

Meadow Lake First Nation News



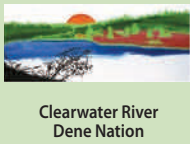
Birch Narrows
Dene Nation



Buffalo River
Dene Nation



Canoe Narrows
Cree First Nation



Clearwater River
Dene Nation



English River
First Nation



Flying Dust
First Nation



Makwa Sahgaiehan
First Nation



Ministikwan Lake
Cree Nation



Waterhen Lake
First Nation



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Resolution health support team supervisor Robert Fiddler's journey is to serve

Robert Fiddler started with the MLTC back in 1973 when it was known as The Meadow Lake District Chiefs (MLDC).

"Our first office was in a little house, the old Indian Agents house," he says. "MLDC started out with about five people – the secretary, who was also receptionist and a bookkeeper. In those days there was one community worker, economic development worker, sports co-ordinator (which was Fiddler's position) and a district representative."

A member of the Waterhen Lake First Nation, Fiddler's mom, Cecil Bear, came from Flying Dust and his father was Joe Fiddler, aka Quee win.

"I was raised in a two-room log cabin, with 14 of us children – seven girls and seven boys," he says. "My dad worked as a rancher feeding cattle, building fences and putting up hay. It was year-round work. I, myself started working on the farm when I was 12. These were good summer jobs for me."

Fiddler says he grew up sheltered on the farm and then things changed by the time he reached seven years of age.

"That was how old I was when I started going to residential school in Beauval," he says, adding his was one of many Indigenous families pulled apart by the residential school system.

"After several years at the residential schools in both Beauval and Lebret, I finished high school in Meadow Lake," he adds.

It was during his high school years



Waterhen Lake First Nation member Robert Fiddler has a key role within MLTC as a facilitator of suicide, grief and loss workshops.

he started playing hockey with the Meadow Lake Stampeders, and played several years with the team following graduation.

An avid sports competitor, Fiddler also played fastball which allowed him to see a lot of the country. He travelled to the United States several times to play ball in Oklahoma and New Mexico. He also had the privilege of winning some big awards too.

"At the Canadian Native Fastball Championships I was voted Best Pitcher and Most Valuable Player," he says. "Sports was a vital to my life. It matured and helped me with my character."

In 1973 Fiddler worked as the

sports co-ordinator at the MLDC, for about five years. Then, when the MLDC took over the residential school in Beauval, he became a supervisor at the student residence.

Later, in 1978, he was employed on his reserve as band manager and was responsible for a few health programs and school committee meetings, but the Indian Affairs staff ran everything else above these programs.

In the early 1980s, after his university days, Fiddler returned to work with the MLDC in different capacities, but later served as chief and then councillor of Waterhen Lake First Nation.

"In the 1990s we dealt with the Bill C31 membership code, Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range and other land claims," he says. "We started to take over more programs like health, education and housing."

During his tenure a membership code was developed.

"Bill C31 helped Indigenous women regain their status and our Waterhen council agreed that as long as you had a family member in your ancestry that was from the band, the descendant's offspring could also be a band member," he says. "The federal government wanted First Nations communities to run their own membership and I'm proud to have been part of that legacy."

Fiddler is currently a supervisor of MLTC's health and social development resolution health support team.

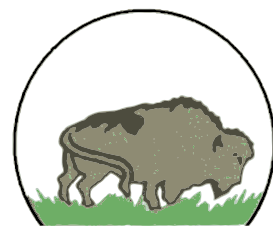
"We work with all Indian Residential School survivors in dealing with their issues," he says. "I also do suicide and grief and loss workshops to all nine Meadow Lake First Nations."

In retrospect, Fiddler says he had to go on a healing journey himself in order to help others. His negative experiences from attending residential school and family addictions drove him to his own battle in life.

"The pain and struggles of my life led me to God and walk a spiritual life," he says. "After many years attending church, I was ordained and am now the pastor at the Flying Dust Church. "It is never too late, or too far gone for anyone to turn their life around. If it can happen to me, it could happen to anyone."



Students and staff from Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation School gather for a group photo Dec. 11 to say 'Thank You Canada'. For more, See page 2.



