



# WHAT WE HEARD

## INSIGHTS GUIDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

# What We Heard

## Insights Guiding the Development of the Family Violence Strategic Framework

### INTRODUCTION

The last data recorded from shows the Northwest Territories (NWT) has the second highest rate of family violence from 2018-2019 in Canada at twelve (12) times the national average (Statistics Canada, 2020). According to the statistics, violence in any form is prevalent in our northern communities.

Family violence, gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People (MMIWG), Elder abuse and other forms of violence are overlapping and have an immense impact on the family unit. Developing a meaningful response to any of the above must take into consideration the interconnectivity and sensitive nature of the subject matter as well as the social complexity associated with violence in all its' forms. Simply removing the abuser does not resolve the issue. Other underlying complexities may exist that find the survivor becoming the adversary through no fault of their own.

For example, a woman may call the authorities on her abuser resulting in the abuser being removed. The fallout from this may include pressure being brought to bear on the survivor by family and community members, especially if the abuser is someone who has provided for the family and the larger community.

Family violence is normalized and accepted or at least, swept under the rug. This is unacceptable.

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is committed to implementing a strategic framework across government that supports large-scale societal change to effectively lower the rates of family violence in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The Family Violence Strategic Framework entitled *Reclaiming the Capable Person: We Are All Capable Persons When We Have Community, A Strategic Framework to End Family Violence in the Northwest Territories* will be referred to as the *strategic framework* in this report. The strategic framework sets out a path forward to achieve transformative social change to stop the cycle of intergenerational trauma that has created a pattern of family violence seen across the NWT. Everyone deserves to be free from family violence and to be free to experience rich, healthy, and thriving relationships.

A crucial component of the strategic framework are the responses gathered in this document during three key engagements undertaken by the Gender Equity Division - one with front line workers; another during the community engagements undertaken to get feedback on the GNWT' response to the MMIWG Calls for Justice; and the Men's Sharing Circle held in partnership with Native Women's Association of the NWT (NWANWT).

The purpose of these engagements was to ensure their lived experiences and insights directly inform the strategic framework.

## BACKGROUND

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) identified the need for greater coordination and accountability in its collective response to the incidence of family violence in the territory. As such, Cabinet directed the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs (EIA) to take the lead on this issue through the work of the Gender Equity Division in response to this identified need.

In 2020, the Gender Equity Division (GED) was tasked with developing the Family Violence Strategy. In addition, the GED has been working in collaboration with their federal, provincial and territorial colleagues on developing the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence (NAP GBV).

The NAP GBV highlights a series of actions that respond to family violence, gender-based violence, elder/senior abuse, MMIWG, etc. Federal funding is being made available to implement the NAP GBV. In preparing the strategic framework, the GED chose to align that strategic document with the NAP GBV.

*Reclaiming the Capable Person: We Are All Capable Persons When We Have Community, A Strategic Framework to End Family Violence in the Northwest Territories* is based on:

- a jurisdictional scan of research-based approaches and innovative initiatives that are being implemented in other jurisdictions (Australia, New Zealand, and the Circumpolar region);
- several NWT specific research reports released in the last few years that highlight the need for a comprehensive response to address family violence rates in the NWT;
- responses from one-on-one service provider engagement;
- relevant input provided during the community engagement on the Draft Action Plan in Response to the MMIWG Calls for Justice; and
- input provided at the Men's Sharing Circle held in partnership with Native Women's Association of the NWT (NWANWT).

## ALIGNMENT WITH THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

The GED has been working in collaboration with their federal, provincial and territorial colleagues on developing the NAP GBV and was finalized and released in November 2022.

The NAP GBV highlights a series of actions that respond to gender-based violence, family violence, and MMIWG and 2SLGBTQQIA+, as noted earlier in this report, they are overlapping issues. Federal funding is being made available to the NWT to implement the NAP GBV.

The GED chose to align the strategic framework with the NAP GBV to ensure the priorities set directly corresponded to the priorities set by the NAP GBV. In doing so, the GED hoped that the funding available for initiatives that flowed from the strategic priorities of the strategic framework met the parameters set by the NAP GBV; which they do.

Recognition of the role that gender can play for both survivors and perpetrators of family violence indicates that the strategic priorities outlined in the strategic framework must be designed through

the lens of gender and culture.

For clarity, the following five pillars featured in the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (Government of Canada, 2020) are also found in the strategic framework and are aligned to ensure that the GNWT encompass a fully holistic and inclusive response to family violence in the NWT.

1. Support for victims, survivors, and their families
2. Prevention
3. Responsive justice system
4. Implementing Indigenous-led approaches
5. Social infrastructure and enabling environment

#### ***Pillar One: Support for Victims, Survivors, and Families***

***Support for victims, survivors, and families that is immediate, responsive, competent, stable, equitable, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate.***

Based on What We Heard, it is clear that survivors require varying support during all stages of their experiences. Support services must have the resources necessary to deliver overlapping services that meet the needs of each survivor, wherever they are in their journey. Service providers must be person-centred in their approach, understanding that survivors are the experts in their own experience and have varying levels of need and want, with regard to the level of service that is offered and provided. Community members who walk alongside survivors are integral to delivering services with these foundational principles in mind.

