get help at encouraging them, understanding gossip and harmful behaviour, knowing who you can trust, and boundaries," McPhaden stated.

"They're seeing who they are for the first time. Some of them sort of knew, some of them have just seen. They look at their whole family history and (recognize) multigenerational co-dependency," she added. "I'm really proud of the women. They work very hard."

Needs assessment basis of Stardale Women's Group

By Peggy Todd

This article is the second in a series of articles profiling the Stardale Women's Group.

With funding from Human Resources Development Canada and the Saskatchewan New Careers Corporation, social worker Helen McPhaden researched a needs assessment that provided the basis for the formation of the Stardale Women's Group.

The objective of the group, which targets women of poverty, is to break the existing cycles of poverty, violence and abuse in their lives and empower the women. McPhaden facilitates the group which officially began its first program in January.

The needs assessment was the first step in a project McPhaden and several partner groups envisioned to tackle the challenges of employment and education facing women living in the northeast. Through her research, McPhaden interviewed 25 women living in poverty and 16 community representatives over a two month period. All of the partners involved in the project recognized alternative approaches to employment and education were required in order to successfully integrate the focus group into the mainstream.

The women interviewed for the needs assessment ranged in age from 18 to 45 years and represented several different communities in the northeast. They all were considered to be living in poverty with an income of less than \$16,000 per year.

McPhaden's needs assessment determined a definite link between poverty and violence and found that together, the combination served as a deterrent for advancing educational and employment opportunities for the focus group. Generational cycles of continual reliance on social assistance, rather than education and employment, combined with instability in both personal and family relationships to produce a "sub-culture" that functions within society.

Age-old patterns of keeping people on social assistance and placing them on training programs that did not address personal interests or skills were identified as part of the problem. The women interviewed for the assessment expressed interest in education and employment opportunities however, previous experiences with both were considered failures as they did not meet the expectations or result in producing employment opportuni-

ties. According to McPhaden's research, part of the blame for the failure of past programs is related to a lack of human resource development or lifeskills.

One of the key findings of McPhaden's research was the need for the development of innovative ways to respond to education and employment opportunities which celebrate strengths rather than magnifying weaknesses. McPhaden identified a bridging program as the key determinant to producing any changes within the current life patterns of the focus group.

The bridging program is a successful employment program that takes marginalized women through a variety of phases, which include self-exploration, experiential learning, education and employment.

Through the program, all areas of study work together to change the focus group's perception of themselves to that of individuals who can and do want to learn. It also addresses the barriers the focus group identified as deterrents to their participation in education or employment training.

These barriers were threefold, according to McPhaden's research. They included situational barriers like childcare, domestic responsibilities, lack of money, and lack of academic prerequisites; dispositional barriers associated with self-concept and self-esteem; and institutional barriers related to the availability of employment and career counselling, course availability and scheduling. Other barriers were also identified and included life crisis; discrimination, particularly among Aboriginal women who were subject to both racial and gender discrimination;

and childcare.

McPhaden's research concluded that through development and initiation of a bridging program that would focus on addressing the barriers identified, the focus group would achieve greater self-sufficiency and become contributing members of society. The model McPhaden referred to would address development of enhanced decision-making skills, problem solving, goal setting, support from other women, examination of careers, job search techniques, mentoring and support services addressing childcare, transportation, training allowance, and access to counselling services.

In conclusion, McPhaden's research determined several general principles that must underlie any detailed action plan for women in

poverty. First, the action taken must take into consideration the whole person, family or community. Second, it must promote links and networking between individuals living in and groups experiencing poverty. Finally, long-term funding must be provided to support any action plan.

McPhaden's needs assessment has formed the basis for the development and operation of the Stardale Women's Group. Currently, twelve women representing a variety of communities in the northeast and a wide range of age groups are involved in the first program being offered by the Stardale Women's Group. A second program, Collective Kitchens, is expected to begin in May. McPhaden plans to offer a third program in the fall.

FACTS

Through the course of her research, McPhaden uncovered several interesting and revealing facts about women living in poverty in northeastern Saskatchewan.

- * Saskatchewan women have the longest life expectancy in Canada at 81.7 years.
- * older women are more likely to live in poverty and use social programs than their male counterparts.
- * nearly 40 percent of wives in market poor families are excluded from the labor force due to family responsibilities.
- * women living in poverty are twice as likely to be battered.
- * 51 percent of all women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual abuse since age 16.
- * one-third of battered women reported they had to take time off everyday activities, such as work, due to abuse.
- * the direct costs of violence to women come in the form of prescription drugs, dental work, transportation to appointments, counselling and home repair.
- * many women in abusive relationships have education and skills but psychological and physical trauma they have experienced may impair their ability to get and/or keep a job.
- * a lack of economic independence is one of the main causes women cite for remaining in violent situations.

Individual empowerment goal of Stardale Women's Group

Apr. 29/98

This article is the third in a series on the Stardale Women's Group in Melfort.

Though their backgrounds are all very different, the women involved in the Stardale Women's Group share one common purpose - individual empowerment.

The women of Stardale have found support and a new strength through their involvement in the group. Midway through the seven month program, they shared their thoughts on the benefits of the group.

Jolene, 20, suffers from mental depression and obsessive/compulsive disorder. Her battle with these illnesses has taken a toll on her health, her self-esteem, her ability to obtain an education and to work. She became involved in the Stardale Women's Group after being contacted by group facilitator, Helen McPhaden.

"I was really looking forward to it because as the result of my depression, I've had a hard time staying at something. When I have had really bad days, I couldn't face everyone but with these guys. I know everybody understands. They've all been through it too. I feel good being around them," she said.

Jolene has fought with depression her entire life. She has spent a lot of time in and out of the hospital over the years, taking her away from school and making it difficult to develop any type of routine in her life.

"If something ever went wrong, I crawled back into bed and wouldn't face anybody. Now I've got to do it," she said. "I'm hoping I've learned to deal with my depression better through this and that I can deal with it better to handle myself out in the world."

Halfway through the program, Jolene is already seeing a positive change in herself. She now recognizes many aspects of her own personality, both good and bad, that she previously chose not to face. She has also learned how to deal with other people.

"I used to let everything get to me which put me down even further

and made me the way I am. Now I'm starting to understand how to work things to my advantage instead of my disadvantage."

Jolene is currently working on obtaining her Grade 12 and hopes to continue to further her education through post-secondary study. She has been actively involved with working with horses and is also taking classes in that area.

Jolene credits the Stardale program with helping her get back on her feet and believes other women could benefit from the program. "I think there should be opportunities like this for other women out there who have problems that have kept them from the workplace," she remarked.

Through the group she now realizes she was the victim of mental and emotional abuse though she was unaware of it at the time. "I think there are a lot of people out there who don't know that and I think that things like this are what's going to help people. I wish everyone would understand."

A desire for something more out of life brought Melissa, 25, to the Stardale Women's Group.

Previously acquainted with McPhaden through a lifeskills program she had taken from her before, Melissa was looking for something more when she joined Stardale in January. "That (first) six weeks wasn't long enough. This one is 14 weeks (of lifeskills) and it's helped a lot and I really enjoy it."

Melissa came to Stardale for a number of reasons. "To better myself, for higher self-esteem, and just to get educated," she explained, adding her present level of education is Grade Nine.

Several circumstances brought Melissa to Stardale. She has been married since she was 16 years old and is raising a family. Looking back, she now understands that she grew up with co-dependency and neglect, both of which had a negative effect on her self-esteem. That has all changed since she arrived at Stardale.

"I think I've come a long way," she stated. "I know I can do it and

I know I can finish this and I can go out and live for myself and my family."

With the support of her family, Melissa is working on achieving her GED. After completing the Stardale program, she intends to continue her education in the field of Early Childhood Development or seek employment in the field of daycare.

Juanita, 26, does not want to see her own children follow the same path in life that she did. She came to the Stardale Women's Group determined to break the cycle.

"Growing up with my family, now that I've been in this course, I see that they were very dysfunctional," she commented.

Juanita had her first child when she was 13 and was married three years later. Her family now includes six children.

"What I'm learning from this course is not only to better myself, it's to help break the cycle so my kids don't have to go through the same."

Initially interested in the lifeskills portion of the program, Juanita was very pleased to learn the certified daycare worker training and literacy were also components of the program.

Juanita admits she was scared when she first entered the classroom on January 26th but the change she has seen in herself and her childrer has kept her coming back. "I've learned how to express my feelings and to say no to people. I basically became a doormat and now people know they can't walk all over me. I'm a real person and my feelings count just like everybody else's."

Taking the knowledge she has gained home has made a difference in her entire family, according to Juanita. "The kids are really learning a lot. We've learned about harmful behaviour, co-dependency and anger management," she explained, adding her family still has a lot to learn but they are all willing to put in the effort so they can all benefit.

Juanita already has her GED. Through the Stardale program she is taking Accounting 10 in addition to daycare training. If she is unable to find employment in the daycare field, she intends to further her education in the field of business administration.

"It took a lot for me to get here and it's really helping. I wish a lot of other women would have this opportunity," she concluded.

All three women agree one of the key ingredients of the program's success is the support system that develops through shared experiences. They also believe the network of support they have developed will continue to flourish long after the program ends.

"One of the problems with me is the other people out there who don't understand," Jolene stated. "I think there needs to be more (opportunities) to talk about things so people can understand what it is like to live with co-dependency and abuse... We've gone through everything and until you've gone through it, you don't know."

Being in a group with people that have shared many of the same experiences has also made it easier for all of the women to share their experiences and feelings, learn and grow. "You don't feel alone and it's okay to talk about it," Juanita summarized. "They've all been through it."

Stardale Group

This article is the fourth in a series on the Stardale Women's Group
By Peggy Todd

For Tamara, Iona, and Maxine, the Stardale Women's Group has begun a healing process that has been long overdue in their lives. They feel fortunate to have been given the opportunity to mend themselves.

At 19-years-old, Tamara has spent the past five years struggling with a drug addiction and trying to get back on her feet. She came to Stardale in an effort to achieve a higher level of education and gain a better understanding of herself and what she has been through.

Tamara is one of few women of Stardale that has her Grade 12 education. The certified daycare worker program is a field she has been interested in pursuing a post-secondary education in therefore, coming to the group was never a difficult decision.

Halfway through the program, Tamara has already felt the benefits that the Stardale group has had on her life. "I have a better understanding of my background, why I did some of the things I did with drugs, how I got into all that, and why I got out of it," she remarked. "I grew up in a really good family...It was just part of me, I guess, peer pressure, growing up, wanting to try something different."

On the road to recovery, Tamara is also well on her way to achieving a higher self-esteem, one of her long-term goals. She also hopes to become independent, self-reliant and self-supportive.

In addition to the changes in herself, Tamara has also noticed the positive impact the Stardale Women's Group has had on her personal life and relationships with both her family and her fiancée. "I share the information. They know that it's helping me and if they don't want to take in what I have to say they don't have to but I know that it's helped me."

After three years of employment as a janitor, a sudden and unexpected job loss left Iona with very little self-esteem. The evasive excuses she was given for her job loss failed to improve the situation.

"I was really hurt about it," the 38-year-old mother stated. "My self-esteem just went right down. Everything was haywire. I was having problems with my bills, trying to keep up. I was really down."

Iona stumbled upon the Stardale Women's Group at an opportune time in her life. She knew she needed to make a concrete effort to improve her own situation. Stardale provided her with that opportunity.

"I had to try and get my self-esteem boosted up. It was really affecting my family."

The results of her involvement with the women's group have reached far beyond Iona's expectations to date. In the few months she has been involved with the program, her self-esteem has returned and surpassed the level it was at even before she lost her job.

"I've learned a lot about myself and it's really helped a lot. I didn't know who I was and now I have more respect for myself and I love

"It gives me confidence in myself that there are things that will happen in your life that are meant to be and our paths are put a certain way, God's way."

After Iona completes the certified daycare worker program, she intends to further her education in the youth care worker program. She believes there are many opportunities for her to make an impact on someone else's life through working with pregnant teens, high risk children, or mentally disturbed youth.

For Maxine, the Stardale Women's Group has been a lifesaver.

The 29-year-old mother found the program just days before it began through her social worker. Though she admits her initial commitment to the program wasn't there day to day, it has since become the driving force in her efforts to turn her life around.

Maxine joined Stardale at the lowest point in her life. "I'd just lost my father and I was still grieving over that and I tried to commit suicide the week before," she explained.

Though beyond its name, Maxine knew relatively little about the program, she jumped at the opportunity to escape her situation. After speaking with program facilitator Helen McPhaden, she realized the program had a lot to offer her.

"I took lifeskills before and the lifeskills I took was not like this. The lifeskills I took didn't cover all of this stuff," she said. "And it didn't bring the real me out like this program has."

It is that aspect of the program that very nearly caused Maxine to quit within the first few weeks of starting. "At the beginning of the program, I had a rough time. I didn't want to accept who I was. I wanted to quit the program because it was finding the real me. There was a fear there."

In the end, the desire to change the direction of her life proved greater than her fear. Maxine's journey into self-discovery has produced more rewards than she ever thought possible.

"I'm in more control of myself. I have the power to say 'no' to people that used to walk all over me. I can say 'no' to them now without feeling guilty," she said. "It's helped with my kids too, especially my oldest daughter."

Maxine isn't the only person who has noticed the transformation she has undergone since becoming involved. She has been approached on many occasions by people who have expressed an interest in becoming involved in the Stardale group after seeing the change in her.

"They want to know what I do during the day. There's not enough hours in the day now for me."

The program has also inspired Maxine to further her education. Though she currently holds her GED, she intends to obtain her high school Grade 12. After she completes the daycare program, she intends to look for employment in the field or continue her education.

"If there are women out there who have a chance to go into this program, take it," Maxine advises. "They'll benefit from it."

Iona agrees. "As soon as women

Stardale Women's Group

Helps women gain confidence for life changes

This article is the fifth in a series on the Stardale Women's Group in Melfort.

By Peggy Todd

Tena, Frances, and Donna have gained the confidence in themselves that they have long searched for in an effort to make positive changes in their life. They credit their new outlook on life to the Stardale Women's Group.

For 30-year-old Tena, involve-

ment in the Stardale group is a progressive step on her personal healing journey.

Tena has been immersed in negative behaviour all her life however, before she joined the Stardale group she was unaware of the detrimental effect it was having on her. "I thought it was just a way of life," she commented. "There's a lot of negative behaviour and that's a hard thing to get out of."

Having lived on social assistance

her entire life, Tena has been trying to make the changes in her life that will have a positive impact. She spent some time in a treatment centre a year ago and has been trying to achieve her GED over the past year. She came to the Stardale group to continue on that journey.

Turning to the group for help wasn't easy for Tena. "It was a difficult decision. For the first little while I wanted to quit because I was going to go back into a treatment centre."

She reconsidered her decision when she started to realize her involvement was actually helping her heal. "I know a lot about myself now, about all the behaviours that are out there, especially on the reserve."

Tena still wrestles with her inner demons and recognizes her journey will not end with the completion of the Stardale program. "I know I need a lot more help," she admitted. "After I'm done, I'm still going to go into a treatment centre."

Stardale has given Tena one more reason to continue to set new goals for herself and to strive to reach her dreams. Although she is a single parent, she is committed to finding the time to finish the Stardale program.

Upon completion, Tena hopes to work in a daycare and plans to continue her education in early childhood development. "Being in

this program...I have a reason to get out of the house," she summarized.

Overcoming the feelings that have haunted her as the result of lifelong discrimination has been a hurdle Frances would not have been able to clear without the Stardale Women's Group.

"My self-esteem was really low. I was ashamed," she said. "I was the victim of the discrimination I grew up with. I grew up in Melfort and there's a lot of discrimination in this town."

With a Grade 7 education, 31-year-old Frances was looking for ways to better herself. While pursuing her GED, she was fortunate to stumble upon the Stardale group, joining after another woman dropped out.

With the support of her family and a husband that is willing to pull out all the stops to ensure she gets to class everyday, Frances has flourished under the new knowledge she has gained.

"I think I have a higher self-esteem. People are always telling me that I'm changing, I'm coming out of my shell. That makes me feel good that they can see the change in me."

A self-described wallflower at social occasions in the past, Frances

can now see the difference in herself and she likes what she sees. "I look at life differently now than I did before," she commented, adding the group has also had a positive impact on her relationships.

Donna's involvement with Stardale has also improved her relationships and, at the same time, opened her eyes to the negative effect they were having on her view of herself. "I didn't realize I was in a co-dependent relationship until I took this course," the 22-year-old stated. "Now I don't let (other people) treat me like a door mat. I speak my mind."

Donna quit school in Grade 9 and had her daughter soon after. She has made attempts since then to improve her circumstances, including returning to school to earn her Adult Basic Education 10, but it is the Stardale group that has had the greatest impact on her life to date.

Her involvement in the program has inspired Donna to continue her education through correspondence studies for Early Childhood Development in addition to CPR and First Aid training. "It's really empowered me," she concluded. "I think this program would help other women better themselves. You learn a lot about yourself."

Stardale stepping stone in making positive changes

This article is the sixth and final in a series on the Stardale Women's Group in Melfort.

By Peggy Todd

The Stardale Women's Group has given Valerie and Tina-Marie the jump start they needed to take concrete steps toward making long-term improvements to the quality of their lives.

Before joining the Stardale group, 23-year-old Valerie had been through her share of troubled times. A mother of four children dependent on welfare to make ends meet, she had spent some time in jail. In addition, many of the efforts she had made in an attempt to bring about change in her life had been thwarted.

"I tried to go to (Adult Basic Education) before out on the reserve but it didn't work out. Too many people (were) gossiping and causing a lot of trouble for me."

In 1996, Valerie began working on her GED 12, which she achieved this past January. She is proud to say she has been sober for the past nine months and, in addition to spending time in a healing lodge, she also took a parenting class before finding the Stardale Women's Group.

"I'm really working on myself," she remarked. "I've done stuff myself that I probably never would have done if I hadn't come to this group."

"I'd rather get an education and get a job in the workforce than sit at home, living on welfare because that's not enough to live on."

Though Valerie's primary motivation for joining Stardale was the daycare training, it is the lifeskills component that has brought her the greatest personal gain. Although she took lifeskills in 1993, Valerie has found the Stardale group's lifeskills component much more thorough.

"In the other lifeskills, I don't even really remember, I just know that I took it. You just went there and you talked. Here, we deal with a lot of issues and work through it."

"It covers everything," she continued. "It's brought up a lot of stuff from my past that I thought I forgot about. It's been a good thing."

Valerie knew the Stardale group

would be another positive step in making changes in her life and, upon hearing about it, was immediately interested in it. However, before she could take that next step on her road to recovery, she had one primary obligation to attend to.

With the responsibility of caring for four children, Valerie decided that unless she could find a reliable babysitter, she would have to pass on the Stardale Women's Group. Once she found a babysitter she could trust with her children's care, she had one other adjustment to make before she would commit herself to the group.

"I had to find (a babysitter) who could move in with me which was very hard for me because I had to ask my brother to move out," she stated. "He's always been living with me, ever since I can remember. We didn't have room for him and a babysitter."

The decision made, Valerie joined the Stardale group and has never looked back or regretted the choices she has had to make. The effects her decision to join Stardale have had on her life are many and especially evident in the relationships she has both strengthened and severed.

"Me and my husband are getting along a lot better. With my children, we always try and spend more time with each other. I know my children have been abused by other people and they have a real low self-esteem. They're always fighting and I'm working on that. I sit down with them and tell them it's not right to fight."

"I have lost a lot of friends because I noticed all the bad behaviours that they have. To me, I don't really care what happens to them," she added. "I feel better about myself and I say what I want to say. I don't let people walk all over me...I don't let people get away with stuff."

Valerie is intent on continuing her efforts to change the course of her life. When she completes the daycare course through Stardale, she hopes to find employment at a new daycare being opened on the reserve. If that doesn't happen, she has already prepared to follow through with another option, having applied to schools in Saskatoon, Prince Albert and Melfort in hope

of obtaining her ABE 12. She is also taking English 30.

"(The Stardale Women's Group) made a lot of improvements in my life. I'm feeling a lot better about myself and I wish more women could come and take this course."

Like Valerie, Tina-Marie has also struggled to raise her four children. In her case however, the 28-year-old single mother is trying to balance a job with raising her family and having a difficult time doing it.

"Before I was juggling a job and a family, looking after my kids and babysitting on the side."

Tina-Marie's commitment to the well-being of her own children and her enjoyment of other children initially led her to the Stardale group. With a Grade 10 work training program as her highest level of education, she looked to the daycare program as a way of furthering her education while opening the door to a potential self-employment opportunity that would allow her to remain at home with her children.

"I only came in here for the daycare course," she said, "but so far, what I've benefitted mainly from has been lifeskills."

Before the Stardale group, Tina-Marie admits she had never even heard of lifeskills, she knew little of what it involved. Today, she would advise anyone that has the opportunity to take it.

"It made me feel a lot better," she explained. "Helen's a fantastic instructor. I don't know if that has anything to do with it but it helps you deal with your problems and there's a lot of really good exercises that we've done that I use today."

