

The implementation of the Chî kayeh Program on Sexual Health
in two Cree communities of Eeyou Istchee

Final Report





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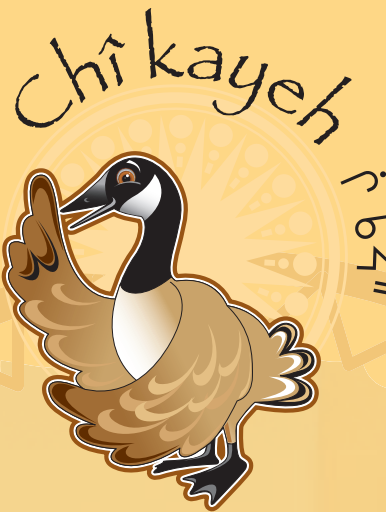


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Summary

This three-year research project focused on the implementation of the chî kayeh Program. It took place in two high schools located in Waswanipi and Waskaganish. The results led to the creation of a fully revised program: The chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih Program on Relationships and Sexual Health. The words chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih mean *“You too, be careful”*.

The chî kayeh Program was a new course for secondary III or IV students promoting sexual health and preventing the spread of STIs and HIV. After learning about sexual health, students created a team project (aashuumiih) in order to share their knowledge and skills with the other students of the school.

Two committees gave a Cree focus to the research project and the program. The Advisory Committee, composed of parents, youth, Elders, Band Council members and other key players from each pilot community provided input for the project. The Sub-committee had four permanent members, including two Elders. These members actively participated in interpreting the results of the research project and in developing and confirming modifications to the program.

Information was gathered from several sources to understand how and if the program worked. Teachers filled out a journal after each lesson. Students filled out a questionnaire at the end of the school year. Parents, teachers, students and other community members were interviewed.

Main results

In light of the information gathered from these sources, significant changes were made to the program to strengthen the cultural adaptation and provide activities that are more sensitive to the ways of learning of the youth involved. The program was also restructured so that team projects could be completed before the Goose Break.

Extracts from interviews held with the students provide a good illustration of their reactions to the program.

“I think so [that it should be offered in the other communities], cause it really help[ed] me again, for my self-esteem, and how [to] tell people to know that; I think it’s a good idea.”

“So, the youth will learn about self-respect and other stuff about growing up.”

“I learn[ed] to be assertive.”

“Now I understand what peer pressure is about and how to say no.”

More than 60% of the students said they found the program interesting and were satisfied with what they learned.

More than half of students learned information that helped with making a decision to put off having sex.

In the second year, 39 students were able to complete and present their group project to other students. What they most retained was a great sense of pride (65%), a feeling of having been able to meet a challenge (53%), a feeling that what they did was useful to others (53%) and to themselves (50%). For many, it was an opportunity to receive positive comments from adults (50%) and from other students (37%).

Conclusion

For this program to work well and be meaningful for the youth of Eeyou Istchee, it must be supported by everyone in the community.

1. Objectives

This was a participatory research project that looked at the implementation of the *chî kayeh* Program. The results of this research project led to the creation of a fully revised program: The *chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih* Program on Relationships and Sexual Health. This program is culturally adapted and sensitive to the realities of Cree youth.

The *chî kayeh* Program was a new curriculum for secondary III or IV students promoting sexual health and preventing the spread of STIs and HIV. After learning about healthy relationships and sexual health, students created a team project (*aashuumiih*) in order to share their knowledge and skills with the other students of the school.

The research project happened over a three-year period (2006-2009) in **Waskaganish** and **Waswanipi** schools. The objectives were:

1. To describe how the *chî kayeh* Program was put in place for two groups of students over a two-year period (2006-2007, 2007-2008).
2. To describe what hindered, facilitated or changed how the program happened.
3. To assess whether the program achieved what it set out to do according to the views of students, teachers and others involved.
4. To prepare the program for transfer to other communities.

WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CHÎ KAYEH PROGRAM:

- How was it put into place?
- What hindered, facilitated or changed how it happened in the schools?
- Did it achieve what it set out to do?
- How was the transfer of the program to the other communities prepared?



2. Research methods

To understand how and if the program worked, we studied groups of students over a two year period, the 2006-2007 group and the 2007-2008 group.

We collected different kinds of information:

- Teachers filled out journal logs after each lesson was given. We received and analysed 208 journal logs.
- At the end of each year, the students filled out an evaluation questionnaire (we received 79).
- We also did 39 semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents and other players involved in the program.

