Council of Yukon First Nations

Liard First Nation
Cultural Orientation and Protocols Toolkit

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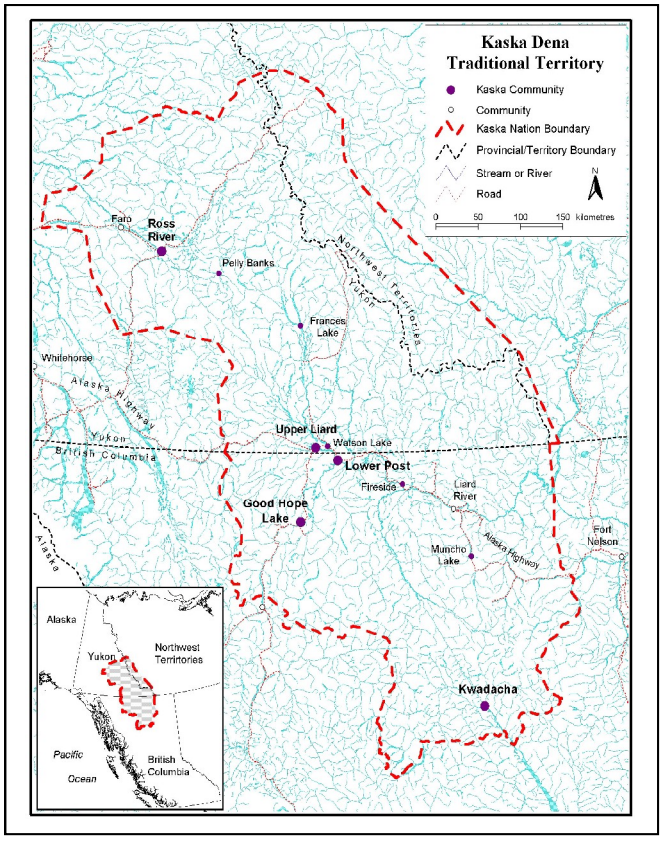
LIARD FIRST NATION SPECIFIC CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND PROTOCOLS

1.0 History

For tens of thousands of years, Kaska Dena have lived in over 240,000 square kilometres of land in the southeast Yukon, southern Northwest Territories, and north-western British Columbia. With the establishment of provincial and territorial borders the Kaska nation was separated into five Kaska families which through the *Indian Act* were called First Nations.

In the Yukon, there are two Kaska First Nations – Liard First Nation and Ross River-Dena Council who live primarily in the communities of Ross River, Upper Liard, Lower Post and Watson Lake. In B.C. there is the Dease River First Nation at Good Hope Lake, the Lower Post First Nation near Watson Lake and the Kwadacha First Nation at Fort Ware, NWT.

The traditional territory of the Kaska includes the upper Liard, Frances and Hyland Rivers and extends into the upper Pelly drainage in the north and to the Dease River in the southwest.



The Liard First Nation people spoke Kaska an Athabaskan language which is spread over western Canada, Alaska and southeastern US. The indigenous name is dene dzage “the people’s language”. Kaska is closely related to neighbouring languages such as Talhtan, Sekani, Beaver, Slavey, Southern Tutchone and Northern Tutchone. The dialects of Kaska spoken in different regions differ somewhat in the pronunciation of words and in the terms that are used for certain expressions. The language is no longer in everyday use, however Elders and those who do traditional work on the land still speak Kaska, mostly among friends and family.

(Source: Kaska Dena Council website)

Pre contact Lifestyles

The Kaska were the original people of the area. They were seasonal migrants who travelled within their established territory while hunting and gathering food. They followed the birds, animals and fish according to migration patterns and seasonal cycles.

Historically Kaska traded and inter-married with both Tlingit and Tahltan trading partners. The ancestors of contemporary Kaska were already using guns and steel tools supplied by Tlingit traders when Robert Campbell and other white traders arrived. In the later fur trade period the Kaska in the Liard drainage, also interacted extensively with Slavey people of the lower Liard and Nelson Rivers. Active trails were maintained between what is now Watson Lake and the territory of the Tlingit people to the north. The Davie Trail linked the Kaska of southern Yukon with and other Kaska people in what is now Ross River and on up to Fort Norman in the Northwest Territories. Packs were used on dogs and even children carried small packs during long walking journeys. Dogs were decorated with beautifully beaded harnesses for packs in the summer and dog teams in the winter.

