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COWESSESS FIRST NATION WELCOMES \$40 BILLION CHILDCARE SETTLEMENT

(Cowessess First Nation) – Investment in families is at the heart of the Miyo Pimatisowin Act, the first Coordination Agreement signed in July 2021, that empowers Cowessess First Nation law to assert jurisdiction to children in care. These efforts now stand to be boosted by today’s announcement that the federal government has reached a \$40-billion agreement in principle related to First Nations child welfare. The agreement was secured by First Nations working together for years to assert their sovereignty over childcare.

“Cindy Blackstock has been a true advocate. On behalf of Cowessess First Nation children and families who experienced challenges while dealing with child welfare, kinanāskomitin (thank you) Cindy and to others who have been leading this fight to assure equality comes to Cowessess First Nation children past, present, and future,” said Chief Cadmus Delorme of Cowessess First Nation.

Half of the investment from Canada is to child welfare reform. Cowessess First Nation has begun reform from Cowessess’ perspective. Since April 1, 2021, Cowessess First Nation has been building a team to lead the Chief Red Bear Children’s Lodge – the organization tasked with leading protection and prevention services - and working with the provinces to educate and affirm the plan to fully assert the Nation’s jurisdiction when it comes to children in protection and families seeking prevention service investment.

Since the signing of the Coordination Agreement, Chief Red Bear Lodge has witnessed many highlights:

- There are zero Cowessess children in the care of the Ministry of Social Services (MSS) on Cowessess First Nation reserve lands. All investigations have resulted in good family plans where children stay home and are provided with supports.
- Nineteen children who were in the care of Social Services have been returned to Cowessess from Saskatchewan and other provinces. All are in the care of their families with supports.
- Nine children in care in Saskatchewan have been introduced to family and community for the very first time.
- Chief Red Bear Children’s Lodge has been able to collaborate with Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services on several occasions to give clients elemental things that they need for their children, using a preventative response rather than intervention.
- At least a dozen families are using the three contracted therapists on staff to support healing and growth.
- Two mothers have their children back. These mothers are at school and welcoming services.
- The Nation’s cultural staff are strengthening culture in the community and offering teachings on a daily basis.

- Cowessess citizens have direct contact with Chief Red Bear Children's. Staff explain their rights and responsibilities.
- Services are offered to strengthen mindfulness training for children to address anxiety and worries.
- We are offering respite to two kokums who need a rest due to their age and health. They would not have shared their needs in the past, for fear of losing their grandchildren.

As well, vital personal connections are being made. "Recently, three children in care had their genealogy chart done by one of our staff. For the first time, they could hear about their relatives and met an Auntie at a gathering," said Chief Delorme. "Everyone was so pleased to be connected and we held a birthday party to invite more family. These children will visit Cowessess soon."

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