



Council of Yukon First Nations

# Kluane First Nation **Cultural Orientation** **and Protocols Toolkit**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>HISTORY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>CURRENT STATUS IN LAND CLAIMS, SELF GOVERNMENT OR OTHER ..</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>SPECIFIC CULTURAL VALUES AND BELIEFS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>BIRTH AND DEATH .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>POTLATCH TRADITIONS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>MARRIAGE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>8.0</b>	<b>TRADITIONAL LAWS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>9.0</b>	<b>TRADITIONAL HEALTH AND HEALING .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>10.0</b>	<b>PROTOCOLS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>10.1</b>	<b>APPROACHING ELDERS FOR ADVICE OR TEACHINGS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>10.2</b>	<b>ACCESSING AND SHARING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>10.3</b>	<b>HOME VISITING &amp; INVITATIONS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>10.4</b>	<b>SPEAKING/MEETING TO INDIVIDUALS OF THE OTHER GENDER .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>10.5</b>	<b>DEALING WITH CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>10.6</b>	<b>MEETINGS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>10.7</b>	<b>EXPECTED BEHAVIOUR .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>11.0</b>	<b>COMMUNITY PEOPLE, HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>11.1</b>	<b>POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>11.2</b>	<b>EDUCATION AND INCOME .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>11.3</b>	<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL STATUS AND WELL-BEING .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>11.4</b>	<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL STRENGTHS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>11.5</b>	<b>COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>11.6</b>	<b>COMMUNITY AND FIRST NATION PLANS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>12.0</b>	<b>COMMUNITY HEALTH &amp; SOCIAL SERVICES STAFF .....</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>10</b>

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# KLUANE FIRST NATION (KFN) SPECIFIC CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND PROTOCOLS

## **1.0 History**

The Kluane Lake people or the “Lu’an Mun Ku Dan” have inhabited the Shakwak Valley for over 10,000 years. It is the homeland of the Southern Tutchone whose traditional territory extends from the St. Elias Mountains in the south, bounded to the east by the southern end of Kluane Lake and the A’ay Chu (Slims River), by the Ruby Range to the north, extending almost to the Nisling River, and on the west by the White River, as far north as its confluence with the Kluane River. It includes the Tachal Region of Kluane National Park & Reserve known as “A Si Keyi” (Grandfathers Country in Southern Tutchone).

“Indians ... at Burwash had been extensive travelers and they knew intimately the country between the upper reaches of the White River and Carmacks, a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles east and west. They had roamed and hunted with their families at different times over the country from the White River south for some sixty or eight miles, or all told an area of some ten to twelve thousand square miles ...” Julie Cruikshank, 1974

Small settlements have been found on the Nisling and Kluane Rivers. The Kluane people had camps throughout the area that were used while hunting, fishing and gathering food. They moved around this territory on a network of well known trails.

The First Nation has close affiliation with the Champagne & Aishihik First Nations to the south and the White River First Nation to the north. For many years, the Department of Indian Affairs grouped the Kluane people and White River people together as one First Nation. In 1991 at a General Assembly of the Yukon First Nations, the White River First Nation became two - the Kluane First Nation of Burwash Landing and the White River First Nation of Beaver Creek.

The majority of Kluane people are of Southern Tutchone descent and follow a matriarchal moiety system of two clans: Khanjet (crow clan) and Agunda (wolf clan). As well many Kluane people have Tlingit, Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone ancestry in their family backgrounds. Today Kluane citizens primarily identify themselves as either Southern Tutchone or Tlingit. The predominant aboriginal language spoken by Kluane First Nation members is Southern Tutchone.

### **Pre-contact Lifestyle**

The Southern Tutchone people lived a nomadic lifestyle adapted to survive in a harsh climate and on a diverse land-base. The people travelled in small family groups to their winter and summer grounds to hunt, fish, trap and harvest berries and other plants.

The people would meet up with other family groups to travel together to special events, to visit, to trade, to make war or to secure relations through marriages and alliances.

They followed the seasons and followed the game for subsistence. During the summer months families gathered to harvest spawning fish in the rivers and creeks. They harvested roots and berries and hunted small animals and birds. In the fall big game (caribou, moose, sheep) were harvested. Much of their time was spent preserving food in preparation for the winter months. Most of the meat and fat was smoked and dried. During the winter months they trapped, hunted moose, ice fished and relied on stores of smoked and dried foods.

