

# ***Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie*** (Jean Marie River)

**Community Wellness Plan** March 2013

Prepared by the community of Jean Marie River and Northern ICE NWT



Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie has had a community plan since 2001. The original community plan was completed with the help of Peter Redvers, Crosscurrent Associates Ltd. and with Mr. Redvers assistance the plan was updated February 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The community plan is thorough and complete and ready to work with. The vision statement and main goals from the original plan follows:

## Vision Statement

*We, the Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie, are proud of our Dene traditions, language, and beliefs. We value and respect the land, water, and animals that have sustained us for many generations. We shall continue to use and respect our natural resources.*

*Building on the knowledge and skills of our people, we shall work together to create a healthy, sustainable future for ourselves and for our children. We shall strive to find a balance between the traditional and modern ways of life.*

## Main Goals

*In order to achieve our vision, the Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie will:*

- *Promote and support healthy, strong families*
- *Promote and support education and training*
- *Maintain and use traditional knowledge and skills*
- *Develop a sustainable, community-controlled economy*
- *Establish an effective self-governance system*

**Dehcho Health and Social Services Authority** funded Northern ICE to engage the community members to answer four questions for Community Wellness Planning. The response of community members is summarized below:

Chief Sanguéz sent a letter in November 2012 requesting Northern ICE's assistance to work on developing Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie's Community Wellness Plan (Appendix A). Northern ICE was in Jean Marie River from March 6<sup>th</sup> till the 14<sup>th</sup>. Upon arrival in Jean Marie River, the Chief suggested that we go door to door to get their input into the wellness plan. Northern ICE visited four Elders, about 12 community people including a band councillor, the children at the school and a couple high school students at the high school in Fort Simpson. The visits to the Elders were helped by the fact that they knew of Be'sha and that she could talk to them in Slavey.



#### Where are we now?

The community completed a comprehensive community plan in 2001, an operational planning workshop in 2004, and updated the community plan in February of 2013. The latest update has healthy families as the top priority with education and training, traditional knowledge research/teaching, economic development, and self government on the top five of the priority list. The community is tired of workshops and meetings and want to get on with doing the work necessary to achieve its vision. Very little progress with carrying out their plan is due to lack of funding, resources, and social conflict in the community.



Sarah Hardisty provides input on Jean Marie River

What do we have to work with?

The community does not have enough local expertise and funding to manage and complete long term projects. Hiring people from outside the community to project manage is costly and does increase local capacity when the initial project is completed. The short term funding availability is time consuming and unreliable.

Most community people do not have the education, training and wellness to do all the work necessary to become a community that can prosper in the economic world while maintaining the vision keeping Dene traditions, language and beliefs strong.

Returning to the traditional cultural ways to restore the health and wellness of the community is difficult due to the restrictions of the bureaucracy. The local capacity to facilitate the return to the teachings will take time and effort to get to the level of expertise it once was.



Mary Louise Sanguez shares her views of the community and the wellness plan.

Where do we want to be?

*Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie* want to be who we are. That means living the traditional Dene way of life. The traditional Dene way of life is healthy, self governing, and in harmony with the environment.

*Tthets'ek'ehdeli Got'ie* also want to be knowledgeable, prosperous and independent in the economic world.

How do we plan to get there?

Healing our mind, emotions, body and spirit is our first step toward social, cultural, environmental, and economic wellness. Community people want the healing the traditional way out on the land with Dene people facilitating the healing.

The next step is bringing our community plan into reality. The community plan is long term, therefore the priority will be maintaining our health through living more in line with our traditional cultural ways and getting the education and training necessary to re-establish our self governance. The education and training will be both cultural and western.



Input for wellness plan from students in smaller communities including  
Jean Marie River at high school in Fort Simpson

### **Northern ICE perspective for Government Wellness Plan**

Social, cultural and economic wellness of the community depends on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of community members. The general health of community has not been good for many years. Federal and territorial government laws and policies and mainstream society's ways are not helping to improve the health of the community. Community people can regain their health by being who they are. Healthy Dene people is where the Dene Way of Life came from. Not speaking the Dene language and not living the Dene traditional way is not who the Dene are. The traditional way is living with respect with all creation. Living with respect with all creation is learned through the Dene Way of Life which is healthy Dene people.

The improvement of health needs to start with addressing the mental illness and addictions that people suffer from in a way that achieves a return to healthy wellbeing.

Mental illness can result in different ways and is not being properly dealt with. Sometimes you are born with mental illness. Living in an abusive situation affects mental health. Not being able to process thoughts in a good way leads to negative mentality. Being abused or violated physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually will negatively affect the mental state. Without the appropriate resources to

deal with mental anguish, people turn to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. Western science doctors are sought to relieve the mental pain. Too many western science doctors frivolously prescribe pharmaceutical drugs to address mental illness. Prolonged use of drugs, alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs weaken the mind and the body. Another hindrance to recovering from mental illness is the term, "mental health." Many people relate admitting the need for asking for help with mental health to being labelled crazy and therefore will not seek help.

