

# YELLOWKNIVES DENE FIRST NATION COMMENTS ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

MAY 2003

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

The Yellowknives Dene First Nation's members and leaders are concerned about the impacts the mines has had on the health of its members working at the mines and their families. The Yellowknives Dene First Nation's population is approximately at 1100 members. The social issues in these communities are many and include the following:

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|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Financial Problems                | 12. Issues on Residential Schools |
| 2. Unemployment                      | 13. Loss of Culture & Language    |
| 3. Gambling                          | 14. Grief & Loss Issues           |
| 4. Drugs & Alcohol Problems          | 15. FAS/FAE, NAS/NAE              |
| 5. Family Violence                   | 16. Child Witnessing Violence     |
| 6. Mental Health Issues              | 17. Dysfunctional Relationships   |
| 7. Child Abuse & Neglect             | 18. Teens Dropouts at Schools     |
| 8. Lack of Affordable Housing        | 19. Sexual Assault/Abuse/Incest   |
| 9. High STD Rates                    | 20. Teen Pregnancies              |
| 10. Criminal Activity/Violent Crimes | 21. Homelessness                  |
| 11. High Level of Suicide Ideation   |                                   |

The diamond mines, although providing employment for many of our members, have lead to exacerbation of many of these social problems. Members now have access to large sums of money but in most cases, <sup>are</sup> ~~at~~ not educated in financial planning. Large amounts of money are readily available and some of our members have serious problems, not only with alcohol, but also with other easily accessible illegal drugs such as cocaine, crack and other addictive narcotics.

Gambling is also a major problem with our members. There is no intervention available for those members who have a gambling addiction. This area for counseling is seriously under funded and this paper addresses the need for those members who need counseling and treatment in this area.

The increased alcohol and drug use, the increased gambling and the two weeks schedules of being in and out of the communities can negatively affect spousal and family relationships. The increased workload for the family member not working at the mines has in many cases lead to frustration and fatigue for the spouse. When the working spouse returns to the home, dramatic shifts are required in the dynamics of the family. Many of our members have a difficult time adjusting to these necessary changes and in

some cases this results in increased family violence and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. This interruption also results in the loss of culture and language if there is no concerted effort to maintain these when they return home.

Other problems created by employment at the mines include daycare arrangements, especially if both parents work at the mine or children are in the care of a single parent who works at the mines. According to Les Harrison, some of the "children in care" with Health and Social Services are placed in care this lack of daycare planning and provisions.

### **Summary:**

It is our belief that in order for people to heal, they need to reconnect with their culture and heal the wounds from within. Many people drink to escape their feelings of shame, inadequacy and guilt. The most difficult aspect of programming is to convince the people in need to access services that are available. Providing counseling services in Ndilo and Dettah and at the mine sites would allow for more integrated approach with referral services to other agencies and organizations located in Yellowknife. On the land healing and treatment programs have been shown to be effective and would allow for integration of services in a culturally relevant environment.

In the last few years our statistics have shown an increase in the number of people utilizing our services. It is our belief that our members are more likely to benefit from services provided in a culturally appropriate setting. It is our goal to provide safe, responsive and relevant programs in order to meet the needs of all Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) members including those members affected by resource development.

Programs to target those affected people who work in the mining industry need to be planned and implemented including on site counseling and support programs. A lack of resources has prevented us from implementing these needed programs and thus reaching this target population.

**It is our belief that we need to have programs including counseling programs available in the communities of Ndilo, Dettah and on site at the mines so that the YKDFN members and affected people can be encouraged to access these services.**

### **An Integrated and Adaptive Approach:**

The Yellowknives Dene First Nation Health and Social Development Program has provided health and social programs since 1994. It has been obvious for a number of years that the mining industry has negatively impacted our people.

Although the mines provide needed employment opportunities, but many social and health problems occur due to lack of or poor financial planning and other life skills needing enhancement. Other health and social problems already existing in our communities lead to many of our members lacking skills to either work at the mines or continue their employment once hired on by the mines.

One of the main issues our members in the community, including those working at the mines are dealing with issues related to the family members who attended residential schools. Problems such as loss of culture and language has resulted in a sense of belonging which can result in excessive alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, relationship and family problems, violence, abuse, homelessness, etc. Cultural programs for re-establishing this feeling of belonging should become a priority for all community programs dealing with Aboriginal populations.

**Therefore it is our belief the Yellowknives Dene First Nation Health and Social Development Program can be adaptive, creative and plan the counseling services to be provided for the communities of Ndilo, Dettah and on site at the mine.**