

Key Messages – Innu Children in Care

- As of December 31, 2016, there were 1035 children and youth in care/custody of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development.
- Of the 1035, 32 per cent (335) of the children and youth were Indigenous, and 175 were Innu (155 were from Natuashish or Sheshatshiu).
- Forty-five of the 155 Innu children and youth from Natuashish or Sheshatshiu were placed outside their home community, including 25 who were placed outside Labrador (10 of the 25 were residing in out-of-province treatment programs in Ontario or Saskatchewan).
- The following children/youth were in care and residing in their Innu communities as of December 31, 2016:
 - 32 children/youth in care in Natuashish
 - 87 children/youth in Sheshatshiu
- Based on data available since 2009, there has never been a suicide of any Innu child/youth in care (or any child in care). Since 2009, one Innu youth who had been receiving services in the past 12 months committed suicide.
- We recognize that there are a number of challenges in our Indigenous communities, primarily related to social issues and other factors such as the remoteness of communities. This often translates to a higher number of children requiring the services of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development. We also recognize that this is a national issue, as similar challenges are being faced with Indigenous communities all across the country.
- In Labrador, efforts continue in working with the Aboriginal leadership, CSSD staff and foster parents to develop and implement creative approaches to increase more foster homes and other placement options. This will allow for more children who need out-of-home placement to remain in their community, closer to home and within their culture.
- The Provincial Government recognizes the best interests of the children and youth of our province are paramount and understands the seriousness of issues such as solvent abuse that negatively impact this vulnerable group in our society.
- The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development continues to provide protective intervention services to the children and youth of Natuashish and to work with all stakeholders involved in supporting families in this community.
- Ultimately, the health and well-being of children and youth depends upon a safe, secure and nurturing environment at home and in the community, which is best achieved by the cooperation of all parties.

Secondary Messaging

- We continue to develop innovative ways to work with our Indigenous communities and overcome these challenges. A Working Relationship Agreement was signed between the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and the Sheshatshiu and Mushuau First Nations in an effort to improve joint case planning, service coordination and information sharing pertaining to child protection in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.
- The agreement outlines more specifically the activities undertaken to improve services between CSSD and the Labrador Innu communities. It is an important partnership that is helping improve planning around the safety and placement of Indigenous children and youth.
- While an Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2012, it was determined that the Provincial Government needed to further improve upon the collaboration, and come together more effectively with the leadership. It was a great first step, but the Working Relationship Agreement is a more shoulder-to-shoulder approach which helps find better solutions to keep children and youth within their communities and culture.
- There are a number of items to improve the process which did not exist in the previous MOU:
 - establishment of a joint committee process which will more clearly define specific case planning and coordination functions; expansion of the role of the Innu Round Table Secretariat;
 - inclusion of the Innu Healing Strategy (2014); and, creation of a CSSD Liaison position with the Innu Nation as a pilot project.
- The Innu Healing Strategy (2014) is referenced as a guide for the new agreement. This is reflective of the current philosophy that, while CSSD must follow provincial legislation in decision-making regarding the protection of children and youth, the Innu can bring a range of resources and insight to each case that can inform decisions and work toward healing family units, while also reducing risk to children in the community.
- Through the Working Relationship Agreement between CSSD, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, Mushuau Innu First Nation, and the Innu Round Table, we work collaboratively to meet the needs of Innu children, youth and families.
- As agreed to through the Working Relationship Agreement, in each Innu Community there are weekly Notice and Case Planning Meetings on individual child protection cases and quarterly Joint Committee Meetings to address systemic issues and share resources.
- Part of the department's Organizational Model, Labrador includes dedicated zone managers for the Innu and Inuit zones, and the collaborative approach with Indigenous leaders and communities to improve planning around the safety and well-being of children and youth, as well as enhance service coordination and delivery in this region.

- The department is recruiting an Indigenous Policy Consultant in Labrador. These systemic issues will be a focus of this position. We also recently filled vacant Supervisor and Zone Manager positions in Sheshatshiu.
- Furthermore, the CYCP Act has recently been reviewed, with one aspect being how unique needs of Indigenous children can be recognized.