At the end of the first year, 12 students also took part in this type of interview.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS GATHERED:

- Teachers filled out a journal after each lesson
- Students filled out a questionnaire at the end of the school year
- Students, parents, teachers and other community members were interviewed



3. Achievement of all objectives

By the fall of 2009, the objectives had been completed successfully. The main results with regard to these objectives will be described in the next section. To make the project run smoothly and successfully, members of the community were consulted through two committees: an Advisory Committee and a Sub-committee. The committees gave a Cree focus to the research project and the program.

The objective of the Advisory Committee was to provide input for the pilot project. It was composed of parents, youth, Elders, Band Council members and other key players from each pilot community.

The Sub-committee's objectives were to actively participate in interpreting the results of the research project and in developing and confirming modifications to the program. This sub-committee was composed of key players (all Cree) involved in carrying out the project and having the program approved in the community. It had four permanent members, including two Elders, all recognized for their knowledge of Cree culture. They were part of the Research team and also authors of the program.

With these committees in place, and because we collected different kinds of information from various sources in the community, we were able to reach our objectives. At the same time, we learned valuable lessons about how to develop and implement a program like this for youth.

TWO COMMITTEES GAVE A CREE FOCUS TO THE PROJECT AND THE PROGRAM:

- **The Advisory Committee was composed of parents, youth, Elders, Band Council members and other key players from each pilot community. They provided input for the pilot project.**
- **The Sub-committee had four permanent members, including two Elders. They actively participated in interpreting the results of the project and in developing and confirming modifications to the program.**



4. Main results

4.1 How the program was put into place

The level of implementation of the chî kayeh Program was improved during the second year of the pilot project, as reflected by the higher number of lessons given and the improved student attendance (see table 1).

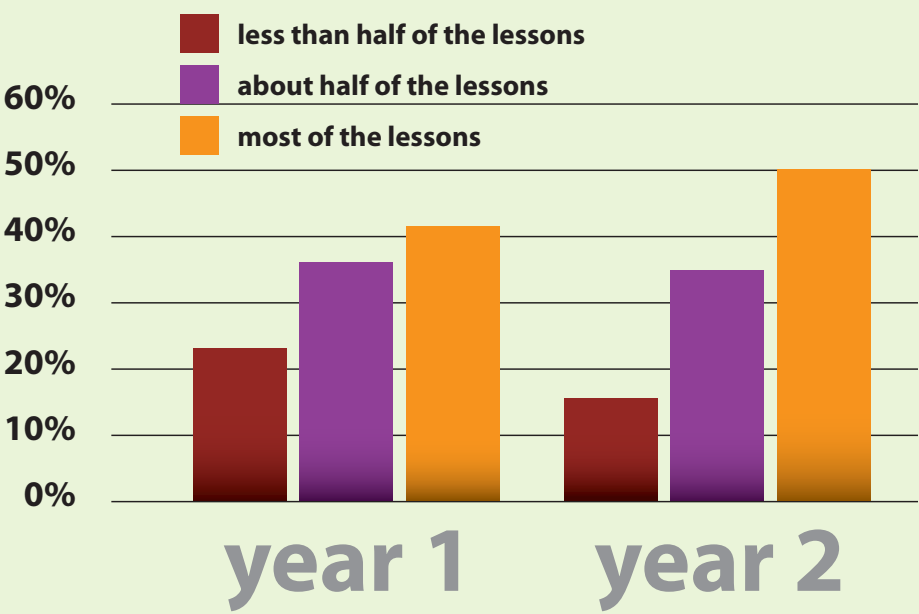
More specifically, during the **first year** of the pilot project, between 20 and 37 lessons out of the 44 initially planned were given by the teachers and 41% of students said they attended most of the lessons (see table 1). At the beginning, the program did not allow the students enough time to prepare their group project for presentation to other students at the school.

In light of this observation, we revised the program so that the lessons dedicated to the team project were more structured and were given earlier in the school year, when possible, before the Goose Break. Other minor changes were also made following our analysis of the first year of the program.

In the **second year**, of the 45 lessons planned, between 34 and 42 were given by teachers and 50% of students said they attended most of the lessons. Moreover, students in 3 of the 4 classes, i.e. 39 students, were able to present their team projects to other students.

