

Report on Innu Services

for the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System

November 11, 2025

Created by the following Innu organizations:

- Innu Round Table Secretariat
- Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation
- Mushuau Innu First Nation
- Shushepeшипан Ishpitentamun Mitshuap
- Mushuau EPH and Group Home
- Mamu Tshishkutamashutau – Innu Education



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INTRODUCTION

Innu thrived living a traditional way of life in Nutshimit,¹ in Ntassinan,² for many generations. There were successful Innu cultural practices and values in place supporting an environment in which Innu people and families helped each other, and raised children into healthy youth and adults. While colonization began to have some impact over time through missionaries and fur traders, the traditional Innu way of life on the land generally persisted well into the 20th century. There are a number of Innu people still alive today who remember growing up on the land, and their memories of doing so are largely very positive and healthy, as the Inquiry has heard directly.

The settlement of Innu in year-round villages in the 1960s and 70s and losses of traditional way of life, coupled with significant levels of institutional child abuse of Innu children by non-Innu in day schools, residential schools and other places, led to a rapid breakdown in the healthy, nomadic Innu-aitun³ and language.

Significant levels of substance misuse emerged as a way to deal with the trauma, loss and grief that came with this breakdown. This compounded social issues in our communities.

Innu started to build up Innu services to respond to that crisis, even going back to the 1970s, but with the few resources we had, the journey to reassume control over our lives began slowly and has followed a long and complex path.

Things began to shift in more meaningful ways in the late 1990s, following the findings of the Canadian Human Rights Commission that the federal government had discriminated against Innu. The federal government shifted to treating Sheshatshiu Innu and Mushuau Innu “like bands” in 1997 and then as actual bands under the *Indian Act* from 2002.⁴ This shift brought an infusion of funding, programs and services by the federal government that could go directly to Innu governments.

Prior to that, the federal government was involved in funding some services to Innu only indirectly, by funding the provincial government. The province held, and still holds, a strong role in services. Child and family services has followed this pattern: the federal government has provided funding to the province, and the province has been carrying out its own services in the Innu communities, according to its own designs. This has had a devastating impact, as the Inquiry has heard.

In 2015 our Working Relationship Agreement with the Province finally started to change things in child welfare, recognizing that we need a voice in these matters as Innu. Soon after, the landmark national decision from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in 2016 vindicating the

¹ On the land, in the country.

² Innu territory.

³ The Innu-aimun term for the Innu way of living, being or Innu culture.

⁴ *Indian Act*, RSC 1985, c I-5 (the “*Indian Act*”).

equality rights of First Nations children in relation to child and family services started off another critical shift in federal government policy.

In 2017, 3 major changes occurred in Innu services related to child and family services:

- Innu Prevention Services began operating out of the Innu Round Table Secretariat (IRTS), supported by federal prevention funding. This was the start of the growth of Innu child and family services.
- Innu also launched the “Bring Our Innu Children Home” initiative, which led to federal and provincial commitments to support Innu placement facilities to ensure more Innu children and youth in care can remain in their community and within Innu culture. The first of these staffed residential placement homes started operating in 2018. This year, 2025, saw the opening of the fifth home, completing the key elements of the original plan.
- Innu wrote down information about our way of helping, the Innu Care Approach. The *Guide to the Innu Care Approach* helps others see what we are doing, and helps staff and contractors (both Innu and non-Innu) who are supporting Innu service organizations understand our vision and stay on track.

Note that 2017 was also the year Innu called for this Inquiry.

Since then, the process of retaking our jurisdiction over child and family services has accelerated for Innu.

In 2019 both federal and provincial legislation was passed, each of which recognized us in various ways.

The provincial legislation finally spoke to our existence and our voice in child protection; it was the very first time provincial legislation had ever recognized the Innu, Innu families and Innu children. For the rest of Canada, its provinces and territories, it would feel as this is a small thing in some ways but the Innu it was a meaningful change.

The federal legislation took the crucial step of recognizing our inherent jurisdiction; a major change. In February 2020, Innu leaders announced to the governments of Canada and of Newfoundland and Labrador that we intended to develop an Innu law in CFS and exercise Innu jurisdiction. This was received positively by both governments. Work on the Innu law has been underway since 2020.

Innu services have continued growing as well. This includes the Innu Prevention Services Agency within the IRTS, community-based prevention services at the First Nation level that are supported in part by prevention funds, and Innu placement services. We have been very busy.

Planning is underway for Innu control of protection services as well, operating under Innu jurisdiction and under an Innu law. There is no fixed date for the full exercise of Innu jurisdiction, but work remains active. It is a big transition.

Day by day, we are working with Innu families. Every time we do that, we are restoring Innu practices, and indeed implementing Innu law, even if that law is not yet written; our practices are based in the laws we have always had. Each day that Innu services grow we move towards greater Innu control and implementation of the Innu vision.

INNU ROUND TABLE

Brief history / context

The Innu Round Table Secretariat (“IRT” in this report; also sometimes referred to as IRTS) is an Innu not-for-profit corporation founded in 2014. It supports capacity building and joint services as requested by each First Nation. It has offices in both Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

IRT is accountable to MIFN and SIFN, with the involvement of Innu Nation as well. The Board of Directors is composed of the Chief and a second representative from each First Nation, with the Deputy Grand Chief of Innu Nation serving as the chair of the Board.

There are 5 departments within IRT:

1. Management & Operations (includes HR and Finance)
2. Innu Prevention Services Agency
3. Income Support
4. Health (includes Midwifery program)
5. Justice

IRT delivers Income Support services in both communities, and is active in the health sector in areas such as capacity building, maternal-child care programs, mental health and addictions, the Innu Midwifery Program, and other initiatives as directed. An IRT Justice and Policing Coordinator works to advance Innu initiatives in that sector as well.

Innu devolution of Income Support, in 2016, was a major milestone in the Innu administration and control of essential services to vulnerable families, especially those with children at risk. Despite reluctance from ISC, IRT took on Income Support program administration which resulted in vulnerable families being able to access basic needs for the first time, without seeking assistance from band councils to meet their daily needs. At the point of the program administration transfer on April 1, 2016, we had a cost estimate from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and ISC of about \$300,000 per year, and about 60 client files. Once we were able to provide service to all those in actual need, with our own people going out and taking applications, we immediately doubled the case load and the real cost was over \$1M. This was based on the same provincial rules (which was monitored); it was just that the province had not successfully enrolled most of the eligible Innu families.

This growth in the program is an indication that there had been a significant negative impact from provincial administration of this service on vulnerable parents and children, which limited access to basic supports, like clothing and food. The program implementation also included the “active measures” service (lead by a Social Worker) which enabled Income Support recipients to access services to overcome barriers to employment, which can often be a driver of family stress that can put children at risk.

In 2023, the Innu Midwifery Program was launched. It aims to reintroduce midwifery to the Innu of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. This program is created to support the training of Innu midwives

using an Innu-specific and a hands-on approach to have more Innu babies delivered by Innu midwives in Innu communities. IRT is building this service with the intention that this program will result in a continuation of our cultural practices.

Since 2016-2017, when Innu first started to receive federal prevention funding for child and family services, IRT began to deliver and continues to deliver Innu Prevention Services in both communities since early 2017. The Innu Prevention Services Agency within IRT includes several related services, explored in more detail below. It continues to expand this range of services.

In addition to operating services, IRT facilitates a tripartite process also known as the Innu Round Table. These meetings include Innu leadership and service providers, the Province, and the federal government in regular meetings about the coordination and improvement of services, and transitions to greater Innu control. It includes quarterly main meetings and several committees.

The remainder of the chapter of this report on the IRT focuses on the Innu Prevention Agency and IRT's role in the Innu law.

Background to Innu Prevention Services

Innu fought for our own services to help our children and families for many years.

For decades we have pushed to advocate for our children and families in a way which has never been done; by utilizing the strengths of Innu-aitun to address the very real challenges of potential harms to families and children. But before 2017, there were no Innu services, no funding, and no program staff in Innu child & family services.

Things began to shift, slowly, in 2014, when the first child and family services staff person, a CFS Transition Coordinator, was hired, though there was still no funding for service development or direct service delivery. This was Wendy White. At that point, the position focused on trying to get prevention funding, and working to advance the relationship with provincial child protection.

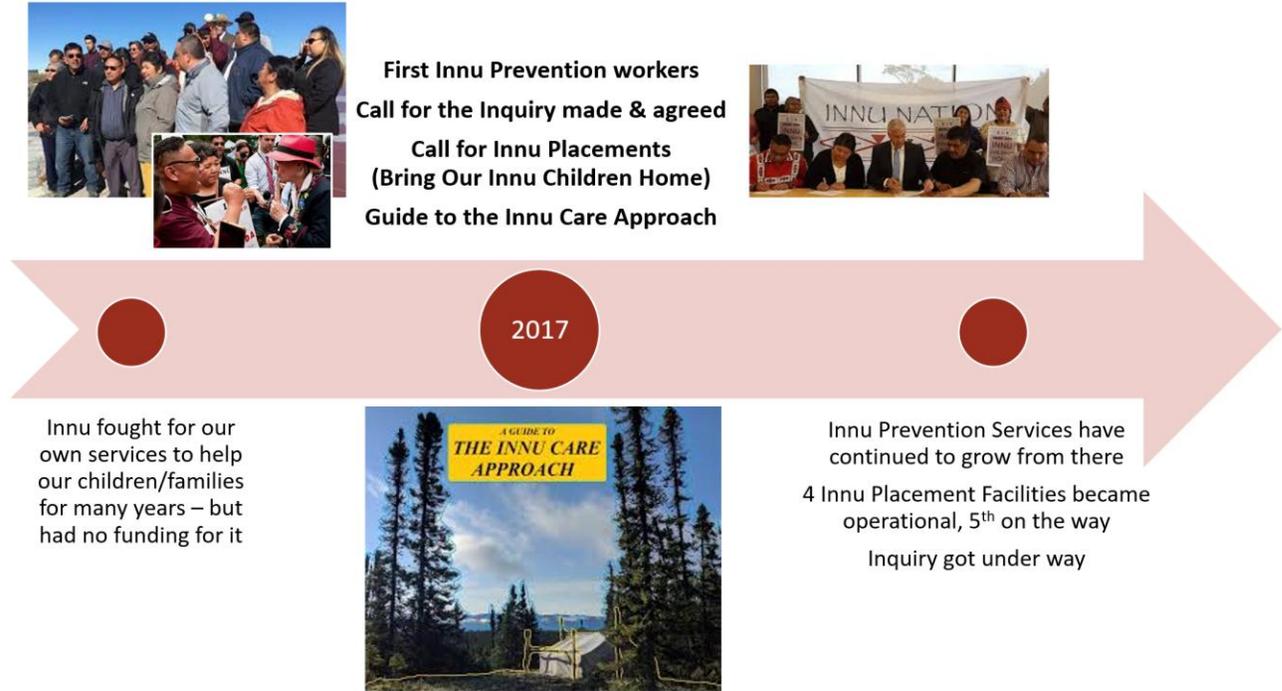
The relationship with provincial child protection did advance with the conclusion of the *Working Relationship Agreement* the following year, in 2015. This was a bilateral agreement with the Province. It was replaced by the *Protocol Agreement* in 2021.

Real changes in resourcing began in 2016/17 after the landmark 2016 CHRT 2 decision in the *Caring Society* case.⁵ Innu were notified of the start of prevention funding in the summer of 2016 and began the hiring process. The first Innu Prevention workers, 7 in total, were hired that year: 4 community workers and 3 social workers (working for IRT). They began work in early 2017. In addition to the 7 Innu Prevention Workers above, 3 other social workers were hired, at the

⁵ *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v Attorney General of Canada (for the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)*, [2016 CHRT 2](#).

request of the Social Health Director, to work directly for the Sheshatshiu Social Health department.

