**NDMS Trip to Pangnirtung**

**Meeting with the Inuit Ilagiit Society**

**June 27th-28th, 2016**

NDMS was invited to Pangnirtung by the Inuit Ilagiit Society to advise them on setting up a social enterprise similar to the Inclusion Café in Iqaluit. The Inuit Ilagiit Society was founded a year and a half ago with the overall mission of addressing poverty in Pangnirtung and barriers to employment through skills and capacity building. Recently, they have also decided to focus on providing employment for people with disabilities and advocating for people with disabilities in the community. Upon first arriving in Pangnirtung, we went to the hamlet office to meet briefly with the mayor, then met with members of the board of the Ilagiit society and their recently hired staff to learn more about their current activities and future plans.

The Ilagiit Society has partnered with the local Youth Centre and is currently renovating their space. The Youth Centre had been well funded through a federal crime prevention program for approximately 3-4 years, and was operating as a sub-committee of the hamlet. The Youth Centre ran out of funding 6-7 months ago and was not able to heat the building during the winter, and it fell into disrepair. The Ilagiit Society formed a partnership with the Youth Centre and agreed to renovate the building in exchange for sharing the space. The Ilagiit society used salvaged materials and volunteer labour, and have almost completed the renovations.

The Ilagiit Society plans on using the Youth Centre space to operate a soup kitchen and community café. They anticipate initially serving 1-2 meals a week for 50 clients in two sittings, with more meals being served as they get more comfortable in running the operation. They plan on charging $2.50 per meal, with the option of working for the Ilagiit society as a means to get food for those who cannot afford to pay. NDMS suggests that an hourly wage be provided to anyone working for the Ilagiit Society to access food, in addition to vouchers for the soup kitchen. By doing so, community members unable to pay for food would make a fare wage, while the Ilagiit society would still be able to achieve its goal of encouraging community members to provide for themselves. The Ilagiit Society might want to consult with the Qayuqtuvik Food Society in Iqaluit or the Inclusion Café Co-ordinator to figure out how best to accommodate paying and non-paying customers.

The soup kitchen would be a new resource for the community in Pangnirtung. Previously, there had been a food bank in operation that provided sporadic access to food, and temporary soup kitchens have happened in the past. There has also been some success with meal deliveries, but nothing on an ongoing basis. Money has been provided from the country food program for community feasts and give-aways, but the need for a permanent soup kitchen to address food insecurity is strongly felt in the community. Members of the society noted that community members are often hungry and that many messages are broadcast on the community radio asking for food. Some people go many days without eating.

The Ilagiit society is exploring various ways to fund the ongoing operation of a soup kitchen. They have received a 25% discount from the local Arctic Co-Op store, with a possibility of this discount going up to 40%. The Ilagiit Society have also tried talking to the grocery stores about receiving surplus food, but are having some difficulties gaining access to this. Currently, the Northern store has a policy to throw away any surplus food. They have also approached the local Hunters and Trappers Organization and the hamlet about the possibility of hiring hunters to take people out on the land to hunt and bring back food for the soup kitchen. In addition, they have secured $18,000 in funding from the Nunavut Food Security program to run a family cooking program for four weeks. The Ilagiit Society still needs to secure funding to get the soup kitchen up and running and to cover initial operating costs. NDMS presented a number of funding opportunities to the board of the Ilagiit society, including the Opportunities Fund offered by Service Canada and the Community Initiatives Program offered by QIA, and will provide any assistance needed in drafting and submitting funding proposals.

In addition to the soup kitchen, the Ilagiit Society also wants to run a community café out of the Youth Centre space, providing drinks and snacks for the community. Currently, the only places to get a cup of coffee in town are the Northern and Co-op stores, where it costs $2.50 a cup. The Ilagiit society plans on offering coffee for $2.00 a cup. The goal is for the café to become an incorporated business running alongside the soup kitchen, with all café profits donated to the soup kitchen to help cover operational costs. The Ilagiit Society has arranged for a consultant from CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization) to help with staff training and the drafting of a business plan.

Through the summer student program, the Ilagiit Society was able to hire Annie as the soup kitchen and café coordinator, as well as three additional students to serve as staff over the summer. Board members will also volunteer their time to get the project up and running during its launch. The next step for the Ilagiit Society is to hire people with disabilities to work in the soup kitchen and café. This fits in with their mission of capacity and skill building. The Ilagiit Society hopes to offer flexible shifts to people with disabilities, who may only want to work 2-3 hours a week. They hope to serve as an example to other businesses in the community on why it makes good business sense to hire people with disabilities, and show a model of how this can be done.

