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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Two Pikangikum Tikinagan CFS staff receive OPP commendation

Pikangikum First Nation, Ontario; November 23, 2021: Two Tikinagan Child & Family Service staff have received a commendation for their years of volunteer service in helping keep youth and adults safe in Pikangikum First Nation. Whyderman Black and Julie Suggashie were both “honoured” to receive the Commissioner’s Commendation from the Ontario Provincial Police’s (OPP) Commissioner, Thomas Carrique.

“It’s an honour to receive this,” said Black, Direct Services Supervisor for Tikinagan in Pikangikum. “I wasn’t expecting it, so it was kind of a surprised when I was told about this.”

Suggashie, acting Direct Services Supervisor at Tikinagan, was also surprised.

“I never received anything like this before,” she said. “It was an honour to receive it.”

Both were presented the commendation in recognition of their community support and assistance to the OPP and Pikangikum Police and community peacekeeper service in urgent missing persons investigations involving youth and throughout the years. Many of the incidents were critical in nature, involving people who threatened self-harm or death, making the guidance they provided vital in resolving situations.

“I am proud to have awarded Whyderman Black and Julie Suggashie with a Commissioner’s Commendation for Selfless Actions,” said Commissioner Carrique. “They have assisted Pikangikum Police and the OPP in locating and saving the lives of several suicidal youth in Pikangikum, and in many instances their assistance was critical to achieving a positive outcome. The relationships we build with community members are invaluable to the OPP.”

Black and Suggashie’s community involvement began well before they started with Tikinagan. Black said he’s been coordinating searches for years to keep youth and adults safe. Suggashie started her work as the youth patrol coordinator almost a decade ago before Tikinagan to ensure youth were safe at night.

“Helping out in my community was a big step in stepping up and assisting,” explained Black. “I’ve been doing it for years. Usually, I get calls from OPP that they need help with a certain person. I coordinate the searches, finding out who they are in contact with last and where they were last seen.”

When their service is required, Black and Suggashie help organize a team of volunteers for searches — sometimes as many as 30 community members.

For Black, this honour is about helping the community, and he encourages youth to reach out for help when they need it. In essence, it's all about Tikinagan's service model Mamow-Obiki-ahwahsoowin, which means "everyone working together to raise our children."

"I wanted to send a message to all the youth," said Black. "It is important to save a life and to let them know that the person is there to help them."

Added Suggashie: "This (commendation) is about showing the youth that we care for them and that they can look at us as role models. There's actually people out there that really care about them. They can come to us and we can talk to them one-on-one and support them."

Both Black and Suggashie have worked for Tikinagan for a total of six years.

For more information, contact Marlene Green by email at MarleneG@tikinagan.org.

****For over 35 years, Tikinagan Child and Family Services has been serving our 30 First Nations in Northwestern Ontario. The Creator entrusted First Nations with the sacred responsibility of protecting our children and developing strong families and healthy communities.****