From 2017 onwards, Innu Prevention Services has been operating.



Starting in 2018, based on another CHRT order, most First Nations in Canada gained access through their delegated agency to prevention funding “at actuals”, meaning, based on applications submitted outlining actual needs and costs. However Indigenous Services Canada (“ISC”) did not allow Innu to access that funding, despite numerous discussions. In response, Innu Nation filed a human rights complaint in 2020.

Funding for Innu Prevention Services went up in 2020 after the filing of the Innu human rights complaint. It increased again in 2021 and 2022 based on developments that occurred in the national *Caring Society* case. The Innu human rights complaint settled in 2023 and Innu are now receiving the same prevention funding as other First Nations; the funding is calculated per capita based on the ISC-registered population residents on reserve.

Outline of current services

Funding Mechanism

IRT receives all Innu prevention funds from ISC as a one-window approach among Innu. Prevention funding to date has been only federal, as the province has continued to hold the position that it does not have a mandate to provide prevention services.

From there, the prevention funding is divided up according to an IRT Board resolution. Under this resolution, a base amount stays with IRT, and 40% of the amount above that is flowed by IRT to SIFN and MIFN to support prevention work through their services available to the general Innu population. More information on SIFN and MIFN services is available later in this report. The remaining funding is used by IRT to deliver core prevention services in both communities, working particularly with families involved in child protection services or at high risk of such involvement.

Within ISC's First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) funding program available to the Innu, prevention funding is the largest component. In addition, there is a smaller amount for First Nation Representative Services, which is intended to cover services in the nature of Innu Representatives. IRT operates Innu Representatives in an integrated approach as part of its prevention services. The ISC FNCFS funding also includes some additional funding in relation to remoteness.

Post-majority services and supports ("PMSS") is another component accessible within ISC's FNCFS funding since 2022. It can support services to youth leaving care, up to their 26th birthday. IRT is starting to access this funding and build a PMSS/youth services program, which is still in early stages. Capital funding has been accessible since 2022 as well, sometimes known as CHRT 41⁶ due to the Tribunal order involved. The PMSS and capital funding is currently application-based, not calculated based on population.

Note that a national funding agreement proposed in 2024 would have changed and increased available FNCFS funding. The increase would have added a few smaller "top-ups" but the bigger increase would have been adding significantly more funding for remoteness in line with evidence-based research. This would have had a meaningful impact for Innu. Given our location in Labrador, both Innu communities experience high costs due to remoteness, and Natuashish even more so as it does not have road access. However the agreement did not pass at the Assembly of First Nations. While Innu do receive the same FNCFS funding as other First Nations now, and the funding has come a long way, we do not yet see the funding as fully sufficient nor fully equitable based on substantive equality, taking into account the needs of Innu families.

Innu Care Approach

IRT Prevention Services are guided by the [Innu Care Approach](#).⁷ The Innu Care Approach begins with the knowledge that the well-being of Innu children depends on the wellbeing of the supports

⁶ *First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada et al. v Attorney General of Canada (representing the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada)*, [2021 CHRT 41](#).

⁷ The Innu Roundtable Secretariat, "A Guide to the Innu Care Approach" (2017), online: <https://www.irtsec.ca/2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/A-Guide-to-the-Innu-Care-Approach-Dec-2017.pdf>

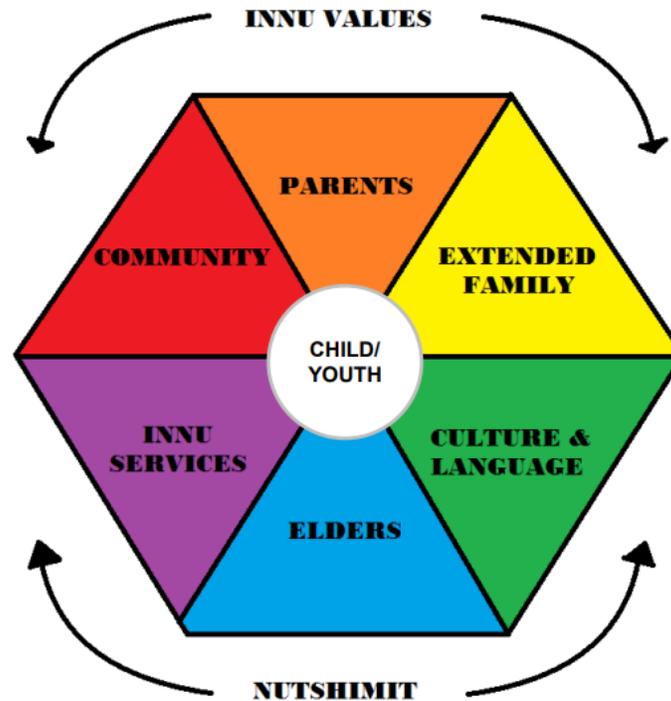
around them – their parents, extended family, community, Innu services, culture and language, and Elders.

These supports are like the tshuap⁸ poles that support a tent; they support a caring environment around our children. They stand strongly on the ground of Nutshimit, which is inseparable from Innu culture. The Innu Healing Values wrap around this support structure, protecting the Innu way of life.



The image above helps to show the Innu Care Approach. The image below shows the approach as well. You can imagine the second image as a birds-eye view from the top of the tent:

⁸ The Innu-aimun word for a home, tent or dwelling.



The Innu Healing Values were identified in the [Innu Healing Strategy](#) (2014). They are:

- **Respect:** Innu value each other and all our surroundings and treat everything with respect as we recognize that we need each other, the land, and the animals to survive;
- **Trust & Honesty:** Trust has always been a key value for the Innu as our very survival as a People, has always been dependent upon our need to rely upon one another and trust that we would all fulfill our role and make decisions that are best for the collective. For trust to exist, honesty must also exist;
- **Cooperation:** Innu work with each other to support the advancement of the People;
- **Family:** Togetherness and connection to family is important to Innu; and
- **Nature:** Nature has been integral to the existence of the Innu as it has provided for both our physical and spiritual needs since our creation, and will do so into the future.

The Innu Care Approach aims to connect Innu children with their culture; keep Innu children with their parents and rooted within their extended families and community; helps Innu children learn and maintain their language Innu-aimun; and encourages children to take pride in the history of the Innu people.

This approach is not new. It has been practiced by Innu for generations through our Innu-aitun in daily life. And it is still practiced in healthy Innu families today. Above all, the Innu Care Approach reflects that, with healthy and strong supports around them, children can grow up healthy and strong, too.

Innu Prevention Services has also identified 3 things that every Innu child needs:

1. At least one consistent & healthy Innu adult caregiver in their life;
2. To learn where they will always belong; and
3. Opportunities in Nutshimit to experience Innu culture and learn Innu history.

These principles inform our practice as we provide and grow our services.

Service Areas

Innu Representatives

Innu Representatives act as a voice for the Innu community in interactions with provincial child protection services. They advocate for the best interests of Innu children and youth with provincial social workers, families, and courts. They can help to navigate language and cultural barriers, and to reach positive solutions that are less intrusive and more appropriate to the situation.

General Prevention Services

This includes various supportive services working with families interacting with child protection or at risk of such involvement. It can include for instance direct interventions with families and children, cultural connections work with children in care out of the community, after hours emergency on call work, therapeutic land-based programming, peer support, referrals to other services, and so on.

Prevention services continues to develop its land-based and Nutshimit programming to encourage families to spend more time in Nutshimit. The Mushuau Innu Representatives are leading the way to create opportunities for children and families to spend time in Nutshimit and to promote land-based healing.

Uauitshitun is a new program providing short-term financial help to families, which falls under the scope of General Prevention Services. It offers material support usually of an urgent nature, to address issues of family needs like food security, children's needs, transportation, short term shelter, and so on, where addressing that need could help reduce the risk of children going into care or lessen child protection intervention needs. The program provides vouchers and other forms of support as needed and based on IRT program policies. The reduction in Jordan's Principle in 2025 as well as backlogs in accessing that program has created additional challenges for Innu families, which has impacted the Uauitshitun program.

Post Majority Support Services

This is another new program, still in a growth and development phase. The federal government started a program in 2022 that can make funding available to support youth leaving care who are between 18-25 years of age (under 26). While the province already operates a Youth Services program, it only goes to age 20 (under 21), has various limitations/restrictions, and many youth

disengage with provincial services due to lack of trust. IRT is building out services to support Innu youth leaving care, aiming to support their transition to healthy adulthood.

Staffing

Innu Prevention Services currently has 35 full time staff, plus about 4 part time staff.

Innu Prevention Agency Staffing as of September 2025		
Position	Full time	Part time
Shared Positions (usually based in Sheshatshiu Office, with some time in both places)		
Agency Director*	1	
Asst Agency Director*	1	
Prevention Manager*	1	
Innu Law Coordinator*	1	
Info. Analysis/Database/Quality Assurance*	1	
Post-Majority Policy Analyst, currently part time *		1
Sub-Total shared positions	5	1
Sheshatshiu		
Innu Representatives – includes 1 Senior Innu Rep. for Sheshatshiu	8	
Operations Manager	1	
Program and Services Development		1
Team Supports	1	
Social Workers Supervisors	1	
Social Workers	3	
Post-Majority Team Coordinator	1	
Post-Majority planner/social worker	1	
Post-Majority Support Worker	1	
Cultural Connections Coordinator	1	
Elder Support	0	
Receptionist	1	
Sub-Total in Sheshatshiu	19	1
Natuashish		
Innu Representatives – includes 1 Senior Innu Rep. for Natuashish	4	
Operations Manager	1	
Cultural Connections Facilitator	1	
Social Workers (rotational schedules)	3	

Post-Majority Team Lead		
Port-Majority Social Worker (on rotation)	1	
Post-Majority Support Worker	1	
Receptionist (shared FT position with another IRT Department)		1
Security / maintenance (2-3 part time)		2
Sub-Total in Natuashish	11	3
Total Innu Prevention Agency (IRT) Staff	35	5

Note that Innu Prevention Services is also supported by a number of central positions within IRT as a whole, including positions relating to finance, HR and overall management. These are not included in the chart above.

Pathways

The Pathways Committee (“Pathways”) is a committee that brings together the different Innu organizations involved in child and family services, both on the services side and law development side (see below for more information about the work on the Innu law). Many of the same people are involved in different spheres of work. It was established to streamline and focus communication and the sharing of relevant information as we all work together to build the pathway to Innu self-government in child and family services. Pathways is chaired and organized by IRT Prevention Services.

The committee consists of representatives from:

- SIM and MEGH
- SIFN & MIFN Social and Primary Health
- IRT Departments
- SIFN & MIFN Council
- Innu Nation

The committee meets monthly to discuss updates and coordinate services, provide direction to OKT in representing Innu organizations at the Inquiry, and engage in work towards the Innu Law.



IRT Child and Family Services Committee

IRT's Prevention Agency Director chairs the Innu Child and Family Services Committee, a tripartite committee that includes Canada and the Province. This Committee meets a few times a year, to address items that require attention by all parties.

Protocol Agreement and Bilateral Work with NL

Our bilateral agreement with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador currently is the *Protocol Agreement*, signed in 2021. It replaced the 2015 *Working Relationship Agreement*.

Using this agreement, our workers and their workers interact on each case. Our workers have the right to receive information about the case and to have a voice, advocating for the best interest of the child or youth with our knowledge of Innu people, and of that family in particular. Day by day, family by family, situation by situation, our team members have made a positive difference in the lives of numerous families and numerous children and youth.

Because of effective collaboration rests on consistent and effective communication with the provincial department, we continue to search for new and improved processes for effective communication. We meet with CSSD weekly for referral notification meetings in order to do case assignments and to follow-up with case conferencing. We hold weekly check-in meetings on operational issues and we additionally hold bi-weekly high risk case reviews and other case conferences as required.

