

# **Project Child Recovery**

## **What is PCR?**

Project Child Recovery (PCR), is a program designed specifically for children aged 6-12 who have witnessed or experienced trauma. This encompasses issues such as family violence, substance abuse, grief, and bullying. Whether children have experienced violence in the home, changes in family dynamics through death or separation, the impact of substance abuse, or challenging dynamics at school, PCR offers them a safe place to explore and celebrate the fact that they are one-of-a-kind. Foundationally built on safety planning, PCR gives children a voice.

## **History**

Project Child Recovery was initiated in 1990 as a joint project of the Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and the YWCA Harbour House. Funding to make this project possible was provided by the Alberta Government's Office for the Prevention of Family Violence. The initial planning of this program centered on encompassing a broader interpretation of violence exposure, as many programs focused exclusively on children from homes of wife abuse. Since that time the program has undergone revision in an effort to respond to the latest research on violence as it comes available. PCR has been expanding into other areas; as far as Yellowknife Northwest Territories, Canada, to the Eastern coast of Canada, as well as the United States of America.

## **Expansion**

In 2016 the YWCA Lethbridge & District expanded this initiative to reach youth ages 13-17, and Project Teen Recovery (PTR) was launched on the Kainai Blood Reserve in the communities of Standoff and Lethbridge, as well as in Lethbridge in the local schools and the community. Foundationally built on safety planning, PTR challenges youth to consider carefully the many issues that they are confronted with on a daily basis.

## **Focus**

Lessons in both PCR and PTR are centered on emotional intelligence, self-worth, and family dynamics. Each participant completes a safety plan during the sessions. Generally sessions are held for eight weeks, meeting once a week for two hours, but the program is always tailored to the needs of each group and is lengthened if required. Currently PCR and PTR sessions are held on the Blood Reserve, the largest First Nations reserve in Canada. Staff at the YWCA work closely with the Prescription Drug Community Development Coordinator, school counsellors, and the Blood Tribe Police Crime Prevention Officer to continually tailor the program to the needs of the children and youth; in 2017 the safety plan for PCR was revised in an effort to meet these specific needs. Within the community of Lethbridge sessions are held in community

schools and in the downtown core. A local agency in the community has extended to the YWCA the free use of space in their building in order that sessions can be held after school. During spring break and summer holidays, camps are held for children and youth. At a camp participants attend full days for four to five days, also receiving snacks and lunch at no charge to the family.

Throughout the year staff receive requests to present lessons to children and youth attending other programs in the city. For example, staff has worked with Big Brothers and Big Sisters, presenting lessons to children and youth in their programs. Requests are also received for one-to-one sessions. These requests come from Harbour House as well as the community. Project Child Recovery has also developed a relationship with a specialized program within the School District #51 in Lethbridge. The Resiliency Program is an educational program designed to assist students who exhibit severe and challenging behaviors. In working together we can accomplish so much more.

Throughout the weekly sessions the message delivered to the children and youth is one of hope and possibility:

- 1) You are one-of-a-kind – you are unique!
- 2) Treat others in the way you would like to be treated
- 3) Ask for help when you need it
- 4) Know that you have a hope and a future.

Children and youth work on many different activities that help them to better understand their unique personality. Sessions are structured in a manner that models and teaches respect to ourselves and others. Children and youth identify their safe places and people throughout the safety planning. Many activities allow time for dreaming and setting goals as personal interests are identified.

After sessions are over, participants are sent home with their own individualized comfort box. Throughout the weeks they are given an opportunity to decorate a special box and identify some of the items that may be helpful coping tools. After placing instructions inside the box lid for phoning 911, along with their safety plan, children and youth are able to pick 3-4 items that they can place in their box to take home. Items made available to the participants are things like play doh, stuffed animals, stress balls, smooth rocks, or lotion, just to name a few.