

INTRODUCTION

The Barriers to ID multi-party working group was developed in early 2019 with Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), Ministry of Indigenous Affairs (IAO) and Ministry of Consumer and Government Services (MCGS), now known as Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery (MPBSD), as the leads. The intent was to work collaboratively with several Ontario ministries and Federal departments to better understand the long-standing issues and challenges of NAN members in obtaining ID and to identify permanent solutions to the priorities identified by NAN.

NAN PRIORITIES:

1. Improve access to ServiceOntario services
2. Eliminate fee barriers for delayed birth registrations and birth certificates
3. Recognize customary care and kinship arrangements and First Nation adoption customs
4. Support First Nation led approaches

Obtaining a birth certificate is the first step in establishing ID and is a prerequisite for acquiring other forms of ID and services and benefits, such as status card, driver's license, social services, and Canada Child Benefit.

Significant work was undertaken by the ID multi-party working group and resulted in the development of key documents that further supported the need for program and policy changes, including *Nishnawbe Aski Nation Barriers to ID Analysis, Jurisdictional Review of other Provinces, and Potential Actions to Address Barriers in Accessing Government-Issued Identification in Remote Northern Communities*. NAN, MPBSD and IAO specifically focused on developing a draft Joint Proposed Action Plan outlining several recommendations and actions to address NAN's priorities to be presented to MPBSD and IAO Deputy Ministers in late spring 2023.

An initial meeting held in November 2021 with NAN Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum, Deputy Minister Shawn Batise from IAO, and Deputy Minister Renu Kulendran from MPBSD (formerly MCGS), confirmed ongoing commitment to find solutions and resulted in funding from IAO to host pilot ID clinics in seven NAN communities from May 2022 - March 2023. The funding was approved to cover the cost of travel to communities, ID clinics and all fees related to securing ID.

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY-BASED ID CLINICS

The goal of the ID pilot project was to host and facilitate Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) community ID clinics to support parents/caregivers to register births of their children and apply for birth certificates and health cards. The clinics were also available for adults who required ID. Key learnings and data collected from the ID clinics would further inform and support solutions identified by NAN, MPBSD and IAO.

The pilot ID clinics involved NAN, Keewatinook Okimakanak Board of Education (KOBE), Matawa First Nations Management and ServiceON Vital Statistics Registry Office in Thunder Bay. KOBE and Matawa reached out to their respective First Nations to participate in the training and clinics. ServiceON provided three virtual training sessions to 26 community-based workers from 10 communities and staff from KOBE and Matawa on completing different application forms. Materials were provided to trainees prior to the virtual ID training and included the following; birth certificate application and tip sheet, Statement of Live Birth application with instructions, Delayed Statement of Birth with instructions, Form 33 Statutory Declaration by one parent or a third party.

The community-based workers represented a range of programs that provided support and services to families, such as Indigenous Healthy Babies/Healthy Children, Jordan's Principle, Family Well-Being, and Crisis Teams.

A summary of the feedback form indicated that community-based workers who participated in the training felt more confident in assisting families in the application process and felt that having trained community-based workers would benefit families who did not travel out of their community very often or had difficulties using the online application process. It was also noted that having an individual in the community who could act as a Commissioner of Oath to notarize documents would eliminate delays in the application process.

NAN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES AND TRIBAL COUNCILS PARTICIPATING IN THE VIRTUAL ID TRAINING:

- Aroland First Nation
- Constance Lake First Nation
- Deer Lake First Nation
- Eabametoong First Nation
- Fort Severn First Nation
- Keewaywin First Nation
- Neskantaga First Nation
- Nibinamik First Nation
- North Spirit Lake First Nation
- Poplar Hill First Nation
- Keewatinook Okimakanak Board of Education
- Matawa First Nations Management

LESSONS LEARNED

→ It was beneficial to have ServiceON provide the virtual ID training as they have the knowledge and expertise to answer questions that were raised.

→ ServiceON staff had the opportunity to learn about the challenges and realities in the communities and gained a better understanding of the barriers and complexities.

→ Virtual training provided an opportunity for ServiceON staff, Tribal Council ID Navigators, and trained community-based workers to develop a relationship and engage in reciprocal learning.

→ Recognizing potential issues with connectivity and being prepared to adapt or have a “practise” run with communities before the training to work out any issues.

→ Virtual training was a good platform to get information out to communities, but it still requires hands on learning and experiences in real time to become efficient in completing applications.

→ Recognize that concerns regarding availability of Commissioner of Oath was raised several times and needs to be addressed.

Based on the communities that participated in the training sessions, ID clinics were held in North Spirit Lake, Nibinamik, Deer Lake, Keewaywin, Fort Severn and Eabametoong. Marten Falls was included due to the high number of members without ID.

Working in collaboration, NAN, KOBE, Matawa and ServiceON planned and implemented the ID clinics that were held over two to three days in the communities. The trained community-based workers were contacted to assist with the clinics and to further develop their skills by assisting with the applications. They were also encouraged to let families know about the clinic through word of mouth, posters and local radio shows and what documentation they would need to bring to the clinics.

A community lead was identified to assist with the logistics and NAN arranged travel for NAN, KOBE and Matawa staff. Planning for the clinics was time consuming, and there were occasions where clinics had to be rescheduled for various reasons, or there were delays in travel due to weather, but the planning was integral to ensuring the clinics were well planned ahead of time and ran smoothly once in the communities.

