



Council of Yukon First Nations

Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation **Cultural Orientation** and Protocols **Toolkit**



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VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION SPECIFIC CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND PROTOCOLS

1.0 History

Vuntut Gwitchin means 'People of the Lakes'. Thousands of lakes are found in the Old Crow Flats which is an important area used for hunting, trapping and fishing. Old Crow was named after a prominent chief who led the Vuntut Gwitchin around the turn of the century, Deetru' K'avihdik, whose name means "Crow may I walk". The descendants also named Crow Mountain and Crow River in his honour. Old Crow is one of 19 Gwitchin communities in the Gwich'in Nation that extends across northeastern Alaska, Yukon and western Northwest Territories.

Some of the most ancient archaeological evidence of humans in North America has been found in the Old Crow area. Further testament to this antiquity is in the Vuntut Gwitchin oral history stories that tell of people living here long ago, when Crow created the world at the crux of the Crow and Porcupine Rivers.

The traditional territory of the Vuntut Gwitchin is centred around the drainage of the Old Crow River including Old Crow Flats, west to Coleen River, east to Berry Creek, north to the British Mountain divide and south to the Keele Range divide, in both Yukon and Alaska. The Vuntut Gwitchin were nomadic, travelling extensively through their traditional territory on a seasonal basis to sustain themselves and their connection to the caribou that also inhabit the area.

The cycle of seasonal activities was as follows:

- Spring – a time of hunting caribou along the Porcupine River and a little later muskrat and migratory bird hunting along the Porcupine River and in Old Crow Flats.
- Summer – camps were set up along tributary streams of the Porcupine and Old Crow Rivers for fishing salmon and other fish. Egg and berry gathering, rabbit snaring took place at this time and in late summer hunting moulting birds.
- Fall – late August and early September were spent in Old Crow Flats hunting caribou. The Vuntut Gwitchin historically used caribou fences to corral and harvest large numbers of animals.
- Winter – a difficult time for the people where they sought shelter from the high winds and extreme cold in the protected valleys along the south portion of the Crow Flats and other areas. They hunted caribou in their wintering grounds when they could.

Vuntut Gwitchin Resources

The rich history and way of life of the Vuntut Gwitchin has been documented by the Vuntut Gwitchin government (VGG) in two excellent books. We encourage people to access these resources full of history and wisdom of the Elders. They are available

through the VGG Heritage department, online and at Mac's Bookstore in Whitehorse.

"People of the Lakes ~ Stories of Our Van Tat Gwich'in Elders/ Googwandak Nakhwach'anjoo Van Tat Gwich'in" - this book is a history of the Vuntut Gwitchin based on ten years of community research that was released in February 2010. The book is co-authored by VGG and Shirleen Smith with a huge contribution from the Elders and VG Heritage Committee.

"The Land Still Speaks", authored by VGFN and Erin Sherry - Gwitchin words about life in Dempster Country.

A Vuntut Gwitchin Cultural Orientation presentation is available in person with the Vuntut Gwitchin Heritage Branch at the John Tizya Centre on request for those who have additional questions or who want more information.

Several short films produced by Vuntut Gwitchin filmmakers can be made available for viewing at the John Tizya Centre.

The John Tizya Centre exhibit area provides an overview of Vuntut Gwitchin culture and lands, including exhibits on the living culture, Gwich'in place names, Vuntut National Park, Ni'iinlii Njik Park and the Porcupine Caribou herd.

Impacts of Early Exploration and Trade

In pre-contact times, the Gwitchin were avid traders with surrounding groups and among themselves. The first contact with European trade goods was through middlemen. In the early 1800's prominent members of the Gwitchin travelled by foot to Herschel Island, on the Beaufort Sea, and further along the Canadian arctic coastline to purchase trade goods, mainly tea, sugar and tobacco. A regular travel route was developed and used for many years. In time, the traders came to the Vuntut Gwitchin. After the Hudson's Bay Company withdrew from the area, a handful of independent traders emerged and continued to trade in the area, along with Gwitchin traders such as Joe Netro and Chief Peter Moses. With the traders also came the missionaries who settled at the site of Old Crow. Around 1911 four Gwich'in families, including the families of Elias Kwlatyi and John Tizya, built the first cabins at the fish camp that is the site of present day Old Crow. After this time a village began to emerge with a store and church. Later the RCMP detachment moved from Rampart House to Old Crow and this became the major settlement in the area. The Gwitchin maintained their seasonal activities and would gather in Old Crow for holidays and gatherings.