#### ***Pillar Two: Prevention***

***Prevention that reduces barriers to getting help and the normalization of family violence by educating children and communities on family violence issues, providing trauma-informed training for professionals, and engaging men and boys in gender-based violence preventative programming.***

To work toward an overall increase in safety for all, primary prevention efforts that centre on healing the root causes of violence are required. Prevention efforts must revolve around the needs of specific populations that are requesting and requiring preventative activities and involve their collaboration during the design phase, all the way through to the end. All community members must be involved at all stages of prevention and the GNWT must listen to communities when making prevention focused decisions.

#### ***Pillar Three: Responsive Justice Systems***

***A responsive justice system that addresses the underlying factors that lead to family violence and is committed to making the necessary adjustments to standard practices that can retraumatize survivors.***

Gaps within the justice system in the NWT help perpetuate the cycle of violence. The justice system is designed to hold those who use violence in their relationships accountable and make suggestions

and provide a variety of mechanisms that allow offenders to move away from re-offending. In addition, the survivors and their families must be treated in a manner that ensures they are not in fear of the justice system, which is supposed to be there to provide them justice for what happened to them.

Despite years of effort and attempts to change perpetrator reoffending rates by changing approaches, the high rates of family and gender-based violence tell us that the justice system is not responding effectively to offender needs and more needs to be done. In addition, survivors are not getting their needs met by the justice system. From what we heard; however, Northerners have several suggestions that can be taken into consideration by the GNWT to make improvements.

Trauma informed training and integrated services across the justice system - from law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, crown witness coordinators and service providers - must be undertaken to ensure that all service providers within the justice system are mindful of the intersectional needs of survivors and perpetrators.

#### ***Pillar Four – Implementing Indigenous-led Approaches***

***Indigenous-led approaches that address the ongoing effects of colonization in the NWT and allows individuals to take control of their own healing.***

Indigenous communities know what they need to heal and must be supported in achieving their goals. All levels of government and organizations can work together toward developing solutions to family and gender-based violence that are informed by those with lived experience and the service providers that walk alongside them. Talking openly and honestly about how coordinating efforts in this way will create sustainable solutions is one way that we can collaboratively move forward. Communities can begin to see real results and support the community values that are centered around culture, identity and healing; really getting to the root of what it is that communities need to return to the way things once were.

#### ***Pillar Five: Social Infrastructure and Enabling Environment***

***Social infrastructure and enabling environments focus on equitable person-centred service delivery.***

Individuals experiencing socio-economic stressors (e.g., poverty, homelessness, inequitable service access) are at a much higher risk of becoming involved in the cycle of family violence. Achieving true equity is the underlying goal that must be met to ensure that family and gender-based violence is a thing of the past as those who are experiencing social inequity are at greater risk of experiencing family and gender-based violence. To be able to achieve true equity, the GNWT needs to make intentional efforts to support equitable distribution of resources and services and this cultural shift in mindset must be central to the GNWT's overall response.

Many of the points noted during the engagement featured in this report apply across several, and sometimes all, of the five pillars.

## HOW WE ENGAGED - Methodology

Input for this document came from three (3) sources – one-on-one meetings with front line service providers, reflections related directly to family violence shared during the community engagement on the MMIWG draft action plan, and thoughts and ideas around the root causes of violence and their roles in being part of the solution extracted from the NWANWT Men’s Sharing Circle report.

Between July 2021 and January 2023, a series of one-on-one meetings were held with front line service providers from all regions of the Northwest Territories to have discussions about family violence from their unique perspectives.

These service providers work directly with community members who are vulnerable to, and experience, abuse and family violence. Those engaged include victim service providers, community justice committee members, community wellness workers, family violence shelter staff, community counsellors, child and youth counsellors, non-government organizations, GNWT program case managers and at times, those with lived experience.

The conversations were guided by a set of questions meant to initiate the conversation and provide an opportunity to identify priority areas, suggestions, and solutions that would be reflected in the framework. Participants were asked to identify gaps and/or barriers in services that effect the incidences of family violence and what they, as front-line service providers, regarded as the best solutions to the gaps and barriers they witness alongside their clients every day while navigating client experiences related to family violence.

Participants were advised that while their responses were confidential, the information provided may be used to inform the development of the strategic framework. A total of eighteen (18) participants took part in the interviews.

Also included in this report are reflections shared by community residents during the open houses held in communities as part of the engagement on the [GNWT's MMIWG Draft Action Plan](#) in response to the Calls for Justice. These reflections included references to family violence. The feedback and input received during those engagement sessions is reported on in the [What We Heard Report](#).

In addition, the GED partnered with the Native Women’s Association of the NWT (NWANWT) to host a Men’s Sharing Circle to provide a safe space for men to share and discuss what can be done to address the root causes of violence against women and girls. The men’s feelings, thoughts, and ideas around the root causes of violence and their role in being part of the solution were extracted from the NWANWT Men’s Sharing Circle report and are shared in this document. Responses noted the critical importance of involving men when developing solutions.

## WHAT WE HEARD – Responses and Analysis

The following four (4) questions were used to start the conversation. Discussion typically flowed freely from these initial questions:

1. What initiatives, policies or processes do you see or experience that are working well toward helping people deal with family violence?
2. What initiatives, policies or processes do we need more of to help people deal with family violence?
3. If you could make anything come to fruition, what would you want to see offered in your community to eliminate family violence?
4. Do you have any anecdotes in your experiences with families that stand out (positively or negatively) that you would like to share?

