

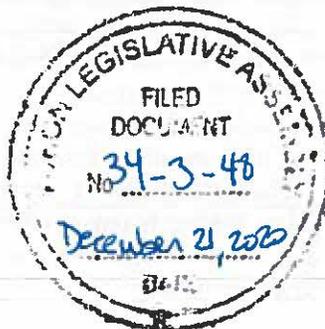


Network for Healthy Early Human Development Yukon

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The Honourable Pauline Frost
Minister of Health and Social Services
P.O. Box 2703 (H-1)
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6



December 10th, 2020

Hon. Ms. Frost,

The Partners for Children Program has been providing services to Yukon families and child care providers for the past 26 years. These programs have supported the healthy early child development of children under the age of 6. These opportunities continue to target parents; and the community at large, including people in training, paraprofessionals and professionals who are interested in or tasked with improving the lives of young children.

We have continuously been involved in the creation/development of relevant science-based knowledge translation, and dissemination including activities such as workshops, newsletters, speakers, training and parent-activities in Whitehorse and throughout the Yukon. We are well known for our delivery of popular groups such as Parent-Child Mother Goose, Mothering Your Baby...the First Year, Handle with Care and Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program.

Across Canada, CAPC (Community Action Program for Children) and PHAC (Public Health Agency of Canada) funded programs, like ours, have partnered with and been financially supported by their provincial and territorial Health ministries. Community organizations, such as ours, have been significant players in terms of bringing the importance of the early years to the forefront in both Whitehorse and the rural communities. As you may be aware PHAC also funds the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs (CPNP) in Yukon and across Canada. CAPC and CPNP programs are designed to piggy-back with each other to capture cohorts of babies and children from prenatal to school entry to promote healthy early child development. At their inception these programs were revolutionary – a bottom up community driven method of meeting the needs of individuals and families. The successful and healthy development of these programs is a result of authentic partnerships – sincere, responsive, and trusting.

Over the years we have prided ourselves on making sure our community partners have been involved with our program initiatives, because we know that it truly does 'take a village'; many hands, many relationships, many perspectives and experiences make for effective, good programming. We have always considered the Yukon Government's Health and Social Services Department to be one of our partners

Originally Yukon Family Services Association, then Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services, offered these family programs using a portion of our CAPC /PHAC funding along with other grants cobbled together. In late August 2014, their Executive Director decided that they would no longer provide family programs effective immediately. The future of these programs was suddenly at the mercy of a decision to be made by the Partners for Program. We felt a moral obligation to figure out how to continue offering these programs because of a lack of other options for inclusive support of new families in our community.

During our existence we have never had an increase in funds from PHAC, nor any supplement from the Yukon Government. We have nimbly adjusted our projects to meet community needs and continue to provide high quality programming that is held in high regard throughout the territory. We have over the years made requests to the Yukon Government for supplemental funds and these requests have been constructive and made with research and 'best-practice' found in other jurisdictions across Canada and the world. Despite these sound requests, monies for ideas and programs we are vested in have been funneled to other non-profit organizations or within Government itself. This has often left us feeling frustrated and disappointed, but we have soldiered on, since the work we do is one of passion, knowing we are improving current lives and future outcomes for young children and their families.

This background sets the stage for our concern in regards to the organizational shift in Health and Social Services, which has resulted in the creation of a new Family Resource Unit. First of all, we are surprised that our organization has not had involvement or consultation concerning this large-scale change, after our being a Territory leader for over two decades. These decisions seriously impact our raison d'être and potentially repeat what has happened in other sectors, by threatening to duplicate programming and to attract our carefully-trained staff due to higher YG wages and benefits. YG has always led us to believe that they have no desire to replace non-profits and their services and take over the private sector. Unfortunately, this is what appears to us to be happening.

