

Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network



Background Brief: Nak'azdli Little Warriors Attending 2010 Olympic Winter Games

Ray Gerow, Vincent Prince, Julia Schwamborn

June, 2010

Title: Background Brief: Nak'azdli Little Warriors Attending 2010 Olympic Winter Games

Authors:

Vincent Prince, A'tuslth (Carrier Name), Program Director
Nak'azdli First Nations Cultural and Leadership Program

Ray Gerow, President/CEO
Aboriginal Business and Community Development Centre

Julia Schwamborn, MA
UNBC Community Development Institute

© Copyright 2010 UNBC Community Development Institute. All Rights Reserved.

About the Urban Aboriginal Economic Development Network: The Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network is an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder network of researchers and practitioners working in urban Aboriginal and Métis communities. This includes organizations, universities, federal/provincial/municipal and Aboriginal governments, private industry, community groups, and NGO's. The network's focus is on mobilizing economic development knowledge and strengthening organizational capacity.

This paper can be found on the network website: <http://abdc.bc.ca/uaed>

Nak'azdli Little Warriors Attending 2010 Olympic Winter Games

Little Warriors – The Nak'azdli First Nations Cultural and Leadership Program

Nak'azdli Band is located in Fort St. James, BC. The Band has over 1,700 members approximately 700 of which live on-reserve. Along with six other bands, they are a member of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (Nak'azdli Band).

The Nak'azdli Health Centre initiated a three-year Cultural and Leadership Training Program called *Little Warriors* for youth of their community. The program is currently in its third year and has eleven pre-teens attending full-time and a few who participate from time to time. Program Director Vince Prince, who developed and runs the program, aims for 16 full-time participants. 90% of the children are of First Nation ancestry, but the program, even though advertised as a First Nation initiative, is open to anyone who is interested. The children are organized in two groups who each meet twice a week for approximately two to four hours at Vince's house on an island in Stewart Lake – the property has been in his family for approximately 600 years.

Vince teaches them everything with respect to Nak'azdli culture and sustenance lifestyle. He follows a fairly traditional lifestyle himself and is able to provide room and material for the Little Warriors' learning experiences. Some of the activities and lessons include: learning songs, singing, drum making, and writing little plays; shooting, trapping, and fishing; learning about and preparing fruits and vegetables; preparing their harvest, butchering and skinning a moose, drying meat and fish, preparing hide; boating, canoeing, water sports, winter sports, and making their own snowshoes; outdoor skills so that they will be building a lean-to and spend a night there together. Part of the Little Warriors' curriculum is to prepare and hold presentations, for example about the effects of some of the big wars of the 20th century on their community and families. The kids also learn community involvement, traditions, and ceremonies: they give away their harvests to elders and community members, they plant fruit trees in people's yards in memory of passed family members, they invite elders to a ceremony where the Little Warriors are awarded badges for their sachets honouring their participation in the Cultural and Leadership Program.

The objectives and expectations initially set for the program to measure its success over time have been surpassed by far and the program is a great success.

The Little Warriors at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games - Tickets

Vince had started looking for tickets to the Olympics for his Little Warriors early when tickets started to go on sale. He had contacted people and organizations but, at that time, was unable to find donated or sponsored tickets.

As the Olympics were coming closer, the Prince George Spirit of BC Committee (PG Spirit Committee) learned that VANOC was going to make a certain contingent of tickets available to less fortunate youth. Most of these tickets went into the lower mainland, where recipients would

face no additional costs for travel and accommodation. As the deadline for ticket applications was fast approaching when the Committee learned about this opportunity, PG Spirit Committee members were afraid that they were too late to find good use and put in successful applications for the 18 to 20 tickets that would be awarded to Prince George. However, Committee member and SD 57 School Trustee Sheryl Warrington and CEO of the Aboriginal Business Development Centre and Spirit Committee member Ray Gerow decided to address Aboriginal groups and reach out to smaller communities of the region and share Prince George resources. They split the tickets that were available to the PG Spirit Committee between the Prince George Native Friendship Centre (PGNFC) and the Little Warriors group in Fort St. James and encouraged each group to submit applications to VANOC.

Everyone involved had to act quickly. After some time of waiting and a mix of hope and trepidation, both the Little Warriors and the PGNFC managed to secure ten tickets each for their youth and would be attending the U.S.-Norway Men's Hockey game on February 18, 2010 and the Victory Ceremony later that day.

