











Going back to the future for a housing solution

Editorial: Our special 4-part series looks into Nunavut's housing crisis

Corey Larocque

Housing might be the most-broken of all Nunavut's pressing economic and social issues. There's not enough. It's not good enough. And it's too expensive.

Solutions proposed by the federal and territorial governments, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and the three regional Inuit associations seem to go in circles without getting much traction.

Former MP Mumilaaq Qaqqaq made housing the cornerstone of her two-year term. She conducted a tour of the territory to witness and document the housing conditions, then shared her report with Parliament. The NDP vowed to keep northern housing on the public agenda and to push for solutions. That was a year ago.

It was more than five years ago that the Senate's Aboriginal Peoples committee studied housing in the North and published a report titled, We Can Do Better: Housing in Inuit Nunangat.

And yet problems persist.

So, when Inuit leader and one-time MP Jack Anawak bent the ear of Nunatsiaq News reporter David Venn about a long-forgotten housing program, it piqued his interest. Anawak told Venn about the Homeownership Assistance Program, run by the Government of the Northwest Territories between the early 1980s and 1992 — back when Nunavut was part of the N.W.T.

Venn spent a year researching the program, culminating with a trip to Naujaat and Rankin Inlet

to meet people who had taken advantage of the program to build their own home — with materials provided by the government along with their own blood, sweat and tears.

The houses are still standing and in good condition

At a time when Nunavummiut watch government continually pump millions of dollars into housing programs that don't achieve their desired goals, why not look at something completely different? Something that did actually get results.

It's why Nunatsiaq News produced this fourpart series — in English and Inuktitut — as a solutions-based look at something that worked before and to ask the question, could it work again?

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When northern hands build northern homes

Part 1: It starts with a couple who built their own house 35 years ago

David Venn Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Martha Hickes, sitting beside her husband, elder Robert Hickes, at their dining table on a fall Saturday afternoon in Rankin Inlet. She lets out a giddy laugh, smiling at the memory and her ability to recall the date without hesitation. Nearly 35 years later, their home stands worn and grey "like an old haunted house" from the outside, Martha tells everybody, though clean and roomy on the inside.

The Hickeses raised a family of six in this house. Their children Sheri, Sandi, Bobby, Susan, Benjamin and Trinity grew up here, and their granddaughter now stays with them. Remnants of bygone days are scattered throughout the living room and kitchen: a painting of a tree and another of a hand dropping blueberries into a pail, portraits, unfinished renovations and repairs.

"We were so excited to move to a new house," Martha says. "It was our home. It helped us to grow, to be homeowners, for the better."

And they built it themselves.

As a young couple, Martha was employed in the public works department in the Government of the Northwest Territories — of which Nunavut was a part at the time — and Robert worked as Rankin Inlet's arena maintainer.

By the time they'd been married 15 years, they were living in a three-bedroom public housing unit with five children and had good incomes. They wanted a bigger space for their family, so in 1987 they applied to the NWT Housing Corp. Homeownership Assistance Program, or HAP for short.

Back then, residents in the territory could apply to

HAP to receive materials to build a home at no direct monetary cost. The housing corporation simply required them to prove they were 19 and lived in the territory, could afford the bills that come with home ownership, hadn't owned a home before and could build most of the house themselves or with friends and family, among a few other criteria.

The Hickeses applied for a lot across from Johnston Cove, where they stand now, looking out their window as the waves come toward them from the water that's just beyond a dirt road and patch of grass. "Nobody's got a view like this around here!" Robert says.

The housing corporation quickly approved their application, and they began building less than 12 months after sending in the paperwork. A package of materials with all the lumber and supplies arrived at their lot in the summer of 1988, and they got to work.

"When we moved in, all my kids had their own rooms and it was more space and a very clean and unused building," Martha says. "You feel at peace, and it's so calming to be in your own home and you don't have to deal with other issues, ugly issues."

Home ownership — let alone the Hickeses' path to home ownership — is hardly an option for Nunavummiut today.

The housing stock in 22 of 25 communities across the territory is in serious, high-need or critical condition, according to Nunavut Housing Corp.'s 2021-2022 annual report. Iqaluit needs to increase its housing supply by 85 per cent of its current stock, while Rankin Inlet needs to increase it by 70 per cent and Naujaat by 69 per cent.

Martha and Robert Hickes are only two of potentially hundreds of Inuit who, predominantly in the 1980s, built their own houses at little to no cost through HAP. Some Inuit, researchers and people who work in the construction and housing industry say HAP was a cost-effective way for the government to provide quality housing and it should be available to the territory's residents again. They argue the benefits are numerous: HAP costs the government less to operate than public housing; there would be less reliance on public housing; Inuit could learn valuable construction skills; individuals can gain pride from building their own homes; and the work could help communities grow their economy.

AT THE BEGINNING of the 1970s, the Canadian government owned most residences in non-resource-based communities in the Northwest Territories as a result of its increasing presence in the North. The federal government transferred some of these units to the territory for subsidized renting, but between the two they still owned a great portion of housing.

Even until 1981, residents owned just 16.3 per cent of the dwellings in the smallest 45 communities, according to a 1986 NWT Housing Corp. document on HAP. The corporation concluded dependence on government housing, "with its negative social and financial costs, would have continued indefinitely."

Meanwhile, in the late 1970s, residents who lived below the treeline began innovating how their communities built housing. They were chopping trees, bucking them into logs and building homes themselves. The territorial government noticed the initiative and began providing materials that weren't available in the communities, such as roofing and insulation, according to a 1987 evaluation on HAP by engineering firm Ferguson Simek Clark.

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Robert Hickes stands at the front window — his usual spot to look out towards Johnston Cove. (Photo by David Venn) ዓንና ዘΔካ ሲኖርጋቱ Δሀረሩ ኒካኒኖ — ርኦውኒ የቦናንት፣ ታዲካ Δኒኒኖውር (Johnston Cove). (ላንትር ኦርኒኒር ርልልና ペッ)

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The idea of providing housing materials to residents and having them contribute sweat-equity was formalized as the Homeownership Assistance Program about five years later in 1983.

In its first four years, the government distributed 438 HAP packages throughout the territory, increasing allocations each year. The goal was to address a growing housing shortage, incentivize home ownership to reduce dependency on territory-owned units, empower

communities to solve their own housing issues and to develop a housing market, according to government documents.

It also led to other positive outcomes, such as eliminating the disincentive to work because there were no income-based cost adjustments as there were with public housing.

