



Ottawa Inuit
Children's
Centre

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SANNGINIVUT
STRONG VOICES FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Improving Systems and Services
for Inuit Women and Children
Affected by Violence:

Community Stakeholder Meeting
September 20, 2017
Report

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Introduction

Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC) is a multi-service Inuit organization that provides cultural, educational, recreational and social support services to children, youth and families of Ottawa's growing Inuit community. Programs include: pre-school, kindergarten and after-school programs; Bridging the Gap school liaison and cultural education; systems navigation; and youth, family and parenting programs. In 2015, OICC embarked on a three-year project to improve systems and services for Inuit women and children affected by violence in Ottawa with funding support from Status of Women Canada. The goal of Sannginivut: Strong Voices for Stronger Communities is to reduce barriers and better support Inuit women and children by providing educational resources and training to build the capacity of agencies.

Community Stakeholders Meeting

OICC hosted a Violence Against Inuit Women and Children stakeholder meeting on September 20, 2017. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- share the research from the project
- showcase the draft training modules and presentations
- gather feedback
- discuss service gaps and systems change.

The following agencies and organizations were represented at the meeting:

- Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
- Counselling and Family Services Ottawa
- Interval House of Ottawa
- Inuit Non-Profit Housing Corporation
- Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women
- Ottawa Hospital
- Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre
- Ottawa Police Service
- Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
- Shepherds of Good Hope
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit

Opening Remarks



Reepa Evic-Carleton, elder and OICC staff member, opened the meeting by lighting a qulliq (traditional Inuit oil lamp). Reepa was born on the land near Pangnirtung, Nunavut and has many happy memories of Inuit life. She spoke of the major changes, traumas and loss of self-determination that Inuit have faced, yet how resilient they are. She wished meeting participants a good day of learning and sharing.

Karen Baker-Anderson, Executive Director at OICC, also provided a warm welcome to participants. She noted what a beautiful but harsh land the North is, and how important it is for Inuit to tell their stories. Inuit women and children deserve to live in a world without violence and discrimination and it is up to all of us to work to make this happen.

Project Research

Dianne Kinnon presented highlights from the three research reports that Sannginivut – Strong Voices for Stronger Communities project completed in its first year:

- Inuit women's experiences of violence and Ottawa agencies;
- service provider perspectives on barriers and needs; and
- promising practices in Inuit and Indigenous responses to violence against women.

Inuit Women and Violence

Two female Inuit staff members at OICC interviewed 10 Inuit women who have experienced violence themselves or supported others. The women ranged in age from 21 to 65; five had lived in Ottawa 20 or more years, three lived here two to five years and two arrived in the last 18 months. Six of the 10 are single parents. Here are some of the findings

I have had violence since I can remember...

Violence is too common an occurrence among Inuit women. They experience violence differently from the mainstream – there is still a lot of silence and judgement.

Up North people don't talk about it. They just turn the other way.

Many women move south with their children to escape abuse and to get services. However, not all women are comfortable talking about abuse and violence.

One police officer seemed nice. It seemed he had more of an open mind. The other not so nice. He talked in a way that it was not very comfortable.

The women had mixed experiences seeking help, including good ones with the health care system, social services, counselling services, the police and lawyers.

It's very scary when I can't call for help because I am afraid of the service providers.

A few women reported not being believed or taken seriously by service providers.

I needed help but was afraid to ask for it because of the racism and pre-judgement.

The women observed there are many differences between Inuit and non-Inuit culture and ways of living that also affect interactions between Inuit clients and non-Inuit service providers.

Service providers need to learn to listen better and have easier processes for accessing their services.

Agencies need to continually reach out and build relationships with Inuit organizations so that service providers know where to refer women for support and where to go themselves for information. Service providers require more training in dealing with Inuit.

Kindness builds trust. Kindness and patience would go a long way in supporting those who are traumatized and are dealing with very stressful situations.

Communication is an important issue. Inuit may struggle to express themselves in a second language, especially if they are in a stressful situation.

The women also raised the importance of service providers really listening, being trustworthy, showing respect and providing continuity so they don't have to keep repeating their stories.

Kindness, patience and being non-judgmental were mentioned most often to improve services and responses to the Inuit community.

[Service providers] need to be taught more about our culture and where we are coming from. Learn more about our history... what we went through... our hurt is current.

