

6. Taking Action: Self-Determination

The *Arrangement for the Funding and Administration of Social Services*, signed by Her Majesty the Queen in the Right of Canada and Alberta, states on page 3 that Canada would arrange for the delivery of Social Services comparable to those provided by Alberta whereby all citizens of Alberta are treated equally (see Appendix E). This reform agreement is not taken seriously by the government of Canada, at this time, leaving it necessary for Shelters to act on this matter.

The 2010 INAC FVPP Review, concluded that Shelters act as civil society institutions and as such are a vital institution for Aboriginal women. Too often “reserves” are unforgiving, unsafe and unstable to support a lively and prosperous future for Aboriginal female residents. To-date the environment in which on-reserve Shelters operate, both from a local perspective and national, have provided inadequate support and financial backbone, when compared to other provincially funded Shelters. There is a need for Shelters to take action and self-determine the future environment in which on-reserve Shelters will operate at a predictable, sufficient and sustainable level.

In the INAC Family Violence Prevention Program Review published on-line on August 31, 2010, section 6.3 Shelters as Civil Society Institutions states,³⁵

“Shelters and their committed staff play an invaluable role within the overall environment of Aboriginal communities. In most cases, their value extends well beyond their mandate to provide shelter and protection. Shelters are unique civil society institutions which act as focal points for the development of local initiative and leadership development. Shelters provide not only protection for vulnerable women, but also a training ground for female Aboriginal leaders who often have very few opportunities to graduate from clients to providers, community leaders and advocates.”

6.1. Current State of Minimal Control

The 2010 INAC FVPP Review concluded that the on-reserve shelters are and/or need be regarded and treated as Autonomous Institutions. The Review reports having found evidence that when INAC holds a direct funding arrangement with the Shelter organization management and control difficulties appear to diminish.

³⁵ New Economy Development Group Inc. Family Violence Prevention Program Review. Ottawa, Ontario. March 31, 2010. http://inac0000.imatics.com/site/li-il/fvpp-eng.asp#section6_1. Date Modified: 2010-08-31.

In the INAC Family Violence Prevention Program Review published on-line on August 31, 2010, section 6.5 Autonomous Institutions states,³⁶

“Shelters with autonomous structures governed by independent Board members appear to have the greatest potential to utilize resources effectively and to develop important partnership links with other community organizations, as well as with outside agencies and different levels of government. While the support and encouragement of Chiefs and Councils is important, it is most valuable when it comes apart from political dynamics that can be a factor if the elected leadership controls the Shelter organization. Where direct delivery of INAC funding to a Shelter has been approved by a Band administration, the potential for difficulties appears to diminish and thus it is reported by many stakeholders to be the preferable funding approach.”

6.2. Alberta On-Reserve Shelters United

Alberta on-reserve shelter Directors have stated in January 2011 interviews with Johnston Research Inc. that they are still willing to negotiate with INAC around the fair and equitable funding of the shelters they have been forced to operate at below minimal standards for many years. There are many inequities that exist that currently exist that warrant a series of meetings and that require key decision maker participation from INAC. The six Alberta shelters are currently united through the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (ACWS).

The original five Alberta On-Reserve Shelters consist of shelters from the communities of Wabasca, Morley, Hobbema, Fort Chipewyan, and Enilda. In 2010, the newest On-reserve shelter to join the On-Reserve Committee is located on the Blood First Nation (Standoff). These shelters are located on reserves and funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

The Alberta First Nation Voice for Women’s Shelters (later to become known as the Alberta On-Reserve Shelter Committee) was formed in 2004. This Committee shares information, networks, and discusses unique issues to shelters located on reserves. Two representatives of the six On-Reserve Shelters sit on the ACWS Board of Directors (since 2005); one who is a paid manager other a shelter board representative.

³⁶ New Economy Development Group Inc. Family Violence Prevention Program Review. Ottawa, Ontario. March 31, 2010. http://inac0000.imatics.com/site/lj-il/fvpp-eng.asp#section6_1. Date Modified: 2010-08-31.