

# Project Assessment



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It started with a vision to create a safe and healthy community; find out how members pulled together to find solutions to address their challenges.

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## WATSON LAKE Community Wellness Initiative

### INTRODUCTION

A great deal of interest has been expressed by municipalities and First Nation governments in the Yukon, as well as the Yukon Government and the National Crime Prevention Centre, around the development of the *Watson Lake Community Wellness Initiative*.

In order to capture and to share this grassroots knowledge and experience across the north and Canada, the National Crime Prevention Centre hired a consultant to conduct confidential interviews with those who had been involved with the initiative to document and assess their progress.

This report is based on the following series of semi-structured interview questions conducted between October 2005 - January 2006:

- ◆ Why the initiative started.
- ◆ What steps and actions have been taken to date.
- ◆ What challenges have been faced & what has been learned with respect to the process.
- ◆ How best to move the process forward.
- ◆ What are the transferable lessons from this process.

The report's main goal was to document the Wellness Initiative's process and to outline its strengths and challenges – defined by the community members who were interviewed.. It is hoped that other communities can learn and share similar experiences.

This report has 4 sections:

**1.0 The Setting** outlines the point in history when the Initiative began.

**2.0 Steps & Actions** capture the process of the Initiative & the events which fostered its growth

**3.0 Interview Summary** summarizes strengths, challenges and lessons learned.

**4.0 Points for Consideration** are key questions raised for the Wellness Committee and its partners to address.

*This Assessment was funded by the National Crime Prevention Center (NCPC). The interviews conducted, research compiled and report written was completed by James L. Wood, a Community Development contractor.*

*“For 20 years Health and Social Services along with Interagency groups have been working towards the health of Watson Lake, but it was professionals telling people what they need as opposed to the community guiding the professionals; it needs to be a descriptive not a prescriptive approach, and that’s what the Wellness Committee is doing, from the grassroots up.”*

*Interview Participant*



*Left – Right: Denis Ryan, ???, Andy Sibbald, Sharon Miller, ???, Shona Cardiga, at the ??? Event*

*“We work collaborative with individuals and groups to promote and sustain community wellness, support the people who live here, and create opportunities for healing and treatment”*

*Mission Statement  
Watson Lake Community Wellness Committee*

## 1.0 THE SETTING

In early 2000, Watson Lake and the surrounding communities were increasingly becoming a community in social crisis. The incidents of break and enters, public fights with drinking and family violence were increasing. In 2002, a high profile family abuse case involving the Chief of the Liard First Nation escalated the crisis and focused attention on the community. This public awareness set the stage for the *Watson Lake Community Wellness Initiative* (Wellness Initiative) to begin.

At a court hearing in October 2003, a B.C. Provincial Court judge requested the First Nation handle this case internally. With the community of Watson Lake already in crisis, and now dealing with the high profile abuse case, the First Nation community along with the *Liard Aboriginal Women's Society* (LAWS) rebuffed the offer stating that the First Nation was not currently capable of handling such a case locally. They strongly suggested that handling the case at the local level would seriously put at-risk many women and anyone who may choose to speak out against the accused and the epidemic community violence; equality of voice was not present in the community, and many members did not feel safe in speaking out. Spousal assaults rates in Watson Lake were very high,. With 5% of the Yukon's population, in 2002, Watson Lake reported 20% of the Yukon's spousal assaults. Between 1997-2001, the spousal assault rate in Watson Lake averaged 16% of the total number reported in the Yukon. Having heard these concerns, the court referred the case back to the B.C. Provincial Court system which handed down a sentence to the accused and ordered a Family Violence Conference by February 2004 to assist in addressing the crisis. LAWS was instrumental in this process.

*"Report on Watson Lake Community Meeting, August 22, 2003", Department of Justice, YTG.*

## 2.0 STEPS & ACTIONS

The events which took place that fostered the growth of the Wellness Initiative and its successes to date cannot simply be outlined for other communities to follow and replicate as the information from interviews conducted outlined the importance of particular (unique?) local situations and people that allowed a space for growth and positive events to unfold. However, the interviews suggest that there were key ingredients in each step that assisted the process. These transferability points will be outlined in section 4. *Points for Consideration* in order that other communities can work from and test locally.(adjust when finalized)

### **August 22, 2003 Community Meeting...**

In the summer of 2003, the Premier, as the MLA for Watson Lake, and the Minister of Justice's office received a number of justice-related complaints from Watson Lake residents (or citizens?). In response, on August 22, 2003, a meeting was held at the Watson Lake Recreation Centre attended by the Premier, the Minister of Health and Social Services and the Minister of Justice to hear first hand the community's concerns. Senior members of the RCMP and officials from a number of Yukon Government? Need to confirm proper name here) departments were in attendance as well. The meeting was very well attended with about 75 people present during the day and continued into the evening to allow business people an opportunity for input. The meeting provided a forum where residents could voice their concerns regarding issues within the community or make written comments.

*It was acknowledged that there is no easy answer. The Yukon government departments involved were there to listen and review options that may assist the community. It was agreed that this initial meeting would not cure the problems facing Watson Lake but was an opportunity to bring people together to voice their opinions.*

# Key Issues Raised

## August 22, 2003 Community meeting

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### ***...high incidents of domestic and family violence.***

“There are children who are afraid to go home and who have no where else to go so they remain on the streets late at night. Children show up for school hungry...the community needs additional counseling services and a greater capacity for health workers to visit homes.”

### ***...alcohol and drug abuse is on the rise in both youth and adults.***

“This results in abusive behaviour and dysfunctional families. People are spending money on alcohol and drugs instead of supporting their families. Concern was expressed about the drinking, driving and inappropriate behaviour exhibited at closing time at the local hotels...local RCMP did not have enough members to control this situation.”

### ***...Vandalism and “break-ins” have increased***

“...into local businesses as well as property crimes have increased. This is costing store owners and private citizens additional money for security measures and higher insurance premiums...[and] the negative effect this is having on tourism and on the community as a whole.”

