



YWCA
NWT

A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN

Child And Family
Services Review



Vision: Equality for women and girls in a safe Northern society

Mission: To build safe and equitable communities where women, girls and families can realize their full potential.

Originally known as YWCA Yellowknife, the organization was founded in 1966 to provide housing for single working women. Since then, the YWCA has offered a variety of services to women, girls and families in Yellowknife and beyond. Housing is still a key component of the YWCA mandate, along with shelter from family violence, afterschool care for children and empowerment programs. In 2017, YWCA Yellowknife became YWCA NWT - a name change reflecting the broader services and reach across the territory.

YWCA NWT is one of 33 member organizations that comprise YWCA Canada, the country's oldest and largest women's organization. In turn, YWCA Canada is affiliated with the World YWCA with its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

PROGRAMS

Family Violence Shelters

The YWCA NWT operates 2 family violence shelters:

Alison McAteer House in Yellowknife is a secure and anonymous family violence shelter for women and women with children to receive support while they are fleeing violence. This shelter has six bedrooms with a capacity of 12 beds. Alison McAteer house also helps people to get Emergency Protection Orders over the phone. The majority of EPOs granted across the NWT are done through Alison McAteer.

YWCA also operates Sutherland House in Fort Smith, which is an 8 bed facility.

Second Stage Shelter

Lynn's Place is for women who need safe housing after leaving a violent relationship, or who are ready to find stability in a safe environment. The building has 24 hour staffing and security, and men aren't allowed in the building. It contains 18 suites on three floors. Rent is affordable, using CMHC affordability guidelines. Tenants may stay for up three years.

PROGRAMS (CONTINUED)

Transitional Family Housing

The Transitional Housing Program (THP) has many years' experience successfully supporting NWT families in crisis. Families that we house are unable to get housing on their own due to a myriad of circumstances such as significant financial barriers, family breakdown, addictions or mental health challenges, or unforeseen emergencies that they couldn't bounce back from. One of our goals with THP is that we help to create a stronger and more resilient community for residents, and offer programs designed to help residents thrive.

We previously operated out of the Rockhill apartment complex, until a fire in 2018. At Rockhill we had some rental units in the community as well, where we housed lower acuity residents. After the fire, our program never fully recovered, though we continue to operate with a scattered-site model, where we rent units for our clients with private landlords, who in turn rent from us. The quality of our program has suffered somewhat, and it's harder to help the most vulnerable families. Also, the liability is much greater because we hold so many leases.

PROGRAMS (CONTINUED)

Child and Youth Programs

After-School Program: Provides after-school care from dismissal until 5:30 for school children up to age 11, and operates out of all Yellowknife schools. They also offer full-day care during PD days.

The Family Centre: is a free drop-in program for families with young children up to age 5. They provide fun outings on a regular basis, and an enriched environment that focuses on mental and physical wellness for families.

Dudes Club: Operates under Project Child Recovery and is a proactive program that promotes healthy coping strategies for children and youth, focuses on creating strong and resilient young leaders by creating a safe place for youth to explore their passions and gifts and ensures they have the support and services they need. It also provides supportive peer group sessions to address common concerns and promote choices that are non-violent. It is a free program accessible for youth ages 8 to 14.

Girls Space: Operates under the same mandate as Dudes Club and is a free leadership program for girls ages 8 to 17. The program runs during the school year and often has special programming during March break and the summer.

Note: The programs that we offer are designed to follow a wrap-around service delivery model. Also, with the exception of After-School, and the Anti-Violence Shelters, these programs were offered at Rockhill. Being housed in the same building made it easy to them to compliment each other, and they were easily accessible to clients.



WHY DO FAMILIES GET INVOLVED WITH CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES?

Poverty is the most significant factor that sees families end up involved with the child protection system. Poverty is about more than just income, it's also about peoples' ability to fully participate in society. Poverty is economic, social, and psychological.

It's easier for poor people to loose their kids to the state than middle-class or wealthy people. More obvious factors include having access to food, clothing, housing, transportation, and reliable child care. Poverty is implicated in addictions for people across the NWT, as well as having more volatile relationships. Implicit bias can factor into a Social Worker's decision, but the ways that poverty can lead to involvement with CPS is deeply entrenched. It is much more than simply parents not able to meet a child's material needs.

Is the problem behaviour, or is it poverty?