Cultural safety training was seen as essential in providing historical and cultural context for interactions, overcoming stereotypes, distinguishing Inuit from First Nations, and explaining Inuit ways of communicating.

Service Provider Perspectives

Key informant interviews were used to gather information on and insights into the different systems and organizations in Ottawa currently providing services related to violence against women, and to discuss issues, needs, barriers and best practices in serving Inuit women and children. We spoke with 15 service providers from 11 agencies.

All of the organizations expressed a desire to work together to improve systems and services for Inuit women and children affected by violence.

The **barriers** that Inuit women face in using agency services include:

- Language
- Culture
- Concerns about privacy & confidentiality
- Transportation and location
- Past negative experiences
- Fears of losing custody of children
- Stigmas and stereotypes

Language barriers most directly affect unilingual Inuit language speakers and those recently relocating from Inuit communities where they are used to accessing services in Inuktitut. Even among those who speak English or French, expressing oneself in a second language can be difficult in stressful situations.

All informants from mainstream agencies acknowledged gaps in their staff's knowledge of Inuit culture and historical contexts, and that familiarity with First Nations is more common (which can also result in wrong assumptions as Inuit and First Nations cultures are distinct).

Service providers spoke of the importance of understanding the context in which Inuit live – their history, present day challenges, experiences with service agencies in the North and southern Canada, family and community norms and values, and also how they view violence and victimization – in order to provide better informed and culturally safe services.

Some ways to **address barriers** include:

- Providing training in cultural safety and violence
- Visibly demonstrate that you are a welcoming agency
- Expand how and where help is given
- Hire Inuit staff and use interpreters
- Inform women about different services
- Rebuild trust in institutions.

Inuit-specific training should include:

- Inuit cultural norms and how they transfer to an urban environment
- Inuit history, and what is needed to support Inuit in moving forward
- Elders' knowledge and teachings related to service delivery
- Information on Inuit-specific services available in Ottawa to facilitate referrals
- Information on Indigenous services and programs that Inuit women, men and children use
- How to fast track referrals to Inuit organizations.

Promising Practices

We conducted a literature review to: 1) learn more about issues affecting Inuit women and children who experience violence, and 2) identify approaches, models and promising practices related to systems change in meeting the needs of Indigenous women and children affected by violence. We reviewed 39 documents, 18 of which were Inuit-specific.

The report provided information on the following.

Indigenous Women and Violence:

A better understanding of violence
Barriers to receiving services
Systems issues
The importance of collaboration
Creating culturally appropriate services
Training

Inuit Women Affected by Violence:

The nature and extent of violence
Gender and culture
Supporting Inuit women
Breaking the cycle of abuse and violence
Cultural safety/cultural competence
Training

All three research reports are available from

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Inuit-Specific Services and Programs

The meeting included a panel presentation on Inuit organization services and programs with:

- Josh Payer, Restorative Justice Program, Tungasuvvingat Inuit
- Trudy Metcalfe, Inunnguiniq Parenting Program, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre
- Samantha Michaels, Violence and Abuse Prevention, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada.

Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI)

TI is an Inuit-specific, provincial service provider that offers social support, cultural activities, counselling and crisis intervention services for Inuit in Ottawa and beyond. TI provides services along the full spectrum of family violence, from "at risk" programming to counselling and advocacy with all members of the Inuit community – children, youth and adults. TI has recently launched a Restorative Justice Program, the first urban Inuit program of its kind in Canada, which will support Inuit in the court system, including Ottawa's new Indigenous People's Court. The centre as a whole offers supportive and healing services for those affected by violence, abuse and trauma. Service plans are flexible, individually tailored

and case specific, and can include housing support, navigation of the legal system, accompaniment to appointments, CAS support, and referrals to other agencies as needed.

Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC)

OICC serves Inuit children, youth and their families living in Ottawa or here temporarily to receive health, child protection and mental health services. The Centre offers a range of community programs including Head Start, child care, kindergarten and school liaison programs, after school and youth cultural programs, and systems navigation for its families. It recently launched a Family Support Program and a Parenting Program and offers women's and men's circles. OICC supports Inuit children, women and families affected by violence through crisis intervention, safety planning, advocacy, accompaniment and referrals, with women's and children's safety being the primary concern. OICC works closely with CAS to support Inuit families in distress and to ensure cultural connections for children in care.