### ***...not adequate policing resources assigned to the area.***

“Incidents in Lower Post require the attention of the RCMP, leaving Watson Lake open. There was interest in a greater police presence at all times.”

### ***...Volunteers in the community are “volunteered” out.***

### ***...not enough family support workers.***

“More workers are needed... The ones they do have are exhausted from their heavy workload and are stressed.”

### ***...The Youth Criminal Justice Act was felt to be inadequate...***

“there is a perception that youth can do anything they want and that the Act protects them; that the RCMP could not charge the youth and therefore criminal activities continued. People want more punishment for those youth committing crimes and want them to be held responsible... [and] ...the court process was too long...only convened once a month, if not cancelled...”

### ***...economy of Watson Lake is at an all time low.***

“There are no new jobs and no new prospects. [Need] some economic progress... People need to work...Right now, parents can't afford to give their children money for entertainment so they hang out in the streets.”

### ***...school funding is not always available***

“While there are some good programs in the schools, funding is not always available to ensure that programs continue. Different programs are required for those students who are not good at academics.”

### ***...youth counselors [needed].***

“There needs to be more extra-curricular programming for teens to get them off the street... expensive for youth to go to the Recreation Centre.”

Community members presented their concerns in the following areas: *RCMP, economic problems, the Criminal Justice system and by-law enforcement*. Four groups were initiated to look at and discuss the following topics: *domestic and family violence, court process, alcohol and drug issues, vandalism, social services, RCMP response, youth and Yukon Criminal Justice Act and economic issues* (See “Key Issues Raised”, left page).

“On the positive side the community spoke about the need to see things change. They talked about how they are pulling together to find the solutions that are required to address the challenges facing them. They want to build a safe and healthy community and are prepared to, both individually and collectively, invest in their town.”

“*Report on Watson Lake Community Meeting, August 22, 2003*”, Department of Justice, YTG.

The meeting ended with a commitment from YTG to complete a written report of the meeting which, in November, was printed and 150 copies distributed in Watson Lake. The “*Report on Watson Lake Community Meetings, August 22, 2003*” is available from Yukon Justice.

This meeting was a catalyst for the eventual coming together of the *Watson Lake Community Wellness Committee* as it publicly broke the silence on the social issues that were affecting Watson Lake. And the progress did not stop there. In October 2003, YTG’s Department of Justice met with community groups and leaders about what they would like to see accomplished at the next community meeting.

While community members and government continued to work towards positive changes coming out of these meeting, one key ingredient cannot be overlooked — Sharon Miller, a local resident, decided to quit her job at the Recreation Center and run for Town Council with only one issue on her campaign: the safety of Watson Lake. Sharon felt that if there was a strong voice on Town Council along with direct participation in the planning of continued positive

action towards safety and wellness of Watson Lake, more powerful outcomes could be accomplished

In order to effectively plan future actions, YTG organized meetings within its own government departments and with the RCMP located in Whitehorse. These key meetings began in November 2003 and assisted in co-ordinating YTG’s efforts in planning around the issues raised at the August 22, 2003 community meeting. Collaboration within YTG was crucial step.

Out of these events spawned an informal “*Safety and Wellness Committee*” while newly elected Town Councillor Sharon Miller quickly began her campaign promise and contacted Justice officials to discuss the next community meeting. Having an elected Town Councillor was a very important step in gaining awareness and resources throughout Watson Lake.

In order to achieve true partnership with First Nation involvement during the formalizing of the “*Safety and Wellness Committee*”, YTG Justice officials sent a letter in December 2003 to the Liard First Nation (LFN) inviting the First Nation to appoint a representative to co-chair the community wellness committee

### **Safety & Wellness Committee meeting...**

YTG’s Justice Department met with LFN and Town Council representatives on January 19th to jointly plan the agenda and objectives for a January 24th *Safety and Wellness Committee* meeting. Options for follow-up meetings and planning for on-going community processes were also discussed which was another key ingredient to support future actions.

Officials from YTG’s Departments of Justice, Health and Social Services, Education, and the Women’s Directorate, along with the Yukon Liquor Corp., the RCMP, LFN Chief Liard McMillan, the Town of Watson Lake Mayor Richard Durocher and 60 community members were in attendance.

# Safety

## Breaking the Silence on Family Violence: Watson Lake Conference

### **Conference GOALS**

To promote and provide services intended to prevent violence against women and children.

### **Conference OBJECTIVES**

To provide awareness and education to the communities on the issue of family violence through workshops and open discussion, and to open doors to community members to stop family violence from happening.

## **PROJECT IMPACTS :**

### **Developing Partnerships**

The steering committee provided an opportunity to develop partnerships, and has planted a seed for collaboration in the community.

### **Stopping the Violence**

People looked at ways victims resist violence and were supported to report all violence and demand an end to it. A strength based approach of “honouring our resistance to violence,” promotes health/wellness in our families/communities, and helps get a better understanding of how to stop violence.

### **Supporting Healthy Relationships**

This type of conference and workshops was a first for many participants. They were surprised to know they are not alone, and requested more information and workshops about healthy relationships.

### **Public Awareness**

There was good participation in the conference from the local community and there is now a heightened awareness about services available to people experiencing family violence. Participants were empowered to take responsibility for ensuring a safe community and zero tolerance for violence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS :**

### **Find Common Ground**

Participants want to see their communities find common ground towards stopping the violence and want to be involved in additional community efforts.

### **Improve Collaboration**

Participants want continued improvement on positive communications and collaboration between and within people, the community and agencies, particularly with the leadership of politicians and service providers.

### **Increase Safe Community Events**

Participants want more community events, conferences, gatherings and workshops that foster safe, sober, and healthy activities for youth and elders with improved transportation and recognition of positive role models.

### **Improve Local Supports**

Participants want to see improved appropriate and local support services such as a treatment centre and support circles for men and youth. LAWS developed culturally appropriate ways towards moving people forward.