It surpassed these goals, according to program evaluators.

"It was a good program and we'd like to see it come back," Martha says. "I know young people that have full-



time jobs are trying to find a home to buy, but there's none available."

Susan Hickes, Martha's daughter, remembers moving into her parents' house at the age of four, admiring it for its grandeur. Now 39 and with two kids, a husband and living in a public housing unit, she sometimes thinks her best chance at home ownership may come when her parents cannot maintain their house anymore and she can return to her childhood home.

"There's absolutely no opportunity in stuff like that now," Susan says, watching her daughter play hockey at Rankin Inlet's Agnico Eagle Arena. "Trying to show your kids a good life, trying to purchase stuff to show them our tradition, and to try and save on top of that — it's hard."

Susan moved into her apartment, a two-bedroom unit in a fiveplex that's a "stopper of the wind," in December 2009 just after it had been built. She and her husband work full-time and they've been trying to buy a home, either prefabricated or modular, but nothing has worked.

A program like HAP, she says, could allow her young family to grow the way she did living in her parents' house.

"I think we're being held back, the people that want to move forward and become homeowners," she says. "Nothing I can do — just live day by day and hope for the best, hope for good news."

Through HAP, the NWT Housing Corp. would provide a client a loan that would be fully forgiven in five years. If the client sold the house before then, they would have to pay back the loan balance. Clients were responsible for building the house, but could receive help from a HAP supervisor. The electrical work was done by a contractor hired by the government.

The average HAP house was about 8.5 by 9.1 metres in size, according to evaluators of the program who also found a HAP unit cost the government 43 per cent less than a public housing unit over a 50-year lifetime.

Residents had the ability to choose almost everything about their home. The government found that by offering a few different housing options with interchangeable

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interior layouts, the program could suit the varying cultural needs of the territory. And it did all this with the help of a project co-ordinator.

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, Alan Robinson would walk around Cambridge Bay and other western Nunavut communities with a briefcase.

He'd meet with potential HAP clients, take them through a catalogue filled with bright drawings of quaint homes and different interior designs; there were different measurements for kitchens and bathrooms, pictures of cabinets, countertops, floors and foundations.

The client would tell Robinson what style and colour of everything they wanted — the house, the walls, the siding — and he would send the information in and wait for the materials to arrive on the following summer's sealift.

"It was a fantastic system. It worked," says Robinson, now 78 and the mayor of Naujaat.

During the mid-1980s, Robinson moved to the territory and joined the NWT Housing Corp. as a project co-ordinator for the Keewatin, which is now largely the Kivalliq region. A carpenter with decades of home building experience, his job was to help residents through the application and construction process and to ensure every approved unit got built.

Over his tenure, he would frequent communities to inspect HAP units. Once, he travelled to Bathurst Inlet to oversee a program similar to HAP, where Inuit were in charge of building their own dwellings.

Robinson speaks fondly of what he and the Inuit he worked with accomplished in those days. When he feels sad he looks at photos from Bathurst Inlet to cheer him up. He tells prideful stories of homes built and the people behind them — one in particular in Gjoa Haven, where he maintains he's "never seen such a beautiful house in all my life."

"Immaculate," Robinson describes it, "the baseboards, the trim, everyth— kitchen cabinets — beautiful." He wanted to hire the builder to finish three HAP houses after inspecting his home. "I said, 'I'll tell you what, I'll make you a deal,'" he recalls, having offered the builder some money. "Guess what," Robinson slams his fist on a table

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in his office, leans in and lets off a grin. "He finished the goddamn three houses and he got the \$15,000."

The program still had its challenges, however, one being the way units were allocated and to whom.

Some said residents who don't have a family shouldn't be allowed to participate in the program; others said people with higher incomes shouldn't be eligible; several clients of the program said politics played a role in who got housing; and at least one person believed the way the program had been advertised excluded those who needed housing most, because they couldn't understand the messaging.

In one community, a researcher found HAP had the potential to exclude women, elders and people who were physically disabled, unless they were a dependent of someone who could build. The researcher stated further that it was designed to help able-bodied people, creating "a certain elitism" as "these less advantaged groups may be left farther behind."

There were also some units that never got finished, and the NWT Housing Corp. would sometimes take them over as public housing. A 1992 document notes there were six communities with unfinished HAP units that may have been taken back by the government; all were Nunavut communities.

There also seemed to be confusion about what the program offered, as some clients when asked about the program thought their home still belonged to the government. Twenty-three per cent of HAP clients said

they couldn't understand the blueprints and so they built based on what they had seen others do.

Forty per cent of clients the evaluators interviewed said their HAP homes didn't have enough rooms, or that rooms were too small, and 14 per cent said the same of their kitchen; there were also many who said there wasn't enough laundry space.

However, the evaluators viewed this as positive because those opinions showed a change in clients' association with housing: they owned it, and so wanted it to be suitable to their liking.

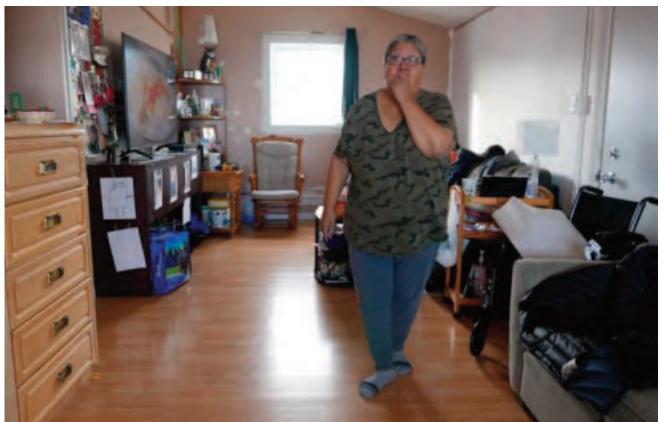
NWT Housing Corp. seemed to address its exclusionary policies by allowing clients to trade sweat equity for cash equity, though it's unclear if it worked. Many HAP clients also enlisted friends and family to build their homes.

Finally, Robinson says the program could have used a few adjustments. Mainly, blueprints should have been simplified and translated into Inuktut.

