

Martine Kanakakeesic, KORI's new researcher
Rick Garrick Nov. 2007

North Caribou Lake's Martine Kanakakeesic still remembers how surprised the Elders in her community were during their first Telehealth examinations.

"People were amazed with how the technology works," says the former North Caribou Lake community telehealth coordinator and current youth information and communication technology (ICT) technician and research assistant at the Keewaytinook Okimakanak Research Institute (KORI) in Thunder Bay. "If we had a consultant in Toronto, especially with the Elders, they were surprised with the technology. But I think that the Elders who learned to appreciate the technology, with 10 minute followups instead of day trips out, their preference was Telehealth. Some of the Elders use canes and others had a hard time getting escorts because their family members were not always available." Kanakakeesic began working in ICT's as North Caribou Lake's community telehealth coordinator (CTC) in 2004 when the fly-in remote northwestern Ontario community joined KO Telehealth's network and installed a telemedicine workstation.

"I had to do open houses and talks on the community radio station to inform the community about the benefits of Telehealth," she says, noting that many people at first thought that the introduction of Telehealth would eliminate their visits with doctors outside the community. "I reassured them that Telehealth would not cut their trips out for serious medical problems."

Kanakakeesic also completed all the technical work required in the community, after observing the technicians who originally installed the telemedicine workstation and with help via video or audio instructions from the K-Net or KO Telemedicine technicians.

Kanakakeesic eventually worked her way up to Team Leader under KO Telemedicine's recent reorganization, where she helped the regional telemedicine coordinator supervise the CTC's in the communities.

"I held weekly meetings with all the CTC's," Kanakakeesic says. "I provided updates for the communities and addressed any concerns."

Kanakakeesic also helped set up KO Telemedicine's family visit sessions. "We have family members who have moved away from the communities and using the video conference units we are able to visit with one another without leaving the community" she says.

Kanakakeesic signed on with KORI at the beginning of October and is busy learning more about ICT's, networks, websites, computer programs and research. She is looking forward to assisting with some of the current and upcoming research projects that KORI is involved in.

"I also help with the video conference units whenever there is an event happening within the city, on the technical side," she says.

Although Kanakakeesic's long-term goal is to complete her nursing degree by studying part-time at Lakehead University, she also understands the importance of the work she is currently doing.

"I've always been interested in medicine," she says, adding that she originally chose nursing as a career and attended nursing school in Winnipeg before returning to North Caribou Lake in 2002. "When you live in a remote community, there is limited access to many things. With this program (KO Telemedicine), it helps us with our education and medical needs. Instead of flying people out, the doctor examines the patient with the general examination camera and determines whether they can be treated in the community."

Kanakakeesic stresses that KO Telemedicine offers a variety of

programs and services, including education, training and healing. "I encourage you to talk to your local CTC and see what is available," she says. "I have personally seen the positive impact that it has made for my fellow community members who have used KO Telemedicine services."