### **Gold Rush**

Although the Gold Rush of 1898 did not occur within the traditional territory of the Kluane First Nation, its impacts were still felt. It marked the beginning of a slow but steady stream of gold seekers, entrepreneurs and settlers moving into the Kluane region.

It was during this time that the people of the area started abandoning their traditional nomadic lifestyles and began to take part in the wage economy and settle in permanent locations like Burwash Landing. Burwash Landing was not settled by the First Nation people until Louis and Gene Jacquot opened a trading post there in 1904.

### **Alaska Highway**

In 1942, during World War II, the US Army built the Alaska Highway to connect the "Lower 48" with Alaska. The Highway cut through the traditional territory of the Kluane First Nation. The impact of construction was devastating on the people. Not only did it bring large numbers of people, it brought disease and opened the region to a steady flow of traffic. The region was also over hunted by the newcomers. A large number of people died in subsequent years from diseases and epidemics that followed the construction of the highway.

The construction of the Alaska Highway led to Burwash Landing becoming the administrative centre for Kluane First Nation.

### **Kluane National Park & Reserve**

The creation of the Kluane Game Sanctuary in 1943 (most of which became Kluane National Park & Reserve in 1972) brought further suffering to the Southern Tutchone people.

One of the main reasons the sanctuary was created was in response to concerns about the health of wildlife populations due to the over-hunting by military personnel and highway workers during the construction of the Alaska Highway.

This area was the traditional territory of the Kluane and Champagne & Aishihik peoples who relied on the area for their livelihood. The First Nation people were essentially banned from entering the land and remained on the other side of the highway for the next fifty years. It was not until the signing of the Kluane First Nation and Champagne & Aishihik First Nations Final Agreements that this situation was righted. Through the agreements the rights of the people to harvest in the region were written into law. Both First Nations have begun the process of re-establishing their connection with this land.

## **Residential School**

Similar to many First Nations across the country, the Southern Tutchone people attended residential schools. Before the children were taken away from the security of their family and community, the members lived life in harmony with the land and had strong spiritual beliefs and values. Children were happy and were an important part of the community.

All this changed with residential school. The goal of these schools was to assimilate the people into another culture that did not reflect the traditional ways of the Southern Tutchone. The children were traumatized by their experiences in residential school and made to feel ashamed of their ancestry. Family bonds and connections were broken. Some lived through unspeakable physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Families were devastated when the children were taken from them. A huge gap was left behind as traditional family roles and responsibilities were disrupted.

Kluane First Nation children continue to have to travel outside the community for school. They go to Destruction Bay for K-8 and to Haines Junction or Whitehorse for high school.

## ***2.0 Current Status in Land Claims, Self Government or Other***

The Kluane First Nation land claim and self government agreements were signed on October 18, 2003 and came into effect on February 2, 2004. Implementation of the agreements is a major priority for the KFN Government and requires ongoing negotiations with the Yukon Government and Government of Canada. Since the signing of the final land claim agreement, KFN has been working on the implementation of the agreements in all departments.

## **KFN Governance**

KFN Government leadership is comprised of a chief and four councilors and two councilors at large (one Elder, one youth). These positions are three year terms. If no youth come forward, then the position is filled with a regular councilor at large member.

The leadership is directed by and given its mandate from the General Assembly on an annual basis.

### **3.0 Communication and Relationships**

When developing relationships with Kluane First Nation members be prepared to get to know them a bit before discussing business. Rushing is seen as being disrespectful and pushy – take the time to have “tea” first. You will know when they are ready to discuss business. Remember you are dealing with a culture, not a business and issues concerning members usually have far reaching affects and may unintentionally affect the whole community.

The “Moccasin Telegraph” still exists and do not mistake it for gossip. Be aware that what you say tends to get around the community.

Physical contact within the community is very common and you will see “lots of hugging”. Once you become familiar, you can expect to be hugged in return. When this starts to happen you can begin to feel quite comfortable in the community. If you are teased by members, do not take it the wrong way. It’s a form of acceptance and you can “tease” back if that suits you, but do it in a respectful way.