Pre contact lifestyles revolved around survival and self-sufficiency – depending on the land for food and shelter. Skills in bush survival, building snowshoes, drum making, trapping, hunting, fishing and gathering were highly prized. Preparing moose hides for use in making clothing and other important items was also an important skill. The natural plants of the land offered many important medicines and individuals learned how to use the “medicine from the bush” from their parents and grandparents.

Elders were highly respected for their life time of accumulated knowledge and were honoured as important role models and teachers. The “Kaska calendar” was used as part of oral tradition to mark the seasonal patterns and passage of time. Traditional laws called “A’I” guided behaviour and defined relationships with a view to preventing conflict and managing peace within the nation. The strict laws included harsh punishment for anyone who abused a woman or a child. Traditional values and beliefs were the foundation of family and community life. Traditions were passed on through stories. As an Elder stated, “there was a story to go with everything.” The Elder went on to say “there was no life like our life – we had nothing and we had everything. There was the richness of our culture, our health, a caring community and love”. “Everyone was responsible for everyone else”.

Rites of passage were used to celebrate when a girl became a woman and a boy became a man. Women were seen as the “givers of life” and greatly respected. Women were often recognized as leaders. Even in situations where men made the decisions, “behind the men were the women”. Hospitality, generosity and respect were very important values. When visitors came, the practice was to “open the door, feed them, and give them a place to rest”. Everything in the living world was seen to have been created as equal – the animals were thought of as once human in another life and the water and the land were seen to be alive and respected as equal to humans. In was not uncommon for people to communicate with animals.

The land was not to be feared – “they know you (the spirits of the land) and respect you”.

Impacts of Early Exploration and Trade

As European explorers crossed the eastern mountains into Kaska lands, trade between them quickly developed. In the 1800s trading posts were established which altered the migration patterns of the Kaska people as they began to settle near the posts.

Gold Rush

The Klondike gold rush had limited affect on the Kaska. The main transportation routes of the gold seekers were miles away from Kaska territory. Where they felt impact was on trade related relationships with neighbouring First Nations.

The Dease Lake gold rush in 1861 and the Cassiar gold rush in 1874 were felt by more Kaska people. The influx of people had more of an affect as some of the gold seekers stayed. It was the “toe in the door” so to speak.

Residential Schools

Like other First Nations, the Kaska were deeply affected by residential school. There was a residential school at Lower Post, the Kaska community just south of the Yukon – B.C. border, 17 miles south of Watson Lake and the home of the Liard First Nation. Many of the stories of the experience of Kaska people in Lower Post and other residential schools have just begun to surface in the last 5 to 10 years.

The First Nation has been actively addressing the impacts of residential school on the citizens of LFN for many years. In 1999, the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society (LAWS) was established “to implement a comprehensive healing strategy to address the physical and sexual abuse of the residential schools.” (www.liardaboriginalwomen.ca). Since that time, LAWS has designed and managed many projects to assist people in healing from the legacy of the residential school experience. The most recent contribution to the community is a 10 Year Plan to address addictions which was released in April 2010. Unfortunately, the primary source of funding for LAWS has been the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and that funding source has ended effective March 31, 2010.

Kaska children were steeped in their language, traditions and culture prior to being forcibly removed to the residential school. Kaska spirituality was embedded into the way the children interacted with each other and the natural world. They had been taught to be caring people who are helpful to others and deeply respectful of all of Creation. Once at the schools, children were told that they were pagans and that they must embrace the whiteman’s religion if they were to be saved. They were seen and treated as “savages” who needed to be civilized.

Alaska Highway

When the Alaska Highway was pushed through pristine wilderness and into the Yukon, the area around Watson Lake was the first to be impacted. The time was early WW II 1942 to be exact and the highway was built in nine months. It was an aggressive, military “invasion” for the purposes and securing Alaska and all of its resources from threats around the Pacific Rim during the war. The American army built the road and as most of the workers were men, the presence of so many men from outside the community impacted both men and women. Some Kaska were hired as guides to show planners the best routes and the wage economy was introduced to the Kaska. Today, there are still dump sites along the highway route that are affecting some lakes.

2.0 Current Status in Land Claims, Self Government or Other

Liard First Nation is the largest of the four First Nations which represent the citizens of the Kaska Nation. Centered in Watson Lake, Yukon and Lower Post British Columbia, LFN is politically and legally responsible to represent the public interest concerns of its citizens throughout Kaska traditional territory in Yukon, British Columbia and the Northwest Territory. These public interests are increasingly wide, complex and diverse in scope.

Until the 1960's citizens of Liard First Nation governed themselves effectively under a complex, comprehensive and effective political, social and culturally founded system of policy development and decision making. As the Elders say “why do we have to worry about self government – we have always had self government and why does it need to be put on paper?”