THE DESERVING VS. UNDESERVING POOR



This critique about poverty and involvement with CPS has been around since its inception, and exists across the western world. It is the legacy of the English Poor Law of 1834, which distinguished between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor'. The 'deserving' poor were conceived of as being poor through no fault of their own, be it disability, age, or sickness, and couldn't provide for themselves. The 'undeserving' poor were seen as lazy and having a weak moral character. They were considered a burden on their communities and undeserving of any but the harshest of treatment from good hardworking people and the instruments of the state. (Golightly & Holloway, p. 3)

This ideology is far-reaching, and is deeply entrenched in how all social welfare programs are delivered to this day.

THE DESERVING VS. UNDESERVING POOR (CONTINUED)

Influenced by the English poor laws, early forms of public assistance in Canada was intentionally punitive and demeaning so as to separate the few 'deserving' from the many 'undeserving' poor. Neglected children were among the few groups characterized as deserving, and the mothers were mostly viewed as undeserving. In 1901, a coalition of charitable and church groups petitioned the government to enact legislation to facilitate their work with neglected and abandoned children. In support of the proposed legislation, a Supreme Court justice offered this comment:

[T]he children of drunken and immoral parents should have protection by law so as to enable them to grow up to live a useful life and not by force of their surroundings becoming untruthful, unclean and immoral and add to the pauper and criminal class of the community. (Strega et al p. 176)

Canada's first Child Protection legislation was intended to 'break the cycle' through separating children from their parents rather than by providing support to needy families.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PRESENT?

- A CPW's client isn't the family or the parents, it's the individual child.
- Categories of deserving and undeserving continue to devolve along lines of individual pathology.
- A lack of much-needed support systems for families.
- The system is stigmatizing and punitive
- We've been stuck in false a dichotomy for one-hundred+ years; balancing a scale between conservative and progressive social values.

OPINIONS FROM YWCA STAFF, CLIENTS, AND CPW'S

To answer the question of what are the most challenging needs for families in the NWT that cause them to be involved with Child and Family Services, I asked that to staff at our family violence shelters, Transitional Housing Program, clients and former clients, as well as CPW's. Many of their responses focused on a lack of resources and support services. Those responses include:

- Safe affordable access to housing
- Addictions and mental health challenges
- Trauma
- Family violence
- High cost of living
- Lack of safe and affordable childcare services,
- Lack of employment options
- Lack of Educational attainment
- No timely access to treatment options or after-care
- Lack of adequate housing supports and policies when family violence is a factor

OPINIONS (CONTINUED)

Highlights from my conversations include:

People most often fall into CPS involvement because of struggles with addictions and trauma. While that's happening, they may also be experiencing family violence, and don't have a strong support network to help them.

We need more support for people who have experienced trauma. The lack of comprehensive support when people get back from treatment is a barrier. People need sustained helping relationships and time to build trust, but counselors don't always stay in their positions for long.

There is no trust of CFS and other support programs. So where do people go for help? The way we see it, clients tend to come back to [the Transitional Housing Program] over and over because they build trust with us. We don't judge them, where as a CPW is mandated to judge people.

Women in domestic violence situations are made to be responsible for their own abuse in so many ways, despite the fact that they are victims.

SUPPORTS THAT WORK WELL

Overwhelmingly, responses to the question of what supports are working well for families in need focused on helping families to meet their basic needs. These supports included

- subsidized rent in public housing
- supports from Indigenous Governments and organizations for food with food cards or assistance with living expenses
- food bank/soup kitchen in some communities
- EPO's
- Support Service Agreements that help people to meet their basic needs
- getting people into treatment services with elders and counselors.
- Women's Shelters
- Victim Services
- Legal aid



ROCKHILL



Rockhill previously housed our Transitional Housing Program. Staff and clients worked at creating an environment that was welcoming and informal. We helped people with what they needed in an open and non-judgemental way. Also, we could be gate-keepers. We had 24 hour staffing and security. Security staff were also good with people, and they helped people to manage challenges they had with guest management. The strength of the Transitional Housing Program was that we could focus on developing a healthy and positive community in the building, with different services available, but also be able to provide security to residents to avoid the challenges that come along with managing a household.

ROCKHILL (CONTINUED)

In a program evaluation we had done by an outside evaluator, the evaluator noted that:

[Transitional Housing Program] staff say that programming and staff-client relationships are designed to stabilize and help families to “learn how to be in their own home and be together in a safe place.” This is done by providing:

- Short-term, no cost emergency housing or transitional housing that is about \$300 cheaper than market rent. “That \$300 is literally peoples’ food money for the month.”
- On-site evening and weekend security.
- Close association with the RCMP and child protection/YHSSA in the event of an incident (although in these cases, staff are not allowed to enter a unit without one of these parties present).
- On-site food and clothing, when they are available.
- Regular on-site nurse practitioner visits.
- One-on-one assistance to find employment, participate in social/recreation activities, receive family services such as through Family Preservation Workers, or secure income assistance and public housing.
- On-site one-on-one and group activities to strengthen parenting, cooking, computer, and literacy skills and provide opportunities for staff-client interaction.

