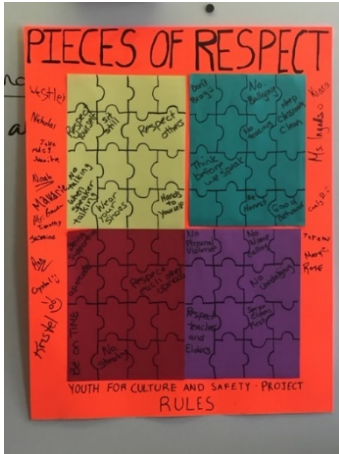


# LAWS Women's Advocacy Project



Evaluation Report July 31, 2017

## Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful for the following individuals who took the time to share their thoughts on this evaluation:

Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake

Piper Allen, Youth Facilitator for YFCS

Duane Esler, Alcohol and Drug Services

Debbra Greig, Social Worker and Counsellor

Debbie Groat, Justice Worker with Daylu Dena Council

Mary Maje, LAWS board member

Linda McDonald, Kaska Teacher Watson Lake Secondary School

Tara McIntyre, Female Community Addiction Worker, Yukon Government for Alcohol and Drug Services

Sanjini Philips, Regional Social Worker, Watson Lake Health and Social Services

Ralph Pilz, Principal, Johnson Elementary School

May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake

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## Executive Summary

Under the direction of the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) Executive Director, the Women's Advocate position supports the social justice needs of young Kaska women and girls who are, or could be, at risk of being victims of violence, in the communities of Watson Lake and Upper Liard, Yukon and Lower Post and Good Hope Lake in northern British Columbia. The project, which ran over a two-year period from August 2015 through July 2017, intended to demonstrate the efficacy of a community-based, culturally-relevant advocacy services.

The project identified three major target groups, with several goals associated with each of these groups. Target groups included:

- a. Young Aboriginal women and girls who are experiencing, or are at-risk of experiencing, violence and abuse
- b. Government agencies and community organizations
- c. General public and communities

Activities included:

- Engaging young Aboriginal women and girls in knowledge sharing activities and support counselling related to intergenerational abuse, family violence, victimization, personal safety and at-risk behavior;
- Supporting young Aboriginal women and girls in navigating the justice system and accessing relevant services, while strengthening the responsiveness of these systems;
- Providing strategic public education and training to enhance community and agency awareness and knowledge of violence prevention;

An important project activity was to document and evaluate the project as a contribution to reducing the vulnerability of young Aboriginal women and girls in northern and rural isolated communities. This report summarizes findings of this evaluation based on key informant interviews and a questionnaire, interviews with the Women's Advocate, review of curriculum developed by the Women's Advocate, and tracking Women's Advocate activities.

This evaluation suggests evidence for progress on all of the intended goals of this position, as well as a number of additional findings. There was no previous advocacy role dedicated to providing support to women navigating justice and victim support services. Highlights of the evaluation are as follows:

1. Informants emphasized that the position was vital to the community as it fulfilled the need for a reliable, empathetic person to provide culturally appropriate support. This was achieved through the Advocate's presence in the community (e.g. in the court room, at interagency meetings, at regional forums and at community functions) and through LAWS programming;
2. A key success of the project was relationship-building with local elementary school youth which also had a positive impact on the Advocate's interactions with other community members. The ripple effects of this work have included more women speaking out

against mental health stigmas and violence, youth taking on leadership roles to support their peers around issues of violence, and more women speaking out about women's rights and opportunities for women. The Youth Advocacy role made up 23% of the current Women's Advocate position, and has proven to be one of the most effective roles in building trust and relationships, and supporting the long-term safety needs of Youth;

3. Services provided by the Women's Advocate addressed the core needs of young Kaska women and girls, while also addressing the community context to build a safer, more responsive community. The Women's Advocate role was seen as having a significant positive impact on the community, especially in terms of awareness-spreading and teaching self-respect and dignity at the individual level when responding to acts of violence;
4. Informants emphasized that clients trust the Advocate to direct them to appropriate services and are grateful to have this kind of support. Other impacts include increased cooperation between community agencies and increased capacity and knowledge among these agencies, particularly with regards to culturally appropriate approaches to violence and safety in Kaska communities;
5. The Advocate fulfilled a variety of much-needed roles in the community, which posed challenges related to shifting demands and prioritization. Balancing the Youth Advocacy component of the role with the Women's Advocacy component was challenging in terms of time allocation and depth of impact;
6. Additional challenges were presented when other agencies shut down, requiring the Advocate to allocate more time to certain roles than others;
7. In addition, the launch of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) inquiry is surfacing trauma for those who are participating, thus creating additional support needs. The Women's Advocate has played a crucial support role over the last six months during these forums and as a support for community members returning for MMIWG events. Additional MMIWG events are anticipated for this winter; and next year.
8. Education and awareness initiatives rooted in response-based practice and Kaska culture were seen as a primary step towards increasing safety for women and girls; however, it was pointed out that more time is needed for the role to make a deeper impact and address systemic issues. Informants emphasized that consistency is imperative to effectively serve a marginalized population impacted by violence and / or trauma and to make lasting changes.

#### Recommendations:

Based on the successes and challenges identified, several recommendations were made. These are summarized below:

- Ongoing, multi-year funding is needed so that the Advocate can continue to build relationships, become established in the community and expand the program's reach
- Continuity, support and security for the individual Advocate in the role (ongoing training, support from leadership and organizations) is needed so that the Advocate can further develop skills, long-term engagement with members, and increase overall impact in the community and surrounding area
- A Youth Advocate position be added to support the work of the Women's Advocate. The Youth Advocate would focus primarily on building relationships with Youth serving the needs of Youth, while delivering preventative cultural programs
- With the additional position, the Women's Advocate would focus on serving women's justice needs including being present in the courts, working with court watch, and doing referrals as well as representing the needs of the communities at regional and national forums on women's safety issues such as the MMIWG inquiry.

*"The education and awareness provided by the initiatives [the Advocate] inspires and provides is the primary step required to increase safety for women/ girls...By combining the personal support with the education the position captures the critical necessities to help keep women safe. By providing knowledge you empower, by providing support you give someone a voice. Nothing can be more in keeping women and girls safe"*

- Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake

*"It takes a while for people to feel comfortable. This position over time will produce results. It does not happen over night."*

-Linda McDonald, Kaska Teacher, Watson Lake Secondary School



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## Overview of Project

Under the direction of the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) Executive Director, the Women's Advocate supports the social justice needs of young Kaska women and girls in the communities of Watson Lake and Upper Liard, Yukon and Lower Post and Good Hope Lake in northern British Columbia. Services provided by the Women's Advocate address the core needs of young Kaska women and girls who are, or could be, at risk of being victims of violence, while also addressing the in-common needs of women generally, and the community context to build a safer, more responsive community.

