

Briefing Note
Department of Health and Community Service

Title: Meeting of Community Representatives from Natuashish with the Child and Youth Advocate on Thursday September 16, 2004

Issue: During the meeting, a videotape was shown of a child sniffing gas that the community representatives stated was taken in July 2004. It also contained footage of the local RCMP office where community members were requesting phone numbers for the Child, Youth & Family Services Office in their community. It is not known if the Innu plan to release the video publicly to draw attention to their requests for additional resources in their community.

Background:

- The Deputy Child and Youth Advocate contacted the Regional Director of Child, Youth and Family Services with the Health Labrador Corporation (HLC) on September 16, 2004 to advise that community representatives from Natuashish had met with the Child and Youth Advocate. At the meeting, the community representatives expressed concern that none of the systems are responding to the needs in the community. The Deputy Advocate also advised the Regional Director about the videotape.
- The community representatives further claimed that there are young children hanging around the community with older youth who are sniffing gas and they feel something will happen to them.

Current Status:

- The Deputy Advocate is attempting to get the names of the children involved from the community representatives and provide them to HLC staff in the community for follow-up.
- HLC is confirming with staff in Natuashish as to whether referrals have been received in their office over the last several months and if the situation involving the child in the video was referred to social workers.
- HLC is trying to contact the community representatives, who are still in St. John's, to arrange a meeting with them in Happy Valley-Goose Bay during their return trip to Natuashish. HLC wants to talk to the community representatives about the issues raised with the Advocate and to establish a plan on how social workers and staff in the community can respond to these needs.
- Depending on the needs in the community, HLC has indicated that it will send additional social workers from other parts of the region to the community. There are currently two social workers and one community service worker residing in the community.
- The visit to the Advocate's Office is part of the Innu's renewed call for assistance in their

community. On September 8, 2004, the *Telegram* carried an article which reported that the

Innu were seeking emergency action to treat alcohol and solvent abuse following two suicides over the summer months.

- On September 9 & 10, 2004, the *Telegram* reported that a Health Canada spokesperson advised funds would not be made available for a centre in Natuashish. Services are available in Sheshatshiu and the Innu have received \$5.4M in additional health funding this year. The spokesperson further stated that there is an obligation on the part of parents and leaders in the community to create an environment that is safe for their children.
- The Departments of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs and Justice have been advised of the situation.

Next Steps:

- HLC staff will follow-up on any referrals received from the Deputy Advocate or community members.
- HLC is seeking a meeting with the community representatives from Natuashish to discuss the issues and establish a plan for response.
- HLC will keep the Department advised of any further developments.

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September 17, 2004