

**NWT Action Plan on Family Violence
2003 - 2008
Revised Final Draft**

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Prepared by the Coalition Against Family Violence

Acknowledgements

The NWT Action Plan on Family Violence 2003 – 2008 reflects the involvement of people who care about the future of individuals, families and communities within the NWT. The Coalition Against Family Violence gratefully acknowledges their contributions. The Coalition would also like to thank the members of the NWT Action Plan Against Family Violence Steering Committee for their guidance, dedication and commitment, and to the project co-ordinators for their hard work putting the Action Plan together.

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Steering Committee Members:

- Marsha Argue, Status of Women Council of the NWT
- Barbara Saunders, Status of Women Council of the NWT
- Karen Willy, Health and Social Services, GNWT
- Lucy Austin, Justice, GNWT
- Audrey Zoe, Native Women's Association of the NWT
- Sandra Suliman, Inuvik Regional Health and Social Services Board
- Ann Kasook, Inuvik Transition House Society
- Bertha Norwegian, Executive, GNWT
- Cpl. Charlotte Joa and Cpl. James Buhler, RCMP
- Carolyn Zielke, Dogrib Community Services Board
- Val Liske, Women & Children's Healing and Recovery Program (YWCA of Yellowknife/Yellowknife Women's Centre)

Project Coordinators:

- Sandy Auchterlonie and Lois Little, Lutra Associates Ltd.

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Message from the Coalition Against Family Violence

On behalf of the Coalition Against Family Violence, I am pleased to present the NWT Action Plan on Family Violence (2003-2008).

Over the past twenty years, research and discussion have shown that family violence in the north is pervasive and complex, and system-wide action is required to combat it. This Action Plan is based on recommendations from all this research along with territory-wide consultations with front line workers, government departments, community groups and the RCMP. The cooperation, collaboration and commitment to developing this Action Plan are reflected in the attached Protocol Agreement signed by electoral leaders from across the NWT.

Like the roots of a tree, the causes of family violence are complex. Working to end the violence requires a multi-dimensional approach – protecting, supporting and educating on one hand and working to change the systems that feed the violence on the other. By working together - men and women, governments and society - in a coordinated way, we can improve the response to and prevent family violence.

This Action Plan is meant to accomplish this in a coordinated way. It strengthens existing programs, supports new initiatives and seeks change in social policy development. The Plan includes 25 actions with target groups, expected outcomes, implementation responsibilities and complementary initiatives. It calls for regular monitoring and reporting on all actions.

The development of capacity to most efficiently ensure that the Action Plan is implemented requires the same multi-dimensional involvement. The Coalition has had lengthy discussions about the key elements needed to most efficiently ensure the actions in the Plan are implemented, monitored and accounted for.

In the next few months discussions and consultations will be held to determine the best means to efficiently ensure the actions within the Action Plan become a reality. It is the Coalition's commitment to act and we invite you to work with us.

Barbara Saunders
Chair, Coalition Against Family Violence

Executive Summary

Family violence¹ in the NWT is serious and complex problem. It exists in all communities and in all types of families. For the most part, family violence stems from the abuse of power and inequities in intimate, kinship or dependent relationships.

The NWT Action Plan on Family Violence was developed by the Coalition Against Family Violence. NWT leaders, government and non-government organizations, Aboriginal organizations and community-based groups participated in, and supported the development of the Action Plan.

The NWT Action Plan on Family Violence (2003-2008) takes a system-wide, multi-sectoral approach to family violence. The Plan describes the actions required in all sectors over the next five years to prevent and respond to family violence. It focuses on realistic, doable actions that foster coordination, and strengthen and support existing initiatives to address family violence.

The NWT Action Plan describes 25 actions in eight broad areas.

1) Policy and Legislation

Policy and legislation actions will help all levels of government and non-government organizations improve their response to family violence.

These actions include:

- Reviewing policies and legislation to make sure they work together (not against one another).
- Developing family violence legislation to help support victims of family violence and their dependents.

2) Working Together

These actions will help people, organizations, governments and community groups work together to address and prevent family violence.

These actions include:

¹ Family violence is a term that includes the many different forms of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that elders, adults, youth, or children may experience in their intimate, family, extended family or dependent relationships.

- Developing and supporting agreements/arrangements for groups/organizations to better work together.

3) Capacity Building

This action calls for community-driven demonstration projects to heal, build and strengthen healthy family relationships and develop healthy, caring communities.

4) Training

Training actions will help front-line workers and community caregivers improve their knowledge and skills. These actions include:

- Delivering sensitivity and emergency response training.
- Delivering training on family violence legislation and policies.
- Developing community-based group facilitation and leadership skills.

5) Prevention

Building healthy and respectful family and dependent relationships are key to stopping family violence. Prevention actions include:

- Community programs/activities that help develop and support healthy relationships (e.g. between adults, children, youth and elders).