Table 1

Student’s participation: first and second year



We revised the program so that the lessons dedicated to the aashuumiih were more structured and were given earlier in the school year.

4.2 What hindered, facilitated or changed how the program happened in the schools

When we analysed the notes from the interviews and teacher's journals, we noticed certain things which made a difference for the program.

The first group of factors stems from the **physical and socio-cultural environment**. The weather, and certain major cultural activities (weeks off for hunting) or social events (funerals, marriages, sport tournaments) in the community led to schools being closed or to teachers and students being absent.

Other things affected the way the program could be delivered. These **organisational factors** included the teacher turnover rate as well as the time of day set aside for the program in the students' schedules. For example, some lessons set for the first period were put off because of the number of students absent in the mornings, which caused these groups to be behind schedule.

The **program itself, and the teachers made a difference** to how the program happened. The topics in the program are sensitive, the program requires a large number of lessons, and some activities in the program are complex to teach. We also found that teachers had a positive or negative impact on the program. Some were very motivated, others less so; some were comfortable teaching this kind of material while others were not or did not have much experience in teaching. We also found that it worked best if the values in the program were similar to the teacher's personal values, if the teachers had knowledge of Cree culture and if they were supported from other staff members at the school.

Finally, **the students' ways of learning played a major role**. Although it seemed clear that the program was relevant, appreciated by students and culturally adapted on many points, some of the ways we had proposed to teach the program did not seem to suit the way these young Cree students learned. They did not appear familiar or comfortable with team work, group discussions, oral presentations or exercises in which writing was important. However, the use of short stories and personal exercises seemed to reach these students better. We made significant changes to the program to make it more adapted to the ways of learning of the youth. Note that the program was given in either English or French, and always by a non-Cree teacher.

We made significant changes to the program. The final version is more sensitive to the ways of learning of Cree youth.



4.3 How well the program achieved what it set out to do

The teachers and students rated the program favourably, and a number of strengths were identified following their feedback. More than 60% of students said they found the program interesting and were satisfied with what they learned.

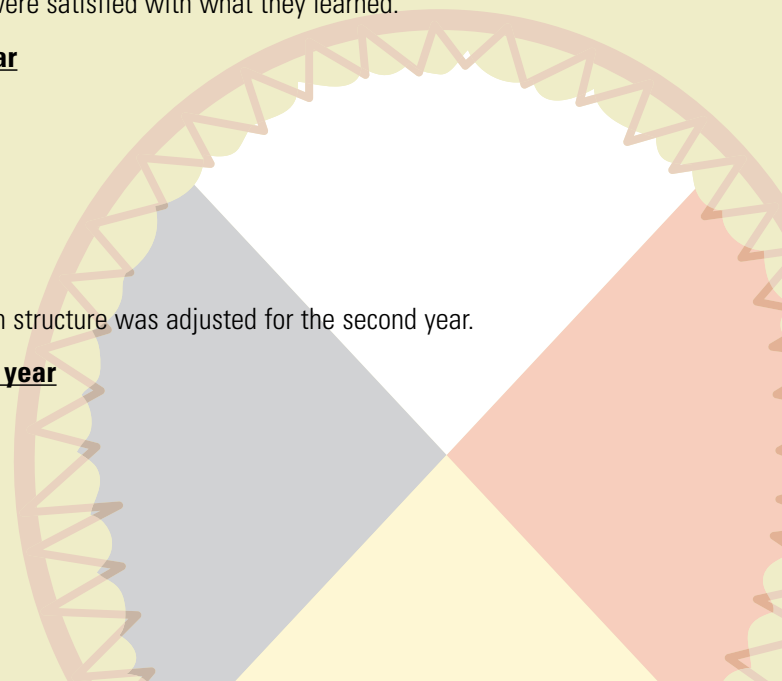
Topics that received the highest learning rates in the first year

- Condoms (77%)
- Consequences of alcohol abuse (73%)
- Strategies for resisting peer pressure (69%)
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) (63%)
- Abusive control in relationships (61%)

In light of the information gathered during the first year, the program structure was adjusted for the second year.

Topics that received the highest learning rates in the second year

- Condoms (90%)
- STIs and HIV (74%)
- Unplanned pregnancies (71%)
- Strategies for resisting peer pressure (62%)
- Assertiveness (60%)



For both years, approximately 54% of students reported having learned information that helped with making a decision to put off having sex. Extracts from interviews held with the students provide a good illustration of their reactions to the program.

