



**Policy Memo: Ways forward in addiction programming in Fort Simpson, NT.
Dene Gogondié, Voices of the people**

*** Kristen Tanche, Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship**

The Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship is a program of the Gordon Foundation. It is a two-year policy and leadership program for Northerners that requires fellows to research and write a policy recommendation paper on a topic they find of importance. Kristen Tanche of Fort Simpson Northwest Territories, is a Fellow of the program. As a long-time community member of Fort Simpson and the NWT, with a background in local leadership, educated in Social Work, and with personal experiences of struggling with addictions Tanche chose to focus on addiction programming and services specific to Fort Simpson.

Her policy paper will be published in October 2019. As part of this process, Tanche has provided the following policy memo for the Government of the Northwest Territories to consider. Please note this policy memo is not comprehensive, nor extensive. The final policy paper explores the topic in further depth. Once the paper is published Tanche will provide it to the Legislative Assembly.

1. Problem Definition:

Addictions programming and related services offered by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) in Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories (NWT), are not always culturally relevant to the Indigenous population. Nor does the GNWT appear to take the voices of the community into full consideration when developing services and programming. With over half the population being Indigenous in Fort Simpson, there needs to be more culturally relevant programming and services truly based on the voices and needs of the people.

2. Background:

Tanche set out to pose questions that related to addiction issues, programming, and western and Indigenous approaches to healing methods to community members in Fort Simpson. Following the Gordon Foundation's policy on research, Tanche framed her work as "conversations with community members". She spoke with 29 people from Fort Simpson. Tanche then reviewed all the interviews several times to pull out major themes, and most frequently brought-up subjects. These community responses, governmental reports, news articles, and scholarly articles are the basis for the recommendations brought forward in her policy paper.



In the work “conversations with community members” Tanche asked whether participants believed addictions to alcohol and/or drugs was an issue in Fort Simpson. Of the 29 respondents, 28 said that addictions to alcohol and/or drugs was/is an issue in Fort Simpson.

The Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addictions, finds that the cost of substance abuse is the highest in the territories when compared with the other Canadian provinces. The Northwest Territories healthcare costs per person attributed to substance use is the second highest in the country at \$723 per person.

3. Options and Analysis: Any reforms to the current system will require governments at all levels to consider what community needs are. Community voices must be respected. Options and analysis are as follows:

- In Tanche’s conversations with community members, issues with the current system of the community counselling program were brought forward. Issues such as long wait times to access services, services not being culturally relevant, little to no Indigenous and/or Northern Counsellors and the existence of a lot of “red tape” to get help. As a result, Tanche has suggested that the GNWT re-consider the status quo of service delivery through the community counselling program in Fort Simpson. Currently, counsellors in the community are employed by the GNWT. Based on the responses received from participants, the system should hire more counsellors who are Indigenous because culturally relevant and northern-based programs would fill a stated gap in services. The GNWT could provide more Indigenous, northern, culturally relevant counsellor positions within the community by granting local organizations with adequate funding and resources to deliver their own community-led counselling programs to supplement the community counselling program that currently exists.
- Tanche’s respondents confirmed that there needs to be more local voices in community-driven, centered, and empowered programming. Programming should be local and include families, be accessible, and be more culturally relevant to the Indigenous population. Furthermore, participants spoke about the need for more education about addictions, and that there is need for education to help shift perceptions on addiction. Therefore, Tanche has suggested that the Dehcho region might host several regional gatherings led by non-government organization(s) such as Dehcho First Nations, and funded by the Federal Government and/or the GNWT, and supported by various other organizations. The gatherings would focus on sharing knowledge about health, addictions and healing, and would bring together people and organizations who work in the health field but also community members. The gatherings would seek to have community members from the region lead further recommendations and strategies for future regional-wide addictions,

wellness and healing programming, thereby creating programming that is truly led by community.

- Despite Fort Simpson having a largely Indigenous population there was little in the way of consistent Indigenous related services. Services and supports such as Dene spiritually, culturally based programs, or land-based options are not always easily accessible nor consistent in the community. Participants in conversations with community members also spoke about the need for more variety in the programming, and that a combination of healing methods would be most effective. In addition to participant voices there are numerous written resources which indicate that a combination of Indigenous and Western methods of addiction healing would be effective in a largely Indigenous population. Indigenous on-the-land programming was frequently discussed in Tanche's work "conversations with community members". Tanche is putting forth that Fort Simpsons' organizations and community members, that are involved with wellness programming should work collaboratively to provide a wider variety of addiction programs and services with a focus on Indigenous culturally relevant programming and services. A specific task committee should be formed to not only pool financial and human resources but also to provide direction on the creation and maintenance of culturally relevant programming. Alternatively, the current Fort Simpson interagency committee could fulfill that role. This could be accomplished by a pilot project for on the land healing camps. Two programs are recommended:
 - 1) A short-term, phased program within a drivable distance area, done in evenings and weekends to ensure accessibility; and
 - 2) Longer-term on the land programming near the community.

Recommendations

Tanche's recommendations are that GNWT act on all three of the ideas below:

Recommendation 1: The GNWT and community of Fort Simpson need to reconsider the status quo of addictions programs and services and provide additional staffing and counsellors who are Indigenous and/or Northern.

Recommendation 2: The Dehcho Region should deliver regional health gatherings led by communities for communities.

Recommendation 3: Fort Simpson organizations need to provide more variety of programs and services that are culturally relevant through on the land programming.