

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

Early 2020

An Advisory Committee meeting was held in February at an Inuuqatigiit Centre office. Participants noted the welcoming feeling of being at the Inuuqatigiit Centre building. The Stakeholder Report Feedback & Recommendations that came from the Stakeholder meeting at the end of 2019 were shared with the group.

3 priorities for 2020 came out of that meeting. They included:

1. Focusing on preventing gender-based violence affecting Inuit by Including men, youth, and Elders voices, working together, in collaboration, for this common cause and promoting Inuktitut language and terminology.
2. Supporting Inuit affected by GBV by providing space for knowledge sharing, encouraging relationship building (internal and external – with clients and partners), focusing on strengths and positives and more fun events for social networking.
3. Promotion of Inuit culture and language by being educated on distinct culture, creating and continuing partnerships with both mainstream and pan-aboriginal organizations and more cultural sensitivity trainings.

The Beginning of a Covid World

Unfortunately, just following that wonderful Stakeholder Meeting everything changed. 2020 will be remembered in history as a difficult year for everyone with the Inuuqatigiit Centre and the GBV project are no exception. In March of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced the shut down and stay at home orders for everyone that wasn't considered essential. The Inuuqatigiit Centre staff began working from home and many of the dynamics of the project were forced to change as a result.

Due to the pandemic, the Project Analyst needed to relocate to support family and left her position working on the project. This absence, along with all of the uncertainty the pandemic caused provided a whole new set of challenges for the project. Advisory Committee meetings and Stakeholder meetings could no longer be held in person, participants were more difficult to have contact with, all meetings needed to be done virtually or over the phone and training would need to be adapted to an online platform. Prior to being able to address all of those barriers, the health and well-being of Inuuqatigiit Centre clients, staff, community members and partners were the first priority.

Finding our New Normal

In October of 2020 a Well-Being and Gender-Based Violence Coordinator was hired to work alongside the Inuit Lead for the project. Both continued working from home and finding ways to adapt to ensure the goals of the project were still being met.

During December of 2020 an Advisory Committee meeting was held virtually. This meeting was the first time the Advisory Committee was able to gather since the pandemic started. Many project partners that are front line workers were exhausted from doing their very best to support their clients through the various struggles Covid caused on top of their already difficult work. The meeting provided an opportunity for the group to come back together, to share their challenges and to re-focus on the project.

Year 2 - What we Learned

We learned very quickly that basic needs needed to come first. At times, GBV project staff would pivot from regular project work to helping deliver food or gift cards to families struggling or covering for sick staff so families could continue to have access visits. Maintaining these basic needs became more and more difficult for the families Inuuqatigiit Centre was supporting as the pandemic continued and many of the families we support were struggling. At times, GBV project staff weren't focusing on the specifics of the project but worked collaboratively with other staff and departments to ensure the immediate needs of clients were met.

We learned that many of our partners were overwhelmed given the pandemic and that we would need to be supportive of them during this difficult time. We knew the patience and understanding that they may not have much time to devote to discussing the GBV project was pivotal in relationship building and ensuring partners kept their interest in the project.

We also learned new ways to plan important meetings such as Advisory Committee meetings and Cultural trainings. We got creative and took different approaches than we had used previously.