A unique cultural and spiritual world view and source of knowledge, contemporaneously known as Dena Keh, along with related laws, sometimes referred to as Dena A’I Nezen, provided the philosophical, ideological and moral foundation for all decisions. These unique culturally and spiritually founded systems evolved over thousands of years and were tested and proven effective throughout profound transformative events; climate change, wars, economic upheavals and epidemics of disease, for example.

As part of the evolving colonial assimilationist policies of the Government of Canada, all Yukon First Nations began to experience the application of the *Indian Act* sometime in the late 1950's, early 1960's. Along with other Yukon First Nations, Liard First Nation saw the sudden imposition of a new social and political order; an Indian Act Band Council, forced removal of children to residential schools and the relocation of entire communities to locations in closer proximity to those children to note a few.

Simultaneously, in the early 1960's, Liard First Nation began to receive the first programs and services presented by the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. These services were largely limited to a social welfare system and social housing as part of a national program applicable to “Indians” across Canada.

The sociological, political and cultural affects of these colonial policies and legislation, applied simultaneously, were and are profound. As the colonial policies intended until quite recently, a breakdown of Kaska social, political, cultural and economic structure and efficacy began to take place within one generation. By the early 1980's, those Kaska families who personally survived their residential school experiences and relocations from traditional villages and their associated economies began to feel the effects of assimilationist policies.

A society that was largely economically and otherwise self sufficient, healthy and prosperous began to become reliant upon welfare for an income and social services, including social housing, to meet their needs. By the second generation following the application of federal assimilationist policies, increasing numbers of Kaska families were becoming dependent on social welfare systems instead of their proven methods of self sufficiency. The impacts on family and individual health and well being, cultural continuity and economic and general self sufficiency were, and continue to be profound and pervasive.

Concurrent with the increasingly negative effects of these colonialist policies, a healthy and positive resistance to these assimilationist policies began among Kaska and other First Nation people across Canada. Empowered by historically important Supreme Court of Canada decisions in the 1970's and 1980's (ie. Calder and Sparrow), and effective political action (ie. White Paper and Berger Inquiry), Liard First Nation took its place among other First Nations in asserting its just and rightful place in Canadian society and political structure.

Many individual Kaska citizens and families found sobriety, and with it a culturally competent and consistent way forward into what had become a profoundly different new world order. Acting in concert, LFN citizens reformed the *Indian Act* political system that was imposed by the Government of Canada, an evolution that continues to this day.

Over the last twenty-five years, the contemporary LFN government has assembled a public administration from a wide spectrum of government sponsored programs and services. While its evolution has been ad hoc and opportunistic, today's LFN public administration offers a remarkable range of services to LFN citizens delivered in ways that demonstrate considerable competence and accountability. This considerable success as a rapidly developed public government is a testament to the persistence and commitment of LFN citizens, public officials and leadership.

Today, Liard First Nation employs over 100 people. It offers a complex range of public services that have an annual value of approximately ten million dollars. LFN is a known political force to be reckoned with throughout its traditional territory in Yukon, British Columbia and the Northwest Territorities. Its' corporations are sound, and has assets in the millions of dollars, with annual revenues to match. Significantly, LFN's cultural competence and probabilities for sustaining cultural continuity rise as increasing numbers of Kaska families and individuals find applications for Kaska culture in contemporary political, economic and social development.

It is this success that may present LFN's greatest challenge in the future.

The trajectory for required public service is increasing steeply in proportion to the political responsibilities required of the LFN government and the program and service needs expressed by its citizens. Public revenues are likely to increase exponentially with the continued increase in political and economic success now underway. The ability to effectively and competently manage the related administrative responsibilities and accountabilities will become challenged.

LFN's current capacity to effectively manage its financial and human resources is competent. It is also taxed to the maximum. While frequently challenging, LFN's current public administration, particularly its finance and senior managers, the Directors, can handle the demands placed upon it today. Today's LFN public administration will not be able to meet the challenges it is presented with as a result of the success and growth that now appears inevitable, unless these new demands are systematically considered, planned and made manifest.

Change requiring management can be the result of many things. Sometimes it is a result of economic collapse, climate or ecological devastation, war, famine, disease or other catastrophic events. All of these catastrophic events have taken place over the course of Kaska people's existence. All have required systematic change in the past, without which Kaska people would not have survived, let alone prospered. Kaska society is one of the oldest societies in continuous existence in North America. The single most important reason for this resilience is arguably Kaska people's ability to adapt to change.

