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Executive Summary

The Indigenous ideal of living “a good life” in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving “to always think the highest thought”... Thinking the highest thought means thinking of one’s self, one’s community, and one’s environment richly. This thinking in the highest, most respectful, and compassionate way systematically influences the actions of both individuals and the community. It is a way to perpetuate “a good life,” a respectful and spiritual life, a wholesome life.¹

Indigenous girls and young women comprise the most marginalized, exploited and frequently victimized population group in Canada. The roots of this tragedy are found in the ongoing effects of colonial oppression evidenced by myriad and extreme social and economic inequities (NWAC, 2010; Ruttan et al, 2010; Amnesty International, 2009; Novac et al, 2002; RCAP, 1996; Status of Women Canada, 1993). Although it has long been recognized that Indigenous girls and women experience disproportionately higher and far more brutal forms of harassment, sexual exploitation, violence and murder there is still no coherent, integrated strategy to protect, support, and strengthen them.

Stopping the victimization of Indigenous girls and women requires moving away from a ‘deficit-based’ mindset and thinking of them, their communities and their environments “richly.” Traditional Knowledge is the foundation of post-colonial practice: re-conceptualizing Indigenous women, their families, and their communities “richly” means recognizing and enhancing their attributes of courage, wisdom, humility, humour, strength and resilience.

The community-based research study described in this report was carried out by Minwaashin Lodge to assess the feasibility of a kin-home model of care for ‘at risk’ Inuit, Métis and First Nation girls ages 14-18 in the City of Ottawa. The term ‘at risk’ in this context applies primarily to girls ages 14 to 18 at risk of being, or who have been taken into care by the Children’s Aid Society including: adolescents whose parent is entering a treatment program or at risk of relapse, or

whose family, foster or adoptive situation is at risk of breakdown, or who are living independently but struggling. A review of case files conducted by Minwaashin Lodge and the Youth Services Bureau for this study indicates 41 young Aboriginal women presently on their caseloads fit this demographic.

A Whole-Family/Community Response to Young ‘At Risk’ Aboriginal Women

Through this feasibility study an innovative model of care is proposed that draws on traditional Indigenous teachings about ‘a good life.’ These teachings reflect and promote an integrated, ‘whole-family’ response to Indigenous youth and family well-being; an approach that honours the practical, life-sustaining wisdom embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. The ‘traditional’ leadership role of Indigenous women in reweaving family and community wholeness is a central feature of this model which protects ‘at risk’ Inuit, Métis and First Nations youth by restoring responsibility and control back to their cultural communities.

The proposed kin-home is a ‘stand-in’ extended family/kin/clan cultural model which provides a stable, protective and homelike living environment, trauma-informed supports and culturally safe services for up to fifteen Inuit, Métis and First Nation young women ages 14-18 annually. Four beds will be available for long-term residents, two beds for occasional, respite care overnight and/or on week-ends/holidays, and two beds for six, 12-week placements for youth whose parents are entering residential treatment for addic-

¹ Cajete, 1994:46 (emphasis added)

tions. Under the administration of Minwaashin Lodge, the proposed kin-home would be staffed by two live-in 'parents'; one full-time Case Manager; a half-time Youth Cultural/Recreation Coordinator; four visiting 'Grandparents', two visiting 'Aunties' (age 30+) and two 'Big Sisters' (age 19-29).

Indigenous girls and young women need and deserve greater protection and respect. Adolescents who are 'at risk' due to conditions outside of their control such as poverty, family breakdown or parental addictions need and deserve culturally safe, nurturing, protective environments in which to heal. They need and deserve a wide variety of relationally-based, developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning and decision-making; and for care that is delivered by members of their own cultural communities, that enhances and expands their social connections, sense of belonging, relational competence and sense of family/kin/community. They need and deserve opportunities

to experientially learn self-care and interdependence from trusted others in order to trust their own inner wisdom and resources. And from strong, confident Indigenous women role models, they need non-judgmental support to resist the widespread and deeply entrenched racist, sexist stereotypes that confront them daily in the streets, the schools, the workplace, the media and popular culture.

Minwaashin Lodge has a proven record for innovation and collaboration in the delivery of high quality, cost-effective community-based programs and services, including a 24/7 residential shelter for abused women and their children. Since its inception in 1993 Minwaashin Lodge has taken a leadership role provincially and nationally in promoting the social and economic empowerment of women and in revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge to end violence against Indigenous women and girls. The proposed kin-home is another step toward achieving this vision.

Methodology

Information for this feasibility study was collected through the following activities: a review of the literature; a review of Ottawa service provider community consultation reports and recommendations over the past five years; file reviews from Minwaashin Lodge and partner agencies; Minwaashin Lodge Board/staff planning sessions in 2010; and meetings/discussions with providers of youth and counselling services in Ottawa who have taken a leadership role in systems improvements including Tungasuvvingat Inuit, the Youth Services Bureau, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, the Centre for Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma, and the Robert Smart Centre. Relevant local reports and recommendations toward strengthening Aboriginal youth and their families that were instrumental in shaping this report include the following.