The Dene way to treat people with mental health problems is to use a different term for mental health. Dene would call them "people that think differently." Sometimes people are diagnosed as mentally ill by western doctors where a traditional healer would diagnose the same person as having spiritual gifts that have need to be mastered. People that think differently are shown respect and are worked with to find out what their learning style is. If people are having difficulty mentally because of self abuse or being abused by others, healing and counseling on the land by traditional teachings and methods have proven successful where other ways have failed. Part of the Dene way which adds to the healing process is that the people are honoured in ceremony for their recovery progress by Elders, family and peers.

Addictions have changed the community's way of life in a dreadful way. People are teaching the culture of drug and alcohol abuse through their own use of drugs and alcohol. The use of drugs and alcohol leads to the abandonment of practicing traditional culture. Some of the illnesses caused from addictions are diabetes, cirrhosis of the liver, and high blood pressure. A few unhealthy behaviours from addiction are loss of pride, damaging relationships, poor parenting skills, distrust, anger, gossip, diabetes, overdosing, and suicide. It also leads to every possible form of abuse. The resources necessary to effectively overcome addictions are not available in the community.

Overcoming mental illness and addiction is dealing with root cause of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual disease which requires a major lifestyle change that will take much time and persistent effort from the entire community to achieve. This major lifestyle change is needed so that the next generations will get the traditional teaching they need to be grounded to face the challenges of learning and excelling in mainstream society.

Community people believe that the way to good health is to return to the teachings, which means going back to the land. **An "On the Land Treatment Centre" is the request of the community and the recommendation of Northern ICE.** Northern ICE can help facilitate and lead the whole process of making treatment on the land happen.

On the Land Treatment Centre will start with:

- Getting direction from the Elders and Chief and council for decision making for treatment on the land.
- A community meeting would be held to inform community members and to get their input.
- Treatment programs and projects will be determined to deal with the various illnesses
- Develop treatment staff on:
  - o Healing methods

- Treatment skills
- Counselling skills
- Local or regional Elders to teach traditional knowledge.
- Other resources will be invited to teach their skills of healthy living, counselling and healing.

On the Land Treatment Centre will be there for:

- Our people from jail for treatment to rehabilitate with traditional teaching to survive in the community.
- Residential school survivors to heal themselves and their families to create strong family ties.
- Abusers and violators to express their anger issues, bad behaviours and bullying.
- Supporting alcoholics, drug users and prescription drug users to recover.
- Bootleggers and drug dealers to see the damage and stop the destruction of the people and the culture
- Youth intervention and promotion of living a healthy lifestyle.
- Leadership building of roles and responsibilities.
- Elders to heal to be great role models to the people.

On the Land Treatment Centre will be based on the Dene laws, Dene environmental laws, and spiritual path the Elders were taught on the land from their Elders. The Elders hold the sacredness of the Dene language and how it is used in the rites of passage for girls and boys going into adulthood. The teachings include roles and responsibilities of relationships, marriage, bearing a child, prenatal knowledge, parenting, grand parenting, and most important, being an Elder. The Elders' roles and responsibilities include passing on the knowledge of the culture, self-government, self determination and self sufficiency. Elders are the teachers of survival skills, crafts, drums and songs, social activities, medicine plants, storytelling. Elders' are natural counsellors and healers and had a strong justice systems that worked for healing our people

The On the Land Treatment Centre is the beginning of wellness and the base to work with to progress on the other issues the community want to get started on. The communities desire to work toward healthy child and youth development, well educated community members, monitored and clean environment, self government, and economic prosperity will not be attained unless people return to the land to regain their health so that they can lead and work with their Dene teachings.

The Dene way of doing things is based on four statements established by Dehcho Elder Leo Norwegian. Below is a comparison between Elder Leo Norwegian and the government wellness plan approach.

**Elder Leo Norwegian:**

Find out who you are  
 Find out where you come from  
 Find out why you are here  
 Find out where you are going to

**Government Wellness Plan Ideas:**

Where are we now?  
 What do we have to work with?  
 Where do we want to be?  
 How do we plan to get there?

The government's wellness plan approach has been used for years. Housing, health, education and economics have not improved with this approach. Federal, Territorial and First Nations leadership and employees need to support each other to work with an approach that the community will embrace. The Leo Norwegian approach to the On the Land Treatment Centre to return to the Dene teachings needs to be pursued to have healthy self governing First Nations communities.

Northern ICE proposes that an inaugural youth camp be run this summer in the Dehcho. The camp would last for two weeks and be for a group of about 25 youth from the ages of 13 to 21 from the communities of Wrigley, Nahanni Butte, Trout Lake, Jean Marie River, and Fort Simpson. The place of the camp would be at the discretion of community members.