Tina-Marie, like Valerie, only hesitated in her decision to join the Stardale group when it came to the issue of childcare. She has had one bad experience already, having fired one babysitter, but has since resolved that problem. She is happy with the opportunities she has been given through her involvement with the group and the effect it has had on other aspects of her life, especially her children.

"It's brought us a lot closer. We spend more time together and I'm at home, it seems, a lot more now than what I was."

"I've almost met a lot of new friends and I've learned to deal with a lot of personal problems through the help of the group."

Tina-Marie hopes to open a private daycare in her home at the completion of the program. She also intends to pursue her GED 12.

Valerie and Tina-Marie admit that without funding assistance to cover the cost of babysitting and other expenses, they would not have been able to make the changes in their lives that Stardale has played a significant role in. Both women encourage the ongoing support and sponsorship of the Stardale Women's Group in order to enable more women to take advantage of the same opportunities that they have benefited from.

Three Melfort women's groups receive grants

Three women's organizations in Melfort received a total of \$25,000 in grants to enable them to access the Internet and to train members to use the new communications technology.

On Friday, Andy Renaud, MLA for Carrot River was on hand to present grants to the Stardale Women's Group, the North East Crisis Intervention Centre, and to the Melfort Metis Women.

"This funding will enable these organizations to network more easily, access information more quickly and serve the needs of their members more effectively," said Renaud.

The grant program is funded by the Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat which provides a basic grant of \$7,000. If groups have exceptional circumstances, such as to plan to make the computer accessible to persons with disabilities, they are eligible for an additional \$2,000.

The Stardale Women's Group received \$9,000 to provide Internet access to its clients. The group offers life skills, literacy and employment training to Aboriginal and low income women.

"We're planning on training the women on both Internet and word-processing," said Helen McPhaden, executive director. "We've got women on waiting lists for this."

The North East Crisis Centre provides support services for victims of family violence and sexual assault. Services include a 24-hour crisis line, day shelter, counseling, advocacy, transportation and support groups.

Dawna Elsasser, executive director, says the new technology will not only be used for clients, but also for training the staff, volunteers and board members.

The Melfort Metis Women

group also received a \$9,000 grant. The group promotes unity with Metis women, children and families through programs such as skills development and job training.

President Gloria Shmyr says 14 Metis women will be trained to use the Internet. The trained women will then help by showing others in

the group. Giving the women Internet access provides the opportunity to promote Metis issues and services.

The Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat is the provincial government agency which works to achieve social, economic and political equality for women.



Stardale women's group receives funding for Internet -- Stardale women's group was one of three Melfort women's organizations to receive funding through the Women's Organizations Line Program. Above, Helen McPhaden, executive director accepts a cheque from Andy Renaud, Carrot River Valley MLA.

Local Women's Groups

Receive Internet access and training grants

Andy Renaud, MLA for Carrot River Valley, on behalf of Judy Bradley, minister responsible for the Status of Women, recently presented funding grants to women's groups in Melfort and Hudson Bay. The grant funding will enable the groups to access the Internet and train members to use the new communications technologies.

The Stardale Women's Group and the Melfort Metis Women will each receive \$9000 while the Hudson Bay & District Crisis Centre and the North East Crisis Intervention Centre will each receive \$7000. The funding comes from the Women's Organizations On Line Program, an initiative of the Saskatchewan Women's Secretariat.

"This funding will enable these organizations to network more easily, access information more quickly and serve the needs of their members more effectively," Renaud said.

The Stardale Women's Group offers life skills, literacy, and employment training to Aboriginal and low income women. Melfort Metis Women works to enhance the social

status of Metis women through programs such as skills development and job training. The Hudson Bay & District Crisis Centre provides crisis intervention and prevention services to women involved in domestic violence. It provides 24 hour access to safe shelter, as well as information and referral services.

The North East Crisis Intervention Centre provides support services for victims of family violence and sexual assault. Services include a 24-hour crisis line, day shelter counselling, advocacy, transportation, and support groups. Each grant recipient will use their funding to purchase computer hardware, Internet connections, and relevant software. They will also organize Internet training for members, staff, clients, and volunteers.



Andy Renaud, MLA for Carrot River Valley, recently presented Helen McPhaden of the Stardale Women's Group with a \$9000 cheque for Internet access and training. The presentation was made on behalf of Judy Bradley, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Program helps keep women healthy in the kitchen

By Robin Phillips
OF THE JOURNAL

A group of women from Melfort and area are learning kitchen basics as part of a Life Skills Program offered by Stardale Women's Group.

Collective Kitchens is a project aimed at helping women learn how to cook healthy in large quantities, said Helen McPhaden, co-ordinator at Stardale.

"The concept of collective kitchens originated in South America by women who wanted to help other women learn these skills," McPhaden said.

The group of ten women, under the guidance of nutritionist, Kathleen Hanks, is not only learning healthy cooking, but how to shop economically, coupon cutting, planning meals, food safety and substitution in cooking.

"I also call this type of program a 'breaking of bread' program. It's

a support group for women to come together and share experiences," said McPhaden.

The collective kitchens experience is part of an eight week program called "Renewal of the Spirit Within", which began in May. The program consists of seven weeks of life skills and one week of collective kitchens.

McPhaden said the need for this type of program is apparent due to the growing occurrence of women overusing food banks.

"We have to address these needs in women and reach them these things. Power is knowledge," said McPhaden.

The kitchen at the Salvation Army is being utilized for the program and the ten women are making 56 meals a day to take home to their families.

Many of the women who take part in programming offered at Stardale, have come forward through word of mouth alone.

"In January we had a group together through a daycare worker certification program," said McPhaden. "Those women then became role models for other women who saw the positive things happening with these other groups."

Planning for this project has been in the works for some time.

"We had our first formal meeting regarding this project in May 1997, and since then there have been many groups who have been instrumental in getting this off the ground," said McPhaden.

The funding comes through Stardale, which has its own administration dollars for projects such as this, however many groups have worked together to get the project underway.

The original partnership was Porcupine Plain Opportunity Program, Pasquia Health District, James Smith Cree Nation and Aboriginal Women's Council.

Participants in this program have already had six weeks of life skills training, and after they complete the collective kitchens portion they have an additional week of life skills.

Stardale Women's Group is planning a fall office worker program which will consist of life skills, literacy skills and computer training.



What's for dinner? -- Diane Wiens (left) and Maniah Brittain prepare bannock for lunch. The two are involved in Collective Kitchens, part of a life skills program offered by Stardale Women's group.



- Rural Roots Photos by Jane Brown

ART USED AS MEANS OF HEALING

Facilitator Helen McPhaden, left, pays close attention as Connie Moostoos of James Smith First Nation explains the meaning behind her clay vessel. Art, including painting (inset), is part of the healing program of the Stardale Women's

Women of poverty reap rich rewards

Women of poverty, many of whom live in abusive situations, often live out their lives with no glimmer of hope. The Stardale Group in Melfort empowers them to brighten their outlooks as well as future prospects.

Stories and photos
by Jane Brown

ARLENE MOOSTOOS WORKED for four years at the James Smith Band Office. She felt her negative behaviour prevented her from doing a good job. She wants the job, and her happy marriage, back.

"My husband was incarcerated," she said. "He got out yesterday and is now in a treatment lodge so he's working on himself. I'm working on myself too, so we'll have a nice little marriage and live happily ever after."

She laughs and blushes as she utters the words, but she's deadly serious.

"A lot of people notice a change in me already. They say I'm more positive. I used to be really negative."

"The thing is, you really have to think, to get in tune with your feelings. It affects you when you're working. I was working five years prior to coming here but had a lot of negative behaviour. I worked four years at the band office and one year at the school. I want to work at the band office again. The school is too rigid and there are more ways to help band members at the office."

As part of her healing process, Moostoos was asked to draw a self portrait. The drawing was to represent her innermost feelings. She was pictured with a sort of protective shield separating her from the background. She was asked what this meant.

"All my life, I've been looking after people," she said. "I'd like to sit back and let someone take care of my needs and what I want to do."

Helen McPhaden is the founder and facilitator of the Stardale Group, a program designed to give women permission to care about themselves. Putting themselves first is something few of them have ever done.

The name, Stardale, came from Star City and Tisdale and the group is made up of women of poverty based in those two towns as well as Melfort and the James Smith First Nation, which is part of the Prince Albert Grand Council.

The Stardale Group was formed after an Aboriginal Women and Women of Poverty Project, funded by a contribution from Human Resources Development Canada and Saskatchewan New Careers Corporation, came up with a Needs Assessment evaluation. It is similar to Bridges, a successful employability program to take marginalized women through various phases of self-exploration, experiential learning, education and employment.

"Clearly there are education/training constraints limiting the options available for introducing change within our northeast sector," McPhaden said when putting her model for the group together. "Transformation is indeed possible, and a

model similar to the Bridges model encompasses all integral aspects of the framework and create a starting point, or baseline conditions, for change."

The Bridging program addresses the real problems and barriers that women encounter. A similar program model within the northeast rural communities, she felt, would be an appropriate alternative to empower marginalized women.

The pilot and model program has special provisions including a focus on the development of enhanced decision-making, problem-solving and goal-setting skills; support from other women; the examination of careers; job search techniques; mentoring/coach; the necessary support services such as child care, transportation and training allowance, and accessibility to counseling services. The program enables women to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency and to be contributing members of society.

"I formed the group because of programming," McPhaden said.

"Programs were not meeting people's needs. God brought me back here for a reason."

"I find I'm looking forward to getting up and going to work. I was raised here, a survivor of violence. I lived in Calgary for a long time and came back because I love the country. I like getting up and making a difference. The women's stories keep me going. It's never enough to give them what you give them — you have to shoot higher."

McPhaden worked with native women in 1984, when violence was brought to her attention.

"We live with total denial. That's when the light bulb went on. I see First Nation people walk with their head down, not making eye contact. She has a right to hold her head high, to have pride. In Melfort, we discuss so many things. Other people's issues and problems are not ours. We have to work to overcome that. It's tough."

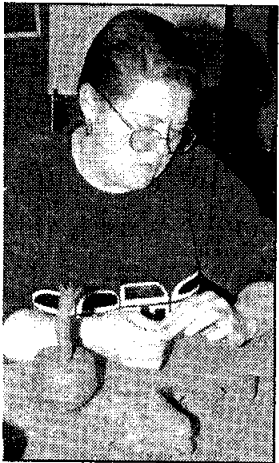
News of the program was spread by word of mouth and now Stardale has files of women wanting to come into the program. Members of the first group have become role models.

"This breaks all the barriers," said McPhaden. "When I returned to northern Saskatchewan, the racism here just blew me away. Our commonality is we're all women. The term healing is very appropriate because we're natural care-givers and nurturers. We have the tools."

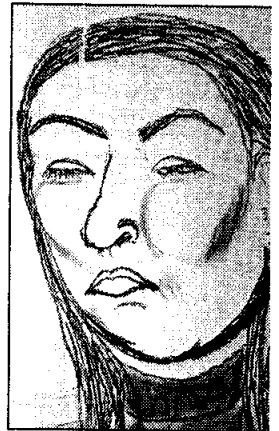
The group meets at a building on McLeod Ave. East in Melfort, every weekday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. To qualify, women have to meet guidelines set out in the Needs Assessment. They can be on Social Assistance, Employment Insurance, or be making under \$16,000.

"Women take ownership in all of this. We go with where the needs are. Each group takes on a life of its own."

(Continued on Page 15)



NEW TALENTS DISCOVERED
Arlene Moostoos, top, has just completed a vessel in which she has disposed of the bad influences in her life. The vessel created by Diane Smith resembles a pot-bellied stove so everything she dislikes about her life can go in smoke. Jolene Richardson, 1, of Melfort, a graduate of the Stardale program, now works part time as a receptionist at Stardale Centre headquarters. She poses with some of the artwork done by her group. On the right side of the page are a number of self-portraits which depict the women as they saw themselves when they first came to Stardale. The bottom painting is one of the poignant portrayals of a life some of these women lead. It was among those dis-



Women work to improve their life situations

(Continued from Page 6)

Elaine Richardson, 21, is a graduate of the first Stardale women's Group — "the ones who started everything." Everything has come along well since I've started with group," she said. "We organized our own graduation, including a meal and dance, and I'm helping Helen McPhaden) out. I suffer from depression, obsessive/compulsive disorder. My husband is a miracle worker. She's helped me a lot."

Before coming to Stardale, Richardson said she didn't do much to fill her days except for riding at Wortman's Arena in Edgedale.

"I'm taking coaching. I'm still riding out there, but now I want to start a business breaking and conditioning horses and giving riding lessons. Before, I didn't have the self-esteem to do that."

Richardson was in the program that ran from January to May of this year. Her group took classes in skills, day care training, literacy and high school equivalency as well as learning to deal with problems such as abuse, chemical or alcohol dependency, co-dependency and low self-esteem. Guests included a baker, an owner of a small business, members of the clergy and even hair and make-up stylists.

"There were 12 in our group and we all got to be really close," she said. "We still get together for visits."

So far, a month into the third group, the current group has discussed communications, self-esteem building, anger management, banking, money management and all about behavioural change, expressing feelings.

"We deal with perceptions — how you see yourself, how you think others see you and how others really see you," said McPhaden.

"It's difficult to get dollars for women. Some are on social assistance, some E.I. Through our partnerships, a lot of meetings, and writing a lot of proposals, we get by. We're dealing with justice, health and education departments and we're part of the Aboriginal Women's Council of Saskatchewan. We're a local with our own mandate."

Elaine Head, who lives at James Smith First Nation, said the first obstacles she had to overcome before joining the group were transportation and child care.

"Now three of us come together in Arlene's vehicle," she said. "I'm terrified of reserve roads. I've got three kids at home and Mom takes care of them. She comes over every morning. Most of us are experiencing baby sitting problems. My second oldest brother is helping me out with a vehicle. He tells me not to miss any of the program. Most people are very positive about it."

One very visible symbol of the positive attitude is the happy face on the top of Diane Smith's pot bellied stove. She came up with the design in a clay sculpting portion of the program.

"I did it so I can throw all the bad things in and let them go through the chimney," she said. "On top of the chimney, I have a smiling face because all the troubles are gone."

The canoe modeled by Elaine Head also combines the positive with the negative.

"I've always been so terrified of canoes. But me and my three kids, one of these days, we'll all get in a canoe and go floating down the river to get rid of all of the bad experiences in my life."

It was vital to team a Life Skills program with literacy to begin to open the doors to the world and to begin to remove barriers, said McPhaden.

"Women who have been abused and neglected, as in the

case of all of our participants, severely lack literacy skills," she said. "This teamed with low self-esteem which has generated from abuse, as well as their lack of personal success, has kept them oppressed and unemployed with no hope."

It is her mission to provide that hope. In fact, the mission statement of the program is "to provide life skills and literacy education, as well as advocacy to women living in poverty and abuse situations, toward empowering their lives, and their families, and their communities, thus overcoming systemic barriers."

As the women shift their ways of seeing, they are making deep connections, and talents which have been dormant will emerge and flourish, said McPhaden.



SERIOUS BUSINESS —Bernice Sanderson, left, Melanie Constance and Janice Burns are totally absorbed in their creativity with clay, part of the healing process of the Stardale Women's Group.

THE HEALING PATH

By Arlene Moostoos
James Smith Cree Nation

On September 14, 1998 I began a program entitled life skills facilitated by Ms. Helen McPhaden, not knowing what the program was about and not knowing what an impact it would make on my life.

I lived on the James Smith Reserve for the most of my forty-one years. It was a life filled with inner and outer turmoil. All of the four areas of my life, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self were in chaos.

Throughout different times in my life I was physically, emotionally and sexually abused. I also faced many incidents of prejudice because I am Native and because I am obese. I also grew up in a relatively dysfunctional family. My spiritual self was suffering because of the confusion between my Anglican upbringing and my need to believe and follow my Native culture. I was torn because on one hand my parents told me that my Native culture was wrong and to follow the Christian religion, while on the other hand I had a yearning to learn more about the sacred customs and rituals of my Native heritage. Due to all these impacts of abuse and confusion I too became dysfunctional.

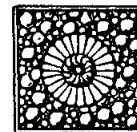


I began to abuse drugs and alcohol at an early age. After I married and gave birth to three children, (the first one passed away at one and one half months from SIDS). I began to try to immerse myself in them. They became my life project. In the process, I brought my children up to be very co-dependent. They also began to use drugs (pot) as an escape. By this time I was using prescription drugs to escape reality. I had also been in rehabilitation five or six times to try to heal myself. I started going to sweats and going to church on Sundays. I was still trying to find myself, and where I fit in the scheme of things.

My husband has been an alcoholic for the majority of his forty-seven years. We have been married for twenty-one years. It has been a turbulent marriage, a lot of abuse and many periods of incarceration for him, because of his addiction.

Through the life skills program I have learned that all things that happen, happen for a reason. Today I see that in the summer of 1998 things were happening that would lead me to the force of the Stardale Women's Group. In June of 1998 I resigned from my position as secretary at our community school. The hours my husband was putting in drinking, the prescription drug usage and the personal problems of foster parenting were taking a toll on my job performance. I resigned and went on Employment Insurance.

In September my husband was incarcerated for a period of six months. In the first week of September I heard that they were asking for applicants for the life skills program. I went to the Stardale office for an interview. Because I was on EI and I had my GED I was a prime candidate. I began the course on September 14, 1998. I was about to learn more about myself in those fourteen weeks than I had learned in the forty-one years of my life.



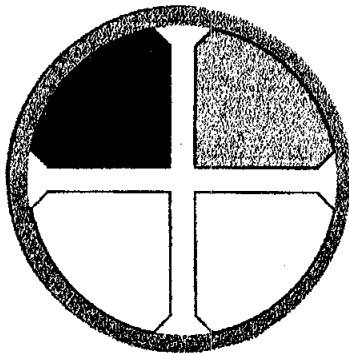
I learned that I am a very beautiful, caring and nurturing person. I also learned that I have choices, and whether I choose to go to sweats or to go to church or just do my praying in my car or at the river or even while I am bathing or showering, it is ok because through prayer and meditation I am showing my Lord and my Creator that I revere Him.

I also learned that everyone and everything is bound by an energy and a force so great, that it connects me to everything I come in contact with.

I became very knowledgeable in the four aspects of the Medicine Wheel. I shed a lot of my inner fears and hurts that were keeping me down through various lessons and techniques in the life skills course.

On January 15th I graduated not only from the life skills course but I graduated from an old hurting, oppressed and addicted Indian woman to a proud hopeful and powerful Native person ready to face the world.

On Jan. 16th I had a very powerful and meaningful dream. At one time I wouldn't have thought anything of this dream but I had also learned that most dreams are messages and all animals are bearers of messages.



In my dream I was being my old self, being loud and boisterous and fooling around, while my Dad was trying to talk to me. He said "My girl, listen!" I kept on being silly and in a more stern voice he said, "MY GIRL, LISTEN! What I have to say to you is important." I stopped fooling around and I started listening. He was pointing at a Medicine Wheel and he said, "In all things in life there is four. Remember that,

my, girl everything comes in fours." And then I woke up. That Sunday evening my mom passed away. The following week three of my family members became very ill. Not only was my Dad warning me of my mom's sudden passing but that three others would be getting very sick too. The dream also showed me that in life there are things that all connect to the order of things. The Four Seasons, the Four Directions, the Four Areas of Self and many other things that I cannot mention at this time.

The dream also told me that at times I must be still and listen, that too many times I am too loud and aggressive. It brings to memory a famous line from the *Desiderata*, "avoid loud and aggressive people, they are vexations to the spirit."

During the course I met many people who came to our course to lecture or share their stories. They too gave me insight. These presenters along with Helen gave me something to definitely digest. Of course I always had the option of spitting it out if it didn't agree with my beliefs and values. I also met nine women who have become very solid caring friends of mine. My classmates and I have bonded through the sharing of our hurts, our pain and our joys.

Spiritual

Mental

Emotional

Physical

My instructor Helen will always remain in my life and my heart as a very spiritual and wise mentor who has guided me through and on to the journey of life. I have no words to express how much I have been assisted spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally by the powerful program that Helen facilitates. I would highly recommend it to all women who need a morale boost or are in the process of starting on their healing path. This is all I have to say. "Akosi."

"I have no words to express how much I have been assisted, spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally by the powerful program."

SAC - 1998/99

The past several months have been busy ones for SAC. Changes within the funding mechanism of Status of Women Canada meant a transition period for us from program funding to project funding. While maintaining the focus of the project initiative on Employment and Training for Women we are still being called upon by individuals, agencies, and women's groups to support and advocate around a multitude of issues affecting women. We are called upon by government departments to respond and participate in committee hearings, conferences and workshops. The Media has looked to us for our input on a number of issues in the throughout the year.

One issue that has required ongoing involvement is the custody and access issue and the impending legislative changes that may result from the recommendations of the 1998 Joint Committee on Custody and Access. Women's groups across the country have great concern with the report delivered by this committee and have made their voices heard in a National Fax Campaign to MP's, Senators, Ministers, etc. Ongoing lobbying efforts are needed to insure that the biases that controlled this committee do not control decisions within the Federal Department of Justice on divorce legislation.

SAC will hold a General Forum at the end of this project term to bring our Focus Group Participants together again. Another issue of Network is planned in a few months. Last year's AGM brought a recommendation that SAC move its office to a more accessible building and we are now in the process of investigating a new location. SAC will also be working on a website for the future. We'll keep you posted!

