



## Justice and Correctional Services Message from the Director Donald Nicholls

On behalf of the Department of Justice and Correctional Services of the Cree Regional Authority, I am pleased to submit this report of activities that the Department has undertaken or completed in the past twelve months.

Since our formal inception in November 2008, we have worked diligently to build the foundation of an integrated justice system. Section 18 of the JBNQA deals with the administration of justice for the Crees and embodies fundamental principles according to which Cree people must be actively involved in the administration of justice, and Aboriginal values must be reconciled with federal and provincial justice model and laws. This agreement created the foundation for a unique Cree-Québec judicial system which takes elements from both the Cree and the Québec systems and traditions, and does so in a way that respects and recognizes Cree circumstances, usages, customs and ways of life.

This year was again a formative year, one in which we furthered our many agendas in parallel with improving services for the people. We believe that our progress has been remarkable for such a young Department, and we thank Cree leadership, our government partners, other Cree entities and Departments, and of course the Cree people of Eeyou Istchee, who have joined us in the journey of building an equitable, responsive and culturally attuned justice system. This report highlights some of our achievements of the past year, and presents our continued priorities going forward to achieve our vision of bringing Cree justice to life.

## Justice Facilities

The Justice Agreement provided funds that enabled the construction of justice facilities and was designated by our leadership and the Cree-Québec Judicial Advisory Committee as an early developmental priority for the Department. Of course, these facilities are an essential component of effective service delivery, and provide the space and technical resources needed to host justice employees, itinerant court sessions, special programs, arbitrations, community justice committee meetings, mediations and family conferences. Facilities also enable us to accept video witness testimony and to implement other important initiatives related to justice.

Preliminary designs and plans were made in consultation with engineers and architects from both the Québec Ministries of Justice and Public Security, to ensure that the buildings met with the best possible design considerations and building standards, at the same time meeting current and future space needs. On January 31, 2011, we were proud to officially open and inaugurate our first facility in Mistissini and shared this with an array of dignitaries and justice leaders including Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, Deputy Chief Ashley Iserhoff, Mistissini Chief Richard Shecapio, Québec Minister for Native Affairs Pierre Corbeil, Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Québec the Honourable François Rolland, Chief Justice Elizabeth Corte of the Court of Québec, Madam Justice Johanne Mainville and others.

The Waswanipi justice facility is scheduled to officially be opened on June 10, 2011, which will be followed by the opening of the Wemindji, Chisasibi, Oujé-Bougoumou and Waskaganish facilities in the fall. In 2012, Whapmagoostui, Eastmain and Nemaska will come on stream to complete our roster of justice facilities, which will be linked by a

secure Cree justice fibre-optic based computer network to ensure fast and reliable services. Of note, the centres will feature state-of-the-art video conferencing facilities that will create a “virtual bridge” to other justice facilities throughout the Province of Québec. For example, the video conferencing infrastructure will allow both Itinerant Court personnel and our staff to connect with other courts, justice and corrections offices throughout the system for meetings, bail hearings, young offender’s cases and witness testimonies from other locations. In the future, when the new detention facility is built in Amos in 2013, community members will be able to visit remotely with family members in the detention system, another example of the way in which we will breathe life into Cree justice.



First Day of Court in New Cree Justice Facilities, Mistissini, November 10, 2011. First Row: François Gunner, Demerise Coon-Come, Me Genevieve Boutet, Me Clara Egarvari, Judge Jean-Pierre Gervais, Me Catherine Gagnon, Diane Trudel, Second Row: Me Guy Prudhomme, Me Francois Doyon, and Me Claude Beaudet.

## Justice System Developments

Our Department, in collaboration with Cree Nation leadership and members of the Cree Québec Judicial Advisory Committee, were active last year in representing the needs and interests of the Cree people in respect to the fundamental system changes necessary to achieve our vision.

The Québec Court is the Itinerant Court that currently visits our communities to hear criminal cases, young offenders matters and by-law infractions. Recently in a meeting with the Chief Justice of the Québec Courts, Madam Elizabeth Corte, she stated her support for our Community Justice Committees and her hope that in the future these will be a vital resource linked to her courts and judges. We have advocated the position that Community Justice Committees must be empowered to create and present community impact statements as part of the court process, which will allow communities to have input on sentencing and other matters including alternative ways in which cases can be resolved. This concept, once achieved, would represent a concrete way in which each community



Grand Chief Dr. Matthew Coon Come prepares to cut the ribbon for the Mistissini Justice Facility with Québec Minister for Native Affairs Pierre Corbeil, Mistissini Chief Richard Shecapio and Deputy Grand Chief Ashley Iserhoff.

has a voice in the administration of justice within its own territory.

