

STORIES FROM NUNAVUT

As most of you know, this week is National Aboriginal Awareness Week. The theme is “STAND AS ONE” with First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples coming together as diverse groups to celebrate this event.

As the title suggests the week is designed to increase awareness among federal public service employees.

AWARENESS can be defined a number of ways but today I will use it as an opportunity to share information and experiences that I have been lucky enough to obtain through my work in Nunavut for over ten years. I have learned many things from the people I sought to serve.

The important and the best lessons come from spending time with Inuit friends and my fondest and best memories have nothing whatsoever to do with court but rather have everything to do with fishing and hunting on the land with the people who call Nunavut “their home”.

I’m a bit disappointed that we won’t have time for the hunting and fishing stories but I do want to acknowledge the fact that I learned the strongest lessons and made the greatest connections during those happy occasions.

STANDING AS ONE means that we must all come together to learn from each other. All too often, I believe, “we” (as in the federal government of which I am proud to be a contributing member) think we know the answers to the problems of others! I am convinced that we simply do not! It is not possible!

In order to fully understand the problems we face and deal with them effectively, we have to own those problems and most importantly, if we do not own them, we need to give up ownership, listen to suggestions for positive change and then step back and simply attempt to facilitate.

Keeping that important principal in mind during my presentation, I am honoured to have the opportunity to share some stories about my personal experiences, first as defence counsel and then as crown prosecutor in Nunavut from 1997 to 2008.

I need you all to keep in mind that these memories are strongly coloured by my own personal life perspectives. These are not Inuit perspectives. Thankfully, I continue to learn and am constantly modifying and changing my thought patterns as my understanding and knowledge about the people I am discussing grows with every day and every new relationship.

I therefore hope that you will take the opportunity throughout this important week to be truly enriched by hearing “first hand experiences” from those aboriginal, metis and Inuit people who were actually born and raised in their respective cultures.

Delivered Wednesday, May 20th
East Memorial Building, Ottawa

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My goal today is to share my stories in an effort to move along the road toward integrated collaboration and open communication which I believe is critical to changing the justice system for the better in northern, remote, aboriginal and Inuit communities.

I am very much an outsider, looking in --- positive and appropriate change must address concerns expressed from the insider, looking out.

In 2006, Justice Canada conducted community meetings in all three territories to talk about a “Northern Vision” and the “Role of the Prosecutor in the North”. During one of these consultations, one participant described how he felt about the Canadian Justice System as follows: ***“Justice is the train wreck at the end of the tunnel.”***

We heard from the participants that our justice system focuses on the rights of the individuals involved whereas their traditional system focuses on the needs of the community. The mainstream justice is mostly concerned with punishment and accountability while the traditional focus stresses healing and reconciliation between the accused, the victim and the community at large.

I am honoured to have been a part of that consultation process.

In a response to the report, the PPSC committed to working with territorial justice departments in the north, as well as with the DOJ and other stakeholders in the south, in order to give as much life as possible to the recommendations identified. It is our goal to work towards effecting positive change in a realistic and reasonable manner.

I am proud of the efforts PPSC has made since the consultation and although there is much more work to do, our accomplishments since 2006 give at least some credibility to what we heard from those dedicated community participants who gave up their time to tell us what they thought.

So let me begin my comments by saying that the Inuit are a very strong group of people whose history is totally focussed on survival in Canada's harshest and most unwelcome climate. I have been told and have come to believe over the years that they are not aboriginal and they tell me that it is important to make that distinction. There are many commonalities such as the history of being colonized peoples but the biggest differences are those such as culture, language and geography.

They are, for the most part, the most gentle, non-adversarial, long-suffering, resilient, generous and forgiving people that I have ever met.

They are survivors who have successfully navigated their way through starvation, colonization, residential schools, tuberculosis, loss of culture and language to emerge victorious.

Through their incredible patience and determination Nunavut became a reality on April 1, 1999 and that day marks the creation of our youngest territory which is the result of the largest land claim in Canadian history.

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My memories of that day are vivid as my husband and I were welcomed to celebrate the occasion with the entire community of Rankin Inlet which is where we were living at the time.