Just a quick reminder that March is membership renewal time so if you haven't responded to the reminder mailing that was sent a while ago please do so now.

Stardale women overcome the odds

By JANE BROWN
Sage Writer

MELFORT

Elaine Head has always been terrified of poor driving conditions at James Smith First Nations. She's always been terrified of canoes. But, thanks to a unique group in Melfort, she's overcoming her fears and facing a brighter future.

The Stardale Women's Group, named for the towns of Star City and Tisdale, is a program designed for women of poverty, most of whom live with daily abuse. The women come from Melfort, Star City, Tisdale and the James Smith First Nation. More than 90 per cent of them are Aboriginal. The program takes them through various phases of self-exploration, experiential learning, education and employment.

"Three of us come together in one vehicle," said Head. "I'm terrified of reserve roads. Most of us are experiencing baby sitting problems. I've got three kids at home and Mom takes care of them. She comes over every morning. My second oldest brother is helping me out with a vehicle. He tells me not to miss any of the program. Most people are very positive about it."

Head is working on her latest Stardale project, sculpting vessels of clay to expel their negative influences. Hers is a canoe.

"I've always been so terrified of canoes. But me and my three kids, one of these days we'll all get in a canoe and go floating down the river to get rid of all of the bad experiences in my life."

Beside her, Diane Smith is creating a pot-bellied stove so everything she dislikes can go up in smoke. On top, a smiling face is a reminder that the exercise is, in fact, a positive one.

The facilitator and designer of the Stardale program, Helen McPhaden, believes that transformation is possible for these women. She wants women to be able to attain greater economic self-sufficiency and be contributing members of society, as well as to achieve inner peace.

A survivor of both an abusive marriage and an abusive relationship, McPhaden worked with Native women in Calgary in 1984 when violence against others was brought to her attention. Now a social worker with two certificates as a life skills facilitator and a certificate in co-dependency from Dr. Charles Whitfield, she returned to her home town of Melfort determined to do something to help.

"I formed the group because of programming," she said. "Programs were not meeting people's needs. News spread by word-of-mouth and now I have files of women wanting to come into the program. When I returned to northern Saskatchewan, the racism here just blew me away. Our commonality is we're all women."

McPhaden brings in guest speakers like United Church minister Helen Herr but also has sweetgrass ceremonies.

"We have to honor everyone's space," she said. "We do inner child work, there's so much that has been hidden or taken away. We have to allow these women to play again. Lots of time those women weren't allowed to be a child. Now they're parents themselves and they were never taught to play."

The first Stardale Group raised the money through a bake sale at James Smith to go to Manitou Beach near Watrous. They were asked to display the art, clay and painting they use as a means of healing at the Doghide Festival in Tisdale.

"Most of us had never worked with clay or painted in our lives," she said. "When people saw our sign, they either stayed away, skirted the display completely, or came in and commented on the raw emotion in the work. Local artists there were so encouraging. We need to develop that area even further."

When James Smith opened a new band office and medical clinic in May, they were invited guests and displayed their work. This took a lot of courage on the part of the women, some of whom return to their abusers every



JANE BROWN

Helen McPhaden.

evening. They believe the abuse has gone on long enough and want the truth brought out into the open.

"Some cases have such hopeless lives," said McPhaden. "They hear about us through walk-ins, referrals, word-of-mouth. That was always my intent and hope."

"The women of the first group have become role models. Others have seen the change and want to come. In the last group, the second one, almost all of the women were in crisis. It was incredible to me that they were going home to extremely violent homes. We, here in northern Saskatchewan, don't have a lot of programming for women.

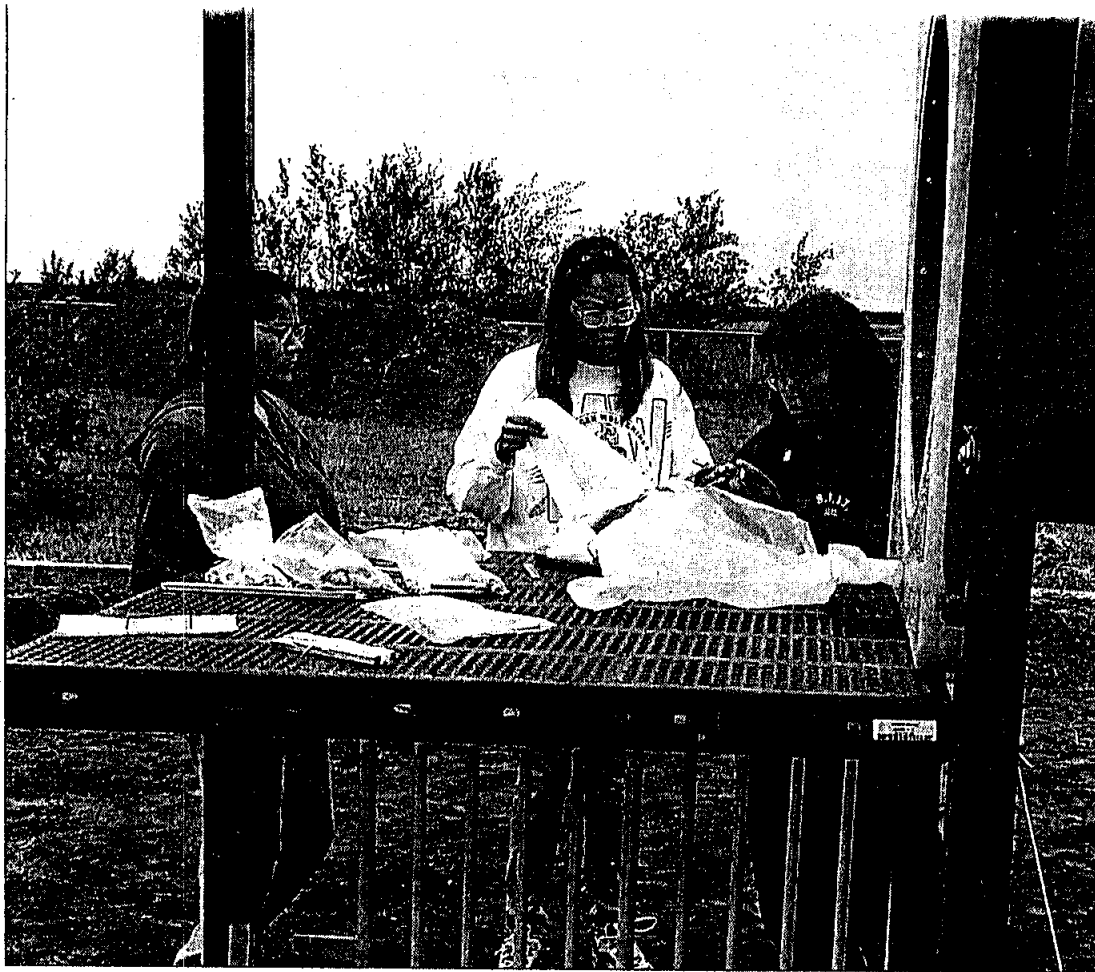
"Human Resources is our partner. There were programs for women on [employment insurance], but most of these women were on social assistance. I saw that as an issue and had to address it, so that's where a needs assessment came in."

There's no doubt that the program is a success. One has only to look at the list of women waiting to get in to realize that fact. But McPhaden still wants more.

"I have to be an information junky. If people ask, I have to be able to give out and I want to keep a running group going.

"A model depends on the facilitator. There's standardized training, and when I write proposals to get funding, I have a very general, broad overview. I want to design more programs. How do I get more for these women?"

For more information about the Stardale Women's Group, call the Stardale office: (306) 752-1802.



(L. to R.) Lola Twist, Marjorie Burns and Angela Burns, members of the Stardale Women's Group 'Exploring Our Options' program, assemble the new play structure at James Smith.

Project helps build self-confidence as well as playground for children

By Heather Baril
of THE JOURNAL

The youngest members of the population at James Smith will soon have a new place to play.

Members of Melfort's Stardale Women's Group are currently building a play structure outside the Margaret Turner Memorial Centre, which houses the James Smith day care.

The construction of the structure was an idea from the women themselves, according to Stardale program co-ordinator Helen McPhaden.

"This project was brought about by the women in the life skills class," she said. "James Smith Cree Nation bought all the equipment, and ordered and supplied the sand, edging and tools."

McPhaden said the play structure was built in response to what the women saw as being needed in the community.

"We were discussing what we could do at James Smith and we got talking

their time because we need a playground for the toddlers so badly'."

When complete, the play structure will feature two slides, a crawl tube, three teeter-totters, and a set of swings. McPhaden said all the construction is being done by the women themselves.

"One of the women said 'If we were to do this, women would even volunteer their time because we need a playground for the toddlers so badly'."

- Helen McPhaden

"The women aren't getting paid for this, it's a community development

was also aiding in its construction. Work on the actual structure started in June, although there was preparatory work which had to be done before that.

"The actual playground structure was started on the seventh of June," she explained. "They had to excavate (the location). They had the bobcats out and they had to dig out that whole site."

The total cost of building the structure is just under \$8,000, the funding for which came from a national women's group, according to McPhaden.

"We're funded by Status of Women Canada," she explained. "They wanted to fund us, but it took us a year to come up with an idea because their criteria is so stringent."

The play structure, is expected to be completed this week, and McPhaden said the group plans to put a plaque up to commemorate the women's efforts.

"We want to have a rock with a plaque on it with the women's names,"

Doing it their way

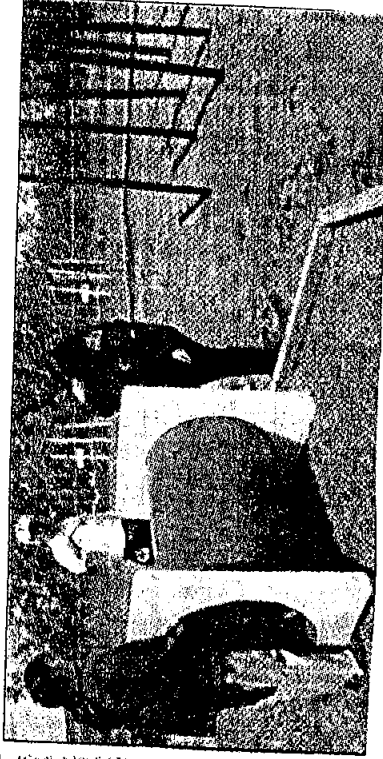
Graduates of the Stardale life skills program in Melfort are completing the final stage of their course. They are giving something back to their community.

Marjorie Burns, Angela Burns, centre, and Lola Twist, in tube, take a break to chat with program co-ordinator Helen MacFadden, right. The women are building a playground at the James Smith First Nation at the local day care centre. And they're doing it all themselves.

Although the women do get some advice from Emery Nelson, below, a work experience co-ordinator with Stardale, they have learned how to drive a bobcat to level the land, dig holes with a post auger and install equipment paid for by the band council and Human Resources Canada.

The community development phase of the program builds self-esteem and self confidence, say the women, and has provided them with good work experience.

"It's been fun," said Twist. "We've learned new skills. Who knows? I might have a future building playgrounds."



facilitate participation in the program and equal access, the financial allowance provided must be raised to at least the poverty line. There should also be a women's advisory group established to work on revising as well as monitoring and evaluating the program.

Access and mobility for rural and northern women

Isolated rural and northern groups of women must not live in fear of losing custody of their children while they attend school, or training programs far from their homes. Gaining economic strength and employment must not be held as ammunition against women. Fear, intimidation, and seizure of children must not be allowed.

This is a barrier for women and a violation of the basic human right to education. Mobility for rural and northern women helps provide protection, particularly in situations where there is a history of abuse between the parents and/or the caregiver. The Saskatchewan Battered Women's Advocacy Network asks the province to recognize and provide education and mobility as a basic human right for farm women and First Nations women on and off reserves.

Support for women fleeing violence

Employers, trainers, and educational institutions must provide support for women experiencing and/or fleeing violence. We recommend financial aid and other types of advocacy support for women/trainees in situations where they miss classes, or are terminated, in situations when their sick leave and annual benefits have run-out, and in situations when their short-term, or long-term disability benefits cease, or don't apply. Women in these situations need support without having to make excuses, without feeling self-defeated, without facing job termination and demotion, and without losing their dignity. They also need support to help them relocate, move, or to transfer schools, and this list goes on and on. We know it will take more than one program to make a difference, but we need to work towards empowerment.

Reviving Bridging

We also recommend reviving and expanding the Bridging program model. This would have to involve SIAST, community colleges, First Nations and Aboriginal institutions, and the women's community to determine how to deliver the program in a range of urban, rural and remote areas across Saskatchewan.

The Bridging model ran for 10 years in Regina and is currently running in Victoria (BC) and St. Johns (NFLD). The model addresses both the situational and dispositional barriers and issues women face. Women, Aboriginal women, and women in poverty need life skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, job preparation skills as well as transportation/mobility in rural and remote areas.

Life skills are an important factor that bridges to other educational strategies. Transportation and mobility are crucial to help women participate in these programs, particularly in our rural areas. Other types of service delivery mechanisms must be developed, such as wired, satellite services, particularly in the North and rural communities, so women have access to services.

The Bridging model has been defined at the post-secondary training level in such past programs as Links, the current program of quick skills, future skills, and the more recent bridging to employment programs. This model has been immensely successful at the Stardale Women's Group. Our program continues to evolve adapting to our women and our community needs.

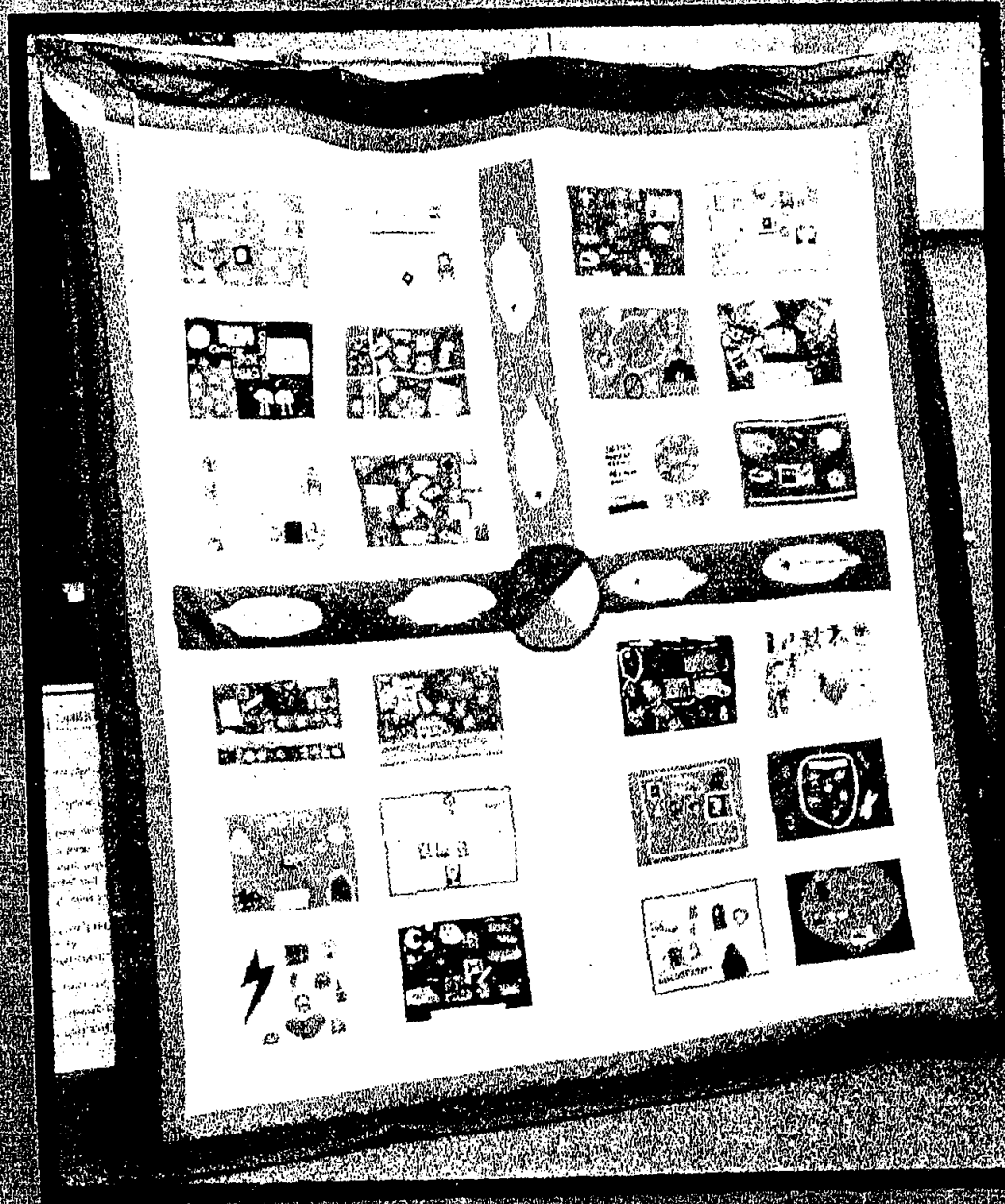
Women's training in prison

Women in prison are frequently incarcerated due to poverty related crimes, and they will return to live in poverty upon release. While women are in prison, they have a great deal of time that is not filled productively. Women in prison must have access to trades training programs. Justice institutions must link with new and existing training programs in the community. Incarcerated women must not be slotted into short-term training, but they must be given access to long-term training options to enable them to continue their program in the community following their release. The goal should always be to reduce

Network of Saskatchewan Women

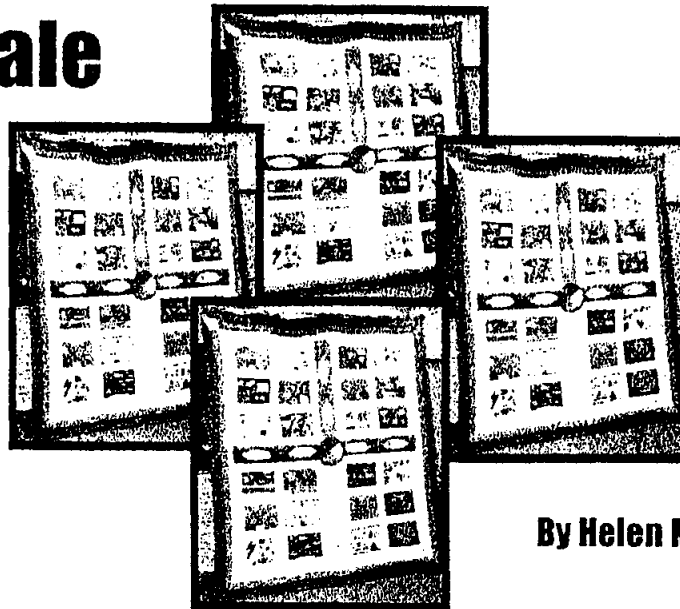
Volume 14 No. 1 Winter 2000

Saskatchewan Action Committee
Status of Women



SAC First Anniversary 1989-2000

The Stardale Model



By Helen McPhaden

Stardale is a learning and healing center for Aboriginal women and women of poverty. Developed by the Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation, the Center opened its doors for service in Melfort in 1998 and serves communities in Northern Saskatchewan.

Stardale's mission is to provide life skills and literacy education, as well as advocacy to women living in poverty and abusive situations in an effort to empower their lives, their families, and their communities.

We strive to provide a special place for client safety and comfort to enable them to express their feelings, past experiences, traumas and hurts in a friendly and caring environment. The four components of our wholistic model encompass the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of life. These are the building blocks to a journey of awakening, healing, self-respect and empowerment. The Stardale model encourages the development of skills and enlightenment by healing with compassion.

In January 1997, a group of low-income women, under the leadership of Helen McPhaden, met regularly as a support group in Star City, Saskatchewan. It rapidly became apparent there were many gaps in services for Aboriginal women and women of poverty in the region. This resulted in the development of a collaborative project with

several partners in the community wishing to make a change to respond to the education and employment challenges within our Northeast region of Saskatchewan.

By October Helen McPhaden was contracted to undertake a needs assessment. The needs assessment process and research plan included each distinct area of social, cultural, and economic spheres of activity in order to understand the totality of gaps in the current system. The research results revealed a lack of literacy and employment opportunities accompanied by social disparities which cumulatively created a sense of uneasiness in the region.

Bridges was the initial model recommended based on the needs assessment research. It is a successful employability program used to assist marginalized women by taking them through various phases of self-exploration, experimental learning, education, and employment. In addition, situational, dispositional, and sub-groups barriers were recognized and special supports developed to enhance each project delivery mechanism.

Although Stardale was conceptualized in January 1997, our Learning and Healing Center did not open until January 1998. The program components of our Center have grown ever since

with a demand for the current programs and long waiting lists for specific programs.

Stardale offers many learning and healing activities and programs solely for the betterment of women. Women are strengthened through a unique approach, which is highly structured, using an educational format combined with experiential learning as well as arts and crafts offered in a therapeutic environment.