The Gwitchin people began to settle in Old Crow in the 1950's. This brought major change to the local subsistence economy as well as to other aspects of Gwitchin culture. The people continued to travel within their territory for hunting and gathering, but to a lesser extent.

The shift from seasonal camps to the more sedentary pattern of settlement occurred over a period of about 50 years, however this change occurred within the lifetime of many Gwitchin and for them it was a very disruptive experience.

Residential School

Similar to many First Nations across the country, the Vuntut Gwitchin children 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. They understood who they were and where they fit into the community and family structure.

The goal of residential schools was to assimilate. To strip away their connection with language, family structure and culture and replace it with something else that in no way reflected or supported their traditional way of life. On top of this, devastating harm was inflicted on many of the children at residential school including physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The staff of the Health & Social department is working to rebuild the missing pieces. Improving communication within families is important in helping prevent hurting citizens from suffering in silence. As a community, the people are gaining strength, healing and moving toward a brighter future.

2.0 Current Status in Land Claims, Self Government or Other

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Land claim and self government agreements were signed on May 29, 1993 and came into effect on February 14, 1995. Implementation of the agreements is a major priority for the Vuntut Gwitchin Government and requires ongoing negotiations with the Yukon Government and Government of Canada. Since the signing of the final land claim agreement, VGG has been working diligently on implementation of the agreements in all departments.

VGFN Governance

Vuntut Gwitchin Government leadership is comprised of 1 Chief, 1 Deputy Chief and 3 council members. The leadership is directed by and given its mandate from the General Assembly on an annual basis where a quorum of 25 citizens from the beneficiaries list (over the age of 18) is required.

3.0 Communication and Relationships

Communications and relationships are most important to the community of Old Crow. For a small community, it is a busy place. There are community activities, where people get together with one another during the day and some evenings and weekends. The community welcomes all resource people to join in and help out.

In a small community, relationships are close and everyone knows one another. It means the community is able to come together in times of need and work toward the common good. It also can mean personal disagreements or conflicts are felt on

many levels in the community. To prevent misunderstandings, contact the Health and Social department with contentious issues. Understanding family networks and dynamics is important to conduct business in Old Crow.

VGG built the Sarah Abel-Chitzee Administration Building in 2000. The admin building houses most of the VGG staff allowing for better communication and working relationships between departments.

4.0 Specific Cultural Values and Beliefs

The cultural values and beliefs of the Gwitchin are inseparable from their close connection to the land and represent a combination of the life ways of all the Gwitchin communities across northern NWT, Yukon and Alaska.

The people are caring and respectful to one another and hold generosity and hospitality in high regard.

People respect one another's values and beliefs and shared knowledge and cultural ways. The VG citizens harvest and respect the land and its resources. The traditional ways are lived predominantly out on the land, especially during hunting and gathering season.

The people want their youth to learn all they can to respect the land and harvest traditional foods. The Elders encourage the young leaders to work together and be helpful to one another to continue an ethic that was so strong in early history. To be able to thrive in such a harsh environment, survival skills had to be excellent as did community cohesion. These skills and values were passed down through many generations and form the basis of community life.

5.0 Birth and Death

The birth of a baby is an exciting time and a very special occasion, especially for Elders. Today people have baby showers to celebrate the birth.

When a death happens in the community, the VGG building is closed out of respect for the family and meetings are usually cancelled. A family representative usually becomes the spokesperson for the family, but sometimes a non-family member is chosen. The community takes care of all preparations for the funeral and potlatch. All community members are welcome to attend potlatches and funerals.

6.0 Potlatch Traditions

A potlatch is a traditional practice of the Gwitchin and a spiritual time. Potlatches are for all special times when a community needs to come together. It is a traditional way for the community to celebrate with joy and also a time for grieving and finding closure. It is common for Gwitchin from other communities to come for the day on air charters as there are deep family connections across the Gwitchin Nation.

Community members and resource people are welcome and encouraged to attend potlatches. It is best to contact a staff member at H & S department or the family that is hosting. The dress code is casual and one can expect to meet and be among many people. The potlatch consists of prayer, presentations by community members and a huge meal. It is an honour to attend and an opportunity to get to know people at these special times. People attending these events are expected to bring their own dishes. Bringing an extra container is a good idea as all the food will be given out during the meal.

7.0 Marriage

Most weddings are held at St. Luke's Anglican Church, with outside and local ministers. After the church service there is a celebration at the community hall, with a feast and a dance that usually carries into the morning. Planes are chartered to bring people from other Gwitchin communities to the celebration. It is common for Vuntut members to marry into neighbouring Gwitchin communities.

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 to the young people.