Vince was going to award the tickets to his Little Warriors by lottery. All the children had to prepare and hold a presentation on their reasons for wanting to go to the Olympics to encourage them to think about the opportunity and fully appreciate what they were about to experience. A few children withdrew from the lottery for health reasons or because they were too young. Therefore, all others were able to go. One leftover ticket was awarded to Nak'azdli Youth Council member Caroline Rivard, a very deserving, excellent grade eleven student, who was unanimously chosen by the entire Youth Council to represent them on this trip. Together with Vince Prince and Chrystal Hicks, she acted as a chaperone for the Little Warriors.

The Little Warriors at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games – Additional Funding

Having secured the tickets for themselves, the Little Warriors still needed approximately \$2,000 to cover transportation, accommodation, and other traveling costs. They were very intent on raising the money somehow and addressed the Nak'azdli Recreation Board, which sponsors Band members' recreational group activities with up to \$500. Vince applied for funding telling the Board what they needed and that he would be happy with whatever they would be able to contribute to the Little Warriors' trip. He took two of the children with him to share their presentations about their reasons for wanting to go to the Olympics. The Nak'azdli Recreation Board awarded them \$1,500 for their trip – a big fundraising success and step towards making the trip possible. Following this success and still in need of \$500 more, Vince and the Little Warriors contacted their Chief and Council and, with their presentations, asked for the remaining \$500. Chief and Council granted them \$2,000 and left them with more than enough money to make the Little Warriors' trip to the 2010 Olympic Winter Games happen. The group also organized two vans, one private, one from the Nak'azdli Health Centre, to transport them to Vancouver.

The Little Warriors at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games – The Trip

Vince decided to let the kids “live it up a bit” with the additional funds they had received and booked one night at Harrison Hot Springs Resort, where they spent the first night after leaving Fort St. James on February 16, 2010. The kids enjoyed the hot springs and spent the entire evening and next morning swimming and playing in the water.

Around lunchtime, the group left Harrison Hot Springs on the 17th and headed to Port Coquitlam. The PG Spirit Committee had partnered with the Port Coquitlam Spirit of BC Committee and arranged for accommodation for the entire group from Prince George and Fort St. James. After visiting the mall and spending some time in Port Coquitlam during the day, the Little Warriors and the group from the PGNFC were welcomed with a big reception and were introduced to the community.

Early the next morning, the kids were provided with a healthy breakfast to-go and took the early train to Vancouver. As the train filled up, the Little Warriors showed their best behaviour and gave up their seats for other people impressing everyone.

The Hockey game was at noon on February 18, and the group had planned to be there early and beat long line-ups. They had time to wander around downtown for some time and gave various interviews to a number of CBC broadcasting stations and a Prince George radio station. They spent a lot of their time singing and drumming as they were waiting for the game to start. The kids enjoyed an exciting Hockey game at Canada Hockey Place, which seats 18,630 spectators (Vancouver 2010), and were once again exceptionally well-behaved and stayed close to their chaperones.

After the game, they had lunch and made their way to the Victory Ceremony for that day, where they were fortunate to watch the Prince George band *Hedley*. After an eventful day, the group got back on a crowded train to Port Coquitlam. Some people offered their seats and started a conversation which ended in Vince and his Little Warriors teaching some of the other passengers songs, and they all sang and drummed together. When it was time for the Little Warriors to get off the train, they got standing ovations from the entire cabin. The kids were very impressed and proud – “a perfect ending to a perfect day”.

After another night in Port Coquitlam, the group headed North with one overnight stay in 100 Mile House before returning to Fort St. James on February 20, 2010.

Vince emphasizes that they had a set of rules for the trip with the children, for example ‘no junk food’, and that the Little Warriors accepted the rules and behaved exceptionally well. The kids will never forget the trip, not only the Hockey game but also all the other special moments: traveling across the Province of British Columbia and seeing places beyond Fort St. James and Prince George; the little bit of luxury at Harrison Hot Springs that most of them would normally not have been able to afford; being at the centre of attention, giving interviews, and performing songs and drumming; the warm reception in Port Coquitlam and exceptional appreciation and farewell from the train passengers on the way back to Port Coquitlam after their day in Vancouver; and being part of the Olympic experience hosted by their home Province.

