



Wet'suwet'en Nation & British Columbia Reach Historic Child Welfare Agreement

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The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and elected Chiefs of the Moricetown Band Administration and Hagwilget Village Council are proud to announce they have reached a landmark agreement with the Province of British Columbia (BC) to reclaim jurisdiction for child welfare services in accordance with traditional *anuk nu'at'en* (our laws), and *bah'lats* (feast) governance systems. The ***Wet'suwet'en Service & Jurisdiction Planning Agreement*** commits the parties to working together to create a distinctly Wet'suwet'en suite of programs and services that will be exercised in accordance with Wet'suwet'en child welfare jurisdiction. This agreement paves the way for the Wet'suwet'en to reclaim our rights and responsibilities to raise our children and youth in a culturally-grounded way such that they become fully thriving adult members of our Nation.

"It is important that we acknowledge and honour our esteemed chiefs and elders whose leadership and vision for our children started us down this historic path. Sadly, many of our *dini ze'* and *ts'akë ze'* (male and female hereditary chiefs) did not live to witness this tremendous accomplishment of what they started," stated *dini ze' Na'moks* (John Ridsdale) of the Tsayu Clan (Beaver). "The late *dini ze' Wah Tah Kwets* (Pat Namox) used to always stress, 'we must create new memories in the minds of our children.' We are under no illusions that a lot of hard work remains, however, as we've shown throughout our history, we are more than up for the task. Today, I feel a deep sense of happiness that our ancestors have been guiding us on this path, and today, we have made them proud."

The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, Moricetown Band and Hagwilget Village Council collaborated together in 2010 to create the, "*Anuk Nu' At'en Ba'glgh'iyi z'ilhdic Program*" (ANABIP), which is a holistic children and families, community development and socio-cultural services program. The "*Wet'suwet'en Wellness Working Group*" was created and serves as a unique steering committee comprised of both Hereditary and elected Chiefs, to provide ongoing oversight of ANABIP programs and services that will be expanded under this agreement. ANABIP practitioners support Clan and House Group members utilizing cultural protocols and practices based on traditional laws and governance systems articulated in a guiding Wet'suwet'en Wellness Conceptual Framework.

"This is a very positive step forward for us. We are now being recognized as owners of our own destiny. It's our future leaders we are most concerned about," expressed *ts'akë ze' Ya ga' lalh*, Chief Dora Wilson, Hagwilget Village Council. "Finally, it's being done properly."

"This agreement represents good faith in our ability to work together to move towards a model where the Wet'suwet'en Nation can exercise full jurisdiction over child welfare," said Minister of Children and Family Development Stephanie Cadieux. "This agreement epitomizes the direction

in Grand Chief Ed John's report and supports our mutual goal of protecting children and youth, while also ensuring the best possible outcomes – a goal that will be achieved through helping children and youth stay connected to their culture, traditions and communities.”

“On behalf of the community of Moricetown, I'm very pleased that our Wet'suwet'en Nation, through the efforts of the Wet'suwet'en Wellness Committee, achieved this important agreement. I firmly believe that we are most capable of identifying what the issues and needs are for our communities, and of finding the best everlasting solutions,” stated Chief Duane Mitchell, Moricetown Band Administration. “I wish to applaud the Ministry of Children and Family Development for the progressive leadership they have shown in believing that we, the Wet'suwet'en, can best look after our children.”

“I was a translator when our *dini ze'* and *ts'akë ze'* advanced the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* court case on behalf of all Wet'suwet'en people that resulted in the landmark ruling that our rights and title were never extinguished, and our oral evidence was admissible in court,” expressed *dini ze' Hagwilneigh* (Ron Mitchell) of the Laksilyu Clan. “This agreement has been a long time coming. I have been working at this, to reclaim our jurisdiction in child welfare for over thirty years, and this means a lot to me. We have lost children to the system, a system that was not ours and that we didn't control. I am happy the Ministry is no longer dictating to us, but is respecting our laws and working with us in a true spirit of reconciliation. This is a wonderful accomplishment for our proud Nation!”

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