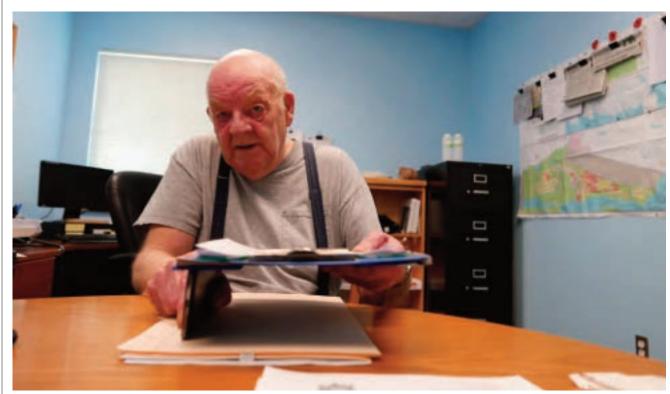
SUSAN'S APARTMENT IS mouldy and too small for her family. She pays \$1,400 a month in rent to NHC. And when she fell behind on payments, Martha used money she'd received from her residential school settlement to pay off her daughter's arrears.

Susan wonders what all their money is going toward and how it's helping her family's future. She struggles for an answer.

"Imagine being given that opportunity, what I could have now if Nunavut still had [HAP]."



Martha Hickes stands in the living room of her Rankin Inlet home on a Saturday afternoon. (Photo by David Venn) LC ΗΔ^ϧኒ α^ϧις >೬ናል^ϧι^ο γ ペርናልኦበና ጋЈ ኦ^ℴΔϧ^ϧσ.(ᡧ᠈ᢣϲ-ኦι^ϧι CΔልና ペ^ο)

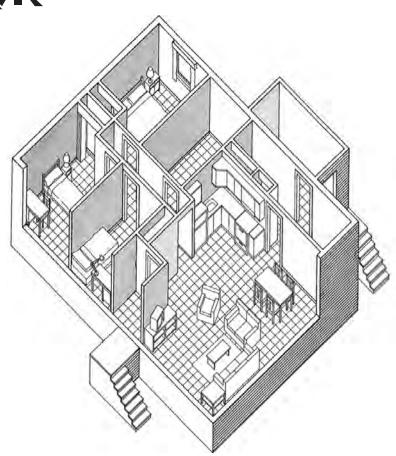




This is a design of HAP A, the first option listed in the NWT Housing Corp.'s HAP catalogue in 1989. It was a two-storey, four-bedroom, 1,416-square-foot house created for families of at least four or more people who want the bedrooms on a different level than the main floor. (Screenshot via the NWT Housing Corp.'s 1989 HAP Catalogue)



At 816 square-feet, HAP D was created with older or smaller families in mind. It's a two-bedroom bungalow. (Screenshot via the NWT Housing Corp.'s 1989 HAP Catalogue)





Alan Robinson received five pictures in the mail circa February 1997 from his time spent in Bathurst Inlet. The pictures are of Inuit building homes through a program Robinson says was similar to the Homeownership Assistance Program. Here, Robert Akoluk works at levelling the ground. (Photo courtesy of Alan Robinson) $\neg d = \dot{\varsigma} \wedge \alpha + \dot{\varsigma$





Robert Akoluk (left) and his son, Tony Akoluk, work on the ground of a soon-to-be home in Bathurst Inlet in October 1996. (Photo courtesy of Alan Robinson) らく くゅっ (ヘラトト) ム・ゆう (ヘラトト) ム・ゆう (ヘラトト・) なっしょう はっしょう なんしょう はんしょう はんしょ はんしょく はんし



The high cost, low return of public housing

Part 2: HAP could help solve the 'long waiting game' of life in public housing

David Venn Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Elder Helen Iguptak had frosted windows, jammed doors, and mould in her public housing units. To solve this, her late husband elder Jackie Iguptak had drilled holes about five centimetres in diameter above their door to replace what was known to them as a "mould thingamajig," creating better airflow.

The couple had lived nearly 35 years in their Rankin Inlet house, courtesy of the Homeownership Assistance Program, or HAP for short. Then in 2016 when Iguptak retired from teaching and her husband from his job as a janitor at the Northern, they realized the cost of homeownership would be too great.

"By the time every bill was taken care of, we only had enough money for one weekend. We had to eat scraps," Iguptak says, chuckling at the memory, shaking her head at the reality. "If I ever get kicked out [now], I'll build my own igloo outside in the snowbanks ... free of charge!"

They paid off their mortgage and moved into the public housing system to receive Nunavut Housing Corp.'s free rent subsidy for elders.

Days spent in the HAP house were stable. Air circulated well and no mould grew because they had a chimney. The only time the house needed repairs or renovations was when her four children had grown older and the family needed more space.

Then, between 2016 and the fall of 2022, the Iguptaks moved into four different public housing units.

The first was a one-bedroom unit. Iguptak slept on a double bed, her daughter on a foam bed at the foot of the double, and her husband split time between the cabin and the laundry room.

They then moved into a two-bedroom in the hamlet's Area 6. Mould began to grow and Iguptak's husband put



holes in the wall, simulating a chimney to de-ice the windows and door. She says it got so cold in the winter that they had to wear snowpants inside.

Iguptak, 71, now houses her daughter and two of her

grandchildren. They are looking for a three- or four-bedroom unit so the family can all be together.

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In the meantime, she says, the unit "needs a renovation big time" — the doorframe, windows, porch — but the housing authority hasn't come around to fix it. "It's a long waiting game," she says. "You keep calling them and nobody shows up."

The Nunavut Housing Corp. supplies 5,955 public housing units in the territory for an estimated 22,831 occupants.

It spent \$224.4 million on public housing in the 2022 fiscal year for maintenance, utilities and other expenses, but only made back \$17.49 million, or 7.8 per cent, of that cost through rent payments. More than \$35 million was spent last year on maintenance alone.

Iguptak's odyssey in public housing is representative of many Nunavummiut's experiences: overcrowding, mould, wait-lists and lack of repairs.

Some say that Nunavummiut building their own homes often means better quality, and a return to HAP could help mitigate many public housing issues, taking pressure off Nunavut Housing Corp. to house nearly two-thirds of the territory's residents.

AFTER FINISHING A DAY of teaching carpentry at Tuugaalik High School, Naujaat elder Gabe Kaunak sits at his kitchen table over a cup of black tea. He recalls the days when many Inuit built their homes through government programs such as HAP and other contracts. He himself used to be a partner in a small business that built homes in Naujaat.

Before Kaunak was a teacher, he was a maintenance worker at the local housing authority for 24 years. He says public housing Inuit built are better quality than other public housing. And yet it costs the government much more today than it did when Inuit were building homes.