Today, LFN is in the enviable position of requiring managed change due to its continued success as a people and a government. This project is intended to form a part of that systematic consideration, planning and effecting of change; adaptation. This is no different from what the ancestors have done so well before.

(Author for the above portion of section 2.0 –Tom Cove, LFN Government Advisor)

The Liard First Nation and Ross River Dena Council have not entered into a MOU to conclude their land claims and remain under the federal *Indian Act*. The Kaska land claims are part of the first comprehensive claim accepted by Canada under its 1973 policy. The claims were accepted by the federal government in 1973 in the Yukon, and in 1983 in B.C.

In addition, agreements related to energy and mineral development, forestry and tourism have been signed between the Kaska, Canada, and British Columbia. These agreements provide opportunities for the Kaska to participate in resource management and benefit from resource-related development on the Kaska traditional territory while treaty negotiations continue. These agreements will create the momentum for growth and development in Kaska communities.

LFN Governance and Structure

The Liard First Nation is represented by an elected chief and a four person council. A tribal chief presides over the Kaska Tribal Council, which includes three band governments (Liard First Nation, Ross River Dena Council, Dease River First Nation in BC).

The structure of the LFN government includes the following departments:

- Health & Social
- Justice
- Lands & Resources
- Language & Culture
- Education
- Capital
- Administration

3.0 Communication and Relationships

The deep connection to the land is vital. The authority and identity of the Kaska people comes from and is tied to the land. It is the land that provides a deep sense of place and sense of self. The relationship exists at both the physical and the spiritual level. This relationship gives purpose to the people – to protect the land, which in turn ensures the well-being of the people.

In a small community, relationships are close and everyone knows one another. This 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 my levels in the community. Being aware the family networks and dynamics is critical.

4.0 Specific Cultural Values and Beliefs

Cultural practices continue to play an important role in the lives of the Kaska people. Fishing, hunting, trapping and gathering berries and medicinal plants are important cultural activities. They provide not only healthy food, medicines and valuable resource materials for the community members, but also connect the people to the land, to their history, and through the sharing of such bounties, to each other. Sharing is an important dimension of First Nations harvesting; food is provided not only for one's immediate and extended family, but also for Elders of the community.

Modesty was highly valued and once traditional skin clothing was traded in for clothing made of cloth, Kaska women wore long dresses, even when on the land. Women and men were expected to dress in a way as to not show their body. Shorts were only worn by children. Pants were not adopted by Kaska women until the 1950's and even then, it was rare to see a woman in pants.

Taboos were in place about when and where animals could be skinned and there were specific skins that were not used for sewing. One such skin was otter skin which was not to be used for clothing. Animal skin is understood to be “strong medicine” and the rules about how the skins are to be respected must be obeyed or negative events could take place.

5.0 Birth, Death and Parenting

Pregnant women were provided traditional teachings to support a healthy pregnancy. One such teaching is that she should not sit on a bear skin for too long for fear that the baby will “hibernate” therefore prolong the pregnancy. Pregnant women were advised not to go to funerals. Ashes were used as protection against roaming spirits for individuals and homes.

Births were celebrated and deaths were honoured through potlatch traditions. Parenting, the role of guiding a child into responsible adulthood through teaching of values, most importantly respect, was seen as the most important role for all community members and particularly the parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents of the child. This most important purpose of family and community was broken down when children were removed from homes and forced into residential schools.

A “living will” was used by the Dene to make arrangements for continuity of the family in the event of a death. A woman might arrange with her sister and a man with his brother to take on responsibilities as parent and spouse in the event of a death.

Traditional funerals and potlatches have strict codes. When a clan member dies, the opposite clan dresses the body and arranges the funeral, burial and potlatches. One must wait for one week after the burial before you cut your hair or even nails. Charcoal or ashes are put in the pocket, under the pillow or around the house to keep family members safe when they sleep. One week is waited between the death and the burial and a wake is held if possible. Family members often bring food to the grieving family. At the funeral, no one leaves until the coffin has left the building. At the Potlatch, before anyone can eat it is tradition to offer food to the spirit first – this is done by offering food to the main fire which is made specifically for this purpose. Tobacco may be offered as well.

6.0 Potlatch Traditions & Naming

Potlatches were used to celebrate marriages and special events. In addition, they were used to mark the passing of a person near the time of the death – the funeral potlatch and again a year or so after the death. Traditionally, the potlatch one year after the death was to mark the end of the acute grieving period and also to give away items belonging to the deceased.

