

## **Jean Marie River Community Wellness Plan**

### **Introduction**

Jean Marie River (Tthe'k'édélj) is a small Dene community located on the south side of the Mackenzie River, about 50 km southeast of Fort Simpson in the Dehcho Region. There are approximately 70-80 residents, the majority of whom are Dene. Jean Marie River is located in the subarctic region of Denendeh, a region characterized by cold winters and mild summers.

The community was originally established as a trading post and has strong ties to local Dene people's histories, lands and practices. Dene Zhatié language and culture are integral to the community's identity, with traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, and Dene arts playing a significant role in daily life. Of the 70-80 residents of the community, approximately 40% speak Dene Zhatie. Jean Marie River has its own local governance through the Jean Marie River First Nation Band Council (JMRFN) and is a designated authority under Dehcho First Nations. The economy is based on traditional subsistence activities, local governance, and some tourism. Residents regularly engage in hunting, fishing, trapping, and other land-based harvesting activities. Community amenities include a health centre, a school, and a few local businesses. The community is accessible by road and river, though seasonal conditions can sometimes affect travel in the area.

A small community school provides education to children. Higher education requires travel to larger centres such as Fort Simpson or Yellowknife. Basic healthcare services are available locally, with more complex services accessed in larger nearby towns. The community celebrates cultural events and traditions, such as annual hunting camps and Dene hand games tournaments.

While isolation, limited economic opportunities, and the impacts of climate change are significant challenges facing the community, Jean Marie River is a resilient community with great potential for eco-tourism and cultural tourism leveraging the community's rich heritage and natural beauty.

### **Community Engagement**

A community feast and public meeting was organized by JMRFN for the evening of March 20th, 2024, in Jean Marie River to collect feedback for this plan. A consultation with JMRFN staff on the afternoon of March 20th, 2024 contributed to the engagement strategy for the community meeting. A professional facilitator led the community engagement meeting and was supported by a GNWT staff person to record community input.

A graphic facilitation approach was used for the community meeting with an adapted historical scan and strategic visioning discussion generating feedback. Using a visual aid depicting a

journey with a halfway point indicating where we are today, residents responded to the following questions:

- What has been working (in advancing community wellness)?
- What would we like to see more of moving forward?

The feedback generated numerous data points which the facilitator recorded, collated and analyzed. From the historical scan and strategic priorities discussions emerged a wealth of data describing successful wellness promotion activities, programs, and ideas that have been established in the community over the years, as well as numerous possibilities for the future. Each question's feedback was condensed into several main ideas, outlined below.

### **What has been working (in advancing wellness)?**

1. Creating opportunities for our community members to be together
2. Reconnecting with our lands and traditional knowledge
3. Staying fit and having fun in town
4. Connecting our young people to their culture and language
5. Being of service to our Elders
6. Learning to let go and take care of one another

### **What would you like to see more of?**

1. Using technology to fortify our language and culture
2. Developing our community's infrastructure and services
3. Gathering ourselves together to celebrate and advance healing
4. Focusing on childhood development by creating opportunities for learning
5. Enabling our members to enjoy healthy diets
6. Making sure people can enjoy the land safely

The results of the historical scan and strategic priorities discussions were combined with the priorities from the consultation with JMRFN staff and certain findings from the JMRFN wellness questionnaire, elaborating on the community's overall wellness priorities. To avoid duplication, points that restated others were not included. Eight main themes emerged, outlining potential directions for wellness workers to build and support existing wellness programs for Jean Marie River residents. An analysis of the feedback gathered through the Wellness Questionnaires is provided in Appendix A.

### **What are the community's wellness priorities?**

1. Strengthening land-based knowledge and skills for community wellbeing
2. Gathering our community around healing, wellness, and celebration

3. Enhancing our connection to our culture and language
4. Planning the development of our community
5. Supporting mental health and holistic wellbeing
6. Creating healthy opportunities for our young people
7. Building strong connections through media, traditional knowledge, and communication
8. Improving community nutrition and food security

## **Priority Areas, Goals and Actions**

### **Strengthening Land-based Knowledge and Skills for Community Wellbeing**

#### **Vision**

Residents of Jean Marie River embrace the connection between community wellness and engaging with the natural environment through traditional knowledge and land-based skills. The community is both learning and preserving traditional knowledge, supporting activities that enable and encourage residents to visit and respect the land, and ensuring safety and access to traditional harvesting areas for all families who would like to travel to those places. People feel confident to be out on the land as they have access to regular safety training opportunities in the community.