### **More Safety Education**

Participants want more public education and open discussions on Family Violence & Healthy Relationships utilizing strength based counseling and support.

Community members and government officials made presentations on progress made since the August meeting. Following the presentations, participants formed small working groups to begin brainstorming on future actions. The community indicated that another meeting to continue this planning would be needed and that they felt that a meeting of just community members would be beneficial; this outcome was yet another realization that it is in the best interest of the community to find local solutions by working together; the *Safety and Wellness Initiative* continued to grow.

### **'Breaking the Silence On Violence' Conference...**

The Kaska Tribal Council and Liard First Nation (LFN) along with an interagency steering committee, in accordance with the 2003 court order, hosted a Family Violence Awareness Conference called "Breaking the Silence on Family Violence: Watson Lake Conference" on February 10th – 12th, 2004. The conference was organized to allow people to bring information and awareness and to forward specific recommendations on how to prevent family violence in their community.

*"Finding answers to the problem takes a community effort, and the conference was a significant contribution towards making the community safe and healthy."*

*Breaking the Silence on Family Violence:  
Watson Lake Conference*

While the main goal of the Family Violence Conference was to promote and provide services intended to prevent violence against women and children, partnerships were strengthened among many prominent community members and agencies by their participation in the conference steering committee.

Approximately 100 people attended the Family Violence Conference and more than three-quarters of the participants were Kaska citizens. This was one of the first times that both First Nation and non-First Nation community members gathered and ate dinner together - a major step in breaking down the barriers.

*"...for too long the pervasive issue of sexual assault and violence against women and children in family relationships has been carefully avoided. Bringing people who live with violence out of isolation for education and support is a powerful tool for stopping the violence."*

*Breaking the Silence on Family Violence:  
Watson Lake Conference*

Presentations were given by the Victim Services/ Family Violence Prevention Unit, and Yukon Justice. Dr. Allen Wade, a counseling psychologist who works with residential school survivors, facilitated sessions on violence and safety. Additionally, both a Men's Talking Circle and a Women's Talking Circle were held for delegates.

On the third day, people were divided into small groups with facilitators for sessions on the topic "Stopping the Violence - The Next Step". In the plenary discussion, Dr. Allan Wade responded to questions and suggested recommendations on how to address violence and promote safety.

This event was seen to help to break down the isolation with elders, women and children as well as the separation of First Nation and non-First Nation. It was noted that when more people recognize, respond to and confront violent behaviour in families and relationships, the health of the community can improve.

Further action plans were created during this event and LFN and the Town of Watson Lake continued to work together towards creating a complete community action plan.

*"People attended the conference to learn how to make their homes & communities a safer place to live, to prevent suicide, and to recognize, confront and work to end racism, an underlying cause of violence. Participants wanted to break the silence of abuse, build healthy relationships, and stop the violence."*

*Breaking the Silence on Family Violence:  
Watson Lake Conference*

# Action

## Watson Lake Community Wellness Planning Snapshot: December '04

### **Communication:**

***Need to improve Communication both within organizations and among agencies in the general community.***

**Action Items include:** Communication Strategy; Watson Lake Community News; Watson Lake Resource Directory; Community Meetings; Justice Interagency Meetings; RCMP; Liard First Nation, Town of Watson Lake and Chamber of Commerce; coordinate funding requests; Watson Lake Radio station.

### **Family Violence Prevention:**

***Work to coordinate initiatives towards the prevention of family violence.***

**Action Items include:** Domestic Violence Treatment Option Court (DVTO); Women's & Men's Talking Circles; Develop culturally appropriate counseling for all ages; Anti-Violence Vigil; Training & Workshops; Identify safe places for men & elders

### **Substance Abuse Prevention:**

***Work towards a healthy community and the prevention of substance abuse.***

**Action Items include:** Prevent Alcohol & Risk Related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) Program; Community Awareness Campaign; Community Training; Prescription Drug Use; Develop a coordinated substance abuse prevention plan; Alcohol & Drug Services Worker and Treatment Center

### **Community Safety, Policing & Property Crime Prevention:**

***Work towards a safe community and the prevention of crimes.***

**Action Items include:** Citizens on Patrol (COPS); Block Parent Program; Community Reporting; RCMP Public Relations & Satellite offices; Auxiliary Constable Program; Neighborhood Watch; Kaska Cultural Awareness

### **Focus on Youth:**

***Create and coordinate healthy and positive opportunities for youth.***

**Action Items include:** Youth Counselor Position; Youth Recreation; Kaska Cultural Awareness Training for teachers; Town Council Youth Representatives; Healthy Families Program; Support for teen parents :Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA); Youth Association of Watson Lake; Youth transportation issue; Youth Recognition Program; Big Brother & Sisters

### **Community Participation:**

***Provide opportunity for all sectors of the Watson Lake community to contribute to community wellness.***

**Action Items include:** Community Forums; Planning Meetings; Terms of Reference; Invite Chamber to participate; Employer support; Acknowledge Community Members

### Action Planning...

On February 25th, 2004 LFN and the Town of Watson Lake planned and co-hosted a working meeting to continue on from the two community forums and the Family Violence Conference. This meeting was facilitated by a contractor from Whitehorse, hired by Yukon Justice at the request of the community. A number of action items resulted from that meeting including:

- ◆ The creation of a resource listing/directory;
- ◆ A community newsletter – combining efforts of the many social agencies who already produce a newsletter;
- ◆ A monthly workshop calendar; and
- ◆ Family Violence and Substance Abuse as priorities for social development.

*There is a new level of cooperation between the Town and LFN as well as between First Nations and non-First Nations. People are also taking responsibility for their own actions, and are getting involved with programs.*

*Community Member*

The next two community working meetings, facilitated by the contractor, were held March 17th and April 6th, where the community group continued to work on the issues identified at the February meeting.

These meetings guided the planning process in terms of how the community would take the process forward and what the purpose and structure of the planning group would be.