Responses gathered during focused conversations with service providers are written in black. Reflections shared by community residents gathered as part of the engagement on the [GNWT's Draft Action Plan](#) in response to the Calls for Justice (MMIWG) are in **gold**. Responses extracted from the NWANWT Men's Sharing Circle report are in **green**. For the most part, the participants' language was intentionally kept intact throughout this report to ensure the integrity of the intended message was relayed. However, the participants' reflections were hand recorded via notetaking during the meetings, are not verbatim and have been written in a way that ensures consistency of written composition.

During the analysis of the responses to the questions, it became clear that the underlying causes of violence are common knowledge. Systemic inadequacies within the services and programs meant to support the safety of family members fleeing violence, access to housing resources such as transitional and permanent housing, poverty, lack of childcare, access to healing programs and examples of how the justice system currently lacks adequate responses to domestic violence are also common knowledge and were cited repeatedly, as were clear and specific solutions to these inadequacies.

Certain themes emerged and the responses to each question are grouped under these themes. In many cases, the same themes are identified under the responses to different questions. How these themes align with the NAP GBV concludes this section.

### **What initiatives, policies or processes do you see or experience that are working well toward helping people deal with family violence?**

#### *Importance of Shelters*

- Shelters are trying to offer as many relevant programs as possible to their clients, such as self-care, violence awareness type of programming or life skills. Not all of the shelters have the same capacity, and it would be nice to be able to collaborate with community organizations to share resources and coordinate who is going to offer which programs so the work and resources are shared properly but often we are fighting for the same pot of money, so it makes relationship building harder.

#### *Training Service Providers*

- Lots of communities have good programs available but trying to get community to participate is a struggle. Communities need a lot of healing and there are a lot of programs being offered it's just that people often need a "spark" to be motivated to attend. Caring service providers can often provide that spark. Service providers that invest in their clients have an obvious effect on

the resiliency of clients. We need to make sure the right people are hired for jobs that involve the vulnerable populations and then train the ones who are right for the job so that they can maintain the capacity to care.

#### *Trauma Informed Approach*

- We require a shift from an accountability and punishment model toward a trauma informed approach when working with perpetrators. Punishment is not working so why would we continue? Men are hurting and that is why they harm others; because they have no way to heal their own pain. Throwing men in jail for 4 months, etc. at a time does not heal them and creates more harm for the family unit. Invest in more resources for men, shifting focus away from accountability to healing. Target the issue at the source. Strengthen help resources and create and utilize more alternatives to court, create more healing programs, make healing programs more accessible, normalize men and boys asking for help.
- An Open House was held at the Hay River Reserve where the team met a probation officer who shared that he started renting office space on the reserve so that he can go there once a week to meet with his clients from the reserve. He noted this was well received by his clients who live on the reserve as some of them may not necessarily have rides to meet with him in his office in town. He noted this has cut down on the number of probation breaches.

#### *Land Based Healing – Families*

- Land based healing for families, where available, is working very well. Integrating mental health and addictions with family violence and crisis intervention responses is showing good progress. Having Indigenous-led prevention activities in communities is really showing benefit.

### **What initiatives, policies or processes do we need more of to help people deal with family violence?**

#### *Service Provider Training – Service Integration*

- Communities need to ensure qualified family violence counsellors and community healing programs are offered widely to the communities and are easily accessible.
- When counsellors are not specialized or knowledgeable in the specifics of family violence this can lead to offering unsafe domestic violence advice to survivors and perpetrators.
- Training should be developed on a set of departmentally pre-determined and agreed upon family violence protocols for front line service providers.
- Child and Family Services needs training for screening as red flags for 2SLGBTQQA+ children and families facing family violence look different.
- Relevant training, such as violence and trauma informed care type training, is required for existing staff and as part of the onboarding process for new staff in all front-line service areas. Systems need to improve our response to people experiencing violence and to improve the primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention programs and services that already exist. This would hopefully also assist in the integration of our response, programs, and services and make the system (organizations and people) more cohesive/working from a common understanding.
- Front line services need family violence specialized training. For example, front line service providers often do not understand specific things about family violence and many blame the

survivor for not leaving. Survivors need to have their other needs met first, especially when they are in acute crisis, before they feel they are set up and prepared enough to leave.

- Revision of the training that is offered to those who assist survivors with Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs) is needed. Options need to be communicated better to callers because some are being discouraged to put forward a formal EPO request by those assisting. Circumstances of the background of the caller need to be communicated clearly if there is a history.
- Service providers in all front-line places of work need standardized training in trauma and violence informed practice to lower the stigmatization of victimization - survivors are being judged more harshly when they have children or if they use substances. We need to set a community standard that survivors are not to be blamed for their circumstances and clearly indicate it in our messaging.
- Service providers need training specific to safety planning.
- Shelters have high staff turnover rates, making it hard to deliver consistent programming to survivors because of the training required to build and retain capacity within staff.
- We need to offer the ability for a survivor to document anonymously and safely what is happening to them on an online, cloud-based system.
- We need to provide people with a place where they can see pathways toward a way forward with listed community resources, programs and service and contact people by regions or communities. It would also be a place people can look to get links to enroll in or attend programs, community events and outreach activities.
- Program and service navigation is very difficult for survivors and perpetrators. They are often left on their own to figure out where to go and the steps they have to take are many. Coordination of those services requires a holistic approach such as integrated service delivery across the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention need areas.

