

Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs

Yukon

By Natalie Edelson

Social Development Report Series, 2009
Commissioned by the CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



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Born in Ottawa and politicized in Montreal, Natalie inadvertently made the Yukon her home in 1991. Following a road trip with two fellow McGill graduates on a 'year off before grad school,' Natalie became enchanted by the physical and human extremes found in the Yukon, and she embraced an off-grid lifestyle, living without electricity or running water for more than a decade. A social activist by nature, her varied and colourful career has unfolded in classrooms, among local, regional and national women's groups, in the territorial justice system, in community mental health organizations, and remote mining exploration camps. Her interests also include song writing and filmmaking. Her CD *Mayfly Days* garnered significant national and international acclaim, and her short film "Still Life: A Portrait of the McLean Lake Neighbourhood" was presented as a personal statement and community tool to protect her community from impending industrial development. Natalie feels blessed to be part of such a vibrant, close-knit community, where the love of kinship, woodstove and banjo prevails.

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Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs

YUKON

FROM COLONIZATION TO DEVOLUTION: A WORK IN PROGRESS

This report provides a brief outline and overview of select poverty reduction policies and programs in the Yukon Territory. While there are no comprehensive initiatives in the Yukon like the government-sponsored, anti-poverty strategies found in other jurisdictions, there is a significant patchwork of individual anti-poverty initiatives being undertaken by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith groups, and specific programs provided by the Yukon territorial government (YTG) or by individual First Nations. The culmination of two parallel processes – the devolution of power from the federal government to the Yukon Territory via the 2003 *Yukon Act*, and the implementation of self-government among 11 of 14 Yukon First Nations, negotiated under the 1993 Umbrella Final Agreement¹ – is expected to spur the development and implementation of anti-poverty initiatives in the Yukon Territory.

Along with these initiatives, there are significant changes coming for Yukon First Nation people who receive financial compensation as part of the federal Indian Residential School (IRS) resolution initiative. First Nation people comprise about 25%² of the Yukon population and they are overrepresented among those living in poverty, so the changes are expected to have a positive impact on the economic situation of some Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities.

One dilemma in the Yukon's approach to poverty alleviation has been grappling with the question: Is it best to address poverty by funding more services for those with low incomes, or are direct payments and subsidies (such as more subsidized housing and shelter beds, higher social assistance rates) a better approach? At this time, funding initiatives for poverty alleviation tend to be "service heavy;" for example, there is often "housing support" available in the form of a housing advocate, but there may be no actual housing available. The Yukon government also favours partnerships with non-profit organizations in the delivery of its services. This can constrain the scope of poverty reduction efforts, given the often limited capacity of these organizations and their restricted geographic reach. While roughly two-thirds of Yukoners live in Whitehorse, there is an urgent need for programs and services in many rural Yukon communities.

Some First Nation communities are also vulnerable due to the lengthy negotiation processes among the federal, territorial and First Nation governments, and there can be gaps in the delivery of social programs under the federal *Indian Act* and the development of new programs under First Nation self-government agreements. Finally, the prevalence of short-term, project-driven initiatives also poses challenges in ensuring consistency and continuity with respect to alleviating poverty and enhancing general well-being.

Despite the Yukon's small population (roughly 33,000 people), there is a relatively high degree of bureaucracy and a disconnection among levels of government (federal, territorial, First Nation, municipal), service providers, community groups, and the general population. (This disconnect is eloquently presented in Gerald Boychuk's book, *Patchwork of Purpose*, which describes the different social assistance regimes within Canada.) That said, however, there are a number of creative and worthwhile initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty in the Yukon that hold future promise. Whether that promise is realized or not will depend to a large extent on the progress of devolution, and on the success of self-governing First Nations in building their capacity and developing new programs to respond to the needs of their communities.

This report examines the history of social development in the Yukon Territory, highlighting efforts to reduce and mitigate the devastating impacts of poverty and low income. It sets out the economic context and provides an overview of socio-demographic trends, including trends in household incomes and living costs in the North. The report also looks at some of the different programs that have been developed for households in economic need and discusses the evolution of self-government and its relevance for social development in First Nation communities. In addition, the work of two key anti-poverty groups is highlighted and important challenges identified in moving forward on a poverty reduction agenda.

HISTORY OF THE YUKON: CYCLICAL BOOM AND BUST

The Yukon Territory's name is derived from the Gwich'in word "Yukunah," which means "great river." Archaeological evidence shows that the area was inhabited more than 10,000 years ago. Extensive trading networks between coastal Tlingit people and interior First Nation peoples long predated European incursions into the area, which began in the first half of the 19th century as the result of the fur trade. As rumours of gold gradually circulated among Hudson Bay Company traders, prospectors began to arrive and in 1874, a group of traders established Fort Reliance, a site near what would become Dawson City.

By 1885, the quest for gold was beginning to eclipse interest in the fur trade. In 1894, the Canadian government attempted to regulate the influx of American miners and the subsequent liquor trade. An emissary of the Northwest Mounted Police expressed an urgent need for police presence in the area and predicted that a gold rush was about to occur. The following year, Inspector Constantine of the Northwest Mounted Police and 20 men were sent to uphold Canadian sovereignty and maintain law and order in the Yukon. Once the police were established, they also fulfilled the roles of Dominion land agent, custom collectors, magistrates, and representatives of all Canadian government departments.

The Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 was the watershed event in the history of the Yukon Territory. It marks the beginning of an economic "boom and bust" cycle that continues to this day. It is estimated that at least 40,000 people migrated to the Klondike gold fields – more than the population of the Yukon today. The influx of American gold-seekers prompted the Canadian government to delineate a separate

territory in order to better regulate the lawless frontier. The *Yukon Territory Act* was passed and separated the Yukon from the Northwest Territories. Dawson City became the Yukon's capital and it was the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg.

At the turn of the century, the White Pass and Yukon Route railway established the town of Closeleigh (later to become Whitehorse) and connected it to the port in Skagway, Alaska. In 1906, the first silver ore was shipped from the Mayo region as gold production began to fall in the Dawson goldfields. Silver King and Keno Hill Mines were in full production by 1920. And while the silver mines proved profitable, the population involved in mining was a fraction of the number that had come north to make their fortunes in Dawson City. By 1921, the total population in the Yukon had declined to approximately 4,000 and remained so until the 1940s, when a new influx occurred with construction of the Alaska Highway.

In 1942-43, another type of boom occurred with the arrival of more than 10,000 American military and civilian personnel for the construction of the Alaska Highway. This relatively recent event had a substantial impact on many Yukon First Nations, since much of the previous trading activity had occurred along the Yukon River system. The shift caused Whitehorse to grow considerably in population size and in 1953, the capital was moved from Dawson City to Whitehorse.

The ups and downs of the mining industry have shaped the Yukon economy in recent decades as well. The 1970s saw a renaissance of the mining industry which included copper mining in Whitehorse, silver and lead mining in Keno and Elsa, and the opening of the world's largest open pit lead and zinc mine in Faro. In the 1990s, however, low metal prices and the high cost of mineral extraction in the Yukon relative to developing countries caused mining to decline; the Keno Hill Mine was one of the first to close in 1989.

Interestingly, the Yukon was also adversely affected by the Westray coal mine explosion in Pictou County, Nova Scotia in 1992. Curragh Resources owned the Westray mine as well as two mines in Faro and Watson Lake. When Curragh Resources declared bankruptcy following the disaster, its two Yukon mines were also closed. The Faro mine re-opened briefly from 1995 to 1998, only to shut down once again. There was another flurry of mineral staking and exploration activity following the discovery of emeralds in the Ross River region in the 1990s. And more recently, there has been resurgence in mining and exploration activity in the Yukon concurrent with high mineral prices, particularly for gold. Commodity prices have fallen with the current economic downturn, however, once again threatening mining operations and employment.