The group discussed plans to hold a larger community meeting and a dinner to update the community on their work to date, to have the community approve a Terms of Reference and to appoint representatives to this community planning group. This would be a way to have the larger community “mandate” a smaller working group to put a community wellness plan in place.

On April 16th there was an interdepartmental meeting held in Whitehorse to provide updates on the work each agency has been doing or planning to do with the community and on progress the community has made. This meeting included representatives from Health, Social Services, Justice, RCMP, Crown, DIAND, Yukon Liquor Corp., and the Cantung Mine Closure (ECO). YTG’s Education, Women’s Directorate and Youth Directorate also participate in this interdepartmental group.

Yukon Justice continued to work with and support the community in the development of their “*Community Wellness Plan*”. This continued institutional support is now seen as an essential part of the continued success.

At some point in the planning, the committee’s name changed from “*Safety and Wellness*” to “*Community Wellness*” and there has been some concerns raised that by dropping the word ‘*Safety*’ from the name, there may be a loss in focus on this key issue.

In May 2004, the *Community Wellness Committee* held several more planning meetings and drafted a **Terms of Reference** and an **Action Plan** for the group. On May 17th this group hosted a very successful community dinner attended by approximately 350 people. Following the dinner, a community meeting was held, where approximately 50 people attended to discuss the draft ‘Terms of Reference’, provide information on training needs, and sign up to volunteer for community events. The *Community Wellness Committee* met again on June 14th to finalize their ‘Terms of Reference’ and then took a summer break.

*“The beginning of a turn around began with the election of a new Town Council. Their leadership, the election of LFN Chief McMillan, and the work of the RCMP have been pivotal to enable the community to begin the critical process of moving forward.”*

*Community Member*

# Committee Actions

## ***Watson Lake News (on going)***

One of the first key issues the community identified was the lack of communication, so a monthly NewsLetter was launched. It was felt that only negative news is publicized and that this hurt the community; therefore one of the main goals was to publish 'good local news'.

## ***Watson Lake Community Wellness Resource Directory***

Another major issue was that there was no easy way to reach out and find all the social resources that are available when someone is looking for help. Yukon Justice, over the course of 18 months, assisted to develop our resource directory.

## ***Community Information & Celebration Dinners***

After the Committee's needs assessments was completed and action plans were drawn, the Committee document was released to the public at a dinner that was co-sponsored by Liard First Nation and the Town of Watson Lake. It was very well attended as the community is very interested in the Community Wellness Project.

## ***2 Windshield Campaigns (Alcohol & Drug Awareness)***

With 2 weeks notice we organized a February 14th awareness day. We baked 300 valentine cookies, decorated and wrapped to hand them out in front of the only post office in the center of town along with a bag full of alcohol and drug awareness information. The lunch time traffic flow is very heavy so we were able to reach a lot of people. This is now an annual event.

## ***Partnered on 2 Youth Appreciation & Celebration Nights at Ski Hill***

Successfully partnered with YTG's Victim Services and other agencies for 2 very successful 'Youth Appreciation & Celebration Night at the Ski Hill'; Liard First Nation supplies the transportation. These are educational events & the youth really enjoyed them; currently new ideas are in the works working.

## ***Youth Center Grand Opening & Appreciation Night***

The Youth Center's Grand Opening and Youth Appreciation nights were both hits with the prevention of substance abuse as a major theme, along with awareness information on date rape, sexual transmitted diseases and local community resources.

## ***Crystal Meth Awareness Day & an "Active Living & Wellness Fair" Community Dinner***

Presentations on Crystal Meth were completed at both schools and a Wellness Fair was put together with many agencies including YTG's Public Health and the Active Living Coordinator & Recreation Programmer. In the evening, the dinner included a film on Meth Awareness, the release of our Resource Directory, and the Grand Opening of the Youth Center.

## ***Organized a series of workshops with ADS***

Recently worked directly with YTG's Alcohol and Drug Services to bring in a series of 'Addictions' workshops that the community had been requesting.

## ***Partnered on youth camp at Francis Lake***

LAWS and the Wellness Committee worked with many agencies to produce a Youth Camp at Francis Lake. This was well attended by the youth as well as elders. There is talk about continuing this project.