#### **Priority Goals**

1. Develop partnerships in the community to co-produce trainings and initiatives focused on teaching traditional medicines and plant knowledge, land-based survival skills and traditional harvesting practices.
2. Help experience land users preserve and pass down valuable cultural practices around harvesting and travelling safely on the land.
3. Facilitate improved access to the land for JMRFN members.

#### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Develop regular training sessions on traditional knowledge and bush skills.
- Organize community hunts and harvesting trips that focus on land-based activities, making them accessible to all age groups.
- Provide resources and training for safe practices in all land-based activities, such as boat safety and wilderness first aid.

- Convene a community harvesting group to consult with on matters regarding access to the land and harvesting areas. This group can possibly can assist with producing trainings, community events, and land-based trips.
- Ensure that necessary equipment and resources are available to facilitate these activities, such as pails and trowels for harvesting foods and medicines, first aid kits, and survival equipment.

## **Gathering Our Community Around Healing, Wellness, and Celebration**

### **Vision**

Jean Marie River is a community that thrives on strong relationships and cultural pride. Regular celebrations, diverse recreational offerings, and robust community support systems create a vibrant, connected community engaged in healing and the pursuit of wellness. Enhanced facilities and consistent opportunities for the community to gather around wellness and recreational activities ensures that all community members feel connected, supported, and engaged, contributing to a resilient and dynamic daily life.

### **Priority Goals**

1. Jean Marie River regularly hosts feasts, drum dances, and traditional gatherings, enriching community life and preserving cultural heritage.
2. The community enjoys a wide range of recreational and social activities catering to diverse interests, promoting inclusivity and active participation.
3. Infrastructure such as a gazebo at Ekali Lake enhances the community's capacity to host gatherings and social events in inviting and accessible spaces.
4. The community has robust support systems in place for times of crisis, fostering resilience and mutual aid.

### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Establishing an annual calendar of cultural and recreational events for the community and encouraging all age groups to participate and contribute to these events can assist in boosting community engagement. Extending invitations to neighbouring communities to attend feasts and drum dances can bring new energy to traditional events, and developing and maintaining programs for talent shows, sports nights, and movie nights offers community members opportunities to get together and have fun.
- Providing extended hours and equipment at the gym supports physical and mental health in the community. Wellness workers or volunteers in Jean Marie River may need to oversee the

closing and securing of the fitness facilities in the evenings.

- Developing projects like the Ekali Lake gazebo and maintaining spaces for community use can inspire residents to organize community events and projects. Creating plans for regular use of these facilities in community activities can help to strengthen the community's connection to these places.
- Establishing plans and events to bring people together strengthens communication and support networks in the community. In times of hardship or crisis, this ensures effective response and recovery through mutual aid and community support.

### **Enhancing Our Connection to Our Culture and Language**

#### **Vision**

Jean Marie River is a community where language, traditional arts, and cultural practices flourish. Dene Zhatié is widely spoken by many generations of language learners and teachers who offer support at any opportunity. Dene Zhatié is a central part of daily communication and education in Jean Marie River. Traditional games, skills, and arts are practiced and enjoyed by all generations. The community takes pride in its handmade goods, contributing to cultural continuance, land-based harvesting activities, and economic opportunities. The community thrives on intergenerational learning, with Elders actively sharing their knowledge and playing a key role in educating younger generations about traditional practices, language, and cultural values. Cultural events and workshops are consistently present in daily life, fostering a strong sense of identity, pride, and community.

#### **Priority Goals**

1. Dene Zhatié language is actively spoken, learned, and incorporated into daily life, local radio broadcasts and community events.
2. Dene arts and skills such as moose hide tanning, drum making, and traditional games are flourishing through widespread participation, education, integration into regular community activities, and economic opportunities.
3. Elders teach youth traditional skills, knowledge, and cultural values, ensuring the cultural continuity of Dene Zhatié language and culture.
4. The community has ensured the necessary infrastructure and resources to support cultural education, workshops, and community events.

#### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Recruit community members interested in the Master and Apprentice (MAP) language learning model, and support them to undertake the program in the community. Creating

cultural camps that offer immersive learning experiences in Dene Zhatié language and traditional practices would pair well with the MAP approach, and wellness worker positions in Jean Marie River could explore partnerships with education agencies to develop and produce immersion camps and weekly language workshops for all age groups. Developing partnerships with local schools, organizations, and agencies to incorporate traditional practices into their curricula will assist in promoting and supporting cultural education and language learning.

- Incorporating Dene Zhatié language into school curricula and community signage, and starting a daily local radio show for language learners to listen to will contribute to better retention in language learning efforts and develop community capacity in radio broadcasting. Three examples and resources for potential partnerships in the area of Indigenous language radio broadcasting are Nuxalk Radio, CBC North, and CKLB.
- Hosting monthly or seasonal cultural nights such as feasts and drum dances featuring storytelling and language learning activities can assist in reinforcing language use in social settings. Feasts and drum dances offer opportunities to celebrate progress and uplift community members who are pursuing mentorship and training in contemporary education, traditional skills and language learning.
- Organizing a series of workshops led by skilled artists and Elders in arts such as sewing, basket making, snowshoe making, and log cabin building, and communicating these opportunities to community members through monthly newsletters and/or a local radio broadcast will assist in increasing participation.
- Holding regular community arts exhibits and seasonal arts markets to display and sell traditional crafts will develop an awareness of local artists and works. Establishing apprenticeships for youth in traditional crafts and practices, guided by Elders, will ensure that arts and skills are passed onto new generations of artists and practitioners.
- Building or upgrading facilities such as the Old School for hosting workshops, craft studios, language learning programs, and community gathering spaces will support the achievement of these goals. Ensuring that facilities are available and equipped with necessary materials and technology to support cultural education and activities will further support the development of language and culture in the community.

## **Planning the Development of Our Community**

### **Vision**

Jean Marie River works to provide a solid foundation for enhancing overall quality of life and creating a sense of community through well-planned and sustainable infrastructure projects

supporting the holistic wellness needs of the community. A focus on improving, building, and upgrading facilities and infrastructure to support the health and wellbeing of community members includes efforts to enhance community amenities and public spaces, and to provide necessary services and housing.

### **Priority Goals**

1. Jean Marie River residents enjoy access to a modern health centre offering comprehensive wellness resources and facilitating access to programs and initiatives that centre the healing and wellness of the community.
2. Community members have access to a diverse range of wellness resources and a number of wellness facilities and spaces in which to practice spiritual and cultural activities, both in the community and out on the land.
3. Community members have enough space to live in appropriate housing that suits their needs.
4. Elders are provided with supports to attend community events or to reach health services.
5. The community actively seeks to diversify its energy sources and move away from a dependency on carbon-based energy.

### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Build or upgrade the health centre to include modern medical equipment, wellness spaces, and accessible facilities. Offer a range of services including general healthcare, mental health supports, access to traditional healing, and wellness programs. Facilitate health programs and initiatives that reflect the community's needs, such as fitness classes, nutrition workshops, and mental health support groups. Advocating for construction, determining staffing needs, and program integration to provide holistic health and wellness supports to the community will be priorities for wellness workers in Jean Marie River.
- Constructing or upgrading spaces such as a healing centre, an Ekali Lake gazebo, and other outdoor community spaces create venues to offer programs and wellness activities, including spiritual gatherings, cultural workshops, traditional feasts, and wellness retreats. Involve community members in the design and use of these spaces to ensure they meet community needs and preferences.
- Advocate for new housing units that cater to various family sizes and needs, and the renovation of existing housing to improve living conditions and meet modern standards. Provide support services such as housing assistance, maintenance programs, and community housing planning assistance. Conduct a housing needs assessment to determine the need for construction of new units, and renovations on existing housing.