Traditionally mining has been seen as the backbone of the Yukon economy, but it has also created serious environmental and social impacts in nearby communities. There are a number of "abandoned" mine sites in the Yukon and the federal government must pay as much as \$2 million per year to "maintain" each site so that hazardous mine wastes do not spill into the Yukon River system when no reclamation is taking place. In 2005, reclamation costs were estimated to be between \$7 and \$35 million dollars per site.³

There are also significant social impacts associated with mining. Women's groups and other social justice organizations have documented increased incidence of alcoholism and drug consumption, domestic

violence, sexual assault, and “boom and bust” effects financially destabilizing families in mining-affected communities, with personal overspending in times of cash flow, then having to sell everything and go into debt when employment in the mines goes bust.⁴

Economic diversification has begun in the Yukon as tourism⁵ and cultural industries become an increasingly significant part of the economy. The government (including First Nation governments) is now the major employer in the Territory. However, the continuing reliance on cyclical industries such as mining, and vagaries of the international commodities market, ensure that the boom and bust pattern of the economy will continue.

CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT OF THE YUKON

Demographic Portrait

In December 2007, the total population of the Yukon was 32,714, up from 30,372 reported in the 2006 Census, and 24,473 of those people lived in Whitehorse. Roughly one-quarter of the Yukon population (7,580 people) reported that they were of Aboriginal ancestry in 2006, a smaller proportion than in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

The median age was 38.4 years, close to the Canadian median of 39.5 years. Seniors aged 65 or older made up 7.5% of the Yukon population in 2006, while 19% were under age 15.

According to the 2006 Census, approximately one of every three (30.9%) private households consisted of only one person (the highest proportion of one-person households of any province or territory), 26.1% were couples with at least one child, and 24.9% were couples without children.

Among Census families, only 55.7% were married-couple families – well below the national average of 68.6%. Common-law families represented 23.6% of families, one of the highest proportions in the country. And more than one in five families (20.7%) was headed by a lone parent, also one of the highest proportions in Canada.

Economy, Employment and Trade

Mining, tourism and government form the main economic engines of the Yukon Territory. In November 2008, the Yukon Territory had a total labour force of 18,300 people; of those, 17,300 people (aged 15+) were employed, in roughly equal numbers of men and women. Despite growing economic difficulties in Canada, the number of people employed in the Yukon grew by almost 1,000 from November 2007 to November 2008.⁶ The employment rate for those aged 15 and older was 72.8% – one of the highest in the country.

Because both mining and tourism are seasonal in nature, there is a cyclical trend in employment rates in the territory each year, with the highest unemployment rates occurring in the winter months. According to the 2006 Census, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for 2006 was 9.4%, but more recent labour force statistics suggest that the situation has improved. The rate for October 2008 was 4.9% – among the lowest in the country.⁷

The unemployment rate for women tends to be lower than for men. As well, the unemployment rate is higher among young people; in 2007-08, almost half of the unemployed were aged 15 to 25 – and in communities outside Whitehorse.

Government is the largest single employer in the Yukon. In December 2007, the total number of government employees in the Yukon – including federal, territorial, and municipal governments – was 5,710, 33% of total employment. The figure would be higher if First Nation government employees were included.

In early June 2008, the Yukon government announced its intention to adhere to the Agreement on Internal Trade, thus rejecting the controversial Alberta-BC Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA).⁸ A review of the TILMA concluded that one of the concerns in joining was potential challenges in implementing recommendations of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board, together with the high costs associated with dispute resolution.⁹

Household Incomes, Cost of Living, and Housing

According to income statistics for 2005, the median after-tax income for all private households in the Yukon was \$52,812, one of the highest levels in Canada. That said, however, there were tremendous disparities. While the median after-tax income for all census families was \$65,221 (and higher for couple families with children), it was only \$37,908 for female lone-parent families.¹⁰ The median income for all persons aged 15 and older was \$31,352 in 2005, yet it was only \$20,690 among the Aboriginal population aged 15+ (Hrenchuk, 2007).

All households in the North face high costs of living. For those living on low incomes, meeting their daily needs can be a struggle. Safe and affordable housing is a particular challenge. Between 2000 and 2006, the average house price increased by 48.1%. And rental housing is expensive. The average two-bedroom apartment in Whitehorse rents for \$780 per month.¹¹ Social assistance benefits only cover \$492 per month for singles and \$807 for families, so it is a challenge for low-income families to find adequate housing, particularly with low rental vacancy rates.¹²

The 2006 Census found that people who rented their homes had been spending an increasing proportion of their income on housing and associated costs, rising from 42% in 1996, to 44% in 2001, and to 49% in 2005. Rising energy costs have had a huge impact on people's expenses, affecting everything from home heating bills to the cost of food. Generally, the rate of inflation in the North is high. From November 2007 to November 2008, the unadjusted rate of inflation in Whitehorse (3.5%) was 1.5 percentage points higher than the rate for Canada (2.0%).¹³

Minimum wage rates and social assistance levels have not kept pace with the higher costs of living. In 2006, the Yukon minimum wage rate was indexed against the Consumer Price Index, but the 2.5% increase in the wage rate for 2008 was less than the increase in average rental costs (3.7%) over the same time period. At \$8.58 per hour, a person working full-time (37.5 hours weekly) at the minimum wage earns a gross of \$322 per week or approximately \$1,288 per month. After taxes, a full-time minimum wage worker nets just over \$1,000 per month. Yet the average rent in Whitehorse represents 70% of that income figure, far in excess of what is defined as affordable.¹⁴

The National Council of Welfare found that the value of welfare incomes has eroded as well, and particularly over the last decade. Benefit levels for some groups were raised in the mid-1980s, and again in the mid-1990s. Since then, however, the value of benefits for different households has fallen. For example, welfare incomes for single employables fell by 9.5% between 1997 and 2007 and by 10.6% for couples with two children. As the table below illustrates, social assistance levels in 2007 were significantly less than median before-tax incomes across all household types.¹⁵

Figure 1

Welfare Statistics by household type, Yukon, 2007				
	Single Employable	Person with Disability	Single Parent One Child	Couple Two Children
Welfare Income* (\$)	12,470	15,503	20,861	29,069
Estimated Before-tax Average Income (\$)	na	na	na	na
Welfare as % of Average Income	na	na	na	na
Estimated Before-tax Median Income (\$)	30,057	30,057	39,053	106,119
Welfare as % of Median Income	41.0%	52.0%	53.0%	27.0%
Peak Year for Welfare Income	2,001.00	2,006.00	2,001.00	1,997.00
Peak Amount (\$)	14,065.00	15,842.00	22,476.00	32,513.00
2007 Amount (\$)	12,470.00	15,503.00	20,861.00	29,069.00
Peak compared to 2007:				
Change in dollar amount (\$)	-1,595.00	-339.00	-1,615.00	-3,444.00
% change	-11.3%	-2.1%	-7.2%	-10.6%
Before-tax Low Income Cut-off (\$)	na	na	na	na
Poverty Gap (\$)	na	na	na	na
Welfare Income as % of LICO	na	na	na	na
Estimated Market Basket Measure (\$)	na	na	na	na
Estimated MBM Gap (\$)	na	na	na	na
Welfare Income as % of MBM	na	na	na	na

Notes: * includes the federal GST credit
 Source: National Council of Welfare, *Welfare Incomes 2006 and 2007*, Winter 2008

The Yukon government recently announced increases in social assistance benefit levels – the first time in 17 years. As of June 1, 2008, benefits were raised by approximately 33% for both individuals and families. (See discussion below)

ADDRESSING POVERTY AND LOW INCOME

While many Yukoners have benefited from the economic development over the last few years, many others have not shared in the prosperity. Poverty and low income remain a considerable challenge in the Yukon, particularly in First Nation communities. And while the issue of poverty has been acknowledged by different levels of government, progress has been limited, in part due to ongoing conflicts over jurisdiction.

The discussion below presents an overview of the Yukon Territorial government and its different programs to mitigate the impact of poverty. The situation of First Nation communities and their efforts to tackle poverty is also examined.

Yukon – Provincial Governments

Chris Pearson
1978 – 1985

Willard Phelps (Progressive Conservative)
1985

Tony Penikett (NDP)
1985 – 1992

John Ostashek (Yukon Party)
1992 – 1996

Piers McDonald (NDP)
1995 – 2000

Pat Duncan (Liberal)
2000 – 2002

Dennis Fentie (Yukon Party)
2002 - present

Yukon Territorial Government (YTG)

Government in the Yukon is comprised of a Commissioner appointed by the federal government, an Executive Council which includes the Premier and Cabinet, and a Legislative Assembly of 18 elected members known as MLAs. The Yukon is represented federally by one Senator and one Member of Parliament.

