



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MATAWA AWASHISHEWIIIGIIHIWAYWIIN OPEN NEW PLAYGROUND AS
PART OF DELIVERY OF WRAP-AROUND SERVICES TO MATAWA FAMILIES
AT-RISK OF CHILD WELFARE INVOLVEMENT IN THUNDER BAY**

THUNDER BAY – Today, during the fourth annual [Back to School Bonanza](#), Matawa Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin opened a new playground. Costing \$511,099.41, the project—which includes a playground, landscaping and fencing—was made possible by Indigenous Service Canada’s (ISC) First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) Post-Majority Support Services capital program for eligible First Nation youth and young families. ISC Minister Patty Hajdu, who provided remarks at the event said “children and families here deserve quality playgrounds, just like anyone else in the country. Thanks to Matawa First Nations, children will be able to play, socialize and grow here. Families will be able to gather. This is another step in providing the services families need so that children can get a fair chance to succeed.”

The ribbon-cutting ceremony included families of the Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin program and other dignitaries. David Paul Achneepineskum, Matawa First Nations Management CEO, who provided remarks at the event said, “this playground offers the children and their families playtime to enjoy themselves while they are going through trauma, it offers relief from pain from the impacts they go through every day.”

“The families of Matawa Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin are truly appreciative of the support of Indigenous Services Canada,” said Robin Larrett, Matawa Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin Manager, adding “children of the families we’re working to stabilize now have a safe outdoor space to play as part of our wraparound services.” Other services the Awashishewiigiihiwaywiin program provides include:

- The Family Support Program which supports families from the Matawa First Nations to support in navigating the child welfare system through prevention, planning and goal setting using community-based, culturally appropriate/responsive care models for children with a focus on prevention and family reunification.
- A Jordan’s Principle (JP) team to assist families both on and off-reserve with JP applications for children and families in the areas of physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs.
- The Family Resource Centre which provides community kitchens, life skills, cultural programs, activities and outings, parenting and anger management courses.

- Next Steps Program that works with youth from ages 18-26 who are aging out of care as part of ISC's Post Majority Care program, it aids in the transition of First Nations youth from in-care to living on their own.

Since August 31, 2023, the Awashishewiigihiwaywiin program has been operating a 6-unit transitional housing living space for Matawa families to support them in a culturally rooted and holistic way and assist them in addressing various needs and working towards independent accommodations. The units are operated in partnership with The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB).

With lengthy wait lists for rent geared-to-income housing in the city, some families were resorting to long-term stays in local hotels or staying in overcrowded and unsafe situations to remain together. The transitional units reduce the need for families to separate and allow for much needed stability for the most vulnerable. Reflecting on TBDSSAB's role with respect to the 6-unit transitional housing living space, TBDSSAB Chair Brian Hamilton said, "on behalf of the TBDSSAB Board of Directors, thank you to Matawa for the work you've done to bring culturally appropriate transitional housing options to families in our community," adding, "these spaces provide a safe space for many families in our community to work toward independent living. We are pleased to have been able to support this initiative."

"We are proud of our partnership with Matawa and the great work they are doing to support people through the development of transitional, supportive housing," adds Bill Bradica, TBDSSAB's Chief Executive Officer. "This is the first transitional housing project in our district that offers a supportive space for families, filling an important unmet need. These six units provide families with a dignified space with the supports they need to become self sufficient. Thank you to the team at Matawa for making this a reality."

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***For more information, please contact** Charnel Anderson, Communications Generalist – Matawa First Nations at (807) 621-9405 or by email at canderson@matawa.on.ca.*

Background

In 2019, Matawa First Nations Chiefs Council began the process of creating a Matawa Child and Family Services Framework including services to Matawa families and established the Awashishewiigihiwaywiin program in Thunder Bay. The program makes its home at the [Matawa Training and Wellness Centre](#) at 523 Algoma Street North.