In the evening, NDMS and the Ilagiit Society held a public meeting to hear about the experiences of people with disabilities living in Pangnirtung and what kinds of services and supports were needed. The meeting was attended by approximately twenty people from the community, including people with disabilities and their families and caregivers. Many in attendance expressed the need for more services and supports for people with physical disabilities. Thula, a member of the Ilagiit Society board, has impaired vision and would like to explore the possibility of getting a computer with assistive software for the blind. Peter, the father of a 2-and-a-half-year-old son with a number of disabilities, would like to know about supports to help his son become more self-reliant and to make their home safer. We provided information on the Nunavut Solutions Grant and the federal Enabling Accessibility Grant as possible ways to address these needs.

Another concern brought up by several people in attendance was the need for more accessibility for people with mobility issues. It is estimated that up to 20 people in the community use wheelchairs, mostly elders. Many of the wheelchairs available in town are old and in need of repairs. The community has access to a wheelchair bus owned by the hamlet, but it needs repairs. It transports people who use wheelchairs up to three times a week, and is also used for medivacs as the community does not have an ambulance. Even with the bus, it is hard for people who use wheelchairs to get around town, especially when there is snow on the ground. Some ramps have been built around town, but few doors have automated entrances, so people with disabilities are still dependent on others to access most buildings in town. In addition, ramps are only built at residences if a person with a disability lives in the unit, which makes it difficult for people using wheelchairs to visit friends and family.

Hearing disabilities were another issue that many town residents face. Quite a few people in town are dealing with partial or complete hearing loss, and this can be a difficult barrier to education and employment. Few services are provided for people with hearing impairments, and access to assistive devices and/or audiologists is minimal and difficult.

A common refrain at this meeting was the need for more access to assessments and services. Access to physical therapists, occupational therapists, audiologists, and speech therapists is spotty at best, and there is nobody based in the town that can provide disability assessments. Peter discussed how he struggled to get a diagnosis for his child, being told by local health workers that his son’s permanent disability could just be a phase. After being assessed, his son can only see a physiotherapist for half an hour twice a year, which is not really a support at all.

The public meeting helped to highlight many of the needs of the community in terms of providing more support to people with disabilities. There is a need for more accessible infrastructure around town, such as ramps and push-button doors. Benches are also needed around town, as there is currently no place where people, especially elders, can stop and take a rest if required while going about town. More funding is needed to make homes and other buildings in the community safer for people with disabilities. Access to computers with assistive technologies would also be of huge assistance to people with vision and hearing impairments, as well as access to braille reading and sign language lessons. There is also a distinct need for more access to physiotherapists, audiologists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists on an ongoing, permanent basis. There was also a consensus that healthcare workers, career development officers, and other municipal workers in the community needed to be better informed of the supports, services, and funding programs targeting people with disabilities, so that community members needing these resources could be told about them.

The following morning, NDMS met again with the Inuit Ilagiit Society’s board and staff to discuss the Inclusion Café in more detail. This meeting was quite productive, and the Ilagiit Society was excited and motivated to use a similar model for the café they plan to open. NDMS discussed how we initially got the Inclusion Café up and running and shared advice on training and day-to-day operations. NDMS provided the Ilagiit Society with a copy of our pictorial recipe book and will send along the Inclusion Café training manual once it has been completed. We discussed various ways the Ilagiit Society could access training for the soup kitchen and café staff. Ilagiit had already arranged for CESO to send an expert on running a food service business. NDMS could also use money in our budget earmarked for CESO to have someone sent to do food-prep training with food centre and café staff in Pangnirtung. The Ilagiit Society is looking into having mental health support workers in the community come in and provide training to board members, volunteers, and staff on how to deal with any crises should they emerge. We also discussed various territorial and federal funding opportunities that the Illagiit Society could access to help with start-up and operational costs, and offered our assistance in drafting, supporting, and submitting applications. In addition, we discussed how job coaches could be provided through our partnership with Ready Willing & Able as soon as the Ilagiit Society hires people with disabilities.

Later in the morning, NDMS and the Ilagiit Society met with representatives from Health and Family Services. After introducing ourselves and NDMS as an organization, we discussed some of the main programs and services we offer, including the Inclusion Café and the upcoming Sivuariit Employability Skills Training Program. The Ilagiit Society offered to be the local contact for issues involving people with disabilities, helping people in Pangnirtung connect with NDMS and other organizations and services. Previously, there had been a society for people with disabilities operating in Pangnirtung in the early-2000s, but it has since stopped meeting. The government workers echoed some of the main concerns brought up at the public meeting the night before. Access to buildings and transportation were the main concerns. It was noted that ramps are not well-maintained, particularly in the winter as there are no funds for snow removal.

