



Chaire de recherche sur les relations avec les sociétés inuit

Research Chair on Relations with Inuit Societies
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Saimatsianiq Research Project

Workshop on Inuit Knowledge regarding Legal Practices

With Sapummijiit Victim Support Agents and Community Reintegration Officers in Nunavik

May 16-18, 2023, Quebec City

Report



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Introduction

In this report, we present the results of a 3-day research workshop held at Université Laval, in Quebec City, on May 16-18, 2023. The ten participants, all Inuit women, work in the Legal, Socio-Judicial, and Municipal Management Department of the Kativik Regional Government. They are hired either as Sapummijiit victim support agents (hereinafter called “Sapummijiit agents”) or as community reintegration officers (hereinafter called “CROs”). Also in attendance from the same department were Lucie Ouimet, Coordinator of Socio-Judicial Services, and Jovel Darling, a para-judicial officer. During the workshop, we welcomed four guests: Donna Chief and Georgie McMartin; two CAVAC support workers for Indigenous communities in southern Quebec; Marilou Brien-Paquette, from the Direction des Services professionnels correctionnels du Nunavik (DSPC-Nunavik); and Isabelle Martineau, a lawyer and master’s student in law at Université Laval.

The workshop was organized by the Sentinel North Research Chair on Relations with Inuit Societies (Université Laval), led by Professor Caroline Hervé (Anthropology). It was co-facilitated by Suzy Watt Kauki (Assistant Researcher) and Marie-Eve Marchand (Research Professional). The workshop had four goals: 1) provide a space for the participants to share their work experiences and support each other; 2) enable them to discuss Inuit values and ways of working while passing them on to each other; 3) help them build their confidence and capabilities in their work; and 4) reflect on how Inuit can play a greater role in the Nunavik justice system.

At the outset, the participants were asked for their written consent. They could waive confidentiality and have their names associated with their words in all publications based on the workshop. Two of them chose to keep their participation and comments confidential. Two interpreters, Annie Baron and Minnie Amidlak, were present so that all participants could communicate freely in Inuktitut.

The workshop was part of a research project called *Saimatsianiq: Documenting, mobilizing, and promoting Inuit legal practices to preserve social harmony in Nunavik*. Funding came from Justice Canada through the Justice Partnership and Innovation Program (JPIP): “Revitalization of Indigenous Laws” (2021-2024). The workshop was made possible through the partnership between the Sentinel North Research Chair on Relations with Inuit Societies and the Legal, Socio-Judicial, and Municipal Management Department of the Kativik Regional Government.



Roles and Realities of Sapummijiit Agents

Roles

Sapummijiit agents are part of the Quebec CAVAC network (Centre d'aide aux victimes d'actes criminels). They offer services to individuals who identify as victims. Sapummijiit agents talked about how they approach their work and their meetings with victims. Their priority is to get the victim to a safe place. If this has not been done, they ask if the victim wants to call the police. Sapummijiit agents are not first responders, and they cannot help a victim who has not called the police yet.

Sapummijiit agents then provide a safe environment where the victim can talk and open up.

[The victim needs] to be heard, to finally be able to open up. So we have to welcome her, to congratulate her that she did the right thing. Finally, when she is able to be heard, when she finally opened up, then we will have to support her. (Sarah Ekomiak, Sapummijiit Agent)

They will also provide referrals to relevant resource people if the victim needs to speak to social services or other services. This must be done in a way that does not force the victim to do anything he or she does not want to do.

I let them know what my job is. Because my job is to listen, "I hear your problems." But sometimes I can also refer them somewhere else if they really don't want to. We cannot force someone who doesn't want to go to things. But we can refer them to who they might be able to talk with. (Sarah Ekomiak, Sapummijiit Agent)

Issues Shared with Other Indigenous CAVAC Workers

Donna Chief and Georgie McMartin are two CAVAC support workers for Indigenous communities in southern Quebec. They were invited to talk with the Sapummijiit agents and tell their experiences and stories about their work. Their jobs are different and based on specific contexts, while also sharing many similarities.