Another reason for a potlatch is a naming ceremony. Names are given at anytime throughout life from baby still in the womb to an older person that may be receiving a first name, a new name or an additional name. Tradition states that it

has to be the right name at the right time. Names may be passed along within members of a family or community. It is a high honour to be given a traditional name.

Part of the potlatch tradition is the “give away” where gifts are offered. It is important to accept any gift that is offered. It is seen as disrespectful to say “no”. It is important to accept a gift offered graciously. Giving and receiving are deeply held values that are honoured in the potlatch tradition.

The serving of food is part of the potlatch traditional and it important to not waste food given on a plate and also to help make sure no food is wasted by taking home food not eaten during the gathering.

Current day potlatch organizers ask people to bring their “potlatch bag” with a plate, cup and eating utensils to reduce the use of disposable materials. Some people have decorated potlatch bags that have gone along with them to many gatherings. Today, potlatches are smaller than they were traditionally and may be held in a variety of ways, depending on the family. The last big traditional potlatch that can be remembered was about 20-30 years ago.

7.0 Marriage

Prior to contact, marriages were arranged. The families of the two individuals would consult with one another and make decisions on behalf of the people to be married. Even though the marriages were arranged, it was not unusual to have long courtships through which the man was expected to prove to his future in-laws that he could support his intended wife. Part of the courtship was hunting and trapping for the grandparents of his wife to be. Traditionally, the woman did not leave her family. It was the man who joined the woman’s family.

8.0 Traditional Laws

Traditional laws were mostly structured around “you are not allowed to”. Certain actions were prohibited and the Elders were responsible for teaching what can and cannot be done. One look or word from an Elder was seen as enough to cause a correction in behaviour. It was seen as disrespectful to question an Elder or an older relative and communication was often carried out without eye contact, as a sign of respect.

If traditional laws were broken, the clan that was shamed by the action of the guilty party was expected to pay reparation to the clan that had been offended. The Wolf and Crow clans are in place as part of the Kaska culture, similar to other Yukon First Nations with the exception of the Tlingit. The Kaska clans are matrilineal with the child taking on the clan of the mother.

Land is seen as sacred and the Kaska have been given the honour of stewardship of their traditional lands by the Creator. The lands are not seen to be “owned” by the Kaska, but they take their sacred responsibility for the land very seriously. There

are a number of traditional laws around how the land and all things from nature are to be respected and treated. One warning that is embedded in the laws is that if the land and its richness are not respected, people will become poor, hungry, disabled or simple minded. Disrespect is expected to be punished by the effects coming "back to you or it will come back to your family or loved ones." The general rule is that "if you cannot survive by it, leave it alone. Use everything from animal or plants, waste nothing." It is also expected that everything that comes off the land will be shared.

The Dene Maintenance Code is in place to enforce the Dene values and to ensure these values are maintained from generation to generation. The Dene codes express the grandparent's rights and are handed down from generation to generation through stories and legends, Elders, leadership, songs, family names, clans, dances and teachings. These maintenance codes are intended to provide for the affairs of the clans, in a manner that carries out the customary codes while maintaining Dene government, including rights, title and other interests.

The Dene Society Code supports the matrilineal society and identifies the affiliation of family members, connection to family use areas on the land, hunting, fishing and gathering rights and the Dene Clan code. The Dene Clan Code describes the Crow Clan and the Wolf Clan and describes the "blood" relationship within clans. Everything is connected to these two clans of life.

Self–control and Self Discipline Codes are taught to children from their earliest years by people older than them. The Education Code was strong in that training needed to be intense to ensure survival from generation to generation. Learning was shared collectively and for both men and women, in different ways. It was up to the older ones to teach hunting, trapping, gathering and fishing. The teachings come in many forms – stories and legends, songs and dances, Elders teachings, show and tell (demonstrations) and passed on at Clan gatherings and celebrations.

The Dene Social Calendar Code showed that the year has thirteen months as it has thirteen new moons. The Dene were taught to understand the calendar by learning to read the natural environment, the animal's life cycle and the Dene's natural diet. They would use the calendar to tell them when to gather for special ceremonies, when to hunt, when to fish, when to harvest and when to trap. These routines kept everything in balance. This in known as the "keep going cycle", that is taught to the Dene throughout various life stages. There also were Codes for men and women to support coming of age and understanding traditional gender roles and relationships.

9.0 Traditional Health and Healing

Stories were used for many purposes and some for the purpose of supporting health and healing. Not hearing the stories and not taking time to listen and learn is seen by some Elders as one cause of the current community breakdown. The children are not actively protected and guided as they once were.