1. Capacity Building Needs and Priorities of Urban Aboriginal Communities in Ottawa, Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition and the United Way/Centraide Ottawa, 2009
2. Feasibility Study for Proposed AYNPHCO Group Home for Aboriginal Youth, Michael Chettleburgh, Astwood Strategy Corporation, April 2009
3. Challenging Transitions: A Profile of Early School Leavers Aged 15 to 24 in Ottawa, Social Planning Council of Ottawa, October 2008
4. Ottawa Final Report, Urban Aboriginal Task Force, March 2007
5. Report of a Community Consultation Process in Support of an Action Plan for Aboriginal Youth and Their Families in the City of Ottawa, Minwaashin Lodge-Aboriginal Women's Support Centre, 2006
6. Moving Forward: Report on Community Consultation for the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, 2006
7. Final Report, Protecting the Circle: Aboriginal Crime Prevention Symposium, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2006
8. Health Needs Assessment of Urban Aboriginal Youth in Ottawa, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2005
9. One Voice: Report of the National Urban Inuit Workshop, Tungasuvvingat Inuit, 2005.

Context: Indigenous Youth in Canada

Aboriginal youth living in urban areas face major disadvantages in comparison with other Canadian youth when measured against every social and economic indicator.²

Indigenous children and youth in Canada continue to bear the brunt of social and economic inequities arising from colonialism; they live the reality of unjust social conditions and marginalization on a daily basis. The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (2007) and UNICEF Canada (2009) report that half of Canada's Aboriginal children live in poverty and 57% of off-reserve First Nations children living in large cities are from low-income families; over 50% of these children live in low income housing compared to 21.5% of non-Aboriginal children.

Indigenous youth experience significant health problems including higher rates of malnutrition, diabetes, disabilities, substance abuse, homelessness and suicide. Health disparities are especially pronounced in the area of adolescent sexuality and dating including high risk alcohol use/sexual activity, risk of FASD, unplanned pregnancies and sexually contracted diseases at younger ages than in the general population. Higher levels of psychological distress among Indigenous youth are reported as being associated with younger age, female sex, early loss of parents or a relative, and a smaller social support network (Banister and Begoray, 2006; Ruttan et al, 2010). Female Aboriginal

Indigenous young people are often criminalized by what are actually violations by States of their human rights obligations. These include racial discrimination, enforced poverty, economic marginalization, failure to protect children from all forms of abuse including sexual exploitation, and denial of access to traditional lands, resources, economic and subsistence activities.³

youth are 7.5 times more likely to die by suicide than female youth in the general population (Ruttan et al, 2008:35).

The Child Welfare System and its Impacts

Indigenous youth are over-represented in both criminal justice and child protection systems. Although the forced removal of Indigenous children and youth from their families, communities and cultures is most often associated with the residential school era, it continues today unabated through the child welfare system. Presently in Canada there are more Indigenous children in care than at the height of forced residential school enrollment. Percentages of Indigenous children in foster or group home care range from one third to over 40% of the total children taken into care largely as a result of family socio-economic conditions and neglect rather than abuse (Ruttan et al, 2010; Blackstock et al, 2004).

Frequent disruptions, moves and school changes impact negatively on school performance in ways that may perpetuate the cycle of poverty; as well, frequent moves while in the care of Children's Aid increase the risk of behavioural and mental health problems. A study of Native girls identifies uprooting as a pervasive, recurring reality of their lives. Those involved with the child welfare system more frequently experience homelessness and report more intense experiences of prejudice by authorities than other homeless youth (Ruttan, 2010).

In recent years, researchers have identified high rates of suicide among youth within child welfare systems. Child welfare involvement is also associated with attention problems and aggressive behaviours: one study reports 40% of children age 5 to 17 in home-based foster care experience these problems, a rate that is 8 times greater than in the general population.

² Canadian Standing Senate Committee Report on Aboriginal Peoples, 2003:86 (emphasis added)

³ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, International Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Indigenous Children and Youth in Detention, Custody, Foster-Care and Adoption, April 2010

Symptoms of psychological distress serve as a strong warning of potential suicide attempts (Gough, 2007). Indigenous girls in detention are also especially prone to self-harm (Fillmore and Dell, 2005).

Six major risk factors have been identified that are associated with self-harm by adolescent girls: experiences of abuse and violence, family disruption and trauma, social isolation and lack of healthy peer relationships, weak ties and involvement with peers in community activities and lack of access to resources, poor personal health, and social structural factors related to family poverty and transient living conditions. The role of past trauma through abuse, neglect, grief, and separation from family or boyfriends was especially emphasized (Fillmore and Dell, 2005).

Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Murder

Any trauma that detaches children from their families, communities and cultures increases the likelihood of involvement in commercial sexual exploitation. Once a child or youth loses such basic parameters as safety, shelter and sustenance, their vulnerability forces them into situations whereby the sex trade can become the only viable alternative for survival.⁴

Indigenous children and youth experience disproportionately higher risks for sexual exploitation, violence and murder. Factors that place Aboriginal girls at higher risk for violence include: being involved with child welfare; isolated from family and community; targeted/stalked for the sex trade; substance abuse; and poverty (NWAC, 2010, Amnesty International, 2009, Save the Children, 2000). A national consultation project conducted by Save the Children Canada reports Indigenous children as young as 9 years of age are lured into the sex trade and in some communities, 90% of the sex trade is Indigenous (2000). According to a national four-part series on Aboriginal Girls and Women Victims of Prostitution Trafficking in Canada the average age of Aboriginal girls who are human trafficked is between 7 and 12 years.⁵

Aboriginal women are 5 times more likely than other Canadian women to die as the result of violence. The Native Women's Association of Canada recently reported that of 510 cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls entered into the NWAC database, a "striking" percentage involve youth. Just over one half or 53% of the murdered and missing women and girls whose age is known are youth 30 years of age or less. Nearly half of the total cases remain unsolved. (NWAC, 2009).

How 'The System' Continues to Fail Indigenous Youth

Experts agreed that discrimination, economic inequalities and racially discriminatory policies and practices, continue to play a major role in the disproportionate placement of Indigenous children and youth in detention, custody, foster care and adoption... Experts recognized that the cycle of institutionalization for Indigenous Peoples often begins with foster care, continues on to youth detention programs and then to custody in the adult criminal justice system.⁶

Whether in health, social services, criminal justice or education, the 'system' has amply demonstrated an orientation toward identifying, measuring and trying to correct 'deficits' of Indigenous youth and their families. As well, the measurements for defining criteria and indicators of success tend to focus on symptoms, failing to understand or address the roots of the problems. As a result the onus is on individuals or front-line services to resolve issues arising from failure of economic or social policy over which individuals and community-based agencies have little control. In the face of symptoms such as intergenerational poverty and familial neglect, the default mode within the system has been to isolate Indigenous children and youth by taking them into care or in custody or detention as a harm reduction strategy. Frontline

⁴ Save the Children Canada, 2000 (emphasis added)

⁵ Sun Media, 2008

⁶ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010

workers in the child welfare system, foster parents, and staff of group homes and detention centres are poorly oriented to Indigenous issues and are provided little support, yet they are put in the position of achieving and reporting 'results.' As well, foster care and family reunification models are structured to replicate a nuclear family model. This model does not align well with Indigenous worldviews and has not proven effective especially where non-Native foster families and

group/detention home staff have no connection to Indigenous communities and no understanding of the history or cultures.

Western values and individualistic views serve to isolate the adolescent at a time when connections take on greater meaning.⁷

Promising Practices toward Better Outcomes

Neither Indigenous youth nor their families can be understood solely as 'victims' of colonial forces beyond their control. Inuit, Métis and First Nation youth have long been actively involved within their communities as well as provincially, territorially, nationally and internationally. Whether in the areas of holistic health, justice, politics, cultural reclamation or the arts, Indigenous youth offer insightful, collaborative and proactive leadership in addressing issues of importance to them. Their commitment to restoring human rights and balanced well-being to their families, communities and nations is evidence of deeply-rooted resistance and resilience.

Concept of 'Family' in Indigenous Worldviews

"The western model has taught us that children fall under the sole authority of the father, who delegates the caregiving to the mother. Our aunts remind us that childcare was traditionally understood to be the responsibility of the community, which included men, women and elders⁸."

Extended families whether biologically related or not, have traditionally played a strong role in the well-being of Indigenous children and youth. Within extended family/kin/clan systems, women are at the centre of authority and decision-making, providing leadership and guidance on all matters relating to individual and collective well-being including allocation of resources, cultural continuity, peaceful coexistence and healthy development through the lifecycle.⁹ For Inuit, life has long been characterized by strong ties of 'fictive' kinship, tightly binding together people who were not otherwise related in a system of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities, ensuring communities were "tightly knit and interdependent."¹⁰

The flexibility of relational bonds between children and adults are especially evident in Indigenous practices of fostering and adoption. These common practices traditionally carried no stigma and ensured children sustained ongoing relational bonds with both

adoptive and biological families. This fluidity of adult/child bonds ensured all children were wanted and cared for properly.¹¹ These cultural beliefs and practices remain very much an important part of urban Inuit, Métis and First Nations community life in Ottawa and are there to draw upon in creating culturally safe services that support, strengthen and reunify families.

The Indigenous conceptual model of healthy development throughout the lifespan describes developmental tasks and responsibilities for every stage of life; no one stage of life is considered 'better' or more important in the lives of individuals, families and communities than any other. Elders and grandparents, whether or not they are 'related' play a crucially important role in the well-being of children and youth. Through their individual responsibilities, all members not only shape their own health but the well-being of their families and communities.

⁷ Banister and Begoray, 2006.

⁸ Anderson (2000:205)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pauktuutit (2006:30)

¹¹ Ibid.

Protective Factors in Human Resilience

Human resilience is defined as the capacity to overcome deprivation and adverse conditions in life. Resilience is enhanced in environments where relationships are caring and supportive, where expectations are positive and high, and where there are ample opportunities for meaningful participation (Benard, 1991). Protective factors enhance a child's capacity to overcome deprivation and adverse life conditions.

