

# BIKIIWEWINIG NINDAWAASHISHIIMINANAK

BRINGING OUR CHILDREN HOME INITIATIVE

## OTHER ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

01

Message from  
Ogiimaakaan  
Bringing Our Children  
Home Initiative

02

Mental Health  
Support  
Administration

03

Office Space  
Upcoming  
Events

### MESSAGE

## Message from Ogiimaakaan

I am pleased to provide my message in this inaugural newsletter of, Bikiiwewinig Nindawaashishiiminanak, Bringing Our Children Home Initiative. I extend my greetings of hope as we begin another year and hope that our lives will come to some normalcy as we journey through the pandemic.

Since finding the 215 missing children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, a lot more missing children have been found. There were 139 residential schools in operation across Canada and only a small number of sites have so far been investigated. As more First Nations seek the truth, more of our missing children will be found. It will be so as we begin our Bikiiwewinig Nindawaasshissiminanak.

On August 25, 2021, Lac Seul First Nation hand delivered a proposal to Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Deputy Minister at a Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) meeting. The proposal was submitted with a 3 Year budget forecast. The annual average requested is \$7 million for each year. ISC has since provided interim funding in the amount



Chief Clifford Bull | Lac Seul First Nation

of \$1 million and one-time funding more than ½ a million for mental health support. Ontario has also committed to providing \$200,000 for mental health.

On September 22, 2021, the Chiefs-in-Assembly, at a SLFNHA meeting, passed Resolution #21-17 authorizing Lac Seul First Nation to lead to administer the Bikiiwewinig Nindawaasshishiiminanak. Lac Seul is administering the Initiative on behalf of 33 First Nations and its partners, SLFNHA and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC).

I am pleased to inform you James Cutfeet, will be the administrative lead for the Initiative. Since November 2021, he has

recruited administration staff, mental health professionals, a residential school survivor and an office space in Thunder Bay.

Another positive development is an internet email domain is being established and is registered as bikiiwewinig-nindawaashishiiminanak.org. A dedicated phone number is also being setup, and staff will monitor the incoming of emails and phone messages. Only a few staff will have access to incoming email and phone messages, to protect the privacy of survivors, families and any person who shares information.

As the Initiative begins searching for missing children, I urge those that will be retraumatized to reach out for support. The work that is ahead of us to find our missing children will affect survivors, families, and communities across our region, more than ever, we need to support one another.

Kiishemanito Kashawenimiikoonan.

## OVERVIEW

# Bringing Our Children Home Initiative

Bringing Our Children Home Initiative began momentum after the July 14, 2021 Gathering at Lac Seul First Nation. Lac Seul First Nation developed a proposal and hand delivered it to Indigenous Services Canada Deputy Minister Christiane Fox. The proposal is a 3 Year funding submission with a total projected budget of \$22,247,500 million or an average of \$7 million annually.

On September 22, 2021, the Chiefs-in-Assembly, hosted by the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA), passed Resolution #21-17, supporting and giving authority to Lac Seul First Nation to administer the Bringing Our Children Home Initiative on behalf of 33 First Nations. The Resolution also authorized Lac Seul to work with partners, SLFNHA and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council. On November 2021, key milestones were achieved.

Lac Seul First Nation, after its October 2021 community assembly, consented to appoint James Cutfeet as Director of Operations for Bringing Our Children Home Initiative. Subsequently, following the community assembly, the Lac Seul Council, in a duly convened meeting, formalized the appointment. Secondly, Indigenous Services Canada, approved interim funding in the of one million for startup costs of the Initiative. On January 11, 2022, a letter of approval was received from Canada, along with Ontario's commitment of the initiative.

The approved funding allows the Initiative to contract for services, a psychologist and mental health counsellors. Mental health support will be necessary to assist the initiative Team when travelling to the 33 First Nations. The trauma of the residential school survivors will surface, and the anguish of long-lost missing children will



James Cutfeet | Director of Operations for the Bringing Our Children Home Initiative

be felt throughout the communities. The task of the mental health support unit is to support survivors while in the community and identify trauma care resources for further assistance.