6) Education and Awareness

Raising awareness of family violence and how it affects people, families and communities is a first step in breaking the cycle of violence. Raising awareness of help available for victims, abusers and their families will also help break the cycle. Education and awareness actions include:

- Education and awareness campaigns for the general public as well as front-line and other workers.
- Continuing successful awareness activities such as Family Violence Awareness Week.

7) Services

Services are needed to heal and support victims and abusers. Services actions include:

- Continuing and expanding existing family violence services including shelters.
- Developing programs and services for men who abuse.
- Improving services for children who are victims of family violence.

8) Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

Monitoring, evaluation and accountability actions will help people see how the Plan is working and whether it is making a difference.

Over the next five years, the Coalition Against Family Violence expects measurable progress toward improving the response to and preventing family violence in the NWT. The outcomes expected from the 25 actions contained in the Action Plan will show this progress.

Next Steps

Most of the 25 actions in the Action Plan need resources that have yet to be determined or secured. While each action contains implementation details, a process for moving on these actions has not yet been agreed to. An organization/group to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan is also needed to ensure monitoring, reporting and accountability to the public. These three elements – resources, an implementation process and an organization/group to oversee implementation – are critical to the success of the Action Plan.

The Coalition has considered possible ways to put these elements in place while recognizing that the primary responsibility for addressing many of the actions rests with the GNWT. With the help of northerners, the Coalition is committed to moving the Action Plan forward.

1. About the Action Plan

At the beginning of 2003, there is little visible evidence of system-wide efforts to address the serious problem of family violence² in the NWT. No specific strategies or legislation, few dedicated resources, and few programs and services are available to respond to and prevent family violence.

The NWT Action Plan on Family Violence (2003-2008) takes a system-wide, multi-sectoral approach to family violence. The Plan links a variety of public strategies and program initiatives and makes family violence a consideration in the development and implementation of every public policy and program. The Plan describes the actions required in all sectors over the next five years to prevent and respond to family violence. It focuses on realistic, doable actions that foster coordination, and strengthen and support existing initiatives to address family violence. It calls for regular monitoring/evaluation and reporting on all actions. This will ensure that northerners are kept informed of the progress being made, and the changes needed to overcome the complex and pervasive problem of family violence in the NWT.

The NWT Action Plan on Family Violence was developed by a multi-sector steering committee of the Coalition Against Family Violence. Members of the steering committee come from the:

- Status of Women Council of the NWT,
- Health and Social Services, Government of the Northwest Territories,
- Justice, Government of the Northwest Territories,
- Native Women's Association of the NWT,
- Inuvik Transition House Society,
- Executive, Government of the Northwest Territories,
- RCMP,
- Dogrib Community Services Board,
- Inuvik Regional Health and Social Services Board, and
- YWCA of Yellowknife.

² Family violence is a term that includes the many different forms of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that elders, adults, youth or children may experience in their intimate, family, extended family or dependent relationships.

NWT leaders, government and non-government organizations, Aboriginal organizations and community-based groups participated in, and supported the development of the Action Plan. Planning activities were supported by:

- § a newsletter introducing the Action Plan and the Coalition Against Family Violence and distributed to 600 agencies and organizations across the NWT.
- § the signatures of 32 NWT leaders on a Protocol Agreement supporting the development of the Action Plan.
- § briefings to and exchanges with senior managers in the Government of the Northwest Territories.
- § distribution of a summary of potential actions drawn from northern and southern research on family violence, including the Coalition Against Family Violence's research report, **Family Violence in the NWT – A Survey of Costs, Services, Data Collection and Issues for Action** (December 2002).
- § consultations with a range of groups in various sectors to identify priority actions for, and contributions to the Action Plan.
- § a review of relevant social strategies, plans and program initiatives proposed by various organizations in the NWT.
- § an NWT-wide multi-sector workshop to review and analyze a preliminary Action Plan.
- § a newsletter describing the Action Plan to 600 agencies and organizations across the NWT.

This Action Plan includes 25 actions. Each action is described by: its target, activities, outcomes, completion date, partners and resources required to implement it. Actions are organized into eight broad categories:

1. Policy and Legislation,
2. Working Together,
3. Capacity Building,
4. Training,
5. Prevention,
6. Education and Awareness,
7. Services, and
8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability.

2. Why Does the NWT Need an Action Plan on Family Violence?

Family violence in the NWT is a serious and complicated problem. It exists in all communities and in all types of families. Women, men, children, youth and elders can be victims of family violence. Individuals dependent on others for social and/or economic security are most susceptible to victimization. These individuals tend to be women, elders, children and persons with disability. Most acts of violence are taken by men and directed at women. Aboriginal women experience high levels of violence.³ Young women are the most vulnerable to spousal assault, spousal homicide and sexual assault. Adult male children and/or spouses are typically the perpetrators of violence against elderly women.