9.0 Traditional Health and Healing

The health and healing of the people is closely connected to the caribou and the land. Most Vuntut Gwitchin are in good health, from living a traditional lifestyle and by eating foods from the land and travelling around the traditional territory to harvest them. The people have to be in good physical condition to sustain a northern lifestyle. Many people spend April to June spring trapping in Crow Flats. They only bring basic supplies with them; everything else the land provides.

10.0 Protocols

10.1 Approaching Elders for advice or teachings

The Vuntut Gwitchin Elders enjoy talking with resource people and making them feel welcome in the community. Home visits need to be set up ahead of time and often a translator is needed. This is a good opportunity to have in depth conversations which will give resource workers a clear idea of the lifestyle within the remote community. The protocol for approaching Elders would be to direct your questions to a Health and Social staff member and they will refer you to an Elder that can help you.

When an Elder speaks, it is respectful to be patient and listen carefully. Elders take time when they speak and there are often pauses as they convey their thoughts. Wait until the speaker shows they have made their point before speaking. It is recommended to talk with the Director of Health and Social in advance of meeting with Elders. An honorarium is required as a gesture of appreciation for the Elder's knowledge.

The Elders enjoy sharing their knowledge and do so with a sense of humour which is a way of expressing their appreciation for your services.

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 must complete this application, available for download at www.vgfn.ca under "Downloads and Forms". Individuals conducting research in Old Crow submit the VGG Research Application, available for download at the same location.

10.3 Home visiting & invitations

Home visits are normally done with a VGG staff member and/or family member(s) included.

Most people feel comfortable with a person of the opposite gender entering their home when there is someone else along. It is protocol to call the appropriate staff in the H & S department prior to arranging these visits. In some cases, a family or community member needs to be included as a translator.

Regular home visits with Elders are scheduled by the VGFN community health representative (CHR). The current CHR is a fluent speaker of the Vuntut Gwitchin dialect.

10.4 Speaking/meeting to individuals of the other gender

When meeting with individuals of the other gender have a staff member from the H & S department attend with you. This is the protocol when dealing with children as well.

There are cultural differences in how to converse with the male gender. It is disrespectful to show too much interest in the partner of the opposite gender. It is also disrespectful to touch personal belongings of the men of the community unless they give you permission. It is important to explain a plan and process so they are clear on what to expect.

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 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 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 resolution plan in place.

It is important to consider that Vuntut Gwitchin protocol dictates that it is not polite to say no to a visitor's request. Frame questions and requests in a manner that allows the person to respond without having to say no. This can help to avoid potential conflicts.

Having effective communication within the staff is critical for the First Nation to be able to serve the community well. Inviting an Elder to assist with finding resolution is always an option.

10.6 Meetings

There are monthly inter-agency meetings held to discuss community issues and solutions as well as doing planning exercises. Health and Social staff members 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.

10.7 Expected Behaviour

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

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.

The Elders are especially respectful of people that work in the health and social field. An Elder in turn expects respect and must be given time and attention to fully express themselves. Please respect the pause in conversation an Elder takes and do not interrupt them.

The Health and Social department and Elders are willing to spend time with resource people and work closely with them until they feel confident and comfortable in the community. Staff is expected to be appropriately dressed at work. The dress code is slightly higher than casual and modest.

With regard to the traditional regalia worn by citizens at Gwich'in Gatherings and other public events, 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 Old Crow is about 300 with the vast majority being Vuntut Gwitchin. As of March 2010 the registered population of the Vuntut Gwitchin on the VGFN beneficiaries list was 757.

11.2 Education and Income

The Chief Zzeh Gittlet School offers grades K-9 in Old Crow. Like all schools in the Yukon, the school follows the British Columbia curriculum. Areas of Gwitchin life are incorporated into the curriculum including language, math, social studies, fine arts etc. The Gwitchin language is also taught in the school. The school is an integral part of community life and many of the local people work with the students. This is especially true of the Elders who spend a lot of time teaching the pupils the ways of the past. They tell legends, teach students how to trap, fish and hunt. All the students spend some time on the land during the school year and there is a school camp inland, below Old Crow specifically for the purpose of land based experiential learning. In the spring many of the students go out to Crow Flats to harvest muskrat as the people have done for many generations.

After grade nine, students must move to Whitehorse to attend high school. Students stay in the Whitehorse dormitory or with family members. It is not an easy time for the students or their families, as the teenagers are away from home for ten months of the year.

There is a Yukon College campus, where continuing education programs are offered, with special programs that are developed in conjunction with the First Nation. 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 VG 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 VGFN is expressed through traditional arts, language, dancing, community gatherings and families harvesting from the land which is deeply rooted in the connection to the land and caribou. The youth are strong members of the community and are encouraged to live with a close connection to the land and the Elders.

