

Bright future for literacy plan

If you want something done, you have to do it yourself.

That's what Joseph MacLean and his team at the Vancouver Native Health Society, VNHS, said when the government wouldn't fund literacy programs for aboriginal youth in Vancouver.

"They wouldn't fund our programs," said MacLean, "but we weren't ready to give up."

The VNHS set up a plan of their own designed to fund programs through for-profit micro-businesses, called the Vancouver Aboriginal Social Enterprise (VASE) project.

"There is a huge need for these programs, only one in five urban aboriginals graduate from high school," said MacLean. "That's when these wonderful flashlights came into our lives and it dawned on me ... shine a light on literacy."

The wonderful flashlights MacLean is referring to are environmentally friendly lights powered by a hand-crank.

The lights are capable of shining for half an hour from just 30 seconds of cranking and the generator is powerful enough to



- Kristin Bradford, 24 hours

Shine a Light team members, left to right: Aaron Tait; project leader Joseph MacLean; Keith LaRiviere and in front Norma Dick.

recharge a cell phone; it was also just what the VASE project was looking for. Urban aboriginals, volunteers and the VNHS have been selling the handy flashlights at the PNE and MacLean says he couldn't be happier.

"We were looking for funding

for our programs for eight months and came up with nothing," said MacLean. "With the flashlights, we're on track to start up one of our major programs in time for Christmas." For more information visit www.vnhs.net.

- Matt Kieltyka, 24 hours