The Department has also met with the Chief Justice for the Superior Court of Québec, Mr. François Rolland. This court oversees some criminal cases, including jury trials, and family and civil law cases. Since we now have seen the realization of modern justice facilities, we have requested that the Superior Court sit in the Cree communities in the future. The Chief Justice is preparing Orders in Council to instruct on Superior Court sittings on criminal matters as the justice facilities become ready in each community. We have asked that the sittings include family matters so Cree members can do a number of custody, probate or other family law within their communities. The Grand Chief has also sent out a letter to the Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Québec to give the Superior Court a timetable of readiness of our community facilities so that we can coordinate their support, and to reiterate that family and civil matters be a part of future services.

In addition to these activities and developments, we are in discussions with the Ministry of Justice on Cree Justices of the Peace and Cree judges. The JBNQA contained provisions for Cree Justices of the Peace. However, in 2004, the Québec Government passed a law removing Justices of the Peace that had been appointed previously and instituted stricter requirements. We are working towards a time when we can have Cree judiciary working within our new facilities, and improving on the accessibility and responsiveness of the judicial system as a whole. The realization of Cree members participating in this aspect of the justice system would be another important step forward for the Cree Nation.

At the federal level, the Department of Justice and Correctional Services has also looked at a number of proposed amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada and other legislation which we believe will further enhance our system of justice for the benefit of the Cree people. In the past year, the federal government has proposed sweeping changes to the pardon system which would potentially limit the number of people who could obtain a pardon. For former offenders who have paid their debt to society and have demonstrated good behaviour, a judicial pardon is essential to obtain good employment, travel freely and make the most of the wonderful opportunities that exist in the Cree Nation and beyond. These proposed amendments, if enacted, would likely disproportionately affect Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and therefore we worked with the Grand Chief to respond to these planned changes.

### **Service Delivery Capacity**

The human resources framework for the CRA Department of Justice and Correctional Services contains provisions for both regional and community-based staff, the latter of which are part of an essential strategy to

ensure that justice services and solutions meet the needs of individual Cree communities, within the context of a well-coordinated and resourced justice vision.

Presently, the majority of these staff members are Community Justice Officers (CJOs) and Community Reintegration Officers (CROs). CJOs support communities in their justice processes such as Community Justice Committees, plan and implement crime prevention and awareness programs, support the Itinerant Court program and generally seek to mobilize community stakeholders to participate in the justice process. CROs, in contrast, work with the corrections system on issues of reintegration, rehabilitation and service coordination for Cree people returning to their communities from custody. Last year, we continued to build the Department through the addition of new CJO and CRO staff in addition to another CAVAC (victims services) officer, and provided them with a range of training programs to ensure their productivity and raise their capacity in areas such as crime prevention, non-violent crisis intervention, restorative justice practices, family group conferencing and more, so as to better serve the needs of our people.

With respect to the position of CRO in particular, we are in discussions with the Québec Public Security Ministry to have CROs work more closely with probation officers to provide more accessible and ready service delivery, and to better link clients with other programs and services locally.

Our community-based staff members play a key role in supporting the operation of local justice committees. In the past year, CJOs and CROs were able to coordinate justice committee training and refreshers within the communities. We signed a new agreement to provide more training for justice committees locally throughout the next year with the Governments of Canada and Québec, and the CRA provides each community with funds to help support costs associated with their operations. Last year we saw some significant achievements at the local justice committee level which confirm and demonstrate the value of these structures. Staff and justice committee members have worked collaboratively to provide sentencing circles, community information sessions and culture walks/culture camps, which have featured the participation of community members, Elders, youth at-risk and former offenders, united in accessing the healing power of our land. For all those people who contributed to these efforts, we wish to express our sincere appreciation for helping bring community-based Cree justice to life.

### **Community-Based Programs**

It is clear, however, that establishing a strong foundation for our justice system depends not only on infrastructure and staff, but also on programs that enhance the quality of service we provide to the people. Last year, we continued to make good progress in expanding, developing



Participants in the SNAP National Symposium, Winnipeg, 2011.



and implementing programs designed to prevent crime and assist Cree people in transitioning successfully from custody back into Cree society.

Last year, with \$1.35 million in funding from the Government of Canada's National Crime Prevention Centre and with the support of the Cree School Board, we officially launched the internationally acclaimed and proven effective Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) program. This program is being implemented in Mistissini and Waswanipi through to 2013, as we were able to obtain licenses and funding to support a pilot project to determine its delivery and effectiveness in non-urban environments. The SNAP program is designed to help at-risk boys and girls aged 6 to 11 years improve their decision-making skills and ability to deal constructively with conflict and behavioural traits. Under the Cree SNAP program, there are seven new staff members in our Department who accept referrals from community partners, meet with families and ensure that children and parents get help and support in areas of life skills and paths to success needed. This pilot program will be rigorously evaluated on its effectiveness so that we can determine whether the program should be expanded to all of our communities, but we are confident that it will demonstrate that intervening early in the lives of children will open new opportunities in their lives, and help reduce crime and victimization in our Nation.

