

Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities
Project Evaluation

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Violence against women in the NWT is nine times greater than the national average.¹ Indigenous women are more often the victims of violence than non-indigenous women. In 12 small, primarily indigenous NWT communities, there are no resident policing services to help women stay safe from violence.

With YWCA Canada funding from Status of Women Canada, YWCA Yellowknife brought NWT women together in April 2009 to shape a project to develop and test new approaches and programs for addressing violence against women. NWT women agreed that the focus of efforts should be on women in small communities who have little if any, support to keep safe from violence. In April 2010, YWCA Yellowknife received funding from Status of Women Canada for a three-year project to develop and pilot safety options for women fleeing violence in NWT communities without a local Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachment.

Lutra Associates Ltd. of Yellowknife was contracted to evaluate the three-year project. The purposes of the evaluation are to determine whether the project did what it was intended to do, and what lessons can be taken from the project. The evaluation involved a review of relevant literature and project documentation, and key informant interviews.

Findings

The high level of fear and silence about violence in small communities was revealed early in the project. This made the planned community development approach to the project unfeasible. To give voice to, and confront the fear and powerlessness among women in small communities, the project shifted to a culture-based empowerment model that would build women's confidence and relationships of trust. As the project unfolded, it became increasingly clear that relationship building and women's empowerment are precursors to creating the community-based safety options/responses envisioned in the original project proposal.

The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project budget was anticipated at \$338,714. The shift in project approach had tremendous financial implications that led to a decision after the first year to reduce the number of target communities from eleven to eight (Enterprise, Dettah, and Kakisa were dropped), and invest significant effort in fundraising. The project was highly successful in this regard. Total project funds and contributions increased the original budget by almost 50%. The estimated final value of the project was \$505,372. The extent and success of fund raising

¹<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf>

illustrates the broad support and value for the project, and the commitment of the project team and Steering Committee to ensuring that community-based women's projects were appropriately resourced.

YWCA Yellowknife had legal and financial responsibility for the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project. Responsibilities were discharged with guidance from a multi-party Steering Committee. A project advisory group anticipated in the original project design, began late in the project and was abandoned due to poor participation and lack of real need for a group to fulfill functions being addressed by the Steering Committee. The contractor, Leading at the Edge of Yellowknife (the project team), was responsible for all aspects of the project including consultation, responding to identified community needs, working with stakeholders, coordination and facilitation of community-based activities, proposal writing, and reporting. The project team and Steering Committee worked well together. This was a real strength of the project.

Due to the change in approach, project activities expanded beyond those originally envisioned. Activities were as follows.

- A scan of models in other jurisdictions rendered little new information. This underscores the importance of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project and the need for research and discussion on keeping women safe from violence who live in small communities with few services.
- Consultations/contact with stakeholders was ongoing and took different forms – consultation, engagement, and funding/in-kind support. The latter form was likely the most successful. Quality and poor relationships of front-line services and local women were identified as issues that need to be addressed.
- Community-based activities were launched in five NWT regions and in nine of the 11 target communities without resident RCMP services. No activities were undertaken in Enterprise or Kakisa. Over the course of the project, activities were terminated in Trout Lake as another project was addressing violence issues, and in Dettah due to lack of interest. Of the seven remaining target communities, the most visits were to Gameti and Wrigley.
- Notwithstanding double counting, over 200 women and 250 community members participated in local activities.
- Community-based women's projects varied but all began with a common process of talking/sharing circles and vision boards/montages, and all were activities that community women had ownership of. Women's project activities included setting up a women's tent, overnight camping and canoe trips, an on-the-land survival camp, an on-the-land mountain camp, a moose hide tanning camp, a cook-out, musical workshop, singing exercises, drumming and singing

sessions, improvisational theatre exercises, safe climbing techniques workshop, Nordic walking equipment and training, self-care, self esteem and 'spa' sessions, sewing and cooking sessions, and a managing finances and budgeting workshop.

- Annual workshops were held in Yellowknife. They proved to be important mechanisms for networking, increasing capacity, and celebrating successes. About 75 northern women attended conferences and workshops over the course of the project. Although some women from targeted communities came to Yellowknife to participate in a legal education workshop in 2013, there was no annual workshop to celebrate the confidence and power of the women who had participated in the Increasing Safety Options in NWT Communities project. This was due to lack of funding. Lack of celebration and closure of the project were identified as failings.

The project exceeded expected outputs in terms of reporting, project participation, and community activities. In terms of outcomes, the project anticipated new safety options, pilot tested safety options in six communities, and more women safe in their own homes and communities. The project did not develop any formal safety plans or options that involved women, front-line workers, and political leaders but created and tested to some degree, safety options. Women involved in the project identified personal choice – the choice of being alone and vulnerable or connected and empowered to choose not to be a victim of violence – and connections with other women as the two options they have for keeping safe from violence. “Women’s safety depends on other women.”

As a result of the project, women in small communities were likely safer, at least for the duration of the project due to the attention on women “who are often forgotten.” It is unknown whether the women continue to be safer as a result of the project, the choices they make, the tools and information they garnered (e.g., on legal rights), or the relationships they built. There are no data to determine if feelings of safety and empowerment translate into more women actually being safer or safe from violence.

The project had several unexpected outcomes including:

- more women taking power over their lives,
- greater understanding of the lives of women in small communities,
- valuable contacts and relationships, and
- more women feeling supported and valued.

In many ways, the outcomes were best embodied in the Gameti women’s project.

Issues and Challenges

Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities was “a dangerous project.” The project posed risks for all involved and highlighted the fear that exists among many women in small communities. Concern about men and doing things without them was also an issue as was adequacy of resources to meet women’s expectations.

Lessons

The project team’s lead facilitator had a long history of involvement in projects to address violence, empower northern women, and build capacity. Her pivotal role in the success of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project speaks to the importance of investing in, and engaging the skills of northern women to address the safety needs of their peers.

Empowerment is a lengthy process that must be sustained over a long period of time. Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities was the first project to be led by a multi-skilled indigenous-non-indigenous team of women committed to working consistently in communities for a sustained period of time. Women in small communities need ongoing support to maintain the ground that they achieved over this project and to move forward.

The project revealed that:

- empowerment is a precursor to community development and planning processes.
- the safety for women in small communities without protection services is reliant on how well women support each other.
- women’s safety is enhanced by police presence and safe homes.

As a decolonizing methodology, a culture-based empowerment model that is supported by peers avoids any hint of paternalism or colonialism. In this project, this was enhanced by:

- a lead facilitator who “is Dene, speaks the language(s), and has a background in healing so women opened up more and asked for one-on-one sessions with her.”
- consistency of support and strong healing, organizational, and developmental skills among Leading at the Edge’s indigenous and non-indigenous project team.
- unwavering support from the Steering Committee.

Historically, indigenous women in the NWT built relationships through their work on the land. The project's effort to replicate these ways of connecting women was successful.

The project modelled collaboration and cooperation. Both Steering Committee and project team members speak of the honour and gift to have had the opportunity to work with women on this project.

The annual gatherings underscored the valuable role that networking plays in supporting women's safety and helping them maintain power and strength to confront violence.

To deliver a culture-based empowerment project, it was overly ambitious to provide the same level of effort in 11 small NWT communities. Six or seven communities was a more appropriate and realistic target.

Conclusions and Next Steps

There is unanimity about the need to continue to support women in small communities both to maintain the ground they have gained personally and in the community, and to evolve more visible responses to violence. There is also a need for:

- facilitation/coordination support to maintain and build on the project's work.
- community-based projects that celebrate and reinforce "the power of choice."
- efforts to strengthen and professionalize front-line services in small communities.
- new relationships and communications between front-line workers and women in small communities.
- efforts to explore ways to create, support, and sustain local safe houses.
- continued advocacy for policing and other protection services in small communities.
- continued advocacy for supports for women in small communities including sharing this evaluation report and promoting research to monitor the impacts of various responses to keeping women safe.

The Coalition Against Family Violence and all northerners have a role in advocating for supports to ensure the safety of women in small NWT communities.

1. Introduction

Violence against women in the Northwest Territories (NWT) is nine times greater than the national average.² Most often, the violence is severe and perpetrated by an intimate partner. Violence results in death or serious physical, mental, and emotional injury, trauma, and stress and negatively impacts on children and others dependent on women for care and nurture. “In the territories, a fear for life was predominantly a reality for female victims of spousal violence, as approximately half (51 per cent) believed that their lives were in danger.”³

The rate of violence is greater against indigenous women than non-indigenous women. Across the northern territories, indigenous women are three times more likely than non-indigenous women to report being victimized by a partner. They are also more likely to experience violence, injury from violence, and death from both spousal and non-spousal perpetrators.

Women across the northern territories experiencing violence are more likely than their peers in southern Canada to report spousal violence to the police. At the same time, the territories have much higher clearance rates than southern Canada, mainly due to the female victim’s request not to proceed with formal charges. Housing, income, family and community consequences (e.g., in the form of ongoing victimization, harassment, and alienation), and lack of support services are among the reasons that female victims of crime may not proceed with formal charges. In communities without consistent or regular protection services, the likelihood of both reporting violence and proceeding with charges diminishes significantly. The realities of violence against women in the northern territories together with the lack of services in small communities without locally-based policing services have culminated in far too many deaths and severe injury.

The 2009 death of Alice Black, a 31 year old Gameti mother of seven, at the hands of her spouse marked a tipping point for YWCA Yellowknife.⁴ As stated by the YWCA Yellowknife’s Executive Director in response to the NWT chief coroner’s report on Alice Black’s death: “Safety and security in your own home is a basic human right. Sadly, neither Alice Black’s community nor the government could keep her safe. We need to do better and we need to start now.”⁵ YWCA Yellowknife supported the coroner’s recommendations for a public awareness campaign on the effects of domestic violence and for governments and community organizations to come together and make a plan

²<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2013001/article/11766-eng.pdf>

³<http://norj.ca/2013/03/violence-against-nwt-women-nine-times-national-average/>

⁴<http://www.ywcanwt.ca/images/YWCA2008-09AR.pdf>

⁵<http://www.ywcanwt.ca/documents/newsreleaseAliceBlackFINAL.pdf>

to help communities with no resources to fight domestic violence. YWCA Yellowknife continues to advocate for more police presence in communities.⁶ Currently, there is no police detachment in Gameti or 11 other small NWT communities.⁷ In the NWT, small communities without resident protection services tend to have populations of less than 200.⁸ Indigenous people make up most of the population in all but one of the 12 small NWT communities without resident police services.

2. Project Overview

In February 2008, Status of Women Canada announced \$1.5 million in funding to YWCA Canada for its Northern Extension Initiative. The funding was approved under the Women's Partnership Fund which supports partnership projects and the full participation of women in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada. The Northern Extension Project was intended to benefit women and children in Nunavut, NWT, and Yukon. It focused on developing and testing new approaches and programs to address violence against women, and provide support services for affected women. While much of the funding and attention was focused on violence against Nunavut women, some funding from the Northern Extension Project was allocated to the NWT and Yukon. In the NWT, northern women were brought together in April 2009 to shape the direction of a project for the territory. There was consensus that the focus of an NWT project should be on women in small communities who have little if any, support to keep safe from violence. In September 2009 and again in February 2010, women from small NWT communities came together to discuss possible responses to keeping women safe in communities without protection or other helping services. From these gatherings funded through the Northern Extension Project, a steering committee was formed to develop a proposal for Status of Women Canada funding.