11.4 Health and Social Strengths

The remoteness of Old Crow is a strength as it creates a close-knit village and helps to maintain traditional ways, with a thriving culture, language and close ties to the land. The way of life is passed on to the youth by families taking their children and grandchildren out on the land. Old Crow is surrounded by beauty and wilderness, rivers and lakes. Community members have cabins along the river as a place where they can spend time as a family. Each season brings traditional activities and the community is well known for their unique beadwork, hand-made moccasins and other traditional clothing.

The Vuntut Gwitchin have been hosts of many major gatherings and meetings featuring cultural ways, traditional foods and entertainment. Feasts and potlatches are held for all occasions including funerals, graduations, weddings, carnivals etc. The Gwitchin nation communities alternate hosting Gatherings every two years. This is an opportunity to be part of a spiritual time among families and relatives.

Old Crow enjoys organizing winter and summer sporting events. Carnivals are well known and involve most community members. There are indoor games during the cold temperatures and outdoor sports like dog races and cross country skiing at the local ski chalet. These are ways the members maintain their sense of humour and continue to be so warm, welcoming and friendly.

Many of the youth volunteer and actively participate in activities. Over the Christmas break, the students that have to leave home after grade nine are welcomed home with feasting and dancing and other activities. It is important to honour the students and encourage them to continue with their education.

The Anglican Church has been a strong force within the community since the arrival of the missionaries. St. Luke's historic church which is in the midst of the community is very different from most churches. All church literature has been translated into Gwitchin making it much easier to incorporate Gwitchin ways into church services. The Elders have followed this ritual and encourage the younger people to continue.

11.5 Community Challenges and Issues

Maintaining adequate funding for long term programs that fit the specific needs of Old Crow is the biggest challenge.

As well capacity is a big issue. Where possible, the Health & Social department hires local members and provides them with on-going training to further develop skills. The H & S department also hires skilled workers from outside to strengthen the health and social team. However, the tendency is that the local staff stay for the long term and the people from outside stay for periods too short to build the necessary trust within the community to bring positive change.

The majority of social issues within the community stem from the devastating inter-generational effects of residential school. Elders spoke out about this with heartfelt concern at a conference "Words of the Elders", in October 1993. Today these effects continue to deeply impact the community.

Alcohol and drug use is a concern in Old Crow. Even though there is prohibition on alcohol and laws against non-prescription drugs, it still manages to make its way into the isolated community. The Health and Social department runs a safe house in response to situations arising from drug and alcohol use. The safe house is also used for personal development workshops, interagency meetings and other health and social programs.

A challenge faced in the community is the distance created between the youth and Elders because of modern technology like computers, video games and ipods. The department is aware of this and working toward bringing the two generations together.

There are community concerns for the students that leave Old Crow to finish high school in Whitehorse. Some students have a hard time coping with being away from family and the community.

Cost of supplies, gas and equipment to be out on the land is very expensive which makes it a challenge for youth and others to spend as much time out there as they

would like. This is unfortunate, as members spending all their free time on the land are great contributors to community wellness.

Some youth are interested in furthering their education and others are interested in living close to the land and staying near their families in the community. Local employment is an issue, as the majority is seasonal which does not provide enough money to cover living expenses.

11.6 Community Uniqueness and Spirit

Old Crow has a powerful northern spirit. The community comes together for happy times and sad times. The people are able to live in harmony with the land, carrying on their traditional activities and at the same time work with the southern culture. Many leaders travel far from home to educate decision makers about Gwitchin culture and its intrinsic ties to the Porcupine caribou herd. They do everything they can to ensure the health of their way of life and the health of the caribou who have been critical to the Gwitchin people for thousands of years. Old Crow people have always lived close to the cultural ways and, producing beautiful beadwork and hand made products that are uniquely Gwitchin.

Cross-country skiing is a popular activity in Old Crow and is one way the people express their strength.