The project, designed to run over a two-year period from August 2015 through July 2017, intended to demonstrate the efficacy of a community-based, culturally-relevant advocacy service and to address the underlying factors that make young Aboriginal women and girls more vulnerable to violence. The outreach service was unique to the region, and included the following general activities:

- 1) Engaging young Aboriginal women and girls in knowledge sharing activities on intergenerational abuse, family violence, victimization, personal safety and at-risk behavior, support services, and the justice system to assist them in making informed choices, and in accessing supportive services and benefits;
- 2) Linking young Aboriginal women and girls with relevant government agencies and community services, assisting them to safely and effectively access support services;
- 3) Supporting young Aboriginal women and girls in navigating the justice system and allied agencies and services, improving their access to relevant support and services, while strengthening the responsiveness of the justice system and allied agencies and services to young Aboriginal women and girls who are, or are at risk of being, victims of violence;
- 4) Providing strategic public education and training to enhance community and agency awareness and knowledge of the issue and prevention of violence against young Aboriginal women and girls;
- 5) Offering supportive counseling to young Aboriginal women and girls experiencing violence or related social justice issues, with a focus on breaking intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse.
- 6) Documenting and evaluating the project as a contribution to reducing the vulnerability of young Aboriginal women and girls in northern and rural isolated communities.

## Goals of Project

The following goals were identified for this project:

- 1) Among young Aboriginal women and girls who are experiencing, or are at-risk of experiencing, violence and abuse: to reduce at-risk behaviors; reduce stigmatization and isolation; improve trust, assuredness, and confidence in safely accessing services and systems; increase understanding of intergenerational abuse, violence, and trauma; increase empowerment and claim to victims' rights; reduce suspected 'under-reporting; and, to have a corresponding long term effect on reducing rates of violence.
- 2) Among government agencies and community organizations: to increase organizational knowledge and capacity; develop common ground and mutual cooperation; appropriately contextualize services that minimize gaps and access barriers; improve social justice results at the community level; and, to make a significant contribution to the relatively limited evidence-based research and best practices around the issue of violence against young Aboriginal women and girls in rural, remote, northern communities.
- 3) Among the general public and communities: to improve the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of services; improve public knowledge of the sources and manifestations of intergenerational abuse, family violence, and trauma; and to increase public involvement in responding to violence at the personal and community level.

The following table breaks down each of these broad goals by target group into a series of sub goals.

Target Group	Goals
<b>Young Aboriginal women and girls who are experiencing, or are at-risk of experiencing, violence and abuse</b>	Improve trust, assuredness, and confidence in safely accessing services and systems
	To reduce at-risk behaviors
	Reduce stigmatization and isolation
	Increase understanding of intergenerational abuse, violence and trauma
	Increase empowerment and claim to victims' rights
	Reduce suspected under-reporting
	Reduce rates of violence
<b>Government agencies and community organizations</b>	To increase organizational knowledge and capacity
	Develop common ground and mutual cooperation
	Contextualize services that minimize gaps and access barriers
<b>General public and communities</b>	To improve the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of services
	Improve public knowledge of the sources and manifestations of intergenerational abuse, family violence and trauma
	To increase public involvement in responding to violence at the personal and community level



## Evaluation Methodology

This summative evaluation report relied primarily on qualitative data, gathered through a combination of interviews, check-ins and questionnaires. In addition, the evaluation examined the breakdown of the Women's Advocate's activities and the demographics of the individuals she served. The goals of the project served as an organizing framework for the evaluation.

Information was gathered through the following evaluative activities:

1. **Tracking of the Women's Advocate's activities/roles by reviewing workplans and program statistics:** The Women's Advocate tracked her activities by day. Using these statistics, we categorized these activities into seven categories to get a sense of the overall breakdown of her activities. We presented the results of this breakdown back to the Women's Advocate for validation.
2. **Tracking of number of clients served by gender and by generation:** The Women's Advocate tracked the number of people she interacted with during her daily activities and then categorized by gender and by generation. We used these statistics to calculate a total number of clients served and a breakdown by age and by gender.
3. **Review of reports describing curriculum developed by Women's Advocate:** As part of her role the Women's Advocate developed curriculum for the Youth for Culture and Safety program. We reviewed the reports the Women's Advocate created describing the program sessions, to familiarize ourselves with the program's curriculum, to gather information about its impact and better understand evaluative comments collected from key informants relating to this program.
4. **Interviews and phone check-ins with Women's Advocate by evaluator:** Through out the project, the evaluator held phone check-ins with the Women's Advocate and the LAWS executive director to check on the progress of the project and collect information. In addition, the evaluator held two formal interviews for the Women's Advocate. Interview questions were sent to the Women's Advocate prior to each interview to give her a chance to write out her thoughts before the interview. Questions were designed with the goals of the project and initial job description in mind.
5. **Key informant questionnaire:** A list of key informants was compiled by the Women's Advocate and LAWS. The goal was to target individuals who had worked alongside the Women's Advocate, and who were in a position to reflect on the change since the Women's Advocate position was initiated. The key informant questionnaire was distributed by email and included open ended questions as well as a few numeric questions where respondents rated the impact of the Women's Advocate's position by goal on a scale of 1-10.
6. **Key informant interviews:** To ensure we also reached Elders, we provided Elders with an opportunity to respond to the questionnaire as an interview. The same questions were asked but over the phone, with the evaluator taking notes.

## Report Outline

The report represents a summative evaluation of the Women's Advocate project for the period between July 2015-2017. The report begins by providing an overview of the Women's Advocates activities. Next, it shares some results from a key informant questionnaire who rated the impact of the Women's Advocate against the projects goals. The bulk of the report is structured by the Women's Advocate project's goals. For each goal, observations made by the Women's Advocate and key informants are listed. Following results by goal, other unanticipated results that did not fit under any of the initial goals of the project are noted. Finally, the report shares our recommendations for the future of this position.



## Overview of Women's Advocate Activities

It is estimated that between January 2016-July 2017 the Women's Advocate has directly or indirectly reached over 5000 people based on her tracking of activities and estimations of people impacted. 65% of these were First Nations, 47% were First Nations Women. Of the First Nations individuals she has reached, 37% attended residential school (1<sup>st</sup> generation), 38% are children of parents who went to residential school (2<sup>nd</sup> generation) and 25% are grandchildren of grandparents who went to residential school (3<sup>rd</sup> generation) (Figure 1).