Both of them talked about the challenges they face at work, such as lack of resources, trouble contacting victims, and how the justice system supports victims, including child witnesses. For example, both have access to a program for child witnesses, whereas Sapummijiit agents are just setting up such a program. So far, social services and youth protection are the ones who have been dealing with young people in court.

They shared tips on doing certain tasks, especially on how to work with victims—how to help them identify their needs, how to deal with children who have to testify, and so on. For example, they discussed how to help a victim fill out the Victim Impact Statement:

I try to refer to the Victim Impact Statement as a story: "Just tell me your story." Instead of individualizing, putting things in a box. We try to make sure that the person is as comfortable as possible in any form and any way. (Donna Chief, CAVAC support worker)



The Victim Impact Statement is a useful tool. Sometimes the victims and witnesses are either shy or dealing with fear, anxiety, or trauma. They don't want to talk in public especially in a court setting. We explain to them: "What you are going to write on the Victim Impact Statement will give you a voice to tell the court and to have the accused listen to what you have to say about how the crime affected you, even if you don't go on the stand." Generally, I get more on the Victim Impact Statement using that approach. (Georgie McMartin, CAVAC support worker)

Roles and Realities of Community Reintegration Officers

Roles

An Inuit community reintegration officer works under the supervision of a probation officer (hereinafter called "PO") and monitors the clients to make sure they respect the conditions of their probation. Typically, when a CRO receives a new case, the first thing is to reach out to the client and explain the probation conditions. The client is welcomed with humanity and kindness. When asked what she can do to help her clients, a CRO answered: "To make them feel like they are humans. I like them to feel comfortable. Human to human. That is what I like to do with them" (Mary Tookalook, CRO).

Because overseeing community work is part of the job, a CRO has to find opportunities for clients and give them different options as much as possible. Unfortunately, the options may be limited by the community's limited resources.

CROs have follow-up meetings with their clients every four to six weeks. Follow-up is difficult, however, because clients do not always show up for their community work or their meetings. In such an event, the CRO will send the client a letter and, after three letters go unanswered, will contact the lawyer. It is important to meet in person, to make sure that the client understands the situation and to check if he has made progress.

CROs sometimes resort to other community resources. Depending on the case, the client may be referred to social services (for example, when a child is involved or, in a matter of domestic violence, when the offender needs help to work on anger issues), although not every CRO is used to making such referrals. When it is written on the probation order that the client must be referred to the justice committee, that instruction is followed, but the CRO is not free to refer a client to the justice committee for any reason. Marilou Brien-Paquette, from Direction des Services Professionnels Correctionnels (DSPC), told the CROs that a new referral form will allow them to refer a client to the justice committee if they feel the client might benefit, even if the probation order does not specify such a referral.

CROs can also call the PO to get an opinion on the case, especially when the case is difficult to handle or when the CRO is uncomfortable taking on the client.



Relations between Community Reintegration Officers and Probation Officers

During the workshop, there was wide-ranging discussion about collaboration and communication between CROs and POs. The CROs said that collaboration had so far been difficult with them. The two groups do not always know each other. New POs are not always aware that CROs oversee community work, and they do not systematically refer ex-inmates on probation to them. Similarly, the workshop participants felt that they did not really know what POs do, what their main mission is, and what their tasks are. Moreover, when a PO leaves a community, CROs are not always told. Finally, CROs are sometimes put in a position of having to teach POs how things work in Nunavik.

The CROs at the workshop had an opportunity to talk with Marilou Brien-Paquette, from the Nunavik Direction des Services Professionnels Correctionnels (DSPC). The discussion gave the DSPC representative an opportunity to clarify the role of POs. Recently, new POs have been hired, a new structure of work has been designed for them, and they should be better prepared for being posted to Nunavik. The CROs and Marilou Brien-Paquette hoped for more collaboration and communication in the future, and they suggested several changes:

- Whenever a new PO comes to a community, the CRO would appreciate being introduced to the PO in person or as part of a team, so that everyone would have each other's contact information and know who they are going to work with.

