

MEDIA RELEASE

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Birch Narrows Youth Leading in the Community

Since the start of 2016, a youth group in the Birch Narrows Dene First Nation has started working to support Elders in their community. Birch Narrows Youth is an organized group of young people ages 10-16, who focus on an inter-generational approach to leadership development that involves the youth spending time with, and supporting the Elders in the community.

The group's organizer, Rebecca Sylvestre, explains the type of work they do: "They started hauling wood, hauling water, chopping wood, cleaning their houses, visiting the Elders, doing amazing at everything like that. The youth group has even begun baking for the Elders." The group was organized because of a need to get the youth active in the community. The idea to have the youth support the Elders in the community was the brainchild of Sylvestre, teachers in the community and the youth themselves.

Neighboring communities, such as La Loche and Meadow Lake, have contacted Sylvestre for advice on starting similar programs. The results on the community have been incredible. "The relationship between our Elders and our youth has totally changed," says Sylvestre. "They are getting to know each other, they are building relationships. Our youth have grown stronger to learn that they can share and they can go to an elder's house and visit." She continues, "They love what they are doing, and it is obvious when even at 40 below, they are still out there. There is one parent who told me that their son would usually go home and play games until he would go to bed. Now he looks forward to the youth group every week."

Beyond the benefits of improving leadership and building stronger ties with their Elders, these youth are staying active and having fun. Sylvestre plans to continue the youth group and advance the types of activities they try. She would like to start a canoe trip this summer that would enable youth and Elders to interact and learn from one another. "They would teach us our language, our trapping, our land and show us different medicines."

Birch Narrows Youth received funding from the ParticipACTION Teen Challenge. Sponsored by Coca-Cola Canada, the Teen Challenge breaks down the barriers that prevent teens from getting active by providing grants of up to \$500 for ongoing events, and \$250 for one-time events.

About SPRA

The Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA) is the recognized leader for the wellbeing of people and communities through recreation, and is the administrator of the ParticipACTION Teen Challenge within Saskatchewan. Organizations who would like to apply for funding through Teen Challenge can find out more about this program at: <http://www.spra.sk.ca/programs-services/children-youth/participaction-teen-challenge/>

Visit Birch Narrows Youth Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1708435216044300/>

For more information on this story or the ParticipACTION Teen Challenge program in Saskatchewan, contact Desirea Weninger, SPRA Consultant – Youth Engagement, at (306) 780-9219 or dweninger@spra.sk.ca.

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