



Dreaming **Big Dreams!**

“Many people from the community dropped in to see what all the hoopla was about! We were the talk of the town.”

Above Mary Chocolate with her star quilt

by Lynn Turcotte

One can easily compare the beauty of the wild flowers in the Canadian Arctic during spring and summer to the ladies and youth of the Sewing Program in Gameti, Northwest Territories (NWT).

To give some perspective, Gameti, NWT, is only accessible by small aircraft most of the year. In winter, the ice road, built over a multitude of lakes and rivers, allows people to drive out during six weeks of the year (4.5 hours south to Yellowknife). At a latitude of 64 degrees north, Gameti is a Tlicho (pronounced Klee-cho) Dene community with a population of about 275.

In 2015, I joined my husband, Mike Westley, who is the community adult educator, to teach and share my love of sewing and quilting with the community. Through some community funding from Dominion Diamond Corp., Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), Education, Culture and Employment (ECE-NWT) and support from the community senior administrative officer, Judal Dominicata, Chief David Wedawin and the Council, I was able to buy fabric and sewing machines to get started.

Before I knew it, I had a full house plus a waiting list! I was excited for the ladies to use modern, up-to-date sewing machines and tools such as rotary cutters, mats, etc. Those in the community who sewed used mostly hand-cranked sewing machines and other retro equipment—the new gear would be welcome. It didn't take long before a wonderful bloom of pillowcases, bags, wall hangings, table runners and other attractive projects were produced.

Giving to the community is a big part of our sewing program. We created gifts for elders and had a wonderful time delivering them. Many people from the community dropped in to see what all the hoopla was about! We were the talk of the town.

This year, with generous support from ECE-NWT and other previous sponsors, we were able to expand the program. Now there are not only classes for more women (ages 24-72), but for school youth as well. Kids aged 10 and up have learned how to sew, making pillowcases and small bags. We currently have about 15% of the community sewing!

This year, the women's group took on the monumental task of making their very own bed quilts—queen- and king-sized! With



patterns chosen and fabric selected, the sewing started in earnest with classes occurring during days, evenings and weekends. I was asked if the group could sew through the night, but there is a limit! Once the quilt tops were completed, and with the help of Air Tindi (our local airline), the quilts were flown across the northern sky to Yellowknife. The

ladies at North of 60 Quilting (Marilyn and Anita) completed the quilting on their long-arm machines—back the quilts came snug in the cargo hold of a small aircraft. The final result was a stunning garden of quilts in an array of colours, mirroring the Arctic landscape.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 61



Judy Wedawin



Therese Arrowmaker and Helen Mantia



Linda Thomas

"I'm dreaming big dreams for my sewing."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59

An open house for the community was held for all to see the women's pride—the sewing program here means more than you can ever imagine. As part of the process, a message board was set up in the classroom so participants could express how they felt. Some comments from the women include:

- *Nothing is impossible in sewing,*
- *I can't believe I did this,*
- *I'm so happy here,*
- *OMG, I'm making a quilt. I'm so excited,*
- *I'm dreaming big dreams for my sewing.*



Therese Bekale

The youth, both boys and girls, are also proud of what they accomplished. Their messages say:

- *I'm so proud—just like a dad,*
- *It was amazing,*
- *I'm really happy and proud of myself,*
- *I love and enjoy sewing class.*

What is truly inspiring to me is the self-confidence and raised self-esteem that comes from learning something new. It is significant for both the adults and youth.

This coming winter, like the wild flowers under the snow, beneath the majesty and splendor of the Arctic aurora, on a cold winter's night, with the stars twinkling way up high, we'll all be snug and cozy under our quilts made with dedication and love. ♦

Note: Lynn Turcotte, instructor, would be pleased to hear from you by email at westley@efni.com.