

Report Shows Healthy Trends in Aboriginal Students

November 30, 2005

Vancouver, BC -- Most Aboriginal students are healthy, feel connected to their families and school, and volunteer in the community, according to a new report, Raven's Children II, released today by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization committed to improving the health of B.C. youth.

Raven's Children II shows that Aboriginal youth in school in B.C. are similar in many ways to non-Aboriginal youth. These youth are tired of hearing dire statistics about themselves, and want to see more positive news reflecting their progress into adulthood.

The report is based on the largest youth health survey ever conducted in the province, and compares findings with two previous provincial surveys conducted by McCreary in 1992 and 1998. An Aboriginal research team analyzed the results for Aboriginal youth participants, with guidance and advice from an Aboriginal advisory committee. In addition, an Aboriginal youth focus group provided feedback on the results.

Raven's Children II includes some good news and promising trends:

- Most Aboriginal students rate their health as good or excellent.
- Most Aboriginal students feel strongly connected to their families and school.
- Nearly two-thirds want to continue their education beyond high school.
- Almost three-quarters regularly participate in organized extracurricular activities.
- Most youth volunteer in their schools or communities.
- Smoking has dramatically decreased among Aboriginal students.
- Fewer Aboriginal youth are drinking alcohol.
- Sexual and physical abuse of Aboriginal youth has declined over the past decade.

Still, some issues leave room for improvement:

- More Aboriginal boys are overweight compared to a decade ago.
- Too many Aboriginal youth think about or attempt suicide and rates have not improved in the past decade.
- Fewer youth reported feeling safe at school in 2003 than in 1998.
- One in five Aboriginal students experienced racial discrimination.
- Marijuana use among Aboriginal students is increasing.

McCreary surveys have consistently demonstrated that in-school Aboriginal youth do better than those in out of school populations. Governments and the Aboriginal leadership remain justifiably concerned about high drop out rates among Aboriginal students. Data from McCreary surveys also demonstrate the disproportionate

representation of Aboriginal youth in custody, in street involved youth, and in commercially sexually exploited youth.

Research has shown that protective factors, particularly feeling connected to family and school, decrease the likelihood of suicide attempts and promote healthy youth development. Youth who feel connected and safe—at home, at school and in the community—have better health, take fewer risks, and have higher educational aspirations. Research also suggests that building on the strengths of youth and their communities is more effective than focusing on youth as problems. These findings suggest the following measures need to be supported:

- Creating safe school environments, where students are free of harassment, discrimination and violence.
- Reducing sexual violence and victimization.
- Supporting strong and nurturing families.
- Promoting positive connections to school.

Raven's Children II is available through the McCreary Centre Society at 604-291-1996, or on the Internet at www.mcs.bc.ca.

For more information:
Kim van der Woerd
Research Consultant
McCreary Centre Society
604-291-1996
www.mcs.bc.ca