1. Caring and supportive relationships - caring relationships convey compassion, understanding and respect, are grounded in attentive listening and establish safety and basic trust.
2. Positive high expectations - high expectations communicate guidance, structure and challenge, and most importantly convey a belief in a young person's innate resilience. They assess, highlight and build on strengths and assets rather than problems, symptoms and deficits.
3. Opportunities for meaningful participation - participation, leadership and contribution to the community may be actualized through decision making, listening and being heard; being included means experiencing what it feels to be valued and to have meaningful responsibilities.

Factors that have been found to enhance the resiliency of First Nations youth include: a strong sense of identity and self-worth; healthy and supportive families and communities; strong coping skills; knowledge of culture and language; a belief in one's ability to handle life's problems; and a positive view of the future (Gideon, et al, 2008:86). The protective factors embedded in Indigenous worldviews and practices, and the strength and fluidity of family/kin/community relational bonds have enabled Inuit, Métis and First Nations people and cultures to survive and thrive despite centuries of colonialism.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety in an Indigenous context refers to being able to speak the truth of one's history and experiences without being misunderstood, pitied, misjudged, blamed, shamed or punished. It is joining with

others in the collective joys of cultural reclamation and decolonization; learning with others the beauty and continued relevance of traditional worldviews and life-sustaining beliefs and practices that promote resilience, individually and collectively. Culturally safe services emphasize the importance of restoring a pride-based identity to replace the shame-based cultural identity created by colonialism – and culturally safe services are able to actualize this through Inuit, Métis and First Nation staff who role model healthy, balanced relations with self and others.

Environments that promote resilience and cultural safety work by meeting the basic human needs for love, respect and belonging; for challenge within a context of structure, responsibility, and safety; for empowered involvement and ultimately, for meaning. In other words, they meet the fundamental human need of relational beings to experience what it feels like to hold a valued place within their extended families, among their peers, within their schools, and in their communities.

Culturally safe and protective environments assure the balanced development of physical, emotional, cognitive, social and moral competence (Werner and Smith, 1992). Home environments that offer protective factors are those that identify and celebrate the unique gifts and achievement of each individual in their own spheres of competence¹². As evidenced by longitudinal studies, adolescents from such environments are more likely to develop the life-long capabilities of:

- social competence: empathy, responsiveness, cultural flexibility, caring, communication skills and sense of humor;
- problem-solving skills: planning, help-seeking, critical and creative thinking;
- self-reliance: a sense of identity, self-efficacy, self-awareness, task-mastery and adaptive distancing from negative messages and conditions;
- a sense of purpose based on belief in a future of hope: goal directed, skill/educational aspirations, optimism, meaning, and spiritual connectedness (Bernard, 1991).

¹² In an Indigenous context, moral competence refers to: gratitude (Giving Thanks) for strengths, capacities and life-giving forces; relational balance and harmony; interconnectedness; respect, and self-determination.

Trauma-Informed Services

For generations in Canada countless Indigenous youth have been deprived of the opportunity to grow and develop in family and social environments that are protective and culturally safe. They have been purposefully and systematically deprived of opportunities to learn parenting skills by being well cared for physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually within the rich cultural context of their extended family/kin/clan environment. The defining legacy of the colonial experience is multi-generational grief and loss.

Trauma informed services are aware of the impact of multi-generational trauma and integrate this awareness into all aspects of service delivery. From this perspective, 'problem behaviours' such as resistance to authority are understood as attempts to cope with disempowering, abusive experiences, situations and

people. Disorders are understood as responses and symptoms are seen as adaptations.¹³ A trauma-informed approach requires neither disclosure of trauma nor treatment of trauma; it simply means accepting where the person is at, being careful not to retraumatize, and creating a safe environment for healing by restoring and respecting each individual's own voice, choice and pace. A trauma informed approach is crucial in an Indigenous service delivery context.

Holistic, culturally appropriate approaches, developed with full community participation are required to address the needs of "at risk" families and children. These must be developed, administered and carried out by Indigenous Peoples themselves. Gender perspectives must be integrated.¹⁴

Opportunities and Challenges

The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing and youngest group in Canada with over 50% under the age 24. Of all the provinces and territories, Ontario is home to the largest Aboriginal population. The Province of Ontario first recognized the rights, special heritage and culture of "Indian and native people" in the Child and Family Services Act of 1984. Twenty of the 77 recent amendments to CFSA in 2006 pertained to 'Indian or native' children, families, band representatives or communities.

Ottawa CAS Commitment to Post Colonial Child Welfare Practice

A transformative shift within the child welfare system has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of the next generation of Indigenous children and youth. In 2005 the Ottawa CAS initiated a process of reconciliation with the urban Inuit, Métis and First Nations communities it serves. Prior to this process, attitudes toward the CAS were marked by deeply-rooted hostility and mistrust. The reconciliation process was informed by a four-phase model for reconciliation in

child welfare: truth-telling, affirming, restoring, and relating (Blackstock, Brown and Bennett, 2006). Urban Indigenous women with long-standing leadership roles in the network of community-based services, including Minwaashin Lodge were actively involved at every step. As members of a community Liaison Group they were instrumental in guiding development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the CAS change process. There were also key roles for Elders and cultural educators who provided training for CAS staff about Indigenous worldviews, cultural practices and impacts of colonial child welfare practice.

