

Saturday January 19, 2012

Preamble

This brief is prepared with the understanding that the fundamental principles of the New Democratic Party are as important as the position of the NDP as the official opposition to the government of Canada. We understand that as official opposition, it is necessary to question the actions of the government. It is important that in this position as official opposition, it is also as important to maintain the fundamental principles of the NDP which include the capacity to listen and work together to improve the conditions of all Canadians.

We present this brief in this same context, that the NDP have the responsibility to monitor, question and hold accountable the government of Canada while at the same time working together with the government for the benefit of all Canadians.

Brief

It is within this context that the overriding message is for the NDP to be aware of mental health issues within Canada, to challenge the current government about their involvement in responding to mental health and to work together with all parties to address mental health as part of the well being of all Canadians. There are a number of organizations that work hard at responding to the needs of individuals and families with mental health issues such as the Commission on Mental Health, Canadian Suicide Prevention Association, or the Mental Health Association of Canada. However it is important that individuals, families and organizations working for mental health are not seen as insignificant and undermined by the government or the professions supporting mental health issues.

The Problem

The Northwest Territories (as all other jurisdictions) has issues with child welfare, justice/incarceration, suicide, family violence, addiction, mood disorders, and trauma when it comes to mental health. However the challenges with each of these areas in the NWT are often higher than national averages and often equate with the predominately Aboriginal problem in this jurisdiction. The larger backdrop is the influence of cultural loss, residential school trauma & family breakdown in NWT (Bezeau & Hoskins, 2007). Some of this behaviour can be described as efforts by a population to resist and persist both as individuals and as a cultural group rather than only perceiving the difficulties as signs of deficiency, weakness/passivity and victimization. It is important to move forward with a strengths perspective rather than a recycled idea of never ending problems with Aboriginal population

The Solution

The first principle is to understand mental health as part of a wholistic approach to wellness. The Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Health and Social Services articulates this well by adopting the World Health Organizations' understanding of wellness to include physical, mental and social conditions but adds cultural and spiritual aspects of our human experience as equally important factors for wellness. (A Shared Path Toward Wellness)

Although various documents will present mental health from a particular perspective such as addictions (references #2 and #3 below) or suicide, it is important to place these specific issues within the context of the whole person where there are often underlying issues to bring attention to the more obvious behaviour such as addictions, trauma or depression.

The second principle; given the problem as heavily impacting the Aboriginal population, it is important to see the question of mental health from a wholistic perspective, consistent with an Aboriginal view, and which is more about good spirit, connection with others and well-being of living in a healthy land. Therefore a more cultural and strength based approach is needed that involves Western medicine and an Aboriginal way of being and relating. There are a number of authors who speak about Indigenous knowing, integrating Western and Aboriginal helping and the value of seeing hope and strength in a marginalized population (Beatch & Stewart, 2001; Hart, 2010, Legat, 2012; Todd & Wade, 2003)

List of Resources

These resources are presented as some of the foundation on which our thoughts are based in encouraging the MP's understanding of issues in the north. (These are not numbered in order of priority.)

1. A Shared Path Towards Wellness: A Mental Health and Addictions Plan 2012-2015, Department of Health and Social Services, GNWT: June 2012. www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca

This document presents an understanding of health based on the WHO's definition which includes physical, mental and social well being. The department of health adds cultural and spiritual aspects to wellness. The understanding is presented in a diagram that reflects all five aspects to health.

2. NWT Addictions Report Prevalence of alcohol, illicit drug, tobacco use and gambling in the Northwest Territories. December 2012. (www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca)

3. Action Plan: Mental Health and Addictions. Department of Health and Social Services, GNWT. June 2004.

4. Mental Health Commission of Canada. Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada. 2012

5. Mental Health Commission of Canada. Together We Spark Change – Annual Report 2011-2012

(Documents 4 and 5 are presented to assure Ms. Davies is aware of them. The issue is about how the government supports and works with this commission in responding to issues related to mental health.)

6. Navaneelan, T. Suicide Rates: An Overview. Health Statistics Division, Statistics Canada. July 2012. (www.suicideprevention.ca)

7. Bruce MacLaurin, Nico Trocmé, Barbara Fallon, Lisa Pitman, Megan McCormack *Northwest Territories incidence study of reported child abuse and neglect, NWTIS-2003: Major Findings*. Calgary: University of Calgary, 2005.

8. NWT Family Violence Action Plan: Phase II. 2007-2012. Department of Health and Social Services, Government of the Northwest Territories.

9. Non-Violence: Strength-Based Community Inquiry. Department of Justice, GNWT.

In June and July of 2010 researchers interviewed a total of 35 men in 12 communities throughout the NWT. The purpose for the interviews was to talk about the ways that men choose non-violent and respectful actions instead of abusive or violent actions. A very good video resulted which is an example of a strength-based approach.

(This video is available on the GNWT website under Justice. I was not able to open it. Rebecca Latour, (Rebecca.Latour@gov.nt.ca) Department of Justice is the contact person for more information on this video. I think it would be good to pass on to Ms. Davies.)

Annotation on References

Beatch, R. & Stewart B. (2001). Integrating western and Aboriginal healing practices. In M. Nash, and B. Stewart (Eds.), *Spirituality and social care: Contributing to personal and community well-being* (pp. 151-170). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- integrating Western & Aboriginal healing practices with specific NWT examples

Bezeau, R. N. & Hoskins, J. R. (Producers). (2007) *The fallen feather: Indian industrial residential schools Canadian Confederation* [DVD]. Available from <http://www.fallenfeatherproductions.com/index.html>

- video identifies the historical grande policy to eliminate the “Indian Problem” through genocidal governmental action, which resulted into a comprehensive implementation of the residential school system

Hart, M. (2010). An Aboriginal approach to social work practice. In T. Heinonen & L. Spearman (Eds.), *Social work practice: Problem solving and beyond*, (pp. 247-274; 3rd ed.). Toronto, Canada: Nelson Education.

- Well respected Cree academic articulates the nature of the Aboriginal approach within social work helping

Todd, N., & A. Wade. 2003. "Coming to terms with Violence and Resistance: From a Language of Effects to a Language of Responses." T. Strong and D. Pare (eds.), *Furthering Talks: Advances in the Discursive Therapies*. New York: Kluwer.

- describes the importance of how people respond to violence and oppression within family and society and how their responses can reveal quiet strength and resistance rather than passivity and deficiency