BRDN school issues no cell phone policy

The first classroom cell phone ban on record in Canada was in March 2019 in the Province of Ontario. However, since the end of the last school year, Buffalo River Dene Nation has had a no cell phone policy and it continues into this 2019-20 school year.



It's something new for Saskatchewan as it's been reported the provincial government of has no intention of imposing a cell phone ban in this province's classrooms.

BRDN School vice-principal Kristen Catarat noted this type of action doesn't come easy.

"We are starting to enforce it again, it's a difficult thing to enforce," she said.

There is a lot of dependence on the smart phones as teachers at her school say phones can be used as a tool for learning and responsible usage. Also, there are always some devices in the classroom to support learning – the teachers' computer, for example.

"Administration has been going around collecting phones just until the end of the day," Catarat continues. "However, if students don't hand them over right away we call the parents and tell them we are going to hold on to them. Parents will agree with us sometimes, and we've had cases where they will come to the school and get their kid's phone."

She says a lot of these parents are supportive, but there are some who say their kids need their phone.

"We've had meetings with the parents and the students," Catarat said. "We want the kids to respect this space as a place for education."

She adds school has long been known as a social place. It's a place where first friends are made, and school by association can pick up words like table, chair, chalk, blackboard, while some students might think up words like fun, activities, play, recess, friends, names of elders and traditional activities.

The one thing Catarat wants to avoid is students recording teachers and other students without permission.

With this new policy, Catarat says the Buffalo River Dene Nation School is trying to set up some personal and professional boundaries.

"We don't take away as many cell phones anymore," she said, adding the kids are leaving their cell phones at home and as a result teachers and students are working together more and the classroom is becoming more fun. "We enjoy the no cell-phone policy and noticing the students are able to concentrate more."

Catarat hopes other schools will try this cell phone ban.

"It's a great idea, but it's challenging," she said. "You just have to be consistent and persistent, on enforcing it. It's worth it for all."



Hundreds of Christmas cards and letters of support and encouragement have been sent to Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation from all across Canada.

Rebuilding hope Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation

One week had gone by since Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation had declared a state of emergency. In that week, the MSFN's extra support services were provided by MLTC, Saskatchewan Health Authority, Indigenous Services Canada and First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIB).

MSFN mental health therapist, Joyce Weeseekase, noted more supports are still needed.

"We have only one counsellor. We need three with various backgrounds in therapy, adult, children and family."

School vice-principal Tarra Olsen spoke about the youth not having proper male role models.

"A lot of our youth come from broken homes. They miss that role model, even here in school there aren't enough male role models," she said.

According to Olsen, the school is overcrowded – this year student enrollment is at 415.

"We need officially 400 students to be considered for an expansion. We don't have the space (we need right now)."

The office of the MSFN school rustled with papers, and standing-room only staff compared notes and filled-in folders. The folders went into three boxes – high, medium and low risk – for supports to students and families.

Weeseekase says the community needs to trust the risk assessment process.

"All we are trying to do is save lives," she said. "The

community needs to also seek help. During this time we have some community members that have refused help."

She said a communications training workshop is planned for the future.

"From our perspective, from the front-line, we need to get stigmas out of the way – no superstition, no fear. The kids shouldn't be afraid to talk and there shouldn't be any secrets," adds Weeseekase.

Olsen said there has been false reporting that is concerning and adds to the stress for the whole community.

"The online news sources have also written falsely about us," she said. "They said we have occasions of in-person and on-line bullying, but these are things that we are not aware of."

Rather, Olsen says MSFN is a close-knit school where breakfast and lunch is served to any student. During this time, the school has had sweats and a focus on land-based education, which Olsen says is a good way to get students outside.

MSFN has held two local meetings on the priorities they want to see their health staff address.

Community elders at the meeting indicated the action for healing the First Nation must come from within, and encouraged members to take ownership, and in working together, put aside differences to help the children and community going forward.

"Those kids that came out with us to sweat, needed to learn the circle and the stories," said elder William Ratfoot. "They need to start learning right now and learn from their elders."