In terms of employment, the local career development officers had done some work on inclusive hiring in the past, but could use more support to continue this initiative. CDOs had previously accessed the Training on the Job funding from the GN, and there were still people using that program in the community. NDMS discussed our partnership with Ready, Willing & Able and how we could offer additional support to foster inclusive hiring. It will be important to keep connected with CDOs in the community moving forward, as they will be able to help us identify people with disabilities in Pangnirtung who need assistance finding or maintaining employment.

Finally, in the afternoon NDMS and the Ilagiit Society met with representatives from the local high school to discuss issues facing students with disabilities and various supports NDMS could provide. NDMS again outlined services we could provide through RWA, and the principal expressed interest in using some of our employment programs for his students. NDMS offered to partner with the school if they have students who are interested in obtaining employment. Job coaches and specialised equipment could be provided through our partnership with RWA, but we need help from the school in order to connect with job seekers. School staff did not know how many students or school-aged children were living with disabilities, but knew that there were two students who are deaf currently enrolled, and that a full-time sign language interpreter had been hired by the school.

Cathy, one of the school’s student support teachers, emphasized that itinerant consultant supports were badly needed, such as SLPs, audiology specialists, OTs and PTs. This echoed calls for similar supports we heard in the public meeting. These services were originally provided by Baffin Health Services in this region, but have since become the responsibility of the Department of Education. However, since the shift, Dept. of Education has not been able to consistently provide these services. Schools are asked to submit a list of students who need support every year, although the school has not received any of the requested support for the past 2-3 years. Mental health support that is grounded in Inuit culture and available in Inuktitut language is also badly needed.

**Next Steps**

There are a variety of ways to address some of the issues brought up by residents during our visit to Pangnirtung. Some solutions can be brought forward internally, by drawing on the resources and opportunities already present in the community, while other solutions will require the assistance of NDMS in conjunction with other NGOs and government agencies.

To begin with, having a venue for people with disabilities and those caring for them to meet, share their issues, and offer or receive support was a desire expressed by many in the community. The Ilagiit Society discussed the possibility of starting a support group to meet this need. Forming such a group would be an easy, low-cost way to keep the conversation about disabilities going in Pangnirtung. The community could also start a bench-building program to provide more seating around town. The idea of starting a sled building program to help transport people using wheelchairs during the winter was also discussed, in conjuction with thinking of ways to increase the service of the wheelchair bus.

To address the shortage of disability support services and specialists, a more concerted effort is needed. Markus, the secretary of the Ilagiit society, brought up the idea of independently hiring specialists to come work in the town or be shared among communities in the region. He thought this could eventually be paid for through the profits of the café. However, it might take a while for the café to make enough profits to cover this cost, especially as café profits will also be used to subsidize the soup kitchen. Instead, it could be more effective to start up a concerted letter writing campaign to lobby the federal and territorial government to hire more support workers for the territory. The campaign could be introduced in communities across the territory, and also involve national professional bodies for support workers, as well as Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. NDMS could draw up a sample letter that could be used by those interested in participating in the campaign. NDMS could also draw on its connections to the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disability, to help advocate for this cause.

Another action that can easily be taken by NDMS is compiling a list of the various supports, services, and funding programs targeting people with disabilities, and having this list easily accessible on our website. Through all the meetings we had in Pangnirtung, it was readily apparent that information on various services are needed, both by members of the community and government agencies. Having this kind of information easily accessible would allow for more people to receive the services they need and are entitled to. Additionally, to help NDMS in providing services to people with disabilities in Pangnirtung, we need the assistance of the Ilagiit Society and partners in the municipal government and local schools to help connect us with locals who need our assistance.

NDMS will continue to offer support and advice to the Ilagiit society as they work towards getting the soup kitchen and café up and running. NDMS has offered to take on some of the administrative duties of running the social enterprise, such as managing staff payroll. We will also provide the Ilagiit Society with all training materials and samples of our stock lists and inventory orders, in case they want to order supplies via the sealift. NDMS can connect the Ilagiit Society with the ilinniapaa campus in Iqaluit for possible first aid and food safety training. We can also put the Ilagiit Society into contact with the Qayuqtuvik Food Society in Iqaluit, who would be able to offer advice and best practices on running a soup kitchen.