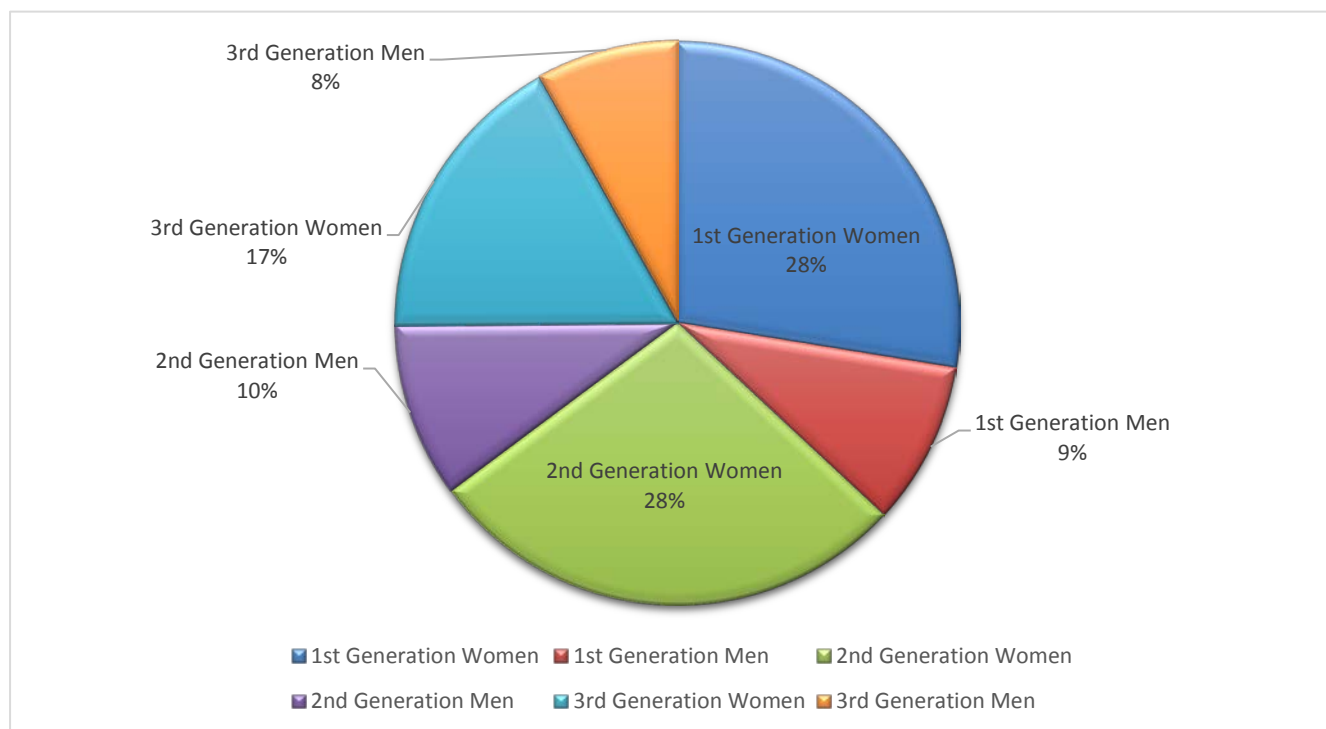


Figure 1: Demographic Breakdown of Women's Advocate's Outreach

An analysis of the roles the Women's Advocate is currently involved with in terms of time revealed the following breakdown (Figure 2):

**Youth Support 23%:** Designing curriculum, delivering and attending Youth safety programs, meeting with parents, meeting with child protective services

**Justice 16%:** Court watch, attending court, meeting with victim services

**Regional advocacy 16%:** Attending regional and national forums such as MMIWG inquiry, National knowledge exchange gathering, YACWI meeting, transgender forum

**Interagency collaboration 14%:** Meeting and collaboration with other agencies

**Serving clients 13%:** Direct service to clients, supporting individuals attending MMIWG inquiry during and after

**Education/conferences 10%:** Attending workshops and conferences on Response Based Practice, mental health and wellness, the psychological damage of residential schools

**Community outreach 8%:** Attending community events such as vigil, funeral support, Lower Post residential school curriculum celebration, drumming workshop, Elders lunch, and filling Christmas hampers

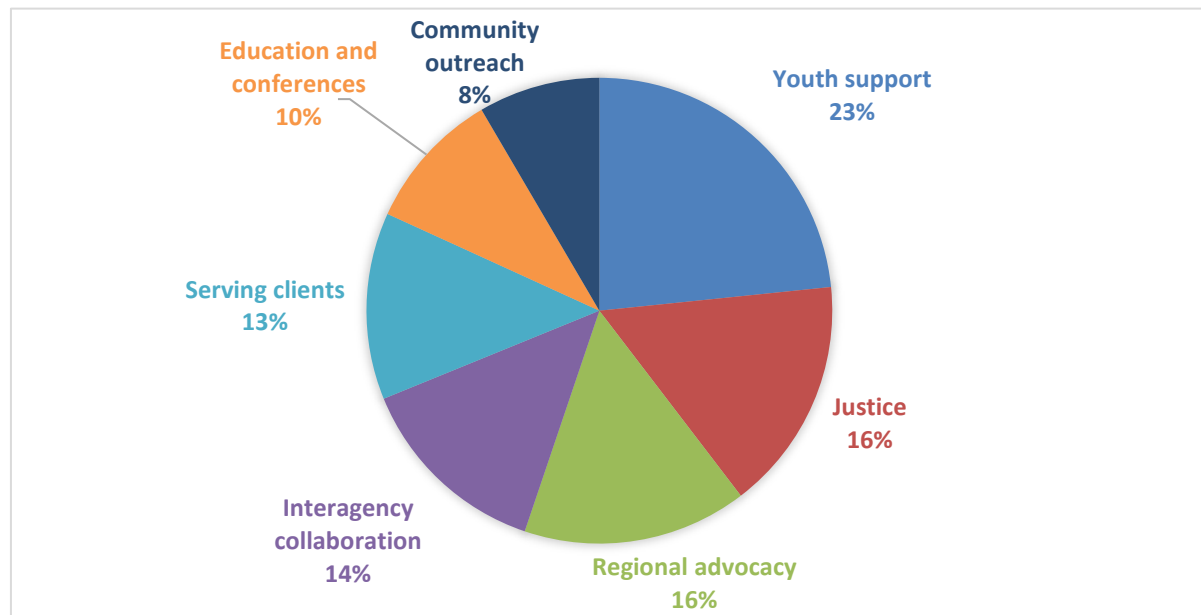


Figure 2: Breakdown of Women Advocate's Roles January 2016-March 2017

## Rating of Impacts

10 key informants responded to a questionnaire where they were asked to rank on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all, 10 being very much) the impact of the Women's Advocate's position on the following goals. The average score for each goal are illustrated here:



## Results by Goal

Target Group: Young Aboriginal women and girls who are experiencing, or are at-risk of experiencing, violence and abuse

*Goal: Improve trust, assuredness, and confidence in safely accessing services and systems*

### Summary:

Informants identified that the Women's Advocacy role has helped to fill a detrimental service gap by supporting women in accessing services. The Advocate provides support through counselling, advocating, mentoring, referrals to resources and services, cultural programs and personal growth programs. In addition to these roles, the Advocate has offered guidance and moral support to women going through the justice system and to those trying to navigate social services. The Advocate formed personal relationships with women in the community, connected with younger girls and teens through LAWS programming, and was present and active in the community such as at community events. The Advocate was particularly instrumental in dealing with crises related to child protection, discrimination from the RCMP and other large-scale organizations. Informants emphasized that clients know and trust her to direct them to the appropriate services and are grateful to have this form of support. When asked how the role of Women's Advocate has increased Aboriginal women and girls' trust in accessing services on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not at all, 10 being very much), the average rating given by informants was 9 out of 10 in this area.

