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## NEWS RELEASE

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Huu-ay-aht First Nations  
Ministry of Indigenous Relations and  
Reconciliation  
Ministry of Attorney General and Housing  
Ministry of Education and Child Care

### **Huu-ay-aht First Nations, Province partner to create Oomiiqsu Mother Centre**

PORT ALBERNI - Huu-ay-aht First Nations and B.C. are celebrating the creation of the Oomiiqsu (Aboriginal Mother Centre), a new housing, support and child care centre that will help Indigenous women and children on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

"Huu-ay-aht has turned over many stones to reach this point of having a mother centre," said Edward R. Johnson, Huu-ay-aht Councillor. "Through the voices of our citizens in the Social Services Report, it is apparent that Oomiiqsu is going to create a positive impact to Huu-ay-aht families and children in preventing the traumas that many families have had to face. Oomiiqsu is going to be a place to bring children home, where mothers and children will feel safe, healthy and connected, and they will be able to look back and tell many wonderful stories."

As part of Huu-ay-aht Social Services Project formed in 2017, 30 recommendations were created in the report "Safe, Healthy and Connected: Bringing Huu-ay-aht Children Home." Oomiiqsu is a response to recommendation 26.

Oomiiqsu, meaning mother, is an Indigenous-led model of care developed by Huu-ay-aht in consultation with its members. The two-storey transition housing, child care and support centre will be managed and operated by the Huu-ay-aht government's Child and Family Wellness Department. The centre will provide a safe and culturally appropriate home for as many as 48 mothers and children leaving violence or abuse, facing mental-health and addictions challenges, poverty or other trauma.

"This partnership between the Province and the Huu-ay-aht First Nations will make an important difference on the west coast of Vancouver Island, where many communities are remote and provide few options for mothers and their children in need," said Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and Minister Responsible for Housing. "At Oomiiqsu, they will find stability, security and access to support in a way that works specifically for the Nuuchahnulth people. I commend the leadership and staff of Huu-ay-aht First Nations for creating this innovative opportunity to work together on these much-needed new transition homes."

The centre will have private bedrooms and washrooms; shared living, kitchen and dining spaces; and laundry facilities. Residents will have access to on-site child care that will include eight spaces for children as old as three and 16 spaces for children 30 months to school age. The Huu-ay-aht First Nations' Child and Family Wellness Department will have office space on the first floor of the building.

Huu-ay-aht will operate the building, providing support services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to Indigenous mothers experiencing violence. Wraparound supports provided by the Province will give families the best chance of staying together and will help address systemic factors leading to the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care.

The project is made possible thanks to a partnership between the Huu-ay-aht and the B.C. Government. The Province is investing as much as \$5 million for Huu-ay-aht First Nations to cover initial operating costs for the Oomiiqsu Mother's Centre. BC Housing is investing approximately \$10 million through the Building BC: Women's Transition Housing Fund and will provide \$88,000 in annual operating funding. The Ministry of Education and Child Care is providing nearly \$800,000 for child care spaces.

By honouring First Nations culture and focusing on reviving familial, community and cultural connections, this new model of care is an essential part of reconciliation. The centre will open for women and children in summer 2024.

#### **Quotes:**

##### **Josie Osborne, MLA for Mid Island-Pacific Rim -**

"Oomiiqsu is a unique, Indigenous-led approach to family services that will make Huu-ay-aht and other communities along the west coast of Vancouver Island stronger and healthier. The centre is an opportunity to support Huu-ay-aht's vision to advance child welfare matters and support resilient families and children."

##### **Katrina Chen, Minister of State for Child Care -**

"Oomiiqsu will provide Indigenous-led child care and wraparound supports and services that focus on healing and strengthening families. For many vulnerable families and those dealing with various trauma - notably mothers - being able to access culturally appropriate child care in a safe space is the peace of mind needed to continue on their healing journeys, and Oomiiqsu offers this holistic approach."

#### **Quick Facts:**

- Oomiiqsu is modelled after the Vancouver Aboriginal Mother's Centre, which was established in 2002 in Vancouver's east end.
- Huu-ay-aht First Nations is an Indigenous community located on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It is a part of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation, formerly called the Nootka.
- Huu-ay-aht is a party to the Maa-nulth Final Agreement, a modern treaty that grants its five member Nations constitutionally protected self-government, as well as ownership, control and law-making authority over their lands and resources.
- As with all projects for women and children leaving violence, the address of this project has not been disclosed for safety reasons.

#### **Learn More:**

Huu-ay-aht First Nations: <https://huyuayaht.org/>

Huu-ay-aht Social Services project video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CouVqqWK72k>

Huu-ay-aht Social Services project report: [https://huyuayaht.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/hfn-social-services-panel-recommendations\\_final.pdf](https://huyuayaht.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/hfn-social-services-panel-recommendations_final.pdf)

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