We also engage with Provincial Directors, at a senior level, on questions of policy, staffing and process. This is supported by the *Protocol Agreement* as well. We aim to hold, at least on a

monthly basis, meetings with provincial directors – or as requested by either party.

An example of our work with the provincial Directors at the policy level is our advocacy on the issue of how Innu foster families are financially supported. For years, Innu foster families have been financially supported at Level 1, the lowest level. Level 2, which provides higher financial support, is supposed to reflect additional value. The only such value that the province recognized for many years was a standardized training called PRIDE training. It was not based in Innu-aitun, and not even available in our communities for over a decade. The province did not recognize the value of being able to transmit Innu culture, Innu-aitun or Innu-aimun. Additionally, the province did not recognize the value of keeping a child in their home community, connected to their people, land, friends, school, and extended family. We advocated with Directors, and then with the Deputy Minister, on this issue.

We are proud to say that we succeeded. As of spring 2025, Innu foster families are recognized as providing added value for Innu children, and are now paid at Level 2 on that basis. This helps provide better funds to Innu foster parents for taking care of Innu children. It is important to encourage the kinds of placements we actually want to see, and to support those placements with appropriate resources, especially with the high cost of living.

Support to the Inquiry

IRT has been active in supporting healing services during this Inquiry. Several IRT staff have acted as healing services workers during Inquiry sessions, and the IRT has also been active in participating on the Inquiry's Healing Services Committee to help organize and plan healing services, as well in carrying out training initiatives.

In addition, as mentioned above, IRT participates in the Pathways committee which provides feedback and direction in the participation of the Innu parties to the Inquiry as needed.

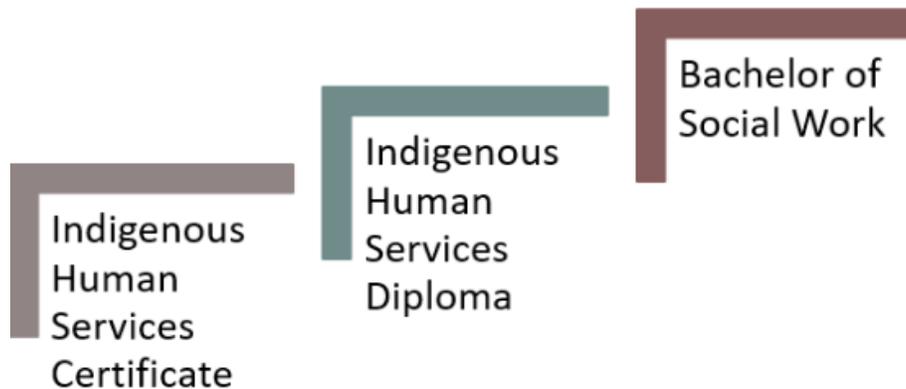
Capacity Building – Social Work Education

Innu who can help other Innu effectively are the core of Innu services. Nothing could be more important to the successful implementation of Innu jurisdiction in relation to child and family well-being. We are investing in our people.

IRTS, MIFN and SIFN have been building human capacity with the future Innu-designed, Innu-led child and family service model in mind. For example, IRTS has partnered with the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, an Indigenous college from BC to deliver a laddered post-secondary program in human services and social work. It can be pursued part time, allowing for students to remain employed.

As of June 2025, the first cohort of students has received their Indigenous Human Services Certificate. This is a significant achievement, which students have completed while balancing other work. As of fall 2025, those graduates are able to continue in the program to work towards

their Indigenous Human Services Diploma, which they could get after the second year. We are also now starting a second cohort of year 1 students this year as well. Once the Diploma is completed, it typically takes another 2-3 years of part time study to complete the BSW.



Thirty years ago, when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples visited Sheshatshiu, the late Rose Gregoire told them, while speaking about Social Services as it was then called, “We’re not stupid. We can do the job ourselves. With probably some training, we certainly can do it.” Twenty years ago, several Innu worked with Memorial University to create a report outlining a plan for Innu social work education, called “Together we want to put up a tent / Nui Manikashunan”. At long last, that tent is finally up. We can certainly do it.

Future directions

Innu Law

In 2019, the government of Canada passed a law called *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (the “Act”)⁹, it recognizes Indigenous jurisdiction in child and family services. It came into force on January 1, 2020.¹⁰ The Supreme Court of Canada upheld the constitutionality of this legislation in 2024.⁴

In January 2020, Innu Nation decided to begin work on an Innu law. It asked the IRT to act as the technical lead for this initiative.

⁹ *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, SC 2019, c 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid* at s. 18.

On February 6, 2020, Innu Nation wrote to Canada and the Province to indicate their intention. This is considered a preliminary notice of intent under s. 20(1) of the Act. Both federal & provincial governments indicated their support in moving forward in this direction.



Principles to draw upon for the Innu law have been identified based on an analysis of multiple sources, including Elder interviews, Innu legends and Inquiry testimony, among other sources. We are now working on staff input and other steps, and putting everything together. Discussions are underway the governance model under our law and other elements.

Future Staffing

We anticipate significant growth in staff numbers over the course of the completion of the transition to full Innu jurisdiction. Based on our research with other nations and our internal projections, we anticipate 180-200 people may be required when in full operation.

Future Facilities: Capital Projects

We are in the midst of planning and building the facilities required to deliver growing Innu services. Starting in 2022 and in lieu of an order in CHRT 41, federal funds started to become available to support such capital projects, if the need for the project can be shown.

A number of projects have been in the works to date. These are not all IRT projects; in fact the applicant for each project is usually SIFN or MIFN. The projects frequently involve collaboration, which may be with IRT, and many involve SIM or MEGH as well. IRT also assisted with the initial

needs assessment. Because it is hard to isolate projects to a specific organization, we are providing a general summary of some of this work here:

	Approved at least at first stage (for most projects, there are several more stages of approval yet to come)	Submitted but not yet approved, or planned but not yet submitted
<p>Sheshatshiu & surrounding area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a new Main Office for Innu CFS • Renovation/extension of Apenam’s Way (Wellness Treatment Centre) at Ushatshaneshet (Gosling Lake) • Part of the cost of an Office Complex (portions that will provide office space for SIM and FamA) • Construction of 2 new placement homes SIM will operate as Individual Living Arrangements • Vehicles supporting SIM services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Transition Homes • Family Reunification Homes • Renovation of Lobstick Lodge for land-based programs • Replacement of the SIM Group Home building • Renovations to the SIM Emergency Placement Homes duplex • Facility supporting infants/early childhood • Renovations to the Youth Centre
<p>Natuashish & surrounding area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEGH Hybrid Home in Natuashish (to move the Goose Bay Hybrid Home to Natuashish) • Renovation of a trailer to be used as a MEGH office • MEGH cabin • Renovations of CSSD trailers • Renovation of the Arena for prevention programming • Renovation of the Church for prevention programming • Renovation/Extension of Border Beacon for prevention programming • Purchase of Skidoos and ATVs for land-based programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a new building for Innu CFS in Natuashish • Replacement of MEGH Emergency Placement Home building • Youth Transition Homes • Family Reunification Homes • Renovations of homes with children affected by mould • Barren Lake cabin for land-based programs • Triplex for rotational staff and consultant service provider accommodations

Future Funding

The funding mechanism will change once an Innu Law is in place. We anticipate that funding will be negotiated directly with Canada and the province, in our own funding agreements under a tripartite coordination agreement.

As mentioned above, the funding will need to be fair and adequate. We do not want to be set up to fail. And we cannot be funded on the assumption that we will just do what the province does; it has to be different. We constantly see the province struggling to find and retain staff. Innu culture has not changed, the people have changed. We have recognized that more support needs to be given to land-based supports and services because we have seen their model repeatedly fail Innu families, by offering crisis-driven, reactive services based on a very narrow range of options. We need to be fully supported to actually help our families, with stable Innu-led staff teams who are supported to avoid burn out.

Future Relationships

To succeed, we also need positive supportive relationships with federal and provincial partners. We need them to trust in us, to give us room, to give us time, and to give us the benefit of the doubt. A decade ago, we rarely ever felt those things. Today, we do more often. But this level of understanding only extends to the people we deal with most regularly. We need that trend to continue and deepen. We need all levels of the provincial and federal governments, including both political actors and the civil service, to be part of this change in outlook towards Innu, Innu services and Innu self-governance.

MUSHUAU INNU FIRST NATION (MIFN)

Brief history / context

Mushuau Innu are primarily based in Natuashish, a small, remote and isolated reserve community located on the north coast of Labrador approximately 300 km north of Happy Valley-Goose Bay. There are about 1,110 registered members, more or less. The community is governed by a Chief and Council, composed of three women and three men as Councillors, plus the Chief.

As described in the Innu timeline presentation, Mushuau Innu have existed as a people for thousands of years. The full history will not be repeated here. Relatively recently, when engaging with colonial structures, the government of the Mushuau Innu operated the band council as a corporation, and later (since 2002) came under the *Indian Act*. Mushuau Innu also experienced several forced relocations, eventually establishing the community of Natuashish in 2002. Mushuau Innu services operating from MIFN have been growing since about the 1990s.

Outline of current services

MIFN receives a portion of Innu Prevention funding to support primary and secondary prevention activities in health and social services. This contributes along with other funding sources to support critical services that are needed to prevent child protection intervention and maintain family well-being.

Health Commission – Overview

The Health Commission functions as a department within MIFN. We focus on community and population health, wellness, health promotion, prevention programs and support programs for Elders, youth and parents. The Health Commission is run by the Health Director, Kathleen Benuen. The Health Commission uses part of the Health Centre in Natuashish for its main office and some of its delivery of services, and it also operates programming from additional locations, including various locations of land-based programs in Nutshimit, the Healing Lodge located down the road, the shelter/safe house and the Aboriginal Head Start building.

As stated above, the Health Centre facility includes space for both the Health Commission and Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS), a provincial organization (formerly LGH). The NLHS operates a clinic out of the Health Centre, the clinic is not a MIFN service. The clinic focuses on primary/clinical health care, and can connect people to clinically focused treatments for mental health and addictions, such as psychiatrists or hospital services. Day-to-day management of the clinic is led by the Nurse-in-Charge. The four nurses on staff at the clinic work on rotation along with a licenced practical nurse. There are no doctors onsite at this clinic; doctors fly into Natuashish from Goose Bay every 4-5 weeks.

Once construction is completed, the Health Commission will oversee visiting dentists and hygienists who will be working out an extension being added onto the Mushuau Innu School.

Additionally, the Health Commission also oversees public health services and programs. Our team of staff includes the following positions:

- Health Administrator;
- Community Health Nurse;
- Community Health Representative;
- Home Care Nurse;
- Diabetes Consultant and Worker;
- Community Health Planner;
- Children's Oral Health Initiative Coordinator;
- Mental Health Worker;
- Non-Insured Health Benefits Workers and Interpreter/Referral Worker;
- Parent Support Program Coordinator;
- Safe House Coordinator;
- Healing Lodge Coordinator;
- FASD Support Worker; and an
- Indian Registrar Administrator (this position also assists with MCP applications and birth certificates applications)

However, there have been significant staffing challenges within these departments, the Health Commission often experiences high rates of employee turnover and recruitment issues due to remoteness of the community, housing needs and a lack of competitive wages. There are currently vacancies in the following positions:

- Community Health Representative;
- Home Care Nurse;
- Community Health Planner; and
- Healing Lodge Coordinator.

These vacant positions force the remaining staff to cover these areas, if they are able to.

Health Commission – Programs at the Health Centre

The Health Centre can and has hosted a variety of programs and services that assist with healthy child development and parental support. This includes parenting workshops, activities and supports, child development and mental wellness focused activities, pre-natal care, healthy pregnancy promotion, new moms and babies welcome activities, healthy babies/healthy communities, parenting support, breastfeeding support, sexual health information, maternal child health monitoring, FASD resources and support, and immunizations. The clinic can also provide parents or foster parents with referrals to see specialists if needed, though access in practice can be a challenge.

