

How it's done in Canada

By Sabra McCracken

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In Canada priority was given to the Athabaskan language three years ago.

"That's when the Special Committee on Education recommended that Native lang-

uage be given funds to develop programs in the schools," said Ethel Townsend, an Athabaskan from Good Hope, Northwest Territories and a member of that committee.

Townsend also serves her community as a member of the

Task Force for Education, which comes under the Canadian Department of Education and as a teacher of both kindergarten through ninth grade language programs, and an adult education teacher.

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Canadian Athabaskans

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"We must be strong on this question of leadership in Native languages," she said. "It is hard work but we must remember that we are not putting feathers in our own caps but working for the good of the community."

Some 14 people from the Northwest Territories attended the Athabaskan Language Conference at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. They represented speakers of five Athabaskan dialects; North Slavey, South Slavey, Chipewyan, Dogrib and Loucheaux.

Townsend said that the Canadian government has been

very supportive of Native language programs but she warned against complacency.

"It is essential to our identity and pride to know our language," she said. "this language conference is a big help to all of us because it puts us in contact with one another and because we can see that there are many people working to preserve the language."

Children in Canada's NWT are now speaking their Athabaskan dialects in the schools. But much more work needs to be done, according to Townsend.