### Quotes:

*"I think that [the Advocate's] role and her as a worker has directly resulted in increase of trust to access services and reduction of stigma and isolation as [she] approaches her work by valuing each woman she works with and strives to treat each client with dignity and respect." – Key Informant*

*"In the past there has not been a community role dedicated to providing court and legal matters support for women. This role and this service has been seen and experienced as a benefit to the WL and the surrounding communities. We are grateful." - Key Informant*

*"Having the advocate present in the community and actively involved in the community has built trust and support. A person that women and teens can go to" -Duane Esler, Alcohol and Drug Services*

### *Goal: To reduce at-risk behaviors*

#### Summary:

In regards to reducing at-risk behaviours, there was a common understanding among those consulted that behaviour change is a complex issue that happens over a long period of time and therefore requires a long-term solution. After the first year of the Women's Advocate project, informants felt the role had a medium to high impact on reducing risky behaviours in the community, with an average response of 7.75 out of 10.

It was identified that reducing risky behaviours will require a sustained and concerted effort and continued relationship building to reach long-term goals regarding behaviour change. The most powerful intervention point noted by key informants is through the Advocate's work with Youth, teaching women and girls how to respect themselves, and through awareness-raising. During the Advocate's work with the Youth, and through the Youth for Safety and Culture curriculum she developed, she introduced ideas on how to stay safe, services available in their community, how to be supportive of victims, and positive and negative social responses. At a recent graduation celebration, 450 people attended the grade 7 and grade 12 graduation, creating a sense that community members are rallying around Youth more than ever before.

#### Quotes:

*"During the past year [my daughter] has been faced with several situations involving peers and exposure ... related to drugs and alcohol and negative attention from young men...She told me directly that much of her healthy decisions made are related to her involvement with this program and learning about the risks and consequences involved with risky choices... feeling empowered as a young female role model and feeling the responsibility and accountability to practicing what she is part of and inspiring others into making healthier and safer choices."* -Key informant, mother of participant in the Youth for Culture and Safety Program and working with the Women's Advocate

*"She is part of instilling respect and dignity into girls that will benefit from this guidance. She is also teaching young men how to treat other boys and girls."* -Piper Allen, Youth Facilitator for YFCS

### *Goal: Reduce stigmatization and isolation*

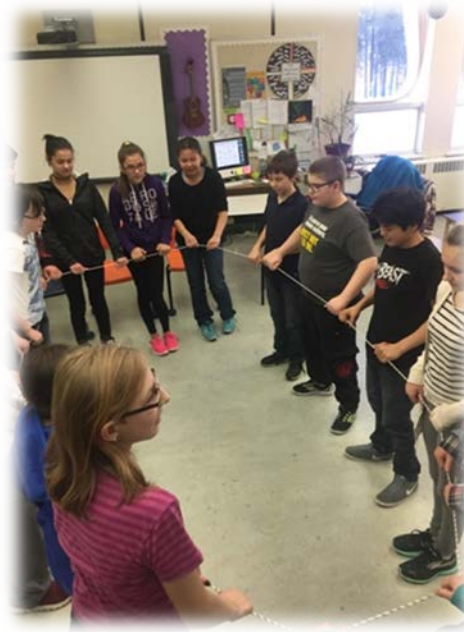
#### Summary:

The Women's Advocate has been effective in reaching vulnerable women and girls by building trusting relationships with them, legitimizing their experiences, providing one-on-one support, treating women with dignity and respect, sharing knowledge, and providing culturally responsive services. In doing so, the Advocate has helped to empower women and victims of violence, thereby reducing levels of stigma and isolation being experienced. When assessing the impact of the Advocate role on reducing stigma and social isolation, responses were mostly high (8 out of 10 on average), showing the positive impact of the role in addressing these important issues.

#### Quotes

*"...Crystal's role as advocate has been so impactful because she is able to provide culturally responsive services. This is what is needed in Watson Lake to reach vulnerable females and girls...For too long women and girls have been revictimized by the very people who are supposed to be supporting them. Crystal ensures that women and girls are heard and that their stories are heard and that action is taken to address systemic issues."* – Key informant

*"She does more than just spread awareness, she teaches women of all ages things from safety to embracing who you are."* - Piper Allen, Youth Facilitator for YFCS





### *Goal: Increase understanding of intergenerational abuse, violence and trauma*

#### Summary:

The Women's Advocate role was rated high (8 out of 10 on average) in terms of impact on Aboriginal women and girls in understanding intergenerational abuse, violence and trauma. Activities such as sessions on mental health and well-being from a First Nation's perspective and presentations and group activities in elementary and secondary schools in Watson Lake were seen as effective methods used by the Advocate to educate Aboriginal women and girls as well as the community about issues of trauma and violence. In particular, working with youth has also had a ripple effect on the rest of the community.

#### Quotes:

*"The leadership and assistance the youth have had, has allowed them to be effective at looking at safety in the community and educating [other] youth and community about violence."* -Duane Esler, Alcohol and Drug Services, Watson Lake

*"Raising awareness, educating, inspiring and supporting women and youth keeps women stronger and safer on not only the physical level but mentally and emotionally as well. This makes longer term positive impacts and allows for those assisted and empowered to do the same for others."* – Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake

*"The Advocate had to build trust and relationships and be culturally sensitive to establish herself as a support for women in this community. The First Nation young women in this community have endured a lot of hardship in this community such as violence, deaths due to alcohol, recent murders, no support from past Chief and Council, and the lack of continuity with Counselors has taken a toll on the community and having an advocate as a support has been helpful."* – May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake

### *Goal: Increase empowerment and claim to victims' rights*

#### Summary:

The emphasis of the Women's Advocate role when discussing empowerment was on the ability of the Advocate to help women and youth find their voices, while also uplifting them so that their voices are heard. This was seen as key to empowerment, building individual confidence, and strengthening the identity of First Nation women and girls in particular. There was also an acknowledgement that the Advocate effectively supported victims' rights by helping women navigate complex social and justice systems. The Advocate has been referred clients who needed support to navigate the justice system, support during mediation and/ or to meet with other agencies. This role has supported clients to explore their options and exercise their rights related to child welfare and other personal issues.