All the four elements – water, fire, air and earth are seen as having unique properties and healing gifts. People are taught to respect the elements as the natural elements always “have more power” than a human being.

Each human being is gifted with a special gift or power and if we learn to honour it and not misuse it, the power will grow. Kaska people were taught that “there is a reason for everything” and that spiritual life includes a very real sense of being “guided or touched by spirit.” Animals are also seen as having special gifts, the gift of the Eagle is protection and communication with spiritual realms. Sweat ceremonies were traditional in Kaska territory although that history is sometimes disputed.

10.0 Protocols

10.1 Approaching Elders for advice or teachings

Elders and other keepers of knowledge are honoured for what they know. As they say “our people know and if they do not know, we can teach them.” There is a responsibility for Kaska to teach Kaska in order to pass on the language and the culture. Someone who is interested and shows respect for the teacher and the teachings will be taught.

When individuals from outside the community seek teachings, one may be asked “why do you want to know.” An individual interested in learning must demonstrate a real interest in the teachings and be willing to be patient. There may be protocols around gifting and visiting that can be learned from people who know about these things. It is best to ask those around the Elder or knowledge keeper what protocols must be used to make a respectful request rather than the Elder themselves. A person may need to explain their role in providing programs and services to Kaska people and demonstrate a commitment to the community. This may take some time before the community sees a resource person as someone who may stay longer than a short period, which makes a person more worthy of an investment of the time and energy needed to establish and maintain and relationship. A resource worker may need to explain the link between what they know about Kaska people and how that translates into an enhanced ability to provide culturally appropriate programs and services that meet community needs.

10.2 Accessing and sharing traditional knowledge

Traditional knowledge is seen as a sacred trust that is passed down within Kaska families and communities using traditional and non-traditional methods. The language is an essential vehicle for understanding and connecting to culture and tradition knowledge. Traditional knowledge is protected by the Kaska as it is essential that it be held by people who can be trusted to hold it sacred and protect Kaska interests.

Some Yukon First Nation communities have a history of being the subject of research that targeted traditional knowledge without full understanding or

permission being granted. Therefore, there is a history of unethical practices that needs to be understood.

Most health and social resource workers do not need access to traditional knowledge in order to do a good job of providing culturally competent services. If a resource worker is fortunate enough to be offered teachings, some of which may be founded in traditional knowledge, it is important to find out what the protocols are around carrying that traditional knowledge, including whether there is permission to share it with anyone else or write it down. The best practice would be to respect it, show your respect to the person who offered the knowledge and hold it confidential. If you would like to write it down, make sure permission is sought and granted before doing so.

10.3 Home visiting & invitations

Home visiting is a practice that is embedded in historical culture. Both visiting for social reasons and to provide programs and services is a good way to get to know families and communities. Always call ahead if there is a phone available to make sure it is a good time for the family. When arriving at the door, make sure it is still a good time to visit. Make sure you state your purpose and accept any food or drink that is offered. Be sensitive to the fact that you may not have privacy as other people may be home. Make sure that your visit is long enough to provide a good opportunity to deepen the relationship and/or provide a comprehensive service but do not overstay your welcome.

In general, the protocol around invitations to community events is that everyone can assume they are invited unless told otherwise. If in doubt, ask a knowledgeable local person about the protocol. It is important for health and social resource workers to become involved in the community so the advice is - do not wait for an invitation, get involved.

10.4 Speaking/meeting to individuals of the other gender

Traditionally, there were tasks that were reserved for men and boys or girls and women. Girls were taught to respect the things that belonged to their brothers, all items and most specifically items used in hunting and ceremony. Girls were scolded if they ever “stepped over” items belonging to the men or boys of the household. Women also did not step over a man or boys legs or any of their belongings. Clothing of men and women were not washed together.

Today, it is understood that men and women that are not married or related need to talk to each other in order to carry out business or to socialize. Due to historical protocols about communication going through a man or woman that is married to or related to the person of the opposite gender, there may be some discomfort with men or women talking directly to a stranger of the opposite gender, particularly about sensitive or embarrassing topics.

10.5 Dealing with conflict and confrontation

Traditionally, justice was dispensed by the collective. Principles were non-judgmental and based on sharing of the burden of the action. The person was expected to admit to the wrongdoing and the process of taking action was swift. The clan system would be used for the resolution of significant conflicts or problems. In very serious cases, the death sentence applied and in other cases, a person may be isolated for family and community or banished for a period of time.