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is a national organization representing all Inuit women in Canada. Addressing violence and abuse issues is a major priority, and the organization has created numerous campaigns, community resources and tools related to child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, family violence and missing and murdered Inuit women. Pauktuutit has developed bilingual plain language resources and supports a network of Inuit shelter directors through training and resource materials. Pauktuutit is continuing its work to raise awareness of violence against Inuit women and girls among men and boys and is increasing its outreach to youth through partnerships with organizations such as BluePrintForLife. Pauktuutit resources can be downloaded from <http://pauktuutit.ca/resources> and used as is or adapted to local needs.

Meeting participants appreciated the opportunity to learn more about Inuit-specific services, programs and resources. They will now be better able to refer clients to Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre and Tungasuvvingat Inuit, and to draw on the resources available from Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada.

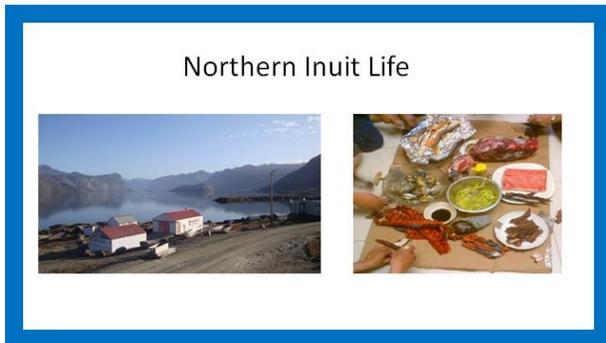
Training Modules

Rebecca Jones and Trudy Metcalfe provided an overview and a sampling of contents from the project's training modules, using personal stories, exercises and Powerpoint presentations. Inuit women will deliver the training modules to service agencies and organizations in Ottawa over the next year. Trainers can deliver some or all of the modules and also customize the sessions for a particular sector or agency.

Currently there are modules on:

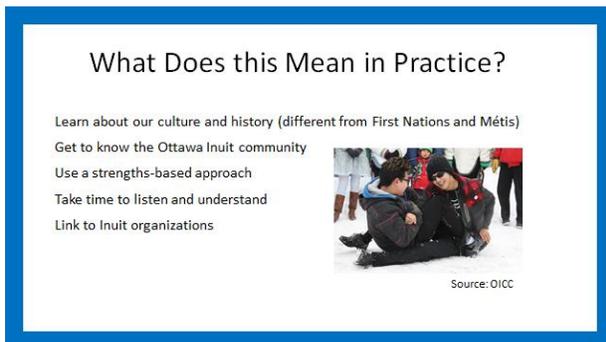
- Inuit Life
- Communicating with Inuit
- Violence Against Inuit Women
- Creating Safe Spaces for Inuit.

The **Inuit Life** module explores the history and contemporary life of Inuit.



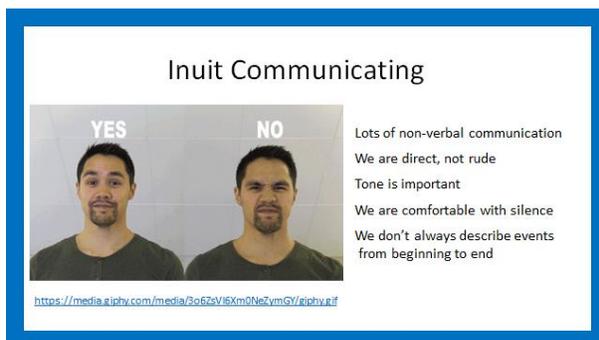
Inuit life in the North and in southern Canada is very different. Inuit moving south have a lot to adjust to – a faster pace, lots of noise, services spread all over the city, and difficulties finding jobs and housing

However, Inuit also have many cultural strengths



Each module includes information and discussion on improving services and programs for Inuit.

Communicating with Inuit looks at Inuit communication styles in a light way.

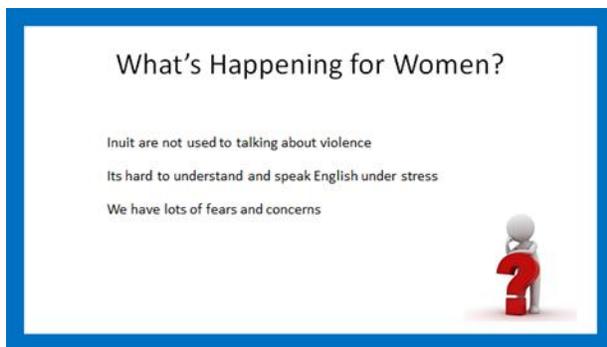


Inuit use both non-verbal and verbal communication.