Rankin is where our hearts still remain and I believe part of the reason is the friends we made there but also the way the community embraced us and included us in something that meant so much to them!

Most of the community --- men, women and children --- gathered together in the Community Centre --- Inuit games, dancing, eating and singing were encouraged into the wee hours of the morning. It was a proud day and one that I am honoured to have been a part of.

The successful implementation of self government through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement continues to give Inuit hope for the future. This year marks its' tenth anniversary and I am convinced that, in spite of some bad publicity, there is a lot to celebrate!

As I said before, in order to make positive change you must engage the help of those who will live with whatever changes you might propose long after you have left Nunavut.

Early on in my northern career, one of my Inuit Courtworkers explained it this way:

"The Inuit are inundated with well-meaning, well-intentioned people from the south who come north, see a need and implement a program to help. While they remain, the program enjoys SOME success but they eventually leave and after they go the program falls apart. Now the community is worse off than they were before. Now expectations have been raised, services have been provided and the community knows what they are missing. This has NOT HELPED!

It was however with this court worker's help and wise wisdom that the Rankin Inlet Spousal Abuse Program was born and flourishes today. Although people from the south, like myself and others from the community and from the federal government, had an idea to address family violence in Rankin Inlet --- this could not happen until the community as a whole bought the idea and jumped on board to make it a success.

Trust me when I say it took a lot of listening before the idea could be presented in a way that made sense to the people who actually wanted the violence to stop.

A number of very dedicated and committed people were then able to assist the community by seeking funds from the Federal government to fund a program modified for and owned SOLELY by the community of Rankin Inlet.

A number of public service federal employees helped to make this program a reality.

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Some people who have been referred to the Rankin Inlet Spousal Abuse Program have expressed in open court the fact that it has changed their lives and the lives of their families.

It is a holistic program involving the entire family and it is directed by Inuit counsellors and respected elders. I am happy to report that there are now people wanting to opt into the program voluntarily.

You see contrary to the belief of some southerners, FAMILY VIOLENCE is not and never has been accepted in Inuit culture.

Prosecutors in the Nunavut Regional Office of PPSC learned this lesson very well when defence counsel put the proposition before the court and prosecutors were forced to prepare to defend it. I believe that some were amazed to discover the complete denial of this way of thinking through the kind teachings and assistance of three new, recent graduates of the Akitsiraq Law School Program, who were articling with PPSC at the time and who have contributed greatly to an overall change in the way southern prosecutors look at the Inuit world.

Our biggest problem is that we continue to think our way is the best --- it is the only way that will work: We refuse to bend. We continue to be rule and policy driven for reasons that do not make sense in a culture that is not our own!

I recall two examples that perhaps illustrate what I am trying to say:

FIRST: In my role as defence counsel living in Rankin Inlet and taking care of the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut, I recall the arrival in that community of a new, young, ambitious police officer who was determined to issue tickets for people who did not stop at the four stop signs that existed in the community. He thought it was terrible that people were not obeying the rules and that they should be punished accordingly. He spoke to me about it and received a less than enthusiastic response.

He was not happy and decided that he would take his concerns to the Justice Committee. He spent a full hour explaining (through an interpreter) to a very attentive audience of mostly Inuit elders his position and why this was so important to him and more importantly why it was so extremely critical to the safety of the entire community. They listened carefully, nodded their heads in all the right places and he left the meeting convinced he had got his point across. In fact, he bragged to me that even though I hadn't taken him very seriously, it was clear that the community felt quite differently.

The very next morning on my way into work, I could hardly contain my laughter as I viewed the chairperson of the committee (a rather frail, elderly Inuit neighbour of mine) quietly sawing down the stop sign at the corner in the centre of town. By noon all the stop signs were missing and the officer could not understand what had happened or why. He stayed for only a few short months.

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SECONDLY: I remember a group of young boys who, out of complete boredom I suspect, spent an hour one Saturday morning throwing rocks at a dog owned by a very nice man from the south. They subsequently and tragically killed the dog. The police did not know how to deal with the situation because the boys were too young to be charged and the owner was, rightly so, outraged by their behaviour. One of the officers decided to call the chairperson of the local Justice Committee. He rounded up some of the other members and they attended at the station and asked to impose their own punishment on the boys. The police agreed.