I wouldn't mind [welcoming new POs and giving them a tour]. [...] During the weekend they are working, but even for a morning. It would be a better introduction to the community without them having to stay in the office. (Monica Angiyou, CRO)

- Because the PO goes to communities on a fly in-fly out basis, it was suggested that the PO's work schedule could be communicated to the CRO in advance and coordinated with the CRO's travel schedule. The two of them could thus arrange to travel together to various communities.
- POs should receive a training program on Inuit culture and the specific features of their assignment in an Inuit community. It was suggested that CROs could participate in this training program (by making suggestions about course content, by facilitating sessions, etc.) and that other Inuit facilitators could provide a workshop. The CROs suggested that such training could include activities on the land and/or traditional activities, for example in conjunction with the Saqijjuq Program.
- The Direction des services professionnels correctionnels (DSPC) is also willing to revisit the 2003 agreement, which defines the roles of CROs, to get them more involved with the POs. The latter must also deal with a lack of resources and are willing to collaborate more with CROs. Marilou Brien-Paquette stressed that CROs are "the experts of their communities." Everyone, including POs, would benefit from more collaboration.



sentence. One reason may be trial postponement. They sometimes no longer remember what they did, as the offence happened many years ago.

They don't remember what they did. So it doesn't make sense. [...] They always say: "Court system never forgives." They can never drop what they did three years ago, even if they have done good for the past three years. They still have to go to the courthouse for what they did three years ago. (Monica Angiyou, CRO)

Many clients are not very receptive to attempts to explain things to them. The CROs described how their clients kept saying "Yes" to everything they were told, just to get the meeting done and over with.

When I get a new client, I like to introduce myself and tell them I am here to help. We want to make them as comfortable as possible. And then I read step by step what the order is. I think it helps a lot, making them comfortable with me. "This is what you need to do..." It helps for them to come to the next meeting. "I am here if you want to call me. You can reach me on Facebook." A lot of them just say: "Yes, yes, yes." I tell them: "You must keep the peace, and be of good behavior. Do you know what that means? What does that mean to you?" I ask them, so they don't just reply: "Yes, yes, yes." (Mary Tookalook, CRO)

There is another reason why some clients fail to comply with their conditions. They already have full-time jobs and responsibilities as providers for their families. They can hardly find the time or the energy to do their community hours.

A lot of them have full-time jobs, at the mines. I don't know why they are given community hours when they don't have the time to do it. They have the time when they are back home, but they want to rest. (Annie Saunders, CRO)

CROs motivate their clients in different ways:

- By using the criminal code to help the client understand the offence: "When they get sentenced, in the criminal code we could just check with them what he or she was charged with. Discuss with them why they are here." (Monica Angiyou, CRO)
- By prioritizing organizations that are more motivating to work for, such as men's and women's associations and the Hunter Support Program

Personally, I don't like to get my client to clean, to do janitorial work, unless they want to. There is more you can do [for] the community to give back. There are already people doing janitor work. I don't want to overwhelm my client, and they don't show up the next day because they don't want to clean. (Mary Tookalook, CRO)
- By staggering the community hours and dividing them up by month or by week to keep the client from feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work to do.
- By considering the client's personal preferences as much as possible. For example, if a client does not hunt, he could still join a men's association or an on-the-land program. He



can then follow what the other participants do and provide some guidance based on his knowledge.

Challenges of Work

Lack of Resources

The Sapummijiit agents and CROs described how they lack resources of different kinds.