Presenters tell stories about communication difficulties and their effects, and lead interactive experiences that increase awareness and understanding.



The module on **Violence Against Inuit Women** provides some statistics and looks at how Inuit women have described their experience violence and getting help.

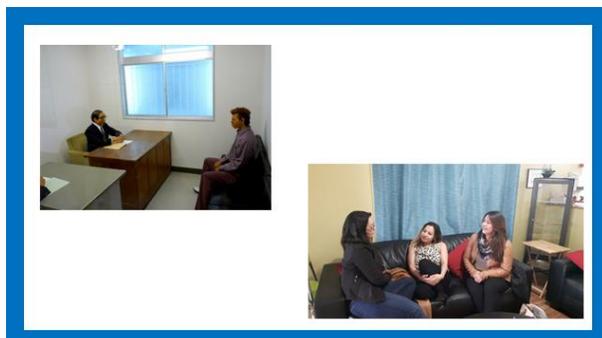


Presenters draw on research the project conducted and their own and others` experiences to talk about violence.

Inuit women ae very clear on what they are looking for among service providers – it is quite straightforward.



A workshop or training session is a good place to think about and plan **Safe Spaces for Inuit.**



We talk about unwelcoming and welcoming spaces and how to make women feel more comfortable and "at home."

There are real consequences to Inuit not feeling safe going to a community agency for help.

When Women Don't Feel Safe

- We don't report violence or seek help for trauma.
- We stop talking or become angry and uncooperative.
- We stay in unhealthy relationships.
- The violence gets more severe.



What Does this Mean in Practice?

- Make the physical environment more welcoming
- Simple things matter – cultural markers – art
- One word in Inuktitut can make a difference
- Smile
- Ask women what they need
- Ask Inuit organizations for help



Each module includes practical advice and discussion of how to improve services.

Participants in the meeting were appreciative of the training modules and the knowledge they gained from presenters during the day. Here are some of the comments from the meeting evaluation.

I learned a lot about resources for Inuit clients in Ottawa and ways to make my agency more accessible to Inuit women.

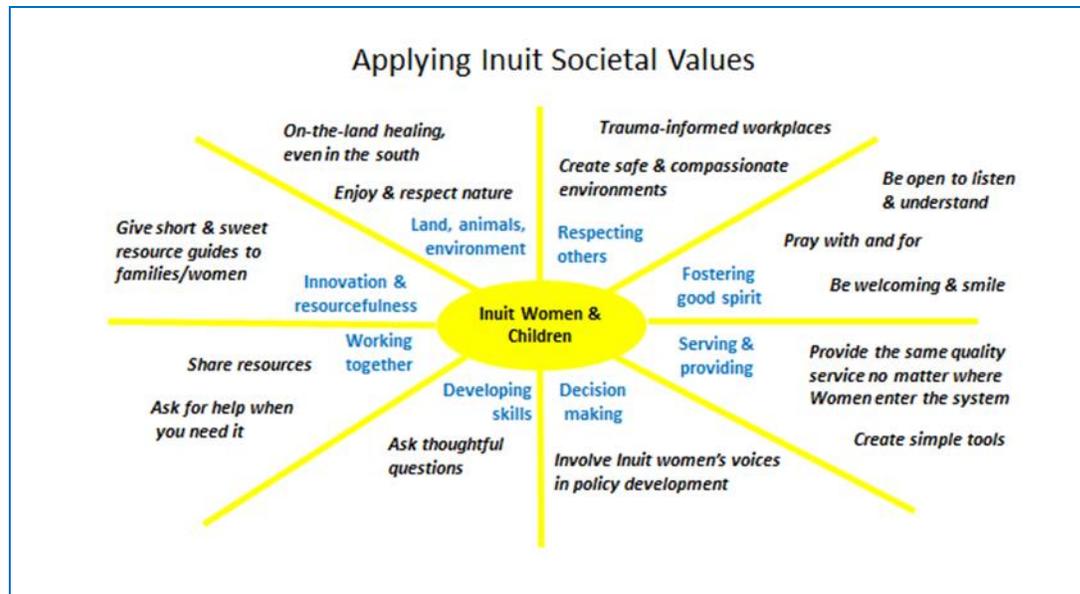
Everything was extremely relevant and added to my knowledge of Inuit culture and traditions. The Communication Styles was particularly helpful.