They then marched the boys over to the dog owner's house and knocked on the door. The Inuit chairperson politely asked where the dog was that these boys had killed. The owner said that he had buried the dog. The elder asked where. The owner was confused and couldn't understand why the question was being asked. Eventually the elder explained that they intended to have the boys dig the dog up and eat what they had killed as a lesson never to do this despicable kind of thing again. Once the owner found this out, he was once again outraged. The elders were now confused and wondered why they could not teach these boys a lesson they wouldn't soon forget.

You see Inuit are taught from an early age that animals are killed for sustenance and must ONLY be killed for that purpose. They are told that they should never taunt or mistreat any living being by using their dominance.

There are many examples such as this one that highlight foundational principles that are foreign to those of us who were not born and raised in Nunavut. Professionals working in the north need to explore these differences and allow solutions that fit the culture.

My next topic is one that I regret having to talk about at all but the hard truth is that you can not live in Nunavut without being touched by suicide. It is so prevalent that it has become common place in some communities. My first of many experiences happened just months after my husband and I first moved to the North.

We were walking home from work on a sunny bright afternoon. About halfway there, we were stopped by an Inuit friend who told us that there were whales in the bay a few yards from our home. We became focused on getting our first look at these magnificent creatures ---- to such a degree that when we were stopped by our neighbour's four year old daughter, we paid little attention.

As we passed by her house, we saw her playing with a group of young children. She came out on the road and tugged at my husband's shirt. She had previously developed a fondness for him as he had allowed her to help him build a picnic table for a friend. She said with a huge smile and an excited expression --- "Hi --- there's a lady hanging in my house." She seemed almost proud to be telling us this news. We assumed she was playing a game with her friends. We kept going and hurried inside to pick up the camera and walk 100 yards to view the whales.

On our way back from our expedition, we saw her Mom return from work. Moments after she entered the house we heard the most horrendous scream that still haunts me today and I knew

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instantly what had happened and what the little girl was trying to tell us. Believe it or not, it was her step sister who was hanging dead inside her home.

Later I learned first hand some of the agony this family and in particular this 13 year old victim had gone through. The situation was no different than many others.

The rates of suicide, sexual assault and family violence are higher in Nunavut than any other province or territory in Canada.

When you experience for yourself the disaster caused by substance abuse, overcrowding, high unemployment, little to no resources or programs, low levels of education and a justice system that focuses on punishment rather than healing, you better understand the urgent need for more community based sentences and services.

As you probably know, in Nunavut, justice is delivered through what we call “Circuit Courts” where, for the most part, the “court party” (a common term used to describe the players in the system) travel together to do court and leave immediately after court is over. Each small community in Nunavut is unique and different in terms of its’ level of “wellness” which directly impacts on court dockets. It is very hard to understand these important differences if you do not live and work there and almost impossible if you are from a different culture entirely. It is small wonder that we see so much recidivism and hopelessness in families who become tangled up with the “system” on a regular basis.

Many are very good people plagued by a tragic past born out of unresolved and untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) that often leads them to substance abuse and/or criminal behaviour.

I am convinced that there is little or no access to justice for these individuals. They are most often what we term: “repeat customers” within the criminal justice system.

FASD is a permanent brain injury with no cure. It poses significant difficulties for defence and crown.

Whether you are dealing with a client, a victim or a witness, there are many frustrations that translate into an inability for persons affected to obtain the information and assistance they need to get to court in the first place, let alone to resolve their legal issues appropriately.

I recall when I first came north that I also lacked the experience, training or quite frankly the patience to even begin to understand these people. I certainly did not deal effectively with the issue at first and it was only when I realized that I could not ignore this reality, that I faced the problem head on and tried “*in vain*” to come up with solutions that might help.

