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Makimautiksat Wellness and Empowerment Camp for Nunavut Youth

In 2007, the Board of Directors of the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, in Iqaluit, NU identified child and youth mental health and wellness as a priority issue to champion at our Centre. In 2010, we received funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to implement our Child and Youth Mental Health and Wellness Research, Intervention and Community Advocacy Project in Nunavut.

Firstly, we developed the model for the camp which focuses 8 learning modules - we have titled the camp model the "Eight Ujarait/Rocks Model" to symbolize the way we envision the 8 modules providing the solid stone foundation of skills and knowledge upon which young people can build their lives. The 8 modules focus on topics highlighted by youth, parents/guardians, grandparents and youth workers as important in achieving and maintaining a strong sense of self. The learning modules include the following:

(1) *Strengthening Coping Skills*
(2) *Building Healthy and Harmonious Relationships*
(3) *Nurturing Awareness of the Body Movement and Nurtrition*
(4) *Exploring Creativity*
(5) Fostering Personal and Community Wellness
(6) Encouraging *Self Discovery and Future Planning*
(7) *Promoting Informed Choices*
(8) *Celebrating the Land: Connecting Knowledge and Skills*

Secondly, the model has been used as the foundation upon which to build a curriculum and series of activities for the camp - the Makimautiksat Youth Wellness and Empowerment Camp. This curriculum incorporates a number of ways of learning, including group discussions, individual reflection, observational learning, activity-based learning, and role-playing. The curriculum includes celebrating the arts and creativity, teachings from Elders, practicing of skills, and, most importantly, having fun! The spirit of the camp is one of inclusion, acceptance, the celebration of diversity, and the empowerment of youth.

The 10-day camp program includes both community-based and on-the-land components. The first 7 days are spent in the community, the last 2 full days and nights are spent on the land. The camp concludes with a graduation celebration that is open to the whole community.

The involvement of healthy role models is a core component of the camp. Role models include youth mentors, Elders, and community members sharing their wisdom and experiences related to the topics in the learning modules. Several activities are included in the modules, such as role- playing, story-telling, games, preparing nutritious meals, photography, and more. The land camp program focuses on celebrating Inuit culture and the campers learn about harvesting foods, living on the land and learning from elders and community members about local and regional history.