As a result of CAS activities over the past five years, much has been achieved toward improving child welfare outcomes for Indigenous families in Ottawa. Recruitment of Inuit, Métis and First Nations foster and adoptive families has improved significantly; the number of cases proceeding into the court system has been reduced; and inter-agency cooperation has increased toward strengthening families and reducing CAS involvement. Even so, the capacity of Indigenous

¹³ Gendering the National Framework, Trauma Informed Approaches in Addictions Treatment (2009). BC Centre for Excellence in Women's Health

¹⁴ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2010)

families and communities to have input into the decision-making process that determines control over their children remains at the discretion of the main-

stream CAS. It is understood that any short-term successes are only the first steps of a long journey toward post-colonial child welfare practice.

Recommendations from Ottawa Reports to Strengthen Youth and their Families

Nine local reports were reviewed for this feasibility study; consistent themes across all findings and recommendations related specifically to strengthening Inuit, Métis and First Nations youth and their families in the City of Ottawa are summarized as follows.

1. Holistic, culturally safe **‘whole-family’ supports** aimed at stopping the intergenerational impacts of residential school abuse are urgently needed, especially strengthening parenting skills and parent/youth communications.
2. Improve **education outcomes** for Indigenous youth by encouraging greater parental involvement in school life, providing homework help, bridging youth to college and university student academic mentors, and providing practical information about career and employment prospects.
3. The need for **self-determination** in individual, family and community healing.
4. **Restoring the connections** between individual, family and community well-being.
5. Revitalizing the foundational role of **cultural reclamation and cultural continuity** in individual, family and community life.

File Reviews of Partner Organizations Serving ‘At Risk’ Youth in Ottawa

Discussions between Minwaashin Lodge and senior management of Tungasuvvingat Inuit and the Youth Services Bureau for the purpose of this feasibility study reveal enthusiastic support for the proposed kin-home model. Like Minwaashin Lodge, these agencies offer important adjunct services such as youth counselling, education and employment programs and addictions counselling. File reviews conducted by Minwaashin Lodge and the Youth Services Bureau reveal the following information about this demographic.

Minwaashin Lodge Youth Counsellor File Review 2009-2010

- 16 girls ages 14-16 on caseload
- 7 First Nation (status); 4 non-status; 3 Métis; and 2 Inuit
- 7 in group home; 3 with mother; 1 with father; 2 incarcerated; 1 in youth shelter; 1 subsidized housing; 1 room rental

Youth Services Bureau File Review 2008-9

- 81 female clients self-identify as Aboriginal descent
- Of these, 25 are ages 14-18

Both Tungasuvvingat Inuit and the Youth Services Bureau welcome a 3-prong partnership with the proposed kin-home for: referral of potential residents; programming linkages; and integrated individual case management.

Profile of Minwaashin Lodge Aboriginal Women' Support Centre

Mandate

Established in Ottawa in 1994, the mandate of Minwaashin Lodge/Aboriginal Women's Support Centre is to:

- promote the empowerment and well-being of abused Aboriginal women and children by offering culturally appropriate services,
- bridge the gaps in service between Aboriginal organizations and/or clients and mainstream services, and
- network and form partnerships among both Aboriginal and mainstream organizations and groups toward ending violence against women and children.

Minwaashin Lodge recognizes that prevention of violence in Aboriginal families is inextricably linked to the restoration of strong, vibrant, self-sufficient communities. Women are the foundation of Aboriginal community life; when women are strong, families and nations are strong. Therefore Minwaashin Lodge is also a place for celebration of the role of Aboriginal women and the revitalization of cultural teachings.

Mission

The mission of Minwaashin Lodge is to provide prevention and intervention services and programs for grandmothers, women, children and youth who are survivors of family violence and the residential school system, including those impacted by intergenerational effects. A full range of violence prevention and intervention programs and services is provided in the context of reclaiming the wisdom of Inuit, Métis and First Nation cultural teachings. Over 1,500 people are served annually through the following core programs.

- Oshki Kizis Lodge, a 24/7 safe, welcoming shelter for abused/at risk women and their children
- 24-hour telephone crisis line
- Confidential counseling, information, advocacy and referral (individual/group)

- Trauma recovery program (individual/group)
- Mental health counselling (individual/group)
- Addictions recovery and support (day programs)
- Wisdom Keeper's program for women 50+
- Sacred Child program for preschoolers and their families including a CAS approved culture-based parenting skills program
- Spirit Movers and Fire Keepers programs for youth
- Housing outreach and support to prevent homelessness
- Employment preparation, training and support for women
- Public and professional education/training about Aboriginal culture, history and customs.

24/7 Residential Shelter for Abused Women and Their Children

Oshki Kizis Lodge is the shelter operation of Minwaashin Lodge which provides 19-bed safe accommodation for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and children fleeing abuse and culturally appropriate services to foster healing.

Oshki Kizis programming includes: support, advocacy, counselling, referrals, court accompaniment, traditional teachings, Elders, crafts, community support, transitional support, educational services, crisis intervention, child & youth advocacy, 24-hour residential support, and hospital visits. As well, residents are bridged to housing, financial, legal and medical resources in the community.