First, understaffing is making work harder. This is a concern both for the Sapummijiit agents and for the CROs. CROs are eager to have partners, as each CRO works alone and oversees several communities. Sapummijiit agents are supposed to work in pairs. As such, they provide each other with invaluable support, as they emphasized at the workshop. However, some communities have only one Sapummijiit agent, or none at all. Work would be easier if there were more Sapummijiit agents and CROs. Each of them would have less travel, and each agent would oversee fewer communities. Today, the distances and the travel make it hard for them to do their job and take care of their clients adequately.

We travel by airplane, charter. We have to go to another village if there is court only. So our clients, if they live in another community with no courthouse, they have to wait, and we can't go travelling. It is difficult to visit them. But at least we have our colleagues. (Sarah Ekomiak, Sapummijiit Agent)

Second, they lack resource people who can take referrals. For example, when a client needs therapy or services to help with substance abuse, the available resources are limited. Isuarsivik Regional Recovery Centre was mentioned as a useful resource, but it has a waiting list. The Saqijjuq Program is much appreciated, but so far it is available only in Puvirnituq. The workshop participants were looking forward to expansion of the Saqijjuq Program to all of Nunavik.

If you know at the back of your mind: "Okay, I know that, I know what place you can go." But most of the times even if they [express a need], I won't tell her: "You can go there," because I don't want to promise anything. (Sarah Ekomiak, Sapummijiit Agent)

Third, they lack the resources to take care of their own mental health as justice workers. The workshop participants reiterated the problems they face dealing with their emotional burden at work. The problems result from the challenges reported in this section of the report and from having to deal with difficult situations and traumatized clients who are also relatives and community members. Everyone at the workshop was asking for support, such as therapist consultations and opportunities to meet with coworkers. Moreover, the CROs emphasized their feelings of being left out of access to opportunities, such as training programs and group meetings. They felt they received less recognition than other workers. However, they added that things are changing, and there has been some progress.

I have a therapist. And I don't know how you women do without it. [...] Without it, I don't know if I would be able to stay with this job, because I hear so much that I never knew existed.



around this problem by going in person to remind the client about an upcoming meeting or by calling out to the client in a public place.

Getting Requisitioned to Perform Other Duties

Another reason why Sapummijiit agents and CROs are overworked is because they are often asked by non-Inuit justice workers (such as probation officers or crown prosecutors) to do tasks that were not initially part of their job description. This is especially true in the case of interpretation, which is often needed. They are also asked to do other tasks, such as finding people who fail to appear in court and training new workers, especially non-Inuit ones who are hired to become their superiors. The last task was mentioned several times during the workshop, and participants regretted that their knowledge and expertise were not formally recognized.

Sapummijiit agent, it is my profession. However, to the crown, to the judge, I am an interpreter. I am also their investigator. I have been told: “Find that person,” “Could you do this or that?” “Try to find this, I need to know more information.” If the police can’t do it, this is the role that I have to take. As a Sapummijiit agent, just because I can speak English and Inuktitut, I am also used. [...] This is what we do at the court, we don’t have any power at all. [...] It is okay to help. We are also training the new staff. Even if they are Inuit or *Qallunaat*. [...] I have to give training when there is a new person. And when they hire a new coordinator from the south, we have to teach the person how things work [...] in the court system. And they are going to be our boss. It is like that everywhere, even in the social worker system. Whatever job we are working, we have to give training, and then they become our boss. We give training to our boss. Are we not knowledgeable or skilled to take on these jobs? (Sarah Ekomiak, Sapummijiit Agent)

Victim support agent is my job title. But I sometimes feel like I am the crown prosecutor as an Inuk because I am literally translating what they say in English into Inuktitut. We should be recognized as Inuit. We are victim support agents, but, when it is court time, it feels like we are crown prosecutors. When the Inuit we are translating for are the clients, they look at us. They don’t look at the crown. They give us eye contact. (Nora Ikey, Sapummijiit Agent)

If we need training, bring someone to give us training in the North. There is going to be people who want to train. If you give us criminology training, I’ll go, and you’ll have more probation officers. (Mary Tookalook, CRO)

This challenge was emphasized both by the Sapummijiit agents and by the CROs. In the case of the CROs, they said this was partly due to lack of collaboration and awareness of the CRO’s job.

