

Circle of Courage – Cariboo Chilcotin Style!

Many of us in the Cariboo Chilcotin are familiar with the Circle of Courage: Dr. Brokenleg has visited communities many times over the years and shared his wisdom and experience on the Circle of Courage; the school district has embedded the values of the Circle of Circle in its vision statement; and many organizations use the Circle of Courage as a working philosophy.

But have you heard about the Circle of Courage Cariboo-Chilcotin style? A few years ago, we had a unique opportunity to personalize the Circle of Courage for our region, and here's how it happened.

The Circle of Courage is a model of positive youth development based on the universal principle that to be emotionally healthy all youth need a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. This unique model integrates the cultural wisdom of tribal peoples, the practice wisdom of professional pioneers with troubled youth, and findings of modern youth development research. <https://www.starr.org/training/youth/aboutcircleofcourage>

Here is the essence of these four universal growth needs:

The Spirit of Belonging – The universal longing for human bonds is nurtured by relationships of trust so that the child can say, “I am loved”.

The Spirit of Mastery – The child's inborn thirst for learning is nurtured; learning to cope with the world, the child can say, “I can succeed.”

The Spirit of Independence – The child's free will is nurtured by increased responsibility so that the child can say, “I have the power to make decisions.”

The Spirit of Generosity – The child's character is nurtured by concern for others so that the child can say, “I have a purpose for my life.”

In March 2012, Dr. Martin Brokenleg, co-founder of the Circle of Courage, visited Williams Lake where he provided a one day workshop on the Circle of Courage. More than 200 people came out to hear the inspiring message and presentation of Dr. Brokenleg. He walked us through the model; described how the circle keeps individuals and communities strong; provided concrete examples of what happens to youth who are disconnected from the circle; demonstrated how to reconnect youth to the circle; and stressed the importance of community mobilization to support and embrace children, youth, and families in the Circle of Courage.

In the afternoon, workshop participants brainstormed what our community is doing well in each of the areas of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity, and what we would like to create and build on in the future. The lists we created were long, and it was very affirming to see how much we are already doing as a community, as families, as individuals, and as schools.

We were also inspired and excited to read about the energy and creative ideas people had to strengthen the circle.

We were determined not to lose our energy, creativity, and momentum, and so a group of people made a commitment to take the lists and provide follow-up actions. The result is this “Made in the Cariboo-Chilcotin” Circle of Courage which we designed with the assistance of graphic facilitator Sam Bradd. It is a 6’x6’ visual representation of some of our current actions and future ideas. We display this Circle of Courage at community events, have made laminated poster size copies which we distribute widely, created a portable banner, and make the electronic version available to whoever wants a copy. In other words, we want it to be visible and utilized wherever possible.

We shared this image with Dr. Brokenleg before he spoke at the Truth and Reconciliation Event in Williams Lake in May 2013. He was excited to see how the Cariboo Chilcotin has embraced the Circle of Courage and made it our own.

We want to emphasize that this image is not all encompassing. It is a snapshot of where we are at and some ideas of where we’d like to go next. We are encouraging community groups, businesses, and organizations to use the circle as a tool in discussions, planning, and taking ideas to the next level. We want the Circle to become a “way of doing business” in the Cariboo Chilcotin.