

New Initiative to help Sheshatshiu and Mushuau Innu First Nation Members with CYFS concerns:

In late 2015, the Chiefs signed a Working Relationship Agreement with the Minister of CYFS. The province (CYFS) agreed to work with us in *a new way for the benefit of Innu children and families involved in child protection matters.*

The GOAL of the Agreement is to ensure that the best interests of Innu children and families are understood and shared between CYFS and the Social Health staff. This means CYFS will not work alone in making decisions about the safety of our children.

The Agreement establishes a liaison function under Innu organization and control. It also commits joint work on 4 new initiatives that our Social Health departments and CYFS will work together on:

. **notification and planning process;**

between the Health staff and CYFS for our health department to advise CYFS they want to support and work with CYFS to assist Innu families **and**

between CYFS and the Health staff for CYFS to advise of involvement with an Innu family.

The planning process which could follow notifications has both CYFS and our Health staff planning together directly with the family involved, to make the best possible plans for the child's safety

. **safety and well-being of newborns** through Innu led prevention work which involves our Health staff and CYFS, to address concerns and make plans before a baby's birth

. **review all CYFS placements of children outside of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish;** Health staff and CYFS to meet together and make plans, wherever possible, to return children to placements in the communities.

. **Joint Committees** in both communities for Innu health leaders and CYFS managers, to address issues with the broader system and try to create better ways to respond to the safety concerns for Innu children

For these initiatives to have success, and ensure the best interests of Innu children and families, CYFS and Innu health staff must work together in new ways. The first 3 initiatives also need **parents who are involved with CYFS to provide consent for information to be shared so Innu and non-Innu workers can work together.**

Without your written consent, Health staff and CYFS cannot share your information. It is against the law. This blocks our health staff and CYFS from being able to work together. It is very important if our health staff are going to be able to work on your behalf with CYFS that you understand and are willing to sign consent for the sharing of information.

A Community Liaison Social Worker was hired by the Innu Round Table to focus on making this Agreement work in the best interests of Innu children and families. Lyla Andrew was hired in this job and her office is in Sheshatshiu; however, she also travels to Natuashish to support this work. Her phone number is 497-3855, ext 233.

Other important work that is connected to the work of this Agreement is also happening. We are working with the IRT on creating more placements for children in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish so fewer children are placed away and can be cared for by Innu caregivers and workers in our communities. Also we are working on doing more prevention work, with the goal to have our health staff reach out to families, children and youth to offer help and support to try and prevent future involvement with CYFS.

If you have any questions about this Working Relationship Agreement or what it might mean for you and your family, contact Lyla or the Social Health Director Jack Penashue and Kathleen Benuen.