The reason I say, “*in vain*” is because ten years ago there were no resources in Nunavut to deal with the disorder, yet as a lawyer working in the system, it was all around me. Many of my criminal clients showed signs of the affliction and the community itself where I lived and worked

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had huge addiction problems that were made worse by the fact that drinking during pregnancy seemed to be an accepted practice. The disorder itself was not even talked about very much, even within the formal justice system and certainly never within the community at large.

It wasn't very long before I had to deal professionally with a young man who had some serious problems that I felt were of considerable concern in terms of his mental wellbeing.

Interestingly enough, I had dealt with this young person before and now he had broken into my own clinic where he damaged our safe, stole a very small amount of money and caused considerable damage in general.

It turns out on the same evening, he also broke into all the churches and schools in Rankin Inlet. The offence date was Christmas Eve and I was out of town at the time. When I returned, he was in custody and crying like a small child for me to get him out of jail.

He had already accumulated a long criminal record, mostly property offences and breaches of court orders but with an assault thrown in for good measure along the way.

I explained to him that I was a bit ticked off with him for breaking into my office but in the end, did manage to get him released to his mother who lived just down the road from me. Within a week, he was in trouble once more and remanded into custody yet again.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that I would be representing him. I was, in fact, the only criminal lawyer in the region.

As a legal aid lawyer, one of the few tools available to me was to ask for a formal assessment under the Criminal Code. That meant that the court had to agree to pay a lot of money to have someone from the south come up and meet with him to try to figure out what was wrong.

The main questions of: "*Was he criminally responsible for his actions?*" and "*Was he fit to stand trial?*" were answered in the affirmative. Since I had already guessed that the answer would be "yes" to both those important legal questions, I sought a further assessment as to his mental health overall.

I recall the court being very reluctant to expand the criteria as it meant the Judge had to somewhat fudge the requirements to include this general type of assessment.

In any event, the assessment order was granted and after many delays (during which time my client remained in jail) a psychiatrist came north to meet with him. What I instinctively knew just from speaking with him on a number of occasions was confirmed.

The doctor indicated in his report that it was certain that this young person was dealing with the effects of FASD and that he needed intensive supervision.

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“Okay, so what do I do now? What submissions do I make to the court? How can the court come up with an appropriate sentence that would see a positive change in this young man’s life?”

Many hours were spent, I recall, researching these issues to could come up with a plan to present to the court because I knew that without such a plan, I would have to deal with him again and again and the community would not be safe from his actions. I very much wanted to be the one to “**SAVE HIM**”, so to speak!

It was clear, as it would be today as a matter of fact, that the only possibility for him was placement in the south where he could receive one on one supervision and care.

This meant sending him to a place where the culture, language and climate were completely foreign to him --- thousands of miles away from his family, his friends, his community and the only home he had ever known.

To be clear his choices were clearly jail or a group home in the south. Of course he picked the group home and so I worked hard to develop the plan and put it in place. I managed to convince the court that probation with supervision was the appropriate sentence in the circumstances.

SUCCESS FOR EVERYONE, RIGHT? Sadly, no!

He was very, very homesick and a few months after sentencing, he talked someone into paying for him to come back to Rankin and he was right back where he started --- in criminal court charged, this time with an even more serious offence.

As his lawyer once again, I felt there were no options available to me as protection of the community was paramount, there was no doubt that he would re-offend if released without help, and sending him back south was no longer a viable option.

Of course it goes without saying that jail certainly wasn’t the answer either but that is what he got at the end of the day. I found myself thinking that access to justice wasn’t even a consideration for this young man and I believe he is once again back in jail as an adult where his underlying problems have never been adequately addressed.

There are many tragic situations such as this that presented themselves to me during my time in Nunavut.

As a crown prosecutor, FASD is particularly frustrating. Women and young people in particular make for excellent victims but very poor witnesses. These people are often picked on and lured into offending behaviour by others. When called upon to give evidence, their ability to articulate what happened is often compromised due to cognitive difficulties and an inability to prepare or even organize their thoughts in a logical way.

I recall a number of young people being charged for about the tenth time with break, enter and theft into various homes and businesses within one particular small Inuit community.

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For whatever reason, I developed a particular attachment to one of these young people who was 14 years old but very small for his age. He looked to me to be about eight.