"At that time we were contracting, we were trying to prove to people in town that Inuit can work on their own, without the help, without getting anybody in," Kaunak says, adding jovially that the biggest problem he faced was finding an electrician.

HAP should be brought back, he says, as well as more contract work for Inuit-owned small businesses. "Our



houses are still good, the ones we built," he says. "We didn't rush and we didn't hide anything."

In 2021, former Nunavut MP Mumilaaq Qaqqaq produced a report on housing. She visited five communities, including 10 homes in Naujaat. Each was mouldy and overcrowded, with one four-bedroom unit reportedly housing 14 people.

More than 80 per cent of the nearly 1,100 people living in Naujaat are under the age of 40, and 130 residents are

on the waitlist for one of the community's 205 public housing units — 115 of which have been deemed as poor quality, according to a Statistics Canada report.

Nunavummiut attribute the dire condition of these units to different causes. One is a lack of care and attention by southern construction companies in their work, which Clarence Synard, chief executive officer of NCC Investment

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Group Inc., says he would agree "100 per cent" with.

"A lot of companies — not all — a lot of companies, though, are just driven on that bottom line," he says. "'Let's get this job done. Let's get out. Let's make our money.'

"Whereas when I see a company like NCC plus other northerly-owned and operated companies, who — no

matter how this year goes — they're going to be here next year and the year after and the year after ... and they realize the importance of those buildings."

Synard has seen the same things that some Inuit have: for example, companies closing up worksites when there's still moisture trapped inside, causing problems that come out years later.

He says there's an unwritten "Nunavut code," which en-

tails a checklist of housing needs beyond what is called for in the national code, such as having an airlock, secondary exit and cold porch. He often wishes engineers worked in the North so they could see how practical their designs are.

"Some of the minimums within the national building code just aren't enough for up here," Synard says.

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"They're OK, but they're not enough."

In 2019 — prior to the COVID-19 pandemic — public housing cost \$683,750 per unit to build. In the 2022 fiscal year, Nunavut Housing Corp. built 175 public housing units at an average price of \$923,447 each, costing more than \$161.6 million in total.

This does not include administration costs over the life of a unit.

In comparison, the NWT Housing Corp. approved 329 HAP houses between 1981 and 1986, according to government documents. It's unclear how many of these are in Nunavut communities. However, each house above the treeline cost an average of \$49,000, or approximately \$117,000 when adjusted for inflation in 2022, according to the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator.

HAP proved to be a cheaper option for the government to supply housing for its residents. Potentially, if it was brought back in some form it could save the government enough money to, in turn, partially fund construction of more public housing units.

Synard believes HAP could and should be brought back today. But it's important to note it cannot be the only solution to Nunavut's housing crisis, just one part of it.

"If anybody's out looking for one clear solution to addressing housing issues in the North, they're going to become very disappointed," he says. "There's many different avenues to resolving this."

Eiryn Devereaux, Nunavut Housing Corp.'s chief executive officer and president, says the corporation's public housing meets the national building code and best practices in Nunavut.

He says it isn't always the weather, the design or construction that causes mould to grow in public housing units: it's that some units are three or four decades old and people living in them sometimes cause damage by physically breaking things or turning off exhaust fans because they don't like the noise.

"For any kind of contemplation, at all, that we're building crap or garbage, is really, it's just an uniformed

consideration," Devereaux says, adding NHC holds workshops in communities to educate people on maintenance, and wants to hold more of them.

He says if people build their own houses, they're much more likely to take care of them. "They have that connection, they're going to maintain that home and they're going to pay attention to things during construction," Devereaux says.

He adds that if more Inuit were trained and working for contractors, NHC could see a five to 10 per cent price reduction for building public housing.

Martha Hickes, a Rankin Inlet elder and HAP house

"By the time every bill was taken care of, we only had enough money for one weekend. We had to eat scraps."

— Helen Iguptak

owner, takes great pride in the condition of her house and being "the driving force of maintaining the unit" over her three decades of ownership. She says when her children were growing up, they weren't allowed to touch the walls, "not allowed to do any wrecking, nothing. And I used to wax my floors."

It's a trait representative of most HAP owners, as one report states that 60 per cent of HAP owners cleaned their homes daily, 20 per cent did alright at maintaining, and 20 per cent didn't do well.

The ability to be a homeowner has also been proven to help move people out of public housing — out of NHC's responsibility — as some residents would rather live in a HAP house than public units if given the opportunity.

Susan Hickes, Martha's daughter, has lived in a fiveunit public housing complex in Rankin Inlet with her family since 2009. In the years since, the unit has begun sloping, had multiple glycol leaks, and her clothes dryer gets filled with snow every year and her laundry room covered in frost.

Last fall, her five-year-old son was sick for three months with a cough, runny nose and fever. She believes it was caused by the mould that's built up in her bathroom since a pipe burst six years ago from being exposed to the Kivalliq winter's north wind.

Every spring and summer, when it warms up, a "sour, ugly" smell wafts from the bathroom into the rest of the home.

Susan says NHC has never fixed the floors, only removed the insulation to dry for a season.

"When I'm out of town, I wake up normal. And then as soon as I come home, I'm back to my constant daily headaches from all the mould in our unit, which causes stress on my job, stress on my family," Susan says. "My special leave is gone from taking care of my son."

She aspires to own a home and says not only would HAP help long-term tenants become homeowners, it would also open up public housing spaces for those who need it, easing overcrowding.

"We're so tired of living in the small space," she says. Eight per cent of social housing tenants who disclose their salary earn more than \$60,000 per year, and five per cent of them make \$80,000 or more annually, according to NHC's 2022 fiscal year report.

Devereaux says the system is "over-stressed," with people who don't have other options taking up spots for those who earn less.

Nunavut has 3,000 people on the waitlist for social housing, he says, and some might believe that means the territory needs the same amount of new public housing units to meet the demand. But if the option were available, Nunavummiut like Susan and her family would move on to homeownership, freeing up space for others to move into public housing.

"If there was more affordable housing supply..." Devereaux says, "literally hundreds of hundreds of people that are currently in public housing [would] make a transition into affordable, rental housing or affordable homeownership units."