In April 2010, YWCA Yellowknife received funding approval from Status of Women Canada for a three-year project to increase the safety of women in NWT communities without resident police services. These communities are Tsiigehtchic, Colville Lake,

⁶<http://hqyellowknife.com/news/local/news/v/Local/71494/YWCA-lends-support-to-chief-coronera-s-recommendation-for-action-on-domestic-violence>

⁷http://www.nnsl.com/frames/newspapers/2010-11/nov22_10rcmp.html

⁸ In 2011, populations of the NWT's 12 small communities were: Sachs Harbour 133, Tsiigehtchic 128, Colville Lake 160, Jean Marie River 72, Nahanni Butte 119, Trout Lake 95, Wrigley 116, Enterprise 97, Kakisa 54, Gameti 311, Wekweeti 145, and Dettah 261.

Wekweeti, Gameti, Wrigley, Nahanni Butte, Jean Marie River, Trout Lake, Kakisa, Enterprise, and Dettah.⁹ The project anticipated:

- A project advisory group made up of Executive Directors of the NWT Native Women's Association, NWT Status of Women Council, Centre for Northern Families, YWCA Yellowknife, and YWCA Canada.
- A project facilitator and coordinator.
- Models of safety options for women in isolated communities successful in other jurisdictions.
- Consultations with NWT services/groups to explore ways to support safety options for women in target communities.
- Engagement of key community stakeholders such as community leaders and senior community administrators, women's advocates, health and social services workers, community justice and victim assistance workers, income support workers, adult educators, and housing staff.
- Community planning sessions.
- Liaison with the Coalition Against Family Violence.
- Regular project documentation and dissemination of reports and other materials

Status of Women Canada committed to funding of \$266,714 over the three year period. A further \$72,000 was anticipated from the GNWT. The logic model for the project follows.

⁹ The only small NWT community without resident RCMP services not included in the project was Sachs Harbour.

Project Logic Model: Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities

Goal: <i>Develop and pilot safety options for women fleeing violence in NWT communities without a local Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachment</i>			
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
-Status of Women Canada \$266,714 -GNWT (Phase 2 Family Violence Action Plan, Victim Assistance Fund, Women’s Initiative Grant) \$72,000	-Form project advisory group -Hire coordinator and facilitator -Hold regular advisory group teleconferences -Scan of safety options/ models elsewhere -Consult NWT service providers to explore supports for safety options -Contact stakeholders to initiate developing and piloting safety options -Facilitate a one-day planning workshop in each target community -Hold follow-up workshop in years two and three -Provide ongoing information and support to communities -Regularly update the NWT Coalition Against Family Violence -Provide support for the advisory group -Hold project advisory group annual workshop -Document and disseminate project experience and safety option models -Gather evaluation data and do interim and final evaluations	-Members,mandate, and minutes -TOR -Contracted coordinator/ facilitator -Teleconference minutes -Information on models -Minutes of consultations -Information and invitations -Workshop reports -Workshop reports -Project documents and minutes -Written updates -Minutes -Workshop reports -Binder of project materials. -Interim and final evaluation reports -70 women participants (40 fleeing violence and 30 advisors/others) -Indirect benefits to >500 women -11 community visits each year	-Awareness of existing safety options -Increased knowledge of services/strategies to respond to domestic violence -Women informing/ guiding responses to domestic violence -Women satisfied with safety planning processes and options -Safety options created through collaborative processes -New safety options for women -Pilot tested safety options in six communities -More women feeling that their safety options have increased -More women using safety options to keep safe from domestic violence -Communities using safety options to keep women safe -More women feeling safe in their homes and communities

3. Project Evaluation

In February 2013, YWCA Yellowknife contracted Lutra Associates Ltd. of Yellowknife to evaluate the Increasing Safety Options for Women in the NWT project. The purposes of the evaluation are to determine:

1. whether the project did what it was intended to do, and
2. what lessons can be taken from the project.

The evaluation involved a review of relevant literature and project documentation, and key informant interviews.

Very little current literature is available on efforts to address the safety of women experiencing violence in small isolated communities in Canada. This limited the extent to which lessons from the project could be validated by experiences elsewhere. The absence of documentation on efforts to address women's safety issues in small primarily indigenous communities suggests that this evaluation report will be a valuable document for informing future work on this issue among this demographic.

The Increasing Safety Options for Women in the NWT project is very well documented. Project documentation provides extensive details of activities, processes, issues, challenges, and decision making. Project documentation allowed the evaluator to track the project as it unfolded and to address main evaluation issues and questions.

The attached key informant interview guide focused discussions with a cross section of individuals knowledgeable about the Increasing Safety Options for Women in the NWT project. Key informants were interviewed either in person or over the phone. In total, 14 key informant interviews were conducted although 18 individuals were contacted. Four individuals postponed their participation and ultimately were unavailable within the timeframe of the evaluation. While a somewhat small number of key informants were interviewed, this does not pose any limitations to the evaluation due to the extensive nature of project documentation and the unanimity of views among those who participated.

Key informants include women involved in advising, facilitating, coordinating, and administering the project, and in community-based activities. Most had a lengthy history with the project although a small number had limited direct project involvement but a broader involvement with women in the target communities. Discussions with key informants provided an opportunity for project reflection and assessment. This was important as some informants felt that the project had not had proper closure (e.g. funding was unavailable to bring women together to assess or celebrate the project at a women's conference in 2013). A list of women interviewed is attached.

4. Findings

The following findings are drawn from project and related documentation and key informant interviews.

Goal and Approach

As shown in the project logic model, the goal of the Increasing Safety for Women in NWT Communities project was to develop and pilot safety options for women fleeing violence in NWT communities without a local RCMP detachment. The approach to achieving this goal followed a community development model that involved consultation and an annual community-based planning/monitoring workshop. A community development approach assumed that the most appropriate way to achieve this goal was to identify and focus on concrete responses that could be piloted such as safe shelter, personal and community safety plans, and protocols.

It became clear early in the project that the approach to achieving the project goal needed to change. This need became evident after initial visits to small communities in the Tlicho and Dehcho Regions. Initial community work revealed the extent of violence and fear among women in the small communities, the multiple layers and depth of trauma that many women experience, and the powerlessness of women in small communities to stay safe from violence. Too many women in small communities are isolated, afraid to speak out, afraid to confront the issues of violence, afraid to come to meetings, and distrustful of other women, front-line workers, and community leaders. Too many women in small communities have had too many experiences as victims of the abuse of power. Within these circumstances, it became clear that facilitated community consultation and planning processes with parallel stakeholder and women's input where women could advise on suitable safety options, was not feasible given that so many women have been silenced by violence or the fear of it.

A decision was made early in the project that the work to achieve the goal of developing and piloting safety options for women in small communities would focus on giving voice to, and confronting "the realities of women in small communities." To this end, the approach would move from community-based planning to building women's confidence and relationships of trust within a cultural context. In other words, the project shifted from a community development¹⁰ to a culture-based empowerment¹¹

¹⁰ There are many definitions of community development but the basic concept was stated by the United Nations in 1948. "Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative." <http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/courses/community-development-for-health-promoters/module-one-concepts-values-and-principles/defini-0>

approach. As the project unfolded, it became increasingly clear that relationship building and women's empowerment are precursors to creating community-based safety options/responses, as was envisioned in the original project proposal.

The shift in approach occurred early in the project and was sanctioned by the funder, Steering Committee, and project team. The shift from a community development to a culture-based empowerment model is reflected in the language of the project. For example, various names were used to describe the project – Safety for Women in the Communities, the Safety Project, Women's Self-Awareness Project, and Women in Small Communities Project. Under these various names, the documentation describes the project as “a mixture of taking action on safety and exploring women's empowerment and awareness” or “empowerment to action” through:

- meeting with, and supporting women in small communities to develop ways to be safe when there may be violence in their lives;
- building trust among women;
- working with women on community projects to help them bond, grow, care for themselves, find their inner strength, and stay safe and healthy; and
- “standing with the women,” positively supporting their choices, and building confidence in an environment where no support is available.

Inputs

The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project budget was anticipated at \$338,714. Early in the project, the budget was altered largely due the change in project approach and associated financial implications. Moving from a broad community development process to a culture-based empowerment model meant that:

- building trust and confidence, and supporting community women to take power over their lives required different strategies and activities, some of which were costly and involved additional human resources.
- more than one yearly visit (as was anticipated in the original SWC proposal) was needed to each community to foster trusting relationships and empowerment.
- facilitators/resource people needed to travel in teams for safety reasons.

¹¹ Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTEMPowerment/0,,contentMDK:20245753~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:486411,00.html>

- budgeted resources were inadequate to initiate and sustain meaningful activities in all eleven communities at any one time.

The shift in project approach and a desire not to begin community work that created expectations that could not be addressed or sustained led to a Steering Committee decision to reduce the number of communities. This decision was made in June 2011, one year into the project. Enterprise, Dettah, and Kakisa were dropped from the project for reasons of inadequate resources, lack of interest, and/or few known issues of violence.

The shift in project approach required extra effort to raise additional funds and seek in-kind and other contributions to support activities that community women identified as appropriate to building trusting relationships and supporting their empowerment. Over the course of the three-year project, funding and other contributions were secured from a variety of sources. Total financial contributions are valued at \$458,872 and in-kind contributions and costs covered by other agencies are valued at \$46,500. Total project contributions of \$505,372 exceeded the budget anticipated in the original SWC proposal by almost 50%.

Funding Source	Year	Amount
Status of Women Canada	March 15, 2010-March 14, 2013	\$266,714
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AADNC)	October 2010-March 2011	\$40,496
AANDC	April 1/11 to March 31/12	\$37,500
Justice Canada Victims Fund	December 2010-March 2011	\$43,400
Canadian Heritage	November 2012- March 31, 2013	\$47,960
Victims Assistance Fund, GNWT Department of Justice	January-March 31, 2013	\$22,802
Costs covered by other agencies and in-kind contributions from various sources	2010/11	\$15,500
Costs covered by other agencies and in-kind contributions from various sources	2011/12	\$25,000*
Costs covered by other agencies and in-kind contributions from various sources	2012/13	\$6,000*
Total financial and other contributions		\$505,372

*estimates only

Three-year funding from Status of Women Canada in the amount of \$266,714 created the conditions for the project to lever additional funds to respond to particular needs as the project unfolded. In fact, almost half of the total financial contributions were leveraged from sources other than Status of Women Canada. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AADNC) contributed two years of funding to support additional project travel costs associated with the need to have more than one

community visit per year and one facilitator travelling to each community, as well as increase the project's capacity to respond to a broader range of women's activities, than was anticipated in original budget. Specifically, AADNC approved \$77,996 (\$40,496 in 2010/11 and \$37,500 in 2011/12).

Both Justice Canada and the GNWT Department of Justice contributed to the project. The Justice Canada Victims Fund approved \$43,400 in December 2010 to support additional project costs at the community level as well as the travel costs of bringing women into Yellowknife for a workshop in January 2011. Travel costs associated with bringing women from small communities together for a legal workshop in Yellowknife in February 2013 was funded in the amount of \$22,802 by the Victims Assistance Fund, GNWT Department of Justice.

Higher than expected project costs in 2012/13 associated with for example, a moosehide tanning camp in Gameti, work in Wrigley, and launching project work in Colville Lake, Tsiigehtchic, and Wekweeti were offset by Canadian Heritage funding of \$47,960.

The project also benefited from contributions and in-kind donations. In 2010/11, in-kind contributions were valued at \$15,500. In 2011/12, YWCA Yellowknife funded two project team members¹² to attend a November 2011 conference on family violence. In the same year, the Deh Cho and Sahtu Health and Social Services authorities and the Tlicho Community Services Agency funded the travel costs of women from small communities in those regions to attend the March 2012 workshop. Also in 2011/12, the Trout Lake Development Corporation and Trout Lake Band contributed approximately \$3,000 in-kind services (e.g., use of boats, guides, and Trout Lake Lodge facilities) and provided the labour of the local fire crew to set up the Trout Lake Women's Survival Camp. The value of these contributions is estimated at \$25,000.