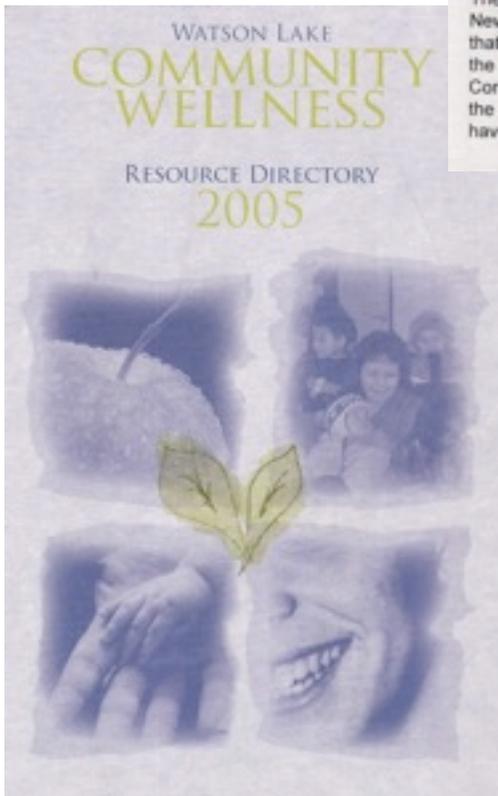
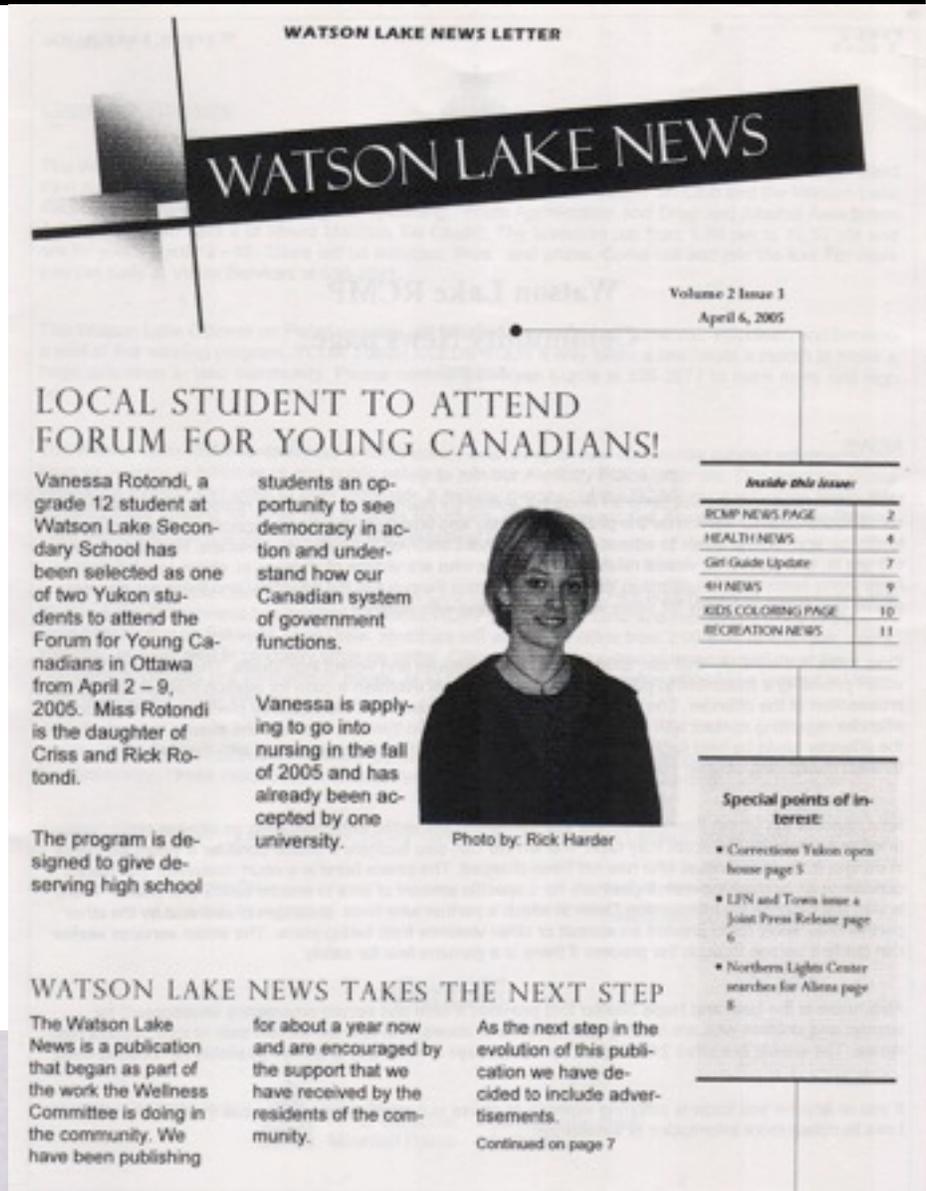
## ***Secured funding for this Community Wellness Project***

Worked with National Crime Prevention Center to secure funding for the Wellness Project for a part time coordinator position and an office space at the local Recreation Center in order to coordinate the activities of the committee and further their work on their identified priorities. Both the Liard First Nation and the Town of Watson Lake continue to work together and provide leadership in supporting the Wellness Initiative.

**Actions begin to flourish...**

In September 2005, the *Community Wellness Committee* began to meet on a regular basis. Some of the projects and key accomplishments over the past year are outlined on the left side of the page.

From the early 2000s – at the time of increasing community crisis evidenced by the incidents of break and enters, public fights with drinking, family violence, and the high profile family abuse case against the Chief of the Liard First Nation – the *Community Wellness Committee* has done much to increase the safety and well-being of Watson Lake and the surrounding communities.



*“It’s gratifying to actually be able to see the good impact that our working together has generated, it gives a sense of empowerment that enables us to continue forward with the work of the Committee.”*

**Mayor Richard Durocher**  
*Town of Watson Lake*

# Solutions by Youth

**During the week of December 7-11, 2004, Dr. Allan Wade spent some time in the high school talking to the youth about what they felt Watson Lake needed in order to become a safer community. Here is what the Youth in W.L. see as solutions...**

## **Grade 8 Youth**

- ♦ *Need a detox and treatment center*
- ♦ *Need to educate youth and adults more about drugs and alcohol use and violence*
- ♦ *Need youth counselors; More people besides teachers to talk to*
- ♦ *Need block parent houses*
- ♦ *More safer homes to go to*
- ♦ *Need a small transit system*
- ♦ *Youth need to make positive connections with those in authority so help can be accessed*
- ♦ *Limit the amount of alcohol able to buy a day*
- ♦ *Put breathalyzers in the bars, take keys away, offer free cabs to drunks*
- ♦ *Less drugs in our homes...parents*
- ♦ *Separate the clinic and the pharmacy*
- ♦ *Raise legal liquor age*
- ♦ *Heavier fines, law enforcement & policing*
- ♦ *More native police, more police dogs*
- ♦ *Advertise the help lines*
- ♦ *More fun teen events*
- ♦ *More part time jobs for youth*

## **Grade 10 Youth**

- ♦ *Need a detox center*
- ♦ *Need to listen to youth*
- ♦ *Get the coke dealers*
- ♦ *Need better policing*
- ♦ *There is a feeling that things will never change*
- ♦ *We need more street lighting*
- ♦ *Need pay-phones at Lucky Lake and the skateboard park*
- ♦ *Need a safe house and youth center*
- ♦ *Need to stop vandalism*
- ♦ *The youth need someone to talk to*
- ♦ *Need warm clothing for those who need it*
- ♦ *Need a warm up shack half way to 2-mile*
- ♦ *Need a soup kitchen*
- ♦ *Adults and those in authority need to be more open minded and less judgmental*
- ♦ *Stop the sexual abuse, girls need self defense training; need to know how to use pepper spray*
- ♦ *Town curfew*