Governance in the Yukon has been an evolutionary process. Carved out of the Northwest Territories in 1898 under the *Yukon Territory Act*, the government initially consisted of a federally appointed Commissioner who reported to the federal Minister of the Interior and was assisted by a council of six appointed members. In 1908, amendments were made to the *Act* which transformed the Council into an elected body. And while the Yukon has maintained its Commissioner-run structure, the territorial government has gradually expanded its functions over time (Hurley, 2002).

By the mid-1960s, matters of a local nature such as public works, welfare and schools were being administered by the territory. In 1979, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

directed the Commissioner to allow elected members of the Executive Council to make high-level policy decisions, indicating that the Commissioner's actions should be based upon the advice and consent of that Council. That same year, party politics were also introduced in the Yukon for the first time.

The Progressive Conservatives formed the first party government, followed by the NDP from 1985 to 1992. That year, the Progressive Conservatives under their new name of the Yukon Party won the election and led the government until 1996, when the NDP were returned. The NDP government was defeated by the Liberals in 2000, and in the 2002 election, former NDP MLA Dennis Fentie led the Yukon Party to victory, and again in 2006.

In the 1980s, devolution of federal responsibilities to territorial governments became a federal priority. In 1987, federal guidelines for the transfer of federal programs to the territories were developed and stipulated that any transfers should reflect territorial priorities and consultation with First Nations. In 1988, a memorandum of understanding between the Yukon and the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was signed committing both parties to further devolution of the remaining provincial-like responsibilities, including fisheries, mine safety, intra-territorial roads, hospitals, community health care, and oil and gas. Parallel to this process were ongoing negotiations towards First Nation land claims and self-government, culminating in the Umbrella Final Agreement between the governments of Canada, the Yukon, and Yukon First Nations represented by the Council for Yukon Indians (now called the Council of Yukon First Nations).

The new *Yukon Act* came into force on April 1, 2003, formalising many of the practices already in use. For example, the antiquated name "Council of the Yukon Territory" was replaced with the Yukon Legislative Assembly, a name that had been in use since 1974. The *Yukon Act* also granted the territory further province-like legislative and administrative authority over its land, resources and water – powers that the Northwest Territories and Nunavut do not yet have.¹⁶ Unlike the provinces, Crown lands in the Yukon are still owned by the federal government, but the Territory manages these lands and derives royalties from the resources.

Yukon Low-income Policy and Programs

The Yukon government does not have a formal anti-poverty strategy, but rather a patchwork of policies and programs that attempt to alleviate poverty and its impacts. As early as 1998, the government emphasized supporting healthy children, healthy families and healthy communities, focusing on low-income children and their families. Several initiatives emerged, namely the Yukon Child Benefit, the Yukon Children's Drug and Optical Program, the Kids' Recreation Fund, and the Healthy Families Initiative. However, the strategy has not been expanded or updated in the last decade. Recently, the government has been criticized by the opposition and by anti-poverty groups for not moving forward with a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy like those adopted elsewhere in Canada.¹⁷

The Yukon government's current approach to poverty reduction is a work-in-progress, due in part to its own jurisdictional evolution. In the wake of self-government agreements recently negotiated with Yukon First Nations, and the new jurisdictional powers granted by the 2003 *Yukon Act*, it is anticipated that the

government may renew its attention to poverty alleviation, as indicated by debates in the Yukon Legislative Assembly in the spring of 2008.

Below, the paper examines the range of programs that are geared towards low-income families and individuals. Targeted programming has focused primarily on children and youth, but with the advent of the 2005 territorial *Decision Making, Support and Protection to Adults Act*, more attention is being paid to the safety and well-being of seniors. Programs for poverty alleviation among seniors include the Pioneer Utility Grant which helps eligible people over age 65 with home heating costs, a Pharmacare and Extended Benefits program, as well as the Yukon Income Supplement which provides a monthly supplement to federal assistance programs for seniors.

Yukon Social Assistance Benefits

The social assistance program is a key component in the Yukon's efforts to alleviate poverty and low income.¹⁸ Yet while attention has been directed to low-income children and their families, there had been no reform of this critical program for much of the last two decades. In particular, the value of benefits has eroded considerably. In April 2007, following release of the territorial budget, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition noted that the Yukon was going into its 16th year without an increase in social assistance rates, while the cost of living had risen by 26% over that same period.¹⁹

Finally, in November 2007, the Yukon Ministry of Health and Social Services announced its intention to make changes to social assistance policy, to take effect in June 2008. The Yukon Social Assistance Reform package included the following provisions:

- Eliminating the three-month waiting period for the earned income exemption;
- Allowing recipients engaged in the labour market to keep \$2 out of every \$4 earned;
- Increasing different rate categories to better reflect current costs;
- Increasing the food allowance to reflect "market basket" calculations; and
- Enhancing services with improved access for persons with severe disabilities.

According to Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers, the most important provision of the initiative was introduction of "the earned income exemption to help recipients enter the workforce, and become self-reliant."²⁰

Anti-poverty groups have expressed support for the increases, but they point out that much remains to be done to enhance the economic security of Yukoners. According to the National Council of Welfare, welfare incomes (in 2007\$) for all categories of recipients were still less than the peak year for welfare incomes recorded during the 1986 to 2007 period. For example, there was a significant erosion in the value of welfare incomes for single employables and lone-parent families with one child between 1997 and 2007, falling roughly by 10% and 7%, respectively.²¹

Yukon Child Benefit (YCB)

The YCB is another important program for low-income children and their families. Created after the introduction of the Canada Child Tax Benefit program, the YCB is a tax-free monthly payment to assist low- and modest-income families – that is, those in the low-wage labour market and those on social assistance – with the costs of raising children under age 18. Benefits under this program are combined with the Canada Child Tax Benefit into a single monthly payment. In December 2007, the Yukon government announced two changes to the YCB. The first change raised the base benefit from \$37.50 to \$57.50 per child per month; the second raised the base annual income for eligibility from \$25,000 to \$30,000. According to the Yukon government, this latter change resulted in an additional 235 Yukon children being eligible for benefits.

YTG Childcare Subsidy Program

Another program targeted to low-income families is the childcare subsidy program. It provides financial help to eligible families whose children attend licensed daycare centres or family day homes. The amount of the subsidy is based on an income test which takes into account such factors as family size and income. Eligibility is also determined by the following criteria: the applicant is employed or looking for work; the applicant is attending school or a training program; the applicant is having medical treatment or has a child with special needs based on professional assessment; and the applicant needs support in addressing a short-term family crisis.²²

The maximum monthly subsidy was increased in November 2007, from \$500 to \$625 per month for infants less than 18 months old, from \$450 to \$565 per month for children over 18 months, and from \$225 to \$281 for school-aged children during the school year. If the cost of childcare services exceeds the maximum allotted subsidy, the family must pay the difference.

YTG also offers direct operating grants to licensed daycares and family day homes. The grants are paid quarterly, based on the specific services provided and the number of children enrolled. The grants are to assist with the operation and maintenance of the services, and alleviate the pressure to raise enrolment fees. In 2007, the government committed to annual increments to raise the base funding for child care by \$5 million, to \$10.3 million by 2012. In October 2008, a 30% wage increase for child care workers was announced, retroactive to April 1st. It is estimated that the wage increase will affect 148 child care workers throughout the Yukon.

Kids' Recreation Fund

The Kids' Recreation Fund began as a partnership between government and the community in 1999. Originally a National Child Benefit reinvestment program, the fund provides support to children and youth from low-income families to participate in organized recreational programs. Eligible children receive up to \$300 per year to participate in a wide range of activities, from sports to summer camps, to bicycling, and musical instruments. The fund is administered by Sport Yukon and is augmented by community fundraising.