### *Elders*

- The involvement and input of community Elders is essential when developing responses to family violence, intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.
- Elders should be included in programs and honorariums should be paid to Elders and others with relevant and lived experience. We shouldn't be expecting those with lived experience to volunteer their time as sometimes there is damage done to those in helping positions when providing healing.
- Participants put a high value on the need for Elders input and said there should be an Elders council for input, and when new policies or programs are being developed to have them contribute.

### *Access to Healing Programs for Men*

- We heard that residential school survivors will benefit from counselling services; many have not dealt with all the residential school deaths nor healed from their experiences. As a result, we have broken communities and violence against women.
- There is a lack of healing or treatment programs for men who use violence in their relationships.

- Need for men's programming was identified. It was recognized that this was a sensitive issue, but Men must be involved in the healing process and the whole community must come together in instances of domestic violence.
- Services and programs need to take a person-centred and phased approach to make sure people are assisted at the place they are starting their healing. For example, some can start with working on their addictions and then move onto trauma in a phased approach.
- Men are hurting and because of society and other men, they hide their pain with anger. Men need the opportunity to connect with other men on a deeper level. Then those men can guide them and show them what it is to be a real man with feelings, a good father, a good husband that provides for his family and who can show love and appreciation in a healthy way.
- There is a desperate need for more healing spaces (of all kinds) that people can go to for general healing. On the land would be best but they should be open and functional throughout the year. Perhaps buildings beside an outdoor space where traditional activities and programs can be run all year would be best.

#### *Indigenous-led Approaches*

- Public Boards (e.g., education, health, etc.) and government committees must have equal representation and equal vote in decisions. Participants noted that some local District Education Authority have no Indigenous members on that board. They also noted that in some cases an Indigenous government is given an observer status without a vote - what's the point of having a seat if you don't have a part in making the decisions.

#### *Healthy Role Models*

- It requires looking at foundations – where is the anger, the violence coming from? What is that person's foundation, growing up, in their family, in their life? Did they have strong parental figures, did they learn their culture, do they know how to communicate and show love? What is missing from their foundation, that's where you start- to help people fill in the gaps.
- We can't isolate the family from the survivor, so the only responsible way forward is to heal and support the family as a whole. Education for children so the ones who are experiencing and witnessing family violence in the home know how to get help and learn early that the way their families are, is not what a healthy relationship should look like.
- Healthy people are needed. This requires healthy relationship education in our education system and beyond, into adulthood, so that we can grow and support healthy people and break the cycle of violence.
- More involvement of men and boys. Both on the prevention level and on the survivor response level. I have spoken to a few male survivors of family violence; perhaps more than a few now who experienced and/or were exposed to it during their childhood. There are many commonalities amongst what they say and what female survivors say. However, the main difference has to do with the fact that their father was supposed to be their role model and their commitment to not walk in his shoes, but rather to find the better path and to be the best father/partner they can be. This is not meant to pass judgement on the parenting skills of the perpetrator's parents, who may have been impacted by residential schools, but rather to develop an understanding of the root causes of an individual's behaviour.

- People go to the (Arctic Indigenous) healing camp because it removed the barriers to accessing the healing. You do not need to go downtown, where everyone could see you open the big glass door and walk up to the reception counter to say, "I need help" and have to book an appointment and then wait for an availability.

#### *Income Assistance/Housing*

- Some programs designed to help low-income families disqualify you when you have any debt.
- Single parents trying to transition out of income assistance or who transition from treatment to getting a place on their own face those same challenges, there needs to be a better transition support type income assistance that people can apply for. More nuanced consideration for income assistance client's needs to catch people in transition. This will boost people into the next level of empowerment and allow them to maintain the momentum.
- When survivors leave their community due to intimate partner violence, they must be residents of the new community that they move to for months before they are able to get on the housing waitlist. This leads them to have to request an exemption from income assistance to get market rent approved, however, often this information is not relayed to them by income assistance or housing, and they need to be connected to a domestic violence advocacy organization in order to know what to do. All front-line service providers should be mindful of how difficult it is to navigate the system for those who have trauma, and in the case of intimate partner violence, who are sometimes dealing with a head injury, there needs to be more thought into how they are treated.
- There were comments regarding accessing domestic violence support funding through income assistance not being easy, there being too much of an onus put on the survivor to provide letters of substantiation and proof. Domestic violence advocates feel like they have to put up a fight (with income assistance).
- Homeowners who are in a current legal proceeding with their abuser are not eligible for income assistance or to be on the housing waitlist – there are exemptions that are permitted by the GNWT, but this information is rarely relayed to the survivor.
- The burden of proof of violence in a relationship that is required to get policy exemptions from Housing is not person-centred. They require proof in the form of a court order, like an EPO, or a police report, etc. This is not trauma informed nor recover oriented practice.
- Policies are made to prevent people from taking advantage of the system, however, there is only a small number of people who are doing that so creating these policies is causing more harm than they are worth. Also, it is unlikely people would lie about being a survivor of family violence to manipulate the system.
- The point systems for the Local Housing Organizations are not working. Families who need housing are on the list for years if they are housed, even with the extra points for domestic violence.
- There is no start up fund for those who want to up and move to start a new life.

#### *Media Campaigns*

- We need a social media campaign that de-normalizes violence and needs to be geared to youth and adults. Also, Elder workshops on awareness about what elder abuse looks and feels like.

- There was discussion on how the normalization of violence against women seems to be lessening; community members are less tolerant and more apt to step in when they see or know that violence is happening.

