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A New Day 'broken'

Group says justice department 'completely ignored' advice on men's healing program

by Jessica Davey-Quantick
Northern News Services

A Department of Justice request for proposals to take over A New Day program was greeted with resounding silence last month.

The department didn't receive a single application for the program, which provides counselling to men who use violence in their relationships, by the original deadline of April 10. The deadline was extended to April 18.

A New Day is currently delivered by contract by the Tree of Peace Friendship Centre. The contract ends in June.

Bree Denning, executive director of the Yellowknife Women's Society, said her organization has "no interest" in taking over the program because she says the department didn't listen to public consultation.

"They listened to what they want to hear," she said. "We're very much trying to say things about the program, and being completely ignored because it doesn't fit with what they want the program to look like."

Right now, A New Day offers free individual and group therapy for men.

The contract was originally set to expire Dec. 31 but a public outcry caused the department to

extend the contract by six months. In March, the justice department issued a new request for proposals which included significant changes to the program. At the time, Hay River North MLA R.J. Simpson criticized the changes, saying the department didn't appear to follow its own recommendations from a recent program evaluation.

In the updated incarnation, A New Day was set to go from full-time to part-time, as needed, did

"It's not a program anymore, it's more like a course."

Julie Green

away with the individual counselling component of the program and didn't require bidders to have expertise in family violence.

In an e-mail to *News/North*, Leanne Gardiner, director of community justice and community policing for the department,

explained why the department originally did not require bidders to have this expertise.

"The original intention was to ensure proponents would not automatically be excluded from consideration because they lacked specific qualifications," she stated.

Simpson accused the government of "sterilizing the program."

Following a proponent's meeting March 14, the Department of Justice made several changes to the request for proposals.

It now includes requirements that new facilitators have counsel-



BREE DENNING: executive director of the Yellowknife Women's Society, says the GNWT is ignoring what people on the ground are saying about the program - which is why no one has applied to take it over.



JULIE GREEN: Yellowknife Centre MLA says she fears the changes the Department of Justice has made to A New Day may have "broken" the program.

ling experience, usually acquired through a degree or diploma program in the social sciences. The part-time, as needed aspect has changed to all-inclusive hourly rates for the facilitators and clarification of the three phases of the program. The exclusive focus on group sessions remains untouched.

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green is less than impressed with the changes.

"They seem to have taken something that was working generally and broken it," she said. "I don't think they're going to end up with a better program."

She added people looking to access A New Day might have dif-

ficulty doing so because it won't be accessible to people through individual sessions or allow people to continue where they may have left off.

"It's not a program anymore, it's more like a course," she said.

The Salvation Army also declined to bid on the contract, according to Dusty Sauder, the Salvation Army's executive director of the NWT Resource Centre.

"We feel strongly that the guys that are running it now have been doing an excellent job," he said.

Denning agrees. She praised Tree of Peace for running a program that has built trust in the community.

"Even if men haven't been in the program or completed the program, word of mouth is out there, and men know there's a place they can go that is welcoming and non-judgmental," she said. "And that's huge."

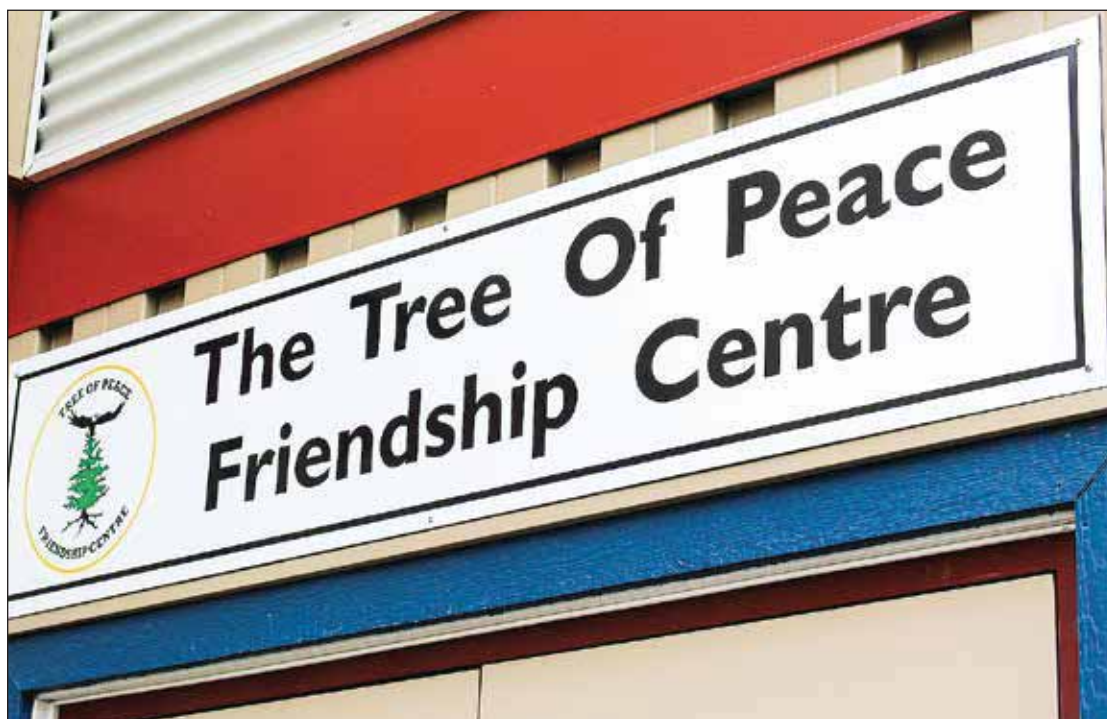
She said she doesn't believe the government considered this when making the changes, adding she feels this is an example of the government claiming it partners with the community but doesn't actually consider feedback when making decisions.

"I think that the coalition against family violence as well as many agencies in town have been saying, 'This isn't what we want to see,'" she said.

"We want to see what's happening at present. And that's been completely ignored."

Gardiner stated the department is on track for the June implementation deadline.

News/North asked representatives of the Tree of Peace Friendship Centre about the issue, and they said they were unable to comment.



A New Day, the only healing program in the NWT for male perpetrators of domestic violence, is currently delivered by a contract through the Tree of Peace Friendship Centre. The contract ends in June.

QUOTE: "Maybe by having our MLAs as ministers we have been getting some benefit. I just haven't seen it at this particular juncture."

- Nihtat Gwich'in Council president Jozef Carnogursky on having both of Inuvik's MLAs in cabinet, page 7