Advocates for the program state that the KRF “allows children to take part in sports and life skills activities they otherwise wouldn’t have been able to afford. Families can apply anytime for the program. Our application form and process are very simple and families like the idea of applying to Sport Yukon rather than a government assistance program.”²³

Youth Investment Fund

Administered by the Department of Justice (YTG), this fund is comprised of money from various territorial government departments. Generally, the fund pays for short-term projects geared towards “at-risk” youth. Funds are dispersed three times per year to successful proposals from community groups. Since its inception in 1995, 437 projects have been funded,²⁴ and in the first half of 2008, \$51,515 was awarded to 17 projects supported by YIF.

Examples of projects funded by YIF include an Emerging Artist Development Program (Breakdancing Yukon Society), Air Rifle and Air Pistol Development Camp (Selkirk First Nation), Summer Adventure Camp for At-Risk Youth (Boys and Girls Club of Whitehorse), and First Nation Graduation Ceremony (Council of Yukon First Nations).

Food for Learning

Food for Learning enables schools to offer nutrition programs such as breakfast, lunch or snacks for students who do not have enough to eat. It was initiated in 1998-99 with a one-time National Child Benefit reinvestment. Ongoing funding is provided by the Yukon territorial government, donations and other sources. In 2007, 28 Yukon schools offered food programs, and they receive a total of \$91,750 from the Yukon government.

Yukon Children’s Drug and Optical Program

This program assists low-income families with the costs of prescription drugs and eye care for children under age 18. Families pay a deductible that is geared to income and adjusted for family size.

“No Fixed Address” Outreach Van

The No Fixed Address (NFA) van provides community-based mobile outreach services to meet some of the health, safety and social needs of marginalized people in Whitehorse. The majority of those served by the NFA van are living with issues of substance use, victimization, homelessness, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and Hepatitis C infections. The NFA van is staffed with a counsellor from Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services, a registered nurse from Kwanlin Dun First Nation Health Department, and a health educator from Blood Ties Four Directions Centre providing. The van circulates throughout the areas frequented by marginalized people, providing the people with supplies such as food, blankets, clothing, and harm-reduction supplies, as well as counselling services, health education and public health services, and referrals to other programs or services.

The NFA outreach van program is administered by the three staffing organizations together with Yukon College Public Health and Safety. The project was initiated in 2001, amid some public opposition, with

funding from the Yukon Government, the National Homelessness Initiative, the United Way, and the Rotary Club. Other non-profit groups, such as the Yukon Women's Transition Home, also participate in staffing the van. In spring 2008, additional funding provided by the Yukon government allowed for a coordinator and an expansion of the services to six evenings per week, from 4:00 to 9:00 pm.

Yukon Housing Corporation Programs

The territorial government is also involved in providing housing supports of various kinds. The Yukon Housing Corporation (YHC) manages subsidized housing units throughout the territory. Generally, these units are available for 25% of gross income. While there is a months-long waiting list for subsidized housing, priority is given based on size of family, whether the applicant is living with a disability, and whether the applicant is leaving an abusive relationship.

In October 2008, the Yukon Housing Corporation announced its intention to work in partnership with Habitat for Humanity to build a multi-family housing project in downtown Whitehorse. The purchased lot, located at 810 Wheeler Street, was the former site of a well-known drug den whose tenants were evicted under the controversial Safer Communities And Neighbourhoods (SCAN) legislation.²⁵

YHC also provides funding support for home improvements to meet the special needs of people with disabilities through the following programs:

- Home Repair Program provides funding support for home improvements to increase accessibility for people living with disabilities. Subsidies may be available for those with low incomes.
- Rental Rehabilitation Program offers low-interest loans to landlords wishing to repair their homes in a variety of ways, including improving accessibility.

Shelters

The Yukon Government provides financial support for a variety of shelter services. It directly provides detoxification services in a 10-bed facility, as well as providing \$967,000 in annual funding to the Yukon Women's Transition Home, and \$218,000 in annual funding towards the operation of the Salvation Army Shelter. Smaller women's shelters in the communities of Watson Lake and Dawson City also receive funding from the territorial government.

Youth Shelter

In January 2008, the Yukon government contributed \$227,000 to provide an after-hours outreach program for youth aged 17 to 20. The program is sponsored by the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, the Blue Feather Youth Centre, the Council for Yukon First Nations, and Yukon Health and Social Services. It runs from 8:30pm to 9:00am daily. There is also an emergency number for youth seeking support or referrals to safe beds that are made available via the local woman's shelter or detox services. Referrals are also made to the daytime family support worker operating out of the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre.

Yukon Council on the Economy and Environment and Yukon Sustainable Progress Indicators

One of the challenges that organizations, including governments, face in the territories is the lack of sound data to identify social and economic trends in order to set targets and evaluate progress. The call for a formal anti-poverty strategy is, in part, rooted in the desire to set goals and evaluate progress against clear markers. The Yukon government experimented with a similar approach to sustainable economic growth a number of years ago, but the initiative was abandoned. It is interesting to review the initiative, however, as an innovative policy experiment relevant to current efforts to develop a poverty reduction plan.

The Yukon Council on the Economy and Environment (YCEE) was created in 1989. YCEE was the first legislated roundtable on the economy and environment in all of Canada. Its mandate was to advise the Yukon government and encourage collaboration among individuals, non-profit groups and businesses to adopt practices, policies and approaches that would further sustainable development in the Yukon. This independent advisory group was comprised of appointed representations from First Nations, mining and commerce groups, women's groups, environmental concerns, rural communities, and labour.

In 1999, YCEE contracted with the Pembina Institute to produce a framework, indicators and implementation approach for reviewing the Yukon Economic Strategy. In 2000, a draft document was submitted that suggested using three categories to create and implement sustainable progress indicators for the Yukon: economy, environment, and society.²⁶ In total, 63 key indicators were selected and analyzed to create a Yukon GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator) model. The exercise proposed using a matrix of monetary and non-monetary Sustainable Progress Indicators aligned with the Yukon Economic Strategy goals.

A change in government leadership in 2002 led to restructuring of the Economic Development Department within the Yukon government. Although the Yukon Council for the Economy and Environment remains a legislated body under the *Yukon Environment Act*, the YCEE has not met since 2004. The secretariat function for the group has been passed from the Executive Council Office to the Department of the Environment, and work on the Yukon GPI has been abandoned. Concerns about the YCEE were raised recently by members of the Opposition in the Yukon Legislative Assembly, but the government has taken no action to revive the YCEE or to pursue the development of sustainable progress indicators.

FOCUS ON FIRST NATIONS

No discussion of social development in the Yukon, and of low-income policy and programs in particular, would be complete without a discussion of First Nations communities and governments. There are 14 First Nations in the Yukon: White River First Nation; Kluane First Nation; Champagne and Aishihik First Nation; Kwanlin Dun First Nation; Ta'an Kwach'an Council; Carcross/Tagish First Nation; Selkirk First

Nation; Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation; Teslin Tlingit Council; Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation; Vuntut Gwichin First Nation; First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun; the Ross River Kaska Dene Council, and Liard First Nation. Traditional social and political organizations in Yukon First Nations are based on a matriarchal two-clan system: Crow and Wolf.

