



Yukon First Nation Education Directorate excerpt
from the Early Years Annual Report 2022



YFNED

Since November 2019, the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate (YFNED) and MFI have been working together to develop a model of the Early Years specific to the unique contexts of Yukon First Nations. YFNED implements Early Years programming through culturally-adapted training and resources and a variety of activities including home visiting, group gatherings and preschool programming, reaching Indigenous families throughout an expansive geographical area. YFNED offers Early Years programming alongside a variety of other wraparound services.

KARMEN'S STORY

I painted this painting with the intention of creating something with good energy and power. The northern lights and snow are to represent the north. The outfit is to show pride and change as the color red is sacred to our people and showing off skin wasn't something our Elders did but we do today. I added stretch marks to normalize the stigma around them and I put baby facing forward to show that baby and mom are going through this journey together.

Karmen Savard created this painting as her Final Project for the Understanding the Early Years (EY-1) course. Her description of her artwork is above.

Jolene Smarch and her grandchild in Kwanlin Dun First Nation, Yukon.

Karmen and her then 11-month-old daughter became involved in the YFNED Early Years program when she connected with an Early Years Visitor at the suggestion of a friend. A year later, she continues her involvement in her position as the Early Years Program Assistant. Below, read her story in her own words.

ON CONNECTING WITH AN EARLY YEARS VISITOR

Once I got to meet her, I thought, oh, she's really nice. I liked this girl because she wasn't awkward and she wasn't pushy. She was just very welcoming and nice... I think she brought us a little welcome package and it had a book in there. I was so excited about the book because my daughter at the time loved reading... And that's one of the main things that reeled me in along with [my Visitor's] amazing personality.

ON THE EARLY YEARS TOOLBOX

The Toolbox cards, they are amazing...I started putting them in this little book that I have for my daughter...And every now and again, I'll go in and see if I need to look at them. And I've found that I've used them with my nieces and nephews, and I just have some of them memorized... When I'm doing my things, my day-to-day life and I see something, it just comes back and I think of the card.

ON RE-CONNECTING WITH CULTURE

The Early Years program, I think, has connected me back to my culture. I think it was a group gathering, or maybe it was just a drop-in, but the first time was with an Elder... The first thing I saw was her standing there and she had some smudge and a feather and a smudge pan. And I thought, "Oh, wow, they're doing this here." I haven't seen this in a really long time. I got so excited and I was really nervous too, because I hadn't done it in a long time, and it's just something that I kind of tucked away and forgot about while I've been up here in Whitehorse. So that was really nice to see and also be a part of again.



"I wish that I could run up to them all and say, 'Hey, come to the Early Years!' We've got games, we've got toys and we've got a great community. We've got food and we have love and laughter. And it's all genuine."

Karmen's wish for other young parents/caregivers

YFNED Early Years This Year

7
communities supported

First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun
Ross River Dena Council
Selkirk First Nation
Taku River Tlingit First Nation
Teslin Tlingit Council
Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Whitehorse

127
families supported

689
visits with families

17
staff members



Courtney Grant holds her child in Whitehorse, Yukon.

51 group gatherings held on topics including beading, sewing, new baby celebration, baby's first foods, medicine making and cooking class.