The first clinic held in Marten Falls provided a good learning experience and resulted in additional steps being added to the planning process. This included asking the community lead to provide a list

of band members who would be attending the clinics to Vital Statistics Registry so they could check their system to see if a member was in fact already registered and just required a birth certificate or renewal birth certificate. This streamlined the process and ensured members were applying for the required ID and avoiding delays if they were already registered. Clinics were held over two to three days to reach as many people as possible and to provide an opportunity to attend an evening session. Despite offering clinics over two to three days, several communities requested another clinic be held as some of their members were not able to attend due to illness, out of the community or heard about the clinic after it was over.

Vital Statistic Registry ensured they had staff available by phone during the day to assist with any questions or complex applications. Due to the confidentiality of information required for the applications, all community-based workers who assisted families needed to take an oath of secrecy prior to the clinic starting.

NAN staff were sworn in as Commissioners by the Deputy Registrar General to ensure delayed birth registrations and affidavits could be notified. KOBE and Matawa had ID Navigator positions within their respective organizations already and were Commissioners of Oath as well. It became evident the ID Navigator positions at KOBE and Matawa were key to the success of the clinics.

The community lead kept a log of members names and what they applied for so they could follow up with members after the clinics to ensure they received their ID or if there were further requests from Vital Statistics Registry requiring clarification or need for more information.

As Health card applications are easy to complete, assistance in completing these applications was included in the ID clinics.

After a clinic was held the applications were compiled into a summary report by community on types of applications completed, number of applications completed and associated fees. It was determined that the easiest approach to pay for the application fees was to submit total fees payable through NAN Corporate Visa and submit to Vital Statistics Registry office. Reimbursement of fees was then recovered through the IAO funding.



SUMMARY OF SEVEN COMMUNITY ID CLINICS HELD MAY 2022 TO MARCH 2023

Table 1: Type and # of applications completed. This does not include applications approved.

Community	# of Live Birth Applications	# Birth Certificate Applications	# Manitoba Birth Certificate Applications	# Delayed Birth Applications	# Adult Health Cards	# Child Health Cards	Total
Marten Falls	1	63		7	41	0	112
North Spirit Lake	0	46	22	9	35	16	128
Nibinamik	0	64	4	3	43	23	137
Deer Lake	0	102	18	10	75	40	245
Keewaywin	0	48	20	7	30	12	117
Fort Severn	0	48	6	0	38	13	105
Eabametoong	35	55	0	14	0	0	104
Total	36	426	70	50	262	104	948

Table 2: Additional documentation required to support applications.

Community	# Complex Applications Require Follow Up	# Form 33	# Affidavits	Amendments	Total
Marten Falls	0	0	0	1	1
North Spirit Lake	4	1	5	2	12
Nibinamik	4	1	10	0	15
Deer Lake	10	0	0	0	10
Keewaywin	0	0	0	0	0
Fort Severn	0	0	0	0	0
Eabametoong	0	0	0	0	0
Total	18	2	15	3	38

LESSONS LEARNED

→ Commissioner of Oath is required, either NAN or Tribal Council staff or a community member.

→ Trained community-based workers were an asset as they knew the families and assisted when an interpreter was required to confirm correct spelling and information of the applicant's name, last name, D.O.B.

→ Caregivers/grandparents who could not provide legal custody documents could not complete an application.

→ Confirm that a guarantor is available and in the community during the clinics.

→ Be prepared for members born in Manitoba and have the required Manitoba documents.

→ Two different time zones in NAN Territory and ensuring availability of Vital Statistic Registry staff.

→ There were several complex applications related to death of a parent(s), birth took place in nursing station, plane, or taxi where the individual could not get a Statement of Live Birth.

→ ID Navigator positions at the Tribal Council level were key to the success of the clinics and in providing follow up as well as continuing with additional clinics at KO outside of the pilot clinics.

→ Individuals may experience trauma when asked about their family history and staff should be trained in trauma informed practices.

→ Documents that had incorrect spelling of members name due to translation errors or anglicized names created difficulties that needed to be addressed.

→ Providing ServiceON with community member's names prior to the clinic to determine if they were already registered and to ensure the proper application forms were being applied for eliminated delays and expense.

→ Due to the high volume of applications, a minimum of three trained staff is required at clinics.

→ Issues of confidentiality and finding appropriate spaces in communities.

→ One community has incoming mail service ONLY so there are mail issues, as there is no Canada Post or money order service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the success of the pilot ID clinics, continue to seek resources to continue clinics in communities for the next five years to ensure families can access in a timely manner and avoid large numbers of children/adults without ID.
2. Future clinics will require ID Navigator positions at NAN and at each of NAN's seven Tribal Councils. NAN position could service the Independent First Nations, as well as ongoing training and troubleshooting and collection of data and reporting.
3. Ensure community translators are available when translation services are required.
4. Continue to train and support community-based workers who know the families and can assist prior, during and after the clinic.
5. Ensure follow-up visits to communities to assist individuals whose applications require further information or were sent incomplete based on correspondence from ServiceON.
6. Ensure ID Navigators have their Commissioner of Oath or there is access possibly through Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services to ensure applications requiring notification can be completed.
7. Further establish process with Vital Statistics Registry office staff for continued support to assist with questions and complex situations, as well as pre-screening of community members to determine if a birth has already been registered.
8. Establish a relationship and process with Manitoba Vital Statistics to assist and follow up with Manitoba applications and fees.
9. Develop toolkit on things to consider when hosting ID clinics based on the learnings from the pilot project, templates and data collection tools.

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