However, the Health Centre struggles to implement many of the programs and services listed above due to the ongoing shortage of nurses and speciality instructors. The inability to offer these needed programs and services to the community members in Natuashish creates gaps in key information on parenting, prenatal health and vital supports to children, youth, parents and families, impacting those who are at risk and those already involved with child protection.

Health Commission – Women’s Shelter & Youth Safe House

As noted above, the shelter / safe house falls under the Health Commission. The shelter and safe house are run by a small staff consisting of a Coordinator and a few full and part-time workers. The shelter provides temporary shelter and relief to women fleeing physical and sexual violence and youth who require a safe place when they do not feel their home is safe at that time, or are having a conflict at home. The women’s shelter and safe house can accommodate up to 6 youth and 4-6 women at any one time. However, due to the remoteness of the community, the shelter and safe house have had to accommodate more than its capacity of 12 women and youth at one time. It will also support women who are displaced with no where else to go, especially during the cold winters.

Health Commission – Healing Lodge

As noted above, the Healing Lodge also falls under the Health Commission. Mental health counselling, trauma-related programming and addictions-related programming is delivered here. The lodge is a non-residential facility. It is a long walk or short drive from the community, located near the airstrip.

The concept of healing used at the Healing Lodge is based on traditional Innu-aitun, beliefs and values. It actively involves Elders, who provide traditional life skills, teachings, storytelling and legends, and related supports. The lodge is headed by the Healing Lodge Coordinator, who oversees a regular staff of 4 full-time counsellors, 2 rotational counsellors, a referral clerk, 1-2 cultural workers and will employ Elders on an “as-needed” basis to run programs and provide services to its clients. Programs and services include:

- Individualized treatment plans for youth and adults with addictions
- Family Treatment and Mental Health Program
- Support groups like AA
- Clinical counselling
- Healing sweats in the sweat lodge
- Youth-focused healing
- NNADAP (assessments and treatment referrals, counselling, suicide prevention, AA meetings, women’s programs)
- Women-only focused activities and presentations
- Men-only focused programs

- Land-based programming
- Visiting healers

Additionally, the Healing Lodge staff arranges referrals to external residential treatment programs related to addictions and trauma for community members.

Health Commission – Day Care & Early Childhood Programming

The old daycare facility was closed in the Fall of 2016 because of a severe mould contamination and structural concerns. Additionally, at the time of closing, there was an insufficient number of certified early childhood educators and assistants to meet provincially mandated ratios. Maintaining staff with an education in early childhood education was difficult due to low wages within this field of work.

Since then, MIFN's Head Start Program has continued operating on an outreach basis out of the Jordan's Principal building. However, the lack of space, the building's heating issues and lack of a real day care program, has been an issue.

An extension is being built onto the Mushuau Innu School that will contain MIFN's Head Start Program and its Early Childhood Education program as well. Despite a larger space to run these programs, the Health Commission will still continue to experience staffing issues due to the remoteness of the community, education requirements, lack of available education funding for Mushuau Innu and the absence of any real competitive wage within this area of employment.

Health Commission – Next Generation Guardians

Next Generation Guardians (NGG) employs two Youth Workers, one position is currently vacant. However, when fully staffed there is one Youth Worker to work primarily with boys, the other to work primarily with girls. NGG also employs a Youth Health Coordinator, a Parental Support Worker, a Mental Support Worker (vacant) and an FASD Worker. Activities are varied and include hiking/walking excursions, camping, cultural activities and summer camps. Some of the funding for this programming comes through ISC. The Next Generation Guardians provide culturally based activities for youth, parents and families, focusing on health promotion, healthy lifestyle choices and community sobriety. The Parent Support Program, when the position is filled, provides supportive home visits, and provides links to other services and referrals.

Recreation Department and Youth Centre

MIFN normally employs a Director of Recreation, assisted a full-time Recreation Assistant Director and several others who work part-time. However, the positions of Director of Recreation and Recreation Assistant Director are currently vacant and the Recreation Department is

currently run by an Acting Director of Recreation. Programs are run year round and include open recreation from 3-5 PM every day for children and youth, as well as some adult programs. Sport-based recreational activities include table tennis, volleyball and hockey. The First Nation also consistently hires a seasonal hockey coach when the arena is open.

The Youth Centre in Natuashish is headed by the Youth Centre Director with a handful of full-time and part-time staff. While staffing levels are generally satisfactory recruitment can be difficult due to a number of reasons, including: personal/life circumstances, experience working with youth and salary. The Youth Centre generally offers diverse range of programs including: traditional craft lessons, library services, movie nights, internet and computer access, music lessons and table tennis for its drop-in attendees. Amongst the listed programs, the Youth Centre also hosts a number of events for Halloween, Christmas and Easter. During the summers, the Youth Centre will offer a number of activities (including cultural activities) like hunting, fishing, boating and summer camp.

Recreational facilities in Natuashish are limited there are a couple main recreational facilities which include the arena with attached gym, a youth centre, baseball field, playgrounds and an outdoor hockey surface maintained in winter at the school. The arena has been closed since 2020 due to the critical need for repairs related to mechanical & electrical issues, as well as issues with the roof, siding, mould, ventilation, lighting, risk of hazardous materials, etc. Several years ago damage occurred to boilers and pipes due to a freeze during a power outage, and Covid also impacted response capability. Funding support for arena repairs from ISC was committed and repairs to the arena are ongoing. MIFN hopes that the arena will be reopened in the winter of 2025.

Non-sports based recreational activities after school are very limited. This is an area that MIFN and IRT have identified as a need for further programming.

Land-Based and other community programs

Annual events that are financially supported by MIFN and the Health Commission, and highly valued by the community include, the Easter gathering outside of Natuashish, St. Anne's Pilgrimage to Quebec, Truth and Reconciliation events and celebrations leading up to National Indigenous Day.

The Outpost Program at Border Beacon and Mistasin Lake, amongst other Nutshimit locations, is central to Innu healing. Families have extended stays in Nutshimit during fall and spring, from as little as one week to several months. Extend families groups spend time together hunting, fishing, trapping and procuring a range of Nutshimit foods. It has significant benefits for individuals and families in terms of health and wellbeing, nutrition, and emotion and cultural wellbeing. This is where knowledge Innu-aitun and skills are passed down to younger generations, and where a strong cultural connection to the land is fostered.

Altogether, the community events constitute a significant annual expenditure for MIFN, funded primarily through own source revenue.

Future Directions

General Community and Land-based Needs

Funding continues to be an issue for MIFN's Recreation Department, Youth Centre and the Health Commission. Remote communities in Labrador struggle to offer competitive wages and incentives to attract potential applicants and Natuashish is no exception to this. Ideally, we want to expand to offer more extensive land-based programming for community as a whole and for specific age groups. We have seen over and over again that connection to Innu-aitun and language at a young age creates well-rounded adults. Right now, we cannot offer age-specific activities as much as we would like to but we want to expand our services and program to offer a wide range of programs and services on the land to adults, youth and children.

Overall, there are several large factors, amongst others, that prevent this from happening, such as:

- minimal funding opportunities;
- inadequate funding for operating services;
- lack of accommodation for potential staff; and
- insufficient staff capacity for program creation and implementation.

The factors listed above provide insight into the struggles that our organizations generally go through to try to create a healthy and happy community. When thinking about employment, remoteness has rarely been considered when our organizations receive funding to run programs and services. Our funding ratios have remained unchanged for years, matching that of an urban Indigenous organization, even though our community faces greater challenges and fewer local resources.

Early Childhood

As discussed above, an extension is being built onto the Mushuau Innu School and the anticipated re-launch the day care is in progress, likely to open in 2026. MIFN and the Health Commission have identified a need to establish an Early Childhood Education Strategy to address current and future needs of this facility and Innu children. Part of this strategy would include the re-development of an adult education program which delivers Early Childhood Education training and certification in community. The Health Commission has offered this certification in the past and those who successfully completed the program have moved into different roles. The Health Commission is continues to search for a partnership with an educational institution or an

instructor to hold an Early Childhood Education program again, especially as it moves toward opening the new facility in 2026.

Shelter and Housing Needs for Unhoused Populations

As noted earlier in this report, the population of Natuashish continues to grow but funding from ISC and other funding streams to construct new homes on reserve remains much the same despite the cost of building materials, shipping and labour rising. The Health Commission oversees the women's shelter and youth safe house in community and we have noted an increase in need for a larger and more modern space to serve those in need of emergency/temporary housing. Along with this increase in need, it is hard for us to offer programming or services to youth in crisis. Clients often come to the women's shelter and safe house with specific mental health needs. If we can assist those who enter our shelter in the beginning then the chances of these clients returning in search of temporary shelter is minimal. One need in particular is creating and implementing a youth outreach program which incorporates traditional activities. Another immediate need is to establish a women's support group at the shelter itself.

The community has repeatedly expressed the crucial need for a men's shelter, we often see unhoused men throughout the community with no where to go. Expanding the women's shelter and youth safe house is as necessary as building a men's shelter because it is not only just women and youth that need assistance. The Innu believe in a holistic approach to helping our people and we cannot continue to exclude the men in our community.

With the above in mind, it is important to note that our shelter is staffed 24 hours a day and in order to retain our current staff and assist with recruitment of new staff, we know that better supports and relief for our front line health and wellness staff is needed within our facility.

Innu elders are sent out of community to receive care if families are not able to provide the care needed. This means that children and youth are missing out on learning opportunities from our elders and elders are equally missing out on quality time spent with family. We have been actively working on plans to keep our elders in community. Despite being met with similar funding barriers we continue to work on building an elder's home in Natuashish so that we can keep families together. Families are holistic, we not only need to keep our children in community but we also need to keep our elders home as well.

The Healing Lodge

In the short-term, the Health Commission plans to advertise and hire a new Healing Lodge Coordinator in order to ensure its programs and services are continued at the Healing Lodge. As the population of Natuashish grows, the Healing Lodge struggles to assist its clients and meet the future needs of incoming clients. Recruitment and retention is an ongoing issue and as the Healing Lodge plans to expand its services, a crucial part of this process is to hire more Counsellors. Mental burn-out and overloading has been an ongoing issue and with expansion in

mind and hiring new staff, a vital step for the Healing Lodge is to implement better supports and relief for front line health and wellness staff.

The Health Commission sees the crucial need for mental health specialists, in order for Mushuau Innu to seek these specialists, they have to leave the community to go to places like Happy Valley – Goose Bay or even travel outside Labrador. Travelling away from community is not always the safest or best option for clients seeking specialists. If future funding permits, the goal for the Healing Lodge is to hire psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health specialists as they look to expand their programs and services.

Youth Programming

The Youth Centre in Natuashish was built in 2021 with MIFN's own-source revenue. For programming, MIFN was able to access a 5-year funding cycle with Public Safety Canada, which they named the "Natuashish Youth Initiative Project".

However the Youth Centre is approaching its final year of this funding, which the staff and programs rely on. Without funding the Youth Centre will be forced to close its doors or significantly limit the programs and services it offers to Mushuau youth.

Despite the Youth Centre being one of the community's newer constructions, its efforts to expand services have been met with spatial constraints. In using the Youth Centre, it has become clear it would be helpful to expand the Youth Centre to create additional office space, additional storage space, more activity areas and specific facilities tailored to meet the needs of children and youth aged 6-17. For example, it would be useful to expand the Youth Centre's kitchen to offer both Innu and non-Innu baking and cooking lessons to children and youth.