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Tradespeople work on a multiplex in Rankin Inlet in November 2022. (Photo by David Venn) አዉትና ላΓረσ bበሜሪላσቴ bঙዮቴሪ σፕር ለርሲና ጋቦና ዾልናለሲር 2022-ህበና ጋЈ. (ላንትሮኦሁኒ ርሷልና ペ٩)



Building people, building homes

Part 3: Under HAP, 'they built the damn stuff and they were proud,' ecologist says

David Venn Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Returning from an afternoon on the land in Naujaat's early fall, elder David Nuluk sits at his kitchen table in a government-owned house with his wife, elder Susan Nuluk, and two boxes of Pilot crackers. He built this house and several others as a young man decades earlier with nine other Inuit, and maintains they are among the best built in the community.

Nuluk can recall the site details as if he had spent the previous summer building. The floors had no insulation, which would have helped, but they could stay warm throughout the winter because of the way they were pieced together "like puzzles." Houses were built in one season before the snow or rain came and, he says, mould only grew if water spilled during truck delivery.

He and his fellow workers built the "Inuk way," as he calls it, which is preventive, quick and with care.

The world he lived in had changed rapidly from his early years, before he settled in Naujaat. He had been used to travelling by dogteam, spending his summers in sod houses, winters in igloos — one of which he was born in, proudly exclaiming today, "I'm an Inuk! I was born in an igloo. Born in an Igloo is my stripe to be Inuk." He went from having a canoe to a 225-horsepower motorboat, to sleeping in cabins and riding snowmobiles.

"Back in 1968, they first started building houses here in Naujaat. That's when I

learned how to build iglo—" he corrects himself, "the houses."

Contractors had chosen Nuluk to work when he was just 16 because of his ability to speak English. Ten years later, he became the first mayor of Naujaat and worked under contractor Peter Katokra to build five houses near the Northern, with hopes of buying a snowmobile for hunting.

He says he was so poor when he got married that he and Susan, his wife of 50-plus years, couldn't afford a ring.



In 2020, the Government of Nunavut's Department of Family Services found there were 1,200 workers from the south — carpenters, cooks, heavy machine operators — who travelled to Nunavut to work on 50 construction projects spread over 24 communities that cost a combined \$600 million. These were jobs Nunavummiut could have done, the department stated.

Among the reasons the jobs weren't filled by Nunavummiut is that there's no training offered in Inuktitut, no one is qualified to teach in smaller communities, and

> southern contractors do not try to bridge the cultural divide, tending to believe Inuit who aren't certified in the trades can't work on a jobsite, the department found.

> Nuluk built a livelihood around building homes. And some see the Homeownership Assistance Program — where people built their own homes with government-provided materials — as having that same effect. The initiative has been noted to promote individual pride, grow local economies and increase construction skills for potential employment outside of the program.

William Rees found most of this to be true in his March 1990 research report, coauthored with David Hulchanski, on HAP in Fort Good Hope, N.W.T. He concluded the program was "widely perceived to have improved not only the quantity and quality of local housing, but also to have contributed to community pride, independence and self-esteem."

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In the 1980s, Fort Good Hope, a predominantly Denepopulated community on the Mackenzie River near the Arctic Circle with about 590 residents at the time, faced housing issues similar to what many Nunavut communities deal with today.

It had houses that were designed poorly, facing north with a lack of insulation that led to water tanks freezing and falling through floors, and with other issues surrounding permafrost, according to Rees' report. There had been overcrowding, a vacancy rate near zero per cent, and a lengthy waitlist for government housing. Many units were in poor shape and rents were high.

Most hamlets had HAP units allocated to them by the territorial housing corporation. However, leaders in Fort Good Hope were displeased with the way a previous housing program had been operated and wanted to receive money so that decisions were made locally rather than in Yellowknife.

After several years of the program, 32 per cent of Fort Good Hope's housing stock was a HAP or Small Settlement Home Assistance Grant house, freeing up public housing units. (SSHAG was HAP's predecessor and some statistics lump them together.)

In his own words 33 years later, HAP "was an opportunity for people to seize control of their lives a little bit.

"They hung their hat on the pride that they took in this self-motivation, the fact that they themselves made the decisions," Rees says. "They built the damn stuff and they were proud."

Robert Hickes, a Rankin Inlet elder who built his own HAP house, says he felt a sense of accomplishment from finishing the home. Helen Iguptak, another Rankin Inlet elder, says her husband, elder Jackie Iguptak, and others were proud of the work completed.

"They would be proud to have finished the whole house when the men built it. They would feel better about themselves because they built the house," Iguptak says.

"GOOD WEEKEND? BAD WEEKEND?" asks carpentry instructor John McLeod to an open classroom at Nunavut Arctic College's Sanatuliqsarvik trades school.



The Nuluks live in this house — which is one of the several David Nuluk built in the 1970s for public housing. (Photo by David Venn) ወኃላና CኖዊσΓኦርኦላ ΔጎጋΓ — ላΓხናርማናርኦ ላዉ/LԿፒናጭ 1970-ጐቦው Δጎጋሮሊት የወይር (ላንትሮኦሁ ርልልና ዋል)

He gets little reply, except for a mumble on a quiet and snowy morning in Rankin Inlet.

If not for a certified roofer's delayed arrival in Rankin Inlet, students might already have been at a job site building a practice house and gaining experience to join Nunavut's construction industry.

But the roofer has not arrived, and so McLeod has his 14 students converting fractions. "Math here, same as everywhere, nobody can do math." He places a piece of wood with marked measurements on his desk and asks his students to write the fraction and its corresponding whole number.

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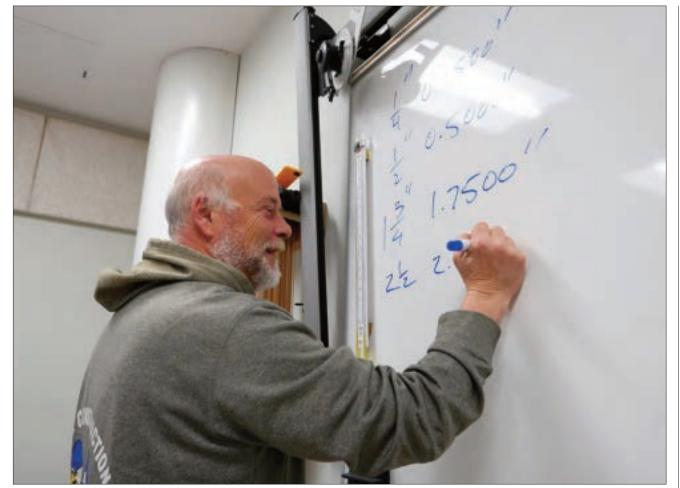
McLeod describes this program, which gives Nuna-

vummiut hands-on experience and a toolkit, as a "pathway to apprenticeship." The lack of worksite experience is why contractors don't employ many Inuit, McLeod says, and even if they do get hired companies often don't train them. This leaves many Inuit to work as labourers.