#### *Restorative Justice*

- If the GNWT decides that they need to expand restorative justice roles, they need to hire the right people (innovative and trauma and violence informed) – Community Justice Committees (CJCs) won't sustain taking on family violence type cases as it stands right now. Community justice committees in smaller communities are not being utilized as they are not receiving referrals. Lawyers lack faith in the current process, there is a lack of oversight and training, lack of rigor and knowledge about how restorative practices can work effectively.
- There is a push for restorative justice to take on family violence related matters however, in the NWT, healing programs and case management do not exist to offer support for restorative justice solutions, therefore community justice committees and restorative justice are not a safe option in the north for perpetrators of family violence. Typically, it takes 1.5 to 2 years for abusive partners to begin healing leading to a change in their patterns of behaviour. One solution would be to support and resource community healing programs, leading to bolster the capacity that would lead to the safe support of Restorative Justice as a response to family violence.
- Review and evaluate current community justice committees and restorative justice practices in the NWT.
- Most participants in the engagement were unaware of the existence of any specialized courts and questioned whether the RCMP were aware that they existed as well. They suggested that the (Specialized Courts) program complete outreach and information sessions with the RCMP.

#### *Service Provider Training – Justice System*

- We need mandatory trauma informed practice training for judges and lawyers and others that work in the Justice system.
- The legal aid lawyers need to receive better training and need to be more eager to work for their clients; it seems like the new lawyers are more eager but are not trained to work with Indigenous populations or in Indigenous communities. Women are going to jail for minor offences, which causes undo trauma and hardship to the woman and to their families. They need healing, not time in jail.
- For those who work within the Justice system, please educate yourselves on colonization, intergenerational trauma, and the child welfare system of Indigenous clients.
- There needs to be more trauma informed training delivered to court workers, crown, all lawyers and to the judges.

#### *Court Process*

- Gladue needs to be applied to the victims of crime not just the perpetrators.
- If there was a way to deal with court matters more quickly, that would help with family violence and relationships in the community (not just between partners but extended family and basically everyone in the community) because the longer court is held up, the longer everyone sits waiting and eventually, if not even at the beginning, people blame the survivor for all of the

tension and hardship, including the survivor blaming herself. Dealing with the matter in community justice committees would be better.

- A woman with lived experience shared with us that after her assault, the court process was very long because of a backlog, leading to tension in the home each time court time came close. Victim Services was very helpful and person-centred but there was not enough coordination between various systems partners (crown, legal aid, victim services, and the courts) and the case was dismissed before the victim was even spoken to in court.
- There is a lack of urgency or seriousness around the court proceedings - cases are put off for months and sometimes years then cases are often dismissed. Survivors recant because they don't have the stamina to go to court and live in the cloud of uncertainty. Resiliency and empowerment building for survivors who remain in relationships as well as those who leave - there is often a need for justice that contributes to survivor's ability to move on and rebuild their lives.
- Sexual assault responses are generally lacking. There needs to be a specialized team for sexual assaults where survivors also have access to ongoing counselling as part of immediate response.
- The adoption of Clare's law (also known as right to ask, right to know legislation) in the NWT was discussed though indicated that this type of law may not be necessary in smaller communities where everyone knows everyone.
- The court systems are not responding appropriately and causing more trauma and damage to survivors, especially children who are affected by family violence and especially court circuits that go into the communities. If court is put off because professionals can't make it into the communities, there should be more effort to ensure that hearings are done online - more rigor needs to be injected into survivor-centric proceedings.
- Court proceedings that have a survivor should be prioritized in court and dealt with quickly. Survivors and their families are left in waiting for far too long of a time, which causes a lot of mental health trauma. Being told over and over that court is postponed is overwhelming and unbearable for survivors and they give up hope.

#### *Legal Aid for Survivors*

- There are no legal aid services for civil cases, which includes division of property, leaving the survivor to pay the costs of a private lawyer, which the vulnerable often cannot afford. This allows the abuser to maintain control of the survivor by refusing to engage in property division, which makes it hard for them to access programs.

#### *Immediate Risk*

- Communities identified barriers to accessing programs that put women and girls at risk and a factor that can lead to crime. It is overwhelming for those fleeing family violence to get help, to set up on their own. This is often the reason survivors don't leave.
- There is a need for a service to help those fleeing violence to walk them through the process and help with funding a new home and accessing available programs.