In 2012/13, financial and in-kind contributions from the Tlicho Government, the Tlicho Community Services Agency, the school in Gameti (e.g., use of a large canoe) and the Gameti Community Government in the amount of \$1,500 helped to support local women's project activities. In the same year, YWCA Yellowknife secured a \$2,500 donation to support the women's tent in Wrigley. The Deh Cho Health and Social Services Authority also contributed funding for a March 2013 meeting in Wrigley. The value of these contributions is estimated at \$6,000.

The extent and success of funding raising efforts including in-kind contributions from a wide variety of sources illustrates the:

¹² Suza' Tsetso and Eileen Mantla

- broad support for the project within various government agencies.
- value accorded to the project at the regional and community levels.
- commitment of the project team and Steering Committee to ensuring that community projects were appropriately supported and resourced.

Administration, Advice, Coordination, and Facilitation

As the recipient of Status of Women Canada funding, YWCA Yellowknife had legal and financial responsibility for the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project. All additional funding secured for the project was administered through the YWCA Yellowknife except monies received from Canadian Heritage in 2012/13, which were administered by the Status of Women Council of the NWT with bridge funding from YWCA Yellowknife (e.g., until funding was flowed from the federal government). Documentation for the project is extensive. It shows that project reporting was completed for the many sources of funds.

YWCA Yellowknife set the overall project direction, controlled funding, called Steering Committee meetings, approved invoices, and received and issued reports. These functions were discharged with guidance from a multi-party Steering Committee. In addition to YWCA Yellowknife, membership on the Steering Committee came from organizations with a track record of working on violence against women. They were: Status of Women Council of the NWT, the GNWT's Women's Advisor, Centre for Northern Families, and Native Women's Association of the NWT. All groups participated regularly with the exception of the Native Women's Association. Staff turn-over appeared to be the main factor impacting the Association's participation.

While there were no terms of reference, the Steering Committee provided oversight, advice, and assistance to, and in consultation with the project team, as required. For example, the Steering Committee advised in August 2010 (3 months into the project):

- to reduce the number of communities to be contacted in the first year from eleven to six;
- on the need for two facilitators to travel to each community as a safety precaution (due to innuendos of safety issues);
- on seeking additional funding to support women's ideas; and
- focusing on women's interests and trust for the project before developing safety plans.

Members of the Steering Committee are also part of the NWT Coalition Against Family Violence. They provided regular updates on project activities to the Coalition.

Project coordination and facilitation (the project team) was contracted to Leading at the Edge of Yellowknife. The Leading at the Edge team involved an indigenous and non-indigenous partnership. The core members of the Leading at the Edge team were Lani Cooke and Suza` Tsetso. Lani Cooke was primarily responsible for project coordination and management, and Suza` Tsetso for counselling and facilitation. Other resources with community development and counseling experience were retained as required.¹³ The project team was responsible for undertaking all aspects of the project including consultation, responding to identified community needs, working with stakeholders, coordination and facilitation of community-based activities, proposal writing, and reporting. The project team provided regular activity reports to the Steering Committee.

The change in project scope and approach impacted on the project team. Fundraising activities expanded from what was anticipated in the original proposal due to increased travel costs, more frequent community visits, and the need for additional resources to realize women's ideas for building confidence and trusting relationships. Further, as the project evolved, team members were called upon to provide one-on-one supports. For example at one point in the project, one team member provided telephone and personal support to seven women from small communities from her home in Yellowknife. Another member maintained telephone support with three women from small communities. Now at the end of the project, Suza` Tsetso has taken work with the Healing Drum Society which puts her in a position where she can to some degree, maintain connections with the women and provide referrals and support.

The Leading at the Edge team worked in an egalitarian way to best use the strengths and expertise of the individuals involved. Indigenous language skills and cultural understanding, healing and counselling expertise along with skills associated with fundraising, proposal writing, and reporting achieved a balance in the team's work. Still balancing skills sets, managing expectations, and ensuring readiness to respond to the varied needs of community women were not without challenges. The demands on the team were high in terms of travel and accommodation (e.g., long drives, sleeping on floors or with families), fundraising, and engendering broader base support for the project. Making presentations was one approach used to promote understanding and engender support. Over the course of the project, the project team provided:

- a project overview presentation to the YWCA Canada annual meeting in Yellowknife in June 2011;
- a presentation to Aurora College, Yellowknife Campus Social Work students in May 2012 to discuss issues of the normalization of violence, lateral violence, the need to provide services in Aboriginal languages, successes of culture-based

¹³Among names mentioned in project reports are: Linda Todd, Agnes Francis, Janelle Dautel, Gisele Forget, Eileen Mantla, and Marie Adele Wettrade

approaches, women not using counseling services, the need for a social marketing campaign, and the need for treatment for men who use violence.

- a presentation on the Gameti moosehide tanning project to the NWT Status of Women Council Board on March 6, 2013.

Team members also participated in training as available and relevant. For example, team members attended a conference on family violence in November 2011 and vicarious trauma training in April 2012. Leading at the Edge was also involved in facilitating the Tlicho Government's February 2012 training of the seven Tlicho Justice and Victims Services Coordinators on how and why to run a women's group. That workshop included a discussion on gossip, personal safety planning, leadership, support, and empowerment.

The Steering Committee and Leading at the Edge team worked well together. The Committee was very helpful in problem-solving, providing input on project activities, and offering vision and oversight. The Committee was extremely supportive of shifting the project approach from community consultation and planning to empowerment and relationship building, and informing Status of Women Canada of the reasons for this. The Steering Committee recognized early that Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities was a "dangerous project" in that "if something went wrong there was no back-up". The Steering Committee members were well acquainted with safety issues associated with family violence work. For example, the Status of Women Council of the NWT takes extraordinary precaution when engaged in family violence activities. The need for similar precautions became evident in the early work of the project. For instance, the Committee's advised the project team to travel in pairs so as to ensure safety.

For women involved on the Steering Committee, the project was an "eye-opening" experience as it brought Yellowknife-based women face to face with the realities that women in small communities face, particularly the:

- large gaps in services that exist between Yellowknife and regional centres and small communities.
- significant controls on women in small communities that keep them silent, separated, and vulnerable to violence.

The original project design anticipated a project advisory group made up of community-based NWT women. However, an early focus on building relationships and trust among women in the isolated communities meant that the efforts to form the

group were postponed. Almost a year after the project had begun, six women¹⁴ volunteered at the January 2011 women's workshop to serve on a project advisory group. While attempts were made to hold teleconferences every few months, the group was disbanded due to lack of participation. Competing demands (e.g., childcare) and lack of readiness to work with others outside their communities to address women's safety issues were identified as factors leading to disbanding the project advisory group. There is also the view that the group was not really needed as the Steering Committee was in many ways fulfilling the role of a project advisory group.

Activities

As shown in the logic model, anticipated project activities included: a scan of safety options/models elsewhere, consultations with NWT service providers, contacting stakeholders, facilitating a one-day planning workshop in each target community with follow-up workshop in subsequent years, providing ongoing information and support to communities, regularly updating the NWT Coalition Against Family Violence, providing advisory group support, holding an project advisory group annual workshop, and documenting and disseminating project experience and safety option models. With the change in project approach, activities were significantly altered. For example, the project advisory group annual workshop was expanded to included more women from small communities workshop, the project advisory group was abandoned, and more intense and varied activities took place in the small communities. More details on project activities are discussed below.

Scan of Models in Other Jurisdictions

A cursory scan of community-based models in small, isolated communities in other jurisdictions that support women who experience violence revealed little current documentation, new ideas, or solution-focused community-based efforts to keep women safe from violence. Barriers created by confidentiality concerns and capacity, and a focus on the shelter model as the most appropriate response were the main findings of the scan.

¹⁴ Dehcho Region: Stephanie Kotchea and Synthea Hope (with support from Lucy Simon; Sahtu Region: Barbara Blanco; Beaufort-Delta Region: Anna-May McLeod; Tlicho Region: Eileen Mantla and Belinda Blackduck; and Akaitcho Region: Alice Abel.

The issues of confidentiality and capacity are well documented in social research in the NWT¹⁵ as long-standing, if not intractable barriers to addressing violence and other stubborn and deep-rooted social issues. The shelter model (e.g., safe houses and shelters) is an option that women in small NWT communities also see as beneficial. In fact, a system of safe homes along with community policing, were recommended in a comprehensive regional plan as a way to respond to violence in communities in the Dehcho Region.¹⁶ At the same time, northern women including key informants are well aware of the challenges associated with this approach. “Communities are really hard on people in the community who hide others from violence. Women who protect other women put themselves in danger.”

The lack of current documentation on new community-based and solution-focused responses to keeping women safe in small, isolated settings with no resident protection services, underscores the importance of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project. In this regard, the project might very well be the first of its kind to document community-based responses to keeping women safe in small communities without protection services. The lack of documentation also suggests a need for further research and discussion on keeping women living in small communities safe from violence.

Consultations/Contact with Stakeholders

Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities consultations and contact with NWT service providers and stakeholders were ongoing over the life of the project. These relationships took different forms – consultation, engagement, and seeking funding/in-kind support. In the first year of the project, several consultations were held with service providers. In years two and three, the focus was on engagement in community projects/activities and securing funding/in-kind support.

In the first year (between January-March 2011), consultations with the RCMP, the Dehcho Health and Social Services Authority, and the Tlicho Community Services Agency revealed:

¹⁵ Examples include the *Social Agenda Conference Report*. (2001). Government of the NWT.

<http://www.gov.nt.ca/research/publications/pdfs/Agenda.pdf>

No Place for Poverty Anti-Poverty Workshop Report. (2010). YWCA Yellowknife and Alternatives North.

<http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/live/documents/content/11-02-08TD136-16%285%29.pdf>

¹⁶ *Dehcho Regional Investment Plan Mackenzie Gas Project Impact Fund* (2009). Dehcho First Nations.

http://www.dehcho.org/documents/mgpif/09_11_regional_investment_plan_update_final_phase_3_report.pdf

- A pilot community policing project running since 2009 that offers Gameti four days/week of policing services and Wrigley three days/week. The pilot continues.
- A protocol for emergency calls in cases where there is no permanent RCMP presence. (Emergency calls are assessed as a life or death situation or not. The RCMP may charter a plane to the community and try to mobilize local resources to stabilize the situation as much as possible until the charter arrives.)
- The Community Constable model is being piloted to focus on community relations and crime prevention. No Community Constable positions have yet been established in small NWT communities.
- Community Justice Coordinators, Community Justice Circle, and Victim Services Coordinators are in place in some communities to respond to cases diverted from the courts. Spousal assault and other severe crimes cannot be diverted to community justice.
- Women taking power for their own safety is the best way to keep women safe. Women need to build confidence, do their own sharing circles, and recognize that they are “the backbone of communities.” Local paraprofessional staff and telehealth video conferencing can help empower women. Many paraprofessionals have the skills and experience to lead circles and support women’s groups.

In the second and third year of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project, the focus of contacts with NWT service providers and stakeholders was engagement of front-line workers and community organizations in supporting the women’s projects. There were some successful examples of engagement. One example was the Trout Lake First Nation and Development Corporation who supported the Trout Lake women’s survival camp with contributions and help setting up the site. Similarly, the Gameti Community Government made a financial donation to the women’s moosehide tanning camp. Engagement of the RCMP in women’s meetings was another success. The RCMP were particularly responsive to project team requests to participate in women’s meetings in Wrigley and Gameti. RCMP participation created some level of safety, albeit for the brief time that they were in the community. Their participation was very positive and local women appreciated talking to them. RCMP members’ illustrated in these two communities that they are well-trained and sensitized to family violence issues.