- Develop a dedicated transportation and support system for elders to ensure they can easily access community events, healthcare services, and other essential activities. This program includes transportation, accessibility improvements, and elder-specific support services.
- Conduct an assessment to identify potential alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, or biomass. Implement pilot projects for new energy technologies to evaluate their feasibility and effectiveness. Educate and involve the community in the transition process, including energy conservation and participation in sustainable energy projects.

## **Supporting Mental Health and Holistic Wellbeing**

### **Vision**

Jean Marie River residents have access to initiatives and programs aimed at fostering mental health, emotional well-being, traditional healing practices, and personal development. The community addresses various aspects of wellness, including mental health, coping with grief, addiction recovery, violence prevention, and empowerment through a number of workshops and group activities. Programs for specific groups, such as Elders and men, strengthen community relationships and lines of accountability, while workshops on violence prevention and financial literacy contribute to a confident and resilient community.

### **Priority Goals**

1. Provide diverse mental health and emotional support through workshops, therapy, and community programs.
2. Integrate traditional healing practices with community health initiatives.
3. Create and support groups for Elders, men, and other community members.
4. Address lateral violence and bullying to foster a supportive community environment.
5. Advance personal growth and financial literacy through targeted workshops.

### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Organizing regular grieving and stress management workshops, healing circles, and art-based therapy sessions, and continuing to provide resources and supports for addressing addictions and trauma will address the community's desire for targeted wellness resources in Jean Marie River.
- Conducting on-the-land healing workshops and promoting traditional healing methods within community wellness practices strengthens connections to Dene Zhatié language, culture, and spiritual places. Developing programs for traditional healers to work alongside modern healthcare providers, such as birth doulas and traditional medicine experts, upholds Dene

traditional knowledge and embeds that knowledge within modern community health initiatives.

- Establish an Elders group for social support and cultural activities. This group can be consulted with on matters relating to traditional knowledge and education directed towards youth in the community.
- Develop and support a men's program with workshops focusing on mental and emotional wellness, physical fitness, skills development, and personal growth.
- Offer comprehensive wellness workshops tailored to youth, women, and Elders. Run workshops on lateral violence prevention and promoting lateral kindness. Implement anti-bullying workshops in schools and community settings.
- Offer entrepreneurial workshops to teach business skills and foster economic development in the community. Explore partnering with Entrepreneorth to develop a business plan for the Jean Marie River sawmill. Conduct financial wellness workshops to address financial trauma and to improve financial literacy and management skills within the community.

### **Creating Healthy Opportunities for Our Young People**

#### **Vision**

Jean Marie River fosters the overall growth and development of young community members through diverse programming including traditional knowledge, language learning, contemporary education, health awareness, and practical skills training. The community emphasizes the importance of providing educational opportunities, skills development, recreational activities, and support systems tailored to youth, and young people grow up with a sense of pride about who they are and where they come from.

#### **Priority Goals**

1. Traditional knowledge and cultural practices are integrated into youth education.
2. Health awareness and substance abuse prevention information is promoted among youth.
3. Enhanced after-school and recreational activities for youth engage young people with cultural teachings and healthy opportunities to have fun.
4. Practical skills training and job preparation for youth are provided in community infrastructure projects and youth are provided educational opportunities with a focus on STEM subjects and digital skills.

#### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Expand the School Trapping Program and School Culture Camp to include more comprehensive cultural teachings, language immersion, and hands-on experiences for young people to explore how their ancestors survived and thrived in the past.
- Collaborate with Elders and community members to provide workshops and activities that teach traditional skills and cultural values, such as drum making, snowshoe building, and moose hide tanning.
- Develop workshops and educational sessions on substance abuse prevention and healthy lifestyle choices. Integrate these sessions into the school curriculum and community youth programs.
- Increase the variety of after-school programs, including sports, arts, and academic supports. Re-open the youth centre for social and recreational use and provide structured recreational activities such as youth swimming lessons, language learning, and games nights.
- Offer job training opportunities, internships, and workshops focused on employable skills development. Create partnerships with local businesses and organizations to provide on-the-job training experiences for youth.
- Explore in-kind donations, partnerships and additional funding sources to deliver STEM programs in school, providing youth with hands-on learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

