



huu ay aht

ANCIENT SPIRIT, MODERN MIND

Huu-ay-aht calls for action from political leaders on child care crisis

Anacla – February 2, 2018 - Huu-ay-aht First Nations is calling on the provincial and federal governments to live up to their promise to address the crisis facing Aboriginal youth in Canada.

According to Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott, an estimated 40,000 First Nations children are in foster care in Canada, making up half of the total number of kids in care in the country. At a two-day emergency meeting on Indigenous Children and Family Services in Ottawa on January 25, 2018, the minister said she doesn't trust that number and believes it is much higher.

"More children are in care now than at the height of residential schools," explains Huu-ay-aht Councillor Sheila Charles. "We are already trying to help the ones who went through residential schools and address the intergenerational issues. Now, on top of that, we have even more children in care than ever before."

In 2016, Minister Philpott also called attention to the fact that children in care now outnumber those who attended residential schools. Charles says the time for talk is over.

"There is now agreement across the highest political levels that the system is broken, biased, and harmful to Indigenous peoples," Charles says. "But talk isn't enough. We have citizens and families right now who are being torn apart by a system that appears built to scoop Indigenous children from their families and communities. They are suffering today."

This is where Huu-ay-aht is ahead of the game, Charles points out, because last year the Nation formed a panel to investigate this issue, and the Nation is in the process of implementing its recommendations.

Councillor Charles says for years she has watched as families are broken apart, adding layers of trauma on top of the intergenerational issues that already exist. She says, to get ahead of this, you must focus on everyone - not just the children, but the whole family.

"We have to break the cycle if we want to see real change," she says. "That's what the 30 recommendations from the Social Services Panel focuses on."

Huu-ay-aht Chief Councillor Robert J. Dennis Sr. points out that the panel's report calls for action from the provincial and federal governments. It says, "The provincial and federal governments have an important role to play in working with HFN toward better outcomes for HFN children and families, and keeping HFN children safe, healthy and connected with HFN community culture. This includes resource and funding contributions in support of renegotiated service and jurisdictional roles in providing prevention and protection services to HFN children and families."

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“Therefore, I make an immediate call for action from First Nations organizations and federal and provincial governments to work with Huu-ay-aht to reverse and reconcile this trend of moving Indigenous children from their families,” Chief Dennis says. “We have a plan, but we need them to support us. If they do, other nations could benefit from the investment our Nation has made to future generations.”

In Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Mandate Letter to Philpott he points out the need to “develop and implement an improved response to the provisions of child welfare and health care.” He stresses the importance of Jordan’s Principle, which Huu-ay-aht has implemented, and that it focuses on the best interests of the child. His letter went on to say, “this will require a holistic approach to the delivery of services that focuses on prevention, family preservation and well-being, and community wellness.”

Chief Dennis points out that the recommendations from the Social Services Panel address these concerns with a similar focus.

In Premier John Horgan’s Mandate Letter to Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Scott Fraser, he calls on the minister to “work collaboratively and respectfully with First Nations to establish a clear, cross-government vision of reconciliation to guide the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and the Tsilhqot’in Supreme Court Decision.”

Although the mandate letter does not directly address the children in care crisis, Chief Dennis says you cannot have true reconciliation if this subject is not addressed.

“The Truth and Reconciliation is an apology from Canada, and it promises they will help break the cycle,” explains Councillor Charles.

A complete copy of the Huu-ay-aht First Nations Social Services Project report – Safe, Healthy, and Connected – Bringing Huu-ay-aht Children Home – is available at <https://huuayaht.org/social-services-project/> .

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