Youth Programming at Minwaashin Lodge

Off-site cultural programming for Aboriginal youth is outreached locally through the Ottawa Technical Learning Centre, Robert Smart Detention Centre and the William E. Hay Centre on a weekly basis. On-site programming for youth includes individual counselling, group counselling in areas such as anger management, and a youth diversion program.

Cultural Reclamation: Restoring Women's Traditional Place of Respect

Occupying a sacred place at the very heart of Minwaashin Lodge, Aboriginal Women's Support Centre is the Healing Lodge. Through the Lodge, a Grandmother-in-Residence assists clients and community members to reclaim and revitalize their cultural identity as taught by their Elders and through their traditional healing practices. Cultural programming is provided on an individual, group and community basis and includes seasonal and sacred ceremonies, a drum group, workshops and traditional teachings for people at all stages of the life cycle.

Cultural Education and Professional Development

Cultural training and professional development is provided provincially and locally for teachers, educators, universities/colleges and service providers including the privately run Beacon Home group home with 85% of its residents from Northern Ontario First Nation communities.

A Proven Track Record in Community Partnerships and Linkages

Minwaashin Lodge has actively promoted and sustained numerous community partnerships to enhance their services. Examples.

1. Family Service Centre of Ottawa: An 9-year on-going direct service partnership providing counseling programs on an individual and group basis;
2. Catholic Family Services: professional development training for staff in French and English around the impacts of residential schooling on Aboriginal people.
3. Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre: A 6-year on-going direct service partnership offering sexual assault counseling and staff development.
4. Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa: An 9-year on-going direct service partnership offering teaching circles to client and staff, partnering on programs for street-involved and at-risk youth from diverse cultural and orientation backgrounds.

5. Odawa Native Friendship Centre: a 6-year on-going partnership to co-ordinate the Annual Children's Powwow; provide support to families and youth; and training education for child care providers of the Sweetgrass Homecare Family Support Program.
6. Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health: An 9-year on-going direct program service partnership, co-ordinating services to the Aboriginal community.
7. Gignul Non-profit Housing Corporation: An 11-year service partnership, providing housing priority to Aboriginal women and their children impacted by violence.
8. Ottawa Carleton Detention Centre ongoing visits, healing circles and cultural sensitization training to staff and residents.
9. Canadian Mental Health Association: a 4-year on-going partnership to provide counseling /referral/ placement for clients of Minwaashin Lodge with mental health needs.
10. Tungasuvvingat Inuit, a 2-year partnership to develop Inuit youth-driven peer education and violence prevention resources.
11. Métis Nation of Ontario: project partnership focused on a youth-driven violence prevention project with the Sault Ste. Marie Historic Métis Council.
12. Inuit and Cree community of Kuuzarabbi: designed and implemented a training and orientation plan for a newly opened shelter.
13. Tungasuvvingat Inuit, Aboriginal Head Start, Inuit Head Start, and Children's Aid Society: ongoing interagency case coordination and case management.

Active, Ongoing Partnership with the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

For the past five years, Minwaashin Lodge has worked closely with the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa toward a post-colonial approach to child welfare. The Executive Director has been an active member of the Inuit, Métis and First Nation Liaison Group which serves in an advisory capacity to senior management of the CAS. Minwaashin Lodge assumed a leadership

role in activities of the Liaison Group including: planning, preparation and implementation of a community consultation and reconciliation process, development and implementation of a culture-based foster and adoptive recruitment strategy, pilot of a Circle of Care alternative family planning and decision-making process, and professional development/training for CAS staff in French and English around the intergenerational impacts of residential schooling.

Board of Directors and Staff of Minwaashin Lodge

Minwaashin Lodge employs a diverse, fully qualified, multi-nation staff including 40 full-time positions and the services of 15 volunteers. The Board of Directors is comprised of 9 long-standing, active community members drawn from legal, research, academic, health, and executive government sectors.