Sanatuliqsarvik is near capacity, but this isn't the only way to train Inuit for potential employment.

"HAP houses, man," says McLeod, who lived in Nunavut throughout the 1980s and '90s and has 40 years of homebuilding experience. "They should go back to some kind of program like that. It gets people out of [public] housing, it gets people skills, they can use those skills while they build a house to go find work."

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McLeod, who owned a HAP house himself, says they are better quality than many other homes in communities. "So you gotta ask yourself, why is that?"

Aspiring tradespeople used to be able to apprentice with the government for four years until they were a cer-

tified journeyperson, McLeod says, but those days have ended alongside the emerging privatization of constructing social housing.

"Things have to change," he says. Then, clapping between each word for emphasis, he adds, "They have to start training people."

That's why he looks at HAP as beneficial for Inuit who

get trained and companies that get to fulfill local hiring obligations.

Engineering firm Ferguson Simek Clark, which evaluated HAP in 1987, stated the program presents a number of skill-building opportunities, not only in construction but also in administration, supervision, design, inspection and teaching.

If HAP were to operate again, the government should formalize training by having supervisors document clients' work on HAP houses, the firm found.

There were employment opportunities that came with operating the program, such as shipping jobs, and local businesses were noted to have made a profit when many HAP units were built in a community. In 1986, each HAP client would spend on average \$11,000 to cover costs like tools and some materials which, if spent in the community, could help the local economy.

Rees speaks wonders of the program's effects in Fort Good Hope: people who gain administrative and construction skills through HAP have a chance to find employment outside the program; fewer residents would leave the community on account of it offering little opportunity; and people take better care of property if they built it ("I mean, if you spend lots of sweat equity on the construction of your house, you're far less likely to burn it down the following winter").

A few of the benefits Rees points out are particular to the case of Fort Good Hope, which was one of if not the only community in the Northwest Territories to have control over funding. In fact, some N.W.T. staff had said no communities above the treeline — the Qikiqtaaluk region, specifically — could work co-operatively to accomplish HAP's goals in the 1980s, even though several had expressed the desire to.

NWT Housing Corp. staff were reluctant to believe some of the program's ancillary benefits, saying it couldn't

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sustain local businesses, and most materials were bought outside communities, according to Rees' report. The staff also said some economic benefits in Fort Good Hope could have been due to local labourers getting paid to build HAP houses with external funding — a circumstance not available in every community.

And although HAP presents itself as a good opportunity to increase skills in the trades, evaluators of the program in 1987 found many clients didn't care about training and looked at building their house as a one-off event.

Rees reported that a manager at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., which helped pay for the initiative, thought HAP was much too generous, saying of the program, figuratively: "It knocks me out."

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This is a first-year HAP house standing beside a tipi in Fort Good Hope in 1988. (Photo courtesy of David Hulchanski) Þሷ ላናናህ የቃናርጭሩ የሁው ሲያርሙ ሲያርጭ ሲያር ውስ ሲያርጭ ሲያር ውስ ተመደመ ነው። አመር በተለከተ ነው። አመር በተለከተ ነው። አመር በተለከተ ነው። አመር የመደመ ነው። አመር የመደመ

HAP being a handout may be true, but it's less a handout than the government hiring people from the south to come and build housing for communities, Rees says.

He's always looked at the housing crisis in the North as being a result of colonization and multiple levels of government failing to provide support for Indigenous people.

HAP, at least in Fort Good Hope, redistributed power

to the communities the program meant to serve, and built up people through housing.

"If you've got a nanny state, you know, doing everything but wipe your nose, what good are ya?" he says. "HAP got away from that. HAP gave them that opportunity. Even though it's a handout, it's a hell of a lot better handout than if government was doing the whole job from the top down."

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Three red houses (rental units) and a blue house (privately owned but since destroyed), sit in front of a brown third- or fourth-year HAP house near Fort Good Hope's Chief T'Selehye School in 1988. (Photo courtesy of David Hulchanski) ለጐሁላና ላÞ<ጐጋና Δካጋልና (ላጋጭጋላሁካና ልካጋልና) ላካር ጋንህላጭጋጭ ልካጋ (ሴዮΓውሲኑÞውਰ የሃላው ለናበጭ/Lርናንጭ, ኒናበላጭሁውናንጭ bላናቧና ልካጋ ላናቫጋ ለጐሁለዮኑÞርናንጭ Þኖዲኃየላጭ በአርቦኑጐሁው ሴዮΓውጭ ልካጋጭለሊኑÞላጭ ÞL ୭ላና ሀና ዘቅና ታላ በሃርተዛላል ልርጭታላጭውና የአውሮኑጐሁው 1988-ህበናጋህ. (ላንዶሚህላጭ Þペጭሁና ርልልና ዘላኒሳየ)



HAP's end, and prospects for a new legacy

Part 4: Homegrown builders are needed to make housing program work, says KIA leader

David Venn Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At 25 years old, Clara Evalik received materials to build a home in Cambridge Bay. Her six siblings had participated in the Homeownership Assistance Program, too, and she saw it as an opportunity. "It was scary," she says. "But I always wanted to be independent. And I think all Inuit want to be independent, living in their own communities."

Evalik's husband had been working at a Cambridge Bay contracting company and had friends who knew how to plumb and build. She says HAP had been more beneficial for men, but women could access it just the same. Some weren't as fortunate as her, though, and had to hire carpenters from the South to help.

Evalik, now vice-president of economic development at Kitikmeot Inuit Association, thinks about where she'd be if HAP didn't exist — "probably still trying to own a home," she says, more than three decades later.

"I think one of the biggest issues that we've faced is that we don't have enough qualified builders in the communities," she says. "So we need to invest. We need to invest in the communities."

There were 1,071 HAP houses built before the NWT Housing Corp. shut down the initiative in the 1991-1992 fiscal year. The government spent \$75 million over about a decade, with each house costing about \$70,000, or roughly \$130,000 adjusted for inflation in 2022, according to 2021 government documents.

"Clearly, this program seemed to have achieved a lot in a short time, in the most cost-effective way," the documents read. "Many residents today reminisce about this program and how helpful it was for them. The homeownership brought pride and care among the occupants of the units."