Honestly, I don’t really know what the POs really do. How they meet with their clients... The only time POs need me is when they need interpreters, for an elder or for someone who doesn’t speak Inuktitut. (Annie Saunders, CRO)



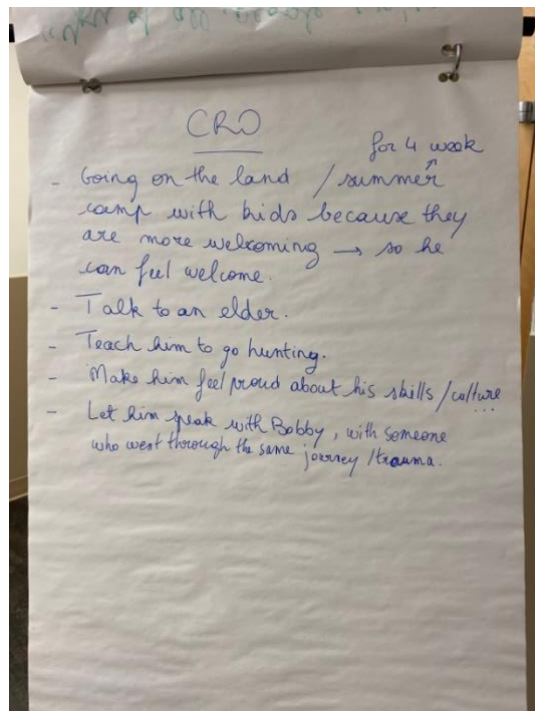
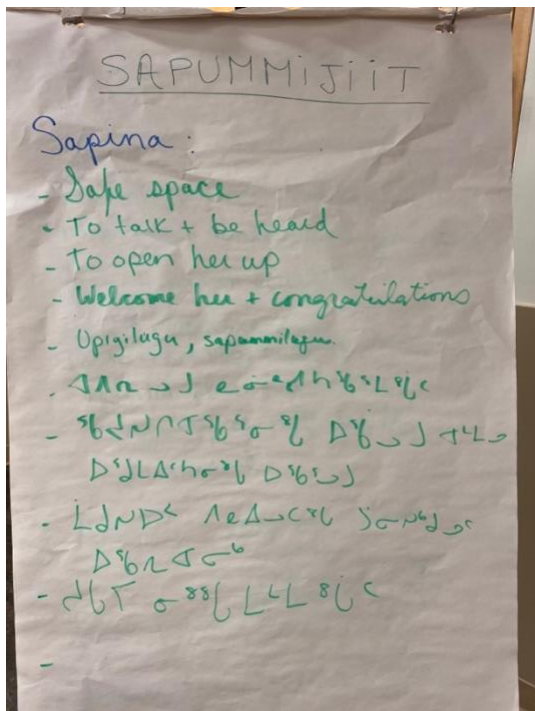
Toward an Inuit Model of Justice

Reclaiming Their Ability to Really Help, as Inuit

The workshop participants discussed the true meaning of their mandate. What role was originally planned for their positions as CROs and Sapummijiit agents? What would their job look like if they were not overworked or limited by bureaucratic issues?

We encouraged discussion through case scenario activities. Everyone had to resolve a situation by imagining that their positions as CROs and Sapummijiit agents had just been created, and that they were free to imagine any kind of solution (see Appendix). This freedom meant not being limited by such things as strict bureaucratic procedures, stressful deadlines, lack of resources, work overload, or interpretation burden.