### Youth raise their voices...

In a project of this magnitude, all sectors of a community must be heard. The youth are no exception; they play a large and pivotal roll in the *safety* and *wellness* of Watson Lake. According to Dr. Allan Wade – violence councilor, researcher & facilitator – the level of violence in Watson Lake was epidemic, mental and physical health was highly misdiagnosed and often ‘cured’ with drugs, and the justice approach was mis-focused. Therefore, during the week of December 7-11, 2004, he spent some time in the high school talking to the youth about what they felt Watson Lake needed in order to become a safer community. Many of their responses came as a surprise to the *Wellness Committee* which quickly integrated these solutions (outlined on left page) into their work plan.

*“When adults decide what is best for youth, often we get it wrong. When adults respect the voices of youth enough to listen and hear the concerns and solutions of the youth, often the outcomes are quite different and more effective.”*

*“In Watson Lake, this proved to be true. Some of the solutions offered by the Youth were quite obvious, yet adult planners had missed them in their original planning. Also, some concerns would never have been raised if the Youth had not had a forum to raise their voices and been accounted for.”*

*Dr. Allen Wade – Youth Facilitator*

In the Elementary school, the negative effects from the problems facing Watson Lake were also showing up, yet in many ways they were improperly addressed by the school. By joining the Wellness Committee and gaining a better understanding of the issues and collective responses, more informed educational solutions were utilized.

*“Violence happens behind closed doors & was showing up as a learning disability; the Wellness Committee has opened my eyes & changed the way we approach education”*

*Denis Ryan, Elementary Principal*

### 3.0

#### INTERVIEW SUMMARY

In the next section, the strengths, challenges and lessons learned of the *Watson Lake Wellness Initiative* will be summarized and discussed based on the interviews. This summary does *not* reflect the opinion of the author, rather it attempts to outline the key points made by the interviewed parties.

# Strengths & Challenges

## STRENGTHS

- ◆ Community spoke out and asked for assistance: realized there were problems that they couldn't solve themselves and they chose not to ignore them
- ◆ Government mobilized from a variety of sectors to support the community's request for assistance. Gave government departments a basis to work together
- ◆ Leadership in the community took ownership and took steps to work together (Town & LFN)
- ◆ Community took immediate ownership of issues and process
- ◆ Community was willing to both accept responsibility and also accept support
- ◆ Government supported the community process in a variety of ways including providing a facilitator, helping to plan meetings, and addressing raised community concerns.
- ◆ Community identified a variety of issues to work on, some of which could be dealt with quickly generating early successes
- ◆ Relationships and trust have been built and strengthened
- ◆ 1st bilateral YTG / Kaska agreement signed; 2nd cooperation Town / LFN agreement
- ◆ Youth events have been very successful to engage Youth
- ◆ Have been meeting for a couple years now sticking with it with many of the same faces.
- ◆ The foundation built makes it easier to do future and further work (ie: planning other events with the committee already developed is easier – the relationships and communication exist)
- ◆ Discussion on a 2nd family violence conference: continue to focus on the issues identified
- ◆ Governments have a reason & direction to continue to work with & support local initiatives
- ◆ Action plan being addressed and worked on at a local pace

## CHALLENGES

- ◆ The issues that the community needs to address (and has identified in their plans) are very serious and complicated issues and could take generations to address.
- ◆ Hard to embed this work in to existing jobs and work of committee members; how does it not become something in addition to their job?
- ◆ Making sure you have representative groups and the right people at the table and continue to be engaged
- ◆ Small community and these issues are hard for community members to address, especially with many family and close connections
- ◆ Leadership changes, and for those supporting, it is hard to know when to push and when to support, when to lead and when to wait for the requests.
- ◆ Cost – community needs to have someone coordinating this work, either through a facilitator, a government person supporting and/or a coordinator.
- ◆ Time consuming – lots of effort needs to be put in to building and maintaining relationships
- ◆ Making sure the right people and groups are at the table and continue to be engaged
- ◆ Continuing to focus on the tough issues and make impact in these areas
- ◆ Finding ways to consistently support the community in a coordinated way locally and with Government and other “Whitehorse services”
- ◆ Volunteer and committee member burn-out
- ◆ Change in Governments at all levels could affect this process
- ◆ Integrating action plan & priority areas into other levels of community and agency plans

### 3.0 INTERVIEW SUMMARY

In every project, it is helpful to guide future actions by looking at how and why a project started, what it has accomplished or not, and where it is headed. The *Watson Lake Wellness Committee* had not formally documented or evaluated their progress as their focus has been on getting organized and staying active.

The interview process was a success in and of itself as it allowed many community members to explain just how powerful of a movement this process has been for them; many mentioned how easy it is to forget the small steps that help create the overall success, and they get bogged down with set backs. What is truly outstanding is how easily and honestly members have learned to acknowledge the local issues and see them as opportunities to work from; rather than focusing on what is not working, they have created a positive response action plan about the possibilities within their community.

Amazingly, the Wellness Committee is not defeated or beaten down by the many set backs they encounter; rather they acknowledge the small steps and victories that continue to cause members to feel empowered and they communicate these through their local newsletter and local events which helps to keep their ideas and work plans moving forward.

With the ownership of the process at a local level guided by community members who are committed to working towards wellness and safety of their community, this has caused the right combination of people, players and events. This was not a formalized process, or a 10 step plan; it grew up locally from the grassroots without a formal plan, it started from passion, commitment and love of their community with variety in its membership. Engaging members from the grassroots up has given power to the movement.



