

For Immediate Release

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Immediate Action Needed to Aid First Nation Communities

Families Suffering Third-World Like Conditions in Northern Ontario, Report States

Sandy Lake First Nation, ON – Quick action is needed to help children and families in Northern Ontario who are living in third-world like conditions as a result of poverty, inadequate housing and health concerns, states a report released today by the North-South Partnership for Children, Mamow Sha-way-gi-kay-win.

“The conditions that people in our communities live in are unacceptable and must be addressed, as a matter of urgency,” said Chief Connie Gray McKay of Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Nation.

In January, under the North-South Partnership, an assessment team of international humanitarian aid experts and others visited the First Nation communities of Webequie and Mishkeegogamang in northwestern Ontario to assess the quality of life for children.

The assessment team included representatives from Save the Children UK, Save the Children US, Save the Children Canada, the Ontario Office of Child and Family Services Advocacy, Tikinagan Child and Family Services, First Nation Chiefs and Elders, community leaders, parents and youth. The community assessment was organized by the North-South Partnership for Children and adapted an assessment model used by international aid agencies in response to emergencies such as earthquakes, drought and famine.

The final community assessment reports document issues of desperate poverty, inadequate housing and community infrastructure, serious health and mental health concerns, barriers to economic development, family and child-care issues, needs for greater opportunities for community participation, and significant gaps in social service programs. Many of these issues are similar to what one might expect to see in developing countries.

“We have come to understand that children and families up north live in desperate conditions,” said Nicholas Finney of Save the Children UK, also a leader of the assessment team.

At present, few non-governmental agencies support remote First Nations communities. The community assessments and response plan will help change that by providing an avenue for support through the North-South Partnership, for individuals, companies and organizations who wish to get involved in support of First Nations looking to rebuild their communities. “They can become part of a growing Wee-Chee-Way-Win Caring Circle to improve life for First Nations’ children,” said Maurice Brubacher, co-chair of the North-South Partnership and member of the assessment team.

“Contributions from Partnership organizations have already touched the lives of many young people in our communities. But, as this recent report indicates, there is much more work that needs to be done to ensure that our children and families have the best opportunities possible,” said Chief Scott Jacob of Webequie First Nation.

The community assessments have identified what needs to be done; and the North-South Partnership for Children is creating the means to do it. It is time to work in true partnership with the community members and leaders of First Nation communities to realize their solutions for their children, families and community.

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Assessment reports can be obtained at:

www.northsouthpartnership.com

The **North-South Partnership for Children, Mamow Sha-way-gi-kay-win** is a group of voluntary non-government agencies and First Nations communities formed in 2006 to improve the quality of life of children in remote First Nation communities. The collective goal of the Partnership, as stated in the Partnership Terms of Reference, “is to build a network of caring relationships, learning from one another, and following the lead of First Nation leaders and communities, to create solutions to the urgent conditions and challenges in remote First Nation communities.”