

Letter Head

Date

Boozhoo,

Re: Letter of Support to Fort Frances Tribal Area Health Services – Wiidookodadiwin Project

This letter is to express support for Fort Frances Tribal Area Health Services (FFTAHS) proposed Women's Shelter. Over the last few years, we have seen an increased need for safe housing. The reasons are primarily stemming from human trafficking, homelessness, potential homelessness, increased mental health related incidents, gender based violence and poverty. COVID-19 has only increased the need and made it more immediate.

The need and conditions are real and impacting on the quality of life for people in crisis situations and in need of mental health support. There is a huge housing shortage for individuals within the Rainy River District.

There have been significant increases in human sex trafficking and domestic abuse amongst the most vulnerable. Not only is the southern Area of Treaty #3 at increased risk of human trafficking due to the innate vulnerability of First Nations women and children, the geographical location poses significant dangers to clientele. Fort Frances shares an international border with International Falls, MN and is approximately 2 hours from one of the largest Human Trafficking ports between Canada and the US. Secondly, we are on the passing highway between two central hubs, Winnipeg and Thunder Bay. FFTAHS provides case management, coaching and mental health supports; however has identified that safe, supportive transitional housing for survivors of human trafficking is a significant service gap within the area.

Within the Rainy River District and Southern Treaty Three catchment area, there is only 1 Women's Shelter located 150 Km to the East of Fort Frances. The catchment area has been significantly under resourced in social supports for vulnerable individuals, and safe housing is a top priority. This poses significant challenges as this one shelter does not provide adequate shelter support for the entire catchment area. An investment for a Women's shelter in the central location of Fort Frances, Ontario with an occupancy of 12 beds would have significant positive impacts on a social systems level.

The Mamow Ahyamowen partnership (supported by ICES) released a Mortality report (1992-2014) identifying that 60% of all deaths in the Rainy River District Community members occurred before 65 years of age, compared to 22% of Ontario. 118 deaths of every 1,000 Community members is 1.7 times the provincial average. 3.3 out of 10 deaths could have potentially been avoided with timely intervention.

We acknowledge the efforts of FFTAHS in providing culturally based healing services and wrap around supports for Treaty #3 citizens in the Rainy River District. Accessible, secure and safe temporary housing that is connected to cultural healing has been an identified need within our area. The proposed Women's Shelter by FFTAHS will help address this current service gap.

We fully support the efforts of Fort Frances Tribal Area Health Services as they pursue the development of a Safe House. We look forward to working and partnering with them in creative ways to help bring renewed health to the women and LGBTQ2S+ individuals in the region.

Miigwech,