Local resources and people are driving this process forward, governments are asking the community how they can assist, and no one is grandstanding their personal agendas; rather, it is a love of the community that drives individuals to join. Relationships are being built and trust is increasing.

There is also a clear recognition that the social concerns were affecting the economy and that to invest in social needs, education and awareness is essential to a healthy local economy and community. When Town Council took 'Wellness' as their own local process and issue to work on – not as a dependent relationship with Federal and Territorial governments to take forward the process and responsibility – this created a shift in philosophy and ownership of their own destiny.

The many positive family fun events are instrumental to building strong trusting relationships. The most important factor in this initiative is that it is a local process, and the community recognized that they can help themselves by acknowledging their issues, and that solutions are within their own reach. Challenges are viewed as opportunities, and members generally feel that they can only succeed when they come forward with commitments to their community's wellness and safety solutions.

# Lessons Learned

## Key points raised...

### ***Importance of acknowledging issues in public***

When the community itself can openly and honestly accept their local problems, they can begin to address positive solutions.

### ***Importance of working together towards solutions***

When local community members work together to find common solutions – and involve organizations and governments through multi-stakeholder dialogues – their community centered actions plans cause increasing positive outcomes.

### ***Importance of seeing ‘Problems’ as ‘Opportunities’***

When community members see problems as opportunities to work from – rather than focusing on what is not working – action plans are created based on possibilities within the community.

### ***Importance of focusing on ‘Safety’ & ‘Wellness’***

When the focus clearly addresses safety & wellness issues, solutions and action plans arise through common goal unity.

### ***Importance of small steps***

When small steps create success, the energy grows, no matter how small, it uplifts the larger vision. Focusing on large plans can be daunting, small steps can get you through the day.

### ***Importance of local ownership***

When community members are engaged from the grassroots up and solutions for the safety and wellness of their community are their own, the movement is empowered and has a greater chance of permanent success.

# Points for Consideration

## Key questions to address...

### ***More research is needed to gage the project’s effects***

Is violence going down? Is the court system improving? Is this initiative creating more safety and wellness in the community?

### ***Keeping focused***

How do you plan to keep focused on safety and wellness while sustaining as a committee when you get discouraged?

### ***Trans-border & Communication Issues***

How many border communities can be included? How far can the Committee reach without losing capacity or focus? Are meeting times & locations accessible to all members? Are Committee documents & minutes available to all members?

### ***Local process & funding***

How does the process stay a truly local process? Will more funding distract from the Committee's safety and wellness goals, or will it facilitate solutions? Is there capacity for more funding?

### ***Youth involvement***

How are Youth involved? What's the accountability structure to the Youth? Are actions based on Youth input?

### ***Committee members***

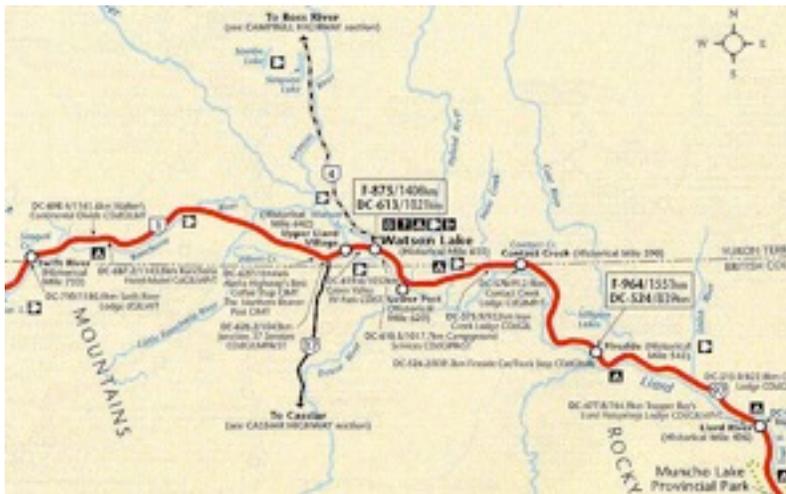
What happens if key community members leave town or remove themselves from the process? Who is not involved? Are Committee members adequately trained?

#### 4.0 POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

With the community's acceptance of the local issues and many tabu issues on the table, the Wellness Committee gained an ability to address the specific needs and find solutions. However, with the many challenges and opportunities at hand, in order to stay effective, members should often ask themselves the questions raised on the facing page.

There are many points to consider to be effective. Having joint events with other organizations is essential. In order to bridge common issues and to share ideas & resources, networking, communicating and partnering to piggy back on other programs already running is a great start. Having a common calendar of events or a website to connect people, resources and ideas could reduce the level of overlap.

Many interviews mentioned transborder issues that are causing many set backs in the Wellness of the larger geographic and political areas. These borders continue to divided resources and planning politically, socio- economically, and physically in all directions –



both up and down the Alaska highway and down the Stuart Cassiar. One can quickly understand that having a Community Wellness Initiative in a transborder zone where jurisdictions are separated between two provinces and many organizations (RCMP, INAC, Yukon Government, Town of Watson

Lake, the Liard First Nation, etc) creates many planning set backs. Many interviews noted that this Wellness Initiative cannot solely be focused on the Watson Lake community, but rather be seen as a “regional wellness” to honor the constant spill over of communities. Agreements such as the ‘socio-economic accord’ between Lower Post and Good Hope or the “Cooperation Agreement” between Liard First Nation and Town of Watson Lake are prime examples of cross border solutions. Other transborder solutions are indeed needed.

There is also a danger of getting caught up in the funding and organizational structure games which add more paper work and can easily take away from the project. A better solution would be to utilize outside resource people from the Yukon Government departments and other organizations for many of these tasks while gaining committee member capacity training from them. Also small local business funding or larger scholarships from corporations (such as Liquor Corporation or North West Tel for education and training) could be sought.

It was also suggested to solidify Youth seats at both Town council and on the justice committee. Furthermore, acting on specific items raised by Youth and having an event to celebrate it with the them would help to integrate the Youth voice.