Community members feel that there is often insufficient youth programming available and opportunities for youth to engage in traditional and cultural activities, learn from Elders, and to develop healthy lifestyles. Lack of programming for youth aged 13 and older is of particular concern. There is a need for health and life-promoting activities. The Youth Coordinator arranges for expeditions/walks in Nutshimit, where children learn about hunting, Innu skills and how to live in a good way. However, as stated above, the continued instability of funding offers a challenge to meet the needs of these Innu children and youth. Whenever possible, the Youth Centre provides some hands-on programming for those youth who are not interested in sports.

In the past, there have been partnerships with outside sports organizations such as Right to Play, Sport Newfoundland and Labrador, Motivate Canada GEN7. However, these partnerships are often short-term, forcing these MIFN departments to put an end to the programs and services available through partnerships.

The population of Natuashish is steadily increasing and MIFN wants to build new facilities and upgrade all its current recreational facilities, including playgrounds. Due to factors like the remoteness of the community, building takes a long time, and once these facilities are finally constructed they have already been outgrown. Larger and more specialized facilities can offer

services and programming for non-sports based programs for youth like arts and crafts, music programs, chess and other board games.

The MIFN wishes to establish a Mushuau Innu Child and Youth Strategy to:

- Plan for increased programming, including land-based programming, for children and especially youth 13 and older;
- provide more opportunities for youth to engage with Elders;
- address youth substance use and addictions;
- establish an Innu Youth Guardians program;
- incorporate suicide prevention activities;
- better integrate planning and program coordination among various service providers in Natuashish; and
- establish a Youth Advisory Group.

Parents and Families

The women's shelter provides a safe space for women and youth but there is no safe place for men to seek shelter within the community. The need for a Men's shelter is high, the Health Commission would like to offer this service but cannot offer it at this point in time.

As listed above, there are a numerous amount of vacant positions within the Health Commission, creating a gap in accessing fundamental programs and services. The Health Commission continues to advertise these positions but they often do not receive applicants. The Health Commission would like to fill these positions and offer competitive wages to offer these vital supports.

Although parenting programs exist, when positions are filled to offer these services, there still exists a need to expand or create Innu-specific parenting programs and services for young families. The community continues to see young mothers lacking parenting skills. There is often an inter-generational dimension; for example, some of these mothers come from teen pregnancies themselves. In that context, integral skills have not been passed on and the interaction with child protection services continues.

Mushuau Innu would also like more programs that assist children to obtain Indian Status cards. Many children suffer because a parent does not complete status forms and therefore they cannot avail of essential services like NIHB (which affects their access to prescription drugs, dental care, medical travel, etc.).

SHESHATSHIU INNU FIRST NATION (SIFN)

Brief History / context

Sheshatshiu Innu are primarily based in Sheshatshiu, a reserve community located 32 km away from Happy Valley-Goose Bay. There are about 2,000 registered members, more or less. The community is governed by Chief and Council, composed of three women and three men as Councillors.

As described in the Innu timeline presentation, Sheshatshiu Innu have existed as a people for thousands of years. The full history will not be repeated here. Relatively recently, when engaging with colonial structures, the government of the Sheshatshiu Innu operated the band council as a corporation, and later (since 2002) came under the *Indian Act*. Sheshatshiu Innu services operating from SIFN have been growing since about the 1990s.

Outline of current services

SIFN receives a portion of Innu Prevention funding to support primary and secondary prevention activities in health and social services. Most of this is allocated to the Department of Social Health, which operates programs using several sources of funding.

The Department of Social Health supports Sheshatshiu Innu in their mental and emotional well-being and family relationships. There are 5 program units and an administrative branch:

1. Mental Health;
2. Treatment Services;
3. Family Services;
4. Youth Services; and
5. Jordan’s Principle.

Social Health Branch	Services
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates at the Mary May Healing Centre in Sheshatshiu • Peer Support – Referrals and support for adults • NNDAP – Referrals & Aftercare • Land-based treatment • Counselling
Treatment Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-week substance (pre-treatment) detox program for adults, at the detox camp • 4-week residential treatment program for adults, at Apenam’s Way

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aftercare services with dedicated team.
Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family resource centre • Parent support (<i>e.g.</i>, help with translation and advocacy, assist with forms, housing, hospital, <i>etc.</i>) • Elders program • Food bank • Parent/tot programs • Supervising visits
Youth Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs at the Youth Centre (after school, evenings, <i>etc.</i>) • Girls Retreat • Youth connections – they take youth to Nutshimit, cultural activities, land-based.
Jordan’s Principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists with Jordan’s Principle applications and provides assistance to community members. • The Jordan’s Principle team has recently taken on FASD diagnosis as well. They started this initiative because provincial referrals were taking too long.

The Mary May Healing Centre is the main site where most Social Health programs are offered. The space is currently split with NL child protection services, leaving not enough office and programming space for SIFN’s Social Health employees and programs. SIFN is planning to construct an Office Complex that can house CSSD for now and during the transition to full Innu jurisdiction (among other service providers), to allow Social Health to expand into the full Mary May Healing Centre. This is an important part of our ability to improve services.

Intensive treatment services for addictions and trauma are also essential. For many years, no residential options existed in Labrador.

SIFN opened Apenam’s House in 2016 to provide Innu with a residential addiction treatment program. This used a building in Northwest River, that we tried to buy but our offer was not accepted. A non-Innu person bought the building, and rented it to us. We offered a 90-day program, primarily serving people from Sheshatshiu but also some from Natuashish, and a few others. The program helped many Innu families reunite with their children and to remain close to their community while they received addiction treatment.

Unfortunately that site was forced to close in August 2023 because the rented facility was in a poor state of repair and deemed unfit for human habitation. There was a pause in residential treatment locally until SIFN was able to purchase a site south of the community that is now the Apenam’s Way residential treatment centre and opened its doors to clients in the spring of 2025.

The site was formally a Christian Youth Camp. In the intervening time, the need for a residential treatment program grew due to the increase in illegal, toxic drugs entering the community plus ongoing increases in population. The site itself needed and continues to need extensive renovations; support for this continues to be pursued through ISC funding, however it is a lengthy process, going stage by stage.

2025 brought great accomplishments for the Social Health Department with the opening of Apenam's Way and more recently, the pre-treatment/detox centre located a few kilometres from the community. However, 2025 also brought hardships as well. Despite Apenam's Way residential treatment centre resuming operations in relation to treatment services, and despite the increased need for growth, expansion and development, Apenam's Way had to close its doors in October 2025. Unfortunately, the pre-treatment/detox facility also had to close its doors in the same month. Our funding streams through ISC were depleted even though we had reached out and applied for more. To date, ISC has not provided any further information or answers regarding our treatment facilities. We continue to apply for other sources of funding in order to continue our very needed programs.

In late October 2025, our staff at the Social Health Department and staff at the pre-treatment facility were overwhelmed with calls from our community members seeking pre-treatment services. The outcry from community members seeking this service impacted our staff at the pre-treatment facility so significantly that they decided to continue the two-week pre-treatment program on a volunteer basis. As of November 2025, our staff continue to volunteer their time 24 hours a day at our pre-treatment facility to ensure our community members are supported.

Even with these setbacks, we continue working to develop a high quality service. SIFN hopes to continue expanding services at the Apenam's Way and the pre-treatment/detox facility, as the need is high.

Most youth programming is run from the Ussiniun Youth Centre in the community. Some youth programming is occurring at Apenam's Way, as it is within 20 minutes of the community and can provide a good setting for some programming. For example, a Girls Retreat was offered there in the summer of 2024. Youth programming at the renovated centre would include day programs, retreats and land-based learning.

Future Directions

The SIFN Comprehensive Community Plan from 2016 projects that by the year 2036, the on-reserve population in Sheshatshiu would double, growing from about 1,500 to about 3,000 in that time. The population is already above 2,000. Daycares, recreational facilities and programs, and housing are all needed to support this young population.

That same study projected that more than twice the number of homes then existing in Sheshatshiu (337) would need to be built by 2036 (total of 755). SIFN has not been able to keep

pace with that need, due to both funding and land limitations. Usable land is limited and construction is expensive, particularly after taking into account the costs of developing the additional infrastructure needed to service a larger population (e.g. wastewater disposal, water treatment, roads and electrification).

Overcrowded housing becomes an Innu child and family services issue in several ways, such as: creating stress; limiting options if a household member is deemed unsafe to be with children who are household members; and limiting options if an alternative care arrangement is needed with another family member or community member.

Note that a small number of Family Reunification Homes and Youth Transition Homes are planned among the capital projects (see above). They are still at the initial stages, and ISC's funding system for capital projects requires several phases. Even once they are built, these will only be able to help with the tip of the iceberg in terms of needs. The housing situation is a major issue affecting many people.

We also experience challenges in recruiting and training our staff, obtaining sufficient funding for services, finding adequate spaces and facilities for services, and coordinated service delivery. The work is hard. Our community members' needs are high, and they face many barriers including pervasive trauma, low literacy, sometimes barriers in spoken language in English as a dominant language for external services providers and with professionals, and so on.

The importance of robust treatment services for Innu child wellbeing cannot be understated, along with immediately available detox and ongoing aftercare. Addiction is the top factor in protection involvement for Innu children and youth and can lead to family separations. Addictions in our community nearly always involve mental health issues relating to significant personal and intergenerational trauma. There is no way to prevent Innu children coming into care, or to successfully reunite Innu families, without accessible, quality, Innu-based mental health and addictions services. The vast majority of adult clients that we have in treatment programs are parents. They are Innu parents trying to avoid separation with their children, or to shorten/end that separation and reunite, or at minimum participate in that child's life.

Treatment services are needed for our youth as well. Too many youth have gone in to care because it was the only the way to access the treatment they needed. But this came at the cost of sending them far away, sometimes very far away (e.g. Ontario or Saskatchewan). Several Innu youth have died after having returned from being sent away for treatment, as this Inquiry knows well. Within the last 2 years, we have seen over 100 youth come to our office seeking addiction treatment services but we cannot assist them. Our funding does not allow space for us to employ any Youth Counsellors or offer a youth treatment program.

A priority of the Social Health Department is to develop and implement a youth residential treatment and pretreatment program, or at the very least, offer youth addictions counselling services. Even though our programs are specifically designed for adults we try to accommodate Innu youth in our daily addictions meetings. Without an increase in funding from ISC or provincial partners, we do not have the ability to continue our operations nor expand them to our most vulnerable population, Innu youth.

We need to ensure that SIFN (and MIFN) Innu treatment and mental health services are strong, stable and able to grow to meet the needs on the ground. A variety of options need to be available, including residential treatment, land-based programs, detox, aftercare, counselling, and retreats to help people stay on track. Topics such as grief, sexual abuse, diagnosed mental health conditions, and others often need special support within this framework.

Staff support and relief services is needed in our department, it has been identified as one of our top priorities. A healthy staff and a wellness team to assist staff members will ensure we keep our employees. As an Innu-run organization, our goal is to recruit and retain as many Innu staff as possible because there is great value in receiving assistance from a person who shares your perspectives, language and culture. Unfortunately, the work is emotionally difficult for our Innu staff and creating support for them is vital – our Innu staff feel the effects much greater than any other non-Innu staff member. Much of the time, they provide assistance to family members or those close to them.

Our very top priority is to receive sustainable funding for both treatment facilities – we currently cannot offer services that our community desperately needs. When community members come to our department seeking services for residential treatment programs, Apenam's Way or pre-treatment programs there is nothing that we can offer, aside from daily addictions meetings. This is not enough and we are risking the lives of our community every day without funding these programs.

Increased sustainable funding would allow the Social Health Department to hire specialists in order to meet the needs of community. We are limited in what we can offer those in need regarding mental and social health issues. We have to refer our clients elsewhere which means they generally have to go through the province. Receiving services from our department would dut down on wait times for potential clients. Wait periods to seek services can often be in-excess of over 4 months to 1 year. By the time services can be provided, people are no longer in the mindset to receive the help they need – or it is too late.