Milestones in Meeting the Needs of Urban Aboriginal Women and Families in Ottawa

Year	Milestones
1992	The Aboriginal Women's Support Centre (AWSC) was formed, sponsored by Harmony House.
1993	Produced report titled "A Community Needs Assessment: Aboriginal Women's Support Program" recommending development of Aboriginal-specific services for abused women and their children in Ottawa.
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AWSC was incorporated with its own Women's Council governing structure. • In a partnership with Heritage College, AWSC sponsored two 1-year <i>Aboriginal Family Violence training programs</i> for counselors of shelters and support programs.
1995	The <i>Sacred Child</i> program was established to help women and their children understand and recover from the impacts of violence and abuse and strengthen parenting skills.
1996	AWSC was the lead agency developing a proposal for an Aboriginal-specific health centre in Ottawa which opened its doors as the <i>Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health</i> in 1998.
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Aboriginal-specific Employment Preparation and Training</i> program for abused women was funded through the OWD "Investing in Women's Futures." • The first annual <i>national Women's Gathering, Bringing the Medicine Back to Women</i> held at Victoria Island drew 350 participants from all cultural and spiritual traditions across Canada.
2000	A building was purchased through private donation to house <i>Oshki Kizis Lodge, a shelter for abused women and their children.</i>
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding was received for a comprehensive trauma recovery program through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. • AWSC hosted the first 2-Spirit conference in Eastern Ontario 'Returning to the Circle'. • Oshki Kizis received funding through the HRDC City of Ottawa Homelessness initiative. • AWSC received the Joan Gullen Award for excellence in service to the community.
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minwaashin became the first Aboriginal service provider in Eastern Ontario to provide information, referral support and counselling for Two-Spirit people and their families. • In partnership with Amnesty International, Minwaashin hosted the national launch for the Stolen Sisters campaign to bring international awareness to the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women; also with the Native Women's Association of Canada for its national counterpart, the Sisters in Spirit campaign.
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minwaashin Lodge became an active member of the Children's Aid Society, Aboriginal Liaison Group and one of the key planners/organizers behind a groundbreaking community consultation drawing over 100 participants. • Produced the rap/music video <i>Love You Give</i> with input from over 100 Inuit, Métis and First Nation youth as a violence prevention peer education tool. The launch drew over 350 people to Confederation High School. • 90 service providers participated in focus groups for The Report of a Community Consultation Process in Support of an Action Plan for Aboriginal Youth and Their Families in the City Of Ottawa.
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a violence prevention website for Inuit, Métis and First Nation youth featuring <i>Love You Give</i> and 3 other new projects. • Distributed over 3,000 <i>Love You Give</i> peer education and violence prevention toolkits. • Oshki Kizis Lodge received core funding.
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March Minwaashin established a 12-member Community Assisting Aboriginal Sex Trade Workers Committee comprised of the Ottawa Police Services, the John Howard and E. Fry Societies, Family Service Centre, Vanier Community Centre and the Salvation Army, Canadian Hearing Society,
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Policy Research Conference • 'Courage to Soar' an employment readiness program begins, offering free post-secondary training to First Nations, Inuit and Métis women • Organized and hosted community forums <i>Paper to Practice: Inclusivity in the Workplace and Strengthening Cultural Connections</i> • designated as Regional Representative for Women's Worlds 2011
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S.T.O.R.M. Outreach is featured in an international documentary • Child & Youth Program Manager awarded the Service Provider Recognition Award by Children's Aid Society of Ottawa • 'When Sisters Rise', an employment resource handbook for Aboriginal job seekers is launched • Procured funding from Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative to deliver a Career Fair for Aboriginal job seekers and a one-day symposium to increase hiring and retention of Aboriginal employees in Canada's major corporations and government.

Proposed Kin-Home Model of Care

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.¹⁵

Mission Statement:

Respecting Women is Our Culture

Through the proposed kin-home, the mission of Minwaashin Lodge is to enhance the capacity of young Inuit, Métis and First Nation women by promoting healthy, holistic personal and social development in accordance with their own unique gifts, values, aspirations and needs.

Philosophy and Principles

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in Canada as victims of violence must be understood in the context of a colonial strategy that sought to dehumanize Aboriginal women.¹⁶

Given that the gendered impacts of colonialism continue to victimize Indigenous women and girls, services for at risk adolescents must empower them individually and collectively. The discriminatory, prejudicial experiences unique to Indigenous women and girls in Canada both historically and in the present must be addressed. An enriched living environment that promotes healthy female development and safety in the context of respecting basic human rights to cultural and gender equality, security of the person, and self-determination is a vital component of youth services in the City of Ottawa.

Guiding Principles

- ✓ Services for our youth must respect and reflect Indigenous worldviews, models of healthy adolescent development, and methods of transmitting knowledge.
- ✓ Women's central role in the cultural traditions, ceremonies and practices of extended family and community life must be reclaimed and restored.
- ✓ Girls and women require opportunities to build their strength and resilience by exercising their own agency, authority, decision-making and leadership both individually and collectively.
- ✓ Restoring the capacity of our youth, families and communities requires healing, strengthening, and reunifying relationships deliberately undermined and disrupted by colonialism (including parent/school relationships).
- ✓ Indigenous girls and women have the right to expect that specific measures will be taken to protect them from disproportionate levels of violence and exploitation without further revictimization.

Program Description

1. Overview

The proposed kin-home service model is based on a 'stand-in' extended family/kin/clan cultural model. Provision of 'trauma-informed' supports, culturally safe services and protective living conditions will enable Inuit, Métis and First Nation girls and young women to achieve optimal developmental outcomes and level of well-being, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

2. Structure

The proposed kin-home will operate under the administration of Minwaashin Lodge-Aboriginal Women's Support Centre. The staffing model for the kin-home includes:

¹⁵ Article 23, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

¹⁶ NWAC, 2010:1

- ✓ 2 live-in 'parents' to provide a healthy, stable home environment, continuity of relational bonds, role modeling for healthy cultural identity, preparation of nutritious meals, guidance about health and hygiene, etc.
- ✓ 1 full-time Case Manager to provide intake, assessment, individual, integrated plans of care, referral/linkage to partner agencies, discharge and follow-up.
- ✓ .5 time Youth Cultural/Recreation Coordinator to provide an exercise program and coordinate linkages to cultural events in the community.
- ✓ 4 visiting 'grandparents' to provide Elder guidance and traditional ceremonies for the residents and staff.
- ✓ 2 visiting 'aunties' (age 30+) and 2 'big sisters' (age 19-29) to provide mentoring, guidance and encouragement on healthy social relationships, coping skills, problem-solving, healthy body/self image and self care as well as accompaniment on outings, medical/dental appointments, cultural events and ceremonies, etc.