It was obvious from the beginning that there were very likely shades of FASD in his short life but he was very polite and quite anxious to receive jail time in the Young Offender Facility in Iqaluit.

His mom did not want him to come back home “unless we were willing to pay her money for having him” and his father was facing ongoing charges of assaulting him. He had no one and no place to live. He was also too old to be declared a child in need of protection.

He had been at the YO facility before and enjoyed it because he got three hot meals and a warm, safe place to lay his head. As well, people were very nice to him there and they actually made sure he got to school every day where he actually did quite well.

It was very clear from the outset that he was extremely immature for his age and he just kept repeating the same mistakes over and over again.

We were lucky in this particular case as there was a psychiatrist in town on another matter so crown and defence asked that the doctor see this young man as well.

Sure enough he was diagnosed with the disorder and once again, I was faced with how to help him in the circumstances. Fashioning an appropriate sentence as the prosecutor was a huge problem. I knew that this case would involve a very large collaboration with every department involved in his future care.

Social Services was very difficult to get to the table because of his age and a serious lack of manpower. Others were less than sympathetic to his obvious plight. The community itself was fed up with his constant criminal behaviour.

I felt so sorry for him that I even went so far as to ask my husband if we could please take him home with us. In the end, through a great deal of discussion and by calling in a number of favours, he was placed with foster parents who were willing to give up their time to help him cope with his behavioural difficulties. I felt that he had a chance. For awhile I followed his progress and he was actually excelling in school and keeping out of trouble.

That being said, I was incredibly disappointed to see his name on another criminal docket the following year. By then, he had been returned to his home community where no appropriate services were present to meet his specific needs.

It is of note here, I think, to mention that during a visit to the particular community that this young man called home, the psychiatric nurse employed there estimated that between 45 and 75% of all the children there had FASD issues. It is unlikely that these children will ever be formally diagnosed, let alone able to receive the help necessary to lead normal lives.

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In Nunavut at least, I am convinced that the history of colonization and devaluation of culture, play a part in making the rates of FASD much higher than the national average.

This becomes even clearer when you look at the factors that contribute to women drinking during pregnancy in the first place, which include:

Family Violence --- 11 times the National Average in Nunavut.

Poverty, Unemployment and Homelessness --- all very much alive and well even in 40 below temperatures.

Stress --- to this I add unresolved issues of post-traumatic stress disorder. The high rates of suicide feed into this. There are no counselling services available for those left behind and everyone there knows someone who has died by their own hand.

Role of alcohol in society --- used regularly to escape reality when one can not just hop in the car and drive to the next community, etc.

Social pressures to drink and poor role models --- these are plentiful in every community it seems.

Low self- esteem and social isolation --- very prominent in the small communities of the north. .

Poor knowledge about the impact of alcohol --- some people (surprisingly even some doctors) still think that a little bit of alcohol during pregnancy will not hurt anyone.

There are still precious little home-grown services available to those with FASD but there is an exciting momentum, commitment and dedication to the problem that did not exist before. There are agencies in all three territories now committed to education and prevention. We still have very little to actually deal with those already living with the disorder but there is certainly recognition of the problem which is the first step to positive change.

Mental illness of all kinds poses a particular challenge for the justice system in Nunavut. In the unreported and very recent case of R v. Partridge, Justice Kilpatrick summed it up in the following way:

“The chaotic life of a homeless citizen; the lack of financial and social support; the difficulty assessing treatment resources, education and employment; the bewildering array of government departments all charged with different mandates; these are conditions that contribute to a sense of hopelessness and desperation. These are conditions that contribute to the marginalization of the mentally ill. These are conditions that breed frustration, suspicion and hostility. This is the perfect breeding ground for a personality disorder. Criminality will follow.”

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Nunavut prosecutors recognize the need to spend more time in communities to understand better the reality of the people they serve. Although great effort is made to arrive early in order to be fully prepared for court, it is often not adequate, given the fact that time is still quite limited.

Recanting witnesses abound and the challenges for a successful prosecution are endless.

