

## Honour Ceremony for Aboriginal Graduates

Jurisdiction: Northwest Territories      Contact: Jane Arychuk and Roberta Kennedy

Level: K-12

Theme: Community Based Practices

### **Description of Practice:** *Honour Ceremony for Aboriginal Graduates*

On June 11, 2005, the first Honour Ceremony for Aboriginal Graduates was held at the Yellowknife River. The event included a Fire Feeding Ceremony and Qulliq lighting, traditional entertainment consisting of drumming, fiddling, jigging, storytelling and throat singing, a performance and inspirational greeting from Leela Gilday and a feast. All the students were presented with a stole made of stroud, moose hide and beads to honour their accomplishments and success.

**Background:** An Aboriginal parent made a request to present her son with a traditional gift at one of the high school graduation ceremonies and was told that with 130 graduates it was impossible to do individual parent presentations. When she did attend the ceremony, she saw foreign students, French students and academics honoured and realized that Aboriginal graduating students needed to be honoured in a traditional method by the Aboriginal community.

The issue was raised at the Yellowknife Education District #1 Aboriginal Advisory Committee and the idea of an Honour Ceremony for Aboriginal Graduates was proposed. The Yellowknife Catholic School Board was approached with the idea and the joint venture was established.

**Development:** A committee was struck including representation from each school board, each high school, and interested parents. The committee met monthly starting in January and discussed a framework for the event followed by requesting donations and contacting possible speakers and entertainers. By May the committee met weekly to finalize the program and confirm participants. The committee was responsible the day of the event to help with set up, clean up and running of the event.

**Evidence:** Our first ceremony was a great success with thirty-two students honoured and attended by about three hundred parents and community members. The students found the event an amazing experience and a wonderful way to celebrate their accomplishments. The comments by people who attended were extremely positive and the interest in this year's ceremony has grown.

**Adaptability:** This event could be easily adapted in another community and could also be used as an honour ceremony for any type of school celebration.

**Further Information:** Please feel free to contact either Jane or Roberta through First Class.