Collective celebrations (e.g., of holidays) to foster a sense of community and relationships of mutual support.

ROCKHILL (CONTINUED)

Aftercare: When clients leave the Transitional Housing Program, they frequently return and can continue to access services. This includes dropping in for coffee, getting help with food or other material supports, help with advocacy, attending social gatherings, or to refer friends and family to the program.

In addition, many clients needed the program multiple times. Clients who were unsuccessful in stabilizing their family situations and exited the program and the building were given second, third, and fourth chances to help get their lives back on track. The trust that we were able to develop with these clients was integral.

IMPACTS OF THE FIRE

When we lost our building in Oct. 2018, our impact was diminished. The in-house services we provided were foundational, and we no longer have the space to provide many of those services. Though we continue to house families and respond to community need, we can't reach the most vulnerable families. These very vulnerable families may be dealing with family breakdown, addictions, recovering from domestic abuse, or families being reunited after a separation or child apprehension.

This work has become more challenging without a building, as we can't provide 24-hour security or the depth of support that in-house services provides compared to a mixed-site model. We continue to provide non-judgemental services, and hundreds of families continue to go through our program every year. However, currently we are less able to help families with complex needs. Having to rely on private landlords means that we're vulnerable to the whim of the landlord. Some landlords are supportive and flexible, though some are not. Our goal is always to help our residents to have secure independent housing, but if we house a client in a unit that we rent, often times we can't get the lease transferred into the client's name, despite having a good tenancy record with us. For clients that may have RCMP or CPS involvement, we are less able to help them through that, because we can no longer act as a gatekeeper for them, and their situation can derail quickly. The Child Protection is now involved with our families quite a bit more than it was when we had Rockhill.

CURRENT SUPPORTS PROVIDED BY YWCA NWT

- Affordable housing and scattered site housing structure since the lose of Rock hill
- Affordable afterschool childcare program
- Children & Youth empowerment programming
- Programming for parents with young children
- Violence prevention programming and safe shelters
- Food security program
- Ongoing support to clients (both current and past) as needed

Overall, our program delivery methods have been successful due to the approaches we employed and the wrap-around supports offered to the clients. We're fortunate to have many long-term and dedicated staff team that value the work and the impact we have in the community.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?



- If 54% of children were involved in CPS because of neglect, and 31% because of family violence for the 2019-2020 fiscal year, then 85% of the Child Protection investigations could have been avoided.
- Everyday social care is the glue that binds us. It connects us to each other, and allows us to build trusting relationships.
- Being a good carer needs to be good for the giver and the receiver. It brings us closer together as people. It is non-stigmatizing and inclusive.

WHAT CAN THE GNWT DO?

Some suggestions include:

- A support benefit for survivors of abuse who are trying to separate from their partners
- Collect and publish data about parental income sources
- More advocates for families
- Get opinions from clients about the services they're receiving
- Move the Income Assistance Program back to Health and Social Services
- Non-profit services are on the front-line; they know how to help and what people need.

ADVICE FOR PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

To have more successful outcomes for families who are or may become involved with CPS, communities need more support services for families. CPWs are in positions where they need to do it all, and no amount of accountability is going to make that better. Only the GNWT can serve the whole territory, but within communities our strengths need to be leveraged.

These partnerships can help in several ways:

- Community-based organizations can roll-out programs quicker and cheaper
- It's easier for community-based organizations to form trusting relationships with clients
- It's easier for families to seek help from community-based organizations
- We can respond more quickly to community needs
- We can provide more informal help, which people often prefer
- We can also help inform CPS because we can often see a family's needs and goals more clearly.

IN SUMMARY

The child welfare system as it stands simply doesn't have the capacity to meet the needs of families. You can't help people by transforming them from something you don't value into something you're willing to value. No matter how compassionate a CPW is, or an administrator, they can't change the system.

By supporting more innovative community-based organizations and programs, we can increase capacity for the sector. More diverse forms of support will help fill the gaps and restore dignity to families affected by poverty, addictions, and family violence.

REFERENCES

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