As of 2025, we have not had a strong relationship with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services. Building a strong relationship with NL Health Services is vital to move forward. The Social Health Department has, to date, not met with the new mental health and addictions unit based out of St. John's and this is where relationship building needs to start. There have been historical attempts to build a bridge and make strong connections with our provincial health care system but they have been, for the most part, unsuccessful. We plan to continue trying to improve that relationship.

INNU PLACEMENT FACILITIES

Brief history / context

The *Working Relationship Agreement* made with the province in 2015 included a commitment to conduct an “out of community review”, i.e. a file review focusing on the cases where Innu children were placed outside their home community, to look at why they ended up there, and what would it take to bring them back.

This review was conducted in 2016. It found that while special needs drove out of community placements in a few cases, most of the Innu children placed in care outside of their communities just needed a safe home. Such a placement was not located in the moment at the time of their removal, which meant the province had sent them to an approved foster home outside of their community. Sometimes that ended up dragging on into long term outside placement.

Innu knew we had to take action. Using that knowledge, IRT worked with the First Nations in 2016 to develop what became known as the 5-Placement Plan. The plan aimed to develop the following 5 staffed facilities:

- 1 Group Home in Sheshatshiu, for youth with more challenging needs
- 2 Emergency Placement Homes in Sheshatshiu, for short-term placements
- 1 Emergency Placement Home in Natuashish, for short-term placement
- 1 Group Home in Natuashish, for youth with more challenging needs

These staff facilities are in addition to the ongoing use of family-based placements within the community, which are often with extended family. Family placements are generally ideal, but may not be available right away for a variety of reasons.

Staffed placement facilities were developed to keep Innu children in community in the first place, and where possible to help bring Innu children and youth in care back into community. This fosters stronger connections to home, family, friends, school, Elders, culture and language.

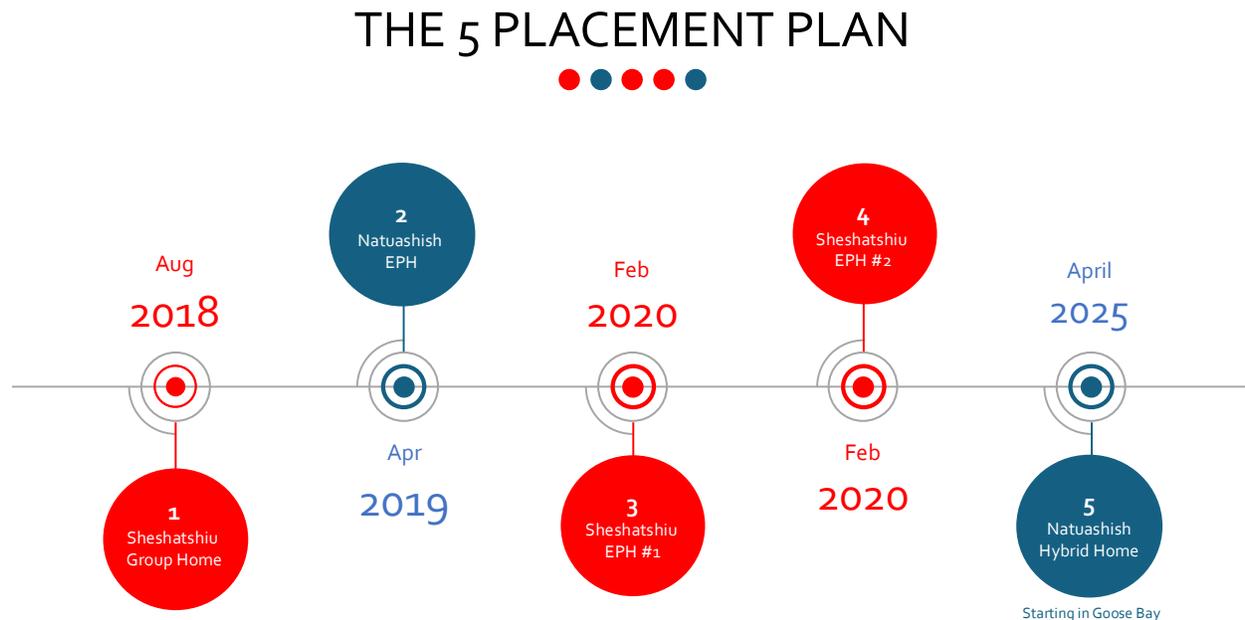
Initially, there was resistance to the idea from federal and provincial partners. Some provincial officials expressed doubt that Innu could operate such homes. The federal government was asked to fund the capacity development stage to get things running, but initially held back.

Innu staged a protest at the federal Minister’s Canada 150th celebration in 2017, focusing on the demand for Innu placement facilities. This, coupled with support from allies within the governments who believed in us, led to commitments to support capacity building and move ahead project by project.

The first Innu-led placement facility started operations in 2018, by transforming the existing Group Home in Sheshatshiu to one that could accept formal placements of Innu children in care by the province at the “Level 4” level. It was followed by four others.

The fifth facility was adapted from the original vision, to open as a Hybrid Home in Goose Bay in spring 2025 (Hybrid Home means it can accept both longer-term and short-term placements, of all ages). It is planned to transition to Natuashish once a facility there is constructed.

The timeline in which these 5 homes opened is shown below:



All of the placement homes are Innu-managed and operated, with oversight by two independent boards, SIM and MEGH, established by SIFN and MIFN respectively. The homes offer 24/7 residential care and are run primarily by Innu staff, based on the Innu Care Approach.

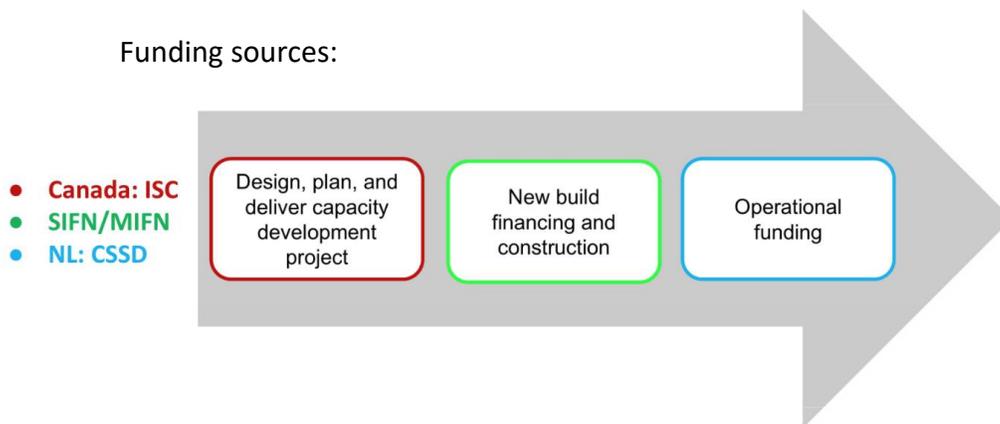
Provincial standards continue to apply to the homes. Provincial child protection services decides who is placed in a home, as the Innu children and youth in the homes are in the care or custody of the Province for child protection reasons.

The original plan was to have the facilities operate under the SIFN and MIFN band councils directly, however provincial rules did not allow for that. The First Nations therefore incorporated not-for-profits. This is how Shushepeshipan Ishpitentamun Mitshuap (SIM) and the Mushuau Innu Emergency Placement and Group Home (MEGH) came to be. Both SIM and MEGH are licensed by the Province to operate placement facilities for children in care.

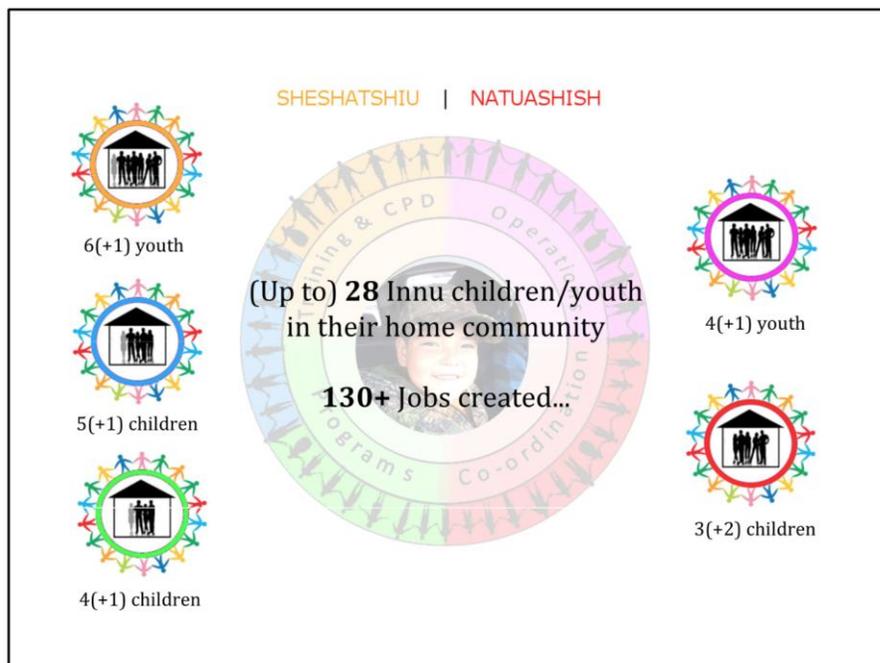
Resourcing for this initiative has involved all levels of government – federal, provincial and Innu.

- The Province provides SIM and MEGH with operational funding for their work. Note that most of this funding ends up being recovered by the province from the federal government, through the bilateral agreement between Canada and NL that funds Innu child protection services.

- Training and other capacity-building start-up costs were covered by ISC.
- Initially, there was no outside funding for capital costs. SIFN and MIFN had to self-fund the facilities. They made arrangements to use existing buildings, which required shuffling other services or member residences in some cases, or obtaining a loan for a new build. They renovated the older buildings as required to meet provincial standards. SIFN and MIFN rent the properties to SIM and MEGH.
- Recently, capital funding from ISC has become available through CHRT 41 (see above). As noted above, several projects are now underway to add facilities, as well as to improve on or in some cases replace the original structures, which were not custom designed for this purpose and in some cases are re-using older buildings that have a number of issues.



This image below summarizes the current placement capacity of the facilities, and their staffing (the indication of “+1” means that a sibling group can add to the total capacity):



Up to 28 Innu children and youth could be in these homes at a time (28 beds).

Since 2018, when the first placement home was opened:

- **Over 120 Innu children and youth have been placed** in one of the homes established in Natuashish and Sheshatshiu. The homes have prevented these 120 children and youth from an external placement and more importantly these 120 kids have been able to remain in their community and stay connected to their families, friends, language and culture.
- Over 200 community members have received training in child development, crisis prevention/intervention, suicide intervention, and mental health first aid. SIM, MEGH and IRT are now updating the child and youth care training program developed by partners at Bluesky/Aurelia based on the Innu Care Approach.
- Over 130 jobs have been created to run the placement homes, 95% of them being filled by Innu. About half of the jobs are full time, and about half are part time.

There were many doubters of the 5-Placement Plan. But over time, we all learned to better appreciate, and then navigate, the complexity of frontline child placement work. Government skeptics evolved into neutral observers, then reluctant helpers and now trusted allies and loud supporters. Innu skepticism and self-doubt turned into trust, confidence, leadership and ownership. A new positive kind of working relationship has taken hold in CFS between Innu operators and government staff.

In the sections below, more detail is provided about Shushepeшипан Ishpitentamun Mitshuap Inc. and the Mushuau Innu Emergency Placement and Group Home Inc., and their respective services.