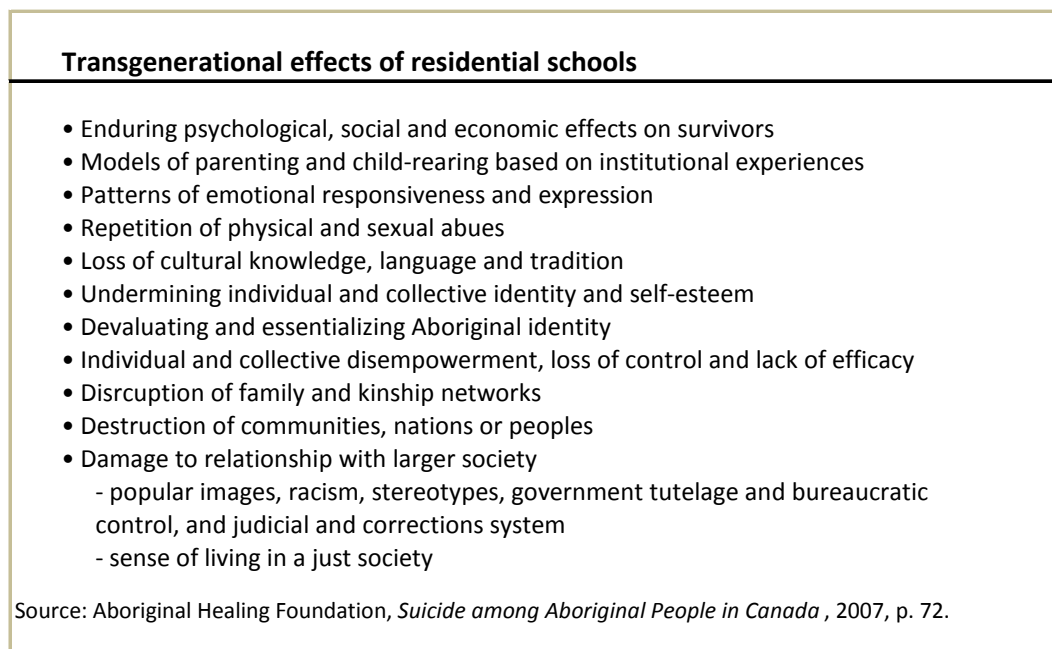
According to the 2006 Census, 7,580 Yukoners (23% of the population) indicated that they were of Aboriginal identity. While the majority of the population in the two major centres of Whitehorse and Watson Lake are non-Aboriginal, the proportion of Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal people is much larger in the smaller Yukon communities.

Despite its relative geographic isolation, the Yukon was by no means immune to the forces of colonization and the expansion of Euro-Canadian interests. The impact of these forces – and of the residential school experience in particular – still resonates among Yukon First Nation people today.

Governmental policies of forced assimilation enacted through the residential school system and the child welfare system resulted in profound disruption in the transmission of culture and the maintenance of healthy communities. The impact of the residential school system and other systemic practices of cultural suppression and forced assimilation can be seen at the levels of individual experience, family systems, communities, and whole nations or peoples. Each of these levels has its own pathways that can transmit negative effects across the generations. Each level also has its own ways of contributing to resilience, revitalization, and renewal.²⁷

In 2001, 87% of Aboriginal adults living in the Yukon reported that at least one family member had attended a federal residential school or industrial school. Almost one in four First Nation adults had attended a residential school,²⁸ and among those aged 45 to 75, the proportion climbed to more than 50%.

Figure 2



In 1973, Elijah Smith, Chairman of the newly formed Council for Yukon Indians and the first President of the Yukon Native Brotherhood, joined with other Yukon Aboriginal leaders to present a document to then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in Ottawa – “Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow, A Statement of Grievances and An Approach to Settlement by the Yukon Indian People.” It was the first time that a group of Canadians of Native ancestry had prepared and presented such a document.²⁹ Thus began the decades-long land claims process which culminated in the signing of the Umbrella Final Agreement in 1991. The agreement laid out the parameters for Yukon First Nations to become self-governing. By 2008, 11 of 14 Yukon First Nations were self-governing. The importance of self-governance in ensuring economic and social security for Yukon First Nations cannot be overstated. This situation is unique in Canada, in that Yukon First Nations are now considered a fourth level of government, but the parameters of inter-governmental relationships are still a work in progress.

Individual First Nations now administer social assistance for their community members. Previously, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) had provided income assistance to status Indians. This presented specific challenges in the Yukon, as most of the decision-making for income assistance claims was based in Winnipeg, and many Yukon recipients did not find the system responsive to their needs.³⁰

First Nations also have the power now to “draw down” programs to meet specific needs in their communities. This involves negotiating the transfer of payments for health and social programs with the federal and territorial governments. In the past under the *Indian Act*, each community had exactly the same federally funded positions, such as community health representatives and drug and alcohol counsellors. According to Liz Walker,³¹ Director of Health Programs for the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN), the new health transfer system has created some new complexities, as each community sets health programming according to its own priorities. For example, there may be an Elder Wellness worker or specific food security activities in one community, and not in another. With assistance from the Aboriginal Health Transition Fund, CYFN is undertaking a community scan to get a sense of what is happening in First Nation communities.

As a group, First Nation people in the Yukon are overrepresented in the incarcerated population, in government-run public programs such as income assistance and child protection, and as perpetrators and victims of domestic and other violence.³² According to Liz Walker, the legacy of oppression and disruptive regimes has had an impact that is still being experienced today:

What we are seeing is the driving-cost pressures of a population whose root issues have never been addressed, around Indian Residential Schools or colonization.... I hear that we do very well once we get through high school into university – that we have similar completion rates – but we can't get our kids through high school. We're still coming up against systems that don't respond to our issues. We spend a lot of time trying. Trying to educate the systems on these issues...Trying to get some understanding. It's very difficult, and it's very slow moving. Especially when we think about what has happened with the (Indian) residential school Common Experience Payments. Some communities have had nine deaths since December. We need a system that responds in a timely manner, not years later after studies and more studies.

We know that First Nation people bear the burden of poverty in this jurisdiction. In 1997, there were 8.8 years less of life expectancy for First Nation men, and 7.2 years less for First Nation women [compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts], but that's a huge improvement over the previous 10 years. The only thing that has changed for First Nation people in those years is self-government. Unfortunately we don't yet have the evidence to support this, but I think that self-government is really responsible for that increase of 9% in life expectancy for First Nation men over the last decade.

Many Aboriginal leaders and social justice advocates believe that by having First Nations gain control over the economic and social development in their own communities, long-term employment will increase and in turn, poverty will be reduced. The power to create health and social programs is also seen to be of substantial benefit, hopefully lessening what Liz Walker refers to as the “heat or eat” syndrome experienced by many First Nation people in the Yukon.

A five-year federal government review of the Umbrella Final Agreement Implementation Plan and the Yukon First Nation Final Agreement Implementation Plans noted that from February 1995 to February 2000:

...there have been enormous changes in the Yukon. Noticeable changes include the many partnership approaches as a means to address a wide range of management issues. In addition, self-governing Yukon First Nations have made major advances in implementing their Self-Government agreements ... (this is) very significant progress by First Nations in the transition from Indian Act bands to self-governing First Nations. This includes the establishment of new governance and administrative structures, development of enhanced financial management and accountability regimes, the enactment of critical legislation, and the successful negotiation of programs and services transfers and tax sharing agreements.³³

Self-governing First Nations are developing infrastructure at a significant rate. An example of this can be seen below in an excerpt from the May 16, 2008 edition of *Yukon News*, concerning employment available. It illustrates the type of development that is currently taking place in Yukon First Nation communities.

Figure 3

Example of employment opportunities available, Yukon First Nation communities

Employment Opportunity	First Nation
Implementation Coordinator	Kwanlin Dun First Nation
Executive Director	Ross River Dena Council
Heritage and Culture Manager	Champagne and Aishihik First Nations
Store Manager	Nacho Nyak Dun Development Corporation
eCommerce Yukon Project Facilitator	Council of Yukon First Nations
Accounting Clerk	Taku River Tlingit First Nation
Resolution Health Support Worker	Liard First Nation
Childcare Workers (7 positions)	Kwanlin Dun First Nation
Capital Director	Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation
Yukon First Nation Language Consultant	Council of Yukon First Nations
Heritage Site Officer/Term Community Support Worker	Teslin Tlingit Council
Administrative Assistant/Housing Clerk	Carcross/Tagish First Nation

Source: Excerpt from *Yukon News*, May 16, 2008.

