

## CHILD WELFARE – INNU STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

The leadership of the Mushuau Innu First Nation, the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation and the Innu Nation understand it is essential to improve how the child welfare system operates in our communities. The leadership and staff have focussed on pushing changes in how CYFS operates in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, and in opening new ways for Innu involvement in all CYFS processes. Working with the band Councils, the Innu Nation and through the Innu Round Table process with Canada and the Province, we have already achieved several important objectives for improvement while working towards longer-term changes leading to self-government.

### **Working Relationship Agreement**

A signed document with the Provincial Minister of CYFS now requires departmental staff to notify and consult with Innu staff on case plans and actions, allows prevention services to be provided to expectant mothers with at risk children before birth, and that all placements outside Sheshatshiu, Natuashish and outside the province will be reviewed and plans developed for children to return. This is just being implemented. Lyla Andrew is now working under Innu direction as the Community Liaison Social Worker to facilitate this coordination and communication.

### **Risk Prevention Program**

Supported by a recent report for us by the Child Welfare League of Canada, a plan for creating an Innu managed prevention program is being developed for submission to Canada for funding. Innu led Prevention measures will reduce the number of children being apprehended and assist in bringing more children back in an orderly manner and with proper services.

### **Creating Residential Placement facilities in the Communities**

In order to bring children back and to keep any future children taken into custody in the community, we need to build/create and operate placement facilities in both Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. The Innu planning team is in the final stages of crafting a proposal to government for operational funding which will allow us to establish staffed placements – In Sheshatshiu, Council's priority is an improved Group Home supported with more resources, staff and services. We are also looking at options to reorganize other facilities to accommodate emergency placements of newborns and young children. In Natuashih, Council's priority is an emergency placement home for newborns and a Group Home for older children. We will then move our attention to other options for residential care homes (staffed residential facilities) for children in care. Innu people will be recruited to run these new facilities.

### **Innu Child Care Model - *Stuassiminutsh***

As part of the approach to change we are refining an Innu model of caring for children in CYFS care. This meets all professional standards but includes Innu culture, language, family and the community as essential parts of the child's upbringing. These are features that can only be provided by Innu here in the communities.