Our first inaugural program, entitled "Honouring Ourselves", ran for twenty-four weeks beginning with life skills and literacy followed by a child care worker training program. The program came out of the needs assessment recommendations, which identified a lack of child care training and high degrees of reported abuse and violence among Aboriginal women and women of poverty. These factors place these women at risk.

The Life Skills component of the program concentrated on the healing and empowerment of women to help them overcome the barriers and marginalization within which most of these women subsist. The program was specifically designed to include issues of self, family, jobs/education, community and leisure. All of these elements combined are critical in taking the first step towards self-empowerment.

The second important component of the Life Skills program, vital to women's healing, growth, and transformation, is literacy. Women who have been abused and neglected, as in the case of all our participant and clients, severely lack literacy skills. This factor, teamed with low self-esteem generated from life long abuse and lack of personal skills, has kept these women oppressed and unemployed with no hope.

As we all know literacy opens doors to the world. The knowledge gained through learning, while developing literacy skills, is a critical part of Life Skills. This knowledge enables women to access positive alternatives.

In May and June 1998 Stardale initiated another program. This time with a Life Skills and collective kitchen component. "Renewal of the Spirit" participants were women receiving social assistance.

Community groups in our area identified community kitchens as a positive method of addressing poverty and hunger. Proper nutrition on a shoestring budget is a challenge for our participants. Food safety and nutrition are constant struggles being addressed in the collective kitchen model. A manual has been developed at the North Central Health District office to be used as a pilot project model for our program. The manual is also being used by the Health District to develop other food security initiatives.

Women in the surrounding community heard by word of mouth about our first program. Based on their requests to participate in a similar program, "Illuminating From Within" began in September 1998. This new program offered office and computer skills certificate training. On June 5, 1999, the first group of talented women successfully graduated from the program.

Our next endeavor, "Transcendence to the Future", began based on the overwhelming number of poor women and people waiting to get into our programs. In this program women, who had previously suffered many atrocities in their lives, started to transform themselves by acknowledging their pain with honesty and a commitment to change. They began to achieve harmony, balance and freedom of thought. It was a slow process of rebuilding their lives. Yet they were willing to conquer these challenges and to heal their past. One of these women went on to start a new business at James Smith Cree Nation, which is a greenhouse operation. This initiative is doing well, and we consider it a tremendous success.

To meet the needs of many of our youth, Stardale has also undertaken a three-phase program entitled, "Exploring Our Options". This was a cooperative project offered along with the East Side L.I.M.B., Human Resources Canada, Melfort Ministerial, James Smith Cree Nation and Stardale. The project focused on education and community development.

In September Stardale offered another program, "Rediscovery of Self". The program format dealt with nurturing women and dealing with many

sensitive issues. It ended in December, as the women moved into two other programs entitled, "Framework for Change-ALAPS (Aboriginal Family Literacy Program)" and "Harmonious Learning", which is a one-on-one and group literacy and GED program. We are enthusiastic about the endless possibilities for women as they begin this new course in their lives.

To further address women's emotional and personal needs, a pilot project evolved using a number of healing methods in the "Talking Quilt". This endeavor utilized the medium of colour, texture, pattern, touchability, and artistry with visual and mental stimulation. It also provided a spark igniting a flame of reconciliation for all the women and youth who participated in designing and stitching the quilt.

The traditional method used in the quilting process followed the "council sharing" model. The council of women formed a circle and discussed their lives, hurts, joys, traumas and experiences giving way to individual awakening, emotional healing, and development as evidenced in the quilt as the speakers of truth.

As the quilt was stitched, group counselling sessions were held and videotaped. Oral and written life stories were logged from beginning to end to record the full intensity and the momentum of healing, growth, and change occurring in each participant. At the conclusion of the project, a video was produced incorporating the quilting process, the counselling sessions and discussions, and our final celebration with a narrative telling their stories.

At Stardale, we focus on the individual expression of self in all art forms--pictures, paintings, sculpture, weaving, or quilt making. We feel the expression of each participant's thoughts in these projects manifest themselves in their own expression of artistry, skillfulness, and immense talent, which all women possess. These unique talents have been exhibited in the "Talking Quilt".

On May 17, 2000, Stardale held a celebration for the unveiling of the "Talking Quilt". The event was very successful with excellent feedback.

Partners, associates, and sponsors of Stardale include: Human Resources Development Canada, CanSask, Cumberland Regional College, James Smith Cree Nation, Aboriginal Women's Council of Saskatchewan (PA), The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Pasquia Health District, Melfort Ministerial Association, and Porcupine Opportunities for the Disabled. Stardale also represents community organizations of the North sector on the Provincial LINKS Board.

Stardale works closely with Victim's Services in the North Central Health District, East Side L.I.M.B., Prince Albert Against Family Violence, Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission, Saskatchewan Energy (Aboriginal Affairs), Melfort Food Bank, and the N.E. Inter-Sectoral. We are also associated with Saskatoon Native Housing, Alberta Family Life and Literacy Limited, and the YWCA (Calgary).

As identified in our needs assessment, funding is a major determinant as well as handicap in the development of our programs. Each program component depends on special funding. Depending on our financial resources, it is sometimes very difficult to offer a particular program for another term, despite the long waiting lists and tremendous demand in our region. Our team of partners is continuously searching for funding to maintain our programs on an on-going basis.

In March 2000, the Stardale program coordinator was invited to present a paper at the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) conference in Toronto. Further presentations took place at the Nakoda Lodge in Alberta. As a direct result of these presentations, other NGO's across Canada are looking at using Stardale as a model in structuring their programs.

For more information about Stardale's programs, including "The Talking Quilt" video and written narrative, please contact Helen McPhaden. Helen McPhaden is the program coordinator of the Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation. She can be reached by phone (306) 752-1802, fax (306) 752-1872, email stardale@sk.sympatico.ca, or by writing Box 1752, Melfort SK, S0E 1A0.

Stardale—learning and healing for women in Saskatchewan, Canada

by Helen McPhaden

Stardale is a learning and healing centre for Aboriginal women and women of poverty, serving the communities in Northern Saskatchewan.

Our mission in Stardale is to provide life skills and literacy education, as well as advocacy to women living in poverty and abusive situations, towards empowering their lives, their families, and their communities, thus overcoming systemic barriers.

We strive to provide, in our centre in Melfort, a special place which safeguards the clients' safety and comfort in expressing their feelings, past experiences, traumas and hurts within the confines of a friendly and caring environment that respects their individuality and freedom of thought.

The four components of the holistic Stardale Model encompass the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of life. As building blocks to a journey of awakening, healing, self-respect and empowerment, the Stardale Model encourages development of skills and enlightenment by healing with compassion.

Our Learning and Healing Centre opened in January 1998. There is now a great demand for the current programs we offer, and long waiting lists already for some of the programs.

Activities & accomplishments

Our inaugural program, *Honouring Ourselves*, was a 24-week program - which began with a 14-week Life Skills program, coupled with a 4-week literacy component, followed by a 5-week delivery of a child care worker certificate program. This first program was based on the results of the needs assessment that identified the lack of training in the day care area.

A needs assessment entitled *Aboriginal Women and Women of Poverty* identified high degrees of reported abuse/violence among aboriginal and women of poverty, and situations where women are placed at risk. As a result, the Life Skills component of the program concentrated on the healing and empowerment of women to overcome the barriers and the marginalisation within which they subsisted. Thus, we initiated a Life Skills program, which is specifically designed to include self, family, job/education, community, and leisure. All of these elements combined are critical first steps toward self-empowerment.

The second very important component of the Life Skills program vital to the women's healing, growth, and transformation is literacy. Women

who have been abused and neglected (as in the case of all of our participant clients), severely lack literacy skills. This factor, teamed with the low self-esteem that has been generated from life-long abuse, as well as their lack of personal skills, has kept these women oppressed and unemployed with no hope. As we all know, literacy opens doors to the world, and the knowledge gained begins to create access to positive alternatives for women. As a result, learning and knowledge encompassed in the development of literacy skills is a critical part of our Life Skills Program.

Renewal of the Spirit was an 8-week Life Skills program with 1-week collective kitchen leadership component. This program was initiated through the months of May and June 1998. The participants were all poor women who receive social assistance. Community groups in our area had identified that community kitchens are a positive method of addressing poverty and hunger. Proper nutrition on a shoestring budget is a challenge for our participant clients. Food, safety and nutrition are constant struggles that are being addressed in the collective kitchens. A manual has been developed and is now being used also by the Health District for their projects in developing food security initiatives.

Women in the surrounding community hearing about the *Honouring Ourselves* program by word of mouth, requested a similar program again within which they could participate. Upon this request, a second program in the series, entitled, *Illumination From Within*, commenced in September 1998, with a Life Skills component, followed by a literacy component, and concluding with a certification as an office worker with computer skills. On June 5, 1999, the first group of talented women graduated from this program very successfully indeed.

Our next endeavor was the commencement of another program entitled, *Transcendence To The Future*, which was based upon the

Breaking the Cycles by Creating the Circles



Stardale Holistic Model

We believe in:

- Each woman heals in her own time and place
- Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do it
- No one person is better than the next
- Being respectful of the experience of each woman
- Experiential learning & healing
- Releasing the victim's conscience
- Wisdom is shared in storytelling
- Embracing ourselves & embracing each other
- Self-discovery process of the woman making art
- Support & unconditional love
- The warrior woman who battles her own destructive patterns & tendencies
- Tears are healing
- Laughter is enriching

overwhelming numbers of poor women who have been on our waiting lists, or who were referred to our organisation by other service providers. In this program, the women who previously had suffered many atrocities in their lives, started to transform themselves by acknowledging their pain with honesty and a commitment to change. They began to achieve harmony, balance and freedom of thought. It was slow process rebuilding their lives. Yet, they were willing to conquer life's challenges and heal their past. One of the women from this group has started a new business at James Smith Cree Nation, which is a greenhouse operation.

To meet the needs of many of our youth, Stardale also has undertaken a 3-phase program entitled, *Exploring Our Options*. This was a cooperative project in collaboration with the East Side L.I.M.B., Human Resources of Canada, Melfort Ministerial, James Smith Cree Nation and Stardale. This project focused on education and community development.

In September, Stardale offered another program entitled, *Rediscovery of Self*, which commenced with a 14-week Life Skills program. The format of the program concentrated on nurturing the women and dealing with many sensitive topics. This program ended on December 17, 1999, as the women moved into two other programs entitled, *Framework For Change-ALAPS, an Aboriginal Family Literacy Program* and *Harmonious Learning* – an individual one on one and group literacy/GED program. We are enthusiastic about the endless possibilities for the women as they begin this new course in their lives.

The Talking Quilt

In order to address the emotional and personal needs of our women, Stardale designed a pilot project utilizing various personal and emotional healing methods, and implemented a program entitled, *The Talking Quilt*. This endeavor encompassed the medium of color, texture, pattern, touchability and artistry, with visual and mental stimulation. It provided a spark that ignited the flame of reconciliation for all the women and youth who participated in the designing and the stitching of the Quilt.

As the Quilt was stitched, group counselling sessions were held and videotaped; oral and written life stories were logged from the beginning to the completion, in order to record the full intensity of the momentum of healing, growth and change in each participant. At the conclusion of the project, a video production was developed incorporating the quilting process, the counselling sessions/discussions and the eventual celebration together with a narrative telling their stories.

The method of approach in the Quilt project

focused on the element of "council sharing" that is a traditional way. Thus, the council of women formed a circle and discussed their lives' hurts, joys, traumas and experiences giving way to individual awakening, emotional healing and development that manifested itself through the Quilt as the speakers of truth.

At Stardale, we focus on individual expression of the self in all art forms whether in pictures, paintings, sculpture, weaving or quilt making. We feel that the expression of thought of each participant in these projects manifests itself in an expression of artistry, skillfulness and immense talent, which all women have. Their unique talents also have been exhibited on *The Talking Quilt*.

Community supports, partnerships and linkages

Partners, associates and sponsors of the Stardale Centre include: Human Resources Development Canada, CanSask, Cumberland Regional College, James Smith Cree Nation, Aboriginal Women's Council of Saskatchewan (PA), The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Pasquia Health District, Melfort Ministerial Association, & Porcupine Opportunities For the Disabled. Stardale also represents the community organisations of the North East sector on the Provincial LINKS board.

Stardale also works closely with Victim's Services, North Central Health District, East Side L.I.M.B., Prince Albert Against Family Violence, Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission, Sask Energy (Aboriginal Affairs), Melfort Food Bank, N.E. Intersectorial; and is associated with Sask Native Housing (Saskatoon), Alberta Life Skills & Literacy Ltd., Y.W.C.A (Calgary)

Where to from here?

Our team of partners are continuously searching for funding for the undertaking of the successful programs at Stardale. Recently, (March 2-5, 2000), the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women held a conference in Toronto with 110 women in attendance. The Stardale program coordinator was invited to present a paper on the impacts of trauma and violence on women's learning; a program model.

As a direct result of these presentations, more and more discussions are taking place with other NGO's from across Canada wanting to use Stardale as the hub and an exemplary model in structuring their programs. This process is now being strategized.

*Ms. Helen McPhaden
Program Coordinator, Stardale Women's
Group Inc. Foundation.*

Box 1752 Melfort, Saskatchewan S0E 1A0 -
Email: stardale@sk.sympatico.ca

MAY 10 2000

Congress Report

*Designing Our Future
Women's Learning, Education & Training
in Canada:
2000 & Beyond*

March 2-5, 2000

The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women

in collaboration with

The National Women's Reference Group on Labour Market Issues

That the curriculum and program of the Learning Experience Centre, of UNITE Local 459, be shared and delivered through more unions and training agencies.

That resources to assist in addressing the effects of trauma on learning be provided, such as: financial aid for supporting services to women (childcare, counselling, transportation, living expenses), training for staff and instructors, support for staff and instructors, etc.

That the spiritual and emotional aspects of learning be incorporated into any educational situation.

That programs such as Stardale Women's Group in Saskatchewan be replicated in other parts of the country.

That greater educational opportunities, and the necessary supports, be provided to older women.

That the principle of "equity" be reinstated as a fundamental component in training agreements between the federal and provincial governments.

That family resource programs work with literacy and other training programs to provide training opportunities that incorporate the needs of families.

That federal and provincial governments maintain commitments to gender equity and equality.

Outcomes of Open Space Technology

Saturday Discussions

The procedure used for Saturday and Sunday of the congress was Open Space Technology in which, rather than having pre-set workshops, participants are asked to identify topics for discussion. There is no limit to the number of topics that can be named and once ideas are exhausted, participants break off into discussion groups of their choice. The purpose of using this process was to determine important issues in women's education and training (specifically, to tease out any hitherto overlooked areas) and to determine possible future directions for a national body addressing women's learning and education. What is documented here is the complete list of identified topics and, under those that were discussed, the most salient points and concrete recommendations.

List of Topics

- 1 Recognition and acceptance of "outside of Canada" credentials by educational institutions, provinces and professional bodies.
- 2 How women have been subordinated in the process of their learning and how it can be different.
- 3 Networking, bodily and digitally.
- 4 How do we sustain older women's education well into their 80s?
- 5 CLOW/NWRG: where do we go from here?
- 6 The role of emotional and spiritual growth in learning, education and training.
- 7 Diversity in education: rethinking and rewriting history and curriculum.
- 8 How to incorporate the needs of students and other "grassroots" into the emerging organization; funding, information, choices, action.
- 9 Immigrant women's literacy: holistic learning, job training, a safe place to learn.
- 10 Using existing resources creatively rather than creating a new organization.
- 11 Starting from scratch: where are the resource connections to create women's literacy centres in non-

Stardale Women's Group garners national recognition

By Heather Baril
of THE JOURNAL

The work done by Stardale Women's Group in the Melfort area has now been recognized by other groups nation-wide.

Stardale project co-ordinator Helen McPhaden attended a national women's conference in Toronto at the beginning of March, where she said other women from across Canada expressed interest in copying the Stardale model in their community.

"The funding (for Stardale) initially came through HRDC and through New Careers for me to do a needs assessment," she said. "Through that momentum we came to where we opened the doors. Now what has happened, as a result of this we are being recognized nationally."

McPhaden presented on the implications of trauma and violence for women and learning to the more than 100 women at the Designing Our Future Women's Learning, Education and Training in Canada: 2000 and

Beyond.

The conference was sponsored by the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CLOW), which celebrates its 20th anniversary this

"Through that momentum we came to where we opened the doors. Now what has happened, as a result of this we are being recognized nationally."

-Helen McPhaden

year. While she's a member of the organization, McPhaden said she's not sure how they initially heard about the Stardale Women's Group.

"I get their materials, which is part of what I use in some of my course curriculum to do with literacy, and behaviours and tra-

ma and so forth, and they sent out material last year because of the conference," she said.

"And then I don't know how it happened, it was just all of a sudden 'Would you be prepared to speak?'"

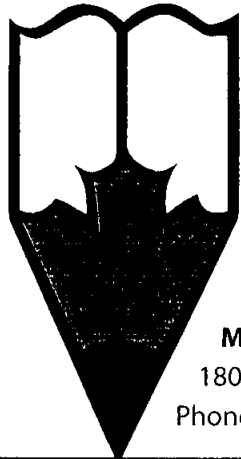
The national interest in Stardale and the work the group does is due mainly to the fact that the program is successful, according to McPhaden.

"The idea is, we were set up as a pilot project. Pilot projects often fall on their face," she said. "This has been a successful pilot project, and as a result of that we continue to grow and move forward."

"So all the material that's been developed from the assessments, evaluation, curriculum, can now be shared."

Groups wanting her to bring the model to their communities, something she said would be dif-

Please see GROUP/Page A-2



Movement for Canadian Literacy

180 Metcalfe Street, Suite 300, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1P5
 Phone: 613-563-2464 • Fax: 613-563-2504 • E-mail: mcl@literacy.ca

July, 2000

Volume 3, No. 1

THE FIRST EVER IN CANADA National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG)

by Priscilla George

IN 1996, BEVERLY ANNE SABOURIN and Associates of Winnipeg and Step-by-Step Early Learning Centre, Kahnawake First Nation

submitted a proposal to the National Literacy Secretariat with the intent of "developing a comprehensive policy framework and strategic approach to the complex issue of literacy within Aboriginal communities and among Aboriginal citizens of Canada".

The first phase of the project compiled an inventory of more than 90 adult literacy programs sponsored and/or initiated by Aboriginal Peoples, and involving Aboriginal learners as clients. Phases Two and Three looked at factors that contributed to the success of Aboriginal literacy programs. The inventory, as well as two chapters entitled *Common Threads* and *Critical Indicators* constitute *The Language of Literacy, A National Resource Directory of Aboriginal Literacy Programs*.

Those interviewed consistently suggested developing a national network of Aboriginal literacy practitioners, and having a

In April, I had the privilege of attending the National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering in Morley, Alberta. Due partly to the wholistic orientation of Aboriginal literacy, partly to the serene beauty of the setting, and partly to the wonderful people of all ages and diverse backgrounds, the experience was as uplifting as it was stimulating. In order to share the experience, and broaden the base for a national Aboriginal literacy network, MCL turned over this issue of *literacy.ca* to the National Aboriginal Design Committee. NALG Coordinator Priscilla George acted as Guest Editor, and wrote the following article as well as any others not credited to other writers. — Wendy DesBrisay

National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG). Phase Three established a National Aboriginal Design Committee (NADC) that is nationally representative of Aboriginal literacy practitioners to oversee such a gathering — the NADC includes a Learner and an Elder. The committee members include:

continued on page 2



What's Inside

- 4 Holistic Learning: A Model of Education Based on Aboriginal Cultural Philosophy
- 5 Writing as a Way of Healing
- 6 A Shining Example of Perseverance and Courage
- 7 Reflections on the National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering
- 9 "A Lasting Impact"
- 10 The Future — Now I Know Where to Begin
- 10 Different Kinds of "Literacy"
- 11 To Fly Without Wings
- 11 Helping People to Better Themselves
- 12 Connections — and Potential
- 13 A Sense of Family
- 13 Earth Angels
- 15 Stardale
- 16 Hopefully a Series of NALGS
- 17 Native Literacy Resources
- 19 Ācimowina (Storytelling)
- 20 Coming Events



PHOTO BY NANCY COOPER

From left to right: Ira Stanley-Tober, Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, Moise Chartier (in background), Timmins Native Friendship Centre, Helen McPhaden, Stardale Women's Group Inc., Melfort Saskatchewan, Nora McDonald-Plourde, Nova Scotia Dept. of Education and Culture, Catherine O'Connell, Ottawa

"I loved the location. It was a beautiful place — a beautiful setting. It was quiet and removed from everything else, so people had to stay there. They couldn't slip away. Everyone that came had something good to say. Everyone came with open hearts, and a willingness to share. It was a very welcoming situation. The main speaker, Diane Hill, reinforced everything that I believe in. It was nice to hear her thoughts on the Aboriginal way of knowing — how everything is connected, and everything has a place and a purpose. I was just happy to be there, to share information on family literacy, and to have the information well-received. This has opened

the door for family literacy programming across Canada."

introduction to scientific method and science vocabulary. Pairs of students performed the experiments, and made a display for a science fair. The project team made a video of the process, and created a workbook so that others could try this idea, too. The video and workbook "Science is Wonder" are available from the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation (204) 989-8860. The second workshop I attended was by Charles Ramsey of New Brunswick. Charles walked us through the layers of information available through the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) website. If you haven't been to it lately, it is well worth visiting (www.nald.ca). The third workshop was by AlphaRoute from Ontario. The project will have four streams of on-line learning available for Ontarians by next year — English, French, Aboriginal and Special Needs Access. The Aboriginal content is being created with the help of Christianna Jones. She is basing her lesson on the Medicine Wheel, and an Aboriginal vision that allows learners to develop concepts enhancing the mind, the body, the spirit, and the emotions. The process will use the self-direction and self-management domain. On-line learners will have access to tutors through toll-free numbers. Their site was user-friendly. You can see a glimpse of their program on www.alphaplus.ca"

— Bebe Ivanochko, Northlands College

the door for family literacy programming across Canada."