As a CRO, I feel like I want to wear [my role] more. You are going to give me a client just to do community work? Kind of reintegrating, but I want someone out of detention to come to me, and they will be able to come to me and say: "I need help, what can I do?" That is a reintegration officer. "You are coming back to society. I want to be able to help. Who is going to help you?" A probation officer who doesn't know about Indigenous people? And they are coming two weeks in, two weeks out? I want to be there to help. (Mary Tookalook, CRO)





- During your first meeting with Lucy, you will have to start the discussion and explain the conditions to Lucy. It is important to meet her face-to-face, to see whether she understands her conditions.
- You should do your best to offer Lucy different options for her community work, so that she can do something she likes. You should try to stagger her community hours, and divide them up by month or by week to keep her from feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work to do.
- You should organize follow-up meetings with Lucy every four to six weeks. Because she may not show up for the meetings, you should send letters and eventually contact her lawyer for help or negotiate an extension of the deadline.
- If necessary, you should refer Lucy to other available resource people, such as the justice committee (only if specified in the probation order) or social services.

Case Scenario 3 – An Elderly Man with Violent Behaviour

Bobby (65) has come back to his community after six months in a detention centre for having severely beaten his ex-girlfriend. He has long been known for his anger and violence and had spent time in detention several times before. You must follow his case, but he has no phone and is very hard to reach. Moreover, the victim’s family is still resentful because the woman was severely injured. Bobby is not welcome in his community anymore. Finally, he is not a hunter, and you must find some kind of community work for him to do.

Summary of the participants’ ideas to resolve the situation:

- Bobby should join a summer camp activity with kids (such as a summer camp organized each year in Puvirnituq). He should stay on the land for four weeks and teach them what he knows about the land (how to use wild plants, such as moss, Labrador tea...), traditional values and practices of any kind, etc. Kids are usually more welcoming and easier to talk to. With them, he could be more open and feel accepted.
- Bobby should meet with his family and a mediator, maybe an elder, in order to start a discussion and to make him feel welcome again. They could meet on the land during the summer.
- Age, abilities, skills, and preferences should be considered when you provide a client with the most appropriate options. In this case, Bobby dislikes hunting, and his wishes should be respected. Maybe he prefers camping. Also, you should suggest activities that are suitable for his age. He should not be forced to carry heavy weights.
- Bobby could meet another offender (for example, Marcussie from case scenario 1 for Sapummijit Agents) who has gone through similar difficulties and experienced similar trauma.



Case Scenario 4 – Domestic Violence with Minor Offence

Paulusie and Mary have been in a relationship for the last 15 years. They have had a history of domestic violence in which both could get physically violent with each other, especially when alcohol was involved. Last week, after a loud argument, Paulusie was upset, left the house, and threw a rock through the window. A neighbour called the police, and Paulusie got arrested. He was released on the condition that he would not contact Mary. A few weeks went by. When Mary heard that Paulusie was flirting with another girl, she became jealous. Yet she really missed him despite everything. She phoned and asked him to come and visit her at home. He agreed. While Paulusie was visiting her, Mary confronted him with the stories she had heard, and they again got into a loud argument. The police came and arrested him for breach of condition. Since there were no significant concerns about Mary's safety, he received a community service sentence. However, he is still upset with her and does not show up for a meeting with you.

Summary of the participants' ideas to resolve the situation:

- Your first task should be to contact Paulusie. First send him a letter. If there is no reply, call him and, as a last resort, contact his lawyer for help and advice. If you are free to do so, you should simply go visit him, as everyone knows each other in a community.
- Once you are in contact with Paulusie, you should inform him that not showing up for the meetings or not doing his community work will put him at risk of breaching his conditions. He might not understand the consequences of his actions.
- The relationship between Paulusie and Mary needs to be fixed. Paulusie and Mary could go to couple therapy together. His community service could be replaced with activities for couples, such as going out on the land, in order to resolve their issues as a couple. They could also be referred to the justice committee for help. If they are willing, Paulusie and Mary could benefit from the pilot project on domestic violence cases, which is run by Makivik Corporation under the Alternative Measures Program.
- To deal with their alcohol issues, Paulusie and Mary could go to the Isuarsivik Regional Recovery Centre or participate in on-the-land activities through the Saqijuq Program.



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