### **Establishing Strong Connections Through Media, Traditional Knowledge, and Communication**

#### **Vision**

Jean Marie River has a focus on improving community communication, enhancing digital and technology literacy, and preserving traditional knowledge. This includes initiatives to restart the radio station, produce community newsletters, enhance digital skills, and create archives for traditional knowledge and stories. Efforts to build a traditional knowledge archive and record stories aim to preserve cultural heritage and traditional knowledge for future generations, while also developing better access to digital media technology and training. These archives and recordings provide valuable resources for education and cultural continuity.

#### **Priority Goals**

1. Re-establish the community radio station and create a regular community newsletter.
2. Improve communication between the Band and community members.
3. Increase digital literacy among community members.

4. Create a community archive to document and preserve traditional knowledge and stories.
5. Document and integrate traditional knowledge into educational resources and community programs.

### **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Restart the radio station, offering training programs for community members to operate it.
- Produce a bi-weekly or monthly community newsletter featuring news, updates, and cultural stories.
- Develop a plan to sustain these media channels through community involvement and possible in-kind partnerships or by seeking additional funding.
- Implement regular updates from the Band through the radio station, newsletter, and digital platforms and create a feedback mechanism where community members can voice concerns and suggestions. Develop a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure timely and transparent information sharing with the community.
- Partner with educational institutions to deliver ongoing digital literacy programs. Offer workshops and training sessions on basic computer skills, internet use, and digital tools. Provide access to resources such as computers and internet facilities for community use.
- Establish a community traditional knowledge team to gather, record, and archive traditional knowledge and oral histories. Reach out to potential partner organizations such as Western Arctic Moving Pictures, the National Film Board of Canada and Reel Youth to produce digital media workshops for community members to learn how to digitize traditional knowledge and to develop digital and physical repositories for storing and accessing these materials. Collaborate with Elders and cultural experts to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the information, and promote cultural awareness and appreciation through community events and workshops featuring this documented knowledge.

### **Improving Community Nutrition and Food Security**

#### **Vision**

Residents of Jean Marie River understand the importance of having a well-established framework supporting healthy eating, food security, and nutrition education. Residents enjoy access to ongoing cooking and nutrition education, regular community meals, and reliable food sources through programs like community gardens and food basket distributions. These efforts aim to enhance overall health, build a strong sense of community, and ensure that all residents have access to nutritious food.

## **Priority Goals**

1. Educate residents on healthy cooking and eating habits.
2. Provide communal meals and ensure Elders receive regular, nutritious food.
3. Enhance food security with a community gardening program to support new gardeners.
4. Ensure all households have access to essential food items.
5. Promote and support healthy eating choices throughout the community.

## **Programs and Plans to Address Goals**

- Implement a series of workshops and cooking classes that focus on nutritious meal preparation. Provide resources and guidance for integrating healthy eating into daily routines, including meal planning and budgeting for nutritious foods.
- Develop educational materials and campaigns to promote healthy eating practices in the community, and collaborate with local nutritionists and traditional knowledge experts to provide ongoing nutrition information and harvesting support.
- Organize regular community meals such as community lunches and dinners to build social engagement and strengthen connections.
- Re-start the Meals on Wheels program to ensure Elders receive nutritious meals delivered to their homes. Develop volunteer programs to support meal preparation and delivery.
- Expand and maintain the community garden to grow fresh produce locally. Offer workshops on gardening techniques, seasonal planting, and food preservation and encourage community participation through garden plots for families and educational activities for children.
- Implement a monthly food basket distribution program to provide basic food supplies to households in need. Partner with local food banks and organizations to support food distribution efforts. Develop a community network for identifying and assisting households with food security challenges.
- Create a support system for residents looking to improve their dietary habits, including access to nutritionists, dieticians, online groups, and traditional medicine practitioners. Organize cooking competitions and events that focus on healthy recipes and ingredients.

## **Appendix A | Community Wellness Surveys**

The Wellness Questionnaire surveys were entrusted to the Facilitator who then digitized and collated the information. The Wellness Questionnaire collected responses on various aspects of wellness from the respondents in Jean Marie River. Below is a summary of the findings based on the data provided.