In addition to empowering women and girls and helping to protect victims' rights, the Women's Advocate role was viewed as a means to contribute to long-term impacts. Through raising awareness, educating, inspiring and supporting women and youth, those same women and youth are able to empower others. Further to this, the Advocate has been researching relevant policies and procedures on the behalf of women navigating these systems to help increase understanding of the systems and comprehension of policies while offering moral support and guidance. Key informants provided an average response of 9 out of 10 when ranking the impact on this goal.

#### Quotes:

*"Crystal is an advocate to give our youth "voice" as they will become the community leaders of tomorrow requiring the skills, values and principles this important program espouses."* – Ralph Pilz, Principal of Johnson Elementary School

*"The most important impact (of the role on keeping women safe) is that there is a role in the community dedicated to legitimizing the experiences of vulnerable women and girls. For too long women and girls have been re-victimized by the very people who are supposed to be supporting them. Crystal ensures that women and girls are heard and that their stories are heard and that action is taken to address systemic issues."* – Key Informant

*"By providing knowledge you empower, by providing support you give someone a voice. Nothing can be more key in keeping women and girls safe."* – Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake

*"She is educating and helping women. Helped voice economic and social rights. Women are starting to come out and speak about social justice, safety and opportunities for women."* -Mary Maje, LAWS Board Member

### *Goal: Reduce suspected under-reporting*

#### Summary:

Having an Advocate people can trust was seen as a crucial factor in violence being reported, an important step toward diminishing rates of violence against women and girls. The Women's Advocate was described as someone people feel safe to speak with, someone who offers an unbiased perspective and positive influence, while creating a safe environment for sharing. One respondent noted an increase in women's reporting of sexual abuse as a result of the Advocate's messaging and the trust women have in her. In addition, the Advocate documented various statistics related to abuse and is helping to expose the gravity of the situation for women. Responses on the impact of this role in reducing under-reporting of violence were high on average (8 out of 10), showing the perceived importance of the Advocate in encouraging women and girls to report incidents of violence, as well as ensuring that their voices and needs are heard.

#### Quotes:

*"People are starting to respect and trust her, they look up to her. More women are reporting sexual abuse. More women are speaking up. Crystal is instrumental in delivering messages saying that "abuse must stop". She helps to expose how many women have suffered abuse."* -Mary Maje, LAWS Board Member

*"I think that the role has made a difference as the number of vulnerable women and girls who are in the community is increasing and now that we have more women and girls coming forward it is such a vital resource to have Crystal available... Being able to tell a woman in crisis that there is someone here in Watson Lake who can provide assistance immediately makes such a difference in ensuring that no one falls through the cracks... [she] is able to scale the types of support she provides and is always aware of uplifting the women she works with and ensuring that it is their voice and needs that are heard."* – Sanjini Philips, Regional Social Worker, Watson Lake Health and Social Services

### *Goal: Reduce rates of violence*

#### Summary:

The Women's Advocate promotes the safety of women through a number of strategies, including offering support and advocacy services to women while also linking them to key resources such as counselling services. It was also seen as important that the Advocate is available and visible within the community and in the courts, as well as being respectful and treating everyone with dignity. Education and awareness provided by through the Women's Advocate initiatives were also seen as a primary step required to increase safety for women and girls.

In regards to the Advocate's role in reducing violence for young Aboriginal women, respondents saw a medium to high impact (7 out of 10 on average) of the role within their community. It was pointed out that more time is needed for the role to make more of an impact within the community in terms of preventing violence. It was also noted that the Advocate is working to address systemic issues that, if addressed, will also help to address issues of violence in the long run.

#### Quotes:

*"In my experience, I feel that she (Women's Advocate) has a very important role in this community. She is very involved in as much as she can do, and is a very empowering individual. She helps keep women safe by sharing her knowledge on certain issues and also providing some ways we could help stop or prevent those issues. She does more than just spread awareness, she teaches women of all ages things from safety to embracing who you are."* – Piper Allen, Youth Facilitator for YFCS

*"The most important impact of this position in keeping women safe is the work done in the schools, educating the youth. Having that one on one relationship and contact from a non-judgmental and unbiased perspective yet being a positive influence in a safe environment is crucial."* – May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake

Target Group: Government agencies and community organizations

*Goal: To increase organizational knowledge and capacity*

Summary:

There are a number of ways that organizational knowledge and capacity is being expanded and enriched by the Women's Advocate project. Respondents consulted were employees of organizations that work with the Advocate on a regular basis, such as community social workers, a health coordinator, counsellor, elementary and secondary school teachers, and an Aboriginal justice worker. They identified key services provided by the Women's Advocate that assisted them in their current roles:

- Provided resources to them and their clients
- Provided support to members going through child welfare mediation hearing
- Provided information on services to the Band Office
- Provided health coordination support
- Provided consultation to service providers
- Provided opportunities to learn about Kaska culture
- Increased awareness on government structures and bureaucracy that uphold systemic oppression
- Increased awareness on how community workers approach women and might revictimize them
- Increased awareness at schools with Youth

In addition to the above services, the Advocate has a strong presence in the community, acting as a link between the community and service agencies. Her presence in the community was observed at numerous locations including in the court room, at interagency meetings, community dinners and functions, in the schools, and participating in interagency programs.

Quotes:

*"By participating in the interagency programs, being involved with both community schools and being present and visible at community functions the Women's Advocate role has educated and engaged many agencies and other community services. This generates referrals to their programs and builds trust and capacity within the community as a whole."* – Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake

*Goal: Develop common ground and mutual cooperation (coordinated network of social/victim services)*

Summary:

As with building organizational knowledge and capacity, the Women's Advocate was also seen as instrumental in developing a common ground and mutual cooperation between and among related agencies and organizations. It was noted that historically, the relationship between First Nations organizations and social services has been tumultuous. The working relationship established between social services representatives and the Women's Advocate, as well as a with variety of agencies throughout the community, was identified as a key project success. Many reported working with the Advocate on a regular basis in a number of areas including accessing support for clients (including moral support), coordinating referrals, and obtaining planning support, advice and consultation services. In particular, the Advocate has worked collaboratively with the community social worker to ensure wrap around service for women.