The project team also successfully engaged community justice coordinators in the Tlicho Region in partnering and supporting events in Gameti and Wekweeti. The Dehcho Health and Social Services Authority, Sahtu Health and Social Services Authority, and the Tlicho Community Services Agency to varying degrees, engaged in

the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project either through funding for, or staff involvement in project activities. Overall however, the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project was better able to engage other parties through financial and in-kind contributions than in on-the-ground support for community women. With the exception of the RCMP in Wrigley and Gameti, few local service providers participated in community activities or offered support to local women. In the few cases where front-line workers did participate (in Colville Lake and Wrigley), the project either paid for the costs of workers to participate or made special requests.

The engagement of front-line workers in community activities was discouraged by local women themselves. In virtually all the target communities, local women lack trust and confidence in front-line workers. Front-line workers are often perceived as gossips, unprofessional, unaccountable, and unhealthy. "They make women feel like they are being judged." At the same time, women involved in the project were both disappointed and discouraged by the lack of support from those few front-line workers that are in small communities. Among some women, there is the view that work must be done to address quality of services that undermine relationships with front-line workers.

Women's Projects

Over the three-year time frame, the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project launched community-based activities in five NWT regions and in nine of the 11 target communities without resident RCMP services. Half way through the three-year project, the Steering Committee and project team made the decision to focus efforts on the most isolated communities and those with the greatest need for support. A decision was taken to no longer visit women in Trout Lake due to another community project working on wellness and violence issues. It was also decided not to begin activities in Enterprise and Kakisa. In the latter case, two women leaders from Kakisa indicated that spousal violence is not an issue in the community at this time. Activities in Enterprise were not pursued because the community is on the highway system and has access to police, shelter, and counselling services 38 kilometres away in Hay River. Lack of response to efforts in Dettah resulted in only one visit to that community.

As shown in the table below, the most visits were to Gameti and Wrigley due to potentially dangerous family situations and the need for support. Notwithstanding double counting, over 200 women and 250 community members participated in community activities.

Community	Visits	Attendance
Gameti	8 visits - July 2010 to June 2012	Women participants 47 Community participants including other women, children, and men 143
Wekweeti	1 visit - December 2012	Women 6
Nahanni Butte	5 visits - August 2010–February 2013	Women 44
Jean Marie River	4 visits - August 2010-July 2012	Women 24
Trout Lake	2 visits – February 2011 –July 2011	Women 12 Community participants including other women, children, and men 50
Wrigley	5 visits – September 2010-March 2013	Women 17 Community and front-line participants including other women, children, and men 32
Colville Lake	3 visits – May 2011-December 2012	Women 33 Community and front-line participants including other women, children, and men 20
Tsiigehtchic	3 visits – April 2011- March 2013	Women 17 Community and front-line participants including other women, children, and men 5
Dettah	1 visit – April 2011	Women 3

Note: Several events/activities were undertaken during each community visit. Attendance refers to the number of participants. There is double counting as the number of individuals participating in the project was not tracked.

A similar process was used in each community to build trust and support women to take power to keep safe from violence. Initially, talking/sharing circles and vision boards and montage were used to explore inner and outer safety, the Dene wheel of life, self-empowerment, traditional spirituality, self-care, healing, healthy relationships and lifestyles, and maintaining a balance of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Processes helped community women to agree on activities for increasing their personal safety and providing mutual support. Activities identified varied from community to community. Community women also evaluated project processes and facilitation.

Consistent with a culture-based empowerment model, the Leading at the Edge team adopted the stance of positively responding to women’s ideas for activities to increase their personal safety and mutual support. The project team sought additional resources when required to put the women’s ideas into action. The team brought needed skills

into the communities to ensure that activities provided the mechanism for women to address their fears and connect with their peers. The project team maintained meaningful connections with local women; role modeled respect for confidentiality; honoured the Elders with gifts; and made efforts to inform the whole community of the women's project. When community women requested, the project team also involved men and children, and front-line workers in activities to promote openness and diminish women's fear and reticence about participating in the project. An overview of community-based activities follows by region and community.

Tlicho Region

Two of the 11 communities targeted by the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project –Gameti and Wekweeti – are in the Tlicho Region.

Gameti

As the home community of Alice Black, the inspiration for this project, much of the project's attention in the first two years of the project was on the safety of women in Gameti. Eight visits were made to the community between July 2010 and June 2012.

1. The first visit involved a two-evening 'self-awareness' workshop. Ideas were generated for future women's gatherings (e.g., camping, moosehide tanning, dancing, karaoke music).
2. Four months later, the second community visit occurred just prior to the Alice Black murder trial. In partnership with the Gameti Justice Coordinator, the project organized a public feast and fiddle dance with information about the Gameti Women's Project. During this visit, contact was made with the Gameti Tlicho Government offices and support was provided to family members of the late Alice Black.¹⁷ A well-attended evening women's meeting involved trust building exercises and a circle 'check-in' at the beginning and end of the meeting.
3. Six months later, a third visit was made to Gameti. Three meetings were held with community women. Two male RCMP officers attended the third meeting and provided information about Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs) and other services.¹⁸ A highlight of the third meeting was the good rapport between local women and the RCMP, and an appreciation for the safety that RCMP presence affords. Women in Gameti enjoyed meeting with the RCMP officers to better

¹⁷ Family members sought personal support and other community members were seeking information. These needs were related to the imminent trial of the husband of murdered Alice Black which was scheduled for November 22/11.

¹⁸ Two EPOs have been successfully implemented in Gameti over the past two years and anecdotal information about at least two women from the community seeking safe shelter in Yellowknife.

understand how an EPO works to address safety in situations of family violence. Following the meeting, a commitment was made to schedule visits to Gameti at the same time that the RCMP are present and hold a 'women and cop' luncheon on a regular basis.

4. A month later, the fourth community visit was an overnight camping and canoe trip. The trip was identified by local women as a way to do traditional activities, enjoy the land, and strengthen connections among Gameti women. While approximately 12 local women were interested in participating, only three were able to go on the trip with two members from the Leading at the Edge project team. The women shared stories and food, rested, connected, and enjoyed the land. They agreed that going on the land is important for healing. Unlike a year earlier when few women were interested in developing safety plans, the women indicated a strong interest in developing personal safety plans and suggested contracting a local woman to talk to Gameti women, the Tlicho Health and Social Services, Gameti Community Government, nurse, and RCMP and develop a brochure about ways for Gameti women to be safe in situations of partner violence. Eileen Mantla was contracted by the project team to take on these activities.
5. Five months later in December 2011, sharing circles and one-on-one counselling together with planning for a moosehide tanning project were the main focus of the fifth visit. Divisions and bullying within the community were themes in the women's discussions.
6. Three months later in March 2012 in a sixth visit to the community, the Leading at the Edge project team brought in a woman¹⁹ with experience working with women in India and Africa and improvisational theatre. This visit involved an evening of games, a community luncheon, and an evening meeting based on exercises borrowed from the theatrical community on showing emotion. The visit also involved a survey of 10 women in their workplaces. The survey identified a need for: community events that involve Gameti men and women; for more meetings with the RCMP to learn about their services; work to build trust among women to keep each other safe; monthly Gameti women's meetings; to involve women from other small communities to talk about how they keep safe; Gameti women to give input to the Chief and Council about safety; a local safe house; men to be supported and encouraged to get counseling; the Whati men's group to work with Gameti men; and a list of the counselling and counselors.
7. The seventh visit to Gameti two months later, focused on planning for a women's moosehide tanning camp, getting support from community leaders, and holding a women's meeting.

¹⁹ Natasha Bhogul of Yellowknife

8. The Gameti women's moosehide tanning camp on an island in Rae Lakes was the focus of the final visit in June 2012. The eight-day camp involved the preparation of a moose hide, making dry meat, checking fishnets, hiking, and cooking for the many other women, men, women, youth, and children who visited the camp.

Since the last project visit, Gameti women continue to look for ways to work together. In the late winter of 2013, community women had a sewing night where several women volunteered their skills and materials to make 20 moosehide vests for youth participating in an NWT hand games tournament. The youth won the tournament and felt very proud. "The women were celebrated for working together and contributing to this success."

Wekweeti

The Leading at the Edge team visited the community in December 2012. An evening workshop and meetings with community staff were held. Community women expressed the need to address lateral violence. The community and women are divided by trauma and families blaming each other. "We need help – it's hard to deal with all this stuff and we don't know what to do." Local women also identified the need for loss and grief counselling, and a women's group that connects women from all families. No follow-up was taken prior to the termination of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project.

Dehcho Region

Of the 11 communities targeted by the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project, more than half (6) are in the Dehcho Region – Wrigley, Nahanni Butte, Jean Marie River, Trout Lake, Kakisa, and Enterprise. The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project launched initiatives in four Dehcho Region communities. No work was initiated in Kakisa or Enterprise due to lack of adequate resources, interest, and/or known issues of violence as well as concern about creating expectations and beginning activities that couldn't be sustained. Due to the circumstances of women in Wrigley, that community was the main focus of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project in the Dehcho Region.

Wrigley

The project team visited Wrigley five times between September 2010 and March 2013.

1. The first women's meeting used montages as the medium for women to share stories and discuss ideas for increasing their personal safety and mutual support.

Ideas for women's projects included: healing circles, on-the-land activities, and dancing. The visit also involved work at the school to share teachings of the four directions, Dene traditions, and animal guiding spirits.

2. During the second visit six months later in March 2011, two workshops were held. Discussions exposed the deep level of fear and lack of safety among women including those in leadership and in front-line positions in the community. Fear perpetrates the whole community and keeps women away from public places. Fear at all levels is a significant barrier to organizing a women's group in Wrigley. "We are afraid to face each other in our community." "We are all afraid of what other people will say." Ideas for women activities in Wrigley included: a Dehcho women's networking workshop, a local feast and a drum dance, and a healing tent/camp on the land. Meetings with the Community Health Worker revealed a willingness to lead some healing circles with project support. The idea of building a women's healing camp resonated with the women and one woman agreed to take the lead on this project including volunteering to secure wood and help to build a tent frame. Wrigley women envisioned the woman's tent as a place for: women "who need time out from their partners," doing traditional sewing and making quilts, sharing circles, teaching young girls traditional skills, singing and playing instruments, learning Dene love songs in Slavey, singing gospel songs, and getting massages from a local masseuse. The women asked the project to allocate a nominal amount for gas (\$200) to drive women and children back and forth to the women's tent.
3. The third visit in September 2011 took place at a cook-out at Hudson Creek with follow-up gatherings in the community. A planning meeting for women's projects was held that included discussions about securing resources for the women's tent and the formation of a women's group that would be led by four local women. One woman reiterated her commitment to the women's tent project and led the set-up of the tent when the project team had secured resources.
4. For the fourth visit in September 2012, the Leading at the Edge team included a resource person²⁰ who led a poorly attended musical workshop at the women's tent. In addition, a musical workshop and singing exercises were offered at the school. Cool, dark autumn nights together with disputes amongst women were identified as possible reasons for poor attendance at activities at the women's tent.
5. The last visit to Wrigley was in March 2013. Due to heavy snow, it was not possible to meet at the women's tent. Three meetings and a sharing circle were held. Two meetings involved local/regional front-line workers who shared information on their services. Issues raised related to: lack of women's

²⁰ Natasha Duchene

participation (like those planned at the women's tent) due to fear (they are "scared of their spouse"); threats to front-line workers ("We get a lot of threats from men at the Health Centre. Men barge in, intoxicated, and threaten us."); lack of support for local women and front-line workers (e.g., it is hard to rely on the RCMP and others in Fort Simpson); and lack of support for victims (e.g., perpetrators are hidden in the community and get support from their families). "It is very disheartening to see the lack of supports for victims." Further, if a woman accuses a man of rape she has to get to the Health Centre in Fort Simpson to go through the testing process. They come back to Wrigley and there may be bad feelings towards them, causing them to feel re-victimized.