Shushepeshipan Ishpitentamun Mitshuap Inc. – Outline of current services

As stated above, Shushepeshipan Ishpitentamun Mitshuap (SIM) operates 1 group home and 2 emergency placement homes, both located in the community of Sheshatshiu. Combined, SIM can accommodate up to 18 children and youth at a time as follows:

- 6-7 in the Group Home in Sheshatshiu
- 6 in emergency placement home (EPH) Peik in Sheshatshiu
- 4-5 in emergency placement home (EPH) Nish in Sheshatshiu

It is staffed by 93 employees (47 full-time). SIM has prevented potential removals of 78 Innu children and youth as of June 2025.

SIM is in the process of planning for the opening of two small additional facilities in Sheshatshiu, called Individual Living Arrangements. These two homes will each be able to care for a single child or youth who has specific needs that would benefit from a specialized, individual placement.

SIM also provides cultural programming, based on the Innu Care Approach, for the children and youth it cares for. Regular activities include berry-picking, boil-ups, ice fishing, and community gatherings. This programming helps to engage the entire community, strengthen the foundations for healthy relationships and fosters connection or re-connection between Innu children and youth and their culture.

In 2022, SIM acquired a cabin in a natural area accessible by the Trans-Labrador Highway, within driving distance from Sheshatshiu, to support family reunification and to ensure the children and youth it cares for are connected to Innu-aitun practices and activities.

Mushuau EPH & Group Home Inc. – Outline of current services

MEGH can accommodate up to 5 children and youth in the EPH in Natuashish, and will eventually be able to accommodate 5-6 children and youth in the Hybrid Home in Goose Bay. However due to the Hybrid Home's recent opening they have a limit of 4 children/youth currently.

MEGH is staffed by 40 employees, 19 of which are full-time. The Hybrid Home employs 9 full-time Child/Youth Care Workers, 2 Operations Managers and a Coordinator of Programs and Services, and there are a number of casual workers. The EPH in Natuashish also employs 9 full-time Child/Youth Care Workers, 2 Operations Managers, a Coordinator of Programs and Services, and 12 casuels.

MEGH has prevented the potential removals of 51 Innu children and youth as of June 2025.

The EPH opened in Natuashish in 2019. Previous to this opening there was no reliable place for youth and children to be taken in on an urgent basis in Natuashish or Davis Inlet. Children and youth were forced to be sent out of community to be placed in foster homes, group homes or other emergency placement homes if a family-based placement that met provincial criteria could not be found immediately within the community.

The planning for what is now known as the Hybrid Home took a longer route. Originally, it was envisioned as a group home in Natuashish. A building design concept was obtained, but the cost of construction in Natuashish was too high for MIFN and MEGH to sustain that cost through rent using operational funds. This left a resource gap. An application to Jordan's Principle was unsuccessful. MEGH then shifted to the idea of starting operations in Goose Bay; it located a facility and rented the property.

During Covid, MEGH had to focus on re-stabilizing the EPH which meant that this also prevented the hybrid home from opening. After, in 2022, capital funding from ISC became available, but given that construction in Natuashish would still take time, MEGH decided to proceed with the plan of opening in Goose Bay as a transitional measure. Plans were finalized for a Hybrid Home, instead of a Group Home, to better address current needs and be more flexible in terms of age range. The Hybrid Home opened in Goose Bay in April 2025.

We are pleased to report that ISC has approved the first stages of funding for the Hybrid Home in Natuashish using CHRT 41 capital funding. Plans are now getting underway for the site feasibility work and design of that facility. If construction occurs in 2026, it is possible that the transition of operations to the facility to Natuashish could occur in 2027.

There is no doubt that the EPH in Natuashish has contributed to ensuring that more Mushuau Innu children and youth in care have been able to remain connected to community, culture, and language. This, in turn, reduces harms and disruption experienced by the children and youth and promotes healing in an otherwise traumatic situation. This is done by providing a space to stay that is in their home community and offers connection to Innu-aimun speakers, Innu culture, and access with family that is consistent, accessible, and supported by other Innu.

Future Directions

Office Space

Office space for both SIM and MEGH is a current issue that was not really planned for sufficiently. In both communities, office space is currently in high demand and short supply. Both started off with a small office within the band office of their respective community, but that space was recovered by MIFN for other needs in the case of MEGH, and destroyed by fire in the case of SIM.

SIM currently operates from a small trailer in Sheshatshiu. Until October 2025, MEGH was operating without an office and MEGH management staff would primarily work from their homes and on the go. However, with CHRT 41 funding, MEGH management have now temporarily moved into a mobile trailer in Natuashish. These solutions, while better than nothing, are not sufficient for the size and scale of the work they are undertaking.

In time, MEGH hopes to add office space into the construction of the Hybrid Home in Natuashish.

SIM is planning to move into the Office Complex once that facility is constructed by SIFN. However the construction of that project, while partially supported with CHRT 41, is being held up due to delays with Jordan's Principle at the federal level. SIFN's Jordan's Principle program was planned to be another tenant of the Office Complex. SIFN is now working on back-up plans to fund this project. For the time being, SIM is still struggling to manage within the small trailer space it has.

Addressing issues with the older placement facilities

As mentioned above, applications to the CHRT 41 capital funds are underway or being planned in relation to some of the current structures. This includes:

- Replacing the EPH in Natuashish with a purpose-built facility. The current facility was formerly a community member's home, and has a number of issues. A new facility would better meet the needs of the services, and could add to the capacity. The current EPH is only built to accommodate 3 children if there are no sibling groups, but placement sometimes occurs for up to 5 children at a time. There is not enough room, and situations often occur where MEGH is forced to split siblings, resulting in MEGH employees fostering siblings while others remain at the EPH.
- Renovating the EPHs in Sheshatshiu. While they were purpose-built by SIFN at the time, there were a number of needs that were not anticipated. Some renovations could assist in improving the function of the space.

- Considering renovating or replacing the Group Home in Sheshatshiu. This is an old building that is divided as between the Group Home and the community shelter. It is not an ideal solution as a Group Home.

Adding rotational worker accommodation capacity in Natuashish

There is a severe shortage of hotel space, housing and rental accommodations in Natuashish. This makes it very difficult for MEGH to bring in rotational staff or visiting clinicians or other professionals to serve children and youth.

MEGH is planning to include some accommodation capacity for this purpose in the design of the Natuashish Hybrid Home. MEGH plans on having one wing with 2 attached multipurpose duplexes to utilize as accommodations for incoming professionals and can double as space for youth aging out of the system with no where to go.

Adding the Individual Living Arrangements (special needs)

SIM and the Province identified a pressing need for two fully-staffed placement homes that function as “individual living arrangements” (ILAs). ILAs are a type of placement for children and youth in care with high needs; some children do not do well in a foster home, EPH or Group Home due to their specialized needs. The ILAs are designed to include three bedrooms, an office area, and accessible features like a ramp. It can accommodate a sibling group if needed.

SIFN and SIM successfully obtained CHRT 41 capital funding to construct these homes in Sheshatshiu. The location for the two ILAs is conveniently located next to SIM’s existing placement facilities. SIM is now preparing to open these new placements.

The ILAs would operate based on the Innu Care Approach just as with other Innu placement facilities. Several Innu children with special needs are receiving care outside of Innu communities. They deserve a chance to come home and to live in their community, surrounded by their extended family, culture, land and language.

The staffing requirements of the ILAs will shift based on the unique needs of the child placed in the home, but is likely to require an increased staffing ratio per shift.

Adding Youth Transitional Homes

Homes for young adults transitioning out of care are needed as a priority, and this has been flagged by IRT, SIM and MEGH, along with the First Nations. Currently, IRT is working with SIFN and MIFN to apply for the construction of such facilities using CHRT 41 funding. IRT has also obtained Post-Majority Services and Support funding from ISC to build out services for this demographic, including but not limited to housing support.

As planning for Youth Transitional Homes moves forward, IRT will be coordinating with SIM and MEGH to work out plans for staffing and other supports. Some elements might integrate well with other aspects of the placement organizations' services.

Training and Recruitment

Training and recruitment are ongoing processes, not one-time events. Some employees remain long-term, and SIM and MEGH work hard to support and retain staff. But there is bound to be some turnover. In the child and youth care sector, turnover is a common issue due to the intensity of the work, or due to things like changes in an employee's circumstances.

Many trainings are required by provincial standards, including Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training, First Aid/CPR training, ASSIST (suicide risk intervention). In addition, an Innu Care Approach training was developed originally based on the overall Innu Care Approach. This training has recently been updated with IRT's involvement as well.

SIM and MEGH keep in touch with each other about training arrangements. It is an ongoing challenge to stay on top of training requirements. The quality of services depends on having a full complement of staff who are well-prepared.

Record Checks

Under current provincial policy, employees of SIM and MEGH and the directors of their Boards must have clearances from police criminal record checks and child protection checks.

Delays can often arise during these processes and these delays are a significant issue in SIM and MEGH's operations. Ironically, international hires are able to avoid the screening process by signing a simple affidavit, however Innu applicants are often waiting months for results. SIM, MEGH and IRT have raised this issue with the CFS Committee numerous times in the past years. Sometimes the speed of processing improves for a while, but inevitably it clogs up again.

IRT, SIM and MEGH are now pushing forward to explore better solutions to this issue with the province. At a minimum, an effective solution would likely require policy updates.

Longer Term

Placement homes will be needed for the foreseeable future but we do not see this as a forever solution. The goal is for the need for placement homes to diminish over time as child, family and community well-being flourish under an Innu law, and fewer Innu children and youth require placements in care. Even after the opening of the Hybrid Home, MEGH continues to think about its future capacity issues and is considering to have the doors open to its hybrid home in Goose Bay to assist with any complex needs.

For now, they remain an important part of Innu services, to reduce the impact of being in care has in a child's life and improve outcomes for each of these children. Because to MEGH and SIM, being in community means that they often see children successfully return to their homes. For

MEGH, this is very important due to the remoteness of the community – once a child has been sent out of the community it has been very difficult for them to return home.

Both SIM and MEGH have stressed that they would like to see more foster homes in community so that children would not be force to avail of an EPH on a permanent basis, the purpose of these homes is supposed to be for temporary basis but this is not always the case for MEGH and SIM.

MAMU TSHISHKUTAMASHUTAU INNU EDUCATION (MTIE)

Brief history / context

Traditionally Innu children learned what they needed to know by observing adults around them and taking a hands-on approach to try out necessary tasks. Learning was experiential, land-based, integrated with daily life, and sometimes provided a way for children to contribute to the household.

Formal education started to be administered to Innu by Catholic missionaries on an ad-hoc basis in the early 20th century. In the 1950s and 60s schools were built in Sheshatshiu and Davis Inlet, and from the 1960s to the 1990s education was delivered through a Newfoundland and Labrador provincial Catholic school board. In the mid-90s, when NL ended the use of denominational schooling, education was transferred to the provincial English school board.

The federal government was involved in this system by providing funding in bilateral agreements to the Province. After Confederation in 1949, the government of Canada did not bring Innu under the *Indian Act*, but it remained involved as a partial funder of education behind the scenes.

Following the Canadian Human Rights Commission's report in 1993 that Canada had discriminated against the Innu and neglected to meet its fiduciary duties, Canada committed in 1994 to devolve programs and funds under existing federal-provincial agreements for the provision of services to and by the Innu. However it took another 15 years for that to take place for Innu education.

Innu delivery of K-12 education finally began in 2009. In 2009, Innu established Mamu Tshishkutamashutau - Innu Education (MTIE) as an Innu school board. Our name means "Let's all learn together". MTIE is a non-profit corporation, with an Innu Board of Trustees that has three representatives from Sheshatshiu and three representatives from Natuashish. It receives federal funding from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).