### *Communities as Experts/Healthy Role Models*

- Participants noted that there is so much expectation by government for community or non-profit organizations to provide services that there should be more support to help these organizations succeed.
  - To increase capacity, core funding should be provided to community and non-government organizations for staff positions and operations. This core funding should be included in any program funding models that are targeted at community and non-government delivery.
  - Community and non-government organizations cannot compete with government wages and often lose experienced and qualified staff or are unable to hire them in the first place. Core funding would allow these organizations to pay higher wages and plan higher quality programming.
  - There are such strict parameters in place to apply for and report on funding. Funding applications and reporting requirements needs to be simplified, standardized across GNWT programs and departments, and greatly reduced in terms of reporting.
- Provide more funding to communities to develop their own responses to violence. On-the-Land Healing opportunities using elders, with focus on mental health and emotional regulation.
- Making mental health more of a priority and offered in alternative formats than the westernized way of providing mental health support (moving away from non-clinical - offering a variety of ways people get mental health support).
- Need to build the capacity of those with expertise via lived experience, passion, vocation, etc. to take on leading initiatives in the communities. It is always the same handful of people taking on the extra healing type work, which leads to burnout, causing the number of those doing it to decrease. There are others that can be developed into viable options for participating in this type of leadership in the communities but who lack the training or know-how to take on these roles.
- Facilitator training programs would really help to get more indigenous people interested in delivering programs and to apply for available funding. Many people who are influential in the community or interested in helping to make improvement don't necessarily have the confidence or skills to know how to run programs.
- Having healthy men employed in front line services that work with families. They are able to model what a healthy male can look like, particularly when they have the capacity to maintain that role without being retraumatized. What ends up happening, however, is that these men are pulled into several projects because they are in high demand because of the reason noted above. Capacity becomes depleted over time, which leads to burn out. GNWT response could be to build capacity in Indigenous role models, male and female, that are in high demand; this includes Elders. Ensure they receive the supports they need to maintain their capacity to continue providing services. This also applies to capacity building amongst those that are not currently providing services because they don't have the training, but they have the knowledge. Most programs are being run by the same handful of people because people who have experience and have capacity are few and far between.
- It is imperative the voices of Men and Boys are included when discussing solutions for family violence. Statistically, men are more likely to use violence in their relationships, but they are

also less likely to report being a survivor of family violence. This means that men are central to determining where we need to focus our attention because they have lived experience on both survivor and perpetrator fronts.

#### *Policy Changes*

- Survivors of family violence who are homeowners are limited in accessing some services, such as income assistance and housing, until they get Director's exceptions, which delays the process in typically emergent situations. The survivor is forced to go back to abuser or won't bother reporting at all. Perhaps housing lifts homeowner restriction for cases of family violence, Jordan's Principle type situation needs to be applied here and GNWT can sort out particulars at a later date.
- Deaf/non-verbal survivors have no way to call for emergency services, increasing risk of harm. The GNWT should implement service enhancements for non-verbal callers, and if they have that already, ensure that it is widely known by community members who are non-verbal.

#### *Integration of Program and Service Delivery*

- There should be a social systems secretariat or something like that. Gender-based and family violence is a public health issue that crosses so many areas, like income assistance and housing, so it should be managed by a central body.
- We need social workers to assist with bridging the housing supports families and individuals need to get housed and to maintain their housing. Once evicted, there are limited options for rentals, they'll never get back into housing, and all the supported housing programs are maxed out (like Lynn's Place, Housing First).
- Everyone (that works in NGOs) is just always so busy with a lot of acute crisis client needs that they are taking care of, even staff who have program delivery jobs end up doing crisis management. If other programs and services offered services based on what the client needs at any given time and accepted drop ins without judgement or relaying to the client that it is outside of their job mandate, it would even the playing field and allow NGOs to offer more empowerment type programs.

#### **If you could make anything come to fruition, what would you want to see offered in your community to eliminate family violence?**

- Some families live in a veil of secrecy around family violence that is happening in the home and suffer in their family silos rather than risk the abuser going to jail or the children being taken by child protection. Most people want the family to stay together, they just want the violence to end. Find a safe way for families to get help without running the risk of police or child and family service involvement and survivors and perpetrators will be more likely to reach out for help.
- Internalized phobias contribute to violent behaviours, counselling supports for 2SLGBTQQA+ individuals need to be specialized. We need organizations to travel into the communities to provide this awareness. Youth would not feel the need to leave their communities to find safer ones as this awareness would increase the number of safe people in communities.
- The government shouldn't be telling us what we need to heal, to step up. We should be telling the government how they can support us to rebuild our families. This is not about the

government, not the RCMP, it's about what we can do as role models in our community. We need our own action plan and do this for ourselves. To help our men lower the barriers and let go of some of the feelings that are there.

- Helping people get sober and learning to communicate, these are a good place to begin. Helping men to get talking, and working through problems, not keeping things bottled up and boiling over.

#### *Media Campaign*

- More dedication to reducing the harm in the first place - prevention activities such as campaigns and workshops.
- Family Awareness programs would assist 2SLGBTQQA+ youth in being properly supported by family members.

#### *Elders*

- Having strong healthy Elders will help us get through and tackle these challenges. 50 years ago, we had strong Elders as resources, today we lack those resources, and we need to be that strength.

#### *Navigators*

- We need general/adult social workers in the communities to check in on vulnerable people like Elders, do home visits, etc. The presence of consistent home visits would send a protective message to anyone thinking about abusing an Elder. This could include strategically increasing visits around pension time.
- It would be great if every community had a catch all community social worker or case manager who was specialized in crisis management. These positions could be responsible for the coordination of community services and programs where they work collaboratively to provide wraparound services. I think it would really positively impact people's faith in the GNWT's programs and services and help to build a sense of community, volunteerism and capacity building. Right now, there are positions fulfilling those roles but outside of their scope of practice. For example, counsellors are fulfilling multiple roles such as case management and crisis management, on a drop-in basis just out of necessity. This is working well with regards to responding to the needs of the community members who use the services but is not sustainable and it takes away from the role that the counsellors are meant for.
- We need better coordination of community events, programming and services. Somewhere online that people can reliably go to see what is being offered at any given time.

