

Remembering Mary Cousins

Teacher, editor, interpreter, TTK founder — 15

Teacher ed drops McGill

U of Regina to grant degrees — 7

suicide
response plans
rather dust

our years ago Nunnally developed response protocols. Schools still haven't received them.

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lavut's most recent suicide took place in Kuplukruk on 11/20, when a 20-year-old man shot himself. Earlier, on Feb. 14, a 14-year-old girl from Igloodik hanged herself at 901.

Four years before these deaths, the Government of Nevada developed plans that would help school principals, community nurses and handler staff work together to deal with trauma of such a loss.

Since then, these suicide response protocols have gathered



Education officials say each school has a detailed suicide response plan. But principals, who would not speak on the record for fear of being punished, said that's not the case.

They say principals who arrive in Nunavut are poorly prepared to cope with suicide in schools, and that any suicide response plans that exist were developed by their own staff.

Meanwhile, detailed instructions have been written, but never circulated, on how principals should work with other community members, such as RCMP, social workers and hamlet councillors, following a suicide.

Margaret Joyce, who helped develop the protocols and is now superintendent of Kirkmire School Operations, said principals will receive a manual for handling suicides this September.

Rather than circulate this plan sooner, Joyce said the government focused on offering crisis management training in schools.

A similar suicide response protocol for nurses at health centres, drafted in October 2001, was only distributed within the past year, Joyce said.

A third protocol, designed to ensure different agencies work together, still awaits a memorandum of understanding to be signed.

Paul Quassa, the mayor of Igloodik, says his community

Expensive imported nurses

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NUNAVUT

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THIS WEEK $\Lambda_{\text{QCD}}^{5b}$

A Night of Jazz and Blues

Friday, May 4 at 7 p.m. at the Francophone Centre. Tickets are \$10. Adults only. For tickets call Emily at 979-0553. Proceeds support the Allinait Arts Festival.

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Pre-school health checkups

Igaluri's public health clinic offers pre-school health check-ups in May and June for children aged four and five. Call 975-4824 to book an appointment.

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Brunch for families

Every Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at House 6594, The Tastinglight Society hosts a brunch for families with children under six. For details or to register call Danielle at 979-6089.

$\Delta c_{\text{H}_2^+} \approx 0.79T_C^{0.66}(C_0 - C_\infty)^{-0.8}$

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Suicide response plans gather dust

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coped with the last school suicide with the help of a support group called *Kajuratsaqtut*, formed several years ago to provide traditional Inuit counselling.

"They're there to support people who may not have anywhere else to go," Quassa said.

But for a problem as big as suicide, which has taken the lives of 14 Igloolik residents since the creation of Nunavut on April 1, 1999, Quassa says they can use all the help they can get.

He's disappointed the GN hasn't sent the suicide response protocols to his community.

"If that's the case, if there are any initiatives... they have to put it out immediately," Quassa said.

Isacette Colleen Hoeltzel, a Fulbright scholar who visited Iqbal last week to learn more about how suicide is handled in Nunavut, says the lack of suicide response protocols was a subject that came up more than once during her trip.

"I don't see any evidence that they are being implemented," she said. "If there are protocols, people don't know about them."

"I see a lot of individuals rising to the occasion, but there isn't a system of support for them," said Hootzel.

"There's a lot of talk. There's a lot of writing. There's not a lot of implementation."

Another tool used by other jurisdictions to combat suicide is a prevention strategy, which the World Health Organization says is an important first step in the battle against what it calls a preventable disaster. Greenland, Alaska and Alberta all have suicide prevention strategies.

Nunavut started drafting its own suicide prevention strategy in March, after officials spent several months dodging the question of when this would happen.

The GN promised to implement a suicide prevention strategy by the end of the life of this legislative assembly in its Pīnastagavut, or "that which we've set out to do," document in 2004.

Premier Paul Okaalik has said a draft of the suicide prevention strategy will be tabled this spring. The house sits next on May 29.

In response to criticism that it's not doing enough, the GN

usually points to the Isak sinageti Inuusimmi Kaujiipatigiti, or Embraace Life Council, which supports community groups with suicide prevention activities such as theatre troupes and sewing groups.

But Embrace Life's activities, as important as they are, have a different purpose than a suicide prevention strategy, which aims to better organize government to reduce the risk factors that lie behind suicide.

Presumably, that includes implementing suicide response protocols that are written, but not put in place.

In 2003, suicides in Nunavut reached their peak, with 37 residents taking their lives. Later that year, a task force formed by the government announced it would cut suicide rates by half by 2007.

In 2006, Nunavut had its second-worst year, with 29 residents taking their lives.

So far, 2007 looks better. Only six residents have taken their lives. But the territory's worst social problems remain, so there's little reason to suspect suicide will disappear from Nunavut soon.

Substance and drug abuse remain high. The same goes with family violence and spousal abuse. School drop-out rates remain around 75 per cent. And 80 per cent of Nunavut's youth can't read well enough to get a government job.

Overcrowded housing only compounds Nunavut's social problems.

Research in the United States and Australia points to how all these factors contribute to making residents more susceptible to suicide

Suicide prevention strategies differ from country to country. Finland placed a heavy emphasis on improving mental health services in its strategy, after the country conducted an in-depth suicide study known as a follow-back study;

That study revealed that firms considering suicide often sought help, but health workers often did not diagnose them as suicidal.

A similar follow-back study is underway in Nunavut, and should be complete next year.