While jobs can help alleviate poverty for some individuals, there are also community initiatives designed to alleviate poverty by ensuring the long-term financial stability of the First Nation communities. One example is the Trondek Hwech'in Financial Trust which the Trondek Hwech'in First Nation wants to establish as a community trust and they have made a public appeal to their members to participate in the initiative:

Financial Trust Training Session "We need citizens to help oversee our compensation dollars and Trondek Hwech'in owned businesses" (Dawson City).³⁴

Another example is economic development offered under Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Targeted Investment Program:

"Targeted Investment Program (TIP) is a funding program under INAC's Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development (SINED) initiative. Funding is available under four thematic areas:

- 1. Building the Knowledge Base*
- 2. Enhancing the Economic Infrastructure Base*
- 3. Capacity Development*
- 4. Economic Diversification*

This is the third year of the program and up to \$3 million is available for approved projects."³⁵

There is no template in Canada concerning the negotiation of federal transfer payments to individual First Nations for the provision of health and social programs to their members. Consequently, the process is complex, lengthy, and onerous. There are concerns that the current process may reinforce the "silo-ing" of service delivery. Rupert Ross, Assistant Crown Attorney for the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General and an advocate for First Nations' decolonization, elaborates:

It may make sense to have 19 different 'healing' agencies working separately in Toronto, each with its own demand for confidentiality, individualized training and different program content, but it does not make sense in communities of 300, 500, or 1,000 people, especially when it is their common histories of colonization that have brought about shared trauma.³⁶

First Nation self-government has brought a fourth level of government to the Yukon, and the resulting changes affect all Yukoners. For example, Chapter 12 of the Umbrella Final Agreement and Yukon First Nations final agreements required a process to assess the environmental and *socioeconomic* effects of proposed projects. The *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* (YESAA) came into force in 2004, replacing the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA) formerly in effect.³⁷

The government-to-government-to-government partnership between Yukon First Nations and the Territorial and Federal governments is the first relationship of its kind in Canada. It is hoped that the evolution in the structure of negotiated and jurisdictional powers will ensure self-determination for First Nations communities and create the basis for a more effective and comprehensive approach to poverty reduction in the Yukon. This evolving partnership holds much promise, not only for Aboriginal peoples but for all Yukoners.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

The Yukon has a vibrant NGO community, and it is not uncommon for community-minded individuals to serve on numerous non-profit boards. The coalitions described below represent more than two dozen non-profit groups with an interest in social issues around poverty alleviation and community well-being that are working towards poverty reduction in the Yukon. The coalitions include Aboriginal organizations, women's and youth groups, religious organizations, government services, and community health groups representing such issues as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, HIV/AIDS, mental health, and other interests. Coalitions also include other bodies such as First Nations and representatives from government departments such as Yukon Health and Social Services.

Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition

Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC) was formed in 1998 and currently has more than 100 individual and community group members. This year, for the first time, there is a part-time paid coordinator for 20 hours per week. The group promotes awareness about the circumstances of those living in poverty through campaigns, lobbying, and activities like the annual anti-poverty and homelessness awareness weeks. Activities are staged in public places to promote awareness and raise funds for local services. Through its lobbying efforts, YAPC was instrumental in bringing about changes to the Yukon Social Assistance programs and the rates increases that came into effect on June 1st, 2008. Julie Menard, co-Chair of YAPC said the main areas of focus for the coalition are: housing/homelessness; reducing societal stigma by promoting public awareness concerning poverty in the Yukon; and looking at linkages between poverty and addictions.³⁸ The coalition has also generated support from the local media: according to Menard, *Yukon News* (the only Yukon paper with territory-wide distribution) has made a commitment to focus on poverty-related issues as a reporting priority.

Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness

Contrary to popular belief that it is too cold for there to be homeless people in the Yukon or that "everyone has a place to go to at the end of the day," homelessness exists. The boom-cycle of the Yukon economy exacerbates the problem of homelessness as market rents far exceed the shelter amounts subsidized by social assistance rates. As well, corporate expansion along the waterfront in Whitehorse over the last decade has destroyed an area known locally as The Shipyards, a series of cabins and trailers close to the Yukon River where dozens of people lived on the margins of society. The recent destruction of two hotels and several blocks of rental housing that primarily housed low-income people in order to make way for the construction of high-priced condominiums in the downtown core has also contributed to an increase in the number of marginalized people visible on the streets of downtown Whitehorse. A report on women's homelessness in the Yukon suggests there are hundreds of women in the territory who remain in unsafe or abusive situations, or who couch surf or use "survival sex" as a means of securing shelter.³⁹

The Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness is a coalition of women's, church, and social justice groups, formed in 2000 to implement the federal initiative on homelessness. In 2002, as the result of intense lobbying by the Group, the federal government allocated \$414,051 through its National Homelessness Initiative to seven organizations to provide homelessness programs in Whitehorse. The following initiatives were funded:

- Salvation Army received \$195,564 to renovate a local building to serve as a drop in/emergency shelter, operating 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and provide beds for up to 10 people per night;
- Options for Independence Society received \$38,460 to provide assisted living support services for people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder;
- Yukon Women's Transition Home received \$11,670 to provide outreach and advocacy services;
- Yukon Family Services Association received \$53,634 of an outreach worker for at-risk youth;
- Bringing Youth Toward Equality society received \$30,000 to establish a youth peer mentorship network;
- Whitehorse Youth Centre received \$31,593 to operate a safe shelter day program; and
- Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council received \$53,130 to conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of a non-profit society to coordinate an emergency shelter for homeless people in Whitehorse.

The Homelessness Initiative was criticized in that very little of the allocated money was spent on physical shelter and 10 beds were not nearly enough to alleviate the complex issues of homelessness and relative homelessness in the Yukon. Critics argued that resources could have been better spent by funding the expansion of subsidized housing. There were also complaints that women who had stayed at the Salvation Army shelter were being harassed, even sexually assaulted, by male residents at the shelter.⁴⁰ In May 2008, the Yukon Women's Directorate funded a feasibility study for the development of a women's emergency shelter in Whitehorse to address this and other concerns. The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon and Salvation Army Shelter continue to receive funding through the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

In 2006, the National Secretariat on Homelessness, together with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Inuit Relations Secretariat, the Nunavut Department of Education – Homelessness Branch, and YWCA Canada co-funded a report entitled, *Women's Homelessness North of 60*. Separate studies of each territory were also undertaken by research teams in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The report by the Yukon Status of Women Council, *A Little Kindness Would Go a Long Way: A Study of Women's Homelessness in the Yukon*, recommended an increase in subsidized housing and the establishment of emergency shelter services for women, options that are currently being examined in detail by the Yukon government (Hrenchuk, 2007).

Activism in Smaller Communities

The bulk of NGO activity on poverty alleviation is based in Whitehorse. While some organizations provide services to all Yukon communities, such as Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services, the services are not necessarily focused on poverty alleviation. Moreover, the focus tends to be individual well-being rather than community empowerment. For the most part, smaller Yukon communities do not have the capacity to tackle issues like poverty on their own, but they can collaborate with larger NGOs on different initiatives. Consequently, communities such as Teslin and Carcross that are closer to Whitehorse potentially receive more benefit from such associations.

However, the potential for positive change within smaller Yukon communities cannot be understated. Dawson City recently witnessed the renewal of the Tron'dek Hwech'in Cultural Centre and a significant expansion in First Nation housing. Community-minded citizens have also rallied together to establish a School for Visual Arts that offers a university-level curriculum and attracts students from across the Yukon and beyond. Community drive and creativity are evident across the territory.

KEY CHALLENGES: HOUSING, FOOD SECURITY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

There are many challenges facing Yukoners who are struggling to make ends meet, several of which have been discussed earlier in this report. Below, we touch on three key challenges – housing, food security and the organizational capacity of anti-poverty groups – each of which highlights in different ways the need for a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to poverty reduction in the Yukon.

Housing

Nationally, the Yukon has been viewed as having less of a housing crisis than in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. According to Andrew Webster, “there are sufficient demographic, socio-economic, and descriptive data to conclude that the Yukon’s homelessness problem is not intensifying as it is in other territories ... Its social housing stock appears adequate.”⁴¹ However, Webster goes on to state that this analysis does not cover Yukon First Nations communities, and that statistics on homelessness in the Yukon are generally deficient in adequately determining the extent of problem in the territory.

