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Gatineau, Quebec  
Kingston, Ontario  
Burlington, Ontario  
Moose Factory, Ontario



**MAMA-WE: ᐃᐃᐃ**

## **Equipping Indigenous Teen Mothers and Their Children to Succeed**

As Canadians wore orange shirts this week to underline the impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities and to celebrate hope for future generations, a new program is being launched to support teen mothers and their babies toward a healthy life together.

*Mama-We* (which is the phonetic spelling of the Cree word for *together*), is the name of this mothers-mentors program developed by I Love First Peoples, in collaboration with professionals, students and an advisory board from Queen's University, as well as primary caregivers and community leaders from the first community in which Mama-We will be delivered, Moose Cree First Nation in Ontario. Mama-We is also made possible in part through the financial partnership of Islamic Relief Canada. To this effect, Islamic Relief Canada has launched a crowdfunding campaign in support of **Shaaden Salem, a young woman who will run 42.2 km this Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, to raise funds for Mama-We!** To find out more about Shaaden's marathon, visit:



[https://www.launchgood.com/project/marathon\\_422km\\_fundraiser\\_for\\_the\\_indigenous\\_community\\_in\\_canada#!/](https://www.launchgood.com/project/marathon_422km_fundraiser_for_the_indigenous_community_in_canada#!/)

There is a notable difference in access to services between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in Canada in various aspects of life. This difference is especially notable for young mothers, as the rate of teenage pregnancy shows a clear divide with 8% for Indigenous teenagers on reserves being mothers compared to 1.3 % in non-Indigenous populations (O'Donnell & Wallace, 2011). Having a child at a young age comes with a lot of responsibility and risk, especially when combined with systemic issues such as lack of access to clean drinking water, healthy food options, health care and supportive surroundings. This can result in significant detrimental impacts on the mental and physical health of the mother and her child.

In an effort to help alleviate the some of the impacts of systemic issues that Indigenous people face, Mama-We aims to build capacity within Indigenous communities by empowering and developing local young mothers into impactful community advocates. The program consists of three main pillars: developing mentorship capacity, providing resources for self-care and baby care, and establishing community programs for improved access to continued education. Young mothers will also learn valuable entrepreneurship skills through the program.

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Mama-We will begin officially, as representatives from I Love First Peoples and Queen's University will meet with the leaders of Moose Cree First Nation, and with elders, primary caregivers and young mothers. All aspects of Mama-We will be developed under the guidance of Indigenous elders, scholars, and knowledge-holders to ensure that the information presented is culturally sensitive and responsive. In February of 2019, a group of 8 to 10 young mothers, who will serve as Mama-We mentors in their communities, will be invited to a week-long training at Queen's University, in Kingston. A series of workshops will take place over a

one-year period, both in Kingston and Moose Cree First Nation, after which time the program will be offered in other communities.

“This is an excellent opportunity for our young women to be empowered in their role as mothers. Our culture values mothers as a central part of well-being; they are the guardians of our children. Mothers influence healthy development, and endorse cultural teachings that will strengthen future generations. We look forward to working with our community members in this pilot project,” says Dorinda Vincent, Director of Health Services, Moose Cree First Nation.

“There is no better way for us to support education and reconciliation, than to invest in building capacity within the communities. We look forward to seeing young women rise up in confidence, having the resources they need to secure their futures and provide their little ones with a solid start in life. We are also extremely grateful to pilot this project with a community so proactive as Moose Cree First Nation,” says Josée Lusignan, president of I Love First Peoples.

“Queen’s is excited to participate in this knowledge exchange and help answer the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We passionately believe in building local capacity as a means of enacting meaningful change,” Dr. Richard van Wylick, Associate Dean, Professional Development & Educational Scholarship, Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen’s University.

“It is a great honour to take part in this important endeavour. By empowering women in the community, we can work toward eradicating gender inequities in health, education and the social determinants of health. Mama-We is poised to assist in this empowerment and offers a small step toward reconciliation,” Dr. Jenn Carpenter, Director of Global Health, Professional Development & Educational Scholarship, Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen’s University.

“We are pleased to take part in the Mama-We program, which seeks to empower Indigenous teen mothers and their children,” Reyhana Patel, Head of Public Relations, Islamic Relief Canada.

## **ABOUT**

[I Love First Peoples](http://www.ilfp.ca) is a Canadian registered charity that empowers Indigenous youth to succeed in school, through projects that foster reconciliation. With chapters across Canada and numerous celebrity friends, we raise awareness on a large scale and provide youth with a platform through which they can be heard. For more information, please visit [www.ilfp.ca](http://www.ilfp.ca)

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