Since the project ended, local women continue to plan activities for the women's tent. Older and younger women are looking forward to spring and to getting out to the tent to do things together. "I am just praying that women will come out.... It is so good to go back on the land" Over the winter, the tent keeper has been blessed with many donations for the tent and several women have been saving moosehides to work on at the tent. In May, the tent keeper will put up a sign to invite women to the tent. The tent keeper also recently did a bake sale to raise money for the tent. The tent keeper and several other local women are "very excited about the future" and are looking forward to future women's gatherings and involving the teenage girls when they come home from school in Fort Simpson.

Nahanni Butte

The Leading at the Edge project team made five visits to Nahanni Butte between August 2010 and February 2013.

1. Circle talk and montage work generated many ideas for women's projects for increasing their personal safety and mutual support. Ideas included mountain climbing, a trip to Virginia Falls, dance, role modelling traditional roles, healing workshops, arts and crafts, and communications activities such as a newsletter, Facebook site, and talking groups. A mountain climbing group had particular appeal as a way to bring women together in a physically demanding activity to help them "be with each other," bond, develop trust, and create a space to discuss issues and how they can support one another to be safe from spousal violence.
2. A second visit to Nahanni Butte occurred four months later. The Leading at the Edge team brought in a resource person²¹ to present information to local women

²¹ Christian Beyrend, the president of the Yellowknife Climbing Club

and young women at the school on safe climbing techniques and a tri-weekly exercise plan for women to follow

3. In October 2011, a third visit to the community also involved the project liaison from Gameti who assisted the project facilitator in sharing circles. During this visit, community women began planning for fundraising activities for a trip to the Liard Hotsprings.
4. Three months later in January 2012, the project team brought five sets of Nordic poles into the community along with a trainer,²² who was also a member of the Steering Committee for the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project. Nordic walking provided opportunities for one-on-one time with a Leading at the Edge counselor. The visit also provided an opportunity for the women to engage others in the community to embark on and complete the Mackenzie River walking challenge.²³ Three sharing circles were also held during the third community visit. Women talked a lot about exercise and physical health, weight loss, proper sleep, and goals for self-care. The women of Nahanni Butte continued planning for a trip to the Liard Hotsprings. They agreed that such a trip would help them build relationships and support each other as well as provide a break from family obligations.
5. A year later, the Leading at the Edge team together with the liaison from Gameti led two evening meetings which included self-care and pampering (e.g., manicures) and one-on-one sessions. Among the issues raised were lack of safety (to do Nordic walking) due to loose dogs, uncertainty, stress, and lack of leadership associated with residual issues from the flood.²⁴ Women in Nahanni Butte were continuing to plan for a trip to the Liard Hotsprings.

Currently, there are no activities in the community that bring women together to keep each other safe. While there are known situations of violence, women in the community feel helpless to stop it because they know that this is a choice that every woman has to make for herself. The Increasing the Safety for Women in NWT Communities project started to put women on the path of rejecting victimization but many factors in the community including the devastating flood in 2012 have worked to undue the work that was done. No follow-up has been done on the women's trip to the Liard Hotsprings.

²² Gail Cyr, Women's Advisor to the GNWT

²³ http://nwtrpa.org/rpa/?page_id=3118

²⁴ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/story/2012/06/13/north-nahanni-butte-flooded.html>

Trout Lake

The project team made its first visit to Trout Lake in February 2011 and a second visit five months later.

1. The Leading at the Edge's lead facilitator/counsellor and another woman experienced in leading sharing circles²⁵ made the first community visit. The visit involved a women's workshop/healing circle. Women's ideas for increasing their personal safety and mutual support included: more healing circles with workshops with Suza' Tsetso, dancing (two-step, jigging), gatherings with women elsewhere, self-defence training, tai chi, outdoor physical activities (canoeing around the lake and upriver, hiking to another community), and traditional activities (birch and spruce canoe-making, caribou babiche making, berry picking and jarring, sewing group, moosehide tanning, and snowshoe making). The women said that organizing a local women's group would be challenged by: childcare, confidentiality, gossip ("They'll laugh at me, I don't want to tell people who I am, they'll tell the whole world what I said."), lack of leadership support, negative thinking, lateral violence, lack of awareness of domestic violence, and a norm that accords less equality to women.
2. A second community visit in July 2011 involved a women's survival camp over three nights and four days. With contributions from the Trout Lake Development Corporation and Trout Lake Band, childcare workers, and Leading at the Edge facilitators,²⁶ local women shared and taught traditional skills such as moosehide tanning, making spruce tree roots baskets, setting spring pole rabbit snares, and collecting/using medicinal plants. They also shared stories and travelled by boat to the Trout Lake Lodge. The camp was visited by the Chief and others in the community to offer support as needed. Lessons taken from the camp revealed that women appreciate culture-based, land-based activities because they "are still very connected to their traditions of surviving on the land." Spending time in traditional activities on the land is a good starting point for developing trust and safety. The women are very interested in developing personal safety plans and believe that it is necessary to "contract a local woman to talk to women through confidential interviews in the home, Deh Cho Health and Social Services, Community Government/the Band, the RCMP who come to Trout Lake, and the nurse and develop a brochure about ways for Trout Lake women to be safe in situations of partner violence." They also expressed their concern about traditions that put elders in control, suppress individuality, and put women at risk.

²⁵ Melanie Bellemare of Montreal

²⁶ Suza' Tsetso and Agnes Francis

About the same time that the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project was initiated in Trout Lake, another project led by Northern Integrated Cultures with the Environment (ICE) and Dene healer Be'sha Blondin got underway in the community. That project was focused on community-based wellness planning which included addressing issues of violence and abuse. A potential duplication in effort caused the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project to terminate its work in the community. It is unclear what if any, follow-up there has been to the women's suggestions.

Jean Marie River

The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project made four visits to Jean Marie River between August 2010 and July 2012.

1. The first visit involved sharing circles which were well attended and supported.
2. During the second visit in February 2011, the Leading at the Edge facilitator and another women²⁷ experienced in leading sharing circles led two sharing/healing circles to address personal issues, inner and outer safety (boundaries), Dene wheel of life teachings, Dene women's rites of passage, anger issues (e.g., where it comes from, how it impacts women and others, how to release anger in a safe and healthy way), and how to create safety in the home. The circles were engaging and helped women to open up to each other in a fun and interesting way. The women expressed their desire for more sessions led by Suza'Tsetso, and for more "laughing and praying together, sewing or cooking together." The women also identified the deep rooted traumas in the community and the very limited resources available to address these issues.
3. A women's sewing circle and a sharing circle the following morning occurred on the third community visit in November 2011. The sewing circle proved to be an excellent way for women to openly discuss issues in their lives and share with other women.
4. The fourth community visit was in July 2012. Along with the Leading at the Edge facilitator, two regional resource people²⁸ held meetings with local women. The meetings involved gifting a Dene drum and empowering women to take up drumming and singing. A short workshop about managing finances and budgeting was also offered during the visit.

²⁷Suza' Tsetso and Melanie Bellemare

²⁸ Cara Lenoir, young Dene woman from the Deh Cho with a commerce degree and desire to support women in small communities and Harriet Geddes, an elder from Fort Providence with extensive knowledge of traditional Dene medicine and drum carrier

At the time of this evaluation, there were no women's projects underway in the community. However, there are local women who are interested in getting together on the land around a constructive project that allows them to step outside themselves and address issues in their lives. Some women are actively looking for resources to make this happen. Other women are maintaining connections that they made during the project and trying to support each other (e.g., two women, one from Nahanni Butte and one from Jean Marie who attended the legal training workshop have connected over the phone).

Akaiicho Territory

One Akaiicho Territory community – Dettah – was targeted by the project.

Dettah

One sharing circle was held in Dettah in April 2011. One woman attended along with two women from Yellowknife. Attendance was poor in spite of liaison with the social services department of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, personal invitations to Dettah women, and posters promoting the circle. A second effort to organize a sharing circle in May 2011 was cancelled due to a lack of response.

Sahtu Region

The community of Colville Lake was targeted in the Sahtu Region.

Colville Lake

Three visits were made to the community between May 2011 and December 2012.

1. The first visit involved separate meetings with two RCMP officers from Fort Good Hope on their bi-monthly trip, the Chief, and local Sahtu Health and Social Services staff. In addition, two healing circles and one-on-one counselling were offered. At the project's expense, two circle helpers²⁹ were brought in from Fort Good Hope to participate in the healing circles. Further, the project team led an afternoon workshop with young girls to teach them to make sushi followed by another workshop with the young girls involving them in 'spa' activities. Many issues were raised during these activities including the need: for more healing circles for both women and men; to deal with alcohol abuse which fuels domestic violence; to address the stresses on front-line workers who try to intervene; and for a safe, secure (e.g., with a "Bouncer") refuge for elders, women, and children who are fleeing violence. While in Colville Lake, the Leading at the Edge project

²⁹ Melinda Laboucan and Doris Manual

team received a threatening phone call from a man claiming that women's circles had caused women to be angry at their husbands. Some safety planning was advised for those involved in the project.

2. Five months later in October 2011, a second trip was made to Colville Lake. The project team for this visit included a co-facilitator/counsellor from the Tsiigehtchic women's project.³⁰ The project team held two sharing circles, met one-on-one with both women and men, and presented the Dene wheel of life to school students. The need for a healer to work with men was identified along with more work on connecting women and providing safe, secure shelter.
3. The Leading at the Edge project team included Debby Rybchinski from the Alison McAteer women's shelter in Yellowknife in the third visit to the community in December 2012. The project team also worked with Sahtu Health and Social Services to coordinate their visit with a staff counsellor but unfortunately, the counsellor did not participate in any project activities. During the visit, two sharing circles, a cooking class with young women, and one-on-one sessions were offered.

At the time of the evaluation, some women in the community continue to hold sharing circles on Sundays to bring women together. Sharing circles are helpful but would be improved with the help of an outside facilitator like Suza` Tsetso "who did such a good job." Also, there is a need for more diverse activities that bring women together.

Mackenzie-Delta

The community of Tsiigehtchic was targeted in the Mackenzie-Delta Region.

Tsiigehtchic

The Leading at the Edge team made three visits to Tsiigehtchic between April 2011 and March 2013. The project team was supported by a liaison/counsellor/circle keeper³¹ from nearby Fort McPherson.

1. During the first community visit, three evenings of sharing circles were organized. Good, consistent attendance together with very positive feedback showed that: women in the community want to continue to meet as a group to talk about safety and women's awareness; healing workshops are preferred; and some local women are interested in training on how to lead healing workshops and a women's group.

³⁰ Agnes Frances

³¹ *ibid*

2. The second visit in July 2011 involved a five-day women's mountain camp south of Fort McPherson away from community distractions such as internet, politics, jobs, and gossip. The camp was attended by younger women aged 19 to 34 years. Activities included: morning and evening sharing circles; hiking; berry picking; collecting mountain water; cooking; and communication energizers. The young women got used to sharing their feelings in a sharing circle and expressed a desire to continue to do this. They also expressed their interest in personal development, self-awareness, and on the land activities. Issues of partner jealousy and partner violence were raised as particular concerns.
3. A third project team visit to the community in March 2013 also included two women³² from the Status of Women Council of the NWT. The Council is a member of the project Steering Committee. A community luncheon, a self esteem workshop, and a workshop on services available to women experiencing family/spousal violence were delivered. The service workshop involved an RCMP officer from Fort McPherson. The Chief and some Band staff attended the luncheon. Lack of services and sympathy/support for victims, and RCMP response time were raised as issues.

