



Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARITABLE DONOR TO FUND SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR WAPEKEKA FIRST NATION

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and Wapekeka First Nation Chief Brennan Sainnawap expressed heartfelt appreciation as a charitable donor will finance a suicide prevention program aimed at at-risk youth that Health Canada has failed to fund.

“This donor was deeply moved by the suicide crisis in Wapekeka after the tragic loss of two 12-year-olds and reached out to us last week. We respect the donor’s wish to remain anonymous, but I would like to express our appreciation for this tremendous response to a community in crisis,” said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, who drew national attention to the suicide crisis last week. “The continued loss of First Nation youth to suicide is unacceptable to the Canadian public. We are grateful that a private donor has stepped in where the Government of Canada has failed.”

The donor has committed to fund approximately \$380,000 to reinstate the community’s Youth Mental Health Program. An initial installment of \$30,000 was wired to Wapekeka on Monday. The community has begun to hire mental health workers to start working with at-risk youth. The remaining funds are expected to flow this week as required by this program.

“We are overwhelmed with this act of generosity and cannot express how grateful we are that this donor is stepping in to help our people. Our community is in crisis and there is an urgent need to get this program back in place as soon as possible,” said Chief Brennan Sainnawap. “Words cannot express how grateful we are that this donor has committed to helping our young people with their mental health struggles. We are extremely disappointed that despite the loss of two of our youth we have never received a commitment from Health Canada or the Government of Canada to get this program back in our community.”

Wapekeka declared a state of emergency following the tragic loss of two young girls to suicide this month. Their loss came after Health Canada failed to fund a proposal submitted by the community in July 2016 for mental health supports for at-risk youth. Submitted just months before this tragedy, it notes Chief and Council’s concern over several suicide attempts by youth in the past year. The proposal did not receive funding as, according to Health Canada, it came at an ‘awkward time’ in the federal funding cycle.

Fiddler and community leaders met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa last week. They are calling on the federal and provincial governments to provide immediate supports while working towards a long-term, comprehensive, sustainable plan that is designed and led by the community.

Note: Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Wapekeka First Nation respect the donor's wish to remain anonymous. No further information regarding the donor's identity will be provided.

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