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Subject: Detox centre promised for Innu; Ottawa, Nfld. will

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Detox centre promised for Innu; Ottawa, Nfld. will

ITEM

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HEADLINE: Detox centre promised for Innu; Ottawa, Nfld. will share costs to treat problem of gas-sniffing

Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Nfld. - Industry Minister Brian Tobin and the premier of Newfoundland promised the Innu on Sunday they would pay to build a detoxification centre to help treat gas-sniffing Innu children in Labrador.

Appearing together, Tobin and Premier Beaton Tulk said the centre would serve the remote communities of Sheshatshiu and Davis Inlet.

Tobin, who recently resigned as Newfoundland premier and is campaigning for Monday's federal election, said he was unsure how much the treatment centre would cost. He said the Liberal government's commitment was nonetheless certain.

"Many of these families are dysfunctional," said Tobin.

"You need not just children in treatment but entire families in treatment."

Last week, Newfoundland authorities rounded up a dozen young people in Sheshatshiu after community leaders asked for help and a court order was issued sending the children for treatment at a centre on

an armed forces base.

The video-taped images of the children stumbling around the reserve sucking gas fumes from plastic garbage bags have shocked many viewers across the country.

Tobin also said he'd "confirmed" that the federal government was now willing to include the Innu under the Indian Act.

In the past the Innu have not been eligible for programs available to status Indians, such as tax exemptions and subsidized food.

The Innu have long sought to be included as part of the Indian Act, because among other things it would give them the power to send suffering children to treatment centres.

Peter Penashue, the president of the Innu Nation and Paul Rich, band chief of Sheshatshiu, met with Tobin, Tulk and social workers all day Sunday to negotiate the aid package.

At the same time, Innu leaders from Davis Inlet met with Prime Minister Jean Chretien in Shawinigan, Que. to tell him that many children in their community are also solvent abusers.

They requested a new treatment centre be built in Natuashish, about 10 kilometres from Davis Inlet.

Tobin wouldn't commit to the precise location of the permanent detox centre, but said it would include treatment for the people of Davis Inlet.

"We anticipate another 40 children from that community will also need to use a treatment centre," said Tobin.

The children who were removed from Sheshatshiu are currently being treated at a temporary detoxification centre on the Goose Bay military base.

Both political leaders said a more permanent solution is necessary.

"We recognize that beyond that temporary structure we're going to need a permanent structure to serve Labrador and perhaps the needs of Atlantic Canada's aboriginal community," said Tobin.

He estimated the centre would cost "millions of dollars."

The province has also committed to spend any money it saves as a result of federal involvement on facilities in the Innu communities, added Tobin.

"We estimate that at about \$4-million annually," he said.

Tobin denied the help has come now because voters were preparing to go to the polls.

"It's not an election issue, it's a case of doing what's right and to recognize the courage of the Innu nation who . . . acknowledged there's deep social problems in their community."

Premier Tulk said "it's a recognition that children are important people here and we have to get them out of this crisis."

ILLUSTRATION Jonathan Hayward / The Canadian Press
Nympha Rich, an Innu from Davis Inlet, Labrador
pauses while speaking to the media about her
gasoline-sniffing addiction after meeting with
Prime Minister Jean Chretien in Shawinigan, Que.,
on Sunday.

SEARCH TERMS INLET; THE; DAVIS;

*** END OF STORY***
