

## **Indigenous Housing Strategy Confronts Homelessness in North Bay**

*North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre seeks meaningful collaboration to expand housing supports*

**North Bay, January 25, 2021** – Today, the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre (NBIFC) has released a paper on the state of housing and homelessness amongst the city’s Indigenous population, outlining a strategic approach to address this crisis. The four-part framework includes recommendations for increased funding, data sharing, collaboration and culturally-appropriate services. By working in alignment with the city and mainstream organizations to co-develop programs and services, NBIFC is confident real progress can be made to end homelessness in the community.

Indigenous people of North Bay account for about 14 per cent of the city’s population but make up 42 per cent of the city’s homeless. The reasons for this disparity stem from both historical injustices and present-day inequities.

With the vast majority of funding going to mainstream services and supports, NBIFC and its coalition of urban Indigenous service providers remain chronically under-resourced. In order to create further evidence-based solutions, the coalition also needs access to data, which must be co-collected, analyzed and shared in a fully transparent manner with all service providers.

As part of the solution, NBIFC is developing Suswin (Nest) Village, 30 units of transitional housing. This much-needed support space is expected to be completed by Fall 2022. NBIFC is actively seeking necessary funding for building and staffing costs.

“Our vision is to create a place where community members feel welcome,” says Kathy Fortin, Executive Director, North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre. “We provide safe, warm and supportive shelter, with access to the Friendship Centre’s programs. To achieve stable housing, community members need these wholistic healing and wellness supports.”

The Suswin Village Project is the outcome of the Suswin Navigator Support Program. Launched in 2017 with the help of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, it was designed to help homeless Indigenous community members navigate supports and services, and find a place to call home. From providing for basic needs such as food, clothing and crisis support to education and training, Suswin Navigators have increased the likelihood that participants find their way to the help they need with a 63 per cent housing success rate in its first three years.

The key to its success has been fostering culturally-safe and trauma-informed care, working with partners across the community and providing training to non-Indigenous service providers. The need for such care stems from generations of colonialization, marginalization, abuse and resulting discrimination that have made Indigenous clients distrustful of mainstream supports. Providing wrap-around services in a culturally specific, welcoming and familiar environment is needed to help rebuild trust and provide a deep sense of safety, allowing healing to take place.

Following in the footsteps of partnerships developed between municipalities and Friendship Centres in London, Peterborough, Dryden and Red Lake, NBIFC seeks meaningful collaboration with local municipal governments and organizations. In addition to proportional distribution, transparent and accountable allocation of funds ear-marked to address Indigenous homelessness is needed to properly address the current and ongoing crisis. Beyond emergency COVID relief funding, reliable and sustainable sources are vital for long-term planning and success.

“Indigenous service delivery agencies are deserving of increased agency, autonomy, and respect. We know the unique needs of our community members and how to address them. Our goal is to also partner with mainstream services as effectively as possible to achieve better outcomes for the entire community,” says Fortin.

Building a relationship of understanding and respect between Indigenous, mainstream and municipal agencies is central to alleviating shared challenges such as homelessness. This work is part of the larger efforts between NBIFC and the City of North Bay to improve supports and services for Indigenous people in the community. NBIFC looks forward to further discussion with the City of North Bay about the *Declaration of Mutual Commitment and Friendship* later this year.

### **North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre**

North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre (NBIFC) improves the quality of life for First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people in the urban environment of North Bay by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access and participation in society and which respects Aboriginal culture distinctiveness. NBIFC provides a wide array of programs and services to support Aboriginal people of all ages. The Centre is a gathering place for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people where Aboriginal culture is celebrated, friendships are made, knowledge and skills are shared, and good times are enjoyed.

[www.nbifc.org](http://www.nbifc.org) | Facebook: [North-Bay-Indigenous-Friendship-Centre](https://www.facebook.com/North-Bay-Indigenous-Friendship-Centre)

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