The provincial system failed to deliver quality education to Innu children, and produced very few graduates. It promoted white, Christian, non-Innu culture, and often denigrated Innu culture, spirituality and traditions. In addition to spiritual and cultural abuse, many Innu children also experienced other forms of abuse at school, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

The provincial schools in the Innu communities were not listed in any previous settlement relating to Indigenous schooling. They were excluded from the Federal Indian Day Schools settlement in 2019, presumably because the schools were not considered "federal", and the Innu were not considered "Indians" for most of the relevant time. Innu requested to be added to that settlement, which did not occur. In 2024, Innu Nation and several of its members launched their

own class action about the day schools in the Innu communities, stating they were seeking similar compensation to what other First Nation survivors received.¹¹ This case has not resolved.

MTIE delivers education services in an environment shaped by the impact of what Innu have gone through. It has been operating Innu education services for about 15 years.

The MTIE Curriculum Development Staff had worked closely with a team from Mount Allison University, including on the design of the skilled trades program but has since had to end this program due to the complications with the funding parameters provided by ISC.

Outline of current services

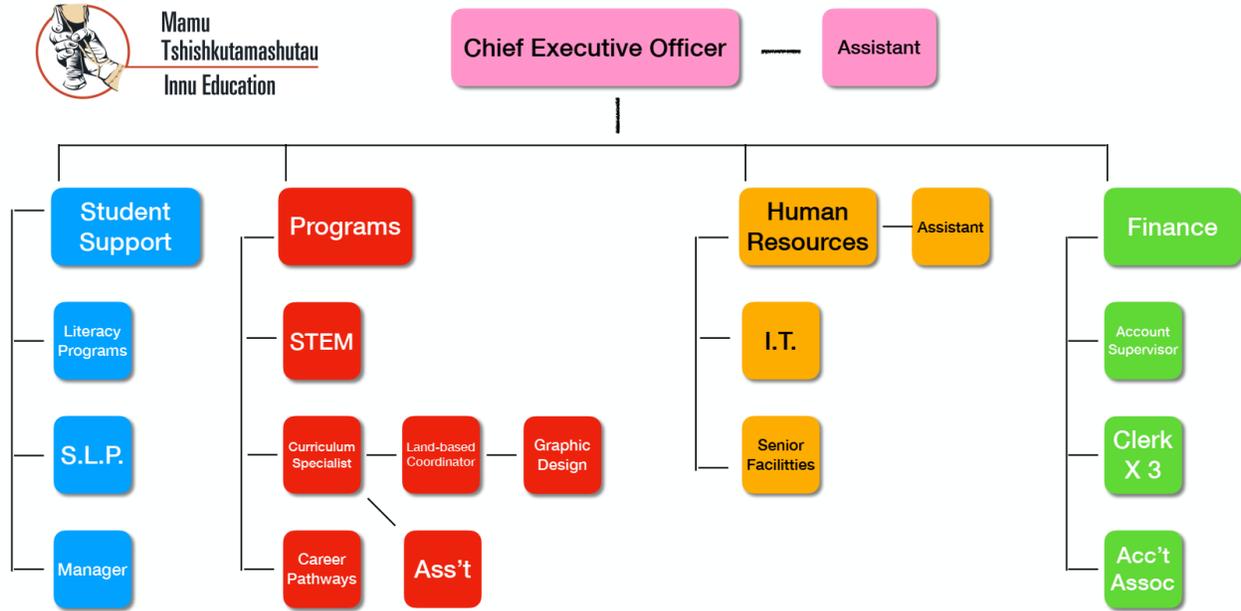
MTIE operates the Sheshatshiu Innu School and the Mushuau Innu Natuashish School. MTIE delivers Pre-K to Grade 12 education services to about 1,000 children and youth between both communities.



The curriculum is provincially accredited, and high school graduates earn a provincial certificate that is recognized by post-secondary institutions. Both MINS and SIS now have a full-time guidance counsellor and MTIE staffs a Speech Language Pathologist and a literacy specialist.

An organizational chart for MTIE's central administration is below (staffing within each school is additional to the chart below):

¹¹ Case materials and links to media coverage at: www.oktlaw.com/services/cases/innu-day-schools.



Organizational Chart 2025

MTIE implemented several changes when it took over control of administering education in both communities. For example, it worked to lower the ratio of students to teachers so that there would be more opportunity for individual attention. MTIE has also developed several Innu curriculum initiatives, language guides and children’s storybooks. Since 2018, it has offered *Innu Tshissenitamun: An Innu Studies Course*. It is important to note that beginning in September 2025, MTIE established an Innu-aimun immersion program for kindergarten students in both schools.

Both schools offer a breakfast program which launched in 2024 and are expanding with a lunch program this year. The schools offer rotational programs and services like Leader in Me, which is in its second year with SIS and will offered in MINS next year. MINS currently offers a trauma initiative program tailored for students which will then be offered in SIS.

The school board has forged several strong partnerships with a number of education institutions in Atlantic and Eastern Canada to increase its capacity and develop course offerings tailored to the needs and interests of the Innu communities.

- The partnership with Nipissing College in Ontario has trained 22 classroom assistants to provide essential support in both schools.
- In the last couple years, MTIE worked with McGill University to develop and run a Teaching Education Certificate program that provides a pathway to an education degree for 12 Sheshatshiu and 5 Mushuau Innu participants.
- Moving forward, MTIE is starting a 4/5-year Indigenous teacher education program in partnership with Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) and the Nunatsiavut

Government. A \$1M grant from the Rideau Hall Foundation supports this program, which will start in 2026.

Future Directions

Innu children are not receiving equitable services, nor services that account for historic disadvantages and the need for culturally based services. Children are suffering now as a consequence of our past and, in many cases, the impacts will last a lifetime. Innu see education as part of a circle of health and healing. MTIE can better promote and maintain healing if it is given adequate resources.

Shockingly, ISC has recently *reduced* the amount of funding it is providing for Innu education. Initially, for the 2025/26 school year, ISC committed to provide only 75% of MTIE's total 2024/25 budget. It was only at the end of September, after the school term was well underway, that ISC approved MTIE for 93.6% of what it received last year. This still translates to a shortfall of \$1.65 million and will create operational problems. The late timing of the decision also made it challenging for MTIE to plan for the coming school year.

MTIE has been chronically underfunded for its entire existence, hamstringing its wholistic educational approach. This traces back to 2009 when Canada based its funding for MTIE on the funding the NL English school board had used in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish as of 2008 – not on any meaningful assessment of Innu needs and how those needs had been unmet under the prior system, and not even properly taking into account board- and Ministry-level services used in the provincial system. Funding was frozen at this level for nearly a decade, even as provincial funding levels increased. On top of everything else, the remoteness of these schools was never acknowledged, despite this being a huge factor for these schools, especially MINS.

In 2017, Canada said it would finally shift to a model that would fund MTIE based on comparable provincial funding. This sounded like a significant improvement, however the devil is in the details; ISC's implementation of this decision continued to shortchange Innu students.

ISC first chose New Brunswick as the comparator for all First Nation schools in the Atlantic region. This ignored significant differences between New Brunswick and Labrador in terms of remoteness, student needs, Indigenous language, and historical factors. It overlooked the reduced economies of scale for a smaller school board, that certain costs are fixed regardless of size, and that there are costs associated with competing with better resourced, larger boards. Applying this faulty standard, Canada determined that its allocations for Innu schools were already sufficiently comparable, and no new funding was required.

Innu eventually persuaded Canada to at least switch to the province of Newfoundland & Labrador as a proxy. MTIE recruited the former financial director of the provincial system to advise on the formula. However that process took years, and gaps still remained because the provincial

averages were heavily weighted towards the resourcing needs of schools in urban areas, and ISC took approaches that minimized funding.

For example, MTIE and their advisor who worked in the provincial funding system proposed using the NL French school board as a proxy for comparable costs, given it shares certain features with MTIE including a smaller size and unique cultural and linguistic interests. ISC refused to accept that comparator for years. Finally, last year, it admitted that the French school board is a more suitable proxy, and that by that standard, MTIE should receive more funding. But at the same time, ISC has said that it does not have the money to address this gap.

Following persistent Innu protest and the launch of a human rights complaint by the Innu First Nations in 2021, Canada offered another potential pathway for increased funding: a Regional Education Agreement (REA). Innu were told that the REA could address Innu education needs based on substantive equality, and would not need to mimic provincial average funding.

Innu worked on outlining and costing these needs, and submitted a proposal for REA funding in November 2024. The proposal requests funding for basic school operations and education projects for the next 5 years. The REA submission is fully supported by the Province. However the funding needs to come from the federal government, through ISC. The REA has not yet been approved or rejected by the federal government. It requires approval by the Treasury Board of Canada.

The REA is informed by the Innu Vision for Education and its guiding principles:

1. Real needs-based funding for Innu Pre-K to Grade 12 education (accounting for remoteness and other realistic cost drivers).
2. Cultural safety and well-being for Innu children, youth, young adults, and families.
3. Substantive equality in education outcomes for Innu children.
4. Culturally informed programming, having regard for the current realities of Innu, including historical and contemporary disadvantages and contextual differences.

MTIE is seeking to fund eight projects informed by Innu Vision:¹²

1. Basic PreK-12 school programming
2. Breakfast and lunch program
3. Language and culture
4. Special Needs
5. MTIE Organization
6. Wellness Centres
7. Skilled Trades/co-op
8. Adult upgrading

¹² Innu Regional Education Agreement Community Update.

The additional funding would support smaller class sizes, which are currently larger than provincial averages, allowing for more individualized attention to students. This is especially important in a population that is dealing with intergenerational trauma, language barriers, remoteness and a lack of access to comprehensive social and health services. Students of MTIE receive modified or alternative programming at much higher rates than other provincial schools. Additional resources from the REA would allow for more accessible, thorough assessments for special education needs, and the resources to meet those needs. It would also allow for certifying staff in trauma-informed teaching, blending Indigenous cultural practices and the Western clinical approach to dealing with grief and trauma.

Mental health programming is another top priority, and here the wellness centres would play an important role. These centres would be in the school, with a full-time mental health nurse and programming on suicide prevention, healthy relationships, wellness and more. We have seen amazing results from the Leader-In-Me program in Sheshatshiu in terms of boosting self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills among Innu youth. This is something that could be continued and expanded to Natuashish under the REA.

With more resources, MTIE will be able to establish an Innu-specific curriculum, with a goal of fully bilingual kids, in both Innu-aimun dialects; land-based programming that involves all of the community so that students know their history and what it means to be Innu; and skilled trades training for both traditional and vocational skills. MTIE would also offer adult upgrading programs for students who take a nontraditional path and need to spend significant time away from high school during their teenage years for family demands or other difficult situations.

MTIE intends to secure capital funding to provide more accommodations for its staff and teachers, it has realized that providing this incentive to teachers in Natuashish has been a huge draw for teachers and would like to offer this option for its teachers in Sheshatshiu as well. Additionally, as of right now MTIE cannot offer a federal pension, which has teachers shying away from potential positions within these schools. MTIE wishes to be able to offer its teachers a federal pension.

MTIE would like to conduct research on land-based learning in Nutshimit, bringing students out in Nutshimit and combining it with providing a better understanding of who these students are as a people and bringing children back to their roots in way where students can graduate and get an education on the land. Home is not Sheshatshiu or Natuashish – home is Nutshimit.

We know what we need to make our schools a safe environment for Innu children to grow into bright, confident and healthy adults ready to pursue their dreams and build up our community. If we succeed in negotiating an REA, it will be a major stride towards this goal.



FINAL NOTE

Please note that Innu services continue to grow and evolve. This report reflects a moment in time. It is intended to provide the Inquiry Commissioners with an update that can be taken into account in the Inquiry's final report.

Any use for other purposes should only be approached with caution, bearing in mind that some information may become out of date. Readers should also bear in mind that the report was prepared in a limited time frame, and while best efforts were made to ensure accuracy, mistakes remain a possibility. Any future users of the report are encouraged to check information with current service providers.