A 2004 evaluation of the Yukon Housing Corporation’s Social Housing Program stated: “If the population remains stable as predicted, there will be no need to increase the total number of housing units.”⁴² This conclusion is in stark contrast to the views expressed by women’s groups (Hrenchuk, 2007). As well, an informant working for YHC has indicated that a planned 30-unit social housing complex is still two years away from completion and not nearly sufficient to meet the demands of the current wait list (Taggart et al., 2008). The Whitehorse Community Plan, prepared for the federal government’s Homeless Partnering

Strategy in 2007, noted 159 people on a waiting list for social housing in Whitehorse. Similarly, shelter workers, homeless women and advocates indicate there is a growing population in Whitehorse with people not being able to access social housing due to previous tenancy issues, a history of arrears, an inability to meet eligibility requirements such as reference checks, and very low asset thresholds.

Food Security

Despite the Yukon's booming economy in recent years, 22% of Yukoners reported having financial difficulties securing food (Yukon Health Status Report, 2003). As poverty advocates have long noted, when other fixed costs for things like housing and fuel are high, low-income families are forced to cut back on nutrition, often with significant long-term consequences for their health and well-being.

To date, there have been no adequate responses to issues of food security. For example, there is no formalized food bank in the Yukon. Two religious organizations in Whitehorse offer assistance, but the programs are limited. The Salvation Army runs a soup kitchen and the Salvation Army and Maryhouse both have food donation programs, but recipients can only use each service once a month. And there is no guarantee that the food provided is necessarily relevant or usable – for example, a person living in a budget hotel room, without amenities, may receive biscuit and cake mixes.⁴³ The Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre in Whitehorse hosts a free, nutritious lunch for community women on Wednesdays, but again, the program does not meet the needs.

In 2008, a new Food Bank Association emerged from the activities of the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, and it is now operating as a separate organization. The group is looking for a building to house a food bank and in August 2008, representatives made a presentation to Whitehorse City Council to ask the City to endorse and participate in the project. Although they argued that two-thirds of Yukoners live in Whitehorse and the majority of those in need live in the municipality, the Mayor and Council unequivocally stated that they do not fund social programs and that such a 'social' project was outside their mandate.⁴⁴ Many criticized the Council for taking this position, since their efforts to develop high-priced condominiums in downtown Whitehorse had led to the destruction of so much low-income housing (approximately 30 dwellings in the Shipyards, as well as several rooming-house hotels and about a dozen rental units).

Organizational Capacity

In the Yukon, four levels of government and over 100 non-governmental organizations serve a population of just under 33,000 people. This creates unique challenges in virtually all aspects of organizational administration.

The Whitehorse Community Plan provides a good example. A plan was developed by the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness and submitted for funding under the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2007. It set out a communications strategy which included distributing the Plan via City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce and numerous other agencies, but to date, that has not been done and other

activities have not been completed. This is largely due to the challenges of trying to plan and monitor this type of initiative through volunteer efforts. Final comments in the Community Plan reflect this sense of frustration and potential burnout among community advocates:

“There seem to be assumptions about the availability of data and the capacity of the local planning group to plan and implement data-collection activities on an ongoing basis. In many cases, the data just do not exist. In Whitehorse, the key players are all volunteers who devote considerable time and energy to the effort but are not available 24/7 to work on this. In fact, the key players all have many other demanding community-service involvements. The rest of the players are typically government or agency staff who have many other responsibilities and are doing the work of the planning group ‘off the corners of their desks.’ To effectively handle the planning responsibilities every two years and manage the maintenance of all the records and data collection in between is a full-time job and there is no one to do it. Having a consultant assist with the planning is a good solution as far as it goes, but that cannot make up for the absence of data in the first place.”⁴⁵

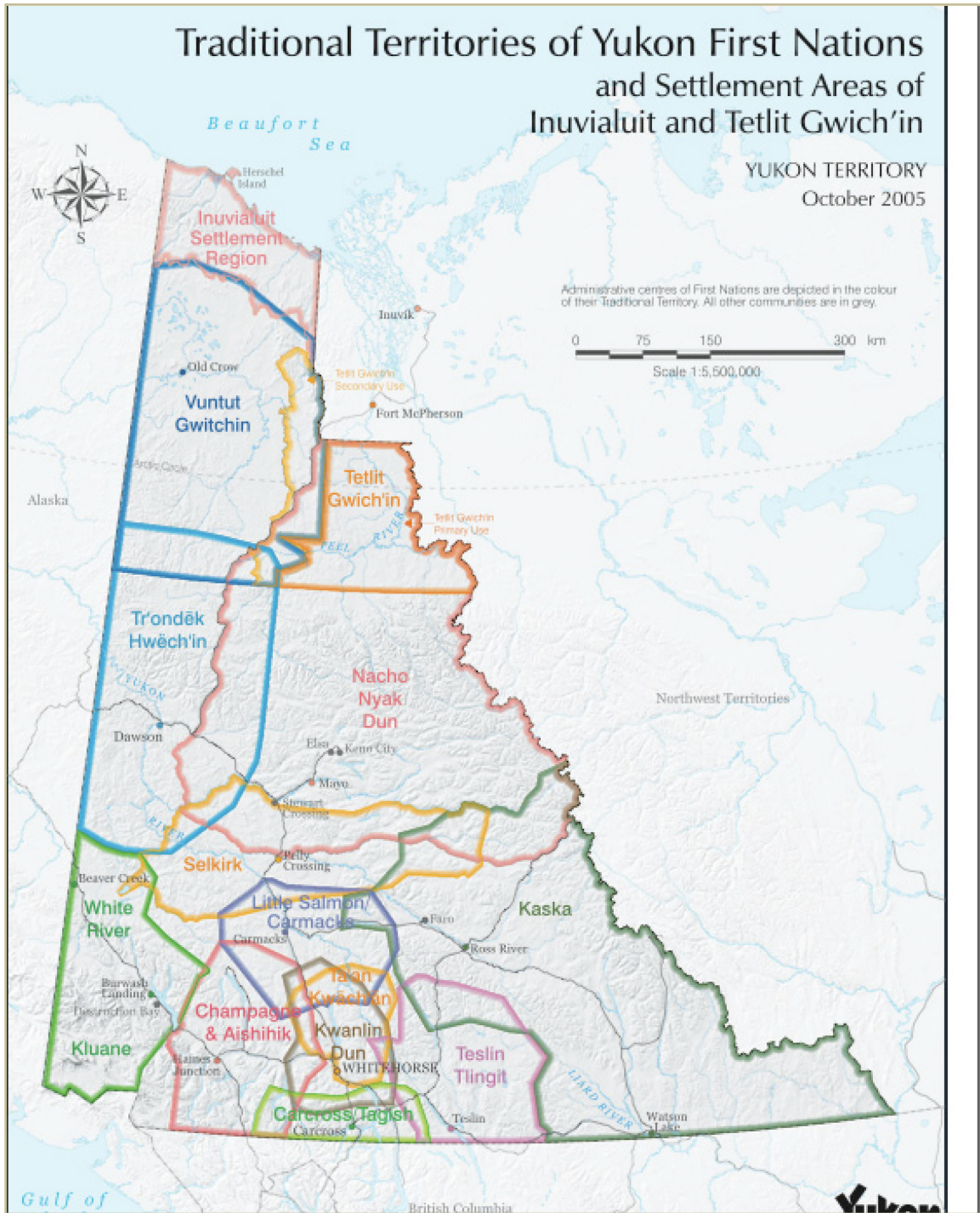
Funding under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is available until 2009. The Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness is in transition as key members depart, and it remains to be seen whether the group will be able to apply for and receive future support. The larger issue of the lack of capacity is a critical challenge that undermines current anti-poverty programs and efforts to advance a poverty reduction strategy.

CONCLUSION

While the Yukon government provides many key services and funds different initiatives designed to alleviate poverty in the territory, the lack of an integrated and comprehensive anti-poverty strategy perpetuates the “silo-ing” of services in the territory. All too often, initiatives are short-lived and isolated from one another, and projects conclude just as they are beginning to get off the ground and make an impact. In addition, the complexities of federal-territorial-First Nation negotiations and delays in the transfer of health and social programs to First Nations continue to exacerbate the precarious situation of many Yukon First Nation people. At the same time, Yukoners possess tremendous ingenuity, resilience and community-mindedness; they work to derive maximum benefit from the Yukon’s “patchwork of purpose.” As the process of devolution continues to unfold and advocates continue to lobby, all will be watching for meaningful and comprehensive poverty reduction in the Yukon.