12.0 Community Health & Social Services Staff

Vuntut Gwitchin Government Main Phone 867-966-3261

Health & Social Director	966-3519
Office Assistant	966-3351
Home & Community Care Coord.	966-3261 ext. 259
Community Health Rep.	966-3261 ext. 249
Community Wellness Worker	966-3418
Family Support Worker	966-3519
Recreation Coordinator	966-3238
Justice Coordinator	966-3167
Manager, Social & Wellness	996-3418



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 www.yukon.taiga.net
 www.yukoncommunities.yk.ca
 www.cyfn.ca
 www.eco.gov.yk.ca
 www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca
 www.ainc-inac.gc.ca

Appendix 1: VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION AND OLD CROW COMMUNITY PROFILE



1.0 INTRODUCTION

This community profile is for the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN), a Yukon First Nation located in Old Crow. 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 Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Location and Infrastructure

Old Crow is the most northerly community in the Yukon, and the only community that can't be reached by road. In some years a temporary winter road is constructed. Old Crow is located on the banks of the Porcupine River, 128 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle about 800 kilometres north of Whitehorse. The vast lands cover 50,000 square miles of prime wildlife habitat, from the western border of Alaska and Canada to the Peel River and Richardson Mountains, and from northern Ivvavik National Park to the Ogilvie Mountains.

VGFN owns and maintains an Administration Building – Sarah Abel Chitze Building, community hall, youth centre, daycare, safe house, skating arena and wilderness camp with cabin for student programs. They also own and maintain housing units for their citizens.

2.3 Business and Government Services

Business

Old Crow is a very small community and services are provided either by the Vuntut Gwitchin Government or local private businesses. There is a grocery store, the Northern Store which sells a broad range of goods from groceries to fuel. There are two Bed and Breakfasts, Ch'oo Deenjik Accommodations and Porcupine B & B which have full amenities.

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).

The VGG created the Vuntut Development Corporation, which administers all business initiatives for the citizens. Air North Airlines is one major business that the remote community has invested in, along with other business in construction and office buildings in Whitehorse.

Yukon Government Services

Yukon Government operates the school and health centre in Old Crow. Other resources visit the community on a monthly basis to provide services to community members and to assist the Health and Social department:

- Mental Health Worker
- Alcohol & Drug Services
- Social Services
- Probation Officer
- Legal Aid
- Victim Services and Family Violence Program Councillor

The responsibility for local acute care services has been delegated to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. Public health and home care services remain the responsibility of Health and Social Services, Government of Yukon. There are two nurses, with physicians that visit the community on a regular basis. The nurses play an essential role and receive a lot of support from the community. VGG Health & Social department provides on-call services to the health centre.

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 for more information.

Services provided in Old Crow include police, postal services, environmental protection.

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.

Child Development Centre – is a Whitehorse-based organization providing early supports and services to Yukon children from birth to school age, particularly those whose needs are special.

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 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.

The department roles and responsibilities are as follows:

Director of Health and Social Programs - oversees and gives direction to all staff in the department. Duties include, proposal writing, networking with other agencies, coordinating inter-agency meetings and authorizing Health and Social staff training and development. The Director is responsible for the development

and revision of all social department policies and ensures that job descriptions and performance evaluations are up to date.

Administrative Assistant - assists each program coordinator as reception and with related administrative tasks.

Community Wellness Worker - working from the Gathering Place, and reporting to the Director, the Community Wellness Worker (CWW) provides counselling for individuals and families, and also delivers the National Native Alcohol & Drug Addiction Program (NNADAP). The CWW works with Health & Social's Community Health Rep (CHR) and Home & Community Care Coordinator (HCC) to facilitate programs and services at the Gathering Place. The CWW also collaborates with the local Nursing Station, RCMP and the school, along with YTG's Health & Social colleagues who visit monthly (Alcohol & Drug Services, Mental Health, and Social Services) to better the community.

Home & Community Care Coordinator - reporting to the Director, the HCC is responsible for coordinating community based health & social services (home support services, elder care, follow up client care plan, etc. as outlined in the HCC Service Delivery Plan). The HCC supervises the HCC workers.

Community Health Representative (CHR) - reporting to the Director, the CHR is responsible for 5 programs Aboriginal Diabetes Initiatives (ADI), Maternal Child Health (MCH), Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD), HIV/AIDS, and the National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (NAYSPS). The CHR provides these services through workshops and educational activities in the community, while building links with other First Nation Health Representatives in the Yukon.

Justice Coordinator - acts as liaison between the courts and clients by setting up and putting out notices for court dates, setting up appointments for clients with lawyers, explaining the court process to clients, speaking on behalf of clients in court, acting as agent in the court if the client cannot attend, arranging for extensions for fines, and collecting fines wherever appropriate. The Justice Coordinator also assists by helping clients understand their legal rights and obligations, ensures clients are familiar with court procedures, and assists clients in obtaining legal counsel. Clients are also assisted in the process of determining if they are eligible for the Old Crow Diversion Program, which is an option other than the Territorial Court system.

Community Recreation Coordinator - works as a team member with the Health & Fitness Program Project Manager and the Health & Social Services department and plans, co-ordinates and delivers a variety of community recreational programs and activities for children, youth, adults and Elders.