

Inuit Well-Being: Gender-Based Violence: What We Are Learning

2019

In 2019, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre changed its name and became Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families (Inuuqatigiit Centre). Inuuqatigiit means "coming together" in Inuktitut. The Centre was established in 2005 as an Aboriginal Head Start Program and had grown into a multi-service Inuit organization that provides cultural, educational, recreational and support services. Inuuqatigiit Centre serves as a major hub of early years, youth and family services for Inuit in Ottawa.

The Next Stage....

As the three-year Sannginivut: Stronger Voices for Strong Communities was wrapping up, we knew we wanted to take on another project on violence. The Sannginivut project uncovered many needs among Inuit affected by violence including the importance of Inuit-specific approaches and effective support services. The opportunity to continue this work came with the Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Gender-Based Violence: Promising Practices to Support Survivors and their Families initiative. Funding was available for projects to better support survivors of gender-based violence in a wide range of settings. WAGE's four principles for successful projects – evidence-based, survivor engagement, trauma- and violence-informed and cultural safety – fit well with the Inuuqatigiit Centre approach.

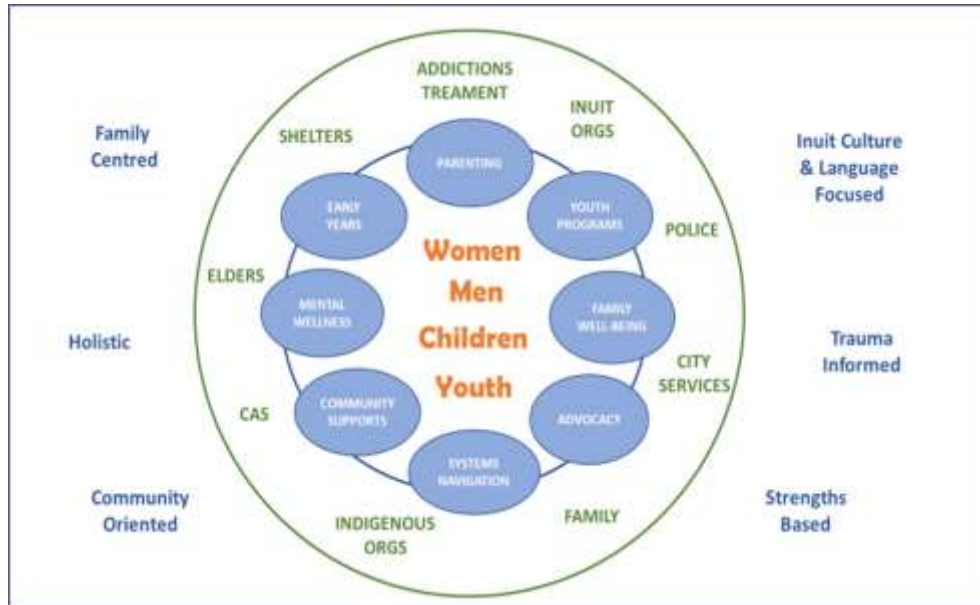
We were successful in securing funding for a five-year project, 2019-24, to further develop, test and evaluate the Centre's "wrap-around" model of service delivery. We wanted to see how well the model supports Inuit who are or have been affected by gender-based violence, recognizing that a significant number of Centre clients have experienced intimate partner abuse, sexual violence and other forms of violence and abuse. We named the project Inuit Well Being: Support for Inuit and their Families Affected by Gender-Based Violence (for short, GBV project). Following Inuit values from the start, we included women, men and youth; survivors, perpetrators and family members; and mainly Inuit, but also non-Inuit parents and partners.

We were especially appreciative of WAGE's financial and knowledge-based support in developing a full project implementation plan from a concept letter. This enabled careful planning and early engagement with those intended to be a part of the project.

What is a "Wrap-Around" Model of Service Delivery?

For an Inuit organization, "wrapping" community members in the services and supports they need when facing challenges comes naturally. Similarly, we know that you can't support a child or youth without also supporting their family. Like many frontline agencies, Inuuqatigiit Centre hadn't documented their approach so a first step in developing the GBV project was to do that, both in words and images. A small group of staff members met to brainstorm and then created a few versions of the model, which would continue to be revised and refined throughout the project.

Here is the original graphic for the model that the project team used in describing the wrap-around model.



In the diagram, Inuuqatigiit Centre services and programs (blue circles) “wrap around” women, men, children and youth and offer the supports needed to be “strong, healthy and proud of their culture, connected to the Inuit community and living a good life” (the Centre’s Theory of Change.) Inuit also get support and assistance from family and Inuit elders, in addition to a network of community partners and stakeholders (identified in green) who provide mental health, physical health, child welfare, community safety, addictions services, etc. Fundamental principles (in blue) guide the Centre’s programs and services and relationships with community supports:

- Inuit culture- and language-focused;
- trauma-informed;
- strengths-based;
- community-oriented;
- holistic; and
- family-centred.

