



PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tikinagan leads way with inclusive practices, affirming gender identity for Youth in Care

Northwestern Ontario – June 12, 2023: Recognizing the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for all members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, Tikinagan Child & Family Services proudly announces its commitment to affirming gender identity by reducing unnecessary disclosures for young individuals in care with changes to its database system.

“In our ongoing efforts to provide the best care and support for children and youth, Tikinagan is proud to be a trailblazer in implementing changes to our systems that affirm gender identity,” said Rachel Tinney, Associate Executive Director and 2SLGBTQ+ Committee member at Tikinagan. “We firmly believe that every child and young person deserves to be seen, respected, and celebrated for who they truly are.”

Children and Youth in care Tikinagan only need to disclose their gender identity and pronouns once, eliminating the need for repeated disclosures. Tikinagan workers make notes of their current, specific gender identity and preferred pronouns. Prior to the change last year, the only option for gender was only male or female. Now, some of the options include: Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Gender Fluid, Two-Spirit, Non-Binary/non-conforming, and prefer not to identify.

This forward-thinking approach not only respects the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of these young individuals, but it could also save lives, said Tinney.

“We understand that multiple disclosures can be intrusive and potentially harmful to the mental well-being of young people. By reducing the need for repeated disclosures, we are creating a safe and inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and supports their overall well-being.”

Tikinagan's 2SLGBTQ+ committee made the recommendation and instituted a change for the entire database system — which is also used by other Indigenous Children's Aid societies in Ontario.

Memekwe Apetawakeesic (Morriseau), a 17-year-old youth from Weagamow Lake First Nation who is bi-sexual and demi-sexual on the a-sexuality spectrum and a member of Tikinagan's Youth Team, said it's not only important to protect queer youth from the discrimination but also support them.

"Support the identity of our youth is important to me because I have a lot of friends who are part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, myself including, and I feel afraid to speak up about my labels because the world is so mean to us."

The impact of this change reaches beyond administrative procedures; it sends a powerful message to all children and youth seeking Tikinagan's support that their gender identity is not only respected but celebrated. By embracing their identities, Tikinagan aims to nurture a strong sense of self-confidence, belonging, and resilience in these young individuals.

"Affirming gender identity is not just a paperwork change for us; it reflects our core values and commitment to inclusivity," added Tinney. "We want every child and youth to know that they are valued, accepted, and loved for who they truly are, irrespective of their gender identity."

As part of its commitment to inclusion, Tikinagan encourages its workers and foster parents to participate in 2SLGBTQ+ trainings offered by the organization. Additionally, the organization actively supports local Pride groups in their efforts to promote diversity and acceptance within the communities it serves.

For more information, contact the Communications Team by email at communications@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.