

# **IRS-RHSP (Indian Residential School Resolution Help Support Program)**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) was signed in May 2006 between Canada, the churches, and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in order to compensate former students for internment and abuses in Canada's Indian Residential Schools.

The need for health support services to residential school survivors as they worked through the challenging and traumatic compensation process was acknowledged by Canada and committed to funding mental health and emotional support services to the Survivors through Health Canada under the IRS Resolution Health Support Program (IRS-RHSP).

The IRS-RHSP program was set to end on March 31, 2018; however, due to an outcry from communities and organizations across the country, Health Canada committed to another year of transition and extended current funding to March 31, 2019. (Canada recognized the intergenerational impacts of the residential schools and extended support services to the families of the survivors). FNHA administers the RHSP funding in BC. Gitxsan Health Society is one of 9 groups in BC contracted to administer the program – in this case, to Kispiox, Sikedox and Gitanmaax.

## **CURRENT**

Canada further committed \$248 million dollars toward Mental Health and Wellness as a way to fill the gap when the RHSP program sunsets in 2021. Both AFN nationally and FNHA in BC have been identifying past issues and trends as a way to set priorities and develop strategic targets to replace the RHSP after 2021.

In BC (as well as nationally), Trauma in all its forms, including Historic and Intergenerational and Traditional/Spiritual Healing practices and approaches (including on the land healing) have been identified as the two emerging priorities and directions for health and wellness strategies.

## GITXSAN HEALTH SOCIETY IRS-RHSP

The IRS former students (Survivors) are aging and directing more attention to their offspring and grandchildren. They are requesting more awareness on impacts of trauma, impacts of colonization, decolonizing approaches, and trauma-informed approaches to healing and wellness.

Our team activities are grounded on cultural practices and guided by our commitment to Gitxsan wellness:

- One-on-one walk-in requests for emotional, cultural and spiritual supports for the second and third generation survivors. Counselling Services, Counselling Support, Treatment Referrals and Aftercare monitoring is provided to both survivors and their family members.
- The Gitxsan social system and structure is matrilineal and indigenous approaches to healing necessarily involve extended families. Traditional resources include the Wilp (Matrilineal family), Xpdeekx (Clan – related huwilp), Wilxsilaks (Father Clan) and Aye'e (Grandfather Clan) and guidance and will be especially evident in the healing plans and activities of the program.
- Public awareness of emerging issues
- In a continued effort to define the Gitxsan Reconciliation Process, community workshops to address and refine the Gitxsan Wellness Model and to implement cultural wellness activities will continue.
- Community gatherings to mark the legacy and milestones of the IRS system will continue as a way to educate our communities.
- Traditional Healing: Swanasxw (fanning and brushing), Hlabalaa (healing touch), Wilp Guu'uutxw (sweat lodges), Haldakxw (Gitxsan medicines), Sisatxw (purification-letting go ceremonies and rituals)
- Reconnection to the land: Cultural camps, Harvesting camps, Communal/Seasonal camps.
- Individual and family healing plans, including Gitxsan leadership training and grooming: Gitxsan history, Gitxsan social structure, Roles and responsibilities of a Wilp and its members, Liliget (feast system) curriculum, Genealogy and its significance, Cultural mentoring.

The IRS team comprises of a program manager and two support workers.

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## INDIAN DAY SCHOOLS

A Class Action lawsuit against the federal government was certified in July 2018 which prompted Canada to begin negotiations on a Settlement Agreement with survivors of Indian Day Schools. The agreement is expected to be approved in May 2019.

Many of the survivors suffered similar abuses in the Indian Day Schools as those in the Indian Residential Schools. As a result, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) has directed the RHSPs across the country to provide support services to Indian Day School survivors until such time as a healing and support fund is established for the Indian Day Schools.

If you haven't already registered as part of the Indian Day School Class Action, please go to [www.indiandayschools.com](http://www.indiandayschools.com) and do so, or contact any of the RHSP workers listed here.