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAID:

- *"I think so [that it should be offered in the other communities], cause it really help[ed] me again, for my self-esteem, and how [to] tell people to know that; I think it's a good idea."*
- *"So, the youth will learn about self-respect and other stuff about growing up."*
- *"I learn[ed] to be assertive."*
- *"Now I understand what peer pressure is about and how to say no."*

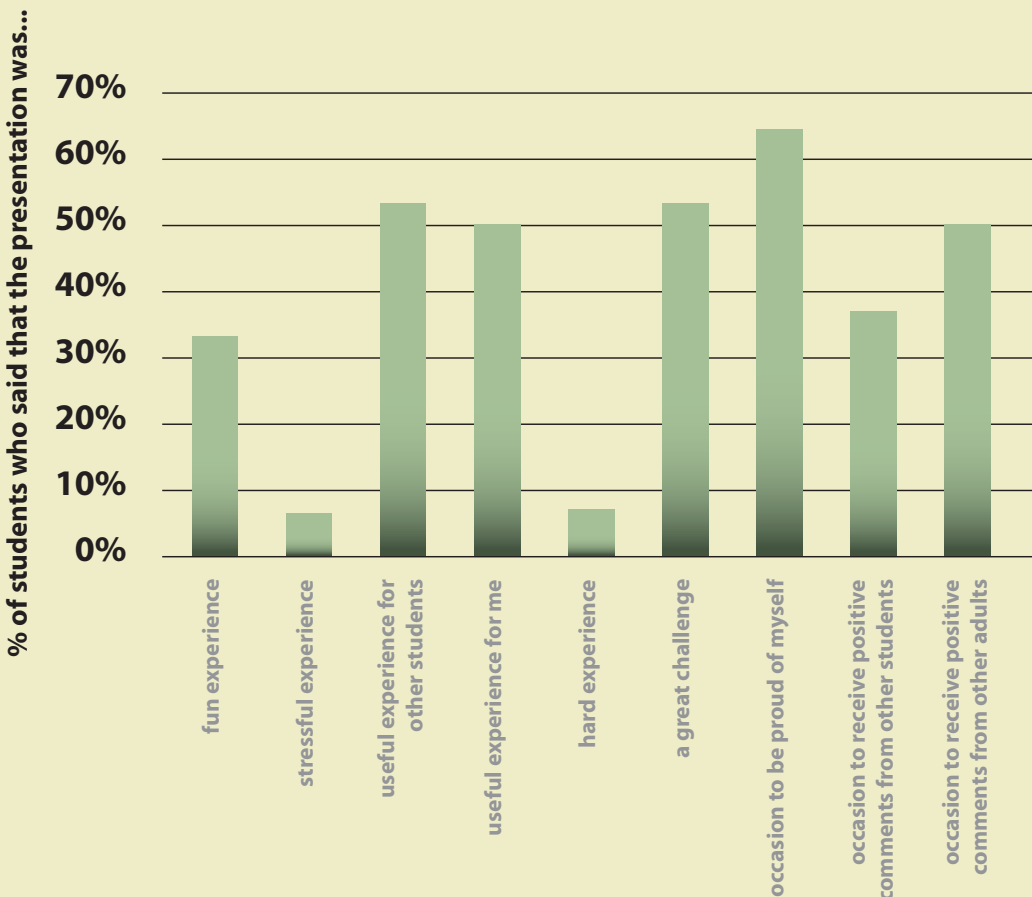


In the second year, 39 students were able to complete and present their team project to other students (aashuumiih). Thus, in the two communities, 14 booths were built to present the following topics: Condoms (5), waiting until later to have sex (4), communication (3) and STIs/HIV (2).

Their assessment of the experience speaks volumes (see table 2). What they most retained was a great sense of pride (65%), a feeling of having been able to meet a challenge (53%), a feeling that what they did was useful to others (53%) and to themselves (50%). For many, it was an opportunity to receive positive comments from adults (50%) and from other students (37%).

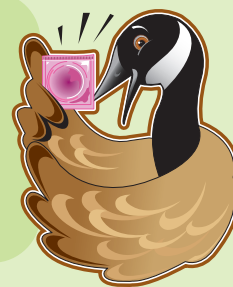
Table 2

Student's appreciation of their experience as it relates to the aashuumiih (Results of second year)



Secondary II students who saw the older students' projects filled out an evaluation form following the activity. On average, their level of appreciation for the older students' projects was favourable.