— Leanne McLeod, Won Ska Cultural School

The Gathering provided a powerful forum for sharing ideas, and collectively building a vision for Aboriginal literacy. Participants were given an opportunity to discuss the strengths of the current Aboriginal literacy movement, as well as to identify weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This information will serve as the base for developing a National Aboriginal Literacy Strategy, and recommendations to the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples.

As a follow-up to the National Gathering, a small working group in Saskatchewan has been convened to explore ways and means to continue discussions at the provincial level. Updates on this process will be included in future issues of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network newsletter.

Debbie Purton is the new Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network,
<sklit@sk.sympatico.ca>

Anyone wishing to contact Leanne may do so at: Pine Grove Correctional Centre, Phone (306) 953-3132, home (306) 764-7204, or e-mail: hlmcleod@sk.sympatico.ca

Stardale

by Helen McPhaden, Melfort, Saskatchewan

The vision statement for Stardale is to provide life skills and literacy education, as well as advocacy, to women living in poverty and abusive situations, toward empowering their lives, their families, and their communities, thus overcoming systemic barriers.

Stardale offers many learning/healing activities and programs which are solely for the betterment of women. They are strengthened through a unique approach, which is a highly structured format that combines experiential learning, and arts and crafts in a therapeutic environment. We highlight some of these activities for this article.

Our first program was entitled, *Honouring Ourselves*. This was a 24-week program, which began with 14 weeks of Life Skills, coupled with a 4-week literacy component, followed by a 5-week childcare worker certificate program. The Life Skills program included self, family, job-education, community and leisure — all critical first steps toward self-empowerment. Also important to the women's healing, growth and transformation is literacy. Literacy opens doors to the world. The knowledge gained creates access to positive alternatives for women.

Renewal of the Spirit was an 8-week Life Skills program with a one-week collective kitchen component. We addressed the challenge of food safety and proper nutrition on a shoestring budget.

Illumination from Within was developed in response to requests from women for a program similar to *Honouring Ourselves*. It began with Life Skills, then literacy, and concluded with certification as an office worker with computer skills.

Our next endeavour, *Transcendence to the Future* facilitated the women transforming themselves by helping them to acknowledge their pain with honesty, and a commitment to change. They began to achieve harmony, balance and freedom of thought. One of the women from this group has started a new business — a greenhouse operation — at the James Smith Cree Nation.

To meet the needs of many of our youth, Stardale undertook a 3-phase program entitled, *Exploring Our Options*. This was a collaborative effort with the East Side Local Area Management Board, HRDC, Melfort Ministerial, James Smith Cree Nation, and Stardale. This project focussed on education and community development.

In September, Stardale offered another program, *Rediscovery of Self*, which saw participants move into two other programs entitled, *Framework for Change — ALAPS, an Aboriginal Family Literacy Program* and *Harmonious Learning*, a one-on-one and group literacy/GED program.

We have just completed, *The Talking Quilt*. This endeavour encompassed the use of colour, texture, pattern, touchability and artistry, along with visual and mental stimulation. It ignited the flame of reconciliation for all the women and youth who participated in the designing and stitching of the quilt. As the quilt was stitched, group counselling sessions were held and videotaped. Oral and written life stories were logged from the beginning to completion in order to record the full intensity of healing, growth and change in each participant. The narrative in the resulting video incorporates the quilting, the counselling sessions/discussions, and the eventual celebration. The "council sharing" method, a traditional way, enabled the women to discuss their lives' hurts, joys, traumas and experiences, giving way to individual awakening, and emotional healing.

At Stardale, we focus on expression of the self in all art forms be it pictures, paintings, sculpture, weaving or quilt making. After all, literacy is more than the written word. Further, these methods often provide a catharsis for the women.



Stardale Program coordinator Helen McPhaden stands in front of the Talking Quilt. The quilt's squares showcase both the negative and positive experiences in the lives of the women who created it.

Quilt tells the stories of abuse survivors

By Heather Baril
of THE JOURNAL

Each square of the quilt tells a story.

They are stories of abuse, of addictions, of the traumatic pasts of the women who made them.

Together, the squares bear testimony to the legacy left behind by the residential schools that aboriginal children were placed in decades ago.

The Talking Quilt, which was unveiled at a ceremony at the Stardale Women's Group on Wednesday, represents a part of the healing journeys of the 13 women who participated in the program.

Program co-ordinator Helen McPhaden said the concept of the quilt is built around the community development idea.

"Women would come together, way back when, and make quilts and it was a means of community development and it was a means of learning an art form," she explained. "I also thought quilting, in some ways, is becoming a dying art form, and it could be a really nice tool or a vehicle to use as a project."

Along with the quilt, the project, which was funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, includes a writ-

ten piece that is also used as the narration for a 12-minute video chronicling the women's work on the quilt.

Oya Aral of Calgary, wrote the narrative while her daughter, Selena Ozol, recited it. Ozol also composed and played the classical guitar music featured in the video.

Aral said she wrote the piece based on a story written by one of the women, as well as notes taken from discussions as the women worked on the quilt.

"It sort of puts (into words) their feelings and hurts and down times and their happiness and laughter and cheer and how they are looking towards the future and hopefully changing some of the cycles they have gone through before," she said.

"So just listening to some of their stories and discussions around the quilt, I just put all the pieces together."

During the unveiling ceremony, women who had worked on the quilt explained the significance and meanings of the different items sewn on their squares.

Those who had been in residential schools told stories of abuse, alienation, and a loss of identity which led to problems such as addictions later in their lives.

Others, who were the children of

parents who had been in the schools, related how the experiences of their parents had affected their lives as well.

McPhaden said it's important to make people aware of the abuses that took place at the residential schools, something many are unaware of.

"Most people don't know what happened (there)," she said. "It doesn't matter what culture you are, it's affected us.

"A culture was completely stripped away, and it's terrible."

Aral said she believes such a project would serve other such groups positively as well.

"If we could encourage other aboriginal or other communities across Canada to do quilts like this one, and we could get maybe 10 or 15 of them together, it could be a marvellous exhibit," she said.

The Talking Quilt will spend the next two months at Stardale, after which plans are being worked out to display it at the Legislative Buildings in Regina and the Prince Albert Grand Tribal offices.

There are also tentative plans to display the project at the Melfort and District Museum as part of Aboriginal Day on June 21.



(L. to R.) Trina Head, Vicki Clouster, Mary St. Cyer, Tonya Missler, Angie Burns and Mandy Sanderson hold the Canadian Millennium flag after unveiling the plaque dedicating the healing garden.

Group hopes project will be legacy

By Jordie Dwyer
of THE JOURNAL

Close to 20 people braved the cool, wintry weather on Friday to witness the dedication of a healing garden in Melfort.

The garden is located on the banks of Melfort Creek, just north of Spruce Haven Park, and was built entirely by the Stardale Women's Group.

Helen McPhaden, coordinator of the Stardale Women's Group, along with a number of women who worked on the garden unveiled a plaque recognizing the efforts of everyone involved in the project.

The project received funding from the Canada Millennium Partnership Program and donations of equipment and materials from local companies and individuals.

Vicki Clouster, one of the women who assisted

in the construction, believes the garden will be a legacy for future generations.

"The garden will be good for a legacy for our kids and generations to come. It will show what women can do," said Clouster. "Digging, cutting railroad ties, and pounding rebar was good to do."

McPhaden said the small garden plot will be open to everyone and the final touches, such as flowers, are going to be added in the spring.

"We have all the benches and arches in place and will be planting the flowers in the spring," said McPhaden.

"The garden will be for people to come meditate, pray, or just have some quiet time."

The group's ideal of Breaking the Cycles by Creating the Circles has also been integrated into the construction of the



The plaque, which sits in the healing garden, recognizes the efforts of everyone involved in funding and constructing the project.

garden. The women of the group will perform all of the maintenance of the site.

Starting as an agency to provide advocacy, life

skills and literacy programs to women, most of the group's members are either aboriginal, been abused or are living in poverty.



Healing garden just a start

By Marjorie Roden
Sage Writer
MELFORT

The Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation, located in Melfort, dedicate a healing garden to the city on Nov. 10.

On hand at the ceremony were Sophie Keetnatch, Stardale's Elder, as well as Rev. Dan Young of the Covenant Church. Young represented one of the partners in the project, the Melfort Ministerial Association.

A dedication plaque set on a large rock was unveiled. On the plaque are the names of all the partners in the healing garden project-Stardale, Plura (an organization comprised of the Presbyterian, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches that fights poverty) CanSask, and the Canada Millenium Partnership program.

"We have a very large partnership, which is very much a part of community development, networking, and it's all about our motto -Breaking the cycles by creating the circles," said Helen McPhaden, program co-ordinator of Stardale.

The healing garden is not yet completed.

"We've got some trees, and that's about it, because we did not do the dedication until the fall. We didn't even really start building it until the fall.

Much of the work in the garden has been done by many of the women who

Healing through weaving

A unique program operated by Stardale Women's Group in Melfort helps women look to the future

Weaving provides many benefits to the people, and an innovative program run by the Stardale Women's Group in Melfort is using the art of weaving to help women.

The weaving program began back in July of last year. Linda Marion from Melfort teaches the program that was specially designed to help the group's clients through the healing process.

"Weaving is one of the oldest professions in the world. In this class, we use that weaving as a means for healing, personal growth and a connecting to all of the women in the present and the women who have gone before us," said Marion.

In order to instruct the weaving course, Marion studied for around a month under Katharine Dickerson through a mentorship program at the Alberta College of Art.

As well, Dickerson came to Melfort to help Marion start the course and to teach some more technical aspects of the course, like creating various colour dyes for use in the natural fibres.

The students in the class learn the process of healing through talking to others and creating their own design with a story that is attached to that artwork. The students also work with natural fibres to better connect with the earth, another point in the healing process of weaving.

"There is a lot of positive energy that comes out in that class. It is healing within the context of an artistic medium that we are teaching," Marion said.

The students have had to face many challenges and struggles so far in their lives – including such things as addiction, abuse of many kinds, dealing with poverty and being marginalized by society – and Stardale has been a big part of the process to restore themselves as a person.

They also believe that the class has helped in their healing.

"The class has helped me in understanding myself and the people around me better," said student Vicky Closter. "I have been able to learn to do that by using the life skills I have learned in class."

Another student, Kerry Archibald, said she has also, in a similar way, been better able to cope with the situations around her and has learned to deal with people in a positive manner.

"I have learned to make my own designs and to use artistic expression in the weaving to better express myself," said Archibald.

Marion has gone one step further with the weaving course by leading a one-day workshop,



Student Kerry Archibald hand-weaves some yarn together during class.

Breaking the Cycles by Creating the Circles, that was organized by the Stardale Women's Group.

"I talked more about how the course works to heal in the context of art but I also provided some information about how I got started," Marion said.

In addition, the weaving group has started up a co-operative that will hopefully become fully operational in the next few months.

Helen McPhaden, co-ordinator of Stardale, said the group will begin test marketing their products soon, along with participating in business and management training classes to learn the needed skills to run the co-operative.

McPhaden said the purpose of holding the workshop was to let other service providers know what the group is all about.

"Our rationale behind it was to share our methodology with other service providers, non-governmental organizations and several different government departments that provide services to women," said McPhaden.

"We are a unique model, and being a fairly new group we wanted to get our information out there so people know what we are doing and what we are attempting to accomplish."

The workshop featured discussion about the weaving course and a talk on sustainable community development through a holistic approach, target setting, applying and integrating a management plan along with some visioning techniques.

"The workshop wasn't just all about talking on things either. People attending the workshop were able to go and see the centre plus talk to

the women that are there. That, hopefully, help them to better understand what it is rather than just sitting and talking about it," McPhaden said.

An exhibit called *Window in Time*, featuring a medicine wheel artwork by the weaving was on display during the workshop before heading to Regina to be part of an art exhibition.



Vicky Closter



Vicky Closter, a student with the weaving class, helps sew together two of the panels to be used in the *Window in Time* artwork.

The program provides an opportunity for women to attend residential schools. In doing so, the women share their experiences with one another while engaging in the making of a quilt. The quilt reflects the personal experiences and feelings of the women. Through the shared quilting a healing process begins. The quilt also provides the women with the ability to share their experiences with others.

12 Aboriginal women participated actively in the program. Their ages vary between 18 to 45 years. All the women quilters have between one and five children. Half of the women attended at least one residential school. All of the women have at least one member of their immediate family who attended residential school.

The Quilt was unveiled on May 17th, with a traditional ceremony. Participants came to the unveiling from many different parts of Canada. The group made a video of the group quilting process and wrote the story of their experience, which they share here with us. If you are inspired by this project and wish to obtain more information, please contact the AHF at 1 888-725-8886 and ask for Giselle Robelin or Wayne Spear.

'The Talking Quilt'
A Healing Journey

(Based on Eliza's Story & the discussions of the group of women who made the Quilt).
Talking poem written by Oya Aral.

Early in the morning
as the sun's rays colour the gray sky
in hues of pink, crimson & gold,
we are on our way to another day
full of learning, caring,
& friendship
in the women's quilting circle.

Our drivers pick up the women,
& we share a ride to Melfort.
While some of us gaze out the window
into the crystalline white snow
covering the hills & beyond,
others are still half-asleep or snoozing.
It is a quiet ride to town.

For the watchful eye in tune,
the tapestry of trees in white,
shining & sparkling icicles bright,
create a dazzling show
that winter's beauty is in bloom.
The icy road disappears behind each hill
of this fascinating scene.

We always see with excitement
the white owl and the hawk
dancing in the air
encircling us in their daily ritual
& find them perched up on a tree
waiting for us at Stardale
upon our arrival.

In the quietness of the morning drive to town,
we think about the quilts we are making,
& its relevance in our lives:
we reflect on our childhood days —
a first blanket at home or at the residential school,
when the families we formed
under the quilts that we shared.

Spending time in silent solitude, cold & chill of the
morning brings to mind sweet & sad memories,
some horror stories of our growing up years. The
women that smoke light up a cigarette before get-
ting into town & sink deep into their own thoughts.

Such warm welcome it is indeed.
Helen awaits us
with cheerful greetings
every bright or gloomy day.
Her symbols of nature
the white owl & the hawk
cheer us from the trees.

How eagerly we look forward to
coming together one more time
to share our childhood memories,
our lives on the Reserve,
our families & children,
& the long lost traditions
of our past ancestors.

As our quilts starts taking shape
in the company of our laughter & tears,
our feelings pour out in discussions
like colours of pink & purple reflecting sweet memories;
dark gray, pitch black or crimson red flags
signaling the dangers,
& the horror stories in our lives.

Loss, grieving, anger & hate
are just some of the emotions
we carry always in our hearts & souls;
and we have to deal with all of these
in every day
of our lives.

Our spirits soar like an eagle
in search of the tradition of our ancestors.
We ask for the boldness & pride of our tribal cultures
to return to us, & give us comfort.
We seek the tenderness of love & caring
from our long lost generations
to come & find us in our family affair.

Piece by piece we contribute to the quilt
presenting a story from each of us.
Our emotions & memories
stitched with our tears & fears,
embroidered with our joy & cheers,
& in the belief of our success
standing in harmony
& togetherness.

We share each other's grief,
desolate times of despair, fear, anger & hatred,
the events in our growing up years:

the traumas —
the booze, drugs & gambling addictions —
the learned behaviours
that destroy our families.

We look at each day as a new piece of thread —
as if threading the beads of sorrowful stories,
we search & seek in our discussions,
new ways & resolutions to our spiritual trauma —
in grieving & letting go the past,
our personal relationships,
problems in raising our youth & family affairs.

Each new & enlightening day
brings us to educational programs,
life skills, sculpting & quilting,
we gain self esteem & communal pride;
we learn new methods & skills
to break the cycles of addictions,
to develop parenting, job qualifications, & social
relationships.

We have lost —
We have lost the roots of our ancestral traditions:
where are the cultural values of our great grandfathers?
What happened to our serene beautiful life in harmony
with nature, family & friends?

Our childhood memories are full of horrible experiences.
we were separated from our families,
& taken to residential schools,
could not even hold hands with our sisters & brothers,
did not even get to see them in our growing up years.
We became a number in the school,
& if we could not remember our number, we got hit;
if we could not remember our number, we got hit!

We lost touch with our families — mothers & fathers,
missed the safety & security of our homes.
Fun times with the grandparents were all gone.
Sisters & brothers separated,
we were not allowed to communicate with each other —
the family bonds & unity
in our lives were destroyed.

The school days were dreary & pitch black at times:
molested & abused by our teachers & supervisors,
wearing the same uniforms, our hair cut short
above the ear,
we had to line up for everything, even to use the
bathroom,
if we were too slow taking a shower,

& wounds of battering behind the walls.
We were also strapped on our hands or other parts of our bodies
which made us feel like we were on fire.
Even as adolescent female students, we could not escape
the trauma of being publicly beaten with pants down
on the private days of our lives.

Shameful, shameful – as we think about those days,
we feel naked & abandoned – our pride gone,
all alone in a world foreign to us,
not knowing where to turn.
The traumas in our lives led us into
alcohol, drugs, addictions,
& abusive actions.

The value of self, & respect for others – lost;
incest & physical abuse,
we could not create
healthy & happy families.
we even failed in raising our own children properly.

All these things were done to us & more,
in the name of "God" we were told.
It became a fearful world,
not understanding the meaning of "God" as all.
One of the quilters asked one day:
"How come they did this?"
And another one answered,
"Because they knew they could get away with it!"

Days of discussions on relationships,
drugs, alcohol, & abusive partners.
What happens when incest
becomes a repeating pattern?
When a destitute mother watches her daughter
as she goes through the same experiences?

God have mercy on us,
we need to break these cycles.

Loss, grieving, anger & hate
are just some of the emotions
we have to deal with
in everyday of our lives.
We need to break these cycles
as we learn new skills.

Everyday is a new bright & cheerful day
if we care enough to make it that way.
We can erase the darkness
slowly out of our lives.

We have a chance,
a God-given chance to understand life
& to choose a righteous path
closer to the Divine.

We share our feelings & emotions
along this healing journey
as we create our quilts together,
with tears, laughter & joy.
In our praying circle,
we pray for each other –
to break the addictions & repetitive cycles.

We can create a wonderful world
for our families & children
if we change the old habits,
teach new values, respect & manners
& promote a new vision
for the betterment
of our communities.

We are the protectors & guardians
of our generation;
& we seek to be the wise mentors
for generations & generations to come.

we search for the truth.

We need to destroy the barriers
to freedom of thought & understanding.
We must be true to our feelings & emotions.
We must have compassion for peace & harmony
in our lives.

We must trust in the process of healing.
We must use our new skills
in altering our perceptions and beliefs.

Our prayers will transcend us, help us redefine who we are.

& bring us closer to the Divine.

Our souls feel the harmony of nature,
that we cherish all around us
& the wonder of the universe
God's creation is all around us,

we feel overwhelmed by its beauty & peace.

The life that we create for ourselves
& the people we love
should have the same harmony as in nature –
caring & sharing we shall stand together
not only in making this quilt,
but, also by using our new skills,
we shall excel in life.

We shall soar like an eagle,
as we strive to be successful participants & leaders
in our communities.

Creating such a beautiful Quilt
has been a healing journey for us women.
We have come a long way
crying, laughing,
denying & changing
to a new light dawning on the horizon –
we shall make it shine.

Look at each piece of the Quilt,
examine it in detail,
look at our stories from the past,
depicting our frustrations & anger
that still linger
deep in our hearts.

This Quilting process has been a new awakening –
an awesome healing experience for us.
We learned many new skills along the way,
rested our emotions,
& looked into each other's lives.
With prayers in our praying circles,
we created a powerful cosmic healing force.

We gained a new understanding
& a renewed interest
in our ancient culture & traditions.
We need to help each other more & more,
& give a helping hand –
be there for one another at all times,
to hold the hand of mistreated & distressed ones.

We the women are the enablers & the rescuers.
We shall survive the conflicts & abuse.

We shall be the leaders
to change the cycles forever.
We shall overcome as we stand together,
hand-in-hand,
to face the new world.

The Stardale Women's Group Foundation
gave us this opportunity
to tell our stories through the Talking Quilt.
We have made changes for the better already,
we are grateful & thankful.

