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INNU NATION

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The following is submitted by Innu Nation to obtain funding for an Innu Family and Cultural Renewal Centre.

In the document "Hearing the Voices: Government's Role in Innu Renewal" we described the family and cultural renewal centre as follows:

"We need to learn our way of life, keep our culture, traditions, values and spirituality. We need to listen to and respect our elders. They should be our leaders and advisors. The children need to learn our culture. We want them to live as Innu. We must talk to them about the past more. They will listen and understand."

We have spoken of the urgent need for cultural renewal. We admit that as Innu we are now but shadows of our ancestors, that the youth in our community know little of the knowledge of our elders. All the ways that knowledge and culture are passed from one generation to the other have been weakened or even attacked. So at this time, we aren't sure of what it means to be Innu.

This is why the Family and Cultural Renewal Centre must be created immediately. By the time we complete the design of our new community we must have sufficient understanding of the forces that have weakened us and a good start on cultural renewal to be able to make sure that the new community meets our needs now, and well into the future.

By immediately setting up the cultural renewal centre, members of the community can deal with substance abuse, understand and reconnect with their past, learn the skills of nutshimit, feel comfortable with Innu spirituality, know who they are. Total healing and total self knowledge is a long process, but this centre should provide a sufficient base to allow us to design our future community.

It should be made clear that existing treatment centres are not sufficient for our needs. Most are disease-oriented, and do not examine the conditions that led to breakdown. Few are even related to our culture. None are in our language. None can re-teach us how to be Innu. Even those that are aboriginal may not know about Innu culture. "

We asked to be provided with adequate resources to set up and operate a

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renewal centre in nutshimit(the country). We have determined the resources we need and have drawn up a budget . The budget was determined on our belief that the renewal centre is the focus of a process of treatment and healing . While the renewal centre itself will be a mobile community of tents set up in the country , the process of treatment and healing will be ongoing both in the village as well as in the country.

The renewal centre in the country will be used to provide treatment sessions two months in length. Each session will have an orientation period of several days in the community before families travel out to the camp. We hope that within one calendar year that we can offer four two month sessions.

We anticipate that we will ask ten families to take part in one session. Family size is averaged at five members, although we know that most families are actually much larger. We imagine that quite a number of small children will be at the camp so we anticipate a need to provide some specific services for them.

The treatment program in the country will be built upon the foundation that there is still much about life in the country, about social relationships in the country which is healthy and strong and needs to be promoted. In the hunting activity and respect for animals there is our spirituality and elder Innu must have a prominent place in teaching us about this. In the camp we will need to look after one another, to share and have respect for the abilities and skills of one another. There will be times for counselling both within families and with the larger group. There will be times for helping participants learn models of understanding behavior, abusive behaviors as well as acceptable behaviors.

There will be work in the community even as a session may be ongoing to develop materials and information and skills that will help to build up the quality of the country treatment program, to build up the confidence and esteem of those Innu who will be delivering the program.

We firmly believe we can offer a very valuable healing experience to Innu and that in the process we too will benefit and become stronger and healthier.

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We also think that the financial costs of doing this for ourselves are quite reasonable. The only item where we feel there is a real need for further discussion is transportation costs. Obviously we want to be in the country, sufficiently far away from the village that the life of the treatment camp will not be invaded by the confusion and chaos which is often present in the village. At some point, we may be able to establish a camp and move most participants by boat or by skidoo but in the present we feel that air travel by charter plane is the best way to get to the site for the camp. Any arrangement, such as a leasing agreement for example, that would allow us to lower the very high costs associated with travel, would be pursued. We also should note that likely no other treatment facility is responsible for covering the costs associated with the participants' travel to and from the treatment facility and maybe this is a cost which should not be ours either.

Our challenge and our need for the resources to meet this challenge is nothing short of relearning our humanity. The cultural renewal centre as the focus of a healing process will provide us with the means to look to the time and place when Innu were healthy human beings, when there was a balance in the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual areas of life. We must use the process of healing and the cultural renewal centre to help ourselves become whole again, to find well being in our lives as Innu today.