It ended, largely, because there weren't enough applicants with the skills to build their own houses, "even with additional supervisory and skilled labour assistance, successful completion became a huge challenge," the report noted.

"I think one of the biggest issues that we've faced is that we don't have enough qualified builders in the communities. So we need to invest. We need to invest in the communities."

— Clara Evalik

Thirty years after its end, Nunavut Housing Corp. is working on what a contemporary suite of homeownership programs, including HAP, might look like as part of Nunavut 3000, the government's pledge to build 3,000 units by 2030, says chief executive officer Eiryn Devereaux.

"We are absolutely excited to think about maybe bringing back a version of the HAP program. Definitely all over that," he says, adding it's too early to share details as nothing has been finalized.

However, introducing a program like HAP, which

worked three decades ago, may not be so simple.

Some Nunavummiut — especially elders — could not afford repairs and had to either leave their homes or let them degrade; some communities struggle with land availability and municipal service infrastructure; and finally, as the NWT Housing Corp. concluded in 1992, some Inuit may not have the necessary construction skills.

The latter is one issue Clarence Synard, chief executive officer of NCC Investment Group Inc., is working to fix.

Synard fondly remembers one of the first calls he received after earning his red seal in carpentry in 2001. A company offered him a job to oversee construction of a fiveplex and sixplex in Kugluktuk. He hung up the phone, shaking, and told himself he wasn't sure if he could handle a job that big.

"I had looked at my red seal and I said, 'You know what, I really don't know if I can do this or not but I have a certificate telling me I can, so I better try it,'" says Synard. "So that's what I'm hoping I can help be a part of in shaping what Inuit throughout the territory [go through]."

NCC recently began offering training programs in the Kitikmeot and Qikiqtaaluk regions. In the summer of 2022, for example, Resolute Bay hosted the High Arctic Training Project, a program NCC says is expected to run until fall 2025.

Under its deal with NHC to build 2,000 of the planned 3,000 units, NCC will offer pre-trades training, including lessons on safety, tools and basic construction. Southern employees now sign a "mentorship agreement" rather than a work contract, so they're "not just hired to build houses, [they're] actually hired to build people."

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Clara Evalik looks onward in Iqaluit's Aqsarniit hotel during a housing summit in 2022. Evalik, a former Homeownership Assistance Program client, says there may not be the skills necessary to run the program again today, but would like to see it return. (Photo by David Venn) PCPS ΔペCト Cdacトの ムット こくはっている こくしょう こくしゅう こくしゅう

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The company hadn't held enough training prior to this, and a program of this scope had not been possible in the past because of the precarious nature of contracting, he says. Nunavut 3000, though, provides the longevity needed.

Synard has goals to see NCC's job sites employ 70 per cent Inuit, rather than its typical 50 per cent. But he says it's not imperative to retain every Inuk the company trains; any lessons learned in the trades will be beneficial, and if it gives people the skills to build their own homes through HAP then that's "a win for the territory."

He also looks at HAP inversely — as a way for Inuit to be worksite-ready without having to go through NCC's training programs. "It's just much better every time we can keep that dollar within the territory as opposed to it going south for imported workers," he says.

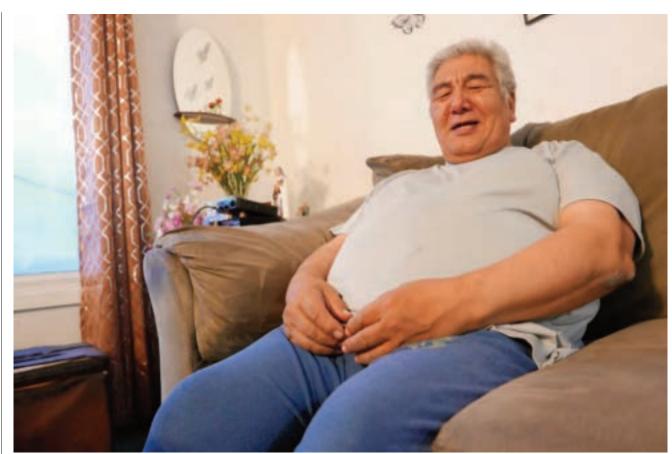
Synard says NCC would even be open to working with Nunavut Housing Corp. to develop training specifically for HAP if the corporation wanted. "Housing is to the core of what I think every family, every individual needs. So I think it's a matter of, how do we develop a program? How do we work with individuals to build up that capacity?"

The percentage of HAP clients who reported having construction skills prior to building their HAP house was 65 per cent in 1984, before decreasing to 58 per cent in 1986, with NWT Housing Corp. staff reportedly being annoyed with the lack of building skills of some clients.

Even several years before the end of the project, HAP evaluator and engineering firm Ferguson Simek Clark said the program had served only 10 per cent of the N.W.T. population that met the monetary requirements, meaning many didn't fit the skill requirement.

The firm concluded prior to the program ending that residents needed to be trained if HAP were to expand; that at the current rate of decline in skills, the market would be saturated by 1990 at the earliest.

Today, Gabe Kaunak, an elder and former homebuilder who teaches carpentry at Tuugaalik High



School in Naujaat, says he believes Inuit have the skills today to build homes. "There are good carpenters," he says, waiting a beat, "— if you get them to work."

NAUJAAT ELDER MICHEL KOPAK, 60, had received a HAP package in 1990. Over the years, he says the maintenance of the home had been paramount to the quality of its construction. "I worked for housing association for 40 years. So I know a little bit."

Beneath dangling retro pop cans strung to his roof ("just for decoration. Why not?") on a Tuesday afternoon,

Kopak says he wishes he could still be working, but he's sick and it's preventing him from doing so.

His house now of 32 years has only known one door and one furnace, which he says is at least 15 years past a good furnace run. The home has held up well, better than most, but it needs repairs — furnace, windows, doors, drywall — as the winters are cold and drafty and mould is growing.

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Elders Joanna and Michel Kopak look up at decorations hanging from the roof of their Naujaat home. (Photo by David Venn) Δ°α° LΔd ላሀ_ ላላ\ ዕ<° የቦናንላኄጋና σልኄህላσና ላናር የቦኖው ለርበኄሀናር የይህር ወይታውና ላጭናናህር መርዕት መርዕት መርዕት የመርዕት የመርዕት

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"We couldn't get the parts for it. We're poor," he says. "We're very poor."