#### *Healing and Treatment Programs*

- Both men and women need to be able to attend treatment programs anywhere they are and at any time. We need to be open and ready to take them in when they feel it the most. Making people wait around to get into treatment months after they are motivated to go doesn't work. If you even think about your own bad habits that you want to break, the motivation only lasts during a short window of time, so if we are not seeing people who are asking for the help right at the same time that window is open, they will walk away, and it may be months or even years until that window opens again. Services of all kinds should be offered on a drop-in basis.

- We need to offer all types of counselling; on-the-land counselling, western counselling in an office, every type so people will always feel the right solution for them is available.
- If I had a magic wand, I would try to get a family healing camp together that runs all year long that would have wellness workers and mental health counsellors available all the time for any families that would want to drop in and get help with whatever they are dealing with. This would really help the youth with prevention and learning healthy relationship styles. That and building a homeless shelter.
- It would be really good if we had a family treatment place for families to go and be sober for a long while together, away from their communities and away from the day-to-day stressors. We have those places all over Canada but in the north where we need it the most, we don't. Organizations that help people fill out of territory family treatment applications can try to express the urgency and lack of services available in the north because a lot of these family treatment places will prioritize the families in their own provinces so it's good to explain to them.
- More shelters are not the only solution. We also need programs to help our men take responsibility for the things they have done, and their role in the family. We also need programing that supports the family not just men and women separately, to allow them to heal together.
- Healing programs are very important to participants, they felt that people had to heal from the residential school impacts to reduce reliance on alcohol which would reduce family violence and harms to women.
- “Enough of sweeping everything under the rug, silence, pretending if you don't say anything for long enough, everyone will just forget” - Kátł'odeeche First Nation Open House.
- Addictions programs and treatment need to include community aftercare services such as access to a case manager type person that can assist them with reaching their goals with housing, income and education, (for example) after the program.
- There is not nearly enough programming available in general. Family Treatment options for healing together are completely void. Families need ongoing support in the community from workers who understand what they are going through and are willing to meet them where they are at and not force them to leave the territory or force them to work with them to get something mandated by the program. Survivors feel comfortable with their local workers and want to work with them because they want to heal and get better as a family.
- Social events and sharing circles in the community need more funding so communities can create opportunities for community members to be together in a healthy way.

#### *Shelters/Housing*

- Find a way to support all types of shelters; they need more money for staff and programming.
- Transitional Housing (1-2 years and with built in, wrap-around supports) is needed in every community, or at least in every region. Homelessness effects the family violence shelters in communities where there are no homeless shelters because if they have the room, they will allow homeless women in as long as they are sober. This is not working because they have to ask the women to leave if the space is needed, which puts shelters in a poor position where they feel liable if something were to happen.
- Safe Houses are needed in every community.

- NWT Housing policies need revision - tenants are not provided a housing support person to work on prevention or to install preventative measures for the things they are getting charges for (like bars on windows for ground level apartments). To access funding through Victim Services to change locks and get broken doors fixed, there must be a violent crime reported (not a property crime). If the perpetrator is on the lease, they will get issued a new key - if there was a housing support person that worked there, they might know about the survivor's wish to have them out of the house or that there is an EPO. If RCMP get called to a unit more than 3 times, Housing evicts the tenant.
- We have long waitlists for housing and a lot of overcrowding, which leads to tension, anger and further addictions. We also have a lot of homelessness. They try to go to the family violence shelters but they have to turn them away. If we could increase the housing in the community, it would do a lot to help with the violence in the community.
- More shelters are needed, including homeless shelters, as shelters around the north try to fill the gap by offering placements for adults who are homeless however, as soon as a family with children show up, they are turned away. We also need more Transitional Housing desperately.
- Housing supports, specific to the needs of 2SLGBTQQA+ people, are required as they don't feel safe in the services that are being provided now (don't fit in the right boxes for programming policies or eligibility). Addressing these concerns would lower suicide and homeless rates.

#### *Alternative Courts*

- Communities indicated that there should be local involvement in the referral process to specialized courts.
- The Domestic Violence Treatment Option (DVTO) Court – Need to open up to communities; they would have a lot of uptake in the communities.
- There was interest in hosting Planning Action Responsibility Toward Non-Violent Empowered Relationships (PARTNER) program sessions with the RCMP in some communities especially smaller ones with more local/community involved detachments. Other programming and workshops should also be offered in the smaller communities.

#### *Local Capacity Building*

- Indigenous people in small communities need to feel stronger in their ability to facilitate programs and in their public speaking abilities. In many communities, there are a very small number of people that take on all the facilitation of programs and group support type activities even though there are several community members who have the life experience and know the topics being discussed very well. This will build confidence and capacity amongst Indigenous community residents and limit the burnout to the small number of people currently doing it.
- Provide training funds or offer workshops to build the capacity of locals. Offer a stipend to those who are volunteering their time to lead programs.

#### *Integration of Program and Service Delivery*

- Interagency coordination – works ok informally when the local community agencies are doing it but would like to see it more formalized and available across the NWT.
- We need case managers in every community who are specialized in outreach and in bridging the relationship gaps with Indigenous governments and Indigenous programming and services.

- We need more social workers in the community that can work with adults (unrelated to child and family services social workers).

