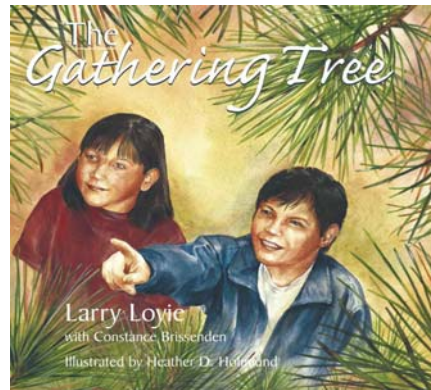


STD/AIDS Control



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The Gathering Tree

Monday, September 26, 2005

New Children's Book Encourages HIV Awareness and Prevention

HIV awareness and prevention is the theme of *The Gathering Tree*, a new children's book launched today by Chee Mamuk, the aboriginal HIV education program of the BC Centre for Disease Control, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. *The Gathering Tree* is a new and up-to-date resource for schools and communities featuring the gently told story of a First Nations family, as well as study material for students, teachers and health educators.

"The number of people with HIV is rising in Aboriginal communities," noted Chief Lea George, Chief of Tseil wa tuth Band (Burrard) and co-chair of the First Nations Summit. "More children will have family members living with HIV and may have questions and concerns. This is a culturally appropriate resource that encourages children to ask questions and learn about HIV prevention. It is a story that supports understanding of children and families that are affected by HIV/AIDS."

Local students as well as representatives of the Aboriginal and HIV/AIDS community joined award-winning First Nations author Larry Loyie and co-author Constance Brissenden at the Squamish Nations Recreation Centre to celebrate the book's completion. The 48-page book, illustrated by award-winning artist Heather D. Holmlund, is a co-publication of Chee Mamuk, the aboriginal HIV/STI education program of the BC Centre for Disease Control, which hosted the launch, and Theytus Books of Penticton.

“What I really liked about the book is that it has a really good story,” says Stephanie Wood, age 11. “I love it when you can read something and learn at the same time. That’s one of the things that makes reading fun!”

Key messages in the book include the facts that HIV is completely preventable, and that, at this point, there is no cure. Education into prevention begins with children learning to make healthy choices. “It’s good to learn more about HIV so you can make sure you know how to prevent it, so it doesn’t happen to you,” says 12 year old Dylan Hughes. “I really liked the fact that one of the characters is a boy just like me.” A First Nations setting of *The Gathering Tree* gives a special quality to the book that children from all cultural backgrounds will enjoy, combining traditional First Nations ways of doing things with information about HIV.

The Gathering Tree includes study material for teachers, parents, health educators and students. “We wanted to take a proactive approach with kids on this subject,” says Melanie Rivers, Educator with the Chee Mamuk program. “A lot of these kids have heard of HIV but that’s where their knowledge ends.” The book is recommended for children ages nine and up and was funded through the BC Centre for Disease Control and the Provincial Health Services Authority.

Publisher: Theytus Books, Hardcover, 48 pages, 10 x 10. ISBN 1-894778-28-6.
Price: CDN \$19.95; US \$18.95.



People in photo: (from left), Constance Brissenden, Co-author, Larry Loyie, author, Melanie Rivers, Educator, Chee Mamuk, Lucy Barney, Program Manager, Chee Mamuk

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