### **4.0 Specific Cultural Values and Beliefs**

The First Nation people of the Kluane region believe their relationship with the natural surroundings is one of the strongest connections that not only connects them to the earth and to their spiritual world, but also provides balance and harmony between these intertwining elements. To them, ensuring a good relationship and balance to the earth will mean that life will perpetuate and good times will be ensured.

### **5.0 Birth and Death**

The birth of a baby is an exciting time and a very special occasion, especially for Elders. KFN members celebrate births within individual family groups.

When a death in Burwash occurs, the First Nation office will close. Within a week, the gravesite ceremony usually happens followed by the supper and potlatch. It is suggested that if you have a scheduled meeting during this time you should phone before you leave to confirm that the meeting is still on.

### **6.0 Potlatch Traditions**

The traditional Potlatch is a community gathering to recognize an important point in a person’s life, such as births, marriages, coming of age, but the most common is the funeral or headstone potlatch. This is a very important time for the community to get together to support each other through a very difficult time. There is a dinner after the gravesite ceremony and money may be collected by the host family to pay the opposite Clan or Moiety for assisting with burying their loved one. This is a very sad time and no celebrating or dancing is allowed. There is a spiritual belief

that the spirit of the loved one may take the life of a child, therefore, to protect children they are not allowed to attend.

The headstone potlatch may be celebrated one year after the funeral potlatch and is a time of gift-giving to the opposite moieties. The traditional belief is that their loved ones spirit finally leaves earth. It can be a more joyous occasion with dancing/drumming and giving of gifts. If you are a guest, you can expect to receive food and gifts and you are not allowed to say "no" to anything given to you. It is seen as being disrespectful to refuse anything given at these events. At the headstone potlatch, names and/ or adoptions of the host family might be done.

A funeral or headstone potlatch is a community event and usually notices will be posted at various outlets in the community and you are more than welcome to attend. When you enter the community hall, you can expect to be seated.

The First Nation offices close in respect for the family whenever someone passes. This can include long time residents or a person who has been adopted into the First Nation.

## **7.0 *Marriage***

Marriages used to be celebrated in a potlatch, but today families celebrate marriages in a western style.

## **8.0 *Traditional Laws***

There were many traditional laws that were strictly followed for many generations. These laws were demonstrated by the people and passed down through stories and legends. The laws covered all aspects of life, from harvesting food from the land, family structure and behaviours and how to show respect to other members of the clans and community. These laws continue to be followed and passed down from the Elders to the young people.

## **9.0 *Traditional Health and Healing***

Traditional activities on the land are key to the health and healing of the people. Seasonal activities include hunting, fishing, and picking berries and medicines in late August and September. The First Nation supports member's ability to participate in these activities.



## **10.0 Protocols**

### **10.1 Approaching Elders for advice or teachings**

If you are talking with an Elder, make sure you wait a few seconds before proceeding, interrupting Elders is considered very disrespectful. Sometimes there is a long pause when Elders speak – do not make the mistake of jumping in too soon. They take their time thinking of what they need to say. Remember Elders pass on traditional knowledge. As an oral society, this kind of communication is still very important. If you are uncertain, ask them if you can proceed with your idea.

In a public forum, Elders are allowed to speak without interruption. When they are finished they will usually thank the forum for allowing them to speak.

### **10.2 Accessing and sharing traditional knowledge**

First Nations use the term traditional knowledge to describe information passed from generation to generation. This information may be rooted in: storytelling, ceremonies, traditions, ideologies, medicines, dances, arts and crafts or a combination of all these.

First Nations culture has developed over many generations - through traditional knowledge of the land, natural resources and environment. Traditional knowledge is known to communities as the foundation or base of all key information from the past and can be blended into all departments within the First Nation government. Elders are getting older and so an emphasis has been placed on documenting their knowledge so it will not be lost to the community.

There are policies to protect this knowledge as it must be treated with the utmost respect. The Heritage department has put in place an application process. Anyone looking to access any traditional knowledge should contact the KFN Heritage department.

### **10.3 Home visiting & invitations**

As a resource worker, you need to work with Social & Health staff and have someone be with you when you visit community members, especially with Elders. There may be language barriers and communicating with them may be difficult. Be prepared to have "tea" with them as they like to get to know you before discussing business.