**Do you have any anecdotes in your experiences with families that stand out (positively or negatively) that you would like to share?**

- The people in the streets here, I used to see many of them out in the bush when I traveled to the communities with my job. They came alive out there in the bush. I see them here and they say to me they would like to get back home, but they can't, no money and it's so far and so expensive.
  - Délıne did a great job with this before, they got support from the GNWT and they chartered a plane, gave their beneficiaries a ride back home, gave them a place to stay, some jobs to do in the community for each one.
  - Unfortunately, not many stayed in the community, they wanted to be out, back in Yellowknife with their friends.
  - We can build on Délıne's example. If we add to this with some social support, find some professional help as well, we can encourage our people to reconnect, go home.
- Fundamentally, communities need to rebuild their faith and trust in each other and that takes healing. Unfortunately, many community members who need the healing the most do not have their basic needs met so to expect them to take on change and healing work through counselling is not realistic. The trickle-down effect of poverty, overcrowded housing, unemployment, food insecurity leads to a loss of hope and loss of sense of responsibility.

*Childcare*

- There is a heavy reliance on the abuser for childcare. Survivors who have no access to childcare for important appointments and mental health breaks stay with abusing partners for childcare reasons. Access to respite care outside of the child and family services program might allow survivors more space to build resiliency and empowerment. Survivors may choose to leave abusive situations that they otherwise are staying in for the wrong reasons.
- It is hard to make ends meet on one income for a single parent with children, especially when the children are in day care or who have children that are in after school care, which makes it very risky to leave an abusive relationship. You make too much to qualify for any programs, but you can't pay all the bills, which forces a single income parent into debt to cover basic needs.

*Housing*

- There is a housing crisis in the NWT that directly impacts the safety of women and girls. More housing is needed in the community.
- Homelessness is both a contributor to family violence and a result of family violence. There are not enough ways people can be housed. Some need the supports provided in a shelter but offered longer term (like Housing First). Same with survivors with or without children. They need to be provided external professional supports to gain housing but also to sustain housing, including the supports related to housing like financial assistance and supports around keeping their children safe and happy.

### *Personal Healing / Integration of Program and Delivery Services*

- For me, I've been sober 10 years now, but it took support. It took counselling, talking, reflecting and support for me to slowly come to understand that I don't need this (alcohol) to be good.
- Me, I had to move away from Yellowknife for two years to get away from the people and the situation that I was in. It's what I needed just to get that start.
- The way the help is delivered is just as important. If you post an ad that says "counsellor will be at the community health centre for 2 days, on these dates, sign up or show up here" how many people are going to do that? It's like announcing to everybody that you have a problem. It's about removing the barriers not making false ones.
- There is a lot of talk of a treatment centre and that is a necessary part of healing. It's not the only thing though and it doesn't work if there is no detox centre and aftercare programming to go along with it.
- My sons, they wanted to quit, right now, right here, but there is no detox centre. They had to go down south, and they went to 5 different treatment centres, and each time they would come back to the same buddies, same situation, it just wouldn't stick until they found a treatment centre that included an aftercare program.
- Healing or wellness funding provided to some communities by the GNWT is not being used appropriately and there is no accountability for this misuse.

### *Justice System*

- A lot of family violence perpetrators need to be charged for them to take their own behaviour seriously, they need the reality check to change their behaviour. Court proceedings are extremely slow. There is a lot of domestic violence on the court roster but when offenders are only held accountable in a dis-jointed way, over a long period of time, *it becomes less about the offense and more about dealing with the justice system*. Also, when offenders are finally sentenced, and they get mandated to do counselling without indicating they are interested in internal change, motivation and attendance is very low.
- The colonized way focuses on the violence (e.g., harm reduction...) focused on pillars of violence, destruction...let's develop our own approach built on pillars of relationship, love, understanding, compassion.

## **GOING FORWARD**

As you have read in this report, service providers and community members across the territory are knowledgeable about family violence. They are experts on the root causes and well aware of the impact of family and gender-based violence on individuals and their communities as they have lived through these experiences either directly or vicariously through the people they serve.

The voices you hear in this report have identified and shared solutions that can make the most impact on the high rates of violence in the NWT. The GED has incorporated these voices into the family violence strategic framework that outlines the approach the GNWT will take to develop an action plan that will strengthen its' response to family and gender-based violence across the territory and work to eliminate the gaps and barriers that prevent Northerners from getting the help they need.

The framework is nearing the end of the internal approval process and will be shared with Indigenous governments and key stakeholders to gain feedback and input before it is finalized and tabled in August of 2023. The strategic document aligns with the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The GED expresses its' sincere appreciation to all those who engaged with us in these difficult discussions. Your voices are imperative to the development the GNWT's response to family and gender-based violence.

The GNWT also acknowledges the critical work that front line service providers do to keep Northerners safe and healthy during difficult times and in times of crisis. We have deep appreciation for the work that you do each and every day to help those who most need it. Your hard work is inspiring, and we are grateful for your service and the choice that you make to continue walking alongside Northerners that need you every day. You are making a difference.

## References

Conroy, S. (2021). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2019*. Juristat. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. ISSN 1209-6393.

Government of the Northwest Territories, (2020). *Changing the Relationship: Action Plan In response to the calls for justice on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people*. Retrieved from [https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/td\\_sow\\_re\\_changing\\_the\\_relationship\\_action\\_plan - gnwt\\_response\\_to\\_mmiwg\\_calls\\_for\\_justice.pdf](https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/sites/eia/files/td_sow_re_changing_the_relationship_action_plan - gnwt_response_to_mmiwg_calls_for_justice.pdf)

Mifflin, M., Greenland, W. (2022). *Men's Sharing Circle On Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Native Women's Association of the NWT*. Unpublished document.