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Plaisance, QC /Ottawa, ON



This week, Family and Child Service organizations across the Nation's Capital will receive over 1300 gift-filled Friendship Boxes destined for Indigenous children living in high risk situations.

I Love First Peoples, the Quebec-based national charity leading this effort, invites Canadians each fall to pack Friendship Box gifts as a means to express care and to engage in an act of reconciliation. For many Canadians, the Friendship Box represents a first step in their learning journey about Indigenous issues. Many elementary and high school students also participate in the program. To date, the organization has delivered over 15 000 Friendship Boxes to Indigenous children and delivered services to 90 remote communities. The organization normally distributes the gifts during spring, in the context of full-day school events that include workshops with celebrity guests.



In early March, prior to the travel restrictions resulting from COVID-19, I Love First Peoples sent 850 Friendship Boxes to Pikangikum, the largest remote community in Ontario. **North Star Air** generously flew the cargo into Pikangikum, where the children are set to receive their gifts as soon as the school reopens.

Rather than holding onto the remaining inventory, I Love First Peoples turned a difficult situation into an opportunity to serve children who are overrepresented in the FCS system and whose circumstances may be exacerbated due to COVID-19 confinement. The organization recognized an additional opportunity to serve children living on reserve in their area and will also be sending shipments to the reserves of Pikwakanagan and Lac Simon (Quebec).



The response from the FCS organizations was overwhelming, with word of the organization's offer spreading as far as Toronto! Given the short supply, organizers are asking donors to help them prepare more Friendship Boxes online through their store at www.ilfp.ca so the effort can be extended.

Wednesday morning, April 15th between 10:30 and 11:30 in Smith's Falls, a moving company will bring the shipment of Friendship Boxes to Ottawa-Stittsville Rotary Club members,

SPREADING FRIENDSHIP AMIDST COVID-19

who have partnered in this effort and will then deliver to the various FCS locations. From there, social workers will give the Friendship Boxes to the children as per their current COVID-19 protocols for visiting families.

Recipient organizations are:

- FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF LANARK, LEEDS AND GRENVILLE (Brockville)
- FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF RENFREW COUNTY (Pembroke)
- PIKWAKANAGAN FIRST NATION COMMUNITY via FCS RENFREW
- CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF THE UNITED COUNTIES OF STORMONT, DUNDAS & GLENGARRY (Cornwall)
- ODAWA NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE (Ottawa)
- INUUQATIGIIT CENTRE FOR INUIT CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES (Ottawa)
- THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF OTTAWA
- THE ALGONQUIN RESERVE OF LAC-SIMON

The Friendship Boxes were inspected and packaged by the organization in December, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

MEDIA CONTACT

To speak with Josée Lusignan, President of I Love First Peoples; Dave Rooke, President of the Ottawa-Stittsville Rotary Club; Karen Matson, Community Relations Officer for North Star Air, or local FCS coordinators, please call or email:

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