SURVIVORS

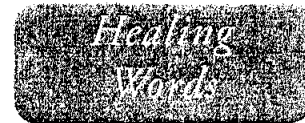
At the age of seven, they took us from our homes

They cut off our braids
Told our parents they would go to jail
Without fail
If they did not send us to residential school
Our parents were not fools
They knew they were going to be used as tools
for the priests and nuns

What a process they put us through
Took away our culture, language and tradition
They shamed and sexually, physically, mentally
abused us
All in the name of the Lord

As we grew older
We could not forget the past
It would for generations last
What the priests and nuns did
To a once proud race
Now we have alcohol and drugs to make us forget
Our ways are lost
But not by choice
But by who ruled at the time

Written by Ron Soro
Member of Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Alberta
February 26, 2001
Printed by special permission. All rights reserved by
the author.



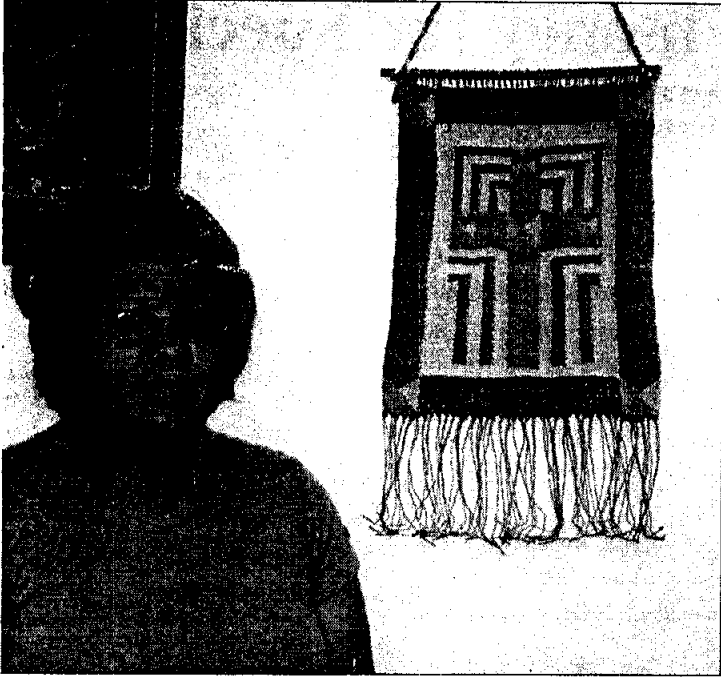
•We are always looking for poems,
stories, photos, and information on
residential schools and residential
school-related matters.

To receive Healing Words, write to us at Suisse
801, 75 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P
5E7 or phone 1-888-725-8886. (In Ottawa,
phone 237-4441). Our fax number is (613)
237-4442 and our email is grobelin@ahf.ca or
uspear@ahf.ca. Keep in mind that the newsletter
is available in French and English and is free.
Also available on-line! <http://www.ahf.ca>



DREAM WEAVERS

Women from Stardale Artistic Co-operative in Melfort produce high-quality weavings based on Salish techniques. Members of the co-op include, clockwise from top, Vicky Closter, Kerry Archibald, Celena Tony and Jackie Tony. Helen McPhaden is coordinator of Stardale Women's Group which helped start the co-op. See more photos on Pages 6, 8 and 11. - Rural Roots Photo by Holly



TY WEAVING – Celena Tony, above, Jackie Tony, above right, and Archibald, lower right, are members of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative. Melfort area women are creating high quality weavings using techniques developed by West Coast Salish people. They use natural fibres such as linen and hemp and create dyes using berries and herbs. Geometric shapes predominate in their weaving. Jackie Tony estimates 80 hours went into making her weaving which depicts a small cabin nestled by a stream and woods. And that doesn't include the time spent preparing the fibres. The Melfort women are some of the few in the world who are proud to practice the traditional craft because the West Coast craftspeople now more often only create Cowichan sweaters.

– Rural Roots photos by Holly





PROUD PRODUCER – Vicky Closter, a member of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative, is proud of the weavings she and other members of the Melfort area group have been producing. They use natural fibres and dyes to create high quality art work in a style developed by West Coast Salish people.

– Rural Roots photo by Holly Wiberg.

Stardale Artistic Co-operative weaving in classic West Coast style

Story and Photos
By HÖLLY WIBERG
for Rural Roots

WEAVERS FROM the Melfort area are giving a traditional West Coast craft a uniquely Prairie spin, according to McPhaden, program co-ordinator of the Women's Group.

Coast Salish weaving, originally done by indigenous people from Canada's West Coast and over Island, is experiencing a revival thanks to eight women behind the Stardale Artistic Co-operative Limited.

"Our knowledge, no one is doing this work to sell," McPhaden said.

Using the natural fibres hemp and linen and local berries as dye, the Stardale group has had their weavings appraised at as high as \$1,600, McPhaden said.

"We are now at a position where everyone is doing very fine, high-end work."

The price tag may seem steep, but it reflects the hours of labour behind each weaving, McPhaden said.

Jackie Tony is one of the women in the co-operative who calculates 80 hours went into one of her weavings depicting a small cabin nestled by a stream and woods.

"The time only includes the hours actually spent weaving."

Preparatory work must be done before the women even touch their looms, Tony said.

PREPARE THE FIBRES must be readied for dyeing. Four threads of hemp or linen are woven into skeins. Then the material is washed in soda and water, rinsed and hung to dry. The fibres are bathed in a tannic solution for so they accept the colouring.

Natural dyes are used, so the women spend hours gathering local plant material and trying different possibilities. Hues from purple onion skins, safflower, geraniums, beets, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and alkanet are among those appearing in the weavings. Marion of James Smith Cree Nation near Melfort travelled to Calgary last summer to learn weaving from Katharine Dickenson, director of the fibre art program at the Alberta College of Art and Design. Since then, Marion has been teaching craft to women at Stardale.

"I began weaving this spring. It was confusing for me at first, but it didn't take long to catch on," she said.

"I love everything just seems pretty easy." Jackie Tony, who also does beadwork, likes the creativity of weaving and enjoys seeing the final project. "It does make me very proud," she said.

WEAVING IS common to many of the world's cultures, including those of Turkey and the American Southwest, McPhaden said. In the British Columbia's West Coast Salish people weaving often provided the family's sole

income.

However, the art form gradually died out as women had to abandon it for work in canneries and as domestic help, McPhaden said. Knitting is now more common, and the Salish are better known for their knitted and hand-spun Cowichan sweaters.

When they did do their weaving, the Salish people used fibres made from dog hair and cedar wood. In comparison, the Stardale women choose to use material more reflective of northeastern Saskatchewan. McPhaden has been talking with a local farmer about the possibility of having home-grown flax linen for their weaving by next summer.

MEMBERS OF the co-operative hope their handiwork will provide them with a decent living. But in addition to the money the weaving brings, it is also spiritually uplifting work, McPhaden said. Many women involved in Stardale have suffered physical abuse or trauma.

"(The weaving) is very therapeutic and very healing because of the repetition, and it just pulls you right out of your body," McPhaden said.

She thinks weaving could help the women and their families retrieve their culture and take their lives in a more positive direction. She would also like to start an after-school program to teach children the Salish weaving techniques.

McPhaden doesn't expect most of the weaving to sell locally. Instead, the co-operative is looking at markets farther afield. Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatoon has already expressed interest in selling the weaving. Other potential customers include government ministries and corporations.

WHILE THE co-operative was licensed in June of this year, preliminary work on the project began with a program known as Sacred Weft started in 1998. Weft refers to something that is spun or woven.

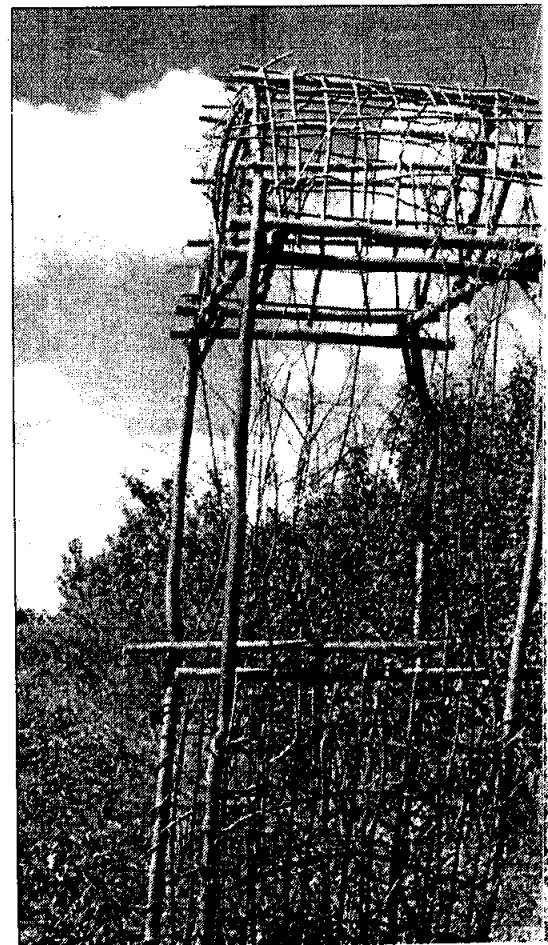
Funding for the co-operative has been provided by Canada Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services, Human Resource Development Canada and Saskatchewan Economic Development.

Now that the group has been licensed, the women will be learning more about co-operative strategies and general business skills, McPhaden said.

As an additional source of income, the co-operative has also been doing willow weaving. Their willow furniture is on display at Stardale's Healing Garden: Connecting with Spirit, a park located on Melfort's east end near Dickie's Creek.



AT WORK — Vicky Closter, left, and Jackie Tony work on traditional West Coast Salish weaving projects. They are members of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative in Melfort.



Page Three



(Left) Jackie Tony displays some of her Coast Salish weaving and willow furniture at the Stardale Artistic Cooperative show.

Art helps to rebuild women's lives

Brad Dupuis
THE JOURNAL

Expressing their experiences rebuilding their lives through traditional methods of weaving the creation of willow furniture is the goal of the members of the Stardale Artistic Cooperative Ltd.

The cooperative set up a display of homemade willow furniture and weavings on Main Street recently to allow the public to get a look at their wares and to hopefully make a few sales.

Jackie Tony, a member of the cooperative, had some of her pieces on display that took her nearly a week to complete. It was my first time building a willow. I learned a lot from mistakes. You have to use right willows to make it work," said Tony who joined the group at the end of April.

Tony had two end tables, a coffee table and a plant stand, all made of willow branches, for as well as a few of her weavings on display. The furniture combined took Tony roughly four hours to build, while her latest weaving took her nearly 80 hours to start to finish.

piece of cake," said Tony.

The cooperative is an extension of the Stardale Women's Group which has been providing life skills programming to Aboriginal women and women of poverty for the last three years.

According to program coordinator Helen McPhaden, the art that the members create is an important part of the healing process as it allows the women to dispel some of the negatives they have had in their lives in favor of positives.

"They create these beautiful, fantastic designs even though they have had very negative factors in their lives, but the positive side is that what they make is very beautiful," said McPhaden.

"Weaving is very therapeutic through its repetition. Women can also talk while they are weaving and that helps."

She went on to say that the reason that the weavings on display were not for sale is that there is no market for them in the Melfort area. She said market research that has been done on the Coast Salish weaving technique that the women have studied show that the weavings could possibly fetch a lot more money

I showed Katherine Dickerson of the Alberta College of Art and Design some of the work and she said it is superior to that of weavers in other parts of the world who have been doing it for years. They are worth thousands of dollars," said McPhaden.

Dickerson, McPhaden said, is the executive director of Fibre Arts at the college and a well traveled expert in the field of weaving.

McPhaden said that the art that the women are creating is symbolic in its nature. They take their media, whether it is willow or fabric, and bring it together to create something strong - just like the cooperative.

Currently eight of the women involved in the cooperative are involved in weaving.

What is so time consuming and expensive about the weaving is that the entire process is natural. The fabric is spun by hand and the dyes are all made from roots and berries. McPhaden said that the fact that these women are using the fruits of the land brings them closer to the earth.

"Everything is from scratch. The ladies pick berries for dyes.



The Tisdale Kinette Club hosted a first-ever and very successful Open House and home-based business show at the Kin Hall last Thursday evening. The willow accessories and woven tapestries of the Stardale Women's Group were among the wares on offer by 12 participating home-based businesses.

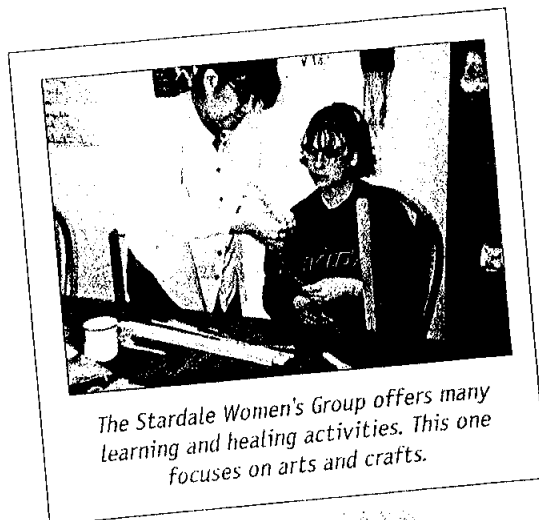
Industry News

- Anderson Exploration of Calgary announced a friendly and lucrative \$4-billion US takeover by Oklahoma-based oil and gas giant Devon Energy. As a result, Anderson will be the largest independent producer of natural gas in North America. (Source: Saskatoon Star Phoenix, September 5, page D5).
- Canadian Hunter Exploration made two major acquisitions, including a natural gas holding in Argentina and an unnamed energy firm in Canada, with assets focused in the Chedderville and Garrington areas of west-central Alberta. (Source: Saskatoon Star Phoenix, September 12, Page C7).
- El Paso Corp. of Houston plans to build a \$1.6-billion US undersea natural gas pipeline off Nova Scotia. The 36-inch pipeline will transport gas from fields off Sable Island to markets in Canada and the northeastern United States. (Source: Globe and Mail, October 3, Page B4).

A positive impact on Saskatchewan women

Aven Ross boost the hope and spirit of Saskatchewan women. Since 1997, this employee from Supplier Development has shared her holistic lifestyle, career path, and experiences with the Stardale Women's Group - a Melfort-based organization offering encouragement and support to Aboriginal women in Northeastern Saskatchewan.

Opening its doors in early 1998, the Stardale Women's Group thrives through the assistance of many partners, such as the National Literacy Secretariat, North Central Health District, and SaskEnergy. Participants are strengthened in a therapeutic environment through education, experiential learning, arts, crafts, and community development.



The Stardale Women's Group offers many learning and healing activities. This one focuses on arts and crafts.

Aven's involvement began when she attended the Centre's grand opening in 1997. Since then, her role has included a business focus, as she helps the Stardale Artistic Cooperative create a new line of business. This includes a revival of Coast Salish weaving and red willow designs. The women are also busy researching which markets would best receive their products.

"By sharing my experiences with these women, I not only show them there is hope for the future, but I also grow as a person," says Aven. "Stardale is a wonderful organization that has a positive impact on these women. I'm so happy I can be a part of it."

For more information about the Stardale Women's Group, visit their website at www.nald.ca/stardale, or give Aven a call at 777-9522.

New program helps save energy and money

Imagine pinpointing where you can conserve energy in the home and save money on your gas and power bills. Imagine no longer. On October 11, SaskEnergy and SaskPower announced **energy check**, a self-serve, interactive energy audit available through either company's website.

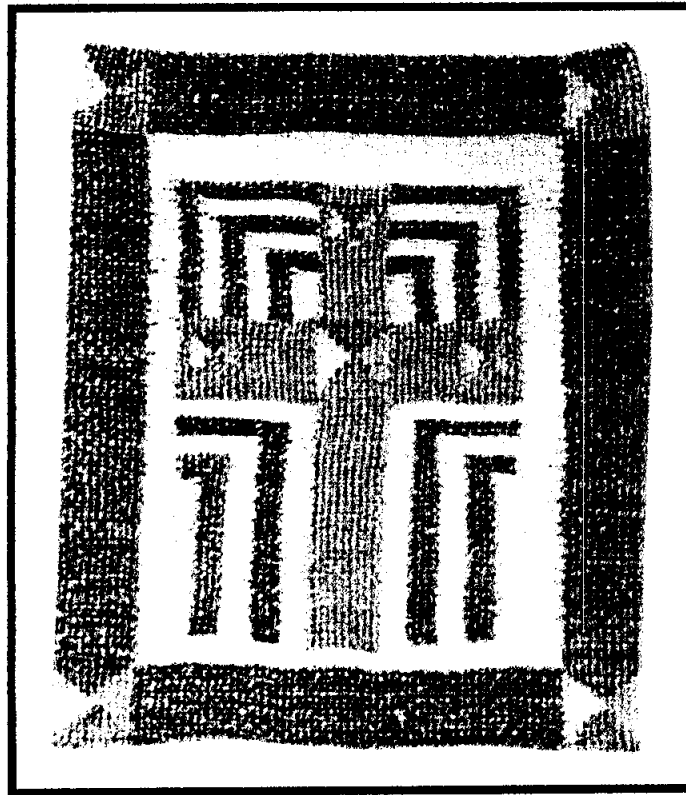
All you have to do is enter your 16-digit account number to access a special feature that shows your previous year's monthly electrical and natural gas consumption, a percentage breakdown of where you use energy, and a complete list of tips for saving energy in your home. If you don't have internet access, just use the internet connections at any of the 318 public libraries across the province.

**Saskatchewan Legislative Building
Cumberland Gallery**

Is Proud to Present

Stardale Artistic Co-operative

Thursday, February 14 at 1:30 p.m.



These unique works are the design of the women of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative of Melfort, Saskatchewan. The Stardale Centre in Melfort is a learning and healing centre for aboriginal women and women of poverty.

Coast Salish weaving is an ancient art using natural products from the earth such as flax fibre, nuts and berries. The tapestry serves as a healing initiative for the women of the co-operative.

Women of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative will be on hand to talk about and demonstrate some of the processes in Coast Salish weaving techniques.

ABUSED WOMEN

Weaving good therapy

By **ADRIENNE BANGSUND**
Leader-Post

While reviving their spirits, members of Stardale Women's Group Inc. are also reviving a once-lost ancient art.

The group out of Melfort has taken up Coast Salish weaving. The art was once a part of everyday life for aboriginal tribes of the northwest coast whose culture was disrupted by European settlement.

Now, members of Stardale, a centre for women dealing with abuse and poverty, are using it as a healing and learning mechanism.

Their work was displayed in the Cumberland Gallery at the Saskatchewan Legislative Building on Wednesday.

Helen McPhaden, program co-ordinator of Stardale, said women of aboriginal tribes used the art to sustain families and villages and their group is capitalizing on that.

"Weaving has always been about sustainability for women."

Starting from scratch, women of Stardale work long hours gathering flax they use for weaving, collecting bark, berries and roots used to make natural dyes and turning the fragile fabric into patterns.

McPhaden said starting with the raw elements is all part of the healing process.

"It's the getting back to nature that helps the women heal."

Kerry Archibald, a member of Stardale, has been weaving for about a year. She said the art was easy to pick up, "once I got one of the stitches down."

She is "pretty excited and nervous" to have her work displayed at the legislature, but hopes people will take notice of it and she will sell some of her pieces.

Archibald said "weaving and making your own designs" has helped her healing process. She had always liked knitting and beading and is proud of the work she has done.

"My daughter wants to learn how."

McPhaden said the repetition and patterns of the artwork "transcends cellular memory of violence", which many women at Stardale have experienced. Stardale helps provide life skills and literacy education to women in poverty and abusive situations.

McPhaden said the group aims at "giving hope and leading towards self-sufficiency."

She told the small crowd gathered at the display that

members of Stardale will travel to British Columbia to teach members of the Cowichan First Nations the art. McPhaden is thrilled of the prospect, considering "the technique is part of their heritage".

The artwork will be on display at the Cumberland Gallery until March 7. Samples can be viewed on the group's Web site: www.nald.ca/stardale/home.htm

SCHOOL LEGACY

Anglican healing fund helps Melfort program

TORONTO (CP) — The Anglican Church's healing fund for residential schools has given \$19,000 to a women's program in Melfort, that promotes self-sufficiency through combining healing work with artistic form and life skills teaching, reports the *Anglican Journal*.

The Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation runs projects for rural women living in poverty and abusive situations. Its newest program, funded by General Synod's healing fund, will use weaving to move women toward financial independence and a new sense of dignity.

"We want people who are in recovery," said co-ordinator Helen McPhaden, who started the first program in 1997. Since then, Stardale has run many healing activities and programs, which include literacy and day-care training as well as the use of community kitchens to address poverty and hunger.

About 80 per cent of the women in the programs are aboriginal, all are poor and living on social assistance, most have less than a Grade 10 education, all have experienced abuse and 26 per cent have fetal alcohol syndrome.

One of the project's goals is to communicate the impacts of residential schools both through weaving and talking circles. Along with learning how to weave, the 10 or 12 women in the program will learn communication skills and anger management.

Eventually the women will sell their weaving as part of a new artistic co-operative, McPhaden said. The potential for careers is limited, she added, both by racism and by the poor economic base in the area.

The church's healing fund was established 10 years ago to help aboriginal peoples address personal and social problems that are the legacy of native residential schools. The fund has dispensed almost \$1 million.