- ***More than 60% of students taking the program said they found it interesting and were satisfied with what they learned.***
- ***More than half of students learned information that helped making a decision to put off having sex.***
- ***What they gained the most from doing the aashuumiih was a sense of pride.***



4.4 How was the transfer of the program to the other communities prepared

The final objective: To prepare the transfer of the program to the other seven communities was achieved in two stages. In the fall of 2008, a preliminary version of the revised chî kayeh Program was introduced in the seven other communities. In the fall of 2009, the final, fully revised program, now called chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih Program on Relationships and Sexual Health, was available in all nine communities of the James Bay Cree Territory.

The participatory nature of the study allowed the communities to begin a process of owning the program, which is an essential condition for its long-term success. In addition, an implementation guide was developed to facilitate this process. It contains the tools needed to promote the program, support the teachers and encourage the participation of important local partners.

5. Consequences of results on the program

These research results served to strengthen the cultural adaptation of the program, and helped produce a final version: chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih Program on Relationships and Sexual Health. This final version includes new teaching tools and an implementation guide to help plan how the program will be delivered and supported in the Cree communities.

The study helped structure how the program was put into place. The two committees mentioned above were especially important, as was the hiring of a Cree-speaking facilitator in each community, who participated in certain activities during the pilot project.

The study also enabled the chî kayeh Program to develop in a professional and structured environment that made it possible to quickly adapt in an organized way to unexpected factors.

One of the major consequences of this research study was the implementation of a systematic and participatory process for making changes to the program at the end of each year of the pilot project. This made it possible to create the final version of the program, which is culturally adapted and sensitive to the realities of Cree youth.



A fully revised program, the chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih Program on Relationships and Sexual Health, is now available in all nine communities of Eeyou Istchee.

6. Recommendations for planning similar research projects

Furthermore, the analysis of how the program was put into place made it possible to develop recommendations that can serve as guidelines for planning similar research.

These recommendations include the importance of establishing a more structured and formal partnership with all key players, right from the start. For example, appointing a representative from the school and from the School Board to participate in the work of the Sub-committee would have helped communications among the various groups involved.

As well, even though youth were consulted during the program planning and evaluation stages, none were permanent members of the Sub-committee. It would be important to put into place a way to encourage greater involvement by youth and by members of the Sub-committee at all stages of the process in order to ensure significant ongoing contributions by community members.

Finally, a preliminary analysis of contextual factors, including consideration and analysis of the learning culture of the youth targeted by the program, should be part and parcel of the pilot project planning stage, as much for project development purposes as for the choice of research methods and measurement tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH PROJECTS:

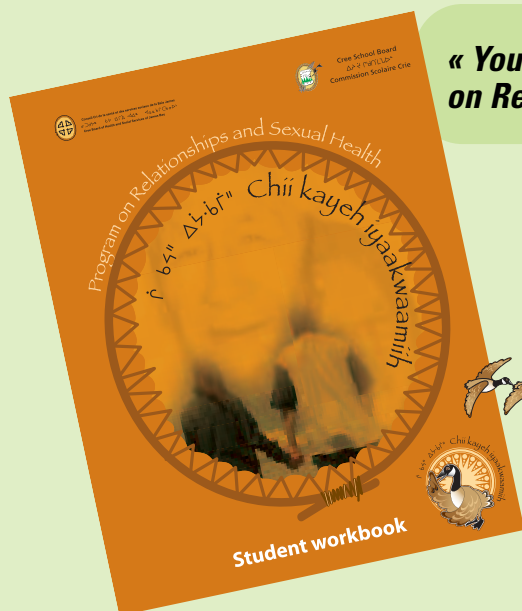
- Invite a representative from the school and the School Board to participate in the work of the Sub-committee
- Put into place a way for greater involvement of youth and Sub-committee members at all stages of the process
- Get a better understanding of the context, including the learning culture of students involved, before the pilot project is put into place.

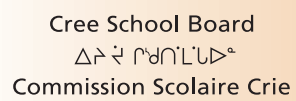


7. Conclusion

This research project resulted in the creation of a fully revised program called the **chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih Program on Relationships and Sexual Health**. For this program to work well and be meaningful for the youth of Eeyou Istchee, it must be supported by everyone in the community.

« You too » can support the chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih Program on Relationships and Sexual Health!





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