Vince and the kids prepared a photo slideshow for the PG Spirit Committee to show their appreciation and share their experiences. They handed out gifts and gave Sheryl Warrington one of the drums they had taken on their trip.

The Little Warriors' Trip and Urban Aboriginal Economic Development (UAED)

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (the Royal Commission) establishes clearly that one problem for urban Aboriginal people is an identity crisis when they find themselves caught between their Indigenous cultural roots and the urban mainstream setting where they want to, or feel pressured to, fit in and adapt. According to the Royal Commission's findings on "Urban Perspectives", many urban Aboriginal people have to establish or reestablish a connection to their cultural ancestry before they can find their place in the urban society. Once they have found back to their own culture, the resolution of their identity crisis often occurs through becoming part of mainstream society and, yet, maintaining a strong presence and basis of their Aboriginal cultures in their lives.

The Nak'azdli First Nations Cultural and Leadership Program is designed to teach the children their culture with hands-on methods. Next to the many skills they learn through watching and participating in traditional activities, the program instills a strong sense of pride and belonging in the participating kids. In addition to traditional practices, the Little Warriors are learning skills such as preparing and giving presentations, which will be important throughout their formal education and will add to their employability once they are entering the work force. Supporting both their cultural education and building a strong sense of belonging and pride also has potential to contribute to UAED capacity building: They will be able to pass on their cultural knowledge and skills as well as their sense of pride in any setting, urban or rural. They are also introduced to traditional oral, demonstrative, and hands-on teaching methods which they can apply later in educational and cultural settings.

The trip to the Vancouver 2010 Olympics provided an experience that most of them would otherwise not have been able to afford. The benefits are many: awarding them tickets, raising the funds, and making the trip possible sent the message to these kids that they deserved to participate in an event as big and important as the Olympics. They were, furthermore, given the opportunity to show some of their cultural skills, such as singing and drumming, and to impress people wherever they went. This was a chance for them to experience other people's appreciation for the Little Warriors' culture and achievements. In addition, the children learned lessons about working hard for something and being rewarded with success, as well as lessons about preparing for a big event and showing their appreciation afterwards through their slideshow presentation and through gifts to those who helped make the trip possible.

Thanks to their program and in no small part to the trip to the Olympics, the Little Warriors will have a sound cultural skill set and a strong sense of pride and belonging to their culture and community as well as to the Province and to Canada. If some of them move into urban centres later in their lives, they should be able to build on that foundation and find their place in society

with more ease. They have also learned that preparation, persistence, and dedication are needed to make things happen and will be rewarded.

Another UAED lesson to be learned from this *Success Story* is that urban centres benefit from and should always consider sharing their resources with smaller communities in their region. Resources can be shared in form of funding and monetary contribution; but sharing resources can also mean opening doors for participation in events and initiatives, or if taken further, the inclusion in economic development activities and plans. Potential UAED benefits include increased capacity building potential with a larger population to draw from; healthier communities; potential for improved education in small, isolated communities; infrastructural enhancements; opportunities for business partnerships and expansions; and improved trust relationships between urban centres and remote communities. All of the above have potential to contribute to better cooperation between urban and rural communities as well as between rural communities and their urban community members.

Contact Information

Vincent Prince:

Phone: (250) 996-7400

Email: youngwarriors@nakazdlihealth.ca

Ray Gerow:

Phone: (250) 562-6325

Email: gerow@abdc.bc.ca

Sources and Related Links

250 News. February 11, 2010. "18 Local Youth Heading to Olympics". Accessed June 11, 2010. <http://www.opinion250.com/blog/view/15458/15/18+local+youth+heading+to+olympics?id=&st=163>

Carrier Sekani Tribal Council (CSTC). Accessed June 14, 2010. <http://www.cstc.bc.ca/cstc>

Nak'azdli Band. Accessed June 14, 2010. <http://www.nakazdli.ca/>

Prince George Spirit of BC Committee. Accessed June 11, 2010. <http://www.pgspiritofbc.com>

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Spirit of BC. Accessed June 11, 2010. <http://www.spiritofbc.com>

Vancouver 2010 Olympics. Accessed June 14, 2010. <http://www.vancouver2010.com/olympic-spectator-guide/interactive-map/>