Just to give you a taste of what our northern prosecutors are up against, I will tell you about a fairly common occurrence when dealing with spousal assaults in particular. Hopefully this will give you a little flavour of the challenges that are unique to the north.

Close your eyes and imagine you are a prosecutor in the Nunavut Court of Justice.....

You have just arrived early in the community of Qikitarjuak to do circuit court and it is 2:00 p.m. You are the only prosecutor and therefore have carriage of the 60 matters on the docket.

Court starts tomorrow at 9:30 a.m. and takes place in the school gymnasium.

You have only been to Qikitarjuak a few times before and do not know the people you will be dealing with very well. It is a community made up of approximately 500 people, 90% of which are Inuit.

Among other things you have complainants to interview for four trials that are scheduled to take place. Thankfully you have prepared many of the files in advance. Defence counsel (there are two of them) are however clamouring for your time to provide them with your positions should their clients decide to plead guilty and you need to have discussions with potential witnesses, complainants and RCMP to be better able to craft appropriate sentences for a number of the other files on your docket.

The RCMP officer (one of two stationed in the community) picks you up at the airport and advises you that three of your complainants for the trial matters are out on the land and may not be back in time to meet with you before court starts. He is trying to locate the fourth complainant who has been avoiding him all week.

This upsets you but the officer assures you that there is nothing he can do. You remind him that you had asked him to set up appointments in advance of your arrival but he tells you he did his best.

Finally at supper time, the fourth complainant is located and she comes to the hotel where you are staying with her 18 month old baby in her amouti. You are just sitting down to eat dinner when she arrives but know enough to realize she won't be back so you excuse yourself to meet with her in your very small hotel room in order to give her at least some degree of privacy.

On the way down the hall, she tells you she is not going to testify against her spouse. You take lots of time to explain to her why her testimony is so important. You talk about why no one in

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Canada, no matter where they live, should be subject to violence in their own homes at the hand of those who claim to love them.

You talk about her spouse's record for hitting her in the past and the escalating violence. You try pleading with for the sake of her children (she has three more at home being looked after by the very man you are trying to prosecute). You take great pains to describe the impact this violence has on her children.

She quietly sits before you, crying softly but continues to tell you that she will not be in court and will not be saying anything against her spouse.

You try going over the statement she gave to the police right after the incident with her but she is unresponsive.

You finally tell her that she has to attend court by law and that if she doesn't attend, she will get into trouble and you will send the RCMP to pick her up.

The crying gets much, much worse but she still doesn't talk to you or look you in the eye.

There is nothing more you can think of to do so you tell her she can go home but that you will see her tomorrow in court. You promise to make it as easy as possible for her and explain the process. You ask her to do this, if not for herself, then for her children.

After the meeting you are exhausted but determined to see this through. You are concerned for her safety.

The next morning she attends court hand in hand with the accused. There is no doubt in your mind that she is being controlled by him but you are powerless to assist except to tell her that he is on an undertaking not to communicate with her and to stay away. The RCMP tell you that they were back together three hours after he was released from custody.

In your professional capacity you reprimand the young officer who remains unconcerned. This is a normal occurrence and the police have better things to do than to lay breach charges in every case of spousal abuse.

This does not make you happy and when the matter is finally called, the court is pressuring you to proceed with the trial. Time is very limited and there are lots of cases to deal with. You have not had the chance or the time to meet with her before putting her into the witness box and know that she is going to be difficult.

Sure enough, she responds badly to your questions and you have to decide whether or not to use other legal tactics to get to the truth which you are convinced is contained in the initial statement that she gave to the police. You ask for a recess to gather your thoughts.

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You are given five minutes to make the decision whether or not to declare her an adverse witness and go through a KGB application.

There is no phone in the gymnasium so you can't call and seek advice from the office. There is no internet connection and no computer access so additional case law or research is not an option. You decide you have to give it a try --- after all her safety and the safety of her children are at risk.