At the time of this evaluation, there were no women's projects underway in the community even though there is a pressing need to address issues of lateral violence, bullying, and violence against women. This need is even more pressing in light of a long-term vacancy in the one front-line social services position in the community.

Conferences and Workshops

The original project design anticipated annual gatherings of the project advisory group. With the abandonment of the advisory group, annual workshops/conferences were expanded to include women from each of the eleven targeted small communities and members of the Steering Committee. Annual workshops/conferences were held in Yellowknife. While costly in terms of travel, the annual workshops evolved as an important way to network, increase capacity, and celebrate successes. It is estimated that about 75 northern women attended workshops/conferences over the course of the project. Participants included women from small communities who were both active and inactive (e.g., Trout Lake and Kakisa) in the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project.

³² Sami Dechief and Annemieke Mulders

The first annual workshop was held on February 10-11, 2010. The workshop followed a similar gathering in 2009 under the YWCA Yellowknife's Northern Extension Project.³³ The workshop involved an estimated³⁴ 20 women from Colville Lake, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Kakisa, Trout Lake, Wekweeti, Tukotyaktuk, Fort Smith, and Yellowknife. The workshop explored examples of creating community safety that included prayer, building relationships, visiting, and offering food, paying attention to physical, emotional, mental signs, a safety plan and readiness to leave, a plan with children about where to go for help, setting up a code word with the children, knowing support services, sharing with good friends what is happening, and a community volunteer caregiver team. Also suggested were: on-the-land workshops/wellness camps and community workshop, having safe shelters/houses, more community awareness and intolerance of domestic violence, emergency response plans that involve all agencies, more helpful interagency responses, and faster/more accessible police responses.

Twenty-three women from small NWT communities attended the Women's Workshop in Yellowknife, January 24-26, 2011. Two women attended from each of Tsiigehtchic, Colville Lake, Wekweeti, Trout Lake, Kakisa, Dettah, and Wrigley. Four Gameti women, three Jean Marie River women and one Enterprise woman also attended. As well, the Executive Directors of the YWCA and Centre for Northern Families, the Women's Advisor to the Government of the NWT, the YWCA Yellowknife shelter manager, and four women working with Leading at the Edge attended. The workshop included sharing circles, exercises to discuss inner and outer safety, a play on violence, role playing around specific scenarios to encourage women to think about various options for community safety plans, exposure to Chinese medicine, acupuncture and yoga, and establishment of the Project Advisory Group.³⁵

In March 2012, the Women from Small Communities Conference brought Steering Committee members together with women from small communities to discuss and learn about ways to be safe from family and spousal violence in their communities. The goal was achieved by: learning about different projects small community women have developed to address family violence; a skit and discussion about lateral violence; talking together and sharing experiences; accessing information about family violence protection programs and supports; meeting people who are available to support

³³ Both the 2009 and 2010 workshops were facilitated by Cathy Richardson who is nationally known for her expertise in response-based approaches to family violence.

³⁴ A participant list or record of attendance was not available.

³⁵ Dehcho Region: Stephanie Kotchea and Synthea Hope (with support from Lucy Simon; Sahtu Region: Barbara Blanco; Beaufort-Delta Region: Anna-May McLeod; Tliche Region: Eileen Mantla and Belinda Blackduck; and Akaitcho region: Alice Abel.

women in small communities to be safe; accessing information about a personal safety planning; and learning about self-care including naturopathic medicine, massage, and the traditions of making and drinking tea. Twenty-one women attended - two from each of Wekweeti, Wrigley, Jean Marie River, and Nahanni Butte, and one woman from each of Kakisa, Dettah, Ndilo, Fort Good Hope, and Fort McPherson. Six women from Yellowknife attended including the Executive Director and Board President of the YWCA, the YWCA Yellowknife shelter manager, two leaders of sharing circles, one person working on logistics and Lani Cooke.

There was no annual workshop in 2013 as funding was unavailable for this purpose. This is seen as a failing. It would have been appropriate to gather at the end of the project to celebrate the confidence and power of the women who participated. Funding was however sought through the Victims Assistance Fund, GNWT Department of Justice to cover the travel costs of 10 women from small communities to attend a legal education training workshop for shelter workers. The workshop addressed legal options for women who are experiencing spousal/family violence. The workshop was well attended, very successful and very valuable. It provided concrete information and addressed issues and concerns associated with interventions by Social Services/Child Welfare and the RCMP in the cases of domestic violence. Following the workshop, there was a disclosure of violence. Relationships established through the workshop enabled follow-up on the incident disclosed.

As the regional centre of the Dehcho Region, the project team travelled through the community of Fort Simpson and worked with front-line service providers who serve small communities in the Region. The Leading at the Edge Project team collaborated with front-line health and social services workers in Fort Simpson to lead a family violence workshop. Although the community had completed extensive work on a community response protocol in 2012, turn-over and vacancies in staff coupled with changing front-line roles and responsibilities had relegated the protocol into disuse. The workshop revealed that awareness of the protocol needs to be refreshed every year and efforts made to monitor implementation. The workshop also revitalized the interagency group overseeing the protocol and helped the community discuss shelter options and shift its focus to a network of safe homes rather than a shelter from family violence which would not be feasible in the community.

Outputs and Outcomes

As shown in the program logic model, a variety of outputs were anticipated including minutes, reports, and number of participants and community visits. For the most part, the project outputs exceeded those anticipated.

The project team issued twelve (12) activity reports that were discussed with the Steering Committee as well as workshop/conference reports, and project funder reports. All reports are quite detailed. Project reports provided a synthesis of community activities, engagement of community women and others, activity evaluations and 'check-in' comments from women about their safety and comfort level, concerns, items requiring action, and follow-up activities planned. Project team reports provided the basis for decision making and accountability reporting. Project reports also enabled Steering Committee members to keep the Coalition Against Family Violence updated on project activities and on progress to develop safety options.

Over the life of the project, a total of 32 visits were made to nine NWT communities. Multiple activities occurred during community visits. While visitation levels are consistent with what was anticipated (33 or 11 per year), the range of community activities exceeded what was anticipated in the original project design. Rather than an annual community meeting as was originally anticipated, community activities involved sharing circles, one-on-one counselling, community gatherings, and a host of other activities that brought women together to build trusting relationships (e.g., Nordic walking, moosehide tanning, canoe/on-the land trips, sewing circles).

Project participation was excellent. Community activities and annual workshops engaged about 275 women and 250 community members and local/regional front-line workers. In the smallest of communities where about half the population are girls and women, at least 10% had some involvement in the project. While double counting is a factor, participation exceeds the original estimate of 70 community women. The high level of participation is commendable given the small populations in the targeted communities as well as the deep levels of fear and mistrust associated with participating in women's activities or confronting violence. While the indirect benefits of project participation are unknown, it is likely that the project did indeed touch 500 or more women, as was originally expected.

While participation varied from community to community and from visit to visit, in some communities participation increased with subsequent visits and activities. For example, four women attended the first Gameti (population 311) meeting in July 2010 but 13 attended the second meeting in November 2010. Overall however, four women were consistently active in Gameti activities. In Nahanni Butte (pop. 119), an average of

six women regularly participated in activities. Similarly in Jean Marie River (pop. 72), five women consistently participated; four consistently participated in Wrigley (pop. 116); and seven participated in activities during the first two visits to Tsiigehtchic (pop. 128).

The original project design anticipated several outcomes including new safety options, pilot tested safety options in six communities, and more women safe in their own homes and communities. For women involved in this project, the safety option identified and to some extent tested, was the one of personal choice – the choice of being alone and vulnerable or connected and empowered to choose not to be a victim of violence. “We women isolate ourselves.” The power of choice together with connections with other women, were identified as really the only two options that women in small communities without protection services have for keeping safe from violence. “Women’s safety depends on other women.”

The project did not develop any formal safety plans or options that involved women, front-line workers, and political leaders. In many communities women were reluctant to meet with Band/Community Councils or engage with the few front-line workers available them, to develop formal safety plans and safety options. This reluctance extended to meetings with other women in the community. Fear of exposing violence in the home was the main barrier to meeting with others. Women’s fears come from:

- the threat of repercussions (e.g., rejection, guilt, shame, and physical harm) associated with breaking the ‘secret’ of violence. These feelings replicate those often associated with the colonial legacy in the NWT especially residential schools.
- judgement and consequences including losing children, home, and place in the community. “Women fear losing their children if it is known that they have witnessed abuse.”
- a sense of powerlessness and worthlessness. Awareness of the right to safety is not wide spread among women in the communities involved in the project. The subjugation of women is pervasive. “There are women living with men and leaders in this community who are constantly told that they are useless and worthless.”

The Increasing Safety for Women in NWT Communities project was a catalyst for a community plan and protocol. A woman involved with the Gameti women’s project worked with the local Justice Committee to develop and distribute a safety plan (with phone numbers) and establish a local safe house. In Fort Simpson, the project team helped to revitalize the community interagency group and interagency family violence

protocol, and more clearly focus the front-line in that community on the safety of victims of domestic violence.

It was expected that more women would be safe in their own homes and communities as a result of the project. The host of expected and unexpected outcomes suggests that women in small communities were safer, at least for the duration of the project. Attention to women “who are often forgotten” made these women safer and some women have chosen not to be a victim of violence. This is not to say that women continue to be safer as a result of the project, the choices they make, the tools and information they garnered (e.g., on legal rights), or the relationships they made. “The norms in the communities need to shift significantly for women to achieve real safety.” Further, there are no data to determine if feelings of safety and empowerment translate into more women actually being safer or safe from violence.

While the project did not produce community-wide safety plans or options involving women, front-line workers, and political leaders, it did generate a myriad of other expected and unexpected outcomes, especially for the women involved. These are identified in the tables below.

Expected Outcomes	Evidence
-Awareness of existing safety options	-Through connecting with other women and talking about violence, women became aware that they have the right to be safe and can get help to be safe. They can choose to be a victim or not. Women in three small communities indicated a desire to work with facilitators to develop personal safety plans.
-Increased knowledge of services/strategies to respond to domestic violence	-The RCMP and/or other front-line workers offered information and safety strategies in Gameti, Wrigley, Tsiigehtchic and at annual workshops/conferences. The project team also served as a resource to community women about services/strategies.
-Women informing/guiding responses to domestic violence	-Except in Gameti, no community-wide or formal plans for responding to domestic violence were guided by project participants. Informally through women’s projects, women informed their own responses to violence.
-Pilot tested safety options in six communities	-Four communities (Gameti, Jean Marie River, Wrigley, and Colville Lake) have a core group of empowered women who want to continue moving forward to keep themselves and each other safe.
-Women satisfied with safety planning processes and options	-Satisfaction with processes and options increased with the number of community project team visits. Women in the six

Expected Outcomes	Evidence
<p>-Safety options created through collaborative processes</p> <p>-New safety options for women</p> <p>-More women feeling that their safety options have increased</p> <p>-More women using safety options to keep safe from domestic violence</p> <p>-Communities using safety options to keep women safe</p> <p>-More women feeling safe in their homes and communities</p>	<p>communities that had more than two visits from the project team were more likely to evaluate project activities positively and be active in shaping processes and activities.</p> <p>-Women collaborated with their peers in a host of processes and activities which made them less vulnerable and isolated. Connections with the Tlicho Justice Coordinators, and the RCMP in Gameti and Wrigley were very positive.</p> <p>-Women in small communities and others involved in the project realized that safety from violence relies on relationships with other women. Women’s groups, projects, and informal networks helped to solidify these relationships.</p> <p>-More relationships and connections with other women and more openness to “a taboo subject” contributed to more women feeling that their safety options had increased.</p> <p>-Workshops such as the 2013 legal education workshop provided new information. At least one woman used the information on legal remedies and services to address violence. Two women from Gameti sought EPOs having received this information from the RCMP.</p> <p>-Women in small communities connected with, and built relationships with each other through sharing circles, moosehide tanning, mountain climbing, a women’s tent, and other activities, and by seeking help from others. “It is better to talk to a friend...this is what the project offered and it changed my life.”</p> <p>-In at least four target communities, women are making efforts to maintain and build relationships among community peers. In the remaining five target communities, little if any women are actively working on personal safety and mutual support options. More women in targeted small communities are choosing not to be a victim of domestic violence, and are feeling safer in their homes and communities as a result. There are no quantitative data to support this assertion. Over the duration of the project attention to women “who are often forgotten,” made these women feel safer.</p>