### **10.4 Speaking/meeting to individuals of the other gender**

When meeting with individuals of the other gender it is best to have a staff member from the H & S department attend with you.

### **10.5 Dealing with conflict and confrontation**

To prevent conflict and confrontations with community members, it would be wise to always check with the Director/Manager of Health & Social or the Executive Director before meeting on any issues or concerns that are sensitive and could be misunderstood.

When a conflict or a confrontation occurs with a member of the community, immediately contact the Director or Manager of Health & Social or the Executive Director and wait for further instruction.

When a conflict or a confrontation occurs between two First Nation employees, an attempt should be made to resolve the situation between the employees. If that doesn't work, then involve the appropriate supervisors. They will put a healing mechanism in place.

### **10.6 Meetings**

The community is working toward implementing monthly inter-agency meetings to discuss community issues and solutions. Health and Social staff members will participate in these meetings providing background and insight into the issues.

There are regular community meetings on various issues held in the community. They are a good opportunity to exchange information and make announcements.

In public forums, it is appropriate to say "thank you for accepting me into your traditional territory for this meeting". This is confirming your recognition of their traditional government and it will be appreciated.

When you want to set up a meeting in the community, contact the appropriate department to discuss the meeting and have someone in the community help organize it to ensure people are aware and involved in the meeting.

If you have a scheduled meeting, it is best to phone before leaving to ensure meeting is still on.

### **10.7 Expected Behaviour**

In a small community it is important to be aware of your behaviours, socially and professionally. With the community being so small, it is important to be a positive role model.

Community and Family Events – as a resource worker you can expect to be invited to events and you should attend these functions. If you have not been invited to an event, it is best practice not to assume but ask for permission to attend.

Resource people must be willing to take the time to gain respect and trust from the people. The community members give a newcomer time to adjust and help them

feel welcome. The advice is to go slow, be patient, be observant and be aware of what is happening in the community.

Dress casually and modestly.

With regard to the traditional regalia, traditional rules are practiced. No one is to touch sacred drums, clothing or other items unless approval is given by the owner.

## **11.0 Community People, Health and Social Well-being**

### ***11.1 Population and Demographics***

The population of Burwash Landing is about 100 with the vast majority being Kluane First Nation citizens. The registered population of the Kluane First Nation on the KFN beneficiaries list is approximately 220.

### ***11.2 Education and Income***

The Kluane Lake School in Destruction Bay offers kindergarten to Grade 8 and serves both the communities of Destruction Bay and Burwash Landing. For grades 9 – 12 students must go to Haines Junction or Whitehorse. Some students board in the communities and in other cases students move with their family. In Whitehorse, there is the Whitehorse dormitory for students staying on their own.

For continuing education programs, there is a Yukon College campus. Members of the community attend the main Yukon College campus in Whitehorse or other institutions for more specialized studies.

### **Income**

Traditional livelihood came from the land. It along with trading between Nations provided everything they needed. Today KFN citizens blend the cash economy with harvesting traditional foods and selling art/handicrafts and sharing knowledge of the land.

### ***11.3 Health and Social Status and Well-being***

The health and well-being of the Kluane First Nation is expressed through traditional arts, language, music and harvesting from the land. The First Nation is working to support its members by ensuring a strong future while maintaining close connections to traditional lifestyles and the land.

### ***11.4 Health and Social Strengths***

The strength of the Kluane First Nation comes from their connection to the land and the knowledge of culture and traditional ways. The KFN leadership and staff are a part of the community as a whole and work on goals and objectives voiced by the community.

### **11.5 Community Challenges and Issues**

The Health and Social Department works with community issues on a daily basis. Funding for long-term programs and capacity needs is the biggest challenge. It is difficult to meet the needs of the community when program funding is short-term and inadequate and often tied to program use that is not necessarily suited to KFN priorities.

Finding the time to strategize and create more programming/activities to meet KFN members healing needs is difficult.

The root of most social issues within the community stems from the devastating inter-generational effects of residential school. KFN is making a priority the assistance of survivors and their families with their healing and ability to move forward in their lives.