For the most part, family violence stems from the abuse of power and inequities in intimate, kinship or dependent relationships. The reasons that perpetrators of family violence prey on more vulnerable or weaker members of their families are complex. Factors that contribute to family violence include racism, pressures associated with changing lifestyles, public policies/practices, societal attitudes and values, poverty, addictions, unresolved family conflict, a family history of violence and trauma and abuses experienced by Aboriginal peoples through residential schools and at the hands of other colonial administrators.

NWT society tends to tolerate and condone a certain level of abuse and violence within families and communities. Unequal treatment or the lack of respect or value accorded to elders, women and other family and community members is evidence of this. Family violence affects all family members. It affects individual health and well-being. It damages self-esteem and is a reason for guilt, shame, fear, isolation, neglect and self-destructive behaviours. It causes injury and death. The impact of family violence is evident throughout the north - in schools, shelters, jails, hospitals, drug and alcohol treatment centres, foster care homes, and in the workplace. Family violence follows a cycle that is difficult to break -

³ In Canada, spousal homicide rates of Aboriginal women are more than eight times the rate for non-Aboriginal women. Status of Women Canada news release issued December 3, 2002 www.swc-cgc.gc.ca/newsroom/news2002

children who are victims or witness abuse are more likely than others to become victims or abusers themselves.

Most acts of family violence are not reported. Victims of violence tend to suffer in silence for economic, family, cultural or personal reasons. Even though the real extent of family violence in the NWT is unknown, the following snapshot based on reported incidents, indicates an alarmingly high incidence. In the 12 months, between April 2000 and March 2001:

- more than 600 women and children entered family violence shelters in the NWT.
- more than 400 spousal assaults were reported to the RCMP.
- 24 children (under 12 years of age) were sexually abused and 16 were physically abused.
- 50 youth (12 to 18 years of age) were sexually abused and 58 were physically abused.

Since 2000, child protection workers have investigated 350 suspected cases of child sexual abuse. In 2001, 90 cases of STDs were reported among children 12-15 years of age.

The problem of family violence persists despite various government and community initiatives over the past 20 years to combat it. These initiatives include the:

- GNWT action plan “*Choices*” – *A Three Year Action Plan to Address Spousal Assault, 1986 – 89.*
- many family violence conferences including a territorial-wide Family Violence Conference held in Yellowknife in March 1988 and another in Rae-Edzo.
- 1993 GNWT discussion paper “*Building a Strategy for Dealing with Violence in the N.W.T.*”
- NWT Legislative Assembly’s adoption in 1994, of the principle of zero tolerance of violence against all people and the endorsement of the goal of eliminating family violence by the year 2000.
- support, in writing, from NWT communities and band councils for the Legislative Assembly’s principle of zero tolerance.
- many family violence awareness and prevention activities undertaken by the Status of Women Council of the NWT, the Native Women’s Association of the NWT and many community organizations.

3. Vision and Principles

The Vision

The Coalition Against Family Violence envisions a peaceful, equitable society where all Territorial residents, as individuals, members of families, communities, organizations or governments are valued, respected, safe and free from the abuse of power and inequalities in intimate, family or dependent relationships.

The Coalition Against Family Violence sees this NWT Action Plan on Family Violence working toward this vision. The guiding principles provide the framework for implementing the actions in the Plan, and providing the criteria for assessing progress.

The Guiding Principles

1. Any form of violence or abuse in intimate, family, extended family or dependent relationships, including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial, spiritual and cultural, is unacceptable.
2. Acknowledging the imbalances of power in society as the root cause of family violence empowers individuals, families and communities to help break the cycle of family violence.
3. It is important to raise awareness and educate all Territorial residents about the many different forms of family violence.
4. All individuals have the right to a safe and secure environment, respect and dignity.
5. No individual is less valuable or worthy than another by virtue of age, gender, race, physical or mental ability, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, culture, spirituality or ethnic origin.
6. All individuals, whether victims, witnesses, survivors or perpetrators of family violence, are entitled to accessible and

- appropriate high quality service and information that are respectful, sensitive and confidential.
7. Eliminating family violence and promoting positive family relationships is in the best interests of all Territorial residents as individuals, members of families, communities, organizations or governments.
 8. It is a shared responsibility of all Territorial residents to take action against and prevent family violence.
 9. Family violence solutions are holistic, culturally and spiritually appropriate and consider the individual in the context of the family, the family in the context of the community, and the community in the context of the larger society.
 10. System-wide cooperation is essential to breaking the cycle of family violence.

4. The Action Plan

The Coalition Against Family Violence has identified 25 actions in eight (8) general areas that would improve the response to, and prevent family violence in the NWT. A summary table highlights these actions that are described in detail in Appendix A.