

# Case Study

## **Project: *Traditional Arts and Crafts – Soper House, Kimmirut***

### **Background:**

Nunavut has a rich tradition of creativity and artistic ability<sup>1</sup>. Traditional Inuit culture, legends and the arctic environment provide inspiration and distinct themes. Inuit have been using their surrounding materials to create art since the beginning of time. Inuit tapestries, prints, carvings, jewelry, and fine arts have become renowned throughout the world. Traditional arts and crafts in Nunavut have blended traditional knowledge with modern-day techniques. This combination of new and old brings together the practices of our elders and youth to create exciting, innovative art that is truly unique to Nunavut.

Victoria Kayuryuk Mamguksualuq, from Baker Lake once stated that arts and crafts gave the only employment to the uneducated or artistic Inuit<sup>2</sup>. This remains essentially true today in many hamlets. While there are far more high school graduates in Nunavut today there are Inuit who do not wish to further their education. Many wish to remain in their home communities. For many of these residents, creating a piece of art for which they receive immediate financial gain is preferable. Many of our artists are extremely talented; proportionally in Nunavut there are a higher number of artistic people than any where else in Canada.

It is generally believed that roughly 3,000 to 4,000 Nunavummiut participate in the arts sector or cultural industries. The Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association (NACA) do not know the value of artisan end products, the cost of production and the level of effort in that production. If Nunavut is serious about nurturing this sector within its economy, a serious investment is needed. The Nunavut Economic Development Strategy for Nunavut has indicated support for such an investment.

### **Soper House:**

Despite its small population of around 423, Kimmirut is a "happening place"! In October 2002, Quliruakut Arts and Crafts Society of Kimmirut was incorporated with 61 original members. Their desire was to establish a gallery in one of the oldest houses in Nunavut, having been built in 1930 by Dewey Soper, a government scientist. Soper is credited, among other things, with having identified the blue phase of the snow goose. Soper used to do watercolours from the photographs he took while in the north, so it is a fitting tribute to him to have his house used as an art gallery. They worked closely with the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth Website

<sup>2</sup> NACA Newsletter, A Publication of the Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association, Fall 2004.

University of Alberta photography archives in Edmonton, and the Arctic Institute of North America (AINA) in Calgary where Soper's watercolours reside, as well as Soper's son Roly, who was just two years old when he lived in Kimmirut.

In June 2003, Soper House Gallery, operated by the Society, was opened. Kimmirut Jewellers' Society was incorporated in March 2004. Soper House Gallery is a partnership between Quliruakut Arts and Crafts Society, Kimmirut Jewellers' Society, Katannilik Park Visitors Centre, Parks Division, Department of the Environment, GN and the Municipality of Kimmirut. Success of the Gallery is dependant on the ongoing support of all partners until this project is self sustaining.

Without Soper House Gallery, the Quliruakut Arts and Crafts Society and the Kimmirut Jewellers' Society will have no place to store, display and sell the beautiful carvings, jewellery and traditional crafts made by local artisans. The loss of the gallery would also mean that Kimmirut would lose a valuable tourist attraction which would negatively impact economic development of the Hamlet of Kimmirut.

### **Assignment:**

Your hamlet and the residents of the hamlet would like to formally establish an association, acquire funding and provide a venue for artisans create and/or showcase their products. Elected officials and administrative staff of the hamlet clearly understand that traditional arts and crafts enhances the tourism sector, this economic development initiative is desired by the residents of the hamlet and will improve the overall economic development within the community. As with all hamlets, success will be dependant on the coordination, establishment and the ability to find the funding to operate until the operation is self sustaining.

Some of the responsibilities would be:

- Identify whether the hamlet has a sufficient base of artisans to establish and sustain this venture
- Identify whether or not the artisans can and are willing to work as a homogenous group
- Identify whether this economic development initiative is part of the community economic development plan of the hamlet the level of current support
- Identify the type and size of structure that will best support the artisans of the community.

### **Issues to be considered:**

- The on going support of the Hamlet and residents of the community – How do you ensure this will last longer than the council or executive of the association you presently have?
- Can the artisans maintain their support for this endeavour if it is a lengthy process and can they agree on the support required within the community?

- Is funding still available for this type of project?
- Can this project become self sustaining?
- Is there sufficient quantity and quality end products to warrant this project?

**Resources:**

Hamlet Council

Community Economic Development Plans

Department of Culture, Language, Elder and Youth

Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association (NACA)

Local Arts and Craft Associations

Soper House - Kimmirut

Jessie Oonak Centre – Baker Lake