[I learned] how important it is to be patient and open with the Inuit community.

I think the training is going to really positively impact the whole Ottawa community.

Applying Inuit Societal Values

Over the course of the meeting, participants contributed their ideas on how to apply the eight Inuit societal values¹ to preventing and responding to violence against Inuit women. Some of the results are shown below.



Service Gaps and Systems Change

The community stakeholder's meeting concluded with a beginning discussion on the need for systems change in how agencies provide services and work with each other. These discussions with Ottawa agencies will continue in Year 3 of the project.

A "system" is

a group of interacting, inter-related or interdependent elements forming a complex whole.

www.dictionary.com

Participants were reminded of the primary systems gaps and barriers for Inuit women and children affected by violence and accessing services:

- Language
- Culture
- Concerns about privacy and confidentiality
- Transportation and location
- Past negative experiences
- Fears of losing custody of children
- Stigmas and stereotypes

¹ The eight Inuit Societal Values were developed in the early days of establishing the Government of Nunavut and are now widely used among Inuit as program and service principles.

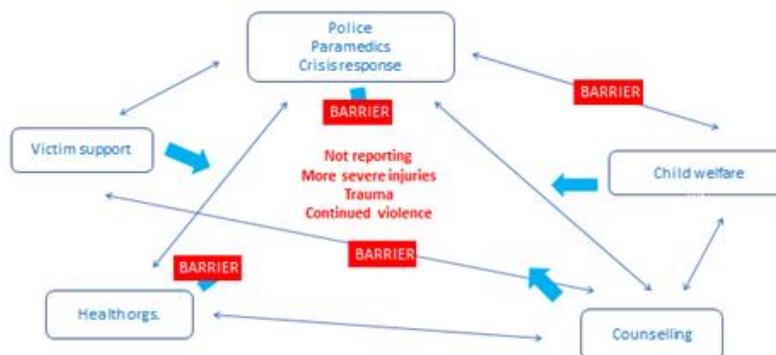
Participants then considered how an effective services system contributes to: safety, intervention, healing and no more violence.

An Effective Services System



And how barriers contribute to an ineffective system and results in: not reporting violence, more severe injuries, trauma and continued violence.

A Harmful Services System



Meeting participants brainstormed on how to remove barriers in the system. For example, fears about a lack of privacy and confidentiality stop some Inuit women from talking about abuse and violence and seeking help from agencies. Solutions lie in creating better plain language materials on rights to privacy and how confidentiality is maintained. This information also needs to be provided verbally and at each meeting or new stage of a process because people who are distressed or in crisis don't retain information. Consent must be truly informed and clients need to be told exactly what information is going to be shared and with whom.

Another major barrier among Inuit women experiencing violence is lack of housing. In order to escape violence and heal from it, women need safe, affordable, accessible places to live. Women and children without viable housing options stay in unsafe relationships, "couch-surf" (live with friends and relatives in often crowded conditions) or become homeless. Solutions lie in development of safe shelters in both the North and southern Canada, transitional post-shelter housing, settlement services for newcomers to Ottawa, and at the policy level, an Inuit-led housing strategy.

Conclusion

Meeting participants were appreciative of the opportunity to hear more about the Saannginivut: Strong Voices for Stronger Communities project and how Inuit women and children experience violence and the helping agencies, explore the training materials and begin to think about systems change.

Anyone who wants more information about the project or to book a presentation or training workshop can contact Rebecca Jones at rjones@ottawainuitchildrens.com or 613-744-3133 ext. 219.

Resources

Improving Systems and Services for Inuit Women and Children Affected by Violence: Interviews with Inuit Women, 2017.

Improving Systems and Services for Inuit Women and Children Affected by Violence: Interviews with Service Providers, 2016.

Improving Systems and Services for Inuit Women and Children Affected by Violence: Promising Practices Report, 2016.

Improving Systems and Services for Inuit Women and Children Affected by Violence: Workshop Handouts, 2017.