The November-December 2021 activities associated with Mental Health Support Recruitment, Administration, and Office Space did not become aligned until the close for Christmas holidays.

## UPDATES

### Mental Health Support

A meeting took place with a mental health counsellor in November 2021. At the meeting, names were provided to contact for Bringing Our Children Home Initiative mental health support. Contacts were made with the mental health Counsellors

referred. The counsellors referred expressed an interest in the Initiative.

The challenged encounter throughout the recruiting process for mental health support was, the demand for counsellors exists throughout with the 33 First Nations and points beyond. The First Nations are receiving mental health funding to hire or contract for services. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the demand for mental health counselling with the general population. To find mental health service field is competitive for counselors and rates of remuneration.

The Bringing Our Children Home Initiative was fortunate to receive expressions of commitment from a psychologist and from two metal health counsellors in December 2021 without a projected starting date of service for January 24, 2022. Unfortunately, the start date for travel into the communities is not possible. The First Nations are experiencing a rise in COVID-19 cases. The communities have implemented travel restrictions for non-essential services until further advisement.

In the meantime, the mental health support recruits will be made aware of the pandemic impact in the communities and contract for service with the Initiative is temporarily delayed. In interim, an alternate solution is to be explored.

### Administration

The first position to be recruited was the Director of Operations for the Initiative. The position became operational November 1, 2021. Thereafter, a temporary administration assistant was recruited. Bringing Our Children Home Initiative positions were posted, the Administration Assistant, Team Community Coordinators and Manager. The response was dismal. Through other forms of recruitment for the positions and adjustments, Administration now has a Program Assistant, a Manager, was acquired through secondment due to lack of applicants, and the Team Community Coordinators will be on full strength by end of January 2022.



# Office Space

A home for Bringing Our Children Home Initiative began in December 2021. A few locations were visited. There were a couple of office spaces that were ready for occupancy. One office space had no room expansion, and the other office space was perfect. An adjustment, to divide the space, was required which the property owner had no interest in doing. On December 20, 2021, an office location was secured with an 'email in principle' to rent to the CEO of Happy Time Tours. A subsequent email on January 4, 2022 was sent, agreeing to rent space at 685 Beaverhall Place at Thunder Bay. The office spaces are in the process

of construction, and it will be ready for occupancy February 2022 at the latest. In the short term, Initiative staff are working remotely. Initiative budget negotiations continue with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). ISC has a program authority level of five (5) million annually. The Initiative budget was adjusted from 7 million to 5 million to remain within the ISC program authority. The Initiative's reductions or anticipated shortfalls, other funding avenues are examined, such as, Ontario is cost sharing with ISC on the mental health support component. A provincial Crown entity is also in discussion, exploring how their funding can support the Initiative.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Leadership Presentations - Feb. 2022

Leadership in each of the communities will be invited to a leadership presentation to go over updates regarding the Initiative, as well as discussing upcoming engagement sessions in each of the communities.

### Website Launch - Feb. 2022

In an effort to streamline communications to all Survivors that attended Pelican Falls Indian Residential School, the Initiative partners will be launching a website!

[Bikiiwewinig-Nindawaashishiiminaanak.org](http://Bikiiwewinig-Nindawaashishiiminaanak.org)

### Survivors Working Group Meeting

The Survivors Working Group will be established throughout February and are slated to meet in **March 2022**. The Survivors Working Group will help establish and guide the processes of the Initiative.

## CONTACT

A phone line was established for all Survivors of Pelican Lake Indian Residential School to share their stories, records and information.

**807-738-3282**

Please call the National Residential School Crisis Line at **1-866-925-4419** if you or someone you know is feeling distressed.





# Gathering in Lac Seul First Nation Bringing Our Children Home July 14th, 2021



Thank you to all of those who attended the July 14th, 2021 Bringing Our Children Home Gathering, a special thank you to the Survivors who came out to tell their stories.