The Advocate has also been able to fill in gaps where the support needed by women and/ or girls does not fall specifically under existing programs or they are in need of more in-depth support that other community workers are unable to provide due to heavy caseloads. The Advocate provides consultation, awareness and education to both service providers and clients. In addition to the above services, the Women's Advocate has participated in the following events, programs and activities in collaboration with community agencies:

- Attending the monthly interagency meetings
- Collaborating with Elders and community members involved in school projects
- Attending youth events
- Being involved in programs in the schools
- Making referrals to counselors
- Working with Liard First Nation Departments
- Supporting families of the Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women's hearings
- Being involved in Court Watch
- Attending JP and Territorial Court
- Assisting and supporting clients in Civil Court matters
- Networking with professionals at all levels of government

Quotes:

*"I would turn to the women's advocate for advice, consultation and support around providing culturally appropriate services. I am looking at running a Seeking Safety Group for women who have experienced Trauma and Addiction, I would love it if the Women's Advocate could consult with me on this project, or maybe even co-facilitate."* – Tara McIntyre, Female Community Addiction Worker, Yukon Government for Alcohol and Drug Services

*"[The Advocate] is very respectful and professional. She plays a key supportive role for the elders, working with myself and other staff at Watson Lake Secondary School and Johnson Elementary. She assists with the various projects, acquiring of resources, scheduling elders and assisting with travel and logistics. [The Advocate] assists with all the details and is wonderful to have on the project. She is our "go to" for all aspects of the project."* – Linda McDonald, Kaska Teacher, Watson Lake Secondary School

*"The person in this position has been instrumental in partnering with other community agencies, groups and departments to help build a more safe and caring community."* – Ralph Pilz, Principal of Johnson Elementary School

*"I have felt incredibly supported by the agencies within the community and it has allowed me to access the support I needed to fulfill my role. This has been one of the most positive aspects of the job."* -Crystal Stewart, Women's Advocate

*"We need to clone Crystal, more support is needed. She builds relationships between LAWS, Agencies and Schools. Helps us to find common ground. Bridging gaps between Elders and Youth. Helps deal with race relations -help manage tension with people in Watson."* - Mary Maje, LAWS Board Member



*Goal: Contextualize services that minimize gaps and access barriers (in victim services)*

Summary:

The arrival of a Women's Advocate marked the availability of essential, targeted and strategic support, education and activities that were previously unavailable to women and girls in the Watson Lake community. The Women's Advocate role fills a number of identified service gaps, including the need for culturally relevant, gender-specific education and capacity building activities, particularly for Aboriginal women and girls dealing with violence and trauma. The Advocate has been called on to undertake work for which there is an empty position and a lack of staff such as justice coordination. The Advocate has also helped to manage tensions and towards better relations with non-Aboriginal residents of Watson Lake.

Quotes:

*"From my direct experience as well as observation I would describe the Women's Advocate role as an essential position in the community. There is no other position in the community that provides the specific and strategic support, education, and activities, in such a culturally relevant and female specific capacity, that Crystal Stewart, the Watson Lake Women's Advocate offers." – Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake*

*"Crystal has been vital for my practice since I am frequently encountering vulnerable women and girls who need more on-going support that may not specifically fall under one of my programs or are in need of a more in-depth supportive worker that often I am not able to provide due to heavy caseloads at my office." – Key Informant*

*"The Advocate worked hard to bridge the gaps between women in the community and other agencies. She also empowered women to use their voice. She gathered information where required and spent time researching policy and procedures for women who needed extra time to comprehend and navigate the systems that they were working in. She supported women who needed additional guidance and moral support." - May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake*

*"This is a culturally affirming program which builds bridges and brings the community together." -Ralph Pilz, Principal, Johnson Elementary School*



Target Group: General public and communities

*Goal: To improve the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of services*

Summary:

When evaluating the impact of the Women's Advocate role on the community's understanding of culturally-appropriate services for women and girls and the availability of services, respondents reported a high impact in both regards (both averaging a score of 9 on a scale of 1 to 10). In terms of the availability and accessibility of services to the general public/community, respondents reported that the Advocate provided education and awareness to youth and community members by being involved with the schools and being present and visible at community functions.

With regards to the appropriateness of services, the Advocate was viewed as offering particularly culturally sensitive services for Aboriginal women and girls and effectively building trust within the community as a whole. At a strategic level, the Advocate note that a major part of her role was to attend meetings in Whitehorse with child protective services, ministers and MMIWG Inquiry representatives. The systemic barriers to service access and need for outreach were important topics during these meetings. The Advocate was heavily involved in strategic planning and development with other agencies regarding next steps for service provision, community member needs and how community members can get involved.

Quotes:

*"The Advocate worked on building a relationship with students in at gatherings and in the school setting. She also made connections with students' one on one as support. She is also a role model for the youth in this community."* – May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake

*"I would turn to the Women's Advocate for advice, consultation and support around providing culturally appropriate services."* -Tara, Female Community Addiction Worker, Yukon Government Alcohol and Drug Services for Community Addiction Services

*Goal: Improve public knowledge of the sources and manifestations of intergenerational abuse, family violence and trauma*

Summary:

In addition to raising awareness among Aboriginal women and girls about intergenerational abuse, family violence and trauma, the Women's Advocate educates the public on this topic as well. The Advocate contributed to an increased awareness of Kaska culture and history within the community. An understanding of the history of trauma against Aboriginal peoples is essential to understanding the issues that many families continue to battle today, especially as community members face this during their participation in the MMIWG Inquiry. During this time when families, individuals and communities are trying to heal from historical trauma and abuse as well as recent violence against Aboriginal women in particular, a culturally sensitive support system is imperative. In addition, in order to educate the public about violence, trauma and abuse, the Advocate provides statistics that reveal the level of violence and abuse that occurs within Watson Lake and the surrounding community. When looking at the impact of the Women's Advocate on community members' understanding of intergenerational abuse, family violence and trauma, respondents rated the role as having a high impact on average (8 on a scale of 1 to 10).

Quotes:

*"The Advocate supports families presently involved in the Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women's Inquiry. She attended the hearings held in Whitehorse supporting families who finally have a voice and a place to tell their story. This is a very emotional time in our community and having someone who can dedicate time directly with families is key to healing."* – May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake

*"The feeling I get in the community are that people are informed more about violence and teens are taking an active role educating and say no to violence."* – Duane Esler, Alcohol and Drug Services

*"[Crystal] shared things such as statistics that really helped put things into perspective considering how much actually happens/ goes on in our community."* - Piper Allen, Youth Facilitator for YFCS

*Goal: To increase public involvement in responding to violence at the personal and community level*

Summary:

The Women's Advocate is supporting the public, including women and girls, in responding to violence through a variety of means. She has acted as an advocate when dealing with situations such as child protection crises and discrimination from RCMP and other large-scale organizations, and has also assisted the public during emergency situations. Respondents ranked the Advocate role high in terms of impact on the communities understanding of the public's role responding to violence (average of 8 out of 10). This role is seen as having a significant positive impact on the community, especially in terms of awareness-spreading in general and teaching self-respect and dignity at the individual level when responding to acts of violence.

Quotes:

*"In YFS and especially YFCS Crystal is teaching young women and older women how to respect themselves and others, and how to know what is right when it comes to how they are treated. She is a part of instilling respect and dignity into girls that will benefit from this guidance. She is also teaching young men how to treat other boys and girls. Both respect and dignity are key in the sessions I have been a part of in YFS and YFCS." – Piper Allen, Youth Facilitator for YFCS*



## Other Findings

Important information arose in interviews with key informants that did not necessarily align with particular goals. This information is captured below and has also contributed to recommendations for the future of the position.