The Leading at the Edge team brought a bevy of coordination, organizational, facilitation, community relationships, healing, counselling, Dene language(s), cultural and spiritual skills and knowledge to the project. The team arrived in communities largely uninvited. At the beginning of the project, “the first question people would ask was ‘who do you work for?’” That changed in time to an excitement that “Lani and Suza` are coming to the community.” As noted below, an unexpected outcome of the project was the strong connection between the project team and community women which if anything, was stronger than among community women themselves. There were three main factors that contributed to this outcome:

- women in the small communities are very proud of their own women leading sharing circles and supporting their choices and projects. The project team’s lead facilitator, a Dene woman from Fort Simpson, Suza’ Tsetso, was lauded for her excellent work in all the communities and as a well respected and loved facilitator that engendered trust and empowerment. The Leading at the Edge team worked closely with two other community-based Dene women and engaged them in women’s projects outside their own community as helpers and co-facilitators. Specifically, a woman from Gameti assisted the project in her own community as well as in Nahanni Butte and Wekweeti. Another woman from Fort McPherson worked with the team in Colville Lake, Trout Lake, and Tsiigehtchic.
- the consistency by which the project team role modelled, trained, and mentored other women in small communities in new skills and personal awareness was applauded by most women who participated in the project.
- the project team showed the women that they were valued and honoured and “stood with them” to make their ideas a reality.

One young woman participating in the project in Gameti described the Leading at the Edge team as “my rock.” She said that she was sceptical that anything could change her life but the project through a montaging process and an opportunity to talk about her life (“even though she knew she wasn’t suppose to open up”), “it changed my life.... I know that it is up to you about how you want your life to be.” This young woman is currently preparing to go to college and study social work, mainly as a result of the life changing experience the project offered.

As shown below, the project had several other unexpected outcomes – more women taking power over their lives, greater understanding of the lives of women in small communities, valuable contacts and relationships, and women feeling supported and valued.

Unexpected Outcomes	Evidence
<p>-A successful process for building trust between outsiders/project team and local women</p> <p>-Trust in a project team from outside the community</p> <p>- More awareness of the extent of violence, control, oppression and powerlessness of women in small communities without protection services</p> <p>-Evidence of work not being done and needed to keep women safe in communities</p> <p>-Valuable contacts for others mandated to address violence in NWT communities</p>	<p>-Consistent participation of a core group of women in five communities (Gameti, Nahanni, Jean Marie, Wrigley and Colville) and strong connections and ongoing relationships between the women and project team/facilitators illustrated the trust built through the project. Underlying project processes, it was clear that “the women felt like someone outside their community cared about them and valued them.”</p> <p>-The Leading at the Edge team of skilled Dene and non-indigenous facilitators/resource people was respected, credible, and trusted. The project team illustrated that long histories of distrust of projects led by outsiders and front-line workers, can be overcome.</p> <p>-The fear and trauma among women in small communities were exposed and “higher than we anticipated.” Also exposed was the “strength of the social controls on women’s behaviour (which) was very limiting in terms of the freedom women had to participate.” Women were afraid to speak, to come to meetings, or to have their voices heard. In one community, women Elders were named as controlling and subjugating younger women. Still, women began to speak openly about a “taboo subject.” “Getting women to share within a community where everyone knows everything else about everyone else, all the secrets and all the gossip, that alone is remarkable.”</p> <p>-As limited or itinerant as they are, women in small communities don’t use the services available to them. Women feel that they can’t talk to counsellors because they don’t trust them. They believe that the counsellors gossip. “Trust has been broken so many times.” Lack of trust and confidence in these services impacts on women’s safety and any action to change the dynamics of domestic violence in small NWT communities. As a result of an identified need highlighted by the project, St. John Ambulance has committed to offering ‘women only’ first aid training in some small NWT communities as a way to empower women in emergency situations.</p> <p>-The project built an informal network of community, project, and Steering Committee women committed to dealing with violence. The network provides a foundation for ongoing relationships.</p>

Unexpected Outcomes	Evidence
<p>-Women becoming active in their own lives and with others.</p>	<p>- Women from small communities embraced new and different ways of caring for themselves and others including: acupuncture, Chinese medicine, legal services, theatre, singing and sharing with each other. “When the instructor (of Chinese medicine and acupuncture) called for volunteers, women were running from their seats to try it out.... And the instructor had follow-up calls from the women.” Women in Nahanni Butte completed the 1,658 km Mackenzie River Nordic walking Challenge; Gameti women worked together with moosehides to sew vests for young drummers; Wrigley women established an on-the land women’s tent; and Trout Lake and Tsiigehtchic women participated in on-the-land camps.</p>
<p>-Women having a sense of value, self-worth, and accomplishment</p>	<p>- At least one or two women in six of the targeted communities gained sufficient inner and outer safety to move outside the victim’s role and stand/demand change. “Now we see women who can get outside themselves and volunteer or get a job, get on Council, make things happen in the community, and connecting with other women.” “It is safe for women to meet, come to the project and survive. Women can lead projects.” The project helped women to look at their lives, and value themselves and what they offer. “Women are the backbone of the community.” The project helped women to overcome their fears of opening up and exposing their lives to others. More than one woman reflecting on the project said that the project helped her personally to “value myself” and know that “we are all unique and special in our own ways.” The project “changed the lives of women in the community... there is more talk among the women... now women know that they are valuable and that they too need special treatment.... women have a stronger voice... Now when women say ‘hi’ to each other it is not about ‘what does she want’ but ‘showing that you care’....this all happened because they (the project) came to the community.”</p>
<p>-Women feeling supported and valued</p>	<p>-The realization of women’s ideas whether Nordic walking, moose hide tanning or setting up a women’s tent illustrated to the women that they have value. For example, a women’s place was a long-time dream of a Wrigley woman and “it finally happened... we did it.” Women and others in the community continue to donate to, and make plans for the women’s tent, showing that they value the women’s place. In Gameti, the moosehide tanning camp celebrated women and acknowledged their skills and</p>

Unexpected Outcomes	Evidence
<p>-Women making choices to break their isolation and refusing to be victims/victimized</p>	<p>talents, and showcased them to the community.</p> <p>-At least some women in the seven communities that had more than one project visit “know that they have a choice.” Women are now more confident to make changes in their lives, and about choosing not to be victimized. Some are speaking out against violence. In the four communities that had the most contact with the project, there is anecdotal evidence that more women are saying ‘no’ to violence. There is some evidence of more women in Gameti seeking EPOs and safe shelter.</p>
<p>-Friendship and connection with other women</p>	<p>-The project developed or strengthened friendships and networking among women in several communities. For example, the Gameti project closed the rift between families by bringing women together to work on moosehide tanning and make vests for young Dene drummers. Women from various target small communities continue to connect through an informal phone and email list.</p>
<p>-One-on-one counselling with women from small communities</p>	<p>-Suza` Tseto provided one-on-one counselling in almost every project community. In some communities, counselling was provided to both men and women. Agnes Frances also provided counselling. Eileen Mantla and Lani Cooke offered friendship and support.</p>
<p>-Mentorship and more capacity among Dene women to work with women to help others</p>	<p>-Suza` mentored two Dene women in leading sharing circles, providing personal support, and leading project activities. In six of the targeted communities, some local women expressed interest in learning to lead circles.</p>

In many ways, the wide-spectrum of outcomes were best embodied in the Gameti women’s project. This is not surprising given that the community:

- inspired the Increasing Options project;
- had the most (eight) visits from the project team; and
- was supported for at least half of the project by a committed and very able local liaison person/assistant facilitator.

The Gameti project was one of “healing and empowerment.” It brought women together who didn’t otherwise connect (mainly as a result of long ago family disagreements). It showed the women that they can work together and support each

other. It also showed to the community that women have value and many skills and talents. It empowered women to reject violence and victimization. It also inspired a project participant to work with the Justice Committee on a community-wide safety plan.

5. Issues and Challenges

The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project was not without issues and challenges. Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities was “a dangerous project.” “The Steering Committee was chilled by the silence and fear in small communities” and concerned about the safety of the project team and local women. The absence of “back-up support” from the RCMP or local groups and front-line workers together with the lack of accommodation and meeting space in some communities exacerbated the dangers and put additional stress on the project team.

Efforts to fully engage front-line support was, with the exception of the RCMP and Tlicho Justice Co-ordinators, challenging. Reticence among community women to engage front-line workers was a main factor. “The nurse is helpful but she doesn’t have time to talk to everyone who needs help....and it takes a long time for women to open up and trust anyone.” For front-line staff, other priorities, heavy workloads, an attitude of victim blaming (e.g., too many times, the response is “is she drinking again”³⁶), lack of advanced notice/planning, and poor communications were factors that limited their participation in the project. On these latter concerns, it was noted that some project activities were poorly organized with “last minute” invitations which made it difficult for visiting front-line workers to shift priorities. For example, invitations to a Monday meeting in Wrigley were issued on the Friday before the event. In Tsiigehtchic, one activity was outside the community and another was poorly communicated.

Women’s fear for their own safety and that of their children was ever present in the project. This posed challenges and barriers at many levels. There were concerns in some communities of violence against women who speak out or take action on violence. Further, there was some fear of traditional medicine being used in negative ways to silence and punish women who speak out.

³⁶ Victim blaming of this nature was noted in the Coroner’s report on the murder of Alice Black of Gameti.

Historically indigenous societies were egalitarian, with interdependent gender roles and relationships. Devaluing women is viewed as a residual effect of colonialization.³⁷ The desire to restore the balance in male-female roles and relationships is a strong element in addressing violence in small primarily indigenous communities. This was evidenced by women's concern about men and about doing things without them. This concern impacted on women's participation in the project and was frequently cited as a main barrier to organizing and running a women's group. For example, Gameti women said that they would be unsuccessful forming a women's group unless the men in their community supported it and were not threatened by it. As such, a community feast and fiddle dance was organized as a first step to addressing this issue.

It was challenging to engage community women. Project engagement required significant groundwork both to communicate the intent of the women's projects and ensure women were safe participating. Good relationships with the Leading at the Edge team helped to mitigate fears as did open communications with the community. "It was very effective and so important to let everyone in the community know what the women's projects were doing, about the meetings, and about safety." Still, participation remained a struggle in each community. Work, childcare, fear of talking about themselves, lack of trust that others would hear or respect their words, and fear of retribution from partners or family members were main barriers. In some communities, the participation struggle was not surmounted or surmounted intermittently. For instance in Nahanni Butte, reticence to participate in sharing circles was attributed to fear or shyness. In Gameti, activity evaluations showed that as the project progressed women felt safer talking about the difficulties in their lives but still, the number of women participating in the sharing circles dropped in the four circles held between April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012. In that community, women choosing to play cards or being prevented by their husbands from attending the meetings were identified as possible reasons for the decline in attendance. In Colville Lake, a decline in participation was attributed to a repetitiveness of process. "Sharing circle are good but doing the same things over and over, doesn't work.... The first time was really good but we need to try different things. "

"Money was always an issue" for the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project. Following through on women's ideas to facilitate empowerment often required resources that were not previously budgeted. As such, fundraising was ongoing and significant time was required to take on these activities. Further, there

³⁷ *Securing Our Place in Northern Society – Women, Global Industries and the Power of Stories*, 2007. Lois Little. <http://dtpr.lib.athabasca.ca/action/download.php?filename=mais/Securing%20Our%20Place%20in%20Northern%20Society2.pdf>

were always expectations at the community-level of honoraria and compensation (a protocol that has long been entrenched in communities without active wage economies). These expectations put additional stress on the project team. Further, there was always the danger of creating expectations or perceptions of favouritism. “If one woman stuck her neck out to develop a safety option, others were sensitive to any perceived ‘benefits’ accruing to her to carry this out.”

