

**The Important Contribution of Community Justice Committees**

Mr. Speaker, our government has committed in its mandate to pursue innovative ways to prevent and reduce crime. Our experience has shown that it is not possible to administer a system of justice exactly the same way throughout our territory. Each community is different, with their own unique set of priorities, and their own way of addressing local justice needs. Our government provides training and funding for all communities to hire justice coordinators, support Community Justice Committees, and develop culturally relevant crime prevention programs.

Community Justice Committees, comprised of volunteers from the community, help to develop alternatives to the criminal justice system in their home community. Community Justice Coordinators are key liaisons between community members, the RCMP, local supports and services, and offenders.

What our community justice supports and programs help our justice system take into account is that people who commit crimes have homes and families. Almost all of them eventually come back to their communities. With the right training and support from our government, local community justice committees can be part of the planning for an offender's safe return. This work is not always easy. Offenders need to know what supports are available to help them with their release plan, and community members need to know about how offenders have committed to addressing the problems that led to the crime when they get home. Community Justice Coordinators and committees can help an offender develop a plan and follow it.

Offences that get referred to a Community Justice Committee are addressed through a restorative model of justice. As more matters are diverted to the restorative process, fewer people are charged with crimes and therefore are not ending up in the corrections system. The RCMP is an important partner in the successful use of the Community Justice approach

in our communities. When police and victims gain trust in their community's restorative approach, the number of referrals to the community justice committee increases. Restorative approaches respect the dignity of victims and holds people accountable for their actions. It does not replace the courts, but can include such things as family group conferencing as well as victim and offender conferencing. It is a different way of dealing with minor offences, and a different way to help an offender plan to return to the community after serving a sentence.

Mr. Speaker, there is innovative work happening throughout the Northwest Territories in support of community justice. Some Community Justice Committees are working with their local probation officers to deliver the Substance Abuse Management and Violence Prevention programs. Others are hosting large events, like the Odd Squad in Délı̄në and Fort McPherson, and the Reel Youth video project in Fort Simpson. Justice committees are also supporting ongoing programs, like the Fort Liard Men's Support Circle, and youth empowerment projects in N'Dilo and Detah, who meet regularly to offer peer support and focus on healthy choices.

Mr. Speaker, our residents know what community safety and wellness supports their communities need, and our government is proud to help them make those things happen. Throughout our territory, every week our government is supporting youth programming, on-the-land activities, and addiction awareness workshops developed locally by justice coordinators and committees.

I applaud the work that the Community Justice Committees and the coordinators are doing to enhance the quality of life in our communities and thank them for being partners to helping us meet our mandate commitments to reduce and prevent crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.