### Inter-personal Skills:

Beyond performing the necessary functions of the role, the Advocate was praised for forming personal, trusting connections with women of different ages. Informants frequently noted the inter-personal skills and cultural competency of the Advocate. Informants emphasized that the Advocate's ability to be culturally sensitive enabled her to establish herself as a support for women in the community in a relatively short period of time. Having an Advocate people can trust was seen as a crucial step toward increasing reporting on violence and ultimately diminishing rates of violence against women and girls.

### Presence in the Community and the Importance of Consistency:

Several informants praised the Advocate for her presence in the community. Informants noted that they experienced her presence frequently in a variety of settings such as the court room, interagency meetings, community dinners, community events and functions and in schools. Beyond performing the necessary functions of the role, the Advocate was praised for forming personal, trusting connections with women of different ages through her active presence in the community (e.g. in the court room, at interagency meetings, and community functions) and through LAWS programming. Having an Advocate people can trust was seen as a crucial step in increasing reporting on violence and ultimately diminishing rates of violence against women and girls. Establishing a role, learning to navigate community dynamics, building trusting relationships and integrating into a community takes time. Recently there has been an increase in referrals, likely due to more awareness and understanding of the Advocate's role, which speaks to the need for the Advocate to have a long-term presence in the community.

### Raising Cultural Awareness:

In addition to raising awareness among Aboriginal women and girls, informants highlighted that the Advocate has contributed to an increased awareness of Kaska culture and history within the community. It was emphasized that being aware of the history of trauma against Aboriginal peoples is essential to understanding the issues that many families continue to battle today, especially as community members face this during their participation in the MMIWG Inquiry.

### Ripple Effects:

The Advocate was a primary facilitator for the Youth for Safety program and became familiar and comfortable with the youth. This had a ripple effect on other community members' trust of the advocate, as they witnessed youth approached her in a variety of settings wanting to communicate. Focusing on women and youth was seen as integral to increasing community safety as a whole and breaking long-standing cycles of violence. The ripple effects of the Advocate' raising awareness and providing essential services to Kaska women and youth was emphasized by many informants. Effects have included more women speaking out against mental health stigmas and violence, youth taking on leadership roles to support their peers around issues of violence, and more women speaking out about women's rights and opportunities for women. The

Advocate's role was seen as giving more voice to systemic challenges associated with safety such as economic and social rights, and drawing attention to mental health impacts such as PTSD and anxiety.

## Summary of Findings

The key informant interviews were overwhelmingly positive with regards to the Women's Advocate role. The Advocate's role was seen as having a significant positive impact on the community, especially in terms of awareness-spreading and teaching self-respect and dignity. The findings related broadly to each of the goals are summarized below.

### Women's Advocate Role:

The Women's Advocate position was the first role dedicated to providing support to women in accessing services and navigating justice and victim support services. The role fulfilled a number of service gaps, including the need for culturally relevant support for Aboriginal women and girls dealing with violence and trauma and for education and capacity building activities. Informants identified several important features of this role, including: counselling, advocating, mentoring, providing referrals to resources and services, and leading cultural and personal growth programs. The MMIWG inquiry surfaced additional support needs over the last 6 months. The Women's Advocate played a crucial role in supporting community members during and after inquiry events. Considering the multiple roles that the Advocate fulfills, it is not surprising that several informants highlighted the need for more than one Advocate to keep up with members' needs for support services.

### Reducing Violence and Increasing Access to Services:

The Women's Advocate promotes the safety of women and supports the public, including women and girls, in responding to violence through a variety of strategies. Informants emphasized the provision of moral support and advocacy services to women going through the justice system and those trying to navigate complex social service systems. The Advocate's role in mediating between community members and service agencies and linking members to key resources such as counselling services was seen as providing important support clients and enabling them to explore their options and exercise their rights related to child welfare and other personal issues. The Advocate has also been particularly instrumental in dealing with crises related to child protection, discrimination from the RCMP and other large-scale organizations.

### Organizational Knowledge and Capacity:

Informants that worked regularly with the Advocate included community social workers, a health coordinator, counsellor, school teachers, and an Aboriginal justice workers. They highlighted that organizational knowledge and capacity is being expanded through the Women's Advocate project, particularly through the Advocate's provision of resources to them and their clients, personal support to members, and health coordination support. The Advocate has networked with professionals from all levels of government, contributed to increased awareness on systemic challenges and opportunities, and provided opportunities to learn about Kaska culture.

#### Mutual Cooperation Among Agencies:

Along with building organizational knowledge and capacity, the Women's Advocate role was seen as instrumental in developing cooperation between and among agencies and organizations. Many reported working with the Advocate on a regular basis in a number of areas including accessing wrap around support for clients, filling in service gaps due to heavy case loads, coordinating referrals, supporting clients in Civil Court matters, and obtaining planning and consultation services. Informants emphasized that the Advocate provides consultation, awareness and education to both service providers and clients, especially through collaboration with community agencies (e.g. at monthly interagency meetings, youth events and school programs, working with Liard First Nation Departments).

#### Raising Awareness and Reducing Risky Behaviour:

Informants noted that reducing risky behaviours will require a sustained and concerted effort and continued relationship building to reach long-term goals regarding behaviour change. The most powerful interventions highlighted by informants included sessions on mental health and well-being from a First Nation's perspective and presentations and group activities in elementary and secondary schools in Watson Lake. These were seen as effective methods used by the Advocate to educate Aboriginal women and girls as well as the community about issues of trauma and violence, contributing to a reduction in stigma and isolation. Emphasis was placed on the ability of the Advocate to help women and youth find their voices, while uplifting them so that their voices are heard. This was seen as key to building individual confidence, and strengthening the identity of First Nation women and girls, increasing self-respect and reducing risky behaviour.

## Challenges

#### Competing Demands:

Working with clients impacted by trauma and violence would ideally be undertaken with uninterrupted time and the ability to work flexibly according to client schedules. This was challenging for the Advocate due to many competing priorities, shifting demands (sometimes hourly) and being unable to anticipate when a client might come for support. The Advocate emphasized that it is necessary to provide support immediately as the window for this may close quickly.

#### Organization and Agency Relationships:

An additional challenge was presented when the Dena Gah Justice program shut down as the program was an important ally for the Advocate and LAWS. Collaboration with this program involved regular updates about individuals in the system, discussions how to best collaborate to provide support, and finding ways to bridge gaps among agencies. This impacted the time required from the advocate to support women in navigating the justice system and highlighted the challenge of interacting with government agencies that often work in silos.

#### MMIWG Inquiry Surfacing Additional Support Needs

The National MMIWG inquiry, whose first round of hearings were in Whitehorse this spring, surfaced additional support needs for community members. Over the last 6 months, the Women's Advocate played a crucial role in supporting community members attending these hearings, and continued support upon returning from these events. Another round of MMIWG events are anticipated in Whitehorse this winter as well as a

hearing in Northern BC for families living in Lower Post and Good Hope Lake and an adequate support system for participants during and after these events is essential.

