

Best Practice

Buffalo Narrows Economic Development Corporation

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Project Date: May 6, 1996 (ongoing)

THE PRACTICE

On May 6, 1996, The Northern Village of Buffalo Narrows passed a bylaw creating the Buffalo Narrows Economic Development Corporation. The mandate of the Buffalo Narrows Economic Development Corporation is to create viable opportunities for development and stimulate employment through a number of business ventures.

THE PROCESS

During the first two years of operation, operating revenue for the Buffalo Narrows Economic Development Corporation was obtained from the Ministry of Northern Affairs. During this time, the Corporation and several northwest communities entered into a joint venture partnership agreement with the English River First Nation and Thyssen Mining. Revenue from the joint venture and a partnership agreement with Northern Resource Trucking provided new operating revenue for the Corporation. The primary purpose of the Corporation at this time was limited to administration of the Small Business Loans Program and to act as an information centre for individuals looking for employment in the mining industry.

In October 2002, a new CEO was hired. The goals of the new CEO focused on skills development projects aimed at increasing the skill sets of young people in the community to obtain employment in the region. As a result of the activities of the new CEO, a pilot project was undertaken and this resulted in the completion and ratification of the Buffalo Narrows Tourism Strategy and the development of the Buffalo Narrows Tourism committee.

THE RESULTS

In the first year of the Skills Development Project, there were 11 participants, with 60% of those moving onto other work or educational programs. The work of the Buffalo Narrows Tourism committee saw the development of 46 lake front lots in 2004. In 2005, 61 lakefront lots were developed, and the development of phase III is currently underway and will result in 54 additional lots. The revenue from the lot sales was used to finance the paving of 2km street in Buffalo Narrows. Other significant results include the ongoing training and operation of a welding and fabrication plant which currently employs five individuals, as well as the completion of the Fort McMurray road link.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Northern Village of Buffalo Narrows has learned that with the right individuals, economic development can occur in even the most remote locations. A focus on skills training allowed workers to obtain a skill set that they could apply locally and contribute to the development of the local economy. Educating local residents to become part of the local workforce is more beneficial to the economy than having to hire individuals from other communities.