But just moments before the reopening of court, one of her neighbours comes up to you and tells you that the complainant's family and the offender's family have been pressuring her to say nothing for the past week. The neighbour seems very angry herself and tells you that you are the lucky one --- you get to fly away at the end of the circuit but this young woman will have to stay. She will not be able to feed her children if he goes off to jail. She will lose her housing because his is the only name on the rental agreement. Her family will not help her. He is a hunter and provides meat to many families so lots of people will be even more angry at her if he has to leave the community.

Court opens and the Judge is wanting you to proceed now! With a deep sense of discouragement, you call no further evidence and the case is dismissed.

At the end of the day you are left with many feelings including dread, helplessness and concern. But, as the Inuit would say, AHYOUNUNGMAH – “it is beyond your control”.

These kinds of experiences are all too frequent in the life of a northern prosecutor.

In an effort to help the situation, the Nunavut Regional Office employs five very important and dedicated Crown Witness Coordinators whose role it is to assist prosecutors in the work they do. They try to enable and encourage victims and witnesses to testify and they prepare them as much as possible for the onslaught of a justice system that is often foreign and always unwelcome.

These dedicated men and women try to bridge the gap between mainstream and aboriginal justice practices. They build the trust that is very often missing between the southern prosecutors and the northern people.

There is no doubt that the work they do is critical to successful prosecutions and we need to take every opportunity to celebrate their work and recognize their incredible contributions.

Having lived in the territory and worked in the justice system doesn't make me an expert. I continue to learn something new everyday about the people, about the culture and about the way the system does or does not work.

That being said, after my first year of practise in Rankin Inlet, I developed a feeling that I have never lost --- I can sum this up in five small words that I say as often as I possibly can:

"ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IN NUNAVUT"

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This is just as true today as it was ten years ago BUT I'm convinced that, in order to effect positive change, a number of pre-requisites must be present:

- THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT YOU MUST POSSESS a strong desire to listen more than you speak --- for lawyers and professionals from the south, this is an almost impossible challenge.
- You must have within your personality a large amount of patience and flexibility.
- You have to adopt a non-judgmental attitude and an ability to see the best in people while working with the worst.
- You must be prepared to look at things differently and to abandon preconceived ideas and assumptions.
- It is critical to understand very clearly that answers to the problems you experience almost daily in the justice system, do not belong to you and are not able to be answered by you.

That being said, I am convinced that making a difference in Nunavut demands an approach that refuses to take NO FOR AN ANSWER!

The Akitsiraq Law School Program is a shining example of this necessary determination and commitment in the face of overwhelming adversity coupled with huge systemic and financial barriers.

Eleven Akitsiraq Law School graduates have proven that ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IN NUNAVUT. In the Nunavut Regional Office we have learned many valuable things from these legally trained individuals who have something we will never have --- the knowledge and real life Nunavut experience to teach us many things about what does and does not work for their people.

The hope is to have a second cohort of students attend the Akitsiraq Law School Program in 2010. There is no doubt that there remains a tremendous need for home grown lawyers and I, for

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one, am convinced that programs that train and mentor professionals in this way are the answer to sustainability and improved services.

There are obviously many things that I have not had time to talk to you about today --- some quite depressing things but others VERY uplifting....

Like the time my husband and I, with four of our Kablunaq friends (a term that means simply "not Inuit") decided to travel by snowmobile from Rankin Inlet to Whale Cove. We called ahead to make sure that we could have lunch at the tiny hotel there when we arrived and set out early on a bright, cold Saturday morning.

About a mile outside the community, we started seeing people at the side of the trail who were waving at us. When we got into town, mostly everyone came out of their homes to shake our hands and welcome us. We felt like royalty and were treated to the best frozen Chinese food that I have ever tasted.

So in closing, I am honoured to have shared with you a few stories about my time living in Canada's newest territory. It has enriched my life and made me a better person all around. I remain convinced that anything is still possible in Nunavut!

I am blessed in my new role as Special Advisor on Northern Issues with an ability to keep in touch with my northern friends in all three of Canada's territories and I do welcome any opportunity I have to share what I have learned so far.

There is no doubt in my mind that if we are prepared to sit back, listen and experience before we facilitate, positive change is not only possible but it is actually INEVITABLE.

THANK YOU so much for listening today and I would be delighted to answer any questions you might have.

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