### **11.6 Community and First Nation Plans**

The Kluane First Nation has completed its "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) that sets out values and defines their environmental, cultural, social and economic objectives. As well, on page 10 of the document is a table with a Social, Health and Cultural Services Inventory and Assessment.

For further reference the ICSP document is located at:

[www.infrastructure.gov.yk.ca/pdf/kfn\\_burwash\\_landing\\_icsp\\_with\\_appendix.pdf](http://www.infrastructure.gov.yk.ca/pdf/kfn_burwash_landing_icsp_with_appendix.pdf)

### **12.0 Community Health & Social Services Staff**

Kluane First Nation	Main Phone	867-841-4274
Health & Social Director		841-4616 ext. 243
Receptionist		841-4616 ext. 240
Health Programs Manager		841-4616 ext. 241
Health Programs Coordinator		841-4616 ext. 244
Homecare Worker		841-4616 ext. 242
Education Support Worker		841-4616 ext. 234

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                 [www.infrastructure.gov.yk.ca](http://www.infrastructure.gov.yk.ca)  
                 [www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/yt/kluane](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/yt/kluane)

# Appendix 1: KLUANE FIRST NATION AND BURWASH LANDING COMMUNITY PROFILE

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This community profile is for the Kluane First Nation (KFN), a Yukon First Nation located in Burwash Landing. The purpose of the community profile is to provide background information on the community.

## 2.0 COMMUNITY PROFILE

### 2.1 *Yukon Context*

#### **Geography**

Yukon Territory is in the extreme northwest corner of Canada. It is bordered by the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alaska and the Arctic Ocean. The territory is 483,450 square km (186,661 square miles), about one third the size of Alaska. Landforms in the Yukon are mainly plateaus bordered and crossed by mountains. The highest range is the Elias Mountains in the southwest where the highest peak in Canada, Mount Logan rises 5,951 metres (19,524 feet) above sea level. The Yukon and Peel rivers drain virtually all of the territory and in the far north; the tundra stretches 160 km southward from the Arctic Ocean.

#### **Economy and Transportation**

Mining has historically been Yukon's chief industry and remains important. Gold, along with zinc, lead and silver are the minerals of interest and exploration and mining contribute significantly to the Yukon economy. Tourism is steadily becoming a more dominant sector of the economy and the Yukon Government is also a strong contributor.

Air travel is used to access Whitehorse and flights are also available to Dawson City and Old Crow (the only fly in community). The Alaska Highway and Klondike Highways are heavily used and all communities other than Old Crow are situated along these highways.

#### **Population / Demographics**

The population of the Yukon was 28,674 in 2001 (Census 2001) and has risen to 34,157 by June, 2009 (Yukon Bureau of Statistics Monthly Statistical Review August 2009). This is the highest population on record. The overall population increased 2.6% from June 2008 to June 2009. Thirteen of seventeen communities in the territory showed population increases during the same period. Whitehorse has 71% of the population with 25,636 people with the remaining people distributed throughout 16 other communities. There are slightly fewer women than men – males 17,407 and females 16,750. Persons under the age of 15 years

accounted for 16.7% of the population, while 8.2% of the population was aged 65 or over. The 2006 Census recorded 7,580 Yukoners (23%) as being of Aboriginal identity. According to Statistics Canada, 3,665 of that total were aboriginal males and 3,915 females. The percentage of the aboriginal population aged 15 and over was 72.8% and 18.2% under the age of 15.

## **Health and Social Status**

The overall life expectancy has risen from 73.4 years in 1994 to 75.7 years in 2006. Yukon female's life expectancy is 77.7 years and for males, it is 74.0 years. Life expectancy at birth is lowest for Aboriginal males in the Yukon with an average of 8.8 years less life expectancy than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Aboriginal males also had the highest increase in life expectancy of 7.3% or 4.6 years from 1994 to 2006. Aboriginal females had the second highest increase of 4.5% or 3.2 years.

The Canadian Community Health Survey (2006) for Yukon aboriginal people reported that 47.4% of self-rated their health as very good or excellent (2396 responses) and 65.7% self-rated their mental health as very or excellent (3319 responses). 21.5% of people over 18 years reported that they had quite a lot of life stress (978 responses). 69.4% felt a strong sense of belonging to their local community (3509 responses).