#### Community Leadership:

Community division and a lack of leadership, particularly from Chief and Council also posed challenges for the Advocate's interactions with leadership, building trust in the community, and managing interagency relationships.

## Recommendations for the future of this position

This section details several success factors and supports were identified by informants. Several recommendations were also made for additional needs that the role could fulfill and potential activities, outlined below. Considering the multiple roles that the Advocate fulfills, it is not surprising that several informants highlighted the need for more than one Advocate to support community members. This section details the recommendation that two positions be developed to fulfill the roles currently being undertaken by the Advocate and the breakdown of the responsibilities of these two positions.

#### Success Factors:

To be effective in this role, the following success factors have been identified:

- a. Familiarity with local dynamics, politics, agencies and services
- b. Relationship and trust building with community members, especially youth
- c. Consistency, to aid in relationship building and to ensure continuity and for clients
- d. Flexibility in the way that Advocate exercises her role (e.g. location, time, job description, prioritization)
- e. Collaboration and communication with other agencies and support staff towards mutual cooperation and support

Given these success factors it is recommended that future positions be funded for no less than 3 years to ensure continuity of service and to allow any new staff the time to build the familiarity and relationships needed to be effective in their role.

#### Required Supports:

Several ongoing supports were identified by informants in order for the Advocate role to be effective and wide reaching. Supports needed include:

- a. Increased funding and training for the program
- b. Access to services from other sources besides essential services provided by the band
- c. Continued support from Chief and Council
- d. Continued support from Schools
- e. Continued support from local agencies such as Social Services and Victim Services
- f. More awareness-raising on the Advocate role and how to utilize her services (e.g. open houses for the program)

- g. Alternative location for the Advocate that is more accessible and private to increase client comfort levels (currently LAWS office which is a fairly public place)

#### Additional Activities and Approaches:

With the potential for secure funding and a permanent role, it was recommended that Advocate increase the community's understanding of its own needs through communication, asking for feedback regularly over time, and reporting back on feedback and concerns. The hope was also expressed that through this increased knowledge, the Advocate would be able to design and host more activities for women from the community to attend, as well as assist other program activities through consultation and/ or co-facilitation (e.g. Seeking Safety Group for Women). Other recommendations related to ongoing activities and approaches included:

- Using response-based practise
- Building networks of agencies
- Increasing awareness among RCMP
- Working towards a Society Justice Strategy
- Reintroducing Kaska Culture into program activities (and potentially writing a Code of Conduct around this)
- Celebrating successes
- Regular updates and meetings between the LAWS team to keep communication open and develop shared understanding of the tasks at hand for each member and competing priorities, and to identify a strategic focus
- Support for members in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Inquiry while they attend events and when they return as these events may trigger traumas
- Increasing time spent in communities outside of Watson Lake

#### Addition of Another Position:

Interacting with youth through various programs and initiatives made up a significant portion of the current Women's Advocate position (28%), and has proven to be one of the most effective roles in building relationships and supporting the long-term safety needs of Youth. While the Advocate was highly adaptive to evolving community needs, being required to fulfill multiple important functions in the community posed challenges with regards to meeting community needs more deeply and consistently. It is recommended that another position be added to support the work of the Women's Advocate. The breakdown of the responsibilities of these two positions could be as follows:

- a. **Youth Advocate:** Focusing primarily on building relationships with Youth, serving the needs of Youth (child protective services), delivering preventative cultural curriculum in collaboration with Youth for Safety facilitators and Elders, and leading programs such as the Youth for safety and culture, Youth for Safety and regalia. It would be important for the Youth Advocate and Women's Advocate to work collaboratively and supportively to build the positions together.
- b. **Women's Advocate:** Focused on serving women's justice needs including being present in the courts, providing information on how the court system works, and doing referrals. When Dena Keh Justice (Liard First Nation) shut down in the fall of 2016, it left a huge gap in services, especially for culturally relevant services tied to the local community. Thus this role could also include



representing the needs of the communities at regional and national forums on women's safety issues such as the MMIWG inquiry, including meeting the cultural support needs of community members at these forums and when returning from these forums. Additional aspects of the role would likely include:

- Undertaking additional research for individuals and agencies on who might be able to provide specific services and collaborating with agencies to open new avenues for support
- Facilitating interagency collaboration and strategic planning and supporting other agencies in their roles in the community
- Referring clients to appropriate agencies (e.g. for counselling, housing issues, health supports)
- Observing court and reporting back to community members as well as court watch (e.g. regarding court atmosphere, police conduct, cases being heard)
- Working closely with Court Watch Yukon on how to provide a safer, more efficient justice system for women and women experiencing abuse
- Providing support letters for agencies looking to better the court system
- Meeting with agencies to discuss the justice system and how it functions in Watson Lake and surrounding communities
- Attending court and following up with other agency members that are there to help go over cases they are attending
- Collaborating with Alcohol and Drug Services (ADS) to start a women's group for support/skill building
- Collaborating on community and agency workshops to enhance and educate the community on response based practice
- Serving as a representative of LAWS at various events and bringing the community's voice to these tables (e.g. related to the Mental strategy, MMIWG inquiry and child protection services)
- Collaborating with new Chief and Council to build on the program and address community concerns

Quotes:

*"I think this [role] has translated in increasing clients' empowerment and rights. I think for reduction of risk behaviour and rates of violence Crystal needs more time as these are complex issues that require a long-term solution."* -Key Informant

*"This is an essential role needed in the community and surrounding area of Watson Lake... [The Advocate] and team from LAWS has done a remarkable job raising awareness and providing an essential service to Kaska and all women and youth which in turn benefits the community and its safety and health as a whole. I hope that the funding remains secured to continue this much-needed service to the community to continue the essential initiative of building capacity and safety which the Women's Advocate position has begun."* - Kelly Allen, Probation Office, Watson Lake

*“The most important impact of this position in keeping women safe is the work done in the schools, educating the youth. Having that one on one relationship and contact from a non-judgmental and unbiased perspective yet being a positive influence in a safe environment... The First Nation young women in this community have endured a lot of hardship in this community such as violence, deaths due to alcohol, recent murders, no support from past Chief and Council, and the lack of continuity with Counselors has taken a toll on the community and having an advocate as a support has been helpful.” -May Stewart, Health Coordinator for Watson Lake*

*“Trust-building with the Youth has been invaluable. Youth are starting to realize that I live in the community and come to me with information. This trust building will allow them to come to me if they ever experience a crisis... Consistency and trust building are so important in serving client needs.” -Crystal Stewart, Women’s Advocate*

*“The justice system suffers from transient staff and siloed agencies. Community members are used to transient staff, and yet consistent support and relationship building is so important.” -Crystal Stewart, Women’s Advocate*