Traditionally, family and community members worked very hard to prevent conflict. Children were raised to be respectful and honourable, reducing the potential for conflict. Now, when conflict arises, there may be significant avoidance in identifying or confronting the conflict or the person. There are many reasons for this behaviour, including a commitment to peace. Individuals may also have a history of alcohol in their family, residential school direct or intergenerational effects or other trauma that may make them more nervous about confrontation. It is best to be indirect in dealing with conflict, using a helper or intermediary to help resolve the conflict without direct confrontation if possible.

10.6 Prayer, Language and Meetings

Prayer was seen as a way of life – everyday. Traditionally, people were taught to pray “wherever you are”. Prayer was seen as a necessary part of everything – a way to ensure the support of the spiritual and natural worlds. Language was seen as a powerful carrier of the culture and connected to traditional spirituality. The revitalization of the language and culture is seen as fundamental to the health and healing of the community.

Kaska language is often incorporated into meetings, sometimes with full translation services for individuals who have Kaska as a first language. Prayer is often used for opening and closing meetings as a way of blessing the gathering and the people.

11.0 Community People, Health and Social Well-being

11.1 Population and Demographics

The population of Watson Lake is about 1,500. The LFN registered population with INAC as of September 2009 was a total of 1,069 citizens with 492 living in the communities and 577 living away. The population is made up of 529 females and 540 males. (Registered Indian Population by Sex and Residence December, 2009, INAC)

Kaska live in the communities of Ross River and Watson Lake in the Yukon and in Lower Post, Good Hope Lake, and Fireside in British Columbia and Fort Ware in Northwest Territories.

11.2 Education

Watson Lake has two schools: Johnson Elementary (K-7) and Watson Lake Secondary (8-12). Headstart programs are offered in the schools.

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 schools elsewhere for more specialized studies.

11.3 Health and Social Strengths

The Health and Social Department is a well developed department with an experienced and committed staff. The staff members offer a broad range of programs and services and work together with Yukon government and federally funded and delivered programs and services.

The development of a camp at Frances Lake and Two Mile Lake both traditional gathering spots and the focus and hard work invested each year in culture camps is a testament to the importance of the revitalization of language and culture. The age old spiritual connection to land and the power of the land to provide opportunities for healing are well recognized.

11.4 Community Challenges and Issues

Economic development is an important priority for the Liard First Nation which is working actively with the Liard First Nation Development Corporation to build capacity for generating own source revenues. The Liard First Nation owns two hotels and is in negotiation with oil and gas, mining and other private sector interests to find ways of providing more opportunities to the Kaska communities.

Social development is also a priority for government. There is recognition that the intergenerational effects of residential school and other impacts related to colonization have had a devastating effect on the health of the community. The

newly released plan (April 2010) entitled “Can You Hear the Drum Beat? Our Ten Year Vision for Health and Healing addresses the issues of a community approach to treatment of drug, alcohol and related problems.

11.5 Community Uniqueness and Spirit

LFN is the primary service provider for LFN citizens and the Liard Aboriginal Women’s Society (LAWS) has been a complimentary and effective resource for the past ten years. The organization has offered a range of healing related programs and services, many geared to working through the legacy of residential school. Their most recent initiative is the development of a ten year plan providing a comprehensive plan involving all five Kaska communities for dealing with alcohol and drug related issues into the future. Unfortunately, the organization is without funding effective March 31, 2010.

12.0 Community Health & Social Services Staff

LFN Government Main Phone	867-536-5200
Health & Social Director	536-5207
Clerical Support Worker	536-5208
Community & Home Care	536-5210
Elder Care	536-5212
Family Support	536-5201
CHR/EPNP	536-5213
Social Assistance Workers (2)	536-5217/18
NNADAP Worker	536-5205

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APPENDIX 1: LIARD FIRST NATION AND WATSON LAKE COMMUNITY PROFILE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This community profile is for the Liard First Nation (LFN), a Yukon First Nation located in and around Watson Lake, Yukon. The purpose of the community profile is to provide some 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 along with tourism. Gold, along with zinc, lead and silver are the mineral of interest and exploration and mining contribute significantly to the Yukon economy.

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 Watson Lake Location and Infrastructure

Liard First Nation (LFN) is part of the Kaska Dena Nation whose traditional territory covers about 25% of the Yukon, 10% of northern BC and some adjacent areas in Northwest Territories.

In the Yukon, there are two First Nations within the Kaska region – Liard First Nation and Ross River-Dena Council. The home of LFN is Liard (Upper Liard) located just west of Watson Lake as well as at Two Mile just north of Watson Lake.