Reader Post Apr 13-02

Women telling their stories through area group's literary project

By Marie Rapoport

Young People's Press

Northeast Saskatchewan women are learning to read and write while using their voices and hands to weave a tapestry of forgotten "herstory".

"The idea of storytelling and weaving is very culturally oriented," said Helen McPhaden, executive director of the Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation in Melfort.

"Women have been doing this for centuries. Women coming together, working, sharing, laughing and crying," said McPhaden. "Storytelling is a way of teaching and keeping things alive in a culture."

McPhaden co-ordinates It's My Story to Tell, a 32-week project funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, aimed at encouraging Aboriginal and low-income women to "sharpen their writing skills as they write stories about their past".

Stardale serves communities in central and northern Saskatchewan. Women learn about the literacy project, designed for 30 women, through word-of-mouth or social service providers on or off First Nations reserves.

Women come to the centre weekdays and engage in structured and unstructured activities, including roundtable discussions and sharing of stories, writing, weaving, painting and learning to use computers.

"We have one room with a large table [where] women sit and work and write things down, or follow what's written on the flip chart ... and they can go into the classroom setting, where we sit in a circle and we talk and share and light a candle," said McPhaden.

"Then they go and work at home, or can come in and work one-on-one with an instructor, or with other participants in the group ... and if they need more work, then we give them what they need."

Women are also encouraged to talk to family members, conduct research in the library, "or anything that inspires them to write," McPhaden said.

"The women that we work with have such a low end of education, and that's a result of trauma, violence, shifting around and feelings of no self-worth. If you have families that are unhealthy, and the majority of women coming here have, school does not become a priority."

The Stardale Women's Group incorporates a holistic approach to education and training by

focusing on arts, culture and healing, as well as business and education.

The literacy project maintains the integrity of this model by helping women improve their literacy skills and employability while facilitating the healing of psychological and spiritual wounds, through personal and cultural reintegration. In other words, by putting the pieces of the past together, through storytelling and art, they can form a clearer picture of who they are and where they came from.

"The idea of literacy, the way that we look at it, combines the holistic approach, meaning the whole person, [with] rebuilding of culture," said McPhaden.

"Whether you come from families with addictions or from foster care, you become traumatized and hide within, and so you never get to know who your real self is."

By telling their stories in a "safe and secure environment," women silenced by the shame of a less-than-normal upbringing, learn to connect with themselves and their children while improving their literacy skills, said McPhaden.

"When I started working with the women, they didn't know about their cultural past and they couldn't talk about their childhood. What was normal for them wasn't normal behaviour [and] they were either ashamed or embarrassed to talk to their children."

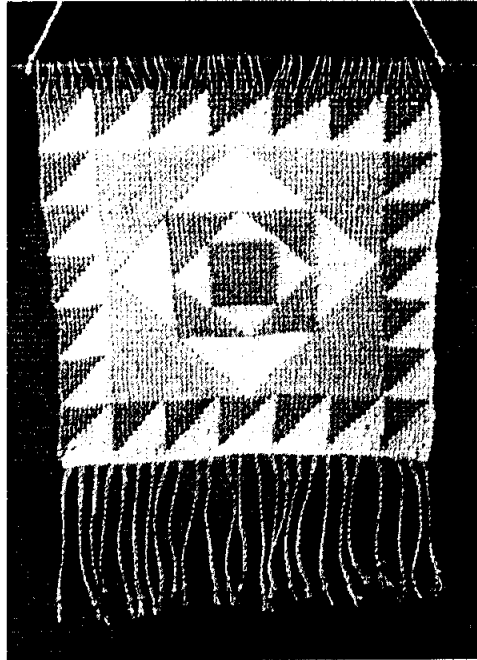
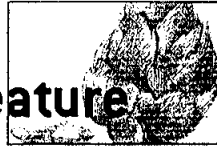
So far, the Stardale literacy project has helped many of these women change in positive ways, she said.

"Because they're talking about their families [now], it's giving back to their children and rebuilding family relationships. There's beauty in all that. The relief, the letting go, sharing aspirations for the future, rebuilding and strengthening the family," McPhaden said.

"Storytelling is a powerful tool because it's linking them back through the past and it's creating a new beginning."

This story is one of a series that Young People's Press (YPP) is doing on literacy issues across the country. Young People's Press is a national, not-for-profit news service. YPP helps to give youth a "voice" in the forum of public opinion, teaching young people (14-24) to write for publication, and disseminating news articles, feature stories and columns to newspapers across Canada.

feature



*Stepping Out Of One's Box, Salish twining,
no dimensions given, Kerry Archibald, 2001.*

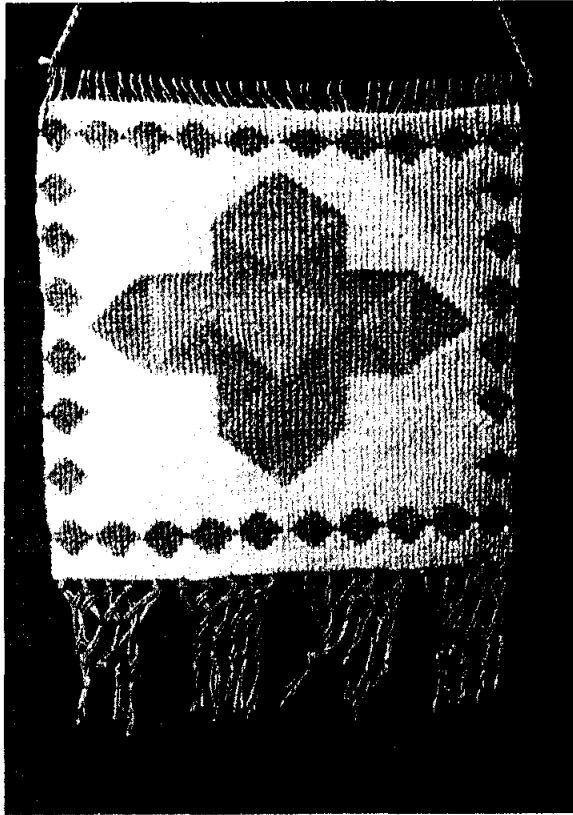
Stardale: A SUCCESS STORY

In November 1999, Stardale Women's Group program co-ordinator Helen McPhaden began researching the possibility of establishing a weavers' co-operative as a component in an ongoing program to foster healing and self-esteem amongst Cree women who live in and near Melfort, 185 km northeast from Saskatoon. Over the winter of 1999-2000 and throughout the following spring the Sacred Weft project was envisioned as a group activity that would incorporate traditional aboriginal weaving practices and wise-woman spirituality with opportunities for personal growth and a measure of economic independence.

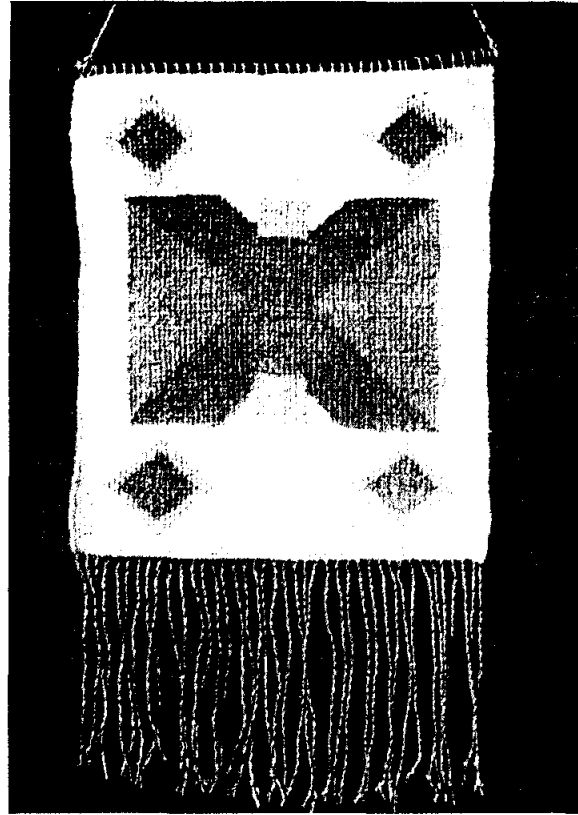
During July 2000, McPhaden met with a Saskatchewan Economic and Development representative to discuss implementing a co-operative within the auspices of the corporation that operates Stardale Centre in Melfort, Saskatchewan. Later that year McPhaden and the group's weaving facilitator Linda

Marion attended a one-day conference in Prince Albert where the provincial economic and cooperative development minister presented a working paper that proposed, among other economic initiatives, establishment of 45 new co-operatives in Saskatchewan, a 30 percent increase in sales of value-added agricultural products, and a 20 percent increase in aboriginal employment—a five-year government policy that dovetailed with the goals the women had been discussing.

Stardale Artistic Co-operative Ltd. was designed to support the women's commitment to developing a rural-based business enterprise that would demonstrate their achievements and encourage other women to create business ventures for themselves and their communities. "Our project is about experiential learning," McPhaden explains, "and about reconstructing history that has been all but lost, that lies dormant in cell memory. Women who have



The Four Directions Of Life, Salish twining, no dimensions given, Mary St. Cyer, 2002.



Freedom to Change, Salish twining, no dimensions given, Vicky Closter, 2001.

experienced sexual and physical abuse, along with other traumatic situations, stop feeling. It's too painful in life's journey. Women who have been cut off from their feelings find language problematic."

"Through the weaving process, the fabric of life is slowly and gently constructed into something strong. It's a metaphor for the women's fragmented selves becoming strengthened and renewed. Weaving suspends awareness of the passage of time. It is meditative and repetitive, therapeutic and diverse. Layers of interlinked information, patterns with non-determinant predictions of beauty, and dazzling carpets of wildflowers are expressed in each design. It's a regaining of culture by *doing*."

McPhaden based the Stardale project on her research observations of the Oawahan Indians of Mexico and her subsequent studies of the weaving culture of the Navaho Nation of Arizona and New Mexico. In each region she learned that weavings asserted a sense of pride and tradition within the communities. Historically, the Cree people in north-eastern Saskatchewan did not produce weavings. Their geographic zone did not provide an abundance of suitable fibres and the techniques of weaving were

either unknown or unused. The lack of a Cree weaving tradition did not deter McPhaden. She took inspiration from another group of First Nations women—the Salish weavers of Sardis, British Columbia—who, decades earlier, worked together to revive their weaving traditions.

Early in 2000 Linda Marion was sent to Calgary for a month to study weaving and dyeing under the tutelage of Alberta College of Art and Design textile instructor Katherine Dickerson, an expert on Salish weaving. The following July, Dickerson travelled to Melfort and spent three weeks working with a small group of Cree women. Under her mentorship and assisted by Marion, they collected dye plant materials such as barks, berries, and roots, as well as willow withes and reeds, and experimented with dyeing and basketry techniques. When Dickerson returned to Stardale for a second session in November 2001, the group included new members and the weaving circle—an important aspect of traditional healing—was expanded.

Salish weavings historically were woven from mountain goat hair. When the practice was revived in the mid-1960s, the Salish weavers substituted yarn spun from sheep fleece which was readily available

from local farmers in the Fraser Valley. Instead of wool, the Stardale weavers chose to work with flax, a specialty seed crop grown in Saskatchewan. They purchased an old spinning wheel from the Star City Hutterite Colony near Melfort and under the guidance of Alvin Ulrich, an authority on flax fibre, began learning how to prepare and spin flax fibre into linen thread.

“In working with Alvin Ulrich and his staff from Biolin Research in Saskatoon, the women learned many things pertaining to making fibre,” McPhaden notes. “Alvin has conducted some of the world’s leading research in the making of linen and has a wealth of information to share. The women learned the different processes of retting, as well as worked with flax fibres that were previously retted and supplied to the co-operative through Naber Seeds.”

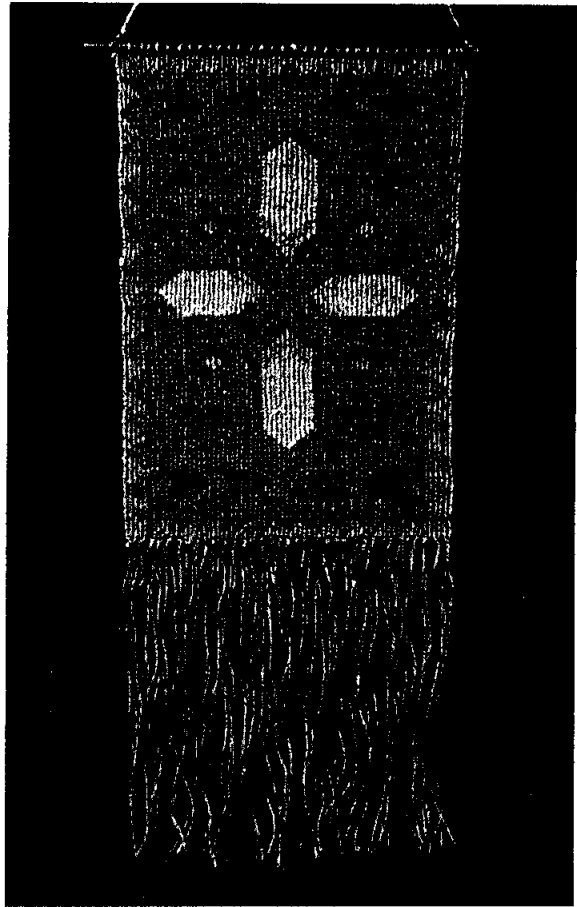
“Cleaning the flax or hackle and scutching the long and short fibres can be a very time consuming process! The women worked diligently, stripping the stalks and peeling away the chaff. To moisten the fibres preparatory to spinning, Alvin devised a plastic-enclosed shelving unit with a humidifier where the prepared flax could be kept.”



The inaugural exhibition of weavings by members of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative Ltd. took place on February 14, 2002, in the Cumberland Gallery at the legislative buildings in Regina. Following speeches by the minister responsible for the Women’s Secretariat and Stardale co-ordinator Helen McPhaden, the women weavers expressed their thoughts and feelings about the project and demonstrated spinning techniques.

“The very fact that the women could speak publicly about their lack of education, their poverty, and the emotional and physical abuses they’ve experienced in their family relationships—and, in the same breath, talk proudly about the business and technical skills they’ve learned through working on the project—is a huge change,” McPhaden declares. “They’ve come a great distance in discovering their potential. They’ve set an example of what personal healing can accomplish, and what empowerment and support can do when nothing else had worked before.”

During May and June, 2002, the *Sacred Weft* series of weavings was shown at Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatoon. In conjunction with a tribal gathering at that heritage site on June 18 - 20, the Stardale group conducted weaving workshops and shared their experience in cultural healing with others attending the event.



The Dream, Salish twining, no dimensions given, Linda Marion, 1999.

Funding provided by the Canada Council for the Arts permitted McPhaden and three of the Stardale weavers to participate this summer in a ten-day cultural exchange on the Cowichan Reserve on Vancouver Island where they learned traditional and contemporary Coast Salish spinning and dyeing methods. On their return to Melfort in mid-July, Kerry Archibald, Vicky Closter, and Mary St. Cyr shared their new knowledge with other members of the Stardale group. ♦

Paula Gustafson

Saturday, March 29, 2003

WP Home

News
Markets & Quotas
Opinion
Production
Livestock
Farm Living
Special Reports
Country Events
Stock Sales & Show Results
KIDSPIN
Entertainment
Extra Content
Find a Story

Classifieds
Ag Careers
Supplements
Advertising

**Farmer's
Phonebook**

Free Stuff

FAQ
Contact Us
Subscriptions
WP Employment
Privacy Policy
Links in the News
Ag Links

Related story

• [MP seeks rural access for victims of abuse](#)

Weaving comforts abused women

this document web posted: Tuesday March 11, 2003 20030306p100

By Karen Briere
Regina bureau

You won't find weavings made by the women of the Stardale Artistic Co-operative at a craft show.

The art they produce using natural fibres like hemp and flax is considered worthy of a gallery, and pieces fetch as much as \$1,000.

But sales aren't the main goals of the project initiated by the Stardale Women's Group Inc. of Melfort, Sask.

Instead, they focus on using art to heal.

Helen McPhaden is the executive director.

"We use weaving as a tool for dealing with abuse," she told the recent Saskatchewan Hemp Association meeting. "You just can't keep putting them through one program after another."

Visual literacy is important to aboriginal culture, which many of these women come from, she said. But much of that culture has been lost.

Salish weaving is an ancient art unique to aboriginals in North America, particularly along the coast in British Columbia.

At Stardale, the women use all natural products for their tapestries.

They ret (soak and split) the fibres before spinning them. They collect bark, berries and plants to produce natural dyes. They make stencils of cured mulberry paper held together by silk gauze and then begin the weaving itself.

The stencils and dyes are applied after the weaving is complete.

McPhaden said the designs created in Melfort are remarkably similar to others around the world. She said this illustrates a cultural link to the past.

"We come at it from a revival of a lost art. When you go through violence and trauma, that can be overcome through cultural heritage."

The women teach others and find solace and safety while they weave.

McPhaden said they are also adding value to agriculture by using flax and hemp fibre that otherwise might have little use.

"We want to look at getting involved in building a hemp textile industry," she said.

FOI

SUBS

1-800

THE West



THE
Weste
Produ

... well
balance



Saskatchewan Update



by Stephanie Martin

Community Profile: Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation

Helen McPhaden, in conjunction with the Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation (a non-profit registered charity), has been instrumental in delivering support and psycho-educational intervention to women living in the Melfort and Northern Saskatchewan regions. Since its incorporation in 1997, the Stardale Women's Group has been viewed as a learning and healing resource for women, many of whom are of Aboriginal ancestry and living in circumstances of abuse and/or poverty. The group's work is grounded in a holistic philosophy and promotes traditional cultural healing perspectives.

Through her work, Helen has also developed the Stardale Model, which is a 14 week (5 days per week) intensive curriculum directed at women, based on a multi-disciplinary approach to self-

development and healing. The curriculum addresses issues such as life skills, literacy development, group dynamics, relationships, anger management, therapeutic art, and parenting. Helen continues to promote this model for delivery throughout the prairie provinces.

The Stardale Women's Group has recently been awarded funding from the Status of Women Canada for a project entitled: **Defining the Future: Embracing our Girls**. This project is designed to assess the experiences and service needs of female youth in Melfort, Saskatchewan, many of whom may be considered 'at risk'. Results emerging from this project will be used to create an action plan intended to assist concerned citizens and human service providers in their efforts to develop and mobilize resources to meet the needs of the young women in their community.

"Wholeness is not a quality of the mind but an aspect of the spirit. That wholeness is a unique presence that is within you - it has only to be rediscovered"

New Face at RESOLVE Saskatchewan



Rebecca Harriman

Hi there! My name is Rebecca Harriman, and I am the new research Assistant at RESOLVE Saskatchewan. I am in my fifth year of university at the University of Saskatchewan. I am currently completing my honours undergraduate degree in psychology, hoping to be finished this April. As part of my degree, I am completing an honours thesis entitled "Sexually Explicit Material and Its Implications for the Observer: Correlates in a Canadian University." I am currently applying to a number of different graduate schools, specializing in either Applied Social or Clinical psychology. I have worked at RESOLVE since mid-October, and I have really enjoyed seeing how research can be applied within the community. I was able to help out with the research conference in November, and it was great meeting community members and people from RESOLVE Manitoba and RESOLVE Alberta. Thank you for those who have made me feel welcome, and I look forward to working with you all in the future.

McPhaden launches program based on Stardale

By Peggy Todd
Once silent in their offering, the collective voices and experiences of more than 100 Aboriginal men and women of diversity in northeastern Saskatchewan are set to facilitate positive change among women in similar situations throughout North America with the recent launch of The Stardale Model curriculum.

was incorporated and opened its doors for service in Melfort in 1998, the program that has evolved over the past five years has now been designed into a 14 week, five day per week curriculum manual targeted at the enlightenment and empowerment of marginalized women.

Helen McPhaden, who researched, designed, wrote and facilitated the development of the manual for The Stardale Model, credits the original women of Stardale as both the inspiration and the examples behind the launch of the Stardale curriculum manual.

"They got the desire for a different type of life," she said of the women of Stardale. "A lot of the women are (now) employed. They went on for further education. In terms of parenting, (they're) a better parent. That was the goal, (that was) what was supposed to happen."

"The end result of this is to move people toward self-efficiency and off of support," she added. "What I want to see is long-term community sustainable development through building of infrastructure."

The result of five years of work with the women of Stardale, McPhaden's Model is unique in its multi-disciplinary approach to meeting needs within the Aboriginal community as well as those of other women facing barriers. While based on the original concept McPhaden developed to address the many gaps in the services available to meet the needs of Aboriginal women and women of poverty in northeastern Saskatchewan, the final product is a progressive evolution of the initial model.

The very heart of The Stardale Model is the nurturing and healing of the self. Through an approach that incorporates several facets, including prior learning, education, community development, health, social inclusion, and social justice, the Model takes an holistic approach to effect positive change among marginalized women.

"When you're working in education and empowerment, you have to go to other levels of getting to the issue. This is what (The Stardale Model) does," McPhaden explained.

In McPhaden's opinion, other programs targeted at facilitating change and self-sufficiency among marginalized populations have failed largely due to the fact that the approaches taken have addressed only parts rather than the whole. "A lot of times you set them up for defeat, meaning the people in general. That's why people are latching on to this because it's a win-win situation."