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics reported the Yukon labour force at 17,500 in October 2009 and of that 16,400 were employed with an unemployment rate of 6.3%. Federal, territorial, municipal and First Nation governments employed a total of 7,000. Private Sector employed 7,300 and 2,100 reported as self-employed.

## **2.2 Kluane First Nation Location and Infrastructure**

Kluane First Nation is located in the central northwest corner of the Yukon on the shores of Kluane Lake, beside Kluane National Park and Reserve. Burwash is 267 kilometres from Whitehorse. Road access is on the Alaska Highway and there is air access at Destruction Bay, but is limited to small aircraft.

KFN owns and maintains 62 houses in Burwash, has developed 15 new housing units in Copper Joe Subdivision as well as plans to develop Bear Creek Subdivision on KFN land in Haines Junction. The First Nation owns and operates the administrative building, daycare, community hall, water plant, garages and the water/chipper/boiler plant.

## **2.3 Business and Government Services**

### **Business**

Burwash Landing is a very small community and services are provided either by the KFN government or local private businesses. There is a gas station, recycling centre, airport, laundromat and bank. There is the Burwash Landing Resort (motel

& restaurant), Talbot Arms Motel, Kluane Museum, Sheep Mountain Visitor Reception Centre, and Dalan Campground.

### **First Nation Business**

Yukon First Nations have continued to increase their economic development activities. First Nations consortiums have invested in businesses as diverse as major hotels, office buildings, and a manufacturing company. As well, First Nations tourism businesses operate out of Whitehorse including retail, arts and crafts, outfitting and adventure, and air or helicopter services. In 2008, Yukon First Nations owned 12 businesses and Yukon First Nation Development Corps owned an additional 19. As well, many individual First Nations people own and operate small businesses. In 2008 they made up 5.7% of sole proprietor and partnership businesses in the Yukon (Yukon Bureau of Statistics Business Survey 2008).

KFN created the Kluane First Nation Development Corporation located in Burwash to administer all business initiatives for the citizens.

Kluane First Nation and Champagne & Aishihik First Nations co-operatively manage the Kluane National Park and Reserve. There is a five-year management plan in place. The management plan can be viewed at [www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/yt/kluane/plan.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/yt/kluane/plan.aspx)

### **Yukon Government Services**

The Yukon government provides a full range of services from education (school is in Destruction Bay), health and social services (nursing station and child services in Haines Junction, counsellor from Whitehorse), environmental services (Destruction Bay), economic and community development (Destruction Bay). Services are not available directly in Burwash Landing, but from other communities. For more information about Yukon government services please visit [www.gov.yk.ca](http://www.gov.yk.ca)

### **Government of Canada**

Over time, federal responsibilities for many services including fisheries, mine safety, intra-territorial roads, hospitals and community health care were transferred to the Yukon government. In October 2001, the Yukon Devolution Agreement was concluded enabling the transfer of the remaining province-like responsibilities for land, water and resource management to the Government of the Yukon on April 1, 2003. As a result, the presence of the Federal Government in the territory has diminished. Please visit [www.gc.ca](http://www.gc.ca) for more information.

Services are not provided directly in the Burwash community. Police services are provided from the detachment in Haines Junction, postal services at a satellite office in Destruction Bay and environmental protection services through an office in Haines Junction.



## **Non-Government Services in Whitehorse**

***Many Rivers Counselling Services*** – is a Whitehorse-based organization that offers non-emergency counselling for individuals, couples, families and groups.

***Alcoholics Anonymous*** – meetings are held in the community.

***Blood Ties Four Directions*** – Whitehorse-based organization that provides outreach services educating people and supporting those with blood born diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C.

***Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon (FASSY)*** – Based in Whitehorse, FASSY provides training, advocacy and support for families and individuals affected by FASD.

## **First Nation Services**

The First Nation provides a range of services to the community including health, social assistance, education, heritage, lands and resources and others. The services are funded directly by the federal government or through financial transfer agreements linked to programs and services transfer arrangements that are the method for implementing self government.

The First Nation runs the Kluane Day Care, Cultus Day Complex and Dalan campground.

The Health and Social department is a key strength in the community. For a smaller population, the department works together as a team to implement a large number of programs to all members.