



Biindigen

Well-Being Centre

Backgrounder

Tuesday, July 5th, 2022

A circle of established partners has come together with a shared goal to develop a new and innovative Indigenous-led Well-Being centre in the McQuesten neighbourhood of Hamilton, Ontario. This new centre of integrated health, family, social and housing services and supports will operate under the name Biindigen Well-Being Centre. “Biindigen’ is an Ojibway word that means ‘welcome’ or ‘come in.’ This is what we want to tell and do,” states Pat Mandy, Chair of the Biindigen Well-Being Steering Committee.

Biindigen Well-Being Centre will be located on the former St. Helen Catholic Elementary School site at 785 Britannia Avenue in Hamilton. The school was closed in 2009 by the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB). It has since been operating as a neighbourhood hub for the McQuesten neighbourhood. The City of Hamilton has purchased the property from the school board to hold for the development of the Biindigen Well-Being Centre. The City of Hamilton, in an open meeting on June 22, 2022, made public its intent to transfer the property to the landowning partners of the new Biindigen Well-Being Centre (De dwa da dehs nye>s, Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services). “This centre will enable a once in a lifetime experience and will be seen as the epitome of what reconciliation means to the City of Hamilton and the Canadian people as a whole.” Mayor Fred Eisenberger

The main partners and supporters are the De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre (DAHC), Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, McMaster University Department of Family Medicine and the City of Hamilton. They are strongly supported by the McQuesten Community Planning Team and the Hamilton Community Foundation. There are also a number of non-Indigenous organizations interested in contributing their programs and networks to make the Biindigen Well-Being Centre an accurate and comprehensive hub of health and social services supports and services. Each partner has come to this circle to increase meaningful access to culturally relevant programs and services for Indigenous people in Hamilton. The Centre will also provide primary health care services to all residents in the neighbourhood where it will be located - regardless of culture or background. “There are mental health concerns, a lack of housing and intergenerational trauma. This is a challenge that Indigenous communities are facing across the country, Hamilton has an opportunity to be a reformer for change.” says Sam Merulla

The Biindigen Well-Being Centre will provide a true community-based continuum of health and social care and services with health care, childcare, housing services,



recreational programs, after-school programs, skills development and training programs, social programs, and innovative neighborhood programs in one location. To address the ongoing harms of colonization, it will be a centre that reflects and values Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing, connects with the land, and cultivates a strong sense of community. It will also provide health services for non-Indigenous residents in the community. “Biindigen could be a model for other communities to follow. Working together and alongside each other is one of our teachings,” notes Monique Lavallee, Executive Director of Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg.

Once established, the Biindigen Well-Being Centre will feature a distinct and forward-thinking Indigenous-led collaborative care model unique to Canada and has tremendous potential to be a model of future integrated health care rooted in reconciliation. As a model of accurate and impactful reconciliation, the Biindigen Well-Being Centre will serve the many diverse population health needs of the individuals and families in the McQuesten neighbourhood. In addition to expanding service opportunities, community activities, and reducing isolation, the hub will operate within the culture of the seven Grandfather Teachings: Wisdom, Love, Bravery, Truth, Respect, Honesty, and Humility. The resources of the organizations housed in the Biindigen Well-Being Centre will enable the provision of increased front-line services and supports to both the McQuesten residents and the Indigenous peoples living in Hamilton.

“We’ve all been chosen to be a part of this dream. But it is not just our dream but the dream of a better world for all humanity. It is also your purpose,” explains Grandmother Renee Thomas-Hill.

About De dwa da dehs nye>s:

De dwa da dehs nye>s is the only organization in the Greater Hamilton area providing a blend of western and Indigenous Traditional medicine. De Dwa da Dehs Nye>s is dedicated to connecting Indigenous communities and local neighbourhoods to health care resources that address community broader determinants of health. For over 20 years, De dwa da dehs nye>s has been successfully providing culturally safe programs and services that are relationship-based, welcoming, and individual directed. Many programs, including Primary Care, Mental Health, and Health Promotions programs, are well sought after and currently have waitlists. De dwa da dehs nye>s is the place of first choice and last hope of Indigenous peoples in the Greater Hamilton area.

About Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg:

Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg is a multi-service Indigenous organization that provides services rooted in Indigenous culture, language, and traditional knowledge. Niwasa offers a wide range of intervention and prevention programs across the life cycle for the Indigenous community in Hamilton. Currently, Niwasa offers its programs at the former St. Helen Elementary School site in partnership with the McQueston Community Planning Team. In addition, it partners with the DAHC to provide integrated care such

as health promotion, early and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, child nutrition programming, and information.

About Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services:

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS) is a provincial non-profit housing organization looking to build 80-100 mixed model housing units at the Biindigen Well-Being Centre. OAHS offers secure and culturally safe housing, which is a core determinant of population health, and this will complete the continuum of wrap-around supports that Biindigen can provide. In addition, OAHS will provide affordable housing in the City of Hamilton, which is challenging to find and is a priority for the city. “Safe, affordable housing is a fundamental prerequisite to health. Through this unique partnership, McMaster University and the City of Hamilton are demonstrating that wholistic, Indigenous-led solutions is the change we need for the benefit of all people” stated by Justin Marchand, CEO of OAHS

McMaster University, Department of Family Medicine

McMaster University, Department of Family Medicine (Department of Family Medicine) will invest in primary care services within the Biindigen Well-Being Centre. It sees the opportunity to teach future physicians and other health professional learners directly in a setting focused on improving the understanding of health challenges specific to this neighbourhood, with a particular emphasis on the urban Indigenous population. Students will be immersed in an unparalleled learning environment that offers dynamic and evolving collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous primary care services by co-locating a non-Indigenous health clinic with De dwa da dehs nye>s' Indigenous health clinic. Importantly, it will finally allow for a longitudinal curriculum in Indigenous health that is immersive (two years) and impactful. Adding a scholarship lens to the Biindigen Well-Being Centre will accommodate student needs, teach future providers culturally safe care, and provide research, evidence, and learning for future growth in this vital area of learning. Biindigen will be an ongoing experience of reconciliation as McMaster joins with De dwa da dehs nye>s in improving access to primary care in the local community, and in creating opportunities for learners to deepen their understanding of Indigenous knowledge and their capacity for offering culturally safe care.” – Dr. Cathy Risdon, Chair, McMaster Department of Family Medicine

A lack of knowledge about health education means that not all individuals receive the same level of care. The Biindigen Well-Being Centre will be a means to close this gap and provide a place of safekeeping for all who make use of the facility. Understanding the importance of access to healthcare among Indigenous peoples also means believing that access to health is a fundamental right for all.

For more information, please contact:

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