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**Innu Child and Family Services Initiative : Year End Report**

Year Ending March 2004

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This year has been the first for this initiative and for the specific position of Interim Director, Innu Child and Family Services. This developmental work has been undertaken for Innu at both Natuwashish and Sheshatshiu.

Three main aspects to this work have evolved over this first year. In broad terms these three interrelated aspects of this work are;

- \* research and data collection of First Nations' services delivery models
- \* integration of provincial legislation within a First Nations' framework
- \* development of a community based model to integrate existing support services with specific child and family services

***research and data collection***

A growing body of information and experience exists with regard to effective and culturally appropriate services to First Nations' children and families. Unfortunately, almost none of this information or experience is within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, it is essential to gain a good understanding and have documentation that demonstrates that a unique First Nations' perspective is being articulated. This unique perspective exists within organizations, agencies and with practitioners in communities and academic settings who have been working at the development of service models to meet the unique needs of First Nations' children and families.

Through phone, email, reading professional journals, published articles, books and reports, as well as through pursuing individual contacts I am developing a resource of information and ideas which should form the basis on which decisions can be made regarding the most appropriate service delivery model for Innu children and families.

This part of the work helps to take Innu from being in an isolated situation and identifies similarities of experience and strengths with other First Nations. This is very important in light of the next aspect of this work which is to integrate the provincial legislation within a First Nations' framework.

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*integration of provincial legislation within a First Nations' framework*

The second aspect of this work has involved working with the current CYFS services providers to gain a better understanding of the legislation in this province that governs child protection matters. Learning the values and principles that are the basis for the provincial legislation is also important because the models of practice have to be consistent with meeting the intent of the legislation.

A lot of this work has arisen from the context of joint meetings with provincial staff, in particular, the Provincial Director and the Labrador Regional Director. Along with other parties to a technical committee, including Innu community representatives, the nature and specifics of provincial child welfare legislation has become clearer. This technical group has worked collaboratively on a draft memorandum of understanding to create a joint Innu-Provincial board to govern Innu child and family services delivery. This is ongoing work at this stage because there are other levels of negotiations involving the federal partner needing to be completed in order to move forward on the MOU.

It has been important to identify those areas of practice experience of the provincial program which can be complimentary to the broader First Nations' framework

This aspect of the work has been characterized by very supportive and helpful relationships between provincial staff and Innu. We have moved from adversarial positions toward a more complete understanding of one another's strengths and challenges and this has been very significant.

The technical committee work and that of the larger program committee is ongoing.

*development of a community based model*

During this past year work was undertaken to begin communication with the Innu public to raise awareness about this initiative. It is very important that the public be as involved as possible in the development of this initiative but this is probably the most challenging aspect of this work. Various staff and community members in both communities have begun to be involved to differing degrees. Also a formal consultation process with regard to this initiative was undertaken. Another important step in this particular aspect of the work was the establishment in Sheshatshiu of a case management team and team leader. This was done because it is absolutely essential, based on what we have found out from the research and data collected, that the First Nation's child and family services agency must be a service that is fully integrated with all the other helping services in the community. In this regard, basic work on helping to build more effective communication processes between agencies of the First Nations is a critical building block in the development of a community based model in which community services are fully integrated with Innu child and family services.

This aspect of the work is solely community based and I find it the most personally challenging

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because I live and work daily in only one of the two First Nations. On a day to day basis I have a much greater understanding of the Sheshatshiu situation and much more ability to be involved in helping to do this kind of work with various helping agencies in the community.

This particular aspect of this work is needing the most attention in the future. A means needs to be found whereby the same level of day to day community involvement can be had with agencies in both of the two First Nations in order to work toward integration of any future Innu child and family services agency in both communities.