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Addictions Week speakers helping youth of today gain confidence

Each year the Meadow Lake First Nations promote National Addictions Awareness Week (NAAW) and this year it was held Nov. 25 to Dec. 1, with the theme being *Stigma Ends with Me*.

Flying Dust First Nation's health department invited Rick Langlais to speak in the community because he is a sought-after speaker on Saskatchewan reserves and in adult-learning classrooms.

"Due to being beaten at home and told I was no good, I left at a very young age and lived on the streets realizing things couldn't get any worse," Langlais said. "I was always high and doing dumb stuff, and it was always about drugs, hot cars and violence. I swore, if I ever dummy up, I will help others."

For the past two decades, Langlais not only takes time speaking to youth, but he also provides a drop-in space, clothing, food and love through *Hands On Street Ministry* in the City of Saskatoon.

This came about after being released from prison, but his idea was to start a fight club for youth to help protect themselves.

"The few kids who signed up were also hungry, so I fed them," he said. "The next day 150 hungry kids appeared."

Now, 27 years later, Langlais and his company is there for the inner city youth in Saskatoon and feeds thousands of hungry kids a month – about 35 tonnes of food each year.

He found from his past skills as a hustler and his past life of crime, those skills transferred.

"There's always going to have to be somebody to fight for the youth and speak up for the youth. I feel like I was made for this," he adds.

He recalls his first attempt at speaking up was as a four-year-old kid.

"I was told to shut up with the back of a hand," he said. "Drugs and alcohol have affected every aspect of my family's life. First my parents, then later myself. Today, I have a family and so honoured to have one."

Patricia Main, FDFN prevention worker, who emceed the addictions week event, was impressed by the guests.

"They were so engaging and they showed statistics that blew our minds," she said. "And the youth from Transition Place Education Centre (TPEC) are still talking about their visit from Rick Langlais."

Also last week, on Nov. 29, the Waterhen Lake First Nation hosted a career day. Two Indigenous small business owners in the fashion industry, Devon Fiddler and Faye Thomas, both attended as speakers.

Thomas began her talk about a red dress (or skirt)



RCMP Cst. Jon Griffioen gives a high five to a student at the Flying Dust School during the MADD awareness walk.

as it has become a symbol for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and girls.

"I began with one red skirt to raise awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women," she said. "We had a photo shoot, put it online, and it went viral."

She says she received many messages of support so she began making more of the symbolic red dresses.

Thomas cites her Kohkum, who is an avid bead-worker, as her main influence.

"She told me stories of her residential school days.

One of her stories that really touched home for me as an Indigenous person was the forced haircuts," Thomas said.

When Indigenous children were first sent to the residential school, everyone had to get a haircut.

Hair that was braided, which often had spiritual significance, was cut. Homemade traditional clothing, Thomas added, was replaced with school uniforms.

"Some of my red dresses have touched a lot of people who can relate to stories of residential school," she said.

Meanwhile, Fiddler shared that returning home to the reserve as a teenager, attending high school at

Waweyekisik Education Centre and by being part of the community, she gained confidence.

Later, during her time at university, she participated in the Indigenous women's community program, where she acquired public speaking skills.

"I learned I want to be my own boss. One of my goals was to have a Masters in Business Admin, that is where I am at right now," Fiddler said. "When we create products, we create based on traditional teachings. Things which instil strength and confidence to all Indigenous women come from all Indigenous backgrounds."

She shared her desire through her company name, She Native, would inspire other women to speak about what they have overcome.

"It has worked," Fiddler adds. "Women have come to me and shared their stories."

Waterhen Lake First Nation health director, Lena Crighton, says hearing these stories is crucial.

"This is what the kids need to hear – young Indigenous people like them sharing success stories. And stories of overcoming," she said.



At left, Devon Fiddler shows students her clothing line from her company, She Native at the Waweyekisik Education Centre career day Nov. 29. Above, Rick Langlais and Flying Dust's prevention worker Patricia Main.

Online survey aimed at future leaders

The Meadow Lake Tribal Council has recently launched an online survey aimed at youth of the nine Meadow Lake First Nations which will give them a voice in shaping new community programming.