### **1. Gift Card Preference**

Survey participants expressed a preference for gift cards, with NorthMart and Amazon being the most common:

Amazon: 36.4%

NorthMart: 36.4%

Other (Visa): 9.1%

No Answer: 18.2%

## **2. Definition of Wellness**

Common themes in the definitions of wellness were physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing, a sense of community and a healthy environment. There was an emphasis on being healthy and making healthy choices, taking care of oneself to ensure overall wellbeing, and the importance of a healthy lifestyle with community supports. Physical health was mentioned by 12 out of 20 respondents as a means of feeling fit and free from illness through exercise, regular medical attention and enjoying a healthy diet. Mental and emotional wellbeing was mentioned by 10 out of 20 respondents, who defined this as managing stress, having a positive mindset and emotional stability, and feeling balanced and content. Eight out of 20 respondents indicated social connections and feeling supported by the community as being important. According to respondents, spiritual wellness involves having a sense of purpose, inner peace, and connection to cultural or spiritual beliefs, and 4 of the 20 respondents identified spiritual health as being a component of wellness, underlining the importance of practicing traditional spiritual and cultural activities. Balance and harmony were also identified as being important components of wellness, as well as having a healthy environment and connection to the land.

## **3. Wellness Support Needed**

Three key themes emerged with regards to the types of wellness supports that are needed in Jean Marie River: Recreational Activities, Land-based Programs, and Workshops and Counselling. Respondents expressed a desire for more recreational options, support programs that connect community members with the land, and healing workshops and one-on-one counselling.

## **4. Desired Wellness Programs**

Common requests with regards to wellness programming in the community centred around On-the-Land Camps, Knowledge Transfer Programs, and Workshops for Youth and Elders. Respondents expressed an interest in healing and land-based camps, programs that facilitate the sharing of traditional knowledge, and focused wellness workshops for Youth and Elders.

## **5. Willingness to Help**

When asked about their ability to contribute to community wellness events and activities, respondents showed a high willingness to contribute to food preparation and facilitating storytelling events with Elders.

## **6. Desired Workshops**

Survey respondents outlined interest in two main areas for potential workshops in the community. These two areas are healing and grief workshops that address emotional and mental health, and skills development workshops in topics such as entrepreneurship, interpersonal communication, and social skills.

## **7. Barriers to Wellness**

With regards to barriers or challenges to wellness, respondents identified a need for enhanced accessibility for services and programs, as well as improved communication between the leadership and the community members when programs and services are made available.

## **8. Preferred Timing for Community Feasts/Meals**

Community members are available at different times, with some preferring evenings or weekends for better accessibility.

## **9. Program Participation**

Based on survey responses, there is a high interest in participating in wellness programs, including facilitating and attending.

## **11. Transportation for Out-of-Community Grocery Shopping**

The majority of survey respondents are interested in community transportation services for purchasing groceries and supplies.

## **12. Transportation for Out-of-Community Activities**

Many survey respondents expressed interest in community transportation services to attend carnivals and visit hot springs. Some expressed interest in transportation for educational and training purposes.

## **13. Desired Community Improvements**

Survey respondents expressed a desire for increased community gatherings and events. Some requests were made for a gazebo, gym equipment, and other community facilities, and some requests called for programs to address addiction and promote healing.

## **14. Additional Comments, Concerns and Suggestions:**

Some responses centred the importance of implementing and following through on wellness initiatives. Some suggestions for community wellness included household improvements and monthly food baskets for seniors.

## **15. Tent Availability**

Some have tents or would use one if provided, indicating a potential need for additional tents, stoves and camping equipment.

## **Community Survey Key Trends and Insights**

There is a high level of interest in participating in and contributing to wellness programming in Jean Marie River, reflecting a strong community spirit. There is an emphasis on the importance of land-based activities and traditional practices in promoting wellness in the community. There is a significant demand for more wellness programs, recreational facilities, and community

events. Issues like ground transportation and accessibility to programs are barriers that need addressing.

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