"My whole model is based on self, meaning into your inner self," McPhaden explained. "If you look at Aboriginal culture, it has all to do with this whole holistic (approach) based on the medicine wheel. When you look at that, you go about doing that inward journey - walking the walk, talking the talk."

Integral to The Stardale Model is a visual literacy component. Women who have experienced trauma in their lives by way of violence or abuse often have difficulty with oral communication, according to McPhaden. Unable to express themselves emotionally, many women will create barriers to disassociate themselves from their past.

Through visual literacy, or therapeutic art, the wounds of the past can be

original women of Stardale to fully comprehend the importance of McPhaden's holistic approach and the power it has to effect positive change within Aboriginal communities alone.

"These women start to make a change because they're finding out who they are. They become more aware of the world and where they can go. They, in turn, become role models to others and it becomes a given...It just keeps branching."

"It just keeps building," she stated. "It is community development at the very base, grassroots (level)."

The success enjoyed as the result of the original Stardale concept caught the attention of researchers, educators, social development staff, and tribal councillors in Canada and the U.S. That interest in the Stardale concept led to feedback that generated the development of the curriculum manual for the purpose of transferring the Stardale Model for use in other communities.

Though originally targeted to meet the needs of Aboriginal women and women of poverty, the development of the Model curriculum now opens the door to integrating the Stardale concept to populations of men and youth as well. McPhaden hopes to see the curriculum used for training and educational purposes on reserves, in northern regions, inner cities, correctional settings, and healing lodges as well as women's organizations and shelters.

The Stardale Model curriculum development also takes program accessibility beyond the grassroots level. Initially designed to reach those at the heart of making the productive changes that will benefit their own lives, the Model curriculum will now also be available to professionals working or training in the fields of Social Work, Public Health, and Women's Issues. McPhaden is currently in discussions about the potential of implementing the program curriculum with educators at the university level as well as front-line workers on reserves in several U.S. states and Canadian provinces.

Through workshops, Stardale is just beginning to take the Model beyond its protective walls. The workshops include components essential to meeting the needs of those that will be taking the training and include components such as the role of environmental setting,



FOLLOWING A SUCCESSFUL five year test period with the women of the Stardale Women's Group in Melfort, Helen McPhaden researched, designed, and implemented the Stardale Model which has recently been compiled and written into a curriculum manual for trainers. The Model is an innovative multi-disciplinary and holistic approach to the empowerment and enlightenment of women. McPhaden's work is being embraced and sought after by educators and those living and working at the grassroots level from points throughout Canada and the U.S.

therapy.

In order to produce optimum results among participants, facilitators must first understand and accept the individual personal and cultural diversity among each participant. By approaching program delivery with a quality of care and concern for each participant and

their ability to learn, McPhaden suggests the end result will be a transformation for the better of the participant and those around them.

"It's all about where are you rooted, where are you going in life," McPhaden concluded. "What I'm doing is to connect people to their past."

Stardale study offers a snapshot of our most vulnerable

While everyone may not like to hear it, violence and drugs do exist in our community — but to what degree?

The Stardale study "Defining the Future: Embracing our Girls" offers a brief snapshot into the lives of several girls in Melfort and the results are slightly frightening.

While the study only records the results of seven girls due to limitations imposed by the University of Saskatchewan's research guidelines, it still gives us a window into the most vulnerable in our society, and therefore into the lives of those who need help the most.

The study does not pretend that these seven girls are a mirror image of all young women in Melfort, as one only has to look at the many girls who volunteer their time with the elderly, play sports in a team setting or baby-sit our children as proof of the good that exists here.

But it does show us that not everything is peaches and roses for every girl in Melfort and that there still is much work to be done.

As a society, we are judged by how we help our most defenseless and susceptible citizens and this study proves that they do indeed exist.

What was unnerving about the study, is the mentality that violence is a solution to their problems in their world as they know it and they don't think twice about raising a fist or weapon in anger. But for many of these girls, violence and anger is all that many of them have known for their entire lives and they are left to act out in the only way they know.

While many might say this is only a small group of troubled teens, these maladjusted girls are the ones who humiliate, abuse and assault our honest and caring youth, which poses a ripple effect through our schools.

Another frightening aspect to come from the study is the ease in which they all stated that they can find drugs in Melfort. One girl stated that all you have to do is walk down the street and drugs are practically forced upon them.

Whether this statement is absolute truth or embellished rumours remains questionable, but it should still make us stop and think about the possibility that there is some accuracy behind even the most outlandish lie.

While there may be some who do not want to believe all that is reported in the Stardale study, unfortunately it looks as if we may need to tackle the problem.

Helen McPhaden of Stardale said in an interview recently that the CBC and other producers from Toronto are planning on a documentary on the study and on these girls in Melfort.

So whether we feel there is a need for extra help for these young girls in Melfort, our hand may be forced as the national media could be descending upon this quiet little city.

The Globe and Mail has already written an expose, which has brightened the spotlight on our community and brought us under the scrutiny of citizens around the country.

And as that light brightens, many that see this documentary will question what the community has done to deal with the situation.

So while every statement in the Stardale study needs to be taken with a grain of salt, there are still some very realistic and feasible recommendations to come from the troubled girls who took part in the research project.

While Melfort is a safe and quiet community, the documentary will not likely focus on these points but rather the violence and abuse that exists.

So when Melfort is on that national stage (once again), how will the rest of the country view the treatment of our most vulnerable? That remains to be seen.

What is wrong with the girls of Melfort?

Peenagers in this Prairie community say young males have nothing on the females when it comes to fistfights, 'swarming' and other physical violence. Some authorities are angry that social workers are studying the problem, but these small-town kids may be just the extreme of a national trend, reports **GRAEME SMITH**

MELFORT, SASK.

The tough talk at Melfort doesn't seem so intimidating when they're giggling in the bathroom, peeing on their makeup. In their sweaters and blue jeans they look like any other attractive teenage, cheeky girl and occasion. Any evening a crowd that hangs together in a room that is a cry for help. The girls because of the current they discussed when they sat down for an interview on a recent Sunday afternoon.

Peenagers talking about their own misdeeds — punching, kicking and somnolent other girls — they've written this farm town about 175 kilometres northwest of Saskatoon as a place where the ordinary assumptions about youth violence have been turned upside-down. Girls aren't more gentle than boys in Melfort, they say, just the opposite. It's the teenage girls who start the majority of the fistfights, swappings and beatings.

The kind of talk has attracted local interest from researchers who began studying the Melfort girls last month to record their stories and find ways of cutting their behavior. The girls' requests to discuss the problem opened a window to a world previously kept of secret from adults. They say, and of the girls' words, the Melfort girls have been young female over the past few years.

It's simply research, as books such as *Girl Got Own: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls' Schools* show. The book, written by the author of *Girls' Talk*, is a national study published last year that makes millions of

those back to the ground, and repeatedly kicked her head.

A month ago, you wouldn't catch her sitting next to her on the couch, the 16-year-old said. "Or if we did, we'd be hiding the crap out of each other."

Sitting on a very beautiful in a diner on the outskirts of town, 17-year-old Megan McPhaden says she doesn't find those stories so unusual.

Speaking softly and hesitantly, the pale redhead explained that girls are generally scarier than boys in Melfort. She had witnessed only one attack herself and wasn't really worried about violence until after a school dance a few weeks ago.

They pushed me into some lockers, and that's when I thought they were serious, she said. Her mother, Althea McPhaden, 35, reached over and straightened the girl's pigtail with a procedure gesture. Suddenly she felt a weight to be alone and better off, she said. Megan nodded, she had a really independent kid, she said.

He said the school and local police would be understood the severity of the problem. "It's a scary situation," she said.

Violence among girls probably wouldn't have been such a hot topic in Melfort if it weren't for Hal McKay, project director of Saskatchewan Women's Group Inc., a

national study published last year that makes millions of

those back to the ground, and repeatedly kicked her head.



A group of hand-knock team girls walks the streets of Melfort, Sask. The 13-year-old on the far right says that recently she and a group knocked down and kicked her 16-year-old friend repeatedly in the head. Now they are even in arms.

the Melfort School Girls.

Sometimes a fight is just another argument for girls, particularly because they know that the sight of two girls fighting will attract the male gaze.

Girls will prefer not to fight say the women girls at their school say just another clique. Like the flocks or peeps.

"You just stay away from them and don't piss them off," one 16-year-old said. She chooses the name she attacks more carefully, she said, even since she was leaving a gathering one night and a group of girls accosted her, smashed a beer bottle over her head and stole her \$55 designer toque.

The group of five peenagers who gathered in Ms. McPhaden's living room recently agreed that the worst violence would happen if a girl stole another girl's boyfriend.

"It would be an all-out war, and I'd paint the town red with someone's blood," one 15-year-old said. Other insults are met with violence too, another said. "I got angry enough actually at one guy, we were getting drunk at his place..."

"Alcohol's a big influence," her friend interjected.

"I know, liquid courage. It's beautiful, seriously." The 15-year-old continued. "But this guy, he's way bigger than me, he's 20-some years old. We were all getting drunk, and I remember he said something to one of my friends that sent her into tears. I just walked right up to him, and I punched him as hard as I could in the face, and I heard his jaw crack."

Several of the girls said they came from difficult or abusive homes, and some admitted doing drugs. Underneath their long-sleeved shirts and beaded brace-

Learning by Example

Stardale Women's Groups

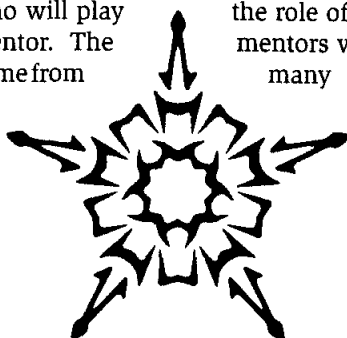
by Lynn Calf Robe

Developed by the Stardale Women's Group Inc. Foundation, Stardale is a non-profit organization that supports education and healing for Aboriginal women and women of poverty. First introduced in Saskatchewan, Stardale is new to Alberta and has just opened its doors in Calgary this past September in Forest Lawn. The Stardale group follows a Model which consists of a 14 week/5 day per week extensive self-development tool. This is used to heal, educate, cultural awareness, community development, and health.

The Stardale Journey for Aboriginal Woman began in September and the first group is set to graduate in

December.

The program will also introduce women to other women who will play the role of a mentor. The mentors will come from many



different backgrounds but share one important thing, living a positive lifestyle.

Project Director of the Stardale Women's Group Helen McPhaden, along with a group of ladies living in poverty began this initiative to overcome a life of poverty and provide more opportunities for the future, "The Stardale Women's Group began in 1997 in Melfort, Saskatchewan which was started as a result of a gap of services to address the needs of Aboriginal women and women in poverty." Part of the skill set is as they learn, they give back. A lot of these women will be trained to teach their skills to other women from their communities which Helen looks forward to, "It will be neat to see where people will go from there (after graduation.)"

NEW TRIBE is a monthly magazine. Our mission is to promote a positive outlook on Aboriginal living in an urban setting by promoting information sharing within the Aboriginal and youth communities

NEW TRIBE welcomes your input. Letters should include your name and contact information. Submissions may be subject to editing.

Opinions expressed in submitted work are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NEW TRIBE or USAY



Canadian Heritage

Patrimoine canadien



USAY

Free
Vol. 4 Issue 4
October 2005

Local at risk girls creating new fashions

By Bonnie Wilken
of THE JOURNAL

It's hard to find where the fabric ends and the floor begins in Helen McPhaden's house.

There's the constant buzz of a sewing machine in the background; piles of colorful cloth and leather working tools are scattered across the wood floor of her small front entrance.

Picking their way around the tools of the fashion trade are several young girls. Some are dressed in creations of their own making, other's in T-shirts and jeans, but all of them are smiling. They're part of an after-school program called 'The beauty of self', which helps at-risk young women develop crucial life skills through art—specifically fashion design.

On Thursday they are showing off their creations with a fashion show at the Melfort Mall. But for now the young women are busily whipping off one-of-a-kind clothing and accessories.

The program gives girls aged 12-16 a safe place to be creative. It primarily targets young aboriginal women.

"The purpose of this program is to give young females an opportunity to expand their inner self through a creative medium," said McPhaden, program creator.

"I believe that if you give someone a tool they'll use it," she said. And it's clear that the tools she has provided have found their way into some receptive hands.

One 13-year-old girl in particular is making the most of the opportunity. In between working on jewelry she took the time to model an outfit which she says will sell at the show.

Laura Brittain's creation is a black top and skirt trimmed with silver metal studding—the effect is both urban and unique.

Brittain enjoys the group design sessions. She comes back to the house, "because it's fun and it gives me something to do besides sitting there and watching TV and I like to be creative," she said.

Her designs have found a receptive audience, although she doesn't wear them out of the house.

"I don't wear them, but I like to show them off to my friends and they say they're really nice... my sister keeps stealing them," said Brittain.

A quiet 12-year-old, Janel McCallum said she is having fun and the program beats, "being bored".

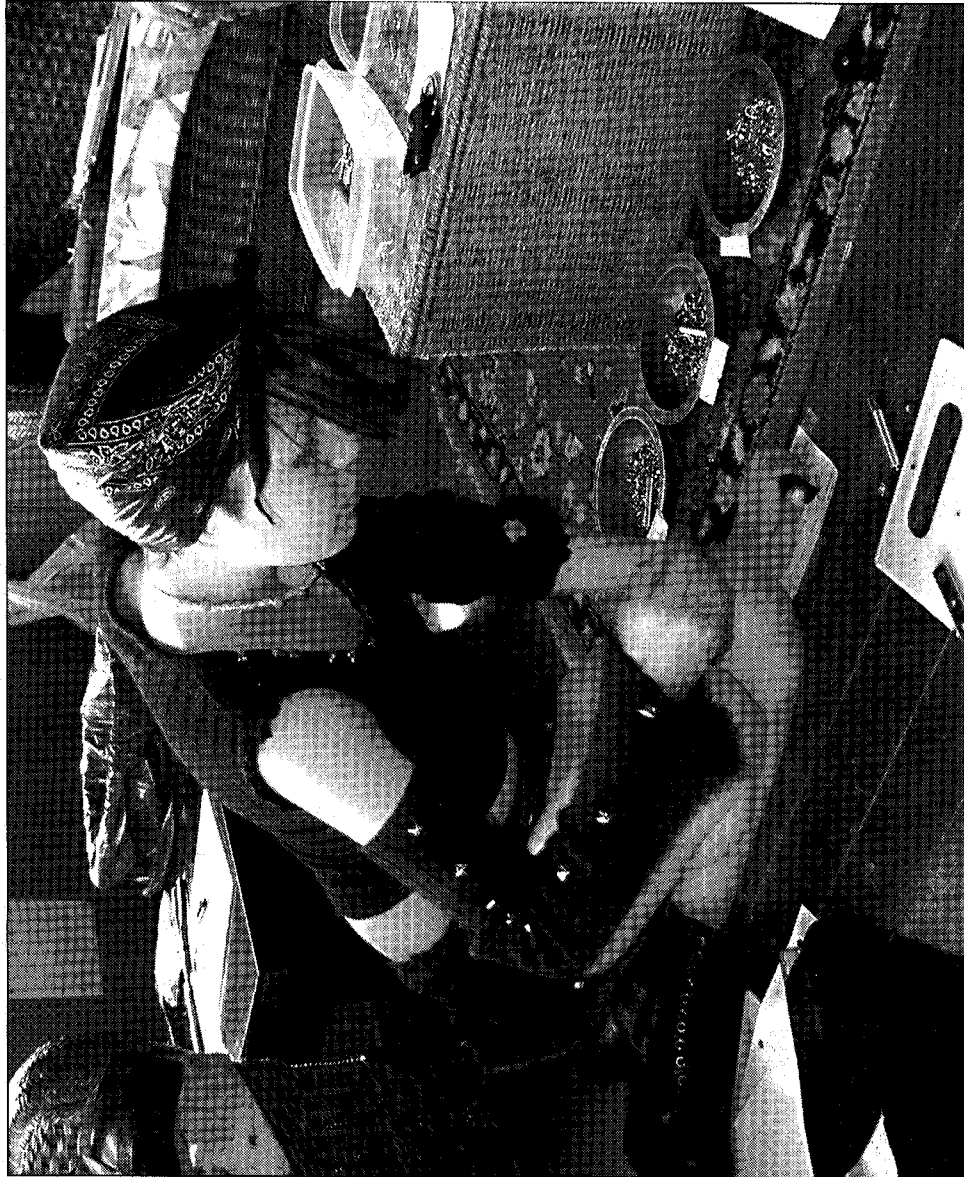
"I've learned how to make bracelets and skirts and stuff like that," she said.

Much of the sewing is presided over by 23-year-old Leah Murphy, a designer in her own right. Calgary-based Murphy has her own clothing company called Hellbent Press. She's passing on her skills to the girls.

Murphy became involved with the program because she intends to become a teacher and is looking for some experience.

"I really like doing it. I like making things and helping people learn how to make things," she said in a brief moment between helping one girl cut out a skirt and supervising another girl working on a sewing machine.

Chantell Stonestand has been coming to McPhaden's house since Monday. The 14-year-old is working with Murphy to make a skirt for the fashion show.



Laura Brittain, 13, is making the most out of the after school program. She made the outfit she is wearing.

"It's good, we should do this more often. I learned how to make bracelets and clothes," she said, "I think it's important to be able to make and create things."

The group has given their collection a name—'Westside Connections'. They'll be showing off their work between 3:30 and 7 p.m. at the Melfort Mall.

NEWS

Stardale study released on violence among girls in Melfort

By Colin McGarrigle
of THE JOURNAL

A study that targets violence in young girls in Melfort has been released that lists several recommendations to deal with the problems in the community.

"Defining the Future: Embracing our Girls" was directed by Helen McPhaden of Stardale Women's Group with research conducted by the University of Saskatchewan's RESOLVE program and Picton Associates of Calgary.

Gang-style violence

The study was initiated after Stardale became aware that many young girls in Melfort were caught in a cycle of violence and abuse. Several of these girls had taken part in gang-style beatings on other girls where constant violence was an answer to problems.

But violence was not the only reason behind the study. Several of the girls identified in the study were also known to abuse alcohol and drugs, engage in sexual behaviour and not complete the sec-

Your first intention is to beat the living snot out of these little witches, and pretty much you wanna leave 'em for dead.

Quote from local youth

ondary education.

Some of the recommendations to come from the study include the building of a non-denominational youth centre in Melfort, the organization of a Mentorship Program and increased public awareness of the issues surrounding violence among girls in Melfort.

Lack of cooperation

"This is not just a Melfort issue. It's becoming more and more of a rural issue," said McPhaden, who added that she did not get much cooperation from service providers in the community, who seemed to boycott the study.

"It's like Melfort doesn't want to acknowledge that it has any problems. (The violence is) there, but people are afraid to talk about it," she explained in a telephone interview from Calgary on the reasons for a lack of cooperation with the study.

McPhaden also suggested that an article in the Globe and Mail, entitled "What is wrong with the girls in Melfort?" might have played a part in the lack of cooperation in the community with the study.

"It's because it's threatening, it's too close to home, it's intimidating and they're afraid. Small communities don't rock the boat," said McPhaden.

According to the study, the project was initiated to understand the experiences of some girls in Melfort and try to create positive change.

The study was divided into two parts: Part One had several

girls fill out questionnaires to express their views and Part Two focussed on community resources available for youth in Melfort.

However, because of the U of S guidelines for research, any girls under 14 were not allowed to partake in the study, which left only seven girls on the record to discuss the problems in the community. McPhaden did acknowledge that it was a small sample of girls, but added that the study was not meant to encompass the behaviour of all girls in Melfort.

During the interview stage, many of the girls said that there was a lack of resources for youth in Melfort and an inherent gang mentality in the community, which often led to their troublesome behaviour.

One girl spoke in an interview on her thoughts when she saw a group of girls she didn't like and replied, "Your first intention is to beat the living snot out of these little witches, and pretty much you wanna leave 'em for dead. Whatever you're going to do, that's your first instinct these days is to fight," said the girl, who cannot be named.

Easy to find drugs in Melfort

Many of the girls also stated that they could get drugs easier than alcohol in Melfort and that there are plenty of drug pushers lurking in the community.

Five of the girls in the study



Helen McPhaden recently finished a study on violence among girls in Melfort, but added that more study is needed on the topic. One recommendation was the building of a non-denominational youth centre.

admitted to using a variety of drugs including cocaine, marijuana, speed, crystal meth, ecstasy, crack and acid.

"Yeah, like in the four corners of this town there's just certain people, like you can walk down the street and someone is going to pull up and say 'hey, you want this?' or whatever, you know? 'Have a sample.' It's like... offering candy to little kids," said the youth in the report.

McPhaden said that a larger research project will be conducted

once a feasibility study is completed and that she hopes members of the community will come forward to participate.

In the mean time, Melfort is about to become part of a national spotlight, as McPhaden said that CBC is planning on doing interviews on the project and that a Toronto-based producer is planning a documentary on the project and on Melfort.

The entire report is available online at <http://www.nald.ca/Stardale/>.