The survey questions asked are designed to solicit feedback for developing new programming in culture, job creation, mental health, and physical health.

It was developed by Recreation Wellness Coordinator Blaine Mirasty, a member of the Flying Dust First Nation who is in his third year of a Masters' Program of Governance and Entrepreneurship

in Northern and Indigenous Areas (G.E.N.I) through the University of Saskatchewan.

Mirasty says the online MLTC youth survey is an innovative approach to connect with First Nations youth of the MLTC. He says the survey is a 'fast-track' to learn what the youth are thinking, it's safe, and it's anonymous.

"First Nations youth are the fastest-growing population in Canada," Mirasty stated. "We need to reach out as quick as we can to our youth."

Mirasty says focusing on the future leaders in the Cree and Dene communities



MLTC Youth Survey 2019

of MLTC will put them into a position to succeed.

"The plan is to highlight our youth, help them build a vision and together share success stories," he adds.

Currently the nine Meadow Lake First Nations develop youth programming in-house through a combination of fundraising efforts, grant applications and the use of *Jordan's Principle* program dollars. Mirasty says there is currently concern among the communities

about a lack of afterschool and weekend programming for youth.

"This survey will help address those needs based on youth input," Mirasty says.

The website has a fill-out form that is anonymous and designed to get an age estimate and grade estimate, which allows for more specific programming for the age differences of the youth, Mirasty says. The data will be sent to MLTC's health and social department to be

distributed to the nine-band stakeholders including their leadership, education and health teams. The data will also be available to each community's recreation director to write and develop new programming to the different funding agencies depending on what category of questions the youth answer. The survey is continuous and will be done in winter (December) spring (April), summer (June) and fall (September).

You can find the survey at www.mltyouthsurvey.ca. It can be filled out on any device – smartphone, tablet, or computer.



Christmas memories

Lucy Garr

(MLTC: Health and Social, ERFN)

My Dad used to get the dog team together – we were in the sled – and I remember looking up at the stars hearing the bells and it was so peaceful. It was a two-hour ride from Dipper Lake to English River to our Grandma's house. We didn't have gifts, but we were together as a family, about 1956 or so. We didn't have turkey. We had traditional foods, and sweet foods that we had gathered during the summer.

Albert Fiddler (Elder: WLFN)

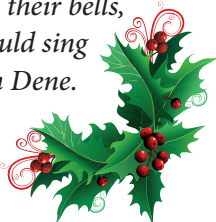
My first Christmas gift, I will never forget. It was a little hand-made truck, made of wood. We were poor back then, but we always had a family dinner. Even my kids today, with their kids and their grandkids, still come to the house where they grew up. It's still home.

Donavan Fineblanket
(Councillor: MSFN)

I think the main thing about Christmas is being with family. It's a time when people who live far away come to visit. Reflect, relax and enjoy friends and family.

Elysa Janvier (Elder: BRDN)

We never had gifts. We had love and we had family. I remember our grandparents would harness up the team with real nice bells and decorations. I swear the horses waited for that all year. Church was about an hour's ride, and the horses would prance and dance with their bells, while Grandma would sing Christmas songs in Dene.



We hope your holiday is decorated with love, laughter and friendship. May the blessings of the season surround you and bring you much happiness and good fortune throughout the year.

This message of hope and compassion for you and your family from the Elders, First Nation Members, Chiefs and Councils and Staff of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council



Meadow Lake First Nations HOLIDAY CLOSURES

- Birch Narrows Dene Nation**
Closed Dec. 20 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Buffalo River Dene Nation**
Closed Dec. 19 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Clearwater River Dene Nation**
Closed Dec. 19 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Canoe Lake Cree First Nation**
Closed Dec. 19 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- English River First Nation**
Closed Dec. 20 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Flying Dust First Nation**
Closed Dec. 20 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Island Lake First Nation**
Closed Dec. 20 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation**
Closed Dec. 20 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020
- Waterhen Lake First Nation**
Closed Dec. 20 • Re-open Jan. 6, 2020

All MLTC offices will CLOSE on Friday, Dec. 20 at 4:00 noon and re-open on Monday, Jan. 6 at 8:30 a.m.