We have been members of the Healthy Families Advisory Committee, now the Family Resource Unit Advisory Committee for a number of years. The committee has only met once in the past 14 months, in September, since earlier meetings this year were cancelled. At the September meeting we were told about the pending changes to the Unit, which we were very surprised to hear about. We were particularly surprised as some of the services being implemented are ones that we already successfully delivering - the groups described above. We had not been invited at any point during the planning for this change to collaborate or provide insight about how best this expansion could serve the community and regarding how overlap and competition between our two organizations could be avoided.

Following this September advisory meeting, we requested a meeting with representatives from the FRU to discuss how our two groups could work together and collaboratively to avoid competition and duplication of services. This meeting happened on zoom on October 8th, 2020. At that meeting we were informed that it was not the FRU's intention to take services away from other agencies, but rather to work collaboratively. At that time the FRU was still developing a schedule of upcoming services and promised us a calendar of upcoming groups in two weeks-time. This would allow us to plan our own upcoming groups and avoid potential conflicts. When we hadn't heard back, our office sent the same schedule request on November 5th. There was no reply. On November 27th, we received an email that the December "Advisory Committee" meeting had been postponed until January 2021. Attached to this email was the agenda for this meeting. On this agenda it stated that the FRU will be delivering Parent Child Mother Goose, Handle with Care and Nobody's Perfect groups in the new year. As noted earlier, these are all groups provided by Partners for Children. We have still not received a calendar of upcoming FRU groups.

Our biggest concern is the lack of oversight in not communicating with our organization during the planning phases of this new FRU programming. Our years of commitment to early child education in the Yukon makes us a valuable resource to this department, and we feel we have been underutilized. This is an opportunity for continued partnership, and instead, we are at risk of losing the partnerships that have been years in the making.

We are now at risk of being in competition with FRU in delivery of our established programs and losing partnerships that we have spent years cultivating and nurturing.

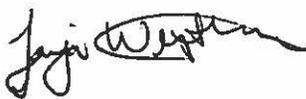
We are concerned that serious errors could be made without consulting those who have worked in this sector for years. For example, many studies have indicated that resource programs and intervention groups should be barrier free and judgement free in order to aid vulnerability and disclosure. With the history of colonization in Yukon, there are serious considerations to be made regarding whether a government department can provide such an environment – even if only because of memories of past traumatic events. Clients need to be able to trust that the programs that they attend are at an arm's length from the government and that their interactions in the group will be private. We are providing this service.

It was honestly always our understanding and belief that the Yukon Government was supportive of and respectful of the significant and extraordinary work completed by non-profit organizations in the Yukon. We are presently at a loss to understand in this instance why instead of supporting an organization already providing an exemplary service, a decision has been made to provide the same service and potentially bring an end to our organization. A year ago, we sent a letter to Deputy Minister Samis and met with his representatives in mid-January 2020 to discuss the possibility of partnering and a small amount of \$18,000 funding, to which we never received a follow-up response.

As a not for profit we are in a unique position to work with a government that values positive outcomes for Yukon children and families. We bring years of knowledge and experience to the table, we are highly familiar with the demographic accessing these programs, and we are able to alleviate some of the work that otherwise falls to busy government departments. We have time and again showed transparency and a willingness to work collaboratively, and we hope to be given the opportunity moving forward.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and look forward to moving forward in a positive and collaborative way.

On behalf of the NHEHDY Board of Directors,



Tanja Westland
President
NHEHD Board of Directors



Tara Wheeler
Vice-President
NHEHD Board of Directors

copy: Liz Hanson, MLA, Health Critic;
Patti McLeod, MLA, Health Critic
Kate White, MLA, Leader of the Yukon New Democratic Party
Currie Dixon, Leader of the Yukon Party
Tanya MacKenzie, Manager of Early Childhood, Prevention and Support Services
Stephanie Asp, CAPC -Traditional Parenting Program
Brittney Johnson, CPNP Skookies Prenatal Nutrition Program
Megan Russell, CPNP Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Family Programs Facilitator
Tiffanie Tasane, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association Yukon Division