By asking why some key resource departments have not been involved such as ‘Probation’, ‘Health & Social’ and the ‘Liard Alcohol and Drug’ services could help to collaborative address some serious issues such as the monitoring of prescription drugs and a regional treatment center.

Finally, each community has different needs based on their own culture and history, there needs to more flexibility and creative uses of funding by funders so that communities can do what works best locally. Each community has their own solutions, there are no quick fixes, but rather it is a process to find pockets of hope and opportunities.

## WATSON LAKE WELLNESS COMMITTEE, COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP INTERVIEWS & CONTACTS

### Watson Lake Wellness Community Initiative:

Sharon Miller, Coordinator, Watson Lake Wellness Community Initiative, 867-536-2430, [wl\\_wellness@northwestel.net](mailto:wl_wellness@northwestel.net)

### RCMP:

Sergeant John Bennett, 867-536-5555 or 2677, [john.bennett@rcmp-grc.gc.ca](mailto:john.bennett@rcmp-grc.gc.ca)

Constable Dean Hoogland, 867-966-5555, [dean.hoogland@rcmp-grc.gc.ca](mailto:dean.hoogland@rcmp-grc.gc.ca)

### School Principals:

Carson Atkinson, High School Principal, 867-536-2501, [carson.atkinson@gov.yk.ca](mailto:carson.atkinson@gov.yk.ca)

Denis Ryan, Elementary Principal, 867-536-7333, [denis.ryan@gov.yk.ca](mailto:denis.ryan@gov.yk.ca)

Barb Macrae, Elementary Vice Principal, 867-536-7333, [barbara.macrae@gov.yk.ca](mailto:barbara.macrae@gov.yk.ca)

### Nurse / Hospital

Wenda Sage, YTG Public Health Nurse, YCDC Nurse Practitioner, 667-8323, [Wenda.Sage@gov.yk.ca](mailto:Wenda.Sage@gov.yk.ca)

Sue Rodd, Watson Lake Hospital Nurse Director, 536-4444, [Sue.Rudd@gov.yk.ca](mailto:Sue.Rudd@gov.yk.ca)

### LIARD First Nation:

Chief Liard McMillan, 867-536-5201, [cstewart@kaska.ca](mailto:cstewart@kaska.ca)

### Lower Post:

Shona Cardiga, 250-779-3161—ext. 248, [scardigah@hotmail.com](mailto:scardigah@hotmail.com)

### KASKA Council

Dorothy John, (867)863-5576 or (867)863-5181, [dorothy.john@LSCFN.ca](mailto:dorothy.john@LSCFN.ca)

### Yukon Family Services:

Kate Hart, ??????, 867-536-2330, [kate\\_hart@northwestel.net](mailto:kate_hart@northwestel.net)

### Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Watson Lake :

Rick Harder, Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Watson Lake, 867-536-7778, [wlcao@northwestel.net](mailto:wlcao@northwestel.net)

### Watson Lake Citizen:

Tom Cove, Citizen, 867-536-2200, [tcove@occl.com](mailto:tcove@occl.com)

### LAWS:

Joanne, Executive Assistant, 867-536-2097, [laws@northwestel.net](mailto:laws@northwestel.net)

Ann Maje Raider, Executive Director, 867-536-2097, [laws@northwestel.net](mailto:laws@northwestel.net)

### L.I.F.E:

Michelle Turner, 867-536-4802; [wl\\_literacy@yahoo.ca](mailto:wl_literacy@yahoo.ca)

Lesley Wheelerdame, 867-536-2932, [lwheelerdame@yknet.ca](mailto:lwheelerdame@yknet.ca)

## WATSON LAKE WELLNESS COMMITTEE, COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP INTERVIEWS & CONTACTS

### **Kaska Men's group**

Kevin Stewart, Watson Lake Citizen, 867-536-7155

### **Contractors / Facilitators**

Lois Moorcroft, consultant hired for the initial planning work, 867-393-1939, [loismoorcroft@northwestel.net](mailto:loismoorcroft@northwestel.net)

Florien Lemphers, consultant/advisor to FN as a YTG employee, 867, 633-4337, [xanadu@northwestel.net](mailto:xanadu@northwestel.net)

Dr. Allen Wade, Youth & Safety worker, 250-701-0713 or 250-710-0432, [awade@cityu.edu](mailto:awade@cityu.edu)

### **YTG:**

Norma Davignon, Policy Development Officer, Justice Department, YTG, 867-667-5964, [noram.davignon@gov.yk.ca](mailto:noram.davignon@gov.yk.ca)

Lareina Twardochleb, Crime Prevention Coordinator, Justice Department, YTG, 867-667-3709,

[lareina.twardochleb@gov.yk.ca](mailto:lareina.twardochleb@gov.yk.ca)

Sandy Bryce, Manager, Victim Services/Family Violence Prevention Unit, Justice Department, YTG, 867-667-3656,

[sandra.bryce@gov.yk.ca](mailto:sandra.bryce@gov.yk.ca)

Karen Goldsmith, Spousal Abuse Counselor, Family Violence Prevention Unit, Justice Department, YTG, 867-667-5663,

[karen.goldsmith@gov.yk.ca](mailto:karen.goldsmith@gov.yk.ca)

Andy Sibbald, Community Liaison, Administration Health and Social Services, YTG, 867-667-8313,

[andy.sibbald@gov.yk.ca](mailto:andy.sibbald@gov.yk.ca)

Kelly Allen, Community Victim Services Worker, Victim Services - Watson Lake, Justice Department, YTG,

867-536-2541, [Kelly.Allen@gov.yk.ca](mailto:Kelly.Allen@gov.yk.ca)

### **National Crime Prevention Center:**

Linda Casson Hare, Senior Program Officer, NCPC, 867-668-2420, [Linda.CassonHare@PSEPC-SPPCC.gc.ca](mailto:Linda.CassonHare@PSEPC-SPPCC.gc.ca)