In addition, we recently completed our pilot Cree Reintegration, Education and Employment Program (C.R.E.E. Program), also known as *Jobs Not Jails*, an initiative funded for 18 months by Service Canada. The program was created to assist with providing transition services to Cree people who are returning to the community from a custody setting, such as the Amos Detention Centre. Through program staff, a specialized registered psychologist as well as our network of Community Reintegration Officers, we have met with many clients to understand their situation and the factors that have contributed to their criminal behaviour, then build a case plan to help them

get the support that they need to lead productive, healthier lives and break the cycle of incarceration that has affected so many people.



The interest in the program was substantial, with over 180 people ranging in age from 19 to 54 registering for the program. This demonstrates clearly to our Department that these clientele want to redeem themselves and be integrated into Cree society. What's more, we believe that the program has stimulated much greater awareness of the needs and circumstances of former offenders, including their desire to re-connect with their culture and the healing powers of the land. Indeed, several Department staff members have taken the learnings from this program and are now investigating new programs that focus on cultural reclamation and traditional Cree life lessons. In addition, plans are also under way to investigate the feasibility of establishing a new service business which will employ and mentor former offenders and provide high quality services – such as slashing, general handyman repairs, snow removal, etc. – in the communities.

The vision of this program is to work together to help heal and support the talents of all people of Eeyou Istchee, including those who have formerly broken the law. To leverage this pilot investment, we have applied to Service Canada for a three-year, \$1.5 million grant to expand the program, inclusive of providing wage subsidies to employers who are partners in rehabilitation, as well as retaining a full-time psychologist to provide on-going counselling to clients.

Last year, the Department began work on the issue of family violence, one that has been identified in our Nation in the 1990s as requiring attention and resources. We were happy to partner with the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association and were successful in obtaining special event funding from the Department of Justice Canada for the 2010 Eeyou Istchee Family Violence Symposium, held from November 16 to 18 in Chisasibi.





There were several objectives associated with the event, which brought together over 120 delegates and speakers from Eeyou Istchee and beyond. We were successful in achieving our key objectives, including raising awareness of the family violence issue, identifying the needs of communities and stakeholders in respect to responding to family violence, and stimulating new partnerships to address this important issue. Expert speakers and counsellors were on hand to meet delegates and discuss solutions, including Denis Windego, Eduardo Duran, Ellen Gabriel and others, and we were fortunate to have many beloved Elders on hand to share their wisdom and inspire us to heal the wounds caused by family violence. Special thanks to Doris Bobbish and her team at the CWEIA for their support and efforts in ensuring a successful event. Presently, we are attempting to leverage this event by securing additional monies from Justice Canada to tour the communities and craft an integrated action plan



Hundreds of youth on hand at the 2010 J.A.I.B. Inter-Band Games in Mistissini.

Supporting these events – in addition to the upcoming Cree Nation Games in collaboration with the Department of Leisure, Sports and Recreation – serves several purposes, including raising the Department's profile, showing our visible commitment to encouraging healthy lifestyles and choices, and demonstrating our absolute commitment to partnerships and social justice principles of solidarity, equity, and access. We have also continued to support a partnership on youth mentoring within some of our programs and with community partners, and plan to launch an awareness campaign with industries in the region directed at youth on healthy choices related to future employment and careers.



Participants in the Family Violence Symposium held in Chisasibi, November 2010.

for change. More information about the event can be found at [www.fvsymposium.ca](http://www.fvsymposium.ca).

The Department views "justice" in the broader sense, beyond just that of criminal justice. Social justice reflects the notion of creating a society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, one that values human rights and recognizes the dignity of every human being. As we build programs, services and capacity in the area of criminal justice, so too do we attempt to support the work of other Cree entities and Departments that are focused on the improvement of Cree society. For example, the Department was an active supporter of the successful J.A.I.B. Inter-Band Games in July 2010, which brought together hundreds of First Nations youth together in Mistissini to compete in organized games and enjoy the fellowship of other youth.

### Looking Forward

The year that lies ahead offers many compelling opportunities in the domain of justice. Facilities will be completed and will provide the resources needed to expand an array of programs and services that focus on crime prevention, intervention and diversion. Existing community, entity and department partnerships will be strengthened and new ones forged to maximize our investments of human and financial capital. Concerted advocacy efforts will continue to ensure that other governments make good on the collective and individual rights that we have been bestowed and which are our right. Justice staff will be mentored and trained so that they can achieve their fullest potential in a way that delivers superlative justice services to all. Community-based justice structures will be supported and encouraged and the people consulted to ensure their voices are heard. And the CRA Department of Justice and Correctional Services will work tirelessly on your behalf to contribute to the building of a safe and harmonious Nation that honours and respects all peoples.