GBV project funding enables us to evaluate how well this wrap-around model supports Inuit affected by gender-based violence while improving services to them and capturing this knowledge and practice in a blueprint document for other organizations.

GBV Project Basics

GOAL	OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
Inuit women, men, youth and their families impacted by gender-based violence are better supported across a range of sectors and are strong, healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the wrap-around model of care, provide culturally relevant supports for Inuit affected by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit Inuit women, men and youth affected by violence to participate in regular interviews about the

<p>and proud of their culture, connected to the Inuit community and are living a good life.</p>	<p>violence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address barriers and gaps in services, including language, culture, privacy/confidentiality, transportation, past negative experiences/system fears, stereotypes and stigmas. • Further develop the wrap-around care model and agency partnerships and identify promising practices. • Draw and build on the outcomes of the Sannginivut project (2016-19). • Monitor and evaluate the program through a community-based, participatory approach. 	<p>support they are receiving from Inuuqatigiit Centre and its community partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with five or more partner agencies to improve cross-referrals and collect information on Inuit clients. • Hold regular Advisory Committee and Community Stakeholder meetings to gather input and feedback. • Deliver training on Inuit culture and GBV to other Ottawa agencies. • Complete an annual evaluation. • Regularly share information on the project and produce a blueprint document in the last year.
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You can see a progress report for 2019 [here](#).

Important Meetings were Held

We held the first Advisory Committee meeting for the new project in September. A somewhat delayed start to the project allowed Inuuqatigiit Centre to hire two project coordinators – an Inuk woman with lived experience of gender-based violence and a non-Inuk with a youth and communications background. They organized a dinner meeting that included caribou stew and bannock in a comfortable meeting area at the Centre. Participants were happy to share a meal, speak in a safe space about violence and get to know other members. An Inuk elder opened the meeting with a prayer and the coordinators reminded participants of the importance of Inuit values: *Piliriqatigiinniq* (working together for a common cause) and *Tunnganarniq* (fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive). Participants said in the evaluation at the end of the meeting that they better understood the project and the wrap-around model, they appreciated inclusion of men and youth and the sharing of knowledge around the table. They also mentioned wanting more time for discussion and a tighter agenda.

This meeting was followed by two community stakeholder meetings in November – the first one with Inuit organizations, elders and community members and the second with Inuuqatigiit elders and staff, other Indigenous organizations and non-Indigenous agencies. This turned out to be a good strategy. The Inuit-specific meeting enabled Inuit to express their needs and concerns openly and to support each other. They identified a number of issues to address in the project, including:

- the important distinctions between First Nations and Inuit;

- the effects of cultural disruption and identity;
- the normalization of violence in the Inuit community; and
- the fear of stigma and discrimination.

Several of the Inuit meeting participants attended the community stakeholder meeting to discuss issues and needs. Agency representatives were very open to hearing these and shared many of the same frustrations. Once again, by creating a safe space for discussion and including survivor voices, we built better understanding, closer relationships and a resolve to make this project a success.

We concluded from the two stakeholder meetings that there are many inter-related factors that contribute to the disproportionate rate of gender-based violence in Inuit communities.

Key issues that are experienced by Inuit affected by violence are linked to the historical and ongoing effects of colonialization. Inuuqatigiit Centre will continue to work with the community and its partners to identify, target and eliminate these determinants and gaps in services and support; also focussing in areas that can create stressful, frustrating, and tense situations thus perpetuating violent behaviours. The Stakeholder meetings highlighted areas for validation and improvement in Inuuqatigiit's Inuit-Specific Wrap-Around model of service delivery which will guide the project as it moves forward.

GBV Stakeholder Meetings 2019 Report

See the full 2019 GBV Stakeholder Meeting report [here](#).

Year 1 – What We Learned

It was a rewarding year to see the work of the Sannginivut project continue and to embark on a project that will strengthen Inuuqatigiit Centre and its community partners' support for Inuit affected by violence. It also was exciting to think about a model that might be of use to other Inuit and non-Inuit organizations.

We were reminded of the power of conversation. The Advisory Committee and stakeholder meetings brought together a rich mix of lived experience, practice-based knowledge and a willingness to listen and learn.

We realized that it was not easy to recruit Inuit to be a part of the project. Some individuals were actively dealing with the violence they were experiencing – trying to support their children while seeking help for themselves, moving homes and schools and in some cases going through the court system. Other women involved with the centre weren't at a place where they identified gender-based violence in their lives and others did not want to be identified as survivors of abuse.

While there was a readiness to form partnerships for cross-referral of clients and training exchanges, it was more difficult to engage the agencies in project activities due to our heavy workloads and busy schedules. This engagement would become a bigger priority in 2020.