APPENDIX

Map of Traditional Territories of Yukon First Nations



ENDNOTES

¹ Eleven of 14 Yukon First Nations are currently self-governing. The dates in parentheses indicate the year in which each self-government agreement came into effect: Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (1995); Teslin Tlingit Council (1995); First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun (1995); Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (1995); Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation (1997); Selkirk First Nation (1997); Tr'ondek Hwech'in (1998); Ta'an Kwach'an Council (2002); Kwanlin Dun First Nation (2005); and Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2006). Three Yukon First Nations have not yet settled land claims and they remain Indian Bands under the federal Indian Act: Liard First Nation; Ross River Dena Council; and White River First Nation.

² This is an approximation. According to Statistics Canada, First Nations comprised 25% of the Yukon population in 2006; First Nations report the figure as being 26%. The First Nation population in the Yukon is growing: from 1996 to 2006, it grew by 23%, compared to an 8% decrease in the total population of the Yukon (Statistics Canada, 2001). Statistics Canada. 2008, *Aboriginal identity population, 2006 counts*, table. *Aboriginal Peoples Highlight Tables*. 2006 Census. Cat. 97-558-XWE2006002.

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/aboriginal/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed December 18, 2008).

³ *Mining Watch Canada Newsletter*, March 21, 2005

⁴ The "Gaining Ground Conference on Women, Mining and the Environment" in Lake Laberge, Yukon, in 2000 is an example.

⁵ In 2007, 382,558 travellers entered the Yukon via Canada Customs.

⁶ The Labour Force Survey collects information on the territories, but it is not seasonally adjusted and it is produced in the form of three-month moving averages. Comparisons should only be made on a year-over-year basis. See Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Information, November 9 to 15, 2008*, Cat. 71-001-X, December 2008.

⁷ Government of Yukon, Bureau of Statistics (October 2008). *Yukon Employment – October 2008*. Information Sheet, No. 34.196–November 2008, p. 1.

⁸ The Yukon government completed a legal review of TILMA and received input from the following organizations: Council of Yukon First Nations, Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, Yukon Chamber of Commerce, Association of Yukon Communities, Yukon Indian Development Corporation, and Yukon Federation of Labour.

⁹ Yukon Government Press Release, June 4, 2008, #08-136.

¹⁰ Nearly three-quarters of the 1,725 lone-parent families are headed by women. Women in the Yukon earn, on average, 85% of what their male counterparts earn.

¹¹ The median rent in Whitehorse in September 2008 was \$725.

¹² In September 2008, the rental vacancy rate in Whitehorse was 2.0% – 2.0 percentage points lower than in September 2007. Government of Yukon, *Yukon Rent Survey – September 2008*, Information Sheet No. 53.55–October, p. 1.

¹³ No statistics for the inflation rate in communities other than Whitehorse are available. See Government of Yukon. *Consumer Price Index – November 2008*. Information Sheet No. 26-209, December 2008.

¹⁴ Yukon Women's Directorate.

¹⁵ See National Council of Welfare (2008), *Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007*, p. 78.

¹⁶ Under the *Yukon Act*, the Yukon Legislative Assembly has the power to create laws in a larger number of areas, however, this transfer of power does not change the Yukon's constitutional status: "Territorial jurisdiction will continue to be enshrined in a federal law, the *Yukon Act*, not the Constitution of Canada." Yukon Legislative Assembly, Information Sheet No. 4, *The Evolution of the Legislative Assembly*.

¹⁷ Yukon Legislative Assembly, April 8, 2008, Motion from Opposition Member Todd Hardy: "THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to recognize the hard work and commitment of community volunteers who are working to establish a food bank in Whitehorse, by providing appropriate financial and other support as required, while also working diligently to develop a comprehensive Yukon Anti-Poverty Strategy to eliminate the root causes of poverty that make food banks necessary."

¹⁸ In 2005, approximately 1,100 people were receiving social assistance benefits from the Yukon government. See “Program Researcher’s Lament,” a comment posted on Canadian Social Research Links website (Yukon) p. 4: “There are some excellent government websites about social assistance in the provinces and territories, but sadly, Yukon is not one of them. The only social assistance program information that I can find on the Yukon Health and Social Services website is a blurb about the Pioneer Utility Grant for people over 65 and a Frequently-Asked Questions page that barely touches on social assistance program details... On behalf of welfare researchers, may I say that it would be greatly appreciated if the nice folks in Yukon Health and Social Services could update their site to include more info on their social assistance program.”

¹⁹ While there is no stated rationale for this lengthy delay, a possible contributing factor could be the government’s priority focus on its own delineation of governance in relation to both devolution and First Nations self-government. CBC news interview with Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition representative, Ross Findlater, April 20, 2007.

²⁰ YTG Press Release #08-128. Statement by Brad Cathers, Yukon Minister of Health and Social Services.

²¹ See National Council of Welfare, *Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007*, Winter 2008, p. 78-79.

²² This includes situations where the applicant is fleeing an abusive situation.

²³ As quoted by Moira Lassen, past coordinator of KRF, on National Child Benefit website.

²⁴ YTG press release, June 26, 2008.

²⁵ Under this legislation which was passed in May 2006, the public can file complaints about a property where they believe there is continuing criminal activity such as drug dealing, prostitution and bootlegging, and pending the outcome of the investigation, tenants can be evicted if there is evidence of illegal activities. Many social justice and women’s groups opposed the SCAN legislation, believing that evictions will only cause the drug dealers to move to other areas, and many innocent bystanders, mostly women and children, will also pay the price of being homeless due to SCAN evictions.

²⁶ Pembina Institute, *Yukon Sustainable Progress Indicators: Framework, Indicators and Implementation Approach for Review in the Yukon Economic Strategy*, 2000.

²⁷ *Suicide among Aboriginal People in Canada*, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2007, p. 16.

²⁸ Statistics Canada, *Off-reserve Aboriginal Population: Aboriginal People’s Survey*, 2001.

²⁹ Council for Yukon Indians, p. 7.

³⁰ This writer has worked as an advocate and witnessed this situation many times over eight years working in a Yukon women’s shelter.

³¹ Interview with Liz Walker, Director of Health Partnerships, Council of Yukon First Nations, May 6, 2008.

³² Government of Yukon, Department of Justice (2003). *Victim Services Review*, “Bridging the “Disconnect,” Section 4.5.3.

³³ Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 2000, p. 5.

³⁴ *Yukon News*, May 16, 2008.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁶ Rupert Ross, “Institutional Colonization and the Delivery of Healing Programs in First Nations,” Presentation to Yukon Victims’ Conference, March 2008, p. 2.

³⁷ YESSA was critiqued by environmental groups and some First Nations, including the Yukon Conservation Society, Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Kaska First Nation, who made submissions as intervenors to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources prior to passage of the bill. Mining Watch Canada stated, “the most egregious problem from our perspective is the clause of section 79 that allows decision bodies to determine that mitigation measures should be ignored if the decision body is of the view that the mitigative measures are excessive, or if they could undermine the economic viability of a mining project. This section reserves to the decision bodies and the Minister the ability to override the recommendations of the Board.” From *Mining Watch Canada*, February 23, 2003 article “Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Act a Step Backwards.”

³⁸ Interview with Julie Menard, Co-Chair, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, May 14, 2008.

³⁹ Charlotte Hrenchuk, *A Little Kindness Would Go a Long Way: A Study of Women’s Homelessness in the Yukon*, Yukon Status of Women Council, 2007.

⁴⁰ As told to this writer in a confidential interview, also documented in Hrenchuk (2007).

⁴¹ Webster, 2006: p. 4.

⁴² Hanson et al., 2004: p. 2.

⁴³ The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition has spearheaded a food-coupon effort. Vouchers are placed at cash registers in local grocery stores and customers have the option of buying a \$2 voucher that goes directly to the Salvation Army food program.

⁴⁴ City of Whitehorse, Regular Meeting, August 25, 2008.

⁴⁵ Whitehorse Community Plan, 2007. HRDC Homelessness Partnering Strategy, p. 11.

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