Client Profile

Up to fifteen Inuit, Métis and First Nation girls ages 14 to 18 annually who are in the care of the CAS or are at risk for apprehension, including children whose parent is entering a residential addictions treatment program. The recommended number of beds is as follows.

- ✓ 4 long-term beds
- ✓ 2 beds for occasional, respite care overnight on week-ends (for youth in foster care at risk of breaking down or with recovering parents at risk of relapse, or youth who have graduated to independent living but are struggling)
- ✓ 2 12-week beds for children of parents entering residential treatment for addictions.

Program Components

At risk Inuit, Métis and First Nation adolescents need to develop the skills and confidence to deal effectively with the realities of contemporary urban life; restoring holistic health, safety and equality for Indigenous girls

and women is a central feature of the programming. Program components have been developed in consultation with key education and service partners indicated below. All components will be implemented and evaluated in accordance with the guiding principles described in this report. The emphasis is on healthy holistic development in the context of strengthening and reunifying families.

1. **Education:** education/career mentorship opportunities and homework help will be provided on-site in partnership with Aboriginal Liaison programs at Carleton University, University of Ottawa and Algonquin College; opportunities for parents and family members to participate in school events will be promoted.
2. **Culture and Recreation:** in partnership with Odawa Friendship Centre and Minwaashin Lodge residents will be referred to recreational programs; the residents and stand-in family of the kin-home will also participate actively in seasonal celebrations such as the Inuit Winter Festival, the Métis Cultural Festival, the Odawa Pow wow, Aboriginal Week celebrations, Louis Riel Day, Nunavut Day etc.
3. **Employment Preparation:** through a partnership with the Employment Training program at Minwaashin Lodge residents will have access to help with resume preparation, career planning and computer skills training.
4. **Transition to Independence:** in partnership with the CAS residents will be referred to the courses for transition to independent living as appropriate.

Clinical Intervention/Supports

1. **Family Support/Access:** supervised visits with parents and/or other approved family members will be provided at the kin-home in the context of movie/popcorn nights, arts and crafts/drum song, workshops, and culture/recreational activities. Referrals and linkages will also be provided for family support, counselling and healing ceremonies through Minwaashin Lodge, Tungasuvvingat Inuit, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre, and Wabano

Centre for Aboriginal Health. Supervised visits for parents in Mamisarvik Treatment program will be negotiated in partnership with TI.

2. **Trauma Recovery:** through a partnership with the Centre for Treatment of Sexual Abuse and Childhood Trauma, individual counselling will be provided on or off-site as well as clinical supervision for the staff team as required.
3. **Drug and Alcohol Counselling:** through a partnership with Minwaashin Lodge, Youth Counselling and Youth Diversion programs and with the Youth Services Bureau residents will be provided with addictions prevention and intervention programming on and off site (using OFIFC Aboriginal Drug Strategy Toolkit).
4. **Healthy Sexuality Education:** a partnership will be developed with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network for a sexual health mentorship program that provides education about healthy sexuality and harm/risk reduction specific to the needs and realities of Indigenous girls and women including protection from sexual exploitation through the Internet.
5. **Parenting:** in partnership with Minwaashin Lodge, residents will receive information about positive Indigenous parenting as well as role modeling and experiential learning through the stand-in role models for 'parents,' grandparents, 'aunties' and 'big sisters.'
6. **Peer Support:** a peer support program based on the Minwaashin Lodge Youth as Leaders training and StreetWolf: Seven Principles of Self-Leadership (OFIFC) will be developed to enhance coping and solution-focused problem-solving skills, including conflict resolution and anti-racism/oppression.

Training

All support staff, including that of partner organizations will receive training in trauma informed, culturally safe service provision unique to the needs of Indigenous women and girls. A training module will be developed for this purpose by Minwaashin Lodge.

Anticipated Outcomes

The anticipated outcomes of the kin-home align with research and recommendations from the literature search as follows.

1. Strengthen resiliency and self-care capacities to reduce vulnerability.
2. Strengthen relational capacity and family/kin/community connections to reduce isolation.
3. Enhance academic and study skills to improve education and economic outcomes.

Evaluation

An evaluation plan and indicators of success for the service will be developed consistent with Indigenous values and the guiding principles and anticipated outcomes described in this report.

Experts encourage Indigenous Peoples to develop and restore their own healing and restoration models based on traditional concepts, practices, stories, songs, ceremonies, languages, worldviews, family and clan relationships, and to assess their effectiveness based on their own criteria and indicators for success.¹⁷

¹⁷ Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2010.

Next Steps Toward Implementation

Upon final approval of the proposed kin-home model by the Minwaashin Lodge Board of Directors, a meeting will be scheduled with representatives of the Ministry of Community Services/Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ottawa Children's Aid to present this report. At that time approval to proceed with development of a budget and workplan will be requested.

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