

MOU Signings for Service Delivery with Aboriginal Communities

Today marks a significant step forward for the delivery of programs and services to Aboriginal communities in Labrador with the signing of three Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).

At events held today (Tuesday, November 6), the Honourable Charlene Johnson, Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, met with members of the Nunatsiavut Government and Innu First Nation leaders to sign MOUs that will improve planning around the safety and well-being of children and youth, as well as enhance service coordination and delivery in the Innu and Inuit communities.

"Leaders within the Nunatsiavut Government, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, and the Mushuau Innu First Nation, as well as Provincial Government officials worked closely together to determine what would best serve the province's Aboriginal children and youth," said Minister Johnson. "These MOUs provide the framework for improvement in overall service accessibility and effectiveness while recognizing the unique culture in Aboriginal communities."

The MOUs also establish expectations and a process for service coordination, which includes securing access to rights and benefits accrued to Innu and Inuit children and youth, as well as ensuring coordination with services operated by the Nunatsiavut Government and the two Innu First Nations such as child care service, family resource centres, group homes, medical facilities and shelters all of which are important in supporting individuals on a child protection caseload.

Minister Johnson was joined for the signings by the Honourable Nick McGrath, Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs and the Honourable Felix Collins, Minister for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

"The Provincial Government remains focused on the needs of Labradorians," said Minister McGrath. "I am very pleased to see these agreements being signed, and I am confident that they will help meet the needs of the Aboriginal communities in Labrador."

This new model for service delivery will be unique to Aboriginal communities and recognizes the need for Innu and Inuit involvement in the overall implementation of departmental programs and services.

"On behalf of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, it has been very rewarding to see the MOUs come to fruition through the effort of all those involved," said Minister Collins. "This is a very positive step forward for the delivery of services in Labrador Innu and Inuit communities."

During the signing event this morning in Nain, Minister Johnson, Minister McGrath and Minister Collins met with Sarah Leo, President of Nunatsiavut, and Patricia Kemuksigak, Minister of Health and Social Development of the Nunatsiavut Government.

"We are pleased to be part of this new service delivery model as it is intended to ensure that the best interests of Inuit children and youth are met," said President Leo. "The MOU promotes an effective and efficient working relationship between the Nunatsiavut and Provincial Governments by facilitating the continued sharing of information and to enhance this sharing for the best interests of Inuit children and youth."

Principle components of all MOUs include establishing a process for sharing information on Aboriginal children and youth who are currently on the caseload of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services; as well as creating a Planning Circle that maintains consistent representation from both the department and Aboriginal organizations. The Planning Circle will review the shared information regularly in order to identify specific and practical ways to improve service delivery within communities and for children and youth on the department's caseload.

"We are very concerned about the high number of Inuit children and youth being placed into care," says Minister Kemuksigak. "With this MOU, both levels of government can work together to ensure the children being placed will have culturally-appropriate care, and that plans can be put in place to support parents."

A joint-signing event held this afternoon in Happy Valley-Goose Bay was attended by Minister Johnson, Minister McGrath, Minister Collins and Keith Russell, MHA for Lake Melville, as well as Chief Andrew Penashue of the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, and Chief Simeon Tshakapesh of the Mushuau Innu First Nation to celebrate the signing of a MOU with each of the Innu First Nations.

“The signed MOUs are a great step forward for the community, involving a united effort and fresh approach by community members,” said Mr. Russell. “This will have a positive impact for children, youth, and ultimately the future in Labrador.”

The importance of recognizing the Aboriginal culture of children and youth in Labrador was determined through consultations with stakeholders and continues to be deemed a top priority for the department.

“I am pleased to see the province committing to working closer with our Innu staff and community services,” Chief Penashue. “Only by working together can we properly care for Innu children and youth at risk. “I, and the new council in Sheshatshiu, look forward to hearing positive results from this MOU.”

Through the new *Children and Youth Care and Protection Act*, the identity, culture and community connections of Aboriginal children and youth shall be considered when providing programs and services.

“The MOU is very encouraging,” said Chief Simeon Tshakapesh. “We are hopeful that this MOU will help us move forward with treatment for children and youth in our community.”

Budget 2012: People and Prosperity affirms the Provincial Government’s funding commitment to children, youth and families with a total investment of \$200.5 million for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

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Photo#1: The Honourable Charlene Johnson, Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, and Patricia Kemuksigak, Minister of Health and Social Development, were joined by the Honourable Felix Collins, Minister for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs; the Honourable Nick McGrath, Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs; Nunatsiavut President Sarah Leo; staff of both the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services and the Nunatsiavut Government; as well as Inuit elders and foster parents for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services and the Nunatsiavut Government in Nain on Tuesday, November 6, 2012.

Photo#2: The Honourable Charlene Johnson, Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services was joined by Chief Andrew Penashue of the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation and Chief Simeon Tshakapesh of the Mushuau Innu First Nation for the signing of Memorandums of Understanding between the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services and each of the Innu First Nations in Happy Valley-Goose Bay on Tuesday, November 6, 2012.

Photo#3: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador officials and Innu First Nations leaders come together to mark the momentous occasion of a joint MOU signing event which will enhance service delivery in Aboriginal communities. (left to right: Paul Davis, Minister of Transportation and Works; Kevin O’Brien, Minister of Municipal Affairs; Keith Russell, MHA for Lake Melville; Nick McGrath, Minister Responsible for Labrador Affairs; Felix Collins, Minister for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs; Charlene Johnson, Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services; Chief Simeon Tshakapesh of the Mushuau Innu First Nation, Chief Andrew Penashue of the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation; and Deputy Grand Chief Jeremy Andrew for the Innu Nation of Labrador) – November 6, 2012

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