

Children, Seniors and Social Development

January 26, 2018

Minister Dempster Reaffirms Provincial Commitment to Address Over-Representation of Indigenous Children and Youth in Care

The Honourable Lisa Dempster, Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, following a meeting with federal, provincial, territorial and National Indigenous Organizations held in Ottawa this week, is reaffirming the province's commitment to address the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care.

This week's meeting examined key causes that lead to high rates of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in care. The meeting included discussions on provincial, territorial and federal participation to achieve the goal to keep First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth safe, healthy and thriving within their families, communities and culture.

This week's meeting also provided the opportunity for Minister Dempster to support the Innu's request for full federal participation in the inquiry into the treatment, experiences and outcomes of Innu in the child protection system.

Newfoundland and Labrador has undertaken a number of initiatives toward addressing the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care in collaboration with provincial Indigenous governments and organizations. A comprehensive list is included in the backgrounder below.

Any work provincially will be done in collaboration and cooperatively with Innu Nation, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, Mushuau Innu First Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, NunatuKavut Community Council, Miawpukek First Nation and Qalipu First Nation.

Quote

"It is necessary for partners, including the Federal Government, all provincial Indigenous governments and organizations and my department to work collectively to address the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in our care. This week's meeting was productive and had a great deal of interesting and thought-provoking discussions. By working together, it is my hope we can achieve our goals to ensure Indigenous children and youth are safe, healthy and thriving within their families, communities and culture."

Honourable Lisa Dempster

Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development

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BACKGROUND

The Provincial Government has undertaken the following initiatives to address the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care:

Inquiry into treatment of Innu children in NL child welfare system

On July 5, 2017, the Provincial Government and the Innu Nation entered into a Memorandum of Understanding that outlined their mutual intent to pursue an inquiry into the treatment, experiences and outcomes of Innu in the child protection system.

Innu Round Table (IRT)

The IRT was formed in 2012 as a successor of the Labrador Innu Comprehensive Healing Strategy. The IRT is an Innu-led tripartite group (consisting of the Innu, and provincial departments of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD), Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, Health and Community Services, and Justice and Public Safety, and federal departments of Indigenous Services Canada and Health Canada) focused on reviewing matters of mutual interest to ensure progress and resolve concerns. The work of the IRT is implemented through the IRT Secretariat, which was created for a coordinated administration of the common priorities of Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, Mushuau Innu First Nation and Innu Nation. CSSD participates in an IRT pre-meeting specific to child welfare issues with Innu and federal officials. This forum offers an opportunity to address issues of mutual concern.

Working Relationship Agreement

Building on the MOA signed with the Innu Nation in 2012, on September 30, 2015, a new Working Relationship Agreement (WRA) was signed between CSSD, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, Mushuau Innu First Nation and the IRT Secretariat to improve service coordination and information sharing. The WRA outlines a number of mechanisms for collaboration on joint case planning, information sharing, service coordination and systemic issues to meet the needs of Innu children, youth and families. Since 2015, CSSD has provided the IRT with \$100,000 for a Community Liaison Social Worker to support the Innu to carry out some of the functions in the Working Relationship Agreement in both Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

Legislative Review

CSSD has conducted a legislative review of the Children and Youth Care and Protection Act. The review provided an opportunity for CSSD to consult with provincial Indigenous governments and organizations on their concerns and identified areas where amendments were recommended. Policy areas under review included Information Sharing, Prevention Services, Licensing and Regulation of External Agencies, Permanency Planning for Children in Care, Youth Services, and Services to Indigenous Children, Youth and Families. Based on input received from Indigenous

governments and organizations, CSSD has identified several legislative amendments to strengthen services to Indigenous people.

Foster Care Partnership

CSSD has engaged in discussions with the Nunatsiavut Government to develop a framework for a pilot program to increase foster home capacity in Nunatsiavut. The creation of additional foster home resources in Nunatsiavut would allow Inuit children and youth to be placed in foster homes within their community and culture, thereby reducing the need for children and youth to be placed in foster homes or Level 4 placements outside of their communities. PRIDE training (training for foster parents) occurred in Rigolet, Makkovik and Postville in 2017. These sessions are co-facilitated with Nunatsiavut Government staff whenever possible.

Level 4 Placement Resources

In November 2015, CSSD, Nunatsiavut Government and Key Assets Newfoundland and Labrador Inc. entered into a service agreement for the implementation of a proposal for Level 4 Staffed Residential Placement Resources within Nunatsiavut Government communities to decrease the number of Inuit children and youth in care being placed outside of their communities or the Labrador region. At present, there are three Individual Living Arrangements established which has helped to satisfy immediate placement needs for children while maintaining family and cultural connections. CSSD is also actively working with the Innu and Indigenous Services Canada to expand residential care options in the communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish.

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7:45 p.m.