It's a problem not uncommon among HAP clients when they retire or can no longer work. Some, like Kopak, can't keep up with the cost of repairs and others, like elder Helen Iguptak in Rankin Inlet, can't pay utility costs and sell, moving into public housing.

Martha Hickes tells a few stories about HAP owners she knew: one who was an elder living alone in the dark because she couldn't afford power; another client who never treated the house well, wrecking it.

Hickes took out a mortgage to pay for renovations and repairs and wishes she hadn't. Now, she and her husband, Robert Hickes, are covered under the Senior Citizens Home Repair Program, which they received a new furnace from.

The program allows up to \$15,000 in repairs for elders over the age of 60 who don't owe NHC money, something Kopak may now be able to access.

Separately, some communities in Nunavut lack water infrastructure and available land; they may not have the capacity to handle a program that introduces dozens of new homes in a short time.

Rankin Inlet, for example, couldn't handle HAP because of its outdated water infrastructure, says Lynn Rudd, hamlet councillor, lands committee member and former small business owner.

Over the past 20 years, the hamlet's water system hasn't been upgraded although it's been "busted so often that they need work from one end to the other," she says, adding people sometimes see brown residue coming from their spouts.

Hickes, who is also Rankin Inlet's deputy mayor, says the hamlet is running out of lots, which evaluators of the program noted as a concern in the 1980s.

Many hamlets had plans to expand roads and municipal services, but few of the plans allowed for an influx of homes. HAP houses, in some communities, began to form their own subdivisions on the outskirts of town. The evaluators wrote that this could be avoided if the housing corporation helped hamlets prepare for incoming houses over the following decade.

Some say that won't be enough; the federal government needs to fund water system repairs.

There also may be concern over how giving away what is essentially a free home might affect the housing market

A former Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. manager said, according to a report, that "it's a mistake to bring this sort of scheme into communities with active housing markets."

HAP evaluators in 1987 found introducing this program to an active housing market in a larger community — such as Iqaluit — would be disruptive. But this is not likely to affect smaller communities, which typically received more HAP units.

Many clients had no intention of ever selling their house, only doing so if it meant building one that was larger, evaluators found, adding that that would have the positive effect of creating a secondary market. That's what Clara Evalik did when her family grew, leading her to believe the key to developing a market is by introducing more supply.

Similarly, Devereaux says NHC isn't concerned about it affecting the housing market in Nunavut because the primary focus is having more supply. "It's such a unique market. How do you describe a market that's such a small number of homeownership units?"

Devereaux has been with NHC for about 30 years, first joining as HAP fizzled out in the early 1990s. "I think at

some point it kind of just — you know, there's not an infinite number of families that want to take on the responsibility of building a house themselves."

Three decades later though the client base has returned, with uncertainty surrounding just how big it is. By spring or summer of this year, NHC will have a better understanding of what program may emulate the old HAP.

"In all honesty, if we introduced a new program similar to HAP where we would say to potential homeowners, 'We will provide you the material package and a little bit of assistance, you gotta put in the sweat equity..." Devereaux says, "I really do think that there's a bunch of people now across Nunavut that would jump on it."

LYNN RUDD WASN'T ALIVE to watch her elders build homes during the North Rankin Nickel Mine run from 1957 to 1962, but she remembers them talking about it, seeing that the structures are among the sturdiest in the hamlet "because they're still standing!"

"Elders that have passed on used to say, 'I helped build those units,'" she says. "And that would come with it: the ownership, the pride that you've helped build it and the recognition that people can have and say, 'People believe in me and I am doing this.'"

It's a similar feeling that Clara Evalik got decades later through HAP: "It's an Inuk pride thing."

They'd both like to see HAP return. And former HAP project co-ordinator Alan Robinson tells tales of some material packages being left out for years, foundations not being laid, or how he'd have to travel to other communities to finish unbuilt houses.

Even with some dysfunction, he supports it.

"This HAP program gave freedom to the people," he says. "Freedom. Freedom."

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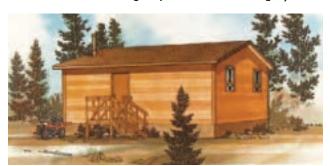
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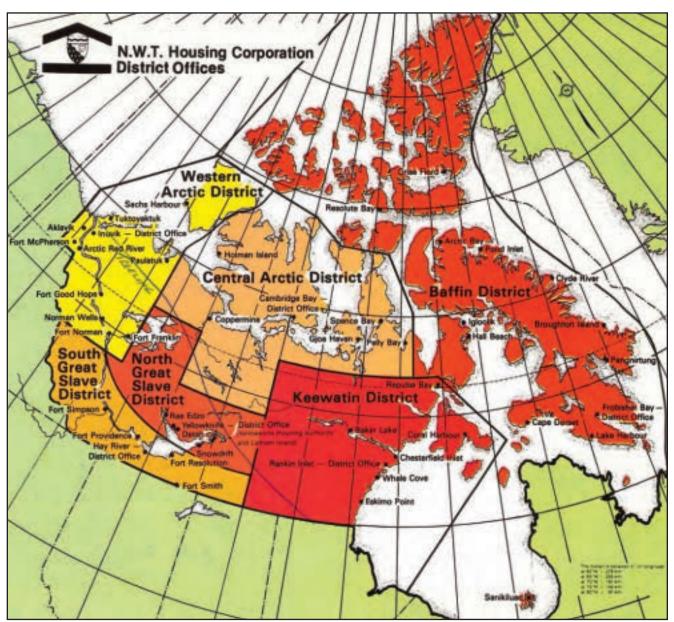
HAP E, according to NWT's housing corporation, was a very popular option. The bungalow is 1,120 square-feet, has three bedrooms and had three different floor plans that could switch up the interior while keeping the exterior the same. (Screenshot via the NWT Housing Corp.'s 1989 HAP Catalogue)



The one-bedroom HAP F was the smallest option at 576 square-feet. It was made for a single person with no family or an older couple. (Screenshot via the NWT Housing Corp.'s 1989 HAP Catalogue)



For families who wanted a one-storey house and had a big lot to build on, HAP G, 1,156 square-feet with four bedrooms, was a good option. (Screenshot via the NWT Housing Corp.'s 1989 HAP Catalogue)



This map of the Northwest Territories in 1986 shows the different regions of today's Nunavut. (Screenshot via the NWT Housing Corp.) Cad Daalde Dacade 1986-L 4% Calcade Alacade Alaca

