



Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Department of Child, Youth and Family Services  
Office of the Deputy Minister

Ref: EXE-042822

April 01, 2013

Ms. Carol Chafe  
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate  
193 LeMarchant Road  
St. John's, NL A1C 2H5

**Re: Health and Well-Being of the Children and Youth of Natuashish, NL**

Dear Ms. Chafe;

I write in response to your letter of March 28, 2013 requesting information on the current situation related to the health and well-being of children and youth in Natuashish and to respond to the questions raised. The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services has provided updates to your office in terms of the department's response since the recent reports of children being unsupervised in the community, resulting in gas-sniffing. This letter is in response directly to the questions raised in your most recent correspondence.

**1. Is the request for assistance that was recently made by the community being considered as part of a strategic response by either the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services or the Department of Health and Community Services in partnership with the Federal Government?**

The proposal, as submitted on March 21, 2013, to the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services is currently under review. The Department is prepared to consider the proposal and contribute funding to initiatives or programs that are results-oriented and are within the department's mandate.

**2. Has the hiring of the two CYFS social worker positions been suspended due to the hiring freeze?**

The process of hiring of two social worker positions with the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services has not been impacted by the hiring freeze and is nearing conclusion. Active recruitment of other positions continues as well.

**3. Is the CYFS social worker in the community on a part-time basis?**

There is a Department of Child, Youth and Family Services social worker assigned responsibility for Natuashish on a full-time basis. This social worker is currently in the community for three

weeks per month and supports Natuashish from Sheshatshiu in the fourth week. She and other staff are available in that week to be present should issues arise.

**4. What, if any, plans does the Department of Health and Community Services have regarding development of a targeted intervention response for the children of the Mushuau Innu First Nations community of Natuashish?**

The Department of Health and Community Services is working with its partners to target interventions for the children in need in Natuashish.

In 2011, the department funded a dedicated mental health and addictions counsellor to be permanently located in Natuashish. This position supplements the work of other community-based mental health and addiction workers employed by the band council.

While this position has been vacant since December 2012, recruitment has not been subject to the hiring freeze and is on-going. The department anticipates that this position will be re-filled shortly. In the interim, any referrals for addiction counselling for Natuashish are prioritized for action through the Mental Health and Addictions Office in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Historically, there have been no problems with immediate access for referrals. While the mental health addictions team can only treat individuals and families that request assistance, all referrals they receive are seen immediately. Access to both in-province and out-of-province treatment is available.

**5. It is my understanding that the Easter break results in many children being left unsupervised in the community. Will there be a presence of service providers in Natuashish to assess this situation and assist these children?**

Ms. Lyla Andrew, Zone Manager with the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services is currently in Natuashish and is accompanied by a Community Services Worker who can speak the language. She will be assessing the safety of children in the community throughout the week and hopes to meet with the Innu leadership and other providers to discuss next steps.

In recognition of the vacant Department of Health and Community Services' position, Labrador-Grenfell Health proposed to have two mental health and addictions counsellors from the Happy Valley-Goose Bay office travel to Natuashish. This interim measure was declined by the Innu Band Council and it is an invitation that still stands today.

**6. Is there a plan to address/respond to the community's cry for help to address the crisis in Natuashish?**

It is of critical importance that the Federal Government (Canada), the Provincial Government (GNL), and the Mushuau Innu Band Council act cooperatively to address the issues around solvent abuse in the community. Solutions need community support. Ultimately, the health and well-being of children depends upon a safe, secure and nurturing environment at home and in the

community, which is best achieved by the cooperation of all parties with responsibilities to and for the Mushuau Innu.

All three parties have made efforts since at least 2001 to address the needs of the Mushuau Innu, through the Labrador Innu Comprehensive Healing Strategy ("LICHHS"). LICHHS, comprised of Mushuau Innu First Nation, the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, Canada, and GNL, was formed by Canada in 2001 to address root causes of the socioeconomic challenges facing the communities of Davis Inlet (since relocated to Natuashish) and Sheshatshiu. LICHHS was intended to foster the Innu's ability to build capacity for governance, and over time, undertake the training necessary to effectively administer their own affairs.

In 2010, the Labrador Innu withdrew from the Canada-led LICHHS and proposed that LICHHS be replaced by an Innu-led Innu Round Table ("IRT"), to pursue similar objectives to LICHHS, with similar levels of federal funding. However, the IRT would be led by the Innu and administered by an Innu Round Table Secretariat (the "Secretariat"). This development was viewed positively by Canada and GNL officials, as all parties endorsed the notion of community solutions.

Canada approved the IRT in 2012, and committed to continued special funding, subject to completion of community health assessments and development of financial accountability and program and service evaluation criteria. Those assessments are in progress, but the IRT has proceeded to convene meetings of officials to discuss Terms of Reference of the Main Table, and the continuation of LICHHS subcommittees, most notably, the Child and Family Services Subcommittee, which has pursued and continues to pursue the development of Innu capacity to deliver child and family services themselves.

The IRT Main Table will next meet on April 24-25, 2013, in St. John's. The recent solvent abuse situations in Natuashish will be on the agenda for discussion by all three parties.

Also, on the agenda at that meeting will be Enhanced Prevention Services. Canada currently only provides funding to GNL for protection, not prevention, services. GNL and the Innu have agreed to present a framework document to Canada for consideration, to access those federal enhanced prevention funds. That framework document will also be a subject for discussion at the April meeting in St. John's, as GNL hopes to advance progress on this issue in time for the 2014-15 fiscal year, as Canada has indicated funds will not be available for this purpose in 2013-14.

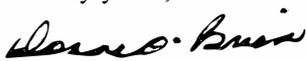
Finally, GNL has continued to pursue community engagement with the Mushuau Innu through a Steering Committee on child and family service delivery in Labrador. This Steering Committee culminated in Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services and the Mushuau Innu First Nation in 2012 to improve planning around the safety and well-being of children and youth, as well as enhance service coordination and delivery in Natuashish. Membership of the Planning Circles is being finalized and Terms of References for the Planning Circles are under development.

A plan of the Department of Health and Community Services to address the communities' needs is reflected in the development of the mobile multidisciplinary wellness team (the "Mobile Team"), called Mapping the Way. The Mobile Team is funded to travel between Sheshatshiu,

Hopedale, Nain and Natuashish. Partners include Labrador-Grenfell Health; the Nunatsiavut Government; the Mushuau Innu Health Commission; the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation; and Health Canada. The Mobile Team's function is to provide a longer-term response to ongoing high levels of social distress in these communities and to enhance mental well-being. Each community partner is required to prepare their communities and provide housing for the Mobile Team in advance of visits.

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services continues to provide protective intervention services to the children and youth of Natuashish and is working with all stakeholders involved in supporting families in the community.

Sincerely yours,

*for* 

Lori Anne Companion  
Deputy Minister  
Department of Child, Youth and Family Services

*for* 

Bruce Cooper  
Deputy Minister  
Department of Health and Community Services