6. Lessons

In recent decades, the Status of Women Council of the NWT, Native Women’s Association, YWCA Yellowknife, Centre for Northern Families and several other organizations have supported a variety of initiatives to address violence against women, empower northern women, and build capacity.³⁸ The Leading at the Edge lead facilitator, Suza’ Tsetso, has been involved in several of these projects. The pivotal role that Ms. Tsetso played in the success of the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project, speaks to the importance of investing in, and engaging the skills of northern women to address the safety needs of northern women.

Past projects to address violence and the safety of women, empower northern women, or build capacity have mainly brought women to Yellowknife or been one-of-a-kind meetings/events in the community. Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities was the first project to be led by a multi-skilled indigenous-non-indigenous team of women committed to working consistently in communities for a sustained period of time. Consistent and sustained community effort enabled the project to come face to face with the issues that confront women everyday, the social, economic, and political controls on women, and the multiple levels of trauma women experience. “Unless you do work in the community, you don’t see or feel what is really happening” and often, unless a fresh perspective is brought to bear, “you miss what is happening to women in small communities.”

Empowerment is a lengthy process that must be sustained over a long period of time. Some key characteristics of the culture-based empowerment approach used in the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project were:

- unquestioning openness and responsiveness to women’s ideas – “if they wanted a singing workshop, it happened;”

³⁸ Seminal projects have included the *NWT Family Violence Action Plan 2003-2008*, *Women’s Voices in Leadership Project*, *From Dark to Light: Regaining a Caring Community*, and the *Women’s Healing and Recovery Project*.

- consistency in terms of the project team coming back over and over which was key to building trusting relationships;
- always talking positively and openly about the project in the community and letting everyone including the Chief and Council, service providers, and men whenever possible, know what was happening so no one felt threatened; "Destigmatizing communication on spousal violence" is central to successful engagement in activities to keep women safe.
- "standing with the women and being there to provide support" rather than lead or make decisions. The choice to act was in the hands of community women;
- celebrating women's skills and talents;
- always having food and being able to feed the men as well so women's responsibilities were alleviated and they could participate in the project; and
- always recognizing self care as a component of women's self-esteem, confidence, and safety.

For many key informants, the significance of women taking power "is huge." "We did it." The above attributes reinforced women taking power over their lives and were strongest in those communities where the project was able to spend more time and provide more support to women (e.g., Gameti and Wrigley).

The women only began to talk about and name violence, and talk about broader community responses in the last year of the project. In at least three communities, women are in a position to more formally evolve and implement safety options. Still, there are always forces in the community "trying to drag people down" and seeking to create and reinforce silence on the issue. This would suggest that women in small communities need ongoing support to maintain the ground that they achieved over this project and to move forward.

The project started with one approach and shifted to another. The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities moved from community development, consultation, and planning to a culture-based empowerment approach based on women's projects. This was "absolutely the right approach for this project." The project revealed that empowerment is a precursor to community development and planning. It also revealed that the safety for women in small communities without protection services is reliant on how well women support each other. Women's safety is enhanced by police presence and safe homes.

A culture-based empowerment model led by peers and well supported by a bevy of expertise/skills built a foundation for addressing deeply rooted fears and traumas associated with violence against women. As a decolonizing methodology, a culture-

based empowerment model that is supported by peers avoids any hint of paternalism or colonialism. This was enhanced by:

- a lead facilitator who “is Dene, speaks the language(s), and has a background in healing so women opened up more and asked for one-on-one sessions with her.”
- consistency of support and strong healing, organizational, and developmental skills among Leading at the Edge’s indigenous and non-indigenous project team.
- unwavering support from the Steering Committee.

Historically, indigenous women in the NWT built relationships through their work on the land.³⁹ Today, women in small communities often have few ways to connect, relax, or feel good about themselves. The project offered women a break from stresses and a way to connect with themselves and others. To some extent, community-based women’s projects replicated the ways that women connected historically. On-the-land activities whether a mountain survival camp, canoe trip, women’s tent, moosehide tanning camp, or hiking, freed women from community gossip, job/home responsibilities, and the pressures of social and family issues within the community. Activities that took place on the land were powerful, and in the view of several women “most beneficial.” “The land is where people feel the safest, at peace, and out of the crisis...the land is where people are able to think and hear their own thoughts.” The land is also a place where relationships can be healed. Land-based, culture-based activities are a non-threatening way to increase women’s self-esteem. For example, the moosehide tanning camp outside Gameti was well supported by the community and the women who participated felt that their skills were acknowledged and respected.

Suza’ Tsetso on moosehide tanning as a healing activity:

- **When women hit the hide it helps to get anger out.**
- **When the hide is in the water it is a cleansing process.**
- **Twisting the hide is releasing emotions.**
- **Stretching the hide out by hand is hard work and discipline.**
- **Smoothing the hide brings softness and gentleness.**
- **Smoking the hide is like a smudge, a type of purification.**

The project modelled collaboration and cooperation at the community level and in working relationships between the Steering Committee and project team. The Steering Committee was supportive and open to responding to what made sense for women in small communities, and served in some ways as mentors to the Leading at the Edge

³⁹ *Securing Our Place in Northern Society – Women, Global Industries and the Power of Stories*. 2007.

team, helping to problem solve and support a mainly culture-based response to community women. The Steering Committee “trusted the healing and empowerment direction and went with it.” In many ways, the project was a learning experience for members of the Steering Committee. Both Steering Committee and project team members speak of the honour and gift to have had the opportunity to work with women on this project.

Annual meetings of women from the small communities were not envisioned in the original project design but proved to be particularly valuable. “Women were much freer in talking about their safety issues when they were away from their communities.” The annual workshops promoted relationships and networking among a community of women, and facilitated an openness to learning/trying new things. The annual gatherings underscored the valuable role that networking plays in supporting women’s safety and helping them maintain power and strength to confront violence. While the lead facilitator continues to support networking among the women involved in the project (through her current work at the Healing Drum Society), a more formal effort is needed (e.g., a regular electronic newsletter) to regularly connect women and affirm and celebrate their empowerment. The annual meetings were also helpful to the Steering Committee, providing insights into the realities confronting women in small communities.

The Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project was ambitious in that it sought to provide the same quality and consistency of support in 11 small communities. With the shift in approach, and the requirement for more concentrated effort and additional resources, it was clear that six or seven communities was a more appropriate and realistic target. Indeed, the six communities that received more than two visits accrued greater benefits from the project than those receiving one or two visits.

7. Conclusion and Next Steps

Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities was the first in-situ project to address the safety of women experiencing violence in small NWT communities. The project team recognized at the outset that violence grows from isolation, lack of value, and powerlessness. The project confronted women’s powerlessness and victimization by consistently working with “kindness and compassion,” and positive responses to engender choice and women taking power for their own and others safety. The project created awareness of choice –the choice to get outside physical and emotional isolation

to not be a victim, not be alone, and to be safe. “Women didn’t know they had the power of choice before they got involved in the project.” It was “totally empowerment in a good way” and in a meaningful way. It revealed that the best safety option for women living in communities without resident police services is relationships with other women.

Over the three-year Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project, some women in some communities were able to build confidence and feel sufficient inner safety and outer safety to make the choice not to be a victim and not to be unsafe in their homes and communities. This is an impressive outcome as are the array of other expected and unexpected outcomes and lessons. Still, there is concern that the forces that work to make women unsafe in their homes and communities, can easily undo the gains made by the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project. There is unanimity that there is a need to continue to support women in small communities both to maintain the ground they have gained personally and in the community, and to evolve more visible responses to violence (e.g., safe homes, community safety plans, and protocols/checklist). Further, it is likely that the groundwork is sufficiently strong in at least three communities - Gameti, Wrigley and Tsiigehtchic – to move toward in the immediate term to strengthen responses.

There is also unanimity in the need for:

- facilitation/coordination support to maintain and build on the work that the project initiated in small communities.
- community-based projects that celebrate and reinforce “the power of choice” (e.g., life skills projects that celebrate women’s skills/talents and incorporate learning about communications, healthy relationships, and mental and physical wellness). “Whatever little confidence they have, someone in the community will always try to drag them down. There is always a need to reinforce the matter of choice.”
- efforts to strengthen and professionalize front-line services so that women in small communities have confidence to use them.
- new relationships and communications to be established among front-line workers and women in small communities to ensure that they support women’s empowerment. “Communications are so important.”
- efforts to explore ways to create, support, and sustain local safe houses.
- continued advocacy for policing and other protection services in small communities.

- continued advocacy for supports for women in small communities including sharing this evaluation report and promoting research to monitor the impacts of various responses to keeping women safe.

Many of the women involved in this project say that the Coalition Against Family Violence has a significant role in advocating for supports to ensure the safety of women in small NWT communities. It is also an “ethical duty” that all northerners share.

Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities – Interview Guide

Lutra Associates Ltd is evaluating the Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities project for YWCA Yellowknife. The evaluation will determine if the project did what it was suppose to do and what can be learned from this experience. Your views would be greatly appreciated. Please be assured that nothing you say will be attributed to you in the evaluation report.

1. What was your involvement with the *Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities* project?
2. How long were you involved in the project?
3. What was the *Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities* project intended to achieve?
4. Did the project achieve these purposes/outcomes? Why do you say this?
5. What parts of the project were particularly effective? Why did they work so well?
6. What shows that these parts of the project were effective?
7. What parts of the project were not particularly effective? Why didn't these parts of the project work so well?
8. From what you know about the project, were there parts of the project that didn't get done or were changed significantly? If so, why?
9. In your opinion, how would you describe the approach used in the project (e.g., response-based, empowerment, community development, culture-based)?
10. How did this approach help to achieve the project purposes/outcomes? How did this approach hinder achieving the purposes/outcomes?
11. In your opinion, are women in small communities safer as a result of this project? Why do you have this opinion?
12. If this project continues, what advice would you offer to make it more effective for women in small communities?
13. Finally, what other comments would you like to make about the *Increasing Safety Options for Women in NWT Communities* project?

Thank you for your time and input.

Interviewees

1. Agnes Frances, Leading at the Edge contractor, Fort McPherson
2. Cathy Sanguéz. Project participant, Jean Marie River
3. Carolyn Lennie, Project participant, Tsiigehtchic
4. Eileen Mantla, Project participants and Leading at the Edge contractor, Gameti
5. Emma Beeching, Community Wellness Worker, Fort Simpson
6. Gail Cyr, GNWT Women's Advisor, Steering Committee, Yellowknife
7. Lani Cooke, Leading at the Edge contractor, Yellowknife
8. Lorraine Phaneuf, Status of Women Council of the NWT, Steering Committee, Yellowknife
9. Lyda Fuller, YWCA Yellowknife, Steering Committee, Yellowknife
10. Marsha Argue, YWCA Northern Extension Project, contractor, Yellowknife
11. Mary Clillie, Project participant, Wrigley
12. Rita Tesou, Project participant, Nahanni Butte
13. Sheena Kochon, Project participant, Colville Lake
14. Suza` Tsetso, Leading at the Edge contractor, Yellowknife