LFN offices are located in Watson Lake which is situated at kilometre 1,012 on the Alaska Highway, about 450 kilometres south of Whitehorse. Community facilities in Watson Lake include an airport, hospital, public library, recreation centre with weight room, squash courts, 5-pin bowling and a youth centre. There are also parks within the town at Lucky Lake and Wye Lake.

2.3 Business and Government Services

Business

Watson Lake has several hotels, bed & breakfasts, campgrounds, RV parks and gas stations as well as a bank, post office, pharmacy and grocery store.

Tourism is an important sector of the Watson Lake economy. For everyone traveling north on the Alaska Highway, Watson Lake is a main stop along the way. Watson Lake offers a number of options for tourists to extend their stay in the area.

Mining is an important economic contributor in the area. Currently the main activity is the Wolverine Mine located 237 km northwest of Watson Lake.

Northern Lights Centre – is a domed 100 seat theatre with panoramic video and surround-sound systems featuring daily showings of the video "Yukon's northern lights" It also incorporates interactive displays that explain the science and folklore of the northern lights.

Signpost Forest – is at the entrance to town and features signposts from all over the world. The collection began in 1942 during the construction of the Alaska Highway.

Wye Lake – offers walking trails and bird observation platforms right in the town.

Lucky Lake – has beach, waterslide and walking trails

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. 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).

Liard First Nation carries out its economic development activities through the Liard First Nation Development Corporation. Business holdings include the Belvedere Hotel and the Gateway Motor Inn which were purchased in 2007.

The Kaska traditional territory is rich in natural resources, and the Kaska are working cooperatively with industry and government to create opportunities for new investment and economic development. Forestry, oil & gas, tourism, and mining initiatives are currently being pursued. For the Kaska, meaningful involvement in development takes the form of joint-ventures, cooperation and participation agreements, impact benefit agreements, and ownership of projects. These kinds of agreements have been struck with several different companies in the Yukon. The Kaska have also been actively involved as committee members in several planning initiatives, including the Muskwa Kechika Advisory Board, the Mackenzie LRMP planning team, the Mackenzie River Basin Management Board, and a Landscape Unit Planning team within the Cassiar Timber Supply Area.

Liard Hotsprings – these famous hotsprings are located two and half hours from Watson Lake at kilometre 765 on the Alaska Highway.

Yukon Government Services

The Yukon government provides a full range of services to the territory from education, health and social services, environmental services, economic and community development. The services provided in Watson Lake include health services (health centre, home care, ambulance). Social Services include a family support worker and a social worker. Community services include volunteer fire department, highways & public works, and conservation services (conservation officer, regional biologist), education services (public and high school and Yukon College campus) and Justice services.

As well, a new hospital is currently under construction. The responsibility for the current and future hospital was transferred to the control of the Yukon Hospital Corporation (YHC) on April 1, 2010. The YHC also operates the hospitals in Whitehorse and Dawson City. Please visit www.gov.yk.ca for more information.

Government of Canada Services

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. Services provided in Watson Lake include police, postal services, environmental protection. Visit www.canada.gc.ca for more information.

Non Government Services

Help & Hope for Families Services - is a 9-bed transition home operated as a nonprofit society. Offers shelter for women and children, programs and services addressing family violence, self-help, healing and personal growth and development.

Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) - provides western and traditional psychotherapy to heal the effects of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools.

Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services – offers non-emergency counselling for individuals, couples, families and groups as well as family education programs.

Creative Playgroup – offers a pre-school program for children 3-6 years which focuses on nutrition, physical education, cognitive skills, fine and gross motor skills, language comprehension and social and early childhood development.

Toy Lending Library - offers educational toys for developmental improvement in children.

Signpost Seniors Centre - provides projects which support and promote the health of all seniors.

First Nation Services

The First Nation provides a range of services to the community including health, education, heritage, lands and resources and others. The services are funded directly by the federal government.

The Liard First Nation Health and Social Department is a key strength in the community. The department administers a list of programs: Canada Prenatal Nutrition, Health Promotion, Home and Community Care, Building Healthy Communities, Brighter Futures, National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP), National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (NAYSPS), Community Health Representative, Maternal Child Health, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), HIV/AIDS Awareness, Diabetes Prevention, Youth Leadership, Community Recreation, Health Careers Program, National Child Tax Benefit Program, Health Support Program, Social Assistance, Work Opportunity Program (WOP), Community Wellness Family Violence, Funerals and Potlatches. As well, land programs with local resources are offered. The Health and Social department offers a Summer Youth Camp at Frances Lake.